Passing through Hamburg: Hesitations and Uncertainties (1632–34)

Hamburg: A Harbour of Refuge

After a difficult voyage Grotius arrived in Hamburg in early May 1632. He was just in time to sit by the deathbed of another exile, the Remonstrant preacher Nicolaes van Grevinchoven, who was no longer conscious and who died soon afterwards.\(^1\) Grotius was ‘quite disgusted’ at the ingratitude shown him in Rotterdam, where Van Grevinchoven had also preached, and felt that his old employers had left him in the lurch.\(^2\) In his own words, Grotius was received by the Hamburg magistrates not as an exile (‘relegatus’) but as an envoy (‘legatus’). In Paris, however, there was a rumour that the city had been unwilling to admit him within its walls.\(^3\) In the summer of that year he stayed at Dockenhuden (Dockinghoede), a western suburb now swallowed up by the great city of Hamburg. Dockenhuden was the property of ‘cousin’ Juliaen de Moer, a Hamburg merchant who had married Jan de Groot’s goddaughter Elselinge van der Dussen.\(^4\) Grotius described Dockenhuden, two miles outside Hamburg at that time, as an idyllic retreat, situated on a sizeable hill, surrounded by woods and the Elbe, with ponds, orchards and a vegetable garden. Many Netherlanders had long settled in and near the city, especially since the outbreak of the Revolt against Spain.\(^5\) Grotius claimed to be content, but his flight from Holland had been a shocking experience. He suffered from a persistent stomach complaint.\(^6\) In August Maria arrived via Amsterdam\(^7\) in

---
\(^3\) *BW* V, no. 1836, from D. Tilenus, 2 May 1633; *BW* XVII, no. 1820A, appendix, D. Tilenus to J. Wtenbogaert, 9 May 1633.
\(^4\) Juliaen married Elselinge Jacobsdochter van der Dussen in Delft, on 8 February 1620. Cf. *Ned. Leeuw* 16 (1898), cols. 7–8, and 30 (1912), cols. 172 and 206. See also *BW* XIX, no. 5319, from W. de Groot, 12 August 1641, with the report of Elselinge’s death on the same day.
\(^5\) *BW* V, no. 1781, to G. Lusson, 27 August 1632.
\(^6\) *BW* V, no. 1766, to G.J. Vossius, 31 May 1632, and *BW* V, no. 1784, to P. Dupuy, 2 September 1632.
\(^7\) *BW* V, no. 1771, from G.J. Vossius, [end of July] 1632.
Dockenhuden\textsuperscript{8} from Paris, but soon left for her fifth journey to Holland.\textsuperscript{9} The family must have moved into Hamburg itself in the course of the year. Hugo, some of the children, and later also Maria lived in the house of Leonard van Sorgen, a copper merchant with contacts in Sweden. After Van Sorgen died on 12 August 1633, Grotius apparently remained in the house of his widow, before moving to the house of Assuerus Matthisius, or in Dutch Sweer Matthijsen, one of several kindred spirits who were ready to offer him shelter. Matthijsen had served as a Remonstrant preacher in The Hague from 1631 to 1632, before moving to Hamburg, where he married Agneta van de Wouwere, a wealthy widow.\textsuperscript{10}

Grotius’ years in Hamburg have been characterized as the low point in his career, because he published so little in this period. It is hard to say whether the inference is justified, since it says nothing about his intellectual activity in his study. In any case, he was unable to work on his annotations on the New Testament, because he did not have the manuscript and the books he needed in Hamburg.\textsuperscript{11} He did make a Latin translation of Euripides’ \textit{Iphigeneia in Tauris}, which has not survived,\textsuperscript{12} and also wrote \textit{Sophompaneas}, his third biblical drama, which will be discussed below. But these literary activities were merely incidental. His top priority had to be to look for suitable employment. This probably explains why Grotius chose Hamburg. He considered that his best chance of finding an honourable position was to apply to, or allow himself to be approached by, agents of the Protestant powers of the North. He thought of Denmark, Poland or Sweden, and even had a personal audience with King Christian IV of Denmark at nearby Glückstadt in 1633, probably in June.\textsuperscript{13} His movements are not easy to trace accurately, for in a letter of 2 January 1638 he

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{BW} \textit{V}, no. 1775, to M. Junius, 17 August 1632; \textit{BW} \textit{V}, no. 1792, from G.J. Vossius, 8 October 1632.
\item \textit{BW} \textit{V}, no. 1792. Maria stayed in Holland until March 1633, at least according to a note in \textit{BW} \textit{V}, no. 1832. A sixth journey followed in the autumn of 1633. In October 1633 Maria was again with her husband in Hamburg (\textit{BW} \textit{V}, no. 1886, to G.J. Vossius, 19 October 1633).
\item \textit{BW} \textit{V}, no. 1907, to M. Ruarius, 14 January 1634.
\item \textit{BW} \textit{V}, no. 1832, to Cl. Saumaise, 9 April 1633.
\item See \textit{BW} \textit{V}, no. 1855, to M. Ruarius, 2 July 1633, in reply to a letter that was presumably written in June of that year (\textit{BW} \textit{V}, no. 1809). Vossius refers to the audience in \textit{BW} \textit{V}, no. 1877, 22 September 1633. See further a letter from H. Ernstius to G.J. Vossius, 12 November 1633, in the \textit{Epist. Vossii} \textit{II}, no. 184 (pp. 131–132). Much later Grotius mentions the visit in \textit{BW} \textit{VIII}, no. 3145, to L. Aubéry du Maurier, 3 July 1637: as a ‘privatus, a meis toties male habitus’, he was nevertheless honourably received by the King.
\end{itemize}