

‘Magnetic Virtue’: Academic Alba Amicorum in the Dutch Republic, 1575-1750

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Abstract

While autograph alba originally appeared as memorabilia of student life, it is often argued that the possibility of boosting their owner’s reputation by association with leading scholars led to their careerist exploitation during the seventeenth century. In German universities, aspiring academics would seek out the most renowned luminaries in the world of learning, and even established scholars would on occasion keep an album with signatures of eminent peers. This article assesses the influence of this practice in Dutch universities and considers whether a careerist use of autograph alba existed in the Dutch Republic, through an exploration of some quantitative trends in the Dutch National Library’s (KB) inventory of autograph alba and the union catalogue Repertorium Alborum Amicorum (RAA).

Keywords: social history of knowledge, album amicorum, universities, scholars, students

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Halfway through his graduate studies in several German universities, Michael Lilienthal (1686-1750), a young Prussian student, decided to make a tour of the Dutch Republic accompanying Dietrich Valentiners (1682-1743), scion to a patrician family from Holstein. This kind of trip was common for well-off young men, and is often referred to as *peregrinatio academica*, a rite of passage where students visited foreign universities, towns, and monuments, typically in France, Italy, and the Low Countries. Lilienthal and Valentiners entered the Republic in June 1710 and spent a couple of months in the Frisian university of Franeker, before sailing across the Zuiderzee to Holland, where they visited the main towns and leading intellectuals. As was customary, Lilienthal brought an autograph album – alternatively known as *Philotheca*, album amicorum, or *Stammbuch* – with the intention of collecting inscriptions from a cross-section of the intellectual elite of the Dutch Republic and, by extension, of the Reformed academic and literary world.

In this article, I will provide a combined qualitative and quantitative assessment of the most prolific kind of album in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, namely those used in the context of academic education and typically kept by students in their early twenties. Lilienthal’s own album provides an archetypical example, and his later academic work on scholarly customs and careerist strategies will provide further context and serve as an illustrative introduction to an analysis of the rationale behind the practice of collecting a friendship album as a part of a practice of self-representation. The article will also analyse the quantitative trends present in the album amicorum collections of the Dutch Royal Library (кв) and the union catalogue Repertorium Alborum Amicorum, and explain how such an overview helps to elucidate the introduction and uses of alba amicorum in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.

Lilienthal kept two different alba during his youth. While both were lost in the bombing of the Königsberg university library during the Second World War, their inscriptions had been catalogued some decades earlier, so it is possible to know who the inscribers of Lilienthal’s alba were. More than a quarter of the inscriptions in the first album, which Lilienthal kept during his preparatory and bachelor studies, were signed by his classmates, and it is very likely that other inscriptions that do not make explicit the occupation of the inscriber were also by fellow students and non-academics. At any rate, no professor nor established intellectual figure inscribed this first album, which was clearly

meant as a memorial to his student days, representing Lilienthal's own intellectual cohort and friends. However, this was not the album Lilienthal carried to the Dutch Republic. In 1706, when he studied at different German universities – Jena, Leipzig, Heidelberg, and Rostock – Lilienthal began a second album with a clear intention of collecting the autographs of renowned professors and theologians. This was the album he brought with him to the Dutch Republic in 1710. While the inventoried inscription index does not contain information concerning the date or place of inscriptions, it is possible to gauge where and when most of the inscriptions were made on the basis of Lilienthal's itinerary as described in his autobiography, the dates of death of the inscribers, and their own location, if known.¹

In Amsterdam, Lilienthal obtained the autographs of the Hebraist Guilielmus Surenhuisius and the philologist Tiberius Hemsterhuis, both professors at the Atheneum Illustre, as well as inscriptions by Jean Leclerc and Phillip van Limborch, professors at the Remonstrant Seminary. Leclerc and Van Limborch were celebrities in Protestant intellectual circles in their own right, but also by association with their common friend, the late John Locke, who rose to fame across the continent as a result of the French translations of his work published in the 1700s and 1710s. Lilienthal also paid a visit to the Cocceian city preachers Taco Hajo van der Honert, who would be appointed professor of theology at Leiden University a few years later, and Johannes d'Outrein, a leading theologian. From Amsterdam, Lilienthal first travelled to Haarlem and then to Utrecht, where he collected the signatures of the reputed orientalist Adriaan Reland, and the Voetian theologians Melchior Leydekker and the Cartesian Herman Alexander Röell. From Utrecht, he went to The Hague and Rotterdam, where the famous Huguenot theologians Jacques Basnage and Pierre Jurieu signed the album. Finally, they progressed to Leiden, the leading university city. Here, Lilienthal collected the signatures of the eminent philologist Jacobus Gronovius, the professor of philosophy Wolferdus Senguerdius, the Cocceian professor of theology Solomon van Til, the orientalist Johannes Heyman, and the Voetian theologian Johannes à Marck. However, after an unpleasant brawl with inebriated students in Leiden and, given that the winter was too advanced to risk the crossing to England, as originally planned, Lilienthal resolved to return to Rostock university. On the way back, he found time to stop by the university of Harderwijk, where he collected some last signatures, those of the professors Theodorus Jansonius Almeloveen, a well-connected polymath who taught medicine and Greek, Cornelius van Houten, a professor of philosophy, and Johannes Meyer, a professor of theology and oriental languages. He also stopped at Zwolle to visit the heterodox theologian Frederik van Leenhof, a local preacher who was in the midst of a notorious argument – among others with Leydekker – concerning his unacknowledged Spinozist ideas, which eventually saw him excommunicated. Lastly, Lilienthal then stopped by Deventer and headed towards Rostock, where he eventually obtained his doctoral title in theology.²

¹ Consequently, this list cannot be exhaustive: it is possible that a few additional inscriptions were made in the Dutch Republic that I have been unable to identify. See for the inventory of Lilienthal's album Bogun, 'Die Stammbuchsammlung', 93-100.

² Lilienthal, 'Michael Lilienthals Leben und Schriften', 810-811.

The Machiavellian Use and Abuse of Academic Alba

Lilienthal's student trip serves as an exemplar of a typical student trip to the Dutch Republic, but also illustrates the identity-based rationale underlying this practice. We can draw three main conclusions from this catalogue of learned men. Firstly, Lilienthal was partial to moderate Reformed theologians, in particular those with Cartesian, Cocceian, and Arminian leanings, while still acknowledging relevant figures with more orthodox Calvinist tendencies, and even ostracized radical scholars. Secondly, he admired professors well-versed in philology and ancient languages. Finally, he sought the signatures of renowned Huguenots who were involved in polemics and published in the periodical press that catered to an international learned community. This selection of autographs does not only reflect Lilienthal's admiration: by collecting these signatures, he was sketching his own intellectual profile - he wanted to be associated with these men and be recognized as belonging to their school, bolstering his own intellectual profile even before he published his first academic works. Like many others, Lilienthal's album was clearly a device designed to aid the self-fashioning of an aspiring scholar. What is particularly striking about Lilienthal's case is his awareness of, and explicit reflection on, this practice: after his graduation at Rostock, Lilienthal promptly returned to his base in Königsberg, where he worked from first-hand experience on his *Habilitation* disputation on the use and abuse of academic autograph alba, which would be printed and defended before the end of 1711, a year and a half after his Dutch tour.

This work, published as *Schediasma critico-Literarium de Philothecis varioque earundem usu & abusu* ('Critical and scholarly essay on friendship alba and their various uses and abuses'), contains several chapters analysing the origin, etymology, and history of the alba as well as, more interestingly, their contemporary practice and exploitation.³ Lilienthal was one of the main contributors to a new historiographical trend that is commonly called *historia literaria*, or history of the learned, which focused not only on the output of recent scholars, but also on their social lives and biographies. As a companion to his dissertation on alba, Lilienthal wrote a more extensive and general treatise, *De Machiavellismo Literario* ('On learned Machiavellianism'), which appeared in early 1713.⁴ Lilienthal coined the term 'literary Machiavellianism' to refer to the behaviour of some scholars who pursued glory and their own interests over and above the common good of the learned community, and regardless of morality.

As Sari Kivistö points out in her study of academic vices in early modern Europe, in a world mediated by print and the written word, an aspiring academic could boost his career prospects by dedicating a book to a wealthy patron, maintaining and publishing correspondence, and also by visiting a famous individual, thus showing he was an accepted member of the learned community.⁵ David S. Lux and Harold J. Cook have also drawn

³ Lilienthal, *Schediasma critico-Literarium*.

⁴ Lilienthal, *De Machiavellismo Literario*, esp. 45-47 for the thematic continuity between this work and the *Schediasma*.

⁵ Kivistö, *The vices of learning*, 91. Kivistö analyses in great detail the theory of academic vices present in Lilienthal's work and his contemporaries.

attention to this phenomenon, albeit from a different perspective. According to them, weak ties, that is, cordial yet shallow acquaintances with distant scholars, were crucial to the validation and approval of an unknown third party in the early modern world of learning. Furthermore, it was not only a person's academic credentials that were at stake, but the credibility of empirical reports was unavoidably linked to their own persona and status.⁶ This early modern marriage of social and epistemological status had been dubbed as a 'moral economy' by various historians of science.⁷ Yet, this trust-based hierarchy was vulnerable to freeloaders and fakes, who took advantage of the distant and mediated character of learned life for their own benefit.⁸ In Lilienthal's own words, there were some Machiavellian scholars who, 'as people say, are known [only] by association, since they are unknown by their merits; amassing trust, they flaunt their friendship with eminent men, whom they barely saw once and usurped this license, everywhere in conversation and in writing'.⁹

Here lies the common note between literary Machiavellianism and the practice of compiling academic autograph alba; having one's album signed by eminent professors opened the possibility to benefit from the inference that if established scholars had committed their names to the album owner, then he must be trustworthy. Lilienthal writes of a certain 'magnetic virtue' of alba in transmitting the qualities of the inscribers to the owner that was essential for their success.¹⁰ Naturally, this does not mean that Lilienthal considered that all collectors of alba necessarily were Machiavellian grifters; even when an album might help an aspiring scholar's prospects, this benefit could be well-deserved. We must remember that he himself engaged enthusiastically in this practice. Besides attesting a connection with learned people, be it legitimate or phoney, Lilienthal distinguished other benefits and potential abuses of alba. For one thing, they served as scholarly icebreakers that allowed one to strike up a conversation, but they might also remind the owner to imitate the example of learned inscribers, or could bring solace and inspiration in case of need.¹¹ On the other side of the spectrum, 'debauched students' had the habit of bothering eminent professors for their signatures while travelling. As an example of disrespectful behaviour by album collectors, Lilienthal denounces 'those who, when they want to indulge in a drinking bout, swiftly pick up their alba and, on account of the names from beginning to the end of the booklet, chuck down an equal number of wine cups to the health of the inscribers in the

6 Lux and Cook, 'Closed Circles or Open Networks?'

7 For a historiographical overview and an analysis of this concept, see Daston, 'The Moral Economy of Science', 2-24. The notion of a moral economy was introduced as a term of art in modern historiography by Thompson, 'Moral Economy of the English Crowd'.

8 Different ways of exploiting the loopholes of the international learning community have been masterfully studied in Goldgar, *Impolite Learning*.

9 Lilienthal, *De Machiavellismo*, 45: 'Alii, in vulgatum illud: noscitur ex socio, qui non cognoscitur ex se, fiduciam collocantes, ubivis & in sermonibus, & scriptis suis amicitiam cum viris clarissimis hic vel alibi contractam crepant, quos tamen vix semel vidisse & usurpasse concessum fuit.'

10 Lilienthal, *Schediasma critico-Literarium*, 42.

11 Lilienthal, *Schediasma critico-Literarium*, 38-48.

Greek style'.¹² Besides these excesses, another common vice, according to Lilienthal, was vainglory: 'No lesser evil to autographical endeavours is caused by those adulators who anxiously try to fill up their alba to the brim with signatures of scholars, so that when they return to their homelands, they can vainly show off.'¹³ More creative shenanigans include interweaving existing inscriptions with obscene and pornographic pictures and adding syllables and letters to existing inscriptions to swerve their meaning into spicy or absurd territories. It is clear from this list of misdemeanours that Lilienthal had a clear profile of so-called 'Machiavellian' album owners in mind: students in their early twenties at the end of their studies, who performed their masculinity through dissolution and obscene humour, who were wealthy enough to afford both the expenses of travel and university, and who were highly Latinate and educated in the classics.¹⁴

The Introduction of Academic Alba in the Dutch Republic

Scholarship on autograph alba unanimously traces back the origins of this practice to sixteenth-century German universities, in particular Wittenberg, and the early Reformation circles. The appearance and spread of inscription alba were part of a complex convergence of different socio-economic, intellectual, and cultural factors. The well-established late medieval genre of armorials – heraldic compilations showing the coat of arms of noble families arranged according to different systems – and the use of mottos and blazon poetry, as can be found in matriculation alba of universities, foreshadowed some key features of the academic inscription album.

Yet it might not be self-evident how these noble practices found their way into academic settings, besides the influence of Luther's social circle, and into Dutch universities. A likely explanation is the sweeping demographic changes experienced by Western European universities. The end of the fifteenth and especially the sixteenth century saw a disruption of previously stable social patterns in higher education. Medieval universities in the Holy Roman Empire were largely a societal community; that is to say, while they were not a democratic equalizer bridging the social differences of their members, academics were a distinct group that largely replicated general male social patterns. In this sense, the ratio of nobility (*nobiles*) to affluent (*divites*) and poor students (*pauperes*) roughly equated to that in the general population.¹⁵ Naturally, there was some variation in the composition, depending on the academic disciplines on offer – law being favoured by nobility, while a broad offering in the letters attracted poorer students – and the student facilities and

12 Lilienthal, *Schediasma critico-Literarium*, 73: 'Sunt enim qui, cum computationibus indulgere volunt, Album suum praesto adesse iubent, & pro numero nominum, a capite libri ad calcem usque extantium, totidem scyphos in sanitatem inscriptorum graeco more evacuant.'

13 Lilienthal, *Schediasma critico-Literarium*, 51: 'Nec minus iniqui sunt rei Philothecariae aestumatores; qui album suum eum unice in finem autographis Eruditorum locupletare anxie student, ut, ad patrios reversi lares, habeant de quo gloriari inepte, possint.'

14 Youthful masculinities in a Dutch university setting have been recently studied by Roberts, *Sex and drugs*.

15 Schwinges, 'On Recruitment in German Universities', 207-209.

accommodation available.¹⁶ This started to change around 1500: while in preceding centuries the student body was also recruited from the poorer layers of society, universities became increasingly aristocratic, both in the sense that enrolment became the norm for the nobility, gentry, and high bourgeoisie, and because ennoblement by office (nobility of the robe) was a possibility for the urban bourgeoisie, while their distance from lower social stations widened. Financial aid for poor students decreased as demand rose for learned chancellors, jurists, and clerks running the increasingly intricate state bureaucracies. By 1600, at least half of the student corps in German universities was composed of noblemen. In particular, the *peregrinatio academica*, a staple of academic life in previous centuries, had become the prerogative of oligarchs. For instance, almost three quarters of all German students of law in Bologna were explicitly inscribed as noblemen, and it is likely that untitled gentry lionised the remaining percentage.¹⁷ Through this process, certain aristocratic practices – such as martial and courtly training, as well as the presence of family arms in the inscription books of the different *nationes* – increased their currency in academic settings, and either progressively overtook or merged with existing monastic and clerical traditions.

The introduction of alba into Dutch academia was a product of its constant interaction with the larger Germanic context. The generation of scholars that became the first cohort of staff to be hired by Leiden University after its foundation in 1575, and Franeker University ten years later, had either studied at Louvain, the only university in the Low Countries, or at neighbouring German universities, such as Cologne and Heidelberg. When Netherlanders travelled abroad to universities in northern Italy and France, they were housed with other members of the *natio germanica*, Paris being the preferred location.¹⁸ Indeed, an overview of the inscriptions in Dutch alba dated before 1575 makes clear that the most common locations for inscriptions were Paris, Douai, Orléans, Wittenberg, and Heidelberg. In this sense, the habitus and ethos of German scholarship was present from the inception of institutionalized higher learning in the Dutch Republic. Equally important, the presence of German students and professors was remarkably high in Dutch universities, particularly at the beginning of the seventeenth and again at the turn of the eighteenth century, and the flow of touring students from the Empire, like Lilienthal himself, was persistent through most of the century – they were especially attracted to institutions like Harderwijk University and the Deventer Illustrious School, where a sizable section of the teaching body was German.¹⁹

Due to the widespread appeal of keeping an album for an aspiring German academic, it is worth considering whether this practice was fully adopted in the Dutch Republic. Indeed, how was the academic album used in the Dutch Republic? Did this practice have currency throughout the century? Did alba catch on amongst Dutch students, or did they remain a foreign tradition? Were alba devices for self-fashioning and Machiavellian career

¹⁶ Ridder-Symoens, 'Rich Men, Poor Men', 154.

¹⁷ Schwinges, 'The Repertorium Academicum Germanicum (RAG)'; Schwinges, 'Zur Prosopographie studentischer Reisegruppen'.

¹⁸ As an illustrative example, see Ridderikhoff and Ridder-Symoens (eds.), *Livres des procureateurs*.

¹⁹ Bots, 'Harderwijker professoren', 61; Slee, *Illustre School te Deventer*, 14–23.

advancement? Is it possible to reconstruct a hierarchy of respect for professors in Dutch universities, based on how often they were asked to sign alba? All of these questions are ill-suited for case-based research but can be fruitfully approached by examining numerical trends.

Methodological Considerations

Academic alba amicorum are considerably more homogenous and numerous than other types of alba, in terms of language use (predominantly Latin and Biblical languages), gender, age, status, and professional orientation of inscribers.²⁰ This homogeneity, together with the fact that academics are one of the best documented professional groups in early modern Europe, with biographical information readily accessible through prosopographical datasets, secondary literature, and biographical dictionaries, makes it possible to approach these questions meaningfully through a quantitative lens. In order to do so, I have relied on two digital union catalogues that include inscription-level descriptions of alba: the union catalogue of the Dutch National Library (Koninklijke Bibliotheek, hereafter KB) and the Repertorium Alborum Amicorum (hereafter RAA), both of which draw upon pre-existing compilation efforts. The KB album catalogue contains data on all their holdings, indexing each individual contribution to an album, with information on the date, inscriber's name, and place of inscription, if available. The RAA catalogue is the largest worldwide collection of alba, also encompassing the KB catalogue and uniting the holdings of research libraries and private collections.²¹

As is the case with any quantitative approach to cultural phenomena, both methodology and intent must be made explicit. I have worked with these data with the sole purpose of conducting this analysis, not with the intention of enhancing the catalogues and identifying all the inscribers. To this effect I used a series of ready-made clustering formulas in Open Refine, as well as a fair share of manual work to standardise the textual information provided in the raw catalogues, making sure that the same string of characters refers only to a single historical actor – with the exception of unknown individuals, who are all referred to by 'N.N.'²² In this sense, I did not use a numeric identification system, nor did I reconcile the names against an external authority file – which would arguably be best practice, albeit unrealistically slow for the purpose of research – but simply sought self-consistency in the textual labels of the indexed alba for any identifiable inscriber that surpasses a threshold of five inscriptions in alba owned by different people. Thus, we can

²⁰ Schnabel, *Das Stammbuch*, 336.

²¹ These two datasets, and detailed descriptions of their content, are accessible at <https://www.kb.nl/bronnen-zoekwijzers/kb-collecties/moderne-handschriften-vanaf-ca-1550/alba-amicorum> and <https://raa.gf-franken.de/de/startseite.html> (Accessed February 2020). This analysis reflects the data as available in February 2020 and does not take into consideration later additions.

²² An overview of this software and the workings of the clustering algorithms is available in Open Refine's online documentation and a series of entry level peer-reviewed tutorials are available at the Programming Historian website. See also Hooland, Verborgh, and De Wilde, 'Cleaning Data with OpenRefine'.

leave aside a long list of inscribers of fewer alba who, despite how interesting they might be from a qualitative point of view, are not relevant for the purpose of this article. Due to this process, and despite holding to high standards, it is perhaps wise to estimate a ten to fifteen percent margin of error in respect to an idealised clean version of the dataset.

At the same time, one must take into consideration the intrinsic survivor bias of these data. On the one hand, the extant alba compiled by the KB catalogue might not necessarily be a representative sample. On the other hand, due to their portable nature many alba of Dutch relevance are absent from the KB collection, while vice versa some alba that have only a cursory relationship to the Dutch Republic do feature in this dataset. This is alleviated by the inclusion of data from the RAA with regards to foreign students travelling in the Dutch Republic. All in all, this possible misrepresentation is not unlike that presented by the close reading of a small set of sources and should not compromise the working conclusions of this essay.

General Trends

Kees Thomassen and Chris Heesakkers were instrumental in the cataloguing of alba held in Dutch institutions, publishing an authoritative bibliography of 1080 alba as early as 1986.²³ They provided an updated overview of their work four years later, in the edited volume *Alba Amicorum*, which remains the most authoritative academic overview of this topic. At that point, their bibliography contained about 1330 discrete album entries, of which some sixty-five percent were owned by Dutch people and the rest by foreign travellers. In a breakdown of the number of alba per decade, they found that there was a clear peak of activity in the period 1590-1620 (fig. 1). These decades coincide with the consolidation and growth of Leiden University, as well as the conflict between Arminians and Gomarists at the Synod of Dordrecht, which Thomassen and Heesakkers identify as the major factors behind this peak.²⁴ While their dataset contained alba that do not belong to an academic context – some ten percent of these alba belonged to noblewomen, for example – the vast majority belonged to students.²⁵

When calculating the number of discrete dated inscriptions, rather than the alba as a whole, using the dataset of the alba amicorum in the KB collection (fig. 2; as of April 2021), it is evident that the patterns Thomassen and Heesakkers identified still hold up, and that overall, the number of alba reflect quite accurately the variations in number of inscriptions. Indeed, as Thomassen and Heesakkers found, there seems to be a peak of activity in the period 1590-1620, followed by an acute decrease mid-century, and a mild upturn in the early eighteenth century.

Furthermore, the KB dataset seems to accurately reflect wider European trends, as the second half of the seventeenth century's dramatic decrease also features in a diachronic visualisation of the dated inscriptions in the RAA catalogue (fig. 3; taking into consideration that

²³ Thomassen and Heesakkers, *Voorlopige lijst van alba amicorum*.

²⁴ Heesakkers and Thomassen, 'Het album amicorum in de Nederlanden', 14-15.

²⁵ On the female alba, see Delen, 'Vrouwenalba'.

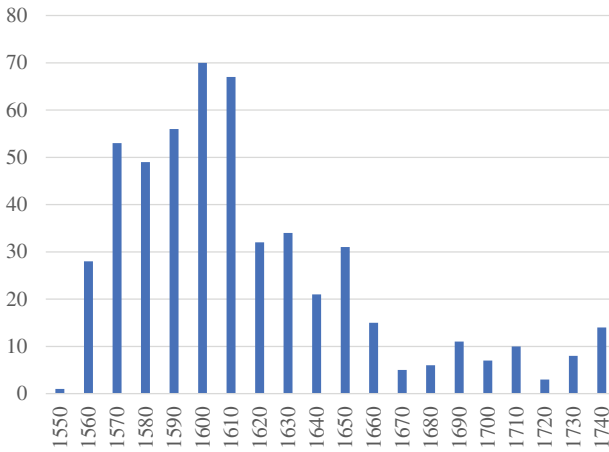


Fig. 1 Number of alba amicorum held in Dutch institutions, 1550-1740. Source: Thomassen and Heesakkers, 'Het album amicorum in de Nederlanden'.

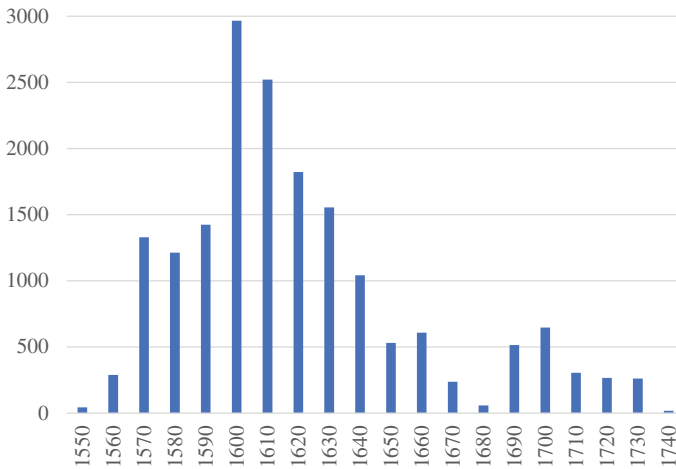


Fig. 2 Number of inscriptions in alba amicorum from the KB dataset, 1550-1740. Source: KB catalogue.

the KB data overlaps with twenty percent of this catalogue). It should be noted, however, that the RAA data indicate that the revival of alba at the beginning of the eighteenth century was somewhat livelier in the pan-European context than the alba in Dutch collections suggest.

What accounts for this sharp mid-century decrease in a large European context? The most likely factor was the Thirty Years' War, which prompted the closure of several institutions and dramatically affected student mobility, but also had lasting effects on the economic status of the Empire. The number of matriculations at the Reformed universities of Heidelberg, Marburg, Basel, Herborn, Duisburg, and Kassel plummeted during the conflict, which also took a toll on Lutheran and Catholic institutions.²⁶ The fact that the overall inscription

26 Hotson, 'Catchment Areas and Killing Fields', 144, 168.

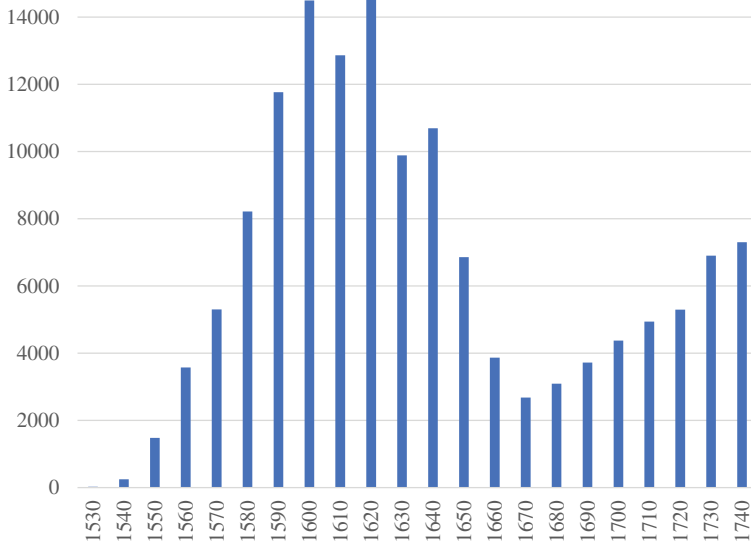


Fig. 3 Dated inscriptions in European alba amicorum, 1530-1740.

Source: RAA catalogue.

patterns of the Dutch Republic coincide with the larger German context suggests, therefore, that the explanatory role of the new Dutch universities and the Synod of Dordrecht have been overemphasized. While both events certainly had repercussions in the Reformed international community, they cannot provide a compelling explanation for the fluctuations in the German-speaking sphere in keeping an album. Instead, we can propose a more likely explanation for this diachronic variation: while the practice of alba gained traction as the sixteenth century progressed, it was already running out of steam by the turn of the seventeenth century, when it was dramatically disturbed by the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War and its impact on German academia. The practice of inscribing alba never recovered its past popularity, although it experienced a mild revival that coincided with the institutionalisation of new academic practices, such as the creation of royal academies and learned journals, as well as the self-reflective episode in the history of scholarship known as *historia literaria*, when scholars became increasingly interested in the learned community as such, and German universities regained their prestige on the European stage.²⁷

Magnetic Professors: Inscriptions in Dutch University Towns

In order to narrow down the data to a sample that reflects the inscribing practices of Dutch academia – and thus excluding other kinds of alba as much as possible – I have selected a

²⁷ Syndikus, 'Die Anfänge der Historia literaria', 3-36.

representative sample. This is composed of all the dated and explicitly located inscriptions made in the five leading academic towns – Leiden, Franeker, Utrecht, Groningen, and Harderwijk – as found in the RAA dataset. While other institutions, such as the Atheneum Illustre of Amsterdam, also played an important role in the intellectual life of the Republic, its cosmopolitan setting hosted a large variety of cultural activities and industries which did not necessarily revolve around the universities. By limiting the scope of the sample to mid-sized university towns, the population is limited to inscribers that did not meet accidentally, or in non-academic circumstances, thus giving further significance to the fact that a travelling student or colleague visited them.

The sample is composed of 139 alba, of which only 29 were owned by Dutchmen. Of these, nineteen were students who compiled some inscriptions in the Dutch Republic in their early twenties, often at the starting point of a foreign trip, and went on to pursue careers: Pieter Nuyts, Johan van Nypoort, Johan van Heemskerck, Johannes Rhala, Homme van Harinxma thoe Slooten jr. and sr., Harmen Jarghes, Everhardus Avercamp, Theodorus Eyssnius, Petrus Keuchenius, Allardus Tamminga, Hans van Wijckel, Otto Keye, Samuel Emmius, Johan van de Poele, Phillip Baldaeus, Sixtus Brunsvelt, Johannes Honingh, and Jodocus Cotton. None of these men pursued an academic career; rather, they formed a diverse group of students from the high bourgeoisie and the middling classes, who eventually became preachers, physicians, military men, and civil magistrates, although it also included two members of the noble Harinxma thoe Slooten family from Frisia.

Besides them, there are eight cases of album owners who did develop a career in academia in later life. Johannes Isaac Pontanus, who would eventually become a professor in the illustrious school of Harderwijk, kept his album amicorum while accompanying three young students (all members of Tycho Brahe's family) on their Grand Tour. Everardus Balck kept his album during his studies in French universities and his short career as a lecturer in law at the university of Bourges. He was briefly appointed as a professor in Harderwijk's illustrious school before his early death in 1628. Robertus Keuchenius also kept an album in his early twenties, before his appointment as a professor in the illustrious school of Amsterdam, as did Samuel Tennulius, who was employed by the illustrious school of Nijmegen. Tennulius's son in law, Johann Friedrich Gronovius, kept an album while travelling through Western Europe, and eventually obtained a chair in Deventer before being appointed professor in the university of Leiden. The remaining two album owners, Jacobus Alting and Marcus Pels, became professors at the university of Groningen.

Lastly, there are three cases of men close to academia who nonetheless never held a professorial chair. Arnoldus Buchelius, a well-known diarist and antiquarian, kept one album during his time as a student, and another in his later life. While he was never attached to an educational institution, he was a well-known scholar in his time. Two other men with connections to academia, but no official position, and who also kept alba, are Janus Dousa and Jan van Hout, who were associated with the defence of Leiden during its famous siege as well as with the foundation of its university, of which Dousa was curator. Both of these alba have received careful scholarly attention and have been published as facsimiles.²⁸

²⁸ Heesakkers, *Een netwerk*; Heesakkers, *Het Vruntbuuc*; Tournoy, 'Some observations'.

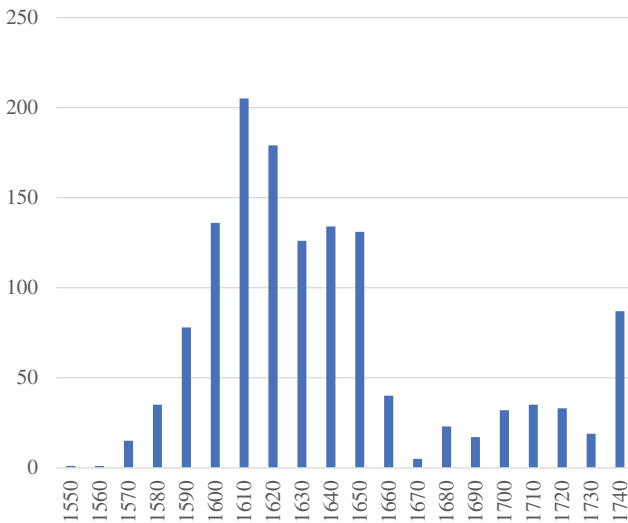


Fig. 4 Number of dated inscriptions in alba amicorum in the university towns of Leiden, Franeker, Utrecht, Groningen, and Harderwijk, 1550-1740.

Source: RAA catalogue.

For the rest, the dataset contains inscriptions in four alba owned by Huguenot and Walloon students, three by Swedes, and one by a Transylvanian student. The remaining ninety-three alba were all owned by students from the German lands, mostly in their early twenties, who were travelling in the Dutch Republic as part of a larger Western European tour, typically comprising England and/or France. In this sense, the Dutch tour of Michael Lilienthal described at the beginning of this essay is fairly illustrative of the average album.

Together, these alba contain a total of 1666 inscriptions spread over two centuries. As shown in fig. 4, the diachronic distribution of inscriptions does not follow all the patterns described above. The noted decrease of alba during the Thirty Years' War is less pronounced here, which may hint at a larger volume of German students opting to study in the Dutch Republic during this period. In fact, more alba were inscribed at mid-century – after the Illustrious Schools of Utrecht and Harderwijk had been promoted to universities with *ius promovendi* – than during the first decades after the foundation of Leiden and Franeker. The decline during the second half of the century is still present, however, as is the mild resurgence at the turn of the eighteenth century, following the overall European trends – which should not be a surprise, given that most of these album keepers were based in the Empire, not in the Dutch Republic.

The predominance of German album owners offers a compelling answer to the question as to whether academic alba ever caught on in Dutch academia: it seems that the keeping of academic alba remained a primarily German practice, one taken up by Dutchmen only incidentally. In the five universities mentioned, a total of 14,430 students graduated before 1750, of which 2,965 came from the Holy Roman Empire (20.5 percent of the total, most of whom graduated from Utrecht and Harderwijk), and 10,281 were native to the Dutch Republic (71 percent).²⁹ Yet German students owned eighty-five percent of all alba signed

²⁹ Frijhoff, *La société néerlandaise*, 379-382. Calculation based on the appendices in this book.

in Dutch university towns, while Dutchmen only held a negligible nine percent. While it was common practice to matriculate and graduate at foreign universities as part of one's tour – in fact, some universities infamously specialised in issuing titles on demand and after payment – it might be argued that the volume of German visiting students who did not graduate from any university was higher. Although this might indeed have been the case, it is under no circumstances reasonable to suppose that the number of unrecorded travelling foreign students would be significantly higher than thirty percent of the student population. Also, one of the reasons why Dutch students did not ask for inscriptions in their home universities may well have been that they kept their alba to be signed by foreign scholars. While recording one's tour was certainly one of the main uses of an album, this is not the case in German academic alba, which also record the professorial corps of their different home institutions, to be used as a letter of presentation later in their journey, and indeed this is the case for the Dutch academic alba that feature in this sample. Moreover, the domestic mobility between institutions within the Dutch Republic was high, thus making the practice of collecting the autographs of renowned scholars in each institution presumably appealing.

All things considered, the practice of academic alba for career advancement – in the sense described by Lilienthal – did not take root firmly in the Dutch Republic. It seems that in general, when scholars based in the Dutch Republic kept an album, they did so for other purposes than to further their academic career, for instance to keep a travelogue, a list of visitors (as is the case for the books present in the cabinet of curiosities of Bernardus Paludanus in Enkhuizen, and Nicolas Chevalier in Utrecht), or a professional network (as in the case of Janus Dousa and Ernst Brinck).³⁰ There are a few instances of alba in the KB catalogue that belonged to men that pursued a university career in the Republic. The common denominator among these album owners was their international profile. Pontanus had strong ties to Denmark, Tennulius started his career as a professor in Steinfurt, Balck developed his career in France, while Kuchenius's father was a German immigrant close to the Elector Palatine, as was the father of Alting, who was himself born in Heidelberg. Gronovius and Pels were both German. Besides them, to my knowledge the only other extant album of a professor in the Dutch Republic belonged to the Fleming Bonaventura Vulcanius, now held in the Belgian Royal Library.³¹ However, the long career of Vulcanius – he served as a secretary to two Spanish bishops before working as a corrector to humanist printers in Switzerland, eventually becoming the personal secretary of the mayor of Antwerp, before taking possession of his first chair in Leiden at age forty-three – is hardly illustrative of the average professorial career in the Dutch Republic.

Given the 'magnetic virtue' of the alba in transferring the merits of the inscriber to the album owner, the fact that some Dutch scholars inscribed more alba of travelling German students allows an exploration of the status or social capital of professors as perceived by their contemporaries, as well as their willingness to vouch for relatively unknown students to increase the currency of their own name. In the sample, 501 inscriptions (30 percent) were made by professors, while 126 fellow students (7.5 percent) gave their autographs,

30 Snoep, "Virtus post Nummos"; Wijk, 'Het Album amicorum van Bernardus Paludanus'.

31 Roersch, 'L'Album Amicorum de Bonaventure Vulcanius'.

Tab. 1 Contributors of five or more inscriptions in alba amicorum in Leiden, Franeker, Groningen, Utrecht, and Harderwijk.

Professor	University	Faculty	Inscriptions
Daniel Heinsius (1580-1655)	Leiden	Arts	35
Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641)	Leiden/Groningen	Theology	13
Samuel Maresius (1599-1673)	Groningen	Theology	11
Adolph Vorstius (1597-1663)	Leiden	Medicine	12
Matthias Pasor (1599-1658)	Groningen	Arts/Theology	10
Johannes Polyander van Kerckhoven (1568-1646)	Leiden	Theology	12
Petrus Cunaeus (1586-1638)	Leiden	Arts/Law	7
Bonaventura Vulcanius (1538-1614)	Leiden	Arts	11
Carolus Clusius (1526-1609)	Leiden	Medicine	8
Everardus Bronckhorst (1554-1627)	Leiden	Law	6
Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609)	Leiden	Arts	9
Joachimus Borgesius (1625-1666)	Groningen	Arts	6
Johannes Steinbergius (1592-1653)	Groningen	Law	6
Aelius Everhardus Vorstius (1598-1624)	Leiden	Medicine	6
Bernhard Albinus (1653-1721)	Leiden	Medicine	6
G.J. Vossius (1577-1649)	Leiden	Theology	7
Joannes Georgius Graevius (1632-1703)	Utrecht	Arts	5
Marcus Zuerius Boxhornius (1612-1653)	Leiden	Arts	5
Sibrandus Lubbertus (1555-1625)	Franeker	Theology	6
Thomas Erpenius (1584-1624)	Leiden	Arts	7
Tobias Andreae (1604-1676)	Groningen	Arts	5

Source: RAA catalogue.³²

explicitly stating that they were students at the time. This leaves sixty percent of inscriptions without an explicit function of the inscriber, but it is safe to assume that the bulk of these were by fellow students, and a small number by private French and fencing teachers, local magistrates, university printers and other personalities associated with university life. The fact that we lack further information on many such inscribers makes it difficult to assess the precise percentage of students who inscribed an album. Yet, the practice of latinising one's name, the fact that they were not professors employed by Dutch universities, and that many did include their patronyms as part of the inscription (largely German, but also Scandinavian and Eastern European locations) warrants the conclusion that the actual ratio of inscriptions by professors and students in the dataset was probably between thirty and sixty-five percent, leaving a small percentage of inscriptions at the hands of other individuals, such as those listed above.

Out of the 315 professors that inscribed their names in alba, tab. 1 shows the ones who did so on five or more occasions, which represents one third of the inscriptions made by professors. The table includes the institution and faculty they were employed at the time of inscription. This uneven distribution suggests that these professors were deemed more popular by their students. Remarkably, the most prolific professors were employed by Leiden University, and belonged to its second generational cohort. In addition, some

³² The original analysis of a reconciled version of the database in 2019 has been updated during the review process with the kind collaboration of the RAA reflecting the state of their database as of April 2022, that has had numerous updates.

eminent Groningen professors, such as Samuel Maresius and Matthias Pasor, also attracted sizeable number of students. The signatures of famous philologists were particularly sought after; those of Contra-Remonstrant theologians and professors in medicine came second. By comparison, professors of law are virtually absent. These proportions do not correlate with the diplomas obtained by foreign students. Medicine and law were their preferred degrees, representing fifty-two and forty-two percent of the total number of graduations respectively.³³ Overall, it seems that the scholars featuring in this ranking had reached a canonical status and attracted autograph collectors, although certain famous professors who already had a considerable international reputation, such as André Rivet, Gijbert Voetius, and Hermann Boerhaave, only inscribed a small number of alba.

Conclusion

We can draw several conclusions from the trends studied above. Academic alba remained at large a German practice in the Dutch Republic. German students would carry the signatures of Dutch professors – together with others signed in France and in different German states – back home, but overall, very few Dutch students asked for inscriptions within the Dutch Republic, and they did not seem to have played a major role in the domestic projection of a Dutch scholar's importance. Most academic alba signed in Dutch universities were kept by travelling students from the Holy Roman Empire and were largely a mixture of the keeper's cohort of alumni and some famous professors, whose research profile did not necessarily coincide with the degree pursued by the album owner. This practice reached its zenith at the beginning of the seventeenth century, both in the Dutch Republic and in the larger German sphere, when Dutch professors were asked to sign alba on numerous occasions, but remained relatively stable in Dutch universities, which were unaffected by the devastation wrought by the 'Thirty Years' War on German universities. By the end of the seventeenth century there was a mild resurgence of keeping an album amicorum – it was at this time that Michael Lilienthal toured the Dutch Republic with his album, and that at the end of his trip he published a tract outlining how students used and abused them. It is difficult to assess whether having signatures of famous Dutch professors helped German students to develop a scholarly career, but judging by the resilience of this practice and Lilienthal's own success – he developed a career in the local academy of sciences and the Church shortly after he returned to his hometown – it might have very well been the case.

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33 Frijhoff, *La société néerlandaise*, 381.

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