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La Bibliofilia

Rivista di storia del libro
e di bibliografia

diretta da
Edoardo Barbieri



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Sordet, revient sur les pratiques commerciales de la librairie d'Ancien Régime et du marché du livre de seconde main, en n'omettant pas l'apport du genre des catalogues de vente à l'histoire des pratiques bibliophiles et bibliographiques (pp. 45-78). Pierre Delsaerdt, dans sa contribution *Le catalogue des livres de Charles III de Croÿ à travers quatre siècles: conception typographique et traces d'appropriation*, propose une analyse matérielle du catalogue imprimé par Velpius et Anthoine ainsi que de sa rédaction avant d'aborder l'histoire de l'exemplaire du collègue des jésuites de Louvain à son arrivée dans les collections des ducs d'Arenberg (pp. 79-100). La dernière étude est cosignée par François Bougard et Françoise Fery-Hue, *Les manuscrits de Charles III de Croÿ: une enquête en cours*. Elle nous dévoile les premiers résultats de leur enquête à la recherche des manuscrits survivants de cette bibliothèque (pp. 101-132). La lecture de ces quatre études nous permet d'entrer directement dans l'univers bibliophile non seulement de Charles de Croÿ, mais plus largement de son temps; tout en prenant conscience des difficultés afférentes à ce genre d'entreprise ainsi que les problèmes auxquels un historien du livre ancien peut être confronté lorsqu'il a dans les mains un exemplaire unique d'une édition du XVII^e siècle.

S'il est un bémol à soulever à lecture de ces études, c'est l'absence d'une synthèse sur le contenu même de cette bibliothèque. Les deux éditeurs en ont conscience et l'annoncent directement dans leur introduction: «ce volume d'études ne se veut pas définitif, bien au contraire: il vise à rendre possible, et à encourager, des approches complémentaires du document dans l'intégralité de sa forme et de son contenu, de tous les mouvements ultérieurs qu'il a engendrés: dispersion de la collection de livres, nouvelles appropriations, disparitions et réapparitions dans de nouveaux ensembles...» (p. 15). Comme ils le soulignent, de nombreuses questions restent encore en suspens autour de cette collection, par exemple celle de la vente publique (a-t-elle ou non eu lieu?). Gageons que la parution de l'édition fac-similé de l'inventaire de la bibliothèque de Charles de Croÿ nourrira de nombreuses études sur l'histoire du livre et des bibliothèques des anciens Pays-Bas à la première Modernité et, pourquoi pas, l'édition critique de ce document agrémentée d'un repérage systématique des volumes encore conservés.

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NATALE VACALEBRE, *Come le armature e l'armi. Per una storia delle antiche biblioteche della Compagnia di Gesù. Con il caso di Perugia*, Premessa di Edoardo Barbieri, Firenze, Leo S. Olschki, 2015, pp. xxi+291 ("Biblioteca di Bibliografia. Documents and Studies in Book History and Library History", CCV), ill., ISBN 978-88-222-6480-0, € 35.

The recent "Material Turn" in historical studies has resulted in welcome scholarly attention to habits of producing and collecting books in the premodern period. Natale Vacalebre's account of the development of libraries by the Society of Jesus from its foundation in 1540 until its suppression by Pope Clement XIV in 1773 adds a rich and useful chapter to our understanding of Christian book culture in the early modern period. The focus on Perugia gives us a close view of a context in which the Society flourished before the Suppression, where Jesuits who also played a role in the growth of the local University were able to collect a noteworthy library that for the most part still exists, even though the Jesuits never returned to Perugia after 1773.

It is important to realize that this story is firmly rooted in Jesuit history. As the title suggests, books were both the "weapons" and the "armor" of the Jesuits, the tools of the Church Militant that allowed them to carry out their campaigns of education and evangelization. In the first chapter, Vacalebre describes how the ideals of the early Jesuits necessitated the collection of books for study and teaching, as reflected in the *Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Iesu* (The Official Plan for Jesuit Education, first

published in 1598/99), an important Humanist document that had a major impact on modern secular as well as religious education. As well as detailed discussions of what subjects Jesuits needed to study and to teach their students, the *Ratio Studiorum* included detailed and explicit guidelines for Jesuit libraries, from their physical arrangements, to (sometimes surprising) lists of desirable books, to the specific details of who should manage the libraries, and who should be allowed to use them. These directions had obvious consequences for the Jesuits as an international congregation, although, of course, most of the material discussed in this chapter comes from the development of libraries in geographically specific areas, in this case, mostly from Spain, Portugal, and the Jesuit missions in Asia and the Americas.

The second and longest chapter focuses on the cultural history of early Jesuit libraries. This part of the study gives an impressive overview of the intellectual concerns of the young Society: as well as the expected books of theology, philosophy and rhetoric, the early Jesuits showed an interest in collecting books of history, science, and literature. The literary collections are particularly interesting in that they include many works one might think inappropriate for a religious congregation, such as the poetry of Catullus and Propertius, the latter, though, in an expurgated edition (p. 29). Vacalebri notes that Jesuit libraries became even more diverse in the eighteenth century, a period that has been more thoroughly studied (especially after the Suppression of 1773); but it is fascinating to see that these diverse, secularized, intellectual interests of the Enlightenment Jesuits can be traced to the very beginning of the Society, existing comfortably alongside the more focused and utilitarian subjects encouraged by the *Ratio Studiorum*.

The final chapter concentrates on the history of collection of the Jesuit library in Perugia. There are a number of general points made here that are especially interesting: for example, that there was a gradual change in acquisitions from donations of books to donations of money that eventually allowed the Fathers to buy their own books from a wide range of booksellers, and the fact that a number of the Jesuits of Perugia also taught at the University. Vacalebri has identified the major donors through an exhaustive study of the volumes extant in the Biblioteca Augusta of the City of Perugia, in comparison with the documents of the Jesuits in Rome. One of the early Jesuit fathers of Perugia, Gerolamo Dandini, who served as Lettore Ordinario of Philosophy at the University starting in 1593, actually drew his university salary in books, a situation that became difficult for him when it became apparent that ownership of an extensive library could be seen as a violation of the Jesuit vow of poverty! (pp. 209-210). In the early seventeenth century, Giulio Rettabene was one of the first Jesuits of Perugia to leave a monetary endowment to be used for the purchase of books (p. 225). That the fathers were accomplished bibliophiles can be seen from the fact that, by the end of the seventeenth century, the cash endowments began to be used to update to newer editions of books already in the collection (p. 232). In short, by the eighteenth century, the Jesuits of Perugia had accumulated a diverse, 'modern,' and impressive library of such a size that donating it to the city created a crisis of space, a problem that all librarians know only too well.

In fact, much of the story that Vacalebri tells, from the period of the *Ratio Studiorum* to the suppression of the congregation, includes details of library culture that can be easily recognized by modern scholars. The physical dimensions and layout of Jesuit libraries are described in detail. We also learn about the appointment of experts who, under the care of the Rector of each house, had the responsibility for the daily functioning of the library. Books were arranged according to subject; so were the catalogues, originally, changing to alphabetical indices only in the seventeenth century. There were also careful rules for the use of books: in 1575, Pope Gregory XIII gave permission to all members of the Society of Jesus to read and annotate books forbidden by the *Index* (pp. 97-99). Jesuits were allowed to take books from the library to their private rooms for a month. Perhaps most surprising is the rule that also allowed outsiders who were

approved by the Bibliotecarius or the Rector to borrow books from the collection for an eight day period. Although Vacalebre has as yet been unable to find any extant registries of borrowers, it seems that outsiders sometimes abused this permission through the collusion of Jesuits who checked out books for lay people to keep for longer periods! (pp. 147-148).

This book gives us a delightful portrait of the most extensive library system of the early modern period. It is based on deep and exacting scholarship, yet offers lively vignettes of the early Society of Jesus, and especially of the community of Jesuits in Perugia. There are, nevertheless, two questions I would like to raise, not so much as criticism, as ideas for further analysis of this interesting story.

First, Vacalebre portrays the Jesuits as the religious congregation based more than any other on the importance of books for pastoral work. Although this may be true for the post-Reformation era, I wonder if attention to some of the medieval religious orders might not offer some interesting comparisons. Most anciently, the Benedictines, and from the twelfth century on, the Augustinian Canons were also mighty collectors of books; both of these congregations gathered libraries of note in their monasteries and houses. Closer to the age of the foundation of the Society of Jesus, that other protector of Catholic orthodoxy, the Dominicans, also developed an intellectual tradition that rivalled that of the Jesuits, and perhaps surpassed them in systematic theology. What might we learn from a comparison of the “book cultures” of these orders to the one described here?

Finally, this is a study of printed books. There is nothing surprising about this, since the Society of Jesus was founded at the very cusp of the explosion of print culture. But, even if the vast majority of books the Biblioteca Augusta of Perugia inherited from the Jesuits are printed, it is important to remember that readers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were also comfortable with manuscripts, and that, indeed, the production of manuscript books continued for almost all of the period discussed here. This raises the interesting question of the relationship between the cultures of manuscript and printed books among the early Jesuits. This is a topic which, as far as I know, has not been addressed, and which a scholar of the caliber of Natale Vacalebre could take on to great profit.

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