To do justice to the truth, and to shut the mouths of the godless, let us add to the commonly assumed age of the world 1440 years, so that in all no more difficulties will remain. In this way, the current year is the 7048th.¹

With these words, Isaac Vossius ended his *Dissertatio de vera aetate mundi*. In this pamphlet-sized text, he would give new impetus to an issue hotly debated in the seventeenth century: the exact age of the world. As Anthony Grafton explains in this volume, it was far from easy to draw a clear conclusion from the massive amount of different calculations. This complexity for example is evident from the rapid exchange of arguments between Vossius and Georg Hornius (1620–1670) in 1659.

In his *De vera aetate mundi*, Vossius draws on various sources; a prominent example is Flavius Josephus, who is invoked to prove that the Septuagint is a more reliable version of the Bible than the Hebrew text. Furthermore, Vossius praises Louis Cappel (1585–1658) for pointing out the differences between the various versions of the Holy Scripture in his *Critica Sacra*.² He occasionally refers to ancient authors such as Aristotle, Eusebius and Diodorus Siculus, and to important explorers such as Marco Polo and Odoric of Pordenone. Additionally, Vossius criticises Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609), the greatest chronologer of his time, for having made several mistakes in his calculations.³ From the quantity of references, and the confidence with which Vossius presents his arguments, it is clear that he has studied the works of these authors in depth. A brief search through

¹ Vossius, *De vera aetate mundi*, LV. ‘Ut itaque veritati satisfiat, ac impiis os obtundatur, addantur ad receptam mundi aetatem anni 1440. jam nulla supererit difficultas. Praesens itaque aeræ mundanae annus est 7048.’
² Ibid., VII.
³ Ibid., XL.
the catalogue of the Vossius collection shows that Vossius’ magnificent library included copies of almost every source.4

It is fortunate that the collection, as it was acquired by Leiden University in 1690, remains available today, and retrievable within the university library, as this offers a wonderful opportunity for a book-historical research project. Taking the sources of Vossius’ *Dissertatio de vera aetate mundi*, as a starting point, it would be interesting to see what information could be derived from the material aspects of books in the Vossius collection. Although it is in many cases impossible to find out when Vossius acquired a book, let alone when he read it, he left his marks in many of them. The margins of some of his books provide a fairly good insight into what he thought about a text, or what information he wanted to add to it.

Vossius was not the first owner of all his books; some he bought or received from other collections, and sometimes their bindings, title pages and endpapers still bear the marks of their previous owners. In several cases, it is possible to identify an ownership sequence, and thus reconstruct the ‘life story’ of a single book, and the personal network of its previous owner. Marginalia by past owners, especially the emendations of an important scholar, or collations from a rare manuscript, would add extra value to a book and may have been the main reason for Vossius or other collectors to acquire the book, sometimes even if they already owned a copy of the same edition.

A recent trend in research into the history of books, for example described by David Pearson, is the examination of multiple copies of the same edition of a book.5 This is not done primarily to identify variations in printing and collation – although this is usually part of the research as well – but to compare their bindings, annotations, and other traces of use by their former owners. Another brilliant example of this type of research is provided by Owen Gingerich, who managed to describe 601 copies of the first and second edition of Copernicus’ *De revolutionibus*.6 Both Pearson and Gingerich searched for copies in many libraries and countries, and their research results include many treasures from all over the world, providing unique insights into the minds of the scholars who read these books in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, even small-

---

4 This catalogue, with LUB shelfmark BPL 127 AF, covers the collection as it was acquired by Leiden University in 1690.
5 In his paper, Pearson describes his own research project on 65 copies of three editions of the translated *Commentaries of Julius Caesar*; Pearson, ‘What Can We Learn by Tracking Multiple Copies of Books?’, 17–37.
6 Gingerich, *An Annotated Census of Copernicus’ De Revolutionibus*. 