

P.A. DONCHE, *Whereabouts van exemplaren van de incunabel
'Van den proprietyten der dinghen' (1485) (1654-2017), 2017*

(*Whereabouts of copies of the incunabel 'Of the properties of things'*)

ENGLISH SUMMARY

This book is about the known existing copies and traces of copies in the past of one particular incunable printed in the Dutch language: *Vanden Proprietyten der Dinghen*. It is the only edition of a Dutch translation of BARTHOLOMÆUS ANGLICUS' medieval encyclopædia *De proprietatibus rerum* ('On the properties of things'). The Dutch translation was printed in Haarlem in Holland by Jacob Bellaert who finished the printing on Christmas' Eve 1485. This encyclopædia, written in Latin ca. 1240-45 was a very popular text during the Middle Ages. Once bookprinting was invented it soon was printed as well, not only in Latin (from 1472 onwards) but also in French (1482), Dutch (1485), Spanish (1494) and English (1495) in a total of 44 editions before 1610.

In 2004 Saskia BOGAERT in her Ph.D. studied translation processes of Latin texts to vernacular languages through this encyclopædia and its translation. In an appendix she compiled a list of 57 copies of *Vanden proprietyten der dinghen* in libraries and one on the public market with the known details of each of these copies as provided by the libraries.

Our own interest in this book started in 2007 when reading in BOGAERT's commercial edition of her Ph.D. (*Geleerde kennis in de volkstaal. Van den proprietyten der dinghen (Haarlem 1485) in perspectief*, Hilversum: Verloren, 2004, 252 p.) that one copy, now in Paris (Bibliothèque nationale de France) has an early 16th-century owner's mark sentence stating that it belonged to *Jacob Donche* and that he had inherited the book from his father *Roelandt*. Both this son and father were already known to us from genealogical research. In Paris, we saw that Jacob also had drawn the family coat-of-arms in the empty shield in the printer's mark at the end of the book. Roelandt, who died between February 28 and March 13, 1492 (at a time when his son Jacob was barely one year old) is the earliest identified private owner of a still existing copy of *Van den proprietyten der dinghen*.

Van den proprietyten der dinghen is a remarkable book in many ways. It was printed 530 years ago, only 32 years after the invention of bookprinting (Mainz, Gutenberg Bible, 1453) and 12 years after the first book printed in Dutch (Aalst, Martens, 1473). Most incunabula (70%) were printed in Latin and from those printed in a national language, only 1,9% are in the Dutch language. As to the contents, 45% are religious works: bibles, missals, theological commentaries, collected sermons. Classical writers and medieval philosophers account for 18%, literature, grammar en rethorics also 18%, matters of law 8%, history and geography 5% and finally sciences also 5%. A book 'On the properties of things' dealing with all kinds of knowledge can be classified in this last group. The encyclopædia is organized in 19 'books' (chapters): *God, Angels and Demons, Soul and Reason, Body's Essences, the Human Body, Daily life, Illnesses and poisons, the Cosmos, Time, Matter and Fire, Air and Weather, Birds, Water and Fishes, Earth, Geography, Stones, Plants and Trees, Land Animals* and 'other subjects' (such as color, smell, taste, music, etc..).

It is also by no means a small book: for the Dutch translation the printer used no less than 466 leaves (932 pages) sized each approx. 270 x 196 mm. The stack of paper is about 75 mm thick. In his edition Bellaert inserted 11 full-page woodcut illustrations and a large printer's device on the last page. The high quality of these woodcuts owed their unknown cutter, who also produced several other woodcuts for Bellaert's books the name 'Master of Bellaert'. Bellaert was proud of this print: it is the only book from his production in which he reveals his name, first name and birthplace in the colophon.

Although at the present day a relatively large number of copies are in national and university libraries in Europe and North-America, on the rare book market it is extremely rare. We have tried to establish the whereabouts of all surviving copies of this incunable, as well as who owned them in the past and how they passed from one owner to another. We searched for traces in catalogues of public auctions, of antiquarian booksellers and in other sources, covering a period of 360 years from 1654 to 2016. We discovered three more copies in libraries and at least eight more distinct copies on the public market than the 57 + 1 recorded in 2004.

We already pointed out that *Vanden proprieteyten der dinghen* is a rather early incunable, that it is written in a national language only used in a fraction of all incunabula, that its number in pages is high and that the Dutch edition has woodcuts of a remarkable high quality. Its rareness on the market is confirmed by the fact that in the 70 years after World War II traces of only seven different copies in public auctions in Europe and North-America could be found.

The largest part of this publication are transcriptions of entries in public auction or rare book dealer catalogues about a copy of this incunable. These are listed in a strict chronological order starting with a record as early as 1654 (with three more in the 17th century) and continues up to 2016 making a total of 123 records over a period of 360 years. We also added records found in old public or private library catalogues, traces of copies found in newspapers, news articles in bibliographical magazines and other sources, making a grand total of 177 records.

Our sources used include internet searches via keywords in engines such as *Google Books*, *Internet Archive*, *Hathi Trust* and *Gallica* as well as some commercial sites (if the cost was reasonable) such as *Rare Book Hub* and *Brill Online*. We also made extensive use of printed annual compilations of the rare book trade business, either in digitized form using the internet or, for the more recent decades, in printed form as can be found in national or university libraries, such as: *Book Prices Current* and *Book-Auction Records* (for UK auctions), *American Book Prices Current* (USA), *Jahrbuch der Bücherpreise* (later renamed *Jahrbuch der Auktionspreise für Bücher*) (Germany, The Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland) and *Annuaire des ventes de livres* and *L'Argus du livre de collection* (France). If a sales record of a copy of *Vanden proprieteyten ...* was found, we always searched for the catalogue itself to read the full entry. Catalogues were looked for on the internet but also consulted in national libraries (Brussels, The Hague), university libraries (Ghent, Amsterdam) and heritage libraries (Antwerp).

Internet searching through keywords is a tricky business. A simple search for '*proprieteyten*' is as fishing using a fishing net with too large meshes: many of the wanted fishes slip through the net and are not caught. Taking into account the variant spellings,

such as *proprieteyten* and *proprieteiten* as printed in catalogues also isn't enough. Indeed some catalogues do not mention that word *at all*, since the book is sometimes mentioned by its alternative title as used in the introduction to the index and in the prologue: ... *eygentscappen der dinghen*. So one must also search for *eygentscappen* (and its variants *eygenscappen* and *eygeschappen*). But these words can also be spelled wrong in a catalogue description. Although to a certain degree internet search engines are forgiving for spelling errors, they do not forgive all of them, e.g. not for *proprieteinten* as one catalogue wrote the word. Another thing to take into mind is that the word *proprieteyten* (and all its variants) can be printed across two lines of text and split. So, searching for *proprie-*, *proprietey-*, *-prieteyten* or *-teyten* should not be forgotten as well. The same holds for *eyg(h)en(t)-*, *-sc(h)appen*. Combinations of both also occur such as: *propietey-ten* [without second r!] ... or even worse: *proprie-tegten der dinghan* (*-tegten* instead of *-teyten* and *dinghan* instead of *dinghen*) or a printing place *Haelem* (instead of *Haerlem*).

Sometimes the Dutch title is not mentioned at all and the book is referred to by its original Latin title *De Proprietatibus Rerum* plus a reference to the national language into which it was translated. For the Dutch copy this language reference can take many forms: *Dutch*, *Hollandois*, *Hollandaise*, *Holländisch*, *Hollandice*, *hol.* and *Belgice*, *Belgicè* and even: *in Linguam Germaniae inferioris cumversus* ... All of these have been met.

Searching the author's name is equally tricky: *Bartholomæus* or *Bartholomeus* for the Christian name, *Anglicus* or *Engelschman* for 'last name', but also *Glanvilla*, *Glanville* or *Glanvil* must be searched as a last name since in many older bibliographical descriptions, up to the 20th century, the author was confused with another Franciscan writer Bartholomeus de Glanvilla, who lived a century later. The printer's name also has its own range of variants and misspellings: we found Bellaert in catalogues written as: *Bellaere*, *Beilaert*, *Benaert*, *Bettaest* or *Ballert*.

In our list of records, the first line of an entry mentions the year and type of record (auction, dealer catalogue or other). Then, for an auction, the name and living place of the owner whose library was sold, the place where the auction was held and the auctioneer. For antiquarian book dealer and old library catalogues similar information is given. From the title of a catalogue we transcribed all relevant information and for the entry describing the copy of *Vanden proprieteyten* ... the information was copied in full. If a particular copy could be identified as one of the copies now in libraries or as one still on the free market, a line precedes the entry: for library copies a reference to its entry in S. BOGAART's 2004 list, for copies on the market, the name of its earliest known owner.

Information from auctions could often be completed with information found in annual compilations of the rare book trade business: these compilations mention auction result and buyer's name. This was added. Finally, if applicable, we added further comments. At the bottom of an entry is a list of the years in which the particular copy was encountered as well.

In the next chapter we list information about the copies in public or semi-public libraries in case it supplements the information already given in S. BOGAART's 2004 overview (which we do not repeat by itself). This information was collected in 2017, either using the on-line library catalogue entry or as obtained from the librarian.

A separate table lists for all 60 copies now in libraries the year in which the copy entered the library (for eight we could not find that information). A small statistic shows that most of the copies in libraries (46 out of 52) entered their library in the period 1750-1950.

The next chapter deals with the 11 copies that were not yet listed in 2004. We have numbered these from 59 to 69, thus continuing the numbers used in the 2004 list. The first three numbers 59 – 61 were assigned to the three newly found copies in public or semi-public libraries, the numbers 62 – 69 to copies on the market, roughly in chronological order of their oldest known whereabouts. If owners of these last eight are known, we gave them the name of the earliest known owner. For two of them we couldn't find any owner and called these *Onbenoemd-1* and *-2* (*Unnamed-1* and *-2*). For each of these 11 copies we present the information in a format equal to the one used in the 2004 list.

Much time went into making sure that these 11 newly found copies are *distinct* copies, that is: that no two of them are a same copy. 55 comparisons between every pair out of the 11 were made and 11 more with nr. 58 (the one known copy on the market as listed in 2004). Tables show for each pair at least one reason why they cannot be a same copy.

During our research we encountered also a very incomplete copy and one detached woodcut of *Van den proprieteyten ...* These are listed in the next chapter.

Presently, five library copies are fully digitized and can be consulted on the internet, for three copies complete text editions are on-line as well. These are listed in the next chapter.

Finally, we added illustrations of the 11 woodcuts and the printer's device taken from an uncoloured copy and a description of the structure of the book: the collation formula and a table showing the start of each gathering, the location of the index pages, the prologue, the start of the 19 'books' (chapters), the location of the woodcuts, the blank leafs, the colophon and printer's device, giving leaf number and gathering signature.