Privileges in Printmaking: The Reliability of Prints in the Early Modern Low Countries

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Abstract

The Low Countries became a centre of printmaking in the early modern period. Printmaking was a disruptive image-technology because it produced images as multiples on an unprecedented scale. With its success also came problems. One was that copying became a problem as it had not been before in the visual arts. This article discusses three approaches used by early modern printmakers to dealing with the problems presented by copying and the fact that prints came in multiples. The first was to acquire privileges as legal protection against copying. Privileges are usually seen as the predecessors of copyright, but here it is argued that this is only part of the story and that they also served as a claim of reliability. A second approach was to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the fact that prints came in multiples, and to produce images as efficiently as possible, in effect endlessly copying the same images. A third approach was to purposefully ignore the technological possibilities of printmaking and instead produce small print runs or slightly different states of one image. These approaches, it is argued, were related both to technological possibilities and to changing ideas about the (visual) arts, showing how the meanings of concepts such as 'invention' and 'skill' were shifting at this time.

Keywords: printmaking, privileges, technology, skill, invention, liberal arts, fine arts

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The early modern Low Countries were a hotbed of printmaking. Printmaking was a disruptive image-technology, making it possible for the first time to produce large numbers – hundreds or thousands of prints from a single copperplate or woodblock – of almost identical images, or multiples.[1] The large print runs led to cheaper images and the images were relatively easily distributed across Europe because they were lightweight.[2] With the success of prints – multiples and easy distribution – came problems of copying. As hundreds or even thousands of images could be produced from a single matrix (woodblock or copperplate), the original printmakers found themselves in a position where they could neither control their income from a piece of work, nor could they control the quality once an image was copied. As a result, both their income and their reputations could suffer.[3]

In early modern Europe, copying was not illegal. But with the advent of the printing press, it did not take long for legal conflicts concerning copying to appear.[4] This article discusses privileges in printmaking in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Low Countries as one way of dealing with copying practices. Privileges were difficult to attain and even more difficult to enforce. Privileges, which were granted by the ruling authority and involved a monopoly on the production and sale of a particular print in a particular territory for a number of years, were an attempt to use the rule of law to prevent copying. As such, printing privileges are habitually seen as the precursors of copyright, but this was only part of the story. Instead, privileges in printmaking frequently served as a claim of reliability. Such claims might relate to content (that the images were 'true' or 'eye-witness')

1 Ivins, *Prints*; Van der Stock, *Printing Images*; Pon, *Copying*; Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching*. This article was supported in part by the ERC project *Before Copyright* (ERC, BE4COPY, 101042034), funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. The article was also funded by the Research Foundation Flanders for the project *Printing Images in the Early Modern Low Countries. Patents, Copyrights, and the Separation of Art and Technology* (FWO: 1214223N). I would like to thank Koenraad Jonckheere and Jessie Wei-Hsuan Chen, as well as all the participants of the workshop in Oslo in May 2023, for their constructive comments.

2 Pon, *Copying*, 7.

3 Hyman, 'Michael Snijders's Copious Copies', 593.

4 Most famously Dürer's case in Nuremberg: Pon, *Copying*, 140.

or to form (an image of 'good quality' approved by the original printmaker, rather than a 'bad' copy). The affirmation of reliability through printing privileges can be seen as a form of patronage and was closely linked to ideas about 'invention' and 'skill' and what it meant to be a good image-maker. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, ideas about invention and skill were determined by the ideals of the 'liberal arts'.

Most prints were published without a privilege. But there were other ways of dealing with copying. One was to fully embrace prints as multiples and focus on efficiency: producing large numbers of cheap images at low cost. This was almost a modern, industrial-type strategy defined by economies of scale and guided by principles of quantity over quality. Or, at the other end of the spectrum, a printmaker might deliberately ignore the efficiency of the printing press and produce small editions or slightly different states of an image by one and the same person (no division of labour between the designer and the maker of the matrix), creating rare editions in a sense. In this latter approach, we see the contours of the rising ideals of the 'fine arts'. Privileges served no real function in either situation, so their acquisition in these cases was rare. The problem of copying was avoided by simply being the cheapest producer in the first instance; or in the second instance by emphasising the quality and rarity of the 'original'.[5]

Printmaking practices dealing with copying and prints as multiples were linked to changing ideas about art in the Netherlands. In printmaking, the opportunity of multiples meant that the effective input of the image-maker per image produced dropped dramatically. In other words, the 'invention' (composition) of the designer and the 'skill' of the woodcutter, engraver, or etcher, however important, were limited to a small part of the production process. Copied prints raised even more questions, as the 'invention' was easily stolen, and the 'skill' involved could be poor. Art theorists in the Low Countries and elsewhere in Europe struggled to determine the status of woodcuts, engravings, and etchings, and to place them in their scheme of the 'liberal arts'.

In what follows, a broad range of printmaking practices are discussed in connection to art theory from the Low Countries.[6] By looking at printmaking in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries alongside art theory from the same period and into the eighteenth, we can see that fundamental changes were taking place in thinking about the art of printmaking. Moreover, these changes revolved around the changing status of 'invention' and 'skill' impelled by the differing roles in printmaking and demanded by the fact that prints came in multiples.

Changing ideas about invention and skill are crucially important to explain the changes in human making or production leading up to the Industrial Revolution.[7] Traditionally,

5 There were also very practical approaches to dealing with copying competitors, such as 'eye-for-an-eye' or collegial consultation. However, these had more to do with collegial revenge or gentlemen's agreements and less so with changing ideas about invention and skill, or claims of reliability.

6 There is little attention for the differences between cities in the Northern and Southern Netherlands. In some cities, for instance, woodcutters, engravers, and etchers belonged to the artists' guild of St. Luke, while in other cities to the guild of printers or booksellers: Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching*, 75-79.

7 De Munck, 'Artisans as Knowledge Workers'. Economic historian Deirdre McCloskey argued that it was 'bourgeois values', while Joel Mokyr argued that it was the combination of 'propositional knowledge' and 'prescriptive knowledge' (what we would call science and technology). Although I agree that changing ideas and values were indeed crucial, this essay argues that specifically ideas about the 'arts' (human making) eventually led to the two separate domains of 'fine arts' and 'technology' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

the Industrial Revolution is situated in eighteenth-century England, where the mechanisation of the production process precipitated the so-called 'deskilling' of artisans. The alienated factory worker of the nineteenth century is, in this reading, opposed to the medieval and early modern artisan. But this view has been adjusted in the last decades: on the one hand, deskilling happened much earlier because of a division of labour in some crafts (not just in mechanised sectors), on the other hand artisanal skills remained of key importance during much of the Industrial Revolution, even up to the twentieth century. Likewise, the old idea of the victory of capital over craft is not sufficient to explain what happened.[8] We ought instead look to the changing status of the arts – and the concomitant changes in the concepts such as 'skill' and 'invention' – which were related to new ways of knowing and new schemes of knowledge in the early modern period.[9] Printmaking is an exemplary art for tracking these changes.

Printmaking as a Liberal Art: Lampsonius and Van Mander

In the Low Countries, the rise of printmaking coincided with the publication of the first art theoretical works. Research on early modern Italy and France has shown that new art theoretical concepts were vital catalysts to the rise of print copyright.[10] As Katie Scott has argued for early modern France, 'those concepts were not inspiration, expression and imagination, characteristic of Romanticism, but rather emulation, imitation and invention, central to the humanistic theory of art'.[11] Christopher Witcombe has noted that the situation in early modern Italy 'raises questions about attitudes towards originality and invention, about notions of artistic property, and about the rights of both artists and engravers'.[12] The Italian art theorist Vasari had little regard for printmaking and paid hardly any attention to printmaking in the first edition of his *Lives* in 1550 – a lacuna he sought to fill in his edition of 1568.[13] As Lisa Pon has argued, Vasari's broad description of printmaking 'reflected the still fluid status of the printmaker that Vasari struggled to reconcile with his conception of the figure of the artist as possessive author'.[14] There is little research on these issues for the Low Countries. In what follows, therefore, I trace the early ideas about printmaking in Dutch art theory in the works of Dominicus Lampsonius (who corresponded with Vasari) and Karel van Mander, both of whom considered printmaking to be a liberal art and a central art in the history of northern art.

8 De Munck, 'Artisans as Knowledge Workers'.

9 Long, *Technical Arts*; Van Berkel, 'The Dutch Republic'; Robberts, Schaffer, and Dear, *The Mindful Hand*; Smith, *Body of the Artisan*; Dupré, 'Artisanal Knowledge'.

10 Scott, *Becoming Property*, 17-20; Witcombe, *Copyright*, 10. See also Leuschner, 'Papal Printing Privilege'; Pon, *Copying*.

11 Scott, *Becoming Property*, 20.

12 Witcombe, *Copyright*, 10.

13 Pon, *Copying*, 137-139; Wouk, 'Introduction', 2. According to Witcombe, Vasari could no longer ignore the revolution in the production of printed images in 1568 (as compared to his first edition of the *Vite* in 1550): Witcombe, *Copyright*, 3.

14 Pon, *Copying*, 139.

Traditionally, art – or the Greek *techne*, the Latin *ars*, and the Dutch *const* – meant any human skill, any way of mastering the world.[15] The so-called 'vulgar arts' or 'mechanical arts' were those arts that involved payment and physical labour, which usually included painting and sculpture.[16] They were opposed to the intellectual 'liberal arts' that had been the basis of education from Antiquity through to the early modern period. An education in the liberal arts was the basis for further study and was not, in principle, designed to enable one to indulge in a trade and earn money. In Renaissance Italy, some humanists began to argue that painting, sculpture, and architecture were also part of the 'intellectual' liberal arts, based on the argument of 'design' or 'invention' (the intellectual process of devising a new composition).[17] Renaissance writers looked back to Antiquity in an attempt to find evidence of arguments that posited similarities between painting and poetry, for example, that suggested a higher status for the visual arts.[18]

In the Italian scheme of the liberal arts, printmaking never really achieved the same status as painting or sculpture. The situation was different in the Low Countries, where first Lampsonius and later Van Mander held printmaking in high esteem.[19] In the first substantial art-theoretical text published in the Low Countries, *Life of Lambert Lombart* (1565), Lampsonius devised a self-aware Netherlandish approach to art which attached a profound importance to printmaking.[20] In the print series *Pictorum aliquot celebrium Germaniae inferioris effigies* (Effigies of Several Famous Painters from the Low Countries), Lampsonius likewise praised modern engraving as being on par with painting. The *Effigies* was published in Antwerp in 1572 by Volckxen Diericx, widow of the printer-publisher Hieronymus Cock. Lampsonius and Cock had begun the project in 1565 and had it been published on time, it would have been one of the first and most ambitious portrait series of painters in Europe.[21] Lampsonius opened the *Effigies* with a dedicatory poem to Cock, in which he praised the late printer and his widow for raising the art of engraving to a high level.[22] The *Effigies*, with its combination of texts and portraits, advocated the union of mind and body, and of artistic practices as a form of knowledge, which, according to Joanna Woodall and Stephanie Porras, stood in contrast to the Italian view of a separation of mind and body.[23]

15 Kristeller, 'System of the Arts'; Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market*; Shiner, *Invention of Art*; Hurley, 'Fine Arts', 199-203; Hendriksen and Dupré, 'Mapping Technique'.

16 There may have been hierarchies between different 'vulgar arts' (ranging from cooking to shoemaking and painting), as well as a hierarchy of quality, but, as Larry Shiner has argued, a hierarchy is not an opposition, and all the arts were a combination of what we would call art and craft: Shiner, *Invention of Art*, 21.

17 Famously in the Italian Renaissance. In northern Europe, as argued in Smith, *Body of the Artisan*, artist-artisans were increasingly appreciated based upon their knowledge of nature (the depiction of nature, but also the manipulation of nature in workshops).

18 Shiner, *Invention of Art*, 14, 19-28.

19 In his best-selling book about the Low Countries, Guicciardini also expresses a high regard for engraving. He describes Lambert Lombard as a learned and wise man as well as an excellent painter and architect. Among his list of excellent men, he also mentions Lombard's pupil, Lambertus Suavius: Guicciardini, *Beschrijvinghe*, fols. 81r, 82r.

20 Wouk, 'Introduction', 1-3, 25-27.

21 Wouk, 'Introduction', 32.

22 Wouk, 'Introduction', 32; Lampsonius, *Effigies*, 108-109.

23 Woodall and Porras, *Netherlandish Canon*, 12.

Edward H. Wouk has argued that Lampsonius purposefully avoided using Vasari's term *disegno* in his writings. Lampsonius used the Greek term *graphice* to connote 'the visual arts', 'design', or 'picturing' in its stead.[24] He also applied the term to engraving in particular and suggested that *graphice* was associated with incising (e.g., on a tablet), implying that there was an ancient precedent to modern engraving (and thus linking the visual to the literary arts).[25] Moreover, Lampsonius argued that in ancient Greece *graphice* 'was considered to be the first in rank of the liberal arts' (next so sculpture), 'practiced by the freeborn' and 'by those of noble birth' – men who were educated and could devote 'themselves to art not so much for material gain but for an honest pleasure'.[26] In his biography of Lambert Lombard, Lampsonius time and again emphasises how Lombard sacrifices material wealth to the love of art. Using this *topos*, Lampsonius celebrates the ancient ideal of the liberal arts as distinct from the vulgarity of making money.[27]

It is sometimes unclear whether Lampsonius uses *graphice* in its more general meaning of 'design' or in its particular meaning of 'engraving', and this lack of clarity is significant. At some points in the text, depending on the translation, Lampsonius even seems to suggest that Lombard was himself able to engrave, and taught his pupils – most famously Hubert Goltzius (the numismatic, engraver, and printer-publisher who published Lampsonius's *Life of Lambert Lombard* and acquired a privilege for the publication) – to do so.[28] In the last pages of the text, Lampsonius writes about other pupils whom Lombard trained 'to draw and to engrave', in this case using the more literal term *incidendisque* for engraving. The same term is used again a page later when Lampsonius describes 'the correct methods of drawing and engraving that they [his pupils] had learned from Lombard'.[29] Today, Lombard is not known as an engraver, but perhaps some of those prints signed simply with 'Lamb. Lombard' – without using indicative terms for his precise role, such as *inv.* (*invenit*) for invented, or *sculps.* (*sculpsit*) for engraved – were, in fact, not only designed but also engraved by him (fig. 1).[30] This is highly speculative, but even if it were not the case, Lampsonius's lack of clarity as to whether Lombard was able to engrave copperplates himself or whether he had his inventions engraved by others is telling.[31] For Lampsonius, the precise distinction between these roles in printmaking was apparently not that important, and certainly not as important as the central point of his characterisation of Lombard as a knowledgeable artist who brought the Renaissance to the north, who followed the

24 Wouk, 'Introduction', 25-26.
25 Wouk, 'Introduction', 26.
26 Wouk, 'Introduction', 27. Lampsonius, *Lombard*, 84.
27 Wouk, 'Introduction', 26, 29; Lampsonius, *Lombard*, 88-89.
28 Lampsonius, *Lombard*, 79, 87, 90.
29 Lampsonius, *Lombard*, 92-93; Lampsonius, *Lombardi*, 35-36.
30 In *The Raising of Lazarus*, hieroglyphs are depicted on a tomb stone. Lampsonius praised Lombard for his collection of 'ancient statues, gems distinguished somehow for their carvings or hieroglyphs […] and ancient coins'. Lombard was also very knowledgeable about their meaning: Lampsonius, *Lombard*, 89.
31 Vasari mentions the many different roles involved in the production of prints: Pon, *Copying*, 139; Veldman, *Netherlandish Prints*, 34.

Fig. 1 Lambert Lombard and Hieronymus Cock (exc.), The Raising of Lazarus, *engraving, 28 × 35,7 cm, London, British Museum.*

examples set by Mantegna, Dürer, and Raphael with regards to putting 'their art in the public domain', and who stood at the roots of Antwerp's rise as a centre of copperplate engraving.[32]

In his *Schilderboeck* (1604), Karel van Mander gave 'pride of place' to prints because of their 'technical virtuosity and topical invention', according to Walter Melion.[33] Van Mander's claim about the development of northern visual art as distinct from Italian art is much like Lampsonius's. Though he claims to write about painting and the most famous painters, Van Mander devotes quite a lot of words to printmaking as well as glass painting, as he considers both to be visual arts based upon drawing, the basis of all liberal arts.[34] He has high regard for artists such as Lucas van Leyden and Hendrick Goltzius (describing each of them as '[an] excellent painter, engraver, and glass painter'). Van Mander even includes a figure such as Hubert Goltzius ('excellent painter, copperplate

32 Wouk, 'Introduction', 30; Lampsonius, *Lombard*, 90-92.

33 Melion, *Netherlandish Canon*, 104.

34 Van Mander originally intended to include separate sections on glass engraving, glass painting, copperplate engraving, and women painters. Due to time constraints, however, he included the best exponents of these arts in his biographies of northern painters: Melion, *Foundation*, 34, 51-52.

engraver, and history-writer'), even though he has little to say about his paintings, simply because he was a knowledgeable figure and thus in keeping with his ideal of the liberal arts.[35] Van Mander mentions Hubert's activities as a printer-publisher and his publication of a book with images of ancient medals – as well as the fact that he was a pupil of Lombard. As Melion has demonstrated, Van Mander viewed copper-engraving as complementary to painting.[36] For Van Mander, a print was not merely a reproduction but a form of art in and of itself, an object in dialogue with, rather than a slave to, the art of painting. Furthermore, and especially in relation to the development of northern art, Van Mander considered that the medium of print could innovate in its own right and influence the art of painting, seeing both arts in opposition to what he called 'vulgar manual labour'.[37] Like Lampsonius, he argued that both painting and printmaking are liberal arts.[38]

Van Mander also described the importance of prints to art history. He lists several artists, including Lucas Cranach, whom he knows as great artists because of their prints, not because of their paintings.[39] Van Mander mentions prints in about a fifth of his biographies of Netherlandish painters, which were generally the best-known artists.[40] This may be because the work of the most successful painters were most often published in print, but at least partly the saying 'publish or perish' also seems to be relevant to early modern visual art. Print was an efficient way to establish an artist's reputation, which was only further anchored within the canon of art history as time passed by. In Van Mander's biographies, most descriptions of prints start with the description of the topic or composition, followed by neutral terms that they have 'come out' in print (*uytgeghaen*, *uyt laten gaen*, or *uyt comen*), without making explicit if the designer also made the plate or woodblock. In some cases, he is very clear about who made the designs or plates, for instance in Maarten van Heemskerck's biography, who 'did not cut himself' and whose designs were engraved, among others, by the 'ingenious philosophical' Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert.[41] When the engraver, etcher, or woodcutter is mentioned, it is usually with words of high praise. So, while Van Mander sometimes distinguishes between the maker of the design and the maker of the matrix, he places neither in a position of superiority over the other. In those cases in which artists

35 Van Mander, *Schilder-boeck*, fol. 248v.

36 Melion, *Netherlandish Canon*, 102-104.

37 Van Mander, *Schilder-boeck*, fol. 3v: 'grove handt-wercken'. Vasari famously opposed the *buon disegno* of the prints of Marcantonio Raimondo to the technical mastery of northern printmakers. Needless to say, Vasari appreciated the *disegno* of the Italian much higher: Witcombe, *Copyright*, 7.

38 Van Mander even claimed that all liberal arts are based upon the visual art of drawing. Drawing is the 'nurse of all good arts and sciences', he noted, and the basis of language: Van Mander, *Schilder-boeck*, fol. 8v. See also Melion, *Foundation*, 79.

39 Van Mander, *Schilder-boeck*, fol. 204v.

40 In a few cases he only mentions the printed portraits of the artists that were published by his predecessor Lampsonius in the *Effigies*. Of the total 91 Italian painters, Van Mander mentions prints in 20 instances; of the total of 191 Dutch and German painters, he mentions prints in 40 cases.

41 Van Mander, *Schilder-boeck*, fol. 246v, 'hoewel Marten self niet en sneedt'; 'den vernuftigen Philosoophschen Dirick Volckersz. Coornhert'. Another example is the biography of Chistoffel Swarts: 'Van zijn inventie comen uyt, door Ioan Sadler ghesneden, verscheyden fraey Printen.' See Van Mander, *Schilder-boeck*, fol. 258r.

fulfilled both roles, such as Goltzius or Van Leyden, Van Mander praises their exceptional art (*const*) as engravers, but he put no real emphasis upon the fact that they had also produced the original design.[42]

Even though 'invention' was a crucial concept in the scheme of the liberal arts, Netherlandish art theorists like Lampsonius and Van Mander were full of praise for the exponents of the manual skill of engraving. In their descriptions, the liberal art of printmaking consisted of both intellectual 'invention' and manual 'skill': a union of mind and body. But, crucially, these roles could be performed by different people, and the division of labour in printmaking was not seen as a problem. After all, the final product – the print itself – in its very nature demonstrated the union of mind and body. Notably, according to Van Mander, 'invention' was different from the Italian *disegno* in that it could mean both the invention of a composition, but also what we would call a 'technical' invention.[43] In other words, Van Mander did not yet distinguish between what would later be protected by copyright and what would be protected by patents.

Privileges for Prints

In the second half of the sixteenth century, several successful publishing houses were founded in the Low Countries. The first was Hieronymus Cock's and Volcxken Diericx's *In de Vier Winden* in Antwerp and, to name just a few examples, their prints designed by Pieter Bruegel the Elder or the innovative images of local, so-called 'vernacular' landscapes of Antwerp's surroundings. Cock and Diericx became successful not only because of their excellent market instincts, but also because they implemented a far-reaching division of labour. It was common practice for the design, engraving, and printing to be carried out by different people, while the printer-publisher co-ordinated these tasks as well as organised financing. Most printer-publishers were originally trained as engravers and remained as guildmembers, even if their actions were now partially or even primarily those of the merchant-entrepreneur.[44] Painters like Bruegel were paid for their design, while Cock attracted talented engravers both within and without the city of Antwerp such as Philips Galle, Cornelis Cort, and Giorghio Ghisi. Engravers were often well-paid as it took quite some time to engrave a copperplate, but also because the art of engraving

42 Van Mander also mentions examples of cases in which they engraved after the designs of others. In his biography of Goltzius, Van Mander writes that Goltzius had made an engraving after a design drawing by Adriaan de Weerdt. At the end of Van Leyden's biography, Van Mander also mentions a print after a work (a painting on glass) by Van Leyden, which is 'excellently cut' by Jan Saenredam: Van Mander, *Schilder-boeck*, fols. 284r, 214r.

43 Hendrick Goltzius, for instance, is praised for his technical inventions and the deliberate confusion between different media: Melion, *Netherlandish Canon*, 56-57.

44 In sixteenth-century Antwerp, printmakers and book publishers became members of the guild of St. Luke: Van der Stock, *Printing Images*, 27-56; Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching*, 75. In the early modern Low Countries, *uitgever* (publisher) was not a common term; most 'publishers' were trained as engraver or goldsmith: Orenstein, *Hondius*, 12-15.

was highly valued.[45] After Cock's death in 1570, Galle, who originated from Haarlem, moved to Antwerp in order to continue some of Cock's earlier businesses alongside Diericx, eventually establishing a successful printing house that would flourish well into the seventeenth century.[46]

Other successful 'mega firms' founded around this time were the publishing houses of Crispijn de Passe in Cologne and Utrecht, Hendrik Hondius in The Hague, and Claes Jansz Visscher in Amsterdam. These large houses from this period are known for the inventiveness of their compositions and for the production of large quantities of prints.[47] Following Cock's lead, they hired from among the best designers (usually painters), who did not object to having their work transferred to print by others, nor to the production of the large numbers of prints. These houses aimed to produce high-quality work, work which was result of the combination of invention and skill. Of course, there also existed a lower end of the market in this period, and there was a great variety in the types of prints. It is important to emphasise, however, that at the upper end of the market, artists in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century – unlike in later periods – did not object to a division of labour, nor to taking on different roles per project.[48] Nor did the high volume of prints detract from their status.

Copying had always been a standard practice in the visual arts. The term copy derives from the Latin *copia*, referring to plenty, abundance, and copiousness.[49] It was not until the early modern period that the meaning of *copia* changed into 'copy' or 'imitation' in the vernacular. In this period, the words 'copy', 'imitation', or even 'counterfeit' did not necessarily come bound with the negative associations they would later acquire. In Dutch, *conterfeitsel* was used for portraits, meaning an exact and individual (not idealising) copy of nature. At the same time, it came to be used in the modern meaning of counterfeiting an original. The Dutch *kopij* was commonly used for the original book manuscript, implying a right to copy for the rightful owner of the *kopij*. The terms *nadruk* (reprint, or literally 'afterprint') or *naesnyden* ('re-cutting', or literally 'after-cutting') were used for copying books and prints. For artist-artisans, the imitation of either nature or exemplary man-made objects was central to their work. Emulation – that is, imitation and improvement – was an important concept in art theory. Furthermore, even small adjustments were often enough to consider an image

45 For example, the seventeenth-century Antwerp print publisher and art dealer Peter Goetkint paid several engravers to cut copperplates, ranging from a few guilders for small plates to a few hundred for a large plate. Among them was the engraver Paulus du Pont, who cut twenty-five small devotional plates at nine guilders a piece, but also one large *Birth of Christ* after an invention by Rubens for six hundred guilders. It is telling that Du Pont executed both types of jobs. See Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinventarissen*, IV, 139.

46 His sons Theodoor and Cornelis Galle were not only successful entrepreneurs but would also make engravings designed by Rubens: Sellink, *Galle*.

47 Veldman, *Netherlandish Prints*, 32.

48 Goltzius, for instance, also published prints designed and/or engraved by others, such as Dirck Barends and Anthony Blocklandt, while Jacques de Gheyn II, Jacob Matham, Jan Saenredam, and Jan Muller executed prints designed by Goltzius. See Orenstein, *Hondius*, 19. See also above, note 45, for Du Pont.

49 Fransen and Reinhart, 'The Practice of Copying'; Wouk, 'From *nabeeld* to *kopie*'; Hyman, 'Michael Snijders's Copious Copies'.

as a new work.[50] The advent of the printing press and the potential for creating multiple copies where once there would only have been one, would change the status of copy.

It has often been argued that copying became a problem not because it infringed on the intellectual property of the maker, but because it encroached on someone's capital investment.[51] Indeed, the argument of the need to defray was used in applications for privileges. However, this does not fully explain why privileges were obtained for some prints and not for others. It was not compulsory to apply for a privilege and it seems to have been exceptional to do so.[52] What follows is a selection of privileges for single prints and print series, as well as for individual printmakers, mostly taken from secondary literature, with an emphasis on the sixteenth century (during which the first privileges for prints were granted in the Low Countries) and the first half of the seventeenth century. It is not a complete survey of all sixteenth- and seventeenth-century privileged prints in the Low Countries and further archival research may reveal more examples as yet unknown.

Obtaining privileges for prints (as opposed to maps or books) seem to have been relatively rare in the sixteenth-century Low Countries, and the following number amongst the handful of known cases.[53] In 1536 and 1538, the painter Jan Vermeyen acquired privileges from the Council of Brabant to print certain portraits, a map, and an image of Emperor Charles V's expedition to Tunis.[54] In 1543, the Antwerp printer Hans Liefrinck was granted a privilege for a print of the *Siege of Heinsberg* as well as for a print after Lombard's painting *Rebecca at the Well*.[55] Hieronymus Cock received numerous imperial privileges for maps, first from Charles V and later Philip II, but also for print series such as *Views of Roman Ruins*, *Small Landscapes*, and *Liberal Arts, with Pallas, Apollo and Industry* (the latter after Frans Floris). Cock's privileged single prints included the following: Giorgio Ghisi's engravings after Raphael's *School of Athens* and Lombard's *Last Supper*, Cornelis Cort's prints after Maarten van Heemskerck (such as the *Story of Tobit*), as well as several engraved by Philips Galle after Pieter Bruegel.[56] In 1559, the thirty-four plates of *The Funeral Procession of Charles V*, designed by Cock and engraved by the brothers Jan and Lucas van Doetecum, were published with a privilege by Christopher Plantin.[57] The Antwerp printmaker Hieronymus Wierix had also acquired privileges for several of his (religious) prints.[58] In 1595, the Haarlem powerhouse of Hendrick Goltzius

50 The same was true for scholarly texts, where small (editorial) adjustments were considered enough to publish a text under a new name. It is only with the rise and success of printed texts that we see a shift towards an idea of original authorship: Margócsy, *Commercial Visions*, 76-87.

51 Schriks, *Kopijrecht*, 34, 39.

52 In the sixteenth-century Low Countries, there was no formal requirement to acquire a privilege before publishing a print, nor was it necessary to submit single prints or print series to the authorities for approval (unlike for printed books, where official approval was formally required): Sellink, *Galle*, 26. In Venice, a system of licensing had been in place since 1506, which meant that all printed materials (both books and prints) had to be approved and obtain a license: Witcombe, *Copyright*, xxi.

53 Orenstein, 'Privileges for Prints', 315; Witcombe, *Copyright*, xxxiii.

54 Veldman, *Netherlandish Prints*, 29; Horn, *Vermeyen*, 20.

55 Witcombe, *Copyright*, 340.

56 Witcombe, *Copyright*, 341-342.

57 Witcombe, *Copyright*, 342.

58 Van Hout, 'Copyright Rubens', 36.

famously acquired a six-year privilege from Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II. A couple of years later, around 1598, Goltzius handed over his printmaking activities to his stepson Jacob Matham, who was granted a renewed privilege from Rudolph II in 1601. Others in Goltzius's circle also applied for privileges with the emperor.[59]

In early seventeenth-century Antwerp, Rubens acquired a threefold general privilege from the authorities in the Southern Netherlands, the Dutch Republic, and France.[60] Notably, Rubens claimed in his letters that he published prints not for financial gain but to protect their quality and propagate his art; the ideal already proclaimed by Lampsonius. Rather than dismissing this as cheap talk to obscure Rubens's true financial motives, at least part of the reason for acquiring a privilege was to ensure the quality and reliability of prints after his compositions. Over the years, Rubens employed several engravers (and a woodcarver) to make plates from his designs, a process he followed closely, often having the plates adjusted until he was satisfied with the final result.[61] The most talented among these engravers was Lucas Vorsterman, who in 1622 got into a serious fight with Rubens over the relative status of the engraver and the painter.[62] Perhaps not coincidentally, Vorsterman applied for a privilege in the same year, which was approved on 11 July 1622.[63]

In the 1630s a prolonged trial about the supposedly violated privileges of the engraver Jan-Baptist Barbé divided Antwerp painters and engravers into opposing camps – which then engaged in a nasty conflict that lasted for several years in- and outside courtrooms.[64] Rubens supported Barbé, as he had also been involved in court cases about his violated privileges.[65] Mostly, such court cases testify to the difficulty of enforcing privileges, something that is also known from the book printing industry. This may be the reason why there were few court cases or complaints.[66] What is also notable is the role of the guild of St. Luke in the Barbé affair. The guild's aldermen were appointed by the Council of Brabant to mediate and collect testimonies, while the accused engravers argued that their traditional freedom as guild members allowed them to engrave, print, and sell prints, implicitly opposing this freedom to the legal privilege awarded by the Council of Brabant to Barbé.[67]

59 Veldman, *Netherlandish Prints*, 35; Orenstein, *Hondius*, 19.

60 Orenstein, 'Print privileges', 315; Van Hout, 'Copyright Rubens', 36-38. For the Southern Netherlands from 29 July 1619 until 29 July 1631, and prolonged to 15 January 1642. The French privilege was granted from 3 July 1619 until 3 July 1629, and renewed on 23 March 1632 for another ten years. The Dutch privilege was for seven years, starting on 24 February 1620. The Spanish privilege was extended at 22 May 1644 for a period of twelve years. There was no further extension in France or the Dutch Republic. Ruben also hired the woodcutter Christoffel Jegher to make woodcuts after his designs.

61 Van Hout, 'Copyright Rubens', 12-13.

62 Van Hout, 'Copyright Rubens', 40-53.

63 Van den Wijngaert, 'P.P. Rubens en Lucas Vorsterman',169, 179; Van Hout, 'Copyright Rubens', 42.

64 Génard, 'De privilegiën', 463; Rijks, 'Barbé Affair'.

65 Barbé was supported by testimonies from Rubens, Willem van Haecht, Gerard Segers, Theodore Rombouts, Theodoor and Joannes Galle, Lucas Vorsterman, Paulus du Pont, Theodorus Jonasz van Merlen, Guillaume Collaert, Peeter Backereel, and Peeter Lanckvelt. See Rijks, 'Barbé Affair'.

66 Nadine Orenstein has found only one such complaint in the Dutch Republic in the first half of the seventeenth century: Orenstein, 'Print privileges', 320. The Barbé affair also seems to be an exceptional case in Antwerp.

67 Antwerp, Felixarchief (herafter SAA), N3468, Notarial records B. van den Berghe, 1634, fol. 315. See also Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinventarissen*, III, 417.

The majority of print privileges in the Dutch Republic awarded by the States-General between 1593 and 1650 were for 'nationalistic' images such as 'portraits of nobility, state funerals, maps of battles, and city views'.[68] In the Dutch Republic, a privilege from the States-General for such prints did not merely provide some protection for one's investment, but, as argued by Nadine Orenstein, may have been seen as a seal of approval from the state.[69] The abovementioned sixteenth-century privileges of Jan Vermeyen and some of Cock's were probably granted for this same reason, as a seal of approval. It may be argued that such 'nationalistic' imagery contained a particular type of claim to truth, and that privileges served to confirm the reliability of such claims. In that sense, such privileges were the mirror image of censorship, where the authorities determined an image or text unreliable or unwanted. Peter Parshall and others have demonstrated that, in the early modern period, in particular in northern Europe, the truth claims of images, especially in printed portraits, became a new class of representation: some prints were seen as 'visual facts'. This class of representation was determined by function: images that were reports of specific events or portrayals (counterfeits) of nature.[70] Such prints made them useful or instructive, which fitted with the popular quotation for 'profit and pleasure', taken from Horace's *Ars Poetica*.[71] The idea that imagery could contain truth claims – and affixing Horace's quote onto imagery – was an argument for the elevation of the visual arts to the liberal arts.

Whereas privileges were usually awarded to individual prints, the States-General could also award a general privilege that would protect all the prints of a certain printmaker.[72] In the second half of the seventeenth century, the requests for print privileges in the Dutch Republic seem to have shifted from the States-General to the States of Holland.[73] Again, the majority was for portraits, land- and cityscapes, battles, and the commemoration of state events.[74]

Notably, one could also acquire a privilege for the work of (long) deceased authors or artists.[75] In printmaking, the owner of the original copperplates was often seen as the lawful owner and could apply for privileges. Barbé, for instance, owned some of the copperplates of his deceased father-in-law Hieronymus Wierix and received a privilege as had Wierix before him – a confirmation of the status and reliability of these prints (and obviously not a protection of Barbé's own inventions). Next to the plates that came into his

68 For example, for prints produced by printer-publishers such as Jacques de Gheyn II, Jan van de Velde, Hendrick Hondius, Willem Delff, and Adriaen van de Venne: Orenstein, 'Print privileges', 313. Sellink, *Galle*, 19, mentions the privilege of Philips Galle for a 1569 print series of the Counts of Holland.

69 Orenstein, 'Print privileges'.

70 Parshall, 'Imago Contrafacta', 556. See also Kusukawa, *Picturing*, 8-19; Fransen and Reinhart, 'The Practice of Copying'.

71 As is argued by Veldman, *Netherlandish Prints*, 259, 'it is striking how often and how explicitly the engraver and printer-publisher Crispijn de Passe refers to Horace's recommendation to combine profit with pleasure'.

72 Orenstein, 'Print privileges', 315-316.

73 Orenstein, 'Print privileges', 315.

74 See for instance The Hague, Nationaal Archief (herafter NA), States of Holland (hereafter SvH) 1629, Privilege granted to Nicolaes Visscher, 1677.

75 In the book printing industry, it was often granted to those who published a particular work for the first time in a territory or made the first translation: Schriks, *Kopijrecht*, 27.

possession through his wife, Barbé attempted to get more of Wierix's copperplates from the inheritance of his sister-in-law by having her declared insane.[76] The value of good copperplates is also evident from another remarkable testimony: in 1639 Justa Galle attested that after the death of her husband, the engraver Adriaen Collaert, several copperplates worth a hundred *pond Vlems* were taken from her house and later found at the house of the publisher and art dealer Martinus van den Ende.[77]

The ownership of the matrix (the woodblock or the copperplate) was crucial while roles were fluid in printmaking. There are countless examples of engravers who sometimes designed and/or printed-published their own prints, but who also engraved for others. The division of labour between the designer and the maker of the matrix was sometimes specified in print, being addressed as *inv.* (invented) and *sculps.* (cut or engraved).[78] These print addresses demonstrate an awareness of the division of labour, but there was no standardised format and there are countless examples of vagueness, in which one or more roles were not specified. In short, there was often a division of labour, but it was not seen as a fixed relationship, nor was its fluid nature considered problematic.

However, distinguishing between the invention and the making of the matrix sometimes became an issue in court cases, where some attempts were made to assert a definition that differentiated between or define (intellectual) 'invention' and (manual) 'skill'. In some of these rare court cases and disputes, arguments were developed about when and for what privileges were justified. In legal disputes, arguments had to be formulated, and positions taken. For instance, Barbé and his supporters argued that if inventions were not protected, new inventions would be discouraged, since 'renowned masters would refrain from making certain pieces, out of fear they would be copied by copyists and bunglers'.[79] His opponents, on the other hand, questioned whether it was justified for Barbé to have a privilege for the inventions (i.e., compositions) of others. They also criticised him for apparently not even recognising his own privileged prints. In fact, most of Barbé's privileged prints known today were invented by others.[80] One example was the *vera effigies* (meaning 'true face' or 'true likeness') of the Jesuit Marcello Mastrilli, designed by Nicolaas van der Horst and engraved and published with a privilege by Barbé.[81] The most remarkable argument Barbé's opponents made was their

76 SAA, PK763, Requestboek, 1635-1636, fol. 101. See also Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinventarissen*, III, 447-449. The declaration of insanity was revoked by the Antwerp magistrate in 1635.

77 Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinventarissen*, IV, 271-272.

78 From the mid-sixteenth century onward, engravers increasingly signed their works with terms borrowed from sculpture, such as *sculpsit*, *incidit*, and *caelavit*: Viljoen, 'Early Modern Engraving'.

79 Génard, 'De privilegiën', 463-464: 'Vermaerde meesters souden naerlaten eenige stucken int licht te brengen, wt vreese dat die van coppisten ende brodders souden naergesneden worden.' Witcombe also mentions such worries regarding quality in early modern Italy: Witcombe, *Copyright*, xxv, xxvii.

80 The opposition between intellectual invention and mechanical reproduction may not have been as sharp as posited by Hyman, 'Michael Snijders's Copious Copies', 661, who argues that the two opposing camps in the Barbé affair are 'highlighting and hardening divisions around the intellectual and the mechanical that had already begun to ossify – with print sitting at the very center of that binary distinction. There were those who invented and there were those who simply reproduced to turn a buck.'

81 Rijks, 'Barbé Affair'.

claim that 'engraving is a liberal art, like painting' and therefore it 'cannot be privileged'.[82] Remembering Lampsonius's ideal of the liberal arts as being opposed to the vulgarity of making money, they made a valid point (one which, naturally, suited their own interests). It was also a familiar argument that a real-world original (a particular person, a particular plant, or a particular city) could not be protected by a privilege, and that anyone was free to make a truthful copy.[83] However, it was often such prints, with their claim to truth, that were privileged as stamps of reliability.

Privileges could also be awarded for 'technical inventions' that were related to printmaking, such as the printing on fabrics, the making of patterns for gold leather, the incising or printing of baleen, and new types of production methods for paper, paper mills, or ink.[84] Among the most remarkable was Magdalena de Passe's privilege for sleeping caps of different types fabrics with portraits or cityscapes (apparently these were printed onto the fabric). De Passe probably received the privilege for the technique or making process.[85] In printmaking, there were arguably no big technological breakthroughs until the invention of lithography in the late eighteenth century, but there were inventions such as the printing on fabrics, mezzotint, or methods of colour printing.[86] For such new or improved techniques, privileges could be acquired, and these are often considered as the predecessors of modern patents. Such 'inventor-privileges' protected a technique or making process as an impersonal procedure that could be easily stolen by others. This was opposite to the earlier idea of personal skill, which was seen as the result of experience, stored in the body of the artist-artisan.[87]

Prints Without Privileges: Efficiency Versus Fine Arts

Most Netherlandish prints, across all market segments, were not privileged. Even a printmaker such as Claes Jansz. Visscher, who produced subject matter such as city views and political prints that might easily have been granted a privilege, never applied for one.[88] At the lower end of the market, privileges could be obtained for cheap prints, but this seems to have been rare. Exact figures are lacking, but the large number of utilitarian devotional prints (*belekens*) in the Southern Netherlands suggests that only a tiny fraction of such prints was

82 SAA, N3468, Notarial acts B. van den Berghe, 1634, fols 315r: 'dat men wel weet, dat plaetsnyden eene vrije conste is, ghelyck het schilderen is'; and fol. 317r: 'dat de conste van plaetsnyden eene vrije const zijnde, niet en can (soo hy meijndt) ghepriviligeert worden'. Also cited in Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinventarissen*, III, 418-419.

83 Parshall describes a court case about botanical images: Parshall, 'Imago Contrafacta', 569.

84 Doorman, *Octrooien*, 75, 84, 111, 118, 139, 174, 204, 211, 227, 286. See for example NA, SvH 1612, Patent granted to Willem van den Heuvel for producing pattern plates for gold leather, 1568.

85 Orenstein, 'Print privileges', 318.

86 Stijnman and Savage (eds.), *Printing Colour*; Margócsy, *Commercial Visions*, 167-190. See for example NA, SvH 1640, Patent granted to Johan Teyler for a new method of colour printing on paper, parchment, satin, silk, or other fabrics, 1688.

87 Smith, *Body of the Artisan*; Margócsy, *Commercial Visions*, 169.

88 Orenstein, 'Print privileges', 319.

ever privileged.[89] At the upper end of the market, the most famous 'artistic' printmakers are notably absent from the Dutch archives. There is no evidence, for instance, that Rembrandt ever requested a privilege, even though he included the inscription 'cum pryvl' in his famous *The Descent of the Cross* from 1633.[90] As I will argue below, Rembrandt and some other Dutch painters took printmaking in a new direction, experimenting with the technique of etching and thereby keeping the whole production process in their own hands.

Next to privileges, there were other approaches in printmaking to deal with copying and multiples. As mentioned in the introduction, these were the seemingly opposite approaches of either making full use of the potential efficiency of printmaking and producing as many prints as possible for the lowest possible cost, or the deliberate ignoring of such possibilities, instead producing small print runs that were valued for their rarity and beauty. In the first approach, one can trace the contours of a more modern industrial thinking. In many cases, efficiency was merely cost efficiency and not very innovative. But with its focus on improving production processes, this approach could theoretically also lead to the improvement of techniques, which became the ideal of industrial production and inventor-privileges or patents for new technology. In the latter approach, one can discern the contours of more modern ideas about originality, rarity, and beauty of the 'fine arts', a new set of ideals that came to full fruition during the eighteenth century.

From the onset of printmaking in the sixteenth-century Low Countries, large volumes of cheap prints were made.[91] This continued to be the case throughout the seventeenth century.[92] Such prints, it could be argued, did not need the claim to reliability in the form of a privilege. Nor were privileges economically necessary. The goal was to outcompete others by the most efficient production process, for instance by endlessly reworking old plates and producing as many prints as possible from one plate. Because of economies of scale, large printing houses had an advantage over smaller producers. In Antwerp, such large printing houses were often run by families who had acquired a prominent position in the second half of the sixteenth century, but became more detached from their artistic-artisanal roots and transformed into merchant-entrepreneurs in the seventeenth century, such as the Galle or Van Merlen families.[93]

89 The Dutch term *belekens* was commonly used for small prints of saints, which were handed out during religious festivities or used for devotional purposes. The Thijs database of devotional prints lists only a tiny fraction of prints issued with a privilege in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (3 out of 235 for the period 1565-1696), although this number increases in the eighteenth century (77 out of 226 for the period 1697-1795): https://www.uantwerpen.be/nl/onderzoeksgroep/ruusbroecgenootschap/bibliotheek/bijzondere-collecties/devotieprenten/collectie-thijs/ (Accessed 5 February 2024). While the Jesuits had acquired a privilege in 1610 which stipulated that no books written by Jesuits were to be printed in the Southern Netherlands without permission of the Jesuit order, a similar privilege for the publishing of single-sheet devotional prints is not known to me.

90 Orenstein, 'Print privileges', 313; Fucci, 'Business of Prints', 326-329.

91 Van der Stock, *Printing Images.*

92 For instance, the painter, dealer of paintings, and print publisher Jan van Mechelen sold thousands of paper and parchment devotional prints to Chrisostomo van Ymmerseel in Seville in 1627. The wealthy engraver and printer-publishers Alexander Voet had a staff of between sixty and seventy people working for him in 1665: Lemmens and Thijs, 'Van Merlen', 99-100, 117.

93 In 1669, when Van Merlen bought a house, he called himself a merchant (*coopman*), not mentioning that he was also an engraver: Lemmens and Thijs, 'Van Merlen', 107.

The Galle and Van Merlen families, as well as some of their colleagues in the Dutch Republic, focused on reworking old plates and selling large numbers of copies of earlier inventions, sometimes adding new names.[94] Some family names were repeated on prints throughout the century and became marketed brand names, suggestive of high quality, such as 'Galle'.[95] The copying that had been a problem for Rubens or Barbé, was, one could say, avoided by endlessly copying. This was *copia* – in its sense of abundance, copiousness, and multiples – to the max. In the 1630s, Barbé and his supporters had claimed that inferior quality would not only damage the reputation of guild members, it would even disgrace the 'renowned and laudable art of engraving'.[96] A diametrically opposed testimony was given on 11 August 1670 by the Antwerp print-seller Theodoor II van Merlen, in a declaration about the sales of 'several small parchment and paper *belekens*'.[97] Generally, these *belekens* were cheap, utilitarian prints: objects of everyday use that have rarely survived to the present day.[98] A more expensive variant, and one more likely to have survived the predations of time, was that printed on parchment – the set of eighteen prints currently in the British Museum are a good example of this (fig. 2). These small prints (6,8 × 9,5 cm each), printed on parchment and hand-coloured, are signed 'T v. Merlen', 'C v. Merlen', or 'Cor v. Merlen' (Cornelis van Merlen, son of Theodoor II).[99] It is possible that the colouring was done by Van Merlen's daughters Constantia and Susanna Maria, who were registered as masters in colouring prints (*afsetterse*) in the guild of St. Luke.[100] The subject matter, Bible history and saints, also fits the description of *belekens* in the archival document.

Van Merlen's testimony also informs us of the status of these printed images: they were nothing more than *cremerije*, which may be translated as 'knick-knacks' or, more literally, 'stuff sold by peddlers'. Furthermore, the document states that Theodor van Merlen is an 'engraver and seller of small pictures'. But then Van Merlen seems to have changed his mind and the clerk crossed out the word 'engraver', leaving his profession as merely the 'seller of small pictures'. He probably did this as to emphasise that he was a peddler, a seller of small goods – and not an engraver. He appears to have purposefully diminished his status and skills as an engraver. This is remarkable, since guild members such as Van Merlen were generally proud of their (moral) status as masters and even saw their products as morally

94 Lemmens and Thijs, 'Van Merlen'.

95 Sellink, *Galle*; Lemmens and Thijs, 'Van Merlen'.

96 Génard, 'De privilegiën', 463: 'vermaerde ende loffelycke conste van plaetsnyden'.

97 Cited in Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinventarissen*, IX, 276: 'vercocht ende gelevert heeft verscheyde parckementen ende pampiere belekens'.

98 Lemmens and Thijs, 'Van Merlen', 95.

99 Cornelis registered with the guild of St. Luke as an apprentice engraver in 1666-1667 and as a master engraver in 1687-1688: Rombouts and Van Lerius, *Liggeren*, II, 370, 521.

100 Only after the death of their father did the two daughters and one son register with the guild of St. Luke, in the years 1675-1676: Constantia as a master in colouring prints (*afsetterse*); Susanna Maria as a master in colouring prints; and Theodoor III as master-engraver: Rombouts and Van Lerius, *Liggeren*, II, 445. According to Lemmens and Thijs, their mother Maria Wiggers might have registered her daughters and son Theodoor III to ensure the continuance of their print business after the death of Abraham.

101 De Munck, 'Material Culture'. Theodoor II van Merlen was a member of a dynasty of printers and engravers active in Antwerp over two centuries, from the early 1600s to the late eighteenth century. He registered as master engraver with the guild of St. Luke in 1631-1632. As a young man, he had been a member and 'consultant' of the

Fig. 2 Theodor and Cornelis van Merlen, Set of eighteen small prints: Bible history and saints, *c. 1670, etching, hand-coloured and gilt on vellum, 6,8 × 9,5 cm each, London, British Museum.*

loaded objects.[101] The end of the document contains a similar statement, namely that Van Merlen is 'publicly known here as a peddler'.[102] Van Merlen makes this statement for a very pragmatic reason: he was testifying as to the low value of the prints to avoid paying high taxes. But both his testimony and his business practices are also exemplary of the efficiency (or industrial) approach in printmaking, which focused on quantity instead of quality, and was unapologetic over its intention of turning a profit.

In contrast to cheap multiples, a new category of prints materialised in the seventeenth century: expensive 'artistic' collector items, prized for their beauty and rarity. This new category of print and artist emerged with the etchings of some innovative Dutch painters from the first quarter of the seventeenth century, as is argued by Ilja M. Veldman.[103] The landscape etchings by Willem Buytwech and Essias van de Velde, for instance, were appreciated for 'artistic' reasons, while somewhat later in the century, prints by Rembrandt realised incredible prices, most famously the *Hundred Guilder Print* (*Christ preaching*).[104]

In his *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkunst* of 1678, the art theorist Samuel van Hoogstraten wrote that the collecting of 'paper art' had become very popular, leading to incredible prices being paid for some prints; a print by Lucas van Leyden, for instance, was bought by Rembrandt for eighty *rijksdaalders*.[105] Painters like Rembrandt used prints in their workshops, but he was also one among a growing group of print collectors in the seventeenth century.[106] In the *Inleyding*, Van Hoogstraten extensively praised prints in a chapter titled 'To make his art public' as the 'ushers and interpreters', which show us the 'content of artful works'.[107] Like his predecessors, Van Hoogstraten praised Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden, who had gained most fame 'by the burin'. But since that time, 'the burin has been almost completely separated from the paintbrush'.[108] Indeed, it was not burin engraving, but the technique of etching that was explored by painters into new directions.[109] Whereas the art of engraving took years of training, etching was much easier and more like the free technique of drawing. Painters could thus relatively easily experiment with etching to produce more drawing-like prints.

Among these experimental etchers was Hercules Segers, whose prints are highly valued today.[110] During his life, however, the 'great' Hercules Segers remained poor and no one

Jesuit-led sodality of unmarried men. His son Cornelis would later also become a member, in 1681. His daughter Constantia also had relations with the Jesuits: she became a 'spiritual daughter' under the leadership of the Jesuit De Wolf. See Rombouts and Van Lerius, *Liggeren*, II, 30; Lemmens and Thijs, 'Van Merlen', 106, 112.

102 Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinventarissen*, IX, 277: 'publicquelyck alhier voor cremer bekent'.

103 Veldman, *Netherlandish Prints*, 38.

104 Veldman, *Netherlandish Prints*, 39; Golahny, *Hundred Guilder Print*.

105 Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 212.

106 Veldman, *Netherlandish Prints*, 31-32.

107 Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 195-196. 'Zijn Konst openbaer te maeken'; 'de printen zijn als booden en tolken, die ons den inhout der konstige werken […] verkundigen'.

108 Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 195-196: 'door het graefyzer verkreegen'; 'is 't graefyzer van het pinseel byna geheel afgezondert'. Van Hoogstraten himself would make design drawings for prints in the book *Beschryvinge der stad Dordrecht* (1677) written by Matthijs Balen, an uncle of his wife Sara Balen: Bakker, 'Samuel van Hoogstraten'.

109 Veldman, *Netherlandish Prints*, 38.

110 De Jongh and Van Sloten, *Hercules Segers*.

wanted to buy his prints, according to Van Hoogstraten. Nevertheless, Segers made art with 'unparalleled diligence', including prints on paper and on cloth, which Van Hoogstraten refers to as printed paintings.[111] It would not be until after his premature death that Seger's prints gained the high prices – up to sixteen ducats – they deserved.[112] Rembrandt was an early adopter of Seger's work.[113] Van Hoogstraten was a pupil of Rembrandt but he hardly mentions any of Rembrandt's own printmaking activities, which is remarkable since Rembrandt attained international fame for his prints well before his paintings.[114] Other art theorists spent more words on printmaking. In 1662, in his *Gulden Cabinet van de edel vry schilder-const*, Cornelis de Bie praised the triumph of the etching, devoting the third part of his book to 'Architects, Sculptors, and Printmakers'.[115] In his *Groot Schilderboek* of 1707, Gerard de Lairesse also devoted much attention to printmaking, which is perhaps not surprising as he was an etcher himself.[116]

Arnold Houbraken mentions printmaking in several of the biographies in his *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantschen konstschilders en schilderessen* (1718), usually at the end. He praises prints for their instructive value: portraits serve as memory of the 'greatest men' of the 'arts and sciences' and as a learning tool for young painters. Yet he also praised more 'artistic' prints, such as the ones by Segers (where he closely follows Van Hoogstraten), and the print collection of his teacher Jacob Lavecq, a great *liefhebber* of prints.[117] Houbraken notes that Rembrandt's etchings, which were 'natural and inimitable', were in high demand with collectors and that his prints alone would have been enough to ensure his fame.[118] While praising Rembrandt for a certain technical 'invention' in reworking etched plates, he criticises him for failing to share it with his pupils, which meant that his 'secret' went with him to the grave.[119] Houbraken also mentions how Rembrandt consciously produced small print runs, making only slight adjustments between different states. This 'brought him great fame, and no little profit', as print collectors (*printkonstlievenden*) were not satisfied until they had acquired every state of a print.[120] In a similar vein Filippo Baldinucci, another of Rembrandt's early biographers, wrote that Rembrandt had made a lot of money from selling his prints and that he had even bought back his own prints at auction to make them scarcer, increase their price, and enhance their status.[121]

111 Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 312: 'onvergelijkelijken yver'.
112 Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 312.
113 Cornelis and Van Sloten, 'Hercules Seghers'.
114 Dickey, 'Prints'. See also Fucci, 'Business of Prints'; Golahny, *Hundred Guilder Print*.
115 De Bie, *Gulden Cabinet*, 419, 'Architecten, Belthouvvers, ende Plaetsnyders'.
116 Veldman, *Netherlandish Prints*, 42. De Lairesse's etchings are praised by Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh*, III, 111.
117 Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh*, II, 136-139, 153-154.
118 Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh*, I, 270.
119 Rembrandt had a particular manner of manipulating and making his etching plates, which he never showed to his apprentices: Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh*, I, 271.
120 Cited in Fucci, 'Business of Prints', 333. See Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh*, I, 271; Slive, *Rembrandt and his critics*, 189-191.
121 Golahny, *Hundred Guilder Print*, 12.

The combination of admiration and critique also characterised the reception of Rembrandt's *Hundred Guilder Print* soon after it was first printed in the 1640s. It was admired as a beautiful and excellent print, but some thought the price exorbitant.[122] One early impression of the *Hundred Guilder Print* was inscribed around 1700, noting that 'this print was retouched by Rembrandt with his own hand'.[123] As Amy Golahny has noted, this phrase is puzzling but probably refers to the way Rembrandt manipulated the ink when wiping the copperplate.[124] Indeed, the early impressions are all a bit different with regards to their so-called 'plate tone', which 'was considered an addition by the artist himself'.[125] In other cases, too, Rembrandt prints were appreciated as being 'printed by the artist himself', or because the prints were a proof, counterproof, or maculature that showed the artist's working process.[126]

Many copies were made of the *Hundred Guilder Print* as well as of other Rembrandt prints.[127] Several of Rembrandt's plates were reworked and reprinted until well into the nineteenth and even the twentieth century. Some of Rembrandt's prints were copied on new plates to be inserted into folio Bibles. These copies were simplified, mirrored, and text was added, while Rembrandt was credited as the inventor in some cases.[128] While artists like Rubens had tried to prevent such copying practices through the acquisition of privileges, in the case of Rembrandt, print connoisseurs were urged to differentiate between original and copy based upon artistic quality, beauty, and rarity.[129] Even if the 'invention' was copied, a copy could never be the result of the artist's 'own hand'. A privilege to protect the invention made less sense, as the value of such prints – as well as their 'reliability' – was determined by the limited editions (rarity) and the hand of the artist. In the experimental strategy of Rembrandt, Segers, and the like – though this was not always appreciated at the time – invention and skill were unified within an individual artist, creating prints that were valued as original works of art in limited editions, compliant within the rising ideals of the fine arts.[130]

122 The collector Ernst Brinck accredited its remarkable value 'due to its excellence'. In 1654, the Antwerp print dealer Joannes Meyssens wrote that he thought the print to be 'very beautiful and clear' and 'especially elegant and fine, although it should only cost thirty guilders': Golahny, *Hundred Guilder Print*, 10-11.

123 This impression was given by Rembrandt to Jan Six: Golahny *Hundred Guilder Print*, 18-19.

124 Golahny, *Hundred Guilder Print*, 19.

125 Another way to get more 'unique' prints was the use of different types of support, such as Japan paper or vellum: Golahny, *Hundred Guilder Print*, 62; Fucci, 'Business of Prints', 333.

126 A counterproof is an impression of a print made from a print when the ink is not yet dry; a maculature is a second impression from an inked plate without putting new ink on it: Golahny, *Hundred Guilder Print*, 23, 62-64.

127 Veldman, *Netherlandish Prints*, 39.

128 Rembrandt was credited in at least two prints for this purpose from around 1650, one published by Cornelis Danckaerts and one by Salomon Savery. In Melchior Küsel's *Icones Biblica*, Rembrandt was not credited (nor were any of the other artists that the prints were copied from). See Golahny, *Hundred Guilder Print*, 91-94.

129 In their well-known texts on printmaking and print collecting, Abraham Bosse in France and John Evelyn in England gave criteria to distinguish between copy and original: Veldman, *Netherlandish Prints*, 40.

130 They met the definition of the *peintre-graveur*, coined by the print scholar Adam Bartsch in the early nineteenth century, to define the artists who fulfilled both the roles of designer and engraver or etcher.

Conclusion

During the eighteenth century – and more fully in the nineteenth century – modern copyright and patent laws were implemented throughout Europe to prevent copying. Copyright protected the original works of authors or creators, while patents protected new inventions. What came to be protected by law – 'original works', the 'author', the 'creator', 'new', and 'invention' – were concepts that once had very different meanings, if they existed at all. Through the lens of printmaking, we can trace some of these changes.

Early modern printing privileges are often investigated as the predecessors of modern copyright. Printing privileges protected the 'invention' (composition) against copying, and in this sense, they were the forerunners of copyright. But the path from privileges to modern copyright (and patents) was messy and complicated. In the early modern Low Countries, general privileges were granted to artists such as Goltzius or Rubens on the basis of their status and networks – they were, therefore, a form of patronage. These official privileges affirmed the status and reliability of their prints. The affirmation of reliability also relates to the singular prints for which most privileges were granted: images with a certain eyewitness or truth claim. Crucially, these claims were to a truth approved by the ruling authority. Most prints, however, were published without privileges, and printmakers also adopted other approaches to managing copying and the multiples of prints, concentrating either on producing large quantities of cheap prints or on creating limited editions in the artist's 'own hand'.

Printmaking was a disruptive image technology because it produced images in multiples on an unprecedented scale and challenged many aspects that had been standard practice in the visual arts, such as copying. The approaches printmakers took to questions of multiples and copying went hand in hand with new ideas about invention and skill in art theory. The variety of approaches used by printmakers resulted in a variety of products whose status ranged from images with a claim to truth (that were for 'profit and pleasure'), to purely utilitarian products produced in large quantities, to 'original' works of art by the artist's hand that were valued for aesthetic reasons.

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