

# From the *Corpus Iuris* to ‘psalterioli da puti’, on Parchment, Bound, Gilt... The Price of Any Book Sold in Venice 1484-1488

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**Abstract** The ledger of the Venetian bookseller Francesco De Madiis, known as the *Zornale* (1484-88), which is currently being studied by Cristina Dondi and Neil Harris, offers a unique insight into the market value of the earliest printed books, of any sort. The essay offers the analysis of a variety of subjects, prices, sales, customers, and comparison with the cost of living in Renaissance Venice, the largest place of production and distribution in 15th-century Europe. The focus is first and foremost on the cheapest and most popular items, a production and trade enabled by the new technology.

**Keywords** Incunabula. Book trade. Book prices. Corpus Iuris. Francesco De Madiis.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Most Expensive Books. – 3 The ‘Middle of the Road’ Books. – 4 The Cheapest and Best Selling Books. – 5 On Parchment, Bound, Gilt... – 6 Conclusion.

## 1 Introduction

The fall in book prices stimulated by the new printing technology was gradual, as can be ascertained by the surviving evidence: first, the purchase notes written inside the books by the early owners, then documentary evidence of various kinds which attests to actual transactions (booksellers’ records), or more indirect references, such as mentions in letters or legal documents.



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The essays in this part of the volume provide the evidence of a progressive reduction in the price of printed books, from the new specimens of the 1460s, still as expensive as manuscripts, to the first drop in the 1470s. A subsequent, very noticeable, decrease in price during the 1480s continues, on a substantial level, in the 1490s. The drop in price coincides with the growth of demand for printed books, and with the increase in production and its diversification, but most of all, with the development and refinement of distribution capacities which establish an international market for the new business.

The transition from a known market to an unknown one was a key stepping stone in this new business. The much repeated crisis of overproduction of 1472 should more correctly be seen as a phase in the new enterprising activities when mass production was not yet supported by a trade network which could reach unknown customers outside the immediate circle of the producer, the possible financial backer or patron, and the local seller of books, the stationer.<sup>1</sup>

Having had the enjoyable experience of perusing all the papers in this volume ahead of their publication, I have noticed how, on the one hand, the contributors have been furnishing very sound evidence about the increasing affordability of printed books; on the other, in some cases, however, they seem almost to disbelieve the evidence, or to consider it perhaps as insufficiently credible, since it appears to go against the trend of what has been written by economic historians, who up to now have consistently asserted that early printed books were expensive and remained a luxury commodity for a privileged few. Such has been the mantra, even though little or no financial data have been produced to support the claim, whether specific in its reference to the years in question, or on a wider scale and more comparative, of the kind and extent discussed in this volume and soon to appear online for anyone to use. Yet again, only by bringing together the evidence into one single, searchable place will we resolve this impasse and enable a proper assessment to be made of the economic and social impact of the appearance of early printed books in European society.

As a step towards this goal, I will offer here some clear examples of the fall in prices over forty years, before focusing on my main documentary source, the *Zornale* of the Venetian bookseller Francesco de Madiis, who sold around 25,000 copies of printed books in slightly less than four years, between May 1484 and January 1488.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The earliest instance of the argument seems to have been by Victor Scholderer with reference to Venice, Scholderer, "Printing at Venice to the end of 1481". The observation has since been repeated by Martin Lowry and most other scholars, without the data being subjected to serious scrutiny, cf. Lowry, "La produzione de libro", 378.

<sup>2</sup> The ledger employs the Venetian currency of the time, established through the monetary reform of doge Nicolò Tron between 1471 and 1474, with prices marked up in duc-

Printed books in the 1460s were indeed still expensive, as expensive as their manuscript counterparts. A copy of the *Rationale divinorum officiorum* printed in Mainz in 1459 and purchased in 1461 by the Benedictines of S. Giorgio Maggiore of Venice cost 18 ducats (that is 1240 *soldi*).<sup>3</sup> While acknowledging the impressive nature of a distribution channel that conveyed the volume from Mainz to Venice in only a couple of years after publication, 18 ducats for one in folio volume of 160 leaves is very expensive. It is almost double the amount of money paid for the most expensive, and largest, set of books recorded in the *Zornale*, 26 years later: a set of the *Glossa ordinaria* in six in folio volumes for a total of 1628 leaves, that is ten times the number of leaves, which sold in 1487 for 10 ducats (but were printed on paper). Indeed several copies of the *Rationale*, in an edition printed in Venice in 1482, comprising 202 leaves, are sold in the *Zornale* for £ 2 s 10, that is 50 *soldi*.<sup>4</sup> These books testify to a fall in price from 1240 to 50 *soldi* over a period of 26 years.

Another bulky Medieval text, which swiftly made its way into the new medium, the *Catholicon*, in a copy printed on parchment, in Augsburg in 1469, was purchased by the Augustinians of Passau in the same year for 48 Rhenish Florins:

Anno domini Millesimo cccc° lxxvii[ij]°. Comparatus est jste Katholicon.  
tempore Johannis Hachinger huius ecclesie [Passau, St. Nikola,

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ats, *lire*, and *soldi*. According to the exchange rate in the 1472-1508 period, the gold ducat was calculated as the equivalent of 6 *lire* and 4 *soldi*, or, more simply, 124 *soldi*. The *lira*, for which we employ the £ symbol, was the equivalent of 20 *soldi*. The *Zornale* does not record prices involving the fourth and smallest coin of the time, the *piccolo* or *denaro*, 12 of which made up a *soldo*; Papadopoli Aldobrandini, *Le monete di Venezia*, 2: 8-9; Spufford, *Handbook of Medieval Exchange*, 80-5; Lane, Mueller, *Money and Banking in Medieval and Renaissance Venice*, 1: 617 (table D.3: «Domestic Exchange: The Ducat in Soldi di Piccoli, 1305-1508»). To recap: 1 ducat (d) = 124 *soldi*; 1 *lira* (£) = 20 *soldi*; 1 *soldo* (s) = 12 denari. Cf. Illustration 6 “Currencies in Venice”.

**3** Duranti, Guillelmus, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*. [Mainz]: Johann Fust and Peter Schoeffer, 6 Oct. 1459. Folio. 160 leaves. CIBN D-278; GW 9101; ISTC id00403000; MEI 02011878; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. Vélins 125; inscription on the last leaf: “Iste liber est congregationis monachorum sancte Justine | deputatus monasterio sancti Georgii maioris venetiarum ac signatus numero 315 | Constitit ducatorum decem octo emptus anno 1461”. Interestingly, another copy of this edition was owned by the Carthusians of S. Andrea de litore in Venice, suggesting a targeted distribution; MEI 02004088; Manchester, John Rylands University Library, 3074. As noted in ISTC, all known copies are printed on parchment, except for the copy in Munich which however appears to be made up from a set of proof sheets.

**4** Duranti, Guillelmus, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*. Ed: Johannes Aloisius Tuscanus. Venice: Georgius Walch, 18 May 1482. Folio. 202 leaves. GW 9124; ISTC id00426000. Evidence on the *Glossa ordinaria* and the 1482 *Rationale* comes from the *Zornale* of Francesco de Madiis. They are copies printed on paper and sold unbound. If the purchaser wanted to add rubrication, illumination, and binding a further cost would have been incurred; cf. in this volume the articles of Harris and Armstrong on the mark ups caused by these additional crafts.

Augustinians under prior Johann Hächinger] pro tunc immeriti praepositi. pro xlvij Aureis Rh. florenis taxatus pro vii solidis xx denaris faciunt in moneta vsuali xlvj talenta.<sup>5</sup>

Another copy of the same edition was purchased in Bamberg in 1470 for 47 Florins and one lira:

XLVII Florenos 1 libram pro libro qui dicitur Katholicon et continet LXV quaternos de impressa littera bona et illuminata.<sup>6</sup>

Another, also on parchment, was purchased in Schnals, Tyrol, in 1470 for 32 ducats:

Anno domini 1470 Dominus fridericus prior monasterij Montis omnium angelorum in Snals ordinis Cartusiensis emit hunc librum pro xxxij ducatis.<sup>7</sup>

Less than ten years later, a copy of a newer edition of the same work, printed in Strasbourg in around 1477 was purchased in 1478 by Paul III, Abbot of the Cistercian monastery at Lilienfeld, Lower Austria, for 7 Rhenish Florins including the binding:

Anno domini M° cccc° septuagesimo octavo hic liber comparatus est per reverendum [...] Abbatem dominum Paulum monasterij Campiliorum unacum ligatura pro 7 florenis Renensibus.<sup>8</sup>

In 1484, that is 15 years later, unbound paper copies of a Venetian edition of the same work were sold for less than one ducat, £ 6 (or 120 *soldi*).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Balbus, Johannes, *Catholicon*. Augsburg: Günther Zainer, 30 Apr. 1469. Folio. 522 leaves. BSB-Ink B-9; GW 3183; ISTC ib00021000; Munich BSB, 2° Inc. s.a. 101.

<sup>6</sup> Bamberg SB, Inc. typ. N. I. 2. Here the price includes parchment as support and illumination.

<sup>7</sup> Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Ink 4.B.4 Bde 1-2; MEI 02107816. During the period here considered, 1469-1501, the standard of the Rhenish Florin (Rheinischer Gulden), which was minted in different places (Cologne/Mainz), was lower than the Venetian ducat: that is to say it was slightly lighter and slightly less fine. At the beginning of this period the gold weight of each coin was 2.7 modern grams, by 1500 it was down to 2.5. The Venetian ducat remained totally stable at 3.4 grams and nearly complete fineness. In this period therefore the ratio of the standards of the two coins varied between  $2.7:3.4 = 0.79:1$  and  $2.5:3.4 = 0.74:1$  (ex inf. Dr Julian Baker, Assistant Keeper, Medieval and Modern Coins, Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford).

<sup>8</sup> Balbus, Johannes, *Catholicon*. [Strasbourg: The R-Printer (Adolf Rusch), between 1475-77]. Folio. 372 leaves. GW 3185; ISTC ib00023000; MEI 00559043; Cambridge UL, Inc.0.A.2.2 [79].

<sup>9</sup> Balbus, Johannes, *Catholicon*. Venice: Hermannus Liechtenstein, 24 Sept. 1483. Folio. 356 leaves. GW 3188; ISTC ib00026000. Evidence from the *Zornale*.

A copy of the Bible in German printed in Strasbourg in 1466 was purchased in Augsburg the same year for 12 Florins. It bears the arms of Hector Müllich and Otilia Cüntzelmeim and the inscription "1466 27 Junio ward ditz buch gekaft vneingepunden vmb 12 gulden".<sup>10</sup>

Another copy, also purchased in Augsburg and today in Cambridge, cost 16 golden Rhenish Florins:

Dise Bibel hat Bartolme rem der Elter zu augspurg kaufft umb 16 guldin reinisch.<sup>11</sup>

A copy of Cicero's letters printed in Rome in 1467 was purchased in the city in 1468 for 4 Florins and brought to Memmingen by Petrus Mitte de Caprariis, a canon lawyer and Preceptor of the Antonine order in Memmingen:

Hunc librum epistolarum familiarum Ciceronis emj Rome anno domini m° iiii Ex octavo ad reponendum in libraria mea in Memmingen pro precio 4or florenis. De Caprariis.<sup>12</sup>

The value of the Rhenish Florin was slightly lower than the Venetian ducat at the time in question but the price was still the equivalent of several hundreds *soldi*. Twenty years on, copies of the same work printed in Venice in 1484 are sold in the *Zornale* for 40 *soldi*.<sup>13</sup>

In 1997 Martin Davies made an important point about prices in the 1460s: "it looks as if the earliest market in printed books was rather more stable and rational than has been credited".<sup>14</sup>

Böninger and Peric, in this volume, provide evidence of prices dropping during the 1470s, the latter explicitly in comparison with some prices in the *Zornale*. For the mid-1480s the de Madiis ledger provides a very large body of evidence of the substantial reduc-

<sup>10</sup> *Biblia* [German]. [Strasbourg; Johann Mentelin, before 27 June 1466]. Folio. 406 leaves. BSB-Ink B-482; GW 4295; ISTC ib00624000; Munich BSB, Rar. 285.

<sup>11</sup> Cambridge UL, Inc.1.A.2.1[52]; MEI 00558537; the inscription is in a contemporary hand.

<sup>12</sup> Cicero, Marcus Tullius, *Epistolae ad familiares*. Rome: Conradus Sweynheym and Arnoldus Pannartz, 1467. 4°. 246 leaves. GW 6799; ISTC ic00503500; Madsen 1136; Copenhagen KB, Inc. Haun. 1136; cf. also Bolton in this volume.

<sup>13</sup> Cicero, Marcus Tullius, *Epistolae ad familiares* (Comm: Hubertinus clericus). Venice: Andreas Torresanus, de Asula and Bartholomaeus de Blavis, de Alexandria, 31 Jan. 1483/84. Folio. 266 leaves. GW 6838; ISTC ic00524000. Among the various Venetian editions to appear by the date of the entry in the ledger, this is the most likely candidate. A total of ten copies are recorded in the initial stock in trade of Francesco de Madiis, with another bound copy among the "libri ligati". Some 139 copies are sold in the *Zornale*, from an initial price of £ 3 (60 *soldi*) then stabilizing at £ 2 (40 *soldi*), and 70 *soldi* when sold bound.

<sup>14</sup> Davies, "Two Book-Lists", 50.

tion in prices, though even these still appear expensive in comparison with the continuous decrease of the 1490s, in conjunction with the expansion of production, as shown by Gatti, also in this volume.

A copy of the Missal for the use of Würzburg printed by George Reyser in 1481 was purchased locally, the same year, for 18 Florins. The high price included the fact that the copy was printed on parchment and had rubrication, illumination, and binding: "1481 Johannes Kewsch vicarius in ecclesia Herbipolensi hunc librum comparavit propriis expensis et pro omnibus scilicet pergameno impressura Rubricacione illuminaturum(?) et ligatione xviii florenis 1481".<sup>15</sup>

A copy of the same Missal, printed again in 1499 by Reyser was purchased locally, two years later, in 1501, for 5 Florins. In this case we have no information about the cost of the finishing touches, although the book is still today in a contemporary binding produced locally: "Anno Domini MDI Ego Georgius Raßmann hujus veri possessor hunc librum comparavi pro florenis V".<sup>16</sup>

Did the fall in prices continue? Evidence for the following century will have to be gathered for scholars to answer this question adequately.<sup>17</sup>

There are two important points which need to be taken into consideration when using books in socio-historical studies.

First, unlike most traded commodities, not all books are the same: books always reflect the market or user they were intended for. If these users belong to different segments of society, in the 5th century as in the 15th century, that has to be taken into account. The texts of the classics sold in the document analysed by Paola Pinelli in this volume could not have been afforded by ordinary shopkeepers or labourers, but neither would they have wanted them. Historical perspective and a sound understanding of the transmission of knowledge in written form, of book production and consumption, and of library history, should guide researchers to understand that in a climate of

**15** *Missale Herbipolense*. [Würzburg]. [Commissioned by Rudolphus de Scherenberg, Episcopus Herbipolensis]. Würzburg: Georg Reyser, [after 8 Nov. 1481]. Folio. 378 leaves. GW M24419; ISTC im00663900; MEI 00206257; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. 1Q 1.7.

**16** *Missale Herbipolense*. [Würzburg]. Commissioned by Laurentius de Bibra, Episcopus Herbipolensis. Würzburg: Georg Reyser, [after 11 Oct. 1499]. Folio. 384 leaves. GW M24435; ISTC im00666200; Hubay, *Incunabula der Universitätsbibliothek Würzburg*, no. 1478; INKA 36001888 (ownership inscription with price, not transcribed); Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Inc. f. 26. Evidence from incunabula not in MEI or the *Zornale* comes from Dominique Coq, whom I would like to thank most warmly for sharing with me a spread sheet file with data on 650 priced incunabula which he extrapolated from printed catalogues of European incunabula collections.

**17** The ERC-funded project *Early Modern Booktrade. An Evidence-Based Reconstruction of the Economic and Juridical Framework of the European Book Market*, led by Prof. Angela Nuovo at the University of Milan, should provide comparative data; <http://emobooktrade.unimi.it/content/early-modern-book-trade>. Cf. also Harris, "Aldo Manuzio, il libro e la moneta"; Davies, Harris, *Aldo Manuzio*, 101-20.

change, of the creation of a new commodity and a new market and of the expansion of literacy, over 500 years ago ordinary shopkeepers and labourers would have sought first of all a primer! And indeed the *Zornale* proves that this is what was consistently purchased in Venice in the mid 1480s. Demand and supply made these books, and ones like them, affordable.

Another approach which has stymied a broader comprehension of the place of books in the early modern economy is the custom of converting fluctuating monetary values into the more stable silver equivalent. While undoubtedly correct, this equivalent should be accompanied by the conversion into Venetian *soldi*, as the EMO Book-trade project has done, and preferably also by looser, more general comparisons with the cost of living. What we lose in precision we gain in understanding.

A book in the manuscript period was mostly unattainable for ordinary people in a way that early printed books were not; of course *mastri* and *balie* could not afford Justianian, but why should they want to anyway? *Psalterioli*, *Donati*, Books of Hours, secular literature were attainable, and the fact that these types of books were printed and purchased in droves tells us that they reached their market, one which was already expanding in the 15th century and was substantially enhanced by the printing press.

The evidence is in the account book of Francesco de Madiis, the *Zornale*. Neil Harris and myself have described this extraordinary source in some detail in previous publications; therefore I will provide here only the essential elements about the document and its background which are needed to understand the figures that I will be providing.<sup>18</sup>

The shop operated a retail rather than wholesale business. This is made clear by the fact that the majority of sales are of individual books, which are most often sold singly. When customers' names are mentioned, they are a combination of people in the trade and ordinary people, on occasion individuals of high social standing.<sup>19</sup>

The range of books traded suggests that de Madiis's bookshop was a rather large operation, where editions of best-selling works produced by some of the major printers and publishers of Venice were distinguished by the name of the same expressed in familiar terms: the Missals of *Nicolò*, that is Nicolaus de Frankfordia, the Breviaries

<sup>18</sup> Dondi, Harris, "Oil and Green Ginger"; "Best Selling Titles"; "Exporting Books from Milan to Venice"; "I romanzi cavallereschi". Also Mansutti in this volume.

<sup>19</sup> For example Alvise Cappello (c. 1449-1512). At the age of 35, in 1484, he purchased a large quantity of lay and devotional literature in the vernacular. He then entered public life in 1495 and was *podestà* of Chioggia in 1501, of Bergamo in 1504, a member of the Council of Ten from 1506, and was made duke of Candia in 1511 but died at sea with his family on their way to Crete. Cf. Dondi, Harris, "Oil and Green Ginger", 351, where Cappello is mentioned but not identified.

of *messer Francesco*, that is Francesco Renner who Italianised his name as Fontana, and so on. No single sheets, paper, or writing material is listed in this ledger, though this is the kind of material booksellers also used to sell. It is likely therefore that separate records were kept for non-printed material on sale in the shop.

The accounting practice, which we can see evolving in the first few pages of the ledger, suggests that this is the first record devoted to printed books of this particular business. The sheer quantity of the sales of the printed books made it necessary to compile a dedicated ledger.

Some 11,100 entries are listed in the *Zornale*, arranged according to the day of sale. Each entry consists of an edition with an author and/or a title, and sometimes with the addition of the name of the printer or publisher. Each entry/edition was sold in one or more copies; the total number of copies sold, as recorded in the ledger, comes to around 25,000. Frequently groups of entries are bracketed together as a bulk sale with a collective price, therefore the total number of sales are 6,950. Some 4,165 entries are sold as part of a bulk sale.

Of the 6,950 sales recorded in the *Zornale*, some 5,915, the vast majority, were sold for less than one ducat. Just over 1,000 sales cost more than one ducat; they are mostly bulk sales, that is groups of two or more cheaper editions sold together.

An initial impression of the monetary range related to the sale of early printed books comes from a breakdown of the overall sales into price categories: under 10 *soldi*, 10 *soldi*, between 11 and 19 *soldi*, between 20 and 59 *soldi* (1 to 3 lire), between 60 and 123 *soldi* (3 to 6 lire), over 124 *soldi* (one ducat or above).

Around 1,160 sales sold for 10 *soldi* or under; of these, 600 are sales between 1 and 9 *soldi*, 560 are sales of 10 *soldi*.

Some 875 were sold for between 11 and 19 *soldi*.

Some 2,346 are sales between 20 and 59 *soldi*, that is 1 to 3 lire.

Some 1,535 are sales between 60 and 123 *soldi*, that is 3 to 6 lire.

Finally, 974 are sales above 124 *soldi*, that is 1 ducat.<sup>20</sup>

It is very important to understand what these editions are in each different price category, and to place the range of books offered by this Venetian bookselling outlet within the wider context of what was being produced and made available in Venice and in Italy during the period covered by the *Zornale*, that is until January 1488.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> 43 sales still need sorting, of which 12 are below 3 *soldi*, 8 are below 10 *soldi*, 16 are below 1 ducat, and 7 are above the ducat.

<sup>21</sup> As the last sale takes place on 23 January 1488, the cut off point for the editions considered falls at the end of 1487.



We have provisionally counted and identified 688 editions in the *Zornale*. The entries never identify an explicit edition in a purely bibliographical fashion. In many instances, however, only one imprint is possible; in others we initially applied the principle of the “Venetian edition closest in time”, unless there were reasons for thinking otherwise;<sup>22</sup> if there is no plausible Venetian edition, we identify as the nearest in time from the centre geographically nearest to Venice, two criteria that sometimes enter into conflict; when no Italian edition is plausible, we look abroad. For some categories of titles, most importantly texts for worship, school books and chivalric texts, a very high percentage of editions has been totally destroyed, and in these instances our identifications are largely hypothetical. With these premises, the geographical mapping of the places of production presents a majority of Venetian editions (454). Other places of production represented in the ledger include Milan (55), Pavia (34), Rome (24), Padua (20), Bologna (16), Treviso (14), Vicenza (10), Brescia (8), Verona (6), Ferrara (5), Mantua (4), Parma (4), Florence (3), Naples (3), Siena (3), Cividale (2), Pojano (1), Reggio Emilia (1), Colle Val d’Elsa (1), Pescia (1), Pisa (1), Perugia (1), as well as a few non-Italian editions, from Cologne (7), Basel (9), and Reutlingen (1), making a total of 234 non-Venetian editions in multiple copies, whose presence in Venice is evidence of their national and international trade.

Some 1,435 editions had been printed in Venice by the end of 1487, out of a total of 3,788 editions printed in the city up to 1500.<sup>23</sup> Some 4,769 editions were printed in Italy by the end of 1487, out of a total of 10,489 printed in the country up to 1500.

This means that the *Zornale* records the trade and sale of roughly a third of the production of the city known to us today, or one sixth of the entire production of the Italian peninsula.

## 2 The Most Expensive Books

The number of sales superior to a ducat is small and relates mostly to bulk sales, for which the individual prices have to be calculated on the basis of single sales elsewhere.

Among the individual editions which certainly cost more than one ducat we find bulky, multi-volume, publications in the fields of law,

<sup>22</sup> A major case in point are the many editions of the law coming from Milan, partly discussed in Dondi, Harris, “Exporting Books from Milan to Venice”.

<sup>23</sup> Advanced search in ISTC: “not printed after” 1488. In consideration of the fact that the *Zornale* does not include single sheets, and that the number of editions dated to ‘c. 1500’ in ISTC is noticeable, the wide representation of editions in the ledger is even more remarkable.

philosophy, theology, together with editions of the Bible, accompanied by commentaries. First and foremost, the *Glossa ordinaria*.

On 17 May 1484 a "glosa ordinaria" is listed in the stock and it is disposed of only four days later for 10 ducats (1,240 *soldi*).

The price of this extensive commentary on Roman Civil Law might have been a bit steep at 10 ducats, but it consisted of over 1,500 leaves (1,628 to be precise) in six large in folio volumes.<sup>24</sup> For the same amount of money one could probably buy a lifetime's supply of leather boots.<sup>25</sup>

### 3 The 'Middle of the Road' Books

What were the works that sold at the middle price range of one to three lire, that is between 20 and 60 *soldi*? *Mischino, Antonina defecerunt, Lucano, Peregrinationes Ierusalem, Esopo istoriato, Dinus de regulis iuris, Paulus Orosius...*

Basically, just about anything pertaining to the classics, philosophy, theology, popular literature, devotional works, liturgy, medicine, and education when printed on parchment, for example *Donato in carta bona*.

Among the best sellers, 933 copies of Breviaries and Diurnals and 246 Bibles were sold for 60 *soldi*, the amount needed to purchase a barrel of wine - enough for one person for two months - and a well-

<sup>24</sup> Justinianus, *Codex Justinianus* (with the *Glossa ordinaria* of Accursius). Milan: Johannes Antonius de Honate, for Petrus Antonius de Castelliono and Ambrosius de Caymis, 27 Feb. 1483. Folio. 294 leaves. GW 7729; ISTD ij00579000. Justinianus, *Digestum novum* (with the *Glossa ordinaria* of Accursius). Ed: Matthaeus Barlasina. Milan: Johannes Antonius de Honate, for Petrus Antonius de Castelliono and Ambrosius de Caymis, 25 July 1482. Folio. 356 leaves. GW 7706; ISTD ij00568700. Justinianus, *Digestum vetus* (with the *Glossa ordinaria* of Accursius). Ed: Mathaeus Barlasina. Milan: Beninus and Johannes Antonius de Honate, for Petrus Antonius de Castelliono and Ambrosius de Caymis, 26 Mar. 1482. Folio. 404 leaves. GW 7660; ISTD ij00548300. Justinianus, *Infortiatum* (with the *Glossa ordinaria* of Accursius). Milan: Johannes Antonius de Honate, for Petrus Antonius de Castelliono and Ambrosius de Caymis, 10 Oct. 1482. Folio. 284 leaves. GW 7682; ISTD ij00557000. Justinianus, *Institutiones* (with the *Glossa ordinaria* of Accursius). Milan: Johannes Antonius de Honate, for Petrus Antonius de Castelliono and Ambrosius de Caymis, 14 Oct. 1482. Folio. 72 leaves. GW 7607; ISTD ij00523000. Justinianus, *Novellae constitutiones*, etc. Milan: Johannes Antonius de Honate, for Petrus Antonius de Castelliono and Ambrosius de Caymis, 28 Nov. 1482. Folio. 218 leaves. GW 7757; ISTD ij00594000. Cf. also Panzanelli Fratoni in this volume.

<sup>25</sup> Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Giudici di Petizion, Rendimenti di conto*, b. 955, registro senza numero, c. 104 dx, 10 ottobre 1457: "Per fatura de 1 per de stivali al [unread] d. 0:24"; the expenses registered by Sanudo are expressed in ducats and *soldi*, but the entry about the boots was apparently recorded in silver grossi, one ducat being the equivalent of 24 silver grossi (my thanks to Isabella Cecchini). Cf. also Cecchini in this volume.

fed goose; or the equivalent of six pieces of green ginger.<sup>26</sup> 272 copies of Missals were sold for 40 *soldi*, that is the amount necessary to buy enough bread for a person for a month.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, 68 copies of Petrarch were sold at 50 *soldi* each, the average salary for two days of the work of a master builder. From the research of Susan Connell we know that 15 *soldi* was the daily wage of an ordinary builder in Venice in this period, and that 28 *soldi* was the daily wage of a master builder.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4 The Cheapest and Best Selling Books

In the *Zornale* are listed about 1,160 sales of books whose price is 10 *soldi* or less, that is below the daily wage of an unskilled labourer, or the cost of two chickens. These are also the books that represent the highest number of sales in the ledger:<sup>29</sup>

##### *Psalteriolo de puti*

Here the reference is to one or probably several lost editions, since the *Zornale* alone sells a total of 659 copies, at a price varying from four *soldi* right down to one, in the case of a large bulk purchase. What else could be purchased in Venice for four *soldi*? A chicken, or 'an excellent eel', or a packet of sugar. And for 1 *soldo* a pound of cherries.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> For the wine and the goose, cf. Pinelli in this volume. At 10 *soldi* each, ginger was clearly a valuable spice; cf. the example provided in a chapter about barterers in *Arte dell'abbaco*. Treviso: [Gerardus de Lisa, de Flandria], 10 Dec. 1478. 4°. 62 leaves. GW 2674; ISTC ia01141000; g4v "de raxone de barati" [...] g5r "...Sono do merchadanti che vogliono baratare...in zenzeri a ducati 8 el cento...", 8 ducats for 100 pieces of green ginger = 992 *soldi* : 100 = 9.92 *soldi* each green ginger.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Pinelli in this volume.

<sup>28</sup> Mueller, *The Venetian Money Market*. Appendix 1: The value of money and the cost of living, with data from Connell, *The Employment of Sculptors as Stone-masons*, 183-4 'table of day wages paid to builders and house carpenters'.

<sup>29</sup> I provide in the Appendix a list of all the works sold for less than 10 *soldi*, arranged by popularity, that is by number of copies sold. The table also provides the subject, the format, number of leaves (when known), and ISTC number. In this way I intend to offer an immediate snapshot of the cheapest and best-selling works. The descriptions of the entries have been prepared by Neil Harris and Cristina Dondi. We distinguish our identifications with extant editions into the categories of certain, probable, and possible.

<sup>30</sup> For the price of squid and beef cf. Mueller, *The Venetian Money Market*, 650: "About 1460, a pair of chickens cost 9 *soldi*, a fat goose 12 *soldi*; a 'pound' of cherries 1 *soldo*, of dried figs 2 *soldi*, of raisins 2-4 *soldi*; an 'excellent' eel 3 *soldi*, 'eleven pairs' of salted eels £ 1 s 4, 100 squid 5-6 *soldi*" quoting from Cecchetti, *La vita dei veneziani*. For the haircut cf. Cecchini in this volume.

In the whole of the *Zornale*, indeed, the single best-selling title is this simplified version of the psalter, whose primary purpose was as a basic learning tool for children. It opened with the letters of the alphabet and they were followed by a sequence of common prayers and catechetical instructions, such as *Paternoster*, *Ave Maria*, *Credo*, *Salve Regina*, *Decem praecepta*, *Virtutes septem*, and a selection of psalms and Gospel readings, such as Psalms 109-113, 116, 114, *Magnificat*, *Canticum Simeonis* ("Nunc dimittis"), Psalm 129 ("De profundis"), the beginning of the gospel of St. John.<sup>31</sup> If the amounts recorded by de Madiis are anything of a guide, the Venetian presses must have churned out thousands of copies, probably tens of thousands, maybe even more, of this simple book. Today only one single copy - in the Staatsbibliothek at Munich - produced previous to the end of 1487 survives. It is undated, but is signed by Erhard Ratdolt, and is attributed by the repertories to 1486.<sup>32</sup> Another was printed in Venice by Johannes Hamman in 1494, also surviving in a single copy once in the library at Dresden, and at present in Moscow, Russian State Library.<sup>33</sup>

The simple content structure of this type of work no doubt derived from the medieval manuscript tradition and took many forms in different languages. Even in the 17th century in England the contents of hornbooks are recognisably similar and these books are today equally rare.<sup>34</sup>

### *Offitieti pizoli*

A total of 121 copies are listed in the stock in trade and 483 copies of small Books of Hours are sold overall. Their price was also 4 *sol-di* for the ordinary, paper copies.<sup>35</sup>

**31** Dondi, Harris, "Best Selling Titles", 67-8.

**32** *Psalterium puerorum*. [Venice]: Erhard Ratdolt, [not after 1486]. 4<sup>o</sup>. 8 leaves. BSB-Ink P-853; GW M35931; ISTC ip01073500 Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, Rar. 863, also available in digital copy. On these early learning texts, cf. also Leidinger, "Über ein Bruchstück eines unbekanntes Holztafeldruckes des XV. Jahrhunderts", 32-42 and plates 8-11; Wagner, "Alphabet, Paternoster und andere Gebete (Abecedarium)", 28-33, with a colour reproduction of a1r on 31.

**33** *Pater noster*. Venice: Johannes Hamman, 1494. 4<sup>o</sup>. 8 leaves. GW M29758; ISTC ip00148470; cf. also Schulz, "Das erste Lesebuch an den Lateinschulen des späten Mittelalters", 18-30.

**34** For the tradition in Italian, the "Babuino", cf. Lucchi, Piero, "La santacroce"; "Leggere, scrivere e abbaco"; "La prima istruzione"; "Nuove ricerche sul Babuino". An English hornbook is Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch. A f.11; my thanks to my former colleague at the Bodleian Library, Alan Coates, for bringing this volume to my attention; cf. *William Shakespeare*, no. 2.

**35** Dondi, Harris, "Best Selling Titles", 63-82; Dondi, *Printed Books of Hours*.

A number of Books of Hours are specifically listed with the name of their printer, Jacobus Britannicus, Antonius de Stanchis de Valentia, and Petrus de Plasiis: none of these editions survive. Two other editions, by the Compagnia and by Boninus de Boninis in Verona, still survive today, each in a single copy.<sup>36</sup>

### *Donado / Donati da puti*

Donatus, Aelius, *Ars minor*. [Venice: Nicolaus Jenson, about 1478]. 4°. 24 leaves. GW 8991; ISTC id00341930. Probable.

Twenty copies are recorded in the first year stock in trade, some on parchment and some bound. One copy on parchment is sold on 3 June 1484 for £ 2, while two – again on parchment – are sold at the slightly discounted price of £ 3 s 10 on 12 June. Two copies of “donati da puti” on paper are sold on 23 June for 6 *soldi* and afterwards the price seems to stabilise at 5 *soldi*, the price of a kilo of beef, or 100 squid, or the payment for a haircut. A total of 258 copies are sold, so it is possible that these belonged to multiple editions.

### *Regule de Guarino*

Guarinus Veronensis, *Regulae grammaticales*. Add. *Carmina differentialia. De diphthongis*. Venice: [Henricus de Harlem?], 10 Apr. 1484. 4°. 38 leaves. GW 11653; ISTC ig00536500. Only extant copy, formerly in Dresden, now in Moscow. Probable.

Six copies are recorded in the initial stock in trade. 252 copies of the grammar of Guarino Veronese are also sold for 4 *soldi* each.<sup>37</sup>

### *De contemptu mundi*

Gerson, Johannes [pseudo-; Thomas a Kempis], *Imitatio Christi*. Venice: Peter Loeslein, 1483. 4°. 52 leaves. GW M46816; ISTC ii0000500. Certain.

<sup>36</sup> *Horae ad usum Romanum*. Verona, Boninus de Boninis de Ragusia, 24 Oct. 1481, 16°. 182 leaves. GW 13389; ISTC ih00357600; MEI 00200541. Probable. The only surviving copy, printed on parchment, is held by the Biblioteca Civica of Bassano del Grappa. Dondi, *Printed Books of Hours*, no. 16. *Horae ad usum Romanum*. [Venice: Andreas Torresanus, de Asula], for Johannes de Colonia, Nicolaus Jenson and partners, 22 Dec. 1481, 32°. 160 leaves. GW 13362; ISTC ih00357700; MEI 00200543. Certain. The only surviving copy, printed on paper, is found in the Library of the Monastery of San Lazzaro degli Armeni in the Venice lagoon. Dondi, *Printed Books of Hours*, no. 18.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. note 30.

The opening of the edition has: "Incipit liber primus Johannis Gerson cancellarij parisiensis. De imitatione Christi et de contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi"; and the colophon: "Johannis Gerson cancellarij parisiensis de contemptu mundi devotum et vtile opusculum finit M.ccc.lxxxii..."

32 copies in stock. 135 copies are sold, initially at 10 soldi, dropping to 8 soldi by the end of 1484 and even 6 soldi in 1488.

### *Meditatione de la passione*

Bonaventura, S. [pseudo; Johannes de Caulibus], *Meditationes vitae Christi* [Italian] *Le deuote meditatione sopra la passione del nostro signore*. Venice: Petrus Maufer de Maliferis and Nicolaus de Contugo, 10 Mar. 1483. 4°. 52 leaves. GW 4789 and ISTC ib00918000 (under Bonaventura, S.). Probable.

Ten copies are recorded in the first year stock in trade. 115 copies are sold, generally at 8 soldi, then down to 6.

### *Dotrinale*

Three editions of this work are sold in the *Zornale*, either with or without a commentary: *Dotrinale con commento pizoli*; *Dotrinale con commento*; *Dotrinale senza commento*.

Alexander de Villa Dei, *Dotrinale (Comm: Ludovicus de Guaschis)*. Venice: Johannes Walbeck and Henricus de Harlem, 25 Apr. 1483. 4°. 132 leaves. GW 988; ISTC ia00425700. Probable.

Alexander de Villa Dei, *Dotrinale (Comm: Ludovicus de Guaschis)*. Venice: Andreas de Paltasichis and Johannes de Leodio, 27 July 1483. Folio. 68 leaves. GW 989; ISTC a00426000. Probable.

Alexander de Villa Dei, *Dotrinale*. Milan: Leonardus Pachel and Uldericus Scinzenzeler, 17 Dec. 1484. 4°. 32 leaves. GW 957; ISTC ia00421680. Probable.<sup>38</sup>

A total of 33 copies are in stock the first year. 105 copies are sold, generally at 9 soldi, the equivalent of a pair of chickens.

<sup>38</sup> For other Milan editions sold in Venice cf. Dondi, Harris, "Exporting books from Milan to Venice"; this as well as several other editions had not been identified as coming from Milan during the preliminary survey.

### Logica de Pergola

Paulus Pergulensis, *Compendium logicae*. Venice: Baptista de Tortis, 16 Dec. 1483. 4°. 46 leaves. GW M30240; ISTC ip00191000. Probable.

Twenty copies are in stock during the first year. 103 copies are sold, generally at the price of 10 soldi, in later years dropping to 8 soldi.

Overall, the affordable strong sellers listed in the Appendix are represented by five works of grammar and five of devotional literature, four works of lay literature, two works of logic, astrology, rhetoric and geography respectively, and individual works of liturgy, pastoral theology, history, and physics. Six of them are classical works, eleven medieval and nine either humanist or contemporary. Most editions are in quarto format (20), four are in folio, one in octavo, and one in 16°.

## 5 On Parchment, Bound, Gilt...

In the *Zornale*, books printed on parchment generally cost six times as much as copies of the same edition printed on paper. It should be noted, however, how few books printed on parchment are sold by this shop: only 77 books are recorded as being "in carta bona", out of the 25,000 copies recorded. We find 27 copies of Donatus, 25 of Books of Hours, 13 copies of the small Psalter (*Psalteriolo*), seven Missals, two Benedictine Diurnals, two Breviaries, and – the one important exception – a copy of Dante.

Books bound generally cost double the price of those sold unbound.<sup>39</sup> In the *Zornale*, the type of book which best represents the variation in price determined by the different support, as well as the expensive hand-finishing, is the Book of Hours, as outlined in a previous article.<sup>40</sup> It will be helpful to reproduce the data in that earlier article in this context:

| Type    | Printer | Bound | Parchment | Gothic Illustration type | Price in soldi | Comment   |
|---------|---------|-------|-----------|--------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| officio | Bressan |       |           |                          | 10             |           |
| officio | Bressan | X     |           |                          | 20             | Double    |
| officio | Bressan |       | X         |                          | 60             | Six times |

<sup>39</sup> Some 1,070 volumes are sold already bound, but only seven are further described as "indorati", with gold-tooling. Bound books present a further complexity, since it is sometimes possible that a volume is 'second-hand' and has been bound up by a previous purchaser, which might explain some discrepancies in price.

<sup>40</sup> Dondi, Harris, *Best Selling Titles*, 63-82.

|                |                |   |   |      |           |
|----------------|----------------|---|---|------|-----------|
| officio        | Bressan        |   | X | 8    |           |
| officio        | Bressan        | X | X | 20   | Double    |
| off. piccolo   | Bressan        | X |   | 15   | Double    |
| off. grande    | Bressan        |   |   | 7-8  |           |
| officio        | Piero veronese | X |   | 20   | Double    |
| officio        | Compagnia      | X |   | 20   | Double    |
| officio        | Compagnia      |   | X | 60   | Six times |
| officio        |                | X | X | 20   | Double    |
| officio        |                |   | X | 60   | Six times |
| officio        |                | X | X | 90   | Six times |
| off. grande    |                |   |   | 7-8  |           |
| off. grande    |                | X |   | 20   | Double    |
| off. istoriato |                |   | X | 8-10 |           |

## 6 Conclusion

The *Zornale* is the largest single surviving set of prices for objects sold over the counter for the whole of the 15th century and, as such, it is a source of immense value, not just for bibliographers and book historians, but also for economic historians and historians in the widest sense of the word.

While it is not possible to compare these 15th-century prices with today's ones, it is both possible and necessary to make the effort to understand them.

The Rialto outlet of Francesco de Madiis was by no means the only book selling shop in Venice. To what extent is it representative of the category and of the book trade as a whole? It is impossible to say with any certainty, though the transactions involving other booksellers discussed in this volume may suggest that the size of the business of this bookshop was somewhat above average. On the other hand, the scale of the Venetian trade, as witnessed by what is clearly the fraction that does survive today, was enormous. The sheer wealth generated is shown by the fact that the Venetian printers and publishers, many of whom supplied the Rialto shop, took over the running of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco only a few years after its foundation. As today, a seat on the board of an important charity was not obtained without becoming a major benefactor.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Dondi, "Printers and Guilds".



Part of the long-term project plan is to make the spreadsheets with the entire transcription, identification, and classification of the *Zornale* available to everyone. They will consist of an entry number, a computer friendly date, the day of the week (an item of information that the original does not include), the number of books bought every day, the date as it appears in the ledger (i.e. more veneto, with the start of a new year on 1 March), the different degrees of identification (certain, probable, possible) of editions; the edition's ISTC and GW numbers; standard author and title. Further, they will provide a transcription of the text as written in the *Zornale*, the number of copies sold, the price, subdivided in ducats, lire, and soldi, the overall price in soldi, the price per copy (when multiple copies are sold), the hypothetical value (when part of a bulk sale), whether a book is bound, or is part of a group sale, the number of books sold in each sale. Whether a book is additionally described as printed on parchment, with woodcut illustration, with hand-decoration, or gold-tooled. The name of the printer and of the purchaser, when mentioned; and the bibliographical identification, including format, number of leaves, and sheet-size. Finally, its subject, time period,<sup>42</sup> and the time which has elapsed between its publication and its appearance in the ledger.

This benchmark will help anybody researching any work printed in the late 15th century to understand its economic value; it will also provide economic historians with the good quality, comprehensive, measurable, sets of data that they can crunch according to their own practices. Data which cannot, and should not, be ignored any longer.

## Abbreviations

BSB-ink = <https://inkunabeln.digitale-sammlungen.de/sucheEin.html>

CIBN = Bibliothèque Nationale. *Catalogue des incunables*. Paris: BnF, 1981-2014

GW = <https://www.gesamtkatalogderwiegendrucke.de/>

INKA = <https://www.inka.uni-tuebingen.de/>

ISTC = [https://data.cerl.org/istc/\\_search](https://data.cerl.org/istc/_search)

MEI = [https://data.cerl.org/mei/\\_search](https://data.cerl.org/mei/_search)

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Illustration 4 for a break down of editions according to the period in which the (main) work they include was composed, and Illustration 5 for subjects.

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- Michael Scotus, *Liber physiognomiae*. [Treviso: Johannes Rubeus Vercellensis, about 1483]. 4°. GW M23305; ISTD im00551800
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- Paulus Venetus, *Logica*. Venice: Gabriel de Grassis, [about 1485]. 4°. GW M30347; ISTD ip00226000
- Persius, Aulus Flaccus, *Satyrae*, with the commentary of Bartholomaeus Fontius. Venice: Reynaldus de Novimagio, 24 Dec. 1482. Folio. GW M31386; ISTD ip00345000
- Psalterium puerorum*. [Venice]: Erhard Ratdolt, [not after 1486]. 4°. GW M35931; ISTD ip01073500
- Sallustius Crispus, Gaius, *Opera*. Venice: [Nicolaus Girardengus, de Novis], 1480. Folio. GW M39660; ISTD is00067000

## Appendix

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| Ofitieti pizoli                       | Officium BMV   | 483         | liturgy               | medieval     | 4             | 16°?   | 192?   | lost edition |
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| Transito de s. Ieroni(m)oli(te)r(al)e | Hieronymus, <i>Vita et transitus</i>   | 50          | literature-devotional | medieval     | 8             | quarto | 44     | ih00243000   |
| Erotemata greca                       | Chrysoloras, Emanuel, <i>Erotemata</i>   | 46          | grammar               | humanist     | 5             | quarto | 32     | ic00494000   |
| Formulario de li(te)re                | Landinus, Christophorus, <i>Formulario di lettere e di orazioni in volgare</i> | 46          | rhetoric              | humanist     | 4             | quarto | 44     | il00037500   |
| Fior de uirtu                         | <i>Fiore di virtù</i>  | 43          | literature-devotional | medieval     | 4             | quarto | 32     | if00178800   |
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| Entries in <i>Zornale</i>    | Identification  | Copies sold | Subject               | Period       | Price (soldi) | Format | Leaves | ISTC       |
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| Salustio                     | Sallustius Crispus, Gaius, <i>Opera</i>   | 39          | history               | classical    | 8             | folio  | 52     | is00067000 |
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| Canzo[ne]te de Iustiniano    | Justiniano, Leonardo, <i>Canzonette</i>   | 32          | literature            | contemporary | 5             | quarto | 44     | ij00501000 |
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