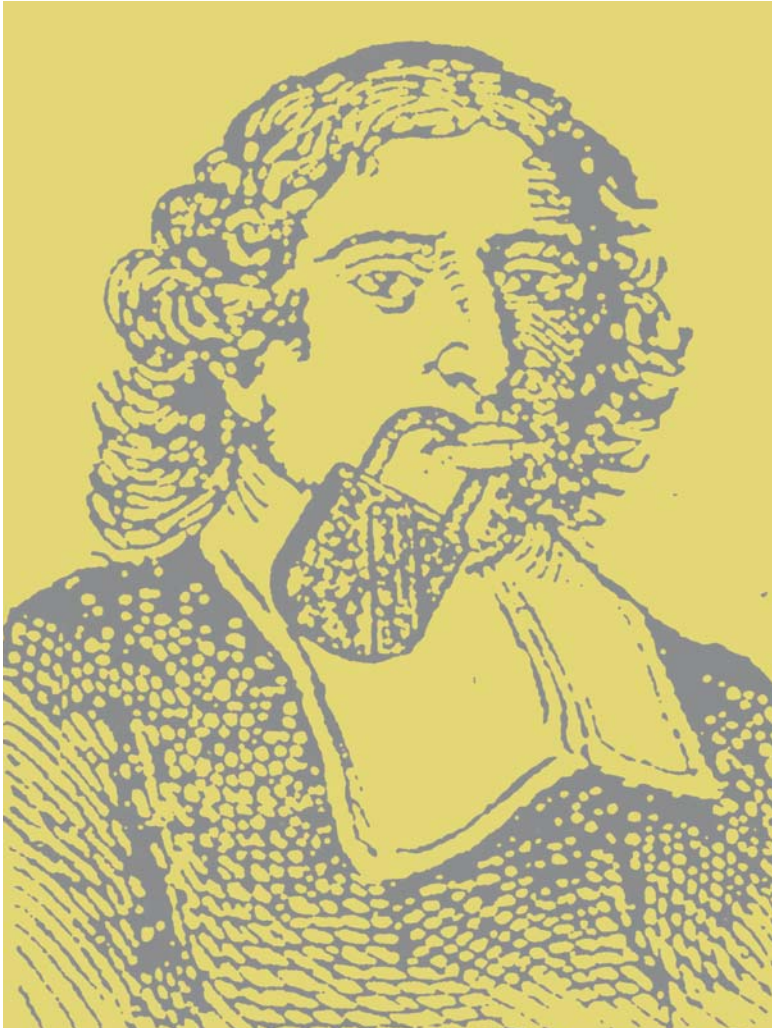


Adriaan Koerbagh 1633-1669

Restoring Honour
to a Rebel Thinker



Why an exhibition on Adriaan Koerbagh (1633-1669)?

In October 1669, the radical free-thinker Adriaan Koerbagh died in the 'Willige Rasphuis', a prison in Amsterdam, having been sentenced there during the previous year for his 'blasphemous writings'. Despite knowing the risk, Koerbagh had felt called upon to spread the 'Light' of new philosophical insights in a rebellious way, which he did through the publication of his critical dictionary *Bloemhof*, and by writing a philosophical treatise *Een Ligt Schijnende in Duistere Plaatsen* (*A Light Shining in Dark Places*). In contrast to his contemporary Spinoza, Koerbagh aimed to disperse the ideas of the Enlightenment widely, including less aristocratic audiences; and so, unusually for the time, he chose to write in his own vernacular, Dutch. This move cost him his life.

This exhibition, *Adriaan Koerbagh: Restoring Honour to a Rebel Thinker*, is a tribute to Koerbagh: his philosophical ideas, and his courage to speak out. It outlines the intellectual and religious climate in the Netherlands in the days of Spinoza and the Radical Enlightenment. It tells the story of the discovery of the light of reason, of the liberating promise of knowledge, and of how every individual is ultimately intellectually independent. In tandem with this, the story equally tells of the stubbornness of the established institutions and beliefs, of power games, and of conflict in society. We come to see how, in a manner unimaginable to us nowadays, religion was used to further political ends and politics to further religious ambitions – all in the so-called glorious Golden Age of the Netherlands.

In our own time, in which science and reason are increasingly under pressure from fake news and fact-free opinion formation, Koerbagh's message remains extremely relevant: *use your own capacity to think critically and be tolerant of those who think differently!*

A short biography of Adriaan Koerbagh

Adriaan Koerbagh lived from 1633 to 1669. His father, Hans Jansz, an Amsterdam earthenware manufacturer, died when Adriaan was 11 years old; consequently, Lambert Reynst, a powerful lawyer and cousin of Johan de Witt, was appointed his guardian.

In 1653, Adriaan, together with his brother Johannes, embarked upon a successful, but controversial, academic career. They first studied in Utrecht and Franeker, and later in Leiden, where Adriaan obtained his doctorate in Medicine in 1659 and his doctorate in Law in 1661.

Adriaan Koerbagh came seriously under fire for the first time through the publication of *Bloemhof*, a dictionary whose definitions contained criticism of the religious and political views of office holders of the time. The book was banned, and Adriaan fled to the free city of Culemborg. While hiding there, he wrote *A Light Shining in Dark Places*, a systematic elaboration of the ideas in *Bloemhof*, and sent a manuscript copy to a printer in Utrecht. The printer was so shocked by its contents that he informed the authorities.

The Amsterdam ‘schout’ (administrator of the law) Cornelis Witsen subsequently issued an arrest warrant for violating the prohibition on Socinian writings – Koerbagh, like the Socinians, denied the divine Trinity. By now, Adriaan had fled to Leiden, but his situation proved perilous, and he was betrayed by a ‘friend’ who wished to remain anonymous. The City of Leiden was prepared to extradite him to Amsterdam on condition that it was to share in the proceeds of a conviction.

The punishment against Koerbagh demanded by the City of Amsterdam was a large fine, chopping off his right-hand thumb, piercing his tongue with a glowing awl, thirty years’ imprisonment, and exile from the city afterwards. The eventual verdict was less ‘medieval’, but still harsh: a large fine and ten years’ imprisonment.

Adriaan was locked up in the ‘Willige Rasphuis’, a Rasphuis (a labour prison) for well-to-do people who had fallen from grace. After just over a year there, he died.

Objects of the Exhibition

1a. and b. Baptismal register of the City of Amsterdam

In the baptismal register of the City of Amsterdam, Adriaan was entered on 25th January 1633 as 'Aerjan' (page 233, left column, right at the bottom). Johannes was entered on 15th October 1634 (on page 12, at the top, third registration); his name has been entered as 'Jan', and his father is described as a 'corn-carrier'. (Original: Stadsarchief Amsterdam)



2. Latin School in Amsterdam

Those who intended to study at university were obliged to attend the Latin School. Latin, after all, was the language of science in those days. The Latin School in Amsterdam, at which Adriaan received his education, was in all probability the one located on the Gravenstraat. Here we see the facing brick of the Headmaster's house, decorated with a birch rod and ferule,

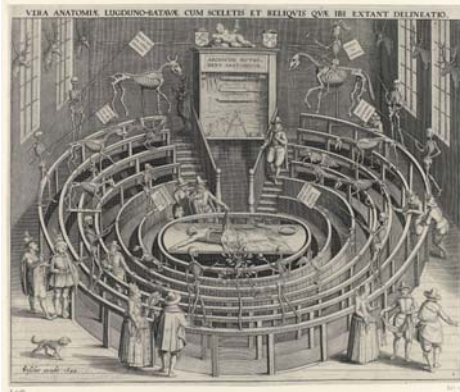
objects used to punish anyone not paying attention in class! (Original: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

3. Portrait of Lambert Reynst

Lambert Reynst (1613-1679) was appointed guardian of the Koerbagh children after their father died. He was part of the governmental elite of Amsterdam: a lawyer, magistrate and four-times mayor of the city, in the period from 1667 till 1672. Prime minister Johan de Witt was his cousin. (Original: Amsterdam Museum)

4. Adriaan Koerbagh, *De chilo vitioso exercitatio prima*

The Koerbagh family was well-to-do and had the funds to offer both brothers a good education. After the Latin School, Adriaan enrolled in September 1653 at the University of Utrecht for both Medicine and Law. In 1656, he enrolled at Leiden to study Medicine alone. Adriaan wrote his first publication *De chilo vitioso exercitatio prima* at Leiden University in 1658. (Original: British Library)



5. The Anatomical Theatre in Leiden

Medical students were required to attend anatomy lessons to learn about the functioning of the human body. These lessons were conducted in a ‘theatre’, a hall with stands around a dissecting table upon which a deceased person (or animal) was anatomised. A theatre for this purpose was built in Leiden in 1596 and a reconstruction can be visited in The Boerhaave Museum. There, this print of Willem Swanenburg, who made it in 1610, can be found.

6. Adriaan Koerbagh, *Disputatio medica inauguralis Phthisi*

Adriaan obtained his doctorate in Medicine from Leiden University in 1659 for his dissertation *Disputatio medica inauguralis de Phthisi*. In 1661, he obtained his doctorate in Law. (Original: British Library)



7. Adraan Koerbagh, *Disputatio juridica inauguralis de Querula in officiosi Testamenti et Legitima*

With this thesis, Adriaan completed his legal studies in Leiden. It is dedicated to his guardian Lambert Reynst, a man of high-standing and influence, (see object 3). It could well be that the close relation with Reynst saved Adriaan from the harsh punishment that was demanded against him in 1668. (Original: Universitaire Bibliotheken Leiden)

8. Utrecht University - graduation ceremony in Dom Church

Adriaan Koerbagh studied Medicine and Law at the universities of Utrecht and Leiden. This image from the 17th century shows a graduation ceremony inside the Dom Church of Utrecht. The print was made in 1668 by H. Winter. (Original: Utrechts Archief)

9. A graduation ceremony at the University of Leiden

This painting depicts a gathering at a graduation ceremony for a doctoral degree. The audience is outdoors, at the waterfront, right in front of the gate of the Academic Building at the Rapenburg in Leiden. The picture is painted in c.1650 by Hendrick van der Burgh. (Original: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)



10. *Album Amicorum* of Johannes Leonardsz Blasius

In the 16th century the *Liber Amicorum* was a popular item. Ostensibly kept as a book to remember friends, it became an important indication of someone's social and business networks. The books are often decorated with numerous illustrations

and poems. This album of Blasius, a Dutch poet, writer, and lawyer, contains a contribution by Adriaan Koerbagh. Koerbagh's entry begins with a sentence from the Bible, written in Hebrew, then in Latin:

*In multitudine sapientiae est multitudo indignationis,
et qui acquirit scientiam, acquirit dolorem. Eccl 1, v 18*

*For in much wisdom, is much grief
and who gains knowledge, gains sorrow.*

Above the crest of the Koerbagh family is their motto:

Nil desperandum Deo duce

Despair of nothing under the guidance of God.

(Original: Allard Pierson | Universiteit van Amsterdam)

11. Lodewijk Meyer, *Woordenschat*

This is a comprehensive and adapted edition by Lodewijk Meyer of a dictionary of loanwords compiled by Johan Hofman. Koerbagh made extensive use of this example for his own *Bloemhof*. The exhibited edition is of a later date, the first edition was printed in 1654. (Original: Koninklijke Bibliotheek)

12. Spinoza, *Ethics*, included in the *Opera Posthuma*

After Spinoza's death in 1677, his publisher Jan Rieuwertsz, together with Lodewijk Meyer and Jarig Jelles, published all Spinoza's manuscripts, including

his *Ethics* alongside a selection from his correspondence and three unfinished works. In 1678, the book was banned by the States of Holland. Friends of Spinoza had already received parts of the text of the *Ethics* at the beginning of 1663, which Spinoza considered ready for printing in 1675. The tragic fate of Adriaan Koerbagh was a possible reason for Spinoza to refrain from publication during his lifetime. (Original: Het Spinozahuis / Embassy of the Free Mind)

13. Lodewijk Meyer, *Philosophia sanctae scripturae interpres*

In this work, published anonymously in 1666 and originally attributed to Spinoza, Lodewijk Meyer argues that the interpretation of the Bible should be based on philosophical research (i.e. reason) rather than revelation. The book caused great commotion in clerical circles. (Original: Het Spinozahuis / Embassy of the Free Mind)

14. Lodewijk Meyer, *De philosophie d'uytleghster der H. Schrifture*

This is the Dutch edition (1667) of *Philosophia sanctae scripturae interpres* (see number 13). Like Franciscus van der Enden, Henry Oldenburg, Adriaan Koerbagh, and Jarig Jelles, Lodewijk Meyer (1629-1681) was an important member of the circle of Enlightenment thinkers around Spinoza. He was a doctor, but better known as a philosopher, lexicographer and playwright. After Spinoza's death, he was the one who, together with Jarig Jelles, arranged for the publication of Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma*. (Original: Het Spinozahuis)



15. Adriaan Koerbagh, *'t Nieuw Woorden-boek der Regten*

Adriaan Koerbagh regarded it as his mission to make the common people resilient to the boasting of authorities, including lawyers with their own 'imposing' language. This legal dictionary, published in 1664 under Adriaan Koerbagh's own name, was intended to help the common man to understand the legal jargon and see through the faulty arguments being presented. (Original: Koninklijke Bibliotheek / Huis van het boek | Museum Meermanno / Allard Pierson | Universiteit van Amsterdam)

16. Gisbertus Voetius

Gijsbert Voet was Professor of Theology at the University of Utrecht. He played an important role in the debate of the time, being averse to many innovations in philosophy and the natural sciences because these would, in his opinion, lead to atheism. He opposed Spinoza and his followers for their deviant concept of God and their criticism of the Bible. (Original: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

17. Portrait of Spinoza

This copper engraving (1680, anonymous) appeared in some copies of the *Opera Posthuma*, and is therefore called the ‘Opera portrait’. It can be regarded as the most reliable likeness of Spinoza. (Original: Het Spinozahuis)

18. Minutes of a meeting of the Amsterdam Church Council

This document discusses a report of an interrogation of Adriaan and Johannes Koerbagh by a church committee. The reasons for the interrogations were Adriaan’s ‘immoral’ life and the visits of Johannes to meetings of the collegiants. (Original: Stadsarchief Amsterdam)

19. Adriaan Koerbagh, *Een Bloemhof van allerley lieflijkheyd sonder verdriet*

Under the guise of an explanatory dictionary of loanwords in the Dutch language, Koerbagh overthrows many views that were sacred to both secular and ecclesiastical authorities. The book appeared under Koerbagh’s own name, but there is also an edition under the pseudonym ‘Vrederijk Waarmond’ (‘Plentiful-of-peace True-mouth’). (Original: Het Spinozahuis / Embassy of the Free Mind)



20. Adriaan Koerbagh, *Een Ligt Schijnende in Duystere Plaatsen*

With this book, *A Light Shining in Dark Places*, written in 1668, Koerbagh lets the light of reason shine on a number of fundamental Christian notions. Much of what he writes has strong similarities with the ideas of Spinoza. The aim of the book was to promote a free and liberal state. Partly due to his not so diplomatic tone, this book became the straw that broke the camel’s

back of religious tolerance at the time. The printer stopped the printing process halfway. (Original: Huis van het boek | Museum Meermanno)

21. Cornelis Witsen

Reproduction of a detail from the painting *Banquet of the Amsterdam Civic Guard in Celebration of the Peace of Münster* (Bartholomeus van der Helst, 1648). It shows magistrate Cornelis Witsen, who had arrested both the Koerbagh brothers. He demanded a particularly harsh punishment (see object 27) against Adriaan, who had confessed to be the only one to have written the two controversial books (*Bloemhof* and *Een Ligt*) for which both brothers were arrested. In the end, the punishment was changed to ten years' imprisonment in the 'Willige Rasphuis' and exile from Amsterdam. (Original: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)



22. Placard against Socinianism

Socinianism was a theological and ecclesiastical movement, initiated by Fausto Sozzini (1539-1604). An important element of its doctrine was the rejection of the Holy Trinity. In 1653, the States of Holland published this placard, prohibiting Socinian publications, but its force had become untested. When Koerbagh's book seemed to support the ideas of the Socinians, this placard was conveniently at the authorities' disposal and on this basis Koerbagh could be convicted. (Original: Universitaire Bibliotheken Leiden)

23. Extract uytte Vierschaer from the City of Amsterdamme

With this document, dated 18 May 1668, Koerbagh was sued by the Vierschaer (the judicial administration) of Amsterdam. In short: *The schout [administrator of the law], Cornelis Witsen, announces that he summons Adriaan Koerbagh to court because of his terrible and blasphemous statements, both orally, in public discussions, and in writing, through printed matter. This is a crime with very harmful consequences.* (Original: Stadsarchief Amsterdam)

24. Message from a herald of the courts of law of Culemborg

Adriaan had fled to the free city of Culemborg, but was being sought there. An arrest warrant for him was issued as he had written, printed and published '*een seer infaem en godlasterlijck boeck*' ('a very infamous and blasphemous book'). The printer from Utrecht had informed the authorities of this book. A traitor's reward of 1500 guilders was offered for information on Koerbagh's residence or hiding place. In this message from 1668, citizens are warned against him and forbidden to accommodate him. They must present him to the public prosecutor without delay. Adriaan went on to seek a safe haven in Leiden; but his hiding place there was betrayed. (Original: Regionaal Archief Rivierenland)

25. Culemborg in the 17th century

Culemborg dates from the early 13th century. The town located in the Lower Betuwe received city rights in 1318, including toll rights and asylum rights. It became a free city with its own jurisdiction. It was frequently visited by people seeking legal protection, often when they were unable to pay off their debts due to adversity or had killed someone in self-defence. Criminals had to appear in front of the 'schout en schepenen' (administrators of the law): they would not escape punishment, but were given the opportunity to defend themselves or be defended by lawyers. (Original: Gelders Archief)



26. The Koepoort in Leiden

Adriaan Koerbagh, betrayed by a paid informer, was arrested at his hiding place on the Koepoortsgracht (now Doezastraat), which was filled up in 1861. The original buildings largely disappeared due to

the explosion of a gunpowder ship in 1807. The Koepoortsgracht led to the Witte Singel where people could leave the city via the Koepoort. The engraving is made by Anthonie Waterloo. (Original: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

27. The punishment demanded against Koerbagh

After his arrest and in custody, Adriaan was brought before the ‘schout and schepenen’ (administrators of the law) for an interrogation in the ‘pain room’ of the Amsterdam town hall. Hans Bontemantel was the oldest of the aldermen and played a prominent role during the interrogations. In a diary, he made notes of the interrogations and the legal course of events. On this page from 1668, Bontemantel records the punishment demanded against Koerbagh:

‘To be pierced with a glowing awl through the tongue, after his right-hand thumb has been cut off, his books to be burnt, in public or in a quiet place, [...] to pay for the costs of arrest, the prison transport and the stay in prison, and the legal costs, and his remaining possessions to be confiscated, and to be imprisoned for 30 years.’ (Original: Stadsarchief Amsterdam)

28. Confession book of Amsterdam

This confession book dates from 1668 and contains the reports of the interrogations of Adriaan Koerbagh, especially concerning his book *Bloemhof*. Confession books contained the accounts of the interrogation of suspects in criminal proceedings. (Original: Stadsarchief Amsterdam)

29. Board of governors of the ‘Rasphuis’

This painting depicts the board members of the ‘Rasphuis’, a labour prison, where men had to grate tropical wood to obtain pigment for the paint industry. Women were locked up in the ‘Spinhuis’, a prison where they had to spin wool. These institutions marked a revolution in the legal approach: not only punishment, but also rehabilitation was offered. A small fee could buy you a visit to the Rasphuis, and some parents would make such a trip with their children to encourage them to behave well, and deter them from ending up in the Rasphuis too! It is not certain whether Adriaan was imprisoned in the Rasphuis, before he was imprisoned in the ‘Willige Rasphuis’ (‘Voluntary Rasphuis’). (Original: Amsterdam Museum)

30. Weather vane of the Rasphuis

In 1596, a detention centre was established in the former St. Clare’s nunnery at the Heiligeweg in Amsterdam. Young male criminals were locked up with the purpose to improve their lives by working. They had to rasp Brazil wood to make pigment for paint. Hence this detention centre was called the ‘Rasphuis’ (rasping house). These days, only the gate of this building remains, opposite the Voetboogstraat. The former building had a little tower with this weather vane. According to myth, Koerbagh was locked up in this rasping house before he was brought to the

‘Willige Rasphuis’; whether he really was locked up there and had to rasp wood, has not been verified. (Original: Amsterdam Museum)



31. Coin of the Rasphuis

Possibly, the men who were rehabilitated in the ‘Rasphuis’ received these coins when they had fulfilled their daily quote. On the coin, around the two rasping men one reads: ’T SLANS SCHRICK BREYDEL ICK

(the nation’s fear, I curb). The other side of the coin shows its value: underneath the word TVCHTHVYS (house of punishment) you can see a pound sign and the characters XXXV, which indicates the value of the coin: 35 lbs of wood to be rasped before they received the coin to buy their food with. (Original: Amsterdam Museum)

32a. and 32b. The burial register of the City of Amsterdam

Adriaan’s name is added in the burial register on 15th October 1669 (32a, 6th line from above). His name appears here as Coerbag. His brother Johannes is added on 31st August 1672 (32b, page on the right, 4e line from above). Different spellings of the family name are being used, in this case Coorbagh. (Original: Stadsarchief Amsterdam)

33. A black chicken

The story goes that during the funeral of Adriaan Koerbagh a black chicken flew onto his coffin. Bystanders saw in this the Devil coming to collect Koerbagh’s soul. This illustrates the need of Adriaan Koerbagh’s work to spread the light of Reason to the common people.

34. Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

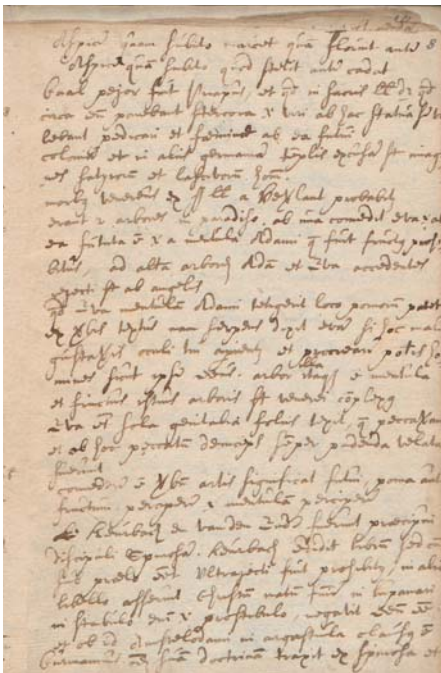
Spinoza wanted to show that freedom of believing, thinking, speaking and writing is a necessary condition for maintaining peace in a country. Besides these proposals, this book also contains a new way of explaining Scripture (namely, according to Reason), and a plea against interference from the church with state affairs. (Original: Het Spinozahuis / Embassy of the Free Mind)

35. Letter by Philippus van Limborch

Remonstrant preacher and theologian Philip van Limborch maintained correspondence with many scholars in Europe. In 1671, two years after Koerbagh's death, he reports a conversation to the theologian Van Velthuysen – in all probability, a conversation with Koerbagh himself:

'[...] conversation I had previously with a member of [Spinoza's] group of followers [namely, Adriaan Koerbagh]. He said that there is only one 'ipstantia' and that this is God; [...] I asked what will happen to us after death? He replied that this 'mode of existence' will perish, and that we will return to this 'ipstantia' and that nothing is distinct from it. [...] [Spinoza and his followers] believe that everything is God and that nothing is really distinct from God [...] this is pure atheism. [...]

A language purist, Koerbagh used the word 'ipstantia' (literally, 'that which is independent') for God, while Spinoza and Descartes used 'substance' (literally, 'that which lies under') to refer to God. From this reference to 'ipstantia' we can infer that, in this letter, Van Limborch is writing about Koerbagh. (Original: Allard Pierson | Universiteit van Amsterdam)



36. Anonymous notebook

The name of Koerbagh is associated with Spinoza in this notebook. In this booklet dating from 1678-79, Koerbagh, together with Franciscus van den Enden, is called '*praecipui discipuli Spinosae*': one of the most important students of Spinoza. The anonymous writer refers both to Koerbagh's attempt to publish *Een Ligt* and to his publication of *Bloemhof*. (Original: Universiteitsbibliotheek Utrecht)

37. Pamphlet by Ericus Walten

In this pamphlet (1691), the radical Enlightenment thinker and pamphleteer Ericus Walten referred to the synod of the reformed church as ‘mad houses’ and was arrested. For years, he was imprisoned without trial and was eventually found dead in his cell in 1697. In this passage, Walten states that he wants to publish a book entitled *Bloemhof der Leer-begerigen; or a key for Theology-minded Philosophers, and Philosophy-minded Theologians, to both learn God’s Word with joy, and, by opening some hitherto closed doors, to take away the rigidities that exist between Theology and Philosophy*. This planned book can be understood as a sequel to Koerbagh’s *Bloemhof*. (Original: Allard Pierson | Universiteit van Amsterdam)

38. Leibniz on the conviction of a Dutch thinker

In the 17th century, the Dutch universities were internationally renowned and attracted many foreign students and scientists. The intellectual climate was characterized by open-mindedness, tolerance and an urge for scientific progress. Leibniz (1646-1716), a widely-read scholar, shared an interest in language with Adriaan Koerbagh but was aware of *Bloemhof* and the fate of its author. In his *Nouveaux Essais* (1704), Leibniz writes that Koerbagh maliciously twisted religious laws and interpretations, and for that reason was punished with imprisonment in the ‘Rafpel-huyss’. (Original: Koninklijke Bibliotheek)

39. *Nieuwe Hoornse Speelwerck*

This collection of poems was based on texts engraved in new church bells in Hoorn. This poem states that, given the content of *Bloemhof*, Koerbagh was fortunate to have lived in tolerant Holland. Everywhere else his fate would have been worse. (Original: Meertens Instituut / Allard Pierson | Universiteit van Amsterdam)

Transcription of 27 by Frank Mertens.

Translations of 10 and 35 by Ruud Hehenkamp and Julius Hasper.



Lecture series

Every month of the exhibition a public lecture will take place. Expert scholars will elaborate on the radical philosophy of the Enlightenment and the role that people such as Spinoza and Koerbagh played in its development. More information about these lectures can be found on the websites of the three exhibition venues.

Dates, locations and opening times

15 November 2019 to 15 March 2020 Rijnsburg

Het Spinozahuis

Spinozalaan 29

2231 SG Rijnsburg

www.spinozahuis.nl

Open Tuesday to Sunday 1pm to 5pm

1 May 2020 to 1 August 2020 Amsterdam

Embassy of the Free Mind

Keizersgracht 123

1015 CJ Amsterdam

www.embassyofthefreemind.com

Open Wednesday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm

5 September 2020 to 5 December 2020 Culemborg

Kapel van Het Weeshuis

Herenstraat 29

4101 BR Culemborg

www.weeshuismuseum.nl

Open Tuesday to Sunday from 11am to 5pm

Vereniging Het Spinozahuis

The association has two goals: to maintain Het Spinozahuis in Rijnsburg and the Domus Spinozana in The Hague as national heritage and to stimulate the study of Spinoza. Become a member at www.spinozahuis.nl/membership and be fascinated by Spinoza's world!



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