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Press Conference to present the event celebrating 140 years of the Vatican School of Palaeography, Diplomatics and Archivistics, and 90 years of the Vatican School of Library Science, “Two specialist institutes of the Holy See: The Vatican School of Palaeography, Diplomatics and Archivistics and the Vatican School of Library Science”

Intervention of Archbishop Angelo Vincenzo Zani

Intervention of Bishop Sergio Pagano

Intervention of the Reverend Don Mauro Mantovani, S.D.B.

This morning, at 11.30, a press conference was livestreamed from the Holy See Press Office to present the event *Two specialist institutes of the Holy See: The Vatican School of Palaeography, Diplomatics and Archivistics and the Vatican School of Library Science*, in view of the forthcoming joint celebration of the 140th anniversary of the Vatican School of Palaeography, Diplomatics and Archivistics, and the 90th of the Vatican School of Library Science, to be held on 13 May 2024. During the meeting, the history, purpose and activities of the two Schools, highly specialized institutes dedicated to the study of archival and library assets, were illustrated.

The speakers were: Archbishop Angelo Vincenzo Zani, archivist and librarian of the Holy Roman Church; Bishop Sergio Pagano, prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Archive and director of the Vatican School of Palaeography, Diplomatics, and Archivistics; and the Reverend Don Mauro Mantovani, S.D.B., prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Library and director of the Vatican School of Library Science.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention of Archbishop Angelo Vincenzo Zani

The main objective of this press conference is the presentation of the event which will take place next Monday, 13 May: with a special audience of the Holy Father and an afternoon of meetings, professors and students of the two Schools of Archives and Library will celebrate their anniversaries: they are, in fact, the 140th anniversary of the School of Palaeography, Diplomatics and Archivistics, created by Leo XIII, and the 90th anniversary of the School of Library Science, established at the behest of Pius XI. It will be an opportunity to retrace their history and purpose with an eye to future perspectives, and to reflect on the specialized studies dedicated to what Pope Ratti called “the cult of science and the noble labour around science”, that is, the constellation of the various disciplines aimed at the study, custody, valorization and better treatment of archival and library heritage. We believe that these schools should be better known and valued for the qualified role they fulfil.

Before their specific characteristics are illustrated, I would like to recall that the two Vatican institutions where they are housed, the Archive and the Library, are the depository of the memory and fruits of human ingenuity, stratified throughout the centuries within a perspective that is at once human and ecclesial and, precisely for this reason, they have the task of gathering, conserving and making available to all the rich heritage preserved so that knowledge may be spread everywhere. The Apostolic Library, created by Nicholas V in 1451, and the Archives by Pope Paul V in 1610, are the necessary bridges connecting past and future, exercising that cultural service which, to use the words dedicated to them by Pope Francis, allows us to “keep the roots alive” and “cultivate memory”. Located within the two institutions, the schools train and qualify professionals dedicated to the valuable functions of safeguarding, illustrating, protecting, studying and enhancing archival documents and materials, following the profile of postgraduate specialization institutes.

What is certain is that today we live in a changing and unpredictable scenario, characterized by the rapidity with which technologies evolve and profoundly affect even the production of intellectual content, as well as by the instability and transience of digital heritage, between constantly changing formats and the rapid obsolescence of devices and applications; in this context, the Archives and Library schools have been able to maintain, over the decades, their profound and consolidated humanistic vocation while embracing the new forms of knowledge processing and propagation, and deepening their characteristics in order to combine them most effectively with their mission. This spirit of adaptation gives students access to a multifaceted, broad and layered formation, enabling them to consciously navigate within today’s cultural complexity with that “wisdom and boldness” that Pope Francis has called for professionals in these fields of knowledge.

The necessary evolution of courses related to the development of specialized subjects, dedicated to the book and to historical, philological, palaeographic and archaeological research on books and maps, have therefore meant that these training bodies have become increasingly structured and articulated and, above all, have taken on the features of highly qualified institutes, capable of happily flanking and integrating with similar or complementary academic studies. In this endeavour to grow and reshape the experience acquired, it was important for our two schools to be in dialogue with the provisions that have matured over the last twenty years through the so-called “Bologna Process”, created to facilitate the international circulation of teachers and students through the recognition of their qualifications. I recall, in this regard, that the Holy See joined the Bologna Process in September 2003.

Throughout the years, a host of qualified palaeographers, archivists and librarians, graduates of the two schools, has achieved important positions in important cultural institutions in various countries. This is a significant confirmation of the effectiveness of the courses and of their high educational value, but also the result of their progressive adaptation to the new features and demands that have gradually emerged in the field of the management of book and documentary heritage. Archives and Libraries, through qualified professionals, from being places of study, become places of transmission not only of unique treasures, but also of precious knowledge, coming from the habit of caring for and enhancing books and papers, and also from continuous dialogue with other similar institutions.

Today, therefore, we are celebrating not only the fruitful longevity of a Vatican tradition of specialized instruction of considerable cultural value, but we also wish to express our heartfelt recognition of the commitment and dedication of all the teachers who, over the course of time, have worked tirelessly to give the schools of the Archives and the Library a significant specialization of studies. And it is thanks to this passionate and qualified dedication that even today these schools continue to attract those who wish to specialize in the humanities. The

two anniversaries also provide an opportunity to take stock of the past and to reflect on how to promote new maps of knowledge to be elaborated and handed down to future generations, and to open up further prospects for long-term training and preservation in order to avoid the risk of self-referentiality, and to look ahead, staying within the current complexity with a spirit of true revival.

Intervention of Bishop Sergio Pagano

The establishment of the Vatican School of Palaeography (later the School of Palaeography and Diplomatics and today the School of Palaeography, Diplomatics and Archivistics) is set in the particular climate favourable to historical studies during the second half of the nineteenth century. At that time, the will of Pope Leo XIII was manifested in the well-known letter *Saepenumero considerantes* of 18 August 1883, which proposed to Catholic scholars to re-enter the scientific field, especially history, without qualms and fears. The pope affirmed: "To bare accounts let laborious and patient investigation be opposed; to the lightness of judgments let the maturity of judgements be opposed; to the capriciousness of opinions let the wisdom of criticism be opposed. As much as possible should be done to restore to their true light the facts that have been misrepresented or supposed, by resorting to sources; and writers should be especially mindful of this, as the primary law of history is not to dare to say anything false, nor to remain silent about anything true", "ne quid falsi dicere audeat, ne quid veri non audeat"; "that no suspicion should appear in writing of favour, nor of hatred".

Pope Leo's merit was also that of having followed words with deeds: the opening of the Vatican Archives was decreed at the end of 1880 and realized as early as the beginning of 1881, and the establishment of the Vatican School of Palaeography, which was created, in a certain sense, to adequately prepare "the young clergy" for the broad and important historiographical programme outlined by Pope Leo in the above-mentioned *Saepenumero considerantes*. The Motu proprio "From the beginning" of 1 May 1884, contains the "Organic and disciplinary regulations for the Offices of the Pontifical Secret Archives", together with the "Regulations for the School of Palaeography at the Pontifical Vatican Archives": The School was set up (and I quote verbatim from the Regulations) "in order to promote and foster the wise study of the history of the Pontificate and the Church, and to form the young clergy in the knowledge and illustration of the documents that refer to it, the reigning Supreme Pontiff has wisely ordered the establishment of a special school of Palaeography and Applied Criticism, to be opened in the room prepared for this purpose at the Vatican Secret Archives".

This immediately reveals the dual methodological character which would always inspire the Vatican School: the theoretical and practical nature of the courses combined with the aim of achieving "knowledge and illustration of documents".

The first teacher of the Vatican School, Canon Isidoro Carini, came from the State Archives in Palermo, where he had replaced his teacher Salvatore Cusa in the teaching of palaeography. Appointed sub-Archivist of the Vatican Archives on 19 May 1884, he was the first to occupy the Chair of Palaeography at the Vatican School. Carini stated: "the true study of history is the study of its sources. Archives and libraries are the repositories, palaeography is the key that enters them, diplomatics the torch that illuminates them".

And here was and is the precious peculiarity of the Vatican School: to have the pupils practice on the original documents, registers and volumes of the Vatican Apostolic Archive, whose range of writings and documentary forms is unique in the world; also to carry out their investigations on the original codices of the nearby Vatican Apostolic Library, which in osmosis with the Archive enriches the School's courses.

In 1923, under Pius XI, a minor course in archivistics was instituted at the Vatican School of Palaeography, to train students "to compose good indexes and manuscripts" in order to "satisfy one of the most pressing needs of owners and scholars and the repeated strong prescriptions of authority". The importance of this novelty was such that it was deemed necessary to change the name of the School as well, which thus became the "Vatican School of Palaeography, Diplomatics and Archivistics". In 1929, the School received its first legal recognition in Italy with the concordat of 1929, in Article 40: "Likewise shall be recognized the diplomas which shall be given in

the schools of palæography, archives and diplomatic documents erected near the Library and the Archives in the City of the Vatican”.

The School not only welcomed many of those who have become famous in the field of historical research, but also some celebrated men of letters. Carlo Emilio Gadda's presence in the Vatican is well known: he had been there since 1931 due to his employment with the Vatican's Technical Services as regent of the technological section of the Central Office. In this capacity, he set up the power station commissioned by Pius XI. Less well known is that, in 1936, Gadda enrolled at the School and, albeit briefly, attended courses in archivistics and diplomatics. He probably wanted to prepare himself, with his usual meticulousness, for the research assignment on the *Spina di Borgo* that was being demolished in those very years and on which a commemorative publication was planned. When the pamphlet project faded, Gadda abandoned the course.

The School was mentioned for example by the famous Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa in *The Leopard* (published posthumously in 1958), when he presented a very avant-garde priest. The episode is well known: don Fabrizio's three daughters had amassed a large number of relics of dubious provenance to which they attributed the most certain authenticity; it was the secretary of the cardinal of Palermo, don Pacchiotti, who cleared away the forgeries: “then the priest asked for the key to the box of documents, asked permission and retired to the chapel [...]. He had been a pupil of the Vatican School of Palaeography [...] his work was long and painstaking [...] After three hours he reappeared with a dusty cassock and black hands, but happy and with an expression of serenity on his bespectacled face”.

Today, the Vatican School of Palaeography, Diplomats and Archivistics offers three courses:

- the two-year course of Palaeography, Diplomats and Archivistics, with a medieval focus, heir to the ancient course of Palaeography and Historical Criticism of 1884;
- the Modern and Contemporary Archival Studies course, also a two-year course, but which awards a diploma in the first year;
- finally, there is the one-year course in Greek Palaeography that awards an annual diploma.

The courses are generally taught by lecturers from the Vatican Archives themselves; in the absence of the required specialization, they are instead recruited from Italian universities.

Intervention of the Reverend Don Mauro Mantovani, S.D.B.

Ninety years in the making: the first course of the Vatican School of Library Science began in fact on 13 November 1934, with the Prolusion of the future Cardinal Eugène Tisserant, who indicated with the following verbs the identity and professionalism of the librarian to be trained: “to care”, “to conserve”, “to increase”, “to order”, and “to value”.

From the beginning, the School was committed to translating the realization of these objectives into teaching, in tune with the profound renewal of cataloguing and volume management which was taking place in the Vatican at that time.

Created as a direct emanation of the Library, the School was immediately involved in the adoption of the new cataloguing standards and in their adaptation to the management of its library holdings, with the help of several assistants who spent periods of training in the best libraries in the United States, and of a working group of experts who came to Rome from overseas: with the work of training the cataloguers, who applied and disseminated knowledge of the new standards, the School increasingly distinguished itself as a modern and highly regarded scientific institution in the field of library science.

Its growing reputation gradually increased the number of pupils, a total of 424 in the first seven years, from many different countries and denominations. Although the course was primarily intended for the benefit of ecclesiastics, the presence of laymen and women was increasingly significant and now constitutes the clear majority. In 1999, in order to further improve the quality of the studies and the degree of specialization, the admission requirements and qualifications were raised, which is why the total number of new students is now no more than 30 each year.

Intending from the outset to be a true “laboratory” of concrete, almost “hothouse” training, the School was organized in such a way that students were housed directly in the Library’s rooms and offices in order to learn the work procedures and use the bibliographical holdings available for consultation. As the number of students grew, however, it became necessary to give up this valid and characteristic method and instead set up special rooms. However, students are always allowed to attend assiduously and carry out their own bibliographical research using the rich heritage of the Library, a place where studying forms one almost by “osmosis”; today, this “practical” dimension is particularly taken care of during the second year, which includes a practical internship, duly monitored.

Indeed, as of 2018, advanced training in library science is ensured precisely by this two-year structure, whose course has equivalence with those provided by the Schools of Specialization for 120 CFU-ECTS, as required by current regulations.

The various texts on the history of the Vatican School of Library Science identify four phases of development, linked - after the first years of its foundation - both to the different sites and to the specialization of the subjects taught, also taking into account the evolution of information technology and new technologies applied to librarianship.

The first two locations of the School were within the Library; in 2002 the School was assigned premises on the ground floor of the Palazzo San Paolo in Via della Conciliazione; since the beginning of this academic year the School has its present location, inaugurated by Cardinal Pietro Parolin on 26 November 2023, in Via della Conciliazione 7. On that occasion, the Secretary of State spoke of the School as a place of education to “concrete competence”, a “laboratory of formation” to “translate into training that wealth of knowledge and that style of study” which makes the Vatican Library a unique place in the world, between the challenge of caring for ancient books, openness to new technologies and service to scholars and readers.

The disciplines currently taught are: Bibliography and reference; Bibliology; Digital library; The ancient, medieval and modern manuscript book; General organization and Library services; Book conservation and restoration; History of Libraries; Theory and techniques of cataloguing and classification.

The School lives and develops through the invaluable service provided by the vice-director, the Secretariat and of course each of the teachers, who are in part members of the Library's internal staff and in part external professors.

If we look at the School's prospects, within the socio-cultural scenario that was described earlier, what emerges first of all is the fact that the pursuit of specialized studies in library science is a fertile field in which to exercise “strong interdisciplinarity”, practising a “comprehensive view”. The paradigm of “competence” is nowadays also associated with that of “culture”, with training in flexibility, in the ability to adapt to different contexts of employment and genre of libraries, in long life learning, in preparing oneself for activities “that we do not yet know”.

The librarian of today and tomorrow is aware of the importance of the humanistic dimension and of the cultivation of memory, in the service of the future generations; he or she is a worker of “cultural diplomacy” in a climate of high relational and professional quality. The School contributes, therefore, to making it grow in a way that is not reductive, but integral, in its multidimensionality; indeed, the greater the library assets of an institution, the greater must be the “human assets” of those who work in it.
