

Foreword

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The articles presented in this volume are based on the conference *Printing R-Evolution and Society 1450-1500: Fifty Years that Changed Europe* which was organised by Professor Cristina Dondi at the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, 19-21 September 2018. The conference coincided with an exhibition of the same name at the Museo Correr and the Biblioteca Marciana. These two high profile, and in their different ways, highly successful events marked publicly the conclusion of a major research project funded by the European Research Council called the *15th Century Booktrade: An Evidence-based Assessment and Visualization of the Distribution, Sale, and Reception of Books in the Renaissance*.

The 15cBOOKTRADE project aimed to address the difficulty many, especially non-specialists, have in questioning the some 500,000 surviving fifteenth-century printed books as evidence of economic, commercial, and intellectual life in the second half of the fifteenth century. The project aimed to record and use material evidence from surviving books, jointly with archival documentary evidence, to address five themes: distribution, use, and reading practices, the contemporary market value of the books, the transmission and dissemination of texts, the circulation and re-use of the illustrations and, finally, data visualization.

Conceived and subsequently coordinated by Professor Dondi, the project has intellectual and practical roots in a major research and cataloguing project which led to the creation of the Bodleian Library Incunable Catalogue, published both in printed and in electronic form, the latter not least due to the continued personal engagement of Cristina Dondi.¹

¹ *A Catalogue of Books Printed in the Fifteenth Century Now in the Bodleian Library*. 6 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, and <http://incunables.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>.

Work on the Bodleian incunable catalogue began in 1992, and was in preparation a few years earlier. I want to record my thanks to Lady Bullard and Sir Julian Bullard who suggested that they wanted to help with finding funding to support a project at the Bodleian Library for a project with a German angle.² My choice immediately fell on the Bodleian collection of incunabula.

Comparing the information available in good catalogues of fifteenth-century books, there were striking differences between those devoted to printed or to manuscript books, although the books themselves were produced in the same areas and at the same time. Information in catalogues of printed books on the texts and their authors was most often minimal, and with very few exceptions it lacked a scholarly apparatus, which made it difficult to use and to cite the information in an academic context. Authors and texts were often tacitly identified on the basis of decisions made by Ludwig Hain in the first half of the nineteenth century.³ Those that we now know as paratexts were rarely identified, and the coexistence in one edition of many texts by many authors was often not recorded. Because of the overwhelming tradition of a focus on production units, it was even rarer that it was easy or even possible to identify the presence in one physical volume of different texts produced separately but brought together by contemporary owners.

Important contributions with a greater focus on texts and authors had been made for instance by Vera Sack, especially in her catalogue of incunabula in Freiburg im Breisgau,⁴ and in the later fascicles of the catalogue of incunabula in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, where the outstanding work of colleagues such as Denise Hillard and Ursula Baurmeister provided us with much valuable information.⁵ The more recent fascicles of the *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke* also increasingly documented textual information. Yet, for scholars used to working on manuscript textual transmission catalogues of incunabula could range from incomprehensible to inadequate or wrong. Scholars and bibliographers who sought to transcend the two formats often found that the bibliographical tools did not help them much.

I aimed to create a catalogue which would make it possible for the printed and the manuscript textual universe to be examined as one corpus, as it surely must have been from the perspective of a fif-

2 Jensen, Kristian. *Incunabula in the Bodleian Library*. Berlin: Kulturstiftung der Länder, 1993. Patrimonia 66.

3 Hain, Ludwig. *Repertorium Bibliographicum in quo libri omnes ab arte typographica inventa usque ad annum MD. typis expressi ordine alphabetico vel simpliciter enumerantur vel accuratius recensentur*. 2 voll. Stuttgart; Paris, 1826-38.

4 Sack, Vera. *Die Inkunabeln der Universitätsbibliothek und anderer öffentlicher Sammlungen in Freiburg im Breisgau und Umgebung*. 3 Bde. Wiesbaden, 1985.

5 Bibliothèque nationale de France. *Catalogue des incunables*. Paris, 1981-2014.

teenth-century reader. My two main models were the catalogue of Latin manuscripts at the Vatican Library, created by the IRHT⁶ and the then most recent volumes of the catalogue of medieval manuscripts at the Bavarian State Library.

Completely integral to this was my wish to provide detailed information about each volume as a uniquely surviving physical object full of evidence about its own history, building further on the already then growing interest in the documentation of the provenance of books. We recorded all types of evidence of use, including simple rubrication, full scale illuminations, ownership marks of all kinds, bindings, marginal notes, and doodles. We sought to give equal weight to the earliest history of the book and to its most recent history. The catalogue has a strong focus on trade history and collecting history, including the acquisition of the items by the Bodleian Library. This is reflected in the decision, then controversial, to establish and record the prices paid by the Bodleian for each book, a practice not repeated at scale anywhere else.

The work on the Bodleian catalogue on the other hand contributed relatively little new to the analytical bibliographical description of the volumes. Here we drew on the amazing scholarship of the twentieth century manifested mainly in the *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*⁷ and in the *British Museum Catalogue* (BMC),⁸ but also in other important catalogues. We were supported by the catalogue slips prepared by L.A. Sheppard (1890-1985), who had collated the Bodleian copies with published bibliographical descriptions, and who had given succinct bibliographical information where it was not found elsewhere. On that background, I felt that we would be unlikely to come up with significant new insights which would warrant the extensive allocation of time expended to analytical bibliography.

I had the great fortune to recruit some excellent colleagues to work on the project. Dr Bettina Wagner, now the Director of the Staatsbibliothek in Bamberg, brought her experience with medieval textual transmission and with codicological skills, as well as her immense personal ability, supplementing my printed books experience and my background as a classicist. Dr Alan Coates also joined the project immediately after the initial planning phase. Dr Wagner was succeeded by Cristina Dondi, without whom the project might well never have been completed, after I left to take up a position at the British Library in 1999, and who importantly went on to ensure that the infor-

⁶ *Les manuscrits classiques latins de la Bibliothèque Vaticane*. Catalogue établi par Élisabeth Pellegrin and others. Paris, 1975-.

⁷ *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*. Leipzig, etc., 1925-.

⁸ *Catalogue of Books Printed in the XVth Century Now in the British Museum* [British Library]. 13 vols. London, etc., 1908-2007.

mation in the catalogue had a second and even a third life in a digital environment.

Professor Dondi's project *15th Century Booktrade: An Evidence-based Assessment and Visualization of the Distribution, Sale, and Reception of Books in the Renaissance* has ensured that this work continues to be built on and to be expanded. The textual information of the Bodleian now forms the backbone of the TEXT-inc database, and the object specific information of the Bodleian Catalogue on which *Material Evidence in Incunabula* (MEI) database was first built, but now organised into a much more structured environment.

While the research of Professor Dondi's project has focused on Venice, the tools which have been created by her project are much more wide-ranging. The MEI database has found a long-term sustainable home with the service provisions of the Consortium of European Research Libraries where it is being used both for cataloguing and for giving access to information beyond the Venetian focus of the research project itself and beyond the life of the project itself.⁹ The tools have real potential for enabling the joint exploration of mechanical multiplication and the evidence provided by individual copies, as data from libraries across Europe and America are added.

Drawing on methodologies developed for the study of manuscripts, but projecting it onto material produced by a different business model, and transferring it to a collaborative, online environment MEI, and in due course TEXT-inc, will make it easier for researchers to engage with the dialectic between mechanical multiplication and the physical evidence provided by each surviving object. Longer-term, the project aims at providing data at such a scale that it can be used to show trends and patterns, well beyond the traditional focus on individual ownership.

The interaction between multiplication and individual copy poses questions which may be unique to this period, and which can be understood neither with a starting point in revolution nor in continuity. It is in examining the dialectic between multiplication and specificity that we can explore the nature of the radical change within its context of pre-existing business models, user expectations formed by existing patterns of production and use both among users and producers.

The diversity of topics covered by the articles in the present volume testifies to the range of research questions which can be formulated and asked within the framework provided by Professor Dondi's research programme and to a lively intellectual environment around books in the fifteenth century which has been sustained and expanded through the stimuli which her Programme has offered.

9 URL https://data.cerl.org/mei/_search.