



Esther Mijers, ***'News from the Republic of Letters': Scottish Students, Charles Mackie and the United Provinces, 1650-1750*** (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 161; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012, x + 223 pp., ISBN 978 90 04 210684).

Academic learning and university training were one of the main assets of the Dutch Golden Age, in the Dutch Republic itself with its high rate of schooling as well as in the eyes of foreign visitors and observers. Leiden University, in particular, was soon considered to be one of the most brilliant centers of scholarship of Europe. Foreigners travelling in Holland never failed to pay a visit to this academy, reputed as center of modern humanism, and whenever possible to attend a lecture in the humanities, law, medicine, or the sciences. Quite a lot of Leiden professors – such as Lipsius, Paeuw, Gomarus, Scaliger, Snellius, Gronovius, Noodt, Perizonius or Boerhaave – managed to attract a more structured audience and to constitute a full-fledged school of pupils swarming out over Europe. Ever since, the glamour of Leiden University has continued to mobilize the attention of foreign scholars, and there is an unparalleled number of publications on early modern Leiden professors. Yet, Leiden was not the only university of the Dutch Republic. In spite of being the first university foundation in the new state, it soon had to compete with others for the first place, which it conquered essentially due to a shrewd nomination and investment policy and the ascendancy and wealth of the province of Holland. Yet, internationally known scholars such as Voetius, Graevius or Bernoulli, to name only these three celebrities, taught elsewhere, and some great scholars in the Netherlands never taught at all, such as Grotius, Huygens, De Witt or Descartes, or only at the minor, illustrious schools, such as Pierre Bayle in Rotterdam and Jean Leclerc in Amsterdam.

Non-Dutch historians have often limited their interest in the Dutch Republic to Holland, and most foreign work on early modern Dutch science and scholarship focuses on Leiden alone. Esther Mijers' study on the Scottish experience of the Dutch universities and the Republic of Letters proves that they were wrong. In fact, two types of foreign students must be distinguished: on the one hand the hasty or passing traveler on his tour abroad, be it the Grand Tour or a simple educational journey, and on the other hand the student who 'went Dutch', attending Dutch university teaching for a more substantial period. For the latter category, the Dutch Republic functioned much more as a single, comprehensive clearing-house for modern science and scholarship. Even if Leiden

remained its logical center, the Republic of Letters covered the whole nation and was perceived in that sense by the foreigners who went beyond a quick and superficial city trip. Other universities like Franeker, Groningen and Utrecht, printing centers like Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and other instances of the Republic of Letters, like the homes of learned ministers or law-students and the refuge of exiled fellow-countrymen, played for them a major or at least a supplementary role in the Dutch experience.

Esther Mijers' study is a reworked PhD-thesis on Scottish students in the Dutch Republic, full of information taken from university sources as well as private papers and diaries, names of students and scholars, and references to a wealth of primary sources in Scotland. It forms an excellent illustration of the suggestion included in its title: for many foreign students the Dutch Republic was not only a wealthy state with self-conscious, well-schooled, and essentially Protestant burghers but as such it also embodied the ideal of the Republic of Letters. The demonstration of this implicit contention follows two lines. The first chapters sketch a general picture of the historiography, the relations between the Dutch Republic and Scotland, the presence of Scots in the United Provinces, the numbers of Scottish students between 1650 and 1750, the university curriculum, the Grand Tour (following a stay in the Dutch Republic), and finally the learned relations between Scotland and the United Provinces, in particular the book trade and the circulation of Dutch learning as a prerequisite of travel abroad. In all, 1525 young Scots matriculated in Dutch universities during those 100 years, of whom 1313 at Leiden, 121 at Utrecht (but the Utrecht matriculation register is notoriously incomplete), 52 at Groningen, and 39 at Franeker (Harderwijk has not been taken into account), peak periods of more than 20 matriculations a year being 1680-1700 and 1720-1730. Most students matriculated in law and medicine, surprisingly few in divinity, in spite of the confessional brotherhood between the Kirk and the Reformed Church of the two countries. Except Boerhaave's medical students, few of them obtained a degree in the United Provinces, for a variety of mostly matter-of-fact reasons. Scottish students could rely on an intricate network of Scots in the Dutch Republic, they found accommodation in inns and boarding-houses, and quite a lot of young Scots went to Holland for some form of apprenticeship. One of the interesting aspects of this study is the variety of relations, cultural and religious as well as economic and political, between the two countries that underpinned the exchange of learning. Intensive personal contacts with the Dutch themselves were however scarce, and few Scots learned to speak Dutch.

The other line of inquiry is a biographical one. Throughout the book, and more specifically in the last chapters, Esther Mijers documents and analyses, as an exemplification of her central theses, the particular career of Charles Mackie (1688-1770), who after his study at Groningen and Leiden as a tutor of a young Scottish aristocrat became the first professor of Universal History at Edinburgh University. He acted at the same time as an adviser for students wanting to 'go Dutch', as an active intermediary of the international Republic of Letters, and as an agent and importer of books from the continent, in particular from the *magasin de l'univers* that Holland had become for the

book trade in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless the career of this *polyhistor* also shows the limits of the Dutch experience for foreign students. By and by, the intellectual tradition of humanism that had ensured the international fame of Dutch university learning in the seventeenth century became obsolete and was substituted by the Enlightenment in the Scottish vein. In fact, around 1750 the Dutch connection came to an end. In all, this study is a welcome and novel addition to the huge body of literature on the early modern university network and the Republic of Letters. Besides, Dutch readers will learn a lot on the role of Scotland in the academic world and on the Scottish presence in the Dutch Republic, in Calvinist Zeeland (the Scottish Staple at Veere) and in the army of the States-General as well as in the huge Scottish commercial community at Rotterdam where at present the Scots Church is still alive.

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