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Böninger, Lorenz.

Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna and the Social World of Florentine Printing, ca. 1470–1493.

I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance History. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021. Pp. 224. ISBN 978-0-6742-5113-7 (hardcover) US\$49.95.

The printer Niccolò di Lorenzo is now primarily known for his landmark 1481 edition of Dante's *Commedia*, which was the first edition of the poem to be printed in Florence, the first to include a new commentary by Cristoforo Landino, and also the first Dante edition to include printed illustrations. But this monumental, even infamous book is not the sum total of Niccolò's achievements in printing, although its tormented publication history was in fact symptomatic of the difficulties the printer would undergo during his whole career. Lorenz Böninger's 2021 monograph, which draws on the archival presence of Niccolò and other individuals involved in the new trade of printing in Florence, is the first full-length study of this still rather elusive figure, and as such makes an important contribution to the scholarship of early printing in Italy, and to business history of the period more generally. The book itself is quite short, with 110 pages of text and a further hundred pages or so of very ample supporting materials, but despite its relative brevity, it is densely packed with archival findings that illuminate the emergent trade of printing in Florence in the 1470s and 1480s. As a business historian, rather than a more traditional bibliographer, or book or art historian coming from the literary or visual disciplines, Böninger is able to provide a rich overview of the institutional frameworks in which printing operated in Florence in this period, linking the production of printed books to the local economy, for example, by showing how the Florentine wool merchants partnered with the printers and used their cloth as a fungible asset to underwrite the publication of books, and how these then intersected with scholarly and clerical networks in the city.

This exceptional archival depth is by far the greatest strength of this volume. The primary sources for the study of printing in Florence have traditionally been the registers of the notarial archive, which have been worked over very closely by now, but Böninger has cross-referenced these with the records of the Mercanzia court (the judicial court used for the resolution of financial disputes) and the Podestà court (which settled disputes between citizens). These are rich hunting grounds for the economic historian of printing, seeking traces of the

everyday business transactions through which publishing was conducted. Using the records of legal court cases clearly creates a more disputatious history than other sources, but by harvesting these, Böninger is able to tell the story of a more precarious and contingent history of printing in Florence than has perhaps been found to date in more traditional or bibliographically focused accounts.

The book is organized into three parts: part 1 (chapters 1–4) gives an overview of printing in Florence from its beginnings in c. 1470, showing Niccolò's interactions with the three printers known to be working there in this period—Bernardo Cellini, Giovanni di Piero da Magonza (also known as Johannes Petri), and the anonymous "Printer of Terentius." Parts 2 (chapters 4–9) and 3 (chapters 10–14) then examine his years of greatest productivity between c. 1475 and c. 1486, first via his partnership with Cappone di Bartolomeo Capponi, and then via his work as an independent printer after 1480–81, when he began forming discrete partnerships to publish specific editions. Two chapters in particular stand out: chapter 8, which provides a pithy overview of the various phases of his publishing career, moving from religious and devotional works, through to a wider variety of genres in Latin and the vernacular; and chapter 11, on the 1481 Dante edition, with much valuable information on the mechanics of the publication, the print run, and, as ever, the financial implications of this ambitious project. This chapter also contains some discussion of the tortuous production of the copperplate illustrations, but simply points to other scholarship on these rather than attempting to draw any definitive conclusions as to the mysteries of their creation.

We learn that Niccolò's debts and financial travails continued to snowball in his last years, despite (or perhaps because of) a series of complicated contracts drawn up for further printing projects. The epilogue surmises on the reasons for his disappearance from the record after 1486, concluding that this was probably due to his ongoing financial and legal difficulties rather than his death, as has been proposed. Böninger in fact finds archival evidence that Niccolò's career in printing continued well after he had put his name to his last colophon, but to the end, his career was dogged by financial problems and disputes, although his notable achievements and powerful partners such as Landino probably protected him to some degree from even worse consequences.

The two appendices provide further scholarly resources: Appendix A gives a handlist of forty-three books printed by Niccolò, while Appendix B

supplies modernized transcriptions of twelve of the most relevant archival documents cited in the text. Appendix A might have been better managed within the volume: the handlist gives only author, title, and date, with the ISTC and GW numbers and further bibliography only given in the footnotes. I would personally have preferred to have had all the bibliographical information in the same place rather than distanced across the backmatter. Appendix B is extremely useful, as only one of these documents has been published before (the printing contract for the Landino-commentated edition of the *Commedia*, previously published by Böniger in a 2016 article). These documents, alongside the extremely scholarly endnotes and exhaustive bibliography, make this book an invaluable reference resource for future scholarship. In some ways it is quite slight, with only 110 pages of text, but the whole volume is buttressed by a lifetime of study and impeccable methodological and archival thoroughness. There is a tight focus throughout on the business history of Niccolò's printing endeavours, which makes it highly complementary to other studies of these individuals and their book-objects in literary and visual fields. Overall, we owe Böniger our gratitude for his painstaking reconstruction of these relationships and social and legal interactions in a charged period of Florentine history, and for his further contribution to widening our knowledge of the intellectual history of the Quattrocento.

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