
“In this book we try to set the record straight in the belief that truth is more satisfying, and more challenging, than propaganda or media hype” (ix). These words, forming part of the Preface (ix-xi), sum up the aim of the publication by William R. Shea, Galileo Professor of History of Science at the University of Padua, and Mariano Artigas, teacher of philosophy and theology at the University of Navarra who unfortunately died at the end of the last year. The authors lay stress on some commonplaces belonging to the Galileo case in order to show the historical authenticity about that important moment in modern history.

A clear instance of a prejudicial reconstruction is outlined in chapter one (1-26), in which the authors discuss the idea that Galileo’s trial is part of the historical conflict between science and religion. That idea was supported by John William Draper (1811-1882) and Andrew Jackson White (1832-1918), though an objective look at their conclusions clearly shows that they have been led astray by their ideological belief in the conflict thesis instead of investigating the historical truth. On the other side, Arthur Koestler’s opinion, which considers the clash between Galileo’s and Urban VIII’s tempers as the main reason for Galileo’s condemnation, can be deemed another kind of historical mistake (27-52). Koestler is right in affirming the condemnation could be avoided but his denying the relevance of a contrast between biblical exegesis and science in the modern age is also not correct. Bertold Brecht’s *Life of Galileo* (53-84) is another clear instance among the ideological and instrumental accounts of that affair. The German author abused Galileo’s memory in order to explain history on the stage and spread his own vision against western society. Unfortunately, most of the Brecht’s audience does not know much about the Galileo’s case and seventeenth-century cultural milieu; therefore, Brecht’s play does not dispel any of the common myths about the case. In the following chapter (85-106) the authors examine five common charges which have been held by historians supporting that Galileo was not treated fairly. Among those accusations, the one upholding Galileo’s being tortured is surely the most absurd. The opening of the Vatican archives in 1998 allowed researchers to examine all the documents concerning Galileo’s trials in great
detail and none of them contains information about any kind of torture.

Some historians, such as Walter Brandmuller, have interpreted Galileo’s conflict with the Church as a case of mutual mistake. The question forms part of the arguments expressed in chapter five (107-125) which deals with the complex aspect of inquiring into the right statements and errors made by both Galileo and the Church in science and theology. The analysis carried on by Shea and Artigas stresses the insufficiency of prejudicial arrangements as many details must be considered in order to express a true judgement upon that question. The idea that Giordano Bruno’s trial is “the occult but real cause of the condemnation of both Copernicus and Galileo” is affirmed by the famous historian of science Alexandre Koyrè and the comparison of those two characters is made in chapter six (127-144). Their trials ended with different verdicts but the most important difference between Bruno and Galileo consists in the core of their thought. Their belief in the Copernican system was the only common ground between them; Bruno, moreover, was not a scientist in the modern sense of the word as his natural philosophy was not founded upon experiments and mathematics. The authors rightly establish that Bruno “was not a scientist, and he was not interested in astronomy as such but in Copemicanism as a launching pad for his cosmological ideas” (129).

The condemnation of Galileo as an actual “heretic” has been declared by the Italian historian Pietro Redondi and his position is discussed in details in chapter eight (165-180), which may be the most specialized essay in the volume. Redondi’s theory is based upon the contents of an anonymous manuscript, preserved in the Vatican archives, which denounces Galileo for denying the doctrine of the Eucharist. Redondi claimed that the author of that manuscript was Orazio Grassi, a Jesuit astronomer who affirmed in a book on comets that Galileo imperilled the dogma of transubstantiation by rendering the sensible qualities of matter subjective. According to Redondi, that was the real reason why Galileo was condemned in 1633. It is well known that Galileo replied to Grassi’s work by publishing *The Assayer*, in which he established the distinction between primary and secondary qualities which led to the suspicion of heresy described in the anonymous manuscript. *The Assayer*, however, had been examined by the theologian Giovanni Guevara who found nothing to proceed against Galileo on that occasion. In a paragraph of that chapter, the theological grounds why the Holy Office let the matter
drop are briefly exhibited. Moreover, a detailed research in the Vatican archives was made by Mariano Artigas when they became wholly accessible to students. Artigas found another anonymous manuscript that was closely linked with the previous one. According to Shea and Artigas, the author of that other document was probably Melchior Inchofer, a Jesuit member of the Preliminary Commission established in 1632 by Urban VIII to analyse the Dialogue on the Two Chief Systems. Therefore, the manuscript examined by Redondy is probably a copy and Inchofer may be the author of the original version. “For the record, let us mention that no one who has studied the trial thinks that Redondi has got it right” (168).

The work made by the Pontifical Commission established in 1992 by Pope John Paul II, as a part of a broader research design concerning the science-theology interaction, is the content of chapter nine (181-194). Not all historians, who in recent years have dealt with Galilean studies, agree with the work of the Commission even if it gave rise to some very meaningful publications. That disagreement can be judged to be a clear demonstration of the difficulties inherent in the reconstruction of the Galileo case and the negative approach of prejudicial and superficial accounts. As the authors declare:

A movie with no clearly recognizable good guys and bad guys might be more true to life but it would stand no chance of establishing a record at the box office. Commercial films sacrifice historical authenticity for broad audience appeal, simplifying the complex patterns of the past, and telling the public what it wants to hear. (195)

This declaration is the main historical consideration that led the authors to write this book. Their conclusions can be found in this highly readable publication. Although it deals with a very specialized subject, it will appeal to general readers interested in modern history. Shea and Artigas present the Galileo case in an objective manner and succeed in showing how it is possible to write an entire book containing the main historical errors about it.