

Egmond, Marco van, **Covens & Mortier: A Map Publishing House in Amsterdam 1685-1866** (Utrechtse Historisch-Cartografische Studies 8; 't Goy-Houten: Hes & De Graaf, 2009, 600 pp. + cd-rom, ISBN 978 90 6194 220 7).

The maxim 'things are not always what they seem' very much applies to this study of Dutch historical cartography. At first glance, this appears to be a coffee table book, to be valued more for its visual appearance than its written content. The volume is oversized, closer to the 'elephant' editions mentioned in the text than to a conventional scholarly book. In addition, it is lavishly illustrated, including, but not limited to, an appendix containing over 200 pages of color plates. The reader should not be fooled by this initial impression, however, as woven into these copious illustrations is an impressive work of scholarship whose latent qualities unfold with the turning of the pages.

After the reader discards the coffee table notion, the next clue to the contents is the title, which could imply, to the skeptical reader, that this will be a sort of a quasi-vanity piece, a study of a particular publishing house, Covens & Mortier, that provides a selective tour through the company archives as a testament to the company's finer qualities and contributions. This is most certainly not the case, if for no other reason than the fact that the records of the company itself are no longer extant. Van Egmond instead recreates the history of this publisher through other sources, including exhaustive bibliographic reconstruction and painstaking incursions into labyrinthine notarial archives. By no means do the results of his efforts lead to a story of unrelenting heroic entrepreneurship. As the author makes clear, while Covens & Mortier prospered for over two centuries, they did not do so without missteps, mistakes, and missed opportunities along the way.

The book is an adaptation of a dissertation, completed in the history of cartography at the University of Utrecht. There are a few vestiges, perhaps, of the dissertation it once was. Chapters

three and four, for example, display extensive bibliographic and genealogical reconstructions respectively, the results of which are not as readable as the remainder of the text and may more appropriately serve as reference chapters. The project was clearly a lengthy one and there are some signs of its long gestation. Some bits of information, such as the erosion of copper engravings and the new mounting for the terrestrial globe, are repeated in multiple parts of the text and while the bibliography has been brought up to date with new research in some areas, in other areas, especially book history, it could use more attention. Finally, it is not clear whether the original text was written in Dutch or English, but every so often the language suffers from the lack of a non-native speaker's ear. These issues, not uncommon with dissertation revisions, are quite minor and largely fall away when the reader plunges into the heart of the analysis, beginning in earnest with Chapter five, an analysis of the choice and acquisition of copy.

Based on the extensive illustrations in Chapter four, the inattentive reader might believe that these later chapters will explore the aesthetics of Covens & Mortier's maps, but Van Egmond largely eschews this perspective, allowing the reader to appreciate these qualities on their own. Other academic readers might also be inclined to think that the study will follow in the footsteps of recent studies that emphasize maps as cultural artifacts, reflecting back on the culture that constructed them rather than the areas they purport to illustrate. Van Egmond does incorporate some of this latter sensibility, but he is more concerned with examining the activities of Covens & Mortier as an example of commercial cartography. The firm was, above all else, a purveyor of maps to customers from all walks of life, particularly in the latter stages of its existence. He contends that while their maps may not all be original, innovative, or even accurate, they are still valuable not as artifacts, but as commodities, albeit distinctive ones. While sources on the consumption of maps and related geographical materials are still too diffuse to be studied in much

depth, Van Egmond is able to effectively reconstruct significant shifts in production and distribution and to show how these were navigated by the various personalities that managed the publishing house.

Building on the theoretical work of book historians, Van Egmond pinpoints innovative links between the map-as-a-commodity and the broader historical context in which Covens & Mortier operated. That context, though, is largely the eighteenth and nineteenth century Netherlands, a period for which the Dutch are not often celebrated, particularly in comparison to their previous Golden Age. Historians often characterize these centuries as eras of stagnation, complacency, relative backwardness, or even outright decline. Van Egmond's analysis belies this conventional wisdom and replaces it with a subtle assertion for the significance of the age. Certainly the firm of Covens & Mortier never reclaimed the same prestige it enjoyed under its seventeenth century founder, Pieter Mortier, but it did enjoy a different kind of esteem, one that was more national than international, and more commercially based than production based, but prestigious nonetheless. As Van Egmond discovers, relative to other houses of commercial cartography, Covens & Mortier may be less innovative, but the quantity and variety of their stock easily surpasses their competitors in other countries.

This book has much to offer even to readers who are not skeptical, jaded, or inattentive. For cartophiles, the collection of map and atlas illustrations is simply astonishing. For bibliophiles, Van Egmond provides an interesting case study of publication history that contributes to broader discussions about book production and distribution in the early modern period. For those interested in the history of cartography, the work represents an impressive bibliographic accomplishment as well as highlighting potentially constructive avenues for further research. Nederlanderphiles will appreciate the reappraisal of an often overlooked period in Dutch national history. Historians would glean useful insight from the integration of commercial

cartography into the broader context. All in all, this text shows, in more ways than one, that you should not judge a book by its cover.

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Berkvens-Stevelinck, Christiane, Bots, Hans, Häselser, Jens (eds.), *Journalisme et République des Lettres: L'élargissement vers les 'Pays du Nord' au dix-huitième siècle: Actes des colloques de Potsdam et de Nimègue, 2004-2007* (Amsterdam, Utrecht: APA-Holland University Press, 2009, vi + 339 pp., ISBN 978 90 302 1274 4).

Cet ouvrage, dirigé par les meilleurs spécialistes des questions abordées, rassemble les actes de deux colloques qui se sont tenus à Potsdam en 2004 et à Nimègue en 2007. Le but des éditeurs est d'étudier 'de façon concomitante' le phénomène que constitue l'essor du journalisme au XVIII^e siècle et la communauté savante qu'on désigne habituellement par l'expression 'République des Lettres'. Ils rappellent comment les périodiques créés en Hollande au lendemain de la révocation de l'édit de Nantes ont profondément renouvelé le genre du journal savant, ouvrant la voie à la création de quelque 38 périodiques qu'il est convenu d'appeler les 'journaux de Hollande', fortement marqués par les apports de l'internationale huguenote en diaspora. Dans le présent ouvrage, l'attention se focalise sur le dynamisme des journalistes dans l'Europe du Nord et de l'Est.

Jan Schillings et Jens Häselser étudient la *Bibliothèque germanique*: dans un article très fouillé et muni de nombreuses pièces justificatives, le premier montre méthodiquement comment la BC a contribué à faire connaître la production livresque de l'Allemagne; le second étudie minutieusement les stratégies de publication et la pratique d'écriture des journalistes en l'illustrant de nombreux exemples tirés de la 1^{re} livraison du journal (1720): pour 'rendre compte en François d'un grand