

Renato Pasta

**The private library of the granducal pair,
Pietro Leopoldo and Maria Luisa of Bourbon**

The eighteenth century has been correctly dubbed ‘l’Age d’or de la lettre’. As far as Italy is concerned, however, the definition should be expanded to include a ‘golden age of libraries’. Beginning with the 1740s the number of public libraries increased as Princes opened their own book collections to lay readers, established new institutions or favoured the transformation of private and ecclesiastical libraries into venues for public consultation and discussion. The ‘golden age of Italian libraries’ witnessed the establishment of renown institutions such as the Palatine library in Parma, the Estense at Modena, the former Jesuit college of Brera, turned after 1773 into a complex of major research institutions at Milan, or the earlier Brancacciana library in Naples. The pre-eminence of ecclesiastical and monastic libraries, which had represented the backbone of the library system in seventeenth-century Italy, was first challenged as the quality and content of the books began to switch away from Ecclesiastical history and erudition by mid-century. The new collections hosted an array of new or renovated typographical and literary genres, including the panoply of French and English novels in the originals or in translation.

This is the context which presided over the development of the private library of Leopold of Habsburg-Lorraine and Maria Louise of Bourbon-Spain, his wife. The development of the collection began most probably in 1768, three years after the arrival of the young Grand-duke at Florence and following the birth of his first male son, Franz, who would succeed his father as Emperor in 1792. By 1771 the collection was deemed large enough to warrant a printed Catalogue in French which survives today only in a very limited number of copies. It lists 1595 titles unequally divided between French texts (50%) and foreign books variously printed in Holland (16%), London (5%), Vienna (4%) and Germany (3%). Approximately 13% of the editions originated in Italy; several must have reached the Ducal Court at Pitti Palace as gifts and complimentary copies from their authors or printers. We know little about the policy of acquisition, even though a double set of marginalia in the hand of Leopold and of his secretary cast a judgement on several of the volumes in the Catalogue. An unknown French bookseller, possibly a member of the Desaint family, must have assembled the large number of French books, most of them printed at Paris (45% of the total) which were then shipped to Florence. Possibly the diplomatic agent of Leopold in Paris, Raimondo Niccoli (1767) may as well have contributed to the gathering and shipping of the books. A loyal, intelligent and active figure, in the 1770s Niccoli provided French books and Physiocratic tracts to the top ranks of the Tuscan government, including the powerful

Finance Minister, Angelo Tavanti. During the American Revolution he took a marked, pro-Insurgents stance and transformed the Tuscan Legacy at Paris into a node of radical political opinion, whose representatives often maintained close connections with Freemasonry.

As to the Catalogue, its printed dedication to the Dukes reflects courtly rhetoric at its best: it compares the rule of Leopold with that of Titus, “être sublime”. Its wording suggests a change in the meaning of sovereignty as compared to the Baroque Age. Government must now be based on love and mutual consensus between the ruler and his subjects – and the young Prince bore this splendidly out. The anonymous writer identified Leopold and his wife as keen readers endowed with the supreme freedom of judgement and choice which dynastic power bestowed on them. The new library which is here portrayed does not reflect the pomp and circumstance of Court life. Instead it was meant as a tool, a working intellectual space free from external constraints, and as a means of instruction and leisure for the royal family. Such an inclination towards the private use of books and prints as well as the rich set of music scores mentioned in the Catalogue reflected a difference in the attitudes to court life in Florence, which followed the example of Joseph II and his streamlining of the Hofburg. As far as possible both Pitti and the Imperial court tried to switch away from the culture of representation reducing their size and the maze of hierarchies and ranks which both had inherited from the seventeenth century. The Florentine collection developed out of an interest in contemporary books – most titles had been printed during the eighteenth century - and included two different, but intertwined strands of the Enlightenment: the critical, oppositional side which Rousseau’s *Contract social* embodied, and the moderate vein attested by Locke and Condillac. No sympathy for the texts of the ‘Radical Enlightenment’ emerged from the printed Catalogue of 1771 and no materialist or libertine tract was procured from the marketplace of ideas in France. Differently from the collections of Frederick the Great, Lamettrie and d’Holbach were banned from reading at the court of Florence.

If we accept the bibliographical categories of the French seventeenth-century booksellers, the distribution of books and titles in Leopold’s private library shows a marked preeminence of Literature, largely in French (554 titles, 1.298 volumes), and History (348 works, with 1.130 vols.). Science and art and Religion cut a fair part with 359 titles (876 vols.) and 186 titles (318 vols.) respectively. A few of the devotional or religious titles were in German, Thomas Trattner had printed most of them in Vienna, and they had presumably reached Florence in 1765, when the eighteen-year-old ruler first moved in. The number of music scores in the collection has recently attracted the attention of the specialists as the accurate work of Stefania Gitto suggests. The importance of music for a polite society in transition towards the nineteenth century can hardly be overestimated. But the Catalogue also exhibits another face which can be

emphasized, namely the almost complete absence of Law from the collection. Law and Natural law had both been largely available in the library of the new Lorraine rulers as they moved to Florence in 1737. The 20.000 vols. collection of the Medicis which Leopold moved to the public library in 1771 also counted several legal tracts and reference works. Legal texts had been much in demand in the late seventeenth- and early-eighteenth centuries in order to defend the Duchy of Lorraine from the encroachments of France. They were less necessary in Tuscany where the Habsburgs had fully established their sovereignty in 1745. Some legal authors, however, were available for family and Court use at Florence. Pufendorf was a case in point: his theories of public power and the role of the state were deemed essential to establish lay sovereignty, especially against the Roman Curia and the Church. Pufendorf's works circulated widely in Tuscany since the first half of the eighteenth century and, as a top governmental official had made clear, his texts were available in several private book collections which made the rules of the Index useless.

The 'modern' character of Leopold's library emerges both from the almost complete lack on its shelves of books in Latin and from the concurrent repulse of antiquarianism and erudition as well as of the heritage of the humanists, including Erasmus and his *Eloge de la folie* (in French). Such a lack of interest contrasted with the renewed attention for the Classics and for their fifteenth-century exegetists in mid- and late-eighteenth century Florence. The ducal set of books also conveyed some disdain for the don of Italian letters, Petrarch. His name is not included in our Catalogue and one of the manuscript marginal notes to its text – by Leopold himself or by his scribe – mocks the 3 vols. *Mémoires pour la Vie de Pétrarque* by the Abbé de Sade (an uncle of the famous Marquis), which had recently been published at Amsterdam: the sheer length of the text supposedly bore its readers to death. The literary cult of Petrarch was at its inception at the time, but the content of the ducal library suggests a different, more pragmatic inclination towards leisure as well as towards a policy of improvement in agriculture, the economy and government. The French Physiocrats and their predecessors are well attested among the potential readings of the Grand-duke and his circle. Melon, Dutot, Plumard de Dangeul, Forbonnais are all listed in the Catalogue as well as Uztariz, Wallace and B. de Mandeville. Interest in the French Physiocrats was lively in Tuscany during the late 1760s and 1770s as a consistent group of top officials strove to reform taxation and to liberalize the economy. Up to a point Leopold shared in their views, but he recoiled from the implementation of *impôt unique* and from the development of a land tax register ('catasto') which would have affected what represented the backbone of Tuscan society, the landed classes. Thus the Hamburg edition of Mirabeau's *L'ami des hommes* garnered a wry comment as his views were deemed "impossible à exécuter".

The modernizing impulse present in eighteenth-century Florence also emerged in some comments about Court relations with the books, as both the Leghorn in-folio edition of the *Encyclopédie*, begun in 1770 under the aegis of Leopold, and the *Description des arts et metiers* by the French Science Academy, elicited enthusiastic support in the Catalogue. The improving, technical side of both works lay at the core of the scribe's favourable evaluation and reflected the attitude of Grand-duke himself. The content of the Leghorn *Encyclopédie* had been updated in comparison with the original in the fields of natural philosophy and history. The editors did not include the stifling remarks on theology and religion which the Lucca in-folio set of the *Encyclopédie* fed to its readers. Acknowledgement of the value of Diderot's *Dictionary* in the ducal library bore witness to the diffusion of this key text of the Enlightenment among the Italian élites. By the late 1770s when the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel tried to sell its own in-quarto edition of the *Encyclopédie* South of the Alps, the market had already been clogged by their competitors, the Leghorn and the Lucca reprints. Other attempts were being made to reproduce or reshape the text in Italy, one of them in Siena where a former Jesuit provided a blueprint for a Catholic *Encyclopédie* in 1778-'79 which listed among its authors the best Italian minds in natural philosophy. Earlier in the century, Chambers *Cyclopaedia* had also scored an immense success in Italy as it boasted three different reprints in Venice, Naples and Genoa. In this context the Catalogue of 1771 suggests a wider, more general interest in the books of the French Enlightenment, even though the materialist strain is ignored.

As I mentioned before, the library hosted only a few Latin and no Greek texts. The understanding of the Classics was made possible by a large number of French, especially Parisian, editions. Contemporary novels in French and in French translations were also present on the shelves, but their free use by Leopold's large family was prevented by strict parental control: the Grand-duke and his wife had pocketed the keys to the cupboard where such 'dangerous' books were kept. As a literary and moral genre the novel had not dissipated yet the stigma cast on it by the religious tradition, nor the lasting prejudice which set it on the lower echelons of any well-assembled library. In our Catalogue the scribe, probably working under dictation from the Grand-duke, deemed *Tom Jones* "ennuyeux... et froid", a comment which also concerned Richardson's *Charles Grandisson* and *Cleveland*, *La vie de Marianne* by Marivaux and *L'Espion Turc* by G. P. Marana; but not the *Contes moraux* by Marmontel which were needed for learning French. However, a small group of novels elicited warm praise: *Robinson Crusoe*, for instance, was commended reading "for the purity of its style and its lack of love affairs"; Abbé Terrasson's tale of the ancient Egypt, *Sethos*, and Andrew Ramsay's *Voyage de Cyrus* both deserved to be read by the young because of their elegance and moral wisdom, the latter being correctly estimated a 'roman à clé' to be dutifully explained to the reader. A similar remark followed the title of the French version of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, a book which had gained several readers in Tuscany because

of its moral content. The ducal book collection also provided two copies of *Télémaque*, the mythological and pedagogical novel which Fénelon had penned in the 1690s for the grandson of Louis XIV. Following the first complete edition of 1717, the book had often been reprinted and had rapidly become required reading in private and princely libraries. A stern ethic of duty asserted in this text the supreme meaning of the rule of law and must have appealed to the Habsburg's, and Leopold's own, rigorous conception of government. To the new Titus that he was, the slow, winding passage of the son of Ulysses in the world embodied a living example of virtue and the task that every legitimate ruler should strive to accomplish, the coming of 'public happiness' for all.

Terrasson's philosophical notion of "la vertu bienfaisante" and Ramsay's novel were common reading in Masonic circles throughout Europe and suggest some interest for the ideology of the fraternity in Florence and at the court. Like his brother, Joseph II, Leopold was never a member of the sect – and the Hannoverian lodge established in town in 1731-1732 had long been dissolved. But a small Masonic network lived on to the end of the century and resurfaced again during the period of French domination and after. In this context the Catalogue listed Baron Bielfeld's works and Algarotti's *Il congresso di Citera* (1739), a book which the Roman Index had condemned shortly after its publication. Both writers had belonged to the fraternity, and Bielfeld was present at the initiation of Frederick II in Braunschweig. Musical performances at the Florentine court, such as Händel's *Messiah* and his *Alexander's Feast*, provide further evidence of Masonic connections. In a similar vein Ranieri de' Calzabigi and Gluck dedicated their new opera, *Alceste*, to the Grand-duke. The notion of a gradual progress towards the good and the pursuit of happiness for mankind represented the recurrent, general elements of a worldview which 'le roy pasteur' and 'Salomon du Midi' – as the Physiocrats dubbed Leopold -- probably shared. More than leisure and distraction, his books were meant to provide 'Enlightenment' and moral wisdom to its readers and especially to the young.

In a remarkable essay S. C. has tracked down the readings which Leopold himself prescribed for his several children. Leopold was most careful about the upbringing of his sons and daughters who received an excellent education since their earliest years. Maria Theresa, the eldest child, could easily converse in three languages – German, French and Italian -- at the age of three. Charles Dupaty, a French magistrate from Bordeaux who visited Florence in 1785, reported to have seen one of the young Archdukes in Pisa entirely taken up with reading Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence*. The children read equally Locke, much history including Hume's *History of England* in French, Rollin and Vertot about ancient Rome, the latter providing two more titles about the history of Portugal and Spain. The printed Catalogue of 1771 also included some manuscripts that had formerly been used for the education of Leopold in Vienna. A committed reformer, the Grand-duke

concerned himself with the school system in Tuscany and went so far as to draft a general plan for the reform of public education along sensationalist lines. During the last part of his rule he also established contact with the Swiss pedagogue, H. Pestalozzi. His keen interest in natural philosophy, which he had partly inherited from his father Francis Stephen, showed in the several books on science in his library as well as in the titles prescribed for his children: s'Gravesande, Musschenbroek and Abbé Nollet six vols. textbook on physics conveyed Newtonian science to the new generation, while Euclid and Ozanam reflected their father's concern for mathematics.

As it stood in 1771, the book collection needs to be contextualized within Leopold's cultural politics at large. Four years earlier the Florentines had witnessed the overhaul of the agricultural academy which was turned into an advisory body on behalf of the government on economic and political matters. In 1775 the Grand-duke formally established the Imperial Museum of Physics as a branch of the Court and entrusted it to F. Fontana, the leading Italian physiologist of the eighteenth century. The Museum was meant to revive the Medicean tradition of patronage towards high culture and the sciences and it acquired most of the science books which had previously belonged to the library of the Medicis. In 1784 a general reform of the learned institutions brought the life of the language academy, the Accademia della Crusca, to an end and concentrated the study of the humanities in one main body, the new Florentine Academy. Much as the Museum, Leopold intended the new history and language academy to become subservient to the needs of the public and to follow the catchword of his times, practical usefulness. Leopold's library also meant to be perused by family and friends. By superseding the culture of representation at the Court, it embodied the core of the much larger book collection which Leopold and later his son Ferdinand III assembled. Some of the texts which inspired Leopold's major reforms, including the suppression of torture and the death penalty, were already available among his books in 1771, as it was the case with the two, Italian and French, editions of Beccaria's *On crimes and punishments*. As the references to Brissot de Warville's tracts and to his 10-vols. *Bibliothèque philosophique du législateur* imply, other texts were acquired later, when the ruler began to develop his plan for a constitution that involved a limited degree of political representation.

The Catalogue of 1771 portrayed a modern, up-to-date collection of (primarily) French texts. However, it shunned philosophical radicalism. If the Amsterdam edition of Montesquieu was praised and recommended for mindful reading, 'Le roi Voltaire' was practically absent from the series, with only a few exceptions for the historian. The library hosted Condillac's *Entretiens de Phocion* and Hume's *Essay on human Understanding*, but lacked any spur of the materialist tradition which d'Holbach and his followers were then reviving. With one exception, the *Contract social*, Rousseau's political philosophy was equally absent from the shelves and so was, surprisingly, his

celebrated novel, *La nouvelle Heloise*. As the extensive diary of the Director of the Uffizi art Gallery indicates, these texts were quite available in Tuscany at that time – as elsewhere in Italy. We do not know which general principles inspired the Grand-duke in his policy of acquisitions at the beginning of his rule. But he may have paid attention to the warnings of his mother, the Empress Maria Theresa, whose devout Catholicism made her recoil from any kind of ‘bad books’, beginning with pamphlets and libertine tracts. This suggestion helps to explain the presence of several religious and Jansenists texts in Leopold’s collection. More than Duguet’s educational treatise *Institution d’un Prince*, which he had perused in his youth and which remained available at the Court, the Catalogue placed emphasis on Muratori and his *De superstitione vitanda*, a tract that had gained remarkable success North of the Alps and one which reflected the ideological tack of Austrian *Aufklärungskatholizismus*. In the years following 1771, Leopold developed a formidable command of most of the contemporary high-cultural and political texts. They served him to implement his large-scale reforms of state and society steering a complex middle course between his brother’s often brutal despotism and the pursuit of an élite constitutional representation in government. The books of 1771 were only an inceptive step along the path which made Leopold into one of the best-read, more informed sovereigns in Europe. Herder, who met him in 1790, reported enthusiastically that the prince had already read and knew “die besten Schriften der aufgeklärten Nationen Europas” . The evidence may be biased in favour of the prince, but Herder’s words place the future Emperor at a very high position among Europe’s ‘enlightened’ rulers. He had opened the way Tuscan society would take in the nineteenth century.