According to Lucien Febvre et Henri-Jean Martin, Sebastian Gryphius was the ‘prince’ of Lyonnais printer-publishers.\(^1\) He worked in Lyon during the golden age of printing and publishing in that city, and a very great number of scholars were the beneficiaries of his labours. As well as being someone who facilitated the operation of the learned book trade, he was also a shrewd businessman who started with little or no capital, and was one of the few printer-publishers of his generation to prosper from such beginnings. My purpose in this paper is to investigate some of the strategies he employed to bring this about; the principal piece of evidence I shall use is the Beraud inventory of 1591 (see above, pp. 251–72), produced during the Age of Iron of the Lyonnais book trade, which was still suffering from the effects of the turbulent years between 1560 and 1572, marked by the struggle for confessional ascendancy and the atrocity known as the ‘Lyonnais vespers’ of 1572, which saw the persecution and murder of Huguenots following the even more sinister events of the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in Paris. Later still in the century, damaging competition from Genevan printers who were undercutting their Lyon counterparts provoked the ruling council (Consulat) of Lyon to summon a group of marchands libraires in July 1588, including Etienne Michel, Pierre Landry, Guillaume Rouillé or Roville, Antoine de Harsy et David de Gabiano.\(^2\) They appeared before the Consulat in the presence of journeymen-printers to hear the following accusation made against them:

That to the great detriment of the City and the said journeymen-printers, they have destroyed the printing industry in Lyon and have transferred their printing activities to Geneva, and, what is even worse, that they declare on the title pages of the books they have printed in Geneva that they have been printed in Lyon, so that they can be put on sale in Italy,

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Spain and other Catholic countries, this constituting fraud and the suppositional use of a name […] and that as a result printing, which use to have high status and reputation in this City of Lyon, will be altogether lost and in order to earn their living, the said journeymen-printers will be forced for as long as this state of affairs lasts to leave Lyon and to go to Geneva, where in the course of time they become heretics.3

The marchands-libraires produced the counter-accusation that the printers had imposed ruinously high tariffs on them; neither side mentioned the civil and religious troubles which severely affected the book trade throughout France at that time. Gryphius had died in 1556 before the first outbreak of religious hostilities in 1562, and so was spared having to operate in this venimous religious atmosphere, or having to decide whether or not to engage in unscrupulous commercial practices, to which Henri-Louis Baudrier attributes the decline of Lyon as a great printing centre.4

Some clues about Gryphius’s publishing activities, as well as those of his colleagues in the Grande Grande Compagnie des Libraires de Lyon, survive in the Beraud inventory, through which we can glimpse the harsh commercial realities of the period, and contrast them with the much more favourable conditions that pertained in the earlier part of the century. Together with other evidence, the inventory will also allow us to form a judgement about Gryphius’s relations with his richer colleagues in the Grande Compagnie des Libraires and with others closer to him in wealth and commercial practice, such as Thibaud Payen. We shall principally be concerned with the 565 reams of sheets, relating to books dating from between 1520 and 1560 in the inventory, of which 259 reams came from the presses of Gryphius and his heirs.

Before looking at these books in detail, it is pertinent to examine at the career of Gryphius himself and his relations with colleagues

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4 Ibid., v.41.