



# PHILATELI-GRAPHICS

Quarterly Publication of the Graphics Philately Association  
 Volume 44, Number 1 • Whole Number 172 • January 2022  
 ISBN 9739-6198

## One Library at a Time: The Marciana Library

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Fig.1. Italy 2016. First Day Cover Marciana Library. [Sc3420]



Fig.2. Postcard. St. Mark's Square: the red arrow indicates the location of the Marciana library.

The third Italian library that we are going to get to know is the National Marciana Library in Venice (Fig.1). The ancient and historical public library, named after St. Mark, the patron saint of the city, is one of the largest Italian libraries and the most important in Venice. It contains one of the world's most significant collections of Greek, Latin, and Oriental manuscripts.

The library is located opposite the Doge's Palace on the Piazzetta of San Marco (Fig.2-3-4), the small extension of Piazza San Marco (Fig.5-6). Unfortunately, there are not many stamps representing the library, even though the city of Venice has had many stamps issued worldwide in its honor.

The library is also known as the Sansoviniana Library, after its architect, Jacopo Sansovino. It is considered Sansovino's masterpiece and a key work in Venetian Renaissance architecture. Sansovino designed several sculptures and buildings found near Piazza San Marco, including the Loggetta (Fig.7), a small, richly decorated building at the base of the bell tower in the square.



Fig.3. Left. Italy 1968. The Square of St. Mark's with the Marciana Library on the right and the Doge's Palace on the left. [Sc989]. Fig. 4. Center. Italy 2021. A similar view of Piazzetta San Marco. [Sc ]. Fig.5. Right. Italy 1912. Reconstruction of St Mark's bell tower. [Sc124].

Construction of the library began in 1537 and ended in 1588 by Vincenzo Scamozzi *cont. on pg 3*

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Fig. 6. Left. Italy 1952. Column and Lion of St Mark. [Sc605] Fig. 7. Right. Italy 1970. Venice: Loggetta del Campanile by Sansovino. [Sc1020].

(after Sansovino's death). During the building, Sansovino was arrested because the ceiling of the palace collapsed, then he was released after he paid the expenses for the damage.

The building is finely decorated, and many important artists gave contributions, including Titian (Fig.8), Paolo Veronese (Fig.9), Alessandro Vittoria, Battista Franco, Giuseppe Porta, Bartolomeo Ammannati and Tintoretto (Fig.10). The building is not very big; it has only the ground floor and the first floor. The arcade is in Doric style on the ground floor and Ionic on the first floor. The columns are embellished and decorated with statues and sculptures.

The history of the Marciana National Library began long before its building. In 1363 Francesco Petrarca, known as Petrarch (Fig.11), forwarded a proposal to donate his collection of manuscripts to Venice, along with a plan for a library. The proposal was later canceled when Petrarca moved to the city of Padua, Venice's rival at the time (Fig.12).

In 1463, the Byzantine scholar Cardinal Giovanni Bassarione donated his collection of over 700 Greek and Latin codices to Venice, with the stipulation that a public library be built to conserve them and make them available. Venice accepted the gift and began to consider Petrarca's drawing made of a "public library" in Venice. The Venetian State promised to create a building worthy of the donation, but it was not possible to start the construction of the library until 1537 using designs by Jacopo Sansovino, who was able to harmonize the most noble classical style of the Renaissance with the picturesque Venetian atmosphere (Fig.13).

In addition to the books from Cardinal Bassarione



Fig. 8. Above left. Italy 1976. Fourth century of Titian's death. [Sc1233].



Fig. 9. Left. Italy 1973. Famous Italians: the Veronese. [Sc1120]. Fig. 10. Above. Italy 1994. Fourth century of Tintoretto's death, painting Ariadne, Bacchus and Venus. Doge's Palace, Venice. [Sc1988]

Fig. 11. Italy 1932. Dante Alighieri Society: portrait of Francesco Petrarca. [Sc 277]



Fig.12. Italy 1997. University of Padua. [Sc2134]



Fig. 13. 2009 Meter of the municipality of Venice.

Below, All Vatican, 1972, marking the fifth centenary of the death of Cardinal Bessarione. Fig. 14. Left. Image: Reading of the Bull of Union between Greek and Latin Churches. Fig. 15. Center. Bessarione wood engraving from *Bibliotheca Chalcographica*. Fig. 16. Right. Detail of St. Peter's portal and Cardinal Bessarione's coat of arms. [Sc528–530]





(Fig.14–16), donations, including some Byzantine manuscripts, were received from other Venetian libraries as well. Many operas from mid-Orient were donated because of the commercial expansion of Venice with that part of the world. The Marciana became the official library of the Republic in 1603 when a law stated that every printer must deposit the first copy of every book they printed (Fig.17–18). Thanks to this rule, the Marciana came to be acknowledged as the Republic's institutional library.

The Marciana preserves one of the most important collections of Greek, Latin (Fig.19) and Oriental manuscripts from all the world. Among the most precious are two manuscripts of the *Iliad* from the 5th and 6th century, the *Chronologia magna* by Fra Paolino, and the first book ever printed in Venice. The library specializes in the history of Venice and classic philology. Important also is the collection of ancient maps.

In 1811 the library was moved to new quarters in the Palazzo Ducale (Fig.20, the Doge's Palace). In 1924 it returned to its original location, which it still occupies today.

At present the The Biblioteca Marciana is supported by the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture and has one million volumes, 13,000 manuscripts, and more than 2,800 incunables. The library building is a true work of art beginning with the decoration of its halls, its sculptures, and its coffered ceilings. This library is rich in terms of Greek culture, the history of Venice and Venetian editions, and has been strengthened in this century by large donations (Fig.21). It is currently at the service of scholars from all over the world and plays an important role in the cultural life of the city of Venice.

The Marciana also has a remarkable collection of historical and current geographical maps and atlases. The "mappa mundi" by Fra Mauro (1459) (Fig.22) and the map of the city of Venice by Jacopo de'Barbari (1500) stand out (Fig.23–24), in addition to the first editions of Aldo Manuzio. (Fig.25)

The library now possesses 548 Greek codices



Fig.17. Italy 1932. Free-frank Marciana library.



Fig.18. Italy 2015. Expo Milano 2015: Xylographs from the volume *Della Agricoltura* by G. Tatti published in Venice in 1560 by Sansovino. [Sc3320]



Fig.19. Left. Italy 1965. 7th centenary of Dante Alighieri's birth: Miniature from the Marciana Library. [Sc918] Fig.20. Right. San Marino 1971. Canaletto: Basin of San Marco. [Sc748]



Fig.21. Left. Italy 1997. Centenary of the death of art historian Giovanni Battista Cavacaselle. Today, the Marciana Library holds Cavacaselle's collection donated by his widow in 1904. [Sc2186] Fig.22. Right. Italy 1991. Colombian celebrations. Left of the stamp: detail of Fra Mauro's globe. [Sc1835–1836]



Fig.23. Left. Vatican 1972. 16th century map of Venice showing the lagoon. The main bulk of Venice is in the upper frame of the image and the large canal at the left is the Grand Canal. The Gallery of Maps in the Vatican Museums holds maps commissioned between 1578 and 1580 to show the regions of Italy and territories of the church. The maps are based on the work of Ignazio Danti, a 16th century Italian priest. [Sc519a-d]. Fig.24. Right. Italy 2021. Six-folded xylographic bird's eye view of Venice by painter/engraver Jacopo de'Barbari. [Sc ]



Fig.25. Italy 2015. Five hundredth anniversary of the death of Aldo Manuzio: Italian Humanist, and founder of the Aldine Press. Printing Office started by Maurizio in 1494 in Venice. [Sc3285]

Fig.26–28. Greece 1998. Fifth centenary of the Greek Orthodox community of Venice: 30d Cathedral; 40d, Icon; 140d Illuminated Manuscript. [Sc1918–1920]

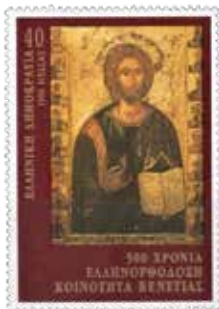


Fig.29. Italy 2016. Francesco Zucchi's engraving "View of the Public Library in the Piazzetta di San Marco", from Theater of the most conspicuous factories in perspective, both public and private in the city of Venice, printed in Venice in 1740 and kept in the Marciana Library. [Sc3420]

Fig.30. Italy 2020. "Europe 2020" Map of Italy of 1695. [Sc3648]



(Fig. 26–28), 337 Latin codices, and 27 incunabula that once belonged to Cardinal Bessarione (Fig.29). Among these are codices with works by Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic authors, many of which constitute the most important, if not the sole, surviving source for their writings.

It hosts one of the world's outstanding collections of Greek, Latin and Oriental manuscripts including: 622,804 printed books, 2,887 incunabula, 13,113 manuscripts, and 24,069 books printed in the 16th century

### **Bessarione's Library**

The private library of Cardinal Bessarione constitutes the historical nucleus of the Marciana. In addition to liturgical and theological texts for reference, Bessarione's library initially reflected his interests in ancient Greek history, Platonic philosophy, and science—especially astronomy. Some of these texts were brought by Bessarione when he arrived in Italy (1438) (Fig.30). Others were shipped at an unknown later date from the Venetian city of Modone (Methoni), near Mystras, where Bessarione had studied under Gemistus Pletho. Among the early codices were works by Cyril of Alexandria, Euclid, Ptolemy, and Strabo, some of which were rare, if not unknown, in Western Europe. Elevated to the cardinalate in 1440, Bessarione enjoyed greater financial resources, and he added notable codices, including the precious tenth-century manuscripts of Alexander of Aphrodisias' works and of Ptolemy's *Almagest* that had once belonged to the library of Pope Boniface VIII.

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Fig.31. Italy 25.5.1978. Venice Cancellation: Week of the book.