

Final paper:

Christopher Scheiner's *Rosa Ursina*

Rosa Ursina was to be Scheiner's magnum opus, a book that he had worked continuously on since the beginning of the sunspot controversy. He poured his heart and soul into it, fully expecting the work to not only show that Galileo was wrong about heliocentricity but also prove that Scheiner had priority of discovery of sunspots, vindicating his years of hard work. Things did not go the way that he planned. The book took over four years to produce, and with its expensive engravings of sunspots, elaborate title, frontispiece, and portrait, Scheiner found himself deep in debt. Upon publication, the book was practically unsalable, and it received a chilly reception from the members of the Republic of Letters. What was to be Scheiner's greatest work turned out to be his greatest failure, and to this day, the work remains relatively unknown.

Scheiner was forced to acquire outside funding¹ for the book, as the Jesuit order refused to subsidize its publication. Cardinal Alessandro Orsini (1592-1626) undertook the project, but soon dropped it. His reasons for doing so are unknown, but it is interesting to note that Alessandro was also a patron of Galileo's, to whom Galileo had dedicated his work on the tides. Alessandro's brother, Paolo Jordano II, Duke of Bracciano (1591-1656) eventually picked up the project, and printed it at his private press at Castle Bracciano. The Orsini brothers, who were both raised at the Medici court in

¹ This was not unusual, and in fact, as Martha Baldwin discusses in her excellent article "Pious Ambition: Natural Philosophy and the Jesuit Quest for the Patronage of Printed Books in the Seventeenth Century,"

Florence, were active patrons of the arts and the sciences, Paolo Jordano II in particular was an avid supporter of astronomy, and had his own observatory built at Bracciano. The Orsini brothers, who had very close ties to the Medici, lived under the shadow of a family scandal; their grandfather, Paolo Jordano I (1541-1585) famously murdered their grandmother Isabella de' Medici (Cosimo II's sister), so that he could be with Vittoria Acoramboni, whose husband he had assassinated so that he could marry her.² They additionally had close ties to the Hapsburgs, as their mother Claudia de' Medici married Leopold V after the death of their father. It is likely that Scheiner secured the patronage of the Orsini via his relationship with Leopold V.

Scheiner's relationship with Paolo Jordano II eventually turned sour, much like his relationship with Alessandro. Alessandro had advanced 900 *scudi* for *Rosa Ursina*, an enormous sum (Galileo's yearly salary, which was very generous, was 1000 *scudi*), and once the printing of the book was completed, Jordano demanded that Scheiner either reimburse the full amount, or furnish him with a corresponding number of copies to be sold. In a letter to Leopold V, Scheiner writes that Jordano was displeased with his demand of 300 copies of the book, and in the end he was only able to keep 30 copies. He gave most of these away, and was only able to take 13 copies with him to Germany.³ To make matters worse, *Rosa Ursina* was an utter commercial failure, and the book was virtually unsalable in Rome. Four years after its publication, Jordano II was still hounding Scheiner to be reimbursed for the cost of printing.⁴ In a letter to Father Vitelleschi written in September of 1634, Scheiner stated that "There is no chance of

² The play *The White Devil*, written in 1612 by John Webster, was based upon his life and affairs.

³ Daxecker, pp. 70-71

⁴ Daxecker, p. 82

selling the books, and the Duke is unwilling to take any number back,”⁵ he laments that he should have given the copies to the Duke when he had asked for them, saving himself and his order a lot of trouble. He then writes: “It is impossible to raise the necessary amount of money exclusively by selling the remaining copies.”⁶ The book was a total loss. Dejected and deeply in debt, Scheiner was forced to liquidate his collection of precious instruments and books to help cover the cost of the debt, which he was never able to pay off completely. He spent the rest of his days in poverty, consumed with his quest for revenge against Galileo.

The title of *Rosa Ursina* translates in English as: “The Rose of the Orsini, that is, the Sun ... dedicated to Paolo Jordano II of Orsini, Duke of Bracciano.” In his letter of dedication, Scheiner explains the Rose theme, stating that in ancient India, roses and rose oil were gifts bestowed upon the highest of nobility; as such, he gives this rose, the sun, to the Orsini, the highest of nobles. This was excessive flattery; the Orsini knew that they were not the highest, nor even the wealthiest nobles in Europe; while it was common to write flowery dedications to one’s patron, such an excessive dedication must have surely been a slight embarrassment to the Orsini. With the title, Scheiner attempts to take a page from Galileo’s playbook by naming a celestial body after his patron. Of course, his attempt was not nearly as successful as Galileo’s, as simply copying Galileo’s naming convention was not the same as *discovering* a new celestial being and then naming it for someone. The sun already had a name, so his attempt at dedication was less than impressive; the sun was not really Scheiner’s to give, while the moons of Jupiter were indeed Galileo’s to give.

⁵ Daxecker, p. 82

⁶ Daxecker, p. 83

Placed next to a copy of *Sidereus Nuncius*, *Rosa Ursina* presents an imposing figure, completely dwarfing Galileo's book; the dedication materials are elaborate to the point of being gaudy, and it is clear that an obscene amount of money was spent producing the book, especially for a Jesuit who had taken a vow of poverty. The title page (figures 1 & 2) features an elaborate engraved vignette depicting three bears in a tripartite cave overgrown with rose vines. On either side of the cave grows a rose bush. The level of detail is such that if one looks closely, one can see lizards, snakes and snails amongst the rose vines at the foot of the cave. The bear in the top cave holds a compass in his right paw, and his left paw a sheet of paper, onto which is projected a ray from the sun (a crude camera obscura). At the bear's foot is a telescope, and to his left is another astronomical instrument. Below him is written "Rosa custos."⁷ In the lower left cave is a mother bear suckling two cubs, and below her is written "constans industria format."⁸ In the lower right cave is a sleeping bear sucking on its paw, under which is written "ipse alimenta mihi."⁹ While at first glance, this vignette seems to be celebrating the Orsini family, with its overbearing theme of bears and roses, however, upon closer inspection, the vignette on the title-page reveals itself to be a brazen piece of self-promotion. With the first bear, Scheiner is of course alluding to the technique he used to make the sunspot observations, his numerous inventions of scientific instruments, and his skill in using them. With the "rosa custos," Scheiner fashions himself as a guardian of the sun, as he believed that he rather than Galileo understood the truth of the nature of sunspots, and envisioned himself as a protector of the geocentric system, protecting the sun from being moved from its rightful position in the universe. With the second bear and its motto

⁷ [Guardian of the Rose]

⁸ [Continuous hard work will prevail]

⁹ [I am my own nourishment]

“constans industria format,” Scheiner makes allusion to his hard work, which he maintained was plagiarized by Galileo; he believed that while Galileo may have profited from this thus far, in the end his hard work would pay off, and Galileo would suffer. With the third bear, and its motto “ipse alimenta mihi,” Scheiner alludes to the *Lincei* who excluded him from membership, showing that he doesn’t need their patronage, and that he is able to get his works published without their help. Scheiner’s allusions to these things demonstrate his insecurities, and lack of confidence in his abilities; his need to point out his accomplishments shows that he felt he was not recognized for them by his peers, and the fact that he alludes to his exclusion from the *Lincei* demonstrates just how much this exclusion really bothered him. His allusion to the fact that his hard work will pay off demonstrates just how much his life was consumed by his rivalry with Galileo.

Perhaps the most over the top element of the book is the frontispiece (figure 3), which is elaborately engraved. It features a portrait of Saint Bathildis (ca. 626-680) a member of the Orsini family¹⁰ above a rose shaped sun, who looks upward towards the divine light emblazoned with the emblem of the Society of Jesus. Scheiner’s incorporation of St. Bathildis appears to be an attempt to deflect the shame of the murder committed by their grandfather, and an attempt to reinforce the holiness and piety of the Orsini family in spite of this. Scheiner’s name appears to the left of the divine light, while Paolo Jordano’s appears to the right. Oddly, the names are symmetrically placed, of the same size font and at the same height; one would expect the patron’s name to appear in a position higher than the author’s name, and in a larger font. This is not surprising considering the fact that Scheiner was on numerous occasions admonished by his

¹⁰ St. Bathildis was wife of Chlodwig II, and Queen of the Franks.

superiors for not staying in his place, and for constantly trying to move up socially. Below the portrait of St. Bathildis is a banner that reads “Ursinae caelum praefert insignia gentis,”¹¹ again alluding to the importance of the Orsini family, whose coat of arms appears at the bottom of the frontispiece. The most interesting elements are two of the four vignettes which appear in the clouds. The upper left vignette features a hand holding an open book, with the words “Auctoris sacra,”¹² which alludes to the fact that Scheiner had God and the Church on his side. The upper right vignette features an eye illuminated by the Holy Spirit, which observes a hand drawing sunspots, with the word “Ratio,”¹³ suggesting that Scheiner was guided by divine inspiration when making his observations of sunspots. Scheiner is also surely alluding to Galileo’s statement in the dedication of *Sidereus Nuncius* “Indeed, it appears that the Maker of the Stars himself . . . admonished me to call these new planets by the illustrious name of Your Highness before all others,”¹⁴ as if to say, “God speaks to *me* too.”

While the title of the book, title page, and frontispiece would have been adequate dedications on their own, Scheiner saw fit to additionally include an engraved portrait (figure 4) of Paolo Jordano II encircled by a ring of twelve suns and twelve roses, each sun with a different positioning of sunspots. The whole is framed by four sets of rose vines. Above it appears a sundial motto from Virgil’s *Georgics*, “Sol tibi signa dabit.”¹⁵ Below the portrait appears an ode to the Orsini:

[Translation]: Hail, chief of the Ursine race! Olympus applauds thee; Phoebus and thy bear sun to serve thee. If others have carved their name and their fame on the silent rocks, ‘twas Fate had aided them. But thy emblem and race fixed in the

¹¹ [The sky displays the symbol of the Orsini family].

¹² [Holy authority].

¹³ [Reason].

¹⁴ Galilei, Galileo; [Trans] Van Helden, Albert *Sidereus Nuncius*, p. 30

¹⁵ [The sun will give you signs]

celestial realms ; God fixed the Ursine orb in place. Well done, hero of noble race.
Earth too narrow for thy triumphs, though seek'st the stars. The author to
Maecenas¹⁶.

This poem makes reference to Gaius Cilnius Maecenas (70 BC – c. 8 BC), friend and ally of Octavian (who of course, became the first emperor of Rome as Julius Caesar Augustus). Maecenas was most famous for being a generous patron of the arts, and here, Scheiner compares Paolo Jordano to him, another over the top dedication. Directly below this appears a verse from Book 1 of Virgil's *Georgics*; an odd choice, seeing that Scheiner repeatedly asserts his priority of discovery of sunspots. The poem makes mention of sunspots, which of course undermines Scheiner's priority:

[Translation]: The Sun too, both rising and when he sets in the waves, will give signs. The surest signs attend the Sun, both those which he brings in the morning, and those when the stars arise. When he shall checker his newborn face with spots...]¹⁷

With the title, title page, frontispiece, letter of dedication, and portrait, it seems that Scheiner was extremely thorough in his dedication but he did not stop there; on every single engraved plate, he included two elaborate rose emblems, flanking the emblem of the Society of Jesus (figure 5). The fact that Scheiner created such a physically elaborate dedication shows he knew that the contents of the book would not be dedication enough for his patrons; what he was offering them then was a dedication in the form of an *object*, much in the way a painting of a sculpture acted as a dedication to a patron. This is really the main difference between the dedication of *Sidereus Nuncius*, and something that Scheiner was not able to replicate. Galileo was able to offer something completely intangible, and thus, the aesthetics of the book were not as important, as the book itself

¹⁶ Curtis, H.D. "Rosa Ursina Sive Sol. A Retrospective." In: *Popular Astronomy*, Vol. 20, 1912, p. 563.

¹⁷ Campbell, Malcom; Virgilius, Marcus Publius *The Works of Virgil; Translated into English Prose with the Latin Text and Order of Construction in the Same Page*. New York: Printed for E. Duyckinck, 1803.

was not really being offered as a *physical* dedication. While Scheiner attempted to offer a dedication of an intangible object, he must have know that his dedication did not quite live up to that of Galileo's, and thus, additionally offered his book as a *physical* object of dedication.

ROSA URSINA

SIVE

SOL

EX ADMIRANDO FACVLARVM
& Macularum suarum Phænomeno VARIVS,

NEQNON

Circa centrum suum & axem fixum ab occasu in ortum annua,
circaq. alium axem mobilem ab ortu in occasum conuersione
quasi menstrua, super polos proprios, Libris quatuor
MOBILIS ostensus,

A

CHRISTOPHORO SCHEINER
GERMANO SVEVO, E SOCIETATE IESV.

AD PAVLVM IORDANVM II.
VRSINVM BRACCIANI DVCEM.



BRACCIANI,
Apud Andream Phæum Typographum Ducalem.

Impressio cepta Anno 1626. finita vero 1630. Id. Iunij. Cum licentia superiorum.

Figure 1: Title page for *Rosa Ursina*



Figure 2: Close up of vignette from title page of *Rosa Ursina*

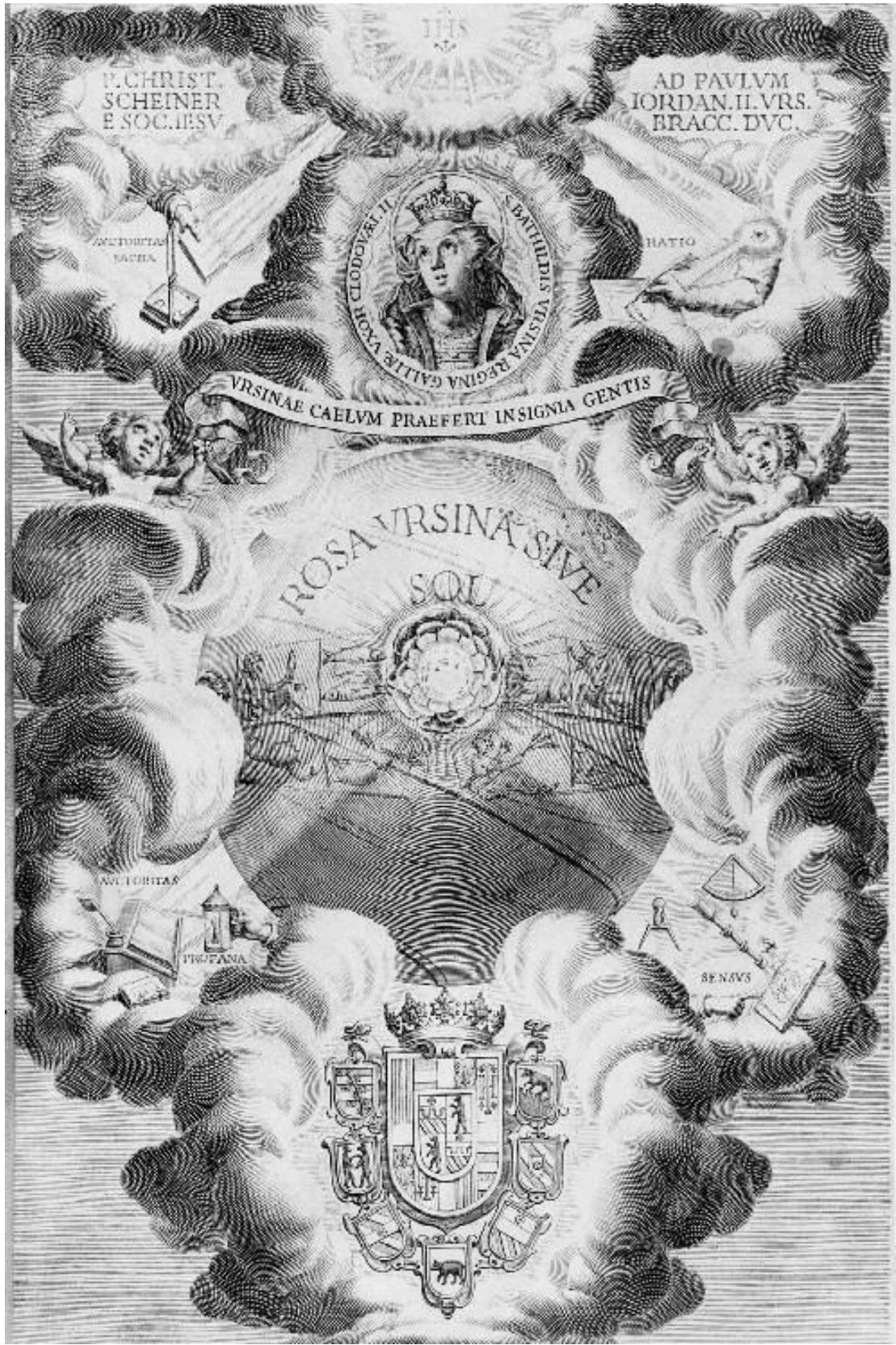


Figure 3: Engraved frontispiece in *Rosa Ursina*

SOL TIBI SIGNA
DABIT.

Virg. 1. Georg.



VR SINAE Dux Gentis Aue; Tibi plaudit Olympus;
Currit in obsequium Phœbus & Vrsa tuum.
Signa genusq. suum mutis incidere faxis
Si potuere alij, Fors ea magna fuit.
SIGNA Genusq. tuum Cælestibus indita fulgent
Orbibus; VRSINOS fixit in axe Deus.
Maeste animi virtute Heros, genus Alte. Trophæis
Quod nimis arcta tuis est humus astra petis.

MOECENATI Auctor.

*Sol quoque & exoriens & cum se condet in undas
SIGNA dabit. Solem certissima SIGNA sequuntur,
Et qua mane refert, & qua surgentibus astris;
(Quando) nascentem MACVLIS variauerit ortum.
Virg. lib. 1. Georg.*

Figure 4: Engraved Portrait of Paolo Jordano II, Duke of Bracciano

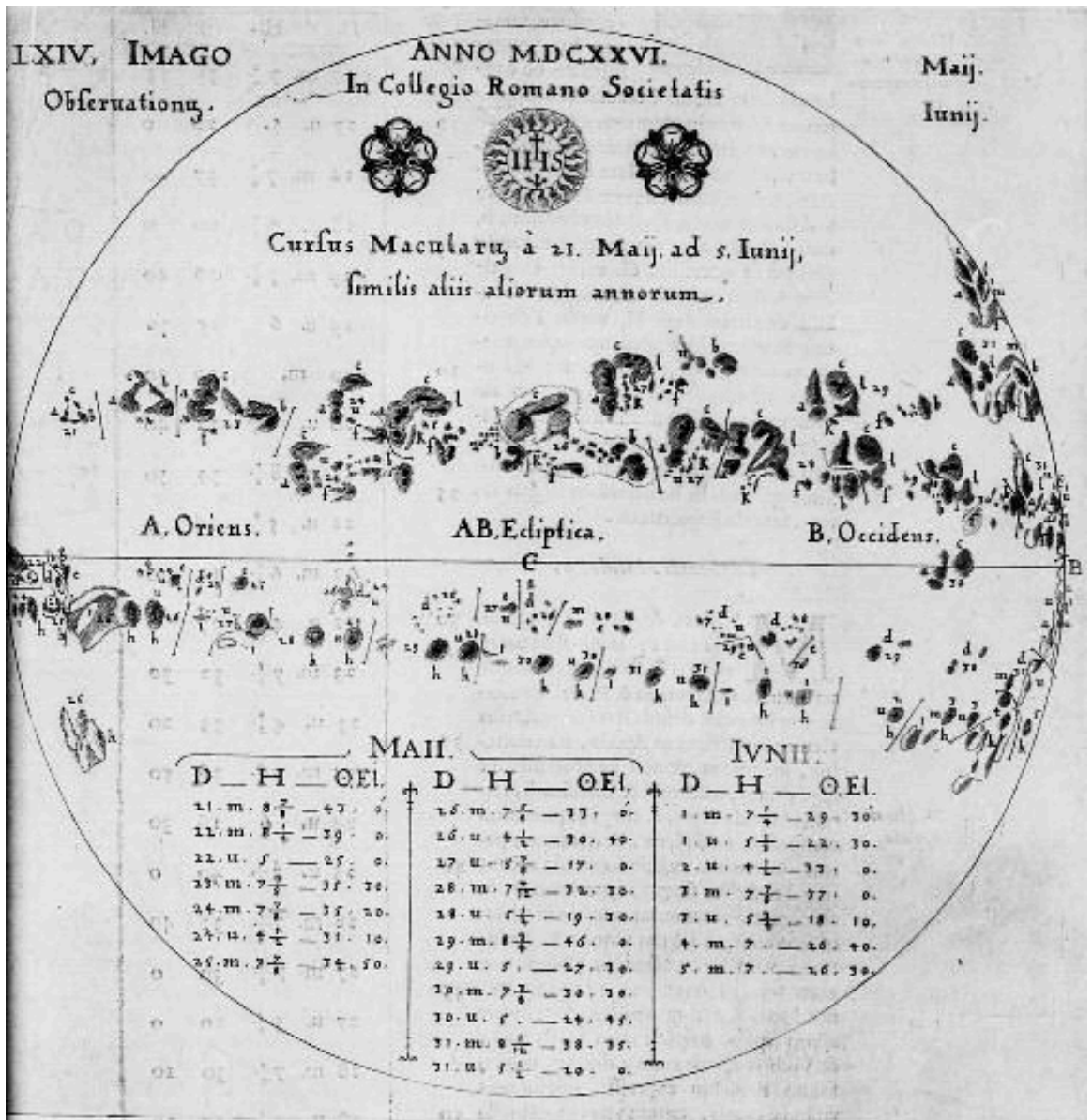


Figure 5: Engraved plate depicting sunspots from *Rosa Ursina*



A first edition of *Rosa Ursina*, belonging to the rare bookseller Jonathan Hill

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