



Paul Botley, *Richard 'Dutch' Thomson, c. 1569-1613. The Life and Letters of a Renaissance Scholar.* (Scientific and Learned Cultures and Their Institutions 16; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016, vi-xv + 385 pp., ISBN 978 90 04 30824 4).

Thanks to the publication of the correspondences of major sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century scholars, we are learning much more about the ways in which ideas were shaped: how books were conceived, how authors gathered information for their writings, the chronology of the production of books, the circulation of ideas in manuscript, and the way in which books were marketed. One thing which social network analyses of the learned world on a collective level are teaching us right now is that people who published very little could be crucial for keeping the Republic of Letters together. Such people acted as knowledge-brokers: as facilitators or intelligencers, who put people in contact, who located and acquired material, and who shared their information about who was doing what, where and when. Richard Thomson was just such a man and his services are brought to life in this exemplary study.

The 'in-betweenness' of Thomson is already indicated in the title: his mother was from Brabant, his father was an English merchant. The 'Anglobelga' Thomson himself was whatever suited him best, depending on the circumstances. Apart from English and Dutch, he knew Latin, Greek and Hebrew, learned some Arabic and presumably German. Thomson's family lived in Antwerp and in Stade, near Hamburg, and he himself spent the last part of his life, from 1599, in England, a period in which he showed himself interested in church history and in Arminianism. That is also what he has been known for: anti-Arminians successfully tarnished his reputation after his death.

The first half of Thomson's life has hitherto been obscure. To date, the largest biographical sketch of Thomson amounted to just 800 words and it had many gaps, to say the least. The confusion about Thomson's life is due to his extreme mobility. This monograph now spells out his trajectory and his activities in detail. Every place he stayed is given a separate chapter in Botley's book. This has led to some very brief chapters, but it has the advantage that the table of contents provides a clear timeline. Thomson moved around from Antwerp to Cambridge, 'Germany' (i.e. several places in Germany), Leiden, England, Germany, Geneva, Frankfurt, Leiden, Stade, England, Geneva, Italy, Paris, Augsburg and finally, from 1599, England again. Botley's reconstruction of the months Thomson spent in each place not only gives us as complete an

account of Thomson's life as is reasonably possible, it also explains how he built his network and how he put his correspondents in contact with each other. For example, Thomson brought the Huguenot scholar Isaac Casaubon into contact with the celebrated polymath Josephus Justus Scaliger. It is clear that his correspondence must have numbered many more contacts than the nineteen individuals listed here. The English mathematician, classical scholar and church historian Henry Savile, for instance, is not among the correspondents, although Thomson knew him well. The 78 letters comprised in this edition present only a small part of what must have been a considerable network.

On the basis of what Botley has gathered, drawing on his vast experience in editing the correspondences of Scaliger (published in 2012) and Casaubon (forthcoming), we meet a wholly new Thomson. It turns out that he was not a failed Arminian theologian whose most important achievement was his activity as a translator of the King James Bible. Thomson was, like Scaliger and like Casaubon, first and foremost a classical scholar with a very keen sense of the value of manuscripts. He knew not only the latest editions of the classics and the sources they were based on, but also which projects were underway: who was working on which authors. With praiseworthy energy, he set out to acquire relevant material and transported it, across countries, to the right person. Historians working on the 'material turn' should be aware that a manuscript represented not only a text, but was also an object in itself, whose 'biography' gives us a sense of how matter was as mobile as, or perhaps even more mobile than, people. The trajectory of a manuscript of Photius' *Lexicon* (88-89) reminded me of novels such as Harry Mulisch's *The Diamond* or Tobias Hill's *The Love of Stones*, in which a jewel long outlives all those who had the privilege of holding it. For the formation of archives, correspondences such as Thomson's constitute invaluable sources.

Historians are therefore much indebted to Botley. The author has dotted his account with brilliantly pointed observations and conclusions, which testify to a long experience with early modern material. The book is mainly source-guided, and the aim was clearly not to write a monograph about, for instance, knowledge brokerage, confessionalisation in the Protestant Republic of Letters, or the relations between Protestant Germany, Holland and England. But those working in such fields will find much to enjoy, even if the orientation of the book seems more towards people interested in the classical tradition. The fact that the footnotes (with much Latin in them) often cover most of the pages reinforces this impression.

Two thirds of the book consist of a marvelous critical edition of the letters, most of which are in Latin. Botley has provided very useful English synopses, a critical apparatus, and historical footnotes which constitute a much needed commentary on the text. More than half of this material has never been published before. The transcriptions are very reliable: I found only half a dozen minor mistakes. (One serious error is the repeated remark that

the Leiden professor of Greek Bonaventura Vulcanius, who never had a wife, was married. He would have made preparations in 1594 for his own wedding to a 'domina Hospita', but this 'excellent woman' (*femina*, never *uxor*), to whom Thomson always sends his greetings, must in fact have been Vulcanius' landlady.)

The classic 'Life & Letters' setup of this timeless and elegantly written book is bound to outlive a succession of fashionable paradigms and will remain relevant to scholars of the learned world around 1600 for a very, very long time.

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