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## *Transnational networks and radical religion: Johannes Rothe and the construction of prophetic charisma*

FREYA SIERHUIS

The life of Johannes Rothe (also spelled Rothé, 1628–1702) reads like something out of an adventure novel. Born to wealth and influence in the Amsterdam regent patriciate, he became an itinerant preacher of the end times, travelled across Europe, was imprisoned in England during the First Anglo-Dutch War, and eventually knighted by Charles II. He associated with the educational reformers John Dury, Samuel Hartlib and Jan Amos Comenius as well as a range of prophets, mystics and radicals, and was ultimately institutionalized after an attempt to establish the Kingdom of Christ on earth. Most of what little scholarship there is on Rothe has taken a biographical line, focusing on the life and career of this extraordinary figure.<sup>1</sup> This article builds on this work to explore in more detail Rothe's millenarian ideas and their expression in the context of the transnational networks and historical events in which they developed, and makes fresh claims for their significance.

<sup>1</sup> Biographical details about Rothe's life can be found in his pamphlets from 1672–7. See W. P. C. Knuttel, *Catalogus van de pamfletten-verzameling berustende in de Koninklijke Bibliotheek* ('s-Gravenhage: Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 1889–1920), II.2; Knuttel's list is not exhaustive: the collection of the Royal Library in The Hague contains a binding with the title *De wercke [sic] van Rothe* (KB 514 G 29), which contains material not available elsewhere. See also K. H. D. Haley's indispensable 'Sir Johannes Rothe: English Knight and Dutch Fifth Monarchist', in Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas (eds.), *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays on Seventeenth-Century History Presented to Christopher Hill* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 311–32; Rudolf B. Evenhuis, *Ook dat was Amsterdam*, Vol. 3: *De kerk der hervorming in de tweede helft van de zeventiende eeuw: Nabloei en inzinking* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1971), 183–9; Frank van Lamoën, 'Chiliasis contra stadhouder: Johannes Rothé (1628–1702)', *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Campo Weyerman*, 22 (1999), 145–59. In *Graphic Satire and Religious Change: The Dutch Republic 1676–1702* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). Joke Spaans gives an analysis of *Een visioen van de tyden der eeuwen Geopenbaert aen de Propheten en Propheten kinders Jan Rothe, Culman, en Someren, de Raat [...]*, which provides a good introduction to Rothe's life.

★I would like to thank the staff of the rare books collection of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Olivia Else of York University library, and Dr Henk Looijesteijn.

Over the last fifteen years early modern historiography has become more aware of the persistence and continued importance of prophetic and millenarian ideas in the later seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> Rather than being a vestige of an earlier more turbulent period, the language of struggle against the forces of Antichrist both defined and motivated the various groups and individuals across the political and religious spectrum.<sup>3</sup> Although the role of radical religious groups in the early Dutch Enlightenment has been recognized by historians such as Wiep van Bunge, Jonathan Israel, Sarah Mortimer and Ernestine van der Wall, the excavation of the complex landscape of Arminians, Socinians, Quakers and Collegiants is far from finished.<sup>4</sup> The story of interaction between English and Dutch radicals during and after the English Civil War still needs to be told, as well as the different currents of mysticism in their pietist, Behmenist or Paracelsian forms. The study of religious radicalism in the Dutch Republic needs a broader, more transnational approach.<sup>5</sup> Rothe himself did not found a religious community, and after the discomfiture of his prophetic ministry his writings exercised no demonstrable influence.<sup>6</sup> However, Rothe's life places him at the centre of a web of connections stretching from the Republic to England, Denmark and northern Germany. For a while, Rothe found adherents among English and Dutch Fifth Monarchists, Behmenists and exponents of Dutch Reformed Pietism. Himself every inch a product of the Dutch regent patriciate, he combined a strong local patriotism with a radical religious agenda that necessarily knew no borders. His millenarianism was fused with a republican political vision that was as international as it was patriotic.

<sup>2</sup> Richard L. Greaves, *Secrets of the Kingdom: British Radicals from the Popish Plot to the Revolution of 1688–1689* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) and *Deliver Us from Evil: The Radical Underground in Britain, 1660–1663* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Warren Johnston, *Revelation Restored: The Apocalypse in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011); Ernestine G. E. van der Wall, "Antichrist Stormed": The Glorious Revolution and the Dutch Prophetic Tradition', in Dale Hoak and Mordechai Feingold (eds.), *The World of William and Mary: Anglo-Dutch Perspectives on the Revolution of 1688–89* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 152–64, and Van der Wall, 'Mystical Millenarianism in the Early Modern Dutch Republic', in John Christian Laursen and Richard H. Popkin (eds.), *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, Vol. 3: *Continental Millenarians: Protestants, Catholics, Heretics* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2001), 37–48.

<sup>3</sup> Van der Wall, 'Mystical Millenarianism', 37.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson, *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy 1600–1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Wiep van Bunge, *The Early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic, 1650–1750: Selected Papers of a Conference Held at the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, 22–23 March 2001* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Andrew C. Fix, *Prophecy and Reason: The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). Cornelis B. Hylkema, *Reformateurs: Geschiedkundige studien over de godsdienstige bewegingen uit de nadagen onzer Gouden Eeuw* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1900 [unrev. re-ed. Amsterdam: Hagen; Groningen, Bouma's Boekhuis, 1978]); Koenraad O. Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring: Historisch-kritische studien over Hollandse vrijgeesten* ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1896); Leszek Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans église: La conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> I use the term 'transnational' networks to refer to the communities constituted through the traffic of books, ideas and epistolary exchanges across the borders of nation states and the geographical boundaries of regions and continents. See Michael G. Müller and Cornelius Torp, 'Conceptualising Transnational Spaces in History', *European Review of History – Revue européenne d'histoire*, 16:5 (2009), 609–17.

<sup>6</sup> Van der Wall, "Antichrist Stormed", 157.

## 1. THE MANY FACES OF A PROPHET – THE LIFE OF JOHANNES ROTHE

Johannes Rothe was born into the highest circles of Amsterdam's regent patriariate. His father, the son of a Danzig merchant who made his fortune in the sugar trade, had married first Maria, the daughter of Diederik Bas, thirteen-times Burgomaster of Amsterdam; and after she died (shortly after giving birth to Johannes), Catherina de Vlamingh van Outshoorn, daughter of Pieter de Vlamingh (four-times Burgomaster) and sister-in-law to the famous physician Nicolaes Tulp. By his own account Rothe was a serious child, withdrawing from company to seek the presence of God. His father frowned upon such behaviour. The adolescent Rothe was accordingly sent to The Hague to learn about politics. It was there that, as Rothe relates, God first manifested himself to him in 1652 in the *Haagse Bos*, a forest close to the city. God appeared to him in a tempest, showing His face 'as if in a fire', saying 'I will take you as my servant to declare my judgements to the world, humble yourself, and lay in sackcloth and ash'.<sup>7</sup>

During his long prophetic career, God presented himself to Rothe through visions, dreams and direct commandments. Yet whereas Old Testament prophets had their vocation inflicted upon them, Rothe actively campaigned for the job. Disarmingly, he recounts how as a child he read that David, the prophets and many other heroes of the Old Testament suffered, fervently hoping to be likewise afflicted. And so it happened that from the age of twelve onwards, he was tempted by the Devil. Indeed, between eighteen and twenty-five, Rothe confesses, not a night went by when he was not tempted by an 'evil spirit'.<sup>8</sup> 'By the manifold nature of the revelations', Rothe asserts, 'I thus understood that God has given me an angel of Satan, who beats me with fists'.<sup>9</sup> There appears to be a link between psychological turmoil in Rothe's life and the frequency and intensity of his divine visitations. When he received his first vision, he was perturbed by the bloodshed of the First Anglo-Dutch War, seeking refuge in the woods to weep and pray.<sup>10</sup> While Rothe received visions throughout this phase of his life, he felt the proximity of God particularly intensely when he served time in a jail in Exeter, imprisoned for prophesying the return of the King; a prophecy mistakenly understood by officials of the Cromwell regime to refer to Charles II.

when I was in England in 1654 and prophesied the coming Kingdom of Christ, I was thrown in jail and guarded harshly by the soldiers, but God was with me in wonderous manner during my imprisonment, so that my enemies became my friends and never did I have more regular communication with God than during

<sup>7</sup> Johannes Rothe, *Eenige prophetiën en revelatiën Godts, aengaende de Christen werelt in dese eeuw [...]* (Amsterdam: Pieter Arentsz., 1673), 4–6. I have consulted the third, expanded edition of the pamphlet, originally published in 1672.

<sup>8</sup> Rothe, *Een korte beschrijving van mijn worstelen met Godt*, in: *De wercke van Rothe* (1674), 33.

<sup>9</sup> Rothe, *Een korte beschrijving*, 39.

<sup>10</sup> Rothe, *Eenige prophetiën en revelatiën*, 6.

that time. The Lord was a steadfast companion to me; and I wept when I was given my freedom [...].<sup>11</sup>

During his travels, Rothe appears to have come into contact with English Fifth Monarchists, and the English nation would always play an important role in his prophecies. On the eve of the Restoration Rothe, who hailed from a pro-Orangist, pro-Stuart family, accompanied Charles II on his return from exile, and was rewarded with a knighthood.<sup>12</sup> He made a favourable impression at court and married Anna Hartlib, daughter of the educationalist and reformer Samuel Hartlib.<sup>13</sup>

In Rothe's own account, the spirit of prophecy left him in the years between 1654 and 1663 and he felt at times forsaken by God. Following the symbolism of the number seven as signifying perfection or completion, and the frequent occurrence of the number in the Book of Revelation, Rothe describes this period as 'seven years of temptation, followed by seven years of writing.'<sup>14</sup> In 1672, the year in which the triple attack on the Republic by England, France and Münster sparked a veritable eschatological panic, Rothe's visions grew more intense. He began keeping a diary recording his dreams and revelations. A turning point came when he received divine instruction to raise the 'Standard of the Lord', discussed at further length below, as a sign of the imminent return of Christ on earth. John Price, a preacher in the English Reformed Church in The Hague, challenged Rothe in his pamphlet *Satan in an Angel of Light* [...] (1674), an indication that Rothe was considered a serious enough threat to be dealt with in print.<sup>15</sup> Rothe's work found its adherents in wider circles that included ministers and theologians, such as Alhardt de Raedt (1640–1716), professor at the University of Harderwijk and author of a treatise on Hebrew vowel points, the Rotterdam minister Everard van Someren (1644–1710), Johannes Goethals (1650–1728), the son of Frederick Henry's court preacher, and members of the regent patriciate such as the Amsterdam burgomaster, diplomat and director of the East India Company, Coenraad van Beuningen (1622–1693).<sup>16</sup> At the same time, Rothe also seems

<sup>11</sup> Rothe, *Eenige prophetiën en revelatiën*, 30–1, n. b.

<sup>12</sup> The letters between Dury and Hartlib are available on the *Early Modern Letters Online* project. John Dury to Samuel Hartlib, undated (June 1661), Sheffield University Library, Hartlib Papers 4/4/43a-b <http://tinyurl.com/ya2mafko>.

<sup>13</sup> According to Pepys, Rothe's family fortune was the decisive factor for the girl's father in accepting Rothe as his son-in-law. Samuel Pepys, *The Diary*: 1660: July (July 1660) *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, Vol. 1: 1660, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (London: Harper Collins, 2016 [1971]) 190.

<sup>14</sup> Rothe, *Een korte beschrijving van mijn worstelen met Godt*, in: *De werke van Rothe*, 35.

<sup>15</sup> John Price, *Satan in een engel des lichts, ofte ondersoek, raeckende de waerschijnlijckheyt, en aert van alle hedendaegse prophetien en openbaringe* [...] ('s-Gravenhage: Johannes Tongerloo, 1674). Rothe replied with *Een zeedige en christen beantwoordinge, op het laster-schrift en schentboecxken van* [...] *John Price: Getitileert Satan in een engel des lichts* (Amsterdam; Pieter Arentz, 1674)

<sup>16</sup> On van Beuningen, see Cornelia Wilhelmine Roldanus, *Coenraad van Beuningen, staatsman en libertijn* ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1931) and Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, its Greatness and Its Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 395, 694, 784, 831.

to have gained something of a popular following. Price relates that women preferred to pray in the open air in the wood where God first appeared to Rothe rather than attend Church services.<sup>17</sup>

In the early months of 1674 anticipation about the coming of the new millennium was reaching fever pitch. Van Someren translated De Raedt's defence of the Fifth Monarchy, *Apologia veritatis adversus Maresium* (1673), into Dutch.<sup>18</sup> On the 28 January, he gave a sermon on Daniel 2: 44–5, identifying the stone that breaks the statue with Rothe. Heckled by his colleagues, who called him a Quaker, Van Someren was ordered down from the pulpit by the burgomaster. He was made to sign a letter of apology. Van Someren left the city to join 'the people of the Standard in Amsterdam', but not before he had published his sermon in print, along with a refutation of his retraction.<sup>19</sup> On Easter Sunday, two years after God had instructed him to prepare the 'Standard of the Lord', Rothe decided the time had arrived to lead his followers out of Amsterdam. They arrived in Hamburg where they remained for forty days, waiting for a sign from God. Yet the summer of 1674 did pass, and gradually Rothe's following dwindled. In May the authorities began criminal proceedings against him, and on 24 June, Rothe was sentenced to perpetual banishment with the confiscation of goods and properties. From exile, Rothe sent volley after volley of letters to friends and enemies, whilst keeping abreast of the authorities, travelling between Hamburg, Emden, Groningen and Friesland. He chided the States of Holland for having asked the authorities in Hamburg to extradite him, and wrote mockingly to the pensionary, Gaspar Fagel, who sent spies after him, threatening to cast out 'you and all the unchristian regents, through the power given me by my God'.<sup>20</sup>

On 1 August, a storm swept through the Republic, causing the nave of St Maarten in Utrecht to collapse. Rothe, who had foreseen a great storm leveling the high churches and who believed God's second judgement would consume the cities of Amsterdam, The Hague, Haarlem and Leiden in an imminent fire, began sending frantic letters to various urban magistracies, urging them to repent before it was too late. Following complaints from the English ambassador, who was concerned about Rothe's contacts with English Fifth Monarchists, the Dutch government introduced more stringent measures against Rothe. In September 1675 Fagel presented Rothe's letters before the States of Holland, who condemned Rothe and his friends as enemies of the States and disturbers of the peace. In December the *Advocaat-fiscaal* of the *Hof van Holland* called for his punishment and the public burning of his

<sup>17</sup> Price, *Satan in een engel des lichts*, 11–12.

<sup>18</sup> *De vijfde monarchie, ofte 't Rijke der Heyligen Schriftmatig bewezen: Door Alhart de Raedt, professor in de H. Theologie in zijn boek genaemt: Verantwoordinge der Waerheijt [...]* (Rotterdam, 1674) The work was partially financed by Van Beuningen. See also Hylkema, *Reformateurs*, Vol. 2, 197–201.

<sup>19</sup> Everard van Someren, *Predicatie over de woorden Daniels Cap. 2. verss. 44, 45 [...]* (Rotterdam: s.n., 1674). Van Someren's colleague's version of events is printed after the text of Esaias Clemens, *Predicatie, over de woorden Daniels [...]* (Rotterdam: s.n., 1674).

<sup>20</sup> Rothe, 'Eenige Fragmenta', in: *De wercke van Rothe*, 21.

pamphlets by the hangman. Yet again, Rothe's powerful connections appear to have shielded him from the force of the law. In November 1676, however, Rothe published *Some Grave Accusations Lawfully Brought against the Prince of Orange* (1676), sending copies to the *Advocaat-fiscaal* with the request that the Prince be prosecuted for treason.<sup>21</sup> Calls for his arrest followed, and Rothe was apprehended. His printer, Sierick Paulus, was arrested and banished, and Gisbert Beijer, the prophet from Rotterdam who had helped distribute Rothe's pamphlets was pilloried and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

Had Rothe not been part of Amsterdam's regent patriciate, he might have ended like Spinoza's friend Adriaan Koerbagh, whose short incarceration in the Rasphuis brought him to an early grave. Instead, he was placed in a mental asylum for the well-off, where he lived tranquilly until 1691 when his family managed to obtain his release. Sometimes, however, even wealth and power offered insufficient protection against melancholy and madness. Such was the sad fate of Coenraad van Beuningen. Ruined through speculation with shares in the East India Company in which he lost a staggering 500,000 guilders, his tribulations compounded by an unhappy late marriage, he began to show signs of mental instability. In 1688, believing the end was near, he took to the streets, banging on the doors of neighbours, complaining of the 'unconscionable lethargy of the citizenry'. He drew strange drawings and cabbalistic signs on the walls of his house on Amstel 216, still known today as 'the House with the Blood Stains'. He was institutionalized at the behest of his family and spent the last years of his life in chains, dying penniless and forgotten in 1693.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. BEHMENISM, MILLENARIANISM AND PHILOSEMITISM IN ANGLO-DUTCH RELIGIOUS NETWORKS

The millenarian fervour of the 1650s, 1660s and 1670s needs to be viewed against the background of a wider climate of religious renewal which manifested itself in the development of Pietism both within and outside of the Reformed Church. This scene included the emergence of various religious groups of varying shades of heterodoxy, including Behmenists, the followers of the German mystic and theosophic philosopher Jacob Böhme (1575–1624), Quakers and Collegiants, a strictly non-confessional group of lay Christians, dedicated to Bible discussion and free enquiry, among whose circles Spinoza moved, as well as the followers of the radical Pietist sectarians Jean de Labadie (1610–74) and Antoinette Bourignon (1618–80).<sup>23</sup> Among these groups the need for far-reaching social and religious reform was widely

<sup>21</sup> [Johannes Rothe], *Eenige swaare beschuldige rechtmatigh tegen de prins van Orange ingebracht* (1676).

<sup>22</sup> Hylkema, *Reformateurs*, Vol. 2, 203; Evenhuis, *Ook dat was Amsterdam*, [I: III?] 196–7.

<sup>23</sup> On the conflicts between Quakers, Collegiants, prophets and mystics, see Hylkema, *Reformateurs*, Vol. 1, 73–98. On the Collegiants, see Fix, *Prophecy and Reason* and more recently Francesco Quatrini, 'Adam Boreel (1602–1665): His Life and Thought', PhD thesis, University of Macerata (2017); on Bourignon, see Mirjam de Baar, *'Ik moet spreken': Het spiritueel leiderschap van Antoinette Bourignon (1618–80)* (Utrecht: Walburg Pers, 2004).

shared. Both the Labadists and the followers of Bourignon, who often came from elite families, practised a strictly communal lifestyle rejecting any kind of luxury, something that lends urgency to the question raised by Henk van Nierop: 'to what extent movements such as the "Further Reformation" [...] or the various millenarian groups of the mid-seventeenth century were a reaction against the capitalist ethos of the era rather than the expression of an atavistic religiosity'.<sup>24</sup> Within the Republic, Amsterdam was the very centre of the exchange of heterodox ideas, and Rothe left traces within many of these (often partially overlapping) networks and communities. He competed for followers with both Labadie and with Bourignon, who like Rothe was close to members of the Hartlib circle, including Petrus Serrarius (1600–69) and Comenius.<sup>25</sup> There were many connections between millenarians and Behemenists: Rothe's supporter De Raedt, for instance, collaborated with Johann Georg Gichtel on the edition of the complete works of Jacob Böhme.<sup>26</sup>

A final current within the millenarian milieu that needs to be explored in relation to Rothe's work is that of philosemitism. Ernestine van der Wall has identified a circle of philo-Judaists, active in England and the Netherlands centred around Serrarius, a former minister of the Walloon community, who had been living in Amsterdam since 1630, as well as the Dutch Hebraist Adam Boreel (1602–65), the ministers Henry Jessey and Nathaniel Homes, the lawyer and politician John Sadler, the physician and natural philosopher Benjamin Worsley, Dury and Hartlib.<sup>27</sup> Serrarius was a millenarian and a mystic, an admirer of Böhme, whose belief in the imminent conversion of the Jews was allied to a sympathetic attitude towards the Jews, and who maintained friendships with figures such as Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, Rabbi Nathan Shapira, the physician Isaac de Rocamora and Spinoza.<sup>28</sup> He translated into Dutch Jessey's *The Glory and Salvation of Jehuda and Israel* (1650), a work that aimed to demonstrate an agreement concerning the fundamentals of the faith between Jews and Christians, including the nature of the Messiah.<sup>29</sup> The conversations between Serrarius, Dury and Menasseh ben Israel about the return of the Lost Ten Tribes spurred the latter to publish *Spes Israelis* (1650), which was soon translated into Dutch, English and other languages. In 1655, Ben Israel arrived in London to petition

<sup>24</sup> Henk van Nierop, review of *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (review no. 1124). [www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1124](http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1124) (accessed 14 May, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> One of Bourignon's followers, Cornelis Gael, a merchant from Amsterdam, eventually abandoned her congregation to join Rothe's followers. Rothe at first seems to have regarded the Labadists as allies, but later followed De Labadie to Altona, then part of Danish-ruled Holstein-Glückstadt, a home to many sectarian communities, to win followers amongst his adherents (De Baar, *Ik moet spreken*, 146, 317).

<sup>26</sup> Lucinda Martin, 'Jakob Boehme and the Anthropology of German Pietism', in Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei (eds.), *An Introduction to Jakob Böhme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception* (Routledge: London, 2013), 124.

<sup>27</sup> Ernestine G. E. van der Wall, 'The Amsterdam Millenarian Petrus Serrarius (1600–1669) and the Anglo-Dutch Circle of Philo-Judaists', in Johannes van den Berg and Ernestine G. E. van der Wall (eds.), *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century, Studies and Documents* (London/Boston/Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 2012) 73–94, esp. 75. See also Yosef Kaplan, Henry Méchoulan and Richard H. Popkin (eds.), *Menasseh ben Israel and His World* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> Van der Wall, 'The Amsterdam Millenarian Petrus Serrarius', 75.

<sup>29</sup> Van der Wall, 'The Amsterdam Millenarian Petrus Serrarius', 76.



Cromwell to allow the Jews to return to England. But while the conference met several times before Parliament, it did not reach a conclusion. Ten years after the failure of the campaign for the readmission of the Jews, millenarian hopes were revived once more when in the autumn of 1665 rumours about a king of the Jews called Sabbatai Sevi first reached Europe.<sup>30</sup>

Rothe was allied to the Hartlib circle through marriage, and was regarded by many in its wider ambit as fellow traveller and ally. In letters of Dury to Hartlib from the early 1660s, he makes a regular appearance. Dury seems to have taken a liking to the young man whom he claimed was very intelligent, well-versed in languages and knowledgeable of political affairs, and who he believed would be of service to his ecumenical endeavours.<sup>31</sup> Another regular correspondent of Hartlib with whom Rothe was in contact was Comenius, who, after the destruction of his home and library in Fulnek during the Swedish-Polish war, had settled in Amsterdam.<sup>32</sup> In his *Clamores Eliae* (1669) Comenius ranged Rothe among mystics and millenarians such as Serrarius, Friedrich Breckling (1629–1711), the pastor and Behmenist from Flensburg, and Georg Lorenz Seidenbecher (1623–63), another central figure in the network of Amsterdam Behmenists.<sup>33</sup> The most prominent Behmenist to defend Rothe's prophetic ministry was the Silesian poet and mystic Quirinus Kuhlmann.<sup>34</sup> Kuhlmann broke off his studies in Leiden in 1673 to join Rothe's followers and published a work titled *Boehme newly brought to life, comprising a hundred and fifty prophecies*, with a partial translation into Dutch appearing at the same time intended to coincide with the preparations for Rothe's millenarian campaign in the summer of 1674.<sup>35</sup> Kuhlmann believed the end of days to be very near, and the *Neubegeisterter Böhme* serves as a warning to the Germans and the Dutch to accept Rothe's prophetic ministry, by pointing to the harmony between the prophecies

<sup>30</sup> Van der Wall, 'The Amsterdam Millenarian Petrus Serrarius', 87–8; see David S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England, 1603–1655* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

<sup>31</sup> Before moving to Kassel, Dury resided for a while with Rothe at Oud Wulven: Haley, 'Sir Johannes Rothe', 314. John Dury to Samuel Hartlib, 5 August 1661, Sheffield University Library, Hartlib Papers 4/4/29a-b EML0 [tinyurl.com/y9fzm2ne](http://tinyurl.com/y9fzm2ne); John Dury to Samuel Hartlib, 2 September 1661, Sheffield University Library, Hartlib Papers 4/4/32a-b EML0 [tinyurl.com/yanvl6cx](http://tinyurl.com/yanvl6cx). On Dury's ecumenical projects, see Antony Milton, 'The Unchanged Peacemaker? John Dury and the Politics of Irenicism in England, 1628–1643', in Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor (eds.), *Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation: Studies in Intellectual Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 95–117.

<sup>32</sup> On Comenius in the Netherlands, see Wilhelmus Rood, *Comenius in the Netherlands: Some Aspects of Life and Work of a Czech Exile in the Seventeenth Century* (Amsterdam: Van Gendt, 1970).

<sup>33</sup> Rood, *Comenius and the Low Countries*, 205 ff. and Ernestine G. E. van der Wall, 'Chiliasmus sanctus: De toekomstverwachting van Georg Lorenz Seidenbecher (1623–1663)', *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis / Dutch Review of Church History*, 63 (1983), 69–83.

<sup>34</sup> On Kuhlmann, see Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, 'Salvation through Philology: The Poetical Messianism of Quirinus Kuhlmann (1651–1689)' in Peter Schäfer and Mark R. Cohen (eds.), *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 259–98; Walter Dietze, *Quirinus Kuhlmann, Ketzer und Poet: Versuch einer monographischen Darstellung von Leben und Werk* (Berlin: Rütten and Loening, 1963).

<sup>35</sup> Quirinus Kuhlman, *Neubegeisterter Böhme, begreifend hundert funftzig Weissagungen [...]* (Leiden: Loth de Haes, 1674) translated as *Jacob Behmens Duytschen propheetes Hondert en vijftigh propheeten van de Gulden Lelyen- en Roosen-Tyt [...]* (Leiden: Loth de Haes, 1674). I have relied on Quirinus Kuhlmann, *Der neubegeisterte Böhme*, ed. Jonathan Clark, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1995).

of Rothe and those of Böhme.<sup>36</sup> Rothe's prophecies had not yet been fulfilled, but he reminded his readers that the year 1674 had not yet passed.<sup>37</sup>

That Rothe was regarded as an ally by mystics, reformers and Behmenists may strike us as surprising. There is no discernible influence in Rothe's writings of the ideas of Hartlib and Comenius on science and education in the wider project of social and political reform, and no trace of a Behmenist anthropology or cosmology, with its optimistic vision of the human potential for perfection.<sup>38</sup> There is certainly no evidence whatsoever of a female incarnation of Divine wisdom, like Böhme's Sophia: Rothe's future Kingdom is hierarchical and deeply patriarchal. But Rothe's belief in the coming kingdom of Christ on earth did make him receptive to the strand of philosemitism that was so pronounced in his immediate environment. The conversion of the Jews, and the return of the Lost Tribes recur frequently in Rothe's work, both in textual and in visual form. The central role of the Jews in salvation history may have made Rothe favourably disposed towards them, although his philosemitism, unlike that of Serrarius and others, does not appear to have been based on any extensive knowledge either of Hebrew, or of the Rabbinic and Kabbalistic traditions. It does nevertheless offer a key to some of his prophetic writings, and to the curious interfaith boundary crossings that marked his prophetic career.

*A New Heaven and Earth: The New Jerusalem* contains an address to the Jews that conveys in condensed form certain elements of Protestant philosemitic literature. It promises the Jewish population the restoration of their rule over Palestine, and to their status as God's chosen people:

The Lord summons Israel, and that is you. You are the people of God if you love God, and the heirs of the world, if you fear him. Such as befits the people of God, the seed of Abraham, such you will do, and so a blessing is prepared for you, if not, a curse and judgement. I know that the Messiah is among you, so honour him as a servant of God, the Lord has sent him for your deliverance. Do no longer shackle yourself to outward ceremonies, nor continue to follow the advice and guidance of your Rabbis: all these things merely envisaged a future freedom, which you have gained through the Messiah. He will come in his glory, you will gain what you expected. The Christians saw him in his humiliation, you, in his exaltation. Thus it has pleased God.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Kuhlmann, *Neubegeisterter Böhme*, Vol. 1, 141.

<sup>37</sup> Kuhlmann, *Neubegeisterter Böhme*, Vol. 1, 139-40.

<sup>38</sup> For a lucid account of some of the keystones of Böhme's thought, see Claudia Brink, Lucinda Martin and Cecilia Muratori (eds.), *Light in Darkness: The Mystical Philosophy of Jacob Böhme* (Dresden: Staatliche Kunstsammlungen/Sandstein, 2019).

<sup>39</sup> Johannes Rothe, *Een nieuwe hemel en aerde: Het nieuwe Jerusalem [...]* (Amsterdam: Pieter Arentsz., 1673) 48-9: 'De Heer roept Israël, 't welck ghy sijt. Ghy sijt het volck Godts so ghy Godt lief hebt; en de erfgenamen des werelts, soo ghy den Heere vreest. Gelijk het een volck Godts, het saet Abrahams betaemt, also doet ghy, soo is zegen weg geleght, anders vloeck en oordeel. Ick weet dat uwe Messias onder u is: Soo eert hem als een knecht Godts, de Heere sent hem tot uwe verlossinge. Bindt u niet langher aen de uytterlijcke ceremonien; noch volght de raet, en de insettinge uwer Rabyenen: Alle dese dingen saghen alleen op een toekomende vryheydt, welcke ghy door de Messiam verkregen hebt. Hy komt in zyne glorie, ghy hebt uwe verwachtinghe. De christenen sagen hem in syne verneederde stant: doch ghy in syne verhooginge. Het heeft Godt also behaeght.'

The interesting thing about this passage is that it shows that Rothe, like Serrarius, saw Sabbathai Sevi, or perhaps one of his successors active during the years of Rothe's prophetic ministry, as doing preparatory work towards the conversion of the Jews, and hence the installation of the Kingdom of Christ. It also draws a connection between the two manifestations of Christ, in humility and in glory, suggesting a parallelism between the Jews who refused to recognize him as the Messiah, and the present-day Christians, who refuse to accept the immanent return of Christ as King. In Serrarius' work, emphasis on the fact that both Christians and Jews are guilty of one form of blindness concerning the Messiah is one of the strategies through which a rapprochement between Christians and Jews, based on a shared need for conversion and spiritual renovation, could emerge.<sup>40</sup>

Yet where Serrarius' understanding of the Kingdom of Christ is spiritual and pacific, Rothe's is historical, literalist and strongly Old Testamentic in orientation. His admiration for the Jews, if we can call it such, seems in some measure to be derived from the Old Testament narratives that chronicle the victories of the Israelites over their enemies, or of godly Kings rooting out idolatry on which his prophecies draw so frequently:

Behold, Palestine has been given to thee if thou do battle bravely: put on the weapons of God, and be strong: God shall grant thee victory. You are God's Israel, so be victors. The Lord, the God of Israel, is your God, and you are his people. Believe the Lord, and be brave. Amen.<sup>41</sup>

Rothe's use of the Old Testament shows a proclivity towards examples of divine judgement exercised through human agency, such as Gideon's slaying of the Midianites, or Eli executing the priests of Baal. This use of a shibboleth of divine vengeance, perhaps a displacement for the predestinarian logic of election and reprobation that Rothe otherwise seems to reject, nevertheless allows for a re-organization of the categories of believers and unbelievers. Thus, the so-called 'Heroes of God', a kind of spiritual elite force of twelve carefully selected men who guard the 'Standard of the Lord,' can be chosen from among the Jews as well as the Christians, as long as they have faith and lead an irreproachable life.<sup>42</sup> In terms of a political and social organization of the new kingdom, Rothe envisaged a restoration of a Davidic monarchy, in which civil power is exercised by the king and spiritual authority by the high priest. Rothe believed he had found a candidate for the role of high priest in the figure of Theodorus Hubert Dirckz, alias Theodore Houbi, a parson from Rotem in Limburg whom he had met in the house of Comenius.<sup>43</sup> He identi-

<sup>40</sup> Van der Wall, 'The Amsterdam Millenarian Petrus Serrarius', 90.

<sup>41</sup> Rothe, *Een nieuwe hemel en aerde*, 49.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Van Lamoen, 'Chilias contra Stadhouder', 149.

fied Houbi as the priest Melchizedek and insisted on paying him fl. 1500 as a tithe. At Rothe's suggestion, Houbi agreed to be circumcised, although he later produced a witness statement, insisting that he had not renounced his faith, but had only done this to facilitate his interactions with the Jews. Unfortunately, the cut became infected, and Houbi needed to be nursed back to health at Rothe's expense.<sup>44</sup> What this curious episode illustrates, however, is that for the project of winning adherents and converts, philosemitic ideas could encourage Judaizing attitudes. It is only by grasping the central importance of the conversion of the Jews to Rothe's millenarian beliefs that one is able to understand one of the most defining characteristics of his ministry, namely the importance he attached to ceremonial objects. A recurring feature in Rothe's writings is the so-called 'Standard of the Lord', the raising of which is the signal towards the inauguration of the Kingdom of Christ. As he explains in *A Gift to the World*, this Standard is the Banner of the Lord mentioned in Isaiah 11: 10–12; 13: 2, and 18: 3.<sup>45</sup> Yet it is for Rothe equally a physical object, which in one of his visions God ordered him to make, giving him precise instructions on how it should look, and which materials were to be used: it was to be crafted out of palm wood, to the length of 12 feet, divided in three segments, and inscribed with the Hebrew words for 'the holiness of the Lord' (Exodus 28: 36 and Zechariah 14: 20) carrying a crown on top, and a banner of gold embroidery, depicting an all-seeing eye encircled by rays of light. At the feet of the Standard a lion would rest, symbolizing the glory of Juda.<sup>46</sup> The engravings Rothe commissioned for *A Gift to the World* and *A New Heaven and Earth* describe the visions in great detail (Fig. 1): a group of believers has formed a circle around the Standard, which is guarded by a rather sedate-looking Lion of Judah, and by the twelve Heroes of God in full armour.

On the ground near the Standard are a burning candle, and what looks like a baptismal font. Throughout his works, Rothe was keen to stress that the meaning of these objects was metaphorical. The Standard of the Lord, he argued, was an outward sign of the inward presence of the Lord, just like the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>47</sup> Occasionally, it seems to operate metonymically and is defined as 'the strength of the Lord'.<sup>48</sup> Yet more often, it is defined as 'the bare sign of a hidden thing'.<sup>49</sup> We are faced with a paradox. With their extreme biblicism, Rothe's writings effectively seek to operate as a 'second Scripture', a re-inhabiting of biblical models that effectively erases the difference between the Banner of the Lord in Isaiah and the handcrafted object carried by Rothe's

<sup>44</sup> Evenhuis, *Ook dat was Amsterdam*, Vol. 3, 185.

<sup>45</sup> Rothe, *Een geschenk aan de wereld van een koningh [...]*, 34.

<sup>46</sup> Rothe, *Een nieuwe hemel en aerde*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Rothe, *Een geschenk aan de wereld van een koning*, 26.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 34



Fig. 1 Anonymous, *De godt Israels, en syne baniere*, 1673, engraving, 190 mm × 120 mm in: Johannes Rothe, *Een nieuwe hemel en aerde. Het nieuwe Jerusalem [...]* Amsterdam, Pieter Arentz (©Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague)

followers.<sup>50</sup> Yet at the same time, Rothe, who like a good Protestant has an abhorrence of idolatry, draws on a Reformed theology of the sign in a way that risks reducing a central element of his ministry to redundancy.

In a time of imminent transformative change, the efficacious power of a sign is nevertheless significant. For as Rothe explains in *A New Heaven and*

<sup>50</sup> The term is borrowed from Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 277.

*Earth*, the physical sign is primarily a rallying point, meant to support the weaker brethren.<sup>51</sup> While we have no direct evidence that Rothe viewed the Jews as these ‘weaker brethren’, such an interpretation is made more probable by the wider context of Rothe’s cross-confessional endeavours. References to 2 Ezra, prophesying the return of the Ten Tribes, and to the conversion of the Jews, recur across Rothe’s works.<sup>52</sup> They find their most startling expression in the vision of Melchizedek that follows the engraving of The Standard of the Lord (Fig. 2). It shows a man in whom we recognize the prophet himself through his seventeenth-century garb, spreading his arms in adoration before a regal figure who emerges from the parting clouds in a halo of light, carrying sword and sceptre. In the foreground two skulls, a skeleton and three figures emerging from opened graves identify the scene as the valley of dry bones from Ezekiel 37: 1–14. In the upper left corner, another vision emerging from the clouds shows the New Jerusalem as a city girded with walls and towers. In the background are depicted the Ten Lost Tribes, identified by their Oriental garb and turbans, shown as turning homewards, but not yet arrived at their destination.<sup>53</sup> Rothe’s vision places the prophet within Ezekiel’s vision, similar to the way in which his vision of the New Jerusalem conflates the Book of Revelation and the new Jerusalem of Deutero-Isaiah. It is in this moment of imminent millenarian expectation, where all temporal distinctions collapse, that Rothe finds a heroic role for the Jews within the plan of salvation.

### 3. RADICAL RELIGION AND REPUBLICANISM

Dutch millenarianism, as van der Wall has argued, was international in character, shaped by the English apocalyptic tradition as well as strands of German mysticism.<sup>54</sup> Despite the idiosyncrasy of his prophetic performance this also holds for Rothe, whose social talents seem to have enabled him to play different parts in different settings, finding adherents among people with whom his ideas ultimately shared very little common ground. Rothe’s writings, moreover, illustrate the importance of the connections between English and Dutch Fifth Monarchism, showing how the resistance to William III’s growing power in the aftermath of the death of the brothers De Witt rehearsed some of the oppositional strategies employed by the English republicans and Fifth Monarchists during the 1660s.

<sup>51</sup> Rothe, *Een nieuwe hemel en aerde*, 44.

<sup>52</sup> In one of the visions recorded in *Eenige Wonderheden Gods, getoont aen sijne knecht Joanne, op verscheyde tyden*, Rothe recounts how an angel announced that the doors of heaven would be opened to the Jews. This was the same angel, Rothe claims, who had visited and shared a meal with him three years earlier. in: *De wercke van Rothe*, 27.

<sup>53</sup> Rothe, *Een nieuwe hemel en aerde*, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Van der Wall, “Antichrist Stormed”, 154.



Fig. 2 Anonymous, *Den Koning Melchizedek*, 1673, engraving, 190 mm × 120 mm in: Johannes Rothe, *Een nieuwe hemel en aerde. Het nieuwe Jerusalem...* Amsterdam, Pieter Arentz (©Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague)

While details are scarce, Rothe appears to have initially befriended English millenarians during his first period of travel in England during Cromwell's Protectorate. Rothe also would have had ties to the English expatriate communities through his wife, Anna Hartlib, who for a period attended the sermons of John Price, as we have seen, preacher to the English congregation in The Hague and the man who later attacked Rothe in print.<sup>55</sup> Particularly after the Act of

<sup>55</sup> See footnote 16.

Uniformity of 1662 the ranks of English clergymen in the Republic swelled with Puritan, nonconforming ministers deprived of their livings, who chose exile and settled in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Leiden, Utrecht and Middelburg. Among their number were several radicals, including the Independent minister and Fifth Monarchist John Rogers, and the Baptist Fifth Monarchist Henry Danvers.<sup>56</sup> One of Rothe's close associates was in fact Dr Edward Richardson, notorious for his role in the Yorkshire Risings of 1663.<sup>57</sup> Richardson, who had been a Dean at Ripon, was evicted after the Restoration, moving to the Netherlands to study medicine at Leiden, where he obtained his MD in 1664.<sup>58</sup> He became a preacher to the English church at Haarlem (1665–70) and, finally, Leiden (1670–75).<sup>59</sup> Richardson was very much on the English government's radar as a dangerous subversive, and Downing tried to have him extradited from the Netherlands, but the request was refused by the De Witt government. Plans to have him abducted and brought home through force similarly came to nothing.<sup>60</sup> It was Richardson, who translated Rothe's prophecies into English as *Some prophecies and revelations of God, concerning the Christian World in this age* (1672).<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, Richardson became a Spiritualist after the Rothe-experiment and dedicated his later years to the study of the works of Jakob Böhme.<sup>62</sup>

In its mixture of radicalism millenarianism and political utopianism, Rothe's work shows its affinity with the writings of the English Fifth Monarchists. It is structured by a Manichaean dualism between two warring rival forces: the kingdoms of earth and of Christ; Israel and Egypt, Jerusalem and Babylon; old Jerusalem and the new.<sup>63</sup> It shows its political radicalism in its vision of a final reckoning that depicts God as a leveller, humbling all that is exalted (Isaiah 2: 11–17); cutting down the mighty trees (Daniel 4: 14; Psalm 39; Ezekiel 14: 21; Matthew 3: 10), and shaking everything in a whirlwind (Isaiah 66: 15; Jeremiah 4: 13; 23: 19). A text of special importance to Rothe and to English Fifth

<sup>56</sup> Geoffrey F. Nuttall, 'English Dissenters in the Netherlands', *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis / Dutch Review of Church History*, 59 (1978), 47.

<sup>57</sup> Nuttall, 46. For the Yorkshire Risings, see most recently Andrew Hopper, 'The Farnley Wood Plot and the Memory of the Civil Wars in Yorkshire', *The Historical Journal* 45 (2002) 281–303.

<sup>58</sup> Greaves, 'Deliver Us from Evil', 186–87, 200–1.

<sup>59</sup> Nuttall, 'English Dissenters', 46–7.

<sup>60</sup> Greaves, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 187.

<sup>61</sup> *Some prophecies and revelations of God, concerning the Christian World in this age. First given forth [...] in Netherdutch: now exactly translated by a Well-wisher to the publick good.* [The translator's address to the reader signed is signed E. R.] (London: 1672).

<sup>62</sup> Hylkema, *Reformateurs*, Vol. 2, 420; Nuttall, 'English Dissenters', 47.

<sup>63</sup> Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), 109–25. Rothe always insisted the overthrow of earthly powers would be the work of the Lord, and that the sword of the Lord was simply the Spirit. Even so, *A New Heaven and Earth* argues that 'If God decrees that you shall destroy a country, a kingdom, and kill its kings and rulers; its subjects, and everything that is in it, as happened to Jericho and Ai (Joshua, 6: 17; and [8: 14; 26: 29]), do you think you are allowed to withdraw your hand, and to pretend to be wiser than God?' ('Indien Godt gebiet dat ghy een Landt: Konighryck: hare Coningen, en Vorsten: en 't geen daer in is verbannen sult, doodende alles met den Sweerde; gelijck aen Jericho en Ai geschiet is, meynt ghy dat ghy uwe handt te rugge trecken moogt, en wijser te willen sijn als Godt is?'), *Een nieuwe hemel en aarde*, 14–15.



Monarchists, was Isaiah 41: 25, 'I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon'.

Rothe's writings from 1673–75 develop something of an outline of the desired new order, grounded firmly on an Old Testament model of kingship, and involving wholesale reform of religion and government.<sup>64</sup> This entailed a rejection of political prudence in favour of biblical wisdom, as well as the outlawing of luxury, blasphemy and idolatry. The institutional structures through which reform is realized remain somewhat schematic: social change, as Bernard Capp argued in relation to the English Fifth Monarchists, is the outcome of the direct, transformational power of the grace of God.<sup>65</sup> Even so, there are certain recurrent concerns. Rothe insists on the need to lower taxes because they affect the poor disproportionately. He exhorted his followers to charity and stipulated that the People of the Standard keep a common treasury, from which the expenses of poorer brethren could be paid.<sup>66</sup> While his political vision is ordered and hierarchical, there is a distinct element of spiritual as well as economic egalitarianism. Rothe rejected the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture (one of the points of contestation in his polemic with Price), which he regarded as an unlawful curtailment of the freedom of the Spirit, and in his view a poorly disguised and unjustified grasping of authority and power by a Pharisaical clergy. In one of his works, he goes as far as to argue that all earthly claims to spiritual authority are a form of spiritual tyranny.<sup>67</sup> Thus, even when the millennial kingdom has been established, every individual will retain the right to appeal to God for a direct answer to a question, or the interpretation of a dream; only when no answer is given will the high priest act as an interpreter.<sup>68</sup>

Rothe first addressed the kings and rulers of Europe in a letter written in 1668, ordering them to lay down their crowns before the throne of the Lamb.<sup>69</sup> In 1672, he renewed his attempt, prophesying the combined attack on the Republic by the French and English, likening the French king to Nebuchadnezzar, the instrument of God's punishment of the disobedient Netherlands. Louis XIV would soon fall, as would the other instrument of divine ire, Charles II.<sup>70</sup> 'Touching my Native Country (The Netherlands)', he continued, 'this shall through the heavy judgements of God be brought as it were to a desolation, and the third part of men shall not remain over therein; for the sword, the pestilence and the famine shall waste away their inhabitants.'<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Rothe, *Een korte aenwysing van saken te herstellen, [...] [1673–74]*, 1–2.

<sup>65</sup> B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men. A Study in Seventeenth Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber, 1972) 185.

<sup>66</sup> Rothe, *Een nieuwe hemel en aerde*, 22, 29–30; *Een geschenk aan de wereld*, 30.

<sup>67</sup> Rothe, *Een nieuwe hemel en aerde*, 55.

<sup>68</sup> Rothe, *Een geschenk aan de wereld*, 34.

<sup>69</sup> Rothe, *Eenige prophetiën en revelatiën*, 24.

<sup>70</sup> Rothe, *Eenige prophetiën en revelatiën*, 16–17; 17–18.

<sup>71</sup> Rothe, *Eenige prophetiën en revelatiën*, 20: 'Aengaende mijn Vaderlant [Nederlant] dit sal door swaere oordelen Godts als tot een desolatie ghebracht worden en het derde gedeelte des menschen en sal in het selve niet overigh blijven: want het sweert, de pestilentie en de honger sal haer onderdanen verteeren.'

On 24 March 1674, a day before the exodus, Rothe wrote a letter to the Prince of Orange, accompanied by an engraving that depicted the Prince as a tottering idol, ready to be struck down by the thunderbolt of divine vengeance (Fig. 3). Near his mouth, a speech bubble reads 'hypocrisy' (*geveynstheit*). The location of the statue, on the Binnenhof, in front of the Gevangenpoort, is provocative: it is the exact location where the brothers De Witt had been murdered, dismembered and cannibalized.<sup>72</sup> When no signs of the coming of the millennium appeared, Rothe began to focus on the man standing in the way of the renovation of all things.

He reissued the print with an incendiary commentary. The citizens of Holland, Rothe claimed, had fallen into idolatry by elevating the Prince of Orange above what his ancestors had been:

I become afraid when I recall the disorder, violence and the misguided zeal used by most of the subjects of this country in the year 1672, to elevate this young Lord to ever higher and greater dignities, and that even with bloodshed, plunder, contempt, rejecting and banishing of governors, because those did not rule to our opinion and liking; and so it was a time more of violence than of law, and the wild, disordered mob ruled like a devouring beast [...].<sup>73</sup>

In the following two years, Rothe aimed more inflammatory writings against William III, whilst returning surreptitiously to Amsterdam.<sup>74</sup> This pamphleteering was the cause of his arrest and imprisonment, but it also is important to grasp how Rothe's polemics are situated in a wider climate of discontent concerning corruption, nepotism and abuse of power in William III's government. While the year 1672 saw William at the peak of his popularity, disenchantment grew in the years that followed, and not merely among supporters of the States party.<sup>75</sup> Matters became worse when in 1675 the Prince appeared to angle after the title of Duke of Gelderland, an endeavour hastily abandoned after a storm of controversy.<sup>76</sup> Rothe entered the fray by publishing a refutation of the letter the Prince had written to the States of Zeeland.<sup>77</sup> The pamphlets see Rothe adopting a different, republican lan-

<sup>72</sup> 'COPIA van een Brief gesonden aen den prins van Orangie, den 24sten Meert 1674. uyt Amsterdam', in 'Eenige Fragmenta', 18. On the print, see *De Prins van Oranje, De Grootte Afgodt van Holland*, Atlas van Stolk 2608, Rijksmuseum FMH 2586, <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.467909> (accessed 10 September 2018).

<sup>73</sup> Johannes Rothe, *De Prins van Oranje* (1674), 2–3.

<sup>74</sup> Johannes Rothe, *Twee missiven, den eersten aen eenen goeden vriend van d'aenstaende oordeelen over Amsterdam, Leyden, Haarlem, Haag [sic], Holland. Den tweeden, aen de heer vaat pensionaris* (1674); *Een brief aen het leger van de Prins van Oranje, Debat of overweeginge wat regeeringe voor Nederlandt de salutairste, en beste is* (1675); *Het Bedrog en Verkeert voornemen van de prins van Oranje ontdekt* (1675); *Refutatatie, of wederlegginge van de brief, geschreven van de prins [CAP 'P': Prins?] van Oranje, op den 18. maart 1675, aen de Staaten van Zeelant* (1675); *Een kort en grondigh verhaal, waar uyt de oorlogh, tusschen Vranckrijck, Engelandt, en desen staat gesprooten is* (1676).

<sup>75</sup> Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 809–11, 813–5, 817–28.

<sup>76</sup> Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 815–7.

<sup>77</sup> Johannes Rothe, *Refutatatie*.

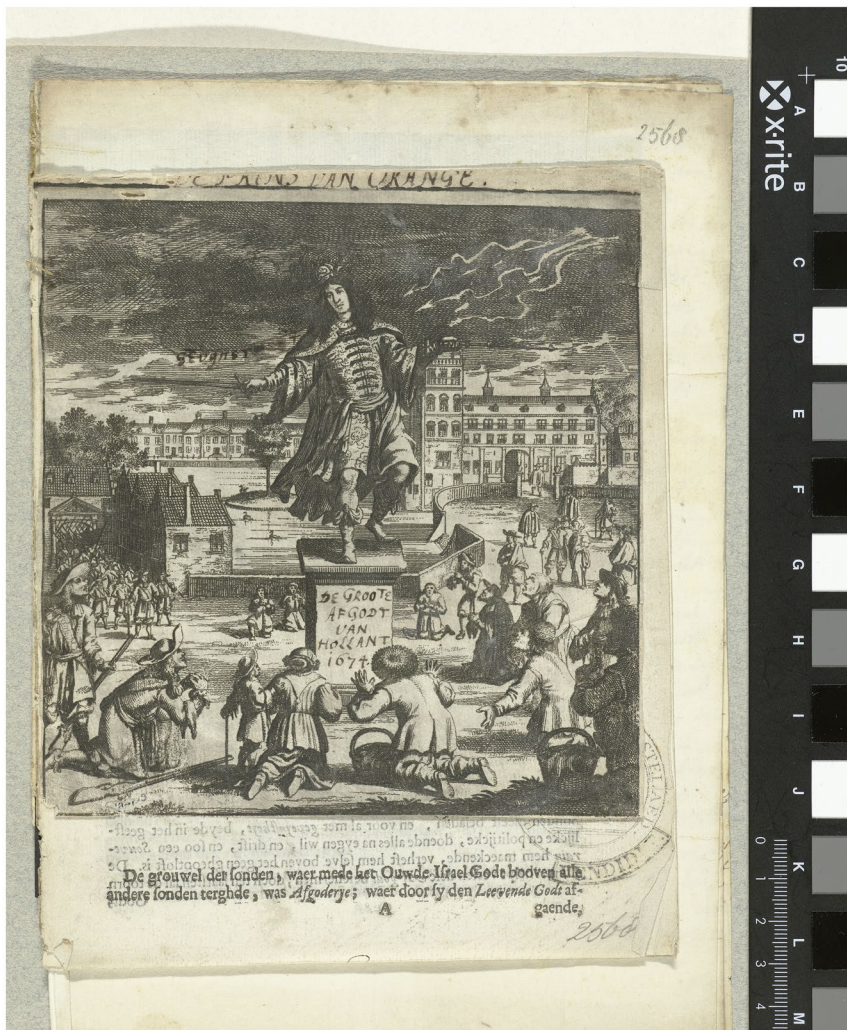


Fig. 3 Anonymous, 'Den grote afgod van Holland', 1674 engraving, title page to untitled pamphlet, 152 mm × 142 mm, Atlas van Stolk 2608, <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.467909>

guage in order to win allies among wider groups and factions. Thus the *Debate, or Consideration, What Kind of Government is Most Salutory, and Best for the Netherlands*, adopts a moderate tone in its defence of the traditional government of the Republic. Holland, he reminds his audience, has always been a government of burghers; modest, moderate and characterized by toleration, in which the States were sovereign, and the stadholder merely a servant of the

States. God has ordained this particular kind of government as specifically suited to the Netherlands.<sup>78</sup> The character and values of monarchy are incompatible with the institutions of a republican state: the rule of one man depends on his will alone. Rothe stresses the Prince's use of a military presence and a heavy tax-burden to keep the country in subjection.<sup>79</sup> He points towards the Roman Republic as a cautionary example, and urges the Dutch to look at the Swiss and the Venetians as examples of stable republican states.<sup>80</sup> Rothe's republicanism is not a departure from his espousal of Old Testament kingship elsewhere in his writings. In fact, the chasm between the world and the millennium highlights that '[I]n an age that doesn't produce Davids or Hezekiahs, kings will be Sauls, Rehoboams and Ahabs: instead: tyrants und unjust men.'<sup>81</sup>

Rothe's account of the Prince's rise to power takes the form of a narrative of popery and arbitrary government. The Prince's ultimate aim is to obtain sovereign authority in the Netherlands, 'to put his foot on the neck of the States.'<sup>82</sup> The evidence for this evil design, Rothe asserts, is there for all to see: the Prince has abandoned the country, so that the enemy could advance to Bodegraven and Swammerdam, and has waged military campaigns against the wishes of the States. He has filled the country with hired soldiers, and his government with foreigners. He is planning to introduce an episcopacy on the English model.<sup>83</sup> Even William III's prospective bride, the Protestant Princess Mary, is suspect, as the daughter of the Roman Catholic Duke of York.<sup>84</sup>

This criticism of the Stuarts suggests how in some darker corners of the Dutch public sphere the opposition to the stadholder sought to create common cause with those critical of the restored Stuart monarchy in England. Here Rothe's language is reminiscent not just of the godly republicanism of the Civil War and Interregnum, but more specifically of the writings of Fifth Monarchists who continued their oppositional activities after the Restoration, such as Thomas Venner. As Capp has argued, Venner's *A Door of Hope: Or a Call and Declaration for the Gathering Together of the First Ripe Fruits unto the Standard of our Lord, King Jesus* (1660) sought to mobilize a broad coalition of religious radicals and supporters of the 'Good Old Cause' against the house of Stuart.<sup>85</sup> Rothe's pamphlets are engaged in a similar operation. What good can the Netherlands expect, he asks, from a Prince who has one eye on the crown of England? Do all his designs not aim to bring the country under English rule like a conquered nation?<sup>86</sup> It is this oscillation between 'the rhetoric of millen-

<sup>78</sup> Rothe, *Debat of overweeginge*, 1.

<sup>79</sup> Rothe, *Debat of overweeginge*, 3.

<sup>80</sup> Rothe, *Debat of overweeginge*, 3–4.

<sup>81</sup> Rothe, *Debat of overweeginge*, 2.

<sup>82</sup> Rothe, *De Prins van Oranje*, 4.

<sup>83</sup> Johannes Rothe, *Refutatie, of Wederlegginge van de brief* (1675), sig. A2r.

<sup>84</sup> Rothe, *De Prins van Oranje*, 3–4.

<sup>85</sup> Bernard Capp, 'A Door of Hope Re-opened: The Fifth Monarchy, King Charles and King Jesus', *Journal of Religious History*, 32 (2008), 16–30, passim.

<sup>86</sup> Rothe, *De Prins van Oranje*, 6–7.

nial fundamentalism and secular, republican arguments', that lends these pamphlets their particular tone.<sup>87</sup>

The enchantment is powerful, with which the Netherlands has been pregnant many years, the Lord, the great God, shall winnow and purify her, and separate the wheat from the chaff, consuming all the godless Princes, governments and people. Tell me, subjects of the Netherlands, do you not have a disloyal and deceitful head, who gladly gives over your old rights, royalties and customs to England [...]?<sup>88</sup>

Shortly before his arrest, Rothe wrote to the House of Commons, admonishing them to protect the Protestant religion against the 'plots of the Popish faction', and warning them that Charles, whose conscience was 'asleep in the lap of prostitutes' was preparing to trample over its liberties. Parliament and the States-General, Rothe urged, needed to work together to avert the present danger.<sup>89</sup> *The Deception, and Wicked Intent of the Prince of Orange Discovered* takes these accusations a final step further by exposing a plot against the country. Having sidelined Admiral Michiel de Ruyter, the Prince of Orange will use the Dutch fleet to lay hold of supreme power. In order to subvert his evil designs, Amsterdam needs to enter into a league with Zeeland and Gelderland. How successful Rothe was in drumming up support from abroad is a moot point. Interestingly, the Prince himself told Sir William Temple that three thousand Fifth Monarchists were planning an attack on Christmas Day.<sup>90</sup>

Historians have depicted Rothe as a religious fanatic or a madman. Yet the manner in which the authorities pursued his case hardly suggests they considered him a mere lunatic. The arbitrary nature of his prophetic authority and the biblical self-referentiality of his writing seems to have encouraged rather than deterred followers. The extravagant nature of Rothe's prophetic beliefs appear to have been masked, moreover, by his undeniable social talents, and his capacity to appear to be different things to different people.

Certainly, Rothe's career demonstrates the fragility of a community centred on prophetic charisma and imminent millenarian expectation. But it also illustrates the mobility of subversive ideas within a wider context of millenarianism and political discontent. The interaction between millenarian and republican arguments offers a fascinating parallel to the activities of English Fifth Monarchists in the 1660s, and suggests that more research needs to be done

<sup>87</sup> Capp, 'A Door of Hope Re-opened', 22

<sup>88</sup> Rothe, *De Prins van Oranje*, 6: 'De betooveringe is groot waarmede Nederland swanger is geweest veele Jaren, de Heere, de groote Godt, sal haar suyveren en wannen, en het Cooren van het Caf scheidyn, en so alles vernieuwende, de werelt onder sijne Heerschappye brengen, verteerende ale godtloose Princen, Overicheeden, en volck, Seght my, ghy Onderdanen van Nederlant, heby ghy niet een ontrouw en gheveynst hoofd, 't welcke u uwe oude Rechten, Roialiteyten, en Gebruyckelijckheeden aen Engelant gaaren overgeeft, werende wat hy tot voordeel van Engelant doet, verhoopt dat 'tvoor sijn selven doet (...)'.  
<sup>89</sup> Haley, 'Sir Johannes Rothe', 30.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

on the functioning of millenarianism as a oppositional language within the Dutch Republic, and on the exchange of radical religious and political ideas between England and the Dutch Republic during the early Enlightenment.

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