

Van der Veen, Sytze. *Brill: 325 Years of Scholarly Publishing*. Contributions by Paul Dijstelberge, Mirte D. Groskamp, and Kasper van Ommen. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008. 180 pp. Illus. Paper, •€20.00 or \$25.00 (ISBN 978-90-94-17932-2).

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The foundation in 1575 of Leiden's university — the first in the protestant northern Netherlands — by way of a reward to the city for holding out against the besieging Spanish forces was to bring rewards far beyond the institution itself. Notably, it turned the sleepy provincial town of Leiden into a center of printing and publishing in the Low Countries second only to Amsterdam. The history of the Leiden book trade has remained intimately connected with its university ever since. Over the centuries the office of *academiedrukker* (printer to the university) was filled by some of the world's most renowned printer–publisher dynasties, including the Plantins of Antwerp, the Elzeviers, and the Luchtmanes, illustrious predecessors of the house of Brill, and the last to hold the post until it was abolished in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Trawling through the long list of distinguished early modern scholars that made use of the services of Leiden publishers one meets the names of Lipsius, Scaliger, Descartes, Galilei, Huygens, Boerhaave, Linnaeus, and countless others. The long and eventful history of the early modern Leiden book trade has been rather well served in recent years. In 2008 appeared two books that both take the history of the book in Leiden beyond the well-documented early modern period into the less explored present. The first is the lavishly illustrated *Brill: 325 jaar uitgeven voor de wetenschap* (translated into English as *Brill: 325 Years of Scholarly Publishing*), which covers the history of the company from 1683 to 2008. The second is the even more lavishly produced and illustrated *Stad van boeken: Handschrift en druk in Leiden, 1260–2000* (City of books: Manuscript and print in Leiden, 1260–2000) by André Bouwman, Berry Dongelmans, Paul Hoftijzer, Ed van der Vlist, and Christiaan Vogelaar. Unfortunately available only in Dutch, *Stad van boeken* both establishes a longer time frame (starting with the manuscript book) and provides a wider context (beyond scholarly publishing) for the history of Luchtmanes–Brill. That both books appeared in the same year, incidentally, is not entirely coincidental. *Stad van boeken* appeared at the occasion of the 2008 exhibition of the same name. Held in the city's museum and art gallery De Lakenhal in the same year, it was generously supported by Brill as part of its anniversary celebrations.

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Today Brill remains virtually the sole — certainly the most prominent — heir to the distinguished tradition of scholarly publishing in Leiden. Having started life as Luchtmans in 1683, this makes it one of the oldest publishing houses in the world and a living monument of publishing history. *Brill: 325 Years of Scholarly Publishing* gives much attention to the scions of the Luchtmans and Brill (from 1848) families, but less to the many technological, economic, political, and social challenges posed to it in the course of the centuries. This is understandable considering the book's scope, limited both by its size (180 pages, of which perhaps a third is illustration) and purpose (a comprehensive account of the company's own history).

As does *Stad van boeken*, the book devotes special attention to the thus far rather neglected nineteenth and twentieth centuries, bringing us right up to the challenges of the digital transition. That the nineteenth century has been relatively underexposed, by the way, goes not just for Leiden, but for the Netherlands at large. One reason why the nineteenth century has remained under-researched where the scholarly book is concerned is no doubt that it was a period of stagnation. The Dutch language area being as small as it was, the absence of a *lingua franca* after the decline of Latin presented one serious problem; the curtailment of Dutch international trade during the period of the French occupation (1795–1813) was another. The exception to this general malaise in the world of the scholarly book was the antiquarian book trade. This was a vital part of the Luchtmans-Brill business, as it was for Martinus Nijhoff, Frederik Muller, and others. The present-day Dutch prominence in library supplying and journal subscription dates back to this time.

Slowly from the end of the nineteenth century, the Netherlands began to reclaim the pivotal role it had held in the seventeenth century as the “magasin de l'universe.” Brill was among the firms which contributed to that renaissance, together with (modern) Elsevier and Martinus Nijhoff. When the Luchtmans dynasty failed to produce an heir, Evert Jan Brill took over the company in 1848. Brill held on to the antiquarian operations, but in other ways he moved with the times. His publishing programme reflected the slow reawakening of the Dutch scholarly endeavor in the second half of the century. He took a particular interest in editions of the classics and orientalia, a tradition Brill continues today, with such highlights as the publication of the Nag Hammadi codices, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

Today the post of *academiedrukker* no longer exists, but Brill continues to be important to the texture of Leiden academic life. *Brill: 325 Years of Scholarly Publishing* may not be the paper monument that **the oldest** continuous publishing houses in the world deserves, but it makes a valuable contribution to the history of Dutch and international scholarly publishing. *Noblesse oblige*: Brill is to be congratulated on having commissioned it to celebrate its 325th anniversary.