According to Aldo Manuzio, one of the most ingenious publishers in history, Venice in 1498 was “a place more like an entire world than a city.”1 The city he had chosen only a few years earlier to be the center of his publishing activity was then at the height of its wealth and power and could boast the most efficient publishing industry in all of Europe, with dozens of booksellers and printers engaged in a voluminous production. Based on surviving incunables catalogues, the volumes printed in Italy accounted for between 35 and 41 per cent of the total of all printed works at the time, and the Venetians alone contributed 40 per cent of the Italian share. At the time, no other European city enjoyed a comparable production capacity.2

Yet Venice had not been among the first European cities to introduce the printing press. The first German printers to venture into Italy had settled in destinations already recognized as centers of manuscript production, perhaps thinking of the printed book as an object altogether similar to the handwritten version. Arnolf Pannartz and Konrad Sweynheim had thus tried their fortunes in the Benedictine monastery of Subiaco in 1461, and shortly thereafter in Rome. But a printing press was not a scriptorium, and the printed book, though it may have born the same text as a manuscript, was proving to be a product of a very different sort. A printshop needed to be connected to a precise economic and cultural context of the sort that soon became clear. It was not until 1469 with the arrival of John of Speyer, likely invited by a group of Venetian patricians of humanist background, that the publishing industry could truly take off in the lagoon. The necessary preconditions for its success, however, were already in place: a financial system with accessible credit, insurance companies

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1 Aldo Manuzio described Venice thus in dedicating to Marin Sanudo the 1498 edition of the works of Angelo Poliziano.
able and willing to guarantee risky transactions, ease and frequency of transport and connections to all of Europe and the Mediterranean, and a dynamic and literate local clientele. These circumstances permitted the enduring success of the Venetian book.

Despite the long tradition of studies dedicated to the Venetian publishing industry, with the exception of Horatio F. Brown’s 1891 *The Venetian Printing Press* (London, 1891), a good general account of the topic is still wanting. Indeed, the abundance of documentation conserved in the Venetian archives and libraries and the multiplicity of possible analytical trajectories have long impeded a synthetic treatment of this story of undoubted importance. To this it must be added that scholarly interest for the topic in the 19th and 20th centuries was only intermittent. The last decades of the 19th century saw a particular blossoming of studies of the 15th and 16th centuries. It was part of a renewed interest in re-evaluating the history of the Venetian Republic and founded on the twin pillars of archival research and the publication of particularly important sources, and many were the scholars who took particular interest in the golden age of the Venetian book. It was the period of the great printed collections of the documents conserved in the archives of the Frari, such as those of Fulin, which grouped together the most important official documents regarding Venetian publishing up to 1526.3 There were also attempts at synthesis, such as Brown’s above-mentioned volume, which also gave significant attention to the search for and publication of original sources. Also of note were the great research projects dedicated to the production of single publishers, like that of Salvatore Bongi on the *Annali* of the Giolito,4 or studies of particular aspects of the book trade, such as the prince of Essling’s early 20th-century monumental work on illustrated editions.5

In general, the late 19th century was a period of extraordinary vitality for studies of the Italian book, a dynamism destined to wane significantly in the early 1900s. Scholarly interest has picked up again particularly in the last few decades, thanks to a Europe-wide revival of the History of the Book and has followed the paths set by the French historians Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, as well as the suggestions of Anglo-

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