

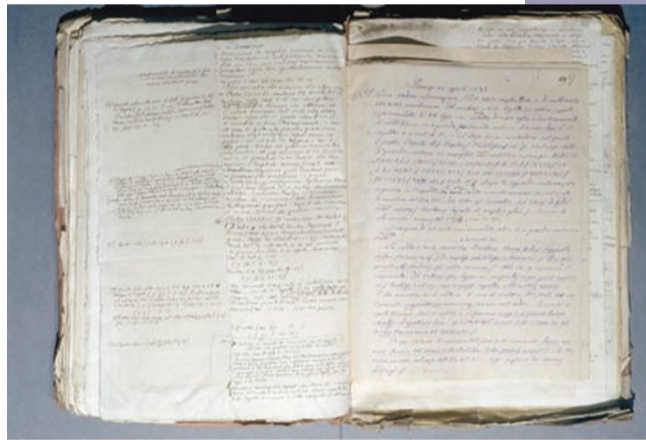
PRINCE BALTHASAR BONCOMPAGNI (1821-94): a case for cooperation



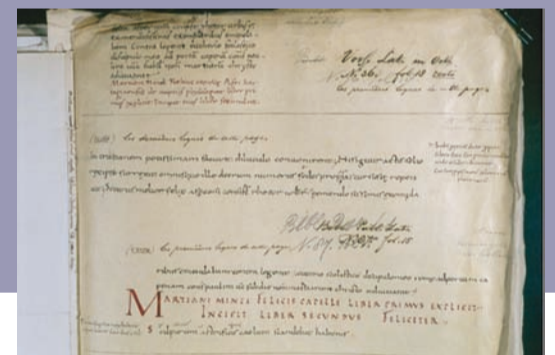
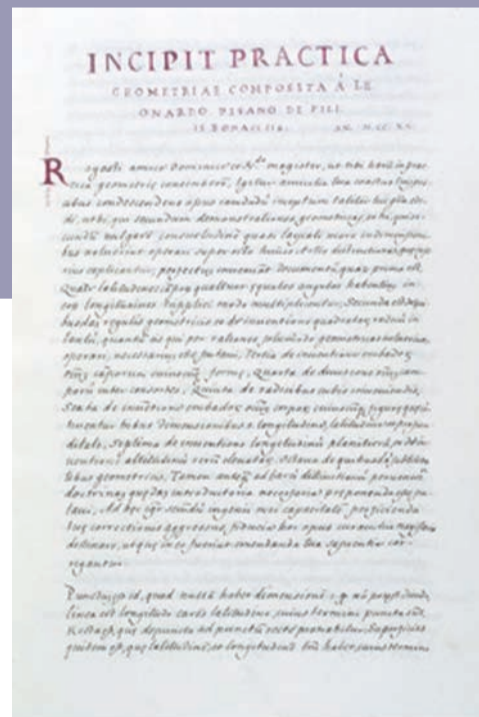
Dispersed collections, common in the world of great libraries, present a number of awkward issues. The Boncompagni papers are one such case. Prince Balthasar Boncompagni (1821-94) was a pioneering historian of science and mathematics, whose books and papers were sold at Rome in 1898 in a total of 14,944 numbered lots, described in 6 printed catalogues.

Boncompagni's collections are now widely dispersed:

1. Trinity College Library Dublin holds 130 boxes, presented in 1909 by J. H. Reddan, a diplomat who had worked on the Venezuela-British Guyana boundary arbitration. Reddan succeeded in purchasing 'a big pile of manuscript bibliography, interspersed with correspondence from librarians and others in all parts of the world'.
2. The Vatican library holds letter-books of a family or political nature which remain largely uncatalogued.
3. Cornell University, Olin Library holds around 1,300 printed items, 11 bound MSS, and around 2,000 other MSS.
4. Stockholm, University Library. These papers are estimated at around 5,000 items, occupying at least 30 meters of shelving.



It is clear from Boncompagni's numbering system that there are many gaps in the papers held at Trinity College Library, but until the collection is catalogued as a whole we do not know what we have or how it fits with the rest of the papers. The whole is always stronger in a case like this than the sum of its parts, yet none of the four institutions with Boncompagni papers (and there may be others) has the resources at present to embark on the large-scale collaborative exercise which is needed.



Exploring Prince Balthasar Boncompagni (1821-94)

BERNARD MEEHAN, Keeper of Manuscripts.

