

**Facing the Roman Inquisition:
social and cultural effects between history and historiography**

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In recent years the Roman Inquisition has become a very attractive topic, a central issue for scholars: the opening of the Roman archives in 1998 attracted the attention of historians around the world, though mainly in Europe and the United States. The reconstruction and analysis of processes are impressive (Morone, Carnesecchi, Soranzo) and different fields of ecclesiastical censorship have been investigated: the impact of inquisitorial activities on philosophical thought deserves to be investigated today with the aid of these new documents. New studies have shed light on the classic trials of Giordano Bruno, Tommaso Campanella and Galileo Galilei. But what actually happened and why? These are two important questions that need to be considered in any analysis of the Roman inquisition that looks beyond its victims. As Thomas Mayer suggested it is time to change perspective.

Several years ago Luigi Firpo drew attention to cases in which self-censorship could be considered a practice of deference to power: some instances of self-censorship are known such as Cardano and Patrizi; however, it is much more difficult to study or reconstruct the fate of works that were corrected by the authors themselves in order to obtain the *imprimatur*. Facing the Roman inquisition the reaction varied according to the social class the accused belonged to. Cardano is a curious, but not unique case in which self-censorship and censorship converged. Girolamo Cardano had been professor at the University of Bologna since 1562, thanks to the support of Cardinals Alciati, Borromeo and Morone. Cardano's trial began in 1570 in Bologna: he was accused by the Inquisitor of Como, who had read the *De varietate* and found sufficient material in it to prohibit not only the work, but also to prosecute its author. Cardano declared himself ready to recant his errors. In March 1571 Cardano was sentenced to abjuration and agreed to give up teaching'. He intended to write an apology to make his work readable for all. This story is a significant fragment of Italian cultural history: it seems especially important to draw a line of continuity between Cardano's self-censorship and the censures prepared over the years to test his sensitivity to the objections that were raised. From Cardano, we move on to the viceroyalty of Naples and to Della Porta. It was long believed that the Inquisition's attention to Della Porta depended on the first

edition of *Magia naturalis*, published in Naples in 1558. Some documents found in the Archives of the Holy Office shed light on the thorny question of chronology and the causes behind the Della Porta's trial. The decrees of the Holy Office record how the proceedings evolved: they opened in October 1577 and ended in November 1578. The case of Della Porta was followed with great attention by the Inquisition: his trial is interesting because of his good relationships with prominent nobles and cardinals. He was charged with necromancy before the Inquisition. Della Porta also tried to get a milder treatment because of his health, requesting a transfer *loco carceris* to the palace of Cardinal Orsini. In the presence of Gregory XIII in October 1578 the Holy Office decided to change the sentence and agreed to conclude the trial with a canonical purgation. But the case was not closed: in fact, his works were forbidden.

The attention devoted to Cardano and Della Porta's works depended to a great extent on their European circulation. In some cases, the Church preferred to use persuasion rather than force and this strategy led many scholars to expurgate their own works while the aristocracy maintained its privilege to buy forbidden books ... In Italy ideas and cultural trends were safely passed on from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment because scholars adopted masks of dissimulation , and because there existed a cement of cultural proximity between censors and the censored, though this concerned only the privileged classes. How deeply the Roman inquisition's action and the rigours of ecclesiastical censorship affected Italian culture and society, not to mention political activity, needs to be investigated, perhaps by examining the continuity of beliefs and even moral judgments still stubbornly resistant in the vast and decidedly dominant Italian provinces.

Manuela BRAGAGNOLO

Réponse

Dans sa reconstruction ponctuelle des étapes et des raisons qui menèrent à la réorganisation du Tribunal de l'Inquisition, à la publication des Index et à la constitution de la Congrégation de l'Index, Mme Valente a mis en évidence l'élargissement progressif des domaines désavoués par l'Église de Rome, lesquels finirent par inclure non seulement les propositions qui contredisaient les dogmes de l'église mais aussi ces idées qui pouvaient engendrer le soupçon que l'on ouvrait la porte à l'hérésie : si, initialement, ne furent visés que les ouvrages d'auteurs réformés, la catégorie « hérésie » s'élargit au fil des années jusqu'à comprendre tout ce qui révélait une quelconque divergence par rapport aux

déclarations de Rome, y compris les ouvrages qui mettaient en question le pouvoir temporel de l'Église, que ce soit sur le plan politique ou historique.

Les deux cas analysés par Mme Valente, celui du médecin milanais Girolamo Cardano et celui du scientifique napolitain Giovan Battista Della Porta, montrent bien cet élargissement de la notion d'hérésie, à laquelle même les auteurs d'ouvrages qui rentraient dans le domaine des « sciences », visant à la connaissance de la nature, durent se confronter. Leurs procès se déroulèrent dans la même décennie (la sentence de Cardan fut prononcée en 1571 et celle de Della Porta en 1578). Respectivement accusés d'avoir pratiqué l'astrologie judiciaire et la nécromancie pratiques, condamnées par l'Église, surtout après la bulle *Coeli et Terrae* de Sixte V (1586), Cardan et Della Porta furent condamnés, l'un à l'abjuration *de vehementi*, l'autre à la purgation canonique. Mais ces sentences ne furent que la première étape d'une série d'interventions de la part des congrégations romaines sur les idées et sur les textes de ces auteurs.

Plus particulièrement, les cas présentés par Mme Valente nous ont permis de saisir les effets directs et indirects de l'activité de l'Inquisition sur les travaux de Cardano et de Della Porta. Ce fut d'abord au travers de l'autocensure et de la recherche d'une protection auprès de personnages influents que ces auteurs tentèrent de faire front face au contrôle des idées et des écrits de la part de l'Église de Rome, tout en restant fidèles, avec ténacité, à leur pensée.

Si on compare les cas de Cardano et de Della Porta il est possible d'établir de nombreux points de connexion. Tout d'abord, on remarque un décalage temporel : le procès (1571), les censures et la prohibition des ouvrages non médicaux de Cardano (1572) arrivent plus de 20 ans après l'édition des textes visés. La situation de Della Porta est assez semblable en ce qui concerne la *Magia naturalis* (1558), et aussi avec la prohibition de la traduction en italien vulgaire de l'*Humaine Physiognomonie* en 1592. Dans les trois dernières décennies du XVI^e siècle, on assiste ainsi à un endurcissement de l'attitude de l'Inquisition à l'égard des disciplines « naturelles ».