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Variables Geometries of Geometers' Libraries: The Italian Case

The university mathematical libraries in Turin, Milan, Pavia, Genoa, Padua and Rome were all directed, from the Unification of Italy up to the Second World War, by members of a single research team. Enrico d'Ovidio, Corrado Segre and Gino Fano in Turin, Giovanni Ricci in Milan, Eugenio Bertini in Pavia, Gino Loria and Eugenio Togliatti in Genoa, Annibale Commessatti in Padua, Luigi Cremona, Guido Castelnuovo, Gaetano Scorza and Enrico Bompiani in Rome, were all algebraic and/or differential geometers, belonging to the Italian Geometric School.

Students of each other, linked by a dense network of scientific and personal relationships, they shared a profile characterized by some distinctive features: the internationalist but very German-oriented style; the sound culture in projective geometry of n -dimensional spaces; fragility in three domains (abstract algebra, topology and number theory), and an important linguistic bias, i.e. ignorance of English.

In this work we will analyze the variable geometries of the afore-mentioned university mathematical libraries under the direction of the member of the so called Italian geometric School. Pervading themes will be:

- the purchasing policies, with particular regard to the differences between the Belle Epoque and the fascist period
- the role of individual estates (i.e. personal libraries of Segre, Severi, Scorza, ecc.) in the creation and enhancement of university libraries through donations and bequests
- the existence of common distinctive features in the management and utilisation of these libraries by mathematicians belonging to a research group with a decidedly defined identity
- the spatial organization of the collections and reading rooms (the model of the Lesezimmer in Göttingen, that of the Institute for Advanced Study, etc.)
- the destinies of the personal patrimonies of the Italian geometers of Jewish origin, forced to leave Italy after racial persecution.