



KONINKLIJKE VLAAMSE ACADEMIE VAN BELGIE  
VOOR WETENSCHAPPEN EN KUNSTEN

**MIDDELEEUWSE BIBLIOTHEKEN EN  
BOEKENLIJSTEN IN DE ZUIDELIJKE NEDERLANDEN**

**LES BIBLIOTHÈQUES MÉDIÉVALES ET  
LEURS CATALOGUES DANS LES PAYS-BAS MÉRIDIONAUX**

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**CONTACTFORUM**

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## PROBLEMS IN EDITING THE ROOKLOOSTER REGISTER<sup>1</sup>

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Three years ago the fourth volume of the *Corpus Catalogorum Belgii* was published, thanks especially to the unflagging zeal of Albert Derolez. With this publication all medieval booklists of Belgium have become available with the exception of the catalogues of the Dukes of Burgundy.

Does this mean that we now have all the facts about the lost as well as about the preserved books from the Belgian libraries at our disposal? There is still a gap as regards preserved manuscripts, which Derolez is planning to fill. But the greatest treasure of data on early library holdings still awaits publication. I am referring to the Rooklooster Register.

Derolez could give two reasons for not including the famous Register in his *Corpus*. First, because the manuscript, which is now preserved in Vienna, was compiled as late as about 1535/40 and therefore beyond the terminus which he had set for his work. But also because the Register does not have the structure of a true collective catalogue of libraries, "ein alter Vorläufer des Gesamtkatalogs" as Paul Lehmann called it. Instead the Register is first and foremost a catalogue of literature.

Therefore the Rooklooster Register does not give a full survey of library collections of the Low Countries. Besides this it does not follow the structure of the *Corpus Catalogorum Belgii*, either geographically, as the Register deals not only with present-day Belgium but with the Northern Netherlands and the adjoining Rhineland as well, or systematically, because data of diverse origin have been interwoven. So, because of its specific composition, the Register requires a different method of editing than other booklists.

Attempts to publish the Rooklooster Register have been undertaken a few times, but they have all failed. Yet every library historian will be convinced that the innumerable titles with references to more than a hundred libraries in all deserve a better fate. In the following I shall present a proposal for such a publication.

To do so I must explain briefly the textual history of the Register. Then I shall continue with the working method of the compiler, or, rather, as we shall see, the working methods of the different compilers, in order to present the edition as I see it now. For this I have obviously

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. P.F.J. Obbema, "The Rooklooster Register evaluated" in *Quaerendo* 7 (1977), p. 326-352, published in Dutch with updated references in his *De middeleeuwen in handen. Over boekcultuur in de late middeleeuwen* (Hilversum, 1996), p. 103-120. See also the analysis of the source in Willem Lourdaux and Marcel Haverals, *Bibliotheca Vallis Sancti Martini in Lovanio*, vol. II, Louvain 1982, Symbolae Facultatis Litterarum et Philosophiae, ser. 8, vol. 8.

used a database program. This creates new possibilities, but whoever is familiar with such a program knows that it also imposes some limitations in the presentation of the edition.

### **History of the text**

The late date of the Rooklooster Register would seem to disqualify it as a witness to medieval book collections. But the compiler, Antonius Geens, librarian of the priory, largely based his data on other library collections of a considerably older source. It was a similar kind of register, known to us as the Register of St. Martin's at Louvain.

This Register originated from another priory of the Windesheim Congregation, just like Rooklooster. The manuscript itself was lost upon the liquidation of the priory library, but scholars quoted from it many times in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These and other sources tell us that it was compiled in the eighties of the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Gerardus Roelants, librarian of St. Martin's. It contained information from two different regions, from the libraries in the duchy of Guelders and surrounding principalities, and also from those in Brabant, Flanders and the bishopric of Liege. Roelants died in 1490. It is possible that still after his death some fellow brothers corrected mistakes here and there, but the Register was certainly not systematically updated. The information on books in Louvain and elsewhere generally goes back to the 80s of the fifteenth century.

Roelants in his turn must have used a similar Register that had been made in Guelders. This, too, has been lost, and we must do with the traces that have been preserved in the Louvain Register. These were sufficient to determine that it originated in the priory of Gaesdonck near Nijmegen, another Windesheim convent. It may be attributed to two priests of the house, Johannes Foyken of Emmerich and Riquinus Allardi from Schoonhoven. Both died in 1483 and will therefore have collected their data mainly in the 1470s.

### **The aim the compilers had in mind**

The compilers of the Registers may have followed different methods, but they had the same aim in mind. This is best determined on the basis of the Rooklooster Register.

The name of its compiler Antonius Geens is not found in the codex, but his handwriting can be recognized in a manuscript copy of *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis* by Johannes Trithemius, now preserved in Paris. Geens used it for his Rooklooster Register. After the name of the author Trithemius usually added a few lines with some biographical details followed by a list of the author's works usually with a specification of their subdivisions, the number of books or the number of *quaestiones*, and often also a short incipit. The list of titles was followed at the end by some information on other works which he had not seen himself and a rough indication of the period in which the author lived. The authors themselves have been ordered chronologically.

Antonius Geens chose a roughly alphabetical arrangement of authors' names, as had been customary in other catalogues of sizable libraries since the fifteenth century. Thus it was easier to look up a specific author and to insert new names afterwards. Within the entries he collected in fact the same data as Trithemius had done, a list of titles and incipits that was as complete as possible, and a short biographical description supplemented to the author's name. The description was mostly an abridgement of what Trithemius had recorded. But the indication of the period in which the author lived was not placed at the end of the lemma, but at the beginning next to the name in the outer margin. This change in the text will have had a practical reason as well. In this way he could still add titles that he had found afterwards. Besides Trithemius Geens himself mentioned a few other well-known catalogues of literature as his sources, from that of St. Jerome till that of Sigebert of Gembloux. I am still not certain

whether he consulted them often. Most of them had already been incorporated by Trithemius. But that was not true of the St. Martin's Register, which he mentions by name in the prologue. There he not only found hundreds of titles that were missing from Trithemius, but also a list of copies present in a large variety of libraries. However, he often reduced drastically these references to copies. That is understandable. Some forty or fifty years after the days of Gerardus Roelants more and more literature had become widespread, owing to the art of book printing. Working your way through the Register, you will find that the number of references to other libraries gradually decreases. Geens must have realized during his work that these references had often become of little use, especially if the work was also present in the Rooklooster library.

There are two lists of abbreviations used to indicate the libraries. Both were probably exactly copied from St. Martin's in their entirety. The names have been abbreviated drastically to one syllable or simply to a letter of the alphabet or a symbol. These letters are sometimes difficult to understand, in particular when the difference between capital and minuscule is involved. It goes without saying that this creates problems for the editing of the MS. I shall come back to this.

Geens had another source, which he did not mention explicitly. It is the collection of Rooklooster itself. The titles present in that library are usually marked with a paragraph mark. The copy, or if more than one, the copies are indicated by twofold 'register marks', a combination of a letter followed by a number. They refer to the alphabetical list of abridged titles in the preliminary pages of the manuscript. Consequently, the Register was not only a catalogue of literature, but a catalogue of the Rooklooster library as well. Thus the Register had a double function : it gave not only the books present in the library of the house but also what was missing from it.

Geens himself constantly compared the titles from his sources with the convent's books. This led repeatedly to additions and corrections to Trithemius, but also to the data in the Register of St. Martin's. If he found different incipits he sometimes even gave both together.

Finally the Register was carefully compared to the books of the nearby priory of Groenendaal, probably even by Geens himself. Here he did not use register numbers but only the capital letter V, an abbreviation of the Latin name of the priory, *Viridisvallis*. When doing so he sometimes recorded not only a new copy, but a new incipit as well, or even new titles and authors. Thus the Register reflects rather correctly the books of Groenendaal in its latter days, about 1540.

The function as a library catalogue based on the names of the authors automatically led to a supplement of anonymous titles. The list of these is divided into two sections. The first is a list of lives of saints, which are mostly anonymous ; the other presents the remaining anonymous works. Both are alphabetically classified at the end of the Register and sometimes also incorporated into the main part of it, if the author's name had become known on the basis of another source.

The list of anonymous works dates back to the Register of Gaesdonck and was continued in St. Martin's. The list of saints' lives was first set up in St. Martin's. It reflects the growing interest in this literary genre in the Windesheim Congregation at the end of the fifteenth century.

St. Martin's and Gaesdonck held more or less the same works as Rooklooster. The compilers could yet not have used Trithemius, which was first published in 1494. However, both priories *did* possess some older *De viris illustribus* books which the compilers will doubtlessly have consulted. Besides this they will undoubtedly have worked their way completely through their own libraries. As Rooklooster was complemented with books from Groenendaal, Gaesdonck must have fallen back on the much better stocked library of the Cistercian abbey nearby Kamp.

Doubtlessly the St. Martin's Register also contained all the titles present in the Louvain priory. Besides, Gerardus Roelants had numerous books at his disposal from other Louvain libraries, which was then the town of the Low Countries with the richest book holdings. Doubtlessly he also will have consulted learned fellow brothers and scholars of the university to solve bibliographical problems. Besides, we know that he incorporated the collections of some other monasteries by means of their catalogues, such as Mariënhage near Eindhoven, Mariënborn near Arnhem, both Windesheim priories, and also the Carthusians of Monnikhuizen near Arnhem.

The compilers of the various Registers all had the same goal in mind: to make a complete survey of all known literature from the perspective of a monastic librarian. The emphasis is therefore on the literature that is characteristic of the main library of the monastery. Books in the vernacular were virtually all left out. These were, with a few exceptions, intended for lay brethren only and did not find a place on the shelves of the main library. The Register was intended for the learned friars, so that they could find there literature they needed for study and spiritual exercises. If a book was not available at home, they would often find a reference to a copy present elsewhere. Generally speaking they were not interested in whether it was a manuscript or a printed book. Therefore later scholars have been wrong to name such lists collective catalogues of manuscripts.

#### **Points of departure for an edition. Aspects to ignore.**

The first problem we face when attempting to edit the Rooklooster Register is its size. Fortunately, it is useless to publish the text as a whole. In my opinion a publication should only contain those data that are important for library history. Therefore titles that were simply copied after Trithemius should be left out when no specific copies are mentioned.

We may even take it a step further. As I have said before, some titles go back to a copy of Rooklooster or Groenendaal. Most of them were not included in the corpus of the Register until around the year 1540. They then belong to the youngest layer, so to speak. That layer is of a totally different nature than the older monastic literature, for it includes mostly books printed later. Together they present a picture of the expansion in these days, when the market was flooded with new imprints, often reprints as well. Together they show that the character of the traditional monastic library was changing drastically. This may be an interesting subject of study, but modern bibliography offers a simpler and, especially, a more reliable tool for studying the world of books at that time. So the additions of around 1540 may be left out unless other references to copies prove that the title was already present in the St. Martin's Register. If so the reader of the edition must know that the phrasing of the title and especially the incipit may have been adapted to a recently printed copy.

In this respect one may ask oneself whether the Rooklooster register numbers that I discussed before are important. I think that they may be ignored in practically all cases. It is possible that one or two times they may enable a scholar to attribute a specific copy of a book to the priory. So far I have not been successful with this. More useful perhaps is the number of copies present. Therefore I shall confine myself to indicating the total number of copies when there is more than one.

The biographical notes are just as superfluous. In general they say what is known already from Trithemius, including all his errors. It is useless to copy all this, so that mostly it is sufficient to state that the biographical description is taken from Trithemius or from another identifiable source.

When the proportions of the content of the text are reduced on the base of these principles, the Register becomes less unwieldy, though practically all the data that are necessary for further research are included. I guess that in this way approximately sixty or

seventy percent of the text may be left out. Thus publication of the work comes within reach. The next question we should ask ourselves is what commentary the edition should include.

### **Preservation of elements relevant to the history of the text**

The edition should aim at recording the library-historical aspects as accurately as possible. This forces the editor to depart from the manuscript text in an important matter. First this concerns the references to libraries. The Register uses letters, symbols or library names that have been abbreviated to a single syllable. Most of the one-syllable abbreviations go back to Gaesdonck and so they date from around 1470. Some libraries mentioned here were revised at a later stage. It is now often impossible to distinguish between these two phases of recording. But if so, then these differences should be maintained in the edition. The best example is the abbreviation of the House of the Brethren of the Common Life at Deventer. It was indicated with the syllable *Da* in Gaesdonck, and later in St. Martin's, with a single *D*.

Similarly there are two strata of Groenendaal, the older already incorporated in St. Martin's, the younger of about 1540. They can often be distinguished from each other. Both have the same abbreviation, a capital *V* (for *Viridisvallis*). The later additions have mostly a capital *V* of a different ductus. For them the titles may have been based on recently acquired copies. Therefore it is useful for the reader of the edition to distinguish both the layers as clearly as possible. I have represented them by two different abbreviations, the older *V*'s being transcribed as GRL, the more recent notations as GRO. But there is another complication. It is sometimes impossible to make the very important distinction between the capital and the minuscule *v*. The minuscule *v* refers to another monastery, the Benedictine abbey of Vlierbeek. These uncertainties in the interpretation of the abbreviation have led to the adoption of special notations. References that certainly point to Vlierbeek are rendered into VLB in the edition, but if the choice between Vlierbeek and Groenendaal is not clear the transcription in the edition is GGX. (The X in my system of abbreviations always refers to an uncertainty). In the same way the older and the more recent titles of Groenendaal are distinguished by GRL and GRO respectively. If it is not possible to make a choice I have noted simply GRX.

### **Authors' names and origin of the titles**

Medieval authors' names are a well-known stumbling block in the interpretation of early catalogues. Of course it is unavoidable to give them in the version of the manuscript, but it is necessary to present also the form that is common now as well. Only then will the index of the edition be useful to the modern reader.

Furthermore, the sources of the titles should also be elucidated as far as possible. Sometimes a printed edition of the *Opera omnia* of an author was the base of the list of titles. Normally Trithemius was the starting point and additions were taken from the Register of St. Martin's. But it may also have gone the other way round. This can usually be recorded in a single line.

### **Commentary to the titles, preserved manuscripts**

Finally we should ask ourselves to what extent a title deserves to be commented upon. It happens that the same work, under a different title or not, is mentioned in two places. This should always be noted, for it provides an insight into the kind of source that has been used, sometimes the catalogue of a specific library, sometimes detailed information about an author.

I am also convinced that an anonymous title should be supplemented with the author's name in the commentary when it is commonly in use today. It is also necessary to point out to

the reader when a title should be attributed to another author. It is common practice, too, when a work certainly does not belong to the corpus of a particular author, to prefix "pseudo" to his name. The source this is based on should also be given, but as briefly as possible. Usually a reference to a reliable lexicon is sufficient. References to older more specialized literature may be useful only in disputable matters. An attempt at completeness would be too time-consuming and stand in the way of completing the edition.

Properly speaking it is desirable to note in the commentary whether the copy that is mentioned is still extant. This makes it possible, among other things, to penetrate more deeply into the way in which a particular library is recorded in the Register. But it will be clear that it is impossible to be exhaustive in this matter. Only in a few cases do we have a detailed list of preserved manuscripts (either according to library or according to author, in which the provenance has been sorted out as well). Even the excellent survey of the titles of St. Martin's library by Lourdaux and Haverals raises some questions which require handling the copy itself. This is impossible in the context of the edition, and therefore it is necessary here as well to rely on data at second hand.

### **Recording the abbreviations of the references to libraries**

Finally there is the matter of the names of the libraries. Computer editing renders it undesirable here to follow the manuscript text literally. It would mean designing special symbols for monasteries that are not indicated by letters and also making a distinction in accidental variants in spelling. For example, *fon* occurs next to *fons*, both meaning the same convent, Marienborn near Arnhem. Before, I have mentioned the difficulty in distinguishing between the capital and minuscule *v*. There are more problems of this kind which occur frequently. I have solved them by rendering all library names with a combination of three capital letters. The advantage of this is that the letters have been chosen in such a way that the user of the edition can easily recognize them and, when in doubt, check them in an alphabetical list of abbreviations. There he will also find any details that are known about the way in which the library was dealt with.

When the Rooklooster Register is edited in the manner proposed here, it will be a valuable addition to the *Corpus Catalogorum Belgii* and a good start of a corpus of catalogues of the Northern Netherlands. Perhaps it will yield both more and less than Derolez expects. In any case he will at least find valuable information about libraries which are missing either completely or for the greater part, for lack of source material, from his *Corpus Belgii*. Libraries such as those of the Windesheim priories of Bethlehem, Korsendonck and St. Martin's are well represented in the Register, to say nothing of the numerous others.