The librarian’s *cri de coeur*: rules for readers (1711)

How many students entering Amsterdam University Library, or any other institutional library for that matter, for the first time will begin their studies by asking for the *Catalogus Bibliothecae Amstelaedamensis*, which was compiled, it is thought, by the librarian Petrus Schaak and published by Jan Rieuwertsz the Younger in Amsterdam in 1711? And yet they would do well to ask for it. They will find it no doubt confusing; quite apart from the paucity of books it describes, the entries are not alphabetical, but follow the general usage of the time with a system of classification by ‘faculties’ and subdivision by formats, and even within these, once Bibles and other well-known theological works have been spotted right at the beginning, it will be difficult for our student to find anything he or she immediately recognises. Nor are the descriptions up to modern standards. But do not despair, for, as you will quickly see, a modern on-screen catalogue is ready to supply all your needs. No, what you should find, read, digest and take to heart is printed on the very last leaf (S4) in this handy quarto volume, its pp. 143 and 144. Provided you have enjoyed the nowadays alas so rare privilege of having been taught Latin, here is an unexpected appeal to your sensibility which you will surely relish – and no doubt happily observe.

Page 143 is in fact an address to the reader which makes up for the absence of a preface, while page 144 asks the reader for his best behaviour, the pill sweetened by doing so in verse. The following is a transcript of these two texts, accompanied by a translation into English for those whose Latin is now rusty or is as yet non-existent.

**BENEVOLE LECTOR**

Praeter eos quos hic exhibemus, alii permulti sunt libri sed ferè minoris formae, qui capsis includuntur. Sed, in novissimo hocce Catalogo in lucem producuntur.

I wish to thank Mr A.R.A. Croiset van Uchelen for his interest and assistance, including information on which much of the following notes is based.

1 No compiler is named in the catalogue or recorded elsewhere, but it is generally presumed to be the work of preacher Petrus Schaak, who was librarian of the Municipal and High School library from 1693 to his death in 1708. He had already issued a ‘new’ catalogue in 1695 (the earliest is of 1612 and there had been others), of which the 1711 catalogue was a slightly revised version. Cf. [K. Gnirrep], *Catalogus catalogorum ad collectiones Bibliothecae Universitatis Amstelodamensis pertinentes* (Amsterdam 1981), pp. 24-25; on the earliest history of this library see H. de la Fontaine Verwey, ‘The City Library of Amsterdam in the Nieuwe Kerk 1578-1632’, in: *Quaerendo*, 14 (1984), pp. 163-206 or its Dutch version, ‘De stedelijke bibliotheek van Amsterdam in de Nieuwe Kerk, 1578-1632’, in: id., *Uit de wereld van het boek*, IV. *Boeken, banden en bibliotheken* (’t Goy [1997]), pp. 69-112, itself reprinted from a publication (Meppel 1980) issued on the occasion of the centenary of the Dutch Publishers’ Association.

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In recensione autem Bibliothecae, libri aliquot non contemnendi, qui Catalogo superiori adscripti erant, non sunt inventi: ii, ut credimus, aliquibus in privatum usum, ad tempus concessi sunt, neque in hunc diem redditi. Publicae autem utilitati interest, & bono Studiosorum, ut locis suis reponantur. Ideoque amicis verbis rogantur & momentur universi & singuli, qui ubi aut apud quos delitescant, sciunt, ut quam possunt, fidem & operam rei literariae praestare velint, quo primo quoque tempore amissa volumina Bibliothecae restituantur.

Quia Magistris etiam mutis reverentia debetur, visum fuit addere Cl. D.C. Plempii Civis & Poëtae Amstelodamensis Jambos Hypomnematicos, officii sui Lectores admonentes.²

GENTLE READER

Besides those books here placed on the open shelves, there are very many, and they are mainly in small formats, which are kept in bookcases. But they have been made available in this very latest Catalogue.

Nevertheless, when we were checking the Library, some books of no little value, which were listed in the previous Catalogue, could not be found: these, we think, were given to some persons on temporary loan and have until this very day not been returned. It is however of public concern and to the benefit of students that they should be put back in their places. Therefore we most amicably pray all and sundry who know where and in whose houses these books may be languishing, that they should to the best of their ability devote their good faith and effort on behalf of scholarship, so that the lost volumes may be restored to the Library.

Since respect is due also to mute Masters, it has been deemed appropriate to add the memorandum in iambic verse by the Amsterdam citizen and poet, the distinguished Cornelis Plemp,² which advises readers of their duties.

Quisquis vir intras literas doctus bonas,
Tumultuosa ne move fores manu;
Nec turbulento fac soleecismum pede,
Musis molestus. Deinde si quem reperis

² Cornelis Plemp (1574-1638) is perhaps best known as the contributor to P.C. Hooft’s Emblemata amatoria (Amsterdam 1611) to which he supplied the Latin versions of the original Dutch verses accompanying the emblematic images. He was however also a poet in his own right, writing mainly in Latin. By training he was a lawyer, but as a Roman Catholic he was excluded from public life and devoted himself wholly to his scholarly and poetic pursuits. He had no official connection with the Amsterdam library and was perhaps asked by a librarian there or in some other place, conceivably Leiden University or Haarlem Municipal Library, to write these rules in verse. Or perhaps the boorish behaviour of some reader or readers drove him to their composition.

³ Ms variant reading: ‘seram’, the bar on the door, replaced by the more familiar word for the whole door.

⁴ Ms variant reading: ‘soleecismum’, another, more common spelling.