

OBITUARIES

Antoine De Smet (1909–1997)

The death on 28 December 1997 of Antoine De Smet leaves a great vacuum in the academic milieu both in his native Belgium and abroad. De Smet was born on 10 August 1909 at Assebroek. After finishing his secondary education at the Collège Saint-Louis at Bruges, he entered the University of Ghent. In 1930 he was appointed instructor-student in the Geographical Division of the University. In 1929, following the advice of his history professor and tutor, Henri Pirenne, he turned to historical geography, the field to which he devoted his research and publication for the rest of his life. In the same year, he published his first essay, 'Le compte de la navigation entre Bruges, Nieupoort et Ypres, 1395–1404'. His doctoral thesis, entitled 'Histoire des villes de Damme, de Monikerede et de Hoeke depuis les origines jusqu'en 1330', followed. From graduation in 1931 until 1934, De



Smet taught at the Koninklijk Atheneum at Ghent and at the Koninklijk Atheneum of Antwerp.

In January 1934, Antoine De Smet embarked on his professional career in the Royal Library of Belgium. In 26 November 1935 he obtained his diploma in librarianship and a year later was appointed librarian. On 1 July 1949 he became Assistant Keeper, and in 1964 Keeper. But already by 1939, he had organized the Royal Library's collection of maps and plans, making it available for consultation. In 1969 he was appointed Head of the Department of Historical Collections. He retired in 1974.

Antoine De Smet contributed equally widely outside the Library. In 1954, he was elected titular member of the Belgian Committee for the History of Science, the oldest Belgian organization for the advancement of the history of science (founded in 1933). In 1956, he became the Secretary of the Committee and the Editor of its *Notes Bibliographiques—Bibliografische Nota's*. In 1957, he co-founded the National Centre for the History of Science, becoming first, in that year, Secretary and then, later on, President. From 1963 to 1974, De Smet was a member of the Editorial Board of *Imago Mundi* and in 1969 he organized the Third International Conference on the History of Cartography, which took place in Brussels. Besides his activities in the history of cartography and in the history of science, De Smet was also at one time President of the Académie Royale d'Archéologie de Belgique.

Antoine De Smet's breadth of interest is reflected in his membership of several learned societies, including the Société royale belge de géographie; the Société belge d'études géographiques; the Société pour le progrès des études philologiques et historiques; the Comité national de géographie (Section de cartographie); the Commission of History of Science of the Royal Academy of Belgium; and the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. He was also corresponding editor of the *Coronelli-Weltbund der Globusfreunde*.

Antoine De Smet will always be remembered for his humanistic attitude, in which a deep and wide knowledge of the subject matter of his cartographical and historical researches was combined with profound kindness and affability.

Hossam Elkhadem