ON THE MACCOVIUS AFFAIR

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Introduction

The Maccovius affair forms a rather obscure episode in the history of the Synod of Dordrecht. Both the Elzevier and Canin editions of the Acta Synodi Nationalis, which appeared in the same year (1620), keep remarkably silent about it. Only in four places of the Acta is it vaguely referred to as a causa particularis or the causa frisica, yet without mentioning Maccovius’s name. One of the main reasons for the silence in the official Acta could have been the fact that this particular case was on the agenda during the last sessions of the Synod—April and May 1619—when the issues regarding the Arminians had already been settled. To many of the foreign delegates, the Maccovius affair appeared to be an internal problem for the Dutch which ought not to be resolved at an international Synod like that of Dordt. Remarkably, also Contra-Remonstrant historiographers such as Willem Baudartius and Jacobus Trigland did not touch upon the Maccovius affair.¹ This may have been a strategic move on the part of the Contra-Remonstrants in order not to disturb the consensus achieved in the canones. Was it not best for the internal problems surrounding this Polish aristocratic bon-vivant, brother-in-law to Rembrandt, to be swept under the carpet?

But there may have been another reason. In later Remonstrant historiography the Maccovius affair was explicitly used to disqualify the Contra-Remonstrant position on predestination. In his Antidotum the Remonstrant leader Simon Episcopius depicted Maccovius as the protagonist brandishing the most extreme form of determinism and wrote

¹ G. Baudartius, Memoryen ofte Cort verhael der gedenck-weerdichste so kerckeliche als wereldliche geschiedenissen van Nederland, Vranckrijck, Hooghduytschland, Groot Bri-tannyen, Hispanyen, Itayen, Hungaryen, Bohemen, Savoyen ende Turkyen, van den laere 1603 tot in het laer 1624, 2 vols., Tweede editie grootelcx vermeerdert (Arnhem, 1624–1625) and J. Trigland, Kerckelycke Geschiedenissen, ende Aenmerkingen op de Kerckeliche Historie van Johannes Wtenbogaert (Leiden, 1650).
that during the Synod “the Polish Doctor Makouwzki . . . defended the most harsh and cruel propositions [on predestination] ever defended.”

According to the Historisch Verhael, written by the Remonstrant theologians Johannes Uytenbogaert and Bernard Dwinglo, Maccovius stubbornly persisted in Manichean teachings. According to the Remonstrant historiographer Gerard Brandt, Maccovius “was promoting the thought that everything happens necessarily.”

Although this negative picture of Maccovius’s extreme position as created by Remonstrant polemics has dominated historiography until now, much of what Maccovius said on several issues became standard in seventeenth-century Reformed scholasticism. Prominent Reformed theologians such as Gisbertus Voetius, Franciscus Gomarus, both delegates to the Synod of Dordt, Melchior Leydekker, John Owen, and Alexander Comrie—to name only a few—spoke very appreciatively of his work.

It was not until the first half of the nineteenth century that modern historiography offered more precise details of the Maccovius affair. The first to shed some new light on the affair was the nineteenth-century Utrecht

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2 S. Episcopius, Antidotum, ende naerder openinghe van het eyghene ghevoelen des Nationalen Synodi gehouden binnen Dordrecht, annis 1618, en, 1619: Tot onderrechtinge ende onderwijsinge der ghener, die de Canones van het selfde Synode souden moghen komen te lesen, cortelijck ende Voorloopers wijse ghestelt (s.l. 1619), pp. 24–25. For the complete Latin text of the Antidotum, see: S. Episcopius, Opera Theologica (Rotterdam, 1665), pp. 10–47.

3 Johannes Uytenbogaert and Bernardus Dwinglo, Oorspronck ende voortganck der Nederlantsche kerkelijcke verschillen, tot op het Nationale Synode van Dordrecht. Mitsgaders Historisch Verhael van ’t ghene zich toegedraeghen heeft binnen Dordrecht in de jaeren 1618, ende 1619 tusschen de Nationale Synode der Contra-Remonstranten, ende hare geassoceerde ter eender, ende de geciteerde kercken-dienaren Remonstranten ter andere sijden. Uytgeheven van weghen der kercken-dienaren Remonstranten in ’t ghemeyn: ende insonderheyt de geciteerde op Dordrechtse Synode, tot verantwoordinge van hare oprechte proceduren (Amsterdam, 1623). The first part, dealing with the origin of the conflict, was probably written by Uytenbogaert, but the extensive account of the discussions and happenings at the Synod itself was probably composed by Bernardus Dwinglo who was present in Dordrecht.
