

*A Comparative Approach to Religions:
A Historical Perspective
from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries*

Carlo Ginzburg

2010 Balzan Prize for European History (1400-1700)

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Carlo Ginzburg is Emeritus Professor at the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa and Franklin D. Murphy Professor of Italian Renaissance Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Ginzburg dedicated the second half of his Balzan Prize to a research programme in which he intends to scrutinize the emergence of a comparative approach to religions. Two young scholars, Lucio Biasiori and Giovanni Tarantino, were initially involved in a research project going back to the 1500s, exploring the emergence of a comparative approach to religions, and focusing on the connection between antiquarianism and early ethnology, in the framework of European colonial expansion. A series of analytical studies emanating from this research were planned. Angela Ballone and Gian Luca D'Errico joined the project at a later stage.

The initial phase of the project consisted in several publications by Carlo Ginzburg (*Machiavelli e gli antiquari*; *Provincializing the World: Europeans, Indians, Jews (1704)*; *Ancora sui riti cinesi: documenti vecchi e nuovi*). Researchers also considered questions raised in the following works: Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science. The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Harvard University Press, 2010); Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," (*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, 1950); Arnaldo Momigliano, "Prospettiva 1967 della storia greca," (*Rivista storica italiana* n. 80, 1969).

Four one-year researcher's positions at the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa were awarded between 2011 and 2016. An international workshop, *Comparing Religions. A Historical Approach (Sixteenth – Eighteenth Centuries)*, was also organized by Ginzburg and Biasiori at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa from 10 to 11 June 2013. An international conference entitled *Norms and Exceptions. A Comparative Approach to Casuistry* was held in Florence (Palazzo Strozzi) from 11 to 13 December 2014. An in-depth joint elaboration of the conference contributions led to the volume *A Historical Approach to Casuistry: Norms and Exceptions in a Comparative Perspective*, London, Bloomsbury 2019.

Another conference on religious dissent before Luther, organized by Lucio Biasiori and funded by the Balzan Foundation was held at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa on 8 November 2016: *Prima di Lutero: Il dissenso religioso nel Quattrocento italiano*. The proceedings of this conference have been published as a monographic issue of *Rivista storica italiana*, co-edited by Lucio Biasiori and Daniele Conti, fellow of the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies (Villa I Tatti, Florence).

The latest event that was organized in the framework of the project is a Balzan Foundation/Onassis Foundation joint workshop held in Los Angeles (Onassis Foundation) in November 2019 and dedicated to fake news. The conference has explored continuities and discontinuities in the use of lies for political purposes, analyzing fake news from different perspectives. The historical reconstruction of the ways in which people coped with fake news in the past has fruitfully interacted with present attempts of checking the truthfulness of information through different means and domains. Historians, political observers, philosophers, sociologists, and even a magician have confronted themselves on those issues, learning from each other. Instead of through the traditional paper or online publication, the results of the seminar will soon be released in the form of a video made by a staff expressly recruited by the Onassis Foundation.

Publications

Ballone, Angela. "Contextualising the Papal Censure of the *Disputationes de Indiarum Iure* (1642). The Consultores of the Congregation of the Index." *Colonial Latin American Review*, 2018, pp. 73-113.

Biasiori, Lucio and Carlo Ginzburg (eds.). *A Historical Approach to Casuistry: Norms and Exceptions in a Comparative Perspective*. London, Bloomsbury, 2019.

- Biasiori, Lucio and Daniele Conti (eds.). *Prima di Lutero. Non conformismi religiosi nel Quattrocento italiano*, monographic issue of «Rivista storica italiana», III, 2017.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. “Machiavelli e gli antiquari.” *L’Europa divisa e gli altri mondi. Per Adriano Prosperi*. vol. 2: 3-9. Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2011 (the essay was translated into English in a volume, also edited by Biasiori with Giuseppe Marcocci, professor of Iberian Studies in Oxford, entitled *Machiavelli, Islam and the East: Reorienting the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*. London-New York: Palgrave, 2017).
- Ginzburg, Carlo. “Provincializing the World: Europeans, Indians, Jews (1704).” *Postcolonial Studies*. Volume 14, Issue 2 (2011): 135-150.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. *Microhistory and World History*, in *The Cambridge World History, VI: The Construction of a Global World, 1400-1800 CE*, part 2: Patterns of Change, ed. by Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 447-473.
- Tarantino, Giovanni. *Republicanism, Sinophilia and Historical Writing. Thomas Gordon (c. 1691-1750) and His ‘History of England.’* Turnhout: Brepols, 2012.