

Charles Verlinden

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Born in Brussels on 3rd February 1907, Charles Verlinden, after a brilliant school career, read history at the University of Ghent. With Henri Pirenne and François Ganshof as his tutors, he specialised in medieval history and was awarded a doctorate with a thesis on "Robert I the Frisian, Count of Flanders" which was published in 1935. He taught in secondary schools in Ghent and Brussels, and then went back to the University of Ghent in 1944 where he was appointed professor in 1948. In 1965 he was appointed to the Chair of Modern History and the History of Colonisation, which he held until he was appointed Emeritus Professor in 1974.

Charles Verlinden's scientific production is impressive. He wrote 26 books and about 800 articles published in Belgian and international journals in several languages. The reader is amazed by the diversity of his scientific interest, by the chronological range he mastered and, last but not least, by his extraordinary scholarship. A medievalist by training, Verlinden never abandoned his research in medieval history which resulted in a masterpiece published in 1955: *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, Vol. I, *Péninsule Ibérique, France*. He was working on a second volume, and it is to be hoped that it will be published posthumously.

Verlinden was not only a first-class medievalist. He was a great specialist in the history of geographical discoveries and colonial history. As far back as 1949 he produced several publications on the history of Spanish discoveries: as well as general surveys, they include penetrating analyses of Portuguese maritime history and biographical portraits of the discoverers. In colonial history, Verlinden concentrated on the birth and the building of the colonial empires. At the same time, with his team of collaborators at Ghent he published four important volumes on the history of prices and salaries under the title of *Documents pour l'histoire des prix et salaires en Flandre et en Brabant*, covering eight centuries, but focussing mainly on the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The contemporary era is included in some interesting general-history syntheses.

Although a very productive writer, Verlinden was not a scholar to the exclusion of all else. Quite the contrary. He was very active academically as well as scientifically. He was Secretary and Dean of the Faculty, and a member of the Administrative Council at the University of Ghent. In Rome he was Director of the *Accademia Belgica* and Chairman of the Belgian Historical Institute. He was President of the International Committee for Maritime History and of many other

important scientific associations. Verlinden took part in countless national and international seminars, he taught in several universities outside Belgium and lectured worldwide, and was elected member of the *Académie Royale* and other Belgian and international scientific institutions of great repute. He was an active member of the *Scientific Committee of the Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini"*, and was an honorary member at the time of his death. With his profound knowledge of medieval and modern history and with his lively intelligence, Verlinden was for very many years a source of inspiration during the preparation of the *Settimane di Prato*. He was one of the great animators in the debates during the *Settimane*, thereby contributing to the huge success of these international meetings. He will always be remembered for this.

