On the Way to Adulthood (1599–1607)

Scholarly Activities, Relations with Johan van Oldenbarnevelt

Grotius first attracted public notice by publishing occasional verses in Latin and Greek. As a twelve year old he composed a poem to mark the marriage of Maria van Almonde and the Treasurer-General Joris de Bie. Maria was a daughter of Abraham van Almonde and Maria de Groot, the half-sister of Hugo’s father Jan.1 As Treasurer-General Joris de Bie was responsible for managing the finances of the Generality, and was therefore an important relation, whom Hugo was eager to cultivate.2 Young Grotius also wrote a poem to congratulate professor Johannes Cuchlinus (1546–1606) on his appointment as regent of the States’ College, the training school for theologians at the University of Leiden.3 His ode to Frederick Henry has already been mentioned. The young poet’s verses showed the House of Orange-Nassau and above all Maurice in a flattering light. Later, during his imprisonment, he would cite them as proof of his goodwill towards the Stadholders.4 But these poems were the prelude to more serious work.

Before he set out for France, Grotius had completed the manuscript of his edition of Martianus Capella’s *Satyricon*, an encyclopaedic work on the liberal arts that was very popular in the Middle Ages.5 He dedicated it to Henri II de Bourbon, Prince of Condé, whom he had met on his journey to France, and with whom he was to have close ties during his later exile. (see ILLUSTRATION 15). The choice of this prince of the blood was understandable, for until the birth

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3 *BG* no. 8. The earliest published texts of Grotius’ Latin poems (1595–1600) are collected in *Dichtwerken* I 2a/b 1.
4 *Verhooren*, p. 9: ‘Belangende sijn Excellentie, hoe lieff mij sijn eere ende reputatie is geweest sullen mijne Poemata getuygen, waervan het beste deel bestaat in ’t roemen van zijn loff.’
of Prince Louis on 27 September 1601 Condé was first in line of succession to the throne of France, if Henri IV should die. The letter of dedication cannot be dated precisely, but the book probably did not appear until the spring of 1599. Johannes Meursius helped Grotius to correct the proofs.\(^6\) Joseph Justus Scaliger supplied an epigraph, and must have received a copy as a present from Grotius, so that he could see with his own eyes the great honour that his pupil paid him as a teacher in the dedication and notes.\(^7\) The French poet Philippe Desportes, whom Grotius had met during his travels in France, also received a presentation copy.\(^8\)

The edition of Martianus Capella served as a visiting card, for it contained an engraving of Hugo de Groot by Jacob de Gheyn, made in 1599, in which the young hero posed proudly, not to say pertly, holding the medallion that Henri IV had presented to him as a gift. It is a splendid portrait, almost finer than the pin-sharp drawing by De Gheyn from which the engraving was made. Both drawing and engraving bear Grotius’ motto, *ruit hora*, ‘time flies’, a truism that does not occur in those exact words in any classical source but has many equivalents. In the same year 1599 Grotius had also been painted by Jan Anthoniszoon van Ravesteyn. (see illustration 18). The painting belongs to the collection of Frits Lugt and now hangs in the Hôtel Turgot, at the rear side of the Institut Neérlandais in Paris. These are the two most important original likenesses of Grotius in his early years.\(^9\) His iconography is in fact a knotty problem for the biographer. The surviving images of him show ever-changing features, so that it is difficult to imagine his physiognomy as it must have been. Grotius’ appearance altered; in the best known portrait, that by Michiel

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8. Information from Marcus de Schepper, who discovered the presentation copy in de Médiathèque Municipale at Cambrai, with a short unknown poem by Grotius. He is to publish this find.