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# Giambattista Della Porta and the Roman Inquisition: censorship and the definition of Nature's limits in sixteenth-century Italy

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**Abstract.** It has long been noted that towards the end of the sixteenth century the Catholic Church began to use its instruments of censorship – the Inquisition and the Index of Forbidden Books – to prosecute magic with increased vigour. These developments are often deemed to have had important consequences for the development of modern science in Italy, for they delimited areas of legitimate investigation of the natural world. Previous accounts of the censorship of magic have tended to suggest that the Church as an institution was opposed to, and sought to eradicate, the practice of magic. I do not seek to contest the fact that ecclesiastical censors prosecuted various magical and divinatory practices with greater enthusiasm at this time, but I suggest that in order to understand this development more fully it is necessary to offer a more complex picture of the Church. In this article I use the case of the Neapolitan magus Giambattista Della Porta to argue that during the course of the century the acceptable boundaries of magical speculation became increasingly clearly defined. Consequently, many practices and techniques that had previously been of contested orthodoxy were categorically defined as heterodox and therefore liable to prosecution and censorship. I argue, however, that this development was not driven by the Church asserting a 'traditional' hostility towards magic, but was instead the result of one particular faction within the Church embedding their conception of orthodox philosophical investigation of the natural world within the machinery of censorship.

During the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the Neapolitan nobleman Giambattista Della Porta and a number of his writings, including the *Magia naturalis* and the *Physiognomonica*, were subjected to intense inquisitorial scrutiny. Recently, interest in Della Porta's encounters with the Roman Inquisition has been reinvigorated by Michaela Valente's discovery of new documents in the archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. These discoveries provide an opportunity to offer a far richer account of Della Porta's encounters with the Inquisition. They also allow new reflection on a venerable historiographical debate concerning the causes of Della Porta's inquisitorial trial, which as early as the nineteenth century was known to have occurred prior to 1581. In 1880 Francesco Fiorentino suggested that it may have been prompted by complaints made by Jean Bodin in his *Démonomanie* (1580), about Della Porta's description of how to produce the witches' salve contained in the first edition of his

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*Magia naturalis* (1558). Luigi Amabile rejected this suggestion in 1892, arguing that Della Porta's trial actually pre-dated the publication of Bodin's work by several years, meaning that it could not have been influenced by the Frenchman's complaints. In 1968 Giovanni Aquilecchia rehabilitated several aspects of Fiorentino's thesis, by suggesting that the trial should be understood as a reaction to a polemic between Bodin and Johann Wier, who drew upon Della Porta's ideas, which had begun in the 1570s.<sup>1</sup>

In one sense Aquilecchia's renewed emphasis on the importance of the witches' salve refocused the analysis of Della Porta's trial onto a relatively limited issue. His thesis was important, however, because it also drew attention to the place of Della Porta's work in the context of the demonological disputes of the sixteenth century, and thus situated his trial in the broader intellectual history of the early modern period. In this manner he indicated how Della Porta's trial could be explained by, and in turn could be used to illuminate, the history of magic in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, his emphasis on the dispute between Wier and Bodin, which took place in northern Europe, distracts from crucial changes to the discussion of magic and divination that took place within the Italian peninsula. During the course of Della Porta's working life, a revitalized regime of ecclesiastical censorship radically altered the acceptable boundaries of magical and divinatory discourse within Italy. Reconstructing these developments will allow us to recontextualize Della Porta's trial, whilst also shifting the analysis of these events away from his dispute with Bodin. Furthermore, it will also enable us to make visible the effects that the new censorial regime had upon the acceptable boundaries of philosophy, and ultimately the history of science. To achieve this latter aim, we must first briefly discuss the secondary literature dealing with the Church's censorship of magic and divination and its impact on the development of modern science.

It has been long noted that during the latter half of the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church used its apparatus of censorship – the Inquisition and the Index of Forbidden Books – to control various magical and divinatory arts. The effects of this development have been debated by several historians of science, particularly those interested in the history of science in Italy. Although they have been undoubtedly correct to stress the fact that the Church did make major efforts to control magic at this time, their analyses of the implications of this development for the history of science have often been hampered by the use of outmoded analytical categories. Frequently, present-centred assumptions have led historians of science to distinguish between 'magic' and 'science' in the early modern period. This has meant that it has been possible to argue that while the Church may have sought to clamp down on magic, it did not deliberately seek to target genuine science.

1 Michaela Valente, 'Della Porta e l'Inquisizione: Nuove documenti dell'archivio del Sant'Uffizio', *Bruniana e campanelliana* (1999) 5, pp. 415–434, which makes available these important new documents. See too Francesco Fiorentino, 'Giovanni Battista de la Porta: I, Della vita e opere di Giovan Battista De La Porta', in L. Fiorentino (ed.), *Studi e ritratti della rinascenza*, Bari: G. Laterza 1911, pp. 235–293 (originally published in *Nuova antologia*, 14 May 1880, pp. 251–84) – on Fiorentino's dating, and speculation on the causes, of Della Porta's encounter with the Inquisition, see especially pp. 245 and 258–60; Luigi Amabile, *Il Santo Officio della Inquisizione in Napoli, narrazione con molti documenti inediti*, 2 vols., Città di Castello: Lapi, 1892, vol. 1, pp. 326–328, but see especially p. 327 n. 1; Giovanni Aquilecchia, 'Appunti su G.B. Della Porta e l'Inquisizione', *Studi secenteschi* (1968) 9, pp. 3–31.

Although works of science, or even works that contained ideas of scientific merit, may have been censored, frequently they have been considered collateral damage in a war on magic. It has therefore been possible to suggest that if the censorship of magic did affect science, it did so only indirectly and its impact was limited.<sup>2</sup>

Such distinctions are increasingly hard to sustain, as for nearly a hundred years historians and historians of science have gradually reconfigured our understanding of magic and its influence on the development of modern science. This enables us to arrive at a more sophisticated assessment of the impact of the Church's assault on magic. In an important recent article, John Henry has proposed a new framework for considering the manner in which magic influenced the new philosophies of the seventeenth century, and for understanding its eventual 'decline'. Prior to c.1600 there existed a rich and diverse magical tradition, a significant part of which was the natural magical tradition. Henry suggested,

By the end of the seventeenth century major aspects of the natural magical tradition had been appropriated by the new philosophies or redefined in order to fit more easily with the new kinds of naturalism. But symbolic magic, demonology and some aspects of natural magic, such as astrology, and the chrysopoeic aspects of alchemy were left aside in what was a new, differently defined, category of magic.

Following the redefinition of magic's boundaries, significant parts of the natural magical tradition were simply no longer considered to be magical. Meanwhile, its remnants, alongside various other magical practices, were left to constitute the whole category of 'magic'. This process of demarcation gave rise to modern understandings of magic and its relationship with science, which historians have in turn erroneously projected onto the magical tradition that existed prior to 1700.<sup>3</sup>

Henry also contended that organized religion played an essential role in the process of partition described above. 'The Churches', he noted,

were vigorously re-asserting what had always been their dominant view, that all magic is sorcery, at the same time that natural philosophers were absorbing much of the tradition of natural magic into their new philosophies. The result was a major shift in the perception of what was magic and what was not.<sup>4</sup>

In this article I explore the extent to which this contention can be sustained in the case of early modern Italy, by examining the role that ecclesiastical censorship played in determining the areas of legitimate study available to scholars. While broadly following

2 These trends were identified by Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols., New York: Columbia University Press, 1923–1958, vol. 6, Chapter 34. For more recent discussions of the censorship of magic see William B. Ashworth, 'Catholicism and early modern science', in David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers, *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp. 19–48; and more recently, Ugo Baldini, 'Le Congregazioni Romane dell'Inquisizione e dell'Indice e le scienze, dal 1542 al 1615', in *L'inquisizione e gli storici: un cantiere aperto*, Rome: Accademia dei Lincei, 2000, pp. 329–364.

3 John Henry, 'The fragmentation of Renaissance occultism and the decline of magic', *History of Science* (2008) 46, pp. 1–48, 11.

4 Henry, op. cit. (3), p. 16.

the position that Henry has set out, I seek to refine his thesis by offering a more detailed understanding of the Catholic Church and its organs of censorship.<sup>5</sup>

Like many other historians of science, Henry treats the early modern Catholic Church in a monolithic fashion, portraying it as a homogeneous institution, possessed of a single vision of orthodoxy. Crucially, opposition to magic is represented as the obvious, and indeed inevitable, stance for the Church to take. While it is widely assumed that opposition to magic and to divination was the 'dominant' position within the Church, I argue that this assumption is inaccurate and distorts our understanding of the ecclesiastical censorship of these arts in two crucial ways. First, at the beginning of the sixteenth century both sets of arts were widely practised within Italy, and the information that they produced was consumed by all levels of society, including the nobility and high-ranking members of the clergy. The assumed heterodoxy of magic and divination makes the widespread enthusiasm for these arts within Italian society appear an anomalous deviation from Christian orthodoxy. In fact many contemporaries, including clerics, could muster philosophically and theologically compelling defences of the orthodoxy of these arts. Second, if it is assumed that these arts were viewed as heterodox by ecclesiastical authorities, it is possible to argue that the clampdown on magic and divination, which undoubtedly did take place at this time, was driven by a newly assertive Church seeking to correct this apparent deviation.

In order to understand the dynamics of censorship in early modern Italy, these assumptions must be tackled head-on. Throughout its history, the Church was no more opposed to the practice of magic per se than it had been to the practice of philosophy. Prosecuting magic was not a desirable end in itself for either the Church as a whole or individual Christians. Clerics sought to do no more than ensure the purity of the orthodox faith, and so they were only interested in eradicating those forms of magic that they deemed to be heterodox.<sup>6</sup> Arriving at a satisfactory definition of the boundaries of orthodoxy was, however, highly complex. From antiquity, through the Middle Ages, and into the early modern period, different groups within the Church, and Christian society as a whole, developed often radically differing understandings of which of the various magical and divinatory arts should be considered orthodox. Contemporaries were able to understand the boundaries of orthodoxy differently, because their explanations of Man's ability to perform certain techniques were rooted in differing theological and philosophical frameworks. The key problem for the historian is seeking to determine how and where the boundaries of orthodox practice were drawn, and to

5 I have made extensive use of a recent body of literature that has exposed significant divisions within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church during the sixteenth century. See, inter alia, Vittorio Frajese, 'La revoca dell'Index Sistino e la curia romana, (1588–1596)', *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* (1986), pp. 15–49; *idem*, 'La politica dell'Indice dal Tridentino al Clementino (1571–1596)', *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* (1998) 11, pp. 269–356; Gigliola Fragnito, *La Bibbia al rogo: la censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della scrittura*, Bologna: il Mulino, 1997.

6 For a discussion of the concepts of orthodoxy and heterodoxy and the elaboration of the concept of heresy in the medieval period see Edward Peters, *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe: Documents in Translation*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980, introduction; R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, especially pp. 68–72.

identify the intellectual, institutional and social resources that contemporaries mobilized to do this.<sup>7</sup>

### Magic and divination in early sixteenth-century Italy

Prior to 1600 there was no single, coherent, universally recognized definition of magic within the Catholic Church. Consequently, the boundaries of orthodoxy, and hence what lay beyond them, were subject to debate. When considering the legitimacy of a given magical technique or practice, discussion tended to turn on two key issues. The first was establishing the means by which an effect had been worked. All magic was believed to be natural, in the sense that it functioned by the manipulation of the laws of nature. The key question for contemporaries was, had a particular effect been wrought through Man's skill, or had he required the assistance of a demon? Or, put another way, was it achieved through natural or preternatural means?<sup>8</sup> The second ground concerned the intended result of a specific technique, or recipe. Was it intended to achieve harmful, or *maleficient*, ends? Or in other words, was it an act of sorcery? Or was it intended to be beneficent? While the practice of magic could be contested on the ground either that it was *maleficient* or that it was demonic, the two did not necessarily go together. Some Christians believed it to be possible to achieve non-*maleficient* ends via demonic means, and *maleficient* ends through both non-demonic and demonic means.<sup>9</sup>

While the legitimacy of the magical and divinatory arts was contested, they were not prosecuted in ecclesiastical courts as a matter of course. This was because the Church had only bestowed upon itself the authority to investigate cases of magic or divination in specific instances. Responding directly to a query from inquisitors concerning their authority to investigate acts of sorcery or divination, in 1258 Pope Alexander IV stated that they 'ought not to intervene in cases of divination or sorcery unless these *clearly savour* of manifest heresy'. The Pope's response to the inquisitors' enquiry is highly revealing, for it indicated that, like many of his contemporaries, he did not believe that either sorcery or divination were necessarily heretical. The full implications of these comments were later revealed when Alexander's letter was subsequently included in the compendium of canon law the *Liber sextus*. A later gloss on this text (c.1300) explicated their meaning: "*clearly savour* ..." as in praying at the altars of idols, to offer sacrifices,

7 On the theological, legal and philosophical status of magic and divination see, for example, Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300–1500*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, especially Chapters 1 and 3; and Edward Peters, *The Magician, the Witch and the Law*, Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1978, especially Chapter 4.

8 In framing my discussion of the manner in which contemporaries distinguished between the categories of natural, preternatural and supernatural, I have drawn on Stewart Clark's excellent *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, especially Part II, Science.

9 I have followed Kieckhefer's definition of sorcery, op. cit. (7), pp. 6–7. On the various types of demonic magic see Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonisation of Christians in Medieval Christendom*, St Albans: Paladin, 1976, Chapter 9.

to consult demons, to elicit responses from them'.<sup>10</sup> This ruling suggested that divination and magic, even in its *maleficient* forms, were only to be considered strictly heretical – and therefore liable to prosecution in ecclesiastical courts – if it could be proved that the diviner or magus had made contact with demons.

In principle at least, forms of magic that explicitly involved demonic contact were liable to prosecution in ecclesiastical courts. Yet whilst canon law forbade this type of magic the law was neither consistently respected nor always effectively enforced. Forms of genuinely necromantic magic, often referred to as 'ritual magic', certainly existed during the medieval and early modern periods, perhaps most obviously in the tradition of pseudo-Solomonic writings, typified by works such as the *Clavicula salomonis*. Practitioners of this form of magic argued that they could use it to control demons, with the aim of using them to achieve both beneficent and *maleficient* effects in the world. These included, for instance, efforts to locate lost property. Frequently, those practising ritual magic attempted to justify their actions on the ground that they had not made any compacts with these demons, nor had they paid them homage. In fact they claimed to command them through God's power, and so the demons were their servants rather than vice versa. Such ritual magic was practised by individuals who identified as orthodox Christians, layman and member of the clergy alike.<sup>11</sup>

In any case, the ruling in the *Liber sextus* did not outlaw all magic. On the contrary, it did potentially allow for a wide range of other divinatory and magical activities, if it could be proved that they worked through non-demonic means. Many of these types of magic, including their rationales, have been described previously, and so I will largely restrict myself to listing them here. The first was folk traditions that had persisted throughout the Middle Ages, and included various forms of 'white' or non-*maleficient* magic as well as forms of *maleficient* sorcery. The former might include making charms in order to find lost property, while the latter might include techniques for inflicting bodily harm on another. These techniques were rarely considered to be demonic by their practitioners, and they continued to exist in many areas until the seventeenth century.<sup>12</sup>

The belief that some forms of magic worked by non-demonic means extended to the elite. Some thirteenth-century Christians such as William of Auvergne contended that there were forms of 'natural magic' which worked by exploiting occult qualities within the cosmos. His views were later echoed by the Dominican friar Albertus Magnus. While he denounced demonic magic, he argued that some magi, notably those who had attended Christ's birth, practised an entirely licit form of natural magic.<sup>13</sup> The category of natural magic was by no means fixed, and some contemporaries stretched it to encompass a wide range of practices and techniques. Some claimed that it should include

10 On Alexander IV's letter see Peters, *op. cit.* (7), pp. 99–100, italics Peters's.

11 See Cohn, *op. cit.* (9), Chapter 9, especially pp. 169–170. For a fascinating discussion of a dispute over the orthodoxy of ritual magic in fifteenth-century Bologna see Tamar Herzog, 'The demons and the friars: illicit magic and mendicant rivalry in Renaissance Bologna', *Renaissance Quarterly* (2011) 64, pp. 1025–1058.

12 See for example, Kieckhefer, *op. cit.* (7), Chapter 4; *idem*, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, especially Chapter 4.

13 See Thorndike, *op. cit.* (2), vol. 2, Chapter 52, especially pp. 342–343; on Albertus and magic see pp. 548–560.

forms of magic rooted in Neoplatonic philosophies which sought to manipulate occult forces within the cosmos by means of talismans and amulets in order to promote health. This form of magic was practised by Arnald of Villanova (1235–1311), and later 'described' in the fifteenth century by Marsilio Ficino, who stressed vigorously that it worked through natural rather than demonic means. There was a further type of natural magic, the cabbalist techniques of Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola (1463–1494), which operated by manipulating the order of angels.<sup>14</sup> Although regarded with suspicion by some within the Church, under the patronage of Medici popes such as Leo X (1475–1521) Neoplatonism and Cabbala flourished in the papal court of the early sixteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Neoplatonic magic subsequently spread into northern Europe, where it was practised by the likes of the Abbot Trithemius (1462–1516) and his protégé Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535).<sup>16</sup>

It was also possible to offer natural explanations for various forms of prognostication. Perhaps the most famous example is the case of astrology, which was widely practised in medieval and early modern Europe. The theoretical basis for this art had been laid down by the ancients and it was rediscovered during the eleventh century. From this period onwards, various ancient theories of astral influence which connected the movement of the planets to mundane affairs became known to western European Christians. Few would have denied the influence of the celestial bodies entirely, but there were disputes about their nature and the use that Man could make of them. Astrology was widely used in medicine and navigation, and prognosticators made use of this art to make predictions about the fate of large populations. Whilst these forms of astrological activity were generally regarded to be legitimate, the practice of judicial astrology was contested.<sup>17</sup>

Judicial astrology was one of a number of arts that promised to deliver knowledge of future contingent events that affected individuals. Many of these arts were underpinned by the Graeco-Roman concept of fate. That is the belief that the future was determined and that individuals could do nothing to alter their destiny. If this idea were true, the ancients believed that it might in turn be possible for Man to discover the course of

14 The essential work on these matters remains D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, London: The Warburg Institute, 1958; see too Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964, Chapters 4 and 5.

15 On the importance of Cabbala in elite clerical circles in early sixteenth-century Rome see, for instance, John William O'Malley, 'Giles of Viterbo: a reformer's thought on Renaissance Rome', *Renaissance Quarterly* (1967) 20, pp. 1–11. For a discussion of Pico's problems with ecclesiastical censors see Yates, *op. cit.* (14), pp. 120–121; and Charles Lohr, 'Metaphysics', in Charles Schmitt *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 537–638, 581.

16 On Trithemius see Noel L. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversies over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999; on Agrippa, see Yates *op. cit.* (14), Chapter 7.

17 On the consumption of astrological prognostication in sixteenth-century Europe see Robert Westman, *The Copernican Question: Prognostication, Skepticism and Celestial Order*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, especially Part 1; and amongst the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy see Thorndike, *op. cit.* (2), vol. 5, especially pp. 252–274. For popular uses of prognosticatory arts see, for example: Ottavia Niccoli, *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy* (tr. Lydia Cochrane), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. On astrology and medicine see Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice*, 2nd edn, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990, pp. 67–69.



future events, through the practice of arts such as judicial astrology, chiromancy or haruspicy. For numerous reasons many Christians considered the idea that the future was determined to be impossible. Amongst the most important objections was the belief that if an individual's destiny were already determined, then (s)he would be unable to exercise free will. Consequently, these Christians regarded warily any art which laid claim to be able to predict specific events in the lives of individuals.<sup>18</sup>

Despite these concerns, some contemporaries did defend prognosticatory techniques as natural. They were not marginal activities. Indeed, it appears that many attracted the interest of members of the nobility. For example, in 1525 Federico Gonzaga II, the Duke of Mantua, accepted the dedication to Patritio Tricasso's commentary on the work of the renowned theorist of the divinatory arts Bartolomeo della Rocca Cocles. The acceptance of such a dedication indicated some level of interest in, if not sympathy for, the content of the work. Although members of the nobility may have shown interest in the divinatory arts, it is unlikely that they would wish to associate themselves publicly either with explicitly heterodox material or with such persons. A brief discussion of a further work by Tricasso will expose how contemporaries defended works that were on the margins of orthodoxy.<sup>19</sup>

In 1538 Tricasso published his own work on chiromancy, the art of prognostication through the interpretation of lines on the hand. For Tricasso, 'this science and doctrine, is a means to prognosticate, and discover future things, granted only amongst knowledgeable men, through the sign lines, which are found in our hands'.<sup>20</sup> In the fourth chapter of his work on chiromancy, entitled 'On the natural principles of this Scientia of Chiromancy', Tricasso set out the philosophical justifications for his assertion that this art functioned by natural means. He began by locating chiromancy within contemporary physics and astrological-medical discourse, by emphasizing the importance of the four primary elements earth, air, water and fire, and the four primary qualities warmth, coldness, dryness and dampness, to the practice of chiromancy. The mixture of these elements and qualities affected the composition of the body, and this was in turn manifested in outward signs on the body. Knowledgeable persons, he continued, could examine these signs to understand the body's composition, and use them to deduce someone's character. Furthermore, he argued, these lines could be related to the movement of the celestial bodies. According to Tricasso, areas of the hand could be associated with the influence of specific planets. For instance, Jupiter's influence was revealed on the area of the palm covering the knuckle joint of the index finger.

18 On fate and prognostication see Antonio Poppi, 'Fate, fortune, providence and human freedom', in Schmitt, op. cit. (15), pp. 641–667. On medieval discussions of and justifications for forms of judicial astrology see Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, especially Chapter 2.

19 Patritio Tricasso, *Expositione del Tricasso Mantuano sopra Il Cocle al Illustrissimo Signore S. Federico Gonzaga Marchese Mantua*, Venice: H. de Rusconi, 1525. For a discussion of the importance of the role of book dedications in the patronage structures of early modern Italy see Mario Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 36–54.

20 Patritio Tricasso, *Epitoma chyromantico di Patritio Tricasso da Cerasari Mantouano*, Venice: Agostino de Bindoni, 1538.

The influences of this planet on the individual were indicated by the nature of the lines found in this area of the hand.<sup>21</sup>

More radically, Tricasso suggested that by reading these lines the chiromancer could offer predictions about the future course of an individual's life. To take one example, Tricasso described how to interpret the life line, which is the semi-circular line running from the top of the thumb to the base of the wrist. The length of an individual's life could, he suggested, be read off from this line in roughly ten-year increments. More specific predictions about a person's life could also be made by tracing changes in the line. If the life line were short, this could be taken to indicate an early death. However, if another line is clearly discernible on the palm next to where the life line ends, this is the 'saturnina, that is the sister to the life line'. He continued that if this line is complete and profound and continues to the arm, 'it signifies having an illness in that time where it appears that the life line has finished. Nonetheless he will have a long life, through the said subsequent line'. Through this technique, then, Tricasso was offering what he claimed to be a natural means to know future events in an individual's life.<sup>22</sup>

Interest in chiromancy and other putatively natural forms of prognostication also extended to the hierarchy of the Italian Church. For example, in his *Tractatus astrologicus* the astrologer Luca Gaurico (1476–1558) bragged that he had suggested to Cardinal Medici that if he wanted to know whether he might ascend to the papal throne, he should have his palm read by Fra Serafino of Mantua, who was prior to the convent of San Francesco. Serafino was, according to Gaurico, 'An old man and doctor of theology, not ignorant of astrology but remarkable as a chiromancer'. Medici followed Gaurico's advice, and fortunately for him the prediction was favourable and he was elected as Leo X. Gaurico also wrote texts on the divinatory arts, and was noted as an astrologer. He twice predicted the accession of Cardinal Farnese in 1529 and 1532. After these predictions came true in 1534, when the latter ascended the papal throne assuming the name Paul III, Gaurico was summoned to Rome and continued in the new pontiff's service. In 1539, he was rewarded with a bishopric.<sup>23</sup>

### Opposition to magic and divination, c.1300–1550

Whilst magical and divinatory practices were common in Italian society, they were by no means universally accepted. Various groups within the Church had formulated coherent condemnations of magical techniques and practices, and among the most prominent were the Franciscan and Dominican orders of friars. From their foundation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries respectively, these orders had sought to reform Catholic society. Their mission was twofold: on the one hand they sought to engage the masses through ritual, ceremony and preaching; on the other they sought to purge Christendom of

21 Tricasso, op. cit. (20), Chapter 4: 'Delli principi naturali di questa Scientia Chyromantia'. On the influence of the planets, see Chapter 19, especially pp. 55–56.

22 Tricasso, op. cit. (20), Chapters 12, 'Della Linea Vitale', and 13, 'D'alcuni accidenti particolari della Vitale', especially p. 72.

23 On Gaurico and Cardinal Medici see Thorndike, op. cit. (2), vol. 5, p. 252, on his predictions for Farnese, see p. 256.

groups and practices that they viewed as contaminants. Consequently, their activities included efforts to eradicate heretics such as the Cathars, and attempts to ameliorate what they considered to be the pernicious effects of the presence of the Jews. They were also engaged in a sustained effort to control the practice of magic at both a popular and a learned level.<sup>24</sup>

In their pursuit of these ends, the friars had a potent weapon at their disposal: the Inquisition. Originally founded in the twelfth century as an episcopal institution, it was reformed in the thirteenth century as an instrument of papal power. The friars provided the majority of the staff for this new institution, which in turn allowed them to determine the standards of orthodoxy for individual inquisitors to use when they investigated allegations of heresy. The Inquisition's perspectives were therefore framed by the mendicants' programme of reform, and conceptions of the orthodox.<sup>25</sup>

Although the Inquisition's attitude towards magic evolved during its long history, the essence of its approach was shaped by the ideas of the Dominican friar Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas was himself heavily indebted to the critiques of magic formulated by the hugely influential Church Father Augustine, and he shared the latter's vehement opposition to its practice. His work played an important role in delineating the boundaries between natural and preternatural causation. Aquinas explicitly rejected any possibility that Man could legitimately have contact with demons. He argued that if an individual believed that through the practice of ritual magic he commanded a demon, he was deluded. The rituals, he continued, had no power over the devil, but he would nevertheless appear to the magus because he regarded them as a sign of reverence. Aquinas therefore concluded that any act of invocation was sinful.<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere he explicitly stated that, in every instance, 'The magic art is both unlawful and futile. It is unlawful, because the means it employs for acquiring knowledge have not in themselves the power to cause science, consisting as they do in gazing on certain shapes, and muttering certain strange words, and so forth.' He reached this conclusion by arguing, in accordance with Augustine, that magical techniques have no inherent efficacy. Instead, the use of words appealed to an intelligent creature, a demon, whose powers made the technique appear effective.<sup>27</sup>

Undoubtedly, Aquinas was hostile to activities that he regarded as 'magic', but there were important nuances to his attitude. While he did not use the term 'natural magic', he

24 For the origins of these orders see Rosalind B. Brooke, *The Coming of the Friars*, Oxford: G. Allen and Unwin, 1975. For a more detailed history of the Dominicans see William A. Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order*, 2 vols., New York: Alba House, 1966–1973. For a discussion of the friars' attitudes to Judaism see Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: Evolution of Mediaeval Anti-Judaism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.

25 The bibliography on the Inquisition is extremely large, but for an overview of its history see Edward Peters, *Inquisition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989; Andrea del Col, *L'inquisizione in Italia dal XII al XXI secolo*, Milan: Mondadori, 2006. In focusing on the standards of orthodoxy utilized within the Inquisition, I have drawn on the approach of Francesco Beretta; see especially 'Orthodoxie philosophique et Inquisition Romaine au 16e–17e siècles: Un essai d'interprétation', *Historia philosophica* (2005) 3, pp. 67–96.

26 Cohn, op. cit. (9), p. 175.

27 For Aquinas's views see *The Summa Theologica of St Thomas Aquinas*, 2nd edn (tr. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province), London: Thomas Baker, 1920, (hereafter *Summa*), secunda secundae partis, Question 96, Article 1.

was prepared to recognize the existence of natural, albeit occult, forces that could be harnessed by Man. His attitude can be discerned from a passage in his *Summa theologiae*, in which he considered whether Man could legitimately make use of observances directed towards the alteration of the body. He began by citing the opinion that it is 'lawful to make use of the natural forces of bodies in order to produce their proper effects. Now in the physical order things have certain occult forces, the reason of which man is unable to assign; for instance that the magnet attracts iron'. Having commented on this opinion, Aquinas concluded that such occult qualities could be employed legitimately by Man, for 'there is nothing superstitious or unlawful in employing natural things simply for the purpose of causing certain effects such as they are thought to have the natural power of producing'. For instance, he conceded that Man could legitimately make use of the occult properties of certain gems or herbs, which were derived from their astrological affinities. However, he added that 'if in addition there be employed certain characters, words, or any other vain observances which clearly have no efficacy by nature, it will be superstitious and unlawful'. Elsewhere, Aquinas also specifically condemned the use of amulets and charms, which, according to certain Neoplatonic theories, allowed the bearer to manipulate entirely natural occult forces in order to promote health. Citing opinions that Augustine had expressed in *De doctrina christiana*, and *De civitate dei*, he concluded that such items could not function by natural means.<sup>28</sup>

Aquinas's desire to define the bounds of the natural also induced in him a sceptical attitude towards some of the aims of alchemy. He did not proscribe this art altogether, but, in the course of an attempt to delimit demonic power, he laid down clear parameters as to what it could be used to achieve naturally. Aquinas argued that, like Man, demons could do no more than manipulate the laws of nature through the use of art. He suggested that it was impossible for practitioners of chrysopoeia, a subdiscipline of alchemy that sought to transmute metals, to achieve their aim. This was because such transmutations would involve bringing about a change in substantial form, and this lay beyond the natural power of both Man and demons. This meant that although alchemists or demons might appear to turn another metal into gold, it was not 'true' gold.<sup>29</sup>

Aquinas's attitude concerning the acceptable limits of prognostication was equally complex. For Aquinas, acquiring knowledge of future events through divine revelation, the gift of prophecy, was entirely licit. Furthermore, an astronomer could predict eclipses

28 For Aquinas's discussion of natural, albeit occult, qualities see *Summa*, secunda secundae partis, Question 96, Article 2. On the legitimate use of natural substances see too Walker, op. cit. (14), p. 43.

29 William Newman, 'Art, nature, alchemy, and demons', in Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and William Newman (eds.), *The Artificial and the Natural: An Evolving Polarity*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007, pp. 109–133, especially 124–126. Alchemy has long been pushed to the margins of the history of science, because of its supposedly spurious character. Recent work on the history of alchemy has clarified earlier misconceptions about this art. See especially William Newman and Lawrence Principe, 'Alchemy vs chemistry: the etymological origins of a historiographic mistake', *Early Science and Medicine* (1998) 3, pp. 32–65; see too William Newman and Lawrence Principe, 'Some problems with the historiography of alchemy', in William Newman and Anthony Grafton (eds.), *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001, pp. 385–432.

through his knowledge of the heavens, and astrologers could legitimately make conjectures about the weather and physicians about 'health and death' through the observation of the stars. It was even legitimate, Aquinas suggested, to use knowledge of the movement of the stars in order to make predictions about the future of large populations. If, however, any individual sought by his own efforts to know future contingent events by any other means then he was guilty of divination. For Aquinas this was manifestly sinful since all divination is achieved 'by means of some counsel and help of a demon', whether or not that individual intended to invoke a demon. Aquinas then listed several of these practices, including necromancy, pyromancy, hydromancy and aruspicy. He also rejected judicial astrology on this basis.<sup>30</sup>

Initially, Aquinas's views in general, and on magic specifically, had limited influence within his order. Furthermore, as the patchy and unsystematic discussion of magic offered in an early inquisitorial handbook prepared by the Dominican Bernard Gui (1261–1331) illustrates, Aquinas's ideas were no more influential in the Inquisition.<sup>31</sup> This situation changed in the mid-fourteenth century, when Aquinas's writings began to assume a pivotal importance in the training and outlook of Dominican friars.<sup>32</sup> Subsequently, they began to inform inquisitorial practice. This change can be detected in the *Directorium inquisitorum*, a new handbook for inquisitors prepared by the fourteenth-century Catalan inquisitor Nicholas Eymerich. Drawing upon the stock of arguments rehearsed by Aquinas, he offered a philosophically and theologically informed account of the natural world which could be used to assess the orthodoxy of reported magical effects. He bluntly asserted that in order to perform their feats all magicians and fortune tellers made compacts with the devil. Furthermore, astrologers and alchemists were also to be viewed with suspicion, not because their activities were necessarily heretical, but because they were unlikely to achieve their ends through natural means. And so 'when they do not achieve their ends they call to the devil for guidance, they implore him and they invoke him. And in imploring him obviously they venerate him'. This effort to define the boundaries of orthodoxy was no mere academic exercise; the arguments put forward in his manual were intended to be used to guide inquisitors in the prosecution of magical techniques and practices. It was routinely used by inquisitors until the seventeenth century.<sup>33</sup>

In the 250 years following the publication of Eymerich's guide, inquisitors began with growing enthusiasm to impose Aquinas's Augustinian account of magic on society as a whole. Guided by these principles, they began to examine the orthodoxy of numerous forms of magic and divination. Various techniques for finding lost property, creating

30 Aquinas, *Summa*, secunda secundae partis, Question 95, Articles 1, 2 and 3. On his condemnation of prediction through the stars see Article 5. For Aquinas on astrological prediction in large populations see Smoller, op. cit. (18), pp. 31–32.

31 Bernard Gui, *The Inquisitor's Guide: A Medieval Manual on Heretics* (tr. Janet Shirley), Welwyn Garden City: Ravenhall Books, 2006. For Gui's discussion of magic see pp. 149–151.

32 For a discussion of the early reception of Aquinas's ideas within his own order see Elizabeth A. Lowe, *The Dominican Order and the Theological Authority of Thomas Aquinas: The Controversies between Hervaeus Natalis and Durandus of St Pourcain, 1307–1323*, New York: Routledge, 2003.

33 Nicholas Eymerich, *Manuale dell'inquisitore* (ed. Rino Cammilleri), 4th edn, Casale Monferrato: Pieme, 2000, p. 171.

love magic, or performing *maleficient* acts came under their scrutiny. Crucially, most inquisitors believed in the reality of the effects that they encountered in the towns and villages; however, they understood them by arranging them on the interpretative grid provided by Aquinas. Frequently, they could find no natural explanation for what they had encountered, and concluded that these effects must function by preternatural means. Many practices, including those regarded as benign by large swathes of the population, and often by the local clergy, were literally demonized by the Inquisition.<sup>34</sup>

### **The establishment of the Roman Inquisition, and the first Papal indices of forbidden books**

Despite the undoubted power and influence of the mendicants and the Inquisition between the thirteenth and early sixteenth centuries, their vision of the boundaries of orthodoxy was not universally accepted. However, their influence grew significantly following a substantial overhaul of the structures of ecclesiastical censorship undertaken in response to the burgeoning religious crisis of the mid-sixteenth century. In 1542 Pope Paul III acceded to Cardinal Carafa's demands to reinstitute the Inquisition in a new centralized form in order to combat the threat posed by the spread of Protestant ideas. The power of this fledgling institution was greatly enhanced in 1543 when the Pope made it the sole authority responsible for censoring books within Italy. This change radically altered the existing system of censorship established by the Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517), which had divided the work between local bishops and inquisitors. Inquisitors now had the authority to bypass the bishops, allowing them to act independently to inspect libraries, printing works, private houses and monasteries in order to seize and burn any heretical works that they found.<sup>35</sup>

The sixteenth century also witnessed the creation of new structures of censorship. By the 1540s both the secular and ecclesiastical authorities had begun to recognize the dangers posed by the increased circulation of books, which had been precipitated by the creation of the printing press and the subsequent growth of the printing industry. They chose to tackle this problem by drawing up and promulgating lists of prohibited books.<sup>36</sup> The universities of Paris and Louvain drew up a number of influential lists, as did a number of Italian states including Milan, Lucca, Siena and Venice. Work

34 On the Inquisition's assault on popular magic from the fourteenth century onwards see Kieckhefer, op. cit. (7), Chapter 5; Edward Peters, 'Sorcerer and Witch', in Bengt Ankaloo and Stewart Clark (eds.), *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, vol. 3: *The Middle Ages*, London: The Athlone Press, 2002, pp. 223–237. For a discussion of the anti-magical atmosphere within the Dominican order during the fifteenth century see David J. Collins, 'Albertus, Magnus or Magus? Magic, natural philosophy, and religious reform in the late Middle Ages', *Renaissance Quarterly* (2010) 63, pp. 1–44, especially 22–25.

35 On the developing structures of censorship see del Col, op. cit. (25), p. 315; Gigliola Fragnito, 'The central and peripheral organisation of censorship', in *idem* (ed.), *Church, Censorship and Culture in Early Modern Italy* (tr. Adrian Belton), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 13–49.

36 Paul Grendler, 'Printing and Censorship', in Schmitt, op. cit. (15), pp. 25–53. For an overview of the indices of the sixteenth century see Jesús Martínez de Bujanda, 'Squadro panoramico sugli indici dei libri proibiti del XVI secolo', in Ugo Rozzo (ed.), *La censura libraria nell'Europa del secolo XVI*, Udine: Forum, 1997, pp. 1–14.

commenced on the first papal Index somewhat later in the early 1550s, and the task was coordinated by the Dominican inquisitor Michele Ghislieri. In an effort to reduce the amount of time and labour required to produce an entirely new Index, Ghislieri initially planned to print the most recent editions of the indices compiled at Louvain (1546) and Paris (1547). However, he eventually decided that this approach would not be sufficient, and so he appointed two of his confrères to the task of compiling an entirely new list. The first, Egido Foscarei, was the master of the Sacred Palace, and the second, Pietro Bertano, was bishop (and subsequently cardinal) of Fano. Although the resulting Index was not officially promulgated, it was circulated to some local inquisitors at their request, and the Milanese authorities printed an edition in 1553, and the following year they printed a second version. The Venetian inquisitor had two separate editions printed in 1554, and another imprint was published in Florence that same year.<sup>37</sup>

The Venetian edition of this list was made up of 596 individual entries. The works it condemned included not only the writings of northern reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, but also the writings of evangelical authors such as the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus, and the writings of members of the *spirituali*, an Italian reforming movement. Importantly, the Index was not solely concerned with eliminating rival visions of reform, but also aimed to implement the Inquisition's reforming vision. Primarily, it sought to reinforce the faith through the removal of contaminating elements. Consequently, the compilers of the Inquisitorial Index sought to restrict works they considered profane, and also the Talmud. Furthermore, in a major departure from the indices prepared by secular authorities and the universities, this list also set out to impose major restrictions upon magic and divination. This represented the first systematic attempt to control books about these arts. Pursuing this latter aim, it included injunctions against all *notoriae artes*, and condemnations of all works of geomancy, hydromancy, pyromancy and necromancy. This list made no reference to judicial astrology, however.<sup>38</sup>

Although the Inquisition had not attempted to officially impose this Index upon Italian society, it nonetheless represented a powerful statement of intent. It was against this increasingly tense backdrop that Della Porta published the first edition of his *Magia naturalis* in 1558. Doubtless conscious of the dangers of writing about magic, in the introduction to the work he sought to establish some clear distinctions. Magic, he wrote, 'is of two sorts, one the most wicked, which is full of superstitions and of incantations, and it proceeds through the revelation of demons'. Della Porta here acknowledged the belief that some forms of magic were indeed preternatural; that is to say, in order to work their effects they required the assistance of demons, and were therefore illicit. 'The other magic', he continued, 'is natural, which everyone reveres'. According to Della

37 For the indices of Louvain and Paris see Jesús Martínez de Bujanda (ed.), *Index des livres interdits*, 10 vols., Sherbrooke: Centre d'études de la Renaissance, Université de Sherbrooke, 1985–1996 (hereafter *ILI*), vols. 1 and 2 respectively. See too Paul Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540–1605*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, pp. 94–95; Fausto Parente, 'The Index, the Holy Office, the condemnation of the Talmud and publication of Clement VIII's Index', in Fragnito, *Church, Censorship and Culture*, op. cit. (35), p. 164.

38 For the Venetian Index see *ILI*, op. cit. (37), vol. 3.

Porta, it was in fact nothing 'save the consummate knowledge of natural things, and a perfect philosophy'. The magic that Della Porta described was, he argued, this second type. The knowledge he presented would allow the skilled practitioner to create effects that 'the vulgar call miracles; for they surpass the intellect of Man'.<sup>39</sup>

In some respects, Della Porta's rhetoric recalled arguments proffered by earlier magi, for instance Ficino and Pico. Like them, he sought to distance himself from illicit magic by vehemently denying that his intellectual activities required the invocation of demons, and he clearly stated that he would not be making any use of incantations or superstitions. However, his magic was far more limited than that of the earlier natural magicians. The *Magia naturalis* was a collection of the 'secrets of nature'. Consisting of four books, it drew upon classical sources and contemporary craft knowledge to provide a compendium of recipes, techniques and knowledge that covered a wide range of matters. It encompassed everything from practical information about growing plants, descriptions of techniques of distillation and for transforming metals, to what can perhaps best be described as illusions. All were presented as being achievable through natural means.

Della Porta did not shy away from potentially controversial material. In the introduction to the third book he wrote, 'Now, while we are labouring to know in full the various effects of things, we have arrived at those experiments that are commonly called Chymica'.<sup>40</sup> Writing about such subjects, Della Porta was keen to stress his orthodoxy. 'Here we do not promise mountains of gold, nor even the honoured philosopher's stone, that men think of which has been sought with diligence, and perhaps found by some; nor the gold, that being drunk by men, renders them free of death.'<sup>41</sup> Having rejected these esoteric aims, he provided recipes for achieving specific ends. These included, for example, techniques for making tin resemble silver, which he showed could be achieved by natural means. This required heating the tin until liquefied, immersing it in quicksilver, heating the resulting mixture in a glass vessel, and so on, until eventually it looked like silver. Notably, Della Porta made no claim to have actually transmuted the metal, but only to have made it appear like silver. He had not claimed to be able to do anything that Aquinas had considered naturally impossible.<sup>42</sup>

Della Porta's alchemical techniques, like most of the material contained in the *Magia naturalis*, were means of creating naturally occurring wonders by the manipulation of natural qualities. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of his recipes and techniques conformed to the boundaries of orthodoxy sketched by Aquinas. The key difference between the positions taken by the two men was the fact that Della Porta called the activities that he described 'natural magic', whereas Aquinas would have simply categorized them as 'natural'. There remained, however, the ever-present danger for Della Porta that he might describe a technique that he held to be natural, which either an episcopal censor or the Inquisition could construe as preternatural.

39 Quotation from Giambattista Della Porta, *Dei miracoli et maravigliosi effetti dalla natura prodotti*, Italian translation of the 1558 edition of the *Magia naturalis*, Venice: Ludovico Avanzi, 1560, p. 1r-v.

40 Della Porta, op. cit. (39), p. 104v.

41 Della Porta, op. cit. (39), p. 105v.

42 Della Porta, op. cit. (39), pp. 120v-121v.



Della Porta ran the risk of seeing his work interpreted in this manner. As we saw in the introduction, in this work he described how to naturally prepare a witches' salve, a substance that some believed allowed witches to transport themselves to sabbats. Della Porta's comments occurred in a section describing the effects of diet on sleep and dreams. Beans, for example, had the power to cause bad dreams, and for this reason were abhorred by the Pythagoreans. Similarly, he believed that the witches' salve was a natural substance derived from the properties of certain foods and other substances, which promoted vivid dreams. When administered to the 'witch', the salve caused them to believe that they had taken part in a diabolical sabbat.<sup>43</sup>

This was not the only potentially problematic passage in the 1558 edition of the *Magia naturalis*. It also contained a series of passages in which he described various procedures and recipes that seemed to be derived from folk wisdom and traditions of 'white magic'. For example, he described how to detect a robbery through the use of a particular stone. He also described a technique that could be used to determine a woman's fidelity. 'Place this *calamita* (adamant or magnet stone) under the head of the woman as she sleeps, if she is chaste, she will sweetly embrace her husband; if she is not, she will toss herself from the bed as though she were pushed with a hand.' Although Della Porta did not describe the use of any incantations, or other superstitious practices, these techniques severely stretched the bounds of the 'natural'. In fact, many critics of magic would have believed that they had exceeded them. Since both the mendicants and the Inquisition had sought to root out such practices both from the rural towns and villages and from larger cities, it is unlikely that their members would have approved of Della Porta's credulous accounts of them.<sup>44</sup>

### The papal indices of 1559 and 1564

The Inquisition's power, and hence its ability to advance its reforming agenda, was consolidated in 1555 when Cardinal Carafa was elected Pope Paul IV. Three years later, the same year in which the first edition of the *Magia naturalis* was published, Paul IV oversaw the drafting of a new papal Index. The new list was completed on 30 December, and promulgated the following January. Made up of 202 individual entries, it was by far the shortest of the three papal indices issued during the sixteenth century. Its brevity notwithstanding, it is widely regarded as the harshest. Furthermore, the new Index was to be implemented solely by inquisitors, thereby completely bypassing the bishops. It thus marked an important stage in Paul IV's efforts to enhance the power of the Inquisition. This power was augmented by a papal bull that denied confessors the authority to absolve those who possessed banned works, but instead compelled them to send the penitent to the local inquisitor.<sup>45</sup>

43 Della Porta, op. cit. (39), Book II, Chapter 24, esp. p. 100r-v;

44 Della Porta, op. cit. (39), on finding a thief see p. 86v; and on the detection of infidelity see pp. 88r-89v.

45 For the Roman Index of 1559 see *ILI*, op. cit. (37), vol. 8. For the production of the 1559 Index and its rules see Grendler, op. cit. (37), pp. 115-116. On the expanding power of the Inquisition see Fragnito, 'The central and peripheral organisation of censorship', op. cit. (35), p. 16.

The contents of the 1559 Index can be broken down into several categories. Of the 202 entries, thirty-one were complete editions of the Bible, and another twelve were versions of the New Testament. Uniquely, this Index also included the names of sixty printers who were held responsible for the publication of heretical material. This means that there were just ninety-nine further entries. A number of these were injunctions against specific classes of book. They included a ban on all works previously condemned by either popes or councils prior to 1515, and a further prohibition on all books published in the preceding forty years which lacked titles, and on all books lacking an imprimatur from either an inquisitor or a bishop. There were also a series of bans on specific books and authors. These included the writings of leading Protestant reformers, such as Luther, Melanchthon and Calvin, and evangelical reformers, notably the complete works of Desiderius Erasmus. The Index again targeted the Jews, by prohibiting the reading of the Talmud and any associated writings. The list also included a number of writings that its compilers believed to be either anticlerical or obscene. This led to the prohibition of the poetry of Francesco Berni and Giovanni Della Casa, and the expurgation of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*.<sup>46</sup>

The impact of the 1559 Index on 'science' is harder to gauge. As a number of historians have previously noted, it did not include any works of natural philosophy or cosmology. It did represent a significant enhancement of the Inquisition's campaign to control works that described the magical and divinatory arts. Four general injunctions targeted types of divinatory and magical activity, namely geomancy, hydromancy, pyromancy and necromancy. There were also two further general prohibitions, the first banning all books and writings on the magical arts, and the second all works on chiromancy, physiognomy, aeromancy, geomancy, hydromancy, onomancy, pyromancy or necromancy, or about soothsaying, sorcery, omens, haruscopy, incantations and any form of divination which used the magical arts. While this latter prohibition also proscribed judicial astrology, it did specifically allow the publication of books and writings that used observations of the movements of the celestial bodies to make predictions for use in navigation, farming or medicine.<sup>47</sup>

Although the Index had banned all writings on 'magic' and 'divination', as we have already seen the definition of these terms was not stable during the sixteenth century. While the ban on the magical arts included explicitly necromantic works, such as the *Clavicula salomonis* (which was named in this Index), the 1559 Index also specifically banned works of divination and magic that had been presented by their authors as being entirely natural. These included the writings of Pope Paul III's client Luca Gaurico, and Patritio Tricasso's work on chiromancy. The banning of these works reflected the Inquisition's efforts to impose a single, coherent definition of magic and divination, which resulted in the prohibition of works whose orthodoxy had previously been subject

46 On the works condemned in 1559 see Luigi Firpo, 'The flowering and withering of speculative philosophy – Italian philosophy and the Counter-Reformation: the condemnation of Francesco Patrizi', in Eric Cochrane (ed.), *The Late Italian Renaissance*, London: Macmillan, 1970, pp. 266–267. See too Grendler, op. cit. (37), pp. 266–284. On the censorship of literature see Ugo Rozzo, 'Italian literature on the Index', in Fragnito, *Church, Censorship and Culture*, op. cit. (35), pp. 194–222.

47 See the 1559 Index, *ILL*, op. cit. (37), vol. 8; for the injunction on the divinatory arts see pp. 291–292.

to debate. The significance of this development does not lie in the outlawing of specific practices, but in the rejection of the philosophical account of the natural order by which they were explained. Although many independent philosophers and their noble supporters may have disagreed with the boundaries drawn by the Inquisition, these definitions had nevertheless been established as the working standards for censorship. According to these new standards, the works of philosophers and diviners such as Tricasso or Gaurico were now defined as demonic, regardless of the authors' claims to the contrary.<sup>48</sup>

The 1559 Index also made fundamental changes to the manner in which censorship was carried out. Following the removal of the bishops from the enforcement of the Index, the work of assessing specific works fell solely to the local inquisitor. In effect, the Inquisition was provided with a new mandate to eradicate from society works that its members had long considered to be dangerous. While some contemporaries may still have been prepared to debate whether a given technique was natural or required the preternatural assistance of demons, the ultimate power to determine the truth of the matter now lay exclusively with the Inquisition. When inquisitors were required to exercise their own judgement, for example when examining a suspicious text that was not specifically named in the Index, or when assessing a new book prior to issuing an imprimatur, they did so in accordance with the protocols established by inquisitorial practice, as recorded within their handbooks. As we have seen, these works rejected many forms of divination or magic, and, as a consequence, the range of possible philosophical accounts of the natural world had been, in principle at least, severely curtailed.

Following Paul IV's death in August 1559, his successor, Pius IV, instigated a less austere papal regime. The power of the Inquisition was reduced, and the new Pope quickly initiated an effort to revise the harsh Index of 1559. He gave the task of drawing up a new list to the bishops attending the Council of Trent. Although the new work was notably more moderate towards both evangelical humanism and the Jews, it maintained the vigorous attempts made in the Inquisition's Index of 1559 to separate licit from illicit philosophical knowledge. For example, every work prepared by Cornelius Agrippa was banned. This included his *De occulta philosophia*, in which he described Ficino and Pico's magic. The 1564 Index also substantially repeated the previous Index's prohibitions on magic. In marked contrast to the previous Index, there was only one specific reference to any work on divinatory practices. Nevertheless, the ninth rule of the Tridentine Index substantially repeated the condemnation of 1559 on the divinatory arts, including the ban on the practice of judicial astrology. Once more this broad condemnation left the local authorities to define precisely which works fell within the boundaries of orthodoxy.<sup>49</sup>

48 1559 Index, *ILI*, op. cit. (37), vol. 8.

49 For the 1564 Index see *ILI*, op. cit. (37), vol. 8. On the preparation of this Index see Grendler, op. cit. (37), pp. 144–149.

## Della Porta and the Inquisition

At some point during the early 1560s, Della Porta established the Accademia secretorum naturae. Its members may have included Domenico Pizzimenti, a classicist, alchemist and one of Della Porta's early teachers; Giovan Antonio Pisano, professor of medicine and anatomy at the Studio of Naples; and Donato Antonio Altomare. As the name suggested, Della Porta's academy was dedicated to investigating the secrets of nature, the form of natural magic that he had advocated in his *Magia naturalis*. Investigating occult qualities in the manner proposed by Della Porta remained a controversial undertaking. The form of magic that he practised was limited, but it occupied a disputed area on the boundaries between the natural and the preternatural. Despite this inherent danger within his work, Della Porta does not appear to have attracted ecclesiastical censure during the 1560s. His fortunes changed in the following decade.<sup>50</sup>

Della Porta's problems may have been precipitated by changes within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In 1565 Paul IV's close associate and inquisitor general, Michele Ghislieri, ascended the papal throne. His elevation once more led to the enhancement of the Inquisition's power. Under this new regime Della Porta was subject to increasing levels of suspicion. In 1574 Cardinal Scipio Rebiba, the head of the Inquisition, wrote to the archbishop of Naples, Mario Carafa, requesting to know Della Porta's whereabouts so that he could be arrested and sent to Rome. The cause of this interest was persistent rumours of necromancy stemming from the Kingdom of Naples, which had reached the ears of the Holy Office.<sup>51</sup> There is no direct evidence to suggest that these accusations were prompted by doubts cast on the orthodoxy of Della Porta's work by the polemic between Wier and Bodin, although this does not mean that it was not an influence. In any case, the activities of Della Porta and his academy would have been sufficient to cause suspicion regardless of any possible doubts arising from the transalpine dispute.

The date of Della Porta's arrest is uncertain, but we do know that the academy that he founded was closed by the Neapolitan authorities in 1574.<sup>52</sup> His trial opened in October 1577, but the available documentation does not allow us to establish precisely why he was being investigated. From what is known of his work, it is unlikely that he had explicitly advocated demonic magic. Instead, it appears that the Inquisition was investigating the orthodoxy of his 'natural' magical activities, to determine whether they had entailed contact with demons. The outcome of the trial was also ambiguous. It concluded in November 1578, with the sentence of *purgatio canonica*. This was one of thirteen possible outcomes to trials identified by Eymerich in his *Directorium inquisitorum*. It was issued, he wrote, when the Inquisition encountered someone who

50 Louise Clubb, *Giambattista Della Porta Dramatist*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965, pp. 12–13, dates Della Porta's departure to 1563–1564; compare with Aquilecchia, op. cit. (1), p. 5, who dated it to between 1561 and 1566. On Della Porta's Neapolitan circle see Nicola Badaloni, 'I fratelli Della Porta e la cultura magica e astrologica a Napoli nel '500', *Studi storici* (1959) 1, pp. 677–715.

51 Valente, op. cit. (1), pp. 420–422.

52 On the date of the closure of Della Porta's academy see William Eamon, 'Natural magic and utopia in the cinquecento: Campanella, the Della Porta Circle and the revolt of Calabria', *Memorie domenicane* (1995) 26, pp. 369–402, 374.

‘in his city or region has a reputation as a heretic’, but it was possible to ‘prove the crime neither with confessions, nor with the materiality of the facts, nor with the depositions of witnesses’, and as a result it was impossible to arrive at a verdict either of absolution or of condemnation. The trial’s outcome suggests that while the Inquisition regarded Della Porta’s activities with suspicion, they were not able to explicitly prove that they had required the assistance of demons. Conversely, Della Porta was unable to prove his innocence.<sup>53</sup>

In such a situation, when the case was essentially unproven, the inquisitor and bishop would read out a sentence of *purgatio canonica*. This would be carried out in expiation for the unproven crime. On a fixed day the defendant would swear on the gospels that he had never adhered to the heresies with which he had been charged. If the defendant did not want to submit to the *purgatio canonica* he would be excommunicated, and if he remained in this state for a year he would be condemned as a heretic. Those who had been through this process found themselves in a similar position to repentant heretics: if they fell into heresy again at a later date they would be treated as relapsed heretics and consigned to the secular arm for execution. Della Porta’s trial therefore left him in a dangerous position. Unable to exonerate himself from the original charges of necromancy, were he to be again investigated for heresy he would have found himself facing the threat of death.<sup>54</sup>

As Della Porta’s trial demonstrated, establishing whether or not an individual had transgressed the boundaries between natural and preternatural effects was extremely difficult, not least in the context of a court. Nevertheless, we can gain an insight into the manner in which the Inquisition approached these issues in the 1570s from a new edition of Eymerich’s inquisitorial handbook, which was being prepared at this time by the jurist Francisco Pena. The new edition, complete with commentaries written by Pena, was available for use by 1578, and it makes several important points concerning the acceptable boundaries of natural magic.<sup>55</sup>

In a commentary on the section of Eymerich’s handbook, entitled ‘by which signs a necromancer can be recognized’, Pena makes some significant distinctions in the category of magic. Pena seized on the fact that in his discussion of the external signs of a necromancer Eymerich had spoken of “heretical magi”, and not of magi in general’. This was, he added, a good name for them, because it distinguished practitioners of heretical arts from those engaged in two other types of magic: mathematical magic and natural magic. According to Pena, both were natural, and ‘they can be practised without recourse to the devil’. For Pena, natural magic ‘consists in the production of marvellous effects with the composition or union of certain things. Some examples: through natural magic one can produce a mixture which can burn under the water or sets its self ablaze from the rays of the sun’. He continued, ‘With mathematical magic, that is with the application of the principles of geometry and arithmetic, they can make for themselves

53 On the dates of Della Porta’s trial see Valente, *op. cit.* (1), p. 421. Eymerich, *op. cit.* (33), pp. 193–196.

54 Eymerich, *op. cit.* (33), pp. 193–196, 193.

55 Eymerich, *op. cit.* (33), pp. 193–196, 193.

marvellous objects. It is enough to recall the case of Archita, who in this manner constructed a dove that flew in the air'.<sup>56</sup>

Pena concluded that there was '[n]othing reprehensible in the exercise of these two types of magic', although he cautioned that from them a third could be born. This was 'the magic of witchcraft or maleficient magic, which uses abundantly spells and invocations of impure spirits'. For Pena, then, interest in licit magic could easily lead to illicit interests. This, he argued, was because of a perverse curiosity on the part of the natural magician who, whilst desiring to produce wonders but lacking the capacity to achieve them, might be tempted to invoke a devil. These, Pena argued, were people of the type whom Eymerich, with good reason, considered heretical magicians. As a consequence, he continued, Eymerich had also justly offered a damning assessment of alchemists:

The examples of collusion between heresy and invocation of the devil and alchemy are so numerous that it is not necessary to linger on them here. It is enough to recall the case of Arnald of Villanova, of whom one knows with great certainty that he was an alchemist, but also, other than a great doctor, a great heretic and demonolater.

Although some might attempt to defend alchemy 'it is much wiser, far more prudent, to hold oneself to the opinion of those that consider it unuseful and, moreover, fateful for society'. In other words, although Pena did not consider the practice of alchemy to be necessarily heretical, he strongly believed that all too often it led in this direction.<sup>57</sup>

Pena's remarks shed much light on the situation facing Italian magi at the end of the sixteenth century. In the first instance, unlike Aquinas, Pena did explicitly recognize the existence of the category of natural magic. Nevertheless, he defined its limits narrowly. His comments did not vindicate the kind of magic described by Ficino, which required the use of talismans and amulets, and he certainly did not allow for the cabbalistic magic promoted by Pico or Agrippa. For Pena, legitimate natural magic was limited to manipulating naturally occurring things, or making skilled use of mathematics in order to work wonders. To a large extent Della Porta's work was consistent with the principles laid down by Aquinas, Eymerich and Pena. Yet even if he, or indeed any other magus, restricted his activities in this manner, he faced the persistent threat that his work might be perceived to have crossed the boundary between the natural and the preternatural. Della Porta's trial indicated that his work was provoking precisely these doubts. This suspicion is strengthened by the fact that in 1583 the *Magia naturalis* was entered into the Spanish Index of Forbidden Books.<sup>58</sup>

### The publication of the *De humana physiognomonia* and the second edition of the *Magia naturalis*

In spite of these lingering doubts about his orthodoxy, Della Porta continued to publish works that could attract attention from the censors. In 1586 he produced *De humana*

<sup>56</sup> Pena's commentary is published in Eymerich, op. cit. (33), pp. 171–172.

<sup>57</sup> Eymerich, op. cit. (33), pp. 172–173.

<sup>58</sup> See Valente, op. cit. (1), p. 423.

*physiognomonia*, which he dedicated to Cardinal Luigi d'Este, followed in 1588 by a second edition of his *Magia naturalis*. Physiognomy was an art that functioned by examining the external signs on the human body. Often associated with forms of divination, it was one of the types of prediction proscribed in the indices of 1559 and 1564. Doubtless conscious of these restrictions, in a letter to the reader Della Porta explicitly stated that the study of bodily features could not disclose actions resulting from the exercise of the free will. His art could only reveal inclinations or character traits. Drawing partly on ancient authorities and often making comparisons with animals, he showed in this work how the analysis of certain physical features could reveal personality types. 'Those with large faces', he wrote, 'should be considered lazy'; resembling cows or donkeys, they tend to be stupid and unteachable. Conversely, 'Those having a round nose, with a blunt tip, are magnanimous'. Individuals with these facial features shared these qualities with the lion that they resembled.<sup>59</sup>

Whilst Della Porta's claims for physiognomy were limited, this did not prevent the Inquisition from harbouring intense concerns about his ideas. On 9 April 1592, the Venetian Inquisition served him with an order from Cardinal Santori, the most powerful cardinal in the congregation of the Holy Office, which forbade him to publish his 'book of physiognomy in the common language, nor any other books, without the express permission of the Holy Tribunal of Rome'. Reflecting the Holy Office's desire to control these matters directly, the order explicitly stated that the prohibition still applied even if Della Porta had been granted permission to publish by any local inquisitor or ordinary.<sup>60</sup>

This was by no means the end of the ecclesiastical authorities' interest in Della Porta. On 8 May 1593 Cardinal Marcantonio Colonna forwarded a letter that he had received from a Neapolitan noble, the Duke of Monteleone, to the secretary of the Congregation of the Index, Paolo Pico. The duke had recently become aware of rumours that Della Porta's *Magia naturalis* might be entered into the latest version of the Index of Forbidden Books, which was at that time being prepared. In his letter he urged the congregation to distinguish clearly the work entitled *Magia naturalis* that was 'printed in 1588, which is different to another, that was printed in 1558'. In other words, the duke wanted the cardinals to hold in mind the fact that Della Porta had prepared a second version of his original text. He continued that he feared that the Congregation might 'prohibit the [second edition] believing that they were prohibiting the first'. The duke's comments seem to be a tacit recognition of the fact that there might be material of interest to the censors in the earlier edition.<sup>61</sup>

Although the duke's comments imply that he believed that the first edition of Della Porta's work contained material that could be construed as heterodox, it was clear that he believed that the new edition was above such suspicions. His letter therefore raises several questions: to what extent did the two editions of the *Magia naturalis* vary, and

59 Giambattista Della Porta, *De humana physiognomonia*, Hannover: G. Antonium, 1593, Epistola dedicatoria lectoris, pp. 3r, 173 and 158.

60 On the prohibition of the Italian edition of the *Physiognomonia* see Aquilecchia, op. cit. (1), p. 22; and Valente, op. cit. (1), pp. 415–434, quotation from document 1, p. 432.

61 Valente, op. cit. (1), pp. 433–434.

what material was left out of the second? Equally importantly, which parts of natural magic did Della Porta and his aristocratic supporter still consider to be legitimate? A brief examination of the 1588 edition will allow us to offer some initial answers to these questions. Expanded to twenty books, it contained a great deal more material than the first edition. The text had also been reworked in places, but there were substantial similarities between the two editions. Importantly, despite the pressure placed on him by his trial and the new censorial regime, Della Porta continued to defend the practice of natural magic. For example, in the introduction to the second edition he gave a similar description of magic to that which he had provided in the first. In the preface he also vehemently rejected the charge levelled by Bodin, and others, that he was a witch.<sup>62</sup>

At first glance, the type of material included in the second edition also appears relatively unchanged, consisting of techniques and recipes for performing natural effects. Della Porta again included a discussion of techniques to transform one metal into another, and retained a recipe for making tin resemble silver. The retention of this material suggests that Della Porta had offered a description of chrysopoeia that was in conformity with the standards of orthodoxy demanded by the Inquisition. It is, however, notable that several passages had been removed from the *Magia naturalis*, and these may have been the problematic sections to which the duke had referred. For example, while in this edition Della Porta once again treated the power of foods to affect dreams, he had removed his subsequent comments on the witches' salve. It is tempting to suggest that Bodin's complaints had prompted this change. While this remains possible, it is equally likely that Della Porta was reacting to the broader changes in the climate of censorship that I have described in this article, which made discussion of issues such as how to naturally produce the witches' salve more contentious. This suggestion is given more credence by the fact that there was a more general impact on the content of his work. Strikingly, techniques such as the one for revealing a woman's chastity, or detecting a theft, described above, had also been removed.<sup>63</sup>

Although in these respects Della Porta was undoubtedly more circumspect, the thrust of his text was unchanged. He remained conscious of, and indeed actually seemed to revel in, the fact that his techniques occupied a disputed area on the boundaries of the natural and the preternatural. In a discussion entitled 'how to make an army of sand fight before you', he remarked that having shown this wonder to his friends, 'many that were ignorant of the business, thought it was done by the help of the devil'. This was nevertheless a natural effect. It worked, he explained, by pounding up a lodestone, 'some very small and some something gross', and arranging the resulting material into various piles on a table. These represented 'Troops of horse, or Companies of Foot'. Then, he continued, by moving a 'principal' lodestone beneath the table it was possible to move these 'troops' as though they were doing battle.<sup>64</sup>

62 Giambattista Della Porta, *Natural Magick by John Baptista Porta, a Neapolitane*, London: T. Young and S. Speed, 1658, Preface and Introduction.

63 On alchemy see Della Porta, op. cit. (62), Book V, p. 160, on the power of certain foods to affect dreams, Book VIII, Chapter 3, p. 220.

64 Della Porta, op. cit. (62), Book 7, Chapter 17: 'How to make an army of sand to fight before you', p. 199.



Seemingly, the duke's letter had the desired effect. Although the Cardinals of the Congregation of the Index did include the *Magia naturalis* in their latest draft, they only called for the emendation of editions published prior to 1587. This suggests that they did not believe that the second edition contained heterodox material. Matters soon improved further for Della Porta, for this version of the Index was never promulgated. When a revised Index was finally issued in 1596, neither edition of the *Magia naturalis* was named, nor was the *Physiognomonica*. It might be going too far to suggest that this decision constituted tacit approval of these works. Della Porta and his writings remained under the surveillance of the Inquisition and the Index, and these institutions continued to discuss whether the *Physiognomonica* should be expurgated.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, the ambiguity surrounding the censorship of these works indicates that Della Porta had done enough to suggest that the arts he described could be natural, and therefore deserving of further discussion. By extension it is possible to suggest that arts such as chrysopoeia, and physiognomy, at least in the form described by Della Porta, were not explicitly ruled to be heterodox by the Inquisition.

## Conclusion

In order to arrive at a new understanding of the dynamics driving the censorship of magic in sixteenth-century Italy, we must abandon the idea that the Church as an institution was historically opposed to magic. Furthermore, we must distance ourselves from the opinion that magic, even in its most alien forms, was invariably considered heterodox by contemporaries, including clerical authorities. Della Porta's life and career straddle an important phase in ecclesiastical history. It was a time when a particular element within the Church captured control of the organs of censorship, allowing them to attempt to impose a single coherent vision of Catholic orthodoxy within Italy.

The long-term effects that these developments within the censorial regime had upon the history of magic, divination and the future direction of the new philosophies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are hard to measure. This article is too short to answer these questions fully. It is, however, possible to offer some tentative conclusions regarding the manner in which the Catholic Church influenced the process of redrawing the boundaries of magic. In the first instance, it is clear that, from its re-establishment in 1543, the Inquisition played a fundamental role in this process. Its activities led to the outlawing of large numbers of magical and divinatory techniques, whose orthodoxy previously had been subject to debate. These included various forms of Neoplatonic magic, and prognosticatory techniques presented by their authors as 'natural'. Perhaps more importantly, the Inquisition began to play a constructive role in policing the boundaries of the natural and the preternatural. This institution now had the power to distinguish descriptions of the natural world that offered a valid explanation for observed events from those which were false, and hence potentially justifying activities that required demonic intervention.

<sup>65</sup> Valente, op. cit. (1), pp. 427–428.

The Inquisition's assertion of their conception of the boundaries of orthodoxy defined a number of techniques and activities as illicit. In this respect the application of the coherent definition of magic described in this article may well have played a significant role in bringing about the changes described by Henry. Nevertheless, a number of the activities that he listed in the reformed category of magic, for example astrology and chrysopoeia, were only partially affected by the new censorial regime. The vast majority of astrological activity, with the exception of judicial astrology, was explicitly defined as orthodox. Furthermore, as the case of Della Porta has shown, in certain instances other arts, such as chrysopoeia and physiognomy, were regarded as, if not fully orthodox, then certainly not categorically heterodox. If we wish to establish the reasons why these activities were removed from the mainstream of philosophical activity, and hence from the history of science, we must look for factors beyond the influence of the Catholic Church.

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