CHAPTER 5

Private Libraries and the Second-Hand Book Trade in Early Modern Academia

The Case of Leuven University 1425–1797

Pierre Delsaerdt

In the early years of the eighteenth century, a member of the Council of Brabant made known his annoyance about a number of abuses in the Brabant book business. He had noticed that in this central region of the Southern Low Countries, offensive books, slanderous prints and indecent lyrics were circulating on a large scale. In his report, the author attributed this mainly to the lack of a uniform, unambiguous regulation that would apply throughout the Duchy of Brabant. Instead, there were separate rules and traditions in each city where publishing and bookselling activities of some importance took place. While the situation in Brussels was not so bad, in Antwerp, the book trade was dominated by the Saint Luke's Guild, which consisted mainly of artists. The directors of this guild were not capable of imposing rules on the book trade, let alone enforce them. However, according to the report, the worst state of affairs was in Leuven, where the university had not limited itself to the control of academic publications, but had also appropriated the right to allow or prohibit the printing and distribution of other works. It had even banned the royal censors from visiting Leuven's bookshops and printing offices, with the local printers and booksellers swearing an oath to the Rector, not the Chancellor of Brabant.[1]

The councillor's litany of complaints reminds us—if this is necessary—that the early modern book business was far from uniform, whether in Europe or in the Low Countries, and not even in the relatively small region of Brabant. The book trade always functioned in a given context of interacting powers, economic possibilities, social relations, legal regulations, and cultural and religious dynamics. A recent volume entitled *Books in Motion in Early Modern Europe: Beyond Production, Circulation, and Consumption*, has emphasised once again the importance of taking into account the broad material, societal

1 The anonymous report of eight folios is held in Brussels, State Archives, *Great Council of Mechelen*, 205/9. Cf. Pierre Delsaerdt (ed.), *Abuysen ende ongeregeltheden. Een onbekend rapport over het boekbedrijf in Brabant rond 1700* (Wildert: De Carbolineum Pers, 2002).

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and geographic contexts to fully understand the history of the book.[2] This rather straightforward view obviously also applies to the study of private libraries and the second-hand book trade, more specifically in an academic environment. It is generally accepted that universities in early modern Europe had their own cultural, legal and institutional status, and that they were often among the earliest centres of typographical activity. Therefore, it seems reasonable to examine the impact that academia may have had on private book ownership and on the development of bookselling techniques. Taking the old University of Leuven as a test case—between its establishment in 1425 and its closing in 1797—it will be argued that some of the features of Leuven private libraries and the second-hand book trade were typical of this particular university town in the Southern Low Countries. While it can be expected that some of these characteristics also apply to other places, this will be limited to academic environments. This contribution, therefore, is also to be interpreted as a call for additional research into the particularities of these phenomena in other academic settings.

The subjects addressed will include the question of how the private libraries of Leuven professors related to the provision of library services by the university and its colleges, and how the academic context encouraged the development of a thriving second-hand book trade. Building on these observations, it will be easier to understand why Leuven booksellers introduced auctions early in the sixteenth century and had already adopted printed auction catalogues in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Furthermore, the account books of a particular Leuven bookseller who worked in the second half of the eighteenth century will allow us to question the value of printed auction catalogues as sources for the reconstruction of private libraries. Finally, we will endeavour to explain why eighteenth-century Leuven private libraries, contrary to what might be expected, tended to be surprisingly small.

The Old University of Leuven, 1425–1797

In order to find answers to these questions, it may be useful to briefly recall a few elements of the history of Leuven university. It was founded by Pope Martin V in 1425, on the initiative of the Duke of Brabant and of Leuven's town council,

2 Daniel Bellingradt and Jeroen Salman, 'Books and Book History in Motion: Materiality, Sociality and Spatiality', in Daniel Bellingradt, Paul Nelles and Jeroen Salman (eds.), *Books in Motion in Early Modern Europe. Beyond Production, Circulation, and Consumption* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1–11.

in conjunction with the Chapter of St Peter's Church. The original papal bull authorised the university to organise four faculties: the Arts, Civil Law, Canon Law and Medicine. In 1432, a Faculty of Theology was added, thus completing the construction of Leuven's *Studium Generale*. Henceforth, it held a monopoly on higher education in the Low Countries until 1562, when a papal bull confirmed King Philip II's initiative to create a university in Douai, then still part of the Low Countries.

Leuven's monopoly, however, was challenged more seriously in 1575, when William of Orange founded Leiden University in a context of fierce Calvinist competition. Douai fell to France in 1668; and from then on, Leuven remained the only centre of higher education in the Southern Low Countries under Habsburg rule. The university enjoyed a set of legal and fiscal privileges that gave it the character of a small republic within the town of Leuven and indeed within the Habsburg Low Countries. The Rector and his Council exercised jurisdiction over the *suppositi:* the registered members of the academic community, who enjoyed significant privileges once they had paid an enrolment fee, proved to be fluent in Latin, and had taken the oath of obedience to the university statutes. This *Ancien Régime* institution, however, was abolished in 1797, some years after the annexation of the Southern Low Countries by the French Republic. Only in 1816 did academic activities resume in Leuven, when the Dutch king William I founded state universities in Ghent, Liège and Leuven, in addition to Leiden, Utrecht and Groningen in the northern part of his kingdom.[3]

Institutional Library Services

Life at Leuven University was organised in a very decentralised way. As mentioned above, five faculties determined the domains taught: a basic curriculum in the Arts (philosophy, mathematics and the natural sciences) was supplemented by programmes in Medicine, Civil Law, Canon Law and Theology. Education was provided in residential colleges that were spread across the town, and it is at this very local level that library services were offered during the first two centuries. Most of the colleges had their own libraries, which were usually rather small collections that were intended first and foremost for their teaching staff and for advanced students, with the latter sometimes entrusted

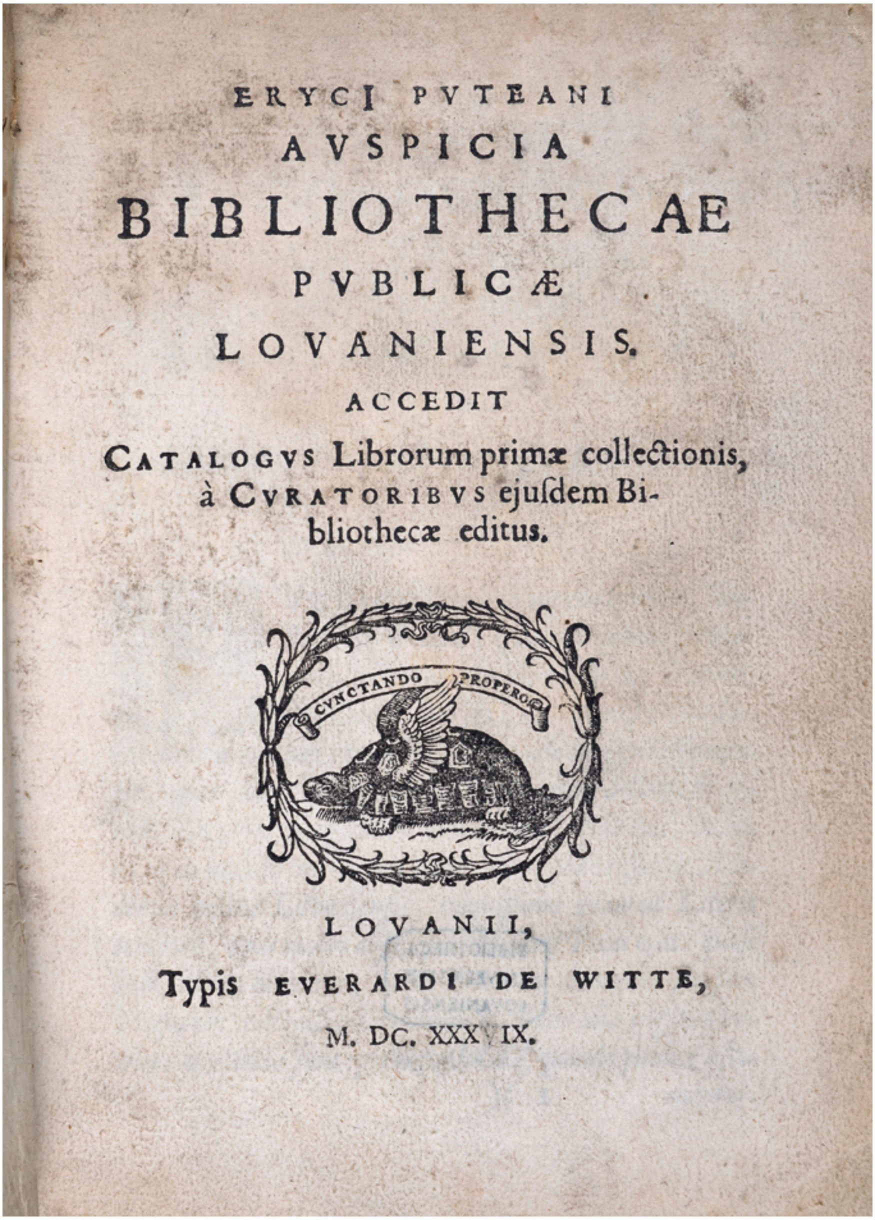
3 Emiel Lamberts and Jan Roegiers, *Leuven University, 1425–1985* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990).

with control of the library's holdings.[4] Only a few colleges had the means to be more ambitious in this respect; they gradually developed into full-fledged faculty libraries. The College of the Holy Spirit, for example, housed a significant number of theology students and an important library, which became the leading theological resource for the entire academic community. In the same way, the library of St Ivo's College functioned as a specialised law library.

A *central* university library was created in 1636. At first, it was intended to complement the existing college libraries, focusing primarily on genres that were not collected systematically elsewhere, such as forbidden (Protestant) books, rare books (especially incunabula) and volumes that were too expensive for the acquisition budgets of individual institutions. This central library was located in the University Hall, at the heart of academic life. From the start, its collection very much depended on donations (as did those of the college libraries), which explains why the original focus on forbidden, rare and precious books could not be maintained. Some proactive academic librarians only found ways to finance a more expansive acquisitions policy in the second half of the eighteenth century. They also succeeded in cataloguing the holdings, thus meeting the growing research needs of the academic community. At that time, however, the dissolution of the university was already approaching. During most of the institution's existence, the lack of consistent and up-to-date institutional library collections forced every individual professor and student to buy the majority of his study and reading material for himself. This was the reality behind a phrase by the Leuven professor, Erycius Puteanus, published in the central library's first catalogue of 1639: "Inter professores suam quisque possidet bibliothecam, et aestimat"—Every professor has his own library, and esteems it (see figure 5.1 page 125).[5]

4 This was the case, for example, for Arras College: cf. Pierre Delsaerdt, 'Arras College Library Leuven: the academic habitat of the Anjou Bible for three centuries', in Lieve Watteeuw and Jan Van der Stock (eds.), *The Anjou Bible: a royal manuscript revealed, Naples 1340* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 139–145.

5 Christian Coppens, Mark Derez and Jan Roegiers (eds.), *Leuven University Library, 1425–2000. Sapientia aedificavit sibi domum* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005); Jan Roegiers, 'The first Leuven University Library rules (1636 and 1655)', in Chris Coppens *et al.* (eds.), *E Codicibus Impressisque. Opstellen over het boek in de Lage Landen voor Elly Cockx-Indestege* (3 vols., Leuven: Peeters, 2004), III, pp. 545–554. Erycius Puteanus's citation in his introduction to *Auspicia Bibliothecae Publicae Lovaniensis. Accedit catalogus librorum primae collectionis, à curatoribus ejusdem bibliothecae editus* (Leuven: Everardus de Witte, 1639), pp. 33–34 (USTC 1510060).


ERYCI PVTEANI
AVSPICIA
BIBLIOTHECAE
PVBLICÆ
LOVANIENSIS.
ACCEDIT
CATALOGVS Librorum primæ collectionis,
à CVRATORIBVS ejuſdem Bi-
bliothecæ editus.

CVNCTANDO PROPERO

LOVANII,
Typis EVERARDI DE WITTE,
M. DC. XXXVIX.

FIGURE 5.1 Title page of *Avspicia bibliothecae pvblicæ Lovaniensis. Accedit catalogvs librorum primæ collectionis* (Leuven: Everardus de Witte, 1639): the first printed catalogue of Leuven's Central University Library, by its librarian Valerius Andreas, and with an introductory essay by Erycius Puteanus [KU Leuven Libraries, Special Collections, CaaA1279] (USTC 1510060)

The Organisation of the Second-Hand Book Trade

The long absence of quality library services during most of the university's existence does not imply that it was not concerned about the provision of knowledge to its professors and students. As a matter of fact, the academic authorities developed a rather effective policy regarding the book trade, which took shape from the very start. Issued shortly after 1425, the first university statutes included a separate chapter entitled *De officio librarii*, which stipulated, among other things, that all prospective *librarii* (traders in manuscripts) had to take an oath of obedience to the Rector. Subsequent statutes and regulations extended these requirements to all Leuven-based printers, booksellers and bookbinders. Their official position as *suppositi* (with all the conditions attached to this) assured them of an independent position vis-à-vis the local and regional authorities. They owed compliance only to the university regulations and to the authority of the Rector. Of no less importance were the fiscal privileges to which they were entitled. Like the other *suppositi*, they were guaranteed free movement of person and goods, and were exempt from all royal, regional and municipal taxes.

As a result of its autonomous position, the university was able to develop a set of very specific regulations for the book industry in 1644, which were updated and extended no less than four times until 1750.[6] Interestingly, one chapter of these regulations was always reserved for the second-hand book trade, more precisely for book auctions. Until then, the Leuven booksellers had enjoyed a great deal of freedom in organising auctions, with the university statutes of 1565 only stipulating that they had to content themselves with a commission of 5% at the seller's expense. However, things changed in 1644, when it was decided: (1) that only sworn booksellers were entitled to sell books at auction; (2) that every auction had to be approved by the Rector; (3) that the auctioneer had to draw up a catalogue, which could only be distributed upon approval by the Rector, the university's librarian and another high official; (4) that 'old' books from the auctioneer's bookshop (books that had remained unsold on the shelves) could be auctioned together with bequeathed second-hand books;

6 Jan Roegiers, 'De reglementering van het boekbedrijf aan de oude universiteit Leuven', in Ludo Simons *et al.* (eds.), *Het oude en het nieuwe boek. De oude en de nieuwe bibliotheek. Liber amicorum H.D.L. Vervliet* (Kapellen: Pelckmans, 1988), pp. 75–88; Pierre Delsaerdt, 'Les règlements sur la production et la vente des livres, promulgués par l'ancienne université de Louvain. Édition critique', *Lias*, 17 (1990), pp. 63–89; Pierre Delsaerdt, 'Printers and printing policy at Leuven university, 15th–18th centuries', in Marieke van Delft *et al.* (eds.), *New Perspectives in Book History: Contributions from the Low Countries* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2006), pp. 49–64.

and (5) that the regulations required the auctioneer to cede a substantial part of his fee to the university.

Second-hand books were clearly of central importance to the dissemination of knowledge in the academic context, and auctions were considered the most effective technique to find new readers for second-hand books. The thriving auction market was encouraged by the presence of a large student population in Leuven, who needed books at affordable prices as a basic commodity, as well as early career academics, who did not always have the financial means to buy brand new books to prepare their courses or to sustain their scholarly work. Even senior academics regularly bid for books that were no longer available in regular bookshops.

However, there is more to say about the success of book auctions in this particular context. University professors in Leuven were usually unmarried—only professors in Canon Law and Medicine were not subject to the obligation of celibacy, which was generally enforced until the end of the eighteenth century.[7] At the end of their lives, they often bequeathed part or all of their possessions to their college or to the university in general, with the aim of creating study grants that were usually associated with a specific college or faculty. In their wills, they appointed one or two executors who were responsible for the sale of their belongings—including their books—in order to finance the grants. From the large number of preserved files concerning these grants and their financing by the sale of books, we can deduce that, in Leuven, auctions were considered the most convenient way to transform bequeathed books into cash. Moreover, the reports of the University Council show that book auctions were already a well-established commercial technique in the mid-sixteenth century. Indeed, the *Acta Universitatis* of 29 November 1559 mentions the Council's decision to ensure a monopoly on book auctions, involving only two Leuven booksellers. However, due to general protest against this measure, it was withdrawn and the Council decided to restore the former practices: "Manendum est in *antiqua* libertate" (We have decided to maintain the *old* freedom).[8] The earliest mention of a Leuven book auction that can be linked to a specific name, dates from 1557; it refers to the auction of the books owned by Petrus Nannius (d. 1557), a professor at the Leuven *Collegium trilingue*.[9]

7 Emiel Lamberts and Jan Roegiers, *De Universiteit te Leuven 1425–1985* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 1988), p. 124.

8 Pierre Delsaerdt, *Suam quisque bibliothecam. Boekhandel en particulier boekenbezit aan de oude Leuvense universiteit, 16de–18de eeuw* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2001), pp. 150–151.

9 This information relies on one particular copy of Hippocrates' *Epidemion Liber Sextus*, Basle: apvd Io. Bebelivm et Mich. Isingrinivm, 1537 (USTC 603127), with the mention "Empt[us]

In summary, on the supply side, auctions were popular as a means to dispose of small or larger collections of books. Booksellers were eager to organise auctions because they earned them easy money. Indeed, the auctioneers received a double reward that was proportional to the sales figures, being paid both by the executors and the buyers of the books. On the demand side, there was always a public of students and professors looking for cheaper ways to acquire books for their personal libraries. Moreover, Leuven book auctions also attracted buyers from outside the university, such as Leuven citizens, civil servants from nearby Brussels and Mechelen, and representatives of the many large abbeys and monasteries in the Duchy of Brabant.[10]

Printed Auction Catalogues

Numerous documents related to the creation of study grants show that book auctions taking place in Leuven in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were announced by means of handwritten catalogues, which were pasted *ad valvas*, at the doors, of St Peter's Church, like all other announcements of an academic nature. Sometimes an additional copy of the list was affixed at the town hall. *Printed* lists did not emerge until later.[11]

The appearance of printed auction catalogues is generally considered to be a key moment in the history of the book trade. It is most probable that auction catalogues were a Dutch invention: the first private library to have been auctioned from a printed catalogue was the collection owned by Philip of Marnix of Saint-Aldegonde (1540–1598). The majority of his books were auctioned at

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8 st[uueris] Lovanij in auctione Na[n]nij Lectoris publici 1557" on its title page; it has recently been acquired by KU Leuven University Libraries, Special Collections, Res. 7B1310. On this copy, cf. Graham Pollard, Albert Ehrman, *The Distribution of Books by Catalogue from the Invention of Printing to A.D. 1800 Based on Material in the Broxbourne Library* (Cambridge: The Roxburghe Club, 1965), p. 216; Bert van Selm, *Een menighte treffelijcke boecken. Nederlandse boekhandelscatalogi in het begin van de zeventiende eeuw* (Utrecht: HES, 1987), p. 14; and above all, Xander Feys, 'A Hippocrates for eight stivers: On Petrus Nannius' library and the earliest-known Leuven book auction (1557)', *De Gulden Passer*, 98:1 (2020), pp. 239–258. I am greatly indebted to Xander Feys, who sent me a transcription of the handwritten note on the title page, and who had noticed in time that the copy was to be sold in November 2019.

10 See, e.g. the enumeration of the clients attending one of the major seventeenth-century auctions: that of the Leuven professor, Libertus Fromondus (1587–1653), listed in the account books of the bookseller Georgius Lipsius, in Delsaerdt, *Suam quisque bibliothecam*, pp. 655–770.

11 Delsaerdt, *Suam quisque bibliothecam*, pp. 161–162.

Leiden, in the Dutch Republic, in July 1599. Printed book auction catalogues followed soon after in other Dutch towns.[12] However, it took several decades before auction catalogues were printed outside the Dutch Republic. The first printed book auction catalogue that appeared abroad was published in Brussels in 1614. It was prepared for the auction of the library of Duke Charles III of Croÿ, a member of an important aristocratic family.[13] However, it seems to have remained an exception, for as far as we know with certainty, the experiment was next repeated only in the mid-1630s, when several catalogues were printed for auctions that took place in Leuven.

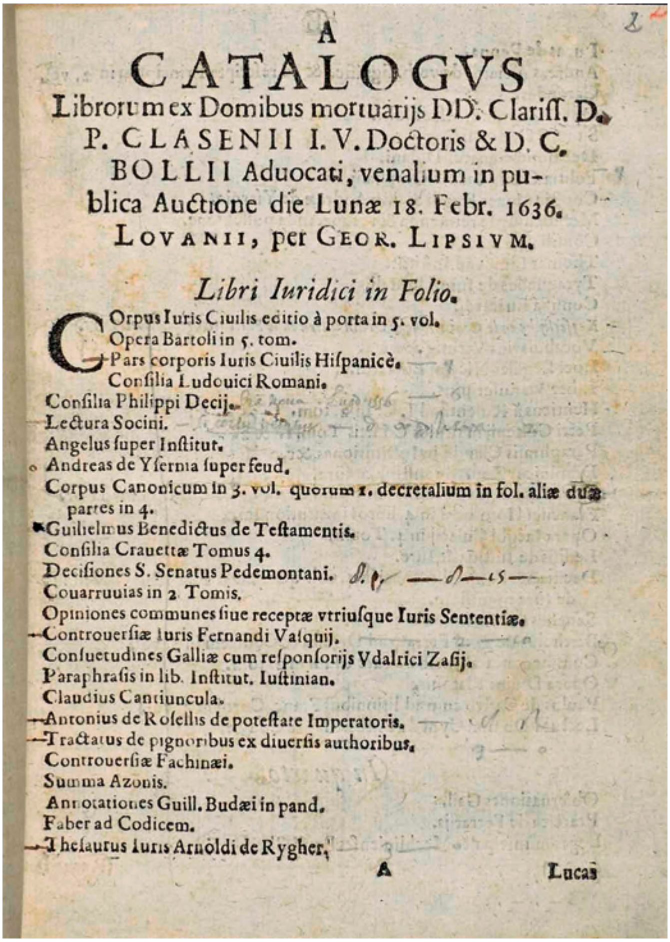
Recent research into the provenance of the only surviving copy of the Croÿ auction catalogue of 1614 has demonstrated that two private libraries of Leuven scholars were auctioned from printed catalogues in the first decades of the seventeenth century, although no copies of these seem to have survived. They were used to selling the libraries of Leuven academics, George of Austria Jr (d. Brussels 1619; catalogue published in Leuven, s.a.) and Petrus Castellanus (1585–1632; catalogue published in Leuven, 1634); both references were hitherto unknown.[14] However, the first Leuven auction catalogues that have been preserved date from 1636, with the three surviving brochures bound together in one pamphlet binding at the Royal Library of Belgium in Brussels. These brochures describe libraries owned by two deceased jurists and one theologian, in addition to a series of books coming from the estates of several anonymous deceased persons (see figure 5.2 page 130).[15]

12 Gerhard J. Brouwer (ed.), *Catalogue of the Library of Philips van Marnix van Sint-Aldegonde, Sold by Auction (July 6th), Leiden, Christophorus Guyot, 1599* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1964); Van Selm, *Een menighte treffelijcke boecken*, pp. 22–38.

13 Edward Van Even, 'Notice sur la bibliothèque de Charles de Croy, Duc d'Aerschot (1614)', *Bulletin du bibliophile belge*, IX (1852), pp. 380–393 and 436–451; Christian Coppens, 'A Post-Mortem Inventory Turned Into a Sales Catalogue: a Screening of the Auction Catalogue of the Library of Charles Duke of Croy, Brussels 1614', *Quærendo*, 38 (2008), pp. 359–380; Pierre Delsaerdt and Yann Sordet (eds.), *Lectures princières & commerce du livre. La bibliothèque de Charles III de Croÿ et sa mise en vente (1614)* (2 vols., Paris: Fondation d'Arenberg, Société des bibliophiles françois, Éditions des Cendres, 2017).

14 Pierre Delsaerdt, 'The Auction Catalogue of Charles III of Croÿ's Library (Brussels 1614): An Object-Oriented Approach', in Arthur der Weduwen, Graeme Kemp and Andrew Pettegree (eds.), *Book Trade Catalogues in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 61–86. On George of Austria and his donation of part of his library to the Leuven *Collegium Trilingue*, cf. Gilbert Tournoy, 'De boekenschenking van Joris van Oostenrijk aan het Leuvense Collegium Trilingue', *De Gulden Passer*, 96 (2018), pp. 283–295.

15 More about these auction catalogues can be found in Delsaerdt, *Suam quisque bibliothecam*, pp. 161–173, and in a facsimile edition of the earliest one: Pierre Delsaerdt (ed.), *Catalogus librorum ex domibus mortuariis. De eerste gedrukte Leuvense boekveilingcatalogus* (Wildert: De Carbolineum Pers, 1995).



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CATALOGVS
Librorum ex Domibus mortuarijs DD. Clariss. D. P. CLASENII I.V. Doctoris & D. C. BOLLII Aduocati, venalium in publica Auctione die Lunæ 18. Febr. 1636.
LOVANII, per GEOR. LIPSIVM.

Libri Iuridici in Folio.

Corpus Iuris Ciuilis editio à porta in 5. vol.
Opera Bartoli in 5. tom.
Pars corporis Iuris Ciuilis Hispanicè.
Consilia Ludouici Romani.
Consilia Philippi Decij.
Lectura Socini.
Angelus super Institut.
Andreas de Ysernia super feud.
Corpus Canonicum in 3. vol. quorum 1. decretalium in fol. aliæ duæ partes in 4.
Guilielmus Benedictus de Testamentis.
Consilia Crauettæ Tomus 4.
Decisiones S. Senatus Pedemontani.
Couarruuias in 2 Tomis.
Opiniones communes siue receptæ vtriusque Iuris Sententiæ.
Controuersiæ Iuris Fernandi Vasquij.
Consuetudines Galliæ cum responsorijs Vdalrici Zasij.
Paraphrasis in lib. Institut. Iustinian.
Claudius Cantiuncula.
Antonius de Rosellis de potestate Imperatoris.
Tractatus de pignoribus ex diuersis authoribus.
Controuersiæ Fachinæi.
Summa Azonis.
Annotationes Guill. Budæi in pand.
Faber ad Codicem.
Thesaurus Iuris Arnoldi de Rygher.

A Lucas

FIGURE 5.2 First page of the first preserved book auction catalogue printed in Leuven: *Catalogvs librorum ex domibus mortuarijs … D.P. Clasenii I.V. Doctoris & D.C. Bollii* (Leuven: Georgius Lipsius, 1636) [Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, II 28.702 A 2 LP] (USTC 1001341)

That these auctions were held in February and March 1636 is no coincidence. All three of the book owners mentioned died in the summer or early autumn of 1635, which is very shortly after the siege of Leuven by the Dutch-French coalition armies in June–July 1635, during the Thirty Years' War. While it is true that the militia of the Leuven population and the students succeeded in warding off the enemy, a few weeks later, the town was struck by the plague, and this led to a significant loss of lives. Whereas the average number of deaths in the early 1630s fluctuated around 100 per year, the figures for 1635 and 1636 leave nothing to the imagination, with 437 people deceased in 1635 and 391 in 1636.[16] It is thus an acceptable hypothesis that the plague increased the number of private libraries left by the deceased, and that, consequently, the Leuven booksellers decided to sell unusually large numbers of books using printed catalogues. This relatively new marketing technique allowed for large-scale advertising and enabled prospective buyers to prepare for the auctions in a more effective way, without having to see the books on show in the bookshops or in the homes of the deceased.

Auction Catalogues and the Reconstruction of Private Libraries

As mentioned above, the regulations that the university drew up for the Leuven book trade from 1644 to 1750 always included a separate chapter on book auctions. Booksellers were expected to ask for special approval from the academic authorities for each auction. They had to present a catalogue of the books on sale, and volumes that were not included in these lists could not be sold. The 1750 edition of the regulations added that the booksellers were required to keep an exact account of their auctions, and to present their account books to the university collector so that he could check if the required taxes had been paid to the university.

This regulation probably explains why one of the most active auctioneers in eighteenth-century Leuven, Joannes Franciscus van Overbeke (1727–1810), kept his accounts in such a detailed way. Eight of the fifteen volumes that he originally compiled, covering the years 1762 to 1796, have been preserved, all of which are impressive.[17] Van Overbeke cut each of his auction catalogues into pieces and pasted these into registers. He recorded the price fetched for each lot and the name of the buyer. What is even more important is that he added the exact provenance of each lot (see figure 5.3 page 132).

Apparently, the books that were presented in the catalogue as coming from the library of one academic, whose name and titles were recorded in detail on the title page, actually had very diverse origins: the academic named on the title page was of course one source, but there was also a long list of other professors, students, private persons and other booksellers who approached

16 Delsaerdt, *Suam quisque bibliothecam*, p. 166.

17 According to the number of catalogues found in his accounts, Van Overbeke held at least 62 auctions from 1757 to 1796. Seven volumes of his account books, covering the years from 1762 to 1793, are kept in Leuven, University Archives; the eighth volume, which covers the years 1793 to 1796, is in Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, cat. nr. VI 87.378 B L.P.

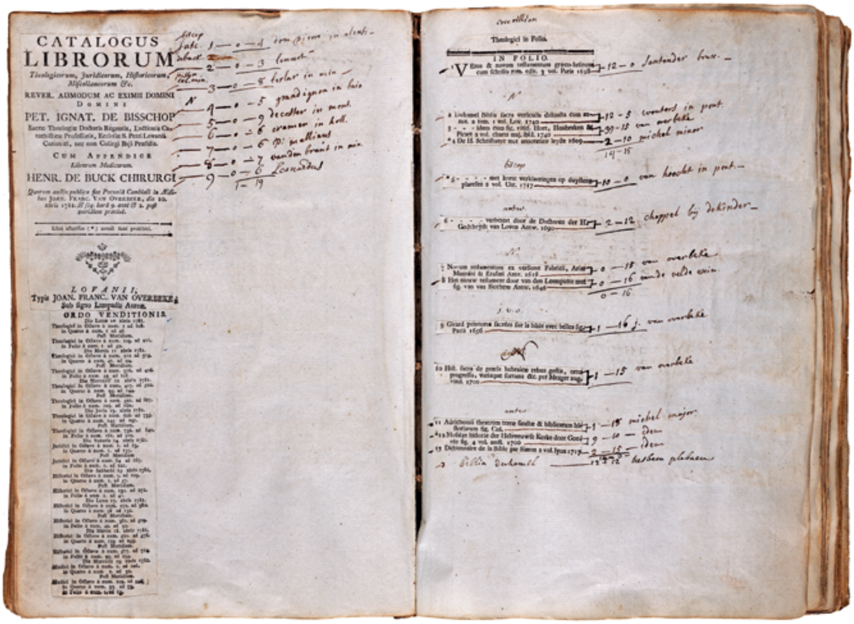

FIGURE 5.3 Annotated fragments of the auction catalogue of Petrus Ignatius de Bisschop, professor at Leuven's Faculty of Theology, and of the surgeon Henricus de Buck (Leuven: Joannes Franciscus van Overbeke, 1781), as found in the fourth volume of Van Overbeke's accounts [Leuven, University Archives, Archives of Jan Frans van Overbeke, 4]

the auctioneer to have their second-hand books sold under a false identity. The fact that this practice was common throughout Van Overbeke's career is proof that it was a successful commercial strategy. Moreover, this was also the case elsewhere in the Low Countries, and especially in the Dutch Republic, in that other university city, Leiden, where, in 1636, the city council and the university issued an ordinance stipulating that booksellers were not allowed to combine their own books with the books of private libraries (in contrast to Leuven, where this practice was authorised). Notwithstanding this, as early as the seventeenth century, there were repeated complaints about booksellers combining their own stocks of books with second-hand books from private individuals.[18]

Nonetheless, these accounts also bring to light that Van Overbeke's original, uncut catalogues are not reliable sources at all for anyone wanting to use them

18 Hannie van Goinga, *Alom te bekomen. Veranderingen in de boekdistributie in de Republiek 1720–1800* (Amsterdam: De Buitenkant, 1999), pp. 185–189.

to reconstruct eighteenth-century scholarly libraries. Two case studies allow us to demonstrate this in quantitative terms: the auction catalogue presenting the collections of the jurist Guilielmus Leunckens and the parish priest Joannes Goetseels (1773), and that prepared for the auction of the library of the theologian Petrus Ignatius de Bisschop (1781). Van Overbeke's account books reveal that only 22.3% and 26%, respectively, of the books mentioned in the 'naked' catalogues had actually been part of the private library of the owners named on the title pages.[19] There is only one conclusion, and it has the character of a severe warning. If we want to use printed auction catalogues as a source for the reconstruction of private libraries—at least libraries from Leuven, but possibly also from elsewhere, as the Leiden case demonstrates—we definitely need additional archival evidence, such as probate inventories, or indeed account books of the auctioneers. If such evidence is not available, these auction catalogues can be considered to only reveal which second-hand books were circulating on the market at any given moment.

The Size of the Leuven Private Libraries

On the basis of Van Overbeke's account books, I have done research on the size and contents of twelve libraries of Leuven academics that were auctioned between 1763 and 1794. The academics involved were affiliated with the faculties of Theology, Medicine, Canon Law and Civil Law; one of them did not teach but was the head of one of Leuven's university colleges.[20] This quantitative analysis reveals some striking features. Firstly, the size of the libraries was much smaller than expected: the median number for the random sample is no more than 410 titles, with the smallest collection consisting of only 78 titles, and the two largest collections including no more than 993 and 1,147 titles, respectively. Secondly, there appears to be no evolution whatsoever in the size of the libraries sold: private libraries that were sold in the years following the French Revolution were not necessarily larger than those sold in the 1760s, some 30 years earlier.

Moreover, a comparison with the private libraries of Leuven academics that were listed in probate inventories or auctioned in the sixteenth and

19 Delsaerdt, *Suam quisque bibliothecam*, pp. 207–221, 321–323.

20 The libraries involved were owned by Henricus Antonius Poringo (auctioned in 1763), Franciscus Michiels (1764), Petrus Boets (1764), Guilielmus Leunckens (1773), Stephanus Dominicus de Laittres (1774), Joannes Josephus Guyaux (1774), Christianus Franciscus Terswaek (1783), Gerardus Deckers (1783), Joannes Josephus Polet (1783), Josephus Curé (1793), Joannes Josephus Michaux (1794) and Eugenius Franciscus Beyens (1794).

seventeenth centuries shows that late eighteenth-century libraries were not significantly larger than their earlier counterparts, but rather the contrary. For example, when the Leuven theologian, Henricus Crockaert (*c.*1535–1581), died at 46 in 1581, he owned 216 books. Another theologian, Libertus Fromondus (1587–1653), left a library of 806 titles, which was sold in December 1653. In addition, when we look at the—very rare—seventeenth-century Leuven auction catalogues that have been preserved, we find fairly impressive numbers: the catalogue of the library left by the erudite polygraph Nicolaus Vernulaeus (1583–1649) lists 1,778 titles; that describing the library of the professor of medicine Vopiscus Fortunatus Plempius (1601–1671) has 1,074 items; and the auction catalogue of the lawyer Henricus Loyens (1607–1686) lists more than 8,000 titles.[21] However, once again, the accounts of these auctioneers have not been preserved, so we do not know how many items actually came from the libraries of these academics.

Several rather trivial factors must be taken into account when attempting to understand these phenomena. Firstly, of course, not every Leuven academic had the same budget at his disposal. There was quite some variety in the revenues of the teaching staff, and some of the professors combined their appointment within a faculty with a function on a board of directors, or with the management of one of the colleges.[22] Secondly, not everyone reached an advanced age, and it is no coincidence that the largest library auctioned by Van Overbeke was that owned by a theologian who reached the age of 90, Joannes Josephus Guyaux (1684–1774). At the end of his life, he owned a library with 1,147 titles. Last but not least, we must take into account the very prosaic factor of the housing accommodation of the Leuven professors. Only very rarely did they reside in a private home; most of them lived in a room or in a couple of rooms in a college. Moreover, they would move from one college to another when this was relevant to their academic career or their income. Every move

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21 A unique copy of the Vernulaeus catalogue (1649) is held in Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, VH 22.938 (Sammelband). There is also a facsimile edition: Pierre Delsaerdt (ed.), *De bibliotheek van Nicolaus Vernulaeus. Een facsimile van de boekveilingcatalogus uit 1649* (Wildert: De Carbolineum Pers, 2005). A unique copy of the Plempius catalogue (1672) is held in Paris, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de médecine. One of two known copies of the Loyens catalogue (1687) is held in Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, BC Sammelband 6 (6), the other is found in Budapest, Széchényi Library, 821.665. Cf. Delsaerdt, *Suam quisque bibliothecam*, pp. 174–175, 233–255, 257–295.

22 Jan Roegiers, 'Professorencarrières aan de oude Universiteit Leuven (1425–1797)', in Aloïs Jans *et al.* (eds.), *Liber amicorum Dr. J. Scheerder. Tijdingen uit Leuven over de Spaanse Nederlanden, de Leuvense universiteit en Historiografie* (Leuven: Vereniging Historici Lovanienses, 1987), pp. 227–239.

entailed a critical appraisal of their book collections: What would be kept? What was less useful and could be discarded? Not only does this repeated appraisal explain the relatively small size of most of the libraries, it also illustrates the rather constant flux of books, for which new readers were sought, and hence the importance accorded by the university to the local second-hand book trade.

The Importance of Context

An analysis of the broad context in which the book business at Leuven university operated has proved fruitful. The specific living conditions of academics and the usually limited space they had available restricted the number of books they had on their shelves, and they regularly discarded volumes that had lost their relevance. At the end of their lives, they only rarely had direct descendants who could take over their library. Numerous collections were sold by executors according to the testamentary arrangements of the deceased, with the aim of financing scholarships. These transactions took place in the university town itself, where sales were ensured thanks to the large number of students and lecturers. The Leuven booksellers benefited from this, enjoying a comfortable status and essentially forming part of the same community as the students and professors.

As private libraries grew in size, they started to sell books by auction, at the latest in the first half of the sixteenth century. An audience of interested customers would gather in one room at an agreed time, and this maximised the chances of a good return. In the 1630s, when external circumstances led to the local market being flooded with books by deceased *suppositi*, the booksellers—possibly following the example of their Dutch colleagues, or possibly inspired by a Brussels precedent—introduced printed catalogues aiming to make the auctions better known and to organise them in a more efficient way. This auction system was encouraged and regulated by the University Council, which taxed the results of the sales.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, possibly also in earlier years, auctions offered other private individuals the opportunity to have their books sold anonymously alongside the volumes bequeathed by locally renowned professors; a guarantee of better sales results. This practice of integrating books of diverse origins—often small packages brought by a large number of private persons—demonstrates the creativity of booksellers. It may also have been inspired by the need to compile an auction catalogue that was sufficiently voluminous; in the eighteenth century, the average professor's library was often too small to fill a substantial catalogue. This, in turn, may be explained by the growth, in the same period, of the university library sector.

Nevertheless, the practice of systematically including books from other sources in the auction catalogues of deceased professors leads to a serious methodological problem: how do we determine whether these commercial brochures are what they claimed to be, that is, a list of all the books that the owner had in his possession at the end of his life? Clearly, any further research that uses auction catalogues as sources to reconstruct the book holdings of early modern readers will first and foremost have to examine how the auctions functioned in the given period and in the given institutional, cultural and economic contexts.