

## Comments on Daniel Margocsy's Huygens-Descartes lecture

HUIB J. ZUIDERVAART

### SLIDE-1

Dear all,

Many thanks for giving me the opportunity to reflect on the lecture of our dear colleague Daniel Margocsy. The kind of research he has discussed with us, looking at the influence on the history of science of a major publication, by composing a census and analyzing its results, is indeed important. And Vesalius can indeed be regarded as very important!

In the classical view with regard to the history of science of the Renaissance, the year 1543, is regarded an *annus mirabilis*, SLIDE-2 because in that very year the crucial books of both Vesalius and Copernicus have been published. In that classical picture these books have revolutionized the sciences: Vesalius, because with his empirical knowledge, based on personal observations during dissections of the human body, the book highlights the birth of modern anatomy, and Copernicus, because his book transforms the central role of the earth in the universe, introducing the concept of the solar system, in which the Earth is no more than 'just another planet'. SLIDE-3

Or, to quote one of Vesalius biographers: "The new thing in his work is that the structure and operation of the human body is sketched on the basis of accurate and detailed representation of the human body parts, observed during dissections performed by the author himself". SLIDE-4

Of course this simple picture has been reshaped already a long time ago, making the story far more complicated than I just described. Nevertheless investigating the role of pivotal publications, such as these, are not only worth while, but also very important.

For, just as Daniel has shown to us, the study of the dynamics of ownership and location of the known copies of the *Fabrica*, undertaken by him and his colleagues, demonstrates to us, for example, that **around 1600** the book was predominantly owned by a highly professional audience, mainly in Germanic lands. That's an interesting observation for a book composed in Italy.

In comparison to Copernicus' *De revolutionibus*, the spread of the *Fabrica* appears to follow patterns similar to Copernicus' book, most copies of which are located in Northern Italy, the southern and western areas of the Holy Roman Empire, and the Low Countries. **SLIDE-5**

The study on the *Fabrica* presented here also shows how the interest in the book was not only scientific, but also driven by arguments related to status and wealth.

Still, although I very enthusiastically welcome studies related to the history of books such as the *Fabrica*, I have still some questions and comments on the choices made, and the methods followed.

**(1). Firstly**, Daniel, you follow the fate of the *Fabrica* through the ages, from the very start in 1543 to the present day. But no mention at all is made on **the completely changing role and meaning** of the book during that time.

At first, in 1543, Vesalius' book was introduced as a novelty, not only in the empirical method it advocated, but also in the way it introduced scientific illustrations as part of the argument. However, although the book remained influential until the first decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – in 1725 even a reprint was issued by two Leiden publishers – not long thereafter new insights made the book scientifically obsolete. Even in such a way that, as you said, the *Fabrica* completely lost its financial value. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century “one could purchase a copy for ten to sixteen shillings”.

So, similar to what happened to the scientific instruments that I have studied, the *Fabrica* is also a textbook example of what **Michael Thompson** has described in his *Rubish Theory: the Creation and Destruction of Value* (1979).

**SLIDE-6**

In this book Thompson argues that obsolete objects can regain only value when they first are dumped from their original function, regarded as being superseded and worthless.<sup>1</sup> This is exactly what has happened with most scientific instruments, after they had fallen into disgrace. And this is quite the same with the book you discussed.

But when later in time these scientific objects regain value, they have a completely different meaning. From useable commodities they have become desirable objects of cultural heritage. This is a topic still interesting to study, but from a completely different perspective than initially was the case.

For me as an historian of science, the foremost interesting question is: ‘what is the influence of an object, person or text in the circulation and transformation of knowledge?’ As far as the *Fabrica* is concerned, that question cannot be studied anymore AFTER – let’s say - the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century!

**(2). Then,** related to this conclusion, another question pops up. Seen how much work already has been done on the composition of a census of the *Fabrica* by scholars from the past, such as **Harvey Cushing** in 1943, **Michael Horowitz** and **Jack Collins** in 1984, **SLIDE-7 Elly Cockx-Indestege** in 1994 and your co-worker **Stephen Joffe** in 2009, **SLIDE-8 why have you chosen to work only on the surviving 300 copies of the first edition of 1543 and the 400 copies of the second edition of 1555?**

You already cited **Roger Gaskell**, who argues that the *Fabrica*’s layout was designed with textual readers in mind, [which according to him is the reason why “all references to the illustrations are relegated to the margins to ensure that they do not break up the narrative”]. To put it in your own words “It was perfectly possible to publish Vesalius’ atlas without images, as confirmed by the success of the 1552 Lyon edition, which printed and pirated only the text”.

So, don’t you think that for the circulation and transformation of knowledge it is also important to look at the fate of the copies of the 1552 **Lyon edition?** **SLIDE-9**

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Thompson, *Rubish Theory. The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford, 1979).

(3). And what about the *Epitome*, the shortened – but still illustrated – version of the *Fabrica*, issued in the same year 1543, by the same Basel printer, Johann Oporinus (1507-1568)? SLIDE-10

Why is the spread of the surviving copies of this cheaper, but therefore perhaps even more influential publication, not included in your census? For, it fits the requirement that Vesalius himself has approved these works.

But even then, the fact that already in 1545 an unapproved London printing was issued with the text and the (reduced) plates of Vesalius *Epitome* can for the spread of ideas be as important as the original printing. The example of the illegal Amsterdam printings of Newton's *Principia* in 1715 and 1721 is here a case in point. These illegal printings (*roofdrukken* in Dutch) had a wider European distribution than the original Cambridge edition of 1714.

(4). And what about the translations of Vesalius in the vernacular? The German version was published by the official printer Oporinus in the same year as the Latin original, followed by other editions in 1551 and 1575. SLIDE-11. An Italian edition was issued in 1560; SLIDE-12 a Spanish one in 1569; Dutch *Epitomes* followed in 1568 and 1569 SLIDE-13; and until 1700 a flood of Latin editions followed, printed all over Europe. SLIDES-14-16

Didn't they all contribute to the distribution of the new anatomical knowledge? Of course such a wider Census would require far more work than looking to the two editions you talked about, but the conclusion would make much more sense.

In the case of **Copernicus'** census this is of course very different, because that book had only two editions in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century. SLIDE-17 But Vesalius' book was printed a lot more.

Let's look to a random sample of Dutch material I had already collected for other reasons. Then we meet the following owners: SLIDES-18-27

1. 1607 - Unknown scholar, in Middelburg
2. 1646 – Nicolaus Mulerius, Professor of philosophy in Groningen
3. 1648 – Johan Thysius, book collector in Leiden
4. 1658 - Surgeon's library. Gift from a magistrate from Middelburg

5. 1682 – Nicolaas Heinsius, Poet & book collector in The Hague
6. 1668 – Jacob Golius, Professor of Greek & Mathematics in Leiden
7. 1701 – Constantijn Huygens jr, Secretary of the Stadholder in The Hague
8. 1713 – Jansonius ab Almeloveen, Antiquarian & polyhistor in Amsterdam
9. 1714 – Benjamin Furly, Merchant in Rotterdam
10. 1766 – Public library in Gouda

So, the Dutch owners are all educated academics, and – in accordance with what you already stipulated, there are also two institutional libraries.

For comparison, I present also such a small random list for Copernicus' *Revolutionibus*: **SLIDES-28-34**

1. Before 1632 – Philippus Lansbergen, clergyman & astronomer in Middelburg
2. 1646 – Again Nicolaus Mulerius, Professor of philosophy in Groningen
3. 1648 – Again Johan Thysius, book collector in Leiden
4. 1668 – Again Jacob Golius, Professor of Greek & Mathematics in Leiden
5. 1669 – Samuel Kechel ab Hollensteyn, Mathematician & astronomer in Leiden
6. 1682 – Again Nicolaas Heinsius, Poet & book collector in The Hague
7. 1688 – Jacob Oiselius, Professor of Law and book collector in Groningen

All academics!

But when we look, for instance, at the Leiden University copy of the *Dutch edition* of Vesalius, **SLIDE-35** who then is the former owner? A non-academic surgeon!

So, it could well be that different editions went to different sectors of the scientific and medical market.

Therefore, with a restriction to a survey of the two official Latin editions (of 1543 and 1555), you could obtain a result that is *not representative* for the contemporary circulation of this new anatomical knowledge.

And then another point, how do you obtain the results of ownership in the different time periods? Of course, from auction catalogues, old owner

inscriptions (such as shown from surgeon), and library catalogues; but – trained as a physicist as I am – then I miss in your numbers a margin of uncertainty. Your percentages, are they all relating to the total of surviving 700 copies of both editions? Is the provenance and former ownership known in all these cases? I can hardly imagine this.

Nevertheless, I agree with you, Daniel, that book history is a fascinating topic. Provenance research and reception history are in that respect still under-investigated. And indeed, these topics are very important for the history of culture. Although I am convinced that census research – as you have executed – must always be flanked by reception history using other sources, such as correspondences, citations by contemporary scholars in their own works, manuals, manuscripts, etcetera.

Finally, what about the history of modern collecting? As a topic in its own, it is of course a fascinating subject too, but it has another focus. But I agree, **I think for all historians, the antiquarian book trade and its history is a very stimulating world.** I can illustrate this from my own experiences. Therefore, I will end my comments with some personal reflections from the antiquarian book trade.

My own first encounter with an antiquarian book seller was in 1974, when my late wife entered the service of **Max Israel**, member of a family with a long tradition in the trade of old scholarly books of importance. **SLIDE-36** Over the years Max became a good friend, and others followed.

When I moved to Middelburg, the antiquarian book sellers **Frans van den Berg** **SLIDE-37**, and especially the clever antiquarian **Adri Verburg** played a similar very stimulating role for me.

**SLIDE-38**

These antiquarians have learnt me a lot about the way books were printed and manually bound in the old days. Sometimes I even doubt if I ever had become a historian of science, when I not had the opportunity to explore their filled book shelves, and admire – by touching with my hands – the works of the flood of scholars from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. It was from these antiquarian

book sellers, Max, Frans and Adri, that I learnt that all these iconic books are still available on the market.

For instance, if one goes today to the website of the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers (ILAB), and search for the 1543 edition of Vesalius' *Fabrica*, you see that it requires "only" 125.000 US Dollars to obtain your own copy! **SLIDE-39**

And the 1555 edition is even far "cheaper", "only" 20.000 Euros! **SLIDE-40**.

So, if you are inspired, you can start your own collection today. As for me, I stopped collecting more than a decade ago, but I still enjoy going to book fairs. So, in this commercial time I end my comment with a commercial **SLIDE-41**: be invited to go next week to the 37<sup>th</sup>-edition of the Amsterdam International Book Fair, and get stimulated by the genuine historic sensation of touching these costly works. Books of a nature, to which Daniel has introduced us so eloquently.

### Vesalius – Comments




Huib J. Zuidervaart  
22 September 2017  
Teylers Museum




### 1543: *annus mirabilis*

**Vesalius *De Humani Corporis Fabrica***



**Copernicus *De Revolutionibus***



### 1543: *annus mirabilis*

**Classical picture: these works have revolutionized the sciences**



Marks birth of modern anatomy.



Marks birth of modern Concept of the solar system

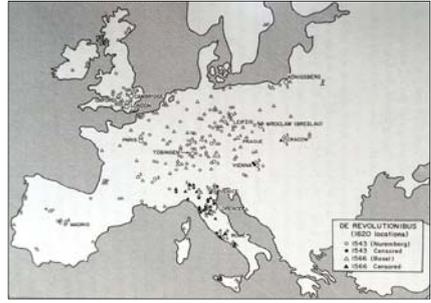
### 1543: *annus mirabilis*

**Classical picture: these works have revolutionized the sciences**



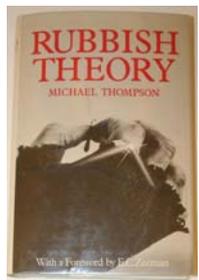
*"The new thing in this work is that the structure and operation of the human body is sketched on the basis of accurate and detailed representation of the human body parts, observed during dissection performed by the author himself".*

### Spread of Copernicus *Revolutionibus*



From Gingerich (2004)

### Thompson's *Rubbish Theory* (1979)

**Vesalius: Census of 1543-edition by Michael Horowitz & Jack Collins**

A Census of Copies of the First Edition of Andreas Vesalius' *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543), with a Note on the Recently Discovered Variant Issue  
 MICHAEL HOROWITZ and JACK COLLINS

**D**e *humani corporis fabrica* was acclaimed by William Osler as "the greatest medical work ever printed."<sup>1</sup> Harvey Cushing wrote the classic bibliographical study and commentaries have been published dealing with every aspect of the production of the *Fabrica*. It did not seem possible that anything new could be discovered about the first edition of the foundation work on human anatomy.

In the footsteps of **Harvey Cushing**, *A bio-bibliography of Vesalius* (New York 1943)  
 Later continued by **Elly Cockx-Indestege**, *Andreas Vesalius, a Belgian census* (Brussels 1994).

**Vesalius: partial Census of 1555-edition by Stephen N Joffe**

**International Archives of Medicine** 

Review [Open Access](#)

**A census of the edition of 1555 of Andreas Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica***  
 Stephen N Joffe

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 Email: Stephen.N.joffe@ucm.edu

Published 8 September 2009  
 International Archives of Medicine 2009, 2:26 doi:10.1186/1753-7423-2-26  
 This article is available from: <http://www.internationalarchivesofmedicine.com/content/2/1/26>  
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Received 27 July 2009  
 Accepted 8 September 2009



**Vesalius *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* Ed. 1552 - Lyon**



**Vesalius *Epitome* Latin Edition: Basel 1543**



Johann Oporinus (1507-1568), the printer



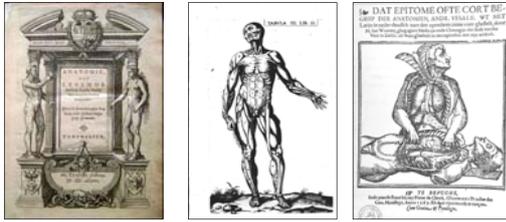
**Vesalius *Fabrica & Epitome* German editions: Basel 1543 ; Nurnberg, 1551 & Zurich 1575**



**Vesalius *Fabrica & Epitome* Italian edition: Venice 1560 | Spanish edition: Rome 1569**

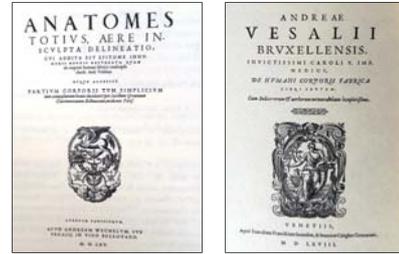


**Vesalius De Humani Corporis Fabrica**  
**Dutch editions: Antwerp 1568 / Brugge 1569**



Anatomie, oft levende beelden vande deelen des menschelicken lichaems (Antwerpen: Plantijn, 1568). Contains also: Het epitome, oft cort verhael vande boecken van Andries Vesalius Bruesselaer, vande fabrijske van d' menschelick lichaem

**Vesalius Epitome Anatomica**  
**Latin editions:**  
**Paris 1565 & 69 / Venice 1568**



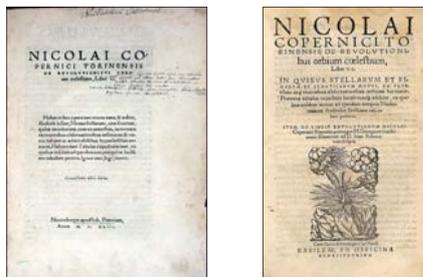
**Vesalius Epitome Anatomica**  
**Latin Editions:**  
**Leiden 1616 / Amsterdam 1616**



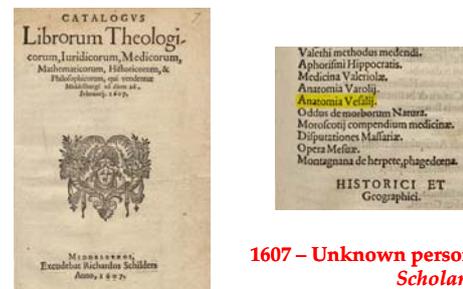
**Vesalius Fabrica**  
**Dutch & Latin editions:**  
**Amsterdam 1647 & Leiden 1725**



**Copernicus Revolutionibus**  
**Only two 16<sup>th</sup> C Latin editions: 1543 & 1566**

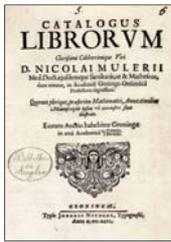


**Vesalius in the Early Dutch Republic**



1607 – Unknown person  
 Scholar?  
 Middelburg

**Vesalius in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1646 – Mulerius**  
**Professor of philosophy**  
**Groningen**

*Libri Medici in folio*  
77. Andr. Vesalius de humani corporis fabrica. Basilee apud Oporinum. 1555. A 3 78. Andr.

**Vesalius in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1648 – Johan Thysius**  
**Book collector**  
**Leiden**



**Bought on auction**  
**Constantijn l'Empereur**

*Ed. Basel 1543*

**Vesalius in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1658 - Surgeon's library**  
**Gift from a magistrate**  
**Middelburg**

*Vesalius de Humani Corporis Fabrica, d'Hr. Mr. Hendrik Thibault, Reumt: Brueyten Schelde en Burgermeester.*

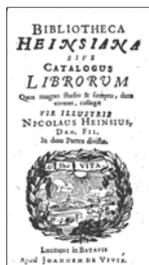
**Vesalius in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1668 – Jacob Golius**  
**Professor of Greek & Mathematics**  
**Leiden**

54. Andr. Vesalius de hum. corp. Fabrica. 2. voll. Lugd. 1552.

**Copernicus in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1682 – Nic. Heinsius**  
**Poet & book collector**  
**The Hague**

100 Andrea Vesalii epitome de Humani corporis fabrica, Parif. 1560

**Vesalius in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1701 – Const. Huygens jr**  
**Secretary of the Stadholder**  
**The Hague**

438 Vesalii de Humani Corporis fabrica libri septem, Basilee 1543. cum fig. elegant.  
459 Andr. Vesalius de Humani Corporis fabrica Bas. 1555

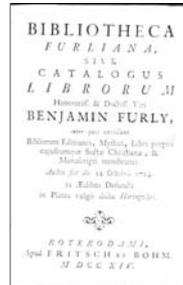
**Vesalius in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1713 – Jansonius ab Almeloveen  
Antiquarian & polyhistor  
Amsterdam**

169 Vesalii (Andrea) de humani Corporis  
Fabrica libri septem. Basilea 1555.

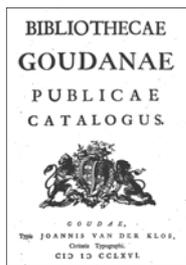
**Vesalius in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1714 – Benjamin Furly  
Merchant  
Rotterdam**

168 Andrea Vesalii Anatomia, in qua tota Humani Corporis Fabrica, Iconibus elegantissimis, juxta generatim Authoris Delimitationem Aeri incisus. Lectori ob Oculos ponitur. Amst. 1617.

**Vesalius in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1766 – Public library  
Gouda**

VESALIUS (Andr.) de Humani Corporis Fabrica. Basil. apud Jo. Oporinum 1555.

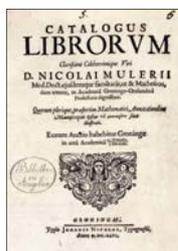
**Copernicus in the Early Dutch Republic**



**< 1632 – Phil. Lansbergen  
clergyman & astronomer  
Middelburg**

Figure 5. F. 81v of Toronto, with annotations possibly from Philips Lansbergen. Reproduced by courtesy of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

**Copernicus in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1646 – Mulerius  
Professor of philosophy  
Groningen**

245. Nic. Copernicus de Revolutionibus orbium coelestium, Basilea, 1566.

**Copernicus in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1649 – Thysius  
Book collector  
Leiden  
'bought on auction  
in The Hague'**

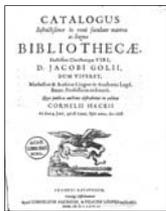


Albert van Helden studying annotations in Thysius' 1566-Copernicus-edition



**Ed. Basel 1566**

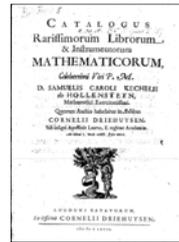
**Copernicus in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1668 – Jacob Golius**  
*Professor of Greek & Mathematics*  
**Leiden**

124 N. Copernicus de revolutionibus orbium caelestium. Norib. 1543. cum anno-  
 tat. M. S. J. Golii aliorumque.

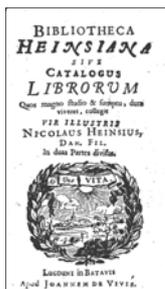
**Copernicus in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1669 – Samuel Kechel**  
*Mathematician & astronomer*  
**Leiden**

62 Copernicus (Nicol.) de Revolut. orbium caelestium basili.  
 63 --- Idem Noribergae 1643

**Copernicus in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1682 – Nic. Heinsius**  
*Poet & book collector*  
**The Hague**

Copernicus de re-  
 volutionibus orbium caelestium, Norimb. 1543

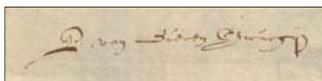
**Copernicus in the Early Dutch Republic**



**1688 – Jacob Oiselius**  
*Professor of Law*  
**Groningen**

78 Nicol. Copernicus de revolutionibus orbium coe-  
 lestium, Basili. 1566.

**Vesalius De Humani Corporis Fabrica**  
**Dutch edition: Antwerp 1568**



Owners mark from  
**"P. van Bueren, Chirurgijn"**



Anatomie, oft levende beelden vande deelen des menschelicken lichaems (Antwerpen:  
 Plantijn, 1568). UB Leiden.

**1974: My first encounter**  
**with the antiquarian book trade**



**Max Israel (2001) – Amsterdam**

### 1979: My further encounters with the antiquarian book trade



**Frans van den Berg**  
(1919-1991)  
Middelburg

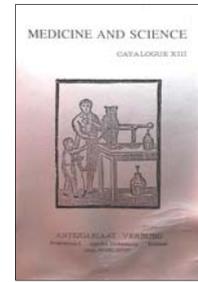


6 Tekening van de eerste velling bij Merlijn op 27 september 1980 door Huib Zuidervaartr sr. (Collectie Leontien van den Berg, Apeldoorn).

### > 1981: My further encounters with the antiquarian book trade



**Adri Verburg**  
Middelburg



### Vesalius in the Old Book Trade

Vesalius, Andreas

**De humani corporis fabrica**

Basel: J. Oporinus, 1555. Abraham Jacob's Copy of the 1555 Fabrica Vesalius, Andreas (1514-64). De humani corporis fabrica libri septem. Folio. [12], [2], [24], [48]pp. Five-page manuscript index in the hand of Bavarian obstetrician Johann Faller (1785-1822), a former owner of this copy, bound in the back. Woodcut title, portrait, 2 woodcut folding plates, text woodcuts. Basel: Oporinus, 1555. 407 x 250 mm. 18th century calf, reinforced preserving original gilt spine and leather label, edges and corners repaired. Light toning, title a bit soiled and with small marginal lacuna, tears in first folding plate repaired at an early date, but a fine, clean copy with large margins. Long Latin inscription dated October 6, 1816 and signed "Jacob" on the front flyleaf, noting that this copy was a gift from Faller to "H. v. C. de Plesseville" i.e. Franco-Saxon Count Pleissel (c. early 19th cent.), author of a treatise on hysterectomy (De hysterotomia, 1820). Faint stamp on title and another leaf of...

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### Vesalius in the Old Book Trade

VESALIUS, Andreas

**De Humanis Corporis Fabrica Libri Septem [Andreas Vesalii Bruxellensis, invictissimi Caroli V. Imperatoris Medici, de Humanis Corporis Fabrica Libri Septem (full title)]**

Johannes Oporinus, Basileae [Basel] 1555 - (1555 (second folio edition)/ 1543. Folio, with the engraved title page, woodcut portrait of the author, around 200 woodcut text illustrations, the full complement of plates (23 full-page and 2 folding), but lacking the 23 index leaves and colophon; the highly influential, elegant and scientific anatomical illustrations and the portrait of Vesalius are printed from the blocks of the 1543 first edition. Contemporary full vellum over oak boards with five raised bands, sides parallel and elaborately tooled in blind with filigree and important historical figures; vellum discoloured and occasionally marked, creases missing, with the leading edges a little worn, exposing the boards; minor loss to the head and foot of the spine, with the joints just starting to split; endpapers no longer present; the title leaf has a blank 45 mm strip at the foot restored, and the blank leading margin heavily thumbled, slightly chipped and wormed, with a small...

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### Thanks for your attention

