SUMMARY

Aim and intention

This study attempts to achieve a picture of the ownership and use of books in Groningen, up to the Reductie, the expulsion of the Spanish forces and the establishment of the Protestant religion, in 1594. The books belonging to and associated with the city's main church, St Martin's, the principal collection in city and province, have been chosen as the centre-point of the research. But as this choice meant the risk of excluding certain books that might make an essential contribution to our understanding, material has been drawn in from a series of varying circles round the core collection.

In attempting to sketch out this picture, the research has been concentrated in the first place on books, i.e. on books as physical objects. From the outset this implies an important limitation: this study does not aim in any way to define the region's intellectual hallmark, even though its results certainly contribute towards this end. It is thus not the intention to sketch, for instance, the progress of protestantism, although, where occasion arose, some observations have been made.

The processing of the material revealed that effective tools for carrying out an investigation of this kind were lacking. Not merely was there but very little trustworthy information on the history of the book in the region, but above all there proved to be a lack of methodological unanimity in more than one area of research. In some cases certain problems had apparently never been recognized. In particular it was the material approach to the history of the book that commanded adjustments, and sometimes innovations, to the descriptive models.

The need to work with fairly large numbers of data was an extra stimulus to develop encoding systems for various elements of the description. Taxonomies were developed for chain clasps, foredge inscriptions, and the decorative patterns of stamped bindings. These theoretical components, transcending as they do the Groningen context, thus add an extra dimension to this study.

Overall structure

This study comprises six chapters, a series of associated appendices, and a dossier with descriptions of the books on which the research is based (362 items).

It falls into four principal parts: first comes an introductory part (chapter 1), with a historical sketch of town and region, the state of the art, the formulation of the problem and the manner of execution of the research, and some other matters relative to the collection and description of the material to be studied.

The second part (chapters 2 to 4) deals with some specific aspects: early owners (both persons and institutions), the makers of books, binding.

The third part (chapter 5) discusses the books in and associated with St Martin's: the building of the collection, the character of the books, and daily routine (keeping and use).

The fourth part (chapter 6) concludes the story with an account of the history after the 1594 Reductie and the transfer to the University Library.
Progress of the research

Essentially two main parts are to be distinguished here: first, the collecting and the preparatory treatment of the material; second, the interpretive analysis. To begin with the first of these, various avenues of approach present themselves.

There is a demonstrable connection between the library of St Martin's Church and that of the University (viz the 1622-24 transfer). H. Brugmans made the suggestion that a large proportion of the books which were in the University Library in 1669 originated in St Martin's. This would imply that very many 'old' books in the present University Library would have come from that collection. One of the first tasks in assembling the material was therefore to ascertain whether (and if so, to what extent) this thesis of Brugman's is correct (chapter 1.4). This proved to be the case only up to a point. The strong and weak aspects of Brugman's theory are accordingly set out (with the aid of tables).

On the basis of a pilot investigation (largely a result of testing of Brugman's thesis) a list could then be drawn up with names of early owners, both persons and institutions, and also of place-names. Starting from these data, as many catalogues of manuscripts, incunabula and early books, and inventories of public records as possible were checked for the occurrence of Groningen people, first of all those whose names were already known. This search turned up a fair number of book-owners. Works of local history and editions of source materials were checked for notices of any of the owners thus identified, but also, in a more general way, for remarks on books, binders, scribes, etc.

After this preliminary check a circular was sent to all major libraries and archives where the history of the collections made it possible to expect early items relevant to our purpose. Unfortunately, this enquiry bore scant fruit. In part this was due to the lack of adequate registers of provenances, but in most cases no Groningers were held.

This done, the starting material was known. Next came the determination of the descriptive principles (chapter 1.5). These largely conformed to the models current in the specialties involved, though with adjustments to the specific questions asked. The introduction of encoding systems proved useful in giving a shorter focus to the information.

The second part of the research consisted in working out the data thus obtained. To that end an inventory was made of the distinguishing features of specific copies, after which these were placed in their context. This meant listing records of ownership (by both persons and institutions), details of production (where, and by whom, written, printed, decorated), and finally details of binding (where and when bound; are there any binders known; possible use of older material, viz fragments of manuscript or print) (chapters 2 to 4, see below).

A multitude of information on the 121 book-owners was assembled - drawn principally from archival material. Besides, a check was made for all these persons whether they could be traced in any university register or other record (chapter 2.1). A very large proportion of them proved to have studied at Cologne, a lesser number at Louvain. For the institutions, too, (22 in the region, 10 elsewhere), an attempt was made to provide (so far as was appropriate within the framework of a study of books) an insight into the location of buildings and library. Their local customs, collection and management were also considered.
A distinction is made between persons and libraries within the region (roughly the Leeuwarden-Emden-Zwolle triangle) and all that falls outside it; the outsiders were treated on a smaller scale (chapter 2.2). Perhaps it is needless to stress here, yet again, that not all the collections from the region are discussed, but only those for which there is a demonstrable relationship with St Martin’s. Naturally a final analysis is made of what these data can contribute to a better understanding of the library there (chapter 2.3).

The details of production are dealt with in this study on a fairly restricted scale. Only eight scribes are known to be directly related to the material studied, and only secondary information can be provided with respect to penwork and other forms of book decoration. For that reason a separate study of the book-hands and book decoration in the region is in course of preparation. In the present study a few penwork clusters are discussed in relation to clusters of bindings and to what is known of manuscript production within the region. Printers are unknown in these parts before 1598, although contacts with practitioners of the mystery are of course in no way unusual. An analysis of the available data on imported work yielded some interesting results (chapter 3).

Much more can be said about binding. This aspect of fifteenth and sixteenth century Groningen book production has hitherto received but scant attention. Most of the bindings which have been preserved are rather simple in their execution, which is why the literature has not so far provided any systematic descriptions. Even the most remarkable features, such as the lozenge patterns executed with pallets or fillets, or the roulette decorations, were never formalized in a descriptive model. This subject accordingly received our first attention. The lay-out, as well as the use of further stamped decoration, appeared indeed to offer indications on which to base a tentative chronology - another contribution transcending the Groningen confines (chapter 4.1).

Next, bindings from the assembled material were discussed, first those with an indubitable Groningen provenance, then a few specimens of certainly alien provenance (chapters 4.2 and 4.3 respectively). For the former, eight groups were formed dating from the early period (viz bindings characterised by lozenge decoration, roughly datable 1475-1520), and fourteen groups with - chronologically later - roulette decoration (to the end of the century).

A following section collects what could be ascertained about binders and bindings, this time again on the basis of archival and other (more narrative) sources (chapter 4.4). This produced several links between binders and booksellers.

In conclusion all data concerning regional binding activities were related together, and an analysis added of the manuscript fragments re-used in bindings (chapter 4.5).

This is followed by the discussion of the city’s most important collection, that of St Martin’s. Three elements are treated in turn: the provenance of the books and the formation of the collection; the character of the library; and finally the management and use of the books.

An investigation of how the books arrived at St Martin’s showed that the majority came from donations and legacies. Attention is paid to the habits of the book-owners, who frequently bequeathed books to one another. A chronological approach proves to affords a certain insight into the formation of the collection (chapter 5.1).

Next it was tried to interpret the books at or associated with St Martin’s according to their character. They were primarily theological, almost wholly excluding (so far as could be ascertained) authors of dubious reputation. In the course of time a few dubious
works crop up, but whether that was a demonstrably alarming development cannot be shown from the remaining material (chapter 5.2).

Finally there remains a discussion of day-to-day practice. Just how the books were shelved is a matter of doubt. To some extent they were chained, but from what is left to show of the clasps no unambiguous system is recognizable. Probably it was comparable to that in the library at Zutphen. However, the furniture used will have had to store mostly unchained books. Certain categories (identifiable by subject) were clearly never chained; among them were works of reference, bible commentaries and patristics (chapter 5.3).

As a kind of after-piece the latter days of the library are dealt with: its transfer from St Martin's to the University and its fading into the larger collections there (chapter 6). The possible reasons are discussed why, after a rapid ascent in 1622, the books were not transferred until later. The University's manner of acquitting itself of its task of administering the city's property, which it had been stipulated should be kept apart and separate (allenich ende separaal), is considered. Probably the fourties brought a change of attitude: by 1669 at any rate the collection had been fully amalgated with those of the University.

At the end of the book extracts are given from the appendices to each of the chapters. A listing is given of all the books described in the 362 dossiers forming appendix 1; from appendix 2 two book-owners and one monastery are discussed, from appendix 3 one scribe, from appendix 4 one early and one late group of bindings. The several sections of appendix 5, viz two surveys and three book lists appended to the chapter on St Martin's, have been printed integrally.