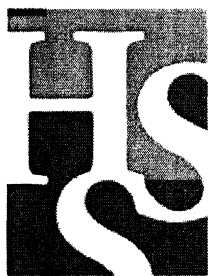


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COPERNICUS AND URBINO: REMARKS ON BERNARDINO BALDI'S *VITA DI NICCOLÒ COPERNICO* (1588)

By Paul Lawrence Rose*

The *Vita di Niccolò Copernico* is one of the two hundred or so *Vite de' Matematici* which Bernardino Baldi (1553–1617), a noted man of letters and mathematician of Urbino, wrote for the most part in the years 1587–1595.¹ Roughly a quarter of these *Vite* were published during the nineteenth century in the *Bullettino di Bibliografia e di Storia delle Scienze Matematiche e Fisiche* and elsewhere, but since 1908 the manuscripts containing Baldi's entire autograph text have been unavailable to the scholarly world. In 1972–1973, however, the codices were re-discovered at Rome by Bronislaw Bilinski

and the present author, working quite independently of one another.² A complete edition is now under consideration.

On the eve of their disappearance five of these *Vite* were published for the first time in Zaccagnini's biography of Baldi. Among these was the *Vita di Niccolò Copernico*, and this has recently been re-printed from Zaccagnini's text by Bilinski.³ The commentary accompanying the new edition postulates that Baldi had available to him sources of information about Copernicus' years in Italy not accessible to Rheticus and other writers.⁴

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¹ For biographical details of Baldi see Guido Zaccagnini, *Bernardino Baldi nella Vita e nelle Opere* (2nd ed., Pistoia: Soc. An. Tipo-Litografica Toscana, 1908). Irene Affò, *Vita di Monsignore Bernardino Baldi da Urbino, primo Abate di Guastalla* (Parma: Carmignani, 1783). Pierre Duhem, *Etudes sur Léonard de Vinci*, prem. sér. (Paris: Hermann, 1906), pp. 89–156. Stillman Drake, "Bernardino Baldi," in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, Vol. I (New York: Scribner's, 1970), pp. 419–420. Bronislaw Bilinski, *Najstarszy Zyciorys Mikołaja Kopernika z Roku 1588 Piora Bernardina Baldiego* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, Studia Copernicana, IX, 1973). All page references are to the revised Italian version: *La Vita di Copernico di Bernardino Baldi dell'anno 1588 alla luce dei ritrovati manoscritti delle Vite dei Matematici* (Rome: Biblioteca dell'Accademia Polacca, Conferenze, LXI, 1973). A list of the lives is in Enrico Narducci, "Vite inedite di Matematici Italiani scritte da Bernardino Baldi," *Bullettino di Bibliografia e di Storia delle Scienze Matematiche e Fisiche*, 1886, 19:335–406, 437–489, 521–640, at 342–346.

I have dealt briefly with the main features of Baldi's historiography in a paper read to the Columbia University Renaissance Seminar on Feb. 20, 1973, entitled "Historians of the Renaissance of Mathematics."

² In 1972 while giving a lecture on Baldi's *Vita di Copernico* in Turin, Professor Bilinski mentioned that the autograph manuscripts of the *Vite de' Matematici* were last known to have been owned by the Roman lawyer Luigi Celli. By chance, a surviving daughter of the *avvocato* Celli—Signora Wanda Artom-Celli—was in the audience and at the end of the lecture identified herself to Bilinski. My own method was to examine the newspaper morgues in Rome, where in 1972 I found a notice of the recent death of Celli's other daughter, the noted actress Maria-Letizia Celli. A visit to the family mausoleum in Frascati obtained for me the address of Signora Artom-Celli in Turin.

In the course of 1972–1973 Bilinski and I, again independently, learned that the manuscripts had been donated by the Celli family to the library of the Padri Rosminiani (Istituto della Carità) in Rome. I am most grateful to Signora Artom-Celli and Don Giuseppe Gaddo, the head of the Rosminiani, for their patience and generous help with my enquiries.

For details of the codices see Paul Lawrence Rose, "Rediscovered Autograph Manuscripts of the *Vite de' Matematici* and Mathematical Works by Bernardino Baldi (1553–1617), formerly in the Albani and Boncompagni Libraries," *Rendiconti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* (in press).

Interestingly, Angelo Celli, the noted researcher on malaria, was the brother of Luigi Celli.

³ Zaccagnini, *Baldi*, pp. 329–333. Bilinski, *Baldi*, pp. 20 ff.

⁴ For the alleged Urbinat and Roman sources available to Baldi see Bilinski, *Baldi*, pp. 38, 93, 97, 108.

One such source is traced to a special relationship between Copernicus and the Dutchman Paul of Middelburg, Bishop of Fossombrone and astrologer to the court of Urbino. In the dedication to *De revolutionibus* Copernicus recalls having been encouraged by Paul of Middelburg to investigate the problem of the length of the solar year. Paul did contact Copernicus and many other astronomers in connection with the reform of the calendar initiated by the Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517), but there is no reason to suspect any especially close relationship between Paul, who was then at Rome, and Copernicus, who was in Northern Europe.⁵

Bilinski's main interest in establishing a connection between Copernicus and various Italian sources is to show that Bernardino Baldi was able to draw on special information for a number of surprising statements made in his *Vita di Copernico*. Baldi claims, for example, that Cardinal Nicholas Schönberg, having received a manuscript copy of *De revolutionibus*, showed this to Pope Paul III, who then approved of the work and urged its publication. Accepting these remarks of Baldi as true, Bilinski has consequently discerned two versions of the dedication of *De revolutionibus*. The first is the preface allegedly sent to Cardinal Schönberg in 1536–1537, the second the revised preface dedicated to Paul III which now graces the printed text of *De revolutionibus*.⁶

⁵ Bilinski (*ibid.*, pp. 44–46) claims that Copernicus knew Paul as early as c. 1500 in Italy, but there is no real evidence for this assertion.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 96–104. Bilinski argues that the mention, in the dedication, of Lysis' letter to Hipparchus means that the dedication was originally written when a translation of that letter formed part of the text of *De revolutionibus*. Indeed, the manuscript version of *De revolutionibus* contains (fols. 11v–12v) a translation of the Lysis letter which is crossed out and does not appear in the printed edition. However, Copernicus could have deleted this passage after writing the first—and only—version of the dedication to Paul III. Any conjecture built around the fact that Copernicus mentions Lysis in the dedication

These constructions appear to have very little substance. There is no evidence that Copernicus ever sent a copy of the manuscript of *De revolutionibus* to Schönberg in Rome or that the work was ever seen by Paul III. The entire story seems to have grown out of Baldi's having read too much into the prefatory material to the printed *De revolutionibus*, which includes a letter of 1536 from Schönberg to Copernicus asking for copies of the astronomer's works to be sent to him in Rome. Baldi construed from this that Copernicus had obliged the cardinal.⁷ Similarly, from the fact that the book includes a dedication to Paul III, Baldi assumed that *De revolutionibus* had received the pope's prior approval. This may well be right, but it does not indicate that Baldi had any special knowledge of Copernicus' relations with the papal court. All of Baldi's account of this topic seems to be inferred, rightly or mistakenly, from the introductory matter to *De revolutionibus*.

In his literal acceptance of Baldi's remarks, Bilinski has overlooked perhaps the one person who could have told Baldi about the reception of Copernicus' work at Rome: Federico Commandino (1509–1575), who was the teacher and close friend of Baldi during the 1570s at Urbino.⁸ In the *Vita di Federico Commandino* Baldi tells us that Commandino's

ought to be received with the greatest caution.

Professor Bilinski also argues that the phrase in the dedication of *De revolutionibus*—"Nam non ita multo ante sub Leone X, cum in Concilio Lateranensi versabatur quaestio de emendando Calendario Ecclesiastico"—means that Copernicus was writing many years before 1543 and much nearer the time of Leo X, perhaps in 1516. No solid argument may be based on such a loose phrase.

⁷ Edward Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, 3rd ed., revised with a biography of Copernicus (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), pp. 387–388, doubts whether Copernicus ever sent Schönberg the requested copies.

⁸ On the underrated figure of Commandino see Paul Lawrence Rose, "Plusieurs Manuscrits autographes de Federico Commandino à la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris," *Revue d'His-*

own teacher (c. 1530) had been one Giam-Pietro de'Grassi, who was then staying temporarily at Urbino.⁹ Now this was the same de'Grassi who, as Bishop of Viterbo, later attended the famous meeting in the Vatican gardens in the summer of 1533 when Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter expounded the Copernican system to Pope Clement VII.¹⁰ Moreover, Commandino himself was either at that time or soon afterward chamberlain to Clement VII, and the two men are said to have frequently and seriously discussed mathematics together.¹¹

None of this is intended to suggest that Commandino was a Copernican. He offered no opinion of Copernicus in his published writings, and his silence may

suggest that he was not favorably impressed by the geo-kinetic theory. In his editions of the *Arenarius* of Archimedes (Venice, 1558) and Aristarchus (Pesaro, 1572) Commandino makes no remark on the movement of the earth, despite the obvious occasions to do so. In contrast, Baldi—a less cautious writer—does give an opinion in speaking of Copernicus, whom he praises as a fine astronomer but whose *De revolutionibus* he criticizes for following the false hypothesis (*quella falsa ipotesi*) of Aristarchus. This might well be an intemperate echo of Commandino's own judgment; on the other hand, Guidobaldo dal Monte (1545–1607)—another pupil of Commandino and friend and teacher of Baldi—could equally well be reflecting Commandino's own opinion when in a letter of 1588 he confessed himself attracted to a geo-kinetic view.¹²

In summary:

Baldi's account of the Italian relations of *De revolutionibus* was drawn, it seems, from a reading of the introductory material to *De revolutionibus* rather than from any special knowledge obtained through the Urbino connection with Paul of Middelburg.

A definite connection exists in the person of Federico Commandino between the Rome of the 1530s and Bernardino Baldi. The amount of information communicated by Commandino to Baldi is, however, problematic.

toire des Sciences, 1971, 24:299–307, "Commandino, John Dee, and the *De superficierum divisionibus* of Machometus Bagdedinus," *Isis*, 1972, 63:88–93, and "Letters Illustrating the Career of Federico Commandino," *Physis* (in press). See also Edward Rosen, "Federico Commandino" in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, Vol. III (1971), 363–365. Stillman Drake and I. E. Drabkin, *Mechanics in Sixteenth Century Italy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), pp. 41–44. The full and accurate chronology of Commandino's life has not yet been established.

⁹ Bernardino Baldi, "Vita di Federico Commandino," *Giornale de' Letterati d'Italia*, 1714, 19:140–185, at 144–145.

¹⁰ For those present at the session of 1533 see M. Curtze, "Inedita Copernicana," *Mittheilungen des Copernicus-Vereins für Wissenschaft und Kunst zu Thorn*, 1878, 1:4; cf. Rosen, *Copernican Treatises*, p. 387. For new information on opposition after 1543 to Copernicus at the papal court see Eugenio Garin, "A Proposito di Copernico," *Rivista Critica di Storia della Filosofia*, 1971, 26:83–87. The leading opponent there seems to have been Bartolomeo Spina (d. 1546), who was intimate with Paul III and held the position of *magister sacri et apostolici palatii*.

¹¹ Baldi, "Vita di Federico Commandino," pp. 145–146.

¹² Biblioteca Comunale, Forlì, MS Autografi Piancastelli 755(1), letter of Dec. 8, 1588: "ho un capriccio che la terra si muove." It is not clear from the context whether Guidobaldo has in mind merely the diurnal rotation of the earth or something more. Guidobaldo was Galileo's close friend and patron.