‘Dieu veuille que cette Paix soit de longue durée . . . ’
*The History of the Congress and the Peace of Utrecht* by Casimir Freschot

*Heinz Duchhardt*

In 1716, a five-hundred-page book, long considered for good reason the authoritative history of the Utrecht peace congress, was brought out, in octavo format, by the enterprising and important Utrecht publisher van Poolsum. It carried the Baroque title *Histoire du Congrès et de la Paix d’Utrecht, comme aussi de celle de Rastadt & de Bade contenant les particularitez les plus remarquables & les plus interessantes desdites Negotiations depuis leur premiere ouverture jusqu’à la conclusion de la Paix Generale*, which curiously referred to a ‘general peace’ never concluded.1 Rather, in line with the vernacular of the day, only a number of bilateral peace treaties were signed at the time.

Interestingly enough, little is known about the author of this book, embellished with an impressive frontispiece engraved by Jan Goeree and a title vignette. Scholars generally attribute the work—as also apparent from a handwritten note on the title page of the volume I used—to Casimir Freschot, who shortly after the publication of his *Histoire* authored a ‘scandal history’ of the Utrecht congress and also edited the congress proceedings, as far as they were accessible at the time. But who was this man? The research literature2 commonly refers to a Benedictine monk named Casimir Freschot, who according to his biographical dates—ca. 1640 to 1720—could be the author. This Freschot produced other publications that, for example, analysed the Viennese court and provided policy recommendations to the office holders involved in the War of the Spanish Succession. But is it really conceivable that a Protestant Utrecht publisher would have entrusted to an author shaped by the fierce anti-Protestantism of the Franche-Comté such an important and rather semi-official publication? It is for this reason that the article by Françoise Knopper-Gouron

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FIGURE 6.1 Title page of Histoire du Congrès et de la Paix d’Utrecht (Utrecht: G. van Poolsum, 1716), with an engraving by Jan Goeree.
PRIVATE COLLECTION
points to a ‘homonyme Protestant’ who had immigrated to the Netherlands—
in other words a namesake,3 which in light of the rather unusual name, though,
would be quite a coincidence. Then again there exist reference works dating
from the early nineteenth century, implying that the Benedictine monk and
the author were, after all, one and the same person. What could lead to a more
certain answer are the archives of the publishing house van Poolsum, should
they still exist. The question who wrote the book thus remains open but will be
returned to in the context of the author’s own reflections in the work.

The thesis that the author may have been a French Huguenot émigré gains
in substance when one takes his open criticism of France and Louis XIV in the
_Histoire du Congrès et de la Paix d’Utrecht_ into account. It resembles his fierce
criticism of the French delegation and their entanglement in organised prosti-
tution, as made public in his _Histoire amoureuse_.4 This ‘scandal history’ has
received much more attention in recent research—see, for example, Lucien
Bély’s fundamental study5—than the book under discussion here.6

What can be said with certainty, however, is that our author—a Casimir
Freschot—had already established himself as a specialist on the various
aspects of the War of the Spanish Succession before he authored his history of
the Utrecht peace congress and the aforementioned ‘scandal history’. To this
end three further publications can be named: a _Histoire anecdotique de la cour
de Rome, la part qu’elle a eu dans l’affaire de la succession d’Espagne_ published
in Cologne in 1704, a _Mémoire de la cour de Vienne contenant les remarques d’un
voyageur curieux sur l’état présent de cette cour et sur ses interests_ published

3 Similar also Abraham van der Aa, _Biografisch woordenboek der Nederlanden_ (Haarlem, 1859), 6: 62.
4 The book, entitled _Histoire amoureuse et badine du congrès et de la ville d’Utrecht_ was pub-
lished in Liege without date. Interestingly, a German translation was published about a year
later with the title ‘Der galante Congress in der Stadt Utrecht oder Einige Zeit während
Friedensverhandlungen daselbst vorgefallene Liebes-Begebenheiten’. A Dutch translation of
the book by Roland Fagel was published in 2013: _Amoureuse en pikante geschiedenis van het
6 Recently Inken Schmidt-Voges also dedicated her inaugural lecture at the University of
Osnabrück to the _Histoire amoureuse_. I am grateful to Schmidt-Voges for allowing me to
consult her not yet published manuscript. Schmidt-Voges underlines in her lecture that
Freschot’s ‘scandal history’ provoked at least two ‘counter-accounts’. It must be pointed out
here that the obvious and principal target of the book—sex sells—was not the only ‘phi-
elosophy’ of journalists; Henriette Goldwyn and Suzan van Dijk refer in their chapter in this
collection to publications of (female) authors where an intact family life of the diplomats is
stressed.
in Cologne in 1705, and a text entitled *Les Intrigues secrètes du Duc de Savoye*, published in Venice also in 1705. The aim of the latter was to shed light on the—sometimes problematic (Rome, Turin)—role of actors in the major, if not to say global, conflict that had come to preoccupy the continent since the death of Carlos II of Spain.

The author opens his book with a dedication to the mayor and senators of the city of Utrecht and a preface in which he reflects on the Peace of Utrecht in general. I have already written about this matter in the context of contemporary debates about treaties of peace and here would merely like to mention that Freschot introduced a kind of typology of peace on these opening pages, distinguishing between four types of peace: first, the demand placed on Christians—in alignment with God’s command for peace—to maintain peace; second, peace to retain a status quo; third, peace brought about by exhaustion after a long conflict; and fourth and last, hollow peace, resulting from the unwillingness of one of the parties to adhere to agreed words and documents. These are rather abstract considerations, which, in the absence of any examples being given, leave the reader to decide in which typological category the author would have placed the Peace of Utrecht.

Freschot quite rightly elaborates extensively in his *Histoire du Congrès* on how the War of the Spanish Succession and the concluding Peace of Utrecht can be understood only in the context of the 1659 Treaty of the Pyrenees and the ever more insecure Spanish line of the Casa de Austria. He therefore dedicates several dozen pages to the political-diplomatic-military conflicts of the 1660s: the attempts made by Louis XIV to appropriate or subject, on the basis of very weak alleged claims to the Spanish inheritance and naked aggression, large parts of Western Europe; the military events, which are described in detail; the political reversals of the Roi-Soleil, with which he time and again surprised his opposite parties. Freschot interprets the marriage alliance of 1659 as a fundamental threat to the European equilibrium, castigating the French attempts to thwart the invalidation of the king’s renunciation of the claims to the Spanish inheritance. Freschot thus disapproves of, in all respects, the

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8 The ‘paix de l’Europe’ rests on an ‘espece d’équilibre de forces entre les deux Couronnes de France & d’Espagne’, but was placed under scrutiny by the marriage alliance set out in the Treaty of the Pyrenees: p. 1.
political project of the Roi-Soleil, which from the very beginning was focussed on dividing his opponents and exploiting the weaknesses in the Spanish royal house. He suggests that Louis XIV planned, after the cruel destruction of the Palatinate, further campaigns in the Holy Roman Empire and complains about the king’s duplicity and unscrupulousness when it comes to forcing opponents to act against faith and law and to leave, contrary to all contractual assurances, alliances led by anti-French leaders. Louis’ politics, such as his attempt to obtain a favourable final will from the last Spanish-Habsburg ruler, verge on the criminal. There is no question that the author was very critical of France and, more to the point, highly sceptical of Louis XIV. This finding does not provide decisive proof as to who the author was but lends, at least at first sight, further support to the thesis that the author may well have been a French Huguenot émigré.

But then the work includes other enemy stereotypes as well. In the description and analysis of the history immediately preceding the war, Freschot leaves no doubt that he considers the British strategy to agree to a partition treaty without involving, or at least informing, the directly affected parties in Vienna as counterproductive, if not fatal. And his criticism of the political agenda pursued by Whitehall and of Queen Anne as a monarch only intensifies when he writes about the events after 1710. Whereas the text duly acknowledges and praises Britain’s military achievements within the Grand Alliance and especially on the Iberian Peninsula, it also condemns the game played by London behind the back of the Allies following the ‘ministerial revolution’ of 1710. To this end it portrays the negotiations between Nicolas Mesnager and Matthew Prior as diametrically opposed to the spirit and text of the Grand Alliance of 1710. Likewise the unilateral withdrawal of British troops from the battlefields is presented as a striking breach of contract—it appears that London wanted, against expressed public opinion, peace at any price.

That the Dutch Republic in the end agreed to enter negotiations with French diplomats to achieve a separation agreement Freschot considered a further example of British malice. Apparently, the British had exploited the constitutional peculiarities of the States-General and the decision-making processes in the United Provinces to relieve the Dutch Republic, which from 1710 onwards had to increasingly guard its commercial interests, of its obligations with regard to the Alliance. The text leaves no question about the author’s assessment of Britain’s perfidious approach.  

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10 Further to the letter from the States-General to Queen Anne of 5 June 1712, reprinted in the *Histoire du Congrès* in its entirety, Freschot remarks: ‘On a voulu inserer & raporter
A third enemy stereotype Freschot develops, at least in preliminary terms, concerns the Pope. He takes as his point of departure a letter, since reprinted in the original, sent by Louis XIV to the head of the Catholic Church in February 1707, asking the Pope to intervene in the conflict, to even act as an arbitrator, in order to swiftly establish a permanent peace. Freschot uses this letter, which he ‘dissects’ with great pleasure, not only to show the absurdity of this proposal but also to place Clement XI in the French corner and to ‘expose’ him as a supporter of Louis XIV. With good reason, so Freschot implies, the Curia distanced itself from intervening in the negotiations as an ‘arbiter christianitatis’ as such an effort was doomed to fail. In contrast, it would have been quite possible to imagine the Republic of Venice, the ‘other’ traditional negotiator, assuming a peace-enhancing role, at least with regard to the French-Imperial negotiations.

Freschot describes the actual ‘negotiations’ in Utrecht in a manner that leads one to conclude that he was an eyewitness—and not a journalist who exploited the periodicals published in the city, e.g. the *Gazette d’Utrecht* or the bi-weekly *Quintessences* edited by Mme Du Noyer. In Utrecht, which had been chosen as the place of negotiations on the advice of the British queen,
everything had been prepared with the utmost care: to avoid any breaches of protocol, a room had been made available in the town hall which could be accessed from opposite sides; further rooms served the internal discussions of the two parties.\footnote{The frontispiece reproduced by Bély, now in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, gives an impression of this (two-door) conference room.} In addition, to avoid any ceremonial mistakes, an agreement had been reached for the respective envoys to enter the main room without any pomp and circumstance. Nonetheless, the ‘negotiations’, ultimately few in number, did not produce anything more significant than an agreement that neither an intermediary nor a keeper of the minutes should be involved. Some envoys, such as the Imperial negotiator Count Sinzendorff, preferred to stay in The Hague rather than to travel to Utrecht, arguing that the substantial negotiations between the British and the French representatives had already been conducted in London. The results of these had been presented to the other delegations more or less as a fait accompli. From this point of view, Utrecht was merely used for a last round of negotiations to arrive at a peace and was entitled to take pride only in a series of bilateral peace treaties having been signed within its walls.

There are several reasons that support the assumption that the text is, indeed, an eyewitness account: the precision with which Freschot describes the (dull) entrances of the envoys; the insights he offers into the social life, which he commences with an account of the ball organised by the wife of the British envoy, John Robinson, the Bishop of Bristol; and the meticulousness with which he writes about an incident involving Dutch and French servants, which he attempts to evaluate in terms of international law.\footnote{Cf. Bély, Espions, 414.} He is disappointed that the treaties were not signed and, after ratification, exchanged in the town hall but in the private quarters of the envoys, or even in an open field (!), and complains, at least between the lines, that the city of Utrecht was thus denied a spectacular set of peace celebrations.

Nonetheless, the (presumed) eyewitness Freschot rather hesitates when it comes to divulging details about the social workings of the peace congress, which in light of the extended periods of inactivity allowed the respective parties to spend their time other than at the conference table or in private political discussions. The reason for this must be that Freschot did not want to distract from the abovementioned \textit{Histoire amoureuse} \ldots, which was published at the same time. Further, it can be assumed that he considered his \textit{Histoire du Congrès} a serious piece of contemporary historiography and did not want this work to diverge from accepted historical writing.
What is certain is that Freschot was no longer an eyewitness at the succeeding peace congresses in Rastatt and Baden that engaged Prince Eugene of Savoy and Marshall Villars as the Imperial side had shown itself unable to sign documents which it had not negotiated. Likewise Freschot was absent in Baden / Aargau, where an entire guard of European principalities assembled to do little more than translate the Treaty of Rastatt from French into Latin.

Freschot therefore devotes few pages to these two peace congresses, referring the reader instead to the official publication of the congress papers, the Actes, Mémoires et autres pièces authentiques concernant la Paix d’Utrecht, for which, in turn, he was responsible and which were published by van Poolsum in 1714/15. This publication continues to serve scholars, the interim plan for a new edition of the primary sources of the Utrecht peace congress aside, as an irreplaceable basis for their research.

Of course, Freschot’s Histoire du Congrès also pays tribute to failed attempts to conclude a peace, such as the negotiations between the French diplomat Rouillé and his allied opponents in The Hague in 1709, set out almost like a chronology. Freschot concisely describes the key role the possible restitution of Alsace to the German Empire and the question of Dunkirk played at the time. The preliminary articles of peace dated 18 May, as received by Torcy and Rouillé, but ultimately never executed, are also included in the volume. Significantly, Louis XIV is made responsible for the failure of this set of negotiations as well as for the Geertruidenberg negotiations of 1710, which also led to no result.

On the other hand, Freschot shows no interest in his Histoire du Congrès in the impact the War of the Spanish Succession had on events and interests outside Europe or in the activities of the lobbyists representing the various trading companies, who, of course, presented their cases to the chief negotiators in both London and Utrecht. He reports on the genesis of the various trade

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19 Freschot, Histoire, 98ff.
21 Freschot, Histoire, 128. For an account of these negotiations see Werner Reese, Das Ringen um Frieden und Sicherheit in den Entscheidungsjahren des Spanischen Erbfolgekrieges 1708 bis 1709 (München: Beck, 1933).
22 Freschot, Histoire, 149ff. Freschot traces the Geertruidenberg negotiations back to the fact that Louis XIV had to give his subjects a sign of goodwill to console them after years of suffering. This did not stop him from taking the first pretext to again withdraw from the negotiations.
agreements as well as the *Asiento* contract\(^{23}\) and comments on the differences and animosities between Spain and Portugal, but fails to examine them against their overseas background. His perspective is first and foremost a European one—the continuation of the war beyond the sea and its repercussions on the Utrecht negotiations were of only minor importance to him.

Has the analysis of Freschot’s *Histoire du Congres* helped to resolve the identity of the author? And has it established whether these very heterogeneous publications by *Casimir Freschot* should be attributed to one or two writers? Bély cites a passage from French correspondence according to which the Cardinal of Bouillon is said to have made use of the ‘mordante plume d’un insigné scélérat et moine apostat bourguignon, marié à Utrecht, nommé Freschot’ in his propaganda writings.\(^ {24}\) The author is certain that the person is the writer of the *Histoire du Congres*. If one believes this contemporary source and assumes—whilst ignoring all the epithets—a renegade monk from Burgundy who marries in Utrecht and earns his livelihood by writing propaganda pamphlets against Louis xiv, then the puzzle is quickly solved: a Benedictine monk who first makes a name for himself by writing Catholic, anti-Protestant pamphlets but who is equally critical of the Jesuits, who blames the Emperor for agreeing to a Grand Alliance with the Protestant states,\(^ {25}\) who, for whatever reason, leaves his order and converts to some shade of Protestantism, settles in Utrecht, distinguishes himself by writing anti-French and (as shown here) anti-British publications, and works as a kind of ‘in-house author’ for the publisher van Poolsum, where he is also responsible for the production of the official publication of the congress papers. Such careers existed, most likely in somewhat larger numbers at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Less frequent were cases of reconversion: Knopper-Gouron, who also assumes a linear and unbroken career, has established that the (one?) person by this name was ‘reintegrated’ into the congregation of Saint-Vanne in 1718 and died in Luxueil in 1720. The thesis of the exiled Huguenot, next to whom there existed a second person of the same name, would thus be refuted. Also the dates—1718 and 1720—would not contradict the present reconstruction of what was quite obviously an eventful life. But perhaps research in Utrecht itself, whether in the registry office or in the publishing house, will reveal further findings and will further substantiate the assumption set out here.

*Translated by Uta Protz.*

\(^{23}\) Freschot, *Histoire*, 368.

\(^{24}\) Bély, *Espions*, 214.

\(^{25}\) See Knopper-Gouron, ‘Le bénédictin Casimir Freschot’.