The bubonic plague is caused by the bacteria *Yersinia pestis* and spread through fleas carried by rodents or air particles from coughing. Notable symptoms include fever, chills, cough, muscle cramps, vomiting, diarrhea, seizures, and painful swellings of lymph glands called “buboes.” If untreated within 24 hours, death will occur in approximately 50% of people. Autopsies reveal that victims’ hearts, lungs, livers, stomachs, and intestines are covered with black spots. Additionally, victims’ gallbladders are filled with black bile and hearts are filled with black, clotted blood. Between 1629 and 1631, the plague claimed the lives of approximately 280,000 people in northern Italy.

The bubonic plague arrived in Tuscany in the summer of 1630, reportedly due to business travels to the infected city of Bologna. Prior to the development of the germ theory of disease in the 19th century, the predominant theory of disease transmission was miasma, or “bad air” originating from “venomous atoms.” Nevertheless, public officials took preventative measures against the spread of the bubonic plague. Because silkworms produced foul odors, production of silk was prohibited. Health magistrates created sanitary cordons around cities, in which guards were stationed at the gates and restrictions were placed on the movements of people and merchandise. The Florentine Magistracy frequently sent instructions to nearby towns with inadequate preventative measures, such as Pistoia. For example, to keep streets as clean as possible and relieve crowded conditions within city walls, Pistoia was advised to ban all foreigners who were not subjects of the Grand Duke.

In 1631, Galileo obtained the imprimatur to publish the *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* in Rome. Following the death of Prince Cesi, who managed the printing process for Lincean Academicians in Rome, Galileo decided to print in Florence and obtained another imprimatur. Galileo wrote to the Father Master of the Sacred Palace in Rome to inform him of these changes, and the Father Master requested an updated copy of the *Dialogue*. However, Galileo was unable to send the copy due to transit restrictions to prevent the spread of the plague. Father Stefani was appointed to review the *Dialogue* on behalf of the Father Master. The ensuing miscommunication led to Galileo’s trial in 1633.