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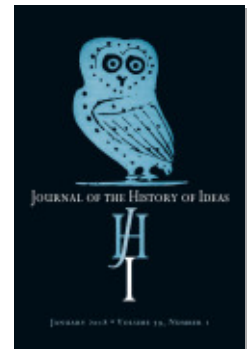
The First Orchestrated Attack on Spinoza: Johannes
Melchioris and the Cartesian Network in Utrecht

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*The First Orchestrated Attack on Spinoza:
Johannes Melchioris and the Cartesian
Network in Utrecht*

Albert Gootjes

Johannes Melchioris's *Epistola ad amicum* (1671) occupies an important place in the history of Spinoza reception as one of the very first refutations of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670) to circulate in print.¹ For long, however, it has been relegated to the fringes as a work of negligible importance, having been subjected to disparaging treatment in the only two studies on the *Epistola* of any significance available to date.² Whether Melchioris's treatise deserved to be discarded in this way, however, is questionable. In his unpublished dissertation, Wiep van Bunge had already credited Melchioris as the very first controversialist to anticipate Spinoza's

For their suggestions and help I thank Eric Jorink, Otto Lankhorst, Piet Steenbakkens, David Sytsma, and Jens Trocha, as well as the participants of the Scottish Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy (2016). I am particularly indebted to Jeroen van de Ven for sharing his unpublished work on Spinoza with me.

¹ Johannes Melchioris, *Epistola ad amicum, continens censuram libri, cui titulus: Tractatus theologico-politicus* (Utrecht: Cornelius Noenaert, 1671). For the early reception, see Wiep van Bunge, "On the Early Dutch Reception of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*," *Studia Spinozana* 5 (1989): 225–51 and Jonathan Israel, "The Early Dutch and German Reaction to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*: Foreshadowing the Enlightenment's More General Spinoza Reception?" in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael A. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 72–100. All dates are adapted to the Gregorian calendar ("New Style").

² J. J. V. M. de Vet, "On Account of the Sacrosanctity of the Scriptures: Johannes Melchior against Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670)," *Lias* 18 (1991): 229–61

identification of God and nature through his reading of the *Tractatus*, and to sense his “atheism” and fatalism.³ The supposed dullness of Melchioris’s theological and philosophical acumen is likewise challenged by the rapid appearance of a second, slightly revised edition within a year of the *Epistola*’s initial publication,⁴ and by Spinoza’s clarifying *Adnotationes* to some of the very passages that Melchioris had subjected to criticism.⁵

While scholarship is at last taking the arguments offered by Melchioris seriously,⁶ his place in the history of Spinoza reception continues to remain unexplored. This is regrettable, given the features of the *Epistola* that make it remarkable on more accounts than chronological primacy alone. Take, for instance, the fact that Melchioris was German rather than Dutch, and that he in 1671 lived in Frechen near Cologne, while the *Epistola* was printed in Utrecht at the heart of the Dutch Republic. All other works in Melchioris’s corpus, on the contrary, were printed close to home.⁷ Similarly striking is his youth; at the time of writing he was just twenty-four years old, making him not just the first but also by far the youngest public detractor of the *Treatise*. More than that, in the next ten years Melchioris would only publish a single other work,⁸ before becoming relatively productive upon his appointment as professor of theology at Herborn in 1682. To the above must be added at least one other striking element, namely the suppression of the author’s identity. Why the title-page should supply only his initials and ministerial status (“J.M. V.D.M.”) is difficult to explain, since the *Epistola* was a perfectly orthodox work that aimed to shore up the defense of the Christian religion against the *Tractatus*, whose anonymous appearance is, of course, readily explained.

The present article will use these noteworthy features of Melchioris’s *Epistola* heuristically to uncover the dynamics of the early Dutch reception of Spinoza’s *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. It will set the stage by tracing

and De Vet, “Letters of a Watchman on Zion’s Walls: The First Reaction of Johannes Melchior to the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*,” in *L’Hérésie Spinoziste*, ed. Paolo Cristofolini (Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 1995), 36–48.

³ Van Bunge, “Johannes Bredenburg (1643–1691): Een Rotterdamse collegiant in de ban van Spinoza” (Ph.D. diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 1990), 145.

⁴ Johannes Melchioris, *Religio ejusque natura et principium: Sive Job. Melchioris V.D.M. ad amicum epistola* (Utrecht: Willem Clerck, 1672).

⁵ As noted by De Vet, “On Account of the Sacrosanctity,” 233.

⁶ Jetze Touber, *Spinoza and Biblical Scholarship in the Dutch Republic, 1660–1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

⁷ See Jens Trocha, “Die Kinderbibel des Johannes Melchior,” in *Die Inhalte von Kinderbibeln: Kriterien ihrer Auswahl*, ed. Gottfried Adam et al. (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2008), 45–82, at 80–81.

⁸ Melchioris, *Christlicher Glaubens-Grund* (Frankfurt: Georg Müller, 1671).

the initial arrival of the *Tractatus* in Utrecht as the place of the *Epistola*'s publication. A second section will use recently recovered manuscript material to argue that, in spite of Melchioris's authorship, the *Epistola* must actually be considered a product of the Cartesian network in that city. Against this background a third section will frame the scattered evidence, both old and new, for other actions undertaken by these Cartesians as a concerted effort to ensure that the *Tractatus* would be met with a worthy reply. In closing this article will outline what impact this narrative has on the study of the Cartesian reception of Spinoza. In particular it will advise that, although the polemical activities appear to justify Spinoza's complaint about the "stupid Cartesians" (*stolidi Cartesiani*) who do not cease to denounce his opinion and writings,⁹ the Utrecht Cartesians' relationship to Spinoza is far more complex than their leading role in coordinating the Dutch response to the *Tractatus* might seem to suggest.

I. READING THE *TRACTATUS* IN UTRECHT

From the very outset Utrecht played a key role in the history of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. At its 8 April 1670 meeting, the consistory to the city's Dutch Reformed church took notice of this "profane and blasphemous book" and charged its acting officers (*directores*) to petition the burgomasters "to take appropriate measures" against it.¹⁰ As the very first mention of the *Tractatus* anywhere upon its publication, these minutes serve to establish the *terminus ad quem* for its appearance. But also the second earliest mention hails from Utrecht, as the city's pastor and professor of theology Francis Burman (1628–1679) recorded in his academic diary having read the work that very same month.¹¹

It is, of course, difficult to imagine that the alarm raised by the Utrecht consistory is entirely unrelated to Burman's reading of the *Tractatus*. Nevertheless, no evidence is available for establishing either the relative order

⁹ Benedictus Spinoza to Henry Oldenburg, n.p., 1675, in *Spinoza Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, 5 vols. (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925–1987), 4:299 (letter #68). Hereafter the Gebhardt edition will be cited as G. For Spinoza and the Dutch Cartesians, see Alexander X. Douglas, *Spinoza and Dutch Cartesianism: Philosophy and Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ Acts of the Utrecht Reformed consistory, Utrecht, Het Utrechts Archief (hereafter HUA), no. 746 (Nederlandse hervormde gemeente Utrecht, kerkeraad), inv. no. 9, 8 April 1670.

¹¹ Franciscus Burman, *Burmannonum pietas* (Utrecht: Willem vande Water, 1700), 211.

of, or the precise relationship between these two events. What does seem unlikely is that Burman would have been the one to urge his brothers in the consistory to move to the political action that resulted in a ban on the work and the seizure of copies even before the well-known edict of the Hof of Holland from 1674. Proscription is, after all, a response one typically expects from the “conservative” side of Utrecht’s divided Reformed camp led by the great orthodox theologian Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), rather than the “liberal” faction of which Burman was an eminent member. And indeed, the delegates whom the consistory sent to speak to the burgo-masters can be identified as Lambertus Sanderus (ca. 1625–1672) and Cornelis van der Vliet (1628?–1683), two pastors from the Voetian camp who had both written against Burman during the pamphlet war over Sabbath observance.

A more fitting context for Burman’s reading of the *Tractatus* in April 1670 is rather offered by the Utrecht “liberal” culture in which he participated. In spite of persistent resistance from the Voetians throughout much of the seventeenth century, the progressive party, which combined a predilection for Cocceian theology and Cartesian philosophy with republican politics, did manage some successes amidst the changing political tides. The natural philosopher Johannes de Bruyn (1620–1675) had come to the philosophical faculty as early as 1652, but was joined in 1660 by the young Regnerus van Mansveld (1629–1672) as professor of logic and metaphysics, and in 1661 by the German philologist and historian Johannes Georgius Graevius (1632–1703). Then, in 1662, Burman was appointed professor of theology, much to Voetius’s chagrin at becoming his direct colleague. In 1664 the theological faculty was expanded with the addition of a *professor extraordinarius*, a position occupied by Louis Wolzogen (1633–1690), the formidable pastor to the city’s Walloon church. By the mid-1660s, then, the university in Utrecht included no less than five Cartesian professors, all of whom enjoyed a certain reputation in their respective fields. To this group must be added at least one figure from outside the university setting, namely the physician, magistrate, and director of the Dutch West India Company Lambertus van Velthuysen (1622–1685), an outspoken Cartesian and republican of Utrecht patrician stock, and a formidable author in his own right. Together with De Bruyn, Van Velthuysen was the senior member of this Cartesian network, and seems to have been at least in part responsible for its creation. In 1660 he worked behind the scenes to secure the appointment of Graevius,¹² and in

¹² See Johannes Georgius Graevius to Johannes Fredericus Gronovius, Deventer, 24 December 1660, in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, cod. 626, fol. 107v.

1664 to realize the call extended to Wolzogen.¹³ Two letters from 1671 demonstrate that he was thought even then to hold sway in the appointment of professors.¹⁴

Aside from the easily documentable social aspect to the network that formed around Van Velthuysen,¹⁵ the relationship between the members also gained a more institutionalized side through their association in what they, as a pamphlet perniciously suggested, had pretentiously styled a “college of savants” (*Collegie der sçavanten*).¹⁶ While evidence for the *Collegie* is difficult to come by, crucial information can be found in a letter that Graevius wrote to the statesman Nicolaas Heinsius in April 1674, after the *wetsverzetting* had made life uncomfortable for those of republican and Cartesian persuasion. Afraid that he, Burman, and De Bruyn would lose their positions at the university, Graevius noted that one reason for the suspicions against him was his former involvement in this *Collegie*.¹⁷ In an attempt to distance himself from the Cartesian and republican views that their group had allegedly been promulgating, Graevius provided a description of its erstwhile activities. In his words, it was

a gathering of friends that for several years had the habit of meeting together every week to discuss various kinds of studies, in which I expounded for these great magistrates some satyrs of Juvenal, and Suetonius, and Grotius’s *De iure belli et pacis*. At times we also looked at the anatomy of the principal parts of the body, such as the heart, the eye, the ears, the spleen, and others, which work De Bruyn, a very good and most experienced master of dissection, performed for us. We also read new books as they were

¹³ A. C. Duker, *Gisbertus Voetius* (Leiden: Brill, 1897–1914), 3:265–66n7.

¹⁴ See Étienne le Moine to Lambertus van Velthuysen, Rouen, 7 March 1671; Theodorus Craanen to Van Velthuysen, Leiden, 2 September 1671, both in Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek (hereafter cited as UB), Bibliotheca publica latina (hereafter cited as BPL), 885.

¹⁵ De Bruyn, Van Velthuysen, Wolzogen, and the wife of Burman all appear as witnesses for Graevius’s children; see the baptismal acts in Utrecht, HUA 711 (Burgerlijke stand gemeente Utrecht en van de voormalige gemeente Zuilen: retroacta doop- trouw- en begraafregisters), inv. no. 5, p. 489 and no. 20, pp. 244 and 247.

¹⁶ *Het Collegie der Scavanten van Utrecht* (n.p., 1674). For a more detailed treatment of the following, see Albert Gootjes, “The *Collegie der sçavanten*: A Seventeenth-Century Cartesian Scholarly Society in Utrecht,” in *Enlightened Religion: From Confessional Churches to Polite Piety in the Dutch Republic*, ed. Jo Spaans and Jetze Touber (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

¹⁷ Graevius to Nicolaas Heinsius, Utrecht, 29 April 167[4], in *Sylloge epistolarum a viris illustribus scriptarum*, ed. Pieter Burman (Leiden: Samuel Luchtman, 1727), 4:489–90 (letter #416).

published, either about the causes of natural things or other matters, and disputed about them.¹⁸

The Utrecht Cartesians had therefore formed a “scholarly society” not unlike the *Collegium privatum* of Amsterdam, the *académie* of Melchisédec Thévenot (1620–1692) in Paris, or the Tuscan *Accademia del Cimento*.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, leading members from each of these groups figure in Graevius’s massive correspondence network, including Niels Stensen (1638–1686), Thévenot, and Lorenzo Magalotti (1637–1712).

When exactly the *Collegie* began and ended its activities is not known. Nevertheless, they must have started in the mid-1660s, when its newest members arrived in Utrecht, and ceased not too long before April 1674, when Graevius spoke of their activities in the past tense but still experienced his former membership as a poignant threat. A variety of historical documents from the intervening period seem to witness to the *Collegie*’s weekly meetings. In April 1670 Stensen wrote a letter to Graevius from Amsterdam, offering the grave illness of a housemate as his reason for declining the latter’s invitation. That it concerned an invitation to the *Collegie*, whose meetings were sometimes attended by outside guests,²⁰ is suggested by what Stensen writes next: “Were it not for [the illness], nothing would be more welcome to us than that most learned companionship, where erudite men contend for victory with gentleness.”²¹ Similarly suggestive are the minutes of the Utrecht Reformed consistory, which on 2 May 1670 took note of the “teaching of a certain college.”²² While at the time the term *collegie* could be used for any institutionalized body, the very indefiniteness (cf. *zeker*, “a

¹⁸ Ibid.: “. . . coetus amicorum, qui conveniebat, per annos aliquot singulis hebdomadibus, confabulatum de vario studiorum genere, in quo & Juvenalis aliquot Satyras, & Suetonium, & Grotii de Jure belli & Pacis libros exposui his grandibus praetextatis. Anatomae quoque praestantiorum membrorum, ut cordis, oculi, aurium, lienis aliorumque aliquando a nobis fuit spectata, quam operam nobis navabat *de Bruin*, optimus secundi & peritissimus magister. Novi libelli, si qui forte prodierant, aut de causis rerum naturalium, aut de aliis disciplinis, a nobis evolvebantur, et de iis disputabatur.”

¹⁹ See also Eric Jorink, “‘Outside God, There is Nothing’: Swammerdam, Spinoza, and the Janus-Face of the Early Dutch Enlightenment,” in *The Early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic: 1650–1750*, ed. Van Bunge (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 95.

²⁰ See Graevius to Heinsius, Utrecht, 29 April 167[4] (see n. 17): “Huic conventui semel iterumque interfuerunt ὁ μαχαρίτης *Gronovius*, *Gudius*, *Swammerdammius*.”

²¹ Niels Stensen to Graevius, Amsterdam, 20 April 1670, in *Nicolai Stenonis epistolae et epistolae ad eum datae*, ed. Gustav Scherz (Freiburg: Herder, 1952), 1:213: “Absque eo esset, nihil nobis optatius foret doctissimo illo contubernio, ubi cum humanitate eruditio [*sic*; l. *eruditi*] de palma contendunt.”

²² Acts of the Utrecht Reformed consistory, Utrecht, HUA 746 no. 9, 2 May 1670: “Ad notam nopende het leeren van zeker Collegie in dese Stadt.”

certain”) of this passage makes it tempting to understand it as a reference to one of the Utrecht Cartesians’ weekly meetings. In fact, when the minutes from the following week specify that the concerns pertained to “certain disturbances that had occurred during or over the teaching of a certain college,”²³ this calls to mind the “pasquinades” and “other foul undertakings” of which the members of the *Collegie* were accused in the pamphlet war.²⁴ Finally, one might point to a marginal comment provided by a contemporary annotator in a published diary describing the situation in Utrecht during the occupation by the French in 1672 and 1673: “The ‘college of savants’ there was composed of ten men, almost all of them well-educated, who had the custom of meeting together at a certain place alone and set apart, since they always held heavy, deep, and erudite discussions there.”²⁵ While the *Collegie* remains somewhat elusive in nature, the date range for its activities leaves no doubt that it was in full swing in the spring of 1670 when copies of the *Tractatus* first made their way to Utrecht.

This is quite significant. Since Graevius’s list of the *Collegie*’s activities included also the discussion of recent publications, it is very tempting to suppose that its members read the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* together during their weekly meetings of the first half of 1670.²⁶ In fact, that, as the rest of the narrative will make clear, nearly every one of its leading members worked, in a variety of ways according to his respective capacity and position, to ensure an effective response may even suggest that a polemical strategy was discussed by the *Collegie* for addressing what was clearly perceived as a communal threat.

II. THE RECRUITMENT OF JOHANNES MELCHIORIS

Surprisingly, one of the first of the Utrecht “savants” to have acted was Graevius, the historian in their ranks. This emerges from a set of previously

²³ Acts of the Utrecht Reformed consistory, Utrecht, HUA 746, no. 9, 9 May 1670: “De Broederen van resp. Quartieren zullen aanspreken de personen van welke eenige ongeregeltheden waren voorgekomen op of omtrent de leering van zeker Collegie.”

²⁴ *Rehabeams raedt van Utrecht* (n.p., n.d.), 4: “pasquillen . . . en andere vuyle actien.”

²⁵ [Abraham de Wicquefort,] *Journal, of dagelijksch verhael van de handel der Franschen in de steden van Uytrecht en Woerden . . .* (Amsterdam: Jan Claesz. ten Hoorn, 1674), fol. 87r^o: “NB het scavante collegie bestont aldaer uyt 10 persoonen meest alle wel door lettert die gewoon waren op seker plaets alleen by een comst te hebben afgesondert alsoo aldaer altyt swaere diepsinnige en geleerde discoursen omgingen.” The annotated copy in question is held in Utrecht, UB, Hs. 3.L.17, and can be viewed online at <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-9-1> (accessed 5 April 2017).

²⁶ See also Jorink, “Outside God,” 96.

uncited letters sent to him by Johannes Melchioris, which provide an inside look at the circumstances surrounding the composition of the *Epistola* and its publication. The significance of what they reveal about Graevius's role in the immediate reception of the *Tractatus* needs to be underlined. While the Utrecht Cartesians do have a set place in Spinoza historiography, the regular actors in these accounts are Van Velthuysen and Van Mansveld, the former by virtue of his famous 1671 letter on the treatise, and the latter through the exhaustive critique he was able to complete shortly before his untimely death in May 1671.²⁷ What the Melchioris letters tell us about Graevius is also notable since these other savants were both active players in contemporary philosophical debate, while he as a historian and philologist did not necessarily have to show his colors. In fact, with the exception of his oration on comets, the somewhat opportunistic Graevius appears on the whole to have avoided committing theological and philosophical pronouncements. This no doubt is how he could insist at one point in time, without fear of contradiction, that he had never owned or even read through any of Descartes's works.²⁸ Avoiding the substance of debate, Graevius was more intent on keeping in touch with his hundreds of correspondents who supplied him with variant readings and facilitated the purchase of manuscripts. Yet in the end it was this position as a networker that would prove key in managing the Dutch response to the *Tractatus*.

Melchioris begins his first letter, dated 1 July 1670, with a report on manuscripts he had come across in Cologne, offering to mediate for their purchase. Then he abruptly moves on to the topic of the *Tractatus*: "I have finished reading the anonymous theologico-political author; he is indeed a man of a very subtle genius and most precise diligence, and as impious a mind and mouth. I have no doubt that, should God grant me the life and opportunity, I will overturn many of his blasphemies with my booklet on the authority of Holy Scripture . . ." ²⁹ The sudden mention of the *Tractatus* here leaves little doubt that it had already been the subject of discussion between Melchioris and Graevius. This earlier exchange seems not to have taken place in letters, for which there is no evidence, but rather during an

²⁷ Van Velthuysen to Spinoza / Jacob Ostens, Utrecht, 3 February 1671, in G 4:207–18 (letter #42); Regnerus van Mansveld, *Adversus anonymum Theologo-politicum liber singularis* (Amsterdam: Abraham Wolfgang, 1674).

²⁸ See Graevius to Heinsius, Utrecht, 29 April 167[4] (see n. 17).

²⁹ Melchioris to Graevius, Cologne, 1 July 1670, in Copenhagen, Royal Library (hereafter cited as KB), MS Thott 1263 4^o: "Authorem anonymum Theologo-politicum perlegi, hominem certe ut ingenii subtilissimi diligentiaeque perquam exactae, ita animi atque oris impiissimi. Non dubito quin, ubi Deus vitam et opportunitatem largiturus est, multas eius blasphemias sim eversurus isto meo de Authorit. S. Scripturae libello . . ."

in-person meeting. Melchioris had lived in the Dutch Republic from 1665 to 1667 to study theology in Groningen under Samuel Maresius (Desmarts; 1599–1673) and Jacobus Alting (1618–1679) and in Leiden with Johannes Coccejus (1603–1669), before returning to Germany where he was ordained at Frechen late in 1667.³⁰ Yet there is no doubt that he was back in Utrecht during the summer following the appearance of the *Tractatus*, since he married Mechtild Ruysch, the daughter of the Utrecht lens grinder Paulus Ruysch, there on 10 May 1670.³¹ It must have been on this trip that Melchioris and Graevius spoke, possibly having been introduced to each other through the intermediary of Graevius’s colleague Hugo Ruysch (d. 1690), professor of mathematics and Mechtild’s brother. Moreover, given the way Melchioris announces in his letter that he has now finished the *Tractatus*, Graevius was presumably the one who had raised the matter then—which is not surprising, since we have seen that the work was a hot topic in Utrecht intellectual circles, especially after the consistory’s attempts to mobilize the city’s politicians against it. One wonders, in fact, whether Graevius might have broached the *Tractatus* with Melchioris because he and his fellow savants were discussing it at their weekly meetings. Burman, at any rate, is known to have been preoccupied with the work during those very same weeks. His academic diary records how, after an initial reading of the *Tractatus* in April 1670, he gave it even closer attention during the month of May when he made a structural analysis of its arguments.³² And if the savants were indeed discussing the *Tractatus* at the time, Melchioris may have been a guest at one such meeting. In this sense it is striking how the only people in Utrecht whom Melchioris asked Graevius to greet on his behalf were “Burman and the Van Solingens,” all of whom were associated with the *Collegie*.³³

Melchioris’s letters from the summer and fall of 1670 hint of a relationship in which both he and Graevius hoped to gain something from the other. The young and aspiring theologian writes that he would like to send his book on the authority of Scripture, in which he intends also to take on the *Tractatus*, “to the most celebrated Burman” as soon as it comes back from the censors.³⁴ This ill-concealed attempt to gain the esteem of Burman no doubt had the same goal as the somewhat sycophantic tone found

³⁰ See Trocha, “Die Kinderbibel,” 45–52.

³¹ See the marital record in Utrecht, HUA 711, no. 98, p. 570.

³² Burman, *Burmannorum pietas*, 211.

³³ Melchioris to Graevius, *Ubiis* (= nearby Cologne), 23 July 1670, in Copenhagen, KB, MS Thott 1263 4°.

³⁴ Melchioris to Graevius, Cologne, 1 July 1670 (see n. 29).

throughout the entire letter. For at the end of the paragraph on the *Tractatus*, Melchioris delicately hints that he may have something to gain through his Utrecht connections: “I understand from relatives of mine that there is some matter that is to be or has already been communicated with you, which may be to my advantage. If any hope dawns for the promotion of this matter, I ask you to do so, in order that I may someday owe it above all to you [pl.], after God, that I was led into the haven of your [pl.] freedom and prosperity, for there is no one to whom I would more gladly owe it.”³⁵ Melchioris’s hopes, whatever they may have been, were soon dashed,³⁶ but not before Graevius seized on his young correspondent’s ambitious intentions to secure a riposte to the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*.

This emerges from Melchioris’s third letter, dated 11 September 1670, where he writes to Graevius: “What you, most famous sir, had urged, namely to tear apart the anonymous author of impious dissertations, I have attempted to do by means of a letter to an old friend.”³⁷ Earlier, in July, Melchioris had thus expressed his conviction that the proofs he was providing in his short book on the authority of Scripture would serve also to redress the *Tractatus*’s depiction of Scripture as a purely human document. Yet Graevius, perhaps in consultation with Burman, quite rightly saw that Spinoza’s arguments were of such an order that they could hardly be dismissed in this way. After all, Melchioris’s efforts would have amounted to little more than a footnote to his *Christlicher Glaubens-Grund*,³⁸ a semi-popular work written in the German vernacular for advanced laypeople. What Melchioris now writes in September lets on that Graevius in his return letter had urged him to consider a bigger project, resulting in the *Epistola ad amicum*. In stimulating his young correspondent, Graevius had also privileged him with an introduction to the select circle of those who knew the identity of the *Tractatus*’s author at the time.³⁹ Melchioris writes to him: “Depending above all on your conjecture, I have called the author

³⁵ Melchioris to Graevius, Cologne, 1 July 1670 (see n. 29): “Intelligo ex cognatis meis, communicandum nescio an communicandum vobiscum aliquod negotium, quod e re mea esse queat. Cuius si promovendi spes quaedam affulserit, faxitis quaeso, ut vobis imprimis post Deum aliquando debeam, quod in vestrum libertatis atque prosperitatis portum fuerim traductus, quandoquidem nemini id debebo libentius.”

³⁶ See Melchioris to Graevius, *Ubiis*, 23 July 1670 (see n. 33).

³⁷ Melchioris to Graevius, Frechen, 11 September 1670, in Copenhagen, KB, MS Thott 1263 4°: “Quod monueras, vir celeberrime, ut authorem anonymum dissertationum impiarum deartuare, conatus sum praestare epistola ad amicum veterem.”

³⁸ See Trocha, “Die Kinderbibel,” 45–82, at 80–81.

³⁹ See on this matter Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza’s Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 219–22.

Zinospa. For I wanted to mention Spinoza expressly.”⁴⁰ Yet the involvement of Graevius did not end even there.

As noted, less than a year after the *Epistola* had been published, a revised edition appeared under the title *Religio ejusque natura*. One striking difference between the two is the full identification of Melchioris’s name on the new title-page, instead of just his initials and ministerial status as in the first edition. A second noteworthy difference is the new edition’s correction of the original printing’s numerous typographical errors.⁴¹ An account of these features can be found in the preface that Melchioris added to the second edition. Here he laments the poor state of the text in the *Epistola*, owing to the “printer’s haste, or the corrector’s shameful stupidity and sluggishness,” noting also that it had gone to press in Utrecht without his knowledge. While this error-ridden text had been widely sold under his partially disguised name, Melchioris makes it clear that he now wants to take full ownership of this work so that his readers might no longer be beguiled.⁴²

While the preface therefore accounts for some of the *Epistola*’s surprising features, it can and must be read alongside Melchioris’s letters to Graevius inasmuch as they not only supplement, but also shed a somewhat different light on the tale it tells. For given Melchioris’s claim that the *Epistola* went to press without his knowledge, it is more than tempting to connect its error-ridden state to the manuscript copy that he had joined to his letter to Graevius of 11 September 1670, apologizing for the bad job his inexperienced copyist had made of it. On this account, the printer was not lazy or inept, but had simply had a hard time deciphering the messy text—exactly as Melchioris himself had feared would be true for Graevius.⁴³ Significantly, this would imply that Graevius was also responsible for bringing the manuscript to press, either himself or through a third party. That this indeed happened is all but certain given the identity of the *Epistola*’s publisher, Cornelius Noenaert, whose presses also produced Burman’s works from that period.⁴⁴ In keeping with Melchioris’s request,⁴⁵ Graevius will

⁴⁰ Melchioris to Graevius, Frechen, 11 September 1670 (see n. 37): “Tua imprimis coniectura nixus *Zinospam* vocavi auctorem. Nam Spinozam expresse nominare volui.”

⁴¹ Pace De Vet, “Letter of a Watchman,” 38, who claims that the errors were only corrected for the 1693 *Opera*.

⁴² Melchioris, *Religio*, preface, *3v–4r.

⁴³ Melchioris to Graevius, Frechen, 11 September 1670 (see n. 37): “verear difficulter a vobis lectum iri.”

⁴⁴ *Disquisitio de moralitate sabbati* (1665); *Synopsis theologiae* (1671–1672); *Belgica afflicta* (1673).

⁴⁵ Melchioris to Graevius, Frechen, 11 September 1670 (see n. 37): “Velim etiam Reverendo D. Burmanno examinandam epistolam cum adiunctis literis dari.”

thus have sent the manuscript to Burman for examination, who then recommended it to his publisher. This reconstruction also explains how Graevius could have known in April 1671, even before the Melchioris's *Epistola* was officially advertised,⁴⁶ that the "brief strictures of an anonymous author" would be published any day.⁴⁷

In spite of what the above might suggest, however, it is doubtful whether Graevius and Burman willfully published Melchioris's manuscript without permission. On the one hand, there is no reason to question Melchioris's claim in the 1672 preface that the *Epistola* had gone to press without his knowledge. On the other hand, in his unpublished letters he does appear to ask Graevius and Burman to help him find a publisher: "But if by chance you [pl.] should form a plan for publication, do not offer anything for the sake of friendship and favor that does not serve public usefulness."⁴⁸ Although deferentially framed as a plea not to let friendship cloud judgment, this sentence all but constitutes a plea to propose his work to a publisher, and it is hard to see how Graevius and Burman could have taken it otherwise than they obviously did.

Significantly, this observation is not without ramifications for the unnamed publication of the *Epistola*—which, as Graevius's use of the term "anonymous" above indicates, was indeed intended to mask the author's identity. While on the face of it one might be inclined to think that Graevius and Burman were more or less forced to suppress the name of the manuscript's author because they had no right to publish it, this explanation fails in light of the reading of Melchioris's letter proposed above. Rather, it would seem that the Utrecht Cartesians were moved to hide the author's identity due to his youth and inexperience. For although the *Epistola* hardly represents a definitive answer to the *Tractatus*, it still was a solid piece of argumentation, addressed some of Spinoza's most important claims, and witnessed a sensitivity to the finer philosophical implications. Indeed, Melchioris's former Groningen mentor Alting expected as much when he heard that his one-time student was preparing to refute the work.⁴⁹ Nevertheless,

⁴⁶ *Oprechte Haerlemse Dingsdaegse Courant*, May 19, 1671; for this reference I am indebted to Jeroen van de Ven.

⁴⁷ Graevius to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Utrecht, 27 April 1671, in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923–), 1/1:143–45 (letter #83).

⁴⁸ Melchioris to Graevius, Frechen, 11 September 1670 (see n. 37): "Quod si forte de publicatione consilium inibitis, amicitiae et favori nolite aliquid deferre, quod non sit ex utilitate publica."

⁴⁹ Jacobus Alting to Antonius Perizonius, Groningen, 24 March 1671, in Alting, *Opera omnia* (Amsterdam: Gerardus Borstius, 1685–1687), 5:380a (letter #55).

the fact remains that Melchioris was an intellectual nobody, while from the beginning the *Tractatus* had been recognized by friend and foe alike as the product of a great mind, whom more and more people were beginning to identify as the formidable Spinoza. Graevius and Burman seem therefore to have done everything to make sure that the *Epistola* would not be hindered by its author's youth and lack of track record, so that "their" response to the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* might be evaluated on the basis of its own merits.

III. AN ORCHESTRATED ATTACK?

Yet Graevius's recruitment of Melchioris and his publication of the latter's manuscript, in which he was aided by Burman, hardly exhausts the activity against the *Tractatus* undertaken by the Utrecht Cartesians. The involvement of nearly every one of the *Collegie's* leading members seems not only to confirm the suspicion that they discussed the *Tractatus* at their meetings in the spring of 1670, but also to suggest a collective aspect to their response. Such an attack would not have been without a parallel. Although the charges of collusion in the highly polemical *Collegie* pamphlet are no doubt exaggerated, there still is little doubt that the savants at times acted as a pack. Thus, after the Voetian party had appropriated the comet of 1665 for their program of religious and social reform by interpreting it as a sign of God's coming wrath, Graevius delivered an oration against this reading, and was flanked in his attack by no less than four of the other savants (De Bruyn, Wolzogen, Van Mansveld, and Burman).⁵⁰ An even closer parallel to the events surrounding the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* seems to be formed by the *Philosophia Sacrae Scripturae interpres* (1666), commonly attributed to Lodewijk Meyer, another work that the Utrecht savants may well have treated in their discussion of the latest academic developments.⁵¹ Among the first to attack it were no less than three of the *Collegie's* members, namely Wolzogen, De Bruyn, and Van Velthuysen.⁵² Of course, the comparison with Meyer's *Philosophia* becomes even more relevant given the way Spinoza with his *Tractatus* joined the hermeneutical

⁵⁰ See Jorink, *Reading the Book of Nature in the Dutch Golden Age, 1575–1715* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 156–57.

⁵¹ Jorink, "Outside God," 96.

⁵² See Roberto Bordoli, *Ragione e Scrittura tra Descartes e Spinoza* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1997), 232–383.

debate by offering an alternative to Meyer, apart from the response of the Voetians on the right and of the “savants” on the left.⁵³

Burman, so it emerges, was not only Graevius’s partner in bringing Melchioris’s *Epistola* to press, but also undertook recruitment efforts of his own. Early in July 1670 he wrote a letter to his Groningen counterpart, Alting, urging him to refute that “most pestilential book.”⁵⁴ Alting would have been in the Utrecht Cartesians’ sights for similar reasons as his former student Melchioris, with whom Graevius was corresponding during those very same weeks. Yet, Alting was as renowned and experienced as Melchioris was young and nameless. Alting himself had been a product of the Groningen “school” of Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641), famous for his consultation of and engagement with rabbinic teachers. Before succeeding his former teacher as professor of Hebrew in 1643, Alting had further honed his Talmudic skills at Emden under the tutelage of rabbi Gumprecht ben Abraham, and studied for longer periods of time with the best orientalists on offer in the western world, such as Constantijn l’Empereur (1591–1648) in Leiden and Edward Pococke (1604–1691) at Oxford. Then, after more than twenty years as professor of Hebrew at Groningen, he was made professor of theology as well (1667), commissioned to teach Old Testament exegesis.

These credentials no doubt explain why Burman in his letter identified Alting as the right man for the job of taking down the *Tractatus*: “For annihilating this work I know of no one apart from you who is so gifted when it comes to the divine Word. Since the study of the Word adorns you with such honor, I wish that you in turn would defend the honor of the Word against those blasphemies!”⁵⁵ With his thirty years of experience as an orientalist, Alting would arguably have been the closest thing to a champion that the Reformed camp had to match the range of Judeo-Christian erudition that Spinoza had applied in his critique of Scripture’s divine status. This impression is confirmed by the way Burman reproached his friend two months later for apparently having declined this task: “I still do not see by what right you may decline to refute that pestilential book on

⁵³ Samuel J. Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵⁴ Burman to Alting, [Utrecht], 5 July 1670, in Burman, *Burmammorum pietas*, 228–29: “*Optem ut dextra tua cadat . . . liber pestilentissimus, multorumque malorum syrma secum trahens, de Libertate Philosophandi tractatum Theologico-Policum promittens.*”

⁵⁵ Burman to Alting, [Utrecht], 5 July 1670 (see n. 54): “*Quem qui extra te perimat, nullum novi, cujus illud est χάρισμα in verbo Divino adeo potentem esse: cujus studium cum tanto te condecoraverit honore, utinam vicissim illius honori contra istas blasphemias consulas!*”

the freedom of philosophy. If there is room here for a single request, I shall continue for the sake of the public good to impress this upon you with all available means.”⁵⁶ Burman’s earlier compliments had therefore not been the flowery adulations commonly encountered in the Republic of Letters. Rather, sensing like the German polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) that the *Tractatus* demanded a knowledge of the Hebrew language and Jewish tradition that surpassed his own,⁵⁷ Burman saw its refutation as a duty that simply befell Alting. And indeed, from the Utrecht Cartesians’ perspective, the other universities in the Dutch Republic had little hope to offer. In Leiden, Johannes Cocceius might have been up to the task, but he had passed away in 1669 shortly before the appearance of the *Tractatus*. Moreover, more ill than good could be expected from other possible candidates in the United Provinces like Christianus Schotanus (1603–1671) at Franeker, Maresius at Groningen, or Voetius in Utrecht, given their stances on Cartesian philosophy. In fact Maresius would be one of the very first to pounce on the link between Descartes and Spinoza, and triumphantly announce that the *Tractatus* proved he had been right all along about the evils of Cartesianism.⁵⁸

Burman’s second appeal to Alting also met with failure. Nevertheless, his efforts seem not to have left his Groningen colleague unmoved. Several months later, when the *Tractatus* still went unopposed in the published sphere, Alting would wish his friend Antonius Perizonius (1626–1672), professor of theology at the *Athenaeum illustre* in Deventer, success in his new project to refute Spinoza’s attack on the Bible’s divine status. He noted that a number of different people were working to refute the *Tractatus*, “such that the one who labors more carefully will bear the palm and lead the vanguard.”⁵⁹ This competitive side to the race against the *Tractatus*

⁵⁶ Burman to Alting, [Utrecht], 4 September 1670, in Burman, *Burmannorum pietas*, 229: “Non video adhuc, quo jure pestilentis libri de libertate Philosophandi confutationem a te amoliaris. Si ullus mearum hic sit precum locus, hoc summis modis a te efflagitare, in boni publici usum pergerem.”

⁵⁷ See Mogens Laerke, “À la recherche d’un homme égal à Spinoza: G. W. Leibniz et la *Demonstratio evangelica* de Pierre-Daniel Huet,” *Dix-septième siècle* 232, no. 3 (2006): 387–410, at 389–90.

⁵⁸ Samuel Maresius, *Clypeus orthodoxiae* (Groningen: Tierck Everts, 1671), 10.

⁵⁹ Alting to A. Perizonius, [Groningen], 24 March 1671, in Alting, *Opera*, 5:380a (letter #55): “Susceptum tibi opus, ut ex voto succedat, animitus opto. Quod plures in eodem desudent, haud miror; sic etiam concurrerunt undique, ut quam flammam Praeadamitae excitarat exstinguerent.” For the oblique reference to Spinoza, see Touber, “Philology and Theology: Commenting the Old Testament in the Dutch Republic,” in *Neo-Latin Commentaries and the Management of Knowledge in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period (1400–1700)*, ed. Karel Enenkel and Henk Nellen (Louvain: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2013), 483–85.

may have been why Alting, who still had Burman's admonitions ringing in his ears, did not just offer Perizonius empty wishes but concrete support. A year later he sent his Deventer friend, who was a solid theologian but did not come anywhere near his intellectual status, an argument to use in his project for countering Spinoza's exploitation of the conflicting reports in Ezra and Nehemiah regarding the number of Jewish exiles who returned from Babylon.⁶⁰ Three weeks later Alting added a second letter to respond to additional questions Perizonius had submitted, most of which pertained to the formation of the Old Testament canon. In crafting his response, Alting cited various rabbinic and Talmudic sources to prop up the credibility of a process whose validity Spinoza had called into question in chapter ten of the *Tractatus*.⁶¹ Alting may therefore have declined to become the face of the Dutch response to the *Tractatus* by composing a refutation of his own, but he did contribute substantively to the work of Perizonius.

On 24 October 1672 Perizonius passed away before he could complete his refutation. This fact emerges from a grief-filled letter which his son Jacobus Perizonius (1651–1715), an aspiring classicist, sent his mentor Graevius, witnessing the family's shock that Antonius should be taken from this world at the prime of his life:

And he would have completed also those books which he was writing, especially the wretched refutation of that accursed and impious disputation *for the freedom of philosophizing*, of which he had already completed a large part. But now he who advanced the cause of God with such application has been overcome in the middle of his labors and passed away.⁶²

Specifying that the manuscript refutation went as far as chapter nine of the *Tractatus*, Jacobus appeals to Graevius for help, lest the literal product of his father's final breaths be wasted: "If possible I would like it to be printed together with the late Van Mansveld's treatise of the same scope. But I am

⁶⁰ Alting to A. Perizonius, [Groningen], 13 January 1672, in Alting, *Opera*, 5:382b–383a (letter #59).

⁶¹ Alting to A. Perizonius, Groningen, 6 February 1672, in Alting, *Opera*, 5:383a–b (letter #60).

⁶² Jacobus Perizonius to Graevius, Deventer, 21 November 1672, in St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Aut. 146, no. 2: "Libros etiam suos, in quibus conscribendis totus erat, libenter perfecisset, praesertim accusatam illam Refutationem sacrae & impiae disputationis *pro libertate philosophandi*, cujus magnam jam partem profligaverat. At nunc ille, qui Dei causam tanto studio egit, in medio laborum suorum cursu oppressus atque exstinctus est."

asking for your advice, and I ask you to speak about these things with the celebrated Burman.”⁶³ Therefore, as with Melchioris’s *Epistola*, so with Perizonius’s refutation, Graevius appears as the first point of contact for bringing the manuscript to publication, while Burman assumes the role of an adviser.

Given the extent of the Utrecht Cartesians’s efforts to secure a refutation for the *Tractatus*, it may come as a surprise that they decided *not* to publish the Perizonius manuscript. This emerges from what Jacobus writes in response to Graevius’s answer to his query (which, unfortunately, is no longer extant):

In regard to my father’s final writings, I will stand by your judgment. I have read his refutation of Spinoza myself. As soon as the times in our Republic allow it, I will give it first to [Christopher] Wittich, and then to other friends, so that they may examine it carefully. I admit that certain things in it are liable to the disparagement of the shameless, but there are also many things worthy in the eyes of men. Nevertheless, I will surrender this matter for the sake of the common interest, lest something appear in public that could cause him ill-will.⁶⁴

Graevius must therefore have declined to bring the manuscript to press by suggesting that it would be better, in the interest of the memory of Antonius Perizonius, for the work not to see the light of day—a judgment to which his son acquiesced, in spite of the feeble protestations formulated above. Even if Burman’s recruitment efforts therefore came up empty-handed, also indirectly in Perizonius, the very fact that inquiries regarding the publication of the latter’s manuscript were addressed to the Utrecht Cartesians serves to confirm their central role in coordinating the Dutch response to Spinoza. In fact, through Graevius’s vast correspondence network, they were even able to exercise a form of quality control. After all, Jacobus Perizonius’s insistence that his father’s work contained “also many good

⁶³ J. Perizonius to Graevius, Deventer, 21 November 1672 (see n. 62): “Vellem, si fieri posset, ut una cum *Mansveldii* τοῦ νῦν ἐν ἀγίοις *ejusdem argumenti tractatu* typis exscriberetur. Sed, tuum consilium exquiro, & ut haec cum Celeb. Burmanno . . . communicates rogo.”

⁶⁴ J. Perizonius to Graevius, Deventer, 2 May [1673], in Leiden, UB, BPL 337: “De posthumis parentis mei scriptis vestro iudicio stabo. Spinozae refutationem ipse legi. Hanc, quam primum per Reip. tempora licebit, Wittichio primum, dein aliis amicis dabo diligenter examinandam. Fateor apparere illic quaedam quae obnoxia sunt improborum obtreptionibus, sed & multa digna hominum oculis. Communi tamen hoc dabo causae, ne quid exeat in publicum, quod illi invidiam facere queat.”

things” is naturally read as a response to concerns expressed by Graevius and Burman about its quality.

That Graevius was concerned about shortcomings in the Perizonius manuscript rather than, for example, its presumably Cartesian nature, is confirmed by his concurrent efforts to publish the refutation of his late colleague Van Mansveld, which openly sought to dissociate their Cartesianism from that of the author of the *Tractatus*.⁶⁵ Like Perizonius, Van Mansveld had passed away (29 May 1671) before his refutation of the *Tractatus* made it to press, and in his funeral oration Graevius expressed the hope that the work might not be abandoned to the moths.⁶⁶ Yet little known is the fact that Graevius played a vital role in bringing his own wish to fulfillment. This emerges from a letter that his fellow Utrecht savant Louis Wolzogen, who had moved to Amsterdam in 1669, wrote to him in March 1674:

Having at last completed Van Mansveld’s work, of which a copy is being sent to you, the printer is asking you again and again to give thought to the preface. Its content has been left to your judgment, provided that it has something in the way of a recommendation from the merit of the author as well as from your own reputation. But speed is of the greatest importance, since the Frankfurt book fair is at hand, and [the publisher] Wolfgang considers it to be to his interest if [the work] can be brought there.⁶⁷

A month later Wolzogen would send him a reminder from the home of Abraham Wolfgang (fl. 1658–1694), who, no doubt seeing his profit shrink before his eyes, had let on that he was unhappy with Graevius for failing to supply the requested preface.⁶⁸ Wolfgang did manage to publish Van Mansveld’s *Adversus anonymum* that same year (1674), but not in time for

⁶⁵ Van Mansveld, *Adversus anonymum*, 4.

⁶⁶ Graevius, *Orationes quas Ultrajecti habuit* (Delft: Adrianus Beman, 1721), 222–23.

⁶⁷ Louis Wolzogen to Graevius, Amsterdam, 24 March 1674, in Copenhagen, KB, MS Thott 1267 4^o: “Perfecto tandem opere Mansfeldiano, cujus ad te mittitur exemplum, rogat etiam atque etiam typographus, ut de praefatione velis cogitationem suscipere. Ejus argumentum tuo relictum arbitrio est; modo commendationis aliquid habeat, cum ab autoris laude, tum a nominis tui fama. Sed in festinatione omne momentum positum est, quod instant nundinae Francofurtenses, et magnopere ad rationes suas pertinere putat Wolfgangus eo mitti posse.”

⁶⁸ Wolzogen to Graevius, Amsterdam, 27 April 1674, in Copenhagen, KB, MS Thott 1267 4^o: “Has in domo Wolfgangii nostri scribo: quod dixisse sufficit ut scias ab illo aures tibi vellicari. Praefationem in Mansfeldii librum, quia promisisti, ideo jure quodam suo flagitat.”

the Frankfurt book fair, nor does the preface in the final product amount to much.

Wolzogen's letters may give the impression that he played the leading role in bringing Van Mansveld's manuscript to publication, and that Graevius's only task pertained to the preface. Yet there is no reason to abandon the consistent pattern encountered above with Melchioris and Perizonius, according to which Graevius would have obtained the manuscript from Van Mansveld's family and then used Wolzogen for communication with the publisher in Amsterdam. This, in any case, would be the nature of the relationship between Graevius and Wolzogen a year later in connection with a manuscript work of the Leiden classicist Johannes Meursius (1579–1639), which it is certain that Graevius obtained and edited.⁶⁹ In this instance too Wolzogen acted as his intermediary, and once more he sent pleading letters to Graevius on behalf of an exasperated Wolfgang, who again was left waiting on a preface.⁷⁰ Graevius often had too many irons in the fire, so that such final details as the writing of a preface seem to have been of a lower priority for him. Yet the fact remains that the nearly 400-page *Adversus anonymum* against Spinoza's *Tractatus*, written by Van Mansveld, and prepared for publication by Graevius with the aid of Wolzogen, truly was a team effort of the Utrecht Cartesian network.

CONCLUSION

The intriguing history behind Melchioris's *Epistola* opens one's eyes to the fact that the Utrecht Cartesians' engagement with the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* went well beyond Van Velthuysen's well-known letter 42 and Van Mansveld's frequently cited *Adversus anonymum*. The theologian Burman may not have taken up his pen himself, but this does not mean he simply rested on his laurels. Rather, he seems to have recognized, quite rightly, that as good a theologian as he was, someone with a greater orientalist pedigree than he would be better qualified to take on Spinoza's arguments against the divinity of Scripture. For that reason he tried to recruit the eminent Alting, and additionally served Graevius as a theological advisor in bringing the Melchioris manuscript to press and, on the contrary, in keeping Perizonius's refutation from being published. So too Wolzogen did not

⁶⁹ *Joanni Meursii Creta, Cyprus, Rhodus* (Amsterdam: Abraham Wolfgang, 1675).

⁷⁰ Wolzogen to Graevius, Amsterdam, 13 May and 10 June 1670, in Copenhagen, KB, MS Thott 1267 4°.

write himself, but acted as an intermediary for Graevius to secure the publication of their late fellow savant Van Mansveld's highly-anticipated work. Somewhat surprisingly, then, the most active Utrecht Cartesian was neither a philosopher nor a theologian, but the philologist Graevius who throughout his life was less interested in the substance of debate than the writing of letters. Yet it was precisely because he had such an enormous correspondence network, primarily for his philological pursuits, that he was able to have a finger in nearly every Dutch anti-Spinoza pie.

Another remarkable feature of the Utrecht Cartesians' response is its speed. As noted at the outset, the earliest signs of the *Tractatus* date from April 1670 when it sent shock waves through Utrecht's intellectual community. Given the sheer volume of Van Mansveld's refutation and the date of his death, there is little doubt that he started his work right around this time—just as Burman followed up his initial reading of the work in April 1670 with a second, closer perusal in May, the same month when Graevius initiated his recruitment of Melchioris. Moreover, in Melchioris's *Epistola* the Utrecht Cartesians were responsible for the very first truly public refutation of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. Scholars may commonly identify the *Programma adversus anonymum de liberate philosophandi* of Jacobus Thomasius (1622–1684), with its 8 May 1670 date, as the first public response to Spinoza.⁷¹ Yet they forget that such *programmata* were brief texts prefixed to orations, or, as in this case, to a schedule announcing the Leipzig professors' public lectures, and would therefore have been printed for the occasion in a very limited run—such that not a single copy of the original *Programma* is known to exist today. The same dynamic applies to the *programmata* of Thomasius's colleague Friedrich Rappolt (1615–1676) from the following weeks, which similarly addressed the *Tractatus*. Melchioris's *Epistola*, however, appeared before the texts of these *programmata* were made widely available, engaged Spinoza's arguments at much greater length, and proved such a commercial success that a second edition was soon deemed necessary.

Yet the most significant outcome pertains to the very nature of the relationship between Spinoza and the Dutch Cartesians. For while it is tempting to understand the machinations of the Cartesians in Utrecht against the *Tractatus* primarily as a political maneuver, in fact no activity apart from the publication of Van Mansveld's tome could have served to dissociate them publicly from Spinoza for the very simple reason that these activities were not public in character. Their actions, and especially the

⁷¹ Israel, "Early Dutch," 81; Laerke, "À la recherche," 388.

efforts made to rescue Scripture's authority through the recruitment of Melchioris and Alting, demonstrate, rather, a genuine concern over the way the Christian religion had been attacked by Spinoza. Therefore, on the one hand, the Utrecht "liberals" agreed with their "conservative" counterparts in the Reformed public church that the *Tractatus* was filled with blasphemous ideas. On the other hand, while the orthodox responded by way of proscription, the response of the Utrecht Cartesian network is notable for recognizing in Spinoza not just a blasphemous heretic and atheist, but also a formidable opponent and a brilliant mind. Their guarded respect speaks in the warning to Melchioris that Spinoza could not simply be refuted with a parenthetical remark in an existing work, but was worthy of a separate work. It is suggested as the reason for Burman's apparent refusal himself to tackle issues for which he was not particularly competent, and for the pressure he rather exerted on Alting as the Dutch Republic's obvious choice as champion. Most of all, however, it would appear to shine through in the recommendation, as a form of quality control, not to publish Antonius Perizonius's refutation, even though his son Jacobus was shopping it around for publication. The esteem in which the Cartesians held Spinoza, bordering at times on fascination, becomes particularly relevant in view of newly recovered manuscript sources indicating that none other than Graevius was the central figure in realizing Spinoza's well-known but puzzling visit to Utrecht in the summer of 1673, and that he was closely in touch with the philosopher for the duration of his stay.⁷² So too Spinoza's acceptance of this invitation ought to make one wary of seeing in the Utrecht savants no more than the "stupid Cartesians" he complained of in his famous 1675 letter. The reception of Spinoza by the Dutch Cartesians is therefore not a purely negative tale, nor can their relationship be addressed as if it were a monolithic whole. It is the task of the historian to unravel this story in all its complexities, even as new evidence is becoming available.

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⁷² For an initial report, see Gootjes, "Sources inédites sur Spinoza: La correspondance entre Johannes Bouwmeester et Johannes Georgius Graevius," *Bulletin de bibliographie spinoziste* 38, in *Archives de philosophie* 79 (2016). An edition of the Bouwmeester-Graevius correspondence is currently in preparation. For the Utrecht trip, see also Jeroen van de Ven, "Crastinâ die loquar cum Celsissimo principe de Spinosa': New Perspectives on Spinoza's Trip to the French Army Headquarters in Utrecht in Late July 1673," *Intellectual History Review* 25, no. 2 (2015): 147–65.