

David Kromhout and Adri Offenbergh, *Hugo Grotius' Remonstrantie of 1615. Facsimile, Transliteration, Modern Translations and Analysis*, Leiden / Boston, Brill, 2019. xx, 222 pp. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004397446>.

In March 1615 the States of Holland commissioned Reinier Pauw and Hugo Grotius, pensionaries of Amsterdam and Rotterdam respectively, to draft an ordinance according to which the Jews could be admitted to live in various places in Holland. Under Emperor Charles V, new Jewish settlements had been forbidden. Those statutes were still on the books when at the very end of the sixteenth century 'Portuguese' merchant families, of Jewish descent but converted under pressure to Catholicism, arrived in force in the now officially Protestant Dutch Republic and returned to the Jewish religion. They settled mainly in Amsterdam, but Alkmaar, Haarlem and Rotterdam tried to lure Jewish merchants to their cities as well with special privileges that would allow them to practice their religion. In Hoorn, however, three ex-Mennonites who had converted to Judaism were threatened by the draconic punishments stipulated in the older anti-Jewish legislation. To prevent such inconsistencies, the two pensionaries were to draft uniform regulations for the entire province of Holland. In December 1619, however, after a silence of several years, the States permitted local authorities to decide for themselves whether or not to admit Jews and under which conditions.

When in 1864 the descendants of Grotius brought a collection of his personal papers to auction, among these were found several documents that related to this episode in the history of Dutch Jewry. At a later date they were acquired for the famous library of Ets Haim, where they are kept to this day. The most extensive of these, titled *Remonstrantie nopen de ordre dije in de landen van Hollandt ende Westvrieslandt dijent gestelt op de Joden*, has now been published in a new edition, with a facsimile of the original document, full transliteration, translations into contemporary Dutch and English, a modern introduction and annotation. This new edition replaces the one published by Jaap Meijer in 1949. It is a complex text that fully deserves the attention of researchers from a variety of disciplines. In an elaborate prologue, it discusses the arguments for regulated admission; in 49 articles it lays out the conditions under which Jews can be admitted without endangering the Christian religion and public order; and in a third part these articles are defended with extensive reference to authoritative legal sources, mainly from the Roman *Codex Iuris Civilis*. It can be regarded as a window into the mindset of the Dutch intellectual elite, not only regarding the Jews, but also on the relation between religion and public order in general. In the words of David Kromhout: it offers 'a

prismaic view of social and cultural tendencies and crossroads of the beginning of the seventeenth century in the Dutch Republic, which combined pragmatic mercantilism with dominant Calvinism and profound humanist learning' (this edition, p. 56).

The present edition, apart from being a really beautiful book, in some respects is an improvement upon Meijer's. In his introduction David Kromhout respectfully lays to rest a number of myths surrounding the arrival and initial organisation of the Jewish community in Amsterdam, with the help of the results of more recent research. Yet it has a number of weaknesses, too. A much more incisive revisionism in the appraisal of this text would have been appropriate, especially as regards the ascription of authorship to Grotius. Kromhout himself seems uneasy about this. In a footnote he acknowledges the lack of evidence (p. 6, n. 3), and notes that the first part of the *Remonstrantie* reads like a *Fremdkörper* in the work of Grotius (p. 30), but at the same time he doggedly continues in the footsteps of the auctioneer Nijhoff in his auction catalogue of 1864 and of his predecessor Meijer. The latter decisively excluded Pauw from joint authorship, despite the joint commission of the two pensionaries, because he was a Calvinist — which seems a little bit peevish in speaking about a man who was twice Grand Pensionary of Holland. This summary depreciation of Pauw has led several authors on a fruitless search for another regulation that could safely be attributed to him, and is not questioned here.

It is, however, highly unlikely that Grotius, or Pauw, would present the States with a piece that reflected a personal opinion only. Reports to administrative bodies usually were the work of committees, who would consult with others behind the scenes, making the final result a collaborative effort. Perhaps the *Remonstrantie* is in this sense the ordinance for which Pauw and Grotius were committed, but that is not a given, and in my opinion unlikely. Taken as a whole, it is somewhat 'academic'. Meijer in his edition printed a much more to the point, also undated and unsigned concept-resolution from the collection auctioned in 1864 that would be a much likelier candidate (Meijer, pp. 95–98, 135–137). It explicitly refers to previous consultation of and approval from the *Hoge Raad* (High Council, an advisory board on the highest level of jurisdiction for Holland and Zeeland). Obviously the matter was discussed more widely, and what changed hands in the auction of 1864 may well have been parts of the work file, and the *Remonstrantie* one of a collection of preparatory texts from diverse persons or colleges, collected by Pauw and Grotius in the execution of their commission (see Meijer, pp. 70–71, 96), rather than his or their original work.

As the term 'remonstrantie' implies a complaint or a request for redress, the *Remonstrantie* may well have predated the commission of the States of Holland

to Pauw and De Groot and provoked the commission in the first place. With its attention to blasphemy and the seduction of Christians to Judaism, its insistence on control of the Jewish population and its missionary inclinations, it may even have come from an ecclesiastical body. The *post-acta* of the synod of Dordrecht and in the 1620s the synods of Zuid-Holland repeatedly voiced very similar concerns. On the whole, Meijer is much more generous in providing the full texts of documents relevant to the genesis of the *Remonstrantie*, such as the regulations drafted by Alkmaar in 1604, Haarlem in 1605 and Rotterdam in 1610 (Meijer, pp. 37–46), the commission to the two pensionaries (Meijer, p. 50), the final resolution of the States of Holland of 1619 (Meijer, p. 101) and even a later project for a mission among the Jews discussed in the Reformed synod and which shows some similarities to the *Remonstrantie* (Meijer, pp. 26–29). Intriguing is also another anonymous and undated document, part of the same auction of Grotiana and thus supposedly of this work file, also given in full by Meijer (Meijer, pp. 98–101, 141–143), which presents the apprehension that some articles of the ordinances under consideration might lay Jewish merchants open to blackmail. In the present volume the spotlight is exclusively on the *Remonstrantie* as a work attributed to Grotius as the unique, and uniquely qualified author. Other texts are shown as (untransliterated) photographs of (parts of) the originals, or given, or referred to only in footnotes, thus robbing it of this context.

In this light, the introduction could have done without the elaborate paragraph on Grotius's biography and on the Arminian Controversies. Both Donner in his prologue to the volume (p. xi) and Kromhout (here, p. 29) point out that the latter, although contemporaneous with the discussion about a regulation of the Jewish presence, have no bearing on the wording of the *Remonstrantie* (although the sneer at the 'many people inclining to novelties and all too curious inquiries into matters surpassing human understanding' in the prelude comes close). Instead of a careful comparison of the argumentation in the *Remonstrantie* with that used by Grotius in his unpublished *Meletius* (dated 1611 or 1612), the introduction would have done more justice to the text by presenting it against the background of the climate of opinion on religious diversity at the time, and the practices of religious coexistence current in various places within and outside the Republic. The *Remonstrantie* itself explicitly refers to the international context and to historical precedents, and recent research has yielded many new insights in this matter — I only mention here Benjamin Kaplan's *Divided by Faith*, which curiously enough is not included in the bibliography.

This would also have opened the way to a discussion of the possible reasons why a uniform regulation did not materialise, and could have pointed out

promising avenues of further research. The composition of the *Remonstrantie* itself suggests that strong opposition to changing the established laws and the new local regulations was to be expected. The big cities, Amsterdam above all, clearly stood to profit from the presence of its Jewish inhabitants. In 1616, years before the States of Holland finally resolved on the matter, it drafted its own charter regulating Jewish presence (mentioned only in both works: Meijer, pp. 80, 100; the new edition p. 22, with a reference to its publication elsewhere). It is well known that decision-making in the Republic was slow and cumbersome, as interest diverged between provinces, between cities, and between cities and the rural areas. The *Remonstrantie* could have been used to dig deeper into the circumstances favourable or unfavourable to the prospering of Jewish life. Article 4 stipulates that Jews can settle in walled cities only. Did the authorities in the industrialised villages of Holland, such as those that produced *kosher* cheese, object? What can have moved Utrecht to steadfastly maintain the prohibition of Emperor Charles V for Utrecht City, while allowing a large settlement of Jews in the village of Maarsse? And why did the arguments of the *Remonstrantie* apparently have no traction in the northern provinces? Now the Jewish community of Amsterdam shares the spotlight with Grotius. This also is a missed opportunity.

The facsimile edition is nice. It supports the conclusion that the very few marginal annotations are not in Grotius's handwriting, as was suggested in the auction catalogue of Nijhoff. A fully diplomatic transliteration seems a little bit overdone. Moreover, it contains many small inaccuracies. Henk van Nierop drew my attention to similar editorial sloppiness in the illustrations: the portrait on page 9 is not that of Queen Isabella of Castile, but of her great-granddaughter Isabella of Austria. The transposition of the text of the *Remonstrantie* into modern Dutch is an attentive service to the uninitiated. Various technical terms from the seventeenth century have no straight equivalent in contemporary Dutch, so without clarifying annotation their meaning remains somewhat opaque, and the translation of lines 477–478 is wrong for a lack of understanding of the terminology. The supple translation into English is useful to researchers who do not read Dutch. An index of proper names and subjects would not have been amiss.

All in all, the volume is a deluxe coffee table book rather than a solid work of innovative scholarship. Despite a small number of errors, Meijer's edition of the text suffices for researchers; and although his interpretations can be ameliorated from a spate of newer studies and the publication of relevant new sources, such as the journals of the Haarlem pensionary Michiel van Woerden by Arend H. Huussen jr., Meijer's approach shows a healthy dose of curiosity that I find sorely lacking in the present edition. The text has been canonised as

a tribute to Dutch toleration and Jewish emancipation. It has become the hostage of intersecting streams of identity politics. The history of the Jewish presence in the Dutch Republic deserves better.

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