

Online Window into the Library



«Avvisi» dalla Vaticana

Cultivating hope

From “The power of hope”, April, 2020

It might seem paradoxical, but this period also represents an opportunity to encounter each other again. Confined in isolation, we perhaps better understand what it means to be a community, and to be radically so. Our life does not depend solely on us and on our choices: we are all in each other’s hands, we all experience how vital interdependence is, a web of recognition and gift, respect and solidarity, autonomy and relationship. Everyone has hope in each other and positively motivates one another to do their part. Everyone matters ...

We are familiar with the semantics of distance and proximity and, in all truth, we need both. They are both important elements in the architecture of what we are: without one or without the other, we would not exist. Without primordial proximity we would not have been generated. But even without progressive separation and distinction, our existence would also not take place.



Allegory of Hope  
Stampe.V.102(54)

It is true that in the personal and social sphere, many distances are only distorted forms of raising barriers, of inoculating the ideological virus of inequality in the body of the community, of offsetting the balance of our common existence with asymmetries of every order (economic, political, cultural...). And we must also recognize that many forms of proximity are nothing more than arrogance to others, a morbid exercise of power, as if others were our property. Therefore, distance and proximity must be purified. Even when we all must suddenly stay closer together (I think of families living out the quarantine in their home, 24 hours a day) and all more separated (because of the recommended one-meter intrapersonal distance), this time can represent an opportunity to rediscover that proximity and distance that ethically qualify our existence.

Card. José Tolentino de Mendonça  
Librarian of S.R.C.



Ott.lat.2019, f. 32r (detail)



## distanced but not distant

From 9 March to 31 May the Library has been closed to scholars and most employees, but the activities of service that it habitually carries out were not interrupted.

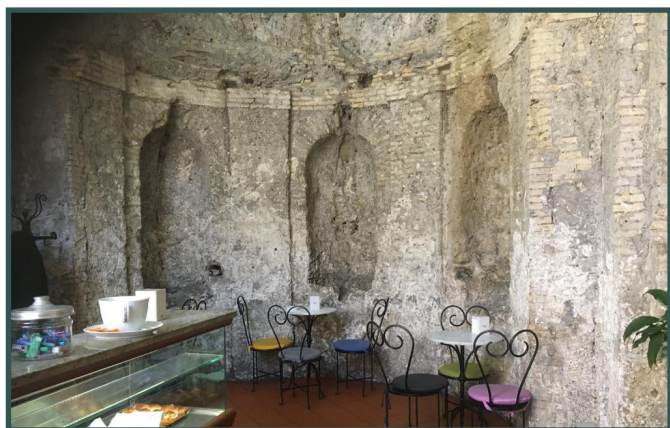
Continuing to keep in contact electronically, with the help of enhanced means of communication, the Vatican Library has provided scholars with bibliographical information, reproductions and publications. Technology, which we sometimes deem all too intrusive, has allowed us to stay in touch with the world, and insofar as it is possible, to organize work carried out from afar, in order to offer the public an efficient and highly developed service, thanks to the work of the staff technicians who guaranteed the necessary tools activated *ad hoc*; they also worked on the completion of the new institutional website.

The staff of the Department of Manuscripts and that of the Printed Works created tools for internal use, with the creation of digital archives from paper records and some inventories; the presences and requests of scholars prior to the introduction of the computer were entered remotely. The personnel of the Conservation Laboratory, whose activities necessarily require the presence *in situ*, remotely transferred the chronological (digitized) registers of works carried out by generations of restorers, starting from 1920, into searchable files.

While in many sectors many paper documents have been inserted in electronic format, and also the staff in the Cataloguing of printed books Section recovered many information from the old records, the staff involved in metadata has continued to work on the cataloging description of groups of digitized manuscripts.

Even in the School of Library Science, the professors continued their teaching duties using the technological tools for remote access; for the exams, the use of applications and platforms were provided to ensure the performance of the scheduled oral and written activities.

The Photographic Laboratory continued to provide photographic reproductions; when the images were not available in the archive, it was necessary, with due caution, to go to the Laboratory, and make them.



The Cafeteria



Printed Books Room



Much energy has been devoted to the activities concerning the Digital Library.

Reproductions of manuscripts and of palimpsest manuscripts acquired in the first years of the new millennium were recovered, adapting the files to the standards in use since 2012 as part of the digitization project. The aim is to include these reproductions in the flow of publication and long-term storage, which involves the transfer of data into FITS, so as to enlarge the Digital Library. The collections that require verification before being included in the recovery-publication-archiving work were checked; shelfmarks existing in the old file system were checked to ensure that the copy in the new system was identical and valid.

Many employees worked on different articles and publications; for example, the staff of the Graphic Cabinet dedicated themselves mainly to the preparation of the Piranesi exhibition in the Vatican, which will be organized at the beginning of next year in collaboration with the Vatican Museums, and to the relative catalog of the exhibition. Every effort has been made to continue carrying out almost all our activities in the best possible way.

From June 1st, after the celebration of the Pentecost Mass, which the liturgy dedicates to the memory of Mary, Mother of the Church, the Library reopened to scholars.

For the moment, only a limited number of people may visit. Attendance is granted only in the mornings, upon reservation, and in full compliance with the regulations regarding social distancing, for the safety of all.

It is useful to work remotely, but for employees and scholars, it is also beautiful to work “in person”, with due caution and a new awareness.

## A new Vice-Prefect and a new director of the Printed Books Dept. at the Vatican Library



A new vice prefect has been appointed at the Apostolic Library. On April 6, the official decree announced Timothy James Janz as chief collaborator to the Prefect.

Born in Basel on April 1, 1966, Dr. Janz attended classical studies at the University of Laval, Quebec, Canada. He graduated from the Sorbonne University in Paris with a degree in classical Greek literature, and obtained his PhD in classical studies from the University of Oxford.

During the selection process for candidates to succeed Professor Salvatore Lilla (1936-2015), *scriptor graecus* of the Vatican Library, who was leaving his position but not, luckily, the serious work undertaken, Lilla himself pointed out that Dr. Janz was an excellent candidate, not only for his “exceptional curriculum” and his multiple scholarly interests, but also “for his knowledge of classical, biblical, and Byzantine Greek, as well as for Latin, Hebrew, and Coptic”. His publications cover different fields of knowledge, “from Greek history to the history of medicine in the broadest sense, from the history of the Greek biblical text to the Gnostic literature of Nag-Hammadi, from Greek codicology and paleography to Byzantine philology”.

Dr. Janz is a native speaker of English and German, and also speaks French and Italian fluently. After coming to the Apostolic Library on May 2, 2002 as an Assistant, he published several articles, monographs and reviews both on the Greek translation of the Bible, called the Septuagint, on classical Greek texts, and on the catalog of Greek manuscripts at the Vatican Library.

On June 24, 2011 he was appointed *scriptor graecus* and in May of 2016 he was assigned the direction of the Department of Printed Books, which he maintained until the new assignment was conferred.

We offer our best wishes to Dr. Janz and assure him the support of the whole Library.



Left vacant upon the appointment of Dr. Janz, the post of Director of the Department of Printed Books has been entrusted to Andreina Rita, employed at the Vatican Library since 1994.

After graduation from La Sapienza University of Rome, Dr. Rita obtained the Diploma of the Vatican School of Library Science and the title of Paleographer Archivist at the Special School for Archivists and Librarians.

She has worked in different sections of the Vatican Library: Archives, Secretariat, Bibliographic Information; since 2009 she has taught the course of Bibliology at the Vatican School of Library Science. In 2016 she was entrusted with the position of Head of the Catalog of Printed Books.

Her publications include the volume, *Biblioteche e requisizioni librerie a Roma in età napoleonica. Cronologia e fonti romane* (Studi e testi, 470). She also edited the fifth volume of the *History of the Vatican Apostolic Library, La Biblioteca Vaticana dall'occupazione francese all'ultimo papa re (1797-1878)*, which was recently published.

Many congratulations to Dr. Rita for the important recognition obtained, and best wishes for the new job.





Easter this year was lived with particular feeling; the desire to celebrate the most important holiday of the year had to be balanced with the conscientious obligation to limit ourselves to a purely spiritual sharing, without being able to be together with those we love. Confined to our homes, we dedicated ourselves to simple activities, rediscovering them as if they were new.

We listened to the words of the Holy Father, surrounded by all that “deafening silence” and that “bleak void”, his reflections, and our minds were engraved with the unforgettable images of a celebration in which the solitude that the crucifix represents brought us all the nearer to those who suffer, and reinvigorates the hope that Easter offers. We read, listened and meditated on the words of sages, poets, philosophers; we read books that had been put aside due to lack of time, rediscovering or discovering the value of spending time alone and imagining being together with others in a way that is both new and old at the same time, in simplicity, enjoying one another’s presence.

We present you with an image that is the emblem of suffering and hope, taken from a splendid manuscript, a *Book of Hours*, *Vat. lat. 3781*, accessible online in our Digital Library ([https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.lat.3781](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.3781)).

The artifact, which was probably made in France in the sec. XV, presents fifteen miniatures handmade by the painter Jean Bourdichon (c. 1457-1521) - who was above all a miniaturist - and his assistants.

The codex was stolen from the Library during a public viewing on April 7, 1925, Holy Tuesday, while on display in the Sistine Hall; its lock had been forced. Fortunately the manuscript was returned a few weeks later. It is one of the wonders preserved in the Vatican Library.



## April 23 martyrdom of St. George



Very little is known about the life of St. George, who was born in Palestine and martyred during the persecution of Diocletian after the edict of 303. The legends about him, however, are diverse and often far-fetched. Numerous literary documents and archaeological monuments bear witness to the spread of the cult of the saint from East to the West.

The *Passio Georgii* is considered among the apocryphal works by the *Decretum Gelasianum* (496). It is therefore necessary to reference testimonies besides the *passio* in order to collect any substantial biographical data.

We have thus come learn that his tomb was venerated in Lydda, Palestine, thanks to Theodosius Perigeta (c. 530); Antonio da Piacenza (c. 570); and Adomnán (c. 670), but there are few elements that remain historically certain.

The legend passed down in the *passio* can be found in its most ancient form in a codex preserved at the National Library of Vienna (*Cod.gr.954*). Later redactions provide information on the cult of the saint, but further complicate his legend.

One of the oldest redactions is found in the codex *Vat.gr.1660*, which dates back to 916. This version was translated into Latin as well as Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian, Arabic, and inserted in the *Vitae* of the saints arranged for liturgical use. Such versions testify to the broad diffusion of the saint's cult.

The episode in which St. George liberates the girl from the dragon was introduced in the era of the Crusades. It is present in the *Legenda aurea* (*Golden Legend*) of Jacobus da Varagine, which was compiled between 1260 and 1298. The saint's battle with the dragon became the symbol of the conflict between good and evil, which became a common image to represent the tension between the faith and paganism.

St. George, patron of England, Portugal and Lithuania, and several cities, together with St. Sebastian and St. Maurice, is the protector of knights, archers and soldiers, and of all those who carry out work related to cavalry.

On the day in which the martyrdom of St. George is commemorated, we celebrate the name day of the Holy Father and present some images of the saint fighting the dragon, taken from different documents kept in the Vatican Library.



S. Bartolini

Sigfrido Bartolini (1932-2007), *Against the beast* (*Bartolini. Stampe.64*); original woodcut inserted in the volume on the Templars which contains the work of Bernard of Clairvaux, *To the knights of the temple in praise of the new militia* (*Liber ad milites de laude novae militiae*), in the original version with translation on the front, published by Volpe in 1977 and illustrated by the Tuscan artist.

Among the series of works by one of the greatest personalities of 20th-century Italian engravings is a splendid collection of 100 woodcuts, intaglio prints and lithographs. It was donated to the Apostolic Library in 2016. Another 16 graphic works were subsequently donated by the artist's wife. Previously, the artist himself had donated to the Vatican a collection of his drawings on the Gospel, made in 1999.



T. Marangoni

Tranquillo Marangoni (1912-1992), *Saint George and the dragon*, one of the six "contour" chiaroscuro boxwood engravings dedicated to the saint, made between 18 and 26 January 1958 for the Cini Foundation with unmistakable expertise and great expressive force. The artist is particularly well-known for his woodcuts, which have gained him the fame as among the best Italian engravers of the twentieth century. In the annotations of the artist, each element is indicated with its own inventory number, editorial code (C.S.), measurements and date.

It is part of the large collection of works donated to the Library by the artist's generous son, Aldo, between December 2018 and March 2019 (see OWL 9, pp. 1-2).



Mt. Pont. Paulus V.453R

Shield of Paul V of the mint of Ferrara, Silver, 31.00 g; 43.40 mm. It is from 1619.

The saint who confronts the beast is a very common numismatic theme in all periods, even in the most recent times.

The manuscript *Arch.Cap.S.Pietro.C.129* is a liturgical book called the “Codex of St. George”, since it is largely dedicated to the saint, his martyrdom and miracles. It contains a Book of saints (March 25-June 9), a prayer office specially composed by a deacon of San Giorgio al Velabro, Card. Jacopo Gaetano Stefaneschi (1270-1343), for whom the manuscript was made.

The story of the saint’s life is based on the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus da Varagine. In the codex the portrait of Card. Stefaneschi appears a number of times: in the act of offering the text of the Mass he composed to Pietro da Morrone, Pope Celestino V (f. 123r); while seated at a desk (ff. 17r, 41r); and while praying in front of St. George (f. 85r). Over time, several hypotheses have been advanced regarding the attribution of this codex: possibilities include Giotto, Oderisi da Gubbio, and Simone Martini. With its “bright, luminous and harmonious color, which blend together and are balanced in typically Mediterranean fashion”, it represents “one of the most beautiful illuminated manuscripts of all time”. Nevertheless, to date, the “Master of the Codex of St. George”, author of a small group of undated works, is still anonymous.

The manuscript, in Gothic rotunda book hand (*libraria gotica rotunda*), dates back to the first half of the 14th century and was probably made between 1325 and 1330. There is a hypothesis dating it to 1328 and copied in Avignon by Italian scribes, the staff that had followed him to France. In this case, the “Codex of St. George” would have been the greatest work of that *scriptorium* of Avignon.

The cardinal resided in Avignon from 1309 to 1341, the year of his death. The 18 decorative miniatures, accompanied by a *bas-de-page* image, were for the most part made in Italy by the Master, whereas the portraits were probably made in France. Two miniatures recall the saint’s battle with the dragon: one on f. 18v, which shows the princess praying and kneeling, facing the dragon; and on f. 85r, the first page of the Mass. The bottom section of the page shows the killing of the dragon, which takes place in a beautiful landscape with a lake on the edge of the city (which, according to legend, George had gone to lead the horse to drink); he is here accompanied by the presence of the princess and the population who assists from the city tower.



*Arch.Cap.S.Pietro.C.129, f. 85r (detail)*

## A hundred years after the birth of St. John Paul II



One century ago, on May 18, Karol Wojtyła was born. He became archbishop of Krakow and later cardinal; he was the first Slavic pontiff to take the chair of Peter upon his election on October 16, 1978, and the first foreigner after 456 years; before him was Hadrian VI, Adriaan Boeyens (1459-1523), born in Utrecht and elected pope in 1522.

The Polish pope brought fresh air and a new accent, as was well understood from the beginning. The speech on October 22, 1978 inaugurating his twenty-seven-year pontificate has become famous. In an appeal to take courage, he said, «Do not be afraid. Open, indeed open wide the doors to Christ, open the borders of the states ... ». Immediately it became clear that his teaching would accord great importance to human rights and to dialogue between peoples and religions.

He visited the Synagogue in Rome on April 13, 1986, and was the first pontiff to cross the threshold of the Jewish temple. He traveled to the Holy Land and Palestine. His commitment to human rights was also solicitous and sacrificial.

He left this world on April 2, 2005; he was beatified on May 1, 2011 by Pope Benedict XVI and canonized by Pope Francis on April 27, 2014.

The Vatican Library recalls his presence on various occasions over the course of its institutional life: his messages, for example, on the occasion of the inauguration of the exhibition, *The Gospels of the Peoples. The word and image of Christ in cultures and history*, 21 June 2000, organized at the Palazzo della Cancelleria. He was also present on several important occasions at the Library.

On February 5, 1983 he presided over the solemn funeral of Card. Antonio Samorè, Librarian of H.R.C., to whom he felt bound “by deep bonds of esteem and affection”.



John Paul II and Prefect Leonard Eugene Boyle, O.P.,  
at the inauguration of the Ignatian exhibit



He met the employees and families of the Library and the Archives on Friday, January 15, 1999 in the Clementine Hall. On this occasion he highlighted the service provided by the two institutions in the new evangelization of culture: “Your work does not end in the commitment of the conservation of books and manuscripts, the Acts of the Supreme Pontiffs and the Offices of the Roman Curia, and their transmission throughout the centuries, although this is very important; rather, it should aim above all to make such treasures of culture and art held within the treasure chest of the Archives and Library available to the Holy See and to scholars all over the world.”

John Paul II visited the papal Institution for the first time on February 7, 1984 for the inauguration for the building works to create spaces for the Catalog, the Office of Accessions and other offices, and came a second time in 1986, on May 27 for the inauguration of the exhibition, *Three alphabets for the Slavs*, on the eleventh centenary of the death of St. Methodius, brother of St. Cyril. A third visit took place on October 23, 1990, on the occasion of the inauguration of *Saint, site and sacred strategy. Ignatius, Rome and Jesuit Urbanism*, an exhibition inaugurating the Ignatian year to celebrate the fifth centenary of the birth of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and the 450th anniversary of the foundation of the Society of Jesus. As established by the popes, to whose authority they had entrusted themselves from the moment of the foundation of the Order, formally instituted by Paul III on September 23, 1540, the Jesuits traveled the world “soldiering” in the service of God. As John Paul II underlined on that occasion, “this exhibition highlights how the Society of Jesus [...] responded to the demands of a world that was changing both in its physical and cultural horizons, as well as in the relation of the Church with the world, and how it felt the urgent needs of those who were marginalized at the time.” In the vivid memory of Pope Wojtyła, we celebrate this anniversary.



John Paul II, the Librarian, Card. Alphonsus Stickler,  
and the employees in the Vestibule of the Library



## Pichler's cameos and gems restored

With the 300,000 pieces that make up its collections, the Vatican Medagliere offers scholars and curious amateurs what has been produced as a medium of exchange and communication traversing from East to West across the centuries, long before the birth of Christ: Punic, Chinese, Carthaginian, Greek, Roman, Italian and European coins, all the way up to modern coinage, as well as a series of precious medal collections, among which the papal one has a special importance; this collection is unique in its kind.

In addition to its collections of coins, medals, as well as leads, plaques, seals and engraved stones, the Medagliere preserves precious collections of casts. Of particular interest is the collection made in the years 1819-1820 by the Roman engraver of Austrian descent, Luigi Pichler (1773-1854), for Austrian emperor Francis I, who intended to present it as a gift to Pope Pius VII Chiaramonti.



Upon going to Vienna in 1795, Pichler had the opportunity to carry out a series of works for the local nobility which contributed to his renown. He also returned there in 1808, when he went to Prince Prosper von Zinzendorf (1751-1822) with a letter of introduction by sculptor Antonio Canova (1757-1822), who had worked for the nobleman. Prince von Zinzendorf had already had the opportunity to appreciate the engraver's work, and on the occasion of that trip, Pichler was also able to meet the emperor and receive the appointment of member of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. The same honor would also be conferred on him a few years later by the Academy of San Luca (1812) and subsequently by the Academy of Florence (1831), Milan (1839) and Venice (1844).

Despite the emperor's invitation to stay in Vienna, Pichler preferred to return to Rome, but in 1818, when Prince Klemens von Metternich (1773-1859) asked him on behalf of the emperor to move to Vienna, Pichler was unable to refuse. He then crafted the reproductions of the cameos and gems of the Imperial Museum, making the copies out of sulfur and glass paste to be the same as the originals, even up to the streaks. It was Pichler himself who brought to Rome the mahogany cabinet containing the replicas of the 595 precious and famous works in metal frames.

He then returned to Vienna, where he taught his art to young students.

Gregory XVI gave him the title of knight of St. Gregory the Great in 1839 and in 1842 that of the Order of St. Sylvester. He asked and obtained permission to return to Rome, because he wished "... to close his eyes where he had first opened them to light". He arrived there in 1850.

Other casts of the Viennese collection had previously been made, but with less refined materials than the ones used for those given to Pius VII. The collection is particularly valuable because of its uniqueness: the matrices were destroyed to prevent the making of other copies, and many of the originals kept in Vienna were destroyed during the Second World War.

Over time Pichler's work (which had been partially experimental) was damaged by atmospheric agents and environmental conditions not conducive to conservation.

Some years ago, the contribution of Alan Baron of Numismatica Genevensis enabled the restoration of a first group of gems. The gilded metal settings of the gems had acquired a blue-greenish oxidation that put the reproductions at risk.

Thanks to the generosity and expertise of the Sem.Ar company, 480 settings damaged by oxidation have recently been restored by Gabriele Veneri, who is also the president of the CNA goldsmiths (National Confederation of Crafts and Small and Medium Enterprises), and his staff. Because of their fragility, the cameos and gems were removed from their settings with extreme care. After being transported to Arezzo, they were hand-cleaned from incrustations and oxidations. At the end of these delicate operations, which in some cases also included the reinforcement of the metal by lasers in order to prevent breakage, and thick layer of gold was added to the settings through the technique of galvanic electrolysis, since gold is the antioxidant par excellence. The settings were then put back together with the cameos and gems in the Medagliere department.

We express all our gratitude to Gabriele Veneri and the professionals of the Sem.Ar company who executed this precious and extensive work on the gems, which have now returned to their original splendor.





## “Curious” gifts to the Library



Some “curious” objects came to the Library in the summer of 1945, gifts from the famous violinist Teresina Tua, who originated from Turin. They were handed over to Pius XII through the Belgian ambassador to the Holy See, Adrien Nieuwenhuys.

Maddalena Maria Teresina Tua (1866-1956), of a slender figure and delicate features, was the daughter and granddaughter of musicians. Gifted with great talent, among the greatest of the time, she studied at the Conservatory of Paris, where she obtained her diploma in 1879, when she was only 13. By her virtuosity she fascinated the audiences of the major theaters of the time, in Italy, England, the Netherlands, France, the United States and Russia. She was known everywhere and everyone called her “the Angel of the violin”. Her last concert took place in Trieste in 1915.

Upon the premature loss of her mother, children, and husband, she took refuge in music and dedicated herself generously to charitable and solidarity activities, in favor of the victims of the earthquake of Messina in 1908 and of those who had been injured and disabled during the war. Her commitment won her important awards, three silver crosses: from the Ministry of War, the Ministry of the Interior and the Red Cross.

She taught at the Milan Conservatory (1911-1924) and at the Academy of Santa Cecilia (1925-1934). Some of her violins, including a Stradivari (1709), are kept at the Turin Conservatory. Another one of her Stradivari violins (from 1708) was donated to the Paris Conservatory.

After divesting herself of her real estate, which she donated to the parish of Sondrio (the city where she had lived with her second husband, who had died in 1933), in 1940 she decided to enter the Order of Perpetual Adoration of Rome (Perpetual Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament), taking the name of Sister Maria del Gesù.

Having probably kept some “small” objects for herself, she then offered them as a gift to the pontiff, Pius XII, who sent them to the Vaticana and to the Sacred and Profane Museums that were part of the Library. The items included a Florentine bronze cannon from the 17th century, a small model of a historical violin, now preserved in the Graphic Arts department of the Vatican Museums, a microscopic edition of the *Divine Comedy*, and the microscopic edition of Galileo’s *Letter to Madam Cristina of Lorraine* (1615).



The publications represent bibliographical curiosities: the first is one of the specimens of the “Dantino” that was printed in Padua by the Salmin brothers for U. Hoepli in 1878, and which measures 50x35 mm (*Libri.minusc.5*). The small book took five years to make and has characters from a type setting made in 1850, called “fly’s eyes type”, which was destroyed immediately after the publication of the other small book donated by the famous violinist, the *Letter of Galileo to Madame Cristina of Lorraine* (*Libri.minusc.8*). It was published in 1896, and measuring 15x9 mm, it is considered the smallest book ever printed with movable type .

The digitization of the “tiny books” is not foreseen, in all 24 documents (21 call numbers) kept in the Reserve depository, since we currently do not have the suitable technological tools to carry it out.





*Asphodelus*



*admire those who resist,  
who have made the verb resist mean  
flesh, sweat, blood and  
who have shown  
without a big show  
that it is possible to live,  
and live on your feet even in the worst of times*

*Luis Sepulveda (1949-2020)*

## Remembering Nello Vian who passed away twenty years ago



January 18, 2000, twenty years ago, marks the date when Nello Vian, “librarian, biographer, historian” of the Vatican Library, passed away; he would have turned 93 on May 28th.

He arrived in Rome in 1931 from Milan, after being presented by Fr. Agostino Gemelli to the Vatican Library. He came to the Library to learn the modern techniques that had been introduced according to the American model of Library Science, which he would later adopt at the library of the Catholic University of Milan.

Personal and professional events led him to establish Rome as his home. Vian began to work officially for the papal Library beginning from 1934. The initial project changed its location, but not its goal. He was the last of a group of seven employees whom the Library sent to America several times to study various themes of library sciences starting in the summer of 1927, thanks to scholarships provided by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

On August 4, 1932, he left for the University of Ann Arbor, Michigan, and returned in May of 1933 to be hired as an Assistant the following year. He worked in the cataloging of printed books and taught Bibliography at the Vatican School of Library Science, together with Iginio Giordani, one of the “seven”, who taught Cataloging and Classification.

The School was established in 1934 by Pius XI, the librarian pope.



From 1949 he was formally the Secretary of the Library, even if he had the role in 1943, when the former Secretary, Alcide De Gasperi (1881-1954), who later on became Prime Ministry of Italy, left the Library. Vian remained in this position until 1977, the year of his retirement.

A man of deep faith, great intellectual abilities and exquisite sensitivity, Nello Vian dedicated his life to study and productive work in different fields. He has published many works; at the Library he is particularly remembered for his witty “portraits” of personalities of the Institution, *Figure della Vaticana* (1986), depicted with such precision that one could imagine the figures walking about the Library, each with the very characteristics highlighted by the scrupulous and benevolent hand of the portraitist.

Paolo, the youngest of his three children, is just as appreciated as was his father. He was *scriptor latinus* and director of the Department of Manuscripts at the Library. Currently he is vice prefect of the Apostolic Archives.

Nello Vian was rigorous but affable, helpful and generous with everyone. Almost none of the current employees of the Library can remember Professor Vian, but the older retirees remember him as a sure and reliable point of reference, for both superiors as well as colleagues, a gentleman of yesteryear, of the kind whom we would hope to meet in every era.

To him a grateful remembrance and affection from a community that is in constant renewal, but which intrinsically cares about the cultural and human memory it represents.



## Two important Chinese manuscripts restored

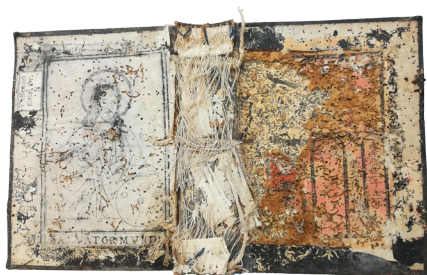
Recent support offered by Dr. Edwin Mok of Hong Kong has enabled the prompt restoration work carried out on two important Chinese manuscripts: two separate editions of the Chinese-Latin dictionary originally compiled by Basilio Brollo (1648-1704), a Franciscan missionary, during his long stay in China, and especially in Nanchino.

The two paper manuscripts restored are *Vat.estr.or.3* and *Vat.estr.or.8*. The first manuscript, *Vat.estr.or.3*, «ex dono Abbatis Mezzafalce 1732» (f. VIIr) makes reference to Giovanni Donato Mezzafalce (1661-1720) from Bitonto (Bari), beneficiary of the Chapter of St. Peter, who had been in China after Card. Carlo Tommaso Maillard de Tournon (1668-1710).

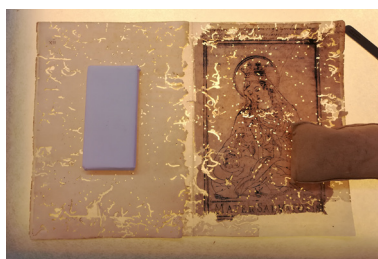
The second manuscript, *Vat.estr.or.8*, containing the same dictionary, was copied by the Franciscan missionary Carlo Orzi da Castorano (1673-1755), vicar of the diocese of Beijing. It belonged to his collection of Chinese books and manuscripts.

The two documents were heavily damaged due to entomological attacks, which had occurred at unknown moments in the life of the artefacts, and which prevented consultation. The paper folios were fragmented and sometimes glued together; the sewing thread had been broken in several places, and the capitals were damaged. The complete restoration of the volumes required the dismantling of the original seam. According to the tradition of the Vatican Library, during operations that take place in order to render the documents fully available for consultation, caution is used to safeguard all the original parts, in order to preserve the elements that offer different kinds of information on the history of the artefact. What was not possible to keep with the body of the paper folios was conserved separately.

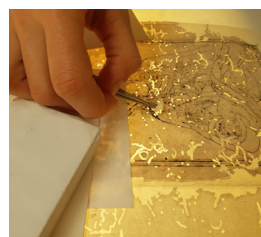
All the papers have been restored with total or local glazes in Japanese veil, or by mending the lacunae and other fragile parts locally by means of Japanese paper and rice starch glue.



*Vat.estr.or.8 - Before the conservation treatments*



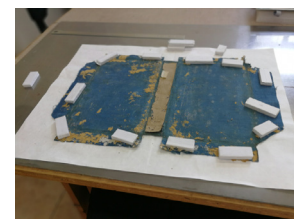
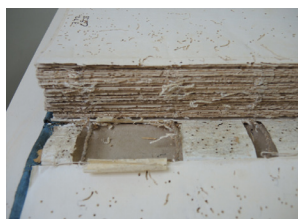
*During the treatments*



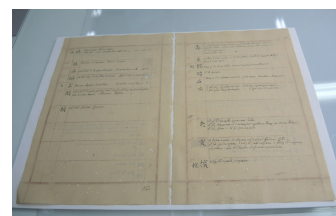
*After the treatments*

Even the covers were restored before reconstructing the whole artefact, by gluing the nerves and the backing to new quadrants.

We are grateful to Mr. Mok, who in the past had already contributed to the recovery of important documents from China, for his commitment to preserve these important testimonies of Oriental culture, now usable once more.



*Vat.estr.or.3*



## Intriguing items in the Library: the labradorite tables



A scholar coming to the Library goes up to the third floor to reach the rooms. He opens the glass door which leads into an open atrium: if he goes straight, he arrives at the Reading Room, while if he goes left, he reaches the Manuscript Room. Perhaps not everyone notices, but anyone who walks through that glass door is welcomed by a beautiful baroque table, whose top is made of a beautiful dark stone.

The table is not merely ornamental, even if the etched crystal vase displayed provides a beautiful decor, a gift from Poland to John Paul II on the occasion of his election. Whoever consults the volumes of the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* or the other biographical dictionaries placed at the entrance hall uses the table. Employees and scholars exchange a few words leaning against the table, sometimes under the illusion that, being farther away from the study desks, they do not disturb those who are sitting and absorbed in their work in the reading rooms.

The carved and gilded wooden table is reminiscent of a certain kind of furniture made by Filippo Passarini (1638-1698), whose drawings and models were published in 1698 in the work *Nuove inventioni d'ornamenti d'architettura e d'intagli diversi*. It likewise recalls the work of other contemporary artists, such as Giovanni de' Sebastiani or Giovanni Maria Giorgetti.

Our table, however, was made more recently, together with three other twin tables: one table is located in the foyer of the Periodicals Room on the first floor, and the other two are housed in the Vestibule of the Sistine Library.

The intriguing aspect of these tables is the “special” marble tabletop, which was the reason they were made. It looks blackish, but the turquoise elements in the stone reflect light intensely. The stone is called labradorite, or Labrador marble, although technically it is improper to call it marble (calcium carbonate), as it consists in a natural silicate of lime alum and soda.

On the two smaller sides of the supports we read: “Year XXXI”, of the pontificate of Pius IX, while on the main sides the emblem of the pontiff is carved.

Our “marbles”, measuring 1.53 mx 0.90 m (5/6 cm thick) each, however, do not come from North America, but from a mine in European Russia.

In 1867 Count Augusto Poniatowski, a Polish nobleman who was fond of rarities and mineralogy, while browsing the shop of an antique dealer in Kiev, saw a block of labradorite of a rare size, coming from the quarries in the area. He thought of offering it to Pius IX on the occasion of his priestly jubilee, but died before he could complete his project.



Several years later, the grandson of the nobleman, Count Dimitri Boutouvine, son of a former Russian ambassador to Italy, learned of his uncle's wish and decided to make it happen. He gave orders that the precious block of stone be sent to Rome via Odessa. The package never made it to Odessa, however, but stopped in Russia, in the territory of the count, where it was buried under a pile of other stones that had been brought there to build a new factory for the owner. The count eventually found it and had it cut into two slabs which were carefully packed and shipped to Livorno and Civitavecchia and then offered to pope Pius IX. The pope appreciated them very much but considered them too big. He decided to have the slabs cut into two parts and then set them in four carved and gilded wooden “shelves” to adorn the Great Sistine Hall, where they stayed for a long time.



The next time that we come to the Library, let us gaze for a moment on that apparently modest “marble”, which, if examined closely, reveals the most beautiful reflections, small flashes of blue, tiny fragments of sky, a beautiful way to start a new day of work.



## Cicognara - Kress Foundation: a fellowship for conservation

It is with great pleasure that we announce that the third phase of the biennial project approved by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation has just come to completion. Under the auspices of the Sanctuary of Culture, the Kress Foundation financed the conservation of the precious collection of approximately 5000 art volumes belonging to Count Leopoldo Cicognara (1767-1834). The count had sold the books to the Library in 1824.

News on the previous phases of this project have been presented in OWL's nos. 8 (October-December 2018), p. 15, and 10 (April-June 2019), p. 13.

From July 2019 to June 2020, the skilled conservator Valentina Giunta, who was entrusted with the execution of the works, carried out restoration work on 25 volumes of the collection, rendering them entirely accessible once again. It should be taken into due account that during the period of time that the Library was closed on account of Covid 19, conservative treatments could not be performed. Restoration is one of those activities that cannot be carried out remotely, of course.

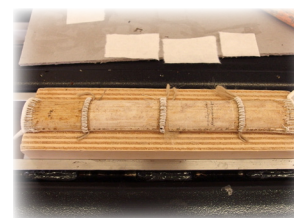
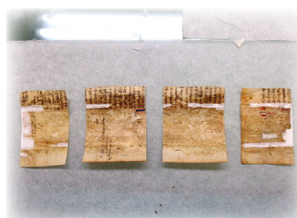
There are therefore 47 volumes restored since the beginning of the project, which started in July 2018.

The curator has affixed a label with the name of the foundation on each of the volumes that was treated, to serve as a reminder of the substantial contribution provided in the work of restoration. What's more, a canvas and cardboard case was created to protect and safeguard each book that was treated.

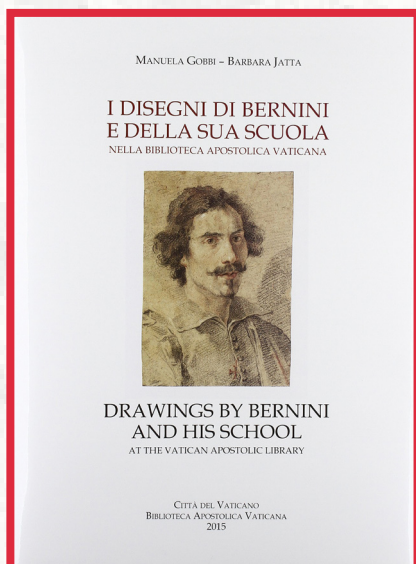
Among the volumes restored in this period, we would like to mention the first critical edition (Lyon 1552) of the Latin text of *De architectura*, a treatise on the subject written by the architect and military engineer Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (1st cent. BC), and dedicated to emperor Cesare Augusto, a guide to the design of buildings. (Cicognara.IV.712)

Being the only treatise on the subject that has come down to us from antiquity, the Vitruvian work has been considered as the first text of architectural theory since the Renaissance, and as the most important source for the knowledge of the canons of classical architecture. It contains a great variety of information on Greek and Roman buildings, as well as instructions for the planning and designing of military camps, cities and large structures, such as aqueducts, ports, and public toilets, as well as for measuring instruments and other small utensils.

All the parties involved in this meritorious initiative, to whom we are most grateful, are aware of its utmost importance. This work acquires an even greater value, if we consider the opportunity to make a world-class, unique collection fully available for study.



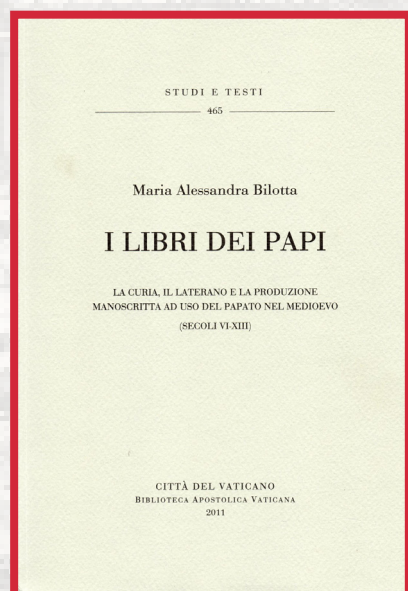
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If you wish to know the history of the Library (and of the Vatican), it will be possible to purchase the 5 volumes of the *Storia della Biblioteca Vaticana* at a **50%** discount rate.



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- Fritz Thyssen Stiftung
- Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg

In the previous edition of OWL (13, p. 4), we gave the wrong name of one of the scholars working in the Korean Project, Doctor Romina De Vizio; we apologize to her.



If you would like to make a contribution to the projects of the Library, please contact:

Luigina Orlandi  
Office of Institutional Advancement  
(orlandi@vatlib.it)

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