



Contribution ID: 2

Type: **not specified**

The Age of Cassini: The Marriage of Historiography and Iconography in a 18th-Century Painting in Palazzo Patrizi-Montoro.

Thursday 11 September 2025 18:05 (25 minutes)

Within the little-known Baroque series of paintings depicting the history of astronomy, which dates back to the early 18th century and is located in Rome's Palazzo Patrizi-Montoro, the final canvas dedicated to the 17th century, stands out and captures the viewer's attention. In this work, Giandomenico Cassini's long shadow looms over the scene, even though he does not appear in the foreground. The selection of episodes depicted is dominated in terms of size by the silhouettes of San Petronio and the Observatoire, the two poles of the brilliant career of the now elderly scientist, who had become a naturalised French citizen. The scene is also marked by the incipient cultural leadership of Francesco Bianchini and the stay of his nephew Maraldi, at a time when the presence of the astronomer from Perinaldo was still felt among the elite of the Eternal City. In this contribution, I will provide a detailed analysis of the work, demonstrating how the emerging historiography of astronomy, in its ambitious beginnings, draws upon Cassini's eclecticism and Galileo's experimentalism. Iconographically, it condenses the triumphs of the new science under the banners of observation and measurement. It offers a panoramic overview, starting with Tycho and Kepler, progressing through Galileo, Hevelius, and Bouillau, and concluding with Picard and Coronelli. As I have previously argued, the scenes chosen by the Patrizi brothers and painted with the help of their probable collaborators, Monsù Giacomo and Cristoforo, are deeply influenced by Francesco Bianchini's scientific interests. However, the final canvas in the series makes it clear that astronomical and cartographic methods and subjects ultimately derive from the systematic programme of Bianchini's indirect teacher and correspondent. Never before has a work of art so skilfully conveyed the world and the age of Cassini.

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Session Classification: Gian Domenico Cassini: 400 anni dalla nascita / Gian Domenico Cassini: 400 Years After his Birth