Occupational Matrilineages in the Printing House: Petitions for Licenses as a Source for Scholarship on Early Modern Women

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Abstract

The application dossiers for printer's licences and privileges from the Privy Council in Brussels are a well-known source for book historians. To increase their chances of success, printers used a range of different arguments in their requests, including a family tradition in the trade. Using the application dossiers of the Boscard and Serrurier families in seventeenth-century Saint-Omer and Douai, I show that women frequently appeared in the applicants' occupational lineage histories and that women printers also used family history as an argument in their own applications. These sources help us to rewrite the patrilinear narratives about the early modern printing business.

Keywords: publishing industry, women's work, succession, family business, privileges

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The cache of papers holding application dossiers for printers' licences and privileges from the Privy Council in Brussels are well-known to book historians. As anxieties around the ability of the printing press to spread subversive ideas arose throughout sixteenth-century Europe, governments began to experiment with ways to control the new technology's reach. A common method was pre- and post-publication censorship of texts and images. In addition, governments also attempted to mould printing communities and regulate who was able to set up shop as a printer in the first place. By vetting aspiring printers before admission, the authorities hoped to curate a body of dependable printers, publishers, and booksellers. In turn, printing communities often welcomed such measures, as they could be used to curb competition and protect market shares.[1]

In the Southern Low Countries, several organisations took on the task of setting up entry barriers to the printing and bookselling trades. Aspiring printers had to gain permission from their local supervising bodies, such as the universities in Leuven and Douai that incorporated 'people of the book' in their communities, or the guild of Saint Luke in Antwerp, membership of which was made mandatory for printer-publishers in 1557 by order of king Philip II. They could also apply to the Council of Brabant or the central government in Brussels, where the Privy Council was tasked with the matter of printers' licences.[2] The surviving dossiers of aspiring printers who applied to the Privy Council between 1546 and 1702 are kept in the Royal State Archives of Belgium. These have proven to be popular sources with book historians, who use them to track individual careers and occupational lineages, that is, families passing on the firms to the next generation(s).[3]

1 McLeod has made a compelling case for this two-way street of governments seeking control and printing communities welcoming restrictions for France: McLeod, *Licensing Loyalty*. For the Southern Low Countries, see Adam, *Le théâtre*; Puttemans, *La censure*; Machiels, *Privilege*.

2 Van der Stock, *Printing Images*, 39-43; Roegiers, 'De reglementering', 75-88; Adam, *Vivre et imprimer*, I, 42-58. On women in the guild of Saint Luke, see Wyffels, 'De drukkersvrouwen'.

3 Not in the least due to Soenen's inventory: Soenen, *Inventaire analytique*. For research using these sources, see Adam, *Vivre et imprimer*; Afonso, *Imprimeurs, société et réseaux*; Soetaert, *De katholieke drukpers*. For the use of similar sources in France, see McLeod, *Licensing Loyalty*.

Despite the growing number of ground-breaking studies demonstrating that women were indispensable to the early modern book trade, book historians have primarily focused on the ways in which male printers set up shop and passed their workshop on to their sons or sons-in-law.[4] In doing so, they habitually confine women to roles of helpmeets and passive pawns in marital alliances which benefit men's careers. This makes for decidedly patrilinear succession stories.[5] While women are part of these narratives, they are not at the heart of them.

However, even a cursory glance at the detailed inventory of the petitions for licences from the Privy Council reveals several women's names.[6] While the majority of applicants were men alone, a sizable minority were widows, widows and sons, and a few cases of husbands and wives. What could these documents tell us about the working lives of women and the ways in which printing communities presented occupational lineage? A selection of five dossiers demonstrates how applicants used family history in different familial contexts and at different stages in their lives. The dossiers of Marie de Marquette from Douai (1658) and Jeanne Burée from Saint-Omer (1626) are applications from widows who positioned themselves as heirs to a business they were surely familiar with. The dossiers of the next generation – Marquette's children Marie and Christophe Serrurier (1667), Burée's daughter Marie Boscard with her husband (1638), and with Boscard's second husband (1650) – illustrate how printers at the beginning of their career as managers related to their parents' years of experience and expertise.

The dossiers contain the petitions themselves, written in the name of the applicants. Often, they include annotations from the council's secretaries, such as a note on the final decision, or modifications to make the initial text function as a draft for the granted licence. Some dossiers also contain supporting documents: statements about their skill and reputation from master printers, parish priests, deans, and similarly authoritative voices from the aspiring printer's local community. Taken together, these documents give a unique insight into the arguments printers used to increase their chances of a successful application, such as the ubiquitous need to support a family and the good standing, necessary skill, and religious orthodoxy of the applicant.

Aspiring printers needed to demonstrate both skill and dependability. They used several types of arguments to make their case with the Privy Council. In order to prove their technical skill, applicants referred to apprenticeships and subsequent work experience, sometimes including letters of testimony from established master printers. Similarly, good conduct and dependable character could be proved through the testimony of community leaders such as the parish priest. Besides these prerequisites, an argument that is often clearly emphasised in the texts is evidence of having been raised in the trade. Parents'

4 Examples of research on women printers in England, the Low Countries, and France include Smith, *Grossly Material Things*; McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street*; Everard, 'Catharina Dóll-Egges te paard'; Hoftijzer, 'Women in the Early Modern Dutch Book Trade'; Jimenes, *Charlotte Guillard*; Arbour, *Dictionnaire des femmes libraires en France*; McLeod, 'Printer Widows'; Valerie Wayne (ed.), *Women's Labour and the History of the Book*.

5 Delsaerdt, *Suam quisque bibliothecam*, 89-90; Afonso, *Imprimeurs, société et réseaux*, 173-180, 212-215; Adam, *Vivre et imprimer*, I, 165-173; Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trade*, 54, 60; Parent, *Les métiers du livre*, 185.

6 Soenen, *Inventaire analytique*.

established credentials in book production seem to have been a compelling argument for the Privy Council. Craft guilds, as self-governing bodies of master artisans, also showed preferential treatment to established printers' family. They often had lower entry fees for masters' sons and established rules for the continuation of firms by masters' widows, therefore organising privileged access to the trade through familial ties.[7]

Tracing Matrilineage in Douai and Saint-Omer

For the printing houses in the licence dossiers, the process of application for a new printer's licence implied a transition in official leadership from husband to widow or from parents to children. The first dossier we shall interrogate, from 1658, pertains to the widow Marie de Marquette (fig. 1). In 1633, her husband Jean Serrurier had established their printing house, called the Salamander (or Newt), in Douai, a city located in the border region with France. Since 1562, it had been home to the second university of the Habsburg Low Countries after Leuven. Along with Douai's religious communities, the university and its colleges provided the heart of the town's printing market. Indeed, the first printer settled in town shortly after the university was established, and printers fell under the jurisdiction of the university.[8]

In Serrurier's and Marquette's time, printers remained a well-established part of the university community. Together, they had an impressive thirty-four years of work under their belt. Jean Serrurier was a first-generation printer who started his business in 1633 with a publication on the duties of a parishioner.[9] His workshop focused on devotional texts in Latin and French. His widow, Marie Marquette, outlived him by at least ten years, taking over as official head of a firm she must have already known quite well.

Marquette submitted her own application to the Privy Council in 1658.[10] Possibly, she had previously been admitted by the university and was only later encouraged to also obtain the government licence.[11] The application's text emphasises the importance of family connections through the idea of the customary widow's right to continue her husband's workshop. Indeed, the advice provided by Douai's aldermen notes that it is customary to let masters' widows 'exercise the art and craft […] of their husbands with the same privileges and liberties'.[12]

In addition to customary rights, Marquette's petition devotes some sentences to her husband's impeccable reputation and strict adherence to the law, as well as the business's

7 Although some guilds also restricted the widow's right. While Ogilvie's overall argument is not without its detractors, her book provides a good overview of different types of entry barriers and rights in European guilds: Ogilvie, *The European Guilds*, esp. 83-171, 232-261.

8 Soetaert, *De katholieke drukpers*, 46-49.

9 *Parochianus obediens*; Labarre, *Répertoire bibliographique*, XI, no. 1883.

10 Brussels, Algemeen Rijksarchief (hereafter ARA), Privy Council (hereafter PC) 1279/12, Licence dossier of Marie de Marquette, 19 August 1658.

11 On the regulations regarding widows taking over as head of the family's printing house, see Wyffels, *Women and Work in Early Modern Printing Houses*, 218-223.

12 ARA, PC 1279/12, Licence dossier of Marie de Marquette, 19 August 1658: 'd'exercer […] l'art et stil de leurs marys jouissantes en ce regard des mesmes franchises et libertes'. All translations are the author's.

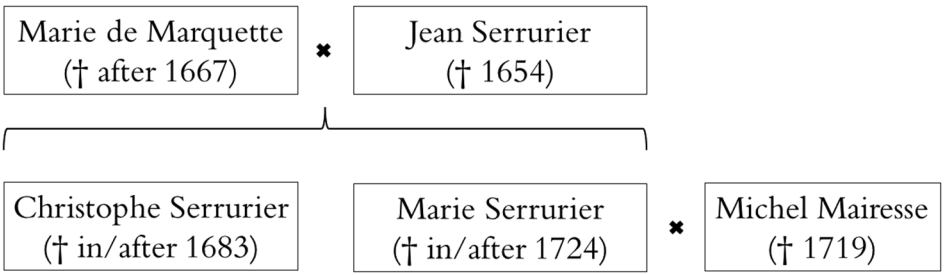

Fig. 1 The Serrurier-Marquette family. Author's diagram.
Sources: ARA, PC *1279/12; Labarre,* Répertoire bibliographique, XI; *Labarre, 'Les imprimeurs', 255, 257; Afonso,* Imprimeurs, société et réseaux, *369-370.*

usefulness to the town's university community. Enclosed are testimonies from three Jesuit priests who used to be professors at the university, who supported the idea of continuation between late husband and widow. They not only stressed that the late master had served them well by printing theses for the college, they also deemed the widow capable of continuing the printing house because she inherited a functioning business: tools and workmen. This indicates that there is no expectation that the widow would need to personally operate the press, as that part of the business could be carried out by her paid employees. As a whole, Marquette's dossier stressed her husband's accomplishments as a well-respected printer and bookseller in Douai's university community and positioned her as the natural heir to both his professional reputation and his – or rather their – business, including the workforce.[13]

As both printer and bookseller, Marquette had already steered the business through difficult years when the Habsburg Low Countries were involved in the Franco-Spanish War (1635-1659). In 1656, for example, she published a news pamphlet which detailed war events near Valenciennes.[14] Only eleven publications bearing Marquette's imprint have survived. There were likely more editions printed under her management, such as the more ephemeral university theses the Jesuits' testimony in her dossier suggest.[15] Despite the war, Marquette managed to keep the family firm in operation for fourteen years after her husband's death, before her children Marie and Christophe Serrurier took over, probably because their mother had either died or retired.

A similar dossier to that of Marquette is Jeanne Burée's from Saint-Omer, an episcopal city in the same region as Douai (fig. 2). Her husband, Charles Boscard, started his career as a second-generation printer in his hometown of Douai in 1596, before moving to Saint-Omer in 1610. The Boscard printing house would contribute to Saint-Omer's role as a centre of Catholic print in the seventeenth century, printing works in English for local

13 For an analysis of all of the arguments used by Marquette, not merely those related to family, see Wyffels, *Women and Work in Early Modern Printing Houses*, 150-153; Afonso, *Imprimeurs, société et réseaux*, 186-189.
14 *Ce qui s'est passé à Valentiennes devant le siege de françois*; Labarre, *Répertoire bibliographique*, XI, no. 2338.
15 De Mûelenaere, 'Disputatio and Dedication'. For the survival rates of rare books, see Proot, 'Survival factors'.

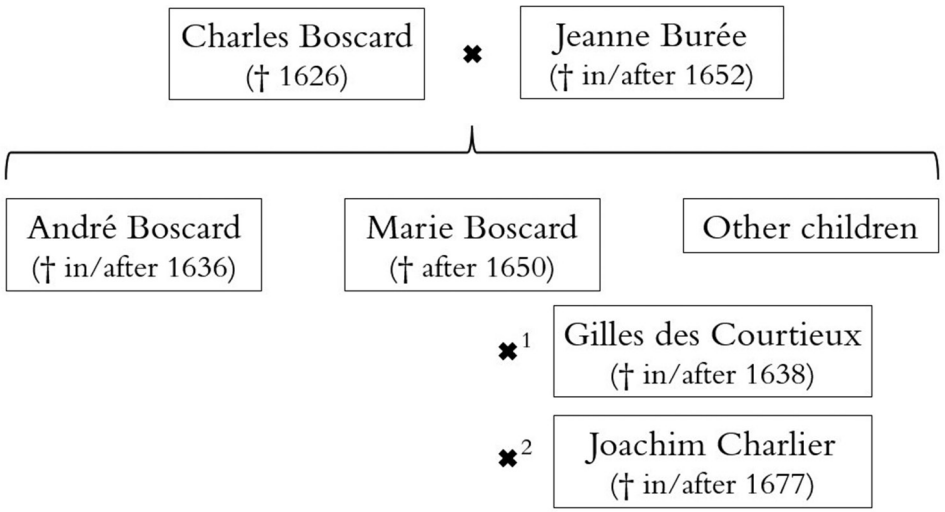

Fig. 2 The Boscard-Burée family. Author's diagram.
Sources: ARA, PC *1277/19,* PC *1278/9, and* PC *1279/7; Labarre,* Répertoire bibliographique, XI*; Afonso,* Imprimeurs, société et réseaux*, 325-326.*

refugee communities and export, amongst others.[16] The English Jesuits were an important factor in Saint-Omer's printing market and both Boscard and Burée probably also worked for their English College Press, which aimed to furnish English Catholics with reading materials in their own language.[17] Jeanne Burée managed the printing house in her own name from 1629 to 1652 and published about fifty editions, roughly half of which were religious works in English, often with a Jesuit connection.[18]

As in Marquette's dossier, Burée's contains testimonies from her town's dignitaries – in this case from the magistrate and the bishop. The latter stressed her late husband's merits as a 'good man, a good Catholic, having always performed his duties honourably'.[19] Continuing the family business, the bishop explained, his widow could perform the same tasks, as she possessed the same tools and had retained the same staff. Like the arguments in Marquette's case, the bishop favoured a certain continuity in the functioning of a printing house, regardless of the gender of its manager.

Additionally, Burée herself would feature in no fewer than three new petitions for licences from her successors. The first petition that used Burée's work history as an authority was that of her son, André Boscard. He successfully obtained permission to continue his parent's printing house in 1636, about seven years after his mother was first granted

16 Afonso, *Imprimeurs, société et réseaux*, 33-34, 44, 77; Soetaert, 'Charles I Boscard'.
17 Soen, Soetaert, and Verberckmoes, 'Verborgen meertaligheid', 64, 73; Soetaert, *De katholieke drukpers*, 154.
18 Afonso, *Imprimeurs, société et réseaux*, 228-229.
19 ARA, PC 1277/19, Licence dossier of Jeanne Burée, 26 October 1626: 'Il a tousiours esté fort homme de bien, et bon catholique, s'estant tousiours acquitté honorablement de sa charge.'

her own licence. Shortly thereafter, however, both André and his wife died of a contagious illness. The dossier also failed to survive, but was referenced by a subsequent petition from the Boscard family.[20]

In 1638, fourteen years before Burée's final edition would come off the press, other would-be successors applied for their own licence. This time, a husband and wife applied together: Gilles des Courtieux and Marie Boscard.[21] As the surnames indicate, it was not Courtieux who could claim affiliation by birth. Their dossier carefully identifies Marie Boscard as daughter of the late Charles Boscard and Jeanne Burée, and as sister to the late André. It also reminds the Privy Council that all of these family members previously obtained licences in their own names. Although not related by blood, Marie Boscard's husband also had a connection to the family business: he had worked for them for eighteen years, including for the widow Burée. Where he could offer skill and work experience, Marie Boscard brought a family history of dependable printers to the table, including her mother.

This combination of arguments must have convinced the council. Unfortunately, no books with Des Courtieux's imprint are known, and he probably died shortly after obtaining the licence. This second family death would explain why Burée kept her name on the printing house after 1638: the second succession plan had failed as well. The third and last petition referring to Jeanne Burée supports the idea that Des Courtieux had died. In 1650, Joachim Charlier presented himself as another son-in-law of Charles Boscard and Jeanne Burée, and as Marie Boscard's husband. Evidently, she had remarried. Like Des Coutrieux, Charlier proved his experience with printing through his work for the ageing widow. This time, the family had more luck with their plans: Charlier would publish in Saint-Omer from 1651 to 1677.[22]

In Douai, the Serruriers siblings' aspirations in the printing trade did not spring out of thin air either, as they indeed strategically emphasised in their application. In 1667 they applied for permission to become printers and booksellers in their hometown.[23] The following year, the Habsburg rulers would cede this town to France in the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, but in 1667 the siblings still had to apply to the Privy Council in Brussels instead of Paris. Marie and Christophe Serrurier's application is somewhat atypical because most sons applied alone. Why the siblings decided to apply together remains unclear, but it suggests that Marie inherited and retained a share in the business.

Aside from their decision to include Marie in the petition, the Serrurier siblings' application is typical in the arguments it proposes, especially concerning occupational lineage. To establish the siblings' connection with the printing trade, their petition references the activities of both their parents. After introducing their father as 'sworn bookseller and printer of the university', the application explicitly introduces their mother as 'Marie Marquette, since her husband's death also sworn bookseller and printer of the university'. The French uses the gendered terms *marchande librairesse et imprimeresse jurée* as

20 ARA, PC 1278/9, Licence dossier of Gilles des Courtieux and Marie Boscard, 2 March 1638.

21 ARA, PC 1278/9, Licence dossier of Gilles des Courtieux and Marie Boscard, 2 March 1638.

22 ARA, PC 1279/7, Licence dossier of Joachim Charlier, 19 February 1650. See also Afonso, *Imprimeurs, société et réseaux*, 214-215.

23 ARA, PC 1279/34, Licence dossier of Christophe and Marie Serrurier, 24 May 1667.

opposed to the male *marchand libraire et imprimeur juré*. There is no question that Marquette held these job titles in her own right.[24]

The designation of Serrurier and Marquette as 'sworn printers' was also deliberate. Given that printers in Douai became members of the university, which acted as a local supervisory body over the trade, emphasising the parents' legitimate and law-abiding practice also strengthened their children's legitimacy. Their family had already demonstrated their reliability to the authorities. The application further notes that Marquette was growing older and wished to retire, prompting the siblings' request to take over the family business. In this way their petition to the Privy Council was framed as a logical first step in a natural transition from one generation of loyal printers to the next, equally dependable one.

Marie and Jean Serrurier would continue the family business from 1669 to 1683. During her lifetime, Marie Serrurier would not only work together with her brother but also with her husband Michel Mairesse. He was a third-generation printer whose mother Dorothée Boscard and grandmother Christine de Roovere had both managed the family firm as widows. After he died in 1719, Marie Serrurier continued working as a widow printer until 1724.[25]

Convincing Narratives

The documents printers submitted to the Privy Council contained highly crafted narratives aimed at convincing a government body. As such, they tell us what aspiring printers (and perhaps legal counsel or their predecessors' experience) thought would sway the decision-makers in their favour. Many applications reference family traditions in printing and publishing as a precedent to their own ambitions. Women appear regularly in these narratives both as part of the argument for the petition's being granted as well as being the potential benefactor. Marie Serrurier, together with her brother, made grateful use of her family's demonstrated expertise, as did the successors to Burée. Both Jeanne Burée and Marie de Marquette were fully integrated into their families' work histories and their presence did not require further explanation.

Both sets of parents in the dossiers discussed above were well-known, respectable booksellers and printers in the small book communities of Douai and Saint-Omer, as testified by carefully chosen witnesses. The years of experience they represented bolstered their children's claims to continuation of the family tradition. The right of widows to continue their husband's trade was well-established, and in the seventeenth-century Habsburg Low Countries, the desirability of passing on firms to master printers' offspring seems to have been upheld both by printing families and by the authorities dispensing licences. Women's place in these occupational lineages was recognised by all parties. Female applicants used their family history, just as families in turn used successful women printers' career histories

24 ARA, PC 1279/34, Licence dossier of Christophe and Marie Serrurier, 24 May 1667: 'bourgeois marchant librare et imprimeur jure de n[ot]re universite de Douay', 'Marie de Marquette, icelle depuis la mort de son mary aussij marchande librairesse et imprimeresse juree de lad[ite] uni[versi]te'.

25 Labarre, 'Les imprimeurs', 255, 257; Soetaert and Wyffels, 'Michel Mairesse'.

to bolster applications for the next generation. Without these women's work, these firms would not have survived until the next generation.

While men and women alike attained the status of licenced printers, there were gendered differences in the ways they argued to be allowed the right to print, or the standards used to measure their suitability. That the argument of family history in the business at hand was deemed a compelling one for men seems obvious. They used the family business, and their place within it, to demonstrate working experience. Men such as Gilles des Coutrieux used this argument through marriage: in his case he claimed to have gained the necessary experience while working for his mother-in-law. For women, the arguments were constructed rather as rights awarded to them through the family connection than as a consequence of their skill as artisans. This was especially true for widows, whose customary widows' right was well-entrenched in artisan milieus, but also seems to have made some sense for daughters. Besides skill, printers who were dependably honourable in their business dealings could count on their reputation to transfer partly to their kin of either gender (until proven otherwise). This gave them an edge over newcomers to the trade, who by definition could not count on established reputations.

Analysing sources such as petitions to obtain licences and privileges allows us to re-examine the role of women in their families' work histories. The depiction of their work experience and their work-related rights was a gendered but integral part of these narratives and served to strengthen the argument put forward for a continuation of the business. Despite the gendered differences in argumentation, the routine and repeated mention of women printers alongside their male contemporaries in these dossiers also demonstrates the normality of women heading printing houses. If women running printing houses were unusual, their appearance in occupational lineages would need explanation. Despite men's dominance of the printing trade, women were therefore plainly embedded in printers' networks and played a crucial role in the successful management of family businesses.

Because the dossiers show types of succession other than that of father to son, they help us rethink purely patrilinear narratives of family firms. Some of them even help us retrace occupational matrilineages, such as firms passing from mother to daughter in the case of Jeanne Burée and Marie Boscard (though this was partly accidental). Highlighting these cases deepens our understanding of early modern printing communities and the way they dealt with the question of succession. They also help us write women back into our narratives of early modern publishing, where their contemporaries clearly felt they belonged. Even male printers at work in a male-dominated craft did not think along purely patrilinear lines.

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