

IN MEMORIAM
PIETER DE LEEMANS
(20.XI.1973–13.IV.2019)

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On Saturday April 13, 2019, Prof. Dr. Pieter De Leemans passed away in Ghent (Belgium) at the age of 45, after a brave fight against cancer. Pieter De Leemans was professor at the University of Leuven, academic Secretary of the *Aristoteles Latinus* project, and Secretary General of the Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale (SIEPM).

Pieter De Leemans was born in Aalst on November 20, 1973. He registered as a student at the University of Leuven, where he chose to study Classics and History at the faculty of Arts, with a specialization in postclassical Latin. For his PhD, he was active at the De Wulf-Mansion Centre for Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy at the same University, where he worked with enthusiasm under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Jozef Brams. He wrote his dissertation within the framework of the *Aristoteles Latinus* project on Aristotle's *De incessu animalium* and *De motu animalium* in the Middle Ages. This project, which would continue to be a very important part of Pieter De Leemans's career, perfectly reflects his research interests, aiming to critically edit all medieval Latin translations of these texts from Aristotle's Greek. His continued work on these two Aristotelian treatises on animal motion, requiring research stays abroad and an extensive re-examination of the manuscript tradition, resulted in the publication of two impressive and meticulous volumes in the *Aristoteles Latinus* series in 2011: *De motu animalium. Fragmenta Translationis Anonymae* (XVII 1.III) and *De progressu animalium. De motu animalium. Translatio Guillelmi de Morbeka* (XVII 2.II-III).

During his time as a postdoctoral research assistant, he was active at both the De Wulf-Mansion Centre and the Institute of Medieval and Renaissance Studies at the University of Leuven, and in that connection he taught several courses, such

as Latin Paleography, Codicology, Editing of Medieval and Renaissance Texts, and Medieval Philosophical Texts.

After having worked several years as part of the *Aristoteles Latinus* project, Pieter De Leemans became its academic Secretary in 2003. This position, previously held by Jozef Brams, entailed his providing scientific and administrative assistance to the international team of editors, as well as coordinating the project more generally.

In 2010, Pieter De Leemans's philologically-based research led to his involvement in the creation of LECTIO (Leuven Centre for the Study of the Transmission of Texts and Ideas in Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance), a research center that focuses on the study of the intellectual history of pre-modern European thought and its texts, bringing together researchers from the faculties of Arts, Theology and Religious Studies, Law, and Philosophy. He was not just a member of LECTIO, but a driving force in it, sitting on its executive committee for many years, helping with the organization of numerous conferences and workshops, and supporting a number of large research grants. The interdisciplinarity – which is the entire idea behind LECTIO – fits beautifully with his own background in Classics, History, Philosophy, and his overall academic curiosity.

Moreover, from 2012 onwards, he held an appointment as professor at the De Wulf-Mansion Centre, and after being a member (2001) and then a board member (2012) of the SIEPM, Pieter De Leemans also became General Secretary of SIEPM in 2017 – only a few months prior to learning of his illness.

But Pieter – he urged his students to call him by his first name from the very first day – was much more than an enumeration of achievements. Behind those facts lay a person and colleague with a pleasant and vibrant personality with whom I had the honor and pleasure to work during my doctoral research.

First and foremost he was one of the most passionate researchers I've ever met. The number of ideas that sprang into his head every second was unbelievable. He was also very generous with these ideas as he helped with devising and formulating several research topics of others and unselfishly stimulated others to take new research directions. The projects on which he enthusiastically brainstormed, mainly projects focusing on medieval Greek-Latin translations, on the concept of movement in medieval natural philosophical texts, and on medical terminology in the Middle Ages, were often granted. Pieter was insatiably curious and creative, with an ability to comb out texts and manuscripts right down to the last detail. His joy upon discovering a new manuscript or an unknown medieval commentary had no equal.

His passion for research reveals itself in the many conferences that were organized under his direction – such as on the topic of Pietro d'Abano, on the *Problemata physica*, on medieval translators such as Bartholomew of Messina – as

well as in the volumes that resulted from these colloquia. His articles were models of in-depth research, well thought-out argumentation and convincing scientific discourse. Up until his last months, Pieter continued working on articles and helped organizing the 2018 annual colloquium of the SIEPM, where he unfortunately could not be present – all signs of his incessant enthusiasm and energy for his work.

Anyone who ever attended one of his academic lectures, or who heard him teach, will acknowledge that he was bursting with energy on these occasions. Pieter was known for his spontaneous and, at times, slightly chaotic way of talking: it was almost impossible for him to stand still. He preferred to walk around when sharing his knowledge with his audience – as much as possible.

Those who worked with him, will certainly remember his dark and self-deprecating sense of humor. He occasionally wondered what influence his work might have, being well aware of the fact that we would not save lives with our studies on medieval manuscripts; Pieter was very down-to-earth and good at putting things into perspective. He may never have realized how much his work and his personality influenced others, and how he touched the hearts of whoever had the opportunity to work with him. Many colleagues have described him as an excellent and passionate researcher, who was also fabulous to work and discuss with, possessing the rare combination of professionalism, humor and kindness.

But Pieter was so much more than just an academic. He had a great liking for the opera, was a skilled painter, and loved fine dining with carefully selected wines. He organized lively parties (his renowned yearly Christmas menu required careful planning weeks in advance) where his friends and loved ones could mingle. He had a great love for Ibiza, where he spent his yearly vacation. And there was so much more.

He lived a passionate life, and touched the lives of many others. He will be warmly remembered as a passionate and loyal colleague, an excellent scholar and a dear friend.

He will be dearly missed.