

## ‘I am happy that Italy fosters such exquisite minds’

### Gijsbert Cuper (1644-1716) and intellectual life on the Italian peninsula

Jetze Touber\*

Gijsbert Cuper (Hemmen 1644-Deventer 1716) was a Dutch statesman and scholar, with three great qualities: he was a tireless communicator, an efficient organizer, and a versatile savant. His paper legacy testifies to all three qualities. He had over a hundred manuscripts, on topics as diverse as antique navigation, a newly discovered manuscript of Church Father Lactantius, and the nature of the Palmyrene alphabet.<sup>1</sup> The remaining correspondence contains thousands of incoming and outgoing letters which Cuper exchanged with learned and influential men all over Europe, and beyond. Cuper experimented with ways of archiving this immense correspondence.<sup>2</sup> Historians have studied only parts of Cuper’s extensive network of correspondents: his prolonged exchange with the Amsterdam merchant and burgomaster Nicolaas Witsen (1641-1717), his Swedish contacts, his correspondents in the Huguenot diaspora, and his exchanges with the Levant.<sup>3</sup> Virtually unexplored, however, are Cuper’s numerous epistolary contacts on the Italian peninsula.

The letters exchanged by Italian scholars with an intellectual jack-of-all-trades such as Cuper enrich our understanding of how minds south of the Alps related to international debates about rationalism, experimental science, biblical criticism and world religions, debates which modern historians consider proper to the Early

---

\* This article is part of a wider investigation of Dutch-Italian intellectual exchange around 1700, centred on Gijsbert Cuper. See also: J. Touber, ‘Religious Interests and Scholarly Exchange in the Early Enlightenment Republic of Letters: Italian and Dutch Scholars, 1675-1715’, in: *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 50, 2 (2014), pp. 411-436.

<sup>1</sup> The majority of Cuper’s manuscripts, as well as his correspondence, are kept in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Royal Library), The Hague (henceforth: KB). See for a recent assessment H. J. Cook, *Assessing the Truth: Correspondence and Information at the End of the Golden Age*, Leiden, Primavera Pers, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> M. Peters, “*Mercator Sapiens*” (*De Wijze Koopman*): *Het wereldwijde onderzoek van Nicolaes Witsen (1641-1717), Burgemeester en VOC-Bewindhebber van Amsterdam*, proefschrift Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2008, 194-195.

<sup>3</sup> P. Rietbergen, ‘C.C. Rumpf, G. Cuper and Cultural Relations between Sweden and the Dutch Republic during the Last Quarter of the 17th Century’, in: J. Lemmink & J. van Koningsbrugge (eds.), *Baltic Affairs*, Nijmegen, s.n., 1990, 315-42; A. Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680-1750*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995; Peters, “*Mercator Sapiens*”, cit.; B. Chen, ‘Politics and Letters: Gisbert Cuper as a Servant of Two Republics’, in: M. Keblusek & B. Noldus (eds.), *Double Agents: Cultural and Political Brokerage in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden, Brill, 2011, pp. 71-93.

Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup> The fact that Cuper's Italian contacts have been overlooked seems representative of a more general neglect of Northwestern European fascination for the Italian peninsula as an intellectual resource in this period. Within the context of the Dutch Republic, historiographical excitement over Cartesian and Spinozist philosophy, experimental sciences and non-Western overseas imports have eclipsed the continued engagement of Dutch academics with Italian classical scholarship in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Whereas the Grand Tour as an extension of elite character building has been in the limelight, the continued scholarly engagement with classical culture and its intellectual custodians among Dutch intellectuals has been left virtually unexplored.<sup>6</sup>

In this article I examine the intellectual exchange transpiring from the correspondence of Gijsbert Cuper with Italian scholars. Rather than a programme of scientific experimentation or political reform, the matters discussed often concern specific books and objects: new publications, enigmatic antiquities, at first sight endless and, at times, rather pointless ruminations on new editions and classical inscriptions, coins and other artefacts. By working out the personal interests of the participants involved, we can appreciate how both gained from exchanges of knowledge – each for different reasons, determined by their proper intellectual habitats. Instead of reading the letters exchanged between Cuper and his Italian pen friends in terms of the correspondents' stronger or weaker integration in international intellectual developments, it may be profitable to consider the distinct effects of their communications locally, on either side of the correspondence. This article suggests that whereas on the Dutch side epistolary exchange advanced the standing of the scholar among his peers, in the vein of the '(im)polite learning' explored by Anne Goldgar, on the Italian side the same exchange fuelled an intricate struggle for recognition within a hierarchical courtly culture, in line with the 'instruments of credit' reconstructed by Mario Biagioli.<sup>7</sup>

### Intellectual progress and backwardness

The intellectual climate of the Italian Peninsula in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries has a bad press. In general, the image of intellectual paralysis in the wake of the Galileo trial still persists. Institutionalised suppression of new ideas supposedly closed off Italian scholars from developments abroad.<sup>8</sup> Grand synthetic theories about the structure of the universe and of matter were reputedly eschewed, in favour of specific observations and experiments, of little value in the absence of a broader programme – suggesting that Italian natural philosophy in the Baroque period was myopic and fragmented.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the metaphysical and

---

<sup>4</sup> See for a broad panorama of Europe-wide intellectual developments in this period: J. I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> J. Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, London, Reaktion Books, 2011, pp. 154-159; M. Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: the Golden Age*, trans. Diane L. Webb, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 222-250.

<sup>6</sup> J. Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003, pp. 1-16; M.G. Brennan, *The Origins of the Grand Tour: The Travels of Robert Montagu, Lord Mandeville (1649-1654), William Hammond (1655-1658), Banaster Maynard (1660-1663)*, London, The Hakluyt Society, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Goldgar, *Impolite Learning*, cit., pp. 1-11; M. Biagioli, *Galileo's Instruments of Credit: Telescopes, Images, Secrecy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp. 21-44.

<sup>8</sup> A. Del Col, *L'Inquisizione in Italia*, Milan, Mondadori, 2006, pp. 639, 666-686, 688-689.

<sup>9</sup> W. B. Ashworth Jr, 'Catholicism and Early Modern Science' in: D.C. Lindberg & R.L. Numbers (eds.), *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986, pp. 136-166.

epistemological innovations of the seventeenth century of the likes of Descartes, Spinoza and Locke, hardly seemed to permeate Italian circles.<sup>10</sup> The experience of an open-minded scholar such as the Florentine librarian Antonio Magliabechi (1633-1714) partly seems to corroborate this – he lamented the poor distribution in Italy of foreign titles, as well as the mediocre quality of scholarly publications originating from the peninsula.<sup>11</sup>

An important characteristic of intellectual life in Italy was the continued proliferation of specialized scholarly societies, the *accademie*, which were often organized locally. In Florence, for instance, the *Accademia della Crusca* kept watch over the literary and linguistic patrimony, while the *Accademia del Cimento* kept interest in natural experimentation alive after the condemnation of Galileo – until its disbandment in the second half of the seventeenth century. In Rome there were similar gatherings. The *Accademia dell’Arcadia* brought together the fine fleur of Roman erudition and literary taste. The *Accademia Fisicomatematica* was an informal circle of experimentalists in Rome. Yet according to Hanns Gross, the dominance of the *accademie* is illustrative of the ‘sad state of the Italian universities of the day’, without taking into consideration that contemporary academies in France and England are often considered as the embodiment of scientific advancement, rather than sclerosis.<sup>12</sup>

Cuper’s epistolary dealings with Italians testify to the importance of the academies. Cuper had read the travelogue of François Maximilien Misson (1650-1722), who had travelled the Italian peninsula in 1688.<sup>13</sup> Cuper was struck by Misson’s opinion that the curious names adopted by Italian academies were bizarre and worthy of horses rather than scholars:

La Bizarrerie des noms, que ces gens la affectent, est une chose toute particuliere. En France nos Ecuers en donnent a peu pres semblables a leurs chevaux de manege. Je vous nommeray seulement une douzaine de ces Academies. Les Addormentati de Genes; les Ardenti de Naple, les Immobili d’Alexandrie, les Fantastici de Rome [etc.].<sup>14</sup>

Curious as he was about the Italian culture of learned academies, Cuper asked his earliest and most long-standing correspondent in Italy, Antonio Magliabechi, librarian to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, what the origins of this custom were. In response, Magliabechi explained that, while the names of the Italian Academies might sound ignominious, membership was, on the contrary, very honourable. The *Accademia della Crusca* (‘Academy of the Chaff’), for instance, was so named because its members separated the wheat from the chaff in lexicographic and idiomatic matters.<sup>15</sup> Cuper’s interest was aroused: he later sounded out the intellectual society around Giovanni Giustino Ciampini (1633-1698), founder of the *Conferenza dei*

---

<sup>10</sup> H. Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment: The Post-Tridentine Syndrome and the Ancien Regime*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 253, 259.

<sup>11</sup> F. Waquet, *Le modèle Français et l’Italie Savante: Conscience de soi et perception de l’autre dans La République Des Lettres (1660-1750)*, Rome, École française de Rome, 1989, p. 63; Magliabechi lamented about the few books arriving from abroad, and the meagre scholarship of his own compatriots, in letters to Cuper, e.g. A. Magliabechi to G. Cuper, 2 December 1692, KB ms. 72 D 10, ff. 78ro-78vo.

<sup>12</sup> Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment*, cit., pp. 247-248.

<sup>13</sup> François Maximilien Misson, *Nouveau voyage d’Italie, fait en L’année 1688*, 2 vol., The Hague, H. van Bulderen, 1691.

<sup>14</sup> G. Cuper to A. Magliabechi, March/April 1692, KB ms. 72 D 11, ff. 42vo-43ro. See Misson, *Nouveau voyage*, II, p. 216.

<sup>15</sup> A. Magliabechi to G. Cuper, 12 April 1692, KB ms. 72 D 10, ff. 68vo-69ro.

*Concili* and the *Accademia Fisicomatematica* in Rome, about the possibility of himself becoming a corresponding fellow.<sup>16</sup>

This very interest of Cuper in associating himself with the Roman intellectual elite is indicative of his ambition to gain acknowledgement of his scholarly standing in as wide an area as possible. However, scholarly associations on the Italian peninsula tended to be fickle and short-lived, dependent as they often were on local patrons who supported them to procure cultural capital for themselves rather than social utility for their subjects. Ciampini's gatherings were no exception, fading away after their founder's demise, precluding the formal inclusion of Cuper as an associate.<sup>17</sup>

Cuper and Magliabechi exchanged letters during a period of thirty-five years. During the first twenty-five years the letters often amounted to bibliographic bulletins, containing lists of worthy publications which had recently appeared in their respective home regions. Despite the novelty of literary journals, which started to appear in Italy as well as in Northwestern Europe, the circulation of such letters remained an important medium of access to literary news for decades. Repeatedly, Magliabechi forwarded Cuper's letters to fellow scholars all over Italy. Consequently, Florentine and Roman scholars took note of Cuper's communications with great interest. This becomes apparent from the response of the Roman curial officer Giusto Fontanini who had received a letter of Cuper from Magliabechi around New Year 1705. Fontanini replied to Magliabechi that the pope himself, Clement XI, had devoured Cuper's epistle, as had Fontanini's own patron, Cardinal Giuseppe Renato Imperiali (1651-1737).<sup>18</sup> Later Cuper clearly took great pride in the pope's interest, boasting about it to his visitor Zacharias Uffenbach in 1710.<sup>19</sup>

What did these men write about? In principle, the range of topics was boundless. Geography, for instance, was of great interest in an age in which increasing overseas travel stimulated interest in foreign peoples and cultures. One longstanding friendship cherished by Cuper was with Nicolaas Witsen (1641-1717), an Amsterdam patrician active in commerce, who sat on the board of directors of the Dutch East India Company.<sup>20</sup> Witsen's family had commercial connections with Russia and he himself had travelled there in 1664-1665. For the rest of his life he would draw on his experiences in an ever expanding description of Russia, which included a detailed map of 'Tartary' (covering a large part of Asia), first published separately in 1687. This map was in demand, and in 1690 Magliabechi wrote to Cuper that he would be delighted to obtain a copy. After a year and a half Magliabechi received a package with maps of Tartary from Cuper.

This valuable source of geographical information soon made its way to those in power, and to those in the know. For instance, Magliabechi forwarded one copy to Enrico Noris (1633-1704), an eminent Augustinian, who was First Custodian of the Vatican Library and created cardinal in 1695. In Rome, Noris had cardinals and other

---

<sup>16</sup> H. Copes to G. Cuper, 15 may 1696, KB ms. 72 C 38, f. 220ro; G. Cuper to H. Copes, 6 / 16 june 1696, KB ms. 72 C 38, f. 207vo.

<sup>17</sup> On Ciampini and his intellectual entourage, see K. Middleton, 'Science in Rome', 1675-1700, and the *Accademia Fisicomatematica* of Giovanni Giustino Ciampini', in: *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 8 (1975), pp. 138-154; V. Ferrone, *Scienza natura religione: mondo newtoniano e cultura italiana nel primo settecento*, Napoli, Jovene Editore, 1982, pp. 11-23.

<sup>18</sup> A. Magliabechi to G. Cuper, 14 February 1704, KB ms. 72 D 12, f. 94ro.

<sup>19</sup> M. Peters, 'Nicolaes Witsen and Gijsbert Cuper: Two Seventeenth-Century Dutch Burgomasters and Their Gordian Knot,' in: *Lias: Sources and Documents Relating to the Early Modern History of Ideas*, 16, 1 (1989), pp. 111-150 (116).

<sup>20</sup> See for Witsen: Peters, "*Mercator Sapiens*", cit.

distinguished Romans admire the map. In Florence, Magliabechi himself showed it to the household of the Grand Duke and to fellow scholars. A Swedish diplomat arranged for the map to be lent to Giacomo Cantelli (1643-1695), ducal cartographer of Modena, who returned it a few days later, after copying it so as to make a reduced reproduction.<sup>21</sup> Thus, within two years some of the major intellectual centres on the Italian peninsula gained access to this cartographic representation of Russia, through the correspondence of Cupper and Magliabechi.

Besides geography, scholars shared a lively interest in astronomy and physics. The letters exchanged between Magliabechi and Cupper bears witness to this, as well. In the years 1680 to 1682, for instance, Europeans were repeatedly held in awe by the appearance of bright comets in the sky, which led to a torrent of publications.<sup>22</sup> In Italy, several astronomers partook of this flurry of editorial activity. Geminiano Montanari (1633-1687), professor of astronomy and meteorology in Padua, published several essays which he had sent as letters to Magliabechi, who sent Cupper copies of these works. Magliabechi also informed Cupper that the professor in Padua was composing another treatise on the subject, and asked for anything Dutch scholars might have written on the same topic.<sup>23</sup>

Cupper reacted enthusiastically: he was impressed with the clever and profound way in which Montanari discussed the comet. 'I am happy that Italy fosters such exquisite minds', he wrote to Magliabechi.<sup>24</sup> However, when Magliabechi requested information from the Dutch Republic, Cupper responded with the news that a French book by an anonymous author had appeared which was highly critical of the interpretation of comets as bad omens, an interpretation endorsed by Montanari.<sup>25</sup>

This anonymous author – as Cupper knew very well – was Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), who had rejected any interpretation of natural phenomena as portents of catastrophe in his *Lettre à M.L.A.D.C., docteur de Sorbonne* (1682).<sup>26</sup> This is one of the first publications in which Bayle expressed his skeptical attitude *vis-à-vis* traditional beliefs about natural phenomena, in favor of philosophical reasoning. The different viewpoints of Bayle and Montanari might seem to confirm the relative backwardness of Italian astronomy.<sup>27</sup> However, Cupper himself was no convert to the new, rational investigation of the regularities of nature, either. In 1684 he congratulated Bayle with his work, but not without adding that ancient authors corroborated his interpretation. After all, they allowed for comets to presage

---

<sup>21</sup> A. Magliabechi to G. Cupper, 26 February 1690, KB ms. 72 D 10, ff. 44vo-45ro; 11 September 1691, KB ms. 72 D 10, ff. 56vo-57ro; 28 June 1692, KB ms. 72 D 10, f. 77ro; 28 October 1692, KB ms. 72 D 10, f. 81ro; 2 December 1692, KB ms. 72 D 10, ff. 78vo-79ro. See for Noris and his controversial theological career: M. Wernicke, *Kardinal Enrico Noris und seine Verteidigung Augustins*, Würzburg, Augustinus-Verlag, 1973.

<sup>22</sup> A. Fix, 'Bekker and Bayle on comets', in: *Geschiedenis van de Wijsbegeerte in Nederland*, 11 (2000), pp. 81-96; E. Jorink, *Het 'Boeck der Natuere'. Nederlandse geleerden en de wonderen van Gods schepping 1575-1715*, Leiden, Primavera Pers, 2006, pp. 172-183.

<sup>23</sup> A. Magliabechi to G. Cupper, 4 March 1680, KB ms. 72 D 10, f. 16ro; 17 October 1682, KB ms. 72 D 10, f. 9ro.

<sup>24</sup> G. Cupper to A. Magliabechi, 31 May / 10 June 1681, KB ms. 72 D 11, f. 6ro.

<sup>25</sup> G. Cupper to A. Magliabechi, 15 / 25 December 1682, KB ms. 72 D 11, f. 9ro.

<sup>26</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Lettre à M.L.A.D.C., docteur de Sorbonne*, Cologne [= Rotterdam], P. Marteau [= Reinier Leers], 1682; the letter is better known by the title of the second edition of 1683, Pierre Bayle, *Pensées diverses, écrites à un docteur de Sorbonne, à l'occasion de la comète qui parut au mois de Decembre 1680*, Rotterdam, Reinier Leers, 1683.

<sup>27</sup> Jorink, *Het 'Boeck der Natuere'*, cit., pp. 172-185.

fortunate events, as well as disasters.<sup>28</sup> That was hardly the disenchanting view of celestial phenomena which Bayle has come to represent nowadays.

### Classical antiquities

The majority of the information which Cuper and Magliabechi exchanged, concerned historical and antiquarian scholarship. They seem to have pursued different objectives with their epistolary communication. Magliabechi strove, first and foremost, to keep abreast of the latest scholarly publications. His letters testify to an unquenchable thirst for news about works published north of the Alps. Cuper, on the other hand, seems to have had a more narrowly defined interest, determining the circumscribed subject matter of their correspondence. Cuper devoted his scholarly life to the reconstruction of ancient history to the minutest detail. This alerted him to publications appearing in Italy, but also to newly discovered antiquities, and to people whose expertise might be of interest. Thus, the correspondence benefited Magliabechi because of Cuper's close connections with the European book market, while it benefitted Cuper because Magliabechi could procure him books, but also contacts and news pertaining to antiquarian studies.

One antiquarian project that illustrates how both sides profited from this epistolary exchange within their own particular frame, concerns the *Apotheosis Homeri*. The *Apotheosis* was a Hellenistic relief sculpted in marble, about which Cuper published a treatise in 1683. The relief had been discovered in 1658 near Rome, in the countryside of Marino, a property of the Colonna family. The Colonna obtained the relief and moved it to the Palazzo Colonna in Rome. The first to study the relief was Marcello Severoli (1644-1707), an official in the Roman Curia in the orbit of Colonna patronage, and later a member of the *Accademia dell'Arcadia*.

Severoli never got round to publishing his findings, but he did produce an engraving of the original. The Jesuit Athanasius Kircher got hold of this engraving and inserted it in his book *Latium* (1671), adding a chapter in which he explained the figures represented on the sculpture (Fig. 1). The engraving was in fact a visual re-interpretation of the original, currently in the British Museum, which is damaged in many details (Fig. 2).

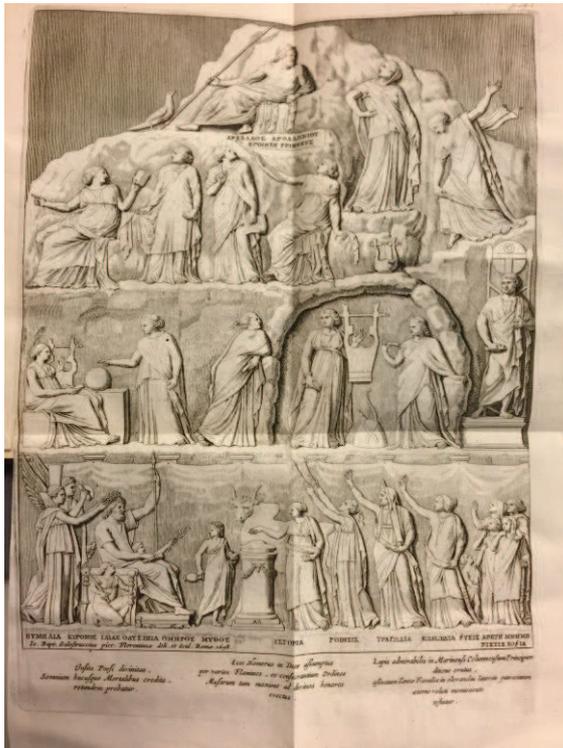


Fig. 1 artist unknown, Apotheosis of Homer, engraving, reproduced in Athanasius Kircher, *Latium, Id Est Nova et Parallela Latii Tum Veteris Tum Novi Descriptio*, Amsterdam, J. Janssonius à Waesberge, 1671, as well as in Gijsbert Cuper, *Apotheosis Vel Consecratio Homeri*, Amsterdam, Boom, 1683 (photo public domain).

<sup>28</sup> G. Cuper to P. Bayle, 2 August 1684, in: P. Bayle, *Correspondance de Pierre Bayle*, E. Labrousse (†) & A. McKenna (eds.), Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 2007, V, nr. 309.

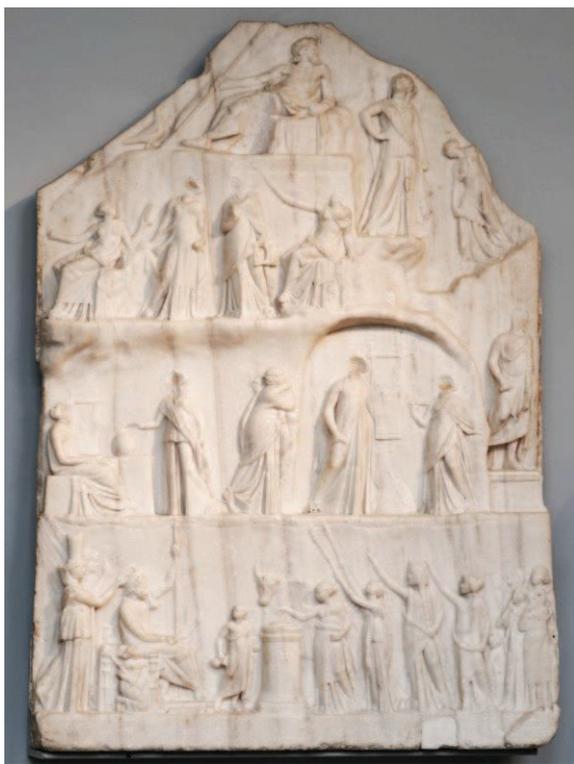


Fig. 2 Archelaus of Priene, Apotheosis of Homer, marble relief, third century BCE, British Museum, registration number 1819,0812.1 (photo public domain).

The relief is a rather complex composition which led to many scholarly debates. According to Kircher's interpretation, it represents a mountain, with figures on three levels. Kircher interpreted this as a representation of Mount Parnassus, with Jupiter sitting on top. In the lower left corner Homer sits enthroned, while behind him a figure crowns him with laurels, and personifications of the poet's virtues approach him with offerings.<sup>29</sup>

Kircher dedicated only a few pages to the *Apotheosis Homeri*, and antiquarians were tempted to improve on the Jesuit's interpretation. As Cuper noted in the book he published twelve years later, several scholars were involved in a more extensive explanation of the relief. He justified his own publication on the marble relief by pointing out that others - notably the aforementioned Severoli, Ezechiel Spanheim (1629-1710), and Ottavio Falconieri (1636-1675) - had died, or lacked the time to publish their observations.<sup>30</sup> Therefore Cuper

published his own interpretation, which differed greatly from that of Kircher. The figure sitting on the mountain top was Homer himself, holding the god's attributes - except for the thunder bolt - and reclining in a sublime position on Mount Olympus.<sup>31</sup>

At the end of his survey of the *Apotheosis*, Cuper added some considerations which others had communicated to him just before his manuscript was sent to the printer. One of these was a short illustrated commentary written by Abbot Raffaele Fabretti (1618-1700), forwarded in 1682 by Magliabechi to Cuper.<sup>32</sup> Fabretti claimed that more than once he had inspected the marble personally, together with Severoli, at the Palazzo Colonna, which had induced him to emend Kircher's analysis in several aspects. For instance, according to Fabretti, Kircher had falsely identified the figure who stood behind Homer's throne and crowned the poet, as the 'genius Eumelia'. Fabretti's improved reading identified the figure as 'Mother Earth', also known in

<sup>29</sup> A. Kircher, *Latium, Id Est Nova et Parallela Latii Tum Veteris Tum Novi Descriptio*, Amsterdam, J. Janssonius à Waesberge, 1671, pp. 81-87. See H.B. Evans, *Exploring the Kingdom of Saturn: Kircher's "Latium" and Its Legacy*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2012. The British Museum acquired the marble relief in 1819 from French art dealers (registration number 1819,0812.1). For Severoli's abortive plans, see KB ms. 72 D 10, f. 3ro.

<sup>30</sup> Cuper knew of Severoli's abandoned endeavour (see below); Spanheim sent Cuper some of his own observations, to be inserted in Cuper's publication: Gijsbert Cuper, *Apotheosis Vel Consecratio Homeri*, Amsterdam, Boom, 1683, pp. 193-194; already in 1673 Nicolaas Heinsius (1620-1681) had inquired on Cuper's behalf if Falconieri had anything on the *Apotheosis* which might appear in print: N. Heinsius to O. Falconieri, 2 June 1673, Leiden University Library ms. BUR Q 14, ff. 13vo-14vo.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 14-15, 25.

<sup>32</sup> KB ms. 72 D 10, ff. 6ro, 8ro.

Antiquity as Cybele, Rhea, or Isis. To prove this, he pointed to the headgear which the figure was wearing, a kind of tower, which Kircher had failed to explain: Egyptians used to depict Isis with a bushel on her head. Gratefully Cuper reproduced these and other corrections, unaltered, in his *Apotheosis Homeri*, as well as the accompanying drawings.<sup>33</sup>

There is a hint of scholarly machinations in the dealings with the marble relief. Both Fabretti and Severoli were protégés of the powerful Cardinal Gaspare Carpegna (1625-1714), and both were to become members of the famous literary circle of the *Arcadia*.<sup>34</sup> Severoli, who provided Kircher with the engraving, and who joined Fabretti in examining the relief, had been preparing his own commentary on the *Apotheosis Homeri*. In Florence, Magliabechi had found out through an intermediary that Severoli had never come very far with his treatise and confided to Cuper that he did not think that Severoli had ever actually put a word on paper.<sup>35</sup> More generally, the posthumously published biography of Severoli implied that he had not lived up to expectations either as a scholar or as a curial officer.<sup>36</sup>

With Severoli underachieving both scholarly and professionally, it may not be surprising that Fabretti resorted to Cuper to have his remarks on the *Apotheosis* published. By sending his remarks to The Hague, by mediation of Magliabechi, at least Fabretti ensured that his own observations saw the light, circumventing the delicate web of patronage and precedence proper to the Roman world of scholarship.<sup>37</sup> In that way, indirectly Fabretti's notes would come to the attention of the icon in the history of art Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768). Winckelmann consulted Cuper's *Apotheosis Homeri*, as is clear from excerpts he wrote down in a notebook, currently in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.<sup>38</sup> In fact, Cuper's observations on the coiffure of the figure of Tragedy on the *Apotheosis* prompted Winckelmann to compare that figure with a sculpture found in Stabia, near Pompeii and Herculaneum.<sup>39</sup> Fabretti may not have had a profound influence on Winckelmann's appraisal of Greek sculpture, but at least through Cuper's book Winckelmann must have been aware of the Urbiniate's corrections of Kircher.

The case of the *Apotheosis* shows a certain asymmetry in the way antiquarians operated in Italy and in the Dutch Republic. Cuper who was internationally active, profited from his Italian connections to make himself indispensable in the European

---

<sup>33</sup> Cuper, *Apotheosis*, pp. 194-200; the original commentary of Fabretti is in KB ms. 72 D 3, ff. 75ro-75vo.

<sup>34</sup> G. Romeo, 'Carpegna, Gaspare' in: *DBI*, XX (1977), pp. 589-591.

<sup>35</sup> A. Magliabechi to G. Cuper, 22 March 1677, KB ms. 72 D 10, ff. 2ro-3ro; for Carpegna's antiquarian programme: C. Benocci, 'Il cardinale Gaspare di Carpegna tra rinnovamento religioso e collezionismo archeologico illuminato: una figura di mediazione attenta al mondo spagnolo,' in: José Beltrán Fortes, ed., *Iluminismo e ilustración: le antichità e i loro protagonisti in Spagna e in Italia nel XVIII secolo*, Roma, Erma di Bretschneider, 2003, pp. 65-83.

<sup>36</sup> G.M. Crescimbeni, 'Vita di Monsignor Marcello Severoli Romano' in: *Idem, Le vite degli Arcadi illustri*, Rome: A. De' Rossi, 1710, II, pp. 275-294.

<sup>37</sup> See for Fabretti's combative *modus operandi* in antiquarian scholarship: I. Herklotz, 'Bellori, Fabretti and Trajan's column' in: J. Bell & T. Willette (eds.), *Art History in the Age of Bellori: Scholarship and Cultural Politics in Seventeenth-Century Rome*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 128-44.

<sup>38</sup> J.J. Winckelmann, 'Notes sur les antiquités grecques et romaines' in: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. Allemand 63, ff. 22vo-27ro ('Gisberti Cuperi apotheosis Homeri'). On Winckelmann see D.J. Boorstin, *The Discoverers: a History of Man's Search to Know His World and Himself*, New York, Random House, 1983, p. 584; T. DaCosta Kaufman, 'Antiquarianism, the History of Objects, and the History of Art before Winckelmann', in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62 (2001), pp. 523-541 (523).

<sup>39</sup> J.J. Winckelmann, *Johann Joachim Winckelmann on Art, Architecture, and Archeology*, trans. D. R. Carter, Rochester, Camden House, 2013, p. 209.

Republic of Letters. His expanding network of Italian correspondents increased his importance to local academics, such as the orientalist Jacobus Rhenferd (1654-1712) and Adriaan Reland (1676-1718), and put him on a par with the likes of Ezechiel Spanheim (1629-1710) and Mathurin Veyssière de La Croze (1661-1739).<sup>40</sup> Fabretti's engagement with the *Apotheosis* initially had a much more local scope, like his works on the topography of Lazio and on the Roman aqueducts. Having inspected the marble relief together with Severoli at the Palazzo Colonna, it would have been more straightforward to pass on his observations to this fellow protégé of Cardinal Carpegna, who after all was supposed to publish a commentary on the *Apotheosis* anyway. When it was clear that that would lead nowhere, once informed that Magliabechi corresponded with the Dutch scholar, Fabretti seized on the opportunity to work around Severoli and to get his notes published abroad.

### Biblical criticism

The interest in *Apotheosis Homeri* concerned the identification of the deities depicted on the relief, and the interpretation of their allegorical significance. Italian and Dutch scholars tended to be reticent in their communications about historical and antiquarian issues with more acute cultural and social implications. It is therefore significant to find one reference to debates about the authenticity of the Bible in Cuper's letter to Magliabechi, which subsequently circulated in other circles due to its publication in a journal.

In 1692 Magliabechi passed on a letter from Cuper to Benedetto Bacchini (1651-1721), a Benedictine who had just started to publish the *Giornale de' Letterati*, based in Parma and Modena.<sup>41</sup> In the third issue of the Parma/Modena *Giornale de' Letterati* Bacchini included an excerpt from this letter, translated into Italian.<sup>42</sup> Cuper mentioned a set of publications and projects which dealt plainly with the status and authenticity of the Bible. He signalled the appearance of a work by the Utrecht professor of theology, Herman Witsius, which sought to 'protect the authors of the Sacred Books, Moses and others, against the arrows of Spinoza, Simon and others, who would wish for nothing more than shattering the authority of those men.'<sup>43</sup> This work was Witsius's *Miscellaneorum sacrorum libri IV* (1692), in which the author railed against the critics who infamously speculated about authorship of the first books of the Old Testament, capitalising on problems with the traditional attribution to Moses: Hobbes, Spinoza, Simon, as well as the Amsterdam based Remonstrant from Geneva, Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736).<sup>44</sup> In the same letter, Cuper

<sup>40</sup> Goldgar, *Impolite learning*, pp. 30-33; for the contacts Cuper inherited from Nicolaas Heinsius, Johann Friedrich and Jacobus Gronovius, see: Touber, 'Religious Interest and Scholarly Exchange', *Rivista della Storia*, 68 (2014), pp. 411-436.

<sup>41</sup> Another journal with that title had appeared in Rome between 1668 and 1681, edited from 1675 onward by Ciampini; see Gardair, *Le "Giornale de' Letterati" de Rome (1668-1681)*, Florence, Olschki, 1984, p. 30; B.M. Dooley, *Science, Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Italy: The Giornale de' Letterati d'Italia and Its World*, New York, Garland, 1991, pp. 37-61.

<sup>42</sup> A. Magliabechi to G. Cuper, 12 April 1692, KB ms. 72 D 10, ff. 68ro, 71ro-72vo; the extract appeared as 'Estratto d'una dottissima epistola latina scritta dal Sig. Gisberto Cuperò sotto li 2. di Gennaio del presente anno al Sig. Antonio Magliabechi, e da questo con la solita incredibile sua bontà comunicatoci, con altre molte novità letterarie, che riserbiamo à sequenti Giornali' in: *Giornale de' Letterati* 1 (1692), pp. 97-100.

<sup>43</sup> 'Sacrorum Voluminum conditores, Mosen, et alios tuetur a telis Spinosae, Simonis, aliorumque; quibus nihil antiquius videtur, quam eorum virorum auctoritatem pessundare', G. Cuper to A. Magliabechi, 2/12 January 1692, f. 40ro.

<sup>44</sup> Herman Witsius, *Miscellaneorum sacrorum libri IV* (Utrecht, F. Halma, 1692); for Witsius's attack on the biblical critics, see M. C. Pitassi, *Entre croire et savoir. Le problème de la méthode critique chez Jean le Clerc*, Leiden, Brill, 1987, pp. 28-29; more generally for the issue of the Mosaic authorship of

observed that parts of Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire* began to be published, and noted plans of the Oxford biblical scholar John Mill (1644/5-1707) to publish the New Testament.

Critical reflection on the history and constitution of the biblical text was one of the main lines along which the intellectuals during the seventeenth century debated the nature of the Christian religion and its claims to truth. In these debates, the importance of the interventions of controversial thinkers, such as Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), Benedictus de Spinoza (1632-1677) and Richard Simon (1638-1712), are central in current historiography.<sup>45</sup> This is typically depicted as a development in early modern intellectual culture in which England and the Dutch Republic seemed to take centre stage, and to a lesser extent France and the German territories. Judging from current historiography, Italians hardly played a role in early modern debates on biblical criticism.

In fact, the extent to which biblical criticism, and in particular the works in this area of Spinoza, Simon and Le Clerc, provoked discussion among Italian clergy and laity, is not quite clear. The prevailing idea is that there was little public debate over the authenticity and divine inspiration of biblical texts before 1725, when Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), the representative of the Neapolitan Enlightenment, published his *Principi di una scienza nuova*.<sup>46</sup> In this complex work Vico suggests that religious imagery functioned as cognitive aids in various cultures and religions, Christian and otherwise, before they fully developed rational modes of explaining phenomena. This implied that biblical histories, precepts and parables were of no more spiritual or moral value than other religious texts – a suggestion which was reminiscent of biblical criticism of Hobbes and Spinoza, even though the actual correspondence between the hermeneutics of these authors is debated.

As for the French Oratorian Richard Simon – the other critic whom Cuper mentioned explicitly, known for the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, 1678 – his work was present in many Italian libraries. There it tended to stand shoulder to shoulder with the famous works of 'Gallican erudition', which included the Patristic editions of the Maurists of Saint-Germain, Jean Mabillon (1632-1707) and Bernard de Montfaucon (1655-1741).<sup>47</sup> Simon thus appears to have been ranged by Italian librarians with French clerical historiography, rather than with biblical criticism.

Through a reference such as Cuper's, pressing controversies from Northwest European intellectual culture were signalled south of the Alps, after all. Cuper drew attention to the turmoil caused by biblical criticism, propounded, among others, by Spinoza and Simon. However, it was rendered inconspicuous by the fact that the *Giornale de' Letterati* truncated Cuper's notice about Witsius's book against

the first five books of the Old Testament in Hobbes, Spinoza, Simon, Le Clerc and Calmet: J. Bernier, *La critique du Pentateuque de Hobbes à Calmet*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2010.

<sup>45</sup> The bibliography on biblical criticism in the early modern period is vast, see e.g. J. Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005; P. Gibert, *L'invention critique de la Bible: XVe-XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, Gallimard, 2010; M. C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010; D. Levitin, 'From Sacred History to the History of Religion: Paganism, Judaism, and Christianity in European Historiography from Reformation to "Enlightenment"', in: *The Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), pp. 1117-1161 (1123-1141).

<sup>46</sup> Israel, *The Radical Enlightenment*, cit., pp. 664-683; cf. J.C. Morrison, 'Vico and Spinoza', in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 41 (1980), pp. 49-68 and E. Nuzzo, 'Between Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Italian Culture in the Early 1700s: Giambattista Vico and Paolo Mattia Doria', in: S. Mortimer & J. Robertson (eds.), *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy 1600-1750*, Leiden, Brill, 2012, pp. 204-234.

<sup>47</sup> Waquet, *Le modèle Français*, cit., pp. 90, 93, 95.

‘Spinoza, Simon, etc.’,<sup>48</sup> omitting the qualification ‘who would wish for nothing more than shattering the authority of [the biblical prophets]’. The editor of the journal, Bacchini, apparently had no wish to emphasise the central contention of the biblical critics to whom Witsius responded. If this seems an unprepossessing reference to pressing intellectual concerns, it is crucial to keep in mind that the more contentious biblical critics were discussed with great reservation by northern scholars, as well.

One debated aspect of the authority of the Old Testament that left traces in Italian philosophy, was the extent to which Moses’s laws derived, not from divine command, but from Egyptian precedent. This was a theme expounded in anti-clerical circles, famously in the tradition of the ‘three impostors’, the subject of a partly legendary treatise which staged Moses, Christ and Muhammed as political frauds.<sup>49</sup> However, it also elicited heated debate among members of ecclesiastical establishments, notably the Anglican divines John Spencer (1630-1693) and John Marsham (1602-1685).<sup>50</sup> The same Utrecht theologian Witsius, whom Cuper mentioned as defending Moses’s authority against ‘Spinoza, Simon, etc.’, wrote extensively against Spencer and Marsham, arguing that all claims of Egyptian seniority were based on late, Roman sources, and therefore invalid. A few decades later, Giambattista Vico, referred to this debate in his *Scienza Nuova*, claiming that he could improve on Witsius in countering the chronological reconstructions of Marsham and Spencer.<sup>51</sup> The letter of Cuper published in the *Giornale de’ Letterati* in 1692 was one channel through which Vico might have become acquainted with the work of the Reformed theologian from Utrecht.

The decades around 1700, which tend to be regarded as relatively poor in terms of Italian participation in European intellectual life, the correspondence of Cuper and Magliabechi ensured continued access to each other’s topical debates. At the same time, Bacchini’s treatment of Cuper’s letter raises the question whether, just like in the case of the *Apotheosis*, with regard to biblical criticism, there was an asymmetrical situation. It would require further detailed study of similar editorial interventions by the Benedictine journal editor, to be able to give a substantiated answer. As a professor of History, Bacchini served the educational institute of the duke of Modena, whose cartographer two years earlier had taken care to obtain the map of Tartary of Witsen for his patron. It would be worthwhile to explore the extent to which Bacchini’s output was conditioned by his proximity to the princely court. The entanglement of intellectual and socio-political interests would have been stronger in his case than for someone like Cuper. The latter also depended for his social position on his loyalty to an aristocratic ruler, but in his case it was William III, whose influence on intellectual life was diluted by the accumulation of intermediate administrative layers of the decentralised Dutch Republic.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> ‘Spinosa, e di Simone, &c.’ Cuper, ‘Estratto d’una dottissima epistola latina’, cit., p. 99.

<sup>49</sup> See for the complex history of the treatise, on the levels of both history of the book and intellectual history: S. Berti, F. Charles-Daubert, R.H. Popkin (eds.), *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought in Early-Eighteenth-Century Europe: Studies on the Traité des Trois Imposteurs*, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996.

<sup>50</sup> D. Stolzenberg, ‘John Spencer and the Perils of Sacred Philology’, in: *Past and Present*, 214 (2012), pp. 129-164; D. Levitin, ‘John Spencer’s *De Legibus Hebraeorum* (1683-85) and “Enlightened” Sacred History: a New Interpretation’, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 76 (2013), pp. 49-92.

<sup>51</sup> G. Vico, *Principi di una scienza nuova*, 2nd ed., Napoli, F. Mosca, 1730, p. 100.

<sup>52</sup> S. Bertelli, *Erudizione e storia in Ludovico Antonio Muratori*, Napoli, Istituto italiano per gli studi storici, 1960, pp. 16-25; A. Veenendaal sr., *Het dagboek van Gisbert Cuper, gedeputeerde te velde, gehouden in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden in 1706*, Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1950, pp. IX-XIII.

## Medieval history

In the course of his life, Cuper acquired several other Italian correspondents besides Magliabechi. For many of them, Magliabechi served as a go-between. We already encountered Raffaele Fabretti, the papal antiquarian, and Enrico Noris, the custodian of the Vatican library, with whom Cuper exchanged letters before 1700. After 1700, Cuper's list of acquaintances grew. He exchanged letters with, among others, Gian Domenico Passionei (1682-1761), a Papal diplomat who visited Cuper in Deventer when he resided in the Dutch Republic to observe the peace negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Utrecht (1713).<sup>53</sup> Francesco Bianchini (1662-1729), celebrated both for his astronomical and antiquarian investigations;<sup>54</sup> and Giusto Fontanini (1666-1736), a curial officer known for his scholarly defence of papal rights in Comacchio, a small seaport town on the Adriatic coast occupied by imperial troops in the War of the Spanish Succession.<sup>55</sup>

In the case of Fontanini, the political dispute between Pope Clemens XI and the ducal house of D'Este, backed by the Austrian emperor Joseph I (1678-1711), motivated a prolonged technical debate over medieval history.<sup>56</sup> A similar conflict between secular rulers and papal authority lay at the heart of another issue of medieval history, which involved the Tuscan Giovanni Vignoli (1667-1733), a little known correspondent of Cuper. Vignoli was a native of Pitigliano who embarked on a career as a lawyer and personal secretary to a number of Roman nobles before becoming Second Custodian of the Vatican Library in 1712.<sup>57</sup> Vignoli's work came to the attention of Cuper when the latter saw a 1703 prepublication of the former's antiquarian treatise, *De columna imperatoris Antonini Pii dissertatio*. Despite the fact that Vignoli intended to criticise Cuper, the Deventer antiquarian was eager to see the result of Vignoli's investigations.<sup>58</sup> Through mediation of Magliabechi and Fontanini, Cuper and Vignoli started a correspondence which lasted for about a decade.

In 1709 Vignoli published a book on the earliest known coins minted in Rome after the fall of the Roman Empire: *Antiquiores pontificum Romanorum denarii*. Cuper received a copy out of the hands of the diplomat Passionei.<sup>59</sup> The book contains a succinct overview of coins dating from the papacies of Hadrian I (pope 772-795) through Benedict VII (pope 974-983). As such it is in line with a renewed interest in the medieval history of Italy, famously pioneered by Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672-1750), the antagonist of Fontanini in the dispute over Comacchio.<sup>60</sup> And, as in the case of the diplomatic techniques developed by Muratori, this survey of early medieval coins served an acute political issue. In the midst of the War of the

---

<sup>53</sup> A. Caracciolo, *Domenico Passionei tra Roma e la Repubblica delle Lettere*, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1968, pp. 75-121.

<sup>54</sup> B. Sölch (ed.), *Francesco Bianchini (1662-1729) und die Anfänge öffentlicher Museen in Rom*, Munich, Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007; L. Ciancio & G.P. Romagnani (eds.), *Unità del sapere molteplicità dei saperi: Francesco Bianchini (1662-1729) tra natura, storia e religione*, Verona, QuiEdit, 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Bertelli, *Erudizione e storia*, pp. 148-160.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100-174.

<sup>57</sup> M. Rubino, *Per la storia della Biblioteca Vaticana: le carte di Giovanni Vignoli a Pitigliano*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Università degli Studi di Udine, 2008, pp. 28-29.

<sup>58</sup> G. Cuper to A. Magliabechi, 13/23 August 1704, KB ms. 72 D 12, ff. 63ro-63vo; the treatise appeared in 1705: Giovanni Vignoli, *De columna imperatoris Antonini Pii dissertatio*, Roma, F. Gonzaga, 1705.

<sup>59</sup> Giovanni Vignoli, *Antiquiores pontificum Romanorum denarii nunc primum in lucem editi notisque illustrati*, Roma, R. Bernabò, 1709; G. Cuper to G. Vignoli, 29 October / 8 November 1709, KB ms. 72 G 23-1.

<sup>60</sup> Bertelli, *Erudizione e storia*, cit., pp. 161-174; P. Von Moos, 'Muratori et les origines du médiévisme italien', in: *Romania*, 114 (1996), pp. 203-224.

Spanish Succession, such historical and antiquarian discussions served as intellectual weapons to justify military and diplomatic manoeuvres.

Vignoli attacked François Le Blanc, who had published his *Dissertation historique sur quelques monnoyes de Charlemagne, de Louis le Débonnaire, de Lothaire (...)* three decades earlier. Le Blanc's book had a revealing subtitle: 'Which Refutes the Opinion of Those Who Claim, that These Princes Have Never Had Any Authority in This City, Except by Consent of the Popes'. He aimed to prove that Charlemagne and his successors had been the sovereign rulers of Rome.<sup>61</sup> Le Blanc appealed to coins of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious and Lothaire, which had the inscription 'Sanctus Petrus', claiming that the emperors who allowed the minting of these coins must have held full sovereignty over Rome.<sup>62</sup>

Vignoli countered with his modest survey of early medieval papal coins. In the preface Vignoli justified his book on early medieval coins, which, despite being ugly, were still very useful. He relied on these coins since authentic written documents justifying the pope's territorial power were lacking and opponents of the temporal power of the papacy therefore had an easy job drawing the papal claims to authority in doubt. The authenticity of coins, however, was above any suspicion. Vignoli's intention was to show that in the Early Middle Ages the Bishop of Rome had held the right of mintage, in an uninterrupted line of succession which spanned the Carolingian and Ottonian ages. This would prove that the popes had always enjoyed full temporal sovereignty in Rome. In fact, he considered Le Blanc to have been completely mistaken in some of his attributions of early medieval Roman coins to Carolingian rulers. In reality, the 'S. Petrus' on the reverse indicated that they were really minted under papal authority.<sup>63</sup> Vignoli's numismatic interpretations thus served to buttress papal claims to temporal authority.

Cuper thanked Vignoli politely for sending him a copy of the numismatic treatise. He agreed with Vignoli that Le Blanc's attributions had been faulty. However, Cuper gently but resolutely rejected Vignoli's conclusions. Even if coins had been minted on the pope's initiative rather than the emperor's, the fact that they had the emperor's face and name stamped onto them, suggested that the pope recognised the emperor's ultimate sovereignty.

That notwithstanding, I also think it is beyond doubt, that the Roman, then the Greek, and in the end the German emperors, as well as the kings of Italy, had the ultimate authority in the City of Rome, as the ancient historians testify, as well as those of your own community afterwards. And I would surmise that it was for no other reason that the Roman pontiffs put the names and the faces of the emperors on their coins.<sup>64</sup>

Cuper realised that his answer might not be welcomed by his Italian friends. He anticipated as much in a letter to Mathurin Veyssière de La Croze (1661-1739), librarian to the King of Prussia:

---

<sup>61</sup> François Le Blanc, *Dissertation historique sur quelques monnoyes de Charlemagne, de Louis le Débonnaire, de Lothaire, et leurs successeurs, frappées dans Rome. Par lesquelles on refute l'opinion de ceux qui prétendent, que ces Princes n'ont jamais eu aucune autorité dans cette ville, que du consentement des Papes*, Paris, J.-B. Coignard, 1689.

<sup>62</sup> Le Blanc, *Dissertation historique*, cit., pp. 1-4, 72-74.

<sup>63</sup> Vignoli, *Antiquiores pontificum Romanorum denarii*, sig. a1ro-a6ro, pp. 7-17.

<sup>64</sup> G. Cuper to G. Vignoli, 29 October / 8 November 1709, KB ms. 72 G 23-1.

I do not think that this will please those in Rome, especially not the Pope, who honours me with his esteem, and who loves to read the letters which I send to the scholars of Rome and Italy [...] but for me the truth always has priority.<sup>65</sup>

What followed was a polite but inconclusive debate between Cuper and Vignoli. The latter considered Cuper's arguments a mere rehearsal of the *communis opinio* concerning imperial sovereignty in Rome, which deserved adjustment in light of the new numismatic evidence. However, Vignoli died before a new edition of the *Antiquiores pontificum Romanorum denarii* was printed, and his intention to include part of his correspondence with Cuper in the edition was never realised.<sup>66</sup>

The Vignoli-episode is the most poignant illustration of how one antiquarian issue – in this case the interpretation of numismatic features – had a very different import on either side of the correspondence. The appeal to coins, in the absence of reliable written documents, is typical of this period in which skepticism about historical texts drove scholars to search for solid evidence about the past in the form of material antiquities.<sup>67</sup> Vignoli partook of the 'antiquarian' turn in the study of the past, in the service of an acute political problem: the historical justification of the sovereignty of the popes in the Papal State. This issue which also involved the young medievalist Muratori – albeit in the enemy's camp. Vignoli was part of the curial machinery, and therefore directly touched by the issue of clerical authority, one of the key themes of the Early Enlightenment. In the Catholic context this issue led to discussions on the earliest history of the Papal State and early medieval history rather than on biblical matters, which is an important difference to anticlericalism in Northwestern Europe.<sup>68</sup> Thus for the Protestant Cuper, the discussion concerning the Carolingian coins was merely about numismatic virtuosity, offering an occasion to show his intellectual peers how well versed he was in the historical interpretation of coins. For the Catholic Vignoli it had a strong political significance.

## Conclusion

The epistolary contacts of Gijsbert Cuper with scholars on the Italian peninsula examined above, first of all with the Florentine librarian Antonio Magliabechi, but also with Giusto Fontanini, Raffaele Fabretti, Giovanni Vignoli – all scholars active in one way or another at the Papal court –, create an impression of intellectual life on the Italian peninsula which was anything but stagnant. Even if the Italian scholars tended to be on the receiving end, eager to know what happened on the other side of the Alps rather than themselves producing scholarship which made an impact, at the very least the epistolary communication shows that Italians were eager to now and to follow intellectual developments in the rest of Europe. The circles emanating

---

<sup>65</sup> G. Cuper, *Lettres de Critique, D'histoire, de Littérature, Etc. Écrites À Divers Savans de l'Europe*, Justinus de Beyer (ed.), Amsterdam, H. du Sauzet and W. Smith, 1742, pp. 46-47.

<sup>66</sup> G. Vignoli to G. Cuper, 8 January 1710, KB ms. 72 G 23-1. The new edition was G. Vignoli, *Antiquiores pontificum Romanorum denarii olim in lucem editi*, B. Fioravanti (ed.), Roma, R. Bernabò, 1734; cf. G. Vignoli to G. Cuper, 20 December 1709 [*i.e.* 1710], KB ms. 72 G 23-1.

<sup>67</sup> A. Momigliano, 'Ancient History and the Antiquarian', in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 13 (1950), pp. 285-315; C. Borghero, *La certezza e la storia: cartesianesimo, pirronismo e conoscenza storica*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1983; M. Völkel, 'Historischer Pyrrhonismus und Antiquarismus-Konzeption bei Arnaldo Momigliano', in: *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert*, 31 (2007), pp. 179-190; I. Herklotz, 'Arnaldo Momigliano's "Ancient History and the Antiquarian": A Critical Review', in: P. Miller (ed.), *Momigliano and Antiquarianism: Foundations of the Modern Cultural Sciences*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2007, pp. 127-153.

<sup>68</sup> S.J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003, pp. 178-185.

from the *Accademia Fisicomatematica*, the scholars aggregating as the *Accademia dell’Arcadia*, as well as the networks responsible for the various versions of the *Giornale de’ Letterati*, all testify to a lively interest in debates across Europe. Despite the limited scope of their actual interests, some of their communications would feed into ground breaking projects of the eighteenth century, such as the aesthetical revolution of Johann Joachim Winkelmann, and the philosophical history of Giambattista Vico.

Ancient culture was the topic most present in these exchanges, as was to be expected from Cuper, ‘le plus savant homme de notre temps dans les antiquités’ as Leibniz characterised him.<sup>69</sup> The issues Cuper discussed with his Italian correspondents often concerned specific details related to classical history and antiquities. By examining the correspondence more closely we manage to see wider social and political implications of some of the issues broached, such as the marble relief of the Colonna family, or the pontifical coins of Vignoli. Local circumstances dictated the immediate interests inspiring the communications. Magliabechi hungered for up-to-date bibliographic information. Fabretti needed an outlet for his critique of Kircher’s iconography. Vignoli sought authoritative backing for his pro-curialist arguments against a representative of Gallican autonomy. Cuper strengthened his position as an acknowledged agent in the international circulation of antiquarian knowledge. Societal and political concerns could be kept at a distance relatively easily from this virtual community – in accordance with the characteristics considered as proper to the Republic of Letters.<sup>70</sup>

Every participant thus made use of the exchanges to advance their own interests within their proper social contexts. The Italian correspondence of Cuper – of which we have merely scratched the surface – thus has the potential to show how single epistolary exchanges functioned differently in distinctive systems of knowledge management: a hub of the Republic of Letters located in the Dutch Republic, the court of the Grand Dukes in Florence, and the Papal court. Cuper used the novelties which came to his attention, as well as Italian appeals to his expertise, to his advantage in a competitive large-distance network of intellectual peers. Cuper’s Italian correspondents tended to work within more tight-knit, compact and hierarchical societies. Knowledge, politics and social standing were more heavily entangled at the courts of the Pope and the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Consequently, new scholarly input generated more complex and delicate interactions.

---

<sup>69</sup> G.W. Leibniz to L. Bourguet, December 1714, Leiden University Library ms. BPL 293 B, nr 8.

<sup>70</sup> A. Grafton, ‘A Sketch Map of a Lost Continent: The Republic of Letters’, in: *Republics of Letters*, 1 (2008), [http://arcade.stanford.edu/rofl\\_issue/volume-1-issue-1](http://arcade.stanford.edu/rofl_issue/volume-1-issue-1), accessed 21 October 2015.

### **Keywords**

Gijsbert Cuper (1644-1716), Antonio Magliabechi (1633-1714), Raffaele Fabretti (1618-1700), transnational correspondence, antiquarian scholarship

**Jetze Touber** wrote his doctoral thesis on the cult of the saints in Counter Reformation Rome, defended at the University of Groningen in 2009, published with Brill (Leiden 2014). Subsequently he has held research fellowships at Utrecht University, studying biblical criticism and antiquarianism in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Currently he is teaching at the Department of History at the University of Amsterdam.

Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam  
Spuistraat 134, 1012 VB  
Amsterdam (Netherlands)  
tjetze@gmail.com

### **RIASSUNTO**

#### **‘Sono lieto che Italia coltiva menti talmentequisite’**

**Gijsbert Cuper (1644-1716) e la vita intellettuale nella penisola italiana**

I contatti epistolari e gli scambi culturali tra l'Italia e i paesi dell'Europa del Nord-ovest a cavallo tra Sei- e Settecento – anni di gran fermento intellettuale – rischiano di passare in secondo piano, rispetto al vivo interesse storiografico per gli sviluppi settentrionali di questo periodo, il cosiddetto ‘illuminismo precoce’. Il fascino esercitato dalle filosofie razionaliste, dalle attività scientifiche e dalla consapevolezza crescente del mondo d'oltremare ha soppiantato l'interessamento per gli scambi continui tra studiosi di ambo i lati delle Alpi. In questo articolo si percorrono alcuni episodi di tale scambio, concentrandosi sulla rete epistolare di Gijsbert Cuper (1644-1716), un antiquario olandese orgoglioso dei suoi contatti italiani. Dall'analisi emerge come Cuper e i suoi corrispondenti – tra cui Antonio Magliabechi (1633-1714) e Raffaele Fabretti (1618-1700) – si sforzavano di far circolare informazioni editoriali e antiquarie, nonostante i ritmi diversi della vita intellettuale nei loro rispettivi territori. Risulta allo stesso tempo che gli interessi di Cuper e dei suoi corrispondenti italiani divergevano tra loro. Bisogna tener presente il contesto culturale di ogni singolo partecipante a questi scambi epistolari, per capire come le informazioni editoriali e antiquarie agivano in modo diverso, a seconda dell'individuo che le adoperava.