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POLITICAL ASTROLOGERS AND THE SECRET WHEELS OF PROVIDENCE. PROPHECIES, ASTROLOGY, AND PRAGMATIC FUTUROLOGIES IN SEVENTEENTH – AND EIGHTEENTH – CENTURY VENICE\*

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*ABSTRACT: The article addresses the issue of the interweaving between prophecy, astrology and the political discussion, in particular at the «popular» level. The case study is represented by Venice between the 17th and 18th centuries, a period marked by great attention towards the political discussion. The archival material, coming especially from the funds of the Inquisitors of State and of the Inquisition, offers the chance to consider from another perspective the intersections between astrology, prophecy, politics and the religious dissent.*

*KEYWORDS: Prophecy, Astrology, Future, Venice, Political discussions, Early Modern Era, Inquisition.*

GLI «ASTROLOGI POLITICI» E LE «SEGRETE RUOTE DELLA PROVVIDENZA». PROFEZIE, ASTROLOGIA E FUTUROLOGIE PRAGMATICHE A VENEZIA FRA SEI E SETTECENTO

*SOMMARIO: L'articolo affronta il tema dell'intreccio fra le possibilità di previsione date da astrologia e profezia e la discussione politica, in particolare quella «popolare». Il caso di studio è rappresentato da Venezia fra Sei e Settecento, un periodo segnato da una grande attenzione nei confronti della discussione politica. Il materiale archivistico, proveniente in particolare modo dai fondi degli Inquisitori di Stato e del Sant'Uffizio, consente di vedere in modo diverso dal passato i piani di intersezione fra astrologia, profezia, politica e dissenso religioso.*

*PAROLE CHIAVE: Profezia, Astrologia, Futuro, Venezia, Discussione politica, Età moderna, Inquisizione.*

On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1645, the Venetian nobleman Leonardo Giustinian issued a complaint to the Podestà and Captain of Treviso against the priest Alfonso Bragadin, vicar of Villanova, a small town near Motta di Livenza, some forty kilometers north-east of Treviso. It was a letter exuding indignation and befuddlement against the vicar, who, according to Leonardo, had been disrespectful towards him. Leonardo Giustinian was in Villanova, where he owned some lands. It was the day of the Madonna della Neve (August 5<sup>th</sup>), and he felt the obligation to go to mass. Perhaps not so diligently, one might suppose, since he showed up at the end of the ceremony: the vicar, however, had not waited for him, despite being aware of his presence in the area. The

\* Asv=Archivio di Stato di Venezia. This article, being the result of a preliminary survey on the intersections of political and religious discourses in Early Modern Europe, is to be considered just a first approach. I've limited the number of bibliographical reference in order to concentrate on the sources that I present here.

waiting would not have caused any trouble, Leonardo later maintained. And so he went to the sacristy and explained to the vicar – the tone is unclear, but one may guess he was annoyed – that he «showed disrespect in not waiting for me, and that in the future he should show me the respect that a gentleman deserves» (haveva poca creanza a non aspettarimi, et che dovesse in avvenire haver quel rispetto, che si deve a gentilhuomini»). In Leonardo's account, at first the vicar had tried to excuse himself, and then had begun to insult him. According to the vicar, things had gone differently, but this is not important now. The following day, Sunday, Leonardo arrived on time for mass, and the vicar started off his sermon with a praise of priesthood and an attack on all those who were not respectful towards the house of God and his ministers. Among other things, the vicar argued that eight words were necessary for the Virgin Mary to become impregnated with the Word «ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum», while to the priests just five were needed «hoc est enim Corpus meum» to make the Word «fall from heaven» («precipitare dal cielo») into the host. According to him, that would prove the superiority of priests – though sinners to the saints, the angels, and the Virgin Mary herself. Those who wronged a priest deserved divine indifference, and were not worthy to be assisted at deathbed. It was for this lack of respect that times were so dark and full of hardships. Gospel in hand, he demonstrated this in his lecture, referring in particular to the «prophecy» («profetia») contained in some specific verses (Luke 19:43-44):

et disse che quando Cristo nostro signore capitò in Hierusalem, et vidde quella città, pianse sopra di essa, dichiarando le parole del verbo, che sono: quia venient dies in te, et circundabunt te inimici tui in vallo, et circundabunt te, et coangustiabunt te undique et ad terram prosternent te, et filios tuos, qui in te sunt, et non relinquent in te lapidem super lapidem. Dichiarando questa Hierusalem essere la città di Venetia, et che sarà distrutta, et non vi resterà pietra sopra pietra, et restarano distrutti tutti li figliuoli di essa, ma non per altro, che per il poco rispetto che si porta al Divino Tempio, et alli divini ministri, et che Dio voglia che questa parola di Dio non si verifichi in questo tempo<sup>1</sup>.

This episode, not at all unusual, is relevant in many respects. One could discuss at length the conditions of rural clergy, or the expectations of the aristocracy, the relationship between clergy and the noble, or the different perceptions of time across different social

<sup>1</sup> Asv, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 72, letter of the podestà and captain of Treviso to the Council of the Ten, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1645.

classes, the devotional practices of Catholics in the Eighteenth century, and so forth. But beyond the motivations and issues at stake, I would like to emphasize how the rhetoric employed by the vicar can be traced back to a well-established strategy that made use of genre that was still very much alive at the time, namely prophecy.

As Lionel Laborie has recently argued, prophetic discourse remained a recognizable and popular element well into the Eighteenth century, enjoying extraordinary fortune from different points of view<sup>2</sup>. A lot has been written about prophecy, and it is not my aim here to provide a full account of it. Instead, I would like to discuss some other, more specific questions on the Republic of Venice – more in particular, the city of Venice – between the Seventeenth and Eighteenth century. In particular, I would like to emphasize how the «control» over the future was an element that caused overlapping and conflict not only between different social figures (chiefly, the Church and «popular culture»), but also between different spheres of knowledge (that of prophets and that of astrologers) and among observers whose trust in the possibility of knowing what would happen varied widely. As Peter Burke has written, «discussions of the future were not limited to ‘destiny’ or ‘prophecy’ but extended to more secular and pragmatic forms of ‘prediction’, ‘prognostication’ or ‘forecast’»<sup>3</sup>. This means that, in the early modern period, the speculation on the possibilities of reading the future began to involve different players who, with different techniques or innate abilities, considered themselves able to read the events to come.

What most deserves emphasis here is the rise in the early modern period of a number of pragmatic approaches to the future, reinforcing the idea of a secularization of thought in this period. ‘Secularization’, be it said, not in the strong sense of the replacement of religious by secular ideas but in the weaker sense of the coexistence of religious attitudes with an increasing variety of secular ones<sup>4</sup>.

The point is particularly relevant because it doesn’t only imply conflicts between disciplinary and institutional relationships, but also a series of hybridizations and new cultural products. More specifically, as I will try to show, with the spreading of political information, the

<sup>2</sup> L. Laborie, *Enlightening enthusiasm: prophecy and religious experience in early eighteenth-century England*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> P. Burke, *Foreword: The History of the Future, 1350–2000*, in A. Brady, E. Butterworth (eds.), *The Uses of the Future in Early Modern Europe*, Routledge, New York–London, 2010, p. XII.

<sup>4</sup> Ivi, p. XIV.

present and the future became subjects of discussion and, more importantly, prediction became a common exercise, almost immediately verifiable. The future became thus something to read and discuss, as much as the present and the past.

It is evident how much the early modern era was characterized by a general rise in the attention towards the future, which was seen as a somewhat controllable space. Implicitly, the attempt to know what would happen was part of a governmental strategy, aimed to give shape to events or redirect actions in accordance to them. It was part of commercial and familiar strategies, too. But «a pragmatic sense of a near future in a certain domain should not be confused with a general vision of a more distant future»<sup>5</sup>. What was probably shifting is that the speculation on the future began to be an independent and explicit activity, not linked to any kind of instrumentality. In other words, the future was becoming a subject of widespread discussion.

Different forces and factors contributed to this «secularization». In the following pages, I would like to devote my attention to some of these factors – only some of them –, to their coexistence and conflicts, in the Veneto area, and in a particular historical period like the Seventeenth and the Eighteenth century<sup>6</sup>.

In Veneto, prophets were a popular thing. Keeping the focus on the early modern era, during the Sixteenth century the region had witnessed the flourishing of wandering prophets who had revived

<sup>5</sup> Ivi, p. XVII.

<sup>6</sup> This essay is based on a thorough analysis of the documentation of the Holy Office and the State Inquisitors in Venice. The activity of these two is well-known thanks to a great amount of studies (for a preliminary survey, see F. Barbierato, *Venezia*, in A. Prosperi (a cura di), *Dizionario storico dell'Inquisizione*, Edizioni della Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa, 2011, vol. III, 1657-1660 and P. Preto, *I servizi segreti di Venezia*, il Saggiatore, Milano, 1994). Their activities tended to overlap more often than one might think, since they both pay much attention to public manifestations of dissent - both religious and political - as attacks to the social order. Therefore, it is necessary to study both documentations in parallel, and put them in perspective. All the references made here - both police investigations or diplomatic activities - are drawn from a systematic study of the collections of the Council of Ten, the Collegio Esposizioni Roma, and the Senato Deliberazioni Roma. Regarding prophecies and divinatory arts, it would be impossible to make even a brief account of all their manifestations. I don't discuss here, for instance, female prophets and other phenomena linked to the «affected sanctity», on which one might start with A. Jacobson Schutte, *Aspiring Saints: pretense of holiness, Inquisition, and gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618-1750*, London, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Md., 2011; A. Malena, *L'eresia dei perfetti. Inquisizione romana ed esperienze mistiche nel Seicento italiano*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 2003; E. Bottoni, *Scritture dell'anima. Esperienze religiose femminili nella Toscana del Settecento*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 2010.

Joachimite instances and adapted them to the massive social and political crisis of the time<sup>7</sup>. It was after all a rather common reaction to those social tensions. Despite the explicit stance of the Fifth Council of the Lateran against prophecies, and in a context where much attention had been given to the potential social, religious, and political drifts of prophetic discourse, apocalyptic preaching still remained successful in the subsequent centuries<sup>8</sup>. As we have seen, prophetic instances with a taste for the apocalyptic could find room in churches and pulpits, and, on a different level, people from any social class were fascinated by prophecies. The reasons for such a success are easily understandable, not to mention that apocalyptic instances were already covertly circulating. Apocalyptic production made use of a publicly expressed repertoire of ideas, and it grew thanks to the very occasions in which elements already present in everyday discourses were amplified. This movement was reinforced by people like Father Camillo Giacomuzzi, a secular priest who, around 1713, despite all regulations, would live on charity and wander around the *calli* of Venice, close to churches and convents. He would beg and preach the poverty of the Gospel and the return to the example of the Apostles, while often inserting apocalyptic elements in the discussions he had the chance to initiate with his interlocutors. As a matter of fact, the starting point in Camillo's view was quite controversial, and he was rather keen on debate: according to him, the prophecy of the Book of

<sup>7</sup> See for instance O. Niccoli, *Prophecy and people in Renaissance Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1990. In Veneto, many different prophetic voices were present, like, for instance, Guillaume Postel. On him and on prophetic trends in Venice, see M. Leathers Kuntz, *The Anointment of Dionisio. Prophecy and Politics in Renaissance Italy*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> The Council explicitly banned the indication of a precise date for the end of the world in prophetic interpretations (the *certum die iudicij*), or any prophecy on the Antichrist. The bibliography on the subject is immense. Some of the books that I have considered are: N. Cohn, *The pursuit of the Millennium. Revolutionary millenarians and mystical anarchists of the Middle Ages*, Revised and expanded ed., Maurice Temple Smith Ltd., London, 1970; C. Hill, *Antichrist in seventeenth-century England*, Oxford University Press, London, 1971; R.W. Scribner, *For the sake of simple folk. Popular propaganda for the German Reformation*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1994; E. Weber, *Apocalypses. Prophecies, Cults and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages*, Hutchinson, London, 1999; O. Niccoli, *Prophecy and people in Renaissance Italy*; R.L. Kagan, *Lucrecia's Dreams. Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990; B. McGinn, *Antichrist. Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000; *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, 4 vols., Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 2001; J.-R. Fanlo, A. Tournon (eds.), *Formes du millenarisme en Europe a l'aube des temps modernes*, Champion, Paris, 2001; N. Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 2001.

Revelation had come true, and the Church – the «whore» («meretrice») – had provided abundant proof of its own fallibility. A case in point was the sanctification of Pius V, «a triumph of the devil» («un trionfo [...] del diavolo»)⁹. To those who stopped by and talked with him, he would show some kind of paper, «in which many things were written, one of those being that the soul was mortal» («nella quale erano scritte molte cose, e tra le altre, che l'anima era mortale»)¹⁰.

Giacomuzzi's sermons were probably the results of a self-taught philosophy built around different sources, and reinforced by the confrontation, sometimes even harsh, with a heterogeneous clergy. His interlocutors of choice were usually friars and clerks in monasteries, whose profound ignorance he could expose, thus standing out for the audacity of his own mind. He attempted a similar approach with the Jesuits too, but was badly chased out. In 1715, in the cloister of the Girolamini of San Sebastiano, he enjoyed greater luck, and interestingly exchanged views and ideas with Friar Giovan Battista, a lecturer in theology. The friar approached Camillo once one of his brothers had informed him that he was a «millenarist» («millenario»). Friar Giovan Battista's opening line was curt and frank: «are you a millenarist?» («sei tu millenario?»). The question probably caught Camillo unawares, who replied immediately «in defense of the heresy of the millenarist» («in difesa dell'eresia de' millenari») and «that the devil was bound» («che il demonio era legato»). Giovan Battista,

informato della sudetta eresia de' millenarii, consistente in ciò che segue, cioè che doppo la resurretion de' morti, il regno di Christo doveva durare per mille anni in questo mondo, nel qual tempo Christo istesso assieme con li giusti e beati doveva godere ogni sorte di delicia corporale, anco per quello riguarda la voluptà della carne, doppo il qual tempo il regno sudetto doveva mancare, per lo che cominciai ad impugnarlo, adducendo io in favore di tal'eresia che essi millenarii si fondano su la repetitione di mille anni che si ha nell'Apocalisse, lo che io sciolsi immediatamente con dire che detti mille anni si devono intendere dell'eternità, e non altrimenti.

Camillo rebutted that the Antichrist had already come, «and that his followers were hidden» («e che i di lui seguaci erano nascosti»). According to Giovan Battista, «this was the millenarists' approach, who believe the pope to be the Antichrist; and not just one pope, but every pontiff» («questo era appunto il sentimento de' settarii, li quali

⁹ Pius V was sanctified by pope Clement XI in 1712.

¹⁰ Asv, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 136, trial against Father Camillo Giacomuzzi, voluntary testimony by Pietro Curti of July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1713.

pretendono che li pontefici siano l'anticristo, per il quale non s'intende un individuo solo, ma tutti li successori al pontificato»). Anyway, the «millenarist» believed he was in good company, because «God allowed many wise men to rise within the Church, so that they could properly humiliate it» («Iddio faceva sorgere nella Chiesa molti dottori, acciò che questi humiliassero la Chiesa medesima»). According to the friar, that was a gross error, since «the Church should be exalted as infallible in its dogmas, and must not be humiliated» («la Chiesa doveva bensì esser esaltata come infallibile ne' suoi dogmi, né doveva esser umiliata»). In such matter, Camillo argued, it was necessary to leave out all traditions and authoritative impositions: «one must talk with the Scriptures at hand» («bisognava parlare con la scrittura alla mano»). It is not surprising that the friar disagreed. And one must also bear in mind that the addressee of his report was the Holy Office, which might account for his heightened orthodoxy, as opposed to Giacomuzzi's damned «millenarianism.» This is why he reportedly replied «that the Scriptures were holy, and it was not up to any individual to give a personal interpretation, but one should rely on the interpretation of the doctors of the Church» («che la scrittura è santa che non toccava al spirito particolare d'alcuna persona dare l'interpretatione alla scrittura medesima, che era necessario rimettersi all'interpretatione de' dottori, admissa dalla Chiesa medesima»).

The explanation was useless. According to the friar, Camillo intended to «interpret the Scriptures as he pleased, and in saying thus he showed me some pages, and I read one in which, as far as I can recall, it was said and implied that 'therefore the devil is bound'» («interpretare la scrittura secondo il di lui sentimento, ed in questo mentre mi presentò alcune carte, e ne lessi una, la quale conteneva per quanto posso aricordarmi un passo di scrittura, da cui detta carta inferiva: ergo daemon est ligatus»). Giovan Battista thus felt the need to reply that, after the coming of Christ, the Devil was bound in the sense that he «did not have the same strength that he will have at the coming of the Antichrist, and I even added in Latin: if the devil is bound, how can you possibly walk? Meaning that he was a demon, and a minister of the devil» («non haveva più quelle forze che egli haverà al tempo dell'anticristo, anzi li soggiunsi in idioma latino: demon est ligatus, et tu ambulat? volendo io inferire che egli era un demonio, e un ministro del demonio»).

While walking towards the refectory, Camillo restated that «in the Church of God there were prophets» («nella Chiesa di Dio vi erano li profetti»), but Giovan Battista ruined Camillo's appetite by pointing out that

che era verissimo, mentre la profetia è un segno della vera Chiesa, e perché al modo di discorrere che faceva l'huomo stesso, mostrava di farsi credere egli per un profetta, io le dissi: tu forse ti aroghi d'esser profetta? Nel sentir ciò egli si alterò fieramente contro di me, tanto che invitato a mangiare non volse accettar l'invitto, e si partì con modo minaccioso dicendomi: videbis videbis [...] testor Deum, quod ille pater (parlando di me) est ignorantissimus<sup>11</sup>.

The definition of «most ignorant» («ignorantissimus») was pretty common among inquisitors, in reference to people like Camillo. According to the inquisitor of Verona, on the other hand, Vincenzo Candidi was simply «crazy» («matto»).

Towards the end of June of 1703, billboards publicizing an «exposition» by a certain Vincenzo Candidi on the Book of Revelation appeared in the streets of Venice<sup>12</sup>. On the night of June 28<sup>th</sup>, around four or five hundred people were in the school of San Teodoro, where the event was to take place. Many of them were priests and clergymen, among whom the most revered preachers and the lecturer in philosophy of the seminary dei Greci could also be found. The majority of the vast, heterogeneous audience was made up of «heretics, Lutherans and Calvinists, common people, and many Jews» («eretici, luterani e calvinisti, persone umili e molti hebrei»)<sup>13</sup>. At the time when the lecture was scheduled to begin, Candidi, a forty-year old man, dressed as a minister, and with a distinct accent from Romagna, showed up with «a desk and a chair» («tavolino e cadrega»). With the Scriptures on the desk, he began to lecture «by saying that everything he would have said was coming as an oracle of the Holy Spirit» («dicendo che quello che haverebbe detto, sarebbero tutti oracoli del Spirito Santo»). His aim was to correct the frequent errors of the Church Fathers, who either said very little or made many mistakes on the subject.

The first meeting ended up being just a vague introduction, in which he stirred the audience's curiosity by pointing out the recurrence of the number 7 in the Scriptures and in the Book of Revelation, which he quoted extensively<sup>14</sup>. He saved the rest for the following meetings. Wednesday, July 1<sup>st</sup>, at the same time, the audience was larger. Candidi showed up again, and this time

<sup>11</sup> Ivi, voluntary testimony by Friar Giovan Battista of July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1715.

<sup>12</sup> I have already considered the case of Candidi in another context in F. Barbierato, *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop. Inquisition, Forbidden Books and Unbelief in Early Modern Venice*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2012, pp. 230-236.

<sup>13</sup> Asv, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 130, trial against Vincenzo Candidi, voluntary testimony by Father Giuseppe Giuliani of July 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 1703.

<sup>14</sup> Ivi, testimony by Father Giuseppe Leoni of July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1703.



si fermò nella sua esposizione, che debba essere il settimo millenario, nel quale li homini saranno felici nel istesso modo fu Adamo avanti il peccato, e provò questo settimo millenario da passi della Scrittura, nella Genesi, ove si ha che Dio diede la benedittione solo al settimo giorno, volendo che fosse significato nel settimo giorno questo suo preteso millenario; fermò pure questo suo settimo millenario di felicità, del stato della natura, nel principio felice, nel mezzo infelice e nel fine fortunato e felice, e provò con tre passi della Scrittura, cioè di Nabucco, Iob e figlio prodigo, de' quali si ha il principio felice, un mezzo infelice et il fine felice e fortunato. Di più, in prova del suo preteso settimo millenario, disse e portò la figura delle sette phiale dell'Apocalisse, due de' quali se ne vuotavano nel sesto millenario, insinuando da questo che nel settimo non sarebbe stato da vuotarne, e così provava la felicità del suo settimo millenario.

These themes were mostly drawn from the Jewish tradition – particularly the identification of the day of Genesis with a period of one thousand years – , with adaptations to the later Joachimite apocalyptic tradition. Candidi made an extensive use of the prophetic books of the Scriptures, especially, but not limited to, Isaiah and the Book of Revelation. In order to appeal to his heterogeneous audience, he felt the need to use more popular references. For instance, when he cited the hymn «Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terram pax [...]» to argue how «this peace is suspended for the angels, and reserved by God for the seventh millenium» («sii questa pace, detta dagl'angeli sospesa, per il settimo millenario, riservata da Dio al settimo millenario»), he made reference also to the *Pater noster*, and its celebration of the kingdom of God. His intention was to demonstrate that «this kingdom is the seventh millenium, meaning 'your kingdom,' and that the requests 'forgive us our debts, and deliver us from sin' were all addressed for this seventh millennium of peace, to make it happen soon» («questo regno sii il settimo millenario, che s'intende il regnum tuum, e che li dimanda dimitte nobis debita nostra, et libera nos a malo, siano tutte dimande indirizzate a questo settimo millenario di felicità, perché succeda presto»)<sup>15</sup>. The «deliver us from sin» was to be understood as deliverance from the current evil, in view of the happiness of the seventh millennium.

In conclusion, according to Candidi's exposition, the world was to last for seven thousand years. Two thousand «in the law of nature, two in the written law, and two in the law of grace» («nella lege di natura, due nella lege scritta, e due nella lege di gratia»)<sup>16</sup>. The seventh millennium of peace, «abundant in everything, and without any pain»

<sup>15</sup> Ivi, voluntary testimony by Father Giuseppe Giuliani of July 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 1703.

<sup>16</sup> Ivi, testimony by Father Stefano Stefanini of August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1703.

(«abondante d'ogni cosa, senza fatica alcuna») would have been preceded by the sixth, with the arrival of the Antichrist. The seventh millennium would have been full of joy, as in the time of Adam before the fall. This happiness was not to be limited to the humans, «but also to vegetative and animal life, so that everything would be happy again in its state of innocence» («ma anco [a] vegetabili et animali, riportandosi alla felicità di tutte le cose, nel stato d'inocenza»)<sup>17</sup>. To make the audience understand him better, he said that this was like taking a house for rent, a matter «[similar to] that of an advance payment, when one rents a house for seven years; in this case, by having paid one year upfront, one does not pay the last year» («cioè di paga anticipata, in uno che prenda casa per sette anni, nel qual caso pagando per un anno anticipato, l'ultimo non paga»)<sup>18</sup>. The reference was to the Jewish Sabbatical year, «in which people did not work, the slaves were liberated, all debts forgiven, and it was a year of peace» («nel quale non si lavorava, li schiavi erano liberi, rimessi i debiti, et era anno di quiete»)<sup>19</sup>.

In the course of the third and fourth lectures (the last ones), on the following Saturday and Sunday, Candidi discussed the salvation of the just and the end of the world, with words taken quite literally from the Book of Revelation. Those references were after all easily recognizable for his audience. Overall, responses were conflicting: «many of the clergy listened to him and frowned, and some other secular men listened to him with approval» («molti [religiosi] lo sentivano con dispiacere, [...] et alcuni altri secolari lo sentivano con applauso»)<sup>20</sup>. His success however was undeniable, judging from the fact that many were unable to attend the last two meetings because of overcrowding<sup>21</sup>.

Candidi must have felt that something wasn't right. He hastened to leave the city and return to Sabbion, a town not far from Cologne Veneta, where he already had begun to lecture on the Book of Revelation and enjoyed a remarkable success. In Sabbion, he could benefit from the protection and hospitality of the priest Giovan Battista da Fano, who transcribed and circulated Candidi's teaching and prophecies. Particularly widespread was «a prophecy saying that in 1706 there will be famine, and in 1707 the plague, and he argued that on the basis of the Scriptures, and different prophetic books» («una profetia [...] che nel 1706 debba esser carestia, e del 1707 la peste, e

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, testimony by Father Giuseppe Leoni of July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1703.

<sup>18</sup> Ivi, voluntary testimony by Father Giuseppe Giuliani of July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1703.

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, testimony by Father Giuseppe Leoni of July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1703.

<sup>20</sup> Ivi, testimony by Friar Antonio da Venezia of July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1703.

<sup>21</sup> Ivi, testimony by Father Gabriele Ghilli of August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1703.

pretende provarlo con la Sacra Scrittura, e libri varii de' profetti)<sup>22</sup>. Thanks to this production, Candidi was well known in the area. Everybody knew he was not a priest, but a secular man. There were legends of his presence among the Jesuits, from whom he would have learned the necessary knowledge to speak publicly about the end of the world. He felt and behaved as «being the only one enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and destined to the truthful exposition of the Book of Revelation» («lui solo illuminato dallo Spirito Santo, [...] destinato alla veridica esplicatione dell'Apocalisse»). To this, he usually added a fierce critique against the Roman Papal court. According to him, popes and cardinals «had to be drawn and quartered by horses, after which the Church was to be moderated and perfected» («dovevano essere strascinati a coda di cavallo, dopo di che la Chiesa doveva essere moderata e ridotta a perfettione»).

From Sabbion he first went to Padua, then probably to Pesaro. He deemed it necessary to change his name to Antonio Olivieri. With a new identity and longer hair, Candidi eventually returned with confidence in the Veronese area<sup>23</sup>, where the local inquisitor was awaiting him, forewarned of his arrival thanks to a Venetian colleague. Candidi's prophetic abilities had not reckoned that Andrea de Vescovi, chancellor of Venice's Holy Office, would spend his vacation between Cologne and Sabbion<sup>24</sup>. He thus preferred to reroute towards Verona and, from there, vanish into thin air.

Candidi was surely one of those «half-saints» that were convinced God had chosen them to prophesy<sup>25</sup>. Even his prophecies used to follow a fairly standardized structure. However, among the most interesting points in his case are his efforts (both reported and written) to legitimate prophecy. Specifically, he treated this issue in a text that had circulated in manuscript form during the time of his preaching. In this text, datable around 1701, Candidi looked back at the past in the aim to demonstrate that prophecies did come true, thus using the past to legitimate his discourse on the future.

From the very beginning, the text lists the issues quite explicitly. According to Candidi, the wars that were raging in Europe had to be

<sup>22</sup> Ivi, testimony by Father Giacomo Maria Marieri, archpriest of the collegiate church of Santa Maria di Cologne of December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1705.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, testimony by Father Giacomo Brugini of December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1705.

<sup>24</sup> Ivi, testimony by Andrea de Vescovi of December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1705.

<sup>25</sup> «They say he's a half-saint, and that he is in the church many hours a day, and that the Lord inspired him to lecture on the Book of Revelation» («Mi vien detto che sia mezzo santo, e che sta in chiesa molte hore del giorno, e che il Signore l'ha ispirato di spiegar l'Apocalisse»). Ivi, letter of the Inquisitor of Verona to the Inquisitor of Venice of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1705.

taken as omens. There was no doubt that they «were happening to cause odd and strange consequences, both in the temporal and in the ecclesiastical realm, so that everybody be filled with awe» («non sian per recare singolarissimi parti di tali e tante novità, si nel temporale, come nell'ecclesiastico, che ogni vivente ne habii un sommo stupore»). Not even «those who are most knowledgeable and wise in politics can see deep inside these profound events» («i più politici e saggi ponno con la loro perspicacia totalmente penetrar la profondità degl'eventi»). These events had been foreseen since the beginning of the Seventeenth century «(thanks to a number of omens in the sky» («da varii segni celesti»). Interestingly, here, *Candidi* put next to each other «the politicians» – unfit, despite their perspicacity, to fully understand the present – to two other figures: astrologers and prophets. Those omens were in fact «properly understood by astrologers in the comets, meager conjunctions, and mostly in planets and solar eclipses; they deduced their prophecies from various methods of divination, built on revelations and saintly prophecies, and corroborated by the prophecies of the Holy Scriptures, especially those of the most divine Book of Revelation» («ben intesi dagli'astrologi nelle comete, congiuntioni magre, e massime de pianetti, et eclisi solari: dedotti parimente da varie scienze cognaturali, acquistate su la lettura delle revelationi, e vaticinii de santi, corroborati dall'intelligenza di molte predittioni della divina Scrittura, et in specie dall'altissima e divinissima profetia dell'Apocalisse»). Astrologers and prophets could understand what «the politicians» were unable to grasp, despite their obvious ability to interpret the future. This, because what was happening were not «ordinary events, but truthful dispositions of God, that transcend any common thing, and had be revealed by the saints many centuries ago, and are showed to us by means of signs in the sky, as I said before, and shall expound now» («ordinarii accidenti, ma vere dispositioni, et ordinationi di Dio, che sommamente trascendono ogni consueto, rivelate a santi molti secoli prima, e da cifre celesti unitamente indicateci, come di sopra ho detto e che in appresso farò conoscere»).

Because they transcended the ordinary, these events could not be understood with the means of «the politicians». It was necessary to pay attention to omens, stars, and the words of saints and prophets. As a matter of fact, «any erudite will know that each of the most important events has been revealed to the worthy beforehand, so that they might tell them to the rest of the world, both orally and in writing; and this knowledge of future things is commonly referred to as prophecy» («ben puol sapere ogn'erudito che l'opere divine di special consideration degne ogni tempo prima della loro effettuazione, sono rivelate all'anime pie, e da medesime preconizzate al mondo, sì in voce, come in scritto; e questa si fatta notitia de futuri

eventi comunemente chiamasi profetia»). God had also another way to make known «the great things he wants to do» («le cose grandi, che ella vuol fare») to the humans, that is by means of «stars, and celestial omens, through which the astrologers build their predictions, and show the future to us» («stelle, e segni celesti, mediante i quali gl'astrologi formano i loro pronostici, e c'additano i casi futuri»). On the basis of what he would witness – «the unheard-of movements that are now happening in the great machine of the world» («l'inauditi moti che hora sono in questa gran macchina del mondo») – Vincenzo was able to discern – and prove – without doubts how everything had been foreseen in prophecies and in the «predictions of the wise astrologers, as I shall demonstrate now» («predictioni de saggi astrologi, come hora dimostraro»).

After this introduction, Vincenzo exposed a lengthy argumentation and a series of prophecies, from Bartolomeo da Saluzzo and on, where it was demonstrated how the death of Charles II had been handsomely predicted in its negative outcomes. Charles II died on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1700, and his death gave way to a chain of wars known as the War of the Spanish Succession. The presence of battling armies in the Italian territory had been predicted also by Joachim of Fiore. Now, those armies were there, and not too far from the places where Vincenzo used to dwell: on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1701, the Habsburg and the French confronted each other in Villa Bartolomea, some twenty kilometers from Sabbion. But Vincenzo had found confirmation of Joachim's prophecy also in a «prophecy printed on a loose leaf (I don't know if it was printed in Venice or not), in chalcography, with different images and symbols of things to happen» («profetia impressa (non so se in Venetia) in un foglio volante, a stampa di rame, in cui sono diverse figure, e giroglifici di cose da venire»). Italy was depicted as a woman «sitting miserably on the ground, crying over her misfortunes and calamities» («sedente in terra tutta mesta, piangendo le sue disaventure e calamità»). From the mountains, three groups of animals, roosters, dogs, and bears were coming towards her «with great haste» («con gran impeto»). The interpretation was even too simple: «the meaning of such symbols is that the roosters are the French, the dogs are the Spanish, and the bears are the German» («la dichiarazione di tal figura geroglifica esprime che per i galli s'intendono i francesi, per li cani li spagnuoli, per gl'orsi li tedeschi»). There was room for Venice too – «the only daughter to remained untouched» («sola filia intacta manet») – and for a shepherd looking after his flock – the Pope, «friend of the friend» («amicus amiciis»). Not so well for Tuscany and Genoa, where «churches and belfries are turned upside down» («appariscono chiese e campanili rovesciati sotto sopra»), while

da un altro lato più ad alto apparisce un fiero dragone ad osservar gl'andamenti dele cose, figura del turco, con un motto che dice: discordia tandem principum eius vorabo, con altre cose misteriose, che hora onn mi sovengono, onde questa tal profetica figura si confronta del tutto con la sudetta, che è nel libro del Gioachino con esprimer meglio agl'occhi nostri l'horrenda tragedia che tra brevi momenti deve seguire in questo bel clima a suon di timpani, tamburi, trombe e strepitosi metalli, e piaccia al cielo che in quell'occorrenze non comparischi anco il turco in scena a dar vigorosa mano alle ruine del Christianesimo come detta figura accenna.

The subsequent extracts quoted by Candidi, especially those in rhyme, proved the veracity of those prophecies. And everything that those prophets said, according to Candidi, had been «predicted also by the wisest of astrologers» («anco da i più saggi astrologi [...] mirabilmente pronosticato»), thus strengthening the association between prophecy-astrology/astronomy. For him, Maurizio Fieschi had been the one who had interpreted the astral conjunctions in that way in his *De causis mutationum sectarum, imperiorum, et regnorum mundi*, published in Lyon in 1662. Of course, Fieschi also predicted that «heretics» would rejoin the Roman Church, and that Turks and other non-believers would at last submit to the true faith. Perhaps, he was overly optimistic. Nonetheless, he bore evidence that a golden age was indeed approaching: all those

mali insorti, e che tutta via insorgono, presto finiranno, e che gran novità nel temporale, e nello spirituale si miraranno, e doppo le sofferte pressure gran glorie e giubili sono dal cielo preparati a tutta la Christianità, onde devon tolerarsi con forte animo questi rigorosi giudicii superni, a nostra corretione, e castigo disposti, né ci deve parer tanto amara la vigilia dell'afflitioni se desideriamo pervenire alla festa delle seguenti somme consolationi che la divina misericordia presto ci concedi. Amen.

In other words, this was God's plan. And God wanted to make it known only to the few who could read in depth and understand its message of palingenesis and renewal. But it was this very trust in God's plan that was put under scrutiny by many, and not just among the higher spheres of speculation.

As a matter of fact, it is thoroughly evident how prophecies and astrological predictions were regarded with suspicion by some. After all, the «skeptical crisis» of the Seventeenth century was carrying away every area of knowledge, from history to religion<sup>26</sup>. But skepticism

<sup>26</sup> On these topics, see Dooley 1999 and Barbierato 2012.

could be displayed in varying ways. Some were contesting the entire package: Tommaso Zattoni from Treviso, for instance, railed against both prophecies in general and «those [...] by the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah» («i vaticine di Gieremie et Isai profeti») in particular. But he also denied the Holy Trinity, the incarnation, the sacraments, the Holy Spirit, the existence of demons, the eternity of infernal punishment, and so forth. The fact that God took on human flesh and «that he was crucified for the human race» («che per l'uomo habbia voluto farsi appiccare») was only a «fable» («favola») just as the Holy Scriptures were a «holy romance» («sacro romanzo»). Storytelling, or little more than that<sup>27</sup>. Some fifty years before, the Dominican Desiderio Bartoli would go around the streets of Vicenza talking of prophecies as «bullshit» («minchionarie»): «I have no clue who invented those stories, and he referred to the prophets... and said 'Look, those prophets saw those marvelous visions and monsters up in the air and now they want us to believe they signify things useful for our faith» («mi non so chi habbia inventà ste cose che mi no le so trovare, e parlò ancora de profeti ... e disse vardè che quei profeti che credevano quelle visioni e mostri per aria adesso vogliono che significhino cose della nostra fede»). It was better to look at the past and the present:

guardè quel coion che s'è fatto crocifigere che seguito l'ha! Perché siamo redotti qua in Italia quatro gatti. S'andiamo in Franza, tutti luterani. In Spagna, tutti hebrei. In Alemagna et quelle parti, tutti calvinisti, si che mi non so trovar dove siano questi christiani che seguitano questa nostra fede. Se la fosse bona sarebbe seguitata da tutti<sup>28</sup>.

The combinations were, after all, numerous, and obviously an instrumental usage of prediction techniques cannot be excluded. Although he was a strenuous denier of the Catholic afterlife and a strong supporter of sexual liberty, abbot Francesco Muselani, who was active in Venice between the 1670s and 1680s, earned his living by being an astrologer, foreseeing the future, and predicting whether women would give birth to males or females. A widespread rumor had it that he had «looked into the pope's life and predicted how long he would live, and was therefore persecuted» («fatto la natività al sommo

<sup>27</sup> Asv, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma Expulsis*, f. 22, meeting of December 14th, 1710 of the consultants Father Celso, Father Odoardo Maria and Antonio Sabini. The trial against Tommaso Zattoni had begun in 1704 in Treviso: Asv, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 131, trial against Tommaso Zattoni.

<sup>28</sup> Asv, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 129, trial against Friar Desiderio Bartoli, informative session of May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1660.

pontefice con predire quanto doveva campare, e perciò era perseguitato»<sup>29</sup>.

In a context where divine authority was doubted and questioned, it almost seemed like astrology could provide truthful answers, because they were not influenced by the interpretation of an ever-growingly doubted religious dimension, and linked, conversely, to a natural dimension, detached from any form of transcendence. It was no longer a matter of divine revelation that, as such, could be used for more or less virtuous goals. In this perspective, the critique of religions that was implicit in their being considered a «political imposture» carried away prophecy as well: prophets thus became false messiah that had used the phantasm of religion to subjugate and control people. All prophets were seen as imposters, and prophecies, for many, became associated with an empty, laughable discourse. Astrology, on the other hand, appeared to be able to offer something new and less subject to manipulation<sup>30</sup>.

However, one of the main problems here is to understand how astrology was intended and to what extent it could be distinguished from the myriad of techniques that both aimed to interpret the future and to give it a specific direction. Overlapping and confusion were constant, and the «institutional» definitions did not necessarily respond to ever-changing practical re-definitions: despite their different origins, their boundaries appeared to be thin and extraordinarily permeable<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Asv, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 123, trial against Francesco Muselani, spontaneous testimony of Antonia Valotti, July 14th 1682, cc. 1<sup>r-v</sup>. For the problems that such predictions could create, besides the famous Campanella case, also see that of astrologer Morandi in B. Dooley, *Morandi's Last Prophecy and the End of Renaissance Politics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> On the themes of the horoscope of religions and the imposture of religions, the point of departure remains G. Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini. La teoria dell'impostura delle religioni nel Seicento italiano*, La Nuova Italia Firenze, 1983. On the Venetian case, see F. Barbierato, *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop*. On the horoscope of Christ, see O. Pompeo Faracovi, *Gli oroscopi di Cristo*, Marsilio, Venezia, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> P. Rossi, *La magia naturale nel Rinascimento*, UTET, Torino, 1989. It is impossible to provide an exhaustive bibliography. See, just as a starting point: W. Eamon, *Astrology and society*, in B. Dooley (ed.), *A Companion to Astrology in the Renaissance*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2014, pp. 141-191 and S. Vanden Broecke, *Astrology and Politics*, ivi, pp. 193-232; *Astrologia e magia nel Rinascimento. Teorie, pratiche, condanne*. Atti del Convegno del Centro di Alti Studi Euaristos Forlì, 21-22 maggio 2013, Edizioni Il Campano, Pisa, 2014; G. Ernst, G. Giglioni (a cura di), *Il linguaggio dei cieli. Astri e simboli nel Rinascimento*, Carocci, Roma, 2012; E. Casali, *Le spie del cielo*, Einaudi, Torino, 2003; Ead., *Astrologia 'cristiana' e nuova scienza. Pronostici astrologici sulle comete (1577-1618)*, in D. Tessicini and P.J. Boner (eds.), *Celestial novelties on the eve of the scientific revolution 1540-1630*, Olschki, Firenze, 2013, pp. 105-131. On the political uses of astrology: M. Azzolini, *The Duke and the Stars: Astrology and Politics in Renaissance Milan*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 2013 and the extensive bibliography therein contained.



How should we inscribe, in this general picture, the widespread habit (especially in Venice) of betting on governmental elections? Everywhere – from the ghetto to the Doge’s Palace, and even the church at San Marco – there were places where one could bet on the sex of unborn children, on the outcome of a conflict, on the election of a pope, or the succession to a throne. One reported to «astrologers» who usually mastered an array of techniques. An especially important case is that of the game of the «pythia» which consisted in identifying the names of the noblemen who would be elected to the various political charges. The money invested in this game was often conspicuous, a business that could really be so successful only in Venice, where the administrative system was elective. To verify the results, small paper sheets (*consegi* or *brogetti*) carrying election outcomes and essential information on the various offices were used. These papers, which were tools of the trade for the noblemen, widely circulated in all social orders thanks to this business<sup>32</sup>.

The case of the «pythia» involved both seeing the future and creating the conditions – possibly the night before betting – required to dream of the elected nobleman, or to find out his name by means of other techniques, such as materially seeing the future in a water jug or in the hands of little girls. As told, among others, by Maddalena Fabriotto, a woman had once placed a candle in her hand and, after having had her recite a nursery rhyme, had told her to look at her free hand: «and looking at my hand, I thought I saw many gentlemen, some seated, some walking, some extracting spheres and showing them; some were dressed in red ... and some in black» («et io et io guardandomi mi pareva veder assai zentl’homeni, chi sentati, chi caminavano, altri cavavano balle<sup>33</sup>, e le mostravano, ve n’erano vestiti di rosso ... e di nero»)<sup>34</sup>. Of course, one could not expect unambiguous responses from entities, like demons and evil spirits, who were ambiguous by definition. Skill was necessary to interpret what they communicated: if, once interrogated, they answered, for instance, «maggio, e porta», one had to «infer that among those who would be elected were Signor Contarini ‘porta di ferro’ – as ‘porta’ implies – and someone from house

<sup>32</sup> D. Raines, *Office seeking, broglio, and the pocket political guidebooks in Cinquecento and Seicento Venice*, «Studi veneziani», XXII (1991), pp. 137-194.

<sup>33</sup> One of the phases of the complex Venetian elective system (a somewhat hybrid procedure, halfway between election and raffle), saw noblemen extract a wax ball - «balla» - out of a container. If they extracted a golden ball they would have been picked during the raffle.

<sup>34</sup> Asv, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 119, file on Giovanni Balbi, trial against Elena greca, spontaneous testimony of Maddalena Fabriotto on January 30th, 1676. Maddalena was 10 years old.

Magno – as that word ‘maggio’ implies» («inferire che andassero in elezione il signor Contarini porta di ferro, insinuato con quella parola porta, et uno di casa Magno, insinuato per quella parola maggio»)<sup>35</sup>.

Everyone enjoyed the freedom to interpret as they deemed fit, but in order to at least gain the material to interpret, it was necessary to establish a contact with the otherworld, or to influence the course of events. One needed techniques, data, words, and languages at one’s disposal. But, sticking to the astrological field, the slip between prophecy and astrology was obviously constant. Let us consider, for instance, the words spoken one night in the Church of the Incurabili by a nobleman of the Barbarigo family before two strangers. He informed them that some letters from Paris had arrived to the Senate «revealing that the prophecy had been made on the Duke of Mantua, which stated he should die within the year» («che portano discorsi come sia stata fatta la profetia al sudetto duca di Mantova, e ritrovato che lui debba morire in questo anno»). The account of the episode proceeded seamlessly with an articulate political and military analysis of the Duke’s weaponry<sup>36</sup>.

In political discourse, «making the prophecy» («fare la profezia») on someone meant explicitly to establish one’s death. And, naturally, the interest towards the lives – and deaths – of princes was very high indeed. On December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1679 abbot Giovanni Chierichelli – who followed the Roman court on behalf of the Venetian State Inquisitors – wrote regarding the illness of Pope Innocent XI that at court it was believed that he would not have survived long, «there being also predictions by astrologers that say that *post decem et octo moretur sine filiis*, since eighteen ‘cappelli’ (Cardinals) are already lacking, following the death of Cardinal Barberini last Sunday» («essendovi anche predizioni d’astrologi che dicono che post decem et octo moretur sine filiis, essendovi già la mancanza di dieci otto cappelli, per la morte de cardinale Barberino seguita domenica passata»)<sup>37</sup>. Chierichelli would continue to follow the pope’s illness (quite a long one, since Innocent XI only died in 1689) and send reports that displayed fluctuations between the world of astrologers, that of interpreters of omens and that of prophets. On November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1680 he stated that «the sighting of a comet, observed from the palace of Monte Cavallo, is said to be a sign of great havoc: it was seen right before the death of pope Alexander VII,

<sup>35</sup> Asv, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 116, trial against Simone Petrachino, Camilla Borghi e Marietta Marchiora, testimony of Girolamo Gabrielli, April 21st, 1671, c. 32<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Asv, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, account by Camillo Badoer, June 15th, 1679.

<sup>37</sup> Asv, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 585, account of December 16th, 1679.

but others believe that, following the same principle, it might indicate the impending death of the ill Grand Duke of Tuscany («motivo di grandi accidenti si dice che possa portare la comparsa di una cometa osservata al palazzo di Monte Cavallo, nell'istessa maniera che fu veduta a punto inanzi la morte del pontefice Alessandro settimo, benché altri credino, per l'istessa causa, che possa seguir la morte del Granduca di Toscana che tutta via s'attrova ammalato»)<sup>38</sup>. It was the same comet that led Pierre Bayle to write the *Pensées sur la comète* and that worried the Venetian spy Camillo Badoer, who, on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1680 reported to the State Inquisitors that in Turin

un prete che fa l'astrologo, per haver publicato discorso vaticinante guerra, sopra quella cometa che si lascia veder alla mettà della notte sopra una piazza di frontiera, con terrore di quelle genti, essendo comparsa tutta fuocho in figura d'una cometa, accerchiata di sangue, che di ciò è verissimo, per altri avisi che questi incontrano.

This was so true that, as he wrote a few days later, also in Venice some noblemen had climbed on San Marco's bell tower at night, with a telescope, to observe it, «a thing that drives the populace wild» («cosa che fa tumultuar la plebe»)<sup>39</sup>.

Omens and interpretations quickly followed one another. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of December, 1680 Chierichelli continued to send news about the pope's illness:

Sopra la vita e la morte della Santità sua sono usciti molti discorsi scritti per la corte, colle osservazioni della cometa che si è veduta qui, discorrendo da periti di simili materie, che nel prossimo venturo mese di maggio possa esser sede vacante, et a luglio la creatione di nuovo papa, e ciò fu anche confermato da un frate apostata, che nella morte del cardinale Albritio disse che presto doveva mancare altro cardinale, e che egli ne haverebbe dato il nome scritto in carta sigillata, come seguì, e si verificò nella morte del signor cardinale Caraffa; ma questo frate fatto ricercare con diligenza da Palazzo è stato con ogni cautela mandato fuori di Roma dal signor ambasciatore di Spagna<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> The fate of the Medici dynasty worried greatly the international observers, also because of Savonarola's prophecy, whose echo was still very much heard. Look, for instance, at the words of Francesco Fioroni, informer for the Venetian government in Rome, in 1699: «May God give comfort to these Highnesses [the Medici], because there are prophecies by Father Savonarola that state that this duke will have no succession» («Dio sia quello che consoli queste altezze [riferendosi ai Medici], perché si ha dalle profetie del padre Savonarola, che la linea deve mancare in questo duca»). Asv, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 929, letter by Francesco Ficononi, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1699.

<sup>39</sup> Asv, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, accounts by Camillo Badoer, January 19<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 1680.

<sup>40</sup> Asv, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 585, account of December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1680.

Diverse practitioners were thus at work: «experts in such subjects» («periti di simili materie») observed the comet, and their observations could find confirmation from the prophets that read the future. A few weeks later he reported that the lateness of the Cardinal d'Etré's arrival from Paris was alternatively interpreted as an omen or as a deliberate choice: it was believed, in fact, that

che possa essere a causa delle predizioni d'astrologi, che a marzo debba succedere sede vacante, per la cometa di nuovo apparsa [...] di straordinaria grandezza, quale ha risoluto vedere sua beatitudine istessa, che più della di lui morte si dice che tema di pestilenze e di guerre, et egli intanto è stato veduto in questi giorni con ottima salute<sup>41</sup>.

The frequency of reports concerning prophecies, or omens in general, within the political-diplomatic practice of the Ancien Régime is an interesting and well-known phenomenon. It is apparent that prophecies (or rather, their use) often contained a metadiscourse. When Ranuccio de Baschi, the Venetian spy in Rome, wrote to the State Inquisitors that «it is commonly thought that these whirls of Mars are fading out, since the motor planets seem to be well-disposed to quiet» («Si discorre comunemente da ognuno che questi turbini di Marte siano per quietarsi vedendosi ne' pianeti motori molta dispositione alla quiete»), the astrological reference was little more than a metaphor where the planets were actually the states involved in the Thirty Years' War<sup>42</sup>. But being aware that the diffusion of a prophetic text was by itself a less than neutral political act does not mean that the content of said prophecies was considered unimportant with regards to the effectiveness of the prevision. Behind the diffusion of a prophecy, political messages or attempts at manipulation could be hidden. But it often happened that an actual interest in the prophecy prevailed: in the multifaceted world of diplomacy (ambassadors, secretaries, informants, spies and so forth), prophecy was indeed highly regarded<sup>43</sup>. If only for their consequences

<sup>41</sup> Ivi, account datable between late December 1680 and early January 1681.

<sup>42</sup> Asv, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 550, account by Ranuccio de' Baschi, March 5th, 1642.

<sup>43</sup> This happened most often when there were events that attracted a collective participation, like, for instance, the Siege of Vienna in the Summer of 1683. At the nunciature in Venice, in 1683, some importance was given to the prophecy of Jesuit Marcin Strzoda (Martinus Stredonius, 1587-1649). Asv, *Inquisitori di stato*, b. 662, account of August 22nd, 1683. Besides, this prophecy was widely and attentively read in many other milieus, and circulated extensively: N. Arnù, *Presagio dell'imminente rovina, e caduta dell'impero ottomano, delle future vittorie, e prosperi successi della christianità. Dato alla luce sotto gli felicissimi auspicii della Lega Santa*, Brigonci, Venezia, 1686, p. 34.

on the public sphere: as the Venetian ambassador in Paris Lorenzo Tiepolo wrote in 1707 to the supreme political body in Venice, the Council of Ten:

Universalmente si presaggiscono disgratie alla Francia, avanzandosi le stesse sopra la vita del re. Discorsi appoggiati sopra oroscopi, fatti in questo tempo, e ritrovati pianetti. Invigilano le perquisitioni più severe, ma sono argini troppo deboli alla pienezza delle dessiminationi: è vero, che non si deve fede a tal sorte di prognostici, ma è anco vero, che non può esser trascurata una voce così universale<sup>44</sup>.

This was part of a wider, painstaking attention to the reading and interpretation of omens. The last Duke of Mantua, Ferdinando Carlo Gonzaga, and his collaborators were extremely skilled in reading events as omens. In February 1684, for instance, they couldn't help but notice that their departure from Venice had been marked by a number of omens: to begin with, a dog had barked continuously throughout dinner «and terrified everyone greatly» («e faceva molto terrore»), but an accurate search notwithstanding, nobody had managed to find out where the animal was. Twice had the Duke's glass broken inexplicably while placed upon the table, «which never happened again in Venice» («cosa che mai più doppo in Venetia fu accaduta»). And right when the Duke was leaving the table, a messenger from Mantua had arrived to announce that the Duchess' waiting room had collapsed, along with substantial portions of the palace. Lastly, «the fourth bad omen was that His Highness got onto his *peota* at the twenty-third hour and left with the candles still lit on the *peota* itself» («per quarto segno cativo sua altezza entrò in peota alle hore sudette vinti tre, e parti con le candelle accese sopra la tavola della medesima peota»). In possible awe of the meaning of these events, the Duke then ordered that the Venetian residence be abandoned, and its contents be transferred elsewhere. Also an acute diplomat like the French Betuelle «greatly pondered about these omens and wrote them all down in great wonder» («sopra li sudetti augurii molto ne fece considerationi e le nottò tutte restando molto sospeso»), telling everything to the French ambassador<sup>45</sup>.

In such context, the predictive abilities became connected and contrasted with a recent (at least in scale) development in continental culture: the increasingly widespread diffusion of a system of «public»

<sup>44</sup> Asv, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti segrete*, b. 54, letter of April 1st, 1707.

<sup>45</sup> Asv, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, account by Camillo Badoer, February 24th, 1684.

information that made a growing number of individuals aware of what was going on in spatially distant contexts.

Naturally, this was a context-related dimension: the ruling groups of cities and, even more, capitals, had long enjoyed stable information webs. But during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, these webs had grown to include an impressive number of individuals from every social group. When written information was not directly available, oral mediation allowed people that had until then been excluded from a wider perception of the world to finally be able to follow what was going on in distant contexts.

Although substantial research in the last twenty years has been devoted to this issue, the consequences of such change still need to be assessed<sup>46</sup>. For instance, it is difficult to envision the results of such a profound transformation in the perception of the world, in the re-definition of one's own position, in making sense of diversity vis-à-vis familiarity. And, above all, it is difficult to give an account of how the idea of time became perceived and articulated. No doubt, the awareness grew of being part of a world where, at the same time and in distant or unknown places, other people were living. From this, the perception of the present as duration rather than instant came to rise.

News had not, of course, displaced history as a subject of discussion. But it had definitively established the present as a zone of activity, as narratable as the past, but distinguishable from it, and thereby constructed a public space within which events could enjoy their ephemeral life before slipping into the maw of history.<sup>47</sup>

In this context, the sense of the past and that of the present overlapped in the perspective of foreseeing the future, since «news stands on the cusp between past and future; it arouses recollection, anticipation, expectation, or apprehension». Nevertheless, their per-

<sup>46</sup> On the theme of information in the early modern period much has been written. For their relevance to the Italian, and specifically Venetian, context, I signal M. Infelise, *Prima dei giornali. Alle origini della pubblica informazione*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2002, and F. De Vivo, *Patrizi, informatori, barbieri. Politica e comunicazione a Venezia*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2012. On the theme of public discussions and on the circular relationship between orality and writing in Venice, R. Salzberg, *Ephemeral city. Cheap print and urban culture in Renaissance Venice*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2014 and the bibliography therein.

<sup>47</sup> D. Woolf, *News, History and the Construction of the Present in Early Modern England*, in B. Dooley, S.A. Baron (eds.), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*, Routledge, London-New York, 2001, p. 98.

ception varies because the communication means have varied<sup>48</sup>. The very meaning of «contemporary» (and, inevitably, the «present») was re-defined on the technological level. A 17<sup>th</sup>-century Venetian reading a gazette coming from London would have faced «news» pertaining to some 40 days prior, and therefore to the past<sup>49</sup>.

This was an important challenge for rulers, who had to take decisions involving the future based on weeks-old information, and with the awareness of being unable to give specific directions to their representatives (either ambassadors or residents) if not after a considerable amount of time. Therefore, the perception of the present upon which the idea of the future was constructed was marked by a thoroughly different sense of the «contemporary» from our own<sup>50</sup>. The problem of the chronological positioning of the past or the present in a specific point is crucial. In this matter, calendars were certainly of no help (Europe had many, and very different among them), as was the habit to begin counting the hours starting from different moments: if Northern Europeans used to start counting 12 hours after midday, Italians preferred counting 24 hours after sundown. The perception of time was, therefore, tied to codes and patterns detached from our own<sup>51</sup>. Just as time «past» was connected to different dimensions. As Ottavia Niccoli remarked, the flow and measure of time in the early modern world was, above all, established by the dimension of the sacred. An «elastic and subjective» time that can hardly be associated with our contemporary ideas and that, consequently, is difficult to grasp<sup>52</sup>.

But let us go back to Venice. Here, the information market was possibly the richest in Italy, together with the Roman one. The Republic found it hard to «create» news because its international presence was becoming weaker. Nonetheless, the city was still in a central position

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, p. 81. See also P. Hunter, 'New and new things'. *Contemporaneity and the early English novel*, «Critical Enquiry», 14, (1988), pp. 493-515.

<sup>49</sup> Still useful are the data provided by P. Sardella, *Nouvelles et spéculations à Venise au début du XVI siècle*, A. Colin, Paris, 1948 and employed by F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, A. Colin, Paris, 1949.

<sup>50</sup> On these issues see B. Dooley, *Introduction*, in B. Dooley (ed), *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> On this aspect see the same *Introduction*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>52</sup> O. Niccoli, *La vita religiosa nell'Italia moderna. Secoli XV-XVIII*, Carocci, Roma, 2008, p. 16. See also E.P. Thompson, *Time, Work-discipline, and industrial capitalism*, «Past and Present», 38 (1967), pp. 56-97; J.-C. Schmitt, *Temps, folklore et politique au XIIIe siècle. A propos de deux récits de Walter Map, «De nugis curialium» I 9 et IV 33*, in J.-C. Schmitt, *Le corps, les rites, les rêves, le temps. Essay d'anthropologie médiévale*, Gallimard, Paris, 2001, pp. 360-396.

for the gathering, distribution and consumption of news in Europe. News got here via the dispatches addressed to the ambassadors that resided in the city, as well as through the gazettes that were read by aristocrats, bourgeois, and populace, thanks to the web of the Jewish communities. A complex distribution system serviced the city, and became thicker in some sections (Rialto, the area of the embassies in the Cannareggio *sestiere*, the Doge's Palace and so forth). And then there were more contingent reasons that attracted attention. Between the 1640s and 1690s the wars against the Turks (wars that alternatively saw Venice as heavily defeated and triumphantly victorious) had brought about the production of an unprecedented, massive body of information: reports, gazettes, papers drowned a city that was anxiously waiting to find out what was going on in the battlefields<sup>53</sup>. First the siege of Candia, and then that of Vienna, were the hotspots where the future of Christianity seemed to be at risk, and where Venetian affairs entwined with the global. Alongside the news, there was an increase in the occasions, places, and willingness to discuss them. The materials taken from papers, gazettes, pamphlets, oral or written reports, became the foundation of a large-scale vision that left room for interpretation. The relationship was changing between politics – or its representations – and marginal publics, represented by increasingly larger and socially uneven groups of subjects excluded from the administration of power, but that wanted and felt entitled to talk about politics and the destiny of kingdoms. The outcome of such change consisted of discussions that were not merely exercises in military strategy, but rather lessons in diplomatic technique, *Raison d'Etat*, or, more simply, displays of predictive abilities.

The whole situation was however complicated, first and foremost, by the fact that gazettes and journals were only a portion of the materials upon which a sort of popular education in state matters was being built: journals were in the good company of satirical works, verse compositions, pamphlets, collections and so forth<sup>54</sup>. And, furthermore,

<sup>53</sup> M. Infelise, *La guerra, le nuove, i curiosi. I giornali militari negli anni della Lega contro il Turco (1683-1690)*, in A. Bilotto, P. Del Negro, C. Mozzarelli (a cura di), *I Farnese: corti, guerra e nobiltà in antico regime*, Bulzoni, Roma, 1997, pp. 321-348.

<sup>54</sup> M. Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*, p. 157. See an example in Asv, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 650, account of the informer at the nunciature, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1692. Generally, rhyme writings were quite successful: an ignominious composition against a «rettore» from Verona, in 1695, after having been posted on walls and enjoyed good manuscript circulation, had «become [...] subject for the entertainment of children in singing, which was and still is publicly done» («passata [...] ad esser trattenimento de' fanciulli nel canto, che pubblicamente si è fatto, e si fa»). In the same period, other songs of similar taste are attested: Asv, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 122, part of December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1695.



by the fact that the oral transmission of news was an established practice in a city like Venice. To gain information, it was enough to walk down the street or enter a shop and listen: just like orations, stories, and songs, gazettes were read aloud in places where people from all social classes gathered, and one could hear them being discussed at length<sup>55</sup>. One would get in touch with news through an oral mediation that increased a single copy's possibilities to reach a potentially large audience, also made up of illiterates. The very professionals in the information business were well aware of the possibility to extend the news beyond the written page. The compilers of gazettes, reports, and stories generally belonged to the world of oral culture as much as they did the written: they knew, like the authors of songs or satirical poems, that their job was destined to a type of communication that relied indistinctly upon both orality and writing<sup>56</sup>. It often happened that children would go around «yelling stories and reports in the Piazza» («gridando historie e relationi per la Piazza»). Generally, sales took place both in shops and by going around «yelling them in the Piazza and Rialto» («criandole per Piazza et a Rialto»). When a piece of news was then revealed to be «rancida» (that is, contradicted by events, or publicly retracted), the value of the printed page went down: in those cases, the sellers didn't stop the sales, but a price was fixed that could cover costs, and the unsold copies would be distributed to the «little boys» («putelli») that sold them around town «yelling them» («criandole»)<sup>57</sup>. As Brendan Dooley wrote,

<sup>55</sup> «Songs, histories, gazettes, accounts, orations» («Le canzoni, le storie, le gazzette, le relazioni, orazioni») were part of «those [...] minor printings of less than three sheets that circulate among the plebs and the riotous populace; those are sung, recounted, and sold down the street and in the Piazza» («quelle [...] piccole stampe che non arrivano ai tre fogli e che girano per le mani della plebe e del rivoltoso minuto popolo, le quali si cantano, e si raccontano, e si vendono per le strade e per la Piazza»): Asv, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 361, anonymous writing datable to the Eighteenth century. It also happened that the news-writers themselves gave oral previews of the news they got: Asv, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 640, anonymous account, December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1704.

<sup>56</sup> B. Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism. Experience and Doubt in Early Modern Culture*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1999, p. 15. Often an interesting circular mechanism ensued, allowing the rumour produced in discussions and gathered in public spaces became part of new written accounts, able, in turn, to influence the construction and structure of discourses. On the complex dynamics in which rumour worked, see A. Fox, *Rumour, News and Popular Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England*, «Historical Journal», 40 (1997), pp. 597-620.

<sup>57</sup> Asv, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 366, trial against Giovanni Batti, testimony of Giovanni, September 11th, 1684.

the thirst for news was slaked from a variety of fountainheads, among them conversation, official communication, eavesdropping, public debate, acting, private correspondence, social gatherings, observation, and the printed and written word. All human faculties were involved in the absorption and digestion of news<sup>58</sup>.

Information was thus redoubled incessantly in speeches and public spaces, in private conversations as much as in gatherings or «bozzoli». Groups in which one would find oneself taking interest in distant affairs that bore no consequence upon one's immediate destiny, but that, at the same time, provided material for discussion, allowing to display one's abilities in analysis, prevision, and the broadness of one's knowledge. Of course, the political climate would in turn contribute strongly to the way in which a piece of news would be received and what impact it would produce on public opinion. These effects were generally predictable. Nevertheless, that of the news-enthusiasts was an extravagant phenomenon that attracted fierce satire throughout Europe<sup>59</sup>.

Besides questions concerning the fate of political discussion, there is one other aspect that bears analyzing. Because of its lack of duration, this kind of information continuously called for a re-definition of one's own perspective, expectations and ideas originating from the very analysis of the events. According to Montesquieu, «as soon as they are done with the present, [the news-people] tackle the future and, preceding Providence, ward it off regarding all of man's enterprises». They preceded Providence by trying to disclose the future. The project was plainly insane. But this was the kingdom of prevision inhabited by the «political astrologers», as they were aptly called<sup>60</sup>. The vocabulary of politics often went back to the esoteric, indicating a hidden, secret knowledge. Rather than «astrologers», the Marquis of Argens preferred the definition of «cabalistes»:

Comme ils n'ont pas l'air assez riche pour qu'on croye qu'ils dépendent beaucoup en Couriers, on le figureroit presque, si l'on ajoutoit foi à leurs discours, qu'ils ont des Esprits aériens à leurs gages, et qu'il y a une étroite liaison entr'eux et les Cabalistes<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> B. Dooley, *Introduction*, p. 17.

<sup>59</sup> See M. Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*.

<sup>60</sup> Asv, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 603, account by Giuseppe Antonio Gasparini, May 22nd, 1700.

<sup>61</sup> J.-B. De Boyer D'Argens, *Lettres morales et critiques sur les differens etats, et les diverses occupations des hommes*, Michel Charles Le Cene, Amsterdam, 1737, pp. 97-98.

The consequences and repercussions were quite substantial: above all, expectations were raised and the coming of news was anxiously awaited, since people wanted to know how things would turn out to be, thus verifying the accuracy of one's own analysis. Secondly, one would become comfortable (even unconsciously) with the idea that truth was momentary and elusive. A great contribution to this aspect was provided by the existence of a multitude of sources. Every day, papers would arrive that often reported the same events in outstandingly different ways. The sellers themselves often signalled the discrepancies and indicate the different versions «so that readers may pick whatever they please» («affinché i lettori si appiglino a quello che loro piacerà»)<sup>62</sup>. After all, the world of the «news-person» was undoubtedly complex: besides the sources' lack of uniformity and credibility, he had to deal with a multifaceted reality. For instance, he had to take into account the new lenses of the political telescope, and the new layers of reality that they created. In the case of wars, for instance, one had to be ready to grasp subtleties: instead of simple alternatives – like being neutral or taking sides for one or the other – a vast spectrum of intermediate possibilities became common. Of course, a country could either enter war or disapprove it, but it could also support (in a more or less secretive way) one or both sides, or even just some of the members or one side, and so forth. Composing the mosaic was the job of the enthusiast, who was constantly looking to modulate plausibility and show off his critical finesse<sup>63</sup>.

The habit of dealing with partial, usually less than truthful accounts led to doubts about the general truth.

The rise of the news-sheet in the seventeenth century made the unreliability of reports of the «facts» more obvious to a much greater number of people than ever before, since rival and discrepant accounts of the same events – battles for example – arrived in major cities on the same day and could therefore easily be compared and superimposed<sup>64</sup>.

With papers, news, and diverse accounts of the events, the individual did not face objective, definitive realities, but rather

<sup>62</sup> Specifically, it was an armed conflict between French and Spaniards that took place in Valenza, in 1656. The episode is reported by M. Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*, p. 93.

<sup>63</sup> On the new possibilities favoured by dissimulation as a technique influenced by the new scientific methodology, see R. Villari, *Elogio della dissimulazione. La lotta politica nel Seicento*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1987, pp. 20-21.

<sup>64</sup> P. Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge. From Gutenberg to Diderot*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 202.

narrations of facts destined to be short-lived. These were representations of reality that were subject to constant changes and therefore could not take a definite shape. The reality provided by gazette-writers was a work-in-progress that forced readers to constantly re-define their own positions towards a reality whose representation was ever-shifting. The real news-writer was always conscious about dates, and the tension raised by the latest news was one of the most important objects of satire:

si quelqu'un devant lui s'avisait de tirer de sa poche une lettre, dans laquelle il fut fait mention d'une victoire, par exemple, remportée en Hongrie sur les turcs, il s'écrioit aussitôt à pleine tête: la date? Et si on lui répondoit, du quatorze de ce mois, il ne manquoit de repliquer: cela est vieux; nous avons des nouvelles du vingt qui assurent le contraire<sup>65</sup>.

This way, throughout Europe, the readers of works of information began to submit traditional methods of scrutiny in matters of politics and finance to a new kind of analysis.<sup>66</sup> Readers of news thus became used to accepting that truth had a duration, an expiration date usually embodied by the next gazette or account. Once they had a new piece at their disposal, it was then a matter of putting order into the events, of modifying the framework where they had been previously inserted. But this also implied a degree of freedom in exercising their own predictive abilities to fill the gaps of uncertainty. In this way, the probability that an event might or might not happen became an increasingly important aspect<sup>67</sup>. Reading the past, observing the present, and foreseeing the future were entwined and inseparable for those who dealt with «world events».

But the future pertained to God, not men. It was a «high» knowledge because it involved God's will, and religious knowledge could not be investigated or questioned. The constant fluctuation between the politics of the *arcana imperii* and religion, between the political and religious discourse, was the extreme result of the perception of the

<sup>65</sup> A.-R. Le Sage, *La valise trouvée*, in A.-R. Le Sage, *Oeuvres*, Renouard, Paris, 1821, vol. XII, 211. The text was written around 1740.

<sup>66</sup> B. Dooley, *News and Doubt in Early Modern Culture*, in B. Dooley, S.A. Baron (eds), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*, Routledge, London–New York, 2001, p. 277 and Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism*.

<sup>67</sup> David Wootton maintained that the growingly popular theory of probability – thanks to Arnaud, Nicole and Pascal – led to the substitution of Christian certainties with deductions founded on probability: D. Wootton, *New histories of atheism*, in M. Hunter, D. Wootton (eds.), *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, pp. 50-53.

two spheres as «different aspects of reality [...] different – but connected among themselves or, more precisely, reciprocally reinforced by way of analogy» («aspetti diversi della realtà [...] diversi, ma tra loro connessi – o, più precisamente, reciprocamente rafforzati per via di analogia»). A knowledge that, alongside that of the mysteries of nature, could not be investigated: «A separate sphere cosmic, religious, and political – which can be defined as «high» and is forbidden to human knowledge» («Un ambito separato, cosmico religioso e politico, definibile come «alto», e vietato alla conoscenza umana»<sup>68</sup>. The decrease in separation between high and low was astounding: it is no coincidence that, in the aftermath of the Reformation, the agreement between the two powers in the effort to repress that kind of knowledge was in response to «that proliferation of forms of undisciplined curiosity, which dared to deal with «high» things, questioning the ecclesiastical authority and making the political tremble» («quel pullulare di forme di una curiosità indisciplinata, che osava affrontare le cose «alte» mettendo in discussione l'autorità ecclesiastica e facendo tremare quella politica»)<sup>69</sup>. The condemnation of prophecy ratified in the Fifth Council of the Lateran was then followed by that of astrology, which found its highest point in Sixtus V's bull *Coeli et Terrae* (1586). In 1663, the English royal censor Roger L'Estrange voiced a widespread opinion by declaring that political information was dangerous because it made «the multitude too familiar with the actions and counsels of their superior»<sup>70</sup>.

As Cardinal Sforza Pallavicino warned in 1644, attempts at prediction were inherently dangerous, since trying to predict the behavior of rulers was as reckless as it was trying to predict God's will<sup>71</sup>. It was like «voler entrare ne' gabinetti della Provvidenza», as Ludovico Antonio Muratori would write a few decades later, almost paradoxically applying political language to the sphere of theology<sup>72</sup>.

<sup>68</sup> C. Ginzburg, *L'alto e il basso. Il tema della conoscenza proibita nel Cinquecento e Seicento*, in C. Ginzburg, *Miti emblematici. Morfologia e storia*, Einaudi, Torino, 1992, pp. 110-111.

<sup>69</sup> A. Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza. Inquisitori, confessori, missionari*, Einaudi, Torino, 1996, p. 65.

<sup>70</sup> C. Hill (1985), *Censorship and English Literature*, in *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill*, The Harvester Press, Brighton, I, p. 30.

<sup>71</sup> S. Pallavicino, *Del bene. Libri quattro*, appresso gli eredi di Francesco Corbelletti, Roma, 1644, pp. 346-347.

<sup>72</sup> L. A. Muratori, *Epistolario*, 8 vols., Società Tipografica Modenese, Modena, 1901-1922, vol. III, p. 925, letter 800, to Carlo Borromeo Arese at the Isole Borromeo, dated Modena, June 2nd, 1707.

The future was in the hands of God, and any effort to know it – especially when applied to the political sphere – was a reckless, rebellious act. There was no point in trying to be «astrologers», because Providence had «secret wheels and master strokes, that could easily stun and fool those smart brains who believe they are on top of the times to come» («delle ruote segrete e dei colpi maestri, da fare rimanere facilmente storditi e beffati que' gran cervelli, che credono di stare a cavaliere sopra i tempi avvenire»). The «times to come» («tempi avvenire») were no thing for men<sup>73</sup>.

<sup>73</sup> Ivi, vol. III, p. 965, letter 850, to Carlo Borromeo Arese in Milano, dated Modena April 12th, 1708 and vol. IV, pp. 1450-1451, letter 1252, to Carlo Borromeo Arese in Napoli, dated Modena March, 18th 1712.