FEDERICA LA NAVE, Harvard/Dibner Institue
*Bombelli and L'Algebra*

In *L'Algebra*, Bombelli was the first to recognize what we call "imaginary numbers" as numbers, and to give them operative definitions. *L'Algebra* was published in three books in 1572. However, Bombelli wrote the first version in five books in 1550. In the 1550 manuscript version Bombelli does not believe that the roots born in solving cubic equations in the irreducible case are numbers. In the published version he believes they are numbers and gives rules for operating with them. The aim of this paper is to try to understand what happened in these twenty-two years to Bombelli's state of belief—how his beliefs changed and what caused that change.