

## BOOK REVIEW

Hannah Marcus, *Forbidden Knowledge: Medicine, Science, and Censorship in Early Modern Italy*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2020. 380 pp. \$45.00. ISBN: 978-0-226-73658-7 (hb).

Since the late 1990s, there has been increasing interest in ecclesiastical censorship and its impact in early modern Italy, a development that has been encouraged by the opening of the Archives of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith (ACDF) in 1998. Such historians as Adriano Prosperi, Vittorio Frajese and Gigliola Fragnito have used newly available documents to reconstruct various aspects of the process of censorship in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, expose its practical limitations, and debate the extent to which the laity participated in this work. These studies have been complemented by Ugo Baldini and Leen Spruit's monumental collection of sixteenth-century documents relating to science held in the ACDF, published in 2009. Their study allowed them to conclude that during the sixteenth century very few individuals (perhaps no more than three) were placed on trial for articulating scientific ideas or saw their work censored on account of its scientific content. Instead, works were censored either because they were written by heretics or because they contained superstitious ideas.

In *Forbidden Knowledge* Hannah Marcus expands on several of the themes and arguments developed in these earlier studies by focusing on the censorship of medicine and its impact on medical practitioners. Marcus enriches our understanding of the processes of censorship by underlining the complexities caused by the principle of expurgation. Introduced by the Tridentine Index of 1564, it identified works that were useful for Catholic readers but were either written by heretics or contained specific ideas judged contrary to the faith. Like Baldini and Spruit, Marcus shows that the process of expurgating medical texts was primarily directed either at works written by Protestants that offered no indication of their authors' confessional allegiance or those that contained superstitious passages. This latter category included descriptions of potentially heterodox healing practices such as the use of talismans or methods of prognostication, such as chyromancy, that resembled divination.

Whilst Marcus's work supports Baldini and Spruit's conclusions, it provides a clearer understanding of the implications of censorship for the Italian medical community. The opening chapter describes the development of a new centralised system of censorship and its impact on the medical republic of letters, noting the reaction to the first papal Index of 1559 and the subsequent introduction of the principle of expurgation in the second Tridentine Index of 1564. The following chapters describe the convoluted development of mechanisms for the censorship of books. In the later sixteenth century, local congregations of censors were established in several intellectual centres to contribute to an Expurgatory Index, a list of required changes to suspended works that was

eventually published in 1607. Marcus describes how lay experts were enrolled in the work of scrutinising medical texts in Padua, the practical difficulties that the Paduan medical community encountered during this work (accessing books, for example) and their apparent reluctance to participate. She also highlights the work of one, unusually enthusiastic, lay censor, the historian and physician Girolamo Rossi, who, Marcus suggests, regarded this work as an opportunity to contribute to Catholic reform. Despite his extensive labours, Rossi's proposed expurgations played only a minimal role in the composition of the Expurgatory Index. Indeed, despite the construction of the congregation system lay expertise played only a marginal role in the creation of this list.

The second half of the book addresses the implications of censorship for Catholic readers. One chapter considers the process of book licensing. Individuals could apply to the Holy Office for permission to possess and read texts placed on the index. For works that had been subject to expurgation, such licences were granted on the condition that they were amended in line with the changes set out in the 1607 Expurgatory Index. Marcus uses archival records to explore the strategies adopted by members of the medical community as they sought permission to read prohibited works and the subjects that interested them. Further chapters reveal the material history of book censorship, by considering the physical practices – burning books, excising passages with a knife, or obscuring them with ink or paper – involved in the alteration of texts to render them orthodox. The final chapter discusses how heterodox works were accommodated in such libraries as the Biblioteca Vaticana, Biblioteca Ambrosiana and the Biblioteca Marciana. Here Marcus recounts the potential dangers of allowing access to controversial works and the systems these libraries constructed to ameliorate these risks, ranging from measures such as using specific book binding to identify heterodox works to the creation of specific areas to shelve them.

I was left with some lingering questions about the book's broader intellectual framework. Throughout the work Marcus deploys, but nowhere discusses, the concept of 'Counter-Reformation'. The meaning and utility of this category has been debated since at least the mid-twentieth century and thus requires careful definition. This is especially important in this book as Marcus frequently uses the category to perform analytical work; for instance, we are informed that Rossi applied the tool of humanist scholarship 'to serve the Counter-Reformation agenda' (79) and that for pious Catholics licensing and censorship 'were integral parts of a broader Counter-Reformation piety' (146). Questions about the most appropriate categories to interpret this era of Catholic history are also at the heart of disputes over the imperatives driving censorship, its nature and its effects, which have taken place between the historians mentioned at the beginning of this review. Marcus raised several of the issues that they debated; for instance, the degree to which members of the laity participated in the work of, or even internalised standards and principles of censorship. However, the lack of sustained engagement with this literature, and indeed wider discussions about how best to conceptualise this period of Church history, limited Marcus's ability to use her many insights to intervene in these debates. Nevertheless, Marcus's book undoubtedly makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of censorship in early modern Italy.