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Inquisitions, Iconography, and Memory

(13th-19th century)

edited by Irene Bueno, Vincenzo Lavenia,
José Pedro Paiva, Nicole Reinhardt

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Introduction

1. *Images and memory*

A quick look at the covers of the countless books which, at least since the late 17th century, have addressed the history, actions, and impact of the modern Inquisitions on the Italian Peninsula and the Iberian world – including, in the latter case, the territories in the respective empires in the Americas, Africa, and Asia – is both perplexing and disappointing.¹ On the one hand, there is a relatively repetitive visual language: readers are rarely surprised by new or unexpected imagery. On the other hand, there is a strong focus on depictions of the Inquisition's most prominent ritual: the *auto de fe*. Paintings by Francisco de Goya from the turn of the 18th century are also widely used, and, despite their sharply critical and condemnatory view of the Inquisition, they still stand out for their power and originality. The state of historical scholarship somewhat mirrors this first impression: systematic or in-depth engagements with the visual representations of the Holy Office across the *longue durée* of its existence are rare, and the visual materials on which they draw tend to be fairly limited.²

1. For some of the earliest, without going back to the 16th century, see, for example, Philippus van Limborch, *Historia Inquisitionis*, Amsterdam, apud Henricum Westenium, 1692; Jacques Marsollier, *Histoire de l'Inquisition et son origine*, Cologne, Pierre Marteau, 1693; James Baker, *A Complete History of the Inquisitions of Portugal, Spain, Italy, the East and West Indies in all its Branches. From the Origin of it in the Year 1163 to its Present State*, Westminster, O. Payne, 1736.

2. The theme of images, for example, is absent in *A Companion to Heresy Inquisitions*, ed. by Donald Prudlo, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2019, and the collection of studies *Judging Faith, Punishing Sin: Inquisitions and Consistories in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Gretchen Starr-LeBeau and Charles Parker, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

A case in point is the marble relief *Consejo de la Suprema*, which features on the cover of this volume. Carved by Antonio Valeriano Moyano Villareal for the Palacio Real in Madrid in the middle of the 18th century, it has remained largely overlooked in inquisitorial studies, despite its considerable aesthetic quality, historical significance, and prominent location.³

Why is this the case? How can we explain the blind spots and move beyond them? Addressing such questions was the starting point, first for a conference held in 2023 in Coimbra, and then for this volume – the third promoted by Inquire, the International Centre for Research on Inquisitions. By bringing together medievalists and early modernists, specialists on the three major modern Inquisitions as well as on the heterodox movements which these tribunals sought to suppress over the course of nearly six centuries, the volume intends to investigate afresh and from diverse perspectives the nexus between the iconography, memory, and visual representations of the Inquisitions.

The historiographical parsimony regarding the iconography of the Inquisition does not imply, however, a complete absence of scholarly production. For the Middle Ages, research into the image of the heretic has largely prevailed,⁴ and there is no shortage of studies on how manuals for inquisitors inspired the “invention” of ancient heresies and, above all, the iconography of dissent in the 14th and 15th centuries, especially in works commissioned by mendicant orders and for the first seats of the inquisitorial tribunals. Here, the icon of St. Peter Martyr was ubiquitous, well before Beato Angelico – painter and Dominican friar – immortalized him on the frescoed walls of the convent of San Marco in Florence (which was never a seat of the Inquisition) in the 15th century. According to hagiographical sources, on 6 April 1252 the inquisitor Peter of Verona was assassinated between Como and Milan by two hitmen hired by a group of Milanese Cathars. The crime was committed with an axe that struck the judge’s head and side. Before he died, the friar had time to write the words *Credo in Deum* with his own blood on the ground or on his tunic. Canonized in 1253, Peter became the saint and emblem of the inquisition tribunals, including their centralized incarnation in the early modern period. Many of

3. *El Consejo de la Inquisición*, 1758, relief, now in the Colecciones de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid.

4. See Alessia Trivellone, *L’hérétique imaginé: hétérodoxie et iconographie dans l’Occident médiéval de l’époque carolingienne à l’Inquisition*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2009.

the confraternities that supported the tribunals in their repressive activities also took their name from this holy judge and made him a widely recognized icon.

As many scholars who have studied the iconographical fortune of the friar from Verona have shown,⁵ Peter's image usually appears as a figure in its own right, or as a Dominican saint present in many polyptychs, often alongside Thomas Aquinas, or in the moment of his death at the hands of heretics. In any case, the palm of martyrdom ended up overshadowing his work as a judge, also because in general there are hardly any records on inquisitors performing their duties throughout the Middle Ages. Already at that time, the secrecy surrounding the court's proceedings discouraged the representation of trials, even if not of the burnings and punishments of heretics. This was the moment when the court showed itself in public to exercise its pedagogy of fear.

Another important tradition depicted the inquisitor and friar Peter Martyr in the act of preaching in order to exalt and project the controversialist and conversionist function of the *officium fidei*. For example, to remain in Florence, in the Chapter House, also called Spanish Chapel, of the Dominican convent of Santa Maria Novella, the frescoes, painted between 1365 and 1367 by Andrea di Bonaiuto and other artists, showed Peter putting on the friar's habit for the first time, preaching to heretics, performing miracles, and dying at the hands of his assassins. On another wall of the chapel, the famous fresco of the militant and triumphant Church once again included the martyred saint, and at its base, a pack of dogs (the *Domini canes*) mercilessly tearing at wolves (the heretics). Yet, given that Santa Maria Novella never was a seat of the Inquisition, it is doubtful

5. Venturino Alce, "Iconografia di S. Pietro da Verona martire domenicano", *Memorie Domenicane*, 70 (1953), pp. 100-114, now in *Martire per la fede: San Pietro da Verona domenicano e inquisitore*, ed. by Gianni Festa, Bologna, Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2007, pp. 307-329; Luigi Canetti, *L'invenzione della memoria. Il culto e l'immagine di Domenico nella storia dei primi frati Predicatori*, Spoleto, Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1996; Christine Caldwell, "Peter Martyr: The Inquisitor as Saint", *Comitatus*, 31 (2000), pp. 137-173; Marina Benedetti, *Inquisitori lombardi del Duecento*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2008; Donald S. Prudlo, *The Martyred Inquisitor: The Life and Cult of Peter of Verona (†1252)*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008; Andrea Improta, "Dal pulpito al sepolcro. Contributo per l'iconografia di San Pietro Martire da Verona tra XIII e XIV secolo", *Porticvm. Revista d'Estudis Medievals*, 1 (2011), pp. 105-119; and, more recently, *Anatomia di un inquisitore. Frate Pietro da Verona – san Pietro martire*, ed. by Marina Benedetti, Milan, Milano University Press, 2025.

whether these scenes were intended to convey a narrative of the purpose and foundation of the Tribunal of the Faith. In fact, until the 15th century – when Gentile da Fabriano depicted Peter’s martyrdom in one of the panels of the *Incoronazione della Vergine e santi (Polittico di Valle Romita)*, now preserved in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan – it is not easy to establish any direct link between the representation of the martyred inquisitor and the need for prestige of the judges or European seats of the Inquisition. Finally, Peter Martyr often appeared in the initial letters of late medieval legal manuscripts, when the new image of the witch flying to the Sabbath also spread; this would eventually populate the demonology treatises that circulated in the early modern period after the invention of printing. While there is extensive research on the visual representation of witchcraft,⁶ a field that has only recently been explored is that of the representation of religious dissent in 15th-century iconography, when, long before the Lutheran Reformation, the Church fought the heterodoxy of the Lollards and Hussites.⁷

Moving on to research on the tribunals of the early modern period, for many decades the iconographical dimension of inquisitorial studies remained at the margins of academic attention. In one of the earliest major classics in the historiography of the inquisitions – the work of Henry Charles Lea – visual representations received minimal consideration, appearing only sporadically and almost exclusively in a chapter dedicated to the *auto de fe*.⁸ It was not until the early 1980s that the first work focusing almost exclusively on the visual representations of the Holy Office appeared in the form of the catalogue of an exhibition held in Madrid, which included one hundred and seventy-six paintings, drawings, and engravings related to the Spanish Inquisition.⁹ The organizers at the time pledged to

6. See, for example, Charles Zika, *Exorcising Our Demons: Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2003.

7. See Kateřina Horníčková, “Framing the Difference: Visual Strategies of Religious Identification in the Czech Utraquist Towns”, in *Reformation as Communication. Reformation als Kommunikationsprozess: böhmische Kronländer - Sachsen - Mitteleuropa*, ed. by Petr Hrachovec, Gerd Schwerhoff, Minfried Müller, and Martina Schattkowsky, Stuttgart, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020, pp. 261-286.

8. Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain*, New York-London, MacMillan, 1906-1907, vol. III, ch. 5.

9. *La Inquisición. Catálogo de la exposición*, Madrid, Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 1982.

create a Museum of the Inquisition, precisely to make use of these elements of visual culture, but the project ultimately never came to fruition. Yet, it is probably no coincidence that shortly thereafter, within the context of Spanish historiography, Maria Victoria González de Caldas published a book chapter dedicated to a hitherto largely overlooked representation of an *auto de fe* in Seville.¹⁰

Over the following decade, scholarly attention continued to focus on representations of the *auto de fe* (or *auto da fé* in Portuguese). Particularly noteworthy is the pioneering work of Francisco Bethencourt, who was the first to undertake a serious comparative analysis of various depictions of the ritual from Spain, Italy, and Portugal.¹¹ Consistently attentive to comparative perspectives, Bethencourt went on to analyse inquisitorial emblems with particular attention to the ways in which the institution sought to represent itself through these symbols. The article's rich iconographical apparatus also includes images related to the foundational period of the Spanish Inquisition, the spaces in which its tribunals operated, and portraits of both inquisitors and victims.¹²

Also in the early 1990s, a lesser-known yet significant study by the Brazilian historian Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro appeared, which mapped the broad typology of images alluding to the Inquisition. Carneiro's emphasis was mainly on Spanish and Portuguese paintings as well as books

10. Maria Victoria González de Caldas, "Nuevas imágenes del Santo Oficio en Sevilla: el auto de fe", in *Inquisición Española y mentalidad inquisitorial*, ed. by Angel Alcalá, Barcelona, Ariel, 1984, pp. 237-265.

11. Francisco Bethencourt, "The *auto da fé*: Ritual and Imagery", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 55 (1992), pp. 155-168. See also Maureen Flynn, "Mimesis of the Last Judgment: The Spanish Auto de fe", *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 22 (1991), pp. 281-297; Michael Scholz-Hänsel, "Propaganda de imágenes al servicio de la Inquisición. El auto de fe de Pedro Berruguete en el contexto de su tiempo", *Norba. Revista de Arte*, 12 (1992), pp. 67-81; Consuelo Maqueda Abreu, *El Auto de Fe*, Madrid, Istmo, 1992; Alejandro Cañeque, "Theater of Power: Writing and Representing the Auto de Fe in Colonial Mexico", *The Americas*, 52 (1996), pp. 321-343.

12. The first result of Francisco Bethencourt's foundational research was his doctoral dissertation, defended in 1992 at the European University Institute in Florence. The thesis was published in Portuguese, French, and Spanish: *História das Inquisições. Portugal, Espanha e Itália*, Lisbon, Círculo de Leitores, 1994; *L'Inquisition à l'époque moderne. Espagne, Portugal, Italie, XI^e-XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Fayard, 1995; *La Inquisición en la época moderna: España, Portugal, e Italia, siglos XV-XIX*, Madrid, Akal, 1997. More recently, and with updates, see Francisco Bethencourt, *The Inquisition: A Global History, 1478-1834*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

with engravings. She underscored that representations of *autos de fe* in Spain often portray the enthusiastic and celebratory participation of spectators – a visual testimony to the widespread social support the Iberian Inquisitions enjoyed for much of their duration. She also highlighted the near-total absence of imagery depicting the everyday experiences of defendants in prison, except for Goya who, as she argued, was the artist most capable of exposing the cruelty of the Holy Office through his portrayal of “dark, anguished, and suffering” figures.¹³

The vigorous historiographical production that marked inquisitorial studies in the final three decades of the 20th century, while wide-ranging, arguably paid little attention to visual representations. This trend has remained largely unchanged in the 21st century. Nonetheless, important exceptions exist. In *La invención de la Inquisición*, Doris Moreno sought to explore the “images” and memory of the Inquisition, focusing on representations produced or conveyed by its victims and by foreign travellers. She also examined paintings commissioned by several Grand Inquisitors from prominent artists of the Spanish Golden Age, such as El Greco and Francisco de Zurbarán. Yet, despite the significance of her contribution, the visual dimension is ultimately treated in a marginal fashion.¹⁴

A major step forward in the study of inquisitorial iconography came with the publication of the *Dizionario storico dell’Inquisizione* in 2010. By presenting a carefully curated set of nearly sixty images of exceptional visual quality, it significantly broadened the field’s scope. The selection

13. Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro, “Inquisição e arte: relações entre o real e o imaginário”, in *Inquisição. Ensaios sobre mentalidade, heresias e arte*, ed. by Anita Novinsky and Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro, São Paulo, Edusp, 1992, pp. 457-469. In the same vein, but some 15 years later and with a few new features, see Benair Alcaraz Fernandes Ribeiro, *Arte e Inquisição na Península Ibérica: a arte, os artistas e a Inquisição*, Ph.D. dissertation, Universidade de São Paulo, 2006. See also Michael Scholz-Hänsel, *Inquisition und Kunst. Convivencia in Zeiten der Intoleranz*, Berlin, Frank & Timme, 2009; Geraldo Pieroni, “A imagética inquisitorial: religião, representações e poder”, *Saeculum. Revista de história*, 30 (2014), pp. 63-74; Vitor Serrão, “Iconografia dos Dominicanos na arte portuguesa dos séculos XVI e XVII: uma aproximação geral e algumas representações de casos miraculógicos”, in *Os Dominicanos em Portugal (1216-2016)*, ed. by António Camões Gouveia, José Nunes, and Paulo F. de Oliveira Fontes, Lisbon, Centro de Estudos de História Religiosa - Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 2018, pp. 173-190; José Ruvaldo Marques Pascoal and Carlos André Macedo Cavalcanti, “A construção da imagética inquisitorial”, *Religare*, 18 (2021), pp. 415-439.

14. Doris Moreno, *La invención de la Inquisición*, Madrid, Marcial Pons, 2004.

includes emblems, ritual scenes, medals, insignia, and spaces associated with inquisitorial activity, with particular emphasis on the figure of the inquisitor. Also noteworthy is the inclusion of graffiti found in inquisitorial prisons in Palermo and Narni.

Furthermore, the *Dizionario* includes a valuable and insightful state-of-the-art contribution authored by Chiara Franceschini.¹⁵ In her analysis, Franceschini clearly identified the state of knowledge at the time – a landscape that has changed little since. From the outset, she emphasized the limited number of studies devoted specifically to inquisitorial iconography. She also observed that, in both the medieval and early modern periods, visual representations more often depicted heretics than the Inquisition itself; that the three early modern inquisitorial tribunals did not adopt uniform policies regarding the use of images; and that visual representations of the Inquisition were produced more frequently by its critics and adversaries than by the institution itself. She underlined that the early modern Inquisitions invested little in promoting or sponsoring imagery related to their activities, a strategy they only began to pursue in the 17th century, with the Spanish Inquisition standing out as the most prolific in this regard.

According to Franceschini this pattern was hardly surprising, given the institution's structural reliance on secrecy, particularly regarding its procedures and internal activities. In general, inquisitorial authorities and their ministers employed the visual arts chiefly to project an image of institutional dignity – through architecture, painting, sculpture, engravings in printed works, and medals, as well as through emblems and banners appearing in materials such as the official regulations of the Holy Office. As might be expected, depictions of the Inquisition's "activities, procedures, and methods" are exceedingly rare. This dimension remained largely in the hands of those who opposed the tribunal and gained prominence particularly from the 18th century onward, contributing to the construction of the "black legend" that has continued to shape perceptions of the Iberian Inquisitions in contemporary historical imagination and public discourse.

The secrecy surrounding inquisitorial procedures, combined with the harsh image of the Inquisition propagated by authors affiliated with the European Enlightenment since the late 17th century, has led to numerous

15. Chiara Franceschini, "Arti figurative: la rappresentazione", in *Dizionario storico dell'Inquisizione*, ed. by Adriano Prosperi, Vincenzo Lavenia, and John Tedeschi, Pisa, Edizioni della Normale, 2010, vol. I, pp. 105-107.

distortions. This is particularly evident in representations of torture, many of which were never sanctioned or employed by the courts of the Holy Office, but which continue to influence public perceptions of the tribunal. The prevalence of such images, nowadays readily accessible online, exemplify this pervasive trend – one that rigorous and scholarly historiography struggles to counterbalance.

Even after the publication of the *Dizionario*, however, studies dedicated to the iconography and memory of the Inquisition have remained relatively scarce, and tend to focus on specific facets within limited geographical and chronological scopes. This holds true also in terms of the thematic focus, methodological approaches, and interpretive functions of iconography in shaping the identity of the Inquisition and elucidating its role in legitimizing the actions of this powerful tribunal.¹⁶ Only few studies have employed comparative approaches. This has somewhat limited the chronological understanding of the development of the tribunals in the transition from the medieval to the early modern period, as well as a more geographically nuanced grasp that is sensitive to the variations between the Iberian Peninsula and its colonial dependencies, where the ritualization of the *autos* reached unusual levels and inspired many images, on the one hand, and the contexts in which the Roman Inquisition operated on the other. In fact, after the first years of harsh repression against heretical dissent, the Papal Holy Office discouraged the Iberian “spectacularisation” of capital punishment – the display of the “splendour of torment”, to use Michel Foucault’s words – preferring to appear instead as an institution dedicated to penitence, persuasion, and conversion. This helps explain why, until now, it has been difficult to trace the iconographical developments inspired by the activities of the Roman Inquisition in the 16th-18th centuries. Furthermore, the leading interpreters of Italian religious history

16. See also Karina Galperin, “The Passion according to Berruguete: Painting the Auto-da-fé and the Establishment of the Inquisition in Early Modern Spain”, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 14/4 (2014), pp. 315-347; Daniel García Cabrera, “La escenificación de la penitencia: un auto de fe en la Granada de 1606”, *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma. Serie IV. Historia Moderna*, 35 (2022), pp. 207-230, <https://doi.org/10.5944/etfv.35.2022.31224>; Manuel Peña Díaz, “Los sambenitillos. Imagen y penitencia en el mundo hispánico (siglos XVI-XVIII)”, *Revista Historia y Justicia*, 15 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.4000/rhj.7522>; Guilherme Augusto Guglielmelli Silveira, “Iconografia sobre as Inquisições Ibéricas e o tema de São Domingos e Dominicanos”, *Perspectiva Pictorum*, 3/1 (2024), pp. 61-76, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13892111>.

have devoted little study to the representation of the tribunal and its local judges, preferring to focus on the relationship between religious dissent, artists' networks, and the production of works with subtle heterodox meanings during the crisis that engulfed the Peninsula from the Sack of Rome to the final years of the Council of Trent.¹⁷

A volume edited in 2019 by Giovanna Fiume and Mercedes García-Arenal breaks with this pattern.¹⁸ Firstly, it addresses a scarcely explored field until then: the extraordinary graffiti left by detainees incarcerated in the jails of the Palermo Inquisition.¹⁹ Secondly, its innovative methodology involves inviting multiple scholars to examine the same subject from diverse perspectives, yielding a richer, more critical, and nuanced interpretation of the images and inscriptions under study. For example, Fiume advances a compelling thesis, highlighting the dynamics of justice/guilt and obedience/redemption evident in the drawings and writings of the inmates of the Palermo Inquisition. Her detailed analysis further uncovers possible links between the harsh conditions endured by the prisoners and the representations of hell found in hagiographical and theological sources. Her reading suggests that the graffiti may be understood as a form of condemnation directed at the Holy Office.²⁰ Fiume has since expanded her research in a remarkable book that offers further avenues for exploration.²¹ In fact, the

17. See, for example, Massimo Firpo, "Per una iconografia dell'Inquisizione. Un dipinto di Federico Zuccari per l'elezione di Sisto V", in Massimo Firpo, *Storie di immagine, immagini di storia. Studi di iconografia cinquecentesca*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2010, pp. 173-202. See also Massimo Firpo and Fabrizio Biferali, *Immagini ed eresie nell'Italia del Cinquecento*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2016; Ottavia Niccoli, *Rinascimento anticlericale. Infamia, propaganda e satira in Italia tra Quattro e Cinquecento*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2005; Ottavia Niccoli, *Vedere con gli occhi del cuore. Il potere delle immagini tra XV e XVII secolo*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2011; Ottavia Niccoli, "Veronese between Devotion, Heresy and the Counter-Reformation", in *Paolo Veronese 1528-1588: Catalogue*, ed. by Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo and Miguel Falomir, Madrid, Museo del Prado, 2025, pp. 98-115; and some essays collected in Adriano Prosperi, *Eresie*, Rome, Quodlibet, 2021.

18. *I graffiti delle carceri del Santo Ufficio di Palermo*, ed. by Giovanna Fiume and Mercedes García-Arenal, Palermo, Istituto Poligrafico Europeo, 2019.

19. For an earlier study of these graffiti, see Gianclaudio Civalè, "Animo carcerato. Inquisizione, detenzione e graffiti a Palermo", *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche*, 40 (2017), pp. 149-194.

20. Giovanna Fiume, "Visibile parlare. Disegni e scritture esposte nelle carceri segrete", in *I graffiti delle carceri del Santo Ufficio di Palermo*, pp. 169-213.

21. Giovanna Fiume, *Del Santo Uffizio in Sicilia e delle sue carceri*, Rome, Viella, 2021. See also Rita Foti, *I graffiti delle carceri segrete del Santo Ufficio di Palermo. Inventario*,

analysis of graffiti, writings, and testimonies left by prisoners on the walls of their cells is an area of research that is rapidly expanding²² and which, within the study of the inquisitions,²³ allows to cross-reference material history, the history of literacy, the history of social mobility, the history of representations of justice, and the micro-histories of heresy trials.

In this context, the “material turn” has opened up further innovative avenues of research to broaden the understanding of the practices and horizons that governed the encounters of judges and detainees. One approach is to focus on objects seized from defendants. These could include drawings, amulets, and written spells, some of which are still preserved in some case files, particularly within the archives of the Portuguese Inquisition, as well as those of Mexico. At the conference held in Coimbra in November 2023, Giuseppe Marcocci explored this line of inquiry in a paper entitled *Domesticating Infamous Objects: A Fictitious Sambenito and the Forgotten Archives of Material Culture*, thereby helping to chart these paths.²⁴

designed and ed. by Giovanna Fiume, Palermo, Palermo University Press, 2023. For the local courts of the Roman Inquisition, see Russell Palmer, “Religious Colonialism in Early Modern Malta: Inquisitorial Imprisonment and Inmate Graffiti”, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 20 (2016), pp. 548-561; Roberto Nini, “Segni di speranza. Carceri e graffiti nel Sant’Uffizio di Spoleto a Narni”, *Giornale di storia*, 24 (2017), pp. 1-13; Anna Clara Basilicò, “Becoming Subalterns: Writing and Scribbling in Early Modern Prisons”, *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 13 (2024), pp. 81-102; Lorenzo Bonvicini, “‘Ingiusticia e chrudeltà’. I graffiti dei carcerati nel Sant’Uffizio di Reggio Emilia in età moderna”, *Riforma e movimenti religiosi*, 18 (2025), forthcoming.

22. See, for example, Charlotte Guichard, *Graffiti. Inscrire son nom à Rome, XVI^e-XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Seuil, 2014; Antonio Castillo Gómez, *Dalle carte ai muri. Scrittura e società nella Spagna della prima età moderna*, Rome, Carocci, 2016; Matthew J. Champion, “Magic on the Walls: Ritual Protection Marks in the Medieval Church”, in *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts, Sorcery and Witchcraft in Christian Britain: A Feeling for Magic*, ed. by Ronald Hutton, London, Palgrave, 2016, pp. 15-38; Carlo Tedeschi, “Epigrafi, graffiti, scritture esposte. Una nota terminologica”, *Scripta*, 16 (2023), pp. 235-255. Tedeschi is directing the ERC AdvGrant “Graff-IT”.

23. Jean Petitjean, “Inscribing, Writing and Drawing in the Prisons of the Inquisition. Methodological Issues and Research Perspectives on Graffiti”, *Quaderni storici*, 53/1 (2018), pp. 15-38 (the essay is part of the special issue “Graffiti: New Perspectives from the Inquisitorial Prisons in Palermo”, ed. by Giovanna Fiume and Mercedes García-Arenal).

24. The paper was presented in Portuguese under the title *Domesticar objetos infamantes: sobre um sambenito fictício e os arquivos esquecidos da cultura material*. A recent essay offers a visual history of the *sambenito*: Cloe Cavero de Carondelet and Yonatan Glazer-Eytan, “Infamy within Sight: Making and Unmaking Sambenitos in the Early Modern Iberian World”, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 77 (2024), pp. 389-441. An example

Another promising approach to the study of material and visual culture lies in examining the inventories compiled at the time of the suppression of Inquisition tribunals. The 19th-century inventory of the Coimbra tribunal, for example, includes descriptions of cupboards, shelves, tables, benches, and inkwells, as well as sand tools used for drying ink during trials. It also records the contents of the chapel that existed within the building where the Inquisition operated. Detailed inventories recording income, expenditure, and purchases of objects and works of art were indeed compiled by the inquisitors throughout the tribunals' existence from the 16th century onwards; a more systematic analysis of these could shed light on the material history of the court buildings, the devotion of the magistrates who fought heresy, and the inquisitors' attitude towards the arts.²⁵

This volume will talk mainly about the iconography of the tribunals, the judges, and the victims, starting from the Middle Ages, but the editors' and authors' aim is also to offer some suggestions for extending the scope of future research. For example, what relationship existed between text and image in the manuscripts and printed works produced by, or intended for, the inquisitors? What role did artistic patronage,²⁶ paintings, statues, buildings, funerals, tombs, and epitaphs play in the construction of the "voluntary memory" of the courts?²⁷ In what sense can we speak of a strategy for

of visual material seized from a defendant is examined in Nathalie Miraval, "How to Tame Your Dragon. Saint Martha, *Hechicería*, and Afro-Catholic Expressive Culture in Sixteenth-Century New Spain", in *The Routledge Companion to Race in Early Modern Artistic, Material, and Visual Production*, ed. by Nicholas R. Jones, Christina H. L. Lee, and Dominique E. Polanco, New York, Routledge, 2025, pp. 146-152.

25. For the Roman Holy Office, some suggestions can be found in Vincenzo Lavenia, "L'Inquisizione a Firenze prima e dopo Salviati", in *Filippo Salviati filosofo libero*, ed. by Alli Caracciolo, Macerata, Eum, 2016, pp. 51-76; Dennj Solera, *La società dell'Inquisizione. Uomini, tribunali e pratiche del Sant'Uffizio romano*, Rome, Carocci, 2021.

26. For the Spanish Inquisition, see Michael Scholz-Hänsel, "¿La Inquisición como mecenas? Imágenes al servicio de la disciplina y propaganda inquisitorial", *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología*, 60 (1994), pp. 301-320; Agustín Bustamante, "El Santo Oficio de Valladolid y los artistas", *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología*, 61 (1995), pp. 455-466; Sonia Caballero Escamilla, "Los santos dominicos y la propaganda inquisitorial en el convento de Santo Tomás de Ávila", *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 39 (2009), pp. 357-387; Sonia Caballero Escamilla, "Fray Tomás de Torquemada, iconógrafo y promotor de las artes", *Archivo Español de Arte*, 82 (2009), pp. 19-34.

27. Manuel Peña Díaz reflected on the effects of infamy and the memory of inquisitorial trials: "Inquisitorial Memory and Everyday Life in the Hispanic World", in

building social prestige, activated by the leaders of the inquisitions or by individual judges who wanted to exalt themselves as magistrates against heresy? And how did visual and written memory relate to each other after the first histories or prosopographies of the courts of faith began to be elaborated?²⁸

An important area of inquiry concerns the implicit or explicit guidelines the different inquisitions followed in the field of image censorship. As is well known, at the end of the 16th century the Roman congregations renounced drawing up an Index of Images, which had been suggested by the Cardinal of Bologna Gabriele Paleotti.²⁹ Yet the discipline of devotions, holiness, and anti-Roman propaganda induced the judges of the faith to put in place a policy of iconographical control, which currently ongoing research projects have already begun to address. The point of view of the artists who worked under the watchful eye of the tribunal, a perspective which has not yet come fully into focus, might also be better assessed in future in light of such studies.³⁰ Paradoxically maybe,

The Complexity of Hispanic Religious Life in the 16th-18th Centuries, ed. by Doris Moreno and Phil Grayston, Leiden, Brill, 2020, pp. 103-123. However, there is no comprehensive study on the monumentalization of the memory of judges and inquisitorial courts. For the funeral rites of the members of the tribunals, see Ricardo Pessa de Oliveira, “Cerimónias fúnebres por Inquisidores gerais no século XVIII”, *Revista de Portugal*, 5 (2008), pp. 21-30; Isabel Drumond Braga and Paulo Drumond Braga, “As virtudes do Inquisidor geral: os sermões de exéquias e a imagem dos dirigentes do Santo Ofício no século XVII”, in *Um historiador pelos seus pares: trajetórias de Ronaldo Vainfas*, ed. by Angelo A. Faria de Assis, Polyanna Gouveia de Mendonça Muniz, and Yllan de Mattos, São Paulo, Alameda, 2017, pp. 23-41; Vincenzo Lavenia, “Morte dell’inquisitore. Prestigio sociale e celebrazione di alcune ‘vite per l’ufficio’”, in *Il mite maestro. Studi per John Tedeschi*, ed. by Giorgio Caravale, Vincenzo Lavenia, and Pierroberto Scaramella, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2025, pp. 61-97.

28. For the first judge-historian of the Inquisition, see Kimberly Lynn Hossain, “Was Adam the First Heretic? Diego de Simancas, Luis de Páramo, and the Origins of Inquisitorial Practice”, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 97 (2006), pp. 184-210. For the Roman Inquisition, see Vincenzo Lavenia, “Centro e periferia dell’Inquisizione nelle ricerche prosopografiche”, in *L’Inquisizione romana e i suoi archivi. A vent’anni dall’apertura dell’ACDF*, ed. by Alejandro Cifres, Rome, Gangemi, 2019, pp. 359-371.

29. See Paolo Prodi, *Arte e pietà nella chiesa tridentina*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2014. For the debate on images in the 16th century, see Wietse De Boer, *Art in Dispute: Catholic Debates at the Time of Trent. With an Edition and Translation of Key Documents*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2022.

30. See the excellent synopsis by Chiara Franceschini, “Arti figurative: il controllo”, in *Dizionario storico dell’Inquisizione*, vol. I, pp. 102-105. For the first results of a larger

this also begs the question to what extent the courts of faith could themselves promote instances of iconoclasm, as they entered into contact with “pagans” and “idolaters” in the global theatre of the Catholic Church.³¹ Similarly, since the concerns regarding the disciplining of *conversos*, the control over religious minorities, and their respective use or refusal of images seem to have been deeply entwined, the question of how this shaped the tribunals’ activities and the judges’ attitudes merits closer exploration.³²

Finally, what happened when the courts were abolished and restored between the 18th and 19th centuries? So far, at least, there are no in-depth or comparative studies on what happened when the end of the Holy Office courts was decreed: what was destroyed (or preserved), apart from the trial papers? By whose will? And how was a secular or anticlerical counter-narrative constructed in the places of inquisitorial memory during the 19th century? These are just a few suggestions, in a field that has yet to be thoroughly explored by cross-referencing printed texts, archival documents, and iconographical sources. There is also no database cataloguing the works of art and images produced, censored, or destroyed by the inquisitions and their judges from the Middle Ages to the age of abolition. The Inquire website (<https://inquire.unibo.it>) will include several sections dedicated to iconography with hundreds of images relating to the inquisitions until modern times (including those inspired by the controversy surrounding the tribunal). It will undoubtedly be expanded over the coming years as researchers move forward and their studies yield new results.

European project (<https://www.sacrima.eu/>) on questions of censorship and self-censorship, but not limited to the history of the inquisitions, see the collection of essays *Sacred Images and Normativity: Contested Forms in Early Modern Art*, ed. by Chiara Franceschini, Turnhout, Brepols, 2021.

31. Without mentioning the numerous studies on Spanish America, for Portuguese India see Jorge Flores and Giuseppe Marcocci, “Killing Images: Iconoclasm and the Art of Political Insult in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Portuguese India”, *Itinerario*, 42 (2018), pp. 461-489.

32. See Emily Michelson, *Catholic Spectacles and Rome’s Jews: Early Modern Conversion and Resistance*, Princeton-Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2022; Katherine Aron-Beller, *Christian Images and their Jewish Desecrators: The History of an Allegation, 400-1700*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024.

2. *This book: Structure and themes*

The collected essays in this volume delve into the many-layered iconographical legacies of the European inquisitions from the medieval to the early modern period. Across the centuries and diverse geographies, they analyse images commissioned by the tribunals and their agents as well as the traces left by their victims. Not least, the authors also address the question of the long-lasting effects of these visual sources on the mental landscapes and historical memory, not only in the territories where the tribunals of the faith were historically active, but across Europe and beyond.³³ They reveal a rich visual culture and “memory theatre”, which arguably could never be tightly controlled. While the contributions bring to light a multitude of new sources and methodological approaches, further research is undoubtedly needed to untap more fully a range of material that was damaged, concealed, or never on public display.

Historians of the ancient and medieval periods have always made wide use of visual and material sources, but over the past four decades or so early modernists as well as modern and contemporary historians have undoubtedly caught up.³⁴ Yet, even with visual culture now enjoying a full seat at the table of historical inquiry, the specific challenge of the interpretation of images should not be underestimated. As Michael Baxandall has reminded us, art historical description alone is not sufficient to unlock the cultural and social meaning of images, nor can visual sources be interpreted simply as illustrations of texts or mere representations of historical events.³⁵ This is also crucial to keep in mind when considering images referring to inquisitorial activities, which need to be especially carefully embedded in precise local and historical contexts; and even then, the ques-

33. See *Tribunal der Barbaren? Deutschland und die Inquisition in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. by Albrecht Burkardt and Gerd Schwerhoff, Constance, Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 2012; Marie von Lüneburg, *Tyrannie und Teufel. Die Wahrnehmung der Inquisition in deutschsprachigen Druckmedien im 16. Jahrhundert*, Cologne-Weimar-Vienna, Böhlau, 2020.

34. See here, in particular, Francis Haskell, *History and its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1993; *Art and History. Images and their Meaning*, ed. by Theodore K. Rabb and Robert I. Rotberg, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

35. Michael Baxandall, “Art, Society, and the Bougueur Principle”, *Representations*, 12 (1985), pp. 32-43. See also Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past. Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

tion of how they were understood by the different historical agents and audiences, or what emotional response they triggered, can remain elusive.

The interplay between text and image is certainly complex,³⁶ as is evident in many of the contributions that follow, and at times it is the reading of the images that helps with unpacking the meaning of texts. And finally, it is evident that the power of images could unfold over the centuries. Real and imagined scenes circulated and were condensed into literary tropes, by which authors could activate the reader's inner eye and imagination in an instant, which in turn again inspired and fuelled artistic production. Crucially, the ways in which the Inquisition was imagined, re-called, and often also mis-remembered profoundly shaped the writing of history as well as the associated political narratives that have fomented European political and religious controversies since the 16th century, and with renewed vigour throughout the struggles of 19th-century liberalism and nationalism. The latter have indeed created such thick sediments of mental imagery that it can be difficult for present-day historians to scrape them back in order to let critical inquiry come to the fore and impose itself.

The volume begins with four contributions focused on the Middle Ages. Here, probably unsurprisingly, the surviving imagery does not project a consolidated image of the power of the Tribunal of the Faith as an institution. The emergence of Peter of Verona as the universally recognizable icon of the Inquisition, for instance, has no strong roots in the medieval hagiographical or iconographical tradition. As Donald S. Prudlo argues, the record speed with which Peter was canonized cannot be attributed to any kind of institutional inquisitorial pressure, but rather reflected the wide veneration for the charismatic preacher and martyr among members of the Dominican order as well as among laypeople. Peter's role as an inquisitor came to be emphasized only at the end of the 14th century, after his popular cult had started to wane. It was then that ecclesiastical and institutional needs took over, and his image was seized and came to stand for the Inquisition and its combat against heresy. While a stable inquisitorial iconography remained underdeveloped, the images of heretics were more abundant. Yet as Alessia Trivellone emphasizes, the records on which historians have often relied to analyse these heresies may be thoroughly misleading, not only because they were produced by inquisitors, but, more importantly,

36. On this problem, see *Where Words and Images Meet*, ed. by Ludmilla Jordanova and Florence Grant, London, Bloomsbury, 2024.

because historians have failed to recognize the impact of the specific medieval “regime of historicity” on their composition. Focusing on the account of Bernard Gui (1261-1331) in his *Practica Inquisitionis* of the heretics he encountered, she shows how the inquisitor relied heavily on inherited models and stereotypes, often copying these out verbatim. More importantly, however, she makes a methodological point by suggesting that medieval descriptions of heresy cannot be taken as empirical accounts but should be understood just like the medieval images as underpinned by a circular perception of time in which past and present tend to collapse into one. Texts and images operated in analogy and with past types, and it is thus that the interpretation of images can inform the interpretation of written evidence.

Moving towards the 15th century and to Bohemia, Kateřina Horníčková investigates the ambiguity of the iconography used to represent the Hussite and Utraquist movements, specifically that of the trial and execution of Jan Hus (1370-1415). While to the opponents of the movement the scenes of his death at the stake incontrovertibly proved the heretical nature of his teachings, to his followers the very same images were evidence of his martyrdom and saintliness. Repeated bans targeting images of Hus notwithstanding, the very ambiguity and ubiquity of the Hussite imagery therefore ended up supporting its survival well into the 1620s. Only after the Thirty Years War and the radical re-catholicization campaigns that followed it could the Hus imagery be more systematically eradicated.

Maxime Gelly-Perbellini’s essay concludes the medieval part – and also straddles the period boundaries – with a meticulous study of one of the first depictions of a woman condemned to be burnt at the stake for witchcraft. It can be found in the illustrations painted by Diebold Schilling into his chronicle (1513) of his hometown Lucerne. By focusing on the scene of the execution of Anna Vögtlin, who had been condemned for the theft of a Host for magical purposes, Gelly-Perbellini uncovers how Schilling’s illustrations contain elements from trial records and other sources available to him. The complex entanglement of the different textual layers and the illustrations also help to uncover an extraordinarily rich context, in which struggles over Lucerne’s authority and jurisdiction are entwined with religious anxieties about the meaning and efficacy of the Eucharist and its potential abuse by witches.

The Spanish and Portuguese tribunals which emerged at the turn of the 15th to the 16th century and stayed in place throughout the early modern period represented an entirely new type of Inquisition. Centralized and under

the monarchy's control, their proceedings were shrouded in secrecy, yet their judgements were spectacular, highly ritualized, and awe-inspiring. As Manuel Peña Díaz shows, the Spanish Inquisition looms large in the writings of early modern travellers who visited Spain. Their travelogues, of which 19th-century historians were so especially fond and which continue to be widely used, are, however, highly problematic. It can be difficult not only to disentangle their intertextual quality, but also to cut through the specific cultural biases that shaped what the travellers saw and how they made sense of it. A characteristic example of the many misunderstandings that mar the travel accounts are their confused entries on the appearance, use, and social meaning of the *sambenitos*; and so, even as the Inquisition's power diminished, the fusion of fact, fiction, and prejudice continued to populate the foreign imagination of Spain.

Focused on the literary imagination, too, is a contribution on the tropes evoking inquisitorial settings and attitudes in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, which have fuelled a string of scholarly speculations as to the author's open or veiled attacks on the Holy Office. Yet as Ana Isabel López-Salazar warns, such interpretations often tend to be anachronistic as well as oblivious of the historical context and the fact that the passages in question never provoked any intervention whatsoever by the Inquisition. Hence, by attributing to Cervantes a proto-enlightened or libertine attitude, critics miss his deeper concern with the uncertainties of human perception, ambiguity, and the fine line separating truth and fiction.

Turning to Portugal, Jaime Gouveia examines early modern emblem literature in which "lust" was rendered in symbolic images that demonized and constructed it not simply as a vice, but increasingly also as a heresy. The iconography centred on the deviation of human reason by carnal appetites that turned men into half animals. Their bodily deformity made visible the moral deformity attributed to the subjugation of the will by demonic forces. As Gouveia argues, this line of interpretation regularly appeared in metaphors used in trial depositions. It was especially relevant to the persecution of the crime of *sollicitatio*, in which the incriminated priests were often considered "victims" of heretical lust rather than the perpetrators of sexual crimes.

Concluding the Iberian panorama, Francisco Bethencourt offers a rich vista both on the images produced by the Iberian tribunals to project their power and on the ways in which enemies and victims made use of visual strategies to subvert and resist it. As he is able to show, visual activism and

mockery increased over the 17th and 18th centuries, and he suggests that historians need to examine more closely the subtle traces with which artists expressed their compassion with the tribunals' victims, sometimes just through minute gestures and expressions, colour choice, or brush strokes. By recording their faces and names, images also helped to establish "martyrologies" which became foundational for later liberal historiographies.

The final section focuses on the Holy Office in the Italian Peninsula. Katherine Aron-Beller compares how Iberian and Papal tribunals dealt with cases of crimes against images from the late medieval to the early modern period. The emergence of this specific crime expressed anxieties over how Jews and/or new Christians might harm and defile Christian images and objects with their gaze or through actions. The image, it turned out, was fragile, but exposure to potential harm was located differently, depending on the context. While in Spain new Christians suffered allegations of not using proper images or not dealing properly with images in private spaces, in Italy the continued and visible presence of Jewish communities meant that the harm Jews allegedly exerted with their postures, gestures, gaze, or the absence thereof, concerned images and objects in public spaces. The notion of crimes against images and their persecution by the Holy Office therefore served a double purpose of detecting alleged crypto-Jewish attitudes and delineating the boundaries of the Christian body.

As many scholars have remarked, the Papal Inquisition was much more reluctant to indulge in public rituals and outward-facing displays of its power than its Iberian counterpart. However, as Vincenzo Lavenia argues, the interiors of the Italian tribunals, mostly Franciscan and Dominican convents that served as local seats of the Holy Office and which still await systematic analysis, may shed new light on how the taciturn judges perceived themselves and their office. At the seat of the Inquisition of Bologna, for instance, which Lavenia is the first to examine here, the inquisitor's quarters were located within an area inaccessible to the wider public and were exquisitely decorated with frescoes in the 18th century. They display dozens of small portraits of individual inquisitors in what amounts to a visual prosopography since medieval times. Simultaneously, the insertion of the inquisitors' portraits clearly transcends the individual and subjects them to a genealogically organized memory palace of the institution.

The final contribution by Massimo Bucciattini is dedicated to the creation of "the iconic moment": that of the solitary Galileo in prison mut-

tering “e pur si muove”. The author examines not only how this moment became a prominent theme in 19th-century French history painting, but also its use and long-term effect on political discourse in 19th-century France. The scenes depicting Galileo contributed substantially to the genius cult typical of the time, in which he was celebrated as an ideal-type modern scientist. But Galileo’s role here was not limited to that of a founding father of modern science. The widespread availability of images that depicted him taking a stance against the formidable tribunal also turned the scene into a topical reference for the fight against Ultramontanism. Liberals loved to refer to it in their campaigns against religious “fanaticism” and clerical influence on public education, and they used it widely to warn of the danger that France might end up like Italy (!), a country of silence with a “dead culture”. Clearly, the memory of the Inquisition lived on, and the trial scene had become a metonym for the *Ancien Régime* and the struggle against it.

This volume assembles a selection of the papers presented at the conference *Inquisitions, Iconography, and Memory* held in Coimbra from 16 to 17 November 2023 and organized by the International Centre for Research in Inquisitions of the University of Bologna (Inquire), the Center for the History of Society and Culture (CHSC) of the University of Coimbra, and the Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG) in Mainz.

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