TIMMERMAN, Petronella Johanna de (1724–86)

Petronella Johanna de Timmerman was born on 2 February 1724 in Middelburg. She was the first child of Susanna van Oordt and Pieter de Timmerman, who was a merchant and a member of the city council. Having mathematical and philosophical interests, de Timmerman taught her daughters the principles of these sciences, and showed her how to use physical instruments. In 1749, de Timmerman married the lawyer Abraham Havekamp, who died nine years later. During and after their marriage, de Timmerman became a prolific writer and published many books on history, geography, theology, and natural sciences.

She studied his works very intensively and made notes to grasp complicated passages. She shared this philosophical preference with Christina de Leevre, one of the few female eighteenth-century women who had an in-depth knowledge of contemporary philosophy. According to Hennert, de Timmerman’s admiration for Wolff even went so far that she managed her household according to his principles, mathematically, economically, and with extreme precision. Hennert sometimes ridiculed her behaviour, but she responded by quoting specific sections from Wolff’s writings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Nagelaatene gedichten (Utrecht, 1786).

Further Reading

Buijsters, P.J., Petronella Johanna de Timmerman (1724–46), with a biography. Her interest in astronomical events becomes apparent from a poem about a comet that was observed in 1743 and 1744. Following the ideas of, amongst others, Balthasar Becker, de Timmerman strongly disputes the idea that comets are signals from God to announce evil. She argues that mathematical calculations can describe and predict a comet’s movements.

Another characteristic of de Timmerman’s publisher’s list are the great number of maps and atlases, most notably the Nieuwe en beknopte hantdlaes (c. 1740), with many reprints, 1728 and 1765, a modest average of 6.5 titles per year.

In content and typographical design his production can be qualified as outstanding when compared to that of most of his contemporaries. His bookseller’s mark, a portrait of Grotius, had the ambiguous device: ‘Na Druk Volgt Vreugde’ (After Printing/Pressure comes rejoicing). He specialized in voluminous and high-standard titles, both of Dutch origin and in Dutch translation. His initiatives provided an important stimulus for the Dutch book trade, which by that time suffered from a collapsing export market. He specialized in the field of history and geography, theology and philosophy, law and politics, and natural sciences. Of fundamental importance throughout his career was his close contact with the prolific historian Jan Wagenaar, also a Collegiant board member of the ‘Oranjeappel’.

Wagenaar contributed to de Timmerman’s renowned first series is nine volumes of Thomas Salmon on interntional contemporary history, Hedinangoische historie of tegowoonstige staat van alle volkeren (1729–37), translated by the Remonstrant minister Matthias van Goesch, to which Wagenaar added seven volumes dealing with the Dutch republic, the Tegenwoordige staat der Vereenigde Nederlanden (1738–44 and 1758). Quite remarkably, one volume of the Hedinangoische historie, dealing with Poland, contained an apology for Socinianism, which was not to be found in Salmon’s original text. Tirion also published the twenty-one volumes of Wagenaar’s opus magnum on Dutch history, the Vaderlandse historie (1749–59). Wagenaar was also the author of two political pamphlets, the Koffy-huis-praatje and De Parool (1747), which caused a political, anti-Orangist controversy and a riot at Tirion’s bookshop. In several lampoons Tirion was accused of commercial opportunism, whatever the truth may be, he sold a few thousand copies of the Koffy-huis-praatje within a fortnight.

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