

Michaela Valente. *Contro l'Inquisizione. Il dibattito europeo secc. XVI–XVIII*. Collana della società di studi Valdesi 29. Turin: Claudiana, 2009. 230 pp. index. €20. ISBN: 978–88–7016–745–0.

Given the steady stream of publications on the early modern inquisitions of Spain and Italy since the revisionist studies of Henningsen, Kamen, and Tedeschi first appeared in the 1970s, which has turned into a veritable flood (and belatedly included Portugal) since the opening of the central archives of the Roman Inquisition in 1998, it is perhaps surprising to note that this study of the image of the Inquisition in both Protestant and Catholic literature represents a first. The work of Antonio Rotondò and Adriano Prosperi, in particular, has drawn attention to the fact that the tribunals of the Inquisition owed their effectiveness, even at the time, more to the fear and suspicion induced by their unsettling image than the messy, decidedly more prosaic reality. Contemporaries, such as Paul IV Carafa's Chief Inquisitor, Michele Ghislieri, were well aware of this, as when the future pontiff wrote to his counterpart in Genoa (on 28 May 1556): "The more the world hates [the Holy Office] so shall we be loved the more by the Lord God." Valente takes this further in her commendably evenhanded treatment of works about this most feared and excoriated of institutions written over an almost 300-year period. Indeed, an alternative title to the volume could be *Beyond the Black Legend*.

Valente begins, predictably enough, with such humanist enemies of the medieval inquisition as Erasmus and Agrippa; however, it was with the 1542 refounding and

recasting of the episcopally-directed tribunals, which had been staffed by St Dominic's friars in their first battle against Cathar heresy in the thirteenth century, into a centralized network, whose procedures were monitored closely by Rome, that things became serious. Although the Venetian aristocrat and later cardinal Gasparo Contarini had registered his fear and dislike of the Spanish Inquisition as early as ca.1525, it was the sometime papal legate during the final period of the Council of Trent, the Augustinian friar, Girolamo Seripando, who in 1545 identified a clear intensification of rigor in the activities of the tribunals operating in the Italian peninsula and clearly saw who was responsible: Giampietro Carafa, future Paul IV. A particularly interesting early work written against the Inquisition, by the Italian exile, Girolamo Massari, was the fictional account of a trial carried out against an imaginary heretic: *Eusebius captivus, sive modus procedendi in curia romana contro Lutheranos* . . . (1553). Valente, who has authored the entry on Massari for the forthcoming *Dizionario storico dell'Inquisizione*, claims that he also wrote the spoof inquisitorial manual *Modus solennis et authenticus, ad inquirendum et inveniendum et convincendum Lutheranos* (1553), in which it is made clear that the purpose of the Holy Office was, above all, to defend the honor and interests of the papacy. One of the first systematic attacks on the Spanish Inquisition, which enjoyed rapid diffusion in all the major European languages, was Gonsalvus Montanus's *Artes de la Inquisición española* (1567). However, perhaps the most widely read account, which was to be mined by enemies of the Inquisition, was that by the Inquisitor of Sicily, Luis Paramo's *De origine et progressu Officii Sanctae Inquisitionis eiusque dignitate et utilitate* (1598), who again acknowledged the close identification of the Holy Office with the papacy as reflected, above all, in the careers of Carafa and Ghislieri.

For Valente, Paramo's work marks the commencement of the next stage in the literary treatment of the Inquisition after what she terms the primarily "pamphletistic" sixteenth century: the historical. A key text here from the earlier period was Paolo Sarpi's posthumously published *Discorso dell'origine, forma, leggie d'uso dell'Inquisizione nella città e dominio di Venezia*, in which the argument ultimately centered on a critique of the jurisdictional claims made by the papacy on behalf of operating the tribunal within the Venetian republic. From the end of the seventeenth century, Valente conducts a fascinating comparative analysis of the two histories of the Inquisition by Philip von Limborch and that, much less well known, by the Gallican Jacques Marsollier. While the first attacked the absurdity of the tribunal's claim to coerce conscience, the latter sought to affirm the right of secular (i.e., French) authorities to try defendants for heresy as opposed to the Church (i.e., Rome). Both works were placed on the Index.

Chronologically speaking, according to Valente, after the pamphlet literature (of the sixteenth century) and the historical treatments (of the seventeenth) came the accounts of the inquisition as travel literature. An early and lurid example of this genre is *The Slaughter House, or, a brief description of the Spanish Inquisition* (1682) by the Spanish convert to Anglicanism, James Salgado. One of the strengths of Valente's account is the way she shows just how important the topic of the Inquisition was for English readers, when compared to French or even German

ones. Perhaps the most sophisticated history attempted in the English language before Henry Lea was that by the Reverend J. Baker (*Complete history of the Inquisition . . .* [1736]). Of particular interest in it is the author's capacity to get beyond the Black Legend and to explore the debates over matters of conscience. More typical, though, were precisely such purveyors and promoters of the *Legenda nera* such as John Marchant's *Bloody Tribunal* (1756) and Matthew Taylor's *England's Bloody Tribunal* (1769). Valente brings her scrupulously researched and presented historiographical odyssey to a close by considering two apologists for the Holy Office, the former Jesuit Alfonso Muzzarelli and the Dominican inquisitor and, as Master of the Sacred Palace from 1792, the pope's official guardian of theological orthodoxy, Tommaso Vincenzo Pani. In *Il buon uso della logica in materia di religione* (1787–89), the former anticipated Benedetto Croce with his argument that it was the authority and operation of the Inquisition that had saved the Italian peninsula from religious wars. The latter's *Della punizione degli eretici e del tribunale della S. Inquisizione* (1789) receives detailed discussion as it clearly constituted what was perhaps one of the most comprehensive justifications of the institution of the Holy Office, and was issued in an expanded edition in 1795 even as the French were descending on Rome and soon to be responsible for the dispersion of the archive of the Inquisition from which historians still suffer to this day.

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