

**Johannes Hevelius' atlas of constellations, based on a lifetime's researches from this private observatory, was the finest of its time, and one of the few ever to be produced by a practicing astronomer rather than a cartographer.**

Hevelius, Johannes. *Prodromus astronomiæ: exhibens fundamenta, quæ tam ad novum planè & correctiorem stellarum fixarum catalogum construendum, quàm ad omnium planetarum tabulas corrigendas omnimodè spectant ... quibus additus est uter[que] catalogus stellarum fixarum...* . Gedani : Typis Johannis-Zachariæ Stolli, 1690. 18 3/4 inches (400 mm), [20], 350, [2] pp.

Johannes Hevelius' (1611–1687) atlas of constellations was the finest of its time, and one of the few ever to be produced by a practicing astronomer rather than a cartographer., the Stellaburgum in his native Danzig (Gdansk), the work was published posthumously with an introduction by the author's widow. It consists of three texts: a technological and methodological *Prodromus Astronomiæ* (**Spreads 19–103**), the *Catalogus Stellarum Fixarum*, a catalogue of 1564 stars, arranged alphabetically by constellation, subdivided by stellar magnitude (**Spreads 103–208**), and the *Firmamentum Sobiescianum* (**Spreads 5–17**), named for his royal patron—Kepler had commemorated the Emperor Rudolf II in similar style in the title of *Tabulae Rudolphinae*. Its accompanying atlas of 54 double-page plates (**Spreads 209–314**) and 2 large folding planispheres depicting the northern and southern skies (**Spreads 314 and 316**). These engravings are the glory of the book, wonderful specimens of the Michelangelo approach to the night sky a Sistine ceiling of constellations.

In producing his atlas, Hevelius, whose portrait appears at **Spread 30**, had the enormous advantage of having himself discovered more than 600 new stars from which to draw in devising a dozen new constellations. The remaining 61 formations illustrated here were already recognized: they include the twelve signs of the Zodiac (**Spreads 257–78**). The frontispiece to the *Firmamentum Sobescianum* (**Spread 5**) depicts Hevelius presenting to Urania, the Muse of Astronomy, nine of his twelve new constellations. The goddess is accompanied by ten famous astronomers. Hevelius's *Catalogus* lies before him; he holds the sextant and the Sobieski Shield, two of his new constellations. The

latter commemorates the Polish king Jan Sobieski III: his *Scutum Sobiescian[um]* is illustrated in the atlas itself on **Spread 237**. (Under the sign of the cross, here borne on his shield, Sobieski had defended Christian Europe from the Turks at the siege of Vienna in 1683). Another of Hevelius's new constellations was the Lynx (**Spread 251**), a constellation so faint as to require the eye of that animal to detect (the astronomer was proud of his excellent eyesight—the contemporary Roman scientific academy, the Accademia dei Lincei, also likened their keen vigilance to that of the lynx). Two other new formations are the *Uraniae Sextans*, based on the brass sextant that Hevelius had invented (**Spreads 264 and 292**), and the hellhound Cerberus (**Spread 222**).

Like other astronomers, Hevelius took pride in his place in the Grand Tradition, choosing to depict himself in the frontispiece (**Spread 25**) at table with Uranus, the Greek god of the sky, William IV, Landgrave of Hesse, who built the first observatory with a revolving dome (1561), and several earlier cataloguers of stars, Ptolemy (137), Ulugh Beigh (1437) and Tycho Brahe (1602). This copy of the book came into the possession of another great astronomer (or rather of several) with a place in that tradition, the Cassini dynasty of four Italian scientists who made their career in France over a period of two centuries (1625–1845). The family shelf-label, a scrap of paper pasted to the endpaper may be seen at **Spread 2**. An old note on **Spread 3** adds the information “From Cassini's library (shelf mark in his writing).”