CHAPTER SIX

HOLIDAYS, TIMETABLES AND ABSENCES

Introduction

If the public lectures served primarily to increase the fame of the lecturers, then we may reasonably ask how often they were given, both on a monthly and on a weekly basis. Unfortunately, not a single calendar or timetable survives from the seventeenth-century Athenaeum. We can nevertheless reconstruct the academic year and its timetables from letters, travel reports, descriptions of the city, and disputations. There is also evidence that these timetables were not always strictly followed at the time.

The academic year

We can reconstruct the holiday calendar of the Athenaeum by combining the dates of disputations with information from professors' letters. The letters cover the first half of the century, and the disputations the second half, but this is not an obstacle, since holiday periods, especially those of summer and Christmas, followed a highly conventional plan. The data from the two half-centuries match excellently, except that Easter and Pentecost, being moveable feasts, always fell on different weeks of the year.

10 January–2 February  classes
3 February–11 February  holidays
12 February–3 March  classes
4 March–16 March  holidays
17 March–Easter  classes

1 During the seventeenth century, as far as is known, no disputations were held between 3 and 11 February.
2 No disputation is known from the period 4–16 March.
Easter: three week holiday
Easter holiday–Pentecost classes
Pentecost: two week holiday
Pentecost holidays–16 July classes
17 July–31 August summer holidays
1 September–21 September classes
22 September–28 September autumn break
29 September–22 October classes
31 October–22 December holidays
23 December–9 January Christmas holidays

3 No disputation is known from the period 12–24 April; see also Appendix 2.
4 See Barlaeus to Huygens, dd. 25 08 1634 (Huygens, BW II, 992): ‘hoc feriarum tempore’; Barlaeus to Cunaeus, dd. 07 07 1635 (Barlaeus, Epistolae, no. 298): ‘Feriae instant’; Barlaeus to Hooft, dd. 13 07 1636 (Hooft, BW II, no. 333): ‘proxima hebdomade a lectionibus feriabimur’; Barlaeus to Wicquefort, dd. 28 07 1638 (Barlaeus, Epistolae, no. 370): ‘Nobis feriae sunt ob Caniculae aestum’; Barlaeus to Neuhusius, dd. 25 09 1639 (Barlaeus, Epistolae, no. 394): ‘feriae egimus’. These feriae caniculares (dog days) were also called, strangely enough, feriae autumnales. See Vossius to J. de Witt, dd. 05 04 1635 (Epp. Col. I, no. 251), in which Vossius promises to stop by in the ‘feriis autunnalibus’. See also Vossius to Doublet, dd. 22 07 1640 (Epp. Col. I, no. 384 [= 386 B]): ‘Auctumnales feriae nostrae hac hebdomade coeperunt’. Vossius to Gronovius, dd. 05 09 1642 (Epp. Col. I, no. 460): ‘Proximis feris autumnalibus partem bonam Hagae fu’. Vossius was indeed at The Hague that summer on 20 and 21 July, as appears from Vossius to I. Vossius, dd. 20 07 1642 (UBA ms. RK J 86 i ) and Vossius to Grotius, dd. 21 07 1642 (Grotius, BW XIII, no. 5801). The dates in the letters are confirmed by the dates of the disputations: in August there were never disputations at the Athenaeum and only once in the second half of July. The middle of July was therefore the start of the summer holiday.

5 From Vossius to Grotius, dd. 25 09 1639 (Grotius, BW X, no. 4310: ‘Cum propter urbis nundinas lyceo nostro hebdomadis unius feria forent...’) we know that this holiday was due to an annual fair. See also A.H. Hooft to L. van der Meyden, dd. 03 09 1661 (A.H. Hooft, Brievenboek, fol. 26r): ‘...in this coming fair.’ In the same period the Latin schools closed because of an extra autumn half-term holiday: Barlaeus to Cunaeus, dd. 20 09 1632 (Barlaeus, Epistolae, no. 197). As far as we know, a disputation was organised only once in the last week of September, out of a total of twenty in that month. This occurred on the 28th. Between 21 and 28 September no disputations were ever held. Another reason for this holiday may have been the students’ pastime of catching finches, which was mainly done in the early autumn. See Evenhuis, Amsterdam IV, 10, who unfortunately gives no source. In the second half of August, at least in 1657, there was a fair in Amsterdam as well. See Hartmann, Tagebuch XV, 127.

6 Between 22 and 30 October there were never any disputations. On 30 October 1754 it was decided to commence that year’s lessons on 7 November. See AOH dd. 30 10 1754 (fol. 23r). P.J. Knegtmans kindly provided this information.

7 Barlaeus to Ploos, dd. 04 01 1633 (Barlaeus, Epistolae, no. 204): ‘Feriae iam sunt apud nos’. There were never any disputations between 22 December and 10 January. The Christmas holiday must therefore have started a few days before Christmas and continued until after the dies natalis of the Athenaeum (8 January).