

## Review

Rudolf De Smet et al. (eds.), *Marnixi Epistulae. De briefwisseling van Marnix van Sint-Aldegonde. Een kritische uitgave. Pars v (1585-1598)*, Brussel, University Press, 2017, 761 pp, ISBN 9789062810291.

In the history of the Low Countries Philips of Marnix, Lord of Saint-Aldegonde, is a key figure in politics and literature. Long thought to have been the author of the Dutch national anthem, the *Wilhelmus*, Marnix has also been considered the first Dutch cryptographer, who deciphered many secret messages intercepted from the Spaniards. A recent edition of Marnix of Saint-Aldegonde's correspondence shows that his legacy is even more impressive and important than these two examples suggest.

Marnix's intellectual development was deeply shaped by Calvin and Beza in Geneva, where he studied theology. His political prestige and renown are largely due to his active role in the Dutch Reformation, his justification of the Iconoclastic Fury of 1566 and, after having fled for the Duke of Alba, his collaboration with William, Prince of Orange, whom he already represented at the first meeting of the States-General in Dordrecht in 1572. In Belgian history, Marnix is also remembered as the heroic burgomaster of Antwerp who, in 1585, surrendered the city to the Spaniards, after a siege that had lasted several months. Less known is his eloquent but fruitless appeal for aid to the German princes at the Diet of Worms in 1578, his equally ineffective attempts to secure the assistance of Queen Elizabeth I, or his efforts, in vain again, to persuade the magistrates of Ghent to cease the persecution of Catholics. Marnix's political position was characterised by his loyalty to William of Orange, his intellectual virtue, and irenic ideals.

Sharing Lipsius's humanist and Neo-Stoic views, he retired from public affairs after moving to the Northern Netherlands. In Leiden and Zeeland he devoted himself to a life of letters: besides his widely read and often translated satire on the practices of the Roman Church, *De roomsche byen-korf (The Roman Bee-Hive)*, written in 1569 during his exile in Friesland, Marnix – who was also skilled in Hebrew and Greek – composed a Latin verse translation of the psalms and published various religious and theological writings. Like his humanist colleagues and friends, such as Lipsius and Bonaventura Vulcanius, he corresponded in Latin, French, and Dutch with intellectual peers and theological opponents alike. Indeed, intellectuals in his league easily crossed the religious borders and antagonisms of their time. His open mind and impressive erudition enabled him to discuss theological views with the Louvain professor of theology Michael Baius, as well as to plead for an end to the Dutch Revolt. Unsurprisingly, Marnix fell between two stools: he was held responsible for having lost Antwerp to Farnese, and was accused of treason for his

reconciling position in the Dutch Revolt by William of Orange and the States-General. A retreat from politics, modelled after the one described and lived by Cicero and reenacted by humanist authors such as Petrarch and Boccaccio, was the outcome, but it also laid the basis for his literary legacy.

Marnix's complex political role in the Dutch Revolt, his (secret) diplomatic activities, and his private life amidst the turmoil and upheavals of the Dutch Revolt have been documented rather fragmentary. Several unique (archival and manuscript) testimonies had been ignored, because his entire correspondence – only a very small part of which has been published in the past centuries – still awaited a complete, modern, and critical edition.

Historians of the Dutch Revolt can now start a more serious study of Marnix's life and legacy, since a solid philological basis has been laid in the five-volume series of the *Marnixi Epistulae*. Whereas the publication of the first volume dated from 1990, the fifth and last volume has now been published. In more than one sense this 761-page volume is a cornerstone. Concluding the long-running and extremely important editorial project initiated by the late professor Aloïs Gerlo (1915-1998), first rector of the Free University of Brussels and eminent scholar of Renaissance humanism of the Low Countries, this volume shows great philological skill, as well as historical, theological, and philosophical erudition, not to mention scholarly stamina by Gerlo's successor, Rudolf De Smet. Together with his post-doctoral and doctoral students Filip Vanhaecke and Tim Wauters, De Smet has provided a glorious crown to this prestigious project.

As in the previous volumes, this fifth volume – containing letters nos. 267-457, from January 1585 to July 1598 – is the result of patient and diligent research in the archives and libraries of Simancas, Brussels, The Hague, Leiden, Haarlem, Middelburg, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Paris, and London. In the 190 letters written by or to Marnix of Saint-Aldegonde in Dutch, French, or Latin, historians and readers interested in the political and cultural history of the Low Countries will encounter both major and lesser-known figures. Among Marnix's correspondents in this volume are the Duke of Alba, Alexander Farnese, Maurice of Nassau, Queen Elizabeth I, King Philip II, the Guise family, King Henry IV, Leicester, Prince William of Orange, Pope Sixtus V, Sir Philip Sidney, and Sir Francis Walsingham. In Marnix's own letters, we find interesting echoes of prominent political leaders. The diplomatic actions of councillors such as Cornelis Aerssens and Jean Richardot are recounted in newly discovered letters, which open up day-to-day research on politics and negotiations. Marnix's disappointment in the political lethargy of the northern provinces and his bitter reaction to his exile also stand out in various letters.

Apart from political issues and the deciphering of letters (which he sent to William Cecil and Elizabeth I), Marnix's correspondence testifies to his intellectual friendship with Lipsius and their common Stoic interests. Many letters shed light on Marnix's relations with other prominent scholars, famous artists, and renowned writers. We can read the polyglot Marnix in ancient Greek, and see him shift effortlessly from Hebrew to Greek, and finally to Latin in a letter discussing psalm 39. Among his long list of learned correspondents are Theodore Beza, the Scottish humanist and reformer George Buchanan (with whom Marnix discussed the publication of his own translation of the psalms), but also the Leiden botanist Carolus Clusius, Hugo Grotius, Janus Gruterus, Isaac Casaubon, Lodovico Guicciardini, and Hendrik Goltzius. A special letter was sent to the Delft minister Arnoldus

Cornelii, concerning the latter's poems that eulogised the victory of the English-Dutch coalition against the Spanish Armada. Here we find Marnix voicing his views on the use of Dutch as a language of literature and poetry. Marnix's love for poetry is equally clear from the Latin epithalamium in eighty-five dactylic hexameters, sent to him by the minister Gerardus Stratenus on the occasion of his (third) marriage with Josina de Lannoy. If anything, this edition of the complete correspondence of Marnix drastically broadens our view on Marnix as a humanist author.

The edition is carefully prepared and edited, providing the full apparatus and all indices a modern critical edition needs. De Smet's commentaries are more than a helpful tool for the reader. Frequently, they are rich essays in themselves, contextualising Marnix's letters and views in such a way that the commentaries read like historical and biographical studies in their own right. With great knowledge and a special sense for nuance, all previous insights and studies on Marnix and his time have been integrated, refuted, or confirmed. As such, this edition is far more than a technical-philological achievement. Even more than the previous four volumes, the final volume of the *Marnixi Epistulae* is a treasure that pays full attention to literary, historical, political, philosophical, and theological themes and details.

It has been said that Marnix of Saint-Aldegonde left an important library. Without exaggeration, we can now add that De Smet and his team have produced an equally important and ground-breaking edition. With its sophisticated philological-historical commentary, this volume will provide an indispensable basis for all future studies of the Dutch Revolt and the early modern Low Countries in general.

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