



Ca' Foscari  
University  
of Venice

Department of  
Philosophy and  
Cultural Heritage



European Research Council

Established by the European Commission



Center for Renaissance and Early Modern Thought



This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (GA n. 725883 EarlyModernCosmology)

**Wednesday  
2019 Nov 27**

h. 3.00 – 4.30 p.m.

**Malcanton Marcorà  
Palace,  
Aula Valent**  
Dorsoduro 3484/D,  
Venice

Introduction by prof.  
**Pietro Daniel Omodeo**

Guests hosted by  
the ERC endeavor  
**EarlyModernCosmology**  
GA 725883

Workshop ERC EarlyModernCosmology

## **Galileo under cover: Pseudonymous Writings on the New Star**

**Matteo Cosci** University of Padua

Discussant:

**David Juste**, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften

In October 1604 a giant supernova unexpectedly exploded in the constellation of Ophiucus and its bright light remained visible to the naked eye for many months. The sudden appearance was an anomalous and stunning event for those observers that conceived the stars as “fixed” and the heavens as unalterable – the accepted position in physics and astronomy at that time. Astronomers as well as astrologers and other stargazers tried to explain the nature and significance of the novelty. The interpretation of the new star was one of the main speculative battlefields where opposing conceptions of the universe collided and its presumed origin was debated at length (even polemically) among its first observers. As in the case of Tycho’s supernova in 1572 and a minor one observed in 1600, the appearance of the supernova in Ophiucus was deployed as a direct challenge to the physics and cosmology of Aristotle, at a time when all contemporaries either accepted Aristotle’s views or had originally been trained in them. For a growing number of scholars the “stella nova” of 1604 disputed Aristotle’s doctrine that the heavens and the earth were absolutely distinct, and that all sorts of substantial change could occur only in the region below the moon. The 1604 supernova appeared from nowhere, outshining the planets before declining in brightness and finally disappearing. This should have been impossible for a star, and in fact some interpreters preferred to view it as a meteorological event in the upper reaches of the air. But measurements established that the object was beyond the moon, hence part of the heavens, and hence impossible according to Aristotle’s cosmology. In addition to occasional observers and extemporaneous writers, the interpretation of the supernova involved the most renowned astronomers of the time, some of whom saw it as salient evidence against Aristotle’s theories and in favor of the new astronomical alternatives that in the meantime were being discussed in a heated debate. Galileo Galilei was among the firsts who were called to share openly their view on that starry “anomaly”, a task that he accomplished at first by giving three public lectures at the Studio of Padua. Focusing in particular on the immediate aftermath of those lessons, I will argue that Galileo was the author of three pseudonymous texts on the new star, one of which can be attributed to him for the first time.