

Print, Knowledge and Power in Early Modern Italy - Mock Exam

Students sitting a 2-hour paper must answer Section A and EITHER Section B or Section C.

Section A

Comment on any FOUR of the following passages

a)

“They shamelessly print, at a negligible price, material which may, alas, inflame impressionable youths, while a true writer dies of hunger. Cure (if you will) the plague which is doing away with the laws of all decency, and curb the printers. They persist in their sick vices, setting Tibullus in type, while a young girl reads Ovid to learn sinfulness. Through printing, tender boys and gentle girls, chaste without foul stain, take in whatever mars purity of mind or body; they encourage wantonness, and swallow up huge gain for it.”

Fra Filippo de Strata, *Polemic against printing* (Venice, 1470s)

b)

“The ruinous ignorance and neglect of printers is corrupting books more and more every day, to the public disadvantage and the shame of this most glorious city. For this reason your most truly faithful subject Gabriel of Brasichella and his partners, being most eager to do what is best for the general good, honour and reputation of our most splendid Republic, have determined to begin printing in Greek and Latin in this illustrious town, using their new and most beautiful technique with the highest care and precision. The aforementioned Gabriel and his partners have spent a great deal of money in this admirable and most useful enterprise, and, because the debt is heavier than their own resources can bear, they hope to receive some sign of Your Most Merciful Serenity’s kind

favour...[So they request] the special favour of a monopoly allowing no other person to use their new technique in the lands and territories of Your Most Illustrious Highness for the next ten years ... on pain of forfeiting all copies and paying a fine of 1 ducat per volume.”

From a petition for copyright to print classical Greek works (Venice, 1497)

c)

Coccio: I had begun to speak of the damage printing has wrought on the men of our time ... I maintain that, because there's such an abundance of stuff to read about our feet, we find ourselves climbing a rubbish heap; and just when we thought we had reached the top, we come crashing down, clutching sheets hot off the press and blackening our faces with the still-wet ink, with the result that we are more often the butt of jokes than veneration ... You try sitting at a table where any number of dishes are served, most of them inedible. Then you'd see how your sense of taste (not to mention your stomach) will be altered for the worse! By picking at morsels here and there, in the end you cannot tell if the food tastes good or not, nor whether it is of any use to the stomach. The Forest of books before us, like an orchard teeming with different varieties of fruit, has but a few crop-bearing trees, what with the mis-shapen, half-withered, rotting, prickly, and putrid ones.

From Antonfrancesco Doni, *A Dialogue on Printing that Took Place at I Marmi* (Venice, 1552-3)

d)



Title page from Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (Basel, 1543)

e)

“In the first book I showed, with the greatest possible exactness, the styles of dress of all Europe. If I am not mistaken I have succeeded in this, as far as the first third of the world is concerned, because, since it is nobler than the other two and therefore better known, information about it was easier to acquire. Information regarding the other two parts of the world has been less accessible to me because of their great distance from Europe, and it should come as no surprise to anyone if in discussing this part of the world I am briefer than I previously was. Since distance not only makes it more difficult to acquire information but also harder to be sure of the truth of what is said, it was easier for me to discuss the styles of dress of Europe, mostly because I had seen them myself, and, if not, people I could trust had told me about them and recounted what they had seen themselves.”

From Cesare Vecellio, *On the Ancient and Modern Clothing of Various Parts of the World* (Venice, 1590)

f)

“...As far as the present time is concerned, the best strategy is to pay attention to events as they occur and publish a narration of them with arguments supporting the side that fits one’s interests and increases one’s advantage, without, however, exceeding the truth... When adopting this strategy, speed is of the utmost importance for two reasons: first of all, when the events are new and recent, curiosity excites everyone to read, whereas after a few days no one wants to hear about them anymore; secondly, the first impression is usually the most effective for holding the mind and arousing the emotions...”

From Paolo Sarpi’s consultation for the Venetian government *On Slandorous Books* (1620s)

g)

“Consider as well that, however, one may sing the praises of those who by their virtue either defend or increase the glory of their country, their actions only affect worldly prosperity, and within narrow limits. But the man who sets fallen learning on its feet (and this is almost more difficult than to originate it in the first place) is building up a sacred and immortal thing, and serving not one province alone but all peoples and all generations. Once this was the task of princes, and it was the greatest glory of Ptolemy. But his library was contained between the narrow walls of its own house, and Aldus is building up a library which has no other limits than the world itself.”

From Erasmus' explanation of the adage “Festina Lente” (Venice, 1526)

Section B

Comment on any FOUR of the following passages

a)

“The noble youths Sebastian and Raphael dei Orlandi have not suffered the illustrious Vegetius (a man most worthy of every praise), in his speech *On Military Discipline*, any longer to lurk in neglect and squalor. And especially for this cause they have concerned themselves that he should be printed, that the youths of Italy, drowsy with long sloth and cowardice, moved by the example of ancient virtue, might at length awake... At Pescia, April 2nd, 1488, Sigismund Rodt being the architect of the work.”

Colophon from an edition of Vegetius (Pescia: Sigismund Rodt, 1488).

b)

“Master Leonardus [Wild, of Regensburg], son of Ser Gerard...printer of the parish of San Benedetto in Venice, on the one hand, and excellent Lord Nicholaus, son of the Lord

Henry of Frankfurt, a German, on the other, came each of his own will and accord to the following agreement, contract, investment and transaction...

The said Lord Nicholas is also obliged to give the same Master Leonardus paper for the printing of the books, at Lord Nicholas's expense, and at the good pleasure of Master Leonardus. Furthermore, should there be any pages in the printed copies which have not been clearly printed and stamped and are not to the liking of the said Lord Nicholas, in that case the aforesaid Master Leonardus is obliged to reprint them at his expense... “

From a contract between two Germans to print bibles, 1478.

c)

“To have the books which one produces from one's thoughts printed at one's own expense and sold at one's own place strikes me like eating pieces of one's own flesh. A writer who goes to a shop in the evening to collect the money from the day's sales smacks of the pimp who empties his woman's purse before he goes to bed. Please God, the favours of our princes and not the poverty of those who buy them will pay me for my trouble in writing these letters. For I would suffer any discomfort rather than insult talent by commercializing the liberal arts. Clearly, those who sell their own writings become wheelers and dealers in their own infamy”

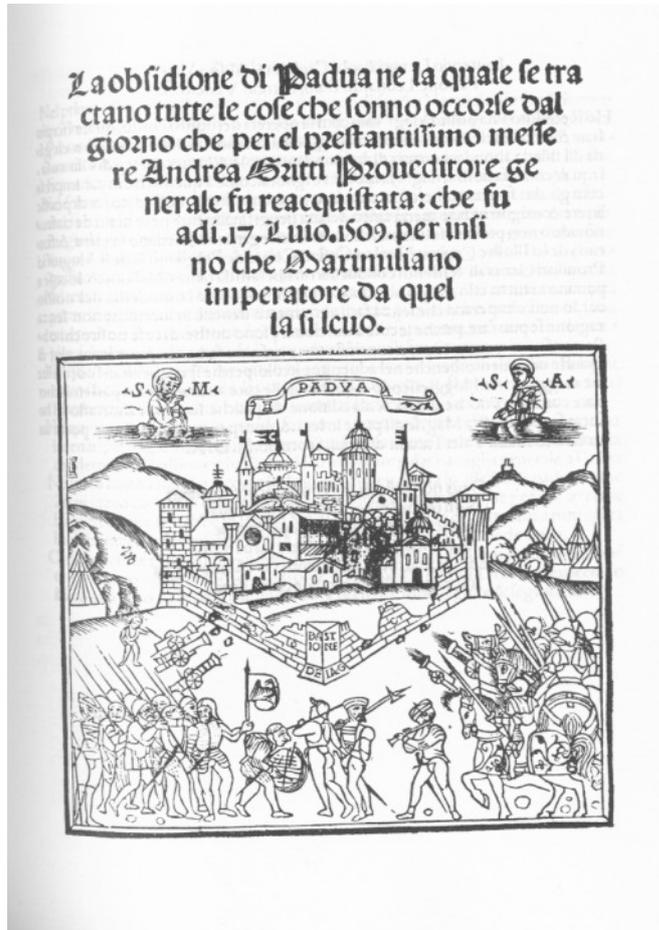
Pietro Aretino, from his letter to Francesco Marcolino (1537)

d)

“...Knowing, kind readers, what a dear and precious thing it is to man to be healthy, spurred by charity I wished to print this little work, so that it might bring health to many poor people infected with the French disease, who, not having a way or the means to pay doctors and for medicines, can be themselves with little expense and in a short time free themselves from such a disease and inflagation.”

From the letter to readers in Eustachio Celebrino, *This is the way to cure the French disease* (Venice, 1526)

e)



Titlepage from Bartolomeo Cordo, *The Seige of Padua* (Venice, 1510)

f)

“In all cities and dioceses the houses or places where the art of printing is carried on and the libraries [bookshops] offering books for sale, shall be visited often by persons appointed for this purpose by the bishop or his vicar and also by the inquisitor, so that nothing that is prohibited is printed, sold or possessed. All book-dealers and vendors of books shall have in the libraries a list of the books which they have for sale... and without

the permission of the same appointed persons they may not under penalties of confiscation of the books and other penalties... possess or sell or in any other manner whatsoever supply other books.”

From “Ten rules concerning prohibited books drawn up by the fathers chosen by the Council of Trent and approved by Pope Pius” (1564)

g)

“From the very beginning since I began to supply in abundance good books to learned men, I believed that it would be the sole purpose of my efforts, that only the best Latin and Greek books in the most correct editions would come out of our New Academy, so that everyone would be inspired towards good literature and supreme arts by our efforts and work. In reality, however, events went far differently... It happens that in the city of Lyon our books appeared both full of errors and under my name, where they deceived unwary buyers both with the similarity of the letters and the format of the volume, so that they were tricked to believe that the books have been printed under our care in Venice. Wherefore lest this matter be a loss for scholars... I wished by this letter of mine to warn everyone lest they be deceived.”

From Aldus Manutius’ *Warning against the Printers of Lyon* (Venice, 1503)

Section C

Answer ONE of the following questions.

- a) How did the arrival of print change Italian communications culture?
- b) To what extent did Italian authorities succeed in controlling the power of print?
- c) How did printing effect the kinds of knowledge accessible to ordinary Italians?