
The Windesheim canon John Gielemans was the author of four substantial works: the *Sanctilogium*, the *Agyologus Brabantinorum*, the *Novale Sanctorum* and the *Hystoriologus Brabantinorum*. In his own day, the impact of his work was limited: the only full copies to survive are the hefty volumes from his home, Rooklooster, near Brussels. In contrast, when serious hagiographical and medieval studies started in the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, respectively, scholars avidly turned to the canon’s work, as it is an invaluable source for late medieval hagiography and the Devotio Moderna. Especially as far as regional saints are concerned, Gielemans sometimes provided the only written record of their activities. Despite its obvious importance, no one had ever found the courage to attempt a study of the entire body of Gielemans’s writings, until the Paris medievalist Véronique Hazebrouck-Souche undertook this Herculean labor. Her book, written in very accessible French, originated in a doctoral thesis. It is as substantial as one of Gielemans’s own. It consists of three parts and four appendices. The appendices consist of codicological descriptions of the extant manuscripts and partial editions, for instance Gielemans’s prologues, which provide information about his intentions, at least as far as he stated them explicitly. In addition, Hazebrouck-Souche provides a set of illustrations that support her arguments.

Hazebrouck-Souche’s interest is in the connection between sanctity and spirituality and Brabant in Gielemans’s work. She starts out by placing Gielemans and his work in context: in a community of regular canons with roots both in Brabantine mysticism and the Devotio Moderna. Rooklooster was among the most important member-communities of the Chapter of Windesheim. It held a central position in the diffusion of religious books, for example, by compiling a catalogue of all books in the Chapter. Hazebrouck-Souche highlights the political angle, which tends to be overlooked in studies of this kind. Yet, for a proper understanding of Gielemans’s works, it is crucial to acquire some insight into the political situation of late medieval Brabant. It had just ceased to exist as a political entity, since it had been subsumed into the Burgundian empire and was now under the control of Maximilian of Austria, the widower of Mary of Burgundy. Rooklooster was a religious community favored by the Valois dukes and their Habsburg successor.
In subsequent chapters, Hazebrouck-Souche discusses the structure of the writings, and Gielemans’s methods and sources, which are entirely medieval. For instance, throughout his works, Gielemans presents himself as a compiler. Frequently, he provides two versions of the life of a saint, leaving it to the audience to choose their favorite. Where he does choose between different versions, considerations of historical or textual criticism do not seem to count, as they would have had he been a humanist. He chose whatever fitted his dual purpose best: the propagation of Brabant as a holy land, which almost naturally produced saints, as well as of a particular kind of sanctity and spirituality.

Hazebrouck-Souche develops these aspects in Parts Two and Three, starting with Brabant. Gielemans focused on Charlemagne and his dynasty, who shared a talent for sanctity. When this is the case, Charlemagne, and his extensive kin in particular, were appropriated as Brabanter, farfetched as this may be in some of Gielemans’s instances. In itself, the motive of the holy kinship was nothing out of the ordinary in a medieval context. However, Gielemans is special in that he privileged spiritual kinship over blood relations. As a result, he omitted some of the blood relations. On the other hand, he did include a figure such as Saint Pharaildis because she was the godchild of Saint Gertrude of Nivelles. As for Charlemagne, he epitomized the holy prince, that is, the Brabant holy prince. His main characteristic was his willingness to defend Christendom against its enemies. Gielemans connected his attitude to the crusading zeal of contemporary princes such as Philip the Good, whom he extolled as an example for the princes of his day.

In the third part, Hazebrouck-Souche develops the connection between sainthood and spirituality and Brabant to its fullest extent. Traditionally, legendaries focused on saints from the Early Church. This was still common in Gielemans’s day. However, the canon was innovative in many ways, for instance because of his interest in regional and contemporary saints. In addition to the Brabantine group, he also included many saints from other parts of the Low Countries. Furthermore, compared to other legendaries, he wrote about many female saints. His choice of saints reflects his political and spiritual roots. For example, he did not include Joan of Arc, for whom no supporter of Burgundy could have any love. As for his roots in Brabantine mysticism and the Devotio Moderna, these too are revealed by the saints whom he does or does not describe. He included Devotio Moderna founding fathers such as Geert Grote; his Brabantine chauvinism shows here because he presented the latter as a follower of Ruusbroec. Oddly, Gielemans did not include any famous Devotio Moderna women, and he excluded Rhineland mystics, probably because some of them bore the taint of heresy. On the other hand, he devoted ample space to