Market Realities

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MARKET REALITIES: CHRISTOPHER PLANTIN'S INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS IN AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD

Le 4 de Novembre 1576 fult par assaut pillée, et bruslée la ville d'Anvers par les Espagnolz soldats lesquelz y faysoynt aussi aultre outrages, grands meutres, etc. Dieu par sa divine grâce doint que n'advienne plus semblable ni à ceste ni à aultre ville et que puissions nous amender toutz.¹

[On 4 November 1576 the city of Antwerp was pillaged and burned by the Spanish soldiers who also committed other outrages and many murders, etc. May God through His divine grace grant that more of the same does not come to pass in this nor any other city and let us amend all.]

This note, in Christopher Plantin's account book for the year 1576, betrays a moment when the reality of religious conflict in the Low Countries intrudes even into the matter-of-fact records of shipments, balancing of accounts, profit and loss. The rich archives now preserved at the Museum Plantin-Moretus in Antwerp enable us to investigate the day-to-day realities and difficulties of developing and maintaining international networks that were vital for a publisher like Christopher Plantin, in order to reach his main market of an educated elite across Europe, the international 'Republic of Letters'. They contain substantial raw sales data, largely untapped, that can be harnessed to map the international networks of the early modern European book trade. This would help us in better understanding a widely dispersed community of print where collaboration, trust and co-operation were just as important as competition. Plantin's success was by no means certain and his achievements, and the success of the international book trade more generally, must also be considered against the background of religious conflict and political upheaval in Europe throughout the early modern period.

From the very first years after the invention of printing in Europe there was an imperative to create an international market. The new product required significant initial capital, technical

¹ Abbreviations: MPM: Museum Plantin-Moretus; CP: Max Rooses and Jan Denucé (eds), *Correspondance de Christophe Plantin* (Antwerp, 1883-1920). 9 vols.; PP: Leon Voet and Jenny Voet-Griselle, *The Plantin Press (1555-1589): A bibliography of the works printed and published by Christopher Plantin at Antwerp and Leiden*. 6 vols (Amsterdam: Van Hoeve, 1980-1983).
Currency: 1 florin (fl.) = 20 stuivers (st.). MPM Arch. 54.

skills, equipment and supplies, but with limited local demand and generally slow return on investment.² This was particularly true for trade in learned and theological books where Latin was the dominant language, shared across Europe. In the fifteenth century the book trade adopted established commercial networks and trading routes, leading to the dominance of commercial hubs such as Strasbourg, Leipzig, Nuremberg, Lyon, and most especially Venice. The connection between flourishing centres for commerce and the international book trade remained strong throughout the following centuries.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Low Countries were at the centre of European trade and Antwerp became one of the most important commercial cities on the Continent. Merchants from England, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal and many other places came to buy and sell products from all over Europe and its new colonial possessions. Antwerp was a principal node in an extensive commercial and banking network that extended across Europe from London to Venice. The Antwerp market benefited from a number of commercial innovations – chiefly the establishment of the first stock exchange in 1532, the introduction of trade in bills of exchange and the influx of capital from German and Italian bankers.³ The economic growth was closely linked to a rising population, and by the mid-sixteenth century Antwerp was one of the five largest cities in Europe.⁴

During this period of growth in the first half of the sixteenth century, the city also became the main centre for the book trade in the Low Countries. From the 1520s onwards Antwerp increasingly dominated book production, producing titles not just for a local audience but a wider international market – in particular classical and humanist texts and schoolbooks. Printers also took advantage of the relative religious freedom in these decades to produce Protestant works for a wide clandestine distribution, most notably for the English market.⁵

² John Feather, 'Book Trade Networks and Community Contexts', in *Historical Networks in the Book Trade* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 19.

³ The standard work in English is Hermann van der Wee, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy: (Fourteenth-Sixteenth Centuries)*, 2 vols (Louvain: Bureaux du Recueil, Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1963). More recent research on the Antwerp market is especially active within the Centre for Urban History at the University of Antwerp (CSG). See also Donald J. Harreld, 'Foreign Merchants and International Trade Networks in the Sixteenth Century Low Countries', *Journal of European Economic History*, 39/3 (2010), pp. 11-31.

⁴ W.P. Blockmans, 'The formation of a political union 1300-1588' in J.C.H. Blom and E. Lamberts (eds), *History of the Low Countries*, new ed. (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), p. 121.

⁵ For English printing in Antwerp see Dirk Imhof, Gilbert Tournoy and Francine de Nave (eds), *Antwerp. Dissident Typographical Centre: The Role of Antwerp Printers in the Religious Conflicts in England* (Antwerp: Plantin-Moretus Museum, 1994) and Antony Allison and David Rogers, *The Contemporary Printed Literature*

Publishers and booksellers benefited from the well-established overland routes to Cologne and Frankfurt – the biannual Frankfurt fair was vital for the international trade of books.⁶

Plantin explains his preference for Antwerp, where he had moved from Paris in the late 1540s, in a letter to Pope Gregory XIII in 1574

I preferred Belgium (Belgica regio) and this city of Antwerp, however, before all others as a place in which to establish myself. What chiefly inspired this choice is that in my judgement no other place in the world could furnish more convenience for the trade I wished to practise. This city is easy of access; one sees the various nations congregating in the market-place, and here all the materials necessary for the practice of my craft are to be obtained; workers for all trades, who can be taught in a short time, are easily found ...⁷

The political crises from the 1560s onwards had a critical impact on Antwerp and resulted in less favourable conditions for international trade. By the end of the century, especially with the continuing blockade of the river Scheldt, markets moved northwards to Emden, Hamburg, Amsterdam and the new Dutch Republic.⁸ Yet this decline was not inevitable and in between the many disasters there were interludes of relative calm and recovery. There is not space here to outline all the circumstances of the Dutch Revolt, its impact on Antwerp and on Plantin's career, but it is essential to keep this context in mind when considering the development and success of his business.⁹ This can be divided into roughly three phases – first foundation, followed by expansion, and finally consolidation. At every stage this development was heavily influenced by external events and punctuated with moments of crisis.

of the English Counter-Reformation between 1558 and 1640: An annotated catalogue. 2 vols (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989-1994).

⁶ John L. Flood, "Omnium totius orbis emporiorum compendium": The Frankfurt Fair in the Early Modern Period', in Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote (eds), *Fairs, Markets and the Itinerant Book Trade* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2007), pp. 1-42.

⁷ CP IV, letter 566, pp. 158-63.

⁸ Van der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp Market*, vol. 2, p. 256 ff.

⁹ The two authors who have published the most authoritative work on Christopher Plantin are Max Rooses and Leon Voet, both Directors of the MPM. See Max Rooses, *Christophe Plantin* 2nd ed. (Antwerp, 1896) and Leon Voet, *The Golden Compasses* 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Van Gendt & co, 1969-72):
https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/voet004gold01_01/

CAREER SUMMARY

After printing his first title in 1555, Plantin quickly established himself as a successful publisher with a developing international network. He faced his first major crisis in 1562, encountering for the first time the dangers for a publisher in an age of religious conflict. In February 1562 the Spanish authorities launched an investigation into the printing of a Calvinist work, *Briefve instruction pour prier*, which they believed had been printed by Plantin.¹⁰ He was away in Paris at the time and three of his journeymen were identified as the culprits and arrested. As master-printer Plantin could still be held legally responsible for all editions produced in his printing house. He felt the best course was to remain in Paris until it seemed safe to return, which would not be until June 1563. On his return he was questioned over another allegedly heretical work, *Instruction chrestienne* by Pierre Ravillan, but managed to escape any criminal punishment.¹¹ Financially the episode was a severe blow. In his absence he was declared bankrupt and his goods were sold at auction in the Vrijdagmarkt (28 April 1562), where today the Plantin-Moretus Museum extends along the whole of the western side.¹²

In order to raise the essential capital to restart his business Plantin entered into a partnership in November 1563 with Cornelis and Karel van Bomberghen, Joannes Goropius Becanus and the Venetian merchant Jacopo de Schotti (brother-in-law of Cornelis). The partnership lasted for four years, during which time the business recovered and Plantin was soon able to expand its scale. Following increased unrest and the Iconoclastic Fury of 1566 the southern Netherlands was effectively occupied by Spanish troops, led by Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, 3rd Duke of Alba. Plantin was able to secure the support of the Spanish authorities, and ultimately Philip II. This culminated in his appointment as chief printer (architypographus) to the southern Netherlands, the publication of the Biblia Regia polyglot bible (1568-1573) and a lucrative commission to print liturgical books for the Spanish market. Even with the escalating crisis Plantin was able to expand his business so that by 1574 he was running sixteen presses with approximately eighty direct employees.¹³

¹⁰ PP 1452.

¹¹ PP 2130.

¹² Voet, *Golden Compasses*, vol. 1, pp. 35-40.

¹³ Including 32 printers, 20 compositors, three correctors and one apprentice. Some piece work was contracted out such as bookbinding, design and cutting of woodblocks and engravings, intaglio printing, red ruling and hand colouring. Raymond De Roover, 'The Business Organisation of the Plantin Press in the Setting of Sixteenth Century Antwerp', *De Gulden Passer*, 34 (1956), pp. 104-120, especially table p. 113.

Following the disaster of the Spanish Fury in November 1576, as we have already seen described in a Plantin account book, the political tide turned against the Spanish. In the period from 1577 to 1585, Antwerp came under Calvinist control and Plantin was appointed printer to the States General. However, the continuing upheaval had an impact on the business and its activities were considerably reduced. By 1582 Plantin was looking to move his business north to Leiden, entering into an agreement with the new university, before moving himself in 1583. Yet he was still able to convince the Spanish authorities of his loyalty after their recapture of Antwerp in August 1585 and he returned there after all. He died on 1 July 1589. Although at the end of his life Plantin was disheartened that the publishing house would never again reach the heights of the early 1570s (he signed many letters at this time ‘from our once flourishing press’), his was nonetheless a remarkable achievement – to establish a publishing dynasty that prospered well into the seventeenth century and lasted until the nineteenth century.¹⁴

SALES ACCOUNTS

The enduring fame of the press rests on the nearly 2,450 editions published in Plantin’s lifetime – scholarly editions of classical authors, scientific works and erudite works of Biblical scholarship, as well as popular religious and secular titles. The extraordinary wealth of the surviving archives offers us much more, providing an unparalleled resource for many aspects of book trade history from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The archives have been mined for details on type production, working practices, activities of printmakers, proofreaders and more. The focus of the present research are the less well studied accounts which cover the sale and distribution of Plantin’s publishing output across Europe (as well as books resold from other publishers). These record sales to other members of the trade in many different countries, individuals who visited Antwerp or lived more locally, and institutions such as monasteries and Jesuit colleges.¹⁵ These accounts have been used as the basis for studies of Plantin’s exchanges with other booksellers in the Low Countries, his

¹⁴ Voet, *Golden Compasses*, vol. 1, p. 117, n.2 for many instances and variations on the theme of the ‘once flourishing press’.

¹⁵ Jan Denucé, *Musaeum Plantin-Moretus. Inventaris van het Plantynsch archief. Inventaire des archives Plantiniennes* (Antwerp, 1926):

https://www.museumplantinmoretus.be/sites/plantinmoretus/files/Inventaris_Plantijsch_Archief.pdf. Christian Coppens, ‘The Plantin Moretus archives: an index to Jan Denucé’s inventory of 1926’, *De Gulden Passer*, 76-77 (1998-99), pp. 333-360. A very helpful chart of the firm’s surviving ledgers is provided by Kristof Selleslach in ‘How to transfer the *Officina Plantiniana* to the next generation’ *De Gulden Passer*, 98/2 (2020), opposite p. 237.

exports to Spain, England, Scotland and France, and for the sale and distribution of individual titles. However, these are still relatively narrow and limited in scale when set against the sheer size and complexity of the surviving evidence.¹⁶

The earliest sales accounts date from 1555, when Plantin transitions from bookbinder to printer, but these are rather fragmentary, inconsistent and often very difficult to decipher.¹⁷ The situation changes with the creation of the business partnership in 1563 when more comprehensive financial accounts were needed for the partners. It was the Venetian merchant Jacopo de Schotti who was responsible for keeping the accounts for the partnership which included a detailed record all revenues and expenses related to the operation of the press. Unfortunately, the detailed cost accounting was abandoned after the dissolution of the partnership in 1567. Though only recorded for a relatively short period, such complete information on production costs is extremely rare and still deserves further study.¹⁸

Although the cost accounting method was dropped, the expanding activity of the business still necessitated more detailed accounts. From 1565 Jan Moretus (Plantin's future son-in-law) took over the main responsibility for keeping the accounts, bringing to the task a much more practical and methodical approach than had previously been the case with Plantin. Moretus had visited Venice in 1562-3 and probably received some training in bookkeeping from Jacopo de Schotti.¹⁹ Starting in 1566 an annual *Journal* records the daily transactions, including lists of titles, usually with prices, entered for each order (from booksellers, general

¹⁶ See especially Frans M. A. Robben, 'Jan Poelman, boekverkoper en vertegenwoordiger van de firma Plantin-Moretus in Salamanca 1579-1607', *De Gulden Passer*, 71-72 (1993-94); Colin Clair, 'Christopher Plantin's Trade-Connexions with England and Scotland', *The Library*, 5th Series, 14 (1959), pp. 28-45; Zanna van Loon, 'Crossing the North Sea for Books. An Overview of the Scottish Book Trade with the Officina Plantiniana between 1555 and 1589', *The Library*, 7th Series, 20 (2019), pp.172-204; Malcolm Walsby, 'Plantin and the French Book Market', in Matthew Maclean and Sara Barker (eds) *International Exchange in the Early Modern Book World*, Library of the Written Word, 51 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 80-101; Denis Pallier, 'Pierre Porret, Ami et Agent de Plantin', *De Gulden Passer*, 94/2 (2016), pp. 219-262; Denis Pallier, 'Recherches sur le cercle Plantinien en France: amis, appuis, familistes', *De Gulden Passer*, 96/1 (2018), pp. 7-72; Julianne Simpson, 'Selling the Biblia Regia: The marketing and distribution methods for Christopher Plantin's polyglot bible' in Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote (eds), *Books for Sale: The Advertising and Promotion of Print since the Fifteenth Century* (London: British Library, 2009), pp. 27-56; Renaud Milazzo, *Le marché des livres d'emblèmes en Europe. 1531-1750*. PhD thesis (Université Paris-Saclay, 2017).

¹⁷ See Voet, *Golden Compasses*, vol.1, pp.17-21. For the period 1555-1562 there is a single ledger for all transactions: MPM Arch. 38 (Libraires et autres 1555-1562); and three journals with lists of books dispatched: MPM Arch. 34 (Livre de vente 1556-1559), MPM Arch. 35 (Journal de toutes mes affaires 1558-1561), MPM Arch. 36 (Journal de Christophle Plantin 1561-1562).

¹⁸ De Roover, 'Business Organisation', p.108. See in particular MPM Arch. 4 (Grand livre des affaires 1563-1567); For current work on these accounts see Mark McConnell, 'Publishing Risk and the Capital Intensity of Early Modern Printing: An Examination of Christophe Plantin's Operations', *De Gulden Passer*, 98/2 (2020), pp. 129-182.

¹⁹ Voet, *Golden Compasses*, vol.1, pp. 151-152.

merchants and individuals). These form an almost-complete record of sales activity in the publishing house right through to the mid eighteenth century.²⁰ From this period the surviving separate ledgers cover accounts with booksellers, other customers and retail sales in the Antwerp shop. Later in the 1570s the ledgers for booksellers were divided into Antwerp and foreigners (*Libraires étrangers*).²¹ In addition, many other loose papers have survived that reveal a mixture of supplementary information – bills of exchange, receipts, inventories of stock and much else. These were collected together and bound into volumes in the nineteenth century.²²

A previously overlooked document in one of these volumes contains an early glimpse of Plantin's business in Frankfurt. This is a single page headed 'Bilanse du Cahier de francfort signé B de l'an 1566 de la foire d'April' with a list of booksellers from all across Europe and the balance of their account at the end of the fair.²³ [See Figure 1] The fair at Frankfurt was an essential meeting point for anyone involved in the long-distance book trade across Europe and Plantin almost certainly began attending regularly from 1557. Unfortunately, the accounts for the Frankfurt fair have significant gaps for the first few decades of the business. Prior to 1565 there is only a single list of books shipped on 11 March 1557 (1558).²⁴ The record improves from 1566 as the journals detail lists of books shipped for each fair, but we have little evidence for their onward distribution from Frankfurt across Europe. We can deduce from what does survive that also from 1565, around the same time as the Antwerp series of journals and ledgers started, new ledgers were introduced for the Frankfurt business. These Frankfurt accounts were in three parts – the rough balance of account for each lent and autumn fair (*carnet*), an equivalent to the annual journal with lists of books bought and sold (*cahier*) and a ledger. However, only a few of the volumes in these series from the 1560s to the 1580s have survived.²⁵ The missing accounts mean that we are unable to see the full picture of Plantin's activities, especially in these crucial early years as he was establishing his international business.

²⁰ MPM Arch. 44-75 (1566-1598), 171-180 (1599-1608), 216-258 (1609-1650), 401-416 (1651-1666), 382-400 (1667-1688), 365-378 (1689-1754).

²¹ MPM Arch. 40 (*Libraires A*), MPM Arch. 37 (*Débiteurs I*), MPM Arch. 43IV (*Vente à la boutique*).

²² See MPM Arch. 98 (*Pièces de famille 1549-1589*), MPM Arch. 116 (*Imprimerie 1555-1585*) and MPM Arch. 117 (*Imprimerie 1585-1599*).

²³ MPM Arch. 116, pp. 87-88.

²⁴ MPM Arch. 34, p.22. Contemporary correction to 1558.

²⁵ The earliest surviving Frankfurt *cahier* for Lent 1579 is signed Ee. This suggests that the first in the series would have been for autumn 1565. *Carnets*: MPM Arch. 849-961 (1571-1644, with numerous gaps from 1571-1587); *Cahiers*: MPM Arch. 962 (Lent 1579), 963-1052 (1586-1639); *Ledgers*: MPM Arch. 43I (1586-1596).

The information recorded in the list, a balance of accounts at the end of the spring 1566 fair, is very similar to summary lists in the later carnets (of which the earliest surviving is from 1571), and might well be an earlier version of this type of record. When compared to the later accounts, the names that appear indicate a certain longevity in business relations. Many are familiar to us from their publishing activities – Oporinus, Froben and Episcopius from Basel; Birckmann and Gymnich from Cologne; Rihel from Strasbourg; Feyerabend and Egenolph from Frankfurt; Willer from Augsburg. Other names are not so immediately recognisable and do not appear in standard book trade directories, perhaps as they were more entirely focused on bookselling and have left fewer traces in imprints and available sources. One such example on the list is Sebastian Rosenblat(t) from Augsburg who, at 77 fl 15 st, is the second largest debtor, after his compatriot Georg Willer. What is most noteworthy is that the majority of names mentioned appear consistently through to the later Frankfurt accounts, even after several decades. Despite its wide geographical spread, the European book trade was clearly a tightly interconnected network.

The success of this network relied a great deal on building strong relationships and developing trust and goodwill. This was not always guaranteed, and the Frankfurt accounts highlight one of the main risks for those involved in long distance trade – the problem of outstanding debts. A few names in the April 1566 list recur in later lists of debtors, many left unpaid for several decades and eventually written off. These include Wolfgang Courard(?) from Tübingen, Walter Hesis from Mainz, Hans Swan from Gorlitz and Wolff Encke from Jena, who seems never to have settled his debt from April 1566.²⁶ While the sums from each individual were relatively small these could add up to a big cash flow problem. The longstanding debts from just these four amounted to 134 fl 16 st. At Plantin's death in 1589 the total business debts were 16,350 fl. This was twice the assessed value of the books stored in the warehouse at Frankfurt.²⁷

Now bound together in the same volume as the 1566 Frankfurt list are several other documents which also contain additional detail missing from the main accounts. These include inventories of shipments to Paris from 1566 to 1574 and similar occasional lists of

²⁶ Debtors are listed in the Frankfurt carnets from 1571 onwards and included in the later ledger from the 1580s, MPM Arch. 43I, ff. 2 & 48. A later seventeenth-century local history of Jena describes Encke as 'eine verdorbener buchführer' (a corrupt bookdealer), Adrian Beier, *Architectus Jenensis, Abbildung der Jenischen Gebäuden* (Jena, 1681), p. 712.

²⁷ Voet, *Golden Compasses*, vol. 1, pp. 165-167.

Parisian debtors. After his move to Antwerp Plantin maintained close links with the Parisian book trade – visiting there often, sending large, regular shipments and publishing a number of titles specifically aimed at the French market.²⁸ In 1566 Plantin established his own bookshop and warehouse in Paris, managed by his close friend Pierre Porret and Gilles Beys, previously an assistant in the Antwerp bookshop (and later son-in-law).²⁹ This Parisian branch lasted until 1577 when Plantin, forced to consolidate after the Spanish Fury, sold all his Paris stock to Michel Sonnius, a leading Parisian bookseller.³⁰

There is evidence from the accounts that during this period, just as for Frankfurt, there was a separate ledger for the Paris branch that has not survived. A new ledger was started in 1564, alongside the accounts being kept for the partnership.³¹ The increasing size and complexity of the business must have become quickly apparent and the following year the series expanded. Most entries in the 1564 ledger have a note pointing the user to the sequential entry in new ledgers. Some of these refer to ‘au livre nouveau signé I’, others to ‘au livre nouveau des libraires signé A’.³² For the Parisian booksellers the note points to a different ledger – ‘au livre long des libraires de Paris signé B’.³³ We might assume that this lost ledger went to Paris and the loose accounts that have survived are extracts from it.³⁴

MAPPING THE ACCOUNTS

The sales accounts will, and should, continue to be mined for detailed case studies of regional trade networks and for individual works or genres. What we do not yet have is the systematic representation of the geographical distribution of sales and networks that could be extracted from the records. The simplest approach, although still by no means straightforward, would

²⁸ MPM Arch. 116, pp. 175-178, 283-290. Shipments to Paris are recorded in the earliest accounts from 1556: MPM Arch. 34, ff. 1-3 (Martin Le Jeune and ‘envoyé à Paris’) and following. Although it is generally accepted that some Plantin titles were aimed specifically at a French market further evidence is needed to verify such market segmentation, see further below.

²⁹ Henri Stein, ‘La succursale plantinienne de Paris’, *Bibliographie moderne*, 1920-21, pp. 34-57; Denis Pallier, ‘“A Paris. Au Compas d’or, Rue Saint Jacques”: La succursale parisienne de Plantin, Première partie: sources, organisation, approvisionnement, réseau’ *De Gulden Passer*, 98/2 (2020), pp. 17-128. Pallier also notes later similar lists from 1574-1577 in MPM Arch. 98, pp. 255-295.

³⁰ Sonnius, originally from Geldrop in Brabant, had been apprenticed to Guillaume de Boys in 1559. After marrying Boys’s daughter he took over the business on his father-in-law’s death in 1565 and became one of the most important publishers in Paris. Denis Pallier, ‘Recherches sur le cercle Plantinien en France’, pp. 38-41.

³¹ MPM Arch. 39 ‘Pour les libraires A’.

³² Now MPM Arch. 37 and MPM Arch. 40. Note also above that the Frankfurt series probably started in the same year, for the autumn 1565 fair.

³³ Or sometimes ‘de Fra[nce]’. There is one exception, Jacques du Puis, who is first entered in the ‘nouveau livre A’ and then transferred on 21 August 1565 ‘au livre des libraires de Paris signé B’, MPM Arch. 40, f. 1

³⁴ A few of the Parisian booksellers start to reappear in the next ledger, eg Michel Sonnius from 1575 in MPM Arch. 17, ff. 363 & 483 (‘libraires signé B’).

As Voet himself remarks in his notes to Appendix 2, a more detailed breakdown of sales for the large numbers of books sent to Frankfurt and Paris is not possible as the accounts have not survived. However, we can supplement his data with that recovered from the other loose extracts in the archive which he did not use. I have identified, located and mapped the booksellers in the Frankfurt April 1566 list. [See Figure 3] A single year, or even a single fair, still reveals only a snapshot for the ebb and flow of the international trade but we can begin to see some patterns emerging. For this single fair there is still some overlap with direct sales from Antwerp (especially Paris, Lyon, Augsburg and Venice) but the main focus is to the German speaking territories (eighty percent). When compared with the data extracted and mapped from Voet's Appendix 4, for the two Frankfurt fairs in 1579, the proportions are very similar.³⁶ [See Figure 4]

Figure 3: Sales figures for the Spring Frankfurt Fair, 1566 (MPM Arch. 116, p. 87)

Despite well-established commercial routes it was still the case that longer distances meant an increase in risk, such as the loss of goods in transit, slow returns on large investments or defaults on payments. Even with is a slight increase from 1566 to 1579, the numbers of books being sent further east (Leipzig, Wittenberg, Prague, Görlitz and Poznań) remain relatively small at around one percent. We see very low figures for direct sales from Antwerp to Italy (between one and two percent) but if we consider the figures for distribution via Frankfurt

³⁶ Voet, *Golden Compasses*, vol. 2, pp. 500-506.

this rises to a much more substantial ten percent.³⁷ Although there were very close commercial links with Italy only a few Italian orders came directly to Antwerp, while more trade was done in Frankfurt – highlighting again the significance of the fair for the book trade. The country that is certainly missing from these figures is Spain. This changed dramatically in the next few years after Plantin secured the support of Philip II and in the early 1570s Spain became the chief market for Plantin – between 1571 and 1576 he dispatched books worth nearly 100,000 fl. to Spain. A similar analysis of the accounts beyond a single year would provide us with an even better view of Plantin’s international networks and basis for further study of early modern European book trade networks.

Figure 4: Sales figures for the Spring Frankfurt Fair, 1579 (Voet, *Golden Compasses*, vol. 2, Appendix 5)

³⁷ All the Italian sales in this sample are to Venice but there is evidence elsewhere in the accounts of sales to Milanese booksellers, eg. Pietro and Francesco Tini, MPM Arch. 17, f. 154.

MAPPING INDIVIDUAL TITLES

Another approach to the data in the sales accounts is to examine the distribution of individual titles and editions, providing valuable information for the analysis of textual transmission across Europe. While some publishers specialised in particular genres or segments of the market most scholarly publishers such as Plantin ranged across many categories.³⁸ Evidence from the archives reveals that he understood the potential markets and likely competition very well, gathering information underpinned by his extensive international network. In one surviving volume is a list of about 20,000 titles published between 1530 and 1595.³⁹ This information would have been vital for Plantin in deciding what titles to publish and where to sell them.

The various patterns of distribution for works of different genres and languages can be demonstrated with a few examples, again using the data tabulated by Voet in *The Golden Compasses*. He provides tables on the sales of three different titles published in 1566, covering the years 1566 to 1568.⁴⁰ The first is *Reynaert de Vos*, which was an illustrated popular novel in Dutch and French.⁴¹ [See Figure 5] As might be expected the majority of sales are within the Dutch speaking region (ninety-seven percent), with just eleven copies out of 608 going to Cologne and six to Heidelberg. The 16mo scholarly edition of Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, edited by the Flemish scholar Luis Carrion (at the precocious age of just 18), had a wider reach.⁴² [See Figure 6] Only twenty-three percent of 341 copies were sold in the Low Countries, with just four in Antwerp itself but fifty-seven in Leuven. There were 182 copies sent to the Frankfurt fair, thirty-five copies went to Paris and thirty-three to London. The third title was Plantin's most ambitious project thus far, an illustrated anatomical treatise based on the *Fabrica* of Andreas Vesalius and another work by Juan

³⁸ Ian Maclean, 'Labor, Impensa, Emolumentum: The Publisher of Learned Books' in *Scholarship, Commerce, Religion: The Learned Book in the Age of Confessions, 1560-1630* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 97-133.

³⁹ MPM Arch. M296. Classified by countries, cities and printers, it includes the title of the book, the name of the author, the format, the number of sheets used for printing and in most cases, the price in local money of account. The data from it now forms part of a database of European book prices constructed by the Early Modern Book Trade project: <http://emobooktrade.unimi.it/db/public/pages/sourceedition/idsources/213>.

⁴⁰ Voet, *Golden Compasses*, vol. 2, pp. 519-521 (*Reynaert de Vos*); pp. 521-523 (Valerius Flaccus); pp. 523-525 (Valverde). MPM Arch. 44, 45 and 46.

⁴¹ *Reynaert de vos. Een seer ghenouchlicke ende vermakelicke historie in franchoyse ende nederduytsch*. 8vo (1566), PP 2139: 608 copies sold from a print run of 1,600. Private customers have been excluded from the figures as Voet does not give information on their location.

⁴² Valerius Flaccus, *C. Valerii Flacci Setini Balbi Argonauticon lib. VIII. Locis innumerabilibus antea à Ludouico Carrione ex vetustiss. exempl. emendati*. 16mo (1566), PP 2409: 341 copies sold from a print run of 1,000.

Valverde, with forty-two copperplate engravings.⁴³ [See Figure 7] This time the largest number of copies went to Paris, a total of 129 out of 331 copies sold in the three year period.⁴⁴

Figure 5: *Reynaert de Vos*, number of copies sold, 1566-1568 (Voet, *Golden Compasses*, vol. 2, Appendix 7)

⁴³ *Vivæ imagines partivm corporis hvmani æreis formis expressæ*. Fol. (1566), PP 2413: 331 copies sold out of a print run of 600.

⁴⁴ There was a large purchase of 25 copies in 1567 by the Heidelberg (later Mainz) bookseller Erasmus Crolbach. This was part of a shipment totalling 705 fl. which included the six copies of *Reynaert de Vos* mentioned above and 12 copies of the 8vo edition of *Argonautica*, MPM Arch. 45, ff. 206-207.

Figure 6: Valerius Flaccus (16mo), number of copies sold, 1566-1568 (Voet, *Golden Compasses*, vol. 2, Appendix 7)

Figure 7: Valverde, *Anatomia*, number of copies sold, 1566-1568 (Voet, *Golden Compasses*, vol. 2, Appendix 7)

Recovering accurate data for this task is also not straightforward – some sales do not appear in the journals but are rather recorded directly into the ledgers, books might be later returned, and many editions take years, even decades, to sell out. The data on edition size is also patchy. For his three examples Voet was able to use information on number of copies printed from the partners' ledger, but after 1567 the information on edition sizes is much more scattered.⁴⁵ Another, more complete, example can be supplied from data on sales of Plantin's polyglot bible, the *Biblia Regia* supported by Philip II.⁴⁶ My own figures, extracted from the accounts over a period of 30 years, show the distribution for a total of 969 copies from a print run of 1,200. This figure excludes the 83 copies delivered directly to Philip II and 143 copies sold to private customers, which is unusually high in comparison to the sales figures recorded by Voet for the other three titles (private sales are around seven percent compared to nearly twenty percent for the *Biblia Regia*). [See Figure 8] While this presents a more complete picture for the European distribution of a single edition there are still gaps, most particularly with the nearly twenty percent of copies that were shipped to Frankfurt before 1586.

Figure 8: *Biblia Regia*, number of copies sold, 1572-1603

⁴⁵ Information on print runs for specific editions can be found in the correspondence and also in payment books for workers. See for example MPM Arch. 788 (Ouvriers 1583-1589), f. [4]. I am grateful to Kristof Selleslach for this reference.

⁴⁶ *Biblia Sacra Hebraice, Chaldaice, Graece, & Latine pietatis concordiae. Isaiae, II Philippi II Reg. Cathol. pietate, et studio ad Sacrosanctae Ecclesiae vsum*. 8 vols in folio (1568-1573), PP 644. See Julianne Simpson, 'Selling the *Biblia Regia*'.

Both of these approaches to the Plantin sales accounts, the extraction of data to investigate book trade networks or the distribution of individual titles, have their own merits and are by no means mutually exclusive. The archives can offer us the macroscopic view on the international trade of books in the sixteenth century but equally be mined to expose the small-scale, human story of the everyday harsh realities of a city in the midst of a bitter struggle. On both levels they open a window onto this challenging and frustrating world.

MARKET REALITIES

Plantin had managed not only to survive the disruptions in the early years of the Dutch revolt but also to enlarge his business. The accounts show vividly the impact of the ongoing crisis in the following years. The first significant interruption to trade occurred in the late summer of 1566 after rising tensions led to the Iconoclastic Fury which began on the evening of 20 August and lasted for several days. Even with these signs of trouble there had not yet been any obvious effect on the business. Earlier that same day Jan Moretus had been busy overseeing a large order (107 fl 8 st) being dispatched to Venice for Luc' Antonio Giunta.⁴⁷ However, Plantin had already voiced his concerns over the possible troubles ahead in a letter to Andreas Maes on 8 August.

I pray God to give wisdom and understanding to our governors that they may know how to make use of the example of our neighbours and conduct themselves according to it, beginning this play with the solution that our neighbours have employed, lest it should finally become a tragedy in which not the death of a few people brings tranquillity but a wrathful fury causing the destruction of thousands of good people, as many on the one side as on the other. For to give my true opinion, I foresee that unless these floodwaters are channelled off, they will so devastate the arable lands that the inhabitants will not enjoy the fruits of anything that grow there. And if the farmers who are tilling the land think (as they seem to have decided) to throw back this flood by force, I fear that this will only be done with grave harm to and loss of the possessions, bodies and souls of many thousands of persons who might be spared to us and saved forever by God's good grace.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ MPM Arch. 44, ff. 113-114.

⁴⁸ CP III, letter 336, pp. 8–10. Translation by Voet, *Golden Compasses*, vol. 1, p. 135.

The disorder continued for several days with riots, looting and the destruction of images in many Antwerp churches. Inserted into the journal is a list of outstanding debts from seventy different booksellers dated 26 August. The total was 4,307 fl 17 st.⁴⁹ The drawing up of this list indicates that Plantin must have been concerned at this moment about the impact on his finances. However, order was gradually restored, foreign booksellers are again present in Antwerp from October and in December Plantin was writing to Gabriel de Çayas about his new plan to publish a polyglot bible. Nevertheless, these upheavals were just the beginning. On 22 August 1567, Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, 3rd Duke of Alba, marched into Brussels at the head of 10,000 troops. While this escalation brought with it new concerns there were also opportunities. It appears that even a Spanish army needed its own bookseller as there is an entry in the ledger for 1568 which shows Plantin selling books to ‘Jaques d’Affrique libr[aire] etc.’ (also called ‘reliure’ in the journal entry) ‘au Camp de Mons[ieur] le Duc d’Alba’. The account included twenty-five ‘cartillas’ or primers and twenty-eight assorted books of hours.⁵⁰

While the 1570s saw Plantin’s business expand and flourish the threat from Spain was ever-present and in November 1576 his worst fears were realised. On 4 November Spanish troops, having retreated to the fortress on the southern edge of Antwerp – isolated and angry at fighting against the rebels without rest or pay – stormed the city. Thousands of citizens died, the town hall and the surrounding blocks of houses were set alight, storehouses and homes were plundered. We have already seen above the note written by Jan Moretus in the journal for 1576 recording the disastrous event. Many citizens, including Plantin were forced to pay large ransoms to protect their lives and property. Much of this money was supplied by his friend and business associate, the Spanish merchant Luis Perez – the sum of 2,867 fl. was entered against his account in the ledger.⁵¹

Business resumed within a few days but the entries in the journal confirm that it took some time to return to anything like normal. There are just a couple of entries for the following days, then a week-long gap to the next series of entries. These are mainly books for Frans Raphelengius, another of Plantin’s sons-in-law whom he had recently set up in his own

⁴⁹ Bilanse du livre des libr[aires] signé A faict ad 26 Aug[u]st 1566, MPM Arch. 40 (insert).

⁵⁰ MPM Arch. 17, f. 74.

⁵¹ ‘Luis Perez doit avoir ad ult. Novembris- [1576] 2,867 fl. 8 st., cest pour aultant que par compte faict il a debourse pour Christophle Plantin pour payer sa ranzon aux soldatz entrez audit mois par assault en la ville d’Anvers’, MPM Arch. 19, f. 103.

[illegible]

⁵² MPM Arch. 54, ff. 165-167.

Plantin was determined to revive the firm and was able to secure the loans and credit he needed to continue, including 9,600 fl. from his old business partner Karel von Bomberghen. While the setback put an end to his expansion, Plantin continued to print on a relatively large scale (in January 1583 he had 10 presses operating with 35 workmen). Against the backdrop of the continuing struggle sales recovered, with customers from the new authorities replacing the old.⁵³ The final blow for Antwerp came in 1585 when, after a twelve-month siege, the city was recaptured for the Spanish by Alessandro Farnese, Duke of Parma. The Dutch fleet continued to block the river Scheldt, cutting off the city's access to the sea and finally bringing to an end its dominance in international trade.

On 21st August 1585 Jan Moretus was ordered by the city magistrate to 'print and publish abroad the treaty of reconciliation concluded between His Highness the Duke of Parma and this city, both in the French and the Brabant tongues.'⁵⁴ Life carried on, orders were received and dispatched – the business survived. In several letters Plantin expressively compares himself to a mariner seeking to bring his frail craft to a safe harbour over a turbulent, reef-strewn sea:

In such a way that we are forced to roam at the mercy of impetuous winds, and as the waves throw us from here to there. The spirit, however, remaining firm and quiet in God, in whom I pray to have mercy on us and finally bring us back to the true safe harbour.⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

We know that the international community of scholars in the early modern world - the 'Republic of Letters' – relied on a series of interconnected networks: social, institutional and commercial. The international book trade played a crucial part in the transmission of ideas both through the publication and distribution of texts but also as important nodes of exchange and contact for social networks.⁵⁶ In turn the trade itself relied on the establishment of networks: social, kinship and commercial. The surviving business accounts in the Plantin archives contain extraordinarily rich data that offer a new perspective on the geography of the

⁵³ See MPM Arch. 18, ff. 310, 311, 362 & 410 for orders from the City of Antwerp between 1579 and 1582, many commissions for handbills and MPM Arch. 18, f. 376 for orders of books by 'Messrs des fortifications'.

⁵⁴ CP VII, no. 1037.

⁵⁵ CP VII, no. 959, letter to Gabriel de Çayas, 3 November 1581.

⁵⁶ This has already been recognised with the inclusion of the published Plantin correspondence in Early Modern Letters Online: <http://emlo-portal.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/collections/?catalogue=christophe-plantin>.

early modern book trade and, more broadly, scholarly networks and the transmission of texts. The models offered here demonstrate the potential for wider analysis which might include several distinct strands, all of which are closely connected, with results from one endeavour informing the others. There are the raw economics of Plantin's international trade and its geography, recording both spatial and temporal elements to encompass the changing political and commercial contexts. A focus on textual transmission would identify individual editions and map their distribution. This could be further divided geographically though it might risk the misapplication of present-day national boundaries onto a much more fluid early modern geography, for example where a common language might characterise a particular market segment. These macroscopic approaches must also be supported by the granularity of detail contained in the accounts, of which a few illustrations have been provided here, to remind us of the human and the personal even in the most dispersed and distant community.