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THE MALATESTA NOVELLO LIBRARY

The Malatestiana is the only example of a monastic humanist library, perfectly preserved in the building, furnishings and book collection, as UNESCO acknowledged by its inclusion in the memory of the World Register, the first in Italy.

The idea of the library is attributed to the friars of St. Francis, who intended to construct one for use as a study annexed to their 14th century monastery.

For this purpose, in 1445 they received permission from Pope Eugene IV to make use of a bequeath and began work on the building, probably in 1447.

In 1450 the initial participation of Malatesta Novello was documented, a Cesena noble who adopted the friars' project and constructed his own library in their monastery.

To equip his collection with a series of volumes adequate and appropriate for the planned library, the Cesena noble appointed a scribe who, through well organized and planned tasks, in a time span of around twenty years produced over a hundred and twenty codices.

The collection is inspired by the humanist model in both its littera scripta, albeit certain codices are in Gothic or semi-Gothic script, and in its texts which include classic authors, Doctor of the Church and translated Greek works, with a particular predilection for the historians and the discoveries of contemporary humanists.

Memorable among the scribes were Jean d'Epinal who copied at least thirty-six codices, Jacopo della Pergola to whom Malatesta Novello entrusted the transcription of onerous works such as the splendid *De civitate Dei* by Saint Augustine (D, IX.1) and also Brother Francesco di Bartolomeo from Figline, who was also the first custodian of the library.

At the behest of a single patron and produced in a short time, the collection has a strongly systematic encyclopaedic character, since it is destined not for the personal interest of the commissioner, but to the studies of an entire community.

This unitary character is also evident in the manuscript decoration.

Malatesta Novello declared his role as promoter, instructing that each initial page of every codex should bear his richly and antiquesly decorated coat of arms and the initials M.N. depicted in gold or other colour on a rectangular, gold leaf background.

The manuscripts commissioned or acquired by Malatesta Novello (around 150 specimens) therefore integrated with the pre-existing monastic setting, composed in the 14th century yet rich in even older codices, such as the 9th century, *Etymologiae* of Saint Isidore.

Added to the collection were medical and scientific texts, and also literature and philosophic texts, donated by Giovanni di Marco from Rimini, doctor to Malatesta Novello and an equally enthusiastic collector of codices.

Fourteen Greek codices, very likely acquired by Malatesta Novello in Constantinopolis, seven Hebrew codices and other donated to Novello, plus a number of other codices added in later centuries complete the collection, which total 343 manuscripts.

Still today, the volumes are held in their desks, which played the dual role of an inclined lectern and deposit for books on the shelf below.

Here the codices, normally five per pluteus and subdivided by subject, are laid horizontally and bound to the desks with wrought iron clains. This abut was probably born from the necessity to provide adequate protection for such precious books.

The Cesena noble, who perceived the library as an undying symbol of his renown for posterity, ordered, by an entirely original and intuitive decision, that the library also be entrusted to the care and attention of the Cesena community.

In fact already in 1461 the municipal council began to perform rigorous controls every two months on booksheld in the pluteuses.

In 1466, after the death of Malatesta Novello, the council even obtained permission to excommunicate anyone removing the codices. Double control of the collection therefore developed, one by its custodians of St. Francis Monastery who guarantee its use, and the other by the local Council, who supervised its integrity and respect.

Nomination of the Custodian-librarian, according to the wishes of Malatesta Novello, also fell to the municipal council.

In this way the history of the Malatesta Novello Library and its prodigious preservation, which still today represents the greatest pride of Cesena, is also the history of a symbol felt to be the property of, and loved with exceptional loyalty by Cesena citizens.

THE PIANA LIBRARY, containing over five thousand printed volumes of the 15th -19th centuries and around a hundred manuscripts, among the most precious codices it boasts a Gospel book dates 1104, a 13th century legal manuscript containing the Decretum Gratiani, a Roman Missal from the beginning of the 15th century with a splendidly described crucifixion.

THE CORAL OF CARDINAL BESSARIONE

Cardinal Bessarione was one of the most important and influential characters of the Church in the 15th century, and leading representative of the conciliar trend wishing to reunite the Wester Latin and Oriental Greek churches.

Between 1450 and 1455 he spent some time in Bologna as papale legate to the city and the Romagna region, coinciding with the commissioning of the corals.

The cicle included eighteen volumes and was destined for the monastery of Franciscan Observance in Costantinopolis, but the fall of the city into the hands of the Turks in 1453 required that the destination be changed, the choice being the Monastery of the Observance in Cesena, where they remained until the start of the 19th century.

After event linked to the Napoleonic occupation and the suppression of religious orders (1797-1810) most of the corals were lost and only seven were placed in the Cesena public library at that time still in the process of construction.

A recent purchase on the international antiques market, allowed one of the missing coral to recovered a splendid anthiphonary, the from pace depicting the Bressanone coat of arms.

THE SMALLER BOOK IN THE WORLD

Among the “curios” of the Malatesta Novello library is a series of miniature format printed volumes, amongst which the “smallest book in the world readable without a magnifying glass”

Printed by the Salmin brothers of Padua in 1897 it measures 15x 9 millimetres and contains a letter from Galileo Galilei to Christine of Lorraine, in which the scientist claims that Copernicus’ theory does not conflict with the revealed truths of the faith.

OPEN CATALOGUE OF THE MALATESTA MANUSCRIPTS

It is possible to make a “virtual” visit to the library and its heritage vie the Malatesta web site.

Accessed through the Malatesta Novello Library web site: www.malatestiana.it the open catalogue of Malatesta manuscripts is subdivided into three sections.

THE FIRST contains general texts on the Malatestiana and its deposited manuscripts.

THE SECOND offers the description, bibliography and full reproduction of all the codices held in the library.

THE THIRD hosts a forum intended as both an area in wich personal and hitherto unpublished scientific studies may become public domain.