# *The Inquisition and the Christian East (1350–1850)*

Cesare Santus, Jean-Pascal Gay, Laurent Tatarenko, eds
(Woodbridge, UK and Rochester, NY: Durham University IMEMS Press, 2025)
[ISBN 9781914967122]

BERNARD HEYBERGER
Centre d'études en Sciences Sociales du Religieux (CéSor),
Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris



Eastern Christianity, and specifically Eastern Rite Catholicism, is absent from recent works on the Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation, as well as from those dealing with the first Catholic globalisation, even though Roman Catholicism has always considered itself in relation to the Eastern Churches, when for instance defining Purgatory or sacraments, or when, at the Council of Trent, it formulated the canon of marriage.

Most striking is the almost total absence of Eastern Christianity in works devoted to the Inquisition. The archives of this institution have hardly been explored with regard to Eastern Christians. We are beginning to discover their presence in the sources by studying their mobility: Armenians, Greeks, and Syrians of various denominations are present in different territories of Europe and Spanish America. Armenians appeared before the Inquisition in the Philippines. The Portuguese Inquisition dealt with Ethiopians and Christians of Saint Thomas in Malabar… (Cesare Santus, 'Introduction: Re-orienting the History of Catholic Confessional Control').

The book therefore attempts to fill a gap. Cesare Santus' article, 'The Roman Holy Office and the Christian East: Overview of Sources and New Research Perspectives', serves as a guide to navigating the documentation and themes of the Roman and universal Inquisition. An index of places and people helps also the reader navigate between the different chapters. The contributions, which deal with disparate places and objects, sometimes require lengthy contextualisation, but highlight that difference between heresy, superstition, and custom, tolerance towards *accommodatio*, or the need to gather reliable information, were issues that arose as much in contact with Eastern Christians as with more distant cultures. In the archives of the Roman Inquisition, Eastern Christianity appears more as a useful category for clarifying points of doctrine or organising the control of confessional boundaries than as a tribunal judging individuals (C. Santus, 'Introduction: Re-orienting the History of Catholic Confessional Control').

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 29/2026

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-17101

Based on the available documentation, Eastern Christians do not appear to have been a primary target of the Inquisition in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although inquisitors were appointed for Eastern territories, they seem to have focused their investigations on Jews and Latin 'heretics', some of whom had found refuge in the East. Eastern Christianity appears much more frequently in theological treatises. Missionaries in the East writing about schism and heresy demonstrate a deep and precise knowledge of Eastern Christianity, in comparison to Western inquisitors who kept busy compiling lists of heresies. The latter paid little attention to Easterners, among whom the Greeks and Armenians were by far the best known and most frequently mentioned (Irene Bueno, 'Late Medieval Inquisitors and the Framing of Eastern Christianity').

In the Middle Ages, the territories with a religious diversity between Latins and Greeks were the main areas of activity for the inquisitors. This was still the case in the following period, when Crete, the Ionian Islands, the Aegean Archipelago, Malta, Southern Italy, Corsica, and the Balkans were meeting grounds between Greeks and Latins, where interference and possible ritual contamination had to be controlled and suppressed. It is these situations that provide the bulk of the contributions to the volume.

In the mid-sixteenth century, Catholic authorities were concerned with the fear of Protestantism spreading among Orthodox Christians, or through their intermediary, in Italy and the Levant. Greeks did indeed contribute to the spread of Protestantism in the Venetian possessions of Crete and Cyprus, where the Inquisition was active (Sam Kennerley, 'Greeks as Targets and Agents of the Inquisitions in Italy, 1541–1564'). An inquisition mission was also tasked with controlling and disciplining the Latins in the former Genoese colonies of Chios and Pera (Istanbul), without much success, as the inquisitor could not rely on the local temporal arm (Martin Rothkegel, 'The Roman Inquisition and the Latin Christians of Constantinople: Commissaries of the Holy Office in the Ottoman Capital, 1558–69').

There was an increase in prosecutions against Greek communities in southern Italy in the second half of the sixteenth century. The arrival of Orthodox migrants fleeing the Ottoman advance in the Balkans created new situations of religious diversity, which were initially treated with a certain degree of leniency, in reference to the Union of Florence. But after the Council of Trent, these Greeks were subjected to attempts to control and align them with Latin doctrine and discipline. The Inquisition in Palermo then discovered that Greek liturgical books, printed more than fifty years earlier in Venice, contained 'heresies' and 'superstitions'. This problem, examined in Sicily and Spain, was then referred to the Roman Inquisition in 1629. In 1636, a special congregation dedicated to correcting the Greek Euchologion was created in Rome. The issue of 'errors' in Greek books proved to be a dizzying one, still under discussion in the eighteenth century, until the publication of a Euchologion in Rome in 1754 (José M. Floristán, 'Inquisitorial Trial on the Liturgical Books Used by the Greek Communities'). The settlement of Greeks from the Peloponnese in the Corsican village

of Paomia in 1676 led to interventions by the Roman Inquisition, which were hampered by the lack of local representatives, Genoese sovereignty over the island, and the competing actions of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. As elsewhere, its interventions concerned conflicts of jurisdiction rather than questions of doctrine or discipline, leaving room for local actors' gambit (Jean-Pascal Gay, 'The Inconsistent Observer: The Roman Inquisition and the Greek Community of Paomia (Corsica, Seventeenth–Eighteenth Centuries)'.

From the sixteenth century onwards, the reception of Eastern Christians into communion with Rome led the Roman Inquisition to also have to deal with the question of confessional and ritual boundaries and of disciplinary distinctions in territories under 'schismatic' or 'infidel' jurisdiction. In cases of conversion to Catholicism, the Inquisition advocated profession of faith rather than abjuration. Professions of faith, initially left to the initiative of their authors, had to conform to a standard model printed in various languages from the time of Urban VIII onwards.

Dennj Solera's article ('Toward the Union of Brest: Gian Vincenzo Pinelli between Roman Inquisition, the Ruthenian-Orthodox and the Venetian Greek-Orthodox') shows how, as in other areas of the Curia, the policy of the Holy Office was largely determined by the need to rely on trustworthy and competent people belonging to the cardinals' circles of influence. Cardinal Santori, Grand Inquisitor of the Roman Holy Office from 1570 to 1602, who appears in several contributions, gave a decisive direction to Roman policy towards the Easterners. We see a gradual increase in the competence of the Holy Office, particularly in terms of language, thanks to the use of Eastern experts based in Rome and belonging to the cardinals' clientele. Nevertheless, this increase in competence highlighted the contradictions of the Roman magisterium on certain points of doctrine and discipline, and the impossibility of deciding on the authenticity and legitimacy of certain Eastern traditions, so that recourse to instructions rather than decrees, or even no response at all, was often recommended. Nevertheless, the systematic work of Prospero Lambertini, as cardinal of the Curia and then as Pope Benedict XIV, established a method for synthesising previous decisions and produced unsurpassable syntheses, particularly on questions related to the sacraments (C. Santus, 'The Holy Roman Office' and Maria Teresa Fattori, 'The Eastern Catholic Churches in Lambertini's Dossiers').

As in other mission territories, missionaries throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries submitted *dubia circa sacramenta* to the Holy Office. The well-established Catholic doctrine, which considered Orthodox baptism to be valid if the Greek ritual had been followed, was constantly questioned by Latin missionaries in the Balkans, in a situation of religious diversity and material deprivation (Emese Muntán, 'Contested Baptisms between Catholics and Eastern Orthodox in Seventeenth-Century Northern Ottoman Europe'). The ritual of animal sacrifice ('kurban'), which the new Bulgarian Catholics shared with their Orthodox and Muslim neighbours, was belatedly condemned by the Holy Office (1760), but nevertheless continued to be practiced, with the participation of the clergy. Like the observance of certain Orthodox

holidays, it constituted a framework of sociability from which Catholics could not easily exempt themselves (Silvia Notarfonso, 'Animal Sacrifice and "Schismatic" Celebrations among the Bulgarian Paulicians (Seventeenth–Eighteenth Centuries)'.

The formation of Eastern United Churches led the Holy Office to deal more often with the subject of Eastern Christianity. In India, the inquisitorial jurisdiction of the Portuguese Padroado practiced a policy of 'reducing' the Christians of Saint Thomas to the Latin rite, which was partly countered by the Jesuits and the Roman Holy Office. Some of the Chaldean prelates of India appealed to the Roman Inquisition to obtain confirmation of their jurisdiction against the Portuguese prelates (Antony Mecherry, 'Early Modern Christians of St. Thomas at Inquisitorial Crossroads').

After the union of the Ruthenians with Rome (1595–1596), the incompatibility of the Byzantine with the Tridentine canon concerning the discipline of marriage raised problems. The second marriage of widowed priests, considered 'bigamy', was the subject of numerous appeals to the Holy Office, which responded kindly and granted dispensations on a bureaucratic basis. The situation of religious diversity and legal competition between Latins, Ruthenians, and Orthodox Christians led the Ruthenian bishops to seek the authority of the Roman Magisterium to justify applying exceptions to Roman law, while gradually bringing the faithful and the clergy to accept Tridentine discipline (Laurent Tatarenko, 'Matrimonial Discipline Facing the Challenge of Uniatism: The Case of the Ruthenian Church (Seventeenth–Eighteenth Centuries)'.

The disputes within the United Churches date back to Rome, where the Inquisition tended to treat them as doctrinal issues, placing Eastern affairs in a general context. Thus, opinions and decisions concerning Malabar and Chinese rites influenced the way *communicatio in sacris* was handled among Armenians and Greeks, and fears of the spread of Jansenism and Gallicanism influenced the handling of essentially personal conflicts within the Melkite Church in the early nineteenth century (C. Santus, 'The Holy Roman Office' and David Armando, 'Ancient Controversies and Modern Challenges: The Roman Inquisition and the Eastern Christians in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century'). Catholic tension in the face of the decline of the pope's temporal power and the emergence of secular political institutions also guided the work of the dicastery (D. Armando).

Far from showing a top-down relationship between the Holy Office and the various areas studied, the contributions reveal configurations in which actors in the field, missionaries and bishops, resorted to the Holy Office in a game of competition and mimicry between Latins, Uniates, and Orthodox Christians. The tension between universalism and particular cases, which even influences the writing of the contributors to this volume, is present throughout the work and lies at the heart of the functioning of the Inquisition.