The Roman Inquisition: Trying Galileo. Thomas F. Mayer. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. Pp. viii + 354.

Was Galileo's clash with the Church about science or about legal procedures that he had apparently neglected? Was he ultimately condemned for heresy or for violating a legal precept by publishing the *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems*? Many assume that he was a heroic scientist martyred by an obscurantist Church, bent on squashing the nascent scientific method. Few however are aware of how little the juridical process had to do with genuine scientific arguments.

This book throws new light on precisely these interesting points. It represents a comprehensive study of the complex and dramatic legal proceedings in which Galileo was involved roughly between 1614 and 1634. His problems started in Florence with some questions regarding his *Sunspot Letters* published in 1613, in which he had argued against the Jesuit astronomer Christopher Scheiner that the spots are not small planets near Mercury but markings on the solar surface. The Dominican Raffaello Delle Colombe highlighted in his sermons how this idea ridicules the venerable ancient conviction that the Sun is without blemish. Another Dominican, Tommaso Caccini made matters worse for Galileo by preaching on how accepting the Earth's motion would go against Holy Scripture. Mayer's first chapter starts with the first phase of the formal proceedings against Galileo that were the outcome of such tension in Florence. The following two chapters then present an in-depth analysis of the beginnings of the formal proceedings between 1614 and 1616, in which Cardinal Robert Bellarmine played an important role. The crucial element in these proceedings was the precept of 26 February 1616. Chapter four deals with 'precept' as a technical term and attempts to determine what it meant at that time and whether the particular

precept issued against Galileo was in any way special. In the final three chapters then, Mayer explores the trial's second phase that lasted from mid-1632 until March 1634, when the pope ordered Galileo not to make further appeals against the final sentence. The pope thereby upheld the banning of the *Dialogue* and confirmed Galileo's permanent house arrest at his villa in Arcetri.

Mayer presents his overall method as a prosopographical approach (2) by which he means an effort to write the kind of history that focuses on individual actors and that highlights their agency and avoids generalizations regarding factions and social groups. He manages this well and brings the historical narrative to life, even though sometimes the hidden motives he suggests remain somewhat conjectural. He is at his best when excavating from original texts the legal meaning that precepts had during Galileo's time. In doing this, he keeps his focus clearly upon the juridical process and he hardly ever refers to the scientific content of the debate. The nearest he gets to expounding elements that might interest philosophers and historians of science is when he recalls how Benedetto Castelli defended Galileo by referring to St Augustin, according to whom astronomy is irrelevant for the salvation of souls (159). It is unfortunate that Bellarmine's letter to Paolo Antonio Foscarini (April 12, 1615) does not appear more prominently in the book. This letter contains Bellarmine's remarkable insights on the logic of the new science and argues that convenience in calculations is not enough justification for the truth of a hypothesis. It shows even Bellarmine's readiness to accept the Earth's motion if strong enough evidence becomes available. Mayer does not deal with these points, presumably because his focus is on what happened after this letter and on how the real concern of the Inquisition, particularly of Pope Urban VIII, was apparently the claim that theologians were not the sole arbiters of truth but had to acquiesce to another discipline.

At least one tiny mistake has made its way into the book. This regards the biblical citation “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky”, which constituted the memorable and dramatic introduction to Caccini’s sermon against Galileo delivered in the Church of Santa Maria Novella at Florence on December 14, 1615. Mayer wrongly attributes the citation to Jesus (19) while in Acts 1:11 this utterance is clearly attributed to the men dressed in white, presumably angels. Obviously, this single inaccuracy does not diminish in any way the value of the book. Because of its clarity, attractive style and rich bibliography, this book will certainly remain for many years to come an indispensable tool for those who want to understand where the current debate is concerning Galileo’s juridical process and the nature of the subtle intrigues associated with it.

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