SPINOZA IN CLANDESTINE MANUSCRIPTS:
A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY OF RECENT RESEARCH

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Since Paul Vernière’s thesis (1954)*, our acquaintance with clandestine literature has gained in width and depth. Vernière worked on the texts discovered by Gustave Lanson (1912) and Ira O. Wade (1938); the American scholar produced 102 titles of clandestine manuscripts for the period 1700-1750. The new inventories proposed by Miguel Benítez (1982, 1988, 1995) have been extended with the help of readers of the Lettre clandestine (1992-) and the latest research proposes a list of 257 titles and innumerable hitherto unknown copies. These figures give an indication of the health and vigour of research into clandestine literature. Discovery of new texts has been accompanied by analysis of the substance of clandestine philosophy, and the picture of Spinoza’s reception is gradually being painted in more detail. In this paper, I will not attempt to draw the conclusions, since much of this research is embryonic; I will try to give a complete scan of critical studies concerning Spinoza in clandestine manuscript literature over the last few years. I will follow roughly the order of P. Vernière’s chronological study of the influence of Spinoza.

Jean-Baptiste Stoupp played a prominent role in making the general public acquainted with the figure of Spinoza. P. Vernière’s documentation came mainly from Gustave Cohen (1925-1926), but recent work throws more light on this enigmatic figure. M. Benítez (ed. 1994) has shown that Stoupp’s controversial book is the source of a clandestine manuscript entitled A Madame xxx sur les différentes religions de Hollande, contained in a collection in Douai. Using the archives in Zürich, Benítez gives new biographical information on the mysterious figure of this Swiss Calvinist, who translated sermons of William Baxter and became a ‘close friend’ of Spinoza. In this context, Stoupp might appear to evolve in the half-light of

* A chronological bibliography will be found in appendix to this article.
freethought, but a new document discovered by Elisabeth Labrousse (1995) ensures his adherence to the Reformed faith: former pastor of the pro-Parlementarian Walloon Church in Threadneedle Street, London, Stoupppe is well known in Charenton, and, in April 1679, having spent some time, with his brother, in military employment as colonel in the Swiss regiment of Louis XIV, requests the provincial synod at Charenton for permission to join the French Reformed community. This permission is granted and Stoupppe remains faithful to the Reformed faith. In 1686, he travels in Italy with the Low Church bishop Gilbert Burnet, and dies on the 23rd of August 1692 from wounds received at the battle of Steenkerken.

To P. Vernière’s list of those who contributed to the diffusion of Spinozist ideas in the Netherlands, we can now add Balthasar Bekker, who has been studied by Wiep van Bunge (1993) and, in the present volume, by Andrew Fix. These same authors (1990, 1991) have published excellent studies of Johannes Bredenburg and the Dutch Collegiants in relation to the development of rationalism. J. de Vet (1989) has made an important contribution to knowledge of the Spinoza debate in Dutch periodicals, and, in the present volume, a number of papers throw new light on the influence of Spinoza in the Netherlands and on the suppression of his works.

Since P. Vernière’s work, Bayle’s article and other texts concerning Spinoza have been studied in more detail: Françoise Charles-Daubert and Pierre-François Moreau (ed. 1983) have provided a new edition of the relevant texts; Geneviève Brykman (1990) studies Bayle’s refutation of Spinoza’s definition of substance and relates the portrait of Spinoza to that of Uriel da Costa (on whom see also Jean-Pierre Osier, 1983); Gianluca Mori (1988) goes over these same texts in an attempt to pin down Bayle’s own position. Among Protestant theologians engaged in conflict with Spinozist ideas, Jean Leclerc has been closely studied by Cristina Pitassi (1987), who provides also (1988) a good idea of the status of Spinozism in Geneva towards the end of the 17th century.

P. Vernière gives little room to Fontenelle, who was strongly influenced by Bekker and Van Dale and in close contact with Huguenot refugees from Rouen who had fled to the Netherlands around 1685. His Traité de la liberté and clandestine versions of the Traité des miracles and Traité des oracles have been edited recently by Alain Niderst (ed. 1996); his materialism and determinism have been studied by Carmelo Romeo (1982) and his relation to Spinozism by Jean Dagen (1989). This last communication gives rise to an interesting debate,