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on Watermarks in Digital Collections

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L'arte della stampa nel Rinascimento italiano by
**Ferdinando Ongania (1894): a source of
watermarks for the Briquet catalogue.**

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Ferdinando Ongania, 1842-1911

Ferdinando Ongania was a bookseller and minor publisher in Venice from 1871 to 1911. His bookstore, located under the Procuratie Nuove in Piazza San Marco, specialized in the production and sale of illustrated art books.

One of his most well-known publications was *L'arte della stampa nel Rinascimento italiano* (1894), which was also issued in French and English.

Divided into two volumes, the work contains heliotype reproductions of title pages, illustrations, type, woodcut initials, and tracings of watermarks, taken from 122 editions printed in Venice from 1469 to 1539, with a preponderance of incunabula.

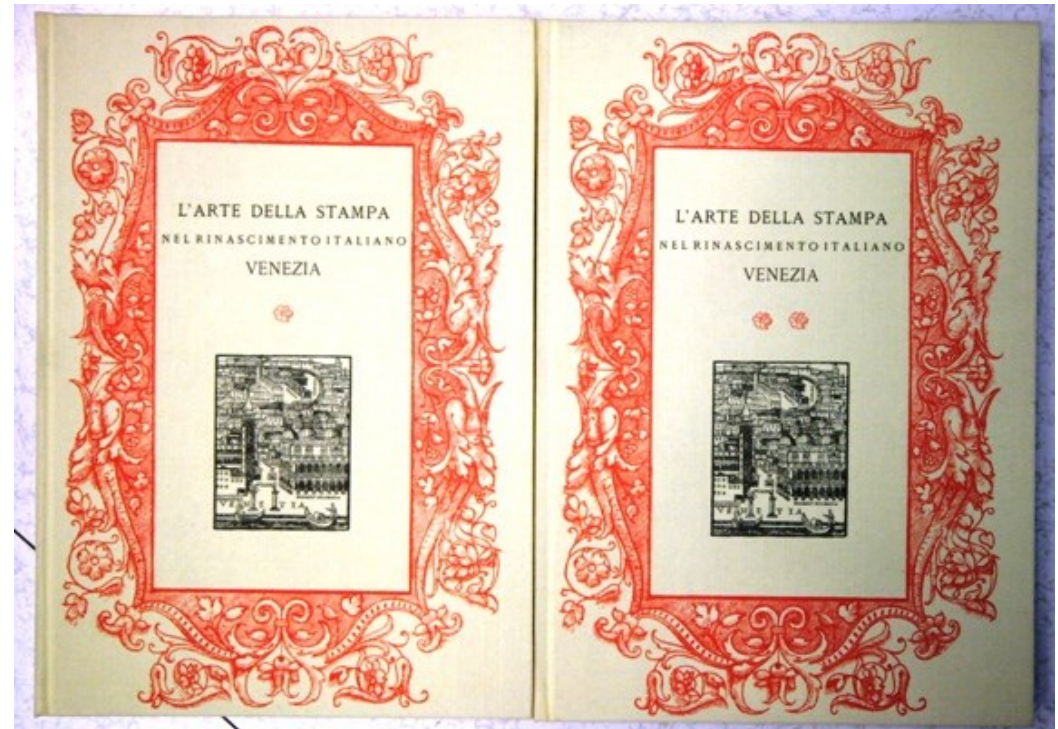


Ferd. Ongania Succ. - Anno 1871.

L'arte della stampa nel Rinascimento italiano, **Ferdinando Ongania, 1894.**

The publication was the first – and only – work in a planned series of illustrated art books about Renaissance publishing centers, and inevitably it was dedicated to Venice.

The facsimiles, printed in red and black, visually trace the history of Venetian printing. It starts with the origins with the brothers John and Wendelin from Speyer, passes through Aldus Manutius, and extends to the printing of music with Antonio Gardano. Following a brief introduction by Ongania himself, the text is signed by the then Prefect of the Biblioteca Marciana, Carlo Castellani (1822-1897). He wrote the historical introduction, as well as notes about book bindings, publishers' marks, music printing, paper mills, and watermarks.



For the compilation of *Les filigranes* (1907), Briquet employed the French version of Ongania, *L'art de l'imprimerie pendant la Renaissance italienne à Venise* (1895). The images are the same, whereas the introductory texts were translated into French by Médéric Le Monnier.

Rather than two volumes, the French version was issued as a single volume, which also included a unified index listing all the texts that Ongania had used as sources for his images, which is very helpful.

From Ongania's work, Briquet extracted 206 references, of which 107 were primary, i.e., the watermark is reproduced in *Les filigranes*, and 99 were secondary, i.e., the watermark comes from another source.

Here is the index of the French reprint, which served as the template for developing the lists in the research conducted here.

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586. Venise, 1504. Filigr. emprunté à Ongania
(p. 170, n° 4).

The primary references within *Les Filigranes* related to Ongania's text, provide the following information:

- The reference number;
- The place of publication;
- The publication year of the printed text from which the watermark is taken;
- The page and watermark number from Ongania's text.

These references can be considered *incomplete* due to the limited information they provide. For example, the reference omits the author and the title of the edition from which the watermark was originally traced. So, anyone wanting to know more must consult the original work by Ongania, which is not easy to find.

En passant, for the 1968 Jubilee Edition of Briquet edited by Allan Stevenson, it was not understood that the Ongania references were to printed books and therefore they are missing from the specific index for printed sources which Stevenson added.

The first phase of my research was to identify the 122 editions cited by Ongania in the GW and ISTC databases for the 15th century, and in Edit16 for the 16th century. The long-term plan is to integrate these references into *Briquet Reloaded*, with the data Briquet had omitted.

Many of the incunabula and Aldines cited by Ongania are quite common, so in a second phase I examined, book in hand, a sample of the editions (10) in the libraries at Udine, in particular the Biblioteca Arcivescovile, the Biblioteca del Seminario and the Biblioteca civica Vincenzo Joppi. I then ventured further afield and viewed the copies held in libraries in Venice, at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana and at the Biblioteca del Museo Correr. For all the editions, Ongania specifically states where he saw the book, so in the Venetian libraries I knew that I was looking at the same copies as he did 130 years ago.

Of the 122 editions listed by Ongania:

81 comes from the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana;

24 from the Biblioteca del Museo Correr;

10 from the Leo Samuel Olschki (1861-1940) bookshop;

2 from the Biblioteca Querini Stampalia;

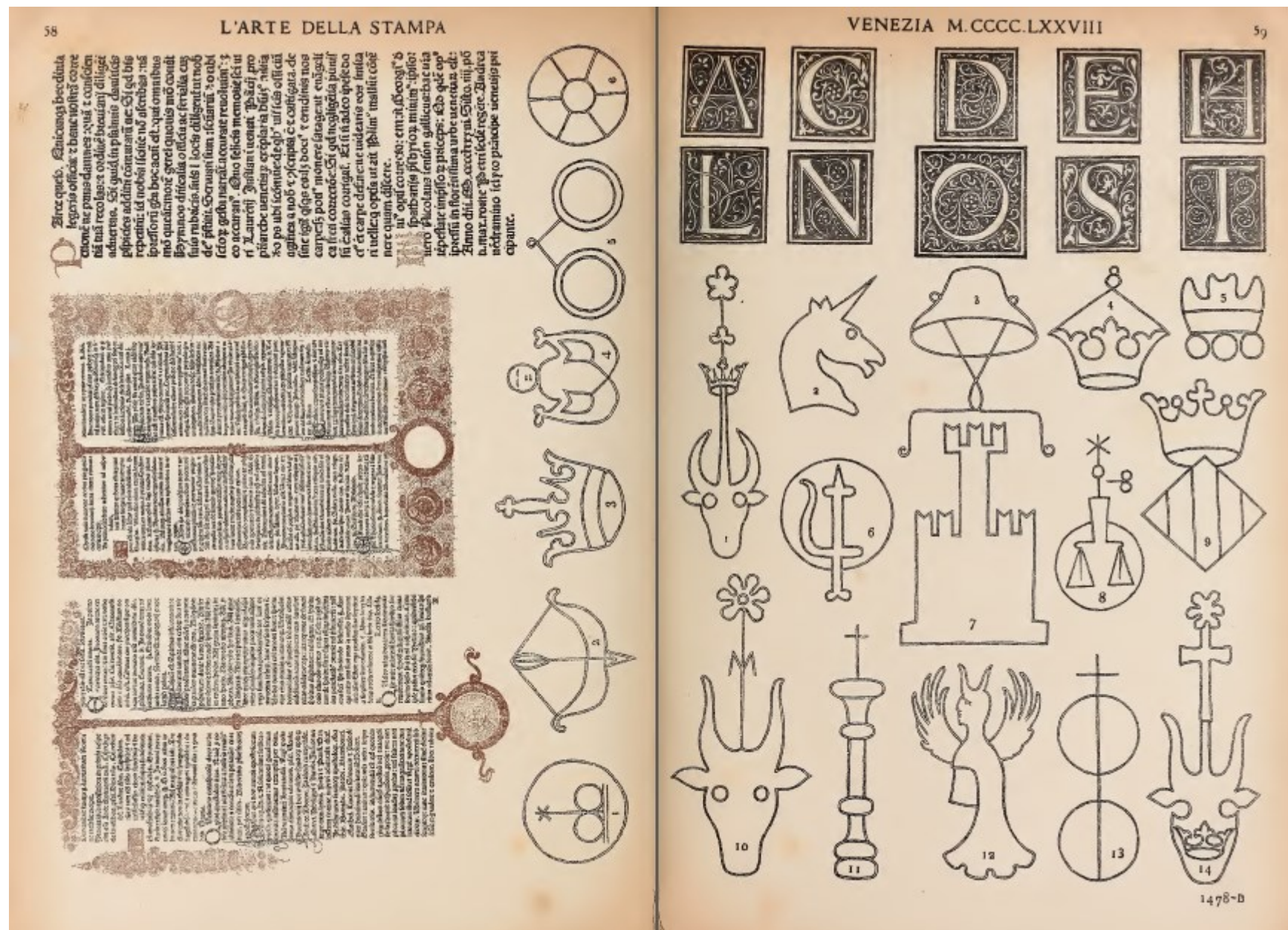
2 from the Biblioteca del Seminario;

1 from the Biblioteca Capitolare di Treviso;

2 from his own bookshop.

During my research, on multiple occasions, I notice that the choice of the placement of the tracings, seem dictated primarily to fill the space in the page; seemed like a matter of *horror vacui*.

This – 1478, Pomponius Mela, *De situ orbis* – was one of the editions that I analyzed.



• 1478 – Pomponius Mela, *De situ orbis*. Franciscus Renner de Hailbrun. – Bibl. Marc. (p. 59)

ISTC: im00450000 in Marciana imperfect

GW M34879

Briquet, *Les Filigranes*, primary references p. 59 nr. 4 = Briquet nr. 5070, «Couronne à diadème».

p. 59 nr. 6 = Briquet nr. 8245, «Lettre H».

un cercle, à plateaux plats, l'attache médiane s'arrêtant avant de les toucher».

p. 59 nr. 9 = Briquet nr. 2067, «Armoiries.

Deux Pals».

p. 59 nr. 12 = Briquet nr. 2896, «Casque»

Cercles l'un au-dessus de l'autre traversés par un trait qui se termine en croix latine».

p. 59 nr. 13 = Briquet nr. 3176, «Deux

secondary references p. 59 nr. 1 = Briquet nr. 14.582, «Tête de

Boeuf».

p. 59 nr. 2 = Briquet nr. 15.814, «Tête

humaine».

p. 59 nr. 3 = Briquet nr. 3378,

«Chapeau».

p. 59 nr. 7 = Briquet nr. 15.890, «Une

tour».

p. 59 nr. 10 = Briquet nr. 14.866, «Tête

de Boeuf».

p. 59 nr. 11 = Briquet nr. 4360,

«Colonne».

p. 59 nr. 14 = Briquet nr. 14.563, «Tête

de Boeuf».

- Verified the copy cited by Ongania at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venezia

Collocation in the library and format: Inc. V. 718, 4°.

Description of the watermarks: hand with a crown, column, profiled face.

- Verified the copy at the Biblioteca del Museo Correr in Venezia

Collocation in the library and format: Inc. H 111, 4°.

Description of the watermarks: column with a cross on top, hand with a crown, profiled face.

- Verified the copy at the Biblioteca civica Vincenzo Joppi di Udine

Collocation in the library and format: Thes. misc. II. 119.9, 4°

Description of the watermarks: scale with a star on top.

In this case, the discrepancy between the watermarks present in the different copies, lead to the hypothesis of two different paper supplies in the copies examined, editions printed by two booksellers with different reams of paper.

In the copies verified at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana and the Biblioteca del Museo Correr, there is a column and a profiled face, but they do not correspond to those reported by Ongania.

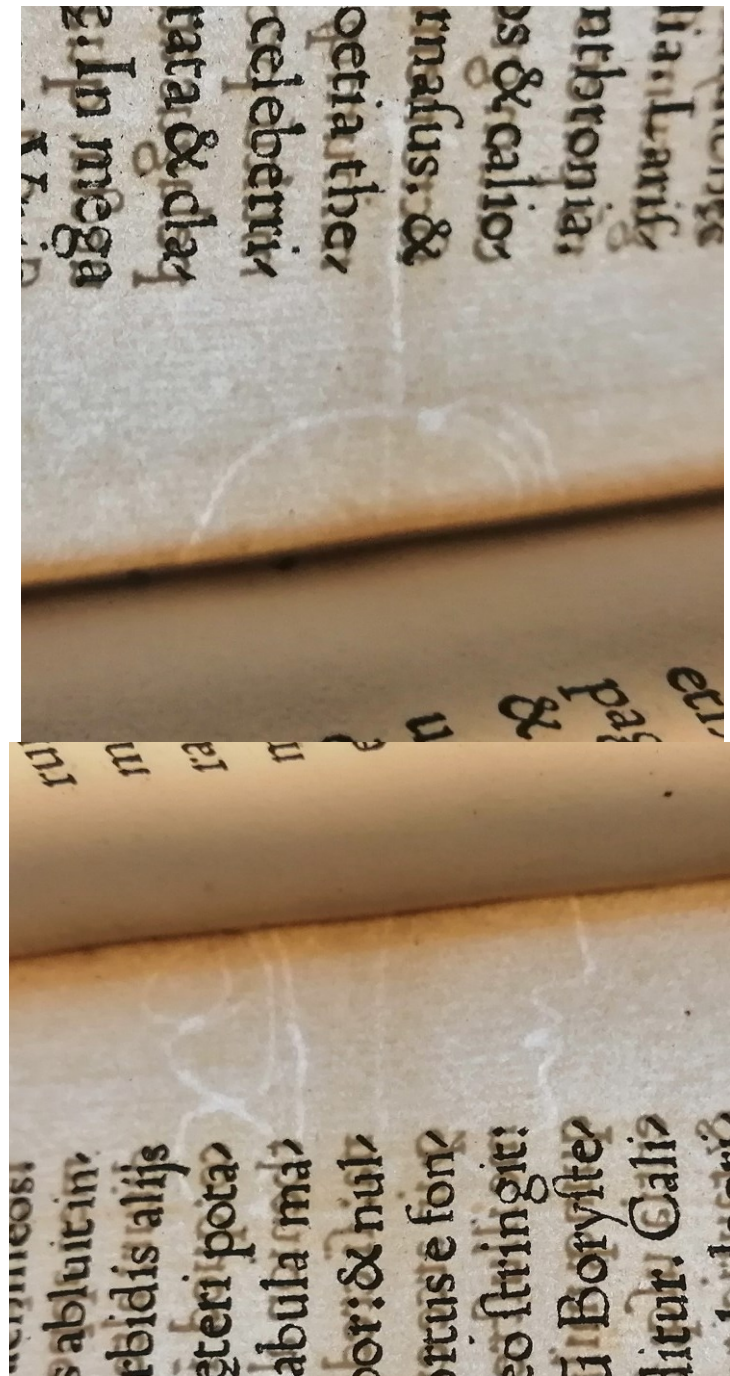
The edition was seen in three copies, searching for the watermarks, of which 6 are primary references and 7 secondary, in *Les Filigranes*.

A *small* problem emerged. The watermarks did not match!

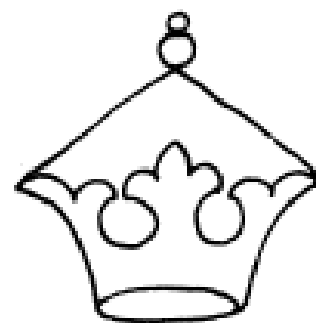
As it can be seen in the previous slide, none of the watermark was found in the copies.

At the Biblioteca civica Vincenzo Joppi in Udine there was a scale with a star on top [in this case, the discrepancy between the watermarks present in the different copies, lead to the hypothesis of two different paper supplies in the copies examined, editions printed by two booksellers with different reams of paper] that did not match with the tracing in Ongania.

In the copies verified at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana and the Biblioteca del Museo Correr, there is a column and a profile of human head, but they do not correspond to those reported by Ongania, and that became entries nos. 4360 and 15.814 in Briquet (secondary references).



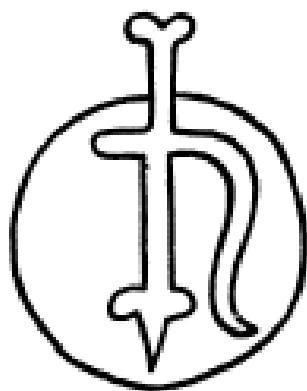
Note that when the images were redrawn for *Les filigranes*, very slight distortions were introduced. The omission of the chain and wirelines, which Briquet always included in his first-hand tracings, makes these watermarks much more difficult to identify. The description also lacks another staple piece of information, i.e., the dimensions of the sheet.



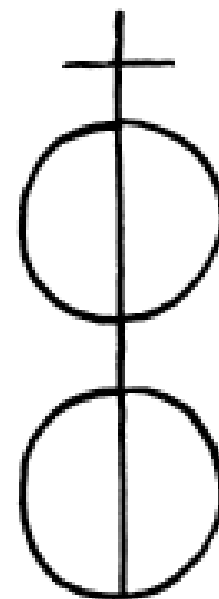
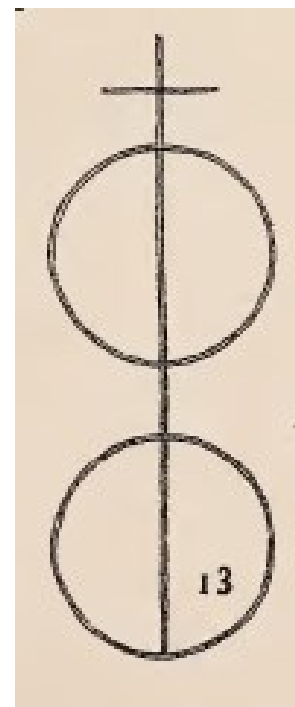
5070

Examples of primary references in the edition mentioned (not found in the copies) and the tracing made by Briquet.

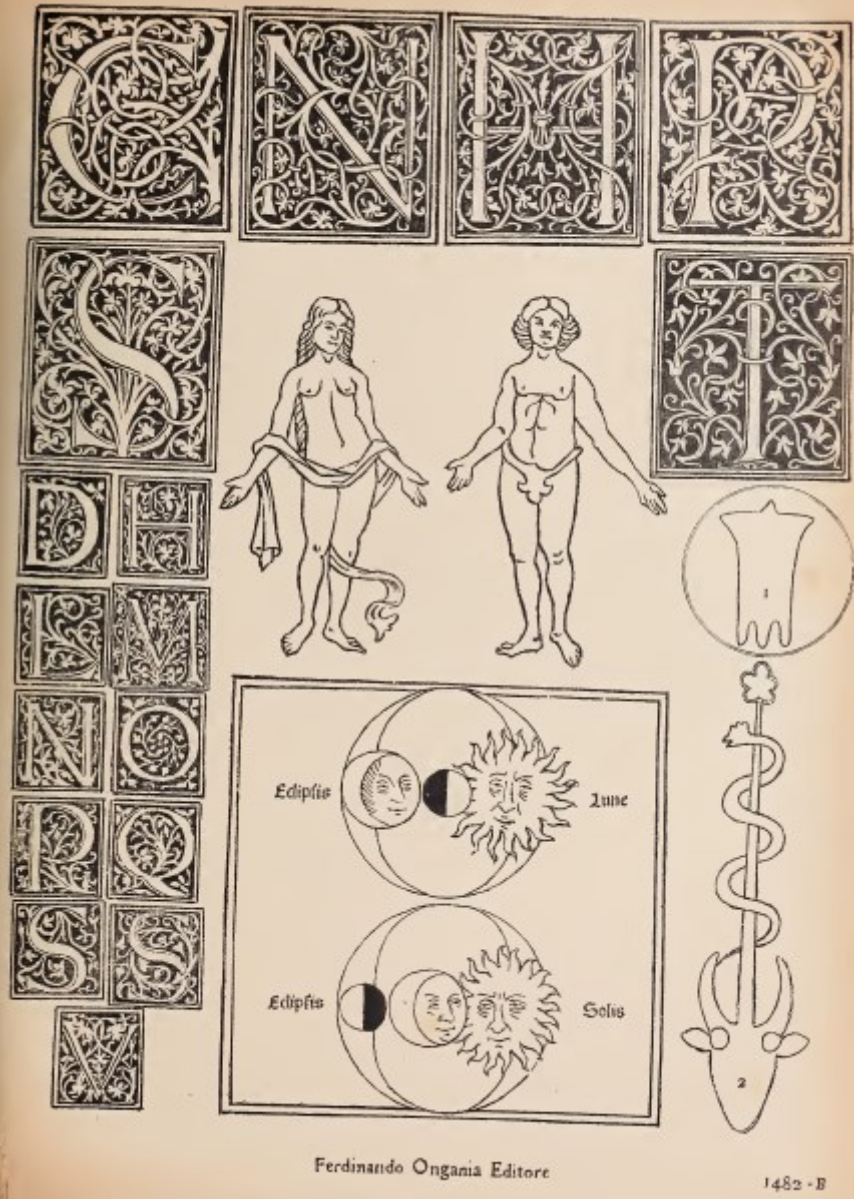
Entries nos. 3176 «deux cercles», 5070 «couronne» and 8245 «lettre H» (which in Ongania is also upside down).



8245



3176



Another issue during the research, was that most of the copies in the sample chosen and seen in the libraries, were in-4°, so the watermark remains in the middle of the two pages.

In the few in-folio copies, moreover, the watermark was almost never on a blank page.

It was a problem for me then to recognize the watermarks, through the text or/and in between the pages.

It is also strange that in Ongania's work all the watermarks are full tracings, if he viewed the same editions I have seen, most of them in-4°.

Here an example of an edition in-4° - 1482, *Iohannes de Sacro Busco, Opusculum Sphaericum* – where a bull's head appears as a complete tracing.

The problem was not so small, after all.

Within the sample of ten editions, out of the original 122, viewed by myself, in some cases in multiple copies, no correspondence was found between the tracing in Ongania (and Briquet) and the watermarks actually in the book.

The watermarks seem, however, ‘authentic’, since they match designs and typologies commonly found in Renaissance Italian documents, as *Les filigranes* elsewhere confirms.

So, what went wrong? Ongania probably collected a large number of watermarks found in the Renaissance editions he included in his repertories, but, when he came to insert them in *L'arte della stampa nel Rinascimento italiano*, the selection seems to have been largely random.

In particular, watermarks were mostly chosen in terms of filling space after the typographical illustrations had been laid out. Another criterion was aesthetic: Ongania often chooses watermarks that were visually pleasing, such as various sorts of lions, and in this respect he was followed also by Briquet.

Unfortunately this was the only publication by Ongania on a Renaissance center, we do not have other examples for make a further comparison.

To *sum* up ...

In creating *L'arte della stampa nel Rinascimento italiano*, Ongania employed a corpus of watermark tracings, probably taken from genuine editions. Their insertion, however, was largely random and dictated mostly by the layout of individual pages.

His work was after divulgatory and he did not intend it to be used for serious scholarly purposes. He certainly did not anticipate Briquet!

No numerical table exists at the present moment of Briquet's sources for primary and secondary references. The 206 references to Ongania (107 primary + 99 secondary), however, make it a source of medium importance, so the discovery that the images do not match the original editions is a disconcerting one.

The next stage in my research will be to try and sort this mess out. I plan to examine as many of the editions cited by Ongania as possible and to see if I can find matches for the watermarks in *L'arte della stampa nel Rinascimento italiano*.

Thank you for your attention!

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