

Joseph Justus Scaliger. *The Correspondence of Joseph Justus Scaliger*.

8 vols. Ed. Paul Botley and Dirk van Miert. Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 507/1–8. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2012. 5000 pp. CHF440. ISBN: 978-2-600-01552-3.

Joseph Justus Scaliger, who used to refer to himself as I(ulii) C(aesaris) f(ilius) in order to cultivate the memory of his famous father supposedly descended from the noble della Scala of Verona, was rightly regarded by most of his contemporaries as the greatest classical scholar of the time. He may well have been one of the greatest of all times. Born in Agen in 1540, he went to Paris in 1558, where he was able to frequent all the luminaries of the day. Five years later, the patronage of the French nobleman Louis de la Rochezay would allow him to travel, study, and write at leisure, mainly in France and in Italy. By 1593, Scaliger's fame was such that, in an enlightened move hardly thinkable nowadays, the recently founded University of Leiden offered him a research professorship with a comfortable salary but without teaching commitments. He was to stay in Leiden until his death in 1609, slandered and ridiculed by some, but feared and admired by most.

Scaliger's surviving correspondence (i.e., letters penned by him or sent to him) amounts to 1,670 items written between 1561 and 1609. Roughly two-thirds of them are in Latin (often interlarded with substantial bits of Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and Syriac); the rest are in French. About 80 percent were written during Scaliger's

Leiden years. Among the most regular (and most interesting) correspondents, Isaac Casaubon heads the list with 254 letters, followed by Jacques-Auguste de Thou (114), Claude Dupuy (88), Marcus Welser (84), and Justus Lipsius (53). Some of the letters included in the present edition had already been published, whereas others were still dormant in manuscript collections all over Europe. Paul Botley and Dirk van Miert, the editors in chief of the eight volumes (amounting to ca. 5000 pages) under review, have included all those pieces that they were “able to locate” (1:ix). Since it is highly unlikely that any other documents will ever come to light, this must be considered to be the first, and final, complete edition of Scaliger’s correspondence.

The headnotes to each letter (not numbered consecutively, but identified by date from 1561 04 10 to 1609 02 03) include up to eight categories of information: the letter title (i.e., date, author, place of composition, and addressee); a list of the sources (manuscript and/or printed; in the cases of Lipsius or Baudius, the latter may run to some twenty items); details of extant replies (answer to/answered by); a discussion of the date (often highly complex when it is uncertain: see, e.g., [1568–1569] 04 14); a discussion of the sources used to construct the text (sometimes yielding complex apparatuses, e.g., 1602 03 31); details of any surviving address; miscellaneous observations (modestly called notes, but occasionally amounting to little essays, e.g., 1579 07 31); and an (always very accurate and comprehensive) English synopsis.

Whenever Scaliger’s autographs are extant, the edition is based on these; when only printed versions are known, the editors took the editio princeps as their starting point. Where two versions exist, the preference has not automatically been given to the manuscript; the reasons for preferring one source over another are then discussed in the notes. Very commendably, “capitalisation, apostrophes, hyphenation, word boundaries and paragraphing,” as well as “the accentuation of Latin, French and Greek texts,” are regarded as “aspects of punctuation and have been modernised accordingly,” whereas “the spelling of the preferred source has not been modernised or standardised” (1:liv). All these and other editorial interventions (there are a few more, mainly regarding the accents in French) make for an eminently readable edition, keeping the reader “as free as possible from distractions” (1:liii). This is precisely how Renaissance texts should be edited for modern readers, and Botley and van Miert cannot be complimented enough for taking such an uncompromisingly sensible stance on the crucial issue of readability.

Every letter is amply annotated, with notes that try to identify all the classical or contemporary sources or allusions; pin down the precise editions Scaliger (or his correspondents) were referring to; supply references to relevant secondary literature, whenever this exists; explain rare or difficult words and constructions (both in Latin and in French); and, generally, clarify what is not immediately evident. Sometimes defeat is acknowledged and it is stated that an allusion to a work or to an individual has defied all attempts at identification; I suspect that many of the non liquet notes cost more time and effort to write than those providing positive evidence of knowable facts. (At 1576 [01] 00, note 25, the unidentified “Minutius” is probably Gabriel de Minut, an acquaintance of Scaliger *père* and author of *De la beauté*:

*discours divers* [Lyon: Honorat, 1587].) It is with an admirable sense of equilibrium that the editors are able to maintain the delicate balance between saying too much and saying too little: they never state the obvious, nor do they presume knowledge of things arcane or abstruse. This makes their commentary exemplary in every respect: deeply learned, it is at the same time refreshingly concise and engagingly modest.

Immense care, too, has been taken with the compilation of the biographical register and the index, which fill volume 8 of the edition. The former gives details of “all of Scaliger’s correspondents, and supplies information on a number of contemporaries who are prominent in the letters” (8:41), often going far beyond what can be learned from the standard biographical dictionaries. The index proper is a remarkable piece of scholarship on its own. The structure given to, for example, lemmas such as “Bible” or “Scaliger, Julius Caesar” proves that the editors were fully aware of the questions that readers of their edition will be likely to ask, and they have supplied them with all the keys to the answers. (Surprisingly, though, there are no entries for *calendar* or *chronology*.)

Inevitably in a work of this size, complexity, and ambition, a few minor typographical errors and stylistic inconsistencies remain. I noted a handful as I was reading along, but can confidently say that they are few and far between, and they can all be easily corrected (e.g., 1598 07 19, note 7: ξείρ for χείρ; [1600] 12 31, note 16: “doti” for “docti”; 1601 07 16, note 13: “had wrote”; there are a few others, all of them similarly inconsequential and not worth pointing out).

To sum up, this is the rare thing: an edition exemplary in every respect that comes as close to perfection as is humanly possible. All those involved must be congratulated on their joined efforts: Paul Botley and Dirk van Miert in the first place; Anthony Grafton for making the whole thing possible by using money from his 2002 Balzan prize in order to fund the enterprise; Henk Jan de Jonge who “read and commented on the entire edition before publication” (1:vii); the Warburg Institute (and here especially Jill Kraye) for hosting the project; and Max Engamarre of Droz for having the courage to publish in one go these eight superb volumes as number 507 of the *Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance*. To those mentioned, and to others who have had a hand in the making of this milestone of scholarship, all present and future members of the republic of letters owe an eternal debt of gratitude.

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