

Malcolm Walsby and Graeme Kemp, eds. *The Book Triumphant: Print in Transition in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*.

Library of the Written Word 15; The Handpress World 9. Leiden: Brill, 2011. xvi + 378 pp. €99. ISBN: 978-90-04-20723-3.

The sixteen essays in this collection, which originated in conferences held at the University of St. Andrews, range widely in scope, from broad surveys of pre-1600 printing in the Low Countries, Italy, and Iberia to studies of individual printers (the French printer Pierre Vidoue) and even particular works (Enguerrand de Monstrelet's *Chronique*). German-speaking lands (the subject of seven essays) and France (with three essays) receive the most attention, while the Low Countries, Italy, Iberia, Britain, the Habsburg lands, and Poland get one essay each. (Ironically,

given the site of the conferences, Scottish printing receives no specific mention anywhere in the volume.) The subtitle of the volume is misleading since it is overwhelmingly concerned with the sixteenth century and only a little with the seventeenth. All of the essays are informative (with the broader essays naturally having the greater interest) and welcome, since so much of sixteenth-century printing, especially in the first half of the century, remains underexplored. However, especially because of the essays' diverse scope, the volume feels somewhat miscellaneous. The brief preface does not explain how the essays relate to one another.

The title of the volume probably should have been *The Printed Book Triumphant*, since, as one of the contributors, Hanno Wijsman, points out, manuscript books are also books. Wijsman's essay on de Monstrelet's *Chronique* in manuscript and print and a second essay by Zsuzsa Barbarics-Hermanik on manuscript newsletters fit uneasily into the volume and seem to challenge its underlying premise by demonstrating the continued vitality of manuscript well into the age of print. Wijsman takes issue explicitly with Elizabeth L. Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979), arguing for continuity rather than disruption in European book production. "The printing revolution," he argues, "never took place" (247). The apparent fault-line between these two essays and the other fourteen is not addressed in the preface and is not even acknowledged.

A second important sense in which the printed book was not wholly triumphant in this period does receive some acknowledgment in the volume. Among the most significant benefits of printing emphasized by Eisenstein and by those who hailed the invention of printing at its first appearance were its "preservative powers": works reproduced in multiple copies by the printing press were not subject to loss in the way that manuscripts were. But print did not confer complete protection against destruction. Several contributors remark on serious losses among sixteenth-century printed books and other printed material. Neil Harris especially emphasizes "the enormous quantity of books, entire editions, not just copies belonging to editions, that have failed to survive" (50). Any assessment of sixteenth-century printing somehow has to take these losses into account.

Despite these qualifications, it could fairly be said, on the basis of the essays in this volume, that the printed book was triumphant in the sixteenth century. Hundreds of thousands of titles were printed, each in hundreds or thousands of copies, and more and more uses were found for printed books, pamphlets, and broadsides. As every sixteenth-century historian knows, print played an enormously important role in the religious controversies of the age, and this is documented by several contributors. Protestant reformers' eager embrace of the printing press is well known, but Catholics also appreciated its capabilities, as Christoph Volkmar's essay on "Catholic Propaganda in Saxony in the 1520s" demonstrates.

Do *The Book Triumphant* and the study of sixteenth-century printed books in general hold any interest for scholars who are not primarily bibliographers or book historians? They certainly should. Although oral and written discourse continued to play paramount roles in the sixteenth century and beyond, the printed book was an increasingly important vehicle for the communication of cultural, religious,

political, and scientific ideas (among many other uses). Since books were printed to meet the demands of the market, studying how, where, and how often certain titles or genres were printed and circulated may be one of the best ways available to trace how ideas spread, developed, and were received in sixteenth-century Europe (especially when copies of books survive with contemporary marginalia). Once all the impressive electronic resources currently being developed by bibliographers and other scholars (many of which are described in the volume) are completed — and especially if a large portion of surviving titles or even of surviving copies of sixteenth-century books are digitized — scholars in many fields should find it relatively easy to trace in some detail the history of particular titles or kinds of books and the ideas embodied in them. The history of the book might in time become more fully incorporated in other forms of history writing. While we wait for all of these projects to be completed and fully utilized, *The Book Triumphant* is a valuable guide to the increasing importance of the printed book in sixteenth-century Europe.

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