



## The letter of Christopher Columbus from the Americas



The *Rossiana Library*, which belonged to Giovanni Francesco De Rossi (1796-1854), includes about one thousand two hundred manuscripts, and more than eight thousand printed volumes, including over two thousand five hundred *incunabula*. After the death of De Rossi, the collection was donated by his widow to the Society of Jesus, on condition that it remained as a whole and intact. It eventually passed *pro tempore* to the Emperor of Austria in the event that the Company was dissolved (but returned to the Company if it were restored).

The condition came into effect, since, after Rome was annexed by the Italian State, religious corpora-

tions were suppressed in 1873.

The collection was then transported to the headquarters of the Austro-Hungarian embassy in Rome, so as to be sent to Vienna in 1877 and subsequently transferred to the Viennese suburb of Lainz in 1895.

The journey back to Italy became possible after the First World War, when the Austrian Empire fell. It was then established that the collection would return to Rome and be placed in the Vatican Library. But one Rossiano *incunabulum* has returned to the Vatican only recently. This is the famous letter of Christopher Columbus, *Epistola de insulis nuper inventis*, concerning the “discovery” of America.



Having departed in August of 1492, Columbus returned to Europe in March of the following year.

The letter in which he describes the trip, written in Spanish, was translated into Latin and already printed several times in 1493. After the *incunabulum* was carefully examined by American specialists, who were assisted by the Library staff, it was concluded that the letter of Columbus that had belonged to the *Rossiana Library*, with the shelf mark *Stamp. Ross. 674*, was actually not authentic.

It is not known when the piece was withdrawn from its collection; perhaps this occurred when the binding was undergoing treatment, but now it has been possible to trace the original *incunabulum* to the United States. It was sold in 2004 by an antique dealer to Robert David Parsons, who bought it without being aware of its origin.

A comparison between this *incunabulum* and the falsified one kept in the Vatican allowed the experts to affirm that the *incunabulum* that had appeared in the United States corresponded to the original one preserved in the collection of De Rossi. Some codicological elements were particularly decisive for the identification, such as the identical number and the identical location of the stitching holes in the internal folds of the pages in both items.

Afterward, with the passing of Robert Parsons in 2014, the widow accepted the request of the US authorities to return the original letter from Columbus to the Vatican Library.

Thus on June 14, the United States Ambassador to the Holy See, H.E. Callista Gingrich handed over the *incunabulum* to Msgr. Jean-Louis Brugès, Librarian of H.R.C.

The Library expressed its appreciation to the US authorities for their precious help in identifying the stolen *incunabulum*, and to Mrs. Mary Parsons for allowing the return of the ancient document of the *Rossiana Library* to the Vatican Library.

After the ceremony, the kind guest, accompanied by her family, visited the historical Sistine Hall.



# Aldus at the BAV

Among the many thousands of ancient and precious editions within the collections of printed materials preserved at the Vatican Library, are the works achieved by the presses of the historic Manuzio family, active mainly in Venice over the 16th century.

In 2017 the three-year BAV-Aldus project was initiated for the analytical cataloging of these editions, thanks to the gracious involvement of Fredrik Vahlquist, who has been Ambassador of Sweden and a friend to the Library, and to the generous participation of H.E. Åke Bonnier, Lutheran Bishop of Skara.

The aim of the project is to make the entire collection of the Aldine editions, the highly sophisticated works printed by the Manuzio family, be known and accessible. The progenitor was Aldo the Elder (c. 1450-1515), one of the greatest publishers of all time: among other innovations, he introduced the use of italics and the octavo format. The Manuzio family, which published works in Greek, Latin and Hebrew, was active during the period from 1495 to 1597.

The collection can be distinguished from similarly prestigious collections in other institutions by its possession of the section of the library that belonged to Aldo the Younger (1547-1597, son of Paolo, 1512-1574), the last descendant of the family.

The number of works described exceeds 2,500 units, distributed among the historical collections of the Vatican as well as in the collections Aldine and Aldine.A. Numerous editions printed by the Manuzio family are in fact present in the collections Barberini, Chigi, De Marinis, De Rossi, Ferrajoli, Propaganda Fide, Raccolta Prima, but there are also some in the Raccolta Generale.

The analytical cataloging also includes information regarding exemplary traits (bindings, stamps, seals, annotations, *ex libris*, decorations) to the description of the editions. The descriptions of the works will be soon visible on the DVL website (*Digital Vatican Library*, [digi.vatlib.it](http://digi.vatlib.it)), with images that reproduce the details of the most significant pieces in the collection.

The BAV-Aldus project came about as a continuation of the previous project called BAVIC (*Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Incunabulorum Catalogus*), conducted by the Ancient Books Section, a project which occasioned the online publication of the descriptions of approximately 6,500 editions printed between 1450 and 1500.

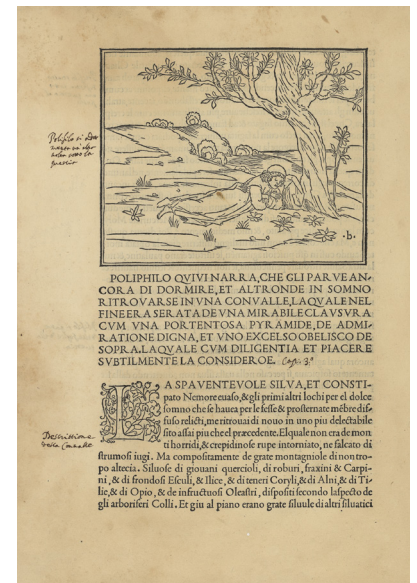
Over half of the Aldine publications have been cataloged and the completion of the project is coming to pass well before its initially estimated timeframe.



"Cortegiano" by Baldassarre Castiglione, Venezia, heirs Aldo Manuzio, the Elder, and Andrea Torresano, the Elder, 1528  
Aldine. I. 67  
Censored by  
Matteo Nerone Censore fiorentino



Aldine. I. 151



Poliphilo sleeping,  
"Hypnerotomachia Poliphili".  
The work is considered one of the  
typographical masterpieces of all time  
Inc. Chig. II. 610  
Annotated by Fabio Chigi



Msgr. Cesare Pasini, H.E. Msgr. Lean-Louis Bruguès, Philippe Brunet, Josef Aschbacher (behind)

## Long-term preservation of digital documents: the Vaticana and ESA use FITS

On April 16, in the Vestibule of the Library, there was a meeting of the representatives of the Library and the European Space Agency (ESA) with the press. In the presence of Philippe Brunet, Director for Space Policy, Copernicus and Defence at the European Commission, the two institutions demonstrated their respective initiatives regarding long-term preservation of digital documents.

The Library, by undertaking the ambitious project of digitizing the collection of its manuscripts, had to face the problem of preserving millions of images in high resolution over the long term, 45 million billion bytes, while making the texts accessible online.

ESA is committed to ensuring both present and future access to a large amount of data. For example, with its Heritage Data Program, ESA protects and guarantees data for the observation of the Earth acquired by satellite.

The technology used is called *FITS* (*Flexible Image Transport System*), and was developed by NASA in the 1970's in order to manage the large amount of data from space missions and astronomical explorations.

The system enables you to record multiple types of information within the same file, allowing one to read the data without necessarily converting it to another format, thus avoiding the loss of information.

Thanks to this technology, the data will also be available in the distant future, regardless of the evolution of software and hardware, as it also contains the directions for decoding it in the future.

Librarians and astronomers, two worlds very far from each other, have therefore bridged the gap by using the same technology in their respective domains; it is an instrument that will enable us to direct our vision toward future centuries.

## The first papal railway

The Prints Cabinet of the Vatican Library conserves a precious Photographic Collection that includes a nucleus of photographic prints big size, coming from the Polish Academy of Sciences of Rome, together with another *corpus* of albums, portfolios, scrolls, packets and groups of loose photographs, reaching a total of about 150,000 photographs.

The second group is composed of works that were sent to various popes from the missions around the whole world, from many dioceses and even private individuals; these documents are of great importance for the history of the Church and for customs from the end of the 19th to the end of the 20th century.

These photographs are not simply portraits of the popes or displays of events of papal interest that document Catholic missions from all over the world, celebrative occasions, inaugurations and ecclesiastic activity, but mainly include photographs of landscapes (urban and natural), architectural works from remote places, views of Italian and foreign cities, historical testimonies of catastrophes (earthquakes, bombings)

and discoveries, explorations, inventions, new patents, documentation of excavations, works of art, archaeological areas, churches, monuments and museums from all over the world. The photos, collected most of the time in albums with precious bindings and casings, were sent to the pontiffs as a testimony and demonstration of affection and gratitude to the Church, and to receive his blessing.

In composing the inventory of photographs in “oblong” format, Oriana Rizzuto, who collaborates with the Prints Cabinet since some time ago with passion and generosity, has found several documents of particular interest. Within the collection we point out the image of the first papal railway (R. G. *Fotografie. Oblungo. I. 997*); its catalog description reads: “Velletri, first Railway. Papal Railway’. Great picture in good condition. Albumin. Panoramic photo folded in two parts. 36x77. 1860”.

The photo represents the large railway bridge constructed above a valley where some people may be observed posing for the photographer.



R. G. *Fotografie. Obl. I. 997*



A locomotive with wagons is passing. The document deserves attention both for technical and artistic reasons, as it is an albumin in panoramic format, as well as for the historical fact *per se*, which represents the event of the first connection between the Papal State and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and, in fact, the “Opening” of the State itself.

Pius IX had ascended to the papal throne in 1846, the year in which the railway was already being built in the neighboring kingdom, when a statement was issued for the construction of four railway lines, including the Rome-Velletri-Segni-Frosinone-Ceprano.

In 1849 the first papal act was issued to grant the Roman company Pia-Latina, which was supposed “to build a railway from Rome to the border of the

Neapolitan Kingdom near Ceprano.”

The company was unable to maintain the terms of the contract and in 1853 a new company, the Railway Company from Rome to Frascati, obtained the right to extend the railway to Albano and Velletri, within the Papal State. On November 11, 1854, the statutes of the company were approved and the building was entrusted to the British firm John Oliver York & Co. In 1856 it opened the stretch from Rome-Porta Maggiore to Ciampino, on August 1, 1859, the one to Cecchina and December 1, 1862, the others, Velletri, Segni and Ceprano.

The railway was inaugurated in 1863 by Pope Pius IX, and officially open to the public from December 1st of the same year.



PONTE DI FERRO DELLA PIO-LATINA  
presso Velletri.

## Pietro Giampaoli, papal engraver

The works of the engraver and medalist Pietro Giampaoli (1898-1998), who led a life dedicated to art of engraving with intense passion, are largely preserved in the *Medagliere* of the Apostolic Library.

At the death of their father, twenty years ago, Maria Teresa, Pierluigi, Chiara, Giuseppe and Simona Giampaoli wanted to seal the long paternal relationship with the Holy See by a generous gift.

This relationship began a few years after his arrival to Rome “with his humble baggage, with his dreams and an unshakable faith in the future”, with the meeting, in 1929, of the Secretary of State of Pius XI, card. Eugenio Pacelli, and which led to the creation of many small and large works over the years.

The Giampaoli brothers have thus given to the Vatican *Medagliere* and to numismatic scholars all the bronzes, plasters, and coinage produced by their father during his 70 years of activity, except for those that had some relation to the family (these were donated to the Museum of Art and Medal of Buja, birthplace of Giampaoli), and the works “Valdostane” (donated to the Regional Library of Aosta, where Giampaoli moved in 1944 and stayed for more than a year).

On several occasions, between 2002 and 2003, the works were handed over to the Prefect at that time, Raffaele Farina, SDB, with whom the modalities for drafting a catalog that also included the other donations were discussed, inspired by a sentiment of friendship.

In the following years, Simona, the youngest of the family, worked on the catalog of the works of Buja and Aosta, published in 2010 in collaboration with the Curator of the Medagliere, Giancarlo Alteri.

The catalog for the works kept at the Vatican of the “unsurpassable master” is under way.

A critic at the Biennale where the artist had participated as a young man said: “Giampaoli’s medals must be seen: every story would only give a very imprecise idea of these small material masterpieces of solid metal ... Every medallion of this Friulian artist contains his whole heart, his whole soul ...”.

After so many years and countless works performed, the statement still has full and more confirmed validity.



Sketch for the silver coin of 500 lire, 1958  
(portrait of Giampaoli's wife Letizia)



Md. Giampaoli. 128A. D



Md. Giampaoli. 128A. R



Mt. Repubblica Italiana, XI, 55,1 D



Mt. Repubblica Italiana, XI, 55,1 R



## Portraits of artists

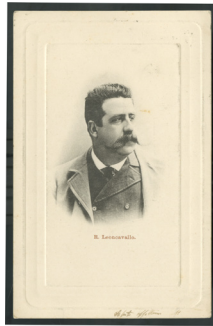
Among the many collections held in the Vatican's Prints Cabinet, there is also a curious collection that includes 193 photographic portraits, mainly of Italian actors and singers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, recorded under the title, *Portraits of artists*.

The *Portraits* include a chronological period spanning from the mid-nineteenth century to the twenties of the following century. Of predominantly Italian origin, and particularly that of Turin, the collection consists of four types of elements: visiting cards, postcards, cabinet-cards and theatrical *souvenirs*. This indicates that the photos belonged to a collector of theatrical paraphernalia of the period, who has been identified, thanks to some elements highlighted during cataloging, as Giuseppe Giovanni Cauda (1855-1936), theatrical critic of the *Gazzetta di Torino* from c. 1876 to 1911, and of other theatrical newspapers. His career and the place in which it unfolded reveal the reason for the collection. On the other hand, the way that the collection arrived to the Vatican is less certain and further research would be needed.

The first seventy portraits of the collection now have a complete inventory with references, biographical data and notes. The compilation of the Italian *repertoire* made by the Australian researcher Monique Webber is in keeping with the Vatican criteria for cataloging and takes into account the research strategies that are active throughout the English-speaking world.

New and different areas of interest and study are offered by the venerable papal Library.

- Arturo Garzes, 1856-1915
- Giacinta Pezzana, 1841-1919
- Ruggero Leoncavallo, 1857-1919
- Elwira, Enrica, Pia Zoppetti, sec. XIX-XX
- Vincenzo Scarpetta, 1877-1952
- Adelina Patti, 1843-1919
- Teresa Burchi, 1887-1963
- Adele Borghi, ca. 1860?
- Armando Falconi, 1871-1954
- Edoardo Scarpetta, 1853-1925
- Jane Hading, 1859-1941
- Gemma De Santis, sec. XIX-XX
- Emma Nevada, 1859-1940
- Ermete Zacconi, 1857-1948
- Teresa Boetti Valvassura, 1851-1930



# Giuseppe Simonio Assemani (1687-1768) on the 250 anniversary of his death



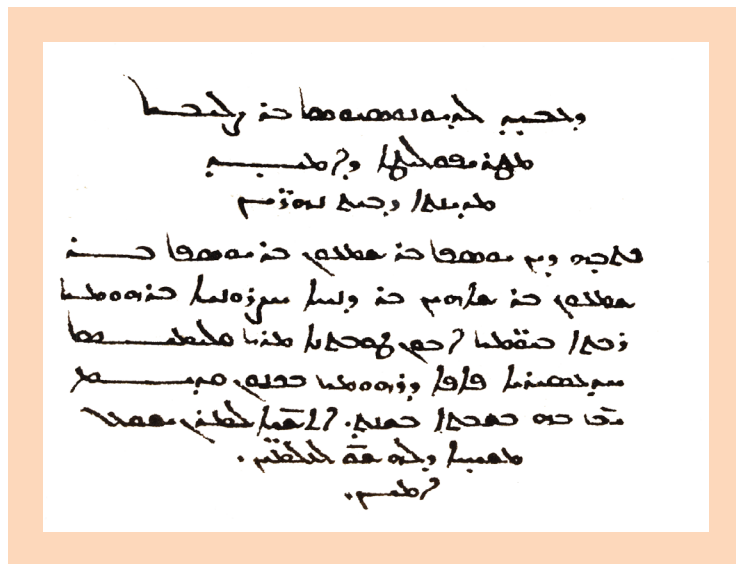
G. S. Assemani, design  
by Pier Leone Ghezzi,  
Ott. lat. 3117, f. 51r

On May 17, in the Sala Barberini of the Library, the 250th anniversary of the death of Giuseppe Simonio Assemani (1687-1768), archbishop, prefect of the Vatican Library, took place. He was a nephew of the homonymous bishop of Tripoli, and illustrious son of the Maronite Church and of Lebanon, an early promoter and executor of fundamental scholarly works who in particular obtained great merit in Syriac studies. One of his main contributions, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, is composed of four volumes: *De scriptoribus Syris Orthodoxis*, 1719; *De scriptoribus Syris Monophysitis*, 1721; *De scriptoribus Syris Nestorianis*, 1725; *De Syris Nestorianis*, 1728.

He was also particularly competent in the Greek and Latin cultures; he published the *Codex canonum Ecclesiae Graecae* in 1762, the first volume of the *Bibliotheca Iuris Orientalis Canonici et Civilis*.

The event was organized by the Pontifical Maronite College where Assemani was a pupil and which was founded by Gregory XIII. Speakers included H.E. Card. Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for Oriental Churches, Msgr. François Zeki Eid, Rector of the Maronite College, H.E. Msgr. Jean-Louis Bruguès, Librarian of the Vatican Library, the Prefect of the Library, Msgr. Cesare Pasini, and the Eastern *scriptor* of the Apostolic Library, Delio Vania Proverbio. The commemoration has anticipated the conference dedicated to the illustrious figure that will take place in Lebanon next 15 and 16 August.

Assemani was a *scriptor* at the Vatican for Syriac and Arabic from 1710; in 1730 he was promoted to Second Custodian (Vice Prefect) and from 1739, First Custodian. Together with his nephew, Stefano Evodio Assemani (1707-1782), who succeeded him, he was the only Eastern Prefect in the history of the Vatican Library. With his nephew he began to compile and publish the catalogs of the Hebrew, Samaritan and Syriac manuscripts in the Library's collections. In 1756 he published *Bibliothecae apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus in tres partes distributus*, devoted to the Hebrew and Syriac manuscripts.



Signing of G. S. Assemani, 1711  
Vat. sir. 361, f. 44

## The Library's opacs have been updated

Since Monday, April 30, the links to the catalogs of the Apostolic Library have been changed: the opacs of printed books, graphic materials, coins and medals and manuscripts (which were added on May 10) may be accessed from the digital library website ([digi.vatlib.it](http://digi.vatlib.it)), in addition to the official site of the Library, which is currently being thoroughly updated.

As the scholars of the Library well know, a new opac page had long been expected, a more agile, efficient and effective tool that would allow a "friendly" approach to those who consult the Library catalogs.

From the new page you can access not only the bibliographic descriptions concerning the editions, but also the data relative to the exemplars and the relations between them, as well as the authority headings.

As a fruit of the commitment of many and of the collaboration with NTT Data, the new access is intuitive, and has the ability to provide various filters during the searches.

This is an important step within two broader perspectives: granting access to the services that the Library offers, especially through the website, and making the software and other equipment used by the Library's cataloging offices more efficient.



## Visit of the ambassador of Korea to the Holy See



The new Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Holy See, H.E. Joseph Lee Baek Man, was recently welcomed as a guest of the Vatican Library.

Mr. Ambassador, who presented his letters of credence to the Holy Father at the Audience of February 16, came on the afternoon of May 15, accompanied by his kind wife, Mrs. Myung Sook Park Lee, Mr. Soo Deok Park, Minister Counselor and Consort, Mrs. Anna On Park, and by Miss Hyun Sook Nam, Third Secretary. The group visited the historic areas of the Institution, including the Lapidary Gallery, with its innumerable stone "texts" arranged on the walls as on shelves.

The guests were able to take a look at some important manuscript documents from Korea kept in the Library's far-east collections and expressed their appreciation for the visit.



## A day of study “in memoriam” of Msgr. Paul Canart (1927-2017)



The Apostolic Library will commemorate the illustrious scholar Msgr. Paul Canart a year after his death. On September 21st, a day of studies will be held in the Sala Barberini in memory of the *scriptor graecus* who spent sixty years of his life at the Library.

The Vatican Committee of Byzantine Studies (CVSB) participates in the organization of the event.

Paul Canart was born in Cuesmes, Belgium, on October 25, 1927, and had completed his studies in philosophy and literature at the Catholic University of Louvain between 1944 and 1953. He had studied Theology in the Seminary of Malines and was ordained priest on April 1st 1951. He got his doctorate at the Sorbonne University in 1979.

In 1956 the Vatican Library invited him to become part of its scholarly staff for the study and cataloging of Greek manuscripts. Thus Msgr. Canart in 1957 became a Vatican’s *scriptor graecus*; from 1993 to 1998 he was the Vice Prefect of the Library.

It has been written that Msgr. Canart was “self-taught”, and with optimal results. At a frequency of five-years-time, he published a volume of the Catalog that had been entrusted to him, and much more.

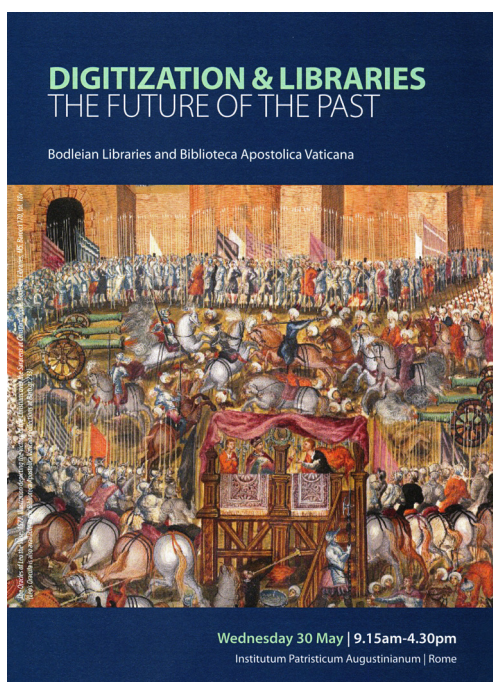
Among his most demanding works, the preparation of the volume of commentary that accompanied

the publication of the facsimile of *Vat. gr. 1209* (Codex B), which was presented to the Holy Father, John Paul II, in the jubilee year of 2000.

According to the memory of card. Raffaele Farina, Librarian Emeritus of H.R.C., Msgr. Canart “had a serenity of extraordinary profundity, which was the secret of his success and his communication with others. He has been on many Councils, Committees and Commissions and, also, in the Government of the Library. He has often been alone for long periods of time. He was a good priest, of an intensely interior religiosity that did not disturb anyone; a hard worker, by sense of duty, but also by acquired efficiency, scholarly preparation and model of life.”

Several scholars will honor him by participating in the initiative together with the Prefect of the Library, Msgr. Cesare Pasini, and the Vice Prefect, Ambrogio Piazzoni. Brigitte Mondrain, Président du Comité International de Paléographie Grecque, members of the Library’s scholarly staff, members of the CVSB and other figures of the academic world, will gather together in the place of study *par excellence* in memory of a great scholar.

## Digitization & Libraries the future of the past



A second session of the conference was dedicated to the future of digital libraries, with the participation of representatives from some foundations, followed by a panel on the topic of subsidies for digitization projects with an obvious connection to the proposed theme, since the future of digitization will necessitate those who believe in such projects and who will also financially support such demanding and costly initiatives.

“But, as is understandable, the future of digital libraries cannot be reduced to a merely financial issue. Its meaning and importance derive from the benefits that can be drawn from it,” underlined Msgr. Cesare Pasini in his introduction to the meeting. He noted that in addition to the benefits related to conservation and dissemination, there are also benefits deriving from the technologies that are being used.

Hence the reference to the so-called ‘interoperability’, i.e., the possibility to allow digital images on the web to circulate freely, accompanied by all the documentary material of descriptive data (with the Polonsky Project the addition of metadata to the images have produced 10,765 new descriptions and 3,256 new authority entries in the Library’s catalogues).

Thanks to the protocol known as *IIIF* (*International Image Interoperability Framework*), developed by Stanford University, it is possible to view more than one digital object on the network with a single computer. The objects are made compatible with the standard, such that they may be viewed by simply recalling the designated web address, even if put online by different platforms, without going to the site of the institution that produced it and made it visible in its database.

In short, “the evolution of methods and techniques and the development of the sciences offer ‘the past’ an exciting ‘future’ to come, thanks to the most refined and perfected digitization and digital preservation techniques.”

The completion of the project set up by the Apostolic Library and the Bodleian Libraries (Oxford), aimed at making the respective collections of ancient texts available for consultation, provided the opportunity for a day of study on the topic of digitization in libraries as a tool for study and conservation of the culture for future generations.

The first session of the conference, entitled *Oxford, the Vatican and the Polonsky Project*, aimed to address the successful collaboration between the participating institutions. The project, carried out between 2012 and 2017, has made accessible online more than one and a half million pages from 2,256 manuscripts and 667 incunabula selected from the collections of Greek, Hebrew and Latin texts of the respective institutions. Such a result was made possible by the generous participation of the Polonsky Foundation.

The Foundation, strongly committed to the process of dissemination of information, has thus made it possible to take an important step toward the sharing of extraordinary intellectual resources on a global scale.



## On the Grasshopper and Cricket



The Poetry of earth is never dead:

When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,  
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run  
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;  
That is the Grasshopper's—he takes the lead  
In summer luxury,—he has never done  
With his delights; for when tired out with fun  
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.

The poetry of earth is ceasing never:

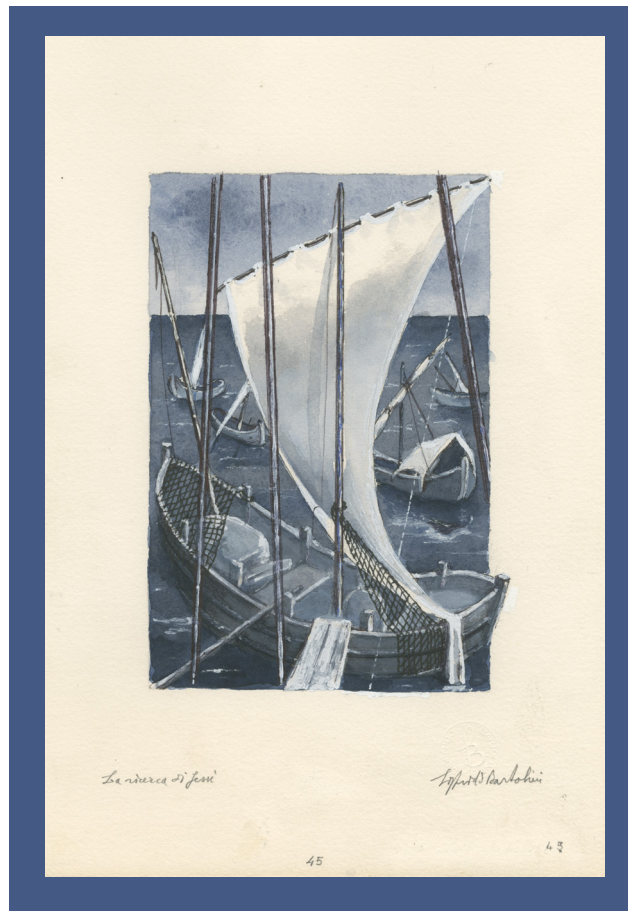
On a lone winter evening, when the frost  
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills  
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,  
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,  
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.



Giulio Bonasone (?), *Ceres and Cupid (or Allegory of the Earth)*, first half of the 16th c., engraving on burin.  
BAV, Riserva S.6, tav. 101a, detail

# Happy Summer!





Sigfrido Bartolini, "La ricerca di Gesù", 1999  
watercolor. BAV, Disegni generali 50

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- Sanctuary of Culture Foundation
- SCG Chemicals
- SemAr s.r.l.
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- Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg



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