



The Printing Revolution

Renaissance print culture in Rome & Venice

24 November–1 December 2025 (ML 853)

8 days • £4,720

Lecturers: Stephen Parkin & Dr Michael Douglas-Scott

The arrival and impact of printing in Renaissance Italy: manuscripts, printed books and the visual arts 1450–1600.

Special displays of manuscripts and books and privileged access to spaces not usually seen by the public.

Accompanied by two expert lecturers: a British Library curator and an art historian specialising in the Italian Renaissance.

No more than 18 participants.

This tour explores the culture of Renaissance Rome and Venice from a new and unusual perspective – the history of printing. The arrival of printing in Rome in the 1460s, followed by the exponential growth of publishing in Venice, had far-reaching and profound consequences. It was nothing less than an information revolution.

Beginning in Rome and continuing to the first site of printing in Italy, the Benedictine monastery at Subiaco, the tour introduces the new technology and what this entailed for the way books were made, bought, collected and read. It shows how the transition from manuscript to print took place, and presents the leading personalities involved in the advancement of printing – cardinals, aristocrats, scholars, printers and booksellers.

Many of the great collections of manuscript codices and printed books which were built at the time survive intact today in splendidly decorated libraries. Foremost among them was the Pope's own library, the 'Biblioteca Apostolica', buried within the great Vatican complex. The story continues in Venice, which in the sixteenth century became the European centre of the publishing and bookselling trades. The monumental libraries here, places of architectural beauty themselves, house some of the greatest collections of illustrated books and manuscripts.

The focus of this tour leads not only to an understanding of the role of printing in Renaissance culture but also to an enhanced appreciation of the art of the period, and an understanding of the place of the book in early modern history.



Rome, Vatican Library, wood engraving c. 1880.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 12.45pm from London Heathrow to Rome Fiumicino (British Airways). Evening lecture and first of four nights in Rome.

Day 2: Subiaco. To set the scene, the tour begins with a drive to the Roman countryside to visit the Benedictine monasteries at Subiaco, the first site of printing in Italy. In the library of Sta. Scolastica there are copies of the first books printed there, including Lactantius' *De divinis institutionibus*, printed in 1465.

Day 3: Rome. See a printing demonstration at the Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica in Palazzo Poli, which abuts the Trevi fountain. The Biblioteca Casanatense belonged to the Dominicans, who were in charge of attempts to control printing by means of the Index of Prohibited Books. The Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana holds the private collection of the Corsini family together with that of the *Accademia dei Lincei*, founded in 1603 and still Italy's leading scientific and cultural academy.

Day 4: Rome. Much of the day is spent in the Vatican, visiting the Vatican Museums, the

Pinacoteca, and (subject to availability) the Pope's own library, the 'Biblioteca Apostolica'. In the afternoon continue to the Biblioteca Angelica, the first public library in Europe.

Day 5: Rome, Venice. Travel from Rome to Venice by business class rail (c. 4 hours). After settling into the hotel, visit the Biblioteca Correr, the library attached to the museum of the history of Venice, which contains many fine manuscripts and incunabula. Cross the *bacino* to the island of S. Giorgio Maggiore, where Andrea Palladio's monastery has a library, now part of the Fondazione Cini, which has one of the greatest collections of 16th-century illustrated books, broadsheets and pamphlets. First of three nights in Venice.

Day 6: Venice. The beautiful Biblioteca Marciana, in Piazzetta S. Marco, was begun in 1536 by Sansovino and finished by Scamozzi in 1591. Among its collections are many sculptures, Fra Mauro's 1459 world map and important manuscripts and books. The small monastic library attached to the church of S. Francesco della Vigna is the repository for all Franciscan libraries in northern Italy and houses the only copy of the first printed edition of the Koran (1537).

The Printing Revolution
continued

Day 7: Cornuda. Travel to Tronchetto by *vaporetto* and from there drive to Cornuda, a small town in the foothills beyond Treviso. Visit the delightful Museo Tipoteca – the only museum of ‘type’ in the world. The site holds more than 180 printing presses and typesetting machines. Lunch in the restaurant here before returning to Venice via the Villa Barbaro at Maser, built by Palladio for two highly cultivated Venetian brothers.

Day 8. In the morning visit the Biblioteca della Fondazione Querini Stampaglia, one of the most beautiful public libraries in the city. Travel by *motoscafo* to Venice airport and fly to London Heathrow, arriving at c. 7pm.

The tour is dependent on the kindness of many individuals and organisations, so although this gives a fair picture of the itinerary, there may be substitutes for some places mentioned.

Lecturers

Stephen Parkin. Curator of the British Library’s Printed Heritage Collections 1450–1600, and specialist in early printing in Italy. He studied at Cambridge University and University College London, has a qualification in librarianship from the Vatican Library School in Rome, and taught in Italian universities for many years. He has a particular interest in the history of bibliography and collecting and has published in these fields; he also works as a literary translator. He most recently curated the exhibition *Aldo Manuzio. Il Rinascimento di Venezia* at the Accademia in Venice, and co-curated *Leonardo da Vinci: A Mind in Motion* at the British Library.

Dr Michael Douglas-Scott. Art historian who has lectured for New York University (London) and Associate Lecturer at Birkbeck College, specialising primarily in 16th-century Italian art and architecture. He studied at the Courtauld and lived in Rome for several years. He has written articles for *Arte Veneta*, *Burlington Magazine* and the *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £4,720 or £4,540 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £5,370 or £5,190 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro traveller) with British Airways (aircraft: Airbus 320); travel by private minibus, coach and business class rail; private *motoscafo* transfers between the hotel and the airport in Venice; a *vaporetto* pass for the duration of the stay in Venice; luggage porterage between the hotel in Venice and the airport; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, 3 lunches and 5 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all taxes; all tips; the services of two lecturers and a tour manager.

Accommodation. Donna Camilla Savelli (www.vretreats.com/donna-camilla-savelli): A pleasingly restored former baroque monastery, now 4-star hotel, set at the foot of the Janiculum hill in Trastevere. **Hotel Splendid, Venice** (starhotels.com): delightful, quiet 4-star hotel situated halfway between Piazza San Marco and the Rialto bridge. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

How strenuous? This is a strenuous tour. There is unavoidably a lot of walking in both cities: the historic area in Rome is vast and vehicular access is restricted, and in Venice there is a lot of walking along the flat and up and down bridges. Standing around in museums and churches in both cities is also unavoidable, and you need to be able to lift your luggage on and off the train and wheel it within stations. The tour should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing.

Group size: between 8 and 18 participants.