CHAPTER THREE

THE CONTENTS OF THE LIBRARY

The most prevalent printing locations in Gessner's library (with more than ten imprints) are:

- Basle: 128 titles
- Florence: 13 titles
- Lyon: 15 titles
- Paris: 42 titles
- Rome: 12 titles
- Strasbourg: 22 titles
- Venice: 47 titles
- Zürich: 28 titles

Basle, Paris and Venice are most prominent. More than half of Gessner's library was printed in these three towns, which were already famous in the 15th century. Paris and Venice remained the leading European printing centres during the 16th century and had about 200'000 or 300'000 inhabitants in the middle of the 16th century. Between 1501 and 1600 approximately 30'000 imprints appeared in Venice, which numbered in 1493 150'000 inhabitants. In Basle, however, there was only an average of 8'000 people during the 16th century and

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1 764 incunabula were published in Basle, 3'026 in Paris and 3'705 in Venice (numbers according the database of the Incunabula Short Title Catalogue).
2 In Paris, from 1501 to 1510, there were published 1'654 imprints, from 1511 to 1520 2'497, from 1521 to 1530 2'322, from 1531 to 1540 3'441 and from 1551 to 1560 more than 3'500 editions, which makes a total, within these five decades, of more than 13'414. If we double this amount for the production of the whole 16th century, that makes about 27'000 imprints. Normally, the production was increasing towards the turn of the century, so a number of at least 30'000 editions seems to be plausible. Philippe Renouard et Brigitte Moreau: Inventaire chronologique des éditions parisiennes du XVIe siècle, tomes 1–5, Paris 1972–2004; Annie Charon-Parent: Le monde de l'imprimerie humaniste: Paris, in: Henri-Jean Martin et Roger Chartier, Histoire de l'édition française, tome 1, Paris 1982, p. 237.
approximately 6’500 titles were published.\(^4\) It was the most important printing centre in Switzerland, followed by Geneva (4’126 imprints)\(^3\) and Zürich (1’582 imprints).\(^6\) Unlike the production in Basle, which encompassed a broader variety of themes, the latter two were specialized on reformed Protestantism.

The Paris printing presses accounted for 53\% of the French book production and the printers of Venice for 56\% of the Italian one.\(^7\) Similarly in Basle more than half of the Swiss 16th century publications appeared. Distributed according to countries, Gessner’s books came from:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>3 titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>7 titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>78 titles (Strasbourg included)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>57 titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>84 titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>161 titles (128 from Basle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5 titles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It’s interesting that the Italian book market remained important for Gessner despite of the Italian opposition to the reformation. Most of his books were published between 1534 and 1560, that is during his professionally active time. It is worth mentioning that even as a physician and naturalist Gessner studied not only new but also older titles. He gathered nearly a century’s worth of science in his study.

\(^4\) Number according to the catalogues at the University Library Basle and the database of VD 16 on CD-ROM.

