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The Roman Inquisition: Trying Galileo

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The Roman Inquisition: Trying Galileo

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This is a deeply flawed book, although it is not completely without merit. Mayer, who died (in January 2014) as this book went to press, may have been an accomplished scholar of ecclesiastical history (1), but was a relative novice in Galilean scholarship. To explain and justify this judgment, I shall first highlight Galileo's trial, then summarize Mayer's book, and finally elaborate my criticism.

1. The Trial of Galileo: Highlights and Approaches

The trial of Galileo involved two sets of proceedings by the Roman Inquisition.(2) They began in 1615 when a Dominican friar filed a written complaint and another testified in person against Galileo. These friars advanced two principal charges, among many: Galileo advocated the Copernican doctrine of the earth's motion, which they thought was religiously dangerous and probably heretical; and he defended this doctrine from the objection that it was contrary to Scripture, by means of arguments that involved novel exegeses of biblical passages and unorthodox hermeneutical principles. Indeed, the first friar attached to his complaint a long letter by Galileo to his former student Benedetto Castelli, in which Galileo defended the earth's motion from the scriptural objection.

The proceedings were concluded in June 1633, with a sentence finding Galileo guilty of a religious crime technically labeled 'vehement suspicion of heresy'; this was an intermediate transgression, short of the most serious crime, labeled 'formal heresy'. According to the sentence, Galileo had committed the crime by writing and publishing (in 1632) a book entitled *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems, Ptolemaic and Copernican*

; in it, he advocated the Copernican doctrine of the earth's motion and implicitly denied the astronomical authority of Scripture.

What connects the two sets of proceedings is an order which Galileo received from the Inquisition in February 1616. In fact, in those earlier proceedings he was not prosecuted or even interrogated, for several reasons: his letter to Castelli was judged in its essence to reflect traditional Catholic doctrine; Galileo could not be found to have advocated the earth's motion explicitly and publicly; and other more serious and theologically pertinent charges could not be confirmed. Instead, the Inquisition decided to privately order Galileo to abandon Copernican ideas, and he promised to comply. Another ecclesiastic decision was that in March 1616 the Congregation of the Index issued a decree, declaring the doctrine of the earth's motion contrary to scripture, and temporarily banning Copernicus's book *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* (1543); but Galileo was not mentioned at all.

Now, for 16 years Galileo kept his promise, more or less, at least to the extent that no difficulties arose. However, the publication of the *Dialogue* reopened the proceedings. The reason why he published this book stems from the fact that in 1623 a cardinal named Maffeo Barberini was elected pope Urban VIII. Barberini was an admirer of Galileo, and had reservations about the 1616 decisions. In 1624, Galileo went to Rome to pay homage to Urban, and was able to have at least six audiences. From these discussions, Galileo got the impression that if he was careful and did not appear defiant, he could publish on the topic.

Thus, Galileo decided to write a book that was a critical examination of all the evidence for and against the idea. The arguments on both sides were presented, analyzed, and evaluated. He tried his best to carry out the evaluation fairly. The arguments for the earth's motion turned out to be stronger than those against it, although admittedly not conclusive. This was at worst an implicit advocacy of the probability of Copernicanism. Galileo's gamble was that friendly Church officials would not blame him for this, because they would recognize that his advocacy was not explicit or absolute, and so was within the spirit of the Inquisition's 1616 order.

Galileo's effort got him into trouble because of some issues pertaining to the precise wording and content of that Inquisition order. In 1632, a document dated 1616 emerged to the effect that the Inquisition's commissary Michelangelo Seghizzi had ordered Galileo not to support, defend, or teach Copernicanism in any manner whatever. Galileo had been under the impression that the order was the one which had been conveyed to him by cardinal-inquisitor Robert Bellarmine; it stated that Galileo was not supposed to support or defend Copernicanism, but said nothing more than this. Seghizzi's order was obviously more stringent than Bellarmine's: a critical examination of pro and anti-Copernican arguments is clearly a manner of teaching Copernicanism (and so a violation of Seghizzi's order), whereas it might not be regarded as an instance of supporting or defending Copernicanism (and so not a violation of Bellarmine's order).

Galileo's trial can be studied from several points of view: the history of physics and astronomy, since the earth's motion was a key issue of the Copernican Revolution; methodology and the philosophy of science, since the denial of scientific authority to Scripture was an epoch-making principle about proper procedure; and general cultural history, since the episode embodies lessons about the relationship between science and religion (apparently implying their incompatibility).

2. Mayer's Approach and Account

However, Mayer's book approaches Galileo's trial from the point of view of law, specifically ecclesiastic or canon law. For the episode was also a legal event. Mayer finds the relevant law to some extent in formal ecclesiastic decrees establishing the tribunal of the Inquisition and governing its procedures, but to an even greater extent in two other sources: inquisitorial practice as found in archival trial records and minutes of Inquisition meetings; and treatises by jurists and theologians attempting to clarify and systematize rules and procedures, and manuals by experienced inquisitors reflecting on their experience with the aim of improving practice and providing useful information to less experienced inquisitors.

Another aspect of Mayer's method is the so-called prosopographical approach. He himself describes it (p. 2) as an emphasis on the biographies of the historical agents, aiming to ascertain their motives and thus help us understand the complexity of events.

Using these two approaches, Mayer elaborates a substantive account of Galileo's trial that may be summarized as follows. Mayer uses as a blueprint the ideal type of an Inquisition trial, as one can reconstruct it from inquisitorial practice, scholarly jurisprudence, and ecclesiastical decrees. He is clear (p. 214) that such a 'typical' trial is a theoretical construct not likely to be fully instantiated by any actual trial, so that we also need to ascertain the actual proceedings of the real trial, and then compare and contrast the two.

Mayer distinguishes no fewer than eleven steps in a typical trial: (1) denunciation, by plaintiffs or witnesses; (2) preliminary investigation by officials; (3) citation of the accused or defendant; (4) further interrogation of witnesses; (5) formulation of charges; (6) '*repetitio*', meaning re-examination of witnesses to clarify discrepancies or follow up newly-emerged leads; (7) defense by the accused or his lawyers, after they have been given copies of all testimony; (8a) consultants' reports, providing expert (legal or theological) opinions, and (8b) '*summarius*', meaning that the chief legal officer (called 'assessor') compiles a summary of the evidence, including important documents as attachments; (9) deliberation and verdict (including penalties) by the judges (in Rome, the cardinal-inquisitors presided by the pope), with the whole being written up in a 'sentence'; (10) abjuration by the defendant; and (11) 'publication' of the sentence, which usually meant merely reading of the sentence to the defendant at a private meeting with Inquisition officials, or at a public meeting in a church.

With some exceptions, Galileo's trial fitted this scheme, according to Mayer. One exception is the complete absence of the *repetitio* step (no. 6). Another is the incomplete adherence to the defense step (no. 7), since Galileo never received written copies of the evidence. A third deviation is that the degree of publicity of the sentence (no. 11) was unprecedented, for in Galileo's case copies were sent to all provincial inquisitors and papal nuncios in Europe, with orders to read it to all professors of philosophy and mathematics. Finally, during the 1633 proceedings, 'Galileo's trial went most seriously off the rails with Commissary Vincenzo Maculano's extrajudicial move, apparently designed to secure Galileo's admission of guilt' (p. 216).

Now, with regard to these irregularities, Mayer is willing to call them 'legal improprieties' (p. 217). And he is even willing to blame them on the officials, on the cardinal-inquisitors, and most of all on pope Urban. In particular 'Urban's penchant for increasingly autocratic behavior, including his housecleaning of the papal administration beginning in mid-1632, and blithe disregard for the law ... should not be downplayed' (pp. 217-18). However, Mayer is keen on pointing out that he does *not* include among the irregularities and improprieties one item that has been widely discussed and commonly alleged to constitute the main and most serious impropriety in the trial: commissary Seghizzi's order, which emerged in 1632, which is found in a document dated 1616, and which Galileo (in the first deposition dated 12 April 1633) denied receiving. In fact, the main thesis in Mayer's book is that Seghizzi's order was really administered; that the 1616 document where it is recorded truthfully reflects what happened; that it was legitimate; and that it ties together the earlier and later proceedings. This issue deserves further elaboration.

At a meeting of the Inquisition on 25 February 1616, Pope Paul V decided the following. Cardinal-Inquisitor Bellarmine should summon Galileo and give him the friendly warning to abandon the Copernican doctrine. If Galileo refused, then commissary Seghizzi should give him the formal injunction to abstain completely from teaching, defending, or discussing the doctrine. If Galileo did not acquiesce at Seghizzi's injunction, he should be arrested and prosecuted.

At the following week's Inquisition meeting (3 March), Bellarmine reported that Galileo acquiesced when he was given the warning to abandon the Copernican doctrine.

However, in the file of Galilean trial proceedings, there is a document dated 26 February 1616, stating the following: Bellarmine summoned Galileo to his residence and warned him to abandon the Copernican

doctrine; immediately thereafter, commissary Seghizzi ordered Galileo to completely abandon the Copernican doctrine and to abstain from supporting, defending, or teaching it in any manner whatever; Galileo acquiesced and promised to obey.

Finally, there is another crucial document, a certificate written by Bellarmine for Galileo and dated 26 May 1616. Its origin lies in the fact that rumors began circulating to the effect that Galileo had been tried, convicted, made to abjure, and given penalties; Galileo became increasingly disturbed by these rumors, and they may have also led him to wonder about the precise content of the Inquisition's orders to him at Bellarmine's residence. Thus, he asked Bellarmine to write a brief and clear statement of what happened and what the orders meant. Bellarmine's certificate states that there was no truth to those rumors, but rather Galileo was only informed that Copernicanism was contrary to Scripture and thus could not be defended or supported.

Ever since these documents became accessible in the 1860s, scholars have discussed the issue that the Seghizzi injunction document seems to conflict with the other three: Pope Paul's instructions, Bellarmine's report to the Inquisition, and Bellarmine's certificate to Galileo. From this conflict and other evidence, various conclusions have been advanced, which can be listed in the following sequence of decreasing strength or extremism: the Seghizzi injunction document is a forgery perpetrated in 1632; a forgery perpetrated in 1616; materially authentic but historically inaccurate; authentic and accurate but legally invalid. Some of these stronger claims, or some versions of them, were conclusively refuted already in the 1870s, but other weaker versions are well-founded and may very well be correct.

Mayer rejects all such claims undermining the legitimacy of the Seghizzi injunction. Instead he argues that the document is materially authentic, historically accurate, and legally valid. His argument is based on a lengthy (pp. 80–120) analysis of the kinds of orders issued by the Inquisition, according to the legal practice, the jurisprudence, and the ecclesiastic decrees. This analysis tries to show that there was no clear distinction between the notion of a 'warning' and the notion of a 'precept'. The critics presuppose this distinction when they argue that Pope Paul had ordered Bellarmine to give Galileo a warning, and Seghizzi to give him a precept if he refused the warning; and that Seghizzi deviated from the papal order when he administered his precept 'immediately after' Bellarmine's warning, and thus without giving Galileo the opportunity to accept the warning.

And here we come to another part of Mayer's argument, pertaining to the meaning of two Latin phrases. One is used in the February 26 document to connect Bellarmine's action with Seghizzi's. The phrase is '*successive ac incontinenti*', which is usually taken to mean 'immediately thereafter'. In an erudite semantic analysis (pp. 67–71), Mayer argues that 'the translation of *successive ac incontinenti* as "immediately thereafter" is open to doubt' (p. 71). He does not explicitly tell us what it means, other than to implicitly suggest that it just means 'thereafter'.

The other phrase occurs in the Inquisition minutes of February 25 that contain the pope's instructions for Bellarmine's initial action and Seghizzi's possible intervention. The instructions stipulate that Seghizzi's intervention is contingent on 'if he [Galileo] refuses to obey', which is the literal meaning of the Latin '*si recusaverit parere*'. Mayer interprets this phrase in the weak sense meaning 'if he is reluctant' (p. 261, n. 149), namely, if 'Galileo objected in some way, perhaps in so mild a fashion as looking grumpy' (pp. 73–4). This facilitates Mayer's justification, validation, and legitimization of Seghizzi's 'precept'.

3. Criticism

In my judgment, Mayer's argument supporting his key precept thesis is unconvincing. His semantic analyses strike me as arbitrary. His conflation of Bellarmine's warning and Seghizzi's precept seems to be a legalistic exercise that fails to take into account the different content of the two orders: not to advocate – presumably as true or as compatible with Scripture; and not to advocate in any way. Mayer also fails to appreciate the conceptual difference between Pope Paul's conditional order (not to discuss) and Seghizzi's order (not to advocate in any way, which would allow discussion aimed to refute). And Mayer tends to conflate and thus

to equivocate among the material authenticity, the historical accuracy, and the legal validity of an order.

Moreover, Mayer fails to appreciate that Bellarmine's report to the Inquisition and certificate to Galileo contradict the historical accuracy and legal validity of Seghizzi's order. In this regard, he has a tendency to dismiss these conflicting documents arbitrarily. For example, he generally holds what may be labeled the Inquisition sloppiness thesis: 'Ideally, the Inquisition under Urban and his brother Antonio's guidance would have done its work more carefully ... That it did not should cause no surprise. In sloppiness, creative record-keeping, and inventive jurisprudence the Inquisition treated Galileo no differently than most of the rest of those who underwent trial before it' (p. 5; cf. pp. 54–5). However, Mayer uses this sloppiness in a prejudicial manner, to apply it primarily to documents he wants to reject, and not to those he wants to accept.

This flaw with Mayer's central substantive thesis is merely the tip of an iceberg of difficulties. Many others are methodological or more general.

Consider Mayer's legal approach. Generally speaking, it is quite proper since Galileo's trial is, among other things, a legal event. The legal approach is also valuable because it has been unduly neglected. However, Mayer betrays a constant mis-appreciation of previous scholarly contributions to the legal aspects of the episode. Three examples deserve mention.⁽³⁾ Mayer has a half-page critical discussion (p. 118) of Léon Garzend's 1912 distinction between a formal theological concept of heresy and a disciplinary Inquisitorial concept; but he completely misses its explanatory potential, especially to help solve the problem of what Mayer himself (pp. 3–5, 219–21) sees as the two main alternative interpretations of the trial, the precept theory and the heresy theory. And regarding another important legal contribution, by Orio Giacchi in 1942, Mayer mostly ignores his many insights; instead, he endorses one of Giacchi's theses which is not only untenable but also perverse: that Galileo should have been subjected to actual torture, and the fact that he did not undergo such treatment was 'the only serious irregularity' (p. 205) in the trial. A third more recent scholar also receives shoddy treatment: Mayer frequently cites the works of Francesco Beretta and accepts or adapts many of his conclusions, but also criticizes him for at least two theses which he does *not* hold; one is a crass version of the precept forgery thesis (pp. 58–9), and the other claims (pp. 154–5) that the Inquisition's assessor authored both parts (instead of only the first part) of a report on the *Dialogue* compiled in the summer of 1632; here we have Mayer twice committing the fallacy of straw-man criticism.

Additionally, Mayer's legal approach is too one-sided: he displays an excessive neglect of the intellectual aspects of the episode.⁽⁴⁾ For example, the book contains no explicit discussion of the content and structure of the *Dialogue*, which was the crucial work that triggered the 1632–3 proceedings. And concerning Galileo's letter to Castelli, which occasioned the 1615–16 proceedings, Mayer does have a few pages of discussion (pp. 22–5), but it never rises above the level of free-association commentary and pseudo-rhetorical analysis.

Thirdly, in his legal approach, Mayer seems to operate with a peculiar conception of law, which I would describe as hyper-legalistic, hyper-formalistic, and self-defeatingly meticulous. That is, some crucial parts of his account of the legal proceedings are such that the legal officials involved did not know what they were doing; and such an account strikes me as a *reductio ad absurdum* of his notion of what it is for a proceeding to be 'legal'. Consider, for example, the 1616 Inquisition's orders to Galileo: it was not just Galileo who was confused; according to Mayer's own account, the confusion was also in the mind of the chairman of the Inquisition (pope Paul V) and of the most authoritative cardinal-inquisitor (cardinal Bellarmine); in Mayer's own words, 'by seeing that Galileo got both a warning and a precept, Paul V took no chances that he could wiggle out of papal clutches. Roberto Bellarmino gladly helped, acting on behalf of both pope and Inquisition in summoning Galileo. Paul and Bellarmino could be excused if they were somewhat confused about exactly what to do. The lawyers had not achieved much more clarity' (p. 84). Or consider the 1632 Inquisition's order to Galileo summoning him to Rome: at the Inquisition meeting of 23 September 1632, pope Urban decreed to have Galileo summoned to Rome; two days later, cardinal-inquisitor Antonio Barberini, the Inquisition's secretary and pope's brother, transmitted the order to Florence's provincial inquisitor; on the same date, cardinal-inquisitor Francesco Barberini, the Vatican secretary of state and pope's nephew, with the help of a legal assistant, transmitted the order to the papal nuncio in Florence; in

Mayer's own account, they were all confused about whether and how Galileo was to be simply given a precept, or first an informal order and then a precept only if he refused; and so Mayer himself describes the whole situation as 'tangled' (p. 116), Antonio Barberini's action as afflicted by a 'discrepancy between decree and letter' (p. 116), and the intervention of Francesco Barberini as a 'disaster' (p. 117) and a 'spectacular mess' (p. 156).

The other part of Mayer's method, his prosopographical approach, is also flawed, although in a different way. The point is that biographical information is valuable, but Mayer too often includes too many details that are irrelevant or distracting. For instance, the Inquisition meetings were usually held at the Quirinale palace when the pope once a week presided the meeting, or at the residence of a cardinal-inquisitor at other times; on 25 November 1615, it met at the palace of cardinal Paolo Sfondrato, concerning which we are told the following cultural-tourism trivia: Sfondrato's palace is 'the present Palazzo Sacchetti, one of the grandest in Rome, which shortly afterward sold for the colossal sum of 55,000 *scudi*' (p. 43). Another example concerns Pietro Paolo Febei, who was appointed assessor by pope Urban in January 1633 to replace Alessandro Boccabella (whose surname means literally 'beautiful mouth'); now, one detail about Febei is found by Mayer to be noteworthy, i.e., 'he cut a good figure. In his home town of Orvieto, they called him "Bellafaccia", "Pretty Face" ' (p. 174); this enables Mayer to speak of a change from Boccabella to Bellafaccia (p. 173)! Finally, during the 1633 proceedings, some decisions suffered delays due to the fact that pope Urban spent a few weeks from late April to early May at the papal country residence of Castel Gandolfo; on no fewer than three occasions (pp. 187, 196, 198), Mayer feels the need to tell us that Urban was 'purging' himself.

There is another limitation of Mayer's work that deserves mention. The issue involves archival research and is relatively arcane in general, but becomes highly revealing in the present context. The present context is one in which Mayer was able to exploit the fact that in 1998, for the first time ever, the Catholic Church regularly and generally opened to scholars the Inquisition archives in Rome, officially known as the Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the new name of the Inquisition). The single most important source of information is the minutes of Inquisition meetings, recording discussions and decisions. And the book's endnotes (pp. 229–329) show that Mayer made a diligent study of them, constantly citing them. This is, of course, commendable and in some ways impressive. Now, for the study of Galileo's trial, an even more crucial set of documents is the original manuscript proceedings, which have survived, and are kept in a different location, known as the Vatican Secret Archives (ASV). Despite such a name, the latter archives are also generally open to scholars with the proper credentials; they have been scholarly accessible for much longer than the Inquisition archives; and indeed Mayer also consulted the ASV. Of the many documents held in the ASV, the dossier of Galilean trial manuscripts is one of the most precious. The Church began to make it accessible to lay scholars in the 1860s, and as a result complete critical editions of the dossier were published, evolving with increasing editorial sophistication.⁽⁵⁾ The dossier consists of about 228 folios, grouped into various bundles of folded sheets, some with writing on both sides, some on only one side, and some blank; these manuscripts accumulated as the trial proceedings occurred. Unfortunately, Mayer never consulted or accessed this original dossier, as he himself reports at one point: 'The original is now in the Reserva of the ASV and allegedly inaccessible for consultation, although Frajese was allowed to see it after I made my request. The photocopy made available to me is useless for most questions of paleography and obviously all those of codicology' (p. 255, n. 54). Frajese is the author of a book published in 2010, and holds a version of the forgery thesis regarding Seghizzi's 1616 precept to Galileo; and he does so in part based on his examination of the original dossier.⁽⁶⁾ And Frajese is not the only recent scholar who has had access to the original dossier: Beretta has also done so; and the present reviewer can report having consulted it first in June 1986 and then again in April 2004. Mayer's lack of access is consequential because direct access is crucial for the resolution of some issues, and even for an informed discussion of them. For example, apropos of the possible forgery of Seghizzi's 1616 document, a first-hand examination of the handwriting in the manuscript is crucial (cf. p. 61); and it is important to also reach an informed conclusion about the fact that in the dossier, between the two folios on which the Seghizzi document is written, another folio has been cut out and disappeared; now, although the multiple paginations of the dossier exclude a 1632 forgery, they leave open the possibility of one perpetrated in 1616; however,

not surprisingly, Mayer is completely unaware of this issue.⁽⁷⁾ Moreover, apropos of the authorship of the two parts of the special commission report on the *Dialogue* in the summer of 1632 (mentioned earlier), it is important to examine directly the original handwriting as well as the water marks on the folio sheets (cf. pp. 155, 304 n. 32).

One of the most damaging features of Mayer's book is that his understanding of the Italian language seems inadequate and his translations of Italian texts are often inaccurate. For example, consider Bellarmine's certificate, concerning which Mayer examines not only the final version, but also an earlier draft, in order to discuss the possible significance of the differences; one change involved the connectives used by Bellarmine to go from a description of what had not happened (a trial) to what had happened (a warning); the phrase '*ma si bene*' (meaning 'but rather') in the first draft was changed to '*ma solo*' (meaning 'but only') in the final version; however, Mayer (p. 65) tells us that the earlier phrase means 'but although'!!! Or consider the (already-mentioned) letter dated 25 September 1632 by Inquisition secretary Antonio Barberini to Florence's provincial inquisitor, for the purpose of summoning Galileo to Rome to stand trial; the letter states that Galileo should come to Rome '*per tutto il mese di ottobre*', which means 'for the whole month of October'; Mayer thinks that Galileo is being ordered 'to come to Rome before the end of October' (p. 116). Finally, consider the letter dated 14 February 1633 by the Tuscan ambassador Francesco Niccolini in Rome to the Tuscan secretary of state in Florence: Niccolini reports that Galileo had arrived the night before, and that today he went to see the previous assessor Boccabella to thank him for his previous support and to seek advice; Galileo also went to see the current assessor Febei; and he tried to see but did not find commissary Maculano; however, Mayer tells us (pp. 175, 321 n. 166) that it was Boccabella who contacted and thanked Galileo, and who tried unsuccessfully to see commissary Maculano, and that it was Niccolini who had 'addressed himself to the new assessor'!!!

Last, but not least, there is a problem with the English language used by Mayer. It's not anything stemming from inadequate linguistic competence; rather, it may stem from an opposite characteristic: a mastery so ingrained as to engender a total unawareness of the effect on readers of the writer's many user-unfriendly stylistic practices. Their combined effect generates an idiolect which I shall dub 'Pidgin English 2.0'. One of these practices is the ubiquitous usage of Latin words, such as: *censura* (censure), *decretum* (decree), *denunciatio* (denunciation), *expeditio* (concluding phase), *monitio* (admonition), *praeceptum* (precept), *processus* (proceedings or trial), *repetitio* (re-examination of witnesses), *socius* (associate), and *summarium* (summary). Then there is the excessive use of Italian terms, such as: *avviso* (news or announcement), *compagno* (associate), *fede* (affidavit or certificate), *giunta particolare* (special commission), *imbreviatura* (abbreviation), *nipote cugino* (relative or second cousin), *processo* (proceedings or trial), *sede vacante* (vacancy), and *staffetta* (courier). In addition, Mayer too often uses English words which are very rare, so much so that I am not embarrassed to report that I had to look them up in my unabridged English dictionary, for example: *accrete*, *benefice*, *brevet*, *chirograph*, *doceur*, *fettle*, *feudatory*, and *sequela*. Here, I am referring to terms whose usage could have been easily avoided, and not to technical jargon, which is unavoidable in almost all scholarship, for example (in this book): *breve* (official papal letter), *fiscal* (prosecutor), *precept* (judicial injunction), *process* (for proceedings or trial), and *rehabilitation* (commutation of some sentence or punishment). As if all these things were not enough, Mayer almost always gives hyper-literal translations whenever he quotes some original Latin or Italian passage; that is, even when they are essentially accurate, his translations are so literal that they are basically unintelligible to laypersons, and useless to specialists who know the original languages. Finally, to compound all these obstacles to normal reading, Mayer often includes (in parenthesis) the original Italian or Latin text, and he does so in the course of his exposition, although other times he relegates the original to the notes.

The general and methodological flaws illustrated above are not the only ones afflicting Mayer's book. There are others which, while still general, are less important. Thus, here for lack of space I will just mention a few others, mostly without illustrating them, just as for the same reason in my critiques above I limited myself to just giving a few examples for each criticism.

The book displays a pervasive anti-Galilean animus, expressed in language that is emotionally charged and full of negative connotations. The clarity of the exposition leaves much to be desired, and frequently I had to

re-read various passages to fathom Mayer's unclear grammatical references and chronological sequences. Mayer completely skips any discussion of the period 1616–30, which is admittedly devoid of Inquisition proceedings, but contains important developments, such as: the 1620 Index decree detailing the corrections to Copernicus's book; the 1623 election of pope Urban; and Galileo's decision to write the *Dialogue*. Mayer practices without acknowledgment a questionable rhetorical approach: he often seeks to find in the texts or actions being examined instances of such things as the art of making the worse argument appear stronger, and the art of unscrupulously winning friends and influencing people; but he applies this technique one-sidedly only to people he wants to portray negatively and texts he does not want to take seriously. Finally, this book contains more than a proper share of factual errors; for example, Galileo left Florence for Rome to stand trial *not* on 21 January 1633 (p. 173), but on January 20; and Giovanfrancesco Buonamici was not (in 1633) Galileo's 'future son-in-law' (p. 210), but rather was already (since 1629) brother-in-law of Galileo's daughter-in-law.

In conclusion, this book displays considerable diligence in archival research; its legal orientation is potentially fruitful; its prosopographical approach provides useful information; and its central precept thesis is challengingly provocative. However, these are tiny merits that pale into insignificance compared to its numerous and deep flaws. These failings are such that laypersons and scholars can ignore the book, if they are trying to learn about Galileo's trial. Nevertheless, a few specialists could benefit from it by exploiting it to sharpen their skills: how to interpret opaque texts, how to evaluate challenging theses, how to avoid historical and philosophical errors.

Notes

1. Cf. Thomas F. Mayer, *The Roman Inquisition: A Papal Bureaucracy and Its Laws in the Age of Galileo* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013); and idem, *The Roman Inquisition on the Stage of Italy, c. 1590–1640* (Philadelphia, PA, 2014).[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. See Maurice A. Finocchiaro, trans. and ed., *The Galileo Affair: A Documentary History* (Berkeley, CA, 1989); and idem, trans. and ed., *The Trial of Galileo: Essential Documents* (Indianapolis, IN, 2014).[Back to \(2\)](#)
3. Léon Garzend, *L'Inquisition et l'Hérésie* (Paris, 1912); Orio Giacchi, 'Considerazioni giuridiche sui due processi contro Galileo', in Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, ed., *Nel terzo centenario della morte di Galileo Galilei* (Milan, 1942), pp. 383–406; Francesco Beretta, 'Le procès de Galilée et les archives du Saint-Office', *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, 83 (1999), 441–90.
[Back to \(3\)](#)
4. On such issues, cf. Maurice A. Finocchiaro, *Galileo and the Art of Reasoning* (Dordrecht, 1980); and idem, *Defending Copernicus and Galileo* (Dordrecht, 2010).[Back to \(4\)](#)
5. Henri de L'Épinois, 'Galilée: Son procès, sa condamnation d'après des documents inédits', *Revue des questions historiques*, 3 (1867), 68–171; Domenico Berti, *Il processo originale di Galileo Galilei pubblicato per la prima volta* (Rome, 1876); Karl von Gebler, *Die Acten des Galilei'schen Processes* (Stuttgart, 1877). Cf. Maurice A. Finocchiaro, *Retrying Galileo, 1633–1992* (Berkeley, CA, 2005), pp. 241–58.[Back to \(5\)](#)
6. Vittorio Frajese, *Il processo a Galileo Galilei* (Brescia, 2010), pp. 57, 103–6.[Back to \(6\)](#)
7. On this issue, see Finocchiaro, *Retrying Galileo, 1633–1992*, pp. 251–8.[Back to \(7\)](#)

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