

A.J. Rinzema and L. van Beek in collaboration with D.E.H. de Boer and C.W. Zwart, *Sicke Benninge en zijn kroniek. Een Groninger burger over opkomst en verval in zijn stad rond 1500*, The Hague (Huygens ING), 2014, 340 pp. (ISBN 978 90 5216 000 9)

In 1536 the city of Groningen and the surrounding countryside, the so-called Ommelanden, were integrated into the Habsburg Netherlands. The previous five decades had been characterized by warfare between neighbouring princes who had hoped to control this strategically important commercial and agricultural hub and by internal political turmoil. Sicke Benninge (ca. 1455- 1530/6) was a relatively rich Groningen brewer. In 1500 Sicke went on a pilgrimage to Rome and shortly after his return he got actively involved in local politics. He complemented travel guides with his own observations and took notes on the stormy events that took place in and around his city. Moreover Sicke compiled a volume on the origins of the Frisians, he copied the early fifteenth century chronicle of Johan Lemego and anonymous Groningen annals and he paraphrased a series of legal and diplomatic acts. Finally, Sicke's pilgrimage had instilled upon him a lifelong interest in the fate of the Eternal City. Therefore he reworked as well printed accounts of the Sack of Rome in 1527. Sicke Benninge integrated all these and even more various writings by himself and other authors into a single three part chronicle.

Although since the late sixteenth century Sicke Benninge's chronicle was well known to local scholars, in particular the learned Ubo Emmius (1547-1625), and they frequently referred to him in their reconstructions of the entangled Groningen history, until recently no complete edition of the work was available. In 1972 Frederik van den Hombergh started to compare the various manuscripts and partial editions of Benninge's work. Only forty years later this complicated task was completed by Egbert van der Werff. Their edition has been published both in print and on the internet by the Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands.¹ The book here under review complements that edition. Originally it had been planned as the doctoral dissertation of Anton Rinzema. Unfortunately Rinzema passed away in 2007. By that time he had completed five complete chapters and the outline for a sixth one. In collaboration with Rinzema's *Doktorvater*, Dick de Boer, Lianne van Beek has rearranged the available material and she has prepared the book for publication.

The genesis of this book was thus nearly as long-lasting as that of Benninge's chronicle. Moreover due to its origins as an uncompleted doctoral dissertation, the book seems somewhat out of balance. In fact, most likely Anton Rinzema will not be remembered for the meticulous description of late medieval German urban historiography he offers in the first chapter. Moreover, Rinzema did not finish planned chapters on learned culture and history writing in Groningen around 1500. Instead, a short addendum only offers short notices on Benninge's contemporaries and followers.

¹ Sicke Benninge, *Croniken der Vrescher Landen mijtten Zoeven Seelanden ende der stad Groningen*, eds. F.A.H. van den Hombergh and E.O. van der Werff in collaboration A.J. Rinzema eds., The Hague (Huygens ING), 2012, 2 vols., CXXIX, XXX and 734 pp also to be retrieved at http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/kroniek_sicke_benninge (last consulted on 16 May 2016).

Notwithstanding these probably inevitable flaws Lianne van Beek, Dick de Boer and the board of the Huygens Institute deserve great praise to have made available Anton Rinzema's *opus magnum* in a systematic way. In doing so, they have rendered scholars invaluable services.

Indeed, Sicke Benninge is a most interesting chronicler. According to him Groningen and the Ommelanden were one of the seven Frisian lands. In previous centuries one after the other of these lands had lost their traditional liberty. Due to party strife also Groningen threatened to suffer the same fate in Sicke's lifetime. His actions in politics were intended to prevent that course of events. Although apparently Benninge had no intention to see his chronicle printed, he may have assembled and written it with the same purpose. Therefore Sicke wanted to understand the origins of the Frisian liberty and how the bold and somewhat naive actions of his fellow citizens contributed to its loss.

In many aspects Sicke Benninge was a *homo novus*. Probably, he owed his wealth to his wife. He was born outside the city and did not belong to the traditional Groningen patrician elite. Neither was he trained as a humanist. Precisely for these reasons his chronicle is so captivating. In tracing back the origins of the Frisians to the Trojans Sicke proved to be a child of his time. His attitude in politics was rather pragmatic. According to him the mighty Charles V, as a successor to Charlemagne who once had granted the Frisians their liberty, seemed to be the only legitimate ruler of the various Frisian lands. Moreover only the emperor could uphold the peace that was a necessary condition for commerce and prosperity. Benninge's chronicle offers us a unique insight in the shifting minds of the Groningen administrators in the decades they gradually lost their independence.

In sum, Anton Rinzema and Lianne van Beek offer their readers a careful analysis of Sicke Benninge's chronicle. Thanks to them we have gained a far better insight in the way how a self-made historian fashioned the identity of his city in times of crisis. Thereby they have greatly enhanced our knowledge of late medieval and early modern historical culture in Groningen and the surrounding regions. I'm convinced their study will remain a touchstone for future generations of cultural historians.

Hans Cools