

# Printing Privileges for Psalters in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic

NINA GEERDINK

**Nina Geerdink** is an Assistant Professor in Early Modern Dutch Literature at Utrecht University. Her expertise is in seventeenth-century Dutch literature, and her research focuses on authorship, women's writing, patronage, hack writing, and social poetry. In 2021, she received a Tiele Fellowship to study authorial engagement in the system of printing privileges. Her recent publications include 'Economic Advancement and Reputation Strategies. Seventeenth-century Dutch Women Writing for Profit', *Renaissance Studies* (2020) and 'Literair auteurs als aanvragers van boekverkopersprivileges in de Republiek', *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse Boekgeschiedenis* (2024).

## Abstract

Starting from the assumption that printing privileges were an important way of enhancing a publication's reputation, this article focuses on psalters, which played an important role in Protestant religious life in the Dutch Republic. Psalters were among the earliest books granted privileges by the States of Holland and the States-General, and were published with a privilege more often than other works. Furthermore, while privileges were generally applied for by publishers, in the case of psalters it was often the psalmists themselves who were the applicant. This article argues that this remarkable engagement of psalmists and printers of psalters in the system of printing privileges interacted with the pluralism of the seventeenth-century Dutch religious landscape, showing how the contexts of the privileged psalters diversified: whereas the first privileges were connected to the Dutch Revolt and the creation of a strong Reformed church, later on in the seventeenth century privileged psalters also became important within other churches. An analysis of the use of the privileges in the front matter of psalters suggests that the sense of political approval of the privilege interacted with the religious approval that psalmists sought. When aiming at an official position within the church, a psalmist was probably at a disadvantage if their work was lacking such a privilege.

*Keywords:* printing privileges, religious literature, psalters, paratexts

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The first printing privileges granted by the States of Holland date from the late 1570s. By requesting privileges from the States of Holland, who at this point in time had no formal power to regulate the book trade, Bible printers in fact took the first steps toward a system in which the States had the formal authority to grant such privileges. During these first decades of the Dutch Revolt, Calvinist Bible printers requested privileges from the States of Holland because they did not wish to engage with the Antwerp-based States-General.<sup>1</sup> It soon became clear, however, that privileging Bibles was a very complex matter, as competing printers requested their own privileges for the same text. In the 1580s it therefore became standard practice that Bible privileges would only apply in the case of specific textual or formal varieties. This became a problem in 1637, when the Dutch authorised Bible – the so-called ‘States Bible’ – was published, as it trumpeted the ideal of uniformity, that is, that there no longer ought to be textual variants. After much controversy, the privilege for printing the States Bible was granted to its translators, who promptly gave it to the city of Leiden, who in turn gave it to the States printer, the widow Van Wouw. Other cities and their printers were fiercely opposed to this and decided to ignore it, making the privilege worthless in practice. Hence, as soon as it expired, in 1652, the States decided that privileges for the printing of Bibles could no longer be requested.

All in all, Bible privileges were toothless when it came to protecting the business of Bible printing: before 1637 multiple printers would be granted ‘the’ privilege for printing the same Bible; after 1637 the need for a privilege to print Bibles was ignored, an act supported by (local) authorities. It is likely, therefore, that so long as it was possible to gain such privileges, they were primarily requested to lend an air of official approval to the subsequent printed Bibles.<sup>2</sup> Whereas historians of the book tend to see privileges as attempts to prevent the publication of pirated copies, the course of events at the end of the sixteenth

1 For a detailed description of the relationship between Bibles and the book trade, with privileges playing first violin, see De la Fontaine Verwey, ‘Nederlandse drukkers’; Van Eeghen, *De Amsterdamse boekhandel*, v, 197–226. See also Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *The Bookshop*, 125–130. 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.

2 De la Fontaine Verwey, ‘Nederlandse drukkers’, 84.

century, as described above, shows that there must have been other reasons for a Bible printer to request privileges.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, recent scholarship calls for a broader perspective on privileges, one that looks beyond the legal and economic interest of printers.<sup>4</sup>

Starting from this assumption that privileges were an important way of adding authority to the reputation of a particular publication, this article highlights privileges granted to psalters. Psalms – the poems taken from the biblical book of *Psalms* – had always been important in religious life, as they were thought to represent the word of God.<sup>5</sup> There are various distinct genres within the psalms, but they all share a combination of individual devotion or meditation on the one hand, and guidance in collective feelings of joy, grief, gratitude, or worship on the other. By creating a Dutch language community of Calvinists, books with psalms rhymed in Dutch played a crucial role in the spread and development of the Reformation in the Low Countries at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, many Dutch psalm books were published during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and across all formats, though most often in smaller formats.<sup>7</sup> Among these titles were books with selections of the psalms, but also many complete psalm books, known as psalters, consisting of all 150 psalms from the Bible. In these publications, the psalm texts were adapted into (rhymed) songs, that were either to be sung to existing melodies, or sung with the help of accompanying musical notations.<sup>8</sup> These adaptations were meant for liturgical use in both churches and at home. Many psalm books were intended for specific religious audiences, with each confession having its own official psalter, but over the course of the early modern period psalm books became increasingly interconfessional.

Following the Reformation, psalm books became almost as important as Bibles within the Protestant church, religious communities, and households. The 1652 States' decision to no longer allow printers to request a privilege for Bibles was not extended to other church books at first, so it remained possible to request privileges for psalm books throughout the seventeenth century. Given both the popularity of psalms in all Protestant religious contexts and the possibility that a particular psalter might be used as the standard text within a confessional community, it comes as no surprise the producers of psalm books often requested privileges to either protect their investment or lend their publications an official air. Just like Bibles, psalm books were among the earliest books granted privileges by the States of Holland and the States-General. In 1579, Philips van Marnix, Lord of St. Aldegonde (1540-1598), became the first psalmist to request a privilege for a psalm book in the Northern Netherlands, and it seems he set the tone, because during the long seventeenth century, psalters were more often published with a privilege than other books. Moreover, whereas privileges in general were usually requested by printers, in the case of psalters it was often the psalmists themselves who requested the privilege.

3 See the introduction to this special issue for an overview of scholarship on printing privileges in the Dutch Republic.

4 Buning, 'Privileging the Common Good'; Orenstein, 'Sleeping caps'; Squassina, 'Authors'. See also the introduction to this special issue.

5 For a general introduction to the psalms, see Ros, *Dauids soete lier*.

6 Kooi, *Reformation*, 83-95; Van de Haar, *The Golden Mean*, 194-246; Pollmann, "Hey ho".

7 Ros, *Dauids soete lier*. On the formats, see Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *The Bookshop*, 130-131, 238.

8 During the seventeenth century, it became standard to publish psalms without musical notation: Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *The Bookshop*, 235.

The fact that psalmists often requested their own privilege can be explained, I argue, by looking at the heated debate about Bible privileges in the first half of the century, and the inability to request Bible privileges in the second half of the century: since psalms, just like other texts from the Bible, did not belong to any individual but were part of the public domain, it was not easy for a printer to claim ownership of a psalter. The psalmist, however, was able to explain what he changed or added to his version of the text and could thus claim ownership for these changes and addenda. Indeed, as we will see, psalmists would often include passionate defences of the choices they made in the front matter of their publications.

This article will focus on the front matter of privileged psalm books, in order to explore the remarkable engagement with the system of privileges by psalmists and printers of psalters during the long seventeenth century. It appears that privilege and other front matter elements interacted in an attempt to present the psalm edition or translation as trustworthy, user-friendly, correct from a linguistic, religious, or musicological perspective, and sometimes also as appropriate for a specific audience. Particular emphasis was dependent upon the ambitions of the publication: during the first half of the century, the privileged psalters were primarily created in the hope of becoming the new standard in the Reformed church, while in the second half of the century privileged psalm books diversified and were often created for specific communities, most notably Lutherans and Mennonites, or for a specific community of believers at home or in informal congregations.

### *Printing Privileges for Psalters*

Privileges were requested for all kinds of books during the long seventeenth century, and at first sight the proportion of psalters does not stand out. Religious books in general accounted for the largest share of privileged books, but this can simply be explained by the fact it also accounted for a very large, if not the largest, share of all books published.<sup>9</sup> However, as it is estimated that less than 1 percent of all books published in the Dutch Republic had a privilege, it is remarkable that of the thirty-two psalters published in the Northern Netherlands between 1580 (the year Marnix first published his psalms) and 1700, ten were printed with privilege (tab. 1).<sup>10</sup> Next to these ten complete Dutch language

<sup>9</sup> Groenveld, 'The Dutch Republic', 295-296.

<sup>10</sup> On the estimate, see Hoftijzer, 'Nederlandse boekverkoopprivileges', 49. The number of thirty-two psalters is based on Ros,  *Davids soete lier*, who gives an overview of all Dutch psalm translations and adaptations published between the sixteenth century and the twenty-first, counting thirty-one complete psalm books between 1580-1700. I added the psalter of musician Jacob Hendricksz. (1649), which is absent because he did not translate the psalms himself. Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *The Bookshop*, 130, argue that because of their intensive use many psalm books are probably lost, which means there might have been more than thirty-two psalters published, and of these lost editions we cannot, of course, know whether they were published 'with privilege'. The number of ten privileges is based on mentions of a privilege in the front matter of the psalters. It is thus possible more psalters had a privilege, but failed to include it in their publication. Since I focus here on the use of the privilege within the publication, these are not relevant for my current analysis. In future research, all privileges in the archives of the States of Holland and States-General should be checked for psalm books to be able to include both lost psalm books with privilege and psalm books with a privilege not mentioned in the front matter.

Tab. 1 *Psalters printed in the Dutch Republic with a privilege, including prolongations, 1580-1700.*

Case no.	Applicant	Role	Title	Granting body	Date granted
1	Bonaventura Vulcanius, on behalf of Philips van Marnix van St. Aldegonde	Psalmist	<i>Het boeck der Psalmen Davids</i>	States of Holland	24 September 1579
	Bonaventura Vulcanius	Intermediary	Marnix, <i>Het boeck der Psalmen</i> (prolongation)	States-General	13 May 1591
	Renier de Casembroot	Printer	<i>Psalmboek [...] door Aldegonde</i>	States-General	2 July 1599
	Bonaventura Vulcanius	Intermediary	Marnix, <i>Het boeck der Psalmen</i> , corrected edition	States-General	20 May 1606
	Louis Elsevier	Printer	Marnix, <i>Het boeck der Psalmen</i>	States-General	6 August 1616
2	Anthonis de Hubert	Psalmist	<i>De Psalmen des Propheeten Davids</i>	States-General	9 August 1623
	Anthonis de Hubert	Psalmist	<i>De Psalmen des Propheeten Davids</i> (prolongation)	States-General	10 August 1640
3	Johan de Brune	Psalmist	<i>CL Davids Psalmen</i>	States-General and States of Holland	4 and 9 March 1643
4	Cornelis Boey	Psalmist	<i>Psalmen Davids</i>	States-General and States of Holland	14 December 1644 and 12 January 1645
5	Jacob Hendricksz	Psalmist	<i>De CL Psalmen des Propheten Davids</i>	States of Holland	26 November 1649
6	Arnout van Overbeke	Psalmist	<i>De Psalmen Davids</i>	States-General and States of Holland	2 and 6 March 1662
7	Johannes van Vlakveld	Psalmist	<i>Des Konings en Propheete Davids boeck</i>	States of Holland	25 March 1682
8	Jan Rieuwertsz. and Pieter Arentsz.	Printer	Oudaen, <i>Davids Psalmen, nieuwlyx op rym gestelt</i>	States of Holland	13 April 1684
9	Gerardus Borstius	Printer	Ghysen, <i>Den Hoonig-raat der psalmdichten</i>	States of Holland	18 February 1686
10	Jan van Duisberg	Psalmist/Printer	<i>De CL Psalmen Davids</i>	States of Holland	7 January 1688

psalters comprising all 150 psalms, there were also many requests for other publications which included psalms, or requests by composers or musicians for psalm music.<sup>11</sup>

It is not only the number of psalm books which appeared with a privilege that is remarkable, but also the fact that many of these privileges were requested not by the printer, but by the psalmist himself. In the complete corpus of privileges granted by the States-General and the States of Holland during the seventeenth century, as surveyed by Paul Hoftijzer, it appears that only 25 percent of requests for privileges were made by people and institutions other than printers. Authors represent but a small part of this percentage.<sup>12</sup> This seems logical, as authors commonly did not get paid for their publications and requesting

<sup>11</sup> See for example the request by Tjaert Sonnema for printing a psalm book with only a selection of the psalms (Sonnema, *Basuin-klank*): The Hague, Nationaal Archief (hereafter NA), States-General (hereafter SG) 156, Resolution 2 February 1661 and SG 12313, fol. 3r; NA, States of Holland (hereafter SvH) 1614, Resolution 21 November 1661. See also the request by Joh. Angelius Werdenhagen for, amongst other publications, a Latin translation of the psalms: SG 12304, Resolution 9 September 1630, fol. 36r. There is no copy known of Werdenhagen.

<sup>12</sup> See Geerdink, 'Literair auteurs', about authorial engagement with the system of printing privileges. I am grateful to Paul Hoftijzer for sharing the data of his survey.

a privilege was expensive. Moreover, printers often frustrated authors' requests in an attempt to protect their trade.<sup>13</sup> Of the ten privileges granted to complete psalters in Dutch, however, eight were requested by the psalmist himself (see tab. 1).

Both reputation management and economic reasons must have motivated the psalmists and the printers of psalters to request a privilege. In 1566, the religious authorities mandated Datheen's psalter for use within Dutch Calvinist churches.<sup>14</sup> In practice, however, various psalters were used, at home and in churches, and in both Calvinist and other communities. From the start, complaints were voiced concerning Datheen's psalter, namely that it was difficult to sing his translations of the French because of metrical deviations and that, according to some, there were mistakes in his translations.<sup>15</sup> Some newly rhymed psalters, such as Marnix's, were openly aimed at 'dethroning' Datheen, but it would take until 1773 for the States-General and the religious authorities to agree on an alternative to Datheen.<sup>16</sup> Similar battles about replacement were going on within other confessions. In the meantime, many Dutch psalters saw the light of day, each one having its own religious, political, linguistic, literary, or musical agenda, and its own group of supporters. A privilege in these cases could be a strategic element in the publication's front matter.

While an 'official touch' in the front matter was beneficial for ideological reasons, as it gave the impression of authority, it could also be economically motivated. Although there seems to have been always a possibility of failure, printing psalm books was on the whole a lucrative business.<sup>17</sup> Just like other church books, psalters represented a considerable trade and sales were stable.<sup>18</sup> Since commercial considerations seem more often than not to have been a major incentive behind the creation and marketing of new psalm books, the requesting of privileges should also be seen in this light. Indeed, some of the requests by psalmists are for psalters they invested in themselves. In the cases of the Enkhuizen musician Jacob Hendricksz. (before 1649-after 1664), the Haarlem physician Johannes van Vlakveld (1628-after 1683), and the Amsterdam lawyer Arnout van Overbeke (1632-1674), it seems safe to assume that the request of the privilege, either to provide the 'official touch' or to prevent people from copying their work illegally, must have been motivated by the wish to protect their investment.

To better understand the dynamics between commercial and ideological reasons for requesting privileges, as well as the importance of a privilege for a psalter's appearance, this essay analyses the printing privileges in psalters in use during the long seventeenth century. The requests themselves seldom survive as discrete documents, but are invariably

13 For the costs of requests, see Van Eeghen, *De Amsterdamse boekhandel*, v, 222-223; Hoftijzer, 'Nederlandse boekverkopersprivileges', 58. On the resistance of the booksellers, see Van Eeghen, *De Amsterdamse boekhandel*, v, 20-21, 213; Schriks, *Het kopijrecht*, 87-88, 133, 135. We can assume there were more requests than privileges being granted. Van Eeghen, *De Amsterdamse boekhandel*, 214, mentions some of these, which are known because of disputes that arose, but we lack the sources to systematically study such rejections.

14 Knetsch, 'Driemaal', 149.

15 Ros,  *Davids soete lier*, 78-81.

16 Knetsch, 'Driemaal', 157-158.

17 De Brune's psalter did not sell well, it seems, because in 1662 a title issue of the work was published (meaning that the first issue of 1644 was not sold out yet by then): Verkrujssse, 'Vier gangen', 10. The same was true for Vlakveld's psalter, of which a title issue appeared in 1706: Ros,  *Davids soete lier*, 194.

18 Heijting, 'Het gereformeerde psalmboek', 163; Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *The Bookshop*, 131.

paraphrased in the States' resolutions, where the granting of the privilege is noted.<sup>19</sup> In most requests, a conventional phrase was used in which it is stated that the printer or psalmist wants to protect himself against *baatzuchtige nadrukkers*: selfish, profit-seeking pirate printers trying to steal a piece of the pie they had put so little effort into baking. Tellingly, psalmists often went much further. Applicants for (printing) privileges in general emphasised how their publication contributed something new and useful which would benefit society.<sup>20</sup> In those requests which have survived in the archives, both psalmists and printers regularly emphasise the ways in which their work has been approved of by others, such as religious authorities, and the psalmists often elaborate on details of their work. These kinds of additions were, in theory at least, unnecessary, as the States expressly stated that the granting of a print privilege did not constitute their authorisation of its contents.<sup>21</sup> In practice, however, they could be useful, most importantly for the way the privileges were advertised as 'badges of honour': the showcasing of the privilege within the publication.

To analyse this showcasing of the privilege, I studied the front matter of the ten privileged psalters and their various editions published in the Dutch Republic during the long seventeenth century (see tab. 1). Books with a privilege often appeared with a note on the title page: *met privilege* ('with privilege'). Also, it was mandatory to copy the formal attribution by the States into the book.<sup>22</sup> On occasion, information about the transfer of the privilege to a specific printer would be shared below the formal text. There were also authors who signed every single copy of their book to mark that it was published with their consent.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, other parts of the front matter, such as dedications, forewords, or laudatory poems, sometimes mention the privilege. Most importantly for my purposes is the fact that the discourse deployed in the request itself is often repeated and elaborated on in the front matter of the analysed psalm books. Moreover, the use of the privilege in a psalter's front matter turns out to be interrelated with the confessional communities they were meant for, and this usage diversified over time. The discussion of the various cases in this article is therefore more or less chronologically ordered along the lines of confessional communities.

### *Privileged Psalters in the Public Church: Dethroning Datheen, 1579-1660*

In 1579, Bonaventura Vulcanius (1538-1614), in the name of his master Philips van Marnix, Lord of St. Aldegonde, turned to the States of Holland to request a privilege for the

<sup>19</sup> In the resolutions of the States of Holland (NA, SvH, including the on-line index), the requests as well as the privileges are registered. In the resolutions of the States-General (NA, SG; until 1625 also digitally available via <https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/statengeneraal>), only the privileges granted are noted. A few weeks before the publication of this article, all resolutions of the States-General became digitally available through the web application [www.goetgevonden.nl](http://www.goetgevonden.nl) (Huygens ING).

<sup>20</sup> Machielse, *Privilegie*, 19-20; Buning, *Knowledge*, 189-193.

<sup>21</sup> Schriks, *Het kopijrecht*, 117.

<sup>22</sup> Van Eeghen, *De Amsterdamse boekhandel*, v, 223-224.

<sup>23</sup> For other strategies designed to prevent others making illegal copies see, for example, Hoftijzer, *De zeis*, 11.

printing and publishing of Marnix's translation of the psalms.<sup>24</sup> Vulcanius was a humanist scholar and secretary to Marnix, a man who, as the right hand of William of Orange, played a crucial role in the Dutch Revolt. In view of the ambitions of these two powerful men, the privilege comes as no surprise: Marnix's new rhymed translation was meant to replace Datheen's. Vulcanius, who was at home in the world of the book as a scholar and copy-editor, presented his master's translation to the provincial synod in Rotterdam in 1581 and, later that year, to the national synod in Middelburg, and would continue lobbying for his master's translation as the synods, initially at least, appeared unwilling to replace Datheen's psalter with Marnix's.<sup>25</sup>

By translating from Hebrew faithfully (*getrouwelijcken*), and inspired by the well-known French examples used by Datheen (*op de Franchoise wyse*), as is emphasised in the request as well as in the title of the publication, Marnix met ecclesiastical interests.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, many learned people considered his psalter an improvement on Datheen's.<sup>27</sup> Marnix knew, however, that quality alone would not be enough to convince the Reformed church to decide in favour of his book, and he thus attempted to garner support for his translation in various other ways. He had made sure that replacing Datheen's translation would be easy for church communities, as he translated the same number of verses, and included a translation of Calvin's foreword from the 1543 edition, just as Datheen had.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, in a 'Warning to the Christian reader', he emphasised it was not his intention to dishonour Datheen, nor to decide for 'the common man' that Datheen ought to be replaced. He only used the qualities God gave him to create a new translation for the wellbeing of the church. In the end, the Christian hearts of the people should decide whether this indeed led to an improvement or if they would like to stick with Datheen.<sup>29</sup> In the meantime, it becomes clear Marnix thought that his translation should supplant Datheen's, as the remainder of the preliminary text – a defence of his theological and linguistic choices – made clear.

By dedicating his psalter to the States of Holland, Marnix tried to secure political support for his ambitions.<sup>30</sup> That he applied for a printing privilege in Holland and other provincial states, as well as at the Council of State and Governor-General Matthias of Austria, should be regarded part of the power play between Marnix and the supporters of Datheen, among whom were those booksellers who feared suffering significant losses if they could no longer sell their stock of Datheen's psalters.<sup>31</sup> Preceding the title page of the

24 NA, SvH 14, Resolution 24 September 1579, fols. 229-230.

25 Van Toorenenbergen, 'De psalmberijming'; Heijting, 'Het gereformeerde psalmboek', 170; Ros,  *Davids soete lier*, 102-106. On Marnix and Vulcanius, see also Todd, 'Politics', 32.

26 On Marnix's rhymed translation in relation to Datheen and Utenhove, see Van de Haar, *The Golden Mean*, 194-246; Todd, 'Politics', 30.

27 Todd, 'Politics', 39; Knetsch, 'Driemaal', 154-155.

28 Ros,  *Davids soete lier*, 102.

29 Marnix, *Het boeck* (1580), 'Waerschouwinge aen den Christelijken leser'; 'ghemeynen man'. See also Ros,  *Davids soete lier*, 102.

30 NA, SvH 15, Resolution 15 July 1580, fol. 131.

31 On the power play, see Heijting, 'Het gereformeerde psalmboek', 171-175; Knetsch, 'Driemaal', 154-155; Van de Haar, *The Golden Mean*, 228; Van Toorenenbergen, 'De psalmberijming'.



1580 publication, a full page is dedicated to the privileges granted to Marnix, which were confirmed by William of Orange.<sup>32</sup>

It was all in vain, as the synods refused to replace Datheen, most probably because of the fierce opposition of booksellers. Even when the Reformed church finally decided in favour of Marnix, during the general synod of The Hague in 1586, the decision would not be implemented in church service.<sup>33</sup> Marnix reacted by improving his translation, publishing a revised edition in 1591. Again, the front matter formed part of his attempt to dethrone Datheen: he applied for a privilege with the States-General, the most important authority at that moment in time, dedicating his book to it. Tellingly, he mentioned neither Datheen nor his ambitions with the psalter in the dedication, which is completely devoted to praising the psalms as such.<sup>34</sup> In his foreword for the readers, he maintains the structure of the 'Warning' from 1580, but there were some additions in the explanation of the revisions, and also some smaller but telling additions to the rest of the text. In emphasising that he was not intent on making the decision to get rid of Datheen for the common man, he now for example added that 'often during his life he [i.e., Datheen] had confessed to having produced his psalms in a hurry', implying a lack of quality.<sup>35</sup> This fervour is absent in the extract from the privilege, where the focus is on the improvements Marnix had made in this revised edition.<sup>36</sup>

Once more all his efforts were in vain, except for a small victory in the Frisian synod of 1595, where it was decided that church communities had the freedom to choose Marnix's translation instead of Datheen's. It is unknown whether any individual community acted upon this freedom to choose, however.<sup>37</sup> After Marnix's death in 1598, Vulcanius continued to press for the adoption of the psalter, including the request of a privilege for a new edition of Marnix's psalter in 1606, after the expiration of a privilege that in the meantime had been requested by the printer Casembroot from The Hague.<sup>38</sup> Vulcanius died in 1614, however, and would thus not witness the psalter's publication, which finally occurred in 1617. Marnix's psalter then appeared with a new privilege, requested by the printer Louis Elzevier.<sup>39</sup> As this contextualised analysis of the front matter in his psalm books shows, Marnix's and Vulcanius's efforts are a case in point with regarding printing privileges not merely as protection against pirated editions, but as 'badges of honour', suggesting approval by the authorities – or even, one could argue, for use as virtual chess pieces in political and religious controversies of the time.

Although it had become clear that every attempt of Marnix and Vulcanius to dethrone Datheen was to no purpose, other psalmists followed in Marnix's footsteps with the publication of privileged psalters: Anthonis de Hubert (1583-after 1644) in 1624, Johan de

32 Marnix, *Het boeck* (1580).

33 Van Toorenenbergen, 'De psalmberijming'.

34 Marnix, *Het boeck* (1591).

35 Marnix, *Het boeck* (1591): 'hoewel hy dickmael in zijnen leven bekent heft dat sy met grooter haasten gemaect was'.

36 On the front matter in this edition, see also Ros,  *Davids soete lier*, 106-107.

37 Ros,  *Davids soete lier*, 107.

38 We can only speculate about Casembroot's motives, as the granting of the privilege is not accompanied by excerpts from the request and no known copy of the book survived: Japikse et al. (eds.),  *Resolutiën*, x, 823-824.

39 Marnix,  *De CL Psalmen*.

Brune the elder (1588-1658) in 1643, and Cornelis Boey (1608-1665) in 1648.<sup>40</sup> Maybe not coincidentally, all three men were jurists from Zeeland, in or on their way to high positions. De Hubert was a member of the Zierikzee town council and would later join the Amsterdam admiralty; in his capacity as a linguist, he had also been involved in the supervision of the States-General's translation of the Bible.<sup>41</sup> De Brune would become Zeeland's land advocate in 1649, and Boey solicitor-general, among other things, for Holland, Zeeland, and Frisia in 1651.<sup>42</sup> Although they were not of Marnix's calibre, each of them must have had the connections and capacities necessary to apply for such a privilege even though they were not printers.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, their Zeeland origin is of importance as it was the most strictly Calvinist province of the Dutch Republic. The three men each requested a privilege for their psalter and included the full text of the granted privilege (including their own request) in the front matter of the publication.

In sending his book to literary friends in Amsterdam and dedicating it to local authorities he had worked with, one gets the impression De Hubert did not necessarily want to make a religious statement with his translations.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, unlike Marnix, he did not conform to choices made by Datheen, which would have made it difficult to replace Datheen's version with his, and in the book's front matter he deployed a discourse focused on his linguistic accuracy. The rhymed psalms are 'translated by him from the original text word for word, and rhymed in Dutch,' as is stated in the privilege text, which is printed in the front matter of the book.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, his linguistic accuracy is underlined in the various front matter texts time and again, as he repeatedly notes he tried to stay as close to the elevated Hebrew language as possible, reconsidering every single letter.

De Brune also stayed as close as possible to the Hebrew original and emphasised his accuracy. His translation was not rhymed for that very reason, but there was something that distinguished his psalter from De Hubert's in a positive way: the States translation of the Bible had been published between the two psalters, and De Brune emphasised in several front matter texts that his translation was 'in line with the new Bible translation,' mentioning this on the title page and including it as part of the addendum to the privilege printed in the front matter.<sup>46</sup> More than De Hubert, De Brune seems to have strived to get his translation

<sup>40</sup> In 1649, the Enkhuizen schoolmaster and musician Hendricksz. published a psalm translation meant, as the publication's front matter suggests, for the Reformed church, but he did not intend to dethrone Datheen: he kept Datheen's texts and only added new musical annotation to make it easier to sing the psalms during church services. He focused his publication specifically on his own community in Enkhuizen and invested in it himself. It seems, therefore, that he mainly wished to protect his investment by applying for a privilege. Little is known about Hendricksz., except for the fact that he was also active as a bookseller in Enkhuizen in 1649-1650, see Hoogendoorn, *Bibliography*, 578; 'Hendricksz, Jacob', *Bibliopolis*, <https://www.bibliopolis.nl/personen/search/database/ADRES+THESAUR/name/Hendricksz/sort/mainEntry/maximumRecords/1/page/26> (Accessed on 25 November 2025).

<sup>41</sup> Zwaan, *Uit de geschiedenis*, 1-13.

<sup>42</sup> Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland*, 320; Keblusek, *Boeken in de Hofstad*, 212-214.

<sup>43</sup> Geerdink, 'Literair auteurs'.

<sup>44</sup> Ros, *Davids soete lier*, 127.

<sup>45</sup> De Hubert, *De Psalmen*: 'bii hem na de oorspronkeliicken text van woorde te woorde vertaelt, ende in Nederduitz Riim gestelt'.

<sup>46</sup> De Brune, *De CL. Davids Psalmen*: 'in conformatie van de nieuwe oversettinge'. De Brune did deviate from the States translation now and then, however, and he discusses why in the front matter, but at first sight, his emphasis is on the alignment.

introduced into the church service: he added an approbation of the Walcheren classis, emphasising the usability of the translation, and dedicated the book to the States-General.<sup>47</sup> After the first publication in 1644, two revised editions appeared in 1650, evidently meant to make the introduction of the translation in church services easier: in the first, the number of stanzas was changed to match Datheen's number; in the second, the meter was equalised and Datheen's rhymed translation printed alongside De Brune's.<sup>48</sup> In the second edition, De Brune also included an appraisal made by some Utrecht professors, among them Voetius, who recommended the use of the translation for collective singing in Utrecht churches.<sup>49</sup>

Boey tried to combine the best of two worlds by revising Datheen's verses to match them with the language of the States translation of the Bible. His ambitions with the work are evident from the front matter, where he wrote that this revision made his version of the psalms 'very suitable for use in the Reformed churches, without any hindrance'.<sup>50</sup> Boey included the privilege texts, from both the States of Holland and the States-General, and a dedication to the States of Holland. An important difference between Boey's privilege and the privileges granted to De Hubert and De Brune is that Boey had applied for a privilege for all of his poetical works. His request therefore does not specify any details about his psalm translation and the privilege text in the front matter of the publication does not reinforce what is written about the translation in other texts in the front matter. Just like De Brune, however, Boey published a revised edition (1659), which he dedicated to The Hague ministers (one of whom had supplied an appraisal, also included).

It is clear that although Datheen's version would remain the official psalter for use in Reformed church services throughout the century, these men did everything in their power to try and get their own versions sung in churches next to, or even instead of, Datheen's. Their theological and linguistic strategies varied, but the manner in which the privileges were showcased in the front matter of their publications is very similar: they were mentioned on the title page and got a prominent position in the front matter. Either by repeating the strengths of the psalm translation or through creating an overlap between the dedicatees and the authorities granting the privilege, this inclusion of the texts of the approval was a coherent part of the front matter and a strategic asset to its ambitions. By including recommendations from, or dedications to, church officials, we see them aligning the sense of political approval to one of religious approval. Was this also a useful strategy for psalmists and psalm printers focusing on churches other than the Reformed, and thus in theory operating outside of the political realm in the Dutch Republic?

### *Privileged Psalters in the Lutheran Church: Dethroning Van Haecht, 1662-1700*

From 1588 onwards there was a Lutheran community in the Dutch Republic, with its centre in Amsterdam. Although the Lutherans were at first barely tolerated by the Reformed

<sup>47</sup> Ros, *Davids soete lier*, 153.

<sup>48</sup> Ros, *Davids soete lier*, 154-155.

<sup>49</sup> Ros, *Davids soete lier*, 155.

<sup>50</sup> Boey, *CL Psalmen*: 'Seer bequaem om inde Gereformeerde Kercken, sonder verhinderinge, gebruyckt te worden.' Also cited in Ros, *Davids soete lier*, 156-157.

city council and thus had to be very careful and quiet while conducting their services, they were used to singing psalms and had brought Van Haecht's Dutch edition of the psalter from Antwerp to do so. There was much discontent concerning this translation, however, just as there was among the Reformed with Datheen's, and many new psalters would be published over the century in an attempt to replace Van Haecht.<sup>51</sup> That it was not until 1663 that such a Lutheran psalter was published with a privilege of the States-General and the States of Holland should be put down to the relationship between the Lutheran community and the government.

The Amsterdam community had a role comparable to the Lutheran authority in other countries, so it was this congregation that could make decisions about the psalter to be used during church services.<sup>52</sup> Amsterdam's Lutheran church began to enjoy more religious freedom towards the middle of the seventeenth century, when Lutherans joined the city elite. These members not only went about their religious business quietly and without fuss, but also boasted international connections which were of importance for Amsterdam's trade and welfare.<sup>53</sup> The States had no say about the choices made within the Lutheran community, however, so a privilege in a Lutheran psalter at first sight does not seem to have been motivated by the wish to have a psalter be prescribed for use in Lutheran church services.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, in both Lutheran cases from my corpus, situated in Amsterdam, it appears that economic imperatives were important drivers of the request for privileges. Nevertheless, the privilege was part of creating a positive image of the psalm book.

The Lutheran lawyer and poet Arnout van Overbeke was in 1662 the first to request a privilege for a psalter meant for the Lutheran church in the Dutch Republic.<sup>55</sup> As a lawyer, he must have been knowledgeable about the process of applying for a printing privilege. Van Overbeke was followed in 1688 by the Lutheran Jan van Duisberg (1639-1700?), who was not only responsible for revised psalm translations, but also for their printing and selling.<sup>56</sup> He was an experienced bookseller and as such familiar with the system of privileges. Both psalmists did not present completely new translations in which they had made radical choices, but instead stayed close to Van Haecht's original in order to meet the wishes of these communities – communities that did not like change, as Van Overbeke noted in the foreword to his readers.<sup>57</sup> Both Van Overbeke and Van Duisberg invested in the publication of their psalter themselves, which means the privilege likely functioned as a protection for their investment. Both psalmists aimed at dethroning Van Haecht, but only Van Duisberg succeeded. Whereas Van Overbeke's psalter was not used in church services and did not sell well as a consequence, Van Duisberg's psalter became the new standard,

51 Estié, 'De psalmberijmingen', 73-75.

52 Hiebsch, 'The Coming of Age', 18-19.

53 Hiebsch, 'Are the Netherlands', 71.

54 An interesting case of a privileged psalter (though not included in this article because printed before 1580 and outside the Dutch Republic) was Van Haecht's psalter, published in Antwerp in 1579: Van Haecht, *De psalmen*. The privilege was signed by Governor-General Matthias of Austria and the Council of van Brabant. I am grateful to Jeroen Vandommele for this reference.

55 NA, SvH 1615, Resolution 6 March 1662. The psalter was published in 1663.

56 NA, SvH 1640, Resolution 7 January 1688.

57 Van Overbeke, *De Psalmen*.

and would remain so until the last quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>58</sup> For Van Duisberg, this meant huge commercial success.<sup>59</sup>

The ambitions Van Overbeke had for his psalter are evident in his front matter. He opened with the privileges granted by the States-General and the States of Holland, each filling a full page, which were followed by a dedication to the powerful Amsterdam consistory.<sup>60</sup> In this dedication he spoke plainly of the poor quality of Van Haecht's translation, presenting his work on a new translation as a sacrifice he had made for the wellbeing of the Lutheran community. His adaptation was, he wrote in the foreword, meant for 'the readers from our community'. In the dedication, Van Overbeke implied that his work was both approved by and made in collaboration with the ministers of his own church community, but there is no proof of any official approbation. One might wonder whether the prominence of the privilege in the front matter can be explained by its ability to distract readers from the absence of the approbation. It lends the publication an official appearance, which might have resonated when matters turned to the approving ministers. What is remarkable, however, is that Van Overbeke's request, as repeated in the States' resolution printed in the front matter, did not mention anything about the book's contents, their importance, or how it was to the liking of important people within the Lutheran church.

This was different in the case of Van Duisberg, who had invested heavily in making sure his psalter would garner official approval. He had published a partial psalter, dedicated to the Amsterdam congregation and a Rotterdam Lutheran minister who was his cousin, in 1680. In 1687 he offered his complete psalter to the Lutheran consistory and the negotiations concerning the approval and use of his psalter started.<sup>61</sup> In the meantime, he requested the privilege. By the 1689 edition, Van Duisberg could include the official approbation. It immediately followed the privilege (from the States of Holland only), with which he opened his front matter, just like Van Overbeke. The text of the privilege is considerably longer than Van Overbeke's, however, and includes an elaborate explanation of the motivation behind the new translation, as well as references to the approbation (which was only made official after the granting of the privilege). Moreover, Van Duisberg had emphasised in his request that the Lutheran congregations had encouraged him to make this new psalter and had already promised to put it to use in their churches. The privilege as such could be regarded as a reinforcement of the approval of the religious authorities that follows.

In both Lutheran cases, the privilege, while possibly offering protection of the financial investments of the psalmists, intersected with the approval of the Lutheran church. While evidence is scarce in the case of Van Overbeke, it might be that he felt that the official touch of the privilege increased his chances of being taken seriously by both the congregation to

58 Estié, 'De psalmberijmingen', 75-76.

59 Van Duisberg in 1700 allowed other printers to publish a new edition of his psalm book, for which he received 150 guilders: Kleerkooper and Van Stockum, *De boekhandel*, 1, 110-111.

60 For a period of time, privileges requested from the States-General were only accepted in the province of Holland when a so called *attache* was requested from the States of Holland (or another province, for that matter). This explains why in the front matter the privilege granted by the States-General is followed by an *attache* of the States of Holland.

61 Molhuysen and Blok (eds.), *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, v, 143.

which he dedicated his psalter, as well as in the Lutheran community at large. In the case of Van Duisberg, it is very clear that he used the (hoped-for) approval of the church as an argument in the privilege request, while reinforcing the official appearance of his book by including the privilege in the front matter. Although one would maybe not expect it in the context of anything other than the public church, it seems that in the Lutheran cases the association with political approval that came with the privileges interacted with religious approval in much the same manner.

### *Privileged Psalters in the Mennonite Church: Oudaens's Psalters, 1680-1684*

Psalms were less important for Mennonites than other Protestants. This traditionally pacifist confession felt uncomfortable with the psalms because they were part of the Old Testament and as such thematised violence, war, and revenge.<sup>62</sup> Only later in the seventeenth century would they adopt the Reformed use of psalm-singing in church services, albeit not as much enthusiastically as other Protestants.<sup>63</sup> At first the Mennonites simply used Datheen, but in the end they longed for their own version of the psalms. The Mennonite church in Amsterdam, comprising various communities, thus commissioned Joachim Oudaen (1628-1692) to adapt the psalms for church singing.<sup>64</sup> Oudaen, a tiler by profession, was a deacon of the Mennonite community in Rotterdam, but above all a pious Christian and renowned poet, who had already published a psalter some years before. A comparison of the front matter of Oudaen's psalters, the first completed on his own initiative, the second commissioned, allows us to analyse the role of printing privileges in Mennonite psalm publications.

Oudaen's own psalter was published in Rotterdam in two parts, in 1680 and 1681.<sup>65</sup> Since he did not intend the psalms to be sung in church services, Oudaen felt free to elaborate on the text. For the first book of seventy-five psalms, he collaborated with a musician, the Middelburg organist and bookseller Remigius Schrijver (?-1681), who provided them with polyphonic musical adaptations. In the foreword to the first part, Oudaen explained that people around him had motivated him to publish his psalms in parts, since they could wait no longer to read and sing them all. Oudaen further reflected on his innovations and stated that he did not bother to stay close to his predecessors, in language nor music, since his psalms would not be used for church services. Without mentioning names, he refers to the many failed attempts to dethrone Datheen: notwithstanding their quality, approval, and support, these had never really been considered.<sup>66</sup> The second part appeared soon after the first, in 1681, and did not include musical annotations, the consequence of a disagreement between poet and musician, as Oudaen wrote in his short foreword.

62 Visser, 'Elke mennoniet zijn eigen lied', 115.

63 Visser, 'Elke mennoniet zijn eigen lied', 120.

64 Visser, 'Elke mennoniet zijn eigen lied', 125-126.

65 Oudaen, *Uyt-breyding*. See for both these psalters with psalms rhymed by Oudaen also Ros, *Dauids soete lier*, 187-192.

66 Oudaen, *Uyt-breyding*, I, 'Bericht aan den lezer, en zanger', fol. 4v.

In the forewords to both parts, Oudaen referred to his network of *liefhebbers* (connoisseurs), consisting of fellow believers, poets, and other intellectuals, who knew he was working on the psalms and had already read some of his adaptations. These were probably drawn from the Collegiants to which Oudaen belonged himself, and with whom he worshipped regularly.<sup>67</sup> Oudaen showed himself convinced by their encouragement that his psalter would be read and sung within this circle and, apparently aiming for no greater accolade, he did not include any formal or appraising elements in his front matter: no dedication, no laudatory poems, no privilege or approval.

The 1684 psalter published on the initiative of the Amsterdam Mennonite communities did come with a privilege, which was mentioned on the title page and copied in the first pages of the front matter. It was followed by a foreword signed by the Amsterdam Mennonite communities themselves. Indeed, the psalter was not published under Oudaen's name and it did not only include his psalms. Oudaen was asked to make adaptations of his earlier psalms in order to align them with Datheen: having the same number of verses and meter as Datheen's psalms made singing in church services easy.<sup>68</sup> In some cases, the Amsterdam Mennonite church chose a psalm rhymed by someone else. This psalter was thus 'owned' by the church itself and did not require an approbation. The fact that the publishers requested a privilege might be regarded from this perspective: it lent the publication an air of authority, which seems to have become common practice for psalters intended for church use. At the same time, it must also be regarded as an attempt to protect the publishers' investment. In the request, copied in full in the front matter, they mention the expenses of the publication as the reason for the privilege, and since the publication was initiated by the church itself, sales must have been expected to be predictable.

The case of Oudaen's 1684 psalter suggests that in relation to the privilege system, there was a difference between psalters intended for church use, and psalters intended for home use: psalters intended for church use came with privileges. The only other psalter from my corpus explicitly *not* intended for church use – by Vlakveld, admittedly with a privilege – was published 'for the author' and was thus most probably requested to protect his own investment.<sup>69</sup> Just like the Lutheran examples, the Mennonite cases show that by the end of the seventeenth century the request of privileges for psalters was not reserved for the public Reformed church, and that psalters intended for church use in other denominations also proudly presented their privileges on the title page and in the front matter. Unlike the Lutheran cases, however, there seems to have been less interaction between the privilege request and approval from the church. Had the privilege become a common element for psalters intended for church use? As psalters also appeared that were intended for church use without privilege (Halma, for example), this remains an open question. The last psalter to be discussed here, however, did come with a privilege and was meant for church use, and very ambitiously so.

<sup>67</sup> See for example Van Slee, *De Rijnsburger collegianten*, 121-124.

<sup>68</sup> See on the adaptations also Visser, 'Elke mennoniet zijn eigen lied', 125-126.

<sup>69</sup> There is one other case which should be mentioned here: the psalms published by Tjaert Sonnema in 1661 (Sonnema, *Basuin-klank*). Sonnema focused on informal religious communities of both Reformed and Lutheran denomination. He requested a privilege but paid for the publication himself (it was printed 'for the author'). This publication was not included in the corpus because it is not a complete psalter.

*A Privileged Psalter Bridging Differences: Ghysen's Collection, 1686*

In 1686, the Amsterdam merchant Hendrik Ghysen (1633-1693) published *Den Hoonig-raat der psalm-dichten*, a collection of previously published psalms from the pens of seventeen different authors of various denominations.<sup>70</sup> For each one of the 150 psalms, he either chose the best translation available or created a new one by selecting the most convincing parts from the published corpus. Where necessary, he adapted or improved on the published version so that they matched the number of verses in Datheen's version and the rhyme and language of the States Bible. Ghysen was cantor in the Amstel church, and his foreword stated explicitly that he had taken pains to prevent any psalm from retaining features that might have hindered their being sung in church.<sup>71</sup> This was also highlighted on the title page, which noted that the psalms had been 'composed with the same meter and verses as is usual in the Dutch churches'.<sup>72</sup> That he envisioned a formal role for his psalter during services is also evident in his references to earlier attempts at dethroning Datheen. He criticised the lack of an official commission for the making of a proper and universally acceptable psalter to replace Datheen. As he and many people around him felt they could no longer wait, Ghysen wrote, he had challenged himself to take up the task.

The front matter corresponds with this ambition. The privilege is more visible than in any of the other psalters discussed in this article. Not only is it mentioned below the frontispiece and once again on the title page, the first page of the book is blank except for four lines stating the book had a privilege for fifteen years, referring the reader directly to the following two pages which were taken up by the full text of the privilege. In the text, the printer-applicant emphasised Ghysen's efforts by describing his work in quite some detail. The text of the privilege was followed by a dedication to Nicolaas Witsen, one of the mayors of Amsterdam and Ghysen's patron, an elaborate foreword, and, last but not least, a series of laudatory poems written by poets and ministers of various religious backgrounds and differing levels of fame.<sup>73</sup>

Ghysen seems neither to have attempted to obtain any approbations nor did he formally present his psalter during synods or other religious congregations. Nevertheless, his psalter was well received and considered as an alternative to Datheen across the whole of the eighteenth century. That Ghysen did not seek official approbation for his psalter might have been the result of his ambition to replace Datheen not only within the Reformed church, but in other churches as well. A privilege, much like a dedication to a regent, served to confer official authority upon a publication without directly linking it to a particular church, and Ghysen and his bookseller perhaps regarded it as a better instrument for the promotion of his work than an approbation from a specific church community which ran the risk of alienating other such communities. Of course, the bookseller who had requested the privilege also hoped for some protection of his investment, given his expectation – which came true – that Ghysen's psalter would be a best-seller.

70 Ghysen, *Den Hoonig-raat*. See on this work also Ros,  *Davids soete lier*, 196-200.

71 Ghysen, 'Den Hoonig-raat', 'Voor-reden'.

72 Ghysen, 'Den Hoonig-raat': 'Gestelt op Sangmaate en Afdeelinghe, in de Nederlandsche Kerken gebrukelyk'.

73 On Witsen's patronage, see Peters, 'Nepotisme', 105-106.



## *Conclusion*

From these different cases, we can conclude that privileges were vital tools with which authors and booksellers alike sought to manage their reputations and positions within ideological debates, as well as serving to protect their financial investments. Most importantly, however, privileges were part of the reputation management of the psalters themselves. As such, the psalmist's engagement in the system of printing privileges intersected with the pluralism of the Dutch religious landscape and was important for the development of religious identities in various churches and religious communities.

Over time, we see both the contexts of the privileged psalters as well as the backgrounds and ambitions of the applicants diversify. Whereas the first privileges were connected to the Dutch Revolt and the creation of a strong Reformed church in the emerging republic, later in the seventeenth century privileged psalters also became important within other churches, and privileges were even requested in support of a publication aiming at overcoming the differences between the various Protestant denominations in the Dutch Republic – psalms for all, as in Ghysen's case. Both psalters and privileges thus came to play a different role in the Dutch Republic over time, also beyond the Calvinist community. Although all applicants were religiously engaged to a certain extent, there is a notable difference between the psalmists of the first half of the century, who played leading roles in the Reformed church, and the psalmists of the second half of the century, whose ambitions were not only religious but also, or in some cases maybe even mainly, literary or commercial.

Still, it seems Marnix set the tone: psalmists and booksellers of psalters could have various reasons to apply for a privilege, and one of these might simply have been that it had become common practice. It may well have been a disadvantage for a psalter that was being pushed towards an official status within a church to have no privilege. The analysis of the rhetoric of requesting also hints at a trend: whereas requests generally did not elaborate on the details of the publications, psalmists' requests often do, focusing on either their unique selling-point (what made their psalm book an improvement?) or their embedding within specific church communities. Moreover, the emanation of the privilege as an approval mark by the States was intensified by the psalmists' detailed description of either their innovations or their support within the request. As the privilege was often part of the front matter, in which exactly the same arguments were developed, it not only lent the publication the authorising power of official recognition, it also reinforced these arguments as part of the representation of both the book and its maker. On the other hand, it could also function as a replacement for other official markers, such as approbations.

As the cases I presented all show a strong interconnection between the privilege and other parts of the front matter, future research should focus on front matter in a larger corpus, including all Dutch psalm books, not only the ones with a privilege. This would also allow to confirm my hypothesis that the privilege request was a trend within the genre: which instruments did other psalmists and printers of psalters use to make their books fulfil their ambitions, and how did the privilege relate to those? If one thing becomes clear from my analysis, it is that privileges were part of a toolbox available to psalmists and printers of psalters to manage their books' reputation, and as such they only rarely operated in a vacuum.

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