Valentin Kockel, Brigitte Sölch, eds. Francesco Bianchini (1662-1729) und die europäische gelehrte Welt um 1700 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), pp. 274 €60.00 (cloth) ISBN 3 05 004133 1.

This handsome volume contains the collected papers of a symposium devoted to Francesco Bianchini, and held in Augsburg in September 2003. In their introduction, the editors sketch the reputation of this Veronese polymath, priest, librarian, historian, astronomer, antiquarian, archaeologist, and virtuoso in the fields of architecture, chronology and museography, and of his works over the past three centuries. As they rightly point out, Bianchini’s forgotten legacy has slowly been rediscovered in recent years thanks to some specialized studies concerning Roman antiquities, the engraver Piranesi, and the Roman milieu of the late Baroque. Although A. Mazzoleni’s biographical sketch Vita di Bianchini (1735) is still valuable, Salvatore Rotta’s voice in the Dizionario biografico degli Italiani and F. Uglietti’s weighty repertory, Un erudito veronese (1986), both represent immense improvements. Further details concerning Bianchini’s relationship with his native town can be found in the first essay of this volume, “F. B. e l’ambiente veronese,” by Irene Favaretto. Roman archaeology was at home in Verona, and Bianchini never lost contacts with local virtuosi, as his rich manuscript legacy now preserved in the Biblioteca Capitolare shows. The other contributors to this volume also draw with a certain frequency on this archive, which also preserves many papers related to Bianchini’s lifelong activities in Rome. His role as protégé of Pope Clement XI Albani, as scholar and executor of some features of the latter’s ambitious cultural programme, is analyzed in a suggestive paper by C.M.S. Johns. Much light is shed on the physical and astronomical work of Bianchini as a pupil of Geminiano Montanari by John L. Heilbron, whose essay deals with the actual astronomical observations executed by Bianchini in Padua, in Rome and elsewhere. The main heavenly phenomena that attracted his attention were the comet of 1684 and the parallaxes of planets, which he measured by means of a new method based on that of G.D. Cassini; much work went also into the collection of the astronomical and historical lore necessary for computing the chronological cycles described in his Istoria universale (1697) and into the intricate calculations of such features as the precession of the equinoxes and the nutation of the earth’s axis, which were necessary for the construction of the celebrated meridian of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Rome, a sundial that is still working and which is expected to give exact previsions of the Sun’s apparent motions up to the year 4000. Bianchini’s more lasting contribution were his telescopic observations of Venus’ surface, on which he discovered “nine seas, eight straights and twelve promontories” (p. 75). Heilbron’s chronicle of the Venus observations indicates that Bianchini was well aware of the Copernican and Galilean implications of his findings. Indeed, as Heilbron rightly remarks, in his Hesperi et Phosphori nova phaenomena (1728), his treatise on Venus (which has recently been translated into English), Bianchini presents the results of his observations tentatively in both Tychoitic and Copernican frameworks; while the latter was still prohibited by the Catholic Church, its advantage in saving the phenomena could not have escaped the attention of a competent reader.
Susan M. Dixon provides a useful guide to Bianchini's *Istoria universale*, of its elaborate structure and apologetical scope; she also deals with his curious didactic device, the playing cards, albeit without discussing the problem of the sources, ancient and modern, of Bianchini's compilation. Three further articles are particularly devoted to the archaeological excavations in Rome and to Bianchini's role as director of the papal antiquities. Valentin Kockel, by putting his work on the subterranean *Camera de' Liberti* into the context of the epoch-making discovery of the "colombarium" on the Via Appia (1725), shows that Bianchini was chiefly interested in the documentary significance of the inscriptions and the architectural meaning of this building. Kockel's comparative study of drawings and descriptions by other contemporaries (L. Ghezzi, A.F. Gori, G.B. Piranesi) provides a comprehensive view of the whole monument, which was destroyed a few years after its discovery. Meinrad von Engelberg analyzes Bianchini's drawing representing the Palazzo dei Cesari on the Palatine Hill and his reconstruction of that edifice, quoting Ghezzi's dismissal of Bianchini's fantastical *Idea del tutto* as an 'impostura'. The contradiction between the dramatic scenery of his drawing and the factual techniques of his archaeological research is explained here as the outcome of Bianchini's (and Piranesi's) intuition that the current idea of 'classical' architecture—as represented by Vitruvius—was a modern fiction; as a consequence, von Engelberg writes, Bianchini's depiction of the monumental scenery "is wavering between the idea of a perfect symmetry and a free reconstruction" and displays a "freedom of contradiction" (p. 160). François de Polignac, in turn, shows convincingly in a detailed comparative study of three cardinals (Davia, Polignac, Gualtieri), how in various periods Bianchini was able to fulfill his archaeologist's duties in the Roman milieu, despite occasional diplomatic and political tensions.

Two further papers deal with Bianchini's pioneering museographical activities. Brigitte Sölch presents some parts of her unpublished thesis, notably a detailed documentary study of some conceptual and graphic arrangements of the Museo ecclesiastico that Bianchini prepared and handed over to his nephew and editor Giuseppe. Bianchini's peculiar stile and method, writes Sölch, testifies to a "Zusammenspiel von Wissenschaft, Apologetik und Theatralität" (p. 220), as displayed in the some subtle symbolic connections between profane and sacred history in the proposed arrangement of the archaeological remains. Paolo Liverani, director of the Vatican Museum's Department of Classical Antiquity, adds to this description his first-hand and up-to-date knowledge of the various successive arrangements that had been given to classical remains, first in the Grotte Vaticane, and later in the changing areas of the existing Museum, from Bianchini's times through the reforms under pope Benedict XIV up to the Musei Capitolini at the end of the eighteenth century. The last paper, by Petra Thomas, which carries the evocative title "Bilder einer Ausstellung," gives an account of the role of portraiture and statuary drawings, etchings, and book reproductions in diffusing iconographical acquaintance with the papal treasures of ancient art throughout Europe. Thomas also deals with the use of the *camera oscura*, particularly of the type invented by the optician and anatomist William Cheselden, from the perspective of the relationship between scientific and artistic book illustrations.