

The early years of Leopoldo Cicognara's book collection

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At the age of thirty-one, the Ferrarese count Francesco Leopoldo Cicognara (1767-1834), after having participated in the initial phase of the Italian revolutionary movement, came to Turin where, on 28 February 1798, he assumed his position as Minister Plenipotentiary of the Cisalpine Republic at the Court of Savoy. It was just at this time that he began his renowned collection of art books.¹ In his old age he recalled in his memoirs how, upon his arrival in Turin, he wanted to furnish himself with the trappings appropriate to his new diplomatic status:

In Turin, I had to supply myself with everything because, as the son of a family of modest means, none of my possessions were suitable for a diplomat's household. But this was compensated for through ministerial subsidies and my wife's fortune. Thanks to the assignats,² I was able to acquire inexpensively magnificent porcelains formerly belonging to the house of Lambal as well as crystal, linens, and carpets from Jacson [sic], the departing English envoy. As for requisite trappings, I bought a coach and

I am particularly grateful to Jeanne-Marie Musto for her review of my text. She made it more readable and clarified the meaning of several passages. Many thanks also to Eve Borsook, who patiently helped me with the translation, and to Andreina Rita for her review of this paper.

¹ Vittorio Malamani, *Memorie del Conte Leopoldo Cicognara tratte dai documenti originali*, Venice: Tipografia dell'Ancora, Merlo editore, 2 vols, 1888, I, 106–21; see also the short biographical summary of Gian Domenico Romanelli, *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1981, vol. 25, 421–28.

Francesca Fedi, *L'Ideologia del Bello. Leopoldo Cicognara e il classicismo fra Sette e Ottocento*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 1990, 65–6; Francesca Fedi, 'Leopoldo Cicognara, letterato e uomo di Stato', in Stefano Levati, ed., *L'affaire Ceroni. Ordine militare e cospirazione politica nella Milano di Bonaparte*, Milan: Guerrini e Associati, 2005, 209, note. Some passages of this paper were published in the introduction to the article 'La collezione dei libri d'arte di Leopoldo Cicognara dal 1798 al 1804, un inventario autografo', *Rara Volvmina*, no. 22 [25], 1/2 (2018), 99-146; the article, which fully reproduces the Milan inventory, was printed during the first lock-down, in the spring of 2020, without my having the opportunity to correct the text; thus, an infinite number of misprints have crept in. Only some of them could be corrected in the 'Errata Corrige' in *Rara Volvmina*, no. 23 [26], 1/2 (2019), 131.

² Assignats were paper money issued in France between 1789 and 1796, backed by the value of properties of the nation (those of the crown, and those confiscated of the Catholic Church). In Italy assignats were introduced by the Roman Republic; I do not know if there were also assignats in circulation in the Cisalpine Republic, or if Cicognara is referring to French currency.

had liveries made. Then there were the rare and precious books along with bibelots, wines and so on.³

Cicognara's collecting activities, at least initially, were not only connected with his new status, but also served (as noted by Francesca Fedi) as a classic cover for rapid access to masonic circles via local scholars.⁴ In fact, Cicognara had already had experiences of this kind in 1789 when, in Naples, he was commissioned by his Freemason friend, Count Carlo Gastone Della Torre di Rezzonico, to buy ancient medals from Magna Grecia during his stay in Palermo; this had brought him into contact with Sicilian Masonic circles.⁵

Cicognara's first years as a book collector, from the beginnings in Turin through May 1804, are documented by an inventory recently found among his papers kept in Milan at the Biblioteca Braidense.⁶ This inventory, which has the autograph title *Collezione di Libri di belle Arti cominciata l'anno 1798*, lists about 800 books and includes information regarding price, author, abbreviated title, year and place of publication, publisher, or printer. Authors' names are underlined in red or black pencil: these colours may refer to the transferring of a specific item to another catalogue. There are also occasional comments on states of conservation and exceptional value. The alphabetically arranged *rubricella* was carried out in a single go in its first part; as Andreina Rita suggests, this set of headings might possibly be based on another source. Subsequent additions can be recognised by the different inks of the entries.⁷

The start of Leopoldo Cicognara's famous collection began during the turbulent period of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in Italy. On 19 February 1797, the Treaty of Tolentino was signed with the Holy See; this permitted the spectacular confiscation of works of art (including books and manuscripts). Confiscations were carried out systematically during the entire Napoleonic period. These, in combination with suffocating taxation that obliged noble families to sell their collections, instigated the huge migration of artistic and cultural goods to Paris. With the suppression of the religious orders and the confiscation of monastic possessions, not only during the Napoleonic period but probably also earlier, during the republic, a great many books were thrown upon the open antiquarian market at very low prices, while the more precious material was sent to Paris.⁸ Marino Berengo vividly described the situation:

³ Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense (MBNB), Archivio Cicognara II, 26. 1–5, c. 27; the autograph memoir of Leopoldo Cicognara, already an important source for the count's biography by Vittorio Malamani, will soon be published by the present author.

⁴ Fedi, 'Leopoldo Cicognara, letterato e uomo di Stato', 205.

⁵ Fedi, *L'Ideologia del Bello*, 60–6; Fedi, 'Leopoldo Cicognara, letterato e uomo di Stato', 204–5.

⁶ MBNB, Archivio Cicognara, V.3.

⁷ The register book (206 x 185 mm) consists of four quinterns containing the letters A-E, F-L, M-R, and S-Z. The cardboard binding is covered with finer paper on the inside. Of the back cover, only a fragment remains along the binding.

⁸ A first insight into the book requisitions during the republican era and their consequences is contained in the ground-breaking conference volume *Ideologie e patrimonio storico-culturale nell'età rivoluzionaria e napoleonica: a proposito del trattato di Tolentino*, Rome: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Archivistici, 2000, with contributions

During the Napoleonic era and the next 15 or 20 years, book prices were low ... which was not fortuitous because the great dispersion of ecclesiastical libraries which filled the deposits of the book sellers caused intermittent floods of offers in order to make space. But also other sources crowded the market. Many noble families underwent their final decline with the liquidation of their palaces, furniture, pictures, and archives, along with crates of books.⁹

The interaction during these years between events in Cicognara's life and our inventory reveals several stages in the development of his collection, beginning with the Turinese milieu which coincided with his new diplomatic status. In particular, the French ambassador to the Court of Savoy in Turin, Pierre-Louis Ginguené, had similar interests and constraints. Ginguené, historian of Italian literature and founder of the *Décade philosophique* as well as being an affiliate of the renowned masonic lodge of the *Neuf Sœurs*, was a passionate book collector and was able to make important acquisitions during his brief stay in Turin.¹⁰

Ginguené (Cicognara attributed to him a total lack of diplomatic skills) was sent back to Paris *ante tempore*, at the end of October 1798, victim of the conflicts between the Directory and the French military operating in Italy. Shortly before, however, Ginguené had successfully intervened, together with the pro-Italian General Guillaume-Marie-Anne Brune (commander of the *Armée d'Italie*), against the removal of Cicognara from his position as minister, because of his suspected association with the patriotic *setta degli unitari*.¹¹ Ginguené and Cicognara remained in contact; their common political aims were to be replaced by erudite exchanges during their meetings in Paris, where Cicognara attended Ginguené's lectures and Ginguené reviewed his colleague's works for the French public.¹² Their intellectual

by Christine Maria Grafinger, 'Le tre asportazioni francesi di manoscritti e incunaboli vaticani (1797-1813)', 403–13 and Luigi Pepe, 'Gaspard Monge e i prelievi nelle biblioteche italiane (1796-1797)', 415–42. The question has been examined in depth in several individual studies; of particular interest for the Roman situation are Andreina Rita, *Biblioteche e requisizioni librerie a Roma in età napoleonica: cronologia e fonti romane*, Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2012 and Andreina Rita, ed., *La Biblioteca Vaticana dall'occupazione francese all'ultimo Papa Re (1797-1878)*, Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2020.

⁹ Marino Berengo, *Intellettuali e librai nella Milano della restaurazione*, Milan: Angeli, 2012, 119–20.

¹⁰ Paolo Grossi, *Pierre-Louis Ginguené, historien de la littérature italienne*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2006, 75–88. For Ginguené's relations with Italy, see Cristina Trincherio, *Pierre-Louis Ginguené e l'identità nazionale italiana nel contesto culturale europeo*, Rome: Bulzoni, 2004.

¹¹ Guillaume-Marie-Anne Brune (1763–1815) was chief of the *Armée d'Italie* from 4 April to 17 July 1798.

¹² Grossi, *Pierre-Louis Ginguené*, 93, n. 232. In 1813 Ginguené reviewed the treatise on beauty: Pierre-Louis Ginguené, 'Del Bello, ragionamenti sette di Leopoldo Cicognara, etc. Sept discours sur Le Beau, dédiés à S.M. Napoléon Ier, Empereur des Français et Roi d'Italie; par Léopold Cicognara, chevalier de l'ordre de la Couronne de fer, etc. A. Florence chez Molini et Landi, 1808, in -40', *Mercurio étranger*, III, 1813. (This review is reproduced in the appendices of Sergio Zoppi, *P.-L. Ginguené Journaliste et critique littéraire. Textes choisis avec une introduction et des notes*, Turin: G. Giappichelli, 1968, 377–84.) Ginguené's review of the

affinities are particularly evident in Ginguené's *Histoire littéraire d'Italie* and Cicognara's *Storia della scultura*, published at about the same time; these works have many features in common including structure and method.¹³

Cicognara's diplomatic mission ended with the abdication of Carlo Emanuele IV of Savoy on 8 December 1798. The event was planned and executed by the commandant of the *Armée d'Italie*, General Barthélemy-Catherine Joubert,¹⁴ with Cicognara's support. In his memoirs, Cicognara recorded the event as having been carried out 'without a shot and at no expense,' attributing this to his own diplomatic skill.¹⁵ Cicognara's Italian patriotic commitment did not escape notice of the *Directoire*. In view of this and the likelihood of violent reactions on the part of the provisory French government, Cicognara decided to leave Turin for Paris and to send all his belongings to Ferrara – including the book collection. It was probably on this occasion that he compiled his first list of books, corresponding to the first part of our inventory and including about 450 titles with a total value of '1071. 95' scudi (?).¹⁶ Among these were 'all the Vitruvius editions, all the galleries, books of medals and incised stones, all the ancient architects, Aldo's *Ipnerotomachia di Polifilo*, and Scamozzi's Roman monuments': all this in barely a single year's activity as a book collector.¹⁷

During the next years, Cicognara was exposed to the tumult of events, experiencing exile, reconciliation, and disgrace. Yet, despite all these trials, he succeeded in cultivating his interests as a collector.

first volume of the *Storia* was published, as always, in the *Mercure étranger*, II, IX, 1813, 149–62.

¹³ Pierre-Louis Ginguené and Francesco Salfi, *Histoire littéraire d'Italie, par P.-L. Ginguené, de l'Institut Impérial de France, membre non résident de l'Académie impériale de Turin, associé correspondant de celle de la Crusca, des Athénées de Niort et de Vaucluse, de la Société des Sciences et des Arts, de la Loire Inférieure, membre de l'Académie celtique, etc.*, Paris: L.G. Michaud, Libraire-Éditeur, 9 vols, 1811–19; Leopoldo Cicognara, *Storia della Scultura dal suo Risorgimento in Italia fino al secolo XIX per servire di continuazione alle opere di Winckelmann e di Seroux d'Agincourt*, Venice: Picotti, 3 vols, 1813–18; the second edition with the title *Storia della scultura dal suo risorgimento in Italia fino al secolo di Canova: per servire di continuazione alle opere di Winckelmann e di D'Agincourt*, Prato: Fratelli Giachetti, 8 vols, 1823–24, reprinted and introduced in 2007 under the editorship of Francesco Leone, Barbara Steindl and Gianni Venturi at Bassano del Grappa by the Istituto di Ricerca per gli Studi su Canova e il Neoclassicismo.

¹⁴ In October 1798 Barthélemy-Catherine Joubert (1769–99) substituted Brune as commander of the *Armée d'Italie*.

¹⁵ For Cicognara's role in the events which precipitated the abdication of Carlo Emanuele IV of Savoy see Giorgio Vaccarino, *I Giacobini piemontesi (1792-1814)*, Rome: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Ufficio Centrale per i beni archivistici, 2 vols, 1989, I, 117–351, and the preceding essay by the same author which was further developed in the subsequent publication: Giorgio Vaccarino, *I Patrioti 'anarchistes' e l'idea dell'Unità Italiana (1796 -1799)*, Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1955; Malamani, *Memorie del Conte Leopoldo Cicognara*, I, 88–311; Fedi, 'Leopoldo Cicognara, letterato e uomo di Stato', 207.

¹⁶ MBNB, Archivio Cicognara, V.3, c. 45.

¹⁷ Malamani, *Memorie del Conte Leopoldo Cicognara*, I, 122–25, and the letter sent from Paris to Cicognara's wife Massimiliana on 24 February 1799. Fearing that the entire contents sent to Ferrara had been lost, Cicognara deplored their presumed disappearance, MBNB, Cart. Cicognara 25 c (24).

As might have been expected, Cicognara was unsuccessful in finding refuge in Paris from Turin. Almost immediately, he was forced to leave by the *Directoire*. But with 'good letters for several transactions', he went on to Belgium and Holland where he visited the monuments, cabinets, and galleries, the famous hydraulic works and the 'ovens of flowers', as well as institutions and political figures. He met other exiles and other old acquaintances including General Brune, then commander of the Republic of Batavia,¹⁸ and was able to make important acquisitions from the rich market of antiquarian books. We know of various Vitruvius editions and 'other books on art and machines' which were probably lost when Cicognara left his trunks in the care of his friend Forcart in Basel, which was subsequently sacked during a revolt at the customs office of Altdorf.¹⁹

The confused and menacing political situation during the Austro-Russian offensive did not stop Cicognara's collecting activities. In fact, the inventory mentions twenty odd titles with prices given in Genoese and Ligurian lire that were probably acquired during his brief stay in Genoa, the last republican stronghold where he took refuge with his family until April 1799. But at the end of August, after the Battle of Novi, he was forced to leave the besieged city. In September, he reached Paris where he spent the long winter months until April 1800 and shared the restrictions of many Italian exiles. Notwithstanding the economic anxieties mentioned in the letters to his wife Massimiliana, he was still able to acquire books and send them to Italy together with his Parisian works and other possessions; these, however, fell into the hands of English corsairs on the sea between Marseille and Genoa.²⁰ On his return to Italy in 1801 Cicognara was elected deputy for the department of the Lower Po and participated in the *Comizi di Lione* where, despite his opposition to the presidency of Napoleon, he was nominated to the state council of the new Italian Republic. In 1803, as a result of his presumed involvement in the Ceroni affair – an anti-French publication, imbued with democratic and patriotic ideals, represented by the Veronese poet and army captain Giuseppe Giulio Ceroni, – Cicognara was arrested in the Castle of Milan, accused again of belonging to the patriotic movement of the *unitari italiani*, and exiled to Tuscany. In May 1804, he finally returned to Milan, pardoned by Napoleon, and reinstated in his public office with all its functions.²¹

For the period between 1801 and 1804, the inventory records books acquired in Verona, Padua, Rovigo, Ferrara, Modena, and Parma which probably go back to 1801. Others were acquired in Lyon, and in London 'through Hamilton in exchange

¹⁸ Fedi, 'Leopoldo Cicognara, letterato e uomo di stato', 208, suspected a secret exploratory mission to find out about the similarity between the dangerous conditions of the young Jacobine republics (Batava and Cisalpine). Malamani, *Memorie del Conte Cicognara*, I, 124–37.

¹⁹ Malamani, *Memorie del Conte Cicognara*, I, 186.

²⁰ Regarding the Italian exiles in Paris, see Anna Maria Rao, *Esuli: l'emigrazione politica italiana in Francia (1792–1802)*, Naples: Guida editori, 1992. Cicognara left Paris on 27 April and returned to Milan on 26 May (Malamani, *Memorie del Conte Cicognara*, I, 185–89).

²¹ For Giuseppe Giulio Ceroni, see Sergio Cella, 'Ceroni, Giuseppe Giulio' in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 1979, vol. 23, 794–96; for a detailed study of the Ceroni affair under different points of view see Stefano Levati, ed., *L'affair Ceroni. Ordine militare e cospirazione politica nella Milano di Bonaparte*, Milan: Edizioni Angelo Guerini e Associati SpA, 2005.

for Cellini's silver horses'; still others were acquired in Milan in 1802 and during the period of his Tuscan exile, in 1803–04.²² The last acquisitions dating from May 1804 coincided with the end of this exile. Book prices are cited in local currency, while the total expenses in each city are given in scudi (?) and annotated at the inventory's end.²³

The year spent in Milan in 1802 marks important changes to his book collecting. During his long and learned conversations with Pietro Giordani, he developed the idea of extending the collection to '*libri d'antichità*', and it was also Giordani who put the entire collection in order during Cicognara's Tuscan exile. From the collation of the Milan inventory with the *Catalogo Ragionato* of 1821,²⁴ it becomes clear that at first he held little interest in books on classical antiquity; that increased only in later years. By 1804, the strongest parts were the treatises on architecture (ca. 125 titles), painting (ca. 70 titles), and guidebooks (ca. 70 titles), followed by books devoted to biography (ca. 60 titles). This also shows how Cicognara, above all, cultivated the bibliophilic aspect of his collection. He focused particularly on precious illustrated books furnished with engravings – a category representing about half of the items listed in the inventory.²⁵ His passion during this period was Vitruvius who, by 1804, was represented by more than forty books including various editions, translations, and versions based on the ancient text – all this despite the bitter losses suffered during these years.

During the year Cicognara was in Milan, he was in touch with the artists Giuseppe Bossi, Andrea Appiani, and Giuseppe Longhi; the first two were bibliophiles like himself. At the same time, Cicognara resumed the artistic studies of his youth and made a first version of his aesthetic treatise, the *Ragionamenti del Bello*, published in 1808. Meanwhile, his book-madness²⁶ acquired an aspect that went beyond bibliophilic interests: he sought to transform his collection into a research

²² For the period in question, see Malamani, *Memorie del Conte Cicognara*, I, 190–292 and the letters sent by Massimiliana Cislago to Leopoldo, MBNB, Cart. Cicognara, 31a/1-24; 31c/1-92.

²³ MBNB, Archivio Cicognara, V.3, c. 46–46 v.

²⁴ It is noteworthy that for the most part the books listed in the inventory are in Cicognara's *Catalogo ragionato dei libri d'arte e d'antichità*, Pisa: Niccolò Capurro, 2 vols, 1821, accompanied by an accurate account of their state (condition, editions, engravings, annotations). For the classificatory structure of the *Catalogo Ragionato* see Barbara Steindl, 'Collezione libri d'arte: la biblioteca di Leopoldo Cicognara e il suo sistema bibliografico', in Giovanna Perini Folesani and Anna Maria Ambrosini Massari, eds, *Riflessi del collezionismo, tra bilanci critici e nuovi contributi*, Florence: Olschki, 2014, 241–71.

²⁵ Leopoldo Cicognara, *Del Bello. Ragionamenti*, Florence: Molini, Landi & Co., 1808; Leopoldo Cicognara, *Del Bello. Ragionamenti*, Pavia: L. Rolla, 1825; Leopoldo Cicognara, *Del Bello. Ragionamento del Conte Leopoldo Cicognara. Con le notizie su la vita e le opere dell'autore, compilate dal signor Defendente Sacchi*, Pavia: Silvestri, 1834. For the further reception of this text, see Fernando Mazzocca, ed., *Scritti d'arte del primo Ottocento*, Milan, Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi editore, 1998, 24–44.

²⁶ The term book-madness was coined by Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Bibliomania or Book-Madness: Containing Some Account of the History, Symptoms, and Cure of this Fatal Disease; in an Epistle Addressed to Richard Heber, Esq*, Richmond: Tiger of the Stripe, 2004; the edition is based on a copy of the 1809 first edition.

tool. This, in turn, stimulated further acquisitions.²⁷ A comparison between the Milan inventory and the *Catalogo ragionato* of 1821 shows how his aesthetic studies influenced the shape of the collection.²⁸ The *Catalogo* section entitled *Scrittori del Bello* lists more than 30 items by Italian, French, and English authors from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, while the inventory of 1798-1804 has barely four, of which only 'Hogarth's analysis of beauty' is cited extensively in the *Ragionamenti*.²⁹ It is only after 1804 that the search for books, the library's enlargement, and Cicognara's scholarship became fully interconnected. This applies especially to the *Storia della scultura* (1813-1818), for which the library was an indispensable tool that grew with the progress of his research.

In 1807, Cicognara expressed his ideas on the duties of a good collector in a small volume dedicated to his friend the bibliophile Giuseppe Bossi which was accompanied by a letter dated 20 August 1807. The volume consists of Cicognara's *Osservazioni sulla bibliomania* and a reprint of the *Breve compendio della vita e morte di San Lazzaro monaco et insigne pittore* — a rare and much sought-after work by the painter Lazzaro Baldi originally published in 1681. The humorous gift to his bibliomaniac friend was supposed to be a consolatory *omage* in the wake of Bossi's bitter decision to give up his position as secretary of the Accademia di Belle Arti of Milan.

In his *Osservazioni*, Cicognara denounced the passion for books unregulated by 'philosophy and an illuminated mind' because 'one owned in order to study them and to discover their merit with philosophic discernment, as well as to share them with others with unreserved liberality and pleasure.'³⁰ Cicognara remained ever faithful to this intention even when his own economic situation compelled him to sell his collection to the Vatican Library in 1824, where it has been preserved and open to the public ever since.³¹

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²⁷ For the formation and significance of Cicognara's collection see Elena Granuzzo, 'Leopoldo Cicognara e la sua Biblioteca: formazione e significato di una collezione', *La Bibliofilia: Rivista di storia del libro e di bibliografia*, vol. CXIV (2012), I, 231–72; II, 371–412 and Steindl, 'Collezione libri d'arte'.

²⁸ Cicognara, *Del Bello*, 1808, 34-50; the other titles are 'Malaspina delle leggi del bello', briefly mentioned in the *Ragionamenti*, 46; 'Nicolai. Il bello novella' and Diderot's 'Traité du beau'.

²⁹ Leopoldo Cicognara, *Vita di S. Lazzaro monaco e pittore preceduta da alcune osservazioni sulla bibliomania*, Brescia: Bettoni, 1807. Note that Cicognara's 'Osservazioni' appeared two years before Dibdin's *Bibliomania*. Dibdin describes the same symptoms already treated by Cicognara in *Vita di S. Lazzaro*.

³⁰ Cicognara, *Vita di S. Lazzaro*, 11.

³¹ For Cicognara's collection of art books in the Vatican Library see Ilaria Miarelli Mariani and Andreina Rita, 'La biblioteca di Leopoldo Cicognara' in Andreina Rita, ed., *La Biblioteca Vaticana dall'occupazione francese all'ultimo Papa Re (1797-1878)*, Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2020, 557–80.



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