

DISCUSSING GALILEO IN THE ROMAN CURIA: SCIENCE AND POLITICS IN COUNTER- REFORMATION ROME

As a result of the impressive mass of studies on Early Modern Rome edited in the past three decades, the city of the Pope cannot be conceived anymore as *tout court* coincident with “the Church”: it was instead the site of many different centers of production and consumption of culture, like courts of cardinals, colleges, academies, seminars and head-quarters of religious orders, as recent works clearly demonstrate. Nor can «the Church» anymore be abstractly conceived as a monolith: it was instead (like it still is) the result of a plurality of different institutions and powers (papal families and clients, congregations, law courts, religious orders etc.) in most cases competing one against the other. These recent achievements urge historians of science to reopen the ‘science & religion’ issue, but now in order to inquire the political role played by those bites of scientific knowledge which challenged the Tridentine theological ‘Science’ (e.g. heliocentrism, atomism, but also geology, paleontology, spontaneous generation....) *within* the polymorphous body of the Church, rather than *out* or *against* it.

Monsignor Giovanni Battista Ciampoli (1589–1643) is a case-study which fits perfectly this intertwinement between ‘science’ and politics. He was, at the same time, a fervent supporter of Galileo and an outstanding member of the Papal bureaucracy (not to say a fertile poet on whom the modern critics do not agree). His life and career represent a very interesting case for the kind of questions that I want to ask for: what did it mean, in 17th century Rome, to be a Copernican and a Church official? What kind of cultural trends – for instance in poetics, theology, political theory, history - went together with natural philosophy, Copernican cosmology and Galilean mechanics in the range of his cultural interests? How, if ever, did his scientific convictions influence him in his performance of official duties? And, reciprocally, did his loyalty to the Pope influence his cultural convictions?

Until very recently, apart from his activity as a poet, historians of science considered Ciampoli almost completely in the shadow of Galileo. Thanks to the deeper knowledge of the inner dynamic of Roman Court and Curia, in the recent years it has at last become clear that, apart from his diplomatic activity in the Curia on behalf of Galileo and the Lincei, he carried out a project of cultural politics on his own. On the one hand, this project aimed to ‘regenerate’ the new levers of papal bureaucracy (the future cardinals and popes), by purifying their minds of the taint of Aristotle’s philosophy. On the other hand, it aimed to re-establish the whole encyclopedia of

human knowledge – natural philosophy, ethics, politics, linguistics – on the basis of a radical empiricism and of sensorial perception. However, many aspects of Ciampoli's personal and intellectual life still remain obscure. It is unclear, for instance, what the eventual destiny of his manuscripts on natural philosophy was: in his will, he had bequeathed them to the king of Poland but they vanished forever, soon after his death, in the crates of the Holy Office's soldiers. But great uncertainty still surrounds the events that led Urban VIII, his very good friend and patron, to expel him from Rome in the same days that Galileo was called to trial by the Holy Office, instead of making him a cardinal, as members of the Curia and international observers had expected.

Very generally speaking, this episode has been explained by scholars in two different ways, which are good examples of the ongoing methodologies on the Galilean studies. The first, dominating 'traditional' Galileo scholarship, likes to explain the episode entirely as a consequence of Galileo's trial. The second, namely Mario Biagioli, explains it as a typical example of the courtier dynamic of the 'fall of the favorite' in the society of the Absolutism. My interpretation is different. A more reliable explanation of this episode, the solution of this apparently futile historical riddle, comes from the combined re-reading of the entire *dossier*, that is from putting together, at the same time, both sides of Ciampoli's activities, as a follower of the new science and as a man of the Pope with his own political theories and his own political faith.