



Gist in de plooien van de geschiedenis. De Nederlandse boeken in de bibliotheek van een vroegmoderne Kroatisch-Hongaarse edelman
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Summary

Miklós Zrínyi (1620-1664) was a Croatian-Hungarian count who was entrusted with prominent functions within the political and military establishment of the Habsburg Empire. His property and the regions for which he served as governor are located in what is now Croatia and bordered at that time on the Ottoman Empire. Miklós's library fully reflects the issues which were active at that time: the qualities and authority of a ruler, the organisation of an army, the legitimacy of the state and of a revolt against it.

The six hundred books that were unquestionably or very probably in Zrínyi's possession were printed in more than seventy different European cities; nearly fifty of them contributed four books or fewer. These books had been published by approximately three hundred different publishers – an average of two books per publisher. The library is characterised, in other words, by considerable diversity and that is all the more striking because the count had his books purchased in one city, Venice. This indicates diversity in the European book trade, not concentration; decentralisation, not monopoly. Many 'smaller' cities in Europe apparently had the capacity to compete with cities which were, on the face of it, more powerful politically, economically and culturally.

The relationship between publisher and subject offers the same picture: there is not a single publisher in the Bibliotheca Zriniana who can boast of being a specialist in a certain genre. This might be an indication of a widely branching (exchange) trade network or of connections that were maintained via international book fairs like those in Frankfurt and Leipzig. Only publishers from the Low Countries are present with large numbers of titles in certain specialised fields. Should we consider them to be among the first entrepreneurs who were in a position to construct for themselves a niche and in doing so to be able to satisfy the expectations of (potential) customers and of colleagues who advanced such exchanges?

The notable number of books from the Netherlands stands in stark contrast to the contributions of Zrínyi's political, cultural and ethnic homelands, respectively: a limited number by Austrian publishers, one or two books from Hungary, and a complete absence of books from Zrínyi's own Croatia.

What is the reason for the complete absence of books from Croatia? In Zrínyi's own day, and for more than a century before, there was not a single printer

operating – not even in service to the church or the government. The same is equally true for the Habsburg region of Croatia as for the Venetian portion (the coastline), the free republic of Dubrovnik and of course for the area occupied by the Ottomans. New facilities were not established during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and certainly not between 1530 and 1690) and no new centres of knowledge emerged.

As the owner of a library, Zrínyi collected the finest books and shared his knowledge with his peers. He wrote essays about politics and military affairs which were based on the books that he had read. He gave free rein to his thoughts, but did not publish them and made no effort to disperse the ideas and opinions which could be found in his library, nor did he promote printing presses or educational institutions, by means of which such a dispersal could take place.

Studies like that of #Elisabeth Eisenstein hypothesise a domino theory as an explanation of the foundation of the early modern exchange of cultural products: what was good was quickly adopted and if necessary adapted, after which it spread like an ink stain. But in Zrínyi's case, and Croatia's, neither the book nor the facilities for producing and distributing books spread. Instead of #Eisenstein's model of an unstoppable and irresistible process, this seems to be rather a case of a collision between a pre-modern and an early-modern world. The micro-entity of the Bibliotheca Zriniana finds itself at an intersection. It is the fruit of an industry which works according to the rules of early capitalism (maximising production and consumption), collected by a representative of the preceding, but still extant system, which seeks to keep knowledge, opinions and ideas and their promotion 'to itself.'

Two years before he died, Zrínyi arranged for a catalogue to be compiled. Thanks to this record, we know that books have been lost but also that a considerable number of books that can be found in the library cannot be found in the catalogue. These books were not simply overlooked, but were deliberately ignored. A comparison between the themes and titles listed and not-listed in the catalogue makes clear what Zrínyi's priorities were in creating his library. The core consists of history, which is subdivided into no less than three different categories, and in addition to that, political and military science. The ancient historiographers Livy, Tacitus and Vegetius in particular provided influential guidelines for personal political and military decisions. Zrínyi's political section consists especially of contemporary political philosophy based on an analysis of these ancient works. This comprises post-Machiavellian authors like Francesco Guicciardini, Jean de Silhon, Arnold Clapmar, Giovanni Botero and Justus Lipsius. It is not unusual for ancient history and post-Machiavellian texts to play an important role in aristocratic libraries of that time. In Zrínyi's library, however,

they have been assigned the central role. That is a result of the fact that the theology section, which is the centrepiece of most contemporary libraries, is absent from this one as it is represented in the catalogue of 1662. The theological element is similarly absent as a leading theme in the political and military essays which Zrínyi wrote. The absence of a theology section is probably unique in the early-modern world. However, we should not regard Zrínyi as an atheist (which he was not). But it does indicate a conscious choice to remove from his 'core library' all works which he did not consider to be useful for the development of a vision of the political world of which he was a part.

The author who, as measured by numbers of titles, is most prominent in the 1662 catalogue is the Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius. Notably, the library contains exclusively his political and military works. Other works by Lipsius, such as his epistolary works and his neo-stoic philosophical text *De constantia*, which were very popular in eastern Europe also, are absent. Zrínyi's political and military essays show that Lipsius deeply influenced his thought. In these works, he cites ancient authors extensively. Zrínyi's collection of ancient literature and history comes largely from Holland. That holds true especially with respect to the 'more recent' works in the collection. Dozens of professors and alumni of the University of Leiden from the late sixteenth century to Zrínyi's own time can be found as editors among Zrínyi's books on the ancient world. Zrínyi shaped his conception of the political world of his own day with these editions in his hand.

Nearly all of the publication from the Low Countries are in Latin. Among the publications from the German cities, Latin and German are equally represented. French and Italian publications are predominantly in the vernacular. It would appear that mid-seventeenth-century Dutch publishers consolidated the position of Latin in Europe. Since publishers in the larger cultural regions (England, France, Italy) increasingly limited themselves to publications in their own languages, Dutch publishers were able to fill an international vacuum with their Latin publications.

Products of the Dutch publishing industry can also be found among Zrínyi's collection of works on practical and applied science. There is an impressive collection on the arts of war, including many maps and diagrams of fortifications in the Low Countries. They are explained, illustrated and discussed in an overt way that was impossible in Zrínyi's own Habsburg Empire.

In the section on politics, we find other examples of the unequalled openness of Dutch culture at that time. Some books that would never get past the censor in other parts of Europe made it into Zrínyi's library by way of Dutch publishers, for example, the emblematic criticism of Cardinal Mazarin, the most powerful man in Europe at the time, and Paolo Sarpi's harsh criticism of the Catholic leadership since the Council of Trent.

Just like other members of the high Hungarian nobility, Zrínyi owned a beautiful collection of atlases by Blaeu. For the map of Croatia, Blaeu had made use of sources from Zrínyi's immediate surroundings. The count also owned Dutch books about Brazil, a Dutch colony at the time. In one of his essays, Zrínyi suggests that he might emigrate there. His library substantiates Eisenstein's claim that the early-modern printed book was unconcerned about borders or cultural and political barriers. Everyone who could afford to could read whatever he wanted.

The question whether we can distinguish the socially influenced and influential reader from the reader with purely individual preferences has to be seen in this context. There is not a single comparable library with such a high degree of correspondence between the social roles of the owner and composition of the collection. The libraries of Valvasor, Esterházy and other contemporaries betray personal interests which have no connection with their specific social position: alchemy, mysticism, discoveries, inventions, but coincidentally also humoristic, frivolous or romantic work. The individual element in Zrínyi's library consists of the fact that he subordinated the personal to his social role. The elimination of a personal life can well be considered to be a very personal choice.