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Cosmic Ink: Fragments from the Past on Journal Pages

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bstract. This contribution describes an editorial project started in 2012 to enhance the cultural heritage of the Italian observatories. It includes a regular column *Cieli di inchiostro* (Cosmic ink) devoted to promoting the astronomical historical archives and published in the *Giornale di astronomia*, a journal of the *Società Astronomica Italiana*.

In every issue of the journal, a significant historical artifact is presented and described. This can be a letter, a diary page, a photograph, a map, a drawing, or another type of item pulled out of the archival folders to bring its history to light. The column is intended to invite historians, amateurs, and students to search and use the documents kept in the archives of the observatories.

"*Do you think it's right to rake up the past?*
I don't know that I know what you mean by raking it up;
but how can we get at it unless we dig a little?
The present has such a rough way of treading it down. "
Henry James, The Aspern Papers, 1888

1. The archives of the Italian stronomical Observatories: how to promote them?

Since 1980, the Italian Astronomical Observatories and the Astronomy Department of the University of Bologna have started to keep, sort out, and inventory their historical archives. These archives preserve the documents of the activities of some of the oldest scientific institutions in Italy, starting from the end of the seventeenth century. The documents reveal the relationships among the astronomers and the scientific community, the politicians, and the society of the time. In the archives, we can find observation logbooks, meteorological registers, thousands of letters, worksheets, personal and scientific diaries, travel journals, sketches, maps, photographs, and administrative papers (see Figure 1).

All of the items are primary sources for historical research and represent a valuable and unique cultural heritage, crucial to the understanding of the evolution of scientific thinking and the contextualization of Italian "scientific politics" during the past three centuries. The archivists in charge of this wonderful heritage restored the original arrangement of the records, published analytical inventories, and made the documents available to all. Furthermore, the web portal "Stardust" was created.



Figure 1. Some documents, projects and observations, from Arcetri Observatory's Archives

At the same time, the material stored in the astronomical archives was promoted. There have been multiple activities to support greater visibility of the collection, including an edition of epistolary exchanges between astronomers, exhibitions hosted in public cultural institutions (usually National ibraries and Archives) to celebrate scientific or personal anniversaries, public lectures of astronomical documents, and guided tours inside the archives.

2. The column Cosmic Ink in the *Giornale di stronomia*: an example of permanent promotion

In 2012, an editorial project to enhance the cultural heritage of the Italian observatories began. A column entitled *Cieli di inchiostro* (Cosmic inks) was included in the *Giornale di Astronomia*. In every issue of the journal, a significant historical artifact is presented and described.

A letter, a diary page, a photograph, a map, a drawing, or another significant item is pulled out from the archival folders to bring to light its rich history. The items reveal not just science, instruments, discoveries, and observations, but also people, travels, and public and private relationships. The historical archives provides the human and interpersonal context to the scientific history.

The authors of the column include archivists, librarians, historians of astronomy, and researchers. The aim of this project is to raise awareness of activities of the historical archives belonging to the *Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica* (**IN F**) (National Institute

for Astrophysics) and the *Department of Physics and Astronomy* of *Bologna University*. These activities include the work required — arranging, inventorying, and promotion of the materials in the archives.

The column invites historians, amateurs, and students to search and use the documents kept in the archives of the observatories. Archives are always surprising: as Marc Bloch wrote in *The Historians Craft's* (1949): "The sight of an investigation with its successes and reverses, is seldom boring. It is the ready-made article which is cold and dull."

3. Giornale di stronomia

The *Giornale di Astronomia* is a quarterly journal of the *Società Astronomica Italiana* (Italian Astronomical Society), published in Italian since 1975. It is the only Italian popular astronomical journal edited by a national professional scientific institution. The *Società Astronomica Italiana* is the successor of the *Società degli Spettrocopisti* (Spectroscopy Society). Established in 1871 by Italian astronomers, it was the first of its kind. Angelo Secchi (1818–1878), one of the pioneers of astronomical spectroscopy in Italy, published the first spectral classifications of stars there. The *Società degli Spettrocopisti* was the first professional organization specialized that in "Physical Astronomy". In 1872, the Society published the *Memorie degli Spettroscopisti* (Memories of Spectroscopy Society), the first scientific magazine devoted to Astrophysics.

Today, the Giornale di Astronomia publishes papers by specialized and professional scholars (not only Italians) on astronomy and astrophysics, the history of astronomy, astronomy education, and on topics concerning relations between astronomy and various disciplines, like philosophy, art, literature, social sciences, and others. Its aim is to promote popular interest in astronomy and science to students, teachers, amateur astronomers, and others, as well as to scholars and professional astronomers.

4. Up to now: ten "fragments of the past"

We present below a short description of the papers, fragments of the past, that have been published in the column "Cosmic ink".

1. ***Primus inter pares*** *(the first of many)*

   The letter from Giuseppe Piazzi to Barnaba Oriani announcing the discovery of Ceres, the first asteroid, on 14 January 1801. The fragment is taken from the Archives of Astronomical Observatory of Brera, Milan.

2. **trip in Florence**

   The parchment diploma to commemorate the *delightful visit* to Arcetri during the first IAU General Assembly held in Rome in May 1922. The diploma is preserved in the Archives of Astrophysical Observatory of Arcetri, Florence.

3. **200 years of light: the foundation of the new Observatory in Capodimonte**
   The program of the ceremony for the foundation stone of the new Observatory of Naples taken the 4 November 1812. The document is taken from the State Archive of Naples.

4. **The Halley's comet in Padua**

   In May 1910, Antonio Maria Antoniazzi made new observations and sketches of the Halley comet in Padua, the city where Giotto painted it six centuries before. The document is taken from the Archives of Astronomical Observatory of Padua.

5. **Born with no papers**

   A letter, dated 27 March 1765, from Ruggero Boscovich to Giovanni Stefano Conti describing the construction of the Brera observatory on the roofs of the Jesuit College. The letter is preserved at the Archives of Astronomical Observatory of Brera, Milan.

6. **case of mimetism**

   A manuscript (from about 1787) by Jesse Ramsden on the astronomical instruments use. The document remained unknown, bound inside a book, for more than 200 years. The document is taken from the Archives Astronomical Observatory of Palermo.

7. **G. Marconi, Sardinia and astronomy**

   The o cial decree signed by Guglielmo Marconi on 15 September 1932 appointing the director of Carloforte astronomical station as member of Italian Research Council. The fragment is preserved at the Archives of Astronomical Observatory of Cagliari.

8. **. Bemporad and the racial discrimination in fascist era**

   The 9 August 1938 Azeglio Bemporad, director of the Catania Observatory, was forced to leave his position because of the "Racial aws" issued by Fascist regime. The document is taken from the Archives of Astrophysical Observatory of Catania.

9. **letter from Genua**

   The letter, dated 25 March 1724 and previously attributed to Paris Maria Salvago, was written by his son Agostino to inform Eustachio Manfredi about the death of his father occurred two days before. The document is taken from the Archives of Astronomy Department of Bologna University.

10. **The stolen comet**

    A discussion about the discover of a comet made by Wilhelm Tempel in the night of 2 October 1877, and a false letter attributed to the prince Tomasi di ampedusa concerning the same discover made seven days before. The documents are preserved in the Archives of Astrophysical Observatory of Arcetri, Florence.