The Initial Contact between De Geer and Luchtmans

Luchtmans, academic publishers and booksellers in Leiden, played a leading role in the formation of the Leufsta Library. But how did this Dutch firm come to be the principal supplier of books for this particular library on the estate of the De Geer family at Leufstabrúk, Sweden? The main connections between Charles de Geer the Entomologist (1720–1778) and the Leiden booksellers were the notable Dutch scientist Petrus van Musschenbroek (1692–1761) and the patrician van Musschenbroek family. De Geer spent his formative years in the Netherlands near Utrecht before moving back to Sweden when he inherited the Leufstabrúk estate. During his studies, he was especially interested in natural history, an interest he cultivated when studying under van Musschenbroek and other prominent scientists. The Netherlands was also the place where De Geer bought his first books, initially from booksellers in his hometown of Utrecht. He later also contacted Luchtmans in Leiden. It is likely that the first contact between De Geer and Luchtmans was made through van
Musschenbroek. Moreover, a clear connection existed between the Luchtmans and the van Musschenbroek families. Jordaan Luchtmans (1652–1708), the founder of the firm, had married a cousin of Petrus in 1683, Sara van Musschenbroek (1647?–1710). In addition, their son Samuel Luchtmans I (1685–1757) married Petrus’ sister, Cornelia (1699–1784).

De Geer filled his library with books he received by post from two nephews of his former teacher Petrus van Musschenbroek – Samuel II (1725–1780) and Johannes (1726–1809) Luchtmans. Van Musschenbroek not only helped link De Geer to the Luchtmans firm but also was connected to Luchtmans in another way. His famous work on physics, the *Elementa Physicae*, was first published by Samuel Luchtmans I in Latin (1734) and Dutch (*Beginselen der Natuurkunde* [1736]). Two notes with calculations of the costs of publishing van Musschenbroek’s work survive in the Luchtmans archive.¹ There is one note for each edition showing, for example, the cost of paper and the red printing ink for the title pages, giving us a small insight into the eighteenth-century publishing business. Unsurprisingly, two copies of this work – both the Latin and the Dutch edition – can be found in the Leufsta Library.

The Extensive Archive of the Leiden Booksellers Luchtmans

The Luchtmans archive is an exceptional primary source, not only for the history of the early modern Dutch book trade but also for the history of the Dutch Republic as it assumed the role of being the “bookshop of the world”. The firm’s extensive archive is now part of the collection of the library of the book trade, which is kept at the Allard Pierson – the Special Collections of the University of Amsterdam. The physical documents in this archive, which occupy approximately

eleven metres of shelving space, have been digitised and are now available online. These documents concern all aspects of the early modern book trade, especially its financial administration. This includes account books containing sales records of private customers – both those who ordered their books by mail like De Geer and those who visited Luchtmans’ bookshop in Leiden – and dealings with other booksellers in the Netherlands and abroad. Other documents include copies of incoming and outgoing correspondence, stock lists and auction catalogues, contracts for business ventures with other booksellers, travel logs, and other more personal documents.

The archive is, in a sense, complete. This does not mean that everything that has ever existed regarding the Luchtmans family and their company’s administration has survived, even though the archive contains information for its whole existence, from its founding to its last name change. In 1848, the company’s name changed from S. & J. Luchtmans to E. J. Brill. The archive is an incredibly valuable source as it gives unique insight into personal and professional networks in the eighteenth-century international book trade. It has, by no means, been neglected in research, but it contains so much information that one could author multiple books about its various aspects.

In the present context, the account books of private customers are quite interesting. These account books contain the information about Charles de Geer the Entomologist’s purchases and other dealings with Luchtmans. De Geer is first mentioned in the account books in 1746, and appears every year until 1778, when he died. These account books generally start with an index. Between 1770 and 1783, for example, the index of the account book shows the importance of De Geer as a customer when compared to the other names listed under the letter “G”. De Geer’s purchases and sales

---

takes up ten pages, whereas other accounts listed under “G” only require one to four pages.

The last account book mentioning De Geer the Entomologist, in 1778, contains a reminder to the Luchtmans brothers themselves regarding their future correspondence with Charles de Geer the Politician: “Reminder: in the future, write in French to Monsieur le Baron Charles de Geer […] and report every year how many volumes are left of the *Memoires sur les Insectes* [sic]”.

The account books and this reminder mention the volumes of De Geer’s magnum opus, which Luchtmans had on consignment. They distributed the best-selling volumes to other booksellers and customers. This meant that

---

the sum owed by Luchtmans to De Geer quickly surpassed the value of the orders placed by their Swedish client.

Since Luchtmans still had many volumes on consignment, the business relationship between the Leiden booksellers and De Geer passed from father to son. The correspondence between Johannes Luchtmans and Charles the Politician (1747–1805) are still extant in the Luchtmans archive. The letters, dated 1786 and 1791, show that Luchtmans urged De Geer the Politician to order more books for the outstanding amount, so he would not have to pay the considerable sum in cash. Charles the Politician virtually stops ordering books, except for a small number of continuing titles: the larger sets of works or the periodicals he and his father had previously ordered were sent over at their convenience. Although we do not exactly know how Luchtmans and De Geer wrapped up their business dealings, it certainly ended around the turn of the century. Charles the Politician decided to expand the Leufsta Library with books on subjects he found interesting, which he ordered from booksellers in Sweden.

The Luchtmans Firm:
A Personal and Professional History

Who exactly were these Dutch publishers and booksellers supplying the De Geer with books? Jordaan Luchtmans moved from a small Dutch town to a true “city of books” – Leiden. Here, he started his career as a publisher and bookseller by registering himself as an independent bookseller with the local guild in 1683. In that same year, Jordaan married Sara van Musschenbroek. She belonged to a wealthy family with ties to the university, the most important employer of local printers and publishers, and therefore provided her new husband with essential connections for building his business.

---

At the end of the seventeenth century, Luchtmans had established a good enough reputation and earned enough money by publishing scientific works to afford moving his business to the heart of the city, next to the university building. As a result, Luchtmans now conducted his business near his most important employer and customers – the university, its professors, and its students – as well as his main colleagues and competitors in the book trade. In a “book city” like Leiden, the competition was never far away. Failing or otherwise disappearing publishing houses and bookshops were quickly replaced, as others were eagerly waiting to take their business. Nevertheless, plenty of cooperation took place as this helped minimise the risks and costs of publishing extensive works.

Jordaan and Sara had four sons, but only one survived childhood, Samuel, named after his maternal grandfather, Samuel van Musschenbroek. Naturally, he was meant to succeed his father in the book trade. In 1708, after Jordaan died, Samuel took charge of the business. Two years later he also became the official, and only, business owner after the passing of his mother. Owing to the efforts of his father at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Samuel was the owner of a thriving business. Thus, he was able to focus his efforts on expanding the firm. At first, this took place in the shadow of his competitors, like the official publisher and printer to both the city and the university, Pieter van der Aa (1659–1733). After 1730, it was Samuel’s time to shine. He succeeded van der Aa as city and university printer, despite the fact that he did not own any printing presses, so he had to outsource the actual printing. Additionally, he had a leading role in the guild. Luchtmans published countless dissertations, disputations, and orations for the university and expanded his stock with works on science and natural history. In turn, the company’s profits increased and Samuel’s importance among his colleagues and competitors grew.

In 1721, Samuel married his cousin Cornelia van Musschenbroek, and the couple had nine children. Their two oldest sons, Samuel II and Johannes, were trained and prepared to succeed their father.
in the family business. To give them the best possible start, their father ensured the brothers received an education in the subjects that would provide them with the best training for the business – such as mathematics, bookkeeping, French, and Latin. In addition, their father made them study German, English, and Italian to make the firm more competitive in the international market. The plans for the succession were set in motion during the 1740s. In 1741, Samuel II joined the guild while still studying at university and, for good measure, was immediately appointed as his father’s successor as printer to the city and university. Johannes joined the guild in 1749, after which the firm was known by the name of Samuel Luchtmans & Sons. Samuel retired in 1755 and left the running of the firm to his sons. This required another name change, one that would last for almost a century: S. & J. Luchtmans.
The brothers were often mistaken for twins (see Samuel at age 30 in Figure 1 and Johannes at age 29 in Figure 2). The publishing house and its production largely remained the same, quite successful but not particularly special. The bookshop and related endeavours were the main focus of the firm’s operations and were developed and expanded significantly. The firm’s large and varied multilingual stock enabled Samuel and Johannes to conduct business internationally on a large scale. They cultivated an extensive professional network of authors, booksellers, publishers, printers, and – arguably most importantly – customers from all over Europe. The incredibly successful cooperation of the Luchtmans brothers ended in 1780 with the passing of Samuel, leaving Johannes to run the business on his own.

Samuel’s son, Samuel Luchtmans III (1766–1812), was destined to succeed his father and join his uncle Johannes in the family business, but in 1780 he was only fourteen years old, too young to run a business. He eventually joined the firm, but he was not extremely interested in the book trade and most of his time was taken up by fulfilling several administrative functions for the city of Leiden. Johannes remained responsible for the business, supported by an external company director from 1802, until his death in 1809, which left his nephew no other option but to run the business. Samuel, however, unexpectedly died in 1812.

Samuel did not have any children, so the firm eventually passed via Johannes’ oldest daughter, Magdalena Henriëtta Luchtmans (1769–1799), and her husband, Evert Bodel Nijenhuis (1766?–1816), to their son Johannes Tiberius Bodel Nijenhuis (1797–1872). Since Johannes Tiberius was only fifteen at the time of his grandfather’s death and therefore too young to assume any responsibility, the daily management of the bookshop and publishing house fell to the external company director, Johannes Brill (1767–1859). Brill was a printer in Leiden and had taken care of the actual printing of their published works. S. & J. Luchtmans was run successfully until 1848 by
Johannes Brill, Johannes Tiberius Bodel Nijenhuis, and Brill’s son Evert Jan (1812–1871), who had joined the firm in 1831.

The year 1848 brought some significant changes to the Luchtmans firm, including a change in the company name. Both company directors, Brill senior and Bodel Nijenhuis, retired and left the business entirely to Evert Jan Brill. He took over parts of Luchtmans’ successful bookshop and printing house, combined it with the printing office he had inherited from his father, and set up shop under his own name: E. J. Brill. On the one hand, Brill continued in the tradition of Luchtmans by publishing humanistic, scientific, and natural history works. On the other hand, he clearly chose his own path by specialising in publishing and printing works in languages that were beyond the scope of his competitors, for example, Arabic, Sanskrit, Syriac, and Javanese. Evert Jan Brill can be seen as the founding father of the present-day renowned international academic publishing house Brill, but its roots can be found in the seventeenth century with Jordaan Luchtmans initial publishing efforts for Leiden University. A certain continuity can be traced from Luchtmans via E. J. Brill to the present day, since the firm’s publishing efforts today mainly focus on scientific (or more generally academic) works with a slight preference for Asian subjects and languages, working on a large, international scale.

The Leufsta Library as a Link between Sweden and the Netherlands

Charles de Geer filled his library with books he got by post from two nephews of his former teacher Petrus van Musschenbroek, Samuel Luchtmans II and Johannes Luchtmans. Thus, the notable scientist played a part in the origin story of the Leufsta Library and, in a broader sense, helped link Sweden and the Dutch Republic in the eighteenth century. As it turns out, the Leufsta Library has once again connected these two countries, now through the Leufsta project concluded by the symposium held in June 2022. Instead
of the dealings between an academic publisher and bookseller and a private customer, like the Luchtmans firm and Charles de Geer, the present connection is between the Dutch National Library (KB) and Uppsala University Library. In both cases, these partnerships helped establish an international network. In the eighteenth century, the network included publishers, booksellers, merchants, and other business connections. Today, the network includes general libraries, academic libraries, curators, scholars, and other authors from across Europe and the world.

Bibliography


Veen, S. van, et al. (2008), Brill 325 years of scholarly publishing. Leiden & Boston.