



The monument to Alessandro Galilei in S. Croce in Florence, 1737

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AN ACCOUNT OF A MEMORIAL TABLET FOR ALESSANDRO GALILEI IN S. GIOVANNI IN Laterano was given in volume seven of *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*.¹ Reference was made to Ilaria Toesca's notice in 1952 of a comparable inscription in S. Croce in Florence, on a monument in the Bardi di Vernio chapel which had not been accessible for many years because of scaffolding.² It is now clearly visible below the monument to the architect (Plate 1). It is inscribed on a shallow white marble tablet embedded in a more solid block of white marble, with Sienna trim in the architrave below an arced top. This is backed by a block of black marble from which the white curlicues of the principal frame swerve upwards in a serpentine figure to a comparable arc, which gathers together the folds of a golden embroidered drapery backing the sarcophagus and bust of the deceased above a reclining, draped allegory of architecture holding a coat of arms of the Galileo family, with the addition of an architect's compass. The inscription differs from that in Rome in the ending. It gives the age of the deceased as *aetatis suae XLVI* rather than XXXXVI, and continues:

*Ibique jacet in ecclesia D. Nicola in Arcione
Ad radices montis Quirinalis
Galileus et Antonius
Patri suo optime merito moestissimi posuere*

(and there [i.e. Rome] lies in the church of Saint Nicola in Arcione
at the foot of the Quirinal Hill.

Galileus and Antonius

in deepest grief placed this [monument] to their most deserving parent).³

1 – Girolamo Ticciati (1671-1744), monument to Alessandro Galilei, S. Croce (Bardi di Vernio Chapel), Florence, 1737 (courtesy Courtauld Institute of Art, London)

The inscription is recorded in detail in 1754 in the first volume of G. Richa, *Notizie istoriche delle chiese Fiorentine*, and attention was drawn to the monument in some guidebooks, such as Karl Baedeker, *Italy: Handbook for Travellers* (Leipzig, 1874).⁴ Otherwise, the monument seems, with the exception of the notice by Dott.ssa Toesca, to be unnoticed in the literature until 1997, when it is mentioned by Silvia Chiara Cusmano in her doctoral thesis for the University of Florence, ‘L’opera di Alessandro Galilei architetto’.⁵

It is a very striking monument by Girolamo Ticciati, who is best known as the sculptor who supplied the figure of Geometry to complete the monument to Galileo Galilei nearby (Plate 2).⁶ That project had taken almost a century to bring to fruition and had been fostered since the death of the great astronomer in 1642 by his most faithful follower Vincenzo Viviani. At his death in 1703, only the bust of the monument had been completed by its designer Giulio Foggini, whose sons Giovanni Battista and Vincenzo carved the figure of Astronomy, balancing that of Ticciati’s Geometry to the right of the richly coloured marble sarcophagus of Sienna and black, which supports a further stage of rococo ornament below the stand supporting the bust of the deceased. This is set within a semicircular shell niche below a broken pediment containing the Galileo coat of arms of a vertical ladder – a motif repeated, with the addition of a divider, on the armorial shield clutched in the left hand of the recumbent allegorical figure below the bust representing Alessandro Galilei.

Girolamo Ticciati (1671-1744) was a Florentine sculptor trained by Foggini. He had studied in Rome and had spent four years as sculptor and architect to the Emperor Joseph I in Vienna. He returned to Florence on the emperor’s death in 1712, and largely inherited the practice of Foggini on the death of that sculptor in 1725, so it is not surprising that the figure of Geometry to complete the monument to Galileo Galilei should have been entrusted to him (Plate 3). It lacks the serpentine structure of the figure of Astronomy, and its draperies are, accordingly, less agitated and more modest, revealing a bare forearm but nothing of her breasts. Her head, with upward gaze, is supported on her forearm and meets the raised gaze of the bust of the great scientist peering into the skies. The secularism of the iconography, in which rational observation by astronomy and geometry replaces the cardinal virtues or patron saints of the preceding age, has frequently been commented upon. The same independence of the ecclesiastical surroundings characterises the monument to Alessandro Galilei, which plays no subsidiary part in an elaborate baroque *concetto* centred on a pious narrative or sacramental ensemble, but asserts a sturdy self-sufficiency.

The position of the monument to the memory of the architect seems to have been already selected, perhaps by Alessandro Galilei himself, near the site of the tomb of the great Galileo Galilei, whose mortal remains, together with those of Vincenzo Viviani, and the presumed remains of the astronomer’s daughter, had been moved to this resting place on 12th March 1737. None of the prejudice against the architect recorded by the Roman diarist Francesco Valesio among the canons of the Lateran Basilica, and by Pascoli



2 – Giulio, Giovanni Battista and Vincenzo Foggini, and Girolamo Ticciati
Monument to Galileo Galilei, S. Croce, Florence, 1624-1737

overleaf 3 – Girolamo Ticciati (1671-1744)

Figure of Geometry from the monument to Galileo Galilei, S. Croce, Florence, 1737

(courtesy Courtauld Institute of Art, London)

among contemporary historians of architecture, seems to have surfaced in his native city to prevent the erection of the memorial.⁷ To adapt the appreciation by the late Sir Howard Colvin of the Corsini Chapel created by the architect in the Lateran Basilica: ‘neo-classicism is in the air, and once more a funerary monument is in the forefront of taste’.⁸

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Michael McCarthy, ‘A memorial tablet for Alessandro Galilei in S. Giovanni in Laterano, 1737’, *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, VII, 2004, 266-70.
- ² Ilaria Toesca, ‘Alessandro Galilei in Inghilterra’, *English Miscellany*, 1952, 189-220.
- ³ Toesca mentions a comparable inscription in S. Nicola in Arcione, Galilei’s parish church in Rome, demolished in 1906. Cusmano has remarked on the absence of a transcription of this epigraph in Vincenzo Forcella, *Iscrizioni delle Chiese e d’altri edifici di Roma* (Rome, 1876), and has concluded that by that date the tablet, also by Ticciati, was illegible. See Silvia Cusmano, ‘L’opera di Alessandro Galilei architetto’, vol. 1, doctoral thesis (University of Florence, 1997) 18, n.26: ‘L’epigrafe in San Nicola in Arcione non è più leggibile dal secolo scorso; infatti Forcella non la trascrive’. She does not mention the tablet in S. Giovanni in Laterano.
- ⁴ Richa’s account of the monument in vol. I, 88-89, immediately follows his account of the tomb of Galileo Galilei: ‘Poi contiguo a questo mi giova notare un altro Deposito parimente di marmo e col ritratto e statua di Alessandro Galilei Ingegnere celebratissimo in Roma, e in Firenze. Questa è diligentissima opera del soprallodato Ticciati, di cui è altresì il disegno, e leggesi quest’ Epitafio’. The monument is absent from Maria Maugeri, *The Church of Santa Croce: a Pantheon of Famous Personalities* (Florence, 2000), though there is a good account of the monument to Galileo Galilei, 52-53, and of the monument of Pier Antonio Micheli, also of 1737, and by Girolamo Ticciati, 30. The Baedeker reference is loc. cit., 337.
- ⁵ loc. cit., I, 18: ‘A Firenze, nella Capella Bardi, è ancora visibile il monumento commemorativo realizzato da Ticciati, precedentemente posto in Santa Croce accanto al sepolcro di Galileo’. Cusmano has since published ‘Alessandro Galilei e il neocinquecentismo’ in O. Brunetti, S.C. Cusmano and V. Tesi, (eds), *Bernini e la Toscana: da Michelangelo al barocco mediceo e al neocinquecentismo* (Rome, 2002) 165-82.
- ⁶ For the history of this monument and ecclesiastical opposition to its placing in the church, see John Fahie, *Galileo His Life and Work* (Whitefish, MT, 2005) 402-05.
- ⁷ McCarthy, ‘A memorial tablet for Alessandro Galilei’.
- ⁸ Howard Colvin, *Architecture and the After-Life* (New Haven and London, 1991) 216.7

