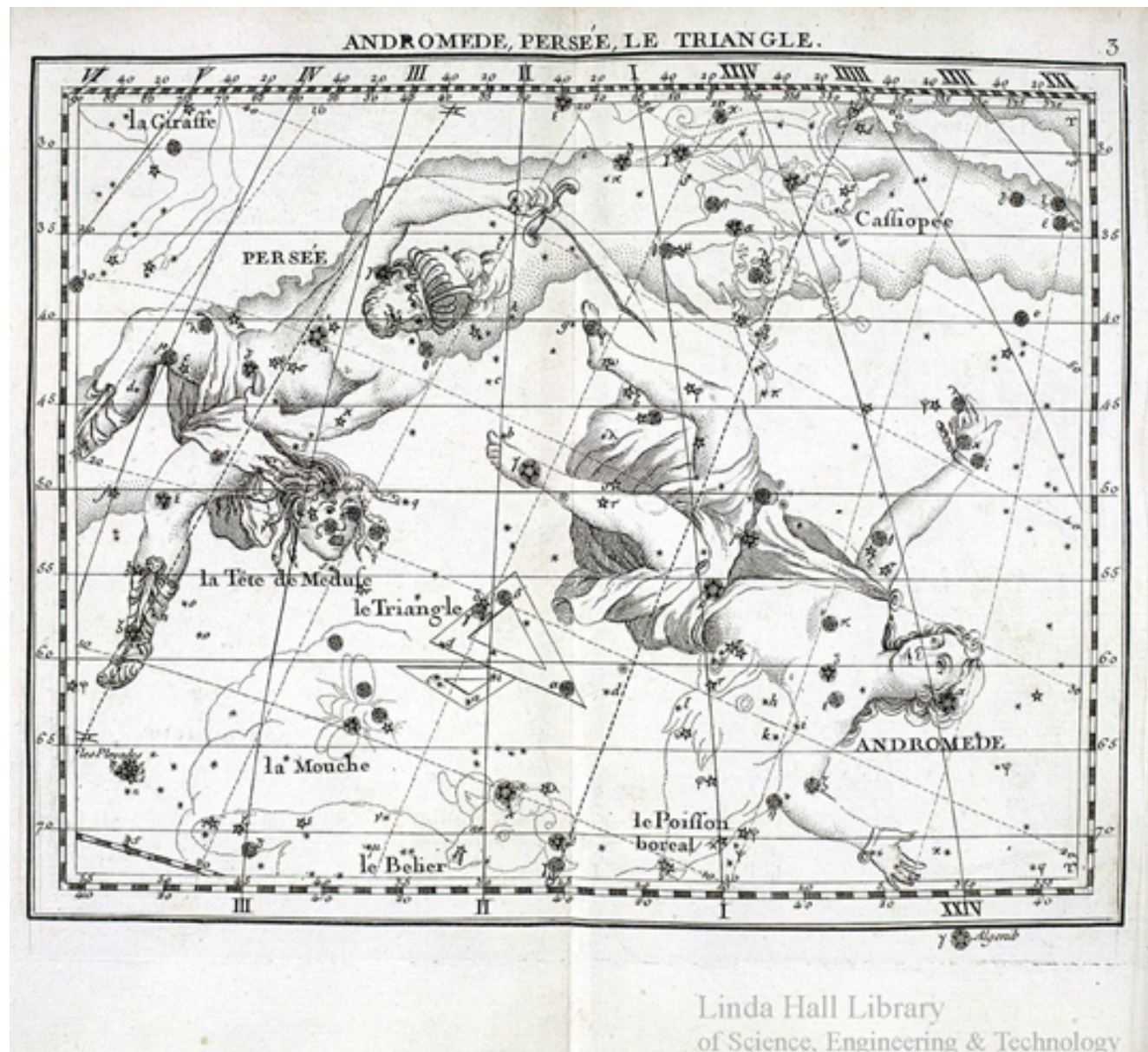


J. Thornhill, *Atlas Coelestis*, 1776: Andromeda and Perseus

Mastery Image

James Thornhill is artist; John Flamsteed was the first Astronomer Royal at the Greenwich Observatory. In 1729 Thornhill used Flamsteed's astronomical observations to draw up the skymaps collected in the *Atlas Coelestis* ("*Celestial Atlas*").

The astronomy in this view of the sky is based mostly upon Claudius Ptolemy (2nd century AD), which Flamsteed used as the ultimate basis for his own work as the official astronomer of England. Since antiquity, observers of the constellations traced the interaction of the Greek mythological characters Andromeda, Cassiopeia, and Perseus. Cetus (Greek for "sea monster") is the constellation out of this view but close to Andromeda, a representation of the threat to Andromeda's life. Greek astronomers used these names, but their Babylonian forebears saw the sky differently. For instance, they called the constellation we know as Perseus the "old man". The figure's left hand holds the Gorgon's head, the bright star called by the Babylonians "Algol." That same star, which the Greeks called the Gorgon's Head, is remarkable for being an [eclipsing binary star](#) — a complex of multiple stars that "twinkle" or dim noticeably every 68.75 hours. This ominous phenomenon was observed in antiquity, and the Greeks may have built the whole story of these constellations about the central figure of the astronomical menace. Can you tell the story of how Andromeda got put on the rock and how she got away?



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