

COMPARING BOOK CENSORSHIP: AN ITALIAN AND EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE (CENTURIES XVI-XVIII)

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Abstract

This article deals with the theme of book censorship between the 16th and 18th centuries, a complex phenomenon whose equal participants were the Church and the States, with the latter interested in controlling ideas with a view to an absolutistic consolidation of their domains, and thus often in conflict with the centralised control promoted by the religious authority at a European level. Revisiting the various forms of censorship, their evolution and their cultural and civil consequences, the situations of the various European national areas are analysed and compared, thus outlining their characteristics.

Keywords: Book censorship, modern Europe, comparison, Church, State

Introduction

In the last few years, the theme of book censorship has been the focus of several studies by scholars specialised in the modern world. The public opening of the Archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (with documents by the Holy Office and the Index) in 1998 has been surely key in reviving interest in the issue and, in general, in the ecclesiastical Inquisition, promoting the start of a vast and widespread amount of research and historiographical discussion that, in the past, had been hindered by a heavy historical legacy of an illuminist nature and by the resulting weight of the ideological beliefs. Sources that were recently unknown, putting an end to the stories on the “mysteries of the Inquisition”, have allowed researchers to compare the different historiographical positions on the institution, through an objective examination of the original documents, to study cases and problems only partly explored and to shed light on the operation of the central organs, after years of historical research mainly dedicated to the victims of the ecclesiastical tribunals (the Protestant reformers, the radical heretics, the martyrs of modern science and free thought). With regards to book censorship, the knowledge acquired along the centuries (with the study of “traditional” inquisitorial material) has been enriched by the many investigations recently carried out on the new Roman material and other

documents of the same kind, both European and non, whose accessibility was also indirectly promoted by the opening of the Vatican archives. Today, there is a large deal of data on the historical universe of the forbidden – with a prevalence of studies, especially in Italy, on the press control by ecclesiastical institutions –, that has permitted to shed light on the practises of censorship and self-censorship and the reading patterns. Special care was reserved to the central and peripheral organisation of the book control and to the relationships of the Catholic Church with the various and fickle forms of the political powers, to the practical application of the censorship rules, to the editorial sectors that bore the brunt of the prohibition and to the project of expurgation of the suspended works. Between “revisionists” (ready to reread “in positive” the history of Inquisition) and their opposers, the study of the censorial machine has thus become part of a desire to understand causes and effects of the many-centuried presence of the Church as a force in the religious and cultural life of the modern society, whose shapes have been modified by that force, if not repressed and crushed by it. Within the context of this subject matter, comparisons and collaborations between researchers from different countries and cultures – with studies carried out over a large time-span (from the Middle Ages until the contemporary age) and a large territorial extension (European and extra-European) – have become commonplace, being necessary because of the strong unifying link of an institutional, legal and “human” nature, that exists between the different forms of censorship (think of the names of the members of the juries or the people being investigated, that sometimes offer the intersecting point between different and often distant documents). Next to the internal courses of the different national histories, started by an international community of historians, the globalisation process and the contemporary experiences (those, for instance, of intolerance and violence justified by religion, of press censorship, of capillary control of opinions) have rendered the topic current and novel, promoting curiosity and interest from readers worldwide towards the cultures of the past. However, it is necessary to stress that the experience of this phenomenon in the contemporary world is but a “deforming filter” (Landi, 2011, p. 73), unable to return its meaning to a complex set of institutional and cultural practices that has “regulated” communication and press during the modern age.

In the midst of this plethora of studies and curiosities, of knowledge and questions, except in a few important and recent analyses (Infelise, 1999; Del Col, 2006; Landi, 2011), there emerges the absence of comparative and more extensive works on the phenomenon of censorship in European history, that aim at researching important differences and, sometimes, of the common base (with regards to the above-mentioned premises) amongst the various territories. Though being aware of the lack of preliminary studies in that

regard, the issue becomes pivotal in advocating a comparative approach, with the “conviction that the historical processes, albeit characterised by their own individuality, are somehow comparable and that, in them, it is possible to find affinities or recurrences as much as differences” (Rossi, 1990, p. X). In that regard, Toqueville’s remark is equally true, when he states that “whoever has seen and studied only France will never understand anything of the French Revolution” (Cafagna, 1990, p. 384). This article reviews part of this vast and documented literature, attempting to provide its problematic summary, by comparing especially four different European countries (Italy, Spain, France and England) and with the ultimate objective of offering specific descriptions and general interpretations of the phenomenon, read in the light of some of the issues that have guided the recent historical research. Italy, for obvious institutional reasons, will often constitute the significant unit of comparison (although within it there are single territorial realities), the context to compare with a plethora of situations and courses at a European level, with the aim of determining both the elements shared with that unit, and especially the internal differences, i.e. the specific traits of the other single contexts.

Forms of censorship in modern Europe

Almost from the start, movable-type printing (though it had been met with approval and support by the political, secular and ecclesiastic power, starting to become an immediate tool of power and of the power, in contrast to the manuscript book) manifested its potential riskiness, by attracting the suspicious attention of the secular and religious authorities. The latter, worried by the educational power of such instrument and its effects, deemed necessary to solve those matters by employing various methods of regulation and restriction. However, it was the Lutheran reform and its swift diffusion, thanks indeed to the capacity for penetration of the printed works, to spur the design of more effective control systems. Censorship was a reality that affected all European countries, despite the political and spiritual divisions, since “no power exists which can allow itself to remain indifferent to the opinions of the people being governed to the point of completely abstaining from the intent to influence them” (Infelise, 1999, p. 123). The need to “restrict the printmaking affairs” (Sabato, 2009, p. 42) was felt chiefly in the livelier book production and circulation areas, such as the German cities, where typography had originated, Venice, which became in the last few decades of the XV century the first editorial centre in Europe, and also the main centres of power and around the great courts, worried and insecure before the new art.

In the economy of this paper, it was deemed necessary to retrace the most evident and analysed forms of censorship, rearranging them in the context of a typology of interventions on the limitation of freedom of press, sometimes

common, other times peculiar to the different political and religious European areas. A first order of limitation concerns the professional and ethical rules imposed by corporations to their affiliates, which – varying according to the importance of press in the urban or national economies and to the relationships between printers/booksellers and the political and religious power – influence the form or the content of the book, whilst simultaneously ensuring its quality. If the printers’ guild was not present in Florence and was constituted in Turin only mid-18th century, in Venice, where the Printers University had very vast competences, a measure of 1726 reorganised the sector, restating the principle of periodical inspection of the print shops, with the requirement to report to the Reformers of Studies in Padua, the bench responsible for censorship. Outside of Italy, in London, the editorial sector was regulated by the *Stationers’ Company*, established in 1557, whose jurisdiction also included the repression of printed works considered heretical, licentious or simply clandestine; while in Paris, the printers and booksellers Community, founded in 1618, under direction of the *Chambre syndicale*, also dealt with the meticulous limitation of the town areas where trading books was allowed.

Alongside the corporative limitations, another common form of obstacle to the freedom of the press in the modern age is the privilege, which consists in the exclusive and temporary right to print and sell a document or a category of printed works granted by a state authority to a printmaker, bookseller or author. It soon becomes widespread in Italy, especially in Venice where, in 1469, *Johannes of Speyer* obtains a privilege to practice the art of printing. Whereas in England this practice of restriction of book production, established by Henry VIII, remains in force until the civil war of 1642-60, in France the privilege, which amounts to the prints revision process, is made systematic by a series of decrees, amongst which, primarily, the *Code Michau* (1629) and the *Code de la Librairie* (1723). Here, every manuscript to be printed (except single-sheets) must be presented to the chancellor, that decides to submit it to a royal-designated censor (the latter pertaining to a category regulated by a specific organism, the *Direction de la librairie*, in charge of permits and printing privileges, which easily became monopolies after mid-1600s). In practice, the institution of the privilege – which often clashes with the internal regulation system set up by the guilds – is used by the sovereigns to protect publications against forgery (and to fight foreign competition), but also to favour and thus ensnare the most dynamic printmakers (exercising easy control over them). Of course, the legal effectiveness of the privilege is limited to the sphere of the jurisdiction of the issuing civil authority, but if the Pope grants it, its value becomes, in theory, “universal”, based not on temporal but on spiritual power, and the rogue printmakers are liable to be excommunicated; actually, such privilege was

respected in Italy but not outside, where only the privileges granted by the single sovereigns were considered valid.

The preventive examination of the text to be printed, by one or more editors appointed by the religious or political authority, is a widespread type of book censorship and it has ecclesiastic origins, similarly to the printed press. Apart from the unruly and little effective initial regulations, issued in several countries and probably motivated by philological concerns (Infelise, 1999, pp. 6-7), in 1487, the constitution *Inter multiplices* by Pope Innocent VIII, the first official document by the Roman Church with regards to the press, establishes the birth of the preventive censorship, forcing printmakers to present the texts to be published, for Rome, to the Theologian of the Pontifical Household and, for the rest of the Christian world, to the people appointed in the diocese (so as to avoid the diffusion of books opposed to the Catholic faith). Similar measures are later adopted by Alexander VI in 1501 (with the bull *Inter multiplices*, that forbids in Germany the publication of books without the approval of the Church) and by Leo X in 1515 (with the constitution *Inter sollicitudines*, that extends the principles of preventive censorship to the whole Christianity, and entrusted to papal legate or the Theologian of the Pontifical Household, and to the bishops or the inquisitors). From then on, a formula reproduced at the beginning and the end of the tome (*imprimatur*) establishes, in canonical law, such approval and makes it visible to the public readers. One of the main credits of recent historiography consists indeed in having shed light on the different ecclesiastic censoring authorities that claim the power to grant a printing permit (bishops, inquisitors and Theologian of the Pontifical Household), and in having shown the meaning of the actors and the power balance involved, which were often in contrast. In parallel, but in a lesser measure, it is possible to see the emergence of the role of the civil authorities (which took off in the secular States between the 17th and 18th centuries) in the preventive control of the European book production, also in the knowledge that it was necessary to put a stop to the diffusion of heresy through the printed press, but also sure about the essentiality of their interference in controlling ideas, which allowed, for instance, to be able to forbid those works opposing the prince or the government. Thus, Already in the 16th century, formulas indicating the release of a printing licence by the secular authority, such as “*con licenza de' superiorī*”, “*superiorum permissu*” or “*avec le privilège du roi*”, accompany or replace the *imprimatur*, thus implying long rivalries with the ecclesiastic organs and often resulting in confusion and overlapping of two authorisations granted by two different authorities (Church and State). The study of the state dimension of censorship has resulted into a necessary distinction between reformed countries and Catholic Europe, though the variety of cases present in those

spaces was not underestimated. France and the Republic of Venice, for instance, belong to a first category of Catholic States that, for ideological and economic reasons, consider preventive censorship a primary or exclusive competence of the civil authority, simultaneously limiting Roman influence and sometimes restricting the sphere of influence of the ecclesiastic censorship to the sole religious books. In the case of France, the need for a licence dates back to 1563 and the assignment is entrusted to the Chancellor's Office; the control of the press (until then split and contended by the faculty of Theology at the Sorbonne, the Parliament of Paris and the king) remains connected to the Crown until the French Revolution, in a century that sees the diffusion of implied permits alongside the granting of a licence. In Venice – a city that, for the important development of the printing industry and its political relevance, is an exception in the framework of the censorial regimes of the old Italian states –, the preventive control mechanism of the press is the result of an unstable compromise between the corporative interests of the printmakers, the policy of jurisdictional autonomy claimed by the State and the censoring authority of the Holy Office. The secular nature of the printing permit (released in 1542 by the Council of Ten, and in 1562 only following the assent of three readers and the licence released by the Reformers of Studies in Padua) manifests itself with the violation of the Roman prescriptions regarding the *imprimatur*, not deemed to be a printing licence, but simply a “faith”, i.e. a certification (from an ecclesiastical editor appointed by the Inquisition) of the consonance of the book to the Catholic religion. All this, here and elsewhere, is however conditioned by the men who hold the reins of the institutions and by the various censors who, with their culture and their action, can considerably influence the daily control activity. In fact, even in the rest of Italy the Roman Inquisition is not free to act everywhere and, although not so persistently, the States claim control of the printing production and the right to issue licences, with more or less tenacious jurisdictional claims, depending on the relationships between the Church and the single States. This is what emerges, for instance, from research focussed on the Kingdom of Naples, a territory that, within the context of Spanish Italy, stands out for its vastness as well as its important disputes between State and Church, mainly centred on the competence boundaries on who was entitled to authorise, and to a much lesser extent on what to forbid, each claiming rights acquired *ab antiquo*. Here, from 1544 (year of the first of seven viceregal Pragmatics, which yet end up recognising the double preventive censorship of the ordinary and of the viceroy), revision of manuscripts and printing licence are the charge of the Major Chaplain [“high ecclesiastic dignitary yes, but also high state dignitary as the King's Proto-Chaplain” (Monti, 1925, p. 160)]; and from 1550 (with the second Pragmatic) the requests for

printing licences are to be transmitted to the Collateral Council which, following the order of the viceroy and the assent of the Major Chaplain, duly requested, contributes, according to the usual custom, to formalise the provision by sending the licence to the applicant. The remedy of the Royal *exequatur*, which was however applied inconstantly (as it happened with the Pragmatics), allows, furthermore, Spanish sovereigns and viceroys to impede that pontifical norms, council decrees or censorship rules can jeopardise royal sovereignty or prerogatives, the latter strongly backed by the “*ministri togati*”, Neapolitan actors of the great jurisdictional controversy of the centuries XVII-XVIII (Sabato, 2009). In the Borbonic 18th century, an age of concordat policy, the printing licence is released first by the Chamber of Santa Chiara, then in 1741 by the provincial Udienza (with the fourth of the thirteen Pragmatics of the 18th century) and finally once again by the Chamber of Santa Chiara (Pragmatic of 1742, which also states a new distribution of competences also between the Major Chaplain, appointed to the revision of documents, and the Delegate of the jurisdiction, in charge of issuing the *publicetur*) (Sabato, 2007). In the other Spanish domain that had remained charge of the Roman Inquisition, the Duchy of Milan, preventive censorship is also officially in the hands of the government, which however operates idly. What happens instead in the other two Spanish domains, which however are under the Spanish Inquisition, Sicily and Sardinia, is rather interesting. Here, censorship remains usually in the hands of the bishops and not the royal officials, as was indeed decreed by the royal Pragmatic of 1554. Also and especially in the States outside the direct Spanish influence (Duchy of Savoy, Grand Duchy of Tuscany, Este States) is practically the ecclesiastic authority that controls the editorial activity (at least until the royalist revisions of the 1700s laws on the press), since the claims of the sovereign prerogatives were uninfluential. In fact, some of these belong to that group of States of the Catholic area that in post-Tridentine times see the sovereignty become the object of an implied allocation between ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction. The Grand Duchy of Tuscany, for instance, in the first half of the 17th century (and for about a century), sees the rise of a system of preventive censorship based on the effective priority of the editor appointed by the Inquisition (a notable member, often, of the civil society), whilst an official of the prince, the secretary of *Riformagioni*, still acts as a censor, placing the *vidit* on each manuscript destined to the press. One century later, with the reformation of the censorship in Tuscany, promoted by a foreign dynasty – the Lorena – unrelated to the counter-reformation ideas, the secular editor holds the prerogative to grant a printing permit, though a binding opinion is requested by the ecclesiastic one. In Spain, one of the first States to create a control system and to resolve the debate on competence early on (as shown by the better effectiveness of its censorship action), the

licence (made compulsory as early as 1502) can be granted by the sovereign or by the presidents of the *Audiencias* (since 1554, only by the Royal Council of Castile), but also by the bishops, given the strong link between the Spanish Church and the Crown. The apex of collaboration between the Inquisition and the University of Salamanca and Alcalá is reached with the index of 1583; and towards the end of the century, the interference of the Spanish Inquisition on the control of the circulation of books becomes such that it replaces, as an authority, the State. During the XVIII century, this censorship device shows signs of weakness because of the failure of the inquisitorial control system and state censorship grows strong again. But the “vocation to compromise” is a defining trait especially of Neapolitan policy in the modern era, openly manifested during a specific stage, as short as it was doubtful (the last 20 years of the 1500s), of the history of State-Church conflicts, when the viceroy allows the archbishop, or his vicar, to review the manuscripts to be printed; and even more with the Concordat of 1741, which legalises the usual routine of the double censorship, by the ordinary and by the royal magistrate, both for works printed within the Kingdom, and for the ones coming from outside.

Concerning the reformed world, it must be stressed that it does not constitute, as opposed to the Catholic world, a cohesive set where freedom of press and expression prevails. For instance, think of the strict procedure of double revision of manuscripts, installed in 1559, in the Geneva of Calvin; or of the preventive censorship system that existed even in the liberal Republic of the Seven United Provinces, introduced in 1588 (in line with the censorship laws in force in the Spanish Netherlands) which became tougher during the 1700s, following a surge of clandestine press. Furthermore, in Protestant England where in the middle of the 1600s the poet Milton would start the debate in favour of the freedom of the press and thought, preventive censorship is established during the reign of Elizabeth I, when the English Crown takes on the task of issuing licences through the Council of the Crown, which establishes a privileged relationship with the booksellers' guild in London, the *Stationers' Company*. In 1586, the court of the *Star Chamber* introduces the requirement of the *imprimatur* (very similar to the one in use in the Catholic area) of the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of London and under Charles I, the editorial control becomes one of the priorities of the government. But here, where there would never be an efficient and capillary surveillance system like the one in force in the Catholic countries, preventive censorship was abolished in 1695, with failure to renew the *Licensing Act* (of 1662) which granted the requirement of a printing licence.

The case of England is fitting to introduce another aspect of the censorship practice, the repressive one (exercised not only on books but also

on people), which, though having been more common and long lasting than the preventive one, has received less attention from historians. Having taken place in the Italian States, through specific prohibitions as well as surveillance at custom houses, periodic visits to print shops and bookshops and the seizure of forbidden books (functions that were carried out by the Inquisition or, in its absence, by the secular police), repressive censorship is characterised by the fact that it could also be exercised without prevention. Thus in England, after the implied annulment of the *Licensing Act*, the government is preoccupied with actualising measures to contain obscene, blasphemous and mutinous libels, i.e. any work opposing the government and potentially dangerous to the public peace. Similar to the case of England are the censorship regimes in force, for instance, in Sweden, where the freedom of press entails a significant exacerbation of the repression of unlawful documents; or in the political area of the Hapsburg Empire (particularly in Tuscany or in the Austrian Lombardy; here, with the absolutistic reforms of censorship, prevails the priority of the secular censor over the ecclesiastic one), where preventive censorship is considered arbitrary and ineffective and there is a perceived need to reinforce the police provisions and to hold authors and printmakers more responsible of the works published. Even in revolutionary France, which enacts the principle of abolition of preventive censorship, there is great attention in hindering excessive freedom, as it is also indicated in article 11 of the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, where, after a first part that grants the right to free communication of thoughts and opinions, there follows a second (often overlooked by historians) that grants the legislator a wide and discretionary power of intervention. During the revolutionary process and especially during the Jacobin republic and in full Terror there is, therefore, a complex police system (dating back to the age of Luis XIV) that, as well as stemming the circulation of the forbidden book (in particular, the counter-revolutionary one) also works to reaffirm the presence of an established order and the existence of defined political, religious and moral values. And, after a brief period of relatively free press (following the fall of Robespierre in 1794), during the years of the Empire there are severe police restrictions, until the pervasive and effective Napoleonic censorship (directed by the ministry of police) becomes the model of the continental censorships (think of Austria, Prussia and Russia). This happens during the Restoration – when the censorship policies of the Italian States confirm and emphasize the trends in act in the second half of the 1700s, regulating censorship with the directives of the ministries of internal affairs – and through all of the XIX century. During the modern age, dissent control is therefore managed by the secular authorities (with advice and assent of the religious ones) in the Catholic States where the Holy Office did not operate and in the Protestant

States, while it takes place in different ways and with different effectiveness in the territories under the Spanish Inquisition (Sicily and Sardinia, for example) and in those falling within the jurisdiction of the Roman Inquisition (Del Col, 2006, p. 477 ff.). In the numerous studies on Spain, the inquisitorial activity has been carefully assessed and measured, finding – for a country deemed the most and better controlled thanks to an omnipresent and terrible police – a scarce number of provisions regarding the diffusion and reading of the forbidden books. Regarding Italy, the reading repression (which also here seems to be, after all, limited) has been studied for the areas of Naples, Venice and Friuli, where it is possible to see the inquisitorial system in action with trials to readers, printers and booksellers, seizures in private homes and bookshops and where, though with different places and times, the censorship action generally achieves the targets set. Sicily and Sardinia, excluding a few exceptional meddling from Rome, see inquisitors, censors and local commissioners, constantly scrutinised by the Supreme Council of the Inquisition (which directs the repressive activity in Spain), enact seizures of heretical books and apply the indexes of forbidden books of the Spanish Inquisition ever more strictly (though maybe not regularly), carry out careful and specific prohibitions and control goods from ships (not without contrast from the viceregal authorities).

It is apt to mention the *censurae librorum* promoted by the Holy Office (an institution which, amongst all, maintains a de facto and de jure supremacy also on this delicate matter), i.e. the work of doctrinal analysis of a printed book with a view to forbidding, allowing, or expurgating it; the indexes of forbidden books especially constitute a form of censorship peculiar to the Catholic world. In fact, catalogues of books for the use of censors also exist in other contexts, as for instance in England during the 1600s. However, none of these catalogues can compare, for extent and orderliness, to the bibliographic and censorship project implemented during the centuries by the Roman Church. Recent studies, keeping in mind past works (mainly focussed on the external events of the formation of such indexes) and on the basis of the new central sources, have reached its correct understanding, underlining how the index (which has the value of a religious and civil law only in the States that embrace it and which, in time, becomes an internal tool of Catholicism) is part of a broader project (as described already, in 1598, in the *Coltura degl'ingegni* by Antonio Possevino), both the result of different and often contradictory censorship strategies enacted by the Roman congregations (remember that the three universal indexes of the 1500s are the expression of as many ecclesiastic organs – the Holy Office, a commission of bishops at the end of the Council of Trento and the Congregation of the Index – that had many reasons for disagreement related, for instance, to the hierarchical order in the exercise of the revision and

repression of the forbidden books, to the treatment reserved to the books condemned, to the role of the vernacular in the liturgy and the religious training of the devotees), and a flexible tool (in the sense that it can easily adapt to the varying strategies for the control of the book production), has brought upon consequences on knowledge and devotion that should not be taken for granted. With reference to the latter, for example, the theory that the indexes are the result of a rift in the circulation of knowledge between northern and southern Europe appears arguable today. Though “universal”, the Roman index is in fact welcomed in different ways in the Catholic world: France ignores it, and Spain and Portugal possess indexes compiled by the local Inquisitions, that are often rather divergent from the ones from Rome. Even in the Italian States the adoption of the index is neither immediate nor very problematic (while the Tridentine one is accepted mostly without difficulties): thus, for instance, in Tuscany (which will come closer to the Roman index only in the 1700s, with the “secularisation” of the catalogue by Benedict XIV), in Venice (especially during the Interdict, and for all the first half of the 1600s), in the Kingdom of Naples (where the Royal *exequat*ur is never formally granted) and even more in Sicily and Sardinia (where the indexes work in a limited way, since censorship takes place independently from Rome).

In the historiographical discussion, also worth noting, for their numerous important indications, are those studies that have examined the different “answers” from the public to the provisions of the censorship that, however “occurred continuously, but most of the times did not achieve the desired effects [...]. [And] if the results were more effective in Catholic Europa and especially in Italy and Spain it was due to the rational organisation of the structures the Catholic censorship was able to adopt” (Infelise, 1999, pp. 11, 24-25). On the one side, it was deemed essential to consider, as an alternative to compliance to the law, the common practice of the book offense (often caused, as in the Kingdom of Naples, by the “imperfection” of the rules, the rigidity of the censorship and to the traditional impotence of the police in the field of diffusion of ideas), generally equated to counterfeit, plagiarism and general clandestine activity, included the one carried out in private printmakers as places potentially favourable to “occult” printing. Within the context of this issue, it is also worth mentioning the phenomenon of the implied authorisations (unofficial permission to print) and the “forged date” (bogus printmaker/fake or omitted publishing location), i.e. that sort of unlawfulness permitted and regulated through implied allowance by the political authority, unbeknownst (but not always) to the ecclesiastical one. Such practice, the result of negotiations that paradoxically represent a way to safeguard the interests of the typographic art, is particularly relevant in Venice during the “war” of the Interdict; in

modern France, where at first it is a manifestation of the widespread phenomenon of the editorial counterfeit, and only later an extended expression of an implied printing permit; but also in Tuscany of the 70's and 80's of the 1700s. Furthermore, it is also a consequence of censorship the steadfast resistance of the manuscript, able to bypass the converging censorships of States and Churches and to circulate within organised circuits, as can be found in much of the trial material of the centuries XVII and XVIII. On the other hand, the historians, still wondering nowadays about the effects of the censorship system, sometimes “unexpected effects” (for example, unlawfulness allowed by glitches in the system or the curiosity intensified by prohibition), and not being able to always count on the quantitative data alone, have researched the serious repercussions of ecclesiastical censorship on the conscience. Apart from episodes of nicodemite dissimulation (useful to circumvent censorship and very common in the Kingdom of Naples), researchers have also investigated, therefore, “interiorised” censorship and the public belief in the binding character of the ecclesiastical prohibitions, hence self-censorship (hard to study, but usefully analysed nowadays through the translation of political and philosophical works), reporting oneself to the authority (a numerically relevant and long lasting phenomenon) and the licenses to read the forbidden works (a practice of complex interpretation, but absolutely not exceptional).

Conclusion

The analysis of the historical processes regarding book censorship in modern Europe might end up providing a pertinent key to better understand contemporary reality. The study of the modern age allows, in particular, to focus the genetic instants of practices that today are at the centre of important upheavals and to make the transformations we are experiencing more intelligible. According to Robert Darnton – a scholar who is aware of the extent with which technological innovations, with the development of new forms of communications able to increase the individual freedom of expression, and with the success of new control methods, are provoking an extraordinary mass behavioural change –, “immersion in the past can provide a useful perspective overview of present and future events” (2011, p. 17). Also, Peter Burke, in a felicitous handbook of history of communication, invites the reader to “take history seriously” and to “realise that some media phenomena go back further than is normally admitted” (Briggs and Burke, 2010, p. 10). In fact, the belief is that, like the current events, the past is unique and that a mutual comparison is possible only after becoming aware of their irreducible diversity.

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