Frans F. Blok, 
26 September 1913-28 September 2007

Dr Frans F. Blok died at the respectable age of 94 years on 28 September. As the editor responsible for the Department of Seventeenth-Century Humanism, he was an esteemed member of the Editorial Board of our periodical *Querendo* from the very first year of its existence until 2005.

After a long career as a classics teacher at several Dutch grammar schools, in Gouda, Oostburg, Amersfoort and Doorn and finally the Huygens Lyceum in Voorburg, Blok was appointed a research fellow at the Instituut voor Nederlandistiek (presently the Department of Dutch Language and Culture studies) of the University of Amsterdam in 1965. He joined the staff of Professor Wytze Hellinga, teaching neo-Latin. When Hellinga became director and professor of the newly created Institute of Neophilology and Neo-Latin in 1967, Blok also transferred to that Institute. For many years he worked there as an inspiring and exemplary teacher of Neo-Latin, now a moribund discipline, but nevertheless so essential for a good grasp, indeed a true understanding, of our learned past.
His doctoral thesis on Nicolas Heinsius, which he defended in Leiden University under Professor Waszink in 1947, already established him as an expert in the field of Dutch (neo)-philology in general, and especially the Leiden literary and humanist circles and Neo-Latin. When he became associated with the University of Amsterdam, he soon turned his interest also to the Amsterdam scholarly environment, focussing in particular on the work and person of Caspar Barlaeus, who together with Gerard Vossius (Isaac Vossius’s father), was one of the first two professors at the Athenaeum Illustre. The result was a magisterial study: *Caspar Barlaeus. From the Correspondence of a Melancholic* (Assen, etc. 1976). Letters, correspondences: these were vital sources which allowed him to approach his subjects as closely and directly as possible. With exceptional accuracy, strong empathy and rare sensitivity and inspiration, he managed to bring Barlaeus to life: perhaps his finest work. Impressive also is the delicate balance which he achieved between bare facts and interpretation, never more apparent than in the occasionally poignant account of the life of Barlaeus, including the bouts of depression of this tormented man. Averse to fanciful interpretations and exaggerations, untrammelled by the urge for theoretical frameworks, he remained true to the facts as he found them, mostly in the expansive and virtually unknown and largely undisclosed correspondence. At the same time he did not cling to his sources or try to hide behind his material. Like no other he knew the learned and literary circles in the Republic inside out, he was a welcome guest there and he was, as it were, an enthusiastic participant.

To the same extent this is also true for his other publications, especially his biography *Isaac Vossius en zijn kring* (Groningen 1999), as voluminous as it is masterful, based as it is on the vast correspondence which Isaac Vossius maintained with the learned world of his time, a book which appeared in Dutch and in English. A figure of flesh and blood emerges, someone we can almost literally touch, probably because there is no pretence of offering an ‘interesting’ story. The facts, large and small, gathered from correspondence and other sources, and especially the way Blok fused them together, interpreting them and forging them into a coherent whole, resulted in a book which is much more than a convincing picture of the scholar Isaac Vossius; it also offers a vivid encounter with the seventeenth-century philologist and the world in which he moved (see the review in: *Quærendo*, 31 (2001), pp. 309-12).

Two of Blok’s articles may also be mentioned in this connection, both of which appeared in *Quærendo*: ‘Deux lettres en français de Marie de Reigersberg, veuve de Hugo Grotius’, in: *Quærendo*, 20 (1990), pp. 4-23 and 87-95, and ‘Isaac Vossius and the Blaeus’, in: *Quærendo*, 26 (1996), pp. 77-84 and 87-93.