ITALY

[A list of books published in 2013. More recent publications will be listed in subsequent issues.]


Catalogue of an exhibition held at the Brera Library in Milan in May–June 2013 to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the death of Giambattista Bodoni.


Emanuele Casamassima (1916–88) had two careers, as a librarian and, from 1970, as a university professor of palaeography. But he is remembered mostly for a chance event, or, rather, an event that was avoidable. In April 1963 he was appointed director of the National Central Library in Florence, in a building constructed on the North bank of the Arno and opened in 1915. A year and a half later, on 4 November 1966, a devastating flood engulfed the library and a large part of its collections, which, unwisely, had been placed in the cellars. Having received no warning, Casamassima found himself trapped on the wrong side of the river, with all communications broken, and it was only possible to reach the library, through thick, treacherous slime, on the following morning. What happened next has entered into the myth and mythology of the alluvione: the director opened the doors to the world, chains of ‘mud angels’ manhandled the sopping books up and out of the fango in an extraordinary rescue, and the whole operation became a prototype of modern disaster management. Although the library’s catalogues were (and still are) in chaos for years as a result of the flood, in the end relatively little was lost. The National Central Library and the 1966 flood has already been described in a 2000 book by Elisa di Renzo; some of the same ground is inevitably covered in the present work, though it includes other aspects of Casamassima’s career and work as a librarian, and adds a lot of new information, including an important documentary appendix. Its weakness, perhaps, is that it betrays rather too easily its origins as a Ph.D. thesis, with a plethora of footnotes and an unwillingness to leave anything out. Nevertheless it is an important biographical study of a great librarian.


This book is an afterthought based on a chance discovery. The author some time ago completed a lengthy monograph, in German, on the figure of Avraham ben David Portaleone (1542–1612), a Hebrew writer and thinker living in Renaissance Italy. Research in the State Archive at Mantua subsequently uncovered the inventory of the goods in Portaleone’s home at his death in 1612, which is the document, partly in Italian and partly in Latin (for the titles of the many books), edited here.


Recent Books


From early days, women found a place in the papermaking industry: the factories were often in out-of-the-way spots, in order to obtain a good water supply, and were run on a family basis (and conditions were much better than those in the French coal mines described by Zola). Women were employed as rag-sorts (stracciarole) and to sort, polish, and pack the reams of paper once they had been made; in a more modern age they also found gainful employment sewing watermarks onto the moulds or dandy rolls. As well as being more docile and more careful workers (though one essay focuses on the ‘subversive’ Elia Contendi), the attraction for employers was that they were paid less. The present volume contains eight essays and focuses, in particular, on the Milani factory in Fabriano, which was pioneering in providing a creche for the who made up a third or even a half of the workforce. It also includes some interesting period photographs.


The present author’s surveys of bookbindings in the archives and libraries of the Piedmont is concludes with this ninth, last, but not least, volume dedicated to the region’s capital, Turin. Some of the previous titles (but not all, to the shame of the reviewer), have been noticed in this rubric. It began, long ago in 1995 with Il Canavese (see The Library, vi, 28 (1996), 56), followed by Il Biellese (1996, see 19 (1997), 588), La Vallesia (1997) and Il Vercellese (1998; see joint notice in 21 (1999), 492), Il Monferrato (2002), Il Cuneese (2006), L’Astigiano e il Torinese (2008), Il Novarese (2010), and now Torino. Despite some uneven writing and peripatetic progress, it remains an extraordinary achievement on the part of the former executive of a petrochemical company, who celebrated his eightieth birthday in 2010 (see The Library, vii, 16 (2015), 107), and still keeps going. It therefore behoves libraries and collectors who have some volumes to complete the set.


The Orlando Furioso by Ludovico Ariosto, first published in 1516, with a revised and expanded version in 1514, was not only the century’s best-selling book, with a plethora of editions and translations, but it also had a huge visual impact, and continues to inspire illustration, theatre, and cinema to the present day. The present, engaging, beautifully printed, catalogue is of an exhibition held at Pisa from December 2012 to February 2013.


Fourth instalment, containing entries nos 3500–4183, with works by authors such as Rousseau, Sansovino, and Sarpi, of this lavish and beautifully realised catalogue of the early printed books in the Turin library of historian Luigi Firpo (1915–89). Includes a few ESTC titles, which however has not been included among the repertories cited. The previous instalments have all been dutifully noted in this rubric; see The Library, vii, 7 (2006), 222, 8 (2007), 468, 11 (2011), 512.