

# MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

## NOMINATION FORM

### The Malatesta Novello Library

REF No 2004-18

#### PART A - ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

##### *1 SUMMARY*

The Library of Malatesta Novello, the last ancient library dating from immediately before the invention of printing, embodies the very concept of a humanist library.

With its building, furnishings and manuscript collection, it constitutes a monumental and bibliographical complex of outstanding importance and is acknowledged the world over as the only fifteenth-century library still intact. The architectural design, which is possibly by Leon Battista Alberti, is splendid and innovative, but the focus and essence of the library are the books themselves. Besides the great works of medieval culture, Malatesta Novello collected the fruits of the classical Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arab traditions so that he could realize his project of a universal culture along humanist lines. The precious 343 codices are still in the place where they have lain for the past five centuries and are still linked to their original fifteenth-century chain on the same reading benches. The whole constitutes a book collection and an ideal endowment worthy of the library of a prince of the first half of the Renaissance.

Thanks to this cultural project, Cesena, despite its remote position and in company with Florence, Milan, Ferrara and Rome, was a driving force of humanist culture, the foundation of Western civilization. The Malatestiana, which started life as a gentleman's library, was donated by Malatesta Novello to the local commune for public use and thus became one of the oldest public libraries in Europe.

Inclusion in the Memory of the World Register would undoubtedly help the Malatesta Novello Library to make the best use of the management's longstanding activities regarding conservation of the Library and universal access to it. This is proved by the project Catalogo Aperto dei Manoscritti Malatestiani (Open Catalogue of Malatesta Manuscripts). The catalogue has been operational for the past year on the Internet under the [WWW.ISIS](http://WWW.ISIS) 5.0 programme and offers unprecedented iconographical, textual and bibliographical material. Access is easy, the service is free of charge and information is plentiful.

##### *2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR*

**2.1 Name of the organization:** Istituzione Biblioteca Malatestiana

**2.3** Arch. Giordano Conti  
Mayor of Cesena  
Piazza del Popolo 10  
47023 – Cesena (Forlì-Cesena)  
Italy  
Telephone: 0039 0547 356204  
Fax: 0039 0547 356 485  
Email: [conti\\_g@commune.cesena.fc.it](mailto:conti_g@commune.cesena.fc.it)

**2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated**

The Director of the Istituzione Biblioteca Malatestiana, the management body that administers and looks after the documentary heritage nominated.

The Mayor of the town of Cesena is the owner, in every legal respect, of the documentary heritage nominated.

Dott.ssa Daniela Savoia  
Istituzione Biblioteca Malatestiana  
Piazza Bufalini 1  
47023 Cesena (Forlì-Cesena)  
Italy  
Telephone: 0039 0547 6108 93  
Fax: 039 0547 21237  
Email: [malatestiana@sbn.provincia.ra.it](mailto:malatestiana@sbn.provincia.ra.it)  
Email: [danielasavoia@hotmail.com](mailto:danielasavoia@hotmail.com)

### **3 IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE**

#### **3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated**

Biblioteca Malatestiana di Malatesta Novello

#### **3.2 Description**

The Library of Malatesta Novello consists of 343 codices of different provenances and eras. To establish this collection, the Lord of Cesena added 126 codices, homogeneous in their writing and decoration and produced by his own scriptorium, to the codices owned by the Convent of St Francis and to the bequest of a group of manuscripts, some of them bought or received as gifts, from Giovanni di Marco, his personal physician. Their binding conferred a uniform appearance on the corpus of the Cesena manuscripts, all of which are nowadays still kept, as they were in Malatesta Novello's time, in the building erected to house them.

#### **Background**

In the mid-fifteenth century, Malatesta Novello built a library in the Convent of St Francis that would transmit to his descendants his reputation as a book-loving prince. Even as the library was being built, he started to prepare a valuable collection of manuscripts which, in keeping with his unifying cultural project, was to become the ideal endowment for a humanist library. The variety of genres demonstrates the founder's desire to establish a universal collection for public use.

The present arrangement of the manuscripts still reflect today the main outlines of the old order: the codices, five per bench, are divided by subject with, on the right, as a rule, the sacred writings, the Church Fathers, Bible commentaries and theological works; on the left are legal, classical and historical texts, contemporary writings and Hebrew manuscripts.

#### **Names and contact details of experts or independent specialized bodies familiar with the value or provenance of the Biblioteca di Malatesta Novello**

-- Professor Umberto Eco, President of the Higher School of Humanist Studies at the University of Bologna;

-- Professor Paul Canart, former Prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Library, Professor of Codicology and Greek Paleography, President of the International Greek Paleography Committee;

--Andréa Emiliani, Superintendent of Artistic and Historical Works of the Emilia-Romagna Region, Member of the "Lincei" Academy, President of the Clementina Academy of Bologna.

#### **4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA**

##### **4.1 Authenticity**

The manuscript collection in the Biblioteca Malatestiana has remained intact over the centuries as the result of a whole series of special measures and precautions.

First of all, Malatesta Novello did not entrust his library to the Franciscans, the convent where it was set up, nor to his own descendants, but to the Commune of Cesena. He introduced strict regular controls, which were exercised even during his lifetime by the town magistrates, who drew up reports that can be found in the records of the commune's proceedings. Because of this completely innovative rule, the Malatestiana codices survived unharmed both the end of the Malatesti domination and other eventful periods of history that elsewhere caused the dispersal and loss of famous aristocratic and monastic libraries.

At the end of the fifteenth century, the commune was especially strict in its protection of the manuscripts. It refused to lend them even to influential persons such as the Bishop of Verona, Gian Mattei Giberti (1532) and Cardinal Alessandro Farnese (1540), the nephew of Pope Paul III. When the French revolutionary troops arrived, the codices were virtually walled up for fear of confiscation and were not returned to their place until 1804.

Detailed inventories of the manuscripts were compiled in 1471 and 1474: on the basis of these inventories, written and printed catalogues regularly certified and minutely checked the consistency of the collection and noted its history, vicissitudes, restorations and codicological and artistic aspects.

Even contemporaries celebrated the library's importance and renown, among them the humanists who visited it after 1467, Flavio Biondi, who praised it during the same century as "melioribus Italiane aequiparanda" (comparable to the best in Italy) and the famous typographer, Paolo Manuzio, who found that it possessed "cose mirabili" (wonderful things), not to mention the many scholars who have examined and admired the precious manuscripts over the centuries. The names of the greatest nineteenth-century philologists and historians appear in the library's registers. They include Theodore Mommsen, who frequently consulted St Isidore, and Charles Yriarte, Pierre de Nolhac and Aby Warburg.

##### **4.2 World significance**

The Malatestiana is the model of an aristocratic humanist library which is both unique and universal. Its building, furnishings and books are in a state of perfect and complete preservation. The collection accurately reflects the culture, taste and interests of a cultured fifteenth-century prince inspired by the canons of the humanist civilization which, midway through the fifteenth century, was to become the guiding light and pattern for that age's culture.

Insofar as the formulation of humanism, the complex evolution of its theorization and the developments thereof can be achieved through libraries, then the Malatestiana represents the sole, intact and perfect witness to such a fundamental moment.

Choice of language early modified Malatesta Novello's original concept of a library: as a direct result of humanist theory and practice, which adopted the language of the ancients, the collection included only volumes in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. However, the Library's catalogue is not confined to the most illustrious examples of classical literature but is enriched by ancient treatises on science and technology, ranging from geographers to mathematicians, doctors, students of agriculture

and the authors of naturalist encyclopaedias. There are also translations of the major scientific, medical, philosophical and mathematical works of the Arab world, represented by Avicenna, Averroes, Albumasar, Haly Abbas, Rhazes and their commentaries. Besides contemporary authors, Malatesta Novello supplemented the ancient classics with the texts of Christian thought (Bibles and biblical commentaries, also in Hebrew) and many of the works of the Church Fathers, among whom St Augustine, St Jerome and St John Chrysostom stand out by their importance and fame.

The choice of each manuscript accords with the end in view, namely, to provide an exhaustive general view of the cultural principles on which the Library is based.

The world significance of the Malatestiana is strengthened by the decision to open the collection to the public under the supervision of the communal authorities.

### **4.3 Criteria**

#### **-Time and place**

Against the broader background of Renaissance experimentation, Cesena enjoyed at mid-fifteenth century, under the overlordship of Malatesta Novello dei Malatesti, an extraordinary period of artistic and cultural splendour culminating in the vast Library project.

#### **-Historical, social and cultural context in which the Library came into being**

With his passion for culture and books, Malatesta Novello was by no means alone among the lords of his time, who were extraordinary propagators and patrons of humanism. These were splendid years for the history of books and libraries in Italy, as well as in the rest of Europe.

For an idea of just how favourable the times were to Malatesta Novello's project, it is perhaps worth mentioning what had been happening in Florence during the previous decade over and beyond the major collections. In order to save the extraordinary collection of the famous book-lover Niccolò Niccoli, and to fulfil the latter's testamentary wish that his codices be made available to the public, Cosimo I de' Medici had commissioned the construction by Michelozzo of a new library in the Convent of St Mark while continuing to enrich and complete the collection. In 1442, the registration of loans by the neighbouring Este Library had begun. During the same period, Pope Niccolò V had expressed a desire to create a specific site for a large library for the use of scientists.

Given the prevailing cultural climate, it is therefore unnecessary to say that the creation of the Malatestiana was not an exceptional event. What is exceptional is that it is the only library to have remained almost intact down to the present day even in the most minor details. We can therefore talk of a "miracle".

#### **-Subject and theme**

The work of bibliographical renewal undertaken by Malatesta Novello forms part of the ancient collection of the Convent of St Francis, which comprised some 50 volumes, among them works on religion and medieval scholasticism together with patristic literature. The task was to fill in the obvious gaps in the collection: the copying workshop set up by Malatesta Novello, which operated from 1450 to 1465, produced some 130 codices intended to renew and complete the Franciscan collection as well as texts with a humanist tinge (literature, science and history), with special emphasis on the Church Fathers. The donation by Giovanni di Marco, Malatesta Novello's personal physician, also a devotee of the precious codices, supplemented the collection with works on fundamental medicine, astronomy, philosophy and literature.

#### **-Artistic and philological aspects**

The Malatestiana codices demonstrate from the artistic viewpoint a standard of production that in its elegance, richness and refinement makes them worthy of mention in the same breath as the most important manuscript collections of Italian humanism. A group of miniaturized manuscripts by artists of the Ferrara school, including the great Taddeo Crivelli, is of incomparable value.

#### **4.4 Issues**

##### **-of rarity**

The rarity of the Malatestiana Library is evidenced by the overall value of the whole collection.

##### **-of integrity**

The Malatesta Novello Library has remained whole and entire since it was started.

##### **-of management**

A management plan (see attached Economic Management Plan) permanently protects the integrity, inalienability and enjoyment of the Library. This is done by economic and political management which, subdivided into chapters, forms the basis for allocation of the institution's annual budget after the most important objectives have been identified.

## **5 LEGAL INFORMATION**

### **5.1 Owner**

Comune di Cesena  
Piazza del Popolo 10  
47023 Cesena (FC) Italy  
Telephone: 0039 0547 356204  
Fax: 0039 0547 356485  
Email: [conti\\_g@comune.cesena.fc.it](mailto:conti_g@comune.cesena.fc.it)

### **5.2 Custodian**

Istituzione Biblioteca Malatestiana  
Piazza Bufalini 1  
47023 Cesena (FC) Italy  
Telephone: 0039 0547 610 893  
Fax: 0039 0547 21237  
Email: [malatestiana@sbn.provincia.ra.it](mailto:malatestiana@sbn.provincia.ra.it)

### **5.3 Legal status**

**a) Category of ownership:** communal and public

**b) Accessibility**

The Library has always permitted direct access to the collection, subject to adequate safeguards aimed at preserving the material, historical and cultural integrity of the documents. Following a reasoned request, scholars and researchers are allowed to consult works in a special room enjoying suitable safety and conservation conditions.

Since March 2002 there has been general access to this heritage via the “Catalogo Aperto dei Manoscritti Malatestiana”, which can be viewed on-line on the Library’s web page ([www.malatestiana.it](http://www.malatestiana.it)). The Catalogo Aperto (Open Catalogue) is continually evolving thanks to information added flexibly at local level over the network. The presence of a related database compiled as a result of development of the [WWW.ISIS](http://WWW.ISIS) 5.0 application gives its pages functionality, versatility and dynamism.

In addition to the large and steadily increasing number of digital images, the Catalogo Aperto dei Manoscritti provides bibliographies, codicological descriptions, a discussion forum and specific texts that supplement knowledge of individual manuscripts.

**c) Copyright status**

The Commune of Cesena is subject to existing Italian state legislation on copyright. Reproduction of a work may be allowed free of charge provided it is for study or scientific research. The only condition is that the source of the reproduction should be quoted and, if possible, that at least one copy of the publication should be provided free of charge.

**6 MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**Evaluation of the importance of the documents**

The Malatesta Novello Library is recognized throughout the world as the only humanist library whose buildings, furnishings and book collection are in a state of full and perfect preservation.

**Access policy and procedure**

Direct access to material is allowed after the necessary protective measures have been taken. Following a reasoned request, scholars and researchers are allowed to consult works in a special room where there are suitable safety and conservation conditions for the manuscripts.

Images, descriptions and bibliographies are accessible in the Catalogo Aperto dei Manoscritti ([www.malatestiana.it](http://www.malatestiana.it)).

**Budget for preservation activities**

The Malatestiana Library is a public institution funded by the Commune of Cesena and assisted by contributions from other public and private bodies. The budget covers everything needed for preventive conservation (microclimate control, dust removal, etc.) and all preservation and restoration operations by more highly skilled specialists under the control of the Library Department of the Emilia-Romagna Region.

However, the budget does not cover the expenditure needed to complete the digitization of all the manuscripts that has been started by the Catalogo Aperto. This amounts to €190,000

**Procedures and policies for control of the physical environment**

Manuscripts are kept in their original places, where optimal preservation conditions have been maintained for centuries (temperature 20° with a 3° variation; relative humidity between 45% and 65%).

Intruder and fire alarm systems are in operation. There is continuous monitoring by CCTV with video recording.

**Archive preservation service**

Conservation and protection of the Malatesta Novello Library are the main duty of the Malatestiana, which complies with the security and conservation regulations laid down by the Italian State for libraries.

The preservation service consists of a librarian/conservator (with a master's degree), a librarian (with master's degree), a photographer and 10 operator/guides. For special projects, use is made of outside specialists.

## **7 CONSULTATION**

Selection of the project with a view to its inclusion in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register has been the subject of detailed consultations with the representatives of the owner and custodian of the documents, professional experts and specialists and representatives of the Italian Memory of the World Committee.

### **Originator of the nomination**

The Italian Committee for the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, in collaboration with the Commune of Cesena and the Istituzione Biblioteca Malatestiana (owner and custodian of the Malatesta Novello Library).

### **Contact persons**

Giovanni Puglisi  
Presidente Commissione Nazionale Italiana UNESCO  
00186 Roma  
Piazza Firenze 27  
Telephone: 0039 066873723  
Fax: 0039 06 6873684

Daniela Savoia  
Istituzione Biblioteca Malatestiana  
Piazza Bufalini 1  
47023 Cesena (Forlì-Cesena)  
Telephone: 0039 0547610893  
Fax: 0039 054721237  
Email: [malatestiana@sbn.provincia.ra.it](mailto:malatestiana@sbn.provincia.ra.it)  
Email: [danielasavoia@hotmail.com](mailto:danielasavoia@hotmail.com)

## **PART B - SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION**

### **8 ASSESSMENT OF RISK**

The documentary heritage nominated for inclusion is not currently at risk from adverse external factors.

### **9 ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION**

Manuscripts are kept in their original places where optimal conservation conditions have been maintained for centuries.

There are intruder and fire alarm systems. Continuous monitoring is carried out by CCTV with video recording.