il Mondo di Luigi Ferdinando Marsili
III Centenario della Fondazione dell’Istituto delle Scienze

the Luigi Ferdinando Marsili’s World
Third Centenary of the foundation of the Istituto delle Scienze

BOLOGNA
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Museo di Palazzo Poggi
Biblioteca Universitaria BUB
Accademia di Belle Arti
Museo Civico Archeologico
Museo Civico Medievale
Luigi Ferdinando Marsili (1658-1730) gave the Istituto delle Scienze e delle Arti, which he founded in Bologna in 1711, a substantial donation of books and a cutting-edge collection of scientific equipment, together with naturalistic collections and archaeological finds collected during his military and scientific campaigns, or purchased from booksellers and tool-makers in various parts of Europe. The wealth and variety of these donations still today bear witness to the far-sightedness and wide cultural horizons of this extraordinary scientific and military figure. Marsili’s “objects” were first displayed in the Istituto’s rooms and laboratories, where for all of the 18th century the general representation of the world they gave was highly innovative, not only for this university, but also in comparison with all the major scientific academies of the time. When the Istituto was abolished at the end of the century, Marsili’s encyclopedia underwent its first transformation: a significant part of the instruments and collections was moved into the laboratories of the newly-reformed university; the plaster-cast gallery of the Accademia Clementina, which was already associated with the Istituto, became the basis for the creation of the Accademia di Belle Arti. However, the “heterogenesis” which so often regulates the life and function of such objects also had to make available the numerous finds which had been left in the previous building, including the Gallery of Antiquities, highly relevant to the encyclopaedic requirements of the new age. These in fact became important to the city when the Italian nation, finally united, began the reconstruction of its historical past, and so these antique collections were largely placed in the Municipal Archaeological Museum, while the Turkish arms and trophies went to enrich the collection in the Municipal Medieval Museum, and the Zambeccari collection became the nucleus of the Pinacoteca. However, after recent developments, the Palazzo Poggi Museum today conserves the memory of that original collection, both in the restructured scientific character of its rooms and in the bibliographic material and archaeological finds conserved in the University Library. The multifaceted exhibition presented today, however, has no intention of reproducing in a single stroke Marsili’s extraordinary collection. Such an aim, apart from being impossible from the point of view of inventory and anachronistic from a historical point of view, would not present the revolutionary range of Marsili’s achievements in the way they deserve. His idea of the “structure of the globe” which these objects “encapsulate” was clearly destined to pass beyond the century in which it originated. The uninterrupted movement and erudite anarchy of such objects have never managed to cancel out the indelible marks they have left on the cultural order which has had such a profound effect on the city over the last three centuries.

“Una sola città come questa, con un piccolo territorio non poteva in altra forma rendersi più famosa che col mezzo della letteratura che s’acquisita senza l’aiuto degli escersi e dei vasti territori ma solo con l’applicazione e l’opera dell’ingegno”
L.F. Marsili 1709
Three hundred years after the birth of the Istituto delle Scienze e delle Arti in Bologna, the Palazzo Poggi Museum is celebrating the scientific and political activity of its founder Luigi Ferdinando Marsili with an exhibition, new initiatives and research dedicated to the illustrious and multifaceted figure of the scientist from Bologna.

Nobleman, soldier, diplomat, traveller, man of science, cosmopolitan by nature, Marsili was an eminent figure in the scientific panorama of Europe of the Enlightenment thanks to his ability to move freely among different fields of knowledge and his experimental approach, inherited from the school of two interpreters of the Galilean spirit from Bologna, Marcello Malpighi and Geminiano Montanari.

While it is true that during the course of his life-time Count Luigi Ferdinando Marsili's exploits took him through a multitude of intellectual and operative, scientific and organizational experiences, whose distinctive feature nevertheless always remained a gaze that looked beyond the already known and acquired, it was without doubt his passion for “military art” that encapsulated the essence of an erudition made up of countless threads embracing a wide range of disciplines, fired by a constant thirst for “experimentation” and an insuppressible “didactic” impulse.

The exhibition, whose theme is “The Science of Arms” and the volume of essays that accompany it, highlight the close relation within Marsili between naturalist, geographer, mathematician and military engineer.

Scientific instruments, models of fortresses and of artillery, pictures and portraits, treaties, manuals and drawings dedicated to fortifications, all provide a background to a reconstruction that is not about military history in a strict sense, but sheds light on an era of transition, that of the “crisis of the European conscience”, of which Marsili was an indisputable protagonist.

A trecento anni dalla nascita dell’Istituto delle Scienze e delle Arti di Bologna, il Museo di Palazzo Poggi intende celebrare l’attività scientifica e politica del suo fondatore Luigi Ferdinando Marsili con un’esposizione, nuovi allestimenti e ricerche dedicate alla figura dell’illustre e poliedrico scienziato bolognese.

Nobile, soldato, diplomatico, viaggiatore, uomo di scienza, cosmopolita per vocazione, Marsili fu figura eminente nel panorama scientifico dell’Europa dei Lumi grazie alla sua capacità di spaziare in campi disparati dal sapere e alla sua attitudine sperimentale, acquisita alla scuola di due interpreti bolognesi dello spirito galileiano quali furono Marcello Malpighi e Geminiano Montanari.

Se il percorso della vita del conte bolognese Luigi Ferdinando Marsili attraversò una gamma di esperienze intellettuali ed operative, scientifiche ed organizzative, il cui tratto distintivo, comunque, rimase sempre uno sempre oltre il saputo e l’acquisito, senza dubbio fu nell’approfondimento dell’arte militare che concentrò l’essenza di un sapere fatto di intrecci molteplici fra conoscenze disciplinari diverse, vivificate da una costante esigenza “sperimentale” e da un insopprimibile impulso “didattico”.

L’esposizione che ha per tema “La Scienza delle Armi” e il volume di saggi che la accompagna, danno conto dello stretto rapporto che si poneva in lui tra il naturalista, il geografo, il matematico e l’ingegnere militare.

Strumenti scientifici, modelli di piazzeforti e di artiglierie, quadri e ritratti, trattati, manuali e disegni dedicati alle fortificazioni, fanno da sfondo a una ricostruzione che non interessa la storia militare in senso stretto, ma chiama in causa la cultura di un’epoca di passaggio, quella della “crisi della coscienza europea” della quale Marsili fu un indiscusso protagonista.

Angelo Varni
The origins of Bologna University Library in the documents of Marsili

The Istituto delle Scienze, of which we are celebrating the third Centenary, was born, as we learn from its Constitutions, as “… a library of books of the best editions and with a large number of Arabian, Persian, Turkish and Greek manuscripts”. The private library gathered by count Marsili during his travels and military expeditions, at “costly application”, thus became the library of the Istituto delle Scienze, the first historical nucleus of the present University Library. For its founder, the Library represented an integral and indispensable part of the ambitious and modern project to renew scientific research, which for decades had fallen into decline, on an experimental basis at the University of Bologna.

The Exhibition arranged by the BUB intends, therefore, to recount the birth of the Istituto and its Library through the documents of Marsili, which have remained intact despite the countless dispersions suffered throughout the course of their three centuries of life. The first document is precisely the Instrumentum donationis (ms.Marsili 146) which describes the first collection of books and scientific material made available to students and teachers. This is followed by the Strumento di una seconda donazione (ms.Marsili 146A), published in 1727. The manuscripts chosen for the Exhibition are those that best document Marsili’s relationship with books and the Library: the tireless search for precious material to be saved, from among the flames of the fire that destroyed Buda (ms.Marsili 85B, Discorso intorno alla famosa libreria di Buda), reflections on how to prepare an environment most conducive to study (ms.Marsili 90C, Progetto d’un gabinetto di libri e mappe geografiche) and how to create the ideal library (ms.Marsili 85G, Progetto d’un’ libreria, ms.Marsili 88E, Idea dell’Istituzione della biblioteca). The Exhibition route concludes with the Costituzioni dell’Istituto delle Scienze and a volume of the Giornale dei letterati d’Italia containing an article dedicated to the inauguration of the Istituto; finally some important historical catalogues describe the first significant donations – not only from Marsili – which lie at the origin of the precious patrimony, still housed at the BUB since 1712.

Biancastella Antonino, Rita DeTata, Patrizia Moscatelli
Luigi Ferdinando Marsili's role is fundamental for the birth of the Accademia Clementina and for the organization of its activity during its first decades. In 1708 he took up the cause of Gian Pietro Zanotti, spokesman of the most illustrious artists in Bologna who two years before had asked the Senate to approve the constitution of an Accademia that would free them from the hegemony of the Corporation of Painters, thus affirming the intellectual nature of their work. Already engaged in the project for the Istituto delle Scienze and contemplating the idea of creating an organism dedicated to research in all fields of knowledge, Marsili used his own influence in the Senate and in the Pope's office to obtain a swift approval of the Statutes, confirmed in 1711 by Pope Clement XI. While awaiting its establishment in Palazzo Poggi, the Accademia was inaugurated in 1710 in the home of Marsili, who immediately gave proof of his generosity and profound interest in every aspect of the working of the new Institution. Marsili personally chose the most suitable models and it is to him that we owe the endowment of the first plaster-cast models copied from the ancient statuary in Rome, the setting up of the first nucleus of the Library, the formation of a rich and varied collection of prints, and the provision of the Architecture Room with models of Roman columns, pinnacles and obelisks, and with the draft of Bernini’s Fontana dei fiumi. Of particular significance for its far-sightedness and the modernity of its didactic principles is the establishment in 1727 of an annual competition for students funded by Marsili himself which took his name and, from 1754, was called Marsili - Aldrovandi following the acquisition of another economic donation. The test-pieces for the Drawn figure, the Modelled figure and Architecture that won the prizes for the I and II classes, were conserved in the Accademia and in turn became didactic models and today form a precious collection that allows us to understand the cultural orientation of the Institution in the years that lead up to the start of the 19th century and to appreciate the early works of artists who later achieved wider fame. After the closure of the Accademia Clementina all the endowments destined for the transmission of artistic knowledge passed to the Accademia Nazionale, set up by the Napoleonic regime and from 1804 situated in the ex Novitiate of the Jesuits, in Borgo della Paglia. This included the material donated or procured by Marsili which, with few exceptions such as the architectonic models, nearly all returned to Palazzo Poggi after a brief stay in the Accademia Nazionale, and are still housed here today.

From “Clementina” to the Accademia di Belle Arti

Il ruolo di Luigi Ferdinando Marsili è fondamentale per la nascita dell’Accademia Clementina e per l’organizzazione della sua attività durante i primi decenni. Nel 1708 egli fa proprie le istanze di Gian Pietro Zanotti, portavoce dei più illustri artisti bolognesi che due anni prima hanno richiesto al Senato di approvare la costituzione di un’Accademia che li affranchi dall’egemonia della Corporazione dei Pittori affermando il carattere intellettuale della loro attività. Già impegnato nel progetto dell’Istituto delle Scienze e accarezzando l’idea di realizzare un organismo preposto alla ricerca in ogni campo del sapere, Marsili esercita la propria influenza presso il Senato e presso il Pontefice ottenendo rapidamente l’approvazione degli Statuti, confermati nel 1711 da Clemente XI. In attesa di stabilirsi in Palazzo Poggi, l’Accademia si inaugura nel 1710 nella dimora del Generale che subìto dà prova di munificenza e di profondo interesse per il funzionamento dell’Istituzione in ogni suo aspetto. Si deve a lui, che sceglie personalmente i modelli più adatti, la dotazione dei primi calchi in gesso tratti a Roma dalla statuaria antica, la costituzione del nucleo iniziale della Biblioteca, la formazione di una ricca e variegata raccolta di stampe, l’allestimento della sala dell’Architettura con modelli di colonne, guglie e obelischi romani e con il bozzetto della Fontana dei fiumi di Bernini. Di particolare rilievo per la lungimiranza e per la modernità dei princìpi didattici è l’istituzione, nel 1727, di un concorso annuale destinato agli allievi che egli finanzia e che da lui prende il nome; si chiamerà, dal 1754, Marsili - Aldrovandi in seguito all’acquisizione di un’altra dotazione economica. Le prove di Figura disegnata, Figura modellata e Architettura, vincitrici dei premi di I e di II classe, vengono conservate in Accademia divenendo a loro volta modelli didattici e rappresentano attualmente una rassegna preziosa per comprendere l’orientamento culturale dell’Istituzione in anni che si spingono fino agli albori dell’Ottocento e per conoscere le opere giovanili di artisti poi affermatisi in ambito più ampio. Dopo la soppressione della Clementina (rifondata nel 1931) tutte le dotazioni destinate alla trasmissione del sapere artistico passano all’Accademia Nazionale, istituita dal regime napoleonico e collocata, dal 1804, nell’ex Noviziato dei Gesuiti, in Borgo della Paglia. Vi sono compresi i materiali donati o procurati dal Marsili che, salvo poche eccezioni quali i modelli architettonici, ritornano quasi tutti in Palazzo Poggi dopo una breve permanenza in Accademia, sono tuttora in gran parte conservati nella medesima sede.

Dalla “Clementina” all’Accademia di Belle Arti

Fabia Farneti
already at the moment of founding the Istituto delle Scienze, L.F. Marsili had foreseen the creation of a “Museum of antiquities for the use of learning”, where his rich archeological collection would be made available to scholars. The Count’s antiquities were destined to occupy one of the most important “Rooms” of the Istituto, where the antique objects would become instruments of empirical research, as well as starting points for debates and discussion. His search for archeological materials was always clearly inspired by his thirst for knowledge of the uses and customs of the distant past rather than their aesthetic exploitation, in sintonia with the general attitude assumed by Marsili with regards antiquity, which he examined from a practical and experimental point of view, in the wake of the eclectic studies he carried out in the field of the natural sciences. In 1881 Marsili's archeological collection, which with the passing of time had been enriched by Egyptian, Etruscan, Greek and, the most numerous, Roman objects, became part of the patrimony of the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Marsili's interests embraced a wide range of aspects of the ancient world, all evidently linked with his very modern concept whereby the study and reconstruction of the past should become an indispensable requisite for the development of the present. Among the many areas of research dedicated to the understanding of ancient technologies, a special place was reserved for the study of military art. The acquisition of certain materials illustrating weapons, such as the Roman cinerary urn, or other objects of war, such as the ships on the fragments of sarcophagi, or else the very particular bronze “war” elephant, on display in the exhibition, was certainly the expression of a desire to deepen his knowledge of the techniques of war “of Egyptians, Etruscans and Romans”. His documents also include a rich iconographic collection of arms, instruments of war, fortifications and means of transport on land and sea, above all from the Roman era, made up of images copied from ancient monuments, in particular from the bas-reliefs of the Trajan Column, divided and arranged according to type of object or structure.

Marinella Marchesi
A fundamental figure in the cultural scene of Bologna in the 18th century, General Luigi Ferdinando Marsili became famous not only for the strategies he adopted while serving the Habsburg empire, which brought him notable success in the diplomatic world, but also for his long-sighted project to found the Istituto delle Scienze, thus relaunching the prestige of the city at a European level. A reflection of his modern conception of studies is the “Arms Room”, which he set up inside the Istituto, as an efficient means of learning, through theory and experimentation, about the tactics and technologies that make the “art of warfare” a science true and proper: containing a wide range of different types of war instruments, collected over the many years he spent in Ottoman territory, whether in prison or during military campaigns, the “Room” was above all endowed with numerous “Turkish weapons”. It was precisely the latter that held a special place in the interests of the General, who confesses that he was fascinated right from his “most tender years” by his reading of the “Histories of the Turkish Nation, … described as invincible”. A fame of invincibility that the general-scientist seemed to wish to reappraise also through the study and classification of the weapons in adozion of the Turkish army, from the “Arms Room” presented in a “panoply” arrangement, and that were described in great detail in his treatise on the Stato militare dell’Imperio Ottomano, published posthumously (1732). Partly belonging to the collection of the Museo Civico Medievale, they are now exhibited here, some of them for the first time. Among others, worthy of particular mention are the tug, military standards ending in a gold-plated brass and decorated with horsehair, which recurred frequently in the celebrative iconography dedicated to the General, becoming a sort of “Marsilian” emblem.

Mark Gregory D’Apuzzo