

## Vatican Archives – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano

The decision taken between 1611 and 1612 by Paul V (1605-1621) to set up a single central archive of the Church laid the foundation of the modern Apostolic Vatican Archive (known until 2019 as the ‘Vatican Secret Archive’). The building chosen for the new archive, which was to house documents kept in the Castel Sant’Angelo and in various parts of the papal palaces, consisted of three rooms beside the Sistine Gallery of the Vatican Library; they were suitably equipped with cabinets made of poplar, bearing the arms of the Borghese family, and decorated at the upper level with a cycle of historical scenes representing donations, privileges and tributes to the Church from sovereign rulers, from Constantine to Charles IV of Luxemburg. After this initial period came the phase of full autonomy. One must bear in mind that initially the Archive had depended on the Vatican Library, which provided its first ‘wardens’ and on which it was in a certain sense dependent. It was only in the pontificate of Urban VIII (1623-1644) that the two institutions became autonomous, and finally, on July 23 1630, were assigned distinct remits. In the meantime the archive continued to grow, with new accessions and transfers of material. It received registers of bulls, the books of the Camera Apostolica, the first registers of the Segreteria dei Brevi and the first volumes of the correspondence of the papal secretaries (diplomatic correspondence). To the three rooms of the floor of the library as founded by Paul V were added other rooms on the floor above, in which, on the direction of Alexander VII (1655-1667), were stored, from March 1660, in specially constructed wooden cabinets that are still in use, the diplomatic correspondence of the Holy See, which forms, together with subsequent accessions, the archive of the Secretary of State up to the Napoleonic era. The popes were concerned to have inventories and catalogues made of the documents, acts, public and private papers, and ecclesiastical bodies, and to preserve the inventories in question in local archives and, eventually, to have copies of them sent to the Vatican Archives. Worthy of mention is Benedict XIII (1724-1730), who made his ideas about archives known a number of times, above all in the apostolic constitution *Maxima vigilantia* (June, 1727), in which the pope made clear his interest in and concern for the ecclesiastical archives in Italian territories. The papal document even went into detail about the inventorying of documents. In 1783 the last of the part of the papal archive which had continued to be kept on French soil, at Avignon, returned to the Vatican Archive; in 1798, in the interests of security, the documents which were still kept in the Castel Sant’Angelo were transferred to the Vatican Archives. The city of Rome was in fact in turmoil because of revolutionary movements and the French occupation. There was good reason to be worried, in view of what happened next, for at the start of the nineteenth century, a new calamity befell the Vatican Archives: its forced transfer on the orders of Napoleon I to Paris, in 1810, together with other archives, libraries and works of art belonging to the Holy See. The archive was deposited in the Soubise palace, which was supposed to accommodate the most important historical archives of the nations that had been conquered by the French empire. Needless to say this caused considerable difficulties. Fortunately the period of exile did not last long, for on the fall of Napoleon the papal archives could return to the Vatican, between 1815 and 1817. There had been damage and losses, and many volumes remained in the French capital. During the pontificate of Pius IX (1846-1878), after the capture of Rome in 1870, the Italian government confiscated the part of the archive of the Camera Apostolica which was in the Palazzo Salviati at the time of the occupation: which was a considerable loss, made worse because it was followed by the break-up of the Camera sub-archive, which cannot now be reconstituted easily. It was also Pius IX who, in the final years of his pontificate, decided that the Vatican Archives should prepare a place to accommodate his own private archive, which was arranged in a room on the second floor, adjacent to the Alexander VII premises.

A new chapter in the history of the Vatican Archives opens with Leo XIII (1878-1903). The new pope, who though no longer young was full of zeal and vitality, faced many problems of many kinds. He made the memorable decision to open the Vatican Archives to be freely consulted by scholars, from 1880. After its opening the Vatican Archives became one of the most important centres in the world for historical research; not a few of the cultural and academic institutes based in Rome owed their foundation to this far-sighted decision, so rich in positive consequences, of Leo XIII. Under his pontificate and those of his successors many documents were acquired by the Archive: one may mention the series of Lateran Registers, the Registers of Lateran Briefs and of Supplications, and the vast Borghese collection. The acquisitions gathered pace after the First World War, when the bureaucratic activity of the Roman Curia increased as a result of the vigorous revival of the activities of the Holy See in the fields of international relations and outreach to the religious and non-Christian world. The Congregations, Offices and Tribunals of the Apostolic See, and the other dicasteries, deposited much of the material which had been in their possession in the Vatican Archives, notably the archives of the Holy Roman Rota, the Congregations for the Sacraments, for Bishops and Religious, for the Council, for Rites, the archive of the Sacred Apostolic Palace and that of Vatican I, as also the archives of the papal diplomatic representatives in the various states of Europe. Mention may also be made of the archives of certain noble families and of minor institutions - who deposited their documents primarily for the sake of their own prestige. To tackle the problem of space to accommodate it all, new premises were acquired, among them, the historic and artistically significant rooms on the three floors of the Tower of the Winds or of the Sundial, which was built on the orders of Gregory XIII between 1578 and 1580 by the Bolognese Palace Architect Ottaviano Mascherino, with the aim of facilitating the studies and the astronomical observations which led in 1582 (24 February) to the reform of the Julian Calendar and its replacement by the Gregorian calendar. The rooms had been decorated with frescos in the years 1580-1582 by Niccolò Circignani (called 'Il Pomarancio') and by the Flemish Painters Matthew and Paul Brill. In the course of the last century Pius XI (1922-1939), created for the convenience of scholars a new reading room which was much larger than the previous one, and adapted to the needs of the time; furthermore in 1933 he adapted for the storage of documents - equipping it with a further 13,000 linear metres of iron shelf-space - the areas on the West side of the Cortile del Belvedere, where the Vatican Picture Gallery was already situated. As for the management of the archive and scholarly production by its staff, outstanding individuals were Cardinal Giovanni Mercati, Archivist of the Holy Roman Church, his brother Angelo, Prefect of the Archive, and Pietro Guidi, Vice Prefect, alongside other illustrious members of staff.

After the Second World War Pius XII (1939-1958) made available to the Archive the premises known as the 'Soffitoni', situated above the Maps Room of the Vatican Museums, and equipped them with hundreds of metres of shelves. During the pontificate of John XXII (1958-1963) a department for photographic services and a conservation laboratory were set up. These were followed by the laboratory for the conservation and visual reproduction of seals, initially engaged in straightforward preservation and recovery of seals; from 1981 to the present day they had more suitable equipment at their disposal, and a specialised technical staff. In the same pontificate new premises were made ready and the present entrance to the Archive, already prepared on the outside by Pius XI and inaugurated by Paul VI on November 13 1964, was opened. This gave access to the Cortile del Belvedere and was separate from the Library. It is to Paul VI (1963-1978) that the Vatican Archives owe the construction of a magnificent building to increase the size of the Archive, in the basement under the Cortile della Pigna - a major operation. It was opened by John Paul II on October

18 1980. This demanded high quality engineering; it is build of reinforced concrete, on two stories, with a capacity of 31,000 cubic metres and 43 linear metres of shelving. It is impossible to list the innumerable *fonds*, accommodated in 82 kilometres of shelving, which today make up the Vatican Archives. The oldest document dates from the end of the 8th and start of the 9th century; the most recent from the pontificate of John Paul II, though these are not yet open for consultation.

### **Bibliography**

**Bibliography:** For information on the Vatican Archives and the series it contains, see above all *Sussidi per la consultazione dell'Archivio Vaticano. Lo Schedario Garampi - I Registri Vaticani - I Registri Lateranensi - Le «Rationes Camerae» - L'Archivio Concistoriale*, new revised edition by G. GUALDO, Vatican City, 1989; G. MARINI, *Memorie storiche degli Archivi della Santa Sede*, ed. A. MAI, Rome, 1825 (reprinted H. LAEMMER, in *Monumenta Vaticana historiam ecclesiasticam saeculi XVI illustrantia. Ex tabulariis S. Sedis...*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1861, pp. 433-453); L. P. GACHARD, *Les Archives du Vatican*, Brussels, 1874; M. MARINI, *Memorie storiche dell'occupazione e restituzione degli Archivi della S. Sede...*, in *Regestum Clementis Papae V...*, I, Rome, 1885, pp. CCXXVIII-CCCXXV; L. GUÉRARD, *Petite introduction aux Inventaires des Archives du Vatican*, Rome-Paris, 1901; G. BROM, *Guide aux Archives du Vatican*, 2<sup>e</sup> éd., Rome, 1911; B. KATTERBACH, *Archivio Vaticano*, in *Enciclopedia italiana*, IV, Rome, 1929, pp. 88-90; G. BATTELLI, «Archivio Vaticano», in *Enciclopedia cattolica*, XII, Vatican City, 1954, coll. 1131-1135; H. HOBERG, «Vatikanisches Archiv», in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2. Aufl., X, Freiburg i. Br., 1965, coll. 635-636; M. GIUSTI, «L'Archivio Segreto Vaticano», in *Il Vaticano e Roma cristiana*, Città del Vaticano, 1975, pp. 335-353, 507-508; *Archivio Segreto Vaticano*, edd. T. NATALINI, S. PAGANO, A. MARTINI, Florence, 1991.

SERGIO PAGANO

Translation David L. D'Avray