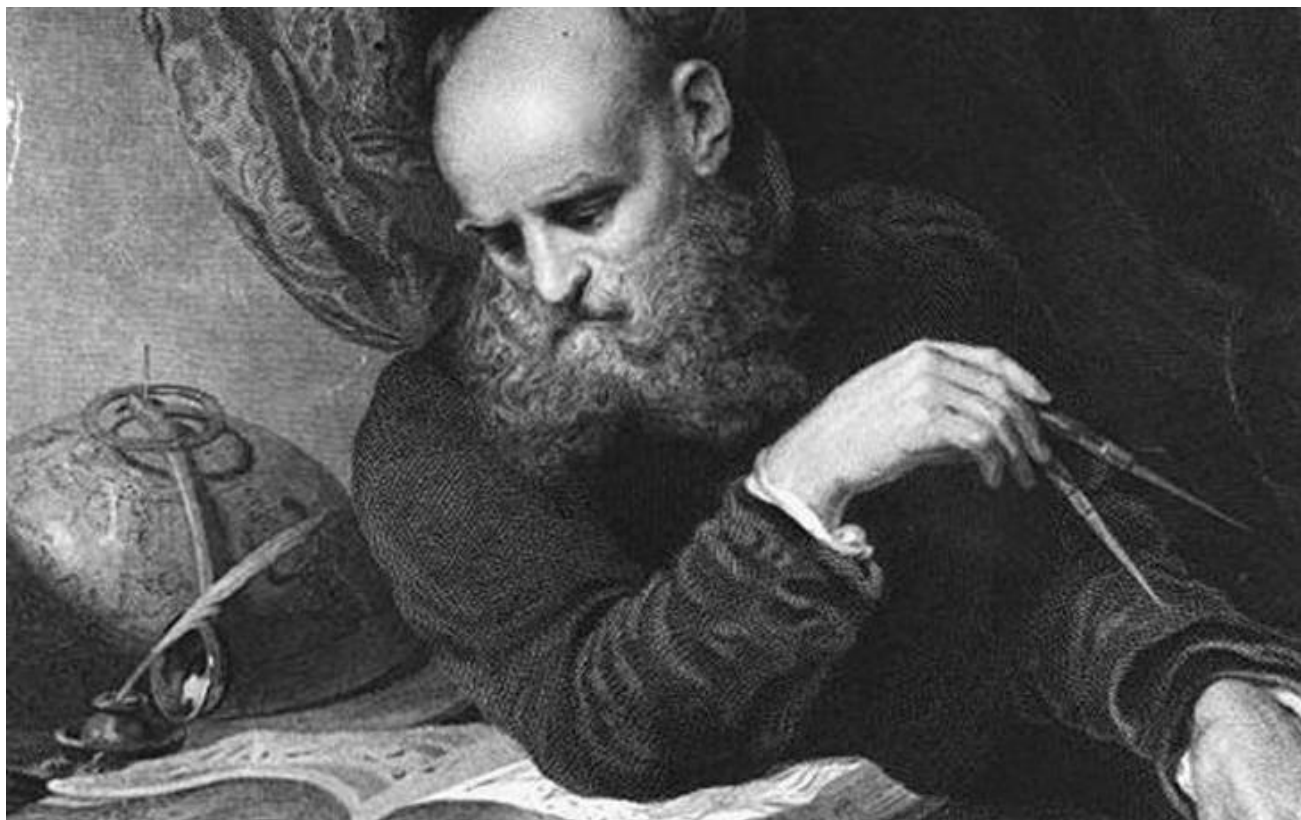


Fourth Centennial of Galileo's discoveries. Florence celebrates at ENIT in New York

Marina Melchionda (April 08, 2009)



“Galileo: Images of the Universe from Antiquity to the Telescope.” Florence pays homage to the scientist and genius by hosting an unprecedented exhibit at Palazzo Strozzi. Interview with Matteo Renzi, President of the Province of Florence, who presented the initiative in world preview at ENIT's headquarters in New York

In November 1609, Galileo pointed his enhanced telescope with 20x magnification to the moon for the first time and used it to prove Copernicus' heliocentric theory. By challenging the geocentric view that had dominated since Aristotle's time, he revolutionized scientific thought and became the father of modern astronomy.

In 2009, the world is celebrating the fourth centenary since his discoveries by declaring 2009 to be the International Year of Astronomy. It is a global tribute organized and sponsored by the [International Astronomical Union](#) [2](IAU) and [UNESCO](#) [3].



Through various initiatives taking place in many different countries, the two organizations aim to help the citizens of the world rediscover their place in the universe through the day- and nighttime sky, and thereby engage a personal sense of wonder and discovery.

The city of Florence has taken this opportunity to personally honor the scientist by launching the spectacular exhibit "Galileo: Images of the Universe from Antiquity to the Telescope," which comprises 250 masterpieces – including paintings, ingenious instruments, sculptures and drawings – and recreates the history of astronomy from its earliest days.

The exhibit, on view until August 30, is divided into eight sections. The first explores the dawn of astronomy and focuses on Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the biblical cosmos. The second section describes the spherical view of the cosmos developed in Classical Greece by Plato and Aristotle. The third examines Hellenistic Greece and the idea of the geocentric cosmos. These are followed by three sections on Islam, the Christianity of the cosmos, and the rebirth of astronomy. The seventh section is devoted to Galileo and his telescope (also on display), while the final part of the exhibit focuses on Kepler and Newton, and marks the definitive triumph of modern science.

The Province of Florence and the Florence Tourist Board presented "Galileo: Images of the Universe from Antiquity to the Telescope" at a conference in New York on March 25. The conference took place in the headquarters of the North America division of [ENIT](#) [4] (Italian Tourist Board)

and was hosted by its director Riccardo Strano.

The exhibit was introduced by Matteo Renzi, the President of the Province of Florence, James Bradburne, Director of Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, where the exhibit is on display, and Antonio Preiti, Director of the Florence Tourist Board. "We are confident that the Galileo exhibit will be a popular attraction for visitors, particularly for Americans who are in love with Italian history and culture," said Mr. Renzi.

Mr. Strano echoed him, praising the beauty of the city that hosts the display: "The initiative is an example of the many ways we keep potential visitors informed of the 'happenings' in the beautiful city of Florence. It is among the most beloved Italian destinations by Americans."

The conference was also an occasion for Italian representatives to meet Meryl Levitz, President and CEO of the [Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corp](#) [5]. The capital of Pennsylvania, connected to Florence for more than 30 years, will host a corresponding exhibit at the Franklin Museum of Philadelphia from April 4 to September 7 entitled "Galileo, the Medici, and the Age of Astronomy." When we asked her about Philadelphia's relationship to Florence, Ms. Levitz said that "they both are considered to be the second favorite destination in their respective countries, after New York and Rome. I am confident that this is the first of the many occasions we will have to increase tourism to our cities and to further deepen the relationship between our people."

We had the opportunity to exchange a few words with the President of the Province of Florence Matteo Renzi who told us more about the exhibit, its features, and its objectives. We also discussed the Internet and new media as potential instruments to increase tourism to Italy and to Florence in particular.

When did you come up with the idea for the exhibit?

"The idea originated with the Director of the [Istituto e Museo Nazionale di Storia della Scienza](#) [6] in Florence Paolo Galluzzi who proposed it to the [Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi](#) [7] in the fall of 2006. Given the importance of the 'Year of Galileo,' and the support of the Italian government, Regione Toscana, and Ente Cassa, we decided to launch the 2009 program as a 'double-exhibition,' covering both the spring and summer seasons. The exhibit celebrates an international pioneer in science, a great Tuscan-born thinker, as well underlines the importance of seeing science as an integral part of culture. Now more than ever it is impossible to separate 'science' from 'culture,' an interdependence clearly shown in the exhibition, which also includes scientific instruments,



tapestries, drawings, and paintings by Rubens, Botticelli, and Brueghel. "

This initiative is part of a wider project conceived to enhance the image of Florence all over the world. How are you working on this goal?

"The image of Florence we are currently focusing on aims to connect the past with the future. Our city is renowned for its palaces, churches, paintings, and museums. The ability to create beautiful things is still with us, and it comes into being in many ways: in design, in fashion, in craftsmanship, and in the modern visual arts. We want Florence to be seen as a city that combines the past with the future, under the sign of style and beauty."

Do you think that Internet and social media such as Facebook and YouTube could be efficient marketing tools in the tourism sector?

"We are discovering Facebook and YouTube as we learn to use them. I have found out that they are a dramatic means of communicating with people, and a way to verify ideas immediately as soon as they come to mind. As of yet, there isn't a standard for the use of these new instruments, and all the possibilities of digital marketing in the field of culture have not yet been explored. Our tourism promotion site has already been transformed with videos, photos, and the direct participation of our guests. These instruments will become stronger and stronger in the tourism industry as well; this is for sure."

Why did you decide to hold the first presentation of the exhibit in New York?

"New York is the center of all that is going on in the U.S. The city has a global dimension that can be found nowhere else in the world. We are here because we believe that if New Yorkers find this exhibit interesting, other U.S. citizens are bound to follow. Moreover, New York is the most important tourist market in the U.S. And, we must not forget the tremendously important connection between New England and Florence, a connection which we are extremely proud of and hope to develop further."

Florence is also twinned with Philadelphia, which is hosting a corresponding exhibit with the one organized in Florence. Do you intend to work on other projects together? What does this 'special bond' mean to you?

"We have to admit that twinings between cities used to be a question of diplomacy, a vestige of the past that for the most part is over. Today, these partnerships have to remain relevant in order to survive, and they need to express something about the present and, more importantly, the future. By twinning Florence and Philadelphia we intend to develop, enhance and enrich our relationship. We have not yet outlined a program, but as the celebrations for Amerigo Vespucci's anniversary draw near, we will explore new ways to cooperate that are in the best interest for both cities."

You are the mayoral candidate for the city of Florence in the 2009 elections. If you eventually become elected, what will you do to encourage further development of the tourism industry there?

"Tourism is one of the city's fundamental economic sectors. We want to re-launch Florence's global image and the U.S. is our biggest market. During 2008, Florence welcomed over 500,000 American visitors. We want to reach as many as 1 million in the next few years, if the world's economic situation allows it. Worldwide, we want to develop family tourism, a target which is crucial for us, and as far as the U.S. is concerned, we want to explore the "new prairie" states such as Texas, California, and Washington, which we think represent a great potential for Florence. Vespucci, who gave his name to America, is our best ally today."

A personal message to our American and Italian-American friends who are planning to visit



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(Edited by Giulia Prestia)

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