

# Swapping Gossip, Swapping Profit: The Book Barter Economy in the Early Modern Low Countries

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Abstract: The early modern book economy thrived on a system of bartering, swapping printed sheets for printed sheets or other valuable bookish material. Widely discussed as *Tauschhandel* in the context of the Frankfurt Book Fair, this practice continued to flourish in the Low Countries the seventeenth century as the fair's popularity declined. This article examines the bartering practices between the Officina Plantiniana in the city of Antwerp, the best documented print business of the handpress era, and merchants and booksellers in their northern neighbour Amsterdam. While the output of the Plantin presses is well-studied, its input, including maps, lottery tickets, reams of high-quality French and Dutch paper, and even luxury objects like sugar and globes, has gone unrecognised. Ultimately, I argue that Dutch sellers were motivated to barter with the Officina due to their superior access to books, paper, and other luxury goods, and their robust professional and personal networks.

Keywords: book trade, social history, economic history, Officina Plantiniana, Dutch Republic, Blaeu, Elzevier, atlas, paper trade

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‘We are not engaged in printing to exchange books for books, but to make money from them.’ So wrote Balthasar II Moretus, head of the famous Officina Plantiniana firm in Antwerp, to his colleague, master mapmaker Willem Blaeu in Amsterdam, in 1634.<sup>1</sup> In one sense, this was a straightforward complaint. Moretus and Blaeu were both regular traders at the Frankfurt Book Fair, and other booksellers’ insistence on the practice of *Tauschhandel*, directly exchanging printed sheets for printed sheets, was potentially disruptive to his cash flow. In another sense, Moretus’ comment was deeply ironic. He and Blaeu themselves exchanged valuable books both inside and outside the fair, and their sons and generations of the businesses they established would sustain themselves sending books back and forth through the end of the seventeenth century. These two powerful printers were emblematic of the flourishing book trades in their respective cities: they were friends and collaborators as well as direct competitors, to the point that Joan Blaeu, Willem Blaeu's son, would even make a name for himself counterfeiting books as being printed by Balthasar III Moretus.<sup>2</sup> The relationship of these two men, and of booksellers in Antwerp and Amsterdam, was predicated on this early modern barter system.

This article calls Balthasar’s bluff by demonstrating just how much extending *Tauschhandel* beyond the fairs allowed his business to flourish. In particular, his business flourished in his exchanges with publishers and merchants in the wealthy and well-connected city of Amsterdam, north of the border into the Dutch Republic. While Dutch publishers were the first to resist the practice in the Frankfurt Book Fair, they eagerly pursued *compte de change* (accounting by exchange) with their colleagues in the Southern Netherlands rather than paying in cash in all areas of their businesses.<sup>3</sup> Using ledgers from the uniquely comprehensive Plantin-Moretus archives, this article examines how the famous Officina Plantiniana in Antwerp settled its accounts with clients in Amsterdam in the second half of the seventeenth century. These accounts show, it argues, that the Dutch enthusiasm for

bartering was motivated by their exceptional access to books, paper, and other luxury goods in the second half of the seventeenth century. It was also motivated by personal and professional relationships between peers and privileged access to networks of information.

In the first hundred years of the book, it was not clear it would survive as a new technology.<sup>4</sup> The overheads were high, and the compensation was uncertain, leading most publishers to choose sensible and conservative material to print. Books were also unique commodities because they were not only mass-produced objects, but repositories of ideas, and therefore required a keen sense from printers and publishers where and how they might be most valuable. As Paul Nelles writes, ‘space was not something through which books simply floated – books also created their own currents’.<sup>5</sup> An influential book could not only sell well but invite reprints or new editions, or conversely, printed corrections or angry responses from its detractors. As a result, the substantial investment that went into their production was not always repaid in cash but could be compensated in many different types of credit.<sup>6</sup> Much of this changed with the growing popularity of the Frankfurt Book Fair, and the increasing adaptation of the barter system.

The Frankfurt Book Fair’s history goes back to at least 1485, where the Free Imperial city of Frankfurt-am-Main began to grow a reputation as a place to sell books.<sup>7</sup> What followed was a hugely popular and successful twice-yearly fair alongside a parallel event in Leipzig, where a printed catalogue was distributed in advance and publishers travelled from across Europe to buy and sell printed wares of their own. In the early modern period, it was expensive and dangerous to buy and ship books across significant distances, so a biannual market was an ideal solution for many. However, with such an international marketplace of booksellers, buying in cash was complex. Carrying cash was not always simple across borders either due to the material differences between currencies and the high risk of theft.

As a result, printers and booksellers established systems of credit, used proxies, or exchanged books at the fairs, leading to the barter, *Tauschhandel*, or *Changehandel* system. While the concepts of credit systems and bartering were not new to the early modern period and were in fact firmly rooted in the medieval economy, they functioned particularly well with the exchange of printed sheets. This became a popular way to get rid of old stock and obtain something new to bring home.<sup>8</sup> By 1650, however, the Frankfurt fairs were in decline, despite the industrious participation of the Dutch there as well as at the Leipzig fair. This was in part due to their own undercutting: as Ian Maclean has observed, Dutch publishers began to insist on 1:3 or 1:4 ratios in order to accept the offer of a book barter.<sup>9</sup>

Christoph Plantin and his successors as heads of the Officina Plantiniana, including Balthasar II Moretus, made these fairs a cornerstone of their business. From the founding of the firm in 1548 through the seventeenth century, members of the firm regularly made the trek from Antwerp to Frankfurt in order to do international business.<sup>10</sup> Thanks to the fastidious record-keeping of its many generations of master printers, the firm's records of trade and payment survive in a remarkably complete state.<sup>11</sup>

The other element of this case study, the city of Amsterdam, became a powerhouse of print in the seventeenth century. It had longstanding trade connections with Antwerp, which was only around 150 kilometres away. In the sixteenth century, Antwerp had dominated Amsterdam in its output of printed material. While booksellers in Amsterdam continued to import huge quantities of print from Antwerp in the seventeenth century, the power dynamic changed. In this period, the Officina was also increasingly specialising in liturgical books, a product that Reformed booksellers were not always willing to buy.<sup>12</sup> Important firms in Amsterdam such as the Elzeviers, the mapmaking Hondius family, and the famous Blaeu family of cartographers began to produce new works on a similar or even greater scale than the Plantin-Moretus business, as a result developing close business and personal relationships

with the Officina Plantiniana and the Moretus family. Amsterdam also became a major supplier of paper for the Officina in the second half of the seventeenth century. While France supplied nearly all European paper for three quarters of the seventeenth century, Dutch mills began to overtake its production in the 1670s and 1680s. By 1685, they had critically shifted the market in their favour.<sup>13</sup> While not all Dutch publishers were wealthy and successful on the scale of the Blaeu or Elzevier families, the Dutch dominance in printing and paper supply put them in an ideal position of power from which they could barter.

Using the remarkable surviving records of the Plantin-Moretus archive, these changing power dynamics in the second half of the seventeenth century allow for a unique snapshot of how books were bartered between Antwerp and Amsterdam. In particular, these records provide a level of depth into the practicalities of trading and shipping books unusual for the seventeenth century and paint a vivid picture of the actors involved. This article will discuss these practicalities before turning to examine the practice of *Tauschhandel* outside the Frankfurt and Leipzig book fairs in the seventeenth century, and finally the exchange of non-book materials, including paper, lottery tickets, globes, and sugar. By looking at how these *comptes de change* were resolved, we see how Dutch publishers and merchants leveraged their unparalleled access to print-related material and information to barter their way to commercial success.

### **Barrels, Boxes, and Bankruptcy: The Practicalities of the Barter Economy**

The archival records of the Officina Plantiniana provide a remarkably detailed perspective on how this *compte de change* functioned. Correspondences, ledgers, bills of sale, and even travel receipts and handwritten bills of sale over hundreds of years are carefully preserved in the Plantin-Moretus Archive. This was in part due to the fastidious recordkeeping of the family. As their most famous archivist and documentarian Leon Voet wrote in 1969,

In many cases chance alone must have decided what went into the waste paper basket and what was preserved for posterity, although the volume of material that has survived gives the reader the impression that the almost obsessive care of Plantin and the Moretuses for their documents prevented much from being thrown away.<sup>14</sup>

This obsessive care is to our benefit. There are few early modern printing firms for which such exceptional documentation survives, especially firms with such comprehensive international distribution. While it is simple to imagine booksellers swapping printed sheets at the Frankfurt Book Fair, the practicalities of a broader barter system raise significant questions, including who was participating, how value was established for the books and objects involved, and how these materials actually crossed borders.

The Plantin-Moretus can provide detailed answers to all of these questions. Even in the seventeenth century, the structure of the archive was intentional, careful, and accessible. All outgoing correspondences were copied into *copieboeken*, and incoming correspondences bound into large volumes. The most relevant records to this study are the *grootboeken*, or *grand livres*, compiled by the head of the firm at the time to record transactions with other booksellers. From 1579 to 1671, these were arranged into two separate categories: booksellers in Antwerp, and booksellers outside of Antwerp (*Boekhandelaren buiten Antwerpen*).<sup>15</sup> After 1671, these three parallel series of booksellers, merchants, and Frankfurt Book Fair clients converged into one volume. Additional ledgers represent trips undertaken by various members of the firm to the Dutch Republic, in order to settle accounts with booksellers and merchants. Studying these ledgers makes it possible to reconstruct how many Dutch booksellers and merchants were trading with the firm, and establish when this took place.

To note that the Dutch book trade of the seventeenth century was remarkably successful is to say nothing new. The Dutch produced and consumed more printed material

per person than any other country in Europe by a significant margin.<sup>16</sup> In 2019, Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen proposed a compelling reason for this: that Dutch printers and booksellers' success was due to their intelligent business strategies in reaching underserved markets in Eastern Europe and the Baltic, which was in part made up of importing large and expensive religious, medical, and philosophical texts from France and the Southern Netherlands. The resulting wealth caused this industry to grow even more dramatically. The material on Dutch booksellers in this article is largely sourced from the *grootboeken* or *grand livres* of the firm, the accounting ledgers, as well as a number of smaller ledgers kept on specific trips to the Dutch Republic undertaken by members of the Moretus family in 1656, 1671, and 1704, as well as records from the Frankfurt Book Fair. This work has yielded a list of 300 Dutch accounts held with the Officina Plantiniana between 1579 and 1732: 226 booksellers, 62 merchants, 9 individual buyers, and 3 organisations.<sup>17</sup>

This work revealed an enormous number of collaborators across the century and a half of its scope. The Officina Plantiniana traded with a huge variety of individuals, clerics, laity, booksellers, publishers, and merchants. Books were exchanged for all sorts of other goods including other books, paper, and maps. Although some booksellers from the Dutch Republic would travel to Antwerp and buy books in cash at the brick-and-mortar Officina Plantiniana, this was not always necessary. Sometimes, collaborators would travel to Antwerp. Gerrit Verduyn, a paper merchant in Amsterdam, was close to the Moretus family, and would regularly come and stay with them.<sup>18</sup> However, more commonly booksellers would send letters of order to the master printer, who would then send the books to them at their expense.<sup>19</sup>

There were several different ways that they could pay. Most frequently, booksellers would pay in their local currency, the Holland guilder, and send it to Moretus through a Dutch

proxy, setting up a system of credits and debits. In their ledgers, the Moretuses would record the agreed-on price of the books sent in Carolus guilders and stuivers, with 20 stuivers to a guilder. Books could cost as little as a single stuiver for a broadsheet or pamphlet and as many as 700 or 800 guilders for an expensive multivolume set. In the Dutch Republic in this period, these proxies were usually either Levinus or Ysbrand Vincent, two paper merchants in Amsterdam who worked closely with the Plantin-Moretus firm.<sup>20</sup> If northern booksellers were selling their wares at the Frankfurt Book Fair, they could purchase books from the Southern Netherlands there, although as previously mentioned this became less popular for booksellers in the Low Countries over the course of the seventeenth century.<sup>21</sup> The *Officina Plantiniana* had a catalogue of missals and breviaries that they distributed internationally. One Amsterdam bookseller, Willem van Bloemen, was interested in importing them and wrote in 1695 to ask for one of these catalogues to be sent to him.<sup>22</sup> Books were shipped unbound in sheets, packed into boxes, barrels, chests, and caskets. The buyer was expected to bear the cost of the shipment in its entirety, which motivated some merchants to visit Antwerp in person to supervise the process.<sup>23</sup> While shipments to Rome or Spain could take a year or more to arrive, shipping to the Northern Netherlands was closer to days or weeks. For some booksellers, such as those in Zeeland, Antwerp was far closer than the print centres of Holland, only a short ride through the canals away. An expedited carriage or boat carrying post could move from Rotterdam to Antwerp in a day.<sup>24</sup>

Some merchants would also be paid to ship books to Spain on behalf of the Plantin-Moretus firm. This became a profitable trade in the second half of the seventeenth century, when the firm increasingly specialised in producing liturgical books for eager audiences of monasteries in Spain. The Spanish Hieronymites ordered thousands of copies of a regular number of liturgical books, and their enormous orders reorganised the priorities of the *Officina*.<sup>25</sup> In order to ensure these books shipped safely, they hired merchants such as



Catharina Kiel in Middelburg to manage insurance, money, and shipping on their behalf. Kiel, and others like her, also frequently functioned as a secondary bank for the firm in the Dutch Republic, collecting debts from negligent booksellers who had not yet paid.<sup>26</sup>

At regular intervals, the head of the firm would take business trips to the Dutch Republic, often to follow up with dozens of these debtors at a time.<sup>27</sup> The litany of misery that emerged from these trips was consistent. Gerard de Langes of Amsterdam, for example, could not pay as he was bankrupt and had fled to the Indies, leaving his family behind, and his widow had moved to Emmerich. Similarly, Joos Colster of Leiden had moved to the Indies, this time with his family, to escape his debts.<sup>28</sup> Several of these entries indicate that the Vincent brothers collected money on behalf of the firm, or at least asked the debtors in-person if they could pay. For example, the Amsterdam bookseller Andreas Frisius had already settled his debts with the Vincents by the time Balthasar III arrived to meet with him in 1671.<sup>29</sup> When Balthasar III recorded meeting with the Vincents on his trip in 1671, he simply noted debts they had collected on his behalf, rather than those they owed him. In one case, Levinus and Ysbrand Vincent even paid bail for one of the Moretus' clients, Jean Emmanuel Huegla, after he was put in a debtor's prison.<sup>30</sup>

Sometimes, booksellers did not pay their debts for years or even decades. Willem Willeborts of Delft had been a customer of the firm since 1580, and when he ordered books in 1594 and 1609 he did not pay these debts back right away. Though he died sometime before 1629, his unpaid debts to the firm were listed, attributed to his son, until at least 1671. The same is true of the unfortunate Bernard Langenes of Middelburg, whose unpaid debt of 30 guilders and 2 stuivers accrued in 1597 was still being pursued in 1671.<sup>31</sup> Without trusted relationships, these transactions could be damaging both to buyer and seller. The completeness of these records is essential for such vivid pictures of the Plantin-Moretus firm's dependents.

### ***Tauschhandel* Inside and Outside the Frankfurt Book Fair**

Despite the debts accrued by some Dutch booksellers, in general they were the most accomplished in early modern Europe. In the seventeenth century, the book trade in the Dutch Republic flourished because its printers, publishers and booksellers understood how to exploit gaps in both domestic and international markets.<sup>32</sup> The lack of any sort of meaningful censorship in the Dutch Republic also meant that they had many more opportunities to pirate or sell heterodox books than their Southern Netherlandish colleagues.<sup>33</sup> This in itself could sometimes facilitate trade between Amsterdam and Antwerp: in 1655, the Amsterdam bookseller Joachim van Metelen sent Balthasar II Moretus a copy of Isaac La Peyrère's *Prae-Adamitae*, first published the same year.<sup>34</sup> This work caused instant controversy among Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish authorities, due to its argument that humans existed before Adam and Eve. It was so controversial that it was even banned in the usually lax Dutch Republic before the end of the same year. However, it was also popular, as at least four editions were printed in 1655.<sup>35</sup> It was certainly not a book that Balthasar Moretus would have been able to sell openly. However, for a certain clientele it would have held enormous resale value.

In the course of regular daily transactions, the head of the firm would record the sale of books and payment both in daily *journals* and *grootboeken* or *grand livres*, which could cover years or even decades. These are laid out like traditional ledgers, with debits on the left-hand side (verso) and credits on the right (the recto of the next leaf). While they are mostly payments through proxies, these credits also reveal a wealth of books and related objects being sent to the Plantin-Moretus by Dutch booksellers. In this period, most of these

fit under two categories: liturgical books and maps. Interestingly, these were two genres in which the firm itself already specialised.<sup>36</sup>

While the Plantin-Moretus firm was largely producing liturgical books by this point, it was well aware of its competition thanks to the books it received from competitors in Amsterdam. The Van Metelen family was a middling printing and bookselling family in Amsterdam who traded extensively with the Plantin-Moretus. Due in part to their shared Catholic faith, the Van Metelens ordered thousands of guilders worth of liturgical books and sent many books back in return. Both Joachim and his son and heir Frederik spent years selling Catholic liturgical books printed by Joan Blaeu in Amsterdam, a direct competitor, back to the firm, while ordering Catholic liturgical books from Antwerp. In 1674, Joachim sent a breviary in four volumes worth 4 guilders. In 1678 he sent a breviary printed by Blaeu worth 7 guilders 2 stuivers.<sup>37</sup>

The Blaeu firm itself printed both maps and liturgical books, and ordered both from the Plantin-Moretus. There are several examples of Joan Blaeu sending his own atlases as payment to Moretus, including an *Atlas Latine* on 12 May 1672. Moretus recorded the value of this famous atlas, comprised of 11 volumes of coloured engravings, at an astounding 767 guilders 10 stuivers.<sup>38</sup> The same year, Joan Blaeu also sent a missal worth 13 stuivers and an *Atlas Hispanice* in ten volumes worth 639 guilders 4 stuivers. In 1673, he sent an *Atlas Gallice* worth 344 guilders 10 stuivers. These were remarkable sums: skilled compositors at the Officina Plantiniana were paid about 1 guilder a day. These three atlases alone would have paid the salary of one of these compositors for 1,751 days, or 4 years, 9 months, and 18 days of constant work.<sup>39</sup> Along with liturgical books, Joachim van Metelen sent a map book of Amsterdam worth 7 guilders. The next year, he sent a travel diary of a journey to China as well, this time worth 14 guilders.<sup>40</sup> In 1685, Frederik van Metelen sent Moretus '*diverse lantcarten*' (various maps) worth 17 guilders and 7 stuivers.<sup>41</sup>

Another major seller was the Amsterdam printer and bookseller Abraham Wolfgang. Between 1681 and 1693, he racked up around 600 guilders worth of debt ordering missals and other liturgical books from the Plantin-Moretus. However, he repaid this handsomely not only in cash but with maps worth hundreds of guilders. He sent Moretus parts of Blaeu's *Atlas Maior* and a number of 'kaertboeken', map books, one depicting the Seventeen Provinces of the sixteenth-century Low Countries.<sup>42</sup> In 1680, Wolfgang sent a twelve-volume Blaeu atlas worth 691 guilders.<sup>43</sup> It is very likely that the Blaeu atlases that Wolfgang sold to Moretus were the same ones that he had bought at auction several years previously. In 1674, Joan II Blaeu held three auctions at his family home on the Bloemgracht, one of which was comprised entirely of atlases, books of town descriptions, and copper plates. Wolfgang and his company bought the lion's share of these materials, which he was proceeded to sell to Blaeu's competitor Moretus.<sup>44</sup> Sometimes, rather than single high-value works, booksellers sent larger numbers of copies. In 1677, the bookseller Andreas Frisius sent in 12 copies of Horstius' *Paradisus Animae* for 12 guilders 17 stuivers.<sup>45</sup>

While these enormous missals and atlases were shipped from north to south and south to north, there were other places where Dutch booksellers could sell books to the Officina: at the Frankfurt Book Fair, and to the Moretuses directly when they visited the Dutch Republic on business.<sup>46</sup> While the Officina Plantiniana had been a regular attendee of the fair, the conflicts of the seventeenth century and the ascendancy of the Dutch book trade led Balthasar Moretus II to stop attending after 1662. After the highs of the seventeenth century, where at least 135 northern publishers were selling their wares, Dutch attendance declined as well.<sup>47</sup> The Peace of Munster in 1648 and the resulting closure of the Scheldt River in the same year in Antwerp, an essential trade and transport link, probably affected this decision.<sup>48</sup> At the fair, it was a frequent and well-documented practice to 'exchange books for books', as Moretus complained about, in order to avoid carrying too much cash or having to figure out

international exchange rates.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the Moretuses were sometimes forced to visit the Dutch Republic themselves in order to chase up clients who had not paid their debts in years or decades. This occurred in spite of the proxies they used to collect regular payments.

One remarkable document allows us to compare sales with his book fair clients and his trip ledger directly. In 1644, in the final years of the Thirty Years' War, Balthasar II Moretus decided to make the perilous trek to Frankfurt Book Fair in person. On the way, his party were robbed and forced to pay off marauding Dutch cavalry, ultimately requiring them to hire a military escort.<sup>50</sup> Moretus only returned to the fair in 1656. Curiously, he seems to have used the same ledger of Dutch booksellers for both trips as well as regular trade in between, and on his 1656 trip visited the Dutch Republic in person, between 3 and 17 May. This provides a unique opportunity to compare the number of booksellers who traded books with him in both.<sup>51</sup> The largest client at the fairs was unquestionably the prosperous Elzevier firm. Between 1644 and 1646, Moretus recorded in his travel journal 201 total copies of 16 different books that Louis and Daniel Elzevier sold him between 1644 and 1646. These had a huge range, include medical textbooks, theological works, natural histories, and French political works. In the same timeframe, Moretus sold Elzevier 71 copies of 25 different books in return.<sup>52</sup> Of 24 Dutch booksellers Moretus interacted with on this journey, 11 were from Amsterdam. Of these 11, only three paid any of their debts in books, with 8 (33%) paying in books overall. Of these clients, the Elzevier, Janssonius, and Verhoeven firms were the only ones who had traded books with Moretus in 1644 and were continuing to do so by 1656. The character of these books in this period is far more consistent with the Frankfurt fair than the regular ledgers, characterised mostly by political, medical, and philosophical works.

Fifteen years later, in 1671, a twenty-five-year-old Balthasar III Moretus embarked on his first business trip on behalf of the firm. In his travel ledger, he was equipped with a signed letter from Balthasar van der Beek, then head of the Dutch Jesuit mission in Amsterdam,

recommending him as a courteous guest.<sup>53</sup> The back of the ledger also contains formulas in the hand of his father, Balthasar II Moretus, instructing him how to write up invoices and receipts for clients.<sup>54</sup> A receipt tucked into the ledger indicates that, on his journey to the northern Netherlands, he also purchased a *stedeboek* (town book), a description and guide to the province, for 2 guilders and 2 stuivers.<sup>55</sup> On his trip, Moretus saw 33 clients, 21 of whom were in Amsterdam. Of these 21, 6 paid all or some of their debts in books.

On this trip, Louis and Daniel Elzevier traded a number of books to Moretus for store credit, including Spanheim's *De usu numismatum antiquorum* (Amsterdam: 1671), a book of numismatics, for 7 guilders and 10 stuivers. Joannes Janssonius van Waesberghe traded 40 books with Moretus for a total of 192 guilders and 5 stuivers in credit, including 4 copies each of Jesuit Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata* and *Mundus Subterraneus*, 10 copies of the works of Marcus Antoninus, and 6 copies of a French edition of Nostradamus' prophecies.<sup>56</sup> This was alongside money normally transferred through the usual proxies. On this trip as well, Abraham Wolfgang traded French books back to Moretus, including an edition of *Memoires et Histoires de Richelieu* in duodecimo, and the works of dramatist Pierre Corneille. This gave him 129 guilders in credits.<sup>57</sup> Hendrik Boom and Cornelius Hackius, in Amsterdam and Leiden respectively, sold Moretus the same work in the same year.<sup>58</sup> Between 1658 and 1667, Arnaud Leers, a bookseller in Rotterdam, paid his entire debt of 97 guilders and 9 stuivers in books, 37 copies of 8 editions in all.<sup>59</sup> However, some important figures mentioned above, Joan Blaeu and Joachim van Metelen, did not pay with books on this occasion. While there are no records of another trip until 1705, by which point the business was in the capable hands of Anna Maria de Neuf Moretus, Balthasar III's widow, nothing seems to have changed. The booksellers Henri and Louis van Dole paid 35 guilders of their debt with a liturgical book, *Minorum Officia*, a book of offices for the Order of Friars Minor, in both octavo and duodecimo.<sup>60</sup>

### **Labour, Perseverance, and Lottery Tickets: Trading Other Materials**

Some of the Officina's most important relationships involved maintaining their paper supply. Both Maurits Sabbe and Leon Voet have written of the importance of the Dutch paper trade in the seventeenth century, once importing paper directly from France was no longer economically viable. After this period, the firm became much more reliant on supplies of paper from the Dutch Republic, even if it was sourced from Dutch-owned paper mills in France. Levinus and Ysbrand Vincent were an essential part of this trade, as were a number of other paper merchants such as Gerrit Verduyn, Adrian Fyck and François le Bleu.<sup>61</sup> In fact, there is a separate series of ledgers that parallels those of booksellers with merchants specifically.<sup>62</sup>

However, printers and booksellers supplied paper to the firm alongside actual paper merchants. Alongside money, Jan van der Meulen in Rotterdam sent dozens of reams of paper, sometimes several times a month, to the Officina from 1682 to 1687.<sup>63</sup> Van der Meulen must have either had connections or owned his own paper mill in Rouen, as the ledger specifically indicates the origin of the paper. These could sometimes be of enormous quantity. In 1658 and 1660, the Amsterdam bookseller Gerrit Willemsens Doornick sold Moretus 250 and 77 reams of paper respectively, for a total credit of 1,880 guilders.<sup>64</sup> Sometimes this paper trade was worth the investment of significant social and financial capital. The business partnership of Jean Emmanuel Huegla and Jacques le Blois regularly sent reams of paper back to the Officina, for example in 1664.<sup>65</sup> At some point in the 1670, Balthasar II Moretus included a new entry in his ledger of foreign booksellers regarding the two:

My son Balthasar [III], being in Amsterdam in the month of September 1671, learned that Blois has moved to Bordeaux, and that Huegla is in prison in Amsterdam for debt. Therefore I have asked Levinus and Ysbrand to pay the aforesaid sum of 28

[guilders] to the prisoner Huegla, in order not to run the risk of importuning his creditors.<sup>66</sup>

Another popular set of items to exchange were books of lottery tickets. These were traded both from Antwerp to Amsterdam and Amsterdam to Antwerp. In fact, the various lotteries taking place in the Low Countries were essential to the interpersonal and business relationships of printers and booksellers. Lotteries were hugely popular and attracted enormous crowds. Though they had been popular in the sixteenth century, they exploded with popularity in the seventeenth century, particularly in the Dutch Republic.<sup>67</sup> On 27 January 1696, Ysbrand Vincent wrote to Balthasar III Moretus, saying that the registration for tickets to the Amsterdam lottery ‘which takes place from morning before dawn until eight o’clock in the evening, [and] is not only full of people, but the street is so full that they have to place a doorman (an unprecedented thing) at the door so that it will be completed in a shorter time’.<sup>68</sup> Luckily for Moretus, Vincent was there to secure tickets for him.

Lottery tickets both entered and exited the Officina Plantiniana. Before Moretus’ 1671 trip, Jean Emmanuel Huegla and Jacques Le Blois had sent six reams of paper ‘of various kinds’ (*de diversis sortes*) in exchange for a packet of lottery tickets from Antwerp.<sup>69</sup> Ysbrand Vincent bought more than Amsterdam lottery tickets for the Moretus family: their correspondences also demonstrate examples of him buying tickets for lotteries in Haarlem, Leiden, Alkmaar, Enkhuizen, Deventer, Hoorn, Arnhem, and Rotterdam.<sup>70</sup> In 1696, foreigners were banned from registering for the lotteries in Holland. In a letter to Moretus, Vincent sneakily suggested that he register Moretus using the shop motto, ‘labore et constantia’ (through labour and perseverance), instead of his name to evade this ban.<sup>71</sup> In return, Moretus registered Vincent’s entire family for the ‘*Aalmoesseniers Loofterye te Antwerpen*’ (Almoner’s Lottery of Antwerp), entering two lots for each of his six children. Moretus, conveniently,



was the *aalmoezenier* (almoner) at the time himself. Unfortunately, it does not seem to have paid out for Vincent in cash, only in friendship.<sup>72</sup>

Occasionally, other materials show up in the 'credit' column of these records. On 9 February 1681, Balthasar Moretus III noted that the Amsterdam bookseller Abraham Wolfgang had sent him '2 great globes, very finely made and finely gilded...with walnut feet', worth a remarkable total of 227 guilders.<sup>73</sup> Wolfgang was a well-known and respected maker of globes in Amsterdam. What is interesting is that he clearly did not intend it as a gift. According to the ledger, it served to pay off some of the debts Wolfgang amassed for ordering hundreds of books from the Officina Plantiniana. In another remarkable case in 1671, Jacques Rombout, a bookseller in Amsterdam, paid his debts with a case of sugar from Lisbon.<sup>74</sup> Lisbon was a major trade centre for sugar coming from Brazil and other parts of South America, and much of this trade routed through Amsterdam as well.<sup>75</sup> In his ledger, Moretus does not indicate how he planned to use the sugar, only that it was worth 28 guilders and 4 stuivers.

Finally, the most valuable trade of all was of information between Amsterdam and Antwerp. Ysbrand Vincent kept an eye out in Amsterdam for the counterfeiting of liturgical books from the Plantin-Moretus. He accused a number of firms, including the famous Blaeu and Huguetan firms, of counterfeiting editions from the Officina Plantiniana.<sup>76</sup> On one occasion, the Amsterdam bookseller Frederik van Metelen informed Moretus that Joan II Blaeu was printing a new missal, and even sent him a copy to compare so he could avoid producing a missal that was too similar.<sup>77</sup> This was alongside the Blaeu missals that Moretus regularly bought from him, and sold to him as well.<sup>78</sup> Van Metelen also sold books to clients on behalf of Moretus. In the same letter, he notes that 'These few lines will then serve as an answer that, according to [your] request, I will send the Hague resident a breviary in 18

tomorrow.’<sup>79</sup> While books crossed borders in the hands of booksellers, shipped in barrels or through Frankfurt, these booksellers also conducted business by proxy on each other’s behalf.

### **Conclusion: Privileged Access**

The early modern barter and credit system was a remarkably complex and deeply human web of interdependence and reputation. It was at once material and immaterial, based on the transfer of objects as well as the exchange of promises and information. Debts could go unpaid for decades or be rectified with lottery tickets or sugar. At the same time, printers and booksellers were exchanging their products while actively counterfeiting others. They could meet regularly or go years or decades without seeing each other in person. They could also disappear into poverty or disrepute.

While this study demonstrates these complexities, it also shows that access to them was not necessarily equal. The status and success of these Dutch booksellers and merchants, alongside the exceptional wealth of Amsterdam, Holland, and the entire Dutch Republic, gave them stability and credit that allowed them to sustain relationships with the *Officina Plantiniana*. Bartering was a system that allowed them to build personal and professional relationships, as well as sustain debts almost indefinitely. Such a reciprocal relationship would not be feasible between two cities with less tremendous publishing industries: however, Amsterdam and Antwerp were remarkably well matched, even specialising in some of the same niche markets with the same niche clientele. Balthasar II Moretus’ claim that ‘We are not engaged in printing to exchange books for books, but to make money from them’ was a specious one: in fact, the two went hand in hand.

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<sup>1</sup> Museum Plantin-Moretus Archief 142, f. 423 (henceforth abbreviated as MPM Arch.), letter of 4 October 1634. English translation in Ian Maclean, ‘The Evolution of the Frankfurt and Leipzig Book Fairs and Their Catalogues, 1564–1700’, in *Episodes in the Life of the Early Modern Learned Book* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 51. ‘*Officina Plantiniana*’ and ‘Plantin-Moretus firm’ are used interchangeably throughout this piece.

- <sup>2</sup> Maurits Sabbe, 'Ysbrand Vincent en zijn Antwerpsche vrienden', *Verslagen en Mededeelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde* (1924), 522; Maurits Sabbe, 'Valsche Plantin- en Moretusdrukken', *De Gulden Passer* 1 (1923), 182-92.
- <sup>3</sup> This is the term generally used by the publishers of the Officina Plantiniana in their own accounting. It also remained a popular method of payment at the Leipzig book fair: Jeffrey Freedman, *Books Without Borders in Enlightenment Europe: French Cosmopolitanism and German Literary Markets* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 23.
- <sup>4</sup> For more on the early book as a commodity see J.F. Flood, 'The Printed Book as a Commercial Commodity in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries', *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 76 (2001), 172-82.
- <sup>5</sup> Paul Nelles, 'Conrad Gessner and the Mobility of the Book', in *Books in Motion in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Daniel Bellingradt, Paul Nelles and Jeroen Salman (London: Palgrave, 2017), 43.
- <sup>6</sup> Flood, 'Printed Book', 178.
- <sup>7</sup> For a useful survey see J.L. Flood, 'Omnium totius orbis emporiorum compendium: The Frankfurt Fair in the Early Modern Period', in *Fairs, Markets and the Itinerant Book Trade*, ed. Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote (London, 2007), 1-40.
- <sup>8</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 78-82.
- <sup>9</sup> Ian Maclean, 'The Decline of the Frankfurt Book Fair after the Thirty Years' War', in *Book Trade Catalogues in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Arthur der Weduwen, Andrew Pettegree, and Graeme Kemp (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 272.
- <sup>10</sup> Leon Voet, 'Chapter 16: Sales', in *The Golden Compasses: A History and Evaluation of the Printing and Publishing Activities of the Officina Plantiniana at Antwerp*, vol. II (Amsterdam: Vangendt & Co., 1969-1972), 387-439.
- <sup>11</sup> R. Lauwert, 'De handelsbedrijvigheid van de officina plantiniana op de büchermessen te Frankfurt am Main in de XVIe eeuw', *De Gulden Passer* 51 (1973), 127. Lauwert also helpfully includes a thorough overview of the extant records of the Frankfurt Book Fair trade in the Plantin Archive, 139 n. 26.
- <sup>12</sup> For a critical documentation of this turn see Goran Proot, 'Shifting Price Levels of Books Produced at the Officina Plantiniana in Antwerp, 1580-1655', in *Crossing Borders, Crossing Cultures: Popular Print in Europe (1450-1900)*, ed. Massimo Rospoche, Jeroen Salman and Hannu Salmi (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 89-107.
- <sup>13</sup> Jan Willem Veluwenkamp, 'Paper Flows through the Danish Sound, 1634-1857', in *The Paper Trade in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Daniel Bellingradt and Anna Reynolds (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 127-28.
- <sup>14</sup> Voet, *Golden Compasses*, II, 7.
- <sup>15</sup> The entire structure of this archive is helpfully documented in a flowchart of the Officina Plantiniana's sales ledger series by Plantin-Moretus archivist Kristof Selleslach in 'How to Transfer the Officina Plantiniana to the Next Generation. The Instructions of Balthasar Moretus II to his Future Heirs (1659-1673)', *De Gulden Passer* 98, no. 2 (2020), 205-297. All of this research is heavily indebted to his curatorial work, which has ensured that the organisation of the business archive is accessible to researchers.
- <sup>16</sup> Andrew Pettegree, 'A Whole New World? Publishing in the Dutch Golden Age', in *Negotiating Conflict and Controversy in the Early Modern Book World*, ed. Alexander Wilkinson and Graeme Kemp (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 73-87.
- <sup>17</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in my forthcoming monograph, *Print and Catholic Persistence in the Dutch Golden Age*.
- <sup>18</sup> Maurits Sabbe, 'Vondel, Balthasar Moretus II, Leonardus Marius en Hendrik Barentsen', *Verslagen en mededeelingen der Koninklijke Vlaamsche Academie* (1921), 611.
- <sup>19</sup> Voet, *The Golden Compasses*, II, 426.
- <sup>20</sup> Sabbe, 'Ysbrand Vincent'. For more on this relationship see Frans A. Janssen, 'Of Red, White and Blaeu. The Widow Moretus Buys New Type through Ysbrand Vincent (1706)', in *Technique and Design in the History of Printing* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 115-27.
- <sup>21</sup> Voet, *Golden Compasses*, II, 363, 396; Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, *The Bookshop of the World: Making and Trading Books in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 267-9.
- <sup>22</sup> Lienke Paulina Leuven, *De boekhandel te Amsterdam door katholieken gedreven tijdens de Republiek* (Epe: Hooiberg, 1951), 33.
- <sup>23</sup> Voet, *Golden Compasses*, II, 425-9.
- <sup>24</sup> Arthur der Weduwen and Andrew Pettegree, *The Dutch Republic and the Birth of Modern Advertising* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 237.
- <sup>25</sup> Selleslach, 'How to Transfer the Officina Plantiniana to the Next Generation'; Dirk Imhof, 'De Plantijnse uitgeverij onder Balthasar II Moretus (1641-1674). Een vergelijking met het uitgeverijfonds van zijn grootvader Jan I Moretus (1589-1610)', *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis* 16 (2009), 113-29, at 119; Proot, 'Shifting Price Levels'.

- <sup>26</sup> For a more comprehensive study of Kiel, alongside the paper merchants Levinus and Ysbrand Vincent, see Elise Watson, 'The Protestant Merchants Who Kept Catholic Publishing Alive: Publishing and Distribution Strategy at the Officina Plantiniana', in *Early Modern Publishers*, ed. Barnaby Cullen, Ian Maclean and Arthur der Weduwen (Leiden: Brill, 2025).
- <sup>27</sup> The heads of the firm discussed in this period are Balthasar II Moretus (1641-1674), Balthasar III Moretus (1674-1696), and Anna Maria de Neuf Moretus (1696-1714).
- <sup>28</sup> Recorded by Balthasar III Moretus in his 1671 journey to the Dutch Republic. MPM Arch. 337.
- <sup>29</sup> MPM Arch. 337, f. 10.
- <sup>30</sup> MPM Arch. 322, Grand livre L (libraires) 1672-1681, f. 163.
- <sup>31</sup> MPM Arch 321, f. 1.
- <sup>32</sup> Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *Bookshop of the World*, ch. 11, 'Bookshop of the World', 266-93.
- <sup>33</sup> David W. Davies, 'The Geographic Extent of the Dutch Book Trade in the Seventeenth Century', *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 22 (1952), 200-07.
- <sup>34</sup> MPM Arch. 322, f. 46.
- <sup>35</sup> Arthur der Weduwen, 'Sold in a Closed Room. Auctioning *Libri Prohibiti* in the Dutch Republic, 1670-1720', in *Book Trade Catalogues in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Arthur der Weduwen, Andrew Pettegree and Graeme Kemp (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 334.
- <sup>36</sup> Groot 'Shifting Price Levels'; for an illuminating case study of the production and sale of maps at the Plantin-Moretus see Dirk Imhof, 'The Trade in Individual Maps from Ortelius's *Theatrum orbis terrarum* after 1612', *Imago Mundi* 70 (2018), 52-64.
- <sup>37</sup> MPM Arch. 322, f. 271.
- <sup>38</sup> MPM Arch. 322, f. 36.
- <sup>39</sup> Proot, 'Shifting Price Levels', 97. For a more thorough analysis of this historiography, and a discussion of how the price of books mapped onto compositor's wages, see 97-100. For another analysis of pricing at the Officina Plantiniana see Renaud Milazzo, 'In the Mind of a Publisher. Establishing the Price of Emblem Books in Antwerp in the Sixteenth Century', *De Gulden Passer* 98, no. 2 (2020), 183-204.
- <sup>40</sup> MPM Arch. 322, f. 30.
- <sup>41</sup> MPM Arch. 320, f. 127.
- <sup>42</sup> MPM Arch. 320, f. 12.
- <sup>43</sup> MPM Arch. 322, f. 290.
- <sup>44</sup> Herman de la Fontaine Verwey, 'Dr. Joan Blaeu and his Sons', *Quaerendo* 11, no. 1 (1981), 21-22.
- <sup>45</sup> MPM Arch. 322, f. 39.
- <sup>46</sup> For a thorough overview of its history and the sources available see Ian Maclean, 'Evolution of the Frankfurt and Leipzig Book Fairs', 6-68.
- <sup>47</sup> A.H. Laeven, 'The Frankfurt and Leipzig Book Fairs and the History of the Dutch Book Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in *Le magasin de l'univers - The Dutch Republic as the Centre of the European Book Trade*, ed. C. Berkvens-Stevelinck, H. Bots, Paul G. Hofstijzer, and O.S. Lankhorst (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 192.
- <sup>48</sup> S.T. Bindoff, *The Scheldt Question: to 1839* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1945; repr. London: Routledge, 2019), 'Part Two: The Closure, 1572-1780'.
- <sup>49</sup> Lauwert, 'De handelsbedrijvigheid van de officina plantiniana', 127.
- <sup>50</sup> Voet, *Golden Compasses*, I, 225. For more on how Dutch conflicts affected the Moretus family, see Kristof Selleslach, "'In goede bewaernisse": De bescherming van privébezit door Balthasar II Moretus tijdens de veldtochten van de Republiek van 1645 en 1646', *De Gulden Passer* 101, no. 1 (2023), 77-104.
- <sup>51</sup> MPM Arch. 1122.
- <sup>52</sup> MPM Arch. 1122, f. 1. These numbers are consistently high until the end of the journal in 1656.
- <sup>53</sup> MPM Arch. 337, f. 1.
- <sup>54</sup> MPM Arch. 337, f. 83.
- <sup>55</sup> MPM Arch. 337.
- <sup>56</sup> MPM Arch. 337, f. 5.
- <sup>57</sup> MPM Arch. 337, f. 19.
- <sup>58</sup> MPM Arch. 337, ff. 17, 24.
- <sup>59</sup> MPM Arch. 337, f. 30.
- <sup>60</sup> MPM Arch. 1082, f. 3.
- <sup>61</sup> Voet, *Golden Compasses*, II, ch. 2, 'Paper and Parchment', 17-46. Sabbe, 'Ysbrand Vincent'.
- <sup>62</sup> These are in eight volumes covering 1571-1592 (Arch. 18), 1582-1589 (Arch. 20), 1590-1599 (Arch. 21), 1600-1610 (Arch. 127), 1610-1618 (Arch. 128), 1618-1629 (Arch. 131), 1629-1655 (Arch. 134), and 1656-1671 (Arch. 319).

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- <sup>63</sup> MPM Arch. 320, ff. 96, 143.
- <sup>64</sup> MPM Arch. 337, f. 2.
- <sup>65</sup> MPM Arch. 319, f. 163.
- <sup>66</sup> MPM Arch. 322, Grand livre L (libraires) 1672-1681, f. 163.
- <sup>67</sup> Sophie Raux, 'Origin and Typology of Lotteries in the Low Countries', in *Lotteries, Art Markets, and Visual Culture in the Low Countries, 15th-17th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 12-40.
- <sup>68</sup> Quoted in Sabbe, 'Ysbrand Vincent', 523.
- <sup>69</sup> MPM Arch. 337, f. 38.
- <sup>70</sup> Sabbe, 'Ysbrand Vincent', 523.
- <sup>71</sup> Sabbe, 'Ysbrand Vincent', 523-4.
- <sup>72</sup> Sabbe, 'Ysbrand Vincent', 524.
- <sup>73</sup> MPM Arch. 320, f. 12.
- <sup>74</sup> MPM Arch. 337, f. 39.
- <sup>75</sup> Christopher Ebert, *Between Empires: Brazilian Sugar in the Early Atlantic Economy, 1550-1630* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 182.
- <sup>76</sup> Maurits Sabbe, 'Valsche Plantin- en Moretusdrukken', 182-92.
- <sup>77</sup> Letter of 17 December 1683. MPM Arch. 654.
- <sup>78</sup> For example, MPM Arch. 320, f. 193. Curiously, in 1688 and 1689, Van Metelen sold Moretus not only liturgical books printed by Blaeu but a ream of royal paper as well.
- <sup>79</sup> Letter of 17 December 1683. MPM Arch. 654.