

4th Conference of LIBER Manuscript Librarians Group

“Meeting with manuscripts, today and tomorrow”

DIRECTOR’S WELCOME

mercoledì 26.5.2010 ore 14.00

I am very pleased to welcome you to the Conference of LIBER Manuscript Librarians Group. This is the fourth Conference of the Group, and we are pleased to host it in Rome at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale.

We have more than eighty participants from almost all over Europe, the largest number since the LIBER Manuscript Librarians Group was created. Twenty countries with a great number of national, university and research libraries, and the Vatican Library, are represented. Some of the countries, such as Latvia, Lithuania and Romania, take part for the first time in the LIBER Manuscript Librarians meetings, and we particularly welcome them. This is a great result if we mind that the field of manuscripts is very specialized and that manuscript librarians are a minority – but a minority which have a particularly strong professional commitment. A certain number of colleagues willing to participate registered but had unfortunately to give it up owing to shortage of funds. (Shortage of resources is a serious problem and it affects our library as well). Such a wide participation shows both a desire of mutual knowledge among individuals and libraries, and an interest in the developments taking place in the management of our cultural heritage - going beyond the traditional tasks of manuscript librarians - which will be the topic of this Conference.

Our library sincerely believes in mutual knowledge, because it leads to mutual understanding and cooperation. And cooperation is nowadays essential, and it is easier than in the past, if we are willing and have the resources to profit from the new technological possibilities. Cooperation can give relevant fruits in spreading the knowledge of our cultural heritage, which is one of our objectives.

Before going on let me introduce very briefly the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale of Rome. It was established in 1876 (eighteen sixty seven), when Rome became the capital of the new Italian state. It is both a research library and a legal deposit library. It holds more than six million books. Besides being the archive of the national book production it holds the historical collections coming from the religious libraries suppressed after Rome became the capital, including about two thousand incunables and about 25.000 sixteenth century editions. It also holds three special collections: the Cartographic collection, the Roman collection, and the Oriental collection. When it was created, the Biblioteca Nazionale di Roma was housed in the Collegio Romano dei Gesuiti. In 1975 it moved to this new complex, that consists of three intercommunicating buildings respectively housing the reading rooms, the bureaus and the book stores. The historical collections are kept together with the manuscripts in a separate part of the stores only communicating with the manuscripts room. In 2001 the reading rooms were utterly renovated.

This is the third time that our library hosts a LIBER Conference. The first time it was in 1974. LIBER was then very young, having been established in 1971. The total number of participants was then lower than the one of today's LIBER Manuscripts Conference. Since then LIBER has grown up; the general scenery has changed, the technological evolution, and revolution, of the last thirty years has provoked deep transformations in the offer of our libraries, in the expectations of our public, and in our profession. More recently, in 2003, we hosted the 36th LIBER General Conference, that was devoted to "Extending the network", a subject linked to the present Conference; some of the topics suggested at that conference have matured and will now receive a new attention. In the meanwhile LIBER gave birth to the Group of manuscript librarians. Our library took part in it from its very beginnings in Stockholm, where the first idea of a group entirely devoted to manuscripts was launched. And that it was worth while, and that the culture of manuscripts has peculiarities of her own but at the same time is not at all separate from the general

evolution in libraries and communication, is shown by the topics of the current Conference.

“No library is a island” was said at the 2003 LIBER Conference. That is particularly true with regard to the libraries of manuscripts. Both ancient and modern manuscript collections are often scattered among many libraries; whatever text you wanted to study, in the past you needed visit more than one library. Scholars used to move from town to town to study manuscripts. And in spite of difficulties they carried out works which still now provoke our admiration. Digitisation and communication technologies make studying much easier now. We find such an amount of digitised material on the internet that was unpredictable only a few years ago. Entire manuscript collections are being digitised and published on the Internet. Our musical manuscripts were digitised and are available together with the ones of other Italian libraries on the Internet Culturale site. The manuscripts from the medieval Nonantula Abbey were digitised as well, and as some of you already know they are the object of a project of virtual reconstruction of the Nonantulan library including the manuscripts held by other libraries; it is still in progress, awaiting for funding. At an international level, the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma gave a substantial contribution to the CERL Heritage of Printed Books database, making available about twenty thousand records. It is now going to contribute to the planetary library which is being carried out by GOOGLE books.

Manuscript and rare books departments used to be everywhere happy islands for small communities of scholars and librarians. The general public, the common citizen have always been excluded from the knowledge of the “cultural heritage”, and above all of the manuscript heritage, owing to the excellent reason of preserving it. Nowadays, thanks to the technological revolution, everyone who is interested can have the possibility of knowing it at least “virtually”. I am pleased that one of the issues of your Conference is how to find the right ways of spreading the knowledge of our cultural sources beyond the boundaries of the scholarly community, never forgetting that they have always to be carefully preserved.

This Conference promises to be rich and stimulating. It introduces quite innovative subjects for manuscript librarians, such as how to manage born-digital material. It can appear a distant matter; but we have learned from the sudden acceleration in the technological progress of the last years that future arrives (sometimes) earlier, and we must be prepared.

I hope you will enjoy the Conference and the visits programme that has been arranged for you. Before inviting the President of the Manuscript Librarians Group, Dr. Bouwman, and the Secretary of the Group, Dr. Weber, to present the Conference, I would like to thank the Roman team that prepared the Conference, trying to make your attendance fruitful and pleasant. It consists of Patrizia Costabile, Silvana de Capua, Arturo Ferrari, Gaia Gajo, Valentina Longo, Alessandra Mariani, Francesca Niutta (coordinator), Natalia Santucci, Maria Grazia Villani; but I particularly wish to thank Arturo Ferrari who, besides carrying out many other tasks, realized the the Conference web-page. The three-day exhibition *Iter Europaeum* was prepared by Margherita Breccia and Claudia Di Lillo to show you some of our manuscripts “on the move”.