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Jan Canin in Wesel, and in Emmerich?

In the spring of 1572 the conquest of Den Briel by the Beggars marked a turning point in what had hitherto been a singularly unsuccessful military campaign on the part of the rebellious Netherlands. Spanish rule had proved vulnerable from the sea and, after the defection of a number of towns in Holland and Zeeland, the first free meeting of the States could be held in Dordrecht in the same year. The recognition of William of Orange as stadholder and his acceptance of the Protestant faith formed a cohesive element in the struggle for liberty.

In the same year the first printer for the States of Holland and Zeeland settled in Dordrecht. Although he had no official appointment he produced a series of publications for the delegates until the removal of the meetings to Delft, where he was replaced by the widow of the printer-publisher Herman Schinckel who had been executed in 1567. She was soon to remarry with the future printer to the States General Albrecht Hendricksz and thus to lay the foundations of a dynasty of printers for the government. To start with, however, it was Jan Canin (or Caën) who printed for the States. He had settled in Dordrecht shortly after the defection of the town on 25 July 1572. Already on 29 June 1573 he was appointed elder of the local consistory.1 His arrival probably coincided with that of two other southerners: the preacher Jan Lippius (Lippens) and David de Courcelles (Corselis), a French schoolmaster. In his new residence Canin set up a publishing house specialised in Calvinist literature. It soon grew into the largest firm in that domain in the liberated Netherlands.

Canin did not come from the Northern Netherlands, but was born in Ghent in about 1534. In 1565 he was a member of the consistory of Breda, probably in the capacity of deacon, together with Lippius and Robert Janssen de Lannoy, both of whom were also from the south. His profession was recorded as ‘verrier’, glazier, and he may have been admitted to that ‘decorative’ guild because of his trade as a bookbinder.2 In Breda Canin was involved in the iconoclastic

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2 Before printers and bookbinders in different towns had an organisation of their own they were admitted to various guilds, such as that of the saddlemakers in Utrecht. We can deduce from Canin’s later career that he had had a sound training as a printer—but certainly not, as has been assumed (Briels, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 194), in Wesel with Augustijn van Hasselt. The latter did not settle there until after May 1567 and in that year Canin already had a press of his own.

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riots. Consequently, on 17 August 1568, the Council of Troubles sentenced him to lifelong banishment and the loss of his property.\(^3\) He had, however, made a timely escape and had moved with his family to Wesel where his third and fourth sons were born.\(^4\) But he could not remain long there either: he was ordered to leave the town on 18 January 1569, banished, together with the aforesaid David de Courcelles, for having printed a suspicious book on Courcelles's initiative.\(^5\) A few days later the local authorities postponed the banishment to Easter on humanitarian grounds—on the condition, as far as Canin was concerned, that he should not print anything else without the explicit approval of the Council.

We known nothing of Courcelles' book—not even the title—and no other publications produced by Canin while he was in Wesel have so far been identified. Nevertheless half a dozen anonymous printed works have survived which could be ascribed to him on the basis of their external features. Three give the town of Wesel as an address but contain no further name. The others have no imprint whatsoever. The publications are only identifiable as Canin's products from their decorations: we see that the printer already had various ornaments at his disposal in Wesel which he was later to use in numerous signed works in Dordrecht. These include an alphabet of woodcut initials and certain easily recognisable vignettes which he alone possessed and which are thus characteristic of his work. This peculiarity never seems to have been noticed in the past—indeed, all too little use has been made of the possibilities of research into typographical material for the whole of the second half of the sixteenth century. When it comes to the identification of typefaces this hesitation is understandable since it requires an experienced eye, but the recognition of woodcut ornaments does not necessarily present an insurmountable problem to a bibliographer. Much more work still needs to be done in this domain and it seems certain that the picture of Dutch book production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has yet to undergo various changes.

All but two of the six books I have mentioned, each one in octavo, bear the year 1567, and there is no reason to doubt the reliability of this date. One of


\(^4\) Both gave Wesel as their place of birth on the occasion of their marriage in Dordrecht in 1594, on 26 and 12 April respectively. Briels, op. cit. (n. 1), quotations (a) on p. 214 and on p. 221 (Trouwboek No. 16). See also Briels's tree of the Canin family on p. 197 of his book.

\(^5\) For the text of the decision see Briels, op. cit. (n. 1), quotation (a), p. 198. The view that the banishment involved Augustijn van Hasselt is incorrect. Augustijn's departure from Wesel was a result of the sale of the press by Plantin to the Family of Love of Hendrik Niclaes. See Paul Valkema Blouw, 'Augustijn van Hasselt as a printer in Vianen and Wesel', in: *Querendo*, 16 (1986), pp. 83-109, 163-90 (pp. 174ff.); id., 'Was Plantin a member of the Family of Love? Notes on his dealings with Hendrik Niclaes', ibid., 23 (1993), pp. 3-23 (pp. 17f.).