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A Precious Documentary Heritage: the Archdiocese Archive of Bologna (Italy)

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ABSTRACT

This contribution wants to show the history of the Archivio Arcivescovile in Bologna also to an untrained public: the numerous, important documents that it contains, the people who worked on it, the changes of seat that took place over the centuries. In this way, introducing the many funds now preserved, a history very linked to the Bolognese territory is rediscovered: in fact ancient and recent papers housed in this place often transmit unexpected, surprising information and contribute to a deeper knowledge of many places (sacred and profane) that cheer the gaze of the yesterday and today traveller.

Keywords: Archive; Bologna; Seat; Fund; AAB

Questo contributo vuole mostrare anche ad un pubblico non esperto la storia dell'Archivio Arcivescovile di Bologna: i numerosi ed importanti documenti che contiene, le persone che ci hanno lavorato, le variazioni di sede avvenute nel corso dei secoli. Presentando i numerosi fondi oggi conservati si riscopre così una storia molto legata al territorio bolognese: le carte antiche e recenti ospitate in questo luogo tramandano infatti notizie spesso inaspettate e sorprendenti, contribuendo ad una conoscenza più approfondita di tanti luoghi (sacri e profani) che allietano lo sguardo del viaggiatore di ieri e di oggi.

Keywords: Archivio; Bologna; Sede; Fondo; AAB

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Introduction

Probably not many people know that the Archivio Arcivescovile in Bologna, generally abbreviated as AAB, with nearly four kilometres of shelves totally full up of documents, hides information which can brighten the history of so many places (churches but not only) still existing today and that can be visited in the Bolognese territory. Let's go through the history of this institute and know how many people took care of it. Let's enter its seats and discover which funds it contains.

1. First seat (XVI-XVIII century)

The Archivio Arcivescovile in Bologna, which was officially founded by Archbishop Gabriele Paleotti (1566-1597) in 1573, nowadays contains part of the most ancient, precious documentary heritage of this Emilian city and diocese. It is numbered among the most important city historical archives and cultural institutes.

The fact this archive was founded in the XVI century does not mean that before the Bolognese Church had not produced any documents. On the contrary, in the late Middle Ages writings and papers were numerous. It means that, until then, all clerical corporations tended to keep archives in their own offices, as there was no common place where to keep deeds and documents. Some examples are the Cathedral Capitolo archive, dating back to the X century (**Figure 1**), and the Mensa archive, which might be dated to the eleventh century, unluckily many documents were lost, so today the oldest writings kept there date back to the thirteenth century.

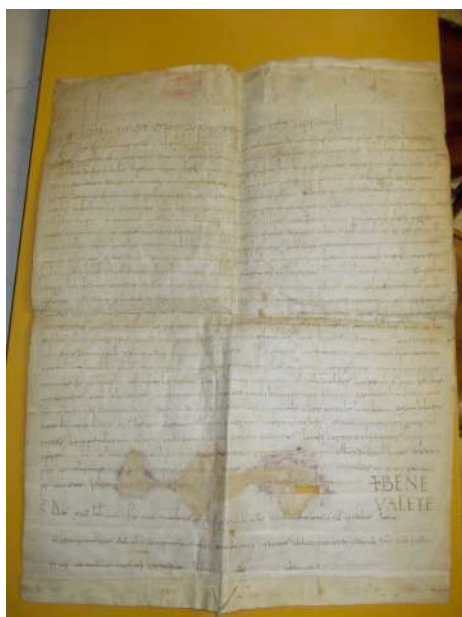


Figure 1: Pope John the thirteenth's privilege (967)

Source: AAB, Archivio Capitolare of the Cathedral of Bologna, n. 14, fasc. 1

There were no preservation places where to keep the curial papers, which were drawn up by private notaries, and all documents were kept in the extenders' offices. In fact, there were some extenders who worked as professional men and, at the same time, as chancellors of the curia: so there were no curial archives. All deeds and documents were kept in the notaries' offices, totally mixed up with other acts drawn up for other customers. This situation lasted until the XVI century when the already mentioned Cardinal Paleotti obtained that the curial documents had to be deposited at the curial office, even if these deeds still belonged to their extenders.

This must have been the reason why it was decided the building of a unique seat for the archive. This seat was set inside the archiepiscopal palace, even if nowadays it is impossible for us to recognize its setting or to see some traces of it. The events occurred to the archive in this first seat were changeable in the following two centuries and the arrival of the French in Bologna in 1796 had immediate effects even on the documents: the Mensa archive was placed under seizure, and the curia archive was seized to let the incoming civil judicial authorities accomplish their own functions.

2. Second seat (1818-1961)

2.1. A new big seat...

We owe to Cardinal Oppizzoni (1802-1855) (**Figure 2**) the reorganization of the diocese after the Napoleonic confiscations, and on this occasion, the archive was almost entirely refounded, starting from its seat.



Figure 2: Cardinal Oppizzoni's bust Source: AAB, study room

Between 1818 and 1826 the halls on the upper floor in the southern wing of the archiepiscopal palace, which previously had been the seat of the College of the Doctors (where the students of the University of Bologna graduated: Alma Mater is known as the world's most ancient University), were readapted as archival deposits. High wooden shelves were leant against the walls; they were six meters high and one meter deep, and they were filled with a great deal of documents (**Figure 3**).



Figure 3: Hall in the second seat of the archive with wooden shelves

Source: M. Fanti, *L'Archivio Generale Arcivescovile di Bologna. Notizie storiche. Elenco dei fondi archivistici. Avvertenze utili per le ricerche*. Premessa di S.E. il Card. G. Biffi [Bologna 1999], p. 9

So much room may appear exaggerate at first sight: but we must not forget that those shelves housed not only the archives, which had been seized or placed under distress during the Napoleonic era, but also, many other document collections. In fact, the restoration of the papal government made the reconstruction of abolished clerical bodies possible, provided that these bodies possessed the needed documents for this goal. Therefore, the just ready seat was filled with papers from archives belonging to different clerical corporations, and parts of these funds must have seldom had an administrative usefulness.

Today we can affirm that Cardinal Oppizzoni's reconstruction of the archive took place first for practical administrative goals, secondly for cultural reasons.

2.2. ...where to concentrate a large number of funds

Therefore the archival funds gathered at the Archivio Arcivescovile were numerous; let's mention some of the most considerable ones about the daily diocesan administration: *Foro Arcivescovile, Cancellerie vecchie, ecclesiastica e civile, Congregazione consultiva per i luoghi pii, Foro criminale arcivescovile, Visite pastorali, Miscellanee vecchie*. At the time of Cardinal Oppizzoni, these funds, with other less important ones, included almost 10.000 archival units and boasted chronological extremes dating back even to the fifteenth century.

Administration was not the only topic of interest; in fact in addition to the Mensa archive, which we mentioned before, the new archive also included the Collection of the prints (all calls, notifications, proclamations, notices and *memoranda* issued

through the archiepiscopal printing works, and also other civil and clerical prints). Also other archives were included: the *Fabbrica of S. Pietro*, concerning every document about the rebuilding of the Cathedral in Bologna (XVI century) and the following restoration works; some fragments from the Holy Office court in the XVII and XVIII century; the *Azienda rogazioni minori* concerning the traditional descent of the image of St. Luke's Madonna into the town: this tradition has been repeated every year for almost six centuries (**Figure 4**).



Figure 4: Procession of St. Luke's Madonna (first half of XX century)

Source: AAB, Segreteria arcivescovile, n. 352, fasc. 4

The archive included also the Census ordered by Pope Pio IX, in 1847, all over the Papal States; the parish priests took it: they filled a booklet for every parish and 356 booklets were drawn up.

We must remember another fund already added to the archive before Oppizzoni's participation: the ex-Jesuitic Heritage, concerning the wealth, which had been taken by the Archbishop in Bologna after the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773. They consist of more than 300 archival units dating back to the XIV century; they included also maps and architectural projects.

The archive named Monastery of Corpus Domini, traditionally called Archive of Blessed Caterina, deserves an introduction. In Bologna, there is a Clarisse Monastery, which is the Monastery of Corpus Domini, founded by Caterina Vigri in 1456. She was a learnt woman, good at reading, at writing, at miniating, at playing and dancing. Caterina died in 1463 and soon she was revered as a saint. This reverence was because her body, exhumed several days after the burial, was found totally uncorrupted. Even today, her body is still exposed at the reverence in a special chapel in the Corpus Domini church. As we can imagine, after Caterina's death a historical devotional collection of hagiographical kind was formed (**Figure 5**).

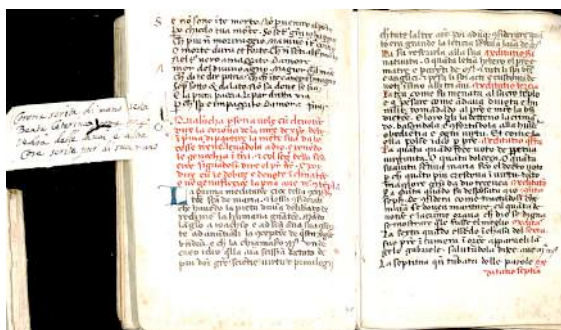


Figure 5: Ancient attestation of an autograph manuscript of St. Caterina

Source: AAB, Archive of Blessed Caterina, n. 25, vol. 2

It included her writings, prayer books and everything her sisters wrote to witness the devotion to St. Caterina. More than 50 archival units were produced and in 1821 Cardinal Oppizzoni put them into the Archivio Arcivescovile, together with the other funds above mentioned.

The bishop concentrated the funds, rearranged them and committed their management to some experienced archivists: it looked strange, at that time, the fact that they all followed one another through the years: Ludovico Rizzoli, Serafino Mazzetti and Serafino Amorini. It is important to point out that the presence of many and different series of documents in an only-one seat suggested the Cardinal with the name of Archivio Generale Arcivescovile. The word “generale” (general) underlines that many different archives are contained inside an only one deposit.

2.3. Post 1855

This destiny to become a great collector of ecclesiastic documents was also confirmed during the decades following Cardinal Oppizzoni’s death in 1855. In that year, in addition to the continuous increasing of the still open, preexisting series, other funds and collections were poured on and they all together formed what today we define as the core of the Archivio Arcivescovile, the original core. Soon the archiepiscopal secretary became part of the archive: it dealt with papers originally fulfilled by Cardinal Oppizzoni, unconnected with the curial matters. This procedure was maintained by the following archbishops and today the fund has 700 units. The Raccolta Oppizzoni joined the Archivio Arcivescovile too: it contains more than 160 units where the Cardinal had gathered and carefully reorganized many testimonies about his work and the events of his time.

Later on, in 1910, count Giovanni Acquaderni left the archive the whole documentation he had produced in his long, very active life: he was a leading spokesman inside the roman Catholicism and played an active role on several occasions. We think it is right at least to remember his contribute to the creation of the Società della Gioventù Cattolica Italiana in 1867 (then flown into the today’s Azione Cattolica), of the catholic daily newspaper *L’Avvenire* and of the catholic bank Credito Romagnolo (the last two both in

1896); and the organization of several initiatives, among which the most important are the Opera dei Congressi Cattolici (from 1874 to 1879), the Priestly Jubilee by Pope Leone XIII in 1884 and the Solemn Homage to Christ the Redeemer in 1900. In Bologna Giovanni Acquaderni developed his activity in many different ways; here we remember his zeal for the building of the church devoted to the Sacred Heart of Christ: we can still see this church near the railway station (**Figure 6**).



Figure 6: Sacred Heart of Christ church seen from the near the railway station (1912)

Source: Tav. from *L'inaugurazione del Tempio al s. Cuore di Gesù e le onoranze al cardinale svampa. Ricordo, Bologna, 15-16-17 Ottobre 1912*, Bologna, 1912

This short survey lets us understand how many important documents were poured into the Archivio Arcivescovile, in all 284 units.

Another important acquisition happened in 1940 thanks to an exchange between the Archivio Arcivescovile and the State Archive. The former gave the deeds concerning the University to the latter in exchange for notarial documentation under the name of *Ricuperi attuariali*. This fund, divided in registers and single acts, is formed overall by 800 units and it concerns an arch of time between 1412 and 1697; complementary to the *Foro arcivescovile* previously mentioned.

2.4. Two priests and one archive

In the meantime, various decades had passed starting from the reorganization of the archive, and the passing time had left its marks. During this long period, two priests among the others worked appropriately on these papers: Canon Luigi Breventani and Don Augusto Macchiavelli.

The former, a great-learned man about historical local studies, who made the most of all with the available documents about the instituted proceedings between Cento town Council (province of Bologna) and the archiepiscopal Mensa. His deep search brought him to the resolution of the legal proceedings in favor of the latter. Canon Breventani (**Figure 7**) was known also for his study method, really accurate and careful. He maintained this method until the very end of his life: he was founded dead in his bed, literally covered with papers and writings.



Figure 7: Canon Luigi Breventani's bust

Source: AAB, library room

In 1929, Don Augusto Macchiavelli was entrusted with the arrangement of the Archivio Arcivescovile, which was falling into bad conditions: for more than twenty years, he fully devoted himself to this assignment with competence, great care and passion. He got very important results even if not so showy; they are witnessed today by the wealth of instruments he prepared.

At his death, in 1950, two problems dragged on for a decade: the replacement of Macchiavelli himself (the consequence was that the Archive remained practically closed for two five-years periods), and the need to find new room where to place the deposits. Even the seat decided by Cardinal Oppizzoni more than a century before was not suitable any longer and above all, there was no room left to add new documents.

3. The third seat and its funds

So it was thought of transferring the archive to its third historical seat. From 1960, in fact, a wing of the archiepiscopal palace, located north-west of the previous seat, was provided with an eight-floored tower deposit, equipped with metallic shelves able to house more than 3000 meters of documents, horizontally (**Figure 8**). On the other hand, during the next decades there was a need to increase again the room, until the today's four kilometers of shelves.



Figure 8: Corridor from the tower deposit in the third seat
Source: AAB property

The transfer of the funds, in Summer 1961, was the prelude to the inauguration (October 5th) of the today's seat of the Archivio Arcivescovile and to the new opening to the public starting from the month of February of the following year (**Figure 9**).



Figure 9: New opening's memorial plaque
Source: AAB, study room

In this new area soon, Doctor Mario Fanti organized consultations among scholars and continued the rearrangement of the archive funds begun by Don Macchiavelli. In the last decades the word “generale”, which is part of the name of the archive itself, has

been emphasized more and more, and the work of gathering important ecclesiastical funds has been continued.

Already in 1961, during the transfer to the new seat, the Raccolta Breventani had been added: it contains the interesting, rich documentation about the studies of the mentioned Canon and of his brother Don Giuseppe. Soon after, therefore starting from 1963, the reclamation of all the archives of the abolished Bolognese parishes was begun: it was a long, complex work because many of these funds had been splitted and scattered at different times, so that this work lasted almost two decades before being considered concluded. Got to the results, it was possible to go on with the arrangement and the stocktaking inventory, which came to a happy end in 2006 with a still available print edition. Thanks to this, we know that it is a collection of more than 1000 units dating back to a period between the XV and the XX century, except for a collection of 23 late medieval parchments, the most ancient of which was drawn up in 1171.

In 1964, the *Archivio Consorziale* of urban clergy was added: it was a witness of mutual assistance among the members of the city clergy. This behavior dates back even to the Middle Ages. Therefore it is an important fund (with print edition of the inventory which has been available since 2009) consisting of 200 units and with documents since the XI century.

In 1971, the part of the Archivio Capitolare of the Cathedral of Bologna, which had not been taken by the State, was added to the Archivio Arcivescovile. Now we are not going to dwell on the great importance and prestige the canonical assemblies had during the Middle and the Modern Ages; we can only remember that this fund contains the most ancient parchment papal document which has come to us (the 967 Pope John the thirteenth's privilege, which is also the oldest document kept at the Archivio Arcivescovile), the most important Bolognese ecclesiastical cartulary (technical term indicating a register of documents, the so called Libro "dalle Asse") and one series of 13 parchment richly miniated choral books dating back to 1330-1332 (**Figure 10**). It is possible to extract this and other information from the inventory published in 2010.



Figure 10: Miniated initial letter “E” (Ecce Agnus Dei)

Source: AAB, Archivio Capitolare of the Cathedral of Bologna, choral book “I”, f. 133r

Another important fund has been poured on several occasions since 1972: it is about the Cathedral baptismal registers. It consists of a continuative sequence started in 1459 and whose importance was due to the fact that until 1918 there was only one baptistery on service in Bologna and suburbs: just the one in the Cathedral. Beyond the relevant role of this source for genealogical or statistical searches, it is always interesting to look through these hundreds of registers and to come across the christening of some famous personality of a more or less recent past, like, for instance, the painters Guido Reni and Giorgio Morandi, the scientists Luigi Galvani and Laura Bassi, Pope Benedetto XIV, the inventor Guglielmo Marconi or the actor Gino Cervi and many others.

The new Agreement signed in 1984 by the Italian State, the Catholic Church produced a territorial diocesan reorganization, and several parishes were abolished. According to what had already happened to the archives of the abolished Bolognese parishes, also on this occasion, since 1993, almost 50 funds were withdrawn, about 500 units altogether between the XVI and the XX century. A few years later, also the Cathedral parish archive, of 150 units, was deposited.

In the same years, starting from 1997, the documents of the Association San Vincenzo de’ Paoli in Bologna were brought to the Archivio Arcivescovile. It contains almost 200 archival units concerning the activities of this important laical association operating from the nineteenth century in the charitable sphere.

One last archive must be mentioned in this concise but not exhaustive enumeration of the most important funds deposited at the Archivio Arcivescovile in the last 50 years. It

was poured in 2010 and consists of the papers of an important private archive bequeathed by Mrs. Paola Giovannini. This fund mostly contains documents related to the Bianconi family. Several members of this house stood out between the XVIII and the XIX century in the Bolognese cultural world and in other different fields too. We remember Gian Giuseppe, Gian Lodovico, Girolamo e Carlo. The life and work of the last one have been recently studied in a research brightly carried on by Doctor Laura Binda from the University of Milan.

Conclusion

Nowadays a new manager (Doctor Don Riccardo Pane) has been entrusted with the care of the Archivio Arcivescovile: since 2013, helped by his staff he has been facing the delicate challenges of a digital, faster and faster world that also needs exact, original studies. A few enrichments to work even more and better are the possibilities of larger searches (ex: through larger visits or agreements about longer opening times for scholars from faraway), new forms of collaboration with universities and the cultural world, through a well-organized internet site.

If we think carefully, also this contribution is the result of traditional reference instruments (few books) supplied by the web news and exactly by the archive site (www.archivio-arcivescovile-bo.it). All this shows that the alliance between tradition and innovation can only be good for the Archivio Arcivescovile, which will become an indispensable crossroads for the knowledge and the interpretation of those places and of the different shapes of what is sacred in the Bolognese area, so to become an example of its territory.

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(Except for the first one, you can find all these publications at the archive, until exhaustion of stocks)

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