

PRIVATE MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL LIBRARIES

1. *Objectives of this research project*

Studying the philosophical literature located in private libraries of philosophers, scientists and scholars in the modern era means entering a field of research which has long been overlooked, but is now of ever-increasing interest, as the recent publications of important libraries—for example those of Schelling and Nietzsche—demonstrates.

Once the catalogues and inventories of libraries have been chosen and made available to scholars, they can be profitably used not only to reconstruct the “material” history of the institutions, but also from a broader perspective to look at the cultural profile of individual authors or of entire periods of intellectual history.

The availability of catalogues of private libraries collected in various countries over the last four centuries could therefore be useful to the scholar who would like:

- a) to account for an author’s studies, fields of interest and competences by working from a list of the author’s books;
- b) to investigate the circulation and the fortune of an author’s works by widening the analysis to the libraries of subsequent generations;
- c) to become familiar with the intellectual features of an epoch;
- d) to study the history of the transformations of private libraries in the passage from one epoch to another, thus contributing to a kind of “sociology of library systems”;
- e) to register the changes which take place in knowledge systems, in the reciprocal relationships among different disciplines (it could be interesting to explore how the philosophical texts present in the libraries of jurists, linguists, naturalists, etc. evolve);
- f) to follow the circulation of extraordinarily rare texts or collections of texts.

In many cases, knowledge of private libraries allows the scholar to rectify threadbare interpretations and to remove an author from the clichés of manuals. The document summary of the Greek library of Francesco Patrizi, for example, immediately reveals the intention “of bringing to light, the ‘encyclopaedia’ of Platonic knowledge—in which music, mathematics, poetry, rhetoric and the art of memory occupy central positions beside theology and philosophy—and contrasting it to that of Aristotle” (Muccillo 1993). Analogously, skimming the

index of Dilthey's library clarifies the breadth and articulation of a philosophical reflection assiduously dedicated—despite the proclaimed autonomy of the “humanities”—to keeping dialogue with the natural science of the period alive. And again, Nietzsche's library testifies, in the variety of the collected texts and of the documented interdisciplinary interests, to an approach with the “patience of the philologist”, extraneous to the “cult of genius” in all its forms, closely connected to the evolution both of positive knowledge and of the many different scientific disciplines.

The catalogues of private libraries in fact represent an orienting basis and a structure of reference and of comparison for the definition and the valuation of the library collections themselves. Thanks to their polyvalent characteristics, these instruments offer scholars the possibility to study in depth and concretely, bringing to light even implicit but sometimes fairly important aspects in the creation of philosophical traditions and fields of research. Certainly researchers cannot disregard enquiries which have been carried out to date within this particular area of study, and with reference to past research, this project intends to provide substantial increase to the knowledge of the catalogue sources.

In particular, in the reconstruction of important philosophical libraries—prevalently through notary deeds or sale catalogues—there is no intention of privileging the moment of the intellectual biography as in historiographic research, nor of offering material of mere erudition. The intention is rather that of expanding the use of the libraries in order to make philosophic historiographic research easier and richer, keeping in mind the growing relevance of research on the history of culture or the history of ideas, or the German "Begriffsgeschichte".

The main objective is to publish materials online which have specific relevance within the theoretical framework mentioned above. This would create an original database of philosophical libraries and of philosophical texts owned by scholars, rendering accessible collections otherwise unavailable, with special advantages for a reconstruction of a cultural history attentive to the circulation of ideas, through an accurate recognition of sources and library collections.

2. The typologies of libraries

It is possible to reconstruct the libraries of philosophers, and to proceed at the same time with an inventory of the philosophical texts present in the libraries of men of letters and of the sciences, gathering and publishing documents of different types:

- a) auction catalogues from the 1600s on, which attest to the sale of collections of books and manuscripts of single scholars;
- b) inventories, generally compiled for more administrative reasons, at the moment of donations or bequests upon deaths;
- c) bibliographic catalogues written by the owners themselves, or for them, in order to publicise their own collection and display its merit;

- d) the catalogues of institutional libraries, drawn up in order to orient users wishing to consult the collected texts.

These materials and documents differ among themselves, but all attest to the circulation of books and allow the reconstruction of the “workshop” of the philosopher or scholar. This makes both a thorough investigation of the sources of a single text and the identification of the cultural background of philosophers and scientists easier. It also makes it easier to bring the most representative works of an epoch or a given environment—that which has sometimes been defined as the “literary canon” of an age, a specific historic period or geographic place—into focus.

Compared to genuine bibliographic catalogues, which were drawn up in a systematic way and then completed with an often onerous editorial effort, sale catalogues for collectors and book lovers had quite a different fortune and circulation. The brochures and lists printed by the antique booksellers reached extraordinary levels of circulation as early as the 16th century, first in Holland and then in the rest of Europe. They often ended up being a chaotic and impenetrable “dark forest” in which it is difficult to find one’s way, since these catalogues were often completely forgotten once the sale was finished.

Leibniz himself used these lists as bibliographic repertoires; he wrote to Joh. Fr. Mayer, on 23 June 1704: «Catalogis, quales Franckofurtani, Lipsiensis et his concinnatae collections Draudiane et Lipeniannae, non satis fide posset, sed magis indicibus Bibliothecarum et auctionum» (Palombo 1993). And his way of working was in agreement with the saying: «ex catalogis et libris doctorum virorum studia eorum cognosci posse».

From a historiographic point of view, only subsequently do significant reflections about the question appear. When the season of the great Hegelian and Neokantian philosophic historiography seemed to draw to a conclusion, attention moves to legacies, unpublished materials and private libraries as well. In 1889 Wilhelm Dilthey, intent on highlighting “the unity of the history of philosophy and of the history of culture” suggested the systematic institution of “literary archives” to gather “plans, sketches, projects and letters” but also the books owned and annotated by the philosophers. While supporting the initiative, which contributed to highlighting the limits of a historiography interested only in the “history of systems”, Dilthey commented on the complex fortune of the Kantian legacy, bewailing the fact that the archives and the books of philosophers so often finish under “the gavel of the auctioneer”. At Kant’s death, most of his papers and volumes were divided between Professor Gensichen, who inherited the library, the bookseller Nicolovius, publisher of his books, and the ecclesiastic Wasianski, executor of his will. Subsequently, upon the auctioning of the Kantian papers “in Gensichen’s possession, a copy of Baumgarten’s *Metaphysics*, with interleaves and with numerous annotations written by Kant even on the printed pages (see Benno Erdmann, “Kant’s Reflections on Critical Philosophy, 1882) and a compendium of Meier’s “Doctrine of Reason” with Kant’s handwritten notes as well, reached Tartu” (Dilthey 1889).

The need asserted by Dilthey was insisted upon again by other scholars at the beginning of the 1900s. Giovanni Gentile, for example, in his preface to the first edition of the *Bibliography* of Giordano Bruno's works by Virgilio Salvestrini (1926), indicates the importance, for the reconstruction of the "posthumous history" of the work of Bruno, "of examining the old catalogues of the libraries" because they "would allow us to document the real circulation of texts which, rare and prohibited, encountered many different obstacles in their circulation" (Canone 1993). Between the end of the 1800s and the first decades of the 1900s some very prestigious library catalogues were published: Galileo's library by Favaro (Favaro 1886 and 1887), Montaigne's as reconstructed by Villey (1908), and that of Pico as proposed by Kibre (1936).

It is therefore worthwhile to explore the main public libraries of Europe where sale catalogues of prestigious private collections are conserved: a copy of the catalogue of Dilthey's library, printed in 1911, can be found in the Universitätsbibliothek of Leipzig. Lorenz Oken's can be found in the Universitätsbibliothek of Basle, Alexander von Humboldt's, published in the 1860s, can be found both in the British Library of London and in the Staatsbibliothek of Berlin.

Along with the sale catalogues the exploration of philosophic literature present in the private libraries of philosophers and scholars in the modern era involves a census of the registered collections. Collections of this type have often reached us in integral condition, since they were donated to public libraries or sometimes constituted the first nucleus of a library, as for example the collection of the codices of Cardinal Bessarione were the founding nucleus of the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice.

As an example of the difficulties which must be resolved, and the way to resolve them, we can consider the case of the *Libreria di Galileo Galilei*. Antonio Favaro's study, published in 1886, "is not only pioneering when compared to the research about private libraries of astronomers in the modern age—studies dedicated to an overall reconstruction of the library collections of Copernicus, Tycho Brahe and Newton only appeared much later—but it is even more noteworthy if one thinks that the scholar did not have a specific inventory of Galileo's library to ease his reconstruction efforts" (Canone 1993). Favaro used many different archival sources: the inventory of the inheritance of Galileo's son, Vincenzo, who died in 1649, the inventory of the books found in the house of Sestilia Bocchineri Galilei in January 1663, the inventory of the rich library of Vincenzo Viviano, who inherited large part of the books of Galileo, now conserved in the National Library of Florence and in some private collections.

The private collections of books, whether they merge with public libraries at a certain point or whether they are auctioned and end up on the shelves of other private libraries, are always privileged places of memory, material traces of a world which is otherwise destined to become corrupt and vanish (Bianchi 1993).

The "reading" and the study of library collections must in any event be "selective" since the materials catalogued are often incomplete. For example, through the catalogue of the library of Voltaire it is certainly possible to trace

decisive developments in modern philosophy: “from the anti-Cartesian polemics of John Locke to the reflection of Shaftesbury on moral and sentiment, to the anti-dogmatism of John Toland, Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins, up to the sceptical results of David Hume’s philosophy” (Carella 1993). But a constant critical scrutiny of this bibliographic documentation is necessary, since in this specific case, the great interest of Voltaire for Newton’s work is not reflected in the catalogue of the library, where there are no volumes of *Principia mathematica*.

The study of catalogues and inventories needs to be integrated with the collection of domestic registers, which as a literary genre are usually composite and inhomogeneous—spontaneous and direct voice of entire generations of families, a self portrait of patrimony and family status, but sometimes a description of a cultural and library microcosm.

The catalogues of library collections are of different types: sometimes printed compilations, in other cases the result of archival and library reorganizations. Often they are inventories drawn up at the moment of donations to archives, institutions and libraries. In general, this material can be incomplete and sometimes of dubious origin: an example is Antonio Labiola’s library, which has never been completely reconstructed, of which a small portion and a clearly incomplete, typewritten register are the only things which remain. In the case of the printed compilations, the sources are second hand, in the case of an inventory, this or the topographic catalogue needs to be obtained, which is usually in a single paper copy only at the institution which owns the volumes. The analysis of these inventories is not simple because it sometimes requires sorting through volumes and groups of books belonging to different people and casually united in the library collection, this is, however, an indispensable preliminary task. This type of collection is particularly common in the 1800 and 1900s in the collections donated by university professors: usually the patron of the libraries that own these books only has access to the alphabetical catalogue, from which the collection which belonged to a person cannot be reconstructed.

Publishing these instruments online, however, simplifies the research for a scholar. Examples of these typologies of catalogues are those for example of the professors of philosophy at the University of Florence (F. Tocco, G. Tarozzi, F. De Sarlo, G. Preti, E. Garin, C. Luporini etc.) and the University of Naples (B. Spaventa, A. Angiulli), but also of some nearly unheard of people, philosophy enthusiasts with no public positions, whose catalogues document the readings and library circulation in narrow intellectual areas. An example of this latter is the collection of V. Finamore, in the library of Ortona (Chieti), whose handwritten inventory documents the formation of an unusual philosophic library, around the change in theoretical perspective in a priest in the mid 1800s who dedicated himself to studying after leaving the priesthood.

The research also has to be extended to less common sources, such as the document summaries and inventories of general libraries or sources such as the *livres de raison* (Bardet et Ruggiu 2005, Tricard 2002), or “family books” (Bec 1984, Cazalé et Klapisch-Zuber 2004, Mordenti 2001 e 2004). These are at the same time domestic registers and collections of various testimonies in which, together with the documentation of the events and family patrimony, materials of quite

different nature are often found. These materials can be daily diaries, autobiographic annotations, transcriptions of genealogical trees with precise birth, marriage and death dates. The *livres de raison* and “family books” are a central reference point of a family system of written memoirs, destined, even if only in a fragmentary way, to be conserved over time. It is a selective memoir, which culls out the elements which best serve to maintain and preserve the fortunes of a family, but which is in any event an important source for documenting aspects of customs as explored through the analysis of family structures. An example of this are the pages of document summaries of the library of Jehan de Piochet de Salins, who lived from 1532 to 1624, and whose files, preserved in the *Archives départementales de la Savoie*, are truly a mirror which reflects not only private spaces but also the cultural world to which they belong.

3. *The Bibliography*

The study of private library collections, although part of traditional research, has acquired an ever-increasing importance and relevance in recent years especially as part of the renewal in the vast range of book studies. In particular, the exploration of private library collections is a fundamental aspect of the methodological debate around the history of libraries (Serrai 1994), divided between either a historical-institutional approach or a more bibliographic one (Traniello 2006). It is no accident that private collections have become a preferred topic in the most recent occasions of collective discussions about these questions (Petrucciani-Traniello 2003; Nuovo 2005; Sabba, being printed).

Private collections presuppose a considerably vaguer definition of a library than that which derives from a study of the political-administrative events of single library institutions. It implies, in fact, a level of analysis completely removed from the consideration of these aspects, and requires a focus on the cultural profile of each collection’s bibliographic identity. This is necessary both as a fundamental element to analyse the stratification of the collections in the libraries—as for example the Passionei Library that merged into the Angelica Library (Serrai 2004)—and as a indication of research interests, disciplinary horizons and bibliophilic orientations which have marked historic epochs, categories of readers and, naturally, single personalities.

In this purely bibliographic perspective, the study of private libraries has taken the form of publications which have given increasing weight to an exact and detailed reconstruction of collections. This occurs through the identification of editions and the creation of rich indices thanks to which the information can be explored as a starting point for a cultural analysis—as, for example, in the case of the Library of Bembo (Danzi 2005) or the Library of Aldo Manuzio the Younger (Serrai 2007).

The systematic recognition of documentary sources is an indispensable premise for this type of approach (Nuovo 2006). This has taken on ever-greater relevance after the pioneering work of Pollard (Pollard-Ehrman 1965), as can be seen from the importance accorded it in the history of bibliography (Serrai 1988-

2001) and by the increase in value placed on the archives of culturally-important figures (see, for example the *Guida* by Capannelli-Insabato 1996 and 2000). Or by the new attention given to archives of libraries (Archivi 2002) for a more thorough knowledge of their collections in stratigraphic terms, and by the census of their special collections (see, for example, as far as personal collections are concerned, *Fondi e raccolte* 2007). In particular, alongside the bibliographic catalogues and inventories, auction catalogues are at the centre of a renewed attention (Charon-Parient 2000, Myers et al 2001). Although little value has been given to these in Italy, with the exception of work on the collections of the Angelica Library (Ceccarelli 1990), they have been the focus of numerous projects at an international level. These projects have sometimes concentrated on the reconstruction of the phenomenon of sales (Selm 1982 and 1990, Loh 1995, Loh 1997, Gebauer 1981), at other times on the exploration of book collections in large libraries (Mattingly-Burnett 1915, Munby-Coral 1977, Bloogie 1982, Bléchet 1996).

Familiarity with these instruments and the systematic scrutiny of the repertoires of sources will necessarily constitute a preliminary phase of the entire research project, which therefore includes conspicuous bibliographic research and the periodic updating of the data.

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4. Characteristics of the site

The inventories, digitalized and memorized in PDF format, are uploaded into an “open” digital library which can be freely consulted through a web site. An information page (descriptive metadata) is associated to every document. This allows users to search and browse the indices of all the digitalized material. The digital archive can be increased over time through a simple interface for content management. The technological platform used by the digital archive and the web site is based on open source software (MySQL, Apache, PHP).

5. Invitation to contributors

The database is open to the collaboration of all scholars who are interested in the aims of the research, and contributions are here explicitly solicited. The success of the initiative will in fact depend on the broadest possible involvement of individual researchers and research centres, through the addition of bibliographic and library materials.

Papers, with proposals for new acquisitions, will be subject to the judgement of an editorial committee. The publication of essays and contributions in electronic format will be guaranteed by a copyright agreement between editors and authors.

Comments and suggestions about the database, and questions or comments about specific contributions are most welcome.

The Editors

How to present a paper

Below is a model presentation that contributors can use. Each contribution should be written in English as well as in the national language of the scholar.

- I-Information about the owner of the library, with brief biographic and bibliographic information if possible
 - A) Name Surname
 - B) Place and date of birth – death
 - C) Brief biography (only for minor figures, possibly no more than 600 characters)
 - D) Main bibliographic references (only for “minor” figures)

- II-Information about the library being described, in particular:
 - A) current collocation of the volumes in libraries or other institutions;
 - B) how the volumes have been collected and kept (for example, if purchased or donated, if the volumes represent the entire library or only a part of it, if they are gathered in a collection or shelved along with the rest of the entire library) ;
 - C) name of the collection in which they are contained (as necessary);
 - D) bibliography of studies on the library of the author under consideration.

- III-Bibliographic citation of the catalogue (where possible, and not in those cases where the collection has no catalogue and is described only by an inventory or similar), as follows:
 - A) Brief title and name of editor of catalogue, if available, typographic notes (for printed materials), physical description.
 - B) Locations of the catalogue in the principal libraries (obligatory for older catalogues, from the 1500 to 1700s).

- IV-Brief description of the catalogue, with indications of:
 - A) the circumstances in which the catalogue was drawn up and its type (sales catalogue, inventory, etc);
 - B) its content (number of volumes and their order)
 - C) characteristics of the classification scheme, (in particular
 - a. reference model, e.g., does it reproduce the original structure of the author’s library, or a classification in use in a public library or the outline of a specialised repertory)
 - b) general format: list of the principal classes and indication of the number of internal subclasses).
 - D) any introductions, prefaces, indices, summary tables, with the classification scheme, etc.
 - E) Bibliography on the catalogue

- V- Reproduction of the structure of the catalogue:
 - Frontispiece
 - Other preliminaries

Body of catalogue
Indices

Papers can be sent by email to bibliothecae.philosophicae@sns.it. Send two or more files by email indicating

- 1) name, address, institution, title of the library
- 2) outline of the proposed library
- 3) catalogue or inventory of the proposed library
- 4) any links with additional or explanatory materials for the libraries outlined in the database.

The papers will be examined by the editorial committee, and its decision will be final for the publication of the texts. The editors will then inform the authors about their decision and the terms of the publication of the papers (if applicable).

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