A brief history
The idea of founding a university library first arose in 1658, stimulated by an ongoing crisis faced by the Studium urbis. Considering this, Pope Alessandro VII Chigi gave enthusiasm to the approval of an important proposal from the Conclusorial Advocates, aimed at raising the university to new levels of splendor, transforming it into a domus Sapientiae: a scientific and cultural reference for the entire modern Christian world.

The pontiff applied all the temporal and spiritual authority at his disposal for the appropriation of any pre-existing collections of books, in order to develop the new library. The structure itself was to be designed by Francesco Borromini. Carlo Cartari, dean of the Conclusorial Advocates, began the register for the Biblioteca Alessandrina in October of 1659.

Methodology
The objective of our project was to identify and catalogue the books donated to the Alessandrina Library by the Chigi family. The methods required direct examination of both the book collections and archival documentation. Through examination of the books we were able to identify the presence of manuscript annotations and specific provenance marks, which were used to reconstruct the genealogy of the items. The project also required development of a database, from which we were able to produce a catalogue adhering to International Standard Bibliographic Description ISBD(A) requirements, to standards of the Regole Italiane di Catalogazione per Autori (REICAT), and to the Guida alla catalogazione del libro antico in SBN (Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale). We catalogued all items bearing the manuscript annotations “Donum S.D.N. Alessandrinum VII” or “Semptimi” or “Donum Em.mi S.R.C. Card. Flavij Chisij”, found either on the frontispiece or in some other part of the volume.

"Duplicates" from the Chigi Library
On 9 December 1664, Cardinal Flavio Chigi, nephew of Pope Alessandro VII, donated a number of "duplicate" books originating from the Biblioteca Chigiana. The cardinal donated a total of 27 works, often in multiple copies, comprising a total of 87 volumes. They dealt with matters fundamental to the culture of the times, including Church history, criminal law, philosophy, biography and ecclesiastical matters.

One of the most important observations of the Chigian volumes concerned the presence of certain bindings, showing the arms of both Pope Alessandro VII and Cardinal Flavio Chigi. These bindings were traced to the workshop of the Andreoli brothers, who were binders, booksellers and publishers active at Rome beginning in the second half of the 1600s.

Results and conclusions
Our project led to the identification and cataloguing of 393 works in 530 volumes. The common denominator among all these specimens is the presence of a manuscript annotation that permits reconstruction of a donation to the Alessandrina Library through the act or order of a member of the Chigi family. Compared to the original inventory of duplicates from the Chigian Library, we found that 33 volumes were missing. Similarly, referring to the relative documents, we found that 168 of the Vatican duplicates are not present, as well as 468 volumes from the original Preti holdings and 456 from those of Uterluci.

The dates of publication for the Chigi collection cover a span from 1509 to 1664. The largest share, at 67.6%, are 17th century editions, compared to 32.3% from the 1500s and two undated volumes.

We are able to gain an understanding of the countries of publication for the books circulating in Rome in the 1600s, since the materials derive from the union of a number of library collections originally developed in different contexts. The cataloguing project also allows us to examine the cultural interests of the contemporary Italian intellectual elite.