LAURENTIUS THEODORUS GRONOVIUS (1648–1724)

by

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1. - Introduction

Laurentius (Laurens) Theodorus Gronovius was a member of a family which has produced a number of important Leyden academics. The more famous among them are Laurens’ father Johannes Fredericus1 Gronovius (1611–1671), professor of Eloquence and History at the Athenaeum Illustre in Deventer (1642–1658) and professor of Greek Language and History in Leyden (1658–1671); Laurens’ brother Jacobus2 (1645–1716), professor of Greek Language and History in Leyden (1679–1716); Abraham (1695–1775), son of Jacobus, Leyden University Librarian since 17413. These three get the most attention in biographical articles; Laurentius Theodorus sometimes is not mentioned at all, and is usually only named as the son or brother of the two professors, respectively. He is also regularly confused with his namesake Laurentius Theodorus (1730–1777), the grandson of his brother Jacobus.

Still he does not deserve to be neglected by legal historians. He lived in the days of the Dutch Elegant School (which blossomed roughly in 1670–1730), at almost exactly the same time as this School’s foremost member, Gerard Noodt (1647–1724)4. His education and field of attention would seem to make him a

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2. Outside the biographical articles I have found no extensive study on him. If such does not exist, it might be well worth writing. Jacob Gronovius appears to have been a rather undiplomatic, but very productive scholar; at least a considerable correspondence has been preserved.


representative of the Elegant School: a doctor of Law, from a family of classicists and jurists, with an interest in Antiquity. Twice, during long travels in Italy, he was on the lookout for interesting manuscripts in various libraries; among these manuscripts the legal manuscript, the codex Florentinus of the Digest, of which he made a full collation. For that reason he is mentioned in the Praefatio to Mommsen’s Editio maior of the Digest.

For legal historians, Laurens Gronovius is of interest mainly because of this work on the text of the Digest. In this respect, he must be studied alongside his younger contemporaries Alexander Cuningham (1655/60–1730) and Henrik Brenkman (1681–1736). We know that these two had plans to publish a new text of the Digest. Cuningham had even been awarded an annuity by the Scottish Parliament in 1698 for his plan to publish a new text of the Corpus Iuris.

2. – Life and career

Laurens Gronovius’ father Johann Friedrich (1611–1671) became a professor at the Athenaeum Illustre in Deventer in 1642. He married Alida ten Nuyl on January 15, 1643. Seven children were born to this marriage; Laurentius Theodorus was the fourth. The other children were Margaretha (born December 7, 1643), Jacobus (October 10, 1645) and Adriana (January 8, 1647). Laurentius Theodorus Gronovius was baptized on October 22, 1648 in Deventer. There is little information about his early years in Deventer, apart from the fact that three sisters were born after him: Catharina (December 2, 1650), Johanna (March 3, 1653) and Maria Elisabeth (September 2, 1655). Gronovius the father was a well-respected man in Deventer: he was the first professor to be elected 'ge-

5. P. XVIII. The collation has been preserved in Leyden University Library as Ms. Gronov. 134. Mommsen studied the collation in 1864–1865 in the course of his work on the Editio maior.


8. He became a member of the Reformed church in Deventer in 1642 (Bugter, 30).

9. Bijleveld gives October 25 as his date of birth, and does not mention the baptism. The baptism records of the Reformed ‘gemeente’ in Deventer (Gemeenterarchief Deventer) have an entry for October 22, 1648, saying: ‘Laurentius Didericus, zoon van Johannes Fredericus Gronovius en Aelheijt Tenuijl’. The second name has changed in the course of time: from Didericus to Theodoricus, and then to Theodorus.