

Tayra M.C. Lanuza-Navarro *, Ana Cecilia Ávalos-Flores **

Astrological prophecies and the Inquisition in the Iberian World

(1) Introduction

The Holy Tribunal of the Inquisition was one of the distinctive institutions of the Iberian World during the seventeenth century. Inquisitorial activity not only affected religious issues, but also intellectual-scientific matters. Science and other disciplines related to it at the time, such as astrology, were thus not studied and practiced in the same way in those territories where the Tribunal was active as in those where it was not. One may ask, for instance, whether astrology declined faster or more drastically in catholic countries where the Inquisition persecuted those who practiced judicial astrology and censored books on the subject. This presentation will aim to shed some light on the question of the role of religion, and more specifically of the Catholic Church, in certain case-studies related to the practice of astrology. By analysing the Inquisitorial attitude towards different kind of astrological predictions it is possible to understand, partly, how deeply this institution was concerned with the problem of forbidden knowledge in general, and astrological practice in particular.

A fundamental characteristic of early-modern astrology was the distinction made between natural and judicial astrology.¹ Natural astrology was concerned with the general character of planetary influences in agriculture and medicine, and the calculation of natural phenomena, such as the measurement of time, prediction of tides and eclipses, and meteorological phenomena. Judicial astrology was the art of judging the influences of the stars and planets upon human affairs. The latter, and not the former, was officially prohibited by the Catholic Church during the Counter-Reformation. The eighteenth session of the Council of Trent established that bishops should suppress astrological prediction in their dioceses and ensure the destruction of all books that cultivated the art. Sixtus V's Papal Bull against judicial astrology was one of the main instruments of the Catholic Church in its battle against the practice of astrology (and other forms of divination) and the possession of books on the subject. The initial premise was that God had reserved unto Himself all knowledge of future events and therefore neither humans nor the demons were able to forecast future events. When trying to investigate the future, often with the aid of demons, astrologers were actually defying God. Thus judicial astrology acquired the status of heresy and the whole inquisitorial apparatus was authorized to operate against it.

An analysis of the inquisitorial trials of men who were accused of being astrologers, specifically “judiciary astrologers”, makes it possible to understand the actual activity of the Spanish Inquisition against the practice of astrology in Spain during the seventeenth century. Despite the Instructions published by the Inquisition, and the historiographical tradition which asserts that this institution actively persecuted the discipline, we argue that the persecution of practitioners of astrology was not a systematic one, and further more that the persecution of astrologers was not even one of the main concerns of the Inquisition during this century. To support this, we identify accusations against specific astrologers, and the predictions that caused certain astrological texts to be forbidden or censored. In their reports about these texts, the censors exposed the reasons why an astrological work was considered as “containing things against the Holy Faith”. A closer look at these reports makes it clear that there was no real consensus on which kinds of prophecy were forbidden and which were not. Condemnation depended

* Bath Spa University, UK and Institut d'Història de la Ciència i Documentació “López Piñero” CSIC, Valencia, Spain; email: tayra.lanuza@uv.es.

** European University Institute, Firenze, Italy, email: ana.avalos@eui.eu.

¹ For the Catholic Church this distinction had its origin in the writings of the Fathers and councils. The most solid fundament was in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, II, 2, q. 95, art. 5.

somehow on the personal attitude of the censors. Licit and forbidden practices were always mixed and were never defined clearly enough to allow such a consensus to be reached.

Prophecy is a particular kind of prediction of future events which was traditionally regarded as one of the 'spiritual gifts' or 'supernatural virtues.'² However, in the seventeenth century it was not only seen as a form of divine inspiration, but also as a *rational* or *scientific* way of understanding the regularities of nature and predicting future events. Prophecy

and its successful interpretation actually relied upon a lawful, and hence predictable, course of events in nature. Future contingents could be foreseen only if some lawful principle was operating in the history of the cosmos. Prophecy, and scientific prediction, it might be said, would then rely equally upon a determined or mechanistic order of things.³

In theory, astrology was a uniquely rigorous predictive discipline, which in method and substance had nothing to do with prophecy. In practice, however, some astrologers used both

the most rigorous astrological data and the most bizarre and unrepeatable portents as revealing divine plans for the years to come. In their cases, the astrologer evidently claimed to have and use not only a particularly sharp set of intellectual tools, but also a particularly rich personal gift of insight into the mysteries ahead.⁴

In this paper, we will use the term *prophecy* in the sense of a *rational* way of knowing the future by interpreting the language of the stars, and not in the sense of divine inspiration.

(2) The Inquisition in Spain

The Catholic Church, inheriting from its origins a Jewish anti-magical tradition and moreover being opposed, in its medieval process of evangelisation, against the old superstitious beliefs began a very long war to censure many beliefs and practices that could be generally classified as magical, disapproving particularly of divinatory techniques. When the mentioned Bull by Pope Sixtus V was published in 1586, forbidding the practice of some aspects of astrology, the Church already had a long trajectory of prohibitions related to magic and divination, even though none of them got in the way of 'scientific astrology'. The Index committee of the Roman Inquisition had forbidden every book on magic, sorcery and any divinatory art on December 4th 1563, following the instructions of the Council of Trent. But this did not cause any disappearance of books on astrology and astrological prognostications. Many of the printed texts on astrology were published as approved by the ecclesiastical authorities, and many members of the Church practiced the art and wrote astrological works.

The ecclesiastic authorities of the time mainly followed the practical posture of Saint Thomas Aquinas: astrology was legitimate as long as it did not deny the human free will. However, though this was the basis of ecclesiastical opinion, it was confusing because it should not be forgotten that there was also a true desire on the part of the Church to combat popular superstitions. Since the boundary between superstition and astrology was so undefined, a continuous repetition on what constituted superstition, and the need for clarification of what was forbidden, as well as what was permitted was necessary.

The Spanish Inquisition published several edicts and sentences against divines, sorcerers and witches, because of heresy. The triumph of the ideas on predestination defended by the Protestant Reform made astrology a conflicted discipline especially during the years of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, largely because of the astrological idea that the fate of men is written in the stars. The Spanish Inquisition published a rule on magic and divination in its Catalogue of forbidden Books in 1583, following the rules of the Council of Trent and the Roman Index of 1564. This was the Ninth rule of the Index, and it mainly forbade any book containing rules which allowed knowledge through

² Harrison, Peter, "Prophecy, Early Modern Apologetics, and Hume's argument against miracles", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 60, Number 2 (1999) [hereafter Harrison (1999)], p. 250.

³ Harrison (1999), p. 252.

⁴ Grafton, Anthony, "Starry Messengers. Recent Work in the History of Western Astrology", *Perspectives on Science*, Vol. 8, Number 1 (2000), pp. 70–83, here p. 81.

the stars of the future things that belonged to man's freedom, and future or past 'contingent' events. These, the rule specified, are the parts of judiciary astrology called nativities, interrogations and elections. However, the rule also emphasized that astrology related to the general events of the world, the natal inclinations of the body, and so prognostication on medicine, agriculture and navigation was not forbidden, because these were 'natural things'.⁵

Despite all the rules published, the papal Bulls, the Roman Index, the 9th rule of the Spanish Index, the interpretation of what parts of astrology should be forbidden and which practitioners of which aspects should be prosecuted depended mainly on the decisions of the censors and the inquisitors participating in the trials. Several documents show the differences of opinion held by the assessors consulted by the Inquisition during the trials and during the elaboration of the Indexes of Forbidden Books.

One example is the Sevillian Jesuit Diego Álvarez,⁶ who considered, when he was asked about the Index in 1579, that the 9th rule of the Index left place for predictions about the life of people and events that depended on free will. The rule allowed predictions on "inclinations, conditions and qualities of the body", and Álvarez saw this as being too near the forbidden predictions. Thus, he suggested that any genethliacal divination should be forbidden. Álvarez, who was often consulted by the Inquisition, had also suggested in 1566 that, even in issues related to medicine, which was the main part of licit astrology, there was a danger of the author crossing the line and talking about forbidden astrology. He wrote: "General warning: in books on medicine there use to be many superstitions and things related to witchcraft".⁷ There was also another assessor, doctor Millán, who expressed the same opinion in his report of 1561.

In the edicts against astrology published by the Spanish Inquisition during the seventeenth century it is easy to identify two main arguments against this discipline: the classic problem of moral freedom and the participation of the demon. In the first case, if the power of the stars to determine the lives of men was accepted, there could be no moral responsibility and this was unacceptable in Christian society. But all those prohibitions did not forbid astrology which was not related to questions depending on free will. And every Faith Edict and Index created during the whole Early Modern Period repeated that prognostication on medicine, agriculture and weather, and navigation, was considered 'scientific astrology' and was therefore allowable.

(3) Inquisitorial trials

During the seventeenth century, the several courts of the Inquisition placed in different cities and kingdoms of the Spanish crown, prosecuted people denounced as practitioners of astrology. But, as not every aspect of astrology was condemned, and considering that many treatises and brochures on astrology were published without problems, the accusations against the people who were prosecuted have to be analysed.

In 1608 the Court of Catalonia prosecuted don Novello de Sentelles,⁸ who was 28 years old and originally from England. He was caught because the Inquisition was told that "he raised natal charts for many people and he divines the events and fortunes that they would have, and that he was a big mathematician"⁹ (which is what astrologers used to be called in Ancient times). When the inquisitors searched his room they found "a book on judiciary astrology, another book titled *Liber nativitatum de interrogationum et electionum* where he had many natal charts raised by him in several provinces".¹⁰

⁵ *Index et Catalogus librorum prohibitorum 1583*, h. 3–4, quoted by Pardo Tomás, J., *Ciencia y Censura. La Inquisición Española y los libros científicos en los siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: CSIC, 1991) [hereafter Pardo Tomás (1991)].

⁶ Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid, Spain), [hereafter AHN], Inq. leg. 4435–5, quoted by Pardo Tomás (1991), p. 158.

⁷ AHN, Secc. Inq. leg. 4480.

⁸ A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Libro 732, fol 23. Muñoz Calvo, S., *Inquisición y ciencia en la España Moderna* (Madrid: Ed. Nacional, 1977) [hereafter Muñoz Calvo (1977)] mentioned this trial, p. 103.

⁹ A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Libro 732, fol 23.

¹⁰ A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Libro 732, fol 23.

Also in 1608 the Inquisition prosecuted Joseph Sala,¹¹ because several testimonies affirmed that he owned many documents on judiciary astrology, that he practised sorcery and incantations, that he used to raise natal charts and that he made “judgements”, that is, prognostications. One testimony said that he owned a forbidden book, a work by Guido Bonatti.¹² Sala was also prosecuted in 1615 because he raised an astral chart to investigate a robbery.

Also Miguel Doménech, a student of medicine, was accused in 1608 of “raising natal charts and of using judiciary astrology and of having books on it”.¹³

In 1609 the Court of Catalonia prosecuted the doctor Domingo Pérez,¹⁴ physician of the city of Zaragoza. The testimonies said that he

used to raise natal figures and make prognostications on the future things and on past and occult things, and on what person of a marriage would die the first, and on robberies.¹⁵

Predictions related to the death of people were forbidden, especially after the Bull of Urbanus VIII. Robberies were considered as contingent events and so they were also a forbidden area of knowledge to astrologers.

In 1611 the Inquisition prosecuted the clergyman Hierónimo Oller,¹⁶ priest in the cathedral of Barcelona. He was said to “make and print prognostications and raise natal figures and make predictions based on interrogations, and he affirmed future and past secret things”. The main accusation here was, indeed, determinism, because his crime was specifically to “affirm things”. Actually astrologers used to defend themselves saying that they did not predict things for sure, that is, affirming them, but only as ‘possible things’. It is interesting to emphasize that in this trial a testimony was consulted because the source was considered “very wise in astrology”.¹⁷ Further more in the documents of the trial several other astrologers were asked by the Inquisition to examine the documents and books belonging to the defendant. In the trial to Miguel Ralphes the Inquisition also asked for the help of an astrologer to examine his documents.

In 1605 The Court of Toledo prosecuted, the “Bachelor González” and Luís Rosicler.¹⁸ González was accused of raising astrological figures and predicting future events.¹⁹ González was consulted by the assistant of the Marquis of Villena and by the Marquis himself. This kind of prosecution; of the astrologers consulted by nobles, is seen in several trials. It was not only the popular class that was interested in astrology, so were the nobles. Luís Rosicler (who, according to the research of historian Caro Baroja, was the brother in law of the writer Lope de Vega) was accused of being a “mathematician and of having raised natal figures”.

The main inquisitorial trial related to astrology during the seventeenth century in Spain was the trial against the Milanese priest Jacome Pramosellas or Giacomo Bramoselli. This is one of the only trials where the main accusation was specifically that the defendant was a “judiciary astrologer”.²⁰ A Jesuit and a Trinitarian examined the documents, not only as theologians but also as experts in astrology. Pramosellas was accused of being a “superstitious, magician, judiciary astrologer and of making judgements based on the natal figures of people”.²¹ He raised natal charts and talked about the hour of

¹¹ A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Libro 732, fol. 25. Muñoz Calvo (1977) mentioned this trial, p. 97.

¹² A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Libro 732, fol. 25.

¹³ A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Libro 732, fol. 25. Muñoz Calvo (1977) mentioned this trial, p. 100.

¹⁴ A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Libro 732, fol.101. Muñoz Calvo (1977) mentioned this trial, p. 96.

¹⁵ A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Libro 732, fol.101.

¹⁶ A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Libro 732, fol.116. Muñoz Calvo (1977) mentioned this trial, p. 108.

¹⁷ A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Libro 732, fol.116.

¹⁸ Caro Baroja, J., *Vidas Mágicas e Inquisición* (Madrid: Taurus, 1992) [hereafter Caro Baroja (1992)] mentioned this trial.

¹⁹ A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Leg. 87. Exp. 12.

²⁰ A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Leg. 88–14.

²¹ There is a description of the life and activities of Pramosellas, and an explanation of the trial in Caro Baroja (1992), p. 247–285. Caro Baroja reproduced some parts of the trial in p. 291–323. I have used the original documents to add information: A.H.N. Secc. Inq. Leg. 88–14.

death of the people who consulted him. Determinism was also one of the accusations, because the prosecutor said that “he affirmed as certain the fallible things, against the papal instructions”.

These and many other examples show that the Inquisition asked for the services of people considered experts in astrology, people that were practitioners of this art, or whose profession was related to astrology. These experts were consulted not only during the elaboration of the Indexes but also during the trials. This means that the practitioners of astrology were not prosecuted, accused and condemned systematically. Some of them were considered wise and were well respected, and they decided, along with theologians, what practices were allowed.

Examining the trials it seems clear that the basis of the accusations against astrologers rested on two things: the fact that a person “raised figures”, that is, made natal charts; and the possession of books teaching astrology. However, many people of higher social importance than these defendants were publishing during the same period. The professors of the universities of Salamanca Antonio Núñez de Zamora and Bartolomé del Valle at the beginning of the century; or the Dominican friar Leonardo Ferrer, professor in the University of Valencia at the end of the century, published books and prognostications including celestial figures and charts. There were also many astrological texts written by physicians, such as the work on Mexico by Diego Cisneros, or a big treatise by the Portuguese physician Figueroa. This suggests a distinction made by the Inquisition between the practices of astrology in the popular realm and in the academic context. Popular astrology was a practice considered, as we have seen, as superstitious and part of the illicit astrology. Academic astrology, practiced by people of social importance, even if it included the same issues which caused the prosecution and trial of popular astrologers, was an astrology not considered so dangerous to the Catholic Faith, and so it was not prosecuted. One reason for this could have been that academic astrology was considered as part of natural philosophy, of knowledge, of science, and this protected it against the activity of the Inquisition.

(4) The case of New Spain

Like in Spain, the Holy Office in New Spain was also confronted against this lack of uniform criteria to discern illicit from licit knowledge. The censors were called to give their opinions on a wide spectrum of astrological predictions: from weather prognostication to political and ecclesiastical prophecies. In this part of the paper, we will focus on two kinds of predictions, and the inquisitorial attitude towards both of them: on the one hand, prophecies concerning changes of power within religious orders; on the other hand, astrological prognostications by almanac-makers which were somewhere in the middle between natural and judicial astrology.

In New Spain, the study of some inquisitorial processes against astrologers during the seventeenth century has revealed that those who studied and practiced astrology at the time were involved in different kind of political prophecies. Sometimes, astrologers were asked to cast horoscopes on the arrival of new viceroys or governors in order to predict the events of their terms of office. However, astrologers much more frequently dealt with predictions about changes of power in the ecclesiastical realm, such as the appointment of new bishops or the election of new provincials within different religious orders. The latter seems to have been a widely spread practice in seventeenth-century New Spain. This is, I believe, one of the distinctive characteristics of the practice of astrology in New Spain, where provincial elections were an important issue of the power conflicts between Spanish and Creoles.

After the first years of colonization, it became evident that neither the regular nor the secular clergy, could continue their expansion by only relying on a peninsular clergy. However, the discrimination against the American born candidates for the habit arose simultaneously with the acknowledgement of the need of Creole participation. Astrological prophecies reflected, to a certain extent, the intense controversies about the creolization of religious orders. What I would like to underline here, however, is that inquisitors did not question the validity or the intellectual basis of any of these predictions; they were mainly concerned about the scandal that such prophecies could cause. Inquisitors thus did not deny that one could attain knowledge of the future by means of astrological inquiry. They did not seem to condemn the practice itself but the political effects that such prophecies could have when publicly known.

In this part of the paper, I would like to focus more on the inquisitorial attitude towards astrological prediction, and less on the contents of these predictions. One way to assess this attitude is by having a closer look at the censor’s evaluations of almanacs. Almanacs were annual publications that included information on celestial phenomena, such as eclipses, planetary conjunctions, or the occur-

rence of meteors and comets; lists of sun's rising and setting times, the phases of the moon, and the position of specific stars. The license for printing almanacs was granted by the Inquisition only after the censor's approval. In Spain and Spanish America, almanacs usually began with a description of the astronomical phenomena of the year, followed by the general annual prognostication. There was also a specific prognostication for each month and, occasionally, for every day of the year. Political and religious prophecies were usually found in the general prognostication, whereas the monthly prognostications dealt only with natural astrology: weather, agriculture, and medicine. Because of these applications in agriculture, medicine, and navigation, almanacs were of greater consequence to daily living.

One of the most famous Spanish almanacs was Jerónimo Cortés's *Repertorio*, which was condemned by the Spanish Inquisition from the publication of the 1632 Index of forbidden books.²² It has been argued that the Spanish Tribunal systematically persecuted astrologers and condemned all works on the subject. The fact is that many almanacs and other astrological works circulated freely in Spanish territories during this period.²³ It is interesting to know that, contrary to the Spanish case, no Mexican almanacs were forbidden by the Inquisition. While the Spanish Tribunal included various almanacs by Spanish authors in the indexes of forbidden books, the Mexican Inquisitors prohibited only one forecast by a Spanish author in 1666: Armengol's *Iuicio Universal Astrologico*.²⁴ Indeed, it was the only text on astrology that I have found so far which was prohibited by inquisitorial edict during the seventeenth century. Armengol's text was not the only Spanish almanac known in New Spain; we have documentation that at least Cortés's repertory was also known in the New World. However, Armengol's almanac contained a special dangerous prognostication on 'conflicts among ecclesiastics and religious, and destruction of convents.' This was the main reason why this almanac was included in the Spanish Index of 1707.²⁵ The fact that Mexican Inquisitors reacted faster to the *dangers* of this text, may be regarded as a further indication of the inquisitorial concern about astrological predictions among members of religious orders in New Spain.

Most almanacs in New Spain were written by astronomers, mathematicians and physicians of the Royal University in Mexico City. The censor's evaluations of these texts can prove extremely useful for understanding to what extent the Church's prohibition of astrology was actually observed and executed. What the Mexican almanacs show is that the authors of these texts did not limit themselves to do natural astrological predictions; rather, they continuously entered into the territory of judicial astrology. In theory, it was the task of inquisitorial censors to avoid the infiltration of such illicit material into licit works. However, there seems to have been no unanimous criteria for censors to undertake their task. Indeed, the variety of opinions played an important role in the attempt to discern natural from judicial astrology.

For the period between 1647 and 1700, I have identified sixteen censors who were in charge of revising almanacs. We know for certain that four of them were Jesuits, two were Dominicans, one was Franciscan, and one was Mercedarian. The guides they used to exercise censorship were Sixtus V's Bull and the Index of Forbidden Books of 1640. However, their position regarding the debate about free will and astral determinism appears ambivalent. For instance, one censor recommended the authorization for printing an almanac for the year 1665 only after removing the title "Diary of moral and political discourses" because Pope Sixtus V prohibited judicial astrology, which is the subject matter of this kind of discourses.²⁶ Despite the title and that the author extended his judgments to the moral realm, the censor continued, the printing of the text is not inconvenient, because these moral judgements are preceded by the author's warning that 'the person's free will is always superior to

²² Pardo Tomás (1991), p. 282.

²³ Lanuza Navarro, T., *Astrología, ciencia y sociedad en la España de los Austrias* (PhD Dissertation Universitat de Valencia, 2005) [hereafter Lanuza (2005)], p. 337.

²⁴ *Iuicio Universal Astrologico computado para el Año del Señor de 1666. Sacado de los aspectos y configuraciones de los planetas y estrellas para el meridiano de Valencia y los de quarenta grados de elevación. Hazle Gerónimo Armengo de Folch generoso Valenciano*. Con licencia en Valencia, por Lorenzo Cabrera, Año de 1665. See: *Se prohíbe un papel impreso por contener información de astrología judiciaria* (1666), Archivo General de la Nación, México [hereafter AGN]; *Edictos*, IV (43).

²⁵ Lanuza (2005), p. 337.

²⁶ AGN, *Inquisición*, vol. 670, exp. 72, ff. 143–145.

every kind of inclination.²⁷ By contrast, a Jesuit censor seems to make a clearer distinction between judicial or divinatory propositions and licit predictions. In his evaluation of an almanac for 1675 he condemns the phrase ‘everybody be careful on roadways’ and ‘a notorious person will die’. The first phrase is forbidden because it refers to robberies, which depend on free will; the second one, because only God can determine the duration of life.²⁸

More than once, the censors recommended to delete certain words, such as ‘anger’ or ‘uprising’, not only because they interfered with free will, but because they were “not convenient in present times” of political instability.²⁹ For instance, when the author of an almanac for 1691 prognosticated the effects of Mars and said that it “won’t stop sending its bad influences”,³⁰ the censor said that “he exceeds the limits of pure conjecture” not only because it is expressed with certainty, but also because he prognosticates effects which are dependent on free will, such as wars and uprisings. The censor proposes a solution for this excess and suggests that the phrase “[Mars] wont stop sending” be changed for “it can be expected that [Mars] sends”.³¹ By changing the formulation of the phrase, the certainty of the prediction was transformed into conjectural, and entered into the category of licit predictions.³²

An interesting dispute between a Mexican almanac-maker and a Jesuit censor was triggered by the former’s accusation that censors did not have enough knowledge about astrology to be authorized to say what was right and what was wrong. Moreover, he complained that censors were not up to date in terms of prohibition of books, and condemned authors who were actually not forbidden, such as Giuntini and Rantzau.³³ The Jesuit replied not only by arguing that these authors could only be read after expurgation, but also by defending his right to exercise censorship: ‘It is a human mistake of the author to assume that in order to censor his predictions the theologian needs to know astronomy when they [the predictions] are not dependant on her [astronomy], like in the case of fortuitous events. What he [the theologian] needs to know about predictions is what the Church commands not to be touched by astrologers.’³⁴ In my view, this dispute illustrates an aspect of censorship that goes beyond a confrontation between tradition and innovation, or between ignorance and wisdom. Rather, it is evidence of a conflict of what we could call *epistemological jurisdictions*. This, I believe, is one of the most problematic issues of the condemnation of astrology by the Catholic Church. Just like in the case of miracles and the supernatural, the future was a territory that the Church wanted to keep under her jurisdiction. She resisted relinquishing it to astrologers, astronomers, or any other person who claimed the possibility to acquire a non-religious knowledge of the things to come.

Censors continuously emphasized the importance of free will in order to overcome astral inclinations and dispositions, but they did not contest the idea of the influence of the stars on Earth *per se*. It is true, says one of the censors, that the stars influence the disposition of humours, the agitation of anger and cholera; however, it cannot be doubted that free will has the main and major efficacy over this humours and it is never necessitated by inclination of corporal temperament.³⁵ What is illicit, he continues, is to talk about effects which are completely uncertain and contingent, or are completely deduced from the causality of the stars.³⁶ Another censor recognized the influence of the stars on the sublunar realm, but emphasized the limits of such influence. For instance, the Sun and other stars generate gold and other precious metals and stones; however, God only is entitled to discover these precious

²⁷ AGN, *Inquisición*, vol. 670, exp. 72, ff. 143–145.

²⁸ Quoted in Quintana, José Miguel (1969) *La Astrología en la Nueva España en el Siglo XVII*. México: Bibliófilos Mexicanos [hereafter Quintana (1969)], p. 147.

²⁹ AGN, *Inquisición*, vol. 670, exp. 66, f. 161.

³⁰ ‘No dejará de enviar a los sublunares sus nocivas influencias’.

³¹ AGN, *Inquisición*, vol. 670, foja. 176.

³² Quintana (1969), p.19.

³³ On this dispute see Trabulse, *Los orígenes de la ciencia moderna en México, (1630–1680)* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994) [hereafter Trabulse (1994)], p. 124.

³⁴ Quoted in Trabulse (1994), p. 124. See: *Diario y Discursos Morales y Políticos según la Revolución y Eclipses del año 1665*. AGN, *Inquisición*, vol. 670, folios 143–145.

³⁵ AGN, *Inquisición*, Vol. 670, foja. 174. Quoted in Quintana (1969), p. 192.

³⁶ AGN, *Inquisición*, vol. 670, foja. 174.

materials, and men's diligence is not enough to find them. For this reason, he suggests in his evaluation of an almanac for 1675 to erase the proposition 'discovery of mines towards noon.'³⁷

Before concluding, I would like to underline that in the same way that inquisitors were mainly concerned about the scandalous effects of astrological prophecies, censors were particularly worried that almanacs would be read by an unlearned or "vulgar" audience. Common people were not able to understand some of the subtleties of astrology and could misinterpret certain information. Thus the authors of these texts should be aware of this fact and be careful with their judgements.

(5) Conclusions

To conclude, we want to go back to some points we put forward at the beginning of this presentation. It has formerly been argued by some historians, first, that astrology declined during the last decades of the seventeenth century; secondly, that the prohibition of judicial astrology by the Catholic Church, together with the persecution of its practice by the Inquisition, somehow set the ground for astrology's death blow by the astronomical revolution. What we tried to show today is that both arguments need to be revised before any general conclusion can be drawn regarding the decline of astrology and the role of the Catholic Church in this process. On the one hand, it needs to be emphasized that, if astrology is to be understood as a belief on the influence of the stars on Earth, this belief did not disappear completely by the end of the seventeenth century. On the other hand, it is important to point out that the position of the Catholic Church towards astrology was often ambiguous. The thin line which divided natural and judicial astrology was frequently crossed not only by astrologers themselves, but also by theologians. From Saint Thomas onwards, it was not difficult for both of them to find ways to conciliate the dogma of free will with the influence of the stars. Therefore, it is not so straightforward that the Catholic Church radically prohibited judicial astrology, and that this prohibition triggered the intellectual scepticism towards astrology.

³⁷ AGN, *Inquisición*, vol. 670, ff. 165–166. Quoted in Quintana (1969), p. 149.