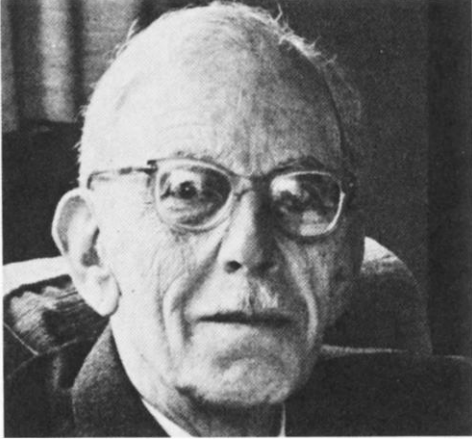


THE ENIGMA OF THE FIRST ARABIC BOOK PRINTED FROM MOVABLE TYPE

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*In memoriam Prof. Dr. Adolf Grohmann, 1 March
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It is generally accepted that the first book printed from movable Arabic type was the *Kitāb ṣalāt al-sawāʿī* also variously known as *Septem horae canonicae*,¹ *Horologion*,² *Precatio horarii*,³ *Preces horariae*,⁴ etc., and usually translated as the *Book of Hours*. This work was presumably commissioned and published at the expense of Pope Julius II (A.D. 1503–13) and intended for distribution among Christians of the Middle East.

The small octavo book consists of 15 gatherings totaling 120 unnumbered leaves. There are 12 lines to the page, enclosed in plain double line borders made up of shorter links which are rather imperfectly joined to each other. Some of these borders as well as the captions are printed in red. Several pages have ornamental borders displaying floral and avian motifs.

There are at least 8 copies of this work known to exist, namely: one each at Princeton University Library, the Estense Library in Modena, the Ambrosian Library in Milan, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, the Dār al-Kutub in Cairo, Bodleian Library, and 2, or possibly 3 in the British Museum. Neither of the two copies closely examined, the copy at Princeton⁵ and the British Museum copy listed below, seem to be complete.

As with so many of the early Arabic printed books, the production of this work is also shrouded in mystery. No contemporaneous references of substance have been found concerning it, and what has been written about it is largely conjectural. Very little is

¹ Christian Friedrich Schnurrer, *Bibliotheca arabica* (Halle, 1811), p. 231.

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0022-2968/79/3803-0005/\$00.95.

² Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (The Vatican, 1944–53), vol. 1, p. 636.

³ Schnurrer, *Bibliotheca arabica*, p. 232.

⁴ Giovanni Galbiati, "La prima stampa in arabo," *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati* 6 (1946): 409.

⁵ A microfilm of this copy was kindly supplied by Professor Margaret Bent of Brandeis University.

known about the work beyond what is found in the book itself, and even that has, at times, been misinterpreted. For example, a note in German on the flyleaf of the British Museum copy (OR. 70.aa 12) identifies the book as a manuscript.

There seems to be a difference of opinion as to just which religious rite the work follows and what audience it was intended to attract. Schnurrer⁶ seems to think that it contains prayers of the Jacobite rite of Alexandria, a notion which would seem corroborated by the arabesque borders which are predominantly North African⁷ and one of



FIG. 1.—Border with avian motif in *Kitāb ṣalāt al-sawāʿi*, courtesy of Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections

⁶ Schnurrer, *Bibliotheca arabica*, p. 231.

⁷ See Claus Nissen, *Die illustrierten Vogelbücher* (Stuttgart, 1953), p. 794b.

which represents the ibis, a typical Egyptian bird (fig. 1).⁸ Hitti,⁹ on the other hand, believes that the book had a missionary purpose among Muslims, while Graf¹⁰ tends to feel that the work was intended for the use of the Melchites.



FIG. 2.—Floral borders from *Kitāb salāt al-sawāʿi*, courtesy of the British Library

⁸ See, e.g., Ahmad Abd al-Raziq, "Trois fondations féminines dans l'Égypte mamlouke," *Revue des études islamiques* 41 (1973): 120 (fig. 9) and p. 124 (fig. 12). A similar arabesque design may be seen in Adolf Grohmann, *Arabische Paläographie*, vol. 2 (Vienna, 1971), p. 172 (fig. 171). Actually the design is found in variations on tombstones in various Islamic countries. Cf. G. V. Iusupov, *Vvedenie v Bulgaro-tatarskuiu epigrafiku* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1960), p. 149 (fig. 12). The arabesque design even made its entry into the European decorative arts. Giovanni Antonio Tagliente

in his first Italian manual of decoration, the *Essempio di recammi* (Venice, 1524) gives striking examples of this. Cf. Stanley Morison, *Splendor of Ornament: Specimens Selected from the Essempio di recammi* (London, 1968), pp. 9, 12, 49, and 56.

⁹ Philip K. Hitti, "The First Book Printed in Arabic," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 4 (1942): 5.

¹⁰ Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 1, p. 636.

That the work was meant for the use of Christians in Syria is evident from a printed Latin preface dated 1517 as found in the British Museum copy mentioned above. It has also been established that the psalms used in the Arabic translation were those of 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Fadl, a Melchite bishop of the eleventh century.¹¹

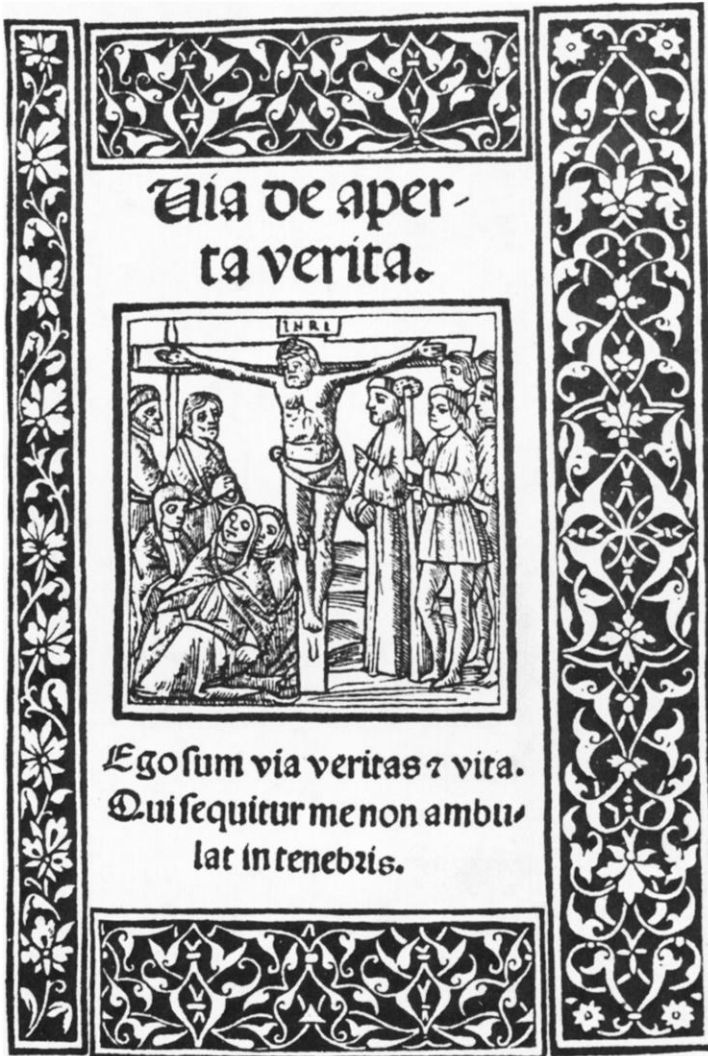


FIG. 3.—Floral borders reused by Gregorio de Gregorii in 1523, courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard University

The translator of the Book of Hours into Arabic is not known. There were a number of persons capable of making such a translation, particularly among the Christian dignitaries from the Middle East who attended the Fifth Lateran Council convened by

¹¹ Ibid.

Pope Julius II and continued by Leo X (A.D. 1512–15). It is known that the question of liturgy played a prominent part in the Council and that liturgy as such was considered a vehicle of unification. Thus we observe Teseo Ambrogio of Pavia, a cleric with a legal background and knowledge of languages, examining the liturgies of the participants of the Council before they were permitted to celebrate mass in their vernacular languages.¹² It would probably be worthwhile to compare the handwriting of some of these persons with the type used in our work, particularly since the type is unique in many ways. Although rather primitive, the font permits the use of some ligatures. A very distinctive

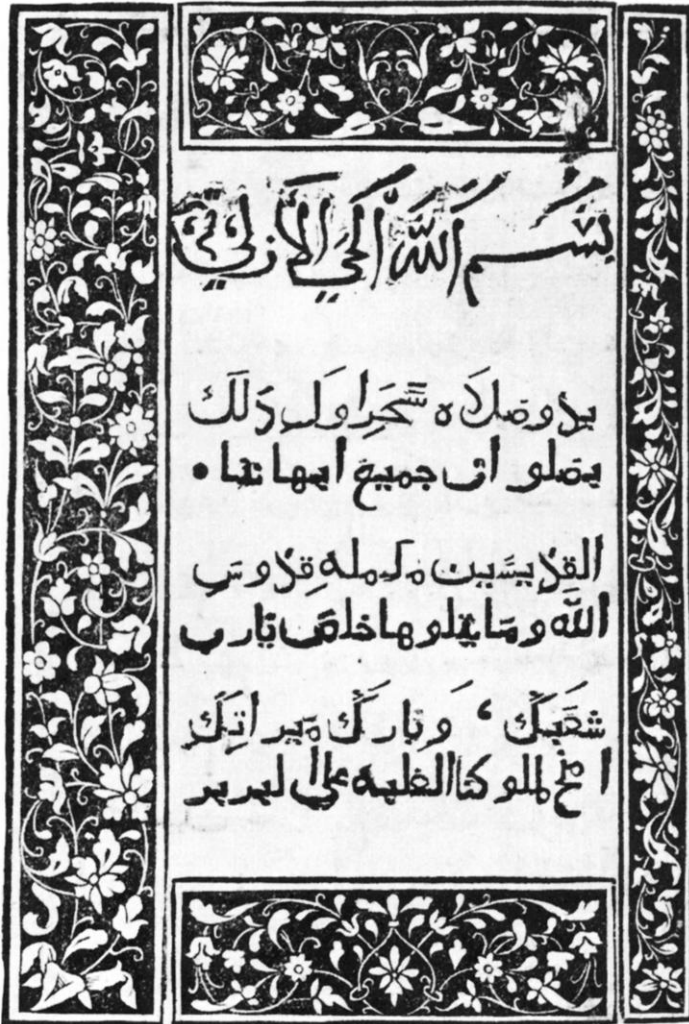


FIG. 4.—Floral borders used in *Kitāb ṣalāt al-ṣawāʿī*, courtesy of Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections

¹² Pietro Terenzio, *Di Ambrogio Teseo degli Albonesi pavese: notizie biografiche e linguistiche* (Pavia, 1860); see also G. M. Mazzuchelli, *Gli Scrittori d'Italia* (Brescia, 1703–63), vol. 1, p. 609.

feature are lines placed above the letter *sin* and *ʿayn* to distinguish them from *shin* and *ghayn*, the former, especially, having been in rather frequent use in Arabic manuscripts of the time.¹³ There is no evidence that the font was re-used for the printing of any other book.

As in Arabic manuscripts, there is no title page, and the imprint is given in the form of a colophon at the end of the book as follows:

This blessed Book of Hours was completed on Tuesday, September 12th of the year 1514 of our Lord Jesus Christ, praised be his name! Amen. It was printed by Gregorius of the House of Gregorius of the city of Venice; printed (*kh-t-m-t*) in the city of Fano (*Fān*) during the reign of His Holiness Pope Leo, occupying the throne of St. Peter the Apostle in the city of Rome. Let him who finds an error rectify it and God will rectify his matters through the Lord. Amen.

The problem which primarily concerns us here is the fact that the colophon gives the city of Fano as the place of publication, while Gregorio de Gregorii, a well-established Venetian printer, is not known to have published any work outside of the Venetian Republic save for this one title and that in a year in which he printed other works in Venice.¹⁴ The colophon admits diverse speculations as to the identity of Gregorio as printer and the identity of Fano as the place of publication.¹⁵ All these leads, however, are not sufficiently promising to be pursued here in detail.

The key to the understanding of this problem seems to be found in the administration of patents in the Venetian Republic. Up to a certain time in history no restrictions were placed on the printers. Beginning with the end of the fifteenth century, however, the publishing trade gradually became more and more regulated.¹⁶ Permission had to be secured from the authorities for certain types of books, and special concessions, patents, and monopolies were granted to publish them. These instruments, called *privilegii*, were granted by the College or the Senate of Venice. With such a monopoly, the government could concede to a certain person the sole right to print or sell either a whole category of books or a single book for a specified period of time.

Two monopolies as preserved in the Notarile del Collegio¹⁷ are of prime importance for the book in question, and will also shed light on the enigma of the Arabic Qurʾān allegedly printed in Venice some time before 1530 and of which no copies are extant. Chronologically, the first of these two documents is dated 15 July 1489 and contains a petition directed to the College of Venice by one Democrito Terracina for the monopoly to print books in esoteric languages such as Arabic, Moorish (*Maghribi*), Syriac, Armenian,

¹³ See, for example, Giorgio Levi della Vida, *Ricerche sulla formazione del più antico fondo dei manoscritti orientali della Biblioteca Vaticana* (The Vatican, 1937), pls. 10/1; 9/1,2a; 13/3; etc.

¹⁴ See G. W. Panzer, *Annales typographici ab artis inventae origine ad annum MD post Maittarii Denisii aliorumque curas in ordinem redacti, emendavi et aucti* (Nürnberg, 1793–1803), vol. 8, pp. 471 f. Mr. Richard S. Cooper of the University of California, Berkeley who has worked on this problem independently, has indicated that imprints bearing the name of Gregorio de Gregorii in Venice appeared there two weeks before the Fano imprint and again on 20 September, i.e., one week later.

¹⁵ Among the conjectures considered here were

Phanos, the island in the Ionian Sea, and Bān, a location 82 kms. southeast of Tripoli in Lebanon, not far from the monastery of St. Anthony of Quzhaya, the birthplace of Karshuni typography in the Middle East.

¹⁶ Horatio F. Brown, *The Venetian Printing Press* (London, 1871), p. 51 claims that "1469–1515 was the period before any legislation on the subject of the press or the book trade had taken place." If this is so, certainly the usage led to the actual legislation by at least two decades.

¹⁷ The documents were found and published by Rinaldo Fulin in "Documenti per servire alla storia della tipografia veneziana," *Archivio Veneto* 12 (1882): 133 f.

Indian (Abyssinian), and the "Barbary languages."¹⁸ This request was granted to Terracina for a period of 25 years and gave him the exclusive right to publish in these languages and scripts during this time, imposing a severe penalty of 200 ducats in gold and the loss of the books on anyone infringing on this right. Twenty-four years later, i.e., one year before the expiration of the monopoly granted to him, Terracina died without having published any books.

The second document dated 31 May 1513 concerns a petition of Lelio and Paolo Massimo, nephews of Democrito, requesting a renewal of the monopoly in their name for another 25 years, claiming that their uncle had worked hard and had had heavy expenses without having been able to reap the fruits of his labors. This request was likewise granted with the same stipulations, including the stiff fine for violators as well as prohibiting exportation and other transgressions of this patent.

As a result of this monopoly granted to Lelio and Paolo Massimo, no book is known to have been published in these languages in Venice during this time, except two Armenian works which were published in 1513, apparently during the short interval between the death of Terracina which terminated the patent issued to him, and its renewal in May 1513 by his nephews.

Various authors speak of a press subsidized by Pope Julius II at Fano which supposedly produced the work in question¹⁹ with statements which are very doubtful. To date, no breve or bull, with which appointments of this kind were made,²⁰ nor even any correspondence relating to such a press has been found which would confirm this assumption.

It has also been suggested that the press work was done by the rather versatile Jewish printer Gershom Soncino, who printed a number of books in the area about this time, principally in Fano, Ancona, and nearby Pesaro. This theory has some credibility since he published works not only in Latin and Italian, but also in Hebrew as well. After checking the publishing record of this printer, however, we find that between 1509 and 1515 Soncino lived in Pesaro, and no books were issued with a Fano imprint during that time.²¹ Moreover, the first book by the members of the Soncino family containing Arabic, namely the Polyglot Pentateuch published in Constantinople in 1546, has the Arabic text expressed in small Hebrew characters.²² Had the printers had Arabic type, surely they would have used it.

Gregorio de Gregorii, on the other hand, was also not unfamiliar with publishing Arabic works, mostly Latin translations, to satisfy the insatiable demand of the period for works in the sciences and medicine. Thus he printed, for example, Hispalensi's translation of al-Qabiṣi's *Mudkhal ilā ṣanā'at aḥkām al-nujūm* in 1491, Ibn Zuhr's pharmacopoeia in the same year, and Ibn Sinā's *De animalibus* in about 1500. Moreover, the two arabesque ornamental borders used in the work in question are found to have been

¹⁸ It should be noted here that Greek and Hebrew books were excluded from this patent, so that books in the Greek language which were printed during that time were not illegal, while Hebrew books were not published in Venice until Daniel Bomberg received permission in 1515. Shorter passages, such as those appearing in Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499), although printed in languages covered by the patent, apparently were not considered violations of that monopoly.

¹⁹ See Hitti, *First Book*, and after him J. Kingsley Birge, "The First Book Printed in Arabic," *Moslem*

World 33 (1943): 147; also J. M. Lenart, "The First Book Printed in Arabic Characters," *American Catholic Quarterly Review* 4 (1917): 60.

²⁰ See Stefano E. Assemani, *Bibliothecae apostolicae Vaticanae: codicum manuscriptorum catalogus* (Paris, 1926), vol. 1, p. lxi, for the nomination of Phedrus to the Vatican Library by breve of 17 July 1510.

²¹ See Giacomo Manzoni, *Annali tipografici dei Soncino*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Bologna, 1883), pp. 199 f.

²² David S. Berkowitz, *In Remembrance of Creation* (Waltham, Mass., 1968), p. 102 (no. 176).

utilized in at least two other printings of Gregorio de Gregorii: Baptista da Crema's, *Via de aperta vita* (Venice, 1523) (figs. 2 and 3) and Fridericus Nausea's *In artem poeticen primordia* (Venice, 1522) (figs. 4 and 5); none of the Soncinati seem to have used these borders.

It remains then to examine the paper used in the production of the work and to compare it with the paper used in other printings of Gregorio de Gregorii and those of Gershom Soncino. In four copies examined,²³ the watermark—an anchor (fig. 6) appearing with astonishing regularity at the top of the page close to the spine—was immediately

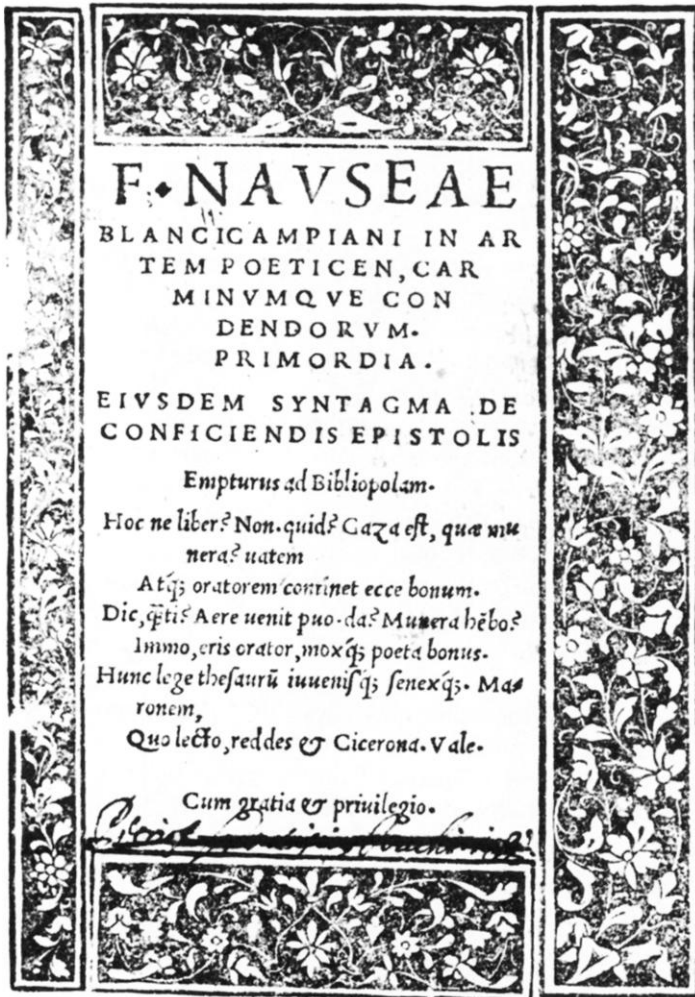


FIG. 5.—Floral borders reused by Gregorio de Gregorii in 1522, courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Department of Special Collections

²³ Copies of the watermark have graciously been supplied by Ms. Virginia H. Gibbons of Princeton University Library, Prof. Enrico Galbiati of the

Ambrosiana, Dr. Ernesto Milano of the Estense Library, and Drs. Hermann Hauke and Hertrich of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.

identified by three persons as Briquet no. 436.²⁴ A random check of some of the readily available works printed by de Gregorii and Gershom Soncino has not turned up any anchor watermarks in the paper used by either printer. However, Briquet definitely identifies the paper as one used in Venice for petitions preserved in the Archivio de Stato.

Considering the preceding circumstantial evidence, it should not be unreasonable to accept the following scenario regarding the printing of the first Arabic book. Gregorio de

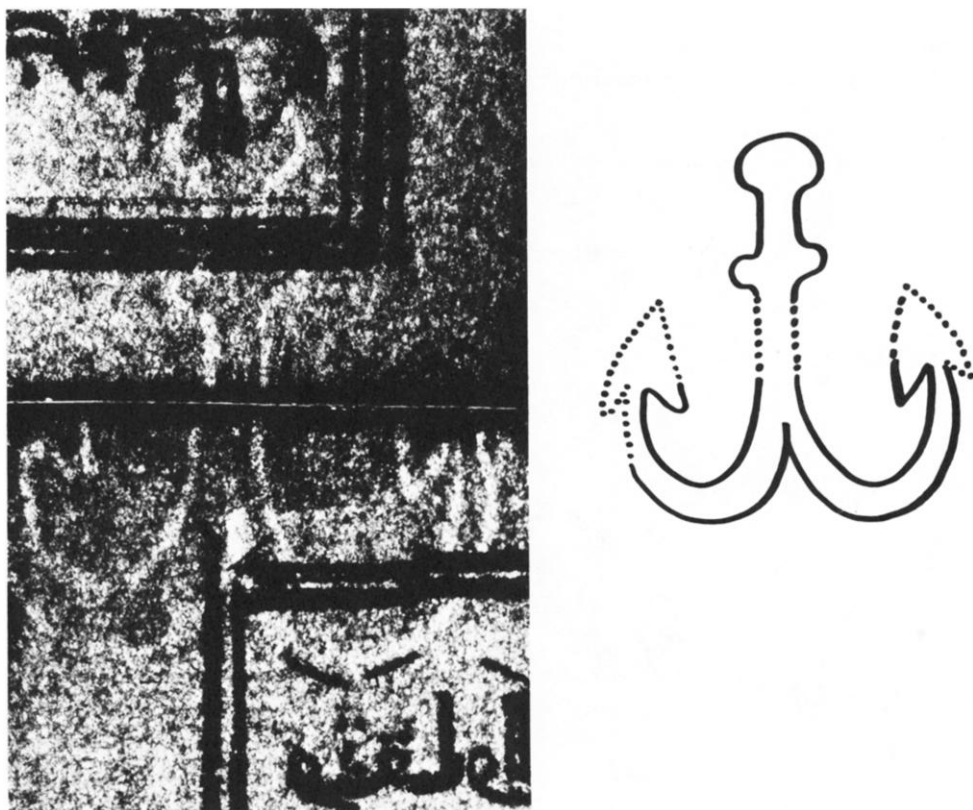


FIG. 6.—Anchor watermark on paper used for the production of the *Kitāb ṣalāt al-sawāʿi* (leaves joined for illustration purposes only); photographs courtesy of Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections; hand drawing by R. Sessions

Gregorii slated the publication of his *Kitāb ṣalāt al-sawāʿi* for 1514 or shortly after, the expected expiration in that year of the 25-year patent granted to Terracina. The expiration of that patent, however, having come to an end one year earlier by the grantee's death, found de Gregorii, unlike the Armenian printer mentioned above, unprepared to issue the work at that time. The patent having then again been renewed for

²⁴ C. M. Briquet, *Les Filigranes: dictionnaire historique des marques de papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600* (Paris, 1907), vol. 1, p. 40.

another 25 years for Terracina's nephews, however, made it impossible for the work to be issued legally with a Venetian imprint when the work was completed as scheduled in 1514. Rather than waiting for another 25 years for the new patent to expire, the printer decided to publish the work with an imprint which included as the place of publication the name of a city outside the Venetian Republic. He may have had in this tacit official approval since the book was marked for export.²⁵ That Fano, then situated in the Papal States, was selected is no surprise, since the work was apparently printed at the behest of the papacy. That the Latin printed preface prefixed to at least one copy has an imprint of its own: *Venetiiis Kal. Decembribus MDXVII* (1517), i.e., in the year the Venetian senate abrogated all the privileges heretofore issued,²⁶ could only strengthen the premise that the work was in fact printed in Venice.

²⁵ It is significant that no copies of the book are recorded held in Venice, Fano, nor even in the Vatican Library.

²⁶ See Leonardas V. Gerulaitis, *Printing and Publishing in Fifteenth-Century Venice* (Chicago and London, 1976), p. 45.