



Jeanine De Landtsheer and Henk Nellen (eds.), ***Between Scylla and Charybdis: Learned Letter Writers Navigating the Reefs of Religious and Political Controversy in Early Modern Europe*** (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 192; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011, xviii + 539 pp., ISBN 978 90 04 18573 9).

Interest in personal correspondence has been hugely reinforced since the late nineteenth century onwards with editions of extensive collections of letters (Erasmus, Lipsius, Grotius, Huygens among others) and more recently, with digitalization and the remarkable usefulness of electronic tools in editing and annotating. The book here under review stems from an international colloquium held in Leuven, Brussels and The Hague on 14-16 December 2006 and focused on a particular point of view: the effect of sixteenth century upheavals on the correspondence of men of learning and the wide range of possible ways they bore witness to the surrounding turmoil. In contrast to the somewhat stereotypical image of great humanists cloistered in their ivory tower, the 25 essays assembled here put forward a fascinating vision of how these men were affected by the harsh conflicts of their time and how they wished, or even attempted in some cases, to intervene for peace and tolerance.

The title given to this volume is borrowed from *The Manual of a Christian Knight* (1501) of Erasmus (as recalled by R. von Friedeburg, 409): 'Thus you must steer a course between Scylla and Charybdis so that you will neither become too confident and careless, relying on divine grace, nor be so discouraged by the hardships of the war that you lay down your spirit together with your arms'. The image also appears in one of Claude Saumaise's letters to André Rivet, in 1641 (H. Nellen, 498), a clear proof, if one were needed, of this lasting and widely shared feeling. Four perspectives have been selected within this general frame: I. Humanist letter writing before 1550: various approaches. II. Humanist letters as a mirror of the Reformation. III. Learned letter writers in the Netherlands as witnesses of the Dutch Revolt. IV. Vicissitudes of Late Humanism. Although the Erasmian metaphor is at the core of almost all the essays, some authors have interpreted it in the general sense of striving to keep a middle position between two conflicting situations, these being, of course, a consequence of the political and religious controversies. Thus, individuals could be caught between the private and public spheres, as in the case of Lipsius, torn between the pressure of Leiden University and his longing

for going back to Leuven (J. De Landtsheer brings much clarity in this much debated subject with the help of Lipsius's correspondence), but also between textual criticism and suspicion of heretic sympathy, in biblical philology (Ch.L. Heesakkers), or between the narrowness of orthodox doctrines (Ch. Fantazzi). Not surprisingly, one author stands out as an exception to the relevance of the 'Charybdis and Scylla' metaphor: Dirk Coornhert, who appears, through his correspondence, more as a steady 'spiritual leader' than as a man 'crushed' between religious conflicts (J. Koppenol).

Whether the letter writers here taken into account appeared desirous, at the beginning, to be as neutral as possible – so was Vives, in 1520, as well as Vossius in 1611-1612 – they could not, in the end, prevent the religious and political events from affecting their life and their friendships. The bitter quarrel between Grotius and Saumaise about church unity, and the role played by letters in exacerbating this conflict, is one of the well-known examples (H. Nellen). The impact could also be on their work or their careers, as shown by R. von Friedeburg, dealing with the career of Christoph Besold (1577-1638), whose conversion from a convinced Lutheran to a radical Catholic appears as an evident consequence of the struggle of conscience that *litterati* could suffer. In some cases, the letters of this period bear witness to the efforts made by learned men to find a peace solution by a scholarly approach of the problems (C.S.M. Rademaker). As is well known, two among Grotius's major books were written in response to the controversies around the Twelve Years' Truce: *The Piety of the States of Holland and Westfriesland* (1613), and *The Authority of the Supreme Powers in Matters of Religion* (written in 1617 and published in 1647). But already in 1565, Cassander fuelled his irenic treatise with scholastic theology (R. van de Schoor). Thus, the 'Republic of Letters', in the mirror of these correspondences, appears as an ambivalent space, being on one side, a 'neutral body' gathering humanists mainly concerned with scholarly contacts, whatever their religious and political differences (J. Papy, 354), and on the other, a learned community incapable of overcoming confessional limits, as in the case of Scaliger and Casaubon's networks (D. van Miert). The great interest of this book lies in its showing that all these authors were more or less forced to 'adjust to the circumstances', which exactly implied: 'to navigate between Scylla and Charybdis' (R. De Smet, 273), and that – still more striking – they trusted the power of their commitment as scholars. Many of these letters have in common the fact of having been prepared for publication by their authors themselves, obviously as part of a strategy and a means to exert influence on ecclesiastical dignitaries (Pope Clement VII), or great European monarchs (Francis I, Henry VIII, Charles V), or public opinion through open letters such as Vives' *De Europae statu ac tumultibus*, 1522, to Pope Adrian VI (Ch. Fantazzi). Grotius, for example, whose correspondence during the troubles of 1609-1610, does not reveal very different opinions on religion and politics compared to his published works, intended his letters – in particular those written to Casaubon, then in England and close to King James – mainly as political propaganda (H.-J. van Dam).

The first part of this volume, with essays from K. Enenkel, R. Leushuis, Ch.L. Heesakkers, Ch. Fantazzi and P.J. Smith, is devoted to studying some examples of the scholarly letter's function in early modern correspondence. With the development and extension of the Reformation, all kind of letters seem to reflect political and religious controversies. From the dedicatory letters prefacing translations (B.M. Hosington) or Latin plays (J. Bloemendal), to letters of recommendation obliged to note the confessional adherence of the recommended (M. Kooistra), letters to friends (R. De Smet) and 'letter-treatises' such as those of Andreas Dudith to Beza, arguing for more tolerance (G. Almasi) – all forms of written communication reflect the growing confessionalisation. One of the precise contributions of this excellent book is to vividly and rigorously render the echoes of sixteenth and early-seventeenth century events in numerous learned letters. At the same time the authors provide some very enlightening analyses on the process of confessionalisation and its relationship to humanism.

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