

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)
announces an Informal Talk
by
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Warburg Institute, London

**Marcus Aurelius and Seventeenth-Century Antwerp:
Philosophy, Philology and Art in the Early Modern Republic
of Letters**

The Antwerp humanist Caspar Gevartius (1593–1666) worked for forty years on an edition of the Meditations of Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Although his lengthy labours bore no fruit, the circumstances surrounding the planned edition provide a revealing example of the interaction between philosophy, philology and art in the early modern Republic of Letters. Gevartius's chronic inability to finish the various projects on which he embarked was the result of spending the bulk of his time and energy on his post as town secretary of Antwerp. He is known nowadays, if at all, for his close friendship with Peter Paul Rubens, who in 1628 painted a portrait of him sitting at his desk, on which there is an ancient bust of Marcus Aurelius, and writing in a manuscript book – this painting, indeed, seems to be the only extant material evidence for the existence of his edition, on which he had begun to work a few years earlier. Rubens was one of the many friends whom Gevartius asked to search in libraries throughout Europe for Greek manuscripts of the Meditations in order to discover new readings for his edition. This produced little in the way of concrete results; and leading figures in the Republic of Letters such as the French antiquarian Nicolas Peiresc and the Hamburg humanist Lucas Holstenius counselled Gevartius to give up his quest for perfection and publish what he had already amassed. Their sound advice went unheeded, however, and Gevartius's edition of the Meditations never appeared. Nevertheless, a vestige of it can be identified in a seemingly unlikely source: an account of the 1635 entrance of the Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand into Antwerp, with a text by Gevartius (one of the few works he managed to complete, though not until several years after the event) and engravings based on drawings by Rubens. This small surviving trace suggests that the image of Marcus Aurelius which Gevartius intended to present to the scholarly world was very much in line with the Christianized Neostoicism characteristic of the mid-seventeenth century.

Monday, 22 February 2016 at 4 pm
Room 2002, CSMC