

Bert Koene, *De diligences van Bouricius. Anderhalve eeuw bedrijvigheid langs 's heren wegen* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2017, 222 pp., ISBN 978 90 8704 663 7).

In *De diligences van Bouricius*, Bert Koene continues his series of regionally embedded portraits of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aristocrats, started in his earlier books. At its best moments, this study reads like an instalment of Marten Toonder's comic saga about aspiring gentleman Olivier B. Bommel (Oliver B. Bumble). Still, there is some room to put the materials Koene collected to greater use.

The book follows the lives of eight generations of the Bouricius family (pronounced 'Bowerisius'). Between the 1690s and 1830s, the Bouriciuses ran the direct diligence service between Amsterdam and Arnhem. In partnership with other companies, they also maintained various services to western Germany. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Bouricius line therefore formed a key link in the passenger and goods transport network of the northern Netherlands.

Accordingly, this book may prove useful to historians of the eighteenth century by providing the necessary background to that household name 'de wagen van Bouricius'. It includes a fair amount of information on timetables, fares, carriage designs, capacities, and passenger and parcel numbers. A little after 1700, for instance, services between Münster and Amsterdam were available thrice a week in both directions. Those between Arnhem and Amsterdam even operated every day, with a single journey time of 15 hours or more. Carriages only had a capacity of six or eight (later up to twelve) persons, although they were occasionally complemented by 'bijwagens' (30-38, 131).

This tiny capacity, at least when compared to later forms of public transport, may be one of the most interesting transport-historical aspects of this study, although this aspect is not separately discussed by Koene. The book is also pleasantly illustrated with portraits and maps, as well as with a large number of coaching scenes which offer a view on historical developments in transport technology across the eighteenth century – though the text does not comment on these images. Nor does Koene spend much time on the experiences of Bouricius's customers, despite alluding to relevant sources in the preface. Evidently, this is not primarily a study in the history of mobility.

Koene's study may be more interesting to art and music historians, particularly those specialising in the history of clubs and societies. Several sons of the family were a member of the Arnhem college of Sint-Caecilia, and the book also contains two auction lists and an inventory of Bouricius

collections in 1770 and in 1826, primarily of paintings, some including sales prices.

First and foremost, however, the book is a family history and a business history. As a family history, it deals with the Bouriciuses' political allegiances (including the wonderful archival find of two 1785 drawings satirising heraldry (94)), their social mobility, personal interests and the relations between various members of the family. As the history of a family business, it investigates investment decisions, negotiations with local, regional and national administrations, staff treatment, relations with competitors and the personal and political allegiances which influenced all of these.

We learn for instance that Gerard Bouricius, who founded the company, did so unencumbered by any experience in the transport industry; that governments often responded to requests for trade licenses with remarkable speed in this period and how especially towards the end of its lifespan, this highly regarded company resorted to rogue tactics to stay in business. One amusing interlude concerns a neighbourly fight between two mayors about a garden fence (117). Yet perhaps the most Bumble-like episode of the book occurs in Adriaan Frans's paranoid attempts to drown his imagined enemies in a flood of accusatory pamphlets.

A key question that is only answered in general terms is what exactly happened around 1800, when the company started ratcheting up losses. Koene mentions the general Dutch 'malaise in trade and business' under William v, compounded by the 'political and social turmoil' of the Batavian Republic, and Napoleon's debilitating taxation and Continental System (109). He does not, however, explain precisely how these developments may have affected Bouricius's revenue. If a general malaise in Dutch trade – often cited by contemporaries – should have led to a decrease in patronage, how could these years at the same time have been the company's heyday (193)? It would also have been good to read a slightly more detailed view on how the dynamic period around 1800 led to diminished traffic (did they suffer from fearful clients? a lack of investment?) and how the Continental System negatively affected an overland passenger and goods service like Bouricius's. As it is, fiscal demands and the equine disease mentioned in a letter by Roeland Jan Bouricius, stand as the two most convincing explanations, next to the price developments that had set in two decades earlier (75).

One half of the family in this family history also receives much more attention than the other half. At least three women played a leading role in the history of the company – Clara Maria van Riedt, Eleonora Eijtelwein, and Bodina Buma – but they tend to be presented as marginal to the undertaking. Van Riedt, for instance, is the only director-owner who does not lend her name to a chapter title. She receives the rather damning epithet of 'sensible woman' (191) and is dismissed several times as merely signing letters and agreements – the public 'face of the operation' – but leaving the management to her sons

(41, 42, 54). Since those letters and agreements seem to be the main sources this study is founded on, however, a reader would like to know how we can tell that Van Riedt was not more actively involved in the family business. Similarly, ‘dissident daughter’ Johanna Jacoba Wentholt-Bouricius, one of the most interesting figures in the book, is assumed to have acquired her political ideas solely under the influence of her father and husband (100).

Like most of Koene’s work, this book is strongly anchored in the regional history of the IJssel and Rhine valleys. This will enhance the book’s interest for readers specialising in those regions. A wider contextualisation, in the form of comparisons with other families and transport companies, would have further broadened its relevance and suggested what new insights the Bouriciuses can offer us. (Koene *does* contextualise Gerard de Jonge’s collection of paintings (65).) It would have been interesting to know how this family history and this business history fit into the early modern history of the European family, or of early modern enterprise. Were they exemplary or exceptional? In his epilogue, Koene does suggest that all family businesses face similar challenges, but he does not illustrate this with examples outside the Bouricius family.

Existing prosopographic research might reveal much of this context. Personal letters and company accounts would also have answered many of the questions that remain, as Koene is the first to acknowledge (189). Unfortunately, the Bouriciuses left hardly any family correspondence or accounts, which raises the question whether they were the most opportune family to focus on. Still, Koene’s book can usefully serve as a case study for future, more synthetic work in family and business history. For if we remain somewhat in the dark about the distinctiveness of Bouricius’s diligence, we do get a solidly constructed collective biography, based on a substantial amount of archival sleuthing.

Anna P.H. Geurts, University of Sheffield