

Charles K. Telfer

**Wrestling with Isaiah:
The Exegetical Methodology
of Campegius Vitringa
(1659-1722)**

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Research Question

Campegius Vitringa Sr (1659–1722) was an internationally renowned biblical scholar. His knowledge of history, philology, Jewish antiquities, and biblical geography were widely respected, and his capacity as an exegete was regarded as on par with the best of his age.¹ Anton Friederich Büsching, who translated Vitringa’s Isaiah commentary into German and produced his *Lebenslauf*, said of his published work:

I will now go on to produce an account of the excellent books and writings of the blessed Vitringa, which have been received by the learned world with almost universal approbation. They are filled with very broad and deep scholarship, and contain countless traces of his God-fearing heart. They have been useful both to the church and to the scholarly world, and their great worth will continue to be appreciated in the ages to come.²

Jean Le Clerc, a notable biblical scholar and one of the gatekeepers of the “Republic of Letters,” highly valued Vitringa’s learning and judgment. In a review, Le Clerc notes the support of “Monsieur Vitringa, the Elder, who [is] a very excellent

1 Ernestine G.E. van der Wall, “Between Grotius and Cocceius: The ‘Theologia Prophetica’ of Campegius Vitringa (1659–1722),” in *Hugo Grotius, Theologian*, ed. G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes, Henk J.M. Nellen, and Edwin Rabbie (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 198. Wall says of Vitringa that he was “especially known for his exegetical achievements. He had acquired a great familiarity with philology, history, [geography], archeology, and Jewish antiquities.” He “was known for his vast scholarship that went hand in hand with a deep piety and an irenic mind.” *Ibid.*

2 Büsching’s biography was printed with his translation of Vitringa’s Isaiah commentary. Anton Friederich Büsching, “Lebenslauf des Verfassers dieser Auslegung,” in *Auslegung der Weisung Jesaia*, vol. I (Halle: Johann Gottlob Bierwirth, 1749), 34. The present monograph contains extensive quotations in translation from German, Dutch, and (particularly) Latin originals. To footnote the originals would make its size unmanageable. These documents are easily available on-line, particularly through the Post-Reformation Digital Library.

judge ... and whose impartiality [is] universally confessed.”³ Vitringa’s work was not only appreciated for its technical expertise but for its theological depth and spiritually oriented quality. He was a theologian of the church, and his efforts in the classroom and through the press were aimed at edifying the people of God.⁴ One of his final books was a deeply moving piece on the spiritual life, so popular that it was translated into Dutch, French, German, and Hungarian (Magyar). The Franeker Hebraist Albert Schultens (1668–1750) called it “a very worthy book that should live and be carried around in our eyes, hands, bosoms, and even our very bones and hearts.”⁵

By all accounts, Vitringa’s *magnum opus* was his *Commentarius in Librum Prophetiarum Jesaiae*.⁶ Vitringa poured thirty years of his life into this project, resulting in a two-volume, 1706 page work (in folio) completed with tremendous care and attention.⁷ This work established Vitringa’s reputation as the foremost commentator on Isaiah for at least the first half of the 18th century. Schultens called it “a magnificent effort,” and another contemporary reviewer remarked that it was “an inexpressibly beautiful and majestic work, which shows more

3 Samuel A. Golden, *Jean LeClerc* (New York: Twayne, 1972), 51. The review dealt with Humphrey Prideaux’s *Connection of the Old and New Testament* (Tomes XVI and XVII) published in 1721. *Ibid.*, 102.

4 Brevard S. Childs, “Hermeneutical Reflections on Campegius Vitringa, Eighteenth-Century Interpreter of Isaiah,” in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 90. Childs admires Vitringa’s remarkable learning as a technical scholar and the “remarkable theological intensity” he evinces as one who “understood himself, above all, as a theologian of the church.” He says we can appreciate the opportunity to learn much from the reflections of a master as Vitringa reveals “his remarkable exegetical skill in trying to resolve perplexing exegetical problems.” *Ibid.*

5 Büsching, “Lebenslauf,” 49.

6 Campegius Vitringa, *Commentarius in librum prophetiarum Jesaiae* (Herbornae Nassavorum: Johan. Nicolai Andreea, 1722). Volume I consists of 710 pp, and Volume II of 958 pp. with a 48 page index. This edition provides the citations from the *Praefatio*. The 1732 Basil edition by Imhoff provides the citations from chapters 1–4, and the 1720 Leeuwarden edition by Halma provides the citations from chapters 65–66 of the commentary.

7 John Sandys-Wunsch, “Early Old Testament Critics on the Continent,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, vol. II (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2008), 975. “Vitringa’s outstanding achievement was his great Isaiah commentary published in two folio volumes (1, 171[4]; 2, 172[0]). The first impression it gives is not only its size but its quality; obviously a labour of love—it took him thirty years to complete it; it must be one of the most thorough Isaiah commentaries ever written. Its very format is indicative of the care that went into the book, for indexes of subjects covered and Hebrew words discussed are provided for each volume and the quality of the printing and production is superb. The work is characterized by careful attention to details of grammar and the meaning of words in context, and various views on the meaning of the text are carefully discussed. More important in the development of biblical scholarship was Vitringa’s emphasis on Isaiah as a book written at a particular period of history before it is interpreted as a source of doctrine.” *Ibid.*

praiseworthy qualities than scarcely any other exegetical book written in recent time.”⁸ Far off in the Americas, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) mentions Vitringa’s work on Isaiah with great respect. He valued not only its “elegant Latin,” but seems to have agreed with a Scottish correspondent that, “perhaps there was never a commentary published on any part of S[acred] S[cripture] equal in learning and judgment to Vitringa on Isaiah and in which so much valuable light is thrown on many difficult texts.”⁹ Büsching gives an extensive list of contemporary accolades for this work and says, “It is not possible to bring together all the praises heaped on this work since it made its appearance. One could fill an entire folio with them.”¹⁰ He cites the famous Johann Jakob Rambach (1693–1735) who considered Vitringa “the most complete commentator on this prophet,” a scholar “among the ornaments of our age,” and a “thesaurus eruditionis philologicae, historicae et theologicae.”¹¹ For Büsching, “If one wishes to judge this work briefly and without bias, they must admit it is not merely the best commentary on Isaiah ever written, but is also an admirable model of what a good commentary should be.” To call the *Commentarius* “the best commentary on Isaiah ever written” was not the opinion of just one man, as we will see in the course of this study.¹² Whether accurate or not, the high regard with which Vitringa was held in the early 18th century makes the fact that he is so little known among biblical scholars and historians today all the more perplexing.

Vitringa’s reputation in his day was such that the trustees of the University of Utrecht offered Vitringa a coveted chair not once but twice, backed with financial incentives that were record-setting at the time.¹³ But Vitringa remained true to the notable institution of his native Friesland, the University of Franeker, where he taught for forty-one years and contributed to the school’s ongoing popularity. His lectures were extremely well-attended as a rule.¹⁴ In addition to his influence on two generations of students from across Protestant Europe, the wide variety and popularity of his writings (as can be seen from a quick perusal of the attached

8 Büsching, “Lebenslauf,” 47.

9 Jonathan Edwards, “Catalogue of Reading,” in *Catalogues of Books*, ed. Peter J. Theusen, vol. 26 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale, 2008), 277. Here Edwards cites the Rev. John Erskine (a Scottish correspondent of JE’s) “in a letter to me dated May 13, 1752.” There are at least two other references to Vitringa in Edward’s papers. In one place he mentions Vitringa’s work on Revelation, and in another he comments, “This Vitringa on Isaiah is several times cited by Rawlin on justification and often also by Hervey in his *Dialogues*.” *Ibid.*, 292.

10 Büsching, “Lebenslauf,” 46.

11 *Ibid.*, 47. That is, “a treasury of philological, historical and theological scholarship.”

12 *Ibid.* I include further citations in Büsching of contemporary scholars in praise of the *Commentarius* in my conclusion.

13 I explore the twists and turns of this romantic tale, which includes the involvement of the Stadholder Willem II (of William and Mary fame), in chapter two.

14 Büsching, “Lebenslauf,” 32.

bibliography) assured Vitringa an ongoing importance throughout the 18th century.¹⁵ Although it will not be possible to develop a thorough *Wirkungsgeschichte* in a work of this length, it is clear that Vitringa had an impact on figures who were significant to the development of Pietism as well as on those who played roles in the development of emerging exegetical methodologies.¹⁶ One scholar traces these lines out to extraordinary lengths, seeing Vitringa as a source of inspiration for German Idealism in one line and 19th century critical exegesis in another.¹⁷ Brevard Childs, the late professor of Old Testament at Yale University, notes that even “such an acerbic and demanding grammarian as Gesenius spoke of Vitringa with great respect and even awe regarding his philological and historical prowess.”¹⁸ Halle philologist Wilhelm Gesenius (1786–1842) produced his own commentary on Isaiah in 1820 and referred back to Vitringa’s effort as a “masterwork of historical exegesis.” His countryman Ludwig Diestel, in the epoch-making *Geschichte des Alten Testaments in der christlichen Kirche* of 1868 called it “a great advance to exegesis.”¹⁹

If Vitringa and his work on Isaiah were so widely appreciated in his day and his contribution was recognized in Europe for the next century and a half, how can it be that he was largely overlooked for a hundred years? Until recently, modern commentators (Evangelical as well as critical) have generally neglected him, particularly in North America. More distressingly, Vitringa is simply passed over in modern histories of biblical interpretation written before 1990.²⁰ This long neglect is one reason we should seek to bring Vitringa and his Isaiah commentary back into a certain amount of well-deserved prominence.²¹

15 “Through his works, which were translated into various languages, and his many students from the Dutch Republic as well as from abroad (Hungary, Poland, France, Germany, Scotland), Vitringa’s influence made itself felt for a long time, lasting well into the nineteenth century. Above all his eschatological ideas were influential among such famous pietists as Philipp Jakob Spener, August Hermann Francke, and Johann Albrecht Bengel.” Wall, “Between Grotius and Cocceius,” 197–198.

16 Ibid. Cf. Hermann Bauch, *Die Lehre vom Wirken des heiligen Geistes im Frühpietismus: Studien zur Pneumatologie und Eschatologie von Campegius Vitringa, Philipp Jakob Spener und Johann Albrecht Bengel*, Theologische Forschung: wissenschaftliche Beiträge zur kirchlich-evangelischen Lehre (Hamburg-Bergstedt: H. Reich, 1974): 55.

17 Klaas Marten Witteveen, “Campegius Vitringa und die prophetische Theologie,” *Zwingliana* 19, no. 2 (1993): 358.

18 Ernst F.K. Rosenmüller (1768–1835), Franz Delitzsch (1813–1890), and Christian F.A. Dillman (1823–1894) too cited Vitringa with respect in the 19th century. Childs, “Campegius Vitringa,” 90.

19 Witteveen, “Campegius Vitringa,” 356; Cf. Ludwig Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testaments in der christlichen Kirche* (Jena: Mauke, 1869).

20 E.g., Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (Bampton Lectures 1885; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) and Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1956).

21 Cf. Charles K. Telfer, “Campegius Vitringa Sr., ‘Praefatio ad lectorem,’” in: *Commentarius in*

The fact that Vitringa's work is largely in erudite Latin has not helped his popularity in North America. Indeed he can be rather long-winded. His reputation has also been tainted by association with the more allegorical approach of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669).²² Additionally, the dominance of higher-critical emphases in biblical studies has long cast a shadow over the value of "precritical" figures such as Vitringa. Even many Evangelical scholars in the last one hundred years have adopted the implicitly historical-critical assumption that the way in which the believing community has read the Bible for millennia can simply be ignored without impairing one's access to the original meaning of the biblical text.

In recent decades, however, both Evangelical and critical scholars are rediscovering the value of the history of interpretation for biblical studies. Publishers are putting out studies that highlight this interest, such as the Blackwell *Through the Centuries* series. The flagship Evangelical publisher InterVarsity not only puts out a popular *Ancient Christian Commentary* series, but now a *Reformation Commentary on Scripture* series highlighting the insights of Reformation and post-Reformation exegetes. And the Society of Biblical Literature, the bellwether of biblical studies in the West, has turned its attention significantly in the last two decades to this subject.²³ The history of the interpretation of the Bible is fast becoming a hot topic in biblical studies. Also the present study of Vitringa underlines Gerhard Ebeling's affirmation: "church history is the history of the exposition of Scripture."²⁴

As the hegemony of the historical-critical study of the Bible is being challenged and as long-cherished, scholarly assumptions in Isaiah studies are being called into question, so-called "precritical" figures may prove to be of help to us as we seek to become faithful exegetes of Scripture. A scholar such as Vitringa (the heir of centuries of Renaissance scholarship as well as of the theological

librum prophetiarum Jesaiae, 1716 and 'De interpretatione prophetiarum,' in: *Typus doctrinae propheticae, in quo de prophetis et prophetiis agitur, hujusque scientiae praecepta traduntur*, 1708," *Handbuch der Bibelhermeneutiken*, ed. Oda Wischmeyer (Berlin: De Gruyter, Forthcoming, 2016), 435–449.

22 Cf. Childs, "Campegius Vitringa," 89–90.

23 The 1997 San Francisco meeting made this a major focus, and recent North American meetings have had a number of programs devoted to history of interpretation issues. The International SBL has hosted a series of meetings on the history of interpretation as well. My own contribution (from the 2012 Amsterdam session) appears alongside those of N.T. Wright, Goldengay, Hafemann and others as part of the book edited by Mark Elliott and Carey Walsh: "Campegius Vitringa (1659–1722): Biblical Theologian at the Beginning of the 18th Century," in *Biblical Theology: Past, Present and Future* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, forthcoming 2016), 18–32.

24 Gerhard Ebeling. "Church History is the History of the Exposition of Scripture," in *The Word of God and Tradition: Historical Studies Interpreting the Divisions of Christianity*, trans. S. H. Hooks (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 11–32.

insights of the Reformation and of Protestant Orthodoxy) may have something to teach us as students of Isaiah today. His view of the hermeneutical task may confirm or call into question some of our own exegetical practices. The way he understands prophecy may challenge our approaches. His view of the Bible is instructive, and his vision of the qualities of character needed in an interpreter may give us points of reference against which to measure ourselves.²⁵

In the recent revival of interest in the works of Protestant Orthodox divines, the theologians have received the most scholarly attention. But the exegetical work accomplished in that period undergirds the systematic theological production. And there has been relatively little work done on exegetical efforts in the period of Protestant Orthodoxy. Richard Muller said that in the case of Vitringa's exegetical work (as in so many of the exegetes of the period of Protestant Orthodoxy), "It's a virgin field." Surely it is time to bring this Dutch master into more prominence.²⁶

This project should be of interest to those studying the intellectual history of Vitringa's day. He wrote during a time of great ferment in Western thought.²⁷ The proper interpretation of the Bible was a major subject of public discourse, and Vitringa was not an insignificant player in some of these debates. Contentions over biblical prophecies and their historical fulfillments were an important component in controversies concerning the reliability of Scripture. Debates that took place in early 18th century England (for example those between William Whiston [1677–1752] and the freethinker Anthony Collins [1676–1729]) concerning the interpretation and reliability of prophecies had their predecessors in similar conflicts which took place in the Netherlands at the end of the 17th century and in which Vitringa played a role.²⁸ Those interested in this broad discussion will find Vitringa's views on prophecy and its fulfillment engaging. Furthermore, Vitringa stands as a counterexample to historiographies that posit a sudden dominance of rationalistic approaches to the Bible at the onset of the 18th century. Though a scholar's scholar, his views remained remarkably orthodox, as we shall see.

Another reason for this project is the paucity of material on Vitringa in English. Only one of his books, highly condensed, was ever translated into

25 I use inclusive language for interpreters in this monograph, but when referring to Vitringa's own conception, "his or her" seems particularly awkward. My apologies to the reader for the use of "his" when referring to the interpreter on such occasions.

26 From a private conversation, for which I am grateful.

27 Cf. Paul Hazard, *The European Mind, 1680–1715: The Critical Years*, trans. J. Lewis May (New York: Fordham, 1990).

28 Wall, "Between Grotius and Cocceius," 195–96. Wall excellently sets forth the way in which the *studium propheticum* in late 17th century Netherlands (better known in the conflicts of early 18th century England) was part of a defense of the Christian religion against attacks on traditional proofs such as miracles and prophecies.

English.²⁹ It has only been very recently that any secondary literature on Vitringa has appeared in English, and these works contain precious little biographical information. The only monograph on Vitringa has been a little-known dissertation in Dutch that appeared in 1865.³⁰ The biography I have produced (as chapter two) should be an especially welcome contribution to Vitringa studies.

1.2 Methodology

This book explores the research question: *What was Campegius Vitringa's exegetical methodology?* It is an attempt to trace out Vitringa's approach to exegesis through a close reading of his most important hermeneutical works. Following his own categories and terminology, the goal is to set forth his hermeneutical model, both in *theoria* and in *praxis*. This enables me to focus the research question more narrowly: *How consistent is Vitringa in carrying out in practice the exegetical methodology that he espouses in theory?* I set forth the result of my research in four areas.

- (a) First, I present a brief biography which helps put Vitringa's exegesis in the context of both his life and his historical milieu.
- (b) Second, I examine the secondary literature on Vitringa with a particular focus on what scholars have said about his exegetical methodology.
- (c) Third, I outline Vitringa's exegetical methodology from those places in his writings most directly concerned with hermeneutical issues. These include the famous *Praefatio* to the Isaiah commentary, chapter two of his *Doctrina christiana religionis* entitled "De scriptura sancta", and the third section of his *Typus doctrinae propheticae* which is extraordinarily relevant.³¹ I engage in a close reading of these texts in an effort to set forth Vitringa's exegetical ideals in his own words. This will help us explain his *canones hermeneuticos*, understand his view of Scripture (and what is required of one who will interpret it), appreciate the way in which he sees himself in relationship to Grotius and Cocceius, and give us a well-rounded view of his exegetical

29 Campegius Vitringa, *The Synagogue and the Church: Being an Attempt to Show That the Government, Ministries and Services of the Church Were Derived from Those of the Synagogue*, trans. Joshua L. Bernard (London: B. Fellowes, 1842).

30 Willem Frederik Caspar Johannes van Heel, "Campegius Vitringa Sr. als Godgeleerde beschouwd" (Ph.D. Diss., Utrecht, 1865).

31 Campegius Vitringa, *Doctrina christiana religionis, per aphorismos summatim descripta*. (Franeker: Franciscus Halma, 1690). This work was issued in various editions and revisions until 1789. Idem., *Typus doctrinae propheticae, in quo de prophetis et prophetiis agitur, hujusque scientiae praecepta traduntur* (Franeker: Franciscus Halma, 1708).

methodology. In short, I will summarize his vision of how biblical interpretation should be carried out.

- (d) Fourthly, after having outlined Vitringa’s own exegetical ideal, I show how far Vitringa keeps his own counsel. Through a close reading of select chapters of the *Commentarius in Librum Prophetiarum Jesaiae*, I examine in detail how Vitringa carries out the exegetical task.³²

In chapter five I make certain generalizations about Vitringa’s exegetical approach, introduce his distinction between “literal” and “spiritual” interpretation, and then examine the contextually sensitive way in which he interprets the biblical text at the various exegetical levels including: words, phrases and sentences, grammar and syntax, style and rhetorical features, and also genre and larger literary structures. I also look at the way in which Vitringa handles the question of the historical background of the text.

In chapter six I then explore more far-reaching areas of Vitringa’s exegetical methodology. I describe in greater detail what he means by “spiritual interpretation,” and I explore the implications of his commitment to interpreting all the parts of Scripture in keeping with the whole. I examine the manner in which the New Testament (NT) becomes a norm for his interpretation of the Old Testament (OT) and the way in which Christ and his kingdom are the substance of both testaments. Vitringa’s ultimate hermeneutical horizon is the broad sweep of redemptive history focusing on Christ.

I also look at the manner in which Vitringa interacts with Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) and Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669) in the body of the *Commentarius*.³³ (Vitringa’s extensive interactions with Grotius stem partly from apologetic concerns since the Remonstrant Grotius’ skeptical views were taken up by later, more radical critics of the Bible. And Cocceius of course was a major figure in Reformed Orthodox exegesis.³⁴) I lay out how Vitringa handles the historical fulfillment of Isaianic prophecies. Finally, I outline how he moves from text to doctrine and to pastoral application. Throughout chapters five and six, I provide a series of substantial quotations to give the reader the most thorough possible exposure to the way Vitringa does interpretation.

In the conclusion I highlight additional personal characteristics of Vitringa’s work, reflect further on his influence (and his relation to Calvin), and definitively

32 See the beginning of chapter five for a justification of the texts I have chosen—principally Isaiah chapters 1–4 and 65–66.

33 Among their many achievements as authors and theologians, each wrote a commentary on Isaiah.

34 Cf. Brian Lee, *Johannes Cocceius and the Exegetical Roots of Federal Theology: Reformation Developments in the Interpretation of Hebrews 7–10*, Reformed Historical Theology 7 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2009).

answer our basic research question regarding the consistency of Vitringa's hermeneutical *theoria* and *praxis*. Along with setting forth some ways in which we may profit from Vitringa's exegetical example (particularly for those seeking to read Isaiah as Christian believers), I also critique certain aspects of his approach. Finally, I suggest a few areas for further research.

This book does not lay out Vitringa's position on every exegetical crux in Isaiah nor does it precisely define Vitringa's relationship to Spinoza (1632–1677), Richard Simon (1638–1712), Jean LeClerc (1657–1736), or other controversial figures of the day. It does include material which helps put Vitringa into historical context, such as the biography, the listing of Vitringa's conversation partners (Appendix 2), and the protracted attention to Grotius and Cocceius. I trust the reader will come away with a sense of Vitringa's importance and influence. The central goal, however, is not to establish a definitive position for Vitringa within the nexus of European thought but to give an authentic and in-depth account of how he envisioned and practiced the craft of biblical exegesis.

The substantial library of exegetical efforts from the period of Protestant Orthodoxy is a largely untapped resource for our efforts today as academic biblical scholars and as Christian thinkers. Translations of Vitringa's works are a *desideratum*.³⁵ But I trust that this present study will provide a window into the man and his exegetical methodology as he (to use Child's phrase) struggled to understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture.³⁶ As we examine a great exegete at work on an even greater prophet, it is my hope that the fathers and the children might be able to discuss things at the same table.

35 I am presently working on a translation of Vitringa's *Typus theologiae practicae, sive de vita spirituali, ejusque affectionibus commentatio* (Franeker: Wibius Bleck, 1716), cf. idem., *Essai de theologie pratique, on traité de la vie spirituelle et de ses caracteres*, trans. Henri Philippe de Limiers (Amsterdam: H. Strik, 1721).

36 Cf. Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). The title "Wrestling with Isaiah" represents a tip of the hat to Child's book that was the initial stimulus for this project.

Chapter 2. Biography

2.1 Introduction

Anton Friederich Büsching, the most painstaking of Vitringa's biographers, begins his 1749 *Lebenslauf* with the following summary:

Campegius Vitringa Sr is indisputably considered among the list of great men. He has gained a lasting name and high respect for himself not only for his sincere godliness, but also for his broad and deep scholarship and great services. The memory of the notable environment in which he was raised, his excellent writings, and his commendable character qualities should be perpetually preserved and relayed to distant posterity.¹

Unless such veneration is utterly misguided (and we will see below that it was far from uncommon), a brief survey of Vitringa's life and work should repay our efforts today. Not only is his life filled with interesting, inspiring, and at times adventuresome details, but a biographical sketch will help us put Vitringa's exegetical contributions in perspective. Various scholars who have written about, translated, or published the work of Vitringa have also started with a life-sketch to provide context for readers. Büsching opened his German translation of the Isaiah commentary with a *Lebenslauf*. Schultens inserted a *Laudatio funebris in memoriam Campegi Vitringa* at the beginning of the Latin original of the Isaiah commentary, and Heel includes a *Levensschets* at the beginning of his dissertation on Vitringa.²

In this chapter we will consider the question of biographical sources, then Vitringa's early life and education, academic career, family, publications, and finally something about his character. A complete *Wirkungsgeschichte* for Vit-

1 Anton Friederich Büsching, "Lebenslauf des Verfassers dieser Auslegung," in *Auslegung der Weissagung Jesaia*, vol. I (Halle: Johann Gottlob Bierwirth, 1749), 25.

2 Campegius Vitringa, *Commentarius in Librum Prophetiarum Jesaiae, editio nova, prioribus accuratior, praemittitur Laudatio funebris, in memoriam cl. auctoris habita a . . . Alberto Schultens*. (Leeuwarden: Henricus Halma, Vol. I, 1714 & Vol. II, 1720), and Willem Frederik Caspar Johannes van Heel, "Campegius Vitringa Sr. als Godgeleerde beschouwd" (Ph.D. Diss., Utrecht, 1865).

ringa is outside the purview of the present work, but the biography, along with the historical notes in the conclusion, provide a large amount of evidence suggesting Vitringa's influence on later figures in the history of biblical studies.

2.2 Biographical Sources

Toward the end of his life, Vitringa himself produced some sort of autobiography, which has since been lost to posterity. Franeker colleague Albert Schultens had this document in hand and made use of its most notable points in composing a funeral address for Vitringa that he delivered at the university church at Franeker on the thirteenth of April 1722.³ This address has been published in its Latin original as well as in a Dutch translation.⁴ Theodore von Hase (1682–1731) published a brief biography of Vitringa that was published in the *Bremishen Bibliothek*.⁵ The most comprehensive and detailed account of Vitringa's life was composed by the German translator of his Isaiah commentary, Anton Friederich Büsching (1724–1793). Büsching made use of all biographical sources available in the years after Vitringa's death. He utilized the biographical references in the prefaces to each of Vitringa's works as well as "his correspondence, which I have gathered together and organized with significant effort."⁶ Büsching also conducted an extensive correspondence with Herman Venema (1697–1787), Vitringa's son-in-law and successor at Franeker, and Vitringa's former student Johann Georg Michaelis (1690–1758), professor in Halle.⁷ Other biographical sources, including Jean-Pierre Nicéron's (1685–1738) ten-page entry on Vitringa in his *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des hommes illustres dans la république des lettres*, seem to be dependent on these basic sources.⁸

3 Büsching, "Lebenslauf," 25, and idem., "Fortsetzung des Lebenslaufs des seligen Herrn Vitringa: von seinem natürlichen und sitlichen Character," in *Auslegung Weissagung Jesaiae* Vol. II (Halle: Johann Gottlob Bierwirth, 1749), 15.

4 Albert Schultens, *Laudatio Funeris in Memoriam Campegii Vitringa, Theol. Prof.* (Franeker: Henricus Halma, 1722), and idem., "Lykrede ter Uitvaart van den voornamen Godgeleerden Campegius Vitringa [Vader]," in *Uitvoerige Waarschuwwing op verscheide Stukken Kategismus* (Leiden: Abraham Kallewier and Hendrik van der Deyster, 1755).

5 I have been unable to locate this resource, but it was thoroughly plundered by Nicéron and Büsching.

6 Büsching, "Lebenslauf," 26. Büsching studied in Halle, obtained a doctorate and a professorship at Göttingen, and was a Lutheran minister of remarkably broad interests, making his greatest contributions as an educator and in the area of political geography.

7 Ibid., 25. This OT scholar became the grandfather of the well-known Johann David Michaelis (1717–91).

8 In the "Additions and Corrections to the First Two Sections of the Lebenslauf" Büsching notes, "My earlier conjecture that Nicéron had taken his biography of the late Vitringa from Schultens' funeral oration and Hase's edition, I have now confirmed by personal examination.

2.3 Early Life and Education

Vitringa was born on the sixteenth of May 1659, in Leeuwarden, the capital city of Friesland (Frisia) in the northern Netherlands. He was the second child of his mother, Albertina von Haen (1635–1666), who died when Campegius was a child. His father, Horatius Vitringa (1632–1699), was chief secretary and later judge of the high court of Friesland. His parents' families were religious and respected people. The family of his maternal grandmother, Margaretha Horatii, had fled Brabant for Friesland during the persecution of Protestants under the Duke of Alba, leaving behind a considerable fortune.⁹

Horatius remarried, but these were days of frequent deaths. Little Campegius lost his step-mother before he was grown. His father personally attended to his early education, training him in the “fear of God” and the basics of the “arts and sciences.”¹⁰ Young Vitringa showed a remarkable zeal and aptitude for learning when he studied under Rhomberg, rector at Leeuwarden, who praised the boy's modesty and piety and called him the “choicest portion of our school.”¹¹ He became not only fluent in Latin but capable in Greek, having read the entire New Testament four times. He went on to study Hebrew and attained such an ability that, “except where obscure words and difficult passages tripped him up, he became able to translate any part of the Old Testament from beginning to end without the help of a version.”¹²

When he was only sixteen Vitringa was able to transfer to the academy (or university) at Franeker in 1675. He bid farewell to the lower school with an oration in Latin entitled “On Christian Endurance.” Herman Witsius (1636–1708), a preacher in the city at that time, heard his speech. “He delivered it with such skill, such agreeable speech and gestures, and with so much brilliance, that the hearers were left astonished. The famous Herman Witsius ... was so moved by the quality and vivacity with which our youth spoke that he could not restrain himself from weeping.”¹³

Vitringa focused on theology at the university, but completed a wide range of preliminary studies. He studied mathematics and astronomy, under Johan Wubbena (1640–81) he trained vigorously in philosophy, natural sciences, and logic, successfully defending a “philosophical disputation, ‘On Fire’ ... against

In the 35th volume of his *Memoires pour servir a l'histoire des hommes illustres dans la rep. des lettres*, 30–40, he furnishes merely a short excerpt from it.” Büsching, “Fortsetzung,” 15.

9 Büsching, “Lebenslauf,” 25–26.

10 Ibid., 26.

11 Ibid., 27.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 28.

many skilled opponents.”¹⁴ Vitringa paid special attention to languages. He studied Greek first under Nicolas Blancard (1624–1703) and then under the private tutelage of Witsius, with whom he carefully read large portions of Xenophon. He read widely in both Greek and Latin literature, making extensive notebooks of quotations that served him well in later years. He also continued his study of Hebrew and “antiquities” under Johannes Terentius (1628?–1677). After Terentius’ death, he included rabbinical literature in his studies, especially Rashi (French commentator Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki, 1040–1105), under the instruction of a local Jewish teacher. In this way he “gained for himself access to an unhindered reading of the Rabbis.”¹⁵

Vitringa studied theology at Franeker for two years under Nicholas Arnold (1618–1680), Johan Mardius (d. 1677), and especially Herman Witsius, with whom he formed a special bond as patron and friend. In his letter of recommendation to Leiden University, Witsius wrote that he considered Vitringa worthy to be his successor, which indeed later took place.

Having come to Leiden, Vitringa continued his studies in theology under Friederich Spanheim Jr (1632–1701), Christoph Wittichius (1625–1687), and Stephanus Le Moine (1624–1689). Shortly after his arrival, Vitringa engaged in a public disputation with Spanheim and earned the respect of both crowd and opponent for his learning and oratorical abilities. After just a year of research in Leiden, he produced three disputations on Psalm 2, which he successfully defended. He graduated with highest honors as a doctor in theology at age twenty in 1679.

2.4 Academic Career

Vitringa was very much desirous of continuing his studies and hoped to travel to Oxford. Not only did his father oppose this plan, but there seems to have been a widespread expectation that he would take up a post as professor of Eastern languages at the University of Franeker. He became a candidate for the gospel ministry on the third of June, 1680. And on the nineteenth of August he received a call from the rectors of the university to serve as professor of Hebrew Language and Holy Antiquities. This position became available because of the departure of Witsius for Utrecht. And so, at the age of twenty one, Vitringa presented his inaugural address, “*De officio probe sacrarum literarum interpretis* [Concerning the Duty of a Good Interpreter of Holy Scripture].” Heinrich Casimir (1657–

14 Wubben said he was “born for philosophy.” Ibid.

15 Ibid., 27–28.

1696), the Prince of Nassau and Stadholder in Friesland, was present in person for the high occasion.¹⁶

Upon the departure of Johannes Marckius (1655–1731), Vitringa was made professor of theology (which included biblical studies), and gave an inaugural address “*De amore veritatis* [Concerning the Love of Truth].” Furthermore, upon the departure of classical scholar and historian Jacobus Perizonius (1651–1715) to Leiden in 1693, Vitringa was honored with a second chair: that of sacred history.

Academics’ careers are not often romantic tales, but Vitringa’s call to Utrecht is worth telling in some detail. When Witsius left Utrecht for Leiden in 1698, it seems that he again earmarked Vitringa as his successor. The rectors sent a call to Vitringa on August 22, promising him a handsome salary. Vitringa accepted. But while he was on his way to submit his resignation to the board of the University of Franeker, he received notice that his appointment had been blocked by the Stadholder of Utrecht, Holland, Geldern, and Obereissel: William III, Prince of Orange and (at that time) King of England! It seems that Melchior Leydeker (1642–1721), professor of theology at Utrecht, may have accused Vitringa of being a Cocceian, whose doctrines were very much out of favor with the Prince and his followers. We will explore in detail below whether this accusation is a fair one. But the rectors of Franeker University happily reaffirmed their desire for him to stay.¹⁷

The leadership of Utrecht was not easily dissuaded from their prize, and in 1702 they renewed their call to Vitringa, sending especially honorable men to press their case. But Vitringa remained loyal to his university, whose regents honored him in turn with a salary that they increased to 2,000 guilders, a sum which none but the famous jurist Ulrich Huber (1636–94) had ever received at Franeker.¹⁸

In September of 1703 the Utrechters once again “tried to steal him for their university,” adding to their offer a lordly gift of 8,000, the equivalent of the four-years’ pay he had not received because of the Stadholder’s interference.¹⁹ But Vitringa did not move. They later made him the extremely lucrative offer of a total yearly salary of 2,800 guilders by adding the position and remuneration of one of the city preachers to the professorate in theology. Still unswayed, Vitringa firmly and finally refused their advances.²⁰

16 *Ibid.*, 29–30.

17 *Ibid.*, 30–31.

18 *Ibid.*, 31.

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.* Büsching attributes this in part to a special love for his “fatherland,” i. e., Friesland, and gratitude to the university there for its faithful support.