

J. LEEMANS & L. JOCQUÉ, *Corpus Christianorum 1953-2003:*
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CORPVS CHRISTIANORVM CONTINVATIO MEDIAEVALIS
OPERA OMNIA of JAN VAN RUUSBROEC

Ruusbroec was born in 1293, probably in the village of Ruusbroec, southeast of Brussels. When he was eleven, he moved to the city and attended the school attached to the collegiate church of St. Gudula. He was ordained a priest and became a chaplain there. In 1343 he left Brussels together with two other priests to live a contemplative life in Groenendaal, a site in Soignes Forest about ten kilometers south of Brussels. The group based there became a community of Augustinian canons regular in 1350. Ruusbroec died there in 1381.

Ruusbroec puts the Low Countries on the map of world literature. His greatness as an author of mystical-spiritual writings has been acknowledged internationally. His work contains eleven treatises and seven letters. The main sources he draws on are the great Cistercians, Guillaume de St.-Thierry and Bernard of Clairvaux, and his female predecessors in Middle Dutch mystical literature: Hadewijch (first half of the thirteenth century) and Beatrijs of Nazareth (1200-1268). So far there have been two editions of his work: one by J.-B. David (1858-1868) and one by the Ruusbroec Society (1932-1934). Neither of these editions meets modern standards. For most of the treatises David chose a codex (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 3416-24) that indeed belongs among the better manuscript witnesses but has the defect that its version is a mixture of different recensions. Moreover, the editor did not shrink from normalizing the orthography and producing self-made headings in Middle Dutch. The edition by the Ruusbroec Society avoids David's imperfections but overestimates the Ruusbroec codex from Groenendaal (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 19.295-97) as the base-text for all textual criticism. In fact, for some treatises, smaller and older manuscripts offer better versions. Moreover, the number of manuscripts involved in this edition remains rather limited. This hampers a clear view across space and time of the transmission of the texts.

For all these reasons a new critical edition was urgently needed. For this, now almost completed *Opera Omnia*, the Middle Dutch text is

based on a critical study of all manuscripts. Carefully comparing the different versions, the editor has searched for the most undamaged version, which is also considered to be closest to the original text. Where this text shows evident shortcomings, these are corrected on the basis of the most acceptable reading offered by one or more of the other manuscripts. Each correction is clearly marked in the critical text and accounted for in the critical commentary. Besides the Middle Dutch text the edition contains a new English translation, which renders Ruusbroec's text as literally as possible, and the Latin translation by L. Surius O.Cart. (1523-1578) according to its first edition (1552). Some small interventions of the editor in the text of this translation make it more readable: the abbreviations are spelled out, the use of u and v is adapted to modern standards and evident misprints are corrected. This triple text-edition intends to do justice to the original text as the only basis for scientific research and to make it accessible to those not being familiar with Middle Dutch.

A threefold apparatus accompanies the Middle Dutch text. The first apparatus mentions the variants with regard to the basic text. Also the variants of manuscripts which contain only excerpts are included; their position within the whole of the transmission can now be identified. The second apparatus contains the palaeographic annotations. They describe the corrections inserted in the text of the base manuscript by the copyist or by correctors. They also provide information about other phenomena outside the normal run of the text, e.g. initials, marginalia, errors in spelling, unusual writing patterns on account of word-divisions, dittographies, and damage to the text from external causes. The third apparatus lists references to the Bible and to other sources and parallel passages, without aiming at an exhaustive source apparatus. A lemmatized vocabulary contains the nouns and adjectives, verbs and adverbs of the critical text, followed by their localization.

The introduction sketches the historical circumstances in which each of the texts originated and outlines their contents. Finally it gives

information about the manner of editing and about the manuscripts which contain the text in question.

The publication of Ruusbroec's *Opera Omnia* in the series of the *Corpus Christianorum* may at first seem surprising: its language is the vernacular and not Latin. Among the public Ruusbroec mainly wrote for (Friends of God, hermits, Poor Clares) many could not read Latin. Moreover he himself undoubtedly preferred his mother tongue to describe mystical life. Surely the fact that he produced high-quality literature in Dutch does not suffice to publish his works in a Latin series. From the sixteenth till the nineteenth century, however, his oeuvre was mainly spread, read and studied in Latin. Surius's translation made Ruusbroec's works available for the West European intelligentsia. Even in the twentieth century this Latin text was used as a basis for translations in modern languages. Furthermore, it is a very readable and accurate translation. From the viewpoint of cultural history the 'Rusbrochius Latinus' has been more influential than the Dutch one. It therefore deserves a place in a series devoted to Latin authors, the more so since an eminent Latin translation is part of the edition.

For the publication of the eleven treatises and seven letters, eleven volumes were planned. The two most extensive treatises each occupy two volumes, whereas three smaller treatises together with the seven letters were put into one volume. Since 1988, nine of the ten parts (nine of the eleven volumes) have been published. Only one treatise still awaits publication: *Van den geesteliken tabernakel – In tabernaculum foederis commentaria*. Because of its size it will be published in two volumes (*Opera omnia*, 5-6 | *CM*, 105-106). We hope to publish this work by 2005. From that moment onwards the translation and study of Ruusbroec's work will have a solid and secure foundation.

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