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2021 Osterbrock Book Prize Winner – Ileana Chinnici

The Historical Astronomy Division (HAD) of the American Astronomical Society (AAS) is pleased to present the 2021 Donald E. Osterbrock Book Prize for Historical Astronomy to Ileana Chinnici for her work “Decoding the Stars: A Biography of Angelo Secchi, Jesuit and Scientist” (Brill 2019).

This is the first full-length biography of Angelo Secchi in English and will become the definitive work on this important figure in early astrophysics. Secchi later became well known as part of the transition from classical positional astronomy to astrophysics. At the 25th anniversary of Secchi’s death in 1896 George Ellery Hale praised his contributions “to the present widespread interest in Astro-physical research”. Chinnici’s work covers not only the research that Secchi is remembered for, but also the broader environment in which he worked. Based on extensive research in Italian and Vatican archives, it is richly illustrated with many color and black & white photographs.

Ileana Chinnici received a University degree in Physics from the University of Palermo, Italy. Her dissertation was “Pietro Tacchini (1838-1905): a first scientific biography”. Since 2004 she has been a Research Astronomer at the INAF/Osservatorio Astronomico di Palermo, Italy, in charge of museum activities and specializing in the history of astrophysics.

The Donald E. Osterbrock Book Prize is given in odd-numbered years. Books copyrighted in the two to five years before the award year are eligible. HAD originated the prize in 2009 and named it in memory of Don Osterbrock in 2010. Osterbrock was a longtime HAD member, a contributor to nearly every HAD meeting, HAD Chair from 1987 to 1989, and the recipient of HAD’s highest honor, the LeRoy E. Doggett Prize for Historical Astronomy, in 2002.

The 2021 Osterbrock Book Prize will be presented to Dr. Chinnici at the virtual HAD Town Hall starting at 01:40pm on January 11, 2021, when she will give a presentation on this book. The HAD Town Hall will be held in conjunction with the virtual 237th AAS meeting, January 11-15 2021.