

GUIBOVICH PÉREZ, Pedro, 2013, *Lecturas prohibidas. La censura inquisitorial en el Perú tardío colonial*, Lima, Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 313 pp.

From the invention of printing until the appearance of electronic books, technological changes (sometimes rapid and sometimes almost imperceptible) have transformed the way we read and approach texts. But, most of all, they have radically changed the way that books are produced and sold. Despite this, we resist considering a book as just merchandise: it is an object that is still capable of condensing multiple meanings depending on the context and the individuals with which it is relating. In "Beyond the Market: Books as Gifts in Sixteenth-Century France. The Prothero Lecture," historian Natalie Zenon Davis states that in 16th century Europe, a book was considered as merchandise but also as an object of high symbolic value that could generate relations of reciprocity. This was because in Reformation Europe all gifts created an obligation and a book had the advantage of being a gift that lacked both a specific sexual or social character and thus could be given in any direction in the social structure. It is precisely this symbolic character of the book that the members of the tribunal of the Inquisition must have had in mind when, according to Pedro Guibovich's study, they persecuted the borrowing of a prohibited book with more zeal than its selling.

In Guibovich's study, the book functions precisely like a bridge to study the changes in the role of the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition toward the end of the colonial period in Peru and in the reading public in the city of Lima, given that, between the 16th and 17th centuries, the capital of the Viceroyalty was the principal center for the production and distribution of books in South America, in addition to having the largest number of readers. The primacy of Lima in the production of books was disputed by the cities of Bogota and Buenos Aires at the end of the 18th century, but Lima continued to be the most important market.

If the Bourbon Reforms permitted a greater circulation of texts in the Americas, they also brought undesired consequences, such as the dissemination of the ideas of the French Enlightenment which questioned the basis of monarchical power. Guibovich suggests that it is on the basis of this contradiction that the Tribunal of the Inquisition redefined its alliance with the Spanish monarchy, specializing in the censorship of books and the control of private libraries.

According to Guibovich's research, this concerns a change in the political priorities of this institution and not decadence, as is often suggested in the historiography of the Tribunal of the Holy Office. Nevertheless, the author warns us that despite their efforts, the inquisitors were not very effective in their task because of the increase in intellectual production and

conflicts within the institution itself. In addition to these weaknesses, there were also problems between the inquisitors and the colonial authorities, who constantly attempted to control the way the inquisitors did their work. As a consequence, the censorship of texts by the Tribunal of the Holy Office had a reactive character rather than being part of a strategic plan.

One of the most important contributions of Guibovich's study is precisely the analysis of the mechanisms employed by the inquisitors to carry out their task and the types of texts they wanted to censure. The control of books was carried out in the ports where they were shipped or arrived, but this type of vigilance was not very effective since the majority of book buyers had a license to read prohibited books, and used it as legal protection to introduce texts which they then delivered to other readers in different ways. In addition, the majority of readers were members of the elite of the city, which made control more difficult. At the same time, as the author points out, in many cases the readers were better informed of the contents of the texts than the agents of the Inquisition and argued with the public prosecutors, thus delaying their work.

The principal tools that the members of the Tribunal possessed to carry out their work as censors were, according to Guibovich, the edicts published by the Council of the Supreme and General Inquisition in Madrid. Through an analysis of these texts, the author has been able to reconstruct the changes in tendencies regarding what the Tribunal of the Inquisition considered as dangerous texts; for example, it is significant that near the end of the 18th century, the authors most often mentioned in the edicts were Voltaire and Rousseau. On the other hand, it is interesting that the Tribunal itself used new printing technologies to disseminate its edicts, including gazettes and periodical publications which appeared at the end of the colonial period.

But, without doubt, the most important contribution of *Lecturas prohibidas* can be found in the author's reconstruction of the reading public of Lima at the end of the colonial period: the networks that assured the trafficking of texts, the motivations that guided the readers, and the dissemination of the ideas contained in the books.

Since local production was very poor, the majority of readers searched for intellectual novelties in European markets. Books could be bought directly during trips to the Iberian Peninsula or through friends and relatives. But it was also possible to acquire books in local bookstores, if one took the appropriate precautions. In addition, one of the most interesting means of obtaining books was by borrowing them. Readers would sometimes make comments in cafés or inns and this connected them with others who were interested, generating relations of friendship or at least a network to exchange prohibited books.

This network of readers had its basis in the development of large private libraries. Generally, their owners had permits to read prohibited books but not to lend them, and it is precisely through this activity that the inquisitors reached the libraries of members of the elite, since lending was more persecuted than possession. In this way, passing a book from one reader to another became both a pleasure and a danger for those involved.

Guibovich has been able to reconstruct these networks precisely thanks to the activity of the inquisitors who inspected, or at least tried to inspect, the private libraries of important figures in the late colonial period such as Nordenflicht, Vidaurre, and Rozas. Nevertheless, the most striking case is that of Santiago Urquizu, because it brings together all the elements discussed and adds interesting nuances related to the meaning of books to readers. Urquizu came from an important Lima family that had a private library, and it was precisely through this library that he came across books censored by the Tribunal of the Inquisition. Later, when he decided to engage in a "licentious" life, he did not abandon the texts, but rather dedicated himself to obtaining and reading those books that helped him weaken his faith. Thus, he obtained new prohibited books from local bookstores and, above all, thanks to contacts he made in his search for new works. Paradoxically, it was reading that led him to change his attitude and to give himself up in a sign of repentance.

Though after finishing this interesting story the author recounts others, he leaves the reader wishing for a comparative analysis that would more deeply explore both the symbolism of the book as an object and the motivations that existed for reading practices. But Guibovich does not expand on the theme and goes on to analyze the practices of the inquisitors. At the end, one finds that in the tension between the two practices analyzed – reading and censure – the author sometimes leaves issues dangling – issues that the reader would like to have been discussed in more depth.

However, there is no doubt that Pedro Guibovich's book, *Lecturas prohibidas. La censura inquisitorial en el Perú tardío colonial*, represents an invaluable contribution to the cultural history of the colonial period. At the same time, it is a book that, because it explores the movement of ideas and reading habits among the Lima elite, provides us with a different vision of the transition from the colonial period to the Republic.

Martín Monsalve Zanatti*
Universidad del Pacífico, Lima

* Email: monsalve_ma@up.edu.pe