

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Anatomy of a Language. Rodolphus Agricola, Antonius Liber and the dawn of humanist Latin in the Low Countries (1469-1485).

The Netherlands did not exist in the fifteenth century. The area that is now known under that name was to a large extent controlled by the Burgundian dukes, but most parts of the area (like Holland, Zeeland, Brabant, Flanders) had acquired a substantial degree of autonomy. The bonds that held them together were not very tight. Some parts of the Low Countries, however, had mutual interests, both politically and economically. One of those areas was what is nowadays the north-eastern part of the Netherlands, with towns like Deventer, Groningen, Kampen and Zwolle. Westphalia, with towns like Münster and Cologne, stood in close contact with this north-eastern region of the Low Countries. This whole area became the cradle of humanism in the Low Countries. Amongst the pioneers were Rudolph von Langen, Hendrik van Rees, Friedrich Mormann, Wilhelmus Frederici, Alexander Hegius, Arnold von Hildesheim, Rudolph Agricola and Antonius Liber. Some of these men studied in Italy, where they were won for the cause of humanism that had been propagated in Italy by such men as Francesco Petrarca, Guarino Guarini, Leonardo Bruni and Lorenzo Valla, and that had won many supporters. After returning to Groningen, which was at the height of its power in the second half of the fifteenth century, they tried to propagate and spread humanist ideas on language, literature and education. They convened at the cistercian abbey at Aduard, of which Hendrik van Rees was then abbot. There they exchanged ideas and discussed matters of theological and literary interest, among which were the 'new' *studia humanitatis*.

This thesis contributes to the study of northern humanism. Its subjects are Antonius Liber's *Familiarium epistolarum compendium* (c. 1475/6) and Rodolphus Agricola's *epistolae familiares* (1469-1485). The focus is on the Latin, the backbone of humanism. For humanists the Latin language was the basis of civilisation, of culture. It enabled a man to gain knowledge, to become a *homo eruditus*. A humanist like Petrarch is strongly aware of the difference between the Latin of his days and the Latin that he read in his manuscripts of Cicero and Virgil. He was the first to persistently try and write a Latin that was as classical as possible in vocabulary and syntax. Classical Latin was his standard. All humanists followed in his footsteps. Classical Latin was their standard too; its vocabulary, its morphology, its syntax, its styles served as examples of what was right, of how Latin ought to be. Many books were written that dealt with all aspects of classical Latin; a genre that culminated in Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantiae linguae Latinae*. Non-classical, 'Gothic' Latin was despised and condemned by them. So too by Rudolph Agricola and Anthony

Liber. They are two of the early non-Italian dedicated followers of the 'new' fashion.

Therefore, it is both interesting and relevant to have a close look at their Latin. It is true that the criterion of style is often invalid for judging the humanist degree of a particular writer. For the northern parts of Europe, however, this observation should be kept in mind when dealing with writers from the 1530's onward. By that time, humanist Latin was almost generally accepted. Even declared opponents of humanism were able, if necessary, to write in the 'new' style (illustrating the dominant position that humanist Latin had acquired by then). But things were different in the (early) days of Agricola and Liber. Their Latin, too, was different from that of their (medieval) contemporaries.

For these reasons, this thesis focuses on the Latin of Agricola and Liber. The first part of the book deals with Liber's *Familiarium epistolarum compendium*. The composer (like his composition) did not become very well known with later generations. Nevertheless, Liber was eminently important in propagating humanist ideas amongst new generations, because of his profession as a teacher (and town secretary) in Groningen, Kampen, Amsterdam and Alkmaar. His letter collection of classical, medieval and humanist authors was intended to present examples of style to pupils of the Latin school in Groningen. In my thesis, I focus on the contents of Liber's *Compendium*: which authors does it contain? Which letters by those authors? Which subjects are dealt with? Can we detect any method in the way the letters were arranged? Liber's letter collection is also compared to three contemporary letter collections from the south of the Low Countries, and to a letter collection from Italy. The first chapter ends with a critical edition (including Dutch translation and commentary) of seven letters written by Liber, together with six letters by his humanist friend Rodolphus Langius. Liber placed these letters at the end of his book, to firmly place his friend and himself in the humanist tradition. These letters were last (and first) edited in the previous century.

The *Compendium* indicates which authors Liber judged fit to present examples of Latin language and style to the pupils of the Latin school in Groningen. He included classical writers (like Cicero, Seneca, Jerome, Sidonius, Symmachus, 'Phalaris'), some medieval authors (Bernard de Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas), and several Italian humanists (Bruni, Poggio, Filelfo, father and son Barzizza, Beccadelli). The texts of the letters by Aquinas were adapted to meet humanist needs. Furthermore, most of the letters that Liber included under Aquinas's name were actually written by his namesake Thomas a Kempis. Liber probably found these letters under Aquinas's name in his source(s). Liber also included twelve anonymous letters. Ten of these originally were part of a short treatise by Gasparino Barzizza (which Liber probably did not know; in modern literature this treatise is ascribed to the

German humanist Peter Luder). The remaining two letters in this 'anonymous' section were written by Francesco Filelfo.

I have not been able to detect any method in the way in which Liber arranged the authors and their letters. Many (mostly very ordinary) subjects are dealt with in the 348 letters. Liber preferred brief letters. The author to whom he gave most pages is Enea Silvio Piccolomini. This does not come as a surprise, since Piccolomini was a very influential figure in the early stages of humanism north of the Alps, and very popular with German humanists.

The letters by Langius and Liber clearly show their dedication to the cause of humanism. They encourage each other to keep reading, studying and writing 'real' Latin. Langius recommends to his friend a 'small manual for classical Latin' by Agostino Dati (the *Elegantiolae*). He warns a young man from his native town of Münster not to waste too much time in contemporary education; he should devote his time to really instructive, classical texts. Aristotle should be read in the modern translation by Bruni, not in the old-fashioned, erroneous, semi-Greek, medieval one that was still used in Germany. Langius and Liber also show by their letters that they were indeed capable of writing humanist Latin.

The second chapter of my thesis deals with the *epistolae familiares* of Rudolph Agricola. His status differs completely from that of Liber. Agricola was not a school man. He was the great inspirer of the northern humanists, because of his intellectual capabilities, his personality, his versatility, his mastery of both Greek and Latin. He was the intellectual father of the northern humanists, so to speak. His role in spreading humanism in the Low Countries was, therefore, a completely different one from Liber's. He certainly recognised the importance of the work done by the likes of Liber, Hegius and Mormann; he supported them, but he did not aspire to such work-in-the-field himself. In one of his letters he makes it quite clear how appalling the idea of having to teach in a school is to him.

The chapter on Agricola begins with an assessment of the Latin of Agricola's letters. What are the classical, medieval and humanist elements that formed his Latin language? Which authors influenced him the most? Whom does he quote? What was his knowledge of the classics? Then follow the texts of his 50 personal letters. For the most part, it concerns a critical edition, since 35 of Agricola's 50 remaining letters are preserved in one source only, and I have used this source as the basis for my edition. The final part of the second chapter offers an anatomy of the Latin of Agricola's letters in the form of a detailed, philological commentary.

My research shows that the vocabulary and syntax of the Latin of Agricola's letters is classical. There are hardly any traces of medieval Latin. Some ele-

ments that are characteristic of medieval Latin can be found, but they are very rare and mostly concern particular words or word combinations. The skeleton of Agricola's Latin is completely classical, its dress nearly completely. The results of my research also make it quite clear that Agricola was very familiar with the writings of Christian authors of late Antiquity. His favourite classical authors are Quintilian, the Plinies and Seneca. We also notice the unavoidable influence of the personification of classical Latin, Cicero. However, Agricola is an eclectic. All Latin authors, from Plautus to Boethius, are his models. In this respect (as in others), he follows in the footsteps of Petrarch.

Agricola also read and wrote Greek. He even begins a letter to Reuchlin with a paragraph written in Greek. He also quotes several Greek authors from Antiquity (e.g. Homer, Isocrates, Theocritus, Lucian). Letter no 21 offers a remarkable quotation from a letter by Gregory of Nazianze.