

Of all the positions of honour or service that might lose the holder his head in the court of King Henry VIII, one imagines that 'biblioscopus' to the king was a safer billet than most. The precise meaning of the title is open to interpretation, but 'a looker at books' ought to have been able to keep himself at a safe distance from the king's strong right arm. The title was applied to the naturalized Dutch scholar Wouter Deleen (c. 1500–1563), and perhaps he applied it to himself for he is the only known bearer of the title. An interesting volume in New College Library, the manuscript portion of which was written by Deleen in his own hand, goes some way towards identifying what he himself perceived the king's to be.

Wouter Deleen was born at Balen, near Antwerp.<sup>1</sup> He studied at Louvain, and became the first teacher of Hebrew in the northern Netherlands, first at Haarlem (1523–7) and then in Amsterdam (1533–5). A convert to Reformation opinions, his lectures in Amsterdam and his involvement in an Anabaptist coup brought him under the suspicion of the authorities. He left for Haarlem and then, in 1537, for England, where his scholarly distinction quickly brought him into royal service. He found himself to be in step with the prevailing mood, and was enthusiastic about government policies such as the royal supremacy as set forth in the Act of Supremacy of 1534. He kept the letters of denization in 1539 and in that year received a handsome quarterly salary from the royal purse of £5 6 8. Doubtless he was being retained for

New College volume, MS 136. It happens to be the only manuscript written by Deleen to have escaped from the Royal Library.<sup>5</sup>

The book is a composite





MS 136, New College Library, Oxford

The book is undoubtedly one of the curiosities of the College Library. It is not yet known quite how or when it arrived. Certainly, it was at the College before 1697, when it