

## VENETIAN HUMANIST ALDUS MANUTIUS

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*Abstract: Printing of rare texts belonging to Greek antiquity represented the culture's way of surviving in a period when the new era was just beginning. Aldus Manutius revived the glory of the ancient texts with a virtuosity that laid the foundation for a guild's deontology that would represent for many centuries a standard. Among the means that would bring the art of printing in the modern poke were the standardization of punctuation and the use of italic writing. His visionary mission was not limited to the printing of texts but also to the creation of an entire people of culture network to provide them with the necessary material, to open the readers' souls to the text and to create an environment conducive to the spread of cultural values by creating editions that were much easier to use. The price paid by Aldus Manutius was so high financially, because many of his editions barely covering the printing price, but also emotionally because the Italian printer would not see his dream of creating an academy fulfilled. Often forcing the limits imposed by church dogma, Aldus would bring texts from the European cultural heritage closer to the general public. The Italian humanist managed to save much of the old texts that otherwise would have remained unknown or circulated in corrupt and erroneous versions. His philological work was duplicated by an integrant cultural vision in which the most important character was represented by the general public, that is the final reader.*

*Keywords: enchiridia, humanism, press, Renaissance, medical texts*

The one who founded Aldine Press, in 1494, the Humanist printer of Venice<sup>1</sup>, **Aldus Pius Manutius** (1449/1452-1515) links his name to the printing of both rare old texts and the attempt to popularize the knowledge acquired in the medical field. Manutius focused on publishing Greek texts, but he also brought many innovations that would pave the way of using books by for more and more readers. His books in small format, which could be carried by the reader with himself, called the *enchiridia*, are the proof of the wide vision of this scholar who dedicated his entire publicity activity to dissemination of information. Manutius wanted to publish the original texts in Greek, which was difficult because of the alphabet. This would lead to the creation of unique molds that resembled handwriting and would be the precursors of italic writing. The fame of his typography would increase and more and more contemporary among the writers of his time and they would have to ask for his help in publishing various texts or translations. At 1500 there were only two typographies specialized in Greek and Latin writings: that of Manutius (in Venice) and that of Giunta (in Florence).<sup>2</sup>

The profound humanism in which Manutius believed was instilled in him by the studies he had completed in Rome. An important figure in his immediate circle was Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the Renaissance philosopher. As a private teacher of his grandchildren, Manutius would turn his attention to the art of printing because he published for his students two works with the help of Baptiste de Tortis: *Musarum Panagyris* with the *Epistle Catherinae Piae* (1487-1491) and *Paraenesis* (1490). The success of the two works

<sup>1</sup> Michael Andrew Screech, *Laughter At The Foot Of The Cross*, Westview Press, 1999, p. 64

<sup>2</sup> Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. X

strengthened his confidence in his editorial capabilities. His establishment in Venice would bring him in contact with Andrea Torresani, the one with whom he laid the foundations of the typography that would be known to the whole Renaissance world. The financial effort of establishing this business was to be supported by Mirandola's two grandchildren, who had been his students but also by other acquaintances of the printer.

Beginning with the thirteenth century the spread of the book became a priority of the men of culture. Initially, lacking the necessary technical means, they copied the texts to facilitate their reading but the appearance of Gutenberg's pattern would facilitate this cultural endeavor. The in-depth study of Greek and Latin languages in Rome would plant in the soul of the one who would later become the elite typographer of the great passion for the study of ancient languages. Manutius came from a wealthy family that had offered him the opportunity to study and his great love for Greek texts materialized in the impressive number (27 editions of the ancient Greeks) that he printed. The first book to be published by his publishing house was *Erotemata cum interpretatione Latina* of Byzantine humanist Constantine Lascaris. In the first year after the typography became functional, in 1495, Manutius began to publish the works of Aristotle. This first volume was to be part of a five-volume series whose printing was to be completed in 1498. This ambitious project that Manutius completed was dictated by his older passion for the ancient Greeks. His typography featured works of Aristophanes and Petrarch. The publication of works belonging to ancient authors was “provocatively innovative. It used a completely new typeface, the first ever italic. The format was octavo.”<sup>3</sup> In 1507 Erasmus would bring to the printing house owned by the Italian *Iphigenia in Audlis*. This distance collaboration would become much more fruitful as Erasmus moved to Venice. In 1508, the work of Erasmus over the years in the collection of proverbs materialized under the title *Adagiorum Chiliades* (1508).

The contribution the Dutch theologian made to the literary works printed by Manutius would be overwhelming and the collaboration between the two would benefit the whole of humanity: “The fine press work of Aldus, combined with Erasmus’s accessible manner of writing, encouraged an expansion of the humanist audience, at least among that narrow affluent company of men and women who read Latin.”<sup>4</sup> The meeting of the two representative figures of the culture, Manutius and Erasmus, would change the printing market but, more importantly, it would change the way in which ordinary people related to reading, opening the horizon of understanding texts that, until then, were wearing the mark of the students who had studied them. This time, the text came in direct contact with the reader.

Among the works published for the care of the two would be *Moralia* signed by Plutarch. Aldine Press, Manutius's typography, is beginning to gain notoriety, especially as it is trying to streamline costs so that more and more people have access to the books printed here. Manutius publishes his texts with accents on Latin and French words. This, according to some interpreters<sup>5</sup> was to influence other writers like Geoffroy Tory and Robert Estienne. It is certain that Manutius was the first to use the diacritics in Latin texts.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, the printer gives up these diacritics.

The texts of the ancient writers were adapted by Manutius so that it could be accessible to those trying to read or study them. Manutius, with a particular flair for being a

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<sup>3</sup> Idem, p.48

<sup>4</sup> John Willinsky, *The Intellectual Properties of Learning. A Prehistory from Saint Jerome to John Locke*, The University of Chicago Press, 2018, p. 191

<sup>5</sup> Charles Beaulieux, *Histoire de l'orthographe française*, vol. II, Champion, Paris, 1927, p. 29

<sup>6</sup> Piet Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's Ethica from Manuscript to Print: Studies on text, form and related topics*, Van Gorcum, The Netherlands, 1994, p. 93

merchant, was first and foremost a humanist convinced of the necessity of spreading ancient writings. What was new was the lack of any non-essential comments, which allowed the reader to focus much more on the text and have a personal interpretation. The totally new approach of the texts that were left to be interpreted by the reader himself represented the decisive step towards a modern printing of the texts but which also offered the complete freedom and joy of finding the text in charge of the person who browsed these books. The impulse thus given to the ordinary reader to get involved by his own reason in his reading represents the uniqueness of the books printed by Manutius: "Aldine books were printed without the marginal commentary or textual apparatus that made scholastic texts so visually offensive to humanist readers." As a result, these texts "would attract a new kind of reader, whose literacy was not circumscribed by the monastery or university."<sup>7</sup>

The Italian printer imposed a scientific standard for publishing not only literary but also scientific and medical texts because Manutius was also a demanding publisher who prided himself on the accuracy of the texts published by his company. In 1497 Manutius published a collection of seven logical questions of Averroes, one of the most important figures of medieval philosophy and physicians. In 1499 the Italian printer published Dioscorides' *Materia Medica*, in which the healing properties of some plants and substances were described. This work that the Italian printer reworked from several texts he had found belonging to Dioscorides would represent the standard in the medical field. His son would resume the edition, completing it, in 1518, three years after the death of his father. Manutius published in 1499 also works belonging to Nicander of Colophon, scholar, poet and Greek physician

The characteristics of the printing company led by Manutius and then by his sons are a first page bearing the sign of the press: a dolphin on an anchor, the small format of the texts so that they can be taken anywhere and the use of the characters named today in italics in an attempt to make readable texts. The dolphin's sign twisted on the anchor was taken from a Roman coin received as a gift. The first book on which he used this sign that would remain the hallmark of his typography was *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499). Among the medical texts printed by Manutius was also the botanical treatise of Theophrastus. The tradition of medical texts printed by the great humanist was to be continued by his descendants who printed the texts of Galen in 1525 and of Hippocrates in 1526. Unlike the Gothic font used until then, Aldine Press used the italic font and modified commas, introducing semicolon. He also introduced the division of text into paragraphs.

In order to better understand the cultural context in which Manutius appeared, we should pause for a moment about that period. If Petrarch, the one who can be considered the exponent of the Renaissance and represented "the fourteenth-century father of humanism"<sup>8</sup> through his special interest in ancient culture but which he managed to bring to the reach of the general public, Erasmus represented the next step in cultural evolution, being the one who understood the need to print texts so that access to old texts would be facilitated. It was precisely in this spirit that Erasmus supported Manutius in his endeavor. Disappointed by the many mistakes that the printer John Philippi of Kreuznach made when he published his collection of 818 Latin and Greek proverbs, *Collectanea adagiorum veterum*, Erasmus begins his collaboration with Manutius, in 1508, in which he publishes an added edition of these proverbs under the title *Adagiorum chiliades*. Venice, where Manutius had founded his

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<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Summit, *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England*, University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 73

<sup>8</sup> John Willinsky, *The Intellectual Properties of Learning. A Prehistory from Saint Jerome to John Locke*, The University of Chicago Press, 2018, p. 182

business, and Florence were already renowned centers of Renaissance printing. But what characterized Manutius in the landscape of Italian printers was “a new humanist aesthetic of the page and font.”<sup>9</sup> The Venetian Senate and the Pope were to grant Manutius privileges to ensure the highest accuracy of the printed texts. What brought innovation, besides the wide range of printed texts, Aldine Press, owned by Manutius, was to turn the book into an instrument of culture: “a more readable, portable, and attractive object.”<sup>10</sup>

Aldine Academy was set up by *Etymologicum Magnum*, a leaflet spread by Jacopo Morelli in which Manutius is mentioned together with other six members as founder of it. The Academy did not specify the clear purpose of its establishment and leaves many aspects of its activity shrouded in mystery. “In fact, the activities usually connected with the Academy philological research and the preparation of texts for publication are never mentioned in the statute, which deals almost entirely with the teaching of Greek, fines for mispronouncing the language, and the use of those fines to provide an occasional party. These apparently limited aims cannot be considered frivolous, in spite of the curiously affected terms in which they are expressed: a society which regarded all language as spoken language, and which read much of its literature aloud, attached far more importance to pronunciation than a more recent age.”<sup>11</sup>

Although Lowry believes that a plausible explanation for the lapidary character of this status of the Academy is that it was the first printing organization in a culture dominated by orality. In the field of printing, Aldine Press was already a name on the European printing market and would have a huge influence on the cultural landscape just beyond the borders of the Renaissance. Erasmus greatly praised Manutius for appreciating his pioneering work in printing ancient texts that were not only difficult to find but had been corrupted by many counterfeiters over time. Proof that all contacts he had made with European cultural people was bearing fruit is an attempt to identify a copy of Aristotelian writings. Manutius was able to make huge efforts to identify rare specimens so that his editions would be part of the original texts. “In 1498 Aldus himself wrote that he had sent to Rome, Florence, Milan, Greece and England in quest of a copy of Bruni's translations from Aristotle: he was willing, and able to ransack the continent of Europe for a single exemplar.”<sup>12</sup>

The tireless work that Aldine Press did to respect the accuracy of the published texts would not escape the Erasmus scholar's eye who saw in Manutius: “the man who sets fallen learning on its feet (and this is almost more difficult than to originate it in the first place) is building up a sacred and immortal thing, and serving not one province alone but all peoples and all generations. Once this was the task of princes, and it was the greatest glory of Ptolemy. But his library was contained between the narrow walls of his house, and Aldus is building up a library which has no other limits than the world itself.”<sup>13</sup> If the purpose of Erasmus was to raise awareness of those who were thirsty for knowledge, Manutius's goal was to reach readers both by intensifying the printing effort and by the ability to make texts more accessible. The bookstores were the meeting place for those with intellectual and academic interests. The fact that more and more scholars were collaborating at the beginning of the 16th century with Manutius led to a much faster dissemination of innovative ideas among the new strata of experienced traders who were trying to polish themselves culturally.

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<sup>9</sup> Idem, p. 189

<sup>10</sup> Idem, p. 190

<sup>11</sup> M.J.C. Lowry, *The 'New Academy' of Aldus Manutius: A Renaissance Dream*, in *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 58, no. 2 (1976), pp. 380-381

<sup>12</sup> M.J.C. Lowry, *Two great Venetian libraries in the age of Aldus Manutius*, in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*. 1974;57(1), p. 149

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Mann Phillips, *Erasmus on His Times: A Shortened Version of the 'Adages' of Erasmus*, Cambridge University Press, 1967, p. 10

Manutius dreamed of creating an academy around his typography as a means of surviving financially and as a much easier way of spreading knowledge.

Considering that the first books printed here date back to 1494, caused Lowry to catalog Aldus as “a figure of European stature.”<sup>14</sup> The great impact that Manutius typography had on European culture can be explained, at least in part, by commercial factors and the fact that the printing market was fragmented. Manutius had that entrepreneurial spirit that ensured his success. He tried to maintain the most varied relationships: “secured the friendship of several Venetian patricians; he made a great and very natural appeal to his ex-colleagues, the professional teachers; and he made the utmost of his chances to cultivate influential foreigners, both in Venice and Padua.”<sup>15</sup>

From this sphere of his knowledge, Manutius was careful to meet with physicians and publish medical texts all the more so as medicine was an emerging field. Manutius gathered in his circle pedagogues, men of letters, poets, philosophers and, in general, everyone whose purpose was to propagate new ideas of cultural openness in a thirsty knowledge society. Among the close collaborators was Jacopo Berengario da Carpi (1460-1530), who will become one of the most famous anatomists of his time with the publication of the work *Isagoge breves* (1522). The one who was his mentor and had a huge influence on the future Jacopo, directing his steps, from adolescence, to medicine was Manutius. The search for Manutius's collaborators was going to expand: from the Italians and the Greeks, the printer would collaborate with German, French associates, Polish, North European and English. The wide network that Manutius has created around him denotes both an active intellectual spirit and an unusual commercial and social intuition. Manutius' intellectual sense told him that the Renaissance man, who is growing in geographic, political and economic movement, needed more modern cultural means and had the revelation of creating books to keep up with social changes: “How much direct commercial success contributed to the spread of Aldus' influence is difficult to say, but his publication of large editions in octavo from early 1501 was a most important development in the history of printing. The octavo form was not new: but Aldus pioneered it as a means of supplying the best literature in a compact form, and directed it specifically at the busy man of affairs who had not time to deploy a weighty folio in his study.”<sup>16</sup>

Diplomats such as Sigismund Thurz and John Lascaris praised this initiative of Manutius, to type small print. The increasingly crowded life of cultural and political circles saw in Manutius's printed books the adaptation of the written text to the needs of speeding up even intellectual exchanges. And from all this turmoil, literary and scientific studies had only to gain. The unmatched success that Aldine press had even surprised its founder: “For a time, Aldus had plainly captured the attention and canalized the energies of the various loose-jointed groups which had carried his enterprise to success. Later in life, he might complain that his print-shop had become a social-centre, but in 1503 he declared proudly that his academy was turning out a thousand or more copies of some fine author every month.”<sup>17</sup> But the decline begins to be felt starting with the following year: 1504 when financial difficulties became impoverishing “A catalogue of Aldine publications available in 1513 adds some

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<sup>14</sup>Lowry, M J C *The 'New Academy' of Aldus Manutius: A Renaissance Dream*, in *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 58, no. 2 (1976), p. 387

<sup>15</sup> Idem, pp. 387-388

<sup>16</sup> Idem, p. 396

<sup>17</sup> Idem, p. 399

detail to the picture: Greek editions are offered at cut prices, while Latin or vernacular works printed at the same time have been exhausted.”<sup>18</sup>

Greek texts were no longer in line with market requirements and the money invested in them was no longer so easily recovered. The readers seemed more interested in the texts in the native languages. Manutius was negotiating with the Germans to relocate his printing on the German land. Lowry suggests that this move would have been both a financial one (the annexation of the Aldine academy to a higher education institution would have exempted it from pecuniary risks) as well as cultural (bringing together all the cultural supporters of typography under the strong emblem of a state would have created a true institutional power of the Aldine Press). “Aldus' patrician friends can also be seen both as a link connecting him to Venice, and as a symptom of growing interest in humanist studies at the highest level of society. But an individual analysis soon reveals how pitifully inadequate these men would have been as patrons of the kind of institution that Aldus seems to have planned. What was needed was money and influence, on the scale offered to Ficino for more than three generations by the ruling clique of Florence. Aldus' friends lacked not only money and influence in Venice itself: they lacked any real coherence as a group.”<sup>19</sup>

A new social category was born: traders who in a very short time accumulated huge assets. The bold print market made up of intellectuals seemed to pale in front of these new riches. The saving of the typography came from the visit that Erasmus made to Manutius in 1508. This meeting between literary and philosophical knowledge and the skill of the printing profession would prove to be of good omen: “partnership of the leading humanist and the leading printer of the age was too much to resist, and there is at least no doubt that our view of life in the Aldine circle will always be that of Erasmus.”<sup>20</sup> Between 1509 and 1511 Manutius spends his time in Milan and Ferrara. The printer sends his cry for help to the Pope. The printing house needed strong funding to continue the dream Manutius had for many years, and in 1513 his printing house would dedicate to Pope the editing of Plato's works. Manutius's dream of laying the foundations of Aldine Academy would not be fulfilled as the visionary had hoped.

Manutius's personality has made its mark on the cultural character not only of Venice but of the whole of Europe through the cohesion of his system of professional values that imposed on his guild a great ethical conduct but also through the large number of collaborators through which the Italian typographer managed to obtain rare and authentic texts. Its name is closely linked to the tradition of ancient Greek culture but also to the social, cultural and political context of the times of rebirth. Manutius was the link between antiquity and rebirth to a brighter future of European culture: “the popularizer of an Hellenic tradition already assured of continuance by the labours of a previous generation, the creature of a Venetian cultural ambience whose resources he exploited and whose colours he assumed. (...) He was not the passive beneficiary of other peoples' efforts. His cultivation of sympathizers, his search across the face of Europe for the exemplars he needed, his merciless driving of himself and his assistants, were integral and very necessary parts in the preservation of a literary tradition that may have been in greater peril than is commonly realized.”<sup>21</sup> His efforts in preserving the tradition of ancient literature must be appreciated all the more because, in the midst of the Renaissance, the spirits of scholars were longing for perennial values. In

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<sup>18</sup> Idem, pp. 400-401

<sup>19</sup> Idem, p. 411

<sup>20</sup> Idem, p. 414

<sup>21</sup> M.J.C. Lowry, *Two great Venetian libraries in the age of Aldus Manutius*, in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 1974;57(1), pp. 163-164

addition to the purely philological interest in ancient texts, Manutius was also interested in promoting the exact sciences in the form of the medical texts he printed as he was aware of the emerging force of exact sciences. Manutius was an icon of his time and his ideals survived long after his death, we might say without mistaking, until present times.

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