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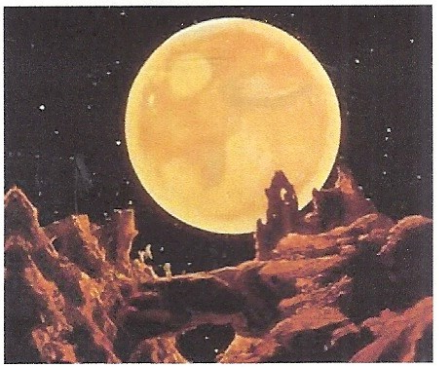
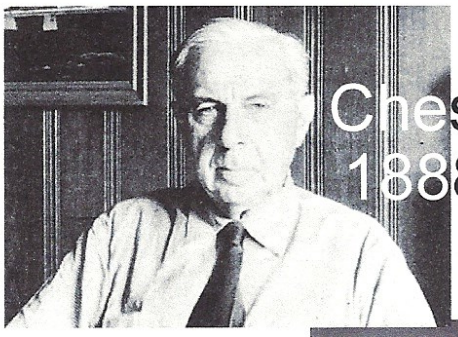
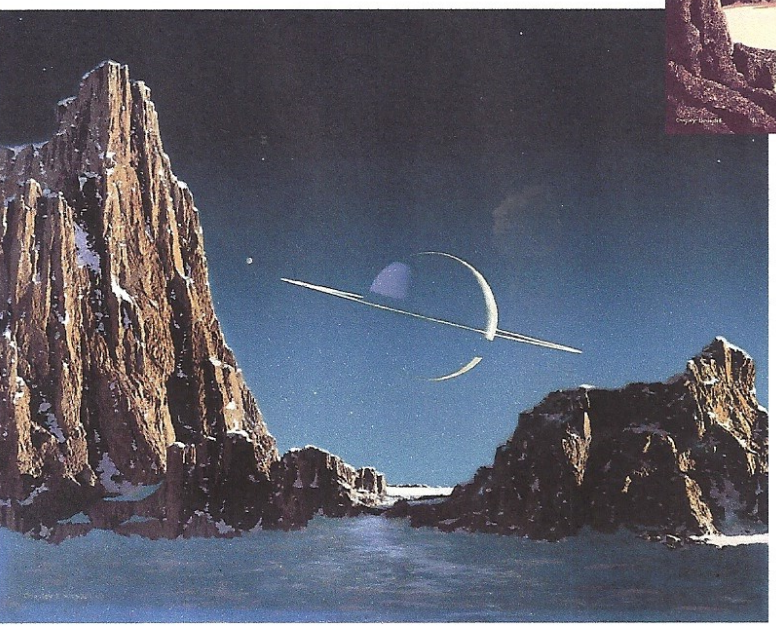
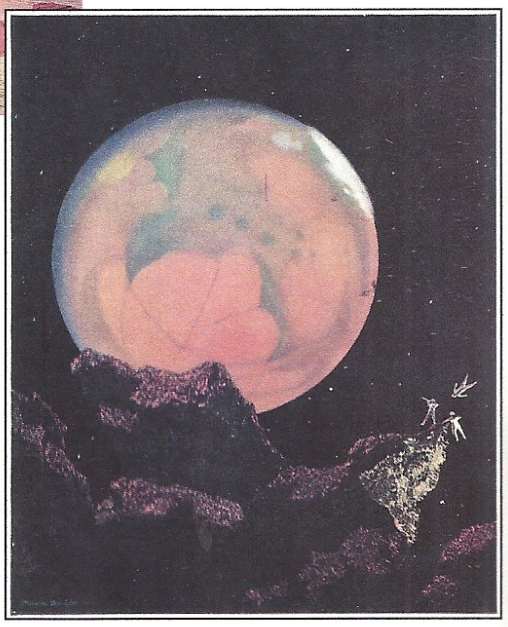




Chesley Bonestell
1888 - 1986





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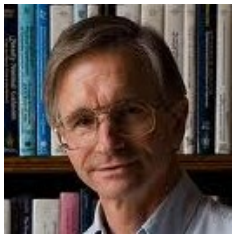
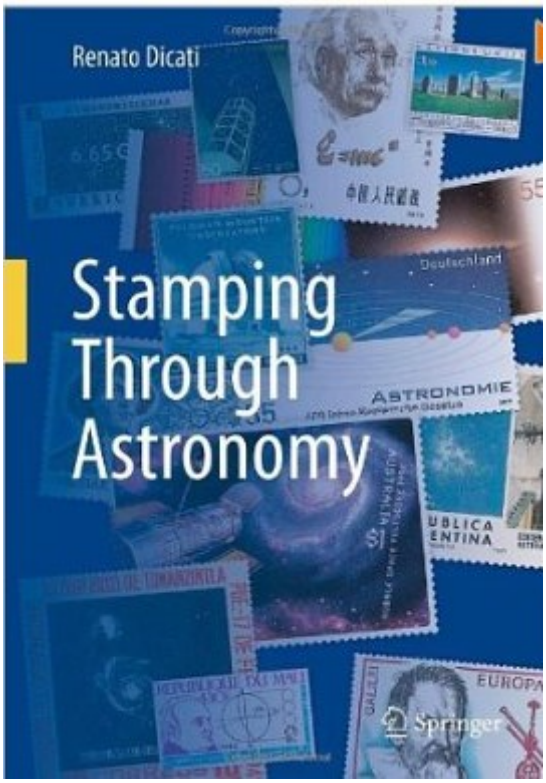
Stamping Through Astronomy by Renato Dicati



FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I've been reading a book called *Stamping Through Astronomy* by Renato Dicati, an Italian astronomer and keen member of the Italian astrophilately society ASITAF. The book came out last year (2013) but the publishers, Springer, gave it little publicity and this might be the first you have heard of it.



As you would expect from its title, the book's theme is astronomy on stamps. However, it is not a comprehensive stamp catalogue, nor does it intend to be. It is actually an overview of the development of astronomy from ancient times to the present. Hence we have chapters on ancient astronomy, the Copernican revolution, the development of celestial mechanics, the invention of the telescope, the advent of astrophysics, cosmology and the opening up of new wavelengths from radio to X-rays.

For illustrations, the author has used stamps and related items such as FDCs, postmarks and maxi cards. According to Dicati there are over 1,300 stamps shown, all full-size and all in colour. I was impressed by the wide-ranging choice of stamps he found, cleverly chosen to represent a broad spread of issuing countries. There were quite a few stamps that I had not come across before and I will certainly be seeking to add some of them to my own collection. The quality of reproduction is first-class.

Dicati describes the stamps in extended captions, and draws attention to various details in their designs that might not be immediately obvious. This is particularly helpful in the case of old astronomical instruments whose purpose may be obscure to the modern eye. Dicati also points out the occasional design error: I, for one, had not noticed that the stamp from Mali commemorating the 200th anniversary of Kepler's birth contains a diagram used by Rømer to demonstrate the velocity of light, rather than one of Kepler's diagrams of the orbits of the planets which was presumably intended. Little gems can be found tucked away in various corners of stamps, such as William Herschel's drawing of the structure of the Milky Way on the 26p stamp of the Royal Mail astronomy set from 1990. Unfortunately the author seldom gives the name of the issuing country or the year of issue in the captions, leaving the reader to search for clues to identify each stamp.

One of the earliest, and certainly most impressive, examples of astronomy on stamps is a set of six from Mexico in 1942, marking the opening of the Tonantzintla Observatory. Pictures of all six are scattered throughout the book, illustrating various topics. See if you can find them! It is not widely realized that the photographs on these stamps are actually from the Harvard plate collection and were not taken at Tonantzintla at all. An explosion of astro stamps from all over the world accompanied the International Year of Astronomy in 2009, and Dicati includes many of these. His most recent examples are from 2012.

The sometimes fractured English prose might be puzzling in places to non-astronomers. The publishers should have had an English-speaking editor read the book before publishing it.

That aside, I have no hesitation in recommending this book to all ASSS members. You are bound to find something new here, both about stamps and about astronomy. Congratulations to Renato Dicati on producing such a useful and informative volume. *Ian Ridpath*

Stamping Through Astronomy by Renato Dicati, Springer, 373 pages, ISBN 978-8847028289, £35.99 hardback, £27.99 eBook.