Ferdinando de' Medici and the *Typographia Medicea*

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When studying the political impact of printing and publishing in early modern Europe, printing in the so-called 'exotic languages' (Syriac, Chaldean, Ethiopic, Persian, Arabic etc.) may not be the first topic that comes to mind. Nevertheless, these publications were, despite their rather limited audience in Europe, of great interest to scholars, as well as to members of royal dynasties and church dignitaries. For Europe's most powerful individuals, it was a prestigious engagement to support the innovative technology of printing in Arabic and Syriac, as well as the pioneering philological work that accompanied it. It was also a zealous endeavour, as these publications were meant to help with missionary activities in the East.¹

The first edition of the Syriac New Testament, published by Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter (1506–1557) serves as a case in point.² Preparing the text for print was a long and complicated process: apart from Widmanstetter, scholars such as Teseo Ambrogio degli Albonesi (1469–1540), Guillaume Postel (1510–1581) and Moses of Mardin (d. 1592) were involved in the editing process. The manuscript, once it had reached Europe, travelled from Rome to Venice to Paris and was finally published in Vienna in 1555. This would not have been possible without help from Emperor Ferdinand I (1503–1564), to whom Widmanstetter dedicated the edition.³ In his dedicatory letter Widmanstetter claimed that Ferdinand, as a Christian ruler, had the obligation to promote

1 In case of the Syriac New Testament historian Robert Wilkinson argued that Widmanstetter wanted to provide the Eastern Churches with liturgical books. Widmanstetter also thought that the text could serve to convert Muslims and Jews. See Robert J. Wilkinson, *Orientalism, Aramaic and Kabbalah in the Catholic Reformation. The first Printing of the Syriac New Testament* (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 4.

2 See *Ketābā d-ewangelyōn qaddiṣā de-māran w-alāhan Yeṣu' meṣihā; syriacae linguae. Jesu, Christo eiusque matri virgini atque judaeis omnibus, Christianae redemptionis evangelicaeque praedicationis tempore, vernaculae et popularis prima elementa. Quibus adiectae sunt Christianae religionis solennes, quotidianaeque preces* (Vienna: Michael Zimmermann, 1555) USTC 607924.

3 See Wilkinson, *Orientalism, Aramaic and Kabbalah in the Catholic Reformation*, p. 179.

the Christian faith and the production of Christian texts for members of the Eastern Churches.

This article examines the unique case of *Typographia Medicea*, a Roman printing shop that was not just supported by a high-ranking member of a ruling noble house, but was actually founded by one. In his quest for personal prestige and political power, Ferdinando de' Medici (1549–1609), Cardinal and later Grand Duke of Tuscany, established a press in Rome in 1584 that would publish both Arabic and Syriac books. In this article, I will explore how Ferdinando used his connections to promote the print shop and support its activities as well as how he planned to use the printing shop to reach his political and monetary goals.

Only four years after establishing the printing house in Rome, Ferdinando became the next Grand Duke of Tuscany and had to leave Rome. The director of the printing shop, Giovanni Battista Raimondi (d. 1614) disseminated the narrative that Ferdinando did not sufficiently intervene in the *Typographia's* business after he had left Rome and was no longer even interested in the printing shop.⁴ Reporting this indifference towards the business decreased its political influence, which increased its financial struggles and, according to Raimondi, meant the ambitious operation failed. The *Typographia Medicea* produced only about 25 editions in the 30 years of its existence.

Researchers have reiterated Raimondi's argument, as there seemed to be few sources that showed the direct involvement of Ferdinando in the printing shop after 1587 and almost none that are related to the trade in printed books.⁵ I argue that this approach needs to be discussed further, since some sources do show that Ferdinando, although indirectly through agents and intermediaries, kept a very close eye on Raimondi's activities. Ferdinando relied on the complex social structure within the Roman clerical environment to control his investment in the *Typographia Medicea*.

The sources on the printing shop are extensive. Six *fondi* in the Florentine State Archive contain material that was collected from the printing shop after

4 See Archivio di Stato Firenze (hereafter: ASF), Mediceo del Principato (hereafter: MdP) 3299, f. 280r–281v. This undated document was written by Raimondi and addressed to an anonymous person at the Florentine court. He might have considered that it would eventually reach the Grand Duke and make him reconsider his actions towards the printing shop. From its contents a date close to 1590 seems probable.

5 See Kaled El Bibas, 'La Stamperia Medicea Orientale', in Patrizia Vallario (ed.), *Un Maestro Insolito. Scritti per Franco Cardini* (Florence: Vallecchi Ed, 2010), p. 216 and Eckhard Leuschner, *Antonio Tempesta; Ein Bahnbrecher des römischen Barock und seine europäische Wirkung* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2005), pp. 355–364.

Giovanni Battista Raimondi's death in 1614.⁶ Additional material on the printing shop is kept in The Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence, the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze and the Roman State Archive, amongst other institutions. Researchers such as Antonino Bertolotti, Sara Fani, Margherita Farina and Alberto Tinto have made these sources accessible.⁷ While their studies provide a broad view of the background of the printing shop, they have not included some important sources. The c. 150 letters written by the Florentine senator Donato dell'Antella (1540–1617) to Raimondi are crucial to reconstructing the activities of intermediaries on behalf of Ferdinando. These letters have not been included in any of the major publications on the *Typographia Medicea*, but they are invaluable in contextualising the economic decisions that Raimondi made for the printing shop. These letters also allow to study the as yet overlooked trade in the books the *Typographia* produced and the involvement of Ferdinando de' Medici in this trade. It is possible to shed light on the connection between printed books in Arabic and Syriac and the political power that could be generated through trading in them and using them as gifts through the study of the archival records on the *Typographia Medicea*.

Establishing the *Typographica Medicea*

As is evident from its name, the printing shop was founded in 1584 by Ferdinando de' Medici, son of Cosimo I, Grand Duke of Tuscany. Ferdinando was the younger brother of Francesco and became Cardinal at the early age of fourteen, though he was never consecrated as a priest. This turned out in his favour when his brother died unexpectedly in 1587 and Ferdinando renounced his post within the Roman curia to return to Florence as the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

Various researchers have tried to establish the reasons as to why Ferdinando founded the printing shop, arguing that he acted out of financial interest, since he was always short on money and the director of the business, Giovanni Battista Raimondi, stated that selling the books to be printed would result in enormous revenues.⁸ Being able to appoint Raimondi as the director of this business was advantageous in itself. He was a renowned scholar and also a

6 See ASF, Miscellanea Medicea (MM) 717–722.

7 See amongst other publications on this topic: Antonino Bertolotti, 'Le tipografie orientali', *La Rivista Europea*, Vol. XI (Florence, 1878) pp. 217–268; Sara Fani and Margherita Farina (eds.), *Le vie delle lettere. La Tipografia Medicea tra Rome e l'Oriente* (Florence: Mandragora, 2012); Alberto Tinto, *La Tipografia Medicea Orientale* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 1987).

8 See Vera Valitutto, 'Presentazione', in Fani and Farina, *Le vie delle lettere*, p. 7.

member of Ferdinando's household. As such, he could be expected to act according to the intentions of his master.⁹ Another reason for Ferdinando to establish the *Typographia* might have been the prospect of being viewed favourably by Pope Gregory XIII.¹⁰ Before the press was established, Gregory XIII made Ferdinando 'protector of the patriarchs of Antioch, Alexandria and the king of Ethiopia'.¹¹ These important figures governed the most prominent of the 'eastern churches', in which Arabic and Syriac were used. Raimondi, who wanted to stress Ferdinando's personal and financial engagement in the printing shop, wrote that Ferdinando embraced and carried out this office as the protector of the patriarchs and the king willingly. Trying to be of even more use to the Holy Pontiff, Ferdinando assured the Pope that he would personally pay for any costs that might result from this office. According to Raimondi, he subsequently established and financed a printing shop of the foreign languages in Rome in order to assist his role as protector.¹²

The foundation charter of the printing shop, however, highlights Raimondi's own involvement in the foundation of the *Typographia Medicea*. This document states that Raimondi promoted the establishment of a printing shop to produce texts in Arabic and Syriac. Raimondi's stated reasoning was that the printing shop would not only be profitable and lead to a promotion of the sciences, but the business would most of all help to promote the Catholic faith.¹³ The foundation charter also makes clear that it was the Cardinal's

9 At least from 10 January 1580 onwards Raimondi was a member of Ferdinando's household and received a salary from Francesco Bellotti, the treasurer see ASF, MdP 61619, f. 428r.

10 See Angelo Maria Bandini, *Lettera del canonico Ang. Mar. Bandini sopra i principj, e progressi della Biblioteca Laurenziana* (Florence: Allegrini, Pisoni, e Comp., 1773), p. 85 and Guglielmo Enrico Saltini, 'Della Stamperia orientale Medicea e di Giovanni Battista Raimondi. Memoria compilata sui documenti dell'Archivio Centrale di Stato', *Giornale Storico degli Archivi Toscani* (Florence: G. P. Vieusseux, 1860), No.4, pp. 257–308.

11 Copy of a letter by Giovanni Battista Raimondi to Gabriele Paleotti, the first part is dated 28 January 1593, the second part was written shortly after: ASF, MM 719_24, f. 1r.

12 ASF, MM 719_24, f. 1r: 'Il Gran Duca di Toscana, essendo ancora Cardinale, fu fatto protettore dalla felice memoria di Gregorio XIII dei Patriarchi d'Antiochia et d'Alessandria, et del Re d'Ethiopia per trattare con loro di cose di stato et di religione, et li fu dato ancora consequentemente la protezione et cura del negotio delle lingue dei quei paesi, cioè Arabica, Chaldaica et simile, il che non solo abbracciò et esequi volentieri, ma per far cosa più grata à quel Santo Pontefice volse cio fare a sue spese, come tuttavia fa, pero che per servizio di detto negotio fece erigere una stamparia in Roma delle lingue straniere ...'

13 See ASF, MM 719_1, f. 1r: 'Essendoci stato Proposto da m. Giovambattista Raimondo una Impresa di stampa in lingua Arabica et Caldaica ... Et Havendo Considerato non tanto l'util Pecunario che se ne potesse conseguire, et la facilità che si accresce alla Notitia Delle Scientie, Quanto al Poter con tal occasione Aprirsi la strada all'Aumento della fede'.

private enterprise: while the Pope expressed his endorsement of such an operation, it was Cardinal de' Medici who financed the business. Thus, the *Typographia Medicea* was never an official Vatican printing shop like the *Stamperia Vaticana*.¹⁴ The entire enterprise, and Raimondi, therefore could not rely on the curia's established trading and commercial contacts; they were wholly dependent on Ferdinando's patronage.

The Production of the First Editions

Upon becoming Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1587, the Roman printing shop no longer served as a tool to increase Ferdinando's reputation amongst his fellow cardinals and other Roman dignitaries. He decided that it would be useful to move the *Typographia* to Florence.¹⁵ While most other members of his Roman household followed Ferdinando to Florence, Raimondi refused to move. He argued that the *Typographia Medicea* absolutely had to stay in Rome by referring to the extremely close ties the business had to have with the papal censors and with editors and translators who were well versed in the 'exotic languages'. All these figures were part of the Roman clerical hierarchy and could not easily leave the city. Raimondi even warned Ferdinando that, in his opinion, moving the printing shop to Florence would put them at the risk of losing the whole market to competitors, who would use their proximity to the curia to their advantage.¹⁶

His arguments were to some extent convincing: Ferdinando refrained from his initial plan to transfer the printing shop to Florence. The Grand Duke, however, did cut his spending on the project significantly, seriously jeopardising the publication of the first editions. It took the *Typographia* six years to publish its first edition, the 1590 edition of the Arabic gospels.¹⁷ This first

14 See Tinto, *La Tipografia Medicea Orientale*, p. 58. Raimondi even wrote a *memoriale*, addressed to Clement VIII in which he offered suggestions on the reorganisation of the *Stamperia Vaticana*, which in terms of productivity was facing serious problems. See Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF), II.V.157, f. 1–6.

15 See Tinto, *La Tipografia Medicea Orientale*, p. 66.

16 See letter by Giovanni Battista Raimondi to Belisario Vinta, secretary to Ferdinando de' Medici, on 13 August 1588 in ASF, MM 719_18.

17 *Evangelium sanctum Domini Nostri Iesu Christi conscriptum a quatuor evangelistis sanctis idest, Mattheo, Marco, Luca, et Iohanne* (Rome: Typografia Medicea Orientale, 1590) UTC 806525.

FIGURE 10.1 Arabic gospels, title page, in *Typographia Medicea*, 1590, Rome
STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN, KUNSTBIBLIOTHEK

publication was followed by a bilingual edition of the same texts in Arabic and Latin in 1591.¹⁸

Other editions include the *Alphabetum Arabicum* and *Alphabetum Chaldaicum*, both relatively small publications issued in 1592, and two Arabic grammars, published in the same year.¹⁹ Significantly more important, both in size and impact, were the Arabic editions of Al-Idrisi's *De geographia universali* (1592), Avicenna's *Canon* (1593) and Euclid's *Elementa* (1594).²⁰ Further works in Arabic and Syriac followed, but the production of the *Typographia Medicea* slowed down in the following years due to limited financial resources.

As early as 1590, Raimondi wrote desperate letters to the Florentine court, even claiming that the workers were leaving the printing shop, and that those too old or too poor to leave in order to look for more reliable employers 'died of despair'.²¹ He also reminded Ferdinando that leaving the business in its current state, not having finished its major publications, would inevitably lead to the loss of a huge sum of money and also negatively affect the reputation of the Medici family and the Holy See. In the same letter, Raimondi hinted at the fact that the Grand Duke was possibly ill-informed about the prospects of the business, since he was not in Rome anymore. In order to provide the Florentine court with more reliable information, Raimondi set out to promote the positive financial future that the *Typographia Medicea* could expect once its major

18 *Evangelium Iesu Christi quemadmodum scripsit Mar Mattheus unus ex duodecim discipulis eius* (Rome: Typografia Medicea Orientale, 1591) USTC 801540.

19 *Alphabetum Arabicum* (Rome: Typografia Medicea Orientale, 1592) USTC 806711; *Alfabetum Chaldaicum et ratio legendi etc.* (Rome: Typographia Medicea Orientale, 1592), unique copy in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma, Sig. 34.6.E.23.1; [*Grammatica arabica dicta Kaphia autore filio Alhagiabi*] (Rome: Typografia Medicea Orientale, 1592) USTC 836127; *Grammatica arabica in compendium redacta, quae vocatur Giarrumia* (Rome: Typografia Medicea Orientale, 1592) USTC 836126.

20 *De geographia universali. Hortulus cultissimus, mire orbis regiones, provincias, insulas, urbes, earumque dimensiones & orizonta describens* (Rome: Typografia Medicea Orientale, 1592) USTC 807510; *Libri quinque canonis medicinae. Quibus additi sunt in fine libri logicae, physicae et metaphysicae. Arabice nunc primum impressi* (Rome: Typografia Medicea Orientale, 1593) USTC 811611; *Euclidis elementorum geometricorum libri tredecim. Ex traditione doctissimi Nasiridini Tusini. Nunc primum Arabice impressi* (Rome: Typographia Medicea Orientale, 1594) USTC 828486.

21 ASF, MdP 3299, f. 280r: 'perchè con haver loro sospesa la provisione per questi sei mesi decorsi, et il donativo di questo Natale passato, del quale ci haveva fatta gratia S.A.S. [Ferdinando de' Medici], si è causato per non haver loro alcuno con che sostentarsi di fare delli debiti, et alcuni non assuefatti à patire et di poco animo per la propria vecchiezza, come ms. Roberto [Granjon], di desperatione ne si sono morti, havendo lassato molto debito in collo à me [Raimondi] ...'. The letter is not dated, for more information see footnote 4.

publications were finished.²² He stated that positive reactions to the editions that were currently being printed had already reached Rome from Syria, Egypt, Persia and Constantinople. In the last case, a privilege for the sale of books in the Ottoman Empire had even been obtained from the Ottoman sultan.²³ Even more favourable was the reaction that Raimondi reported having received from Morocco; the king himself had allegedly seen some printing proofs, such as the first pages of the works of Euclid and Avicenna and desired the finished products greatly.²⁴

It may have been due to Raimondi's predictions of excellent sales that made Ferdinando's decision to allow Raimondi to stay in Rome and continue his activities as director of the *Typographia Medicea*. Alternatively, the Grand Duke may have made been motivated by the realization that closing down the printing shop before the editions of the works of Al-Idrisi, Avicenna and Euclid were finished would indeed cause a loss of reputation for the Medici family. Yet he cut the financing of the printing shop significantly, and from then on it was strictly supervised by Medici representatives.

In the following years, Raimondi and his collaborators tried to establish and use commercial connections with North Africa, the Near, Middle and Far East, as well as the major European book fairs to sell the books printed in the *Typographia Medicea*. The archival records of these connections, their preliminary preparations, such as choosing book agents, and the limited sales that followed offer details of why the proceeds remained far lower than Raimondi's projections: the production of the books was slower – and more expensive – than expected, book agents disappeared or provided unfaithful accounts and some books were even stolen by one of the printing shop's own employees.²⁵

22 ASF, MdP 3299, f. 280r–281v.

23 This document was later printed and added to some copies of the edition of Euclid's *Elementorum geometricorum*. An Arabic manuscript copy as well as an Italian translation are preserved in ASF, MM 719_13.

24 ASF, MdP 3299, f. 280r–281v: 'Le speranze che si hanno dell'esito di detti libri, et delli tre altri già finiti et di quanti altri sene facessero sono fondate non nell'opinione nostra solamente, ma nelli avisi che sempre si sono havuti in favore di detto esito da Soria, d'Egitto, da Persia, et da Costantinopoli, da dove ancora in favore di detto esito, per quello che si havrebbe potuto dubitare, si è havuto un privilegio dal Gran Turco. Et similmente da Barbaria, dal Regno di Fez et di Marocco, et dal Re istesso, il quale havendo ancor lui viste le mostre delle stampe et li primi fogli dell'Euclide, et dell'Avicenna che si stampano adesso, et delli altri già stampati, li cerca li desidera, et li sollecita ...'.

25 In 1593 Matteo Neroni, the *proto* of the *Typographia Medicea* was found guilty of illegally printing copies of the products of the printing shop, stealing and selling them at a considerable lower price than the price charged by Raimondi. See Archivio di Stato di Roma (ASR), Tribunale Criminale del Governatore, Processi 1505–1599, f. 380–478. For information on the other aspects see documents in ASF, MM 717–722.

Ferdinando's Continued Involvement

According to Raimondi, Ferdinando had invested a total of 40,000 *scudi* in the printing shop by January 1593.²⁶ It is improbable that he would leave such a business without close supervision, especially, since the printing shop, apart from missionary and scientific goals, set out to earn money.²⁷ Apart from Raimondi's extremely positive reports on the prospects of the printing shop, no detailed or extensive reports on the business have been preserved. Neither are there extant documents that could cast a light on how Ferdinando assessed the business. And yet, there must have been a steady stream of information providing the Grand Duke with details on this matter, since the archival records provide information on the network that Ferdinando established to control the activities of the printing shop.

Ferdinando instructed the Florentine senator Donato dell'Antella to check on Raimondi's activities since the foundation of the *Typographia Medicea*. Dell'Antella was renowned for his incorruptible bookkeeping as Ferdinando's *maestro di casa* in Rome.²⁸ When Ferdinando left Rome, dell'Antella accompanied him to Florence but this transfer did not end his engagement with the printing shop. Dell'Antella did not travel back to Rome to control the accounts of the printing shop. Instead, he and Raimondi corresponded via letters. Almost 150 of dell'Antella's letters, dating from March 1588 to July 1596, have been preserved. Unfortunately, this corpus only includes his letters to Raimondi; Raimondi's letters to dell'Antella appear to have been lost.²⁹ Dell'Antella and Raimondi discussed the administration and financing of the *Typographia Medicea* and its printing projects. These letters reveal how much of the daily business of the printing shop was based on trial and error or on the advice of outsiders. One case in which these deficits were especially obvious was the sale of the finished products. Trading in Arabic and Syriac books was an international and long-distance business, one that required knowledge of trade routes and custom systems, as well as a network of reliable contacts. Neither Raimondi nor dell'Antella had experience in any of these areas.

Ferdinando de' Medici further relied on the Florentine ambassador in Rome, Giovanni Niccolini to check on the spending of the printing shop. Raimondi received regular payments from the Florentine court through Niccolini. He

26 See ASF, MM 719_24, f. 1r.

27 These aspects were already mentioned in the foundation charter of the printing shop, see ASF, MM 719_1.

28 Letter by Cipriano Saracinello to Giovanni Niccolini on 4 December 1592 in ASF, MdP 3621_2.

29 ASF, MM 721.

never had access to larger sums of money – 150 *scudi* was the average payment per month.³⁰ While there are few payments that were dedicated to specific purchases (mostly paper and wages), Raimondi was strictly required to send accounts of all expenditures to the Florentine court. In 1592 dell'Antella even remarked a single missing *scudo* in Raimondi's calculation – indicating that the Grand Duke required perfect accounts of his investments in the printing shop.³¹

After 1587, on his own Raimondi had no influence in the curia. The printing press business was also constantly threatened by the possibility that the pope might decide to open up a papal printing shop dedicated to printing in the 'exotic languages'.³² The Grand Duke provided Raimondi with a political support system to advance the interest of the printing press. Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti (1522–1597) and Cardinal Francesco Maria Bourbon del Monte (1549–1627) repeatedly intervened on behalf of Raimondi and the *Typographia Medicea* in the curia, in some cases even presenting Raimondi's projects to the pope directly. For example, Raimondi noted in his diary that on 28 January 1593 Cardinal Paleotti presented the project of the polyglot bible to Pope Clement VIII.³³ The interventions of this cardinal on behalf of the polyglot bible project date back at least to 1589. In this year, dell'Antella mentioned the opportunity to use Paleotti's influence at the Holy See to draw the pope's attention towards this enormous project.³⁴ The cardinal also informed Raimondi about current developments in the curia that could be of importance for the *Typographia Medicea*.³⁵

The reason that Paleotti assisted Raimondi and the printing shop was not motivated by his interest in the polyglot Bible alone, but also because Ferdinando de' Medici ordered him to do so. Before leaving Rome, Ferdinando

30 Letter by Donato dell'Antella to Raimondi on 1 June 1590: ASF, MM 721_35.

31 Letter by Donato dell'Antella to Raimondi on 13 June 1590: ASF, MM 721_84, f. 168r.

32 It certainly explains why Raimondi was strongly opposed to the idea of lending Arabic type to the Jesuits, who wanted to print books for the Maronites in the 1580s. See the letter by Raimondi to Cardinal Mondovì, c.1585–87, ASF, MM 719_15.

33 ASF, MM 718_25, f. 4r: 'A 28 di Gennaro 1593 parlo al Papa l'Illustrissimo Cardinale Paleotto per la Bibbia da stampare in molte lingue'.

34 See letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 1 July 1589, ASF, MM 721_8.

35 On the occasion of the papal election in November 1591 dell'Antella wrote to Raimondi: 'Ma l'informazione è Necessaria, et Aiutissimo senza dubbio sarebbe l'illustrissimo Paleotto ...', hinting at the possibility to gain inside information on the new pope's plans. See letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 16 November 1591 in ASF, MM 721_62.

had asked Paleotti to act as a *protettore* of the *Typographia Medicea*.³⁶ Nevertheless, this arrangement did not seem to have been openly communicated. Dell'Antella was preoccupied with the idea that the pope (in this case Innocent IX) might feel deceived once he found out that Cardinal Paleotti acted on behalf of Ferdinando de' Medici for a business that was owned by the Grand Duke.³⁷

The second person who assisted Raimondi was Francesco Maria Bourbon, Cardinal del Monte. Del Monte was even more closely connected to Ferdinando de' Medici than Paleotti, as he had been Ferdinando's assistant and member of his household for some years. After Ferdinando renounced his position as cardinal, del Monte was appointed as his successor, and his close ties to the Medici family – who also regularly paid him a salary – were well known in Rome.³⁸ This relationship explains why Ferdinando stayed informed on the business of the *Typographia Medicea* and why Raimondi was instructed by dell'Antella to answer del Monte's potential questions truthfully.³⁹ Using these two important Roman figures in order to control Raimondi's activities, but also to assist him, was relatively easy for the Grand Duke, as this network was already established.

Establishing International Trading Networks

In contrast to his vast personal networks in the curia or the Roman society, Ferdinando de' Medici had limited experience in commercial trading, let alone trading in books printed in Arabic and Syriac. However, in contrast to many other fields of commerce with which he was engaged, such as the trade in luxury fabrics or precious stones, the associates organising the trade in his

36 Letters written by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 16 November 1591, ASF, MM 721_62, f. 124v and on 30 September 1589 in ASF, MM 719_22, f. 1r.

37 See the letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 16 November 1591 in ASF, MM 721_62, f. 124v–125r: '... mi risolverci gia, a creder' che fussi a proposito che ne seguissi l'effetto, dubitando, che potendo S.S.ta [the pope] sapere che questo è negotio del Gran Duca, et che da S.A. [Ferdinando de' Medici] fu pregato l'Illustrissimo Paleotto a contentarsi di tenerne protetione, potrebbe forse parerli che si procedessi per via non ordinaria'.

38 Victor Ivo Comparato, 'Francesco Maria Bourbon del Monte', *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (hereafter DBI) 13 (1971).

39 Letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 26 January 1589, ASF, MM 721_5, f. 9.

name – Giovanni Battista Raimondi and Donato dell'Antella – did not have much experience either.⁴⁰

Surprisingly enough, the products of the *Typographia Medicea* seemed to attract merchants and potential book agents on their own. As early as 1589, some German merchants, offered to transport products of the *Typographia* to the important fair in Frankfurt and to sell them there in the name of the printing shop.⁴¹ In the same year, the Jewish merchant Jacob Levantino from Ancona reached out to Raimondi, offering to take some copies of the Medicean editions via Ancona to Ragusa (Dubrovnik).⁴² He planned on reselling the books there to one of his fellow merchants, who would then be able to sell them in the Ottoman Empire.⁴³ This route was cheaper than bringing the books to the Ottoman Empire directly, as merchants from Ragusa had to pay considerably lower taxes than those from other places.⁴⁴ Some months later, two merchant brothers, residing in Pisa and Florence visited the *officina* in Rome and offered to take the finished books and even unfinished publications via Livorno to Morocco. They promised to take the editions to the royal court, where they traded regularly.⁴⁵ All of these actions seemed to indicate a great interest in the Arabic books printed in Rome, and an equally large potential for revenues. Nevertheless, the engagement of these merchants is peculiar, considering that, when they contacted Raimondi, no edition of the *Typographia Medicea* had yet been finished. In fact, in most cases, printing had barely begun.

It is worth looking at one of these cases in more detail. Donato dell'Antella noted that the two brothers trading with Morocco were called Diego and

40 For example, Ferdinando de' Medici had Filippo Sassetti sent him luxury textiles and weapons from China, India and Malabar. See letter from Filippo Sassetti to Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici in November 1585, ASF, MdP 513_2, f. 651. On 23 January 1586 Sassetti wrote to Florence that he had met Giovanni Battista Britti in Goa. Britti travelled as a book agent for the *Typographia Medicea* and as an ambassador for Cardinal Ferdinando to Ethiopia. See letter in ASF, MdP 5037, f. 553. Both agents clearly acted independently and only met by chance.

41 Unfortunately, the names of these merchants are never mentioned in the sources. They are mentioned for the first time in letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 26 January 1589, ASF, MM 721_5, f. 9r.

42 This merchant was mentioned for the first time in a letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimon on 25 November 1589 in ASF, MM 721_29, f. 54r.

43 Letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 15 February 1591, ASF, MM 721_72, f. 144r.

44 See Angelo Tamborra, *Gli stati italiani, l'Europa e il problema turco dopo Lepanto* (Florence: Olschki, 1961), p. 18 and Halil Inalcik: *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age 1300–1600* (New Rochelle: Caratzas/Orpheus, 1989), p. 136.

45 Letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 12 October 1590, ASF, MM 721_46.

Rodrigo Marchienna or Marcena.⁴⁶ Diego and Rodrigo had another brother called Juan, and were in all probability of Spanish-Jewish descent.⁴⁷ Their family emigrated from Cordoba to Morocco, most likely to escape the political situation and religious persecution in Spain. While keeping their financial ties with Morocco, Diego and Rodrigo immigrated to Italy in the 1580s. While Diego was living as a Christian in Pisa (in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany), Rodrigo settled first in Florence and later in Venice. The family left substantial traces in written records from the last decades of the sixteenth century, as they were connected to several noble dynasties. Both brothers not only had commercial contacts with Morocco but also acted as agents of the Moroccan sultan, Ahmad al-Mansur (died 1603).⁴⁸ When questioned about the religious identity of Rodrigo in the year 1612, a certain Ludovico Lopez attested that, to his knowledge, Rodrigo traded with Morocco for a long time and that he was 'commissioner and representative of his Majesty the king of Fez and Morocco in Venice'.⁴⁹ This testimony confirms the close ties the Marchienna family had with the Moroccan court. Additionally, when Rodrigo's son Alonso or Abraham was kidnapped from Cadiz by an English ship in 1596, the Moroccan sultan wrote to Queen Elisabeth I, requesting the release of Alonso, offering to pay the necessary ransom personally.⁵⁰ Alonso also received support from another ruler in securing his freedom. Ferdinando de' Medici wrote to the Earl of Essex advocating for the release of Alonso, explaining that Alonso's uncle, Diego, was a citizen of Pisa and thus his subject.⁵¹

Juan Marchienna, the third brother who stayed in Morocco, was also involved in diplomatic missions. He acted as an agent on behalf of the Moroccan sultan in Spain, and on behalf of Ferdinando de' Medici in Spain and Morocco.

46 Letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 27 October 1590, ASF, MM 721_47, f. 93. Some slightly divergent dictions were used throughout the sources.

47 Gerold Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala im Barock: Leben und Werk des Abraham Cohen de Herrera* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), p. 226.

48 Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala*, pp. 225–226.

49 State Archive of Dubrovnik, Diversa de Foris, ser. 34, vol. 24, f. 215r–217v. As cited by Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala*, p. 255.

50 Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala*, pp. 55–56; 224–225.

51 Letter by Ferdinando de' Medici to Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, on 6 September 1597: ASF, MdP 292, f. 70: 'Diego di Marcena Portuguese ma hoggi vassallo mio come habitatore di molti e molti anni nella mia città di Pisa ha costì uno Alonso Nugnez de Herrera suo nipote fatto prigionie in Cadiz in compagnia d'altri et è detto Alonso nato in Fiandra. Et sicome è questo che paghi qualche cosa per la sua liberazione, così vorebbe essere separato dalli altri, et che il suo ricatto a parte fusse facilitato, trovandosi anco il padre con si poca facultà, che non può concorrere con li altri et ha voluto per intercessore come nipote di un mio vassallo ...'.

Taking these lofty connections into consideration, the judgement of scholars Rachid El Hour, Mercedes García-Arenal and Fernando Rodríguez-Mediano that the family Marchienna acted as key figures in the Moroccan-Italian relations while keeping their own financial interests in mind does not seem to be an exaggeration.⁵²

Despite their connections in the Mediterranean trade, Donato dell'Antella (and presumably also Raimondi) did not initially trust the abilities of the Marchienna brothers as merchants. Dell'Antella requested some friends to provide further information on these merchants and only then concluded that they might be acceptable as agents for the printing shop, even if they were uneducated.⁵³ In October 1590, Raimondi gave copies, including some unfinished ones, of editions from the Medicean press to the Marchienna brothers, who left Livorno in December of the same year. A list of the prices for the books at their destination is preserved.⁵⁴ These prices were calculated especially for the sale of the Medicean editions in Morocco. While the list completely omits Christian works, it gives inexpensive prices for Arabic grammatical tracts. The 'Giarrumia' was to be sold at three *baiocchi*, while the 'Cafia' was at one *scudo* to 15 *baiocchi* slightly more expensive. Arabic 'scientific' works (such as the works of Euclid and Avicenna) were more costly, with prices set at six and twelve *scudi* respectively, despite being not yet completed.

The Marchienna brothers continued to act as merchants as well as mediators between Morocco and Tuscany, and were held in high esteem by the Grand Duke, as can be seen in some letters of reference issued by Ferdinando in 1594 and 1595 on behalf of Diego Marchienna.⁵⁵ Their close ties to Ferdinando de' Medici are also evident during the aforementioned negotiations concerning the release of Diego's nephew from English captivity.⁵⁶ In the matter of the *Typographia Medicea* editions, there is reason to infer that they were either asked by Ferdinando to act as distributors for the press in Morocco, or decided to do so in order to be of service to the Grand Duke. The brothers not only approached the printing shop before the first editions were finished, but they

52 Rachid El Hour, Mercedes García-Arenal and Fernando Rodríguez-Mediano (eds.), *Cartas Marruecas; Documentos de Marruecos en Archivos Españoles (Siglos XVI–XVII)* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2002), pp. 70–71.

53 Letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 27 October 1590, ASF, MM 721_47, f. 94r.

54 Letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 12 October 1590, ASF, MM 721_46.

55 ASF, MdP 287, f. 21 and f. 52.

56 Letter by Ferdinando de' Medici to Earl of Essex, on 6 September 1597 in ASF, MdP 292, f. 70.

stayed in the service of Ferdinando de' Medici even after the sale of Arabic books in Morocco proved either impossible or at least unprofitable.

The same phenomenon can be seen in the aforementioned case of the merchant Jacob Levantino, who tried to sell copies of the Medicean works in Ragusa around 1592. Even after this contract with the *Typographia Medicea* had failed, Ferdinando de' Medici still issued letters to the officials of Ragusa, declaring that Jacob, in his trading activities, acted in his name and should be provided with all necessary help.⁵⁷ Like the Marchienna brothers, these merchants had approached the *Typographia Medicea* even before the editions were finished, indicating they might have done so at the urging of Ferdinando de' Medici. The Grand Duke may have encouraged merchants, who already had some ties with the grand ducal court, to trade in the newly printed books in Arabic in order to help turn a profit as soon as possible. Nevertheless, no surviving sources state that Raimondi or dell'Antella were aware of the connections that the merchants might have had to Ferdinando's court. In both cases, they checked on the background and experiences of the merchants and discussed their proposed trade routes and asking prices in detail.

Nevertheless, sources seem to indicate that the revenues dell'Antella and Raimondi expected were never realized. The collaboration with the Marchienna brothers was mentioned for the last time in a letter of 25 January 1591. In this letter dell'Antella described how he was repeatedly asked by some of his friends what happened to the books that were sent to the 'Re di Feza', and that he could not give any other answer to this question than to shrug his shoulders.⁵⁸

The End of Ferdinando's Involvement with the *Typographia Medicea*

Once it became clear that the projected quick revenues from the sale of the Medicean editions would most likely not be realised, the Florentine administration began actively searching for other ways to utilise the books. One of the possibilities was to use the prestigious and expensive books as presents for renowned scholars, who were thought to value such gifts highly. One of these scholars was the Jesuit Francesco de Toledo (1532–1596), who, in August 1593, received a copy of the Arabic gospels, the works of Avicenna and Euclid and

57 Letter by Ferdinando de' Medici to the 'signoria di Ragugia' on 20 July 1592, ASF, MdP 283, f. 93v and f. 156v.

58 Letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 25 January 1591, ASF, MM 721_71, f. 141r: 'Et più volte in questo proposito mi è stato domandato quel sia seguito dei libri che si mandorno al Re di Feza sopra di che io non so risponder' altro salvo che ristignermi nelle spalle'.

was especially grateful to have received a very rare printing proof of the planned polyglot Bible. He called this last gift 'a very beautiful and marvellous thing' according to Giovanni Niccolini.⁵⁹ Niccolini advised Belisario Vinta, secretary to the Grand Duke, that Ferdinando could present a wider range of friends and benefactors with these books. He concluded that utilising the books as prestigious gifts would put the high sums Ferdinando invested in the printing shop and the production of its editions to a good use: 'So that in the end it would not have been such a high investment and will return to his highness in terms of his personal reputation.'⁶⁰ The ambassador added that, should Ferdinando be willing to use the books in this way, he would be happy to arrange for it to be done accordingly. The case of Niccolini, in addition to the already mentioned cardinals Paleotti and del Monte, shows that Ferdinando's representatives in Rome were preoccupied with the unprofitable printing shop. They were actively seeking ways to use or free the capital that was bound in this business, and sent reports on this matter to Florence regularly.

Around 1596, when it was clear that the sales of the copies would remain quite low, making it near to impossible to ever recover the cost of printing these books, Ferdinando sold the *Typographia* to Raimondi, or – in Raimondi's words – made him buy the business, because 'the great lords have long hands'.⁶¹ However, Raimondi could not pay the whole sum for the printing shop, and thus a particular arrangement was made. The important production material of the *Typographia Medicea* (especially the matrices produced by the master-punch cutter Robert Granjon [c. 1513–1589]) remained in Raimondi's possession, and most of the already printed books were put in storage. If Raimondi was able to sell copies of these books, he had to report the revenue to the Florentine

59 Suzanne B. Butters, 'The Uses and Abuses of Gifts in the World of Ferdinando de' Medici (1549–1609)', *I Tatti Studies on the Italian Renaissance*, 11 (2007), p. 284 and p. 330.

60 ASF, MdP 3306, n.f. as cited in Butters, *The Uses and Abuses of Gifts*, p. 330: 'questo proposito non voglio lassare' di dire a Vostra Signoria che alli giorni passati a me fu detto, et messo in consideratione che sarebbe stato bene, poichè Sua Altezza con tanta spesa ha eretto questa stamperia et finito già di stampare questi tre libri, che per honore et gloria sua, si doverrebbe donarne di ciascun' libro uno a tutti li cardinali, ambasciatori et altri particolari amici di Sua Altezza, il che finalmente non sarebbe grande spesa, et tornerrebbe in reputatione dell'Altezza Sua et dell'opera che si fa, però se all'Altezza Sua parrà che si facciano dare come ho detto, faccimelo sapere Vostra Signore et in che modo, se legati o non, et in che forma'.

61 ASF, MM 719_27. Especially interesting is f. 9: Raimondi explains that the great social and financial differences between the seller (Ferdinando de' Medici) and the buyer (himself) made it impossible for him to properly negotiate during the sale.

ambassador in Rome, Giovanni Niccolini (1544–1611).⁶² Niccolini would then collect most of the money in order to reduce Raimondi's debt. Through this method of controlling the sales of the copies, Ferdinando made sure that Raimondi used all financial assets available to pay back his debt to the Grand Duke. But even after focussing on printing sponsored editions of Latin works, none of his editions were ever a financial success.⁶³

Raimondi did not succeed in maintaining the aforementioned relationships with the merchants or the two cardinals after he bought the printing shop from Ferdinando de' Medici. He was thus unable to access their social circles after 1596. Neither Paleotti nor del Monte intervened in the curia in Raimondi's interest once the printing shop was no longer the possession of the Grand Duke. Raimondi also did not try to send individual merchants in the name of the printing shop to Morocco or other countries after 1596. The very few documents that deal with the trade in books that can be dated from 1596 onwards seem to indicate that Raimondi employed professional merchant families, who maintained branch offices in various countries of the Near East and North Africa and could add the Medicean books to their general merchandise. One family repeatedly named in this context is the family Agudi. This important merchant family owned branches at many important North African and Middle Eastern trading centres.⁶⁴

Conclusion

Upon purchasing the workshop, Raimondi changed its name from *Typographia Medicea* to *Typographia Linguarum Externarum*. Despite the change of name, the printing shop was still seen as close to the Medici family, and Raimondi's

62 See for a copy of the act of sale: ASR, 30 Not. Cap., Uff. 36, Camellus, vol. 12, f. 407–410 and f. 413–415. For further information, see Saltini, 'Della Stamperia orientale', p. 279.

63 Even Raimondi's Latin publications were equally huge printing projects – financially and literally. For example, the printing shop published the reformed *Graduale*, also called *Canto Fermo* (1614/15), an edition whose mere size made other printers shy away from the task. A reformed *Pontificale* (1596 and 1611) and *Caerimoniale* (1600) were also published. These works were supported by the curia and supervised by a congregation of cardinals but since their support was not sufficient a *congregatione* of private investors for the production of these editions was founded. See ASF, MM 719_42 and ASF, MM 722_2b. Nevertheless, Raimondi also succeeded in publishing a final edition of an Arabic grammar, called *liber Tasriph* in the year 1610.

64 Letter by Donato dell'Antella to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 7 August 1593, ASF, MM 721_119, f. 236r. and Edoardo Demo: *Mercanti di Terraferma. Uomini, merci e capitali nell'Europa del Cinquecento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2012), pp. 45–49.

constant financial struggles threatened to cast a bad light on Grand Duke Ferdinando. As a result, Raimondi's work in the shop was closely watched. After Ferdinando's death in 1609 his son, Cosimo II (1590–1621), or rather Cosimo's mother, Cristina di Lorena (1565–1636), decided to buy the *Typographia* again. In January of 1610, the previous contract was revoked and the *Typographia* became once again a business of the Medici family.⁶⁵ In this context, Cosimo's secretary, Belisario Vinta, also mentioned that the business might prove to be useful, once there would be a 'nuovo signore Cardinale Medici'.⁶⁶ A cardinal from the Medici family could have once again used the printing shop as an asset to gain power and influence in the curia. However, this perspective could not be realised, since Raimondi died in 1614, one year before Carlo de' Medici (1596–1666) was elected cardinal. The business of the *Typographia Medicea*, did not survive Raimondi's death, and was shut down. Raimondi's ultimate goal was the publication of an enormous polyglot *Biblia Pontificia* in ten languages with their respective Latin translations, which would also contain illustrations. This work would have surpassed Plantin's *Biblia Regia*, but was never realised.⁶⁷

The sale of the printing shop to Raimondi was followed by a great shift in the political and economic network available to him in Rome. Resources, such as the access to the curia via cardinals connected to the Medici family, were no longer at his disposal and had to be replaced with new contacts in order to re-establish the printing shop and attract new sponsors. That Raimondi was supported as well as supervised by several of Ferdinando's officials shows that from 1587 to 1596 the *Typographia Medicea* was by no means 'abandoned' by Ferdinando de' Medici, nor isolated from the Florentine court. Consequently,

65 For the letters that were exchanged in this context consult ASF, MM 719_39.

66 Letter by Belisario Vinta to Giovanni Battista Raimondi on 17 January 1609, ASF, MM 719_39_5: 'et se, come il mondo vuole, si haverà presto in cotesta corte un nuovo signore Cardinale de' Medici, V. S. [Raimondi] haverà cumulativamente un'altro Benefattore ...'.

67 Around 1610 Raimondi prepared a list of texts to be published 'once the necessary funds will be available'. This list comprised of 67 titles in seven languages and contains many bilingual or polyglot texts. See ASF, MM 719_49. Raimondi described the actions that Ferdinando de' Medici took towards the publication of this bible as follows: 'Anzi, per far magior servitio al detto Pontefice; et soi successori et alla Christianità tutta li [Ferdinando de' Medici] venne in pensiero di fare stampare la Biblia in tutte le sopradette lingue et in quant'altre più si potesse, et cossì fece venire d'Egitto, di Soria, di Persia et d'altre provincie d'Oriente con molta spesa, tempo et travaglio i sacri testi della Biblia in molte delle sopradette lingue ...'. As a result, according to Raimondi, manuscripts containing the biblical texts in Greek, Hebrew, Chaldean, Syriac, Arabic were found, bought and prepared for print. 'Perfect' manuscripts in Persian, Armenian, Ethiopic and Croatian were not as easily located and as Raimondi drew up his account, his agents were still looking for them: ASF, MM 719_24, f. 1.

we must revise Raimondi's narrative that Ferdinando did not intervene in the business of the printing shop after he had left Rome and was not interested in the *Typographia*. The Grand Duke tried to assist Raimondi in ordering cardinals that were connected to his family to 'protect' the business. He tried to make his trading connections accessible to the printing shop via merchants and agents that were attached/affiliated with his household. His officials were also actively searching for ways to make use of the books printed as gifts and reported on this matter to the grand ducal court. The *Typographia Medicea* was surely not a minor business, neither in the scale of its financial engagement nor in the scale of its social prestige. Although, the close network that the Grand Duke employed in Rome served ends other than simply supporting Raimondi's activities, he also constantly utilised his power to control him and his investment.