

The banning of a culture: intellectuals, illiterates and censorship in Counter-Reformation Italy, I (abstract)
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The plan to control ideas and book circulation which the papacy enacted in the second half of the sixteenth century in close collaboration with the Congregation of the Inquisition and the Congregation of the Index radically changed the landscape of Italian culture. The repeated and systematic interventions to ban or expurgate books which marked the last decades of the century profoundly influenced the cultural habits and frame of mind of contemporary Italians. The best productions of humanistic Platonic culture were excised in the name of the prevailing Aristotelianism; the most perceptive and innovative Italian political thinkers of the first half of the sixteenth century were swept away by an increasingly pervasive *raison d'église*; the best-known works of Italian lay and religious literature were either entirely removed from the publishing market or returned to the reading public in a frankly unrecognizable form; the devout Christocentrism of *The Benefit of Christ* was replaced by the suffocating dictatorship of Marian theology and the cult of the saints. Ten years after the opening to the public of the archives of the Holy Office we now know much more about the censorship history of individual books placed on the Index and we have a clearer view of the vast array of texts which came under the attack of the Roman cardinals. We are also better informed about the delays, lack of efficiency, opposition and difficulties encountered at various stages in the implementation of the censorship plan.

The object of my research project is to investigate the impact of censorship on Italian culture during the Early Modern Age and the effects of this imposing effort of cultural and social discipline on the structuring of Italian cultural identity. I intend to examine the historical figures of the intellectual and the illiterate and determine the evolution (or regression) of their roles between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries so as to establish whether the increasingly evident separation between the unlettered and the intellectual classes was the result of a conscious choice on the part of the ecclesiastical hierarchies or merely an unsought effect of Rome's policy of censorship.