CULTURE IS AN OPEN BOOK
Digita Vaticana Onlus is a non-profit organisation that promotes the digitalisation project of the manuscripts of the Vatican Library, by raising the necessary funds to guarantee its success. The organisation develops communication initiatives in order to spread knowledge about and promote these important historical documents, giving visibility to the project and its supporters.
Completed in Florence in 1470, this map is the Latin translation of the map of the world found in Ptolemy’s Geographia from 150 A.D. The map, framed by the twelve winds represented as human faces, was drawn by the famous German cartographer Nicolaus Germanus, who added Sweden, Norway, and Greenland to Ptolemy’s map. Urb.Lat.274, ff.73v - 74r.

There used to be and thanks to you there always will be

Founded by Pope Nicholas V in 1451, the Vatican Library is home to an invaluable heritage of historical evidence ranging from literature to history, from art to law, from astronomy to mathematics, from natural science to medicine...

- Over 80,000 manuscripts
- Around 100,000 archive records
- Around 9,000 incunabula
- Tens of thousands of 15th and 16th-century documents
- 1,600,000 books
- 150,000 prints, drawings and plates
- Over 150,000 photographs
Because of its high level of specialisation, the Vatican Library only allows access to specialised scholars. In fact, a library such as this cannot be open to the public, because it must guarantee the conservation of the delicate materials it houses, which must be adequately protected to ensure that they do not deteriorate.

The paper books are made of is one of the most delicate materials that exist, and is very sensitive to factors such as light, humidity and temperature. For this reason, the need to consult the Library’s documents puts their very survival and their future availability and accessibility at risk every day.

“We determine that whosoever wishes to gain these indulgences granted by us, must [...] visit these same Basilicas for thirty days in succession...”

On 22 February 1300, with the Papal bull Antiquorum Habet Fida, Pope Boniface VIII proclaims the first Holy Year in history. Arch. Cap. San Pietro, caps. 1, fasc. 1, n. 8.
The Vatican Library has begun a huge project: the digitalisation of its 80,000 manuscripts.

**Digitalising Means**
- Protecting and conserving these delicate historical manuscripts, minimising the need for scholars to directly consult the originals.
- Guaranteeing their high-quality reproduction, while maintaining their original aspect as much as possible, before they deteriorate.
- Making cultural heritage accessible to the public, online and free of charge.

In 1450, Sandro Botticelli illustrated the Divine Comedy. Conceived as an album to leaf through, he commented the cantos with his illustrations, in this extraordinary unfinished work. Reg.Lat.1896, f.101r.
For the digital conservation of its manuscripts, the Vatican Library has decided to adopt the FITS format. Created by NASA and used for the storage of astronomical and astrophysical images and data, the FITS format was developed precisely for the long-term conservation of such data and documents. The maxim “once FITS, always FITS” has been coined to indicate that no modification could ever invalidate an existing FITS file.

- It is an open standard format, free of any legal restrictions for its use
- It is systematically updated by the international scientific community
- It can be visualised, printed, and reproduced by all the most widely-used image processing programs
- It is immune to viruses and other forms of malware
- It is able to store images which perfectly reproduce the originals in terms of colour and resolution

“If thou art a God, Love, is not thy power free? Ahi! Do for me, if thou canst, Love, What if I were Love, I'd do for thee!”

During his life, Michelangelo wrote over 300 poems and sonnets. Codex Vaticanus 3211 is composed of 111 pages of manuscripts containing poems, technical notes, and preparatory sketches. This sketch is for Jonah’s right knee in the Last Judgment, and contains the sonnet “If thou art a God, Love”. Vat.Lat.3211, f.88r.
The 1st-century Greek doctor Pedanius Dioscorides’ herb encyclopaedia is one of the most well known ancient texts containing descriptions and illustrations of medicinal plants. It was reproduced in an illuminated manuscript during the 15th century. Chig F.VII.159, f.134r.

CONSERVE
COMMUNICATE
GIVE VALUE

The manuscripts will stay safe in an anti-atomic bunker with temperature and humidity-controlled conditions. The digitalised images will be housed in two different protected data storage locations, quite far from each other.

The documents will be accessible online. Scholars will still be able to consult the originals, but the possibility of accessing their digital version online will minimise the risks related to the direct consultation of the manuscripts.

From Library heritage to cultural heritage: at the moment, on the Vatican Library website, it is already possible to consult the digital version of many manuscripts and incunabula (books printed before 1500). When the project is complete, the entire collection of 80,000 manuscripts will be available online.
Digitalisation allows for cross-referenced research among all the 80,000 manuscripts contained in the Vatican Library. An innovation that will permit scholars to more easily carry out studies that had to be done by hand before. This will lead to knowledge and discoveries that are unthinkable today, and will pave the way for unprecedented cultural initiatives.

This 1585 letter attests to a first direct encounter between Japan and the West. The authors were four young Japanese men, converted during the so-called “first Japanese embassy”, a trip organized by the Jesuit priest Alessandro Valignano to show the Pope the fruits of the Jesuit missions in the East, as well as to introduce Japan to the marvels of Christian Europe. Borg.Cinese 536.
LET’S GIVE A FUTURE TO OUR PAST

The project begun by Digita Vaticana aims to digitalise around 40 million pages for a total of 45 billion bytes.

In order to complete the project, we need:
- More than 15 years
- Over 50 million euro
- At least 150 technicians, including photographers and verifiers
- Avant-garde instruments (scanners, cameras, servers, computers...)
- Adequate work environments for both the workers and the manuscripts themselves

The project will ensure:
- Perfect quality results
- All the necessary information to correctly catalogue the documents (material, dimensions, provenience, date, acquisition date, etc.)
- The conservation of the originals and their use in the digital era
- Possibilities for research unexplored until now

STEP INTO THE PROJECT TO BECOME PART OF HISTORY

Today it is possible to contribute to an undertaking on which the conservation and safeguarding of ancient knowledge depend. Technology allows us to think about the past while looking to the future, and, thanks to the web, world culture can truly become common heritage, accessible to everyone, at any time and completely free of charge.

The following can become supporters of DIGITA VATICANA:

- **BENEFACTORS**
  Institutions (businesses, foundations, associations, etc.) and individuals that support the project through liberal donations.

- **CORPORATE PARTNERS**
  Provide goods, services, specialised personnel, and funds to be used for the digitalisation project.

- **UNIVERSITIES AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS**
  Sustain and promote the digitalisation of manuscripts of their particular interest.

"Questioning is always difficult, both for the questioner but even more so for he who is questioned."

On 30 March 1821, Giacomo Leopardi wrote a passionate letter to the “first librarian” of the Vatican Library, Angelo Mai, hoping to obtain a recommendation letter for a position as a scriptor. Vat.Lat.12895, ff.42v - 42r.
DIGITO ERGO SUM

The website www.digitavaticana.org will be the platform for the promotion and diffusion of the single digitalisation projects. Some ad-hoc content (videos, mini-sites, short reports) will be created to tell the story of the manuscripts being digitalised.

Our supporters will be able to choose which digitalisation project to sustain financially, upon which Digita Vaticana will decide which content to digitalise in order to valorise both the manuscripts and their supporters as much as possible.

In addition to this content, the Digita Vaticana website will contain a section dedicated to the detailed Case Histories of the projects financed by its partners and supporters. The supporters in turn will find their logo on publicity materials created by the Association.

Moreover, Digita Vaticana supporters will be able to participate in exclusive events during which they will be updated on the status of the manuscript digitalisation and the results achieved so far, and they will have the privilege of seeing some of the historical documents up close. Finally, they will be able to participate in Vatican Library cultural events such as exhibits, book readings, private guided visits, and even trips abroad to visit foreign museums to which the Library has lent pieces.
SUPPORT THE PROJECT

Through a Bank Transfer
Digitale Vaticana Onlus
Via Ferrando di Savoia 3 - 00196
Tax Code 93756206580
IBAN: IT 02 V 03380 02020 00000020141
BIC: BIBA7IT2 - Ubi Banco di Brescia

On the www.digitavaticana.org website you can contribute to the project with just a few clicks.

Become a Partner of Digitale Vaticana Onlus you will help us to save a priceless cultural heritage and you will be involved in exclusive events organised by the Association.
Send an email to info@digitavaticana.org.

THANK YOU

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