

THE BIBLIOTECA CAPITOLARE OF VERONA 16 CENTURIES OF HISTORY PROJECTED INTO THE FUTURE

The oldest library in the world still in activity is being renovated with additional exhibition spaces, more visitor opportunities and an enriched calendar of events, thanks to the new Foundation

Verona houses the oldest library in the world still in activity. This is the Capitolare, whose existence has been documented with certainty since the year **517 AD**. In the shadow of the Cathedral, in the historic heart of the city, the library is home to a priceless treasure of **unique works**: ancient collections, including **1,280 manuscripts**, an archive of **11,000 parchments**, **100,000 books**, among which are **250 incunabula**, thousands of 16th and 17th century editions, and **750 works of art**, including various artefacts, paintings and archaeological finds. The bookshelves display titles from the most diverse disciplines: theology, law, philosophy, poetry, astronomy, medicine, botany, history and countless other sciences, forming the **foundations** of Western civilisation.

Knowledge spanning centuries

The Biblioteca Capitolare was born as the offshoot of a **Scriptorium**: a prolific bookmaking workshop, where the amanuenses devoted themselves to the painstaking transcription of the texts of the Cathedral Canons. Strangely enough, one of those clerics - **Ursicinus** - signed the manuscript he had just finished copying and marked it with the date, 1 August 517: a crucial insight in certifying the origins of the Capitolare.

From the 12th century onwards, the library also became a place of study frequented by the fathers of Italian literature: among others, **Dante Alighieri** and **Francesco Petrarca**. With the advent of the printing press, the Scriptorium was closed and a new collection of **incunabula** and early printed books began. The Capitolare's library holdings are not only impressive, having been amassed over **1,600 years**, but above all are characterised by unparalleled **treasures**.

Open-book treasures

In addition to the aforementioned Ursicinus' manuscript, among the most precious books in the Capitolare's possession is the magnificent Codex VI, one of the oldest surviving **purple Gospels**. The pages, in exquisite purple-soaked parchment, contain the four Gospels in Latin, written in elegant gold and silver letters.

The library also houses the world's oldest copy of **St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei***, produced at the beginning of the 5th century, when its author was still alive.

The Institutions of the Roman jurist **Gaius** are also of great interest, and the focus of study at several Universities: this precious manuscript, dating back to the 5th century, hands down to us the only collection of **classical Roman law** that survived the Byzantine manipulations of Justinian's reform.

But possibly the most distinctive work, despite its brevity and simplicity, is the famous **Veronese Riddle**: a short puzzle, annotated by an unknown copyist at the edge of the page in an 8th century

manuscript, representing the first written attestation of the Italian vernacular language. The rooms of the library also house a very significant picture, the **Raterian Iconography**: the oldest representation of the city of Verona in the Middle Ages.

The new museum spaces and the birth of the Foundation

Today, the rooms of the Capitolare look very different from their medieval counterparts due to the **restorations** that have taken place over time, following dramatic historical facts: the plague of 1630, the raids of the Napoleonic regime, the 1882 flood and the American bombing in 1945. Events that saw the library's supervisors do their utmost to save its holdings. The reconstructions, however, have not undermined the charm of the past that can be breathed when walking through the rooms.

With the mission to open the doors to the future, the **Fondazione Biblioteca Capitolare** was established in 2019: a non-profit organisation with the aim of preserving the world-renowned material and, at the same time, making it increasingly accessible to the public.

In September 2023, the Foundation has opened new exhibition spaces on the first floor of the building, and is currently at work on a multi-faceted project, ranging from the renewal of the brand to the enhancement of scientific research, from the redesign of the exhibition areas with advanced technologies, to the creation of a cultural hub for the **integrated study** of books and to support **collection-based research**. The library's calendar is also enriched with **guided tours, thematic events, conferences and workshops**.

The development path undertaken by the Capitolare also includes opening up to the private sector, through partnership actions and the **organisation of events** in the library's evocative spaces: from the iconic **Monumental Hall** to the conference room, inaugurated in 2022 following renovation and refurbishment, to the elegant **12th-century Canons' Cloister**.

Fondazione Biblioteca Capitolare di Verona

Piazza Duomo 19, 37121 Verona - Italy

Admission to the exhibition spaces subject to payment

Opening hours: 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. (closed on Wednesdays)

Guided tours available upon reservation

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