Thomas F. Mayer

The Roman Inquisition: Trying Galileo. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. Pp. 368. Hb, \$89.95.

This volume follows on two previous books: *The Roman Inquisition: A Papal Bureaucracy and its Laws in the Age of Galileo* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) and *The Roman Inquisition on the Stage of Italy, c.1590–1640* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). This book covers the period from 1616 to 1633, analyzing what many historians have described as two separate trials: the 1616 trial condemned the heliocentric hypothesis and censored Copernicus's *De revolutionibus*; the 1633 trial specifically focused on Galileo's response to the earlier verdict and resulted in Galileo's condemnation, the prohibition of his 1632 *Dialogue on the Two World Systems*, and his confinement to house arrest. Mayer's account is unique among the many monographs on Galileo's condemnation because he approaches the trial from the perspective of a legal historian.

Relying on the Inquisition's own terminology which considered the definition of a case as the opening of a dossier, Mayer argues—contrary to many previous interpretations—that the 1616 and 1633 proceedings should be considered one joint “trial” against Galileo and not the customary two. He claims that Galileo's trial, though it involved a protracted holding period in the middle, followed most of the procedures common to the Inquisition in the period. Of the eleven steps Mayer has identified as being standard in a typical proceeding, Galileo's case contained nearly all the required phases, though not in the usual order. Its most startling omission was the *repetitio* which involved the reexamination of all witnesses and the defendant often with the assistance of an attorney.

Mayer's narrative of the case follows what he terms the “precept interpretation,” namely that the first phase of Galileo's trial ended in 1616 when he was given a precept to abandon the Copernican hypothesis. The second phase judged him guilty of violating the precept through the publication of his *Dialogue*. According to this interpretation, one promoted during the trial itself by Niccolò Riccardi, the master of the sacred palace, who issued the *imprimatur* for Galileo's *Dialogue*, Galileo's transgression was merely a disciplinary one. However, Mayer argues, an alternative “heresy interpretation”—that Galileo's crime was a heresy—predated the precept interpretation, and remained in dialogue with it through Galileo's abjuration and after.

Chapters One, Two, Five, Six, and Seven trace the documents, events, and individuals from the Inquisition's first serious interest in Galileo in 1612–13 when his *Sunspot Letters* (*Istoria e dimostrazioni intorno alle macchie solari e*

loro accidenti [Rome: appresso Giacomo Mascardi, 1613]) were subjected to pre-publication censorship, through the beginnings of formal proceedings in 1614 to the conclusion of the trial in 1633. These chapters follow what Mayer describes as a prosopographical approach, one intended to advance Mayer's philosophical premise that "humans make history" and designed to "restore agency to all the individual actors involved" (2). His technique provides short biographies of the individuals named and, when possible, he draws inferences about motives. Such an approach does facilitate Mayer's stated goal of revealing the complexity and depth of the church officials who helped determine Galileo's fate. At the same time, these biographical details coupled with Mayer's decision to pay even more attention to detailed chronology often swamp the reader, as the intricate process by which church officials met, Galileo maneuvered, and books and opinions were criticized, is described with little authorial guidance as to the relevance and importance of many of the details.

Mayer's examination of the precept laid down in 1616 is masterly. In Chapter Three, he analyzes the injunction's documentary evidence found in the Inquisition's files. On the basis of this evidence, Mayer concludes that Galileo did in fact receive a precept ordering him to abandon Copernican ideas. This conclusion differs from earlier interpretations which placed great weight on the Jesuit cardinal Robert Bellarmine's affidavit on May 26, 1616, which certified that Galileo had not abjured or suffered other punishment and that he, the cardinal, was aware of an ecclesiastical decree that the Copernican hypothesis should neither be defended nor held. Mayer argues that this affidavit reveals little about what actually happened on February 26, the date on which Galileo received the precept. Mayer instead, on the basis of numerous documents including Pope Paul V's order on February 25, 1616, and the report of the Congregation of the Inquisition from March 3, argues that Bellarmine obeyed a papal order and warned Galileo about Copernicus's ideas. Galileo's objections, "perhaps in so mild a fashion as looking grumpy" (74) resulted in a precept from Michelangelo Seghizzi, in the name of the Holy Office, to abandon "completely" Copernicus's ideas (74).

"Warning" and "precept" were common combinations in the early modern period, as Mayer demonstrates in Chapter Four where he reconstructs the Roman Inquisition's understanding of admonitions and precepts through an examination of canon law and legal practice. Relying on numerous textual sources, including popular manuals and medieval commentaries on Gratian's *Decretum*, Mayer emphasizes a lack of consensus regarding the permanence and force of precepts. Through an examination of the warnings and precepts issued by the Roman Inquisition between 1569 and 1633 Mayer concludes that the Inquisition regularly issued warnings and precepts, and that the precepts Galileo received in 1616 and 1632 were legal and legitimate.

Throughout, Mayer pays close attention to the larger diplomatic and political context in which Roman and Florentine officials operated. The role played by individuals within the Inquisition and ecclesiastical hierarchy, including the appointment and demotion of key individuals sympathetic or hostile to Galileo, features prominently in the narrative. For example Mayer notes how Vincenzo Maculano's replacement of Ippolito Lanci as commissary of the Roman Inquisition proved a key turning point in the 1633 trial. Of particular interest to scholars of Jesuit studies will be Mayer's concluding remarks calling into question political or factional interpretations of the trial. In contrast to historians who have blamed Galileo's fate on his worsening relations with the Jesuits or have argued that competition between Jesuits and Dominicans shaped the course of the trial, Mayer highlights the many instances, such as the administration of the precept, when Dominicans and Jesuits collaborated; he stresses that the Inquisition acted as a unified body in the condemnation of Galileo. Overall, Mayer's attention to the legal issues of Galileo's trial offers an important perspective in a literature often focused on issues related to politics, religion, and science.

Renée Raphael

University of California, Irvine

renee.raaphael@uci.edu

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