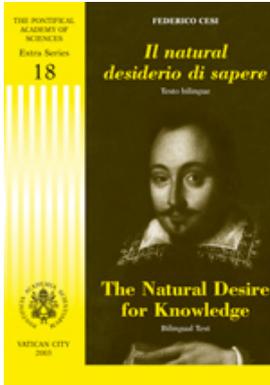




Il natural desiderio di sapere



The Natural Desire for Knowledge

Federico Cesi

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Cesi and the Adventure of the Lyncean Academy – On 17 August 1603, at the home of Federico Cesi in via della Maschera d’Oro in Rome, a small group of scholars, all very young but animated by a fervid cultural and moral enthusiasm, met ‘in an atmosphere almost of conspiracy, of secret and polemical play, today one would say anti-conformism’, to found the Accademia dei Lincei (the Lyncean Academy). The initiative for the meeting had been Cesi’s, then eighteen years old, firstborn child of a rich and powerful Roman family of Umbrian origins. The other three companions of adventure were: his cousin Anastasio de Filiis from Terni, twenty-six, later named Secretary; his very close friend, Francesco Stelluti from Fabriano, who was to live longer than all the others and would later represent the Academy as general procurator, also twenty six; and a foreigner, the twenty-four year old Jan Heckus of Deventer who, because of his Catholic faith, had fled the Netherlands at a very young age, lived for a time in Spoleto, and taken his degree in Medicine in 1601 at the University of Perugia. The minutes of the first meetings contain the justification of the choice of the name:

Lyncaeam Academiam appellarunt ex Lince animalium omnium oculatissima. Cum enim in scientiis speculatione maxime opus sit ac se in mente vi praeditos debere esse cognoscentes quae Linx in corpore dotatus, eius Academiam nomine, et se ipsos indigitarunt Lyncaeos.

The Lynceans gave themselves an organizational structure and set forth their program in a lengthy charter, the Lynceographum, never completed despite successive drafts, and only recently published. The experience of the first Academy is generally considered to have ended in 1657, the year that the Lyncean Cassiano del Pozzo died, and its brief history is usually divided into three periods: the first goes from 1603 to 1611, the year of induction of Galileo Galilei, and is marked by the group’s initial enthusiasm as well as organizational and familial difficulties; the second lasted until 1630, the year of Cesi’s death, and can be said to represent the most fecund and most interesting period of the institution’s activity, by virtue above all of the presence of the great Tuscan scientist; and finally, the last period in which the Academy ceased to exist as an organized institution but continued as a scientific body, whose life, under the impulse of Stelluti, was much more protracted and which succeeded in 1651 in completing and publishing the *Tesoro messicano*, the Lynceans’ great collegial opus.