

What did Urban VIII and Galileo discuss during the “six long meetings” in 1624?

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In this Conference honoring Jürgen Renn, one of the outstanding historians of science, I thought to deviate a little from the strict protocol in the presentation of papers. Since, thankfully, I was asked for an evening lecture, I would take the risk of talking about something I have not published anything before! At the end of April 1624, Galileo visited Rome to pay his respects to his old friend Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, who was elected Pope Urban VIII, in August 1623. As Galileo wrote to Frederico Cesi, the founder, funder and motive force of the *Accademia dei Lincei*, he had “six long meetings” with the Pope before returning to Florence in June 1624. We know nothing of what was discussed in these meetings. Most historians assume that Galileo may have asked Urban to repeal the 1616 edict of the Congregation, something that Urban refused to do and that Urban gave him the go-ahead about his forthcoming book as long as the Copernican ideas were not treated as necessary truths but as hypotheses. In the talk I shall try to test a different assumption of what was discussed in these meetings: Urban proposed to Galileo to write a book where the (Aristotelian) philosopher would be the one who, as the narrative in the book unfolded, will be proclaiming and promoting the ideas that the astronomer had initially articulated. The philosopher in the proposed work would be neither a passive listener nor a straw man to be bashed about nor someone whose (counter)arguments would be too weak to merit serious discussion. Though in the beginning of the book it would be the astronomer who will be providing the evidence and the arguments in support of Copernicus’ ideas and the philosopher would be rather reserved in fully accepting them, as the book progressed it would be the philosopher who would become the hegemonic figure, embellishing and overindulging the new state of the cosmos. One of the justifications for the assumption put forward, is the “reading” of *The Assayer* as a political and social manifesto of the Linceans. Even though Urban had expressed his enthusiasm about *The Assayer* when it was first read to him in 1623, as the months passed the political exigencies of the office he held, forced him to change his opinion. Realizing that *The Assayer* expressed a social agenda aiming at marginalizing the Aristotelians, Urban was determined to suppress the agenda of Galileo and the Linceans as it was articulated in *The Assayer*. It is, further argued, that the agenda expressed in *The Assayer* was very much the same as that expressed in Copernicus’ preface to *De Revolutionibus* and that the intensity with which the Aristotelians were attacked in *The Assayer* might be strongly related to the Congregation’s censure of the emblematic paragraph in *De Revolutionibus* containing the phrase “mathematics is written for the mathematicians” in 1620. Such an assumption of what went on during the meetings of Galileo and Urban provides more coherent explanations of a number of issues that historians have mostly ignored: the letters of Galileo to Cesi during his stay in Rome, the style of Galileo’s Reply to Ingoli, the delay in the writing of the *Dialogue*... , the total mess in the way the imprimatur of the *Dialogue*... was issued and some passages from the correspondence of the Tuscan Ambassador in Rome Francesco Niccolini in 1632 with the Tuscan Secretary of State, Baldi Cioli.

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