

## **The Rare Book and Manuscript CRAI Library of the University of Barcelona inside the process management model**

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Rare Book and Manuscript CRAI Library of the University of Barcelona

### **Slide 1: Title**

The [strategic plan](#) created by the [University of Barcelona's Learning and Research Resource Centre \(CRAI\)](#) for the period 2019-2022 includes a specific line dedicated to book heritage. A commitment to preservation and description is key to ensuring responsible safekeeping. However, our work should seek to transcend these tasks and exploit the collection in a way that facilitates its discovery and promotes its value. For these reasons, the mission of the [Rare Book and Manuscript Library](#) must be to increase awareness of our collection, not only within our academic community, but among society as a whole.

In this presentation, I will talk about the specific way we handle the University of Barcelona's ancient collection within the CRAI with a view to making this vision a reality.

### **Slide 2: Process Management Model Used in the CRAI**

All activities carried out with the antique heritage collection are linked to the [process management model](#) established by the CRAI, which is based on the EFQM. The creation of this model allows all practices to be encompassed in interrelated, cross-cutting areas. The intention is to ensure that every action generates the greatest possible impact. Therefore, the way in which we handle the ancient collection, specifically the tasks of preservation, description and digitization, must serve not only to raise visibility of the specific documents that make up the collection, but also to fuel other content and broader projects. This ensures that the work has an exponential payoff.

Over the course of the next 20 minutes, I will attempt to illustrate this process management model through the basic tasks that are carried out at the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, this is, conservation, description and dissemination. These tasks are found in the central part of the model, dedicated to user support and satisfaction.

### **Slide 3: The Origins of the University of Barcelona Library**

First of all, I think it is important to touch on the history and nature of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library collection, which is closely linked to the history of the city of Barcelona and its university.

As you may know, the University of Barcelona was closed in 1714 as a punishment for the city's support for the Habsburg dynasty in the War of the Spanish Succession. It would be nearly 130 years after the university would reopen. It is important to note that no trace of the old University of Barcelona library remains.

Another important event in the city's history that played a key role in the creation of the restored university's library was the confiscation of church property in 1835 and 1836. The city of Barcelona had 23 convents of different religious orders. The libraries of these convents were rich not only in religious works, but also in works on a wide range of subjects. In fact, we know that some of them had received legacies and donations from important private libraries and their collections were open to the public. The works from these libraries formed the restored university library's core collection in 1842, which today is kept in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Given the origin of the collection, it serves as a major source of information about Catalonia's cultural history.

Although resources from a number of different sources have since been added, it is considered a closed collection, since it is no longer enhanced with new acquisitions.

#### **Slide 4: Type and Number of Collections**

The Rare Book and Manuscript Library collection consists of five different types of documentation: manuscripts, incunabula, printed books dating from before 1820, engravings and parchments. As mentioned previously, the vast majority of the collection came from expropriated property, but collections from other sources, such as the old University of Cervera and the old College of Surgery of Barcelona, have also been added. It should be noted that the incunabula collection is the third largest in Spain and the collection of old printed books is the second largest, after the National Library of Spain, although it ranks first in terms of 16th-century printed documents.

#### **Slide 5: Restoration and Preservation**

I will now talk about our first priority area, which is preservation and conservation.

The CRAI has a [book restoration workshop](#) that opened in 1998. This workshop deals with all matters related to restoration and preservation for all CRAI libraries, although most of its time and resources are obviously spent on the Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Several initiatives are carried out to increase awareness of the restoration workshop and its work:

- The CRAI has launched a [book sponsorship project](#) to support its restoration work. A list of restoration candidates in a range of disciplines is provided so that the sponsor can choose a particular book, fall in love with it and contribute to its restoration. The project has its own website that shows the candidates that are available to sponsor and those that are already being sponsored, alongside a summary, some images and the procedures and budget required to restore each one. The books included in the project are marked in the catalogue records.
- For some time now, specific restoration reports can be accessed from the catalogue records.

- In 2017, a [video](#) about the workshop that showed the book restoration process was recorded. The video is available on the CRAI YouTube channel and on some screens in the various CRAI libraries.
- Occasionally, the restoration work is reported on the [CRAI blog](#), with explanations and before and after photos.

In addition to restoring books and other documents, the workshop also plays an important advisory role, since it offers guidance on the preventive conservation of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library collection and other heritage collections. This advice relates to the cleaning process, the protection of books in neutral cardboard and boxes, monitoring of the temperature and humidity conditions of storage spaces, etc.

The [library's blog](#) occasionally reports on these preventive conservation tasks, which are often invisible and involve a huge investment in terms of time and money.

### **Slide 6: Cataloguing**

The second area I want to talk about is cataloguing. At the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, we are fully aware that this is a priority task. It is important to note that cataloguing old books requires considerable time and specific knowledge.

Our work is based on an exhaustive description of each edition and the specific characteristics of each copy. This enables users to correctly identify and understand both of these dimensions, which are essential in the case of old books. Broadly speaking, people who catalogue old books are required to perform a series of steps in addition to providing the main elements of the bibliographic description (this is: the author, title, imprint and a physical description). These steps include identifying the edition and the agents involved and providing a detailed description of the copy. For this reason, the bibliographic records in the antique catalogue are much more extensive than those of the modern catalogue.

In view of our experience, and having witnessed how meticulous cataloguing boosts the dissemination process and supports researchers, we are firmly committed to creating comprehensive records, despite the fact that it involves a huge commitment in terms of time.

### **Slide 7: Catalogue**

It is important to highlight the fact that the [UB's general catalogue](#) contains an OPAC that relates specifically to the [heritage collection](#). Given that users of the ancient collection have a highly specific, chronologically limited research framework, we thought it would be useful to offer a specific product, beyond the [Cercabib discovery tool](#). This will help ensure that results relating to the heritage collection (documents that are at least 100 years old) are accurate at all times. This resource also includes a thematic cloud to provide access to documents in graphic form, arranged in broad subject categories that go beyond the descriptors included in bibliographic records.

### **Slide 8: Catalogued and Non-Catalogued Documents**

Unfortunately the work to catalogue the ancient collection is not complete and many books and documents have still not been digitally catalogued.

This graph illustrates, by documentation type, how much cataloguing work remains outstanding. The documents still to be catalogued are marked in orange.

To redress this situation, we try to provide information about uncatalogued resources on each [website](#) dedicated to specific categories of old documents. Each website contains a section that describes the existing catalogues. There is a link to the CRAI's online catalogue and references to other manual catalogues in both traditional and PDF formats, depending on the case.

### **Slide 9: Digitization Process**

The description process is followed by the digitization process. The CRAI has a [digitization centre](#) that was created in 2016 and is dedicated to the digitization of the CRAI heritage collection. All digitized material is provided through the portal of the [Digital Heritage Library \(BiPaDi\)](#), divided into thematic collections, and also through a link in the catalogue record. A total of nearly 4 thousand books have been uploaded so far.

### **Slide 10: Dissemination of the Library**

I will now briefly talk about activities that go beyond the preservation, description and digitization of documents and that aim to disseminate the collection, firstly from a general perspective and secondly with reference to specific activities carried out within the University of Barcelona's academic environment.

### **Slide 11: Databases**

As a result of the cataloguing process, the Rare Book and Manuscript Library has created two vitally important databases. These are the [Printers' Devices database](#), created in 1998, and the [Former Owners database](#), created in 2009.

The first records all printers with typographical marks in our books and includes basic information about each one and images of the marks found in their books. This project is general in nature and represents an international benchmark in the field of printers' marks.

The second database lists all previous owners and, like the *Printers' Devices* database, features a section with information on the previous owner, whether an individual or an institution, followed by images of any identifying marks (bookplates, stamps, bindings, etc.).

The databases are similar in structure and are linked to the general catalogue, so that users can consult the records of books belonging to the category they searched for from any database record.

### **Slide 12: Special Collections**

An important exercise we carry out to promote the collection beyond individual documents is the creation of [special collections](#). These draw together works that deserve to be highlighted due to their unique characteristics. The special collections have the same structure in different tabs: **Description, Query, More Information** and **Location**.

The CRAI currently has more than 60 special collections; some of these are thematic compilations, while many others are private collections bequeathed by UB academics. The antique collection currently includes [nine special collections](#).

### **Slide 13: International and National Projects**

Another practice we have been promoting lately is the incorporation of our records in catalogues and our participation in external projects. Our records and digital documents have been added to such influential resources as the [Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke \(GW\) database](#), the [CERL Thesaurus](#) (for the inclusion of printers and former owners of our collection), CERL's "[Material Evidence in Incunabula](#)" project, the [Europeana digital library](#), the project "[Footprints: Jewish Books Through Time and Place](#)", [Iberian Books](#), the "[European Jesuit Libraries Provenance Project](#)" and many other national resources.

### **Slide 14: International Rare Book Librarians in Our Library**

Since 2018, the Rare Book and Manuscript Library has been inviting foreign librarians who specialize in ancient collections to spend a week in our library. In 2018 we hosted seven librarians and in 2019 we welcomed a further seven. This experience requires a considerable time commitment on our part, but we believe that the benefits for both sides make it well worth the effort. The work schedule is carefully planned before the visitors' arrival and consists of different practices so that, during the week, they have the opportunity to learn about our work, get involved in some work on our collection, visit other units within the CRAI and tell us about their professional experience at their own institution. We then conclude with a final exchange of views. The visitors all write a news item on our blog after their stay.

### **Slide 15: Guided Tours of the Rare Book and Manuscript CRAI Library**

The Rare Book and Manuscript Library offers a range of guided tours to describe its history and collection and to present particularly beautiful or especially interesting pieces. Most of the tours are organized by the UB's Institutional Relations and Protocol Department. There are 40 tours a year and, at the end of each one, visitors are presented with bookmarks featuring the address of the Rare Book and Manuscript CRAI Library and its social networks.

### **Slide 16: Exhibitions at the Rare Book and Manuscript CRAI Library**

We also organize internal exhibitions, a task we believe is key to disseminating our collection. In recognition of this effort, a dedicated space was made available in one of the Philology Library

rooms last year for exhibitions organized by the two libraries (the Philology Library and the Rare Book and Manuscript Library) and includes a screen for providing additional information.

The exhibitions are either prepared by the Rare Book and Manuscript Library alone, or are the result of collaborative work with independent researchers or one of the University of Barcelona's faculties. In the latter case, these are often exhibitions to accompany a congress or conference. Six internal exhibitions were organized last year; three of these were collaborations with other UB entities and the other three were organized by the Rare Book and Manuscript Library alone.

All exhibitions organized exclusively by our library since last year have been accompanied by talks from experts to provide more in-depth knowledge of the subject matter and guided tours at different times. After the exhibition has ended, the [virtual version](#) is uploaded to the website. This version often includes additional pieces and more information than the on-site version.

### **Slide 17: Social Media**

The Rare Book and Manuscript Library's social media activity began in 2009 with its [blog](#), then continued with [Facebook](#) in 2013 and [Instagram](#) in late 2018. The blog is used for news about our activity and collection, our Facebook profile to announce internal news as well as external resources related to the world of ancient books, and Instagram to highlight our collection and activities in a concise and visually appealing way.

The news items posted on the blog vary widely. Some, such as information on and newly acquired reference literature and new additions to the antique book catalogue and the *Printers' Devices* and *Former Owners* databases, are regular features. Others are published according to the dynamics of the library and cover aspects such as in-house exhibitions virtual exhibitions, the discovery of noteworthy editions and copies, and information about external staff (including participants on the Erasmus+ programme, students undertaking their final bachelor's or master's degree thesis, and students in internships or scholarships) to report their experience in the library or with the collection. Our intention is to make the blog a lively, dynamic channel.

We also have a [YouTube](#) channel that features videos made in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library and three different playlists with external videos.

### **Slide 18: University Environment**

I would now like to turn my focus to the university environment. Our years of experience in the library have taught us that the antique collection is treated with a degree of indifference, but also generates a great deal of respect and a feeling of uncertainty. In the end, this creates considerable ignorance of the collection among students and teachers. We are conscious that our collection has huge potential for both teaching and research and we have a duty to make it available to the university community. There are specific programmes in which our presence is a must, especially in the areas of library and information science, philology, history that refers to the periods represented by our collection and history of science. In view of this situation, we have been striving in recent years to implement a series of actions to overcome this isolation and provide the tools needed to make the antique collection more accessible.

**Slide 19: Practical Lessons**

One action we believe is essential if we are to play a key role in the University's teaching framework is the organization of [classes with antique materials](#) in a special room. The first class using this format was organized many years ago. In these classes, the teacher chooses (with our help if necessary) a series of books to illustrate the session. These classes have gradually increased in number, and in 2019 there were 38. However, these classes proved insufficient to raise awareness of the UB's antique collection, so a few years ago we decided to offer a methodological session, which is given by the staff of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library and is designed to allow students to become familiar with and take maximum advantage of the antique collection. The session is carried out with documentation related to the subject in question and students are told about the collection, items that may be of interest to them and how to access them. These sessions began in 2018, and 22 were held last year.

**Slide 20: Proposals for Bachelor's and Master's Degree Theses**

Another initiative designed to make our collection more accessible to students involves offering them a range of proposals that allow them to base their final bachelor's or master's degree project on our collection. Given that the librarians are highly knowledgeable about the collection, which features a high number of volumes and a wealth of topics, we decided that we had the skills required for this task, although some teaching staff members have also been involved. Since 2018, students have been able to choose from a [catalogue of proposals for their final bachelor's or master's degree project](#). These are divided into five faculties, six bachelor's degrees and eleven master's degrees. A total of 100 proposals are currently on offer, and this year we are co-authoring five final master's theses and two final bachelor's theses.

**Slide 21: Collaboration with Degree Programmes**

Along similar lines, we also support projects in a range of subjects. These collaborations focus on generating win-win relationships, where students are given the opportunity to work with a heritage collection and the Rare Book and Manuscript Library benefits from studies or products that help us disseminate and raise awareness of our collection.

Some examples include:

In a subject taught as part of the design degree in the Faculty of Fine Arts, students are required to prepare a campaign to promote the CRAI's antique collection.

In an archaeology subject, students study engravings from ruins.

In a master's degree on digital content, students work on creating virtual versions of our exhibitions.

In the subject of codicology, which is taught as part of a master's degree in medieval culture, students work on manuscript fragments used as spine reinforcements in bindings.

**Slide 22: Internships**

In an attempt to further boost our collaboration with students, our library is also available for undertaking internships. This option is currently only open to students on the Master's Degree in Libraries and Heritage Collections, which is taught by the Faculty of Information and Audiovisual Media. This year, three students participated in the internship. They are assigned very specific tasks that help students to gain in-depth knowledge of a topic. For example, one student has been working with 16th-century Italian editions that will be incorporated into the ICCU's EDIT 16 database.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the importance of an experienced, well-trained team that values in-depth knowledge of the collection and the adoption of strategies to disseminate it, from different perspectives and in line with internationally prevailing trends. Indeed, these qualities allow our team not only to perform the most traditional librarian tasks, but also to address a wide range of specific and creative tasks in various fields, aspects I have tried to highlight today. Thus, we participate in groups specializing in antique collections, we take part in conferences, we contribute to specialist publications and we teach subjects on highly specific aspects of our field.

I hope this presentation has been of interest to you. It is unfortunate that, due to the current situation, you are unable to visit our library as planned. However, we look forward to giving you a warm welcome when you visit in the future.

**Slide 23: Thanks**

Many thanks.