The Maurits Sabbe Library and Its Collection of Jesuit Books

The Maurits Sabbe Library at the University of Louvain

The Maurits Sabbe Library of the Faculty of Theology at Louvain is a rather recent library. Since its inception in 1974, it has served as an independent research facility for the Faculty of Theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. The story of its development leads us back into the larger history of the University Library of Louvain. During the twentieth century, this history took a dramatic course; indirectly, it teaches us something about the composition of the collections that eventually arrived in the theological library.1

The Louvain University Library was formed in 1636, when various important collections from colleges and professors’ private libraries were centralized in the University Hall. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this library had grown into a very valuable collection, including ca. 300,000 books, 800 incunabula, and 1,000 manuscripts. In the four decades to come, however, it was twice almost completely destroyed by acts of war.

At the beginning of the First World War, the city of Louvain was occupied by German troops. Following some unaccounted hostilities, the Germans decided to retaliate upon the Louvain population, which had fatal consequences for the University as well. On 25 August 1914, the University Hall was reduced to ashes, including its library, whose books were all destroyed. At the end of the war, the Treaty of Versailles compelled the Germans to reconstitute the library as completely as possible. Moreover, at the initiative of an American reconstruction programme, a monumental new library was built and solemnly dedicated in 1928. At the beginning of the Second World War, however, Louvain was again occupied by the Germans. On 14 May 1940 they bombed the new library building, and again, nearly the entire collection went up in flames (only 12,000 volumes and fifteen manuscripts survived).

Eventually, after the renewed reconstruction of the University Library in the 1950s, the collection was definitively split at the end of the 1960s as part of the division of the University of Louvain into separate Dutch-speaking and French-speaking universities. The ‘Katholieke Universiteit Leuven’ remained in Louvain and the ‘Université catholique de Louvain’ moved ca. 30 kilometres south, where a new university campus was built in Louvain-la-Neuve. The library collection was then divided between the two libraries in Louvain and Louvain-la-Neuve.

Upon that occasion, the Flemish University of Louvain adopted a new library policy, largely decentralizing its library facilities. Henceforth, every faculty got its own research library, and various parts of the University Library were assigned to the faculty libraries according to the different scientific disciplines. In the process of building up these ‘sub-libraries’, the new library for the Faculty of Theology was to become something special for the new Catholic university: namely,

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it was to be a model library, destined to be “a kind of confession of faith of the University Community.”

On 16 October 1974, the library of the Faculty of Theology was solemnly inaugurated. The instigator and driving force behind the library project had been Professor Maurits Sabbe (1924-2004), the faculty’s first academic librarian. He succeeded in setting up an attractive new building, designed by architect Paul Van Aerschot (b. 1938). In the meantime, he had managed to supplement the small theological collection received from the central University Library with large, very valuable collections, which immediately gave the theology library the size and richness worthy of international significance.

The most important library integrated into the faculty library was the collection of theological and historical works from the library of the Flemish Jesuits, located in Heverlee near Louvain. In 1969, this collection was deposited into the theological library; additionally, by the end of 1969, the library of the major seminary of the Archdiocese of Mechelen was also incorporated. The latter library contained a very rich collection of early printed books, particularly the so-called ‘Cardinal d’Alsace Library’. Both libraries became the cornerstone of the new faculty library. Furthermore, over the course of time, the collection was extended through an intensive purchasing policy by the faculty and by numerous donations, acquisitions and deposits from existing libraries. Among them were the library of the Louvain Irish College (1980), the provincial library of the Friars Minor at Vaalbeek, near Louvain (1988), and the Marian library of the Belgian Montfort Fathers (1995); they were particularly renowned for their collections of early printed books.

In 2004, on the occasion of its thirtieth anniversary, the faculty library received the name of its great promoter and officially became the Maurits Sabbe Library. In this year, the Flemish

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7 See the catalogue, Frans Gistelinck (ed.), *Bibliotheca Mariana Lovaniensis: La bibliothèque mariale de Banneux-Notre-Dame, une collection monfortaine dans la bibliothèque de la Faculté de théologie de la KU Leuven*, Documenta Libraria, 18 (Louvain: Bibliotheca van de Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid, 1997).
Jesuits also deposited their Jesuitica and Ignatiana collections into the library (in 1998, they had already deposited their philo sophica). In 2005, the very rich collection of Jesuitica and preciosa belonging to the Dutch Province of the Jesuit Order was also deposited. Furthermore (and in addition to many others), in 2008, the theological library’s collection was extended by the acquisitions of the library of the Flemish Capuchins, which included a rich collection of early printed books, and with the library of the Josephites (C.J.).

Eventually, the holdings of the Maurits Sabbe Library increased to the current sum of approximately 1,300,000 volumes, including – next to the majority of present-day research books – ca. 900 manuscripts and ca. 180,000 early printed books: 602 incunabula, 1,600 post-incunabula (3,000 volumes),9 5,000 items (10,000 volumes) from the late sixteenth century, 55,000 volumes from the seventeenth century and 110,000 from the eighteenth century. Within this vast collection, the works by Jesuits and dealing with Jesuits are among the richest collections. A very attractive selection from this treasure was already displayed in the exhibition “Emblemata sacra: Emblem Books in the Maurits Sabbe Library, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.” The exhibition ran throughout the month of January 2005 in the Maurits Sabbe Library, and was later on display at Saint Joseph’s University in Philadelphia and at Fordham University in New York.9

Jesuit Books from the Low Countries in the Maurits Sabbe Library

Concerning their provenance, the books related to the Society of Jesus and now preserved in the Maurits Sabbe Library belonged to a number of Jesuit colleges and residences all over the Low Countries, as is indicated throughout this publication. In the South as well as in the North, the Jesuits had various houses with superlative libraries. First of all, there were a number of interesting scientific libraries, such as the Musaeum Bollandianum (the library of the Bollandists, which possessed a unique collection of hagiographica and liturgica),10 and the lesser-known Musaeum Bellarminianum (founded in Antwerp with a fund by Roberto Bellarmino (1542-1621) to support Jesuit controversi als, which was later known as the Musaeum historiographicum, that focused on historical research).11 In our collection, numerous Jesuit colleges

10 The Musaeum Bollandianum emerged from the collection built by the Bollandists during the seventeenth century. In 1794, after the suppression of the Jesuit Order, it was dispersed, but in 1837, with the restoration of the Bollandists, it was reconstituted. See Robert Godding, et al., Bollandistes, saints et légendes: Quatre siècles de recherche (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 2007), esp. 45-51, 115-125; Bart Op de Beeck, “La bibliothèque des Bollandistes à la fin de l’Ancien Régime,” in De Rosseyle aux Acta Sanctorum: La recherche hagiographique des Bollandistes à travers quatre siècles, ed. Robert Godding et al., Subsidia hagiographica, 88 (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 2009), 149-284.
11 Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Musaeum Bellarminianum had been located at Mechelen; later, when it became the Musaeum historiographicum, it moved again to Antwerp. In 1795, it fell victim to the same fate as the Musaeum Bollandianum. Jos Andriessen, “L’apostolat de la plume,” in Les jésuites belges 1542-1992: 450 ans de Compagnie de Jésus dans les provinces belges, ed. A. Derneef, X. Dusausoit, C. Evers et al. (Brussels: AESM, 1992), 71-72; R. Godding, et al., Bollandistes, saints et légendes, 116.
and houses (e.g. novitiates, professed houses) are of great interest, such as Louvain, Antwerp, Bruges, Ieper, Kortrijk, Gent, Brussels, Nivelles, Tournai, Douai, Sint-Winoksbergen, Maastricht, ’s-Hertogenbosch, Roermond, Mechelen, Namur, Dunkirk, Cassel, Bailleul, Oudenaarde, Aalst, Mons, and Halle. The libraries of these houses were dispersed after the suppression of the Jesuit Order in 1773. All of their books were confiscated and thousands of them were sold during the years 1773-1795. More than 100,000 volumes were sold at auctions between 1777-1780, solely from the libraries of Jesuit colleges in the Southern Netherlands. Later, through various channels, many of these books reappeared in the collections of the large libraries mentioned above, and were finally brought together in the Maurits Sabbe Library. In order to trace the most important suppliers of the books, one can follow the development of the more prominent collections that had been constructed after the restoration of the Jesuit Order in the nineteenth century.

The Southern Low Countries

In the Southern Low Countries the Jesuits were able to resume their activities after the independence of Belgium in 1830. Soon thereafter, one residence and two colleges were opened, and in 1832, the Belgian province of the Jesuits, which also included the Jesuit colleges and residences in the Northern Netherlands, was finally restored. Later, in 1849, the Dutch Jesuits became a vice-province, and in 1850 they became an officially independent province. The Belgian novitiate itself had been reinstituted in Nivelles in 1831 but was quickly transferred to Drongen (Tronchiennes) in 1837. In 1839, the scholasticate was established in Louvain, where the library of the Order would eventually be housed. A major

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13 Jerome Machiels, 

14 Remarkably, the then librarian of the University of Louvain, theologian Jan Frans Van de Velde (1743-1823), was very active at these auctions and had purchased ca. 15,000 volumes. Thus, he made a major contribution in providing the ancient University Library of Louvain with an exceptional collection of Jesuitica, which unfortunately was destroyed in the fire of 1914. See Coppens, et al. (eds.), Leuven University Library 1425-2000, 69; Theodore Wesley Koch, The University of Louvain and Its Library (London/Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1917), 18; Edouard de Moreau, La Bibliothèque de l’Université de Louvain 1636-1914 (Louvain: René Fonteyn, 1918), 44.
figure during this period of Jesuit library reconstruction was Lodewijk Vincent Donche (1769-1857). After the restoration of the Order, this former ‘Père de la Foi’ exercised various functions, including the role as rector of the ‘Krijtberg’ Jesuit residence in Amsterdam (1814-1817). Donche had collected a huge library, estimated at 25,000 volumes, many of which had come from suppressed Jesuit houses. In 1827, he bequeathed his entire library to the Society of Jesus. In 1832, the collection was transferred to the Jesuit residence in Gent, where the Order’s theologate was housed. In 1839, the library followed the theologate when it moved from Gent to the Order’s new Collegium Maximum on the Minderbroedersstraat in Louvain. In 1851, the library moved yet again and was housed in a new, large library hall.

The library grew steadily under the direction of the most competent librarians, among whom some well-known names are worth mentioning. Alois De Backer (1823-1883) was librarian from 1857 to 1883 and, as co-author of the Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus, was extremely well grounded in continuing a judicious acquisition policy. The most important librarian was patrologist Joseph de Ghellinck (1872-1950), who directed the library for more than thirty years, from 1909 to 1941. During this period, the library’s number of volumes increased tremendously, while broadening its scientific scope; this is why De Ghellinck is called “the second founder of the library.” The collection remained undamaged during the First World War, and in 1931, it reached 200,000 volumes. Meanwhile, in 1927, the Philosophy Department of the Southern Belgian Province had moved to a new house of studies in Egenhoven (near Louvain), taking with them the corresponding books from the library (in 1931 the collection numbered ca. 35,000 volumes). In 1940, at the beginning of the Second World War, this library of Egenhoven was destroyed.

Marc Dykmans (1905-1991) was librarian from 1941 to 1961. He systematically continued the work of his predecessor and played a central role in the transfer of the library to the new house of studies of the Flemish Jesuits, located on the Waversebaan in Heverlee (near Louvain). In the summer of 1959, the library from Minderbroedersstraat, numbering more than 250,000 volumes, was moved to Heverlee.

17 Donche intensively collected libraries of former Jesuits and other clerics and purchased books at auctions in the Northern and Southern Low Countries. In Dordrecht, he earned the nickname “de boekenvreter” (“the book devourer”), Marlier, Lodewijk-Vincent Donche, 375.
18 In actuality, Donche was not the only person who had donated a valuable collection to the Society. In that same period, for instance, the Flemish cleric and bibliophile Carolus Valentijns (1791-1865) also donated a precious collection of books to the Jesuits. See Patrick Valvekens, “C. Valentijns, een vergeten bibliofiel uit de negentiende eeuw,” V.R.B. Informatie 27 (1997): 69-71.
19 A smaller part of the collection went to the library of the Bollandists (De Smet and Gistelinck, “Vroeg zestiende-eeuwse boeken uit de bibliotheek van de jezuïeten,” 14).
20 De Smet and Gistelinck, “Vroeg zestiende-eeuwse boeken uit de bibliotheek van de jezuïeten,” 15.
22 Dykmans developed a new decimal classification for the library, which he also later introduced at the library of the Gregorian University in Rome, where he acted as prefect between 1961-1967. See Marc Dykmans, Le déménagement d’une bibliothèque semi-publique: Un problème de bibliothéconomie (Louvain: Éditions de la Bibliothèque S.J., 1956). Information about Dykmans can be found in the Jesuit newsletter Jesuïeten 17 (1959): 107-111, 142-143, 145-147.
Ten years later, the transfer of the Jesuit library to the new library of the Faculty of Theology had begun. The leasing agreement was signed on 19 March 1969 for the entire theological collection of the Jesuit library, consisting of more than 200,000 volumes. In the summer of 1974, the books were transported to the new library building in Louvain. On the part of the Jesuits, the transfer operation was closely supervised by Herman Morlion (1925-2008), librarian at Heverlee from 1967 to 1998, and by Silveer De Smet (1924-2007), who was a part-time professor at the theological faculty and was responsible for the Jesuits’ theological collection from 1972 to 1989. After a while, other sections of the library followed suit, including the *philosophica* collection, which was transferred to the faculty library in 1998. Finally, with the contract of 11 December 2003, the transfer of the *Jesuitica* was agreed upon, and, beginning in 2004, it was realized. At that moment, the “Jesuitica” website was in the process of being developed, keeping in mind the vision of opening up the library worldwide while promoting historical-theological research into the Society of Jesus. In total, ca. 550,000 books from the library of the Flemish Jesuits were integrated into the Maurits Sabbe Library. Evidently, the latest transfer enriched the library with a tremendous amount of early printed books dealing with all aspects of the history of the Society of Jesus.

23 See the obituary notices in “In Memoriam: Jezuïeten uit Vlaanderen,” *Jezuieten* no. 7 (Nov. 2008): 19-24 and 7-11 respectively.
24 Books concerning other areas of research were transferred to the Central University Library and the libraries of the faculties of Letters and of Sciences at the K.U. Leuven.
25 See the website www.jesuitica.be.
Other library collections, present in the Maurits Sabbe Library, are also important to the history of the Society of Jesus. The library of the archdiocesan seminary of Mechelen includes among its ca. 35,000 pre-1801 printed books various volumes that are important to our subject.26 Particularly in the Cardinal d’Alsace Library there are many books that came from suppressed Jesuit houses and were eventually incorporated into the library of the archdiocese through purchases made by third parties. In particular, the Musaeum Bellarminianum was integrated into that library after the suppression of the Jesuit Order; by way of this detour, parts of this collection finally arrived in the Maurits Sabbe Library.27

The Northern Low Countries

After the Jesuits in the Netherlands were recognized as an independent province of the Society of Jesus in 1850, Dutch novices began receiving their formation in Ravenstein.28 It was only in 1865 that the novitiate moved to the residence ‘Mariëndaal’ in Grave. The philosophicum had been located in the minor seminary of Culemborg since 1845. In 1867, it was also transferred to ‘Mariëndaal’ and received a proper home in Oudenbosch in 1878. Finally, in 1929, it was transferred to the Collegium Berchmanianum in Nijmegen. In 1852, theological formation, initially provided at Culemborg, moved to the Collegium Canisianum in Maastricht. During the nineteenth century, various of these houses built up a new valuable book collection. Also colleges such as the Willibrord College in Katwijk aan den Rijn (later The Hague) and the Canisius College in Nijmegen possessed rich libraries (the former including an important collection of manuscripts). Furthermore, as in the South, individual clerics had contributed books to Jesuit libraries. Especially worth mentioning is the Antwerp Jesuit Cornelius Geerts (1734-1819), who was very active at the beginning of the nineteenth century in purchasing many books at auctions which he subsequently donated to Jesuit houses in the Netherlands.29 The major library of the Dutch province of the Jesuit Order was located at the Canisianum in Maastricht, including a precious collection of Jansenistica and Jesuitica.30

This situation remained unchanged until the middle of the twentieth century. In the course of the 1960s, the various formation programs of the Dutch Society of Jesus were involved in a nation-wide reform, which aimed at combining the numerous institutions of priestly education in the Netherlands into five theological colleges or faculties.31 In 1966-1967, the Dutch Jesuits decided to join the consortium of theological studies in Amsterdam. This signalled the end of the theological faculty at the Canisianum in Maastricht and of the philosophical faculty at the Berchmanianum in Nijmegen. Obviously, the discontinuation of separate formation institutes had its

26 See the extensive article by Goran Proot in this book, pp. 252-256; further data can be found in Luc Knappen. “Les postincunables du fonds de Malines et leurs anciennes provenances,” in Early Sixteenth Century Printed Books 1501-1540 in the Library of the Leuven Faculty of Theology, ed. Frans Gistelinck and Maurits Sabbe, Documenta Libraria, 15 (Louvain: Bibliotheek Godgeleerdheid/Peeters, 1994), especially 34-42.
27 De Smet and Gistelinck, “Vroeg zestiende-eeuwse boeken uit de bibliotheek van de jezuïeten,” 5.
consequences for the libraries that were part of them.\footnote{See Klaas Appel, "De lotgevallen van onze bibliotheken," Sf-Berichten no. 9 (11 Sept. 2002): 19-21.}

The integration of the hitherto independent libraries into the newly planned Faculty of Catholic Theology at Amsterdam (Katholieke Theologische Universiteit van Amsterdam, KTHU), began immediately, but the plan failed due to financial problems. In 1973, another solution was found: the holdings of the Canisianum and the Berchmanianum were sold to yet another, newly planned institution, the Universiteit Limburg (University of Limburg), located in Maastricht. At the same time, Jesuit superiors made an important decision: they wished to preserve, separate from the library mentioned, one central library of their own, which would include books on their own spirituality, Jesuitica and pretiosa. This became the ‘Provinciebibliotheek SJ’, located in Nijmegen; later on, this library would be called the ‘Jesuit Library Berchmanianum’. Originally, it consisted primarily of the collection from the previous ‘Mariëndaal’ novitiate, but later, it was enlarged with collections from the suspended houses, with the Jesuitica collection from the Canisius College of Nijmegen, and with some research libraries of Jesuit scholars. Moreover, in 1980, various books, considered important for the Berchmanianum Library, were repurchased from the library at Maastricht, to which the former Jesuit library was sold earlier.\footnote{In various provenance notices, this is indicated by the annotation “Wederinkoop” (repurchase). See pp. 49, 70, 72, 125, 170, 220, 224, 184.}

From 1996 onwards, the newer scientific collections and doubles were sent to the library at Sogang University in Seoul (South Korea) and to Zagreb (Croatia). Finally, in 2005, the Dutch Jesuits decided to deposit their Jesuitica and pretiosa collections from the Jesuit Library Berchmanianum in the Maurits Sabbe Library. On 30 March 2005, the contract was signed in Louvain.\footnote{Jan van de Poll, “Jesuitica en pretiosa naar Leuven,” Sf-Berichten no. 4 (17 April 2005): 14; Marc Lindeijer, “Overdracht Provinciebibliotheek,” Sf-Berichten no. 10 (16 Oct. 2005): 28.}

This agreement was the crowning glory of Father Klaas Appel (b. 1923), who had been in charge of the book collection of the Dutch Jesuits for more than thirty-three years. In 2005, Father Appel was succeeded by Father Guus Hendrichs (1940-2008), who accomplished the transfer in 2008. The collection preserved in Louvain consists of ca. 14,000 volumes. Also, since 2000, a specialized Jesuitica library exists in Amsterdam, at the Nederlands Instituut voor Jezuïeten Studies (NIJS, Dutch Institute for Jesuit Studies), with a small but important collection of early printed books.\footnote{An important collection of Jesuitica is also present in the University Library of Amsterdam. Furthermore, a detailed description of the incunabula possessed by the Dutch Jesuit Province was made by Theo Ausems, S.J. (1914-2000).}
The libraries brought together in the Maurits Sabbe Library form one of the richest Jesuitica collections of the world. Considering their provenance, these books are most valuable for enhancing our knowledge of the history of the Society of Jesus in the so-called Low Countries (present-day Belgium and the Netherlands). Nineteen titles from the Flemish Jesuit collection and thirty-eight books from the Dutch collection are represented in this book. Eleven books belong to the seminary library of the archdiocese of Mechelen; three come from the collection of the Friars Minor in Vaalbeck; three were purchased by the Maurits Sabbe Library; two are from private collections. The information on provenances that is provided in each article shows that many of these books travelled a long way, often from the Southern to the Northern Low Countries. Thus, the books that are presented here – which could be supplemented by many others from the library collection – bear witness, through their vicissitudes as well as through their contents, to the exceptional cultural impact of the Society of Jesus in the Low Countries during the first centuries of its existence.

_Leo Kenis_

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36 One of these books comes from the library of Dutch missiologist Arnulf Camps, OFM (1925-2006), who legated his library in 2006 (see below, p. 98).