

Pirenne in Brussels before 1930

Guillaume Des Marez and the relationship between a master and his student

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1. A STUDENT AND A FRIEND

In his article, published in 1999 in the *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, the American medievalist Bryce Lyon thoroughly described what he qualified as an exceptional relationship: the one between Henri Pirenne and his student, Guillaume Des Marez (Lyon, 1999, 1051-1078). Among the numerous militant groups of students directly educated by Pirenne, Des Marez indeed figures as the beloved pupil. The departure of Des Marez in 1931, four years before Pirenne, naturally added to the image of a special relationship. Pirenne, already marked by the death of his second son, expressed his feelings at Des Marez's funeral in a famous sentence that has survived its author and added to the reputation of the famous Belgian historian as a remarkable orator:

"Il est monstrueux qu'un père survive à ses enfants et qu'un maître survive à ses disciples".²

He continued by drawing a moral portrait of his pupil full of human warmth and sensibility, which was first published in 1934 and reissued in 1936 as part of the publication of unedited studies of Des Marez by a group of former students from the Free University of Brussels.³ Pirenne opened his study with

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² "It is monstrous that a father has to survive his son, just as that a professor survives his student": reformulated in an indirect way in G. Despy (1982, 14). Bryce Lyon (1999, 1076) refers to F.-L. Ganshof, source of this speech fragment and witness to the last meeting between Pirenne and Des Marez and the latter's funeral.

³ Pirenne (H.), "Notice sur Guillaume Des Marez", *Annuaire de l'Académie Royale de Belgique*, 1934, pp. 149-207.

one of his typical, penetrating sentences: "Guillaume Des Marez a été mon élève, et il est resté mon ami".⁴ Reading the numerous personal archives both men left behind indeed confirms the vivid, lifelong interest Pirenne took in Des Marez. This loyalty in Pirenne's friendship has to be taken seriously, especially since Des Marez repeatedly endangered his relationship with Pirenne. In itself the strength of the relationship is not puzzling or even embarrassing, according to the anthropological reading of daily practices among historians at the turn of the 20th century. As Jo Tollebeek has recently demonstrated in his study of the relationship between Pirenne and his colleague in Ghent, Paul Fredericq, there was an almost kin-like bond between masters and students. The study of history was organised in an intimate way in these decisive years for the development of truly scientific history.⁵ What we intend to deliver is an analysis of what made the relationship between Pirenne and Des Marez specific and singular, and therefore more than a matter of mere preference.

2. INITIATIONS

Born in 1870 in Courtrai (Kortrijk) into a petty bourgeois family – his father was to become an inspector of primary education, his mother came from an even more modest background. In a letter she wrote to her son, now in the Municipal archives of Brussels, she testified to her limited literacy⁶ – Guillaume Des Marez went to study at Ghent university in 1890, while Pirenne was still a very young professor.⁷ The latter was struck by the brilliance of the young student as he passed his exams in law, probably with only a vague ambition of becoming a barrister. Only in 1892, after having been tempted by the study of Greek history, Des Marez enrolled in Pirenne's seminar. It is a moment of revelation for both men. In Des Marez, Pirenne found

⁴ "Guillaume Des Marez was my student, he stayed a friend": G. Des Marez, *Études inédites, publiées par un groupe de ses anciens élèves, précédées d'une notice sur Guillaume Des Marez par H. Pirenne*, Brussels, 1936, p. 7. A literary analysis of Pirenne's style: Cl. Thiry (1986, 95-96).

⁵ J. Tollebeek (2011, this issue) and J. Tollebeek (2008), *Fredericq & zonen. Een antropologie van de moderne geschiedwetenschap*. The designation "Fredericq & zonen" refers ironically to the way commercial and industrial firms presented themselves in the 'fin de siècle' period and well beyond. The formula, again, is from Henri Pirenne's pen.

⁶ Municipal archives of Brussels (MAB), Archives Des Marez, carton 18, letter dated February 1901.

⁷ Two biographical entries were published on Des Marez, in French by M. Martens (1988, 72-77), and in Dutch by C. Wijffels (1987, col. 465-472).

his first student with great intelligence, and soon both men developed a collaborative relationship. Impressed with Des Marez's ability for judicial analysis, Pirenne launched him into writing a Ph.D. dissertation on property rights in medieval cities, the subject of much scholarly debate in Germany at that time.⁸ The dissertation, published in 1898 in the series of the Faculty of Arts of Ghent University, is still considered a fine example of the judicial approach to the question of property rights directly linked with social history. This approach has become very fashionable again, at least in Flanders, where it is known as *huizenonderzoek* ('house history' or 'house analysis') – a subject which mobilises broad public support for preservation of heritage sites. As such it is one example, among others, of the longevity and novelty of Des Marez's research.

Pirenne's dreams about his student's academic success were similar to the dreams of Pygmalion. His ambition was to construct a career for Des Marez worthy of the latter's talents. In the summer of 1897, he sent Des Marez to Berlin, then to Paris the following year. Of course, this allowed Des Marez to attend the classes of some of the period's most famous historians: August Meitzen, Otto von Gierke, Erich Liesegang, Gustav Schmoller, Gabriel Monod, Charles Langlois, Gaston Paris, and Arthur Giry. However, judging by his letters home, Des Marez only benefited slightly from attending these lectures. He said that what he has heard abroad did not equal the level of education he received previously in Ghent.⁹ On the contrary, what left a huge impression on him and contributed in a decisive way to the formation of his general attitude towards life was his observation of German nationalist exaltation and expansionism. The way in which he described what he witnessed is a caricature, of course, as is his description during a second journey to Germany in 1907 (Lyon, 1999, 1056-1058).¹⁰ But Des Marez also expressed his embarrassment when he was confronted with the vehement scientific conflicts and intellectual debates, which he joined in timidly (*Ibid.*, 1056).

⁸ Pirenne repeatedly recalled the encounter with Des Marez: *Université Libre de Bruxelles, Manifestation G. Des Marez, 12 novembre 1927*, p. 5; Pirenne (H.), "Notice sur Guillaume Des Marez" in: G. Des Marez, *Études inédites publiées par un groupe de ses anciens élèves*, Brussels, 1936, pp. 8-9.

⁹ More details on the Berlin and Paris sojourns of the young Des Marez, in the article of B. Lyon (1999, 1053-1061), based essentially on correspondence with Pirenne, preserved at the archives of the Brussels Free University (ULB).

¹⁰ The question was resurrected when one of Pirenne's sons, Henri, sent to Berlin and Heidelberg in order to study philosophy, came to similar conclusions concerning militarism and national chauvinism in Germany in the years 1912-1913. In his *journal de guerre* (war diary) Henri Pirenne conceded in 1915 that his son was right in assessing German intellectuals: "Mon pauvre Henri, à Berlin et à Heidelberg, avait raison de ne voir en eux que des brutes savantes" (Lyon, 1999, 1067).

His intellectual independence clearly shows when he related to Pirenne how he, dismissing the objections of Liesegang, went to a feminist reception at the invitation of Lina Morgenstern, because the subject of the meeting interested him despite the anti-Semitism dominant among his Berlin colleagues (*Ibid.*, 1058).¹¹

3. HOW ONE BECOMES A PROFESSOR

Study abroad in Germany and France primarily provided Des Marez with the opportunity to network and learn worldly values. The fundamental problem now facing Des Marez and Pirenne, eager to launch his student's career, was how Des Marez was to become a recognised member of the scientific community when he lacked the right ancestors and the necessary capital to support himself independently and had no access to the decision-makers who gave out assignments in scientific institutions and determined the budgets which financed scientific success. Des Marez could only succeed as the creation of a person or a group, in this case, Pirenne and the intricately complex network of Brussels liberalism. It was in Brussels that Des Marez had most opportunities to advance his career. The path he followed is sometimes obscure, but some aspects are already very clear.

The first stop was right in the heart of the citadel of Brussels liberalism, the city administration, where the mighty Charles Buls (1837-1914) was still in charge as burgomaster.¹² Des Marez was nominated for the post of second archivist, a position apparently created *ex nihilo* for him (Vanrie, 2006-2007, 21)! He was introduced to Buls by a close friend and brother-in-law of the burgomaster, Léon Vanderkindere (1842-1906), medievalist, professor at the Free University of Brussels, former rector of the university, member of parliament and a highly influential liberal member of the communal movement (Leclere, 1956-1957, col. 825-835). Vanderkindere of course knew Pirenne very well as, for one thing, they shared the same predilection for German-

¹¹ Lina Morgenstern (1830-1909) was a remarkable figure in Berlin: philanthropist, feminist and pacifist, energetically engaged in protection of children and poor women, promoting Friedrich Fröbel's work, organising *Volksküchen* and numerous associations to sustain and educate poor housewives and women workers. Antisemitic attacks were directed at her and her activities at the end of the century (Fassmann, 1/3/2009; 10/7/2010).

¹² Charles Buls was burgomaster of Brussels from December 17, 1881 until December 16, 1899. Concerning him, see M. Martens (1958-1959, col. 231-236), and more recently: M. Smets (1995).

inspired historical methodology.¹³ The meeting between Des Marez and Buisson, organised by Vanderkindere proved to be a great success. After passing an examination in archival sciences – a completely new subject for him – young Des Marez was formally hired by the communal administration in 1899 (Vanrie, 2006-2007, 21-27). It was to become a life-long engagement. However, Des Marez saw it as just a beginning, insufficient to satisfy his own ambitions, or to fulfil the ones cherished by his master. However, this initial appointment proved to be a crucial step that made possible the subsequent appointments, which brought much more prestige, though fewer financial rewards.

For the next step, characterised in the very words Vanderkindere used in one of his letters of 1901 as "la combinaison de Monsieur Solvay", additional elements were needed.¹⁴ One element was Des Marez's public defence of some principles of the German historian Karl Lamprecht, with whom, he said, he had studied while in Germany, a distortion of reality to be excused by his youthful eagerness.¹⁵ One of these principles envisioned collective movements, rather than individuals, as the primary movers of society, a highly controversial idea, in Germany as well.¹⁶ But it had the advantage of making Des Marez visible in the circles around Solvay. It led to his co-optation by the governing board of the *Institut de Sciences sociales*, the Institute for Social Sciences, which Ernest Solvay (1838-1922) was planning to re-establish after a previous attempt had failed. This failure involved important figures, Hector Denis (1842-1913), Guillaume De Greef (1842-1924) and Emile Vandervelde (1866-1938), to their dismay.¹⁷ As a patron of the soda industry Solvay wanted his beliefs about productivity and 'social energetism' confirmed and legitimised by scientific research. With the support of the rising star of the young radical liberals, the engineer Emile

¹³. He was to introduce the model of seminars based on the analysis of sources at the Free University of Brussels (Despy, 1977, 3-8).

¹⁴. MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 18, professional correspondence between Vanderkindere and Des Marez, letter dated January 20, 1901.

¹⁵. MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 17, notes for a conference given in Bruges in December 1899, "La manière moderne de faire de l'histoire", p. 4. Des Marez did meet Lamprecht while in Germany, but he never formally studied with him. Bryce Lyon's analysis of his correspondence shows that Des Marez took courses and contacted the historians in conflict with Lamprecht and his new ideas, which were rigorously contested in Germany (Lyon, 1999, 1055-1056).

¹⁶. On Lamprecht see the entry by Louise Schorn-Schütte (2002, 189). On the 'Methodenstreit' the twelve volumes of his 'Deutsche Geschichte' triggered after 1891: G. Oestreich (1969, 320-363); R. Von Bruch (1980); L. Raphael (1990, 325-263).

¹⁷. Concerning the institute's history as well as that of the *Institut de sociologie Solvay*, which took over in 1902 on the site of the Parc Léopold, see: J.-Fr. Crombois (1994, 23-44).

Waxweiler (1867-1916), Solvay built an *Institut de sociologie* within the scientific city in Parc Léopold, close to the newly-founded Institute for Physiology, which he had constructed from 1891-1892 onwards, to house research and teaching facilities for Paul Héger (1846-1925) and himself (Crombois, 1994, 32; Despy-Meyer, Devriese, & Sirjacobs, 1997, 195-208). The close physical location of the institutes was not accidental. To the contrary, their proximity reflected Solvay's wish to keep the social sciences well informed of discoveries in the scientific fields concerning the physical and chemical functioning of living organisms (Crombois, 1997, 209-220). The fact that Des Marez was able to function in such an environment while leading a research unit on economic history seemed profitable for both sides, the historian and the institute, at first glance. The entire project was conceived as a response to Des Marez's own convictions, and the Institute was quite royally supported financially, compared to what seemed the norm at that time, both in terms of the allotted budget (500 francs alone for new acquisitions for the library) and possible extramural funding.¹⁸ The most important advantage was that the Institute position conferred the equivalent rank necessary for a University entry position. Vanderkindere demonstrated this in his letter to Des Marez, dated January 20, 1901:

"Cher Monsieur, j'ignorais que la combinaison de Monsieur Solvay fût aussi avancée... Je suis heureux d'apprendre que vous lui avez promis votre concours. Vous exercerez, au sein du Conseil d'administration une excellente influence et peut-être, ce qui vaudrait mieux encore, consentiriez-vous à donner quelques cours à l'Université, dont ce nouvel institut sera une précieuse annexe"... ("Dear Sir, I did not know Mr. Solvay's plans were that far developed... I am happy to learn you promised to stand beside him. Your influence will be an excellent thing for his board of governors, better still: perhaps you would consider also teaching some courses at the University to which this Institute will become a useful addition?").¹⁹

¹⁸. In carton 8 of the Des Marez archives at the MAB are documents about the working conditions which confronted the young archivist upon his arrival at the Institute. But both Waxweiler's and Solvay's ideas ultimately had a negative impact on his work, so much so that he left the institute early in 1910. Some echoes reflect his anger with what he considered a deliberate construction of dogmatic thinking: see carton 8, 'notes manuscrites sur des circulaires à partir de 1907': "je considère ceci comme du bluff"; "!! Pas de dogme!! Cette conception a faussé tout le programme de l'Institut, obligé de vérifier les dogmes proclamés par Solvay". Concerning the budget for the acquisition of books, see the letter from Waxweiler dated June 13, 1901, in the same archival collection (carton 18, correspondence).

¹⁹. Letter cited above, n. 19. The desire of Vanderkindere to guide Des Marez towards university teaching is remarkable, certainly so if, based on his correspondence with Pirenne, we consider the extent to which he questioned Des Marez's ability as a university instructor after reading his thesis (Lyon, 1999, 1060).

An ingenious combination was thus established which aimed to create at the university a course in legal history, which had not existed up to this point – in the school for social and political studies, founded in 1899 with important financial backing from Solvay. With a degree in law and a Ph.D. in arts, Des Marez was a 'natural' candidate (Bartier, s.d., 67). By the end of 1901 the operation had become a success, with the enthusiastic support of Pirenne, who wrote:

"Mon Cher Des Marez, j'écris aujourd'hui ...avec toute l'éloquence ...dont je suis capable. Je vais fourbir votre avenir avec soin et le parer des couleurs les plus riantes. Je n'aurai pour cela qu'à me laisser aller aux vœux que je forme pour vous" ("My dear Des Marez, I write today... with all eloquence I'm capable of. I will construct your future with care and make it as colourful as possible. I only have to follow my dearest wishes concerning you").²⁰

In less than three years Des Marez had achieved a university chair, and was fully recognised and socially knighted as a scholar. The relationship network had worked effectively.

4. AN ANGRY YOUNG MAN IN A CHANGING UNIVERSITY

The young archivist and professor now only had to fit into the new circles, by abiding with the customs and appearing where he was expected to be seen. As an expert guide, Emile Waxweiler pointed out the figures Des Marez should visit. His new colleagues mobilised support for him in all the capital's organisations and among its opinion-makers linked with liberalism and even to the nascent socialism. Thus Des Marez became a Freemason by joining *les Amis Philantropes n°2* lodge, known for moderate views, traditionalism and a marked spiritual quality, to which all of his protectors belonged: Vanderkindere, Buls, Waxweiler and the imposing Eugène Goblet d'Alviella.²¹ The new

²⁰. MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 18, letter by Pirenne to Des Marez, 6 March, 1901.

²¹. For the history of this lodge an offshoot (dated 1895) of the Amis Philantropes, see: Quatuor Coronati Bruxellensis (1979, 75-78); Anonymous (1999, 189-211). In order to situate and contextualise this lodge in the political and ideological environment of Brussels-based Freemasonry, see: M. D'Hoore (2000, 38-39). The division of the Amis Philantropes was due to important differences among members concerning various topical questions and to the difficulties resented by representatives of different groups within the liberal and socialist movements. The Amis Philantropes (without number) continued to welcome the most progressive and socially active members of both liberals and socialists (Henri La Fontaine, Camille Huysmans, Emile Vinck, and Emile Tassel, etc. Emile Vandervelde joined this branch

mason soon joined the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme* (the human rights league), showed solidarity with the committee against anti-Semitism, and became an active member of the *Ligue internationale pour le progrès de la législation du travail* (the International League for Progress in Justice for Labour).²² Meanwhile, he maintained his older relationships in Western Flanders (born in Courtrai, Des Marez had spent his youth in Menin) who were active anticlerical liberals and/or socialists, engaged in the struggle for the maintenance of public schools against the dominant Catholic school system.²³

As he had to be socially respectable and conform to social norms, Des Marez also planned to get married in 1901-1902. We will probably never know whether his new social network tried to set a 'hypergamy' in motion, as happened in so many other contemporary cases. What we know for certain is that Des Marez proposed at one point to marry a young woman from his home town, probably because she came from a familiar setting. A letter buried in his professional correspondence reveals that he asked a correspondent in Courtrai to contact a young girl among his acquaintances there. This was to no avail, however, because the young woman politely turned down the offer.²⁴ As this operation was more diplomatic than sentimental, it confirms the impression that Des Marez needed to get married in order to secure his

in 1899), while the others created the Amis Philanthropes n°2. Between both lodges, close links were maintained. Members of one lodge were frequently invited to address the other lodge. The newly recruited Des Marez was, for example, invited to talk on May 6, 1901 before the Amis Philanthropes (without number), on "*l'organisation du travail à Bruxelles au XVe siècle*". This was the title of what was to become his important book, published in 1904, which would mark his entry into the Brussels' scientific world. At the same moment, Emile Vandervelde came to speak before the lodge of the Amis Philanthropes n°2 on Socialism... (Anonymous, 1999, 230; Quatuor Coronati Bruxellensis, 1979, 76).

²² Des Marez's correspondence from March 1901 is full of testimonies regarding these recent affiliations: MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 18.

²³ At Menin in the same period, the socialist leader August 'Slunse' De Bunne (1872-1963) was active. This lifelong socialist member of parliament (1906-1948) and burgomaster of Menin (1921-1938) was close to the Ghent socialist leader Edward Anseele. De Bunne established a socialist movement following the Ghent model in Menin. The rank and file of his movement were the numerous Flemish frontier workers (Defoort, 1998).

²⁴ MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 18, letter dated May 7, 1901: "Cher Monsieur, j'ai eu l'occasion de rencontrer la personne en question. On m'a fait observer que le deuil était trop récent et que d'ailleurs, pour le moment, la jeune fille n'avait pas l'intention de se marier. Dans ces circonstances, je n'ai pas cru devoir insister et je regrette que ma démarche n'ait pas eu un résultat satisfaisant" ("Dear sir, I had the opportunity to meet with the young person. One has made me understand that her mourning was much too recent and that the girl does not intend to get married. Under these circumstances, I did not find it useful to pursue it further and I have to inform you that unfortunately my undertaking did not yield any result so far").

remarkable social ascent. The archives show, in fact, that a socially exclusive group was moulding the newcomer whom they had accepted as a member. The history of the Free University of Brussels at the beginning of the 20th century is full of similar cases.²⁵ Its ideological nature as a 'Free' university, its situation in the nation's capital in the midst of ideological battles between Catholics and liberals, between traditional and radical liberals, and between liberals and socialists, both necessitated and facilitated an expansion of its scientific and academic personnel. By 1894, with the creation of the *Université Nouvelle* the ULB had recognised the need to confront social changes and scientific and ideological debates much more openly.²⁶ In addition, university education had to be updated in order to address the new technological and scientific needs of industry and those who thought that understanding mass movements and the governance of social organisations was fundamental.²⁷ New disciplines and revised curriculum were needed to include sociology, political economy, psychology and the commercial sciences. Development of these was essential in the eyes of the captains of

²⁵ Des Marez's case is not without resemblance to the case of Jean Massart (1865-1925), a young biologist and physiologist of modest origins, who was propelled to succeed Léo Errera, who had died unexpectedly: F. Stockmans (1973-1974, col. 561-569), and more recently: S. Denaeayer, J-P. Herremans, & J. Vermander (2006, 26-45). On Massart's network, the same as that of Des Marez: B. Notteboom (2006, 51-68). On his social career and his marriage to Marguerite Alvin, see: P. Héger, "Notice sur la vie et les travaux de Jean Massart, professeur à la Faculté des Sciences", *Rapport de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles sur l'année académique 1924-1925*, Brussels, 1926, pp. 36-41.

²⁶ The *Université Nouvelle* of Brussels was the result of serious conflicts within the *Université Libre*, liberalism in Brussels and Brussels Freemasonry, dating from the Dwelshauvers affair (1890), named after a young scientist who was forced by his master, the spiritual philosopher and freemason Guillaume Tiberghien, to withdraw his Ph.D. dissertation after it was judged to be too positivist. In this conflict, the authoritarian dogmatism of certain teachers at ULB was brought to light, which divided the Board of Governors (composed through co-optation by representatives of the Brussels' liberals and freemasons), faculty and students. The division was exposed once more in the case of Elisée Reclus (1894). The board had forbidden the opening of a course on Comparative Geography which this French scholar was supposed to teach, because the board disliked his sympathy for anarchist ideas. (In the previous year in Paris, Auguste Vaillant had tossed a bomb into the houses of parliament). A significant group of the faculty as well as the students turned their back on the university and started, with the help of the most progressive freemasons and some local notables, a dissident university which remained open until the end of World War I (Uyttebrouck, 1984, 21-25; see also Noel, 1988).

²⁷ Ernest Solvay evidently took charge of this movement. With him marched a group of prominent industrialists: his brother Alfred, Raoul Warocqué, master of the coal industry at Mariemont and financiers like Georges Brugmann and Léon Lambert. Solvay supported the *Université Nouvelle*, and before he ended up in conflict he employed some of the leaders of the 1894 secession, like Hector Denis and Guillaume Degreef.

industry and Belgian capitalism. They wanted ambitious young scholars, not yet committed to traditional scientific directions, to identify and develop these new paths of learning and teaching. What were needed were brilliant minds, sufficiently malleable and flexible to accept embarking on an intellectual journey which was inadequately mapped and subject to intense debates and controversy. Guillaume Des Marez undoubtedly matched this portrait.²⁸ His notes for the 1899 conference paper, "La conception historique moderne" ("modern historical concepts"), noted above, illustrate his intellectual position at the time. He naturally situated himself in Pirenne's train, following the latter's famous article in the 1897 *Revue Historique*, "Une polémique historique en Allemagne" ("Historical polemics in Germany").²⁹ After citing the text extensively, Des Marez expanded upon its meaning, taking a stand as a convinced evolutionist in the footsteps of the positivist sciences:

"Quant à moi, je n'hésite pas à m'avouer transformiste et évolutionniste en histoire... Quels que soient les obstacles qu'on élève pour empêcher l'idée nouvelle, celle-ci restera victorieuse. C'est qu'elle est la résultante naturelle de l'évolution de la conception historique elle-même et que l'on ne saurait aller à l'encontre de ce qui est dans l'ordre régulier et normal du développement de l'esprit humain. Le principe de l'évolution, qui est adopté dans les sciences naturelles, philosophiques, juridiques même... ne tardera pas à recevoir la reconnaissance unanime des historiens..." ("As far as I'm concerned, I do not hesitate to confess that I am a transformist and evolutionist in things historical... Whatever obstacles are raised in order to impede the new ideas, they will be victorious in the long run. This is because they will prove to be the natural outcome of the evolution of the very notion of history, and one cannot restrain what is part of the natural and normal order of development of the human spirit. The principle of evolution, as adopted by the natural sciences, philosophy and even the juridical sciences ... will one day be generally adopted by historians").³⁰

This radical view definitely demonstrates that Des Marez was making overtures to a group which could offer support for his university career – not the

²⁸ P. Bourdieu (1984, 87) recalls "l'orthodoxie des professeurs canoniques, passés par la voie royale des concours, et l'hérésie tempérée des chercheurs et des professeurs marginaux ou originaux, souvent parvenus à la consécration par des voies de traverse...". At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the latter type of academics had become very interesting given the way society had evolved.

²⁹ H. Pirenne, "Une polémique historique en Allemagne", in *Revue Historique*, 22, 1897, pp. 50-57; for an electronic version, see: http://digistore.bib.ulb.ac.be/2006/a12995_000_f.pdf

³⁰ MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 17, notes in preparation of a conference presented in Bruges in December 1899, entitled "La manière moderne de faire de l'histoire", (the modern way of practising history), p. 9.

historians, as one might suspect, but the sociologists, who were building alternative academic support for knowledge and control in an industrial society. In his inaugural lecture on the History of Law, Des Marez repeated the essence of his 1899 paper almost literally, as he presented law as the product and result of economic and social conditions, which becomes visible in everyday practice. The sociologists received this text positively, although in varying degrees of enthusiasm, and it was published in 1902, only weeks after its oral presentation.³¹ In a short note, Pirenne reacted with sympathy but clearly took a stand as the master of the newly acclaimed master:

"Mon Cher Des Marez, j'ai été privé ...du plaisir de vous féliciter de votre remarquable leçon inaugurale que j'ai lue hier soir. Je vous y retrouve tout entier, avec votre rigueur et votre clarté et il me semblait, en la parcourant, entendre le son de votre voix. Je ne vous parlerai pas des idées décrites, puisqu'elles nous sont communes et chères à l'un comme à l'autre. C'est le côté pédagogique (souligné), qui m'a surtout intéressé, dans votre traitement de l'imparfait. Votre cours d'histoire du droit, tout en restant scientifique, doit être compris en Belgique (souligné)" ("My dear Des Marez, I was unable ... to congratulate you on your remarkable inaugural lecture, which I read yesterday evening. I found it entirely yours, with your rigour and clarity, and in going through it I even seemed to hear your voice. I do not refer to the ideas it contained, which we share and cherish, both of us, you and me. I was struck by its pedagogical (underlined) impact and how you use the past tense. Your course on the history of law, although of scientific relevance, ought to be understood in Belgium (underlined)").³²

Des Marez's text did not use the past tense in the elaborate way often employed in French, but contained literal translations from Flemish and used the style of French spoken by Francophones of Flemish descent. In the margins of Pirenne's congratulations, he kept and emphasised a certain distance.

³¹ G. Des Marez, "La conception sociale et économique de l'histoire du droit. Leçon d'ouverture du cours d'histoire du droit, 4 mars 1902", *Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles*, VII, 1902, pp. 537-559. Concerning its reception: MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 18, correspondence of May 1902, more precisely letters by Philipson and Hoffmann.

³² MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 18, letter from Pirenne to Des Marez, May 11th 1902. This letter was not entirely understood by Bryce Lyon (1999, 1064). Pirenne's handwriting is indeed very difficult to read.

5. EMANCIPATION FROM THE PATRON: THE 'ESPINAS CASE'

Des Marez now occupied the position of a young man who had gained access into a social milieu and held positions which would normally have been unattainable. He had two possible paths before him: one marked by obedience and gratitude, the other by a strong individual affirmation of arrogant, even imprudent, egotism. It soon became clear that Des Marez had chosen the second road.³³ He wrote a highly critical, if not arrogant, review of the works of Georges Espinas (1869-1948), a close collaborator and friend of Pirenne.³⁴ The debate pitting Des Marez against Espinas is a rather famous clash of scholars, at least in the small world of Belgian medievalists. It started with Des Marez's critical review of Espinas' booklet on Jehan Boinebroke, a rich Douai-based merchant from the 13th century, specifically on the relationships between employers and employees in the medieval drapery industry.³⁵ In this particular case what caused the upheaval was not so much the question of which of the two contenders was 'right'³⁶, but that Des Marez broke the unwritten rule of solidarity among the close circle

³³ In a letter by Pirenne to his pupil, both affectionate, ironical and clearly with a nostalgic touch we learn that from 1901 onwards Des Marez was changing, on his own initiative, his relationship with his old master: "Mon Cher Des Marez, Que devenez-vous? Je commence à croire qu'une transformation profonde soit intervenue dans votre existence car je n'ai jamais été si longtemps sans aucun signe de vie de votre part. Je serais pourtant content d'avoir des nouvelles... Il me semble que vous me deviez tenir au courant puisque vous m'avez pris pour collaborateur..." ("My dear Des Marez, what's happening to you? I almost come to believe that a profound change occurred in your existence, for I never was without any news for such a long time. I would be very grateful to have any news... should you not keep me informed, after all you hired me as your collaborator..."). MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 18, letter by Pirenne to Des Marez, April 12th 1901. P. Bourdieu (1984, 88) analyses this kind of relationship in stating that "conformité ou rupture sont inséparablement scientifiques et sociaux".

³⁴ See: B. Lyon (1999, 1065-1066). Georges Espinas' career is described in a necrology by R. Grand (1948, 337-339) (Espinas was an ex chartist, student of the École des Chartes) and the article by L. Febvre (1950, 535).

³⁵ The contentious review was published in the *Revue de l'Instruction publique en Belgique*, XLIV, 1905, pp. 118-123. Des Marez made use of the Boinebroke case as an example in his seminars given at the Institut de Sociologie. From 1904 onwards he formulated some criticism, which he brought together in his 1905 review: MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 8, notes in preparation of a seminar on economic history.

³⁶ The state of the art nowadays tends to give the advantage to Des Marez, cf. A. Derville (1972, 357-361) who by the way does not refer to Des Marez.

surrounding Pirenne.³⁷ The Brussels municipal archives contain an impressive collection of letters dedicated to this discussion between Espinas and Des Marez.³⁸ They clearly illustrate the extent to which a young scholar in full scientific ascent could be caught up by the facts, so much so that he defended his own point of view at all cost. What were the facts? Des Marez elaborated his point well, and did not use an aggressive tone. The main point he argued is that Espinas over-simplified social relations in the Douai textile industry. In the review, Des Marez referred to his own study on the labour organisation in late medieval Brussels, another way of seeking recognition for his own scholarship. Once the review was published, Espinas naturally wrote a response. This response, which he carefully sent to Pirenne first, is long enough to be an article on its own. In certain mildly ironic statements, he cast doubt on Des Marez's methodology, particularly on his extrapolations from the Brussels example. Pirenne sent the text to Des Marez, along with an understanding letter of his own, hoping this would calm his pupil. In vain. Des Marez felt offended:

"Je proteste et protesterai avec énergie contre la méthode défectueuse qui m'est attribuée. Je n'ai nulle part identifié Douai et Bruxelles ni pris Bruxelles comme souveraine justification. D'autre part tous mes écrits monographiques et tout mon enseignement protestent contre cette manière, par trop en usage parmi les historiens actuels, de vouloir grouper en un seul et même champ des textes empruntés à des milieux différents... laisser croire que vraiment j'étais, en matière de reconstitution historique un défaut aussi capital... c'est me faire gratuitement tort dans ma situation de professeur, c'est-à-dire de *docens*, appelé à apprendre, dans mon séminaire, à mes élèves, comment il faut aborder une étude historique..." ("I do protest forcefully against the fact that I am presented as being someone using defective methodology. I never identified Douai with Brussels, nor did I put forward Brussels as 'the example'. All my monographs so far, all my teaching, oppose the method too often used by historians to bring together texts drawn from different environments... to make people believe that I would commit such an error when aiming at a historical reconstruction... is to attack me in the heart of my professional occupation, as a professor, as a scholar who 'teaches' in his seminar, in front of his pupils, on the question of how to approach a historical problem").³⁹

Pirenne, unquestioned and well established, clearly had not foreseen to what extent Des Marez still considered his own position as vulnerable and

³⁷. See the interesting remarks by P. Bourdieu (1984, 80-81), concerning the importance of group values and an *esprit de corps* within these professional groups.

³⁸. MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 12, Clash Espinas-Des Marez, May 29-August 2nd 1905.

³⁹. MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 12, minute, letter by Des Marez to Pirenne of June 22nd 1905, written on official letter paper from the Brussels' archives.

therefore could not abide any criticism. In Pirenne's eyes the question was different: he was affected by the dispute but on different grounds. Pirenne regarded this as a genuine scholarly debate, and he was worried about the status of what one might call his (emerging) school in the wider scientific community. In his eyes it was crucial to preserve internal cohesion and unity around what he called 'our ideas', a socio-economic interpretation of history and the practice of urban history focused on comparison. Both Espinas and Des Marez were useful, each in his own place, to strengthen this focus in the field of history.⁴⁰ Pirenne could not allow Des Marez to break up the united front, while Des Marez on his part could not understand how his own professor could minimise the impact of the blow that he felt he had received. The mutual incomprehension seemed enormous.

Des Marez wrote a long (11 pages) and sour rejoinder to Espinas' response to his original review! It opened with the following words:

"Sans protestation de ma part, [cette réponse] serait de nature à discréditer l'enseignement théorique et pratique que je donne à l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, en tant que professeur d'histoire du droit et d'histoire économique et en tant que directeur du séminaire d'histoire du droit" ("Leaving this response without protest would go against the very nature of the theoretical and practical education I dispense at the Free University of Brussels, as its professor of the history of law, professor of economic history and director of the seminar for legal history").

Pirenne then attempted to deploy his authority: he summoned Des Marez to the tavern where they usually meet in Brussels. On the invitation Des Marez wrote:

"répondre que je suis empêché" ("[I] respond that I am incapable of attending the meeting").

Pirenne could only note Des Marez's unwillingness. The letter in which, throwing in the towel, Pirenne reacted to the vitriolic text his pupil had written against Des Marez, is full of delicate and affectionate language:

"Aujourd'hui, je suis plus désolé que jamais de voir deux travailleurs du même champ d'études, liés d'amitié jusqu'ici, se brouiller si malheureusement. Par votre lettre, vous dites que vous 'rompez' décidément avec Espinas. Où en sera l'avantage et pour lui et pour vous et pour nos études? Consentiriez-vous à ce que je cherche à

⁴⁰ From 1903 on, Pirenne incites Des Marez to publish in the new German review which is dominating the field, the *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial-und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*. "Je voudrais que votre nom figurât aussi dans la revue comme une preuve de notre vitalité dans le domaine de ces études" ("I would love to see your name in that review as a testimony of our vitality in that particular field of study"): letter of November 1st 1903, cited by B. Lyon (1999, 1064).

calmer un incident qui a pris à mon sens des proportions irraisonnables? Remarquez que je comprends bien votre émotion mais je suis convaincu d'autre part que vous vous êtes mépris sur les intentions d'Espinas... Je pense qu'Espinas retirera la lettre ou en modifiera les termes quand il saura comment vous les avez interprétés et comment, je me hâte de le dire, il vous donnait la voie de les interpréter..." ("Today I am so sad watching men who should stand together labouring in the same field of study, friends until now, fall apart and rage against each other in such an unfortunate way. In your letter you announce you are 'breaking' definitely with Espinas. What good is there in all this for him and for you and for our studies? Would you allow me to try to bring calm to an incident which has taken on disproportionate dimensions? Know that I fully understand your feelings, although I am still convinced that you misjudge Espinas' intentions. I am quite sure that Espinas will take back his letter or will agree to modify it, as soon as he understands how you interpret it and how, I hasten to say, he gave you reason to read it like you do...")

and he adds

"ne me répondez pas dans votre premier mouvement, le second est souvent le bon. Et comptez en tout cas que je n'agis, dans tout ceci que par amitié pour les deux combattants et surtout pour celui des deux, avec lequel je suis lié depuis le plus longtemps, par une confiance et une affection réciproques" ("do not answer me with your first spontaneous reaction; the second is often the good one. And be sure that in all this I am only driven by friendship for the two contenders and foremost with the one with whom I am by far the longest acquainted and linked by mutual trust and affection").⁴¹

Des Marez hesitated but could only reiterate his request that Espinas' response should not be published:

"Je continue à croire que si la réponse de Monsieur Espinas était exacte, il ne resterait rien de ma personne. Moralement, je coulerais dans ma situation" ("I continue to believe that if Espinas' answer proves to be true, nothing will remain of my person. Morally I would be destroyed").⁴²

Pirenne continued to negotiate for an end to the conflict, but in vain. The master finally became impatient:

"Le débat Espinas-Des Marez est aussi compliqué que la question marocaine et menace de durer aussi longtemps qu'elle. Je ne me sens pas les talents diplomatiques nécessaires, pour la conduire à bonne fin et je crois qu'il faudra se résigner à communiquer ou publier comme un 'blue book', les pièces primitives du procès. Plaisanterie à part, je le regretterais sincèrement" ("The debate between

⁴¹. MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 12, letter of July 5, 1905.

⁴². MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 12, letter of July 7, 1905.

Espinas and Des Marez is as complicated as the Moroccan question and may take just as much time. I do not feel I have enough diplomatic talent to end it expeditiously. I think we have to resign ourselves to communicating publicly as in a 'blue book', the original documents of a famous trial. Joking aside, this only fills me with regret").⁴³

After several more exchanges Espinas asked permission to react to Des Marez's response... This time even Des Marez realised that the debate had to end. He composed alternatives, grinding his teeth as he remembered Espinas' peculiar psychology.⁴⁴ Pressed by Pirenne, Espinas finally ceded and recalled the entire polemic.⁴⁵ As the war ended before it really started, there would normally be nothing left of this Homeric battle between academics. We are only able to reconstruct it because Des Marez kept meticulous track of the conflict in his personal archives, even copying out by hand several of Espinas' letters, and keeping notes of his own letters with the original letters from Pirenne.⁴⁶ Neither did Des Marez concede defeat. In the following year, 1906, for the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, he wrote a rather critical assessment of the first part of the *Documents relatifs à l'histoire drapière en Flandre*, a joint publication by Pirenne and Espinas.⁴⁷ Pirenne was surprised but refused to dissociate himself from Espinas. Pirenne's reaction again was surprisingly mild, confirming his absolute loyalty towards Des Marez.⁴⁸ Shortly afterwards, when Des Marez could no longer refrain from questioning his master, he directly attacked some of Pirenne's social interpretations, concerning the nature of the participants in the battle of Cassel (1328), for instance. Finally, in the introduction to one of his last publications, Des Marez formulated an axiom which completely contradicted Pirenne's theses:

"Une économie domaniale évoluée, loin d'être exclusive de l'économie urbaine, renferme en elle le germe de celle-ci... Comme le grand domaine, la ville est le résultat, non d'un apport extérieur, mais d'un dynamisme interne, dont le degré d'action pouvait se trouver augmenté ou amoindri par des causes externes..." ("A

⁴³. MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 12, letter of July 15, 1905. The evocation of the 'Moroccan question' refers to the current political debate in 1905 over the colonial ambitions of France and Germany. It resulted in the first important international manifestation of American diplomacy.

⁴⁴. MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 12, letter of July 19, 1905.

⁴⁵. MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 12, letter by Pirenne to Des Marez, July 25, 1905.

⁴⁶. Bryce Lyon clearly did not consult the archives kept at the Brussels municipal archives, because the whole affair is only partially known to him through the Pirenne correspondence. He even misjudges the work of Espinas as originally reviewed by Des Marez.

⁴⁷. Des Marez (G.), "Espinas (G.) Pirenne (H.), La draperie en Flandre. Recueil de textes", *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, 1906, col. 2707-2709.

⁴⁸. This second affair is correctly treated in B. Lyon (1999, 1066).

more evolved domanian economy is not cut off from urban economy, on the contrary, it contains all the seeds allowing the latter to grow... Like the grand demesne, the city is not the result of an external force, but of internal dynamism, fuelled or halted by external causes").⁴⁹

Such shocking behaviour violated all academic custom and must have been very upsetting in the small world of Belgian historians. We have to take this into account in order to explain the distance, if not the hostile antipathy, several Ghent historians – all pupils of Pirenne – maintained towards Des Marez. It also explains the latter's growing isolation from what had been his original university. François-Louis Ganshof (1931, 1381-1385) wrote about Des Marez in a worthy but notably cold manner after the latter's death. From his more personal memoirs, never meant to be published, Hans Van Werveke appears to have thought Des Marez's behaviour truly scandalous.⁵⁰ Pirenne, for one, was only embarrassed by the criticism of Des Marez once, when he attacked Espinas. After Des Marez's death, Pirenne recalled with slightly ironic tenderness the former's self-confidence, absolute surety, and belief that he could succeed in everything, which Pirenne presented as something original, even anti-conformist.⁵¹

⁴⁹. MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 17, single page from a report to the Academy, non identified. This point of view is argued in: Des Marez (G.), "De la phase préconstitutionnelle dans la formation des villes belges", communication au Congrès de la Fédération archéologique et historique de Belgique tenu à Anvers en 1930, *Études inédites publiées par un groupe de ses anciens élèves, précédées d'une notice sur Guillaume Des Marez par H. Pirenne*, Brussels, 1936, pp. 50-53.

⁵⁰. To quote his posthumously published memoirs: "In de jaren na 1918 heeft Des Marez gerebelleerd. Bepaalde stellingen die hij verdedigde, onder andere inzake oorsprong van de steden en ontstaan van het ambachtswezen, gingen regelrecht tegen de opvattingen van Pirenne in. *A priori* was dit natuurlijk niet af te keuren. De leerling kan gelijk hebben tegen de meester. In feite was dit niet het geval" ("In the years following 1918 Des Marez was the rebel. Some of his points of view, notably concerning the origins of towns and of the guilds went directly against the theses of Pirenne. This is not wrong *per se*, the pupil can be right and prove the master to be wrong. This was, however, not the case") (H. Van Werveke, 2000, 121).

⁵¹. Pirenne (H.), "Notice sur Guillaume Des Marez" in: G. Des Marez, *Études inédites publiées par un groupe de ses anciens élèves*, Brussels, 1936, p. 7. We might propose another interpretation which takes into account what preceded. It was perhaps the utter absence of self-confidence and the wish that he would always be successful, rather than the belief, that characterised Des Marez, for obvious social reasons which are more obvious to us than they were to Pirenne.

6. DES MAREZ'S MODERNITY

As an anti-conformist, Des Marez confirmed his role in other fields besides supposed filial piety towards Pirenne.

At the level of intellectual activities and historical practices, he explored several new paths, often triggered by topical problems, such as the polemical development within social science for one. For this, his tenure in the *Institut de Sociologie* and his entire intellectual journey were essential.⁵² Other debates which fuelled his research concerned working conditions in his own time and the urgent need to establish trade-unions⁵³, or the problems caused by urbanism in large cities invaded by new modern functions and suffocating traffic.⁵⁴ Des Marez was also a forerunner and innovative scholar in his activities as an archivist and as a historian attentive to the role played by (urban) space.⁵⁵ Els Witte has recently emphasised that, just like that other

⁵² MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 8 Institut de Sociologie, groupe d'histoire, Paper by Des Marez on the foundation of a historical group within the sociological institute (March 14, 1904). This fundamental text is a programme for further research in the field of historical sociology. Des Marez explains what he understands by 'ideal type'. He urges all collaborators in the institute to formulate their working notes to use all historical work in order to stimulate sociology. Lamprecht is often cited in this text, while Pirenne is totally absent...

⁵³ See the following publications: G. Des Marez, "Le compagnonnage des chapeliers bruxellois (1576-1909). Pages d'histoire syndicale", in *Annales de la Société royale d'Archéologie de Bruxelles*, XXXIII, 1909, pp. 137-244; *Les syndicats industriels. Le passé* par G. Des Marez *Le présent* par G. De Leener, Brussels, 1910, Institut Solvay, Institut de Sociologie. Sommaire de la réunion collective de la semaine sociale, 16 avril 1910; G. Des Marez, "L'évolution historique du mouvement syndical, corporations, compagnonnages, mutualités", Semaine sociale du 6-11 octobre 1913; Report by Marcel Vauthier, pp. 87-101; G. Des Marez, *Les origines historiques du mouvement syndical en Belgique*, syllabus of the course of the extension of the Université de Bruxelles, Brussels, 1913; a second version of this text was published in 1925 in French and in 1926 in Dutch respectively in *l'Eglantine*, 3, no. 10, 35p. and in *De Wilde Roos*, 4, no. 6.

⁵⁴ Des Marez was an active member of the Comité historique du Vieux-Bruxelles, founded by burgomaster Charles Buls with the aim to preserve at least a photographic testimony of the old quarters of the city condemned by extensive construction on the Mont-des-Arts and the railway junction. In this context of urban upheaval, Des Marez engaged in last-minute archaeology. As the city archivist he intervened in person at important sites and kept a journal of the discoveries in the soil of Brussels and irreversible destruction. Actually the regional archaeological department considers him a pioneer and irreplaceable testifier to things lost forever (Cabuy & Demeter, 1995, 56-57; Demeter, 2004, 147-150).

⁵⁵ A. Vanrie (2006-2007, 23-26) recalls how Des Marez, helped by Max Fauconnier, was among the first to attach importance to the organisation of the photographic archival collection and the preservation of contemporary economic and social records in the municipal archives of Brussels. Completely new was his attention to cinematographic sources: G. Des Marez, "Les archives cinématographiques", in *Actes du Congrès international des Archivistes et*

medievalist Pirenne, Des Marez studied contemporary history without any following at a time when it was still not considered worthy of academic attention (Witte, 2007, 47, 63, 90, 92). Des Marez wrote studies on social organisations and collective movements which were ahead of their time. Many of his views on these subjects, as with his approach to property rights in a urban setting, sound extremely 'modern' and have often been confirmed or reinvented by more current research.⁵⁶

Des Marez was also a non-conformist on the level of his personal life and morality. The inner circle must have been aware, although they guarded it as a secret, that he was openly gay.⁵⁷ One hypothesis is that he became aware of his sexual orientation during the male-oriented and alcohol-imbued evenings he spent in Berlin (Lyon, 1999, 1056-1059). He saved many letters sent to him in the years 1901-1902 by a young Austrian historian of the early modern period, letters which movingly express an outspoken, tender friendship.⁵⁸ Later on, both the university and scientific circles in Brussels were well informed about his intimate relationship, which only ended with Des Marez's death, with Dutch archivist Pierre de Lom de Berg, member of the *Société d'archéologie de Bruxelles* after 1908 (Martens, 1988, 77).⁵⁹ When Des

Bibliothécaires, tenu à Bruxelles les 28-31 août 1910, Brussels, 1912, pp. 383-384. Concerning space: G. Des Marez, *Étude sur l'origine et le développement de la Ville de Bruxelles. Le quartier Isabelle et Terarken*, Paris, Brussels, 1927, with illustrations (Publication du Comité Historique du Vieux-Bruxelles) and G. Des Marez, "Le développement territorial de Bruxelles au moyen âge", published by P. Bonenfant and F. Quicke, Foreword by F.-L. Ganshof, *1er Congrès international de géographie historique*, III, Brussels, 1935, 90 p., plans.

⁵⁶. See especially his *Les origines historiques du mouvement syndical en Belgique*, Brussels, 1913. When Jan Dhondt wrote his article on the origins of trade-union movements in 1948, he dedicated it to the memory of Des Marez (Dhondt, 1948, 393-437). A recent overview of the state of the art concerning the study of social movements concerning the later Middle Ages can be found in M. Boone (2010, 29-56).

⁵⁷. Only the biographical sketch by M. Martens (1988, 77) contains a hint in that direction.

⁵⁸. MAB, Papiers Des Marez, carton 18; copious correspondence with Hans Schlitter (1901-1902).

⁵⁹. See also the way in which L. Van Meerbeek (1982, 19) evokes the bond between Des Marez and his friend. De Lom de Berg left his personal archives and the art library of Des Marez, which he may have acquired, to the University of Nijmegen (nowadays Radboud university). The documents are now incorporated in the university library of Nijmegen: <http://webdoc.ubn.nl/anon/c/capiseuid/cs000008.htm>

We sincerely thank Madame Symons, archivist of the city of Brussels, who directed us towards these sources. De Lom de Berg is presented as a Belgian and as an archivist of the city of Brussels. It is not impossible that Des Marez had such an appointment in mind concerning his friend. What is beyond doubt is that they worked together on several dossiers. In the introduction to his study on the hat-makers of Brussels, Guillaume Des Marez offers sincere appreciation to his friend: G. Des Marez, "Le compagnonnage des chapeliers bruxellois (1576-

Marez's students at the ULB held a ceremony for him in 1927, they explicitly invited Des Marez's friend.⁶⁰ This friend informed the academic authorities that Des Marez was incapable of teaching, given his illness, in the autumn of 1932.⁶¹ Logically, the university sent its condolences to him, once the news had spread that Des Marez had died. One is tempted to explain the remarkable intellectual affiliations claimed or hidden by Des Marez's pupils by the latter's sexual orientation, which was, of course, strongly condemned in his day. Historians as Félicien Favresse, Henri Laurent and Jean de Sturler naturally paid their loyal respects to their master, but it is striking to what extent both in the case of Favresse and de Sturler, Pirenne loomed above all others when it comes to expressing gratitude.⁶²

In the very surroundings to which Des Marez had given the best of his energy and creativity, the Brussels archives, he encountered the most animosity and incomprehension. Charles Pergameni (1879-1959), a historian Des Marez had introduced into the Brussels archives early in his career, did nothing to commemorate his colleague and chief (Vanrie, 2006-2007, 27-30).⁶³ After absenting himself from the tribute to Des Marez organised in 1927, Pergameni put his own name alone on the analytical inventory of the Brussels archives, the fundamental project in which his predecessor had invested exhaustive research and intellectual effort for the benefit of users of the archives.⁶⁴

A final illustration of the way in which Des Marez succeeded in alienating his companions came at his funeral. His ULB colleagues and the members of his Masonic lodge were all invited to attend his funeral, but upon their arrival they discovered that a religious mass was to be celebrated in the church of Notre-Dame de la Cambre, a building Des Marez had actively worked to

1909). Pages d'histoire syndicale", in *Annales de la Société royale d'Archéologie de Bruxelles*, XXXIII, 1909, p. 6.

⁶⁰ *Manifestation Guillaume Des Marez* [on the occasion of 25 years of teaching at the ULB], 12 November 1927, Archives de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, ULB/H12, DESMAR 526*G/n°4: De Lom de Berg is mentioned among the invited guests: p. 1.

⁶¹ Archives de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, personal dossier of Des Marez, 1 P 88.

⁶² F. Favresse (1932, 3-4); he expresses his thanks in an copious way to the Fondation Pirenne; J. de Sturler (1936, 26).

⁶³ The Des Marez archives contain irrefutable proof of the animosity of Pergameni towards his superior, as in the angry notes written on many administrative records.

⁶⁴ On this affair and concerning other rather dark aspects of Pergameni's tenure in the Brussels' archives: Y. Leblicq (1981, 8-9) and A. Vanrie (2006-2007, 29-30).

preserve.⁶⁵ Legend has it that on that occasion, Pirenne exhorted the bystanders, who were reluctant, to enter the church. As the freemasons remained outside, Pirenne went in alone to join the Des Marez family and close friends in mourning, thus marking his loyalty to his favourite pupil until the very end (Lyon, 1999, 1076).⁶⁶

In 1927 during the jubilee organised for Des Marez by his former history students, he recounted the following anecdote to Pirenne:

"Un jour – je venais de terminer mes études – dans une de ces conversations familières dont vous avez seul le secret et qui enveloppent l'âme de vos auditeurs d'un charme si prenant, vous énumérez votre généalogie spirituelle et vous disiez, à la manière de la Genèse, un tel genuit un tel, Frédéricq genuit Pirenne, Pirenne genuit Des Marez, Des Marez genuit nihil. Maître, il y a trente ans que vous m'avez tenu ce plaisant discours. Depuis, j'ai suivi ma voie. L'esprit a engendré l'esprit, et voilà que je vous amène un cortège d'enfants, garçons et filles, qui agitent leurs mains vers vous et vous tendent des couronnes. Reconnaissez-les, ce sont vos petits-enfants. Vous êtes leur aïeul" ("One day, – I only just ended my studies – in the course of one of these exchanges you alone are party to and which capture the very soul of your audience, you mentioned your spiritual genealogy and you told us, in the manner of Genesis, so and so brought forth so and so, Frédéricq brought forth Pirenne, Pirenne brought forth Des Marez, and Des Marez brought forth nobody. Master, thirty years ago you told me this. Ever since I have followed my own path, the spirit engendered the spirit, and look: I bring you a whole group of children, boys and girls, who wave to you and offer you a crown. Recognise them as your grandchildren. You are their ancestor").⁶⁷

This is perplexing to read now. We wonder about the exact context in which Pirenne said this to Des Marez, and would like to understand what revenge Des Marez had in mind. When he mentioned his pupils, he indicated that there are girls and boys. Counting the ones which are apparent, there were 11 girls and 7 boys and even then some of them were only distant pupils of Des Marez. This was, for instance, the case of Paul Bonenfant, who did not write his Masters nor his Ph.D. dissertation with the historian he was soon to replace.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ From 1911 on, Des Marez was alarmed by the projects to transform the site. G. Des Marez, "L'abbaye de la Cambre. Historique, description, projets de transformation", *Tekhnè*, 1911, pp. 441-452. He then became an active member of the "Ligue des Amis de la Cambre".

⁶⁶ Lyon recalls that he heard the story from F.-L. Ganshof who was present at the funeral.

⁶⁷ *Manifestation Guillaume Des Marez*, 12 November 1927, Archives de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, ULB/H12, DESMAR 526*G/n°4, p. 10.

⁶⁸ Among the former female pupils of Des Marez: Madame Vincent-Cooreman (professor École normale Emile-André), Ghislaine De Boom (Royal Library), Valérie Lamy (Athénée of Brussels), Suzanne Tassier (Lycée Schaerbeek), Mathilde Bingen, Josine Lothaire, Laure

Undoubtedly Des Marez was only a weak link in the chain of Pirenne's descent, a broken link. His career and biography illustrate how profoundly the scientific and academic world was heading for change. A man of several transgressions, Des Marez embodies the entrance of the Belgian scientific milieu into the 20th century, a new world in which one could become a university professor without belonging to the social elite, a world in which women could become doctors, a world in which the well-kept barriers between disciplines tended to disappear, in which history became 'total', in which cinematographic and publicity documents acquired the status of historical sources (Des Marez was among the first to enter them into official archives), a world which would eventually eclipse Pirenne. It was a world symbolised by the contested figure of Des Marez, whom Pirenne himself never abjured.⁶⁹

ABBREVIATIONS

MAB Municipal archives of Brussels

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Archives Des Marez; Papiers Des Marez
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Wallon, misses Puttemans, Van Volsem (Athénée of Brussels), Lejour (Professor in Windsor-Canada), Chase; the male pupils: Bautier, Crick, Bonenfant, Favresse, Jacquemyns, Laurent, Barjon. The list of female students should be increased by Andrée Dewandre and Lucienne Van Meerbeeck: L. Van Meerbeeck (1982, 16). On Bonenfant: G. Despy (1989, 69-70), Paul Bonenfant was a student of Michel Huisman.

⁶⁹. Thanks to Colleague Jean-Pierre Devroey (ULB) for his interesting remarks.

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**Pirenne in Brussel voor 1930. Guillaume Des Marez en de relatie tussen
een pupil en zijn leermeester**

CLAIRE BILLEN
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SAMENVATTING

Als geliefkoosde leerling van Henri Pirenne en als een vriend voor het leven, dankte Guillaume Des Marez zijn academische en professionele positie aan de liberale Brusselse netwerken die zijn leermeester had gemobiliseerd. Des Marez voelde zich daarom niet uitgesproken schatplichtig en hij legde dan ook geen intellectuele afhankelijkheid noch enige onderdanigheid aan de dag. Integendeel: eens vast in het zadel als hoogleraar aan de ULB en als stadsarchivaris, cultiveerde Des Marez zijn onafhankelijkheid, getuige de bij momenten stormachtige briefwisseling tussen beiden. Een en ander illustreert, samen met andere elementen uit het carrièreverloop van Des Marez, welke fundamentele veranderingen er bij de aanvang van de twintigste eeuw het sociale functioneren in universitaire en wetenschappelijke netwerken kenmerkten. Bovenop de opleiding die hij bij Pirenne in Gent had genoten, vertoonde Des Marez een vroegtijdige moderne kijk op de dingen die fundamenteel bijdroegen aan het verbreden van zijn actieradius als historicus en als bewust wegbereider van een doorgedreven vervrouwelijking van het historisch beroep.

Pirene à Bruxelles avant 1930. Guillaume Des Marez et la relation entre un élève et son maître

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RÉSUMÉ

Élève favori d'Henri Pirene, ami de toute une vie, Guillaume Des Marez dut sa position académique et professionnelle aux réseaux libéraux bruxellois activés par son maître. Cette dette n'entraîna aucune dépendance intellectuelle, aucune servilité de la part du disciple. Au contraire, une fois établi comme professeur à l'Université Libre de Bruxelles et comme archiviste de la Ville, Des Marez cultiva jalousement son indépendance. La correspondance, parfois orageuse, entre les deux hommes, en témoigne. Elle témoigne, avec d'autres éléments relatifs à la carrière de Des Marez, des profonds changements qui étaient à l'œuvre, au début du vingtième siècle, dans le fonctionnement social du milieu universitaire et scientifique. Au-delà de la formation reçue à Gand auprès de Pirene, Des Marez fait montre d'une modernité précoce qui le portera à ouvrir très largement le spectre de ses interventions et à féminiser la profession d'historien.