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Bookbinders in the Early Modern Venetian Book Trade

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Abstract

Bookbinders are still among the least known of the professions of the early modern Italian book trade, partly because they rarely signed their work. However, they had an undeniably fundamental role in the production and circulation of books (both manuscript and printed) across Italy, and especially in Venice, where the book trade was a particularly lively industry. In recent years, there has been a strong interest in early modern material culture but little attention has been paid to bookbinders, who quite literally shaped the materiality of books. This article looks at the scarcity of documentary sources on Venetian bookbinders between 1450 and 1630 both as a methodological challenge and as evidence of their role in local production and consumption of books. It explores both the lack of sources documenting the professional lives of binders, and sources traditionally underused in book history, to highlight the social lives of binders. Evidence of binders' family finances, marriages, and social and geographical mobilities is used to identify their lower social standing in the early modern Venetian book world in comparison to booksellers, the overlapping of their professional roles, and the locations of binders' workshops in the topography of the city.

I

In 1581, two Venetian bookbinders, Valerio Padoan and Zambattista Mandelli, were called to answer the accusation of working outside the limits imposed on their profession by selling bound books – a prerogative of booksellers. They defended themselves with almost identical formulas, stating that they were ‘simple bookbinders’ and did not sell books.¹ We do not know whether the accusation was true, or even whether they were found guilty; but the charge and the defence they used are revealing. The struggles and competition typical

¹ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Venice (ASV), Arti, b. 163, no. I, fo. 28v (‘il qual rispose non vender libri ma solamente esser semplice ligador’) (1581) and fo. 30r (‘disse d’esser semplice ligador de libri, et non esercitar altro’) (2 Nov. 1581). Names from primary sources are spelled as they appear if they are single occurrences or have a consistent spelling in the documents.

of the early modern book trade have been studied in depth and there are many known examples of attempts to escape local regulations. However, the relationships between Venetian bookbinders and booksellers are still obscure, despite both being part of the same prolific and lively trade. As I will show, Valerio Padoan and Zambattista Mandelli's claim to be 'simple bookbinders', halfway between an opportunistic defence and a declaration of humility, is indicative of the status of the profession within the Venetian book trade, of their attempts to expand their businesses, and of their social networks.²

Bookbinders – one of the least known professions in the book trade, especially in Italy – are an essential missing piece in the nuanced and complex picture that was the production and consumption of books in early modern Venice. The period under examination covers the introduction of printing to the city (1469) to the 1630s, when a second outbreak of the plague plunged the Venetian and Italian book trade into a profound crisis from which it would not recover.³ Over the next few pages, we will encounter intrigue, trials, murders, and forced weddings, often at the expense of bookbinders. I will also use a variety of documentary sources, many unpublished, to cast light on the place of bookbinders in the Venetian book trade, and in wider society, between the 1450s and the 1630s.

II

Recent research has highlighted the fascination of early modern European elites with processes of making and how this influenced consumption and manifestations of taste.⁴ Books are widely recognized as a key example of the use of materiality for self-fashioning in this period, and yet the makers of books themselves remain mostly unknown, and their association with their work opaque. In historical research, bookbindings often occupy a 'marginal' space, while, in fact, they were an essential element in the production and consumption of books: bindings were instrumental in protecting books (many of which would not have survived to this day were they not bound) and as carriers of meaning, in their decorative as well as their structural components. Like many other objects used, worn, and shown off by Venetians, bookbindings were made by trained artisans who created each object according to their own skills and 'know-how', the materials available, the tastes of customers, and the fashions of the times. What can looking at binders – the link between producers and consumers, albeit not always a direct one – and their practices and networks in the Venetian urban space tell us about the local book trade at its apex and decline?

² Similarly, pedlars often emphasized their own poverty when petitioning for licences to sell prints in the streets. See Rosa Salzberg, *Ephemeral city: cheap print and urban culture in Renaissance Venice* (Manchester, 2014), p. 87.

³ The crisis of the Italian book trade was caused by both cultural and other factors, such as a new outbreak of the plague and the Thirty Years' War. See Angela Nuovo, *The book trade in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2013), pp. 48–51.

⁴ See Ulinka Rublack, 'Matter in the material Renaissance', *Past & Present*, 219 (2013), pp. 41–85, esp. 45.

The history of bookbinding is a relatively young branch of book history. At first, bindings became the object of attention mostly as decorative arts but, in the last thirty years or so, techniques and material features have come to the fore, and they are now understood to be essential evidence in placing the making, usage, and life cycle of books. Less attention has been given to their makers, at least by historians of Italy: past approaches have focused more on the cultural-historical aspect of the craft and trade than on the economic or business history of bookbinders' interactions with other binders, other trades, and customers, leaving bookbinders in an obscurity that mirrors our still-imperfect knowledge of how artisans operated in many other trades.

One of the reasons for this obscurity is that sources on Venetian bookbinders (*ligadori*, *ligadori da libri*, or *ligalibri*) in the fifteenth to seventeenth century are scarce. In this sense, binders are akin to the 'invisible technicians' described by Steven Shapin as the important but unnamed actors in the history of science – individuals responsible for the physical creation of objects and the execution of experiments who were often specialized to do so.⁵ Additionally, Italian bookbinders only very rarely signed their work. The lack of signatures on bindings raises the question of the place that binders effectively occupied in the world of the Venetian book trade, as well as of the nature of their self-perception. Visibility, authorship, social prestige, and professional success are all deeply interconnected in the act of signing one's work, a cultural practice designed to craft personal and professional identities and provide proof of authorship.⁶ Venetian paintings, for instance, gradually bore signatures more and more consistently after 1440, a shift that has been linked to the increasingly international success of individual workshops.⁷ In previous discussions of bookbinding, binders have been known by pseudonyms based on the tools they employed, the owners for whom they worked, or the contents of a volume in a significant binding, a symptom of how little is known about the personal lives and social history of these craftsmen, in spite of their fundamental role in the book trade.

Authorship research is further complicated by the variety of models of labour organization that existed in Renaissance Italy: a book could easily be bound in more than one phase and by more than one binder.⁸ The sewing and covering of a book could be completed before the volume was sold, and decoration added (perhaps according to a patron's directions) by the same or a different binder at a later date.⁹ Documentary sources on 'unfinished' bindings are also minimal: in sixteenth-century Genoa, Cristoforo Zabata, a

⁵ Steven Shapin, 'The invisible technician', *American Scientist*, 77 (1989), pp. 554–63.

⁶ Judith W. Mann, 'Identity signs: meanings and methods in Artemisia Gentileschi's signatures', *Renaissance Studies*, 23 (2009), pp. 71–107.

⁷ Louisa C. Matthew, 'The painter's presence: signatures in Venetian Renaissance pictures', *Art Bulletin* 80 (1998), pp. 616–48, at p. 616.

⁸ Franca Petrucci Nardelli, 'Il legatore: un mestiere fra organizzazione e sfruttamento', in Marina Regni and Piera Giovanna Tordella, eds., *Conservazione dei materiali librari, archivistici e grafici* (2 vols., Turin, 1996–9), I, pp. 329–32.

⁹ Mirjam M. Foot, 'Bookbinding research: pitfalls, possibilities and needs', in Mirjam M. Foot, ed., *Eloquent witnesses: bookbindings and their history* (London, 2004), pp. 13–29, at p. 16.

publisher, bookseller, stationer, and poet with important business networks in Pavia and Venice (and for whom see further below), sold a large quantity of books to the bookseller Antonio Orero. Some of the books were listed as ‘forwarded and incomplete’ (*ligati e non finiti*) or ‘completed’ (*finiti*).¹⁰ Zabata must have been waiting for customers to give instructions on how they ought to be decorated, or for a suitable binder.

The distance between economic history and book history is never a great one, and in considering how goods were created, circulated, and thought of, material culture is positioned at the intersection of art history, economic history, and the history of ideas.¹¹ It is true that the large majority of the transactions that would reveal authorship and commission of bindings are not attested in the sources. But we have evidence of many other economic (and socio-economic) transactions that paint a vivid picture of how bookbinders as a professional and social group lived in early modern Venice. The binders in this article pay rent (or do not), get married (more or less willingly), write wills and testaments (or act as witnesses at those of others), or become booksellers (or try, and fail).

Perusing primary and secondary sources, I was able to assemble a corpus of eighty-eight names of bookbinders active in the Republic of Venice in the period under consideration.¹² The corpus was built through research in the Archivio di Stato in Venice, namely the notarial archives (*Atti and Testamenti*); the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century documents of the guild of printers and booksellers (*Arte dei Libreri e Stampadori*) and occasionally other *Arti*; and series from offices in charge of managing and recording dowries and property transactions (the *Giudici dell’Esaminador*, the *Giudici del Proprio*, and the *Giudici del Procurator*) and apprenticeships (the *Giustizia Vecchia*). Many of the names were unearthed by following the lead of the *Ricerca Duca di Rivoli*, an investigation commissioned by Victor Masséna, duke of Rivoli (1836–1910), held in the Archivio di Stato.¹³ While Masséna was mainly interested in printed illustrations, the materials of his research encompassed several professional figures of the local book trade, including bookbinders, between 1450 and 1550.

III

One clear example of the ‘invisibility’ of binders is in the *Status animarum* held at the Archivio Storico del Patriarcato. Ordered by the church after the Council

¹⁰ Graziano Ruffini, *Cristoforo Zabata. Libraio, editore e scrittore del Cinquecento* (Florence, 2014), pp. 33–4, 187–202. On unfinished bindings, see Nicholas Pickwoad, ‘Unfinished business: incomplete bindings made for the booktrade from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century’, *Quaerendo*, 50 (2020), pp. 41–80.

¹¹ On the complex relationship between cultural and economic histories of early modern Italy, see Francesca Trivellato, ‘Economic and business history as cultural history: pitfalls and possibilities’, *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 22 (2019), pp. 402–10.

¹² See the appendix in the Supplementary Material for details.

¹³ I am indebted to Catherine Kikuchi for bringing this source to my attention in the first place. See Mario Infelise, ‘Note per una ricerca sull’editoria veneziana del ‘500’, in Marco Santoro, ed., *La stampa in Italia nel Cinquecento. Atti del Convegno, Roma 17–21 ottobre 1989* (Rome, 1992), pp. 633–40. Photographs of the original are available for on-site consultation at the Archivio.

of Trent (1545–1563), these censuses of the ‘souls’ (residents) of each Venetian parish were carried out in the 1590s.¹⁴ The *Status animarum* are not always reliable, as they were based upon self-certification. Considering how they registered the population of the entire urban area over a small number of years, however, they still constitute a formidable source of information.

The Venetian *Status animarum* include the names of seven individuals who self-identified as *ligadori* in the city. That is a remarkably low number, especially compared to the sixty-seven individuals who self-identified as printers (*stampadori*). With the high number of books printed in Venice every day at the time, it would have been impossible for seven men (or even seven workshops) to satisfy the city’s need for binding services (as a rule of thumb, a single press could regularly keep several binders in business). As well as books printed in Venice, there would also have been manuscripts and imported books to bind, and books to rebind.

As mentioned, there are some limitations to using the *Status animarum* as a tool for demographic research. They usually provide a single element of identification for the head of each household: their profession, the religion the family followed, or their surname, the last being the most common in the case of patricians, while the *popolani* (the lowest and largest social class) were usually identified by their profession.¹⁵ Luca and Vincenzo (in the parish of San Canzian), Piero Antonio (San Zulian), Zuanne (San Bartolomio), and two more Zuane at Santa Sofia and San Zulian were all listed as *ligadori* or *ligadori da libri*; no surname was provided. They remain bare names to which we cannot attach a workshop, an output, an ethnicity, or a network. Additionally, three of them were simply noted as *ligadori*, which may mean that they were bookbinders or that they were *ligadori del fontego dei Tedeschi*, whose work included binding (that is, wrapping up) commercial goods in the *fondaco* to prepare them for shipping.¹⁶

There is one exception: Francesco Bonin, *ligador*, who worked in San Bartolomio, and whose entry was compiled with a surname. This may be because he was better known than other bookbinders in his community, as he appears again in 1594, sitting in the Capitolo Generale of the Scuola di San Mattia Apostolo alongside other tradesmen, including the important printer and bookseller Damiano Zenaro and one Francesco, bookseller ‘at the sign of the three hats’.¹⁷

¹⁴ See Athos Belletini, ‘Gli “status animarum”: caratteristiche e problemi di utilizzazione nelle ricerche di demografia storica’, in *Le fonti della demografia storica in Italia. Atti del Seminario di demografia storica 1971-1972* (Rome, 1974), pp. 3–42.

¹⁵ On *popolani* in Venice, see Claire Judde de Larivière and Rosa Salzberg, ‘“Le peuple est la cité”: l’idée de popolo et la condition des *popolani* à Venise (XVe–XVIe siècles)’, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 68 (2013), pp. 1113–40, esp. pp. 1128, 1132 for identification by professions.

¹⁶ The *ligadori del fontego dei Tedeschi* belonged to the German minority in Venice (often from Bolzano). See Natalino Bonazza, Isabella Di Leonardo, and Gianmario Guidarelli, eds., *La chiesa di San Bartolomeo e la comunità tedesca a Venezia* (Venice, 2013). In these three cases, the names only appear once, and the profession of these individuals cannot be confirmed.

¹⁷ Valentina Sapienza, ‘(Intorno a) Leonardo Corona (1552–1596): documenti, fonti e indagini storico-contestuali’ (PhD thesis, Venice–Tours, 2011), p. 221. On Damiano Zenaro, see Patrizia

Guild craft documentation and early modern technical literature are not of much help in identifying practising binders either; until the eighteenth century, bookbinders in Venice did not have a craft guild to call their own, and, even when they did form one, in 1732,¹⁸ it was only as a *colonna* (section) of the guild of booksellers and printers (*Arte dei Libreri e Stampadori*).¹⁹ Before then, bookbinders were only members of the *Arte dei Libreri e Stampadori* if they were booksellers or printers in their own right; occasionally they could also be part of other guilds, such as one Paolo de Paseto, who matriculated in the guild of painters (*Arte dei Dipentori*) in the early seventeenth century.²⁰ The lack of a guild is in contrast with most other professions and commercial activities in early modern Venice, which existed within the fluid but established galaxy of the *Arti*. Economic and social historians have long debated to what degree craft guilds hindered or sustained pre-modern economic prosperity in European cities, but the ability of the *Arti* to guarantee continuity of expertise, negotiate with stakeholders, and regulate the market is now generally seen as a positive force for the Venetian economy.²¹ In any case, access to the *Arti* was a tool that other book professions in Venice possessed but bookbinders lacked, creating an imbalance.

Outside Italy, bookbinders' professionalism found its expression in manuals that were first published in the mid-sixteenth century and were well established by the seventeenth century.²² German-, French-, and Arabic-language manuals were part of strong traditions of writing about bookbinding techniques.²³ In Italy, on the other hand, such a tradition was almost completely lacking. In the early modern era, mentions of binding techniques are brief and scarce, such as a short account of the art of gilding book edges ('A mettere oro sopra delle carte de libri') in Alessio Piemontese's *Book of secrets* (1555).²⁴

Bravetti, 'Damiano Zenaro: editore e libraio del Cinquecento', in Simonetta Pelusi and Alessandro Scarsella, eds., *Humanistica Marciana. Saggi offerti a Marino Zorzi* (Milan, 2008), pp. 127–32.

¹⁸ 1731 *more veneto* (the Venetian calendar started on 1 Mar.).

¹⁹ Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venice, *Mariegole*, *Mariegola* 119, fo. 121r–v (20 June 1736). The act of foundation specifically prohibited any bookseller from entering the *Arte dei Legatori*, and any bookbinder from applying to enter the *Arte dei Libreri*, unless the applicant possessed the experience necessary to practise both professions. Those applying to become members of the *Arte dei Legatori* would also have their skills tested by completing 'a missal, to be bound with gilt edges, and covered in black goatskin, tooled in gold in whatever fashion the *Capo Colonna* desires'. See Laura Carnelos, 'La corporazione e gli esterni: stampatori e librai a Venezia tra norma e contraffazione (XVI–XVIII)', *Società e storia*, 130 (2010), pp. 657–88.

²⁰ Elena Favaro, *L'arte dei pittori in Venezia e i suoi statuti* (Florence, 1975), p. 152.

²¹ On craft guilds and economic history, see mainly S. R. Epstein, 'Craft guilds in the pre-modern economy: a discussion', *Economic History Review*, 61 (2008), pp. 155–74; Andrea Caracausi, 'A reassessment of the role of guild courts in disputes over apprenticeship contracts: a case study from early modern Italy', *Continuity and Change*, 32 (2017), pp. 85–114.

²² Graham Pollard, *Early bookbinding manuals: an annotated list of technical accounts of bookbinding to 1840* (Oxford, 1984).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Girolamo Ruscelli, *Secreti del reverendo donno Alessio piemontese, nuovamente posti in luce* (Venice, 1555), pp. 180–1. See Mirjam M. Foot, *Bookbinders at work: their roles and methods* (London, 2006), pp. 68–9.

It seems very unlikely that binders would have been as rare in Renaissance Venice as they appear from the records. Many more must have been practising this profession in a city that satisfied and at times surpassed a significant amount of the European demand for books. Bookbinders rightfully appear twice in Robert Darnton's famous 'communication circuit': in connection with printers and booksellers, and in connection with customers, as some printed books were put on sale already bound, but many received their bindings at some point after being sold, or were rebound, if sold in wrappers.²⁵ Indeed, reports of customers struggling to find the services of a binder in other cities exist, but not in Venice.²⁶ So what makes Venetian bookbinders, whose work is omnipresent in libraries, so rarely named in the sources?

The scarcity of explicit sources on bookbinders in early modern Venice offers a unique methodological opportunity: their absence – a 'present absence' – reveals just as much as it hides.²⁷ Elusive in the sources, bookbinders were deeply entwined in the fabric of the early modern book trade. In evaluating their visibility in a social context, we need to consider how, within the local book trade, they were practically at the centre (since most books were bound at some point) but socially on the margins. Three main factors come into play: firstly, the level of literacy of the binders; secondly, the status of bookbinders within the early modern Venetian book trade; and thirdly, the fluidity of professional roles in Renaissance work, and in the book trade in particular.

IV

It is useful to begin by looking into the level of education, and thus of literacy, of bookbinders. A low level of literacy among binders could explain a lack of signatures, as well as a lower frequency of appearance in primary sources: illiterate bookbinders may not have been particularly well connected, would have been employed less frequently as witnesses, and would have left fewer autograph documents of any kind. However, if assessing the percentage of a population who could read and write at a given time is tricky, the task becomes even more difficult when narrowing down the pool to examine a specific professional body. In early modern Venice, about one third of the male population received some kind of formal education, with strong differences in literacy rates among social classes and occupations.²⁸

²⁵ Robert Darnton, 'What is the history of books?', *Daedalus*, 111 (1982), pp. 65–83. On books being sold already bound, see Anthony Hobson, *Apollo and Pegasus: an enquiry into the formation and dispersal of a Renaissance library* (Amsterdam, 1975), pp. 102–5; Kevin M. Stevens, 'A bookbinder in early seventeenth-century Milan: the shop of Pietro Martire Locarno', *Library*, 18 (1996), pp. 306–27, at p. 309.

²⁶ See, for instance, Daniela Fattori, 'Venezia e la stampa glagolitica: i Cimalarca', *Studi Veneziani*, 45 (2003), pp. 213–28; Suraiya Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and sultans: the Hajj under the Ottomans, 1517–1683* (London, 1994).

²⁷ On present absences and materiality, see Morgan Meyer, 'Placing and tracing absence: a material culture of the immaterial', *Journal of Material Culture*, 17 (2012), pp. 103–10.

²⁸ Paul F. Grendler, 'Education in the Republic of Venice', in Eric Dursteler, ed., *A companion to Venetian history, 1400–1797* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2013), pp. 675–99, at pp. 682–3.

In a sense, bookbinders occupied an unusual place: continuous physical proximity to books, the physical carriers of knowledge, but a conceptual distance from them. Binders had great familiarity with books in their materiality, and books as tools of humanism in turn had an important role in the development of professionalism in Renaissance Italy.²⁹ Simultaneously, however, binders were not fully acknowledged as members of the book world, and were often distant from those who consumed its products. Books were prestige goods for the intellectual elites; this was, in fact, a point often made by those who opposed printing, a technique bound to enlarge reading audiences.³⁰ A certain disconnect existed between the idea of books as texts, and that of books as physical commodities produced by relatively uneducated individuals such as pressmen and binders.

Binders did not necessarily need to be able to read and write to carry out their tasks. As sophisticated as it was, bookbinding was still largely a manual process. Some knowledge of letters was mainly required for ensuring that the gatherings were bound in the correct order, by reading signature marks, and for tooling titles on covers. Neither was necessarily carried out by the same binder who sewed the bookblock, and even then, a basic proficiency could suffice, although binders would certainly benefit from being able to read different scripts.³¹ As a matter of fact, sometimes a printer might even be better off employing an illiterate binder, for instance if wanting to traffic prohibited texts: Marcantonio Giustiniani (1516–71), the *governatore* of Cephalonia who set up an illicit printing press on the island to print Hebrew books, was eventually exposed by his binder, Giangiacomo Bollani.³²

The question of how many bookbinders were literate, and to what degree, is complex: some knew letters well enough to transfer text from one script to another or from lower to upper case, but not to avoid mistakes. Anthony Hobson has argued that the Mendoza Binder could read and write Greek because of the iotacism in the Greek titles of several manuscripts.³³ Yet it is also possible that someone laid out the letter tools for the titles for the binder – someone who (whether Greek or not, as iotacism was not unique to native speakers) was used to speaking the Byzantine variety of the language on a regular basis. Similarly, it should not be assumed that directions on the ideal manner to bind a book were meant to be read by the binder, such as those in Latin and Greek that can be found at end of the second volume of the works of Aristotle printed by Aldus Manutius (1449–1515).³⁴ In fact, this example seems to be addressed to the owner of the book, so that the learned patron could relay its contents to the binder or bookseller.

²⁹ See Douglas Biow, *Doctors, ambassadors, secretaries: humanism and professions in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, IL, 2002), pp. 1–26.

³⁰ See Salzberg, *Ephemeral city*, p. 34.

³¹ Foot, *Bookbinders at work*, p. 128.

³² ASV, Savi all'Eresia (Santo Ufficio), b. 28 (1570). See Paul F. Grendler, *The Roman inquisition and the Venetian press, 1540–1605* (Princeton, NJ, 1977), pp. 143–4.

³³ Anthony Hobson, *Renaissance book collecting: Jean Grolier and Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, their books and bindings* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 108.

³⁴ Ambroise Firmin-Didot, *Alde Manuce et l'hellenisme à Venise* (Paris, 1875), pp. 98–9.

Other professions of the book trade, such as pressmen (*torcholieri*), who physically pulled the bar of the presses, would have been statistically even less likely to be literate. Of four workers who were asked whether or not they could read in Venice in 1585, three reported that they could not read at all, and one that he could read 'as much as I need'.³⁵ 'Pragmatic literacy', which was generally learned in professional contexts, became increasingly common in the Middle Ages, but proves difficult to assess either statistically or in individual cases.³⁶

On the other hand, some binders were most definitely literate – among them those who also (or primarily) worked as scribes, like the calligrapher Felice Feliciano (1433–79).³⁷ Others were literate enough to be among the few who signed their work, usually with their names and the word 'bound' (*ligavit*). Unfortunately, signing was a less common practice for Italian binders than for the German or Flemish,³⁸ but some examples from across Italy survive: Baldo da Camerino, who signed a binding in 1472; Adriano di Nichola di Pisano, a bookbinder and bookseller from Viterbo, active in the fifteenth century; the Italian Luca Coronensis, who worked for King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary (1443–90); the Flemish Anthoni Lodewijk, who bound books for Johann Jakob Fugger in Venice and Augsburg; and Francesco de Rossi, who was also active as a printer and bookseller in Ferrara between 1521 and 1574.³⁹

More interestingly, the bookbinder Alberto da Padoa, of San Zulian in Venice, was jailed in 1505 on the charge of posting a pasquinade against Doge Leonardo Loredan (1436–1521) and his son. Marin Sanudo describes the pasquinade in some detail, pointing out that the text was in verse and illustrated.⁴⁰ Alberto was innocent: a new text was posted while he was

³⁵ ASV, Arti, Arte dei libreri e stampadori, b. 163, I, fo. 57r.

³⁶ On pragmatic literacy, see Michael T. Clanchy, *From memory to written record: England, 1066–1307* (3rd edn, Chichester and Malden, MA, 2013), pp. 329–35.

³⁷ Anthony Hobson, *Humanists and bookbinders: the origins and diffusion of humanistic bookbinding, 1459–1559* (Cambridge, 1989), esp. pp. 3–12, 41–50; Orfea Granzotto, 'Alcune note su Felice Feliciano legatore', in Agostino Contò and Leonardo Quaquarelli, eds., *L'antiquario' Felice Feliciano veronese tra epigrafia antica, letteratura e arti del libro. Atti del convegno di studi, Verona 3–4 giugno 1993* (Padua, 1995), pp. 221–9.

³⁸ For the signatures of German binders, see Franca Petrucci Nardelli, *Legatura e scrittura. Testi celati, messaggi velati, annunci palesi* (Florence, 2007), pp. 134–43. For Flemish binders, see Staffan Fogelmark, *Flemish and related panel-stamped bindings: evidence and principles* (New York, NY, 1990).

³⁹ Camerino: Tammaro De Marinis, *La legatura artistica in Italia nei secoli XV e XVI. Notizie ed elenchi* (3 vols., Florence, 1960), II, p. 67, no. 1476. Pisano: Franca Petrucci Nardelli, 'Un legatore viterbese del Quattrocento: per l'identificazione della figura di in artigiano del libro', in Arnaldo Ganda, Elisa Grignani, and Alberto Petrucciani, eds., *Libri, tipografi, biblioteche. Ricerche storiche dedicate a Luigi Balsamo*, vol. 2 (Florence, 1997), pp. 355–62. Coronensis: Marianne Rozsondai, 'Sulle legature in cuoio dorato per Mattia Corvino', in *Nel segno del corvo. Libri e miniature della biblioteca di Mattia Corvino re d'Ungheria (1443–1490)* (Modena, 2002), pp. 248–59. Lodewijk: Hobson, *Renaissance book collecting*, p. 129. Rossi: see the entry in the *Manus Online* database for MS Ferrara, Biblioteca comunale Ariosteana, Classe I, Cl. I. 215 (CNMD\0000051232), https://manus.iccu.sbn.it/opac_SchedaScheda.php?ID=51232.

⁴⁰ Marin Sanudo, *I diarii di Marino Sanuto (MCCCCXCVI–MDXXXIII) dall'autografo Marciano ital. cl. VII codd. CDXIX–CDLXXVII*, ed. Rinaldo Fulin, Federico Stefani, Nicolò Barozzi, et al. (58 vols., Venice, 1879), VI, pp. 259–60. See also Iain Fenlon, *The ceremonial city: history, memory and myth in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven, CT, 2007), pp. 129–30.

imprisoned, and he was freed.⁴¹ But, regardless of the authorship of the satirical attack, for a bookbinder to be considered as a possible perpetrator, he must have been literate enough (or considered to be so) to compose verses.

V

Bookselling, in contrast, was inevitably among the most literate professions of early modern Venice. Although illiteracy was common among tradesmen in early modern Italian cities, it would have been a serious disadvantage for booksellers, due to the nature of their activity and the clientele they attracted.⁴² Bookshops were places of aggregation in the urban landscape, where ideas and news were discussed;⁴³ the Aldine shop was reportedly where bored Venetians and visitors gathered ‘to see if there are any news’.⁴⁴

Unlike printing and bookbinding, bookselling was not a mechanical art. The ‘pregiudizio meccanico’ (‘mechanical prejudice’) contributed to defining urban social stratification, and acted as gatekeeper for those with a family history of manual professions; bookbinders, like many others, sat on the wrong side of it, that of the ‘vile’.⁴⁵ On the other hand, Tomaso Garzoni’s (1549–89) *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, an irreverent overview of the professions and walks of life of Venice,⁴⁶ stated that bookselling was a noble profession, because those who practise it ‘are always in the company of scholarly and honest men’ and that it ‘is not at all dirty in itself, but clean and polite’.⁴⁷ Bookbinders and booksellers both worked with books, earning very different degrees of prestige from it.

⁴¹ Sanudo, *I diarii*, VI, p. 264.

⁴² On illiteracy in tradesmen, see Armando Petrucci, ‘Scrittura, alfabetismo ed educazione grafica nella Roma del primo Cinquecento: da un libretto di conti di Maddalena pizzicarola in Trastevere’, *Scrittura e civiltà*, 2 (1978), pp. 163–207.

⁴³ Massimo Rospocher and Rosa Salzberg, ‘“El vulgo zanza”: spazi, pubblici, voci a Venezia durante le Guerre d’Italia’, *Storica*, 48 (2010), pp. 83–120, at pp. 95–105; Nuovo, *Book trade*, pp. 411–20. On commercial enterprises as spaces of communication in early modern Venice, see Filippo de Vivo, ‘Pharmacies as centres of communication in early modern Venice’, *Renaissance Studies*, 21 (2007), pp. 505–21; Evelyn Welch, ‘Space and spectacle in the Renaissance pharmacy’, *Medicina & Storia*, 8 (2008), pp. 127–58.

⁴⁴ See Martin Lowry, ‘The “New Academy” of Aldus Manutius: a Renaissance dream’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 58 (1976), pp. 378–420, at pp. 383–4.

⁴⁵ Enrico Valsertiati, ‘Il superamento del pregiudizio meccanico: mobilità sociale e geografica a Brescia tra prima e seconda dominazione veneziana’, in Andrea Gamberini, ed., *Mobilità sociale nel Medioevo italiano, 2: Stato e istituzioni, secoli XIV–XV* (Rome, 2017), pp. 189–214.

⁴⁶ See Paolo Cherchi, *Enciclopedia e politica della riscrittura. Tommaso Garzoni* (Pisa, 1981), pp. 41–82.

⁴⁷ Tomaso Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, ed. Paolo Cherchi and Beatrice Collina (Turin, 1996), p. 1335: ‘Per un’altra ragione si dice che la professione de’ librai sia molto nobile, perché sempre sono in compagnia di persone letterate e virtuose ... Ha del nobile parimente quest’arte perché non è sporca niente in se stessa, ma netta, et polita.’ Translation from Salzberg, *Ephemeral city*, p. 31. See Rosa Salzberg, ‘Masculine republics: establishing authority in the early modern Venetian printshop’, in Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline Van Gent, eds., *Governing masculinities in the early modern period: regulating selves and others* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 47–65, at pp. 54–5.

Across Europe, there was often little social recognition to be found in bookbinding and, according to binders themselves, there was also little profit to be made. They recognized that in their profession it was hard to make a profit or even just to make ends meet.⁴⁸ Christoph Ernst Prediger (fl. 1751), an eighteenth-century German binder, noted bitterly in his manual that no honest man could live off carefully binding books, and recommended employing one's family and maid for the lightest tasks.⁴⁹ Bookbinding was a time-consuming activity, as early manuals pointed out.⁵⁰ For scholars, spouses could be either a hindrance or a resource.⁵¹ For bookbinders, in contrast, they were employable hands: Angela and Laura, who worked in their aunt's husband's workshop (that of the printer Bernardino Benali), are the only laywomen occupied in bookbinding activities I was able to find in the Venetian Republic.⁵²

Another way for binders to improve their condition was geographical mobility: about half of the eighty-eight names in the survey indicate a provenance from outside Venice, the majority of them from within the Venetian Republic.⁵³ One Antonio, from Bergamo, the periphery of the republic, provided all sorts of services for the bookseller Antonio d'Avignone in Padua, from binding and illuminating books to cooking.⁵⁴ Binders practising in Venice or within the republic could also come from further afield, such as Nicholo 'darezo ligaduro de libiri', who may have come from Reggio Calabria ('da Rezo'), as the spelling suggests.⁵⁵ Professional identity in Venice was often connected with belonging to an ethnic or regional group, but there does not seem to have been a prevalence of one particular ethnicity among bookbinders.

From a social perspective, however, bookbinders could certainly be classified among the *popolani*, albeit not at the bottom of the class. The dowries

⁴⁸ Foot, *Bookbinders at work*, p. 120.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 118, 120, 133.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 115–18.

⁵¹ For spouses of scholars as hindrance, see Rosa Salzberg, 'The richest man in Italy: Aldo Manuzio and the value of male friendships', in Peter Sherlock and Megan Cassidy-Welch, eds., *Practices of gender in late medieval and early modern Europe* (Turnhout, 2008), pp. 177–98, at p. 195, for the case of Aldus Manutius. As a resource, see Ann M. Blair, *Too much to know: managing scholarly information before the modern age* (New Haven, CT, 2010), pp. 104–5.

⁵² ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 974, no. 7 (17 Sept. 1517). See Deborah Parker, 'Women in the book trade in Italy, 1475–1620', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 49 (1996), pp. 509–41, at pp. 520–1; Marco Santoro, 'Imprenditrici o "facenti funzioni"?'', in Marco Santoro, ed., *La donna nel Rinascimento meridionale. Atti del convegno internazionale, Roma, 11–13 novembre 2009* (Pisa, 2010), pp. 371–82, at p. 372. The nuns of the monastery of Santa Maria Maddalena in Padua bound missals: see Antonio Barzon, 'Saggi di rilegature (codici e incunabili della Biblioteca Capitolare)', in *Libri e stampatori in Padova. Miscellanea di studi storici in onore di G. Bellini, tipografo editore libraio* (Padua, 1959), pp. 297–318, at p. 306.

⁵³ On mobility in the Venetian book trade, see Salzberg, *Ephemeral city*, pp. 73–81.

⁵⁴ Antonio Sartori, 'Documenti padovani sull'arte della stampa nel sec. XV', in *Libri e stampatori in Padova*, pp. 111–231, at pp. 135–6. On Antonio Avignone, see Daniela Fattori, 'La bottega di un libraio padovano nel 1477', *Bibliofilia*, 112 (2010), pp. 229–43.

⁵⁵ He appears as a witness in ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 930, no. 579 (5 June 1529).

that bookbinders obtained from their marriages were typical for Venetian *popolani*.⁵⁶ Anastasia, widow of the bookbinder and bookseller Andrea de Longis, had brought 200 ducats as a dowry in the 1510s;⁵⁷ Lugrecia had a dowry of 230 ducats when she married her husband, Domenico da Soresina, in the first half of the century.⁵⁸ These numbers, while not small, are nonetheless far below not only those of the patriciate (whose dowries could amount to 20,000–50,000 ducats) but also those of printers, which often reached the lower thousands.⁵⁹

Binders do not seem to appear in the *redesima* of 1514, a sub-series of the self-assessment documents on property ownership provided by Venetians to the Savi alle Decime for tax-paying purposes.⁶⁰ When it comes to the rental market, however, some rented relatively expensive properties. According to Monica Chojnacka, 8 ducats was ‘a typical rent for a modest apartment in a working class neighborhood’.⁶¹ Tomaso, *ligador*, paid 11 ducats for a house in San Severo in Borgolochio;⁶² Giovanni Casilio, from Mantua, *ligatori librorum*, spent 26 on a house and workshop in San Giovanni Novo in 1547;⁶³ Nicolò Pasini paid 20 ducats for his workshop and 24 for his home in 1581 – though he seems to be atypical, as he was the owner of lands from which he derived income.⁶⁴ These rates are nevertheless lower than those of more prosperous bookmen (publishers in particular) and more in line with those of skilled artisans.⁶⁵ For other bookbinders, poverty must have been a real risk: Zuan Piero, *ligalibri*, was behind with his rent in 1540 and was threatened with eviction from his home in San Zulian.⁶⁶

Anthony Hobson argued that binders ‘were humble people, kept by the booksellers from public view’.⁶⁷ Indeed, the manual trappings of their

⁵⁶ On the dowries of artisans in Verona, see Zoe Farrell, ‘The materiality of marriage in the artisan community of Renaissance Verona’, *Historical Journal*, 63 (2020), pp. 243–66; see also Ioanna Iordanou, ‘Pestilence, poverty, and provision: re-evaluating the role of the *popolani* in early modern Venice’, *Economic History Review*, 69 (2016), pp. 801–22.

⁵⁷ The *instrumentum dotale* of Andrea and Anastasia, produced as proof in 1533, was dated 1516 (ASV, Giudici del Proprio, Vadimoni, b. 3, reg. 18, fo. 62v) (7 Oct. 1533); see also an inventory of her possessions, valued at 180 ducats, in ASV, Giudici del Proprio, Mobili, b. 3, reg. 5, fos. 217r–219r (7 Oct. 1533).

⁵⁸ As mentioned in Domenico’s will (ASV, Notarile, Atti, b. 209, no. 147, and b. 211, fos. 76v–77r).

⁵⁹ Grendler, *Roman inquisition*, p. 18; Stanley Chojnacki, ‘Dowries and kinsmen in early Renaissance Venice’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 5 (1975), pp. 571–600.

⁶⁰ The *decime* were a tax on estates. In 1514, a fire destroyed archives held at the Rialto, and therefore a new estimate (*redesima*) was compiled; see Bernardo Canal, ‘Il Collegio, l’Ufficio e l’Archivio dei Dieci Savi alle Decime in Rialto’, *Nuovo Archivio Veneto*, 16 (1908), pp. 115–50, 279–310. The 1514 *redesima* is available on the ASV website (<http://www.archiviodistatovenezia.it/>).

⁶¹ Monica Chojnacka, ‘Women, men, and residential patterns in early modern Venice’, *Journal of Family History*, 25 (2000), pp. 6–25, at p. 9.

⁶² ASV, San Lorenzo (Venezia), Atti, b. 9, reg. 3, unnumbered [Intrade del monasterio de S. Lorenzo in la contrada de S. Severo in Borgolochio]: no. 12 (undated).

⁶³ ASV, Notarile, Atti, b. 10642, fo. 258v (4 Nov. 1547).

⁶⁴ Grendler, *Roman inquisition*, p. 20.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–21.

⁶⁶ ASV, Giudici del Procurator, Extraordinario Nodari, reg. 29, fo. 73v (Sept. 1540).

⁶⁷ Hobson, *Renaissance book collecting*, p. 116.

profession did not fit the image of an intellectual book world, which booksellers, printers, and customers were all keen to promote. Booksellers, who had books bound for their shops or acted as intermediaries for patrons who purchased unbound volumes, constituted the source of much of the binders' revenues. Despite a generalized distrust towards intermediaries in Renaissance economic thought, this meant that booksellers exercised a fairly significant degree of control over the business of binders.⁶⁸ Some binders who worked for booksellers even signed contracts that forbade them from working for other dealers.⁶⁹

In this sense, bookbinders were in a different position from the artisans of early modern science, whose contribution to the methodology, craft, and thought of their time is considered crucial.⁷⁰ The examples presented here of bookbinders and patrons interacting directly are in the minority, which may also explain the lack of signatures in bindings: there is little scope for promoting one's work if opportunities for direct interaction with customers are limited. A similar situation occurred in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Rome and Turin, where booksellers and stationers made an active effort to keep bookbinders from conducting business personally with customers. By doing this, booksellers essentially controlled the bookbinding market, manoeuvring customer loyalty towards their own shops not just for books (and paper, writing supplies, etc.) but also for bindings. Simple bindings could be made *in situ* in the shops, while the rest were outsourced to professional bookbinders.⁷¹ Booksellers and stationers could thus present themselves as 'librai e legatori' (booksellers and bookbinders), to the detriment of binders' commerce.⁷²

However, there are also records of successful binders who personally interacted with customers, setting their own prices and providing services on their own terms. This paints a diverse picture of a profession and a market which must have included well-connected and possibly highly specialized craftsmen. Zuane, *ligador de libri*, was paid directly out of the *cassa* of the Patriarchate of Venice after binding several batches of books.⁷³ One Alberto, possibly the same as the one accused of a pasquinade in 1505, charged prices so outrageous that the scholar Andrea Navagero (1483–1529) complained strongly about them in a letter to Giambattista Ramusio (1485–1557) in 1515. Interestingly, Navagero was particularly irked at the price that Alberto was charging (6 *marcelli*) because he himself had provided the piece of skin for covering the book.⁷⁴ It is unknown how common this practice was, but it should be noted that in

⁶⁸ Evelyn Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: consumer cultures in Italy, 1400–1600* (New Haven, CT, 2005), pp. 40–1.

⁶⁹ See Stevens, 'A bookbinder in early seventeenth-century Milan', p. 318.

⁷⁰ Pamela H. Smith, 'Science on the move: recent trends in the history of early modern science', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 62 (2009), pp. 345–75, at p. 362.

⁷¹ Petrucci Nardelli, 'il legatore'.

⁷² Armando Petrucci, 'Sulla legatoria romana del XVIII sec.', *Bibliofilia*, 63 (1961), pp. 165–95.

⁷³ ASV, Mensa Patriarcale, b. 61, 1508–11, fo. 20 (various dates).

⁷⁴ Gabriele Mazzucco, 'Legature rinascimentali di edizioni di Aldo Manuzio', in Susy Marcon and Marino Zorzi, eds., *Aldo Manuzio e l'ambiente veneziano, 1494–1515* (Venice, 1994), pp. 135–79, at p. 136.

early modern sartorial businesses, by contrast, tailors often advised customers on the best fabric, bought the product themselves, and were reimbursed by the customers.⁷⁵

Other binders established long-lasting personal relationships with customers, to the point where they are mentioned in the customers' wills in a friendly and endearing fashion: such is the case of Bernardino Corsi, bookseller and 'highly skilled' binder, who bound several books pro bono for the notary and lawyer Tiberio Armano. Armano valued Bernardino's work so much that he stated he could not have repaid him fully even by providing him with legal services.⁷⁶ It is also possible that there were workshops making cheap bindings that were closely associated with booksellers, and independent craftsmen at a higher level working for the elite market.

Not only professional but also family networks – specifically marriages – tell stories of both adversity and social mobility. In the early 1490s, a trial took place after a theft in the house of the patrician Francesco Minio.⁷⁷ Witnesses testified to some recent quarrelling in the family, caused by young Margherita, who had come to the Minio household as a wet nurse, being in a position to breastfeed because she had just given birth to a child out of wedlock; she reportedly became the lover of Francesco's brother Alvisè. Witnesses stated that, before entering the family's service, she 'stood at the balcony' ('stabat ad balchiones'), a recognized custom of prostitutes.⁷⁸ Margherita had to go, so it was arranged for her to marry one Giovanni Pietro, a bookbinder in San Apollinare ('Ioannem Petrum ligatorem librorum de contrata S. Apollinaris'). As his wife, Margherita showed barely any respect for Giovanni Pietro, and rumour had it that she beat him regularly.

This whole episode gives clear social indicators: a bookbinder-bookseller was a humble enough man that he could be pressured into marrying a concubine, someone 'of fairly low standing' ('satis male nature').⁷⁹ But there is also one case of a bookbinder using marriage as a tool to climb the social ladder, albeit in an unconventional way.⁸⁰ Alberto 'who binds books' ('che liga libri') in San Zulian (now potentially in his third appearance) had managed to marry his daughter to Francesco, son of M(agist)ro Calcerando de Benedictis,

See also De Marinis, *La legatura*, I, p. 32: here a patron in Rome paid for 'boards, thread, leather, and metal furnishings'.

⁷⁵ See Jola Pellumbi, 'Revealing and concealing: official male dress in early modern Venice, 1520–1610' (PhD thesis, Kings College London, 2017), pp. 178, 220.

⁷⁶ ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 348, not. Giovanni Andrea Catti, no. 450 (5 Nov. 1615, *cedola* from 31 Oct.). I would like to thank Isabella Cecchini for pointing out this source to me.

⁷⁷ ASV, Santa Croce della Giudecca, b. 8, fasc. 464 (various dated in May 1493).

⁷⁸ See Diane Wolfthal, *In and out of the marital bed: seeing sex in Renaissance Europe* (New Haven, CT, 2010), pp. 82–5; Alexander Cowan, 'Seeing is believing: urban gossip and the balcony in early modern Venice', *Gender & History*, 23 (2011), pp. 721–38. On prostitution in Venice, see Paula C. Clarke, 'The business of prostitution in early Renaissance Venice', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 68 (2015), pp. 419–64.

⁷⁹ For examples of former concubines married off to men of lower social status, see Joanne M. Ferraro, *Marriage wars in late Renaissance Venice* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 105–8.

⁸⁰ On endo- and exogamy, see Anna Bellavitis, *Identité, mariage, mobilité sociale. Citoyennes et citoyens à Venise au XVIIe siècle* (Rome, 2001), pp. 235–4.

a wealthy Aragonese physician, with a dowry of 800 ducats and a dower of 2,000 ducats. As time passed and the couple struggled to conceive a child, Alberto ‘very astutely’ (‘cum ogni possibile astutia’) had an infant from the Ospedale della Pietà (the city’s orphanage) christened as the couple’s son, in order to gain control over money that was destined to finance poor students for as long as Francesco remained childless.⁸¹

One notable aspect of several of these documents is their ambiguity in indicating the professional profile of bookbinders. Alberto and Giovanni Pietro are called binders as well as booksellers (*librer*, *libraro*), as are Andrea de Longis and Domenico da Soresina, and many others, indicating that they engaged in multiple activities.⁸² Fluidity in professional roles in the early modern and modern book trade is a known phenomenon, and providing a diversity of services was common as a way of expanding existing businesses and dealing with competition. But how was this articulated in the specific case of early modern Venetian bookbinders?

VI

Relatively low literacy rates and social status alone cannot explain the lack of bookbinders in sources. Binders are, for instance, equally missing from Garzoni’s *La piazza universale*, which includes several destitute professions and individuals of questionable repute, but no binders. Like many forms of manufacturing, bookbinding is a complex craft. It encompasses a variety of tasks that can be completed in different sequences, and at different points in the lifespan of a book. Similarly, the roles of bookbinders are not univocal. A bookbinder could be involved in multiple trades: some of those who called themselves bookbinders did not, in fact, bind books; and some of those who did, preferred other denominations.⁸³ This was partly true of all professions within the book trade: in Renaissance Italy, *stampatori*, *librai*, and *bibliopole* were not exclusively printers or booksellers;⁸⁴ for the first century after the introduction of printing in Venice, individuals had ‘multifaceted careers’.⁸⁵ Bookbinders were frequently also stationers (*cartolari* or *bidelli*), involved in the sale of paper and of *libri da carta bianca* (pre-bound blank books).⁸⁶ In

⁸¹ ASV, Giudici del Procurator, Sentenze a legge, reg. 24, fos. 110v–115r.

⁸² For Alberto, see *ibid.*, fo. 113v. In ASV, Giudici del Proprio, Vadimoni, b. 3, reg. 18, fo. 62v (7 Oct. 1533), Andrea is called ‘librarius’, but elsewhere – e.g. ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 1184, no. 301 (1 June 1514); Notarile, Testamenti, b. 190, no. 341 (1521) – he is called bookbinder. For Domenico, see below.

⁸³ See Anthony Hobson, ‘Booksellers and bookbinders’, in Robin Myers and Michael Harris, eds., *A genius for letters: booksellers and bookselling from the 16th to the 20th century* (Winchester, 1995), pp. 1–14.

⁸⁴ Grendler, *Roman inquisition*, p. 4; Jane A. Bernstein, *Print culture and music in sixteenth-century Venice* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 9–11.

⁸⁵ Salzberg, *Ephemeral city*, p. 73.

⁸⁶ Anna Gialdini, ‘Selling paper in early modern Venice: paper-retailers and the “libri da carta bianca”’, in Daniel Bellingradt and Anna Reynolds, eds., *The paper trade of early modern Europe: practices, materials, networks* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2021), pp. 31–54.

the records of his rental payments every year in the 1510s, one Cristofolo da Pavia appeared alternately as *ligador de libri* and *bidelo*.⁸⁷ Similar overlapping of roles occurred regularly across early modern Europe.⁸⁸ And yet for Venetian bookbinders this professional fluidity seems particularly frequent, considering that about one third of the individuals in the corpus practised other professions (about another third are only mentioned once, as binders). One may even have taken religious vows: in 1485, ‘the priest Andrea Bidolo, bookbinder, whose office as priest is not confirmed’ is recorded as having mortally wounded a barber.⁸⁹

Due to their perceived lack of social prestige and the limitations imposed upon their work, in Venice we see this overlap play out in bookbinders’ attempts to climb the hierarchy of the local book trade. Benetto (Benedetto), known as Padoana (‘Benetto dicto Padoana ligator de libri’),⁹⁰ a prolific binder, asked for a privilege for printing in 1509.⁹¹ Another Venetian bookbinder-turned-printer was Bartolomeo Faletti, who operated in Rome, where he bound books in the shop of Paulus Manutius (1512–74).⁹² More commonly, binders also sold books. Some, such as Brancazio de Zenaro (1596) and Niccolò Tolin (1628), requested to join the *Arte dei Libreri e Stampadori* in order to do so;⁹³ others tried to avoid the financial burden of the entrance fee and the obligations of membership. Being not just artisans but retailers, and selling books without booksellers as intermediaries, meant higher revenues for binders. The *Arte* frequently complained of binders and paper retailers selling books, especially in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁹⁴ Padoan and Mandelli, mentioned at the beginning of this article, rejected the accusation by calling themselves ‘simple bookbinders’: an attempt to claim innocence while, perhaps, showing that they knew their place in the food chain.

One revealing case in the matter of professional identities is that of Sebastiano Danieli, a witness at the redaction of the will of Joannis Poesius in 1519 who signed as ‘bookseller’ (‘Sebastian de Danieli librerr’). The notary, however, copied the names of both witnesses in a new version of the will, when Ioannis left an additional sum of money to his wife. Here, he called

⁸⁷ For instance, ASV, Mensa Patriarcale, b. 157, I, fo. 70, II, fo. 111, III, fo. 160; b. 159, I, fo. 111, II, fo. 160 (various dates).

⁸⁸ For England and France, see Foot, *Bookbinders at work*, pp. 35–40.

⁸⁹ ASV, Signori di notte, Criminale, reg. 15, fo. 37r (23 Mar. 1485): ‘Presbiter Andreas Bidolus ligator librorum qui non constat off(ici)o sit presbiter’.

⁹⁰ He has been identified with the Rosettenmeister: see Ilse Schunke, ‘Venezianische Renaissanceeinbände: ihre Entwicklung und ihre Werkstätten’, in *Studi di bibliografia e di storia in onore di Tammaro De Marinis* (4 vols., Verona, 1964), IV, pp. 123–200, at pp. 153–4.

⁹¹ ASV, Collegio, Notatorio, reg. 16, fo. 40v (28 Feb. 1509 = 1508 *m.v.*). See Rinaldo Fulin, ‘Documenti per servire alla storia della tipografia veneziana’, *Archivio Veneto*, 23 (1882), pp. 84–212, at p. 171.

⁹² Tiziana Sterza, ‘Manuzio, Paolo’, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 69 (Rome, 2007), pp. 250–4.

⁹³ ASV, Arti, b. 163, no. I, fo. 120v (17 Dec. 1596), and no. III, fo. 58r–v (21 Mar. 1628).

⁹⁴ See Laura Carnelos, ‘Libri da grida, da banco e da bottega: editoria di consumo a Venezia tra norma e contraffazione (XVII–XVIII)’ (PhD thesis, Venice, 2009), pp. 16–63.

Sebastiano a bookbinder employed in a bookshop ('magister Sebastianus de Danielibus ligator librorum in apotheca domini Bernardini Stagnini mercatoris librorum').⁹⁵ The preference for a more prestigious professional identity, indicative of a desire for greater social standing, might have contributed to making binders less visible in the sources. Similarly, Domenico de Soresina self-identified as a *librer* in his own will (1553) and those of several others, but was called a bookbinder twenty-five years earlier, when he was named as the intended victim of an attempted murder (the instigator being a bookseller and one of the perpetrators his apprentice, possibly indicating professional strife).⁹⁶ Unlike Sebastiano Danieli's case, where the documents were created in quick succession, for Domenico de Soresina this may also indicate a career trajectory from the more humble occupation of binder to the more prestigious role of bookseller.

Diversifying services was a key strategy in customer contact and retention, one that booksellers regularly implemented by offering quills, parchment, paper, and binding. Similarly, bookbinders sometimes branched out into other mechanical arts to gain further competences and an edge over the competition, which ironically led booksellers to take a position against the confusion between 'artist' and 'retailer'.⁹⁷ This is clear when looking at the mechanics of transmission of knowledge in Venetian bookbindings, for which apprenticeship contracts are the main source.

Sons often learned their fathers' professions, but this was not always the case.⁹⁸ In 1596, Francesco Luse, an eleven-year-old Venetian boy, was taken on as an apprentice 'in the art of goldsmithing' ('alarte del zugelier') by the bookseller Battista de Rocho for five years.⁹⁹ As Battista was in the book trade, he perhaps taught young Francesco the art of making metal furniture, jewelled bindings, gold tooling, or edge gilding.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, one fourteen-year-old Cristofolo was taken in as an apprentice 'al arte del indorar libri' ('in the art of gilding books') by Zuane Garzoni in 1592.¹⁰¹ The involvement of goldsmiths in the making of bindings is also attested in payments such as those made in 1480 to the maestro Alvise to rebind Gospels and other books covered in velvet and gilt in silver;¹⁰² similar payments were made in 1574 to Zam Battista

⁹⁵ ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 190, no. 367 (20 June 1519).

⁹⁶ ASV, Avogaria di Comun, Raspe, b. 3666/26, fos. 43r, 44r (= fos. 51r, 52r) (11 and 12 Oct. 1528).

⁹⁷ Carnelos, 'Libri da grida', pp. 51–2.

⁹⁸ An example of a son following in his father's footsteps is that of the stationers Battista de Sano and his son Domenico (see Gialdini, 'Selling paper'). Francesco de Longis, son of Andrea, discussed above, was also a bookseller (ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 976, no. 127; b. 209, nos. 46 and 269). On apprenticeships in Venice, including in the book professions, see Anna Bellavitis, Martina Frank, and Valentina Sapienza, eds., *Garzoni. Apprendistato e formazione tra Venezia e l'Europa in età moderna* (Mantua, 2017).

⁹⁹ ASV, Giustizia Vecchia, Accordi dei garzoni, b. 115, reg. 157, fo. 53r.

¹⁰⁰ See the case of the goldsmith maestro Alvise in Padua in the 1520s (Barzon, 'Saggi di rilegature', p. 314). On relations between stationers and goldsmiths, see Anna Melograni, 'Oro, battiloro, orefici e la produzione libraria tra Medioevo e Rinascimento', in Paola Venturelli, ed., *Oro dai Visconti agli Sforza. Smalti e oreficeria nel Ducato di Milano* (Milan, 2011), pp. 63–77.

¹⁰¹ ASV, Giustizia Vecchia, Accordi dei garzoni, b. 115, reg. 155, fo. 103v.

¹⁰² Barzon, 'Saggi di rilegature', p. 314.

Rizoletti, a jeweller in Rialto, for the gold and silver covers of a book.¹⁰³ Returning to apprenticeships, Giovan Battista Ninfa started working as an apprentice as a 'ligator de libri in oro' for Battista Carè dalli Canoni in 1626; perhaps because he was seventeen, he was to be trained for just one year.¹⁰⁴ Apprenticeships usually lasted longer (twelve-year-old Giacomo de Rotta from Bergamo trained in bookbinding with Paulo Grani Romano for six years, starting in 1598).¹⁰⁵ The length of these apprenticeships indicates that, despite the low appreciation it received and the limited income it provided, the craft of bookbinding required lengthy training and specific competences.

As a consequence of booksellers' roles as intermediaries between binders and customers, it is often impossible to say whether a bookbinder operated an independent business or was employed by a bookseller. In 1530, a bookbinder called Marco testified against one Hyeronimo Morando, in favour of the famous bookseller Ottaviano Scotto.¹⁰⁶ Marco had been present at the purchase of several books on the part of Morando, who had subsequently failed to honour his debt.¹⁰⁷ Marco might have been present at the sale either because he worked on Scotto's premises or because he himself was doing business with Scotto; but six years later he had his own workshop and bookshop, if he was the 'Marco librario ad insigne Annuntiate' ('Marco, bookseller, at the sign of the Annunciation') who was in debt to the widow of Ottaviano's cousin Amedeo Scotto.¹⁰⁸

As far as the Aldine enterprise is concerned, the matter of the employment of binders is hotly debated. Aldus's network certainly included bookbinders, in the same way that it included, for instance, illuminators.¹⁰⁹ However, no binder has been convincingly associated with the Aldine Press at the time of Aldus the Elder, even though a 1506 letter by the scholar Jacob Spiegel (1483–c. 1547)¹¹⁰ indicates that Aldus at least had one or more binders whom he trusted personally – hardly unexpected for a printer of his prestige.

Gabriele Mazzucco identified patterns in binding techniques and tooling used on books from the Aldine Press.¹¹¹ Recent studies by Nicholas Pickwoad and Mirjam Foot have pointed out the great diversity in style, decoration, and economic investment in the contemporary bindings found on

¹⁰³ ASV, Procuratori di San Marco, Procuratori 'de supra', Chiesa, Registri, b. 3 (28 Feb. 1574 = 1573 m.v.).

¹⁰⁴ ASV, Giustizia Vecchia, Accordi dei garzoni, b. 118, reg. 164, fo. 199v.

¹⁰⁵ ASV, Giustizia Vecchia, Accordi dei garzoni, b. 115, reg. 158, fo. 128v.

¹⁰⁶ On the Scotto printers, see Bernstein, *Print culture*, pp. 115–28.

¹⁰⁷ ASV, Giudici dell'esaminador, Testamenti rilevati per breviario, vol. 15, fo. 22v (29 July 1530). See Hobson, 'Booksellers and bookbinders', p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ ASV, Giudici del Procurator, Extraordinario Cogitori, b. 15, fo. 8r–v (9 Dec. 1536).

¹⁰⁹ See Helena K. Szépe, 'The book as companion, the author as friend: Aldine octavos illuminated by Benedetto Bardoni', *Word and Image*, 11 (1995), pp. 77–99.

¹¹⁰ Spiegel sent a poorly bound copy of the Aldine *Pontanus* to Aldus, imploring him to take care that the 'dearest' book be rebound in Venice and sent back. Pierre de Nolhac, *Les correspondants d'Alde Manuce. Matériaux nouveaux d'histoire littéraire* (Rome, 1888), pp. 69–70, no. 58.

¹¹¹ Mazzucco, 'Legature rinascimentali'.

Aldines;¹¹² while Carlo Federici and Melania Zanetti highlighted the consistency of features and materials among Aldines in Greek, suggesting that Aldus's customers had a common preference for a particular binder, or even that a binder worked on the premises of the Aldine shop.¹¹³ Anthony Hobson, however, suggested that the Mendoza Binder was the first bookbinder to be continuously employed by the Aldine Press, much later than Aldus's death.¹¹⁴

Some booksellers owned bookbinding tools, perhaps indicating that they employed binders in their bookshops.¹¹⁵ Cristoforo Zabata, mentioned above, rented out presses, cutting knives, measuring tools, pincers, and several dozen finishing tools to his colleague Francesco Borlasca in 1583.¹¹⁶ The inventory compiled after the death of Giuseppe Semini, a bookseller in Rome, in the same year, showed that he owned bookbinding tools: he clearly operated on a large scale, as his shop contained copious amounts of French parchment, seven presses, and almost 250 finishing tools.¹¹⁷ At times, the ownership of bookbinding tools reveals unexpected associations of activities, as in the case of a barber in 1625 Naples, who also worked as a bookbinder for the Jesuits and owned his own tools.¹¹⁸

One further profession of Renaissance Venice should be taken into consideration: that of leather workers. These highly skilled craftsmen, called *cuoridoro*, obtained independent guild status in the sixteenth century and had over seventy workshops in early modern Venice.¹¹⁹ They worked and tooled all sorts of items covered in leather, including chairs, boxes, purses, quivers, and shields. While techniques often differed, there must have been some overlap or encounters between the activities of leather workers and bookbinders. Contacts between the two professional categories certainly existed, inasmuch as they bought the same leather imported to Venice from Spain, northern Africa, Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and Istria.¹²⁰ In some cases, like those of

¹¹² Nicholas Pickwoad, 'Books bound after what manner you please', in Mario Infelise, ed., *Aldo Manuzio. La costruzione del mito* (Venice, 2017), pp. 226–58; Mirjam M. Foot, 'The binders who worked for the bookshop "al segno del'ancora et dolphin"', in Natale Vacalebri, ed., *Five centuries later: Aldus Manutius: culture, typography and philology* (Florence and Milan, 2018), pp. 95–101.

¹¹³ Carlo Federici and Melania Zanetti, 'Le legature dei libri di Aldo', in Infelise, ed., *Aldo Manuzio*, pp. 198–225.

¹¹⁴ Anthony Hobson, 'Was there an Aldine bindery?', in David S. Zeidberg and Fiorella Superbi Gioffredi, eds., *Aldus Manutius and Renaissance culture: essays in memory of Franklin D. Murphy: acts of an international conference (Venice and Florence, 14–17 June 1994)* (Florence, 1998), pp. 237–45.

¹¹⁵ Petrucci, 'Sulla legatoria romana'.

¹¹⁶ In Ruffini, *Cristoforo Zabata*, pp. 36, 203–4.

¹¹⁷ Francesco Barberi, 'Un inventario e un catalogo di librai romani del Cinquecento', in *Miscellanea in memoria di Giorgio Cencetti* (Turin, 1973), pp. 339–61, esp. 356–7.

¹¹⁸ See Vincenzo Trombetta, 'Libri e biblioteche della Compagnia di Gesù a Napoli dalle origini all'Unità d'Italia', *Hereditas Monasteriorum*, 4 (2014), pp. 127–60, at p. 128.

¹¹⁹ Anna Contadini, 'Cuoridoro: tecnica e decorazione di cuoi dorati veneziani e italiani con influssi islamici', in Ernst J. Grube, ed., *Arte veneziana e arte islamica. Atti del primo simposio internazionale sull'arte veneziana e l'arte islamica* (Venice, 1989), pp. 231–51. Zuleika Murat, 'Leather manufacturing and circulating models in the Middle Ages: from a Byzantine patena in Halberstadt to a Veneto-Cretan icon in Ljubljana', *Zbornik za Umetnostno Zgodovino*, 47 (2011), pp. 75–97, at p. 84.

¹²⁰ Mario Gallina, 'Un aspetto poco noto dell'economia veneto-cretese: il commercio delle pelli nella seconda metà del Trecento (dai registri notarili candioti)', *Thesaurismata*, 39–40 (2009–10),

Baldassarre Scariglia and Masone di Maio in fifteenth-century Naples, we know that artisans worked at the intersection between the two arts: Scariglia, the court bookbinder, also made leather decorations; di Maio was a skilled leather worker who also made bindings.¹²¹ The link between the professions, however, has yet to be explored in depth.

VII

In Venice, securing a good position in the cultural and economic topography of the city was particularly important because customers moved around on foot.¹²² Evidence that bookbinders tried to gain access to the bookselling market also comes from the locations of their workshops.¹²³ Unlike printers, who operated all over Venice, booksellers and bookbinders gathered around the busiest, but also priciest, areas of the city, where political affairs were conducted and information exchanged, and where wealthy customers came for their shopping: the streets around and especially south of the Rialto bridge, towards San Marco.¹²⁴ This part of the city, known as the Mercerie, was where commerce was most lively in the city, and exactly where the binder Nicolò Pasini had his shop, while one Battista had his in Rialto.¹²⁵

Some parishes in this area, such as San Zulian and San Bartolomio, were as popular with booksellers as they were with binders for the catalysing power they had on customers. Over time, Calle delle Acque, a street running alongside the church of San Salvador towards the Mercerie, was the location of the shops of the bookseller and binder Domenico da Soresina (1543; 'al San Marco'), the bookseller Zuane da Brugniera (1547), the etcher and bookseller Giovanni Franco (1573; 'all'Elefanta'), the printers Iseppo Foresto (1550s; 'al Pellegrino') and Giacomo Bendolo (1584–5; 'alla Corona'), and finally the Florentine binder Francesco de Bartole (who was killed in 1482 by Leonardo, a jeweller from Florence, and his partner-in-crime, one Sebastiano,

pp. 57–89; Benjamin Arbel, 'Venice's maritime empire in the early modern period', in Dursteler, ed., *Companion to Venetian history*, pp. 125–253, at p. 230.

¹²¹ Angela Pinto, 'Legature di epoca aragonese nella Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli', *Bulletin du bibliophile*, 2 (2001), pp. 239–69, at pp. 241–3. See also the leather-covered boxes, the tooling of at least one of which is attributed to Clovis Eve, bookbinder at the court of France, included in *Catalogue de reliures du XVe au XIXe siècle, en vente à la librairie Gumuchian & Cie.* (Paris, 1929), pp. 64–6, nos. 129bis–130, pl. L.

¹²² On the Rialto market, see Fenlon, *Ceremonial city*, p. 236.

¹²³ It is not always possible to know whether the indication refers to a home or workshop.

¹²⁴ See Fernanda Ascarelli and Marco Menato, *La tipografia del '500 in Italia* (Florence, 1989), pp. 327–445, for the locations of many printing shops. See also Bernstein, *Print culture*, pp. 12–13. On the focal areas of the city, see Filippo de Vivo, 'I luoghi della cultura a Venezia nel primo Cinquecento (1509–1530)', in Sergio Luzzatto and Gabriele Pedullà, eds., *Atlante della letteratura italiana* (Turin, 2010), I, pp. 708–18. For the locations of booksellers, see Carnelos, 'Libri da grida', pp. 152–68; Nuovo, *Book trade*, pp. 22, 327; Salzberg, *Ephemeral city*, p. 50.

¹²⁵ See Filippo de Vivo, 'Walking in sixteenth-century Venice: mobilizing the early modern city', *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 19 (2016), pp. 115–41, at p. 125. Pasini: Grendler, *Roman inquisition*, p. 20. Battista: ASV, Notarile, Atti, b. 378, fo. 554r–v (9 Sept. 1550).

picturesquely known as ‘Tartaro’).¹²⁶ Yet properties in this area were expensive, and sources also show binders living and working in neighbouring locations, such as San Canzian, San Vidal, or San Moisè.

VIII

By looking at the lack of sources as a ‘present absence’, and by interpreting the economic and social indications of those that exist, despite how rarely they describe professional activities, the dynamics that shaped the place of bookbinders in the book trade come to light. The book trade of early modern Venice was a complex cosmos in which different situations occurred: bookbinders taking customers’ orders or struggling with their inability to do so; binders working independently or with booksellers – possibly even on their premises; binders marrying up or accepting a patrician’s rejected lover as spouse; binders struggling to make ends meet or expanding their businesses. The struggle with booksellers is clear: binders could not compete with them for revenue, connections, location, or potential for expansion. The distribution of books required networks and money: bookbinders had little of either.¹²⁷ The ‘invisible technicians’ of Venetian books become all the more invisible through booksellers’ attempts to keep them on the margins, and through their own ambition to be recognized instead as members of more prestigious professions. It is by looking at absence even more than presence that bookbinders become fully formed in their attempts to move away from economic, geographical, and social peripheries.

Acknowledgements. I am grateful to Filippo de Vivo, Nicholas Pickwoad, Rosa Salzberg, Mirjam Foot, Enrico Valseriati, Jaap Geraerts, Robyn Adams, Matt Symonds, and Jacqueline Glomski for their helpful feedback. I am also grateful to Davide Drago, Francesca Zugno, and Andrea Erbošo for sharing their research with me, and to the anonymous referees for their comments.

Funding Statement. The research for this article was partly supported by a Gladys Kriebler Delmas Foundation Commonwealth Grant for Venetian Research.

Supplementary Material. To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X21000728>.

¹²⁶ For the Calle delle Acque, see Hobson, *Renaissance book collecting*, p. 106. Soresina: ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 1017, no. 228 (1543); ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 1203, no. 16 (Aug. 1549). Brugniera: ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 1084, no. 55. Franco: *CERL Thesaurus*, cni00037050, <https://data.cerl.org/thesaurus/cni00037050>. Foresto: *CERL Thesaurus*, cni00020803, <https://data.cerl.org/thesaurus/cni00020803>. Bendolo: *CERL Thesaurus*, cni00020110, <https://data.cerl.org/thesaurus/cni00020110>. Bartole: ASV, Avogaria di Comun, Raspe, b. 3655/15, [1482], fo. 37r–v (= fo. 100r–v) (1482). On booksellers’ signs in Venice, see Giacomo Moro, ‘Insegne librarie e marche tipografiche in un registro veneziano del ’500’, *Bibliofilia*, 91 (1989), pp. 51–80.

¹²⁷ Grendler, *Roman inquisition*, p. 16; Nuovo, *Book trade*, pp. 47–96.

Cite this article: Gialdini A (2022). Bookbinders in the Early Modern Venetian Book Trade. *The Historical Journal* 65, 901–921. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X21000728>