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UNIQUENESS OF MEDICI PATRONAGE AND GALILEO'S ACHIEVEMENT

Abstract:

When Galileo observed the satellites of Jupiter in 1610, he first named them as “Cosimo’s Stars” in honour of Cosimo de’ Medici. The dedication was a well planned move since Galileo wanted to have Medici patrons. Surely any researcher or artisan at the time would like to have wealthy patrons, and Medicis surely did have plenty of resources. But the choice of Galileo was not motivated simply by the wealth of Medicis.

I will try to show that the Medici family had a tradition of patronage much different than any other wealthy family. I will demonstrate the uniqueness of Medici patronage by comparing their support of Michelangelo and the French kings’ patronage of Leonardo. Medici patronage was for novelty even when it is not to their interest.

Galileo, an admirer of Michelangelo and former teacher to Cosimo de’ Medici, knew this all too well. Hence his approach to the Medicis. Even when Galileo finally seemed to achieve his aim and was invited to Tuscany to hold the title “Grand Duke’s Mathematician” he refused it. The status of mathematics at the time was not a very prestigious one. Mathematicians were considered as people making useful calculations without any authority on truth. Truth was the jurisdiction of a philosopher. Yet Galileo was not looking for the title of philosopher either, for his great novelty laid in his view that mathematics may give us truth. At the end he convinced Cosimo to offer him the unusual title of “Grand Duke’s Mathematician and Philosopher.”

That Galileo’s choice was ideal for his aims and also very farsighted became evident after his famous conflict with the Church. Despite the fact that Medicis had absolutely no interest in defending Galileo they not only saved his life but also protected his legacy.

In this presentation I will try to show that Galileo’s achievement was not simply about the motions of heavenly bodies, but it was about a new conception of knowledge. And that only Medici patronage could have provided the means for him.

Keywords:

Medicis, Galileo, Michelangelo, Cultural Novelty.