La Biblioteca Vaticana nelle sue architetture. Un disegno storico
The Architecture of the Vatican Library. A Historical Outline

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Fig. 1
View of the Belvedere Courtyard, ca. 1560, drawing attributed by some to G.B. Naldini, previously attributed to G.A. Dosio (Florence, Uffizi Gallery, Department of Prints and Drawings, 2559 A).

IL CORTILE DEL BELVEDERE
La storia dell’edificio che ancora oggi ospita parte della Biblioteca Vaticana costituisce, almeno per quanto riguarda le origini, un capitolo della storia del Cortile del Belvedere (figg. 1, 2, 3). L’avvio di questo grande progetto architettonico, che avrebbe reso monumentalì le terrazze del colle vaticano verso nord, si deve a papa Giulio II della Rovere (1503-1513, fig. 4), nipote prediletto di Sisto IV, quel papa che qualche decennio prima aveva segnato profondamente la vita della Biblioteca. Il pontificato di Giulio II fu caratterizzato da una politica piuttosto attiva, finalizzata al consolidamento dello Stato della Chiesa, e nello stesso tempo fu improntato a un forte e colto mecenatismo. Per dare lustro alla residenza pontificia e restituire alla città eterna lo splendore dell’antichità, chiamò presso di sé i maggiori artisti del tempo, facendo di Roma la capitale della cultura, primato che in quegli anni spettava soprattutto a Firenze. Papa della Rovere si rivolse, tra gli altri, al noto architetto urbinato Donato Bramante (1444-1514) chiamato a realizzare il grandioso rinnovamento edilizio della città di Roma e in modo particolare del colle Va-

THE BELVEDERE COURTYARD
The history of the building that still today houses part of the Vatican Library is, at least in its origins, a chapter of the history of the Belvedere Courtyard (fig. 1, 2, 3). The start of this great architectural project that would transform the monumental terraces of the Vatican hill on the north side is due to Pope Julius II della Rovere (1503-1513, fig. 4), the favourite nephew of Sixtus IV, the Pope who had so radically changed the life of the Library some decades earlier.

Julius II’s papacy was marked by a very active policy aimed at consolidating the Papal State, and at the same time by an intense and wise patronage for the arts. He summoned the most famous artists of his time in order to bring prestige to the papal residence and give the eternal city the splendour it once had, thus making Rome the cultural capital instead of Florence.

Pope della Rovere called upon, among others, the acclaimed Roman architect Donato Bramante (1444-1514) who was asked to carry out the greatest architectural renovation of the city of Rome and in particular of
ticano, residenza pontificia. Oltre che della nuova basilica di San Pietro, il Bramante fu incaricato di progettare un collegamento tra i Palazzi apostolici - compresa la Cappella Sistina, appena terminata - e il Belvedere di Innocenzo VIII Cibo (1484-1492), cosiddetto proprio per la posizione dominante sul colle (fig. 3). L’intervento riguardava dunque un vasto spazio rettangolare, ampio 90 metri e lungo oltre 300, caratterizzato da un forte dislivello altimetrico di circa 25 metri in senso longitudinale, che il Bramante risolse in modo originale, progettando un cortile su tre livelli, raccordati da scalinate, chiuso da una cornice monumentale, realizzata in cotto con ornamenti in travertino e alleggerita da logge e ampi porticati. I due lunghi bracci rettilinei, paralleli e scoperti nella parte superiore collegavano le diverse zone della residenza pontificia e cingevoano, senza interromperne l’unità visiva, il grande spazio polifunzionale, la cui articolazione seguiva ed enfatizzava la struttura naturale del terreno (fig. 5, 6, 7). Ciascun livello del Cortile era infatti destinato a funzioni diverse: il più basso, chiuso nel lato meridionale da unemiciclo, era il più esteso; fungeva da ingresso ed era utilizzato come teatro, the Vatican hill, the Papal residence. In addition to the new Basilica of Saint Peter, Bramante was appointed to design the connection between the Apostolic Palaces - including the newly finished Sistine Chapel - and the Belvedere Palace of Innocent VIII Cibo (1484-1492), so called because of its dominant position on the hill (fig. 3).

The space involved was rectangular in shape, over 300 metres long and 90 metres wide but with a 25-metre difference in height lengthwise. Bramante’s brilliant solution was a courtyard on three levels, connected by stairs and framed by terracotta and travertine ornaments, loggias and porticoes.

The two open-top parallel porticoes linked the various areas of the Pope’s residence and surrounded the large multi-purpose area, without interrupting its visual unity and emphasising the natural shape of the area (fig. 5, 6, 7). Each level of the courtyard was dedicated to a different use: the lower terrace was enclosed at the southern side by a hemicycle; it was the largest of the three and served as the entrance in addition to a theatre.
Fig. 5
*Cortile del Belvedere nella pianta di Roma di A. Tempesta (1593).*
*The Cortile del Belvedere in a map of Rome by A. Tempesta (1593).*

Fig. 6
*Modello del Cortile del Belvedere e dei palazzi vaticani nella struttura realizzata intorno alla metà del secolo XVI, Musei Vaticani, inv. 54628.*
*Model of the Cortile del Belvedere and the Vatican Palaces in a structure dated around mid 16th century, Vatican Museums, inv. 54628.*
and a venue for feasts and tournaments.
In this part of the courtyard the three orders of loggias were adorned with pilasters. The small middle terrace in contrast had only one order of loggias surrounding it, just 30 metres wide, corresponding to today’s Library courtyard. This terrace could be reached by a series of shallow steps from the first terrace and from the top terrace by a triangular staircase with two wide ramps; these last stairs are still visible today although no longer in use.

In 1565, the architect and antiquarian Pirro Ligorio remodelled the garden in order to close the vanishing point in the Belvedere perspective and added the exedra that now hosts the 4-meter tall Roman bronze Pigna, which in the Middle Ages could be found in the atrium of St. Peter’s Basilica (fig. 4). Ligorio also completed the loggia on the western wing of the Belvedere courtyard, which neither Julius II nor Bramante lived long enough to see.
When the Belvedere courtyard was commissioned to Bramante, the Vatican Library, or Bibliotheca palatii as it was known then, was still in its original location. Pope Nicholas V (1447-1455, figs. 9, 10), founder of the new papal library, built this structure around the mid 15th century.

Nicholas V was a scholar and a man of the Church; he was educated in Florence where he contributed to the opening of the first public library established in the Dominican convent of St. Mark. During his 8-year papacy he was able to collect around 1,300 manuscripts, more than 400 of which were in Greek. Some he inherited from his predecessors; others he bought, and some he had copied.

The whole collection, including his personal manuscripts gathered through his research, was filed in order of subject (facultates) and organized according to the humanistic project of a universal library.

A librarian was appointed and the whole collection was available for the common interest and use of men of science.
The precious library collection, open to scholars for the first time, was situated on the ground floor of the new wing of the Apostolic Palace, commissioned by Nicholas V himself. The entrance to the library was from the Cortile del Pappagallo, whose rear façade looked onto what would become the Vatican Belvedere. The tower with the Borgia apartment would be built next to Nicholas V’s structure just a few years later. The library was arranged in three halls, of which only the medium sized one, called Bibliotheca graeca, was completed before the Pope’s death.

The coat of arms with Pope Parentucelli’s monogram is frescoed in a classic and austere simplicity on the central vault of the hall. It was most likely Andrea del Castagno who frescoed this almost square space, probably acting on a project of the great architect Leon Battista Alberti.

The design for the library hall was created around a fake quadrangular portico, with a classical double-row layout, following a rigorous and luminous architectural perspective (fig. 8). It was the Franciscan theologian Sixtus IV
continuity with the project initiated by Nicholas V. Infatti con la bolla *Ad decorem militantis Ecclesiae* (in both editions of 1471 and 1477), he endowed the new institution with specific and clear economic funding, guaranteeing its administrative autonomy, and further appointed the humanist Bartolomeo Sacchi, known as Platina, as its librarian.

In his role as librarian Platina was responsible for the loans and accounts; the records he kept are precious sources in establishing the history of the Vatican Library from its origins. A Sisto IV and the lively activity of Platina contributed to the Library’s need for expansion: thus another hall was added, the so-called Pontificia, to the existing three built by Nicholas V. Platina also oversaw the decorations of the halls, commissioned to the best artists of the time, including Melozzo from Forlì and the brothers Davide and Domenico Ghirlandaio. Sisto IV also completed the architectural projects of the existing halls, appointing the Ghirlandaio brothers for their decoration. Today, we can still see the Sala Latina, decorated as a high walled courtyard.
Fig. 12
Anonimo, Sisto IV visita la Biblioteca insieme ai nipoti e al bibliotecario Bartolomeo Platina, affresco, sec. XV, Roma, Ospedale Santo Spirito in Saxia.
Anonymous, Sixtus IV visits the Library with his nephews and the librarian Bartolomeo Platina, fresco, fifteenth century, Rome, Ospedale Santo Spirito in Saxia.
with segmented vaults decorated with busts of Greek philosophers and Church Fathers, illustrating the sacred and secular sections into which the library’s collection was divided (fig. 11). By 1481 the papal library was formed by over 3,500 manuscripts housed in four halls. The Sala Latina and the Sala Graeca, the collection of Latin and Greek works, were open to the public, the other two, Secreta and Pontificia, were for the exclusive use of the library’s personnel. The latter two housed volumes not directly available to the public, together with the papal archives and registers, according to a well-established “library-archive” model of the Holy See (figs. 12, 13).

LA BIBLIOTECA SISTINA: DAL CINQUECENTO ALL’OTTOCENTO
Sopravvissuta al Sacco di Roma, operato nel 1527 dai Lanzi di Carlo V, che in verità si dimostrarono più interessati alle decorazioni d’argento delle legature che ai libri, la raccolta da quel momento fu costantemente accresciuta. La quantità sempre maggiore di manoscritti, ma anche di stampati conservati, richiese l’adozione di un nuovo sistema di segnatura per rendere più agevole l’identificazione e il reperimento dei volumi. The library survived the sack of Rome in 1527 by Charles V’s mercenary army, who were more interested in the silver decorations of the bindings than in the books themselves, and from that moment on the collection continued to grow steadily over the years. The growing number of manuscripts and printed books created the need to adopt a new system of shelf-marks, making the volumes readily retrievable and easier to identify.
There was also the need to find a new, suitable location to store the collection. To this end, Sixtus V (1585-1590, fig. 14) resumed an earlier project by Gregory XIII (1572-1585) that encompassed all the architectural and organizational solutions later adopted for the Salone Sistino. The Swiss architect Domenico Fontana (1543-1607) was appointed to design and build a new and important site for the Library (fig. 15). The plan was to build a completely new wing, in place of the lower staircase designed by Bramante to link the two lower terraces of the courtyard, making the stairs redundant. The location was chosen during the papacy of Pius V (1566-1572). It required little preparation, and ethical and cultural reasons were predominant in the choice. The Belvedere Courtyard was evocative of the Papal magnificence of the Renaissance; this project effectively ‘cut’ the courtyard and would be regarded as a symbolic return to a more austere and spiritual life, in keeping with the Reform of the Church described by the Council of Trent. The new Library was therefore erected between the corridors of the...
Belvedere Courtyard and linked at the ends with the two foreparts added by Pirro Ligorio during the papacy of Paul IV (1555-1559) after the disastrous collapse of 1531.

The new building was not very wide; an ample portico was opened on the ground floor, in front of the Belvedere Courtyard, behind which a number of halls protruded into the side of the hill.

On the upper floor of the new building a large hall stood, more than 70 metres long, 15 metres wide and 9 metres tall, with seven large windows along each of the longest walls. It was used as a reading room until the mid 19th century and will soon be fully equipped once again and ready for use by the readers.
Fig. 16
N. Bonifacio, Prospetto della facciata della Biblioteca Vaticana, in Della trasportatione dell’obelisco vaticano et delle fabbriche di nostro signore papa Sisto V fatte dal cav. Domenico Fontana arch. di Sua Santità, Roma, appresso Domenico Basa, 1590, incisione ad acquaforte.


Fig. 17
Pagine successive: Veduta del Salone Sistino.
Following page: View of the Salone Sistino.
It is known as the Salone Sistino (Sistine Hall) and was the largest study hall in Europe for centuries.

It is a magnificent space divided into two naves with a row of pillars down the middle (fig. 17), flooded by the Roman light at every hour of the day.

This very impressive structure was brightened by the decorative choice of having walls and ceiling vaults in wonderful frescoes, with large decorations on white and light blue backgrounds, framed in green and gold. Federico Ranaldi, Primus Custos of the Library at the time, created most of the iconography, with the advice of other leading library experts of the age: the Augustinian Angelo Rocca (1546-1620), founder of the Angelica Library in Rome, and Card. Silvio Antoniano (1540-1603), celebrated scholar, owner of a collection of 1,500 printed volumes, later donated to the Vallicelliana Library.

The entire series of decorations of the Salone Sistino evolves around the celebration of books. On the wall overlooking the Belvedere Courtyard is a tribute to the libraries of the past.
It starts with the Bibliotheca Hebraea, represented by Ezra, the priest and scribe who reinstated the sacred library of the Hebrews (fig. 18), and ends with the Bibliotheca Pontificum, the descendent of all institutions of the past, represented by the founder Nicholas V, Sixtus IV and Sixtus V, who built the new halls. As an introduction to this historical path we find Moses handing over the Tablets of Law to the Levites as a symbol of the transition from oral to written tradition.

On the opposite wall a book is also at the centre of the scene, depicting the ecumenical councils from the one of Nicea to the Council of Trent in chronological order. On the central pillars, symbolizing an ideal and iconographic foundation, we find the illustrations of the presumed or real inventors of the alphabet (fig. 19).

The frescoes on the vaults and on the shorter walls are dedicated to Sixtus V. They show the symbols of his papacy (the Coronation and the Cavalcata per il possesso) and specifically celebrate the accomplishments in urban innovation and landscape building in Rome and the Papal State during the reign of...
Fig. 20
Il Cortile della Biblioteca o della Stamperia, in Illustrazione Vaticana, IX, 6 (marzo 1938), copertina.
The Courtyard of the Library or of the Printing house, in Illustrazione Vaticana IX, 6 (March 1938), cover.
this Pope. The decorations of the main hall and the two adjacent halls (Sistine halls) were managed in two subsequent stages by Giovanni Guerra of Modena and Cesare Nebbia of Orvieto, who, thanks to the large number of artists involved, were able to finish all the frescoes in a very short amount of time. Partly still visible are the frescoes in chiaroscuro that decorate the external façade of the buildings overlooking the Library Courtyard, also carried out by the same artists (fig. 20).

The lower portion of the wall of the hall was not frescoed, but covered in coloured marbles and fitted with engraved wooden settles that, just as the rest of the fittings, were recovered from Sixtus IV’s Library for which they had been commissioned to Giovannino Dolci.

Ranaldi’s initial project was to create storage space for the volumes, which were kept on desks and tied with chains; but it was not until around 1645 that the Library was fitted with cabinets. At the death of Pope Sixtus V, in August 1590, the decorations of the Hall were almost complete and the furnishings from the old library had almost all been
Fig. 22


Lapidary Gallery. To the right, the entrance to the Library from the time of Sixtus V to 1928.
moved to the new location. However, in spite of the new fabrica (building), it was only a few years before the need for further room was felt. From the start of the 17th century the Vatican Library’s collection was continually increased through bequests and acquisitions, often formed by entire valuable collections. In the time of Paul V (1605-1621), two new halls were added, the Sale Paoline, perpendicular to the Salone Sistino and were built within the internal corridor of the Belvedere Courtyard. Over time the Library’s structure came to resemble a T, with the longer leg continuing to grow over the years until the end of the 19th century, with the so-called Gallerie that occupied an entire floor of the western corridor of the Belvedere Courtyard.

During Paul V’s papacy, the grotto located at the centre of the staircase linking the upper and middle terraces of the Courtyard was refurbished. The apse-like structure with five niches and a central fountain was decorated with the symbols of the Borghese family, eagles and dragons. It was the backdrop to the small
citrus grove garden overlooked by the north side of the Sistine Library (fig. 23).

The interest in antiquities that characterized the 18th century also involved the Pope’s Library. At the time the Library and the museums formed a single body, following a model that was typical of that age. In 1738 the Medagliere (Numismatic Department) was inaugurated. In 1755, during Benedict XIV’s papacy (1740-1758), the first hall of the Sacred Museum was opened to the public; from this collection, the secular artefacts were later separated to form the Secular Museum, which was set up with the help of the well-known German archaeologist J. J. Winckelmann. The Palace also houses the Lapidary Gallery commissioned by Gaetano Marini, Primus Custos of the Library and Prefect of the archives: it is a collection of epigraphs that are also divided into sacred and secular, as traditionally done with all the artefacts of the Library (fig. 22). The Museum’s collection was positioned in the spectacular Galleries of the Ligorio corridor, while Pius VI (1775-1799) had the Stanza delle Stampe (Collection of Engravings) built to house the collection of prints, on the same level as the Salone Sistino, towards the Pigna Courtyard (fig. 24). Decorated by Bernardino
Nocchi, this hall was later demolished (1820) to accommodate the Braccio Nuovo of the Vatican Museums.

THE RENOVATION OF THE VATICAN LIBRARY: LEO XIII, PIUS XI AND PREFECT FRANZ EHRLE

The history of the Library reached a turning point during the papacy of Leo XIII (1878-1903) who, with the help of German Jesuit Prefect Franz Ehrle (1895-1914), set the path towards innovation. It is in those years that the Library developed into a place not only of preservation of precious collections but also an active centre of philological and historiographical studies.

The Library became readily accessible to researchers and historians and it was equipped with expert personnel to catalog the manuscripts according to an analytical system, which at the time was considered extremely innovative.

Leo XIII also had the Library’s premises extended and the administrative structure reorganized. He created a reading room for printed books with volumes on open shelves...
stampa accatastati nell’Appartamento Borgia, che fu dunque sgomberato, e organizzò un laboratorio di restauro interno. Per ordine del papa, i locali dell’antica armeria negli spazi sottostanti il Salone Sistino furono assegnati alla Biblioteca. Si trattava di due grandi aule con volta a botte alle quali in seguito fu aggiunta un’ulteriore sala, perpendicolare alle precedenti, che fu tolta allo Studio dei mosaici per essere utilizzata inizialmente come deposito e per questo non venne decorata (ora è la seconda sala di consultazione dei manoscritti, fig. 28). La ristrutturazione degli ambienti, di complessivi 1.000 metri quadri, fu affidata all’architetto Francesco Vespignani che curò anche la costruzione della scala di collegamento tra la Biblioteca Sistina, sita al piano superiore, e quella Leonina (fig. 26). La scalinata fu realizzata all’interno di un piccolo edificio costruito ex novo e addossato all’angolo tra il palazzo voluto da Sisto V e il corridoio del Bramante, nel lato interno del Cortile della Biblioteca, che nella parte adiacente alle nuove sale fu riabassato per evitare infiltrazioni di umidità dovute al contatto con il terreno. Le sale Leonine, simmetriche al Salone Sistino anche nella disposizione for direct consultation (fig. 25); recovered the volumes in the Borgia Apartment; and, most importantly, founded the internal restoration laboratory. By order of the Pope, the two large vaulted rooms of the ancient armory under the Salone Sistino were assigned to the Library.

A further hall, perpendicular to these, was added from the Mosaic Studio to be used as a storage room and therefore remained undecorated (it is now the second Reading Room for Manuscripts, fig. 28).

The restoration of the new space, more than 1,000 square metres, was commissioned to the architect Francesco Vespignani. He was also assigned to create a staircase connecting the Sistine Library on the first floor to the Leonine Library below (fig. 26). This staircase was created inside a small purpose-built structure, placed on the corner of the Palace commissioned by Sixtus V and Bramante’s corridor, on the internal side of the Library’s Courtyard. The latter had to be lowered next to the new halls to avoid any water infiltrations from the ground.

The Leonine halls were symmetrical to the Sistine Hall, replicating the layout of the
Fig. 29
Sala di consultazione dei manoscritti, c. 1931.
Manuscript Reading Room, ca. 1931.

Fig. 30
Sala di consultazione dei manoscritti nell’allestimento del 1936.
Manuscript Reading Room as prepared in 1936.
windows. Ettore Cretoni, Giuseppe Aloisi and Tito Troia decorated the halls with frescoes, in the manner of the Zuccaris and in the traditional Renaissance taste of Pompeian style. Just like the Vatican loggias, this formed a decorative continuity with the halls above them. The new halls were furnished with central shelves divided into eight sections. Prefect Franz Ehrle (fig. 31) was in charge of organizing the volumes in these spaces. He separated the historical collections (so-called closed collections) from the rest to better preserve their unity. Afterwards he created a Consultation Library that consisted of a collection of scientific books arranged on open shelves and divided into forty categories, all readily available for consultation (fig. 27). His intention was to provide those who visited the Library and the Archives with every necessary research material: to this end, a corridor was created leading scholars directly to the Leonine halls. The books were arranged by subjects related to the manuscripts of the Library (Sacred Scripture, Liturgy, Councils, and also Catalogues, Bibliographies and Dictionaries) and by geographic categories that contained documents useful for the archives.
Fig. 32
Sala del catalogo (1928).
Catalogue Room (1928).

Fig. 33
Sala Leonina, navata prospiciente al Cortile della Biblioteca con il catalogo cartaceo nello schedario originario.
Sala Leonina, the nave which faces the Library Courtyard, with the card catalogue in the original cabinets.
The layout and fixtures of the halls had to be perfected several times and were improved at various stages over the years.

During the papacy of Pius X (1903-1914), specifically in 1912, the current Manuscript Reading Room was opened, next to the Reading Room for Printed Books (fig. 29, 30).

It was created in the rooms that Sixtus V had assigned to the Typography, which was moved to another building. The adjoining rooms and the ones above were subsequently used as storage for the manuscripts, and most of the volumes in the Sistine Hall were placed there. This storage space was used until 1983.

Franz Ehrle’s successor as Prefect of the Library was the Milanese Achille Ratti, former Prefect of the Ambrosiana Library who subsequently became Pope taking the name of Pius XI (1922-1939, fig. 34). His papacy marked a further step forward towards the renovation of the Library that had already begun. His awareness as a librarian, based on his long experience, led to a series of organizational decisions that over the years turned out to be very far-sighted.

Fig. 34
G. Roscioli, Busto in bronzo di Pio XI nella Sala di consultazione dei manoscritti.
G. Roscioli, Bronze bust of Pius XI in the Manuscript Reading Room.

Fig. 35
Attuale ingresso della Biblioteca sul Cortile del Belvedere aperto durante il pontificato di Pio XI (1928); il portale a formelle bronze è opera di Tommaso Gismondi (1985).

Current entrance to the Library in the Belvedere Courtyard, created during the papacy of Pius XI (1928); the bronze panelled portal is by Tommaso Gismondi (1985).
He promoted the cataloguing of printed books according to precise rules (fig. 32); reorganized the reading room; and created the first card catalogue for all printed books (fig. 33), to be used alongside the existing scientific catalogue of the manuscripts. Most importantly, he promoted the training of Vatican librarians in collaboration with Washington’s Library of Congress, which led to the opening of the Vatican School of Library Science in 1934 (fig. 45).

At the same time, Pius XI encouraged building works that resulted in the current structure of the Library. The new entrance from the Belvedere Courtyard was opened in December 1928 (fig. 35). Until that time the entrance to the Library was through the Sixtus V door (fig. 36), which could be reached through the Courtyard of San Damaso and the Galleria Lapidaria. The reading rooms could be accessed using the Vespignani staircase. The idea of creating a direct access to the rooms for researchers was part of the renovation project of the Belvedere Courtyard assigned to the architect Luca Beltrami (fig. 37). The original project saw the creation of a single
Fig. 37
Ingresso del Cortile del Belvedere.
Entrance to the Belvedere Courtyard.

Fig. 38
Scalone monumentale nel precedente ingresso principale della Biblioteca, realizzato nel 1928 e ristrutturato nel 1942.
Monumental staircase of the previous entrance to the Library, created in 1928 and restructured in 1942.
Fig. 39

Magazzino degli stampati. Particolare con scaffalatura in ghisa e strutture metalliche di sostegno.

The Stacks for Printed Books. Detail of the cast-iron shelving and the supporting iron structures.
Attuale magazzino degli stampati nel Corridoio del Bramante.

Current Stacks for Printed Books in the Bramante Corridor.

The entrance for both Library and Archives; this was later changed to accommodate two separate entries. The new entrance in classical style was opened in the second arch to the right of the Sistine building. Beyond the doorway a grand stairway in travertine divided into two ramps (fig. 38), connecting the existing stairs commissioned by Leo XIII and reaching the Consultation Halls. Furthermore, Pius XI personally followed the project for the Library’s stacks, an impressive design that had the capacity to store around 250,000 volumes.

This new space was built in the old stables on the ground floor on the eastern side of the Belvedere Courtyard. A three-story steel and cast iron shelving system was installed in this impressive hall, 75 metres long and 12 metres wide. The bookshelves were not anchored to the walls, so that these were not affected and could be restored to Bramante’s original design. The steel framing supported the adjustable cast-iron shelves that were perforated to allow better circulation of air.

The entire system was built by the US company Snead, based in Jersey City (fig. 39).
Stairs and a lift connected the three levels of shelves. A further level was added in 1931 and then another two followed, occupying the entire length of the second level of Bramante’s corridor, bringing the total capacity to 800,000 volumes (fig. 40).

Pius XI also promoted the refurbishing of the Salone Sistino. In December of 1931 the disastrous collapse of a central pillar caused the death of five people and the loss of several precious volumes. This deeply upset the Pope, who immediately arranged for the static restoration of the building and the renovation of the Hall, which was completed in March 1933 (fig. 41).

VERSIO IL XXI SECOLO


TOWARDS THE 21ST CENTURY

The Vatican Library received additional space in the second half of the 20th century. Pope John XXIII (1958-63) had in fact allocated the rooms of the ex Floreria in the Apostolic palace as storage space for the Library, halls that belonged to the Pope’s library in its origin. However, subsequent provisions allocated these halls to the Bishops’ Synod. The Vatican Library was given the rooms occupied by the Autorimessa Nobile in 1966 by Paul VI.
Cross-section of the original project of the four floors of the Periodicals Deposit, currently completely restructured.

The rooms were renovated and restructured to accommodate a four-story metal shelving system that, due to stability problems, could not be anchored to the building itself (fig. 42). A self-supporting structure of rotating shelves with compact and modular ledges was installed on the first two floors. The third floor was in the attic and was equipped with existing shelving. The fourth and final floor required specific work to be carried out due to the bulky chains strengthening the vaults of the ceiling. Strafor italiana, a firm who had worked on the Library’s renovation since the 1920s, completed the entire project, including the lighting and ventilation systems.

The installation of the new stacks, with a capacity of about 400,000 volumes (fig. 43), was completed between 1968 and 1971, with the strong participation of Card. Librarian Eugène Tisserant. When he was young, Tisserant had followed the works commissioned by Pius XI and particularly the
Fig. 43
Fasi di costruzione dell’antico magazzino dei periodici (1971).
Phases in the construction of the old stacks for periodicals (1971).

Fig. 44
Magazzino dei periodici dopo l’attuale ristrutturazione (2007-2010); scaffalature mobili.
The stacks for periodicals after the current building works (2007-2010); mobile shelving.
Aula di biblioteconomia (1942), ospitata al piano terra dell’edificio costruito di Sisto V, sul lato prospiciente il Cortile del Belvedere.

Classroom of library science (1942), housed on the ground floor of the structure built by Sixtus V, in front of the Belvedere Courtyard.

Aula della nuova Scuola vaticana di biblioteconomia con sede in Via della Conciliazione.

Classroom of the Vatican School of Library Science, with new quarters in Via della Conciliazione.

tivo magazzino degli stampati nel corridoio del Bramante. Recentemente l’intera ala del magazzino occidentale (corridoio del Ligorio) è stata oggetto di un nuovo intervento edilizio, di cui si dirà in altra sede (fig. 44). Paolo VI concesse alla Biblioteca anche il vasto appartamento sovrastante la Galleria Lapidaria, occupato in precedenza dalla Guardia Nobile e nel 1975 opportunamente ristrutturato quale sede del Gabinetto numismatico.

Si pose in continuità con la linea di ampliamento e rinnovamento strutturale della Biblioteca anche la prefettura del salesiano Alfons Maria Stickler, che nel 1972, solo un anno dopo aver assunto l’incarico, avviò un articolato progetto di ristrutturazione edilizia, per il quale riuscì a trovare un ingente finanziamento. Si trattava di riorganizzare la più grande istituzione culturale della Chiesa, in preparazione del V centenario della sua fondazione, allora calcolato sulla data del 1475. L’apertura di una nuova sala di lettura (ora sala periodici), nel piano ammezzato sotto la sala Leonina, imponeva il rifacimento del solaio e l’installazione di un ascensore per collegare l’ambiente alle sale sovrastanti. L’arredamento della nuova sala

construction of the innovative storage space in the Bramante corridor.

Recently the whole western wing of the storage area, the Ligorio corridor, has been subjected to a restructuring program, which will be explained later (fig. 44). Pope Paul VI also assigned the large apartment above the Galleria Lapidaria to the Library. The Guardia Nobile previously occupied this space and since 1975, year of its renovation, it houses the Numismatic Cabinet.

The following Prefect, the Salesian Alfons Maria Stickler, also continued the trend to extend and renew the Library’s structure. In 1972, just a year into his prefecture, he was able to find considerable funding for a major restructuring plan for the largest cultural institution within the Church, in preparation for the fifth centenary of the Library’s foundation, considered at the time to be 1475.

On the mezzanine floor below the Sala Leonina a new reading room was created (now the Periodicals Reading Room) through the renovation of the attic and the installation of a lift connecting it to the rooms above.
Strafor italiana was commissioned to design the new three-level shelving for the perimeter walls in 1974, but the work was interrupted several times through the years and the hall was only opened to the public in 2002.


The restructuring of the ground floor and the creation of the Aula di biblioteconomia (Hall of Library Science) went a little faster. This hall, which is a second site of the Vatican School of Library Science, was opened in the academic year of 1977-78 and comfortably fitted with 112 fixed seats equipped with folding desks. The school of Library Science was subsequently moved (2003) to new premises with appropriate computer equipment in Via della Conciliazione, outside the Vatican walls (fig. 46). Between 1982 and 1983 a one-story building was created outside the Belvedere Courtyard, in the space next to Bramante’s corridor, above the tunnel leading to the fountain of Galea (fig. 47). This new wing, so-called New Catalogue, was to house the offices of the Scriptores and of the Accessions and Catalogue Services. In 1985 the first data processing centre of the Library was also housed here.
The need for further storage space for manuscripts led to a formal request in 1980. The premises used until then, behind the Manuscript Reading Room, were deemed insufficient and unsuitable to house the valuable volumes.

The initial project was to design a two-story underground storage area below the Chiaramonti Museum, similar to the one created for the Vatican Secret Archive below the Pigna Courtyard. After a year however, the technical services of the Governorship deemed the location unsuitable due to humidity problems, poor ventilation and difficult access. An alternative location below the Library Courtyard was found, and the wider surface area made it possible to fit the entire stacks by excavating just one story below ground level (fig. 48, 49).

The new project was approved on January 1982 and the work was tendered to the firm Figli di Leonardo Castelli, who by contract had one year (365 days) to complete it. The new storage space is built of reinforced concrete, with 10 kilometres of shelving, all perfectly air-conditioned, and occupies an...
ne vi è stata allestita anche una Sala papiri, con caratteristiche di temperatura e umidi-
tà adatte alla conservazione dei preziosi re-
perti (fig. 51).
Il recupero e la razionalizzazione degli
spazi e il miglioramento della struttura
della Vaticana sono stati tra gli obiettivi
principalì della prefettura dell’attuale Car-
dinale Bibliotecario Raffaele Farina, carat-
erizzata da importanti interventi edilizi,
volti a realizzare un modello di biblioteca
storico-umanistica che, utilizzando le più
innovative tecnologie, sia in grado di con-
servare, tramandare e accrescere il prezio-
sissimo patrimonio che le è stato affidato, e
di offrirlo, secondo l’antico impegno, a un
pubblico di studiosi sempre più attento ed
esigente. I lavori, durati circa un decennio,
hanno riguardato tutti i settori della Biblioti-
teca. Si sono messi a norma gli impianti
elettrici, i sistemi antincendio, i regolatori
termo-idrometrici; sono state eliminate le
strutture fatiscenti e non conformi a quanto
previsto dalla legge, consolidate quelle por-
tanti, ristrutturati ambienti e arredi storici
e acquisiti ulteriori spazi, anche fuori delle
Mura Vaticane, da utilizzare come magazzi-
ni. Ma tutti questi interventi, spesso di non
area of about 700 square metres (fig. 50).
During the recent restructuring of the Library a
new Papyrus Room was created, with separately
controlled temperature and humidity suitable
for the preservation of this material (fig. 51).

One of the main objectives of the Prefecture of
the current Card. Librarian Raffaele Farina
has been the recovery and rationalization
of the spaces and the improvement of the
structures of the Vatican Library through
important building renovations. The goal
has been to create a historical-humanistic
library model, using the most innovative
technologies available to preserve and increase
the wealth entrusted to the Library over time
and, following the ancient pledge, to make it
accessible to an increasingly enlightened and
demanding public of researchers.

The project was completed over a 10-year span,
and involved all aspects of the Library. The
electrical wiring, the fire prevention systems
and the thermo-hydro regulators were brought
to current safety standards. Certain crumbling
structures that were not up to regulations were
eliminated and the main structures renovated
and restructured, as were the furnishings.
Further space outside of the Vatican Walls was acquired for more storage space. All this work was often not immediately evident, but it set the stage, as it were, for the last three years of the building phase (2007-2010) in which the Library underwent a radical reorganization.

The restructuring of the Library buildings has guaranteed a more linear and rational mobility of both people and objects, which in turn created a more positive day-to-day working environment. The restructuring of the Library, the reasons behind it and its description is the subject of other publications (fig. 52). So the Vatican Library crosses into the third Millennium architecturally and technologically renovated. The commitments taken at the beginning of its history stand true: to preserve the cultural heritage of the See of Peter, as a service to mankind and to its culture; and now to fulfil a new project, the opening of the Salone Sistino as a modern, state-of-the-art reading room. This is not a return to the past but the continuation of a service towards the Church and mankind: conservata aliis tradere.

immediata evidenza, sono stati in un certo senso propedeutici all’ultima fase edilizia, condensata in un triennio (2007-2010), che ha determinato una radicale riorganizzazione della Biblioteca. La realizzazione di nuove strutture garantisce infatti, a persone e a materiali, una mobilità più lineare e razionale, con un effetto positivo sull’organizzazione del lavoro quotidiano. Le motivazioni che hanno determinato questi fondamentali lavori e la loro descrizione sono argomento di altri saggi (fig. 52).

Dunque, la Biblioteca Vaticana, rinnovata negli spazi e nelle tecnologie, varca le soglie del terzo Millennio, confermando la profonda costante dedizione all’impegno originario di custodire, al servizio dell’umanità e specialmente della cultura, le memorie librarie della sede di Pietro e presentando un nuovo solenne progetto: la prossima apertura del Salone Sistino come moderna sala di consultazione (fig. 53). Non un ritorno al passato, ma la continuità di un servizio alla Chiesa e all’uomo: conservata aliis tradere.
Fig. 1
*Ingresso alla Biblioteca: stato ante operam.*
Entrance hall of the Library, before the restructuring.

Fig. 2
*Ingresso alla Biblioteca: stato post operam.*
Entrance hall of the Library, after the restructuring.