

## Appendix: A Letter by Hendrick van Steenwijck the Younger from 1632

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MS

Ashmole 1399, part II, fol 104 r-v (Henri vom Steenwijck to Theodorus Gravius, May 18, 1632); 20 cm in height, ca. 22 cm in width

Written in a quick cursive hand, folded, with address on the exterior; closed with a wax seal (broken). The transcription has been formalized and edited for readability and comprehension.

On the exterior of the sheet: *To mij werij loving friend Mr. Theodorus Gravius / Lintford*

Gross günstiger Her(r) undt freundt das Schrijben \ von dem 21. April / <sup>1</sup> beneben dem / Wasserstein, auch ~~die mue~~ So in ghenomen ~~habt im~~ des her(r)en / ghehabte mue<sup>2</sup> im ab schrijben des Jacob. B. Explicatio ist / mir wool beha(n)diget war foor Ich dem ~~hern danke~~ / ~~v vor disse~~ her(r)en danke. Das Schrijben so mich der ~~junge~~ / hans ~~zu ge~~ zu mir ghebrach(t) hat habbe Ich dem / Mr. Allardin geliwrt<sup>3</sup> Sagte mir ~~w~~ das(s) er dem / her(r)en selbst wolte Antworten. So es noch nicht getan / hat wil Ich anhalten das(s) es die nexte woge<sup>4</sup> ghes[...]<sup>5</sup> / wirt, undt als dan(n) auch selbst an den herrn von al[...]<sup>6</sup> / weijt Lustiger schrijben ~~a~~ antwort auf des herrn ~~begere~~ / begeren. Dan(n) ~~dise~~ auf ~~dis~~ dißes mahl kan(n)s nich(t) [word crossed through] / seijn umsaghen halber die Ich d(e)m herrn mit dem ersten / wil(l) Lassen wissen. midellerZijt<sup>7</sup> bitte treuijntlich der / herr wil(l) mich auf dis mal exkusirren undt mich / halten als ein freujnt der ghewillig ist altzwijs / dem her(r)n. zu di(e)nen mit / was in mijn Vermeghen ist \ Mijne husfrau / un(d) Ich wensen [word crossed through] den her(r)n / hir mit alles gutes.<sup>8</sup>

In grosser eijl

den 18 Meij 1632

henri. vom Steenwijck

A letter in German dated May 18, 1632, from Hendrick van Steenwijck the Younger to the theologian and alchemist Theodoricus Gravius (also known as Theodore Graw), adds an interesting snippet of information to the artist's biography, even if its contents seems rather mundane. In 1631 Gravius, who was originally from the Kassel area and thus a fellow Hessen compatriot of Van Steenwijck, settled in Great Linford, some ninety kilometers northwest of London.<sup>9</sup>

The letter is preserved amid Gravius's papers, which, together with the literary estate of his mentor, Richard Napier, found their way to the Bodleian Library in Oxford.<sup>10</sup> Richard Napier (1559–1634) was a respected Anglican cleric based in Great Linford who practiced alchemy and medicine and left a substantial amount of writing.<sup>11</sup> In 1630, he took under his wing and into his home the penniless Gravius, who was highly knowledgeable in alchemy and conversant with the hermetic sciences.<sup>12</sup>

Writing “in great haste” (In grosser eijl), Van Steenwijck addresses Gravius as “my very beloved friend” (mij verij Loving friend). He thanks him for two texts the latter had sent on April 21: the “Wasserstein” and a copy Gravius had laboriously made of the “Explicatio” by “Jacob B.” The (further?) writings, which were brought to him by a servant called Hans, were delivered by Van Steenwijck to a Mr. Allardin. The latter would answer separately. Should he fail to do so, Van Steenwijck would urge him to reply the following week. Van Steenwijck himself would also write more extensively then, since, for reasons he would explain, he was not able to do so at the moment. To conclude, he assures Gravius of his friendship and willingness to be of service before sending him, also on behalf of his wife, all best wishes.

The spelling of his first name as well as that of his family name at the end of the letter (“Henri vom Steenwijck”) is in accordance with that found in signatures on paintings Van Steenwijck made in England.<sup>13</sup> The combination of written German and Netherlandish peculiarities, particularly the repeated use of “ij” for “ei,” reveals his Netherlandish mother tongue. Similarly, when he writes “nexte woge” (“next” instead of “nächste”) it shows a remnant of the time he spent in England, as well as the Netherlandish pronunciation of “g,” instead of the German “ch.” Van Steenwijck may have written the letter from London or from Holland.<sup>14</sup>

The letter contains a small surprise. The mention of “Wasserstein” is a reference to an alchemistic-theosophical text. The *Wasserstein der Weisen*, allegedly written by Johann Ambrosius Siebmacher or Lukas Jennis, was first published by the latter in 1619 in Frankfurt. One of numerous early seventeenth-century texts that elaborate on the manufacture of the philosopher’s stone by connecting alchemy with theological speculation,<sup>15</sup> the *Wasserstein der Weisen* must have appealed to the medical-alchemical interests held by Napier and his pupil Gravius. The name of the second text is more ambiguous. However, since Gravius was the first in England to translate a text by the German mystic Jakob Böhme (1575–1624),<sup>16</sup> the text referred to in the letter as by “Jacob. B.” must be one he authored.<sup>17</sup> Although we cannot be certain which treatise the letter refers to as the “Explicatio,” it perhaps concerned a copy of Gravius’s *Theologiae mysticae, seu theosophiae Jacobi Bohemi, compendium*, which has been preserved in the Bodleian Library in the same composite volume of manuscripts as the letter by Van Steenwijck.<sup>18</sup> In light of the fact that Gravius’s own writings were inspired by hermetic-alchemical examples, it seems entirely plausible that a compilation of an alchemical treatise and another text either by, or about, Böhme, were exchanged.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, the identity of “Mister Allardin,” to whom Van Steenwijck forwarded a (or: the) letter by Gravius,<sup>20</sup> remains to be found.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Above the line.

<sup>2</sup> For “Mühe” (effort).

<sup>3</sup> For “geliefert” (delivered).

<sup>4</sup> For “Woche” (week).

<sup>5</sup> Probably: “geschehen” ([will] happen).

<sup>6</sup> Probably: “allem” ([about] everything).

<sup>7</sup> For “zwischenzeitlich” or “in de tussentijd” (Dutch) (in the meantime).

<sup>8</sup> Indent to the left, next to the signature.

<sup>9</sup> William Poole, “Theodoricus Gravius (fl. 1600–1661): Some Biographical Notes on a German Chymist and Scribe Working in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Ambix* 56 (2009): 239–52, esp. 244n24. <https://doi.org/10.1179/000269809X12529013496338>

<sup>10</sup> William Henry Black, *A Descriptive, Analytical, and Critical Catalogue of the Manuscripts Bequeathed unto the University of Oxford by Elias Ashmole* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1845), col. 1099, no. 19: “Letter of Henri vom Steenwijch to Gravius (18 May 1632), with the draught of his answer; both in German” (Ms Ashmole 1399, part II, fol. 104r-v).

<sup>11</sup> The manuscripts are being edited digitally: The Casebook Project: a digital edition of Simon Forman's and Richard Napier's medical records 1596–1634 (<http://www.magicandmedicine.hps.cam.ac.uk>; accessed August 8, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> The Landgrave of Hesse-Kassel, Maurice, also known as Moritz der Gelehrte (Maurice the Learned), was a staunch supporter of this field of study and established the first professorship in chemistry (or chemical medicine) at his university in Marburg. Bruce T. Moran, "The Kassel Court in European Context – Patronage Styles and Moritz the Learned as Alchemical Maecenas," in *Landgraf Moritz der Gelehrte: Ein Calvinist zwischen politik und Wissenschaft*, ed. Gerhard Menk (Marburg and Lahn: Trautvetter & Fischer, 2000), 215–28 (with further literature; in the same volume see the contributions by Heiner Borggreffe and Hartmut Broszinski).

<sup>13</sup> Howarth, *The Steenwyck Family*, cats. II.C.12; II.C.14; II.B.36; II.E.8; II.D.5; II.D.6; II.C.19; II.C.23; II.F.3 and 4.

<sup>14</sup> Van Steenwijck's sons were born in 1632 and 1634 in Amsterdam and Leiden, respectively, which suggests that at least his wife Susanna Gaspoel had already moved to Holland. See Marloes Huiskamp, "Gaspoel, Susanna," in *Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland*. <http://resources.huigens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon/lemmata/data/Gaspoel> [22/01/2018]. Since Van Steenwijck includes greetings from his wife, it is even possible that Gravius met Van Steenwijck and his wife on the occasions that he visited Holland (in June 1630 Gravius was probably in Haarlem and in 1635 in Amsterdam). Poole, "Theodoricus Gravius," 246. <https://doi.org/10.1179/000269809X12529013496338>

<sup>15</sup> Wasserstein der Weysen Das ist Ein Chymisch Tractätlein, darin der weg gezeiget, die Materia genennet vnd der Proceß beschrieben wird, zu dem hohen geheymnuß der Vniuersal Tinctur zukommen, vor diesem niemalen gesehen; Darbey auch zwey sehr nutzliche andere Büchlein der gleichformigkeit vnd Concordantz wegen angehenckt [...], Francofurti 1619. For a digitized copy, see <http://gso.gbv.de/DB=1.28/CMD?ACT=SRCHA&IKT=8002&TRM=%2739:116545E%27>; VD17 39:116545E, esp. 8–9 for the most authoritative authors on the subject (from Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras, Alexander Magnus, Plato to Basilius Valentinus and Philippus Theophrastus).

<sup>16</sup> Poole, "Theodoricus Gravius," 241 <https://doi.org/10.1179/000269809X12529013496338>; Ernestine G. E. van der Wall, "De Mystieke Chiliast Petrus Serrarius (1600–1669) en zijn wereld" (PhD diss., University of Leiden, 1987), 70–79 *et passim*. See also the seminal essay by Gilly (Carlos Gilly, "Wege der Verbreitung von Jacob Böhmes Schriften in Deutschland und den Niederlanden," in *Jacob Böhmes Weg in die Welt: Zur Geschichte der Handschriftensammlung, Übersetzungen und Editionen von Abraham Willemsz van Beyerland*, ed. Theodor Harmsen (Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan, 2007), esp. 81–82 (for Gravius).

<sup>17</sup> During a stay in Amsterdam, Gravius frequented the social circles of Petrus Serrarius (1600–1669), who was particularly interested in the manuscripts that circulated of Böhme's writings. Through Serrarius, Gravius must have become acquainted with the Amsterdam merchant Abraham van Beyerland, the most important early collector of texts by Böhme.

<sup>18</sup> Black, *A Descriptive, Analytical, and Critical Catalogue*, col. 1099, Nr. 14: "Theologiae mysticae, seu Theosophiae JACOBI BOHEMI, compendium; ejusdem quippe libri epitome, in gratiam R. T. conscripta, per GRAVIUM" (Ms Ashmole 1399, part II, fol. 88r–93v). Other possible candidates would be *Sex puncta mystica* (Kurze Erklärung Sechs Mystischer Punkte; 1620), the *Mysterium Magnum* (Erklärung über das erste Buch Mosis; 1623) or the *Clavis* (Schlüssel, das ist Eine Erklärung der vornehmsten Punkten und Wörter, welche in diesen Schriften gebraucht werden;

1624).

<sup>19</sup> In 1622, Böhme recommended the “Wasserstein” to one of his correspondents. Joachim Telle, “Jakob Böhme unter deutschen Alchemikern der frühen Neuzeit,” in *Offenbarung und Episteme: Zur europäischen Wirkung Jakob Böhmes im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, eds. Wilhelm Kühlmann and Friedrich Vollhardt (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 165–82, esp. 166 <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110288612.165>; Gerhard Wehr, “Jacob Böhme: Leben und Werk,” in *Jacob Böhmes Weg in die Welt: Zur Geschichte der Handschriftensammlung, Übersetzungen und Editionen von Abraham Willemsz van Beyerland*, ed. Theodor Harmsen (Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan, 2007), 55–70, esp. 60.

<sup>20</sup> On the outside of Van Steenwijck’s letter, Gravius started drafting (in German) a letter to “Mr. Alartin,” in which theosophical considerations about the sorrowful condition of the human soul after the Fall of Man are discussed. The text begins as follows: “(und) weil ich mich in d(ie) <rige complexion so tieff verschlammt befinde, darin d(as) astrum (female symbol) [Venus] seine Vernis (?) straflos einschuster.” In closing, Gravius writes: “bitte wollet mir zu guth halten was ich aus fulle [lies: Fülle] m(eines) (heart symbol)ns geschrieben, u(nd) w(as) d(as) gemüth durch d(en) geist frei aus gestoßen.”

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the recipient was a member of the Allardin (Alartin, Alardijn) family, who, after having been exiled, settled in Bremen in the sixteenth century. In the later seventeenth century, several members of this family became theologians. Robert van Roosbroeck, *Emigranten: Nederlandse Vluchtelingen in Duitsland (1550–1600)* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 1968), 239 (Dionys Alardin), 243.