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**The lure of the dark ages : writing the Middle Ages and political rhetoric in humanist historiography from the low countries**

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Considering that humanist scholars often referred to the Middle Ages as an uncouth period of darkness and ignorance, it is surprising that humanist historians by no means neglected the centuries between the fall of the Roman empire and the rise of humanism. The central hypothesis of this book is that the choice of medieval subject matter and the ways in which historians such as Reynier Snoy (1474/1475-1537), Adrianus Barlandus (1486-1538), Petrus Divaeus (1536-1581), and Janus Dousa Sr (1545-1604) described the medieval past of their country can be explained by the turbulent political context from which their writings originated and in which they were often directly involved as aldermen, ambassadors, private teachers of noblemen, city clerks, noble lords, members of the provincial Estates, or judges. This political context was marked by great upheavals caused by factors such as the Habsburg centralization policy, the Reformation, and the Dutch Revolt.

The chapters on these authors bring forward some key characteristics of early modern medievalism. They show how concepts of the medieval were used as rhetorical tools (e.g. for self-legitimation), in what ways and to what ends medieval forms and ideals were appropriated, and how the classical heritage was involved in the representation of the medieval.

This analysis is informed by an approach to historical writing that differs from what is common in the study of sixteenth-century historiography. Historical writing is regarded not as a means to uncover the truth about the past, but as narrative rhetoric. It deploys narrative techniques and intertextual allusions and plays with genre expectations in order to convey its (political) message to its readers. Moreover, the historian's position in the political arena is shown to be a catalyst for new developments in the study of the past rather than a menace to objective historiography. In this way, historians were strongly involved in contemporary political discussions. They made medieval history serve life by rediscovering in the past the desire for financial control, the rulers' majestic power, the legal right to govern oneself, or the resistance against tyrannical oppression that had always been present in their communities.

Coen Maas



*The Lure of the Dark Ages*

# *The Lure of the Dark Ages*

Writing the Middle Ages and Political Rhetoric

in Humanist Historiography

from the Low Countries



COEN MAAS

