

# The Tommaso Obizzi del Catajo Collection in the Estense University Library of Modena: notes for the manuscripts identification.

Paola Di Pietro, Estense University Library, Modena (Italy)

Pietro Baraldi, Department of Chemistry, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia  
(Italy)

The 3rd of June 1803 in the castle of Catajo at Battaglia Terme (Padova), the last descendant of the Obizzi House, the marquis Tommaso Gravato died from a disease, but soundminded and compos mentis, wrote his own will in favour of the Este House to whom he addressed all his goods, excepted some amount of money and personal objects he wanted to leave to some friends. Worried by the more recent political events, that brought the changeover of Frenches and Austrians in Northern Italy, upset by the new ideas of democracy brought by the French revolution, unsatisfied with the treatment received by the Venetian Republic, Tommaso searched as his own heir a prince house opposing to Napoleon and to the transalpine ideas and to which he was bound by commitments of friendship and thankfulness. His choice fell to the Este House, to Ercole III of Este, from which he had received the 22nd December 1783 the bill of Brigadier in the Ducal Troops.

In case of predecease of Hercules III, the heir should have been Carlo Ambrogio, the last son of the archduke Ferdinand of Austria, son of Maria Teresa, and of Maria Beatrice, the only Hercules' daughter and therefore the sole heir of the Este House. With Hercules passing, the inheritance passed immediately to Carlo Ambrogio. After his death, Maria Beatrice and her children renounced to their rights in favour of Francesco, who, after the Restoration, became duke of Modena with the name of Francesco IV.

The succession comprehended the luxurious residence of Catajo, where remarkable collections were preserved: manuscripted and printed books, arms, musical instruments, medals, antiquities were collected by the marquises Obizzi during centuries. The musical instruments in 1859, after the unification of Italy and the fall of the Este Dukedom, were conveyed to Vienna where also antiquities arrived in 1896; the arms went to decorate the walls of Konopiste castle, near Praga, rebuilt by Ferdinand of Este; the collection of medals enriched the already very rich collection of the Estense Gallery in Modena, and the library is now included in the precious dotation of the Estense University Library in Modena. The collections, begun in XVII century by Pio Enea II and increased in the course of time by various members of the Obizzi family, found in Tommaso the man who could enrich them considerably because of his great passion of bibliophile and antiquarian.

The manuscripts of the Obizzi's inheritance<sup>1</sup> were forwarded to the Library by H.S.H. the duke Francesco IV the 18th April 1817. They were recorded in the *Libro in*

---

<sup>1</sup> The study was carried out only on the manuscripts, of which an identification table is added, but the Obizzi's inheritance included some printed works, of which a detailed list is lacking. Until now eleven of these have been identified, all of numismatic and collectionistic subject, on the basis of the ex-libris applied on the verso of the fore table of the binding, during works of inventorying and cataloguing of the material preserved in some rooms of the Estense Library.

*cui si noteranno tutti i libri che di mano in mano verranno in questa Ducal Biblioteca*<sup>2</sup> where since 1757 the new accessions were recorded. So, in this first chronological register on entry to the library there is the *'Elenco dei manoscritti provenienti dall'eredità Obizzo e trasmessi alla Biblioteca dall'Anticamera di S.A.R. il Seren.° Duca Padrone*.

It includes Latin, Italian, oriental, foreign, and Greek manuscripts, with datations between XIII and XVIII centuries, but with particular reference to codices of the XV and XVI centuries.

There are manuscripts related to different subjects such as religion, represented by the Bible and the Offici of the Virgin, moral, philosophy, history, literature, music, attested above all by chorals, graduals and antiphonaries, medicine and veterinary medicine. There are Italian and Latin classics, works by Petrarch, Dante, Lorenzo de' Medici, Cicero, Juvenal, Martial, Sallust, Lucanus, Valerius Maximus, Ovid, Seneca, St. Augustine, St. Jerome.

The list of entries is the only coeval trace recovered of the manuscripts of the Catajo at the Estense Library, because the documents of the archive of the library report a lacuna from february to may 1817.

The collection was much appreciated by the ducal librarians who more or less widely hint to it in their memories. Giovanni Galvani<sup>3</sup> in his history of the Estense Library reminded that the new prince Francesco IV, after Restauration, wanted not only to recover the precious codices taken away by Napoleon, but also wanted to increase the already rich dotation of the library. The arrival of the Tommaso Obizzi's collection, worth of "eterna ricordanza", "seemed to suddenly restore the Este from all damages suffered". Then, "under beneficial provision of the human Prince, three hundred twenty nine Latin, Italian, Greek, Hebraic and Arabian codices arrived, some rich for their precious illuminations, some distinct for their rarity and ancient writing of contents, some for their clarity of the letters, lastly many for their diligent conservation: so that, after such an accession, in the splendour of that great depository of ancient wisdom that is the collection of the Estense manuscripts, the name of Francesco IV emulated the times of Alfonso II and of Francesco II, and exceeded in adventure all his other magnificent predecessors". Also Antonio Lombardi<sup>4</sup> cites in his history of the library the collection "but what makes greater the celebrity of this library is the notable addition of manuscripts made, the praised H. S. having here deposited those that were in his Royal residence of the Cattajo, that is 348 volumes, among which many are valuable for their antiquity and many others for the beautiful illuminations ornating them". Lombardi is the sole who hints to 348 manuscripts, whereas, Giovanni Galvani, Luigi Carbonieri<sup>5</sup> and Domenico Fava<sup>6</sup> speak of 329 codices.

On the list of the chronological entry register the codices were recorded with a concise signalling of authors and titles or with only a reference to the typology of belonging and their total number. Therefore, the list gives information about 25 Chorals

---

<sup>2</sup> "book where all the books as thy will come to the Duke Library will be recorded" It is the historical catalogue of the Estense Library with accession mark Cat. St. 60.4.

<sup>3</sup> G. GALVANI, *La R. Biblioteca Estense durante il regno di Francesco IV*, sec. XIX (BEUMo, It. 1571 = alfa.E.3.4.37)

G. GALVANI, *La R. Biblioteca Estense*, in "Alla memoria di Francesco IV. Tributo della R. Accademia di Scienze Lettere ed Arti di Modena. Parte prima" Modena 1846, pp. 28-51

<sup>4</sup> A. LOMBARDI, *Storia della Biblioteca Estense*, sec. XIX (BEUMo, Camp. 2047 = gamma.O.1.21, c. 42r)

<sup>5</sup> L. CARBONIERI, *Cenni storici della R. Biblioteca Estense in Modena*, Modena 1873

<sup>6</sup> D. FAVA, *La biblioteca Estense nel suo sviluppo storico*, Modena 1925, pp. 206-209

and 33 Offici of the Virgin. The authors' names do not follow precise rules of cataloguing and also the titles are merely indicative. Frequently, for brevity, one sole work indicates a miscellany; by mistake, many titles have been recorded twice and differently; it is possible also to encounter three different volumes, belonging to the same work, recorded separately, also it may happen to find manuscripts in the collection, with their ex libris, not inserted in the list, or at least apparently absent, since they could have been signalled in an unusual and dissimilar way.

In her essay, the Estense librarian Anna Rosa Venturi<sup>7</sup> traces a careful profile of Tommaso Obizzi, emphasizing his personality and above all his spirit of sagacious collector, a real interpreter of the culture of the seventeenth century. She transcribes from the historical catalogue the list of the Obizzi books, observing the identifications by Domenico Fava, director of the Estense Library from 1913 to 1933, but she does move beyond, and does not offer elements for a systematic reconstruction of the manuscripts inside the Antico Fondo Estense, restricting herself to quotations of some of the most important items, without any doubt pertaining to the collection for the presence of the ex-libris.

Since many years one of us, in the course of her activity as a responsible in the manuscripts section of the Estense Library, undertook a long way towards that reconstruction, by examining one by one the codices, in a particular way those no more provided with the Obizzi escutcheon. Therefore, the new list, elaborated and placed as an attachment, is a fruit of a patient and long labours of research, constituted of controls and comparisons also with other manuscripts of the Antico Fondo Estense, in order to make the Obizzi provenance to emerge. There is no doubts for the 267 codices, mostly still bound with the old covers of the seventeenth century, exhibiting the ex-libris in their original position or reattached inside the new binding, after the substitution of the ancient one. In some codices, besides the ex libris, there is the family escutcheon traced with black or red ink or illuminated, usually in the lower edge of the first page. It can be supposed that this intervention is ascribable to the end of of the seventeenth century or to the beginning of the eighteenth century. In fact, not only the ex libris, but also full page illuminations have been inserted in the Obizzi codices in the seventeenth century, as it has been possible to ascertain by the application of Raman microscopy to the investigation on the pigments used, such the Prussian Blue (it. 960).

Once identified the manuscripts provided with the belonging sign, the problem was to proceed with the remaining ones, about sixty, lacking connotation, for which it was necessary to find different elements, useful for the purpose of their identification.

For this purpose, an interesting item emerged that enables a great number of the manuscripts to be reconducted to the collection donated by Tommaso. The man who organised the library in the castle of the Catajo or in the Estense library when the collection arrived, traced a number on the first fol. This number is still traceable or, in the case of a new binding, sometimes readable in a specular way, because of the ink transfer by contact with the subsequent page. The number is still present in 208 manuscripts and the last one ascribed to the ancient orderer is just 329. The numerical progression is not continuous and sometimes different works are marked with the same number and either all or some of the volumes constituting a single work. In the investigation for the identification it is certainly necessary to start from the eighteenth

---

<sup>7</sup> A. R. VENTURI, *La raccolta libraria di Tommaso Obizzi, corollario delle sue collezioni eclettiche*, in "Gli Esternsi e il catajo. Aspetti del collezionismo tra Sette e Ottocento", Milano 2007, pp. 101-115

century list, and then moving from it and proceeding solely with a direct examination of the manuscripts.

The entry list is divided into seven columns referring to author, work title, codex century, number of volumes and of works, marks of codices, volume format. The “marks” are abbreviations printed in gold on the binding spine. Some of them, more frequently recurring, are of an easier interpretation, such as MS (manuscript), CMM (codex membranaceous manuscript), CM (codex manuscript or codex membranaceous), CMC (codex manuscript in paper), CMMC (codex manuscript membranaceous and paper), CC (codex in paper). A key for a better interpretation of these marks is given by the abbreviations appearing on the spine of the manuscripts Lat. 665 (COD. MEMBR.) e Lat. 695 (COD. MS. CHART.) and perfectly corresponding to a membranaceous codex and to a paper manuscript, respectively.

Some bindings of the seventeenth century with a particular look, today easily identifiable inside the Fondo Estense also with a cursory glance, certainly gave the library a character of homogeneity. The spines are made with nerve skin, broken up by flowers impressed with gold, and also the cartouches with indication of authors and titles are written in gold, so as in gold are the marks. The covers present a considerable variety and can be grouped in about ten types. In fact, the boards are generally covered with paper sprinkled in red and black, or in red and green, or in red, yellow and black, or in red and blue, or in pink, red and green; they can also be in all white paper or in all red paper, but always with the skin spine with gold impressions. Many codices have a parchment binding or in all leather or in leather with a carved and embroidered ivory plate mounted in the boards.

The most complex problem of identification is for the codices that lack all these identification data, neither l'ex libris, nor the first and last paper number, nor the mark, nor an author nor a title traced in the entry list and cited only for the typology of pertinence, such as the Offici of the Virgin. For the chorals it was possible to immediately establish their provenance thanks to the presence of the ex libris, but for the 33 Offici their identification has not been so straightforward.

For the reconstruction of the pertinence of these codices some notes by the Estense librarian Michele Carlo Caputo were helpful; he examined the codices Obizzi between 1896 and 1904, that is before those operations of restauration that led to a substitution of the bindings for the codices 815, 824, 831, 833 and to the consequent loss of every identification element. His precious service notes<sup>8</sup> reveal that the collection Obizzi included the codices marked in the catalogue of the latin manuscripts 665, 731, 737, 762, 764, 799, from 800 to 812, from 814 to 833, from 839 to 842, 844, 846, from 851 to 862, 866, from 869 to 874, 882, from 892 to 893, 922, 968, from 989 to 990. The list is certainly helpful, though it must be taken into account that the codices Lat. 737 and 989, quoted by Caputo, surely belong to the Antico Fondo Estense, since they exhibit the duke eagle on the spine. However, the Estense librarian must be considered an areliable source, because he certainly saw personally the manuscripts covered with their original bindings still provided with the owner escutcheon, before that in the years Sixty of the Twentieth century they were restored and the new bindings set up that cancelled the marks of ownership.

---

<sup>8</sup> M. C. CAPUTO, *Manoscritti entrati in Biblioteca a cominciare dall'anno 1761 e la loro provenienza* (BEUMo, Beta.24.9, c. 13r)

Witness of this pertinence is also Giuseppe Fumagalli<sup>9</sup> who in his descriptions of the codices with artistic binding declares the provenance Obizzi for manuscripts that today do not exhibit the ex libris.

The inheritance Obizzi sent to the library is made of 326 handwritten works for a total of 329 items, taking into account that a work is composed of two volumes and another one of three.

The works with the ex libris are 268, those without it 61. Those with the number on the first page are 210, whereas 116 are lacking it; the total of 329 items is reached whenever the subdivision in tomes is considered. The mark is present on the spine of 118 codices.

The Italian manuscripts are 30, the foreign ones 2, the Oriental ones 17, the Greek only 1.

The illuminated manuscripts are 174, about the half of the whole collection, represented mainly by the Latin codices (158). Only 10 are the illuminated Italian ones, 2 the oriental ones and 2 the foreign ones.

Italian illumination coming from pictorial areas of the Northern-Central Italy is prevailing. The bolognese illumination is widely represented by 25 anthem books (Lat. 1001-1025) coming mostly from the monastery of the Olivetans of S. Michele in Bosco in Bologna and attesting the illumination of the XIII century, by Franco bolognese to Niccolò from Bologna. The psalter of the Certosa of Ferrara (Lat. 990), ascribable to Giraldi, is an expression of the art of Ferrara. The Lombard illumination is recognisable in the Officio of the Blessed Virgin richly ornated with a wide prospection of saints (Lat. 842), whereas the florentine illumination is connected to the offizioli of particular refinements. The *Liber physiognomiae* of the XV century (Lat. 697) is from the area of Veneto, like the famous epigraphic sylloge of Giovanni Marcanova (Lat. 992). Some codices are of French craftsmanship, above all the psalters of the XIII and XIV centuries (Lat. 844, 874) and the famous Dioskurides (Lat. 993); the Offici of the Flemish illumination attracting the attention for refinement and lightness of images. The famous *Life of Christ* illuminated by Nicola Glockendon is one of the greatest expressions of German illumination (Est. 136).

### **Materials and techniques in the codices of the Obizzo collection**

Together with the tentative reconstruction of the Obizzi collection, it appeared important to identify some criteria for ascribing the illuminated manuscripts to a geographic area, to a chronology, to an author beyond those applied by the art historians and art materials experts. The identification of materials and techniques used for the illuminations, the gilding, the decorations, the writing could be valuable data for this ascription. The association of materials can be typical of a scriptorium or of an illuminator; the use of gold powder or foil, of silver foil could make use of a preparation layer with different materials: animal glue, egg white, gumarabic. Also the traces of underdraw for illumination, when some painting falls, could be characteristic.

A main problem in this research is the need of using only non-destructive scientific techniques. In recent years Raman microscopy and X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy have been widely applied. Most part of a scriptorium have been analysed (Baraldi et al., 2008) and many substances and techniques identified. Here we refer about the analyses of some twenty codices of the Obizzi collection. This is in order to identify whether

---

<sup>9</sup> G. FUMAGALLI, *L'arte della legatura alla corte degli Estensi*, Firenze 1913, pp. LXVII-LXX

there are some specific features in the Obizzi collection and subsequently whether a distinction can be made among the codices so as to identify their probable provenance. We decided to take into consideration some materials for illumination and some specific features such as the use of gold and silver powder and their substrates, the way of obtaining some hues, the kind of ink and the way of heightening some details.

The data are summarized in the Table reported below. It can be observed that some materials are very common and other are less common. Some lakes are used in many instances, but the most commonly used pigments are azurite and lazurite for blue, cinnabar and minium for red, lead white for white, carbon for black, malachite for green. A yellow pigment is rarely used, the common solution for yellow being gold and purpurin. Concerning the latter it can be said that its finding is a very uncommon one. This material is widely cited in the technical codices, such as the bolognese manuscript, but rarely attested in painting and illumination. It is necessary to emphasize that it was used almost always in the ovals surrounding some small images. This fact can lead to suspect that this was a repainting of the manuscript to underline the property of the codices, though we have not found it in all codices. The use of ovals with purpurin was also found by us in a late XIV century parchment probably from Piacenza (Baraldi et al., 2007). The use of purpurin also in some other particulars of illuminations besides the ovals makes considerations more complex.

Some singularities can be of help in attributing to a scriptorium one of these codices: for example, graphite is found only in one lombard codex, litharge in some cases. In three cases the use of giallolino (lead tin yellow tipe I, a synthetic compound typical of the Renaissance period) is ascertained and this could be a particular use of the French-Flemish area. The use of indigotine for rendering black or gray or sky blue or green hues is also encountered.

Only one codex is made without use of white lead. A low number of codices exhibit the use of silver plate for rendering the metal color, in one case with a decoration on the silver surface.

Table I. Materials used in illumination and writing (abbreviations: Az = azurite, Bi = white lead, C = carbon, Ci = cinnabar, Cl = Calchantite, Gi =lead tin yellow, Gy = gypsum, In = indigo, L = lake, La = lazurite, Li = litharge, Ma = malachite, Mi = minium, Pu = purpurin, p = powder, s = sheet)

codex	Origin	White	Black	Yellow	Red	Green	Blue
aF6.9	Rome?	Bi	C		Ci, Mi	In	BdP, Az
aF9.16	Florence	Bi	C	L, Pu	Ci, L	Ma	Az, La
aG9.2	Naples	Bi	C	Pu	Ci, Mi, L	Ma	Az, La, In
aG9.3	Ferrara	Bi	C	Pu	Ci, L	Ma	Az, La, In
aG9.6	Lombard	Bi	C	L, Pu	Ci, Mi, L	Ma	In, La
aG9.26	Clovio	Bi			Ci, Mi, L		Az
aG9.27	Emilian	Bi			Ci, Mi	Ma	Az
aH9.7	Florence	Bi	C	Pu	Ci	Ma	Az, La
aJ9.21	Florence	Bi				Ma	Az
aJ9.26	Lombard	Bi		Pu	Ci		Az
aL9.28	French	Bi	C	GiI	Ci	Ma	Az
aP9.28	Flemish	Bi		Li?	Ci, Mi, He?	L	In, La
aQ6.2	Lombard	Bi		Pu	Ci	Ma	Az

aQ7.6	Flemish?	Bi	In	GiI, Li	Ci, Mi		In
aS2.16	Flemish	Bi	In		Ci	In	Az, In
aS2.31	Lombard	Bi	C, G?	Pu	Ci, Mi, Ci(Mi)		Az, In, La
aS2.38		Bi	C		Ci	Ma	Az, La
aT4.13		Bi	C	Pu	Ci, Ci(Mi), L	Ma?	Az, In
aT4.14	Veneto	Bi	C		Ci, Mi		Az, Cl
aT9.33		Bi		Pu	Ci	Ma	La, Cl
aU6.7	German	Bi	C		Ci, Ci (Mi), L	Ma	Az, In
aW8.20	Verona		In, C		Ci, L	Ma?	Az, In
aW9.13	Flemish	Bi		GiI	Ci (Mi)		Az

Experimental part. A portable HE600 Jobin Yvon Raman microscope was used for the measurements. A red He-Ne laser (632.8 nm) was used as excitation source and a CCD detector with 1024 x 254 pixels cooled to -70°C. Normally an Olympus 50x fluorite objective was used at full laser power.

### Technical Solutions for some hues

codex	Gold p/s	Silver p/s	Pink	Violet	Green	Prepar	ink	relief
aF6.9				L		Mi		
aF9.16	p/s		L	L			FeG, Ci	Bi
aG9.2	p/s				In+Ma		C, Ci	Bi
aG9.3	p/s		Ci, L			He	FeG, Ci	Bi, Li?
aG9.6	p/s		L			Gy, He	FeG, Ci	Bi
aG9.26	p			L				Bi
aG9.27	p/s					Mi	FeG	
aH9.7	p/s		L	L			FeG, Ci	
aJ9.21				L			FeG	
aJ9.26	s							
aL9.28	p/s		L	L		Gy	FeG	Bi
aP9.28	p/s	p	L	L			FeG	
aQ6.2	s			L			FeG, Ci	Bi+Az
aS2.16								
aS2.31	p/s		Bi+Mi				C	Bi
aS2.38	p/s			L			FeG, Ci, Az	
aT4.13	s	p	L			Gy	FeG	Bi
aT4.14	s			R+Az		Mi	FeG, Mi	Bi
aT9.33	s						FeG	Bi
aU6.7	p/s	p		L, Az+R		Gy	FeG, Ci	Bi, Li
aW8.20	p			L			FeG, Ci	
aW9.13							FeG	

### Bibliographic Note:

P. BARALDI, G. MOSCARDI, M. RICCI, P. DI PIETRO, Indagine su alcuni frammenti pergamenei da rilegature: materiali, tecniche, testi, problemi di recupero, Atti del Congresso A.I.Ar, Firenze (2007) pp141-151

P. BARALDI, G. MOSCARDI, P. BENSI, M. ACETO, L. TASSI, *Investigation on Palette and Techniques of Some High Middle-age Codices by Raman Microscopy, IRUG Conference Wien 2008.*

C. BERNHEIMER, *Catalogo dei manoscritti orientali della Biblioteca Estense*, Roma 1960

M. C. CAPUTO, *Manoscritti entrati in biblioteca a cominciare dall'anno 1761 e la loro provenienza* (BEUMo, Beta.24.9)

L. CARBONIERI, *Cenni storici della R. Biblioteca Estense in Modena*, Modena 1873

P. e P.L. FANTELLI, *L'inventario della collezione Obizzi al Catajo*, in "Bollettino del Museo Civico di Padova", a. LXXI (1982), pp. 101-238

D. FAVA-M. SALMI, *I manoscritti miniati della Biblioteca Estense di Modena*, Firenze-Milano, 1950-1973



G. FUMAGALLI, *L'arte della legatura alla corte degli Estensi a Ferrara e a Modena dal sec. XV al XIX*, Firenze 1913

G. GALVANI, *La R. Biblioteca Estense durante il regno di Francesco IV*, in “Alla memoria di Francesco IV. Tributo della R. Accademia di Scienze Lettere ed Arti di Modena. Parte prima”, Modena 1846

A. LOMBARDI, *Storia della Biblioteca Estense*, sec. XIX (BEUMo, Camp. 2047 = gamma.O.1.21)

L. RIZZOLI, *Il castello del Catajo nel padovano e il testamento del marchese Tommaso degli Obizzi (3 giugno 1803)*, in: “Archivio Veneto-Tridentino”, 4 (1923), pp. 127-146

A. R. VENTURI, *La raccolta libraria di Tommaso Obizzi, corollario delle sue collezioni eclettiche*, in “Gli Estensi e il Cataio. Aspetti del collezionismo tra Sette e Ottocento”, Milano 2007

F. A. VISCONTI, *Stima dell'eredità Obizzi* (BEUMo, Cat. 19.1)

Figures

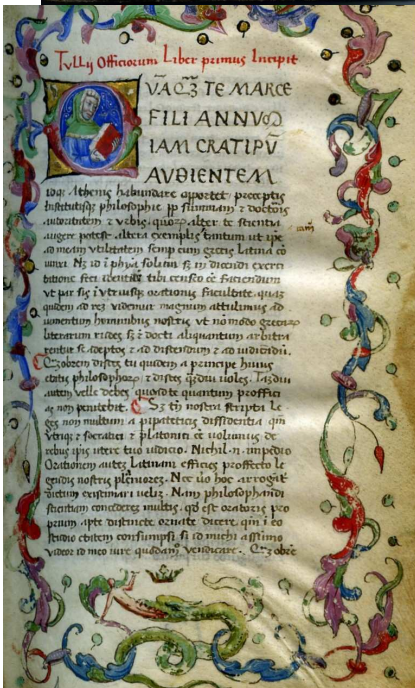


Fig.1 a Cover with a worked ivory insert, 1b folio with an ex-libris, 1c illuminated folio.