

Francesco Ammannati
Joran Proot



Book prices from the
Officina Plantiniana
in a comparative perspective
(1586 – 1631)

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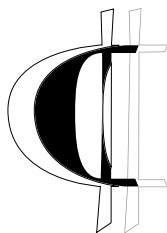
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COMPETITION IN THE EUROPEAN BOOK MARKET

Prices and privileges (fifteenth–seventeenth centuries)

Edited by
ANGELA NUOVO · JORAN PROOT · DIANE E. BOOTON



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List of abbreviations

- BT E. Cockx-Indestege, G. Glorieux & B. Op de Beeck, *Belgica typographica, 1541–1600*, Nieuwkoop 1968–1994 (4 vols)
- EDIT16 Edizioni italiane del XVI secolo, edit16.iccu.sbn.it/web/edit-16
- EEBO Early English Books Online
- GC Leon Voet, *The Golden Compasses. A history and evaluation of the printing and publishing activities of the Officina Plantiniana at Antwerp*, Amsterdam 1969–1972 (2 vols)
- GW Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke, www.gesamtkatalogderwiegendrucke.de
- GLN15–16 Bibliographie de la production imprimée des XV^e et XVI^e siècles des villes de Genève, Lausanne et Neuchâtel, www.ville-ge.ch/musinfo/bd/bge/gln
- ISTC Incunabula Short Title Catalogue, data.cerl.org/istc
- MPM Museum Plantin-Moretus, Antwerp
- PP Leon Voet & Jenny Voet-Grisolle (coll.), *The Plantin Press (1555–1589). A bibliography of the works printed and published by Christopher Plantin at Antwerp and Leiden*, Amsterdam 1980–1983 (6 vols)
- SBN Catalogo collettivo delle biblioteche del Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale, opac.sbn.it/web/opacsbn
- STCN Short Title Catalogue Netherlands, www.stcn.nl
- STCV Short Title Catalogus Vlaanderen [Short Title Catalogue Flanders], www.stcv.be
- USTC Universal Short Title Catalogue, www.ustc.ac.uk

Book prices from the *Officina Plantiniana* in a comparative perspective (1586–1631)



‘A book was a commodity like jewels, gloves, handkerchiefs, rosaries, pepper, or any other luxury product; it was not a commodity like meat, beans, wheat, wine, and other products that everyone needs to buy just in order to live’ – this is how book historians usually describe the nature of books as commodities.¹ The book is a product that, in contrast to food, fuel or housing, is not essential. In times of shortage, prices of grains go up, as a result of the imbalance between offer and demand. This point was dramatically made in 1586 and 1587, when the Southern Netherlands were haunted by extremely wet summers and, as a consequence, very poor harvests.² As a result, prices spiked as never before, and common people had no other choice but to postpone or drop unnecessary expenses.³ In contrast, prices of luxury goods remained relatively stable, as they did not experience shocks in supply or demand. Buyers of luxury products usually do not suffer as much as common people under inflation, decreasing wages or rocketing food prices.

In this chapter we focus on the following questions. First, how did average book prices change over time at the *Officina Plantiniana* in Antwerp in the period from 1581 to 1655? Second, how do book prices relate to people’s fluctuating income, their and rents? Third,

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1 Christian Coppens & Angela Nuovo, ‘Printed catalogues of booksellers as a source for the history of the book trade’ in Giovanna Granata & Angela Nuovo, *Selling & collecting: Printed book sale catalogues and private libraries in Early Modern Europe*, Macerata 2018, 145–160: 146. With reference to Christian Coppens, ‘Giovanni da Colonia a.k.a. Johann Ewylre/Arwylre/Ahrweiler: the early printed book and its investors’ in *La Bibliofilia*, 116 (2014), 113–119.

2 E. Scholliers, ‘De levensstandaard der arbeiders op het einde der 16de eeuw te Antwerpen’ in *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 68 (1955), 80–103, esp. 81.

3 Herman van der Wee, ‘Voeding en dieet in het ancien régime’ in *Spiegel historiael*, 1 (1966), 94–101, esp. 100–101.

how did book prices fixed by the *Officina Plantiniana* compare to prices of their competitors elsewhere in Europe, and more specifically, of books produced in the German-speaking area? Answers to these questions will help to understand the status of the books produced by the famous *Officina Plantiniana* during the last years of its founder, Christophe Plantin, and the business operation directed by his successors after July 1589, and help to put it in a broader, international perspective.

In the first part, we will discuss how we assess income, wages, rents, and book prices. Then we will compare trends between income and book prices. This will be followed by a comparison with prices of books produced in the German-speaking region for sale at the Frankfurt Book Fairs. We will conclude with a discussion and further research questions.

Methodology: assessment of income, wages, rents and book prices

The goal is to verify whether the prices of the books produced by *Officina Plantiniana*, or rather their trend over time, follows or diverges from those of a general price index represented by a basket of goods measuring the average consumption of the population of the Brabant area and from that of another *sui generis* but still representative ‘commodity’ as the average rents of houses in Antwerp. Those prices will be related to the nominal and real wages of two categories of workers belonging to a lower-middle class of the population, in this case compositors serving at the *Officina Plantiniana* and Brabant master masons.

Price baskets of consumables

For the creation of the price index, we relied on the data proposed by John Munro,⁴ obtained by processing the basket of consumables offered by Herman van der Wee.⁵ Van der Wee observed the behaviour of prices in the Brabant region of Antwerp-Lier-Mechelen for the three centuries from 1400 to 1700, thus covering the entire Price Revolution era, along with the preceding century.

The present analysis covers the period 1581–1655; as we will explain later, the time span for the second part of our analysis, which includes ‘German’ books, is limited to the years 1586–1631.

The set of goods considered by Van der Wee includes a combination of food products, such as farinaceous (grains), drink (barley malt), meat, fish, dairy products (butter and cheese) and industrial products, including fuel/light (charcoal candles, lamp oil), and textiles (linen, canvas, coarse woollens).

A remarkably positive element of the index proposed by Munro/Van der Wee is that its components do not have fixed shares of the total basket. The proportions accounted for by each commodity group vary over time with changes in relative prices, and the major variation involves grain prices. This is important for at least two reasons. First, grain represented a large part of the entire consumption basket, especially for the lower-middle classes of the population. Second, grain prices frequently experienced severe fluctuations. For example,

during prolonged periods of population growth, and presumed diminishing returns in agricultural production, the relative price of grains usually rose more than did those of animal products, which in turn rose considerably more than did the prices of labour-intensive industrial products. That was particularly evident in the case of families showing fixed budgets for household expenditures.

Rising food prices would have led low-income households to reshape their budgets, devoting a larger share of their expenditure to bread, and somewhat less to beverages, meat, fish and dairy products. A restriction of disposable income would also have pushed the household budget to a reduction in the share to be spent on industrial goods, which could generally be foregone or postponed (although hardly eliminated altogether), with the possible exception of fuel. Consumer demand for this latter category of goods would therefore have grown at a lower level, or not grown at all, and that would be reflected in the corresponding behaviour of relative consumer prices. On the contrary, with a persistent decline in population, cereal prices tended to fall, with a greater decline than the prices of other goods: such grains would have accounted for a smaller share of the basket, while industrial goods would have seen their relative weight increase.

The construction of this index, in sum, aims to reflect better the historical reality of consumer expenditures.

The price index calculated in this way, compiled for five yearly intervals and adapted by us to take as a basis the period 1581–1585, was then used both to compare the trend of the book price index and to deflate the nominal wages of the two categories of workers identified according to the standard formula $RWI = NWI/CPI$, i.e., the Real Wage Index equals the Nominal Money Wage Index divided by the Consumer Price Index. It should be noted that the wage index provided by Munro for the master masons has been adapted by him to reflect the trend of seasonal work.⁶

The wage index of the compositors has been obtained from the data of 63 workers active at the *Officina Plantiniana* in the period 1595–1655.⁷

- 4 J.H. Munro, 'Real wages and the "Malthusian problem" in Antwerp and South-Eastern England, 1400–1700: a regional comparison of levels and trends in real wages for building craftsmen'. Paper presented to the Second Dutch-Flemish Conference on The Economy and Society of the Low Countries in the Pre-Industrial Period, University of Antwerp, 20 April 2006; J.H. Munro, 'Money, prices, wages, and "profit inflation" in Spain, the Southern Netherlands, and England during the Price Revolution era, ca. 1520–ca. 1650' in *História e Economia*, 4:1 (2008), 13–71.
- 5 H. van der Wee, 'Prijzen en lonen als ontwikkelingsvariabelen: een vergelijkend onderzoek tussen Engeland en de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, 1400–1700' in *Album aangeboden aan Charles Verlinden ter gelegenheid van zijn dertig jaar professoraat*, Gent 1975, 413–447; translated as (but without tables): 'Prices and wages as development varia-

bles: A comparison between England and the Southern Netherlands, 1400–1700' in *Acta Historiae Neerlandicae*, 10 (1978), 58–78; republished in Herman van der Wee, *The Low Countries in the Early Modern World*, Cambridge/New York 1993, 223–241.

- 6 E. Scholliers, 'Prix et salaires à Anvers et dans la région anversoise (16^e–19^e siècles)' in Charles Verlinden et al. (eds), *Documents pour l'histoire des prix et des salaires en Flandre et en Brabant (xv^e–xviii^e siècle)*, Brugge 1959–1972, 3 vols, vol. 2, 2 (pub. 1965), 641–1056.
- 7 The data about the compositors is taken from G. Impens, 'Salaires à l'imprimerie plantinienne (16^e–18^e siècles)' in Verlinden et al. (eds), *Documents pour l'histoire des prix et des salaires en Flandre et en Brabant*, vol. 2, 2, 1057–1235, who in turn took this data from the business records of the *Officina Plantiniana*.

Finally, the index of rents has been derived from the one elaborated by Scholliers, to which we refer for further details, and modified so as to have the five-year period 1581–1585 as a basis.⁸

Book prices at the Officina Plantiniana

As a rule of thumb, the price of a book in the handpress period depends on the number of printing sheets it contains because the production of each sheet requires the same amount of raw material and labour. To keep labour cost under control, the workers in great enterprises, such as the *Officina Plantiniana*, worked at piece rates.⁹ Thus, a book consisting of two printing sheets cost twice as much as a book consisting of only one sheet, and this is why printers, publishers and booksellers usually counted in sheets.¹⁰ But a book is never just a book. There are books of all kinds, on different subjects, in different formats, in different languages, and geared to different audiences.¹¹ Some of these features have an impact on the price of books. An analysis of Parisian book prices in bookseller's catalogues of Henri Estienne between 1552 and 1552 has shown that both specific bibliographic formats, such as, in Estienne's case, sedecimo, and the use of special types such as Greek and Hebrew, force prices up.¹² In the case of the Antwerp printer Martinus Nutius I, who was active between 1540 and 1558, the editions in Spanish were more expensive than the books that he produced in Latin.¹³ Furthermore, it is obvious that the use of a second colour (usually red) causes higher prices because it requires extra manipulation to ink the second colour and an extra passage under the press. And last but not least, different analyses of book prices at the *Officina Plantiniana* have shown that the presence of illustrations in relief or intaglio, or the use of specific paper stocks, such as very thick or very large paper, also weigh in on prices.¹⁴ For the purpose of this contribution, we analysed two different archival sources. First, we focussed on ideal retail prices fixed by Christophe Plantin and his successors in the period 1581–1655 as recorded in manuscript M 321 at the Museum Plantin-Moretus in Antwerp. M 321 is a dynamic production list of titles with prices for the book trade starting in 1580 and was completed year after year, by several hands, down to 1655.¹⁵ It contains 2,367 entries of editions and, in a number of cases, different issues of editions. Second, we analysed purchases by the Antwerp company at the Frankfurt Fair in the period 1586–1631, which are recorded in the so-called *Cahiers de Francfort*, in order to understand price levels of books produced in the German-speaking region.

Prices in both sources are expressed in *Carolus Gulden* (*Carolus Guilders*), the account money usually used in the *Officina Plantiniana* for earnings and expenses.¹⁶ One Carolus Gulden or *florijn* (*florin*, abbreviated as *fl.*) consisted of twenty *stuivers* (*stivers*, *st.*) or *patars*.¹⁷

Not unimportant for this analysis, prices always pertain to first-hand, unbound books, i.e., *in albis* or *en blancq*, thus avoiding difficulties related with bindings and other types of finishing, such as washing or red-ruling.¹⁸

The production list is beyond any doubt a very valuable source for the study of prices of first-hand books on offer by the *Officina Plantiniana* over a period of 76 years. It allows for comparisons of pricing strategies of the last nine years under its founder, Christophe

Plantin (c. 1520–1589), and his four successors, subsequently Jan Moretus I (in charge of the publishing enterprise from 1589–1610), Balthasar Moretus I (1610–1641) and Jan Moretus II (1610–1618), and Balthasar Moretus II (1641–1674). The sheer number of entries in the document may suggest that it is complete, but that is not the case. Some editions are lacking, but in general, the quantity of data is so vast that it guarantees a reliable reflection of price trends.

In order to make comparisons across prices of all kinds of books possible, we re-calculated the price per copy to the price per printing sheet. By doing so, we obtained a stable price per unit across varying sizes of books (bibliographic formats). Then we re-calculated all quinquennial averages as an index, taking the period 1581–1585 as a base (100%), which allows for a comparison with the Antwerp price index, wages, and rents.

Book prices at the Frankfurt Book Fairs

The analysis of the *Cahiers de Francfort* is more complicated. A brief description of this source may explain this. Twice a year, an employee or an agent of the *Officina Plantiniana* travelled to the Frankfurt Book Fairs, held at schrove tide (*Quadragesimale*, in the middle of Lent) and in September, 14 days after August 24th.¹⁹ At those fairs, the *Officina* sold large numbers of books and bought books from local and international bookdealers. Sales and purchases were first recorded in little scrap books (the so-called *carnets de Francfort*), which were then copied in fair notebooks (*Cahiers de Francfort*). Typically, sales to a bookseller were listed on the left-hand side of a double page, and purchases on the right-hand

- 8 É. Scholliers, 'Un indice du loyer: les loyers anversois de 1500–1873' in *Studi in onore di Amintore Fanfani*, v, *Evi moderno e contemporaneo*, Milano 1962, 593–617.
- 9 Cf. Leon Voet, *The Golden Compasses. A history and evaluation of the printing and publishing activities of the Officina Plantiniana at Antwerp in two volumes*, Amsterdam 1969–1972 (henceforth: GC), II, 344.
- 10 See also the chapter by Saskia Limbach in this volume.
- 11 Francesco Ammannati, 'Book prices and monetary issues in Renaissance Europe' in Granata & Nuovo (eds), *Selling & collecting*, 161–176, at 162: 'The very nature of the book object itself demands special attention when deciding to perform aggregate data analysis.'
- 12 Goran Proot, 'Prices in Robert Estienne's booksellers' catalogues (Paris 1541–1552): a statistical analysis' in Granata & Nuovo, *Selling & collecting*, 177–209, here 207. See also the chapter by Diane Booton in this volume.
- 13 Giles Mandelbrote & Goran Proot, 'Prices for Spanish and Latin books published by Martinus Nutius I, ca. 1558' in Goran Proot, David McKittrick, Angela Nuovo & Paul F. Gehl (eds), *Lux Librorum. Essays on books and history for Chris Coppens*, Mechelen 2018, 65–122, esp. 73–76.
- 14 Goran Proot, 'Shifting price levels of books produced at the *Officina Plantiniana* in Antwerp, 1580–1655' in Massimo Rospoche, Jeroen Salman & Hannu Salmi (eds), *Crossing borders, crossing cultures. Popular print in Europe (1490–1900)*, Berlin 2019, 89–107.
- 15 For a detailed discussion of M 321, see Proot, 'Shifting price levels', 91–93.
- 16 GC, II, 445. About Carolus Gulden as account money, see Erik Aerts & Herman van der Wee, 'Les Pays-Bas espagnols et autrichiens' in Johan van Heesch, Jean-Marie Yante & Hannes Lowagie (eds), *Monnaies de compte et monnaies réelles. Pays-Bas méridionaux et principauté de Liège au Moyen Âge et aux Temps modernes*, Louvain-la-Neuve 2016, 163–200; here especially: 182–188. We noted only one exception in this production list. On fol. 113 recto the price for a copy of Rembertus Dodoens's *Cruydtboeck* from 1644 is explicitly priced in cash (*parata pecunia*) (cf. *Short Title Catalogus Vlaanderen* (STCV), at www.stcv.be, no. 3119583). With thanks to Diederik Lanoye.
- 17 GC, I, 440; II, 445, n. 2. In turn, 1 *stuiver made 4 oorden*, but the latter unit never explicitly appeared in M 321.
- 18 GC, II, 244–252.
- 19 GC, II, 396, note 3.

side. Entries usually mention very brief titles, the number of copies involved, often bibliographic formats (in about 77% of the cases) and almost always total prices for the total number of copies sold or bought. In a small number of cases (about 4%), the source also mentions the price for one copy. Sometimes, a deduction – in money or in kind – is mentioned below the grand total of a transaction with a business partner. The prices that we used for this analysis do not take those deductions into account. Prices are recorded in Carolus Guilders (florins and stivers).

We analysed prices for books produced in the German-speaking area in ten *Cahiers de Francfort* for September fairs between 1586 and 1631, in five-year intervals.²⁰ A number of entries could not be used because prices were lacking or too obscure. In a limited number of cases, acquisitions included bound copies. More importantly, a great number of entries could not be linked with editions present in VD16 and VD17, the online bibliographies of 16th- and 17th-century books from the German-speaking region.²¹ For this analysis, descriptions in those bibliographies are of great importance, as they include the bibliographic format of the books and their extent (collation, foliation or pagination), two elements which are essential for the recalculation of the price per sheet.

This resulted in a dataset of 903 editions (see Table 1), with prices ranging between 0.03 and 4.40 stivers per sheet. To obtain more consistent results, we trimmed the dataset by 5% (46 records, each time 23 records at the lower and at the high end of the dataset).

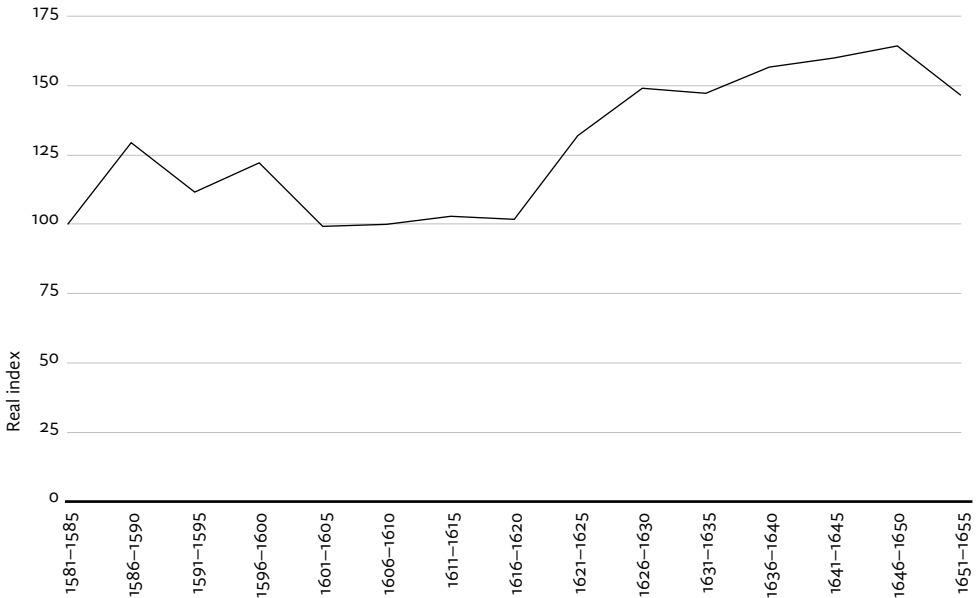
Cahier de Francfort	Number of editions	Trimmed dataset (omission of 5% outliers)
September 1586	130	109
September 1591	31	31
September 1596	39	38
September 1601	28	26
September 1606	126	126
September 1611	164	159
September 1616	198	193
September 1621	66	62
September 1626	38	38
September 1631	83	75
TOTAL	903	857

Table 1 Editions with prices from the German-speaking area, recorded in *Cahiers de Francfort*, 1586–1631

For the calculation of average prices per sheet, editions were grouped according to the date of publication, and not the date of acquisition, because in general, printers, publishers and booksellers maintained the price established when the book was first put on the market.²²

Results

The first graph indicates the evolution of the price index of an average basket of consumables in five-year spans, taking the period 1581–1585 as a base for our index (= 100).



Graph 1 Antwerp price index (1581–1585 = 100)

Since the index is based on the period just before the Fall of Antwerp in 1585, it reflects the immediate effects of this disruptive event in the period which follows immediately. The surge of prices is also caused by very bad harvests in the years 1586–1587 and, more generally, other political (i.e., wars, pillaging, taxes, abuse of power), economic and monetary factors, such as the progressive devaluation of local currencies.²³

Prices for rye and barley remained very high until 1587.²⁴ By the beginning of the seventeenth century, price levels are back to normal and stay at the original level during the peaceful years of the Truce (1609–1621). The end of the Truce is marked by a sudden rise in price levels until the period 1626–1630. Prices rise again from the period 1636–1640 onwards, albeit at a slower pace, and drop again in the last quinquennial of our survey.²⁵

20 Antwerp, Museum Plantin Moretus, Arch. 963 (September 1586), Arch. 972 (September 1591), Arch. 982 (September 1596), Arch. 992 (September 1601), Arch. 1012 (September 1606), Arch. 1011 (September 1611), Arch. 1021 (September 1616), Arch. 1031 (September 1621), Arch. 1041 (September 1626), and Arch. 1051 (September 1631).

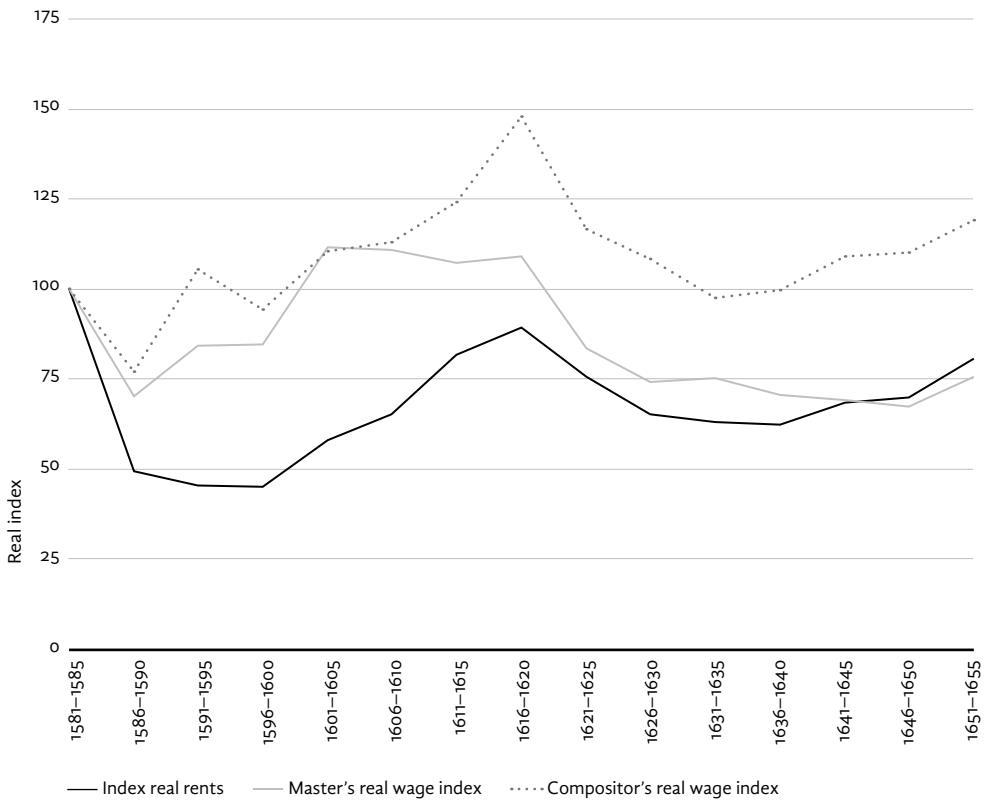
21 See www.vd16.de and www.vd17.de.

22 See for instance Proot, 'Prices in Robert Estienne's booksellers' catalogues', 206.

23 Aerts & Van der Wee. 'Les Pays-Bas Espagnols et Autrichiens', 166–167. See also H. van der Wee, *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth–sixteenth centuries)*, The Hague 1963, I, 128–129 and III, 26–27; Van der Wee, 'Prijzen en lonen als ontwikkelingsvariabelen', 427; GC, I, 440–443 (Appendix 6).

24 Cf. Van der Wee, 'Prijzen en lonen', Table at p. 433; Scholliers, 'De levensstandaard der arbeiders', 81.

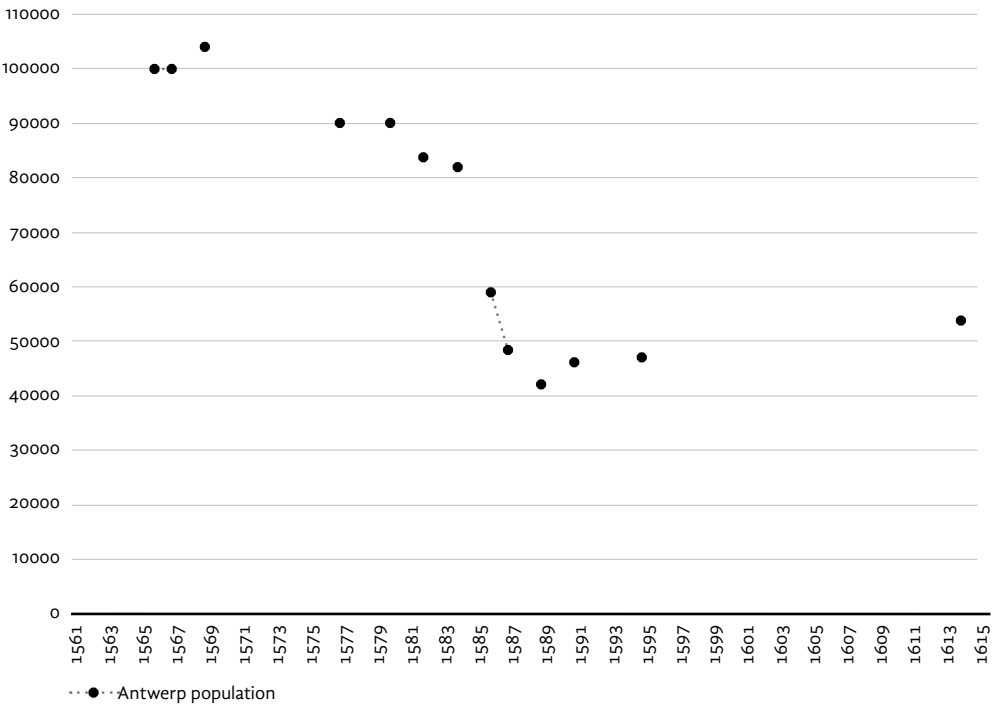
25 Compare Van der Wee, 'Prijzen en lonen', esp. graph 1 on p. 419.



Graph 2 Real rents, wages of master masons and composers at the *Officina Plantiniana* (1581–1585 = 100)

Graph 2 compares the price index with real wages of master masons in Antwerp and composers active at the *Officina Plantiniana*; it also displays information about real rents in this city. The graph shows that nominal wages were not compensated for the sudden rise of prices from the Fall of Antwerp until the end of the sixteenth century. In the period 1601–1620, master masons and composers at the *Officina* enjoyed better times, as their income must have allowed some extra purchasing power. This changed dramatically after 1621. Incomes went down, while prices went up. As a result, people became considerably impoverished for at least some 35 years. Remarkably, the composers at the *Officina Plantiniana* systematically earned more than master masons from the 1610s onwards and must have suffered less from diverging prices and incomes. As Voet pointed out, after the disruption of the labour market by the events in 1585, it had become increasingly difficult to find skilled workers such as composers, which is why they could negotiate better piece rates for their work.²⁶ The evolution of rents in this period is compared to wages in Graph 2.

Because of the massive depopulation of the city after the Fall of Antwerp, as represented in Graph 3, rents plummeted in the following years, to increase again from the beginning of the seventeenth century until the end of the Truce, after which they dropped again.



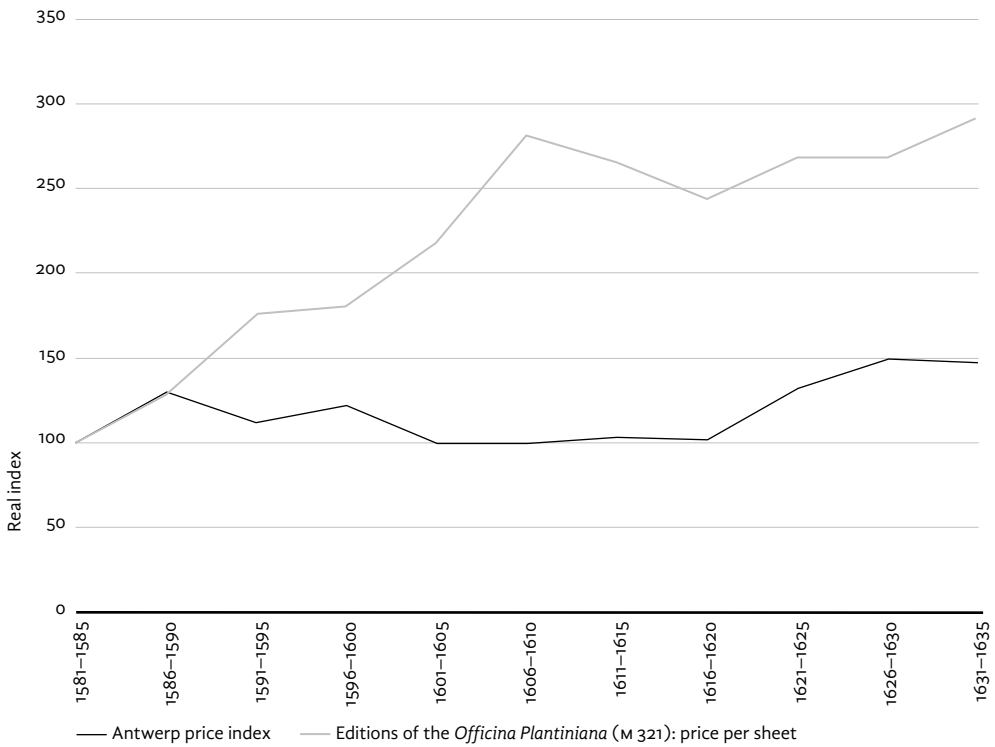
Graph 3 Size of the population in Antwerp, 1561–1615

Interestingly, rent levels are systematically paralleled by levels of wages. It confirms, once again, how compositors were always better off than master masons.

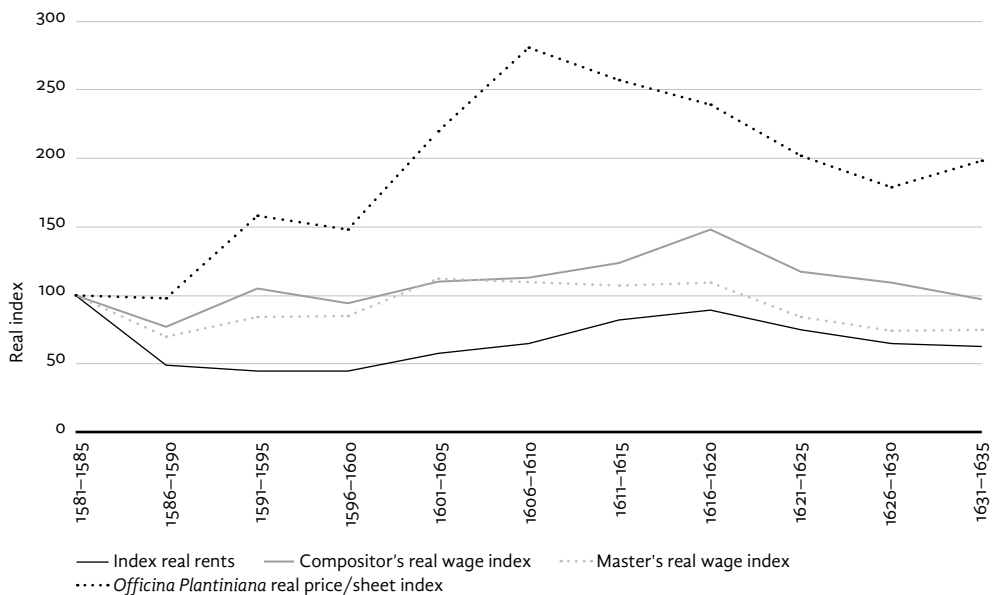
Graph 4 compares the evolution of the price index with the average nominal retail price per sheet of new, unbound books at the *Officina Plantiniana*. Remarkably, it reflects a steep increase in book prices, diverging from the price index from the period 1591–1595 onwards. This happened probably not by coincidence after Jan Moretus I took over the business of his deceased father-in-law in the summer of 1589. As explained below, Jan Moretus I immediately steered the company in a new direction.

Graph 5 combines prices, wages and rents expressed in real terms, i.e., deflated using the general price index. This graph also confirms the divergence in the average price per sheet, wages and the cost of living. Book prices at the *Officina Plantiniana* evolved in a sovereign way, as they detached completely from evolutions in prices, wages and ‘commodities’ like housing (rents).

26 GC, II, 341.



Graph 4 Antwerp price index compared with the evolution of price per sheet at the *Officina Plantiniana* (1581-1585 = 100)



Graph 5 Real index: wages, rents, and price per sheet (1581-1585 = 100)

Discussion

These findings not only confirm what we already knew about the direction taken by Plantin's successors at the firm, but they also put it in a wider perspective. The comparison with living standards of common people allows for a more articulated interpretation of the book prices that the masters of the *Officina Plantiniana* had established.

Other studies about the *Officina Plantiniana* have indeed demonstrated that Jan Moretus I and later generations gradually moved towards (1) the production of more expensive book formats, both large (folio, quarto) and small, especially duodecimo;²⁷ (2) that they reduced the number of woodcut illustrations in favour of more beautiful but also more expensive intaglio illustrations;²⁸ (3) that they produced more special runs of editions on luxury paper than previously;²⁹ (4) that they systematically and increasingly focussed almost exclusively on liturgical books, printed in two colours, which, as they were in Latin, could be aimed at both local and international markets.³⁰ All these elements match well with specifically targeted public groups of well-to-do individual and institutional customers who did not suffer much from inflation, debased currencies, rising prices or dropping wages. More than ever, by the mid-seventeenth century, the *Officina Plantiniana* had moved to the upper strata of the book market.³¹

How does the price level at the *Officina Plantiniana* relate to prices for books produced in Germany? A comparison with books bought by Plantin and his successors at the Frankfurt Book Fair throws some light on that question. Graphs 6 and 7 show the average price per sheet in *stuivers* Carolus Guilders for editions produced in German-speaking countries. The average values are grouped in five-year intervals according to the date of publication of the books.³² Graph 6 displays information for both Antwerp books and German books in nominal terms, while Graph 7 translates the same data in real terms.

27 Cf. Proot, 'Shifting price levels in books produced at the *Officina Plantiniana*', 100–101, and Table 2; Dirk Imhof, *Jan Moretus and the continuation of the Plantin Press. A bibliography of the works published and printed by Jan Moretus I in Antwerp (1589–1610)*, Leiden 2014 (2 vols), I, LXXIII.

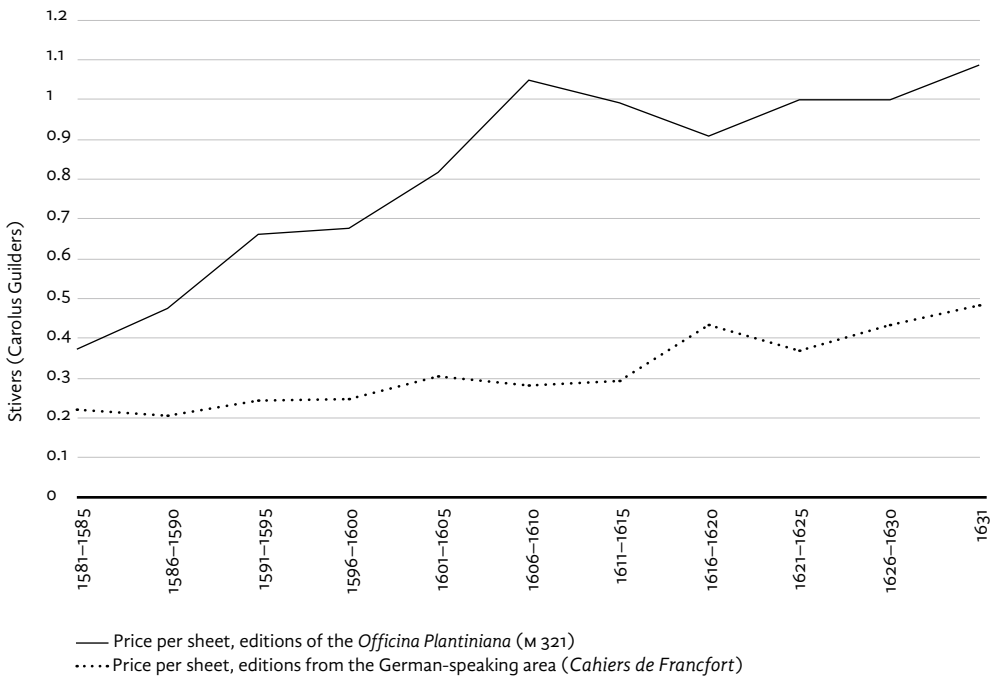
28 Cf. Proot, 'Shifting price levels in books produced at the *Officina Plantiniana*', 103–105; Karen L. Bowen & Dirk Imhof, *Christopher Plantin and engraved book illustrations in sixteenth-century Europe*, Cambridge 2008; Karen L. Bowen, 'Tabellen van illustraties in liturgische werken' in D. Imhof (ed.), *De boekillustratie ten tijde van de Moretussen*, Antwerpen 1996, 178–181, esp. the table and graph on p. 181.

29 Cf. Proot, 'Shifting price levels in books produced at the *Officina Plantiniana*', 105.

30 Cf. Kristof Selleslach, 'The confirmation of the Officina Plantiniana's general privilege in 1641' in *The Golden Compasses*, 98:1 (2020), 197–223, at 198 (graph 1); Proot, 'Shifting price levels in books produced at the *Officina Plantiniana*', 104; Dirk Imhof, 'De Plantijnse uitgeverij onder Balthasar II Moretus (1641–1674). Een vergelijking met het uitgeversfonds van zijn grootvader Jan I Moretus (1589–1610)' in *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis*, 16 (2009), 113–129.

31 Cf. Proot, 'Shifting price levels in books produced at the *Officina Plantiniana*', 107.

32 26 editions in the dataset for the German-speaking area were published before 1580 and are omitted from Graphs 6 and 7.

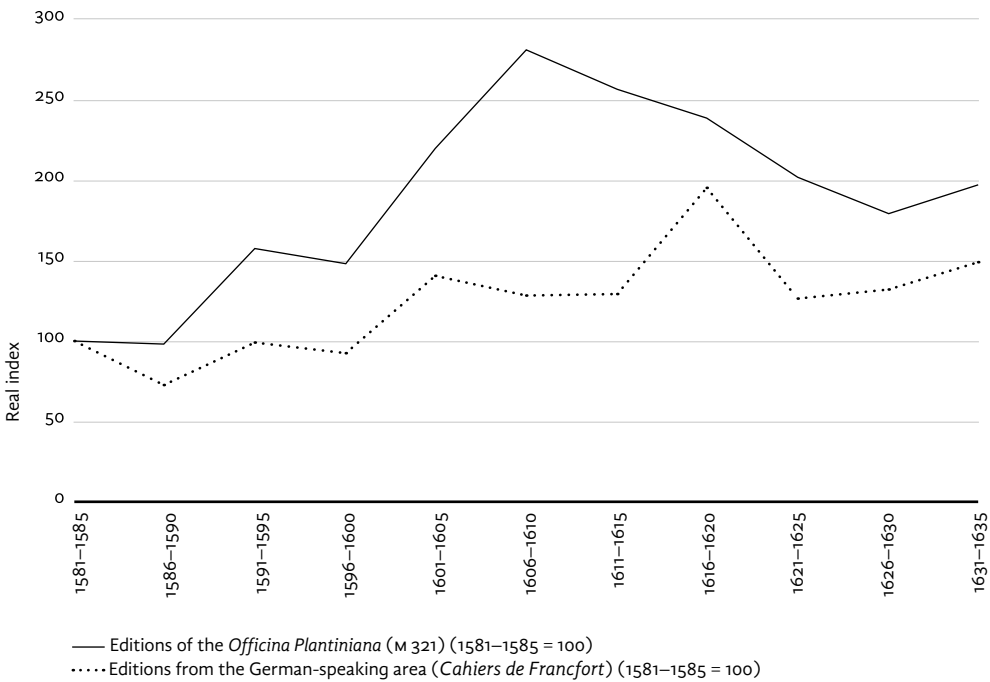


Graph 6 Average nominal price per sheet in stivers of editions published by the *Officina Plantiniana* (based on MPM M 321) and in the German-speaking area (based on records in the *Cahiers de Francfort*), grouped in five-year intervals (based on the year of publication); n(M 321) = 1,621 and n(CdF) = 831 (trimmed datasets)

The average price of editions published in the period 1581–1631 by the *Officina Plantiniana* is 0.81 stivers per sheet, while those acquired at the Frankfurt Fairs and published in the German-speaking area in the same period cost 0.31 stivers per sheet, which makes an overall difference of about 62%. As graph 6 with nominal prices indicates, the difference between the two datasets in the beginning of the period (1581–1585) is 0.16 stivers per sheet, or about 41% if one takes the Antwerp value as a base. Later both graphs gradually increase, but the Antwerp graph more so, and the spread between them remains considerable. It varies between about 57% in the period 1586–1590 and about 73% in the period 1606–1610.

This comparison indicates that the price per sheet of editions produced in German-speaking countries was, on average, significantly less expensive than those produced by Plantin. This is undoubtedly due to the nature of the books that poured out of the Antwerp enterprise. It is clear that Plantin and his successors increasingly focussed on richer audiences than their competitors in the German-speaking area.

But we must remain cautious not to jump to conclusions. One of the unsolved questions which springs from this comparison is to what extent the acquisitions by the *Officina Plantiniana* at the Frankfurt Book Fairs are representative for the market *at large*. Did those books match the high-end products from the *Officina Plantiniana*, or was this selection representative of the entire market?



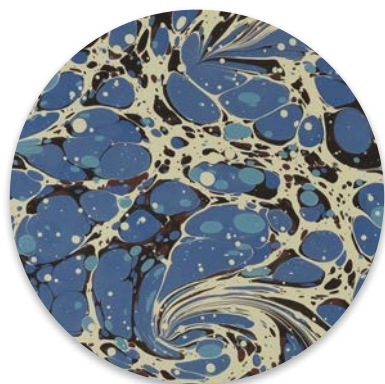
Graph 7 Real index of the price per sheet in stivers of editions published by the *Officina Plantiniana* (based on MPM M 321) and in the German-speaking area (based on records in the *Cahiers de Francfort*), grouped in five-year intervals (based on the year of publication); n(M 321) = 1,621 and n(CdF) = 831 (trimmed datasets).

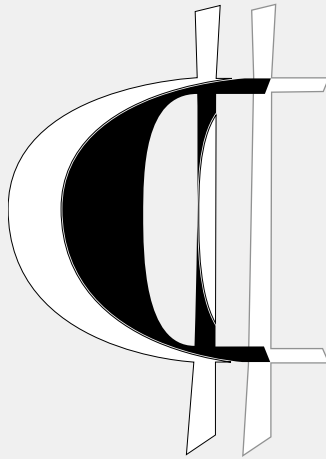
Conclusion

The method demonstrated in this contribution offers clear insights into general price trends and wages compared to the price of books. Book prices published by the *Officina Plantiniana* evolve in ways that are no longer related to the average trend of prices or to the evolution of wages. If regular books were already labelled as luxury commodities, then books from the *Officina Plantiniana* can be labelled as ‘luxury objects to the power’.

Once again, this survey shows that the *Officina Plantiniana* occupied a specific place in the market and that trends shown in their business records do not necessarily reflect strategies of other printers/publishers, and finally that their pricing strategy was probably not the norm for other businesses.

From the comparison with editions from the German-speaking area at the Frankfurt Fairs, it is obvious that book prices from the *Officina Plantiniana* cannot serve as a good proxy for book prices in general, as they do not target typical customers from the middle class. Future research should try to define ‘common books’ as opposed to ‘luxury books’ and study their prices. It is very likely that other publishing firms developed other pricing strategies to meet the demands of the common and local public in need of, amongst others, almanacs, prayer books, and school books.





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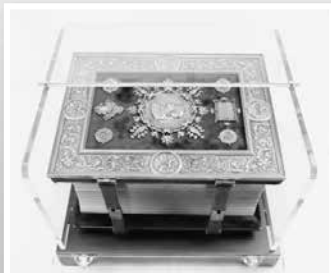
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