

The World of the Sixteenth-century French Book

Introduction

FVB is a twelve year research project based at the University of St Andrews.

Since 1997, the project team has attempted to identify surviving copies of all known editions of works published in the French vernacular during this, the first great age of print. In contrast to other major bibliographical surveys (such as the English STC and German VD 16) this project has not been able to rely on a small number of enormous core collections. Instead, the project team has visited a large range of large and medium size collections, many not previously catalogued or known to scholars of sixteenth century literature and history.

The heart of the project has been the investigation of library collections in three main categories: libraries in Paris, French municipal libraries outside the capital, and collections outside France. The project has surveyed, from card or manuscript catalogues, six of the largest collections in Paris outside the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF): St Geneviève, Arsenal, Mazarine, Bibliothèque de la Société d'Histoire du Protestantisme Française and the Bibliothèque de la Ville de Paris. The editions recorded here and in provincial libraries have then been compared and studied alongside the phenomenal collections of the BNF. Each of these libraries has many hundreds of items not represented in the collections of the BNF, particularly in the crucial categories of small polemical pamphlets that form the bulk of the 50,000 editions listed here.

Perhaps least well known of all are the collections of the French municipal libraries, over 400 of which have been systematically logged and studied for this project. The strength of the rare book collections in town libraries is a peculiarity of French book culture, and probably unique in the world of library science. It dates from the French Revolution, when by decree of the revolutionary authorities the massive collections of the French religious houses were confiscated to the use of the state. As the result of these edicts, many thousands of rare books were physically transferred to the keeping of the civic authorities: many still are housed on the shelves built to accommodate them at that time. Relatively small towns sometimes have extraordinary collections, large parts of which are theological works in Latin that fall outside the scope of this project. But more than 30 libraries possess several hundred early vernacular works, and the largest collections of all (at Lyon and Aix-en-Provence) have over 4000 items relevant to the project.

Finally, this project would scarcely have been complete without a systematic survey of French books in libraries outside France. The massive wealth of the British Library in London is well known, but in fact almost half (10 out of 22) of the largest collections surveyed in this project lie outside France. This bibliography has incorporated information from a virtually complete census of surviving copies of early French books in British libraries (including Oxford and Cambridge college collections), as well as the largest collections in Continental Europe and the United States.

Relationship with other Bibliographical Projects

Aside from library visits, the second major strand of work underpinning the project has been the documentation of references from a wide range of published or on-line bibliographies. Although nothing has previously been attempted of precisely this scope, we have been able to make good use of several substantial bibliographical tools. The Répertoire bibliographique des livres imprimés en France au seizième siècle is a published survey of French provincial printing outside the main printing centres of French print (Paris, Lyon, with Normandy treated in a separate series). Compiled by experts in the print culture of each separate place, it is an invaluable cornerstone of what we know of printing in Bordeaux, Poitiers and many smaller places, though the individual volumes vary greatly in quality and all are substantially incomplete. We also have incorporated material from the Baudrier study of Lyon print (partially re-worked by Sybille Gultlingen), and the Renouard and Moreau studies of Paris printing (the former studies individual printers and reaches as far as the letter B, the latter all Paris printing to 1535).

A particular help has been the monumental series of catalogues of the major French provincial collections compiled towards the end of the 19th century. These, however, have to be used with caution. There are numerous inaccuracies, particularly in the recording of authors and formats, and at least half the libraries have now abandoned the call numbers recorded. These catalogues do, however, sometimes provide the only record of copies destroyed in the warfare of the 20th century. For both French and German collections these lost books have been recorded here, though with an appropriate note. The on-line Catalogue Collectif de France, an ongoing project, represents a partial attempt to replace the provincial catalogues with accurate records for the largest collections, and this has proved useful in attempting to locate individual items.

In addition to these larger projects, we have made whatever use possible of specialist bibliographies, relating to individual collections, authors, printers or subjects. The full range of bibliographical resources employed is listed in the preliminaries.

Definitions

The project has attempted to log references to all books published wholly or substantially in the French language before the year 1601. Works published in French but outside France are therefore included. This brings into the project not only a substantial group of mainly religious works published in Protestant exile centres such as Geneva, but also a substantial body of work published in the Netherlands for local consumption. The seventeen provinces of the Netherlands were a bilingual culture, and the frontier with France provided no sort of barrier to the exchange of ideas, news or information. Large parts of the work of the Habsburg government of the Netherlands were also conducted in French, leading to a substantial corpus of documents published in French, or bilingually in French and Dutch. At the very end of the century new printing houses in the free northern state published a number of books in French for the benefit of the large immigrant Walloon (that is French speaking) minority, refugees from the still Spanish controlled south.

We have also included books that are bilingual or multilingual with French as a major component. These include dictionaries and works published in two or more languages as primers to language students. As a result there are a small number of works listed here that have a title other than French: in these cases a note of explanation is appended. We have not, however, included works that are wholly in Latin with the exception of a French privilege: some Books of Hours fall into this category.

Books are defined, as is customary, as any item wholly or largely printed. This includes single-sheet broad-sheets, though the survival of such ephemeral items is extremely patchy. Our definition excludes manuscript books (a tradition that enjoys a robust life even in an age when print was ubiquitous) and some official forms that include a few printed lines but are mostly hand-written.

Books are listed if they are known to have been published even if a surviving copy has not been located. It is virtually impossible to surmise what proportion of the printed material published in the sixteenth century may have been lost without trace. Losses would have been highest among ephemeral classes of literature, such as broad-sheets, or small pamphlets that might have been used to destruction, such as primers. At the other end of the scale the high number of surviving copies of large format and longer book suggest few of these would have disappeared completely.

In a very small number of cases a book is known through a reliable contemporary reference, and these books (some of them early polemical literature) have been included. In these cases the appropriate bibliographical reference has been added.

Editions, Issues, & States

The complexities of industry practice in the world of sixteenth century publishing are well known to all those who have wrestled with the particular problems of editions, issues and states. Given that it is almost impossible to achieve total clarity and consistency outside the detailed study of a very small corpus of books, this bibliography is constructed on the principle of recording bibliographically distinct states of a book as separate items. It should be emphasized that these do not always represent separate editions. The practical implications of this are explored below.

A common practice in the Paris book world was to finance an edition between a consortium of publishers or booksellers. A project would be contracted to a printer, who would be instructed to prepare copies with the names of each of the participating publishers on the title-page of part of the edition. To preserve the record of this interesting publishing practice these items have been given separate numbers for each individual participating publisher.

In contrast, printers in Geneva developed the practice of printing part of an edition with Geneva named on the title-page, and part not. Sometimes Geneva was over-stamped with a single line of type (hand stamped) on a previously printed page. These items, difficult to distinguish consistently, are treated as different states of the same book.

Music Printing

The printing of music and music part books was a highly specialised trade, requiring the casting of separate type. By the 16th century this was generally achieved by casting individual notes on a background of five horizontal lines, which would then be fitted together to create the staves. This was highly intricate work, and few printers would think it worth the initial investment. Music printing thus remained the preserve of a small circle of well-funded publishing houses, many of them enjoying valuable royal patronage and privileges.

From the middle decades of the century much music printing was in the form of part books for domestic, parlour use. Works were printed in four or six parts which only rarely survive in complete sets in individual libraries. The separate parts are again treated as bibliographically distinct items (as indeed they are) and given separate numbers.

Printers, Publishers, & Booksellers

It was a universal requirement in the mature, regulated print cultures of 16th century Europe that the name of the responsible member of the print fraternity was displayed on the title-page. France was no exception. The Paris authorities kept a tight leash on the capital's printers and booksellers; so much so that the publication of a book without the printer's name occurred only far away from the capital, or at moments of acute political contention.

It can nevertheless not necessarily be assumed that the name given on the title-page identifies the printing establishment that physically created the book. Books in France were very commonly commanded from a printer by another member of the print fraternity: either a bookseller or a third party who had provided the capital (the publisher, who might or might not run a bookshop).

The individual named on the title-page may be any one of these three: printer, publisher or bookseller. The inclusion of a location from which the book might be purchased usually indicates the involvement in the production process of a major bookseller. Sometimes it will be clearly stated that a book is printed 'for' a publisher/ bookseller. The relationship between the printer and publisher/bookseller is often easier to discern in the first half of the century, when it was usual to include further publishing details at the end of the text (the colophon). Here it might be stated that the project had been printed for a named printer for the publisher/ bookseller named on the title-page. Unfortunately the practice of printing a colophon becomes less common as the century wears on, increasing the difficulty of differentiating printers from publisher/booksellers, at a time when political and religious pressures were in any case increasing the temptations (and opportunities) for unattributed publication.

Books published without any identification of publisher or place of publication almost all fall into one of two categories: Protestant works published abroad or at times of weak political control within France, or Catholic works published at the height of the political crisis following the death of Henry III in support of the Catholic League. Thanks to intensive study by Eugenie Droz, Louis Desgraves and Jean François Gilmont, among others, many anonymous Protestant works have been successfully attributed to a printer or publisher. The accumulation of data for this project has brought other important figures out of the shadows, not least in the opportunistic print communities of Normandy and Lyon. But the phenomenon of anonymous print during the League remains comparatively unstudied, and largely unexplained.

Editors & Translators

A very significant proportion of the books listed here, in all genres, were originally published in a language other than French. If we exclude books of less than two sheets or 16 leaves in octavo in length (mostly edicts, pamphlets and broad-sheets of purely local relevance), then this proportion may climb as high as 30 per cent.

As one might expect the majority of these translations were from a Latin original, but there were also significant numbers of translations from Italian and Spanish (particularly of literary works) and smaller numbers from Dutch, German and English. For other base languages (Hebrew, for instance, or Greek) a Latin edition often served as the intermediary text used in the French translation, and this could also be the case with works published from German originals (such as works of the German and Swiss Protestant reformers).

In this bibliography all works are listed, where possible, under the name of the original author; this extends to works where the originator is not known, which are treated as anonymous works rather than listed under the name of a French editor. It is, however, possible to reconstruct the complete published oeuvre of a French scholar, as author, editor and translator, using the system of cross-references under his name in the bibliography.

Privilege & Copyright

Comment on attempts to control the output of the printing press in the 16th century has concentrated almost wholly on censorship of books on religious or political grounds. Yet although most European authorities were indeed extremely sensitive to the dangers of dissident or heretical books, the fact remains that the most persistent pressure for the regulation of publishing came from within the industry itself. Printers and publishers about to embark on an expensive or risky project wished to be assured that their market would not be usurped by opportunistic competitors. They therefore sought official protection in the form of a formal privilege granting them the unique right to print a stated book for a given period. In France, and especially Paris, the system of privilege was extremely well developed; and because it was the custom (and sometimes a legal requirement) to print a summary of the privilege in the book we can follow the evolution of the system in some detail.

A privilege was granted on the petition of a publisher or bookseller, either by the king or the Parlement of Paris. Particularly favoured printers held privileges for whole categories of print - royal edicts, music printing, works in Hebrew, for example - but most privileges were granted for individual projects. The privileges granted varied in length from a month or three months (generally for the more ephemeral projects that might be expected to be of passing interest only, such as news pamphlets) to up to twelve years for the most complex and expensive books. Penalties for the breach of a privilege were usually confiscation of a printed edition and an unspecified fine (expressed by the formula *confiscation et amende arbitraire*, sometimes with the more stringent addition assuring aggrieved printer of his *despens, dommages et interest*). More exotic or precise privileges occasionally specified a named sum as fine, sometimes shared between the complainant and the local poor chest, and, in very rare cases, corporal punishment for the offender.

Sometimes, though rarely, a privilege was granted not to the printer, but to a particularly favoured author. In the early years of the Wars of Religion a number of Catholic authors were granted a general privilege for anything they might write for a period of ten years from first publication: presumably this was intended to stimulate writings against the menace of Protestant heresy. It was then for the author to pass these protected rights to the printer of their choice; and doubtless such editions were much sought after. But these were very rare instances of an author receiving protection for his work; on the whole, in this age before systematic copyright legislation systems of privilege protected those in the publishing industry who bore the cost of production, rather than the intellectual property of the author.

It is far more difficult to follow the operation of the privilege system outside Paris. In Geneva regulation of the press was extremely close: all books to be published were liable for prior inspection before they were put to the press, and this presumably made the production of local pirate editions unlikely (though Genevan works were pirated in Lyon and La Rochelle). In Lyon the responsibility for issuing privileges was born by the local presidial court, though Lyon printers occasionally went to the trouble and expense of obtaining a privilege from Paris. However, since it was much less the custom to

print summaries of privileges in Lyon books we know much less about how the system functioned on a day to day basis.

Towards the last decades of the century many books carry a further assurance of orthodoxy with a note that they had been viewed and inspected by qualified theologians. Such a process of inspection had been a technical requirement from at least the 1520s for works of a religious character, but it is only from the 1570s that such approbations are commonly displayed, in Parisian work often on the same page as the privilege. On the provincial presses, at Lyon and elsewhere, such approbations often take the place as a formal privilege: these smaller self-contained publishing fraternities would, in any case, have been much easier to control, particularly in towns where there were seldom more than one or two printers operating at any one time.

Centre & Periphery

The first age of print saw Paris quickly established as one of the major centres of European print culture. In France, the supremacy of Paris was absolute, at least until the emergence of Lyon as a significant centre of high quality books in the first three decades of the 16th century. The two printing centres continued in this relationship for much of the first half of the century. A press was established in Poitiers as a conduit for official edicts and legal texts for the south and southwest, but elsewhere local presses usually enjoyed a fleeting and ephemeral existence. Even in Rouen, a Cathedral city with a large legal establishment and a thriving market for books, local booksellers often sent to Paris to have books printed, even if the names of Rouen bookseller/publishers consequently appeared on the title page.

The religious and political conflicts of the middle and latter part of the century altered this pattern significantly. The ban on the publication of vernacular Bibles in Paris led to the establishment of significant centres of French print abroad, first at Antwerp and Neuchâtel, then most significantly at Geneva. With the collapse of royal authority after the death of Henry II other evangelical presses opened up closer to home, in Normandy, Orleans and at Lyon, where a rash of bitterly anti-Catholic works challenged the previously sedate world of humanist learning. Later La Rochelle would emerge as a significant centre of Protestant printing in the French west.

These developments inspired by religious conflict were part of a larger trend towards the establishment of a robust provincial printing culture. Local figures in the Catholic hierarchy acted as sponsors for this movement, as at Reims, and the drive to restore royal authority led to the establishment of several regional publishing houses largely for the publication of official mandates, as at Le Mans and Tours. Local civic pride also played its part in this development. For much of the century there had been little indigenous printing in the south of France. Bordeaux had no established press until 1572, and for much of the century the proud city of Toulouse had to make do with the efforts of the brothers Colombiès, whose grubby and slipshod work hardly lived up to their august title as official printers to the University and Parlement. The lack of a robust local printing culture was in one respect a tribute to the efficiency of distribution networks from Paris and Lyon, and on the Protestant side from Geneva. Towards the end of the century the Protestant cities of the south, Montauban, Montpellier and Nîmes, did sponsor a limited local publishing industry, but even these subsidised ventures scarcely competed with the established centres of Protestant print at Geneva and La Rochelle, which continued to dominate the market.

A further phase of diversification came with the conflicts associated with the rise of the Catholic League and the succession of Henry of Navarre. Given that most of the established centres of print were in Leaguer towns, Henry IV had little option but to establish new centres of printing in the towns he controlled, such as Tours, and this he did very successfully. But the Paris and Lyon presses also turned out a torrent of works during these years, and their statistical domination of French printing remained overwhelming. Thus although printing is recorded during the course of the 16th century in over 100 separate locations, during the course of the century as a whole Paris and Lyon between them were still responsible for over eighty per cent of books published in French. Within this total Paris out-published Lyon by around four to one.

Categories of Print

It is inevitable that in an age as politically and religiously charged as the 16th century certain categories of print will have been more intensively studied than others. A major aspect of this bibliographical project has been to bring welcome attention to certain types of work that have received comparatively little. This bibliography contains over five hundred editions of mediaeval romances, none more popular than the ubiquitous (and bibliographically complex) *Amadis de Gaule*. One can also chart the steady growth of interest in a number of technical subjects, including botany, anatomy, architecture and the science of warfare. The market for popular vernacular books on medicine seems almost inexhaustible. Nor was interest in the classics of Greek and Roman culture confined to the Latinate: this bibliography records several hundred French editions of the works of leading classical authors. We can chart the first emergence of new fields of writings, such as comment on the great overseas explorations, and the evolution of established genres, such as poetry and drama.

Latin & Vernacular

The above remarks, indicating the penetration by the vernacular of learned fields of print, should not be taken as evidence for the eclipse of Latin. Publishers in Paris and Lyon first made their reputation, and in the process often accumulated significant wealth, through the publication of Latin books, and Latin retained a leading place in the world of the book to the end of the 16th century, and beyond. In contrast, Latin books were only very rarely printed in France outside these two largest publishing centres.

The early demise of Latin print can too easily be assumed to be a consequence of the political turbulence of the Reformation. In fact, if one surveys known Paris editions for the first 35 years of the 16th century (the period covered by the published survey of Brigitte Moreau) then Latin books make up a massive 75% of all known editions. Significantly, this proportion is not much lower at the end of the period, than at the beginning. Evidence taken from another source, a sample analysis of the books listed in the *Index Aureliensis*, confirms this impression of the tenacity of Latin print: in this survey the vernacular moved into a (narrow) majority of all editions published in France only in the last two decades of the 16th century.

The implications of this for our understanding of European print culture are profound. Although Latin works do not form part of this bibliography, one must keep constantly in mind that the vernacular editions described here made up only a portion of the printers' inventory of work. On average, too, Latin works would have been longer and more often in larger formats than the norm for vernacular books; the profits to be made in Latin printing played a large part in underpinning the economics of the industry. For all that, the urgency of current events and the gradual growth of a reading public combined to tempt even the most established printing houses into the world of vernacular printing. And by the second half of the century a large number of printers, even in Paris and Lyon, were printing almost exclusively in French.

The Reading Public

With the development of the book world of 16th century France one can discern a significant evolution in the nature of the reading public. There was, first and most obviously, a steady growth in the number of books published. From an average of less than 100 works in the French language published during the first decade of the sixteenth century, this number increased steadily (though not on an entirely linear graph) through the century. The steady expansion of the market is interrupted by two marked peaks of production: during the years before and during the first religious war (1562-3) when the Protestant agitation was at its height, and during the controversies of the Catholic League and succession crisis of 1588-1590. These two periods also showed a marked change in the nature of books published, for these two crises were both dominated by a vast increase in the number of short political or religious works in small formats put onto the market. It was during these periods of crisis that regulation of the book trade came closest to collapse; printers and booksellers were quick to take advantage of the commercial opportunities that attended political crisis.

But the market in small books was by no means confined to times of political turbulence. Throughout the second half of the century we can observe the growth of royal government (and the struggle to restore authority) through a vast proliferation in the publication of official royal edicts. In France royal edicts were generally published as small octavo pamphlets; these provided documents of record to

accompany the public proclamation of royal orders by the royal officers or the town crier. Successive kings and counsellors also sponsored an increasingly self-conscious appeal for the support of a divided public through the promotion of printed works of theology, political thought, or satire. Judging by their popularity it is clear that these books were eagerly consumed by an urban public anxious for information or reassurance in troubled times.

Even beyond this it is clear that a lively market for popular literature existed independent of the turbulent events dominating French politics. Increasing numbers of publishers specialized entirely in these sorts of books: accounts of sensational crimes, floods and other natural disasters, monstrous births and prognostications. French readers would have found it increasingly easy to interest themselves in events in other parts of Europe. Paris and Lyon publishers turned out a steady stream of books relating to the ever present Turkish threat, or the course of the wars in the Netherlands. The election of the King's brother, the later Henry II, to the throne of Poland provoked a rash of books about the customs, manners and political organisation of his new eastern kingdom.

It is not to be assumed that small, cheap books appealed only to a less educated audience. Many of the more ephemeral books were eagerly read by members of the political elite. Printed edicts were collected and bound together by practicing lawyers, which is why they have survived so well. But for the well-stocked library there were also increasing numbers of more elaborate and luxurious projects. Something close to ten per cent of the books recorded here were large and expensive folios, many of them richly illustrated with woodcuts. It is in these larger books that one charts the advance of popular scientific texts, particularly the sciences of observation, botany and anthropology, for which the availability of woodcut illustrations opened up whole new possibilities. Other books were published in alternative formats for different pockets. These included Bibles and New Testaments, the undeniable bestseller of the age, but also other vernacular texts that competed with scripture for the leisure hours of the bourgeois and nobility, such as the romance *Amadis de Gaule*. In a recent trip to one of the most magnificent of all collections, the Musée Condé at Chantilly the project team saw a whole series of chivalric romances, reprinted in a small format by the Parisian printer Nicolas Bonfons. With these inexpensive quartos, he was obviously targeting a new bourgeoisie audience - a precursor of the *Bibliothèque Bleue* of the seventeenth century.