



Herman Geertman in Pompeii, 1999 (photo Hans Knikman).

IN MEMORIAM

Herman Geertman

(Boxtel 28 January 1935 - Amsterdam 30 June 2015)

With the death of Herman Geertman in the early summer of 2015, the world of archaeological scholarship lost one of its leading Dutch personalities. The merits of this distinguished scholar and teacher will be remembered by many readers of this journal, the present profile and quality of which he helped to create.

Herman Anton Alphons Paul Geertman was born in the heart of the province of Noord-Brabant, the son of parents who were both teachers. At the Augustinian gymnasium in Eindhoven his interest for classical antiquity developed to such an extent that he decided to study classical philology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. Here, one of the authoritative professors was Christine Mohrmann, an internationally renowned expert on Early Christian Latin. His interest for the classical languages was, however, soon surpassed by a passion for archaeology. After switching to the University of Utrecht in 1960, he studied Classical Archaeology under the guidance of Jan Hendrik Jongkees, whose growing interest in Late Antiquity left an imprint on the student Geertman. As a consequence, he spent a year as 'uditore' at the Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana in Rome (1962-1963). He returned to his old gymnasium to teach Greek and Latin, but in 1967 his career took a decisive turn when he received funding for archaeological research in Rome. He had in the meantime married the Italian archaeologist Maria Beatrice Annis, whom he first met during his year at the Pontificio Istituto. Together with her, he undertook an excavation project in the Early Christian basilica of San Sisto Vecchio.

After two prolific years in Rome, Herman Geertman started his career in the Universities of the Netherlands. His first period in the Classical department of Groningen University was marked by studies of the Roman *Liber Pontificalis*, which resulted in a doctorate from the University of Utrecht in 1975 (supervisor: Jan Willem Salomonson). In Groningen, he worked as an associate professor in classical archaeology in fruitful collaboration with Annie Zadoks-Josephus Jitta. His growing professional prominence led to a full professorship at Leiden University in 1978. In 1997 Geertman became the director of the Netherlands Institute in Rome (now: Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome), a position he held until his retirement in 2002. With this Roman directorship, his career came to a happy conclusion, symbolically enough in the city where it had once begun.

From 1962 onwards the city of Rome set the tone for his professional and private life like a *basso continuo*. The excavations of S. Sisto Vecchio were decisive in several ways for Herman's scholarly profile. His enduring interest in Late Antiquity and Early Christianity, his passion for architecture, and the development of a rigorous methodological approach, in which physical evidence is connected to written sources, came to the fore here for the first time. And maybe still more important: it was the first professional collaborative project between Herman and Maria Beatrice: he focussed on architecture, she deployed her expertise of ceramics. Many other moments of scholarly and human synergy between the spouses would characterize Herman's career. S. Sisto Vecchio stimulated Herman's curiosity in the *Liber Pontificalis*, the compilation of lives of the popes, full of archaeological data on Late Antique and Early Medieval Rome. He soon discovered that this complex source was far richer in information than the usual quotations in secondary literature of 'illustrative' texts regarding Roman churches. For his PhD-thesis, he developed a model of analysing the structure and systematics of entries in the lives of the popes of the Carolingian period. This approach, which departed from the internal taxonomy, opened up a new way of reading the entire *Liber Pontificalis*. His dissertation, like most of his later bibliography published in Italian, was appreciated by an international circle of experts. In later articles, and in an ambitious conference on the *Liber Pontificalis* organized at the Netherlands Institute in Rome in 2002, Herman was able to refine his method of 'smontaggio e rimon-

taggio' of the source, and to share his knowledge in an increasingly intense exchange with other scholars.

Considered by some of his colleagues in the late 1970s to be an 'Early Medievalist', Herman Geertman's appointment at the prestigious chair of Leiden University confirmed his identity as a classical archaeologist. As such, his rather exceptional characteristic was his indifference towards an artificial dividing line between the 'classical' era and Late Antiquity, which - in Rome at least - continued far into the Middle Ages. For him, Christianity was an expression of continuity. His studies and projects on, for example, the metopes of Olympia, Vitruvius and the design principles of Hellenistic and Roman architecture (his inaugural lecture in Leiden focussed on the Pantheon) and on Roman urbanism, particularly in Pompeii, show him to have been a versatile scholar. At the same time, he loved to give his wife substantial assistance in her ethnographic research in Sardinia. His need for wide horizons prevented him from becoming a 'Roman' in the local sense of the word.

All his scientific work is characterized by the same strict methodological approach, by transparent reasoning and by a writing style that excels in conciseness. Geertman's bibliography demonstrates his aversion to quantity alone, aiming instead to produce clearly focussed, innovative contributions to his preferred research areas. Some of his results and conclusions have not achieved general acceptance by others, for example aspects of his reconstruction of Vitruvius' design principles, and his dating of the Basilica maior of S. Lorenzo in Rome. Important conferences organized by him and the resulting proceedings published by him, witness his openness to a wider perspective and to debate, even if in his heart he remained convinced of the correctness of his findings. His strong scholarly presence has greatly influenced and inspired the most ambitious of his students.

Herman Geertman was one of the leading personalities in the academic world of classical archaeology in the Netherlands during the last quarter of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. He was convinced that the discipline had to innovate itself by leaving behind the traditional focus on social elites and moving on to explore the field of material culture in its entirety. He was in 1978 a founding father of ARCHON, the national research school of archaeology and in which he remained involved. At Leiden University, his mission was the fusion of the departments of historical archaeologies. The formation of the Archaeological Centre in 1984 was at least in part his personal success. He became the first director of this broad department, in which the particularly rich range of archaeological traditions that was typical for Leiden (Mediterranean, Egyptian, Near Eastern, American and Far Eastern including China) collaborated with and strengthened each other. More complicated was the integration of the Archaeological Centre and the Interfaculty of Prehistory, but to this process Herman also gave of his best, so that Leiden University now has the only independent Faculty of Archaeology in the Netherlands.

Another significant mission was the re-establishment of this journal. Due to a disastrous financial situation, the survival of the *Bulletin Antieke Beschaving* had, in the early 1970s, become extremely doubtful. As a member of the board of the BABesch Foundation, Geertman took the lead in a rescue operation with the substantial support of Zadoks-Josephus Jitta. Thanks to a solid financial reorganisation and private funding *BABesch* (nowadays *BABESCH*) was in 1975 to appear in a new form. Not only were its title and typographical design modernized, the quality of its contents also came up to international scientific standards. The relationship with Peeters in Leuven/Louvain (Belgium), publishers of *BABesch* from 1977 onwards, secured an optimal international diffusion. Additionally, Geertman expanded the scope of the organization from a strictly Leiden-based affair into a broadly based foundation, with members from The Netherlands and Flanders. Lastly, he was the initiator of the series of *BABesch*-supplementa (nowadays *BABESCH* supplements). Following on from the publication of a few irregularly edited volumes which ended the late 1980s, Geertman installed an international editorial board, formulated the instructions to authors, detailing the required standard for manuscripts, and sketched a clear profile of the editorial principles for the series. For the rest of his life, Herman felt closely connected to *BABESCH* and was editor of the Supplements together with Marc Waelkens until 2010.

He saw his directorship at the Institute in Rome as the pinnacle of his career and also as an opportunity to deepen and to broaden his professional work. He made important steps to anchor the institute more securely in the academic world of the Netherlands, among other things by extending its teaching programmes. He sharpened its scientific profile in the international community of research institutes in Rome, not only by his own scholarly work and reputation, but above all by stimulating

others in their scholarly talents and ambitions. Furthermore, he modernized the cultural programme of the institute, notably by creating a platform for contemporary classical music. The latter was certainly inspired by a personal passion, but at the same time he saw that in this way, the institute could complement cultural life in Rome. He also devoted his best forces to the loving renewal of the building and its garden.

After the publication of the proceedings of the 2002 conference in 2003 Herman considered his studies of the *Liber Pontificalis* essentially completed. He later offered a retrospective reflection on his approach and contributions in the Epilogue of a volume of collected articles on the early *Liber Pontificalis*, published in 2004 (*Hic fecit basilicam*). He brought his work to a close with a new presentation of the text itself (until 535 AD) in 'an anatomical' reconstruction of its genesis (2009). The archaeologist Geertman always remained a philologist! His trust that the younger generation of scholars would continue to study the topic allowed him to close the Book of Popes with contentment. His work on Vitruvius has also found its way into several publications and, yet, he continued working on the subject and did his utmost to finish a contribution that is now pending. Unfortunately, the urbanistic and architectural surveys in Pompeii, carried out by his team, lack comprehensive publication. However, it gave Herman particular satisfaction that the results of this teamwork are included in several doctoral dissertations of his PhD students. Moreover, it has been decided by the Pompeii team that the research data will be integrated into a geographical information system map of Pompeii. This is being developed in the Pompeii Quadriporticus Project at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Finally, his later Roman years offered the opportunity to issue a conclusive publication of his earliest project: the excavations of S. Sisto Vecchio. This extensive article appeared in 2004.

Many students and colleagues will remember Herman as a learned, rational, formal, demanding, focussed and – sometimes – rigorous person. With this first impression, he gained a lot of respect, but he could also draw forth irritation or lack of understanding. He was demanding of others, but no less of himself. In circumstances where these demands failed to be understood, a certain degree of tension and inflexibility could get hold of him. However those who had the privilege to know him slightly better saw a charming, humorous and generous teacher, supervisor, team leader and colleague.

Herman supervised 17 PhD-candidates who accomplished their doctoral dissertation. They have learned a lot from their 'master' (a word he would never have used himself), but above all they admired his academic and human attitude: nobody was forced into his system, but in critical and analytical discussions, everybody was called upon to reflect on his or her own approach. Herman judged people purely on their merits, notably of intelligence, dedication and reliability. He was principled in everything he did. And he was fundamentally progressive in social and cultural terms. Herman believed in the power of human reason. Intellectual autonomy was crucial to him; it determined his scientific independence and originality, and maybe also his personal life. Certainly, his spirit was dynamically stimulated by the enduring intellectual and emotional partnership with Maria Beatrice Annis.

After his retirement, he and Maria Beatrice moved into a beautiful apartment on one of the canals of Amsterdam, the only city in the Netherlands that might be a serious rival to Rome. Here, even when increasingly troubled by Parkinsonism, he continued to work on his beloved subjects: the *Liber Pontificalis*, Vitruvius and Pompeii. Herman died at the age of 80, after having finished his last contribution to the studies of Vitruvius.

The farewell ceremony in Amsterdam on July 6 2015 was much in Herman's style: no laudatory, academic or religious commonplaces, but a loyal group of persons from his closest private and professional circles, united in listening to a quartet of talented young musicians.

Sible de Blaauw

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