



LIGUE DES BIBLIOTHÈQUES EUROPÉENNES DE RECHERCHE
ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN RESEARCH LIBRARIES

Manuscript Librarians Group

Italy – Backgrounds

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Introduction

Manuscript collections in Italy are spread among a great number of state, university, regional, municipal and ecclesiastical libraries of different size, origin and age, not to mention archives and museums. Therefore it is possible to focus only on the major ones.

The oldest collections come from medieval monastic libraries, many of them still extant (Montecassino, Abbazia di Grottaferrata etc). In the 15th century a massive migration of manuscripts from monasteries to humanistic and aristocratic libraries began. During the Counter Reformation new religious libraries were built up; others were created later by local sovereigns and scholars. After 1861, when Italy became a united nation, the most important of them were absorbed by the Italian state.

The Italian state libraries now total 46 (<http://www.bibliotechepubblichestatali.it>) including the National Central Libraries of Rome and Florence (BNCR and BNCf); they depend on the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali (MiBAC) - Direzione Generale per le Biblioteche e gli Istituti culturali (DGBl). Many of them keep manuscript collections. Former Sicily state libraries became regional in 1977. Two other national institutions related to libraries depend on MiBAC's DGBl: Istituto Centrale per il catalogo unico e le informazioni bibliografiche (ICCU) and Istituto Centrale di Patologia del Libro (ICPL).

According to *Anagrafe delle biblioteche italiane* (<http://anagrafe.iccu.sbn.it>), edited by ICCU, Italian libraries are more than 16,000; it is generally up-to-date in relation to addresses, opening times etc, but little reliable as to manuscript collections. A general directory of manuscript collections in Italian libraries is missing. The old *Inventari dei manoscritti delle biblioteche d'Italia* started by Giuseppe Mazzatinti (Torino 1887-) and not yet finished can give an idea of their number and holdings. O. Kristeller's *Iter Italicum*, although devoted to humanistic manuscripts, is a worthy surrogate of a census of manuscript collections.

Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Roma (BNCR)

<http://www.bnccrm.librari.beniculturali.it>

Established 1876, after Rome had become the capital of Italy (1870), in the former library of the Jesuit Roman College (founded 1551). Acquired manuscripts through confiscation of about 70 ecclesiastical Roman libraries. In 1975 moved to a new building in Castro Pretorio. Holds 8,000 manuscripts and more than 120,000 autographs and loose leaves.

Major collections:

- Fondo Gesuitico: 1752 manuscripts from Collegio Romano and other Jesuit libraries (many other manuscripts from Collegio Romano turned out in last century in the Vatican Library)
- Fondo Sessoriano: 590 mostly medieval manuscripts from the Cistercian monastery of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, where ancient monastic libraries (Nonantula, Casamari, S. Martino de' Bocci, etc.) were concentrated in the middle of 17th century
- Fondi Minori: 2,043 manuscripts from more than 20 suppressed monastic libraries; particularly outstanding the collection of the medieval monastery of Farfa (33 manuscripts)
- Fondo Vittorio Emanuele: hosts new acquisitions since the institution of the Library; includes about 1,800 medieval (e.g. Codex Hersfeldensis/Aesinas of Tacitus, acquired 1994) and modern (e.g. Gabriele D'Annunzio, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Elsa Morante) manuscripts
- Fondo Greco: 24 manuscripts; among them Gr. 6, the most important Homeric codex (11th century)
- Fondo Musicale: about 200 manuscripts
- Fondo Orientale: 314 manuscripts
- Autografi (16th-20th century)
- Archivi Raccolte Carteggi: about 50 collections of manuscripts and personal, family, cultural institutions papers (D'annunzio, Arturo Onofri, Giorgio Vigolo, etc.)
- 15th and 16th century manuscript globes and maps

Other historical libraries holding outstanding manuscript collections in Rome

- **Biblioteca Angelica**
<http://www.biblioangelica.it>
Established by bishop Angelo Rocca, OSA (1546-1622), it was the first library to be open to everybody. Holds 2,744 manuscripts, 24,000 loose leaves and letters, 85 handwritten maps.
- **Biblioteca Casanatense**
<http://www.casanatense.it>

Established by cardinal Girolamo Casanate (1620-1700); open 1701. Holds 6,000 manuscripts, the original bulk being the cardinal's collection

- **Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana**
<http://www.lincei.it/biblioteca/index.php>
 1883 Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei moved to palazzo Corsini. Its library merged with Biblioteca Corsiniana, whose origins go back to cardinal Neri Corsini in 17th century. Three main sections: Sezione Accademica, 32 manuscripts; Sezione Corsiniana, 2,650 manuscripts; Sezione Orientale, 412 manuscripts (Arab, Persian, Etiopic)
- **Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea** <http://www.bsmc.it/intro.php>
 Holds 11,000 items, mainly autographs, and 56 personal archives (40,000 items). Main collections: papers of Giuseppe Mazzini, Ugo Foscolo, Domenico Guerrazzi
- **Biblioteca Vallicelliana**
<http://www.vallicelliana.it>
 Origins are connected with Filippo Neri and his Congregazione degli Oratoriani. Holds 3,000 Latin, Greek and Oriental manuscripts, among them the collections of Filippo Neri, Aquiles Estaço, Cesare Baronio and Leone Allacci

Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze (BNCF)

<http://www.bncf.firenze.sbn.it>

Established 1861; formerly Biblioteca Magliabechiana, built up by Antonio Magliabechi (1633-1714), open in 1747; acquired scholarly and religious libraries (Gaddi, Biscioni, Lami, Strozzi). In 1861 incorporated the duke of Lorena's Palatina Library, and at a later date libraries of suppressed monastic institutions. Holds about 22,000 manuscripts and 1 million autographs.

Major collections:

- Magliabechiano: 5,799 manuscripts, divided into 40 classes
- Nazionale: 3,971 manuscripts
- Palatino: 3,102 manuscripts, including the outstanding Galilei collection, 348 manuscripts by Galileo Galilei and his disciples, one of the most important collections in the history of science, partly catalogued and digitized on line.
- Conventi Soppressi (including the outstanding collection of S. Marco, another part of which held by Laurenziana Library): 2,232 manuscripts
- Conventi Soppressi da ordinare: 541 manuscripts from monasteries suppressed in 1867
- Nuovi Acquisti: 1,420 manuscripts
- Manoscritti Musicali
- Manoscritti Orientali
- Besides: Banco Rari; Gentile Farinola; Gino Capponi; Cappugi; Foscoliani; Landau Finaly, etc.

Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Firenze

<http://www.bml.firenze.sbn.it>

Origins go back to Cosimo de' Medici (1369-1464); opened in 1571 by grand duke Cosimo I. Holds one of the most outstanding collections in the world including a great number of Greek and illuminated manuscripts. Holds 11,000 manuscripts, 2,500 papyri, 43 ostraca.

Major collections:

- Plutei: the library's original bulk; about 3,000 manuscripts collected in 15th and 16th century by Cosimo de' Medici and his descendants (among them Lorenzo il Magnifico and popes Leo X and Clemens VII)
- Medicei Palatini: from the library of grand duke Francesco Stefano di Lorena, the last Medici descendant (since 1745 the emperor Francesco I)
- Private and ecclesiastical collections: Gaddi, Strozzi, Edili (from Florence Cathedral), etc
- Conventi soppressi: 631 manuscripts from monasteries suppressed by Napoleon I in 1808
- San Marco: from the famous Dominican monastery, suppressed by Napoleon I
- Ashburnham: the 2,000 manuscripts collection of Lord Ashburnham, acquired by him in 1847 from Guglielmo Libri (1809-1869), who had stolen a certain number of them in Italian and French libraries. Acquired by the Italian government in 1878
- Orientali: collected by cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici (1549-1609), grand duke of Tuscany. In 1771 grand duke Pietro Leopoldo split the collection between Laurenziana and Magliabechiana (later Nazionale Centrale di Firenze) libraries
- Acquisti e doni: about 900 items; hosts new acquisitions. Includes 2,500 papyri found by Italian archaeologists in Egypt at the beginning of last century
- Alfieri: autograph manuscripts and papers of Vittorio Alfieri

Other historical libraries holding outstanding manuscript collections in Florence

- **Biblioteca Marucelliana**
<http://www.maru.firenze.sbn.it>
Created by Francesco Marucelli (1625-1703); open 1752. Holds 2,500 manuscripts, 30,400 loose leaves, 3,200 drawings
- **Biblioteca Riccardiana**
<http://www.riccardiana.firenze.sbn.it>
Created about 1600 by Riccardo Riccardi; open to the public 1715. Holds 4,415 medieval and above all humanistic manuscripts, 4,900 loose leaves; among them the autograph manuscript of Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*

Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III, Napoli

<http://www.bnnonline.it>

Formerly Reale Biblioteca Borbonica, established late 18th century by king Ferdinando IV; absorbed Neapolitan libraries rich in manuscripts such as Brancacciana (created by cardinal Brancaccio, open 1691) and S. Martino's. Became a national library with Italian unification. Thanks to acquisition of private and religious libraries is one of the major manuscript libraries in Europe. Holds famous Greek and Latin medieval manuscripts, among them two purple Evangeliaries written in silver and gold letters (5th and 9th century).

Major collections:

- Farnesi, going back to the 15th century, created by Alessandro Farnese (1468-1549), the future pope Paolo III, and his nephews Alessandro and Ranuccio
- S. Giovanni a Carbonara, an Augustinian monastery; includes the 16th century library of cardinal Seripando, with the 15th century humanist Giano Parrasio collection
- Biblioteca Brancacciana
- Fondo S. Martino

- Archives of writers and scholars such as Torquato Tasso, Giacomo Leopardi (5000 autographs), Francesco De Sanctis, Benedetto Croce, Giuseppe Ungaretti
- Herculaneum Papyri. Kept in a special section of the Library (Officina dei Papiri ercolanesi Marcello Gigante); found in mid 18th century in the excavations of the Roman town Herculaneum (buried in 89 by Vesuvius eruption). Formed the library of the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus, and represents 'the oldest still extant book collection' (<http://www.bnnonline.it/sezioni/papiri.htm>).

Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venezia

<http://www.marciana.venezia.sbn.it>

Origins go back to 1468, when Greek cardinal Bessarion gave the Republic of Venice his collection of about 1,000 manuscripts. Holds one of the richest manuscript, mainly Greek, collections in the world, increased through acquisitions and legacies (e.g. 1734 Gian Battista Recanati's 216 manuscripts including manuscripts of the Gonzaga family; 1794 Amedeo Svajer's more than 340 manuscripts, including Marco Polo's will; and above all (1797) Jacopo Nani's more than 1,000 manuscripts, many of them in Greek and Oriental languages). During Napoleon's domination, religious institutions were suppressed and their libraries entered the Marciana.

Holds more than 13,000 manuscripts, distributed in the following collections:

- Codici Greci. Fondo antico
- Codici Greci. Appendice
- Codici Latini. Fondo Antico
- Codici Latini. Appendice
- Codici Italiani. Fondo antico
- Codici Italiani. Appendice (including Music)
- Codici Francesi. Fondo Antico
- Codici Stranieri. Appendice
- Codici Orientali
- Fondo Riservati
- Fondo Archivio Morelliano

Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, Modena

<http://www.cedoc.mo.it/estense>

The library of the Este family in Ferrara; origins go back to 15th century. Moved to Modena 1598. After Italy became a national state, merged with Modena University Library (established 1772).

Holds 168,854 manuscripts, many of them illuminated, and loose leaves; music and 15th-century handwritten maps.

Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, Torino

<http://www.bnto.librari.beniculturali.it/>

Established 1723 by king Vittorio Amedeo II di Savoia. Important manuscript and book collections entered the library with the suppression of monastic institutions. In 1876, after Italian unity, became one of the national libraries. In 1904 a fire heavily damaged books and manuscripts.

Major collections:

- Savoia collections, including Indian manuscripts on palm leaf, Coptic papyri and a Hebraic parchment roll. The ancient collection included in 1904 Greek, Latin and oriental (Arab, Persian, Turkish, Hebraic manuscripts); among them: the

- illuminated *Quatuor Ordines* by Jacob Ben Ascer (1472), and the Hebraic translation of Averroes's *Commentary to Metaphysics* made by Zerayah in 1284
- Nuove accessioni: manuscripts and documents acquired after 1904

Biblioteca Reale, Torino

<http://bibliotechepubbliche.it/genera.jsp?id=139>

Established 1837 by Carlo Alberto, king of Sardinia. Holds 4,500 manuscripts and some family archives.

Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milano

<http://www.ambrosiana.it/ing/index.asp>

Established 1609 by cardinal Federico Borromeo and still under religious authority. One of the major manuscript collections, consisting of 15,000 medieval (Latin, Greek, Oriental) and modern manuscripts. Among them: *Ilias picta*, 5th century; Vergilius Ambrosianus, illuminated by Simone Martini, with notes by Petrarch; manuscripts and papers of Giuseppe Parini and Cesare Beccaria.

Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Milano

<http://www.braidense.it/>

Opened in 1786 by empress Maria Teresa of Augsburg in the former Jesuit College. In 1880 became a National library.

Major collections:

- Manzoniana: the Library's most important collection, consisting of 250 manuscripts and 5000 autographs of Alessandro Manzoni
- Raccolta Foscoliana: autographs of Ugo Foscolo
- Raccolta Pascoliana
- Archivio storico Ricordi. The archive of the music publisher Ricordi. Includes original manuscripts by Giuseppe Verdi, Giacomo Puccini and many other musicians.

Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna

<http://www.bub.unibo.it>

11,000 manuscripts (including loose leaves) and 58 Greek and Latin papyri from Egypt. The original bulk of the library consists of scientific books and manuscripts of Luigi Ferdinando Marsili (1658-1730), including 620 Arab, Turkish, Persian manuscripts. The collection of Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605) entered the Library 1742. Illuminated liturgical manuscripts were given by pope Benedetto XIV (1675-1758). Other manuscripts entered the library with Napoleonic and later suppressions of ecclesiastical institutions.

Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna

<http://www.archiginnasio.it>

8,500 manuscripts, many of them concerning Bononia's history, culture and life.

Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venezia

<http://www.museicivicheveneziani.it/frame.asp?musid=58&sezione=biblioteche>

Established 1830, when the city of Venice inherited the artistic and bibliographic collections of nobleman Teodoro Correr. Holds 12,000 manuscripts.

Major collections:

- Fondo Correr, 1,553 manuscripts

- Fondo Cicogna, 3,825 manuscripts (handwritten catalogue of the collection available online)
- Fondo provenienze diverse, 3,430 items

Other municipal libraries holding distinguished manuscript collections:

- **Civica Biblioteca Angelo Mai, Bergamo**
<http://bibliotecamai.org>
More than 9,380 manuscripts and a high number of collections of autographs. Includes papers of Torquato Tasso and of the Gonzaga family.
- **Biblioteca Civica Queriniana, Brescia**
<http://portale.comune.brescia.it/NR/exeres/E60D5AC8-44FE-4537-A812-C9D9539A3A09.htm>
Medieval manuscripts, mainly coming from the Cathedral library; the oldest is a 5th-century fragment of a work by Cyprianus.
- **Biblioteca Malatestiana, Cesena**
<http://www.malatestiana.it>
Build up by Domenico Malatesta Novello (1418-1465), the lord of Cesena; represents a perfectly preserved 15th century library, still in the original building. Holds 1,753 manuscripts, 17,000 letters and autographs.
Major collections:
– Fondo Conventuale: 50 manuscripts.
– Fondo Malatestiano: 150 Greek and Latin manuscripts collected by Malatesta Novello, above all Greek and Latin classics, many of them illuminated
– Fondo Giovanni di Marco: the library of a 15th century physician, consisting of 53 manuscripts
– Chorales: 14 illuminated church manuscripts (7 given by cardinal Bessarion).
- **Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea, Ferrara**
<http://www.artecultura.fe.it/index.phtml?id=350>
Main collections: Classe I, authors from Ferrara, 822 manuscripts, including fragments of *Orlando Furioso*; Classe II, authors from outside, 485 manuscripts, including autographs by Torquato Tasso; Antonelli Collection (local history and culture); Collection of city statutes.
- **Biblioteca Comunale Augusta, Perugia**
<http://comune.perugia.it>
Built up and given to the city of Perugia (1582) by Prospero Podiani; open to the public in 1623. Holds 3,370 manuscripts; 365,000 documents.
- **Biblioteca Classense, Ravenna**
<http://www.classense.ra.it>
Formerly the library of Classe Abbey, created by Pietro Canneti (end 17th-beginning 18th century), became a civic library in 1803, with Napoleonic suppressions of religious institutions. Holds outstanding manuscripts (e.g. the only Aristophanes' manuscript with 11 comedies), and private papers (Lord Byron's letters).
- **Biblioteca Panizzi, Reggio Emilia**
<http://panizzi.comune.re.it>
8000 manuscripts, including illuminated manuscripts, chorales and personal archives (Lazzaro Spallanzani, Giovan Battista Venturi, Cesare Zavattini)

Literary archives

Collecting literary, mainly contemporary, archives is the specific task of institutions such as:

- Archivio contemporaneo "Alessandro Bonsanti" del Gabinetto Vieusseux di Firenze (<http://www.vieusseux.fi.it>). Established 1975, collects materials of the contemporary literary, artistic, music world. Holds 130 collections (500,000 documents). Included are manuscripts and letters of Alberto Savinio, Giorgio Caproni, Eduardo De Filippo, Carlo Emilio Gadda
- Fondo manoscritti di autori moderni e contemporanei dell'Università di Pavia (http://www.unipv.it/fondomanoscritti/inform_bibliogr.html). Established 1969, devoted to collecting and studying modern and contemporary authors
- Biblioteca Museo Luigi Pirandello, Agrigento. Holds 5000 autographs and documents of L. Pirandello
- Una rete per gli archivi letterari del '900, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma (<http://www.bnrcrm.librari.beniculturali.it/ita/archivi/fsarchivi.htm>): edits an online census of contemporary literary archives held by libraries and private institutions, with links to them.

Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico (ICCU)

(www.iccu.sbn.it)

Gives guidelines and coordinates national projects.

Istituto centrale di patologia del libro (ICPL)

<http://www.patologiaibro.beniculturali.it>

National institution carrying out research on preservation, restoration and conservation of library materials. Draws up guidelines and functions as an advisory body for Italian libraries.

Archives

Public records are kept in the State Central Archive and in State Archives (one for each province) depending on MiBAC's General Direction for Archives (www.archivi.beniculturali.it) and in municipal archives. They also hold manuscripts and family and private archives.