

THE TWO MONASTIC LIBRARIES

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The Rule of St Benedict makes it clear that books were considered to be a fundamental tool for the spiritual formation of the monks and should therefore be present in each monastery. The library where they were kept thus became of great importance in providing the “learning materials” for the monks’ education¹. In addition, the Rule stipulates that each monk should undertake to read an entire book over the period of Lent: “accipiant omnes singulos codices de bibliotheca, quos per ordinem ex integro legant”².

We have no information on the origins of the monastery library as a special space dedicated to this purpose. The monastery’s books were kept in the church, in the choir and in the sacresty, in the chapter house and the refectory – in short, in all the places where they were used.

From the 11th century onwards cultivated and enlightened abbots enriched the Subiaco library with several new acquisitions, resulting in the community possessing by the end of the 14th century a notable number of manuscripts, so much so that the library was held in esteem and visited by a number of illustrious figures. One such was Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who in his work *Dialogo su un sogno*³ gave an account of the library in narrating the visit of Pietro da Noceto⁴, the private secretary of Pope Nicholas V.

The existence of a book collection in the ‘Sacro Speco’ was recorded in 1327 by the monk Nicola Capella, the prior of the Speco, who describes a library there (he uses the adjective “specuense”) and the 126 manuscripts it contains, of which he had compiled an inventory. Both libraries are further recorded in a funeral oration composed by the monks on the death of the bishop Ludovico di Maiorca, who died on 8 February 1429. They mention that he had purchased two copies of St Jerome’s Epistles and gave one to each library, at Santa Scolastica and the Sacro Speco⁵.

¹ G. Cavallo, *Dallo scriptorium senza biblioteca alla biblioteca senza scriptorium*, in *Dall’eremo al cenobio. La civiltà monastica in Italia dalle origini all’età di Dante*, Milano 1987, pp. 331-413.

² *R.S.B.*, c. 48, 15.

³ Enea Silvio Piccolomini, *Dialogo su un sogno = Dialogus de somnio quodam*, saggio introduttivo, traduzione e note di Alessandro Scafi, Torino, Nino Aragno, 2004, pp. 131-137.

⁴ On Pietro da Noceto (1397-1467), see M. Accarini, *Pietro da Noceto segretario di papa Niccolò V*, in “Parma nell’arte”, 15 (1983-84), pp. 13-20.

⁵ V. Federici, *La biblioteca e l’archivio*, in: *I monasteri di Subiaco*, II. Roma, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 1904; p. III.

Further irrefutable evidence that there were two separate libraries until at least the 15th century comes from the annotations found in the manuscripts and incunabula which survive in the current library in Santa Scolastica. Most of these contain several indications of ownership in the lower or upper margins, usually on the recto of the first leaf⁶. Palaeographical criteria show that the gothic script of the inscription *Iste liber est Specus Sancti Benedicti* (S. Scol. LXVII.69) as of the note *Iste liber est mon[asterii] sublacensis* (S.Scol. LXXXV.87) can be dated to the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th century⁷, while the inscriptions *Est sacri mon[asterii] Sublacensis S[ub] N[umero]* (S.Scol. XXVII.29) and *Iste liber est Congregationis casinensis...* (S. Scol. CCVI.210) can be dated to the 16th century.

Another verbal formula can be found in the ownership notes found in the copies in Santa Scolastica: *Iste liber Congregationis casinensis alias S. Iustine deputatus ad usum monachorum monasterii Sublacensis* (S.Scol. LXVII.69 and XCV.100). This wording dates from after 1514, when the monasteries in Subiaco were annexed to the Congregation of Santa Giustina, on the initiative of the commendatory abbot Marcantonio Colonna.

Over the entire course of the 16th century the two libraries underwent alternating phases of growth and reorganisation, of which traces survive in the copies today. During the first half of the 16th century the Congregatio Casinensis entrusted the monk Gaetano Nicola with the task of compiling an inventory of the library of Santa Scolastica⁸. The inventory was never completed but annotations in books which survive today in the library reflect this period of reorganisation. Nicola and other monks devised an ownership formula (with occasional variations) which reads: *Iste liber est congregationis Casinensis alias Sanctae Iustinae de Padua, deputatus ad usum monachorum Monasterii Sublacensis signatus numero...* This form of wording was subsequently amended by the monk Guglielmo Capisacchi (1507-1579)⁹ who, between 1560 and 1575, carried out the first cataloguing of the codices, incunabula and other printed books in the two monasteries. While he worked on this task many of the manuscripts and the incunabula which were kept at the Sacro Speco were moved to the S.

⁶ Id., p. IV.

⁷ P. Supino Martini, *Roma e l'area grafica romanesca (sec. XI-XII)*. Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 1987; p. 179.

⁸ L. Branciani, 'Subiaco. Biblioteca statale del monumento nazionale del monastero di Santa Scolastica', in *I manoscritti datati di Grottaferrata, Subiaco e Velletri*, Firenze, Galluzzo, 2009, pp. 9-19: especially p. 14.

⁹ G. Capisacchi da Narni, *Chronicon Sacri Monasterii Sublaci (anno 1573)*, ed. critica a cura di Luchina Branciani, Subiaco, Tipografia Editrice Santa Scolastica, 2005; pp. 19-54.

Scolastica monastery in order to form a single library¹⁰. We can find Capisacchi's hand in many of the ownership inscriptions in the surviving incunabula in the library today: *Iste liber est Monasterij Sublacensis signatus numero...* On occasion the phrase *signatus numero* is replaced by the simple abbreviation S.N.

Over the following centuries the contents of what had been the two libraries was added to but also reduced¹¹. Today the day-to-day care of and responsibility for this valuable legacy has been entrusted to the monks under the auspices of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Tourism. The books and manuscripts which form the library of Santa Scolastica in Subiaco make it one of the most important collections in the Lazio region.

¹⁰ V. Federici, *La biblioteca*, p. III.

¹¹ M. A. Orlandi, *Cultura e spiritualità a Subiaco nel Medioevo: la produzione libraria sublacense nei secoli X-XIII*, Subiaco, Tipografia Editrice Santa Scolastica, 2007, pp. 41-45.