



Rare books in the Vatican Library: reshaping the catalogue

Laura Lalli

1 BAVIC: an example of analytical cataloging

A long time has passed since «[...] il 4 dicembre 1925 il comitato direttivo dell'Endowment approva la proposta di Butler di assistere la Vaticana nell'allestimento di un moderno sistema di catalogazione e nella realizzazione di un catalogo a schede» (Weston and Galeffi, p. 1249)¹. In those years, the idea to develop a general catalogue of printed books based on international standard formats, with the exception of the incunabula, for English-speaking countries took form. Among the projects undertaken, as part of a collaboration with the Carnegie Endowment, there was also a brief recognition of the incunabula collection (Mattioli Háy). Towards the last two decades of the 20th century, it was decided to adopt the international standards for bibliographic description sponsored by International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) based on the Anglo American cataloging rules and the Machine Readable Cataloguing (MARC)21's

¹«December 4, 1925 when the [Carnegie] Endowment's directives committee approved Butler's proposal to help the Vatican Library to set up a modern cataloging system and the realization of a card catalog»



format (Russell). Within two years, the entire Vatican Library's card-catalogue was converted into electronic format and the incunabula were not suitable for card in a 7 x 12.5 cm. such as is used for modern books. In those years, father William Sheehan, C.S.B. published a census: *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Incunabula* (Sheehan, William, C.S.B.). After about ten years, the Vatican Library approved the VISTC Project (Lalli). The project consisted in data entry, listed by Sheehan into the electronic catalogue. It was the first time that information about incunabula could be seen online by scholars all around the world.² So, the possibility of opening a cognitive horizon for the users and the practice of producing records seemed to have changed. Only after the first decade of the 21th century the VISTC Project was completed. The second step was called *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Incunabulorum Catalogus* (BAVIC)³ This project, based on an analytical description of early printed books, was launched in 2011. It paved the way for the future description of the editions printed between 16th to 18th century kept into the Library. It was a first step towards the discovery of the Vatican provenances. The Vatican incunabula collection is the fourth in the world in terms of importance and it includes the legacy of the popes, bequests of the most famous Roman noble families, of religious congregations and private people.⁴ The choice of the example is due to the fact that incunabula are products which, by their nature,

²As Carlo Revelli pointed out «[...] paper tradition is still prevailing in cataloging rules after the coming of computer and necessary transformation requires a change in outlook and some time, because the path of transition, follows a complex and not brief course». In Carlo Revelli Testimony-Opening speech in FSR 2014.

³I would like to thank Adalbert Roth, Director of Printed Books Department in Vatican Library. I warmly thank the team of BAVIC Project and Polonsky Foundation Digitization Project (Incunabula's metadata Section): Benedetta Cenni, Libera Giachino, Mara Mincione and Francesca Schena.

⁴It holds nearly 9.000 copies, about one hundred on vellum. Until now, it has catalogued 40% of the entire fund.

represent the middle ground between the manuscript codex and the printed book with its modern features known to us all. For this reason, they show, gathered together, all the details of what became the modern printed book. They are witnesses that allowed the transmission and continuity of the ancient manuscripts. The progress of printing highlighted all the graphical and textual elements. I would like to begin considering as users in general the scholars and academics of the Vatican Library. BAVIC's home-page aims to be smart, fast and rich in detail.⁵ A part of the web site is dedicated to general information: the history, the collections, repertories, links, list of incunabula on loan for expositions. The other part is devoted to research issues. The use of the catalogue is to retrieve semantic data. This quality must be mediated in order to create a greater interaction with the users. For centuries, the catalogue has been considered the most powerful tool of the library. Its organization has been finely tuned in order to facilitate access to the printed heritage and to allow the retrieval of contents. The new OPAC is designed as a true portal in which the mainstream functionality is integrated with many web services to increase the level of interaction. Today, more than ever, libraries have the function of informing scholars on which copies are conserved and, if possible, to show the online version. Moreover, BAVIC's home-page is connected with all the catalogues of the Vatican Library: manuscripts, modern books, prints and medals. The user can find the same item by pointing inside each of them. A resolute page shows both the location and the type of material to be studied and it shows all issues in chronological order. One can select immediately the kind of material desired. In the advanced search and several indexes guide the scholars towards the best result. A keyword-search allows also to pick the best result from generic fields

⁵<http://opac.vatlib.it/iguana/www.main.cls?v=9b21bf8c-18c4-11e1-9e67-5056b2001200&locProfile=INC>.

related to the copies' notes. I am referring to information relating specifically to the copy: bookplates, provenances, manuscripts annotations, bindings, illuminated illustrations, stamps and coats of arms. The order of the record is conventional: a first part is dedicated to the edition and a second part to the characteristics of copies⁶ The model applied in the description includes all the elements needed to identify each edition. It allows the presence of variable amounts of data, from a minimum description called short-title to a very rich set of bibliographic information.⁷ Professional cataloguers have to pay attention to the font's types. They vet the structure of the pages and the texture of the paper.⁸ A critical point is the copies *census*, the variations (Richardson). In the Vatican Library, as in the other major libraries, there are several copies of the same edition: a sort of multiple identity for the same edition. In most cases, copies are different in the typographical form for the presence of abbreviations, for the modifications of the *mise en page*, for different woodcuts used in the decoration or for the types of typographical Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Glagolitic fonts. The cataloguer's task is to create relationships between data (Floridi). To produce those we have to gather a large number of data. In fact, copies can frequently show a patchwork of information created by printed elements such as texts and variants, xilographies, printer's marks but also not-printed elements such as drawings, and stamps, coats of arms and handwritten notes or sometimes illuminated decorations (Stijman). All these elements create a wonderful cultural mosaic. But how can we describe all this

⁶ISBD(A)rev <http://archive.ifa.org/VII/s13/pubs/isbda.htm>; <http://stephanus.flg.uci.edu/inst/fontsel>; Early European Bbooks, <http://eeb.chadwyck.com>; Minima Bibliographica, http://centridiricerca.unicatt.it/creleb_1751.html.

⁷Rare Books Section continues to catalog according to Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Books (DCRMB) and Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR)2 for descriptive cataloging, using RDA guidelines for access points (Moriarty).

⁸In other words, the staff has to pull out all the steps to illustrate copies (Bigardi).

information? We try to do it using MARC21 local fields. I would like to present, in practice, the difficulties that cataloguers face during the consideration of not-printed elements. They try to capture the signs of age affixed to the books in the course of time by ancient owners or even by simple readers. The focus is especially on the copy's notes (Sandal). Concerning old shelf marks, the bold target is to group the locations of rare books to try to rebuild the old library, giving the users the opportunity to have an easier route⁹ In the future, it will be possible to rebuild the rare collections which belonged to ancient convents received in the Vatican Library after the suppression of the religious orders in the 19th century (Rita). Concerning handwritten additions, where possible, the cataloguers write a summary of the manuscript text¹⁰ It is possible to discover interesting historical information. For example, in the copy *Inc.II.970*, we note a handwritten list of people infected by plague in the second half of 16th century in Milan¹¹ On the copy *Reg.lat.1820*, we can read a handwritten dedication by Jacopo Sadoletto to cardinal Oliviero Carafa¹² Also, in the copy *Membr.I.25*, a handwritten note about «Conti delle spese per le gite del Sig. Gianfrancesco Aldobrandini in Francia Germania et Ungheria, l'anno 1597»¹³ Obviously, in this case, the cataloguer will insert all access entries useful for search in different stages to recreate the historical connection with the person or with the ancient provenances. On the other hand, there exist a large number of cases where it is very difficult to find

⁹MARC21 Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae (BAV) local field 097.

¹⁰MARC21 BAV local field 931.

¹¹Ludolphus de Saxonia Vita Christi. Mediolano, c. 1488-1489. BAVICid11017601; Sheehan L-172; Goff L345; HCR 10289; IGI 5875.

¹²Sadoletto, Jacopo De bello contra Turcos oratio. Rome, J. Mazochius, c. 1509. BAVICid11012665; Sheehan S-10; Goff S17; IGI V p.5 [S.l.: s.n., after 1500].

¹³["List of the costs of outtrips of Sig. Gianfrancesco Aldobrandini in France, Germany and Hungary in the year 1597."]. Breviarium. Venetia, N. Jenson, before 6 may 1478. BAVICid11004347; Sheehan B-472; H 3896*; IGI 2114; GW 5101.

the real identification of the hand writing. In this instance, when cataloguers cannot trace the name of the unknown annotators, they will simply record the presence of notes without affixing any link tab. A critical point is the manifold description of brands and coats of arms¹⁴ When they are identified, cataloguers include the name of previous owners, such as in the cases of books coming from popes' private collections, religious congregations and so on. Frequently symbols are hard to understand. When they cannot be identified, for example when they appear identical or they just change the colors or the shape of animals drawn in them, cataloguers depict them with a specific language adopted from heraldry. In turn, the user can retrieve the copy in Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) with a search for keyword as 'alloro', 'scudo', 'monte a tre colli', 'interzato'¹⁵ (Cordero Lanza di Montezemolo and Pompili; Bascapè). These images will be linked with the record. There are noteworthy copies that, after entering the Library, were dispersed in the general fund called 'Inc.[unaboli]'. Therefore, the analytical cataloging and the study of ancient inventories help cataloguers to find former owners or well-known humanists¹⁶ Another important issue

¹⁴Next to owner's brands which belonged to noble Roman families, the Vatican Library preserves collections which belonged to the historical funds Palatino, Urbinate and Reginense. The following funds include early printed editions (in chronological order of entry into Vatican Library): Alessandro Gregorio Capponi, Barberini's family, Propaganda Fide, Giovanni Francesco De Rossi, Chigi's family, Gaetano Ferrajoli, Archivio del Capitolo di santa Maria Maggiore, Archivio del Capitolo di san Pietro, Henry Stuart (duke of York), Giuseppe De Luca, Tammaro De Marinis, Etienne Pagès.

¹⁵[Laurel], [Shield], [Three-hill mountain].

¹⁶So far, it showed copies concerning to collections of Fulvio Orsini, Lucas Holste, san Silvestro a Monte Cavallo and sant'Andrea della Valle, cardinal Francesco Saverio Zelada, cardinal Angelo Mai and also regarding Alceo Feliciani, Carlo Vercellone, Anton Ruland, Seminario Minore Vaticano, Collegio Greco, cardinal Francesco Segna, Francesco Bandileone, san Gregorio al Celio, Camaldolesi, monsignor Giuseppe Conti, sant'Uffizio, santa Casa di Loreto, the bookseller Giuseppe Martini, cardinal Ildefonso Schuster and of Convento Montesanto a Todi.

is how to describe a book's decoration. In the record, a specific field is dedicated to illustration¹⁷ Generally illuminated, sometimes water coloured, it shows coat of arms, metaphorical signs and other things¹⁸ In the same way as for the coat of arms, cataloguers describe them with specific terms that belong to the antique books vocabulary. The user will be able to find all the copies that present similar, often, decoration with a keyword-search. I would like to continue about ornamentation, introducing the theme of digitized copies. If we pick up Seneca's *Opera* published in Naples in 1475, the copy *Stamp.Ross.939bis* is decorated with an illuminated initial on gold leaf and a coat of arms at the bottom of the page, the copy *Inc.I.65* is white¹⁹ In this case, they are two identities of the same work. A quick reference is made to the description of the old bindings and all the other elements that they conserve, indicated into the record in a local field²⁰ BAVIC project is still in progress. We have to wait until it is finished to have full knowledge of the entire heritage of the Vatican's early printed books.

¹⁷MARC21 BAV local field 936.

¹⁸«Che divario fra queste tinte delicate e trasparenti, queste linee tenui e morbide ombre e la durezza, l'angolosità metallica delle negre lettere. Qual contrasto tra il fulgore della foglia d'oro, che dà alla figura la preziosità d'un gioiello, e la volgarità della comunissima carta». [«That gap between these delicate hues and transparent, these soft lines and soft shadows and hardness, angularity of black metal letters. What contrast between the brilliance of gold leaf, which gives the figure of a precious gem, and the vulgarity of the very common paper».] in (Donatip. 25).

¹⁹Seneca, Lucius Annaeus *Opere*. Neapolis : docti Mathiae scripta Moravi artificis, 1[4]75. BAVICid 11013638; Sheehan S-155; HC 14592; IGI 8867; GW M41235.

²⁰MARC21 BAV local field563. The Vatican Library maintains an extensive collection of ancient and modern bindings as the famous Tammaro Marini's collection.

2 Digitization and metadata

The digitization activities promoted by the Vatican Library are producing a large database that support the most important collections. In this way, as Beth Russell said «[...] modern information technology offers amazing possibilities, such as linking bibliographic records to digital images of title pages and the simultaneous indexing of unlimited fields of information»(Russellp. 519).²¹

These objectives, nowadays, cannot be achieved unless we confront ourselves with new developments in the digital approach. This result recalls the sense of responsibility and service to the academic community worldwide introducing the topic of conceptual interoperability. The Vatican Library will take on a new challenge in the complex organization of metadata. In the last year, the digitization has opened up new perspectives for access to historical collections. The technological side plays a role in the cultural program of the Library. This project, known as “Polonsky Foundation Digitization Project”²², exceeds in some respects the language barriers and cul-

²¹Regarding to the future of cataloging rules relating to digital, see: *Statement of International Cataloguing Principles* in <http://www.ifla.org/publications/statement-of-international-cataloguing-principles> and *FRBR-Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* in <http://www.ifla.org/publications/functional-requirements-for-bibliographic-records>.

²²For further details, see: <http://bav.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>. The Rare Book Section of the Vatican Library is present with some precious examples: fragments of eight blockbooks, the parchment copy of the 42-lines Bible's (BAV digital copy: Stamp.Barb.AAA.IV.16–17), the Bible printed in Köln, known as *Ende-Unde* (BAV digital copy: Stamp.Ross.283-284) embellished with numerous water-colored woodcuts. For its peculiarity, the Vatican Library exposes other three very important issues: the first psalter translated from greek to latin by Giovanni Crastone, printed in Milan by Bonaccorso Pisano (BAV digital copy: Stamp.Ross.2103), the second psalter printed by Alessandro and Laonico from Candia's city (BAV digital copy: Inc.Chig.IV.1923) and the last one printed in Venice by Aldo Manuzio (BAV digital copy: Inc.IV.758) with elegant woodcut ornaments.

tural differences. The Bodleian Libraries and the Vatican Library joined efforts with the aim of opening up of their repositories of ancient texts. The project will focus on three main groups of texts including 600 Vatican copies of early printed books. The topics chosen are in line with the Vatican's tradition of keeping texts, their conservation and restoration: classical Latin and Greek authors, Roman printers, Hebrew books, religious books, parchment copies and patristic works(Buonocore and Piazzoni).



Figure 1

3 Conclusion

All these services, however, seem to lead to a shift to a new perspective: historical books are not perceived as physical objects but as a 'virtual entities'(Wagner and Reed).The paradigm has changed: the same cataloguers indicate the metadata and trace out the items in order to make it available(Weston). The book is made available and at the same time the Pope's Library continues to protect the tradition.

It is open to all scholars in the world *pro communi doctorum virorum commodo* and serves not only the Catholic Church but scholars and humanistic learning in general²³ The Rare Books Section will continue to encourage collaboration between researchers and curators paying particular attention to new technologies. Only with common real interest, can we have an exhaustive inventory of our cultural heritage. There is need to adhere fully to the standards and procedures for cataloging and to the alignment of the data provided for the national index(Mugridge). Within the international context, the Rare Books Section cooperates in various projects with many institutions, which are concerned with the preservation of traditional book publishing, such as the Centre for the Study of the Book (CSB)²⁴ and the Consortium European Research Libraries (CERL)²⁵ It seeks to share resources and expertise between libraries especially with the *CERL Thesaurus search* and the database of the Heritage Printed Books (HPB) where converge data relating to the Vatican Library's copies²⁶ In the future, we hope to exchange data-information about provenance also with Material Evidence in Incunabola (MEI)²⁷ From the point of view of the specific cataloging, I would like to note the connection with Virtual International Authority File (VIAF)²⁸ which aims to implement the various authorities to provide a single database and make it available as a free service of the semantic web.

²³The Vatican Library is the Pope's library made according to the intention of Nicholas V, "pro communi doctorum virorum commodo" (bulla, April 30, 1451) and the thought of Sixtus IV, who built it "ad decorem militantis Ecclesiae, fidei catholicae augmentum, eruditorum quoque ac litterarum studiis insistentium virorum commodum et honorem"(bulla, 15 June 1475). For further details, see:(Manfredi; Vircillo Franklin) .

²⁴<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/csb/contact>.

²⁵On 2007, the Vatican Library adheres to CERL as Special Member.

²⁶<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/csb/contact>.

²⁷<http://www.cerl.org/resources/mei/main>.

²⁸<http://viaf.org>.

It allows the user to search for and find data among the records of international authorities in any languages. Finally, I would like to mention the successful and continuous interaction with the International Short Title Catalogue (ISTC)²⁹. Nowadays, the changes in technology invite us to rethink the relationship between users and services. The question today is how we can bring the library to the users. The answer will necessarily involve a transformation of the catalogue(Coyle), which is moving from a cataloging context of the past towards a future relational context highlighting the significance of contents and relationships. The hope is to achieve a complementarity between the possible research strategies and the way in which the results are organized. The Web OPAC is the Vatican Library's window to the world. This is the symbolic meaning which will make possible its universal consultation and readability.

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²⁹<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/istc>.

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LAURA LALLI, The Vatican Library.

lalli@vatlib.it

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ABSTRACT: This contribution will focus on the aims of the Rare Books' Section of the Vatican Library. Taking as a start the analytical cataloging of incunabula, the Section will deal with similar cataloging of the books printed in the 16th century and later. Analytical cataloging requires deep skill in reading and interpreting the features which bear witness to the book's journey through history: handwritten notes, coats of arms, owners' identification, printers' marks, bindings, etc. In recent years, the Section also takes part in the rare books' digitization project known as "Project Polonsky". Thanks to digitization, scholars from all over the world will be able to see the rare incunabula preserved in the Vatican Library.

KEYWORDS: Incunaboli; Cataloguing; Digitization.

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