



Mostra del libro italiano

Patrimonio bibliografico nazionale tra biblioteche,
librai e collezioni private

Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Roma
Sala Conferenze. giugno - luglio 2020





The Italian Book

*The Italian bibliographical heritage in libraries,
the antiquarian book trade and private collections*

**Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma,
Sala Conferenze June-July 2020**

The prestige of Italian book production, fundamental for our understanding of the history of the book, was acknowledged in two important exhibitions in the early decades of the 20th century: the Mostra Storica dell'Arte della Stampa in Italia in Leipzig in 1914 and the Exposition du Livre Italien held at the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1926. The catalogue of the Paris exhibition opens with the statement: "l'Italie est depuis vingt siècles la terre du livre".

The current exhibition will take place in Rome in 2020 at the national library, the Biblioteca nazionale centrale. The planning for the exhibition has been undertaken in close collaboration with the Associazione Librai Antiquari d'Italia (A.L.A.I. – the Italian antiquarian booksellers' association) and the aim is to show the general public how Italy has indeed been over twenty centuries "la terre du livre", the land of the book. As in the Leipzig and Paris exhibitions a century ago, the exhibition is designed to reveal the complex picture of the country's bibliographical heritage, found not only in institutional libraries but also in antiquarian bookshops and private collections in Italy and abroad. In this way the exhibition brings together the public and private spheres, in a model of harmonious collaboration, in which the 200 masterpieces which will be displayed alongside each other will narrate a remarkable and fascinating story of the book in Italy, of antiquarian bookselling and collecting over the centuries.

These themes will also be explored in conferences and talks which will take place while the exhibition is on as well as in the comprehensive catalogue which will accompany the show. Promotion and outreach will take place on institutional websites and through the press, television and social media; there will also be a programme of guided tours and other events aimed at involving as wide and diverse a public as possible. The exhibition and all the associated events will be free and open to all who are interested.



THE EXHIBITION

Italian book production – both manuscript and printed books – has long been seen as a fundamental part of the cultural history of these written artefacts. Collectors have always been fascinated by the codices produced in medieval scriptoria, illuminated humanist manuscripts, the elegant editions of Aldus Manutius, the first books printed in Greek and Oriental types, Renaissance decorated bookbindings, the cycles of popular woodcut illustrations and the fine engravings of important Italian artists. All the great research libraries across Europe and the United States have important collections of Italian books which are seen as a ‘jewel in the crown’ – examples include the remarkable manuscripts which once belonged to the Visconti-Sforza library in Pavia and today are one of the treasures of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the vast collection of early printed Italian books held by the British Library in London, the Italian Renaissance drawings which are part of the Pierpont Morgan Library collection in New York, or the extraordinary library of Aldines at the University of California in Los Angeles.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, two major exhibitions paid tribute to the importance and prestige of the Italian book. In 1914, as part of the International Exhibition of Graphic Arts in Leipzig, the *Mostra Storica dell’Arte della Stampa in Italia* was held, with the aim of telling the story of the Italian book from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. An equally spectacular *Exposition du Livre Italien* followed in 1926 at the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris. The catalogue’s opening statement was “l’Italie est depuis vingt siècles la terre du livre”.

Both these legendary exhibitions aimed to celebrate the heritage of the Italian book by taking visitors through a display of rare and precious volumes which placed centre stage not only Italian scribes, illuminators, printers, binders and engravers but also libraries, antiquarian booksellers and private collectors - the other leading players in the world of books.

On both occasions too there were magnificent manuscript and printed volumes not only from important public libraries but also on loan from private collectors and important booksellers such as Leo S. Olschki, Ulrico Hoepli and Tammara De Marinis.

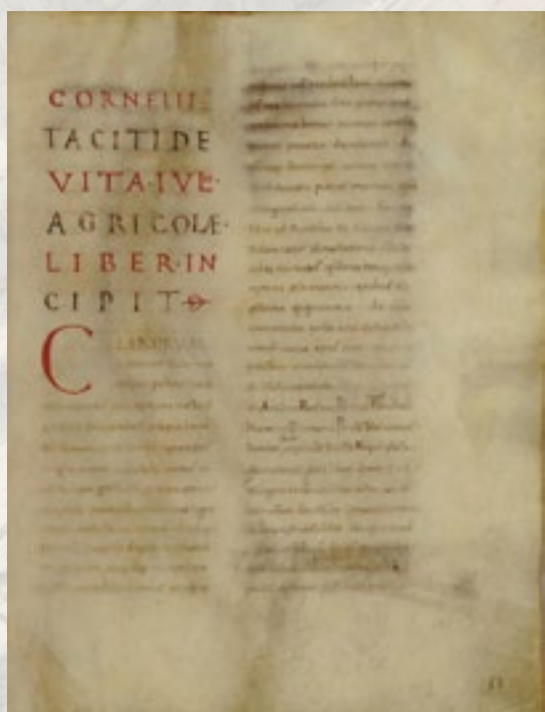
The current exhibition has the same aim. Thanks to the collaboration with the Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Roma and the Associazione Librai Antiquari d’Italia (A.L.A.I.), it aims to show the riches and complexity of this national cultural heritage of the book to a general public, with books coming not only from institutional libraries but also antiquarian booksellers and



private collectors in Italy and abroad. In this way present-day librarians, antiquarian booksellers and collectors are following in the footsteps of the Leipzig and Paris exhibitions with a new and challenging initiative: a journey through books which come from a variety of different sources and encounter each other in a kind of dialogue, giving rise to fresh insights and new lines of research.



The exhibition will be a unique opportunity to look at the many places where Italian books have a presence, to rediscover masterpieces which have mistakenly been thought to be missing or definitively lost but which have in fact been conserved with the utmost care by knowledgeable collectors or which booksellers have enthusiastically sought out, discovered and made public again. The worlds of the antiquarian booktrade and of private collecting are woven together in the history of Italian institutional libraries, whose historical collections have their origins in the collections of princes and rulers, religious orders and universities and were subsequently enriched with the later arrival of private libraries and individual editions acquired from booksellers. This history is exemplified by the collections of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Rome, which not by chance has been chosen to host the exhibition.



THE PARTNERS

Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma

The library was established in 1870 on the orders of the then Minister of Education Ruggiero Bonghi and named after the reigning monarch Vittorio Emanuele II of Savoy; it was given the responsibility for housing and conserving the vast patrimony of books which came from the libraries of the suppressed religious orders and at the same time of becoming a cultural symbol of the new nation, an institution open to innovation with international horizons, modelled on the British Museum Library in London and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, with an acquisitions strategy covering both Italian and non-Italian publications.

But alongside the need to keep abreast of current national and international publications, the Library also acquired valuable editions – as single works or entire collections - from antiquarian booksellers and private collectors to add to the holdings of early printed books and manuscripts. These acquisitions went to form the nucleus of new important sections in the Library and to complete the earlier holdings with editions which were lacking.

A new manuscript collection was also named after Vittorio Emanuele II, which is still an open collection today with new manuscript acquisitions being added. At present it contains about 1,800 items, the consequence of numerous remarkable acquisitions made by the Ministry on behalf of the Library and by the Library itself acting independently.



VITAE IMPERA
TORVM A DIVER
SIS AVTORIBVS
SCRIPTAE
HELLI SPARTIANI
HADRIANVS



RIGO
IMPE
RATO
RIS
HADRI

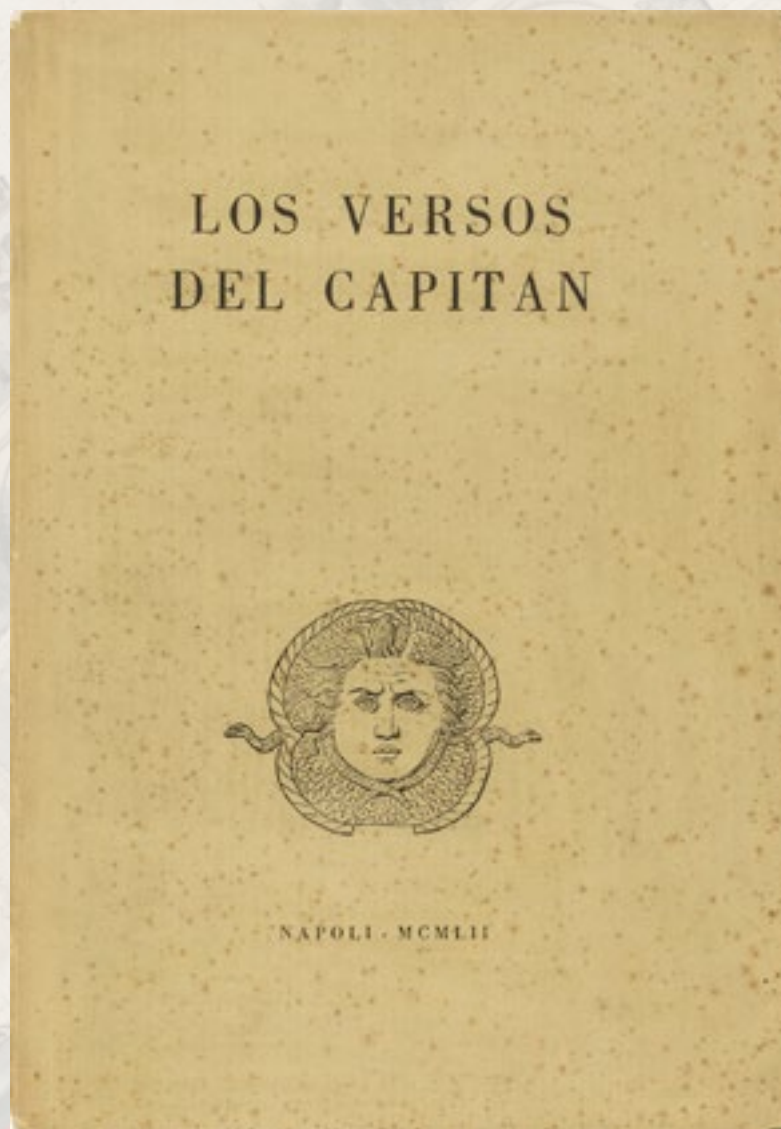
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The 'Associazione Librai Antiquari d'Italia' (A.L.A.I.)

The 'Associazione Librai Antiquari d'Italia' was created in Milan in 1947 as the 'Circolo dei Librai Antiquari', matching similar professional associations which had emerged in the early decades of the 20th century in Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, Denmark and Sweden. In January 1948 19 booksellers belonged: Banzi in Bologna, Bozzi and Delai in Genoa, Olschki in Florence, Casella in Naples, Nironi and Prandi in Reggio Emilia, Rappaport in Rome, Bourlot and Pregliasco in Turin, Cassini in Venice and no fewer than nine booksellers from Milan: La Bibliofilia, Cantoni, Cavallotti, Garzanti, Hoepli, Mediolanum, Il Polifilo, Turri and the Libreria Vinciana. The same year, 1948, also saw the creation of the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers (ILAB), with A.L.A.I. as one of the first national associations to sign up to the League as a member.

The aims of the Association are to ensure the ethical standards of its members' business dealings, to restore and maintain the professional dignity of the term 'antiquarian', to communicate an interest in early books and their collectability to as wide as possible a public, and to work to improve the legislation relating to international commerce.





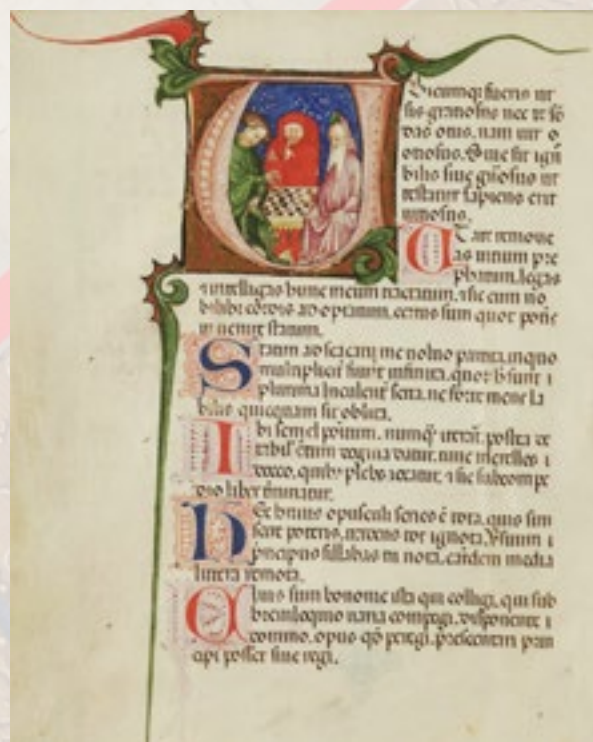
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THE EXHIBITION

Main section

In the central part of the Sala Conferenze in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale – which has been entirely renovated for the occasion with final refurbishing currently taking place - there will be a dazzling display of approximately 200 manuscripts, incunables, early printed editions, engravings, drawings, private press and artists' books, and 20th-century first editions. The aim is to retell the history of the Italian book as a whole in the context of a renewed spirit of collaboration among all those concerned with the conservation, promotion and study of Italian books. Significant treasures acquired over 140 years in the 'real' library – in other words, the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale – will be seen alongside and in dialogue with a 'possible' or ideal library, made up of precious volumes belonging to member booksellers of A.L.A.I and private collectors from Italy and abroad who are generously supporting the initiative.

Among the 60 masterpieces which will be on display, covering a chronological range of over 1000 years, the exhibition will show a 14th-century manuscript of Cicero which belonged to Francesco Petrarca and is filled with his autograph annotations (Ms.Vitt. Em. 1632, end of 14th century), the celebrated Hersfeld Codex containing the earliest known text of Tacitus's minor works (9th century), the splendid manual of warfare created for Guido da Montefeltro (ca. 1480), alongside other richly decorated humanist manuscripts, a unique copy of an incunable edition of Virgil's works, a printed book containing Torquato Tasso's autograph annotations, a view of Rome by Caspar Van Wittel, as well as recent acquisitions of important literary documents from the 20th century such as the unpublished notebooks of Carlo Emilio Gadda and Umberto Saba's typescript illustrated booklets of his Canzoniere, which have added to the already remarkable gallery of Italian writers and their work on permanent display in the library's Spazi Novecento.





L'ARDIRE COMPAGNO D'AMORE

Related sections

Accompanying the main section of the exhibition other spaces will be dedicated to in-depth examinations of a variety of related topics: the most important exhibitions on the Italian book from 1914 to 1965, the catalogues of historical antiquarian bookshops in Italy and catalogues of the most celebrated Italian private collections which were dispersed between the end of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century, and the history and activities of A.L.A.I. Taken as a whole, all these sections will construct a remarkable and detailed story of the development of the booktrade, of bookcollecting and taste in collecting, as well as of the intellectual personalities and range of interests of booksellers, collectors, bibliographers and librarians from 1870 onwards, after the foundation of the national library in Rome. This was a period which saw an increasing professionalisation of the figure of the antiquarian bookseller and a first attempt at creating a professional association on the part of a group of scholars and enthusiasts which had formed around the journal *Il Bibliofilo* founded by the lawyer and bibliophile Carlo Lozzi.

The exhibition will also look at the fundamental contribution which Italian booksellers have made (and continue to make) in their catalogues to our knowledge of the history of the book, an aspect of their work which has only recently received attention on the part of academics, institutions and librarians, as two recent international conferences on outstanding Italian booksellers from the past have shown, one in 2014 held in Lucca on the figure of Giuseppe Martini and one in October 2019 organised by the Fondazione Cini in Venice on the bookseller, collector and scholar Tammaro De Marinis.



The exhibition space

The exhibition will be held in the 600-square metre space of the 'Sala Conferenze' of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, which has just been the object of a complete and stylish redesign, carried out to the highest quality standards. A highlight of this vast space will be the huge tapestry created by the Italian artist Giuseppe Capogrossi for the new building of the BNC in 1970. The customary seating will be removed to create the spaces for visitors' experience of the exhibition, with display cases, illustrative panels and multimedia stands.

The cases in which the volumes will be displayed will be designed to the highest conservation standards. The lighting in the cases has been carefully planned to help visitors to see as accurately and clearly as possible all the details of the volumes on display, including their colours and rich decoration.



RELATED EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Throughout the period of the exhibition both the Biblioteca nazionale centrale and A.L.A.I., working together, will organise conferences, talks and round table debates, with participants from Italy and other countries, to discuss the many themes which are explored in the exhibition.

These contributions will later be published, as single volumes or as monographic issues of specialised journals.

An especially noteworthy event will be the international conference 'Bibliotecari, librai e bibliofili all'opera' ('Librarians, booksellers and collectors: a common task') dedicated to the history of the book, of the booktrade and collecting, and earlier national exhibitions on the Italian book, with the participation of specialists from Italy and other countries.

A comprehensive catalogue to accompany the exhibition is planned, which will include not only detailed descriptions of the books and manuscripts on display but also a series of essays by specialists on specific topics, such as the antiquarian acquisition policies of Italian libraries from 1870 to the present day, the history of the Italian antiquarian booktrade, and the evolution of collecting taste.

Publicity, promotion and other communications will be disseminated via the usual channels - institutional websites - the Biblioteca nazionale centrale, the relevant Ministry (Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali e il Turismo), A.L.A.I and its individual members - , the press, television and social media as well as through other national and international organisations and associations, such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the Associazione Italiana Biblioteche (AIB), the Society of the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP), the Centro di Ricerca Europeo Libro, Editoria, Biblioteca (CRE-LEB), the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers (ILAB). There will also be a special focus on the potential audience of individual collectors, through associations such as the Association Internationale de Bibliophile, the Grolier Club of New York, and others.

A programme of guided visits and other initiatives aimed at the widest possible general public will also run throughout the exhibition.

The exhibition and all the associated events and initiatives will be free and open to all.

