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## **Preface**

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This volume is the result of a collaboration between the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence and the Department of Italian Language and Literature at the University of Tokyo. It brings together the outcomes of seminars, lectures, and didactic activities held in Florence and Tokyo, made possible thanks to the generous support of the University of Tokyo Humanities Center. These sessions, open to members of the Humanities Center and to Japanese scholars, explored the history of the book, the Italian tradition of libraries—especially the holdings of the Laurenziana—and their comparison with Japan’s more recent yet significant tradition, exemplified by the rare Italian books preserved in the General Library of the University of Tokyo.

Founded on the Medici family’s private collection, the Laurenziana preserves approximately 11,000 manuscripts, 2,500 papyri (the most extensive collection of Egyptian papyri in Italy), 566 incunabula, 1,681 sixteenth-century editions, and roughly 120,000 later printed books. Many of its manuscripts feature sumptuous bindings and some of the finest examples of Florentine illumination, while the library also serves as a primary laboratory for the study of scripts, particularly the transitional hands that shaped the development of modern typefaces.

The collaboration between the Laurenziana and the University of Tokyo began in 2023 with a program that enabled a group of Tokyo students to spend a week in Florence. Guided by their professors and by the Laurenziana staff—especially Francesca Gallori and Eugenia Antonucci—the students visited Michelangelo’s celebrated reading room and the historic *plutei*, and had the privilege of examining a selection of manuscripts of exceptional rarity and beauty.

Among the works shown were: a first-century A.D. Greek papyrus (PSI VII 745)

with fragments of Homer's *Iliad*; several Trecento manuscripts of Dante, including copies of the "Danti dei Cento" (e.g. Plut. 40.16), a group of *Commedia* manuscripts linked to a Florentine workshop, generally attributed to the direction of Francesco di ser Nardo da Barberino; and the codex *Tempi I* (1398), illuminated by Don Simone Camaldolese and his workshop; manuscripts from the atelier of Vespasiano da Bisticci, such as Plut. 82.3, containing Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis historia*, decorated by Francesco d'Antonio del Chierico; Plut. 74.7, a tenth-century Byzantine medical codex of Nicetas' treatises on anatomy and surgery; the *Codex Squarcialupi* (Palat. 87), the great anthology of Trecento and early Quattrocento secular music, illustrated with portraits of the composers; manuscripts from the UNESCO-listed *Bibliotheca Corvina*, originally destined for King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, such as Marsilio Ficino's *De vita celitus comparanda* (Plut. 73.39) and the monumental three-volume Bible (Plut. 15.17) with full-page miniatures; Greek manuscripts such as Plut. 32.1, containing Homer's *Batrachomyomachia* and *Iliad*, transcribed by Theodorus Gaza (1415–1475); and, finally, Ashb. 361, Francesco di Giorgio Martini's *Treatise on Civil and Military Architecture*, annotated by a young Leonardo da Vinci.

Through these and other manuscripts, the students were able to discover books that are not only historical witnesses but also enduring monuments of art and culture.

Thanks to the support of the Humanities Center, Gallori and Antonucci were also able to share the wealth of the Laurenziana with a wider Japanese audience by delivering two seminars each: one in Florence (14 March 2025) and one in Tokyo (22 May 2025). Their lectures addressed both the Laurenziana's collections and broader topics such as the evolution of the book as an object and the shifting functions and significance of libraries.

During Antonucci and Gallori's stay in Japan, when they also paid a visit to the General Library of the University of Tokyo, by serendipitous coincidence several significant milestones occurred: in 2024 the General Library celebrated the acquisition of its ten-millionth volume, and in 2025 the Department of South European Languages and Literatures reintroduced its historic name, once again becoming the Department of Italian Language and Literature, as it had been from 1979 to 1994. Together with the

Laurenziana visit, these were anniversaries that fostered renewed reflection on the role of Italian studies at the University of Tokyo.

The holdings of the General Library themselves recount the story of Japan's first university. The Italian collections—especially the rare and early printed editions—illustrate the consistent interest in Italian culture cultivated by the University's scholars. The library houses four incunabula, nearly one hundred sixteenth-century editions, and hundreds of later volumes in Italian and Latin, many of them of exceptional value. Among European literatures, Italian pre-1600 works are by far the best represented. Numerous editions are Aldines, or *editiones principes* of works fundamental to the history of Italian language and literature. Most remarkably, several copies preserve traces of past readers—annotations, drawings, glosses, even handwritten poems—that vividly bring to life the intellectual history of the book.

Along with the essays based on the seminars held in Florence and Tokyo, this volume also includes reflections on the Italian holdings of the University of Tokyo. It opens with Eugenia Antonucci's *The Forms of the Western Book from Its Origins to the Fifteenth Century*, which surveys writing supports from papyrus rolls to parchment codices. It then goes on to trace the emergence of the "author's book" in the Trecento, culminating in the invention of printing. Francesca Gallori's *Manuscripts and Scribes* examines the material practices of scribes, from parchment preparation to the *pecia* system, highlighting the roles of monastic scribes, women scribes, and humanists like Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Poggio Bracciolini. Her second essay, *The Library: Historical Development of an Idea*, traces the evolution of the library from monastic *armaria* (cupboards) to civic institutions. It moves from Petrarch's dream of a public library to Niccolò Niccoli's bequest realized at San Marco, through Renaissance basilica-plan libraries such as the Laurenziana, and into the modern and digital age. Antonucci's *Historical Notes on the Formation of the Medicean Collection* then provides a detailed account of three centuries of Medici collecting, from Cosimo the Elder to Lorenzo il Magnifico and beyond, describing the Laurenziana as both Humanist canon and civic monument "for the ornament of the patria and the utility of its citizens." The volume concludes with Lorenzo Amato's *Treasures of Italian Rare Books at the University*

*of Tokyo: the 'Dante' and 'Renaissance' Collections*, which presents the General Library's major holdings: the Dante Collection (1987), with its incunables, Aldines, early illustrated editions, and the landmark Crusca edition of 1595; and the Renaissance Collection (1997), with its *editiones principes* of Petrarch, Bembo, Ficino, Castiglione, Trissino, Giambullari, and others. Enriched by annotations and monumental illustrated Dante editions by Zatta, Bodoni, Flaxman, Ademollo, Doré, and Dalí, these collections provide invaluable testimony to the diffusion, reception, and material history of Italian literature, positioning the University of Tokyo as a key center for its study in East Asia.

It is our hope that this experience will mark the beginning of future collaboration and further projects. The former is already planned in the form of an exhibition of early Italian printed books from the Dante and Renaissance Collections of the University of Tokyo to be held at the Komaba Museum in October–November 2029. This exhibition aims at serving didactic purposes, highlighting the significance of the Tokyo collections at the same time as it fosters new insights into how the study of early books can illuminate both past and present, for the book, in all its forms, is at once artifact and idea, cultural object and living organism—continuously reinterpreted, yet always central to our understanding of history, literature, and art.

In conclusion, I wish to thank Francesca Gallori and Eugenia Antonucci for their generous participation in the educational projects of the University of Tokyo and for their contribution to this volume. Their dedication went well beyond the duties of librarians at one of the world's most important cultural institutions. I also extend my gratitude to Professor Hideyuki Doi, who encouraged and assisted me at every stage of the work, both in Florence and Tokyo, and in preparing this volume; to Motohiro Watanabe, who translated Gallori's and Antonucci's papers into Japanese and organized the Humanities Center seminars; to Brenda Porster, who kindly revised the English translations; and, finally, to the Humanities Center itself, in particular to Mao Wada and Shintarō Seki, for their invaluable support at every stage of preparing the seminars and this publication.