

Dirk van Miert. *Humanism in an Age of Science: The Amsterdam Athenaeum in the Golden Age, 1632-1704*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009. xiv + 433 pp. + 11 illus. + 3 appendices. \$147.00. Review by JOSEPH M. MCCARTHY, SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY.

Although the University of Amsterdam achieved its present status in 1877, it originated in the Amsterdam Athenaeum Illustre, founded in 1632 as one of a number of attempts after 1675—some successful, some not—to establish distinctively Protestant institutions of higher learning in what became the Dutch Republic. Its first professor, Gerardus Vossius, an internationally renowned scholar and workaholic, gave the inaugural lecture 8 January 1632 on the usefulness of history. The following day his colleague, Caspar Barlaeus, a man of melancholic temperament, followed with an address entitled “the wise merchant,” providing the Athenaeum with a durable *leitmotif* that had endured to present times and shaped our understanding of the purposes, conditions and early history of the institution.

Because the Athenaeum had no archive of its own until 1730, the usual primary sources for a history of the first century of its existence, matriculation lists, records of faculty deliberations and curatorial decisions, data regarding academics, faculty and student life, do not exist. Municipal records providing details of faculty appointments, salaries and teaching duties have been the principal resource for historians. In the present work, Dirk van Miert has also exploited professional correspondence, student disputations, professors’ orations and the prefaces of their published works to elucidate the aims, curriculum and teaching practices of the Athenaeum. With these materials, van Miert embarks upon the project of discovering whether this institution, which differed from a university in that it was not required to maintain four faculties (though it was doing so as of 1686) and could not grant degrees, was operating merely at an elementary level to prepare students for universities, was offering courses at a standard of excellence comparable to universities, was addressing primarily knowledge of immediate civic and commercial practicality or was doing all of these. He is most concerned with the question of whether the Amsterdam Athenaeum dared to embrace the “new science” or hewed to the Aristotelian worldview of the Iberian scholastics spread

in the Low Countries during the period of Spanish domination. This translation from the Dutch of a shortened version of van Miert's 2004 doctoral dissertation at Amsterdam is valuable to scholars for many reasons. Not only does it fill in a lacuna in the institutional and intellectual history of the University of Amsterdam, it provides insight into the educational climate and practices in the early Dutch Republic and demonstrates impressively how an apparent dearth of primary sources can be overcome by imagination and hard work to retrieve a seemingly inaccessible past.

At the outset, van Miert recounts the history of the first century of the Athenaeum through the succession of professors and their contributions. The practicability of the curriculum for the wise merchant was considerably less important in hiring than the prestige of scholars and their place of origin. Because there was no long-term strategy for recruitment, an uneven distribution of staff shaped the curriculum and teaching practices willy-nilly and left the Athenaeum unable to cope adequately with the economic decline at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Thus by 1704 the "golden age" of the Athenaeum was over. From this overview, van Miert moves to a lengthy discussion of the Athenaeum's teaching practices, which embraced private teaching, public teaching, and semi-public teaching, ending this second section of his book with a brief consideration of academic holidays, timetables and absences. While adding a wealth of detail about the operation of the school, he concludes that in the general organization of its educational work the Athenaeum did not significantly differ from the practice of the universities. He is also able to conclude that the overall participation and interest of the "wise merchants" declined by the end of the seventeenth century. The largest section of the book, on the contents of teaching, is rich in detail provided largely by van Miert's thorough analysis of whatever information is available regarding student disputations. His treatments of the study of the rhetorical subjects of the arts, of law, of medicine and of theology comprise just less than half of this section, leaving the bulk of the treatment to the discussion of the philosophical subjects: logic, physics and mathematics, and moral philosophy. This is in line with the presence of these subjects in the life and work of the Athenaeum, as compared to the University of Groningen where half

of the student disputations were devoted to theology and only ten percent to the arts. At the Amsterdam Athenaeum eighty-one percent of the disputations were in philosophy and none in theology. Clearly, the Athenaeum retained throughout its first phase a propaedeutical character, fulfilling the felt need of its founders to perform a bridging function of transitioning students into university, even though it sometimes provided some competition for universities toward the end of the seventeenth century.

Overall, van Miert's investigation reveals an educational venture in which Aristotelian humanism remained deeply imbedded during an age of the emergence of the "new science." Physics forced itself on the attention of eclectic Aristotelians, but they dealt with new phenomena by incorporating them into the old Aristotelian framework with necessary modifications. Descartes made no inroads at Amsterdam until late in the century, Spinoza not at all. Illustrious schools like the Amsterdam Athenaeum survived by copying the universities and perished if they were too innovative.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the Aristotelian humanists had faded, but they were succeeded by empirical Cartesians because pure rationalist Cartesianism had come to a dead end. Van Miert thus concludes his study by agreeing with Anthony Grafton's observation that, "Humanism lived, deep into the age of science," an insight evidenced by the experience of the Amsterdam Athenaeum. Clear, graceful and thorough, this is a distinguished and rewarding contribution to the history of higher education.

Karen Bowen and Dirk Imhof. *Christopher Plantin and Engraved Book Illustrations in Sixteenth-Century Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 458 pp. 101 ills. \$128. Review by LARRY SILVER, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

One of the continuing problems in the early history of prints remains the lack of attention to printed books, partly because they are located in their own special library collections instead of available in print rooms. Moreover, since so much of the history of prints is driven by the names of famous designers, frequently the anonymous