IN SEARCH OF SPINOZA IN THE HISTOIRE DES OUVRAGES DES SAVANS

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A mirror of the intellectual life of their time and a platform where men of learning could exchange ideas: these were two functions of the periodicals of learning of the Ancien Régime. Research into this material has abundantly proved its value for intellectual history. This is valid for the history of Spinozism as well: the discovery of Spinoza’s Letter 19 to Van Blijenbergh in De Boekzaal Der Geleerde Wereld, edited by Willem Séwel¹ and the evidence that Spinoza was not the author of Stelkonstige Reeckening Van Den Regenboog and of Reeckening van Kanssen, demonstrated by means of an article in Pieter Rabus’ De Boekzaal van Europe,² constitute convincing proofs. No wonder that recently there have been systematic investigations into old periodicals like Bayle’s Nouvelles de la République des Lettres and Le Clerc’s Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique to see what they could tell us about Spinoza and the circulation of his ideas.³ The periodicals in the United Provinces, published in an area with a relatively great freedom of the press and, moreover, the cradle of Spinozism, are of especial interest. And such a periodical is the Histoire des Ouvrages des Savans which we will examine here. It appeared from Sep-

¹ Spinoza, Briefwisseling, ed. F. Akkerman et al. (Amsterdam 1977), p. 518.
tember 1687 till June 1709 with the exception of the year 1707.\(^4\)

The editor of this periodical was the Huguenot Henri Basnage de Beauval, formerly a lawyer in Rouen, later living as a refugee in the United Provinces, and heir-apparent of Pierre Bayle when the latter abdicated as editor of the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*. In his “Préface” Basnage called his predecessor “l’illustre auteur”, and they were friends until Bayle’s death, although there was a certain coolness in about 1700.\(^5\) The philosopher supported Basnage in his editorial task, among other things by sending him memoirs,\(^6\) but the latter did not become the “heraut de Mr. B” and maintained his own ideas.\(^7\) Although the different dispositions of the two editors and the difference in circumstances left their traces, *Nouvelles* and *Histoire* may be considered as two phases of one periodical, for instance from the nearly equal attention that was paid to “la question religieuse”.\(^8\) In the *Nouvelles*, Charles-Daubert and Moreau drew attention to passages on Spinoza six times (there are a few more\(^9\)), in the *Histoire* there is a greater number, obviously because of its longer period of publication. This number was irregularly spread over the years with a remarkable vacuum in the period 1692-1695. Two of these places were referred to in the famous article “Spinoza” in Bayle’s *Dictionnaire*.\(^10\)


\(^6\) Bots & Van Lieshout, *Contribution*, p. xviii.


\(^8\) Hubert Bost, *Un ‘Intellectuel’ avant la lettre: le journaliste Pierre Bayle (1647-1706)*... (Amsterdam-Maarssen, 1994), p. 6 calculates that 47% of Bayle’s periodical deals with “la question religieuse”. In the *HOS* this is about 45% if the small category of canon law is not included, which it is in Bost. (In acknowledgement to Dr L. van Lieshout for her information).

\(^9\) Among other things we can add: *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* 1685, 1336-1350, especially 1349, on James Dalrymple, first Viscount Stair. Cf. De Vet, “Learned Periodicals”, p. 31 and note 38. In *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* 1684, 385 *De Waerheyt van de christelijcke gods-dienst*... (1674) is meant, of Willem van Blijenbergh, who was not mentioned by Charles-Daubert and Moreau in Bayle, *Écrits sur Spinoza*, p. 142 (“on ait écrit [...] en flamand”) in connection with the fragment quoted from an article on Saldenius.

\(^10\) Remarque M, note 75, reference to *HOS*, March 1696, article III, on a work by Van Til. Remarque S, note 137, reference to *HOS*, March 1689, article X, on a work