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Galileo and the Astrological Prophecy of Manuel Rosales

Nick Kollerstrom

Abstract: Scholars and biographers of Galileo have felt at liberty over the centuries to ignore his apparently keen endorsement of a polemical and astrological prophetic text, which he published in Rome in 1626. Omitted from the collected works of Galileo, it was finally brought to light by Luigi Guerrini in 2001. The text concerned a Portuguese prophecy for the restoration of its empire. Such delayed recognition may serve to remind us of the sheer extent to which Galileo's involvement in astrology has been censored, marginalised and written out of the history books. The prophecy was viewed as inflammatory by the Spanish authorities, and orders went forth for all copies to be destroyed. One single copy remains of this publication with Galileo's foreword, in the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale* in Florence, where it was found by M. Guerrini. The author's name seems to have varied over the years from Manuel Bocarro Francês y Rosales to Dr Jacob Rosales to Imanuel Bocarro Francês. It is unclear whether Galileo and Rosales ever met; it is possible that Galileo wrote this Foreword at the request of the Medicis who employed him.

Dr Jacob Rosales, [was] a many-sided, exceptionally gifted and controversial personality, a prolific author interested in astronomy, mathematics, medicine, alchemy, literature, politics, political astrology and Jewish apologetics and one of the best-known exponents of political messianism, whose alchemy and astronomy studies led him onto prognostication. He was also an accomplished poet writing in at least three languages, Portuguese, Spanish and Latin.¹

The Prophecy

In 1624 the Jewish philosopher Manuel Bocarro Frances y Rosales, described by Halevy and Silva as 'a prolific author interested in astronomy, mathematics, medicine, alchemy, literature, politics, political

¹ M. Halevy and S. Silva, 'Tortured memories, Jacob Rosales alias Imanuel Bocarro Frances: a life from the Files of the Inquisition', *The Roman Inquisition, the Index and the Jews*, ed. S. Wendehorst (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 107-151, p. 117.

astrology and Jewish apologetics and one of the best-known exponents of political messianism', published his prophecy, composed with a view to the restoration of the Portuguese monarchy, featuring some millennial-apocalyptic visions.² Entitled, 'Small lunar and smaller light of the Portuguese monarchy: Explanation of the first *Anacephaleoses*', it was printed in Lisbon. It foresaw a 'hidden Prince' who would restore the monarchy and specified the year 1653 when he would appear, to rule the world.³ One part of this book was entitled *Luz Pequena*, a development of the four-part astrological poem published in 1624, *Anacephalaeses da Monarchia Lusitania*, 'A Summary of the Lusitanian Monarchy'. It was a prophetic and messianic work of which only part one seems to have actually appeared, the other three being burnt immediately by the Spanish authorities. Utilising methods of political astrology, the book predicted that Portugal, then under Spanish rule, was destined to become the last and mightiest world empire, when in the year 1653 the emergence of the 'hidden king' would vanquish the followers of Mohammed.

With Portugal under Spanish rule, copies of this seditious work had to be burnt by the authorities, and its author Bocarro-Rosales denounced for a second time before the Holy Inquisition. This was done by his own brother in 1624 at the Goa Inquisition Court (Goa was then a Portuguese Indian colony); then Mr Bocarro was denounced one more time in 1626 at Lisbon. It was a stressful time for Jews in Europe and altogether he was denounced to the Holy Inquisition on nine occasions before the courts of Goa, Lisbon and Madrid. These Inquisition reports contain most of the known information about his life.

Upon being released from jail, Bocarro fled to Rome, changed his name and 'came out' as a professing Jew (as opposed to a Marrano Jew—one obliged to convert to the Christian religion, as he had to while in Spain). He arrived in Rome in 1625; Galileo would not have been there, as he was then living near Florence. Guerrini described how, around the middle of 1625, Mr Bocarro arrived 'in Rome, at Gomez e Silva, Duke of Pastrana, a character very influential and very close to the dominant Barberini family'.⁴ He seems to have adopted the name 'Rosales' upon arriving in Italy. There were six occasions on which

² Halevy and Silva, 'Tortured memories', p. 127.

³ Halevy and Silva, 'Tortured memories', p. 126.

⁴ Luigi Guerrini, 'Galileo fra gli astrologi', *Bruniana e Campanelliana* 7, no.1 (2001): pp. 7, 233-244, 238; republished in *Ricerchesu Galileo e il primo Seicento* (2004): pp. 97-105, p. 100.

Galileo visited Rome: the first was in 1616, and then later from April to June of 1624 to celebrate the election of the new pope Barberini.

What Galileo Saw

Galileo assisted the publication, in Rome, of this astrological prophecy. The part of this book prefaced by Galileo was entitled *Luz Pequena*. As published in Rome in 1626, Rosales' *Luz Pequena* comprised 30 pages in Portuguese, in both prose and verse, with Galileo's introduction in Latin. It was the fourth part of his banned book *Anacephalaeoses*, together with notes which he brought out under the title *Luz Pequena Lunar*, the first three parts having appeared in 1624.⁵ Galileo may have translated some parts of it. It alluded to the Copernican theory and the eccentricity of the solar orbit, but hardly in a style one might expect Galileo to have approved of.

It seems not to have troubled Galileo, that the work had been banned in Portugal where it was printed, and its Jewish author thrown in jail. His introductory paragraph praised the 'learned astrologer' who had composed it: Manuel Rosales, he explained, had 'sent us as a gift his astrological judgements, similar to prophecies, in his excellent Portuguese language', adding, 'We have taken care to translate it into the Italian language'.⁶ (If Galileo had produced such a translation, no copies remain.⁷) Galileo's introduction praised this text as being 'in the author's own words, since they are of great meaning for general knowledge and love of science' and described Rosales as 'first amongst astrologers'.

His Introduction to Rosales' text alluded to 'this very admired and extremely learned Doctor Emmanuel Bocarro Frances (*Virum Admirandum, & doctissimum Astrologorum Principem*) 'who also rejoices in the name Rosales' (Latin '*gaudet*' for 'rejoices in'), which implies—or so Moreno-Carvalho has surmised—that 'the letter was the outcome of a personal meeting between Rosales and Galileo' where

⁵ Halevy and Silva, 'Tortured memories', p. 128; Luis M. Carolino, 'Scienza, politica ed escatologia nella formazione dello "scienziato" nell'Europa del XVII secolo: il caso di Manuel Bocarro Francês - Jacob Rosales', *Nuncius* 19, no. 2 (2004): pp. 477-506.

⁶ Text and translation given at end of essay.

⁷ Its accession number in Florence national Library is 1068.27. The text was edited in 2006 by Luis Miguel Carolino, and the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal owns a copy.

Galileo had the significance of this name-change explained to him.⁸ He adopted the name Rosales upon arriving in Rome. Or, does Galileo's preface suggest he had been *sent* the document? As in, Mr Bocarro 'sent us as a gift his astrological judgements, similar to prophecies'.⁹ But, the latin '*obtulerit*' in Galileo's Preface may not be optimally translated as 'sent', but could rather imply that he had received Bocarro's booklet from somebody who was Portuguese.¹⁰ Galileo then added the words of great praise: 'So, I invite him who explains the book of the universe to admire, love, and praise the talent of this man'.¹¹

It is hard to think of anyone except Giovanni Sagredo who gets such an enthusiastic and affectionate write-up from Galileo. If these two had not met, then the affectionate and familiar tone of this Preface is quite hard to explain. He signed it simply as 'G.G. Mathem'. But no-one has doubted that this was really Galileo. As court philosopher to the Medici family in Florence, Galileo had described himself in his 1624 *Il Saggiatore* as a 'philosopher', that is, no longer just a 'mathematicus' as he had been in Padua. He may well have been asked by the Medicis to get this text published: the Spanish crown was seen as a threat by the Vatican, so it could have been politically advantageous to have their court philosopher Galileo endorse a prophecy of its downfall; although Galileo himself generally kept clear of politics, this could have been important for the Medici family. Support for this view comes from a much later work of Rosales published in Florence and dedicated to Cosimo III de Medici.¹²

This text has been omitted from just about all collections, anthologies, indexes of letters, and books about Galileo, over the centuries—certainly all English-language texts—until finally Luigi Guerrini noticed it, and

⁸ F. Moreno-Carvalho, 'A Newly-discovered letter by Galileo Galilei: contacts between Galileo and Jacob Rosales (Manoel Bocarro Francês), a seventeenth-century Jewish scientist and Sebastienist', *Aleph* II (2002): pp. 59-91; he surmised that Rosales may have met Galileo in Florence, see p. 78.

⁹ The translation given by Moreno-Carvalho, 'Galileo and Jacob Rosales', p. 73.

¹⁰ Advice from Luigi Guerrini, who supplied the translation used here.

¹¹ See text translation at end of essay.

¹² Rosales' 1754 work *Fasciculus Trium Verarum Propositionum Astronomicae, Astrologicae at Philosophicae* was published in Florence and dedicated to Cosimo III de Medici; see Carolino, 'Scienza, politica', p. 482.

published his report on it in 2001. A publication of 2002 by Moreno-Carvalho wrongly claimed to have been the first to publish it.¹³

A Time of Optimism

Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions take place every twenty years, and their sequence remains in a given zodiac element or 'trigon' (a triangle of three zodiac signs with the same element) for two centuries, so that it moves through all four zodiac-elements every eight hundred years. These conjunctions were traditionally accepted as measuring out the cycles of history and an especial importance was attributed to their entry into the fire-element, as happened at the dawn of the 17th century with the 1603 triple conjunction. Based on this, Tycho Brahe had envisioned the return of a Golden Age. Tycho Brahe's vision of 'the start of a new golden age' was based partly on the new star he had seen, in 1572, but also on his view that 'the seventh cycle of history was about to begin', counting these by the chronocrators (Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions) moving through the zodiacal elements.¹⁴ On the other hand, Kepler in his *De Stella Nova* of 1606 had been more circumspect, though pointing out that the previous entry into the fire-element was in the time of Charlemagne and the one before that, the birth of Christ; there had been 'seven great periods' of 800 years since the 'beginning of the world' 5,600 years ago.¹⁵ The visionary-astrologer and political revolutionary Tomasso Campanella likewise prophesied the 'return' of the Golden Age.¹⁶ Campanella followed Tycho Brahe, and his argument was in some degree based upon the notion of history as having as periods of six thousand year duration, as well as the two new stars appearing in the sky. In his very first public lectures on astronomy made in 1604 about the bright new star which had

¹³ Darrell Rutkin's 'Galileo Astrologer: Astrology and Mathematical practice in the late-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries', *Galileana* II (2005): pp. 107-143, gives Guerrini credit for this discovery, see p. 136.

¹⁴ Germana Ernst, 'From the Watery Trigon to the Fiery Trigon: Celestial signs, Prophecies and History', in *Astrologi hallucinati' Stars and the end of the World in Luther's Time*, ed. Paola Zambelli (NY: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), pp. 265-280, p. 272.

¹⁵ For English translation of Chapters 7-9 of Kepler's *De Stella Nova* (Frankfurt, 1606), see 'Kepler's Astrology', *Culture and Cosmos* (Winter 2010): pp. 209-234, p. 213.

¹⁶ Germana Ernst, 'Watery Trigon', p. 270; also Germana Ernst, 'Astrology and Prophecy in Campanella and Galileo', in *Galileo's Astrology*, ed. Nicholas Campion and Nick Kollerstrom, *Culture and Cosmos* 7, no. 1 (2003): pp. 21-36.

42 Galileo and the Astrological Prophecy of Manuel Rosales

appeared in the sky, Galileo discussed how it had been right next to that Jupiter-Saturn conjunction of 1603 in the sign of Sagittarius: intimating that the new star had somehow been produced by the conjunction. That had been a rare once-per-century triple conjunction, with Jupiter thrice crossing the longitude of Saturn, i.e. meeting Saturn three times.¹⁷

Rosales' prophecy, endorsed by Galileo, was based upon the appearance of the very bright comet of 1618, and upon the last two Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions. Campanella saw Galileo's own great discoveries as fulfilling this prophecy. There are nine letters which Campanella wrote to Galileo which survive, some quite lengthy, but no replies extant from Galileo.¹⁸ We may, I suggest, best apprehend whatever side of Galileo's character impelled him to write in praise of Bocarro, by trying to evaluate his correspondence with Campanella. The latter explained to him that the prophecy of a new heaven and a new earth was being fulfilled by Galileo: after all, had not his telescope seen the new heaven?¹⁹

In 1644, Rosales republished his prophecies, including Galileo's Foreword. He felt vindicated because a Portuguese monarchy 'was indeed restored in the fateful year of 1640'.²⁰ A text of his claiming his prophecy had been valid was published in Florence in 1654. All copies of Bocarro's work had to be burnt for their 'heresy' according to an edict of

¹⁷ Campion and Kollerstrom, *Galileo's Astrology*, pp. 73-4.

¹⁸ Germana Ernst, *Tommaso Campanella: The Book and the Body of Nature* (New York: Springer, 2010) p. 159.

¹⁹ Germana Ernst, 'From the watery Trigon to the fiery Trigon: Celestial Signs, Prophecies and History', in Zambelli, Paola (ed.), *'Astrologi hallucinati': Stars and the End of the World in Luther's Time*, Berlin and New York, Walter de Gruyter 1986, pp. 265-80 (pp. 265-6); also, Germana Ernst, *Astrology and Prophecy in Campanella and Galileo* (English translation of Ernst's essay in *Novita celesti e crisi del sapere*, ed. P. Galluzi, Florence 1983), in Campion and Kollerstrom, *Galileo's Astrology*, p. 24; see also Germana Ernst, 'Galileo, Campanella e le dottrine celesti', in *Il processo a Galileo Galilei e la questione galileiana*, ed. G. M. Bravo, *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 15, no. 1 (2010): pp. 159-184.

²⁰ L. M. Carolino and C. Z. Camenietzki, 'Tokens of the Future: comets, astrology and politics in early modern Portugal', *Cronos* 9 (2006): pp. 33-57, p. 34.

1774, but maybe this decree did not reach Florence, where a copy remains in the main library.²¹

Text:

Lectori amico. Hoc viri admirandi, et supra modum doctissimi DMBF, qui etiam R nomine gaudet, iudicium astrologicum, vaticinio simile, ad nostra pervenit manus, cum excell. Personae, lusitano idiomate, illud obtulerit. Et quamvis huius modi opusculum cum I Anacephal. De quo agitur, converti in italicum sermonem curavisset, sic quae eo fruamur, nihilominus, typis mandare propria autoris verba, sunt enim magis significativa, ob commune studium et scientiae amorem curavimus, ut ad hibito, quem exponit, libro mundus viri astrologorum principis, ingenium miretur, amet et laudet. Romae 1 Julii anno 1626 G.G. Mathem.

Translation by Luigi Guerrini.²²

To the friendly reader, this astrological judgment, in the manner of prophecy, of the admired and extremely learned doctor I. Manuel Bocarro Frances, who is also called Rosales, came through our hands. Since it is written in the Portuguese language of its distinguished author, we took care to translate this booklet, together with I Anacephal (which deals with it) into Italian, thereby enjoying it. Nonetheless, for common study and love of knowledge, we decided to send into print the author's own words, which are in fact most significant, so that people could admire, love and praise the talents of this man, first among the astrologers.

Rome, July 1st 1626, G. G. Mathem.

²¹ Moreno-Carvalho found one other copy of the *Luz pequena*, in the general library of the Coimbra university in Portugal: 'Galileo', ref. 1 p. 72, entitled: *Luz Pequena lunar et estellifera. Do Doutor Manoel bocarro Francez Rosalez.*

²² Translation kindly provided by Luigi Guerrini for the author.