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Free Online Resources on Rare and Antique Books in Astronomy

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Abstract. A web site, on rare and antique books, has been constructed. General resources of interest to historical librarians, such as acquisitions, cataloguing, preservation, conservation and digitalization projects are offered, as well as specific resources in the field of astronomy.



Figure 1. The image utilized in the web site.

<http://www.astropa.unipa.it/biblioteca/>

1. About the Site

The above site presents free online resources for rare and antique books. In addition, general resources such as acquisitions, cataloguing, preservation, conservation and digitalization projects are available in the top portion of frame, while more specific astronomy resources are provided on the bottom half. Thus, the two searchable halves: *General* and *In and around astronomy* enable users to simultaneously refer to both sections.

The primary objective for constructing this site, was to provide links to all sites I currently utilize in my work. The collection of rare books held in the library of the Osservatorio Astronomico di Palermo contains 1300 titles published in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and includes monographs on astronomy, related sciences such as mathematics and physics, philosophical works, literature classics, books on local history and government, bibles, grammar, dictionaries and serials. None of the books had been catalogued.

The resources listed on the web page have been helpful in my efforts to sort, shape and describe the rare book collection, although no assurances can be made regarding their completeness. This site is constantly evolving and at no time can it be considered "finished".

Just a few words regarding some of the headings:

- Acquisitions

The links are useful for checking on a book's value, for acquiring additional data or including hints as to the entirety or condition of the volume(s) owned by a library.

- Cataloguing

Since cataloguing is my primary responsibility, this heading represents the highest number of links. Although the standard used for the Observatory collection is ISBD(A), when doubts arise it can be useful to check other rules and manuals. A section I often refer to is the Reference sources: *The World Biographical Index 9* (by K.G. Saur Publishing) with its 2.5 million names has proven very useful for cross-checking names and locating an author's date of birth or death. The most utilized links, however, are those relating to catalogues of national libraries, including the Italian SBN. Although the web site at the University of Queensland includes all catalogues, I have provided direct links to those I access most often. The reason librarian's search national catalogues is to find complete bibliographic descriptions, especially for data such as: number of volumes that complete a set of books, pages and tables. If this information is unavailable, another approach is to search library sites who have special scientific collections. I have also located sites offering online access to catalogues maintained by special funds. (At this stage,our library still falls under this category!) However,for special funded libraries, many items listed are often inadequate or inaccessible. For example ,all pre-1801 English and American books (i.e. STC, Wing and 18th century), which are represented in the *English Short Title Catalogue*, constitute a separate database in RLIN and no free access is possible.

- Digital Texts and Images, and Exhibitions

The headings point to areas that are still under construction and the links are not representative of the vast extent of material available on the web.

- Other sites

This heading is comprised of URL's that I particularly appreciate even though they do not directly correlate to my current work. (e.g. history of the book).

If you visit this web page and have any suggestions or comments, please write to donata@astropa.unipa.it