

## *The Travail of Philosophical Liberty: libertas philosophandi in the long Sixteenth Century*

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*The present article examines the vindication of the “freedom to philosophize” in astronomy and cosmology from Rheticus and Copernicus to Galileo and Kepler. The common thread of the study, the famous sentence by the Greek Platonist Alcinous taken up by Rheticus in his Narratio prima (1540), is traced through the Latin edition of Galileo’s Dialogo (Strasbourg, 1635), where it joins with similar motifs in Seneca’s Naturales Quaestiones, then widely diffused across Germany on the occasion of the comet of 1618. This development is studied in relation to the hardening of measures against philosophical and theological dissent in Protestant and Catholic circles as manifested in the sentences suffered by Bruno, Telesio and Patrizi.*

Keywords: Rheticus, Melanchthon, Castellion, Jesuits, Kepler, Federico Cesi, Galileo.

In 1538 Georg Joachim Rheticus – a young professor of lower mathematics at the University of Wittenberg and pupil of Philip Melanchthon – undertook a study trip with the support of his teacher. In his first stage, in Nuremberg, Rheticus met the local mathematician Johannes Schöner, who mentioned the existence, in Poland, of a canon, named Nicholas Copernicus, apparently in possession of new calculations of the celestial movements whose publication could be of great interest for the perfection of the science of the stars. Schöner exhorted Rheticus to also meet Copernicus; at the same time, Rheticus received from the printer Johannes Petreius his willingness to publish the work of the Polish canon.

After visiting Ingolstadt and Tübingen, Rheticus returned to Wittenberg and got permission from Melanchthon and the authorities to visit Copernicus. Rheticus met the Polish canon in Frauenburg (on the Baltic coast) in the spring of 1539. The intellectually isolated Copernicus welcomed Rheticus warmly and offered him access to the manuscript of his work (*De revolutionibus*), regardless of their difference in religion. The reading of the work led to Rheticus’s rapid conversion to Copernican cosmology and his strong insistence