

TIMEKEEPERS IN HISTORICAL OBSERVATORIES

Challenges in conservation, restoration and maintenance

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Chronometric collections in INAF observatories

It is well known that the role played by timekeepers in observatories is crucial, as accurate astronomical observations require good telescopes no less than good clocks. The combination of these instruments hence determines the quality of the data collected by the astronomers. In Italy, more than a hundred chronometric instruments are preserved in the twelve observatories that are part of the National Institute for Astrophysics (INAF). These collections include astronomical pendulums, chronometers and chronographs, mostly dating back to the 19th century. The Palermo collection is particularly outstanding as it also preserves rare 18th-century clocks. In this talk, a survey of these Italian collections will be presented and a discussion will be opened on their conservation practices.

Ileana Chinnici is a research astronomer at INAF-Palermo Astronomical Observatory and is responsible for the Specola Museum's scientific activities. In 2025, she became President of the Scientific Instrument Commission (SIC), which promotes research in the history of science. Her work focuses mainly on the history of astronomy and astrophysics. Her biography of Angelo Secchi won the 2021 Osterbrock Book Prize.