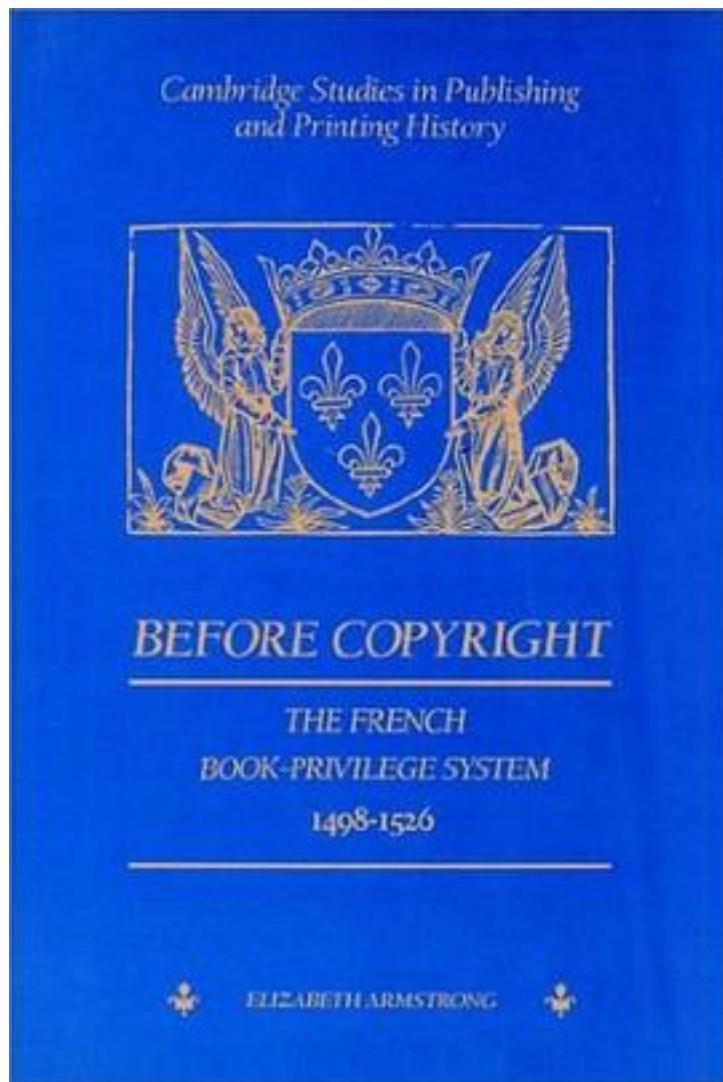


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When printing first began, a new book automatically fell into the public domain upon publication. Only a special law or privilegium enacted by a competent authority could protect it from being reprinted without the consent of the author or publisher. Such privileges for books are attested before 1480, but in Germany and Italy their efficacy was limited to a relatively small area by the political fragmentation of the country. During the 1480s and 1490s France became one of Europe's main centres of book production and, as competition intensified, privileges were sought there from 1498. Although privileges were to last as long as the Ancien Régime, the period to 1526 is the least-known stage of their development and the most important. Most privilege-holders printed the full text of their grant, and many others a summary.

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