

Book reviews

David Kromhout and Adri K. Offenbergh, *Hugo Grotius's Remonstrantie of 1615: Facsimile, Transliteration, Modern Translations and Analysis*. Leiden: Brill, 2019. xviii + 222 pp. ISBN 978-9004396074.

This handsome volume offers a top-quality, modern scholarly edition of one of the most interesting and significant documents concerning the history of Jews and Jewish-Christian relations in the Dutch Golden Age. Commissioned by the Morasha Foundation, which promotes the study of Dutch-Jewish history, this new edition was undertaken to mark the four-hundredth anniversary of the document in 2015. It is greatly superior to the 1949 edition produced by Jaap Meijer, on which scholars have relied for decades, and totally supersedes the latter.

Hugo Grotius's *Remonstrantie* (Remonstrance) falls into an unusual category among historical documents, at least for the early modern era: a detailed blueprint for legislation that was never enacted. Its writing was triggered by the indictment in the city of Hoorn of three formerly Christian converts to Judaism. This episode prompted the States of Holland to ask the pensionaries of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, Grotius and Adriaan Pauw, to draw up regulations "tot weeringhe van alle schandalen, ergernisse ende seductie" that might be occasioned by the residence of Jews in the province. It is unclear whether Pauw had any role in the drafting of the *Remonstrantie*. Ultimately, the States decided to leave it to the discretion of individual cities to decide on their own regulations, none of which followed the model laid down in the *Remonstrantie*. Thus the importance of the document does not lie in its direct influence on the realities of Jewish life in the Dutch Republic. At the same time, as David Kromhout argues in his 'Introduction and Analysis of the *Remonstrantie*', the document should not be taken as a transparent expression of the renowned jurist's personal views on Jews. Rather, the *Remonstrantie* reveals much about the issues surrounding, and possibilities for, the toleration of Jews in Christian Europe in the early seventeenth century.

The text of the *Remonstrantie* has three parts. The first is an introduction considering whether Jews should be allowed to reside in Holland, whether

their worship should be tolerated, and how one might best regulate Jewish-Christian relations. The second is a set of forty-nine articles for the proposed provincial placard, while the third consists of a learned commentary (*annotationes*) on the articles that explains and justifies them with the help of legal and historical precedents, mostly from antiquity. This combination of elements already makes the document curious, as real placards did not include such introductions or commentaries. Comparing it to an earlier, unpublished work by Grotius, the *Meletius*, Kromhout observes that the *Remonstrantie* combines draft legislation with humanist scholarship of the sort pursued at the University of Leiden. To my mind, though, Kromhout's explanation that we should see 'Grotius as a scholar working in the public arena' (38), does not fully pierce the mystery of Grotius's reasons for combining genres in this unique fashion.

In addition to this comparison, Kromhout's extensive introduction and analysis provides a great deal of background information useful for general readers, including information about Sephardic Jews in Iberia, Grotius's early life, and the Remonstrant controversy that raged in the 1610s. More interesting for scholars is the comparative analysis Kromhout performs of several modern accounts of the origins and early years of the Amsterdam Jewish community. All of these accounts are shown to have accepted as fact some of the mythology that has surrounded the story ever since the seventeenth century. Kromhout also offers a careful comparison of the terms of the *Remonstrantie* to those of the ordinances for prospective Jewish residents issued by Alkmaar in 1604, Haarlem in 1605, and Rotterdam in 1610, as well as Amsterdam in 1616 (revised in 1632). This comparison sheds light on one of the most remarkable features of the position of Jews in the Dutch Republic: the extent to which they were treated like other (Christian) citizens and inhabitants.

One of Grotius's principal concerns, which comes out especially in his *annotationes*, was whether Jews in Holland should be allowed to form legally distinct subcommunities with their own ordinances and institutions. This was the norm in many parts of Europe, including notably the mercantile cities of Italy and Germany. Rotterdam offered Jews a similar arrangement in which they would constitute a "nation" of foreign merchants, with its own governing consuls and other officers. But this was not the approach taken by Alkmaar, Haarlem, Amsterdam, or by Grotius, who insisted to the contrary that "De gemeenschap vande Joden bestaet puijrelijck in de religie ende nijet daerbuijten. Ouersulcx en moghen zij geen *uniuersitatem* maecten op haer seluen *quae suis legibus utatur*" (183). In Grotius's vision, Jews were not a nation or ethnicity but a religious group and should be allowed

to live and worship on the same terms, for the most part, as did other religious dissenters. Like his patron Oldenbarnevelt and the magistrates of Haarlem, Grotius had in mind particularly the large Catholic minority in Holland, who were permitted to practice their religion only privately. In order to avoid setting a dangerous precedent or point of invidious comparison for Catholics, Grotius favored granting Jews permission to worship in designated houses but not to build synagogues. Amsterdam's magistrates maintained a similar position until 1639, when the building that functioned as the city's Sephardic synagogue was given a grand façade. With this alteration, the manner in which Jewish worship was tolerated diverged sharply from how that of most Christian dissenters was. To be sure, Jews in Dutch cities were treated differently from Christians in some other ways as well, such as the prohibitions issued against their proselytising. In line with Grotius's vision, though – the vision articulated in a programmatic document never implemented – they were always to a remarkable degree assimilated legally into the wider urban communities where they lived.

This edition of Grotius's *Remonstrantie* has been meticulously prepared. It includes a photographic facsimile of the entire manuscript, with a transcription and a translation into modern Dutch in columns on pages facing the relevant manuscript page. The transcription, by Adri Offenberg, is 'strictly diplomatic', so there is no regularisation or modernisation of the text. The translation, by contrast, is relatively looser and seems to prioritise readability. Toward the end of the volume can be found a translation of the *Remonstrantie* into English, which is also the language of the introduction and other explanatory texts. Thus the volume not only facilitates a deeper understanding of this fascinating document, but also makes the latter far more accessible than it had been to international scholars and students.

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Yaacov Dweck. *Dissident Rabbi: The Life of Jacob Sasportas*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019. 504 pp. ISBN 978-0691183572.

Jacob Sasportas (c. 1610–1698) gained his fame for being among the first and surely the fiercest to rebut the messianic claims of Sabbetai Zevi in real-time. But how does one know if the present Messiah is the real one? A dire question indeed, a question that Jacob Sasportas had no immediate answer for when news from Smyrna first told of the arrival of the Messiah. In *Dissident Rabbi: The Life of Jacob Sasportas*, Yaacov Dweck recounts the