Catalogue of the Plantin-Moretus Museum

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CATALOGUE
OF THE
PLANTIN-MORETUS
MUSEUM
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The PLANTIN-MORETUS MUSEUM

The Plantin-Moretus Museum is situated in the buildings which were occupied, from 1576 until 1876, by the illustrious printer, Christopher Plantin, his son-in-law John Moerentorf or Moretus, and their descendants.

By a deed dated 20th April 1876, the Municipality of Antwerp bought the Plantin-Moretus mansion, with the printing materials and collections which it contained and converted it into a public Museum, which was opened on the 19th of August 1877.

Before enumerating the objects exhibited in the different rooms, we shall briefly make known the family who, during three centuries, inhabited and managed the renowned printing-office. We shall then concisely state the history of the buildings, composing the present Museum.
The Plantin-Moretus Family.

The founder of the Plantinian printing-office, Christopher Plantin, was born at Saint-Avertin, a mile from Tours. The date of his birth is not exactly known. One of his engraved portraits and his tombstone both mention the year 1514. In an inscription under an engraved portrait of Plantin his grandson François Raphelengien states that he knows from the most reliable sources that his grandfather was born in the month of May 1520, whereas in several public acts Plantin himself varies about the date of his birth and fluctuates between 1518 and 1525. He lost his mother when very young.

Plantin's father, having retired to Lyons to secure himself from the plague which had carried away his wife, entered there the service of Claude Porret, audiencier of the church of St. Just. Accompanied by his son, he followed one of his master's nephews, Peter Puppier who was going to study at Orleans and Paris. On his departure from latter town, he left there young Christopher with a small sum of money to continue his studies. He promised soon to come and take him, but forgot his promise and the youth, having exhausted his meagre resources, went to Caen where he bound himself apprentice to a printer.

The contemporary witnesses agree that his master was the printer Robert Macé, second of that name. At Caen Plantin made the acquaintance of Jane Riviere; whom he married in 1545 or 1546, and they went to live in Paris. There he found Peter Porret, a nephew
of the audiencier Claude Porret, with whom he had been brought up in Lyons. The two, who had been friends from childhood, called each other brothers, and this habit, which they kept up during their lifetime, served as foundation to a legend on the origin of Plantin and Porret.

Both, it is said, were sons of the illustrious Charles de Tiercelin, who died crowned with glory, but devoid of fortune. His children having to provide for their sustenance by the labour of their hands, resolved to do so with courage. But, that they might not dishonour the arms of their noble ancestors, they assumed the plebeian names of two plants, the plantain and the leek, in French Plantain and Porret. One became a bookseller, the other an apothecary.

Only the last sentence of this story is true. Plantin, after his marriage, lived some time in Paris. In 1549 he settled at Antwerp, which was at that time, together with the Capital of France, the most flourishing town of the north-west of our continent, as a bookbinder and casket-maker.

He first lived in the "Lombaardenvest" near the "Kammerstraat", and next removed to one of the streets in the neighbourhood of the Borse (Exchange) where we find him established in 1555. He soon became known as a clever workman; his bindings, his caskets and cases, his works in gilding and mosaic on leather, excelled in beauty all that was made of that kind in the Netherlands.

He was well received by the learned men then residing
at Antwerp and by the merchants who frequented the Bourse; he even gained the good graces of Gabriel de Çayas, secretary to King Philip II. This high officer of State who, being in Antwerp about 1555, and wishing to send his master a precious stone of great value, directed Plantin to make a casket in which to send it. The work being finished, Plantin took it himself to Çayas. Night falling, the artisan, preceded by a servant who carried a light, arrived at the «Meirebrug», when some masked drunkards in search of a guitar player, who had offended them, thought they recognised their enemy in the inoffensive workman, carrying his casket under his arm. They rushed upon him, one of them drew his sword and stabbed him. The thrust was so violent, that the aggressor had great difficulty in withdrawing his weapon from the wound. Plantin explained to his furious assailants that they were mistaken in their man; they saw their mistake and fled. The wounded man reached his house half dead. Joannes Farinalius, a surgeon, and Dr. Goropius Becanus were immediately called, at first sight they despaired of saving the victim of this fatal mistake. Nevertheless his life was saved; but, not being able to devote himself any longer to a manual labour, which necessitated a continual moving and bent posture, he abandoned his trade as a book-binder and returned to the profession of printer, which he had practised at Caen.

Plantin became a citizen of Antwerp on the 21st of March 1550; and in the same year was received
into the Guild of St. Luke, with the title of printer, which proves that, though occupying himself with book-binding, he already regarded as his principal trade that which he was to follow so gloriously later on.

The first book Plantin printed under his name is dated 1555, and entitled: *La Institutione di una fanciulla nata nobilmente*. From 1555 to 1562, he only published a comparatively small number of works, and the progress of this first period, though modest was real.

In 1562, he was accused of having printed a heterodox tract entitled: *Briefve instruction pour prier*. A search was made at his house and three of his workmen were arrested and condemned to the galleys. Plantin himself escaped conviction, the most rigorous examination having discovered nothing in his conduct which was contrary to orthodoxy. But not thinking himself safe in the Netherlands, he took refuge in France and remained a whole year in Paris. The next year he returned to Antwerp and entered into partnership with Corneille and Charles Bombberghe, Jacques de Schotti and Doctor Goropius Becanus. Plantin was appointed what we should call the managing director of the Association, which lasted from 1563 until 1567 and enabled our printer to make a large extension to his business.

In his correspondence, Plantin frequently declares that he broke with his companions, because they were not of irreproachable orthodoxy. And, in fact, shortly after the end of the partnership, the brothers Bom-
berghe and Jacques de Schottti were obliged to flee from an accusation of heresy. It would be difficult to acquit Plantin himself, both before and after 1567, of all relationship with the heretics. We know from certain sources, that in his early years, he was one of the fervent disciples of Henri Niclaes, the founder of the Family of Charity, one of the branches of Anabaptism.

Later on, he disagreed with the founder of this sect; but to the end of his life, he remained on the most intimate terms of friendship with Henri Jansen, who, called himself Barrefelt after his native village and took, as an author, the Hebrew name of Hiel. Barrefelt was one of the first followers of Henri Niclaes, but afterwards left the Family of Charity to found a new Church in his turn. Plantin's ideas were in sympathy with those of this kind of illuminate, and he printed several of his works. Barrefelt preached absolute identification with God and considered public worship an indifferent thing. In this mystic doctrine Plantin saw no obstacle to serving with ardour the Catholic Church and his great supporter, the King of Spain.

About 1567, he found his principal protector in Philip II and counted amongst his most devoted and powerful friends Cardinal Granvelle and the King's Secretary, Gabriel de Çayas. On their recommendation he was chosen to publish the Royal Bible in five languages, the principal work he ever printed, nay, the most important which any printer ever produced in the Netherlands.
Whilst Plantin was working at the Bible, he printed at the same time his first Breviary and Roman Missal, after the version authorised by the Council of Trent. In November 1570, Philip II commissioned Plantin with the printing of the liturgical books for Spain and obtained for him on this occasion a License from the Holy-See, extending to all the countries dependant to the Monarchy. This license was the foundation of the future prosperity of the Plantin-Moretus family. Ever since 1572, the Missals, Breviaries, Diurnals, Psalters, Antiphonaries, the Offices of the Virgin, in every size, were issued from the Antwerp office by tens of thousands.

Plantin himself in the meanwhile suffered but losses and pecuniary troubles by these privileges and royal favors. At that time these provinces were passing through the frightful crisis caused by the contest with Spain, which lasted for seventy years and ended in the ruin of Antwerp and the Spanish Netherlands. Trade was destroyed, money concealed, confidence in the future wanting, and all the entreprises into which the printer, bold to rashness, threw himself proved a failure. The King of Spain, having burdened him with ruinous works, promised large subsidies. But times were as hard for the monarch’s chest as for those of his subjects. To the end of his life Plantin claimed in vain the enormous sums which Philip II owed him and which were never paid. He ran so deeply into debt, that he felt the necessity of leaving once more his adopted town. In 1583 he proceeded to Leyden,
and remained there until 1585. He then returned to Antwerp after this town had been taken again by the Duke of Parma.

In 1557, Plantin left his abode near the Borse, and settled in the «Kammerstraat», which in former days was the centre of the book-trade. Until 1564, he lived at the Golden Unicorn but in the course of that year, he transferred his offices and shop to another house in the same street, called the Grand Falcon. He changed this name into that of the Golden Compasses borrowed from his printing-mark. He occupied this abode until 1576, when he set up his offices in a house in the «Hoogstraat» situated near St. John’s Gate and belonging to Martin Lopez. To the end of his life he nevertheless continued to keep his bookshop in the «Kammerstraat».

After the sackage of Antwerp, in 1576, Plantin had to reduce his expenses and kept only half of Lopez’ house. On the 22nd of June 1579, he bought this part, which had an outlet into the Friday-market and gave it the name and sign of Golden Compasses. There he lived till his death and there too his successors continued the business, until the town of Antwerp bought the buildings to make them the Plantin-Moretus Museum.

Plantin never had, as has often been said, a branch office at Frankfort, but like other printers, he used to open a shop there during fair-time about Easter and in the autumn.

In 1567, he founded a branch in Paris, the manage-