Rewriting the Middle Ages in the Twentieth Century

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BREPOLS
François Louis Ganshof was born in Bruges on March 14, 1895 in a very distinguished family. His father was a lawyer and his mother, a lawyer's daughter too, was descended from general van der Meersch who had led the revolutionary armies of the Southern Netherlands in their revolt against Joseph II at the end of the eighteenth century. To foreigners Ganshof may be well-known as a scholar, but in legal circles in Belgium his brother Walter Jean Ganshof van der Meersch—in a very unusual move for a Belgian—he added his mother's name to his, to ensure that her great family name would not die out, is still much more famous, as he was, as Commissioner for the Security of the State, responsible at the end of World War II for restoring order in newly liberated Belgium (at the height of his power and influence he was even called the 'vicerey of Belgium'). Another notable achievement of his has been that, as Belgium's highest senior magistrate, he was responsible for making the highest court in the land accept the principle that international rules should have priority over Belgian law.

François Louis Ganshof might have had a career like his brother as a magistrate or a civil servant. In fact, during both World Wars he served in the Belgian army. In the First he was a lieutenant, junior grade, working for the Geographical Department of the Belgian army; in the Second he took part as commander in the short, though valiant, resistance of the Belgian army to the German invasion in 1940. In 1944 he was his brother's trusted right-hand man in pacifying Belgium. Thus, Ganshof has become one of the few historians who not only wrote about history, but also lived it.

Note: several of Ganshof's works were translated and/or reprinted. Unless otherwise indicated, references will be to the first edition. Because it was impossible to look up all editions and translations, no distinction will be made between revised and non-revised editions or translations. The best way of accessing later editions and translations is by looking up the publication at the date of its first edition in the following bibliography: VAN CAENEGEM, R. et al., In memoriam F.L. Ganshof (14 maart 1895 – 26 juli 1980). Bibliografie Prof. Dr. F.L. Ganshof, in: "Koninklijke academie voor wetenschappen, letteren en schilderkunsten van België, Jaarboek", 1980, 242-251. Later editions and translations are indicated in the footnotes.

1 These are only a few of the highlights in the career of one of the key figures of Belgian twentieth century history. For a biography of Ganshof's brother, see MARTIN, D., Ganshof van der Meersch, biograaf Walser (Brugge 18 mei 1900 – Tongeren 12 september 1993), in: "Nieuwe encyclopedie van de Vlaamse beweging", Tielt, Lannoo, 1998, 1230-1231 and the literature referred to there.
2 His secret reports of his activities have been published by Wilfried Pauwels, De bevrijdingsdagen van 1944: de geheime rapporten van François Louis Ganshof (De Nederlandsen: Antwerp, 1994).
Ganshof: a Pirenne student going his own way

When a scholar is awarded as many honours as Ganshof, and, at the same time, is the student of an even more famous scholar, it is justified to ask whether the student did not achieve greatness in the slipstream of his master. Such a question is only justified, if one does not know Belgian (or for that matter also Dutch) historians. The idea of a 'school', i.e. of students following in their master’s footsteps, is very alien to them. The great Belgian historians are rather isolated figures, teaching their students the craft, but thereafter leaving them free to develop on their own. Thus, if anything, it is almost normal for students to have interests very different from their masters. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of François Ganshof.

But also made it. In 1919, he was a member of the Belgian delegation at the Paris Conference and the Versailles Peace Treaty which ended World War I, although at that time he had not yet finished his university studies, interrupted because of the war. He obtained his doctoral degrees in philosophy and letters in 1921, and in law in 1922, both at Ghent University, where Henri Pirenne, arguably Belgium's greatest historian ever, was his teacher. Thereafter he went to study with Ferdinand Lot in Paris and was enrolled at the bar, but his career there was a very short one, as he became a lecturer for two courses at Ghent University in 1923.

There, he taught all sorts of medieval history until his retirement in 1961, in the meantime having become professor ordinarius in 1932, and serving as dean of his faculty in 1937-1938. It is to be remarked here that he started his career at Ghent University when it was bilingual, so that he was teaching in both French and Dutch. When the university became unilingual Dutch in the 1930's, Ganshof succeeded his master Pierre Pirenne, who had no wish to teach in Dutch and left Ghent for Brussels.

Ganshof was a member of the editorial boards of several reviews, president of the Commission royale pour la publication des anciennes lois et ordonnances de Belgique and working member of the Royal Flemish Academy for Sciences, Letters and Arts, corresponding or foreign member of so many foreign academies and other organisations that it would take too much paper to list all of them here. The same holds for the many prizes he received, so that it should be sufficient to say that in his native Belgium he received the Francqui prize and the State Prize for Historical Sciences, whereas thirteen universities from other countries awarded him a doctorate honoris causa. After this long and distinguished career Ganshof died in Brussels on June 26, 1980.

Louis Ganshof. In fact, Ganshof became a specialist of legal and institutional history, a subject about which Pirenne could teach him little, so that he had to acquire his knowledge by reading foreign literature. His interest in legal and institutional history was stimulated by Ferdinand Lot, but Lot was not a legal historian himself. In fact, Ganshof's interest in law and institutions goes back to his childhood, to his maternal grandfather, who Ganshof fondly recalled thus: "Si nous avons placé en tête de ce petit volume le nom d'Auguste Van der Meerch, de son vivant associé à Bruges, c'est qu'il fut pour moi et mon fils, le premier maître qui l'a initié à l'histoire de son peuple. Avec l'amitié de la langue de la Flandre et de sa culture, il a su lui inspirer le culte de son passé."

Even though Ganshof went his own way, he was, of course not free of Pirenne's influence. He sometimes wrote about social and economic history, Pirenne's favourite fields of study, but always in such a way that its legal and institutional aspects were highlighted. Besides, at times Ganshof was sceptical of his master's great theories. Only one book can be seen as continuing Pirenne's work, a study of the development of cities in the area between Loire and Rheine, first published in 1941, but as Ganshof looks at this subject from a topographer's viewpoint, his World War I experiences in the Geographical Department of the Belgian army seem to be just as important an influence as Pirenne. Besides, it would have been hard for him, living his native Bruges, one of the most beautiful medieval cities in the world, not to be interested in the development of medieval cities. Another influence by Pirenne might be Ganshof's "belgitude". Ganshof, like Pirenne, was a Belgian patriot and had no qualms about giving one of his books the title La Belgique Carolingienne, even though Belgium would only come into existence more than a thousand years after the death of Charlemagne. Ganshof saw his study of history as a way of serving Belgium, as becomes evident in the foreword of one of his books: "Ce petit livre a été écrit sur l'amicale invitation de Mme Suzanne Charlier-Tassign... Nous n'avons pas cru pouvoir nous dérober à cet appel, puisqu'il y a bien qu'il s'agissait de servir la Belgique en répondant à une exacte connaissance de son histoire au sein du grand public."

For Ganshof who had served his country in two wars, writing about its history, was just another, though much more preferable, answer to a call to arms. There is no need to see Pirenne's influence here, Ganshof was himself enough of a patriot. However, Ganshof was a Belgian and a Flemish patriot. The quotation above is to be found in the introduction to a study of Flemish, not Belgian, history. To Ganshof, his allegiance to one part of the country, Dutch-speaking Flanders and its language, was not contrary to his love for Belgium as such. Ganshof supported the fight for the recognition of Dutch as a language of science in Belgium, but he also wrote in French and sometimes a study was first written in Dutch and then in French.

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6 The complete list of the courses he taught, can be found in Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis en Literatuur van Gent. Liber memoriaal 1913-1960, ed. by Lukas Thee (Ghent: RUG Reclamo, 1960), I, pp. 245-247.

7 About the language at Ghent university, see Kromsk van de strijder voor de vennveerdonding van de Gentse universiteit, ed. by Karel De Klerk c.a. (Ghent: RUG Archief, 1969).
or the other way round. In this, he was the opposite of Pirenne, who had no love for the Flemish movement, which fought for the recognition of Dutch as the language of Flanders, and also of many of today's Flemings who would rather get rid of Belgium. To Ganshof, it was not Belgium or Flanders, but Flanders and Belgium.

Ganshof's works

a. The universal works

Ganshof has written almost six hundred publications, and even if one would discount the smaller ones like reviews of books, there are still too many left to study them all in detail. Only some general patterns can be indicated here, though this is an injustice to the wide scope of his scholarship. In fact, Ganshof could write about very varied subjects of medieval history and has also authored some great general works. Examples of these abound: his La Flandre sous les premiers comtes, La Belgique Carolingienne, and his contributions to great general series or general works like the Geschiedenis van Vlaanderen van Van Roosbroeck, the (old) Algemeene geschiedenis der Nederlanden, The Cambridge economic history of Europe, Pelgrimstochten der mensheid, the Histoire générale de Glotz, the Prophäen Weltgeschichte, or Renouvin's Histoire des relations internationales. Apart from these general publications, Ganshof's works seem to concentrate on a certain theme and a certain period: law and institutions from the eighth to the thirteenth century, in either a Flemish/Belgian or a European context, though there are of course exceptions.

b. The thesis: a sin of youth, forgotten later?

Within this general preference for law and institutions several main themes can be distinguished, but again some works stand on their own. Strangely enough one of these is Ganshof's doctoral thesis, published in 1924: Etude sur les ministériaux en Flandre et en Lotharinge. In this Ganshof studies the ministerials, a group of persons in the high middle ages who combined a high social status with a servile condition. Whereas many others do not manage to study anything else but the subject of their thesis for the rest of their careers, Ganshof never went back to it. After 1924, he stayed clear of this subject, but the reasons for this are not known. Reading this book, one has the impression that Ganshof was still learning at the time he wrote it, that he was still trying to find his way as an historian. Moreover, though at the time this thesis was favourably received, obtaining a prize from the Académie royale de Belgique and assuring its author of a position at the university, it is with hindsight, a book that may be called unworthy of 'the great Ganshof', i.e. good for others, but not really at the level, anyone familiar with his later work would expect of him. It may be that Ganshof himself shared this judgement and, therefore, never returned to his study of the ministerials.

c. 'Ganshof of feudalism'

One of Ganshof's early publications was about feudalism, a theme that he would study throughout his career. In fact, to many historians, Ganshof 'is' feudalism. Americans sometimes called him 'Ganshof of feudalism' and others later coined the expression 'Ganshofian feudalism'. Although Ganshof wrote many fine articles about feudalism, the main themes being feudal courts and the union of benefice and vassalage, his fame rests mainly on one book, his Qu'est-ce que la féodalité, first published in French in 1944, with several new editions thereafter, and also translated into English.

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22 E.g. his book about the development of cities (see note 8) was first published in Dutch, then in French and, likewise, his book about the capitals (see note 50). On the other hand, La Flandre sous les premiers comtes was first available in French (Bruxelles: La renaissance du livre, 1943); new editions in 1944 and 1949; Dutch translation, Anwerp, Standaard, 1944.
23 See note 12.
24 See note 10.
25 See note 11.
32 However, Ganshof's few publications about Byzantine history, in one way or another studied themes related to the rest of his research, like the military aid the count of Flanders sent the Byzantine emperor after the defeat at Manzikert (Rohrech de Fries and Alexis Commenes', in Handelingen der koninklijke Zuid-Nederlandse maatschappij voor taal- en beeldende en geschiedenis, XV (1960), 145-160. (French revised translation in: "Byzantium", XXXI (1961).
33 E.g. his publications about tolls (for example. Het toeleven in het Frankische rijk onder de Moravians.
34 Het toeleven in het Frankische rijk onder de Moravians, in (medalies van de koninklijke Vlaamse academie van wetenschappen, letteren en schilder- en schilders, XXIV/ 1 and XXIV/ 2 (Bristol : 1958-1959).
35 Mémories de l'académie royale de Belgique, classe des lettres, second series, XX (Brussels : Lamber, 1955).
37 E.g. 'Note sur la compétence des cours féodales en France', in Mélanges d'histoire offerts à Henri Pirenne (Brussels : Vromant, 1926), pp.161-170.
38 E.g. 'Note sur les origines de l'union du bénéfice avec la vassalité', in Études d'histoire dédiées à la mémoire de Henri Pirenne (Brussels : Nouvelle société d'édition, 1957), pp.173-190.
Ganshof was not alone in studying feudalism as a legal phenomenon. Didier's book on feudal law in Hainault and Melle's Lehrrecht und Staatengesetz, are at least as good and sometimes based on a more detailed study of the sources. Nevertheless, their books were never reprinted, whereas Ganshof's Qu'est-ce que la féodalité still is. The explanation is to be found in its title: this is a book that puts a question any student of the Middle Ages could ask: What is feudalism? The clear answer to that question is only to be found in Ganshof. His book reads as a kind of a legal manual. The confusion of the sources disappears by a clarity that is all the more remarkable, because it is not based upon an abstract theory, but upon a very detailed and erudite knowledge of the sources. Erudition and great teaching do not always go hand in hand, but in this book they are perfectly matched, and this has ensured its success. One can read libraries about feudalism without getting any wiser, and then there is this one book which says it all. An extra bonus was that the author kept on adding to his work, integrating new research by himself and others, although most of the articles he wrote on feudalism in his later career were limited to feudalism in the Carolingian era.

d. Ganshof, le Fleming

As has already been mentioned, Ganshof was, in his way, a patriot. He was very proud of being from Bruges, Flanders and Belgium. Although he wrote a few articles about Bruges, and some books, which can be seen as Belgian, Flanders had his special attention. One should however not confuse the Flemish spokes part of Belgium and the old county of Flanders, mainly held as fief from the king of France (Crown Flanders), though a small part of it was held from the German king (Imperial Flanders). It was the latter, not the former that was the subject of Ganshof's research. His main articles and books dealt with the judicial organisation and urban law. The key publication was his book about early Flemish history, La Flandre et ses premiers comtes, and his study of the local comital feudal courts, Recherches sur les tribunaux de châtellenie en Flandre. Ganshof's publications about Flemish institutions culminated in another of his masterpieces, his article about Flanders in Lot and Fawtier, Institutions françaises au moyen âge in 1951.

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37 Heinrich Melle, Lehrrecht und Staatengesetz. Untersuchungen zur mittelalterlichen Verfassungsgeschichte (Weimar : Bohlaus, 1933).
38 The last 'update' by Ganshof is to be found in the 1975 German edition, but the 1982 French edition has a more recent bibliography.
39 Eg. L'origine des rapports féodaux et vassaux. les rapports féodaux et vassaux dans la monarchie franque au nord des Alpes à l'époque carolingienne, in Revue de droit comparé et de science politique, 1954, 4-5.
41 Eg. Le droit urbain en Flandre au début de la première phase de son histoire, in Tijdschrift voor rechtsgeschiedenis, 1951, 387-416.
42 See note 38.
43 See note 39.
the great in depth study of Flemish judicial organisation which he had hoped to make in the 1980's was never written and after 1957 Ganshof almost stopped writing about Flanders. The reason is that his research into Flanders, a Carolingian successor state, inevitably led him to study its origins, the Carolingians.

e. Ganshof and the tragedy of Charlemagne

Ganshof's study of classic feudalism and of Flemish institutions made him realize the importance of the Carolingian era for the history of medieval institutions. Therefore, his post World War II research was mainly about Carolingian institutions.

Although he had written about Carolingian subjects before the war, including even a general book about Carolingian history41, these studies did not really leave a great impression, unlike Ganshof's later publications by which he became known as probably the greatest scholar of Carolingian studies in his time. Again, Ganshof's work is of an impressive variety, as he wrote many of his most important Carolingian articles for the congresses of the Société Jean Bodin and the Settimane di Spoleto42. These would have a central theme which Ganshof would then study for the Carolingian era. In fact, in certain years one can guess what the topic of these congresses was, by just looking at Ganshof's publications for those years.

However, there was a central theme underlying Ganshof's work, as becomes very clear when consulting the two collections of his Carolingian articles which have been published in English43. To him the Carolingian era was at its heart weak, the historical importance of Carolingian institutions not so much being the impact they had on their own times, but the influence they would exert on the successor states. This was an opinion only to be expected from a man who had come to study the Carolingian era because of the influence they had on their successor states. In their own right, Carolingian institutions were instruments for strengthening central power44, and at first Charlemagne seems to have had some success. However, his later years show an ageing and failing emperor, whose empire is already crumbling before his death, hence articles like La fin du règne de Charlemagne. Une décomposition45. L'Échec de Charlemagne44 and Het falen van Karel de Grote44. Ganshof's Charlemagne is somewhat of a tragic figure, a man who could have been great, whom later historians have called great, but who was not. Likewise, Ganshof is kinder towards Louis the Pious85, like his father a failure, but can one blame the son for failing to achieve what his father could not?

41 See note 19.
44 See e.g. 'Charlemagne et le serment', in Mélanges dédiées à la mémoire de Louis Halphen (Paris : PUF, 1951), pp. 250-270 (English translation, Carolingians, nr. 7).

That Ganshof was trained as a lawyer is nowhere more evident than in his study of Charlemagne. For Ganshof, the main instrument for Charlemagne in imposing his will upon his enormous empire, was legislation, though of a special kind, the capitulare, "des édits subdivisés en articles, émanant des chefs d'état carolingiens"46. By these capitulaires Charlemagne tried to either enforce existing rules which had been neglected, or to adapt these rules to new circumstances, which sometimes meant creating new rules. Because the capitulaires were so important as instrument of Carolingian power, Ganshof made a small study of their technical aspects. The title of his book about them is again his program: Wat waren de capitulaires?47 (What were the capitulaires?). What Que s’est-ce que la finalité is to feudalism this book is to the capitulaires; a book that gives a clear introduction to the technical aspects of what had hitherto for many people been a confusing subject. Again, translations were published, and the author was hailed for his clarity.

In his Wat waren de capitulaires? Ganshof did not go into the details of their effects. These are not to be found in his general publications48, where it becomes clear that the capitulaires fell short of their objectives, as the emperor had to reissue the same orders over and over again, his power being too personal, too dependent on his presence, to have much lasting effect. At the end, Charlemagne is a crisis manager who failed to contain crises. It should be stressed here that Ganshof's Carolingian studies were to a certain extent only preparatory, because his original intent and the expectation of his colleagues was that he would write the final (in so far as any history book can be final) great biography of Charlemagne49. Yet, it was not to be. What the scholarly world has to miss because of that, can be experienced by reading his La Belgique Carolingienn50, one of his best books, which was based on earlier articles written in Dutch for the (old) Algemeen geschiedenis der Nederlanden51. When a new version of this Algemeen geschiedenis der Nederlanden was published in the early 1980's, only one author's articles had stood the test of time, and were only updated, not replaced; Ganshof's52. This is no mean feat if one takes into account that more than four hundred scholars worked on the new Algemeen geschiedenis der Nederlanden.

48 'Louis the Pious reconsidered', in History, XLII (1957), 171-180 (also published in: Carolingians, nr. 14).
50 Most of these can be found in the collections mentioned in note 45.
51 B. Lyon, Foreword', in Frankish institutions, ix.
52 See note 10.
53 See note 16.
Foreign scholars may be forgiven for thinking that we miss only one major work of Ganshof, his Charlemagne biography. There were a few more: a general history of medieval institutions, an introduction to the sources of medieval history and an historical introduction to private law. Ganshof's college notes about all these were available in Dutch to his Ghent students. In fact, the book about medieval institutions was as good as ready and an English editor was willing to publish a translation, but Ganshof refrained from publishing it, because he thought his text was immature. Anyone who has read it, can only wonder what the mature version might have been.

Ganshof's failure to publish what could have been works as influential as his Qu'est-ce que la féodalité, is related to his 'philosophy of history', a term which is not very apt here, as it implies great theories of the author, about which he has written lengthy articles. In reality, Ganshof never wrote about his philosophy of history and abhorred this subject (he got rid of the books about philosophy he received as soon as he could), though his ideas are very clear. Ganshof was a very rankian historian, whose device really was: Was nicht in den Akten, hat nicht gelehrt, but this 'positivism' was more a practical attitude, than the consequence of an elaborate philosophy of history. Because of his positivism, Ganshof's preferred method of working was to neglect the literature about the subject he studied, which does not mean that he did not read it, but rather that he did not write his publication as a response to another author (for example in his book about the capitularia: "Il nous a paru superflue de placer toujours, en face de nos opinions propres, celles des auteurs qui se sont occupés de la question.").

When he had to rely on literature, he profusely excused himself for not justifying every statement by direct references to the sources as he usually did. Preferably, every new publication meant a new consultation of the relevant sources, as Ganshof was very critical and even his own publications were still less trustworthy to him than the sources themselves. Ganshof self-criticism went so far that when he had to write an article in French about Flemish institutions, he did not just translate an older article of his in Dutch, but wrote a new one instead. Not being satisfied with it, he threw it away and wrote a new version from scratch. It was published in 1957, followed one year later by his last book. Thereafter, he would not write more great books, although he was to live for another twenty-two years.

After 1958, Ganshof never judged his great works to be ready, to be finished, there was always one more detail to be studied first (it is typical for Ganshof that more than thirty of his articles start with "Note sur, or a like expression"), and the fact that he found an occasion for studying these details in the thematic congresses of the Société Jean Bodin and the Settimane di Spoleto only strengthened him in this. At the end of his life, he realised that he had been wrong, now that his mind was finally ready to write the next great books, the physical ability was no longer there. Like his hero Charlemagne, Ganshof became some kind of a failure, a man who people called great, although they did not realise how great he really could have been. When one reads Ganshof's short and masterful description of Charlemagne's life in his dinner speech for the Medieval Academy of America in 1948, one can only feel sympathy for the emperor as described by Ganshof, not a superman, but a giant whose last years were hindered by his declining capacities, but did Ganshof realise in 1948 that somehow his last days were to mirror the emperor's?

Ganshof's method of sticking to the sources had other defects than gradually making it impossible for him to write the great syntheses which had made him famous. His method made the eighth to thirteenth centuries ideal for him: enough sources to enable a solid historical study, but not so many that he would no longer be able to consult them all. However, other periods would have been beyond him and his method also limited him to writing about political, legal and institutional history, because anything which required a leap of faith into imagination, like history of ideas, or history of mentalities, would have made him leave the solid ground.

In the end, Ganshof's ideas about history could only lead to a study of the sources, and this is what happened. His last major work was the edition and commentary of a Carolingian source: the polyptique of the abbey of Saint-Bertin. The Ganshonian philosophy of history, if brought to its extreme, turns historiography into nothing more than a detailed reading of the sources.

Ganshof's legacy

What is now left of Ganshof's work? First of all, as Ganshof himself was a student of Pirenne, but did not follow in the footsteps of his master, Pirenne having no real 'school', likewise Ganshof had many students, but they all went their own ways, going in directions he would not have thought of. An example is his most famous student, and Ghent University's leading historian of the post-Ganshof generation, Van Caenegem. Although Van Caenegem continued one work of Ganshof's (he published a book about the sources of medieval history for which Ganshof had laid the groundwork), his career went in a very different direction when he took up...
the study of English law and other subjects, which never appear in Ganshof's work. Much more Ganshofian was Jan Dhondt, who in his early career wrote some studies about post-Carolingian France, very akin to what Ganshof had written, but thereafter switched to the study of modern history. Adriana Verhulst studied the Carolingian domains and historical geography, topics which Ganshof had written about, but even then he did not really continue Ganshof's work. Some of Ganshof's intellectual grandchildren, students of his students took up his favourite subjects again, but without having known him and sometimes going in directions he would not have approved of. Ganshof's greatest influence upon his students may be a negative one. They all deeply regretted the fact that their master had not been able to write the other great books he had in him and that it was set out to do all they could to avoid his mistake, and sometimes they have admirably succeeded, as anyone can see who looks at the list of the great syntheses of history published by Raoul Van Caenegem.

The influence of Ganshof's publications varies. His Etude sur les ministériales is the oldest and most outdated of his studies. His universal works about the Middle Ages are still worth reading, though other books are now available, so that they are not very popular anymore. More complicated is the situation of his publications about Flemish history. For many details his work is to be corrected by what has been written by among others, Van Caenegem, Koch, Verhulst, De Hemptinne, Prevenier, De Gryse, Heirbut and others. His book about the Tribunaux de châtellenie, for example, is no longer up to date. Yet, Ganshof's articles about Flemish institutions and Flemish history are still used a lot by foreigners, though this is mainly due to a language problem, much of the new literature not being available in other languages than Dutch. Another fact is that, although a great collective work about Flemish institutions has been published, as a short synthesis Ganshof's general articles about Flemish institutions are still so good, that authors who have to deal with this subject like Lambrecht and Van Rompay, or Heirbut, have tried to reconcile their articles with his, estimating that it was impossible to improve the great master.

Ganshof's legacy as a historian of feudalism also reveals the longevity of his great syntheses. All of the central tenets of the classic historians of feudalism have in recent years been overturned: the High Middle Ages were not the golden age of feudalism, because a feudal society never existed, many so-called feudal institutions, like feudal aids, not being feudal at all; feudalism as such only broke through later than Ganshof and his contemporaries thought, its rise being linked to the centralisation in the emerging kingdoms of Europe and thus, it was not a centrifugal element, but an instrument of the prince's power: feudal order instead of feudal anarchy. All this was directed against the old historians of feudalism in general (an introduction to these new ideas about feudalism can be found in Susan Reynolds's Feuds and Vassals), but specifically 'anti-Ganshofian' were complaints about the 'Belgocentrism' in the study of feudalism and the new claim that the 'South', i.e. the Mediterranean world, instead of being the periphery, was the real heartland of feudalism. Undoubtedly, much of the anti-Ganshof criticism is justified. For example, the reproach of 'Belgocentrism' in Ganshof's work is not without reason. To Ganshof, the feudalism par excellence was to be found between Loire and Rhine, and more specifically in Flanders and Lotharingia, anyone looking at a map cannot but realise that these two territories amount to some kind of Greater Belgium. Yet, some of Ganshof's critics have not been much better, as they emulated, not corrected, his mistakes, by exchanging his 'belgocentrism' for radical 'meridionalism'. Many of the sources from Flanders and Lotharingia which Ganshof used, are absent in the works of his critics. Even such a well-known text as the 1127 homage and fealty done by the Flemish vassal to William Clito, in the description of Galbert of Bruges, is neglected by them. Recent surveys of feudalism sometimes

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70 See, however, note 17.
72 E.g. Steven Vanderputten, Een heilig volk is gehoord. Ophouwen en onderschat van een christelijke staatstheorie uit de vroege middeleeuwen (12e-13e eeuw) (Hilversum: Verdonk, 2001), who goes much further in interpreting his sources than Verhulst would have liked.
74 For brevity's sake, only two are mentioned here, in their English version: Raoul Van Caenegem, An historical introduction to private law (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Raoul Van Caenegem, An historical introduction to Western constitutional law (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
76 References to their works, can be found in the bibliography of Dirk Heirbut, Heem, in Prevenier, ed. by Walter and Augustyn, Beatrix, De Vlaamse stoffering, 15. Het Anonieme Regime: recent onderzoek in nieuwe perspectief (Brussels: Algemeene Rijksarchief, 1999), pp. 41-58.
even ‘forget’ the crucial area between Loire and Rhine. One may suspect that one reason is, that the sources from this region are still closer to the Ganhsphian model than to the new theories. Anyway, anyone wanting to study feudalism in the Loire-Rhine region still has to take up Ganhsph, because his critics have not really offered an alternative to him there. This is also true in general. The new historians of feudalism have been very good at tearing down the beautiful structure Ganhsph made of feudalism, but they have, up to now, been unable to put something new in its place, a new synthesis, which can stand the comparison with the simplicity and clarity of Ganhsph’s Qu’est-ce que la féodalité. At least, a beginning student is still better off reading Ganhsph than his critics. Like them, he will only give a glimpse of a more complex reality, but, at least, he has the advantage of not leaving one confused.

For Carolingian studies, Ganhsph’s memory is hindered by the lack of his great book, but even if he had written it, it would now have been something of the past. Ganhsph’s extreme fidelity to the sources would have made his work incomplete in our eyes, as it would be lacking some dimensions. The ‘sociology of power’ which is so predominant in recent studies, would have been anathema to Ganhsph. However, this means most of all that Ganhsph’s Carolingian publications nowadays can be seen as being incomplete, rather than wrong. This is most of all true for Ganhsph’s study of the capitularia, which is still indispensable, although it cannot be read without looking at more recent studies like the ones from Hubert Mordek or Bühler. Recent historiography also seems to agree with Ganhsph in his ideas about Charlemagne’s failure and his more positive evaluation of Louis the Pious. Thus, whereas the new historians of feudalism are antagonistic to Ganhsph, the new historians of the Carolingian era seem to be complementary.

Conclusion

In 2002 an article was published about multiple vassalage, fundamentally criticizing an article by Ganhsph, written in 1929, more than seventy years earlier, and thereby proving that Ganhsph still influences and stimulates current research. In fact, whatever the subject he wrote about, Flemish, feudal or Carolingian institutions, Ganhsph’s works have become classics with a long life still ahead of them.

Chronology

1895. Born, Bruges March 14
1914-1918. Lieutenant, j.g., in the Belgian Army
1919. Member of the Belgian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference
1921. Ph. D. (History)
1922. I. D.
1925. Lecturer at Ghent University
1932. Full professor at Ghent University
1940. 1944-1945. Commander in the Belgian Army
1944. Publication of Qu’est-ce que la féodalité
1946. Is awarded the Francqui prize
1955. Publication of Wit wenen de capitularia
1957. Publication of Le Flandre
1961. Professor Emeritus
1980. Dies, Brussels June 26

Selected bibliography

1. Books


La Belgique dans le Royaume des Pays-Bas (1814-1830), in Atlas de géographie historique de la Belgique, vol. 7 (Bruxelles: Elsevier 1920).


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Oor de stadsontneming tusken Loire en Rijn gedurende de middeleeuwen (Antwerp: Standaard, 1941; 2nd ed., 1944; Paris: PUF, 1943).

Pays d’histoire (Bruxelles: La grande Librairie belge, 1941; 2nd ed., 1944).


Qu’est-ce que la féodalité (Bruxelles: Office de publicite, 1944); Later editions in french: (1947: 1957: Bruxelles: Presses universitaires de Bruxelles, 1968; Paris: Tallandier 1982); English


La Belgique Carolingienne (Bruxelles: La renaissance du livre, 1958).


Monarchie franque (6e-9e siècles) (Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1964). Introduction bibliographique à l'histoire du droit et à l'éthnographie juridique; B, 6.


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Royauwe Burgonde (Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1972). Introduction bibliographique à l'histoire du droit et à l'éthnographie juridique; B, 7.

Les institutions féodales (Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1972). Introduction bibliographique à l'histoire du droit et à l'éthnographie juridique; B, 8.


2. Articles

This list contains only a selection of articles by François Louis Ganshof. For a complete bibliography of his articles, see Raoul van Caeysens, Bibliografie Prof. Dr. F.L. Ganshof; in *Koninklijke academie voor wetenschappen, letteren en schone kunsten van België*, Jaarboek, (1980), 241-251.

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'Etude sur le faussaire de judgements dans le droit flamand des XIIe et XIIIe siècles', Bulletin de la commission royale des anciennes lois et ordonnances de Belgique, 14 (1935), 115-140.
Lodewijk de Vrome, de jaren 828 en 829, Bijdragen en mededelingen van het historisch genootschap, 82 (1968), pp. 11-34; German revised translation, Frühmittelalterliche Studien, 6 (1972).


3. Ganshof in memoriams and biographies


Wilfried Pauwels, De beweestijgingen van 1944: de geheime rapporten van François Louis Ganshof (Antwerp: De Nederlandsen, 1994).


