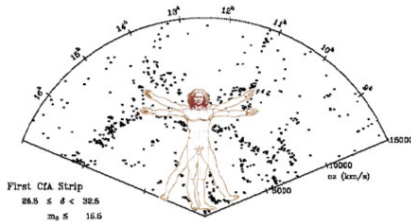


II CIELO COME STRUMENTO - PRIMO CONGRESSO NAZIONALE DI ASTRONOMIA CULTURALE. Organizzato dall'INAF - IASF di Palermo e dal gruppo di ricerca AsCultA



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Francesco Fontana and the mysterious origin of the astronomical telescope

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After four centuries, we still do not know the genesis of the Galilean (or Dutch) Telescope, but equally obscure is the origin of the astronomical telescope. This telescope made with two convex lenses (also called Keplerian) became widely used from the second half of the XVth century and dominated the astronomical scene till the XXth century. In his *Dioptricae*, Kepler (1611) described the combination either of two or three convex lenses, but he never described a telescope or made such a device. The first mention of a telescope made with two convex lenses is by the Jesuit Christoph Scheiner in his *Rosa Ursina Sive Sol* in 1631. This is probably why Antonio Maria Shyrleus de Rheita in 1645 credited to Scheiner the first construction and use of such a device. However, the discovery by Franz Daxecker (2004) of a passage in the Jesuit annual account of the year 1616 at the Tyrolean State Museum shows that an astronomical telescope was in the possession of the Archduke Maximilian III, and that it was converted for terrestrial use by the Jesuit astronomer Christoph Scheiner. In our view then this implies that Scheiner was not the inventor. In his *Novae Coelestium Terrestriumque rerum Observationes*, Francesco Fontana (1646) claimed to have conceived the first positive eyepiece already in 1608. He also produced a testimony by the Jesuit Johan Baptista Zupus who declared to have used his new telescope since 1614. Generally, scholars have always considered Fontana's claim a lie and not taken seriously. However, there are other evidences that Keplerian telescopes were circulating in Europe in 1617 as one of this could be depicted in the Allegory of Sight by Jan Brueghel the Elder. Thus, Fontana remains the only one, and therefore the most likely, candidate to have manufactured the first Keplerian Telescope as early as 1614 and possibly, if we trust him, already in 1608, which would be before the Galilean's one.

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