Exile (1621–25)

Paris, a Refuge in a Turbulent World

After the snug village of The Hague and the rising commercial city of Rotterdam, Paris with its 300,000 inhabitants was a true metropolis, rapidly growing under the rule of Henri IV and Louis XIII. There is every reason to assume that Grotius soon felt at home there. He spoke fluent French. He represented the political tendency that had always seen a close alliance with France against Spain as the best hope for the Republic’s independence. It was natural that he should be well received in France, where he could count on important political protectors, including Pierre Jeannin and Benjamin Aubéry du Maurier. In the King’s Council, following the death of the Florentine adventurer Concino Concini (1617), the ‘Barbons’, the old ministers of Henri IV, were still in control. These were politicians who had been very supportive of Oldenbarnevelt’s policy: Villeroy, the Chancellor Sillery, his son Puisieux, the Keeper of the Seals Du Vair and Pierre Jeannin, who was now surintendant des finances.

When Grotius fled the Republic, internal peace, the precondition for an energetic prosecution of the war against Spain, had been restored. The war was gradually resumed after the Truce expired on 9 April 1621, but the outlook for the Protestant powers at the time was bleak. In Bohemia the Estates had risen in revolt against the Habsburgs and elected the Calvinist Elector Palatine Frederick V, the patron of Grotius’ friend Georg Michael Lingelsheim, to the crown of Bohemia. But because he received inadequate support from his allies, and the French government let the Emperor have his way, Frederick suffered a crushing defeat at the battle of the White Mountain near Prague on 8 November 1620. He was driven from Bohemia and the Palatinate, lost his electoral rank and was known from this time by the mocking nickname of the Winter King, having been a king for a single winter only. International Protestantism was trying to find a way to recover from this blow, but the outcome was a long conflict, later known as the Thirty Years’ War, which claimed

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1 The French documents in the dossiers on the Indies trade prove that Grotius already had a good active knowledge of French in his Holland period. Cf. BW XVII, no. 399A, report of the conference with the English delegation, [beginning of May 1615], and G.N. Clark and W.J.M. van Eysinga, *The colonial conferences between England and the Netherlands* II, p. 100.
counrless victims. One of them was Lingelsheim, who shared Grotius’ fate. After the White Mountain he was forced to leave Heidelberg for his birthplace Strasburg, where he remained almost until his death.

In France too the prospects were far from rosy. The country had just emerged from a struggle between the Queen Mother Maria de’ Medici and Jean-Louis de Nogaret de La Valette, Duke of Epernon, which was followed almost immediately by the first war of religion during the reign of Louis XIII (1620–22). Led by Protestant noblemen, including Henri, Duke of Rohan, the Huguenots rose against the central government, which was already weakened by rivalry between the courtiers for royal favour. Louis XIII and his ‘grand fauxconnier’ and Constable Charles d’Albert, Duke of Luynes, went south in 1621 to subdue the Protestants. After Concini, Luynes was the next favourite to exploit the fluctuating relationship between Maria de’ Medici and Louis, but he died of smallpox in December 1621, and a new period of political uncertainty began. The situation would not be stabilized until the rise of the great statesman Cardinal de Richelieu. Although the monarchy was by no means in calm water yet, at least a consistent course was being steered. Richelieu became a member of the Royal Council on 29 April 1624 and its unofficial chairman on 13 August the same year, but he had not reached that position when Grotius arrived in Paris. Grotius had to find his feet in an unstable political world.

How does an exile driven from hearth and home manage to survive? Once out of his own country he may well cry ‘satis late patet orbis terrarum’ or ‘ah, que le monde est grand’, expecting to find a safe haven soon; but most migrants are not so fortunate. Harsh reality soon compels them to make a choice. An exile can attach himself to those who are in the same plight, and join forces to bring about their return; or he can adapt to his new environment. It will become clear that Grotius tried both survival strategies during his exile in France. He was never isolated, for he soon found several Remonstrant fellow-counrmen who helped one another to bear the burden of repression and exile. Together they made overtures to French anti-Calvinists and even to

3 G. Parker, The Thirty Years’ War, pp. 42–63.
4 After the Swedish armies had taken Heidelberg in 1633, Lingelsheim was able to return, but not for long. Following the battle of Nördlingen (6 September 1634) the war situation changed again, and he had to flee to Frankenthal, where he died in captivity. See A.E. Walter, Späthumanismus und Konfessionspolitik: die europäische Gelehrtenrepublik um 1600 im Spiegel der Korrespondenzen Georg Michael Lingelsheims, pp. 155–168.
6 BW II, no. 1005, to W. de Groot, 29 August 1625: ‘the world is wide enough.’
7 BW IV, no. 1702, to P. Dupuy, [December 1631].