

## Royal Commission of History

-

### Annual Report 2003

The Commission held meetings on 22nd February, 28th June, 11th October and 6th December. The Commission Officers also met on those dates.

The Commission was saddened by the loss of one of its members, Carlos Wyffels, who died 13th December 2003. He was admitted as an honorary member on 15th May 1997 and was honorary general archivist of the Kingdom. He was elected to our Association on 6th March 1971 as a temporary member. He became a member on 1st April 1976. He assumed his functions as secretary and treasurer with competence and dedication from 28th April 1979 to 20th June 1981. He published several major works in our collections, amongst which the oldest accounts of the town of Bruges (1280 – 1319).

The Commission also learnt of the death of one of its scientific collaborators, Mrs. Fabienne Mariën, who died on 19th December, 2003.

At the meeting of 11th October, Mr. Herman Van Goethem, Doctor of Law and Bachelor of History (contemporary period), and professor at the University of Antwerp, was elected to the seat of our late lamented colleague, Adriaan-E. Verhulst.

In accordance with the mission entrusted to it since its foundation in 1834, the Commission ensures the publication of hitherto unpublished texts relating to our national past, kept in Belgium or abroad, in its *Bulletin* and its series of volumes (Collections 4to, 8to, Collection of acts issued by the Belgian princes, Documents relating to Belgium's international status since 1830, Sources concerning the history of Belgium during the Second World War, Tools of the trade, etc.). These collections currently include more than 220 titles covering all periods of history. The catalogue is regularly updated on the Commission's website ([www.kbr.be/crh-kcg](http://www.kbr.be/crh-kcg)).

The Commission thus contributes to the development of historical knowledge, but as its publications demonstrate, it also serves to point the way and is sometimes even a precursor as regards research. The sources it publishes concern the different sectors and eras of our history. Their specific interest is often combined with setting an example, showing researchers how to make full use of these types of documents, which were little known until now or unexploited in the suggested sense. The abundance of the documentation, clearly of unequalled interest, and the budgetary constraints, obviously mean certain choices have to be made. These are a result of a policy that defines certain priorities according to the Commission's internal criteria: originality, typological or documentary value, relative inaccessibility, rarity, added value created by the expertise of the researcher who manages to compose a coherent whole on a theme from various documents. All these elements constitute a set of factors to which the four commissioners, responsible for examining all the manuscripts put forward, pay particular attention.

The offers of co-operation come from Belgian and foreign researchers, generally on a voluntary basis. The Commission also receives completed university projects relating to its domain, carried out in partnership. Furthermore, to fully meet its vocation, it is its duty

to support high level research in sectors within its remit, particularly where certain gaps still need to be filled. It therefore contributes to the international influence of Belgian historical science. These large-scale undertakings, spread over several years, require the indispensable collaboration of paid researchers. Their number is inevitably limited once again, for financial reasons. The Commission appreciates in this respect the resources from sponsorship, which are however increasingly limited and uncertain. Nevertheless, the official ministerial grant is the only resource that guarantees the continuity and success of this work.

Anxious to carry out its tasks to the best of its ability, the Commission cannot remain indifferent in the face of situations that are detrimental to it and to the whole of the scientific community. Thus, it has noticed with regret that regardless of the law, the Walloon Brabant province still does not possess, within its limits, a library for state archives. Since 1998, the year the permits were granted, the file's development has been frozen, with no solution in view. Users are forced to make unnecessary journeys, which are costly both in terms of time and money. They are disoriented by the fact that documents are scattered across different libraries, from Saint-Hubert to Brussels, Anderlecht and Beveren-Waas! The Commission therefore feels it is its duty to express its concern regarding this matter in the form of a motion, which it has sent you, as well as other political authorities. It requests that the construction of a library for the Walloon Brabant province be undertaken at last, under this government.

The list of current or future ventures helps to illustrate the different facets of the Commission's activities.

- **Volume CLXVIII, 2002, parts 1 to 4 of the *Bulletin*** has been printed. Besides the administrative part, it contains three articles totalling 258 pages.
  - Jean-François Nieuws (*Un exemple précoce de répertoire féodal : le livre des fiefs de la châtellenie d'Encre (nord de la France, ca 1245)*) published a fragment, unknown until now, and exceptional for the time. It is preserved in Paris' National Archives. In an extensive introduction, the author provides a true monograph relating to the territory concerned. He broaches questions on both terminology and on "feudal statistics". As a result, the interest of his study goes far beyond the regional extent of the work.
  - Rob Weckx (*De Diestse schepenakten van 1265 tot 1306, toebehorend aan het Stadsarchief te Diest*) published ninety-five acts, all written in Latin except for one written in Middle Dutch. This well-balanced file perfectly reflects the somewhat limited amount and nature of a deputy burgomaster's activities in a small Brabant town.
  - Enfin, Philippe Desmette (*La Confrérie du Saint-Nom de Jésus de Soignies en 1581. Ses origines romaines. Ses influences à Flobecq*) brings a detailed contribution to the study of a devotion in full expansion following the Council of Trent.
- The preparation of Volume CLXIX, 2003, parts 1 to 4 has been sent to press, and has led us to consider the modernisation of the cover. The typographical justification of the pages has also been modified in an effort to make savings.
- The publication of significant and voluminous works due to come out in 2003, has been deferred. Such is the case for the work of Godfried Croenen, *De oorkonden van de familie Berthout (1212-1425)*, LXXXII 485 pages (Collection 4to), a model work of the reconstitution of particularly rare archives of a seigniorial Brabant family. This study is important because it sheds light on the political, economic and social

history of the nobility of the old Netherlands in the Middle Ages. There are two main reasons for this delay. The high scientific requirements of the Commission regarding the compiling of indexes, which is essential for optimising the consultation of source publications, sometimes slows down the work of researchers that are, incidentally, voluntary. Furthermore, a decision taken by your predecessor also influenced the printing schedule. Minister Picqué felt obliged to reduce the 2003 budget by 10 % in comparison with 2002, while at the same time congratulating us for the quality of our work.

- We hope that the budgetary funds available will allow us to offer the public this expected work during 2004. And depending on our financial means, four other volumes:
  - Véronique Lambert, *De oorkonden van het Sint-Donatianskapittel te Brugge*;
  - Bryce en Mary Lyon, *The Wardrobe Book of 1296-1297: A Financial and Logistical record of Edward I's 1297 Autumn Campaign in Flanders Against Philip IV of France*;
  - Cl. Bruneel en Cl. De Moreau de Gerbehaye, *Les gradués de la Faculté de médecine de l'ancienne Université de Louvain (XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)* ;
  - Jo Tollebeek, *Writing the Inquisition in Europe and America. The correspondence between Henry Charles Lea and Paul Fredericq (1888-1908)*.
- Other important research works are continuing or are reaching an end. Mrs. Alla Namazova, head of the modern section at the Institute of Universal History at the Academy of Sciences of Russia, is putting the finishing touches to her *Guide to documents relating to the history of Belgium, preserved in the archives of Russian public institutions*, whose scale exceeds the recently repatriated archive collection. With the valuable help of Mrs. Françoise Thomas, Bachelor of Economic Sciences, Bachelor of History and scientific collaborator at the Royal Academy of Belgium, she is endeavouring to deal with the remarks and suggestions formulated by the four fellow members responsible for supervising the work.
- Mr. Alain Marchandise, qualified FNRS researcher at the University of Liège, is working on finalising the publication of the cartulary from the Aulne abbey.
- Professor Alain Dierkens (Free University of Brussels) is in charge of the publication of the acts of the counts of Louvain and the dukes of Brabant (until 1190). The manuscript should be delivered by the end of this year or the beginning of 2005.
- Moreover, the Commission has agreed in principle to the suggestion made by Mr. Alfred Minke, professor at the Catholic University of Louvain and state archivist at Eupen, to publish an anonymous manuscript, probably written by a local worthy, entitled *Annals of Gaulish Limburg, 1794-1814*). It is an interesting source regarding the history of people's attitudes in Belgium at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. The text, which includes philosophical considerations on the misfortunes of the times, illustrates, amongst other things, the way major international events are perceived on a regional level. The work has been promised for the end of this year.
- Other ambitious projects are still under negotiation. Discussions are well under way between the Commission and M. Philippe Raxhon (University of Liège), spokesman for the expert historians from the "Lumumba Parliamentary Commission". With the agreement and conditions already set by the President of the Chamber of Representatives, and in respect of the document copyrights, we envisage the publication of a collection of pieces relating to Belgian-Congolese relations. The contents would, to a great extent, go beyond the particular issue of the death of

Patrice Lumumba. The venture will of course be carried out according to the scientific requirements as regards the handling of documentation with contents still considered "sensitive". The realisation of this project is, amongst others things, subject to obtaining the necessary authorisations from the numerous eligible parties, which could influence its programming.

- Aware of the growing costs of publishing, the Commission is taking care to make optimal use of the grant it has been awarded. In the same way as it welcomes the opportunities of scientific collaboration, it also considers sharing expenses, through, for example, co-editing or subsidies. The Commission is indeed hoping to move towards this solution, when Mrs. Nicole Haesenne-Peremans and Mrs. Nicole Caulier-Mathy (University of Liège) publish the voluminous *Journal* (1830 and 1855-1880) kept by Baron Michel-Edmond de Selys-Longchamps, a senator, naturalist and scholar, and member of the Royal Academy of Belgium. This document abounds in information on the political, economic, social, religious and scientific life of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- The Commission regularly has to consider the best way of publishing its works, on paper or digitally. Each time, it naturally takes into account not only the financial aspect but above all the added value, when the method is compared to the traditional media. We are thus drawing up a contract with Ghent's Institute of Social History (AMSAB), in order to distribute the records from the headquarters of the Belgian Workers' Party (1894-1940) on CD-ROM. The legal aspect of the ownership of the original documents remains to be clarified by our partner.
- As regards electronic publishing, let us remember, the Commission has an internationally recognized prestigious achievement to its credit, the *Thesaurus diplomaticus* (usually called New Wauters) published in 1999. This digital record of the charters relating to the old Southern Netherlands, kept in many archive libraries in Belgium and abroad, brings right up to date and completes the content of the version produced in the 19th century. It is the result of a partnership with the National Committee of the Dictionary of Medieval Latin, with its secretary Mr. Paul Tombeur, emeritus professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, and our fellow member Walter Prevenier, emeritus professor at the University of Ghent. The venture will continue until they reach the year 1250. Mr. Philippe Demonty, the scientific collaborator of the Commission, is continuing his research under its supervision. At the moment, the documentary section comprises 17,087 studies and the bibliography relating to the notes, 3,423 titles.
- Mrs. Godelieve De Mey, under our fellow member Therese de Hemptinne, is continuing her detailed study of the Acts of Thierry d' Alsace, Count of Flanders (1168-1177). Two volumes have already been published on the initiative of the latter and that of our fellow member Adriaan-E. Verhulst (†).
- So as to facilitate access to the content of some of its publications still without indexes, the Commission has thought it necessary to provide lists of names and places. Consequently, it has received a subsidy from the town of Bruges and from the province of West Flanders, so as to compile an index for the accounts of the town of Bruges (1302-1319). This work, nearing completion, is entrusted to Mrs. Katrien Vandewoude. Mr. Stijn Meersseman has completed the index for the *Compendium of documents relating to the cloth industry in Flanders*. The manuscript is to be submitted to four Commission members before being sent to press. Mr. Wim Blockmans has informed us of the imminent delivery of the index for the *Handelingen van de Leden en van de Staten van Vlaanderen (1419-1467)*.

- With the support of the Commission, Mr. Erik Van Mingroot, emeritus professor at the Catholic University of Leuven, has decided to publish the acts of the bishops of Cambrai (until 1300) according to different standards.

On a European level, the Commission is associated with the large-scale undertaking of the *Monumenta Paleographica Medii Aevii*, sponsored by the International Academic Union. It is responsible for publishing several texts in a *Series Belgica*.

Our Vice-President, Ludo Milis, is contributing as before, with Madame Veronique Lambert, to the progress of the work on the *Repertorium Fontium Historiae Medii Aevi* (New Potthast).