



An 18th century attempt at organising knowledge: The classification system of the Biblioteca Pubblica 1763-1798

Project brief

Aim

To analyse the classification system adopted by Agius de Soldanis, the first Librarian, for the newly established Bibliotheca Pubblica in the mid-18th century

Considering the absence of standardized classification and cataloguing systems in place, this research will try to establish the inspiration behind such arrangement.

Currently, the research is still in its initial stages, however, a good indication of the main classification system and the orientation of the collection can already be discerned, as shown in the preliminary results section.

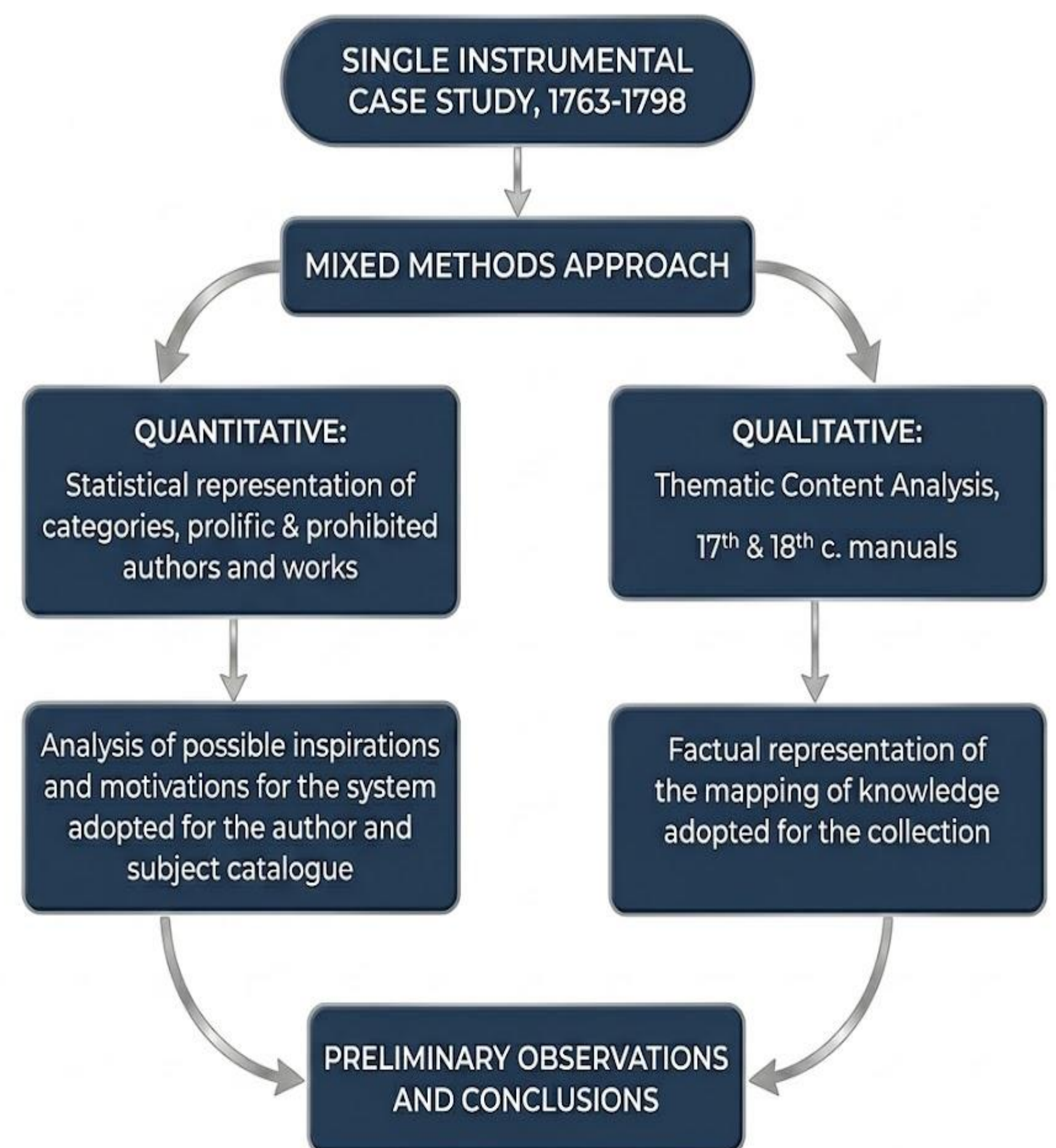
Methodology

Single instrumental case study

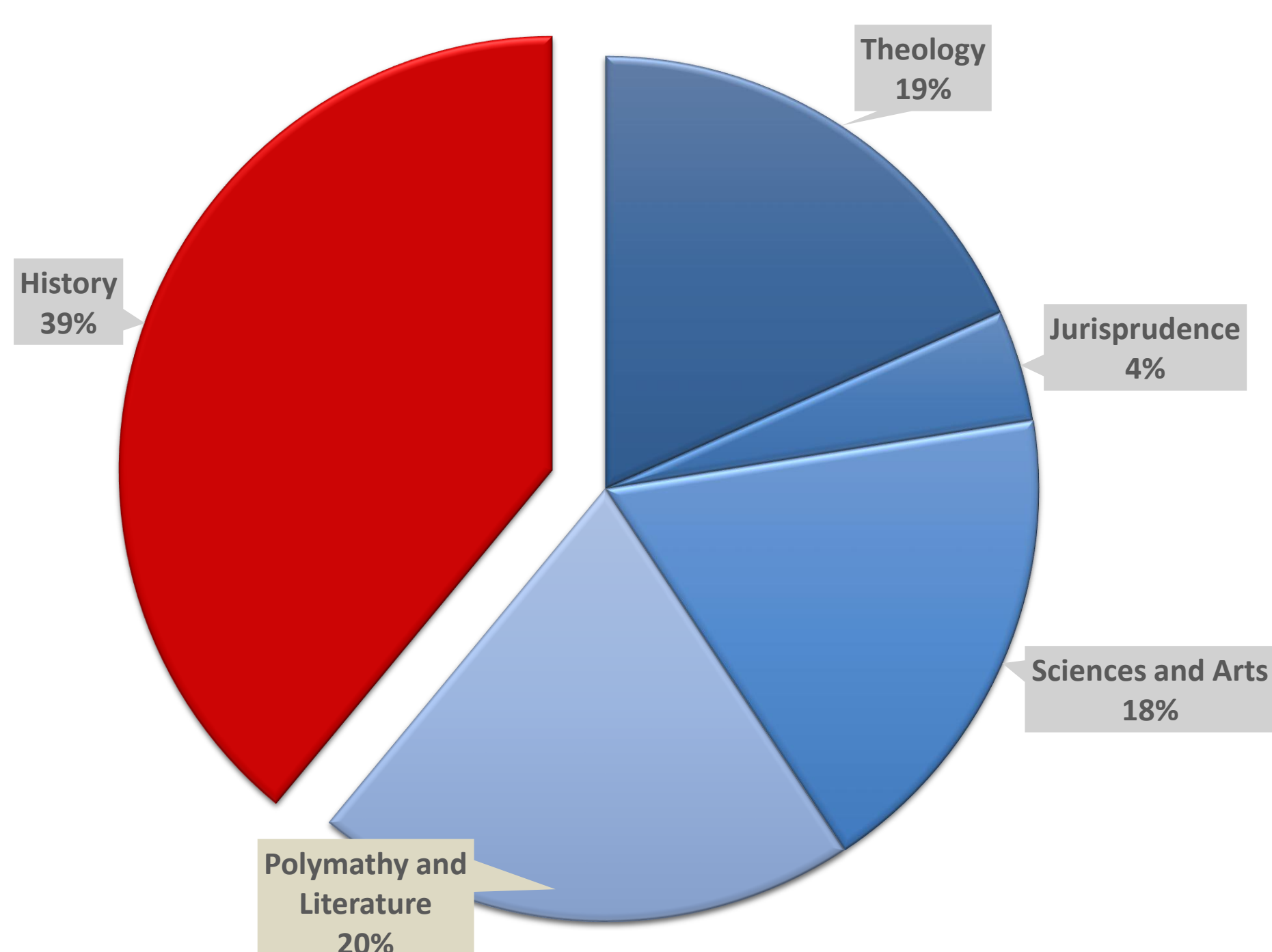
- Set within a pre-defined timeline (1763-1798) determined the boundaries for this research, which in turn helped in setting the context.
- This period was specifically chosen because it starts with de Soldanis compiling the author and subject catalogues and ends with the forced departure of the Order of St. John by the French.
- The identification of the orientation of the existing collection within the pre-defined timeline and what may have inspired such mapping of classification.

Mixed methods approach

Orientation was determined by **counting all the entries** in the subject catalogue (represented hereunder), whereas the potential inspiration was deduced from conducting a **content analysis** of the 17th and 18th century library/collections manuals mentioned by de Soldanis himself in his *Notizie*.



Main subject class between the years 1763-1798



Preliminary results

History as the largest category in the collection, with a very small section comprising of the History of Malta and Gozo (55 out of 7,040 entries).

Surprisingly, **Sciences and Arts** (mathematics, medicine, surgery, fortifications) and **Theology** are both superseded by Polymathy and Literature, hinting more at an enlightened library rather than that of a religious, military hospitaller Order.