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How Private Libraries Contributed to the Transmission of Texts

Abstract: Private libraries developed in Western European cities at the end of the eleventh century, in connection with the spread of the practice of writing and autographs. In this article we study the influence that these libraries exerted as a cultural model, not only through the works they contain, but also through the ways in which books were supplied and transmitted.

The first libraries appeared in Western Europe during the Carolingian period, but became more established in the eleventh century, before spreading, especially in cities, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. These libraries attested to the renewed relationship that their owners had with the practice of writing and with the imparting of knowledge by teachers, both orally and in writing, and its reception by pupils.[1] Supporting the spread of vernacular languages and document production, the books gradually came to embody the emergence of autography and personal writing.

These aspects can be studied by combining two approaches. The first approach, which is historical, examines the documents that bear witness to the concrete presence of books in an environment, and namely inventories, lists, contracts, and other practical sources. It cannot be applied exclusively, because owning a book did not necessarily imply that it was read or understood. The second approach pertains to literary history: literature is primarily made of writing and books.[2] This approach takes into consideration textual models and autographs, as well as their diffusion. It cannot be exclusive either, because the manuscripts were not always copied to be circulated or reproduced, or to serve as a model. This is the case of monastic chronicles, for example, which were often written to remain at the monastery and were not duplicated.[3]

1 I am mainly referring to Vernet 1989; Cavallo 1988; Petrucci 1983a and 1983b. For a recent and up-to-date list of the bibliography of the history of libraries cf. Géhin 2017.

2 Bartoli Langeli 2010, 43.

3 Guenée 1973; see also *Écrire son histoire* 2005.

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1 The libraries of masters: from creation to succession

People whose profession was to study – theologians, canonists, physicians – collected books for teaching and pastoral purposes. As they were affiliated to the institutions where they trained or exercised their ministry, these teachers bequeathed their books to them, thus disseminating their knowledge even after their death.[4]

Books were generally passed down through wills. Inherited from Roman law and established through the custom of pious bequests, the will became prevalent in the Western world in the thirteenth century, the era of the consolidation of private fortunes in towns. Drawing up a will was a unilateral, voluntary act through which an owner disposed of his assets after his death. This final act, that was nonetheless revocable as long as the person was still alive, contained provisions relating to fortunes as well as other elements. In medieval society, dying intestate was considered harmful to the salvation of the soul. Initially, the act was formally declared before an adequate number of witnesses who, at the required time, would be capable of passing on the contents of the will and ensuring that it was applied. The first version of a will was written by the owner himself, healthy in body and mind, in his own hand, or under direct supervision if his condition prevented him from doing so (nuncupative will or will *in scriptis*).[5] It is therefore important to emphasize the strong ties between the practice of making wills and the personal expression of writing – ties that are probably not unrelated to the importance always granted to books in the provisions of wills.

To leave one's possessions to a church, a monastery, or an order was an act of charity and devotion, but it was also the expression of a cultural choice and a social strategy. First, at the end of the Middle Ages the books most frequently bequeathed to churches were prayer books or personal devotion books, which the testator recommended be firmly secured, in his memory, in the places where the community gathered, whether the chapter, cloister, or refectory. These books often stated the *ex dono* of their initial owner so that his name could be evoked in prayers. Second, books were associated with life choices. At the beginning of the period under consideration here, books were often a part of the luggage of masters abandoning secular life to return to the monastic world. Their intention would be to spend their last years there, with a lifestyle that they believed to be

4 Parkes 1976; Bataillon 1983; Nebbiai 2013.

5 Regarding wills as a historical source and an expression of personal writing, cf. Bartoli Langeli 1985; Bartoli Langeli 2008; Paravicini Bagliani 1980. On the custom of pious bequests in Paris during the Middle Ages, cf. Gorochov 1999; Courtemanche 1997.

more compatible with the teachings of the Gospels than that which they had beforehand. For example, Peter Cantor (d. 1197) bequeathed his books to the Cistercian Abbey in Longpont, where he had retired.[6] Adam de Curtilandonis, the dean of Laon, offered his to the Abbey of Cuissy.[7] Lastly, regarding the criteria for choosing recipients, even though members of the clergy generally bequeathed their books to religious institutions, this was far from being the only option from the second half of the thirteenth century onwards. Many clerics and cannons, for example, preferred to give priority to their direct heirs (nephews, grandnephews, other family members) under the condition that they study. As for laypeople, they most often handed down their books to other laypeople and the transmission took place within the same social environment. For example, in 1334, a blacksmith in Pistoia bequeathed his blacksmith's manual to his colleague in the same city.[8] In many cases, however, institutions, whether religious or secular, were called upon to take over for private heirs if they proved to be unworthy or simply inadequate.

Let us consider a few cases. In 1347, Richard de Granges, a canon from Montbéliard, sold his books to his uncle, the executor of his will, but reserved a copy of the 'Decretals, a compilation of canon law', for his nephew, who was studying law.[9] Johannes Gasqui, Bishop of Marseille (d. 1344) bequeathed his books to the cathedral of Marseille, except for his natural science and medicine texts, which were to go to his nephews.[10] In 1433, Petrus Fica, a Sicilian master of the arts and medicine, appointed his daughter Constance, wife of Johannes de la Rocha, as his universal heiress, but stated that if she proved to be unworthy, the books would go instead to the church of San Domenico de Trapani.[11] This type of dual option was also found at the end of the Middle Ages in the will of scholar Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who appointed his brother as the executor of his will and authorized him to sell his library to a religious foundation, with a limit of two years following his death to carry out the transaction.[12] If this were impossible, the brother was allowed to dispose of the books as he pleased, with the exception of giving them to Giovanni's grandson, Giovanni Francesco, should he wish to purchase them.

The intent was therefore the most interesting aspect, even if it was not always explicitly stated. Allocating books was a personal choice; it allowed the owner

6 Bondéelle-Souchier 1991, 192.

7 Bondéelle-Souchier 2000, 115.

8 Florence, Archivio di Stato, Mercanzia 1054, c. 140, 1334, 22 apr.; cited by Leonelli 1985, 41 n. 2.

9 Nebbiai 2013, 202 and 258.

10 Marseille, Archives départementales des Bouches du Rhône 6 G 104, n° 696. Albanès 1899, cols 309–310.

11 Bresc 1971, 154–159, no. 67.

12 Bianca 2008, 454; Kibre 1966, 119–297 (*Inventarium librorum Ioahnnis Pici Mirandulae*).

to live on at an institution or simply through the members of his family and own circle. At the end of the Middle Ages, these motives are found in a literary account, the famous *Philobiblon* by Richard de Bury, Bishop of Durham (1287–1345). He wrote of books as members of his family, brothers or children that passed down a heritage, that ensured the preservation of knowledge from father to son.[13]

Books were perceived in a new way. As opposed to being simply a receptacle for writing, they were performative and exerted a new influence over the collection to which they belonged. Reciprocal adaptation thus took place: by becoming an integral part of institutional libraries, private libraries contributed to the evolution of the content and organization. For example, in 1257, Guillaume Ribot, Bishop of Vence, died at the infirmary of the Monastery of Saint Victor in Marseille, where he had retired a few years earlier. At the time he donated his books to the abbey, thereby enriching it with works that it had not had beforehand: a copy of Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia imperialia*, one of Einhard's chronicle, another of Marbodius of Rennes' *De lapidibus*. These texts reflect the literary tastes of a clergyman active in the fight against heresy.[14]

The seventy or more books of Dominican Friar Jean, bequeathed to the Convent of Turin in 1287, were organized by subject according to a categorization that would be readopted by the receiving library: Bible and *biblica*, *originalia*, and sermons.[15] The will of Gerard d'Abbeville, a master at the Collège de Sorbonne, refers to two types of books: everyday books, and books on theology and canonical law. This distinction may have foreshadowed that of the Collège library. Gerard d'Abbeville also ordered that his contribution be maintained in its original state, without a doubt to strengthen the inalienable nature of the bequest. He therefore also bequeathed a chest to contain the books.[16] A few decades later, in 1311, the Florentine priest Amat did the same thing, bequeathing six volumes of biblical and theological works to the Cistercian Abbey of San Salvatore de Settimo, along with a cabinet in which to place them.[17]

13 Altamura 1954, 122–123.
14 Nebbiai 2005, 90–93.
15 Nebbiai 1992, 110–113; Ferrua 1992, 111–166.
16 Denifle and Châtelain 1889, 402, no. 430 (1271, oct. 19).
17 Nebbiai 1992, 117–119.

2 The model book

Created in the scholarly world, the concept of the model book emerged from a change in writing production that occurred in the eleventh century. The traditional practice of copying in the scriptorium, within the monastic community, declined as it was gradually replaced by the activity of workshops located in towns and managed by *scriptores*. These were generally laypeople who were paid for their work. Chosen on the basis of their skills, they worked on behalf of the religious authorities, who were responsible for verifying the quality of the books produced, as well as their compliance with orthodoxy.

As a result, a two-way relationship was established between the *scriptor* and his commissioner: a partnership similar to that of teacher and student. The goal was to produce high-quality books for clerics' training. Every book was conceived of as a whole, whether it was isolated and contained a complete work with comments, consisted of all of the works of an author, or formed an overall collection when combined with other volumes. The fact that Bibles appear among the most well-crafted and important results of this production is no coincidence. For example, the copying of the monumental Bible in four volumes of the Dominican Convent of Lille was entrusted to William of Sens in 1264. Its 'philological' rereading was entrusted to the convent prior, Michel de Novirella, famous for being *expertissimus in Biblia*. In the colophon, he states that he followed the version 'of the Hebrews and the ancients'.[18]

It was up to the secretaries of Saint Thomas to write the summary of his classes, ultimately to complete the references cited by the theologian, and always under his guidance, to carefully verify the work of the copyist.[19] Around 1270, one of the theologian's assistants, Rinaldo de Priverno, reviewed his own notes (*reportationes*) on the commentary on the Gospel of St. John, on behalf of another theologian, in this case a layperson, the dean of Saint-Omer cathedral chapter, Adinolfo d'Anagni, who was active in Paris and associated in particular with the Collège de Sorbonne.[20] It must once again be noted that this two-way writing relationship also existed at the chancelleries of Dominican provinces, where ministers always had one or two associates trained in rhetoric and *dictamen*.[21]

18 *Anno domini M°CC° sexagesimo quarto scripta fuit hac Biblia a Guillermo Senonensi et diligenter correcta secundum Hebreos et antiquos a fratre Michaele de Novirella tunc priore fratrum Praedicatorum Insulensium et cappellano domini pape, expertissimo in Biblia*. Cf. Catalogue des manuscrits 1897, 11–12; Beer 1969, 37 n. 42.

19 Dondaine 1956.

20 Nebbiai 2018.

21 Bartoli Langeli and d'Acunto 1999, 399.

The emergence of the practice of autography is reflected in these evidences. 'Authorial' autography is used to describe manuscripts composed and annotated by the author himself, and 'editorial' autography is used when the author takes on the task of revising and annotating the work of others in his own hand.[22] In the realm of religious institutions, which are the subject of this article, the most famous examples of 'authorial' autography are found in the monastic world. Many of the handwritten and hand-annotated manuscripts of Guibert de Nogent, Otloh of Sankt Emmeram, and Sigebert de Gembloux have survived from the tenth and eleventh centuries. Throughout their works, these authors also provide evidence of their writing practices, the ways that they had learned, and the pain it caused them to no longer be able to write, due to age and disease.[23] Probably because these monks considered the practice of writing to be a means of personal redemption, related to prayer and manual work, they adopted it far more readily than did their secular confreres in educational institutions. In fact, manuscripts copied and claimed as such by secular masters are rare. These scholars tended to delegate this task to their assistants and simply to verify their copies.

In the fourteenth century, at the Parisian Collège de Dormans-Beauvais, there were two *escripvains* [writers] who, under the direction of a master, created the manuscripts necessary for the needs of the *socii* and hosts, each of whom was specialized in producing a particular type of work.[24] At the Collège de Sorbonne, Gérard d'Utrecht did not sign his manuscripts, no more so than did Gerard d'Abbeville or the dean of Saint-Omer, Adinolfo d'Anagni. Pierre of Limoges and John of Murs used *scriptores* and checked their work. These verifications were important, because the manuscripts of the Collège de Sorbonne could be used as models for other institutions. One of them has been conserved, with texts by Albert the Great, originating from the Abbey of Saint Victor (Paris, BNF lat. 14728, note on fol. 274).

In bequests, the quality of a copy was emphasized by precise terminology, which is worth studying. Nicolas de Vrigny (d. 1264) bequeathed to the Sorbonne his *exemplaria*, reference manuscripts that were recognized by the university.[25] Gerard d'Abbeville (1271) did likewise, leaving his *originalia* (copies containing the complete works of an author) to the institution,[26] while Franciscan cardinal

22 See mainly Gasparri 1994; Lehmann 1959; Giové Marchioli 2015; Garand 1981.

23 Grégoire 1998.

24 Pellegrin 1947 (from college's accounting registers in Paris, Archives nationales, H³ 2875, 1-17 and M 94 A).

25 Douet d'Arcq 1867, 217–219.

26 Denifle and Châtelain 1889, 402.

Matthew d'Acquasparta divided his up among the convents of Todi and Assise (1287).[27] Many statements confirm that these volumes served as models. No amendments could be made to them except in authorized places, as emphasized by the will of Bishop of Lille, Wautier Marvis, who allowed the transportation of his manuscripts only to the Dominican *studium* of Paris, where students could use them.[28] A few years earlier, in 1194, the canon Cotta gave seventeen theological and biblical volumes to the Cathedral of Vercelli, requiring that no one but the Cathedral chancellery may be authorized to reproduce them. Cotta mentioned moreover that the texts were correct, because these books had been checked against Parisian copies.[29] It was also in Paris and only in Paris that the copy of the commentary on the Decretals donated in 1271 by Cardinal Henry of Susa to the Embrun Cathedral could have been corrected, in copies created exclusively in the cathedral chapter.[30]

One of the most meaningful terms that translates the notion of reference is without a doubt 'corpus', the usage of which to refer to a collection of books can be traced back to Salatiele, a native of Bologna, in 1240.[31] According to the sources consulted, 'corpus' indicates the collection, the complete series of biblical books. The term denotes the collection's unity, in other words, its organic nature, which remains even when the will stipulates that it will be divided up among multiple recipients. While Gerard d'Abbeville left his theology 'corpus' – the same one that he used to study – to a single heir, the Collège de Sorbonne, in 1287 Galien of Pisa, a former canon of Saint-Omer, protector of the Franciscans, chose by contrast to distribute his corpus between the Cordeliers of Paris (who received two thirds of it), and the Dominicans of the Convent of Saint-Jacques (one third).[32] Galien's will is also interesting because the provisions concerning his 'corpus' of books immediately follow those of his burial. The document thus meaningfully alludes first to the physical body of the canon, and then to his spiritual body, composed of books.

27 Menesto 1982, 104–108.

28 Lille, Archives Départementales du Nord, 127 H 30, n° 212; Lille, Archives de la province dominicaine, 27.80.9 (*Littere domini Walterii quondam episcopi Tornacensis de libris ad usus fratrum Predicatorum de Insula comparatis*).

29 Nebbiai 2001, 87; Frova 1989.

30 Paravicini Bagliani 1980, 133–141.

31 Edited by Orlandelli 1961.

32 Brunel 1997.

3 From autography to the library project

To have had the idea of passing down one's books, and above all, to have wanted to make them available to an audience of readers, in both the present and the future, it must have been necessary for a person to consider them as 'his own', like a personal work; in short, to have had, with his books, the same relationship that an author has with his writings. Born during the scholastic period, when autography became an established practice, this relationship was largely shared by readers in urban society at the end of the Middle Ages. It facilitated the emergence of numerous projects to supply existing libraries or to create new ones. While these projects required favourable conditions to materialize, and especially the political authorities' backing, the dissemination of scholars' work through their books could also have been effectively relayed by social circles – fellow believers, family members, friends, and followers who were responsible for promoting and reproducing their writings and disseminating the content. Therefore, it was not necessary for their collections to remain intact; no more than it was necessary for them to be passed down to an institution. Consider a few examples that illustrate this.

The majority of these private projects to supply libraries were born in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in northern and central Italy, and particularly in Tuscany, where the book market was widely diverse and newly founded mendicant orders received numerous private bequests. For example, in 1370 the physician Guido di Bagnolo donated a total of 60 books to the school he founded in Bologna;[33] in the mid-fifteenth century, Angelo da Gambiglioni, a jurist from Arezzo, left his books to his male children and in turn their male descendants, specifying that otherwise, the library should go to the Brotherhood of St. Mary of Mercy;[34] and Florentine merchant Filippo Pieruzzi bequeathed his library to the Cistercian Abbey of San Salvatore a Settimo, where he also chose to retire and where he hosted a cenacle on Greek and Latin studies.[35] In humanist Florence, we find the practice of monastic retirement, as practised by the master theologians of the previous centuries.

The dynasties in power supported some of these projects when they believed that they backed their interests. Still in Florence, at the end of the fourteenth century, it fell on the Medicis to arbitrate between two competing projects to create a public library: the first was put forth by Palla Strozzi, who planned to

33 Livi 1918.
34 Maffei and Maffei 1994.
35 Fiesoli and Somigli 2009, 7, n° 14.

bequeath his manuscripts to Santa Trinita; the second was promoted by Niccolò de' Niccoli, who was also the owner of a vast collection of books that he preferred to leave with the Dominicans of San Marco.[36] The second option was chosen. However, these favourable conditions were not always the case, and numerous library projects stagnated, despite the prestige of the people who initiated them. For example, the creation of a study library to be used by clerics in the city of Amiens, imagined in the thirteenth century by the cleric Richard de Fournival in his *Biblionomia*, was never completed.[37] A century later, Francesco Petrarch successively came up with two configurations to guarantee an institutional future for his book collection, and both failed. He initially planned to combine it with Boccaccio's collection so that, according to him, they would remain *indecerptae* in the future, and could, following their death, be passed on to the guardianship of a religious institution. Boccaccio however subsequently chose to entrust all of his books to the Florentine Convent of the Santo Spirito.

At a later date, Petrarch thought of transferring his books to a public library, planning to leave them at the Basilica of St Mark, with the support of the city authorities. However, the death of a few of his close associates resulted in the loss of all of his political support. It is consequently no longer possible to find evidence of the project to found a library in the will that he drew up in 1370. His books were divided up among different recipients. His prayer book, for example, was bequeathed to the Padua Cathedral, of which Petrarch was one of the canons. There were no provisions concerning his books in vernacular language, even though they were numerous and played an important role in establishing his cultural knowledge. Moreover, a few years earlier, in a list-curriculum of ideal reading material, the poet only mentioned Latin and Greek works. Lastly, probably for emotional reasons but also considering their philological value, Petrarch bequeathed some of the original copies of his works plus a few duplicates to his son-in-law, Francescuolo da Brossano, and the da Brossano's children.[38]

The dispersion of Petrarch's library – albeit it not absolute, as several of his manuscripts made it to the library of the lords of Padua – did not harm the cultural dissemination of his works or the reputation of excellence of his manuscripts. To cite only a few examples: the sumptuous complete copy of the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* by St Augustin (Paris, BnF, latin 1989, eleventh century), originally from central Italy, which had been offered to him in 1355 by Boccaccio, who had acquired it from the Franciscan convent in Siena, and which Petrarch used

36 Gargan 1988, 169–171.

37 Lucken 2017.

38 Regarding Petrarch's library, cf. Nolhac 1892; Billanovich 1947; Petrucci 1967; Gargan 1988.

to proudly show off to his friends when he lived in Milan, remained associated with his reputation as a scholar, even after his death. The manuscript of Cicero's *Familiares* (Florence, Biblioteca Mediceo-Laurenziana, Plut. XLIX. 9, ninth–tenth century), discovered and annotated by Petrarch in Vercelli, was acquired by Leonardo Aretino and then later by his son, finally ending up in the hands of Donato Acciaioli. The other manuscript by Cicero, discovered by Petrarch in Verona in 1345 and immediately and carefully re-copied, has not been identified, but we still have Titus Livius' *Decades* (London, British Library, Harley 2493, twelfth–fourteenth century), partially written in his own hand, which were acquired during the fifteenth century by the humanist Lorenzo Valla.[39]

The transmission of the works of Arnaldus de Villanova, a Catalan theologian, may be one of the most interesting cases of actions to spread the writings of an author carried out by his close associates. Initiated by Arnaldus while he was still alive, with the help of his private chancellery, these actions took place following his death in 1311. We have a long document drawn up in 1318 by his followers, two years after the inquisitorial sentence of Tarragona condemning his doctrines. The document goes over the operations of his inheritance in an openly memorial way. It details the books that Arnaldus bequeathed to the Carthusian Monastery of Scala Dei, where his nephew was a cleric oblate; it makes reference to the volumes that the Inquisitor, Arnaldo Burguete, had seized at his residence to support his conviction, as well as the works that had been taken to Sicily by a group of followers guided by his assistant and secretary, Andreas Ferrandi. In an *albaran* (in other words, a quittance), the philosopher, preparing to head out on a trip abroad, which he then later decided against, had also left a portion of his books to another one of his associates. Other books were left to communities of Beguines, his followers in Valencia, Barcelona, Montpellier, and Marseille.[40]

A few concrete pieces of evidence of this dissemination have survived. Starting in 1311, Pope Clement V wrote a memorandum requesting that someone find him a copy of the book on kidney stones that Arnaldus had dedicated to him. One of Arnaldus' nephews, John Blasi, also a doctor, who later became a banker and was known for having founded the Hospital of the Holy Spirit of Marseille, related, in 1324, in his commonplace book, that he had two of his uncle's books at his home: a copy of the medical *Speculum* and a book on the crusade (*Livre du passage de la terre d'outremer*).[41] The latter work discussed one of the epi-

39 Sambin 1958.

40 On the history of the writing of Arnaldus de Villa Nova, his entourage, and his books, cf. Ballester, McVaugh and Rubio Vela 1989; Manselli 1994; Santi 1994; Nebbiai 2004.

41 Marseille, Archives municipales I/1, 187; Hauck 1965; Villard 1934; Baratier 1968, 272–275.

sodes in the life of the Catalan teacher mentioned above. In an inventory of goods and books at the Hospital of the Beguines of Valencia in 1354, we find another of Arnaldus de Villanova's books, following one of the provisions of his will. It was a copy of his commentary on the Apocalypse. This scholarly work stood out in a collection of administrative and religious books in vernacular, but its presence can be explained by the fact that this hospital belonged to an environment that supported radical Franciscanism.[42]

In short, despite the dispersal of his books, the dissemination of this Arnaldus' work appears to have been carried out as he had himself planned, not only for a literate public but also for the people who read and wrote in the vernacular and who had enthusiastically supported his reformist theories. A while later, in 1405, Bertran Boysset, a land surveyor from Arles, stated that he had borrowed from one of his fellow citizens, the notary Arnoldus del Puey, a land surveying treatise that he attributed to Arnaldus de Villanova. He provided a translation for it, which was according to him 'word for word'. In Bertran's manuscript (Carpentras, Bibliothèque L'Inguimbertine, MS 327), several sketches depicting the philosopher, which are simple but not devoid of liveliness, testify to the dissemination of his works in Provence even still at that time.[43] Translations also bear witness to this. I will mention only, for his medical and scientific tests, the translations into Hebrew by Abraham Abigdor.[44]

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42 Rubio Vela and Lizondo 1984.

43 Leonelli 1985.

44 Born probably in Arles in 1350; cf. Ballester and Feliu 1993.

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