



Ton van Kalmthout, Huib Zuidervaart (eds.), *The Practice of Philology in the Nineteenth-Century Netherlands* (History of Science and Scholarship in the Netherlands 14; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015, 258 pp., ISBN 978 90 8964 591 3).

Scholars have long been familiar with the concept of the seventeenth century as a turning point in the history of science. It is only in recent decades that they have started to think of the nineteenth century in similar terms. The rise of the research university – especially the research seminar – as well as processes of disciplinary differentiation, professionalization and institutionalization have influenced and determined modern academic practice to such an extent that it seems reasonable to ask whether the nineteenth century has brought about a (second) ‘scientific revolution’ of its own. Did nineteenth-century science essentially differ from science as practiced in the past? Should nineteenth-century science be seen as an integral part of what is known as the ‘rise of modernity’?

In the Netherlands, these intriguing questions have only recently begun to attract scholarly attention, for example from Joseph Wachelder, who pioneered into this field in the 1990s. Yet, many gaps are to be filled. Not much is known, still, about the transformation of philology, the discipline that had been Holland’s pride ever since the Renaissance and that in the nineteenth century for some time even served as a model for other disciplines. Ton van Kalmthout’s and Huib Zuidervaart’s collection of articles on *The Practice of Philology in the Nineteenth-Century Netherlands* therefore comes as a welcome exploration.

The book’s title is somewhat misleading, as the term ‘philology’ is applied so broadly as to almost coincide with ‘humanities’. There are only two articles on (Dutch) philology in the strict sense of the word, while other contributions sketch the rise and institutionalization of various new academic disciplines, such as historiography, modern languages, comparative literature and linguistics, all of which of course have a strong philological component. The book contains a wealth of information giving insight into the often laborious rise of disciplines that only recently have come to be conceived of as having a natural place at the university. Marie-Christine Kok-Escalé narrates the modern languages’ long struggle for academic recognition. Acquiring

their first chairs in Groningen only in the 1880s, it took four more decades for German, French and English to get their own degrees and exams. Despite all efforts of the first professors to give ‘neophilology’ the appearance of a strict science, it was very hard for modern languages to get rid of their ‘practical’ (i.e. inferior) connotation as ‘spoken’ languages. Jan Noordegraaf describes how linguistics gradually succeeded in acquiring an autonomous status by opposing itself to ‘historical’ philology, of which it originally was a part, and modelling itself instead on the physical sciences. Many authors also explicate the complex relationship between discipline building and political-historical circumstances. Kris Steyaert for example provides an interesting picture of how ‘nationalistically’ inspired curricula of Dutch literature at Flemish universities were given very different substance depending on the political tide.

In studies on transformative historical processes there is always a risk of falling into ‘whig history’: downplaying continuities by making changes and innovations seem larger, more widespread and more essential than they actually were. Gert-Jan Johannes shows himself aware of this problem, explicitly rejecting the dominant idea that the humanities were subjected in the nineteenth century to an irreversible and law-governed process of disciplinary differentiation. Johannes shows that, within Dutch philology, ongoing specialisation and ‘scientification’ (recognizable from a narrowly defined philological practice bent on producing text editions) was only one – and not the most significant – among various developments. According to Johannes, the gradual broadening of Dutch philology that followed and partly reversed the previous narrowing has done much to keep Dutch philology a successful and viable discipline. Moreover, the fact that this broadening was mainly brought about by secondary schools’ call for broadly educated Dutch teachers belies the widespread view that discipline formation is always an internal scholarly process. Jan Rock also sheds a nuanced light on nineteenth-century innovations. On the one hand marking several aspects that distinguish nineteenth-century from previous Dutch philology – such as the creation of new fields of study, the popularity of literary journeys and the rise of methodological debates – he shows on the other hand that many methodological principles adopted by nineteenth-century scholars (such as distinguishing between authentic and forged textual elements) have roots in the Leiden tradition of antiquarian philology, dating back, at least, to Scaliger.

Not all authors, however, avoid overemphasizing change. It is hard to understand, in the first place, why the collection does not contain a single article on classical philology, which remained the dominant kind of philology at Dutch universities throughout the nineteenth century. Secondly, in an interesting general introduction Rens Bod skillfully portrays philology’s historical role of triggering a ‘chain of sweeping changes’ (26) – resulting e.g. from Valla’s unmasking of the *Donatio Constantini* in 1440 or from Erasmus’ removal from the New Testament of the so-called *comma Johanneum*.

However, Bod hardly pays attention to philology as a constructive discipline, which was of fundamental importance in making available and intelligible a canon of 'classical texts', the study of which was institutionalized in higher education for centuries. So eager is Bod to emphasize philology's contribution to progression and change that he does not shrink from attributing to Valla, Erasmus and Scaliger 'a sceptical view of everything' (26) and a tendency 'to cast doubt on every text', hardly an adequate description for scholars who were after all deeply religious and who considered imitating the classics nearly equivalent to becoming a civilised man.

Finally, in many articles, the relationship between the sketched developments and the nineteenth-century background is only very vaguely assessed. In Jo Tollebeek's contribution on the 'father' of Dutch academic historiography, for example, Robert Fruin's attachment to precision, sound principles and hard work is assumed to be consistent with, if not proof of, the typically nineteenth-century academization of historical science. Such inferences are notoriously risky, as it leaves one wondering why qualities that can very well be seen as general scholarly virtues should be taken as specifically modern when encountered in the nineteenth century. In other words, while the book provides a wealth of information and a broad range of perspectives on a variety of topics, many fundamental questions concerning the nineteenth century's position within the history of Dutch philology and science remain largely unanswered.

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