Scholars working on the history of the book in Early Modern Germany have been in a very advantageous situation since 1963: The publication of Josef Benzing’s *Die Buchdrucker des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts im deutschen Sprachgebiet* provided the community with a comprehensive checklist of all printers working across the German lands. It was a considerable extension both in terms of content as well as coverage of his 1952 *Buchdruckerlexikon des 16. Jahrhunderts (Deutsches Sprachgebiet)*. The volume quickly became universally known as the ‘Benzing’ and gained recognition as a reference work on printers as well as on the literature on printing in the towns of Early Modern Germany. Benzing published a second edition of his work in 1982 and his work became the subject of a large overhaul when Christoph Reske published his major re-edition of the work in 2007. He added details on the relationships of the printers, their families and ties to local authorities and notable authors. His was able to add 21 new places of printing, bringing the number of towns within the German ‘Sprachgebiet’ to 381.

This concept of the ‘Deutsches Sprachgebiet’ (German language region) has been debated extensively in the past. This linguistic area typically comprises the Holy Roman Empire, the German speaking parts of Switzerland, Luxembourg, South Tirol, Alsace, Silesia and East Prussia. In the Early Modern period printing in German was not necessarily confined to areas with a
predominantly German population. Thus, the handbook leaves out a certain amount of printers and publishers located in the Baltic area, Eastern Europe, and the Balkan. And this list could be enlarged considerably. Graham Jefcoate recently drew the attention to the multitude of German printers in London and their involvement in the English book trade.¹ Yet the lack of information on printers from said regions is not the author’s fault; Reske is too aware of this gap and has deliberately chosen to update the already existing introductions for his latest edition of the handbook.

The handbook in its latest edition comprises just under 300 individuals; each listed in alphabetical order under the place in which they worked. The entries paint a biographical portrait of the printers, highlighting notable editions as well as the earliest and latest works. Wherever possible, Reske elaborates on the printer’s relationship with local authorities and his competitors. He provides alternative spellings of the printer’s name and lists heirs and successors.

For this endeavour, Reske predominantly drew on secondary literature. His bibliography is extensive and covers the scholarship of book historians as well as the works of scholars with a regional focus who might only have touched upon the aspect of printing or a specific printer in passim. The wealth of Early Modern books recently digitised by libraries across the globe adds further information that Reske perused in the course of updating the work.

He furthermore incorporated a range of works by scholars on the book, stemming from the nineteenth century. The improved bibliographical record in the VD16 and VD17 provided him with the opportunity to give imprint statements on the printers. Those working with incunabula will be pleased to see that all books are now referred to with their respective GW numbers. Similarly, Reske used VD16 and VD17 numbers for editions of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

It is to be hoped that this edition will be kept up to date with future editions and the coverage may eventually expanded into areas that the handbook currently does not cover. Christoph Reske has first and foremost provided the community with a comprehensive handbook on the people of the Early Modern book trade in Germany. The fact that no scholar has published a considerable expansion of the list of printers is testament to the rigour of Reske and his predecessor Benzing. Reske’s invaluable service to the community can be found too in the enormous amount of work that has gone into examining literature ranging from major monographs and periodicals to small articles on