

Libraries in Italy: a brief overview

Mauro Guerrini with the collaboration of Giovanna Frigimelica

Mauro Guerrini



Giovanna Frigimelica



Abstract

The Italian library network is complex and difficult to explain. This article reports some characteristics of this system, that comprises State, university, special, public, school and ecclesiastical libraries, foundations and privately owned structures. An overview of the main historical features is given, as well as present-day major trends, such as education, legislation, new library projects, etc. Concludes with proposals for new national services.

Keywords: libraries; library and information services; library education; librarianship; Italy

Introduction¹

The Italian library network is complex and difficult to explain. Italy does not issue an annual report on the state of its libraries. The Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT – Italian National Institute of Statistics) the official statistical office, does not issue a specific annual report on libraries. The Associazione Italiana Biblioteche (AIB – Italian Library Association) started the publication of a *Rapporto AIB (AIB Report)* only in 2001. The last report was published in 2006;² the 2007–2008 edition, expected to be published in Spring 2009, is still in progress. This *Rapporto* is gradually becoming a main source for professional update and a showcase of the Italian library situation for anyone in every part of the world. This publication is the result of skilled contributions from many associates, who monitor events occurring within various professional fields and who are happy to share this information with the entire Italian library community. The extraordinary and, in some ways, entirely unique chance to host the IFLA Congress (Milan, Italy, August 23–27, 2009) is stimulating the Italian professional community to pay great attention to the international context, as strategic decisions taken during international meetings are later transferred into the national context.

There is a great amount of literature published on Italian libraries. What is missing, however, is a study that gives a concise outline of the overall problems. We offer here, therefore, some characteristics of the Italian library network, a system that comprises State, university, special, public, school and ecclesiastical libraries, as well as those of foundations and privately owned structures.

The Historical Context of Italian Libraries

The origins of Italian libraries are quite varied and reflect the condition of the cultural and political fragmentation that always characterized the Italian peninsula up to 1861, the year when the Kingdom of Italy was established under the House of Savoy. The year 1861 marked the beginning of a great united independent State. Full unity was in fact only accomplished on 20 September 1870, with the

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incorporation of the last areas belonging to the Pontifical State and with the celebration of Rome as capital in 1871.

In the late Middle Ages, libraries attached to monasteries assumed special importance in Italy, as they did in the rest of Western Europe. Their main function was preservation and in many cases they were associated to *scriptoria*. Scribes working in *scriptoria* devoted their time to copying manuscripts, for the most part of patristic and liturgical literature. Among monastic manuscripts, those of Benedictine monasteries stood out due to the wealth of their collections. Chapter libraries, attached to the bishops' sees, were also of great importance in that period. With the founding and spread of universities, beginning from the 12th century, and especially with the arrival of Humanism, libraries attached to the Palazzo in particular (Palatine libraries), and to the nobility (the 'Prince's library') began collecting and preserving ancient literature and gave birth to a new concept of culture. This concept was based upon religious literature, law scholarship, study and rediscovery of classical authors and contemporary humanist writers, but it allowed also the spreading of recreational literature. By this time, various libraries were founded which belonged to noble families; exemplary is the Biblioteca Malatestiana (Malatestian Library)

of Cesena, created according to a model that influenced even the foundation of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vatican Apostolic Library) of Rome and which continued into the following centuries.

With the spread of printing with moveable type, book production greatly increased and this resulted in the creation of numerous important libraries promoted by the nobility and the Church. During the 17th century great libraries were opened to the public. Such was the case with the Biblioteca Ambrosiana (Ambrosian Library) of Milan. Important libraries were also opened to the public in the 18th century. In the 19th century, with the Unity of Italy, libraries of the pre-unity States were handed over to the Kingdom of Italy and, following the suppression of religious orders in the second half of the 1800s, several ecclesiastical library collections were confiscated by the State. Unfortunately a lot of ecclesiastical collections were scattered, sold to foreign institutes, or ended up in the studies of local dignitaries (lawyers, notaries, physicians, etc.). The Palazzo libraries of the old unitary States, and the libraries of religious orders, often became the bibliographical basis and the structure of State libraries and of the most important libraries of local bodies, for example, the National Library of Rome, previously the library of



Figure 1. Biblioteca 'Antonio Delfini' – Modena.

the Order of Jesuits. This 'rearrangement' meant that libraries were established with miscellaneous book collections, which originated from different needs: no more bound to the cultural needs of an intellectual elite, new libraries were mainly intended for a wider dissemination of culture and information. In many cases no consideration was given to the lack of education of a vast part of the Italian population, that is, to the literacy of the lower classes and to scientific training in the productive fields of agriculture, crafts and industry, in which there was a widespread state of backwardness. The bibliographical heritage of the newly born Italy was therefore characterized by an important cultural and historical heritage to be safeguarded, but which was actually not very functional as regards the requirements of the contemporary situation. Libraries born out of the confluence of historical and ecclesiastical collections had therefore to be re-modelled based on use and circulation within the relevant community and adapted to the goals of the emerging English public library.

From the 1800s to the 1900s

During the second half of the 19th century the structure of Italian libraries was based on the *Regolamento organico delle biblioteche pubbliche statali* (*Rules*

of State Public Libraries), known at the time as 'government libraries'. This had a legal value that covered all types of library, including public libraries. The *Regolamento* was issued a number of times: in 1876 and in 1885. The founding of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma (Central National Library of Rome) dates to 1876. This was the result of the need to provide the new capital of the Kingdom of Italy with a general library on a large scale that could be comparable to the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (Central National Library of Florence). In 1885 the National Library of Rome and the National Library of Florence were both given the title 'Central', and made eligible for bibliographical control and legal deposit. They were also given the task of representing all the various branches of Italian culture (humanistic, technical and scientific), and of following the main developments of national cultures. Other 'National' libraries that were not 'Central', among which were some university libraries, were given the task of representing regional culture.

As regards public libraries, a census of 1863 counted 100 of them; about half of these showed as having been founded in the previous century, enlarged mostly by gifts, bequests and confiscations of ecclesiastical property; about 70 libraries



Figure 2. Biblioteca 'Gambalunga' – Rimini.

did not have even as many as 10,000 books. A census of 1893 showed that public libraries had increased fourfold to 419, the most recent of which were formed from the collections of suppressed convents. Administrative law provided that the costs for a public library should be included among the optional expenditures of the local authority. This resulted in a chronic lack of financial resources for public libraries, and in the absence of a development policy for the collections. This in turn prevented the updating of the bibliographical heritage, unsuitable for the needs of a public library, because of the nature (chiefly ancient books) of the works present in the collections. This deficiency was only partly filled by the movement of *biblioteche popolari* (working class libraries); this, with its strongly pedagogical motivation, and in the absence of any notable and lasting support of a legal or economic nature, promoted the circulation of books in the lower classes of society.

The structural development of public authority libraries only began in the 1970s, when the Italian Parliament started to grant to Regions the autonomy which had been foreseen by the *Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana (Constitution of Italy)*. The State transferred to the newly established Regions a series of legal powers; among these was legal responsibility regarding archives and libraries of local bodies or of local interest. Decentralization was experienced by the Italian library community as a chance for innovation and the creation of a widespread model of public libraries. Many librarians and politicians wondered about the role that public libraries should play in modern society and reflected on the need to promote a functional policy in favour of public libraries. Although there were a certain number of difficulties, local decentralization marked a period of intense debate for Italian librarians. It even contributed to marking an evolution in Italian librarianship, that began to overcome its traditional attitude of being bound to scholarship, towards a new concept of library as a *service* with social, cultural and economic characteristics relevant to a certain territorial and user context.

During the 1980s and 1990s there was a marked development in university libraries, thanks to considerable investments – originally in favour of the automation of catalogues and some services to the public and subsequently in favour of digital libraries and the gradual establishment of university library networks. Some Italian universities participated

in the early 1980s in the birth, experimentation and establishment of the Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale (SBN – National Library Service), a great new step for Italian libraries, which for the first time began to experience cooperation, and to think about their role in terms of cooperation and service to the Italian and international public.

The 1970s and 1980s were also, and especially, marked by growth in the professionalism of librarians; the figure of the librarian of a public library, in particular, underwent a serious evolution, as did that of the librarian of a university library. They were united by the establishment of a library model based on the management and organizational culture of service to users, on quality, on the measurement and assessment of services.

The National Libraries and the General Management for Books, Cultural Institutes and Copyrights

Historical and political factors were, then, the reason for State libraries having an Italian distinctiveness. Italy does in fact have eight so-called ‘National’ libraries. The ‘National’ qualification is assigned to two types of university library: to libraries that carried out a national function in the old pre-unity States, drawn into the new Italian unified State in 1861; and to libraries established in the last decades of the 1900s in various cities, mainly in the South of Italy (for example Bari, Potenza, Cosenza) to mark their importance that was not always soundly motivated and not always due to specific functions. Two of these national libraries are also nominated ‘Central’, to mark their particularly important role as national libraries in a more traditional sense: the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF – Central National Library of Florence) and the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Vittorio Emanuele II di Roma (BNCR – Victor Emmanuel II Central National Library of Rome). The other six national libraries are: the Biblioteca Nazionale Sagarriga Visconti di Bari (Sagarriga Visconti Volpi National Library of Bari), the Biblioteca Nazionale di Cosenza (National Library of Cosenza), the Biblioteca Nazionale di Potenza (National Library of Potenza) (institutions founded in the 1900s), the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense di Milano (Braidense National Library of Milan), the Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III di Napoli (Victor Emmanuel III National Library of Naples), and the Biblioteca



Figure 3. *Biblioteca di Scienze Sociali – Università degli Studi di Firenze.*

Nazionale Marciana di Venezia (National Library of St. Mark's of Venice).

There are 38 State libraries to be added to the eight National libraries, making a total of 46 libraries that are under the authority of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali. (MiBAC – Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities).

The 46 libraries work under the Direzione Generale per i Beni Librari, gli Istituti culturali ed il Diritto d'Autore (from now on General Management for Books Heritage, Cultural Institutes and Copyright),³ which is a Department of MiBAC.⁴ The General Management deals with State public libraries, bibliographical services and national libraries, cultural institutes, promotion of books and reading, copyright and royalties, and conservation and promotion of library collections; it also assists publishers and fosters the diffusion of Italian culture abroad; it supervises cultural institutes such as academies and foundations.

The General Management is currently divided into nine executive offices. These are:

1. Servizio I – Affari generali, personale e bilancio (Service I – General affairs, personnel and budget)

2. Servizio II – Patrimonio bibliografico statale e non statale (Service II – State and non-State bibliographical heritage)
3. Servizio III – Istituti culturali (Service III – Cultural institutes)
4. Servizio IV – Diritto d'Autore e Vigilanza sulla SIAE (Service IV – Copyright and supervision over the Società Italiana Autori ed Editori (SIAE – Italian Society for Authors and Publishers)
5. Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico delle biblioteche italiane e per le informazioni bibliografiche (ICCU – Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries and Bibliographic Information)⁵
6. Istituto Centrale per i Beni Sonori ed Audiovisivi (Central Institute for Sound and Audiovisual Heritage)⁶
7. Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma Vittorio Emanuele II (BNCR – Victor Emmanuel II Central National Library of Rome)⁷
8. Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF – Central National Library of Florence)⁸
9. Centro per il Libro e la Lettura (Centre for Books and Reading)⁹

The development and usability of the collections is ensured through: Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale (SBN – National Library Service)¹⁰; Biblioteca

Digitale Italiana (BDI – Italian Digital Library); the website Internet Culturale (Cultural Internet); and the website in progress Il Pianeta Libro (Planet Book) in the State public libraries.

*Biblioteca Digitale Italiana
(Italian Digital Library)*¹¹

The digitization of historical catalogues has been singled out, considering that Italy lacks bibliographical information in digital format relating to historical collections owned by public libraries. Moreover the BDI Committee takes into account that digitization of such information is not only a service but also a preservative activity. The availability of this information would be essential both at national and international levels; it would also be important as a guide to further orientate digitization programmes in the country. On the basis of these ideas, underlined in the feasibility study, two pre-programmes on music resources and serials have been started.

Internet culturale (Cultural Internet)

Internet culturale (Cultural Internet)¹² allows access to the SBN, historical catalogues (with digitized cards of the Italian bibliographic heritage), specialized catalogues and foreign catalogues. It also permits to search and directly display images, texts and other digitized contents belonging to libraries, organizations and institutions.

*Il Pianeta Libro (Planet Book)*¹³

This is a project to promote the Italian publishing output in Italy and in the world, with the cooperation of Italian publishers.

The Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF – Central National Library of Florence)

The Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze traces its origins to the private library of Antonio Magliabechi. This collection contained approximately 30,000 volumes and was bequeathed in 1714, in his will, “to the universal benefit of the city of Florence”. In 1737 it was decided that it should contain a copy of all the works that were printed in Florence and since 1743 those of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. In 1861 the Magliabechiana was joined to the Palatine Library (formed by Ferdinand III of Lorraine and continued by his successor Leopold II) and took the name of National Library. The name

‘Central’ was added in 1885. Since 1870 it has received by legal deposit a copy of all works published in Italy.

*The Bibliografia Nazionale Italiana
(BNI – Italian National Bibliography)*

From 1886 to 1957 the BNCF published the *Bollettino delle pubblicazioni italiane ricevute per diritto di stampa* (Newsletter of Italian Publications received by Legal Deposit) which from 1958 became the *Bibliografia nazionale italiana* (BNI – Italian National Bibliography).

BNCF is responsible for the compilation of the BNI. This initiative begun in 1958 and BNI is today published monthly in four series: monographs, periodicals, doctoral theses, children’s books. BNI is also available for a fee on CD-ROM with quarterly updates and with monthly online updates, or on an exclusively online basis.

With law no. 662 of 1996, MiBAC financed Arricchimento dei servizi della Bibliografia Nazionale Italiana (ARSBNI – Enrichment of the Services of the Italian National Bibliography).

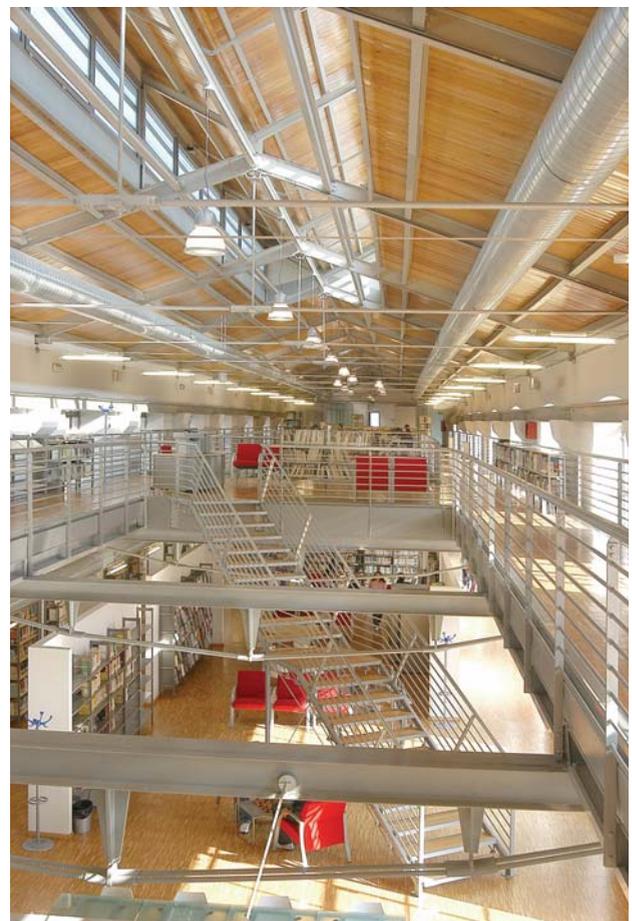


Figure 4. Biblioteca comunale – Vobarno (BS).

BNCF intends to link a bibliographical record to digitized images from the edition in hand and to allow its free access on the Internet. The pages of about 70,000 volumes published in Italy after 1994 can be browsed by BNI number and read on the web: it is foreseen that digitization and optical recognition for full text research will be possible for indexes, title pages, and the preliminaries of the books described in the *BNI*. There will also be 5,000 digital copies, with a total of about 1,250,000 pages, of volumes missing from the collections of the BNCF in consequence of the 1966 floods. In 2008 title pages and indexes of about 40,000 volumes were already accessible.

BNCF is the leader in the creation of records for the Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale (SBN – National Library Service).

The Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma (BNCR – Central National Library of Rome)

After the unification of Italy and the transfer of the capital from Florence to Rome, Ruggiero Bonghi, Minister for Public Education in the Minghetti Government, wished to establish a national library in the capital. It was decided to use the 16th century

palace that the Jesuits had built for the Collegio Romano as its seat. The library, named after Victor Emmanuel II, was opened on 14th March 1876 with book collections mostly coming from libraries of suppressed convents (1873). Its collections were increased, not only through purchases, but also with Italian publications from the obligatory legal deposit of printed material. In 1886 the Library began to publish the *Bollettino delle opere moderne straniere* (*Newsletter of Modern Foreign Works*). The Centro Nazionale di Informazioni Bibliografiche (National Centre for Bibliographical Information) was set up in the Library. This promotes and edits the *Indice Generale degli Incunaboli* (*IGI – General Index of Incunabula*), published in the series *Indici e cataloghi* (*Indexes and catalogues*). The growth of the collections made it necessary to find a new building. The first projects date from 1912; the Castro Pretorio area was eventually chosen in 1958. The new building was opened on 31 January 1975, a century after the library's foundation.

Since 1987 the BNCR has formed part of the SBN; since 1991 it has been doing retrospective cataloguing of its 16th century volumes. Since 1990 the Centro Nazionale per lo Studio del



Figure 5. Biblioteca Salaborsa – Bologna.



Figure 6. *Istituzione Biblioteca Classense – Ravenna.*

Manoscritto (National Centre for the Study of Manuscripts) contains microfilms of all the manuscripts kept in Italian libraries and in other libraries of bodies that wish to participate in this service. At the moment BNCR owns about 6 million bibliographic resources.

Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico delle biblioteche italiane e per le informazioni bibliografiche (ICCU – Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries and for Bibliographic Information)

The Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries and Bibliographic Information (ICCU) got its current name in 1975 when it

replaced the Centro Nazionale per il Catalogo Unico (National Centre for the Union Catalogue), created in 1951 with the task of cataloguing the national bibliographical heritage. Its aim is to arrive at a union catalogue of all Italian libraries; this is sought through cooperation with different types of library (State, university, local authority, etc.). ICCU looks after the National Library Service (SBN), the network that links the libraries of MiBAC and of other ministries, those of local bodies, universities and other institutes which contribute to the creation of the Italian joint catalogue. Moreover, the Institute promotes and coordinates national censuses of the manuscripts of Italian editions of the 16th century present in the country's libraries.

ICCU has another important task: the responsibility for addressing, producing, spreading and adapting to the Italian situation the international standards (for example, those of IFLA) for cataloguing different types of material, from manuscripts to multimedia resources.

In brief, the ICCU is responsible for:

- promoting and coordinating cataloguing and documentation and overseeing the unification of methods
- publishing and overseeing the sale and spread of the *Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries*
- corresponding with public and private foreign bibliographical institutes, and with international bodies working in the sector.

Istituto Centrale per i Beni Sonori e Audiovisivi (Central Institute for Sound and Audiovisual Heritage)

The Istituto Centrale per i Beni Sonori e Audiovisivi (Central Institute for Sound and Audiovisual Heritage), formerly the Discoteca di Stato, is the main public collection of sound documentation. It guarantees the preservation and enjoyment of a patrimony made up of works published on tape and on magnetic and optical disc, CD-ROM and audio and video DVD. It oversees the steady increase of historical collections and the update of other collections through legal deposit, in cooperation with record companies: from classical to folk music, from jazz to rock, from orally narrated fairytales to historical speeches.

The collection is composed of about 200,000 supports, such as wax rolls, discs, tapes, CD-ROM



Figure 7. Children's corner – Biblioteca 'Antonio Delfini' – Modena.

and DVD, plus a collection of tools for sound reproduction and a library. The tape library is composed of recordings, for the most part unpublished, made directly by the Institute or other bodies, for example by universities. Since 1992 a catalogue of the new entries is available online on the SBN network. In 1999 the Museo degli Audiovisivi (MAV – Museum of Audiovisuals), was established within the Discoteca di Stato, “with the task of collecting, preserving and ensuring the public enjoyment of sound, audiovisual and multimedia material that was created with traditional methods or with advanced technology”.

Istituto Centrale per il Restauro e la Conservazione del Patrimonio Archivistico e Librario (Central Institute for the Restoration and Preservation of Archives and Books)

The Istituto Centrale per il Restauro e la Conservazione del Patrimonio Archivistico e Librario (Central Institute for the Restoration and Preservation of Archives and Books) comes under the MiBAC and evolved from the unification of the Istituto di Patologia del Libro (Central Institute for Book Pathology) with the Centro di fotoriproduzione, legatoria e restauro degli Archivi di Stato (Centre for Photocopying, Binding and Restoration of the State Archives). The Central Institute for Book Pathology, founded in 1938, carries out functions of research and provides guidelines and technical coordination in the field of preservation and restoration of books. It has research laboratories, owns a specialized library and a museum, and promotes the diffusion and development of knowledge on book preservation and restoration through conferences, seminars and congresses.

Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale (SBN – National Library Service)

The Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale was born in the 1980s. SBN is the most widespread network of Italian libraries; it is promoted by MiBAC, Regions and universities. It is coordinated by the ICCU, whose aim is the creation of one union catalogue of Italian libraries (called *Indice*). Its members include (in 2008) over 3200 State, university, local body, public and private institution libraries, of general or specialist nature and in various fields, gathered into 61 *poli* (nodes).¹⁴

Member libraries share the same database model and the same bibliographical format (SBN-MARC).

Above all they share the same idea of cooperation and the same objectives: to provide citizens with a joint national catalogue containing millions of records, and the related services of resource searching, finding and circulation.

At the end of the 1970s Angela Vinay, director of ICCU and AIB President, drew up the project for the National Library Service clearly and far-sightedly; SBN was to be primarily focussed on three premises:

1. Bibliographical control based on a national book archive and on a national bibliography; this was not to be limited to the mere reception and description of current publishing output, but to work towards the retrospective cataloguing of books published in the past. This would have made it possible to build a more or less exhaustive integrated structure of documentary collections and controlled descriptions of the resources collected.
2. Universal availability of publications based on a national service of interlibrary loan (ILL) and on the support of related international programmes.
3. Professional education of librarians entrusted to innovative academic programmes.

The SBN Network

The first local *poli* (nodes) were activated in 1985. These are formed of one or more libraries and linked to the union catalogue, also known as *Indice SBN (SBN Index)*. In 1992, with the start of *Indice SBN*, the Italian national network was created. Initially, the *Indice SBN* only held identification (essential) details of the bibliographical records; starting from 1992, it contains a complete bibliographic description.

SBN supports standardization and cataloguing simplification; these are considered the basic necessity for the provision of services to users and for the participation of Italy in the world programmes of Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) and Universal Availability of Publications (UAP).

The creation of an integrated union catalogue was not foreseen; in the 1980s coding of cataloguing data was still a goal to be achieved. Angela Vinay writes:

Before SBN the majority of [Italian] librarians did not know the national cataloguing rules



Figure 8. *Istituzione Biblioteca Malatestiana – Cesena.*

or even, in some cases, use any rules for the description of documents. Cataloguing in SBN coincided therefore, for many, with learning *RICA (Regole italiane di catalogazione per autori; Italian Cataloguing Rules for Authors)* and ISBD.¹⁵

Libraries that form part of SBN are gathered into local nodes; each pole consists of one or more libraries, grouped on a territorial basis, that manage all the services with automated procedures through terminals linked to a server. The network has a stellar architecture that foresees communication between a central network (*Indice*) and the peripheral *poli* (nodes). When the user accesses the *Indice* he can search a bibliographic resource, find it in the SBN libraries that possess it and read its bibliographic record.

SBN libraries work independently and at the same time are united in a cooperative system based on a national network. The main functional characteristic that makes this integration possible is shared cataloguing. In SBN a resource is catalogued only by the first library that acquires it. Other libraries take its bibliographic record from the *Indice SBN* and add the local call number. One of the most important projects in recent years was the copying of the *Catalogo Cumulativo 1886–1957* of the *Bollettino delle pubblicazioni italiane ricevute per diritto di stampa dalla Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (CUBI – 1886–1957 Cumulative Catalogue of the Newsletter of the*

Catalogue

The OPAC SBN (SBN OPAC) is the public interface of the *Indice*, the union catalogue of the libraries that participate in the SBN. The OPAC SBN contains: descriptions of the resources acquired by SBN libraries starting from the years around 1990 or from the entry of that individual library into SBN; other documents of the 16th to the 20th centuries; and descriptions of books recovered from paper catalogues dating to before 1990.

The database of OPAC SBN is updated weekly. OPAC SBN allows to:

- identify the resources in which you are interested
- select libraries that have those resources and access the record of the individual library
- access local catalogues for additional information on the availability of the resource
- access the online loan service or document delivery (ILL SBN) if the library provides such a service
- access authority records (*Voci di autorità*) in the authority file, controlled form of names created to grant univocity and uniformity of access points in the catalogue.

At the present time, just a part of the records for persons are recorded and researchable. There exist only authority records for authors and only for a small part of them.

EDIT16 – Censimento delle edizioni italiane del XVI secolo (Census of 16th century Italian editions)

The *EDIT16* database, created within the sphere of the census of 16th century Italian editions project, aims at documenting Italian printed production of the 16th century and of making a survey of the patrimony in the possession of Italian libraries. It contains descriptions of books printed between 1501 and 1600 in Italy, in all languages, and printed abroad in Italian. Approximately 1200 Italian libraries, as well as the Biblioteca Statale della Repubblica di San Marino (State Library of the Republic of San Marino) and the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vatican Apostolic Library) participate in *EDIT16*. *EDIT16* also contains information on authors, publishers, uniform titles and printers' devices (digitized images of the devices are also available). In September



Figure 10. Project of the Central Public Library – Turin.

2008 the database contained approximately 62,500 bibliographic records of early printed books, 36,000 of which provide shelf marks in participating libraries; about 25,000 authority records of authors; approximately 5500 records of publishers, typographers and booksellers; and approximately 2200 records of printers' devices.

University Library Networks¹⁶

The situation is a rather complex one. Universities of Centre-North Italy have well-organized and efficient library networks. Among these are the Universities of Trent, Milan, Genoa, Pavia, Padua, Bologna, Florence and Siena. Universities of Southern Italy have difficulty in organizing themselves, in spite of some praiseworthy exceptions. This just confirms the historical gap between the different areas of the country, although a certain activism does emerge in the South and in the islands.

Only a part of university library networks participate in SBN; among university library networks that do not participate in SBN, Aleph ILS is a popular choice. Other universities still use different software, without participating in any cooperative program.

MAI (MetaOPAC Azalai), created in 1999, allows a cumulative query of about 250 Italian (SBN and other networks) library catalogues, offering a partial coverage of university library catalogues.

A census of Italian university library networks, held in 2007, resulted from the convergence of interests between the Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane (CRUI – Conference of Italian University Rectors) and the Gruppo interuniversitario sul monitoraggio dei sistemi bibliotecari di ateneo (GIM – Interuniversity Group on Monitoring of University Library Networks).¹⁷ Investigated universities numbered 74 (73 of whom provided answers), the data being referred to 2006. Formal establishment of library networks appears by now to have been almost completed at national level. In fact only two universities declared that they formalized the existence of the library network in any of their by-laws.

Reorganization of Italian universities in recent years led to a decrease in the number of university libraries from the 1345 estimated for 77 universities in 2002 to 1227 for 73 universities in 2007. The number of service points also declined from 1902 to 1553 in the same period, and this process allowed to reduce costs while offering the same quality.

The total space assigned to university library services is estimated at 696,000 square metres. The total number of reading places declined slightly

from 84,510 in 2002 to 80,614 in 2006. As regards the collections, the GIM estimated about 1,075,000 annual acquisitions and 209,000 active subscriptions to print periodicals for 2006. Total expenditure on bibliographic material for 2006 was EUR 116,448,425. Eighty-three percent of university libraries provide lending and reference services, while 76 percent provide document delivery services.

National cooperation initiatives for access to electronic resources¹⁸ are focussed on the activities connected with dealing with suppliers, while collection, preservation, and document delivery policy issues find it hard to make progress.

The commitment of Italian universities towards open access became a concrete reality with the signature by 72 of 77 rectors of Italian universities of the Dichiarazione di Messina (Messina Statement)¹⁹ in November 2004. The impact of this document on the situation of Italian universities was, however, less than expected, due to the lack of a national policy in support of open access and, above all, of a related “organizational infrastructure at national level that could support coordinated research and study projects inherent



Figure 11. Biblioteca ‘San Giorgio’ – Pistoia.

to the reform and diffusion of the scientific communication system, within whose scope funds for supporting repositories could be allocated”²⁰. In spite of this, in 2007–2008 a strategy of self-archiving showed a gradual and significant step forward in Italy. In July 2008, there were in fact 40 Italian archives indexed in the OpenDOAR, the Directory of Open Access Repositories.²¹

Public Libraries²²

According to statistics compiled by ICCU,²³ there are 4918 public libraries, most of which (4797, nearly 98 percent of the total) belong to municipalities. Of the remainder, 55 are owned by Regions, 10 by Provinces, 24 by consortia and associations of corporate bodies and 9 by unions of municipalities. As in the case of university libraries, there is a considerable gap between the various areas of the country: more than half (51 percent) are located in Northern Italy, 20 percent in the Centre and 29 percent in the South (the extent of the imbalance is to be related to the population to be served). Although public libraries of Southern Italy are not always functional, in certain areas of the South they are beginning to be a consolidated reality.

Public libraries in medium to large size cities are usually part of a local urban library network that includes a headquarters and branches situated in various areas of the city (for example Trent, Milan). Some Regions *de facto* impose the creation of local library networks (for example Tuscany Region), usually on a provincial or inter-municipal basis, with a resulting clear improvement in the quality and efficiency of the service to citizens. Public libraries offer a host of services, and bibliographic resources are available for reading on site or for loan. In most cases (58 percent) book collections do not exceed 10,000 volumes. Almost one third (32 percent) of the libraries have collections of 10,000 to 100,000 volumes, while only 3.3 percent exceed that threshold.

As regards attendances, the only information available at national level comes from the ISTAT investigation:²⁴ in 2006 11.7 percent of the population of 11 years of age and older (6,100,000 people) state they had been in a library at least once in the 12 months preceding the interview. Of these over half did so exclusively for reasons of study and/or work (51.7 percent), 36.4 percent only for

recreational purposes, and 10.5 percent for both purposes. Libraries are used more in the North-East (16.1 percent), the North-West follows with 13.5 percent; the Centre is at 11.1 percent. Lesser percentages are found in the South (7.7 percent) and in the Islands (9.4 percent). The Regions with the highest rate of library attendances are Trentino Alto-Adige with 28.8 percent and Valle d’Aosta (27 percent). A far way off we find Emilia Romagna (16.1 percent), Sardinia (14.6 percent), Lombardia (14.5 percent) and Veneto (14.2 percent). The lowest rate is found in Campania (6.2 percent).

The ISTAT survey showed that people go to the public library to borrow books (59.1 percent), read and study (44.5 percent), get general or bibliographic information (42.4 percent) and, to a lesser extent, consult catalogues (11.8 percent), borrow newspapers, magazines or other printed material (7.4 percent), and borrow audio-visual material (8.5 percent). A comparison with the data for 2000 shows an increase in the number of users who attend libraries to read/study (from 40.6 percent to 44.5 percent) and to borrow audio-visual material (from 4.2 percent to 8.5 percent), while there is a decrease in the number of users who go to libraries to get information (from 43.8 percent to 42.4 percent).

Ecclesiastical Libraries²⁵

Ecclesiastical libraries are an important element of the Italian scene. The *Annuario delle biblioteche ecclesiastiche italiane* (*Yearbook of Italian Ecclesiastical Libraries*), published by the Associazione dei Bibliotecari Ecclesiastici Italiani (ABEI – Association of Italian Ecclesiastical Librarians) in 1995, with constant updates published in the *Notiziario dell’ABEI* (*ABEI Bulletin*), records the existence of 1469 libraries in a presumed total of at least 5500 existing ecclesiastical institutes. These libraries are of various types: diocesan, chapter, monastic and convent, parochial, seminary, of theological faculties (these are in fact university libraries), of institutes of religious sciences, of ecclesiastical academies, of Catholic associations and ecclesial movements.²⁶

Ecclesiastical bodies often have a complex structure, which is reflected in their libraries. The oldest libraries are the chapter and monastic libraries, that usually possess important and rare documents

of a liturgical, biblical and canonical nature. Then there are the modern functional libraries of the Roman ecclesiastical universities that have hundreds of thousands of volumes and the most sophisticated computer technology. And then the libraries of religious schools, not to mention the more modest parish libraries, with a limited range of activities. Among libraries of the same type the size of the patrimony can differ greatly. The total bibliographic patrimony of the ecclesiastical libraries amounts to about 30 million volumes and the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI) recently launched an online cumulative catalogue, called CEIBIB.²⁷

School Libraries²⁸

School libraries are rather uncommon, especially in compulsory education schools (primary and middle schools). A fair number of Italian high schools (lyceums) have book collections available to teachers and students, but these often come with no catalogues. Moreover, economic resources are few as are study spaces and especially skilled and stable personnel. Many school librarians are teachers who look after the library.

In recent years Italy has worked hard to raise school attendance, reaching 93 percent of students registered in high schools;²⁹ the rise in school attendance has, however, been accompanied by a still disturbing rate of school dropouts (20 percent), that increase at the university level. Meanwhile, Italian schools are still strongly affected by an 'imperfect' autonomy, inasmuch as they are still lacking in dynamism and creativity; they are also suffering from the effects of financial cuts at the central level and from the uncertainty that weighs on the entire system. All this translates into a whole series of organizational and management problems coming at a high cost to teaching and the quality of the education.

The institutional answer to the problem continues to be that of using teachers who are no longer suitable for teaching due to serious health reasons, but suitable for other functions and tasks, among which are libraries (as well as in the school secretariat, in the branch offices of the Ministry, in laboratories, etc.)

In 2007, the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (Ministry for Public Education) initiated the project 'Amico libro' ('Book Friend')³⁰ with the aim



Figure 12. Biblioteca 'Sandro Penna' – Perugia.

of spreading good practices in promoting reading; eligible schools were rewarded with a one-off sum of EUR 1000 for purchasing new books. Almost half (4214) of all schools answered the announcement of the project, of which two-thirds (2751) were primary and secondary schools, among which were Istituti comprensivi (institutes that include many levels of teaching), elementary schools and kindergartens. Participation was considerably imbalanced in favour of the North and the Centre: this highlights a disturbing gap, due to the fact that even new means of communication see the centre-north schools more ready to grasp opportunities and incentives offered to schools. For example, only the northern Province of Bolzano has regulated the field of school libraries with the provincial law of 7th August 1990, no. 17.⁵¹

Other Libraries

Many foreign universities, especially those of the United States, have a library in Italy, especially in Florence and Rome. Moreover, the library of the European University Institute, specializing in social and juridical subjects, is located in Fiesole (Florence).

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vatican Apostolic Library)

The origins of the library, located in the Vatican City, date to the early centuries of the papacy. The current library took shape with the humanist Pope Nicholas V (1447–1455), who organized a large collection of codices, the first nucleus of the Vatican Library. Pope Sixtus IV gave it juridical form through the bull *Ad decorem militantis ecclesiae* (15th July 1475). The library has acquired numerous manuscript and book collections: the library of Fulvio Orsini (1657), the library of Queen Christina of Sweden (1690), and the private libraries of numerous pontiffs. The Vatican Library specializes in humanities (history, history of art, classic literature, philology); it has volumes in many languages and in various alphabets. The patrimony consists of: 1,600,000 ancient and modern printed volumes; 8,300 incunabula (of which 65 are on parchment); 150,000 manuscript codices and archival papers; 300,000 coins and medals and about 20,000 art objects. Access is granted only to university teachers and scholars. Documents cannot be borrowed. The catalogue of the modern printed volumes

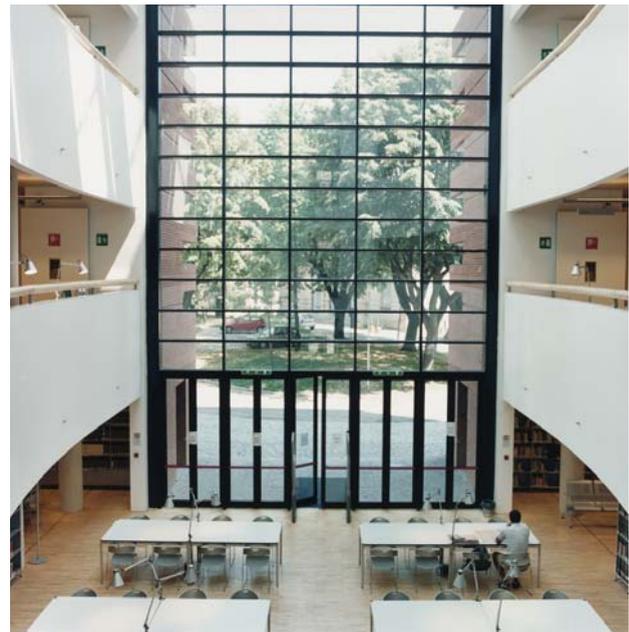


Figure 13. Biblioteca 'Tiraboschi' – Bergamo.

is online since 1985, and includes over 800,000 records.

Biblioteca Ambrosiana (Ambrosian Library)

The Biblioteca Ambrosiana, located in Milan, was founded by Cardinal Federico Borromeo in 1609, and is one of the first public libraries of Europe. It was conceived by its founder as a study centre: he in fact desired that the library should be near to other cultural institutions, such as the Collegio dei Dottori, the Academy of Fine Arts and the Art Gallery. The cardinal collected many Greek, Latin and vulgar codices for his library and also codices in various oriental languages. Among these are the precious collections from such religious institutions as the Benedictine monastery of Bobbio, the Agostinian convent of Santa Maria Incoronata and the library of the Metropolitan Chapter of Milan; there are also volumes from important private collections. There is also an Arab and Oriental collection of great importance and the *Codice Atlantico (Atlantic Code)* of Leonardo of Vinci.

Biblioteca Sala Borsa (Sala Borsa Library)

The Sala Borsa Library, inaugurated in Bologna in December 2001, opens a rich and fascinating cultural and multimedia space inside Palazzo d'Accursio, the old historical seat of the municipality that faces onto Piazza Maggiore, centre and heart of Bologna. With a collection of 260,000 resources, it is one of the largest Italian public

libraries as regards to contemporary bibliographic resources. Since its opening it has lent over 5 million resources thanks to its 60,000 active users.³² This library was the only Italian library highlighted among 100 new library buildings of 39 countries, through photographs and detailed descriptions, in *New Library Buildings of the World* (2nd ed.), published for IFLA by Shanghai Scientific & Technological Literature.

Two Projects for New Libraries

Biblioteca Europea di Informazione e Cultura (BEIC – European Library of Information and Culture)

The ‘Milano Biblioteca del 2000’ Association was founded in 1997 with the aim of promoting the creation of a European Library of Information and Culture, with its seat in Milan, occupying an area of 20,000 square metres. The international competition for its design, announced by the Municipality of Milan in 2001, was completed on 9th November 2001. The competition was won by the architect Peter Wilson of Münster, Germany.



Figure 14. Rome, Florence and Venice, 1929: first conference of the International Federation of Library Associations.

The final project was handed over on 18th April 2006 and the executive plan was consigned on 4th March 2008. Currently, the project ran aground for lack of funds.

Biblioteca civica centrale di Torino (Central Public Library of Turin)

In March 2001, an international jury chose the project of architect Mario Bellini for the Cultural Centre of Turin, including the new Central Public Library and the headquarters of the foreign cultural institutes, along with a restaurant and several other commercial services. The new Central Public Library (19,000 square metres) will take the form of a large multimedia centre. It will be able to house around one million resources (including around 300,000 in open access areas) and will be totally wired up to be able to offer the public the instruments and resources of new technologies. It will be equipped with seats for 1,500 people, individual study stations and rooms for group activities.

Legislation³³

Legal Deposit

The new law on legal deposit (law no. 106 of 15th April 2004) replaces the law of 1939 and subsequent amendments of 1945. On 3rd May 2006 the D.P.R. (Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica – President of the Italian Republic Decree) no. 252 was issued: ‘Regolamento recante norme in materia di deposito legale dei documenti di interesse culturale destinati all’uso pubblico’ (‘Regulations on the Norms Regarding the Legal Deposit of Documents of Cultural Interest Destined for Public Use’), in force from 2nd September 2006.

AIB contributed useful suggestions and proposals for the necessary amendments to the 1939 regulations. However, the law of 2004 did not really deal with today’s problems of legal deposit; the context has indeed quite changed from that of 1939. Law 106/2004 therefore presents both positive and negative aspects. The positive aspects are:

- clear identification of the goals which should be achieved with legal deposit
- statement of the need for two levels of archive: national and regional

- transfer of the documents from the printer (simple executants) to the publisher (responsible for the work)
- full list of the different types of documents to be deposited for the formation of the archive, including also digital-born resources and web distributed resources.

The inclusion of electronic resources, in agreement with the latest IFLA/UNESCO guidelines of 2000³⁴ still has a taste of avant-garde; few laws of European countries include web distributed resources at present, because of the obvious difficulties of preservation, description and control of them. At the moment, however, a real digital repository does not yet exist.

The new legal deposit regulations are important because they increase the coverage of the national publishing output, especially as regards so-called lesser publishing and as regards the extension of the deposit requirement to graphics and electronic resources, excluded until now from the legal deposit, and for the positive effects on the national bibliographical services as a whole.

Each Italian Region has seen to the identification of the libraries and other cultural institutes that should receive regional publishing output.³⁵ Criteria for choosing depository libraries therefore vary from Region to Region.

Copyright

A process for reorganizing laws regarding intellectual property and copyright started in 2002. Its aim was to adapt and bring Italian legislation into line with the general principles of the European Union.

The work of revising the text of the law in force (633/1941) on copyright has been intensified in recent years, thanks to a specially formed Commission within the MiBAC Permanent Consultative Committee³⁶ (ex art. 190 of l. 633/1941). In 2005 the Commission in office at the time tried to prepare a systematic reform project that was innovative in its form and content, but without success. It did however produce a draft that was judged negatively by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers then in office. The aim of the Commission in office for the three-year period 2007–2009 was to promote a serious discussion in order to arrive at transparent and shared solutions.

Representatives of the AIB contributed to the drawing up of the proposals of the Working Group ‘Libere utilizzazioni’ (Free Uses); these proposals, together with those of other working groups were first inserted in wiki and then in the final document ‘Proposte per una riforma del diritto d’autore – Proposals for a Reform of Copyright’³⁷ delivered to MiBAC in December 2007.

A correct application of the laws in force on copyright for libraries means limiting the activities of users, such as the reduction to 15 percent of the contents that can be photocopied and the prohibition to reproduce and lend printed music. Italy, like several other European countries, was convicted by the European Commission for not having applied the European Commission directive 92/100/CE on public reading libraries (the law required to charge a fee for loans made in public libraries).

Following the sentence, the Italian government amended the national regulation in force, introducing the principle of remuneration of publishers for loans in State and local body libraries and establishing a national fund of EUR 3 million. The fund is financed 80 percent by the State and 20 percent by Regions.

The main reform proposals made by the AIB, and shared with the other associations participating in the ‘Free uses’ Working Group. are:

- lawfulness of reproductions in order to aid the preservation of the works in library collections
- making available the backup copy in the place of the original
- gratuitousness of reading of works or playing of pieces of works of any type, carried out for cultural advertising in public libraries or in similar cultural institutes, after communication to owners of copyright
- legality of reproduction of indexes, summaries, abstracts, covers, etc. in OPACs
- communication to the public of orphan works or of those no longer on sale
- reproduction by libraries and communication to the public in favour of users with physical disabilities
- increase of the percentage of pages that can be reproduced for personal-only use
- lawfulness of electronic document delivery for personal-only use.

Professional Education and the Library Profession³⁸

In Italy, as elsewhere, higher education is considered the basic path for the education of librarians. The Italian university system currently includes 80 universities associated with the CRUI. Many universities offer graduate courses in cultural heritage studies and some a postgraduate degree in archival science and librarianship. Other universities offer annual master's courses; the University of Florence, for example, has a 2-year master's course. Since 1997, the University of Udine, in consortium with other Italian universities and, since 2007, the Università La Sapienza of Rome, offers a PhD program in bibliography, librarianship and archival science. The Scuola Superiore per archivisti e bibliotecari (SSAB – Special School for Archivists and Librarians) of La Sapienza, once the only Italian postgraduate course in the field, now completely restructured, offers a very varied series of studies. Updated information on education opportunities in this field can be found through the *AIB-WEB Formazione professionale* (Professional formation) list.³⁹

The profession of librarian does not have juridical recognition in Italy, nor does it have a precisely defined educational curriculum. Every individual administration adopts different criteria for hiring new staff. In this difficult context, Italian librarians and AIB have tried to contact labor unions and bodies that own libraries to define professional profiles.

Professional Associations

Associazione italiana biblioteche (AIB – Italian Library Association)

The Italian Library Association (AIB) is the professional association of Italian librarians. It was founded in 1930, with the name of Association of Italian Librarians, and it took its current name in 1933. It has about 4000 members, mainly librarians, but membership is also open to libraries and to persons or bodies interested in the field (students, international libraries, private companies, etc.). Corporate bodies (local and otherwise) form approximately 10 percent of the members. The Association has among its objectives the promotion of the organization and development of libraries in Italy; AIB works through commissions

and study groups and through the organization of congresses and conferences. The institutional structure of AIB is divided into a Comitato Esecutivo Nazionale (CEN – National Executive Committee) composed of seven members; CEN is flanked by the College of Arbitrators and the Union College, and Comitati Esecutivi Regionali (CER – Regional Executive Committees), these too with seven members each, all elected every 3 years.

Regional sections have financial and political autonomy. They draw up activity programmes on the basis of the 'Programmatic lines' expressed by the CEN. The Consiglio nazionale dei presidenti regionali (CNPR – National Council of Regional Presidents), presided over by the President of AIB, has a fundamental role in the coordination of regional activities and supports the CEN in its decisions. As the representative association of the professional community, AIB manages and maintains the Italian roll of librarians. Registration in the Roll on the one hand certifies the professional skill of its members and on the other offers users a certification of their actual skills.

It publishes two periodicals:

Bollettino AIB (AIB Bulletin): a 4-monthly bulletin; it deals with librarianship issues with special attention to the international sphere and to innovations in the field.

AIB notizie (AIB news): this is the association's newsletter, dedicated to news, information on the association and its activities, subjects of interest that emerged from online discussion lists, etc.

AIB organizes a National Congress every year. In 2008 it had arrived at its 55th edition. The annual national congress also hosts Bibliocom, a fair of products and services for libraries.

The AIB official website, AIB-WEB (<http://www.aib.it>) provides institutional information and documents on the activity of the Association, and also news on libraries and library professions. Among the major services are the *Repertorio degli OPAC italiani (Index of Italian OPACs)*, on whose basis MAI was created; and *Segnazweb*, an index of websites selected by Italian librarians, useful for the information services of public libraries, but also directly for citizens.

Associazione dei bibliotecari ecclesiastici italiani (ABEI – Association of Italian Ecclesiastical Librarians)

The Association of Italian Ecclesiastical Librarians (ABEI), gathers together librarians of Italian ecclesiastical libraries. It promotes librarianship studies, publishes *Bollettino ABEI*, a 4-monthly bulletin, and promotes professional courses. It also sponsors *ACOLIT. Autori cattolici e opere liturgiche. Una lista d'autorità (Catholic Authors and Liturgical Works. An Authority List)* three volumes of which have already been published. The first volume is entitled *Bible, Catholic Church, Roman Curia, the Pontifical State, the Vatican, Popes and Anti-Popes* (1998); the second is *Religious Orders* (2000); the third, *Liturgical Works* (2004); the fourth, in course of preparation, is dedicated to the Fathers of the Church and will come out presumably at the beginning of 2010.

Vendors

Mention should be made of the presence of important vendors of bibliographic resources and services that contribute to spreading Italian books in the world: among these are Casalini Libri, with headquarters in Fiesole (Florence) and Licosa, with headquarters in Florence.

A Current Overview of Italian Libraries

The current situation of Italian libraries probably reflects the more general problems and characteristics of our society: almost half of the libraries are located in the North; the remainder are located between the Centre and the South; there are no complete statistics regarding public libraries



Figure 15. Rome, 14–18 September 1964: AIB hosted the 30th Session of the IFLA Council.

and surveys highlight a lack of homogeneity in geographic distribution and in the quality of services. All the information and indicators worsen gradually as we go from the North to the South of Italy; about half of the libraries possess less than 5,000 resources, a quantity that is insufficient for assuring even a basic access to culture. Lack of homogeneity of services and weak structures characterize Italian libraries, in spite of the undoubted points of excellence, especially within public and university libraries.

In this problematic condition of deficiency, a sort of parallel and private national Italian bibliography has even emerged – *I Libri* – created by Casalini Libri. *I Libri* has been most successful – so much so that several library management softwares have implemented an *import* function for it.

National Services

National services carry out an irreplaceable function even if currently lacking and inadequate, but they need to make radical changes.

What proposals can be put forward?

National Library of Italy and Italian National Bibliography

The establishment of a single National Library of Italy is to be desired. This would encompass at least the current BNCF, BNCR, ICCU, the Istituto Centrale per i Beni Sonori e Audiovisivi and the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro e la Conservazione del Patrimonio Archivistico e Librario. This Library would be guaranteed autonomy from a scientific, financial and administrative point of view. The State should concentrate its resources on the infrastructural services that are required for a National Library of Italy and for an Italian National Bibliography. Bibliographic control should be timely, distributed (but with a central agency that coordinates the bibliographical process), using skilled personnel. A first step in this direction is the upcoming creation of a single SBN node that will encompass BNCF and BNCR.

Creation of Retrospective Databases

Structural and coordinated interventions are needed so that a full (from the first book printed in Subiaco to the latest novel published in Milan)

catalogue of Italian bibliographic production is available. What is required is a National Retrospective Bibliography to ensure bibliographic control of Italian publishing output of the past. A network needs to be created to preserve and make available the national cultural production in the various fields of knowledge, with a programme for completing the retrospective part that is now in existence; this programme should be realized through an efficient and coordinated system of legal deposit and through collaboration with universities, research centres and academic publishers. So as to include electronic resources, institutional repositories could be established under the National Library of Italy. Current legislation on legal deposit (l.106 of 2004) offers contradictory elements such as uncertainty of funding and omits crucial themes regarding digitization.

Drafting and Dissemination of Norms and Standards

Individual libraries and individual areas of cooperation should concentrate on cultural projects and services, not bibliographic, descriptive, or semantic norms and guidelines. This task should be accomplished by the National Library of Italy, which should provide librarians with updated, controlled and trustworthy working tools.

Management of a National Authority File

An authority file of Italian authors and of anonymous Italian works (concepts that certainly are not easy to define) has been created by ICCU, but is still at an early stage. The authority file should be based on a real integration of the various specialized libraries and on the cooperation of publishers (as happens for example in Great Britain). This work is basic and essential for the preservation and development of our culture.

Final Comments

The complex situation of Italian libraries and the variety of bodies that manage them would require the establishment of a framework transversal to libraries of various types, possibly under the protection of a professional agency, in cooperation with university research structures. Italian libraries, like the entire cultural field, receive funding that is often inadequate to the service mission and to their information and cultural function.

Moreover, the gap between the North and South of the country remains unresolved as regards the quality of sites and services.

In the last 20 years, however (and notwithstanding frequent negligence and confusion), numerous bodies (MiBAC, universities, municipalities, provinces, dioceses, etc.) have invested in the functional restructuring of historical libraries (for example, the Municipal Library of Trent, the Classense Library of Ravenna), in the inauguration of modern libraries that respect the quality standards established by IFLA (for example, the National Library of Bari, the Biblioteca Sala Borsa of Bologna, the Library of the University of Bolzano, numerous libraries of the University of Venice, the Biblioteca di Scienze Sociali of the University of Florence, the Biblioteca San Giorgio of Pistoia) and in the presentation of projects for new libraries (for example the University Library of Genoa). Again in the last 20 years there has been a considerable professional growth in Italian librarians, who, in many cases, have attained a commendable level of quality, due to the spread of librarianship in Italian universities, the introduction of professional courses by AIB, Regions and private agencies, the spread of periodicals specializing in LIS and the participation of an increasing number of Italian librarians in the international scientific and professional debate.

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About the Authors

Mauro Guerrini is Professor of Library Science at the University of Florence, Department for the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and Dean of the Master in Archivist, Library Science and Cataloging. He has been President of the Italian Library Association (AIB) since 2005, a Professor at the University of Udine from 1992 to 1999, and at the School for Archivists and Librarians of the University of Rome La Sapienza from 1999 to 2001; he has also taught at the universities of Pisa and Pavia and on many professional courses. Prior to assuming academic positions he was librarian at the public libraries of San Marcello Pistoiese (Pistoia) (1980) and Montecatini Terme (Pistoia) (1980–1981) and, successively, Director of the Library and Museum Leonardiano in Vinci (Florence) from 1981 to 1992.

A graduate in Italian Literature from the University of Rome La Sapienza, Professor Guerrini obtained the Diploma of Librarian and the Diploma in the Conservation of Manuscripts at the School for Archivists and Librarians (University of Rome La Sapienza) and later the archivist certificate at the Sovrintendenza Archivistica in Florence. He is Editor

of *ACOLIT* (Catholic Authors and Liturgical Works) and author of many publications; he is also a member of the editorial boards of *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* and other journals. He has been a member of AIB (Italian Library Association) since 1979, ABEI (Italian Catholic Library Association) since 1994 and IFLA (University of Florence) since 1998. He is Chair of the AIB Committee on Cataloguing and a member of the IFLA ISBD Review Group and the IFLA Cataloguing Committee. He may be contacted at: University of Firenze, Dipartimento di Studi sul Medioevo e Rinascimento, Piazza Brunelleschi 4-50121 Firenze, Italy.

E-mail: guerrini.mauro@fastwebnet.it; mauro.guerrini@unifi.it Website: <http://www.meri.unifi.it/CMpro-v-p-111.html>

Giovanna Frigimelica has been Secretary General of the Italian Library Association (AIB) since February 2009. She previously worked for the AIB since 2006 as librarian in the special library of the Association, in charge of following the publishing workflows of AIB monographs and journals, and of the marketing of promotional advertisement and sponsorship. Graduated in 2001 in Conservation of Cultural heritage (LIS syllabus) from the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, she worked from 2001 to 2005 for an outsourcing agency as librarian in several libraries (mostly public) of Treviso and Venice provinces. Since 2000 she cooperates with the board of AIB Website for the maintenance of several pages, and she maintains a personal website with online resources on LIS: <http://www.frigimelica.it/vrd/vrd.htm>. Due to this interest, she has been a speaker in some training courses about library web design and Internet searching skills from 2004. She may be contacted at: Associazione Italiana Biblioteche, Casella postale 2461, I-00185 Roma AD, Italy. Tel. +39 06 4463532. Fax: +39 06 4441139. Mobile +39 333 7644084. skype: [aib.frigimelica](https://www.skype.com/name/aib.frigimelica) E-mail: frigimelica@aib.it Website: <http://www.aib.it>