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Collectanea manutiana. Studi critici su Aldo Manuzio

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Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Accendere, Pier Davide, and Stefano U. Baldassarri, eds.

Collectanea manutiana. Studi critici su Aldo Manuzio.

Florence: Le Lettere, 2017. Pp. xii, 205. ISBN 978-88-9366-017-4 (paperback) €36.

Aldo Manuzio, the legendary founder of the Aldine Press in Venice, might be the most consequential figure of the humanistic culture of Renaissance Italy. The combination of his erudition as a humanist, ingenuity as an industrial innovator, and savvy as a businessman, shaped the modern book—this most versatile object, able to endlessly resist obsolescence—as a cognitive tool, the prime medium of a millennial tradition, and a material commodity.

The fifth centennial anniversary of Aldo's death, in 2015, was celebrated through numerous academic initiatives all over the world: exhibitions, symposia, panels, and, of course, books. The interdisciplinary and transnational nature of such celebrations shows how pervasive and influential Aldo's legacy was, well beyond the limits of Italian Studies. One of these initiatives, developed in Florence for an international scholarly readership, is the volume *Collectanea manutiana*, whose Latin title groups together essays written in Italian and in English about Manuzio's life and afterlife as a Renaissance mind devoted to the art of printing. Pier Davide Accendere and Stefano Baldassarri, both experts in early modern European culture, edited this collection of innovative scholarly works with a keen attention for the dialogue between the past and the present.

Two of the chapters, both written in English, remain in the realm of textuality, investigating Aldo's rapport with grammar and translation. Robert Black, a distinguished expert in Renaissance pedagogy, reconstructs Aldo's impact on the diffusion of Latin grammatical texts. A good knowledge of Greek was fundamental for Aldo, as an educator, to properly teach and learn Latin, and this pedagogical conviction informed his work as a publisher of pedagogical books. Black shows how he promoted classical texts as fruitful linguistic examples, showing the influence that Lorenzo Valla, a founder of modern philology, casted on the editions of the *Institutiones gramaticæ* printed by the Aldine press. This text is the essay's main object of analysis, and Black connects it with various coeval books to show how traditional (indeed, orthodox) Aldo's approach to grammar remained in the passage between the fifteenth and the

sixteenth century. Italianist Brian Richardson, on the other hand, writes about the Aldine volumes that were printed both in Latin and in Greek. These were presented as pedagogical tools too, but included religious and ethical passages meant to elevate the reader's spirit. Richardson analyzes the bilingual books from a strictly material point of view as well, showing how Aldo's printing choices determined the practical uses of them by readers. However, the essay's main points are related to Aldo's work as a translator, and in particular to his lexical choices (and the theory of language that can be inferred from them) within the debates on translation that animated Renaissance Europe at large in the same decades.

A more historical approach characterizes the chapters by Edoardo Barbieri and Piero Scapecchi, two scholars of bibliography and book history. Barbieri returns on a problem that was widely debated within the niche field of "Manuzio Studies": the edition of Philostratus's *Vita*, a Greek text on the life of the Pythagorean philosopher Apollonius of Tyana. Barbieri reconstructs how Aldo, unsatisfied with Alamanno Rinuccini's existing version, rewrote the Latin translation of this text in order to print it and sell it after the unexpected success of a previous Aldina edition—that of Apollonius's letters, printed in 1499. Scapecchi frames Aldo's work in the context of the economic crises that devastated many competing printing companies in late fifteenth-century Europe, showing how Aldo's innovations (in particular his groundbreaking *in ottavo* books, ancestors of current paperbacks) made the Aldine press flourish in a rather inhospitable market. Scapecchi insists on the collaborative dimension of Aldo's enterprise, which was nourished by important collaborators both on the purely cultural and the more technical side. An interesting aspect of this essay is the reconstruction of Aldo's attempts to found a new humanistic academy in Renaissance Italy—an endeavour that he was not able to accomplish, despite his tenacity.

The most transhistorical and interdisciplinary essays in the book were penned by Giancarlo Petrella and Lorenzo Baldacchini. Petrella explores the afterlife of Aldo's books in the libraries and collections of nineteenth-century Europe. His erudite and detailed analysis of the bibliographic funds of northern Italian families (in particular the Containi Costabili collection, in Ferrara, and the collection of the Thun family in Trento) are particularly informative. Baldacchini's essay, which opens the book, offers an exciting reflection on the problem of legibility, connecting Aldo's fonts and technical innovations in

print with ophthalmology and current ideas in neuroscience. Aldo's impact on typography may have been important for the development of Western thought from a neurological and optic point of view, shaping the brain of generations of readers through his influential use of blank spaces, readable fonts, and architectural designs of pages and volumes.

Collectanea manutiana is a dense and useful book that will matter for scholars of many disciplines within Renaissance Studies: book history and bibliography of course, but also Reception Studies, the history of ideas and of education, philology, and even neuroaesthetics and Disability Studies. While it does not include a proper index, a list of the cited names makes it easier to navigate it as a resource. The introduction, very clearly and elegantly written by the editors, is another excellent tool to approach the variety of methods and approaches represented in the six chapters.

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