
As its title suggests, Martin Lowry's study of Aldus is only incidentally bibliographical. Lowry is mostly concerned with investigating Aldus' milieu and the printer's place within it, and as such The World of Aldus Manutius is largely aimed at the debunking of myths. Lowry is neither a bibliographer nor a classicist; indeed, he makes disparaging remarks about the practitioners of both disciplines early in the book. He is an historian, rather, and his inclination is to reject as the dogma of tradition, rather than hard fact, much of the genuflecting with which posterity has approached Aldus. Aldus' principal claims to enduring fame — his classical texts, his typefaces, the use of the octavo format, the establishment of the New Academy — all come in for some hard knocks; and if, in the end, Lowry comes out in support of the contention that places Aldus at the very centre of the achievements of the Renaissance, along the way not a few sacred cows of printing and bibliographical scholarship are sent to the slaughter.

Scholars who venture into the domain of other specialists take obvious risks. What is to be gained — as Lowry is at pains to point out — is a fresh investigation of much-treaded material. Lowry, though not a bibliographer, is otherwise superbly qualified for his task: he is a scholar of early Venetian history and is competent in the half-dozen languages that are a sine qua non for research in early printing. The results, if not always favourable to Aldus' reputation, are consistently refreshing and interesting. This is so despite the fact that documentary evidence for Aldus' career is pitifully meagre, excepting, of course, the books themselves.

It is impossible to enumerate all of Lowry's conclusions in the space available here, so an example must suffice. The chapter on Aldus' abilities as an editor and textual critic points out that Aldine texts, though neither uniformly bad nor good, are not as scholarly as has often been contended. This was not wholly the fault of the printer. Certain manuscripts were simply not available to him, and textual scholarship was still barely recognized as a science. It is usually assumed, however, that part of Aldus' advantages as a printer of Greek texts was the accessibility of manuscripts that his location in Venice afforded. It comes as a surprise, therefore, to learn that Aldus seems to have made no use of the manuscript collection bequeathed to the Republic by Cardinal Bessarion [the Marcian Library]. Aldus frequently made complicated efforts to locate ostensibly unique exemplars of the text of a particular author, when in some cases superior copies lay resting unused quite literally just down the street. In addition, as Lowry points out, emendations were too often made on a haphazard basis and there are more examples of compositorial mistakes than can be excused in the texts of a printer who offered a reward to anyone who could spot errors in his work.
Important as they are, however, Lowry's criticisms of Aldus do not constitute the major accomplishment of his book. It is the sure hand and informed intelligence with which Aldus' time and his place in it are detailed that deserve attention and praise. Only occasionally is one reminded that Lowry is a late-comer to the field of printing history [his reference to Geoffrey Tory gives the impression that he does not expect us to know who this 'antiquarian fanatic' was], but such almost invisible blemishes on an otherwise convincing and admirable text are easily forgiven. Lowry has made an important contribution to the surprisingly small body of scholarship in English on Aldus. One hopes that, having once been lured into the field of printing and bibliography, he will not abandon it for other pastures.

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By William A. Pettas. With a checklist of all the books and documents published by the Giunti in Florence from 1497 to 1570, and with the texts of twenty-nine documents, from 1427 to the eighteenth century.

There has been surprisingly little written in English on the Giunti, and it is undoubtedly for this reason that Bernard Rosenthal decided to publish William Pettas' book in the form he has. The Giunti of Florence is a doctoral dissertation presented to the University of California, and Rosenthal has simply reproduced the typescript and published it as a limited edition book. The style and presentation of the material are therefore somewhat pedestrian, and there are rather more typographical errors than one would expect from a book: a footnote is dropped on p. 110, several dates are given incorrectly, words are misspelled, etc. Nevertheless, given the paucity of material in English on the Giunti, one is grateful to have Mr. Pettas' book made available.

The reasons for the relative neglect that the Florentine publishers have suffered at the hands of bibliographers and historians of the book are several. Printing in Florence never achieved the scale and eminence that it did in Venice. Taxes in Florence were higher, manuscripts were more difficult of access, and the city was not well situated for the cheap and efficient distribution of books. In addition, the local market was smaller than in Venice, and as a result the Giunti were forced to make do with the Church as their primary customer. As publishers of humanist and classical texts the Giunti house is much overshadowed by Aldus, and in many cases – despite the privileges granted to the Venetian printer – they simply copied Aldine editions and purloined Aldus' typefaces and formats. After Aldus' death in 1514 they even lured his editor, Markos Mousouro, to Florence to work for them. The Giunti had also to contend with the fact that, despite their eminence, it was another printer, Torrentino, who was made ducal printer to Cosimo de Medici when the Florentine Republic fell in the 1530s.

In spite of these impediments, the Giunti managed to publish a respectable number of books during the period 1497 to 1570, and their publishing empire extended into both France and Spain. The editiones principi of most of their authors