

International Conference

**Reshaping the Early Modern Book World:
Competition, Protection, Consumption**

University of Milan, 2–4 December 2020

In a famous letter of 12 March 1455 to Cardinal de Carvajal, Enea Silvio Piccolomini praised the qualities of a Bible printed by Gutenberg: with ‘[...] very clean and correct letters, without any faults, which Your Eminence could easily read without glasses’ (‘[...] mundissime ac correctissime litterae, nulla in parte mendaces, quos tua dignatio sine labore et absque berillo legeret’). Although the sender – the future Pope Pius II – is uncertain about the exact number of copies produced, what stands out is that the new method of producing books in large print runs with moveable type transformed the early modern book world. For centuries, this world had been dominated by manuscripts, usually ordered one by one by clients, often from the social and intellectual elites who were willing to pay considerable sums of money for texts of their selection copied out on parchment or paper.

As printing with moveable type quickly spread in Europe, everything about the production, distribution and consumption of books changed radically within decades. Old and new clients had to be persuaded of their need for books, now available in ever-greater quantities; large print runs and increasing competition forced printers to seek ever-cheaper production methods and materials; technical innovators and publishers of new text editions sought protection for their products from governments, which in turn tried to regain control over the increasingly elusive circulation of information, knowledge and opinions that undermined traditional power structures. Compared to manuscript production, the printing business was very capital-intensive, marked by a slow return on investment, and it required the development of trade routes, specialised fairs and advertising strategies. Publishers and booksellers developed innovative techniques and refined their know-how to create new tastes and to satisfy new demands from the public.

For about a century, the hand-press book as a commodity underwent slow but dramatic changes. Books changed hands more often transnationally amongst wholesalers settling debt and credit on account. Information about books and prices circulated amongst booksellers in letters, printed advertisements or catalogues. Important printing enterprises developed systems and tools to come to grips with regional and international competition. Printers and publishers deployed strategies to win a place in the market: for instance, by focussing on niche markets, collaboration or product diversification. About a century after Piccolomini’s letter, the book world had undergone a deep transformation, and so had society.

This international conference marks the conclusion of the EMoBookTrade project funded by the European Research Council and directed by Professor Angela Nuovo. At the core of this five-year project are two powerful and innovative tools which facilitate, on the one hand, the study of the privilege system in Venice from the introduction of printing in the Serenissima until 1603, and on the other hand, the prices of books in Europe. This information is organised in two related and fully searchable databases, available online to all researchers.

The organisers invite 20-minute papers in English, French or Italian concerning one of the following themes or related topics:

- The economics of the early modern book trade
- Books and cultural consumption in the early modern age
- Financing the early modern book trade
- Knowledge economy and economic growth

- The privilege system and its use by authors and publishers
- Book prices and their trends in early modern Europe
- Fairs and markets
- The economic impact of censorship on the book trade
- Publishers, booksellers and business strategies
- Knowledge tools and/or strategies to assess the book market
- Material aspects of books in relation to production prices
- Print runs
- Paper production and trade
- Cheap print: market and circulation
- Specialised printing: images, music, non-Western languages
- Paratextual materials and marketing strategies

Paper proposals of max. 500 words should be sent to Prof. Angela Nuovo (angela.nuovo@unimi.it) by 31 March 2020 along with a short CV (one page max.). The event is supported by the ERC EMOBookTrade Project and the University of Milan. Other sponsors include The Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL). Speakers' accommodation and travel costs will be paid by the EMOBookTrade project, which also offers travel grants to subsidize conference attendance by PhD students and PostDocs.

Papers from this conference will form the basis of a peer-reviewed, open access edited volume.

Academic committee

Prof. Angela Nuovo, Università degli studi di Milano
 Prof. Christine Bénévent, École nationale des chartes, Paris
 Prof. Lodovica Braida, Università degli studi di Milano
 Prof. Hilario Casado Alonso, Universidad de Valladolid
 Prof. Giuseppe De Luca, Università degli studi di Milano
 Prof. Dr. Markus A. Denzel, Universität Leipzig
 Prof. Cristina Dondi, University of Oxford
 Prof. Ian Maclean, University of Oxford and St Andrews
 Prof. Germano Maifreda, Università degli studi di Milano
 Prof. Andrew Pettegree, University of St Andrews
 Prof. Andrea Zannini, Università degli studi di Udine

Important dates

- Submission of conference proposals closes: **31 March 2020**
- Acceptance/rejection of proposals announced: **15 May 2020**
- Submission of applications for travel grants opens: **15 June 2020**
- Submissions of applications for travel grants closes: **15 August 2020**
- Awarding of travel grants announced: **15 September 2020**
- Publication of final programme: **5 October 2020**