Enea Silvio Piccolomini was an accomplished humanist and a successful diplomat when, in 1458, he became Pope Pius II. Emperor Frederick III, in whose chancery he served in his youth, had crowned him *poeta laureatus* and his novel *Eurialus and Lucretia* (*Historia de duobus amantibus*, 1444) had brought him literary fame. His letters together with his historical works—of which the *Commentarii*, dealing with his own life and times, is easily the best known—are proof of his impressive rhetorical and literary skills. Before he was elected pope he served a number of ecclesiastical dignitaries, among them the popes Felix V, Eugenius IV, and Nicholas V. Somewhere during the 1440s he exchanged his antipapal support for the Council of Basel (1431–1449) for a universalistic stance in favour of a combination of papal and imperial power. He buttressed this by negotiating an alliance between Emperor Frederick III and Pope Eugenius IV which put the conciliarists virtually out of action. He hoped the most powerful European princes would unite and organize the defence against Ottoman expansion on the Balkans and in the Mediterranean. As pope he worked hard to reach this goal. Nothing, however, came of it: he died in Ancona while fruitlessly trying to finalize preparations for a crusade in which ideally all European powers should have taken part.

Michel Goldsteen and Zweder von Martels translated a number of Enea’s private Latin letters as well as a sizeable part of the *Commentarii* into Dutch. The translations are preceded by a lengthy introduction focusing on Enea’s biography and in particular on his attitude towards the Ottoman expansion in Europe. The selected 21 letters cover the period before he was elected pope, beginning in 1434, when young Enea was writing a history of the Council of Basel, to 1454, when he was already deeply involved in diplomatic efforts to get a concerted action against the Ottomans off the ground. In their choice of letters the editors took care to include material mirroring various aspects of Enea’s life and learned preoccupations: one letter, to his father, tells us about his illegitimate son, another informs the philosopher Cardinal Nicholas Cusanus about Enea’s views on the fall of Constantinople. The Polish statesman Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki received a long treatise on poetry, Leonhard von Laiming, Prince-Bishop of Passau, was made happy, we hope, with the offer of an epitaph. In writing his many private letters in exquisite Latin, taking
great pains over their rhetorical style, Enea is following his shining example Petrarch. The translations of the letters are mainly based on Rudolf Wolkan’s edition (Fontes Rerum Austriacarum, Vienna, 1909–1918), and presumably also on the corrected edition of the Epistolarium seculare (Studi e testi 439, Vatican City, 2007) by Arie (Adrianus) van Heck.

The main part of the book, nearly 300 pages, is devoted to translated excerpts from the twelve books of the Commentarii, witnessing Enea’s spectacular career and his considerable self-love. In order to give coherence to the selected texts the editors provided introductions to every text and supplemented summaries of the omitted parts. This works very well, together with the short explanatory footnotes, for any reader who does not have the history of Italy and Europe during the second half of the fifteenth century at his fingertips. Enea’s lively style and interesting, often quite witty, arguments about European affairs in general and Italian political problems in particular come across very well in these careful translations. As Enea, once he was Pope Pius II, did not give up travelling, we meet him quite often picnicking with his following at pleasant Arcadic spots somewhere in Italy, or describing the history and the beauty of the cities and ancient monuments he visited. However, the main subject of this anthology in translation is, as it should be, contemporary politics. Pius II shows himself ardently involved here, shrewdly analysing the doings and misdoings of the protagonists. Particularly the war of the Neapolitan succession between Ferrante of Aragon and the Angevins, in which Pius II supported Aragon, takes up a large part of the Commentarii and is duly represented here.

A very welcome bonus, also for those who do not read Dutch, is the cd-rom accompanying the book. The translated selections of both the letters and the Commentarii are given here in searchable form together with the Latin text and illustrations. The introductions to the selected texts as well as the footnotes are provided in extended form, with references to internet sources wherever appropriate. Also, a few letters and selections from the Commentarii that did not find place in the printed book are added here. Links to a number of digital Latin texts are made available as well, for instance to the first printed edition of the Commentarii (1584), the edition that was heavily censured by its editor, Francesco Bandini-Piccolomini, or to Enea’s poems. Enea’s great worries about the Ottoman Empire and its attacks on Europe are taken into account by providing a link to a French site concerning the history of the Ottoman Empire until 1512, his involvement with the Council of Basel is matched by a link to a site dealing with its history. And so on: there are links to well-known digital sites for the learned and for those aspiring to become learned, such as a link to