

The Museo della Specola



The old Specola hosting the Museum

The three domes sitting on top of Palazzo dei Normanni, besides making a characteristic Palermo landmark, also represent the Observatory and its history, which today is narrated by the Museo della Specola.

The domes were installed between the end of the 18th and the mid-19th centuries, in order to protect the main instruments of the Specola. Later in the 1950s they were rebuilt in iron and recently have been replaced with lighter, coppered ones, thus completing the restoring project of the old Palermo Specola where the Museum of the Observatory has been hosted since 2001.

The criterium inspiring the museum arrangement was to recreate the same settings where Piazzini and his successors operated, thus replacing back to their original locations instruments and furniture, such as, for instance, the purpose-designed cabinets by famous architect Léon Dufourny (1754-1818).

The rich historical legacy of the Observatory is now accessible to the public on a guided tour (see page 19).

A trip through the Observatory history

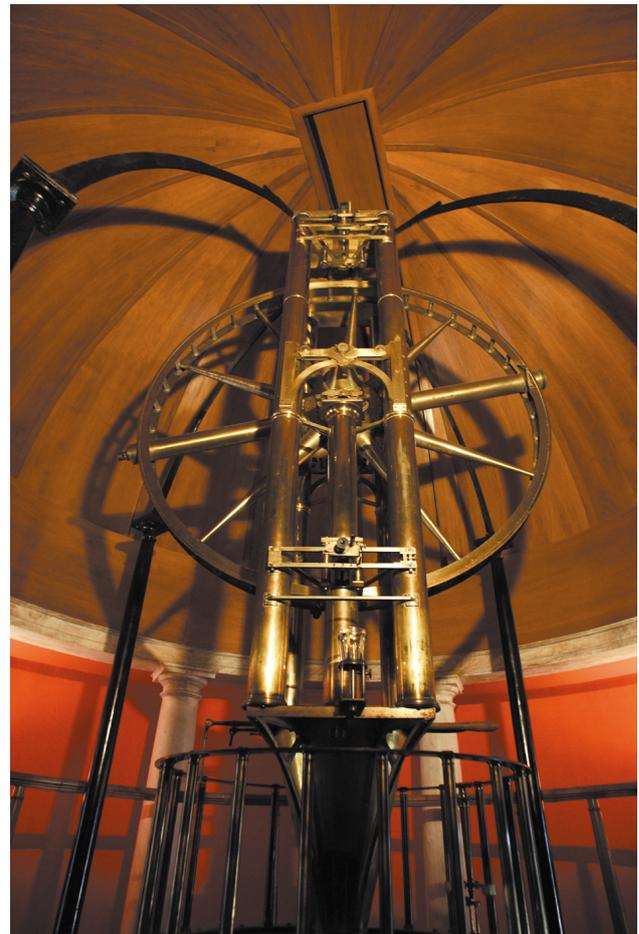
Instruments 'talk' about the history of an institution: at the Museo della Specola visitors go back in time through a fascinating trip along 200 years of history of the Observatory, made of glories and crises, reflected by the instruments used. Visiting the museum is thus an interesting means of "reading" the past, through new perspectives and historical evaluations.

The core of the Observatory Museum includes the instruments which were the original equipment at the and nowadays are still largely preserved.

On its foundation, the Observatory was provided with the best equipment available at the time, mostly commissioned to the English maker Jesse Ramsden (1730-1800). He built the famous Ramsden's Circle, a unique instrument, a masterpiece of the precision mechanics of the time, that was used by Piazzini. It represents the jewel of the collection.

Among the most valuable objects of this old set are worth mentioning some English astronomical clocks, a mirror from a telescope built by the astronomer William Herschel (1728-1822), a Short reflecting telescope and a rare couple of globes, terrestrial and celestial, made by Bonne and Lalande.

The original nucleus also includes a set of topographical instruments, bought by Piazzini between 1804 and 1811 with the purpose of drawing a map of Sicily: together with a specimen of the French toise and a



The Ramsden's circle

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