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3-1-2008

"Leuven University Library, 1425-2000"

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Kelly, James R., ""Leuven University Library, 1425-2000"" (2008). *University Librarians Publication Series.* Paper 39.
http://scholarworks.umass.edu/librarian_pubs/39

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Coppens, Chris, Mark Derez, and Jan Roegiers, eds. *Leuven University Library, 1425-2000*. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven Univ. Press, 2005. 543 pp. Illus. Cloth, $350.00 (isbn 90-5867-467-3).

While engaged to write this review—but not as yet having begun to do so—I happened to be asked by two undergraduates at my university if I would consent to be interviewed as a part of a video they were making in fulfillment of a course requirement. Specifically, they were interested in learning what librarians (at least academic librarians) think of graphic novels and their place in research libraries. In preparing for the filming, I did some background work to determine how much material, primary and secondary, we had on the subject. One item in particular caught my eye: *Image & Narrative: Online Magazine of the Visual Narrative*. Indeed, an electronic scholarly journal devoted to the graphic novel and its ilk and, most remarkably, from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven! The very ancient and very august institution whose nearly 600-year old library was chronicled at length in this book proves to be in the vanguard of communication technology working at the edges of traditional genre concepts.

That aside, where to begin to do this volume justice? Its size is as monumental as the collection it describes (12.5" x 10.25" and a whopping 8 lbs.), but that is merely its physical aspect. What awaits the reader within is truly glorious. The book comprises three main components: the text of the library's history proper as written by several hands; "box texts" describing a wide variety of related topics (e.g., "A University Press",

“Leuveni Kodex”, and “The University Carillon”, among many others) interspersed with throughout the book and distinguished from the main historical account by virtue of their bicolumnar arrangement, smaller typeface, and initial decorative fleuron, and the illustrations.

White the text along with its accompanying scholarly apparatus including the usual bibliography and index as well as an exhaustive list of all of the building’s inscriptions and a chronology deserve praise, the illustrations command attention. There is scarcely a page that does not have some image on it, usually in brilliant color. Along with the two-page spreads one finds everything from thumbnail pictures to lavishly rendered endpapers (those in the front even differing from those in the back!). Furthermore, while the images are a treat for anyone interested in library architecture or institutional furnishings, the welter of reproductions from early printed books, illuminated manuscripts, and prints is a delight and a rich source of teaching material for anyone in the field of book history. Alas, a word-based review of this sort is wholly inadequate in its inability to give fuller embodiment to all of these appealing aspects; I could wax much more eloquent on the volume if I could reproduce a small number of its graphic gems.

Despite undergoing plundering in 1795 and 1797, burning in 1914 and 1940,and lastly the rather ignominious fate of division along language lines for political reasons in the 1970’s, the library proved its resilience in not only surviving but undergoing a magnificent restoration around the turn of the millennium. If there is a lesson or two to be

learned from all of this, it might be that books and the buildings dedicated to their preservation can sometimes prevail despite the most unpromising circumstances, and that on occasion deserved note is made and proper attention paid to sharing the existence of these symbols through the compilation and publication of a book such as this. The editors along with Wim Platteborze, the book designer, Antilope, the printer, and the Leuven University Press deserve prominent mention and our praise.

James R. Kelly (Collection Development, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003) views the world from the 19th floor of the twenty-eight storey library building that is the Du Bois Library.