

*Francesco Platone de' Benedetti. Il principe dei tipografi bolognesi fra corte e studium (1482–1496)*. By ELENA GATTI; introduction by DANIELA DELCORNO BRANCA, epilogue by EDOARDO BARBIERI. (Libri e biblioteche, 39.) Udine: Forum, 2018. 614 pp. €35. ISBN 978 88 3283 107 8.

Francesco de' Benedetti, or 'Platone' as he preferred to be called, given his humanist inclination, is documented as a printer and publisher at Bologna in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, though his activity as a bookseller most likely began earlier and provided the financial clout to branch out into riskier enterprises. Bologna is Italy's quintessential university city, where the *alma mater studiorum* was founded in 1088 (something that pushes Oxford and Cambridge virtually into the red-brick category), and swiftly acquired a vast international reputation, especially in fields such as law. Its status as a force in university publishing was assisted by the fact that its main rivals, Venice and Milan, chose to place their centres for higher studies elsewhere, respectively Padua and Pavia, and thus had less feel for this particular market. The claim on the other hand, implicit in the title of the present monograph, that Platone was the most important printer in a city where the new *ars artificialiter scribendi* had first appeared in 1471 and continued unbroken to the end of the century and beyond, is perhaps however overstated. The annals for him here list fifty-six editions and another twenty-one mostly small items attributed to his press, in a known surviving production for the city of nearly 600 items, including many substantial publications from other printers. Hardly a position of dominance. What makes him special otherwise is the survival in the city archive of the inventory of his bookshop, compiled on 4 April 1497, following his death in August 1496. It was first discovered by the great librarian, director of the city's Archiginnasio library, Albano Sorbelli (1875–1944), who described it in an article in the *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* in 1937 and provided a transcription of the list of books in a 1942 volume published in Italy to celebrate Gutenberg. The full text of the extremely lengthy document, compiled primarily to protect his young widow and children, which includes a complete inventory of all Platone's possessions, down to the pots and pans and the coop for the chickens, was transcribed by Sorbelli in the first volume of the *Corpus chartarum Italiae*, which stood in type for some sixty years, before being finally revised and published in 2004 (see *The Library*, vii, 8 (2007), 446–8). The book inventory part of the document records first the *Libri in iure*, with 270 copies, listed separately due to their greater market value, followed by the more mundane *Libri in humanitate*, with 10,306 copies; further references are made to a stock of 177 copies sent in exchange to a bookseller in Milan and to a deposit in Pavia. It is a formidable total, but the quality of the document is spoiled by the hurriedness of the original compilers, whose all-too-frequent errors transform the identification of the titles into a guessing game. In the final total of 746 entries, many of them multiple references to the same work, it is almost impossible to decide whether the edition is the same, or whether several editions are involved, probably a bit of both. The present author carefully reworks Sorbelli's transcription and interpretation, bringing it up to date with reference to resources such as ISTC and GW, as well as discoveries made in the interim. As such it is a valuable contribution, though only a modest percentage of the titles can be attributed to Platone himself, and a large proportion of his wares was imported from Venice or Milan, making the identification of the likely edition an uncertain business. Careful arguments are advanced for the presence in the document of some forty-five editions that have since wholly disappeared. This is an important study, therefore,

albeit marred by a certain wordiness and a tendency to overload the discussion with sometimes irrelevant information. The listing of Platone's editions includes the individual copies examined by the author, but, given the generally high survival rate, how useful is it to be told about nineteenth-century library stamps or twentieth-century bindings? Likewise, the Cambridge University Library copy of the 1496 *Scriptores rei militaris* has as endpapers a couple of broadsheets printed in Forlì in 1681 and 1686, undoubtedly interesting, but in this context not really deserving of a two-page bibliographical description (pp. 460–61).