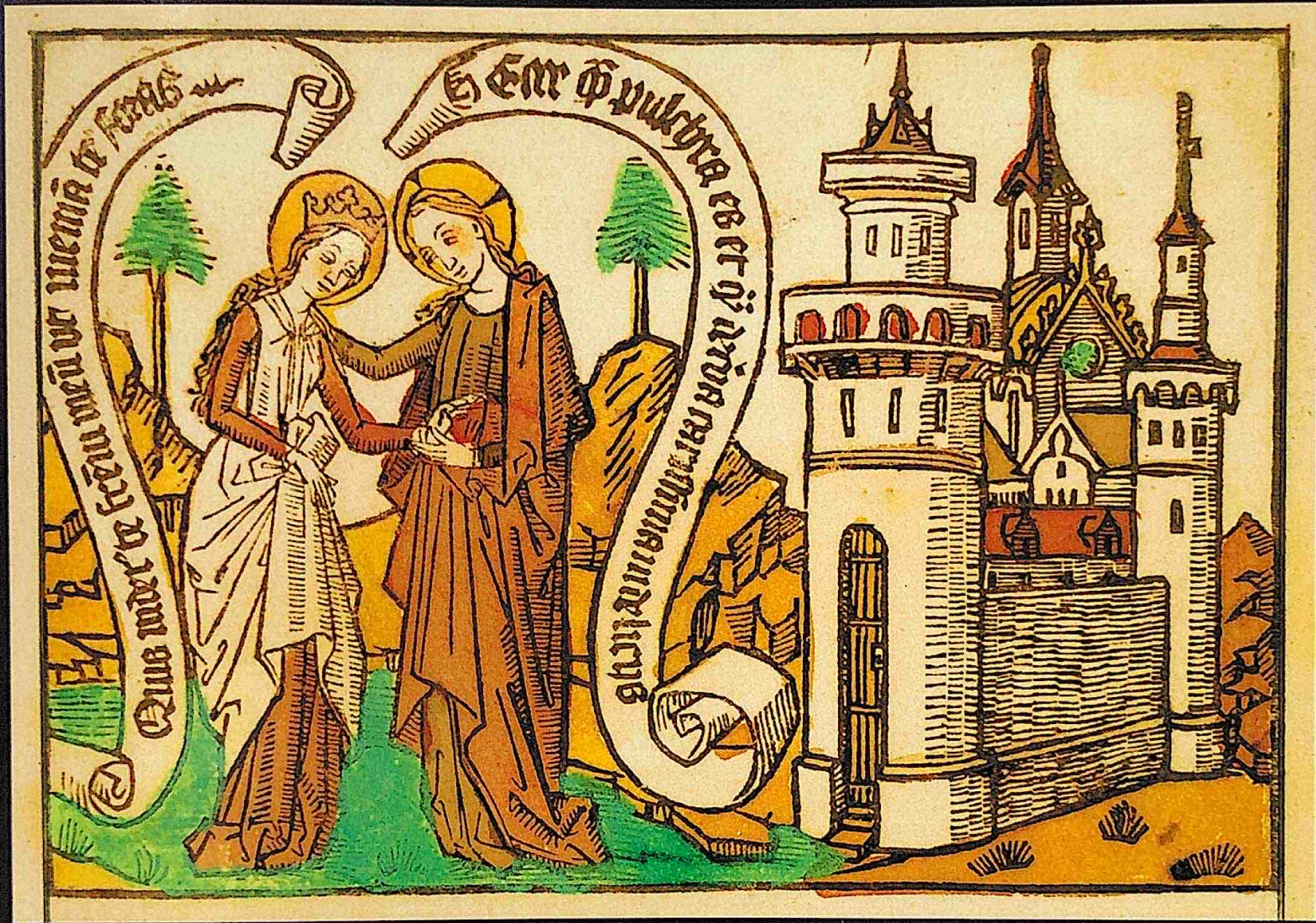


Journal Printing of the Historical Society

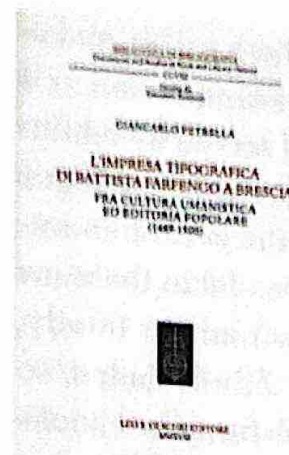


and the book's merit as an expression of the author's considerable design skills. It is also useful (in parts) as a practical manual, and has a particular value for its coverage of, almost incidentally, the history of book-design on this subject (not book-design, but its history) which is hardly covered by any other publication I know (only Ruari and Lean's *Modern book-design from William Morris to the present day* of 1958 covers some of the ground). The illustrations in the book are numerous and vary from good to outstanding. It is one of the joys of the volume that it includes so many technical images, historical examples and specimen page-layouts, some of them showing the author's own book-designs, which are invariably good. The only criticism I would make of the images is that some are enlarged and some reduced, generally without indication when this is the case; this is sometimes significant where types, which should ideally be shown at actual size or a stated degree of enlargement, are depicted.

The design and production of the book are excellent. Argetsinger has brought his own theories to bear upon the composition and page-layout, and produced a thoroughly conservative and, to my eye, beautiful design, influenced by the principles and limitations of letterpress book-design, in which craft the author began his working life. He uses only one roman type-face throughout (no hint of a sans anywhere) and makes the pages exemplary of his design philosophy in a way that not every writer on book-design does. The binding is excellent, in red cloth with a gold- and blind-blocked decoration on the front board and a label-title on the spine; the dust-jacket is a typographical *tour-de-force*, created only with (digital) type and ornaments, including some of Monotype's Granjon fleurons; and the printing and binding (by a firm in the Czech Republic) seem to be flawless.

In overall appearance this book is an expression of its contents. It is hardly a book to be carried and read on the train, or even in bed, but seems to want to sit upon a lectern like a church bible, or at least on the desk of a bibliophile. It had to be large to encompass both the author's design-theories and the many, splendid illustrations, and the book has an appropriately monumental appearance. It is also tremendously cheap. The publisher is to be lauded for offering such a curiosity, such an extensive and beautiful doorstep of a book, at only \$65.00.

Paul W. Nash



Giancarlo Petrella, *L'impresa tipografica di Battista Farfengo a Brescia fra cultura umanistica ed editoria popolare (1489-1500)*. Florence: Olschki, 2018. *Biblioteca di bibliografia* 208. Pp. XXXI, 507. ISBN 978-8-8222-6607-1. €50.00. Paperback. Monochrome illustrations.¹

Albeit inexorably minor, Battista Farfengo was, and is, one of the more intriguing figures in Renaissance Italian publishing, not least for the fact that from his very first edition he qualifies himself as a *pre*, i.e. priest, and had a university education, something the majority of early printers lacked. His output was anything but religious, except in a popular sense, though he did produce some of the most attractive illustrated editions of the fifteenth century. The present listing of fifty-seven editions in 473 copies obligatorily takes account of oscillations in survival rates. At one extreme the 1490 Latin version of the *Sermones* of Ephraem Syrus is documented in seventy-one copies, the 1493 *Philosophia pauperum* attributed to Albertus Magnus in fifty-four copies, and the 1497 Latin Homer in eighty-two copies, all of them among the more substantial titles produced by Farfengo; at the other, twenty-three of his editions are known in a single copy (some in private collections), and another has not been seen since the end of the sixteenth century. The inference is therefore that a significant portion of Farfengo's catalogue has been irremediably lost, especially of the shorter, more popular, texts, and so the portrait here is inevitably incomplete and imperfect.

His entire career as a publisher, printer and, probably also, bookseller (the 'impresa tipografica' of the title appears misleading in this sense) was in the Lombardy city of Brescia, not far from the important paper-making district on Lake Garda. Technically ruled over at the time by Venice, geographically much closer to Milan, its output competed with both these centres or had to seek out a more local clientele. On the whole Brescia publishers did so successfully: just to get a measure, their total of just under 300 surviving documented fifteenth-century editions is three-quarters that

1. This review was written in 2019, but publication has been delayed by various factors, including the Covid-19 pandemic.

of England in its entirety, though whether this makes the former important or the latter unimportant is a moot point. Brescia has also been well served by bibliographical scholarship, including a short-title catalogue by the late Paolo Veneziani in 1986, the acts of an important conference edited by Emilio Sandal in the same year and, in 2012, a study of the Britannico family, again by Sandal together with Rosa Zilioli Faden, so that the present volume extends a well-furnished bookshelf.

Farfengo's precise dates are not known, but something can be guessed. In the earliest archive document in which he is mentioned, in 1475, he already enjoys the title of priest, so hypothetically he was born in or around 1450 and therefore came to printing, in 1489, at a mature age. His last dated publication, very conveniently for incunabulists, appeared on 20 December 1500 (a Sunday), and the general, entirely credible, assumption has been that he died shortly afterwards; instead of which two documents cited here show that he was still active and alive in January 1513, and therefore not only did he pass unscathed through the dangerous first decade of the sixteenth century, but he also survived the violent sack of Brescia in 1512 and the nasty bout of plague that followed it. Contemporaries of course did not see any incompatibility between the ecclesiastical and publishing professions: the first printers in Italy, both Germans, sought benefices when their over-ambitious project went pear-shaped, while in Milan the most important publisher after the Legnano brothers, Niccolò da Gorgonzola, was also a priest.

The present author, who is a long-standing resident of Brescia, has written copiously on Italian Renaissance publishing over the last decade and more, averaging a bulky tome every eighteen months or so. It is an enormously impressive work-rate, so there is no doubt about his ability to assemble and present, at great speed, large amounts of bibliographical information. It further has to be admitted that the substantial volume reviewed here is about as complete a portrait of Farfengo as could be achieved, given the exiguous state of the documents and the fact that almost everything has to be gleaned from the books themselves. The annals in the final part of the volume include not only descriptions with quasi-facsimile transcriptions, but also extensive descriptions of the copies, about which it is necessary to gripe for the bad design, since everything is presented in a single type-size, rather than helping the reader by putting the copy descriptions, necessarily less important, in a smaller

point-size. It is also irritating that the illustrations, of which there are many, are not cross-referenced from the bibliographical descriptions (a point to which I shall return), and that in a copy-census involving just under 200 libraries, not to mention private collections, it is not made clear which items have been seen *in persona* and which through intermediaries, whether electronic or human.

In an age in which annals for fifteenth-century printers are inevitably in debt to large-scale electronic resources (the *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke* and the *Incunabula short title catalogue*), as well as all the paraphernalia of instantly-accessible online cataloguing, it is pleasing that a more traditional compilation, such as this, has found something new and previously undocumented. The present work adds two items to Farfengo's output. The first involves a popular medical text, the *Cibaldone ovvero Libro terzo di Almansore*. Some twenty editions are documented in the fifteenth century, almost all of them surviving in a single copy, so that an even higher number has undoubtedly been lost. Among these the above-mentioned resources identify two Farfengo editions, the first bearing his imprint and recorded in a unique copy at the Queriniana Library in Brescia (GW M38008; ISTC i000174400), the other without an imprint and extant in copies at Munich and Würzburg (GW M38019; ISTC i000172500). What up to now has been regarded as a second copy of the first of these items, at the Wellcome Library, on direct inspection has proved to be a previously unknown and unrecorded edition, though to describe it as a 'clamoroso equivoco' (p. 83) is perhaps overstating matters. To find two editions camouflaged inside the same catalogue entry, even in the era of high-powered electronic resources, is not that extraordinary an event. The second discovery is a reference to an edition of the *Sermonarium per Adventum* by Michael de Carcano dated 1490, recorded in a Tuscan monastery in the huge survey ordered by the Sant'Uffizio at the end of the sixteenth century, now being put online as the *Ricerca sull'Inchiesta della Congregazione dell'Indice (RICI)* project. The book may be long gone, but the bibliographical description remains and should be considered authentic. As ever with annals of a printer conducted by direct examination of the books themselves, small variants and other details, often of interest but too numerous to be listed here, are also described.

Where the haste in the compilation of this volume undoubtedly works to the detriment of the user is

in the presentation of the research conducted and its interaction with previous scholarship (such is the conclusion also by the late D. E. Rhodes in *The library*, 7th series 22 (2019), pp. 248–250). The author is tendentiously plethoric and the sheer quantity of material poured into the book is such that meaningful information becomes difficult to locate, as the present instance will suffice to show. Entry 'n. 1' in the bibliography is for the *Fiore di virtù*, a popular religious text, of which the colophon for this particular edition declares the date of publication to be 8 February 1499, this time a Friday (GW 9951; ISTC if00186000). In the first mention of this item in the text (p. 10), the reader is informed that the date 1499 is 'erronea', while at the second (p. 18) it is defined as 'del tutto improbabile', and in the description itself (pp. 343–345) the date is corrected in square brackets to 1489. All well and good, but why? Shifting the date back by a decade (on the assumption that the compositor put in an 'x' too many, i.e. 'Mcccclxxxviii' instead of 'Mcccclxxxviii', when the corresponding day was again a Sunday) makes this edition Farfengo's first extant publication and so the matter is not without import. An initial explanation at page 10 is the presence in the line following the colophon of the initials 'P. M.', which are taken as referring to a mysterious backer, whose identity remains unknown. The same initials, together with a 'P. B.' (decipherable as 'Pre Baptista'), appear in a woodcut device in the second surviving edition published by Farfengo, an Italian version of Ovid's *Heroides* dated 2 October 1489 (GW M28842; ISTC i000150700). Neither this device nor the initials appear again in Farfengo's known output. The argument that the date of the *Fiore di virtù* should be anticipated by ten years appears therefore to rest on the circumstance that the initials of the unknown backer are found only in these two books. Well, yes, interesting but not necessarily convincing. More, however, is to come. Chapter 3 of the volume is given over to an extensive analysis of paper, type and illustrative material, in which we learn that the R77 type employed in the *Fiore di virtù* is the first used by the printing shop (p. 208), which subsequently preferred a G76 for popular texts of this kind. From 1493, moreover, Farfengo employed a slightly larger R78, which appears to be the result of a partial recasting. But again, there is no proof that by 1499 the shop had entirely eliminated the original type. The matter is not finished though. Pursuing further into the text, a lengthy discussion of the famous woodcut on the titlepage of the *Fiore di virtù*

occupies six pages (pp. 235–240). It shows a man in Renaissance garb sitting at a desk, with a large tome open in front of him (by contrast the *Fiore di virtù* is a small book), surmounted by a shelf with two imposing vases of flowers under an ornate wooden ceiling. This woodcut reappears, in the same condition, in Farfengo's reprint of the *Fiore di virtù* dated 10 November 1491 (GW 9948; ISTC if00183700); later, in 1494, it is used again on the title-page of the pseudo-Albertus Magnus in Italian, *Libro de le virtù de le berbe* (GW 0066910N; ISTC ia00267350), and this time, possibly to make space for an octave with a summary of the contents, the block is shortened, with part of the base chopped off. Here of course is unequivocal proof that the 1499 date in the *Fiore di virtù* cannot be right. What the explanation moreover fails to clarify is that this fact has been pointed out in the past, first in an article by Lamberto Donati in 1947, later in another by Ugo Baroncelli in 1967. The catalogue of the incunabula at the Queriniana Library in Brescia, edited by Baroncelli in 1970, in describing their copy of the *Fiore di virtù* likewise briefly explains that the date should be taken as 1489 (n. 414). One final element, not considered by any of this scholarship, including the book reviewed here, involves the large woodcut initial on a2r in both the '1499' and 1491 editions. In the latter the base is broken, something not visible in the former, signifying that the '1499' edition was not printed later than November 1491 and consequently that the extra 'x' hypothesis is easily the most plausible (the surprising fact, if anything, is the failure of the major repertories – in particular GW and ISTC, which, as this review goes to press, still have '1499' – to acquire this snippet of bibliographical information, though in an electronic environment, fortunately, updating is always easy). There is of course no rule that says all the information relating to a certain subject has to be in the same place; cross-referencing is, however, an indispensable alternative, so that my copy of the present book is now heavily marked up in pencil, something that, in my opinion, should have been obviated by the author, whose index also fails in this respect. Such a method of compilation, in which the reader has to work strenuously to assemble pertinent information, is obviously unsatisfactory and so, if the author continues to churn out books at this rate of knots, more thought needs to be given to how he goes about the task.

Neil Harris