PIET VISSER

Jan Philipsz Schabaelje and Pieter van der Borcht’s etchings in the first and the final state. A contribution to the reconstruction of the printing history of H. J. Barrefelt’s *Imagines et Figurae Bibliorum*¹

1. INTRODUCTION

When Renatus Christianus, alias HIEL (Hendrick Iansz Een-vvesich Leuen Gods [... Uniform Life of God]), or H. J. Barrefelt addresses the reader in his *Imagines et Figurae Bibliorum* the purpose of the work becomes clear. The reality of God has been ‘depicted or counterfeited [...] in figures’ ['in figuren ... laten af malen ofte conterfeyten'] by the illustrator of the Plantin press, Pieter van der Borcht. Hiel has added ‘the only sense, ground and foundation of the Holy Scriptures after the spirit and being of Christ’ ['den eenighen sin, gront ende het fondament der heyligher schrifture na den gheest ende ende wesen Christi’]. These interpretations lead the reader to the ‘substance’ ['wesentlicke'] of what is illustrated ‘figuratively’ ['figuerlick'] in the plates. The outer manifestation is simply a means—and therefore of subsidiary importance—of knowing the spiritual truth. The prints represent two levels: they are first ‘figurative, and then substantial’ ['figuerlick, ende daer na wesentlick’], and it is Hiel’s text which bridges the gap. In this manner the reader can attain the spiritual objective and ‘come to a new life in Christ’ ['om tot een nieuwe leuen in Christo te omen’].²

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Even if Hiel's objective is straightforward enough, however, his doctrine is by no means so. Yet this is not the subject of this article. I am primarily concerned with two elements in the somewhat obscure printing history of the *Imagines*: the genesis and the final stage of the Bible illustrations. Oddly enough the last editor of the series, Jan Philipsz Schabaelje, is connected with both stages.

As Voet has already shown, and as Hamilton has confirmed, there are copies of the first edition which differ greatly where the state of the illustrations is concerned. Some only contain the 60 Old Testament prints with the accompanying text. Then there are copies which also contain 38 New Testament etchings but without Barrefelt's commentaries, a feature which is difficult to conciliate with the connection between text and print on which he lays such emphasis in the introduction. Both scholars have attributed this discrepancy to the circumstance of Plantin's temporary stay in Leiden. Thanks to a discovery I have made of several etchings which display a still earlier state than has hitherto been known I propose to throw a little more light on the somewhat confused composition of the first edition(s).

We are faced with a very different question when we come to explain why Schabaelje, some sixty or seventy years after the first impression, should have again added Hiel's text to the prints and should himself have written commentaries to the New Testament series entirely in the spirit of the sixteenth-century spiritualist. Before Schabaelje published his edition in 1653 the prints had been reissued on various occasions. Michiel Colijn was responsible for the first series of reprints, in 1613 and in 1617, already with the title *Emblemata Sacra*; Bernardus Sellius provided the prints with a Latin motto and a four-line moralizing verse; and Claes Jansz Visscher reprinted the etchings in 1639. On this last occasion the prints underwent their greatest change: Sellius's Latin mottoes were engraved on the prints by Visscher with a few alterations. The representation of God is replaced by a tetragram, and there is no longer any sign of an accompanying text.