

Review

Jan Hengstmengel, Jos Babeliowsky, C.L. Heesakkers (†), and H.J.H. Mooren (†) (eds.), *Gens Schotana* iv. 20 [*Brieven en album-inscripties van Bernardus Schotanus (1598-1602); Catalogus Epistolarum Bernardi Schotani; Bernardus Schotanus (1598-1652) Bibliografie III*], Franeker, Schotanus-Stichting, 2020, ISBN 97890802626900.

GENS SCHOTANA



20

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Rarely have I been asked to review a stranger book than one that starts with a page carrying the number 138 and an apparent chapter number '4.3.8'. A visit to the website of the publisher, the Schotanus Foundation, informs us that it concerns volume 20 (hence this loose number on the cover) of the series *Gens Schotana*. In fact, it is the second part of the third tome, and it consists of three chapters, of which the first and most substantial one is entitled 'Letters and album inscriptions of Bernardus Schotanus (1598-1652)'.

Schotanus was a member of an extensive scholarly family in Friesland. He made a career as professor of law in Franeker, Utrecht, and Leiden, authoring an often-reprinted textbook on the *Digest* of Roman law while maintaining contact with his Frisian and Utrecht peers. Such a biographical sketch is not offered here.

Editions of texts may be excused for dispensing with the sharp-edged historiographical positioning required for monographs. They usually proceed immediately to a biographical introduction of the protagonist, but apparently, Schotanus's life was already described in some of the other issues in this series. Hence, a mere four pages introduce the reader to the bare minimum of the early modern learned letter, privileging materiality over theory: it altogether ignores the epistolographical tradition of the early modern scholarly letter and its social context, preferring to dive *in medias res* by discussing how autographs were folded, sealed, and delivered, with a note about the difference between old and new styles. It accounts for the decision to print the twenty-nine letters from Schotanus not in chronological, but in alphabetical order of the recipient (and chronologically if there are

multiple letters to one recipient). The edition discards the thirty surviving letters addressed to Schotanus for the reason that so many letters are missing that no epistolary dialogue is constituted among them. This is an unusual editorial decision. The reader is thrown back and forth in time (the last printed letter dates to the beginning of Schotanus's career), and is ignored access to half of what is available of Schotanus's social life. The introduction explains the basic characteristics of *alba amicorum*, since the edition exemplarily also contains eighteen surviving entries of Schotanus in such *alba*.

The decision to have a diplomatic transcription is defensible, even if it is unusual to maintain capitalisation, punctuation, and Latin accents. Noting variants in capitalisation and punctuation is even stranger (in particular since edited sources are not consistently collated), as is the decision to print all roman-type original text in italics and the other way around. This said, the edition itself is exemplary. To give an example: the editors have not satisfied themselves with copying out Martin Engels's modern edition of the letters to Saeckma, but revisited the manuscripts. The transcriptions are spotless: there are hardly any typos in the transcription.¹ The full Dutch translations are very accurate (some letters are very technical) and the discursive annotations extremely useful. The biographies of the owners of the *alba* testify to some impressively detailed research. It would have been preferable to use footnotes over endnotes, but the extensive and complete appendices make up for that: the editors left no stone unturned. Chapter 4.3.9 comprises an inventory by Henstmengel of the Schotanus correspondence and album-entries, as well as an addition (4.3.10) to Schotanus's bibliography by Ferenc Postma and Hylkje de Jong, both updated from previously published overviews in the *Gens Schotana* series. The hand of the late Chris Heesakkers is apparent throughout the edition; this phenomenally erudite Neo-Latinist never felt too good to spend numerous hours on an almost invisible, privately published edition.

Since Schotanus is no household name, what remains of his letters are a set of undorned and untampered occasional views into the life of a respectable professor. Contrary to what happened in many seventeenth-century editions, his family was not edited out of his correspondence, which allows his wife and daughters to appear as integral to his daily life. Inconspicuously short administrative memos sit next to a laboured dedication letter to William II. The letters are rewarding for readers interested in the practicalities of private lessons (we know little about private *collegia*, but Schotanus mentions them often and provides details that never make it to institutional archives). Schotanus was sometimes asked to give his professional view on legal issues regarding testaments, showing that he managed to use theoretical knowledge of Roman Law for practical purposes. Overall, this edition provides a small collection of aborted scenes in the life of an average citizen of the Republic of Letters. Even if the *raison d'être* of this publication is a limited intended audience of Schotanus lovers, historians of learning have here an incongruous edition that meets some of the highest scholarly standards possible while ignoring some very basic

¹ The expression 'me is cumulatum' (p. 181, top) is not a mistake for 'meis cumulatum': *is* is the second person singular of the verb *ire* and *cumulatum* is a supine (cf. top of p. 185); 'serio' on p. 185 is not a mistake for 'seria': it's adverbial, not adjectival; p. 172, line 52, 'promptissimare' must be *promptissimum* (*promptissima re* does not fit either); p. 178, line 1: *Doctore* = *Doctori*.

ones at the same time. Readers are advised to order some of the economically priced previous volumes to gain a wider picture. It is to be wished that all people fascinated by the history of their own family would come up with something as good as this.

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