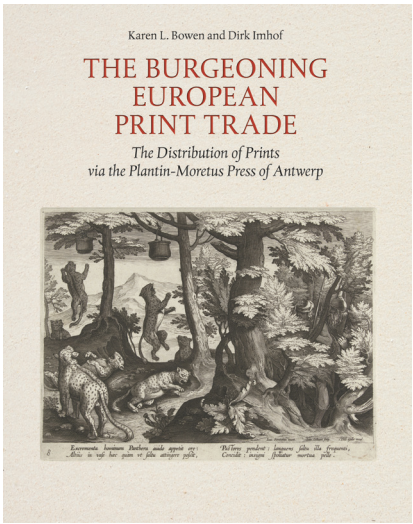
Review

Karen L. Bowen and Dirk Imhof, *The Burgeoning European Print Trade. The Distribution of Prints via the Plantin-Moretus Press of Antwerp*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2025, 404 pp. ISBN 9781915487070.



The Museum Plantin-Moretus in Antwerp is, in addition to its remarkable collection of early modern books, prints, drawings, copperplates, and printing presses, also home to an unparalleled archive. Former curator of the Museum's books and archives, Dirk Imhof, and art historian Karen Bowen, have both collaboratively and independently published numerous studies drawn from this rich resource. Their latest contribution is perhaps their most ambitious work to date: a study of how the Plantin-Moretus firm worked with local printmakers to buy and sell printed images alongside their books to an international clientele. In addition to mining the Plantin-Moretus archive, the authors made extensive use of Antwerp's Felixarchief, meticulously reconstructing the complex community of book and print publishers and sellers in Antwerp from guild membership lists, as well as the webs of intermarriage and godparentage, emigration and immigration, that underpinned many of these commercial relationships. In one such fascinating example, Bowen and Imhof discuss who was invited to various Plantin-Moretus family funerals.

Their earlier book, *Christopher Plantin and Engraved Book Illustrations in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge 2008), reconstructed the Antwerp publisher's employment of printmakers to provide captivating imagery for his books. Here Bowen and Imhof expand their scope considerably to the question of just how the Officina Plantiniana dealt in printed imagery: from hand-coloured prints on parchment to bulk sales made to buyers in France, Germany, Italy and Spain, and farther afield. An initial note to the reader includes a useful introduction to specialist language of the book and print trade, as well as notes on currency and measures, sample wages and prices, and an explanation of the archival sources. Alongside the introduction's survey of notable early modern print collections in

DOI 10.51750/emlc.29169 - URL: http://www.emlc-journal.org
Publisher: Stichting EMLC
Copyright: The Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

Europe and its discussion of the close links between the trade and collecting of books and prints, this prefatory note will make useful reading material for students and those new to the study of print or to early modern Antwerp.

The second chapter provides an overview of specific types of prints bought in bulk from the press, from a 1602 shipment of more than five thousand small prints from Adriaen Collaert sold to the merchant Rocho di Gabrielli for export to Gdańsk, to the nine hundred hand-coloured images on parchment also sold to a Gdańsk bookseller in 1644. The authors work out average bulk price rates across different formats. Tables 1 through 6 in the appendices list prices for individual prints, organised by publisher, tables 7 and 8 give prices for unspecified bulk prints on paper and parchment. The appendices are a treasure trove for specialists, including both lists of print publishers and the prints they sold, as well as individuals who purchased prints from the Plantin-Moretus press, organised by location, and all generously cross-referenced to the specific Museum Plantin-Moretus archival source. This alone is a gift to the study of Antwerp print, as well as the broader early modern print trade.

The following three chapters are organised around individuals: Plantin (Chapter 3), the Moretus (Chapter 4) and Galle families (Chapter 5), and various Antwerp printmakers, publishers and dealers (Chapter 6). The authors unpack recorded shipments and sales, drawing out key intermediaries or shifts in commercial strategy over time. We learn that following the departure of his final Calvinist partners, Plantin's involvement in the print trade increased significantly, aided and abetted by his relationship with Benito Arias Montano. Yet the prints acquired by the royal Spanish librarian appear not to have ended up in the Escorial collections. Later, the Moretuses saw their role in the print trade as supplementary to their main business, as they shipped packages of prints alongside books and met specific requests for printed images, apparently more to maintain client relationships than for strict profits. Landscape prints as well as devotional images were persistently sought by their customers: significant sales of the Wierix brothers' prints went to buyers in Cologne and in Spain, and those of Spanish origin resident in Antwerp.

There are many such fascinating asides in this volume, breadcrumbs for future scholars to pursue and interrogate. Yet there are a few missed chances to connect the example of the Plantin-Moretus enterprise to the broader study of early modern print. Bowen and Imhof's observation that the firm engaged in a variety of 'little jobs' alongside their regular work is in fact in line with Peter Stallybrass's description of the English book trade. How unusual was the Officina Plantiniana? Did their close collaboration with Antwerp printmakers and print publishers give them a commercial edge? Who were their local, regional and international rivals within the business or producing and selling printed images abroad? The wealth of archival detail presented in the volume sometimes overshadows these larger questions. However, this is notable only insofar as the book presents such a dense forest of information, that one can (still productively) lose oneself in the trees.

In the final three chapters, the authors direct their attention on questions of demand, with specific chapters dedicated to Cologne (Chapter 8) and the Frankfurt Fair (Chapter 9) that present more forceful and compelling narrative arguments. The chapter on Cologne

models how insights from the archive can be drawn out to craft larger arguments about regional relationships, immigrant networks, and the Counter Reformation's impact on the print market. The chapter on the Frankfurt Fair allows readers to consider the firm's diverse commercial interests, buying ink for printmakers and carrying currency, as well as books and prints between Antwerp and the Fair. Time and again, the authors provide delightful archival titbits ranging from describing the various ways prints were packaged to the particular taste of the Cologne Jesuits.

While an exhaustive survey of every market for Antwerp print could not be accomplished in a single volume, in this richly illustrated volume the authors have laid a crucial foundation. For example, one of the many findings of the book is the importance of the French market for the firm, as both a final and intermediary destination for Antwerp prints. Bowen and Imhof have laid out a template for future studies of Paris, Seville, or Gdańsk in their chapters on Cologne and the Frankfurt Fair. The book's conclusion suggests further tantalising fields of study as the authors note the rising importance of female agents as buyers and sellers of prints in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as the rising market for Antwerp prints in Latin America. *Burgeoning European Print Trade* is an essential resource for those interested in Antwerp print and the early modern print trade more generally, and with this book the authors have lit the way for future scholarship on early modern print in Antwerp and beyond.

Stephanie Porras, Tulane University