

Joos Balbian en de steen der wijzen. Annelies van Gijsen. Louvain: Peeters, 2004. 258 pp. €40.00. ISBN 90-429-1444-0.

REVIEWED BY: Bas Jongenelen, Fontys Hogeschool Tilburg

"Joos Balbian and the philosopher's stone—the alchemistical heritage of a sixteenth-century doctor" is the translation of the complete title of Annelies van Gijsen's study. The author has based her research mainly on the manuscript Joos Balbian made and used for his own alchemistical practice. This manuscript is a multilingual compendium of 279 pages, completely written by Balbian, who lived from 1543 until 1616; it lies nowadays in London, in the British Library (MS Sloane 1255). Balbian hardly composed his own texts: he was a translator, editor, and collector of alchemistical texts. Almost every text in his manuscript is known elsewhere, in other manuscripts or in printed books.

The life of Joos Balbian was a European life; his father was born in Piemont and came to work as a banker in Aalst and Antwerp, where he married a Flemish woman. They could send their sons, Joos among them, to universities in several European countries. Joos studied in Heidelberg, Orléans, and possibly in Padua. After graduating as a medical doctor he came back to Flanders, primarily to be a banker like his father, but possibly also a doctor. He married Josine Fouasse, the daughter of an Italian banker and his Flemish wife. Because of confessional troubles (the family converted from Catholicism to Calvinism) Joos and Josine were forced to leave Flanders, and they went to Delft where they had relatives. Josine died; Joos married Janneke (who was more than thirty years younger) and they moved to Gouda.

Balbians's biography reads as a turbulent life set against the background of one of Europe's most tumultuous periods in history. His mixed heritage and his physical, political, and religious mobility made him a European citizen. In the sixteenth century, alchemy lay at the center of interest of the intellectual and social elite. That Balbian was very concerned with alchemy came true with his cultural heritage. In the years after his migration to the northern Netherlands he collected quite a store of texts and illustrations. He worked for more than fifteen years on his manuscript, which contains almost two hundred treatises, poems, and recipes.

The manuscript is multilingual, but Latin is the most frequent language, as would be expected from a scholar from this period. Dutch texts are hardly less frequent, and French is the third common language (several texts in prose, four poems, and six recipes). German and Italian are each represented by three poems, and there is one long Spanish poem. The age of the texts varies: some of them are from the classical period, others are pseudoclassical, and there are quite a number of contemporary ones. Although the ages of texts and forms vary, the content is remarkably consistent; Joos Balbian was primarily interested in the philosopher's stone, the theme that dominates in all languages and genres. The spectrum of approaches to this subject moves from philosophical treatises and enigmatical images and surveys to practical instructions for alchemistical procedures and recipes. Balbian did not use the alchemistical texts only for himself. He wanted to share his knowledge with others; therefore, he edited two relatively small books in Latin, which were printed in 1599 in Leiden. The texts of these two books can also be found—of course—in his manuscript.

The largest share of Annelies van Gijsen's book is a florilegium of texts from MS Sloane 1225. The main accent lies on Dutch texts, which is on the one hand a bit sad, because now the choice is not representative. On the other hand, that is not too much of a problem; Balbian was not a writer or an inventor, so almost all of the texts in his manuscript can be found elsewhere in other editions or on the internet (e.g., <http://www.alchemywebsite.com>; last

accessed 10 July 2006). Balbian collected works from Raymond Lull, the Rosarium Philosophorum, Morienus, pseudo-Aristotle, Geber, Avicenna, and Razes. Take a look on the internet, google around with these names, and see how much there is to be found.

Why should Annelies van Gijsen's research be read? Not because of Joos Balbian's personal history—that part of her book is rather small (ten pages), and there is much to find out yet. The author also remarks that several sources were not used for reasons of time, and that is a pity. Balbian's life can be read as a *vie romancée*, but we will have to wait until someone writes his complete biography. A large part of the book is about alchemist practice, but that can be found in a lot of literature on the matter. The interesting part of the book is the Dutch alchemistical texts; there are not many editions of this kind of texts. For that point, *Joos Balbian en de steen der wijzen* fills a gap.

Pirro Ligorio: The Renaissance Artist, Architect, and Antiquarian. David R. Coffin. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004. 226 pp. \$55.00. ISBN 0-271-02293-0.

REVIEWED BY: David Karmon, Pennsylvania State University

New scholarship continues to add luster to the activities of the artist-antiquarian Pirro Ligorio. Once branded as the work of a charlatan and forger, Ligorio's archaeological investigations are recognized by contemporary scholars as a vital source for the Renaissance understanding of antiquity. Further, his work demonstrates the unique contributions made to antiquarian studies by a practicing artist and architect who was also a scholar. Now David Coffin, whose research has done much to encourage this positive reappraisal, has provided us with the first comprehensive biography of Ligorio. The handsome monograph reveals the broad range and complexity of Ligorio's many undertakings and will serve as an authoritative source for future studies.

Coffin's scholarship, distinguished by its thoroughness and precision, distills an impressive quantity of new material into a straightforward narrative that makes a marked contrast with Ligorio's own discursive (not to say rambling) approach. Four appendixes supplement the chronicle of Ligorio's life and work, including a list of his house façades at Rome, documents relating to his heirs, an essay debunking the attribution of the so-called *Palazzetto di Pirro Ligorio*, and an appendix of figural and ornamental drawings. The scholarly apparatus also includes a checklist of drawings, and a bibliography grouped by individual areas of interest.

The first chapter, "The Early Years in Rome," underscores the diversity of Ligorio's interests and occupations following his transfer to the papal capital from his birthplace of Naples in his early twenties. Between 1540 and 1550 Ligorio worked not only as a painter but as an architect, specializing in designs for both fountains and palaces. He also became a self-taught archaeologist, analyzing newly unearthed remains in the extensive papal excavations at the Roman Forum, which would result in his career-changing appointment in 1549 as the *antiquario* of Cardinal Ippolito d'Este. Ligorio's antiquarian projects, which included an encyclopedia of antiquities and topographical maps of Rome, would repeatedly demonstrate his dual training as scholar and artist, and his unparalleled ability to manipulate both textual and graphic materials.

Ligorio's antiquarian knowledge and artistic versatility brought him dazzling success in the service of the popes, the subject of Coffin's second chapter. Ligorio began work on the