

Angela Nuovo
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The price of books in
early modern Venice
(1586 – 1600)
A statistical analysis

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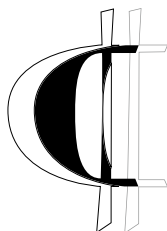
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COMPETITION IN THE EUROPEAN BOOK MARKET

Prices and privileges (fifteenth–seventeenth centuries)

Edited by
ANGELA NUOVO · JORAN PROOT · DIANE E. BOOTON



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List of abbreviations

- BT E. Cockx-Indestege, G. Glorieux & B. Op de Beeck, *Belgica typographica, 1541–1600*, Nieuwkoop 1968–1994 (4 vols)
- EDIT16 Edizioni italiane del XVI secolo, edit16.iccu.sbn.it/web/edit-16
- EEBO Early English Books Online
- GC Leon Voet, *The Golden Compasses. A history and evaluation of the printing and publishing activities of the Officina Plantiniana at Antwerp*, Amsterdam 1969–1972 (2 vols)
- GW Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke, www.gesamtkatalogderwiegendrucke.de
- GLN15–16 Bibliographie de la production imprimée des XV^e et XVI^e siècles des villes de Genève, Lausanne et Neuchâtel, www.ville-ge.ch/musinfo/bd/bge/gln
- ISTC Incunabula Short Title Catalogue, data.cerl.org/istc
- MPM Museum Plantin-Moretus, Antwerp
- PP Leon Voet & Jenny Voet-Grisolle (coll.), *The Plantin Press (1555–1589). A bibliography of the works printed and published by Christopher Plantin at Antwerp and Leiden*, Amsterdam 1980–1983 (6 vols)
- SBN Catalogo collettivo delle biblioteche del Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale, opac.sbn.it/web/opacsbn
- STCN Short Title Catalogue Netherlands, www.stcn.nl
- STCV Short Title Catalogus Vlaanderen [Short Title Catalogue Flanders], www.stcv.be
- USTC Universal Short Title Catalogue, www.ustc.ac.uk

The price of books in early modern Venice (1586–1600)

A statistical analysis



This chapter analyses a dataset of book prices drawn from a consistent group of Venetian sources.¹ In the last fifteen years of the sixteenth century, about fifty publishers' catalogues were published in Italy, thirty-five of which, issued in Venice, included prices. All but two catalogues set prices in the same currency, Venetian lire,² within a limited period of time, fifteen years, and circulated in the same form, printed materials. All of them pertain to first-hand, unbound books, still in the publishers' warehouses. Drawing from these Venetian catalogues, a total of 3,469 records were entered in the Early Modern Book Prices database, which can be easily queried online. About 88% of these prices were definitively identified with extant editions, thanks to both the precision of the sources and the excellent bibliographical coverage of sixteenth-century Italian editions, thus conferring very high reliability to our dataset.

In the Early Modern Book Prices database, all prices are expressed in *denari*,³ the minimum submultiple of Venetian *lira*, which we chose as general currency. This means that other currencies of non-Venetian sources were registered not only as such, but also converted into Venetian lire and grams of silver, a recalculation made on the best criteria

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* Although the two authors have discussed the whole paper, Angela Nuovo wrote the text of the chapter, and Francesca De Battisti is responsible for the statistical analysis and graphs.

1 These catalogues were unearthed by Christian Coppens; see his article 'I cataloghi degli editori e dei librai in Italia (secoli xv–xvi)' in *Bibliologia*, 3 (2008), 107–124. The authors would also like to thank Professor Coppens for his generosity in sharing information about this topic from his study, *Advertising*

the early printed book: a census of publishers' and booksellers' advertisements and catalogues till 1600, London (in preparation).

2 In fact, as we will see, the Giunti catalogues used a different Venetian currency, *grossi* and *ducats*, converted into Venetian lire in the database.

3 The *lira di piccoli* was divided into 20 *soldi*, and each *soldo* into 12 *denari*, so that 1 *lira* was worth 240 *denari*. See also the chapter by Francesco Ammannati in this volume.

possible but that must still be considered as indicative.⁴ In the case of the dataset discussed in this chapter, however, no conversion was needed.

Publishers' printed catalogues

This concentration of printed catalogues after decades of almost no extant example in Venice can be related to two main factors:⁵ first, a general factor connected to the shrinking printed production in Venice in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, caused by the growing success of foreign competitors in book markets; and a second factor more closely associated with the publishers of these catalogues that indicated the difficult generational shift in family business for some of the most important firms, which were soon to leave book production, like the Manuzio, Scoto, Giolito.

As for the Venetian book-trade crisis in this period, it can be approximately calculated from the data available in EDIT16. Almost 28,000 extant Venetian editions are known to have been published in the sixteenth century. Even without the possibility of including all lost editions in this calculation, and notwithstanding difficult years, the development of the book industry seems to have been continuous and progressive all through the century. Then, a major epidemic struck almost all of the major cities in the Republic of Venice and in Lombardy in 1575–1576, but the demographic recovery was rather swift, and the elite could return to their roles as soon as the epidemic had subsided, without bringing dramatic losses to those manufacturing sectors that worked especially for their needs, like the book industry. Therefore, professional skills crucial for the industry were not lost and the production soon resumed. Up to 1585, a remarkable growth was in place again, but soon after, in the early 1590s, another crisis (famine this time) hit the Republic. Production touched another low, and this happened in the period just when most of our printed catalogues were published. Another demographic crisis, certainly in combination with other events that affected Venetian publishers' activity, caused a decrease in sales.⁶ Resorting to the tool of printed catalogues was therefore an attempt to mitigate all these negative factors.

In the Early Modern Book Prices database, all 35 printed catalogues with prices known today are included: 24 by Aldo Manuzio the Younger, 4 by Giolito, 2 by the Giunti, 2 by Scoto, 1 by Damiano Zenaro and 1 by Niccolò Misserini.⁷ The fact that printed catalogues were an efficient tool to increase sales is proven by this concurrent surge of catalogues, an example of the usual competitive 'imitation game' of the publishing industry in the overcrowded area of Venice.⁸

Following almost a century of activity in some cases, these catalogues listed what was still available, both as books which did not attract sufficient buyers and as books conceived since the beginning as long-sellers, printed with a horizon of sales of a few decades, like the multi-volume editions of the *Auctores*. Backlists did not simply mean unsaleable (or too slow-selling) stock; they represent a much more nuanced commercial proposal. These catalogues, therefore, are representative of the production and the pricing policy of almost all the big players in the Venetian market, allowing us to get a grasp of the market and its trends.

Scholars of printed catalogues have discussed the nature of the prices included, stating that the catalogues first of all targeted trade colleagues and wholesale booksellers.⁹ Printed book prices were thus book-trade prices. In Italy, booksellers, when they were required to demonstrate expertise in books evaluations, for instance, in the case of trials, used to refer to these prices as prices set in Venice and in Venetian lire, transport costs excluded, as opposed to prices for students, i.e., retail prices, students being the public *par excellence* for retailers, especially in university cities like Bologna and Padua.¹⁰ These prices would have been reduced once books were sold. For instance, when books were sold by a bookseller on behalf of a wholesaler/producer, the discount was registered in ledgers as *tarra*.¹¹ Based on the surviving documentation about bookshop management, it seems that this discount could vary greatly, between 10% and 25% of book-trade prices.¹² Book-trade prices are at the basis of the whole commercial chain and constitute the common ground for the business in Europe, as the practice of Christophe Plantin (c. 1520–1589) confirms.¹³

- 4 The conversion is discussed in Francesco Ammannati, 'Book prices and monetary issues in Renaissance Europe' in Giovanna Granata & Angela Nuovo (eds), *Selling and collecting: printed book sale catalogues and private libraries in early modern Europe*, Macerata 2018, 161–176. As of today, the database includes the following currencies: Carolus Guilders, Ducati napoletani, Livres tournois, Lira ferrarese, Frankfurt Gulden, Lira milanese di imperiali. For a description of the database, see Giliola Barbero et al., 'The database of the EMO-BookTrade project. A proposal to encode early modern book prices and privileges' in *JLIS.it*, 11:2 (May 2020), 108–132.
- 5 Numerous booksellers' catalogues were printed in Italy in the fifteenth century, but only the Manuzio family went on afterwards with this form of advertisement in the sixteenth century.
- 6 The real extent of the Venetian book-trade crisis is still a matter under investigation. The traditional connection established by previous scholarship between this phenomenon and the enforcement of the Indexes of Prohibited Books seems to undervalue the events with major economic and demographic impact that are mentioned in the text (Angela Nuovo, *The book trade in the Italian Renaissance*, Boston/Leiden 2013, 47–51).
- 7 See Appendix. *List of catalogues with prices, printed in Venice from 1586 to 1600*, at the end of this chapter.
- 8 It is likely that other printed catalogues were circulating at the time, but only manuscript copies remain. One possible example is De Franceschi's list in the catalogue of Bernardino Giunti, for which see Flavia Bruni, 'Peace at the Lily. The De Franceschi section in the catalogue of Bernardino Giunti' in Granata & Nuovo (eds), *Selling and collecting*, 265–281. In addition, many publishers prepared a list of books for sale in manuscript form on request of special clients. An example is the list of books probably put together by members of the Giunti family in 1568 for Pope Pius v, who was planning a new library in north Italy, near Alessandria. This list is also included in the Early Modern Book Prices database.
- 9 Arthur der Weduwen, Andrew Pettegree & Graeme Kemp, 'Book trade catalogues: from bookselling tool to book historical source' in Arthur der Weduwen, Andrew Pettegree & Graeme Kemp (eds), *Book trade catalogues in early modern Europe*, Leiden/Boston 2021, 3–32.
- 10 According to a bookseller's statement in a 1522 trial in Bologna, see Rita De Tata, *Il commercio librario a Bologna tra xv e xvi secolo*, Milano 2021, 130.
- 11 The old Italian word *tarra*, meaning discount, is an equivalent of the modern Italian *tara*, that is, tare. *Tarra* is the same as *terra* (soil), the two terms being used as synonyms: for instance, a vegetable sold by weight that was not clean and with a lot of soil had to be discounted to compensate for the extra weight: hence the *tarra*, as explained, among others, by Niccolò Tartaglia in his *La prima parte del general trattato di numeri, et misvre*, Venegia: Curtio Troiano de i Nauò, 1556, Lib. iv, Cap. vii, fol. 66 verso (CNCe 31550).
- 12 See, for instance, the ledger in which the bookseller Lodovico Avanzi recorded prices of books sold for Aldo Manuzio the Younger in his Venetian bookshop (Roma, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, manuscript Vat.lat.7129, fols 53 recto–79; a final report of the number of books sold and the discounts applied at fols 71 verso–73 recto.) On this manuscript, see Giliola Barbero, 'Il ms. Vat. Lat. 7129 di Aldo Manuzio il Giovane: studio paleografico e codicologico al servizio della storia del libro' in *La Bibliofilia*, 121:3 (2019), 429–449.
- 13 'The "book-trade price" is the base price serving as the departure point for all negotiations with his book-trade colleagues in Antwerp as well as at the Frankfurt Fairs, and more rarely with certain clients receiving reductions (because Plantin was above all a wholesale merchant)'; see Renaud Milazzo, 'The economic stakes in the choice of bibliographic format and paper in the publishing policy of Christophe Plantin (1555–1589)' in Goran Proot, Yann Sordet & Christophe Vellet (eds), *A century of typographical excellence. Christophe Plantin & the Officina Plantiniana (1555–1655)*, Paris/Dilbeek 2020, 142–191 (146–150).

These catalogues give a snapshot of the change in the activity of those who were often the last members of the great Renaissance publishing dynasties. They prove that these businessmen were at that moment less interested in continuing their publishing initiatives, and more and more eager to liquidate as quickly as possible their assets in books accumulated over decades of activity. Whereas the first goal of this impressive series of catalogues was certainly to sell books to as large a public as possible, they remain consistent with their respective usual clientele: catalogues were printed in Latin or Italian according to the targeted market zones and publics.

Logically, the reason why a producer would print prices in his catalogues consisted in an effort to control discounts applied by retailers and to set sustained prices as points of departure of the actual sales. However, not only profitable and expensive books are listed for sale; printed materials costing 2 soldi and even 1 soldo are also included, indicating that the operation of stock inventory was conducted by booksellers in a very comprehensive way in order to clear every single bit of the printed stock.

The availability of a relevant dataset of almost 3,500 book prices related to a specific period of the trade in Venice allows us to outline a structure and conception of prices and the process of setting them.¹⁴ Pricing a printed book was first of all based on cost calculation and on adding a markup that could give place to a profit margin capable of paying costs while also earning a target profit. This is the simplest approach, the cost-plus pricing, and it was likely applied by the very first printers in Italy, such as Konrad Sweynheim and Arnold Pannartz (fl. 1465–1473) in Rome.¹⁵ In the first decades, profit margins could be remarkably high. Certainly, it is impossible to deduce from prices the real costs of printing in the early modern period. Information about costs of production is too scattered across early modern Europe: as it is well known, only documents for Plantin are sufficient to calculate his costs of production (both fixed and variable).

The Early Modern Book Prices database was built using a data structure that mirrors the main factors which could lead a publisher to set a certain book price. In this database, material aspects of books, which are associated with higher costs, can be immediately detected. They include labour costs connected with more time-consuming activities, like printing in non-Latin types (Greek and Hebrew), printing in two colours, or in formats smaller than the octavo (8vo). Expensive additions, like copper engravings, stand out invariably as connected to higher prices, and to prices that remained stable over the course of many years. Much rarer is the possibility of knowing whether books were printed on special paper (high-quality paper, large paper, blue paper), unless the source itself stated this.

Therefore, it can be said that the Early Modern Book Prices database helps to detect variable costs. By means of a detailed study of Plantin's documents, it has been shown which variable costs influenced publishers' decisions. Generally, only direct costs of paper and labour were mentioned in printing contracts, while the structure of costs included, in reality, fixed costs as well, like factory overhead (fuel, candles, food for workers) and shipping charges, which became more and more relevant with the development of commercial networks, which were key to a successful business. Although unmentioned, these costs were well known to publishers. In fact, firms with higher fixed costs with many presses in operation and a rich typo-

graphical assortment already cast, like Plantin or Giunti, had an incentive to continue printing even when demand was weaker, with the goal of staying in the market with continuous production. Conversely, smaller firms with reduced fixed costs had an incentive to decrease or stop production in such circumstances.¹⁶

Whereas 'cost-plus' pricing was the starting point of the process for setting the price of a book, that process originated from the publisher's knowledge of costs and only reflected his viewpoint. In fact, the sum that customers were willing to pay for a product had less to do with its production costs and more to do with how much they valued the product that they were buying. Books were a special merchandise whose content could, on the one hand, cause the greatest impact and, on the other, depreciate or even suddenly be prohibited. While successful publishers were aware of what could attract buyers, they were frequently running risks when adding innovation. They were constantly looking for information about the public demand in different markets, adjusting their production accordingly and finding a way to determine a value-based price, that is, a price based not on cost but on value, or, how much the customer believed the book for sale was worth. This was the best strategy, provided that a publisher could make sure that the value to the customer was higher than his costs. In value-based pricing, the perceived value to customers is primarily based on how well the book is suited to their needs and desires. Therefore, setting a value-based price meant adapting the book to appeal to particular readers.

The most common solution in selling books at a value-based price targeted specific customers, having discovered new or at least not-too-crowded market zones; in addition to this strategy, investment in the trademark was crucial, as brands were the strongest tool available to publishers in establishing a link with their clientele and in conferring a plus to their production.¹⁷ Transforming a customer base into a community of readers was also crucial, for instance, by addressing dedications, prefaces and paratextual material in general with the goal of advertising the quality of the edition. Although relevant cultural motivations lie in the invention of publishers' marks or in the widespread use of epistles to readers as Aldus Manutius the Elder started so successfully to do,¹⁸ these strategies developed

14 Joran Proot has offered multiple examples of this sort of analysis, applied to sources from different European zones (Paris and Antwerp); see Goran Proot, 'Shifting price levels of books produced at the *Officina Plantiniana* in Antwerp, 1580–1655' in Massimo Rospocher, Jeroen Salman & Hannu Salmi (eds), *Crossing borders, crossing cultures: popular print in Europe (1450–1900)*, Berlin 2019, 89–108; Goran Proot, 'The pricing policy of the *Officina Plantiniana*, 1580–1655' in Dirk Imhof et al. (eds), *Balthasar Moretus and the passion of publishing*, Kontich 2018, 32–44; Goran Proot, 'Prices in Robert Estienne's booksellers' catalogues (Paris 1541–1552): a statistical analysis' in Granata & Nuovo (eds), *Selling and collecting*, 177–209. See also the work of Renaud Milazzo quoted in note 13.

15 Martin Davies, 'Two book-lists of Sweynheym and Pannartz' in *Libri tipografi biblioteche: ricerche storiche dedicate a Luigi Balsamo*, Firenze 1997, 1,

25–53. For an in-depth analysis of economic aspects of the book market in Florence and Bologna in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Giovanni Bonifati, *Dal libro manoscritto al libro stampato: sistemi di mercato a Bologna e a Firenze agli albori del capitalismo*, Torino 2008.

16 Mark McConnell, 'Publishing risk and cost incentives in early modern printing: an examination of Christopher Plantin's operations' in Nina Lamal & J. Christopher Warner (eds), *Christophe Plantin 1520–2020. Studies of the Officina Plantiniana at the quincentennial of Plantin's birth*, Antwerp 2021, 129–182 (special issue of *The Golden Compasses = De Gulden Passer*, 98:2 [2020]).

17 Nuovo, *The book trade*, ch. 5 ('Marks and branches').

18 Tiziana Plebani (ed.), *Aldo al lettore. Viaggio intorno al mondo del libro e della stampa in occasione del v centenario della morte di Aldo Manuzio*, Milano 2016.

massively exactly because they were effective in book marketing. Differentiating editions was one of the commonest and less risky strategies used by competitors to exploit a text in high demand while proposing it again with different features. Even a modest textual addition (a commentary, an unpublished group of letters or sonnets as an appendix at the end of the main text, for instance), if advertised and even boasted about on the title page, could supersede previous editions of the same text and permit the newly published one to sell at a higher price. A set of woodcuts, surely not expensive in Venice, greatly allured readers at both ends of the market (elite and popular) and allowed an old text to enjoy a renewed life. This sort of investment was done all the more when a series of editions of the same text with the same set of illustrations was planned (as seen in cases of Italian literature works, like those of Dante, Boccaccio, Ariosto, ...) or when there was a special financial support for their production from outside the firm. Changing the physical aspect of a book by reducing its format was from early on the commonest way to differentiate books, provided the publishers were able to sell it as a positive innovation and not simply a way to cut costs.

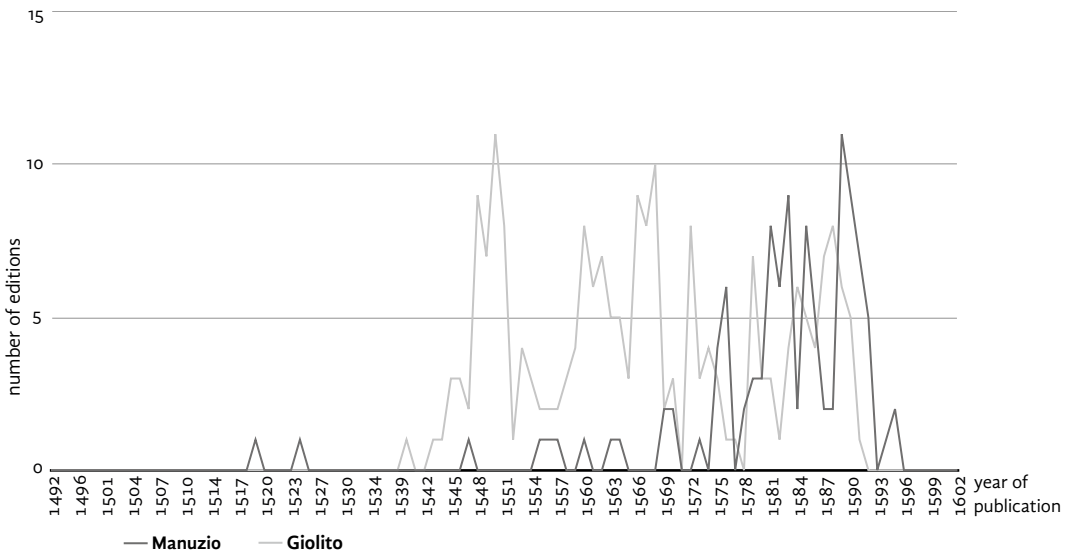
The corpus

As already observed, the corpus includes 24 catalogues printed by Aldo Manuzio the Younger, 4 by the Giolito family, 2 by the Giunti, 2 by the Scoto, 1 each by Damiano Zenaro and Niccolò Misserini. The first three publishers in our dataset are particularly relevant because the Manuzio, Giolito and Giunti families had long been the three most important business dynasties in Italy. Together, they represented more than 20 percent of all Italian book production, and they determined and gave form to three different genres, namely, the humanistic book, the vernacular book, and the Latin book for professionals: liturgical, law, medicine and, in general, academic editions. In addition, the Scoto and Zenaro catalogues are highly representative of Venetian book production in different sectors.

- 19 Copies of the 1503 and 1513 catalogues with manuscript annotations of prices survive, see Neil Harris, 'Aldo Manuzio, il libro e la moneta' in Plebani (ed.), *Aldo al lettore*, 79–110; Neil Harris, 'Aldus and the making of the myth (or what did Aldus really do?)' in Mario Infelise (ed.), *Aldo Manuzio: la costruzione del mito = Aldus Manutius: the making of the myth*, Venice 2016, 346–385.
- 20 The Venetian publisher Marco Ginammi (1590–1654) revived the use of publishing a list of available books at the end of his volumes, starting in 1622, but he avoided adding prices.
- 21 Manassi was the manager of the printing shop from 1577; when Aldo left Venice in 1583, he became responsible for the whole firm. For their relationship, see Emilio Russo, 'Un contratto nel registro di bottega di Aldo Manuzio il Giovane' in *Accademie e biblioteche d'Italia*, 69 (1999), 5–20, and
 - 22 A comparison of three of Aldo the Younger's catalogues appears in Rudolf Hirsch, 'The art of selling books: notes on three Aldus catalogues, 1586–1592' in *Papers of the Bibliographical Society, University of Virginia*, 1 (1948–1949), 83–101.
 - 23 Only one of them, published in 1592, was a broadsheet, an independent publication.
- Idem, 'Manuzio, Aldo, il Giovane' in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 69 (2007), 245–250. (<https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ricerca/Manuzio,-Aldo,-il-Giovane/>; all online sources last consulted 6 November 2022). For the demise of the family, see Angela Nuovo, 'The end of the Manutius dynasty, 1597' in Jill Kraye & Paolo Sacht (eds), *The afterlife of Aldus: posthumous fame, collectors and the book trade*, London 2018, 45–78.

Manuzio

The case of the Manuzio catalogues is the most unusual in Venice. The founder of the family, Aldus Manutius the Elder (c. 1450–1515), acquired unprecedented prestige throughout Europe for his outstanding Greek productions and for a series of successful innovations in the area of format, book illustration, and typefaces. He started publishing catalogues of his production in 1498 with a broadsheet that contained detailed descriptions of each book's content and its price. Two other catalogues followed in his lifetime (1503 and 1513), both without printed prices.¹⁹ After 1515, a few catalogues were sporadically published by his heirs, but prices were never included. Whereas humanistic books remained the stronghold of the firm, Greek production was soon abandoned altogether. When the firm was in the hands of the nephew, Aldo Manuzio the Younger (1547–1597), the publication of book lists for sale suddenly reappeared in a most systematic way, according to a formula which seems to have been completely new at the time and not followed by any other Venetian publisher until the following century.²⁰ Aldo, or rather Niccolò Manassi, who was the Venetian manager of his firm with a peculiar flair for commerce,²¹ printed the list of available books as part of regular publications, prices included, with the title, *Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si ritrovano al presente or nella libreria di Venetia* [Fig. 1].²² In this way, we have today a corpus of 24 catalogues printed before the end of the sixteenth century, which means a total of 1,683 prices processed in our database.²³ Naturally, these prices refer many times to the same editions, still available over time, mostly keeping the same quote. The distribution of the editions advertised by Manuzio in chronological order is shown in Graph 1.



Graph 1 Distribution of the editions advertised in the catalogues of Manuzio and Giolito

rate ; De his , quæ Daemones per se operantur in nobis , & de his , quæ hominum auxilio peragunt . 8. 1589.	L	£	19
IACOBI PONTANI de societate Iesu progymnas. ad usum scholarum humaniorum , cum annotationibus de rebus literarijs . 8. 1590.	L	1 f.	4
P. IOANNIS NVNNESII Valentini . Epitheta ex M. T. Cic. collecta . 8. 1570.	L	2 f.	
LEONARDI VAIRI Beneuentani . De Fascino libri III . In quibus omnes fascini species , & causæ describuntur , nec non contra praestigias , imposturas , illusionesque Daemonum . 8. 1589.	L	1 f.	4
LVCÆ PAETI . de mensuris , & ponderibus Romanis , & Graecis . fol. 1573.	L	1 f.	10
B. LORENZO GIUSTINIANO primo Patriarca di Venetia . Del dispregio del mondo , & suo vanità . In che ci mostra , quante & quali siano le insidie del nostro perpetuo nimico . 4. 1579.	L.	1 f.	15
* LVIGI REGIO Francese . Vicissitudine , o mutabile varietà delle cose nell' uniuerso , tradotta dal Cavalier Hercole Caro . 4. 1592.	L	3 f.	
* M. T. CICERO . Manutiorum commentarijs illustratus , antiquaeq; lectioni restitutus . fol. 1582.	L	62 f.	
Eiusdem . Epistolae , familiares dictæ ; cum Pauli Manutij interpretationibus , & similitudinibus locorum in margine , expressionibus dictionum graecarum , indice rerum , & verborum locupletissimo . 8. 1575.	L	2 f.	10
Eiusdem . De rhetorica cum Pauli Manu. scholijs . 8. 1569.	L	3 f.	
Del detto . Epistole ad Astico fatte volgari da Mateo Senarega . 8.	L	2 f.	10
M. ANTONII MURETI Galli , & ciuis Romani orationes . XXIII . 8. 1576.	L	1 f.	4
MARCI VELSERI Mathaei F. Patrici Augustani inscriptiones antiquæ Augustæ Vindelicorum . 4. 1590.	L	1 f.	
Eiusdem . Fragmenta tabulae antiquæ , in quis aliquot per R. prouincias itinera . 4. 1591.	L	1 f.	
Eiusdem . conuersio , & passio SS. Martyrum Afræ , Hilariae , Dignæ , Eunomiae , Eutropiae , quæ ante annos paullo minus M. C. C. C. Augustæ Vindelicorum passæ sunt , cum ipsius commentario . 4. 1591.	L	1 f.	4
NICODEMI FRISCHLINI quaestionum grammaticarum libri IIX . ex probatissimis auctoribus collecti . 8. 1584.	L	1 f.	10
Eiusdem . Strigilis grammatica , qua grammaticorum quorundam sordes , arti liberalissimæ aspersæ , detergentur . 8. 1584.	L	f.	10
NICOLE VITTO di Gozzi Raguseo . Discorsi della peni-			

tenza

Fig. 1 Catalogue of Aldo Manuzio (from V. Pribojevic, *Della origine et successi de gli Slavi oratione*, 1595, fol. a7 verso–a8 recto) Bibliothèque Mazarine, 4° 13593-5

<i>senza sopra i Sette Salm. Penitentiali di David, con figura. 8. 1589.</i>	L	2 f.
<i>Del detto. Governo della famiglia, nel quale breuemente si tratta la vera Economia, & il modo di accrescere, & conseruare le ricchezze. 8. 1589.</i>	L	f. 10
<i>* Del detto. Stato delle Republiche, secondo la mente di Aristotile, con esempi Moderni Giornate otto, con CCXXII. auuertimenti ciuili, per coloro che gouernano Stati. Et in fine vna Apologia dell'honor ciuile. 4. 1591.</i>	L	4 f.
<i>* OFFICIUM B. Mariae Virginis reformatum, & Pij V. iussu editum, cum XLV. figuris aereis. 12. 1587.</i>	L.	7 f.
<i>ORACOLI POLITICI, cioè sentenze, & documenti nobili, & illustri, raccolti da tutti gli antichi, e principali autori hebrei, greci, e latini; con i fiori de gli apoteogni di Plutarco. 8. 1590.</i>	L	f. 15
<i>PHILIPPI MOCENICI Archiepiscopi Nicosiensis Regni Cypri vniuersales institutiones ad hominum perfectionem, quatenus industria parari potest. fol. 1581.</i>	L	7 f.
<i>* PAVLI MANVTII Aldi F. in M. T. C. Orationes commentarius. fol. 1578.</i>	L	18 f. 12
<i>* Eiusdem in M. T. C. Epistolas, quae Familiares vocantur, commentar. fol. 1582.</i>	L	10 f. 10.
<i>* Eiusdem in M. T. C. Epistolas ad T. Pomponium Atticum, M. Iunium Brutum, & Q. Fratrem commentarius. fol. 1582.</i>	L	9 f. 6
<i>Eiusdem. Epistolarum libri xij. vno nuper addito. 8. 1590.</i>	L	2 f.
<i>* Eiusdem Antiquitatum Romanarum, libri 1v. de Ciuitate, de Senatu, de Comitijs, de legibus. 8. 1595. imprimit.</i>	L	f.
<i>Eiusdem Antiquitatum Romanarum, liber de Senatu. 4. 1581.</i>	L	1 f. 4
<i>PAVLI CLARANTIS Epitome in librum de paschatis chronologia, eiusdem auctoris.</i>	L	f. 8
<i>RICHARDI STREINNIJ Baronis Schuuarzenauj de gentibus, & familijs Romanorum. 8. 1591.</i>	L	f. 15
<i>SAVINO BOBALI Sordo. Rime amorose, e pastorali, & faire. 4. 1589.</i>	L	1 f. 10
<i>TITI LIVII Pataulni. Historiar. ab urbe condita Decades cum Caroli Sigonij scholijs ab ipso postremo auctis, & emendatis. fol. 1591.</i>	L	9 f. 6
<i>* TORQUATO TASSO. Rime, e prose figurate, prima, e seconda parte. 12. 1583.</i>	L	3 f.
<i>Del detto, aggiunta alle rime, & prose, col suo ritratto. 12. 1585.</i>	L	f. 8
<i>Del detto. Aminta fauola boscareccia figurata. 4. 1590.</i>	L	1 f.
<i>La istessa. 12. 1589.</i>	L	f. 6
<i>Del detto. Rinaldo innamorato, con le figure, argomeni, & allegorie a ciascun Canto, con due tauole de i principij di tutti</i>		

Giolito

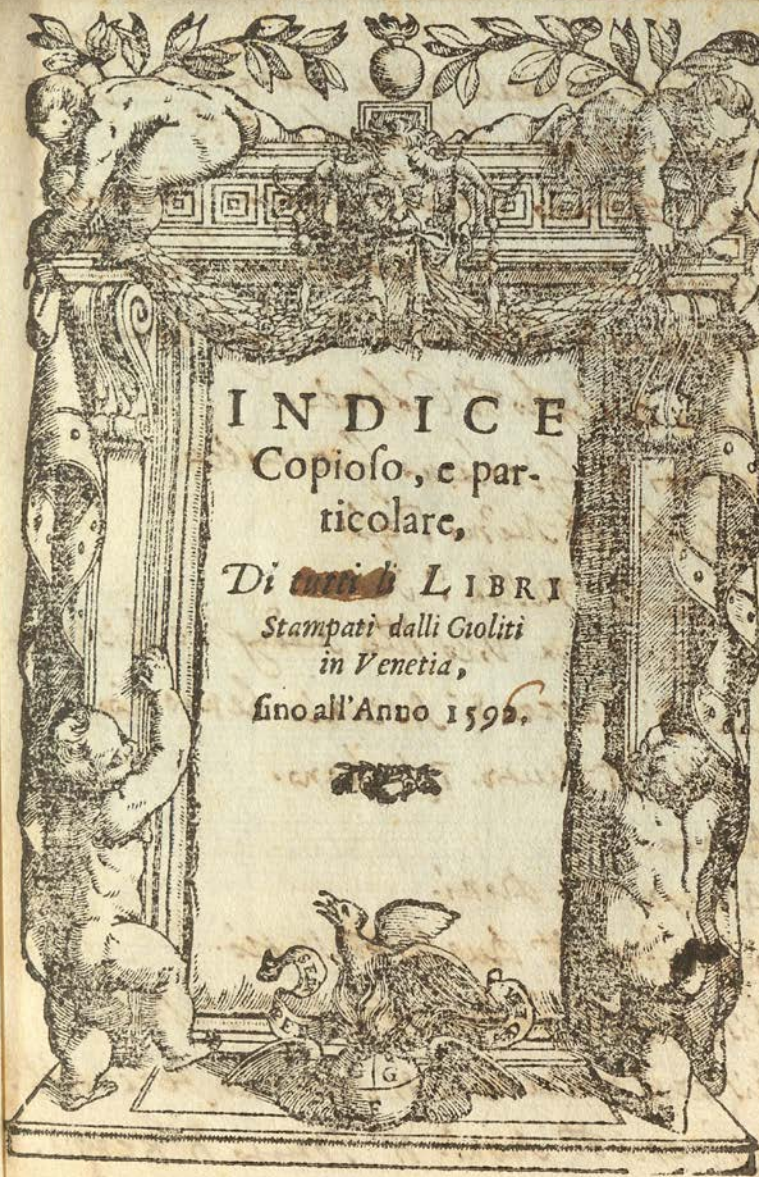
The Giolito family adopted a policy of marketing books by means of printed catalogues in 1587, quite late in the history of this successful business family, and contemporaneously with Aldo Manuzio's catalogues. The firm appeared in Trino, Monferrato, the hometown of the founder of the family, Giovanni Giolito de' Ferrari (active 1503–1539), who printed mainly law books in Latin. After his death, the firm moved to Venice under the direction of his son Gabriele (active 1536–1578), who started a brilliant career and soon managed to conquer a dominant role in the already very large and crowded market of books in Italian. Gabriele, whose production almost completely excluded books in Latin, achieved the greatest impact in the Italian market, first in the field of secular literature and thereafter, in parallel with the affirmation of the Counter-Reformation, in the field of devotional literature and history. Printed catalogues of books for sale began to be published about ten years after the death of Gabriele. The heirs of Gabriele Giolito (Gabriele's son and nephews) retained the traditional pattern of printed catalogues, both in the form of broadsheets and brochures. The Giolito catalogues have been by far the most studied, and they have all been published with a commentary, so that we can already rely on an in-depth analysis of content and prices; besides their general catalogues, their publication of the first specialised list of books in vernacular, the *Libri spirituali*, was remarkably innovative.²⁴ The most relevant of these catalogues is nevertheless the last one, *Indice copioso*, published as a booklet by the heirs of the firm in 1592, with the clear intent to liquidate the entire stock of remaining copies [Fig. 2]. More than five hundred book prices in our database come from the Giolito catalogues. The distribution of the editions advertised by Giolito in chronological order is shown in Graph 1.

Giunti

The Giunti owned the most prominent publishing firm in Italy in the early modern era.²⁵ Originally from Florence, this merchant family entrusted Luc'Antonio as early as 1477 with the foundation of a business in Venice that would soon become a flourishing activity in the book business. Although Venice was the centre of their affairs and responsible for an

24 Angela Nuovo & Christian Coppens, *I Giolito e la stampa nell'Italia del XVI secolo*, Geneva 2005, esp. 451–566; Giliola Barbero, 'Ordinary and extraordinary prices in the Giolito *Libri spirituali* sales list' in Granata & Nuovo (eds), *Selling and collecting*, 211–264; the list is dated by Barbero to 1589. The catalogue edited by Giovanna Granata ('Un elenco di vendita di libri dei Giolito conservato nella Biblioteca Universitaria di Cagliari', part I, in *La Bibliofilia*, 119:2 (2017), 269–288, part II, in *La Bibliofilia*, 119:3 (2017), 379–416) is not included in this analysis because its attribution to the Giolito firm is questionable.

25 For the book production of the Giunti in Venice, see Paolo Camerini, *Annali dei Giunti*, Firenze 1962–1963, 2 vols. For a brief sketch of the family's economic activity, see Andrea Ottone, 'L'attività editoriale dei Giunti nella Venezia del Cinquecento' in *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica*, 2 (2003), 43–80. On the business operations of Luc'Antonio Giunti the Younger, see Alberto Tenenti, 'Luc'Antonio Giunti il giovane stampatore e mercante' in *Studi in onore di Armando Saporì*, Milano [1957], 2 vols, I, 1023–1060. Very helpful are the entries devoted to various family members in the *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, and in Marco Menato (ed.), *Dizionario dei tipografi e degli editori italiani. Il Cinquecento*, II 'G', Trieste 2020, 131–157.



Stadtbibliothek
Winterthur.

Fig. 2 Title page of the catalogue of the Giolito, 1592 (corrected by hand in 1596)
Bibliothek Winterthur, Sch_354/20

outstanding output of book production, both quantitatively and qualitatively, they maintained entrepreneurial activities in their hometown. They also branched out quite early in Lyon, Rome and in Spain. When their two known sale catalogues of books with prices were printed (1591 and 1595), the owner and manager of the firm was Luc'Antonio the Younger (1540–1602), who was probably the most successful member of the family and performed an intense mercantile activity across Catholic Europe, trading in many different goods (jewels, woven materials, skins, sugar and others) as well as books. The core of the Giunti book business was the most profitable sector of the market, i.e., prayer books, liturgical books, learned books in Latin and, to a much lesser degree, vernacular books. Their commercial network was one of the most developed in Europe because the branches were soon given the independence to develop local partnerships and associations in order to enhance production and distribution. The copies of catalogues extant today seem to have been used within a bookkeeping context, probably by the Giunti themselves. At the end of the sixteenth century, the Giunti, too, felt the need to market their books via printed catalogues. Two of them, which are included in this survey, were produced in the form of broadsheets and contain a total of 650 editions with prices. A crucial feature of these catalogues is that prices are not expressed in Venetian lire, like all others published in that city, but rather in a different Venetian currency, *grossi* and *ducats* (a ducat was worth 24 *grossi*). This happened not only in these specific sources but also in commercial documents and lists of shipping from other cities,²⁶ and in the catalogue of Bernardino Giunti, where many prices of Giunti books were recorded.²⁷ Again, this attests to the Giunti's predominance in the market, not only on the Italian peninsula but also in other areas, such as Lyon or Salamanca, especially in some specific sectors of production. In any event, editions included in these two catalogues are all printed by the home office in Venice. The distribution of the editions advertised by Giunti in chronological order is shown in Graph 2.

Scoto

Two catalogues of the corpus are connected to the Scoto family (or Scotto, or Scoti), one from 1591 and the other from 1596; the latter is dedicated exclusively to music editions.²⁸ The founder of the family business was Ottaviano Scoto I, a native of Monza (near Milan)

26 De Tata, *Il commercio librario a Bologna*, 142.

27 See the chapter by Andrea Ottone in this volume.

28 Franco Pignatti & Laura Daniela Quadrelli, 'Scoto (Scotto, Scotti) Ottaviano' in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 91 (2018), 634–638 ([https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ricerca/Scoto-\(Scotto,-Scotti\)-Ottaviano/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ricerca/Scoto-(Scotto,-Scotti)-Ottaviano/)); Carlo Volpati, 'Gli Scotti di Monza tipografi-editori in Venezia' in *Archivio storico lombardo*, 59 (1932), 365–382; Claudio Sartori, 'La famiglia degli editori Scotto' in *Acta musicologica*, 36 (1964), 19–30; Oscar Mischiati, *Indici, cataloghi e avvisi degli editori e librai musicali italiani dal 1591 al 1798*, Firenze 1984, 99–106; Jane A. Bernstein, *Music printing in Renaissance Venice: the Scoto Press (1539–1572)*, New York 1998.

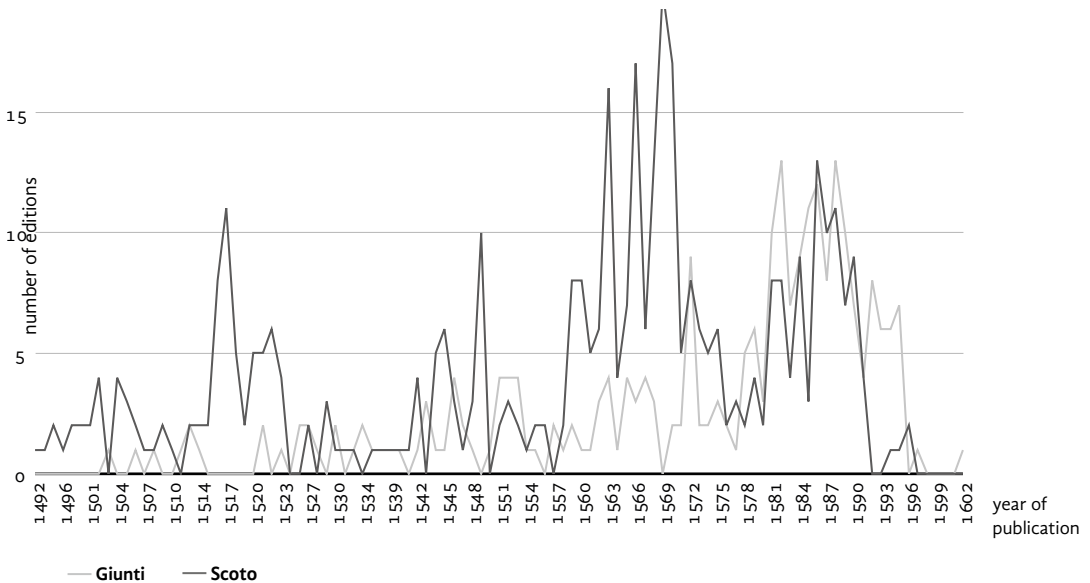
29 Mary Kay Duggan, *Italian music incunabula: printers and type*, Berkeley 1992, 102–105.

30 In this same volume, see the chapter by Alessandra Panzanelli.

31 Rather unusually, in his request for an extension of his privilege in 1514, Ottaviano Petrucci explained that he was compelled to resort to the great means of Amadio Scoto 'merchant of books' in order to be able to start printing his music books that required large capital, which he, being poor did not possess; see Stanley Boorman, *Ottaviano Petrucci: catalogue raisonné*, New York 2006, 10, 1150.

32 Angela Nuovo, 'Una lettera di Michele Tramezzino a Giovanni Bartolomeo Gabiano (1522)' in *La Bibliofila*, 115 (2013), 147–156.

and from an ancient merchant family active in the wool trade. He came to Venice in 1475, and his activity was characterised by an extensive participation in partnerships, which led him to abandon the printing business in favour of pure publishing and commercial initiatives. His rich production of university texts was distributed, thanks to a large commercial network that certainly included the University of Pavia and the city of Valencia in Spain. He was one of the first publishers in Italy to develop an interest in music printing with movable types.²⁹ Upon his death (1498), the enterprise was carried out by some of his numerous heirs, among whom Amadio (†1535) stands out for his remarkable skills. He must have been the director of the business, given that he was the beneficiary of all privileges granted to the firm from 1500 onwards. He entered more decidedly in the law books sector, participating in the company of the Torti brothers (together with Luc'Antonio Giunti, Giorgio Arrivabene and Antonio Moretto), who dominated the Venetian market of legal books for many years.³⁰ Amadio acted as a financial partner of the great printer of mensural music Ottaviano Petrucci, so that the family name continued to invest in music printing.³¹ Under his direction, the expansion of the family business certainly grew, as evidenced by the existence of a branch of the company in Rome, from at least 1522.³² After Amadio, it was the turn of Girolamo Scoto (†1572) to display a large and intense activity with almost 850 editions over the course of forty years, half of which were of music (being a composer himself). He was responsible for a process of modernisation of the printing house, which was one of the most conservative in the Venetian market: he adopted a new mark and started to use smaller formats and roman/italic typefaces (the Scoto printed in black letter until the 1540s) while he was still publishing large volumes of philosophy, medicine, and theology in black letter and in two columns. In the 1540s the firm branched out at least in



Graph 2 Distribution of the editions advertised in the catalogues of Giunti and Scoto

Naples, Siena and Bologna. Girolamo's prestige was indisputable in various environments: in 1548, Conrad Gesner dedicated the eighteenth book of his *Pandecta* on civic philosophy to him.³³ In 1571, Girolamo Scoto was elected first *priore* of the guild of printers and booksellers in Venice.

The activity of Girolamo Scoto gives us the opportunity to underline, notwithstanding occasional tensions and conflicts, that the big players of the Venetian printing sector were accustomed to collaborating, formally and informally. Among the formal collaborations, members of the Scoto family joined a variety of partnerships for the publication of law books. Girolamo, in particular, was a member of the Company of the Crown, which also included the Giunti, Gabriele Giolito and Federico Torresano,³⁴ and later a member of the *Societas Aquilae* (1571–1608), the most important Venetian company for publishing law books in the sixteenth century, led by Luc'Antonio Giunti.³⁵ The close social ties among publishers, also in the form of intermarriages and godparenthoods, were one of the crucial factors that helped the sector to develop successfully. When Girolamo died, his nephew Melchiorre Scoto, who had collaborated with his uncle for many years, inherited the firm and always signed his books with the formula '*herede di Girolamo Scoto*'. Still able to publish around 390 editions in forty years, he preferred to concentrate even more on music, seeing that three-quarters of his output consisted of music, a field where the Scoto brand had reached considerable prestige. And it is Melchiorre who published the two printed catalogues (1591 and 1596) that are included in our corpus. These dates are meaningful, as from 1592 until 1596 Melchiorre's output decreased dramatically, having only a brief revival afterwards. Thus, the need to liquidate assets is particularly evident in this case. The distribution of the editions advertised by Scoto in chronological order is presented in Graph 2.

Zenaro

In comparison with the abovementioned publishers, Damiano Zenaro (†1604) was a newcomer in Venice. Originally from the paper district of Salò, on the Lake of Garda, he started as a bookseller in Venice in 1546 at the sign of the Salamander and published about 320 editions from 1563 to 1603.³⁶ From the 1560s, he was closely tied to Paolo Manuzio, whose printing shop in Venice he managed, together with Domenico Basa when Paolo moved to Rome. He took part in a number of consortia for publishing law books, among which was the abovementioned *Societas Aquilae*. His network was extensive, and it included the cities of Milan,

33 Conrad Gesner, *Pandectarvm sive Partitionum uniuersalium* [...] libri XXI, Tigvri: excvdebat Christophvs Froschouerus, 1548, fol. 311r (fol. Gg1 recto).

34 Nuovo & Coppens, *I Giolito e la stampa*, 86–91.

35 Nuovo, *The book trade*, 59–61 and 65–67.

36 Patrizia Bravetti, 'Damiano Zenaro: editore e libraio del Cinquecento' in Simonetta Pelusi & Alessandro Scarsella (eds), *Humanistica Marciana. Saggi offerti a Marino Zorzi*, Milano 2008, 127–132.

37 De Tata, *Il commercio librario a Bologna*, 147.

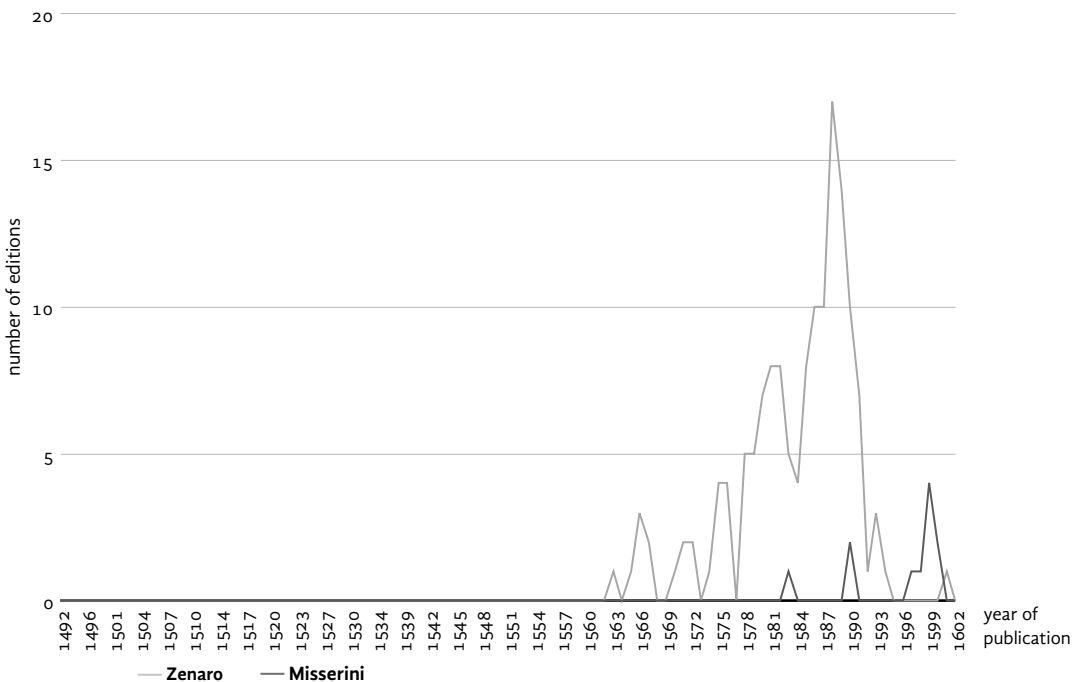
38 Paul F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian press 1540–1605*, Princeton 1977, 122, 167; Nuovo, *The book trade*, 289.

39 This information can be drawn from the account books of a Florentine bookseller, Piero di Giuliano Morosi, as analysed by Paul Gehl, "'Mancha uno alfabeto intero": recording defective book shipments in Counter-Reformation Florence' in *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 93:3 (1999), 316–58. See also Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition*, 173.

Pavia, Cremona, Piacenza, Ferrara, Bologna (where he probably had his own branch),³⁷ Brescia and Messina. He was an active international bookseller, given that in 1581 some bales of books coming from the Frankfurt Fair and belonging to him were sequestered in the Lombard city of Como. He was warned and punished by the Holy Office on different occasions.³⁸ He also had agents and correspondent booksellers in a few Spanish cities. When he died in 1604, the books that he had in his shop and warehouse were inventoried and evaluated at 9,000 ducats. His printed catalogue from 1591 accounts for about 50% of his production, mainly in the fields of law and religion. The distribution of the editions advertised by Zenaro in chronological order is shown in Graph 3.

Misserini

Niccolò Misserini was active as a publisher from 1589 to 1635, with an output of about 140 editions. In 1601–1602, he was elected *priore* of the guild of printers and booksellers in Venice. He was active in partnership with the Giunti and specialised in liturgical books in extremely small formats. Towards the end of the century, he was increasingly important as a supplier of breviaries and other prayer books, sometimes even infringing on existing privileges and occasionally in competition with the Giunti.³⁹ Regrettably, his activity has aroused little attention until today. However, an informed official such as the *priore* of the Venetian guild of printers Andrea Zuliani in the seventeenth century did not hesitate to mention Misserini at the same level of the Giunti as representatives of the wealthy and



Graph 3 Distribution of the editions advertised in the catalogues of Zenaro and Misserini

successful publishing houses flourishing in the golden age of printing in Venice.⁴⁰ The distribution of the editions advertised by Misserini in chronological order is presented in Graph 3.

Refining the dataset

The corpus of almost 3,500 book prices includes a relevant number of duplications. To begin with, the 24 catalogues by Manuzio display the same edition in multiple instances with the same price.⁴¹ These have been deduplicated and removed from the dataset. Only the first appearance of every price was kept, deemed as the original price set in the specific moment of the publication (or at least, the first appearance in a printed catalogue of a price of an earlier edition still available in the shop). In fact, the Manuzio catalogues show mostly newly published books and, in a few cases, even book announcements of editions that would be published in the following year. All in all, Manuzio's catalogues advertised an early example of books in print, while all the other catalogues include mainly (but not only) backlog or unsold older editions.

The two Giunti catalogues, printed in 1591 and 1595, almost completely overlap. In this case, too, we retained the 1591 prices in the dataset, adding only the few editions printed from 1591 to 1595, and therefore listed only in the 1595 catalogue.

The singularities of the Giolito catalogues, published between 1587 and 1592, have posed more complex issues. The firm's four catalogues, although chronologically close, cannot be easily cumulated or deduplicated in the same dataset. The book prices do not follow the same pattern of seriality as those by Manuzio. The three earlier catalogues are published in the form of a broadsheet, probably for specific occasions like book fairs, with a limited list of publications, while the last one, the *Indice copioso* of 1592 is a booklet, listing many more books with much more detailed descriptions. In addition, the broadsheets can be dated to the period when the firm was in the hands of Giovanni II (son of Gabriele) and Giovanni Paolo Giolito, whereas the brochure was a much more engaging and thought-over marketing initiative, realised after the untimely death of Giovanni II by the last heirs, whose clear intention was to leave the book business altogether. This is reflected, and therefore explained, in the different pricing policies chosen by the two different managements. It has already been observed that the 1592 *Indice copioso* attests to an unusual increase in prices: most prices were raised by 17%, while only 4 of the previously advertised prices were devaluated by 20%.⁴² Whereas one would expect a depreciation of the Giolito editions over time, the opposite trajectory shows a strong engagement in sustaining prices as much as possible while investing time and money to publish a product of higher bibliographic quality in comparison not only to previous Giolito catalogues but also to all Venetian catalogues of the period. For all these reasons, only the prices taken from the 1592 *Indice copioso* have been included in our analysis.

One more consideration needs to be put forward. As already observed, in the EMO-BookTrade database, prices are registered both as total prices and prices per sheet. A sheet

was the standard working unit in printing shops, as many printing contracts show. Visualizing and assessing books as sets of printed sheets, and not as leaves or pages, was the rule not only for printers and publishers; scholars and collectors also referred to books in the same way, as the *Bibliotheca universalis* (1545) by Conrad Gesner authoritatively shows. This is connected to the fact that books were distributed and sold, business to business, mostly in loose sheets, and bindings would have been applied according to the buyer's needs, tastes and means.⁴³ Scaling down the price of an edition into price per sheet is a crucial process, as the sheet is the only invariable unit that can enable a meaningful comparison among book prices, regardless of format.

The price per sheet, therefore, is essential in our analysis, even if the nominal price of each copy for sale can teach an interesting lesson. However, the price-per-sheet calculation could not be performed on the entire corpus. Prices per sheet are determined by bibliographic formats, but only within the limits of the *routine* printing process, which included what can be defined as a plain book in the most frequent bibliographic formats (folio, quarto, octavo), printed in black ink and a normal type size in the Latin alphabet.⁴⁴ As we will see, different factors can increase the standard price, often in connection to higher production costs, but the price increase caused by extremely small formats attested in our dataset, like 64mo and 96mo, is totally off the charts. These miniature editions are exceptional but represented a stronghold in the catalogue of Niccolò Misserini, whose specialised output was based on this sort of prayer book in 24mo, 32mo, 64mo and even 96mo.⁴⁵ Religious texts in very small formats have a long history: they were produced as manuscripts before the invention of printing and, consequently, had seldom been produced in Venice since the 1470s (both in 16mo and 32mo). Predictably, their output in printing shops intensified during the Counter-Reformation as a personal devotional object, which the believers would be able to hold comfortably in their hands throughout the day. In Misserini's list, for instance, we find a *Seven psalms* in 96mo, perhaps used as a sort of amulet or pendant for ladies, and not surprisingly, there is no surviving copy. Time-consuming production of editions of this sort needed exceptionally skilled workers, causing prices per sheet to spike disproportionately.

40 Zuliani's report, written in 1660, has been published in Paolo Ulvioni, 'Stampatori e librai a Venezia nel Seicento' in *Archivio Veneto*, 108 (1977), 93–124.

41 The few fluctuations registered in some catalogues can be considered occasional mistakes in typesetting.

42 Christian Coppens, who unearthed the previously unknown Giolito broadsheets and published the *Indice copioso* with an ample commentary, was the first scholar to acknowledge such atypical price dynamics; see Christian Coppens, 'I cataloghi di vendita dei Giolito' in Nuovo & Coppens, *I Giolito e la stampa*, 453–566. Giliola Barbero pushed the analysis further and published the Giolito list of *Libri spirituali* (1589) with commentary in her article 'Ordinary and extraordinary prices'.

43 We have countless evidence that printed materials were distributed in loose sheets, as shown by the

number of requests to reintegrate parts of books (sheets or entire quires) sent by booksellers to wholesalers. Retail bindings and pre-bindings seem to be more common in specific contexts. The process of applying a binding to a newly purchased book could take a long time, as attested to by many unbound books in private collections. For instance, a whole section of unbound books from the library of Gian Vincenzo Pinelli was still kept in this form by the Duchess Nicoletta Grillo, tutor of his last heir, Galeazzo Francesco Pinelli, years after the death of the owner; see Anna Maria Raugel, *Gian Vincenzo Pinelli e la sua biblioteca*, Geneva 2018, 117–122.

44 Proot, 'Shifting price levels', 93–95.

45 Anne C. Bromer & Julian I. Edison, *Miniature books: 4,000 years of tiny treasures*, New York 2007.

The price per sheet of this edition in 96mo reached a value up to 85 times higher than the most expensive book in a standard format. The same can be said for another religious Miserini edition in 64mo, whose price per sheet reached a value up to 43 times higher than the most expensive book in a standard format. Thus, price-per-sheet analysis, normally the best methodology to assess and compare prices, cannot be applied in the case of Venetian productions of extreme formats. While these prices, as outliers, would have been excluded from the dataset in any event,⁴⁶ understanding which types of printed materials constituted a category of their own in this period remains instructive. Following these considerations, the dataset has been reduced to 1,299 book prices.

Publication date of the editions on sale

As already observed, the corpus of the editions listed in these printed catalogues comes from different firms. Most of them had been active for more than one century, whereas others were in the field for a much shorter period. It is therefore to be expected that many old books were put on sale by publishers who, in some cases, were withdrawing from the industry. We have already seen the dates of the books put on sale by each publisher. If we take into consideration the whole dataset, according to the absolute frequency distribution, per year, we obtain Graph 4.

We can see that some of our printed catalogues put on sale include incunabula, but the data for the first fifty years of this scheme are too dispersed. Data start to become more significant with productions in the 1540s. As the year 1545 marks an important turn with the issue of the law that ruled for the first time on the authors' position in the privilege system, which caused a surge of privileges and new editions, we can zoom the graph to the period 1545–1595, when most of the observations are available [Graph 5].

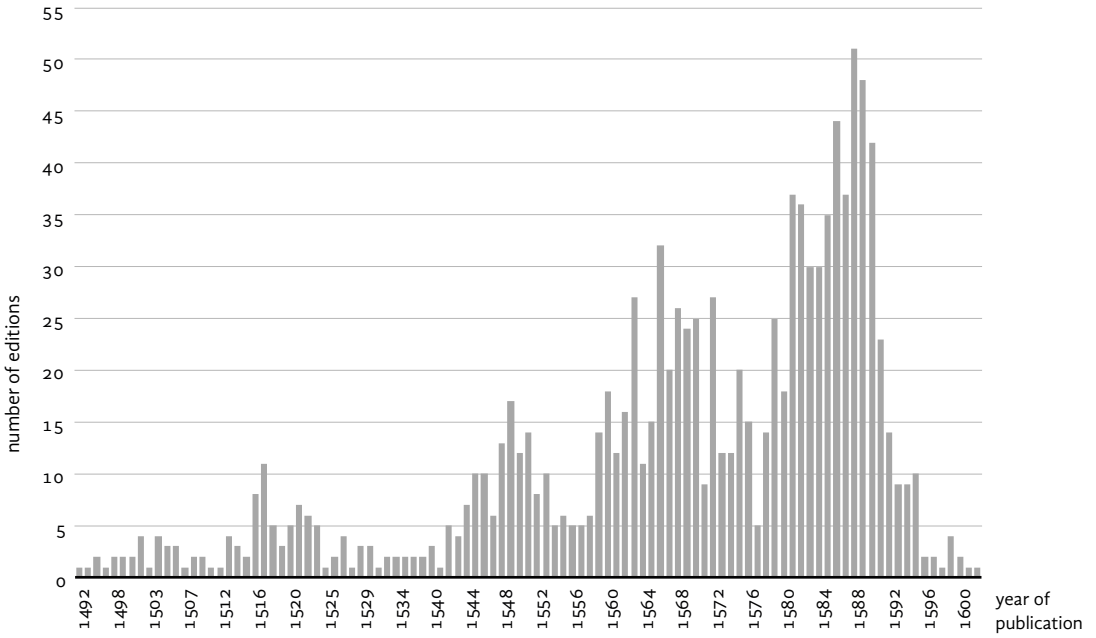
We can observe, with some exceptions, that production is constantly growing. Fifty percent of the advertised editions were published in the period 1575–1600, making our dataset very significant not only for the back stock but also for recently published books. The 1591 catalogue by Scoto advertised mostly backlog: the fifteen oldest editions in the dataset are recorded in this list.

The following graph gives an overview of all editions, according to different publishers' catalogues distributed over time [Graph 6]. Most of the price data come from 1591 and 1592, and in general from the 1590s.

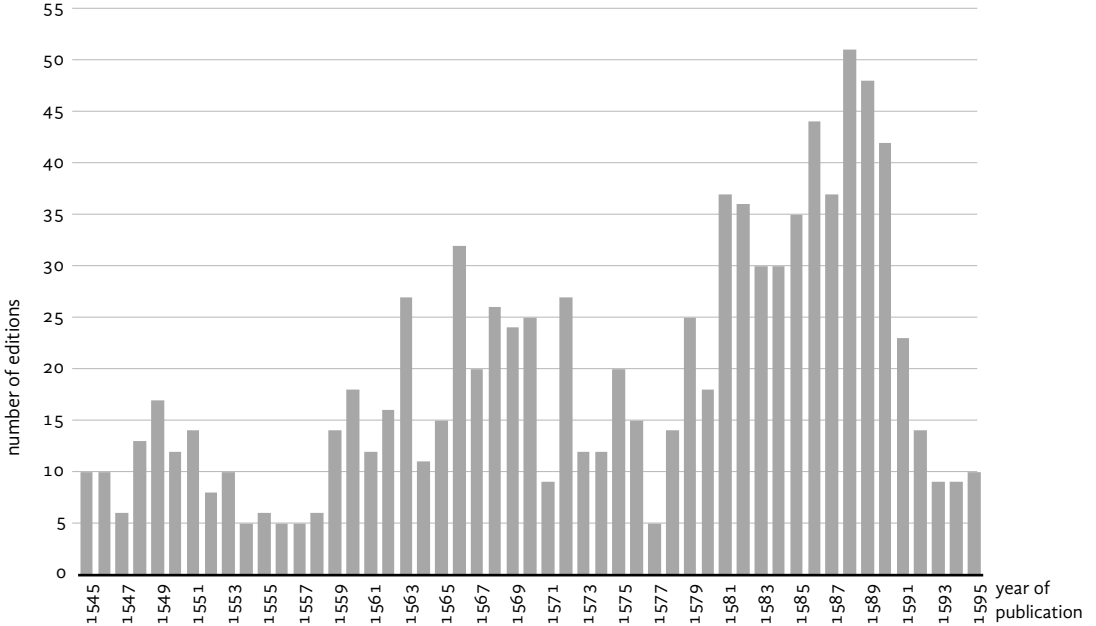
Are older books less expensive than newly published ones? Here, the best answer that we can find lies in the analysis of the price per sheet in chronological order. For each year, the value corresponds to the mean price, all sources considered [Graph 7].

The fluctuation in the first part of the curve cannot be taken as representative of the price of books published before the 1540s because the dataset is too limited. However, starting from the books published in 1545, it is clear that mean prices constantly increase.

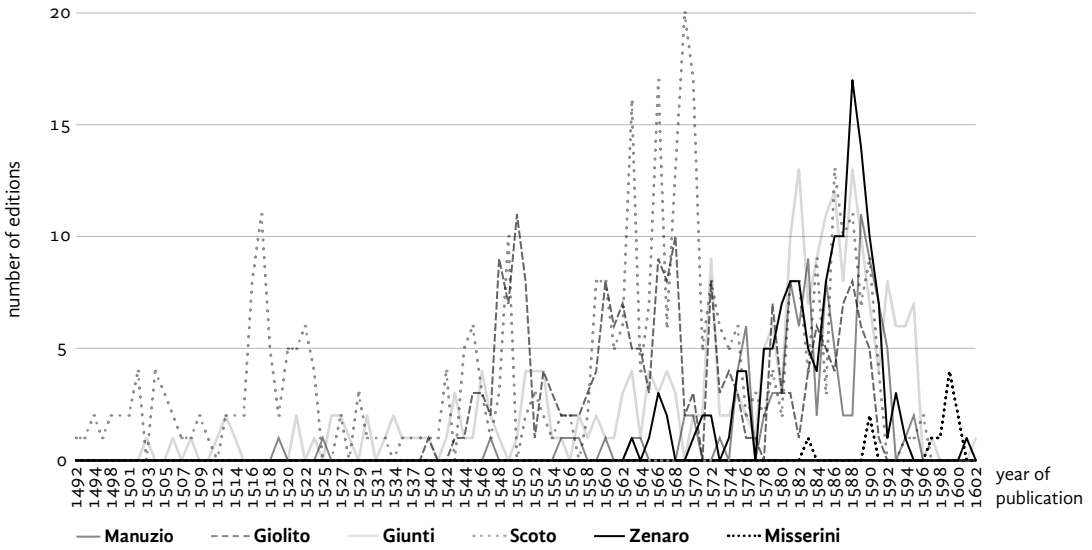
⁴⁶ The same has been done for books for which the price per sheet is less than 5 denari *lire Veneziane* (hereafter: LV).



Graph 4 Number of editions listed in Venetian booksellers' catalogues with prices according to year of publication



Graph 5 Number of editions listed in Venetian booksellers' catalogues with prices according to year of publication 1545–1595



Graph 6 Distribution of the editions advertised in Venetian booksellers' catalogues with prices

Whereas inflation certainly played a role, it is evident that the ‘newness’ factor influenced the prices ever more consistently. When we focus only on the period 1545–1595, Graph 8 gives a clearer result, presenting a slight but steady growth of the price per sheet.

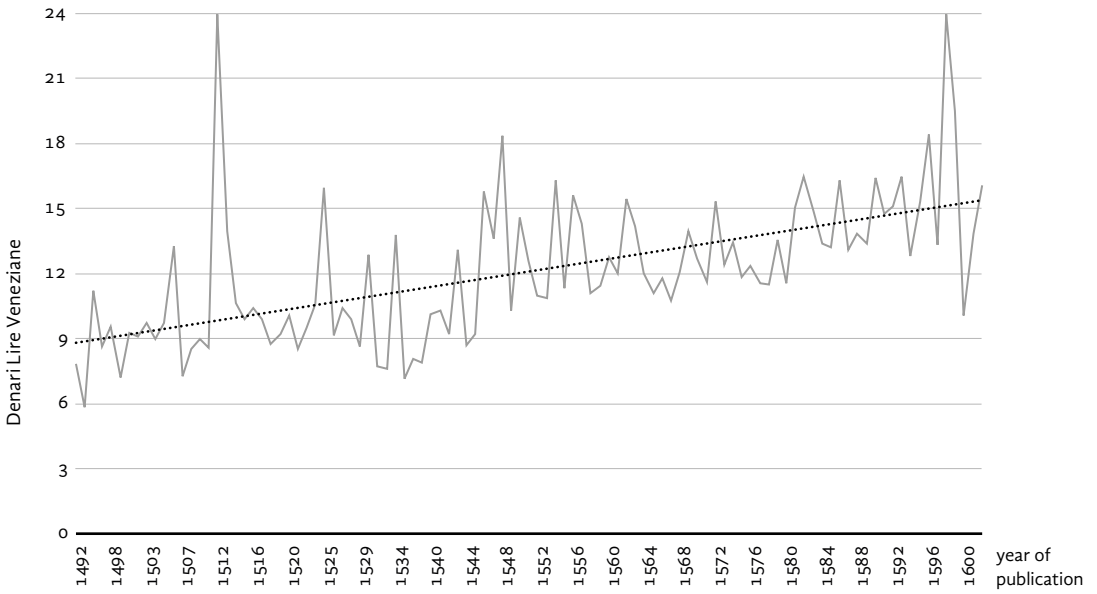
Statistical analysis of book prices

An overall analysis of the dataset as a corpus of 1,299 book prices reveals that the price per copy ranges between 12 and 17,860 denari.⁴⁷ The mean price is about 960 denari, with a standard deviation of about 1,785 denari. In fact, an overwhelming majority of book prices (1,249) do not exceed the sum of 5,000 denari, which corresponds to about 21 lire. The range of price per sheet goes from a minimum of 5.23 to a maximum of 70 denari per sheet. The mean is 13.53, with a standard deviation of 7.12.

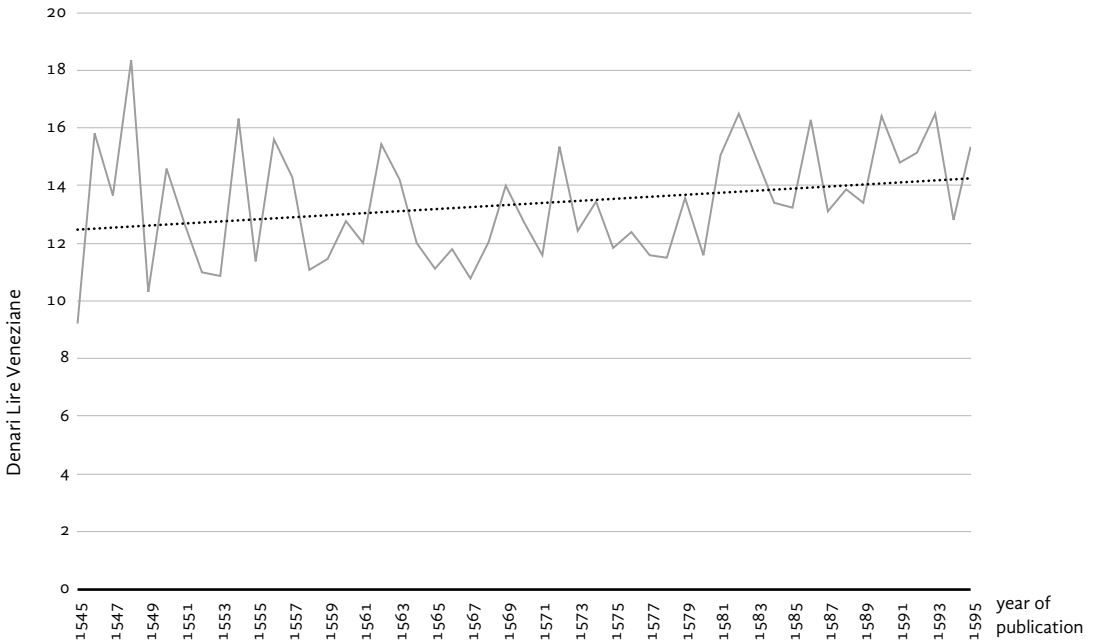
We can start a more detailed analysis by focusing on individual factors that influenced book prices, factors that have been differentiated and highlighted in the processing of data in our database. This will prove useful in order to grasp the possible influence of certain labour costs on price setting.

The language of texts is the first factor. It points in the simplest way to different sorts of texts and different groups of readers. We can observe only the difference between Latin and

⁴⁷ The price of 17,860 denari corresponds to the high sum of about 12 ducats, which was the price of the 1587 eight-volume edition of the *Repetitiones* on canon law by Quintiliano Mandosi, published and put on sale by the Giunti (EDIT16 CNCE 27720).



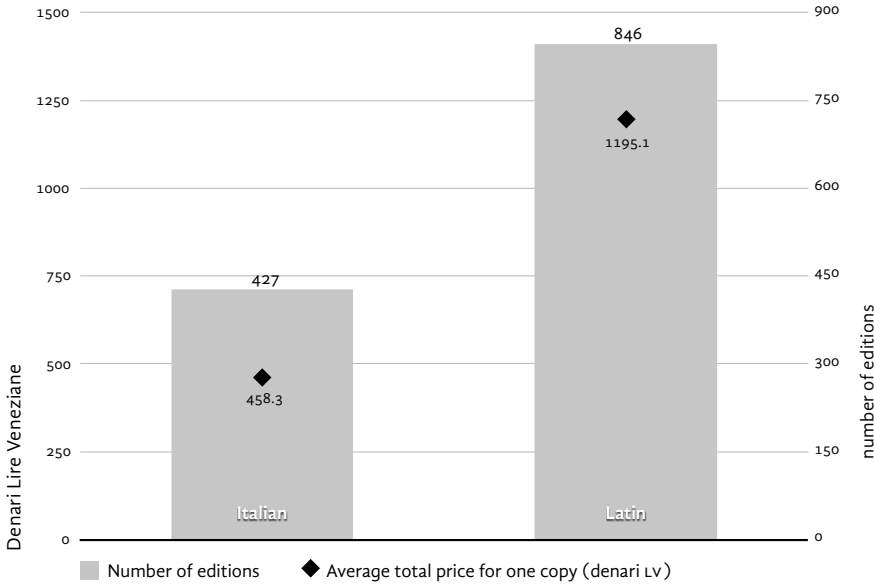
Graph 7 Average price per sheet in denari Lire Veneziane



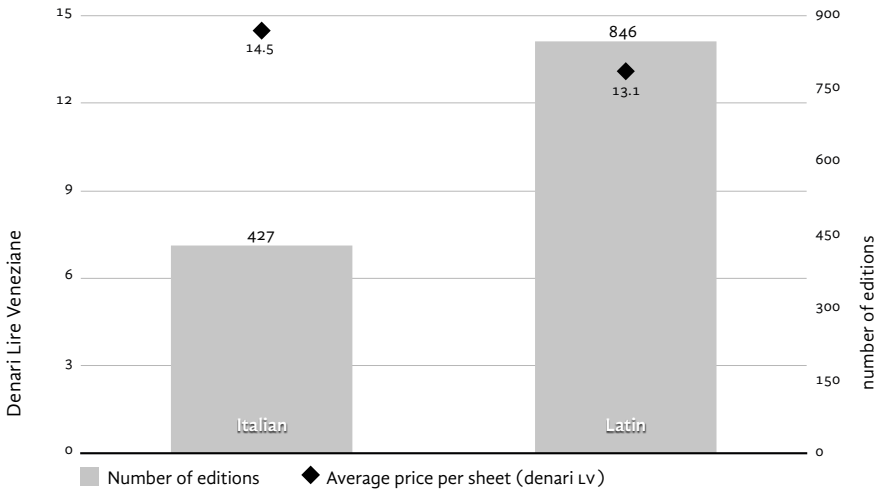
Graph 8 Average price per sheet in denari Lire Veneziane, 1545–1595

Italian. In our dataset, just four editions in Greek (plus two bilingual, Latin and Greek) and certainly no Hebrew editions are included: no relevant production in these two languages appeared in Venice at that time.⁴⁸

The following analysis will make clear the different results that can be attained using the price-per-copy vs price-per-sheet approach. In both cases, Graphs 9 and 10 display mean prices.



Graph 9 Italian vs. Latin editions: average price for one copy (denari Lire Veneziane) and number of editions

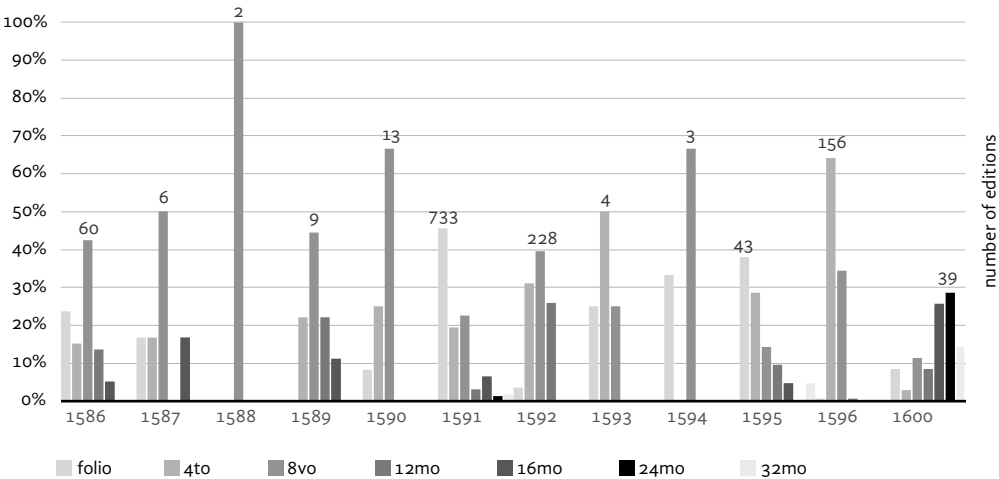


Graph 10 Italian vs. Latin editions: average price per sheet (denari Lire Veneziane) and number of editions

The two columns in Graph 9 show the absolute number of editions in Italian and in Latin, respectively; the black diamonds mark the mean price per copy. The mean price of individual books in Latin (which consisted mainly of academic and learned books, usually more voluminous than books in the vernacular) was more than double the price of books in Italian. Italian editions were much less expensive. Since the dawn of printing, Italy, and Venice in particular, had significant production in the vernacular; this production corresponded increasingly to books in smaller bibliographic formats and in fewer sheets.⁴⁹ But when we switch the analysis to price per sheet, the result is quite different, showing that editions in Italian were more expensive in terms of price per sheet [Graph 10].

The average price per sheet of editions in Italian is 14.47 denari, while editions in Latin cost 13.07 denari per sheet. This means that, although the unitarian price was higher for Latin volumes, publishers succeeded in making Italian editions more profitable in comparison.

Another straightforward but revealing indicator is linked to the format of books, that is, from the viewpoint of production, how many times a sheet of paper was folded, and the related number of leaves/pages produced with each printing sheet. It is obvious that whereas printing in smaller formats would reduce the cost of paper, it would have been accompanied by an increasingly difficult and time-consuming process of typesetting and imposition. Graph 11 represents the relative distribution of format according to the dates of the catalogues in our dataset.



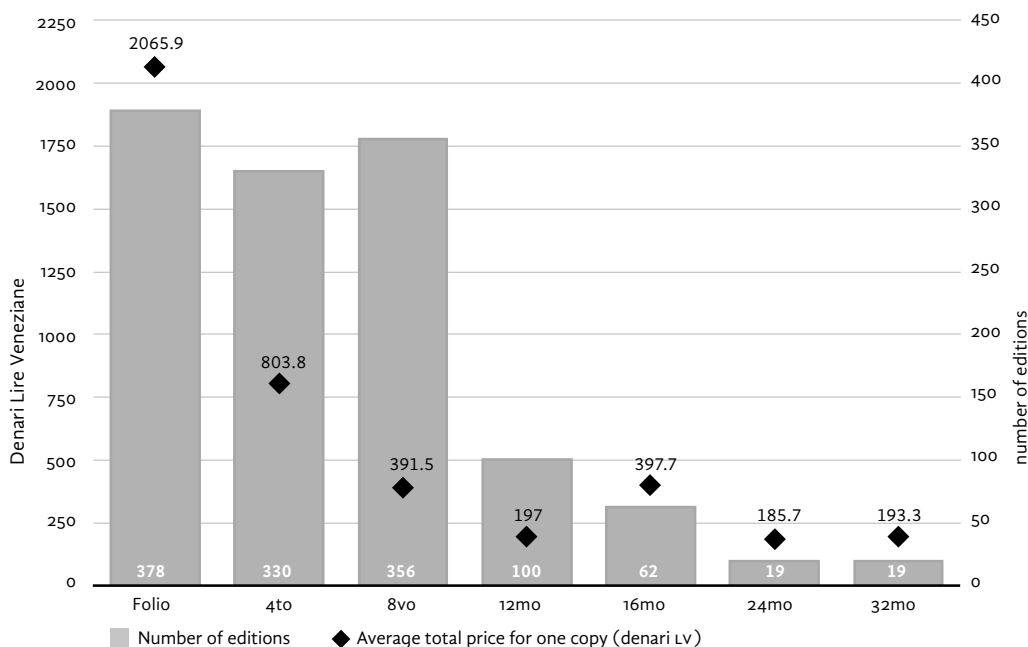
Graph 11 Relative distribution of bibliographic formats per booksellers' catalogue

48 The number of editions in other modern languages is negligible: only two editions are in French.
 49 According to EDIT16, the number of octavos editions in Venice is ten times higher than the number of folio editions.

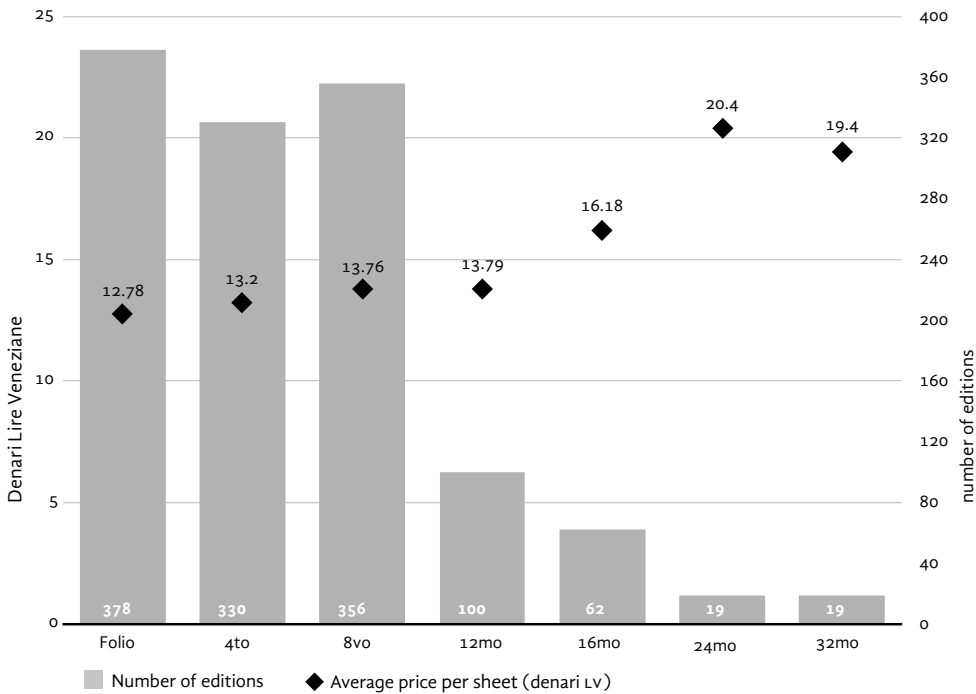
In 1591 and 1592, fourteen catalogues were published, so there exist significantly more data for those years: 733 prices for 1591 and 228 for 1592. The effect of the types of catalogues published in those years is mirrored in the results: in 1591, the folio format recurs in almost 50% of the observations due to the catalogues of the Giunti, Zenaro and Scoto, which are full of learned books in Latin, whereas octavo editions are a little more than 20%. In the following year, however, the publication of the Giolito catalogue leads to a reverse situation. Now, 40% of the books are in octavo, followed by 30% of the books in quarto and 25% in duodecimo (12mo), while the percentage of folio editions is negligible. In 1596, almost all data come from the Scoto catalogue of books of music, and this is why the quarto reaches more than 60% of the observations, but this is actually the oblong quarto, the commonest format for musical works.

Regarding the effects of format change in the book trade, the process of reducing the book sizes was one of the most successful ways to establish value-based prices. Whereas the series of octavos of Aldus Manutius was the first successful experiment of classics of Italian, Latin and Greek literature and was able to make an unprecedented impact when published in a smaller format, his innovation did not lead to a reduction in price in the short term – on the contrary. It was a differentiation that led rather to value-based prices because readers proved eager to buy the new elegant, refined, pocket aldines.⁵⁰

In our Venetian sources from the last quarter of the century, the process of reducing book formats was still going on, although the traditional formats represented the bulk of books for sale. Graph 12 shows the prices of individual copies (total price per copy).



Graph 12 Bibliographic formats: average price for one copy (denari Lire Veneziane) and number of editions



Graph 13 Bibliographic formats: average price per sheet (denari Lire Veneziane) and number of editions

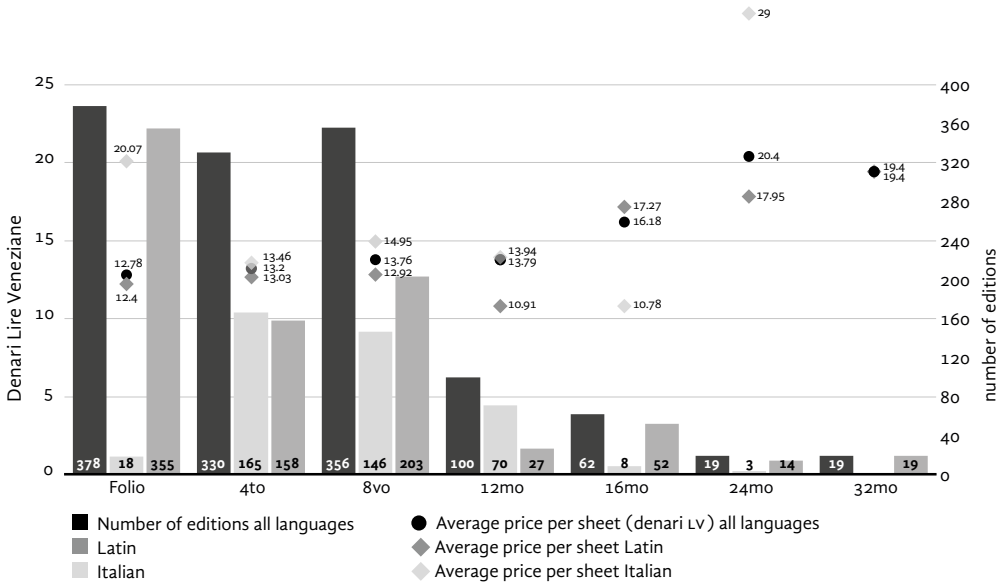
It is a largely predictable outcome: folio books, including several multivolume editions, were much more expensive than quartos, approximately two and a half times as much, five times more expensive than octavos, and ten times more expensive than duodecimo. For the smallest formats (16mo, 24mo and 32mo), we have a limited number of observations; still, at least for 16mo, there seems to be a trend of overpricing this format with respect to 12mo and 24mo.⁵¹ However, the graph of price per sheet reveals a quite different situation [Graph 13].

Here, the cheapest formats were folios. For voluminous folio books, it would be infeasible to charge a high price per sheet. Prices per sheet progressively registered a slight increase for quarto, octavo and duodecimo. Much higher prices per sheet characterised the smallest formats: 16mo, 24mo and 32mo: in all these cases, however, the low number of available data limits their reliability.

What these prices can tell us about the different clientele whom they targeted can be inferred from a graph that combines formats with languages [Graph 14]. The total quantity of editions is in the black column, editions in Italian are in light grey and editions in Latin

⁵⁰ Harris, 'Aldo Manuzio', 106–110.

⁵¹ This is certainly connected to the fact that books of prayers constituted the largest component within the subset of books in 16mo format.



Graph 14 Average price per sheet (denari Lire Veneziane) and number of editions according to bibliographic formats and language

are in grey. The price per sheet is displayed by black dots for all editions, and separately for Italian editions (in light grey) and Latin editions (in grey).

With regard to folios, we notice that editions in Italian are exceptional: the very high price per sheet in this category is a result of illustrations, as will be explained below. The overwhelming majority of folios in Latin contained everything we would expect: law, philosophy and theology books, sometimes in multivolume editions, namely, materials that only sporadically were proposed to private customers but rather targeted institutions, for instance, the many educational institutions and religious orders on the rise in the period. Quartos present a very balanced situation, with almost no difference between Italian and Latin: they cost the same. The Latin octavos were more numerous but less expensive than the Italian ones: for a long time, octavos were the standard format of textual reading in the vernacular in Italy and, as such, the most popular format whose demand remained high. The same happened with duodecimo books: the Italian books were 28% more expensive than the Latin ones.⁵² This is quite interesting because the duodecimo format clearly accentuated the trend of octavos, where Italian was more expensive than Latin.

The growing affirmation of the duodecimo in the market of Italian books seems to have been the innovative process set in motion in the final decades of the sixteenth century. Of course, the duodecimo had been extensively used for decades for *Officia* and other prayer books, but in the last quarter of the century this format started to be used for different texts. Besides public worship, the duodecimo appears essentially in two instances in our dataset: the first and foremost is represented by texts of devotional literature, produced in the vernacular by the Giolito firm in great numbers; the second, no less innovative and successful, is mostly represented by contemporary literature.⁵³ In this sector, Gabriele Giolito was the real innovator who started as early as the 1550s to produce duodecimo editions of Italian

literary texts (ranging from the classics, like Petrarch, to contemporary authors, like Anton Francesco Doni) as the final stage of a chain of editions, which often began with quartos, continued with popular octavos and were then repurposed and renewed in duodecimo, a format which appeared more fashionable.⁵⁴ However, the clear protagonist of the duodecimo fashion was the most important Italian author of this period: Torquato Tasso (1544–1595). Taking into consideration the entire series of about two hundred Tasso editions, printed all over Italy from 1580 to the end of the century, 36 were in octavo, 67 in quarto, and a remarkable majority of 85 were in duodecimo, including editions of his long poem, *Gerusalemme liberata*.⁵⁵ In this series of Tasso duodecimo editions, Aldo Manuzio the Younger plays a pivotal role. Printing in duodecimo was therefore a way to propose a new pocket-book format to the reader of Italian poetry, which, at the time, could look more elegant and/or more functional, and for this reason, it could be sold at a higher price per sheet. This is also evident considering the success of the duodecimo in the increased production of new forms of poetry during the following century: idylls and pastoral poems.

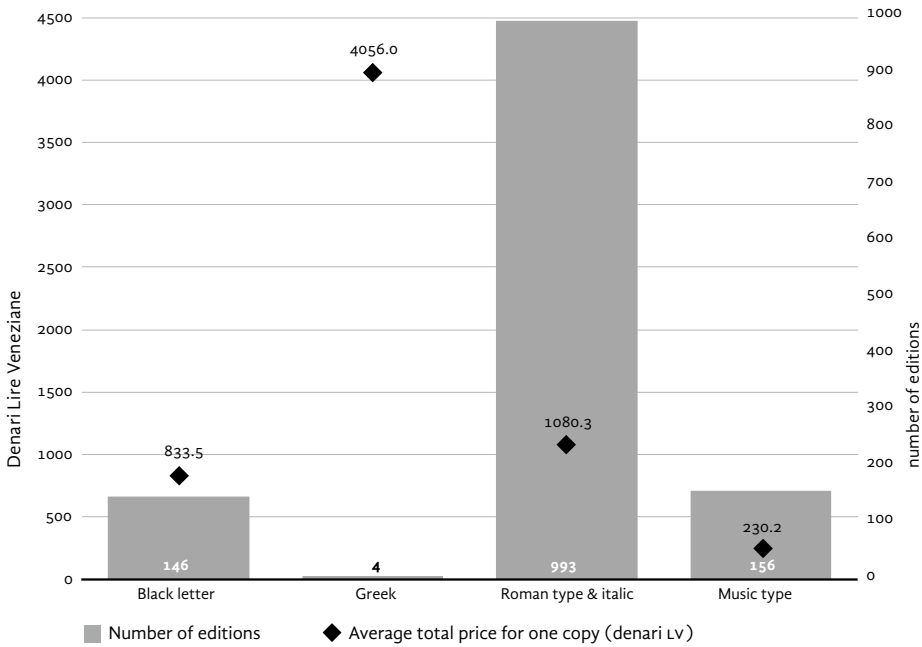
Other factors that have proved useful in analysing prices are: typefaces, illustrations, colour printing and different qualities of papers.⁵⁶ Not all of them apply to our dataset, unfortunately, and therefore, a real analysis can be conducted only for typefaces. The vast majority of these editions are printed in Latin types, roman and italics being the commonest types in use in all printing shops; only four prices connected to editions printed in Greek are included in our dataset. The era when Venice could print Greek books for the rest of Europe had become, by the end of the century, only a memory. Moreover, several editions combine different types: editions in black letter also include roman and italic types; editions in Latin include occasional words in Greek; liturgical books in black letter can include roman types and music (normally printed from woodcuts) and so on. In all these cases, the main text type used is considered. Additionally, we can analyse the role played by another specific type in the price strategy, thanks to a good number of editions in our pool of data: music types. Our dataset consists primarily of books printed in plain roman and italic types (76.5%); only 11.2% are printed in black letter and 12% in music types. Greek books account for only 0.3%. This situation leads to Graph 15, showing the prices of individual copies for typefaces.

- 52 To keep data consistent, we removed an outlier from the set of the duodecimo Latin editions. For information about the edition connected to this price, see below 'The most expensive editions in Venice'.
- 53 Included in the subset is another genre on the rise, comedies and other works for theatre, which are scarcely represented in our dataset.
- 54 Francesca Cerri, 'I Pistorotti amorosi: studio per un'edizione critica' in Giorgio Masi (ed.), 'Una soma di libri'. *L'edizione delle opere di Anton Francesco Doni*, Firenze 2008, 121–154. For the best physical appearance, duodecimo volumes rarely exceeded 200 leaves: in fact, the very long text of Ariosto's *Furioso* was severely cut when printed in that format; see Enrica Pace, 'Aspetti tipografico-

editoriali di un *best-seller* del secolo XVI: l'*Orlando Furioso*' in *Schifanoia*, 3 (1987), 103–114.

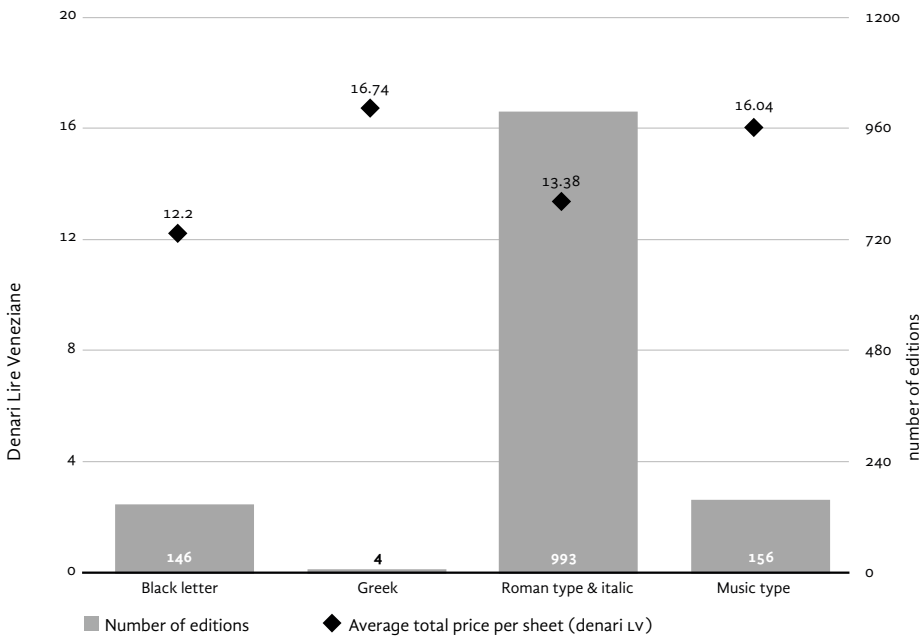
- 55 Angela Nuovo, 'Le prime edizioni della *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1580–1581)' in Alberto Petrucci et al. (eds), *Libri, biblioteche e società. Studi per Rosa Marisa Borraccini*, Macerata 2020, 141–159.

- 56 Logically, there is no mention in these lists of copies printed on parchment or blue paper, as this kind of production was geared to clients outside the regular market.



Graph 15 Type family: average price for one copy (denari Lire Veneziane) and number of editions

In addition, Graph 16 holds prices per sheet according to different typefaces.



Graph 16 Type family: average price per sheet (denari Lire Veneziane) and number of editions

Books in roman/italic types, which Venice printed massively for the whole peninsula and beyond, are characterised by a very high price for individual copies and rather an average price per sheet, certainly not high but not low either. The few prices connected to Greek books in our dataset behave consistently: they were both very expensive as volumes and very expensive when we consider the price per sheet. However, data are so scarce that a qualitative analysis would work better. The presence of the Greek Galen printed by the Manutius firm in 1525, the most expensive project ever undertaken by the firm and sold at a very high price at the time of its publication, markedly increases the results of the prices of Greek books in our pool of data.⁵⁷

Prices of books printed in black letter (11.2% in our dataset) tell us clearly how the market of these books had shifted. Although prices per copy placed books in black letter just below books in roman and italics, because these were often bulk volumes of philosophy and theology, prices per sheet indicate that these books had lost their attractiveness in the Venetian market. Some of the oldest editions in this group of catalogues are precisely books in black letter printed in the fifteenth century and the first decades of the sixteenth century, mainly sold by Scoto.

Music printing required such a different technique, staff and organisation that it had to be performed only by specialised printing shops. We are dealing here with editions of lay and sacred music, accompanied by texts, offered to the market by the Scoto firm, mostly published by Melchiorre Scoto, with the addition of a few titles by other printers.⁵⁸ Whereas it would be easy to expect music printing to be more costly than printing verbal texts, our graphs display a different reality. In terms of price per copy, the Scoto music editions were the least expensive books on the market, about one fifth of plain Latin/Italian texts in roman and italic types, but their price per sheet was 20% higher. We can justify the limited price of single books by the fact that these editions were normally very thin and included few sheets; in this way, songs, Neapolitans and madrigals were truly within reach of a large public of musicians and singers, both professional and amateurs. In addition, the prices of music books included in the Scoto 1596 catalogue seem to be quite low in comparison with prices of music books printed in the first half of the sixteenth century and recorded in the EMOBookTrade database.⁵⁹ There could be a specific reason for this phenomenon. According to Mary Lewis and Jane Bernstein, Venetian printers in the mid-sixteenth century apparently employed a special kind of tool for their music publications: a wooden inner frame containing indentations or grooves that held each line of music type in place.

57 Galenus, *Galenus Librorum pars prima [-quinta]*, [Venice: heirs of Aldus Manutius the Elder and Andrea Torresano the Elder], 1525, 5 vols in folio (EDIT16 CNCE 20152). Lorenzo Perilli, 'A risky enterprise: the Aldine edition of Galen, the failures of the editors, and the shadow of Erasmus of Rotterdam' in *Early Science and Medicine*, 17 (2012), 446–466; Paul Potter, 'The *editiones principes* of Galen and Hippocrates and their relationship' in Klaus-Dietrich

Fischer, Diethard Nickel & Paul Potter (eds), *Text and transmission: studies in ancient medicine and its transmission presented to Jutta Kollesch*, Leiden 1998, 243–261.

58 Bernstein, *Music printing*, 52, and ch. 5.

59 For instance, editions from the inventory of Antonio Sivieri's bookshop in Ferrara, drawn up in 1550, that was rich in music materials.

This resulted in the remarkably consistent alignment of music staves from one page to another, not only within a given music edition but in all editions using the same music font. Scoto employed this special mechanism in his earliest music editions of 1539, while Antonio Gardano began to use it around 1543.⁶⁰ In this way, production could proceed swiftly, and the price of single copies could be kept lower than before, thereby launching this genre to a greater public. However, even if the buying public was unaware of it, these items were actually among the most expensive in terms of price per sheet and constituted a very profitable production.

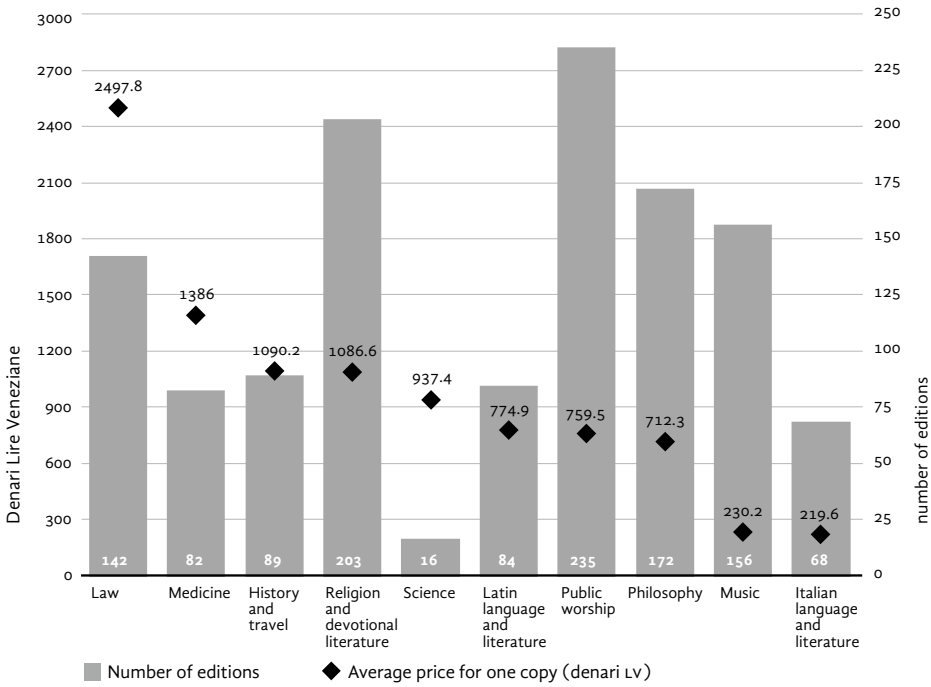
An analysis of the relationship between price and content of the books can also be performed. Our pool of data is sufficiently varied, representing major intellectual interests of the day. By applying a simplified Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) to indicate the subject matter of editions to our data, we chose to highlight certain sectors of book production that could provide more clues about changes in the sixteenth-century Venetian book trade. To this goal, we treated the large subject of religion, ranging from theology to collections of sermons and devotional literature in the vernacular, as separate from the public worship sector, which includes missals, breviaries and other religious service books. The latter represented a specific publishing area with its own characteristics (for instance, the need for a double impression in order to print in two colours) as well as a growing impact on the market. A more nuanced picture of Venetian book prices in relation to different subjects can be obtained by looking first at total prices of individual books and then at prices per sheet of editions.

Graph 17 provides clear information about the most voluminous editions, that is, the most expensive editions for sale. Not surprisingly, law still occupies the priciest corner of the market, with a remarkable mean price per copy of almost 2,500 denari, followed by medicine, history and religion: these subjects are all connected with a mean price per copy above 1,000 denari. Under 1,000 denari, we find in this order: science (but with a relatively small number of observations), Latin language and literature, public worship, philosophy and, at a great distance, music and Italian language and literature. At either end, a law book cost about ten times the price of an Italian book of literature, which on average cost about 220 denari, less than 1 lira.

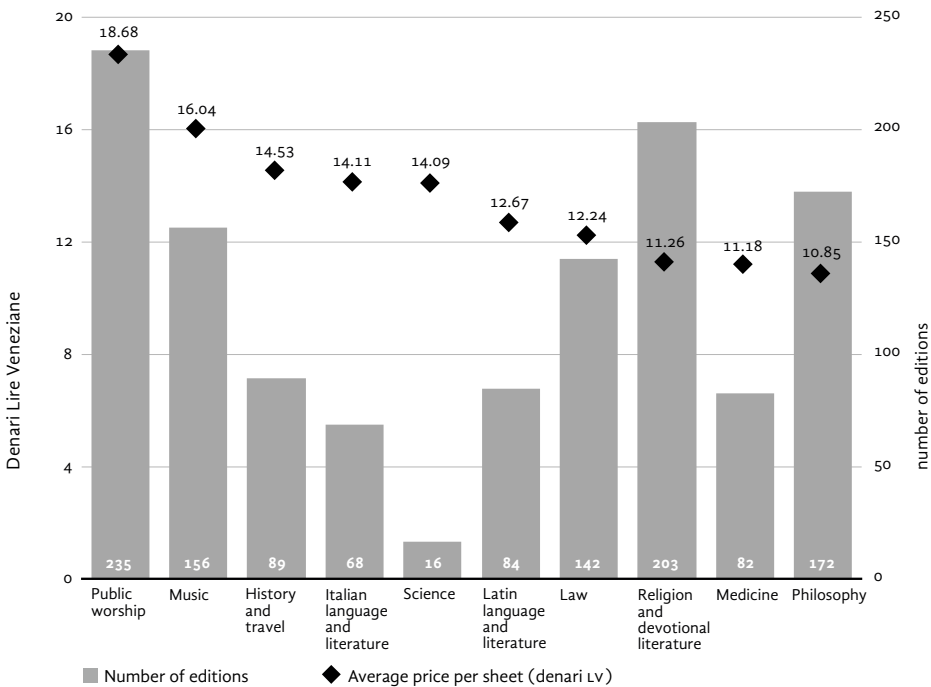
However, studying book prices as prices of individual books regardless of their many differences proves especially misleading in this analysis because prices per sheet tell a completely different story.

In Graph 18, displaying prices per sheet, we find a situation almost at odds with the preceding one. Public worship was the sector in which we found top prices (almost 19 denari per sheet). Just above, music books confirm their noteworthy price per sheet (16.04), followed by history (14.53) and Italian books (14.11), which were the least expensive ones in terms of

⁶⁰ Bernstein, *Music printing*, 58. Mary S. Lewis, *Antonio Gardano, Venetian music printer, 1538–1569: a descriptive bibliography and historical study*, New York/London 1988–1997, 3 vols, 1, 64–66.



Graph 17 Subject matter: average price for one copy (denari Lire Veneziane) and number of editions



Graph 18 Subject matter: average price per sheet (denari Lire Veneziane) and number of editions

price per copy. All the other subjects are comprised of between 12.67 and 10.85 denari per sheet, beginning with Latin literature books, followed in order by law, religion, medicine and philosophy. The priciest subjects, public worship and music publications, were both specialised sectors whose production needed technical skills and extraordinary investments: in both cases, competitors were few and prices could be kept high.

Price strategies of Venetian publishers

Venetian publishers lived and operated in a city where competition was aggressive but was in some ways compensated by the protection provided by the Republic through the privilege system. The Serenissima built a massive corpus of about 5,300 concessions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to support the local industry and avoid that competition, although harsh and sometimes unfair, did not become destructive.⁶¹ The major Venetian firms had succeeded through the activity of several generations to develop brands by which they cultivated ties with a definite customer base, keeping control of specific market zones. Humanistic books (increasingly in combination with books in Italian) printed by the Manuzio, vernacular books (literature, history and devotional literature) printed by the Giolito, and academic and religious service books printed by the Giunti were the staples of the Venetian industry. The Scoto were publishing as many university textbooks as the Giunti, but they altogether avoided entering the market of public worship. They compensated for this with a large production of music editions. And while Zenaro had a mixed production with a prevalence of law books, Misserini started his activity as Giunti's satellite firm and remained in the business of miniature books of prayer.

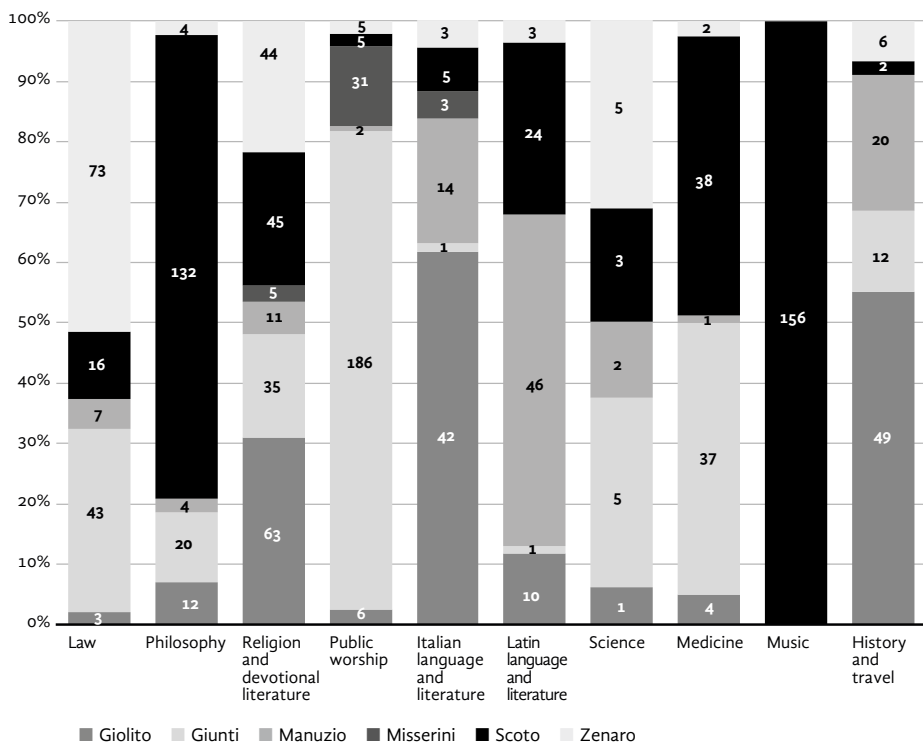
Graph 19 visualises the division of market zones, in percentages and according to subjects; note that subjects are different in terms of the number of editions included, and some are much more populated than others. The number of editions per subject is different and is reported in the graph in order to highlight both absolute and relative information.

We can see, for instance, that all 156 music editions come from Scoto, a firm that also predominates in the subjects of philosophy and, together with Giunti, in medicine. Almost 80% of public worship editions (186 of 235) are due to Giunti. Giolito's share of Italian editions reaches 60%, very close to the share of Manuzio's Latin editions, which is 55%. Zenaro published 51% of the law editions.

We can measure how expensive, on average, the books published by the different publishers were by comparing average prices, both in terms of price per copy and price per sheet.⁶²

⁶¹ All Venetian privileges granted in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are included in the database Early Modern Book Privileges in Venice, available at <https://emobooktrade.unimi.it/db/public/frontend>. See also: Erika Squassina, *Privilegi librari ed edizioni privilegiate nella Repubblica di Venezia (1527–1565)*, Milano 2022, and the chapter by the same author in this volume.

⁶² In the following two graphs, Misserini data are too limited to allow a reliable evaluation.



Graph 19 Distribution amongst booksellers' catalogues according to subject matter. Nominal values in the bars.

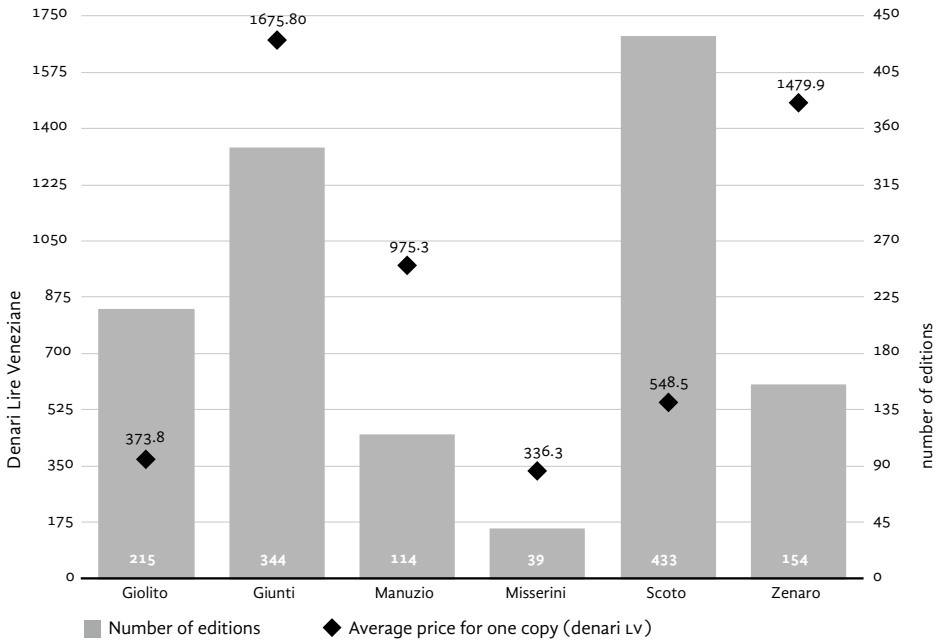
Graph 20 closely shows what could be a contemporary buyer's experience. A client in a bookshop in Venice, who was familiar with individual books for sale, would have fully known the general landscape of prices: the bulky Giunti books were placed at the highest end of the market; Aldo Manuzio was still keeping his prices relatively high, while the Giolito editions were truly in reach of most buyers.

Prices per sheet follow the same pattern [Graph 21]. While selling the most voluminous books on the market, Giunti was still able to keep the price per sheet remarkably higher than all competitors – except for Misserini. Only Manuzio was able to keep pace with Giunti's high prices per sheet, while Giolito and especially Scoto had to sell their books more cheaply.

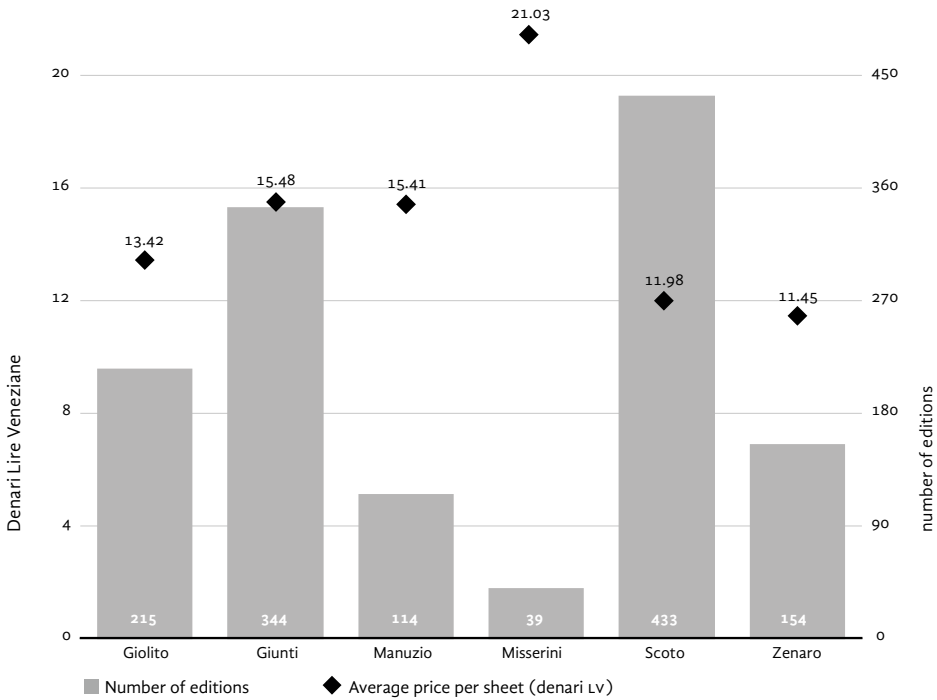
A more refined way to analyse the distribution of data involves box plots,⁶³ which allows us to show both the variability and the skewness of data and to compare distributions by different publishers.

63 In descriptive statistics, a box plot is a type of chart often used in explanatory data analysis. Box plots visually show the distribution of numerical data and skewness by displaying the data quartiles (or percentiles) and averages. Box plots are useful because they show the dispersion of a dataset. When the median is in the middle of the box, and the 'whiskers' are about the same on both sides of

the box, then the distribution is symmetric. When the median is closer to the bottom of the box, and if the whisker is shorter on the lower end of the box, then the distribution is positively skewed (skewed right). When the median is closer to the top of the box, and if the whisker is shorter on the upper end of the box, then the distribution is negatively skewed (skewed left).

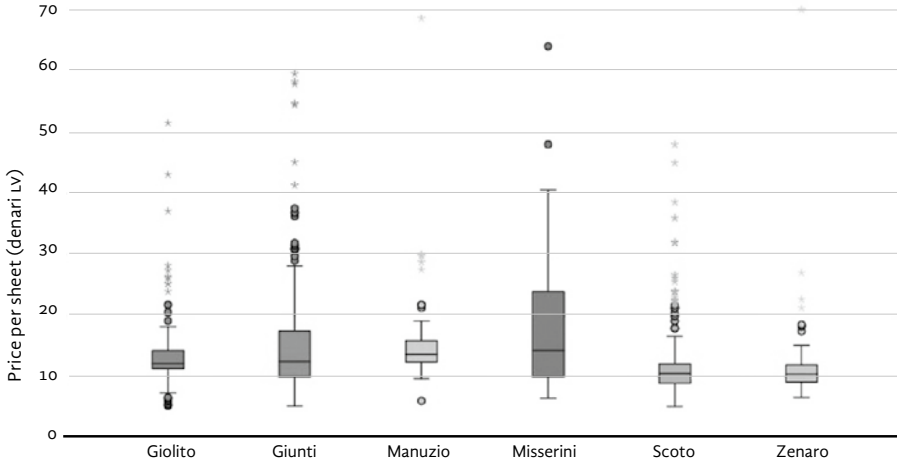


Graph 20 Average price for one copy (denari Lire Veneziane) and number of editions according to booksellers' catalogue

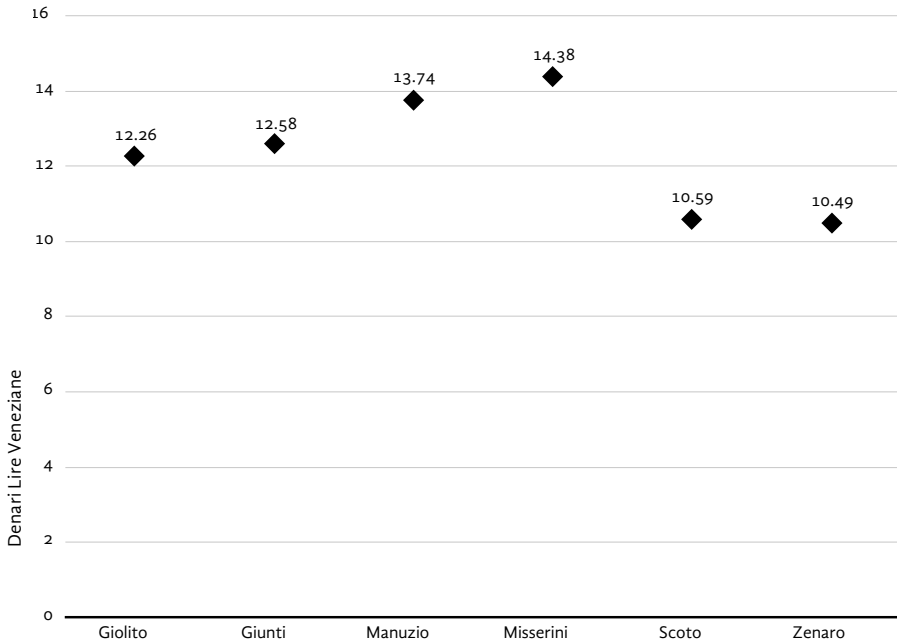


Graph 21 Average price per sheet (denari Lire Veneziane) and number of editions according to booksellers' catalogue

The prices per sheet are represented on the vertical axis, and the median price per sheet is shown by the black horizontal line in the box. The median value divides the overall distribution of prices (from the minimum to the maximum) in two parts: half lower and half higher than the median. The basic feature of the median price compared to the average price is that it is not affected by a small proportion of extremely large or small values.



Graph 22 Box plot of average prices per sheet (denari Lire Veneziane) of Venetian publishers



◆ Median price per sheet (denari LV)

Graph 23 Average price per sheet (denari Lire Veneziane) according to booksellers' catalogue: median values

Different box lengths reflect the different distribution of the central 50% of the data within each subset: the longer the box, the more dispersed the data, and inversely, the smaller (or more compact) the box, the less dispersed the data. For instance, the box of Misserini, whose catalogues provide only 39 prices for our analysis, is very long because it highlights a great variability of prices [Graph 22]. All distributions are positively skewed, due to the presence of outliers on their upper side.

The smallest variability of prices is displayed by the Zenaro and Giolito catalogues. The distribution for the Giunti prices is far from the others, exhibiting a stronger positive skewness, with a long tail of high prices and a greater variability. These characteristics justify the results found in the previous graph for the average price per sheet. Most simply, we can also represent median prices of Venetian publishers as in Graph 23.

While all median prices are lower than the mean ones,⁶⁴ we see that Manuzio's median price is the top one, followed by Giunti's price. Giolito's median price comes third, like his mean price, but the difference from Giunti's price is much reduced. The highest median price of Manuzio's catalogues is certainly connected to the fact that they advertised mainly newly published books.

We can infer that the three main dynasties of the Italian book trade continued to defend their prominent position on the market, where their choice of texts, their innovation applied to various book features, the value of their publisher's device, that is, their brand, and their vast output, allowed their books to occupy the highest level of the market.

The most expensive editions in Venice

Statistical analysis of book prices leads us to face some facts and figures of the book trade in an objective, quantitative way. Qualitative analysis is always revealing though, and individual cases can be better addressed using the findings of statistical analysis as a general backdrop. In our set of data, many peculiar cases attract attention, but analysing the most expensive editions is especially revealing. We refer to the price per sheet, of course, because the most expensive prices per copy are invariably connected to multivolume editions. Increasing the price per sheet is a much more hidden way to raise prices on buyers.

Two editions in our dataset deserve special consideration. Outliers excluded, the most expensive edition with a price of 70.02 denari per sheet is Livio Sanuto's *Geografia*⁶⁵ [Fig. 3].

⁶⁴ Misserini's prices are as usual based on few observations and therefore are not representative.

⁶⁵ Livio Sanudo, *Geografia [...] distinta in XII libri. Ne' quali, oltre l'esplicatione di molti luoghi di Tolomeo, e della bussola, e dell'aguglia; si dichiarano le provincie, popoli, regni, città; porti, monti, fiumi, laghi, e costumi dell'Africa. Con XII tauole di essa Africa in disegno di rame. Aggiuntivi de più tre indici da M. Giovan Carlo Saraceni*. Vinegia: Damiano Zenaro, 1588.

[24], 146, [12] fols, double plates; folio (ED1116, CNCE 39608; USTC 854899). Giuseppe Gullino, 'Sanudo, Livio' in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 90 (2017), [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/livio-sanudo_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/livio-sanudo_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

4895 A

GEOGRAFIA
DI M. LIVIO SANUTO
 distinta in XII libri.

Né quali, oltre l'esplicatione di molti luoghi di Tolono, e della Bussola, e dell'Aguglia, si dichiarano le Province, Popoli, Città, Porti, Monti, Fiumi, Laghi, e Costumi dell'Africa.

Con XII tavole di essa Africa in disegno di rame.

Aggravata da più tre Indici da
M. GIOVAN CARLO SARACENI.

CON PRIVILEGIO

IN VINEGIA. Appresso Damiano Zenaro. M.D.LXXXVIII.

Fig. 3 Title page of Livio Sanuto, *Geografia [...] distinta in XII libri*, Vinegia: appresso Damiano Zenaro, 1588
Bibliothèque Mazarine, 2° 4895 A

Sanuto (1520–1576), a man of letters and a geographer who had the opportunity to study mathematics and cosmography in Germany, was a scholar whose exceptional skills were so much acknowledged that in 1560 he was admitted to the Accademia Veneziana (1557–1561). He spent four years (1570–1574) building a large terrestrial globe with the help of his brother Giulio, who was a chalcographer.⁶⁶ Sanuto, who can be defined as the last of the great Venetian geographers, died young, so his *Geographia* was published posthumously with twelve beautiful double-page engraved maps representing Africa that were created by his brother. This edition was much sought after and soon became part of many erudite collections.⁶⁷ It was also presented at the Frankfurt Fairs [Fig. 4].⁶⁸



Fig. 4 Sanudo, *Geografia*, Vinegia: appresso Damiano Zenaro, 1588: table 10
Bibliothèque Mazarine, 2° 4895 A

Very close to the *Geografia*'s price per sheet is that of a Manuzio edition from 1581, the *Officium B.M.V.*: a volume in duodecimo, costing 68.57 denari per sheet.⁶⁹ This edition seems to have been strategic in the firm's production and marked a renewed interest in the increasingly competitive trade of religious service books, the same category for which Aldo's father, Paolo Manuzio, had enjoyed the papal universal privilege a few decades earlier.⁷⁰ To understand this initiative better, we need to recall briefly the context in which it took place. The revision of liturgical texts, set in motion by a decision of the Council of Trent, caused

the newly authorised versions to be used to the exclusion of all preceding ones. In this way, a massive demand for these books in all Catholic countries was suddenly created, a need that the holder of the papal universal privileges, Paolo Manuzio, could never have managed to satisfy in a short time. His subsequent cession of privileges to third parties via subcontracts set off negotiations and kindled the business ambitions of the major European bookmen, Plantin and the Giunti among them.⁷¹ Moreover, Plantin envisaged a way to distinguish part of his production of liturgical editions from that of his competitors by illustrating them with copper engravings. As it has been thoroughly reconstructed, liturgical and prayer books printed by Plantin with such illustrations were strategic in the outstanding expansion of his firm in the years 1572–1576.⁷² The successful production of thousands of copies of these books in various formats with engraved illustrations resulted from many factors: Plantin was able to establish fruitful relationships with excellent engravers working in Antwerp, gather a collection of plates in various formats to maximise its potential use, and especially foresee and create a market for his new, richly illustrated and much more expensive versions of religious service books. Only in the Spanish domains, where his prestige was growing thanks to the immense undertaking of the Polyglot Bible, was he able to sell about 10,000 copies of his illustrated missals, breviaries and books of hours.⁷³ Plantin was simultaneously printing the same texts with woodcut illustrations, so that different publics could buy his editions during a period of exceptional demand; the price of a book with copper engravings was approximately double that of ordinary copies of the same text with woodcuts.⁷⁴

The Italian clientele, too, was very attracted to these luxury books, which were mainly imported by two Milanese booksellers, Giovanni Antonio degli Antoni and the Tini brothers (Francesco and Simone). Venetian bookmen, however, did not follow Plantin's successful steps and did not publish missals or breviaries with engraved illustrations in the 1570s, nor later; the reason why this happened 'remains a mystery'.⁷⁵ This is particularly true in the case of the Giunti, who were the dominant actors in the production of liturgical and prayer books for a long time in Italy, often in partnership with other bookmen. For unknown reasons, Venetian publishers preferred not to enter into competition with Plantin in this field.

66 The only surviving specimen of this work is held by the Museo Correr in Venice. The diameter's globe is 68.5 cm; see Michael Bury, *Giulio Sanuto. A Venetian engraver of the sixteenth century*, Edinburgh 1990.

67 Concerning the book as a collectible item, see Francesca Ambrosini, *Paesi e mari ignoti. America e colonialismo europeo nella cultura veneziana (secoli XVI–XVII)*, Venezia 1982, 19–21.

68 Nikolaus Basse & Georg Willer, *Collectio in unum corpus omnium librorum [...] qui in nundinis Francofurtensibus ab anno 1564 usque ad nundinas autumnales anni 1592 [...] editi, venales extiterunt*, Francofurti: Nicolai Bassaei, 1592, 4to, III, 52 (USTC 623058).

69 *Officium B. Mariae Virginis nuper reformatum: & Pii v: Pont: Max. iussu editum*, Venetiis: Aldo Manuzio, 1576, reprinted in 1581, [24], 562, [2] p.; ill., plates, in 12mo (EDIT16, CNCE 79915, not in USTC).

70 Francesco Barberi, *Paolo Manuzio e la Stamperia del Popolo Romano (1561–1570): con documenti inediti*, Roma 1986. The only reformed text that Aldo Manuzio never ceased to publish over the years was the *Catechismo* (in Italian).

71 Nuovo, *The book trade*, 249–257.

72 Karen L. Bowen & Dirk Imhof, *Christopher Plantin and engraved book illustrations in sixteenth-century Europe*, Cambridge 2008.

73 *Ibidem*, 154.

74 *Ibidem*, 159.

75 *Ibidem*, 171.



Fig. 5 *Officium B. Mariae Virginis*, Ven.: apud Aldum, 1576 (first issue): title page
Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus, B 1657 (159 × 82 mm)

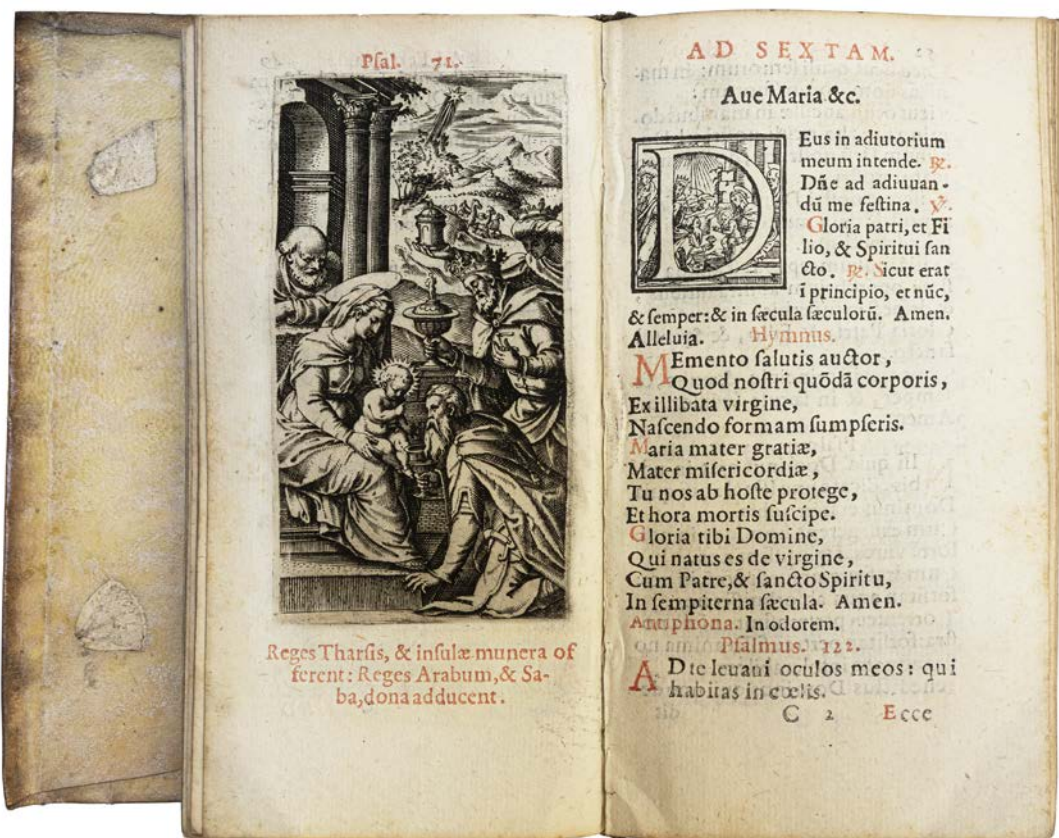


Fig. 6 *Officium B. Mariae Virginis*, Ven.: apud Aldum, 1576 (first issue): fol. C1 verso–C2 recto
Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus, B 1657

Only one exception is known today. The *Officium B.M.V.* of Aldo Manuzio seems to have been the only occasional competing initiative [Fig. 5–6]. This edition includes woodcut illustrations in the calendar section and a series of 45 full-page engraved illustrations in the body of the text, created by various engravers, among whom the well known artist Gaspare Osello or Uselli from Cittadella (in Latin, Gaspar ab Avibus), who signed the frontispiece representing the fifteen mysteries of the rosary in medallions. Osello's work as an author of artistic prints and in particular of the series of 74 etched portraits of members of the House of Austria (first edition 1557) is well known, while his activity for numerous Venetian publishers remains to be reconstructed.⁷⁶ Whereas the idea of complementing this text with engravings

⁷⁶ Giuseppe Stralio, *Gaspar ab Avibus incisore cittadellense del XVI secolo*, Cittadella 2000; Stefania Seccareccia, 'Gaspare Osello. Contribuiti per un catalogo' in *Grafica d'arte*, 27 (1996), 7–17; Eadem, 'La serie delle *Austriacae gentis Imagines* di Gaspare Osello, prima parte' in *Rassegna di studi e di notizie*,

22 (1998), 403–420; 'seconda parte' in *Rassegna di studi e di notizie*, 23 (1999), 179–222. For a general picture, see Gert Jan van der Sman, 'Print publishing in Venice in the second half of the sixteenth century' in *Print Quarterly*, 17:3 (2000), 235–247.

certainly came to Aldo Manuzio from Plantin's numerous editions of books of hours, the latter's editions did not serve as direct models because Manuzio's edition displays relevant differences in the selection of the accompanying text and in the choice of images. It is worth noticing that this edition with engraved illustrations, the earliest known imitation of Plantin's books of hours, was published just three years after the start of Plantin's extensive production of such books.



Fig. 7 *Officium B. Mariae Virginis*, Venetiis: apud Aldum, 1581 (second issue): fol. C6 recto
By permission of the John Rylands Library, Manchester, Aldine Collection 18614.

Aldo Manuzio's *Officium B.M.V.* is known in two different versions. Five years after the *princeps* in 1576,⁷⁷ the book was completely reworked, using the same materials, and this is the edition actually put on sale in his printed catalogues.⁷⁸ The 1581 edition is a more problematic product. On the one hand, it is made in such a way as to resemble more closely a Plantin's book of hours by introducing the ruler box on every page (but the result is not neat) and by inserting text in the box, further complicating the printing process. On the other hand, after presumably selling all copies from the 1576 edition, the second edition was made with the same plates, some of which looked evidently worn [Fig. 7].

Finally, what was the reception of this book? Only guesswork is possible, based on some clues. We can imagine that Manuzio launched the innovative but risky initiative in order to gain a share of the profitable but challenging market of prayer books with engraved illustrations where the new aesthetic created by Plantin was the benchmark. Aldo's investment must have been relevant. We can infer that the 1576 print run had been entirely sold in about five years, which was probably encouraging, given the decision to republish

it in 1581, exploiting the same materials. However, perhaps because the second was not truly an accomplished production, copies of this *Officium* remained unsold during the whole period under examination here, and beyond. The nominal price remained the same during the nearly 40 years that the edition was available, which means that it lost value according to the inflation rate.

The story of Aldo Manuzio's *Officium* and its dubious outcome may provide some clues about the reasons for which the Giunti did not attempt to produce this kind of prayer book with engravings. The Giunti would have been perfectly informed about the edition and its

fate, not only because no secret was possible in the overcrowded city of Venice, but specifically because Aldo was married to Francesca Lucrezia Giunti, Tommaso Giunti's illegitimate daughter and the cousin of Luc'Antonio the Younger. Thus, Manuzio's *Officium* remained for a long time nothing more than an experiment in Venice. As already observed, the Giunti and their partners preferred to carry on their customary production of prayer books with woodcut illustrations, a field where they were in a prominent position for more than a century.

Conclusions

Studying book prices means finding a further way to explore the economy of the publishing sector in one of the most competitive cities in Europe. The publication of so many printed catalogues in fifteen years undoubtedly marks a critical moment. The slower sale of stocks speaks of a progressive saturation of the book market, an excess of supply over demand. Book prices from these catalogues constituted a reliable and consistent array of current prices in Venice. More research is needed, and this is also possible thanks to the EMoBookTrade database that allows us to verify in other sources whether and how these printed prices succeeded in becoming reference prices in diverse and faraway contexts.

For instance, the most expensive book in our pool of data, the *Geografia* by Livio Sanudo was evaluated at a bit more than one third (price per sheet 26.26 denari) of the price set by its producer Zenaro (price per sheet 70.02 denari) in the inventory drawn eighteen years later (1609) of the private library of Gian Vincenzo Pinelli.⁷⁹ In a more general examination, the printed catalogue published in 1601 by Gaspare Bindoni on his way back from the Frankfurt Fair displays the remarkable mean price of 29.54 denari of all 588 imported editions, more than double the mean price in Venice, according to our sources (13.53).⁸⁰ These considerations help to understand the demand and offer conditions of the book market in that period, although no generalisation is advisable.

All in all, we can conclude that Venetian publishers set higher prices per sheet for texts in Italian than in Latin, for smaller formats than the larger ones, for special typefaces (e.g., music) than for roman/italic, and for books of prayers than any other subject of the period. Only exceptional factors (also in combination with each other) caused a real spike in price per sheet: the use of engraved illustrations, new content (particularly in special areas, like

77 The only copy known of this first issue is in Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus, B 1657.

78 The only copy known of this second issue is in Manchester, John Rylands Library, Aldine Collection 18614.

79 *Index librorum Bibliothecae Pinellae* (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS B 3119 suss.). We wish to thank Anna Maria Rauegi for having generously given us access to her unpublished edition of this document, whose data have been processed in the Early Modern Book Prices database.

80 *Catalogo de i libri della Fiera di Franchfort passata di settembre MDCI. Di Gaspare Bindoni libraro in Bologna, 1601*. The catalogue has been published with commentary by Ian MacLean, *Episodes in the life of the early modern learned book*, Leiden/Boston 2021, 138–211, who generously allowed us to process price data in the Early Modern Book Prices database.

geography, architecture and medicine), and the exclusive permission to publish the reformed religious service books. In fact, *Officia*, missals, breviaries and religious service books represented the most profitable sector of the market in this period because they were in the greatest demand exactly when their production was restricted by the pope's need to exercise control over the reformed texts. Moreover, every expensive edition was invariably protected by a Venetian privilege.

Thanks to the statistical analysis, we can now ascertain what was the average price of a printed book produced by some of the most influential Venetian publishers in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Certainly, this is not simply in terms of what was the 'average' price of a book.⁸¹ We have demonstrated that prices of individual books are not the ideal starting point to determine the 'average' price of a book. Only price-per-sheet calculation gives a reliable picture. In addition, we are now able not only to focus on the mean price per sheet but also to enrich this calculation with another element: the median price per sheet of each publisher. The publisher's mean and median prices per sheet confirm a tight range of about 4 denari, not shifting much according to the different publishers. This allows us to conclude that prices on the Venetian market were remarkably consistent. Notwithstanding the dissimilarities among the different publishers, none of them could charge their goods beyond a limited range of quotations except in a very few cases. Contrary to other administrations, the Venetian authorities decided not to control (or try to reduce) prices, even when editions enjoyed a temporary monopoly, thanks to a privilege. Rather, they let prices be set in a process free from impositions. And, as we have seen from the data, the system worked remarkably well.

81 This has long been an investigated issue in the history of the book. 'The average price per books was between 1 and 2 lire' wrote Paul Grendler (*The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540–1605*, Princeton 1977, 12–14), referring to the same

Manuzio and Giolito catalogues that we have worked on. Grendler thought that these prices were 'retail prices' and analysed Giolito's catalogues by relating them only to book formats.

**Appendix List of catalogues with prices, printed in Venice
from 1586 to 1600**

Aldo Manuzio the Younger

- 1 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Armandus de Bellovisu, *Declaratio difficilium terminorum theologiae, philosophiae atque logicae*, 1586
- 2 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo che si trovano al presente' in Juan Huarte de San Juan, *Essame de gl'ingegni de gl'huomini*, 1586
- 3 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Jean Bodin, *Demonomania de gli stregoni, cioè furori, et malie de' demoni, col mezzo de gli huomini*, 1587
- 4 'I libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in G. Iulius Caesar, *Commentarii*, 1588
- 5 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Savino Bobali, *Rime amorose, e pastorali, et satire*, 1589
- 6 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Jean Bodin, *Demonomania de gli stregoni, cioè furori, et malie de' demoni, col mezzo de gli huomini*, 1589
- 7 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Leonardo Vairo, *De fascino libri tres*, 1589
- 8 'Libri di Stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Juan Huarte de San Juan, *Essame de gl'ingegni de gl'huomini per apprendere le scienze*, 1590
- 9 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Aldo Manuzio, *Epitome orthographiae*, 1590
- 10 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Angelo Rocca, *Osservationi intorno alle bellezze della lingua latina*, 1590
- 11 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Marcus Welsler, *Inscriptiones antiquae Augustae*, 1590
- 12 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Charles Estienne, *Agricoltura nuova et casa di villa*, 1591
- 13 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Niccolò Vito di Gozze, *Dello stato delle repubbliche secondo la mente di Aristotele*, 1591
- 14 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Marcus Welsler, *Conversio et passio ss. martyrum Afrae, Hilariae, Dignae, Eunomiae, Eutropiae*, 1591
- 15 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Marcus Welsler, *Fragments tabulae antiquae*, 1591
- 16 *Libri di stampa d'Aldo, nella libreria di Venetia, CIO IO XCII*, 1592
- 17 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, nella libreria di Venetia CIO IO XCII' in Cornelio Bellanda, *Viaggio spirituale nel quale facendosi passaggio da questa vita mortale si ascende alla celeste*, 1592
- 18 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, nella libreria di Venetia CIO IO XCII' in Jean Bodin, *Demonomania de gli stregoni, cioè furori, et malie de' demoni, col mezzo de gli huomini*, 1592

- 19 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che si trovano al presente' in Paolo Manuzio,
In epistolas M. Tullii Ciceronis quae familiares vocantur commentarius, 1592
- 20 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, che hora si ritrovano nella libreria di Venetia del CIO IO XCII' in T. Livius, *Historiarum ab urbe condita libri qui extant xxxv*, 1592
- 21 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, nella libreria di Venetia CIO IO XCII' in Louis Le Roy,
Della vicissitudine o mutabile varietà delle cose nell'universo libri XII, 1592
- 22 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, nella libreria di Venetia, M. D. XCIV' in Francesco Bellinato,
Discorso di Cosmografia, 1595
- 23 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, nella Libreria di Venetia, CIO IO XO IV' in Aldo Manuzio,
Eleganze insieme con la copia della lingua toscana, e latina, 1594
- 24 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, nella Libreria di Venetia, M. D. XCV' in Vinko Pribojevic,
Della origine et successi de gli Slavi oratione, 1595
- 25 'Libri di stampa d'Aldo, nella Libreria di Venetia, CIO IO XCVII' in Sophocles,
Elektra tragedia, 1598.

Giolito, heirs of Gabriele

- 26 *Libri di stampa de' Gioliti [A]*, 1587
- 27 *Libri di stampa de' Gioliti [B]*, 1587
- 28 *Libri spirituali di stampa de' Gioliti*, 1589
- 29 *Indice copioso e particolare di tutti li libri stampati dalli Gioliti in Venetia fino all'anno M.D.XCII*, 1592

Scoto, heir of Girolamo [Melchiorre]

- 30 *Index librorum omnium tam ad principales scientias, nempe theologiam, philosophiam et iuris utriusque peritiam, quam ad quascunque alias artes et facultates cuiuscunque generis pertinentium, qui ad annum usque praesentem MDXCI editi extant, atque habentur penes haeredem Hieronymi Scottii*, 1591
- 31 *Indice de' libri di musica stampati dalli magnifici Scoti, cioè quelli che sino al presente anno 1596 si ritrovano*, 1596

Luc'Antonio Giunti the Younger

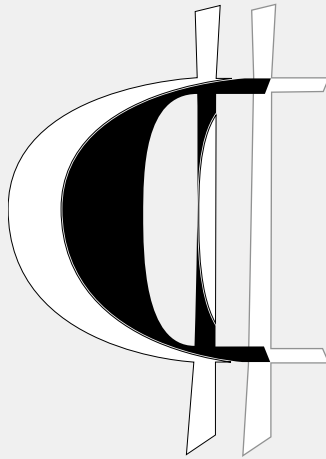
- 32 *Index librorum omnium qui Venetijs in nobilissima Iuntarum typographia usque ad annum MDXCI impressi nunc etiam existunt*, 1591
- 33 *Index librorum omnium qui Venetijs in nobilissima Iuntarum typographia usque ad annum MDXCV impressi [...] unc etiam existunt*, 1595

Damiano Zenaro

- 34 *Libri stampati dal magnifico Damian Zenaro sino al MDXCI in Venetia: cioè tutti quelli, che si ritrova al presente, con il suo manco prezzo a contanti*, 1591

Niccolò Misserini

- 35 *Libri di stampa di Nicolò Misserini che si ritrovano al presente 1600, 1600.*



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- ❖ information on visits, education, events, exhibitions and auctions;
- ❖ a newsletter (in Dutch);
- ❖ an annual meeting in Antwerp, including a lecture and informal dinner;
- ❖ special offers and discounts.

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We will be happy to answer all your questions by e-mail (voorzitter@bibliofielen.be) and hope to welcome you soon!



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