This catalogue of the chained library of the church of Saint Walburgis is a book after my own heart. It is well designed, it opens well (all praise to the bookbinders Witlox & Walrecht), and as a voluminous book pregnant of more books, it makes wonderful, endless reading. Voluminous can be beautiful, and even manageable, taking into consideration the choice of paper, a sober and very clear layout, with a little playfulness in the well chosen black endpapers, praise therefore also to the typographers Ekkers & Paauw. It might have been better to set 'Librije Zutphen' in gold, and not 'Catalogus', and to reverse the size of the letters. There are many catalogues, but there is only one Zutphen Librije.

The book begins with a welcome 'History of the Librije in Zutphen', very illuminating (also to an international audience, thanks to the English translation, although it is a pity that the index only covers the Dutch version). The word 'pulmpt' (for pulpit) (p. 18) does not exist. It would have been better to use 'pult', which is used in Dutch book historical studies (and unjustifiably is not incorporated in the Van Dale Dutch dictionary, although 'pulpitum' is; 'pult' on the other hand can be found in the Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal). Of course a chained library at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century was not regarded as 'medieval', as can be seen in the well-known engraving by Woudanus of Leiden University (founded 1575) in 1609. The library that was planned in 1600 by the Duke Charles de Croÿ in the near of Leuven as part of the monastery attached to his castle, still had lecterns. More examples could be given.

That the Reformation permeated the collection not through the books but through the book bindings (‘However, the Reformation entered the Librije, not via the books but through their bindings. Unnoted by Berner, the binders Vincent Russenberg and Wilhelms de Boekbinder used, among others, a roll with the portraits of Hus, Luther, Erasmus and Melanchthon’, pp. 20-1), can be questioned. In the first place, such tools were regularly traded from Germany, and no doubt copied as well. Moreover, it is unlikely that someone like Herman Berner, appointed church warden in 1540, would have overlooked this. It is not easy to immediately offer an alternative to this opinion, but the situation certainly was much more nuanced.

The next chapter of the introduction is an account of the descriptions of the catalogue. The six manuscripts in the collection have been extensively described by a group of students under the supervision of the late Jos. M.M. Hermans. For the descriptions of the printed books, the choice of a diplomatic transcription of the title-page is both an easy and a time consuming decision. A short-title clearly was no option, because in such a description one always misses what one needs. But unless it concerns very rare
editions, unique copies or variants, a full transcription makes the whole rather obscure. De golden mean is to leave out through ‘[…]’ what isn’t really relevant, such as titles of authors, editors, translators, and marketing rhetoric, and to transcribe indeed the hinge elements, the real information given (additional texts, names of translators and editors, mention of privileges). This is no easy task, but it would have created a better overview, and a catalogue is after all not a bibliography.

Under the bibliographic references in the descriptions, there are amongst others NK (Nijhoff-Kronenberg), TB (Typographia Batava) and BT (Belgica Typographica). Sometimes the specific reference is overlooked and the reader is all too easily referred to the NUC (National Union Catalogue) (without a number, for a Bible for example, no. 91). For instance, no mention is made of the bibliography of Lorenzo Torrentino (no. 396), by the way a printer from present-day North-Brabant in the Netherlands, and active in Florence. For this and other Italian references apparently Edit 16 (http://edit16.iccu.sbn.it/web_iccu/ihome.htm) was not used either, in spite of its being the numero uno for sixteenth-century Italian books. Under ‘Copy description’ (p. 82) Paul Needham is cited as the inspiration for noting copy specific information as ‘that legitimizes the publication of a catalogue of a collection’, but what is left unsaid (and not done in the catalogue) is that he also stresses to include at least an approximate dating of provenance information, marginalia, membra disiecta, etc.

About the description of the binding (p. 83) is said that ‘unless stated otherwise and apart from later restorations, all bindings are contemporary’, but it would have been good to give the dating in every description, also to make it more convincing, as ‘contemporary’ seems quite flexible sometimes. A user consults a catalogue, but does not read the introduction first. It is a pity that there seems no separate volume about the bindings planned, with good photographs and rubbings, though it would be very interesting.

Paratext by other authors is indicated to as ‘bijdragen door’ (contributions by; for example nos. 396 and 414), while it may well concern a preface, a panegyric, a letter. It is for instance a bit confusing to find a ‘contribution’ by Joannes Trithemius (1462-1516) in an edition printed in Paris in 1622 (no. 414). The printer’s marks in the descriptions are not identified on the basis of the existing reference works. Occasionally confusion exists with regard to printer’s and publisher’s/bookseller’s marks, as with typical imprint phrases such as ‘Apud’, ‘In aedibus’, ‘Sumptibus’, etc. (see for example nos. 412 and 413).

To use the author’s name Jean Despautère (nos. 20, 200, 211) seems a little unwordly. One would expect Joannes Despauterius, or Jan de Spauter (as was explicitly done by an American author in a recent article on Despauterius’ Grammatica). It is like using ‘Juste Lipse’ instead of Justus Lipsius.

The Librije has a surprisingly large collection of Corpus iuris canonici & civilis (nos. 226-60), large folios which are now often very rare. Among them there are quite some incunables. But descriptions such as ‘Initials and capitals in red and blue’ seem to refer to rubrication, with lombards, duplex and pen-flourished initials. The ‘ornamental initials in colours heightened with gold’, seem to be illuminated initials with gold on bole.