
A PRECIOUS PHOTO ALBUM IN HONOR OF THOMAS
HANBURY RECENTLY REDISCOVERED

FRANCESCA DE CUPIS^{1*}, DANIELA GANDOLFI^{2*}

¹Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Genova e le province di Imperia, La Spezia e Savona. Via Balbi 10, 16126 Genova, Italy

²Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri, Centro Nino Lamboglia. Via Romana 39, 18012 Bordighera, Italy

*Corresponding authors: francesca.decupis@beniculturali.it,
dgandolfi@istitutostudi.191.it

ABSTRACT

The contribution is a first and preliminary presentation of the precious large-format photo album made at the initiative of Alwin and Elise Berger on the occasion of Thomas Hanbury's 75th birthday. Hanbury died before the delivery of the gift.

KEY WORDS.

Thomas Hanbury, Alwin and Elise Berger, photo album, Patrick Geddes, Robert Horne

INTRODUCTION

Last March, through Dr. Elena Zappa, curator of the Giardini Botanici Hanbury (Università degli Studi di Genova), we learned of a request made by Mr. Lutz Schmalfuß, director of the “Alwin Berger Archive” of Möschlitz, Thuringia (central Germany) in the municipality of Schleiz, which had given birth to the illustrious German botanist, curator of the Botanical Gardens of La Mortola from 1897 to 1914.

In his correspondence of March 12, Mr. Schmalfuß referred to a letter, identified in the archives under his direction, in which Alwin Berger expressed his intention to donate to Thomas Hanbury, on the occasion of the latter's 75th birthday on June 21, 1907, an album of photographs in which were present all the personalities that had been, or

were at the time, in contact with the Botanical Gardens of La Mortola and with Hanbury himself. In his letter dated 14 July 1906, and addressed to Sir William Thiselton Dier, Berger, requesting participation in the project, informed that this album was to be an artistic work made in Italy and designed by “Signor Vernazza, the painter of the al fresco (Carlo Quinto) [sic]” and listed the names of other botanists who intended to be involved or who had already promised their participation [Möschlitz, “Alwin Berger Archive”, 133: letter of A. Berger to W. Thiselton Dier from July 14 1906. On the presence from 1903 of the Genovese Angelo Vernazza, in the villa of La Mortola to decorate the loggia with the triumphal mural depicting “The procession of Carlo V crossing Porta Canarda” (De Cupis, 2011)].

This album was also mentioned in the “Lebenserinnerungen” of Alwin Berger’s wife, Elise, drafted in 1931, immediately following the death of the botanist on 21 March of that year, and only recently given to print.

“Am 21. Juni 1907 sollte Sir. Thomas seinen 75ten Geburtstag feiern. Vater plante eine Ehrung des Jubilars. Eine künstlerische Ehrenurkunde sollte ihm überreicht werden, ebenso ein Album, das die Photographien aller mit dem Garten in Beziehung stehender Botaniker und Pflanzenfreunde enthielt.” (On the 21st of June 1907 Sir Thomas would have celebrated his 75th birthday and the father [Alwin Berger] projected the idea of creating an homage for the event. Thomas Hanbury would have received a certificate of merit and an album containing photographs of all the botanists and lovers of plants that were connected to the Gardens) (Berger, 2016).

The research carried out in the exceptional and vast Hanbury collection kept in the archives of the Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri in Bordighera (Saita, 2011) have allowed, thanks to the attention of Dr. Bruna de Paoli of the same institute, the identification of the album mentioned in the correspondences of Alwin Berger and in the biography drawn up by his widow, an album striking for the care and beauty with

which it was realized [Archivio Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri (henceforth IISL), Bordighera. Fondo Hanbury]. The news of the delivery of this album to the widow Hanbury recurs in the chronicles of the era, as, for example, in “The Gardeners’ Chronicle” of 8 February 1908 (Anonymous, 1908) and in the “Daily Telegraph” of 11 February of the same year. In addition, Alasdair Moore cited it in his volume dedicated to Thomas Hanbury and to the Gardens of La Mortola in 2004, without specifying the source (Moore, 2004).

THE ALBUM

The Album measures 44 x 34.3 cm, has a green leather cover adorned with minute gilded decorations, and a leather strap with metallic buckle (Fig. 1). Two decorated parchment sheets precede the gallery of portraits: the first, richly decorated, contains the dedication to Thomas Hanbury for his birthday, the second a list of the persons represented in the album (Fig. 2).

The dedication, which recalls the virtues of the dedicatee, bears the signatures of four illustrious characters: Dietrich Brandis, Berlin, German botanist, Joseph Dalton Hooker, Sunningdale, English botanist, Baron Schröder, London, passionate collector and owner of a well-known rock garden in Surrey, and Paul Ascherson, professor of botany at the University of Berlin. At the base of the title page appears the name of the Scottish painter Robert Home and the designation Edinburgh, dated March 1, 1907, only a few days before the death of Thomas.



Fig. 1. The Album in honor of Thomas Hanbury (Archivio IISL, Bordighera. Fondo Hanbury).



Fig. 2. The frontispiece of the Album

The album consists of 50 sheets in blue paper edged with gold, equipped with recessed frames arranged to accommodate the hundred and fifty autographed photographs, with captions handwritten by Alwin Berger with the name, the charge or/and the role played, the city of birth, of all the botanists, gardeners, correspondents, directors of Gardens and



Fig. 3. The pages of the Album with the photos of the American botanists Nathaniel L. Britton, William Trelease, Joseph N. Rose with, on the left, the handwritten identification by Alwin Berger.

Botanical Gardens, who had been in contact with the celebrated and who adhered to the initiative of which Berger was certainly one of the most active parties (Fig. 3)

We present here a first synthesis on the Album, about which we will give a complete illustration in a monograph being prepared in collaboration with the DISTAV-Università degli Studi di Genova.

Of great interest, in reconstructing the events related to this album, is a group of letters belonging to the Patrick Geddes collection (“Patrick Geddes Papers”) preserved at the archives of the Scottish University of Strathclyde [University of Strathclyde Archives (henceforth ASA), *Patrick Geddes Papers*, GB 249 T-GED]. A character of extraordinary standing - biologist, sociologist and urbanist, advocate of an interdisciplinary approach between the various disciplines of scientific knowledge - Patrick Geddes (Ballater 1854-Montpellier 1932) is considered the pioneer of urban ecology, a discipline based on the study

of how integrate nature and the built environment. For the biography of Patrick Geddes and for a bibliography of his works, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Meller 2004).

The twenty letters sent to Geddes by Alwin Berger and his wife, from the summer of 1906 to the spring of 1907, cast light on the origins of the photo album, taking into account a "work in progress" that proceeds through a continuous exchange of ideas and suggestions, touching all the different aspects of the preparation: from the choice of the artist for the miniature, to the artistic binding, to the collection of photographs, to the writing of the dedication of the greeting, up to the search for funding to support the costs of the album¹. A shared work in which Elise Berger assumed a significant role, committed from the start in all aspects of the project. Facilitated by her mastery of the English language, learned in Britain despite being of German birth, she constantly updated Geddes on the progress of the project, requested assistance in soliciting the photographs of the British botanists, about whom she laments the lukewarm support to contribute financially to the project.

Despite the difficulties, the enterprise succeeded in completing the precious gift intended for Thomas Hanbury. The rich parchment containing the augural dedication was composed by Patrick Geddes himself.

Based on the model of a medieval page written in Gothic letters, it is the work of the Scottish artist Robert Home, who affixed his signature and

¹ The letters written by Alwin Berger are eight, the rest are by Elise. Following are the archival references in chronological order; the indication between parentheses (AB) and (EB) identifies the author of the citation, respectively Alwin and Elise Berger; ASA, GB 249 T-GED-9-673 (AB) 26 July 1906; 9-720 (EB), 17 October 1906; 9-730 (AB), 11 November 1906; 9-732 (EB), 30 November 1906; 9-737 (AB), 14 December 1906; 9-738 (EB), 20 December 1906; 9-748 (EB), 11 January 1907; 9-749 (AB), 13 January 1907; 9-751 (EB), 18 January 1907; 9-754 (EB), 23 January 1907; 9-755 (EB) 1 February 1907; 9-759 (EB), 21 February 1907; 9-762 (EB), 10 March 1907; 9-761(EB), 6 March 1907; 9-763, 14 March 1907 (AB); 9-764; 24 March 1907 (AB); 9-765 (EB), 27 March 1907; 9-772 (EB) 15 April 1907; 9-777 (EB), 9 May 1907; 9-785 (AB), 31 May 1907.

the date at the bottom of the page: “Robert Home, Edinburg Inv., Del. et Pinx., 1:03:07“. He also created the second parchment that precedes the photo gallery containing the list of botanists broken down by geographical areas of origin.

Not well known today, Robert Home (Edinburgh 1865-Ceres 1938), was a member of the Society of Scottish Artists, of which he was president between 1915 and 1918. In addition to portraits, he also did book decoration, production of drawings for windows, miniatures and, especially, heraldic designs – well documented by their presence at annual exhibitions of the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh, which saw a concentration of miniature works on parchment during the first decade of the twentieth century. The notations found on the painter are very few (McEwan, 2004; Halsby & Harris, 2010). The date of the death can be found in the local newspaper at the time, see *St. Andrews Citizen*, 13 August 1938; 20 August 1938. In his later years he did landscape painting, two of which are in the collection of the Fife Folk Museum in Ceres, a village near the university town of St. Andrews, where the artist spent his retirement, and died. Some portraits are published on the website: artuk.org. A portrait, presented at the annual exhibition of the Society Scottish Artists in 1918, was reviewed in the pages of *The International Studio*, 1918, p. 129. It is also worth noting his designs for the stained glass of the Coldingham Priory: Thomson, 1908, p. 100, and a parchment with a dedication to Dr. Morrison of the Public Library of Edinburgh (see *The Library Word* 1904, p. 297). For a list of the participation of Robert Home at the Royal Scottish Academy exhibitions, from 1882 to 1929, see Viles & Soden (1991).

Painted with enameled colors and with copious use of gold, used in particular to embellish the body of the letters that make up the name of Thomas Hanbury, the dedication page presents fringes decorated with florals and palmette branches that house a series of heraldic and symbolic elements. On the right the coats of arms of the two “Patrie” of the celebrated (Italy and England), resolved in the happy chromatic counterpoint of the alternation of the fields; in the lower left corner a dragon, alluding to

Hanbury's travels in China; in the upper right, the heraldic emblem of the Hanbury family – a crest surmounted by an exuberant lion cub – drawn based on a photograph of the marble coat of arms inserted in the entrance door to La Mortola. At the center of the great capolettera, a sinuous Botticellian goddess Flora pays homage with a palm branch to an elder Thomas Hanbury dressed in gardener's attire in the of La Mortola, with the villa and the Sea, travelled by some sailboats, and the bluffs of Ventimiglia to the cape of Sant'Ampelio of Bordighera, in the background. (Fig. 4) (ASA, GB 249, T- GED -9-749, *Lettera di Alwin Berger a Patrick Geddes*, 13 January 1907).



Fig. 4a-b. The heraldic emblem of the Hanbury family painted in miniature, and that in marble over the entrance of the Villa of La Mortola, the inspiration for the former.

Inspired by the style of Italian seventeenth century bookbinding, in turn deriving from the French models called “à la Gascone”, the album is a unique piece, made with great technical skill, undoubtedly related to the “Giulio Giannini & Figlio” workshop (Fig. 5), which had for years won in Florence a prominent position in the bookbinding arts, achieving great success in the preparation of photographic albums particularly



Fig. 5. The mark of the workshop “Giulio Giannini Firenze” stamped on the inner border of the Album cover.

appreciated by the English clientele. In 1888 the English community in Florence paid homage to Queen Victoria, during her visit to Florence, with a photographic album from the Giannini workshop. The words “Giulio Giannini Firenze”, embossed with gilded characters on the inner edge of the front plate, suggests, moreover, the involvement of the owner of the firm, Giulio Giannini, committed in recent years to reassert the historical styles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, presented both with original variants, and faithful reproductions, as in the case of the Hanbury binding, evident by a comparison with the ancient specimen published by Giannini in an article that appeared in the 1912 “Risorgimento Grafico” (Giannini, 1912). To compare a similar binding see *I Giannini*, p. 41 (no. 8) (Ercoli, 1986).

In the album are collected photographs, which bear in many cases, beyond the signature and the date, a dedication autograph, of 150 “fautores” of Thomas Hanbury, who responded to the invitation of Alwin Berger: directors of gardens, botanists, gardeners, scientists, explorers, university professors and leaders of various botanical and horticultural societies.

The photographs, which sometimes occupy the entire right page, are most often presented in pairs, or larger groups, and are accompanied, on the left page, by regular handwritten notes from Berger himself, placed roughly in correspondence with the images, with the name of the personage, their job at the time, sometimes the specialization or the activities in which they had distinguished themselves. In some cases the name is preceded (more rarely followed) by a cross indicating the death of the personage, from which it could be deduced that the album, started in 1906, missing the target date of June 21.1907, and donated to the widow Katherine Hanbury in April of that same year, was given identification tags until at least 1912, the year of the death of Eduard Strasburger (Bonn, 18 May), botanist in Jena from 1871, of the Spanish naturalist José Arechavaleta, who died in Montevideo (Uruguay) on June 16, and Ludwig Winter (Mannheim, July 12), all noted in captions.

After the large-format photographs of the four presenters (Fig. 6-8), the groups of photos are organized to some extent on the nationality of the characters present, or the country in which they worked at the time of the realization of the grandiose gift, starting from the two “Patrie” of Thomas Hanbury: The United Kingdom with its colonies, then Italy and then, to follow, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Belgium, the Scandinavian countries, America, Japan, Java and at the bottom, the late comer, Prof. Alberto Terracciano, director of the Botanical Garden of Sassari.

Among the many present, (“Together with an Album containing their Photographs”), and it could not be otherwise, are the first curators of the Garden of La Mortola who, together with Thomas Hanbury and his brother Daniel, had designed one of the most beautiful acclimatization gardens on the Italian soil, Ludwig Winter and Berger himself who, in his identification card, does not add more than his name (Fig. 9). Also included are the Brits who, like Hanbury, had chosen that far corner of Liguria to establish his enchanted residence: Clarence Bicknell, George King and Ellen Willmott, the only woman



Fig. 6. The photograph of John D. Hooker in the Album.

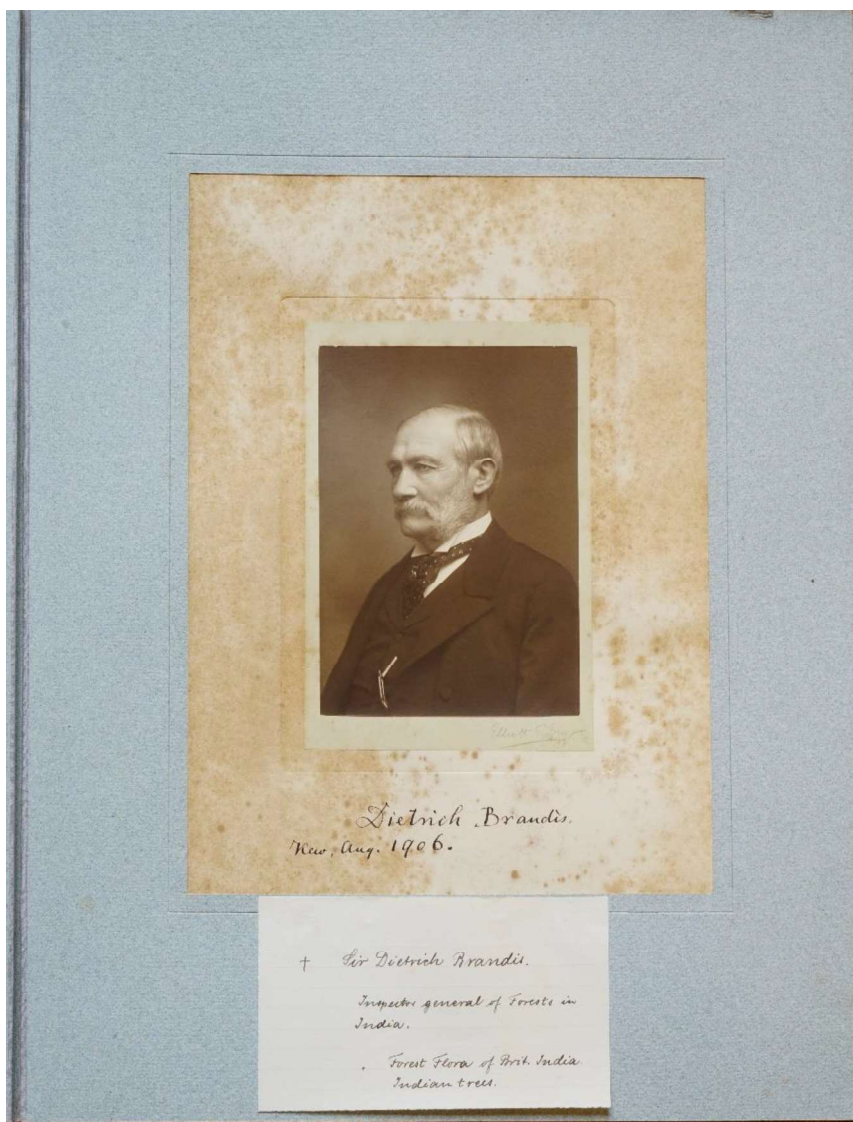


Fig. 7. The photograph of Dietrich Brandis in the Album.

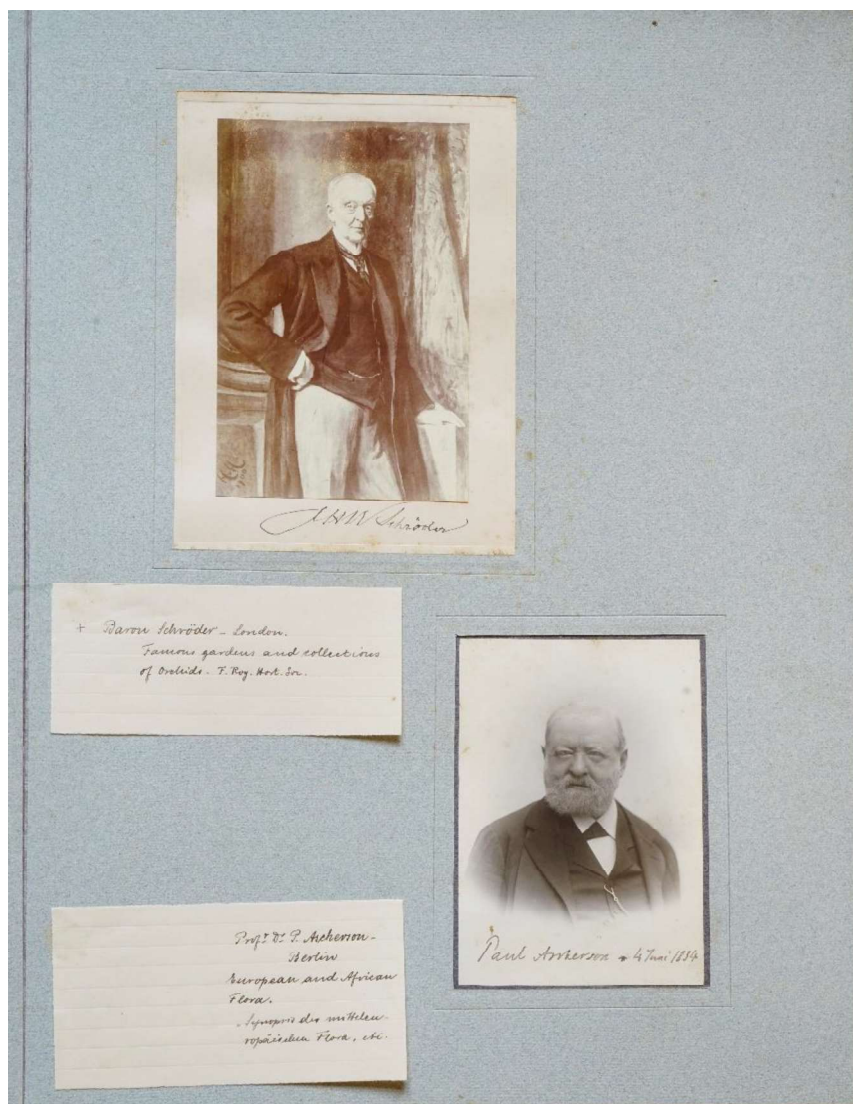


Fig. 8. The photographs of Baron Schröder and Paul Ascherson, with the handwritten identification by Alwin Berger, in the Album.



Fig. 9. The photograph of Alwin Berger in the Album.

present in the album through the reproduction of her portrait by the painter Rosina Mantovani Gutti (De Cupis, 2011), and the botanists with whom he had close relationships, full of esteem and collaboration, such as German Prof. Otto Penzig, – from 1886 professor at the University of Genoa and director of the local Botanic Institute – and who led Hanbury in 1892 to finance the construction of Botanical Institute which today bears his name; or as Sir Patrick Geddes himself (Fig.10), who had done so much for the Album, and who in 1920 would create in Montpellier the Collège des Ecosais, or even as in the case of Otto Adolf Oesterle, the son-in-law of Frederich Augustus Flückiger, who is included in the Album under the name Osterle-Flückiger, to remember the illustrious father-in-law that disappeared in 1894, who had published, together with Daniel Hanbury, the famous treatise on Pharmacographia (London , Macmillan, 1874) and, in 1877, the essay “*An Easter Holiday in Liguria: with an account of the Garden of Palazzo Orengo at Mortola*”. Among the directors of the Great Gardens and European Botanical Gardens is also Alexander Fischer von Waldheim, a Russian of German origin, then director of the Imperial Botanical Garden of St. Petersburg.

CONCLUSIONS

Thomas Hanbury never received this precious album, conceived by its creator as a gift to honor his great spirit, since death seized him a few months before his 75 birthday, on March 9, 1907, but still today, a hundred and ten years after his passing, it speaks of the profound esteem, admiration and, in many cases friendship, that his person had aroused, and of the emotional and shared mourning that his death caused in the hearts of those who had known him in person, through his works or walking in the garden where in March of 1867, sailing in the Bay of Menton, he had found his port. “*Inveni portum. Spes et Fortuna valet! Sat me lusistis; ludite nunc alios!*” is the Latin couplet, actually of Greek origin (*Anth. Pal. IX, 49*), that Thomas Hanbury had placed on a headstone mural over the entrance to the Villa in the Gardens of La Mortola.



Fig. 10. The photograph of Patrick Geddes in the Album.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS - Mauro Mariotti and Elena Zappa, Università degli Studi di Genova; Carol Stewart, Archives and Special Collections, University of Strathclyde; Bronwen Brown, Edinburgh Central Library; Jill Forrest, Center for Research Collections - University of Edinburgh main library; Fiona Ewen, Fife Folk Museum, Ceres; Sandy Wood, Collections Department, Royal Scottish Academy of Art & Architecture; Jessica Burdge, Museum Collections Unit, University of St Andrews; Matthew Jarron, Museum Services University of Dundee; Maria Giannini e Guido Giannini of the artistic bindery “Giulio Giannini & figlio”, Firenze; Bruna De Paoli, Elena Risco, Giovanni Russo of the Museo-Biblioteca Bicknell dell’Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri di Bordighera.

PHOTOGRAPHIC REFERENCES. The photographs of the Album used in this article were made by Daria Vinco, Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Genova e le province di Imperia, La Spezia e Savona.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anonymous, 1908. The Late Sir Thomas Hanbury. *Gardeners’ Chronicle* February 8, 1908: 89.
- Berger E., 2016. *Ricordi di Vita. Lebenserinnerungen*. Genova University Press-De Ferrari, Genova.
- Colle E., 2004. Artigianato artistico e industrie a Firenze tra Ottocento e Novecento. In *I giardini delle regine. Il mito di Firenze nell’ambiente preraffaellita e nella cultura americana tra Ottocento e Novecento*. Sillabe, catalogo della mostra di Firenze, 6 aprile -31 agosto 2004, Sillabe, Livorno: 112 -123
- De Cupis, Ragusa E. (Eds), 2011. *La Mortola e Thomas Hanbury*, Atti della Giornata di studi, 23 novembre 2007. Allemandi, Torino.
- De Cupis F., 2011. Thomas Hanbury a La Mortola: orientamenti artistici, collezionismo e gusto dell’arredo. In: De Cupis F., Ragusa E. (Eds), *La Mortola e Thomas Hanbury*. Allemandi, Torino: 175-196.
- Giannini A., 1912. Influenza delle legature straniere in Italia. *Il Risorgimento grafico* IX, n. 10: 345-358.
- Halsby J., Harris P., 2010. *Dictionary of Scottish painters. 1600 to the present*. Canongate Books, Edinburgh.
- Ercoli G. (Ed.), 1986. *I Giannini e l’arte del libro a Firenze, 1856-1986*, catalogo della mostra di Firenze, 1986. G. Giannini & figlio, Firenze.
- McEwan P.J.M , 2004. *Dictionary of Scottish Art and Architecture*. Glengarden Press, Ballater, Scotland, 2 ed. revisionata e aggiornata.
- Meller A, 2004. *Patrick Geddes*. In: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 21: 701-706.
- Moore A., 2004, *La Mortola in the footsteps of Thomas Hanbury*. Cadogan, London.

-
- Saita E., The Hanbury world. Il mondo in un archivio. In: De Cupis, Ragusa E. (Eds), 2011. *La Mortola e Thomas Hanbury*. Allemandi, Torino: 37-52.
- Thomson A., F.S.A, 1908. *The Coldingham: Parish and Priory*. Craighhead Brothers, Galashiels.
- Viles & Soden, 1991, *The Royal Scottish Academy Exhibitors, 1826–1990: A Dictionary of Artists and Their Work in the Annual Exhibitions of the Royal Scottish Academy*. Hilmarton Manor Press Wiltshire, England.
- The Library World*, vol. VI, luglio 1903-giugno 1904.