

# ‘Il più bello gabinetto delle stampe che esiste’: a (failed) project for the Ortalli collection of prints at the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma

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## Introduction

If one visits the website of the Palatina library in Parma (Biblioteca Palatina, Complesso Monumentale della Pilotta) looking for information regarding the Ortalli collection of prints, one might be surprised to find it listed under the category ‘library holdings’ (*patrimonio bibliografico*) instead of under ‘artistic holdings’ (*patrimonio artistico*).<sup>1</sup> The categorization and the location of prints can tell us a lot about evolving assessments of the meaning and function of the printed image. Today broadly recognised as works of art in their own right, prints have long been understood to serve a mediating role in relation to other visual or textual information. To this day, groups of prints are accommodated in every kind of cultural institution—from museums to libraries, from archives to art academies—a fragmented distribution that appears to be starker in Italy than in other European countries. Prints are often found in paper-based collections where they are collected and kept in conjunction with drawings. But while drawings are normally presented and described as works of art, in some contexts (such as the abovementioned website) prints still bear the signs of their ‘double nature’: they are at once comparable to works of art and to library material, especially when kept in bound albums. Even the Italian Code of cultural heritage and landscape, the main Italian source of law defining cultural heritage to assist its protection and enhancement, hints at this. Issued in 2004, the Code does list ‘rare and prestigious’ prints under cultural goods, but in the same group as books, manuscripts, letters and incunabula.<sup>2</sup> This situation demonstrates concrete issues that have long affected

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<sup>1</sup> <https://complessopilotta.it/biblioteca-palatina/#patrimonio>.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Sono altresì beni culturali ... i manoscritti, gli autografi, i carteggi, gli incunaboli, nonché i libri, le stampe e le incisioni, con relative matrici, aventi carattere di rarità e di pregio.’  
(*Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio, ai sensi dell’articolo 10 della legge 6 luglio 2002, n. 137,*

curators and researchers' work. Suffice it to say, prints housed in libraries might still be catalogued in the Italian network of libraries (SBN – Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale) following the rules issued by the national authority for bibliographic description standards (ICCU – Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico). To launch a simple query for a single-sheet engraving on the SBN online public access catalogue is enough to realise how poorly the ICCU standard, which was originally designed to describe books, suits the technical and iconographic features of prints.<sup>3</sup>

This extremely uneven situation, in which prints are not only housed in different kinds of institutions but also inconsistently described, cannot be explained by simply studying the origins of each individual collection. On the contrary, more elements need to be taken into account. Scholarship on Italian print collections has so far given little attention to curatorial approaches and to political as well as administrative factors that have impacted the location of prints, whether they landed in public libraries, art academies, or museums. Ginevra Mariani and Miriam Fileti Mazza have investigated the museological histories of, respectively, the Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe (now Istituto Centrale per la Grafica) in Rome and the Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe of the Uffizi in Florence.<sup>4</sup> Alessandra Giovannini Luca and Federica Panero have offered insights into state collections of prints in Turin.<sup>5</sup> These individual case studies point to a larger need to examine the

legislative decree no. 42, 22 January 2004, parte II, titolo I, capo I, articolo 10, comma 3. The full text can be found here: <https://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/testi/04042dl.htm>. It was the so-called Commissione Franceschini, an investigative committee established in 1964 to conduct a survey of cultural heritage in Italy, that first raised awareness of the fact that prints sit at the intersection between art and books: see *Atti della Commissione Franceschini, Dichiarazione LIV*, where prints are listed together with books (*beni librari*) <http://www.icar.beniculturali.it/biblio/pdf/Studi/franceschini.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance the catalogue entry in the SBN online public access catalogue for Raffaello Guidi's engraving *Faciam vos fieri piscatores hominum* housed in the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome ([https://opac.sbn.it/opacsbn/opaclib?saveparams=false&db=solr\\_iccu&select\\_db=solr\\_iccu&searchForm=opac%2Fficcu%2Ffree.jsp&resultForward=opac%2Fficcu%2Ffull.jsp&do\\_cmd=search\\_show\\_cmd&nentries=1&rpnlabel=+Tutti+i+campi+%3D+faciam+vost+fier+i+%28parole+in+AND%29+&rpnquery=%40attrset+bib-1+&40attr+1%3D1016+&40attr+4%3D6+&22faciam+vost+fier+i%22&fname=none&from=1](https://opac.sbn.it/opacsbn/opaclib?saveparams=false&db=solr_iccu&select_db=solr_iccu&searchForm=opac%2Fficcu%2Ffree.jsp&resultForward=opac%2Fficcu%2Ffull.jsp&do_cmd=search_show_cmd&nentries=1&rpnlabel=+Tutti+i+campi+%3D+faciam+vost+fier+i+%28parole+in+AND%29+&rpnquery=%40attrset+bib-1+&40attr+1%3D1016+&40attr+4%3D6+&22faciam+vost+fier+i%22&fname=none&from=1)). The print is classified as a 'monograph', inscriptions are provided in the 'general notes', and the subject is described in the section 'summary, abstract'. Moreover, the hyperlink leads not to a digital reproduction of the impression of the engraving held at the Biblioteca Casanatense but, instead, a reproduction of the impression held at the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo. For a draft of ICCU guidelines for cataloguing prints, drawings and posters in SBN (July 2012) see

[https://www.iccu.sbn.it/export/sites/iccu/documenti/2012/graficaPDFluglio2012/txt\\_vs0.pdf](https://www.iccu.sbn.it/export/sites/iccu/documenti/2012/graficaPDFluglio2012/txt_vs0.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Ginevra Mariani, ed., *Il Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe. Storia e collezioni 1875–1975*, Roma: De Luca, 2001; Miriam Fileti Mazza, *Storia di una collezione. I disegni e le stampe degli Uffizi dal periodo napoleonico al primo conflitto mondiale*, Firenze: Olschki, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Alessandra Giovannini Luca, *Alessandro Baudi di Vesme e la scoperta dell'arte in Piemonte. Erudizione, musei e tutela in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, Milano: Ledizioni, 2015, 159–176; Federica Panero, 'Stampe a Torino 1863–1893. Giovanni Vico conoscitore e collezionista', in Chiara Gauna, ed., *La Sfida delle stampe. Parigi Torino 1650–1906*, Torino: Editris, 2017, 129–149.

curatorship of prints held in specific repositories in the context of broader shifts and ongoing tensions in the assessment of prints. At the same time, a national history of the evolution of public libraries and art museums and the rise of dedicated departments such as print rooms should be taken into account as well. Through analysis of the Ortalli collection, this article will attempt such a synthesis.

After briefly introducing the Ortalli collection of prints in Parma, this article first outlines the overall state of print collections housed in public libraries during the first decades following the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. The rising value accorded prints during the nineteenth century will be considered along with how public organisations reacted to it. Secondly, a (failed) project to relocate the Ortalli print collection from the Biblioteca Palatina to the royal art museum (Regia Galleria) in Parma will be reconstructed. Thanks to archival research conducted across several institutions, the attitudes of librarians, museum curators and government employees can be integrated into the final analysis, which will reflect upon the importance of accounting for curatorial approaches when studying print collections.

### The Ortalli prints: From private collection to public benefit

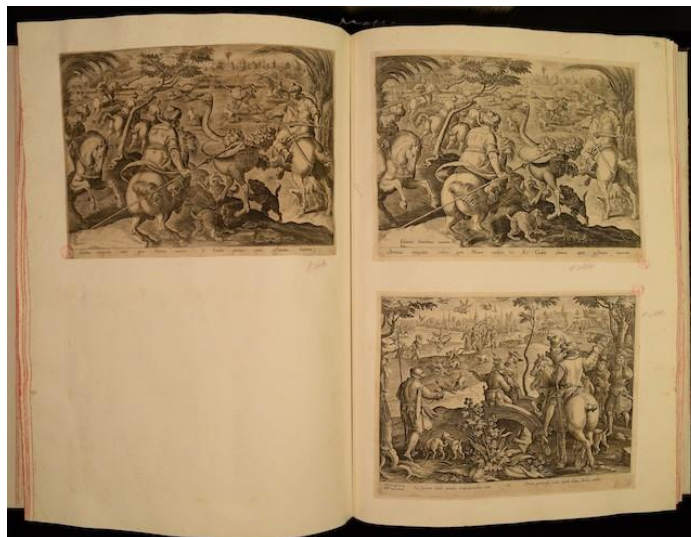


Figure 1 Three engravings by Jan van der Straet (1523–1605) with hunting scenes, from the Ortalli album no. 265 *Stradano – Caccia e Pesca*. Parma: Biblioteca Palatina (Complesso Monumentale della Pillotta). Courtesy of Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo.

The story of the Ortalli prints as a public collection in the early nineteenth century began with a bequest. In 1827, the collector Massimiliano Ortalli (1742–1833) sold his roughly 65,000 prints—largely bound in 487 leather albums—to Paolo Toschi (1788–1854), professor of engraving and director of the art academy in Parma.<sup>6</sup> Two

<sup>6</sup> For a profile of the collection, see Roberta Cristofori, 'L'insigne ornamento', in Roberta Cristofori, Maria Grazia De Rubeis, eds, *L'Insigne ornamento, La raccolta di stampe di Massimiliano Ortalli nella Biblioteca Palatina di Parma*, Parma: MUP, 2014, 9–58. Ortalli assembled drawings as well: see Giovanni Cirillo, Giuseppe Godi, eds, *I disegni della Biblioteca Palatina di Parma*, Parma: Banca Emiliana, 1991. The entire collection is digitised and can be searched on the web portal Imago:

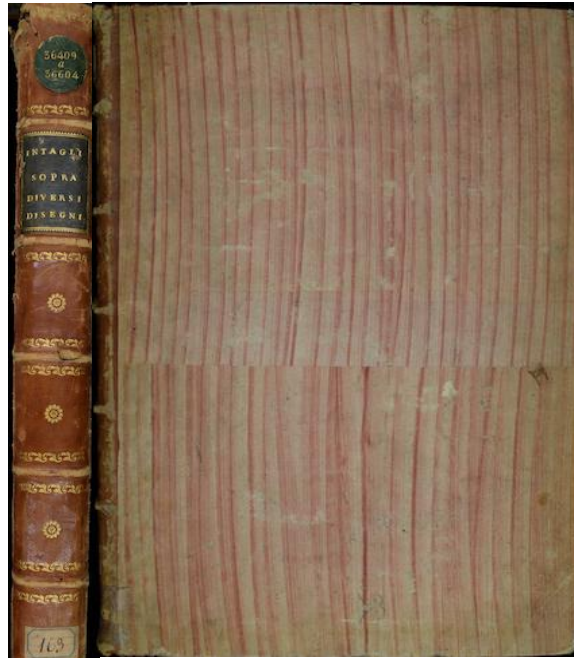


Figure 2 Spine and front cover of the Ortalli album no. 264 *Intagli sopra diversi disegni*. Parma: Biblioteca Palatina (Complesso Monumentale della Pillotta). Courtesy of Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo.

main incentives led Toschi to pay 45,000 *lire nuove* to acquire this vast collection. First of all, he wished to avoid a great loss to the Duchy of Parma, such as the city would have encountered if the collection had ended up abroad. Loss of cultural patrimony was already an open wound in the Parma area where, since the eighteenth century, several families had split up and sold their collections to buyers outside the Duchy. Secondly, Toschi wished to retain the print collection at the art academy of Parma for its strong didactic value. The collection comprised Italian and western European artistic schools from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Notably advised by print collector and scholar Pietro Zani (1748–1821), Ortalli had arranged the prints in bound albums (figs 1, 2), mostly organised by schools (*Scuola Fiorentina*, four albums; *Scuola Bolognese*, two albums; *Scuola Tedesca*, three albums, etc.) and by artists (*Opere dei Carracci*, two albums; *Luca d'Olanda e Gio Teodoro de Bry*, one album; *Opere di Jacopo Callot*, two albums, etc.). Others contained prints collected for their subject matter (*Bassirilievi e camei*, one album; *Animali d'ogni genere*, two albums, etc.) or technique (*Acquafortisti*, four albums). Toschi firmly believed that such a visual atlas of art history would be best appreciated at the art academy, where the prints could be instrumental in facilitating students' education. There they would serve as 'a kind of library of fine arts, of the utmost necessity in as much as both professors and students could learn what the old masters had achieved.'<sup>7</sup> He

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<http://imago.sebina.it/SebinaOpacIMAGO/Opac>. A list of the print albums can be found here: <http://www.bibliotecapalatina.beniculturali.it/index.php?it/123/disegni-e-stampe>.

<sup>7</sup>'In totale questa collezione mi sembra più convenire ad una pubblica accademia che ad un amatore di stampe. Poiché la prima avrebbe in essa direi come una biblioteca di Belle Arti che rendesi pur necessaria onde sì i Professori e sì gli Alunni possano sapere e conoscere quanto è stato fatto da' nostri antichi Maestri. Anzi se la stessa che è l'unica in questa città fosse mai venduta a qualche straniero, ciò sarebbe per noi una grave perdita' (Parma,

cherished the collection for the possibility of accessing *storie* and *maniere*; as such, the Ortalli albums had a special value for their iconographic content as well as for enshrining aspects of *disegno*, which played a key part in the learning process at the art academy. These aspects prevailed over the prints' technical features and their significance as works of art in their own right. Toschi was not alone in his thinking: Count Giacomo Carrara (1714–1796) in Bergamo and Marquis Luigi Malaspina di Sannazzaro (1754–1835) in Pavia marshalled very similar arguments when they chose to entrust their collections of art on paper to art academies.<sup>8</sup>

The price demanded by Ortalli was, however, quite high. Such an expensive acquisition could hardly be borne by a single individual. Furthermore, the considerable value and significance of the collection called for the intervention of a higher authority. This is why in 1828 the archduchess Marie Louise (1791–1847) – who reigned in Parma from 1814 until her death – stepped in and bought the prints from Toschi to secure them for the city. Despite Toschi's prominent position within the art academy and in the city of Parma, Marie Louise decided to hand over the 64,975 prints to the Biblioteca Palatina founded in 1761 by Duke Philip Bourbon (1720–1765), rather than to the academy.<sup>9</sup> Since at the art academy admittance to graphic material would have been restricted to artists and art students only, one might surmise that her decision was grounded on ethical considerations revolving around accessibility, as this was the case elsewhere. For instance, the prints (together with drawings) of Filippo Juvarra (1678–1736) and his students were acquired by the Biblioteca Universitaria in Turin in 1762–1763, and the prints collected by the Abbot Francesco Marucelli (1625–1703) became part of the Marucelliana library in Florence in 1783.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the format in which prints were usually arranged (bound albums) had caused such collections to gravitate almost naturally towards the shelves of a library.

### Managing prints in Italian libraries after 1861: A difficult heritage

At the time of Italian Unification in 1861, the Ortalli, together with the Marucelliana in Florence (approximately 12,000 prints in thirty albums and 1,000 drawings in six albums), were perhaps the most important collections of prints bequeathed to

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Biblioteca Palatina [hereafter, BPP], Fondo Moreau, cassetta 84, fascicolo, 1/I, 28 May 1828 and following letters; see also Cristofori, 'L'insigne ornamento', 20–21, 46).

<sup>8</sup> Laura Aldovini, 'Luigi Malaspina di Sannazzaro and the "accessories" for a print collection', in Andrea Gáldy, Sylvia Heudecker, eds, *Collecting prints and drawings*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, 203–218; Giovanna Perini Folesani, 'Count Giacomo Carrara and the foundation of an art academy in Bergamo', *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 5–6, 1986 (1987), 139–162.

<sup>9</sup> The handover certificate listed 16,906 prints of all schools; 8,920 portraits; 3,227 'Paesi'; 35,742 prints in books; 180 single sheets (BPP, Fondo Moreau, cassetta 84, fascicolo 1/I, *Convenzione della Presidenza dell'Interno*, 21 July 1828; see Cristofori, 'L'insigne ornamento', 48). On the foundation of the library see Andrea De Pasquale, 'La nascita della Biblioteca Parmense', in Andrea De Pasquale, Giovanni Godi, eds, *Il Ducato in scena. Parma 1769: feste, libri, politica*, exhib. cat., Parma: Grafiche Step, 2009, 41–52.

<sup>10</sup> On these two collections see, respectively: Panero, *Stampe a Torino*; Luisa Berretti, 'Sulla collezione di grafica della Biblioteca Marucelliana dal 1804 a Nerino Ferri', *Studi di Memofonte*, 3, 2009, 1–15.

Italian public libraries. Numerous smaller collections, meanwhile, found their way to other state and civic libraries. Their distribution, at times quite random even within geographically contained areas, frequently reflected little more than the desires or personal connections of the donors to one or another institution. Comprising both reproductive and original prints, collections in libraries around the country included works that ranged from illustrations to architecture, ornament, books of models, trading cards and ephemera (*fogli volanti*), all assembled to the collectors' tastes and arranged following different criteria. Once they landed in a library, prints were often classed with books but could not be treated as such, because of the preponderance of visual over written elements they contained. Sometimes the sheets were arranged by format, pasted or even trimmed to fit into certain albums. Inventories, when present, rarely offered details on the contents of the groups of prints the library inherited, often en bloc. Usually only the most significant specimens bore proper titles and were listed under the artists' names. Others were simply and collectively described as a batch or sheaf, without mention of the artists: a sign that owners may have collected prints not for who made them but rather for what they illustrated.<sup>11</sup>

Libraries and art academies were not alone in collecting prints—museums, archives, and schools owned them too. Technical features of prints, as well as uses and collecting practices established during the previous centuries, had led to an extremely fragmented distribution across public organisations. Despite permeating every corner of the peninsula, however, prints played no part in the first inventory campaigns promoted post-unification by the Italian ministry of public education.<sup>12</sup> These surveys mainly addressed artistic and archaeological artefacts, and were above all aimed at preventing sales and dispersions abroad, although priority was also given to arranging and presenting the national heritage to the Italian public. Indeed, both the objects and their display were enlisted in the development of a controlled narrative of great educational importance within the nation-building process. Civic and state museums, where such artefacts were assembled, came to be perceived as the keepers of, respectively, local and national memory.<sup>13</sup> There was

<sup>11</sup> See for example what Fabia Borroni pointed out about the Fondo Magliabechiano in the national library in Florence, whose catalogue listed the album *Antiquarum statuarum urbis Romae liber primus* by Giovanni Battista de' Cavalieri. Along with de' Cavalieri's plates, the album actually included, among others, a series of prints *d'après* Jacques Callot and Antonio Tempesta, ink sketches and watercolours by two other artists and a series of etchings by Giuseppe Maria Mitelli (Fabia Borroni, 'Le stampe della Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze', in *Bollettino d'informazioni – Associazione Italiana Biblioteche*, 1:3, 1961, 111–117: 113–114).

<sup>12</sup> In Italy the ministry for public education (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione; hereafter, the ministry) was in charge of cultural heritage until a specific ministry for heritage was established in 1975 (initially Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, now—as of 2021—Ministero della cultura).

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of the complex problems and issues relating to cultural heritage faced by the Italian state in the aftermath of the unification, see Andrea Emiliani, *Una politica dei beni culturali*, Torino: Einaudi, 1974, 66–97, and Andrea Emiliani, 'I materiali e le istituzioni', in Giovanni Previtali, ed., *Storia dell'arte italiana*, I, *Materiali e problemi*, 1, *Questioni e metodi*, Torino: Einaudi, 1979, 99–163, who focus on the relationship between politics, conservation and the concept of heritage; Federica Papi, *Cultura e tutela nell'Italia Unita 1865–1902*, Pian di

little doubt expressed as to where paintings, sculptures, and antiquities belonged, and what role they could play in the development of national identity. Prints, by contrast, remained a class of objects with no clear-cut institutional home or national role.

Not that the cultural administrators of the country were totally unaware of 'special' print collections within libraries. Shortly after the Duchy of Parma was annexed to the Reign of Sardinia in 1860, the ministry for cultural matters asked the director of the Biblioteca Palatina, Angelo Pezzana (1772–1862), to provide information regarding the inventory of all the ancient and modern prints that were housed in the library of Parma. Additionally, the ministry wanted to know which prints were the rarest and most important and asked Pezzana to clarify their value.<sup>14</sup> Apart from isolated cases like this one, which at least suggests awareness of collections of this kind, the state of prints in libraries was not a matter of discussion until well into the 1870s. Surveys conducted between 1863 and 1865 and subsequent regulations issued in the 1870s and 1880s prove that indeed there was an attempt to rationalise the organisation and collection management of public libraries, but chiefly in their administrative and organisational aspects. The regulations approved were extremely vague as far as special collections (which included prints) were concerned. No specific guidelines to collect, store and present prints to the public existed.<sup>15</sup>

The cataloguing of print collections was often begun upon the initiative of the institutions' directors. Lack of resources and of established standards, however, often prevented cataloguing campaigns from reaching a satisfying conclusion. From the moment the Ortalli prints arrived at the Biblioteca Palatina, several cataloguing campaigns were initiated, but none was completed. It was not until 1869 that the Palatina library director Federico Odorici (1806–1884) proposed to discard the classification which the library had used up to that point, which was based on the name of the *inventor*, the painter whose design the print mediated. Instead, he introduced a system more appropriate to prints, in which they were listed first by

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Porto: Tau, 2008, who discusses the most debated issues of the time through analyzing journals and annals such as *La Nuova Antologia*, *Arte e Storia*, *Archivio storico dell'arte*, *L'Arte*, *Il Marzocco*; Simona Troilo, *La patria e la memoria. Tutela e patrimonio culturale nell'Italia unita*, Milano: Electa, 2005, on the concept of *patria*, memory and civic institutions; Antonella Gioli, "'Centri" e "periferie" nella storia del patrimonio culturale: l'istituzione di musei e pinacoteche nei verbali dei Comuni', in Andrea Ragusa, ed., *La nazione allo specchio. Il bene culturale nell'Italia unita*, Manduria-Bari-Roma: Piero Lacaita Editore, 2012, 59–90.

<sup>14</sup> 'Se siavi in codesto uffizio apposito inventario delle novantamila stampe antiche e moderne che si conservano nella Reale Parmense Biblioteca; Quale di esse stampe siano le più rare ed importanti: di queste dovrà spedirsi, del che si prega, apposita nota con quegli appunti che valgano a dimostrare il pregio.' (BPP, Fondo Moreau, cassetta 84, fascicolo 1/I, ministry to director of the Palatina, 21 June 1860).

<sup>15</sup> For an overview on the history of state libraries after the unification see Mauro Tosti-Croce, 'L'amministrazione delle biblioteche dall'Unità al 1975', in Direzione generale per i beni librari e gli istituti culturali, ed., *Archivi di biblioteche: per la storia delle biblioteche pubbliche statali*, Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2002, XLII–XCIII; Francesco Sicilia, ed., *Tra passato e futuro. Le Biblioteche pubbliche statali dall'Unità d'Italia al 2000*, Roma: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2004. Useful material concerning library directors can also be found in <https://www.aib.it/aib/stor/stor.htm>.

schools and then alphabetically, under the name of the engraver.<sup>16</sup> The Palatina was not the first public institution in Italy where this system, reflecting the evolving importance of printmakers' identity and agency, was adopted. Odorici may have first seen it in use elsewhere, for example at the Brera art academy in Milan where he studied. There he may have seen the Bianconi print collection, whose arrangement was turned from painter-based to engraver-based by Pietro Zani in 1787.<sup>17</sup> Odorici may also have been advised to introduce this classification system at the Palatina by art historian and bibliophile Count Leopoldo Cicognara (1767–1834), who reportedly criticised the classification conventions for prints previously in use at the Palatina.<sup>18</sup>

With regard to the display and storage of print collections, by the end of nineteenth century Italian librarians could rely on general library management literature such as *Della collocazione dei libri nelle pubbliche biblioteche*, the fourth part of Giuseppe Fumagalli's *Trattato generale di biblioteconomia* (1890). In the few paragraphs devoted to print collections, Fumagalli suggested following the British Museum's example in organising exhibitions, while he recommended Parisian libraries' cutting-edge system for arranging and storing prints in screw post binders.<sup>19</sup> However, the extent to which library directors could choose what to present to the public and how to present it remains unclear. Evidence shows that some display projects were subject to authorisation by the minister. In 1869 Odorici asked permission to display 'the many and beautiful prints of the Palatina, either bought or received as a gift from the former princes' in the library's 'great room of Marie Louise'. These would form 'a permanent public exhibition to testify to

<sup>16</sup> BPP, Fondo Moreau, cassetta 84, fascicolo 1/I, Odorici to minister, 31 December 1869. To avoid an 'informe pasticcio', Odorici described the new inventory to be prepared 'l'uno a guisa d'inventario a numeri progressivi, l'altro secondo gl'incisori' in a report published in 1873: Federico Odorici, *La nazionale biblioteca di Parma, relazione di Federico Odorici*, Torino: Tipografia C. Favale e comp., 1873, 77. See also Roberta Cristofori, 'Delle ragioni di un catalogo di stampe', in Roberta Cristofori, ed., *Agostino Annibale e Ludovico Carracci. Le stampe della Biblioteca Palatina di Parma*, Bologna: Compositori, 2005, XCVI.

<sup>17</sup> Giuseppina Benassati, 'L'Arti per via. Percorsi nella catalogazione delle stampe', in Giuseppina Benassati, ed., *L'Arti per via. Percorsi nella catalogazione delle opere grafiche*, Bologna: Compositori, 2001, 22. Engraver-based arrangements or catalogues existed in 'private' libraries too, such as the Biblioteca Corsiniana in Rome. Following the rearrangement by Luigi M. Rezzi, in 1858 librarian Francesco Cerroti announced that he intended to draw up a new catalogue of the print collection, which would list prints by engraver's name. Francesco Cerroti, *Memorie per servire alla storia della incisione compilate nella descrizione e dichiarazione delle stampe che trovansi nella Biblioteca Corsiniana*, I, Roma: Dallo stabilimento Tipografico di via del Corso 687, 1858, no page.

<sup>18</sup> BPP, Fondo Moreau, cassetta 84, fascicolo 1/I, Odorici to minister, 31 December 1869. In previous years, Cicognara had repeatedly advised Odorici's predecessor Angelo Pezzana on the library collection's content and arrangement (Cristofori, 'Delle ragioni di un catalogo di stampe', LXXXVII, LCIII).

<sup>19</sup> Giuseppe Fumagalli, *Trattato generale di biblioteconomia*, IV, *Della collocazione dei libri nelle pubbliche biblioteche*, Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1890, 62. There is no evidence that Odorici was aware of the screw post binder system that was later recommended by Fumagalli. Some of the original bindings of the Ortalli albums were replaced with screw post binders during the first half of the twentieth century.



national art and to instruct its followers'.<sup>20</sup> The display, where prints were 'arranged in good order, according to schools' was first presented at the Congresso Artistico Italiano, an art congress which took place in Parma in 1870 (fig. 3).<sup>21</sup>



Figure 3 Unknown photographer, *Salone Maria Luigia* (with a display of prints set-up during the Congresso Artistico Italiano), 1870. From Federico Odorici, *La nazionale biblioteca di Parma, relazione di Federico Odorici*, Torino: Tipografia C. Favale e comp., 1873, unnumbered page.

### Prints from libraries to museums?

As scholars increasingly turned their attention to prints housed in Italian private and public collections, the lack of a rational system for arranging the latter progressively came into focus. Striving to know more about these collections, scholars publicly lamented the challenges they faced when attempting to access the prints as well as the institutions' inadequate conservation methods. In 1886 the Piedmontese artist and director of the royal picture gallery (Regia Pinacoteca) Francesco Gamba (1818–1887) complained about the way prints were 'left piled up ... in a dark closet' at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Turin.<sup>22</sup> After one of his visits to Italy, Max Lehrs (1855–1938), director of the print room (Kupferstichkabinett) in Dresden, described in the journal *Archivio storico dell'arte* the dangers of prints that were exposed to unsafe levels of light. He judged the situation especially precarious

<sup>20</sup> 'Le molte e belle stampe della Palatina, od acquistate o avute in dono dai cessati principi ... [of which] si facesse pubblica mostra, ma con istabile collocamento, a testimonio dell'arte nazionale e ad istruzione de' suoi cultori ... nella gran sala di Maria Luigia' (Odorici, *La nazionale biblioteca*, 18, 77).

<sup>21</sup> 'in bell'ordine schierate a ragione di scuole' (BPP, Fondo Moreau, cassetta 84, fascicolo 1/I, Odorici to ministry, 31 December 1869). On the congress see Vanja Strukelj, 'Città in mostra. Parma 1870, immagine debole di un potere in crisi', in *Ricerche di S/Confine*, I:1, 2010, 58–81.

<sup>22</sup> 'in un oscuro gabinetto ... gettata e ammonticchiata' (Turin, Biblioteca della Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Torino Miscellanea Vico, fascicolo L inf I 25, mazzo 6, Vico, corrispondenza relativa alla Galleria dal 1870 al 1885, Gamba to minister, 18 January 1875. The letter is published in Panero, *Stampe a Torino*, 148).

at the Biblioteca Classense in Ravenna and at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan.<sup>23</sup> It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that the decades following the unification of Italy saw the first attempts to transfer prints from libraries to museums.

The greatest relocation of print albums from an Italian library to a museum took place in 1895 when a number of those held at the Corsini library in Rome were moved to the Galleria Nazionale.<sup>24</sup> Similar projects had been discussed, however, since the late 1870s. In the 1880s, Gamba and the artist and collector Giovanni Vico (1812–1893) tried very hard to obtain the prints housed at the Biblioteca Universitaria for the new department of prints and drawings they established at the Regia Pinacoteca in Turin. This collection comprised precious works by Andrea Mantegna, Jacopo Caraglio, Agostino Carracci, Guido Reni, Nicolas Béatrizet, and Nicoletto da Modena but was locked in a 'dark closet' away from the library reading room and not easily accessible to library users. Gamba and Vico repeatedly brought their case to the minister in Rome, but the reluctance of library director Gaspare Gorresio (1808–1891) to give up the collection never allowed the matter to be settled.<sup>25</sup> In Florence in April 1879 Pasquale Nerino Ferri (1851–1917) asked to have the prints housed in the Biblioteca Marucelliana handed over to the Uffizi where he was in charge of art on paper. According to Ferri not only would the Marucelliana prints fill gaps in the Uffizi's own print collection, but they would 'enjoy a worthy and far more suitable setting'. He maintained that only by being kept at the museum could the prints be studied, catalogued, and displayed to the public. At the Marucelliana library, he feared, the prints risked remaining 'almost neglected and unknown'.<sup>26</sup> The relocation never took place, however, because the prints' donor had explicitly stated in his will that no objects from his collection were to leave the Biblioteca Marucelliana.<sup>27</sup>

Things went differently in Bologna. Thanks to the persistent requests of Anacleto Guadagnini (1832–1919), director of the art academy's *pinacoteca* (which became the independent Regia Pinacoteca in 1882), most of the collection of drawings and prints from the local university library was transferred to the museum. In this case, the handover solved a safety issue: since 1868, several thefts had deprived the library of precious engraved sheets, specifically in the section of German masters.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See Max Lehrs, 'Una nuova incisione in rame del maestro alle Banderuole in Ravenna', in *Archivio storico dell'arte*, III–IV, 1889, 165–166.

<sup>24</sup> See Mariani, *Il Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe*, 17–19.

<sup>25</sup> The events are described in Panero, *Stampe a Torino*, 133–135, based on the correspondence between Gamba and Vico (Turin, Biblioteca della Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Torino Miscellanea Vico, fascicolo L inf I 25, mazzo 6, Vico, corrispondenza relativa alla Galleria dal 1870 al 1885).

<sup>26</sup> He even defined the museum as a 'natural' site for the prints: '...quasi negletta e sconosciuta, perché fuori della sua sede naturale. Sono convinto che tale disposizione non potrebbe che essere bene accolta dagli artisti ed intelligenti, sì nostrani che esteri, i quali accorrono ad ammirare i capolavori racchiusi in questo tempio dell'arte, dove senza dubbio quella insigne collezione avrebbe più degna e conveniente sua sede.' (Firenze, Archivio delle Gallerie degli Uffizi, filza B 1879, posizione 1, inserto 60, Ferri to Pigorini, 3 April 1879).

<sup>27</sup> The events are discussed in Fileti Mazza, *Storia di una collezione*, 60 and Berretti, 'Sulla collezione di grafica', 5.

<sup>28</sup> Andrea Emiliani, 'Il gabinetto dei disegni e delle stampe', in Andrea Emiliani, *La Pinacoteca*

Although local circumstances significantly contributed to the success or failure of the relocation efforts mentioned above, such efforts were not isolated. They were products of the evolving understanding of art museums' mission. While initially conceived primarily for art students, they were increasingly recognised as places for public enjoyment and as resources for scholars in the growing disciplines of art history and archaeology. This recognition had its pivotal moment in 1882 with the separation of art and archaeological collections in Milan, Bologna, Venice, and other cities from the art academies to which such collections were attached.<sup>29</sup> Connected to this institutional transformation was a budding reconceptualization of individual categories of art, including works on paper. These changes, including those touching on prints, were international in scope. Similar relocations of prints from one institution to another had taken place in France, Germany and other countries since the late eighteenth century. As in Italy, debates about proper repository for prints were embedded in a broader discourse around their reception.<sup>30</sup>

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*Nazionale di Bologna, Notizie storiche e itinerario servizi didattici*, Bologna: Ed. Alfa, 1979, 43–47: 43; Elena Rossoni, 'Nuovi studi sulla collezione di stampe della Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna: ricerche su donazioni e acquisti del secolo XVIII', in *Aperto. Bollettino del Gabinetto dei disegni e delle stampe della Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna*, 1, 2008, 3–26: 9. 240 prints from the former engraving school within the art academy, collected by Francesco Rosaspina for teaching purposes, were also moved to the Pinacoteca (see Paul J. Kristeller, 'R. Galleria di Bologna. Raccolta di incisioni', in *Le Gallerie Nazionali italiane: informazioni e documenti*, 2, 1894–1895, 163–167: 165).

<sup>29</sup> 'Le gallerie, le pinacoteche ed i Musei archeologici, annessi alle Università, alle Accademie ed Istituti di Belle Arti, cesseranno di fare parte dei detti Istituti scientifici o artistici, ed avranno amministrazione propria.' (Royal Decree no. 678, 13 March 1882). See Martina Lerda, *Le pinacoteche statali nell'Italia unita. Politiche museale e affermazione della disciplina storico-artistica (1859-1882)*, PhD Dissertation, Università degli Studi di Udine, 2014-2015, 223-228.

<sup>30</sup> Comparable events took place at least in Sweden, England, Germany, and France. The royal Swedish collection of prints and drawings was initially housed in the royal library but was transferred to the royal museum in 1794 (Jan Af Burén, *Grafik. Konst & Kunskap på papper*, Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 2009). Originally belonging to the department of printed books, in 1808 prints and drawings at the British Museum became part of the department of antiquities (Anthony Griffiths, Reginald Williams, *The Department of prints & drawings in the British Museum. User's guide*, London: British Museum Publications Limited 1987, 1; Felicity Myrone *Prints and drawings at the British Museum and British Library*, <https://www.bl.uk/picturing-places/articles/prints-and-drawings-at-the-british-museum-and-british-library>). During the first decades of the nineteenth century, prints without text among those housed at the Hof- und Staatsbibliothek (today Bayerische Staatsbibliothek) in Munich were removed from albums and transferred to the Kupferstichsammlung (today Staatliche Graphische Sammlung) in the same city (Michael Semff, Kurt Zeitler, eds, *Künstler zeichnen, Sammler stiften. 250 Jahre Staatliche Graphische Sammlung München*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz 2008, I, 165). The proposed relocation of the Cabinet des Estampes of the Bibliothèque nationale to the Louvre, which however never took place, is discussed in Laure Beaumont-Maillet, 'Le Département des estampes et de la photographie de la Bibliothèque nationale de France et sa collection de dessins: aperçu historique et descriptif', in Laure Beaumont-Maillet, Gisèle Lambert, Jocelyn Bouquillard, eds, *Dessins de la Renaissance. Collection de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des estampes et de la photographie*, exhib. cat., Paris: BnF Editions 2003, 11–25: 11–12.

## Prints as works of art for the nation: Kristeller's plan for a print room in Parma

Among art historians specifically interested in printmaking, the Berlin-born Paul James Kristeller (1863–1931) was to become Italy's most enthusiastic advocate for relocating prints from libraries to museums.<sup>31</sup> Kristeller was not only a refined scholar but also a keen collections manager. His inclination towards curatorial work had likely arisen during his training at the royal print room (Königliches Kupferstichkabinett) in Berlin. He had worked there in the early 1890s under the direction of Friedrich Lippmann (1838–1903), who famously turned the Berlin museum of prints and drawings into a model for other collections.<sup>32</sup> In Berlin Kristeller observed the advantages of storing prints individually, that is, mounted on passepartouts rather than pasted in collectors' albums. Furthermore, he recognised that a card catalogue index could facilitate researching and locating prints in the museum holdings. Thanks to his frequent travels to study early Italian and German printmaking, Kristeller had grown well acquainted with public collections in Vienna, Paris, London and several other European cities. It was during these study trips that he acknowledged the organisational and methodological gap between Italian public collections of prints and the one in Berlin, especially in terms of accessibility and exhibition-making. Pushed by his love for Italian art, and drawing on Lippmann's example, he embarked on a mission to fix this organisational gap.

In 1894, the Italian ministry of public education hired Kristeller to rearrange collections of prints housed in state museums according to the method he had learnt in Berlin. The art historian detailed the tasks he would need to carry out. First of all, to detach the most valuable single-sheet prints from collectors' albums in order to mount them individually on passepartouts. Secondly, to store individually mounted prints in Solander-type boxes<sup>33</sup> and place them in cabinets.<sup>34</sup> Thirdly, to document

<sup>31</sup> Unlike the similarly-named Paul Oskar Kristeller (1905–1999), a renowned scholar of Renaissance Humanism, Paul James Kristeller is a lesser-known figure to this day, although he has long been recognised as an expert on early Renaissance Italian printmaking as well as on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century German illustrated books. See Silvia Massa, *The musealisation of prints and drawings and the birth of Gabinetti disegni e stampe in Italian state museums (1860–1909)*, PhD dissertation, IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca, 2019, chapters 4 and 5. In 2020 the Author organized an exhibition on Kristeller held at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (*Mich tröstet die Liebe zur Kunst. Paul J. Kristeller von Berlin nach Italien*, 30 June – 11 October 2020).

<sup>32</sup> See Max Lehrs, 'Zur Geschichte des Dresdner Kupferstichkabinetts', in *Mitteilungen aus den Sächsischen Kunstsammlungen*, III, 1912, 84–95: 84.

<sup>33</sup> While travelling with Sir Joseph Banks on Captain Cook's first voyage (1768–1771), staff member of the British Museum Daniel Solander (1733–1782) adopted boxes with three rigid sides in order to keep botanical specimens collected during the trip. An overview of the use of Solander boxes to store prints and drawings is provided by Niccolò Caldararo, 'The Solander box. Its varieties and its role as an archival unit for storage for prints and drawings in a museum, archive or gallery', in *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 12, 1993, 387–400; Joanna M. Kosek, *Conservation Mounting for Prints and Drawings. A Manual Based on Current Practice at the British Museum*, London: Archetype Publications, 2004, 8–9.

the prints using an index of catalogue cards in which the artist's name, engraver's name and subject were registered. Finally, to organise permanent and temporary displays to present the most important sections of the collection to the public. According to Kristeller's plan, all public collections of prints should be housed in dedicated museum departments (*gabinetti delle stampe*) and managed by specialist art historians, who would put into practice the curatorial plan that Kristeller had devised. He was convinced that only such a rational arrangement could support the advancement of printmaking as an art historical discipline, on the one hand, and help secure national heritage for the nation, on the other.

Kristeller was first assigned to the Regia Pinacoteca in Bologna to work on the Lambertini collection (1894–1895), but his ambitions went far beyond the scope of a single museum. Thanks to the help of Adolfo Venturi (1856–1941), who had facilitated his coming to Bologna, Kristeller aimed to start a national, centralised collection of prints and to build around it a 'network' of peripheral collections.<sup>35</sup> Venturi, who was quickly convinced that Kristeller's idea would raise the profile of Italian state museums, advocated in the ministry for the foundation of a national collection of prints. In particular, he emphasised the risk of letting important private collections of prints leave Italy to be sold abroad. But a further element must have been of equal importance when Venturi pleaded his case: he insisted that Italy required a national print room because other countries already had one. Whether one of these arguments was more successful than the other is hard to say. After around four years of negotiations between Venturi, the ministry, and the Accademia dei Lincei (custodian of the Corsini collection of prints) the Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe in the Galleria Nazionale Corsini was founded on 5 June 1895. At last, just like paintings, sculptures and antiquities, prints were recognised as part of Italy's artistic patrimony, and as such fully entitled to play their part in the process of nation-building that was currently underway.

As mentioned above, there was one aspect in Kristeller's scheme that was of critical importance to him: in order to be properly taken care of, prints had to be kept in museums and not in libraries. To make this possible, Kristeller advocated for relocating prints from one institution to another. Thanks to his knowledge of the Italian language and the support granted by Venturi, Kristeller addressed his letters directly to the minister and to those in charge of libraries and museums (Direzione Generale Biblioteche and Direzione Generale Musei). As the following quotation suggests, the German art historian built his relocation requests on the principles of access and public utility.

Graphic art scattered across various state libraries in Italy is so far away from corresponding to this goal [to serve study purposes], that most of it is barely accessible, so much so that often scholars are not even aware of the collections' existence. And even when the prints are accessible, the lack of a

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<sup>34</sup> Above all, this action answered a conservation concern. Along with dust and woodworms, it was believed that mechanical problems due to internal pressure and contact of the sheets within the movable album pages were the major cause of damage.

<sup>35</sup> The phases of their plan can be reconstructed by consulting the letters Kristeller sent to Venturi, now in the Centro Archivistico Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa (hereinafter, CASNS).

reasonable arrangement, catalogues, reference books or specialists, makes their study very difficult for scholars, and almost impossible and useless for *amateurs*. The taste for art and the possibility to enjoy all of its creation contributes to the mind and the soul; instead of hiding them and making access difficult, one ought to present them to the public as much as possible, and to invite the public to visit these collections. The leading principle for all public organisations must be that of public utility, so that teaching and study can take advantage of all extant objects [in that organisation]. So why does it have to be so, that works of art of the same genre are scattered across different institutions with different features? This makes their study impossible, or arduous, and complicated.<sup>36</sup>

Using his on-site knowledge of many institutions as well as his contacts among Italian scholars and museum directors, in 1896 Kristeller promoted a survey through the ministry in order to assess the content of libraries regarding art on paper. He drew up a list for each city in which he detailed which institutions had prints among their holdings, and from this list he formulated suggestions as to where it could be feasible to relocate prints from libraries (or art academies) to museums. For example, the 'vast collection of prints' in the national library in Naples 'could increase the one in the royal museum', while the prints of the university library in Pavia 'could be deposited in the Galleria Malaspina, that already owns a valuable collection'.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps because of his status as an outsider, unencumbered by Italy's fragmented history and identity, Kristeller conceived a vision in which university libraries could deliver prints to state museums, and state libraries to civic museums, despite belonging to different public bodies. Kristeller did not mind these administrative differences, as he saw the collections as belonging to one national, collective heritage that could be freely exchanged and transferred from one institution to another.

<sup>36</sup> 'Le opera delle arti grafiche sparse in varie biblioteche governative in Italia sono tanto lontane dal corrispondere a questa fine, che per lo più sono praticamente inaccessibili, tanto che spesso gli studiosi non posso avere cognizione della loro esistenza. E quand'anche accessibili, la mancanza di un ordinamento ragionevole, di cataloghi, di libri di consultazione o dell'aiuto di specialisti ne rendono lo studio difficilissimo agli studiosi, quasi impossibile ed inutile agli amatori. Il gusto dell'arte, il godimento di tutte le sue opera deve altamente contribuire alla coltura dell'intelletto e dell'anima, che invece di nasconderle e di rendere arduo l'accesso, si avrebbe il dovere, di offerirne l'aspetto quanto più è possibile al pubblico, e invitare questo con ogni mezzo visitarle. Per tutti gl'istituti pubblici non può valere altro che il solo principio dell'utilità pubblica, affinché tutti gli oggetti esistentivi rendano il maggior frutto possibile per l'insegnamento e lo studio. Perché dunque deve essere reso impossibile, o difficile, o meno vantaggioso lo studio per la dispersione di opere d'arte dello stesso genere in diversi istituti di carattere differente?' (Rome, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione Generale Antichità e Belle Arti [hereafter, ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA.], III versamento, II serie, busta 213, fascicolo 424, Kristeller to ministry, 30 May 1896).

<sup>37</sup> 'Napoli Biblioteca Nazionale. Si fa cenno nel suindicato libro ad una larga raccolta di stampe, la quale potrebbe accrescere quella del R. Museo ... Pavia Bibl. Universitaria. 3930 stampe. Forse potrebbero essere date in deposito alla Galleria Malaspina, la quale già possiede una pregevolissima raccolta.' (ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II serie, busta 213, fascicolo 424, Kristeller to minister, 30 May 1896).

From a scholarly point of view, among all collections of prints housed in Italian public libraries the Ortalli albums at the Palatina in Parma were the ones that most interested Kristeller. For this reason he repeatedly insisted that Venturi have him assigned to Parma. Particularly well acquainted with the Palatina holdings thanks to his frequent visits to Parma,<sup>38</sup> Kristeller longed to properly rearrange the Ortalli collection, still 'unknown to scholars'.<sup>39</sup> But first he needed to have the albums relocated to the Regia Galleria, where he hoped to establish a print room. As a matter of fact, unlike the majority of royal museums in Italy, the Regia Galleria in Parma already maintained two rooms dedicated to prints, 'inherited' from the art academy on which the museum formally depended until 1882. Called the 'Toschi rooms' after the art academy's esteemed former director, they contained ninety reproductive prints engraved by Toschi and other local artists.<sup>40</sup> This permanent display was grounded in the contemporary view of printmaking as a reproductive means rather than as an independent language. Kristeller had, however, a different kind of exhibition in mind.

In order to carry out his ambitious project, Kristeller needed to negotiate with all the different parties involved, both inside and outside of Parma. To do this, he needed strong collaborators. Along with Venturi in Rome, Kristeller had made a second powerful ally in Corrado Ricci (1858–1934), who had been directing the Regia Galleria in Parma since 1894. Even before his formal employment in Italy, Kristeller convinced Ricci of the wisdom of arguing that the collection of prints should be transferred to the museum straightaway. Once there, the prints would have been capable of illustrating the history of printmaking as well as helping scholars study art history.<sup>41</sup> Rather than stored together with books in a library, prints had to be recognized as 'a necessary appendix to artistic collections', as Venturi himself kept repeating in Rome, while he tried to have the Divisione Generale Biblioteche approve the relocation request.<sup>42</sup>

In his capacity of *funzionario* (ministerial employee), Kristeller was sent to Parma for a first investigation in summer 1895 while being formally still assigned to

<sup>38</sup> See CASNS, Fondo Adolfo Venturi, Carteggio, Kristeller, Paul; Kristeller to Venturi 3 March 1889; 15 June 1894; 31 July 1894.

<sup>39</sup> 'Se fosse consegnata la collezione sarebbe già fatto un grande passo avanti si potrebbe pensare di utilizzarla per lo studio. Avevo grande voglia di dedicarmi proprio a quella raccolta di fatto sconosciuta nel mondo scientifico' (Ravenna, Biblioteca Classense [hereafter, BCR] Fondo Corrado Ricci, Carteggio, volume 100, c. 19080, Kristeller to Ricci, 3 October 1894).

<sup>40</sup> Most of the objects on view reproduced paintings by the 'glories' of the city, Parmigianino and Correggio, but *d'après* works of art by other artists such as Raphael, Mantegna, and Poussin were present too. See Corrado Ricci *La R. Galleria di Parma*, Parma: L. Battei, 1896, 268–281; 282–289; 290–306. See Lucia Fornari Schianchi, 'Corrado Ricci in Parma allo scadere dell'Ottocento', in Andrea Emiliani, Claudio Spadoni, eds, *La cura del bello. Musei, storie, paesaggi per Corrado Ricci*, exhib. cat., Milano: Electa, 2008, 132–157: 147.

<sup>41</sup> BCR, Fondo Corrado Ricci, Carteggio, vol. 100, c. 19080, Kristeller to Ricci, 3 October 1894.

<sup>42</sup> 'Come negli istituti esteri, il gabinetto delle stampe si considera quale appendice necessaria alle collezioni artistiche; così in Italia, a Torino, a Firenze, a Napoli i preziosi fogli incisi sono corredo delle raccolte governative d'arte ... per il bene degli studii.' (ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II serie, busta 204, fascicolo 401, minister [but written by Venturi] to Direzione per le Biblioteche e gli Affari Generali, 23 May 1894).

the Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe in Rome.<sup>43</sup> While in Parma he produced a report which included remarks on the content of the collection: 'it's one of the largest and most precious collections in Italy. There are 40,067 prints in 195 albums, and then twenty more albums containing portraits and nineteen folders containing around 2,500 prints'; on its value: 'speaking of value, the collection is less rich than the ones in Rome, Florence and Bologna as far as artworks of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century are concerned, but it contains a huge number of very beautiful and very rare prints, and it has plenty of Italian prints of the second half of sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century'; and, finally, he remarked on its conservation status.<sup>44</sup> As regards this last point, he recommended the same kind of treatment used on the prints in Bologna and in Rome, that is, to detach the sheets from the albums and store them in boxes. Mindful about the smallest details, he did not fail to mention the precise quantity of mounts, boxes, frames and closets which would be necessary, and attached an estimate of all expected expenses.<sup>45</sup>

In spite of Kristeller's efforts, it would take some time before his appointment in Parma could be made official. The primary obstacle was that the Regia Galleria lacked the space for a print room for old masters. After roughly three years of negotiations, Ricci succeeded in securing the so-called Sala della Biblioteca situated in the sixteenth-century Benedictine monastery of San Giovanni adjacent to the museum. In use until that time by the ministry of war (fig. 4),<sup>46</sup> the room (21 x 12 x 6 m) was divided into three aisles by two rows of five columns each and decorated with oil frescoes by the sixteenth-century Bolognese painters Ercole Pio and Giovanni Antonio Paganini (fig. 5). This room was believed to be the best choice for the print collection thanks to its 'space, light and decoration'.<sup>47</sup> On 12 February 1898, Kristeller was officially invited to move to Parma to prepare the Ortalli prints for the relocation. By his own account, this project could inaugurate 'the most beautiful print room ever'.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II serie, busta 204, fascicolo 401, minister [but written by Venturi] to Kristeller, 26 June 1895.

<sup>44</sup> 'è una delle più numerose e pregevoli, che possiede l'Italia. Vi sono 40.067 stampe in 195 volumi, più 20 volumi di ritratti e 19 cartelle con circa 2500 incisioni ... Quanto al valore delle incisioni la collezione è meno ricca di opera del '400 e del principio del '500 che le collezioni di Roma, di Firenze e di Bologna, essa contiene però un numero grande di stampe bellissime e rarissime ed è ricca specialmente di incisioni italiane della seconda metà del '500 del '600 e del '700' (ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II serie, busta 204, fascicolo 401, Kristeller to minister, 25 July 1895).

<sup>45</sup> ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II serie, busta 204, fascicolo 401, Kristeller to minister, 19 July 1895.

<sup>46</sup> On the church and monastery see Mariangela Giusto, *Oltre l'apparenza: ultime scoperte nel Monastero di San Giovanni*, Parma: Cartongraf, 2010, and [monasterosangiovanni.com](http://monasterosangiovanni.com); on the library and its frescoes, see Marcello Calzolari, *La Biblioteca Monumentale dell'Abbazia di San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma: un affascinante viaggio all'interno di una biblioteca rinascimentale*, Parma: Benedettina editrice 1999, and Elena Pratizzoli, 'Gli affreschi della Biblioteca del monastero di San Giovanni Evangelista di Parma', in *Aurea Parma*, 87:2, 2003, 207–226.

<sup>47</sup> 'la quale ha spazio, luce e decoro' (draft in ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II serie, busta 204, fascicolo 401, ministry of public education [signed by Costetti] to the ministry of war, Divisione generale artiglieria e genio, 25 July 1895).

<sup>48</sup> 'La Sala della antica biblioteca dell'ex- Convento di S. Giovanni Evangelista, preparata già da tempo per servire come Gabinetto delle stampe, si presta meravigliosamente a questo



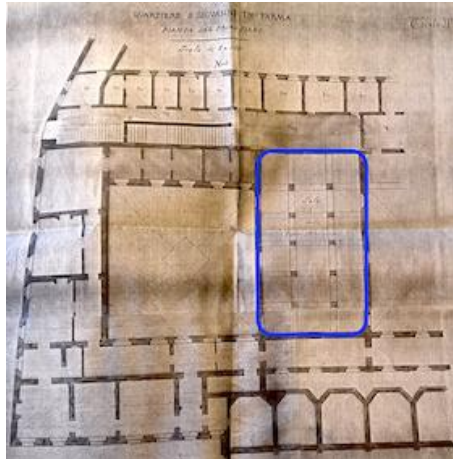


Figure 4 Map of the first floor of San Giovanni Evangelista monastery in Parma; the library is on the right-hand side. ACS, MPI, AABBA, III versamento, II serie, busta 204, fascicolo 401. Photo: Silvia Massa.



Figure 5 The library of San Giovanni Evangelista monastery in Parma as of today. Photo: Monastero San Giovanni Evangelista, Parma.

Of all the documents produced by Kristeller once he was officially assigned to Parma, the most interesting is certainly the one containing his design for the display.<sup>49</sup> In order to exhibit four centuries of printmaking, he proposed to install glass cases between the room's columns and thus maximize the available space. This would provide him with a ninety-three meter long visit itinerary. He made no

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scopo, e sarà, senza dubbio, il più bello gabinetto delle stampe che esiste.' (ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II serie, busta 203, fascicolo 398, Kristeller to minister, 14 May 1898).

<sup>49</sup> CASNS, Fondo Adolfo Venturi, Carteggio, Kristeller, Paul; Kristeller to Venturi, 8 April 1898.

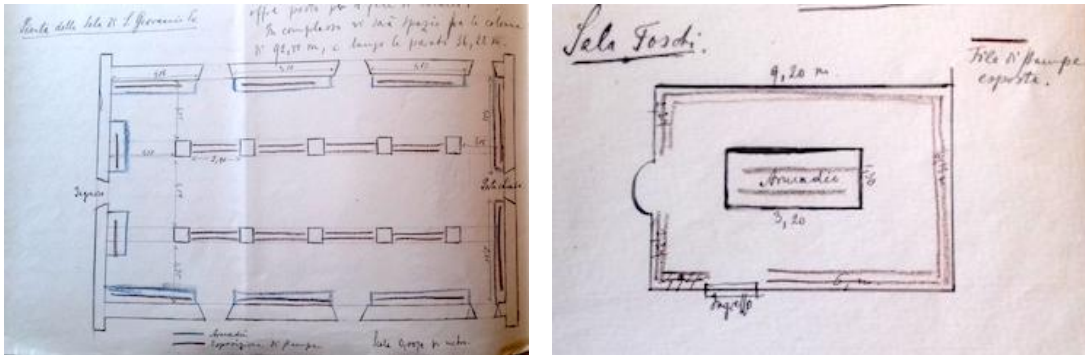


Figure 6 Kristeller's sketch of his project for the Gabinetto delle Stampe in the Regia Galleria of Parma. ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II serie, busta 204, unnumbered folder, Kristeller's report, [May?] 1898.

Photo: Silvia Massa.

Figure 7 Kristeller's sketch of his plan C for the print room in the Regia Galleria of Parma. ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II serie, busta 204, unnumbered folder, Kristeller's report, [May?] 1898.

Photo: Silvia Massa.

provisions for protecting the prints from excessive light exposure. On the contrary, Kristeller praised the room for the amount of sun it received. (Despite a few scattered allusions to this issue, there was no body of established knowledge concerning light damage to works on paper.) Prints remaining inside the albums, together with those in folders and boxes, would be stored in closets placed along the walls (figure 6). While this idea built on previous displays Kristeller had organised in Bologna and in Rome, the larger space available in the Sala della Biblioteca allowed him to add something new. Kristeller devised a second permanent exhibition along the walls in order to present ornament prints depicting motifs or designs for specific objects, which since mid-fifteenth century provided patterns and ideas to artists (in studios first and at the academy later) to copy and reinvent. As such, Kristeller justified the inclusion of *ornato* prints in exhibition because they were 'useful for the education of artists'.<sup>50</sup> By suggesting the installation of two separate permanent exhibitions, which could be read in parallel by different categories of viewers, Kristeller was trying to make the interaction between prints' multiple values and uses visible. Mindful of financial constraints and of other potential complications, Kristeller even proposed a plan B and a plan C (figure 7), which could be used in combination. While plan B consisted of mounting prints on simple cardboards instead of on more expensive passepartouts, plan C contemplated an alternative display location in case the Sala della Biblioteca had to be returned to the ministry of war. Should this happen, a temporary display could be arranged in the Sala Toschi where the Ortalli old master prints would join prints by Toschi and his school. Such juxtaposition would have highlighted even more vibrantly the dialogue between different ways of using and perceiving prints: as 'visual atlases' and models for artists, on the one hand, and as works of art per se, on the other. What is more, plan C implied that both categories were fully entitled to

<sup>50</sup> 'utile per l'educazione degli artisti' CASNS, Fondo Adolfo Venturi, Carteggio, Kristeller, Paul; Kristeller to Venturi, 8 April 1898; 17 April 1898. On the use of exhibiting ornamental prints, see William M. Ivins, 'Notes on the exhibition of ornament', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 5, 1919, 107–111.

representation in a state museum. Again, Kristeller imagined addressing multiple categories of visitors.

Despite the emphasis Kristeller placed on accessibility and public service in the realm of print collections, however, none of his schemes included a study room like the ones where he himself had admired prints in Berlin, London and other European cities. Considering his concern for every factor, including economic, that could impact his plans, the choice not to include a study room was likely due to his awareness that there was no space in the Regia Galleria of Parma for a non-exhibition area. Alternatively, Kristeller and Ricci may have made other arrangements for scholars to consult the prints (e.g. in the staff offices, as was already the case in some art academies), although no trace of such agreements has been found in the documentation. And so, despite the solid steps taken towards the musealization of prints by the end of the 1890s, no Italian museum was provided with a study room, something that prominent art historians such as Charles Loeser (1864-1928) did not fail to observe.<sup>51</sup>

### **Librarians vs. art historians: Kristeller's plan terminated**

For any of said A, B or C plans to be carried out, Kristeller listed a few conditions, the first being the immediate relocation of the Ortalli prints from the Biblioteca Palatina to the Regia Galleria. The ambitious project was supported both politically in Rome by Venturi and practically in Parma by Ricci. Nevertheless, many letters sent by Venturi and Ricci to the Direzione Generale Biblioteche on behalf of Kristeller went unanswered for long stretches, slowing down his plans. Though one might suspect that the lack of prompt reactions from ministry departments was due to the slow pace of bureaucracy, the short time span between other letters sent between the same offices and the same people in the same months points in another direction. As discussed above, relocations of prints from libraries to museums had already been carried out successfully in Bologna and Rome, and Kristeller and Venturi never failed to mention these well-known precedents to strengthen Kristeller's requests. In Parma, however, there was no urgency to remedy compromised security (as had been the case in Bologna) and the Ortalli collection would not necessarily gain in prestige by moving to the museum, as did the Corsini print collection in Rome when it took on the title of 'national'. It seems that many of the parties involved in Kristeller's project failed to understand and accept the arguments on which he based his relocation requests. The whole project slowed down. His position in Rome might have complicated the matter further. In May 1898, a special committee was established within the Accademia dei Lincei to inquire about the validity of Kristeller's work when he was put in charge of the Corsini collection, especially in reference to invasive restoration procedures that he prescribed for some of the Corsini prints. Finally, the fact that he was a German taking care of Italian national heritage was of no secondary importance.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> See Charles Loeser, 'I disegni italiani della raccolta Malcolm', in *Archivio storico dell'arte*, 3, 1897, 341–359: 342, where the American art historian and collector called for redesign of the spaces where collections were stored, following the examples of London, Berlin, and Dresden.

<sup>52</sup> See Mariani, *Il Gabinetto delle Stampe*, 21–24; see also the letters kept in Rome, Archivio

When minister Nicolò Gallo (1849–1907) eventually approved the Ortalli relocation project, another issue arose—this time not within the ministry, but at the very core of the Biblioteca Palatina. Despite having received precise instructions to hand over the Ortalli albums to Kristeller, and so to the museum, Palatina director Edoardo Alvisi (1850–1915) refused to proceed. A telegram sent by [Filippo?] Mariotti to the Direzione Generale Biblioteche provides a clear picture of the situation as of April 1898: 'Head librarian of the Palatina asks for clarification; Ministry is awaiting a reply; obstacles in the way of delivering prints to the Galleria make Kristeller's work hard, slow. Please arrange immediate adjustments'.<sup>53</sup>

As in Turin in the 1880s, when university library director Gorresio blocked Vico's and Gamba's attempt to transfer 'his' prints to the Regia Pinacoteca, in Parma Alvisi tenaciously opposed the relocation of the Ortalli prints. In charge of the library since 1893, Alvisi's resistance had started at least as early as summer 1896, while negotiations among Ricci, Venturi and the authorities in Rome were still in progress. An unsigned letter kept among miscellaneous material in the archive of the Biblioteca Palatina connects the case of Turin with the situation in Parma in a tangible way. With the heading 'Confidential for Alvisi', and dated 22 July 1896, the letter contains a series of arguments against the relocation of the prints from the Biblioteca Universitaria in Turin to the Regia Pinacoteca.<sup>54</sup> It is useful to know that between June and July 1896, upon the suggestion of Kristeller, the minister had revived the 1880s project to move the prints held in Turin's university library to its art museum, and invited Turin's new library director Francesco Carta (1847–1940) to execute the transfer.<sup>55</sup> In light of this, the anonymous letter dated 22 July looks like a draft, or a copy, of the message that Carta must have sent to the ministry in Rome to oppose the revived relocation request. It is quite curious that this letter, concerning matters of Turin, has ended up in the archive of the Palatina. Although at present no other documents have been retrieved that could help clarify exactly what happened, the following explanation seems reasonable. Worried by the ongoing negotiations concerning the relocation of the Ortalli albums, in 1898 Alvisi might have turned to his colleague Carta in Turin to ask for advice. Well aware that back in summer 1896 Carta had succeeded in keeping the prints at the Biblioteca Universitaria in Turin, Alvisi may have decided to defend his claim by relying on the same arguments, or might even have been directly advised by Carta to do so. In fact, as we will see,

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Storico dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, titolo 27: Galleria Arte Antica. [Galleria Corsini] Gabinetto delle Stampe, 1887-1938, busta 1, fascicolo 6, published in Mariani, *Il Gabinetto delle Stampe*, 138–142.

<sup>53</sup> 'Bibliotecario Palatina chiesti schiarimenti Ministero attende risposta frapporte difficoltà consegna stampe alla Galleria rende lento difficile lavoro professore Kristellei [sic] – prego affrettare disposizioni' (ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II parte, busta 203, fascicolo 398, Mariotti to ministry, Direzione Generale Biblioteche, 4 April 1898).

<sup>54</sup> BPP, Archivio storico, Varie, 1896, letter not signed [Francesco Carta?] to Alvisi, 22 July 1896.

<sup>55</sup> See ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II serie, busta 213, fascicolo 424, Direzione generale AA.BB.AA. to Direzione generale istruzione superiore e biblioteche, 26 June 1896 [draft]; Direzione generale istruzione superiore e biblioteche to Direzione generale AA.BB.AA., 11 July 1896. The same invitation to transfer prints from libraries to museums was sent to Florence, Lucca, Milan, Rome and Venice.

Alvisi's answer to the instructions received by the ministry in April 1898 were partially based on the mysterious letter found in Parma.

This letter outlines several reasons why libraries should be considered the best place to keep prints. First of all, the unnamed author, evidently Carta, observes that printmaking derives from books. As a consequence of this, he states that prints must be understood as core elements of 'bibliographic science', books and bookmaking studies, rather than as a concern of art historians. Secondly, the author brings a matter of accessibility to the fore. He explains that entrance to libraries is free of charge and this makes them more accessible to the public than museums, where visitors pay an entrance fee. He then observes that to split a collection, or to detach it from its housing, would mean to break the historical bond that connects the library holdings to their former owners (for Turin, that was the Royal House of Savoy). A fourth argument looks at collections of prints kept in important libraries abroad (the author mentions London, Paris and Vienna) which had been following practices adopted in Italian libraries since the sixteenth century; for this reason, such a widely-recognised prototype should not be dismantled. Lastly, the author concludes by discussing the supposed incapacity of the ministry to take care of the collections of prints housed in museums. He points out that 'professors' and intellectuals do not care for prints at all ('they are too much in love with great art to take an interest in minor arts') and further, that Italy has no real specialists in the field, as proven by the fact that a foreigner (Kristeller, indeed) is in charge of rearranging print collections 'with very little national glory and not without danger'.<sup>56</sup>

Overall, the arguments put forward by the letter's author are shallow. Some are generalizations that (purposefully?) disregard notable examples: no reference is made, for instance, to the Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe in Rome or to the fact that at the British Museum prints, together with drawings, were removed from the Department of Printed Books already in 1808. The argument concerning specialists was not only wholly unsupported, but also defensively anti-elitist and blatantly nationalistic in simultaneously disparaging the Italian professoriate and the dangers of German interference. Nevertheless, the content of the letter is extremely important for this story. The arguments provide us with a concrete example of how differently prints were still perceived by their curators, depending on institutional context, in spite of the increasing recognition of works on paper within the nascent discipline of art history since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

<sup>56</sup> 'Lasciando stare infatti che nelle Gallerie e nelle Pinacoteche si paga l'ingresso ... Ad ogni modo l'uso di conservare le stampe nelle Biblioteche è istituto prettamente Italiano; e bibliotecari italiani furono i più grandi collettori e [illustratori?] di stampe dal sec. XVI a tutto il sec. XVIII. E fu appunto ad imitazione delle nostre grandi Biblioteche che le grandi Biblioteche di Parigi, di Londra, di Vienna, di Pietroburgo, di Madrid che abbiano ed hanno annesso i gabinetti delle stampe; poiché se è vero che le stampe isolate servono alla storia dell'arte, è pur vero che servono, come è noto ai bibliografi, anche più alla storia del libro, di cui l'incisione è figlia primogenita ... se è vero che ora gli specialisti sono scarsi nelle Biblioteche, è pur vero che sono scarsissimi nelle Pinacoteche e per modo che l'assetto delle stampe, certo con poca gloria [paesana?] e non senza pericolo è affidato ad uno straniero. Si sa poi che i Direttori e gl'impiegati delle Gallerie, quando non sono letterati, sono troppo innamorati dell'arte grande per portare [?] affetto alle arti minori.' (BPP, Archivio storico, Varie, 1896, letter not signed [Francesco Carta?] to Alvisi, 22 July 1896).

Contrary to these superficial and biased arguments, the unnamed author makes one which is quite sound and builds on the importance of retaining the historical memory of the collection, a concept that remains central to cataloguing practices today. Although the author accepts that 'small collections without history' may be moved from libraries to museums, especially if they had not yet been properly arranged, he firmly maintains that to move bigger 'historic' collections would betray the donor's trust and violate the agreement between the donor and the library.<sup>57</sup> It is noteworthy that this modern concern for institutional history and the integrity of collections and donors' intentions was absent from Kristeller and Venturi's masterplan for prints.

In fact, the risks involved in breaking up collections never come to light in the several letters and reports concerning the relocation of the Ortalli prints, nor in the correspondence concerning the foundation of the Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe. This raises the question of how well Kristeller's ideas and operations served the protection and enhancement of public print collections. Kristeller must surely be credited with raising awareness of prints as works of art in Italy, and undoubtedly the actions he promoted while working for the Italian ministry brought concrete gains in terms of the accessibility of print collections. In particular, some of the procedures he introduced (such as improvements in inventory and exhibition practices) still inform current curatorial methodology. The same cannot be said of his views on preservation (which, however, reflect the body of knowledge available at that time concerning material decay of prints), nor of his practice of detaching prints from their housing and relocating them from one institution to another. Although he contributed to the creation of the national collection of prints, the Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe, at the same time he did not prevent but rather facilitated the loss of this founding collection's historical memory. Specifically, by selecting which albums should stay in the library of the Accademia dei Lincei and which ones should be moved to the Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe, in 1895 the German scholar de facto altered and compromised the identity of the Corsini collection. Given today's concern for the materiality of prints and the integrity of collections, such moves would now be considered unconscionable in the community of curators and restorers alike.<sup>58</sup>

Of all the arguments outlined in the anonymous letter, Alvisi decided to prioritise maintenance of collection integrity. He wrote to Felice Bernabei (1842–1922), head of the Direzione Generale Biblioteche, to remind him that the Ortalli

<sup>57</sup> 'Sarebbe quindi [?] ed utile che il provvedimento, come pare sia anche la circolare, fosse limitato alle piccole raccolte, e soprattutto alle piccole raccolte che non hanno storia, se per ciò è consentito dalle Leggi e dai Regolamenti.' (BPP, Archivio storico, Varie, 1896, letter not signed [Francesco Carta?] to Alvisi, 22 July 1896).

<sup>58</sup> One notable exception concerns drawings, not prints, but touches upon similar issues. In the early 2000s the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan requested restorers at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence to conduct a conservation treatment on the Biblioteca's *Codice Resta*, containing 289 drawings assembled by Padre Sebastiano Resta (1635-1714) in the early eighteenth century. The treatment included creating new bindings and providing the drawings with new backing pages. At the same time, however, the most precious drawings were extracted and permanently mounted on passepartouts, thus splitting the integrity of the *Codice* (see <http://www.opificiodellepietredure.it/index.php?it/288/milano-biblioteca-ambrosiana-codice-resta>).

albums were a gift from the archduchess Marie Louise for the Biblioteca Palatina. That she had donated the collection to the library made the case of Parma comparable to that of Turin, where King Vittorio Emanuele had given the print collection to the Biblioteca Universitaria: the provenance of both collections elevated their status and made them 'untouchable'. To strengthen his position, Alvisi pointed out the critical conservation issues that could compromise the safety of the prints should they be stored and displayed in the Sala della Biblioteca. Again, the danger of light was not of concern; instead, Alvisi observed that books which had been kept in the Sala della Biblioteca for decades had been severely damaged by mould (while Kristeller had praised the room for being absolutely dry).

Unwilling to take responsibility for altering the historical memory of the Ortalli collection and for compromising the albums' safety, on 23 April 1898 Bernabei forwarded Alvisi's complaints to the minister and once more blocked the relocation.<sup>59</sup> By that time Ricci was no longer director of the Regia Galleria and the delicate political balance within the ministry did not allow Venturi to keep campaigning for Kristeller's ideas. All negotiations were interrupted and the German art historian, isolated and frustrated by the ongoing dispute with Alvisi,<sup>60</sup> could not proceed with the project. At the beginning of May Kristeller was instructed to go back to Rome, and the project for a print room in the Regia Galleria in Parma was definitively abandoned.<sup>61</sup> As his letters reveal, the obstruction Kristeller experienced both in Parma and in Rome caused him not only profound discontent and disappointment on the professional level, but health problems as well. By the end of June 1898 he resigned from Italian public service and returned to Germany. Letters sent to Ricci months later show that he continued to inquire about the situation in Parma ('Do you know what has become of the Parma collection?').<sup>62</sup> This query underlines the enduring passion that had driven him to keep working despite the gulf between his scientific views and those of his many Italian colleagues, and despite the nationalistic antagonism that he encountered.

## Conclusion

In 1855 Jean Duchesne (1779–1855), director of the Cabinet des Estampes at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, praised the *cabinets des estampes* housed in libraries of some European cities but seemed to ignore Italian ones: 'There is in Europe a great number of libraries; only those in Vienna, Munich, Dresden, London, Lyon, Angers and Paris host important collections of prints. The taste for arts is now

<sup>59</sup> ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II serie, busta 203, fascicolo 398, Bernabei to minister, 23 April 1898.

<sup>60</sup> In his letters to Ricci and Venturi, Kristeller often lamented Alvisi's rude attitude. Kristeller described Alvisi as an unpleasant person who treated everybody, and Kristeller in particular, 'like dogs', and of trying in every possible way to hinder his work in Parma (BCR, Fondo Corrado Ricci, Carteggio, volume 100, c. 190104, Kristeller to Ricci, 31 March 1898; CASNS, Fondo Adolfo Venturi, Carteggio, Kristeller, Paul; Kristeller to Venturi, 31 March 1898; 16 April 1898).

<sup>61</sup> ACS, MPI, AA.BB.AA., III versamento, II serie, busta 203, fascicolo 398, minister to Mariotti, May 1898.

<sup>62</sup> 'Non sapete nulla, cosa è diventato della collezione di Parma?' (BCR, Fondo Corrado Ricci, Carteggio, volume 100, c. 19116, Kristeller to Ricci, 23 November 1898).

so expanded, that it comes as a surprise that organisations of such nature are not more numerous.<sup>63</sup> Today this situation has changed completely. Despite inheriting print collections with a number of challenges (absence of inventories, ephemera and fine prints kept together, quality diminished by prolonged exhibition, etc.), in the past decades several Italian libraries have been promoting study, cataloguing and preservation campaigns to protect and enhance their art on paper. Their collections are now well-known among scholars, if not always by the public at large.

Still some questions remain open. They concern, for example, description standards, categorization and presentation of the collections, as the introductory section of this article suggested (*patrimonio bibliografico* vs. *patrimonio artistico*). The case of the Ortalli albums of prints shows how the events that shape current collections' organisation, perceived value and storage fall beyond the boundaries of one institution's history. To interpret historical data retrieved from archival records in the light of art historiography, museum studies and history of collecting allows for a discussion of how prints were preserved in different institutions, and how the people in charge understood these collections (especially in terms of their history and use). Further, it clarifies which arguments were used to advocate or discourage particular selection, storage and display methods—arguments that can be useful to reconstruct even when current practices discard such methods. Indeed, this approach can complement art historical, object-based analysis and offer curators and conservators alike instruments for a fuller understanding of collections of art on paper in their care.

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<sup>63</sup>'Il existe en Europe un grand nombre de Bibliothèques; celles de Vienne, Munich, Dresde, Londres, Lyon, Angers et Paris contiennent seules d'importantes collections d'estampes. Le goût des arts est maintenant si répandu, qu'il semble étonnant que des établissements de cette nature ne soient pas plus nombreux' (Jean Duchesne, *Description des estampes exposées dans la galerie de la Bibliothèque Impériale attribuée au cabinet depuis l'année 1854 et formant un aperçu historique des produits de la gravure*, Paris: Impr. de Simon Raçon et Cie, 1855, V).