

The Renaissance Studies Program
presents a lecture by

THOMAS F. MAYER

Trying Galileo

2:00 p.m., Friday, March 30, 2012
Ballantine Hall 006



Galileo did himself in. True, he had help, whether from Paul V and Urban VIII, the Jesuits, the Dominicans, the Congregation of the Index or even the Inquisition, but ultimately his fate was largely his own fault. Focusing on the trial before the Roman Inquisition, Thomas F. Mayer will illustrate how it went through two phases, the first in 1615–16 and the second in 1632–33, leading to his condemnation for violating an order given in 1616 to abandon the belief that the sun was the center of the universe.

Mayer does not assume that the outcome was inevitable, nor that philosophical, scientific or even theological issues necessarily determined the result. Instead, he takes a legal and political approach beginning with the discovery that Galileo arrogantly rejected a strong case in law that could have allowed him to avoid condemnation. Given the flexibility of the Inquisition's procedures

(which have been ignored until recently), both of his investigations contained lots of legal oddities, twists and turns at which other outcomes became temporarily possible. In both phases, perhaps unsurprisingly, the pope's role turns out to be vital. But equally, both Paul and Urban had to at least bend if not break the rules in order to bring Galileo to book. He gave them plenty of provocation. Highlighting the trials as trials leads to a much different picture than the still dominant view that Galileo fell victim to intolerance and superstition.

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