



Sandra Langereis, *De woordenaar. Christoffel Plantijn, 's werelds grootste drukker en uitgever (1520-1589)* (Sleutelfiguren; Amsterdam: Balans, 2014, 399 pp., ISBN 978 94 600 3345 2).

Christoffel Plantijn certainly deserves his inclusion in the series 'Sleutelfiguren', an initiative of the Prins Bernard Cultuurfonds set up in 2007 with the aim to present (eight) key figures who significantly shaped Dutch society. Given the wealth of material that is available about this man and his impressive printing house (in the printed edition of Plantijn's letters and business documents, in the archives of the Plantin-Moretus Museum in Antwerp and elsewhere), it is surprising that there has not been an earlier biography of him and his wide-spread business activities. Sandra Langereis' well-researched and well-presented book, volume 6 of the above-named series, is, therefore, a much welcome contribution to our knowledge of not only a remarkable man and his family, but also of the world of business and publishing in the turbulent times of sixteenth-century Antwerp.

The series is aimed at a wider readership. Within this parameter, Langereis has done an excellent job in making her voluminous study of almost 400 pages very readable, but also deeply embedded in scholarship, with the bulk of the academic apparatus packaged in an appendix with a survey of the sources and the secondary literature and carefully selected footnotes. For the academic reader, Langereis' strategy not to overload the book with all too many (often foreign) names can be frustrating at times – Andreas van Gennep, Hebrew professor in Leuven and teacher of Andreas Masius, for instance, remains consistently anonymous in the text – but many useful details can be traced in the annotations.

Langereis has chosen for a convincing kaleidoscope of family history, business history, intellectual history and a presentation of the wider historical background of the emerging and eventually exploding confessional and political conflicts in the Low Countries. Readers can skip chapters devoted to details of the story that they might find less interesting (although for the present reviewer it was just the mixture of these themes that succeeded in bringing all aspects of Plantijn's achievement and legacy to life). This strategy sometimes leads to repetitions. However, with such a substantial book, a reminder of earlier information might also be welcome. The arrangement is largely chronological, although the presentation of Plantijn's efforts for his first major enterprise, the Dutch dictionary, which he realized when he was already reasonably well connected

in Antwerp and had a team of experts as well as some money at his disposal, appears in chapter 5 (of 12 overall), which leaves a chronological gap between Plantijn's youth and apprenticeship in France and the establishment of his business in Antwerp. It is here, however, where the reader finds an explanation for Langereis' choice of title. 'De woordenaar' unfolds Plantijn's vision of a standardized Dutch language as a tool to foster unity in the 'elusive Netherlands' of his times, and of his efforts to realize this goal. – This dedication to the Dutch language seems all the more striking since Plantijn never mastered its finer nuances and conducted most of his correspondence in French. Next to the Polyglot Bible, his *Schat der Neder-duytscher spraken* (1573), the *Dictionarium Teutonico-Latinum* (1574) and the *Etymologicum Teutonicae linguae* (1599) are presented here as the lasting legacy for Dutch society of this immigrant from Tours.

After the first chapters on Plantijn's precarious childhood and early education in France (with additional information on educational concepts and practices of the time) the story gathers momentum upon his arrival in Antwerp, a metropolis offering chances for aspiring men and women with a business vision and a sharp eye for new opportunities. Plantijn and his wife Jeanne have certainly responded to these challenges with a keen understanding of early modern market forces in an international mercantile surrounding. We are repeatedly and rightly reminded of the difficulties that a family with no established networks in the city and no money at their disposal had to overcome. The Plantijns developed a family-strategy, incorporating the potential of their five surviving daughters, who played an important role in the business not just as pawns on the marriage market, but as entrepreneurs in their own right. Plantijn also heavily utilized his links with childhood friends and his foster-family in Paris, which were also fortified through marriage bonds. The reader is constantly reminded that Plantijn would not have realized his ambitious printing plans aiming at the high-end of the market, if he could not have relied on the steady income from his international trade with luxury textiles (in the competent hands of his daughter Martine) and from the equally steady production and sale of cheap prints such as almanacs. Plantijn's family business (which gradually expanded to include his sons-in-law) thus unfolds as an enterprise with a vision for a specific place in the market, a risk-spreading strategy (including property investment and business-diversification), a sense of opportunity, which transgressed political and confessional lines, and with (international) networks, which generated capital as well as expertise on the shop floor. Langereis can certainly bring to life the energy and the drive underlying Plantijn's plans, which are visible, for instance, in his relentless and ultimately successful attempt to woo King Philip II of Spain as his patron (a mixed blessing as it turned out when the production costs for the Polyglot Bible exploded and Philip turned a deaf ear to pleas for support). In this story, Christoffel Plantijn emerges as the role model of a successful entrepreneur: an international networker (with migrant background), flexible in approach, but firm in vision, which is both geared towards income maximization, and also towards the spreading of knowledge and understanding in a

world fractured by confessional strife and war. A hard-worker, but also a family man, who never forgot his humble beginnings.

Sandra Langereis successfully navigates her readers through a labyrinth of themes ranging from theological debates about passages of scripture to the volatile market of calves' hides used for the production of expensive books. She also masters to explain the often complicated details of early modern printing including the management of its hardware: paper and parchment, different letter types and machinery (and the experts to handle them). The details about trade-mark letter types and the uses of the various alphabets is fascinating and reminds the reader of the highly complicated business behind early modern books – it also invites us to a visit to Antwerp's Plantin-Moretus Museum and its unequalled collection of 278 moulds, 4,477 punches and 15,825 matrices for the production of around 80 different letter types, including Greek, Hebrew, Syrian, and Ethiopic styles of letters.

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