

## VU Amsterdam objects and their stories

### 1920-1925: The Library and its collections: The Bavinck collection

Ever since the university was founded in 1880, literature has been necessary for research by professors and students. The collections of individual collectors and professors were – and are – an essential source of new additions. In the early 1920s, one such addition was the Bavinck collection, while the Postma-Gosker collection is one of the most recent. But what actually happens with those collections?

By Willemien van Dijk and Anneke Houtkamp, with a contribution from Ferenc Postma and Margiet Gosker

[Herman Bavinck](#) (1854-1921) arrived at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 1902 and became a professor of Dogmatics, Ethics and Similar Subjects in 1904. In doing so, he succeeded Abraham Kuyper, who had held this chair until accepting emeritus status in 1901.

Hundreds of books from Bavinck's private library have been preserved in the collections of the University Library to this very day. While it is not easy to uncover exactly how these books found their way to the University Library, what is certain is that we must look at two methods of acquiring books.

Firstly, from 1917 on, VU Amsterdam made use of what were known as seminar libraries. These were relatively small collections of books that fell under the responsibility of a specific professor and could be used for teaching purposes. The professor in question was tasked with supplying the librarian at the time, Mr J.C. Breen, with the titles of the works in such collections. Breen would then enter these titles into the written library catalogue. In this way, the catalogue was expanded without placing a strain on either the limited budget available to the library or the equally limited space for storing books. In the current metadata, books that were part of such a seminar library can be recognised by the note 'Oud Bestand' [Old Stock]. It is quite likely that Prof. H. Bavinck was in charge of such a seminar library as well. A note such as *Bav. 1251*, attached to the volume [De opvoedkundige denkbeelden van Betje Wolff en Aagje Deken; bijdrage tot de kennis van de opvoeding hier te lande in de achttiende eeuw](#) [The pedagogical ideology of Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken: a contribution to pedagogical knowledge in this country in the eighteenth century], probably means that this work belonged to his seminar library, or a subcollection named after him, under that number.

Among the current University Library collections, it is also possible to find books featuring one of Bavinck's bookplates. These books were probably purchased by the University Library. Following Bavinck's death on 29 July 1921, a committee was established to raise money for the purpose of acquiring Bavinck's collection. It would seem that they had no problem raising sufficient funds. What was a problem, however, was lack of space. In 1923, the librarian Breen expressed his disappointment with the plans to renovate [Keizersgracht 162 and 164](#). These plans failed to include the space needed to house Bavinck's collection. Ultimately, the plans were adjusted, and the second and third storeys of the two canal-side buildings were connected with one another and turned into a library. In July 1924, Breen announced that the crates holding Bavinck's books were to be unpacked and the work of cataloguing them could now begin. In the current metadata, the books added to the collection through this acquisition can be identified by the note 'Acq.nr./col.: Bavinck' or 'oude sign.: Bavinck'.

Today, 100 years later, it is unfortunately no longer possible to determine exactly what Bavinck's library looked like in his day. As a result of relocations, the books have become scattered across the various depots of the University Library, and due to changes in library systems, we have lost sight of the collection as a whole. That being said, in September 2020, we were able to use the modern metadata to shed light on which works



Bookplate from the Bavinck collection  
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from the current library collection were once part of the Bavinck collection. We successfully traced a total of [891](#) titles. This fine assortment of books demonstrates the breadth of Bavinck's interests.

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Source acknowledgement: [Een vrije universiteitsbibliotheek, studies over verleden, bezit en heden van de bibliotheek der vrije universiteit \[A free university library: studies of the history, ownership and present of the library of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam\]](#). Van Gorcum, Assen, 1980.

## **Bavinck and the Postma-Gosker Library**

Venlo, 30 October 2020.

As you might be aware, we donated our historic book collection to VU Amsterdam in 2012. It was the last major collection acquired by VU Amsterdam, as we were recently informed. When we were asked to write something about one of the first and oldest collections to be added to the VU Library – the Bavinck collection – we immediately began digging through our bookcases. There, alongside the comprehensive biography of 'Dr Herman Bavinck' (Amsterdam, 1921) by Hepp, we found two works of Bavinck himself: '*Bilderdijk, als denker en dichter*' [Bilderdijk as a thinker and a poet] (Kampen, 1906) and his ideas on '*Het Christelijk Huisgezin*' [The Christian Household] (Kampen, 1908). Bavinck had not escaped our attention, that much is clear, which makes sense for an individual who was so important to 'us Reformed Christians' – even if it was quite some time ago.

However, these were not the only works from Bavinck's collection to emerge from our bookcases. Before us, we see three issues from the series of brochures entitled '*Groote Godsdiensten*' [Major Religions], which were published at that time in Baarn by Hollandia-Drukkerij. These are issues 2, 4 and 5, which were published in 1911 and 1912 and sold for 40 cents apiece. Issue 2 is about 'The religion of Ancient Egypt' (by P.A.A. Boeser); Issue 4 deals with 'the religion of Israel' (by H.Th. Obbink); and Issue 5 covers 'The religions of the Babylonians and Assyrians' (by B.D. Eerdmans). In terms of format, the brochures are exceedingly simple, yet their content is important enough to have earned them a place in Bavinck's private library. Proof that there can be no doubt whatsoever as to their provenance is present in the form of the three bookplates pasted in the front of the brochures. The labels are marked 'Ex-Libris Bavinck' and 'Anno 1921': the year in which Bavinck's library was acquired by the VU. Furthermore, the corresponding book number has been preserved in all three cases: Bib. Bav. 1635, 1636 and 1641, as evidenced by the labels pasted to the front covers.

While we do not remember exactly when the three brochures made their way into our bookcase, we do know that we were immediately struck by the lovely bookplates pasted inside them. Those were reason enough to take particular care with this remarkable bit of VU Amsterdam heritage, we thought. When the time comes for our Postma-Gosker Library to definitively go to VU Amsterdam, it will be our pleasure to add these three titles from Bavinck's private library to that collection – at which point they will return to their rightful home after a century.

Ferenc Postma and Margriet Gosker are book collectors and the donors of the [Postma-Gosker collection](#).

Source acknowledgement:

Marion Poll – Margriet Gosker – Ferenc Postma, *Wij zoeken niet, wij vinden. – Ferenc Postma en Margriet Gosker over 40 jaar boeken verzamelen* [We do not seek, we find: Ferenc Postma and Margriet Gosker on 40 years of book collecting] (Amsterdam: VU Library – Special Collections, [2013]).