



Caspar Barlaeus

The Wise Merchant

Edited by Anna-Luna Post

Critical text and translation by Corinna Vermeulen

Amsterdam
University
Press

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Anna-Luna Post & Corinna Vermeulen

Introduction: wealth, knowledge and prestige

On 9 January 1632, Amsterdam was a prospering city. In some 50 years, its population had more than tripled to over 100,000 inhabitants, and the city continued to expand rapidly. The newly constructed canal girdle offered space to its increasingly self-assured elite, and the new houses functioned both as living spaces, home offices and storage units. Their inhabitants not only belonged to the city's economic elite, but also formed its political core, fulfilling posts in the city militia and urban government. Conveniently, the *Wisselbank* (Bank of Amsterdam), Bourse and city hall were within walking distance of their homes, as were the numerous printing houses and bookshops on the Rokin and Kalverstraat. These offered a welcome diversion and intellectual stimulation to the hard-working, always busy merchants.¹

The source of all this growing wealth and prosperity was trade: by this time, Amsterdam had become one of the most important trading cities in Europe. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) had been in business for 30 years, and many canal houses stocked large supplies of sugar, spices and other exotic goods. Profits were used to further invest in trade, but also in city planning and real estate. The construction of new neighbourhoods and the reclaiming of land outside the city provided profit and prestige to investors, but also quickly led to corruption and scandals, as the city's political elite used these projects for flagrant self-enrichment. Nonetheless, Amsterdam explicitly and proudly celebrated its commercial identity, for instance in the poem Jan Vos wrote for the new Bourse. In this poem, which was printed on several maps and medals, Vos

¹ C. Lesger, 'Merchants in Charge: The Self-Perception of Amsterdam Merchants, ca. 1550-1700', in M.C. Jacob and C. Secretan (eds.), *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists* (New York 2008) 75-97, 75, 79-82.

equates Amsterdam's Bourse with several ancient examples of greatness:

Ephesus' fame was her temple
Tyre her market and her port
Babylon her masonry Walls
Memphis her pyramids
Rome her empire
All the world praises me.²

The commercial hustle and bustle of Amsterdam was not to everyone's liking. In a letter to his friend and fellow scholar Arnold Buchelius, the famous humanist and poet Caspar Barlaeus compared the quietude of Leiden to the crowded chaos of Amsterdam, and also said he would rather live in Utrecht than 'between these merchants and gainful men.'³ Barlaeus had been trained as a minister and doctor but provided for his family by writing and offering private tuition. He consequently associated

2 The original reads 'Roemt Ephesus op haer kerk / Tyrhus op haer markt en haven / Babel op haer metzelwerk / Memphis op haer spitze gaven/ Romein op haer heerschappy / Al de werelt roemt op my', in E.A. Sutton, *Capitalism and Cartography in the Dutch Golden Age* (Chicago 2015) 55 (transl. Sutton). Also see ibidem, 55-67, on the Beemster, and C. Lesger, *Handel in Amsterdam ten tijde van de Opstand. Kooplieden, commerciële expansie en verandering in de ruimtelijke economie van de Nederlanden ca. 1550-ca.1630* (Hilversum 2001) 171-172 on corrupt politicians.

3 Caspar Barlaeus to Arnoud Buchelius (Aernout van Buchel), 16 April 1631: 'Ad Calendas Maji hinc abitum paro, Amstelodamum migraturus, ex quieta in turbulenta & negotiosam urbem. Nihil est quod eo me rapiat, praeterquam melioris famae solatium, alioqui plura sunt, quae me hic detinere possint, eruditorum frequentia, Academica studia, loci amoenitas, assuetudo, aliaque. Si Ultrajectinis illud fuisset institutum, quod jam est Amstelodamensibus, maluissem in vestra urbe vivere, quam inter Mercuriales & quaestuosos homines.' Letter 175 in *Briefwisseling van Caspar Barlaeus (1584-1648)*, after the edition of Geeraerd Brandt (Amsterdam 1667), edited by M. van Zuylen and A.J.E. Harmsen, available on www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Latijn/BarlaeusEpistolae.html, accessed 22 February 2018. All translations are by the author, unless otherwise stated. Translations of Barlaeus' oration are of course by Corinna Vermeulen.

Amsterdam with the low pursuit of trade, rather than with his own most coveted enterprise: learning. This association was, perhaps, not surprising: the one thing Amsterdam's elite inhabitants could not reach by foot was a university. In 1575 Leiden was chosen as the preferred spot for a university in the newly founded Dutch Republic. Its unique privilege in the province of Holland effectively prevented Amsterdam from establishing its own university. As Amsterdam grew, this lack of a prestigious institution became more conspicuous; it was not only inconvenient, but also contributed to the negative perception of its inhabitants as men who only valued money.

Barlaeus was not the only one to condemn Amsterdam's inhabitants for their mercantile spirit and lack of learning. Although trade brought numerous advantages to the city as well as to the Republic at large, Amsterdam was still frequently looked down upon and disapproved of. Ancient as well as Christian thought viewed merchants as unreliable crooks and trade as an unsuitable occupation for men of honour, as it required its practitioners to lie, manipulate and deceive.⁴ And yet, within a year of his disdainful remarks on Amsterdam's merchants, Barlaeus publicly spoke in defence of trade and its practitioners. On 9 January 1632, he delivered a long and compelling oration on the fruitful combination of trade and philosophy: *Mercator sapiens, sive oratio de conjungendis mercaturae et philosophiae studiis*, or *The Wise Merchant: Oration on Combining the Pursuits of Trade and Philosophy*.

He spoke on the occasion of the opening of the Athenaeum Illustre, Amsterdam's Illustrious school: the closest thing to a university the city was able to establish without interfering with Leiden's privilege.⁵ The aim of the Illustrious School was

4 See C. Lis and H. Soly, *Worthy Efforts: Attitudes to Work and Workers in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leiden and Boston 2012) 263-273, for the discussion on trade in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Republic.

5 D. van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science, The Amsterdam Athenaeum in the Golden Age, 1632-1704* (Leiden and Boston 2009) 21-34; M. Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age* (Cambridge 2005) 30.

to provide education for the sons of the city's elite: boys who had finished their early education at one of the Latin schools, but were still deemed too young to attend university in a foreign town, or lacked the necessary philosophical background. The lectures, provided by two professors – one in history, one in philosophy – were to take place each morning and would be open to the broader public, thus enabling the young boys' fathers to attend as well. After some delay, the Athenaeum Illustre opened its doors on 8 January 1632, with the inaugural address of its new history professor, Gerardus Johannes Vossius.

Barlaeus spoke the day after Vossius and made the combination of philosophy and trade the explicit subject of his oration. He argued throughout that the relation between them was not necessarily one of tension, but rather one of mutual benefit, and he cited numerous ancient authors to support his case. This theme made the oration uniquely suited to capture the interest of his audience and of many later readers. The oration was swiftly published by Willem Jansz. Blaeu, and two Dutch translations appeared within 30 years of its first deliverance.⁶ The original Latin text also opened the collection of Barlaeus' orations, which first came out in 1643 and appeared in two later editions as well.⁷ The oration thus quickly gained recognition in humanist circles in Amsterdam and the Dutch Republic at large. Barlaeus' text has stood the test of time: his oration has continued to draw the attention of Dutch scholars and publicists throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. In 1969, Sape van der Woude issued a Dutch translation accompanied by a brief introduction, which has

6 D. van Netten, *Koopman in Kennis: De uitgever Willem Jansz Blaeu in de geleerde wereld (1571–1638)* (Zutphen 2014) 175. The first Dutch translation by Wilhelmus Buyserius appeared in 1641 in Enkhuyzen, the second (by Jan van Duisburgh) was published in the Dutch edition of Barlaeus' collected speeches in 1662. See C. Secretan (ed.), *Le 'Marchand philosophe' de Caspar Barlaeus. Un éloge du commerce dans la Hollande du Siècle d'Or. Étude, texte et traduction du Mercator Sapiens* (Paris 2002) 100–101.

7 A. Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism in the Dutch Golden Age: The Political Thought of Johan and Pieter de la Court* (Leiden and Boston 2012) 188, n176.

inspired countless scholars to include the term ‘mercator sapiens’ in their articles about merchants, agents or publishers with an interest in science or the scholarly life.⁸ The prominent public historian Geert Mak has even called for a revival of the *mercator sapiens*, arguing that the modern Netherlands lacks a proper elite that truly fulfils an exemplary function and combines the pursuit of wealth with that of wisdom, as it did in seventeenth-century Amsterdam.⁹

More recently, the oration has also sparked the interest of an international readership. The seemingly straightforward oration has been portrayed as an archetypical text that uniquely captures the spirit of the Dutch Golden Age, by celebrating the merging of trade and wisdom. Harold Cook argues that the text shows ‘that the values inherent in the world of commerce were explicitly and self-consciously recognized to be at the root of the new science by contemporaries’.¹⁰ Cook’s interpretation of Barlaeus’ oration has drawn criticism, however, especially by scholars who firmly place Barlaeus’ text in the context of Renaissance humanism.¹¹ Most recently, Catherine Secretan, the oration’s French translator, has argued that the text offers a legitimization of merchants’ active participation on the world stage, through the lessons of the ancients and recent authors in the tradition of Erasmian

8 M. Peters, *De wijze koopman: Het wereldwijde onderzoek van Nicolaes Witsen (1641-1717), burgemeester en VOC-bewindhebber van Amsterdam* (Amsterdam 2010) and M. Keblusek, ‘Mercator Sapiens: Merchants as Cultural Entrepreneurs’, in B. Noldus and M. Keblusek (eds.), *Double Agents: Cultural and Political Brokerage in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden and Boston 2009), are just two recent examples; many more can be found, as van Netten, *Koopman in Kennis* 175, has also pointed out.

9 G. Mak, ‘De kooplieden van Amsterdam: Leve Spinoza, leve Gümus, leve de mercator sapiens!’ in *De Groene Amsterdammer* (30 november 2002); G. Mak, ‘Wij, de elites van nu, missen noblesse oblige’ and ‘Wij, de elite van deze tijd, zijn veel te bang’ in *NRC Handelsblad* (18 April 2015).

10 H. Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven 2007) 68.

11 K. van Berkel, ‘Rediscovering Clusius. How Dutch Commerce Contributed to the Emergence of Modern Science’, *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review*, vol. 123, no. 2 (2008) 233; Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 226-228; Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism* 184-190.

humanism.¹² The authors of *Worthy Efforts: Attitudes to Work and Workers in Pre-Industrial Europe*, who consider the speech to be 'one long ode to businessmen, without any reservations', have followed this interpretation.¹³

Yet, Barlaeus' oration is much more complex than appears at first sight. Rather than an unequivocal appraisal of the pursuits of trade and wisdom on equal grounds, Barlaeus firmly argues that wisdom ought to be valued over trade. Similarly, while Barlaeus seemingly offered a straightforward endorsement of the activities of merchants and traders, he also issued covert and less covert warnings to them and to the city's government. In addition, Barlaeus used his opening address to strike a chord with the merchants of Amsterdam and to win them for his cause: the study of ancient texts. He clearly explained this purpose in a letter to his close friend Constantijn Huygens, sent several days after he delivered his inaugural address: 'It is our intention that the merchants take to the taste of it [i.e. the lectures] and that we arouse in them a love for these studies, from which they have until now held themselves at some considerable distance.'¹⁴

Thus, rather than as an endorsement of trade, the oration as a whole should be read as a long and detailed *captatio benevolentiae* – a rhetorical strategy to induce the audience's goodwill for the Athenaeum Illustre. Barlaeus' stress on knowledge and wisdom as keys to better trade, government, and, more generally, life itself, rendered the Athenaeum Illustre an attractive undertaking to Amsterdam's elite. At the same time, Barlaeus also found a way to criticize the society developing in the Dutch Golden Age: he presented the example of the virtuous, wise merchant as one that should be followed by his public and their offspring, and warned those who would not heed his advice. This double-sided reasoning is at the core of Barlaeus' oration.

12 Secretan, *Le 'Marchand philosophe'* 13.

13 Lis and Soly, *Worthy Efforts* 264.

14 F.F. Blok, *From the Correspondence of a Melancholic* (Assen 1976) 17 (transl. Blok).



Portrait of Caspar Barlaeus in 1625, by Willem Jacobsz Delff. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Barlaeus himself phrased it best: 'I have chosen a subject that in my opinion suited the character of this city and its citizens as well as the interests of a very wealthy trade centre – imitating fishermen who attach a decoy to the hook, an enticing bait.'¹⁵ The metaphor is strikingly appropriate. Barlaeus chose an attractive, seductive subject to draw in Amsterdam's administrators, merchants and youth; yet, that enticing bait hides a much more serious message that suits his interests rather than theirs. Like Barlaeus' audience, historians have frequently been reeled in by this bait, while overlooking the hook and its fisherman. What we need to do, instead, is to analyse the text as a whole and in more detail, asking what Barlaeus aimed to achieve with this text, and how the main argument is related to that aim. In doing so, we are able to highlight how the humanist scholar tried to please his audience while simultaneously warning it against the risks of the commercialization of society. We may then further probe the significance of the text, and question some of its earlier interpretations. This can only be achieved by placing the oration – and its author – in its particular context. Thus, this introduction discusses the founding of the Athenaeum Illustre, Barlaeus' life, career and relation with his colleague Gerardus Johannes Vossius, as well as the influence of ancient philosophy and Renaissance humanism on the *Mercator sapiens*.

Barlaeus' life and career

In his funerary oration, delivered on 16 January 1648, the jurist Johannes Arnoldus Corvinus (born Joannes Arnoldsz Raevens) listed the many achievements of his late colleague at the Athenaeum Illustre. Among them was a surprising number of publications, both poetry and prose, on an astonishing range of subjects. It is quite an accomplishment that Barlaeus managed to combine this wealth of publications with his many other

¹⁵ Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 77, 3-6.

endeavours – for Barlaeus' career was really quite remarkable. He had started out as minister in the small town of Nieuw Tongen in 1609, and had subsequently become sub-regent of the *Collegium Theologicum* (The States' College or Statencollege in Leiden, financed by the States of Holland, which prepared young men for a career as minister). In 1619, he took up the study of medicine at Caen and completed his degree in just two years. Yet, rather than practise his new profession, during the 1620s Barlaeus made a living by tutoring students and offering them room and board. For several years, he supplemented the income from these activities with his poetic endeavours, occasionally lamenting his dependence on others. Yet, Corvinus' funerary oration presented Barlaeus as 'Doctor of Medicine, and Professor of all of Philosophy for the Illustrious School of Amsterdam'.¹⁶ How, – and why –, one might ask, did Barlaeus go from minister, to doctor, poet, private tutor, and finally, to professor of philosophy?

Caspar van Baerle was born in Antwerp on 12 February 1584. Like many Protestants from the Southern Netherlands, Barlaeus' parents moved to Leiden in 1586 after the fall of Antwerp. Two years later Caspar's father was appointed rector of the Latin school in Zaltbommel, a town located near the Waal river. His uncle Jacob occupied the same post in Den Briel (near the coast). When the young Caspar lost his father in 1595, this uncle took over the task of raising him. The boy showed a talent for learning and, at the age of sixteen, Caspar Barlaeus started as a theology student at the States' College. He completed his propaedeutic programme in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and philosophy within three

16 In the title of Boëthius Van Elslandt's Dutch translation of Corvinus' speech: *Lyk-Reden op 't overlyden van den wydt-beroemden Caspar van Baerle, Doctor in de Medecijnen en Professor van de gantsche Philosophie in de doorluchtige Schole tot Amsterdam, uitgesproken door Johannes Arnoldus Corvinus* (Amsterdam 1648). Van Elslandt was a student of Barlaeus; see K. Bostoën, 'De Van Elstlands: Een Haarlems Poëtengeslacht' in E.K. Grootes (ed.), *Haarlems Helicon: Literatuur en Toneel te Haarlem vóór 1800* (Hilversum 1993) 123-138, 123.

years, followed by another three years of study – now in theology proper.¹⁷

Shortly after completing his education, Barlaeus received his first appointment as minister in Nieuw Tongen. Only two years later he was named sub-regent of the States' College and, thus, returned to his alma mater to teach there and assist the regent of the college. When in 1615 a new regent was appointed, Barlaeus was joined by Gerardus Vossius.¹⁸ Vossius was Barlaeus' senior by seven years, and had also attended the States' College. The similarities did not end there: about fifteen years later, both men would be asked to become the first professors at the newly founded Athenaeum Illustre. Before that, however, they both lost their positions at the States' College due to their religious stances.¹⁹

In the second decade of the seventeenth century, the young Republic was ridden by a new religious conflict that had profound influences on the new state and its inhabitants. Against the background of the Twelve Years' Truce, internal struggles came to the fore, and one of these entailed the proper interpretation of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. The conflict arose in 1604 and initially its two main players were Franciscus Gomarus, professor of theology at the University of Leiden, and his colleague Jacobus Arminius. Arminius, leader of the Remonstrant party, employed a more lenient interpretation

17 S. Van der Woude (ed.), *Mercator Sapiens. Oratie gehouden bij de inwijding van de illustere school te Amsterdam op 9 januari 1632*. Dutch translation and introduction by S. van der Woude (Amsterdam 1967) 8–9. See also J.A. Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle I. Zijne jeugd, studententijd en predikambt (1584-1612)', *Oud-Holland*, vol. 3 (1885) 241–265.

18 F.F. Blok, 'Caspar Barlaeus, de filosoof van het Athenaeum Illustre', in C.L. Heesakkers, C.S.M. Rademaker and F.F. Blok, *Vossius en Barlaeus: Twee helden die der dingen diept en steilt afpeilen. Het Athenaeum Illustre en zijn eerste hoogleraren* (Amsterdam 1982) 24.

19 Van der Woude, *Mercator Sapiens* 11. For more on Barlaeus' years at the Statencollege and his efforts to advance the Remonstrant cause, see J.A. Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle II: Barlaeus als onder-regent van het Statencollege (1612-1619)', *Oud-Holland*, vol. 4 (1886) 24–40.

of the doctrine of predestination, while Gomarus, head of the Counter-Remonstrants, argued for a stricter interpretation.²⁰ Both Barlaeus and Vossius sided with the Arminians in this conflict; a choice that would greatly influence their lives and careers. This was especially true for Barlaeus, who had signed the Five Articles of Remonstrance (*Remonstrantie*) in 1610. In the years to come, he would actively participate in heated debates on the subject, and in 1618 he even attended the national Synod of Dort, where delegates representing both groups tried to settle the controversy.²¹ In the meantime, the conflict had spiralled into the political realm, leading to the arrest of grand pensionary (*raadpensionaris*) Johan van Oldenbarnevelt by the stadholder, prince Maurice of Orange. At the final meeting of the Synod, which took place on 9 May 1619, the conflict was decided in favour of the Counter-Remonstrants. As a result, the Remonstrants were excluded from important positions, and consequently Barlaeus, at this time professor in Logic at Leiden University, was fired from his post.²²

Barlaeus knew his Remonstrant sympathies would be an obstacle to a renewed career as a theologian, and therefore aimed to take up a new and potentially lucrative profession: medicine. He must have hoped this career shift would enable him to provide for his family: in 1608, he married Barbara Sayon, and by 1619 they already had four children. The former theologian swiftly received his medicine degree, and equally quickly discovered that the new occupation did not suit him well. Barlaeus had a sensitive constitution and found it difficult to be confronted with human fragility. He, therefore, never pursued his new profession,

20 J. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford 1995) chapters 18-20 give an extensive account of the conflict and its broader implications. See Prak, *The Dutch Republic* 29-37, for a succinct overview of the main developments.

21 Van der Woude, *Mercator Sapiens* 9.

22 Blok, *From The Correspondence of A Melancholic* 2. For more on this conflict and the influence it had on Barlaeus see Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle III. Zijn verder verblijf te Leiden (1619-1631)', *Oud-Holland*, vol. 4 (1886) 172-189.

and instead provided for his family by offering private tuition, room and board to students.²³

Barlaeus supplemented this modest income by writing laudatory and marriage poetry on commission, and evidently had more success as a poet than as a doctor. He became a very prolific writer and even earned the epithet 'Prince of the Poets', assigned to him by his friend Hugo Grotius.²⁴ Barlaeus' network of influential scholars was a useful asset: the friendship he struck up with Constantijn Huygens in 1625 would prove particularly fruitful. Huygens introduced Barlaeus to other potential national and international patrons, and functioned as a broker by circulating his works at court. Most importantly, Huygens recommended the poetic skills of his new acquaintance to stadholder Frederick Henry, who would become Barlaeus' most important patron.²⁵ From 1625 onward, Barlaeus regularly celebrated Frederick Henry's military pursuits and special family occasions in verse.²⁶ His efforts were rewarded with occasional gifts from the stadholder, and from 1635 onward, Barlaeus even received regular monetary support from the stadholder in the form of a pension.²⁷

During this period, Barlaeus' reputation sufficiently prospered to be considered an ideal candidate when the burgomasters of Amsterdam started their search for a professor to lead the Athenaeum Illustre. Barlaeus, however, did not wholeheartedly welcome their invitation. He complained of his dependence on

23 Van der Woude, *Mercator Sapiens* 11-12, and Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle III. Zijn verder verblijf te Leiden' 176-177.

24 Secretan, *Le Marchand philosophe* 31.

25 Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle III. Zijn verder verblijf te Leiden' 179-181.

26 Between 1625 and 1647, Barlaeus wrote seven works celebrating Frederick Henry's military pursuits and two works concerning the stadholder's children Willem and Louise. He also composed a funeral oration for the stadholder in 1647. Barlaeus further wrote two works praising Johan Maurits van Nassau. In L.D. Petit, *Bibliographische lijst der werken van de Leidsche hoogleraren van de oprichting der hoogeschool tot op onze dagen*, vol. I (Leiden 1894) 193-221.

27 Blok, *From The Correspondence of A Melancholic* 5; Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle III. Zijn verder verblijf te Leiden' 180; Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle IV. Eerste jaren te Amsterdam (1631-1635)', *Oud-Holland*, vol. 5 (1887) 98, 101.

others, writing Huygens: 'I am like a piece of land, which, as it does not have an owner, falls to the first person who sits down on it.'²⁸ This was a complaint he had voiced before, both in letters and in poems, and one that was uttered more often by writers who depended on their literary output for their income. Barlaeus was also reluctant to leave Leiden for Amsterdam, which he did not care for much – as we have already seen.²⁹ Still, Barlaeus appreciated the opportunity offered to him and, regardless of his complaints, accepted. He particularly looked forward to the freedom the city would offer him: in Amsterdam, he would be able to speak his mind more freely while simultaneously enjoying the advantages and stability of a fixed position.³⁰

Although Barlaeus would finally enjoy a stable salary (of no less than 1,500 guilders) at the Athenaeum, he did not give up his writing. On the contrary, he proved especially productive in the period 1632–1648.³¹ The move to Amsterdam allowed him to expand his network, resulting in several poems celebrating the

28 Van der Woude, *Mercator Sapiens* 13: 'Ik ben gelijk een stuk land dat, daar het geen eigenaar heeft, toekomt aan de eerste de beste die er zich op neer zet.' Original Latin in Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle III. Zijn verder verblijf in Leiden (1619-1631). Vervolg' 248, 99.

29 From Barlaeus' correspondence, letter 175 to Buchelius, 16 April 1631: 'Ad Calendas Maji hinc abitum paro, Amstelodamum migraturus, ex quieta in turbulentam & negotiosam urbem. Nihil est quod eo me rapiat, praeterquam melioris famae solatium, alioqui plura sunt, quae me hic detinere possint, eruditorum frequentia, Academica studia, loci amoenitas, assuetudo, aliaque. Si Ultrajectinis illud fuisset institutum, quod jam est Amstelodamensibus, maluissem in vestra urbe vivere, quam inter Mercuriales & quaestuosos homines.' See also C.L. Heesakkers, 'Het Athenaeum Illustre', in C.L. Heesakkers, C.S.M. Rademaker and F.F. Blok (eds.), *Vossius en Barlaeus: Twee helden die der dingen diept en steilt'afpeilen. Het Athenaeum Illustre en zijn eerste hoogleraren* (Amsterdam 1982) 5; and Van der Woude, *Mercator Sapiens* 13.

30 See Blok, *From the Correspondence of a Melancholic*, 10-11; Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle III. Zijn verder verblijf te Leiden (1619-1631). Vervolg' 251, on the freer atmosphere in Amsterdam.

31 See Petit, *Bibliographische lijst* 193-221; A.J.E. Harmsen and E. Hofland, *Bibliografie van Caspar Barlaeus*, category C: Not in Petit. Via www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Latijn/BarlaeusBibliografie.html, accessed 22 February 2018.

marriages of Amsterdam regents or their family members. The poem written for Eva Bicker's marriage to Dirck de Graeff in 1629 seems to suggest that Barlaeus already sought to become embedded in the Amsterdam network before his official appointment to the Athenaeum.³² Not only was Eva Bicker the direct cousin of Andries Bicker, one of the four burgomasters who had invited Barlaeus to Amsterdam, but Dirck's father Jacob Dircksz. de Graeff would serve as one of the curators of the Athenaeum in 1632. Dirck de Graeff had been a student of Barlaeus in Leiden, and the two men kept in touch after De Graeff had finished his studies.³³ The poem Barlaeus wrote in his honour might perhaps be a clue as to why Amsterdam's regents immediately approached Barlaeus when they sought a professor for the Athenaeum.

The families Bicker and De Graeff formed a strong alliance in Amsterdam, and ensured a more lenient climate for the Remonstrants in the city.³⁴ Seen in this light, Barlaeus' poem celebrating the marriage of their offspring in 1629 gains further significance. In the years to follow, Barlaeus ensured the consolidation of his new-found connection with these powerful families. In 1633, Barlaeus wrote a poem to celebrate the marriage of Cornelis de Graeff – Dirck's brother –, to Geertrui Overlander. When Eva Bicker remarried after the death of her first husband Dirck, Barlaeus also provided a poem to praise her marriage to Frederik Alewijn.³⁵ Barlaeus further dedicated his poem in celebration of Maria de Medici's official visit to

32 Petit, *Biographische Lijst*, entry 33. The poem was published in Leiden in 1630, and reprinted – in collected works – several times over the course of the seventeenth century.

33 Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle III. Zijn verder verblijf in Leiden. Vervolg' 248.

34 S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, *Van Amsterdamse burgers tot Europese aristocraten. Hun geschiedenis en hun portretten. De Heijnen-maatschap 1400-1800* (The Hague 2008), discusses the Libertarian faction of Bas, Bicker and De Graeff on page 177 and 185.

35 To complicate matters further, Alewijn had previously been married to Agatha Geelvinck, daughter of Jan Cornelis Geelvinck, another one of the burgomasters who appointed Barlaeus in 1629. See P.C. Molhuysen, P.J. Blok et al. (eds.), *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek*, 10 vols., (Leiden and Amsterdam 1911–1937) vol. 4, 32. For Barlaeus' compositions, see Petit, *Bibliographische Lijst*, entries 48, 71.

Amsterdam to the city's burgomasters.³⁶ He probably did not receive any financial rewards for these poetic endeavours, in contrast to the ones he sent out to Frederick Henry; I have, at least, not found any reference to such rewards. Yet, his poems must have served to cement his new, comfortable position in Amsterdam.

Although Barlaeus expanded his network when moving to Amsterdam, he also remained firmly attached to his previous circle and continued to dedicate works to those associated with the court in The Hague.³⁷ In addition, he also published several works celebrating foreign rulers, and honoured two colleagues from his Leiden time with funeral orations.³⁸ Thus, Barlaeus' move to Amsterdam by no means resulted in a total severance of his previous friendships.

He finally set up house in Amsterdam in 1631. His home in the Spinhuissteeg was located near the Athenaeum Illustre (on the Oudezijds Voorburgwal), next to Vossius' house. A close friendship between the two men developed, and Barlaeus also found comfort in the presence of other learned men. Once classes started and Barlaeus established a routine of his own, he even

36 Petit, *Bibliographische Lijst*, entry 67.

37 On these friendships and dedications, see Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle IV. Eerste Jaren te Amsterdam' and 'Caspar van Baerle V. Zijn verder verblijf te Amsterdam (1635-1644)', *Oud-Holland*, vol. 6 (1888) 87-102. For correspondence regarding the efforts of Huygens, Van der Myle and Van Wicquefort to ensure Barlaeus' payment from Frederick Henry, see Blok, *From the Correspondence of a Melancholic* 56-60, 88, 90, 124-125, 155-156. On Schonck, see idem 91; Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle IV. Eerste Jaren te Amsterdam' 101 and Barlaeus to Constantijn Huygens, 23 July 1633, through *ePistolarium*, consulted 22 February 2017. Finally, Barlaeus also wrote a marriage poem for Katherine Wotton and Johannes Polyander van Kerckhoven Jr., another one of Frederick Henry's confidants, as well as for Walburg, Johannes' daughter of his first marriage. See Petit, *Bibliographische Lijst*, entries 76 and 91.

38 Barlaeus dedicated three works to foreign rulers: Gustav Adolf II of Sweden, prince-elect Christian of Denmark, and cardinal Richelieu; see Petit, *Bibliographische Lijst*, entries 45, 53 and 77. The Leiden colleagues Barlaeus honoured are Simon Episcopius – who, from 1634 onward, headed the Remonstrant seminary in Amsterdam – and Johannes Polyander van Kerckhoven Sr; Petit, *Bibliographische Lijst*, entries 83 and 93.

came to appreciate the city.³⁹ This appreciation turned out to be mutual: several sources indicate that Barlaeus was a valued professor at the Athenaeum, and the funerary oration delivered by his friend and colleague Corvinus not only recalled the strong bonds of friendship Barlaeus had formed, but also stressed how often, and how well, he had addressed his audience from the exact place Corvinus was speaking.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, the fragile constitution that refrained Barlaeus from practising medicine would continue to influence his life and career. A few months after the Athenaeum had opened, Barlaeus fell ill. He wrote an old friend in Leiden that he had become 'melancholic', a disorder from which he had suffered before and which would continue to haunt him all his life. It was allegedly caused by an excessive presence of black bile, one of the four humours that were supposed to keep the body balanced. Barlaeus recovered reasonably quickly from the episode of 1632, but he experienced several more episodes near the end of his life. These may have been triggered by the personal drama that haunted Barlaeus after his move to Amsterdam: he lost several children, and in 1635 his wife Barbara died.⁴¹ In the later stages of the disease, delusional ideas could also occur, and it is likely that Barlaeus ultimately died as a result of these: on 14 January 1648, just before the Athenaeum's morning classes would start, Barlaeus drowned in a rain-pit or well, possibly in an attempt to extinguish the imaginary fire his delusions made him see and feel.⁴² Vossius was one of the first to know of his

39 Rademaker, *Life and Work of Gerard Vossius, 1577-1649* (Assen 1981) 240 and 246; Blok, *From the Correspondence of a Melancholic* 14-15. A description of the Agnietenkapel, in which the Athenaeum was housed, can be found in Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 45. Vossius and Barlaeus would eventually both move to the Oudezijds Achterburgwal; Blok, *From the Correspondence of a Melancholic* 11.
40 Van Elslandt, *Lyk-Reden* 4, 16-18.

41 Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle IV. Eerste jaren te Amsterdam (1631-1635)' 111-112; Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle V. Zijn verder verblijf te Amsterdam' 87-88.

42 See Blok, *From the Correspondence of a Melancholic* 20-28, 155-184 for a more elaborate discussion of Barlaeus' illness and death.



Portrait of Caspar Barlaeus by Joachim von Sandrart, made between 1637 and 1643.
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

friend, neighbour, and colleague's passing, and wrote his friend Pieter de Groot: 'Yesterday, at about the time when he was due to mount the rostrum, I was suddenly called by the children. But he had already breathed his last before I reached him.'⁴³

The strange circumstances in which Barlaeus died spurred speculations of suicide, although not everyone chose to believe them. The rumours were made worse by the unexpectedness of Barlaeus' death. His acquaintances mentioned this fact in their letters; Corvinus called attention to it in his funerary oration (Vossius, the most obvious candidate to give the oration, had fallen ill) and the poems accompanying the published edition of Corvinus' speech also referred to it.⁴⁴ Celebrating the wide scope and high quality of Barlaeus' many publications, Corvinus said 'the world would have seen many more of his wonders' had it not been for his unexpected passing.⁴⁵ Of course, Corvinus did not neglect to speak words of admiration for Barlaeus' activities at the Athenaeum Illustre, and praised the scholar's diligence, erudition and passion for teaching: 'From this place, the deceased used to sharpen us with his wisdom: but alas! He will no longer sharpen us. You have, like me, heard him often when he showed his great passion, and affection toward us in his teaching; but you will hear him no more.'⁴⁶

43 Vossius to Pieter de Groot, 15 January 1648, in Blok, *From the Correspondence of a Melancholic* 165-166 (transl. Blok).

44 Van Elslandt, *Lyk-Reden* 30-40; the poems were written by respectively Jacob Westerbaen, Joost van den Vondel, Gerard Brandt, Reyer Anslo and Van Elslandt, some of the Republic's most prominent poets.

45 Ibidem 20-21. Quote on p. 21: 'De Werelt soude meer wondren van hem ghesien hebben; maar syn leven was ten ende, de doodt heeft hem haestich wegh-gheruckt, een onderwachten hart-vangh benam hem 't leven, men hoorde dat hy 't leven verlaten hadde eer der een voor-boo van 't sterven was.'

46 Ibidem 4: 'Van dese plaets plach de overledene ons sijn wijsheyt in te scherpen; maar ach! hy sal se ons niet meer in scherpen. Gy hebt hem nevens my, als hy sijn groote drift, en genegentheyt t'ons waerts in 't onderwijsen betoonde, dickwils gehoord; maer ghy sult hem niet meer hooren.'

The Athenaeum Illustre

Barlaeus' death was all the more lamentable as he had made such a splendid impression the very first time he had mounted the rostrum. He addressed Amsterdam's elite, and praised them for their initiative to start an institution of higher learning in a city that had so far mostly been dedicated to the pursuit of earthly profits:

Every time I look upon this city of yours – which is now my city as well – and let my gaze wander over all its marvellous sights, I deliberate as to what I should admire in it first, what second and what last. ... Nature and labour, virtue and fortune, earth and sea seem to have vied with each other to make this city great. All of this, however, although it is excellent, splendid and admirable, spreading at home and abroad the fame of a most prosperous city, should be considered less important than this project of the honourable council and burgomasters, by which on this day they begin to pursue a new jewel in their republic's crown in a manner that is new and unusual to this place: from the study of wisdom and literature, and public classes on these subjects.⁴⁷

The city of Amsterdam had developed rapidly in the early decades of the seventeenth century. New neighbourhoods and splendid churches arose and the city became known as a capital of freedom and wealth. It assumed a prominent position in the province of Holland as well as in the Dutch Republic as a whole, and inspired admiration and jealousy in the rest of Europe. Yet, despite this new-found prosperity, the city lacked a university or institution of higher learning that would add lustre to its name and attract students from elsewhere.⁴⁸ The city did have several Latin schools,

47 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 73, 9-11 and 30-32, 75, 1-6.

48 Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 28; Blok, *From the Correspondence of a Melancholic* 11-12.

which served the children of Amsterdam *burghers*, but these schools did not attract students from abroad, nor pupils from the other larger cities of the Republic, as these had their own Latin schools. For precisely this reason, these Latin schools did not improve Amsterdam's status: the city was in no way unique in this regard. Thus, the foundation of the Athenaeum Illustre was closely tied to the desire for intellectual recognition and Amsterdam's new-found prosperity.

The one institution of higher learning that would definitely attract students to the city and add lustre to its name was, of course, a university. Unfortunately for Amsterdam, however, Leiden had been granted the exclusive right to this illustrious institution in the provinces of Holland and Zeeland.⁴⁹ Amsterdam was permitted to open an Illustrious School, as several other cities had done before. Illustrious Schools did not have the right to grant academic degrees, making them less prestigious than universities, and usually provided pupils with the education necessary to bridge the gap between the Latin school and the university level. Their propaedeutic programme focused on the *artes liberales*.⁵⁰ And although not as impressive as a university, an Illustrious School would still increase Amsterdam's standing.⁵¹

In his oration, Barlaeus explicitly referred to the quest for prestige as a motive for the establishment of the Athenaeum Illustre. First, he asked God in the opening prayer for several things, among them intellectual renown: 'Grant us, most merciful God, that this city, so ample in territory, so busy with citizens, so renowned for its commerce, gain greater renown from the value of its learning.' Second, in the main body of the text Barlaeus explicitly argued that wealthy cities need institutes of learning: 'But all books and all Antiquity are full of examples from which we know that the wisest men already said as much in those times;

49 Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 41.

50 Ibidem 32-34.

51 Ibidem 28.

that precisely the wealthiest cities cannot do without schools, teachers, libraries and the other instruments of wisdom.⁵²

Still, when the burgomasters and city council discussed the possible foundation of an Illustrious School in Amsterdam, a quest for prestige and status was not at the forefront of their minds. In their meeting of 31 December 1629, they mentioned the complaints they had received regarding the education of the city's youth. The burgomasters explained to the city council that when boys finished the Latin school in Amsterdam, they had to leave the city in order to pursue a university education elsewhere. According to the burgomasters, this was problematic for two reasons. First, the young boys were ill prepared for this step since they had not yet received proper education in the fundamentals of philosophy. Second, the young boys were exposed to a strange city and a rough student life at the age of sixteen, or sometimes even fourteen, without the supervision of their parents.⁵³

The city council acknowledged the importance of the complaints right away and asked the burgomasters to look out for a suitable auditorium. They were also authorized to search for a learned and able person, whom they could install with the salary they saw fit.⁵⁴ This learned and able person was Barlaeus,

52 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 67, 16-18 and 113, 12-15. Vossius also mentioned the desire for prestige as an important motivation for the foundation of the Athenaeum Illustre in his correspondence; see C.L. Heesakkers, 'Foundation and early development of the Athenaeum Illustre at Amsterdam', *Lias*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1982) 4.

53 Heesakkers, 'Athenaeum Illustre' 4; Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 40. In 1629, the burgomasters were Jan Cornelisz Geelvinck, Abraham Boom, Anthonie Oetgens van Waveren and Andries Bicker. Barlaeus dedicated the printed edition of his oration to the latter two, as well as to Jacob de Graeff, Dirck Bas and Jan Grotenhuys. These five men formed the head of the city council in 1631; De Graef, Bas, Oetgens van Waveren and Bicker were burgomasters, and Grotenhuys *schout*. In addition, they were the Athenaeum's first curators. See *Beschryvinge van Amsterdam, haar eerste oorspronk uyt den huyze der heeren van Aemstel en Aemstellant: met een verhaal van haar leven en dappere krijgsdaden* (Amsterdam 1665) 478, available on Google Books.

54 Heesakkers, 'Athenaeum Illustre' 4; Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 40.

who at the time still resided in Leiden. It is likely, however, that he had even been approached *before* the official meeting of the city council: in a letter written on 31 December 1629, the same day the city council convened, Barlaeus wrote an acquaintance that he 'had heard, here and there, that this rumour circulates with persistence, at least among persons who this issue does not concern. Whether something about me has been decided, I cannot yet determine for lack of trustworthy spokesmen.'⁵⁵ From this letter it appears that the idea to establish an Illustrious School had originated somewhat earlier, and that informal preparations had already started before the city council gave the official order. Yet it still took two full years before the Athenaeum actually opened.

This delay had nothing to do with Barlaeus, who quickly accepted the burgomasters' offer, regardless of the doubts he voiced to his correspondents. The offer was simply too good to reject. In April 1630, informal inquiries were made again: this time to ask whether Vossius would be interested in becoming the second professor of the Illustrious School. This would prevent a complete standstill in case of illness. In December 1630, the city council formalized its decision to employ two persons. In light of Barlaeus' melancholic episodes, this turned out to be a wise decision: Barlaeus already fell ill in the first months of his appointment, leaving Vossius as sole professor for several weeks.⁵⁶

Barlaeus and Vossius visited Amsterdam in January 1631 to look at housing prospects, but Vossius only accepted the Athenaeum's job offer in August. He was in a different position: although both men had been fired from the Statencollege, Vossius had later been

55 Translation mine, after Heesakkers' ('Athenaeum Illustre' 4-5) Dutch translation. For the original Latin, see Heesakkers, 'Foundation and early development of the Athenaeum Illustre at Amsterdam' 4-5.

56 Heesakkers, 'Athenaeum Illustre' 4-5; C.S.M. Rademaker, 'De vrijdom ga zijn' gang' in Heesakkers et al., *Vossius en Barlaeus: Twee helden die der dingen diept en steilt'afpeilen. Het Athenaeum Illustre en zijn eerste hoogleraren* (Amsterdam 1982) 12-23, 13.

appointed Professor of Rhetoric and Greek at the University of Leiden.⁵⁷ He was not immediately prepared to leave this comfortable position and wanted insurances that his workload would not increase and his salary would not decrease. The Athenaeum offered him the exceptionally high salary of 2,600 guilders, as well as many benefits including housing and a widow's pension. The decisive incentive might have been the more liberal atmosphere in Amsterdam: Vossius expected to finally have the time and freedom to publish works about theology and church history, which he had refrained from in Leiden.⁵⁸

Vossius' potential departure from Leiden may have spurred the city to finally take formal action against Amsterdam's plans. Fearing that a large part of their potential students would prefer Amsterdam, they filed a complaint against the Athenaeum Illustre with the Court of Holland and Zeeland on 6 June 1631 – two months before Vossius officially accepted the Athenaeum's offer. Leiden's main claim was that the new school in Amsterdam would violate its exclusive privilege to a university. Amsterdam argued that it merely wished to offer education bridging the Latin School and the university, without providing schooling in theology, law and medicine. Although these promises were later broken, in December 1631 the court ruled in favour of Amsterdam. The city's lawyer had argued that it did not plan to open a competing university, but rather an institution that would prepare Amsterdam's youth for their Leiden university education. The court of Holland and Zeeland judged this a fair claim and granted Amsterdam its Illustrious School.⁵⁹ Their

57 Rademaker, *Life and Work of Gerard Vossius* xxvi, chapter 3, section 3 (esp. 125-142) and chapter 3, section I (143-166). Also Van Netten, *Koopman in Kennis* 191-192 and Rademaker, "De vrijdom ga zijn' gang" 13-14.

58 Rademaker, "De vrijdom ga zijn gang" 13; Rademaker, *Life and Work* 238 and 310.

59 P.C. Molhuysen, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis der Leidsche Universiteit*, 5 vols., (The Hague 1913-1924) vol. 2, 153-155, 159, 214*-252*, 285*-289*. Asterisks refer to page numbers in the Appendices. A discussion of the conflict, based on these sources, can be found in W. Frijhoff, 'Het Amsterdamse Athenaeum in het academische



Portrait of Gerard Vossius by David Bailly, 1624. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

landschap van de zeventiende eeuw' in E.O.G. Haitzma Mulier, C.L. Heesakkers, P.J. Knechtmans, A.J. Kox and T.J. Veen (eds.), *Athenaeum Illustre. Elf studies over de Amsterdamse Doorluchtige School 1632-1877* (Amsterdam 1997) 37-65, 61-65.



View of the Athenaeum Illustre on the Oudezijds Voorburgwal, anonymous, 1663–1665. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

SCHOOL.



main argument was that the Athenaeum would not compete directly with Leiden as it was not allowed to award doctorates.⁶⁰

Three weeks later, the Athenaeum was in business and not one, but two learned and able persons delivered their inaugural oration from the rostrum at the Oudezijds Voorburgwal.⁶¹ With Barlaeus and Vossius, the burgomasters had attracted two scholars of great renown to enhance Amsterdam's status, and they were welcomed accordingly. On 2 May, the day after Barlaeus arrived in the city, the *schout* (sherriff) Jan Grootenhuys came to his home to welcome him to Amsterdam.⁶² The city council could count themselves lucky with their new professors. Barlaeus had gained international fame through his writings, while later sources would praise his didactic skills as well.⁶³ Vossius ranked even higher than Barlaeus: the differences in salary as well as the fact that his opening oration took place the day before Barlaeus', are clear signs of the hierarchy between the two men.⁶⁴ More generally, there is no question that both men were well suited to serve the Athenaeum as their inaugural addresses also showed.

Apart from the two practical arguments described in the council's minutes, and the quest for intellectual renown, the city council and the burgomasters may have had a fourth reason to start the Athenaeum Illustre: it would allow their own sons to receive an education that would prepare them for their public careers in the new political climate of the Dutch Republic. Studying ancient history, rhetoric and philosophy would enable them to learn from the illustrious history of the Greeks and Romans

60 Blok, *From the Correspondence of a Melancholic* 13-14. Van Miert has argued this difference existed mostly in theory, as students could easily obtain a doctorate at a different university by briefly enrolling rather than completing an entire course of study. Towards 1700, furthermore, the Athenaeum had appointed professors in law, theology and medicine as well. In Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 40-42, 110.

61 Heesakkers, 'Athenaeum Illustre' 6.

62 Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle. Eerste Jaren te Amsterdam' 93.

63 Blok, 'Caspar Barlaeus, de filosoof van het Athenaeum Illustre' in Rademaker et al., *Twee Helden* 24-32, 26; Blok, *From the Correspondence of a Melancholic* 10-11.

64 Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 4.

and grasp the ancient principles of good government.⁶⁵ Their sons would not be the only ones benefiting from this type of education. The two professors would deliver their lectures each morning from 9.00 to 10.00 (Barlaeus) and from 10.00 to 11.00 (Vossius), thus enabling Amsterdam's merchants to attend their classes before going to the Exchange, which was open from 11.00 to 12.00 each day.⁶⁶

Barlaeus and Vossius adapted their opening lectures to this type of public, to convince them of the use and importance of the new-found Athenaeum. Both men, therefore, spoke on the utility of their own subjects: Barlaeus on the use of philosophy, Vossius on the use of history. Both speakers emphasized the relevance of their subject: Vossius by arguing that life is too short to learn everything by oneself, and that the shortest and most practical way to knowledge is history.⁶⁷ Barlaeus appealed specifically to the merchants in the audience, and stressed the relevance of trade for the city of Amsterdam. As such, his choice of subject matter was especially apt, as Corvinus also signalled in his funerary oration.⁶⁸

It is likely that Barlaeus and Vossius coordinated their efforts to reach out to Amsterdam's ruling and mercantile elite, both in their opening speeches and in the lectures to follow. In a letter to Huygens, Barlaeus discussed both inaugural speeches, and mentioned they were now at the publisher to be printed. He then told Huygens of the first regular lectures the two of them had given:

After the speeches we began our lectures, Vossius on the time from the creation of the world until the time of Abraham, I on the schools and tenets of the ancient philosophers, the

65 Ibidem 22-24, 354, 358.

66 Blok, 'Caspar Barlaeus' 27; Worp, 'Caspar van Baerle IV. Eerste Jaren te Amsterdam' 96-97.

67 Rademaker, *Life and Work of Gerard Vossius* 242-243.

68 Van Elslandt, *Lyk-Reden* 21.

Academics, the Stoics, the Epicureans and the Peripatetics. It is our intention that the merchants take to the taste of it and that we arouse in them a love for these studies, from which they have until now held themselves at some considerable distance. The start conforms with our wishes; but I fear that here again it will be proved that the beginning is hot etc.⁶⁹

Although Barlaeus initially felt that his and Vossius' efforts to win the merchants for their cause had been successful, he also feared they might not be able to maintain their interest. It is hard to say whether his intuition was correct, as it is impossible to determine which – or how many – people attended Vossius' and Barlaeus' lectures in the following years. Even enrolment numbers of regular students are difficult to establish, let alone the irregular attendance of non-enrolled merchants or administrators.⁷⁰ Several letters, written by the two professors or their acquaintances, indicate that their lectures were popular and drew the attention of the merchants. Yet, these also suggest that they occasionally had to adjust the subject of their lectures. Vossius, for instance, told his correspondent William Boswell he had to shift the focus of his lectures to Roman history rather than Church history. Otherwise, he – and the Athenaeum – ran the risk of attracting fewer students, who would no longer come to the 'lesson market'.⁷¹

69 Barlaeus to Huygens from 18 January 1632, in Blok, *From the Correspondence of a Melancholic* 17. With 'The beginning is hot etc.' Barlaeus quotes a medieval proverb: 'The beginning is hot, the middle tepid, the end cold', again in Blok, *From the Correspondence of a Melancholic* 17, n41. Vossius wrote Johannes Corvinus that his lecture had also been successful, and had drawn a large and varied audience, see Wilhelmina G. Kamerbeek, 'Some Letters by Johannes Arnoldi Corvinus', *Lias* vol. 9, no. 1 (1982) 93.

70 Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 5; Frijhoff, 'Het Amsterdamse Athenaeum' 38-41.

71 Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 194. See Rademaker, *Life and Work of Gerard Vossius* 244-245; Rademaker, 'The Athenaeum Illustre in the correspondence of Gerardus Johannes Vossius', *Lias* vol. 9, no. 1 (1982) 19-55, 33 for correspondence regarding the attendance of the lectures.



Interior of the Athenaeum Illustre in Amsterdam, possibly by Hermanus Petrus Schouten, c.1770–1783. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

It is clear that the Athenaeum prospered with Barlaeus and Vossius in charge.⁷² Within a decade after its opening, the Athenaeum established two new chairs – Martinus Hortensius started his lectures in mathematics in 1634, while Johannes Cabeliau was appointed Professor of Law in 1640 – and even tried to attract the famous Italian mathematician Galileo Galilei.⁷³ This attempt failed – Galileo did not wish to leave Italy at his old age –, and not all professors hired after Barlaeus' and Vossius' deaths in 1648 and 1649 would prove as learned and able as they had been. Although this hurt the Athenaeum's status, no serious problems arose until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when economic decline and declining enrolment numbers in the Dutch Republic as a whole coincided with staffing problems at

⁷² Rademaker, *Life and Work of Gerard Vossius* 245.

⁷³ Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 55-60.

the Athenaeum Illustre.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the Athenaeum remained in business until it was given the status of an official university in 1877. From that moment onwards, it would be known as the University of Amsterdam.⁷⁵ The names of its two first professors would, from 1927, be attached to two other institutes of learning in the city: the Barlaeus Gymnasium and the Vossius Gymnasium, which provide high school education – including Greek and/or Latin – to boys and girls between the ages of twelve and eighteen.

The oration

The oration Barlaeus delivered on 9 January 1632 has come down to us in its printed version, published by Willem Jansz. Blaeu. This edition is dedicated to the Athenaeum's curators: the four burgomasters who ruled Amsterdam in 1631, Anthonie Oetgens van Waveren, Andries Bicker, Jacob de Graeff and Dirck Bas, and to Jan Grootenhuys, the 'praetor' or *schout*: the highest magistrate in the city government.⁷⁶ Two of them, Oetgens van Waveren and Bicker, had also been in office when the Athenaeum was founded in 1629, and had invited Barlaeus to come to Amsterdam as its first professor. These men are excellent examples of the ways the mercantile and political elite of the city overlapped: all of them came from wealthy merchant families with long traditions of political power, and all of them had served as burgomasters before. Their family histories also illustrated the risks inherent

74 Ibidem 68, 110-111.

75 Ibidem 3.

76 The burgomasters were elected on the first of February and appointed for one year; those appointed in 1631 were therefore still in office in January, when Barlaeus held his oration. See M. Hell, 'De Oude Geuzen en de Opstand. Politiek en lokaal bestuur in tijd van oorlog en expansie 1578-1650' in W. Frijhoff and M. Prak (eds.), *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam. Centrum van de Wereld 1578-1650* (Amsterdam 2004) 241-297, 242. For more on these men, see J.E. Elias, *De Vroedschap van Amsterdam 1578-1795* (Amsterdam 1963), no. 84 (Grootenhuys), 80 (De Graef), 76 (Bas), 107 (Oetgens van Waveren) and 110 (Bicker).

to this overlap: with several others, Oetgens van Waveren's father had abused his power to greatly enrich himself during the 1612 expansion of Amsterdam. This led to a temporary lapse of his faction's power in 1615, although it managed to return to power in 1621.⁷⁷ These were the sort of men Barlaeus addressed in his oration, and knowing their background makes his frequent warnings and exhortations even more pungent.

Barlaeus spoke for approximately one hour: the printed edition of the oration consists of about 6,000 words, and Barlaeus' regular lectures took the same time. To retain his public's attention, Barlaeus addressed them directly at several points throughout the oration. Although we cannot establish with any certainty who attended the opening, Barlaeus explicitly addressed different groups of people in his oration as if they were present at the time. The city government, the city's ministers, its merchants and traders, and its youth are all called upon, and enticed to listen to Barlaeus' oration with arguments specifically suited to their interests and situation. What is more, Barlaeus' oration also contains implicit or explicit calls to action for each of these groups: the ministers, for instance, are called upon to prevent further religious strife, while the civil government is asked to serve and support learning rather than trade. Yet taken together, the arguments presented in the oration serve one overarching aim: to raise interest in and goodwill for the Athenaeum Illustre as an institute of learning in the city, dedicated to the study of the ancients. Within this overarching and seemingly harmonious framework, three important themes deserve further attention. An analysis of the oration based on these themes not only improves our understanding of Barlaeus' ideas on each individual topic, but also increases our grasp on the oration as a whole.

77 See Dudok van Heel, *Van Amsterdamse burgers tot Europese aristocraten*; Elias, *De Vroedschap van Amsterdam*; and Lesger, *Handel in Amsterdam*, 142-144 on the links between the political and the mercantile elites in Amsterdam. Lesger discusses the misconduct of Frans Hendricksz Oetgens and others between 1612-1615 on pages 171-172.

The first of these is the relation between the roles of the government of Amsterdam and the Reformed Church. Although Barlaeus opens his oration with a prayer, the secular government consistently comes before the Church in the remainder of the text. The clearest example of this hierarchy can already be found in the opening prayer preceding the oration, when Barlaeus lists those present: 'Before you stands the supplicant republic [...]. Before you stands the supplicant church [...]. Before you stands the supplicant citizenry [...]. Before you stands the supplicant youth [...].'⁷⁸ In these first few sentences, the hierarchy that continues throughout the oration is immediately established: republic before church. This pattern is repeated at several points in the oration.⁷⁹ As Secretan pointed out, this is how Barlaeus firmly places himself in the Remonstrant tradition of valuing the authority of the state over the Church.⁸⁰ We also detect his experience as a Remonstrant in his appeal to God to unite those divided by faith: 'Gather together the members of your church that were torn apart, so that those who were separated by diversity of opinions may be united by a prevailing love. Bind the citizens in mutual love and banish all causes of dispute from these city walls.'⁸¹

Judging from the examples cited above, Barlaeus' text should not be considered as completely secular: he consistently puts the Church in second place and does not exclude it entirely. The same is true for the role of Christian teaching in the oration. As Van der Woude's edition shows, many Biblical references can be found throughout the main body of the text. These are not as prominently presented as references to ancient authors; not only are there far fewer references to the Bible, these references are also less explicitly announced to the public. Whereas Barlaeus often explicitly introduces ancient quotes or sayings, he leaves references to the Bible implicit. This may, at least partly, be explained by the

⁷⁸ Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 67, 5-13.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, see for instance page 69 and 119.

⁸⁰ Secretan, *Le 'Marchand Philosophe'* 72-75; Prak, *The Dutch Republic* 30.

⁸¹ Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 69, 25-29.

familiarity of his public with Biblical teaching, as opposed to their knowledge of the ancients. Of course, promoting the latter was also an integral part of Barlaeus' oration: by showing the relevance of ancient knowledge to current-day affairs, he hoped to reel in his audience and spur their enthusiasm for the Athenaeum Illustre.⁸²

This brings us to a second important theme, namely the relation between ancient and modern knowledge. The influence of ancient rhetoric is notable in the form and structure of the text, but the importance Barlaeus assigned to ancient wisdom becomes most clear from the more than 150 references to ancient writers and works. The oration similarly contains several references to humanist authors.⁸³ These references serve not only to legitimize Barlaeus' subject matter, but also to present authoritative examples. Barlaeus further derived lessons from the teachings of ancient authors with regard to the proper way of conducting trade. Moral philosophy, especially through the teachings of the Stoics, teaches merchants how to trade and live wisely, whereas speculative philosophy serves as a more practical guide. In this sense, Barlaeus' text is more conservative than it is sometimes made out to be: it presents a clear case for the study of the ancients, rather than advocate 'the new science', as Harold Cook has argued.⁸⁴

Barlaeus did not only rely on ancient authorities to make his case. He also cited Erasmus, 'immortal ornament of our Holland' as a fervent admirer of Cicero, thus presenting his public with an example of another Christian, Dutch humanist they might follow. Barlaeus thus not only gave his public one more legitimization of the importance of ancient authors – Cicero in particular – but also highlighted the importance of the Dutch intellectual tradition.

82 On Barlaeus' treatment of Christian and ancient teaching, also see Van der Woude, *Mercator Sapiens* 14-15 who has argued that the Church plays no role in the main body in the text. It is only mentioned in the opening prayer preceding the oration, and the Church Fathers are dismissed in favour of the ancient philosophers near the end of the oration.

83 Van der Woude, *Mercator Sapiens* 15.

84 See notes 10 and 11 above.

At different points throughout the oration, Barlaeus presents Amsterdam as the heir to the traditions of Athens, Sparta and Rome.⁸⁵ He also reinforces this argument by stressing the intellectual importance of the Dutch Republic through citing its most famous exponent, Erasmus.⁸⁶

The most important theme of the oration is the triumph of wisdom over trade. Although Barlaeus' oration is devoted to the combination of the pursuits of wisdom and trade, this combination is not without friction, and it is not a union on equal terms. Early in the oration, a hierarchy between the two clearly manifests itself to those who listen carefully and who perhaps even notice the warnings Barlaeus includes in his oration. Throughout the oration, Barlaeus stresses time and time again that trade without wisdom is worthless, and might even lead

85 Presenting a city or state as the successor of ancient Rome or Athens was a *topos* employed by many different cities in early modern Europe. See W. Velema and A. Weststeijn (eds.), *Ancient Models in the Early Modern Republican Imagination* (Leiden and Boston 2017) for a recent exploration of the importance of ancient models in early modern Europe.

86 Although the Dutch author Dirck Volkertsz. Coornhert (1522-1590) is not explicitly discussed in Barlaeus' oration, his work is often compared to Barlaeus' in recent literature. Coornhert, who was born in Amsterdam and the scion of a merchant family, wrote extensively on ethical questions, and his exploration of the way merchants should behave resulted in a short work titled *De Coopman: Aenwysende d'oprechte conste om Christelyck ende met eenen gelycken moede in 't winnen ende verliesen coophandel te dryven* (Norden 1580). This work, written in 1580, took the form of a dialogue between the fictive character of Gerard Mercator and Coornhert himself. Although familiar with Ciceronian philosophy – Coornhert had translated *De Officiis* in the 1560s – Coornhert's advice to merchants was almost entirely based on Christian principles, while Barlaeus' reasoning is clearly rooted in ancient philosophy. See Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism* 188-190; Secretan, *Le 'Marchand Philosophe'* 81-90; and Lis and Soly, *Worthy Efforts* 263 for a more extensive discussion of Coornhert and Barlaeus. Lis and Soly, as well as K. Bostoën, 'Zo eerlijk als goud: de ethiek van de wereldstad' in H. Pleij (ed.), *Op belofte van profijt. Stadsliteratuur en burgermoraal in de Nederlandse letterkunde van de middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam 1991) 333-346, also discuss how the topic of virtuous trade was taken up by the Chambers of Rhetoric, especially during the 1561 edition of the Antwerp *Landjuweel*-festival, where different groups of *rederijkers* each presented a literary discussion of the importance of good merchants.

to ruin. Those who possess true wisdom, on the other hand, do not desire wealth, as they realize its ephemeral character will not bring them joy. As this message is wrapped in flattery and arguments that seemingly advocate trade, many listeners might just have thought Barlaeus fully endorsed their activities – as has been the outcome of several later interpretations of the oration.⁸⁷ Yet, a closer look at the text as a whole reveals Barlaeus' much more reserved stance on this matter. This becomes especially clear if we follow Barlaeus' argument from the start of the oration.

Following the opening prayer, the text contains a brief panegyric of the city of Amsterdam, and states that the speaker does not know what to praise first when looking around: Amsterdam's churches? Its poor houses? The towers and lighthouses? Its dams and sluices, or the merchant's porticos? The expensive goods that are brought into the city, or the ships carrying them, or perhaps the ports in which they land? The splendour of the buildings, or the magnitude of the crowds? The observance of prudence of the regents and the observance of the law, or perhaps the obedience of the subjects, their modesty and their orderliness? No; although each of these elements are admirable and praiseworthy in themselves, none of them are as admirable as the initiative started by the city council: to found the Athenaeum Illustre. For the riches the Athenaeum brings are eternal, and will survive all of Amsterdam's fleeting material wealth.

It was, Barlaeus continued, indeed appropriate that this city, which abounded in worldly treasures, had finally started thinking about the benefits of immortality. This, he emphasized, was something new to Amsterdam, as the city had so far been mainly concerned with the acquisition of worldly wealth. For that reason, it would be useless to speak about anything else than commerce,

87 See for instance: Lis and Soly, *Worthy Efforts* 264: 'His speech was one long ode to businessmen, without any reservations and in some places giving highly creative interpretations of historical facts'; Secretan, *Le 'Marchand Philosophe'* 55: 'It is by conferring on the entire merchant profession, as a whole, the nobility of an activity comparable to that of philosophy that [Barlaeus] intends to irrefutably establish the dignity of trade.'

profit and wealth. He immediately admitted that he did not think he could teach Amsterdam's inhabitants how to make a profit. He could, however, teach them how to do it wisely. Here, we encounter Barlaeus' double-edged message for the first time: he added that he did not want 'to condemn the pursuit of wealth, but to keep it in check with the brake of reason'.⁸⁸ In other words: just after promising to teach merchants how to trade wisely, Barlaeus immediately added he would actually show them how to *temper* their pursuit of wealth.

He followed these remarks with a brief outline of his main argument:

This I will show: that trade and the pursuit of wisdom and the arts go together very well, and that neither the care for augmenting one's wealth is in the way of the mind's contemplations, nor vice versa. On the contrary, the human faculty for trade and that for philosophy work together in the best of ways: the more splendidly a merchant can philosophize, the luckier I will deem him.⁸⁹

In these few sentences, both Barlaeus' argument and his rhetorical strategy become crystal clear. Although he first suggested that trade and the pursuit of wisdom go together very well and positively impact each other, the next statement shows that the relation between the two is not an equal one. Barlaeus praises the merchant who philosophizes, but not the philosopher who trades.

He subsequently gives several examples which show the importance assigned to philosophy and trade in Antiquity. Barlaeus shows that trade and wisdom had helped each other since Antiquity; that the antiquity of trade is best studied based on the works of the ancient philosophers, and that the link between trade and philosophy is a suitable subject for an oration. Left implicit is the fact that although the ancient authors Barlaeus mentions

88 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 77, 19-20.

89 Ibidem 77, 20-26.

did recognize a link between trade and philosophy, most of the stories he recounts in the oration actually contained the clear lesson that although trade may benefit from philosophy, the latter always triumphs over trade. The exception may be found in his opening statement, where Barlaeus presents an actual argument for the benefit of trade for wisdom, derived from Antiquity: 'these two pursuits have always benefited one another, as the wise have always believed that it was impossible to solve human problems without exchanging merchandise, and on the other hand it is well known that through such an exchange, big steps are made towards prudence.'⁹⁰ Barlaeus found an argument in favour of trade in its usefulness to society: the exchange of goods also leads to an exchange of ideas and an understanding of foreign people.

In the subsequent discussion of the ancient writings on trade and wisdom, two examples stand out. The first one concerns his discussion of the marketplace as envisioned by Pythagoras:

Even Pythagoras, who came before Plato, distinguished the entire marketplace into three types of people: those who had come to sell, those who had come to buy – both these types, he said, are agitated and consequently less fortunate – and the third type, who come to the market merely to watch, the only type he named fortunate, because without worries they enjoy a free pleasure.⁹¹

Here, Barlaeus again applied a clear hierarchy: while seemingly advocating trade, he actually only makes a case for philosophy, as those who do not participate in the marketplace and only study it from a distance, are the happiest. This, it seems, is what he hoped the Athenaeum's students would learn to do.⁹²

⁹⁰ Ibidem 79, 9-13.

⁹¹ Ibidem 81, 21-27.

⁹² S. Rauschenbach, 'Elzevirian Republics, Wise Merchants, and New Perspectives on Spain and Portugal in the Seventeenth-century Dutch Republic', *De Zeventiende Eeuw*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2013) 81-100, 87 draws the same conclusion.

After reciting several more examples of ancient authors discussing the unity of trade and wisdom, Barlaeus also presents his public with a coveted warning. By briefly recalling the story of Damasippus, who only turned to philosophy *after* going bankrupt, Barlaeus sent a clear message to those people in the audience who were arrogant enough to think they could do without philosophy: eventually, they would encounter ruin, and then it would be too late.⁹³ According to Barlaeus, these examples showed ‘that the greatest men of learning and wisdom recognized a link between trade and philosophy, as between all the other arts, and spoke seriously of the very things we are now discussing.’⁹⁴

How philosophy is beneficial to trade is dealt with in the next section of the oration, which starts with the following devilish statement: ‘But I would like to consider the virtues of merchants more closely and demonstrate with some serious precepts borrowed from philosophy how wisdom can also remedy their shortcomings.’⁹⁵ The arguments presented in this part of the oration can be placed in the Stoic school of thought and amount to three important conclusions regarding the importance of philosophy to trade.⁹⁶ First, moral philosophy teaches merchants that they should actually not care about trade, as philosophy will make them realize wealth has very little value compared to knowledge. The philosopher would teach the merchant that one may only be considered rich if one stops desiring; a man’s value should be measured by his way of life and culture, not by his wealth. Should the merchant follow this line of thought to the extreme, he would give up his business and take up the scholarly life. Barlaeus did not dwell on this argument but only presented it very briefly; speaking for an audience of merchants, he realized this message would not be favourably received. This

93 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 83-85.

94 Ibidem 85, 5-7.

95 Ibidem 85, 8-10.

96 For a more detailed discussion of how Barlaeus’ oration relates to Stoic, Aristotelian and Ciceronian thinking, see Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 226-228; and Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism* 185-190.

is, however, the overarching argument framing his oration, and it is implicitly present in the remainder of the text.

The second argument was more realistic: from moral philosophy, his public would also learn how to trade *wisely*. Apart from tempering their desire for riches, merchants should use their wealth to serve the common good. In other words: even if one has achieved riches, one should not let this determine one's character. Wealth should not inspire jealousy or greed, but should be put to use to further the glory of God and help one's neighbour and the poor. In that case, merchants may be considered truly virtuous: 'Wisdom does not despise the well-to-do, but approves of them especially: of those, that is, who are affluent without harming anyone, magnificent without decadence, generous without ostentation, serious without being morose, religious without superstition.'⁹⁷

The link between wealth and virtue becomes most clear when Barlaeus describes the wise merchant and the relation between his wealth and his virtue in more concrete terms:

When he looks closely at his coins, he imagines that piety is stamped onto one, honesty onto another, faith onto another, onto another prudence, kindness onto yet another, and in the very incentives to evil he imagines pictures of what is honourable. So when he lays aside whole stacks of money, it is as if he has laid aside the whole chorus of virtues as well.⁹⁸

This was not an uncommon line of thought in the Dutch Republic: the wealthy grain merchant and multiple-time burgomaster Cornelis Pieterszoon Hooft felt that wealth reflected a man's personal qualities, and that wealthy men were wise, sensible and competent.⁹⁹ According to Barlaeus, the wise merchant is further inspired to act virtuously by his wealth in the realization that he

97 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 89, 13-17.

98 Ibidem 89, 22-28.

99 Lesger, 'Merchants in Charge' 81.

has been favoured by God and understands the responsibility that comes with his own fortune. Barlaeus stressed that his public consisted of such wise merchants, and with these statements perhaps implored them to share yet more of their wealth.¹⁰⁰

He then moved on to the third characteristic of the wise merchant: he trades honourably and does not deceive others. Here, Barlaeus relied heavily on the teachings of Cicero and used an example from his work to illustrate what it means to trade wisely. Cicero, in *On Duties*, raised the following question: if a merchant sailing from Alexandria to Rhodes knows the price of grain in Rhodes is very high due to a shortage, may he sell his grain for the highest price, even if he knows more grain is on its way and the price will thus plunge soon? Although Cicero had other philosophers – such as Diogenes of Babylon¹⁰¹ – argue that the merchant is not obliged to share his information by law and may, therefore, negotiate the best price possible, he himself stated that a merchant who knows more than a buyer and uses this to negotiate a better price, acts dishonourably. In his view, merchants are, like every other human being, bound to serve public welfare.¹⁰² They should, therefore, share the information

100 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 89, 18-19.

101 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 97. Cicero's work contains an imaginary dialogue between Diogenes of Babylon and Antipater of Tarsus, which ultimately leads him to the conclusion the merchant should share the information with the starving population of Rhodes, see Lis and Soly, *Worthy Efforts* 224.

102 Cicero, *On duties*, III 52: "What say you?" comes Antipater's argument on the other side; "it is your duty to consider the interests of your fellow men and to serve society; you were brought into the world under these conditions and have these inborn principles which you are in duty bound to obey and follow, that your interest shall be the interest of the community and conversely that the interest of the community shall be your interest as well". Barlaeus follows Cicero closely: 'Cicero on the other hand, together with the very sharp-witted philosopher Antipater, states that the information should not be concealed, because you are born under the law that you should not obstruct public welfare and as a human being should do well by other human beings, and as a citizen by fellow-citizens.' Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 97, 18-23.

they have with the inhabitants of Rhodes, even if this means a decrease in profit.¹⁰³

Barlaeus explicitly underlined the importance of ancient learning by adapting examples to fit the Dutch context. Hence, the Alexandrian merchant becomes a man from France, while Rhodes turns into Amsterdam.¹⁰⁴ He further used this concrete case to connect with his public by appealing to them directly: 'I think you understand that it is not just you, but also the ancient Romans who like sincerity, simplicity, candour, and who dislike cunning and deceit.'¹⁰⁵ This direct appeal enabled him to explicitly stress the utility and importance of ancient learning for modern Amsterdam and its inhabitants.

Thirdly, Barlaeus also argued for the utility of philosophy to trade on a different front altogether: philosophy may also help the merchant make such a profit. It is, however, not moral philosophy but speculative philosophy that does so. Speculative philosophy, as Barlaeus told his audience, comprises a broad array of disciplines, ranging from astronomy and mathematics to geology and ethnography. These subjects are more practically oriented and help the merchant with his enterprises abroad: he should learn to navigate the seas, as well as how to deal with foreign people.¹⁰⁶ Yet, this did not mean that the Athenaeum was teaching 'the new science', as Harold Cook phrased it: experimental philosophy had no place in the curriculum. Barlaeus here again leans heavily on ancient authors such as Aristotle, Pliny and Strabo, and promoted the study of ancient writers as part of the Athenaeum's curriculum.¹⁰⁷

103 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 97-99.

104 See M. Spies, 'De Koopman van Rhodos. Over de schakelpunten van economie en cultuur', *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 6 (1990), 166-173 for a more elaborate discussion of Cicero's example in Barlaeus' oration, as well as in several other works.

105 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 99, 6-8.

106 Van Berkel, 'Rediscovering Clusius' 233.

107 Ibidem, 233; Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 227-228; Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism* 187.

In sum, Barlaeus argued for the use of philosophy for trade on three different levels. First, it would teach merchants that they should actually not care about trade – an argument that probably did not find much traction with most of his public, but that Barlaeus, as a true humanist scholar, made anyway. Second, as he knew his public would not agree with the first argument, he also argued that philosophy would teach them how to trade wisely. This argument must have pleased Amsterdam's political-mercantile elite, especially as it emphasized their own virtues and offered them a (partial) intellectual legitimization of their pursuits. Finally, he argued speculative philosophy would help them further increase their wealth.

As both moral and speculative philosophy would be taught at the Athenaeum Illustre, we may conclude that Barlaeus argued for the use of the newly opened school on these three grounds. Seen in this light, and taking Barlaeus' consistent dismissal of trade as a pursuit equal to that of wisdom into account, it is perfectly possible to see the oration as a plea for wisdom and the Athenaeum Illustre, rather than as one praising the union of wisdom and trade on equal terms. Indeed, we may view the text in its entirety as an elaborate *captatio benevolentiae* for the Athenaeum Illustre.¹⁰⁸ By choosing a topic so important to his powerful public, and by seemingly flattering the men in his audience while simultaneously proclaiming them insufficiently cultured, Barlaeus managed to achieve a perfect balance, superbly suited to his purpose. On the one hand, he subtly told his public that, although they were already quite virtuous, they had not *quite* reached the level of moral virtue they should aspire to. On the other hand, he promised them this higher level was within their reach: through study of the ancients, under his own auspices at the school they had recently financed, they might yet achieve true wisdom.

108 Van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* 228: 'Barlaeus knew exactly how to pitch a clever *captatio benevolentiae*'.

Thus, Barlaeus delivered what he had promised in the opening paragraphs and managed to reel in his public with this 'enticing bait'. Rather than legitimizing the merchant's active participation on the world stage through the lessons of the ancients as well as of recent, Erasmian humanism, the oration legitimized the pursuit of ancient knowledge on moral and practical grounds.¹⁰⁹ This conclusion is supported by the final paragraphs of the oration, where Barlaeus addressed three types of public. The first of these are the rulers of the republic, whom he urged to help and protect the school: 'Defend, indeed advance, not as much those whom you have invited here with great rewards as the humanities, without which no republic ever was or ever will be ornate and well provided.' Barlaeus again illustrated the hierarchy he envisioned between trade and wisdom: the city government should reward the latter, not the former. To bring home his point, he added that they should invite Minerva, goddess of erudition, humanity and wisdom into the city: not to teach the citizens to trade, but to be wise.¹¹⁰ Barlaeus' words to Amsterdam's rulers contained not just a plea for support, but also a coveted warning. Minerva, after all, also teaches 'by what counsels [kingdoms and cities] rise and fall'.¹¹¹ The message is clear: for now, the city government had chosen to spend its money wisely, namely on the Athenaeum Illustre. Should they change course, they would encounter the ephemeral value of their riches.

The second group of people Barlaeus addressed were the merchants, whom he called 'most noble, respected and learned men'. He asked them, whether citizens or immigrants, to be kind to the school in mind and in speech. They would find a place of solace and quietude in the school, where they would learn to value literature and its teachers, and realize the world of knowledge was much larger, and brought more enduring rewards, than the

109 Secretan, *Le 'Marchand Philosophe'* 13.

110 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant* 119, 4-20.

111 Ibidem 119, 14.

physical world they were so keen to explore.¹¹² Although Barlaeus' choice of words was kind, his message was again crystal clear: philosophy was much more useful than trade, and the merchants would do best to remember it.

Finally, Barlaeus addressed the city's youth. Barlaeus only spoke briefly to them, but addressed them most kindly as 'this republic's hope'.¹¹³ By studying Plato and Aristotle, they 'will not only liberate [their] intellect from the filthy mould of ignorance, but also triumph over [their] enemies: anger, pleasure, desire, audacity, ambition, prodigality'. Barlaeus had high hopes for their advancement, and clearly desired them to become the third type of merchant Pythagoras envisioned: the type that only observes the marketplace, rather than participates in it. He, therefore, spurred them to value learning over riches: 'Do not believe that your life is what you draw from the air, but that it is what you draw from your studies; do not think it splendid to have the shine of gold or silver around you, but to shine with the light of learning.'¹¹⁴

In the true spirit of the humanist educators, Barlaeus put his faith in the youngest generation, which would benefit most from the teachings of the Athenaeum Illustre. While the older generations might be flattered into thinking they were *mercatores sapientes*, this generation might still learn the true value of learning, and choose it over trade altogether. In this manner, Barlaeus proved himself to be the wisest among the merchants: he had assured himself of the older generation's support, thus allowing him to educate their sons towards a different future.

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¹¹² Ibidem 123-125.

¹¹³ Ibidem 123, 15.

¹¹⁴ Ibidem 123, 24-28.