

ERASMUS

75 YEARS ERASMUS BOEKHANDEL AMSTERDAM-PARIS

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AMSTERDAM  
PARIS

*FRG*



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Sytze van der Veen

*ERASMUS*

2009

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## PREFACE

This book is offered to you by Erasmus Boekhandel to mark its 75th anniversary. It outlines the history of our company and shows how present trends are based on past achievements.

On the occasion of this jubilee we wish to thank our library clients and business partners in the publishing world for their continued support and the excellent relations we have maintained with them over the years.

We would also like to express our gratitude to all former and present members of staff, some of whom have been with Erasmus for more than 25 years. The company's progress would have been impossible without their dedication.

Our offices in Amsterdam and Paris will continue to provide interesting offers to our clients, based on staff expertise and making optimal use of the latest technological developments. Customer service will remain our highest priority.

This small retrospective is intended as a source of inspiration for the years to come, when we hope to enhance and expand Erasmus' position as an international library supplier. We hope that our predecessors in the company are pleased with the way in which we have continued their work.

Finally, our thanks are due to the author of this book, Sytze van der Veen, translator Cis van Heertum and book designer André van de Waal.

Amsterdam, 2009

Sasha M. Brunsmann  
Kurt Tschennett

LIEBE ZUM BUCHE  
des geschriebenen Wort  
es Geistes/die uns aus  
nen Druckseite in une  
ständnis für die Eigen  
er Schöpfung / den Sti  
Voransetzung / die  
ben des Schönen/Buch  
Feines Empfinden für  
er Teile / die sich für  
fabrung auf  
eiten un

## EARLY HISTORY

Erasmus Boekhandel was founded in 1934 by Abraham Horodisch, who had left Berlin in the summer of the previous year to go to Amsterdam. By birth he was not a German, but a Russian: he was born on 3 February 1898 in Lodz, a city which at the time was Russian, later becoming Polish. He came from an upper middle class Jewish family which owned its own banking house in Czarist Russia. After the foiled revolution of 1905, with pogroms breaking out in many regions of Russia, his parents feared that rioting might also spread to Poland.

To escape assaults, the family moved to Königsberg in East Prussia in 1906, where Horodisch grew up in the same assimilated Jewish milieu as the slightly younger philosopher Hannah Arendt. From his earliest years, he had been surrounded by many languages. He owed his lasting knowledge of Russian to his childhood years in Lodz and absorbed the German language and culture in Königsberg. Yiddish was spoken at home, while he received his religious education in Hebrew in the synagogue. At the age of fifteen, still at grammar school, he turned away from religion, but remained attached to the cultural traditions of Judaism all his life.

At the outbreak of the First World War he and his parents moved to Berlin, where he finished school in 1915. Although he could have been drafted because of his age, he escaped conscription as a non-naturalized foreigner. Following his father's advice, he took up economics, although it was a study in which he had little interest. He took his degree in the summer of 1918, not in Berlin but at the newly founded Frankfurt University. For his doctoral thesis he chose a rather pragmatic and prosaic subject, namely the manufacturing of batteries for torches. After he left University he was briefly employed by the National Office for the Purchase of Foodstuffs in Berlin, but books were more precious to him than food or torches. In 1920, together with a friend, he founded the bibliophile Euphorion Verlag.

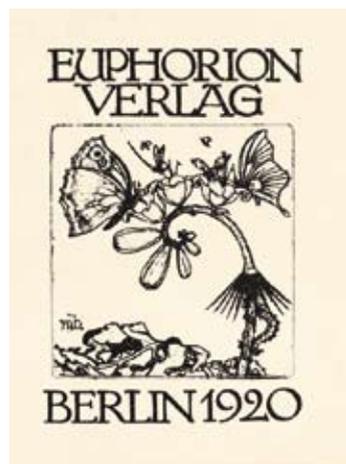


Abraham Horodisch at the age of 27,  
by Paul Kleinschmidt (1883-1949).

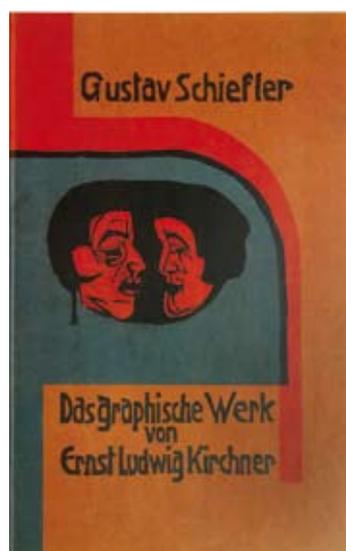
The portrait was painted in 1925;  
two years before, Horodisch hosted  
an exhibition of the artist's work in his  
publishing house Euphorion. JHM

< 'The love of books': Euphorion's  
bibliophile creed (1920), composed by  
Horodisch and printed in a special type.

UBA/BC



Euphorion's vignette, designed by the artist Marcus Behmer (1879-1958). UBA/BC



Cover for Gustav Schiefeler, *Das Graphische Werk von Ernst Ludwig Kirchner*. This collection of woodcuts by Kirchner (1880-1938) was published by Euphorion in 1926. UBA/BC

## THE ART OF THE BOOK AND ART BOOKS

According to Horodisch it was Euphorion's mission to produce the ideal book, which had to be a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in terms of form and contents. All aspects of book design - paper, type, layout, printing, illustrations and binding - should be combined to create perfection. Although typesetting, printing and binding had been mechanized to a high degree at the time, Euphorion preferred traditional craftsmanship. A good book had to be handmade and preferably bound in a decoratively stamped leather binding. The favourite illustrative technique of the publishers was the woodcut, which they considered to be more authentic than either etching or lithography.

Euphorion published some fifty books over a period of thirteen years. Since the print runs ranged from a few hundred to a thousand copies, the editions are now rare and sought after antiquarian items. Euphorion books have in fact acquired the status of legend for connoisseurs of the 1920s. Especially in the early years, the designs made for Euphorion fully satisfied the aesthetic standards of the two founders. The publishing house produced bibliophile masterpieces and also gained a reputation for its art books. Euphorion brought out a great deal of graphic work by Expressionist artists, either in book form or as loose sheets in portfolio.

Euphorion's artistic orientation brought Horodisch into close contact with the leading Expressionists of the day. In an interview sixty years later he recalled, amongst others, Lovis Corinth, Max Pechstein, Emil Nolde ('a difficult man, unbelievably suspicious') and Ludwig Meidner ('I was the only one he didn't fall out with'). Euphorion published graphic work by Nolde and Corinth, as well as Walter Gramatté, Lyonel Feininger and Paul Kleinschmidt, who is less known. Greatly impressed by the work of Käthe Kollwitz, Horodisch paid repeated visits to her workshop, but failed to engage her for his publishing house. Euphorion was also known for its surveys in book form of the graphic work of Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Erich Heckel and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. At the same time, Horodisch managed to build up an impressive collection of Expressionist art thanks to his good standing with artists.

Following a conflict with his associate Ernst Rathenau, Horodisch left Euphorion in 1924, finding a new partner in Moses Marx, with whom he established the firm of Marx & Co. Not long after, Marx, an expert in Hebraica and Judaica, was offered a job as a librarian in the United States. When the latter left in 1926, the company was renamed Horodisch & Marx,



Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, 'Landscape with dunes and windmill' (1917). The coloured woodcut was published by Euphorion in a portfolio of graphic work by the artist (1884-1976). It was part of Horodisch's collection of Expressionist Art, which he bequeathed to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. TAM

The Hebrew bible in the making.  
The first page of Genesis was separately  
printed in 1929 for the members of the  
Soncino Gesellschaft. UBA/BC >

Vignette of the Soncino Gesellschaft.  
The *Mitteilungen* were edited by  
Horodisch. UBA/BC



although the transatlantic associate only contributed his name to the firm. The list of the young publishing house grew thanks to the assignments Horodisch managed to get through his bibliophile networks. Although the leather luxury bindings were a thing of the past, he still made fine books.

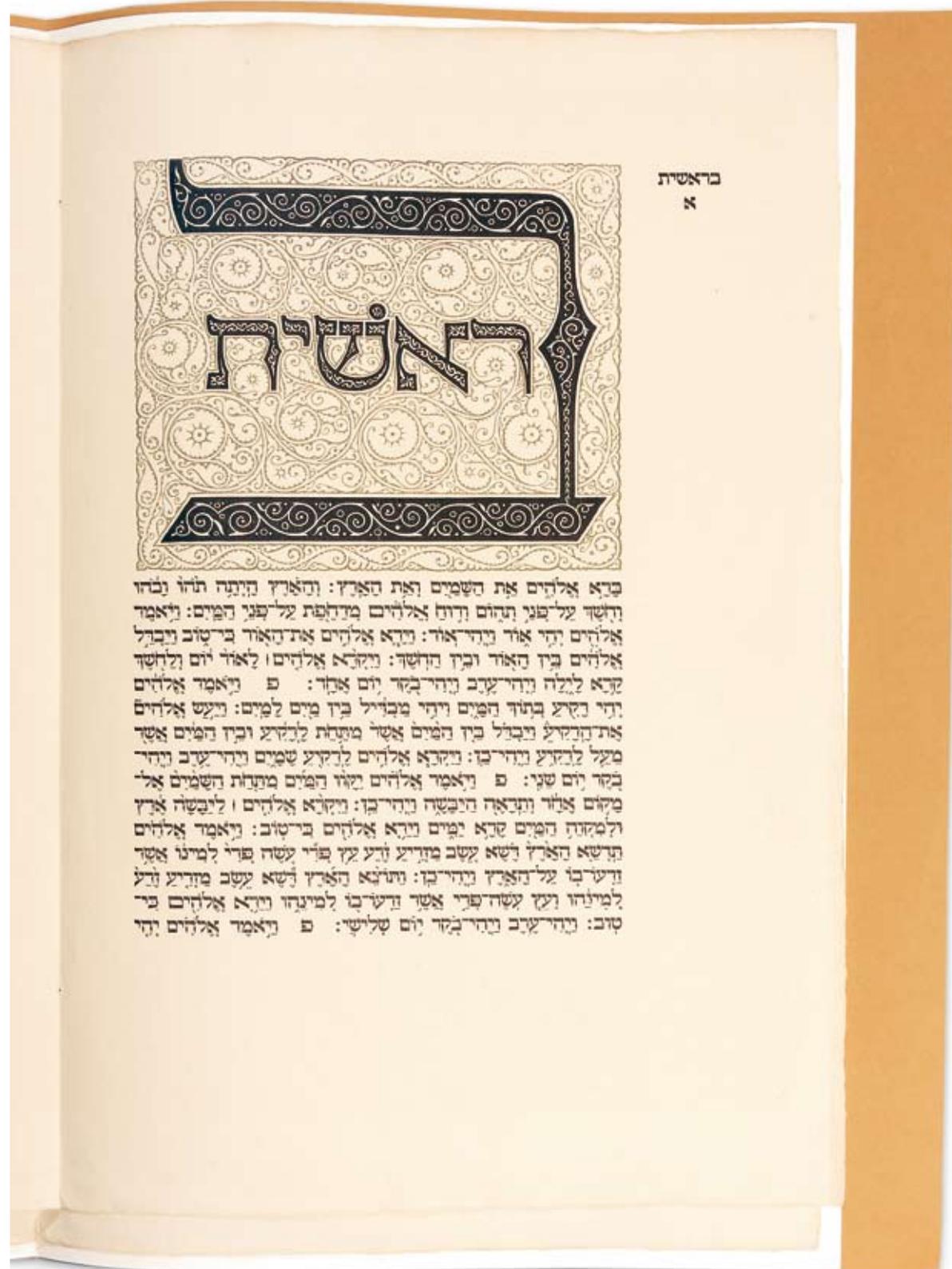
Horodisch's interest in the traditional methods of bookmaking led him to set up a handpress in 1929, in addition to his publishing house. The new venture was called Aldus Druck and was established in the printing house of the brothers Erich and Reinhold Scholem, who were both his friends. The typesetting and printing was carried out by experienced typographers, who also taught Horodisch the finer points of the trade. To mark the centenary of Goethe's death in 1932, an exhibition was organized in Leipzig showing tributes by fifty printers. Horodisch's contribution was a portrait of Goethe entirely composed of capitals - a consummate piece of typesetting artistry.

### THE BOOK OF BOOKS

In 1924 Horodisch was one of the founders of the 'Soncino Gesellschaft der Freunde des jüdischen Buches', a society which allowed him to indulge his bibliophile ideals from another angle. According to the Society's founding manifesto, the form and contents of the Jewish book had to be a perfect match - a restatement of Euphorion's motto. Men of high cultural standing like the Zionist leader and first president of Israel Chaim Weizmann, the author Max Brod and the philosopher Martin Buber endorsed the Society.

The Society's output was distributed among its eight hundred members. In all, the Soncino Gesellschaft produced some hundred works, ranging from books to printwork and loose sheets, mainly in German, some in Hebrew, others in Yiddish. Finance for these books came from contributions and donations, though sometimes it was provided by the members themselves. The Society also brought out a yearbook, called the *Soncino Blätter*, containing articles on book history and literature.

Until 1933 Horodisch was closely involved with this remarkable society, which he later described as 'an intellectual adventure'. As a publisher he was certainly as active for Soncino as he was for Horodisch & Marx, if not more so. All works appeared under the Society's name, but a number of them were printed on the presses of Aldus Druck. The Soncino





Soncino publication on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Albert Einstein (1929). As the author of the book Horodisch had several conversations with the renowned scientist. UBA/BC

Gesellschaft published a wide range of Judaica: Chassidic tales, a play by its member Arnold Zweig, facsimile editions of rare Hebrew books, reprints of historical texts, novels and Jewish curiosities. The Soncino Gesellschaft also embraced contemporary celebrities: in 1929 Horodisch edited a work offered to Albert Einstein in honour of his fiftieth birthday.

Soncino's most ambitious project was an edition of the Jewish book par excellence, the Hebrew bible. In view of the historical role the Book of Books played in Judaism it was an obvious choice, even though many members - including Horodisch - were secular Jews. Nevertheless, he was one of the driving forces behind the Society's *magnum opus*. The project was announced in 1928, but the work was a long time in the making. The first obstacle was to find a Hebrew printing type able to stand the test of bibliophile criticism. The Society's board

commissioned Marcus Behmer, an artist who had previously worked for Euphoriion, to cut a new type. The new letter was ready for use in 1929, but printing progressed only slowly. Not until the beginning of 1933 were the first five books of the Bible completed. The result was a triumph of Hebrew printing, but, for evident reasons, the remaining books would never appear.

### NIGHT TRAIN TO AMSTERDAM

In 1920s Berlin various societies were dedicated to the cult of the fine book. Horodisch was an enthusiastic member of the still existing Berliner Bibliophilen-Abend, a society for which he also acted as publisher. From 1929 he was co-editor, together with Emil Tuchmann, of the eight-volume *Berliner Bibliophile Abhandlungen*, two of which he wrote himself. He also joined the Fontane-Abend, a society focussing on the work of the eponymous author Theodor Fontane, and the more broadly oriented Maximilian-Gesellschaft. In this bibliophile subculture Horodisch could mix pleasure and business in an agreeable way, making numerous profitable contacts.

The love of the fine book led to love for a beautiful woman. In the autumn of 1930 he met the twenty-five year old Alice Garnmann, also a member of the bibliophile circuit, with whom he became romantically involved. By then he had already been married for five years, but the union was apparently an unhappy one. Alice Garnmann was born and bred in Berlin, where she trained as a graphic artist at the art academy after having taken her degree in art history. Alice was on the threshold of a promising career as a graphic designer and illustrator. Her sketches appeared in avant garde periodicals and she also collaborated on works brought out by Horodisch & Marx. In 1931 a book she had designed was awarded a prize as one of the fifty finest book designs to have appeared in Germany that year.

Horodisch was making his mark as a writer, publisher and printer, and unquestionably he was on the rise in the world of the book. Berlin offered him a cultural habitat which felt like a natural home. Soon after Hitler seized power, however, his ivory tower of books and art collapsed under the pressure of politics. Already in March 1933 the Jewish members of the Berliner Bibliophilen-Abend were asked to give up their membership. With many non-Jewish members withdrawing in protest, the Society soon crumbled. Similar events were taking place across

Horodisch, *Die Schrift im schönen Buch unserer Zeit* (1931). Publication of the Berliner Bibliophilen Abend, offering a survey of German printing types then in use. UBA/BC



the other bibliophile societies. The Soncino Gesellschaft, too, was moribund. While his world was rapidly disintegrating, Horodisch decided it was time to leave Germany. On 21 June 1933 he and Alice Garnmann boarded the night train to Amsterdam.

## TAKING RISKS

Seeking refuge in the Netherlands turned out to be a wise decision. Soon afterwards the Gestapo raided the offices of Horodisch & Marx, on the pretext that the publisher had been distributing communist books. Although no evidence was found, the entire book supply was confiscated and destroyed.

In Amsterdam Horodisch at first intended to continue his bibliophile activities, but his Dutch friend Menno Hertzberger advised against it. This antiquarian bookseller warned him that the Netherlands was not like Germany and hardly had a bibliophile culture to boast of. Hertzberger talked from experience, because the Nederlandsch Verbond van Boekenvrienden (Dutch Society of Friends of the Book) he had founded led a lingering existence. Bibliophily simply did not thrive on Dutch soil, least of all in times of crisis. Horodisch may have met Hertzberger on a previous visit to Amsterdam, or perhaps the latter was introduced to him in Berlin. Hertzberger was one of the few foreign members of the Soncino Gesellschaft and like Horodisch he contributed regularly to the German bibliophile yearbook *Imprimatur*.

In the autumn of 1933 Horodisch had come to the conclusion that an antiquarian bookshop was the best way forward, or rather involved the least risk. Not much more could be said about the prospects of such an undertaking. It was a bold step setting up a bookshop during the depths of crisis, the more so for a foreigner. Being one of the first exiles of the Nazi regime, the Dutch authorities did not hinder him - with the ranks of Germany refugees growing in the years to come, their initial benevolence to foreigners soon changed.

On 1 January 1934 Horodisch rented the premises on Spuistraat 314 at thirteen guilders a month. To stock the shop, he and Alice Garnmann combined their honeymoon with a purchasing trip to London. His first marriage having recently been dissolved by a Berlin judge, the couple chose to be married in London on Horodisch's birthday, 3 February 1934. The firm, too, was made official: on 16 March 1934 Erasmus Antiquariaat en Boekhandel joined the Amsterdam Chamber of Commerce. Horodisch chose Erasmus as the name for his

bookshop because of his affinity with Erasmus' outlook on life and his love of books. The humanist's cosmopolitan rootlessness may also have struck a cord with him. And of course the name was familiar to the ear and had a trustworthy ring.

## BOOK PARADISE

At first the income from the shop was meagre, but it earned the couple a living. Horodisch had calculated that they needed 175 guilders a month to get by. He did not have to sell hundreds of books every month to make that amount, but he would have to trade at least several dozen. His wife contributed to their income by working as an illustrator and a graphic designer. In 1935 she took part in an exhibition on graphic design in the Stedelijk Museum, called 'Reclamekunst' (advertising art).

The firm's financial scope increased considerably in the autumn of 1935, when Ernst Rosenberger, a wealthy refugee from Berlin, invested twenty thousand guilders in the company. Considering the small financial turnover of the firm, it was a huge capital injection. Backed by this windfall, Erasmus was able to take the plunge and move to a better location. A little later an opportunity presented itself to relocate to an address at Spui between Rokin and Kalverstraat, Amsterdam's principal shopping street. The distance between Spuistraat and Spui was negligible, but the difference in status was vast. Towards the end of 1935 Horodisch rented the shop premises at Spui 2, which would remain the company address until 1991.

Erasmus reached customers by issuing monthly catalogues which eventually contained over a thousand carefully described items. In the late 1930s they were issued in editions of up to 2,500 copies, which in Horodisch's meticulous calculations came down to a cost price of 36 cents per item. The catalogues were put together by Horodisch himself and by Martin Oppenheim, an erudite refugee who had become an acting partner in the firm in 1936. When Rosenberger had to withdraw his financial support in 1937, his role was taken over by the Amsterdam banker Paul Auerbach, a collector of books in Greek and a good customer of Erasmus. Auerbach stood surety for an amount similar to that of his predecessor; Horodisch for his part was able to add some two thousand guilders to the firm's working capital.

The first auditor's report on Erasmus, for the year 1934. AE





Horodisch enlarged his supply by making annual spring and autumn trips to Paris and London to buy in books. In February 1938 he exhibited a magnificent collection of French books in his shop, in cooperation with the antiquarian booksellers Maggs Bros. of Paris. A journalist who happened to pass by could not believe what he saw in the shop window. The astonished reporter feasted his eyes on illuminated medieval manuscripts, incunables, sixteenth-century printed books and rare special editions from later centuries. 'In short ... the bookworm's paradise in Amsterdam is to be found behind a glass door at Spui'. In just four years Erasmus had become a household name for book lovers.

#### TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Horodisch had no problem setting himself up as an antiquarian bookseller. The Nederlandsche Vereeniging van Antiquaren (Dutch Antiquarian Booksellers' Association), founded by Hertzberger in 1935, warmly embraced him as a member. In the early years the antiquarian department formed the backbone of Erasmus, but its founder also wanted to expand his business as a modern bookshop. Here, however, he encountered a problem because the trade in modern books in the Netherlands was restricted to members of the Vereeniging ter Bevordering van de Belangen des Boekhandels (Society for the Promotion of the Interests of Dutch Booksellers). Horodisch needed their permission to set up shop. His application in 1934 was refused on the grounds that he did not speak Dutch and was unfamiliar with 'the customs of our trade'. Business was slack and there was no need for foreigners trying to muscle in.

Publishers were not allowed to supply unregistered booksellers and so Erasmus was unable to sell new Dutch titles. However, Horodisch was still an official member of the German Börsenverein and turned to importing German books. Because he did not want Erasmus to be regarded as an exclusively German-language bookshop, he also sold modern French and English books. The Vereeniging was not happy with these developments and tried to put a spoke in the wheel. One book exporter in Leipzig was given to understand that it was forbidden to supply books to Erasmus. Van Ditmar publishers were carpeted for the same offence and were threatened with a boycott by Amsterdam booksellers. But Horodisch was not to be intimidated by such petty actions and carried on regardless.

< The corner of Rokin and Spui in 1930.  
From 1935 until 1991 Erasmus was located  
in the shop to the left of the white corner  
building. SAA



Alice Horodisch-Garnmann designed this change of address card when Erasmus moved to Spui in 1935. Her design was a Germanism in imagery: thinking in her native language, she drew a train ('Zug') to mark the move to the new premises ('Umzug'). The decorated letters she designed for Erasmus have remained the company's logo to this day. UBA/bc

Looking back, he wryly observed that the Dutch association's rebuffs had helped foster an international outlook, one which would prove to be the abiding strength of Erasmus.

In the course of 1933 the first exile publications appeared in Amsterdam. Horodisch may have been thinking of starting an *Exil Verlag*, but refugee editors of the Berlin publishing house Kiepenheuer were ahead of him and took the products of the literary diaspora to the Amsterdam publishers Allert de Lange and Querido. Erasmus did sell all *Exil* publications in Amsterdam, while in Germany they were partially distributed through Horodisch & Marx. Obviously someone in Berlin was taking care of the business in the absence of the main company director. The Vereeniging, irritated by Querido's supplies to Horodisch & Marx, went so far as to ask the Deutsche Buchhändlergilde to institute an inquiry in 1935. Its report described the firm as a rather vague mail order bookshop conducting its business from an upstairs flat.

The Vereeniging put pressure on Querido to stop supplying Erasmus, but without any success. Later Horodisch would confirm that *Exil* literature had been an important source of income for him during those years.

In 1938 the Vereeniging mulled over his renewed application to be admitted as a registered bookseller. By now he had a command of Dutch and had learnt about 'the customs of our trade' the hard way, so this time he was not to be put off with an empty show of words. The Vereeniging tried passing on the hot potato to the Uitgeversbond (Union of Publishers), which suggested demanding a bank guarantee of three thousand guilders. Much to the Vereeniging's chagrin, Horodisch was able to come up with the required guarantee. It did not take the Vereeniging long to recover from this unexpected blow: Horodisch was next informed that he could not be admitted as a registered bookseller for the simple reason that he was already active as an antiquarian bookdealer.

This latter argument being altogether new in the Dutch booktrade, it was necessary to adjust the Vereeniging's regulations. However, at the extraordinary general meeting that was subsequently called the members defeated the resolution. All options having been exhausted, the Vereeniging was left with no other choice than to accept Horodisch as a member in November 1938. It is unclear whether this really was the end of the matter: in Horodisch's recollection, the Vereeniging spontaneously offered him membership in 1940 to protect him from being harrassed by the German occupiers.

## ERASMUS UNDER THE OCCUPATION

The German invasion of the Netherlands landed Horodisch in the same situation he had wanted to escape from seven years earlier. An immediate effect of the occupation was a complete paralysis of the Dutch business community, which also hit Erasmus. Business had all but come to a halt and Horodisch feared he would have to let some of his staff go. He was already considering firing staff, but the sale of books slightly recovered in the autumn of 1940. Around that time, too, the impact of the first anti-semitic measures began to be felt. In October 1940 Horodisch was forced to enter Erasmus as a 'Jewish' firm, with an inventory of existing capital assets. Early in 1941 he and his wife had to register as Jews and in August of that year their identity cards were stamped with the infamous 'J'.

The illusion of normality offered a shaky hold against an unrelenting reality. Horodisch applied himself to his bibliophile studies and published a series of articles on miniature books in 1940-1941, a subject which seems rather esoteric in light of the situation. Another pastime was the study of ornamental initials in incunables, of which he had started a photo collection as early as the 1920s. He wrote about the subject in *Initialschmuck Französischer Frühdrücke (1479-1500)*, which appeared anonymously with the Amsterdam publisher Pantheon in 1941 (probably a disguise of Erasmus). To the occupier, ornamental initials of the Renaissance were not offensive, but the same was not true for the author's name.

After some time, companies which had earlier been branded as 'Jewish' were placed under German control. This was also the case for Erasmus, which had to accept a certain Heinrich Vossiek as its 'Verwalter' in November 1941. Vossiek, a German, had been living in The Hague for a long time, though not as a political refugee. Horodisch knew him because he had been one of Erasmus' customers in the years before the war. Although it was within Vossiek's mandate to liquidate the firm, it was not what he had in mind. Early every month he would drop in to collect the salary he had bestowed on himself. He did the same in some five other antiquarian bookshops, including Hertzberger's. It was a monthly extortion which Horodisch and his colleagues had to put up with.

The occupiers' policy was to drive Jewish citizens to the margins of society. They were not allowed to visit public places or use public transport. Even owning a bicycle was made an offence. Early in May 1942 Jews were ordered to wear the Star of David, which marked the beginning of the end. When Horodisch wanted to go from his home in South Amsterdam to his shop at Spui, he had to cross half the city on foot with a yellow badge on his coat. In June rumours began circulating in Amsterdam about plans to put Jews to work in camps in Eastern Europe. Horodisch had read *Mein Kampf* and harboured no illusions about Hitler's plans for the Jewish people. He knew it was time to go, but he did not know how.

The answer offered itself, when late in June 1942 Max Gans and Jenny Gans-Premela came to say goodbye to the Horodisches. They had an address in the south of the country, the beginning of an escape route to Switzerland. The young couple had decided to escape and would leave in a few days. Their friends were welcome to come along, if they dared take the risk. Horodisch estimated they had a fifty per cent chance to

Coloured-in engraving of tulips from J.W. Weinmann, *Phytanthoza Iconographia* (Regensburg 1737-1745). This botanical work was part of the initial stock of Erasmus' antiquarian bookshop. Horodisch bought the four parts containing over a thousand magnificent illustrations for 60 guilders in 1934. Loose engravings from this work nowadays fetch € 600, which would bring the total value of the work in its disassembled form to € 600.000. UBA/BC



come through, whereas chances of survival in the Netherlands were practically nil. Backed by this calculation they, too, decided to take the chance. Their hurried departure left them little time to settle their affairs. Martin Oppenheim took Horodisch's collection of books and art to a secure place, after which he went into hiding himself.

Notice in the journal of the Dutch book trade (*Nieuwsblad van den Boekhandel*), 18 December 1941: H. Vossiek has been appointed as administrator for Erasmus Antiquariaat en Boekhandel in Amsterdam. He is 'authorized to alienate the company'. UBA/BC

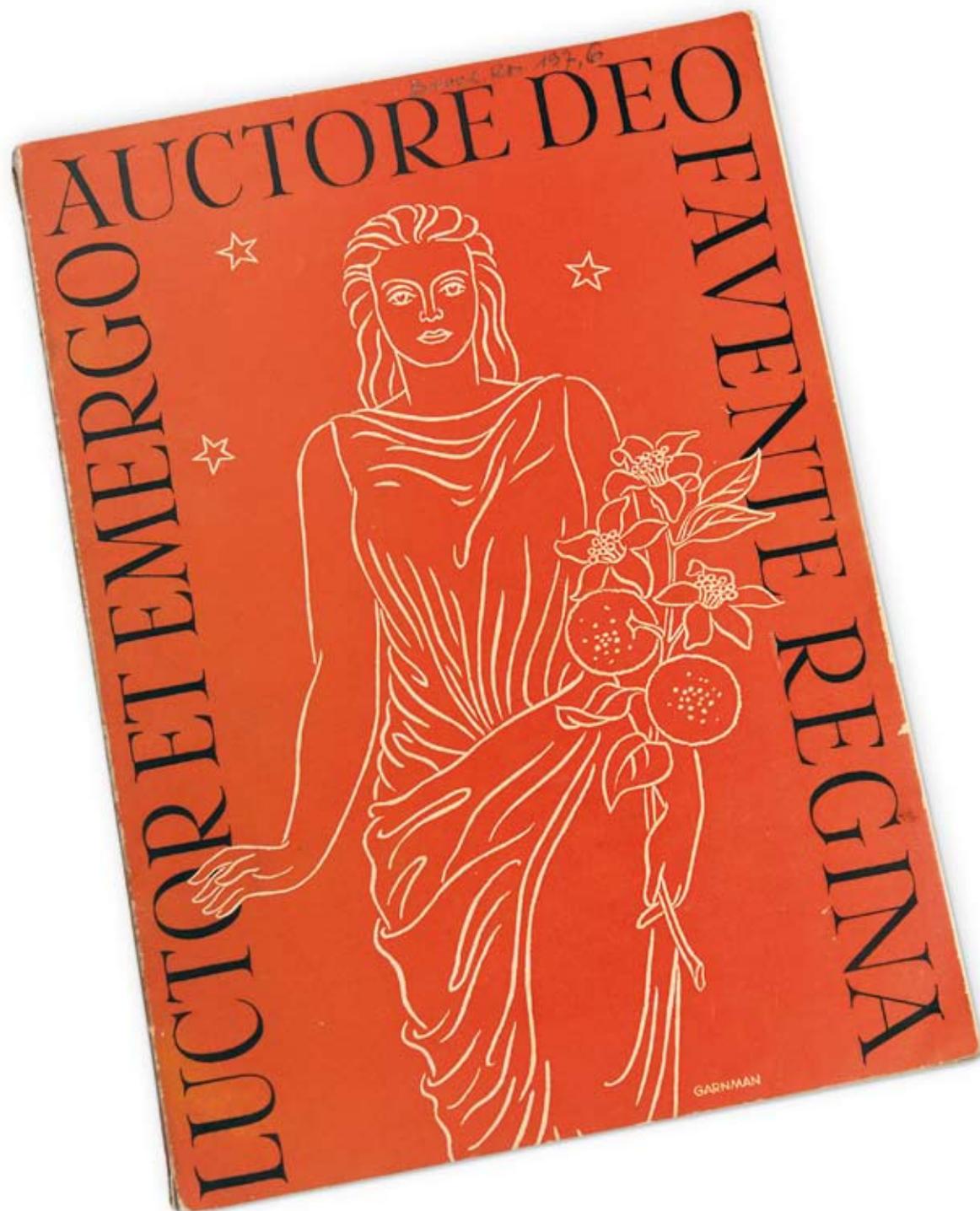
Erasmus Antiquariaat en Boekh., Spui 2, Amsterdam. Bewindvoerder: H. Vossiek en bewindvoerder gerechtigd tot het vervreemden der onderneming: Nederl. A.G. für Abw. von Untern. te 's-Gravenhage.

*Nieuwsbl. 18 Dec. 1941*



Abraham Horodisch and Alice Horodisch-Garmann in the summer of 1941.

The photo was taken by Horst Garmann, then eighteen years old, when he visited his cousin and her husband in Amsterdam. Garmann later became a director of Erasmus and was associated with the company until 1993. AE



## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOUNTAINS

The date of departure was set for 2 July 1942, which, by hindsight, was just in time - within two weeks the first deportations were carried out in Amsterdam. To reduce the risk of discovery, the two couples travelled separately to the south. They knew that the minute they boarded the train in Amsterdam, they would become a prey for manhunters. At a steep price, their contact in the south had arranged a 'trafficker' who would take them across the border with Belgium on foot. His colleague in Antwerp, who was next in line to help them on their way, turned out to double-cross the people entrusted to his care. Only at the last minute did the refugees find out that they were dealing with a traitor.

A friend in the booktrade in Brussels gave Horodisch the address of a French resistance worker in Besançon, who could help them reach the Swiss border. Acquaintances in Antwerp saw to it that they were escorted to Namur. Having managed to cross the French border without any trouble, they took the train to Besançon, continually afraid of discovery. Their contact in the French city was a railroad man who arranged their transport to a border village. From there they were on their own and had to cross the border into Switzerland, which ran across the Jura. There was open terrain at the foot of the mountain where border guards were patrolling with dogs. With the rain pouring down on them, they waited for the right moment and ran to find cover among the trees of the wooded slope. After a nerve-racking climb they reached the summit of the mountain, where Horodisch's pent-up tension released itself in a burst of exuberant dancing.

They had reached the Promised Land, but it was not overflowing with milk and honey. For a few days the refugees were detained in a prison in Neuchâtel, after which they were taken to the internment camp Sumiswald in the canton of Bern. Max and Jenny Gans received a residence permit fairly soon, but the Swiss authorities were less forthcoming with respect to the stateless Horodisch couple. Until the spring of 1943 they remained interned in Sumiswald camp, where they were kept busy with various futile activities. Political refugees were not allowed to do any paid work, but a Dutch priest with whom they were on friendly terms managed to get Horodisch a job as a volunteer at Fribourg university library. The couple found a roof over their heads in a convent in the city. Horodisch's parents, who had emigrated to the United States in the 1930s, sent money to support their son and daughter-in-law. Alice and Abraham Horodisch spent the rest of the war in Fribourg.

An anniversary book compiled by Dutch refugees in Switzerland on the occasion of Queen Wilhelmina's birthday in 1944. The publication was a coproduction by Max Gans - who later achieved renown as the author of the *Memorbook* of the Dutch Jewry - and Abraham Horodisch. Cover design by Alice Garnmann. UBA/BC

## RESURRECTION

Erasmus, too, survived the war, at least, what was left of the company. Vossiek continued to milk the firm until August 1944, when at the age of sixty he was called up for military duty. The next German administrator liquidated the remains of the book supply and meant to use Erasmus bookshop as an outlet for national socialist works. As there were no buyers for this particular merchandize, it wasn't long before the shop stood empty. Fuel shortages during the last winter of the war did the rest: the wooden bookcases fed the fires in the homes of shivering Amsterdammers. Martin Oppenheim, who had come out of hiding early in May 1945, had kept his key to the shop. What he found when he opened the door was utter havoc.

In 1938 Horst Garnmann, a younger cousin of Alice, had come to the Netherlands at the age of fifteen. His parents had decided to send their son across the border in view of the situation in Germany. He lived in Rotterdam first, but moved to Arnhem after the bombing of the city. In the summer of 1941 he cycled to Amsterdam to visit his cousin and her husband in Amsterdam, but later lost touch with them. In 1943 he had moved to Amsterdam, where he earned a living doing a variety of odd jobs. He was completely in the dark about the fate of his relatives. On 10 May 1945 he called at Erasmus, where Oppenheim opened the door to him.

Together they cleared the mess and opened shop. This marked the beginning of Horst Garnmann's career at Erasmus, which was to span almost half a century. Not that there was anything to sell at first: there were no books or customers. In the months

Notice to clients that Erasmus will resume business after a few years' interruption (February 1946). A new catalogue is due out soon, in a limited edition because of paper shortages. UBA/bc



A typical scene from the late 1940s: Erasmus's heating system, which also functioned as hot water supply and tea stove. The wastepaper bucket next to the stove seems to be something of a fire hazard in a shop full of books. AE

following the liberation, however, the shopkeepers managed to derive a decent income selling illustrated papers, which fed the hunger for news. Already at nine in the morning, avid readers would be queuing up on Rokin for their news fix.

The Horodisches returned to Amsterdam in the autumn of 1945. Thanks to a loan given to him by a refugee friend, Horodisch had managed to buy a batch of French and English books in Switzerland. Amsterdam had long been deprived of fresh supplies, and these 'foreign novelties' created something of a stir in December 1945. For the rest, the ransacked shop had to be built up starting from scratch. As there were no restrictions on the trade in second-hand books, there was a veritable boom in antiquarian bookshops after the war. Unlike Horodisch and Oppenheim, the owners of such shops often did not have a clue what they were selling. Their incompetence offered opportunities for cheap buys, and Oppenheim especially undertook regular forays to relieve the competition of books with which to stock Erasmus.

Tactics like these managed to keep the firm afloat, but only just. There was no money to buy books, the banks did not

Rembrandt, drawing of the Mennonite theologian Cornelis Claesz. Anso (1641). Illustration taken from Otto Benesch's compilation *The Drawings of Rembrandt* (London, 1954-1957), which was a milestone in Erasmus' progressing career as an art bookshop and library supplier. UBA/bc

extend any credit and there was hardly a demand for books. From a business point of view the post-war years were extremely difficult. A balance sheet of 1945 shows that Erasmus started out with a deficit of fifteen thousand guilders. Non financial losses - relatives, friends and customers who had not survived - weighed even heavier. Among them was Paul Auerbach, Erasmus' silent partner of the pre-war days. Horodisch later returned Auerbach's share in the business capital to his heirs, using the 'Wiedergutmachung' he received from the Federal Republic of Germany.

Oppenheim's sudden death in 1949 was another hard blow, yet in the same year the economy began to show signs of recovery. A wealthy South-American book collector commissioned Erasmus to put together a comprehensive library for him. The antiquarian bookshop also profited from the flow of German books that were discarded by Dutch readers who had lost interest. Horodisch bought them at a low price and sold them to American libraries.

#### A MAN WITH VISION

In the early 1950s the trade in new books began to pick up. At first Erasmus was a general bookshop like the others, carrying a wide range of books in the field of literature and the humanities. On the ground floor Horst Garnman\* took care of the business of buying and selling modern books, while Horodisch on the first floor presided over the trade in old and rare books. It wasn't long before the shop at Spui was cramped for space, unable to take in the growing supply of new books. Garnman took a decision which showed he had vision: he decided to refurbish 'his' part of Erasmus and turn it into a bookshop specializing in art books. All novels, books of poetry, travel guides, atlases, dictionaries etcetera disappeared from the shelves.

\* Horst Garnmann eventually dropped the final 'n' from his name, consistent with Dutch spelling practice. His cousin Alice was even more frugal and used the name 'Garman'. From now on, the Dutch name variants are used.



FIG. 956 (Cat. No. 759)

At the time it was highly unusual for a bookshop to occupy a particular 'niche' in the market. While others clung to tradition and continued to stock as widely as possible, Erasmus changed direction and became a specialist in art books. With hindsight Garnman's move proved to be a brilliant decision. Erasmus developed yet another remarkable specialty, that of book history. This particular expertise was primarily fed by Horodisch's own personal interests, and included both antiquarian and modern books. For more than forty years, Erasmus was the only bookshop in the Netherlands able to offer the full range in this field. The specialty of book history was then in its infancy and gained Erasmus a unique standing internationally. The present firm still honours its book historical tradition.

The chosen specialty may have been partly dictated by lack of space, but it was also encouraged by a degree of vision absent in professional colleagues. From the start, Erasmus had a more cosmopolitan outlook than other bookshops in the Netherlands. Like Horodisch, Garnman developed a keen eye for the international aspects of the booktrade. The new specialty was also the outcome of careful calculation, because the art book turned out to be a good business investment. For instance, Otto Benesch's famous collection *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, which was published by Phaidon in London between 1954 and 1957, was a bestseller for Erasmus. In spite of the high price of 600 guilders, a large number of copies of this six-volume series were sold to scholarly libraries and museums in the Netherlands and abroad.

This range of institutional customers indicates that the new specialty coincided with another change, which was to have a great impact on the firm: from the early 1950s, Erasmus evolved into an international supplier of libraries. With time, this side of the business eclipsed the bookshop and the antiquarian department. Horodisch took an active share in setting up the mail order bookshop, but from the 1960s its growth and success were mainly due to Horst Garnman. His efforts eventually shaped the image of the present firm, which from 1991 has provided books to libraries exclusively.



Alfred Kubin, 'Pierrot' (1922). As a schoolboy, Horodisch became acquainted with the work of the Austrian artist Kubin (1877-1959) and was particularly gripped by his 'black romanticism'. He possessed a complete collection of Kubin's graphic work and wrote various works on the subject. In 1952 he organized a Kubin exhibition in Amsterdam. He also corresponded with the author, who edited an illustrated edition of the work of the Austrian poet Georg Trakl at Horodisch's behest. UBA/BC

## WIDENING THE HORIZON

The 1950s in the Netherlands are usually defined as the period of reconstruction, but in the case of Erasmus it is fair to speak of an entirely new structure. The growing focus on academic institutions required an entirely new network of international relations. Even more than today, it was essential to establish personal contacts with librarians, curators and scholars. Horodisch and Garnman had, quite literally, to "show their faces" in order to win the trust of foreign clients. In their efforts to promote Erasmus, they displayed remarkable energy.

For convenience sake, the two partners partitioned the world between them. Horodisch toured France and England, countries which he used to visit in the years before the war, and extended his travels into Italy. He forged profitable ties with universities and museums, managing at the same time to buy in books for his antiquarian department. From 1950 he also travelled every other year to the United States, where his elderly parents were living and where many of his German friends had found new homes.



'Knight in the order of the book'.

On his travels through the United States, Horodisch began a collection of cartoons on books, booksellers, readers and writers. In 1952 he published an article on the subject which he illustrated with his finds. UBA/BC

Alice Garman\* accompanied him on these transatlantic expeditions, which were done by freighter to keep travelling costs down. A visit to the United States would usually last up to three months and was by no means limited to New York: Horodisch travelled across the continent on long train journeys which took him from the East Coast to the West Coast and from north to south. He called at all major universities and museums of North America and managed to secure many important clients for the firm. To this day many of these institutions are still clients of Erasmus.

Horst Garnman's territory covered the German-speaking areas of Europe and he also ventured beyond the Iron Curtain. In the years dominated by the Cold War, his trips to the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia and Hungary roused the suspicion of the Dutch intelligence service. In their view the regular Eastern Bloc traveller might very well be a subversive, using the book trade as a cover. The fact that he was a stateless citizen made him all the more suspect in the eyes of intelligence officers.

Fortunately the Cold War and the chill suspicions it generated are past history. When out of curiosity Garnman asked to see his file only a few years ago, he found that his movements had been closely monitored. An altogether unnecessary surveillance, the more so because the peaceful nature of his mission contributed, however modestly, to international détente. Garnman was naturalized in 1957, which gave him greater freedom of movement. Eight years before, Horodisch, also stateless, had already obtained a Dutch passport.

#### OF BARTERING AND FRIENDLY TURNS

The cosmopolitan character of Erasmus is reflected in a remarkable episode of barter trade with the Soviet Union, the result of a trip Horodisch took to St Petersburg (then still Leningrad) in the late 1950s. When visiting the Hermitage, he took the opportunity to inform the curators that Erasmus was able to provide art books. As a native Russian, it was easy for him to make connections. The need for Western literature appeared great, but neither the Hermitage nor any other museum in Russia had access to foreign currency. The curators

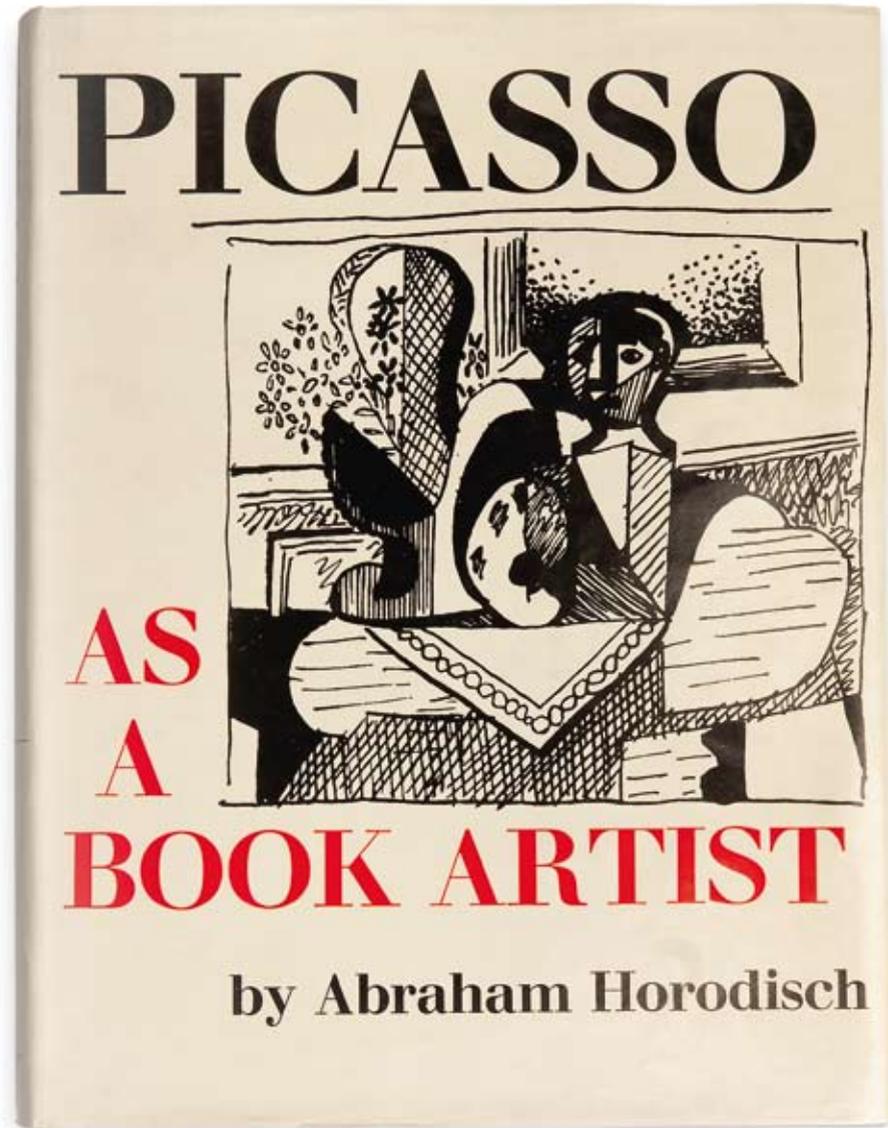
\* See note on p. 28

were therefore very happy to accept Horodisch's proposal to trade Western art books for Russian ones. Thanks to these transactions in kind, Erasmus became the only bookshop in Western Europe able to offer Russian art historical works.

This friendly exchange of books between Russia and the Netherlands lasted for over a decade. From the 1970s, the purchasing offices in Russia and other communist states increasingly took to buying their Western books at the German Book Fairs, where they also sold their own publications. Nevertheless, there are still a number of prominent Russian museums among Erasmus' clients.

Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman, cover of the ninth issue of the periodical *The next call* (1926). Illustration taken from H.A.P. Grieshaber et al., *Hommage à Werkman* (Stuttgart 1957; New York 1958). The first international publication on the printer and artist Werkman (1882-1945) appeared in collaboration with the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Erasmus played an important role in selling the book and also advertised it in a special brochure. UBA/BC





Thanks to the joint efforts of Horodisch and Garnman, Erasmus had achieved a solid status as suppliers to Dutch and foreign libraries at the end of the 1950s. Along with the bookshop and the antiquarian department, the mail order bookshop was now a firmly established part of the company. The strong growth in library supplies in the two decades to come was based on the foundations laid down during the fifties.

A striking example of the bookshop's international network was the volume *Amor Librorum*, published by Erasmus on the occasion of Horodisch's sixtieth birthday in 1958. Herman de la Fontaine Verwey, then director of the University Library of Amsterdam, is to be credited with the initiative for this anniversary book; however, the *liber amicorum* was largely compiled and edited by Horodisch himself, who also brought out his own birthday present under the imprint of Erasmus. He found no less than thirty scholars, at home and abroad, willing to contribute a book historical article to the volume. The authors came from everywhere, reflecting the international renown Erasmus had achieved by the 1950s. In addition to the Netherlands, articles came from the United States (3), Germany (4), Switzerland (2), Italy (2), France (1) and Belgium (1).

Cover of Horodisch's *Picasso as a book artist* and a drawing by Picasso, which was used as an illustration in the book. The drawing represents the opening scene of Picasso's absurdist play *Le désir attrapé par la queue* [Desire caught by its tail] (1941). The artist illustrated the manuscript, which was reproduced in a few facsimile copies for a performance in 1944. Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus played characters like 'the pudgy foot', 'the onion' and 'the pie'. Horodisch managed to get hold of one of the rare facsimile copies in Paris and sold it to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. A performance of the play in 1955, in the hall of the museum, caused a scandal because of the appearance of a scantily clad lady. Horodisch used the same facsimile copy for his book on Picasso's illustrative work, which appeared in German (Frankfurt a.M. 1957) and in English (London 1962). UBA/BC





## A PASSION FOR COLLECTING

A collector's passion is directed at specific objects of desire and is fed by a longing for more. The aim is to make the collection complete, but on the road to perfection the true collector takes a profound pleasure in collecting for the sake of collecting. A collector nourishes his special interests and meticulously cherishes his treasures. Collecting is a lifestyle, perhaps even a way of being.

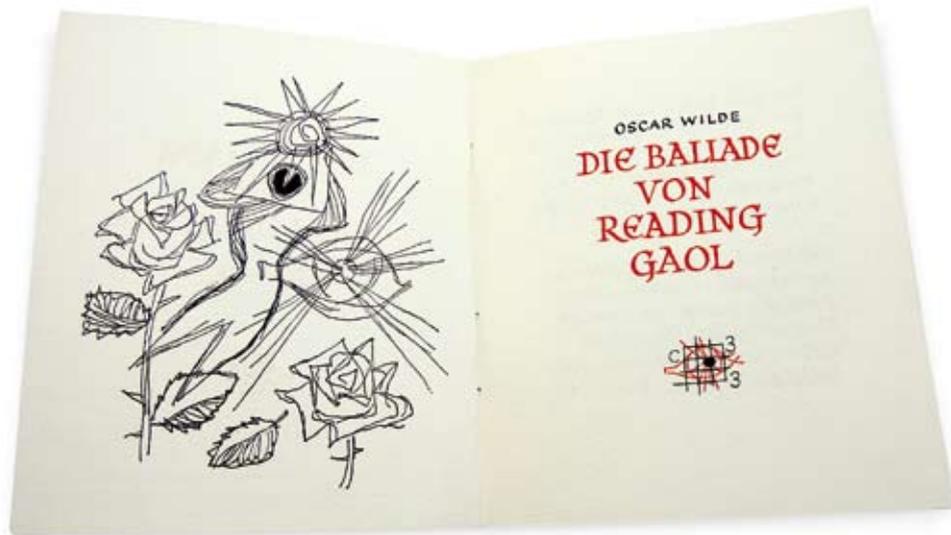
Horodisch was a born collector, an instinct which for an antiquarian bookseller is a professional need. All his life he continued to add to his various collections with a steady dedication, often writing about them in published articles and books. His interests ranged from antiquarian books to modern art. Some of his special collections have already been touched upon - the Expressionist art he collected while still in Berlin, his complete collection of the work of the Austrian artist Alfred Kubin and his steadily expanding book historical collection.

Horodisch's fascination for the illustrated book also spanned both past and present. He wrote about the graphic work of contemporary artists like Kubin and Picasso, but he also possessed a unique collection of illustrated books from the sixteenth century. He especially liked woodcuts by Renaissance artists like Bernard Salomon and Pierre Vase, then still relatively unknown. He regarded them as the historical counterparts of the modern Expressionists, whose woodcuts he collected with an equally great passion. Ever since the Soncino Gesellschaft had awakened his interest in the Jewish book, Judaica was a constant element in his collecting habits and became a specialty of his antiquarian bookshop. According to one expert, his collection of Russian books was surpassed by two collections only, both in the public domain, those of the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris and the Ost Europa Institut in Munich.

Smaller collecting areas also developed alongside the larger ones, such as a collection of all first editions of the works of Heinrich von Kleist. Apparently Horodisch also ran a number of sub-collections with intriguing names like 'bibliomania' and 'bibliophobia'. Another notable collection comprised all editions of Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*, including rare Japanese and Frisian translations. In 1918 Horodisch had come across the ballad in a bibliophile edition published by Hyperion Verlag in Leipzig, and bought another three German editions of the poem in the 1920s. This quartet formed the

Some bookplates designed by Alice Garman for her husband's book collections. The complete collection consisted of 21 bookplates, which were published in a small portfolio as *Bookplates in pen and ink* (New York 1954; in an edition of 300 copies). AE

Bottom of the page: Horodisch, *Miniatur Exlibris* (published by Erasmus; Amsterdam 1966). The pages here shown describe the mini ex libris Alice Garman designed for his collection of miniature books. UBA/BC



Horodisch possessed a collection of all editions of Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Alice Garman contributed to this collection with a miniature edition of the ballad, calligraphed and illustrated by her (1961). AE

basis of a collection which was enlarged with every edition he could lay his hands on during his trips in Europe and the United States. The worldwide literary quest for Wilde resulted in his *Oscar Wilde's Ballad of Reading Gaol. A bibliographical study* (New York, 1954).

Miniature books were another abiding bibliophile hobby, which can be traced to the 1920s. In honour of a marital tradition, Alice Garman added an item to this collection of bibliophile trinkets every year. Early in 1943, while they were still staying in the Swiss internment camp at Sumiswald, she was looking for a birthday present to give to her husband. As there were no shops to go to, nor any money to spend, she decided to produce some thirty small drawings and offer them to her husband in a hand sewn miniature book. Since then, Alice made a habit of presenting Abraham with a miniature book on his birthday, which was also their wedding anniversary. In 1967 the Letterkundig Museum (National Literary Museum) in The Hague devoted an exhibition to these unique hand made objects. In his opening address the director observed that the items were surprisingly economical in exhibition space compared to works in folio. Some of Alice Garman's miniature books appeared in print as bibliophile editions.

The couple shared a love of small ornaments, as shown in their collection of Japanese miniature *netsuke* sculptures. Another small object that caught their fancy was the ex libris. Alice Garman was a renowned designer of bookplates, and Horodisch for his part wrote some articles on the subject. The miniature book she made for him in 1952 contained twenty designs for bookplates to match his several book collections;

two years later this small gem was published under the title *Bookplates in pen and ink* (New York, 1954).

One of the bookplates was meant for Horodisch's collection of miniature books, which presented a challenge to the designer. To fit the design to a type area of a few square centimetres was meticulously delicate work. Horodisch became intrigued by the miniature ex libris as a book historical phenomenon, almost inevitably leading to a publication on the subject. His *Miniatur Exlibris* was published by Erasmus in 1966, appropriately enough in the form of a miniature book with a type area measuring 58 by 54 millimetres.

A similar interaction on a small scale occurred in 1963 when Alice Garman designed a set of stamps, the so-called 'kinderpostzegels', stamps sold every year in the Netherlands to benefit children. The enthusiastic Horodisch immediately embarked on a remarkable new hobby which he described as 'bibliophilately'. He studied depictions of books, writers, libraries and printing presses on stamps and published a number of articles about them.

#### STEADY GROWTH

In the 1960s and 1970s, Erasmus grew into a major library supplier under Horst Garnman's direction. The bookshop and the antiquarian department also continued to flourish in these decades, but the mail order book shop increasingly determined the volume of trade of the firm. Gradually and quietly, the scales tipped against the modern and antiquarian bookshop. Around 1980 the mail order book shop's share had risen to 85% of the total sales, with the bookshop and the antiquarian department together making up the rest. As he grew older, Horodisch retired more and more into his beloved antiquarian sanctum and left the daily running of the business to his cousin, who had become a partner in 1970. Garnman, who greatly valued personal contact with clients, from then on did all the travelling abroad. He was often absent to strengthen the international network of customers and acquire new clients.

Company strategies introduced by Garnman are still followed by Erasmus today. He set great store on actively approaching customers, especially by informing them about relevant new titles. For this particular service, the staff needed to develop two skills: on the one hand the offers had to be geared to the client's needs, on the other hand it was essential to receive

Illustration from Alice Garman, *Bibliophantasia* (Hamburg 1952; in an edition of 250 copies). The miniature book contains drawings of eccentric readers like 'Professor Schulze'. AE



advance information about new book titles. It was a sport to Garnman to get information from publishers before the official catalogues were out. Armed with such advance knowledge, he regularly managed to steal a march on the competition. Thanks to his good standing with the University Presses of Oxford and Cambridge, Erasmus received their Advance Information Sheets. These advance copies only went to the closest contacts on the mailing list.

Erasmus expressly positioned itself as the intermediary between publishers and libraries. On-approval shipments were another element of the pro-active customer approach. To save the tedious conversion of exchange rates, foreign clients were allowed to settle their invoices in the local currency. This extra courtesy not only required computational skills of the staff of Erasmus, it also meant they had to keep close tabs on international monetary exchange. The Deutsche mark had to be converted into the French franc, American dollars into Italian liras. In the early days of automation, an invoicing machine was installed to relieve the staff of time-consuming calculations. The modern monster, which had to be fed each morning with the current rates, was approached with some trepidation by the staff.

The international reputation of Erasmus rested securely on its art book expertise, but the range of its mail order bookshop widened in the course of time. Book supplies to libraries covered

Free advertising for Erasmus: the Swedish National Girobank explaining to its clients how to fill in international payment orders (1969). AE



The staff of Erasmus around 1970, with Horodisch in the middle. Behind him on the right, with tie and glasses, stands Horst Garnman. AE

### Girering till utlandet

Har mottagaren i sitt land ett postgirokonto, kan Ni girera betalningen.

POSTGIRO BUREAU DE CHEQUES POSTALE STOCKHOLM		UTLANDSGIRO		Adressat UTLANDSGIRO		Adressat	
Postkontonummer 28 88 28 (Försv. 13148 UTLANDSGIRO)		Kontonummer 46 28 88 28		Postkontonummer 28 88 28			
B. Pettersson Storgatan 25 123 45 STORSTAD		Titel och efternamn Hraag 23 40 79		Titel och efternamn Hraag 23 40 79			
Belopp i floriner FL 67 50		Belopp i floriner FL 67 50		Svenska kronor SEK			
Erasmus Antiquariaat		Erasmus Antiquariaat		Erasmus Antiquariaat			
Amsterdam		Amsterdam Nederländerna		Amsterdam			
Faktura 1322-6-69		Storstad den 16.5.69		Namn B. Persson			

Blanketten "Utlandsgiro" ifyllt för girering till Holland. Beloppet här angivet av avsändaren i floriner (holl. mynt). Omläring till svenskt mynt görs av postgirokontoret efter gällande dagskurs.

## Kontou

Efter varje omsatt omsättningar sam Med kontoutdrag Ni fyllt i och mott

Kontoutdragen ä På baksidan finns

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Alla betalningsup förs och expedie lördagar, midson

Anmärkning mot

the entire field of the humanities and could be expanded to include other disciplines if required. Photomechanical reprints, made possible by the new technique of offset printing, were in great demand in the 1960s. Libraries in Eastern Europe placed numerous orders for photomechanical reprints of reference works, while German libraries acquired them to replenish stock lost in the war. Photomechanical facsimiles of medieval manuscripts were also very popular, and were an obvious choice to sell for Erasmus. Occasional orders for art books came from all corners of the world, from Kenya to Jamaica and from the Philippines to Iran. The postmen in Amsterdam's inner city developed a knack for deciphering abstruse address details.

The strong growth in foreign orders meant that the shop at Spui had become far too small to house the mail order bookshop. In 1969 it relocated to Voetboogstraat 18, within walking distance. The ordering and invoicing departments remained on the second floor of the shop at Spui. Garnman and his right



Every year Alice Garman designed a New Year's Card which was sent to the clients of Erasmus. Her drawings were far too modern for the editor of journal of the Dutch book trade, the *Nieuwsblad van de Boekhandel*. Year after year he grumbled about her drawings, which were completely incomprehensible to him: (1957): 'An ingenious New Year's Card by Alice Horodisch-Garman.. But why is there a fish with a fork on the black protagonist's headgear?' (1958, see illustration): 'We may add this drawing to the many enigmas already baffling us in this world.' (1959): 'A card in need of psycho-analytic interpretation.' (1960): 'A New Year's Card with two cats, two hands and a one cent stamp in the palm of one of them. As usual, the symbolism escapes us'. JHM

hand Alma van Saane also stayed on at the old address and managed the firm's international business from a small office below the staircase.

From the start, Erasmus had cast its net wider than other library suppliers. Similar firms abroad were exporting domestic books to foreign clients and importing foreign books on behalf of customers at home. Erasmus on the other hand was less obviously focussed on its home base, which was partly due to the modest dimensions of the Dutch library market. As international book suppliers, Erasmus went beyond borders, local constraints and national prejudices. The Amsterdam-based firm provided English books to German libraries, or Italian ones to American libraries - any book to any customer, wherever in the world. To this day, Erasmus' great strength is its international flexibility.

#### BOOKSHOP AND ANTIQUARIAN DEPARTMENT

To connoisseurs in Amsterdam, Erasmus Bookshop was a household name. Traditionally, the modern bookshop and the mail order one were closely connected. With Horst Garnman at the helm, the latter had grown out of the former and until 1969 both divisions were housed in the same building. The art book specialty remained the common denominator for both bookshop and mail order, while the continuous search for new title information stood both divisions in good stead. Thanks to the existing synergy, the shop at Spui carried a sublime international range of art books, easily leaving all competition

in the Netherlands behind. In 1974 Michael Martens, a young bookseller with experience in the foreign book trade, joined the staff. Eventually he rose to become manager of the shop and has been a valued member of staff these past thirty-five years.

The shop's circle of customers included academics, students and art lovers. Foreign clients on the mailing list also regularly paid visits to Spui. Knowing Erasmus as an internationally operating library supplier, they were often surprised at its slightly old-worldly and small-scale setting. Yet if some imagined to have stepped into the world of Dickens, an inspection of the shelves soon brought them back to reality. Behind the facade of a 'quaint old shop' lay a modern business with an international appeal.

The stylish shop windows of Erasmus were renowned in Amsterdam.

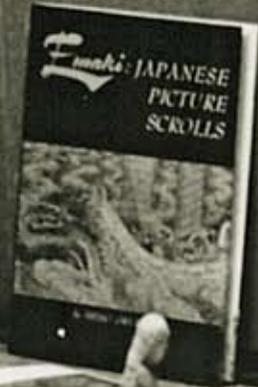
This 'Oriental look' dates from the early 1970s. AE >

His Majesty Gustaf Adolf VI of Sweden kneeling down to admire Erasmus' antiquarian treasures. The visit took place around 1970. AE

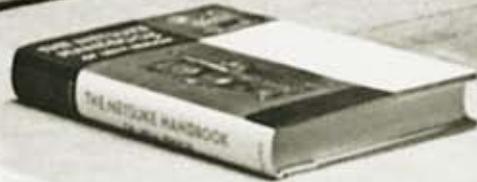


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海生書



FOR SALE





Catalogue no. 324 issued by Erasmus Antiquariaat. AE

The Dickensian enchantment was felt most on the first floor, where the antiquarian department was housed. This was Horodisch's sanctuary, where a succession of assistants stood by his side over the years. Erasmus' origins lay in the antiquarian book business, and the shop windows at Spui still advertized 'Erasmus antiquarian and modern bookshop. Books and libraries purchased'. By now the shop was sailing under colours of the past, with the antiquarian department more and more becoming an enclave of old books within a dynamically changing organization. Renowned at home and abroad, it had become a separate entity within Erasmus.

The antiquarian department had its own pool of clients and was a natural focus for Horodisch's circle - academics, writers, fellow antiquarian booksellers and bibliophiles. It also had its own international network, distinct from that of the mail order bookshop. Horodisch bought at foreign auctions, distributed his catalogues worldwide and supplied books to foreign clients. His fame spread as far as Sweden, as is witnessed by a visit from King Gustaf Adolf. Around 1970, the Swedish monarch paid a visit to Horodisch's antiquarian bookshop. A photographer recorded that even His Majesty was moved to kneel in front of Horodisch's treasures.

The specialties of the antiquarian bookshop matched Horodisch's own interests: sixteenth-century printed books, Judaica, Eastern art, bibliophily, book history and German literature (including a wide range of *Exil* works). While his



Abraham Horodisch was decorated with the Silver Carnation by Prince Bernhard for his achievements in the field of culture on 28 June 1978. AE

assistants compiled the subject catalogues, the annual catalogue of rare printed books remained the work of the old master.

On 28 June 1978 Horodisch was awarded a Dutch culture award, the Silver Carnation, in recognition of his merits. At a ceremony held at the Royal Palace in Amsterdam he was decorated by HRH Prince Bernhard, who praised Horodisch's numerous book historical publications. In his speech, the Prince described the laureate as a paragon of Erasmian humanism, in its characteristic intellectual openness the best antidote against any form of narrow-mindedness.

### TWILIGHT OF THE PATRIARCH

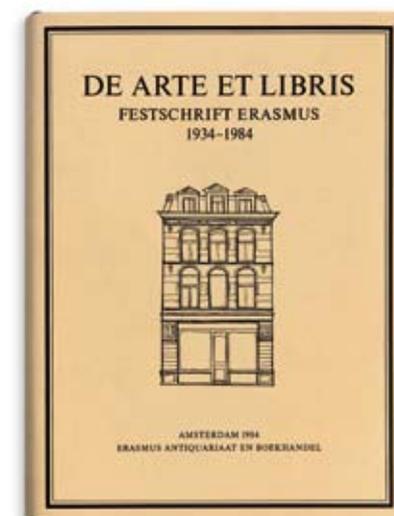
The fiftieth anniversary of Erasmus in 1984 was widely covered in the media. The jubilee firm - or rather, Horodisch - published a hefty volume on the occasion, entitled *De Arte et Libris. Festschrift Erasmus 1934-1984*. According to Karl H. Presser, who reviewed the book for the *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*, it was 'a weighty - in the widest sense of the word - and true monument for and by Abraham Horodisch'. At the age of 86, the old scholar once more celebrated his love of books.

As with the earlier *Amor Librorum* (1958), a range of authors contributed articles in the field of book history. This volume, too, was international in scope, with contributions in French, English, Dutch and German. The authors came not only from the Netherlands, but also from Germany (12), Switzerland (2), Poland (1), Italy (2), England (2) and the United States (2). Horodisch did the editing and the layout for this book, which took him all of a year to complete. Having started out as a publisher of fine books in 1920, he wanted to repeat the achievement of his youth at the close of his career. The rich and magnificently illustrated volume was the bibliophile's swan song.

The jubilee year 1984 was a double anniversary, as the fiftieth anniversary of Erasmus coincided with the golden wedding of Alice and Abraham Horodisch. Alice was still able to celebrate the joyful day, but died at the age of 79 on 12 December 1984. It was a heavy blow to her husband, who recalled their 'life without a cloud' in the funeral notice. All in all the couple had been together for 54 years.

Less than a month later Horodisch was awarded a doctorate *honoris causa* by the University of Amsterdam. The academic

*De Arte et Libris* (1984), with a stylized cover drawing of Erasmus' shop at Spui. AE





recognition was the apogee of his career, although the public ceremony was a trial for him due to the recent loss of his wife. He was awarded the honorary doctorate for his 'numerous outstanding and widely acclaimed studies' in the field of book history and bibliography. Three others received honorary doctorates on the occasion of the 353rd anniversary of the University's foundation, including former Labour prime minister Joop den Uyl.

Another laureate that day was the historian Boris Sapir, formerly attached to the International Institute of Social History. After the ceremony, which took place in the Great Hall of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Horodisch and Sapir were much surprised to find that they shared common ground. Both had been born in Lodz, in 1898 and 1902 respectively. The lives of the two men, marked by the violent events of the twentieth century, briefly crossed in the Concertgebouw. The two old gentlemen travelled back eighty years in time, exchanging recollections of turn-of-the-century Lodz in Russian. They retraced lost time in a place where they had not expected it.

The growing discomforts of old age did not stop the industrious Horodisch. Each day he would come to the shop at Spui and laboriously climb the stairs to his antiquarian sanctuary on the first floor. The discipline which his work and his books had always afforded him were even more essential to him after his wife's death. Erasmus was his life, even in his remaining years. Towards the end of September 1986 he took a bad fall when he set out to visit an auction which offered some rare sixteenth-century books. He was slow to recover and his health deteriorated. Abraham Horodisch died on 7 November 1987 at the age of 89 years and nine months. The passing of the learned bookseller was commemorated in a stream of obituaries in newspapers and periodicals.

Horodisch left his private collections to the state of Israel. His book collections went to the library of the University of Tel Aviv, including the unique collection of eight thousand 'books on books' which he had built up in the course of his life. This veritable hoard contained almost everything to have appeared on the subject since the sixteenth century. In a fitting tribute to its benefactor, Tel Aviv University instituted the Abraham Horodisch Chair for the History of Books, which is currently held by professor David S. Katz. Horodisch donated his art collection, mainly work by German Expressionist artists, to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. The *netsuke* miniature sculptures which he had collected together with his wife were deposited in the Tikotin Museum of Japanese Art in Haifa.



Promotional gift on the occasion of Erasmus' first jubilee: a crystal paperweight. AE

< Abraham Horodisch was awarded an honorary doctorate on 8 January 1985. AE



Max Pechstein (1881-1955), 'Killing of the banquet roast' (1911). Woodcut with orange, yellow and green watercolour on newsprint. Originally published in 1912 in *Der Sturm*, the periodical of the Expressionist avant-garde.

The woodcut was part of the collection bequeathed by Horodisch to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. The donation as a whole consisted of almost 1000 prints, some 50 drawings, more than 80 portfolios and 90 art books. TAM

Sasha Brunsmann and Kurt Tschenett.



## NEW BLOOD

In the jubilee year 1984, Horodisch and Garnman were not only looking back but also looking ahead. At that point the senior director had already reached a ripe old age, while his junior partner was in his sixties. It was obvious that new blood was needed to revitalize the firm and ensure its continuity. The advertisement that was placed in the papers was challenging: the gentlemen were looking for an academically qualified and experienced bookseller able to speak a number of languages. The successful candidate was Kurt Tschenett, who was living in Hamburg at the time. Not only did he combine all necessary qualities, he was even able to redouble them: his wife, Sasha Brunsmann, joined him in Amsterdam to imbue Erasmus with a new élan. Both had earned their stripes in the book trade.

Kurt Tschenett was born in Greifswald (then East Germany). As a boy of thirteen, he fled with his family to the Federal Republic in 1958. He went to school in Dortmund, where he subsequently trained as a bookseller in Borgmann's bookshop. It was there that he met his future partner, Sasha Brunsmann, a fellow trainee. After Kurt had finished his apprenticeship, he went on to attend professional training in librarianship and

documentation. In 1972 he enrolled as a philosophy student at the University of Bochum, completing his studies after four years with the 'Magister Artium' degree. From then on he worked as a librarian for the University Library of Dortmund, where he successfully completed the 'Fachprüfung für den höheren Dienst' in 1978. At the time he already had professional dealings with Erasmus, which was one of the library's suppliers. When Horst Garnman toured Germany, he also called in at Dortmund University Library.

After finishing her training, Sasha Brunsmann worked in the United States for a while, first as an au pair, afterwards as a bookseller in San Francisco. Late in 1967 she returned to Germany and began working for Brill booksellers in Cologne, a subsidiary of Brill academic publishers in Leiden. In 1972 she moved to Amsterdam, where she joined the European office of the Richard Able company, an American library supplier. The Amsterdam branch was run by Bernhard Starkmann, a bookseller who had also been trained at Borgmann's in Dortmund. In the 1970s Abel was a pioneer in automation and far ahead of his time. Because his customers were not ready for the new technology, Abel was defeated by the dialectics of progress in 1976. The ailing company was acquired by the British firm of Blackwell, leading to the formation of Blackwell North America. Bernhard Starkmann for his part turned his knowledge and experience to good use to set up his own company in London, Starkmann Library Services.

Following her time spent in Amsterdam, Sasha took a year off to travel through Asia, an adventure which took her from Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran and India to Bali. In 1976 she returned to Europe and found employment with Starkmann's in London, while Kurt Tschenett was then still working in Dortmund. Trains and boats and planes helped to bridge the distance between the two cities, but after a while the couple preferred a life together. In 1978 Kurt moved to London, where he, too, joined the staff of Starkmann Library Services. A few years later, Kurt accepted Blackwell's offer to lead their European office. The new European Sales Manager chose Hamburg as his operating base, where Sasha found a job in the customer services department of the German office of the American publishing firm McGraw-Hill.

Just as they had set their house in order in Hamburg, Erasmus entered their lives. The cosmopolitan couple decided to take up the challenge and moved to Amsterdam in the summer of 1984.

## CHANGING TIMES

Alma van Saane, Garnman's right hand, left Erasmus around the same time to start her own company with her husband. Her responsibilities in the mail order bookshop were assumed by Sasha Brunsmann. Until then Erasmus had been legally owned by Horodisch, but from 17 October 1984 the company was made a PLC. Horodisch, Garnman and Tschenett had equal shares in the company and were co-equal directors. Thanks to the years spent in Amsterdam, Sasha had little trouble with Dutch, but Kurt felt obliged to follow a crash course in the language. Erasmus is able to address its foreign clients in any language, but Dutch is spoken in the Amsterdam office.

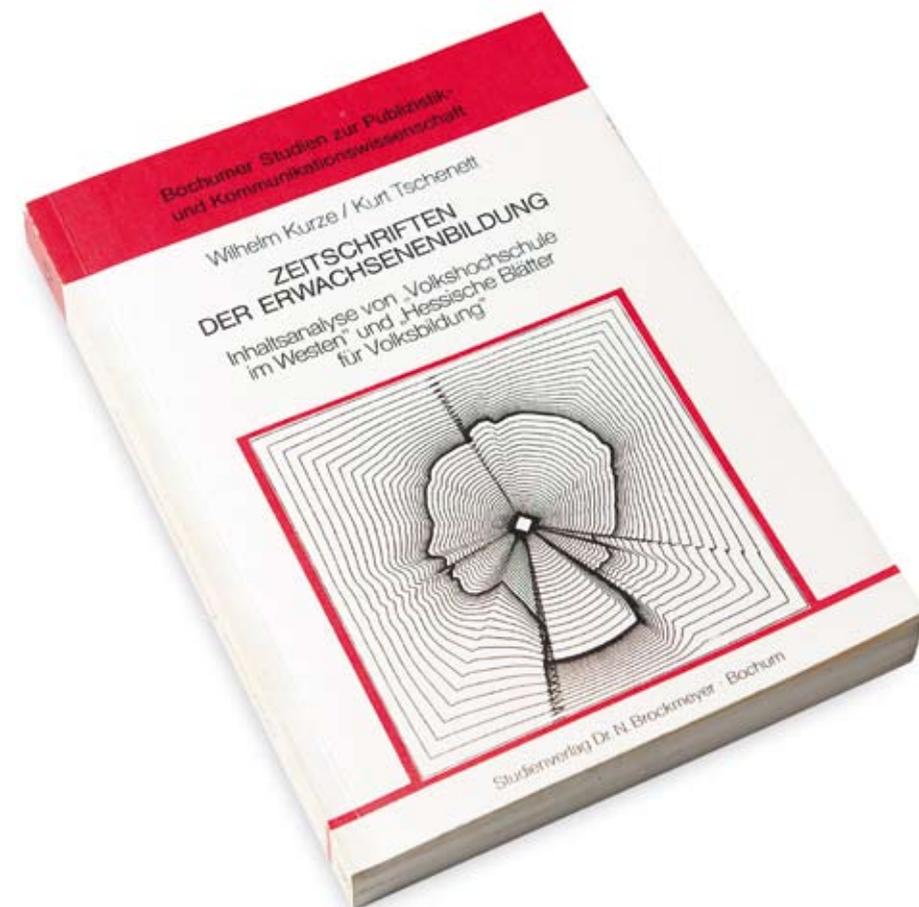
By 1984 Erasmus was a firmly established and renowned library supplier, but it was obvious that management would have to adjust to the changing demands of the day. The times were changing, and Erasmus had to change with them. The mail order bookshop had gradually reached its limits and could not expand. There was a chronic shortage of space in the building on Voetboogstraat. Being located at two premises meant that staff wasted much time moving between the two offices. On top of all that, inveterate routine frustrated the efficient running of the firm. It was established practice, for instance, to go to the nearby University Library to make photocopies. It took Kurt Tschenett some persuading to make Horodisch see that a photocopier was a useful investment.

The newcomers realized that Erasmus would not be able to survive without drastic modernization. Garnman shared that view and supported their efforts to update business management. Together they improved the logistics of book processing, streamlined the administrative process and invented a better system for standing orders. Occasionally a very simple measure led to a considerable gain in efficiency. A legendary episode in the annals of Erasmus was the introduction of plastic folders for order slips, which in those years were returned to customers. Until then, these slips had been loosely gathered with a rubber band and had a tendency to disappear. The staff had got used to these elastic bands and it did not enter into anyone's head to change the practice. Along with new management, corporate culture changed, with Kurt and Sasha encouraging staff to assume active responsibility rather than remain passive performers.

In 1986 the firm was able to rent a large business property on Nieuwe Herengracht 123A, which was eventually purchased

and is still Erasmus' address. Compared to the crowded premises on Voetboogstraat, this former furniture showroom was an ocean of space. Moving the mail order bookshop not only solved the shortage of space, it also offered the opportunity to optimize business management. In the new location the physical and administrative processing of book orders could be arranged in anticipation of automation, which was already making itself felt as the next step to be taken. Garnman was all for moving, but Horodisch found it difficult to keep up with the pace of change. When the old gentleman came to look at the new premises, he was overwhelmed by the sheer size of the place: 'Was this really necessary?', he asked. Yes, it was.

Kurt Tschenett's 'Magisterarbeit' on adult education was published in 1977 by the University of Bochum. His co-author Wilhelm Kurze also embarked on a career in the booktrade, becoming a bookseller and publisher in Oberhausen.





## RENEWAL

Having originally started as a bookshop, since the 1950s Erasmus had developed into an international library supplier. The turnover of the antiquarian and modern bookshop, both still at Spui, was small fry compared to that of the mail order bookshop. Horodisch's death inevitably raised concerns about the viability of the antiquarian department. Although at first the idea was to keep the tradition alive, finding an antiquarian bookseller with the required skills proved difficult.

Hartmut Erlemann, who had learnt the antiquarian trade from Horodisch himself as an apprentice at Erasmus, had set up his own business in the early 1980s. He was the ideal man to carry on Erasmus' antiquarian department, but after some hesitation he preferred to continue his own company. The lack of a suitable candidate eventually forced Garnman and Tschennett to close the lingering antiquarian shop. In the late 1980s the remaining stock of old books was gradually sold off and auctioned.

The closure of the antiquarian department also meant the end for the shop at Spui. Since Horodisch's death, Michael Martens had been manning the bookshop in the city centre on his own. Erasmus still carried an unsurpassed stock of art books and was greatly valued by a select circle of writers, academics and book lovers. Art experts used to combine an auction at Christie's on Rokin with a visit to Erasmus at Spui just around the corner. The art bookshop was one of a kind and had become something of an institution to the connoisseur.

The turning point came in 1991 when the lease expired and renewal meant that the shop's rent would treble. The building was in great need of repair and required a costly renovation. The mounting costs meant it was no longer an option to continue the shop. At the time a mail order bookshop was still legally required to run an actual bookshop, but the building on Nieuwe Herengracht was spacious enough to comply with this regulation.

In light of these considerations it was decided to close not only the antiquarian department but also the bookshop. After more than fifty-five years, Erasmus left its old quarters at Spui and the regulars lost a place where they had felt at home. The circle of customers included several writers who loved browsing among the overwhelming stock of new and old books. When the Dutch author Cees Nooteboom was busy writing his *Voorbije Passages* (1981), he needed to account for

The team of Erasmus-Amsterdam. >





the painter Tiepolo's stay in Würzburg in the 1750s. Walking through town, he dropped in on Erasmus and found the answer to the question that had vexed him in the antiquarian department: 'a splendidly designed book dating from 1956: *Tiepolo, die Fresken der Würzburger Residenz*'.

The author Boudewijn Büch was another regular visitor who came to sip tea and seek wisdom from the old master. In 1988 Büch dedicated his *Boekenpest* to the memory of Horodisch. To the old faithful, the passing of Erasmus left a void in town. One journalist even spoke of an aesthetic loss, now that the elegant shop windows had disappeared for good. Horst Garnman especially had developed a talent for attractive book displays.

Leaving Spui also deprived Erasmus of a place in film history. Another customer was the writer Harry Mulisch, who awarded an important role to Erasmus in his *The Discovery of Heaven* (1992). When the book was turned into a film in 2001, it was no longer possible to shoot the scenes on site: the bookcases in the shop at Spui had been replaced by pizza ovens. An antiquarian shop in Leiden stood in and was renamed 'Erasmus' for the occasion. Most viewers will have been unaware that this was only an apparent resurrection.

After closing down the antiquarian and modern bookshop, Erasmus concentrated on what had become its core business: large-scale supply of books to academic institutions. From then on, the company called itself 'Erasmus Boekhandel', dropping the antiquarian bookshop from its name. The traditional epithet, however, remained part of the official company name. It seems to have been another forward-looking decision, since the antiquarian department is witnessing a digital rebirth. In recent years Erasmus has been offering to its clients an 'out-of-print search service', which on request will trace older titles on the internet.

## ERASMUS AND HERMES

Erasmus' front office communicates with the international library and publishing world, while its back office is equipped to handle the complex logistics of processing the flow of books. Naturally, the front and back offices have to cooperate closely: the interaction with the outside world generates a demand, which through Erasmus' internal operations, must be transformed into a concrete offer of books.

A fake Erasmus bookshop in 'The Discovery of Heaven' (2001), the film based on the novel by Harry Mulisch (1992). Parts of the book are situated in the antiquarian bookshop of Erasmus, which, however, no longer existed when the film was shot. In the scene shown in the illustration, actors Stephen Fry and Greg Wise are walking towards 'Erasmus', but actually an antiquarian bookshop in Leiden.



ERASMUS

2

ERASMUS

From the 1960s Horst Garnman looked after the company's foreign clients, which generally meant that he was abroad for a period of two to three weeks every three months. He set great store on personal contact and aimed to meet his clients once every year. In the latter half of the 1980s, he introduced Kurt Tschenett and Sasha Brunsmann to the clients of Erasmus. Eventually they relieved him of the extensive travels abroad and became responsible for the firm's international network. Kurt covered Germany and Switzerland, but also toured the United States. Sasha was mainly active in France - about which more later - and explored the Scandinavian market. France and the United States were the two countries where Horodisch had initially built up a network of clients; when it was Sasha and Kurt's turn to investigate these markets, they were able to benefit from the contacts he had already established.

Automation was introduced to Erasmus' business management in the middle of the 1980s. As happened with other companies at the time, it took some time to adjust to the new technology. The first step was the introduction of office automation which made the staff familiar with the computer. A more radical innovation was the computerization of the flow of orders and invoices, which had to be tailored to the needs of libraries and publishers. Erasmus opted for Hermes, a standard software system for the bookselling trade that had been developed by the Booksellers Group of the Netherlands (BGN). However, to meet the special requirements of a library supplier, its functionality needed to be greatly expanded. Automation of the administrative processes was facilitated as a result of the previous streamlining of the operational processes, and now the physical processing of book orders could be stepped up thanks to computer-assisted technology.

The metamorphosis of Erasmus since 1984 had a clear impact on the company's trade results. In ten years' time, the company's turnover more than doubled, in spite of the loss of the antiquarian department and the bookshop. In 1993, Horst Garnman was able to retire into an *otium cum dignitate* with an easy mind. He was now seventy years old and had given his best to the company for almost fifty years. After his retirement, Sasha Brunsmann became Kurt Tschenett's co-director. In view of the company's increasing complexity, neither of them would have been able to manage the task on their own. Together, however, they displayed an ingenuity completely in the spirit of the mythological Hermes, the god of commerce and communications.

Horst Garnman. AE



Booksellers in action.

## BOOKS IN TRANSIT

Appearances are deceptive and an unsuspecting stroller along Amsterdam's Nieuwe Herengracht might easily pass by Erasmus. Its premises do not have an inviting shop window and do not even look like a bookshop. The visitor who does enter is pleasantly surprised by a spacious office with bookcases lining the walls. The thousands of art books on display are an impressive token of the firm's specialty. Although there is no longer a statutory obligation to keep a shop, this book collection is still part of Erasmus' stock. However, it is mainly a symbolic shop: few customers come here and the sale of these books is not actively promoted. Only occasionally will a booklover make an appointment to relish the selection on display.

The Nieuwe Herengracht in 1890, with the sluice forming the entrance to the Entrepotdok. Erasmus' current premises are just outside the image, a little to the left of the houses along the canal. SAA >



Behind the reception area lies the large hall, an architectural solution typical for Amsterdam's inner city. A double canal house has been extended with an annex ('achterhuis'), which runs the length and breadth of two gardens. Staff workplaces are dotted around the numerous library racks. This working space is the actual nerve centre of Erasmus and it is bustling with energy. Staff members are busy unpacking recently delivered books and storing them in the right place, others are preparing outgoing orders. Telephone calls are made in all possible languages. Pallet boards are busily being loaded with boxes of books or stand ready to be shipped. Books from a wide range of countries arrive in this storehouse and find their way from here to buyers all over the world.

Not far from Erasmus' premises, on the other side of the Nieuwe Herengracht canal, is an old port which is called the Entrepotdok. It was built around 1830 and must be considered as a historical failure. Intended to revive Amsterdam's seventeenth-century role of 'staple market' for the world trade, the Entrepotdok failed to deliver its promise. A few decades ago, the rusty cranes on the quay were dismantled and the derelict warehouses were converted into apartments. The hoped-for resurrection of the staple market never did materialize in Entrepotdok, but a lively staple market for books has sprung into existence a few hundred metres further along the canal. Erasmus is a modern example of the international transit trade which in the past made Amsterdam the world's foremost port.

Acting as a liaison between publisher and library, Erasmus handles an enormous quantity of books. Bulk processing is out of the question, as each book requires attention and deserves separate treatment. Each book is unique, coming from a particular publisher and heading for a particular customer. Erasmus processes books on a large scale, but administration and logistics are geared to handling them with an eye for detail. The work demands great accuracy and errors cannot be tolerated: impeccable delivery is the book trade's first commandment. The second one is timely delivery, which puts the labour intensive work under constant time pressure. All books are promptly processed, because they have to arrive at their destination within days.

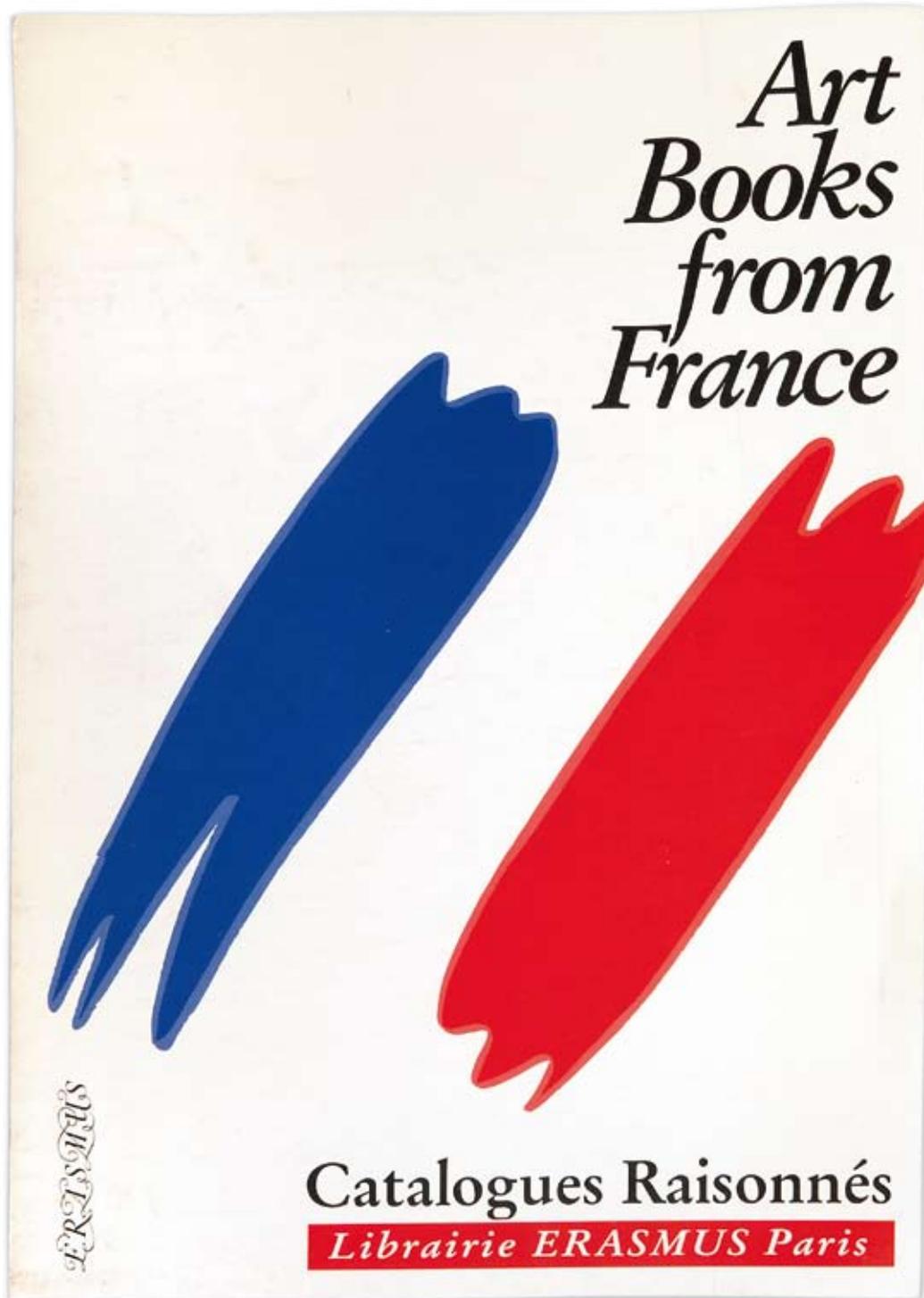


Sasha Brunsmann in front of the buildings of the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.

#### LIBRAIRIE ERASMUS IN PARIS

As previously mentioned, Sasha Brunsmann made several trips to France in the late 1980s to explore the market. At the time, France was an exceptional case in the international book trade and was known as a 'difficult' area in the profession. French production of academic books was high and the country boasted many major publishing houses. Yet delivery abroad was problematical, because automation in the French book trade was lagging behind. French suppliers found it difficult to meet the demands of foreign libraries and were unable to offer the service that was standard in other countries. France was in fact the weak link in the chain of the international book trade.

The sluggish export of French publications presented a problem for libraries in Europe and the United States. Erasmus was repeatedly asked to deliver French books with the same high-quality service it provided for books from other countries. Careful market analysis and discussions with customers in Germany and the United States led to the decision to set up a branch in Paris. After having examined various possible locations, the choice fell on 28, rue Basfroi in the 11th arrondissement. Librairie Erasmus was founded on 5 December 1990, with Beate Jahnel as its first manager and driving force. Some of the members of staff she appointed at the time are still with the Librairie, as for example Frédéric Martinez and Corinne Schnaëbelé. Today the Paris office is run by Angelika Walch,



a former employee of the company who eventually returned with years of accumulated experience.

Nearly twenty years later, Librairie Erasmus is still located on rue Basfroi, although the neighbourhood has changed considerably. Around 1990 the 11th arrondissement was a rather run-down area in the centre of Paris, where it was wise not to be out on the streets at night. Owing to an intensive urban redevelopment scheme carried out in the 1990s, the 11th arrondissement flourished into a pleasant residential area with a host of restaurants and shops. The rue Basfroi and adjoining streets benefited from this urban makeover and are now fashionable places to be.

The location in the centre of Paris has the added advantage that the Librairie can offer a unique delivery service to its customers. Publishing houses in Paris employ messengers or 'coursiers', who drop in every day at the booksellers in the centre to collect orders. They also make the rounds at Librairie Erasmus and come back the very next day with the ordered books, which are then immediately dispatched to the customers. Another advantage of being located in Paris is that the company is registered as a French firm: many libraries hold to the belief that books from a country ought to be sold by a bookseller who is established in that country.

As both organisations are supported by identical computer systems and business operations, the synergy between the Amsterdam and Paris offices is high. Current communication ensures easy contact between the two branches, while the high-speed TGV train bridges the physical distance between Paris and Amsterdam in a few hours. Occasionally the staff of the two offices meet for social events. One of these offered the unusual sight of French booksellers pedalling their way across the countryside north of Amsterdam.

Originally, Librairie Erasmus was set up to deliver French books to libraries outside France. German and Dutch institutions were among its first customers, but soon the circle of clients widened to include libraries in the United States, Great Britain and Italy. The sister company in Paris started off with two people, with the number of staff growing to fourteen over the years. The increase in staff also meant that it was necessary to expand office space, which could be accommodated in the premises on rue Basfroi.

Librairie Erasmus has not only developed into a leading supplier of French books to foreign libraries, but has also widened its scope to encompass delivery to domestic libraries.

Catalogue of Librairie Erasmus in Paris:  
a survey of French art books. AE



The team of Erasmus-Paris.

In 2003 Erasmus became a player on the French market, a step that was made possible by the introduction of the 'droit de prêt' or lending right. This act does not only cover copyright and lending right, but also imposes a ceiling on the discounts suppliers are allowed to extend to libraries. The good prices and high-quality service that Erasmus is able to provide earned the company a solid reputation in the French library world. Among other libraries Erasmus has gained the trust of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, which is now a major client of both the Amsterdam and the Paris offices. Librairie Erasmus makes a valuable contribution to the company's success in terms of quantity and quality, and is expected to increase its role in the future.

In addition to the Paris office, Erasmus also founded a sister company in Cologne in 1993. Located at 97, Thieboldsgasse in the Altstadt, the Cologne office was set up to cope with the VAT Germany charged on domestic sales. A sales channel registered in Germany seemed a pragmatic solution to this tax obstacle. A few years later, foreign companies operating in Germany were allowed to apply for a German tax number under their own name. As a result, it was no longer necessary to maintain an office in Germany and Erasmus Cologne lost its raison d'être.

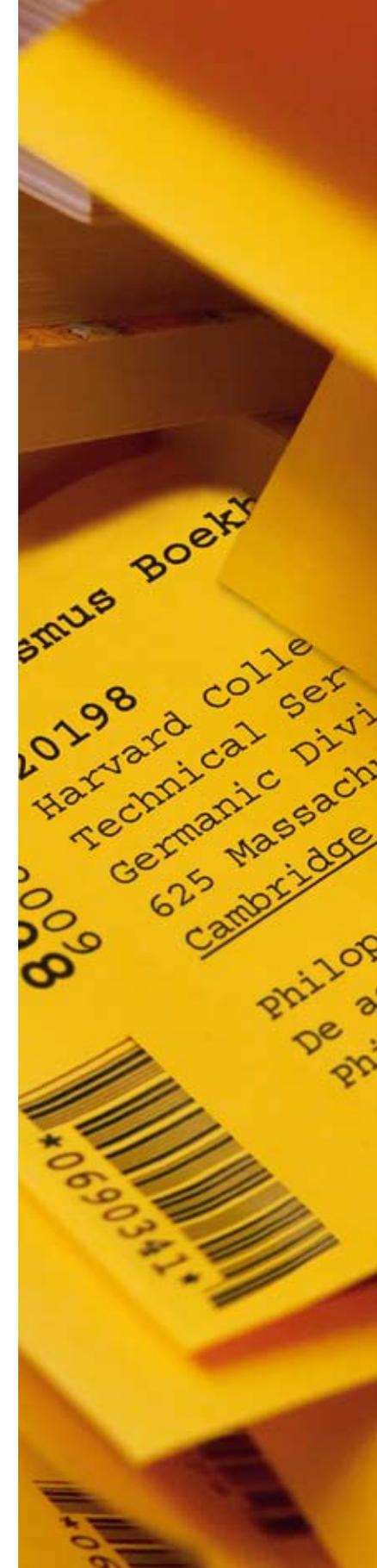
## ERASMUS AT PRESENT

Booksellers must rise to the demands and opportunities of a complex market without losing sight of the possibilities for development. Maintaining a competitive edge requires continuous improvement in management and service. Decisions about the future are taken at the interface between external demand and internal resources. A balanced interaction between these two results in sustainable growth, in other words in optimal continuity.

Based on this organic growth perspective, the policies introduced by Kurt Tschenett and Sasha Brunsmann have yielded impressive results. Compared to the early 1980s, there has been a six-fold increase in turnover, with a similar steady growth in the number of orders. In 1984 Erasmus handled about two thousand orders per month, rising to some six thousand per month ten years later, while the number of orders has since doubled again. In the busiest month of 2008, the number of orders processed ran to twenty thousand. Compared to the preceding year, the total number of books sold increased by 15%. This considerable growth was realized with the same number of staff and was mainly due to innovative changes in operational processes. The reorganization of the packaging department and the introduction of new packaging machines combined to make for higher speed and greater efficiency in processing book orders.

The geographical distribution of orders has changed over the years. Twenty-five years ago, Erasmus derived eighty per cent of its sales from Germany and Switzerland, with France and the United States together contributing the remaining twenty per cent. Nowadays, with a six-fold increase in turnover, more than a third of the sales come from the German-language areas, while another third comes from France. Fifteen per cent of the present turnover is generated by sales in the United States, while the Netherlands and Italy together contribute a similar share. Erasmus' domestic market is relatively small, though most of the larger libraries in the Netherlands are among its steady customers.

These favourable developments are also due to the division of tasks between Kurt Tschenett, Sasha Brunsmann and Dirk Raes. The latter joined Erasmus as a sales manager in 1995 and is currently deputy director. Kurt and Sasha were able to leave the responsibility for the American and French markets to him.



Erasmus' chief clients are the libraries of universities, academic institutions and museums. Renowned institutions in Europe and North America have been part of its circle of clients for many years. In the case of some long-standing customers, the firm has had dealings with successive generations of librarians. The working relationship with other institutions, for instance the Bibliothèque nationale de France mentioned above, is still relatively young. The British Library and the National Libraries of the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Luxemburg, Estonia, Latvia and the Czech Republic are also among the younger clients of Erasmus.

The international outlook of the firm manifests itself in visits to foreign trade fairs such as the congresses of the American Library Association and ARLIS/NA (Art Library

Society of North America). Erasmus also regularly attends the German Bibliothekartag and the Charleston Conference, as well as the Frankfurt Buchmesse and the book fairs in London, Paris and Brussels. Such gatherings offer excellent opportunities for liaising with libraries and publishers, while they also allow Erasmus to keep up to date with the latest publications and the newest trends in the international book trade.

The firm could not exist without its experienced and highly qualified staff. The specialized services which the modern library supplier must be able to deliver require a high level of expertise. Erasmus currently employs forty-four staff members, thirty of whom work in the Amsterdam parent company, the other fourteen in Paris. Several of these were formally trained as librarians or booksellers. The staff come from various countries, reflecting the international scope of the company.

Both the Amsterdam and Paris offices are open and informal organizations, which offer a pleasant working environment. Kurt Tschenett and Sasha Brunsmann, both of whom will be celebrating their twenty-fifth anniversary with Erasmus in 2009, are not the only ones with long records of service. Four members of staff have already passed that milestone. This quartet is headed by Michael Martens, who joined the staff of Erasmus in 1974; he is followed at some years' distance by Boy Kuperus, Hans Pronk and Gerdine van den Heuvel. Loyalty to the company is an enduring factor: some members of staff who left to join other firms have later returned to Erasmus.

## MODERN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Erasmus has grown steadily over the past twenty-five years and has seen major changes in the process. Its gradual metamorphosis is bound up with technological innovations and the changing demands made by libraries on their suppliers. When Kurt Tschenett and Sasha Brunsmann came to Amsterdam in 1984, they realized that the computer was going to have a major impact on the book trade. At the time nobody could have predicted the radical changes which the new technology would bring about. Erasmus was able to respond to the new technological and commercial innovations with alacrity and managed to integrate them successfully in its business management.

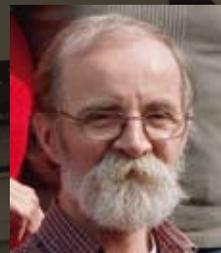
Six heads representing more than 150 years of experience in the booktrade.

On top, from left to right: Kurt Tschenett,

Gerdine van den Heuvel and Sasha

Brunsmann. Bottom: Michael Martens,

Hans Pronk and Boy Kuperus.





A small number of orders are still received by post, telephone or fax, but e-mail and the website have become vastly more important. Libraries increasingly tend to place their orders online via the Erasmus website, which is tailored to their professional needs. 'Electronic data interchange' (EDI) plays a role of growing importance in the communication with libraries and publishers. More than 75% of the orders Erasmus places with publishers nowadays is made using EDI, while libraries, too, turn more and more to this method of ordering. If required, libraries can also be invoiced with the help of EDI. The experience Erasmus has gained with electronic invoicing in various library management systems can easily be transferred to others. The adoption of electronic invoicing and payments is expected to become increasingly popular, while order statements will also be sent out using EDI.

Erasmus offers bibliographic information which can be directly integrated into the library systems of the clients. MARC records can be created for all titles in the database at the website [www.erasmusbooks.nl](http://www.erasmusbooks.nl), which currently contains over 9,6 million titles. Customers are able to consult MARC records on the Erasmus website and upload them to their own computer; on request Erasmus can also supply the same data for orders which have been placed online or via EDI. MARC records contain essential bibliographic data such as author, title, ISBN, publisher etc. The records include brief content summaries and subject classifications based on the Dewey and Library of Congress codes. In 2008 the firm became a partner of the WorldCat Selection of the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC). Both the Amsterdam and the Paris offices submit MARC records to OCLC.

The Nieuwe Herengracht with Erasmus' premises in the middle.

## TENDERS, SHELF-READY DELIVERY AND E-BOOKS

Personal relations with customers have always been essential in the book trade, but nowadays there are additional methods for client acquisition. Under European Union Law, libraries in member states are required to invite public tenders for earmarked budgets of a certain size. Eligible suppliers are required to submit comprehensive and detailed tenders with advance specification of terms, discounts, services, estimated delivery dates and other conditions. The public tender system demands accurate calculation of the terms and conditions of offers. Competitors operate on small margins and the tender goes to the contractor offering the best price with the highest service. Judging by the number of tenders Erasmus has managed to obtain, the company scores well on both points.

To achieve greater efficiency in processing books, libraries make increasingly higher demands on book delivery. Many of them nowadays prefer to receive the books in a 'shelf-ready' condition, *i.e.* ready to be placed on the designated shelf. The processing implied in this demand is outsourced to the supplier and ranges from the binding of paperbacks to improve durability, to laminating covers, attaching barcodes, library stamps and security strips. Erasmus is able to offer any of these additional technical services.

Currently the electronic book, or e-book for short, is making its way into the publishing world as a means of information. Undoubtedly the e-book will claim a growing market share in the years to come, although it is hard to predict how large this share will be. Even so, a prudent bookseller must anticipate the trend and make sure that he is able to supply the new medium. Erasmus supplies e-books in cooperation with a provider who makes a wide range of electronic publications available.



## NEW TITLE SERVICE

Informing clients about new and forthcoming titles has always been a service offered by Erasmus. Our oldest example - a typewritten page with concise title information - dates from 1935. When Erasmus began to specialize as a library supplier, Horst Garnman refined the new title information, finding ways to obtain information promptly and anticipating his clients' wishes. He made careful selections from the range of new books, tailoring them to the individual needs of university and museum libraries.

Erasmus' current New Title Service continues this tradition, though the task presents a greater challenge with publishing output growing every year. A vast amount of material needs to be assessed in order to collect the essential data. As the information can only be partially obtained from publishers' catalogues, a great variety of alternative sources must be consulted. Staff members of Erasmus are continually searching for new titles on websites, in bibliographies, printed media and periodicals.

Each new entry in the New Title Service contains exact bibliographic information and a summary of contents. The book is classified according to the Dewey and Library of Congress codes. These classifications are then used to select the titles for the customers who have subscribed to the New Title Service. The new title information is issued on a monthly basis and made available to the subscribing libraries by post, e-mail or via the website.

Out of the total range of books published in the field of the humanities and social sciences, Erasmus in Amsterdam selects some five hundred titles every month. Geographically, the New Title Service covers the United States, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Italy. Special publications from Scandinavia and Eastern Europe are also included. Librairie Erasmus in Paris does the same for French-language publications, selecting some three hundred titles on a monthly basis.

## STANDING ORDER DEPARTMENT

The Standing Order Department is another cornerstone of Erasmus. In Amsterdam the department administers some 8,000 current series and 1,800 periodical subscriptions; the office in Paris has about 3,000 series and 1,200 subscriptions. Each new volume in a series or a new issue of a periodical is immediately sent to the subscribers.

In general it is not enough to wait passively for the next volume or issue to appear, as not every publisher can be trusted to send them automatically. To be aware of which new volumes have come out, it is necessary to monitor closely the entire range of new books. Most serial works appear irregularly and the time gap between volumes can be great - sometimes it takes years before the next volume is published. The chronological succession of volumes can sometimes be misleading, because a volume appearing later in time may numerically precede an earlier one. Other series, on the other hand, may not be numbered at all. For some serial publications it must be borne in mind that a volume can at the same time be part of a sub-series. A serial publication may also be made up of various sections and sub-sections, as for instance the long-running *Handbuch der Orientalistik*.

The Standing Order file has grown over the years and some of the orders go back a long time. Erasmus' oldest standing order dates from 1957 and concerns *Les Primitifs Flamands*, which has been through several changes and still appears in sub-series. In quantitative terms, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* by the Rembrandt Research Project is the foremost title with a total of 120 subscribers; since 1982 four volumes of this monumental series, which is still awaiting completion, have appeared.

The Standing Order file has been largely automated. The complexity of the subject matter inevitably means that the role of the computer becomes increasingly important, although supervision by qualified staff remains essential. Gerdine van den Heuvel has been in charge of this department for many years and has acquired a thorough knowledge of Erasmus' standing orders.



## APPROVAL PLANS

Divided over both offices, Erasmus currently runs seventy-five Approval Plans for libraries in Europe and North America. An Approval Plan is an arrangement whereby a library commissions a supplier to deliver all books that match its pre-established collection profile. Approval plans ensure that libraries can efficiently manage their acquisition budgets by having suitable titles sent to them automatically.

In general a supplier will work closely with a library before reaching an Approval Plan arrangement. The agreement is based on trust, because part of the library's acquisition is contracted out to the supplier. Reliability and expertise are the foremost criteria to judge a supplier's services in this respect. Proven experience with Approval Plans for other libraries is also an advantage.

When both parties have agreed upon establishing an Approval Plan, a detailed profile is made of the books that match the library's collection needs. The collecting areas are defined as accurately as possible in terms of content and geographical origin, and in accordance with the budget available. A wide range of subject definitions can be used to build a profile. To prevent duplicates being sent, a stop list is used: the selected titles are checked against the standing orders and blocked if necessary. Initially, Erasmus' Approval Plans mainly concerned art history and archaeology, areas that were among the company's traditional specialties. Gradually other disciplines came to be included and the firm now administers several Approval Plans in the fields of literature, history, psychology and law.

The diversity of Approval Plans obliges the staff of Erasmus to search continuously for new titles. When the profile demands it, the search may extend to highly specialized titles. Approval Plan coordinators need to possess a high degree of expertise and be intimately familiar with the subject areas acquired by the subscribing libraries.

Prior to shipment, the client can see on the website the titles that have been selected and are ready to be sent. Sometimes a book is excluded from the selection - because it is a dubious case in terms of the agreed profile, because it is too expensive or for other reasons. In such cases a notification is sent to the library in question. Should the client still want the title, a confirmation order is required. Title selections are checked against the library's digital catalogue (OPAC) via a special web service, so that any titles already present in the library can be blocked from the selection.

Two self-portraits of Rembrandt from the *Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. IV. With 120 subscriptions, it is the serial with the largest number of standing orders with Erasmus.



The Thesaurus

SICUT

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THE HISTORY OF THE  
AMERICAN PEOPLE

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Approval Plan deliveries currently make up ten to fifteen per cent of the firm's turnover. American partners making use of the Approval Plan service include the academic libraries of Harvard, Columbia and Princeton, as well as the libraries of the Getty Museum, the National Gallery, the Frick Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. Major European libraries such as the Institut national d'Histoire de l'Art in Paris, the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich, the Kunstbibliothek in Berlin and the Royal Library in The Hague also have Approval Plans arrangements with Erasmus.

#### WWW.ERASMUSBOOKS.NL AND WWW.ERASMUS.FR

The fastest growing contact point for customers is the Internet and as a result the two websites of Erasmus are becoming increasingly important. The sites are designed to be user friendly and their functionality is tailored to the needs of libraries. Both aspects are carefully monitored and improved in response to customer feedback. Innovations are aimed at optimal integration with the customer's own Library Management System (LMS), so that data from the site can be uploaded directly to the customer's own system. Customer privacy is ensured through the use of a unique user name and password.

As previously mentioned, at [www.erasmusbooks.nl](http://www.erasmusbooks.nl) clients have access to a bibliographic database holding some 9,6 million titles. The database consists of data supplied by the British firm Nielsen Book Data, the German 'Verzeichnis lieferbarer Bücher' and the Dutch Centraal Boekhuis. Erasmus' own database, comprising all titles that have been supplied by the firm in the past fifteen years, is also incorporated. The Librairie Erasmus website contains more than a million French titles, which are supplied by Dilicom. Erasmus' historical database can also be accessed via the site of the Paris branch. These vast databases, which are continuously updated, can be searched by author, title, subject, keyword, ISBN, publisher and year of publication. Most English titles, as well as a large number of Dutch, German and French ones, additionally offer summaries or tables of contents.

Titles can be ordered using the well-known 'shopping trolley', where order reference numbers and remarks can be simply added. Titles not present in the database can be ordered using the 'order outside database' option. Book prices are offered

in various currencies, enabling the customer to do his shopping in his preferred currency and keep track of expenditure. With a simple click the contents of the trolley can be sent to the customer's own e-mail address for further processing.

The website offers a unique reservoir of data, made accessible in a user friendly way and providing a valuable source of information for the customer.



## FESTINA LENTE

The history of Erasmus is one of continuity and change, two factors which have resulted in a steady growth. The company's progress is well expressed in the well-known adage of the humanist to whom it owes its name: 'festina lente', or 'make haste slowly' (Desiderius Erasmus, *Adagia*). Avoiding undue haste has proved a useful strategy in the past and offers a trustworthy guideline for the future.

Such a perspective does not encompass growth for the sake of growth. Instead, Erasmus pursues an organic and sustainable growth along two lines: on the one hand the firm strives to maintain its specialty in the humanities, on the other hand it aims to expand its position as a library supplier offering a wide range of books and a high-quality service. Both orientations are necessary to survive in a changing and competitive market. With an eye to the future and building on the past successes of its founders and predecessors, Erasmus will continue to concentrate on specialist knowledge and a highly customer-oriented service.



Desiderius Erasmus, painted by Hans

Holbein the Younger (1523). кб

## AFTERWORD

Conversations were an important source of information for this book. I wish to thank Kurt Tschenett, Sasha Brunsmann and Michael Martens for taking the time to share their knowledge with me. Horst Garnman and Alma van Saane threw light on Erasmus' progress in the 1960s and 1970s. Wity Gans was kind enough to impart his memories of Abraham Horodisch. Garrelt Verhoeven, chief curator of the Special Collections department of Amsterdam University Library, kindly agreed to supply images from the collection. Both the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art generously provided illustrations. Finally we would like to express our thanks to antiquarian bookseller Robert A. Gilbert and Eve Leckey, who carefully read the English translation and offered valuable suggestions.

Research was based on documents in Erasmus' own archive and in the Special Collections of Amsterdam University Library. For reasons of space I limit myself to mentioning a selection of relevant literature. Abraham Horodisch described Euphorion in 'Der Euphorion Verlag', in: *Imprimatur*, Neue Folge VI (1969), p.105-120; idem, 'Aus den Erinnerungen eines Berliner bibliophilen Verlegers der zwanziger Jahre', in: *Imprimatur*, Neue Folge VIII (1976), p.243-254. Both Lothar Lang, *Expressionistische Buchillustration in Deutschland, 1907-1927* (Leipzig 1975) and Ralph Jentsch, *Illustrierte Bücher des deutschen Expressionismus* (Stuttgart 1990) describe the cultural context of the publishing house. See also the entries 'Euphorion' and 'Horodisch & Marx' in the *Lexikon Deutscher Verlage von A-Z* (Berlin 2000). Ernst Rathenau continued Euphorion until 1933 and later became a publisher of art books in New York; in 2001 Ketterer Kunst Verlage in Munich acquired the rights to both Euphorion and Ernst Rathenau Verlag.

Co-founder Horodisch recalled the Soncino Gesellschaft in 'Ein Abenteuer im Geiste: die Soncino-Gesellschaft der Freunde des jüdischen Buches', in: *Bibliotheca Docet. Festgabe für Carl Wehmer* (Amsterdam 1963; published by Erasmus), p.181-208; this essay was later published in an abridged form as 'Die Soncino-Gesellschaft der Freunde des jüdischen Buches' in *Imprimatur*, Neue Folge V (1967), p.131-148. Recently Ulrich Heider published a concise book on the Society, which also served as the catalogue of an exhibition in Cologne: *Die Soncino-Gesellschaft der Freunde des jüdischen Buches e.V.*

(1924-1937) (Cologne 2006; published by Antiquariat Heider); an abridged version appeared in *Aus dem Antiquariat*, Neue Folge 5 (2007), p.401-411. Rainer Fürst and Klaus Schreiber published a comprehensive and thorough review of Heider's work in *Informationsmittel (IFB): digitales Rezensionsorgan für Bibliothek und Wissenschaft* (<http://ifb.bsz-bw.de>).

The rich bibliophile culture of 1920s Berlin is dealt with in Fritz Homeyer, *Deutsche Juden als Bibliophilen und Antiquare* (Tübingen 1963). For the Berliner Bibliophilen Abend see: Flodoard Freiherr von Biedermann, *Fünfundzwanzig Jahre Berliner Bibliophilen Abend* (Berlin 1930); Wielandt Schmidt, 'Zur Chronik des BBA', in: *Imprimatur*, Neue Folge VIII (1976), p.41-59; L. Sommer, 'Berliner Bibliophile Vereine in der Zeit der Jahrhundertwende bis 1945', in: *Marginaliën* 106 (1987), p.1-53; and H. Gittig, *Freude an Büchern. Protokolle, Dokumente, Berichte des Berliner Bibliophilen Abends 1920-1943* (Berlin 1990).

Horodisch sketched the early years of Erasmus in a personal memoir: 'Fünfzig Jahre Buchhändler in Amsterdam', in: *De Arte et Libris* (Amsterdam 1984; published by Erasmus), p.465-469. Erasmus' difficult start as a modern bookshop is described by Jan Schilt, 'Hier wordt echter het belang van het boek geschaad'. *Het Nederlandse boekenvak, 1933-1948* (Amsterdam 1995). Details about Erasmus' antiquarian department can be found in Piet J. Buijnsters, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse antiquariaat* (Nijmegen 2008); idem, *Het Nederlandse antiquariaat in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam 1997); Nop Maas and F. W. Kuyper, *Offeren aan Minerva en Mercurius. De Nederlandsche Vereeniging van Antiquaren, 1935-1995* (Amsterdam 1995).

In *Vluchtweg* (Amsterdam 1990) Jenny Gans-Premsele recorded her recollections of the escape to Switzerland of the Ganses and Horodisches. The bookplates designed by Alice Horodisch-Garman were discussed recently in J. Aarts, F. J. Hoogewoud, C. Kooyman, *Joodse Exlibris Cultuur in Nederland* (Groningen 2007). A highly adequate profile of Erasmus in the early 1990s is to be found in Peter-Erik Neyssen, 'Bestel- en verzendboekhandel Erasmus', in: *Boekblad* 18, 6-5-1994, p.16-17.

Author Boudewijn Büch (1948-2002) leaving Erasmus' bookshop at Spui in high spirits, carrying an impressive pile of books just bought. Photograph by Klaas Koppe (1982). >



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**ERASMUS**  
ANTIQUARIAAT EN BOEKHANDEL  
INKOOP VAN BOEKEN  
EN BIBLIOTHEKEN

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INKOOP VAN BOEKEN  
EN BIBLIOTHEKEN

**HET PAROOL**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED FOR ILLUSTRATIONS

AE	Erasmus Archive, Amsterdam
JHM	Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam
KB	Kunstmuseum Basel
SAA	Stadsarchief [City Archives], Amsterdam
TAM	Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv
UBA/BC	Amsterdam University Library, department of Special Collections

## COLOPHON

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