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Cheap Print and the Academic Market: The Printing of Dissertations in Sixteenth-Century Louvain

Malcolm Walsby

The survival of single sheet items printed in the sixteenth century owes much to chance. Their inherent fragility meant that their use often involved exposing them to damage that eventually entailed their destruction. In most instances, when they are known today, it is because a single copy has somehow avoided destruction. Cases such as the broadsheet printed for the town of Troyes which survives in no fewer than twenty-two copies are very much the exception rather than the rule; here we seem to have the remaining stock of copies that were not required for distribution.¹ Such haphazard survival was complemented by acts of conscious collecting – as is demonstrated by the ephemera produced during the Catholic League gathered together by Pierre de L'Estoile in the 1580s and 90s.² At first glance, this seems also to be true for the case presented here. The Louvain dissertations that are the object of this study survived because they were methodically collected and bound into a single volume.

Despite this careful attempt to preserve these imprints, all knowledge of their existence had been lost and none of the editions were listed in the specialist bibliographies of printing in the Southern Low Countries in the sixteenth century prior to the publication of *Netherlandish Books*.³ Part of the reason for this neglect was the way in which they were catalogued. Though they are preserved in one of the world's major rare book collections, the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, very little attempt had been made to describe them properly.

1 *De par monsieur le baillly de Troyes ou son lieutenant* (27.04.1589), (Troyes : [Jean Moreau], 1589), USTC 59290, Archives Municipales de Troyes, Layette 20. See also chapter one, for examples from Antwerp.

2 On L'Estoile's collecting see Tom Hamilton, *A Storehouse of Curiosities: Pierre de L'Estoile and his World in the Wars of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

3 Elly Cockx-Indestege and Geneviève Glorieux, *Belgica typographica, 1541–1600. Catalogus librorum impressorum ab anno MDXLI ad annum MDC in regionibus quae nunc Regni Belgarum partes sunt* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1968–1994). Andrew Pettegree and Malcolm Walsby, *NB: Netherlandish Books. Books Published in the Low Countries and in the Dutch Language Abroad Before 1601* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

As is the case with a surprising number of composite volumes or *Sammelbände*, the librarian who should have listed all the items separately simply resorted to giving a general title to the volume. This was then mis-transcribed when the on-line catalogue was created, which left the editions regrouped under the mangled title “*Quoestio theologica*”.⁴

The lack of consideration with which these items were treated is not untypical of the wider disregard for unillustrated single sheet items, as is demonstrated by their exclusion from some large scale bibliographies such as the German VD16. Being written in Latin and dealing with some of the theological issues that preoccupied the sixteenth-century Catholic Church, the dissertations were undoubtedly not considered to be particularly interesting by the time they were catalogued. The composite volume preserved in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* contains 226 items that represent 214 different editions. From the dates given on the sheets, they range over twelve years from 1577 to 1588, though almost a third do not have any indication as to the date at which they were published. Each text presents the work of a theology student enrolled at the University of Louvain in the form of an academic dissertation addressing an aspect of Catholic doctrine.

Despite the manifest lack of interest from scholars, their examination is very revealing of the academic market for cheap print that developed in early modern European universities. Furthermore, their analysis helps us better to understand some of the practices of the University of Louvain and its theology students. As some of the sheets bear the marks of their readers, we can also gain some insight into how the items were used and how they were collected and preserved. This suggests, as will be argued here, that the point at which they were gathered together into the bound volume marks the end of their useful life, after a period of fluid and dynamic use where the dissertations went through several earlier stages of collection and consultation.

Printing Academic Broadsheets

The bibliographic information provided on the dissertations is in most cases very limited. Only 16 of the 214 editions bear the name of the printer's workshop in which they were produced. In all, there are three printers named: Reinerus Velpius the younger (active 1573–1577, 12 editions), Andries Corthoudt (1576–1577, three editions) and Jacob Heyberghs (1567–1596, one edition). Though there is no indication of the place of publication, all these printers

4 <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb33570635d>, accessed 11 February 2016.

were active in Louvain. In the context of the production of such short pieces which required only limited investment, a local printer was a logical choice. It enabled the university to keep a close eye on what was being produced and build a relationship with a local workshop. There are, however, instances of such dissertations being published in nearby towns. In Nantes, for instance, a quarrel between one of the university's bookseller-printers and one of the colleges revealed that the cost of printing the dissertations was the subject of much disagreement. The better price offered by the printers of another university town, Angers, showed that printing the items in the immediate vicinity was not necessarily an automatic choice.⁵

Where were the remaining 198 editions printed? Not only did the vast majority of these items fail to indicate the name of the printer, they also did not share the same characteristics as those with an imprint. The types used were not the same size whilst the ornate letters and typographic ornaments were of different styles. It is also notable that the typographic habits of the workshop were at odds with those that did bear a printer's name: the large bulk of the dissertations, indeed, seem to have been the work of a single unnamed workshop. The editions published by Velpius, for instance, vary considerably in their choice of woodcut ornaments, of type and in the layout of the text compared to the unsigned editions. This greater variety can perhaps be seen as reflecting a more assertive approach mirrored in his decision to include his name on the sheets. Despite these variances, there were many shared similarities between the different editions. Most notably, all three printers chose to insert the imprint details at the bottom of the page, mimicking in this the layout of traditional title pages.

This adoption of patterns traditionally used on the title pages of books is consistent throughout the composite volume. Each edition included, first of all, information about the content of the work, generally in the form of a generic short title. In most cases this was "Quaestio theologica", often separated from the rest of the text and made more visible by the use of an ornate frame or a filet. The question that was to be resolved then followed with the response that occupied, in most cases, approximately two thirds of the printed page. Then came the student's name indicated in the middle of the page and in many cases separated from the preceding part by the use of a filet or a typographical ornament. Finally, at the bottom of the page, there were either the

5 See Malcolm Walsby, *The Printed Book in Brittany, 1480–1600* (Leiden: Brill, 2011) pp. 121–123 and Léon Maître, 'Une procédure universitaire au collège de Nantes contre le monopole des libraires au XVI^e siècle' *Annales de Bretagne*, XXII (1907) 224–238. The original document is in the AD Loire-Atlantique.

commercial details on the printing of the work or information on where and when the dissertation was to be defended. This mirrored the division of the title page into the title, contents, intellectual authority and commercial details that became the norm on title pages in the francophone world in the second quarter of the sixteenth century.⁶

Analysis of the typographical choices tells a similar story. In a number of the unsigned imprints, the printer chose to highlight the name of the student by the use of a different set of type. In some cases this involved the insertion of characters taken from a set of *bastarde* type resembling *civilité*. This font originally devised by Robert Granjon in France had never been fully adopted by printers in the Low Countries. Its use remained occasional and, by the final decades of the sixteenth century, it was typically only employed as a visual device.⁷ This was usually on the title page, as is demonstrated by the imprints of contemporary printers as varied as Julien du Clos in Rennes or Christophe Plantin in Antwerp.⁸ In this way, the typographical choices, just like the layout of the dissertations, imitated the prevalent presentation of title pages.

Almost all the sheets used a frame to encase the dissertation's text. The adoption of borders was equally reminiscent of many title pages. After having been introduced at the end of the incunabula age, they became particularly popular during the following decades.⁹ Though they never became habitual in the francophone world, in Germany as in England, they remained popular throughout the century.¹⁰ In the dissertations, the borders remained of simple design, made up of a series of small floral typographical ornaments. This was more reminiscent of the English rather than the more decorative German model. Taken as a whole, the design, layout and typographical choices sought to facilitate reading. They made these items easy for contemporaries to

6 The breakdown and evolution of the French title page is analysed in Malcolm Walsby, 'La circulation et l'économie du livre imprimé en France pendant la Renaissance', *Habilitation à diriger des recherches*, Université Paris 1, Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2015.

7 On the development of this type by Robert Granjon see Rémi Jimenes, *Les caractères de civilité: typographie et calligraphie sous l'Ancien régime, France, XVIe–XIXe siècles*, (Gap: Atelier Perrousseaux, 2011).

8 Walsby, *The Printed Book in Brittany*, p. 127 and Louis Van den Eede, Roland De Winter and Marijke Helleman, *Letters proeven, Prenten smaken: dubbeltentoonstelling Plantin-Moretus en het Prentenkabinet* (Antwerp: Museum Plantin-Moretus and Stad Antwerpen, 2004) pp. 76–77.

9 Margaret M. Smith, *The Title-Page, its early development 1460–1510* (London: British Library, 2000) pp. 131–134.

10 See in particular the examples given in A.F. Johnson, *German Renaissance Title-Borders: Facsimiles and Illustrations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929).

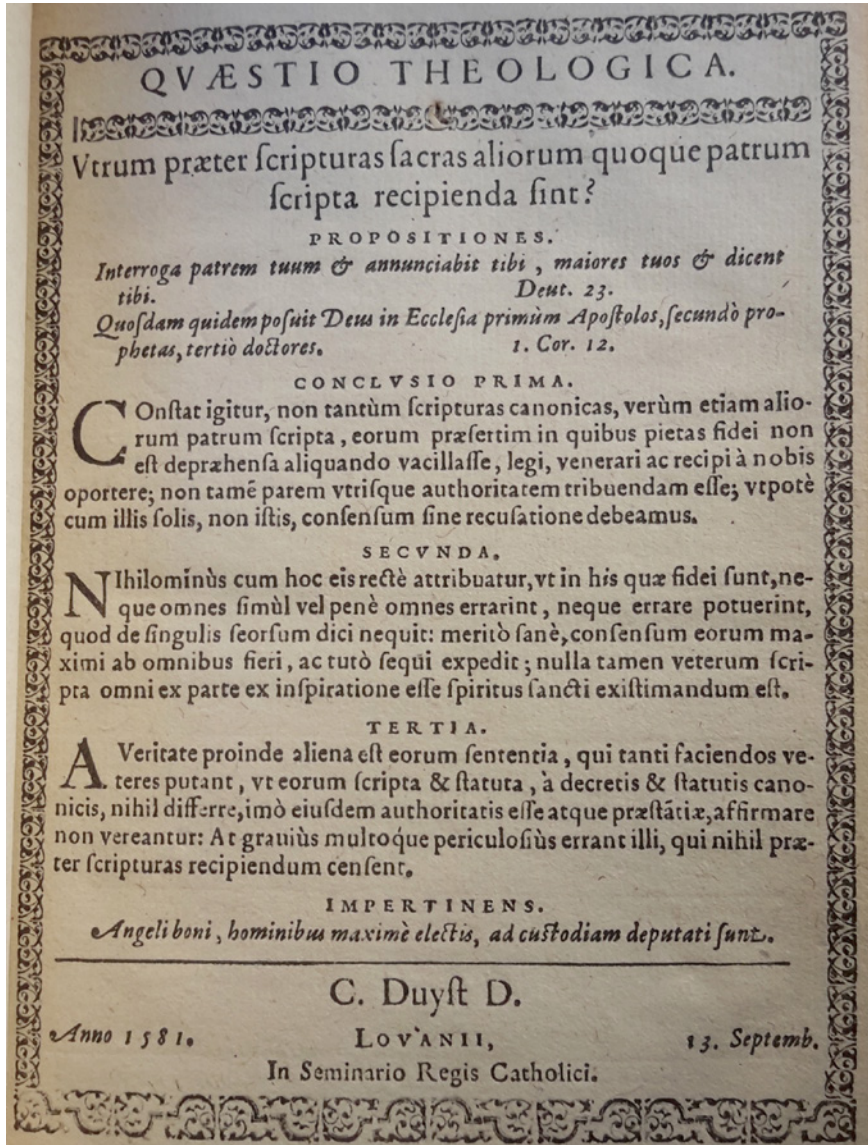


FIGURE 15.1 Cornelius Duyft, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum praeter scripturas sacras aliorum quoque patrum scripta recipienda sint?* 13.09.1581 [Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1581], showing typical layout of the dissertations. USTC 442482. PARIS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE, D 9526 (10).

decipher. The formulaic nature of their presentation would have been familiar to the sixteenth-century reader.

This familiarity of style and layout was reflected in the manner in which they had been produced. In every case, the paper was placed so as to have the main chain-lines running horizontally, as with a quarto. This choice is interesting: it mimicked the format of pamphlets, royal ordonnances and, more generally, the majority of ephemeral output in the Low Countries. The imprints in the volume are, however, slightly smaller than would have traditionally been the case with a quarto (a cut height just under 19.5 cm) but retain much the same proportions.¹¹ As such, it offered itself to the reader in what could be considered as a conventional format that he would have easily associated with the medium of ephemeral print.

As we have noted, most of the dissertations did not give any indication of their printer's identity. This anonymity was, however, superficial. Unlike the attempts of publishers involved with polemical texts who actively sought to hide their association with an imprint, this was anonymity by default.¹² The anonymous printer simply decided not to include his name on an often already crowded page. Since other workshops inserted these details we may infer that this was the printer's decision. This suggests that it was in no way a university requirement. It would also seem to indicate that the printer was likely to be a more modest figure than men like Reinerus Velpius, who was both a printer and an active publisher as well as being the son of the well-established and successful bookseller Rutger Velpuis.

This supposition is borne out by typographical analysis. The type as well as the ornate letters and other woodcut ornaments tell us that the anonymous printer was Joannes Masius, or Jan Maes, a figure who has attracted very little scholarly attention. Not only is he absent from general works about printing in the Southern Netherlands, he does not even figure in the study of books in Louvain sponsored by the University of Louvain itself.¹³ Born in Louvain, he had

11 Philip Gaskell estimates uncut height of a quarto at a minimum of 19.5 cm, see his *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) p. 86.

12 On the different levels of anonymity see Malcolm Walsby, 'L'auteur et l'imprimé polémique et éphémère français au seizième siècle' in Martine Furno & Raphaële Mouren (eds) *Auteur, traducteur, collaborateur, imprimeur... qui écrit?* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013) 35–56 at pp. 47–54.

13 Christopher Coppens (ed.), *Leuven in books, books in Leuven: the oldest university of the Low Countries and its library* (Louvain: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 1999). A very brief summary of his career is given in Pierre Delsaerdt, *Suam quisque bibliothecam: boekhandel en particulier boekenbezit aan de oude Leuvense universiteit, 16de-18de eeuw* (Louvain: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2001) p. 389.

moved to Antwerp where he worked for Plantin before returning to his home town in 1567. A sworn printer of the University, he sometimes undertook his own publishing ventures, but his output was dominated by works he published for other local booksellers such as Velpius and Petrus and Philippus Zangrius. Though he is only credited with printing “plusieurs dizaines d'ouvrages” by Rouzet's dictionary of printers and publishers, the *Universal Short Title Catalogue* acknowledges him as the printer of over 200 imprints apart from the dissertations attributed to him here.¹⁴

Close inspection shows that three different sizes of type were used by the printer of the unsigned dissertations: a Small Pica (R 70) for the main text, a Pica (R 80) and a Great Primer (R 118).¹⁵ An identical Roman Pica is to be found in the core text of Masius's version of Jacobus Janssonius's *In sacrum Missae Canonem, quo Romana utitur Ecclesia, expositio*, as well as in Jean de Lens's *De fidelium animarum purgatorio libri duo*, which also employed an identical Great Primer to print the dedication.¹⁶ Finally, the Small Pica appears in the five lines that constitute the second approbation of a *Catholici ecclesiae instructio*.¹⁷ As for the *bastarde* type, this was used by Masius in his edition of Antonius Sexagius's treatise on the Dutch language *De orthographia linguae Belgicae*.¹⁸

The ornate letters provide further confirmation. Several different alphabets were used by the printer, in particular a large unframed floral set (22 by 22 mm), which also appears in all of the works produced by Masius discussed above. Less common in Masius's other imprints, were a group of historiated initials with a bestiary theme and a double frame (20 by 20 mm), which was probably from an older, less fashionable set. This could have been initials that he mainly used in ephemeral print, keeping his better alphabet for more

14 See Anne Rouzet, *Dictionnaire des imprimeurs, libraires et éditeurs des XV^e et XVI^e siècles dans les limites géographiques de la Belgique actuelle* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1975) p. 143.

15 The precise sizes (converted into 20 line measurements) are in millimetres: [R 70] 70 x 1.8: 2.5; [R 80] 80 x 1.8: 2.8; [R 118] 118 x 2.4: 3.9. The formula follows the convention developed by Hendrik D.L. Vervliet in his *The Paleotypography of the French Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2008) I, pp. 3–5, and his *French Renaissance Types. A Conspectus* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 2010) pp. 54 and 59.

16 Jacobus Janssonius, *In sacrum Missae Canonem, quo Romana utitur Ecclesia, expositio* (Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1586), USTC 440794, and Jean de Lens, *De fidelium animarum purgatorio libri duo* (Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1584), USTC 402617.

17 *Catholici ecclesiae instructio* (Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1586), USTC 403609, on aiv.

18 Antonius Sexagius, *De orthographia linguae Belgicae, sive de recta dictionum Teutonicarum scriptura, praesertim Brabantorum, pronuntiandi usitatam rationem* (Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1576) USTC 412057 on A7v, for instance.

important or prestigious commissions.¹⁹ Certainly, the printer does not seem to have made much of an effort to ensure that his workshop maintained the high quality workmanship for the dissertations that was on display in his larger endeavours.

The speed and relative lack of care with which Masius printed these dissertations is betrayed by the layout of some of the examples in the Paris collection. In one case the setting up of the page was so poor that the compositor was unable to organise the text effectively with the frame. As a result the borders were not aligned correctly, giving the impression of amateurish work.²⁰ This impression of sloppy work is reinforced on a number of copies by the presence of ink smudges consistent with the ink used in the printer's workshop rather than any later manuscript annotations.²¹ This is far more common than in the case in more important undertakings: the copies of his books I have consulted bear no such marks.

The unwillingness to invest adequate amount of time and care in this work is further underlined by the paper used. Though the quality of the material seems reasonable, on a number of occasions the form has been placed too close to the edge of the sheet. This means that it was impossible to have both a decent margin and a well cut leaf. In one case it even affected what should have been the printed area.²² This means that the text was undoubtedly printed

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- 19 For the use of cheaper typographical material in ephemeral works see my comments in Malcolm Walsby, 'Les premiers temps de l'imprimé vernaculaire français', in Pierre Aquilon and Thierry Claerr (eds.), *Le Berceau du livre imprimé. Autour des incunables* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 43–54 at p. 45.
- 20 Guilielmus Lucas, *Quaestio theologica. Justane ratione, prudentique consilio Christus post tam longa tempora venerit?* 26.01.1584, [Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1584], USTC 442533.
- 21 See Johannes Leestius, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum anima sensitiva traducatur cum semine?* [Louvain: Joannes Masius, s.d.], USTC 442525; Johannes Cornelii, *De peccato originali. Quaestio theologica. Utrum peccatum originale sit primi parentis actuale peccatum?* 08.11.1581 [Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1581], USTC 442457; Lambertus Gilzius, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum humanum genus sub diaboli tyrannide servitatem peccando incurrerit?* 08.06.1583 [Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1583], USTC 442496; Johannes vanden Ouwenhoven, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum semper fuerit ecclesia Christi visibilis?* 01.08.1584 [Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1584], USTC 442557; Johannes Cornelii, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum mortis Christi tempore permanserit Ecclesia visibilis? Et qua ratione dicatur visibilis?* 16.08.1584 [Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1584], USTC 442638 and Godefridus Thienwinckel, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum baptisma Joannis contulerit peccatorum remissionem, uti baptisma Christi?* 11.07.1582 [Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1584], USTC 442598.
- 22 I.V. Xanthenis, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum divinae personae conveniat mitti? Et utrum a Deo omnia quae sunt creata sint?* [Louvain: Joannes Masius, s.d.] USTC 442607.

on paper left over from other jobs rather than new sheets. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that the pages were not printed following a standardised format. Rather the space they occupied varied in function of the content. In some cases this meant that the text was calibrated to cover a wide surface, in others very small.

The poor visual quality of the dissertations and their lack of physical standardisation were not their only defects. Errors in the composition of the text were too frequent for this type of scholarly endeavour. Critically, these errors sometimes involved the fundamental proposition that was central to the subject of the dissertation. Some of these mistakes also suggest limited theological knowledge. Thus in one instance a Biblical quotation taken from the Acts of the Apostles was incorrectly rendered.²³ Such mistakes were particularly galling and many were corrected by readers: the hands are the same as those that annotated the dissertations. The limitations of the workshop were also marked by the absence of any Greek or Hebrew type: all relevant citations were systematically translated into Latin.

The overall impression is one of a job executed rapidly with little real care either for the presentation or the content of the dissertations. In this context, that Joannes Masius chose not to include his name on these imprints could be seen as an indication of the lack of regard he had for this enterprise. Yet this must have been a lucrative contract, not least as it was undoubtedly exclusive. This was certainly the case in other towns, as the lawsuit brought by rival printers and booksellers in Nantes revealed. There, the local printer Pierre Doriou was able to charge dialecticians of the local university no less than two and a half *écus* for printing their theses despite the fact that they only required a sixth of a sheet – his opponents contended that it could have been done for a third of that price. His exclusive right to print the texts allowed him to set a price and declare “qu’il aimeroit mieux s’en torcher le derriere que de les bailler à moindre prix”.²⁴

That a similar system of exclusivity existed in Louvain is suggested by the fact that Masius dominated the market despite the presence of other workshops active in the city at the same time. In an article devoted to the Velpius dynasty, the nineteenth-century bibliophile Van Even noted that both Reiner Velpius

23 Johannes a Porta, *Quaestio theologica. Quisnam sit effectus, atque minister confirmationis?* 01.08.1582 [Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1582], USTC 442564. The passage in question is Acts 8: 14.

24 “That he would prefer to wipe his behind with them than sell them at a lower price”. His critics also remarked witheringly that even at a third of the price they could have been “beaucoup plus nettement imprimé”. Maître, ‘Une procédure universitaire’, p. 233.

the elder and his son published large numbers of theses for the university.²⁵ The institution was certainly a vital market for the younger Velpius as in 1574 he chose to relocate close to Winckel College where he remained for the rest of his career.²⁶ But after 1577, Velpius disappeared and it probably after this that Masius was able to work for the university. Masius's relationship with the institution was strong: by the 1590s he was even entrusted with the printing of the university's privileges.²⁷

Though Masius's proximity to the university and his position of exclusivity resulted in a certain lack of care on his behalf in the production of the dissertations, it also had its advantages. The institution had at its disposal a printer who understood its workings. The layout of Masius's imprints shows that he grasped the relative importance of the different elements, highlighting the initial proposition that was to attract students and the time and place of the event. This suggests that the imprints were used as flyers to promote the defence of the thesis that was contained in the text. Such tactics were certainly employed to attract students in other universities such as Paris where flyers were distributed to advertise papers given by well-known authors.²⁸

This knowledge of the university market also had a practical implication for the publication of the dissertations. When setting up the form, Masius was conscious that he needed to leave wide margins on either side of the printed text. By the second half of the sixteenth century, it had become accepted practice for students to follow lessons book in hand, annotating their copy as they went. Many surviving manuals are covered in copious annotations, sometimes translating words, but often inserting the comments of their teachers.²⁹ This was equally true for short ephemeral pieces like these dissertations.

25 They printed "une masse de Thèses pour la Faculté de théologie de l'Université de Louvain": Van Even, 'Les imprimeurs Velpen (1539–1680)', *Bulletin du Bibliophile Belge*, 1X (1852), 313–319 at pp. 315 and 317. Unfortunately, the author does not give a reference for these remarks, though he had clearly seen some of the theses.

26 *Ibidem*, p. 317.

27 *Privilegia academiae Lovaniensi, ab apostolica sede, imperatoribus, regibus, aliisque principibus, concessa* (Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1597) USTC 413413.

28 See the tract for the lessons on Aristotle's *Ethica* and the catalogue entry by Nicolas Petit in Frédéric Barbier (ed.), *Paris, capitale des livres. Le monde des livres et de la presse à Paris, du Moyen âge au XXe siècle* (Paris: Paris bibliothèques et les Presses Universitaires de France, 2007) p. 118.

29 For the copying of annotations see the examples given by Owen Gingerich in his *The Book Nobody Read. Chasing the Revolutions of Nicolaus Copernicus* (London: Penguin, 2004).

The Dissertations and University Usage

The Louvain dissertations in this volume have numerous marks that bear witness to this practice. Though some remained unannotated, others have heavy marginalia all over the recto and spilling over onto the blank verso. The system of annotation is interesting: the use of strokes linking the words and sentences of the printed text to the relevant remarks shows how the student readers tried to organise their notes, probably as they listened.³⁰ That this was sometimes done at the time of the defence is suggested by some of the absent-minded doodling that adorns some of the theses.³¹

The better organised, and more attentive, students worked with other sheets of blank paper on which to take their notes. This is shown by the ink splodges to be found on the recto or verso of some of the items that do not correspond to any manuscript notes on the following pages.³² The clumsy transfer of some of these notes onto dissertations illustrates how they inadvertently pressed the pages of their handwritten sheets against the printed text as they copied down remarks.³³ This work with an adjacent piece of paper was organised by a different system of annotation to the rapidly placed strokes linking the marginalia to the relevant word. The relationship between printed and manuscript page was indicated by the introduction of numbers that would have linked the commentary to the abstract of the argument.³⁴

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- 30 Carolus de Kersmakere, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum unus homo possit alterum docere?* (Louvain: Joannes Masius, s.d.), USTC 442520.
- 31 Petrus Leo, *Quaestio theologica. An inter angelos, unus illuminet alium, eique loquatur?* ([Louvain]: Reinerus Velpius, s.d.), USTC 442526 and Martinus Matthaei, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum ad veram beatitudinem consequendam sit aliqua in Deum necessaria fides?* 29.02.1584 (Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1584), USTC 442541.
- 32 Petrus Guilielmi, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum trinitas separabilis dici debeat? Et an naturali ratione cognosci possit?* [Louvain: Joannes Masius, s.d.], USTC 442501.
- 33 Petrus Guilielmi, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum anima hominis sit res subsistens, et incorporea?* [Louvain: Joannes Masius, s.d.], USTC 442500 and Petrus Proveners, *Quaestio theologica. Possitne justitia naturae viribus acquiri?* 17.01.1582 [Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1582], USTC 442568.
- 34 Theodorus Meinhardi, *Quaestio theologica. Sitne utriusque speciei communio divino jure omnibus necessaria?* 12.07.1586 [Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1586], USTC 442545 and Alexander Rotarius, *De missae ac communionis ceremoniis. Quaestio theologica. Sitne caeremoniarum in eucharistiae sacramento seu offerendo, seu sumendo approbandus ecclesiae Romanae usus.* 26.07.1586 [Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1586], USTC 442583.

As suggested above, the manner of some of the annotations and haste with which they were inserted points to many such notes being made during the defence. But in other cases it is clear that the additional text must have been copied out, either after the event or by a student who was lagging behind in his notetaking. Thus, in one instance the annotator corrected a word he had mistakenly transcribed as “culpa” with the word “clausa” – an error that is inconceivable had he been listening to the defence, but which seems far more plausible if he was not blessed with good palaeography (especially as the latter word was written with a long s).³⁵

The presence of all this marginalia does not just indicate how the students worked; it also tells us about the process of printing these single-sheet items. It confirms that the items were not printed off as celebrations of a successfully defended argument, but were produced prior to the event. It also suggests that the pages, despite their layout, were not simply created as posters to be pinned up in strategic locations, but were also handed out as flyers either to promote the event or to those attending as they entered the room. Their very existence is therefore important to our understanding of university processes and the institution’s interaction with the presses. This is all the more true as this type of imprint is particularly rare for Catholic institutions.

Schools and universities were one of the main markets for cheap books in the sixteenth century. Thousands of students throughout Europe bought short grammars and other educational books that sustained printers’ workshops in many regions – and this was certainly the case in Louvain.³⁶ Furthermore, the staff and more senior students of the universities also commissioned the printing of many texts. By the second half of the century, the doctoral students of many universities began to have short summaries of their dissertations published locally by their institution’s assigned printers. This phenomenon seems to have been particularly developed in Protestant faculties. Thus there are a number of extant copies of printed theses produced in Copenhagen. There, doctoral students prepared sometimes quite substantial works that were

35 Jakob Fischer, *Quaestio theologica. Quodnam sit originalis peccati subjectum, carone an anima* [Louvain: Joannes Masius, s.d.], USTC 442492.

36 On the attractiveness of the University of Louvain for booksellers and printers see Hubert Meeus, ‘Printing in the Shadow of a Metropolis’, in Benito Rial Costas (ed.), *Print Culture and Provincial Cities in Early Modern Europe: A Contribution to the History of Printing and the Book Trade in Small European and Spanish Cities* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 147–170 at pp. 156–159.

published and sold.³⁷ But the defence and main thesis of the dissertation were often also communicated in broadsheet format.³⁸

In the Low Countries, the Protestant faculties followed suit. Students of the University of Leiden (founded in 1575) soon adopted this tradition of printing the main arguments of their dissertation. The two volumes of *Netherlandish Books* enumerate no fewer than 753 editions published between 1582 and the end of the century.³⁹ This remarkable production of academic material mainly involved short quarto pamphlets as well as 59 broadsheets. The imprints that rolled off the presses of Franciscus Raphelengius and Jan Paets Jacobszoon dominated the genre. The Academy of Franeker also encouraged the publication of theses and disputations. The institution was founded ten years after Leiden and printed 127 dissertations between 1588 and 1600. This much more modest output still seems to have dwarfed the production of many other cities, if current survival is to be taken as a trustworthy indication, and this was particularly the case for Catholic centres of print.

Perhaps the most famous Catholic faculty of them all, the Sorbonne in Paris does not seem to have required its students systematically to print their dissertations in the sixteenth century. In the entire kingdom of France, we have so far been unable to find any extant copies of Catholic printed dissertations. The only known examples come from the Protestant faculty set up in Orthez and Lescar at the end of the century.⁴⁰ But this was not simply a case of Protestant versus Catholic tradition. Archival evidence indicates that in other some Catholic universities students did have their texts printed locally. In Toulouse, in south western France, we know that theses were printed in the city thanks to the accounts of some of the journeymen printers interrogated by the Spanish inquisition.⁴¹ In Nantes, a lawsuit confirms that students reading at the local

37 Niels Hemmingsen, *Themata theologica, quæ publice die secundo Iunii defendunt ... Iohannes Thomas, Erasmus Catholmius, Christophorus Knoff, presidente Nicolao Hemmingio* (Copenhagen: Laurentius Benedictus, 1572), USTC 303216. This represented 32 leaves in octavo.

38 Hans Thomesen Guldsmed, *Themata ad quæ publice respondebunt honesti et eruditi aliquot juvenes pro gradu baccalaureatus in philosophia, presidente Johanne Aurifabro Collegii* (Copenhagen: Johannes Stockelman and Andreas Guttervuitz, 1575), USTC 303074.

39 See the entries listed in Pettegree and Walsby, *NB: Netherlandish Books*.

40 Louis Desgraves, 'Les premières thèses de l'Académie protestante d'Orthez et de Lescar (1585–1592)', *Revue de Pau et du Béarn*, v (1977) 153–154.

41 This is mentioned by Clive Griffin in his *Journeymen-Printers, Heresy, and the Inquisition in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 163. The reference is from the trial of Pierre de Rinz.

university also habitually printed their dissertations.⁴² But the absence of surviving copies from any of these three French institutions means that our understanding of the phenomenon is limited.

In the Catholic Netherlands, the University of Louvain suffered from a similar problem. Prior to this discovery only two printed dissertations were known. Such a small sample gave only a few indications about the manner in which the university worked. We are now much better placed to infer certain practices by examining the editions in this volume. The dissertations presented a heavily abbreviated form of the thesis. It was often split into two parts. First there was a concise *propositio* which laid out an idea or an argument on a specific question. This was followed by a *conclusio* in which the student laid out his thesis (a part sometimes subdivided into prior and posterior parts) along with the final *impertinens*. This system was not an invention of the Renaissance university; it was built on the scholastic method developed throughout Europe in the late mediaeval era.⁴³ Despite this general consistency in the layout of the dissertation there could be significant variations in the format of the text. Thus in some instances there were multiple conclusions, rather than just a single logical outcome.

The conclusions were often presented in the form of a citation from a prominent text of Catholic theology. By reaching a well-accepted point of doctrine through this type of debate, the orator sought to bolster orthodoxy in a time of religious controversy. If the coherence of the argument and the manner in which a case was presented were perhaps the crucial elements of the intellectual game, the conclusion was nevertheless important for it stressed the strength of the Catholic faith. In this regard it is interesting to note the prominence of quotations taken from the acts of the Council of Trent. Widely promoted by Philip II both through the medium of print and through other means, Tridentine doctrine was, outside France, seen as a vital part of the response to Protestantism.⁴⁴ This was mirrored in the fact that no fewer than forty-nine dissertations quoted the acts with references to the council (with session number and canon) virtually always appearing in the conclusion. This repeated presence of the acts emphasises the role of such educational institutions in spreading the rulings of Trent.

42 Maitre, 'Une procédure universitaire'.

43 Cf. the description given in Lambertus Marie de Rijk, *La Philosophie au Moyen âge* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), pp. 100–101.

44 See Ignasi Fernández Terricabras, *Felipe II y el clero secular: la aplicación del concilio de Trento* (Madrid: Sociedad estatal para la conmemoración de los centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 2000).

The impact of this effort to strengthen the Catholic Reformation would have mainly touched the Low Countries. Analysis of the geographic origins of those who defended the theses shows that, despite the undoubted prestige and international standing of the institution, the university's appeal was mainly regional. Over three quarters of the dissertations featured a student from the Netherlands. Two thirds of these originated from the Southern Low Countries. In other words, they mainly involved individuals who attended their local Catholic university. Only eight of the authors can be formally identified as coming from further afield.

The importance of the local authors was not simply statistical. In the sample we possess, they were clearly the most active members too. A number of them presented a series of theses: Martinus Matthaëus was thus named on 7 imprints, whilst Joannes Cornelius was the most productive with 10. This emphasises that the publication of the dissertations did not mark the award of a degree.⁴⁵ Despite such recurrences, it is unlikely that the author was one of the main draws for prospective auditors. Their name was often indicated



FIGURE 15.2 Known geographic origins of those named in the Louvain dissertations.

45 This is one of the four principal purposes for such publications identified by Joseph S. Freedman in his 'Dissertations in Europe in the Early Modern Period' in Douwe B. Breimer, *et al.*, *Hora Est! On Dissertations* (Leiden: Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden, 2005), pp. 30–50, here pp. 30–32.

prominently, though this might have been more to do with accepted presentational formula. This is suggested by the authorial anonymity of some of the dissertations. Six were thus published without any indication of their author, whilst others were presented semi-anonymously with the inclusion of their initials. This might well have involved some students who had indicated their names on other imprints: the three initials (first name, second name, place of birth) correspond in some instances to those of other authors (Henricus Vermeulen, Albertus Dansius, Cornelius Duyst, Guilielmus Lucas).

A final question surrounds the institutions that were involved in the publication of the dissertations. Did the dissertations all emanate from the same institution or were they printed for students from a selection of different colleges? Almost half of the imprints give no information on where the theses were to be defended. For the others, the presence alongside the date of the indication "In seminario regis catholici" was the most common. In other cases, the mention of educational institutions referred to the strategic geographic placement of the printers' workshop rather than to where the authors of the dissertations were educated.⁴⁶ The fact that the same authors (such as Augustinus Balet, Antonius Hulselmans, Carolus de Kersmakere, Martinus Matthaëus, Joannes de Moorzele, Arnoldus Mutsaerts and Alexander Rotarius) had theses advertised both with and without an indication of where they were defended suggests that the remaining imprints were also produced for the royal college. Founded by Philip II, the college sought to defend the faith against Protestant attacks.⁴⁷ To achieve this aim, the seminary sought particularly to teach "la methode par les disputes".⁴⁸ This along with the high profile given to Tridentine doctrine in the conclusions of the dissertations certainly corroborates the idea that the imprints were undertaken for the college's students.

Collecting the Dissertations

This careful examination of how the dissertations were produced and how they were used offers important insights into the world of the Catholic university in the second half of the sixteenth century. It stresses the importance of

46 "Prope Colleg. Winckels." for Reyner Velpius, "e regione Gynasii Lili" for Jacobus Heybergius and "juxta paedag. Lili" for Andreas Corthoutd.

47 This was already a major concern of the university before the foundation of the college: see Jésus Martinez de Bujanda, *Index de l'Université de Louvain, 1546, 1550, 1558* (Sherbrooke: Éditions de l'Université de Sherbrooke, 1986), p. 30 et seq.

48 Jean Nicolas de Parival, *Louvain, très-ancienne et capitale ville du Brabant* (Louvain: George Lips, 1667), p. 148.

Tridentine doctrine, but interest in such ephemeral theological imprints should have waned after they had served their purpose. And yet they were methodically collected and preserved, posing the question of how and when they were gathered together in this *Sammelband*. The volume they are bound in today offers few clues as to the early history of the survival of these broadsheets. The binding is made out of cheap brown speckled sheepskin – a material typical of the low quality leather used in seventeenth and eighteenth-century workshops throughout France. The front and back boards remained without decoration of any sort. Attempts to improve the volume's appearance were limited to the spine where the spaces between the raised bands were decorated with some gold tooling and the short title "Quaest. Theolog.". As a whole it is clear that the volume was not the subject of much attention.

The provenance information is equally unhelpful with regard to the early history of the dissertations. The undated manuscript *ex libris* inscribed at the top of the first broadsheet indicates that the book had entered the collection of the Parisian convent of the Recollects at some point in the late seventeenth century (if the handwriting is to be trusted). It undoubtedly stayed in this religious library until their books were seized at the revolution and taken to the large warehouse set up in "rue Saint-Honoré" in 1790.⁴⁹ For the most part, their volumes were integrated into the collections of what is now the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*. The later fate of the volume is therefore easy to follow. But if the provenances and binding provide few indications as to what happened before the book's arrival in the library of the Recollects, the items themselves bear the marks of early use.

One of the noticeable physical peculiarities of the imprints is the presence of holes in the upper half of the pages. Positioned centrally, they clearly have nothing to do with the current binding or with the process of annotation. Interpreting such marks is difficult. On the one hand, the holes could be consistent with the idea that the dissertations were being posted up as advertisements rather than being handed out to prospective attendees. The presence of corrosion marks on the paper surrounding the holes could have been due to the use of nails. This is strengthened by marks on some items that show both slight ripping and compacting of the paper that seem to be mainly above the marks.⁵⁰ Both these phenomena could have been caused by the fact they were left hanging for some time.

49 Alfred Franklin, *Les anciennes bibliothèques de Paris: églises, monastères, collèges, etc.* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1867–1873), II, pp. 297–300.

50 See for instance Ludovicus Handtsamus, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum habitus intellectuales speculativi sint virtutes?* ([Louvain]: Reinerus Velpius, s.d.), USTC 442502 for ripping

However, this conjecture does not stand up to further investigation. In some instances there is not just one hole, but two, three or even four.⁵¹ It seems inconceivable that this type of ephemeral print used to advertise a precise event would be hung up a number of different times. Furthermore, this process could not have been systematic since, though such tears are commonplace throughout the volume, there are a number of items that bear no such marks. Also, the holes did not just obliterate printed letters: in some cases they affected words that had been handwritten on the verso during the defence.⁵² This means that they must have been made after and not before the event had taken place. In other words, the holes cannot be attributed to the use of the sheets as posters.

The perforation seems more consistent with a manner of gathering and filing the different items. They were collected after the event and preserved by punching a hole with a nail or a large pin in a manner common to late mediaeval and early modern archiving of material. The multiple holes would be consistent with the use and reuse of items in these piles of dissertations. Once consulted, the reader would simply gather together the papers and stick the pin through the stack once more, thus sometimes creating new holes. The slight ripping and compacting of the paper could be attributed to the fact that readers could have tried to consult an item without removing the pin, naturally pulling the main part of the text towards them as they did so. The holes are thus the proof of the existence of a prior state of conservation of the dissertations, a kind of rudimentary *Sammelband*, which could be made and unmade at will.

The presence of multiple holes also tells us that these dissertations continued to be actively used after the defence of the thesis. They were consulted and collected over a number of years in this format before they were bound into a more formal volume. This is also suggested by the fact that the marginalia and notes on the verso of the items were made in a series of different hands, sometimes on the same sheet.⁵³ These successive annotators are proof that the useful lifespan of these ephemeral imprints was longer than perhaps could

and Tilman Vosmer, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum sint aliqui angeli mali?* [Louvain: Joannes Masius, s.d.], USTC 442626 for compacting.

51 Both the following example has four holes: Johannes Candreisch, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum consilium sit inquisitio? Et utrum consensus sit actus appetitivae virtutis?* ([Louvain]: Andreas Corthoudt, [1577]), USTC 442452, as has the example given in fig. 15.3.

52 Jakob Fischer, *Quaestio theologica. Quodnam sit originalis peccati subjectum, carone an anima* [Louvain: Joannes Masius, s.d.], USTC 442492 and Guilielmus Tilborch, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum peccatum causam aliquam habeat?* [Louvain: Joannes Masius, s.d.], USTC 442600.

53 See Petrus Leo, *Quaestio theologica. An inter angelos, unus illuminet alium, eique loquatur?* ([Louvain], Reinerus Velpius, s.d.), USTC 442526.

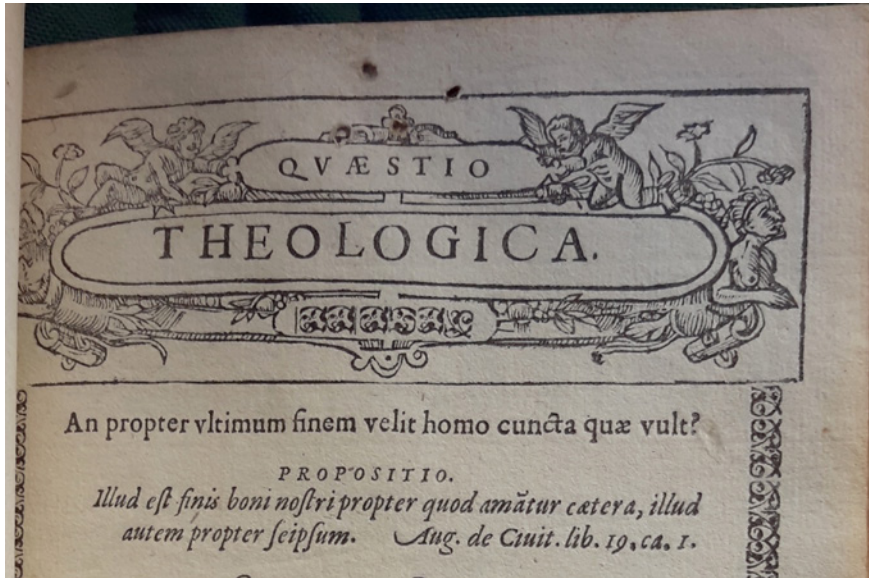


FIGURE 15.3 Samuel Loyaerts, *Quaestio theologica. An propter vltimum finem velit homo cuncta quæ vult?* ([Louvain]: Reinerus Velpius, s.d.). Showing multiple holes at the top of a dissertation. USTC 442532. PARIS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE, D 9526 (69).

be expected. Despite their brevity, the propositions they expounded retained their interest.

The variety of hands is not the only evidence that indicates that these sheets were not all initially owned by the same person but that they must have been collected subsequently. Other clues point in the same direction. The first of these is the presence of duplicate copies: twelve of the dissertations are included twice in the volume. Furthermore, some of the annotations were made on the inside margin, in places that would necessarily be integrated into the inner hinge when the items were bound.⁵⁴ Clearly the first owners had not intended to have these pieces gathered into a single volume. This is underlined by the fact that some of them were initially folded rather than preserved flat to facilitate the binding process. The time that elapsed between the printing of the dissertations and their insertion into this *Sammelband* is emphasised by the dirt on the back of a number of pages.⁵⁵ Some copies had been left lying

54 *Quaestio theologica. An daemones sint in diversis ordinibus constituti?* [Louvain: Joannes Masius, s.d.], USTC 442573.

55 For instance on *Quaestio theologica. Utrum virtutes morales sibi invicem sint connexae?* [Louvain: Joannes Masius, s.d.], USTC 442578.

around before being gathered together and given the protection of a hardback binding.

Despite the fact that the dissertations were in the end preserved in a proper volume, very little care or interest seems to have accompanied this process. The binding work itself was sloppy. The pages were cut with little regard for the original format of the dissertations, truncating the text when they were too wide or too large compared to the smaller copies.⁵⁶ Though the texts seem to have been broadly gathered together and organised by theme, the volume contains, in some instances, two copies of the same edition with one inserted immediately after the other.⁵⁷ Thus though they were ordered methodically, the work was done without checking or reading the dissertations already present.

This later seventeenth-century attempt at creating a coherent corpus was therefore done without due care or, at least, without much regard for future readers. The lack of interest displayed is mirrored in the absence of any later marginalia or proof that the book was read or used after it was put into its current binding. This impression is reinforced by the lack of a manuscript index or any attempts to number the imprints. With over two hundred items, using this type of *Sammelband* without any guidance as to the position or the content of a given dissertation would have been very difficult. It suggests that the goal of their insertion into this volume was to preserve knowledge rather than to use it.

Conclusions

The suggestion that the moment that the dissertations were bound marked the end of their useful life is intriguing. The volume state certainly appears less dynamic than the primitive but effective manner of holding them together with a pin. In this original state, the order in which the texts were kept could be re-arranged. They could also be removed to permit a more comfortable way of reading and, if need be, allow the taking of further notes without

56 Stephanus Cottin, *Quaestio theologica. Utrum actus humanus recti ractionem habeat aut peccati in quantum bonus est vel malus?* [Louvain]: Andreas Corthoudt, [1577], USTC 442468 and *Quaestio theologica. Utrum creatura corporalis, administretur per angelos?* [Louvain: Joannes Masius, s.d.], USTC 442574.

57 One example is Johannes Cornelii, *De haeresi libertinorum. Quaestio theologica. Utrum salva professione nominis Christiani quiduis de religione sentire liceat?* 05.10.1583 [Louvain: Joannes Masius, 1583], USTC 442456.

having to hold a volume open. It is also possible that in this state, some of the dissertations were kept with the accompanying manuscript sheets the existence of which is demonstrated by the methods of annotation we have identified. When they were integrated into the codex format they lost their modular capacity. They formed part of a rigid classification, a single volume that sought to record rather than facilitate use.

This interaction between format and use helps us understand the evolution that occurred over time. The imprints were initially conceived as flyers to be distributed and to advertise a forthcoming event. During the event, they became a prop for the audience to follow the defence, a prop on which they could also take notes. After this, they became a reference tool, gathered together in order to serve as a repertoire of theological ideas of the Catholic Reformation. Finally, once bound, they became evidence of past procedures and debates. This evolution in the use of these items marks a profound disjuncture between their original intended use and the real use to which they were later put. Though some facets seem to have been in part anticipated by the printer (with the incorporation of wide margins to allow for annotation, for example), for the most part this later life of the imprints illustrates the complex, multifaceted and unpredictable nature of single sheet item use over time.

The insertion of the dissertations into a single volume is undoubtedly the main reason for their survival. But, as we have demonstrated, this was only the final stage in what might seem an unlikely evolution in the use of these items. They were particularly vulnerable during the years spent unbound. They could have easily been destroyed through lack of care or, once their utility as a reference tool had come to an end, been reemployed as envelopes or blotting paper.⁵⁸ That this volume offers over two hundred copies of Louvain University dissertations when previously only two were known emphasises the importance of the shadow economy of the book: a trade in ephemera difficult to quantify that makes the analysis of such unlikely survivals all the more important.

58 This was often the fate of ephemera that was no longer considered useful. See Porret to Jan Moretus, 18 September 1582. Letter 989, in Max Rooses and Jan Denucé (ed.), *Correspondance de Christophe Plantin*, (Nendeln: Kraus, 1968), VII, pp. 61–64.