

## **The Janus Face of Scaliger's Heritage: Heinsius and Grotius**

**Dirk van Miert, 30 August 2012, uncorrected version of a paper as read out, without the slides**

It is well known that Joseph Scaliger was a brilliant philologist who was extremely able in three particular manifestations of philology: textual criticism, linguistic analysis and historical contextualisation. After having edited the correspondence of Scaliger, I can still see no broader agenda to Scaliger's philological work. It was not meant to support a particular kind of policy or theology. Scaliger appears to have had no philosophical, educational, or anthropological interests. And he was reluctant to engage in theological discussions. To quote his Catholic friend Jacques-Auguste de Thou,

“As for Scaliger's sentiments on religion, I solemnly affirm that I never heard this great man dispute on the controverted points of faith; and I am well assured that he never did discuss them but upon provocation, and then reluctantly.”<sup>1</sup>

The same De Thou for years put pressure on Scaliger to publish his notes on the New Testament, but Scaliger categorically refused to do so. Scaliger's reluctance seems to have had a very practical reason. For he is also recorded to have spoken the now famous words:

‘There are more than fifty additions or changes to the New Testament and to the Gospels. It's a strange case, I dare not say it. If it were a pagan author, I would speak of it differently.’<sup>2</sup>

Did Scaliger fear running into trouble with his fellow Calvinists? I think he did, even if he defied these same co-religionists, and Christians in general, by having published black on white in his *Thesaurus temporum* that he believed the world was older than the oldest possible calculation the Bible allowed for. This observation resulted from his choice to defer more authority to a pagan source than to the Old Testament. This was a radical remark, potentially subversive for biblical authority if not destructive for his own career. It proved not to: his *Thesaurus temporum* a standard work and he was not decried for it. Perhaps few people read

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Grafton, *Scaliger* 1, 123.

<sup>2</sup> *Secunda Scaligerana*, p. 399, s.v. Joseph: ‘Il y a plus de 50 additions ou mutations au Nouveau Testament et aux Evangiles ; c'est chose estrange, je n'ose la dire; si c'estoit un Auteur profane, j'en parlerois autrement.’

it and those who did could not link this loose observation to a recognizable agenda on Scaliger's account. I think there is one *more* reason why Scaliger was left in peace by his fellow Calvinists: he was very much respected and acted as one of the Calvinist hero's in the ongoing polemic with Rome. As the consul of the Republic of Letters, and as a princely superprofessor at Leiden University, no one felt the need to draw the ultimate consequences from this observation. In short: the fact that **A** Scaliger had no recognizable subversive philosophical or theological agenda and that **B** he enjoyed the full backing of the Calvinist community who paid him as their champion, make that he got away with it.

Scaliger taught some students at home in irregular tutorials. Two of these students will occupy us the next fifteen minutes. They were Daniel Heinsius and Hugo Grotius.

From 1600 onwards, Heinsius established himself as Scaliger's star pupil, quickly ascending through the ranks of the University to chairs of poetry, Greek and History and chief of the library. During the troubles of Twelve Years Truce, Heinsius, who had never had much sympathy for Arminius, kept a low profile, but in the final years of the decade, he tended openly towards the Counter-Remonstrant camp. After the Synod of Dordt, at which he acted as the secretary of the delegates of the States General, Heinsius re-invented himself as biblical critic, advising the Elzevir firm on the edition of the Textus Receptus (a term he coined), contacting John Selden to procure permission to republish Selden's work on the pagan gods mentioned in the Bible, and publishing two major biblical commentaries himself. First, in 1627, he published his *Aristarchus Sacer*, a hybrid commentary on a Greek paraphrase of the Gospel of John, written by Greek poet Nonnus of Panopolis. This was an indirect commentary on John himself. From 1627 onwards, Heinsius worked on a commentary proper of the New Testament, which he entitled *Exercitationes*. In fact, these exercises had much in common with the established philological genre of the *annotata* or *annotationes*: notes on selected verses. Why Heinsius precisely turned to biblical criticism is not clear. I have the impression that he recognized it as the cutting edge science of the day and he wanted to be part of the avant garde. His treatment of the text served two goals which he explicitly identified. First of all, he aimed to voice critique of the Latin translation by Theodorus Beza, although Heinsius never mentioned Beza by name. A second motive was to present his linguistic theory regarding the status and nature of New Testament Greek, which he labelled as a *hellenistic dialect*. As most of his contemporaries, he acknowledged that New Testament Greek was heavily influenced by Hebrew grammar and idiom, which he thought made the language a class of its own: not just a Hebraising koinè Greek, but a pure biblical language which he called Hellenistic.

Maintaining the triple modi of philology, we will first look at Heinsius's textual criticism, then at his linguistic analyses and finally at his historical contextualisation.

**First** the constitution of the text. Henk Jan de Jonge has concluded that Heinsius was no systematic collator of manuscripts, no 'collector of variants', and that as such he was different from people like Beza and Grotius.<sup>3</sup> Heinsius also warned against conjectured emendation, lest one gives 'his very own edition' of a text.<sup>4</sup> Yet, he acknowledged that textual corruption had taken place. A colleague of his in the Faculty of Theology, professor Constantin l'Empereur, scrutinized a draft of his *Exercitationes*. L'Empereur objected to Heinsius's admittance that the text of the New Testament might have been corrupted in certain places. On the occasion of Acts 7:15-16, Heinsius suspected that the text was corrupted and that some incompetent scribe or commentator had filled up a gap in the text. As if Heinsius knew that he was treading on thin ice, he added that **[quote]** 'the great Augustine warns us that the first thing to do, when we get stuck in the Sacred Scripture, is to diligently consider whether the manuscripts are corrupted.'<sup>5</sup> **[unquote]** Heinsius's conjecture was rejected by L'Empereur, who would rather take refuge to other arguments to harmonize apparent contradictions.<sup>6</sup>

Heinsius was acutely aware of what he called **[quote]** 'the great variation between the manuscripts (of which the Fathers of the church themselves continually speak)' **[unquote]** but he rejected 'those who want to see themselves permitted to use the freedom which they are glad to seize on in the profane authors, in casting doubt on the sacred authors', a quotation which shows he was well aware of Scaliger's dictum that the status of the New Testament as a godly text prevented him from treating it freely as if it were a pagan text.<sup>7</sup> Heinsius also followed Scaliger's theory that citations of the Sacred Text found in the church fathers were

---

<sup>3</sup> De Jonge, 'The "Manuscriptus Evangeliorum antiquissimus" of Daniel Heinsius (Vatic. Reg. gr. 79)', in *New Testament Studies*, vol. 21, pp. 286-294 (293).

<sup>4</sup> Heinsius, 'Prolegomena', 1640, p. 4: 'ne vel uni codici, vel pluribus, plus aequo tribuatur, aut, quod iam receptum facile immutetur, ante omnia ne quisquam ex ingenio id sibi sumat et hanc histrioniam exerceat, ut propriam editionem nobis donet. Ne iam dicam, etiam aetate nostra optimos atque antiquissimos iam pridem codices collatos'. cited by De Jonge, 'The Study of the New Testament', 1975, p. 93; and by Bloemendal and Nellen, 'Early Enlightenment or High Philology? Heinsius and Grotius', 200[?], p. 117, n. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Heinsius, *Exercitationes Sacrae*, p. 277 (not 227 as in Van Rooden, *L'Empereur*, p. 138, n. 163): '...quam prudenter magnus Austinus moneat, Primum esse, si in Sacris haereamus, diligenter cogitare, utrum corrupti sint codices.'

<sup>6</sup> Van Rooden, *L'Empereur*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>7</sup> See the phrase in the *Scaligerana*, p. 399, cited at the opening of this book: 'si [le NT] estoit un auteur profane j'en parlerois autrement'.

probably nearer to the original text than the often copied codices of the biblical text themselves.<sup>8</sup>

But L'Empereur was worried: he acknowledged that citations found in the texts of church fathers were sometimes different from the transmitted text. But the transmitted text was unequivocal and it would be disastrous to destabilize the text in such cases only because a citation elsewhere has a different reading: as he exclaimed: **[quote]** 'what will then be certain in the Holy Scriptures?'<sup>9</sup> After the *Exercitationes* had come out in 1639, Heinsius attempted to lay hands on collations from the *Codex Alexandrinus*, with an eye to a second edition, but that edition never came to fruition.

**[second]** Like the *Aristarchus sacer*, the *Exercitationes* was largely a vehicle for Heinsius to bash Beza and present his theory on the Hellenistic language. L'Empereur, an accomplished orientalist, aided him in pointing out the Hebrew and Aramaic background of certain expressions. Both men, then, were willing to understand New Testament Greek on its own terms, acknowledging it was product of its time.

Heinsius was a keen linguist, and he does not fail to highlight parallels between biblical passages and idiom from ancient Greek and Roman authors. Heinsius was in the first half of his life, primarily known as an author and theorist of lyrical poetry and tragedy. His interest in late-Greek poetry is clear from his commentary on the Nonnus' paraphrase of the gospel of John.

**[Third]** The political, ritualistic historical contextualisation is a bit limited in the *Exercitationes*, but Heinsius does take into account Jewish commentaries.

Heinsius is remarkably silent on the most controverted points of faith, either those between Catholics and Protestants (such as the nature of the eucharist) and those between Calvinists and Remonstrants (such as election, faith, grace and free will). The genre of *Exercitationes* allowed him to gloss over theological battlefields.<sup>10</sup> Not because he was peevish. After all, his colleagues took offence at his butchering of Theodorus Beza's Latin translation on every single page of his *Exercitationes*.

Grotius was likewise tutored by Scaliger and he and Heinsius were student buddies, although Grotius quickly left University to embark on a legal and administrative career, in

---

<sup>8</sup> Cited after the translation in Van Rooden, *L'Empereur*, p. 139. For Scaliger's remark regarding the church fathers, see *Secunda Scaligerana*, p. 589.

<sup>9</sup> 'Si id semel admittatur, ut propter varietatum, quae alibi occurrit, etiam ubi nulla varietas est, eam faciamus, et quidem tot vocibus mutatis; quid erit certi in sacris?', cited after Van Rooden, *L'Empereur*, p. 140, n. 170.

<sup>10</sup> Van Rooden, *L'Empereur*, p. 134, sees this as a general characteristic of the *annotationes* commentary, in contrast to the systematic theological commentary.

which he climbed through the ranks of the States of Holland. Like Heinsius's *Exercitationes*, Grotius' *Annotationes* had a long period of gestation. They were already started in 1620, when Grotius was imprisoned. But Grotius did not publish them before the biblical annotations of Heinsius had come out. He wanted to know what Heinsius was up to and in what ways he would be responded to. Like Heinsius, he had drafts circulated amongst his most trusted colleagues. Both men were keen to test the water before going entirely public.

When Grotius finally read Heinsius' *Exercitationes*, he was disappointed and decided to push on with publishing his own annotations.

**[First]** When it comes to textual criticism, Grotius was much more willing than Heinsius to take into account variant readings and different translations. He acknowledged that the biblical text had changed over time: that was inevitable. But he posits that this was not the case during the first two centuries of Christianity. It is important to make clear that Grotius stated with so many words that these corruptions need not bear upon theological reasonings.

Nevertheless, time and again Grotius signals the variants found in the Codex Alexandrinus. Contrary to Heinsius, he does not shrink from commenting at length on vexed loci, such as the eucharist in Matthew 26 or the passages on grace and election in Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*, and he used Codex Alexandrinus.

**[Second]** When it comes to linguistic analysis, Grotius often illuminates the meanings of a word.<sup>11</sup> Grotius often clarified what went on in the minds of the apostles or their audiences by paraphrasing their words and making explicit the feelings these people were likely to have had in the interaction. Such paraphrases demonstrate the power of Grotius's imaginative historicism: he placed himself in the historical actors. He did the same for the language which the people in the time of Jesus and of the Apostles must have heard and spoken. Grotius ascribed deviations from koine to the influence of Syriac.<sup>12</sup> Grotius, then, largely agreed with Heinsius when it came to the oriental influences of the New Testamentary Greek, and this impression was in fact shared by most philologists.

Far more spectacular is that Grotius consistently (and on a broader scale than Heinsius had done) pointed out textual parallels with pagan texts from Greek and Roman antiquity in an attempt to contextualise the linguistic mind set of Hellenistic Jews in the first century AD. This brings us to historical contextualisation.

---

<sup>11</sup> Reventlov, 'Humanistic Exegesis', p. 177.

<sup>12</sup> Van Unnik, 'Grotius', p. 193.

[Third] The *Annotationes* breath political, ritual and religious contextualisation. For example, the way in which Grotius traces pagan antecedents of the eating of the body of Christ takes on a dangerously radical tone when suggesting a historical link with the cannibalistic rituals of human sacrifices of certain pagan peoples. Grotius also uses Jewish tradition in order to make sense of the Hellenistic Jewish world of the peoples figuring in the New Testament.

Perhaps even more significant is that Grotius plays down on the divine inspiration of the bible. According to Grotius, only the prophets, the Apocalyps, the predictions of the apostles and of course Christ's own words were divinely inspired. The historical books and the books of wisdom were written with a pious spirit, but not inspired.<sup>13</sup>

Grotius did not steer completely clear of theological interpretations. Sometimes, his textual-critical, his linguistic and his historical approaches of the Bible spill over into statements which dovetail with Remonstrant convictions and even Catholic thought regarding free will.

It should be made clear that all such remarks are framed by his religious political ideal. This ideal was Christian ecumenism through focus on the earliest church. Significantly, the preparation and publication of the various parts of his *Annotationes* ran parallel with a host of polemical writings about Grotius's attempts to unify Protestant and Catholic churches, most memorably by denying the identification of the Pope as the Antichrist. Such a larger agenda is lacking with Heinsius, and that can explain the dissimilar outcomes of two students who wielded such similar tools.

It would like to conclude by stating that there was something inherently subversive in biblical philology, but this potential was only given space if the philologist inhabited a mental universe which allowed for it. This is, of course, the case with Spinoza.

---

<sup>13</sup> Grotius, *Rivetiani apologetici Discussio* (in: Opera Omnia Theologica IV, pp. 722b-723a): 'Afflatu Dei locutus quae locuti sunt, scripsisse quae scribere iussi sunt, Prophetas toto animo agnoscit Grotius: idem iudicat de Apocalypsi et Apostolorum praedictionibus. Christi dicta omnia quin Dei sint dicta, dubitari nefas. De scriptis historicis et moralibus Hebraeorum sentiis, aliud putat. Satis est quod pio animo scripta sint et optima fide et de rebus summis.' Grotius, *Animadversiones in Animadversiones Riveti* (in : Opera Omnia Theologica IV, p. 647) : ' Multum autem fallitur D. Rivetus, cum putat omnes eos libros Veteris Testamenti, qui in Hebraeo exstant Canone, dictatos a Spiritu Sancto. Esdras secundum omnes Hebraeos neque Propheta fuit, neque Spiritum Sanctum habuit. Sed libr eius et toa collectio liborum vetustioreum ab ipso facta, approbata est παρὰ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς μεγάλῆς, in qua erant et Prophetae nonnulli; quamquam de libro Ecclesiastae haesitatum fuisse aiunt Hebraei: sed praevaluisse sententiam eorum, qui eum reciperent. Quorums ententiae libens subscribo. Lucas quoque scripsi verissima, sed unde ea haeserti dixit ipse in praefatione.' See also Van Unnik, 'Grotius', p. 187.

Spinoza did not invent the type of biblical criticism he exercised in the *TTP*. From Erasmus to Grotius, the historicisation of the biblical world and the transmission of the text had been variously applied by different philologists. Overall, there seems to be some general development, as insight into the oriental context of the text accumulated and evidence of diversions between manuscripts started to become more and more apparant. I think that in the long run, the potential subversivity of philology with regard to the authority of Scripture was bound to become manifest, but when and where was absolutely uncertain. There is nothing teleological about this. There were a century and half between Erasmus's edition of the New Testament and Spinoza's *Tractatus*, and those 150 years saw religious turmoil on an unprecedented scale. The devastation brought by the endemic wars could have opened up ever so many radical interpretations of scripture. If they did, these were not the result of biblical philology. On the contrary, biblical philology served the powers that be: the most impressive accomplishments were done on the side of the Catholic polyglot bibles. And in the Calvinist camp, Theodorus Beza was an accomplished philologists, and later on Franciscus Gomarus, the exemplary counter-remonstrant, was a brilliant biblical antiquarian and linguist.

I think that it required a philosophical reason for philology to be able to manifest its deconstructing potentiality. This philosophical space was to a large extent theological-political; it was only in that context that one can speak of secularisation, as it befitted the agenda's of Grotius and Spinoza. Secularisation, it should be emphasized, had little to do with religiosity or Christian morality.

There was a more mundane context as well. Scaliger, however individualistic, was recruited into a profoundly Calvinist elite and served within the framework of a university and was entangled in fierce polemics with Rome. So did Heinsius, who subjected his *Annotations* to the authority of colleagues, and who, throughout his life, was confronted with the limits of freedom set by academic institution. Grotius was much more independent, and whose irenicist policies were supported by his employer. He had much more freedom.

Spinoza was a self-supporting outcast, with no strings attached. So on the one hand, philology was inherently radical, but it needed a revolutionary philosophy to actualise that radicality. Anthony Grafton is surely right in stressing the importance of humanist philology for the history of seventeenth century. And Jonathan Israel is right in emphasizing the radicality of Spinoza's philosophy. Their two views interlock when we acknowledge that Spinoza's *methods*, as far as *TTP* is concerned, provide a clear link between humanist scholarship and the Enlightenment.



Discussion matter:

Radical conclusions based on philological analysis were also made by others, such as Isaac La Peyrère and Isaac Vossius. Peyrère had a millennial agenda, which allowed room for radical philology. Isaac Vossius's philology has to be seen in the light of his larger agenda to negotiate Egyptian and Chinese history and accommodate these to the biblical chronology. Besides, Vossius was famed for his libertine ideas in general. So it needed some kind of larger philosophical or political agenda on the mind of the philologist, before philology could have free play.

Even Gomarus at some point in his life was confronted by allegations from orthodox colleagues that he did not subscribe to the canons of Dordt. The same does not apply for Grotius, who was much more independent, and whose irenicist policies were supported by his employer. He had much more freedom. So did Peyrère, whose patron believed in what Peyrère thought. Isaac Vossius was not entirely independent, but he consistently refused to accept income if strings were attached, and if they were attacked he ignored them anyway. Besides, Vossius could always fall back on his library as source of capital.