On 6 February 2015, conferences and other such events marking the quincentenary of the death of Aldus Manutius took place at his birthplace Bassiano, at the Warburg Institute in London, in Oxford and in Lviv (Ukraine), one day later in Chicago and again in Oxford, while Cambridge University Library also opened a superb little exhibition of its Aldines. This we can learn from the website The Manutius Network 2015 (later published in The Library, 7th ser. 17, 2016, pp. 336-40), where its compiler, Paolo Sachet, lists thirty-four exhibitions and twenty-one conferences held from the commemoration date up to June 2016.

Taken together the exhibitions are a celebration of the world-wide recognition of Aldus’s work, the conferences being mostly devoted to analysis of his success as publisher and the factors that contributed to the exceptional rate of survival of his publications. Reasons for this are not difficult to find in the books themselves. Aldus invented a new form of presenting classical texts in Latin, Greek and a few in Italian in small books, ‘enchiridia’ for classicists but also attractive for a larger public. Although based on ancient sources and edited by the best scholars of his day, their octavo format and typography in newly designed italic and Greek founts offered a light-footed approach to the ancient texts that gave them new appeal. The intimacy offered by small formats had been known in print from the 1470s, mainly in books for private devotion; pocket books of the classics was an innovation that immediately became a success story, to be rediscovered several times in the history of publishing. Aldus added to their charm by issuing copies on special paper or vellum, and gave a new lease of life to the Venetian tradition of illuminating printed books with wonderful paintings.

The subject of the colloquium held at the Warburg Institute was

not Aldus himself but how the reputation of his books fared in the 500 years between their first appearance and our time. For their publication the papers presented on this occasion are divided so as to highlight three aspects of his after life: the continuation of the publishing dynasty by Aldus’s son Paolo and his grandson Aldus the Younger, the dissemination of their books during and after these years, and the bibliophile collecting of Aldines. In the years after Aldus's death his in-laws Andrea Torresani and family took over until Paolo came of age. He and his son, Aldus the Younger attempted to keep up the high standards set by the founder of the dynasty. Ludovica Braidato relates Paolo's complaints that he was obliged to give all his time to the printing house, leaving no time to fulfill his ambitions as a scholar. Nevertheless he published works of his own including important anthologies of his correspondence with fellow-humanists. Shanti Graheli’s chapter concentrates on the episode when the Accademia Veneziana harnessed Paolo’s experience as a scholarly printer to bring out an ambitious series of over 600 publications. The notion of a Manutian house-style was to be applied to designing the style suited to an institutional press. Paolo made a rapid start in the summer of 1558, but in the troubled times of the mid-sixteenth century only a fraction of the proposed titles were published, the venture ended early in 1559, and Paolo moved the Aldine printing house to Rome. When his son Aldo succeeded him he was not favoured either by the turbulence of the times, but that was not the only reason why the enterprise foundered. The end of the Manutian dynasty came in 1597 with Aldo’s sudden death, ‘per troppa crapula’ (as a contemporary sneered), and similar terms may describe the state in which he left his business. Angela Nuovo dissects the course of this demise. Much circumstantial detail is revealed in the correspondence of Aldo’s associate, Niccolò Manassi, who tried to continue the business while dealing with the numerous debts. She discovered this source in the Pinelli collection in the Biblioteca Trivulziana in Milan and publishes it here in full. This valuable contribution to Aldine history includes the various attempts to dispose of the library, accumulated over a century of publishing but as it turned out of disappointing value.

The second part of the book begins with Luca Rivali’s overview
of the ownership of Aldine editions in Italy. The patchy trail of provenance research reveals such early owners as scholars and students at various level of distinction, and occasionally a patron, as for example Isabella d’Este, duchess of Mantua. In 1501, as soon as the first small-format Aldines were printed, she gives instructions for special copies ‘in cartha bona’. Do we see here a beginning of collecting by a bibliophile? The question how to define ‘book-collecting’ as distinct from other motivations for ownership is briefly raised by Rivali. Following Seymour de Ricci he considers Consul Smith the first collector of Aldines in Italy, with fifty-one copies in the library that he sold in 1763 en bloc to George III. Joseph Smith gave only his incunabula special treatment by compiling separately issued lists, including a few printed by Aldus. But he never singled out the post–1500 Aldines. Such a list had indeed been compiled as early as 1720 for the catalogue of the auction planned to be held in The Hague by Abraham de Hondt of the collection of Georg Wilhelm, Freiherr von Hohendorf, as noted in the final chapter by G. Scott Clemons. This collection was sold en bloc to Prince Eugene of Savoy and thus became part of the Hofbibliothek in Vienna. The claim to be the earliest collectors of Aldines in Italy rather belongs to Andrea Redetti whose catalogue (undated) includes a separate list of Aldine editions; it was bought by Mauro Pinelli, whose collection was dispersed in a London auction in 1789.

Collecting Aldines had started in France at a much earlier date, introduced there by Jean Grolier after he had spent some years in Milan (1509–1521). On his return to Paris and the court he promoted the interests of the firm. Through the collections of Grolier and also of De Thou, father and son, and indeed of François Ier himself, the Aldine books basked in an aura of courtly prestige. In the course of the seventeenth century they were eclipsed as collectibles by the Elseviers, whose little books were suited for even smaller pockets, while classical scholarship had advanced. But in the course of the eighteenth century they became fashionable again in France, in socially diverse circles of bibliophiles where rogue aristocrats met successful money makers. In a fascinating chapter François Dupuigrenet Desrousilles and Jean Viardot offer a meditation on the fluctuation in appreciation and values, and the influence of the
book trade on notions of rarity. Collecting Aldines in France reached its apogee in 1812 with the publication of Renouard’s bibliography *Annales de l'imprimerie des Aldes*, but the taste for it waned from about 1830. The Aldine collection of the Duc d’Aumale, preserved in the Musée Condé in Chantilly, was largely acquired in England during the duke’s exile after the revolution of 1848. Collecting Aldines had by then become an English mania.

Paolo Sachet presents in a short chapter his proposal to investigate the British collecting of Aldines on the basis of sale catalogues, which he considers still under-exploited (a position somewhat undermined by his footnotes). Nicholas Poole-Wilson demonstrates the scope and intensity of English Aldine collecting by telling with much background detail the story of three transactions. After Renouard’s Aldines were sold in London in 1828, the young and enterprising bookseller Thomas Thorpe promptly issued a catalogue of almost 700 Aldine items, many of which were former Renouard copies. The other two stories are cases of entrepreneurial failure. The London bookseller James Toovey compiled in 1880 an exceptionally fine (and pretentious) catalogue of his Aldine collection, offering it for sale *en bloc*. The collection failed to sell until in 1899 his grandson sold the books to J. P. Morgan. Finally, Poole-Wilson relates the misfortunes of the Aldine collection described in the Quaritch catalogue of 1929 and yet again intended for *en bloc* sale. The collection was expertly put together, the *tour d'horizon* of its highlights reading like an Aldine bibliophile’s vision of paradise, but hardly had the catalogue been issued there came the Wall Street crash. The books had to be sold piecemeal. Poole-Wilson does not reveal when (or if) the last one was sold. Yet this chapter is a delight for collectors.

In the final essay G. Scott Clemons fully answers the question if there is anything left to be revealed after centuries of Aldine bibliography. Thirty years of collecting led him to further explorations. He selects items in his collection to illustrate some of his discoveries, for example counterfeits of the easy-to-imitate octavo editions. Aldus and his successors fought back with privileges, such as the papal privilege threatening excommunication. In addition his essay gives a concise and lively overview of the history of the whole dynasty.
From the collection of G. Scott Clemons, with his kind permission.
Erasmus greatly enlarged the second edition of Adagia. The printer’s device represents the dolphin for speed and the anchor for stability of production.

The book ends with the fully illustrated record of a small exhibition of Aldines held at the British Library, curated by Jill Kraye, Stephen Parkin and Paolo Sachet.