Book Reviews


Eight hundred printed pages have been needed to contain Melanchthon’s letters, advices, notes and related material from a single year. In total the two volumes offer 356 texts from the year 1530. The striking bulk of this harvest is explained by the special significance of the year in the life of the humanist and reformer. Almost everything he wrote in 1530 was concerned with the Imperial Diet which was being held at the time in Augsburg, and which he, the Wittenberg professor, attended in the retinue of Elector Johann of Saxony. Melanchthon acted as the theological adviser of this chief representative of the Protestant estates. In this capacity he was to play a leading role in the important negotiations on religious matters for which the Diet of 1530 is so memorable. He was the chief draftsman of the Confessio Augustana, the confession which a group of Lutheran estates submitted to Charles V on 25 June. The reply to this document drawn up for the Emperor’s use, the so-called Confutatio confessionis, spurred Melanchthon to produce his second important theological work in the period covered here, his Apologia Confessionis. The first version was written during the Diet, the definitive text was printed with the Confessio Augustana in 1531. Soon both writings served as the basis of the doctor’s oath which the professors of Wittenberg had to swear when they took office.

The ‘Briefwechsel’ of the year 1530 documents the emergence of these two works and also Melanchthon’s diplomatic activities at the Diet: his tireless efforts to restore the unity of the Church and to preserve political peace in the German Empire. His eirenical activity reached its first climax during the colloquy held at the Diet after the Confessio and the Confutatio, in an attempt to reconcile the conflicting opinions revealed in the two works. Melanchthon took part in this discussion and excelled in drafting one new formula of
consensus and concord after another. The second climax coincided with his role in the preparation of a *recessus imperii*, or final resolution on religion, which Charles V caused to be formulated on the basis of the outcome of the colloquy, and for which he tried in vain to win the consent of all the estates on 22 and 23 September. Together with Gregor Brück, the former chancellor of the Electorate of Saxony, Melanchthon acted as the interlocutor of the diplomats from the Catholic camp, who wrangled with the duo for ten days to frame a *Reichstagsabschied* that would be acceptable to both parties.

Johanna Loehr, a classicist and philologist by training, has acquitted herself splendidly of the difficult task of producing a critical edition of the letters of 1530. The task was difficult, among other reasons, because of the exceptional wealth of manuscripts and early printed editions in which the texts of this year have survived. One need only think in this connection of Melanchthon’s copious and impressive correspondence with Luther, who was staying at the Coburg during the Diet. Including the letters to Luther’s confidant Veit Dietrich, it consists of 84 numbers. Because of their special importance these letters have been repeatedly transcribed and printed, the German texts translated into Latin and retranslated from Latin to German. The editor has had to decide in each case which manuscripts and printed versions ought to be used as the basis of her critical edition, and which of these sources ought to be mentioned in the apparatus of textual variants. In the introductions to the individual letters the editor appears to have striven for the fullest possible documentation of the textual tradition; her selection and incorporation of the textual variants is exemplary.

At first sight the format of the apparatus of explanatory footnotes may appear strange. Here Johanna Loehr has naturally followed the guidelines laid down by Heinz Scheible, the main scholarly editor of ‘Melanchthons Briefwechsel’ (MBW), at the start of the project in 1977. The present two volumes form part of the main series of the project, T (= Texte), which is expected to take 53 volumes. Alongside this series runs a second series, which has no title of its own but consists of 14 so-called ‘Erschliessungsbände’. The core of this series is a number of volumes of ‘Regesten’, pure calendars or brief abstracts of the ca. 9,000 letters to be edited in the T-series. The user of the two text volumes that deal with 1530 will find in ‘Erschliessungsbände’ 1 (calendars), 9 (addenda to 1) and 10 to 13 (indexes of persons and places), a brilliant tool to assist him or her in studying the source materials for the year that Johanna Loehr has edited. Because of the rich information contained in these ancillary volumes, the usual historical annotation is confined to an almost always successful and masterly tracing of explicit or concealed citations.