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A STORMY FAMILY. PAUL FREDERICQ AND THE FORMATION OF AN ACADEMIC HISTORICAL COMMUNITY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*

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The transformation into a science of historiography in the (late) nineteenth century and the associated ‘academicization’ and ‘professionalization’ are often described in historiography as the result of the success of a ‘disciplinary creed’. Historical writing, as it became clear, then acquired a standardised ‘method’ which united all historians and distinguished the new science both from other sciences and from amateur historiography. This method was codified in treatises such as the *Introduction aux études historiques* (1898) by Langlois and Seignobos¹. Much less attention has been devoted to the daily practices in which the new historical science took shape and which made it so different from the former, ‘spectacular’ historiography. These daily practices – reading, taking notes, corresponding, maintaining academic friendships, exchanging material, correcting proofs – not only involved all kinds of epistemological notions and procedures, but were also interwoven with ethical values and standards which were just as rarely made explicit. This complex praxis needs to be mapped out more extensively.

In this essay, the focus will be on the staff of the new historical science and the way in which an academic historical community was formed. This staff consisted not only of professors («either bureaucrats or satraps in an academic empire», said Jacob Burckhardt)². There were also the librarians, the archivists and – in the archives – the copyists, the professional ‘writers’ who produced correct copies of archival documents, for payment, on behalf of visitors, some of whom were foreign (in 1829 Leopold von Ranke was accompanied every morning by his permanent *Schreiber* to the Palazzo Barberini in Rome)³. Then there were the assistants, the (scholarly) staff, often also referred to as ‘secretaries’. These are the people who will be the central focus here. After all, their adventures reveal how the

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¹ See, for example, (for France) G. Lingelbach, *Klio macht Karriere. Die Institutionalisierung der Geschichtswissenschaft in Frankreich und den USA in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 181) (Göttingen, 2003), 382-404.

² L. Gossman, *Basel in the age of Burckhardt. A study in unseasonable ideas* (Chicago-London, 2000), 440-441.

³ A. Grafton, *The footnote. A curious history* (London, 1997), 36 and 50. Cf. more generally about the status of the copy, H. Schwartz, *The culture of the copy. Striking likeness, unreasonable facsimiles* (New York, 1996), 211-257.

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new scholarly and professional practices were learned and passed on in a hierarchical context.

In this context, developments will be illustrated using one specific case study: that of the secretaries to the Belgian historian Paul Fredericq (1850-1920)⁴. Fredericq became involved at an early stage in both liberal and anti-clerical politics and in the Flemish movement. Following a career as a teacher in Mechelen, Arlon and Ghent (in that order), Fredericq – with the usual political help – became a professor at the University of Liège in 1879. Four years later, he accepted a chair in Ghent, where Henri Pirenne was to become his *collega proximus*. His main scholarly work concerned the mediaeval and sixteenth-century Inquisition. Between 1889 and 1906 Fredericq published five volumes of a *Corpus documentorum Inquisitionis haereticæ pravitatis neerlandicæ*, a source edition, the findings of which were summarised into two volumes of a *Geschiedenis der Inquisitie in de Nederlanden* in 1892 and 1897. This work never served as a purely scientific study: writing about the despotism of the past was also always a means of propaganda in the struggle against the – Catholic – rulers of the present. Historiography belonged fully in the public domain⁵.

Various reasons justify the choice of Fredericq and his secretaries in this context. Firstly, the fact that his work does not illustrate the final condition of history being transformed into a science, but shows this process in its early dynamics. In addition, Fredericq actually portrayed himself as the apostle of the new historiographical practices, including by presenting these in detail in a series of well-read and translated reports of visits to various European universities⁶. Finally, there is the exceptional source material. Fredericq not only kept a diary for many years and not only collected ample material for his memoirs, but also made detailed notes in separate notebooks of the work and adventures of his secretaries⁷. That material enables an exploration of the scholarly sub-culture of the academic historical community and its professional codes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁴ Biographical data in: H. van Werveke, *Paul Fredericq in de spiegel van zijn dagboek* (Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, Klasse der Letteren 41, no. 1) (Brussels, 1979), and E.C. Coppens, *Paul Fredericq* (Ghent, 1990). For a brief summary: Idem, «Fredericq, Paul», in *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*, 6 (1974), 296-305.

⁵ See in detail in J. Tollebeek, *Writing the Inquisition in Europe and America. The correspondence between Henry Charles Lea and Paul Fredericq* (Brussels, 2004), IX-CXXVI.

⁶ P. Fredericq, *L'enseignement supérieur de l'histoire. Notes et impressions de voyage. Allemagne - France - Ecosse - Angleterre - Hollande - Belgique* (Ghent-Paris, 1899), a collection to be complemented with Idem, «Notes de voyage sur l'enseignement supérieur en Suède et en Finlande», in *Revue de l'Instruction publique en Belgique*, 20 (1877): 421-426.

⁷ Ghent, Ghent University Library, Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books (abbreviated below as BUG): Paul Fredericq Archive, Ms. 3704: «Aanteekeningen over mijn leven» (diary); Ms. 3705: «Algemeen overzicht van mijn leven»; Ms. 3706: preparatory notes for «Mijne gedenkschriften»; Ms. 3707: «Reisindrukken» / «Reisaanteekeningen»; Ms. 3708: diary from the war period and Ms. III 77 (23): «Mijne Secretarissen» (14 notebooks). The extensive preserved correspondence (Ms. III 77) also allows the voices of his secretaries to be heard.

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Laboratories of history

In the literature, two institutions are regarded as iconic for modern historiography: archival research and training in seminars⁸. The preference for archival research was based on the idea that the records or archivalia, compared for example with chronicles, were ‘passionless’ witnesses to the past (as it was already said in the eighteenth century)⁹, which allowed for a more objective historical picture. Just as a pilot would later derive his status from his number of flying hours, so the status of the historian increased with the number of days and months he spent in the archives. As many recognised, this ‘endless’ archival work was not adventurous. However, the physical contact with the authentic documents and the *effet de réel* that they could have could also lead to different kinds of emotions and phantasms, each of which fuelled the Archival Romance of the historian¹⁰.

The seminars in turn formed an alternative to the traditional *ex cathedra* lectures and were aimed at training students to be independent researchers. To many, this originally German form of education served as indisputable academic progress. It was therefore with pride that, in 1898, Fredericq presented a *tableau* of the *cours pratiques* that had been offered in Belgium since 1874¹¹. This also included his own seminars in Liège and Ghent¹². However, despite the fact that these seminars were also described as a *rite de passage*¹³, they seemed to evoke far fewer powerful emotions than the archives.

On the contrary, the seminars were conceived by their propagandists according to the model of laboratories in the sciences and in medicine. These still relatively new phenomena in the universities at the end of the nineteenth century were not locations of passion. But they did elicit enthusiasm, an enthusiasm that was transferred by historians at the seminars. The American Herbert Baxter Adams referred to the seminars as laboratories in which books changed hands like mineralogical specimens and were examined and tested¹⁴. Fredericq also spoke of the *cours pratiques* as laboratories; his own Ghent seminar became «a small historical laboratory». Perhaps he had heard the comparison from his teacher

⁸ A.o. B.G. Smith, *The gender of history. Men, women, and historical practice* (Cambridge, MA-London, 1998), 103.

⁹ T. Verschaffel, *De hoed en de hond. Geschiedschrijving in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden 1715-1794* (Hilversum, 1998), 160.

¹⁰ A. Farge, *Le goût de l'archive* (La librairie du XXe siècle) (Paris, 1989); C. Steedman, *Dust. The archive and cultural history* (New Brunswick, 2002), and J. Tollebeek, «‘Turn’d to dust and tears’. Revisiting the Archive», in *History and Theory. Studies in the Philosophy of History*, 43 (2004): 237-248.

¹¹ P. Fredericq, «L’origine et les développements des cours pratiques d’histoire dans l’enseignement supérieur en Belgique», in A Godefroid Kurth, *professeur à l’Université de Liège, à l’occasion du XXVme anniversaire de la fondation de son cours pratique d’histoire* (Liège, [1898]), 3-149.

¹² See the reports in BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. 2991 and Ms. 2991/I.

¹³ J.D. Popkin, *History, historians, & autobiography* (Chicago-London, 2005), 122.

¹⁴ Quoted in Smith, *The gender of history*, 105-106.

Godefroid Kurth, the Liège mediaevalist, who also described his seminars as laboratories¹⁵.

However, the historians even went one step further. Given the established analogy, they asked the government to grant their ‘laboratories’ what the scientific and medical faculties’ laboratories had previously been granted: a reliable infrastructure and in particular the necessary staff. If the scientists and the medics had assistants available and the teaching of history was also becoming increasingly ‘more practical’, Kurth then wondered why the historians had no assistants¹⁶. Fredericq in turn went repeatedly to the competent minister, but equally without success¹⁷. For this reason, he continued to do what he had done beforehand: paying for an assistant out of his own pocket. Between 1889 and 1907, eight secretaries worked for Fredericq in almost continuous succession – some for a few months, some for a few years. They were all recruited from among Fredericq’s own students or former students at Ghent. They were, in order, Julius Frederichs, Daniel Jacobs, Maurits Basse, Arthur van Renterghem, Albert Blyau, René Verdeyen, Jan Eggen and Emiel Vuylsteker¹⁸.

The notion that historical science – at least in the metaphorical sense – was a laboratory science, where an essential role was reserved for assistants, made the new historiography into a collective praxis. History became teamwork in the eyes of the innovators. This was also translated at emotional level: a feeling of community could emerge in the ‘laboratory’ – centred on the professor. From the notes that Fredericq kept about his secretaries, it appears that this cooperation could take many forms. For example, when working on the source edition, the *Corpus*: «He comes in the afternoon and we work on without a break [...]. I decipher and dictate the piece, Blyau writes it up beautifully and works with passion and dedication»¹⁹. However, the desire to form a ‘group’ was even more explicit in the fact that Fredericq presented some of his publications as co-publications. Every volume of the *Corpus* was published explicitly under the name of «Paul Fredericq and his students». Moreover, in both Liège and Ghent, Fredericq brought together the fruits of the work of his students (in his seminar) in a series of publications of his own. From that perspective, historical science no longer had room for distinct and vain individuals. Even the professor had to be self-effacing in order to be able to fulfil his role within the group. Transforming history into a science implied democratisation, including undermining the former concept of the author.

At the same time, the new historiographical praxis followed an economic

¹⁵ Fredericq, «L’origine et les développements», 26 and 66-67, and G. Kurth in *A Godefroid Kurth*, 195.

¹⁶ Kurth in *A Godefroid Kurth*, 196-197.

¹⁷ Fredericq, «L’origine et les développements», 26, 66 and 75, and the correspondence since 1898 with ministers Frans Schollaert and Jules de Trooz in BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. 2921/II A, Ms. 2919/IV B and Ms. 2919/V B.

¹⁸ For the exact dates and biographical data on the secretaries: Tollebeek, *Writing the Inquisition*, 27-28, n. 53.

¹⁹ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): note 13 September 1899.

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model: that of the modern workshop. This model was associated initially in historiography with developments in the United States. Reference was made in particular to Hubert Howe Bancroft, the famous Californian historian, whose work assumed monumental proportions because its author not only made use of an army of collaborators (copyists, stenographers, reporters) to collect material, but also led a literary workshop in which indexers, note-takers and assistants systematically processed this material²⁰. Bancroft was of course an impossible act to follow: the required financial means were not available to any historian in Europe. However, the principle of the division of labour nicely matched the desire for a historiographical praxis with a cooperative character.

Professionalism, honour and loyalty

More generally, the new historical science required a management culture. At the level of the secretaries, the most formal expression of this was the employment contract. Fredericq drew up a contract with each of his secretaries when they were recruited, which included two provisions in its standard format²¹. Firstly, the salary and method of payment were established. For example, in Frederichs' case, it read: «50 fr. per month and 2 months of holiday without monthly pay (i.e., 500 fr. per year)». In addition, the tasks were described, such as these for Frederichs, «1° Every day at 9 o'clock he will come to me to hear whether I need him to take books from the Library, etc. 2° He will follow my practical course as assistant. 3° He will read and annotate books for me, etc., etc.». This contract was formalised in due course; it was given written expression. The conclusion of the agreement also took on an increasingly professional character for both parties. The salary was established by negotiation, where the employer was forced to make allowances²². The job description became increasingly detailed so that discussion about the obligations of the employee was limited.

What did the secretaries' task involve in practice? In the case of Fredericq's secretaries, it involved first and foremost scholarly research. It could involve making articles and separate studies ready for printing or, as expressed by the professor, all kinds of 'small jobs': individual assignments implying research in the university library or in an archival repository. However, the main task was cooperation on the *Corpus*. The secretaries received a stack of Inquisition papers from Fredericq (authentic documents or copies), which they had to arrange and analyse. Their work bore witness to a 'return to the text', following the romantic

²⁰ J. Tollebeek, «The Archive. The panoptic utopia of the historian», in *Eco in fabula. Umberto Eco in the humanities - Umberto Eco dans les sciences humaines - Umberto Eco nelle scienze umane*, eds. F. Musarra et al. (Leuven-Florence, 2002), 339-355.

²¹ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): notes 14 October 1889, 3 October 1891, 7 October 1891, 5 November 1891, 24 October 1893, 27 October 1895, 6 September 1899, 21 May 1903, 28 October 1904 and October 1907.

²² See, for example, BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. 3704: note 7 October 1891.

rhetoric²³, but also to the importance that was attached to what Langlois and Seignobos referred to as *élaboration critique*²⁴. In addition, many other tasks were required for the *Corpus*: correcting proofs, compiling the index, maintaining relations with the printer. Much of this work had a repetitive, routine nature. As a result, it also lost its ideological tension: even with a subject as loaded as the Inquisition, the controversy disappeared (at least) from the routine work. The secretaries dated papers or pointed out corrupt passages in the documents, they did not place the guns in position.

In addition to this research work, other assignments were also involved, such as assistance with teaching. Fredericq expected his secretaries at every session of his *cours pratique*, the ‘small laboratory’ in which students were taught how to deal with the traces of the past in the form of documents. Then there was the administrative work: selecting and forwarding correspondence, help with the ‘writing’ that Fredericq had assumed as secretary of many different committees and, sometimes, taking shorthand notes at a lecture²⁵. In a scholarly existence that was becoming increasingly hectic, the secretary’s job was to ‘save’ the professor’s ‘time’.

But that was not all. It is evident from Fredericq’s notes that the secretaries were also involved in their employer’s political activities. They performed administrative work and attended the editorial meetings of *Het Volksbelang*, the liberal Flemish movement journal headed by Fredericq (a task which was also included in the contract in due course), but they did occasionally write articles too²⁶. When elections were pending, they also had to «carry out political work now and then»²⁷. They were recruited to the campaigns which the Ghent professor was continually waging against the educational policy of the ‘clerical ministry’²⁸.

However, this political involvement also led to differences of opinion and could undermine the relationship between Fredericq and his secretary. Fredericq discovered, to his great dismay, that Blyau had left the liberal nest and become a socialist (although the person in question denied ever having set foot inside the Brussels *Maison du Peuple*). Verdeyen proved to have very different ideas when it came to the politically extremely important dutchifying of the university in Ghent. In the former case, the question was resolved: Fredericq and Blyau were reconciled – except in their shared historical interest – as liberal and socialist within a broad network of free-thinkers in which anti-clericalism set the trend. In the latter case, it led to a break²⁹. However, the conflict with former secretary Eggen during the

²³ Cf. Fr. Hartog, *Le XIXe siècle et l’histoire. Le cas Fustel de Coulanges* (Paris, 1988), 148-155.

²⁴ Ch.-V. Langlois and Ch. Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques* (Paris, 1992), 49.

²⁵ For the latter: BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. 3704: note 29 January 1896.

²⁶ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): notes 16 January 1890, 22 April 1890 and 15 December 1890.

²⁷ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): note 27 May 1898.

²⁸ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. 3704: note 17 December 1898.

²⁹ For Blyau: for example BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77/20: A. Blyau to P. Fredericq, 16 October 1896; Ms. III 77/21: A. Blyau to P. Fredericq, 20 August 1897, and Ms. 3704: note 17

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Great War was much more serious. During the war, the latter chose activism, the radical Flemish movement's rejection of the Belgian state and, to this end, also collaborated with the German occupier. Fredericq, who was to be imprisoned in 1916 for his resistance to the Germans, together with Pirenne, subsequently denied the 'traitor' all access to his house³⁰.

Both Fredericq's tendency to involve his staff in his political activities and the disputes to which that could lead when it appeared that these assistants did not share his opinions made it clear that the new desire to form a historiographical community was also a desire for a *homogeneous* community. Assistants were expected to convert to the 'party' of the professors. The term 'party' should be understood here not exclusively in its modern, party-political sense. The 'party' of the professor seldom had a firm organisational structure or clear ideology; it was not united around a programme, but around a person.

In addition, values were at work which did not originate in the same register as the references to the laboratory or the workshop or the introduction of the division of labour and management. At the same time as the professionalization of historiography, a process of what could almost be called 'increasingly chivalry' took place; in addition to the salary and employment contracts, the code of honour and loyalty also emerged. This was evident purely from the fact that Fredericq opened up the employment contracts he reached with his secretaries into 'ethical-social' contracts: anyone who fulfilled his obligations, he decided, would not only receive the agreed financial remuneration but would also be treated 'as a friend'³¹. Secretaries were also expected to be 'men of honour', scholars who would fulfil their task 'conscientiously' and who would command 'trust'. Consequently, the relationship between the professor and his staff had to be one of mutual loyalty: the professor promised his staff support and protection, but also had to be able to rely on them not leaving him in the lurch when it came to implementing his scholarly enterprises. This type of contract had to be sealed in a solemn way. After setting forth the arrangements with one of his secretaries, Fredericq noted, «The sun is shining brightly in my large and light study. We shake each other warmly by the hand as we say goodbye»³².

The professorial house

The fact that transforming history into a science was not purely a process of professionalization is also evident from other things that took place in the study. In the literature, the transformation into a science of historiography is often associated

December 1899. For Verdeyen: BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): notes 28 October 1904, end November 1904, 26 November 1904 and 4 March 1905.

³⁰ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. 3704: notes 1915. For Fredericq during the war: Van Werveke, *Fredericq in de spiegel*, 56-62: «Van 'ontreddering' naar 'optimisme'».

³¹ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): note 6 September 1899.

³² BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): note 27 October 1895.

with ‘academicization’: in the nineteenth century, the universities became the *hauts lieux* of historiography. This picture is accurate, witness for instance the dominant role of the professors in the new historical trade. But it also requires some adjustment. For Fredericq, his secretaries and his students, it was after all not the university lecture theatre but the professor’s own – private – study that formed the stage where scientific innovations took place. This was where the secretaries were expected every morning and where the students took the *cours pratiques*.

Nonetheless, the latter had not always been the case. In Liège, Fredericq had set up his seminar in a university building and, in Ghent, he initially convened his students in a small room in the university library. However, from 1890 onwards, the *cours pratiques* were transferred to his own study. This was nothing new. Fredericq knew that this was also customary in Germany. In France, his friend and contemporary Gabriel Monod was no exception: his seminar, sometimes referred to as ‘a branch’ of the successful seminar of Georg Waitz in Göttingen (where Monod had studied for a year)³³, started in his Paris apartment. The respectable Robert Fruin did the same in Leiden: he received his students in a plain, specially equipped room beside the living room of his own house³⁴.

So it continued – until after the First World War – in the spacious house in Winkelstraat, Ghent. This house was fully occupied. The still unmarried Fredericq, who sometimes regretted his bachelor status³⁵, lived there with two of his sisters, who were also unmarried. One of them had set up a private school in the house for well-off young ladies³⁶. In 1896, they were joined by the two young daughters – still children – of Fredericq’s third sister who had died young («It will cheer and warm our house, our life, our spirits», he wrote in his diary)³⁷. Three years later, an aunt also came to live with them³⁸. Finally, there was also the maid.

It was therefore an overwhelmingly female world with an overwhelmingly private character. Nonetheless, this was where Fredericq installed the engine for the innovations he advocated, at a time when the private space was being feminised, while the public forums were being monopolised by men, and in a discipline – historiography – where the transformation into a science also implied a gender segregation and women were often relegated to the sidelines of the academic trade³⁹. As a result of this paradoxical location, Fredericq’s *cours pratiques* acquired a family atmosphere. This was also felt and made explicit by Fredericq himself. The communal work in these seminars, it was said in 1898, is

³³ Hartog, *Le XIXe siècle et l’histoire*, 98. For a portrait of Monod (as *patron*): P. den Boer, *History as a profession. The study of history in France, 1818-1914* (Princeton, 1998), 286-290.

³⁴ See Fredericq’s own descriptions in Fredericq, *L’enseignement supérieur de l’histoire*, passim.

³⁵ See for example BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. 3707/38: note 12 August 1893.

³⁶ H. van Werveke, *Herinneringen uit kinderjaren en jeugd* (Ghent, 2000), 42.

³⁷ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. 3704: note 28 September 1896. Cf. also BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. 3707/44.

³⁸ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. 3704: note 24 September 1899.

³⁹ For a detailed example of the latter: M. Grever, *Strijd tegen de stilte. Johanna Naber (1859-1941) en de vrouwenstem in geschiedenis* (Hilversum, 1994), 94-152. More recently, in a European context: *History women*, special issue *Storia della Storiografia*, eds. M. O’Dowd and I. Porciani, 46 (2004).

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carried out «as if it is being done within the family». In the same year, Pirenne recalled the ‘family’ nature of the *cours pratiques* which he had taken as a student at Kurth’s house⁴⁰. In the *cours pratiques*, however, this family atmosphere took on a well-defined form: it was the atmosphere of an institution which bore a clearly male stamp: the club⁴¹.

Moreover, the seminar shared an intimacy with the club which also implied a certain ceremony. Seated around a long table in the quiet professorial study – with its bookshelves, desk covered in papers, the compulsory in-folio’s of the *Monumenta Germaniae historica* – the small group of students (and the assistants) felt both elected and faithful followers. It was a closed gathering (in a sealed room) whose members were introduced to the secrets of the trade during weekly sessions (*séances*). Both the location and the event exerted an almost magical power of attraction over the participants, who felt united as if in a brotherhood⁴². After every meeting, a pre-designated member wrote down the details of what had taken place; Fredericq talked of the *histoire intime* of the seminar⁴³. Moreover, this seminar acquired its own heroes. Upon returning from a trip to Germany, Fredericq showed his students photographs of Ranke, Waitz, Gustav Droysen and other «princes of historiography», after which he hung them on the walls of his study. In 1896, when he received a portrait of Henry Charles Lea, the American Inquisition historian much admired by him, he added that to his collection⁴⁴. A pantheon thus emerged, again bearing witness to a trend towards heroism and individualisation in a science that wanted to present itself as a democratic, collective enterprise.

This intimate but solemn atmosphere did not rule out informal dealings between members of the club, including the professor. On the contrary, Fredericq and many others emphasised that discussions about the documents on the table or the historical questions covered during the meetings could be particularly animated. The problems that arose had no preset solutions, no conclusions extracted by the professor. When these conclusions were ultimately reached, «a feeling of intimate completion, felt by everyone» arose. In the mean time, people smoked or made plans for joint outings to historical monuments or museums. At the end of every cycle of the *cours pratiques* the café beckoned, *à la manière d’Outre-Rhin*⁴⁵. Fredericq explicitly noted all of this in his overview of the Belgian seminars. Somewhat provocatively, he wanted to make it known that the traditional academic boundaries had been crossed in these seminars.

This also applied – in this same domestic and intimate atmosphere – to the

⁴⁰ Fredericq, «L’origine et les développements», 66-67, and H. Pirenne in *A Godefroid Kurth*, 162.

⁴¹ Cf. the excellent characterization in Smith, *The gender of history*, 105-116.

⁴² See, for example, the impressions of J. Pée, «Herinneringen aan Paul Fredericq. Bij de honderdste verjaardag van zijn geboorte», in *De Vlaamse Gids*, 34 (1950): 489-510.

⁴³ Fredericq, «L’origine et les développements», 48-49.

⁴⁴ B. Lyon, *Henri Pirenne. A biographical and intellectual study* (Ghent, 1974), 43-44, and Tollebeek, *Writing the Inquisition*, 35.

⁴⁵ Fredericq, «L’origine et les développements», 28-30 and 66-67. Cf. Pirenne in *A Godefroid Kurth*, 162-163.

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relationship with the secretaries. The relationship between Fredericq and his secretaries, it appeared, was not only determined by business arrangements and feelings of honour and loyalty. Their relationship could acquire an intense emotional charge. In 1903, when he and Blyau eventually reached breaking point – following persistent problems – but the breach was quickly repaired, Fredericq wrote: «The next day reconciliation by letter. Like two lovers. – Sublime». When an unexpected departure then intervened a few weeks later: «*Tableau*. That boy brought some emotions into my life»⁴⁶. By contrast, Fredericq was sorry that Blyau's successor was so withdrawn at personal level; he missed the contact⁴⁷.

These emotional relationships – or the sadness at their absence – point to the fact that in the professors' eyes, the assistants had become what Don Kelley, talking about the relationship between the German professors and their *promoti*, referred to as an extended family⁴⁸. Fredericq therefore felt like a 'family father', responsible for his secretaries. He gave financial support when one needed money as a result of the death of his (natural) father and tried to console when another lapsed into depression⁴⁹. He was not afraid of going to call on his secretaries at home – in their 'quarters'. But the ties stretched even further: Fredericq also felt obliged to care for his secretaries' relatives. He recommended the brother and sister of Jacobs, after the death of their father, for 'a position', supported the widow and orphan of his former secretary Frederichs, who died at a young age, helped Blyau resolve the dispute with his grandmother and ensured that his brother also found employment⁵⁰. All of them found shelter in the large professorial house.

In the twilight zone

This extended support and protection was important because the professional position of the secretaries was unstable. They lived in a twilight zone: they were no longer students but nor did they yet have a fully-fledged professional existence. They were still young. In order to be able to become Fredericq's secretary, two candidates first had to ask their father's permission⁵¹. Once a secretary, they continued to live – like their predecessors and successors – as if they were students. They still lived in student housing, with a landlord or landlady or with a family member. They were still unmarried and had no family, nor did they have the

⁴⁶ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): notes [6 March 1903] and 23 April 1903.

⁴⁷ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): notes end November 1904 and 26 November 1904.

⁴⁸ D.R. Kelley, *Fortunes of history. Historical inquiry from Herder to Huizinga* (New Haven-London, 2003), 174-175.

⁴⁹ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): notes 7 February 1893 and 2 May 1901.

⁵⁰ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): a.o. notes 7 February 1893, 2 July 1900, 16 July 1900, 6 August 1900 and 28 April 1901; Ms. III 77/23: J. Frederichs' widow to P. Fredericq, 2 January 1900; Ms. III 77/27: P. Fredericq to G. Blyau, 24 May 1901 and Ms. III 77/28: J. Frederichs' widow to P. Fredericq, 1 January 1903. See also the necrology P.F. [= P. Fredericq], «[Untitled]», in *Revue de l'Instruction publique en Belgique*, 43 (1900): 79-80.

⁵¹ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): notes 3 October 1891, 7 October 1891 and October 1904.

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income to care for a family. They could barely make ends meet on the wages they received as a secretary and had to earn additional money in other ways, for example by giving private lessons to the children of rich citizens. Few alternatives were available. What was on offer was regarded as inferior. Jacobs was happy to be able to be Fredericq's secretary: «Otherwise, he would have had to be a housemaster at a boarding school in Brussels or somewhere else»⁵². But all of them longed for a 'real' job, permanent and well-paid, and therefore spent a substantial amount of their time and energy looking for that kind of employment⁵³. They therefore regarded working for Fredericq as a half-way house, on the way to something better. This also applied to those working elsewhere in comparable positions: the *gelehrte Gehilfe* of the *Monumenta Germaniae historica* for example, who also complained about being forced to live like students, also regarded their work as a temporary job that would quickly have to be swapped for something better⁵⁴.

But what? Some of Fredericq's secretaries toyed with the idea of trying their luck abroad – in England, Germany or Africa – and did actually emigrate⁵⁵. But this was also temporary. Ultimately, all had their sights fixed on the merry-go-round of the teaching profession. Every shift that took place in secondary education could release a much sought-after place. At that point, the professor served as a *patron*, who wrote letters of recommendation, just as he did in order to increase the chances of his staff finding additional work – private lessons, archival assignments, other additional academic income. This was also explicitly understood and described in terms of loyalty, not only on the part of the professor. When Blyau asked Fredericq for a recommendation for a vacancy in 1901, he opened his request with the words, «Have you remained loyal to me?»⁵⁶.

A regular academic career with fixed stages, in which being an assistant could be the first step, did not yet exist⁵⁷. Three of Fredericq's secretaries nonetheless continued along the path of an academic career. In 1916 Eggen became a professor at the 'Von Bissing University' in Ghent (which had been dutchified by the Germans during the war), Verdeyen was appointed to Liège in 1919 and Basse followed four years later as a lecturer in Ghent. However, none of these appointments followed immediately after their assistantship: Eggen had been a lawyer before his appointment, Verdeyen and Basse teachers in various places, just as Fredericq himself had been before his appointment in Liège. But that does not mean that they continued their university careers unprepared.

⁵² BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): note 3 October 1891.

⁵³ Cf. the comments regarding more recent examples in Popkin, *History, historians, & autobiography*, 120-183, passim.

⁵⁴ H. Fuhrmann, 'Sind eben alles Menschen gewesen'. *Gelehrtenleben im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, dargestellt am Beispiel der Monumenta Germaniae historica und ihrer Mitarbeiter* (Munich, 1996), 77-90.

⁵⁵ See for example BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): note 2 May 1901.

⁵⁶ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77/25: A. Blyau to P. Fredericq, 10 July 1901.

⁵⁷ Cf. for the development of this type of academic career in France: Lingelbach, *Klio macht Karriere*, 300-323.

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The scientific training which Fredericq gave his secretaries was first and foremost a way of gaining experience. Anyone who worked for him became 'an apprentice'⁵⁸, who was supposed to acquire professional training. From that perspective, historiography was a *métier*, a craft that had to be taught in a workshop by a master to a mate. The latter had to make the 'method' of the historian his own, had to be practised in auxiliary sciences, such as palaeography, and had to be imbued with the care and accuracy required by the craft. This did not imply a transfer of theoretical knowledge, but an introduction or an initiation (as in the seminars) to the 'esoteric' rules of the craft⁵⁹. The way in which these had to be mastered was in turn not purely theoretical: the rules had to become tacit skills. That meant that the apprentices had to acquire the 'competence' of experts, they gradually had to acquire the experience that they would need in their work. Those who already had this experience warned that this was a long and difficult process. Kurth urged the young men to hold back when it came to publishing their work: the 'method' was not acquired from one day to the next, it required 'practise and time'. *Ars longa*, he concluded⁶⁰. It was an adage that comprised both an epistemological concept and an ethical prescription simultaneously, as well as a picture of the future: the apprentices would one day belong to a peer group.

However, the latter also required another form of preparation. Fredericq did indeed try to impart more than experience to his secretaries. He also attempted, as a *patron*, to 'launch' them: to insert them into a network and to make them known in an academic trade that was still surveyable around 1900. He did this by encouraging his secretaries to take part in the professional communication of this trade and supervising them in doing so. Specifically, this meant that he taught them how to evaluate the work of others and how to put that opinion into a review. This review was then offered, through him, to an authoritative, international trade journal such as Monod's new *Revue historique*⁶¹. However, the 'launch' of pupils was also possible in other ways, for example by suggesting these pupils as alternative authors when he himself was prevented from accepting a commission due to lack of time⁶².

Both in acquiring experience and in 'launching' in the existing trade, continuity took pride of place. In each case, it was a matter of ensuring transfer from one generation to another of aspects regarded as valuable (the 'method', auxiliary scientific skills, routine techniques, communication, etc.). The secretaries had to put this transfer into practice and thus strengthen the academic historical community. But that also meant that they had to match a certain profile, which proved no simple task.

⁵⁸ Explicitly in BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): note 7 November 1893.

⁵⁹ For the term 'esoteric': L. Raphael, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Extreme. Theorien, Methoden, Tendenzen von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 2003), 68.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Fredericq, «L'origine et les développements», 23-24.

⁶¹ See for example BUG, *Fredericq Archive*, Ms. III 77 (23): notes 6 January 1891 and 3 February 1891.

⁶² See for example BUG, *Fredericq Archive*, Ms. 3704: note October 1897.

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Moral (self-)portraits

The main aspects of the profile which the secretaries had to satisfy were regularity, promptness and reliability. These were regarded as necessary for the organisation of the ‘laboratory’ and for the success of every scientific campaign, such as an extensive source edition. Discipline, therefore, had to reign. Fredericq translated this requirement into a specific set of rules. He determined exactly how often and at what times his secretaries had to come to Winkelstraat to hear whether there were any new assignments for them and required that, whenever he was not in Ghent, they issue a detailed written report of their progress. Professionalization therefore not only implied acquiring technical knowledge and expertise; it also encompassed character formation: no character, no expert.

However, that was an insight that apparently had not reached the secretaries themselves. Repeatedly, year after year, in every secretary, Fredericq noted a lack of discipline: they did not keep their promises, were not on time, wasted time, were wayward in doing what was asked of them. This could lead to heated discussions over continued frustration at the slow progress of the work (which would indeed remain uncompleted) and at the realisation that it was financially impossible to employ more than one secretary at a time⁶³. Fredericq himself was criticised in this respect: in self-defence, one secretary asked whether it would not be quicker to correct proofs if the manuscript itself had not been full of errors and sloppiness⁶⁴. Much more frequently, however, conflicts escalated to the same intensity as the emotional relationships described above; Fredericq himself talked of these ‘punishments’ as *scènes à grand orchestre*⁶⁵. However, every dispute was followed by a reconciliation, in which the secretary promised to abide more closely to the agreements, these agreements were defined in even more detail and a workbook was opened in which what had been agreed was noted precisely. Until the next dispute broke out and only the lies were counted⁶⁶.

It was therefore no easy feat for even a person endowed with professorial authority to get a grip on these assistants, to ‘discipline’ them and to integrate them smoothly into the academic community. As a result, a *discours* could arise in which the world of the secretaries was presented as essentially *different* from one’s own world, which itself also took shape in this *discours*. Its author was the professor who painted a moral portrait of his secretary as soon as he was recruited, which proved to be the result of the detached observation associated with the hierarchic position of the author. These portraits were, given the time when they were compiled, overwhelmingly positive. For example, Fredericq wrote of Basse, «[...] a man of conscience, of will and of healthy intellect, very talented. Just a little

⁶³ See in this context the begging letters to Lea in Tollebeek, *Writing the Inquisition*, 27-28 and 76.

⁶⁴ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77/29: A. Blyau to P. Fredericq, 16 September 1903.

⁶⁵ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): notes 6 September 1898 and 13 October 1898, and Ms. 3704: note 13 October 1898.

⁶⁶ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): note [September 1899] (about Van Renterghem: «23 August to 7 September 1899. Six written lies. Average of one written lie per 3 days»).

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proud and easily offended»⁶⁷. However, as time passed and disputes arose, these portraits expanded into extensive clinical pictures. As appears from Fredericq's notes, it was no longer exclusively a question of the (in)ability of the secretary to function in the academic community. The stage had become broader: while Fredericq described himself as the offspring of «an ordinary Belgian middle-class family, neither rich nor poor, but intellectually highly developed»⁶⁸, the secretary appeared as a man who had no part in middle-class virtuousness.

Given the nature of the conflicts, criticism was targeted firstly on the poor work ethic of the secretaries: they lacked enthusiasm and diligence, were lazy or in any event «did not happily work themselves to death»⁶⁹. But the catalogue of vices compiled against them was broader. The secretaries were accused, for instance, of having no stamina, patience or seriousness. These were failings that had manifested themselves in their daily historiographical practices. For example, did they not treat lightly the problems that unexpectedly arose in their document research? But at the same time it was clear that these failings also distinguished them from the virtuous citizens.

But there was more: Fredericq was forced to observe that some of his secretaries distanced themselves from the civil order as a result of their conduct (and not as a result of their shortcomings as assistants). The portraits did not lie. Fredericq believed that almost all the secretaries were greedy for money but they also continually got into debt. Most were confirmed carnival-goers. One was discovered to be neglecting his scholarly work in order to read novels and travel stories; Fredericq told him «that whores did that too and were equally unwilling to do honest work». Three assistants (including the novel-reader) were discovered to be going out drinking and womanising: the first had become «madam's darling» in a dubious café, the second had used his father's money to «treat the women of Mozart and Olympia to oysters and champagne» and the third – Eggen – had been struck off at the bar by becoming the lover of one of his rich clients and later, so rumour had it, had left another girl with two bastard children. He had become a man of «indelicacies and coarseness», «a *voyou*»⁷⁰.

The picture had therefore become pessimistic and confused: the young researchers at the 'laboratory', who had been admitted to the intimacy of the club, had become strangers. The professor regarded them with 'the eye of Lombroso': to him, they were individuals who threatened the existing order⁷¹. Fredericq seemed to regard his secretaries, almost without exception – following the conceptual

⁶⁷ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): note 24 October 1893.

⁶⁸ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. 3705.

⁶⁹ A.o. BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): notes 1 December 1897 and 27 January 1898.

⁷⁰ A.o. BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): notes 17 February 1890, 17 December 1892, 4 May 1893, 20 January 1899, 13 February 1899, 6 September 1899, 8 September 1899 and 11 December 1899, and Ms. 3704: notes 24 April 1915, 7 May 1915 and 14 September 1915.

⁷¹ Cf. P. Strasser, «Cesare Lombroso: l'homme délinquant ou la bête sauvage au naturel», in *L'âme au corps. Arts et sciences 1793-1993*, ed. J. Clair (Paris, 2002), 355.

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fashion of the day – as *dégénérés*⁷², although they could not all be tarred with the same brush. Some were lazy degenerates: Jacobs, «who had no honour in his body and had truly sunk to the depths», and Van Renterghem, who seemed to have lost all feeling of self-worth and was «broken». Some, however, were morally weak. Blyau was neurotic, an unstable man who would take something into his head and who always over-reacted. Vuylstekker was quickly characterised after his appointment as «sickly and melancholy»⁷³.

Finally, there was yet a third category: the political *dégénérés*. This group included Verdeyen, who had now become the victim of the «moral corruption among the intellectual youth», spread by the Catholics and, as a free-thinker, went to church out of cowardice. During the war he was accompanied by Eggen: a «Jew», wrote the *dreyfusard* Fredericq of the collaborator, a «Jew in the foulest sense», because he did everything for money like an unscrupulous man⁷⁴. This was how six of Fredericq's eight secretaries were reviewed – as having become contemptible, weak or cowardly and by no means trailblazers of progress or innovation. In 1901, the news arrived that Jacobs, barely past thirty, had sunk into decline. Perhaps Fredericq then remembered what he had noticed eight years earlier about Jacobs' physiognomy: not very handsome, not very powerful. Perhaps he also thought about Frederichs, who had died one year earlier and of whom he already knew much earlier that tuberculosis had made him an easy target⁷⁵.

What did these portraits, varying on the doctrine of degeneracy, mean? Why did they imply more than anecdotal histories? Once again, they demonstrate that the new labour relations that emerged in the late nineteenth century in the academic historical world encompassed much more than business arrangements. They were also related to identity formation. The portraits of the secretaries were above all self-portraits: by comparing it against what was portrayed as chaos and decline, they represented the historical community inspired by professors as a world full of order, energy and ascetics. Professional and character-related identity overlapped and both were formed in this representation process. Fredericq's small portraits again made it clear that the academic community grew out of what could still best be described as an emotional, stormy family.

⁷² For the (success of) degeneration thinking in Belgium: *Degeneratie in België 1860-1940. Een geschiedenis van ideeën en praktijken*, eds. J. Tollebeek, G. Vanpaemel and K. Wils (Leuven, 2003), and J. Tollebeek, «Degeneration, modernity and cultural change. A Belgian perspective, 1860-1940», in *The many faces of evolution in Europe, c. 1860-1914*, eds. P. Dassen and M. Kemperink (Leuven-Paris-Dudley, MA, 2005), 53-70 and 145-149. Cf. also *De zieke natie. Over de medicalisering van de samenleving 1860-1914*, eds. L. Nys et al. (Groningen, 2000).

⁷³ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): notes 2 May 1893, 13 October 1898, 20 January 1899, November 1901, 5 March 1903 and October 1907 and Ms. III 77/25: A. Blyau to P. Fredericq, 28 May 1901.

⁷⁴ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): note 4 March 1904 and Ms. 3704: notes 24 April 1915 and 22 August 1915. For the liberal *dreyfusards* in Belgium: J. Stengers, «La Belgique, un foyer de dreyfusisme», in *L'affaire Dreyfus et l'opinion publique en France et à l'étranger*, eds. M. Denis, M. Lagrée and J.-Y. Veillard (Rennes, 1995), 273-290.

⁷⁵ BUG, Fredericq Archive, Ms. III 77 (23): notes 7 March 1890, 15 March 1890 and 8 March 1893 and Ms. III 77/25: A. Blyau to P. Fredericq, 19 February 1901.