

Bringing the Archives to the People, and Vice-Versa

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(slide 1) *ilCartastorie* museum can be thought of as a link between the local community and their own history, or as a gateway for the general public to enter a world that was previously reserved for scholars and experts in the fields of economics, art history, and the history of southern Italy. Today, I would like to tell you a bit about the special relationship between the Historical Archives and *ilCartastorie* Museum, and then to focus on our efforts to 'bring the archives to the people and vice-versa.'

(slide 2) First of all, the Historical Archives of the *Fondazione Banco di Napoli* is [one of] the oldest and largest banking archives in the world, with 330 rooms and a few billion documents, which, if you laid them end to end, would stretch across 75 kilometers. Those bank documents date back to the middle of the 16th century and cover the entire history of banking in the region up to the year 2000, hiding 17 millions of names. You can find every type of monetary exchange in the documents called *fedi di credito* and *fedi di deposito*, along with Royal decrees, binding contracts, and so on.

(slide 3) But it is not just the economic information that is interesting. The system that was invented by the governors of 8 original banks was quite impressive.

Instead of paying in coins, you could write an amount on a piece of paper (that today we would call cheques), the name of the person who would receive the money, the reason for the payment, and then simply sign it. From these ancient "cheques" arises the whole system that gives a shape to our archives. First there is a *pandetta*. This is a book containing the names of all the 'clients' of the banks.

Next to each name, there is a number corresponding to a page **(slide 4)** in an accounting ledger called a *Libro Maggiore*, where all of the debits and credits for each account are listed, using the double entry method in two columns. Whenever a document needed to be 'processed', it was first copied into a *giornale copiapolizze*, (a *daily copybook*) and then it was 'extinguished' by stringing it up on a cord.

(slide 5) And of course, one very important thing was required, in detail – the *causale*, or reason for payment. This is the part that makes all of the economic information even more interesting. For example, we have a credit document from 1606, in which a certain painter called Caravaggio, receives a down payment for a painting:

"Banco di S. Eligio, bank copybook n. 31, October 6, 1606.

Payment order of two hundred ducats from Niccolò Rudolovich to Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio for a painting [which]...must be finished and delivered before the end of next December, with a height of 13 2/3 palms and width of 8 ½ palms with the figures mentioned above, the image of the Madonna with the child in her arms surrounded by choirs of Angels and below Saint Dominic, and Saint Francis in the middle, with Saint Nicolas on his right and Saint Vitus on his left".

And this is just one of the reasons for payment found on our archival documents – there are many, many others, ranging from payments for party decorations for weddings and other ceremonies to hush money for the family of a girl who was raped – this last from 1656.

(slide 6) The Foundation, the Historical Archives, and *ilCartastorie* Museum are located deep in the heart of Naples, at the same site as one of the 8 original ancient banks which were eventually merged to form the *Banco di Napoli*. The building itself, *Palazzo Ricca*, was built in the sixteenth century, and the setting lends itself very well to a historical museum. In fact, for

many years, the *Fondazione Banco di Napoli* has maintained the Archives at great cost, and has only recently decided to use this important patrimony in an innovative way. It was deemed necessary to create something that would attract non-specialist visitors, and to do it in a completely new way. In other words, we want to promote our cultural heritage not in the form of a classic exhibition of objects or documents but in a series of narratives – in short, storytelling.

(slide 7) So we couldn't simply create a traditional museum – we wanted to take the information found in the 'reason for payment' written on each credit or debit document, and create historically accurate stories from them. We then invited the people to come and enjoy these stories, which we told through our permanent multimedia tour, with videos, interactive exhibits, and hands-on exploration of the large tomes of the archives.

(slide 8) We have created popular school projects based on historical themes, the social and economic history of Southern Italy, the history of art and music in Naples, and many others, where students create original stories, songs, videos or plays after doing their own research. **(slide 9)** Other 'storytelling' projects created to attract the public to the site are Theatre and Creative writing workshops which are always based on the research done in the Archives, as well as events such as concerts and plays centering on the results of information arising from Archival material.

(slide 10) The result? Local and international visitors are given the opportunity to learn about the important heritage of southern Italy in an entertaining way, and they are the ones who ask if they, too, can do personal research about their own families, about a famous character from history, or about a particular artist, writer, or musician. In essence, they ask us if they can come back and explore more in the archives.

So far, we feel good about our success, and we have won the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage 2017 in the section "awareness raising and education". **(slide 11)** More and more stories come from the pages of the *copiapolizze* every week, so our collection of stories continues to grow, creating a reason for visitors to return and learn more and more.