This paper seeks to explore and elucidate the ways in which ancient histories were marketed in early modern England and Europe, in order to further our understanding of the ways in which these histories shaped cultural practices in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It also attempts to shift the direction of classical reception studies. At present, the focus in the field remains largely literary (Braden et al., 2010; Gillespie, 2011; Cheney and Hardie, forthcoming). Yet the material realities of the books containing classical histories, and the ways in which their pages were constructed, affected the reception of the classical world just as much as the words in which the texts were written. Using a more empirical approach, this historical investigation emphasises the importance of commercial concerns for the study of texts; it therefore generates conclusions of importance for historians of economics and political culture, as well as literary scholars and students of the history of the book.

Engaging with a range of CHARM’s themes, the paper draws upon early printed material; primarily, upon the printed editions of classical histories produced in continental Europe in the first two centuries of the handpress era. Often, the physical appearance of a book was its key selling point. Publishers had to decide on a format for the books in which they invested, in order to appeal to the right market. Small editions could be carried around in pockets for easy reference; large folios were impressive, and were bought as status objects, rather than merely as reading material. The consumer’s subsequent treatment of the book shows us a further aspect of the perceived value of the text: bought as loose pages, early modern books were then bound by their owners according to their own tastes and pockets, and a huge, two-thousand page folio could be made to look even more impressive with a beautiful and costly binding.

Networks of scholars across Europe worked to produce ever more detailed, critical editions of these histories by authors such as Caesar, Suetonius, and Livy. On the title-pages of these works, which effectively served as advertisements for the text, the stationers printing the books made reference to previous scholarly editions, arrogating to their current author the intellectual glory of former editors and translators, in order to add authority to their own endeavours. By the later sixteenth century, so great was the legacy of previous scholars that the very titles and sub-titles of the texts ran to several lines, in order to include the illustrious pedigree of the text on offer to the prospective customer.

Moreover, these books were intended to appeal to a trans-national community of readers who shared an identity as educated gentlemen, using the classical past to better understand how to perform their civic duty in a humanist age. So strong was this identity that it was jealously guarded by certain elements in intellectual society:

> There is a sort of Morose Gentlemen in the World, who, having at the price of many a sore Lashment, possess’d themselves of the Greek and Latin Tongues, would now very fain Monopolize all the Learning in them…(Wheare, 1685, sig. A3v-4r) [2]

It is clear from the extant records of book purchase and ownership that consumers believed themselves to belong to an international intellectual elite, participating in a shared Latinate culture that transcended vernacular linguistic boundaries. Wills containing information about private libraries indicate that English scholars and gentleman eschewed English vernacular copies of ancient histories, preferring to own the respected editions printed on the European mainland, editions with commentaries produced by such internationally renowned figures as Justus Lipsius. Perhaps this is also a reason why English stationers did not bother to produce their own classical-language editions, choosing rather to print almost exclusively in the vernacular: the scholarly market was already well-served by the acclaimed editions pouring from the European presses, and they could not compete.
Indeed, so successful was the marketing of classical texts by making reference to illustrious editors that several printers sought to capitalise on the success of their competitors by devious practices, mis-attributing texts and editions to famous scholarly figures. This was an age before copyright, but such behaviour certainly earned the censure of the international scholarly community. Meric Casaubon, son of the famed Isaac, in the address accompanying his edition of Florus’s *Epitome of Roman History* published in 1658, tells of such a book that came into his possession:

> having a desire to furnish myself with as many different Editions of Florus as came in my way: among others, I lighted upon that of Leyden, *Ex officina Adriani Wyngaerden*, an. D. 1648 (Florus, 1658, sig. B5r)

Casaubon had two objections to this edition. Firstly, it purported to be a scholarly work and was advertised with the great names on the title page, such as Gruter and Salmasius. In fact, it was nothing of the sort, being a poor edition by one Mr N. Blanckardus. This inaccurate marketing was not the only crime of which the edition was guilty; for, where Casaubon expected to see explanations of how and why the text had been altered or corrected by its editor:

> instead of that, you may find perchance a long story of the *ligue* of France against Henry the III. or how the Palatinat was lost, and King James deluded by the Spaniard (Florus, 1658, sig. B6r).

Had the edition been textually sound, this would not have been so grave a failing, as Casaubon goes on to explain, saying that:

> I do not except against as of it self altogether impertinent or improper: but I doe not think the Margins of Books very proper for such politick Discourses and Speculations; when the Text itself is left in such obscurity and ambiguity (Florus, 1658, sig. B6r).

This particular consumer, then, was highly displeased with one particular edition of ancient history; he believed that not only should texts contain what was advertised on the title page, but that marketing a book as a critical edition implied that the work would be of a particular quality. But other examples of interaction with marketing practices suggest that a buyer’s relationship with a book could be more complex. The library catalogues of institutions such as the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge indicate that their founders were also keen to possess the famous, ‘best’ editions produced in the major printing cities of Europe, for their intellectual cachet.[2] Individual scholars, however, often appear to have been less discriminating. When Archbishop Narcissus Marsh opened his library to the public in the early eighteenth century, it contained four editions of Plutarch’s *Lives*; one was a respected continental edition published as a large folio Basel in 1550, another was a tiny epitome published in Geneva in 1590, and the other two were English translations from the later-seventeenth century. The same is true for other ancient histories: some editions are important and valuable, others small, cheap and poor by comparison. All clearly appealed to Marsh at some point in his book-buying career, but precisely what marketing strategy persuaded him to buy them, is still unclear. The marketing, and the purchasing, of classical histories in the early modern period was clearly a complicated and multi-layered business: a business that can has much to teach us about the culture and values of Renaissance society.

**Notes**

[1] This is Edmund Bohun’s introduction to Degory Wheare, *The Method and Order of Reading Both Civil and Ecclesiastical Histories* (London, 1685), Wing W1592, sig. A3v-4r. The book is a translated and expanded version of the text based on Wheare’s inaugural lecture as Camden Professor of Ancient History at Oxford, which appeared as *De ratione et methodo legendi historias* ... (London, 1623), STC 25325

[2] For example, St John’s College, Cambridge MSS U1 and U4, library catalogues from c.1637 and 1640.
References
Florus, L (1658), The history of the Romans, By Lucius Florus, from the foundation of Rome unto Caesar Augustus, London, Wing F1370.
Wheare, D (1685), The Method and Order of Reading Both Civil and Ecclesiastical Histories, Charles Brome, London, Wing W1592.