A Post-Mortem Inventory Turned into a Sales Catalogue: a Screening of the Auction Catalogue of the Library of Charles Duke of Croy, Brussels 1614

Christian Coppens
Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium

Abstract
The article deals with the catalogue for the auction of the library of Charles Duke of Croy in Brussels in 1614. The catalogue is based on the post mortem inventory drawn up after the Duke's death in 1612. A subtitle of the 'subjects' reveals that most of the books had labels, the basis of the (sometimes poor) description by booksellers. The real subject order is briefly compared with those of contemporary catalogues. There is a short analysis of the content of the library, the core of which he had inherited ultimately from his great-grandfather-in-law, Georgius Haloinus. In appendices there are graphs showing the content and the languages of the works in the library.

Keywords
Croy (Charles III Duke of), Arenberg (Dukes of), auction catalogues, Leuven University Library, Justus Lipsius, Rutgerus Velpius, Ludovicus Elsevier, private libraries (16th/17th century), Georgius Haloinus

As a result of quarrels among the heirs, it was not until two years after his death that the library of Charles, third Duke of Croy (1560-1612), was sold in Brussels. The auction started on 19 August 1614. The printed catalogue was referred to in more recent times in an article of 1852 in the Bulletin du bibliophile belge based on the only known copy which is preserved in Leuven University Library, and derives from the Jesuits in Antwerp. This copy disappeared when the Germans destroyed the university library in 1914. The slightly romantic exaggeration of the description by the local antiquarian and librarian, who confined himself mainly to the list of the manuscripts, coupled with


© Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2008
DOI: 10.1163/157006908X363958
the old dream, going back to Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) and his pupil Erycius Puteanus (1574-1646), that this library could have become the founding collection of the University Library of Leuven at or even before Charles's death, gave the story the time to become something of a myth.² For the book world in the twentieth century, the fact that after his death Charles de Croy became known as the Duke of Arenberg was no less exciting.³

It is striking that the dispersal of the library by sale saved it from total destruction. Had it been transferred to the University Library, it would certainly have been destroyed in 1914 as was its catalogue. Had it remained in the castle of Beaumont (in the province of Hainaut), it would have been destroyed twice over: first by the French army under Charles-François de Joyeuse, count Grandpré (c.1624-80) in 1660, and what survived this by William III of Nassau (1650-1702), king of England, who blew up the castle in 1691.

However, another copy of the sales catalogue survives in the Arenberg Archives in Enghien (Brabant); its provenance was the Leuven Jesuits, with an entry dated 1639.⁴ It can be used to reconstruct the library, or at least part of it. Yet the catalogue is interesting in its own right.

---

² Among the works Lipsius dedicated to Charles was his De bibliothecis syntagma (1602).


⁴ It certainly came on the market after the abolition of the Jesuit Order and the many sales of its libraries. It came into the possession of the Duke of Arenberg. It is bound in a half leather binding, with the back tooled in gold, divided into six fields, decorated with a small floral tool, the title in the second field — BIBLIOTHEQUE // DU DUC // DE CROY; and at the bottom: 1614. The front marbled paste-down bears the nineteenth-century armorial ducal bookplate drawn by Auguste Félix Schoy (1838-85) and engraved by Eduard Vermorcken (1820-1906). The three cartouches for the acquisition and/or subject numbers are filled in with 76, III and 8K2 (respectively, the latter being stamped over with 'BIOGRAPHIE'. The verso of the flyleaf has on top the same stamp with written underneath '43'. (There seems to be a second copy in a private collection. For this information my thanks to Prof. Pierre Delsaerd.)