Hendrick Beets (1625?-1708), publisher to the German adherents of Jacob Böhme in Amsterdam

During the seventeenth century the northern Netherlands, and in particular the city of Amsterdam, provided a welcome sanctuary to many of those, who, because of their dissenting views on matters of faith, had found themselves obliged to leave their own countries. Socinians, Labadists, Quakers and many others were able here to express themselves with greater freedom than anywhere else, and nowhere else were there as many printers willing to spread the writings of such movements.

This was the atmosphere, then, in which the ideas of the 'Philosophus Teutonicus' Jacob Böhme (1575-1624) were so rapidly and so avidly studied by a wide circle of readers, a fact to which attention was first drawn by the church historian Chr. Sepp in a detailed treatise on the subject of Böhme and his friends in Holland.¹ Sepp's researches were centred principally on the circumstances in which, in 1682, the first complete edition of Böhme's works was produced by Johann Georg Gichtel and others. Nevertheless, the article contains numerous detailed references to the Amsterdam merchant Abraham Willemszoon van Beyerland, who published Dutch translations of most of Böhme's work between 1634 and 1642. Later research by L. Brummel threw fresh light on the figure of Van Beyerland, who was a leading member of the Dutch civet cartel.² The poet and etcher Jan Luyken, too, attracted the attention of researchers for his Dutch translation of the Aurora, the German mystic's first and best-known work, in 1686.³

² L. Brummel, De oudste Nederlandsche vertalingen van Jacob Boehme, in: Handelingen van het Tweede Wetenschappelijk Vlaamsch Congres voor Boek- en Bibliotheekwezen Gent... 1932 (Ghent 1933), pp. 119-38; an altered and abridged version is: A. W. van Beyerland's vertalingen van Jacob Boehme, in: Het Boek, N.R. 21 (1932/33), pp. 67-90. New information is included in the same author's essay Jacob Boelme en het 17e-eeuwse Amsterdam, in: Historische opstellen aangeboden aan J. Huizinga op 7 December 1942... (Haarlem 1948), pp. 7-28; also in: L. Brummel, Miscellanea librarla. Opstellen over boek- en bibliotheekwezen... (The Hague 1957), pp. 178-203. Also on Van Beyerland: I. Prins, Gegevens betreffende de 'Oprechte Hollandsche Civet', in: Economisch-Historisch Jaarboek, 20 (1936), pp. 3-211. Civet cartel: the civet-cat secretes a fragrant liquid, civet, which is used in the manufacture of perfume. Amsterdam was an important centre for the civet trade.
³ C. B. Hylkema, De nieuwlichter Jan Luyken, in: De Gids, 68 (1904), iv, pp. 28-58; F. Reitsma, De oorsprong van Luykens 'Jezus en de Ziel', in: Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taal-
Research into the influence and circulation of Böhme’s works was given a new dimension by the appearance of W. Buddecke’s bibliography *Die Jakob Böhme-Ausgaben*, the first part of which (1937) describes the German-language editions, while the second part (1957) deals with the translations. The information on Van Beyerland’s translations in the second volume provides firm bibliographical support for Brummel’s research, and clarifies and defines much that was previously uncertain. But the first volume, too, is of considerable importance in its contribution to our knowledge of Böhmis n the Netherlands, for it shows that a large proportion of the seventeenth-century editions in German were published in Amsterdam. The vast majority of these appeared under the imprint of the publisher Henricus Betkius, whose name in everyday life was Hendrick Beets. There has never been very much attention paid to Beets, despite the fact that his activities in the spreading of Böhme’s writings were of no less consequence than those of Van Beyerland, and were certainly not aimed exclusively at the German market. Furthermore, there were among Beets’s friends and relations several Dutch spiritual reformers of some renown, and the works which Beets published alongside those of Böhme reflect the general line of thought which was current in such circles at this time.

At first no more than a few of Böhme’s works were available. During the author’s life only three short tracts from his hand were printed together, in a volume entitled *Der Weg zu Christo* (1624). Between then and 1656 nineteen editions of his work were published in various places, though taken together this was but a fraction of his total literary production, especially as this figure includes a number of reprints. Many people knew Böhme’s writing only from one or more of the many manuscripts which circulated among those who took a particular interest in it. An end to this situation did not come until the appearance of the collected works in the editions of 1682, 1715 and 1730. Thanks to the efforts of Hendrick Beets, however, it was possible even before 1682 to find reliable editions of the majority of Böhme’s works. Between 1658 and 1678 27 Böhme editions were produced by Henricus Betkius – a relatively large number when compared with the total of 61 editions which appeared up to the year 1700.

Nonetheless, Betkius’s list was not particularly long. But it were these very publications which, together, constituted a driving force in an