

Royal Historical Commission

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Annual Report 2007

The Commission held its sessions on 3rd March, 16th June, 29th September and 15th December. The Committee met on the same dates.

1. Personalia

The Commission regrets the loss of one of its honorary members, our fellow member Jean Bovesse, who died in Namur on 15th July. The Chairman paid tribute to his memory during the session on 29th September. Moreover, the American historian, Bryce Lyon, professor emeritus at Brown University, died on 24th May. He maintained close relations with the Commission for many years, which received several of his publications. It founded an annual prize in his honour and that of his wife. A minute of silence was observed in his memory at the beginning of the session on 16th June.

Upon their request, four fellow members successively obtained honorary titles during the course of the year: Baron Van Caenegem (elected in 1971), Messrs André Joris (elected in 1971), André Goosse (elected in 1984) and Reginald De Schryver (elected in 1972). The Chairman expressed the Commission's profound recognition for their devotion to the Commission over the past few decades.

At its session on 15th December, the Commission elected Mr. Karel Velle, National Archivist and part-time lecturer at the University of Ghent; Mr. Bruno Demoulin, lecturer at the University of Liège; Mrs. Valérie Piette, lecturer at the Université Libre de Bruxelles; Mr. Jo Tollebeek, ordinary professor at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

In accordance with its regulations, the Commission proceeded with the replacement of its assistant secretary/treasurer in the course of the year, owing to our fellow member Reginald De Schryver becoming an honorary member, followed by its chairman and vice-chairman whose mandates had reached the end of their term. Our fellow members Guy Vanthemsche (as assistant secretary/treasurer), Jean-Marie Duvosquel and Gustaaf Janssens (as chairman and vice-chairman) were elected. Guy Vanthemsche will see the mandate of our honorary fellow member through to the end of its term. Our two other fellow members took up their positions as of 1st January 2008 for a period of three years.

2. Objectives

The mission attributed to the Commission when it was founded in 1834 was confirmed by the Royal Decree of 1st April 1976. Its purpose is to "research, record, edit or analyse written sources which are of interest to the history of Belgium, to publish critical studies concerning these sources and to make work tools available to historians".

Owing to the evolution of society and progress in historical science, it is necessary to interpret these directives in a non-restrictive manner. While continuing to publish texts in the traditional form, the Commission is well aware of the advantages and interest of

electronic publication and the constitution of databases (cf. 6.3, 6.4, 6.5). It also organises symposiums relating to the missions it has been attributed (cf. 6.1, 6.5). In this domain, as in others, it is always keen to develop partnerships and collaborations on a national and international level (cf. 6.4, 6.5). Through its initiatives, the contacts its members have made on a personal level or as a delegation, and its website (cf. 3), the Commission benefits from an international reputation, and is acknowledged, for instance, as a founding member of the European network *Porta Historica* (cf. 6.5).

3. Website

The existence of its website (<http://www.crhistorie.be> or www.kcgeschiedenis.be) significantly contributes to increasing the Commission's visibility, both in Belgium and abroad. The statistics for 2006 and 2007 concerning visits to the website are 41,690 and 53,147 respectively, i.e. an increase of 27.5 % from one year to the next. Hosted on the Royal Library of Belgium's server, the site presents the history, composition, objectives and achievements of the Commission in a detailed and illustrated manner, in French, Dutch and English. It features the complete catalogue of publications. It can be consulted either by searching the authors' names, words in the title, or keywords. The latest volumes and new items are the subject of a presentation accompanied by a summary.

For its 175th anniversary (cf. 6.1.), the Commission decided to update the site from a technical point of view and in terms of presentation. This work is currently underway. Material will also be added to the contents, in particular by adding complete tables from the *Bulletin* (from 1834 to the present day). At the same time, it intends to print the texts of works in great demand but out of print. Finally, it will provide access to different databases (cf. 6.3, 6.4, AMSAB, *Narrative Sources*, *Thesaurus diplomaticus*).

4. Publications and distribution

The Commission publishes an annual *Bulletin* and volumes divided into various series (in-4°, in-8° collections, *Recueil des Actes des Princes Belges*, documents relating to the international status of Belgium since 1830, sources concerning the history of Belgium during the Second World War, work tools, and, not forgetting, the *Thesaurus diplomaticus* in the form of a CD-ROM). These collections currently include 224 titles, many of which comprise several volumes. In accordance with the mission it has been given, these publications, of a high scientific value, concern previously unpublished texts relating to our national past, kept in Belgium or abroad. While all eras deserve attention, there is a definite imbalance which is detrimental to the contemporary period and, more so, the present day. The Commission is particularly keen to find a solution by encouraging various initiatives and collaborations (cf. 6.3, 6.4), without however sacrificing the rigour and scholarly nature of its approach. Indeed, in this quest for written and oral (interviews) accounts, it is entering a domain where it is subject to the competition of other publishers and media, whose aims and results are not necessarily scientific.

The extent of the constantly increasing amount of documentation relating to the present day, and the increasing limitation of the Commission's means over the years, constitute two constraints that inevitably dictate these choices. Subsequently, the four commissioners, statutorily responsible for reporting on the quality and suitability of all the publications, especially take into account, in each case, the originality, exemplary value,

and contribution of the proposed documents in terms of improving the search for answers and the methodology.

One publication was printed in 2007:

- **Volume 172, 2006, fasc. 1-4 of the *Bulletin***, comprising 283 pages. Besides the administrative part (sessions held in 2005 and report of 2004), the volume includes a major scientific contribution from Olivier Vanderhaegen, who was awarded the Bryce and Mary Lyon Prize (cf. 6.2). *La correspondance de dom Nicolas Spirlet, dernier abbé de Saint-Hubert avec Patrice-François de Neny, chef-président du Conseil privé des Pays-Bas autrichiens (1760-1782)* includes 182 letters, which help to understand the political history of the period, on the one hand, and, to discover little-known facets of the two characters through the private elements of the correspondence, on the other hand. Spirlet, a man with a difficult character, cherished certain personal ambitions: he wanted to turn his land into a bishopric with the aim of being its titular bishop. For a long time, he played the role of informer, and even intermediary, between the government of Brussels, especially with regard to the principality of Liège, and France. He sought the support of the monarchy to solve his conflicts with his monastic community and the inhabitants under his jurisdiction. All the correspondence amply reveals the particularly complex situation of a region endowed with classic feudal and seigniorial structures, but which was nonetheless a centre of interest with regard to international politics. Owing to its geographical situation, it was an object of desire for those in power.

EBSCO Publishing wanted to include the *Bulletin* in its database, which is available in university libraries worldwide. A link to the Commission's website will be mentioned every time. The Commission has agreed to this proposal, which will significantly increase the readership of its publications.

5. Publications: proofs or awaiting composition

- Véronique Lambert, *De Oorkonden van het Sint-Donatianskapittel te Brugge, 9^{de} eeuw-1300*, deel I (Collectie in-4^o). The proofs of this large volume (540 charters) are currently undergoing correction.
- Nicole Haesenne-Peremans and Nicole Caulier-Mathy (University of Liege) have finished the huge editing of the *Journal* (1830 and 1855-1880) of Baron Michel-Edmond de Selys-Longchamps, senator, naturalist and member of the Academy. This book, which should be published in 2008, benefits from a subsidy from the 'Commission Communale d'Histoire du Pays de Liège'.
- *Bulletin 2007: the following texts have already been chosen*
 - Bryce Lyon, *François Louis Ganshof: Medieval Historian and Friend*.
 - Alexis Wilkin, *La datation du Polyptyque dit de 1280 de la cathédrale Saint-Lambert de Liège*.
 - Lieve De Mey en Kathrien Heene, *Vita en conversacio Salome prorisce in Diepenven*.
 - Toon Quaghebeur, *Het decreet van 7 november 1695 van Gouverneur Maximiliaan van Beieren tegen de recursen aan seculiere rechtbanken door clerici*.

- Frederik Buylaert et alii, *De adel ingelijst. Zes adelslijsten voor het graafschap Vlaanderen in de veertiende en vijftiende eeuw.*

6. Current activities, collaborations on a national level and international relations

6.1. In 2009, the Commission will celebrate its **175th anniversary**. Several initiatives are currently in preparation to celebrate this event. The *Bulletin* for the year in question will recall the life of the Commission during the last quarter century. Furthermore, it will feature an original contribution from each of its members. The *Tables* of the volumes that have been published since the beginning, from 1834 to the present day, will be finished for this occasion. It will therefore be far easier to appreciate the immense heritage contained in the 172 volumes, much to the benefit of researchers. They are currently being compiled and the entire collection will be available on the Commission's revised website. Furthermore, the decision was taken to establish a prize in the name of Henri Pirenne (1862-1935), a renowned international historian who was also active as the secretary of the Commission until his death in 1935. Finally, two international symposiums will be organised. One will take place in May 2009, and will reunite the partners of the *Porta Historica* (cf. 6.5) European projects, on the theme *Électronique et Histoire*. The other one will deal with *Chancelleries princières et scriptoria, du X^e au XIV^e siècle*. It will take place on 11th and 12th December 2009 at the Palais des Académies. The scientific committee is composed of our fellow members Thérèse de Hemptinne, Jean-Marie Duvosquel, Jean-Louis Kupper, Walter Prevenier, Karel Velle, Professors Alain Dierkens, Benoît Tock, Michel Margue, Messrs Jean-Luc De Paepe, administrative secretary of the Commission, and David Guillardian, as well as a representative of the Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis (ING).

6.2. The **Bryce and Mary Lyon Prize** was set up thanks to the generosity of this American historian, whose death was mentioned at the beginning of this report. The prize, of an amount of EUR 1,000, aims to encourage young researchers in the editing of scientific archival documents and manuscripts. By rewarding them in this way, the Commission officially provides confirmation of their merit, which they can then use to add value to their curriculum vitae. The prize was awarded for the third time in 2007. The winner was Mr. Olivier Vanderhaeghen for his study of the correspondence between Patrice-François de Neny and Dom Nicolas Spirlet, published in the *Bulletin* in 2006 (cf. 4).

6.3. Current main research projects which are not the subject of a partnership

- Mrs. Carol Chattaway, Doctor of History at the University of London, is responsible for editing two personal property inventories established upon the death of Philippe le Hardi (1404) and Marguerite de Male (1405). An online edition is envisaged.
- Miss Stéphanie Lambot, a history graduate from ULB, has submitted the edition of the *Corpus des inscriptions médiévales belges. Époque mérovingienne - 1100*. The manuscript is currently being examined by the four commissioners.
- Mr Alain Marchandise, an FNRS qualified researcher at the University of Liege, is responsible for finalising the editing of the cartulary from the Abbaye d'Aulne.

- Mr Alfred Minke, professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, and head of the state archives section in Eupen, is responsible for the editing of the *Annales gallo-limbourgeoises, 1794-1814*. This manuscript, written by a noteworthy villager, is particularly revealing in terms of the history of attitudes in our regions. However, owing to the professional obligations of the editor, he is sometimes obliged to postpone the finalisation of this work.
- Mrs. Katrien Vandewoude hopes to submit the index (names of people, places, professions) of the accounts for the town of Bruges (1302-1319), edited by our late fellow member Carlos Wyffels, in the course of 2008. Increased difficulties concerning identification, and the solution for the frequent homonymies that are only superficial, among other things, explain why this undertaking is so lengthy. Research and additions are entered into a computer file which has nevertheless become voluminous and difficult to handle (currently 394 pages and more than 65,000 entries). The financing of this work was facilitated thanks to a subsidy from the communal authorities and a subsidy from the Province of West Flanders. An electronic edition is envisaged.
- Professor Jeroom Vercruysse, Messrs Jacques LOGIE and Joseph Van Den Broeck offered to edit the memoirs of Albert of Saxony, Duke of Teschen, the governor-general of the Austrian Netherlands. This piece of editing was accepted. However, owing to the untimely death of the last two authors, a team must be reconstituted to continue with the preparation of the manuscript.
- Mr Maurits Van Durme, the author of the series of volumes *Les Archives de Simancas et l'histoire de la Belgique (IX^e-XIX^e siècle)*, is continuing to put the finishing touches to the alphabetical index (vol. II, N-Z) of names relating to the four published volumes, which is proceeding very slowly owing to his advanced age. Although the Commission has offered the support of an assistant, he has unfortunately declined. Our fellow member Gustaaf Janssens is regularly checking the state of progress of this table. He is also the scientific guarantor for other works by the same author, including the *Inventaire détaillé des copies Gachard et Morel-Fatio prises sur les documents de Simancas et conservées aux Archives générales du Royaume à Bruxelles*. He is revising the first proof.
- Our fellow member Guy Vanthemsche and Mrs. Patricia Van Den Eeckhout published the reference work entitled *Bronnen voor de studie van het hedendaagse België 19^{de}-20^{ste} eeuw* (Brussel, VUBpress, 1.439 p.) in 1999. The Commission shall publish a second revised and updated edition in its collections, which will also be translated into French. It should be published in 2009.
- Numerous other proposals have been sent to the Commission, which has approved the principle of the editing. However, it is currently too early to report on this work, which is still at project stage or barely begun.

The majority of the research carried out under the auspices of the Commission rely on the dedication of voluntary members. However, in order to ensure the successful outcome of more ambitious and lengthy projects, it is essential to work with paid scientific colleagues. Therefore, Mr. Philippe Demonty is responsible for the continuation of the *Thesaurus diplomaticus* (usually known as the 'Nouveau Wauters'. The version up to 1200 was put on CD-ROM in 1999) relating to the period from 1200 to 1250. This digitised list of charters relating to the former Southern Netherlands, stored in numerous places in Belgium and abroad,

fundamentally renews and completes the contents of the volumes elaborated in the 19th century.

The support committee for the project is composed of our fellow members Thérèse de Hemptinne, Jean-Louis Kupper and Walter Prevenier. Mr. Demonty will present the state of progress of his research to the Commission during the meeting on 1st March 2008.

This continuation for the period 1200-1250 has nearly come to an end, and it is now a question of deciding in which form it should be published. The Commission would like to make it accessible to everyone, at the lowest possible cost, or, if possible, free of charge. It would therefore like to put the contents online and provide access via its website. It may even be possible to provide access further afield in the form of a collaboration with ARTEM in France.

6.4. Collaboration on a national level

- The National Archives and the State Archives in the provinces: the partnership which began in January 2007, to digitise the indexation of the diplomatic correspondence between Vienna and Brussels (1740/1748 – 1790), is continuing in a fruitful manner. Approximately 200 microfilms (more or less 30,000 views) kept in the National Archives, have been processed and the necessary controls performed in Vienna.
- AMSAB (Ghent's Institute of Social History). The partnership contract relates to indexing and putting on line the minutes of the Committee and the General Council of the Belgian Labour Party for the period 1892 to 1940. AMSAB has promised to complete the work by 1st October 2008. It can be consulted via the Commission's website as well as on AMSAB's own website.
- Universiteit Gent (Prof. J. Deploige and Guy De Tré): an agreement has been concluded with this university with a view to producing a new software program to improve performance as regards the consultation of the *Narrative Sources* database. It is listed in the narrative sources of the Netherlands in mediaeval times (Prof. Deploige). The contract came into force on 1st October 2007 and the project will last two years. It will be possible to consult it via the Commission's website. The Commission is represented by our fellow members Ludo Milis and Thérèse de Hemptinne on the support committee.
- Université libre de Bruxelles: the preparation of the editing of the Acts of the Dukes of Brabant (Prof. Alain Dierkens and Mr. David Guilardian) is still in progress. The manuscript can most probably be submitted in the course of 2008.
- Vlaams Instituut voor Geschiedenis (VIGES): recently set up by the Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten (KVAB) and the Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde (KANTL) to support the *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*; this institute also aims to digitally publish documents of biographical interest. As such, initial contact has been made to study possible ways to co-operate. Our fellow member Ludo Milis is in charge.

6.5. Collaboration on an international level

The Commission has been participating in the European *Porta Historica* project since the beginning. A *Network of Editors of Historical Sources*, begun in May 2006 by the Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis (ING, The Hague). The other partners are the Institut für Mittelalterforschung (Vienna), which is a section of the Österreichische Akademie für Wissenschaften, the École nationale des Chartes (Paris) and the Institute of Historical Research (London). The Charter setting out the objectives and the mode of operation was adopted in December 2007. The Commission is represented by our Chairman, Ludo Milis, and our fellow member Thérèse de Hemptinne, who was chosen as a member of the Board until 2010. The above-mentioned congress in May 2009 will be organised by the Royal History Commission.

On a European level, the Commission is also working on the renowned undertaking of the *Monumenta Palaeographica Medii Aevi*, sponsored by the International Union of Academies (IUA). In agreement with Belgium's two Royal Science Academies, it is responsible for publishing several texts in the *Series Belgica*.

Our chairman continued to participate in the progress of the work on the *Repertorium Fontium Historiae Medii Aevi* (Nouveau Potthast), which ended this year.

Our fellow member, Herman Van Goethem, and the administrative secretary, Mr Jean-Luc De Paepe, are representing the Commission on the National Committee of Historical Sciences, affiliated to the International Committee of Historical Sciences. Our fellow member, Claude Bruneel, is representing the Commission in the Director's Office of the Belgian Historical Institution in Rome.