CHAPTER EIGHT


The importance of the north German port town of Emden as a centre of vernacular printing in the sixteenth century is now reasonably well-known.1 For a short period in the middle of the century, Emden flourished as a principal publishing centre for Dutch evangelical literature, turning out Bibles, catechisms, and works of religious polemic for the clandestine Calvinist churches in the Netherlands. A total of over two hundred editions emanating from Emden presses have now been identified.2 As a well-known nest of heresy Emden remained throughout this period a considerable thorn in the side of the Habsburg administration of the Netherlands.

What remains less clear is how Emden functioned as a northern outpost of the European book trade. Almost all of the books printed in Emden were religious works, intended for clandestine import and distribution in the Netherlands. The process of distribution and sales mechanisms remain, necessarily, somewhat shadowy.3 However, important light can be shed on Emden’s wider role as a centre of book sales and distribution by the recent discovery of an unusual document: a

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2 Listed as an appendix to Pettegree, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 252–311.

broadsheet catalogue of books offered for sale in 1567 by an Emden bookseller, Gaspar Staphorst (see illus.).

Such documents are rare enough for this to be an exciting find in its own right. For Emden, where the wider context of book production and sales remains wholly unknown, it is quite unique. Its existence enables one, firstly, to piece together the career of an individual not previously recognized as an important participant in the Emden printing industry. Gaspar Staphorst was one of a number of booksellers active in Emden during this period. Inevitably printing, one of the growth industries in a town enjoying booming prosperity during this period, supported a number of auxiliary trades: bookbinders, booksellers, and merchant capitalists prepared to invest in the book trade. Quite possibly Staphorst, probably an immigrant from Germany, was one of the latter. He is first recorded in Emden in 1562, when he appears in the Emden tax lists as 'Jasper Bokebinder' under two separate addresses. In 1570, he registered a contract with his children in the Emden contract register. The catalogue printed here dates from a period in between, 1567, a date of some importance in both the history of the Netherlands revolt and the Emden book trade. It is immediately clear, both from its scope and contents, that Staphorst was the owner of a flourishing business. The catalogue lists some 176 editions offered for sale at his shop, a very considerable stock given the limited size of the local market. Furthermore, these are strikingly not, on the whole, the small, vernacular books which were the typical product of Emden’s own presses. Over 60 percent of the titles advertised here were Latin works, many of them high quality folios of considerable size and cost.

The rest of this article will be devoted to a closer examination of the contents of the list, attempting to establish the origin of the books offered for sale. This will make possible some more general reflections on Emden’s role in the European book trade at this date, and some

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6 Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv, Aurich, Rep. 234/13, fos. 47–7v. I am grateful to Dr Martin Tielke, Director of the Ostfriesische Landschaft, for drawing my attention to this contract.