



The Royal Library in Turin

The Royal Library was founded in 1831 by King Carlo Alberto of Savoia-Carignano who, having ascended the throne that year, wished to stimulate the development of Piedmont by promoting administrative and political reforms and re-evaluating the institutions of arts and culture.

King Carlo Alberto planned the expansion of the court library, which had been considerably reduced in size after Vittorio Amedeo II had donated in 1723 much of its contents to the library of the Royal University of Turin (today the National University Library of Turin). Carlo Alberto added to it his personal collection, which included volumes that had belonged to his paternal grandmother, Giuseppina of Lorena-Carignano, an educated woman who had been open to the new ideas of the 18th century.

The King relied on the collaboration of a small and efficient group of scholars. He subsidised research trips abroad that allowed them to come into contact with progress in letters, sciences and cultural institutions, and to locate documents relevant to the history of domains of the House of Savoy and other works which, for their rarity or beauty, deserved to be

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purchased. The library was enriched with precious volumes, old books and illuminated manuscripts.

For the new library Carlo Alberto chose the east wing of the Royal Palace, below the Royal Armoury (also founded by him). The premises, first used as a storeroom, were converted into the library by Pelagio Palagi, the artist (painter, architect, interior designer) who designed and directed all the transformations of Savoy residences in the period of Carlo Alberto.

The library was designed in the Neoclassical style, with a ceiling decorated with a monochrome fresco showing allegories of the Arts and Sciences, two levels of walnut bookcases and an elegant balcony with a wrought-iron railing, which allows access to the upper level bookcases, and the wooden floor.

The Royal Library was opened, at the behest of the king, to the officers and scholars interested in studying the country's history and fine arts.

In 1839 Carlo Alberto purchased from Giovanni Volpato (a man of humble origins born in Chieri, a self-taught art collector who, having travelled through Europe, had gathered an interesting collection) a large group of drawings by Italian and foreign masters from the 15th to the 18th century, including Michelangelo, Raffaello Sanzio, Rembrandt and Leonardo da Vinci.

Leonardo's works held by the Library include the famous *Self-Portrait* drawn with red chalk, the *Study for the Angel's Face*, a preparatory sketch of the angel for the painting *The Virgin of the Rocks* (at the Louvre, Paris) and the *Codex on the Flight of Birds*, a paper notebook of 18 sheets,

in which Leonardo jotted down his thoughts and made some sketches about the movement of birds.

The Codex on the Flight of Birds entered the Royal Library at the end of the 19th century, as a gift to King Umberto I from Theodore Sabachnikoff, a Russian patron of the arts and scholar of the Italian Renaissance.

After the Second World War, with the passage of the holdings of the House of Savoy to the State (the legal argument over this case ended in 1970) the Royal Library became a state public library and is currently under the direction of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities.

The Library contains approximately 200,000 volumes, 4,500 manuscripts, 3,055 drawings, 187 incunabula, 5019 sixteenth century books, 1500 works on parchment, 1112 periodicals, 400 photo albums, maps, engravings and prints. In 1998 an underground exhibition room was built to allow the display of the treasures of the Library in a suitable and safe place equipped with the most up-to-date museum technologies.

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