Chapter 15

Diplomacy and Exegesis: The Paris Embassy (1640–44)

A New Address

In 1641 Grotius and his family moved to a new address, still in the faubourg Saint-Germain-des-Prés, on the rue des Saints-Pères. The lease, signed with the owner Paul Bailly, abbé of Saint-Thierry-au Mont d’Or-lez-Reims, was dated 13 April 1641 and provided for a six-year tenancy, terminable at six months’ notice.¹ Grotius was evidently assuming that he would remain in Paris for some time. Bailly was a brother of Anne Bailly, the widow of De Garsanlan, who had leased the house on the quai Malaquais to Grotius. At 2700 livres, the rent was again higher than that for the previous house, but the new accommodation was more spacious. The family moved in on 27 April, when Grotius wrote Willem a letter from one house while busy transferring his belongings to the other.²

If a plaque were to be erected in Paris to commemorate Grotius’ residence, this house, the present number 52 rue des Saints-Pères, would be the most appropriate site, even though it is now the home of the library of the Society for the History of French Protestantism. Paul Bailly had bought a parcel of land on the rue des Saints-Pères on 9 June 1639 and borrowed money, 55,000 livres, to build a house on it for his own use. He only lived there for a short time, for on 27 September 1639 he bought the adjoining house (number 54), which was let until the end of 1640. When Bailly had moved next door, Grotius could move into number 52. On 20 July 1643 Bailly sold number 52 for 38,000 livres in annuities and 31,000 livres in cash, to Pierre de Creil, a royal counsellor, but Grotius’ lease was unaffected. This sale agreement describes the house as ‘a large house, newly built, with a porte-cochère which gives access to the rue des Saints-Pères, a large inner courtyard and several rooms around it; of which the largest looks

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² BW XII, no. 5159, 27 April 1641, postscript: ‘Scripsi in aedibus, in alias migrans.’
on to the garden and the inner court; there are also stables, a back garden and all manner of outbuildings’.

The house was on the edge of the faubourg, rather off-centre, but of course this was no obstacle to the statesmen, diplomats, scholars and travellers from Holland who sought out the ambassador there. Because the visitors were soon too numerous to cope with, Grotius tried to limit them, even instituting visiting hours. He wrote to Vossius that he was living in a sufficiently spacious house, a ‘domus satis laxa’, but regretted that he had not managed to persuade Vossius’ son Isaac to come and lodge with him, since he would have had no problem in finding room for him. In 1640 an uncle of Richelieu, Charles de La Porte, marshal de La Meilleraye, built a house at number 56. Grotius was certainly living in a fashionable neighbourhood. Most of the houses in the rue des Saints-Pères were large mansions with portes-cochères and gardens. When he heard from Sweden, not long afterwards, that he might be recalled, he replied that he had just leased a better house for a lengthy term and had furnished it in a style that was not so much to his own taste as befitting his status.

It is not easy to catch a glimpse of Grotius’ home life. According to the French literary man Gilles Ménage, Grotius was accustomed to entertain his guests after meals over a dessert, at which drinking was expected. He never addressed his servants by name, but if he needed them he summoned them with a loud

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4 See BW XI, no. 5388, to W. de Groot, 28 September 1641, where Grotius relates that he was now working on the annotations to the Acts of the Apostles, so far as his embassy left him the time to do so. He continues: ‘Salutationes accido, quantum comitas permittit.’ He had previously written to G.J. Vossius about instituting hours for receiving visitors (BW XI, no. 4923, 10 November 1640): ‘Ego salutatorium numerum minuo indies aut ad certas horas redigo. Idem tibi ut facias, auctor sim.’ It was the famous Joseph Scaliger, who had set the example: BW V, no. 1898, to G.J. Vossius, 30 November 1633: ‘… nec aliud remedium video, nisi ut toto mane tibi et publice audientibus indicato horam unam aut alteram ante vesperam assignes salutatoribus, Scaligeri exemplo’.

5 BW XII, no. 5367, 14 September 1641.

6 J. Hillairet, Dictionnaire historique des rues de Paris 11, p. 501.

7 BW XII, no. 5285, to A. Oxenstierna, 20 July 1641.