Little is known about the life of Baruch (Benedictus) de Spinoza (1632-77), the most important philosopher of the Netherlands. He was reticent about himself and lived a fairly secluded life, did not hold any public office and was not affiliated with a university. His works and correspondence do not reveal anything about significant periods and events in his life, such as his youth and education, the ban pronounced against him which resulted in his break with the Jewish community, his departure from Amsterdam, the cruel death of his friend Adriaan Koerbagh, the assassination of the De Witt brothers or his visit to the French commander in Utrecht in the 'disaster year' 1672.1

We do have some biographies dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as those of Jarig Jelles (1677), Jean Maximilien Lucas (1679?), Sebastian Kortholt (1700), Pierre Bayle (1697/1706), Johannes Colerus (1705), Stolle-Hallmann (1704) and Johannes Monnikhoff (after 1743), but they are not always very reliable.

Since the revival of interest in Spinoza, which began in Germany, and, since the middle of the nineteenth century, also spread to the Netherlands, a great deal of material about him has come to light, for the greater part resting in archives. This research has resulted in the still valuable work by Koenraad Oege Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring* (1896)2 and Jakob Freudenthal's *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas* (1899),3 supplemented by the important archival discoveries made by Abraham Mordechai Vaz Dias and Willem Gerard van der Tak, *Spinoza mercator & autodidactus* (1932).4

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3 J. Freudenthal, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas in Quellenschriften, Urkunden und nichtamtlichen Nachrichten* (Leipzig 1899; repr. London 1980); a Hebrew translation was published in Vienna in 1912.

As early as 1977 Manfred Walther, emeritus professor in philosophy of law at Hanover University, has been adding bio- and bibliographical notes to Freudenthal’s work in a number of publications, eventually leading to the monumental work in two parts now under review. A comparison between Freudenthal’s original work and the new edition gives a good idea of the progress achieved in more than a century of Spinoza research. Two texts could be added to the ‘Lebensbeschreibungen’ section; the ‘Dokumente’ section has been subdivided in four categories: documents concerning (a) B. de Spinoza’s family, (b) his father, (c) his life, and (d) statements by and about Spinoza. In all, 214 documents are included, often elaborately annotated; of which 18 are new in category (a); 20 in category (b); 42 in category (c) and a further 14 in category (d). There are 94 new documents, which to a certain degree have already published before, by Vaz Dias and van der Tak in 1932. On many occasions Odette Vlessing of the Amsterdam Stadtarchief double-checked the precise transcription of the texts. (More Dutch experts have supplied information, amongst whom Wiep van Bunge, Piet Steenbakkers and Theo van der Werf). All documents (French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew, Latin) have been translated into German. They also include more recent finds, such as passages from the (Latin) diary of the Dane Ole Borch, which was published in 1983 (document 79). This diary contains an entry dated 10 September 1661 about a German by the name of Daniel Langermann, who had paid a visit to Spinoza in Rijnsburg and was astonished to find an atheist living a sober and irreproachable life – a very early observation, and one which would often recur. It is also the first time that mention is made of Spinoza’s lens-grinding activities. It is furthermore striking to find that Spinoza is called an atheist by a foreigner at a time when he had not yet published anything offensive. Another recently discovered document is a text by J. Gronovius found by Wim Klever in 1993 (document 192), which may go some way to prove that the relationship between Spinoza and Johan de Witt was not as good as was previously assumed. It is, however, not certain that the document alludes to De Witt.

The absorbing and elaborate annotations to these documents in the second part, which also incorporates virtually all of the literature until 2005, are of major importance.

For readers of Quaerendo, document 151, being the second inventory of Spinoza’s estate drawn up on 2 March 1677, is of special interest. It is the list of Spinoza’s library compiled in the presence of notary public Willem van den Hove. This inventory has been long known. In 1888 A.J. Servaas van Rooijen, archivist of the municipal archive and Autodidact. Charters and other authentic documents relating to the philosopher’s youth and his relations, by A.M. Vaz Dias and W.G. Van der Tak, was published in 1982 in the sixteenth installment of the biannual periodical Studia Rosenthaliana and in separate offprints.