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THE CORRESPONDENCE OF JOHANNES DE LAET (1581-1649)

AS A MIRROR OF HIS LIFE

Taking the correspondence of Johannes de Laet (1581-1649) as a mirror of his life produces a rather incomplete image.1 The reasons for this imperfection are various. For example, no letters have been preserved of him to his relatives or members of his family, or vice versa, from his relatives to him. His correspondence therefore hardly provides us with any immediate insights into his role as a husband and father, and consequently of De Laet's family life. This situation is to be regretted, as we are rather poorly informed about this intimate side of De Laet, and we must remain dependent on the scattered remarks he makes about his family in letters to others. There is a further reason why his correspondence yields an imperfect picture of his life. It appears that the correspondence inasmuch as it has survived or can be reconstructed falls into certain periods, of which especially the first thirty years of his adult life are poorly covered. There is a batch of letters which dates from the period between 1603 and 1607, a handful of letters from the period 1611 to 1616, some scattered letters from the 1620s, and then, finally, from the early 1630s we witness a dramatic increase. All in all, I have been able to recover some twenty of his correspondents, their letters together amounting to about 350.2 Unfortunately, relatively few mutual letters between De Laet and his correspondents have been preserved, so that we must frequently make do with a one-sided correspondence which sometimes leaves much to be guessed at. We may conclude therefore that De Laet was somewhat negligent when it came to filing the letters he received and the minutes of letters he dispatched, or, and this is more probable, that his children (and heirs) have badly settled his epistolary inheritance.

Considered as such, neither the number of De Laet's correspondents nor the size of his epistolary exchanges is impressive compared with that of many other scholars of his time. Nonetheless, we have to be satisfied with what we do have. Some of his correspondence already appeared in print in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while only the letters from the London antiquarian John Morris to De Laet

1) I would like to thank Christine Kooi (Baon Rouge), Kees Dokter, Sophie van Romburgh, Henk Jan de Jonge, and Kees Zandwijk for their help in various ways.

2) They are listed in the Appendix.
have received a modern, annotated edition.3 In this respect, things are not made easy for the investigator. On the other hand, there is the challenge to be creative.

* 

It is 11 December 1649, a nippy day, when the Leiden based French scholar Claude Saumaise alias Claudius Salmasius is passing the Elzevir printing shop in the court-yard of the Academy building on the Rapenburg. Louis is standing on the doorstep and raises his hand to his hat to greet him, without Saumaise taking notice of it. Whereupon the publisher addresses him: ‘What’s the matter with you that you don’t return the greetings of one of your best friends?’ ‘Ah’, Saumaise replies, ‘how can I raise my hat to anyone today? Don’t you know that by losing De Laet, I have lost my right hand?’4 Whichever its reliability, this anecdote aptly illustrates the nature of the relation between De Laet and Saumaise.5 The latter had succeeded Joseph Scaliger, after a long vacancy, as the professor of history and demeae at Leiden in 1632, enjoying the same privileges as Scaliger had had. The two seem to have entered a friendly relationship fairly soon after Saumaise’s arrival in Leiden. Even in the Spring of 1634, the French scholar Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc wrote to Saumaise in answer to a query on behalf of De Laet on gems and stones ‘pour l’amour de vostre Mr Laet, de qui j’honore infiniment la vertu de longue main, et que je serois tres ayse de servir’.6

De Laet often rendered Saumaise what we would now call editorial assistance. He figured as a mediator between Saumaise and his publishers and like no other was able to decipher his miserable handwriting. He also assisted Saumaise in correcting galley-proofs. Notably, the task of seeing Saumaise’s De primatu papae through the press was left in the able hands of De Laet when Saumaise had to leave Leiden in 1640 for France in order to settle a litigation in connection with his paternal inheritance. Very confident of the matter, Saumaise wrote to Andre Rivet, chaplain to Stadholder Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange, in The Hague: ‘Je suis au reste tout à fait resolu de laisser ici mon de primatu pape, puisque Mons’ De Laet s’est offert à moi de prendre la peine d’avoir soin de la correction.’7 Saumaise’s stay in France turned out to last more than three years—people in Leiden even feared he would not return—and all that time De Laet delayed the publication of De primatu, as well as that of another book, De Hellenistica. On 7 September 1643, Rivet informed Saumaise that ‘Mons. de Laet est à Amsterdam, et cela a retardé la sortie de votre Hellenistique, pour qu’il y juge un indice nécessaire.’8 However, the idea of adding a register was not entirely De Laet’s initiative. Three weeks earlier he had received a letter from Claude Sarrau in Paris in which the latter—Sarrau performed editorial services to Saumaise just like De Laet—had urged him to compile such an index, as Saumaise informed Rivet: ‘Je l’avais advirti qu’il seroit tres utile d’y adjouster un indice tres exacte ce qu’il [i.e. De Laet] me promet aussi de faire faire [sic] pour la commodité et soulagement du Lecteur.’9 This is not to say that by performing such tasks De Laet considered himself merely a factotum, and hence Saumaise’s inferior. Flaunting the custom of prefixing all kind of honorific titles to people of high standing (and Saumaise was not just a prince in the Republic of Letters but also of noble birth), he addressed his letters plainly to ‘Mr. de Saumaise’10, a phenomenon so exceptional that it provoked the comments of contemporaries.11 Saumaise, on his part, knew how to express his gratitude to De Laet for his services rendered, and dedicated De Hellenistica with a letter of over 50 pages to De Laet.12 In it he praised his friend especially for his ‘singular erudition, careful judgement, and, above all, seriousness of manners, and the highest fairness of discrimination.’ On top of this all, it was their friendship which had begun right from Saumaise’s arrival in Leiden, that had moved him to dedicate this book to De Laet.

8) Leroy and Boets, Correspondance Saumaise/Rivet, no. 139 and note 6.
10) The correspondence between Saumaise and De Laet has not been published, but is deserving of an integral edition, according to the judgement of Leroy, Le dernier voyage, 220. Only De Laet’s end of the correspondence has been preserved, mainly in Bibliothèque Nationale, Manuscripts latins, no. 8598, amounting to 64 letters of which 52 pertain to the period of Saumaise’s stay in France. See further Appendix.
12) Claudius Salmasius, De Hellenistica commentarius, controversiarum de hinc Hellenistice declaratarum et plerumque pertinaciorum origines et dialecticos Graeciam (Leiden, 1643). The latter dedication is paginated independently from the main text, 3-54. This book may have been of particular interest to De Laet because of Saumaise’s discussion of the origin of Greek and its related European languages. Occasionally, Saumaise included Old English in his discussions, the knowledge of which he will have obtained from De Laet, cf. Klaus Decker, The Origin of Old Germanic Studies to the Low Countries: Brill’s Studies in the History of Ideas 92 (Leiden, New York and Cologne, 1999), 228-30. For De Laet’s study of Old English, see below.
Laet.13 De Laet’s service for the scholarly work of Saunaise is not just an expression of the friendship between the two, but also a sign of confidence on Saunaise’s part in De Laet’s intellectual and managing skills. De Laet was not a scholar pur sang, as we will see, but well-versed in classical philology, with a keen interest in contemporary political events, eager to exchange information on a wide variety of scholarly topics, a mediator in book-collecting, amiable, and, when necessary, a man who stood up for his religious principles no less for his economical interests.

In what follows I will sketch with broad strokes the career of this Leiden scholar with the help of his correspondence as well as occasionally of that between others in which he is mentioned. Archives of churches and towns have provided external data to help fill in some lacunas in De Laet’s biography.

Johannes de Laet was born in Antwerp in 158114, and, as is most likely, was taken by the Calvinist Flemings fled by thousands to the young Dutch Republic which had declared itself independent from Spain in 1581, and settled mainly in the towns of Holland, notably in Leiden, Haarlem, and Amsterdam. In September 1597, at the age of fifteen, De Laet matriculated at Leiden as a student of philosophy15, which really meant that he was to receive a solid grounding in the Classics. As was the custom at the time, young students from outside Leiden often less than the rector of the University, Franciscus Gomarus,16 probably through the Flemish connection, as Gomarus was also a refugee from Flanders. The Leiden Academy was experiencing its first heyday with such eminent professors as the Grecian Bonaventura Vulcanius, the historian Josephus Justus Scaliger, and the theologian Franciscus Junius the Elder. Especially Scaliger was an international star, who had been contracted in 1592 to supply particular splendor to Leiden. Exempted from giving lectures, Scaliger was able to devote himself entirely to research and writing skills.

Hence, he was willing to give tutorials to students in whom he had confidence. Students who were so fortunate to belong to this ‘coterie of brilliant young men’ included such future celebrities as Prince Frederick Henry, Hugo Grotius, Daniel Heinsius17, and, as we will see, the promising Jan de Laet.

13) De Hellenistica, dedicatory letter, 3: ‘... eruditio tua singularis, judicium limatum, morum sinceritas praebuit, quae inter nos intercedit non amara, sed ab eo tempora sua & inuis ex quo Bataviob: vestram felici sepulcrum.’
14) Not in 1582, a date often found in encyclopedias and biographical handbooks, as pointed out by Bekkers, Correspondentie, v.v. n. 1. For a brief outline of De Laet’s life, see also Bekkers, op.cit., x vii.
16) This piece of information, apud Mag. Rectorum D. Gomarum, is taken from Album studiosorum, Leiden Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS Anhœl Steenwijk 71, p. 11. The printed edition of 1875 lists only the names of the students, not the addresses often added in the original album.

22) Eleven letters written by Scaliger to De Laet, 1604-1607, have been printed in illustri. viri Joseph Scaligeri, ... Epistolae omnes quae reperti sunt postea ... ed. Daniel Heinnsius (Leiden, 1627), nos 437-464, 449. The last letter of this series is printed without an addressee (‘N.’), but is identified, according to a marginal annotation by Dionysius Vossius in one of the copies held at Leiden University Library (call-number 765 F 22), as De Laet.

Two years after he had enrolled, De Laet already seized the opportunity to round off the first phase of his studies with the public defence of Theses logicae de ordine et methodo.18 This booklet of no more than four pages filled with theses, is dedicated to his father (and namesake), who was still alive at the time, as well as to the rector and corrector of the Amsterdam Latin School. De Laet cordially thanked his father for his inspiring example, and his teachers for the education he was privileged to have received from them.19 At the same time, the slim book provides us with a clue as to where De Laet’s parents had settled after their arrival in Holland. This piece of information has been left unmentioned in the literature, not wholly surprisingly, since the Album studiorum of the Leiden Academy, which lists De Laet twice, gives Antwerp as his place of origin. Apparently, De Laet remained proud of his Flemish roots, for we also often find him mentioned as such on the title-pages of many of the books he has put to his name. However, the dedication in the Theses suggest that his parents first found a new home in Amsterdam. Had they lived in Leiden, he would have attended the Latin School there. A good two years after his Theses logicae, on 30 January 1602, he publicly defended a thesis on prayer, De oratione, under the presidency of Franciscus Junius the Elder.20 With this feat he had completed his studies at Leiden, and, like so many graduates, set out on a tour abroad.

In the summer of 1603, as we learn from his correspondence with Scaliger21, he sojourned in London. What he was doing there exactly is not clear, but in view of his later career as a merchant, it seems likely that he wanted to gain experience in the world of international trade. In any case, he had not yet turned his back on matters intellectual. He stayed in touch with Scaliger, or maybe rather the other way around22, and Scaliger was the one who was interested in maintaining the link with his former student because he found it useful to have a friend in London who could purchase all kinds of books for him, or borrow them as the case may be. Scaliger appeared to be particularly interested in getting hold of a copy of the Bible, or in any other
case of the New Testament, in Irish. As is known, the polyglot Scaliger was also familiar with the Celtic languages. 23 It was not an easy task for De Laet to obtain the desired book. Time and again, Scaliger returned to the subject. 24 

Not long after his arrival in England, De Laet moved on to France. He took up his abode in Paris, and spent his days there with the buying of things, amongst other things. The precise year of his stay in France has been a matter of some uncertainty until now, whether this should be 1604 or 1605. 25 The first time we learn of his provisional plans is in a letter from Scaliger to De Laet of 28 February 1604. Scaliger had apparently given some books to De Laet which the latter should have forwarded to Isaac Casaubon, but had failed to do so—much to Scaliger's chagrin. 'So either send them, or, if you prepare a visit to France, deliver them to him in person.' 26 This suggestion must have been music to De Laet's ears: a visit to the great scholar Isaac Casaubon! Scaliger also advised him to consult Casaubon on certain books De Laet should buy in Paris, for he was the right man, and would readily offer De Laet assistance. And indeed, his plans for the trip to France materialized. On 29 April 1604, Petrus Labbaeus (Pierre Labbé) mentioned De Laet's presence and activities in Paris in a letter to Scaliger: 'Mr. De Laet, who arrived here a month ago, has bought many books, which you will see within a few months' time, as I hope, because he has sent them directly to England.' His meeting with Casaubon must have deeply impressed De Laet. When almost 35 years later Johannes Gronovius was collecting material for an edition of the correspondence of Casaubon, he also sent a request for letters to De Laet. 'I am eagerly looking forward to the edition you are preparing', De Laet wrote back. 'I knew that incomparable man quite intimately when I was in Paris, but I never received any letters from him; otherwise I had willingly shared them with you.' 27

25) See Scaliger, Epistolae, no. 437 (Scaliger to De Laet, 28 February 1604), no. 438 (Scaliger to De Laet, 8 June 1604), no. 439 (Scaliger to De Laet, 15 November 1605).
26) Cf. Bekkers, Correspondence, xv, '1604 or 1605'.
27) Scaliger, Epistolae, no. 437. Scaliger responded to an unreceived letter from De Laet he had received on 30 January: 'Quas tibi dedarem ad Casaubonam, ipsius nullas accipscce se conquiritur: Atque ilius si mittis, aut, si in Galliam profectus es para, ipsae deferre... "De libris quos Lutetiae parare intendis?..." De libris quos Latitiae parare desideravi; non possitem datas caviliari, quam quod ad Casaubonum ipsae speere potes, qui, quae humaniores, est, in esse operam suam litteras accipere.'

However much he was enjoying this springtime in Paris, by June of that same year De Laet had returned to London, for Scaliger then informed Carolus Labbaeus in Paris that all the books which the latter had asked for, were with De Laet in London. In addition, Scaliger had some hot news for Labbaeus: De Laet was going to be married in London, and had also had his father come over to England for the happy event. Scaliger expected De Laet to return to Leiden newly wedded, but—first things first!—hoped that the books would be there even earlier. 29 It would seem that De Laet's father—perhaps a widower by then, for Scaliger does not make mention of De Laet's mother coming to the wedding ceremony—had meanwhile moved from Amsterdam to Leiden, for more than once Scaliger wrote to De Laet that he had handed over to him the money for books De Laet had purchased for him. 30 It was not an average girl De Laet, who was twenty-two at the time, was going to marry. His eye had fallen on Jacob-mynget (or Jacquemine) van Loor, 21 sweet seventeen and the eldest daughter of the merchant Pieter van Loor, a prominent member of the Dutch Reformed congregation in London—een man van middelbare ende van courage 32—which he was also to serve as an elder. 33 The wedding ceremony took place in Austin Friars, the church of the Dutch Reformed congregation in London, on 3 July 1604. 34 The van Loor family had been living in London for over twenty years by then. Pieter van Loor, originally from Utrecht, had served in England as a soldier in a Dutch Regiment under the command of Sir Francis Drake in 1589 35 , and had made a speedy career in London, not only materially as a merchant but also socially. 36 Through the marriages of his daughters—he had eight daughters and one son 37 —van Loor became affiliated with the aristocracy of London, and by joining this family, De Laet became brother-in-law to, amongst others, Sir Edward Powell, Sir Charles Caesar, Sir Thomas Glenham and Walter de Raet, all of them serving in the middle and upper regions of the government. 38

29) Scaliger to Carolus Labbaeus, Epistolae, no. 333 (20 June 1604): 'Puto, omnes libros, quos ad mihi missae scribili, apud Lataniam in Anglia esse. In omne huius opere ac gratia pater ejus in Anglicum transplici. Eum omnium speciem eius spectum, neque ante illos libros me accepisse spero.' On Charles Labbé de Monvénor (1582-1597), a French philologist and jurist, and brother of the earlier mentioned Peter, see e.g., Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne (Paris, 1819-1826), XXII, 15-16.
30) For example, Scaliger to De Laet, Epistolae, no. 444 (2 July 1606): 'ego petui tuo, postquam significaveris quus indicatus fuerit, atque precor remundi.'
31) Baptized 5 February, 1587, see W. J. C. Moens, The Marriage, Baptismal and Burial Registers 1571-1874 and Monumental Inscriptions of the Dutch Reformed Church at Austin Friars, London (Lymington, 1884), 47.
32) 'A man of means and courage', J. H. Hessels, Ecclesiæ Londinæ-Batavorum archivum, 4 vols (Groningen, 1898-1899), ii, item 1719 (12 August 1610). Further references to van Loor in items 1705-1712, 1722, 1725, 1750.
33) Moens, Registers, 209.
34) Ibidem, 119.
35) Hessels, Ecclesiæ Londinæ-Batavorum archivum, iii, item 1142.
36) He was created a baronet in 1628, see John Burke and John Bernard Burke, The Extinct and Dormant Baronetages of England (London, 1838), 345.
37) Moens, Registers, 46-47.
38) Edward Powell was one of the first to be married, and had married Maria van Loor (Bekkers, Correspondence, no. 8 and n.13, was ignorant of this); Walter/Guiler de Raet, of the Hague, was knighted in 1660. On these two men, see Burke and Burke, Extinct Baronetages, 424 and 158, respectively.
position must have given De Laet a good entrance in those circles, especially after he had acquired the denizenship of London on 16 August of that year. To all intents and purposes, De Laet was determined to settle down in London. On that account, it is somewhat curious that he once more matriculated at Leiden on 10 January 1605, this time as a student of theology. How he would have been able to pursue his studies in Leiden is not quite clear, for he remained living in England, even though in the original Album studiorum his parents are given as his address, implying that he lived in Leiden.

His marriage with Jacob-myntgen was to last only about two years. In the summer of 1606, she died. On hearing this sad piece of news, Scaliger wrote him a moving letter of comfort:  

If your wife’s death has overwhelmed you, know that I am no less overwhelmed by your grief. But whatever comfort you have found in your wisdom, that I will also apply in imitation of you. And therefore we placidly bear everything that happens, because we know that nothing happens except at God’s command. But I praise your decision to leave England. As for me, I’d like nothing better than to be waiting for his company and conversation. As if to indicate that life went on as usual, Scaliger concluded his letter with some matters of business and requests. De Laet, though, did not leave straight away, and apparently completed his year of mourning in London. In June of 1607, he was still in the metropolis, for Scaliger expressed his annoyance with De Laet’s still not having seen William Camden to greet him on his behalf. He would especially like to be kept informed of the progress of the new edition of Camden’s Britannia. It is the last letter from Scaliger to De Laet we have, because later that summer the young widower returned to Leiden, where they preferred oral over written communication.

From the letters exchanged between the great scholar and his former student, it appears that De Laet had a warm spot in Scaliger’s heart. It is probably not a matter of coincidence, therefore, that Franciscus Gomarus, one of the Leiden professors of theology, dedicated his edition of Scaliger’s lectures on chronology to De Laet, anico singulari, his ‘special friend’. In his dedicatory letter of 10 January 1607—so still during Scaliger’s lifetime and De Laet’s stay in London—Gomarus expounded which three traits of character are to be admired in Scaliger: pietas, doctrina, candor, virtues that De Laet would certainly emulate in his life. Gomarus, an established scholar both at Leiden and in the ecclesiastical Netherlands, could very well have chosen another, more important person than the young De Laet to whom to dedicate this book. He significantly selected De Laet who had not published anything substantial as yet and who had neither academic nor ecclesiastical nor secular status. What Gomarus must have recognized—besides De Laet’s place in Scaliger’s orbit—was a promising future for his former lodger in one of these three domains.

Two years after the publication of the Elenchos, ‘the eagle in the sky’, ‘the prince of scholars’—to give but two of Scaliger’s many contemporary epithets—died. Having remained a bachelor all his life, Scaliger had bequeathed a part of his library, his oriental manuscripts and books, as well as his Latin and Greek manuscripts, to the Leiden Academy in his last will, where they are being kept up to the present day. But before the rest of his library was sold at an auction, a number of intimate friends, amongst whom De Laet, were allowed to select a few books from the shelves as a personal remembrance of their friend and teacher. De Laet did not miss that opportunity. When many years later—we then write the year 1631—the Leiden professor of theology and Hebrew, Constantine L’Eurepere, was preparing a new edition of a twelfth-century Hebrew text in which the Spanish rabbi Benjamin of Tudela gives a detailed account of his journey from Spain to Baghdad by way of Jerusalem, he gratefully used the annotations Scaliger had scribbled in the margin of an earlier edition, and which had been kindly put at his disposal by De Laet.

Jonge, Auction Catalogue, 17, item 8, and 19, last item. Scaliger’s interest in Anglo-Saxon England also appears from his possession of two books by Matthew Parker, De antiquitate Britanniae ecclesiastica (1605) and Acheiropoietos regem gestae (1574), see Auction Catalogue, 17, item 11, and 18, item 7, respectively.


At this auction, De Laet bought at least some ten books, see Paul Hulstijn’s contribution to this issue.

See the long letter of 28 March 1609 from Daniel Heimius to Isaac Casman reporting on Scaliger’s death in Scaliger, Epistulae, no. 453, p. 835. However, Scaliger’s testament does not mention De Laet, cf. H. J. de Jonge, “The Latin Testament of Joseph Scaliger, 1607”, Elus 2 (1975), 249-63, idem, ‘How did Gomarus Acquire the Copy of Flavius Josephus in Greek from Scaliger’s Librery?’, Dutch Review of Church History 77 (1977), 258-65, at 264-66. I assume that De Laet was included among the ‘seius minis amis’, whom Scaliger did not mention by name in the French version of his will, but who were specified as a ‘credulculus’ appended to his will in 1609, and now lost.

See van Roojen, Theology, Biblical Scholarship and the Biblical Studies, 153-54. Almost ten years later, De Laet once more helped L’Eurepere by introducing him to Johann Rittungel, the German
In 1609, the year of Scaliger's death, De Laet became involved in the ongoing controversy between the Jesuits and his admired Leiden teacher. A pamphlet, containing a Nieu Mey-Liedeken ('New May Song') written per unum scholarem de Leyde ('by a scholar from Leiden'), and edited by a certain Gelasius ('Joker'), has convincingly been attributed by Anna Simoni, both on internal and external evidence, to De Laet as the most important author. The publication of this poem, which bears the signs of a student-like joke all over it — the title-page with fake names and a spurious publisher as well as the scatological poem itself are written in a mixture of Latin, Greek and Dutch — seemed to Simoni the work of a 'a clique of bright young men with a good deal of leisure on their hands'. To the arguments that Simoni has adduced to establish De Laet's prominent share, one might add De Laet's close ties of friendship with Scaliger.48

What purpose De Laet had in mind when he enrolled for the study of theology in 1605 remains unclear for the time being. I do not know whether it was customary in those days to take up the study of theology without the intention of a future pastoral career — I doubt it. Nor is there any indication that De Laet ever finished it. In any case, the mere study itself served him well. In a letter to Sibrandus Lubbertus, professor of theology at the University of Franeker in Friesland, De Laet praised the claritas et simplicitas in Lubbertus' recent treatise Theses de praedestinatione, a hot item in those days. These virtues De Laet appreciated in Lubbertus, as well as the Church Fathers, and the caritas et simplicitas of Lubbertus, which was so typical of the later medieval theological treatises, from which people were now liberated owing to the Reformation.59

De Laet clearly felt confident to impart his frank opinion of Lubbertus' treatise, and showed himself able to base his judgement on his acquaintance with the writings of both the early and medieval theologians.

The doctrine of predestination or election had increasingly become a shibboleth in the period between De Laet's return from London to Leiden in 1607 and his membership of the Synod of Dort is largely filled with blanks where his daily activities are concerned. Fairly soon after he had settled in Leiden, he remarried with Maria Boudewijns van Berlicum, daughter of a merchant who lived on the Rapsenburg. Unlike his first marriage, this one was blessed with children, about a dozen of them.64 His biographers remain silent on his profession, but in all likelihood he was already earning a more than decent living as a merchant in overseas trading and as an investor in the reclamation of land from the many lakes in Holland.65 Even in 1610, before he was thirty years old, he was able to purchase a stately house on the Rapsenburg — one of the nicest canals in Leiden and much in

De Laet did not conceal his position in this controversy, and sided with the Gomarist faction against the Arminians. In 1617, he published an anthology of patristic writings, De Pelagianis et Semi-Pelagianis commentariorum ex veteris Patris scriptis, libri duo, in which the problems figured that occupied the centre of attention: hereditary sin, man's free will to choose for God, and God's grace to elect people. In the letter in which he dedicated the book to the Leiden professor Anthonius Thysius, De Laet confessed not to have been particularly taken in with the trouble of compiling such an anthology, but the insistence of many friends, Thysius in particular, had given him the energy to bring the book to completion.60

De Laet's book on Pelagianism no doubt will have contributed to his being delegated as elder of the National Synod of Dort which had been convened in 1618 to settle the doctrinal disputes. De Laet had become one of the experts in the field. In Dordrecht, he became acquainted with one of the several delegates of the Churches of England and Scotland,61 Dr Samuel Ward, at the time Master of Sydney-Sussex College, Cambridge, and shortly afterwards Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at that university.62 Four letters from De Laet to Ward, written between 1619 and 1628, have been preserved, dealing with ecclesiastical and theological matters.63 At the Synod, Ward counted as an ardent adherent of Gomarus, and in his later career he was a defender of puritan theology.

The period between De Laet's return from London to Leiden in 1607 and his membership of the Synod of Dort is largely filled with blanks where his daily activities are concerned. Fairly soon after he had settled in Leiden, he remarried with Maria Boudewijns van Berlicum, daughter of a merchant who lived on the Rapsenburg. Unlike his first marriage, this one was blessed with children, about a dozen of them.64 His biographers remain silent on his profession, but in all likelihood he was already earning a more than decent living as a merchant in overseas trading and as an investor in the reclamation of land from the many lakes in Holland. Even in 1610, before he was thirty years old, he was able to purchase a stately house on the Rapsenburg — one of the nicest canals in Leiden and much in
demand with the aristocracy, old and new – for the goodly sum of 7,600 florins from no one less than his friend, Franciscus Gomarus.56

The experience and fortunes De Laet had gained in these branches of Holland's booming economy must have merited the trust of the Leiden magistrates when they appointed him in 1619 to cooperate in the foundation of the Dutch West Indies Company (WIC). He was given a spacious room in the Leiden town hall from where to direct the fund-raising necessary for Leiden's participation in the Amsterdam based enterprise. When the Company was officially launched in 1621, Leiden's brought-in capital amounted to 275,000 guilders. With this sum, Leiden ranked as the second investor, after Amsterdam, with 10% of the shares in the Chamber of Amsterdam, one of the five constituent chambers of the Company.57 It was only a matter of decency that De Laet was appointed as one of the Company's first directors in the Board of the Lords Nineteen who were to manage the Company's affairs.

His work for the Company must initially have absorbed much of his energy and attention, at least judging by the paucity of letters from the 1620s. Apart from a few letters to the aforementioned Samuel Ward, no correspondence survives, which need not imply that he did not write or receive any letters. As part of the efforts of the WIC to establish a colony along the Delaware and Hudson rivers, De Laet drew up a Provisionele Oordele, in which the rights and obligations of colonists were laid down in 1624.58 The autumn of the same year he sent a lengthy manuscript to the printer, which appeared in 1625 as Nieuwe Wereldt of Beschrijvinghe van West-Indiën.59 It was the first, extensive description in Dutch of the New World, and the result of a long-term project, as De Laet explained in his dedicatory letter to the States General.60 Based on published sources in various languages61, log-books and personal interviews with sailors who had visited those distant shores, the book provided extensive information on the natural resources of the New World, where to find fresh water, the flora and fauna, safe harbours and roadsteads, and strategic strong points from where to proceed. For investors it presented the possibilities of economic gain, and the maps and illustrations afforded captains support in their voyages. The book proved a great success, both in the Netherlands and abroad.62 As a matter of fact, very few letters indeed survive from De Laet in his quality as one of the directors of the WIC, no doubt mainly because the archives of the WIC were neglected and finally dissolved in the early years of the nineteenth century. All we have are two more or less identical letters, which De Laet wrote to the Lords Nineteen to accompany copies of his detailed account of the activities of the WIC during the first fifteen years of its existence, called Jaerlijker Verhael, still the major source for our knowledge of its early activities.63 Incidentally, these two books are the only ones he wrote in Dutch, an indication that the reading public he intended, and consequently their contents, differed from the many he wrote in Latin – mercantile rather than intellectual. His only other work originating from his involvement in the WIC belongs to the latter category again. It is his edition of Historia naturalis Brasiliensis, a lavishly illustrated compilation in folio format of the natural conditions of the Dutch colony in Brasil, and as such a fine specimen of the high level of Dutch book-production at the time.64

Italian, Spanish, French, and English sources, and in his own translations had followed the idiom of these languages more than would approve of, Nieuwe Wereldt, p. *42.


Unlike the scarcity of letters in his capacity as a Director of the WIC, things are different when it comes to De Laet's activities as an investor in the development of New Netherland. In 1630, Killian van Rensselaer, together with Samuel Godijn, Albert Coenraets Burgh, and Samuel Blommert — all of them directors of the WIC — took the initiative of starting a colony on either side of the North River (now Hudson) near Fort Orange (now Albany, New York), under the aegis of the WIC. As Coenraets Burgh had meanwhile left for Russia when the contract had to be signed, De Laet took over his share on the understanding that, if Coenraets Burgh returned and demanded his share after all, he would willingly cede it. Since Coenraets Burgh never did claim his share, De Laet effectively became a shareholder for one-tenth, while Van Rensselaer became the most important investor with three-fifths, and it was he who became the patron, in charge of the administration of the colony. The correspondence between Van Rensselaer and De Laet reflects the changing fortunes of their colonies, appropriately called 'Rensselaerswyck' and 'Lahtsburg' by Van Rensselaer. The latter settlement consisted of three farms on the west bank opposite of Fort Orange, and a grist-mill. Van Rensselaer's extensive reports about the affairs, the costs and the profits, and the disputes over precedence in ownership in the course of the next ten years are very detailed, so much so that De Laet complained of his prolixity.68

The major difficulty in getting the colony off the ground was the availability of people in Holland who were willing to start a new life in America. It also proved difficult to ship sufficient supplies to the tiny population that had settled there. In 1634, negotiations were started to transfer the authority over New Netherland, which was actually a private enterprise, to the federal government in The Hague. Van Rensselaer estimated the value of his part — Rensselaerswyck — to be 6,000 Flemish pounds, certainly no small amount, 'and I would not readily sell it for less, since I have been reported that our part is doing beautifully'69, he informed De Laet. The same letter also reveals that De Laet was not particularly diligent in settling his financial liabilities. Van Rensselaer had to remind him for the second time that De Laet still owed him 300 guilders, an amount that would have been much higher had it not been that Van Rensselaer had received 'a good sum for the peltry come over with the most recent voyage.'70 The joint venture, though, soon began to show signs of friction. Van Rensselaer, who undoubtedly shouldered the greatest part of running the colony, both financially and administratively, assumed more rights and privileges than De Laet and the other shareholders were willing to grant him. Matters ran to a head when not long after Van Rensselaer's death in 1643, the guardians of his children started a litigation with the De Laet cum suis, which was eventually brought for mediation to the States General in The Hague. The case was dealt with in 1648 and 1649. A few weeks before his sudden death, on 5 November 1649, De Laet was summoned by the States to furnish within a fortnight the relevant documents proving his rights in the colony to a committee of deputies enabling them to make their final judgement.71 It may very well have been that De Laet's stroke was caused by his aggravation over the whole affair when he was in The Hague on 5/6 December. In the end, the case was decided in favour of the defendants.72

Perhaps out of a moral duty as one of the directors of the WIC, but more likely following his own interests, De Laet participated in an ambitious project staged by the prestigious publisher/printer Elsevier in Leiden to publish a series of books in pocket format with descriptions of all the then known countries of the world. As Elsevier was aiming for the international market, this so-called Respublica series was written in Latin, and De Laet took care of the publication of at least eleven volumes of the total of 48 that appeared.73 It is especially these books that earned him a name as a prominent seventeenth-century geographer.74 The dedicatory letters which he included in the prefatory matter of the Respublica volumes afford us an impression of his social network, or at least, the people he wanted to be associated with in public. Thus, the books on Spain and France, which both

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67) VRBM, App. F: 'een goede somma ... van de peltery de laatste reis overgekoend.'
68) PRBM, 725-30.
69) De Roever, Appendix F: 'een goede somma ... van de peltery de laatste reis overgekoend.'
70) VRBM, 725-30.
71) VRBM, 725-30.
72) VRBM, 725-30.
73) VRBM, 725-30.
74) VRBM, 725-30.
75) VRBM, 725-30.
76) VRBM, 725-30.
77) VRBM, 725-30.
appeared in 1629, were dedicated to two brothers-in-law. They were, respectively, Sir Edward Powell (through his first marriage), meanwhile Masters of the Requests, and Jacob Boadewijns van Berlicum (through his second marriage), a licentiate in both laws. The volume on India from 1631 was dedicated to Daniel Heinsius, the one on Persia from 1633 to the English ambassador in The Hague, Sir William Boswell.

De Laet had started to correspond with Boswell in 1632, and continued to do so until his sudden death in 1649. Boswell was a very interesting person, and it is amazing to find that until the present day no monograph study has been devoted to this key-figure in the Anglo-Dutch relations in the seventeenth century. A scholar of standing, Boswell started his diplomatic career as the secretary of his predecessor in The Hague, Sir Dudley Carleton. As for his religious position, Boswell was in line with the Counter-Remonstrants, and therefore with De Laet. Their considerable correspondence, which has not been published yet, is characterized by exchanges of political, scholarly and religious subjects, of which I will highlight one – their mutual interest in the language of the Anglo-Saxons, Old English. Curiosity in the oldest phase of English may not be surprising for the Englishman that Boswell was; for a Dutchman, this was quite exceptional.

Even early in his career, De Laet appeared to be interested in Old Germanic languages in general – an interest that may have been inspired by Scaliger, and Old English in particular. In order to familiarize himself with Old English, he had borrowed one of the first printed texts, the Anglo-Saxon Gospels, from one less than the famous William Camden. Camden himself, a prominent member of the group of London Antiquarians, had spent considerable attention to the earliest phases of the English language in his monumental Britannia. In April 1616, De Laet finally returned to Camden the book he seems to have been hanging on to for...

75) Cf. note 38, above.
76) Quite remarkably, De Laet seems to have preferred to dedicate his books – not all of them include a dedication, though – to people that belonged more or less to his own social class. He rarely dedicated his books to monarchs or princes. This seems to indicate to me that he was not trying to be a social ‘climber’, but rather points to a consciously marking his position among the new class of wealthy, intellectual, civil servants. His Compendium historiae universae (Leiden, 1643), for example is dedicated to Andrus Rey, a Pole from Naglowice, whom he brands as patroni generis sllvatici. All I have found about this man is, that he matriculated at Leiden in 1600 at the age of 16, and his Theses politicae de optima republica (Leiden, 1602) – he was apparently a contemporary of De Laet. His edition of Pliny’s Historiae naturales iibri XXXVII (Leiden: Eizevier, 1635), made at the behest of Eizevier himself, was dedicated to Jerome Higon (1589-1656), at the time the king’s representative in the French parliament, on whom see Dictionnaire de biographie frannoise 16 (1954), 438-49. For only two books De Laet aimed higher: De gemmis et lapidibus (Leiden: Eizevier, 1647) was dedicated to Elisabeth Stuart, wife of Frederick of Bohemia (the ‘Winter King’), and hence niece of Prince Frederick Henry, while his Venerabilis edition of 1649 was devoted to Queen Christina of Sweden, something quite fashionable amongst Dutch scholars at the time.
English text in the seventeenth century, and the lengthy introduction to this text revealed L'Isle to be an expert in the field.84 To him Boswell wrote about De Laet's study of: '... our old Saxon tongue, whereof hee hath some MSS here in Leyden (where he lives in very great credit) ... and by the affinity of it with the High and Low Dutch mother Tongue, hath made many remarquable observations.'85 To Spelman he imparted that De Laet 'loves that manifold ... knowledge of Antiquitiees joyned with all good learning.'86 In January 1638, De Laet left for England and stayed with his brother-in-law, Edward Powell. L'Isle had died in the meantime, but his acquaintance with Sir Henry Spelman was marked by a cordial atmosphere. De Laet was also introduced to Patrick Young, the king's librarian, and a great scholar. Provided with a number of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts De Laet returned home better equipped for his enterprise than ever.

From the period of this visit dates a curious letter in folio format, hitherto unnoticed, written by Abraham Wheelock, librarian of the Cambridge University Library from 1629-53, addressed 'in gratiam Doctissimi, præstantisissimique Domini mei germani', without providing the name of the addressee. It lists five Anglo-Saxon manuscripts present in the 'publica Bibliotheca Cantabrigia', providing the incipits in an imitation insular hand and furnished with interlinear Latin glosses or transcriptions of the insular forms. Beside these five numbered manuscripts, Wheelock also mentions an Anglo-Saxon Psalter, which John Spelman, Sir Henry's son, is about to publish, -- as this would be in 1640, this year provides a terminus ante quem for Wheelock's letter -- and a 'splendid manuscript' with the four Gospels in Old English. He concludes the letter with the information on how Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, had donated these, and many more manuscripts to the library of Corpus Christi College. The letter can hardly have been directed to anyone else but De Laet, the only man actively engaged in the project. About the same time Sir Henry sent a discouraging letter to D'Ewes telling him to discontinue his endeavours, because De Laet had made such progress. '[De Laet] is the best man for that purpose that we can lите on both for his knowledge and great travel in the Saxone tongue and also for the prudence which his own language and the Frisian have to the uncencet Saxon above our English.'87 In this way, Sir Henry tried to play off De Laet against D'Ewes in favour of Wheelock.88

De Laet proved not an easy man to detcr, however, and steadily continued his labour, managing meanwhile to tap still more sources to enlarge his knowledge of Old English. In the summer of 1641 he paid another visit to London, for several purposes this time, parental, diplomatic as well as scholarly. One of his concerns was to help obtain the status of English citizenship for his son Samuel, who had married a daughter of the London based Dutch merchant Thomas Cruze, but the attempt proved to be of no avail.90 Nonetheless, he was held in high esteem, for the King honoured him by charging him to write a genealogy of the young Prince William (II) of Orange who had recently married Mary Stuart. In order to requite himself of this task De Laet wrote to Constantine Huygens, Prince Frederick Henry's secretary, for additional information.91

After his return from England, De Laet devoted much time to the compilation of his Old English dictionary, which not only provided translations of words but also gave words in their context and indicated the source in which they were to be found. In addition, Dutch cognates, when available, completed the entries. Before long, he had written some thousands of lemmata, and their number was growing daily.92 The frequency of exchange of letters increased dramatically between De Laet and Spelman, De Laet and Young and other players in the field such as Sir Simonds D'Ewes and Abraham Wheelock. All of a sudden, people seemed to wake up in England. Was a Dutchman going to achieve what was only right for an Englishman to do, the completion of the first Old English dictionary?

Henry Spelman, who had established a lectureship in Anglo-Saxon studies at Cambridge, for which he had appointed his protégé Abraham Wheelock, wanted Wheelock to perform that task. In September 1638, he wrote to Wheelock that he was not willing that it should be done by a stranger and we here (to whom it more particularly belongeth) be pretermitted.90 Thereupon he wrote to De Laet that he had better abandon his work on the dictionary, because it was already being done in England. Sir Henry was alluding to Simonds D'Ewes, who was engaged in a similar project. About the same time Sir Henry sent a discouraging letter to D'Ewes telling him to discontinue his endeavours, because De Laet had made such progress. '[De Laet] is the best man for that purpose that we can lите on both for his knowledge and great travel in the Saxone tongue and also for the prudence which his own language and the Frisian have to the uncencet Saxon above our English.'91 In this way, Sir Henry tried to play off De Laet against D'Ewes in favour of Wheelock.92

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87) Leeuwarden, Provinciale Bibliotheek van Fryslân, 149 Ha., fo. 9 (donated to this library by the 15th-century Frisian scholar John Jaelstroom). Wheelock's hand was kindly identified for me by Professor Ray Page (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge). Contrary to what Beeker, Correspondence, xx and 176 note 23, claims, viz. that De Laet borrowed manuscripts from the College library, De Laet only received transcripts of the first pages of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MSS 190 and 466; see Timothy Graham, 'Abraham Wheelock's Use of CCCS MS 41 (Old English Bede) and the Borrowing of Manuscripts from the Library of Corpus Christi College', Cambridge Bibliographical Society Newsleter, Summer 1997 (Cambridge, 1997), 16-16, at 16-16.
90) British Museum, MS Harley 7041, fol. 78, Spelman to Wheelock (28 September 1638).
91) London, British Library, MS Add. 34061, fol. 6, Spelman to D'Ewes (17 April 1640).
92) On this episode, see more extensively my 'Late Medieval and Early Modern Opinions on the Affinity between English and Frisian: The Growth of a 'Common Place', Folia Linguistica Historica 9 (1989), 167-91, at 176-79, with further references.
93) Beekers, Correspondence, xxv.
94) Cf. J. A. Worp, De briefwisseling van Constantijn Huygens 1606-1687 (The Hague, 1914), III, no. 2823 (Huygens to Johannes Polyander van der Kekxlof, 18 April 1641): 'Je reçoit une lettre de Monsieur de Laet et monsieur de Mr. le Prince Guillaume de Clèvese; je les prie de vous transmettre. Il m'assure que le Roy a commandé de me tenir au courant de tout le mariage de la Princesse Marie avec S.S. le Prince Guillaume d'Orange, et qu'il m'en donnerait advise pour luy enoyer plusieurs choses.'
De Laet had also been invited by the English Parliament to advise them on the possibilities for starting a West Indies Company. Advocates of this policy included Sir Simons D'Ewes, who may well have been instrumental in honouring De Laet with such a task. That the invitation was seen as an honour in the Netherlands appears from the correspondence between Nicolaes van Reigersberch and his brother-in-law, Hugo Grotius. Van Reigersberch also knew why, for De Laet was reribus indicarum peritus (‘an expert in Indian matters’). Little was Grotius to know that De Laet’s expertise in this field would soon play him such bad tricks! Notwithstanding De Laet’s address to the English members of Parliament, the majority proved against an English counter-part of the Dutch West Indies Company.

In addition to these activities in London that summer, De Laet also took care of his scholarly pursuits. Through Patrick Young, whom he had come to know during his previous trip to England in 1638, De Laet borrowed two Anglo-Saxon manuscripts with Latin texts provided with interlinear glosses from the Royal Library. He also borrowed an Anglo-Saxon medical manuscript through Young, and from the well-stocked library of Sir Robert Cotton, an Old English manuscript on plants. De Laet’s interest in medical treatises is striking, but especially the interpretation of Old English names for plants which were prescribed for certain medicinal receipes proved to be difficult. Somehow or other, the name of Olaus Wormius must have crossed his mind.

Ole Worm, by far the most learned man in Denmark at the time, occupied the chair of medicine at the University of Copenhagen, and was the king’s personal physician, but had also made a name for himself through his various studies on the Old Norse language, literature and laws. In 1642, de Laet wrote a long letter to Worm, which is interesting because it illuminates how De Laet proceeded in his Anglo-Saxon studies. Without ado, he plunged right into his subject. ‘A few years ago, I have been seized by a wish to clarify the Anglo-Saxon language, which the English usually neglect today, a few excepted.’ He continued by telling how he had found several names of plants he was unable to identify, although there were some that could be clarified with the help of Dutch cognates. Having said that, he gradually disclosed the reason for writing this letter. He knew that the Danes had invaded England and had brought their language along, so that it occurred to him that some people in Denmark might better understand Old English than the people who were living in England now or close to it, and who were speaking a language that was less corrupted than what was spoken in England today. Knowing, too, that Worm had written quite a few books on and was familiar with the Northern languages, he proposed to start a correspondence and together study those plant-names he was unable to explain. To this long letter, De Laet added a long list of ninety plant-names by way of an appendix.

Worm must have been quite surprised to receive a letter from a scholar whose name, status — he addressed his reply to ‘Societatis Indicis Occidentalis Praesidii Eminentissimo’ — and scholarly work were as familiar to him as his own had been to De Laet. Six years earlier, he had acquired a copy of De Laet’s Novus Orbis, an extensive account of the American continents, peoples, flora and fauna. Quite delighted and flattered perhaps, too, to be approached by De Laet as an authority, he replied that he would only be too pleased to be of help. To show that he was not wholly ignorant of the state-of-the-art in Anglo-Saxon studies, he mentioned that he was informed of the works of Henry and John Spelman, William Lambard and John Selden.

Plant-names were a tricky problem, Worm realized, because people in Denmark gave different names to plants depending on the region where they live, so that sometimes there are ten different names for the same plant. Nonetheless, 2 vols (Copenhagen, 1751) II, no. 781 (4 April 1642): ‘Cepit me ad aliquot annis desiderarum linguam Anglo-Saxonam illustrandi, quam Angli fore hodie negligunt, paucis exceptis. Parum anno superiori, cum in Anglia estem, multos Codices illius linguæ manus scriptos; in eis alios libros quendam Medium authores anonymi, ut & Apuleium Herbarium eadem linguæ auctum. Inveni in illis multa herbarum nomina, e quibus me expedere non possum, quos nuncupat explicatur quales sint, neque ex collatione eorum nostre Belgice linguæ quocum certi potui colligere. Quia autem scio angio-Saxonum illos et e parte Danica in Angliam venisse, quod linguam ita importasse, volui in memorem, non posse me suadere melius expectare, quam ab ille partem aut saltem vivere incertum, et e quibus ille primum venissent, quippe ad huc eadem linguæ incursitis, quam hodie Angli utuntur: impressis aucta T. A. & aliorum eruditorum, totidem paucis, quantum polessa in cogitatione linguæ illius & omnium antiquissimorum septentrionalis illius tractus. Curio ad obsequium obsequere, ob communi studia, ut mihi dingeris explicare quae vos sint illae herbae, quae nominum e Mediceo ibi MS. acceptis in indiculo adjuncto mittis; nisi fore & apud vos ea vocabula jam tam amissent, quae non opinor. Caeterum opussem aut T. A. interdum de illis linguis, quae, quantum tum docte atque litteris illustratis, per litteras conferre, & deceri a te quae ignore. Asique ex eo voce fiasco, Deum ante precor, ut T. A. quam hisuisse invenisse & florescentem confiteri. […]’

Tradit ibi hasce illius Eloquii nostri, cui si responsam reddere dingeris, commodissime ad me petiri mittit, aut ipso redrente afferri.’ The Appendix is headed ‘HERBARUM omnium antiquissimorum septentrionalis illius tractus. Curio ad obsequium obsequere, ob communi studia, ut mihi dingeris explicare quae vos sint illae herbae, quae nominum e Mediceo ibi MS. acceptis in indiculo adjuncto mittis; nisi fore & apud vos ea vocabula jam tam amissent, quae non opinor. Caeterum opussem aut T. A. interdum de illis linguis, quae, quantum tum docte atque litteris illustratis, per litteras conferre, & deceri a te quae ignore. Asique ex eo voce fiasco, Deum ante precor, ut T. A. quam hisuisse invenisse & florescentem confiteri. […]’

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as a token of his willingness, he added a first commentary on the names De Laet had sent him, but the question marks after many of his suggestions indicate that Worm was frequently baffled by them. The two men exchanged a number of letters on this topic in a fairly short time, in one of which Worm taught De Laet the principles of the runes alphabet - a novelty to Worm who was ignorant of the existence of poetry in that language. In his turn, De Laet sent Worm a rather long passage from an Old English poem - a novelty to De Laet who had lent the vernacular carum appellations, ut vocabulariis vulgaribus rerem.

By the by, however, their attention shifted from Old English and Old Norse to other matters. In 1643, De Laet appeared to be interested in Greenland. Was it still inhabited, and if so, were the people there Christians? And why had the population there almost become extinct? I suppose that these questions had to do with De Laet's controversy with Hugo Grotius at the time over the origin and language of the American Indians. However that may be, Worm was embarrassed to confess that he knew precious little about Greenland. In former centuries there used to be a lively trade between Greenland and Scandinavia, but in 1320 the plague had carried off most of its inhabitants. Moreover, today the land was almost entirely covered by ice unlike in former times. Whether the Greenlanders, in as many as were left of them, were Christians something he could not say.

On his part, Worm was eager to obtain all kinds of exotica, of which he suspected that De Laet connected his correspondences with the WIC could easily supply him with. Worm had a museum with a wide variety of curiosities, and had published a catalogue of them in 1642, of which he had given a copy to the young Elzevier in Copenhagen to have put some things in a little box which I missed in your catalogue, and which I will give along to Mr. Bartholin so that it may reach you in time. De Laet sent to Copenhagen we find some extraordinary items in the runic alphabet. In his turn, De Laet sent Worm a rather long passage from an Epistolae, proving the guide by which De Laet went. Among the things De Laet sent to Copenhagen we find some extraordinary items:

Meanwhile, Worm has put some things in a little box which I missed in your catalogue, and which I will give along to Mr. Bartholin so that it may reach you in time.

To De Laet's controversy with Hugo Grotius at the time over the origin and language of the American Indians. In the following years the two men regularly exchanged letters, and Worm duly included the powder in his museum, and reported De Laet's explanation almost verbatim. Worm was never to get an answer to the letter he wrote in December 1649, for early January 1650 he received news from his pupil Erasmius Bartholinus, informing him in the briefest of words of the sad news that De Laet had incurred a cerebral haemorrhage in December when he was in The Hague, and had afterwards been buried in Leiden.

What had become of De Laet's Old English dictionary? Various indications make clear that he had completed its compilation in the months before his death, and it was not only Worm who showed a keen interest in it. In Uppsala, the coast of Africa, near Angola. The Portuguese call her in their language Perse de Molther, which is the same as 'siren'. And the balls which are turned from her ribs are widely praised as an excellent means against haemorrhages, as I have heard from a Portuguese scholar. I hope I will soon set my eyes on a picture of a live one.

Whether Worm believed that these were really bones of a mermaid we will never know, but he did include them in his collection, and they are also described in detail, along with other reports about mermaids, in his Museum Wormianum which was published in Amsterdam in 1655. Another curiosity which De Laet had shipped to Worm was a box which contained the brains of the canis careharia or lamia, which, as he wrote in the accompanying letter, 'our sailors call haye (Du. 'shark'). Its most prominent application', he continued, is for pulverizing and expelling kidney-stones. It is brittle, like powder, and yet has nothing stony to it. I used to have lots of it, when my wife, who was vexed by this ailment, was still alive. After her death I forgot about it, but I never tried it on her in any case, because she had a rather narrow urethra, and this medicament expels rather heavily and must be applied with the utmost care.

In this box was typographically modelled on De Laet's Pharmacopola. This book was typographically modelled on De Laet's Dansk Biografisk Leksikon (1979), 476-80. This book was typographically modelled on De Laet's Historia naturalis Brasiliae (Leiden and Amsterdam, 1648), see H. D. Schepelen, Museum Wormianum: des Forschers and Analyse (Aarhus, 1971), 208-12.


philologist Georg Stiernhelm was also eagerly awaiting its appearance and encouraged Swedish residents in Leiden to make inquiries. In July 1649 he was informed by Johan Rising that Elsevier had told him that not yet a letter had been set up for De Laet's dictionary.116 In the autumn of that year, Stiernhelm seems to have prodded his son Johannes into action, who was actually given access to the manuscript, either by the Leiden professor of history, Marcus Zuurius Boxhorn, who also was using the dictionary for his own studies117, or by De Laet himself. Johannes Stiernhelm was kindly allowed to copy the entries for the letter 'M' from the dictionary, which his father needed for an etymological treatise.118 A few months after De Laet's death, the Dan Erasmusius Johannes Brocman reported to Worm that the dictionary was ready for the press in De Laet's own neat handwriting. De Laet's children had handed it over to professor Boxhorn to see it through the press.119 Boxhorn, undoubtedly the most capable man in Leiden at that time to deal with such a matter, was allowed to live on De Laet's dictionary.120 In the autumn of that year, Stiernhelm seems to have caused by the English when they bombarded Copenhagen in 1728. 120

Overlooking De Laet's correspondence we have to conclude that it is rather rapiditary, unfortunately. Notwithstanding, from what is left of it, we can see a man who was indefatigably active in scholarly matters, and this for the greater part besides his daily occupations as a director of the WIC, in which capacity he had to travel regularly to The Hague and Amsterdam. What is known from his publications also appears from his correspondence: De Laet's intellectual scope was very wide indeed, and included classical philology, geography, biology, medicine, theology, history, contemporary politics, and, not to forget, Germanic and comparative philology—all of these subjects enjoyed his warm interest. In addition, he was a versatile polyglot, who seemingly without effort translated from Dutch into Latin or French, from English to Latin, besides from various classical and modern languages into Dutch. For his scholarly pursuits he always managed to find the right persons, whether they lived in England, France or Denmark, or, nearby, in the Netherlands.121 Many letters must have disappeared in the course of time, but plenty have survived that have neither been studied nor published. As for this lacuna, De Laet deserves a better treatment, and it is encouraging to see this merchant-scholar back in the floodlights. Hopefully, the essays in this issue will lead to a renewed interest in this somewhat neglected Leiden polymath.

**APPENDIX**

Concise survey of De Laet's correspondents, alphabetically arranged. I do not claim to be exhaustive, but this survey much advances on what was presented by Bekkers in 1970. Only for correspondents who have not been mentioned in this article, some bibliographical references are supplied to facilitate a first orientation.

| BL | British Library. |
| BN | Bibliothèque nationale. |
| UBL | Universiteitsbibliotheek Utrecht, |
| UBU | Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden, |


De Laet to Albert Coenraets Burgh (fl. 1620-1650; alderman and burgomaster of Amsterdam, Director of the WIC, merchant): Private collection, one letter (1647). Published in Van Laer, VRBD, 724-25.

De Laet to William Camden (1551-1623; antiquarian and historian): BL, MS Cotton Julius C 5, fol. 164 and Camden to De Laet: BL, MS Add. 36294, fol. 68, both letters from 1616. Published in Camdemi ... Epistolae (London, 1691).


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118) Wiesegren, Brev, no. 118 (6 November 1649): 'Voces incipientes e litera M. e lexico Boxhornij Cambrico-britannico et dictionario Joh: De Laet saxo-britannico exseribuntur, exscriptasque patri quam primum transmittam.' On Stiernhelm's treatise, see Wiesegren's note 116. I have not been able to find out whether Johannes' excerpts are still preserved in the Stiernhelm archives in Upsala.

119) Epistolae, II, no. 1000 (28 June 1650): 'Quis sum: defuncto b. m. De Laet amicitiam te coluisse non submitto, sed ad te namque, quod ille, adhuc vivus, Lexicon Anglo-Saxonum consciuscepit & absolutum manus e nova editione excerptum ad praelios parvericui, quas edendi cumus ipsius hodiecedes non in dubium Chrest. De H. M. R. Conkerii committit, quem ilium antiquitas, nec ad nostram Septentrionaliam, studiosum esse non ignorabam.' On Brocman, see DBL 2 (1979), 359.


121) A point in case is the Utrecht antiquarian Arnoldus Buchelius (Acronyn van Buchell), who provided a description of Utrecht which De Laet inserted in his Belgic Confoederatio Republican (1630). De Laet was a good acquaintance of Buchelius, and a welcome visitor in Utrecht for the news he brought, see G. Bron and J. A. van Langendael, eds., Diarium van Arndt [pl.] van Buchell. Werken Historisch Geschiedenisc 3e serie, nr. 23 (Amsterdam, 1907) and J. W. C. van Campen, ed., Nieuwe Quotidianum van Arnonit van Buchell. Werken Historisch Geschiedenisc 3e serie, nr. 70 (Utrecht, 1940), index s.v. De Laet (Latinus), respectively.

122) See previous note.

De Laet to Silvanus Lubbertus (c. 1556-1625, theologian): BL, MS Add. 22961, fols 151, 155, 161; contemporary copies of first and last letter in Provinciale Bibliotheek Frysln, Archief GaBemaa Cod 1, 33-34, 3 letters. Unpublished.

De Laet to John Morris (c. 1590-1658; Master of the London Watermills, antiquarian): Oxford, Queen's College, MS 284, fol. 20, 1 letter (25 June 1643), and John Morris to De Laet, UBU, MS 986, fols 284-409; 100 letters between 12 April 1634 and 6 November 1649. Published in Bekkers, *Correspondence*.

Klaen van Rensselaer (1580-1645; merchant) to De Laet: Private collection, seven letters between 1632 and 1641. Published in translation in van Laer, *VRBM*, 196-201, 312-13, 333-36, 339-41, 516-18, 528-34, 539-43, respectively.

Sir Thomas Roe (1581?-1644; diplomat) to De Laet: UBU, MS 986, fol. 411, one letter (1640). Published in Bekkers, *Correspondence*, 63.

De Laet to Claude Saumaise (1588-1653; scholar): BN, Mss latins, no. 8598, 64 letters of which 52 between 1640 and 1643; De Laet to Saumaise, UBL, PAP 7, five letters from 1642 and 1643; Saumaise to De Laet: UBL, Ms. Gro 11, one letter, c.1648. Unpublished.


Anna Maria van Schurman (1607-1678; scholar, poetess, painteress) to De Laet: one letter (1640). Published in A. M. van Schurman, *Opuscula Hebraica, Graeca, Latina, Gallica, Prosaica et Metrica* (Leiden, 1650), 194-95.

Sir Henry Spelman (1563/4-1644; historian and antiquarian) to De Laet and De Laet to Spelman: BL, MS Add. 26053, fol. 7; 34,600, fols 118, 121, 126, 171, 190; BL, MS Add. 34601, fols 14, 38, eight letters between 1 August 1638 and 21 December 1640. Unpublished.


De Laet to Samuel Ward (d. 1643; theologian): Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Smith 72, 73, 75, 76, four letters between 1619 and 1627. Unpublished.

Georg Rudolph Weckherlin (1584-1653; English Undersecretary of State): UBU, MS 986, fols 410-12, two letters (1641). Unpublished. There are further letters to him, see Bekkers, *Correspondence*, no. 18, note 4.

Abraham Wheelock (1593-1653; Professor of Arabic and Lecturer of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge) to De Laet: Leeuwarden, Provinciale Bibliotheek Fan Frysln, 149 Hs, fol. 9. Unpublished.


De Laet to Samuel Ward (d. 1643; theologian): Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Smith 72, 73, 75, 76, four letters between 1619 and 1627. Unpublished.

Georg Rudolph Weckherlin (1584-1653; English Undersecretary of State): UBU, MS 986, fols 410-12, two letters (1641). Unpublished. There are further letters to him, see Bekkers, *Correspondence*, no. 18, note 4.

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De Laet to Ole Worm (1588-1654; professor of medicine, antiquarian): 18 letters between 1642 and 1649. Published in *Wormi Epistolae*.

De Laet to Directors of West India Company: UBL, PAP 2, November 1644. Two almost identical letters. Unpublished.

De Laet to Patrick Young (1584-1652; theologian and Royal Librarian) and Young to De Laet: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Smith 75 and 76. Seven letters between 1638 and 1641. Published or summarized in J. Kemke, *Patricius Junius* (Leipzig, 1898).