

## Introduction

# The development of the book market and book collecting in the sixteenth century

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This collection of essays on the distribution and acquisition of printed books in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is based on the contributions given at the conference *Selling & Collecting: Printed Book Sale Catalogues and Private Libraries in Early Modern Europe* held at the University of Cagliari in September 2017. In particular, the purpose of the conference was to focus on publishers' and booksellers' catalogues as evidence of the advertising and selling techniques used by agents in the book trade. A related theme was private libraries, associated with the growing phenomenon of book collecting, which ensured not only the consumption and accumulation, but also often the preservation, of the works being circulated by the book trade.

In recent years increasing attention to private libraries, associated with the growing phenomenon of book collecting, has brought about a renewal of the study of the history of the book in the early modern period. Research has been characterised by the following two themes: the commercial book trade, its economic goals and operational mechanisms, and, on the other hand, the creation of great private collections driven by encyclopedic and sometimes political ambitions. These two fields, however, have only occasionally been examined within a single context.

In fact, they are more interconnected than is generally recognized. Book collectors are often remarkable people, and in the early modern period their role was certainly pioneering. They were the first to acquire, store and find ways to retrieve great quantities of books, larger than ever before. In Italy and elsewhere, within a few decades, collections of several hundred books no longer were an exception, and these were in turn eclipsed, by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, by individual collections containing ten to thirteen thousand volumes. Book collecting had reached a new level, reflecting a book trade which had become ever more sophisticated. More than ever, books traveled through well-organized networks, reaching a wide variety of purchasers, with different interests and different spending capacities.

Market penetration and expansion were essential needs for publishers. While manuscripts were produced in comparatively limited numbers in few copies and were generally commissioned, producers of printed materials had to cope with the sale of large quantities of copies and find even more customers to have a sufficient return on investment. In addition, it was essential to reduce the duration of the economic cycle to a minimum in order to recuperate the money invested as quickly as possible so as to survive economically and be able to reinvest earnings in new projects.

Private libraries represented a substantial share of the market for the book trade. Not surprisingly, they also bear witness to their owners' great interest in the marketing tools perfected by trade agents in the early modern period. Among those tools some of the most important were booksellers' and publishers' printed catalogues, which were distributed through wholesale and retail networks, advertising the works currently on offer. Customers could mark them up to place orders, but they also quickly became instruments of reference. Book collectors started to use them as sources, wish lists, and even as collectable items in themselves. This is why a large number of these vulnerable items are to be found in private collections, many of which are today preserved within institutional libraries.

In the following pages two Italian private libraries are analysed and discussed as the preservation of a collection. Both contain precious and sometimes unique copies of printed booksellers' and publishers' catalogues. These are the library that Prospero Podiani (1535 ca.–1615) established in Perugia and left to the city with the intention of opening it as a public library in 1582 (studied by Maria Alessandra Panzanelli Fratonì) and the library put together by the Sardinian jurist Monserrat Rossellò (1568 ca.–1613), today held at the Library of the University of Cagliari (studied by Giovanna Granata). Thanks to the Rossellò collection, at least two otherwise totally unknown printed catalogues have survived until today, in particular the only such catalogue known from sixteenth-century Spain, from the bookseller Simone Vassalini (studied by Pedro Rueda). In fact, one of the reasons for choosing Cagliari for our gathering was to draw book historians' and bibliographers' attention to the cultural richness of the city which, precisely because it was peripheral, preserves cultural memories and evidence of underused collections which are in certain ways unique today in Europe. A census focused on the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century editions found in Sardinian collections (CLASAR: Censimento dei Libri Antichi in SARdegna), under the supervision of Giovanna Granata, is now devoted to discovering and making them much better known to scholars. Actually, these findings do not come as a complete surprise for book historians, since they are familiar with surveying a wide range of cultural and material transfers within the framework of transnational exchanges, a process which characterized the distribution of printed books.

Archival research in Italy is always rewarding and it is especially true with regard to this aspect, as Graziano Ruffini has demonstrated by studying the documentation on the bulk sale of books held in 1583 Genoa. Documents of this kind show that the ability to negotiate and evaluate book stocks was a crucial skill in the booksellers' trade.

Printed sales catalogues, studied by Christian Coppens and Angela Nuovo, are essential sources for a general investigation of sixteenth-century book prices. An extensive survey on their characteristics, purposes and use (Coppens), cannot be separated from the information they give about book prices established directly by the producers (Nuovo).

Among the many features of the history of the book trade which have been explored over the last few decades, one aspect has to a great extent been neglected, in spite of the amount of surviving documentation relating to it: the economic side of the commercial transactions and, in particular, the problem of the prices of the books. Relevant sources on this topic have now begun to be exploited in a more sophisticated way, opening up new perspectives.

The evolution of book prices over the early modern period is a subject that could only recently started to be investigated systematically thanks to the EMOBookTrade project, directed by Angela Nuovo and funded by the European Research Council. In order to focus on this subject, the EMOBookTrade research group is taking into account primarily commercial sources containing extensive sets of prices, established by book producers, booksellers and trade professionals in general, such as printed catalogues.

In the following pages, members of the EMOBookTrade team offer some preliminary results of their research on specific problems and sources. The question of book prices is connected with and contextualized within the overall monetary issues of Renaissance Europe by Francesco Ammannati. Specific printed catalogues, their data and the observations that can be drawn from them are treated by Goran Proot in the case of Robert Estienne's catalogues, by Giliola Barbero with an examination of Giolito's sale lists, and by Flavia Bruni for Francesco de Franceschi's books for sale at the Giunti shop in Venice.

These essays offer an exploration of a wide variety of problems posed by these fairly elusive contemporary sources, which hold a hitherto untapped wealth of valuable information which will help us to understand better the ins and outs of the early modern book trade. It is hoped that this collection of studies will inspire new generations of book historians and provide an impetus for the development of improved methods and techniques which will enable these sources to speak to us.