

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-12617-5 - Renaissance Book Collecting: Jean Grolier and Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, their Books and Bindings

Anthony Hobson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

TWO RENAISSANCE BOOK
COLLECTORS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-12617-5 - Renaissance Book Collecting: Jean Grolier and Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, their Books and Bindings

Anthony Hobson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I

GROLIER: THE EARLY YEARS

IT IS PROBABLE that there has been no period since Grolier's death when the books of his final library have not been valued by other collectors. The 1620 edition of Jacques-Auguste de Thou's *Historiae sui temporis* contained the rather exaggerated statement that 'he had so many books that even after his great generosity to friends and the various accidents it suffered, the finest libraries both in Paris and elsewhere in France owe their adornment solely to Grolier's copies'.¹ This remark, incidentally, is confirmation of the fact, amply attested by other evidence, that the library did not remain intact until 1675 or 1676, as La Caille claimed,² but was at least partly dispersed long before.

In the first French national bibliography, Lacroix du Maine had already written in 1584 of Grolier's 'superb and magnificent library'.³ Père Louis Jacob, in his *Traicté des plus belles bibliothèques* (1644), was only able to repeat Lacroix du Maine's and De Thou's remarks. La Caille was the first to mention Grolier's bindings, in his *Histoire de l'imprimerie et de la librairie* (1689), but his claim that Grolier had been ambassador in Rome continues to cause confusion. Meanwhile a dedicated bibliophile had assembled no fewer than twenty-five of Grolier's books. This was the Abbé Jean Balesdens, editor and collector, a member of the literary and art-loving circle around the Chancellor Pierre Séguier, whom he served as personal secretary.⁴ The first Grolier known to have reached the British Isles was acquired by Edward Synge, Bishop of Limerick, in 1660.⁵

By the eighteenth century the association with Grolier was recognized to have a commercial advantage. Gabriel Martin's catalogue of the sale of Étienne Baluze's library in 1719 noted of each of six lots 'Exemplar Grolierii' and of a seventh 'Exemplar elegans Jac. Grolierii'. Copies in Woodman and Lyon's series of sales of libraries imported from the Continent between 1724 and 1731 were variously described, probably because the vendors hoped to conceal the

1. J.-A. de Thou, *Historiarum sui temporis libri*, Geneva, 1620–1, ii. 353–4. The passage does not occur in the first edition of 1606 or in the octavo edition of the same year.

2. Jean La Caille, *Histoire de l'imprimerie et de la librairie*, Paris, 1689, 87–8.

3. François Grudé de La Croix du Maine, *Premier volume de la bibliothèque*, Paris: Abel l'Angelier, 1584, 231.

4. *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, iv (Paris, 1948), 1425–7. 5. Nixon, *Grolier Exhibition*, no. 2; Austin 446.1.

fact that no buyer had come forward at the first time of offering. So the same copy could appear in one catalogue as ‘Ligatura antiqua Italica’ and in another as ‘ex Bibliotheca Jo. Grolierii’.⁶

By the time of the English bibliomania of the early nineteenth century, with its accompanying fashion for collecting Aldine Press books, enthusiasm for Grolier had reached a new level. Renouard owned nineteen specimens, the Sixth Duke of Devonshire twenty-five. Dibdin paid the books the highest compliment in his power—‘books with *larger margins* are no where to be found’—and expressed approval of the bindings, though for contradictory reasons: ‘[the] exterior ornament was generally in excellent good taste: quiet and simple, yet rich and flowing’.⁷

Le Roux de Lincy’s *Recherches sur Jean Grolier*, published in 1866, provided for the first time an outline of the collector’s life based on documents, and a list of his books. The stage was now set for Grolier to be acclaimed as the ‘Prince of Bibliophiles’. When in 1884 a book collectors’ club was established in New York the nine founders decided to call it after their French predecessor. An English translation of Le Roux de Lincy by Carolyn Shipman was commissioned by the Club and published in 1907 with a much enlarged catalogue of the library.⁸

Le Roux de Lincy’s work contained many mistakes, by no means all of which were corrected in the English translation. G. D. Hobson in collaboration with Louis-Marie Michon intended to write a radically revised biography, but the proposal, put forward during the Depression, failed to win support from the Grolier Club and was never implemented. He left an account of the Chantilly letters which I have made use of. Other scholars have addressed particular aspects of the subject: Jacques Guignard, Grolier’s early life; Ilse Schunke and Howard Nixon, the workshops that produced the bindings; Gabriel Austin, a much improved list of the books.⁹

Only two writers have dissented from the consensus of approbation and enthusiasm, both men of German origin or formation resistant to Francophile Groliermania. ‘His library was extensive,’ the late Curt Bühler wrote, ‘carefully chosen, and beautifully bound—but, so far as my observation has gone, apparently as unread as it was repetitious . . . There may be a certain pretentiousness about the books that Grolier had bound so luxuriously.’¹⁰ More recently, in a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Hamburg, Herr Gustav Beck depicted a very unfamiliar Grolier, a thief and forger who appropriated an Italian humanist’s finely bound books and added his own insignia of ownership, a man with no acquaintances in the Milanese book-trade and no right to be called a bibliophile.¹¹ These unorthodox views add welcome seasoning to what otherwise risks being too rich a diet.

6. Robert Birley, ‘The Library of Louis-Henri de Loménie, comte de Brienne, and the Bindings of the abbé Du Seuil’, *The Library*, 5/17 (1962), 125.

7. T. F. Dibdin, *The Bibliographical Decameron*, London, 1817, 471–2.

8. A.-J.-V. Le Roux de Lincy, *Researches concerning Jean Grolier his Life and his Library*, ed. Baron Roger Portalis, tr. and revised by Carolyn Shipman, MA (New York: The Grolier Club, 1907).

9. See Ch. 3 n. 41 and the Bibliography on pp. 267–9.

10. Curt F. Bühler, *The Fifteenth-Century Book* (Philadelphia, 1960), 83.

11. Gustav Beck, *Norditalienische Plaketteneinbände der 1. Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts und ihr Bezug zu Grolier* (1984). Copy deposited in the British Library.

Handsome bound books from a famous collection have a high rate of survival. Three-quarters of Giovanni Battista Grimaldi's library have survived,¹² an even larger proportion perhaps of De Thou's. Such bindings invite forgeries and more or less innocent restoration, but not deliberate destruction. About 500 books once in Grolier's possession have been recorded. The exact figure is in doubt. Gabriel Austin eliminated many fakes and duplicate entries; but some volumes have not been seen for a century or more and their status is uncertain. Grolier's early acquisitions have no doubt suffered unduly, for reasons that will become apparent, but probably three-quarters of the library in its final state is still in existence, or at least survived long enough to be recorded. La Caille's claim that the library comprised 3000 volumes, all in gilt bindings, appears much exaggerated.

In spite of the attention given to Grolier's career, many problems remain. The first concerns the date of his birth. At the time of his death, in 1565, he had been a widower for twenty years.¹³ Two of his daughters and two grandsons arranged for his burial in Saint-Germain des Prés and paid for his tomb. The inscription recorded that he had lived for eighty-six years, a statement evidently based on what the collector had told his family.¹⁴ In fact he was several years younger.

In an article¹⁵ from which I have taken most of the examples that follow, Creighton Gilbert observed that '[In the Renaissance] people were often vague or inconsistent about their ages.' Vasari constantly made mistakes about artists' ages. He reported Benedetto Ghirlandaio's death aged 50, when he was really 39. Tribolo, born in 1500, was said to have been 65 when he died in 1550. The age of Georg Kress, a *Briefmaler* of Augsburg, is given in the city muster rolls as 48 in 1610, 50 in 1615 and 55 in 1619.¹⁶ Only one of these figures can have been correct.

There was a clear tendency for old men to think themselves still older, age being a matter of pride. At a time when men matured early, they began to feel old at what we would consider quite a youthful age. Michelangelo called himself old when he was 42. Erasmus wrote his poem 'On the discomforts of old age' when he was 39 or 40. Jacopo Sansovino died at the age of 93, according to Vasari and to his son Francesco, a historian who wrote his father's epitaph; they exaggerated by nine years. Andrea del Castagno, previously thought to have been born in 1390 or 1410, is now believed on better evidence to have been born in or about 1421. The best-known example is that of Titian, who recorded his age as 95 in 1572 but was almost certainly ten years younger. It will be noticed that mistakes of as much as a decade were common.

The tendency has survived into the modern world of birth certificates and national insurance. To take a rather disreputable example, Gerald Hamilton, the original of Christopher Isherwood's Mr Norris, gave his date of birth as two years earlier than the truth.¹⁷ And a female

12. A. Hobson, *Apollo and Pegasus* (Amsterdam, 1975).

13. The *post mortem* inventory of Anne Briçonnet's property was taken in 1545: Paris, Minutier Central des Notaires, LXXXVI, 91.

14. Jacques Bouillart, *Histoire de l'abbaye royale de Saint Germain des Prez* (Paris, 1724), 194.

15. Creighton Gilbert, 'When did a Man in the Renaissance Grow Old?', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 14 (1967), 7–32.

16. John Roger Pass, 'Georg Kress, a *Briefmaler* in Augsburg', *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (1990), 178.

17. John Symonds, *Conversations with Gerald* (London: Duckworth, 1974).

relation of my own, when admitted to hospital at the age of 70, let it be known that she was 80 years old.

'Doubt of [the accuracy of undocumented birth dates]', Creighton Gilbert concludes, 'might be signaled when two factors appear together: (1) a birth date is based on a reference to the [man's] general age recorded later in his life, and (2) the birth date thus fixed leaves an early decade of his career blank as to known activities.' Both factors are present in Grolier's case. The traditional date of birth is based on nothing earlier than the inscription on his tombstone, though it must be admitted that this was universally accepted by his younger contemporaries, such as De Thou, as it has been by later writers. His earliest recorded appearance is in 1508, at what, by the traditional chronology, would have been the mature age of 29.

Fortunately, more reliable evidence is forthcoming. Jean Grolier's father, Étienne, Treasurer-General of Milan, dictated his will on 27 July 1509. In it he declared that he and his wife, Antonia Esbauda, had lived together *in vero matrimonio* for twenty-four years. After listing numerous legacies he named Jean Grolier, his legitimate and only son, as his heir general.¹⁸

Étienne Grolier and Antonia Esbauda were therefore married in 1485 and their legitimate son, Jean, cannot have been born before 1486. There is however no reason to suppose that he was the eldest of their five children. When Étienne Grolier made his will, two of his daughters were married but the two youngest were both under the age of 15. Unless these two were twins, the youngest member of the family cannot have been born before 1496. The births of the five children may thus have been spread over ten years. Assuming that at least one of the two married daughters had been born before the only son, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that Jean Grolier was born in or about 1489. This date makes better sense of many events of his early life. There would, for instance, be more point in Alessandro Minuziano's reference to the honours he had received *in giovenil etate* from the 'Foremost King in the World',¹⁹ if he had succeeded his father as Treasurer-General of Milan as a youth of 19 or 20 instead of as a man of 30.

I had reached this conclusion when documentary confirmation came to light. M. Philippe Hamon kindly informed me that when interrogated on 13 July 1527 in connection with the case against the Constable de Bourbon, Grolier gave his age as 37.²⁰ He was therefore born either in the second half of 1489 or the first half of 1490. The quincentenary of the traditional date was commemorated with exhibitions in London and New York. I regret that the true date has been discovered too late for a second round of celebrations.

The Groliers, originally of Italian origin, from Verona, were a family of rich Lyonesse merchants. Étienne Grolier was a wealthy man. His will mentions numerous houses, fields, and vineyards which he left to his wife, as well as the family home in Lyons. He also left her several pieces of silver, including a basin, three salt-cellars, and two flagons, all made or bought in Milan, a gold chain which he had had made in Milan, and a silver-gilt vase or cup made in

18. Emilio Motta, 'Il testamento del padre di Grolier con altri appuntamenti di storia franco-lombarda', *Archivio storico lombardo*, 44 (1917) 159–63.

19. Dedication to Grolier of Petrarch, [*Canzoniere*] (Milan: Alessandro Minuziano, 1516).

20. Letter from M. Hamon of 19 June 1992. The source is Paris, BN, fr. 5109, fols. 446^v–448.

Germany.²¹ There was certainly plenty left over for his son. In the dedication to Jean Grolier of an edition of Petrarch, 1516, Alessandro Minuziano spoke of ‘your abundant riches, honestly acquired by your ancestors’.²²

The rich bourgeois of Lyons were anxious to rise in the world. They could do this in one of two ways, both of which involved giving up commerce. They could either buy an estate that carried rights of nobility, or they could use their money to buy office. Antoine Gondi, a grocer, of Italian origin like the Groliers, took the first course; in 1520 he bought the seigneurie du Perron for the derisory sum of 625 *livres*, thus laying the territorial foundation for a family that numbered two dukes, a cardinal and a marshal of France.²³ Étienne Grolier took the second course. He was already *élu*, or tax-collector, for Lyons, a post which his son inherited but passed on after a few years to his uncle, Antoine Grolier. It was doubtless by purchase that he obtained the office of Treasurer-General of Milan, the appointment dating from 14 July 1506.²⁴

The Grolier family were from Lyons, and Jean Grolier described himself as *Lugdunensis* in his early inscriptions. He gave up the territorial qualification when he started to have his ownership gilt on his bindings, and although he still owned the family house in Lyons in 1536, he never lived there after his childhood and made his home in Paris. His wife, Anne Briçonnet, was of a family from Tours and his four daughters all married non-Lyonese husbands. Nevertheless he retained a sense of loyalty to his place of origin, and in 1557, although by then one of the Trésoriers-généraux of France, wrote to warn the Town Council to keep their affairs secret in order to avoid exorbitant tax demands.²⁵

Our information about his education comes from the dedication to him of an edition of Suetonius, *De vita duodecim Caesarum*, printed in Lyons by Balthasar de Gabiano in 1508.²⁶ The editor, Gaspar Argilensis, was evidently acting as tutor to Grolier, who by this time held the post of *secrétaire du roi*. Gaspar observed that in spite of the interruption caused by constant journeys through France, since Grolier by virtue of his office had to attend the peregrinatory court of Louis XII, they had succeeded in continuing their literary studies. They had read Suetonius together during a halt of several days at Lyons, where Louis XII had gone to await news of the Emperor Maximilian’s abortive advance on Milan. To make readily accessible a good text of a work which seemed of value to anyone concerned with the government of an empire Gaspar gave the book to Balthasar de Gabiano, whom he called ‘a most elegant printer’, to be published in an edition of 1,000 copies. (This is a rare example of the Lyonese printers producing an octavo edition of a classical author before Aldus Manutius.)

Gaspar Argilensis went on to say that the dedication to Grolier ‘should be a perpetual testimony before posterity of my benevolence towards you, the foundation of which has already

21. Motta, ‘Testamento’. 22. Dedication of Petrarch, 1516; see n. 19.

23. A. Kleinclausz (ed.), *Histoire de Lyon*, i (Lyons, 1939), 490, 498–9.

24. L.-G. Pélissier, ‘Trois registres de lettres ducales de Louis XII aux archives de Milan’, *Bulletin d’histoire et de philologie* (1892), 23.

25. Philippe Hamon, *L’Argent du roi*, 511.

26. Suetonius Tranquillus, *De vita XII Caesarum*, Lyons: [Balthasar de Gabiano], 3 October 1508. Copy in BL, G.9053.

been faithfully laid by both of us from that time when you, a boy of distinguished appearance, were living in the same house and under my protection while most successfully performing your literary service in the celebrated school of Paris'. Grolier therefore attended the University of Paris, and Gaspar Argilensis acted as his tutor and governor. Paris University in the early sixteenth century has been described as 'a formidable machine for forming theologians',²⁷ though this was not a course Grolier would have followed. Literature was studied only for purposes of grammar, and here Gaspar Argilensis's tuition must have been a valuable corrective. The future *secrétaire et notaire du roi* was also required to have mastered at least the rudiments of law.

Gaspare Mazzoli (Gaspar Argilensis), called 'da Argile' from his birth in the castle of that small town, was a Bolognese humanist of some small local reputation. His published work, besides the edition of Suetonius already mentioned, consisted only of a single epigram, but he won the regard of the elder Filippo Beroaldo and of Antonio Urceo. He obtained his doctorate from Bologna in 1485. His career for the next twenty years is undocumented. In 1505 he was appointed Professor of Rhetoric and Poetry at short notice to replace Diomede Guidalotti who had died shortly after being appointed. Gaspare Mazzoli held the chair for one year only. Italian authors, at a loss to explain why his name was not inscribed on the academic roll for the following year, have assumed that he died in 1506.²⁸ Presumably he left the university because he had accepted an invitation from Étienne Grolier to go to Paris as his son's tutor.

Grolier's education was unique. No other French schoolboy of the period had an Italian humanist as a private tutor. He acquired his facility in Latin, his enthusiasm for ancient literature and learning, his fairly wide classical reading and his handsome humanistic handwriting from Gaspare Mazzoli. Almost nothing is known of Étienne Grolier, but his role in forming his son's outlook and developing his talents was a crucial one. He was evidently ambitious for his son, anxious to give him the best possible education and in advance of his French contemporaries in recognizing the superiority of Italian learning.

The *secrétaires et notaires du roi* staffed the 'large' and the 'small' chancery under the Chancellor.²⁹ Their duties were to draw up and authenticate by the signature of one of them all royal decrees, decisions of the chanceries, deliberations of the Council, and awards of the sovereign courts. The youngest and most recently joined acted as assistants to their seniors. They enjoyed considerable privileges. 'Their persons, property, incomes, goods and households were immune from any form of taxation.'³⁰ They were exempt from military service and from having troops billeted in their houses, and they were automatically enobled. Like almost all offices in sixteenth-century France the post of *secrétaire du roi* could be bought. It was seen as a useful first step in a career in the public service, and as an easy way of advancement for the sons of rich merchant families ambitious to rise to a higher social class.

27. L. Delaruelle, *Guillaume Budé* (Paris, 1907), 54–6.

28. Giovanni Fantuzzi, *Notizie degli scrittori bolognesi* (Bologna, 1781–94), v. 377; Carlo Malagola, *Della vita e delle opere di Antonio Urceo detto Codro* (Bologna, 1878), 235–9.

29. Pierre Robin, *La Compagnie des secrétaires du roi (1351–1791)* (Paris, 1933); R. Doucet, *Les Institutions de la France au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1948), 109–10; N. M. Sutherland, *The French Secretaries of State in the Age of Catherine de Medici* (London, 1962).

30. Sutherland, *French Secretaries of State*, 10.

No doubt Jean Grolier's office of *secrétaire du roi* was bought for him by his father. Fifteen was the minimum age.³¹ Candidates might be named when younger, but were not received until they had reached that mature age. In 1539, for instance, Nicolas de Neufville, sieur de Villeroy, resigned his office of royal secretary and notary in favour of his 14-year-old son.³² Jacques Petit (born in 1448) was a student of not more than 16 at the University of Paris when appointed, Dreux Budé II (born in 1456) an 18-year-old student at Orléans.³³ These however seem to have been unusual cases. Appointment at between 19 and 21 was more common.³⁴ Grolier would not have been unduly young at 18 if appointed in late 1507 or early 1508. He was already in office and in attendance on Louis XII at Lyons in May of the latter year.

His earliest known acquisition of a printed book dates from this period, a Catullus in a pirated imitation of the Aldine edition of 1502, printed in Lyons by Balthasar de Gabiano in about 1503.³⁵ The book was a present—'Pro Johanne grolier Lugdunensi' is written at the end of the text—and the donor may have been Gaspare Mazzoli, or Balthasar de Gabiano, the same printer to whom Gaspare entrusted his edition of Suetonius. The gilt binding (fig. 1) is by a workshop which, as Jacques Guignard showed, belonged to the Parisian bookseller, publisher and bookbinder, Simon Vostre.³⁶

This Catullus has features that are unique in Grolier's library. His arms painted at the beginning of the text are in a form that was never repeated: *azure, two staves argent crossed saltire-wise between three stars of the same*, with two lions as supporters. The motto, *Sans Varier*, inscribed on a banderole above the arms and gauffered on the upper and lower edges—Grolier's only motto in a language other than Latin—makes its sole appearance in this volume. The fore-edge is gauffered *A Jehan Grolier*, another unique feature.

Clearly the book was decorated and bound before Grolier's first visit to Italy, but it is not necessary to conclude that the binding is exactly contemporary with the date of printing, nor—though the tooled ornament is extremely rough—that it was Simon Vostre's first essay at gilding. The Italian fashion of gilt-tooling was disseminated by Italian scholars in northern countries and often first brought into use on their presentation copies to prospective patrons. What could well be Simon Vostre's first gilt-tooled work is to be seen on the manuscript of Fausto Andrelini's poem of 1507 celebrating the French capture of Genoa, perhaps bound for presentation to Louis XII.³⁷ Grolier may have been quite capable as a 13-year-old schoolboy

31. Hélène Michaud, *La Grande Chancellerie et les écritures royales au seizième siècle (1515–1589)* (Paris, 1967), 94; André Lapeyre and Rémy Scheurer, *Les Notaires et secrétaires du roi sous les règnes de Louis XI, Charles VIII et Louis XII (1461–1515)* (Paris, 1978), xix.

32. Lapeyre and Scheurer, *Notaires*, 237. 33. *Ibid.* 252–3, 68.

34. Cf. *ibid.* 61 (Nicolas Briçonnet, Grolier's father-in-law), 94 (Jacques Chevalier), 100 (Jean Cornu), 118 (Nicole du Brueil), 202 (Martin Le Picart), 249–50 (Étienne Petit II), 281 (Alexis Robertet).

35. Rome, BNC Vittorio Emanuele II, 68.7.C.3. Austin 93.5.

36. Guignard, 'L'Atelier des reliures Louis XII', *passim*.

37. A. Hobson, *Humanists*, 172–4, fig. 139. In a review of my book (*Text: Svensk Tidskrift för Bibliografi*, 4, 4) Dr Staffan Fogelmark contested this view on the grounds (1) that two earlier books, printed in Bologna in 1505 and Basle in 1506, are in gilt bindings by the Simon Vostre workshop, and (2) that the interval between printing and binding 'is not likely to be one of years . . . but rather one of weeks or days'. Anyone familiar with the subject will know that this opinion is untenable. In the early 16th century books were bound, not when they were printed, but when they were sold. Dedication copies



1. Catullus, *Carmina*, Lyons: Balthasar de Gabiano, [c. 1503], upper cover.
Rome, BNC Vittorio Emanuele II, 68.7.C.3. 8vo.

of acquiring the Catullus and having it bound. But if the binding dates from 1503, why was there an interval of six years before the next recorded book purchase? If the Catullus was a present from Gaspare Mazzoli, Grolier cannot have received it before 1506, and it may have been given at any time between then and his departure for Italy in 1509. If the donor was Balthasar de Gabiano, the most likely occasion would have been the period in 1508 when Grolier was in Lyons and probably financed the publication of Mazzoli's Suetonius.

Étienne Grolier dictated his will on 27 July 1509. Since his son's presence is not mentioned in the document, Guignard concluded that he had not yet arrived in Milan. By 15 September however the father was dead and Jean Grolier had succeeded him as Treasurer-General of the Duchy of Milan.³⁸ It was common for the holder of an office to obtain, usually by purchase, the right to hand it on to a son or nephew, either during his lifetime—a process known as *résignation*—or after his death—when it was known as *survivance*. This may have been Étienne

are likely to have been bound at once; other copies might remain unsold and unbound for years. Grolier's plaquette bindings, which date from after his arrival in Milan in 1509, contain several incunabula and no book printed after 1507. Of the surviving books bound for Giovanni Battista Grimaldi in 1544–6, less than 25% were printed in those years, whereas 38% date from before 1540.

38. The date is given in a document presented by Dr Otto Schäfer to the Grolier Club, New York: Sotheby's, 5 June 1973, lot 267; *Gazette of the Grolier Club*, ns 35–6 (1983–4), pl. f. p. 77, translation on p. 86.