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Market assessment and risk prediction: resources and know-how of a seventeenth-century bookseller of Venice coping with competition

1. Growing competition and growing information

If observed from the perspective of current survivals, the 1580s can be seen as the golden age of book sale catalogues.¹ The question is opened whether a greater number of survivals of book sales catalogues from the 1580s onward may be caused by an increasing production (of both single editions or an augmentation of their average pressrun) or an enhanced practice of preservation. Regardless the reason, evidence converge in the same direction: towards the end of the sixteenth century, book sale catalogues were progressively acquiring a greater relevance for both consumers and producers. The obvious ramification of this phenomenon is that among the actors of the Renaissance book trade there was an increasing awareness regarding how their economic space was both expanding and getting progressively crowded and their operations were getting overall more complicated. In other words, bookdealers were getting growingly preoccupied with an exacerbating competition. Book catalogues were clearly a form of advertisement that responded to the necessity of positioning one's commercial offering in a growingly difficult environment. The practice of self-advertisement shows a growing concern that single

¹ I owe this notion to Christian Coppens who so generously shared it with me while working on a comprehensive survey of book sales catalogues printed in Europe. To his future publication on this matter, I shall address the reader. His previous publications on the subject comprise (Coppens 2008; Coppens and Nuovo 2018). Another source of information on the greater density of bibliographic information on book sales catalogues post 1580s is the EMOBookTrade project, which sees me as a proud member. Said project between 2016-2022, has devoted its attention to gathering information on book prices at the beginning of the print age. Most of the sources of data acquisition are printed catalogues. A look at the back-end perspective of the catalogue will confirm how current remaining of sales catalogues carry a date later than 1580 or may be attributed to that period when a date is not declared in the source. A survey of the sources so far entered in the EMOBookPrices database can be completed here: <https://emobooktrade.unimi.it/db/public/pages/sourcespriceslist>. Along the way I often used the generous help of several persons that I would like to thank: Carolin Strecker had often had to listen to my thoughts on this Collection 170/622 and read my first draft. My frequent conversations with Francesco Ammannati, Flavia Bruni, Christian Coppens, Angela Nuovo, Renaud Milazzo and Joran Proot have been fundamental to adjust my argument. I would also share my gratitude with Serena Malvasi and Lucia Botindari. Part of my studies on this topic have been conducted with the support of the Ahmanson Research Fellowships that was granted to me in 2018. My gratitude goes to the CMR Center for Early Global Studies and to the personnel of the Department of Special Collection at UCLA's Charles E. Young Research Library. My gratitude goes to Megan Drinkwater for revising my paper and for sharing her advice.

publisher had that their portfolio may be overlooked due to the availability of a rising number of different concurring offer of similar products.

The way in which individual publishers coped with the difficulties of an overcrowding market may be observed by pinning down a few metatextual elements found in book sale catalogues. A brief excursus over a selection of them may reveal the tricks used by publishers to lure and consolidate their constituency within a selected market space. A relatively limited publishing initiatives like that of the Giolito family, active in Venice and chiefly projected to an Italian speaking audience, would circulate a small format catalogue with listings organized alphabetically. They would use vernacular Italian addressing their advertisement mainly, but not solely, to a peninsular audience interested in a portfolio which, in fact, mainly comprised vernacular literature. They would provide prices in Venetian lira, knowing that their listings would rise the attention mainly in those regions of the Italian peninsula dominated by the Venetian book market.² A way larger operation like that of the Plantin-Moretus family would boast a selected number of publications on a 1579 broadsheet with an elaborated set of designs framing a polyglot text, hence addressing a wide erudite audience potentially scattered all over Europe and beyond. They would organize their listings by genre and, within each section, listings would be distributed in alphabetical order. The commercial taxonomy deployed by the *Officina Plantiniana* would comprise standard categories such as law books, history, and geography, Greek and Hebrew (hence addressing a highly erudite audience). However, the linguistic component would be dominant in said commercial taxonomy and it would brag publications in vernacular Flemish, quite sensical for a publishing house based in Antwerp, French, Spanish and Italian, hence asserting the diverse potential of their output, the capability, and ambitions of their distribution network. Prices would be absent, probably to adjust their sales to the contingencies demanded by the choice of directing such a wide operation in different geographic and commercial contexts, hence enabling them to flex their sales opportunities to many other unpredictable exigencies that a fixed price, expressed in any given currency, would not as easily allow. The fancy outlook of this spreadsheet catalogue, suited to be posted in display at fires or other selling posts, for passersby to admire was completed by an elaborated trademark placed at the bottom right to attract the attention of customers to a very articulated and laudatory address to the reader composed in fine Latin.³ A similarly large operation was that of the Giunti publishing house of Venice. Reliant on a wide distributing network, the Giunti would advertise listing on a spreadsheet manifesto, with friezes framing a text almost exclusively in Latin. Prices would be provided in Venetian Ducati, a heavy metal currency with which many in the know merchants, either sub or trans-alpine, must have been acquainted with if they did business in a relevant trading post like Venice. Their 1591 and 1595 catalogues proposed an advertisement format displaying listings grouped by literary genre organized according to an academic hierarchy of knowledge spanning from the quadrivium to the higher education, hence luring an

² See for example Perugia, Biblioteca Augusta (henceforth BA), Ald 558(13 and *ibid.*, Ald 558(14). Both catalogues are available in open access in (Panzanelli Fratoni 2018, 104-105).

³ BA, Ald 558(11). See (Panzanelli Fratoni 2018, 102).

audience aiming or belonging to the high professions: legists, physicians and clergy.⁴ Lastly, a more modest dealer would be Giovanni Domenico Tarino, whose commercial orientation were mainly influenced by the legacy of the Bevilacqua family with whom he collaborated and by whom he installed his activity in the early seventeenth century. His undated post 1609 catalogue would carry many listings in Latin and addressed mainly to an erudite audience interested in law books (both civil and canon law), casuistry or other religious works. His limited network must have constrained him to a subalpine mostly Latinate audience; hence the heading was in vernacular Italian, although his listings were mainly Latin, and his prices were in the local Piedmontese currency (Florin) with some indications on currency exchange still mainly meaningful to a peninsular merchant.⁵

By using elements such as taxonomy, visual aids, pricing and language, publishers were clearly aiming to consolidate and expand their audience. In doing so, they were carving their own special place in the market by addressing specific areas, both geographic and social.

This limited excursus on the outlook of late Cinquecento and early Seicento book sale catalogues were aimed to uphold one point. With competition growing in the book trade, and with spaces of maneuver shrinking while the European market was saturating, publishers were forced to resort to creative methods to cope with the heating friction between similar, if not identical commodities circulating a growingly tight market. Resorting to advertisement strategies was progressively becoming a must. Much of the same phenomenon could be observed in the transformation of titlepages into public arenas where publishers would showcase the alleged or factual novelties that distinguished their editions from previously circulating ones. This paper will argue that advertisement via an outbound flux of bibliographic information from printing centers onto the periphery of European readership would not suffice, especially not when knowledge of how dense the community of European publishers would have become by the second half of the sixteenth century. It will further argue that more refined computational skills of inbound bibliographic information were called for if a publisher or bookdealer was willing to tame a wild horse such as the late Cinquecento book market had become. With both the publishing and the retail practice becoming a risky business an efficient storing and managing of updated information regarding the state of the market of reference was necessary. The limited vision that early modern merchants had over the complex folding of their own transnational market was certainly a limit. Despite the poor communication that premodern Europe offered, early modern book dealers had all that they needed to do endeavor into a rudimentary systematization of relevant information they sought to operate a sound business planning. Record-keeping diligence and a computational mindset (fostered by the numerous

⁴ BA, Ald 558(8. See (Panzanelli Fratoni 2018, 99). A closing section of the catalogue would advertise a small group of vernacular Italian works, clearly placed at the periphery of this catalogue, as much as peripheral was the publisher's interest for a non-Latinate audience.

⁵ «Lista de libri di Gio. Dominico Tarino, stampati in Torino, con il prezzo loro: auertendo che grossi 12 fanno vn Fiorino e Fiorini 10, Grossi 6 fanno vn Scudo d'oro d'Italia.» See (*Lista* [1609]); a known copy can be found at Perugia, Bibl. Augusta, Ald 558(10. See also digital reproduction in (Panzanelli Fratoni 2018, 101).

abacus schools) were mandatory skills for late Renaissance merchants. Most importantly, however, publishers and bookdealers at large, could count on an ever-growing influx of bibliographic information which were spreading over Europe via sales catalogues.⁶ Furthermore, *ad hoc* catalogues could be fairly easily compiled by publisher by simply retrieving bibliographic data from the very edition that were circulating via commercial and private channels around the continent and beyond. Title pages and colophons, in fact, stored most of the information necessary for cataloguing relevant commercial details. The manuscript volume that this article centers upon is one such example of how book dealers of the Renaissance made use of the many bibliographic information circulating at the time to build their own catalogues to refine their knowledge of their own commercial area of interest.

2. Bernardo Giunti and his alleged Stockbook

This section will focus on a single manuscript which, it will be contended, shed light on the ability that early publishers had to assess their market of interest to measure the redundancy of circulating edition and, hence, plan their commercial strategies accordingly. The manuscript in question is Collection 170/622, preserved at the Charles E. Young Research Library, Department of Special Collections, at the University of California, Los Angeles. The manuscript is commonly known to scholars as the «Giunta's publishing house stockbook» and so is it currently catalogued at the holding institution. To my knowledge the first to have used the term stockbook in reference to this manuscript has been Martin Lowry (Lowry 1991). His work has been pioneering in two ways: not only did his work revived scholars' attention on the issue of book prices but it also brought to the spotlight an extraordinary repository of information on Renaissance publishing such as ms. Collection 170/622. His undoubted scholarship however could not rely on the bibliographical resources and digital tools that were made available to scholars some ten years after his study was published. The digital revolution progressively encouraged book historians thinking in terms of big data. That was for example the effort of the EMoBookTrade project which analyzed an array of sale book catalogues comparatively. Only a linear exploration of the dataset contained in manuscript Collection

⁶ Catalogues proved to be commodities suitable for multi-purposes exchanges. An interesting case of commodification of commercial catalogues emerges from the archive of the Congregation of the Index. The Roman institution showed its interest by having a hold of recent copies of the Frankfurt Fair's catalogue for policing purposes. Clearly watching over the offering of Italian and transalpine publishers meeting in a protestant city was of much interest for a censorial office in order to have a feel of the status of the production and circulation of contested material. Venetian book dealers returning from the fair were solicited to send over a copy of the recent Frankfurt Fair's catalogue over to the central office of the Congregation for the Index. Venetian publishers, on their part were almost always in need of special dispensations and corrective material produced by the Roman Congregation in order to operate their presses and plan their publishing. The Roman congregation proved to use such constant need of the Venetian publishers to extort them a copy of the latest catalogue. An example of this trading of bibliographic intelligence in exchange of institutional favors emerges from the following correspondence occurred between July and November 1601 between Rome and Venice: Vatican City, Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, Index, V.1, ff. 140v, 144v, 163v and *ibid.*, III.6, f. 298r. Further details on this matter can be found in (Ottone 2022, 272, fn. 30).

170/622 and a comparison between the inner logics of this and other commercial sources of the time could reveal that what was previously considered a catalogue of books in stock was in fact an even more fascinating tool of commercial planning. My present work builds on Lowry's scholarship and tries to propose a different definition of Bernardo Giunti's own manuscript. One must in fact take into account that Lowry's main goal was not to investigate the nature of the manuscript he was surveying but, rather, to derive valuable information on the Manuzios' pricing policies.

Before diving into the ambiguities of Bernardo's own manuscript, some attention will be given to its very owner and, likely, main compiler. Bernardo Giunti was a rather marginal member of the Giunti family, a transnational network of publishers originally from Florence, with a well-established presence in other Italian states as well as in Spain and France. The barycenter of the Giunti's commercial network was Venice, where the family's enterprise likely took momentum.⁷ Bernardo di Bernardo Giunti was born in Florence around 1550. When still a minor, his father Bernardo senior, leader of the Florentine branch of the publishing house died, leaving behind a suffering business which was unable to foster the professional ambitions of his five male heirs. Filippo and Jacopo then already adults, seized the firm leaving their three brothers no other option than seek their fortune elsewhere. Giulio and Luca went to Madrid to further consolidate the Giunti's presence in Spain and Bernardo went to Venice to try his luck under the watchful guidance of Lucantonio senior, leader of the Venetian branch and indisputably the most prominent member of the transnational firm.⁸ There, Bernardo's publishing activity did not seem to prosper, or at least not in comparison to what other Giunti were achieving in Venice and beyond. His greatest achievements in terms of publishing came mainly when he was in partnership with someone, initially his two brothers Filippo and Jacopo and, at the turn of the century with a book business connoisseur like Giovanni Battista Ciotti, Senese in origin but very well established in Venice and equally well connected with the Frankfurt commercial scene.⁹ His partnership with Ciotti began exactly in the year 1600, which is also the year when Bernardo Giunti started assembling his manuscript catalogue.¹⁰

Ms. Collection 170/622 is a bibliographic directory comprising some 11,000 entries. A greater number of enlisted editions date from the late 1570s to the 1640s.

⁷ On the origins and comprehensive history of the Giunti's enterprise a lot of work has been made by Alberto Camerini (1962-1963), William Pettas (1980; 2013) and Alessandro Barbero (2022).

⁸ A precious account on Lucantonio Giunti's personality and business posture and commercial success can be found in (Tenenti 1957).

⁹ Giovanni Battista Ciotti publishing endeavors and business approach are well described in (Maclean 2013) and (Rhodes 2013).

¹⁰ The manuscript has a ownership statement and a beginning date right at the ideal front page YRL, Collection f. 4r. The indicated starting date is March 1st, 1600. This date, I believe, must be taken as ideal, as ideal since it indicates the beginning of the Venetian calendar. However, a linear survey of the entries reveals how the earliest data were entered between 1600 and 1604. Details on the methodology used to consolidate these assumptions are provided in (Ottone forthcoming).

The latest edition that I could find so far is dated 1643.¹¹ Hence, the active life of the manuscript must have been 1600 (the declared year when the manuscript was initially compiled) to the 1640s. Entries, at their best descriptive level carry information on title/author, format, publisher, number of printing sheet and price (e.g. «Epistolae di Tullij. In 8°, Griffio, C. 33, L. 1.4»¹² Very rarely, information on the year of publication is provided (e.g. «Epistolae familiares. Altobello, 1586, C. 33 ½»¹³). The steadiest element in the descriptive standard of the manuscript is the sheet count (i.e. the number of printing sheet employed to assemble the enlisted edition). This for publishers was the chief quali-quantitative element when it came to thinking about the bare facts of their business. The sheet count provided the synthetic representation of the merging of expenses related to raw material and labor: press people, composers and proofreaders were all paid per printing sheet produced (or in the case of proofreaders, per printing sheet corrected and collated). When information on the number of printing sheets was associated to information on book price (and in Bernardo's catalogue often, but not always, is), an agile and well-trained mind could spot the cost-price/effort-gain ratio. Entries could however be way more imprecise and just list a title or little more: «Esopi. Combi, C. 13» or «Esopi. In 16°, Serena».¹⁴ These barebone entries are not so frequent in Bernardo Giunti's catalogue, but ironically, they are the most useful to define the inner logic of the catalogue, as they circumscribe the minimum requirement an entry should display in order to fit the purpose of Bernardo's listings. Entries with such little descriptive elements serve a purpose alone: they maintain that a given edition existed in a given time of interest for the compiler. This is exactly what Bernardo's catalogue did best: assert the presence of commodities of interest in a specific time and space.

Bernardo Giunti's catalogue has been referenced to as a list of books in stocks likely because of the fact that knowingly, Bernardo's main activity was that of publisher and book retailer. Hence it made sense to hold the idea that an extensive list of editions would reflect the book holdings of his shop or that of the Giunti of Venice. A commonsense idea that, unfortunately collide with several internal evidence.¹⁵ The most perplexing element is the fact that Bernardo Giunti blatantly in-

¹¹ «Avvento sacro di Serafino di Sera. Folio, Leggi, 4°, C. 108 ½ [...]» (University of California, Los Angeles, Charles E. Young Research Library, Department of Special Collections (henceforth YRL) Collection 170/622, f. 138v, item 40). The entry matches (Leggi 1643). See also (Catalogo del Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale (<https://opac.sbn.it/>), UM1E\001310).

¹² YRL, Collection 170/622, 11ra, 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, item 30.

¹⁴ YRL, Collection 170/622, f. 12v, respectively items 18 and 16. «Combi» refers to Venetian publisher Sebastiano Combi (EDIT16 (<https://alfabetica.it/web/edit-16>), CNCT 256); «Serena» or *Sirena*, was the insignia of the Varisco family; the entry matches (Aesopus 1595), hence it also matches the tenure of the Varisco publishing was that of Giorgio and Marco. For a sample of the edition see (EDIT16, CNCE 409).

¹⁵ A systematic survey of the reasons why I contend that ms. Collection 170/622 escapes the purpose of this paper. A linear assessment of the evidence can be found in (Ottone forthcoming).

corporates somebody else's' printed catalogues to build his own dataset.¹⁶ This notion alone conflicts with the commonsense idea of an inventory of books in stock. Furthermore, a common element of inventories is that they carry information on the quantity of commodities that are being inventoried. Quantities are in fact the key element in an inventory whose purpose is to crystallize the value of a standing patrimony. Bernardo Giunti's catalogue carry no information on quantity per item.¹⁷ One may argue that quantities were expected to be a dynamic element if the alleged stockbook was meant to be a search aid to browse the standing presence of a stock of books in sale in a Venetian bookshop. However, inbound and outbound movement should have been recorded to make the stockbook a useful directory for the shopkeeper to navigate the stacks. Instead, the catalogue solely records the sedimentation of bibliographic data for a timespan of over forty years. An inventory of this kind would have either mislead the shopkeeper in search of long sold books or, inversely, it would have been the testimony of a glorious business failure: that of a bookshop that stubbornly accumulated commodities that would not sell for over forty years. An alternative hypothesis could be that the manuscript was mainly a directory of prices. However, if prices are indeed well represented in the listings, they are however not constantly present. Their exact incidence among the listings cannot still be assessed but an approximate estimation would be that some fifty percent of the entries indicate a price (or, at times, even more than one). No wonder that indication on prices was so unstable in a tool that lived an active life of over forty years. It is hardly the case, that prices would in fact stay stable for this long. Summing up, the presence of data derived from secondary sources (i.e. printed sale catalogues) and the long span of the active life of this manuscript are the greatest evidence against the stockbook being in fact a catalogue of books in stock. Instead, a suitable hypothesis is that the catalogue was a directory aimed to aid the user to browse a virtual repository. But which virtual repository then?

The greatest clue that helps cracking the code of this ambiguous manuscript lies on the almost complete disentanglement of the editions that Bernardo Giunti chose to enlist in his manuscript catalogue, with the potentialities of the commercial network that the Giunti so carefully established over the years, mostly thanks to the entrepreneurial vision of Lucantonio Giunti senior, founder of the Venetian branch of the firm. Throughout two centuries the Giunti carefully placed family members in Spain (Burgos, Salamanca and Madrid), France (with a strategic presence of a family member in Lyon, the city where a relevant national fair would meet. In Italy,

¹⁶ So far, I spotted at least three occurrences of said copying practice: Giovanni Tarino's (Lista [1609]) is copied almost linearly at YRL, Collection 170/622, ff. 267r-268r. Listing derived from the (*Index* 1595) can be found scattered across entries at YRL, Collection 170/622, ff. 5r-165v. Niccolò Misserini's 1600 printed catalogue (*Libri* 1600), can be found mainly scattered in YRL, Collection 170/622, ff. 123r-136v (I am grateful to Giliola Barbero for drawing my attention to the incorporation of Misserini's data in Bernardo Giunti's manuscript).

¹⁷ An example of how a bookshop's inventory would be conceived in the Cinquecento comes exactly from within the Giunti's network, albeit from Spain can be found in (Pettas 1995). The document in question does carry exact information on quantities per item enlisted. This was a necessary information to resolve or prevent legal controversies that, most often the reason behind the drafting of an inventory, such as is for example the case of Juan de Giunta's catalogue here referenced.

Venice and Florence were their main hubs but, throughout the sixteenth century the Giunti was able to establish their presence in several other key or minor centers of the booktrade. While Bernardo Giunti was active, the Venetian branch of the family, with which he was clearly collaborating,¹⁸ could count on a vascular network of subcontracted collaborators operating in several Italian cities.¹⁹ Very little of this network of direct franchising or agents is represented by the geographic spectrum of Bernardo's bibliographic catalogue. This factor poses another heavy burden on the hypothesis that Collection 170/622 could have been an inventory of book acquisitions. It would in fact be strange that in compiling their stock the Giunti of Venice (or Bernardo alone) would disregard the commercial potentials of their standing network. The mismatch between the geography of Bernardo's catalogue and the geography of the Giunti's network, as anticipated also provide a clue to unpack the enigma of the nature and function of the manuscript bibliographic directory that Bernardo and others so carefully compiled for over forty years. It was no doubt a search directory, as its multiple search aids reveal. But what were the queries that brought users to consult this massive repository of bibliographic information?

With an eye to the internal geography of ms. Collection 170/622 (i.e. the provenience of the editions therein enlisted) it becomes clear how the greatest potential of the manuscript was to inform users on the state of the art in term of publishing output of the book market of north Italy, particularly the north-east. This was clearly the slice of the book market that was of greater interest of a small to medium scale bookdealer like Bernardo Giunti. Not only a great number of listings overall contained in the catalogue are coming from said region, but also, and this is even more telling, the compilers went a long way to endow the catalogue with specific search aids that would help users to navigate the data by provenience and did their best job in providing stronger search aid in the area of the manuscript that enlisted Italian imprints. These search aids consisted of tags surfacing outside the righthand margin of the volume and, most importantly, a pagination system (from 1 to 39) that was exceptionally used in the portion of the manuscript that focused on the Italian imprints (ff. 248r-267v).²⁰ Search aids can be also found in other portions of the manuscript but not with the same narrowness shown in the mentioned section of the catalogue. Much of the same data found in this portion are also repeated in the second most prominent section of the catalogue (ff. 5r-236v) which organizes largely the same listings by subject-matter.²¹ The by-subject portion of the dataset,

¹⁸ Minutes from the meetings of the Venetian guild of printers reveal that Bernardo Giunti acted within the guild jointly with Lucantonio Giunti (Camerini 1962-1963, II, 452-53) and later with his two sons to defend their direct commercial interests with reference to the commercialization of liturgical literature (Camerini 1962-1963, II, 454-55).

¹⁹ This network has been impressively reconstructed in (Tenenti 1957).

²⁰ Overall, the by-provenience portion of the manuscript occupies ff. 137r-268v of Collection 170/622 which covers also a number of transalpine editions which will be discussed later. A number of digital reproductions of the manuscript Collection 170/622 can be found in the open access publication (Ammannati and Nuovo 2017). The whole manuscript is currently accessible online via the YRL digital catalogue.

²¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 5r-236v

much like the Giunti 1591/5 printed catalogue discussed before was organized by scholarly categories that mimicked the study curriculum of students involved in the higher education (humanities, philosophy, theology, canon and civil law, medicine, liturgy).²² Within each of these thematic categories, letter-tags would ease alphabetic searches by author or title. Within each letter section listings were grouped by typographical format. The by-provenience portion of the manuscript gathers listings by macro-regions, i.e. Germany and Italy. Significantly, information on the provenience of said editions was sporadic but not absent, again, with special regard to Italian imprints. In sum, several internal evidence would suggest that browsing listings by provenience was in all ways enhanced in Bernardo Giunti's catalogue, and Italian imprints occupied a special place in his investigative practices.

So much interest in surveying the dataset of Italian proveniences, hence a market space largely dominated by the Venetian book industry, was probably aimed to guide Bernardo, and his acolytes, in draft business planning, publishing policies and retailer strategies. Rather than a directory of books in a physical stock, Bernardo's catalogue seemed to be quite the opposite. By selectively noting down the recent imprints of his most proximate competitors or allies, Bernardo Giunti was compiling a list of books that one should have been get a commercial distance from, both as a publisher and a retailer, as they were already circulating in his market of interest, hence saturating further commercial opportunities.

This hypothesis, however, shows one weak spot that needs further discussion. If Bernardo Giunti's catalogue was so invested in getting a pulse of the market most proximate to Venice, then why so much interest also in recording a good deal of German imprints? The «Catalogue of books printed in Germany» in fact occupies 43 densely written ad alphabetically organized leaves (with side letter tags) of his catalogue. So much interest on the German market would be particularly unexpected, provided that the Giunti had no direct link to that commercial area.²³

Germany however was closer to Venice than one would normally expect, hence, much closer to Bernardo's interests than his family's commercial network would show. For starters, his friend and associate Giovanni Battista Ciotti was a habitual visitor of the Frankfurt book fair. Quite intriguingly, the partnership with Cotti begins exactly when Bernardo's manuscript volume begins, in the year 1600. It is more than likely that his new associate would share commercial information with Bernardo in the form of sale catalogues that would normally converge at the international fair as an advertisement tool. It is also true, however, that Bernardo Giunti did not necessarily need to have an indirect chain of transmission with the German book market. German merchants were normally flooding the city of Venice to transact a diverse number of commodities, including books. All Bernardo had

²² Ibid., ff 137r-165v occupies a gray zone as it gathers information on editions in vernacular Italian printed in Venice. As the Giunti 1591/5 catalogues (*Index* 1591; *Index* 1595) other minor categories would appear: Greek and Hebrew books, for highly specialized scholars, and vernacular literature, the closest genres to escapist literature for non-specialized customers.

²³ YRL, Collection 170/622, ff. 206r-248r: «Catalogue of books printed in Germany» («Catalogo delli libri stampati in Germania»). What very likely this section ended up being in fact was a selection of information of books displayed at the Frankfurt fair. This is so far only a working hypothesis based on the notion that some of the listings included books printed in Antwerp, Lyon, and Paris.

had to do was to walk to Rialto, where most of the transnational business took place in Venice, as well as most of the book retail. Quite significantly, next to Rialto bridge, on the San Marco side of the canal, Germans had their own warehouse known as the Fondaco de' Tedeschi. In short, the German portion of ms. Collection 170/622, albeit counterintuitively, was part of the general survey that Bernardo was conducting on the Venetian local market. An up-to-date knowledge of the general status of the German book market would have allowed Bernardo to better assess what to receive and, most importantly offer to German retailer visiting Venice.

3. David versus Goliath: Bernardo Giunti versus Christof Plantin

Collection 170/622 may be one of the few artefacts revealing how book dealers approached market strategies with more than just a good instinct for their trade. The idea that complex, costly and risky operations such as publishing and retailing book required a good deal of planning, had long circulated among book historians. But the question of how they could deal with the intricacies of a wide and fast evolving transnational market such as that of the Renaissance while coping with the limits of premodern communication has often been left open. Looking at Bernardo Giunti's bibliographic directory it seems that their method was in fact simple and manageable for an early modern merchant, although the conceptual implications of a tool like the one devised by Bernardo are to some extent impressive and need stress.

To these days only another catalogue that shows partial similarities to Collection 170/622 has surfaced, and that is Christoph Plantin's M. 296.²⁴ The two directories display some qualitative common features. These are for example the outlook of the single entries (mentioning either author or title, or both, format, sheet count and price), the grouping of multiple listings according to commercial categories (mainly, provenience and publisher), and the alphabetical organization of data within classes. However, some differences need to be pinpointed. Plantin's catalogue M. 296 does not display the dual organization of data by subject and by provenience and is rather focused on proveniences, grouping entries by macro region, i.e. language areas, print centers and publishers (Milazzo 2020, 184; 2021, 146). Furthermore, lateral search tags are not present in the manuscript and users were relying mainly on their capacity to browse information alphabetically in a volume of 425 leaves. The considerably larger size of the manuscript is one of the justifications for the Goliath versus David analogy proposed in the heading of this section. In quantitative terms, not only does the Plantin-Moretus volume outnumber Bernardo Giunti's catalogue by 112 leaves, but also the number of entries available is overwhelmingly greater: ca. 20.000 entries in the Plantin-Moretus manuscript versus the ca. 11.000 found in Bernardo Giunti's one. The quantitative distance becomes even greater if one considers that the data in Bernardo Giunti's catalogue tends to repeat between the two main sections of the volume: the one that organizes data by subject and the one that organizes data by provenience.

²⁴ Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum, M 296. The purposes and potential of this manuscript is discussed in Milazzo 2020.

The quantitative differences found in the two catalogues under scrutiny is justified by the different magnitude that characterized the operation directed by the Plantin-Moretus publishing house and that operated by Bernardo Giunti alone or in partnership with Giovanni Battista Ciotti. The Plantin-Moretus publishing house aimed virtually at a global market comprising Europe and, via its relationship with the Spanish crown, the emerging colonies. Moreover, the Flemish firm was greatly invested in publishing and commercializing its own publications, aside from reselling other publishers' initiatives. In the case of Bernardo Giunti, with his known signed editions being so modest in number, it may have been the case that his activity as a retailer had priority over that of publisher. With Plantin-Moretus' goal being that of dominating a market that went throughout and beyond the continent, the array of information that the firm needed to master was by far greater than the ones necessary to Bernardo who mainly operated a sub-transalpine firm. Hence, the quantitative difference finds its clear explanation. Furthermore, the size of the firm and the number of collaborators that could work on gathering and implementing data in the two catalogues must have also made a difference.

But the smaller size of the dataset put together by Bernardo Giunti has ironically some advantages for current historians interested in dissecting the practical knowhow of bookdealers. A limited dataset like that of Bernardo Giunti speaks more clearly than the overly eloquent M. 296 in use by the Plantin-Moretus firm. For instance, it defines more clearly the scope of the planning strategies of a medium to small regional book dealer operating in a printing center that, although used to dominate the market, was now feeling the bite of northern centers, especially Antwerp, where the Plantin-Moretus firm operated. Therefore, Collection 170/622 defines quite clearly the minimum requirement in terms of business planning necessary to a book dealer who wanted to just stay afloat in a growingly competitive market.

Whereas M. 296 does a great job of compiling refined data for a very large continental market, Collection 170/622 compiles as many data available for the most relevant local market that a dealer operating mainly in Venice could aspire to work with: most of relevant northern Italian cities, some relevant central and southern Italian cities and Germany (due to its strategic relevance for the retail activities of Venice). In the composition of data, Bernardo Giunti did his best to acquire as many information as possible, but eventually he could lose some on the way. The first victim of this information decay were prices. Very interestingly, the earliest stratification of data most of the time carried information on prices whereas that was not much the case for later entries.²⁵ Hence, prices were a relevant information at the earliest stage of the data entry endeavor, but compilers partially lose interest on this element as time passed. Number of printing sheets was a steadier element. This could valuably replace information on price as barter was part of the way bookdealers carried out their transactions (Maclean 2021, 50-51). But this in-

²⁵ This is particularly clear in the section of his manuscript that classifies edition by subject-matter (YRL, Collection 170/622, ff. 25r-136v). The morphology of the text on each leaf along the matching of single entries with surviving editions allow a tentative analysis of the data. Metatextual elements such as the distribution of text within the space or changes in handwriting are also taken into account in this analysis.

formation, at times, could also be skipped by the compilers of Bernardo Giunti's catalogue. The information that they were most interested in keeping track of was by all means the presence of a given edition within the market of direct influence of the Venetian publishing industry and, eventually their later recurrences (i.e. later editions of the same title). Published works were, however made sense in terms of commodities. This means that compatible commodities had to share not only their content, but also their outlook, most importantly their typographic format. Ultimately if the Plantin-Moretus catalogue did a great job recording prices differences per analogous commodities (no wonder M. 296 also does a better job of noting down the year of publication of the enlisted editions than Collection 170/622 does), Bernardo Giunti's artefact was mainly good at keeping track of the redundancy of the same commodity in the commercial space that was of interest for Bernardo Giunti's enterprise. This seemed to be the vital information that a mid to small size book entrepreneurs needed to acquire when looking at expanding their operation, like Bernardo Giunti did when entering in partnership with Giovanni Battista Ciotti.

This last conclusion calls for a discussion of another relevant difference between the Christof Plantin catalogue and the Bernardo Giunti catalogue, that is their span of active life. Renaud Milazzo convincingly contend that data were entered in M. 296 between 1572 and 1596. Its active life lasted for twenty-five years or, likely little more. Collection 170/622, instead, was implemented between 1600 to, at least 1643, hence, for almost twice longer. Two hypotheses are possible: one is that within twenty years the width of Plantin-Moretus' operations expanded so much that that the data contained in M. 296 became obsolete. The second could be that after over twenty years the greatest asset of M. 296 (comparing prices in a continental radius) would become completely unreliable.

A much safer hypothesis can be made for Collection 170/622. The catalogue, less invested in controlling the market value of the commodities under watch could instead preserve a longer standing potential in surveying the saturation of the local market by the enlisted editions. So capable was this potential of the catalogue that Bernardo Giunti's catalogue outlived its original creator to be used by others after him.²⁶ Fourth years after its assembling, the best operational feature of the catalogue, i.e. controlling the saturation of the local book market must have greatly weakened and its implementation ceased. By the 1540s the local book market must have looked much different in terms of the local demand and the global offer that was flooding it. Forty years in early modern terms would comprise at least three generations of collectors. By that time new authors and even new literary trends had emerged and the Bernardo's compilation of bibliographic information must have become obsolete to assess the trends of not only firsthand but even secondhand acquisitions.

²⁶ Bernardo di Bernardo Giunti fades away from sources little earlier than the 1630s (Camerini 1962-1963, II, 527) when he must have been already in his eighty.

4. Common knowledge or publishers' book of secrets

The question of how Bernardo Giunti may have acquired the rudimentary knowhow to pursue computational analysis of market trends needs some reflection. Unfortunately, it is still difficult to offer a definitive answer. Clues suggest two distinct tentative hypotheses, both equally possible. One hypothesis would be that Bernardo Giunti learned the practice of rudimentary market surveyes within the circles of his own family. This is based primarily on the contiguity that his work had with the enterprise of Lucantonio Giunti. An enterprise of the size like his could hardly prosper in the transnational market without developing an efficient way of controlling the viability and profitability of his publishing endeavors. That implied a thorough knowledge of what the market was capable and willing to absorb. One problem with this argument may be that the available information does not allow to assert that Bernardino started his market research practice earlier than the year 1600, whereas his career as a bookman started in the 1570s. The hypothesis that he may have had a previous such catalogue as Collection 170/622 is inviting, however, to these days, still unsupported by evidence. Moreover, the fact that the year 1600 sees both the start the Giunti-Ciotti partnership and the start of Bernardo Giunti's data collection may hardly be a coincidence. When Bernardo's activity as a publisher took a leap forward thanks to the partnership with Ciotti, then his new position required him to move a step ahead in his commercial strategic planning. Hence, factual evidence and clues would concur to suggest that the 1600 catalogue was Bernardo's first endeavor in a systematic practice of assessing his market of interest.

Almost certainly Bernardo Giunti's method of assessing redundancies of editions in his market of interest was hardly his own invention. His manuscript bibliographic repository is too similar, albeit not identical to that used by the Plantin-Moretus publishing house. Did Bernardo Giunti learn of this practice via his transalpine connections? This would be the second hypothesis suggested by some of the available clues.²⁷ In all fairness, Bernardo Giunti's bibliographic directory begins just four years after the latest entry is entered in the Plantin-Moretus catalogue. This is also an irresistible coincidence. If one would like to argue in favor of a filiation between the former and the latter catalogues, a possible vehicle of this commercial method of market bibliometric may have been Giovanni Battista Ciotti. He, like Christoph Plantin, was a frequent attendant of the Frankfurt fair. There Ciotti may have learned the valuable secret of northern merchants who just started asserting their leadership in the European book market. Did Bernardo Giunti adopt the time-consuming craft in use by growing colossus of publishing like Plantin?²⁸ If so, Bernardo Giunti did not merely and passively absorb Plantin's method. Rather he readapted it to his needs and somewhat advanced it. His multiple search tags and multiple organization of data that allowed to access information from different an-

²⁷ I should mention that this was the thought-provoking hypothesis that my friend and colleague Joran Proot proposed me during a post-conference walkabout in Milan, and I would like to manifest my gratitude to him.

²⁸ «Bernardino», Italian for little Bernardo, is the name that can be found in a beginning note that declares the legitimate property of the volume (YRL, Collection 170/622, f. 4r).

gulations did not find a parallel in the Plantin catalogue. Did Bernardo perfect the craft all alone? Possible, but not entirely credible.

Commonsense would suggest that compiling bibliographic catalogues for market assessment practices may have been a common drill among bookdealers whose ambitions were more than just modest. But to this day, the scarcely available sources suggest keeping this as a working hypothesis.

One conclusive statement would be that quali-quantitative computational search directories do not show up in the skillset outlined for beginner traders.²⁹ Then was this computational technique a secret of early modern book traders?

5. Ramifications

This essay has argued that early Renaissance and early Baroque printers had developed a technique to go around the risk of a growingly competitive market. The basis of this argument were two artefacts found in relevant cities of the book industry such as Antwerp and Venice. By focusing mainly on the Venetian example, it has been contended that market risk calculation was a practice linked to a systematic compilation of bibliographic data that were flooding late Renaissance Europe. The hypothesis that is being suggested is that the growing competition created the pressure conducive to generate a systematic solution to a tangible problem. Meanwhile the information revolution brought forward by the printing press and the mechanical and quasi-industrial mindset of its key operators provided the fertile ground for this technical innovation in commercial bibliometric. Likely this rudimentary technique germinated in the environment of the print proto-industry. Ultimately, unlike all other commodities circulating in Europe, printed books were the first to carry unequivocal information on their production history. Such information was in full display on the title pages and colophons of most of the printed volumes. Censorial authorities often imposed printers to include precise information regarding authors, printers and publishers, along with the city and year of impression, to hold people accountable of the content of printed texts in circulation. The notion of a growing competition, already voiced by the very editions in circulation, was further amplified by the many printed sale catalogues circulating in Europe. However, if title pages, colophons and printed catalogues contributed to enhancing the notion of a growing competition among publishers, the information being so vascularly disseminated also provided the solution to prevent the trick of said competition. The mass of information traveling around Europe was ready to be diligently and orderly systematize in bibliographic repositories that could function as searchable directories of useful bibliographic information for strategic planning.

²⁹ A survey of the education of Italian merchants can be found in (Caracausi 2013).

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