

The Ancient Book Collection of the Capodimonte Astronomical Observatory: Iconography Online

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Abstract. The Capodimonte Astronomical Observatory (OAC) library, was constituted during the time period of 1812-1815 (Olostro Cirella, 1995) and has collected some remarkable gifts. The most important gift was made by Giuseppe Cenzato (1882-1969), an engineer and amateur astronomer who, in 1964, donated instruments and books that were from his private collection.

At present, we are cataloguing and studying the symbolic and artistic representations (e.g. valuable and enigmatic engraved title-pages, elaborated frontispieces, original printing marks, and astronomical instruments) of this ancient book collection. At the same time, we are digitising these documents and plan to make them available on-line in the near future.

1. The Ancient Book Collection

The OAC ancient book collection has various rare book editions, particularly *cinquecentine* and *seicentine*, such as Johannes de Sacro Bosco's incunabulum, the *De sphaera Mundi* (Venetiae, 1488), as well as books by Tycho, Copernicus, Galileo, Father Kircher (see Fig.1), and the Jesuit Clavius. In addition to these, the library also collects works on celestial cartography.

At present, we are compiling and collating a computerized catalog that will be comprised of many of valuable works including: engraved title-pages, elaborate *antiportae*, original printing marks, star maps, and astronomical instruments.

This work is developing through three steps: 1. Examination of books; 2. Census of images; 3. Introduction of data onto a card (see Fig. 2) that has been subdivided into specific fields and provides the following information:

- location;
- i. d.;
- iconography apparatus;
- condition of preservation;
- acquisition details;
- sources and documents;
- notes.

2. Studies of the Scientific Iconography

The catalogued books, while primarily a tool for historians of science, also provide analysis of historical, cultural, and artistic backgrounds from which the images have been produced. In addition to their scientific importance, there has been a good deal of interest in their philosophic and cosmological implications, particularly as they relate to social and religious problems.

At present, the first studies have provided interesting results, for example, the discovery of a jesuitic *manifesto* in the title-page of Clavius' *Euclidis Elementorum Libri XV* (Coloniae, 1591) and two rare representations of the infinite universe in the *antiportae* of Doppelmayer's *Atlas Coelestis* (Norimbergae, 1742) and of Euler's *Theoria motuum planetarum et cometarum* (Berolini, 1744).

In the meantime, we are digitising the illustrations in order to protect and to make them available online. They will be equipped with a short introduction, a synthesis of the iconographical and iconological studies of the representations and a legend. The work, based on a laurea thesis (Cecere, 2001), is in progress.

Acknowledgments

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References

- Olostro Cirella, E., 1995, *Il fondo antico della biblioteca dell'Osservatorio Astronomico di Capodimonte*, Almanacco OAC, 153
- Cecere, I., 2001, *Sul fondo antico della biblioteca dell'Osservatorio Astronomico di Capodimonte: arte e scienza nei frontespizi e nelle antiporte*, laurea thesis

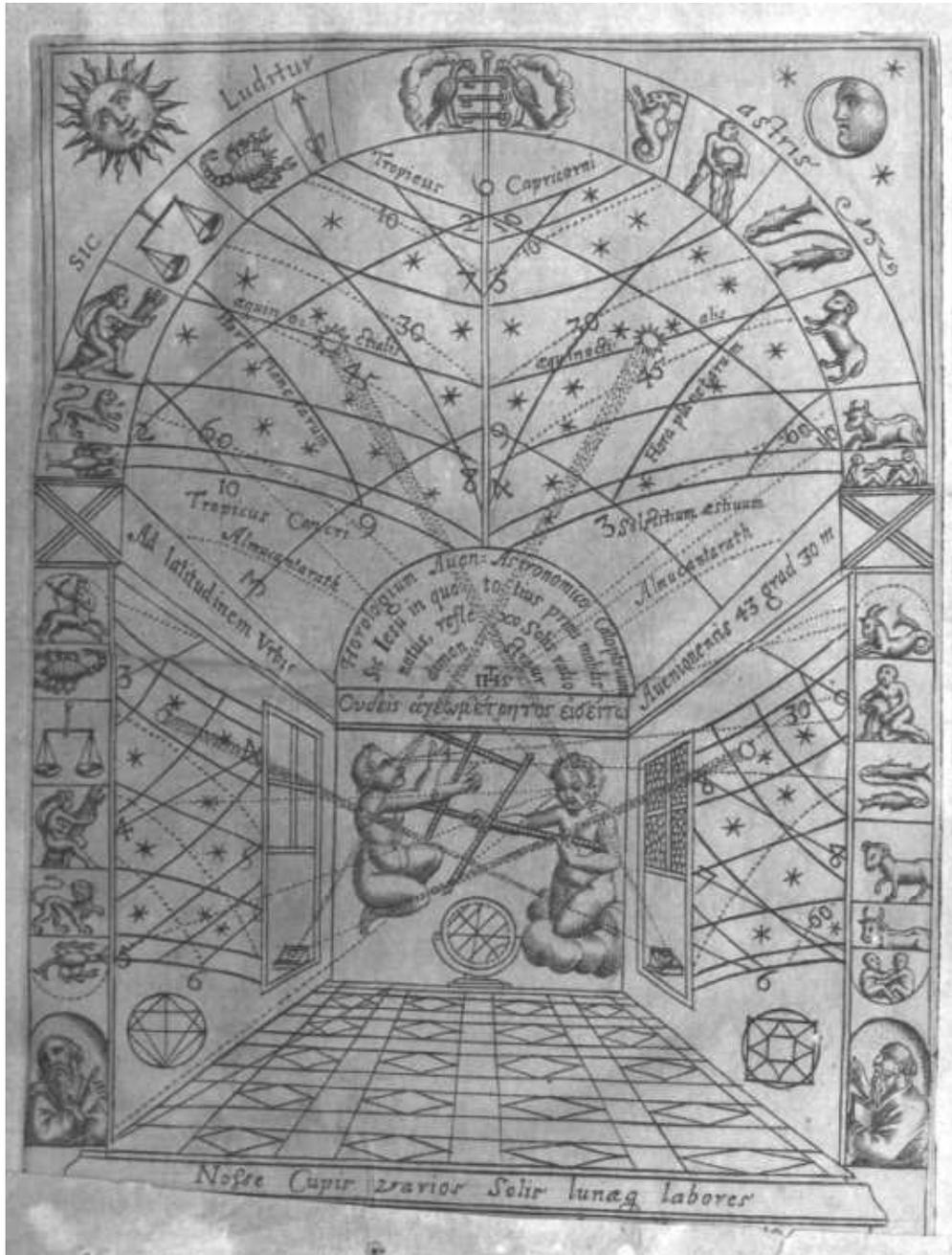


Figure 1. Engraving in antiporta. From A. Kircher, *Primitiae gnomonicae hoc est horologiographiae novae specularis*, Avenione, 1635.

CAPODIMONTE ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY - NEAPLES		
H ^o of general inventory 17045A 103		
Progressive number 118		
Date: 2002/03/18		
Completer		
Location		
Nation: Italy	City: Naples	Body: OAC
		
I. D.		
Title: <i>Novae coelestium terræque reciens observationes</i>		
Subject: astronomy		
Author: Francesco Fontana		
Place of edition: Naples		
Date of edition: 1646		
Printing: Officina		
Paging:		
Title and number of collection:		
Measure: 22 x 13		
Material: paper		
ICONOGRAPHY APPARATUS		
Title page: engraved title page		
Frontispiece:		
Number of plate:		
Enclonura:		
Engraving technique: xylography and chalcography		
CONDITION OF PRESERVATION		
Condition of preservation:		
ACQUISITION DETAILS		
Type of acquisition:		
Date of acquisition:		
Place of acquisition:		
Legal position:		
SOURCES AND DOCUMENTS		
Archival documents:		
Bibliography:		
Art exhibition:		
NOTES		
Notes:		

Figure 2. An example of cataloguing card.