

The Reception of Dante's *Monarchia* in the Reflections upon Universal
Monarchy in the Early Modern Dutch Humanism

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Master Apprentice

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Master Apprenticeship Report

At the beginning of the second semester of the academic year 2018/19, I contacted Dr. Cascio after reading about the existence of the *Observatory on Dante Studies*, a research project based in Utrecht that studies ‘the legacy, reception and afterlife of Dante’s works in literary and popular culture in the Netherlands’¹.

During this first stage of the apprenticeship I undertook the initiative of asking a researcher in a field of my interest and competence, whether there was room for a collaboration on a project he was conducting. Out of the interest over this subject, we set a plan after discussing my interests and my previous knowledge over the topic, as well as the possibility to relate a small research project on Dante within the scopes of the *Observatory*.

The supervisor of this apprenticeship, together with the programme coordinator for the medieval track, Dr. Rob Meens, agreed upon the dimension of the paper to be written and the number of credits to be gained. It was decided that a paper of six thousand words (footnotes and bibliography excluded) for an amount of 7.5 EC would be the case.

I therefore designed a work plan and the deadlines for the research paper I was going to write on a minor work of Dante, the political treatise *Monarchia*, and its relation and influence on a limited number of Dutch humanists from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, namely Erasmus, Lipsius and Grotius.

In the following months, I worked with both primary Dantean as well as the Renaissance sources and secondary literature² in order to outline the context of the case, I proceeded with a close reading of the works taken into account, and I reflected on the possibility whether there has indeed been a reading and an influence of Dante’s *Monarchia* in the political thought of the chosen Dutch intellectuals.

In the early stages of the research I contacted as well an expert on political and intellectual culture in the Dutch Golden Age and modern Italy, who helped me framing more distinctly a context in which carrying on my work.

Developing a paper in the form of an Apprenticeship improved my communication and organization skills, and enhanced major autonomy in my research, since I had to follow the schedule with strict deadlines that I designed at the beginning of the project; it also favoured a more personal approach from the professor, with whom I regularly shared discussions over the material I was working on. The experience has been a useful means for learning the processes of individual research and for allowing me to do a work similar to the one that I will be required to do for the Master Thesis.

Due to the limitations of this project in terms of time and space I was allowed, the study resulted in a preliminary research on the subject, for which a further and deeper investigation is still a desideratum; nonetheless, it is believed that this subject could prove to be a useful perspective for further studying the Early modern political thought developed within the Low Countries.

¹ Observatory on Dante Studies, <https://dante.sites.uu.nl/> retrieved June 2019.

² For the full bibliography see pp. 19-21.

Introduction

Iustitia potissima est solum sub Monarcha: ergo ad optimam mundi dispositionem requiritur esse Monarchiam sive Imperium.³

The idea of a Universal Monarchy did not die with the end of the Middle Ages and of the long-lasting conflict between Papacy and Empire, but it arose again in Europe in the early Sixteenth Century and remained in the reflections of humanists in their debate over the best possible form of government desirable.

This paper will attempt to provide a multi-faceted reading of the enduring significance of medieval and ancient motifs, such as the claim of the Monarchy as the institution that could provide international peace and stability, and ‘the role of Rome as a (quasi) global empire’.⁴

The case study will assess the significance of the debate over the best institution possible to aim at peace by studying the *Monarchia*, the late Medieval political treatise written by Dante Alighieri which best illustrates his ideas on the debated issue. The scholastic work written by Dante was not just imperial propaganda in the context of the struggle between Papacy and Empire, but a significant composition that assessed in a broader way his political vision, ‘a concept of society and of sovereignty that transcended anything existing in Dante’s Europe.’⁵ In particular, the paper will analyse the possible implications of the reading and influence of this work over the political reflections of Northern European humanists.

As this study will be limited in terms of quantity, the results will be of preliminary nature. However, a more in-depth investigation of the subject is still a desideratum, and it is believed that it might throw light on a new perspective to consider in the study on the Early modern political thought developed within the Low Countries. In the absence of studies that attempt to assess the influence of the Italian author within the Early Modern Dutch literary and philosophical tradition, some general observations will have to suffice here.

The main question that this research aims to answer is: to what extent did the *Monarchia* influence the reflections on political theory developed within the Dutch humanism between the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries?

The question regarding the extent to which the treatise was known will be answered by looking for direct references to the work of Dante in the one of the Dutch humanists; if an explicit mention of Dante and his *Monarchia* proves to be lacking, it will be considered the fact that sometimes omissions and silences can be telling as an explicit reference, stated that common patterns of thought will have been recognized within the texts.

Given the constraints of this paper, the main topic that will be considered is the conception of the Empire as described by Dante and in the reflections of three Dutch Early Modern scholars: Desiderius Erasmus (1466-

³ D. Alighieri, *Monarchia*, Maurizio Pizzica (ed), Milano, Bur, 1988, I, xi, p. 184. ‘Justice is at its strongest only under a monarch; therefore for the best ordering of the world there must be a monarchy or empire.’ English translation by P. Shaw available online: Princeton Dante Project, <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/monarchia.html> retrieved May 2019.

⁴ See C. P. Moudarres, *New Worlds and the Italian Renaissance: Contributions to the History of European Intellectual Culture*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2012, p. 2.

⁵ See J.T. Johnson, *The quest for peace: Three moral traditions in western cultural history*, Princeton University Press, 2017, p. 113.

1536), Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) and Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). The case study will develop from a fairly punctual analysis of those aspects of the doctrine on the Empire promulgated in the *Monarchia* that can be found in the political writings of the Dutch authors taken into consideration. In particular, the subject of the first book of the *Monarchia*, i.e. ‘whether the monarchy is necessary for the well-being of the world’ is thoroughly embedded in the reflections of the three intellectuals, who gave different answers to the question.

What is relevant to underline is that the concept of Empire was not restricted to the Middle Ages, in order then to be replaced in the modern world by the one of the State, as said by Muldoon:

To some extent, the notion that empire was a medieval issue stemmed from the assumption that the term empire referred only to the medieval Holy Roman Empire, an institution that failed to evolve into a state during the early modern era. In fact, however, as European kingdoms were being transformed into states, several were also acquiring overseas territories that were, and are, popularly described as empires.⁶

The first decades of the Sixteenth century saw on the contrary a general revival of the idea of the Empire. Yates in *Astraea* attentively pointed out how in particular the reign of Charles V (1519-1556) seemed to his contemporaries as the re-establishment of the medieval conception of Universal Empire. As Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V was the heir of Charlemagne, the Ottonians, Hohenstaufen, as well as the *dominus mundi* of the Roman law tradition; in the historical reality though, ‘he was the ruler of a collection of German principalities over which he had little control outside of his own dynastic territories’.⁷ This proves the difficulties that come with the terms Empire and Emperor.

Sources and Methodology

Central to the research is the study of Dante’s *Monarchia*, in particular of those passages from the first two books which deal respectively with the general question regarding the necessity of the Monarchy as the best form of government, a Monarchy as intended during the Roman Empire. Considering the scope of the paper, to answer the research question, there have been selected three relevant Dutch Humanists: Erasmus, Lipsius and Grotius, together with a selection of sources from their texts where they dealt with political matters linked to the theme of the Empire and of the most suitable forms of government for the contemporary Europe.

Regarding Erasmus, most attention had been driven on his correspondence in the approximately ten years between the 20s and 30s of the Sixteenth Century. Moreover, important considerations were collected from the Education of a Christian Prince (*Institutio principis christiani*, 1516), a manual dedicated to prince Charles, the future Emperor Charles V.

Justus Lipsius’ *Admiranda sive de magnitudine romana* (1598) is the richest account left on the appraisal and admiration for the Roman Empire and there he shares many reflections connected with Dante’s political thought. Lipsius praised the military and political virtues of the Romans as the true and only foundation of a

⁶ J. Muldoon, *Empire and Order: The Concept of Empire, 800–1800*, Studies in Modern History, New York: St. Martin's. 1999, p. vi.

⁷ See *Ibid.*, p. 115. See also F.A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, Routledge 1999, who writes on the idea of the Empire at the time of Charles V.

successful Empire, a glowing example to the realms governed by the Habsburgs in his own time.⁸

This, together with the *Politicorum sive Civilis doctrinae libri sex* (1589), will be the central sources for considering the presence of late medieval political thought in Lipsius.

Finally, Hugo Grotius' main work, *de iure belli ac pacis* (1625) is the more beneficial account as it mentions directly Dante in the text, while considering 'the quest for universal empire by the Holy Roman Emperor as a cause of war'.⁹

The research will proceed as a textual analysis of their words confronted with the ones of Dante. The aim is to discover whether it would be possible to state that Dante's *Monarchia* has had some influence over the Dutch Early Modern political thought.

Relevance and theoretical justification

This research paper, which relates Dante and his reception in the Netherlands, aims to make a contribution to the 'Observatory on Dante Studies', a research centre based in Utrecht. As the purpose of the project is to monitor the legacy of Dante in the Dutch culture and promote the divulgation of initiatives on the Italian author, this research embeds within it as it carries the dual aim to analyse the reception of a minor work of Dante that might have reached a learned audience in the Netherlands in a determined historical period, and therefore to contribute to the current initiatives of the Observatory.

The study will mainly link late medieval and Early Modern political theory, in particular the discussion regarding the conception of the Empire and of the best example as a form of government.

⁸ See A. Bredecke and P. Vogt (eds.), *The End of Fortuna and the Rise of Modernity: Contingency and Certainty in Early Modern History*, Berlin/München/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2017.

⁹ See S.C. Neff (ed.), *Hugo Grotius on the Law of War and Peace: Student Edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, Book II, 22, pp. 304-05.

I. A universal Monarchy. The multifaceted position of Erasmus

In 1527, the imperial grand Chancellor Mercurino Gattinara sent a letter to Erasmus, asking him to publish a critical edition of Dante's treatise *Monarchia*.¹⁰ The document, in which Dante expresses his theory on the universal imperial rule, is regarded as 'the most striking statement of imperialist theory in medieval times';¹¹ a controversial work already in the first years of reception, its circulation arose in those moments when the imperial propaganda favoured a revival of the idea of universal empire.¹²

Thus, the request embeds itself in the climate of the 1526-27 campaign for the Emperor Charles the V. Gattinara was hoping that 'an authoritative edition of Dante's *Monarchia*, the classic text for imperial claims, critically established and published under the auspices of the greatest humanist of the age', would give the ultimate support to the 'Ghibelline' cause.¹³

The expectations were nevertheless disregarded.¹⁴ Erasmus could not subscribe to Gattinara's imperial view of Christian polity and did not support the programme of the Habsburg 'world monarchy' that Gattinara was favouring.¹⁵

Although an answer, if written, is now lost, the Dutch humanist had already stated in the prefatory letter to his edition of *Historiae Augustae scriptores* in 1518 his critical view toward an imperial world monarchy.¹⁶ This chapter will explore, throughout the reading and comparison of Erasmus' words and Dante's, the reasons behind the Dutch humanist's critical position towards a possible 'revival' of the Empire under the rule of Charles V, and therefore the reasons that led him refuse to publish the work.

Erasmus in 1516 wrote the *Education of a Christian Prince* and dedicated the manual to prince Charles, the future Charles V, to whom he had been appointed councillor earlier in the year.¹⁷ The text presents precepts

¹⁰ See D. Erasmus, et al., *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 1658 to 1801; January 1526-March 1527*. Vol. 12, University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2003, n. 1790, pp. 474-476.

¹¹ See Yates, *Astraea*, p. 11. See also Muldoon, *Empire and Order*, p. 87; p. 91: 'Dante's answers to these questions provided the most complete defence and justification for the existence of a universal Christian empire. When later writers discussed the medieval empire, they often did so in the terms that Dante presented. Along with the lawyers Bartolus and Baldus, Dante shaped the views of Mercurino de Gattinara, the advisor who contributed to Charles V's conception of universal empire.'

¹² See for instance G. Boccaccio, *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, Bologna: Zanichelli, 2009, where Boccaccio states that the work was scarcely known before the quarrel between the German Emperor Ludwig of Bavaria and the Pope in 1328. Regarding Charles V's context, see *Astraea*, pp. 1-28, especially 21-22.

¹³ See J. L. Headley, *The Emperor and His Chancellor: A Study of the Imperial Chancellery under Gattinara*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History, Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 111.

¹⁴ The *editio princeps* of Dante's *Monarchia* would be eventually published in 1559 in a collection of tracts on the Roman Empire: Andrea Alciati, *De formula romani Imperii libri duo* (Basel: Johannes Oporinus, 1559).

¹⁵ Erasmus, *Letter n. 1790*, p. 474.

¹⁶ D. Erasmus, R.A.B. Mynors, & D.F.S. Thomason, *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 446 to 593; 1516 to 1517* (Vol. 4). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1977, pp. 373-83. This was later the Preface of his edition of Suetonius, edited by Erasmus with the *Historiae Augustae scriptores*, printed by Froben in June 1518.

¹⁷ D. Erasmus, et al., *The Correspondence of Erasmus. Letters 298 to 445, 1514-1516*, Vol. Vol. 3, University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1976, see the letter n. 392, pp. 245-47.

See also the introduction to Desiderius Erasmus, translated and annotated by N.M. Cheshire and M. J. Heath, 'The Education of a Christian Prince: Institutio principis christiani', in A. Levy (ed.), *Panegyricus: Moria; Julius Exclusus; Institutio Principis Christiani; Querela Pacis; Ciceronianus; Notes; Indexes. Literary and Educational Writings*. Toronto [Ont.]: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1986, pp. 199-288, especially p. 200.

on the values that a good prince should develop in his education and that possess in order to govern justly; his main concern was to form an individual, thus he proceeds throughout the text with giving practical advice to the young prince.¹⁸ Nonetheless, there can be found elements that connect this work with the notions on imperial power that Dante expressed in the *Monarchia*.

Two points in particular are to be analysed: the conception of one person who directs and rules mankind (unum oportet esse regulans sive regens, *Mon.* I, V, 5), opposed to Erasmus who sees a danger of tyranny behind such an extensive rule; secondly, the praise of the Roman Empire in the words of Dante, and Erasmus' negative view of it.

I.1 One Monarch

Proprium opus humani generis totaliter accepti est actuare semper totam potentiam intellectus possibilis, per prius ad speculandum et secundario propter hoc ad operandum per suam extensionem (...) patet quod genus humanum *in quiete sive tranquillitate pacis* ad proprium suum opus.¹⁹

Dante sets universal peace as the ultimate goal of humankind, and for it to be achieved what was necessary, according to him, was the rule of one monarch or emperor. The lesser political units had then to be ordered to this one ruler.²⁰ Erasmus recognizes as well that the very purpose of the human nature is to seek for world peace; relevant this passage in the *Institutio*:

You, noble Prince Charles, (...) owe it to heaven that your empire came to you without the shedding of blood, and no one suffered for it; your wisdom must now ensure that you preserve it without bloodshed and *at peace*.²¹

Similarly later:

Our first and foremost concern must be for training the prince in the skills relevant to wise administration in time of peace, because with them he must strive to his utmost for this end: that the devices of war may never be needed.²²

It is visible here the shared idea that a ruler should have as a first concern the good of mankind. Dante writes directly about the need for the Monarch to love his people:

Cum igitur Monarcha sit universalissima causa inter mortales, ut homines bene vivant, quia principes alii per illum, ut dictum est; consequens est quod bonum hominum ab eo maxime *diligatur*.²³

The same can be found in the *Institutio*:

The next lesson is *to love* the country he rules and (...) frequently call to mind the example of those who have held the well'-being of their citizens more precious than their own lives.²⁴

¹⁸ Erasmus, 'The Education of a Christian prince', p. 200. See Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, in particular on 'the reception of humanist political thought', pp. 213-243.

¹⁹ Dante, *Monarchia*, I, 4, 1, p. 170.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 6, 4, p. 178: 'Et sic omnes partes prenotate infra regna et ipsa regna ordinari debent ad unum principem sive principatum, hoc est ad Monarcham sive Monarchiam'.

²¹ Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, p. 204.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 253.

²³ Dante, *Monarchia*, I, 11, 18-19, p. 190.

However, Erasmus also warns about the danger of such an extensive power in the hands of a single person, thus distancing himself from Dante's theory. In the irenic vision of Erasmus, who believes that international *pax* in Europe could be achieved thanks to a collaboration between Christian princes, it appears that his position on the matter was not completely estranged from the plans that the imperial chancellery was developing. On the other hand, he was not willing to be a partisan of Charles V. He saw the danger of tyranny if too much power was invested in one ruler.

Even though Erasmus opposed to the universal monarchy, ideas close to the one of the classical world can be found in his work. In particular, in the letter written in 1517 to the dukes Frederick and George of Saxony, he shares the thought that ideally it would be the best form of government, although never concretely realized and hardly possible to be restored in his days:²⁵

Every region should have his own master, although I say this with no wish to deny that monarchy is the best form of commonwealth (...) because, men's natures being what they are, I doubt whether we could be so fortunate, and partly because, even if we were fortunate enough to get such a prince, I do not think the mind of one mortal man capable of such extensive rule.²⁶

These are practical and realistic concerns that Dante did not take into consideration in his writings and that show the realism behind Erasmus' position.

His idea on gaining international peace is for 'the monarchs of the individual states' to have had an honourable and Christian education, 'in the virtues that can be acquired from moral pagan writers.'²⁷

The world will not greatly feel the absence of such a monarch, if Christian princes are united in concord among themselves. The true and only monarch of the world is Christ; and if our princes would agree together to obey His commands, we should truly have one prince, and everything would flourish under Him.²⁸

I.2 The Roman Empire

Dante declares his admiration for the political form as embodied by the Roman Empire in many *loci* of the Comedy, where the best known examples are collected in the canto VI of all three *cantiche*; - but also in *Convivio*²⁹. In fact, the whole second book of *Monarchia* is dedicated to a justification of it, showing that the Roman people acquired the office of the Monarchy by right, not by usurping. Erasmus is strongly critical towards the empires in the classical world and speaks with conviction against the Roman emperors, whom he associated with tyranny and violence.³⁰

²⁴ Erasmus, 'The Education of a Christian Prince', p. 254. The cursive is mine.

²⁵ Erasmus, *Letter n. 586*, pp. 373-83. See also Yates, *Astraea*, pp. 18-19.

²⁶ Erasmus, *Letter n. 586*, p. 382.

²⁷ See Erasmus, 'The Education of a Christian Prince', and Yates' considerations, p. 19.

²⁸ Erasmus, *Letter n. 586*, p. 382.

²⁹ See F. Fontanella, *L'impero romano nel Convivio e nella Monarchia*, in «Studi Danteschi», LXXIX, 2014, pp. 39-142, for considerations on Dante's political view; in particular, it is stressed how the thinker saw the continuity from archaic, republican and imperial Rome to Charlemagne's empire and his own time.

³⁰ Erasmus does not follow Petrarca when he is implying 'disregard of the whole institution of the medieval empire and its claim to be the true successor of the imperium Romanum', this is for the Dutch humanist not a relevant matter; consider that in the northern humanism Petrarch is not so much followed, they're against the idea of an Empire

In all those princes scarcely can a few be found who are tolerable and very few who are virtuous; most are not simply vicious, but mere monsters, mere plagues of the human race, and many of them mad.³¹

The form of government as represented by the Roman Empire is not the right example to follow, and it would be unwise for a prince to want to imitate certain princes from classical antiquity:

so far is it from seeming right to defend and revive an institution which for many centuries now has been largely outdated and non-existent, at the price of a great upheaval in human affairs and very great loss of Christian lives.³²

What greater madness could there be than for a man who has received the Christian sacraments to model himself on Alexander, Julius Caesar, or Xerxes, whose lives even the pagan writers criticized (or those of them who had some degree of judgment? Just as it would be utter disgrace to be surpassed by them in any of their good actions, so for a Christian prince to want to copy them completely would be sheer insanity.³³

Nevertheless he does not deny directly the vision of Dante and many other medieval thinkers, and as suggested by Yates, 'a vestigial survival of the imperial idea can be detected' within his words:³⁴

My object in saying this is not to suggest that the power of the Caesars lacked legal foundation, for authority born in force and the right of conquest, and even in crime, if it gradually wins the consent of the multitude and strikes root, can become lawful.³⁵

Whether that ancient empire should be restored as it was once, is an open question. For my part, I do not think any intelligent man would desire this, even if wishes could put it back; so far is it from seeming right to defend and revive an institution which for many centuries now has been largely outdated and non-existent, at the price of a great upheaval in human affairs and very great loss of Christian lives.³⁶

In conclusion, had Erasmus read the *Monarchia*, the decision not to publish that work must have lied mostly in the political environment of his time, where this imperial treatise would have been used as a means of imperialistic propaganda. Erasmus did not believe this was a practical way to solve the conflicts in the early sixteenth century Europe. It was evident that claiming a universal empire in that specific historical period would have not lead to universal peace, which was the desired *finem* for Erasmus as well as for Dante. In particular, the risk in supporting the Emperor's world monarchy programme, would have been a great

'barbarized' by the Germans. See G. Cappelli, 'Petarca e l'umanesimo politico del quattrocento', in *Verbum*, VII, 2005, pp. 153- 75.

³¹ Letter n. 586, pp 376-77.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 382.

³³ Erasmus, 'The Education of a Christian Prince', p. 252. See also E. De Bom, M. Janssens, T. Van Houdt, and J. Papy (eds.), *(Un)masking the Realities of Power: Justus Lipsius and the dynamics of political writing in early modern Europe*, Leiden, The Netherlands: BRILL, 2010, p. 123.

³⁴ Yates, p. 19.

³⁵ Letter n. 586, p. 381.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 381-82. P. 378: the name of emperor, which the world once held sacred and august - and even now it moves the emotions of many men as some-thing solemn and venerable, (...) scarcely anything remains except the shadow of a mighty name.

distress in the context of European politics, especially regarding the relations of the Emperor with the king of France and the Pope.³⁷

If we take into consideration a letter written in 1529 to Alfonso de Valdes, the imperial secretary for Latin correspondence and a close associate of Gattinara, it is evident that Erasmus did not favour the idea of a universal monarchy of the sort upheld in Dante's political treatise.

He dismissed it as contrary to the realities of his own time, criticizing in the first place 'the arguments used to assert the authority of the emperor'.³⁸ Among those the most used was the metaphor of the two suns, the Pope and the Emperor, each deriving its authority directly from God:

I would accept the parallel, if just as the sun, in its tireless motion, circles and illuminates and nurtures the whole world, so one man could look after all the several nations of the earth.³⁹

This was a task that no man would be able to complete.

³⁷ See for instance the introduction to the letter of Gattinara, Erasmus, *Letter n. 1790*, p. 474.

³⁸ Desiderius Erasmus, and Estes, James M.. *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 2082 to 2203*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, pp. 140- 150, p. 141, 23-24. Earlier in the same (18-22): 'As if there has ever been a supreme ruler of the whole world except God; even today the whole world is not yet known, and what is known has never answered to one man'.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, *cit.*, p. 141-42. Dante, *Purgatorio*, 16, 106-108: 'Soleva Roma, che 'l buon mondo feo,/ due soli aver, che l'una e l'altra strada/facean vedere, e del mondo e di Deo.'

II. *De magnitudine Romana*. Lipsius and the praise of the Roman Empire

Some thirty years after the requested edition of the *Monarchia* that Erasmus refused to publish, the *editio princeps* of the treatise appeared in 1559 in the reformed Basel.⁴⁰

It was released by the protestant publisher Johannes Oporinus in a collection of five treaties concerning the relations between the Empire and the Papacy; five years later Dante's work was included in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* among those accused of heresy.⁴¹ It is interesting to note that Dante's political treatise 'first saw the light in the guise of a Reformation tract', and it is then not unlikely to believe that in this manner the oeuvre reached the Dutch Protestant circles in the following decades.

Although a relation between Dante's political thought and Justus Lipsius can be traced from their words, there can be found in his works no clear traces that lead to believe that the Flemish humanist read the *Monarchia* and held it as an authority.

This chapter will deal first with the conception of the universal monarchy as the best form of government and as the source for international peace as it is understood in Lipsius' words and in its relation with the central reasoning in the first book of the *Monarchia*; secondly, it will consider Lipsius' work *Admiranda sive de magnitudine romana* (1598), the richest account this author left on the appraisal and admiration for the Roman Empire, which is understood to be an example for the Habsburg contemporary monarchy.⁴²

II.1 On the universal Empire and its necessity for the good of the world

Justus Lipsius, described as the greatest Renaissance scholar of the Low Countries after Erasmus, wrote on different topics and left a rich account of his philosophical and philological studies, although his most remarkable contribution is tied to the foundation of Neostoicism, a *practical* philosophical school of thought centred on the recovery and application of classical moral virtues for the turbulent times he lived in.

His idea, applied in the political works, was to draw universal lessons from the examples of history, rather than giving theoretical precepts.⁴³ Thus, he discussed the virtues a prince's government must possess and presented the classical Roman Empire as the timeless example to inspire the development of modern politics.

In the second half of the sixteenth-century political literature the concern for peace and unity was remarkably felt, and Lipsius' words were addressing a concrete institution, i.e. the Habsburg Spain, aiming to support its

⁴⁰ W. P. Friederich, *Dante's Fame Abroad, 1350-1850 : The Influence of Dante Alighieri on the Poets and Scholars of Spain, France, England, Germany, Switzerland and the United States: A Survey of the Present State of Scholarship*. Edizioni Di Storia e Letteratura, 1950, p. 344: 'A copy of *De Monarchia* is known to have existed in Heidelberg, in the library of the Elector of the Palatinate, throughout the sixteenth-century', and it is believed that though the humanists Vergerius or Flaccius, 'a copy of this manuscript may later have reached Oporinus, the first printer of *De Monarchia*'. [Literature on subversive Dante? Dante in Reformation? Not relevant here, but it does relate to the reading of this medieval author in northern Europe in Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries and its spreading. Did it reach Lipsius this way?]

⁴¹ The complete title of the work is: *Andre[a]e Alciati Iureconsulti clariss. De formula Romani Imperii Libellus: Accesserunt Non Dissimilis argumenti, Dantis Florentini De Monarchia libri tres. Radulphi Carnotensis De translatione Imperii libellus. Chronica M. Iordanis, Qualiter Romanum Imperium translatum sit ad Germanos*, Basileae: Oporinus, 1559.

⁴² See for instance A. Brendecke, and P. Vogt, eds. *The End of Fortuna and the Rise of Modernity*, p. 80.

⁴³ Among Lipsius' most important works, *Politicorum sive Civilis doctrinae libri sex* (1589), *De Constantia* (1584), *Monita et Exempla Politica* (1605). See L., Halvard, 'At the Crossroads: Justus Lipsius and the Early Modern Development of International Law', *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 20 (2007), pp. 65–88 for considerations on Lipsius' political views.

imperial project; this, without undertaking the operation Gattinara tempted in the early years of the century, trying to resurrect the old ideal of the medieval conception of the universal monarchy.⁴⁴

In the *Politicorum sive Civilis doctrinae libri sex*, Lipsius draws on a wide range of classical sources, above all Tacitus, and builds the tract on short sententiae; the subject of the treatise was specifically how to rule principalities and construct civil life based on ethical virtues.

In Lipsius there can be found, absent in Dante and other political thinkers, a clear intention to give practical advice to the rulers he is addressing; what can be observed, however, is the general conception that a single rule is the most adapt to guarantee the best order in a society.⁴⁵

Just as seen in Erasmus' words and in Dante's reflections, Lipsius states as well that the aim of politics was to gain international peace and stability.

Civil Life in a community is: to live in community of two things, trade and government. (...) Government, then, I define as a well-defined ordering of commanding and obeying. The force, or rather the necessity of which is so great that it is the sole pillar of human affairs. For, without government, no single house, city, or people, or even the entire human race can exist, nor the natural world, or even the universe itself.⁴⁶

It is stated clearly in the *Politica* that the monarchy, i.e. an authority capable of securing order on all levels of society, is the best and indispensable form of government, as it is the most ancient (quod ille vetustissimus: primus et divinissimus principatus) and the best according to its nature (ad natura aptissimus).⁴⁷

II.2 *Admiranda sive de Magnitudine Romana*

Justus Lipsius' admiration for Italy and especially Rome was endorsed by his love for the classics; he visited the city between 1568 and 1570, and there he 'spent [his free time] observing memorial stones, ancient sites, and whatever was to be seen and explored in and around the city', included the Vatican Library, and 'whatever was relevant to the understanding of antiquity'.⁴⁸

Central in his discourses on the Empire is the admiration for the ancient Rome, seen as a model of a universal monarchy that brought the world peace and prosperity. Lipsius already stated in the *Politica* that the possibilities for peace would be provided by a universal empire, and described the benefits that such a rule could bring on a more practical side:

⁴⁴ See for instance B. Kingsbury, B., Strauman, *The Roman Foundations of the Law of Nations: Alberico Gentili and the Justice of Empire*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

⁴⁵ See J. Lipsius, *Politica: Six Books of Politics or Political Instruction*, ed. by Jan Waszink, Van Gorcum, 2004, pp. 35-36.

⁴⁶Lipsius, *Politica*, Liber I, 1, p. 295: Sine Imperio enim nec domus ulla, nec civitas, nec gens, nec hominum universum genus stare, nec rerum natura omnis, nec ipse mundus potest.

⁴⁷ See Lipsius, *Politica*, pp. 296-97.

⁴⁸ J. Papy, 'An Antiquarian Scholar between Text and Image? Justus Lipsius, Humanist Education, and the Visualization of Ancient Rome', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring, 2004), pp. 97-131, p. 103, see especially the notes n. 30 and 31.

In the *Admiranda* Lipsius stressed that a universal European empire would create effective and efficient rule, support trade and communications, create security and peace, provide a universal language and religion, and bring civilization to the world.⁴⁹

The *Admiranda sive de magnitudine Romana* (1598) is Lipsius' dialogue on the greatness of Rome, an Antiquarian study published in 1598 and dedicated to Albert Archduke of Austria.

The work has often been dismissed as a mere description, overly praising, of the greatness of Rome and the Roman Empire, over its history, the greatness of the eternal city and the virtues of the Roman people. Lipsius though clearly linked his political work with the *Admiranda*, as it is devoted to those aspects which in his view determined the greatness of the Roman Empire, e.g. its power, moral virtues, and durability, all values that contemporary and future princes of Europe had to keep in mind and perform in their government.⁵⁰ While praising the military and political virtues of the Romans as the true and only foundation of a successful Empire, he was willing to give 'a glowing example to the realms governed by the Habsburgs in his own time'.⁵¹

Of particular interest is the fourth book of the *Admiranda*, which is centred on the virtues and vices of the Romans and their leaders.

Dante as well gave powerful expression to the myth of Rome, describing in the second book of the *Monarchia* numerous republican and imperial examples taken from the Roman history and literature. He argued that the Roman people was the noblest, and that their Empire was brought to perfection by miracles willed by God:

Non dubium est quin natura locum et gentem disposuerit in mundo ad universaliter principandum (...) satis est manifestum quod fuerit Roma, et cives eius sive populus.⁵²

nullum dubium est quin prevalentia in athleticis pro imperio mundi certantibus Dei iudicium sit secuta.⁵³

The best example is given by the fact that the Roman people sought the common good:

Quod autem romanus populus bonum prefatum intenderit subiciendo sibi orbem terrarum, gesta sua declarant, in quibus, omni cupiditate summota, que rei publice semper adversa est, et universali pace cum libertate dilecta, populus ille sanctus pius et gloriosus propria commoda neglexisse videtur, ut publica pro salute humani generis procuraret. (...) declarata (...) est, quod romanus populus subiciendo sibi orbem bonum publicum intendit.⁵⁴

The point of Lipsius' work was to assert the incomparable magnitude of Rome, in particular of the imperial

⁴⁹ L. Halvard, 'At the Crossroads: Justus Lipsius and the Early Modern Development of International Law', in *Leiden Journal of International Law* 20, 2007, pp. 65-88, pp. 82- 83. He suggests to see K. Ekenkel, 'Ein Plädoyer für den Imperialismus: Justus Lipsius' kulturhistorische Monographie *Admiranda sive de magnitudine Romana* (1598)', *Daphnis* 33, 2004, p. 619.

⁵⁰ See the considerations in *(Un)Masking the Realities of Power: Justus Lipsius and the Dynamics of Political Writing in Early Modern Europe*, p. 15.

⁵¹A. Brendecke and P. Vogt, *The End of Fortuna and the Rise of Modernity*, p. 80.

⁵²Dante, *Monarchia*, II, 6, p. 260: there is no doubt that nature ordained a place and a nation to exercise universal rule in the world: (...) it was Rome and her citizens, that is to say her people. See also Mon, II, 5, pp. 248 ff.: as Lipsius, Dante writes on the virtues of the Romans, drawing examples from Cincinnatus to Fabritius Camillus, Brutus etc.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, II, 8, p. 270: 'There is no doubt that the victory among those competing in the race for world domination was won in accordance with God's judgment'.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 5, p. 250 and 256: 'The Roman people, in subjecting the world to itself, aimed at the public good'.

Rome, and to do so he proceeded throughout the four books by describing ‘the longevity of Rome, its wealth, territory, population, the strength of its armies and fleets, its capacity to pay enormous taxes and indulge its populations not only with bread and circuses, but also with immense donatives, the glory of its public works, etc.’⁵⁵ In sum, he gave a long explanation on the reasons Rome was *admiranda* .

He gave as well practical examples that could be embedded in a contemporary context. The historical reality however did not mirror the greatness of the past: ‘At nostra Europa misera, quam iam a multis saeculis expers eorum est? Iactatur assiduis bellis aut dissidiis, quare?’⁵⁶

The answer comes straight: ‘quia regna aut dynastiae paruis aut modicis finibus inclusae, semper in vicinos aussam habent timendi vel sperandi, querendi vel ulciscendi.’⁵⁷

Europe was in turmoil, fragmented, damaged by wars and treats from outside; here it can be seen a connection with Erasmus, in their conception of the aims of politics, which are to reach peace and unity, tranquillity, happiness and, underlines Lipsius, ‘unhindered commercial exchange’; in this sense Rome was the ‘timeless paragon of modern politics’.⁵⁸

He, writing as a subject of the Habsburgs, set his hopes on a Habsburg universal monarchy, since the answer to the difficult condition of contemporary Europe was to have ‘a powerful and strong single head’.⁵⁹

Lipsius showed a keen interest in the Roman antiquity, but he remained blind for the modern Rome; as Dante, they both draw from the greatness of Rome and quoted classic authors – but in Lipsius’ work there cannot be found concrete traces of a mediation through the medieval thinker. Moreover, differently from Dante’s conception, in his work there is no space for God’s providence; it was for their virtues that the Romans were great and admirable.

⁵⁵ (Un)Masking the Realities of Power, p. 69.

⁵⁶ Lipsius, *Admiranda*, p. 254.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 255. Lipsius explains then that it was like this, before the Romans (Idem et ante Romanum imperium erat), giving examples from Plutarchus.

⁵⁸ A. Weststeijn, ‘Commonwealths for Preservation and Increase: Ancient Rome in Venice and the Dutch Republic’, in Wyger Velema and Arthur Weststeijn (eds.), *Ancient Models in the Early Modern Republican Imagination*, Leiden: Brill, 2017, p. 71.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

III. Hugo Grotius. Against the rightfulness of the Universal Monarchy

Already by the beginning of the seventeenth century, with the remarkable exception of Campanella, the concept of universal monarchy had lost any positive connotations for leading political thinkers, especially with regards to its ability to provide a stable, peaceful political order.⁶⁰

The last figure that is going to be taken into consideration is the Dutch humanist and jurist Hugo Grotius. Differently from Erasmus and Lipsius, he expressed with conviction a direct denial of the necessity of the universal empire as rightful of ruling over the world, as well as a sharp critique towards Dante's political conceptions.

An explicit reference to Dante can be found in Grotius' masterwork, *de iure belli ac pacis* (1625).⁶¹ The chapter will examine the position of Hugo Grotius regarding the debates on the rights of the Empire, focusing on his wide-ranging political vision and his refutation of a world monarchy as an impracticable form for governing.

Central in Grotius' political reflections is the concept of Natural Right, which, in its modern use, indicates that there is a set of legal rules common to all men.⁶² With his universal perspective of Natural Right, Grotius stands in the tradition of Christian Scholasticism, which recognizes a universal fellowship of mankind. That being so, as Dante in his *Monarchia*, also Grotius 'argues in favour of an encompassing order as guarantee for the peaceful striving of human beings on earth, which presupposes the use of human intellect as a means to recognise the legal order entailed in divine creation'.⁶³

Therefore, the two of them share the same aim; what differentiates them is the means to achieve it. Furthermore, what for Dante is the means to bring peace to humankind, the institution of the Empire, for Grotius is one of the causes that can lead to unjust war.

As we have already seen, Dante establishes the purpose of peace in the protection of the individual and aligns the universal monarchy with the achievement of individual happiness. However, if he identifies the universal order with the Roman Empire, since the Romans had acquired their right by their natural virtue and by divine designation,⁶⁴ Grotius does not recognize any existing institution nor an actual manifestation, but

⁶⁰ P. Schröder, 'The Concepts of Universal Monarchy and Balance of Power in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century – A Case Study', in M. Koskenniemi, W. Rech, M. J. Fonseca (eds), *International Law and Empire*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

⁶¹ The edition employed is S.C. Neff (ed.), *Hugo Grotius on the Law of War and Peace: Student Edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. The work is constituted by three books and the introductory Prolegomena and deals with the concept of war, its causes and its legitimacy. See for a general overview of the work and for a useful bibliography on Grotius J. Miller, "Hugo Grotius", E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2014 Edition.

⁶² See C.A. Strumpf, *The Grotian Theology of International Law: Hugo Grotius and the Moral Foundations of International Relations*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 2006, p. 31.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶⁴ See generally the second book of the *Monarchia*.

creates ‘the idea of a universally applicable legal system without any particular institutionalised ruler other than God as legislator’.⁶⁵

De iure belli ac pacis

The issue on maintaining peace within the Christian community is central in Grotius’ concerns. There can be found a parallel with Erasmus regarding the irenic program that was pursued in particular in his later years. What is here to underline, is that it would not be an emperor nor a world monarchy the authority that could be responsible for bringing and maintaining civic peace and virtue. The powers of sovereignty are to be organized according to the history and tradition of a given society. This principle gave Grotius a great deal of flexibility in defending different political arrangements.

His focus is put on political order, unattainable through the means of a universal monarchy;⁶⁶ his reasons are clearly explained in the second book of *de iure belli ac pacis*.

Of particular interest is the twenty-second chapter, on unjust causes of war. Among them is listed the ‘quest for universal empire by the Holy Roman Emperor’:

I should hardly trouble to add that the title which certain persons give to the Roman Emperor is absurd, as if he had the right of ruling over even the most distant and hitherto unknown peoples. (...) Nor should anyone be influenced by the arguments of *Dante*, by which he strives to prove that such a right belongs to the Emperor because that is advantageous for the human race.

Grotius continues by explaining his practical concerns, which remind us of the reflections on the same matter that Erasmus expressed in his letter to the Dukes Frederick and George of Saxony (1517).⁶⁷

The advantages which it brings are in fact offset by its disadvantages. For as a ship may attain to such a size that it cannot be steered, so also the number of inhabitants and the distance between places may be so great as not to tolerate a single government. ⁶⁸

Therefore, Grotius believed that Dante’s conception of a universal empire would never work because it was a geopolitical reality too large and unwieldy to be effective: ‘Grotius’s objection to the notion of a universal empire, the impracticality of such a large governmental structure, was related to the actual condition of the Empire in medieval Europe. Even in Dante’s own day, the reality of imperial power and of the jurisdiction of the Empire was in almost inverse proportion to his image of it.’⁶⁹

The question on the relation between kings and the emperor is subordinated to the one of the issue of its relation to the papacy, in Dante’s work, but it became a debated question among early modern political thinkers and, in particular, canon lawyers:

Again, even if we should grant that the ascription of such a right to the Emperor is advantageous, the right to rule by no means follows, since this cannot come into existence except by consent or by punishment. The Roman Emperor at present does not have this right even over all the former possessions of the Roman people; for as many of these were acquired by war, so by war they have been lost; while others by

⁶⁵ Strumpf, *The Grotian Theology of International Law*, p.16.

⁶⁶ See for instance W. Maas, ‘Grotius on Citizenship and Political Community’, in *Grotiana* 21, 2001, 163-178. P. 172: the purpose of government is to create an orderly environment in which individuals safely and properly exercise the rights that are intrinsically theirs as human beings.

⁶⁷ Erasmus, Letter n. 586.

⁶⁸ *Hugo Grotius on the Law of War and Peace*, Book II, cap 22, 13, p. 304. The cursive is mine.

⁶⁹ Muldoon, *Empire and Order*, p. 93.

treaties, others still by abandonment, have passed under the authority of other nations or kings. Some states, too, that were once completely subject [to Roman rule], later began to be subject only in part, or merely federated on unequal terms.⁷⁰

Another interesting point in this work, which relates Dante to the Dutch jurist, is to be found in the ninth chapter of the second book, where Grotius deals with the *present possession of the rights which once belonged to the Roman Empire*:

Among historians and jurists, there is also the notable question, who is now the possessor of those rights which once belonged to the Roman Empire.⁷¹

Here Grotius speaks against the idea that the Roman Empire survived through the middle Ages in the German Holy Roman Empire, whereas for Dante the German emperors represented the legacy of Rome and are therefore their rightful successors. According to him, the universal empire traditionally attributed to the Romans continued under the secular monarchy of the Christian emperor, whose authority did not come from the pope but directly from God. Grotius' main arguing point against this is that Germany lied outside the border of the Roman Empire during most of its existence; it is rather the pope who 'holds the primacy among the Roman people, who are at such a time free.'⁷²

In conclusion 'it seems appropriate to view Grotius as heir of a distinct Christian tradition of legal and political thinking, of which in particular Dante Alighieri may be seen as well as an important representative'.⁷³ It's important to highlight, however, the clearly critical position towards the idea that a single ruler cannot work against the law because his office is constituted and derives from the law. Whilst this conception is strongly referred by Dante in his *Monarchia* (just the monarch, legislator and executor of laws, has judgment and justice in the highest degree)⁷⁴, Grotius developed a theory on Natural Law that implies the access and participation of everyone, and in particular the idea that the establishment of the state is a product of human will and not of God.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Hugo Grotius *on the Law of War and Peace*, p. 304.

⁷¹ Hugo Grotius *on the Law of War and Peace*, Book II, cap 9, 11, p. 174.

⁷² *Ivi*.

⁷³ Strumpf, *The Grotian Theology of International Law*, p. 16.

⁷⁴ Dante, *Monarchia*, I, 13, p. 198: que duo principalissime [iudicium et iustitiam] legis latori et legis executori conveniunt. See also *Convivio*, IV, iv, 4 and 7, Princeton Dante Project, retrieved May 2019: <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/convivio.html>.

⁷⁵ See Strumpf, *The Grotian Theology of International Law* , Chapter 3, on the concept of Human Right and Human rule, pp. 101-57. P. 121: human society will have the (natural) tendency to establish institutions of government for the administration of common affairs. Yet, the rulers thus appointed are, in principle, not divinely appointed. They remain human beings appointed by human beings to rule over them.

Conclusion

I have analysed some of the features that appear in the work of Dante and that come back in those of some early modern Dutch thinkers. To what extent is it possible to talk about the influence and knowledge of the medieval political treatise *Monarchia*? The brief overview that this study confronted leaves further reflections to be assessed over the subject.

I have examined the words of Erasmus, Lipsius and Grotius and confronted with the ones of Dante. This operation could not be conducted enough in depth to enable me to assess with certainty the extent to which the knowledge of his work might have had a role in their intervention over the debate on the universal empire.

While, on one hand, it was seen that Erasmus and Grotius were familiar Dante's position, a direct reference was not found in Lipsius. On the other hand, the fact that many common considerations could be identified, and considered the familiarity of Lipsius with the Italian cultural heritage, might make us opt for a vision where the lack of a direct reference must not be interpreted as a ignorance on the subject – 'for silences are often as telling as explicit mentions'.

As stated by Johnson, Dante's goal remained embedded in an European cultural tradition that from the Renaissance utopianism continued to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries currents of thought:⁷⁶ the never-dying ideal of a peace-making government and of an ideal society remained, in fact, an important theme that was further developed by the Renaissance humanism.⁷⁷

What has at the same time to be underlined, is that from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries onwards the concept of universal monarchy was 'not sufficiently able to reflect the increasing complexities of European interstate relations',⁷⁸ therefore mainly criticised or dismissed by the political thinkers of the time.

That Dante had a limited influence on Dutch political thought is the conclusion that is here not deniable. However, further studies regarding the role of this thinker within the circles of Northern humanists would be worthwhile. Research is needed to fully understand the implications of the reading of this author in the Early Modern times, as well as to break some historiographical considerations that distinguish too clearly the Late medieval and Early modern political thought. The aim of the present research was to introduce a source that could help further develop the reflections on international cultural relations and ideas, whereas the subject still needs an in depth study that this paper had not being able to assess.

⁷⁶ Muldoon, *Empire and Order*, p. 93, quoting James Turner Johnson (1987), who has suggested that Dante's discussion of world peace was an early stage of a tradition that was to 'be carried on by Renaissance utopianism, the "perpetual peace" movement of the Enlightenment, and the internationalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries'.

⁷⁷ See Johnson, *The quest for peace*, p. 118.

⁷⁸ P. Schröder, 'The Concepts of Universal Monarchy and Balance of Power in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century – A Case Study', in M. Koskenniemi, W. Rech, M. J. Fonseca (eds), *International Law and Empire*. Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 98.

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