



## Watchers of the Stars: the story of a revolution

by Patrick Moore

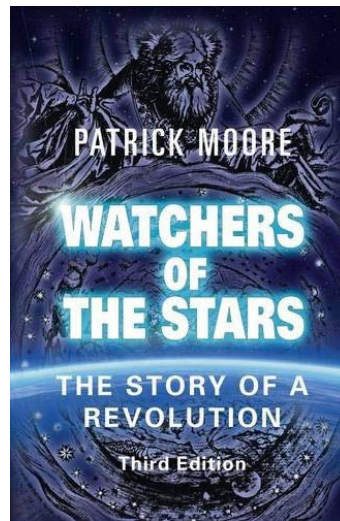
3rd edn, Horwood Publishing, 2009. ISBN 978-1-904275-44-2. Pp vi+186, £10.00 (pbk).

The author is well known both inside and outside astronomical circles for his scholarship and for his capacity for engaging readers. This book shows evidence of both these talents. It tells the story of the revolutionary changes in human understanding of the heavens between 1543 and 1687. These dates define the period between the publication of Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus* and Newton's *Principia Mathematica Philosophiae Naturalis*. In the intervening turbulent years, Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Johannes Kepler, Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton were actors in a drama that saw the human-centred and enclosing sky become the vast universe we know today.

The author locates each character in vividly described cities and intellectual circumstances. The richly anecdotal portraits, complete with gossipy details, bring each one to life. The critical elements of the slow

revolution are described in terms of the careful and knowledgeable observations, the rigorously articulated theories, and their publication to a wider public. The narrative is enriched with background information from our modern understanding of the universe that shows the pivotal importance of each contribution.

But ultimately the book is disappointing. The revolution the author describes is much wider than he suggests. The world had been understood through argument from first principles. A perfect and spherical heaven looked down on an imperfect and fallen world while planets moved in circles or circles of circles in the perfect harmony of the music of the spheres. The genius spirit of the wider revolution was Observation. With observation came the



need for explanation and testable theory. The focus on individuals tends to obscure the wider world of ideas and the role of publication in making the new ways of understanding available beyond the small world of the intellectual elite.

The book is most badly let down by its illustrations. Several of the illustrated documents are evidently scans of previous reproductions. The colour photographs look aged and tired. They make a gloomy contrast to the

vividness of the narrative. The vivid originals deserve better.

**Rosalind Armson**

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