

## Ludo Milis. An Appreciation

On 28 March 2005, Ludo Milis celebrated his sixty-fifth birthday. At this age professors at Belgian universities are required to retire. Whereas reaching emeritus status may be a difficult or at least an emotional moment for many academics, Ludo Milis rounded that cape with the greatest of ease. Two years earlier, in 2003, he surprised many a friend or foe by choosing early retirement from his *alma mater*, Ghent University. In view of the profound reforms in European higher education heralded by the so-called Bologna Declaration of 1999, he preferred to make room for younger academics. In his opinion, it could not be he — who would never experience the final implementation of these reforms anyway — but rather his younger colleagues who should be called to help shape the academic future. Ludo Milis could look back upon a very successful and varied career. The sometimes confusing mix of intellectual boldness and social restraint, of honesty and irony, of kindness and subtle provocation, of critical rigor and aversion to intellectual snobbery, which so thoroughly marks his personality and his work, has left none of his students and colleagues untouched.

Ludovicus J. R. Milis was born in Antwerp on 28 March 1940, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War in Western Europe. Although as a small child he did not consciously experience this dark page in history, the lethal bombings of Antwerp by German V-1 and V-2 rockets at the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945 are part of his earliest memories. Ludo grew up as the youngest of two children in a family of modest means. His father was an employee in a cannery, his mother a

housewife. It was she who aroused his curiosity in history and the world of culture, as well as an awareness of social change in post-War Europe.

Setting a pattern for the rest of his life, Ludo started his secondary education a year early, at the age of eleven. He enrolled in the Latin and Greek programme of the Royal Athenaeum of Hoboken, where the foundations of some of his future interests were laid. His Dutch teacher there was Paul Lebeau (1908–1982), a committed Flemish militant and then a famous writer of novels and essays. Ludo also struck up lasting friendships, for example with the future sociologist Cornelis (Kees) Kruithof. Upon finishing his secondary education in 1957, he was unsure which direction his further studies would take; he was fascinated by mathematics, but in the end history won out. His interests in mathematics, however, may explain why, in his historical research and in guiding students, he always placed much emphasis on precise terminology, clearly explained methodology, and the value of quantification; he was also one of the first medievalists to fully embrace computer technology to enrich historical research.

The years of Ludo Milis's academic formation at the so-called Historical School of Ghent University witnessed the gradual substitution of the 'old masters' by a new generation of medievalists. The former, born at the end of the nineteenth century, had been trained in medieval history by Henri Pirenne (1862–1935), the 'godfather' of the Ghent medieval school<sup>1</sup>. During his 'candidate' and 'licence' studies (1957–1961), Ludo Milis worked closely with François-Louis Ganshof (1895–1980), Egied Strubbe (1897–1970), and Hans Van Werveke (1898–1974). Ganshof and Strubbe, both scholars of history as well as law, exerted perhaps the most influence on Milis's early research. Ganshof was primarily a specialist of institutional history — he gained international renown with his monograph *Qu'est-ce que la féodalité?* (1947) — and of land exploitation in the Early Middle Ages. Strubbe, an expert in the history of law, was best known for his many editions of primary sources in legal history and his concomitant work in palaeography, diplomatics and other auxiliary disciplines.

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<sup>1</sup> On Pirenne's role as the founder of the 'École de Gand' see the *Liminaire* in F. L. Ganshof, E. Sabbe, and F. Vercauteren (eds.), *Études d'histoire dédiées à la mémoire de Henri Pirenne par ses anciens élèves* (Brussels, 1937), p. v. See also R. C. Van Caenegem, 'Reflecties bij "Een eeuw Gentse Historische School"', in *Een eeuw Gentse Historische School 1891–1992*, ed. by L. François (Ghent, 1993), pp. 7–15.

Like his future colleagues at Ghent, Raoul C. Van Caenegem and Adriaan Verhulst (1929–2002), Ludo Milis wrote his 'licence' thesis under the direction of François-Louis Ganshof. The thesis, completed in 1961, was a solid, traditional study of the demesne of St Salvator's abbey at Ename during the High Middle Ages<sup>2</sup>. Ludo was Ganshof's last thesis student. The work he did with this giant figure of the Ghent school's second generation was also virtually his last to follow closely in the positivist tradition that dominated historical research at Ghent University between Henri Pirenne's retirement in 1930 and the early 1960s. But even though in his further career he rarely returned to this kind of research, the history of Ename continued to hold a special place in his work.

As a student, Ludo Milis not only impressed his professors and fellow students as a promising historian but also threw himself fully into the extracurricular aspects of university life. In 1959–1960, he became the dynamic president of the *Vlaamse Geschiedkundige Kring*, the organization of history students at Ghent founded in 1931 by the future Antwerp city archivist Frans Blockmans. Ludo was also an active member of the regional club *Antwerpen Boven*, led in the years 1960–1961 by the future journalist and Antwerp alderman Tuur Van Wallendael. Several lifelong friendships were born at this time, for example with the future Byzantinist Edmond (Mon) Voordeckers, co-author of one of the essays included in this volume<sup>3</sup>. The most important new development in his life was unquestionably his love for Greta Proost, a spirited history student two years ahead of him in the history programme; as his wife she would form the cornerstone of his existence until today.

One year after his graduation, Ludo Milis became the assistant of Egied Strubbe, who had directed Greta Proost's 'licence' thesis and remained close to her. As Strubbe's assistant, Milis began his doctoral dissertation on the history of the regular canons of Arrouaise, a religious order formed during the Gregorian reform of the late eleventh century. Until then, re-

<sup>2</sup> L. Milis, *Het domein der Sint-Salvatorabdij te Ename gedurende de Middeleeuwen. 1063–1250* (Unpublished 'licence' thesis, Ghent University, 1961).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. : L. Milis, 'Testimonium amicitiae', in *La spiritualité de l'univers byzantin dans le verbe et dans l'image. Hommages offerts à Edmond Voordeckers à l'occasion de son éméritat*, ed. by K. Demoen and J. Vereecken (Turnhout, 1997), pp. 21–26.

ligious history tended to fall outside the purview of the Ghent historical school. Perhaps for that reason Milis often ventured abroad for research and additional course work. As early as 1961, in the first months after his graduation, he took part in the summer programme of the *Centre d'études supérieures de civilisation médiévale* of the University of Poitiers. There, he met two famous medievalists who played stimulating roles in his later research: the late Dom Jean Becquet (1917–2003), monk of the nearby abbey of Ligugé and a respected specialist of the history of medieval monastic and canonical orders (nine years later, Milis and Dom Bequet co-edited the *Constitutiones* of the order of Arrouaise for the *Corpus Christianorum*<sup>4</sup>); and the British medievalist Giles Constable, the expert of monastic history in the High Middle Ages, with whom he remained in touch for the rest of his career. In 1962, Milis studied at the University of Cambridge with Christopher Cheney and David Knowles, then among the leading scholars of medieval Church history.

Ludo Milis did not finish his dissertation under the auspices of Egied Strubbe. In a new generational shift at Ghent University, Raoul Van Caenegem became a full professor in 1964, and Milis joined him as his assistant. Like Ganshof and to a great extent also Strubbe, Van Caenegem was trained in both history and law; his main interests were institutional and legal history. In the course of his assistantship with Van Caenegem, Milis gained expertise in this area of research and in the editorial scholarship it required. With Van Caenegem, he later edited and commented upon a number of famous Flemish city charters as the output of research seminars conducted with upper level students<sup>5</sup>. In the mean time, he was able to continue his own doctoral research. On 10 May 1967, he received his PhD as the first of Van Caenegem's doctoral students.

The dissertation was a far more innovative work of church history than its title — *The Order of Regular Canons of Arrouaise: History, Institutions and Constitutions from the Foundation of the Mother House (ca. 1090)*

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<sup>4</sup> *Constitutiones canonicorum regularium Ordinis Arroasiensis*, ed. by L. Milis and J. Becquet, *Corpus christianorum. Continuatio mediaevalis*, 20 (Turnhout, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> See below, Bibliography, Articles and Book Chapters, for the years 1977, 1979, and 1981. Two of the authors of this Appreciation remember those seminars with great awe — they inspired more than the occasional nightmare.

until the End of the Annual Chapters (1471) — suggests<sup>6</sup>. It did not quite fit into the traditions of the Ghent school up to the 1960s, but soon received international recognition. The book was not only concerned with narrating the history of Arrouaise in the Middle Ages: rather it subjected that history to comparative analysis within a larger framework, that of the Gregorian reform and the new monastic trends of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. It also implicitly applied Max Weber's sociological observations on the transition, in new religious movements, from charismatic origins to institutionalized observance by later followers through the elaboration of all kinds of legal instruments. In subsequent years, and even up to very recently, Milis returned to different aspects of his dissertation research for several publications, erudite source editions as well as synthetic essays characterized by a wealth of ideas and methodological rigour. These essays caught the attention of his old friend Cornelis Kruithof, who made them the subject of an inspiring sociological analysis<sup>7</sup>.

Thus Ludo Milis had started his university studies guided by the 'old masters' at Ghent but finished his dissertation as a new cohort of historians took over, all born around 1930. Soon after Van Caenegem, Adriaan Verhulst and Walter Prevenier also received appointments as full professors. As had been the case with the former generation, the new group of Ghent medievalists presented the Ghent school of medieval history with a seemingly homogenous and immediately recognizable face to the outside world, while internally working rather independently from each other. The traditional emphasis on the concept of a 'Ghent School' tends to obscure the many innovations it generated and the many different ways in which it evolved after Pirenne. Unlike today, when all medieval historians at Ghent are members of the same department, these medieval-

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<sup>6</sup> L. Milis, *De orde der reguliere kanunniken van Arrouaise. Geschiedenis, instellingen en constituties vanaf de stichting der moederabdij (ca. 1090) tot het einde der jaarlijkse kapittels (1471)* (Unpublished dissertation, Ghent University, 1967). The dissertation was published in French as *L'ordre des chanoines réguliers d'Arrouaise, son histoire et son organisation, de la fondation de l'abbaye-mère (vers 1090) à la fin des chapitres annuels (1471)*, 2 vols, Rijksuniversiteit Gent. Werken uitgegeven door de Faculteit van de letteren en wijsbegeerte, 147–48 (Bruges, 1969).

<sup>7</sup> C. L. Kruithof, 'De institutionalisering van de stilte. Een aantekening over heremitisme en cenobitisme', *Tijdschrift voor sociale wetenschappen*, 28 (1983), pp. 214–18.

ists were chairs of different and sometimes competing 'seminars' that gradually carved out their own paths. They became the breeding ground for the exploration of new historical fields. Immediately after the Second World War, the medievalists Charles Verlinden (1907–1996) and Jan Dhondt (1915–1972) were the founding fathers of the seminars of, respectively, Early Modern and Modern History, with their very own distinguished futures; in the 1970s, Adriaan Verhulst laid the basis for a thriving school of agrarian history that was quite different from Ganshof's institutional approach, while Raoul Van Caenegem became a leading scholar of English legal history and Walter Prevenier generated new approaches to both the auxiliary sciences and the social history of the Late Middle Ages<sup>8</sup>. Milis thus was trained in an ambiance that paid tribute to long-standing tradition but showed all signs of exploration of the new.

While Ludo Milis remained a member of the 'Seminar of General and Institutional History of the Middle Ages' directed by Raoul Van Caenegem until its dissolution into the larger department of Medieval History in 1992, he — like his colleagues Hilde De Ridder-Symoens and Monique Vleeschouwers-Van Melkebeek — enjoyed considerable freedom to pursue his own research interests. Influenced by historians of the third generation of the French *Annales* such as Jacques Le Goff or — Georges Duby (1919–1996), though always with distinctively personal insight, Ludo Milis became more and more interested in the history of 'mentalities'. In doing so, he was following in the footsteps of Jan Dhondt, who had pioneered the field in several important publications of the 1950s<sup>9</sup>,

<sup>8</sup> See: R. Van Eenoo, 'Van Seminarie voor Hedendaagse Geschiedenis naar Vakgroep Nieuwste Geschiedenis. Herinneringen', in *Geschiedenis maken. Liber amicorum Herman Balthazar*, ed. by G. Deneckere and B. De Wever (Ghent, 2003), pp. 49–57 (especially pp. 49–53); C. Verlinden, 'Biografie Charles Verlinden', *Bulletin van het Belgisch Historisch Instituut te Rome*, 67 (1997), pp. 7–31 (especially 11–16); W. Prevenier and E. Thoen, 'The Scholarly Career of Professor Adriaan Verhulst', in *Peasants & Towns-men in Medieval Europe. Studia in honorem Adriaan Verhulst*, ed. by J.-M. Duvosquel and E. Thoen (Ghent, 1995), pp. 15–30; L. Milis, *et. al.*, 'Preface', in R. C. Van Caenegem, *Law, History, the Low Countries and Europe*, ed. by L. Milis *et. al.* (London and Rio Grande, 1994), pp. ix–xii; W. Blockmans, M. Boone, and T. de Hemptinne, 'Walter Prevenier. Un portrait intellectuel', in: *Secretum secretorum. Liber alumnorum Walter Prevenier* (Louvain and Apeldoorn, 1999), pp. 9–17.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Dhondt, 'Les 'solidarités' médiévales. Une société en transition: la Flandre en 1127–1128', *Annales ESC* 12 (1957) pp. 529–60 and Idem, 'Une mentalité du douzième siècle. Galbert de Bruges', *Revue du Nord* 39 (1957) pp. 101–09.

but the two had relatively little personal contact, nor did Milis ever harbour the ambition to emulate Dhondt. What he and Dhondt held in common, however, was not only an interest in mental attitudes as an important part of human agency in history, but also the conviction that innovative research had to prickle, even to provoke, in order to be successful, and that erudition for erudition's sake did not deserve much admiration<sup>10</sup>.

Shortly after receiving his doctoral degree, Ludo Milis was made '*eerstaanwezend assistent*' at Ghent University. After the sudden death of Jan Dhondt in 1972, he was put in charge of a regular course 'The History of the Romance-Language World'. Two years later, he became an associate '*docent*', teaching courses on the ecclesiastical, cultural and religious history of the Middle Ages as well as the heuristics of research in medieval history and the methodology of cultural history. He was made an associate professor of history in 1980 and a full professor in 1991. Following Van Caenegem's retirement in 1992, Milis took charge of the 'big course', the 'Introduction to Medieval History', required for all beginning students of history. He became '*gewoon hoogleraar*' in 1996.

Ludo Milis's early academic career was closely connected to the protest movement of the late 1960s and the academic reforms of these years. Students who took his classes at that time immediately thought of him as the 'other', more 'progressive' professor, mainly because of his innovative choice of research subjects, but perhaps — students being what they are — also because of his rather revolutionary dress code: tie and suit were replaced by brown corduroy trousers and a turtleneck sweater that has now achieved legendary status among alumni. He was also an innovator in the use of computer-assisted research<sup>11</sup>. In the late 1970s, Milis started to guide students (and colleagues!) into the personal computer era, firstly with a primitive Commodore 64 machine that all of his thesis students came to know well. Sometimes these classes had little to do with medieval

<sup>10</sup> See also W. Simons, 'The *Annales* and Medieval Studies in the Low Countries', in *The Work of Jacques Le Goff and the Challenges of Medieval History*, ed. by M. Rubin (Woodbridge-Rochester, 1997), pp. 99–117 (especially pp. 113–14, 119).

<sup>11</sup> For an early example, see L. Milis, 'History and the Computer', in *Guide to the Sources of Medieval History*, ed. by R. C. Van Caenegem and F. L. Ganshof (Amsterdam, New York, and Oxford, 1977), pp. 381–87.

history, but that was never an objection: Milis was convinced that computers held enormous promises for historians, and he was of course right.

In the course of his academic career at Ghent University, Ludo Milis directed fifty-nine 'licence' theses and seven doctoral dissertations: his first 'licence' student graduated in 1976, and in 1985 his first PhD student completed his dissertation. Most of his students pursued research in the religious history of the Southern Low Countries, in the history of mentalities and daily life in medieval Europe, and in medieval historiography<sup>12</sup>. As a thesis adviser, Milis was not interested in gaining large numbers of students. He liked to stimulate his students by provocation, which charmed some (including the editors of this volume) but disturbed others, not because the latter were more conservative, but rather because, once established truth was demolished, they often found themselves at sea and alone: he was notorious for giving his students a great deal of freedom, starting with the choice of their thesis topic.

Ludo Milis always wanted his students to think and to work independently from the very beginning, and to come to terms with the fact that scholarship may be a profoundly unsettling enterprise, demanding independence of judgment based on methodologically sound research. But those who worked with him found their initial apprehension gradually replaced by pride and possibly elation at the discovery that they were scholars in their own right. They knew that in Ludo they could count on an ever accessible and generous sounding board for their questions. Above all, Milis wanted to make sure talented young researchers were not held back in their natural growth as scholars because of too narrow a subject matter or too rigid his guidance. He may now find satisfaction in observing how many of his former students successfully found their way into teaching and research positions not only at Ghent University but also at other colleges and universities, even abroad; as curators of manuscripts and archives; as leaders in the booming sector of cultural heritage management; or as editors of specialized publishing houses. And he may be even

<sup>12</sup> They are catalogued in L. François and G. Leloup, *Te paard op drie eeuwen. Bibliografie van de licentiaats- en doctoraatsverhandelingen aan de Vakgroepen Geschiedenis van de Universiteit Gent* (Ghent 2004). The list should be completed by the doctoral dissertation of Laura Galoppini, *Mercanti toscani e Bruges nel tardo medioevo*, defended in 2003.



more pleased by the fact that their achievements were made without any lobbying effort on his part, an activity which he always loathed and for which, as a man of principle, he lacked all inclination.

On the political and ideological issues that divided Belgium after the Second World War, Ludo Milis took an early stand in favour of Flemish emancipation, without espousing a narrowly separatist vision. His profoundly democratic convictions put him at odds both with the Belgian monarchy — a medieval anomaly in the modern world — and with certain fascist trends in the Flemish movement. In addition to his interest in religious and cultural history, he became intrigued by the history of French Flanders and the historical shifts in the boundaries between French and Dutch (Flemish) languages in the region. His first publications on this topic date as far as 1969. In several of these essays, he examined why Romance (French) languages displaced Germanic languages (Dutch in Northern France and German in Alsace). Taking into account this historical phenomenon, he supported the legal establishment of a linguistic boundary in Belgium from 1963 onwards.

Meanwhile, Milis also had the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with Dutch students at the *Nutsacademie voor pedagogische en maatschappelijke vorming* of Rotterdam, where from 1971 until 1983 he taught several courses in medieval history. The experience may have increased his interest in the old ideal of a culturally united Low Countries, of the old *Grootnederlands*-perspective, within a newly emerging European context. These ideas never led to a firm political commitment. Milis was (and is) too much of an individualist to move to the frontlines of social debate, let alone to fight on the barricades for a cause. Moreover, his convictions were too strong and too much guided by principle for him to join any political movement, which sooner or later might imply making pragmatic choices. Nevertheless, he actively promoted Dutch-language culture as a member of the *Orde van den Prince*, a pluralistic society aimed at the promotion of the Dutch language and culture; and as a regular contributor to both *Ons Erfdeel*, the journal of Dutch culture founded by Jozef Deleu, and its off-shoot, *De Franse Nederlanden—Les Pays-Bas Français*, a journal focused on French Flanders. He also serves on the board of several historical or academic organizations in Northern France, some of which are especially concerned with the study and support of Dutch-language culture in the region. The growth of the European Union, within which he

prefers to see the cultural emancipation of Dutch and Flemish culture, also affected his academic activities. He firmly supported the mobility of students within Europe as promoted by Erasmus programmes and edited a textbook on Europe's medieval religious history, published as one of the first results of the international project *Manuels universitaires sur l'histoire de l'Europe*<sup>13</sup>.

As a historian, Ludo Milis continued to direct his attention to medieval monks, canons, and hermits. But as indicated above, his interests from about 1980 onward shifted towards religious 'mentalities' and to the relation between powerful religious elites and ordinary people during the Middle Ages. In this new direction, he was drawn into closer contact with several foreign colleagues: Frederik (Frits) W. N. Hugenholtz (1922–1999), Rudi Künzel and Hendrik Teunis, of the Netherlands; Miri Rubin in the U.K.; and, as we will see, several French historians. At Ghent, his new orientation toward the history of mental attitudes and his qualified criticism of the positivist tradition caused clashes with a few colleagues, although they never became disruptive and relations with even the most 'positivist' colleagues, such as Adriaan Verhulst (whom Milis always greatly respected), remained cordial. It should indeed be noted that despite all of his innovative drive, Milis never renounced his Ghent roots in the sense that he continued to privilege the thorough study of primary sources as the basis of research.

In his approach of the primary sources, Ludo Milis always started from two principles: first, the sources used should be 'representative'; second, they should be studied preferably to answer questions unrelated to the original intentions of their authors (since these naturally determined the explicit content). In his publications, Milis allotted relatively little space to debate with other scholars in medieval studies. That made his approach rather different from that of cultural historians working in the *Annales* tradition, or from most historians of medieval culture and religion in the English-speaking world. Until today, Milis likes to declare with pride: "I don't read secondary sources because I can think for myself",

<sup>13</sup> L. Milis (ed.), *La chrétienté des origines à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Série Europe et histoire (Paris and Brussels, 1998).

a provocative motto with which he was and still is able to needle many colleagues. At the same time, however, he displayed a remarkable ability to write historical syntheses that asked probing questions for specialists but were also accessible to a wider audience, such as in his contributions to the *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, translated in this volume. Although he supposedly (this was of course not really true) did not read the works of others, he did intend to be read.

An important turning point occurred in 1989, when Ludo Milis was a member of the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where Giles Constable was a resident professor. After many years of gruelling pressure as a teacher, Milis converted for the occasion into the role of a true hermit — one of his favourite research subjects — in a splendid isolation that lasted a good three months. As many reliable but somewhat mystified witnesses report, his social contacts and daily comfort were reduced to the absolute minimum in order to write his most successful and most controversial monograph, *Angelic Monks and Earthly Men* (1992). This book brought to a close but also questioned years of research and writing on monastic and canonical life. Analysing with Ockhamian rigour the relationship between medieval monasticism and the world outside the monastic enclosure, the book at first met with confused reactions from historians and other critics, who did not always understand the author's intentions: to define the core values of medieval monastic life and to clearly outline their implications for the society in which monasticism 'flourished' but from which, by definition, it must withdraw. Few historians of the Middle Ages before him had reflected on the conflict so brilliantly and honestly, as many readers across the globe soon understood: the book was translated into Dutch, Japanese, Italian, and Polish.

The following years were among the most prolific in Ludo Milis's career. In addition to his *Angelic Monks*, he also edited in 1991 the successful *De heidense Middeleeuwen* (*The Pagan Middle Ages*). This collection of essays by former students and others (with an important contribution by himself), completed a series of questions Milis started to ask in the 1980s in his 'La conversion en profondeur, un processus sans fin', translated in this volume. *The Pagan Middle Ages* convincingly countered the nineteenth-century ideal of the 'Christian Middle Ages' and argued for the essential syncretism of medieval religious culture in which,

despite centuries of Christian evangelization, pagan and Christian elements were often seamlessly combined. This highly productive period in Milis's career intensified his international contacts. In 1992, he was a Visiting Fellow at Clare Hall College in Cambridge. Five years later, Jean-Loup Lemaitre invited him to the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in Paris for a series of lectures that resulted in a thoroughly revised French version of his *Angelic Monks* — a version that received much scholarly attention and that became the occasion for a radio broadcast in September 2002, in which Milis was joined by Jacques Le Goff and Michel Parisse in a fascinating discussion of his book<sup>14</sup>.

In the mean time, in 1994, he had published *De indiscrete charme van Jan Schuermans, pastoor van Ename (1645–1655)* [*The Indiscrete Charm of Jan Schuermans, Curate of Ename, 1645–1655*], arguably the book that best illustrates his lifelong interest in the history of mentalities. *De indiscrete charme* carefully reconstructs, analyses and interprets the true story of a village priest who impregnated a young woman at the time of the Treaty of Münster (1648), as well as the act's consequences. The book was of course not devoted to the Middle Ages as they are traditionally defined, but for Milis, medieval history did not end in the late fifteenth century. He shared with a few historians of the *Annales* school a belief in a 'Long Middle Ages', lasting until the late eighteenth century<sup>15</sup>. It was no accident that Schuermans' story brought Milis back to Ename, the subject of his 'licence' thesis. Throughout his career he remained interested in the village with its rich medieval history; he enthusiastically supported the archaeological excavations at the site of St Salvator's abbey. About Ludo Milis's newest book, we are still more or less in the dark. During his final year as a professor at Ghent University, he took a sabbatical leave to write a monograph synthesizing several lines of enquiry that had remained unpublished. The editors of the present volume have gathered that the manuscript nears completion, but note that they do not know its true subject.

<sup>14</sup> 'Les moines et le peuple', broadcasted on 'France Culture' (*Les lundis de l'histoire*) on 9 September 2002.

<sup>15</sup> The last article in the present volume — 'State Boundaries and Ethnic Alienation: Perspectives on Research into the Alienation Processes of French Flemings' — testifies again to his interests in the early seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In the 1990s, Ludo Milis left an important legacy with the Internet database *Narrative Sources*<sup>16</sup>. This annually updated online catalogue of all narrative sources from the medieval Southern Low Countries was the main result of different joint projects directed since 1987 by Milis and his colleagues Jean (Jan) Goossens and Werner Verbeke of the Catholic University of Leuven. While the catalogue was largely based on preparatory research by Werner Verbeke and the work of several collaborators, *Narrative Sources* undeniably bears the stamp of Milis's inspiring guidance. Firmly centred on the study of primary sources, more specifically on narrative texts (which are so crucial for the study of medieval culture and mentalities), the online catalogue was upon its release in 1996 one of the first of its kind worldwide. Since the catalogue was funded by governmental grants, Milis insisted that it should be freely accessible — in contrast to many other historical databases. Its technical realization owed much to the collaboration with the Ghent University Library and its pioneering experience in computerized cataloguing techniques developed in the 1990s, under the direction of Herbert Van de Sompel. *Narrative Sources* proved to be a success: not only is it still consulted daily by dozens of researchers from all over the world, it also inspired a whole range of new doctoral dissertations until today. In 2002, the scope of the database was even enlarged to the Low Countries as a whole, through a Dutch research project coordinated by Renée Nip at the University of Groningen.

For many years, Ludo Milis preferred to concentrate his energies on teaching and research; he had initially little interest in serving on the many influential and prestigious boards that control public grants for research in Belgium. This attitude changed in the mid-1980s. The first important function he assumed was that of the presidency of the Belgian Historical Institute in Rome, which he held from 1986 until 2001. The position fitted him well: his great love of Italy, its history and culture, its people and language, its cuisine and wines, made him take up the task with great enthusiasm as well as empathy for the country that hosted Belgian scholars in

<sup>16</sup> *The Narrative Sources from the Medieval Low Countries—De verhalende bronnen uit de middeleeuwse Nederlanden—Les sources narratives des Pays-Bas médiévaux* (Ghent, Louvain, and Groningen: Ovid-database, 1996–2005, 10 editions), <http://www.narrative-sources.be>.

Rome; he worked also very hard to improve the quality and distribution of the Institute's publications. In 1991, he became a member of the Belgian Royal Commission for History, surely the most important of all historical societies in the country but in the 1970s and 1980s sometimes perceived as rather antiquated. Milis had criticized this 'venerable' institution in his younger days; as happens so often with former rebels, in 2005 he became the Commission's President. From 1995 until 2003 he also served on various committees of the Fund for Scientific Research – Flanders, where he gained a reputation for his discretion, his thorough knowledge of the issues, and his aversion to all lobbying by outsiders.

Even before Ludo Milis left academic life, he often indicated to his collaborators that he did not want to be honoured with a *Liber Amicorum*. Although his wish certainly grew from his natural reserve, his experience serving on committees of the Fund for Scientific Research helps to explain his reticence; all too often he noted that contributions to this kind of *Festschriften* — though very common in the arts and humanities — barely had any scientific impact in most other disciplines. And he also recalled that Henri Pirenne's *Liber Amicorum*, published shortly after Pirenne's death in 1935, caused some tension<sup>17</sup>. However, he happily welcomed the idea of collecting some of his essays in an English translation that would make available to a larger audience part of his most important work.

This volume contains eleven essays published between 1969 and 1990, offering insight in Ludo Milis's varied research interests. A close examination of his bibliography will reveal that in the period before his *Angelic Monks*, Milis only rarely published in English. Nine essays included here appeared in Dutch or French and have now been translated into English; two essays previously published in English but not widely distributed are also included and newly edited. The first part of this collection is devoted to the religious history of the Low Countries during the Early and High Middle Ages, and to issues of religious conversion and persuasion. These essays, which may serve as the historical framework for many others in the volume, demonstrate Milis's unusual talent for his-

<sup>17</sup> See note 1.

torical synthesis. The second part contains two fundamental contributions, inspired by his 1967 dissertation, to the history of the twelfth-century regular canons and their eremitical origins. We next include three very different case studies in which Milis examines the ways in which ideology and power shape society and its cultural expressions. The volume concludes with a few lesser known, but highly original essays on the social and cultural history of French Flanders, a theme dear to Milis's heart.

Bibliographical references in this volume have been harmonized and in a few cases corrected, but no attempt was made to update them.

His emeritus status allows Ludo Milis to choose now more freely among his commitments and activities — scholarly, social, and cultural — and to devote more time to his biggest passion, his family. His *famiglia*, in its Italian sense, always played a very important role in his life. His wife Greta, famous for her congeniality and her talents as a hostess, was, and still is, his main pillar of strength and his greatest supporter. Their three children, Huib, Geertje, and Daan left the parental home at Sint-Martens-Latem quite a while ago now, but their visits are naturally always cherished, especially when they bring along the grandchildren Timo, Illy, and Cosmo. Ludo and Greta continue to visit their Tuscan pied-a-terre in Guardistallo and to travel widely; most recently to Thailand, the 'motherland' of their youngest grandson. It is our most profound wish that Ludo and Greta will continue their new path in life in the happiest of circumstances and for a very long time.

Jeroen DEPLOIGE, Martine DE REU, and Walter SIMONS