CHAPTER ELEVEN

ALBERICO GENTILI, HIS PUBLISHERS, AND THE VAGARIES OF THE BOOK TRADE BETWEEN ENGLAND AND GERMANY, 1580–1614

Of all the titlepages of Alberico Gentili’s books printed during or shortly after his lifetime, only one records who actually paid for the book to be produced and marketed. This was the composite edition of the three parts of the *De iure belli commentationes* which appeared in 1589 from the press of John Wolfe, with the mention ‘expensis I.C.M.’; the financier was Giacopo Castelvetro, a Modenese exile and a prominent member of the literary scene in London.¹ Other mentions of printers on Alberico’s books, who may or may not be publishers on their own account, simply state in whose workshop or through whose initiative it was produced (‘excudebat’, ‘typis’, ‘in [or ex] officina’, ‘apud’), or through whom the book was available for purchase (also ‘apud’). In respect of Alberico’s printers and publishers whom we shall meet, it is very rare to find any reference in the text to the financing of the edition; and the clues which may be gleaned from other sources (such as dedications and book fair catalogues) are scarce.

This is both surprising and unsurprising. Surprising, because Alberico as an author and grateful client of a sequence of patrons is scrupulous in recording who helped him in any way; unsurprising, in that the finances of the book trade at this time were taken for granted by most of those involved in the business, even if a significant number of books at this time record in the imprint on the titlepage who paid for the edition (‘sumptibus’; ‘aere’; ‘expensis’; ‘impensis’). It was assumed that everyone was aware that there were various sorts of printers in the market, some of whom were able and willing to assume the costs of producing

a text, others not. It was common for the dedicatee of the book to offer financial support to the author, but only retrospectively; it was therefore necessary to provide in advance the money for the paper (at least 30% of the total costs) and the labour in the workshop. Moreover, once the book was produced (in nearly all cases, in an unbound form), it had to find its way to a potential market, and perhaps be protected from unfair competition in a market zone which would be defined by the jurisdiction cited in the licence or privilege (which was itself expensive). This presupposed advertisement, most obviously through a book fair, which implied also the transport of a sufficient number of copies to the fair and their distribution, not to speak of the complex issue of the relationship of publishers between themselves (which might be take the form of collaboration, or hostile competition, or a sort of non-aggression pact), and the disposal of unsold copies. The fair’s rules about books would also have to be respected, which often entailed the (often spurious) claim that the book in question was a new edition. Authors themselves would hope to have negotiated some sort of reward from the printer or publisher, if only in the form of free copies; they might also have had to play a role in the printer’s workshop as a proof-reader of their own text. If their work was sent abroad for printing, they were unable to eliminate the errors arising from the compositor’s misreading of his manuscript. Nor was printing their only option; they would also have had the choice of disseminating their work through multiple manuscript copies taken from a scribal exemplar (a popular mode of publication in Elizabethan London and Oxford, notably in the circles of which Alberico was part).^2

^2 On all these points, see Ian Maclean, ‘The market for scholarly books and conceptions of genre in northern Europe, 1570–1630’, above, pp. 9–24 (and the references there to other works on the operation of the book market); on manuscript publication in Elizabethan London, see Henry Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sidney and the circulation of manuscripts, 1558–1640, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996; on Oxford and scribal culture see The Oxford dictionary of national biography, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 (hereafter ODNB, citing also the name of the author of the entry), s.vv. John Rainolds (Mordechai Feingold), Tobie Matthew (William Joseph Sheils), Edward Dyer (Steven W. May); see also Paul E.J. Hammer, ‘The use of scholarship: the secretariat of Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, c. 1581–1601’, The English Historical Review, 109 (1994), 26–51 (46), on the use made of manuscript circulation by the Earl of Essex. Even Jacopo Castelvetro, who invested so much in print (see notes 1 and 67) engaged in one act of MS publication (his Breve racconto di tutte le radici, di tutti l’herbe, e di tutti i frutti che crudi e cotti in Italia si mangiano: Dick, ‘Castelvetro’, records that there were six MSS produced between May and September 1614.