

The Printed Editions of Benedetto Cotrugli's Treaty

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Ugo Tucci wrote on the printed tradition of Benedetto Cotrugli's work in 1990.¹ No other element able to shed completely new light on editorial events has emerged since then. It is still, however, possible to look again at just how much Tucci took into consideration and try to see if other suggestions can emerge.

Therefore, the book was published for the first time in Venice in 1573 in octavo format with the title *Della mercatura et del mercante perfetto. Libri quattro di M. Benedetto Cotrugli rauego. Scritti già più di anni CX & hora dati in luce. Utilissimi ad ogni mercante*. It did not carry the name of the printing house or the bookseller, but only its device "In Vinegia, all'Elefanta, 1573". The title page also featured the image of a she-elephant nursing her calf along with the motto *non sine spe*. The publishing symbol is very rare. It appears on only three editions, all

¹Tucci (1990, 3–17).

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from 1573, and allows for a documentation of an original editorial firm brought to life by a neo-platonic philosopher by the name of Francesco Patrizi and his nephew Giovanni Franco, the owner of a bookshop named “All’insegna dell’Elefanta” and situated in Venice in Calle delle Acque, off of the Mercerie, which was the main location for the concentration of bookshops in the city.²

The fact that Patrizi had very intense intellectual activities and, among other things, had been put on trial by the Holy Office for his anti-Aristotelian *Nova de universis philosophia* must not be misleading. Patrizi had a long and great life where his commitment to study and philosophical research was on par with other occupations as well as his travels from one part of the Mediterranean to the other. He himself recounted of his adventures in an autobiographical letter written in 1586.³ He was descended from a Christian Bosnian family who took refuge in Cherso in the Quarnaro Gulf in order to escape the Turkish advance. He was born there on April 25, 1529 and from there was sent at a very young age to an uncle in Venice, to abacus school with the intention of making him a merchant. In the meantime, young Francesco, having discovered an inclination for law, began his studies in grammar alongside a priest who did proofreading for the great publishing house of Giunti. Following this, his father sent him to study in Bavaria in Ingolstadt, where he was then directed to studies in Padua in 1547. It was in the Paduan ambience that he learned the rudiments of Greek and philology. In the 60’s, he was in Cyprus, where he dealt with improving the conditions of property of the Contarini dal Zaffo family where they had enormous holdings (Nicolau-Konnari 2013). On the eastern Mediterranean island, he also busied himself with reclamations and collaborated with the Cypriot bishop Filippo Mocenigo in governing some villages. In the meantime however, he became interested in Greek manuscripts (Grivaud 2013). From Cyprus, he continued on to Barcelona, as “philosopher” to the viceroy of Catalonia, the Prince of Francavilla, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza y de la Cerda. It was on this occasion, that not being able to collect the

² On the device of the elephant, Ascarelli and Menato (1989, 425–426). On the publishers’ devices Zappella (1986, I, 158; II, fig. 481).

³ The letter, dated Ferrara 12 January 1587, was sent to the Florentine legal expert Baccio Valori. It was published in Patrizi (1975, 45–51). On Patrizi see Vasoli (1989).

wage promised to him by the viceroy, he began to deal in book trafficking, selling “many crates of books that he had brought with him” and realizing that “one could profit greatly” (Patrizi 1975, 49). Among others, he granted various Greek codices collected in Cyprus to Philip II of Spain for the library of El Escorial.

It was at the end of his Spanish endeavours that Patrizi returned to Venice, in any case with the idea of specializing in publishing, at a moment in which access to the book trade was still a liberal profession, enrolment into the guild of printers and booksellers not yet having become obligatory. It happened therefore, that several different people could operate, true editors, who were not professional printers or booksellers, such as what happened with Francesco Patrizi. In 1571, he entered into an agreement with Leonora Caglia, Apulian, “ancilla” of Girolamo Ruscelli, one of the most noted writers of Venice in the 1500's, and who inherited from Ruscelli himself the texts and illustrations of *Le imprese illustri*, one of his last works dedicated to the king of Spain Philip II.⁴ The book was published in 1572 by Comin da Trino of Monferrato completely revised and corrected by Patrizi, with a print run of 1125 copies. During these months, he had also published the first volume of *Discussionum Peripateticarum* for Domenico de Franciscis and some manuscripts of Pope Pius II on behalf of Francesco Piccolomini.

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The following year Patrizi had to think about giving prominence to his editorial role, deleting from the cover page, the name of the printing house on whom the publishing operations relied and replaced it with the device of the she-elephant, which was associated with the bookshop of his nephew Franco. However, his commitment in that field had not been lucky and remained limited for only a few months, presumably in the second half of 1573, bringing forth only three editions, however not for a lack of ambition.

Dated the 14th of October, 1573 was the dedication to Cardinal Alessandro Farnese from the mathematical treatise of the Vicentine Silvio Belli—regarded by Andrea Palladio as “the greatest building surveyor in the Veneto of his times”—*Della proportione, et proportionalità communi passioni del quanto. Libri tre utili et necessari alla vera et facile intelligentia*

⁴ On editorial events about Patrizi see Marciani (1970).

della Arithmetica, della Geometria, et di tutte le Scienze et arti. It dealt with a brief mathematical text of 40 pages in quarto format published in a beautiful italic typeface. In its presentation, the author predicted the imminent issuing of other mathematical texts which would otherwise have never seen the light of day.⁵ In these same months, battle schemes engraved in copper *Gl'ordini della militia romana* based on the writings of Polibio were collected. These engravings predicted the imminent issuing of a further work by Francesco Patrizi on the Latin writer with more images, which, instead, were published in Ferrara 10 years later (Patrizi 1583).

The third volume with the symbol of the she-elephant was the treatise by Benedetto Cotrugli, which he dedicated to the celebrated merchant Giacomo Ragazzoni and was dated the 15th of November 1573. The Dalmatian merchant's book was published in octavo format, but in any case in editorial form, using an elegant italic type.⁶

In the dedication, the only available information on the events of the edition was found. The manuscript was recovered by the Ragusan Giovanni Giuseppi, who would have entrusted its use in a rather casual way (“fu gran ventura ch'ei si abbattesse in me”) to Patrizi who, upon recognizing the importance of the piece especially for its practical teachings, would have set out reviewing it. Tucci's evaluation of this work was decidedly negative: “the activity of revision that he employed, certainly with the best of intentions, was disastrous”. It is worth considering however, that it was not so much in the intentions of Patrizi to prepare a philological edition in the written version, as to—more simply, render the text more legible than how he received it which surely presented several comprehension problems. It is also worth bearing in mind that it was during this time he was qualified as “honorando negoziante di Venetia”, which leads one to think that the intention was that of releasing a useful document for learning commercial techniques, at a time when, especially in Venice, there was a good demand for tools of this kind.⁷ However, it is


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⁵ On Silvio Belli, see Barbieri (1965).

⁶ It is also noted an example with a dedication to the Ragusan merchant Francesco Radagli, kept in the Baltazar Bogišić library in Cavtat (Ragusa Vecchia) (Tucci 1989, 4).

⁷ Between 1470 and 1600 at least 136 books concerning generically commercial techniques were published in Venice. The other major publishing centers were far behind: Antwerp with 84, Frankfurt 76, London 59, Lyon 53 (Hook et al. 1991).

also true that the ~~ecclesiastical~~ revision had occurred, as was common in those times, modifying here and there the original text. Tucci noted that references to priests, friars and theologians were expunged.

Still, business did not go very well and the symbol of the she-elephant ceased publications soon after, even if Francesco Patrizi did not altogether end his editorial activities. It is, however, certain that the titles he edited had low circulation. The treatise was re-printed with no significant changes only one time in 1602 in Brescia—a hub for editorial activities in those years (Spini 1988)—in a shared edition (with two different cover pages) by Comino Presegni and by Giambattista Bozzola (Cotrugli 1602a, b). It also had a translation into French in 1582 with the title *Traité de la marchandise, et du parfait marchand* in Lyon at the heirs of François Didier, à l'enseigne du Fénix, which in any case, had low circulation.⁸ The translator was Jean Boyron, a literary from Annonay, in the vicinity of Lyon, and author of other translations from Latin into French 

Italian Editions:

1573

Della mercatura et del mercante perfetto. Libri quattro di M. Benedetto Cotrugli raueo. Scritti già più di anni CX. & hora dati in luce
In Vinegia, all'Elefanta, 1573, [8], 106, [2] c.; 8°

Impronta: 4141 e,,e rela anco (3) 1573 (R)

~~Codice identificativo: IT\ICCU\BVEE\002293~~ 

1602

Della mercatura et del mercante perfetto. Di Benedetto Cotrugli Raueo. Libri quattro. Doue si tratta il modo di lecitamente negoziare ... Opera ad ogni mercante, e deuoto christiano vtilissima Nuouamente data in luce

In Brescia, alla libreria del Bozzola, 1602, [6], 213, [i.e. 203], [1] p.; 8°

Impronta: nore tei, a-er coEr (3) 1602 (R)

~~Codice Identificativo: IT\ICCU\MILE\053079~~ 

Della mercatura et del mercante perfetto. Di Benedetto Cotrugli Raueo. Libri quattro. Doue si tratta il modo di lecitamente negoziare ... Opera ad ogni mercante, e deuoto christiano vtilissima Nuouamente data in luce

⁸ A replica of the French translation was published by Marco and Noumen (2008).

In Brescia, appresso Comino Presegni, 1602, [6], 213, [1] p.; 8°

~~Impronta:~~ nore tei, a-er coPe (3) 1602 (R)

~~Codice Identificativo: IT\ICCU\RMLE\021425~~



French translation

1582

Traicté de la marchandise et du parfaict marchand disposé en quatre livres. Traduit de l'italien de Benoit Cotrugli raugéan, par Jean Boyron..., Lyon, par les héritiers de François Didier (27 Oct. 1582), 179 [-13] f.; in-16°

Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon.

Uncorrected Proof