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“Due to the Tender and Close Relationship”: The Italian Inquisition’s Investigations of Jews and Christians in the Sixteenth Century

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“Due to the Tender and Close Relationship”: The Italian Inquisition’s Investigations of Jews and Christians in the Sixteenth Century

A thesis presented in Candidacy for Departmental Honors in
History
from
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

by Jacob Schapiro
May 1, 2023

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Acknowledgments

This project, ultimately, began in January 2023, when my mom showed me an article about an Italian historian named Dr. Piergabriele Mancuso and his discovery of a painting by a Jewish artist; she suggested I email him. I did and we FaceTimed, where I learned about the research he was conducting about Florence and its Jewish population. That summer, when I studied abroad in Florence, I met with Dr. Mancuso and he mentioned an Inquisition *processo* of a Jew who had an affair with a Christian woman. This piqued my curiosity and with Dr. Mancuso's help, I found the case online. I would like to thank my mom and Dr. Mancuso for getting this journey started.

Even when I had pictures of the case online, I could not decipher the sixteenth century Italian script. I would like to thank Frank Lacopo for agreeing to transcribe the Italian and assisting me with the facts of the *processo*. When it comes to actually understanding the Italian, I must thank my Italian professor this year at William & Mary: Professoressa Sorbera. We spent many weeks after class in her office, going over passages of archaic Italian, as she helped me understand what the documents actually said.

This thesis would not have been possible without my wonderful advisor, Professor LuAnn Homza. Thank you for photocopying all those Inquisition cases, even when the machine wouldn't cooperate. You sent me so many great sources and always read my drafts thoroughly, leaving comments and addressing issues that I hadn't even considered.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Historiography

The word “Inquisition” tends to conjure up images of faceless men in red and black robes, imprisoning their helpless victims in dark, dank dungeons before torturing them or burning them at the stake, all done out of Christian zeal. These depictions are reinforced through popular culture.¹ Most of these depictions deal with the Spanish Inquisition, which preceded the Roman Inquisition by about sixty years. Though there were multiple Inquisitions throughout Europe, the Spanish version is by far the most well-known. In modern parlance, the Inquisition stands as an easily-identifiable symbol of intolerance and repression, everything that the modern mind should revolt against.²

These ideas surrounding the Inquisition have their origin in Protestant propaganda from the Reformation: intent on denigrating the Catholic Church, Protestants used the Inquisition to paint the entire Church as bloodthirsty. In his *Book of Martyrs*, English theologian John Foxe wrote about the “extreme dealing and cruel ravaging of these Catholic Inquisitors of Spain, who, under the pretended visor of religion, do nothing but seek their private gain and commodity.”³ Identifying themselves with past groups that the Church had deemed ‘heretical,’ many Protestants used past persecutions as “proof of the Roman church’s spiritual bankruptcy.”⁴ This

¹ See *The Name of the Rose*, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud (Nelson Entertainment, 1986), *Man of La Mancha*, directed by Arthur Hiller (Produzioni Europee Associati, 1972) and *The Pit and the Pendulum*, directed by Stuart Gordon (Full Moon Features, 1991).

² Becky Andrew, “‘The Inquisition in Hollywood’: An analysis of representations of medieval inquisition in American and western European films and television series” (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2019), 6.

³ William S. Maltby, *The Black Legend in England: The Development of Anti-Spanish Sentiment, 1558-1660* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1971), 35.

⁴ Christine Caldwell Ames, “Does Inquisition Belong to Religious History?” *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 1 (February 2005): 12.

helped to create the emerging ‘Black Legend,’ the view among many Europeans that Spain was a nation full of blind fanatics.⁵

Moving into the Enlightenment, the Inquisition continued to come under censure. In a section on the Inquisition, Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* said that “Human nature is never so degraded as when ignorance is armed with power.”⁶ In the Enlightenment, philosophers self-consciously advocated for secularization and rationalization; they thought that it was possible for man to free himself “from his self-incurred immaturity.” To many of those same people, the Inquisition was a perfect example of the superstition which had for too long held man back.⁷

With the growth of history as a professional discipline in the nineteenth century, historians turned their attention to the Inquisition—and what they found, at first, was more of what had come before. The first American historian to create an original work on Spanish history was William Hickling Prescott, who published *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabel* in 1837. In writing about Spain, Prescott was also writing, implicitly, about America—or at least, what America was not. Still a young nation, America possessed the requisite energy and potential to accomplish great things. In Prescott’s estimation, fifteenth-century Spain had also enjoyed that same spirit: the nation possessed “enlightened leadership, the sound government, national will, and the dynamism necessary for monumental achievement.”⁸ However, Spain had had two flaws that ultimately doomed it to decline and decay, ones which America fortunately lacked: royal absolutism and Catholicism. Royal absolutism degraded Spain less during the

⁵ Helen Rawlings, *The Spanish Inquisition* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 1.

⁶ Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, *Encyclopedie ou dictionnaire raisonne des sciences, des arts, et des metiers, Tome 8*, 775.

⁷ Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment,” *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, 1784, 1. Translated by Ted Humphrey Hackett Publishing, 1992.

⁸ Richard L. Kagan, “Prescott’s Paradigm: American Historical Scholarship and the Decline of Spain,” *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 2 (April 1996): 428.

reigns of Ferdinand and Isabella and more with their successors. But when it came to Catholicism, there was no greater example of the evils of that faith than the Inquisition. For Prescott, and many subsequent historians, whatever capacity for self-improvement Spain may have once had had been destroyed by the Inquisition and the Catholic monarchs, working hand-in-hand. In this way, America was Spain's opposite. It was as though Spain and the US had walked along the same path, but came to a fork in the road. Spain took one route (the wrong one) and America would now choose the other route (the right one).⁹

Indebted to yet determined to supersede Prescott's work, Henry Charles Lea, an American historian, published *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (1888) and *A History of the Inquisition of Spain* (1906), thus becoming one of the first historians to seriously investigate the Inquisition. In his estimation, that institution had been the cause of Spain's ruin:

The real importance is to be sought...in the silent influence exercised by its incessant and secret labors among the mass of the people and in the limitations which it placed on the Spanish intellect—in the resolute conservatism with which it held the nation in a medieval groove and unfitted it for the exercise of rational liberty when the nineteenth century brought in the inevitable revolution.¹⁰

The Black Legend framed Lea's work on Spain. The West may have moved forward and learned how to implement democracy, but the Inquisition had unfortunately kept Spain stuck in the Middle Ages.

Scholarship on the Inquisition has evolved a great deal since it first began almost two centuries ago. Beginning in the late 1960s, scholars began to reevaluate Spain and its accompanying Black Legend. In the process, which is still happening today, historians moved away from this conception of the Inquisition as a tyrannical tribunal that ruthlessly crushed its

⁹ Kagan, "Prescott's Paradigm," 429.

¹⁰ Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain: And the Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies* (I.B.Tauris, 2011), 1. First published in 1908.

opponents.¹¹ Historians now pay more attention to the local peculiarities and changes over time of the Spanish Inquisition, showing how reality could deviate from legal theory. Because of scholarship over the past few decades, most historians no longer view the Inquisition as a semi-totalitarian institution.¹²

Older literature tended to focus more on the Spanish Inquisition, and often neglected the Roman version. This is partially because there are more extant records from the Spanish Inquisition than the Roman Inquisition and they are more conveniently located. The former existed in a relatively centralized proto-nation-state, whereas the latter crossed a patchwork quilt of polities that did not become a true nation-state until the late nineteenth century. Because there are more consistent records from Spain, located in fewer places, scholars have an easier time studying them. Roman Inquisition documents, on the other hand, are scattered throughout Italy, as there were many states with their own branches. Many are also currently located at Trinity College in Dublin.

Since the Roman Inquisition consisted of many individual tribunals based in different city-states and kingdoms, with Rome heading the inquisition overall, in order to obtain the fullest picture of the institution, one must study two sets of documents: those from Rome and those from the individual political entities. For example, if one were to write about the Inquisition in Piedmont, the ideal strategy would be to examine documents in both Piedmont and Rome: they would provide two ends of the same chain. Unfortunately, most of the Roman documentation has been lost to time. In 1810, Napoleon took the Inquisition's archive to Paris; in 1816, once the dictator had been exiled for good, the Holy See sent an agent to recover the material, instructing

¹¹ Kagan, "Prescott's Paradigm," 440, 443.

¹² Lu Ann Homza, ed., *The Spanish Inquisition, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), ix-x.

him only to ship back important material. In the end, thousands of records were burned or sold for scrap.¹³

Those documents that did make it back to the Vatican or had never left were inaccessible to historians for centuries. Historically, the Holy See, distrustful of modernity and secularism, viewed historians with suspicion, as intent on embarrassing the Church; the Papacy had no intention of exposing any potentially damaging material to the scholarly world. However, in the later twentieth-century, Pope John Paul II promoted a process of the Church reckoning, at least somewhat, with its past. As part of that, in 1998, he opened up the central archive of the Holy Office, the *Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina delle Fede* (ACDF), or the Archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Still, it soon became clear, as some had suspected, that the vast majority of documents that had once been in the ACDF were gone.¹⁴

When scholars first came around to examining the Roman Inquisition, they spoke of it in similar terms to how they had long described the Spanish Inquisition: as an oppressive, secretive, all-encompassing instrument of terror, freely torturing suspected heretics. Because of this, the Papacy was at fault for Italy's stunted development. Essentially, historians imported the Black Legend from Spain and applied it to Italy.¹⁵ Exaggerated publicity regarding death sentences that the Roman Inquisition handed down also contributed to an Italian Black Legend.¹⁶ And just as

¹³ John Tedeschi, "The Dispersed Archives of the Roman Inquisition," in Tedeschi, *The Prosecution of Heresy: Collected Studies on the Inquisition in Early Modern Italy* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991), 24-5.

¹⁴ Anne Jacobson Schutte, "Palazzo del Sant'Uffizio: The Opening of the Roman Inquisition's Central Archive," Perspectives on History, American Historical Association, May 1, 1999, <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/may-1999/palazzo-del-santuffizio-the-opening-of-the-roman-inquisitions-central-archive>.

¹⁵ Anne Jacobson Schutte, "Recent Studies of the Roman Inquisition," in *Politics and Reformations: Histories and Reformations. Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Brady Jr.*, ed. Christopher Ocker (Boston: E.J.Brill, 2007), 93.

¹⁶ Christopher F. Black, *The Italian Inquisition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 99.

with the Spanish Inquisition, scholars eventually more and more saw the Roman variety's nuances and ambiguities: the power struggles, the petty bureaucratic infighting, the victims who were able to defend themselves, despite their disadvantages.

Those who came before the Inquisition were indeed handicapped in mounting a defense, as—apart from a few exceptions—they were barred from confronting their accusers, or even knowing their identities.¹⁷ Even within the constraints of Inquisitorial procedure, however, the accused had some room to maneuver and assert agency. While being aware of this, one must balance on a tightrope. 'Agency' does not necessarily equate with 'resistance.' While it might be comforting to imagine the Inquisition chamber as a battle between bigoted Inquisitors—bent on persecution in service of some fanatical worldview—versus their virtuous victims who bravely fought back and asserted their humanity, such a vision does a disservice. The past becomes a morality play and nuance disappears. There are many ways for a person to demonstrate agency without resisting an institution.¹⁸ A Jew who reported another Jew to the Inquisition, as indeed occasionally happened, showed agency, and yet can historians truly categorize that as resistance?

The sweeping, broad generalities that scholars like Prescott and Lea once used have fallen out of favor, and now there is greater attention to the particular within inquisition scholarship. With this attention, a new picture emerges: that of the Roman Inquisition as one of many overlapping judicial bodies, sometimes working in harmony and sometimes fighting with each other.¹⁹

¹⁷ Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, 78.

¹⁸ Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (Autumn 2003): 115.

¹⁹ Irene Fosi, "Conflict and Collaboration: The Inquisition in Rome and the Papal Territories (1550-1750)," in *The Roman Inquisition*, eds. Katherine Aron-Beller and Christopher Black (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 46.

Just as with Inquisition studies, the field of Jewish studies has changed dramatically over the past two centuries. It was not until the nineteenth century that the study of Jews and Jewish history became an object of serious scholarly focus. The precursor of Jewish studies was *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, or the Science of Judaism. This German movement originated in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and sought to critically examine Jewish texts and history in a scientific manner.²⁰ However, there was also a more practical motive to this new approach, as Jews sought to show that Judaism was an area worthy of academic attention and thus counteract antisemitism and “prove” that Jews were worthy of emancipation.²¹ Immanuel Wolff, one of the movement’s founders, wrote in 1822 in *Über den Begriff einer Wissenschaft des Judentums*, or “On the Concept of a Science of Judaism,” that: “Scientific knowledge of Judaism must decide on the merits and demerits of the Jews, their fitness or unfitness to be given the same status and respect as other citizens.”²² With the rise of a new generation that did not uncritically accept traditional Judaism, a “new justification for adhering to Judaism needed to be found... Voluntary adherence to the Jewish religion was only possible... if Judaism were able to contribute to the progress of humanity, that is, if Judaism could find a... place within the civilized world’s general culture.”²³ Thus, *Wissenschaft* members sought to ensure the survival of Judaism, finding a place for it in the modern world, one based on rationality.

²⁰ Clémence Boulouque, “From *Wissenschaft des Judentums* to *Geisteswissenschaft*: Early Kabbalah Scholarship and the Construction of the Unconscious,” *The Journal of Religion* 99, no. 3 (2019): 291.

²¹ There is some disagreement over whether to spell it ‘antisemitism’ or ‘anti-Semitism.’ Following the lead of the Anti-Defamation League and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, I choose to use ‘antisemitism.’ This is done so as to not suggest that there is a Semitic race, an idea that was created in the nineteenth century and based on racial pseudoscience.

²² Immanuel Wolf, quoted in Michael A. Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History* (New York: Behrman House, 1974), 154–55.

²³ George Y. Kohler, “Yehuda Halevi’s *Kuzari* and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (1840–1865),” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 109, no. 3 (2019): 337.

These motives of trying to prove the value of Judaism both to the outside world and to Jews created a contradiction: though *Wissenschaft* proponents sought to examine Judaism in an objective, scientific manner, they also had deeply personal and subjective motives. In trying to synthesize Judaism, an ancient tradition, with the emerging world of modernity, *Wissenschaft* scholars sometimes ended up adopting an apologetic tone and denigrating their own traditions. Aspects of Judaism that seemed unreasonable to them, such as *halakhah* (law) and kabbalah, were either ignored or waved away.²⁴ *Wissenschaft des Judentums* introduced the idea that Jewish history deserved to be studied, and is thus the precursor to modern Jewish studies, but the climate of the times and biases of its adherents prevented it from fully grappling with the complexities of Jewish history.

One of the first scholars of Jewish history was Heinrich Graetz. Born in Prussia in 1817, he was influenced by the *Wissenschaft* movement to write his *History of the Jews*, the first large-scale piece of Jewish history written by a Jew. In eleven volumes published throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Graetz showcased the noble struggles of the Jewish people for survival over millennia. However, in writing with love about how his people had persisted against oppressive forces, Graetz concentrated largely on the negative aspects of Jewish history. To him, suffering was the price of being God's people and a part of the Jews' salvation.²⁵ Jewish studies scholars usually adopted a pessimistic tone, focusing on the dark elements of the Jewish past, in part out of a desire to contrast the gloomy past with the positive developments of emancipation—by putting down the pre-Emancipation past, they, at least implicitly, lifted up the

²⁴ Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Jewish Scholarship as a Vocation," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, eds. Alfred L. Ivry, Elliot R. Wolfson, and Allan Arkush (London: Routledge, 1998), 35.

²⁵ Nils Roemer, "Turning Defeat into Victory: "Wissenschaft Des Judentums" and the Martyrs of 1096," *Jewish History* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 67.

post-Emancipation present.²⁶ For decades after, this would be the main angle through which scholars approached the study of Jewish history. It would not be until well into the twentieth century that this framework would shift.

A key figure regarding changes in the field of Jewish studies was the Austrian-born Salo Baron (1895-1989), a historian and professor at Columbia University. Sometimes called the “greatest Jewish historian of the twentieth century,” Baron revolutionized Jewish studies by questioning what he called the “lachrymose conception.” According to him, earlier scholars, among them members of the *Wissenschaft* and Graetz, had focused for too long only on the negative aspects of Jewish history, portraying the Jews’ history in Europe as nothing but a tale of endless oppression, with Jews the perpetually helpless victims.²⁷ According to this view, it was not until the light of the French Revolution and emancipation pierced the darkness of European persecution that Jews became free.

The lachrymose conception actually has its roots in Jewish literature, with medieval chronicles depicting post-Temple Judaism as full of only pain and suffering that would only cease with the arrival of the Messiah. This view was secularized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but the dark outlook remained the same. In the second half of the twentieth century, a version of the lachrymose conception emerged that looked at Jewish history as a series of persecutions, one after another, finally culminating in the Holocaust.²⁸

Even before the Shoah, Baron took issue with this framework. In his 1928 article, “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?,” published in *Menorah*

²⁶ Roemer, “Turning Defeat,” 66-7.

²⁷ Flora Cassen, “Early Modern Jewish History Ongoing Trends, Global Directions,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 97, no. 3/4 (2017): 396.

²⁸ David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 9.

Journal, Baron pushed back against the lachrymose conception. He made the point that while Jews lacked many rights in the various medieval states, so did most people, as the idea of individual ‘rights’ was a modern creation. Additionally, the separate, sometimes ghettoized existence of Jews allowed them to live according to their own laws and customs, a possibility which the modern nation-state destroyed. With his article, Baron challenged historians to focus also on the positive aspects of Jewish life throughout history.

It was around the time that Baron wrote his extremely influential article that Jewish studies began to come into its own. After WWI, though at first on a small scale, Jewish studies became its own field, part of the university landscape, and not just as an appendage to the study of Christianity. In 1925, Harry Austryn Wolfson became the inaugural Lucius Littauer Chair of Jewish history and philosophy at Harvard University. After Harvard, other universities followed suit and began hiring Jewish studies scholars. A major milestone happened when Brandeis University was founded in 1948 as a secular Jewish institution and soon “initiated the first comprehensive university program in Jewish Studies out of the State of Israel,” with its “now famed Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies.”²⁹ With the increasing prestige and attention of Jewish studies, new histories of the Jewish people appeared, including one by Baron himself.

Baron wrote *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, originally published in 1937 but revised and expanded over the next few decades. Like Graetz’s work, this book was a history of the Jewish people from the very beginnings to the present day but unlike Graetz, Baron embedded Jews in the larger societies of the time. His sweeping history was carefully researched, with Baron reading sources both ancient and modern, in many different languages. As seen in his

²⁹ Mendes-Flohr, “Jewish Scholarship,” 38.

article and book, Jewish history, for him, was filled with positive moments and he wanted scholars to acknowledge that, as he did.

This mantle was taken up, perhaps too zealously, by future historians. Cecil Roth, a Jewish historian from England, homed in on a particular era of Jewish history, which is relevant for my work: the Renaissance. His *The Jews in the Renaissance*, published in 1959, showed how Jews during this time period in Northern Italy were a part of the Renaissance, actively contributing to its greatness. Roth examined many individual Jews in prominent professions, ranging from architects to artists to physicians. Not only did his book certainly break with the “lachrymose conception,” but it was also one of the first scholarly works to show how Jews interacted with, and enriched, the surrounding society. Instead of portraying Jews as purely insular, uninterested in interacting with the world around them, Roth brought the Jewish community into the mainstream culture.

However, Roth’s book has come under criticism in the ensuing decades for painting an overly rosy portrait of Jewish-Christian relations of this epoch. The myth of the Renaissance as a golden era for Western civilization, where creative genius flowered and finally broke with the millennium of gloom that was the Middle Ages, still held sway in Roth’s time. Since then, the distinctiveness of the Renaissance has lessened for historians, with some even claiming that it did not exist.³⁰ It is clear that Roth was trying to link the greatness of the Renaissance to the Jews, and in doing so, exaggerated the tolerance of the Renaissance: he relied too much on individual stories, which obscured the general trend, as most Jews in Northern Italy, just like most Christians, were not scholars or artists.

³⁰ Kenneth R. Bartlett, *A Short History of the Italian Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 10.

For the next few decades, a debate would rage, and indeed, is still raging, about what paradigm of Jewish life should be emphasized in Jewish history.³¹ For decades, scholars have wrestled with just how “lachrymose” Jewish life was in various times and locations, and whether the persecution of Jews or Jewish agency should be emphasized. Robert Bonfil, a professor emeritus at Hebrew University, wrote in his *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, published in 1994, that “Accounts of the history of the Jewish people in the Diaspora...oscillate between what Salo W. Baron defined as the lachrymose conception of Jewish history’ and what, paraphrasing Baron, we might call “the antilachrymose conception of Jewish history.”³² The category that Baron had named had become so embedded as a trope in Jewish studies that it was still mentioned, even parodied, over sixty years later. As time has gone by, historians have become less interested in writing tomes about all of Jewish history, lachrymose or anti-lachrymose, and instead have focused more on specific eras or institutions. Just as scholars in the field of inquisition studies have zoomed in on certain parts of the institution, in Jewish studies, there is now an attention to the particular.

A corresponding debate concerns how friendly relations between Christians and Jews could be. This argument can be viewed as a corollary to the ‘lachrymose debate.’ Friendlier relations might lessen the lachrymosity of Jewish history, while negative relations could reinforce it. If one takes early modern laws at face value, then it appears that Jews and Christians rarely interacted, for such meetings were often illegal, especially after the promulgation of the papal bull *Cum nimis absurdum* in 1555. And yet, the law can only ever tell part of the story. Laws, by definition, demonstrate what behavior people do: if no one did an action, there would

³¹ Cassen, “Early Modern,” 400.

³² Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1.

be no need to make a law against it. In the transgressing of the law, which is documented in documents from the Inquisition, one can see that Christians and Jews did interact a fair amount. Scholars once spoke of two completely separate communities, with Christians having nothing but hatred for Jews and Jews completely isolated from Christians. Again, scholarship now highlights the gray areas, acknowledging that though sociability may not have occurred all the time, it certainly did sometimes. Just as the nuances of the Inquisition have come to the forefront, so too with interfaith relations, as scholars study Jews and Christians and their interactions. At times, though, one cannot even tell if the people being studied are Jews or Christians or something else.

The identities of the people involved in Inquisition *processi* (cases) can be quite slippery, as will be seen in the next chapters. While older works on the Inquisition tended to speak of people as either ‘Jews’ or ‘Christians,’ scholarship has increasingly focused on the blurring of boundaries. Sometimes the situation was not always so clear and obvious as scholars had once thought. Historians have been investigating how Jews could transition to a Christian identity and back, as they migrated from different parts of Europe to other parts or the Ottoman Empire.³³ Some people moved between the categories, or wavered on the edges, in ways that frustrated the authorities’ attempts to pin people into one or the other area. Judaism could be a ‘performance,’ which Jews participated in or worked against, depending on the specific situation.³⁴

To make matters even more intricate, Italy in the age of the Roman Inquisition was a center for Mediterranean trade and exchange, and that worldly environment could not help but

³³ Stefanie B. Siegmund, *The Medici State and the Ghetto of Florence: The Construction of an Early Modern Jewish Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 3.

³⁴ Cassen, “Early Modern,” 402 citing Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (December 1988) 519.

often affect the people living in Italy and questioned by the Inquisition, who might not even be Italian. Indeed, the Mediterranean in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was so interconnected a place, where different cultures and religions met and mixed, that one scholar has called the period from 1500 to 1650 “the golden age of the renegade.”³⁵ These renegades provided continual grist for the Inquisition, as seen by this denunciation from 1555 against Durante Gomez and Agostinho Enrichez:

If Enrichez and Gomez are Jews, they must be punished because they are dressed in the Christian manner and live outside the Ghetto. If they are Christians, they must be punished because they do not live as Christians, in that they do not have in their houses a cross, a figure of Christ or of any saint, nor do they receive communion, or even enter church, and they eat meat on prohibited days. If they are Marranos, they must be punished too, because they live in Venice, although the law has expelled them.³⁶

Enriches and Gomez sometimes acted in a way that suggested that they were Jews, but behaved like Christians at other times. Each group had certain clothing, locations, and activities that marked one as belonging to that group. Mixing the two led to suspicion of being a Marrano, a derogatory term for an Iberian Jew who had converted to Christianity but still continued to practice Judaism. Suspected of judaizing, Gomez had his fellow merchants testify to his Christianity, and was eventually cleared.³⁷

According to Venetian law, Christians, Jews, and Marranos were each discrete categories, with certain rules applying to each group. However, Gomez, Enrichez, and others like them, whether intentionally or not, worked against such neat and tidy categorizations, much to

³⁵ Eric R. Dursteler, *Renegade Women: Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 111 in Aron-Beller and Black, *The Roman Inquisition*, 268.

³⁶ Pier Cesare Ioly Zoratini, ed. *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia contro ebrei e giudaizzanti (1561-70)* (Florence: Olschki, 1982), 73-4 in Aron-Beller and Black, *The Roman Inquisition*, 277.

³⁷ Brian Pullan, *The Jews and the Inquisition of Venice, 1550—1670* (London: I.B.Tauris Publishers, 1983), 109.

the bafflement and anger of the Inquisitorial authorities and even, sometimes, their own communities. The Papacy shared Venice's concern about everyone fitting into the proper box, and this motive, among others, served as impetus for the creation of the Roman Inquisition.

Historical Background

The Roman Inquisition has antecedents in both the various medieval inquisitions and the Spanish Inquisition. Nevertheless, the Roman version arose in its own context. Throughout the end of the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth century, the Church had dealt with many issues. Anti-clerical and anti-papal sentiment had bred calls for reform from within the Church and many of these reform efforts—such as the founding of the Oratory for Divine Love, the 1511 Church Council in Pisa, and the Fifth Lateran Council—predated Luther's 95 Theses.³⁸

Once Luther had published his ideas and they had spread throughout Europe, Italian intellectuals began to discuss them. While few overtly adopted Luther's ideas on predestination, salvation by faith alone, and rejecting the priesthood, men like Gasparo Contarini and Paolo Giustiniani debated these positions. Even more influential was Juan de Valdés, an upper-class Spanish reformer who fled to Italy in 1530 to escape the Spanish Inquisition. His ideas, a mix of Luther, Erasmus, and Spanish mysticism, found many supporters, including among the clergy.³⁹ All these attempts at reform alarmed many senior officials in the Church and led to suspicions of heresy. Fearing further spread of ideas that the Church deemed dangerous, the Papacy decided to take action.

In 1542, Pope Paul III established the Congregation of the Holy Office, what would become known as the Roman Inquisition. Pope Paul IV, who, as Giovan Pietro Carafa, had been one of the first Inquisitors-General, wrote the Inquisition "has precedence over all the other

³⁸ Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, 1.

³⁹ Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, 12-13.

tribunals and that its ministers will be revered by all others, who will submit humbly and obey them in every circumstance.”⁴⁰ As pope, Carafa would promulgate the bull in 1555 that would ghettoize Rome’s Jews. His hatred of any perceived heresy and zeal in combating it earned him the enmity of his subjects in the Papal States, who rioted in celebration at his death in 1559, even sacking the offices of the Inquisition in Rome.⁴¹

The Roman Inquisition functioned according to specific methods. Inquisition cases, or *processi*, could begin in three ways. Often, one person would denounce another and then the Inquisition would investigate this denunciation, or delation, and decide whether it should open a formal trial. Sometimes, people would denounce themselves; self-denunciations could happen for a variety of reasons, ranging from a desire to clear a guilty conscience to a hope for mercy from the tribunal. If rumors of certain illegal behaviors reached the ears of the Inquisition, the tribunal could also begin investigating on its own.⁴²

Once the Inquisition had decided to begin a *processo*, the Holy Office would follow certain procedures. The first step was to gather testimony from witnesses, as part of the phase of the *processo informativo*. After the first phase had ended, the suspect was summoned to appear before the Inquisition and interrogated, without being informed of the accusation against them. The suspect was asked if they knew why they had been summoned. At the *litis contestatio*, the suspect entered a plea. Then, during the *repetitio*, the prosecution and the defense questioned witnesses, with the defense submitting questions for the judge to ask. In order to prepare questions, the suspect was now allowed to read witnesses’ statements, although the names of the witnesses were left out. After the *repetitio*, the suspect was able to offer a formal defense. Then,

⁴⁰ ACDF, SO, St.St. LL 5-g, cc. 619r–623r in Aron-Beller and Black, *The Roman Inquisition*, 37.

⁴¹ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York: Viking, 2003), 270.

⁴² Black, *Italian Inquisition*, 71-72.

after considering the case, the Holy Office passed sentence in the *expeditio*, after which the suspect abjured, or solemnly rejected, their crime and was punished.⁴³

The Holy Office wanted the other Italian states to establish their own Inquisitions, under the umbrella of Rome. The Venetian government was wary of creating any body that would answer to Rome and not itself. Negotiations between Rome and Venice continued for a few years, with the deaths of Francis I of France and Henry VIII of England pushing Venice to become a greater ally of Rome (there had been hopes that they might ally with those leaders to assert their independence from Rome). Eventually, the Venetian Inquisition was established as a permanent institution in 1547.

Half-Church and half-state, the Venetian Inquisition was fully under the control of neither.⁴⁴ The tribunal was composed of six men: three high-ranking Venetians, the papal legate, the Patriarch of Venice, and the Inquisitor. The inclusion of three Venetian noblemen had been a concession from the Church to ensure the creation of the Inquisition in Venice. The Inquisition's goal, in its most basic sense, was to punish heresy. But more expansively, the Inquisition strove to defend the dominance of Catholicism in Venice.

With its cosmopolitanism and expansive commercial links to the rest of the Mediterranean, Venice was a city-state where people of many faiths resided: Ottoman Muslims, Spanish and Portuguese New Christians (*conversos*), German Protestants, Ashkenazi Jews—all could be found in Venice. Some made the city their permanent home, while others only settled temporarily, or used the city as a transit zone before traveling further abroad.⁴⁵

⁴³ Thomas F. Mayer, *The Roman Inquisition on the Stage of Italy, c. 1590-1640* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 7-9.

⁴⁴ Pullan, *The Jews*, 16.

⁴⁵ Pullan, *The Jews*, 4.

Despite all the diversity within it, Venice, like most of Italy, was a Catholic entity and the Inquisition strove to protect the city's Catholic character. A report on behalf of the Patriarch of Venice sent to Rome in 1612 neatly stated the valuable work which the Inquisition had, in its own estimation, done:

By the grace of God the city of Venice lives in the manner of Catholics. Although men of various nations and men from far-flung countries dwell therein, they cause no public scandal, and do not dare to speak of the faith, much less dispute about it. A tribunal of the Holy Inquisition has been established in the city, and with all due diligence the most illustrious Papal Nuncio, the most reverend Patriarch and the reverend father Inquisitor keep watch to prevent any outbreak of heresy, and when the need arises they are most readily supported by the secular arm.⁴⁶

While Venice's international nature had the potential to injure the Catholic faith, by having people of so many different faiths all interacting in one city, the Inquisition ensured that no such harm actually occurred.

Besides stating goals, the wording of the above report is important for another reason: it subtly demonstrates a tension between the Roman Inquisition and the Venetian state. Based on the report's phrasing, it sounds as though the Inquisitorial tribunal was composed of only the papal nuncio, the patriarch, and the Inquisitor—that is, the ecclesiastical authorities. The secular authorities were only mentioned almost as an afterthought, waiting patiently in the wings until the tribunal called upon their aid, and then retreating back to the shadows. There were times when Roman representatives may have wished for this to be the state of affairs. In reality, though, the Venetian state—composed chiefly of the Doge, the Council of Ten, and the Senate—took a much more active role in prosecuting heresy, for it was in the state's best interest to do so.

The Protestant Reformation, which had spread rapidly throughout much of Europe, created changes in the Catholic landscape. In an age in which church and state, while not the

⁴⁶ Ad Limina Venezia, *relazione* of Giovanni Andrea Salice on behalf of the Patriarch Francesco Vendramin, fol. 19. in Pullan, *The Jews*, 5.

same, were linked, a threat to one was a threat to the other. Rulers, including those in Venice, believed that Protestantism bred instability and rebellion. Writing on the early religious wars some decades later, Paolo Sarpi, a Venetian statesman, claimed that “due to the war of Charles V, and the fame that was spread about it, it was believed that that reformed religion brought with it war and a change of state, and, for this reason, it was decided to keep it away; and this opinion took deep roots in the hearts of Signoria.”⁴⁷ Heresy, of which Protestantism was an example, would also call down the wrath of God upon the Venetian state. Even if the rulers of Venice were not heretics, their toleration of heresy in the city could provoke divine punishment.⁴⁸ Such charged language concerning God’s anger already appeared in the historical record when it came to sexual relations between Christians and Jews, which were already illegal well before Jews were forced into the ghetto or the Roman Inquisition was founded.⁴⁹ Venice’s famed stability, which had allowed it to prosper and become a thriving mercantile hub, depended upon keeping God’s favor. These two aspects of Venice—its commercial character and its religious nature—thus reinforced each other. However, they sometimes did stand in tension with each other, which necessitated a balancing act. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the Venetian Ghetto.

The Venetian state founded the Ghetto in 1516, the first of its kind. The place was called the Ghetto Nuovo because the state confined the Jews in an area that had once been an iron foundry—“Ghetto Nuovo” means “new foundry.” In 1541 the ghetto was enlarged to what had once been the old foundry, somewhat confusingly now called the “Ghetto Vecchio,” despite actually being newer. In 1633, the “Ghetto Nuovissimo” was formed, showing that by this point,

⁴⁷ P. Sarpi, *Lettere ai protestanti*, ed. M.D. Busnelli (2 vols, Bari, 1931), II, p. 123. <https://archive.org/details/137SarpiLettereSi232/page/n129/mode/2up>.

⁴⁸ Pullan, *The Jews*, 20.

⁴⁹ Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 71.

the term “ghetto” had lost its association with foundries and now referred to the areas where Jews were forced to live. During daytime, Jews could leave the ghetto, as long as they wore identifying badges, but had to return by nighttime.⁵⁰

It may seem curious that Venice, with its relatively cosmopolitan atmosphere, would be the first state to forcibly confine Jews, forty years before the pope took the same action. Why would that city-state take the lead in such a persecutory act? The answer lies in an idea that, to modern ears, sounds jarring and offensive: the ghetto, at least in Venice, represented an improvement in Christian-Jewish relations. Previously, the city had not allowed Jews to settle permanently within its limits, but the ghetto changed that. Now, all Jews were to live within a certain enclosed area. Designating a specific urban area where people of a particular religious minority were legally required to live makes the modern ear recoil, and yet that state of affairs was no doubt preferable for many Jews, who now had a permanent, legal home. Rather than choose one extreme course and expel the Jews, or the other extreme and fully accept them (which was never really an option anyway), the state reached a compromise between its duty to protect Catholicism and its economic interests.⁵¹

The ghetto was seen as necessary because the Venetian state believed that contact with Jews was polluting. The decree establishing the ghetto proclaimed that “No godfearing person in our state would wish to see them, after they [the Jews] arrived, dispersing throughout the city, to share houses and go wherever they like day and night.”⁵² Allowed to move freely, the Jews

⁵⁰ Steve Siporin, “A Map to the World’s First Ghetto,” in *The Italian Jewish Experience*, ed. Honorable Thomas P. DiNapoli (Stony Brook, New York: Forum Italicum Publishing, 2000), 2-3.

⁵¹ Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 70-71.

⁵² ASV, Senato Terra, Reg. 19, 95r, 29 March 1516 in Aron-Beller and Black, *The Roman Inquisition*, 275.

would have caused a problem, but as long as they were quarantined to a defined section, the situation could be handled.

In Rome, where a Jewish community had lived since before the beginnings of Christianity, the creation of the ghetto represented a more obviously negative state of affairs. The former Cardinal Carafa, now Pope Paul IV, promulgated the bull *Cum nimis absurdum* in 1555, the year that he ascended to the papacy. The preamble lays out the reasons that the bull was necessary:

Since it is absurd and improper that Jews—whose own guilt has consigned them to perpetual servitude—under the pretext that Christian piety receives them and tolerates their presence should be ingrates to Christians, so that they attempt to exchange the servitude they owe to Christians for dominion over them; we—to whose notice it has lately come that these Jews, in our dear city and in some other cities, holdings, and territories of the Holy Roman Church, have erupted into insolence...considering that the Roman Church tolerates the Jews in testimony of the true Christian faith and to the end that they...should at length recognize their errors, and make all haste to arrive at the true light of the Catholic faith, and thereby to agree that, as long as they persist in their errors...they have been made slaves while Christians have been made free through Jesus Christ, God and our Lord, and that it is iniquitous that the children of the free woman should serve the children of the maid-servant.⁵³

The bull then goes on to list a series of laws regarding Jews. Among them: they, the Jews, must live in their own segregated area, they cannot be called ‘master’ by Christians, they must wear a yellow badge, they cannot employ any Christian servants, they may not socialize (eat, gamble, etc.) with Christians. Not all of these policies were new: some, such as the identifying insignia, came from the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, under the papacy of Innocent III. Over the years, though, these measures had often been only loosely enforced, which meant that their reappearance, along with the imposition of new laws, surprised many Jews, as seen in contemporary sources.⁵⁴

⁵³ David Berger, “Cum Nimis Absurdum and the Conversion of the Jews,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 70, no. 1 (July 1979): 42-43.

⁵⁴ Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 68.

The many polities on the Italian peninsula implemented these stringent measures to various degrees. With regards to Venice, the bull did not greatly affect the condition of the city's Jews because either similar measures had already been in place or the state never followed the Pope's admonitions. Venice had legally obligated its Jewry to wear an identifying insignia since the end of the fourteenth century. The city government had tried to prevent Jews and Christians from socializing even before the 1555 bull, though they were never able to fully stamp out such meetings as much as the law required. Venice never tried to prevent Christians from calling Jews 'master,' as such a law would have been almost impossible to enforce. The only possible large change that the bull precipitated was the banning of Christians servants in Jewish households—such a prohibition was added to the charter of the Jews of Venice in 1566. The issue of Christians serving in Jewish households, though, continued even after.⁵⁵

At the same time, if the 1555 bull did not directly force other Italian states to ghettoize their Jews, it clearly demonstrated a preference for the creation of such segregated spaces. Other states did follow suit, including Florence in 1570, when Cosimo I de' Medici, the first Grand Duke of Tuscany, expelled the Jews living outside of Florence from their homes and forced them to migrate to Florence. The next year, he created the city's first ghetto, north of the Mercato Vecchio (today the area comprises part of the Piazza della Repubblica). The Christians who lived there were forced to leave (they were compensated) and about 1,000 Jews moved into the area that would become the ghetto. The buildings were partially redone to accommodate the new Jewish residents, with space provided for a future synagogue. Almost a century-and-a-half later,

⁵⁵ Benjamin Ravid, "Cum Nimis Absurdum and the Ancona Auto-da-Fé revisited: their impact on Venice and some wider reflections," *Jewish History* 26, no. 1/2 (May 2012): 89-93.

in 1705, Cosimo III would expand the Ghetto, creating the Ghetto Nuovo. By that point, about half of Florence's Jews actually lived outside of the Ghetto.⁵⁶

As in Venice, Jews were permitted to go about Florence during the day, but had to wear clothing to mark them as Jews and were required to be back in the ghetto by nightfall. If found outside the ghetto gates after the ringing of the Campana, they were to be fined 10 scudi. Despite the regulations surrounding the ghetto, it possessed a fair degree of autonomy, with the Jews likely choosing their own leaders, who were responsible for creating and enforcing laws (subject to the state's approval).⁵⁷

Cosimo's decision was in some ways puzzling: he had previously shown no particular animosity towards Jews and, unlike Venice, Florence already allowed Jews to live permanently in its domains. Some scholars, such as Umberto Cassuto, have theorized that Cosimo ghettoized Florence's Jews to maintain support from the papacy, which had awarded him the title of Grand Duke.⁵⁸ Historically, the Medici had had positive relations with the small Jewish community of Florence, with Lorenzo the Magnificent helping to create Jewish *banchi* to offer low-interest loans. Indeed, for much of the ghetto's three-hundred-year history, the Medici allowed (or at least tolerated) many Jews inhabiting non-ghetto areas. The Medici also never created a House of Catechumens in Florence. The Houses were institutions set up in various Italian cities to teach converts the basic elements of Catholicism.⁵⁹ The lack of conversionary efforts in Florence

⁵⁶ Pierngabriele Mancuso and Lorenzo Vigotti, "From Centuries-old Squalor: The Ghetto of Florence, from History to Virtual Life. Introduction to the Ghetto Mapping Project," *Rivista di Letteratura Storiografica Italiana* (2017): 127-8.

⁵⁷ Siegmund, *Medici State*, 261.

⁵⁸ Siegmund, *Medici State*, 52.

⁵⁹ Tijana Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 160.

suggests that the goal of the ghettos was not to hasten the conversion of the Jews, as it was in Rome.

Despite the rich amount of scholarly literature that exists concerning Florence, the Florentine Ghetto is less well-known and has received less attention than other ghettos in Europe, including Venice.⁶⁰ Florence, with its smaller population and a reduced reliance on trade compared to Venice (especially once the Medici Bank fell at the end of the fifteenth century), did not have as many Jews and so scholars have devoted less time to the city's ghetto. This has been changing though, with the creation in 2013 of the Eugene Grant Research Program on Jewish History and Culture in Early Modern Europe, as part of the Medici Archive Project, itself based in Florence.⁶¹

In sum, the ghettoization of Venetian and Florentine Jewry represented different changes, depending on the context. For Venice, which had previously banned the permanent settlement of Jews in its territory, the ghetto, strange as it may seem to modern ears, meant an expansion of the possibilities for Jews: now they had an area of the city specifically set aside for them. In Florence, where the Medici, as rulers *de facto* or *de jure*, had long kept a relatively liberal policy towards the Jews, the creation of the ghetto undoubtedly was a step backwards, though the Jews created community institutions to make the best of the circumstances.

Despite the individual conditions that surrounded the various ghettos, the trend as the sixteenth century progressed was unmistakable: the various Italian states, encouraged by the

⁶⁰ Siegmund, *Medici State*, 1.

⁶¹ "The Eugene Grant Jewish History Program," The Medici Archive Project, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.medici.org/the-eugene-grant-research-program-on-jewish-history-and-culture-in-early-modern-europe/>. Under its Director, Dr. Piergabriele Mancuso, the Program has created and is actively working on the Ghetto Mapping Project, an initiative based on a series of more than two hundred manuscripts volumes discovered in 2016 that concern the ghetto's history. Based on the documents, the Project has created a three-dimensional digital model of the ghetto.

Church and its Counter-Reformation, hardened the lines between Christian and Jew. With Protestantism, associated with disloyalty and disorder, spreading across Europe, it became more important than ever to shore up the faith at home. This meant taking greater steps to separate and segregate Jews from Christians, lest Jewish pollution spread. Thus, in a semi-paradoxical manner, the “age of the renegade” was also one in which the Christian authorities expended greater effort surveilling and curtailing the activities of the Jews than they previously had. The establishment of Rome’s House of Catechumens—designed to house converts to Christianity while they learned about the faith—and the requirement that Rome’s Jews listen to conversionary sermons were part of the same trend.

The Inquisition was not created with the goal of policing Jews, but it still did sometimes involve Jews. The relationship of the Inquisition to Judaism was complex. While the institution was certainly no friend to Jews or Judaism, inquisitors were not tasked with converting the Jews, but prosecuting heresy and apostasy. Christian tradition did not define Judaism as heresy, though the Jews were still in error. According to Thomas Aquinas, Judaism lay half-way between paganism and heresy. Through the Old Testament—the Hebrew Scriptures—the Jews knew of part of Christianity: the implicit faith. The explicit faith, contained in the New Testament, still eluded them.⁶² The Inquisition was only meant to pursue cases against Jews who broke laws concerning Jewish-Christian relations or who prevented Christians or potential converts from practicing Christianity.⁶³ But a Jew who obeyed the laws and did not have dealings with Christians except in very narrow circumstances had nothing, in theory, to fear from the Inquisition.

⁶² Pullan, *The Jews*, 59.

⁶³ Aron-Beller and Black, *The Roman Inquisition*, 304.

In the eyes of the Catholic Church, heresy was a large crime, for it was not merely confusion or uncertainty over Church tenets, but “the formal, public denial of some aspect of orthodox Christian theology or religious practice.”⁶⁴ Apostasy was even more extreme than heresy, denoting a “rejection of the Christian faith in its entirety.”⁶⁵ Although this meant that apostasy was the more serious crime, the line between the two could be ambiguous and the Inquisition could expend great effort in trying to sort out who was a heretic versus an apostate. Under the umbrella of heresy and apostasy fell multiple crimes, all of which the Inquisition had jurisdiction over: baptized Christians (whether born Jewish or Christian) who adhered to and practiced certain parts of Judaism, moved from one to the other and back, or converted entirely to Judaism. Jews who insulted the Christian faith could also find themselves targets.

The Inquisition, the ghettos, and the House of Catechumens: though different in size, scope, and effectiveness, all were part of a post-Tridentine Catholic universe, one in which new attention had to be paid to the figure of the Jew. And Jews were indeed figures in the minds of much of Cinquecento Italy. Recent scholarship has elucidated the trope of the ‘imaginary Jew’ in the psyche of the Church and Western Europe, not only in the sixteenth-century, but throughout history.⁶⁶ These imaginary Jews, who had only the slightest relationship—if any—to real Jews, could be deployed as needed and in post-Tridentine Italy, the trope served a variety of useful purposes: showcasing the power of the Church, asserting Catholicism’s dominance in the aftermath of the Reformation, and acting as a mirror for Christian behavior.⁶⁷ The small number of Jews who converted demonstrated the superiority of Catholicism, while those who did not, in

⁶⁴ Homza, *The Spanish Inquisition*, xi.

⁶⁵ Pullan, *The Jews*, 60.

⁶⁶ See David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: the Western Tradition* (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 2013).

⁶⁷ Emily Michelson, “Conversionary Preaching and the Jews in Early Modern Rome,” *Past & Present* 235, no. 1, (May 2017): 71, 72, 94.

their degraded state—which only became more degraded as the sixteenth century progressed—again demonstrated the superiority of Catholicism. The newfound zeal in policing and attempting to convert Jews showed a vigorous Church, one that had still not given up on bringing over its most ancient enemy.⁶⁸

During the Middle Ages, various secular and ecclesiastical authorities in Europe had persecuted Jews. In 1240 in Paris, the Church put the Talmud, the collection of rabbinical commentaries on the Hebrew Bible that guided (and still guides) much of Jewish life, on trial. Found guilty of being blasphemous to God, containing insults to Jesus and Mary, and advocating violence against Christians, thousands of copies of the Talmud were publicly burned. While highly dramatic, the effects of this trial were limited, as soon after, a number of Jews convinced Pope Innocent IV to permit the use of the Talmud, with only the censorship of a handful of passages deemed offensive.⁶⁹

Despite the reprieve that Jews won in Innocent IV's decision, this episode was evidence of the Church's realization that Judaism had changed over the past millennia. Previously, the Church had criticized the Jews for stubbornly clinging to the Biblical Law of the Old Testament, or Hebrew Scriptures—in this way, the Jews were seen as a relic, like a fossil frozen in amber. With the burning of the Talmud, a new, more dangerous, view emerged: that of a living Judaism that constituted “a heresy and perversion, a pernicious oral tradition of religious law and doctrine, a gross deviation from the religion of the Old Testament.”⁷⁰ In the eyes of the Church, and consequently Christendom, Jews no longer followed the Law, which once had mattered but

⁶⁸ Michelson, “Conversionary Preaching,” 104.

⁶⁹ John Friedman, Jean Connell Hoff, and Robert Chazan. *The Trial of the Talmud: Paris, 1240* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2012), 84.

⁷⁰ Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 76.

had been superseded by the arrival of Jesus, but they now adhered to laws of their own creation and this made them even more sinister. Over the centuries, this view would grow.

Three centuries later, in Rome in 1553, the Talmud would once again be consigned to the flames by the Church, now led by Pope Julius III. However, there was a subtle yet important difference in the reasoning behind the action in 1553, compared to 1240: while the Paris burning had occurred because of supposedly blasphemous and intolerable statements in the Talmud, the Roman burning was motivated more by a desire to hasten the conversion of the Jews. Julius III saw the Talmud as impeding conversion efforts and believed “that in distinction to the policies of his predecessors, every constituent procedure of his Jewry policy, beginning with toleration itself, ought to be predicated on the usefulness of that procedure in promoting conversion.”⁷¹ The Talmud, supposedly a divergence from the Bible, was thought of as an impediment to conversion. After Julius III’s order, the Talmud was burned in the Campo de’ Fiori. The Inquisition directed other Italian states to follow suit and many did.⁷²

The Talmud, evidence of changes within Judaism over time, created after the crucifixion and unrelated to the New Testament, represented a vital Judaism, and that went against the trope of the Jew, which portrayed Jews as Biblical remnants. Jews in Italian Christian society had a role to play and deviation from that role could provoke severe punishment.

Over the course of the sixteenth century, Jews throughout Italy were ghettoized and subject to increasingly stringent rules meant to separate them from Christian society. The Inquisition sought out those who failed to adhere to this separation, along with those who mixed the identities of Jew and Christian within themselves. The following cases concern the latter

⁷¹ Kenneth R. Stow, “The Burning of the Talmud in 1553, in Light of the Sixteenth Century Catholic Attitudes Towards the Talmud,” *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 34, no. 3 (1972): 439.

⁷² Stow, “The Burning of the Talmud,” 435.

issue and show the Inquisition's interest in policing boundaries as well as its limit in enforcing them. These cases also demonstrate the lives that people could live, outside of the officially proscribed limits of the laws of the state and the Inquisition.

Chapter 2: Blurred Boundaries

In this chapter, I will examine two Inquisition *processi* and conduct case studies on them. These *processi* come from *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia contro ebrei e giudaizzanti* (Trials of the Holy Office of Venice Against Jews and Judaizers), a collection of cases from the Venetian Inquisition.⁷³ Transcribed by Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, an Italian historian, and based upon the surviving records, these proceedings are an invaluable source of information regarding the inner workings of the Venetian Inquisition. These *processi* show what kind of information reached the Inquisition's ears, who was interviewed, what kinds of questions were asked, and how witnesses answered.

The *processi* in this chapter concern the difficulty that the Inquisition, and by extension, the governments of Rome and Venice, faced in determining whether someone was a Christian or a Jew. The line between the two groups, in theory, should have been firm, and indeed, often was quite clear. Though it may not have been its main purpose, the Inquisition and other bodies enforced such separation, which only became sharper as the sixteenth century went on. Jews in Venice lived in the ghetto among other Jews, they wore a yellow badge when out-and-about the city, adhered to their own dietary laws, and socialized with their coreligionists. Most obviously, Jews did not go to church or participate in any Catholic rituals. Some of these measures came from the Jews' own initiative, while others were forced on them by the state, but they all had the effect of reducing Jewish-Christian interactions.

Before I present my case studies, a few cautions are in order. While the word "*processi*" may variously be translated as "trials" or "proceedings," a more accurate term would be

⁷³ P.C. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia contro ebrei e giudaizzanti (1571-1580)*, vol. VI (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1985).

‘investigations.’ When the Venetian Inquisition received a delation, or denunciation, the men of the tribunal had to decide whether or not to begin an investigation. Sometimes, if the delation was done anonymously and the information it contained was overly vague, with no witnesses, the tribunal would not even bother probing further.⁷⁴ If there were possible witnesses, the Inquisition might question them to see if there was any proof of the delation. Based on the information gathered, the inquisitors then decided whether or not to actively try someone.

Sometimes, there are records of a person being denounced and witnesses being interrogated about their dealings with that person. None of this, however, is conclusive proof that someone was actually tried and punished by the Inquisition. The Venetian Inquisition did not pursue the majority of delations.⁷⁵ As with any law-enforcement institution, the Venetian Inquisition had limited time and resources and inquisitorial prosecutions could sometimes be long, drawn-out affairs. Thus, it was very common for the tribunal not to follow up on a denunciation or decide, based on interviews, that the case was not worth continuing.

Testimony, as a kind of primary source, has value to the historian, but only if it is interpreted in the correct manner. Witness statements cannot be taken as absolute truth—the who/what/where/when of an event. Memory is fallible and those who gave their testimony to the Inquisition were often recounting events that took place months or years beforehand; they could also have reasons for being less than honest, whether to downplay their own criminal activity or to settle an old score. The Roman Inquisition developed methods to try and ensure that denunciations had been made in good faith. When the Inquisition questioned the accused, the

⁷⁴ Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, 57.

⁷⁵ Pullan, *The Jews*, 92.

tribunal would ask them if they had any enemies. If the accused then named the person who had denounced them, that could mean that the original accusation was made in bad faith.⁷⁶

Still, the problematic aspects of testimony do not mean that historians can simply discount testimony: it certainly can be factual, especially if different witnesses agree on the same point. Testimony also has a different kind of value—it can give historians the “experiential truth,” meaning the truth as the witness saw it. This is the “truth of his or her state of mind, the truth of what he felt or she experienced, of how a person is in the world and how he or she responds to that condition...It is, rather, a yes/but truth. Yes, that is true for you, but it is not necessarily true for everyone.”⁷⁷ Experiential truth can tell the reader how witnesses lived their lives, what they considered normal, abnormal, deviant, and, potentially, criminal.

The reader must also keep in mind the limits of these documents. All sources have their biases, and Inquisition *processi* are no exception. They are court documents and were made for the use of high-ranking Venetian and church officials; they record the testimony of people and thus, though the words survive today in written form, their origins are oral. The key figure in bringing the spoken to the page was the oft-forgotten notary. Notaries fulfilled a key function and yet, historically, remain in the background: *processi* usually name which officials were there and who was being interviewed, but rarely is the notary named. Notaries in early-modern Europe also worked according to set rules, with manuals instructing them “in straitening the endless diversity of people’s actions and language into the approved formulae...Their truth was recognizable not by its singularity but by its very regularity. It was truth by template.”⁷⁸ The

⁷⁶ Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, 58.

⁷⁷ Devin O. Pendas, “Testimony,” in *The Routledge Guides to Using Historical Sources: Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History*, eds. Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann (London: Routledge, 2009), 232.

⁷⁸ Kathryn Burns, “Notaries, Truth, and Consequences,” *The American Historical Review* 110, issue 2 (April 2005): 352.

notary's job was to render peoples' speech into a manner that was acceptable and intelligible to the authorities.

Notaries were able to write at least somewhat in both Latin and Italian, though some were better at their job than others.⁷⁹ Many of the names written in these documents are spelled inconsistently throughout. For the records that have no flaws, though, one must not make the mistake of believing that the documents “are in the form taken down when witnesses and accused were being questioned...what survives was more often a reworked version from original notes.”⁸⁰ Listening to witnesses, notaries would jot down the main points and then create a coherent dialogue. Even the trustworthiness of notaries was not a sure thing: Pius V, in 1561, complained of the difficulty of finding honest notaries and allowed inquisitors to obtain notaries from religious orders, instead of from laymen.⁸¹

Another caveat concerns the translations. The documents that I discuss in this chapter were written in Latin and Italian. The introductions—stating which members of the tribunal were present, which witness was there, and what questions were asked—are in Latin. The *processi* then switch to Italian once the interrogatee is quoted. I have put the descriptions of members of the tribunal, the witnesses, and questions in italics. Sentences not in italics are the responses of witnesses.

These translations are a mix of my own knowledge of Italian, translation websites, and the assistance of my Italian professor. I put sentences through different translation websites and then compared and contrasted the translations to find the most logical meaning. I have attempted

⁷⁹ Thomas F. Mayer, *The Roman Inquisition: A Papal Bureaucracy and Its Laws in the Age of Galileo* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 28.

⁸⁰ Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, 66.

⁸¹ John Tedeschi, *The Prosecution of Heresy: Collected Studies on the Inquisition in Early Modern Italy* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1991), 178 n88.

to strike a balance between a more colloquial, intelligible translation versus a more literal, word-for-word record of what transpired. Considering that the Italian language has evolved over the past four centuries and that I am not an expert in Italian, there may be subtle nuances that I have missed in these documents. Still, I have been able to capture the general narrative and broad takeaways that illuminate certain aspects of the Venetian Inquisition and Venetian society, among them the fluidity of religious borders. The first person I am examining who moved between those borders is Salomone Dardero.

The *Processo* of Salomone Dardero

On December 18, 1571, a man named Giacomo di Mattheo di Montevarchi walked into the palace of the Inquisition in Rome and accused Salomone Dardero of having lapsed back into Judaism after having become a Christian. Giacomo said:

I have come to this Holy Office to denounce Salomone Dardero, a Jew, who some time ago became a Christian in Venice and then returned to Judaism...I was in Venice and found myself in a place where people talked about him and I heard that the said Salomone had first been a Jew and then a Christian. It's true that I didn't see him baptized but I certainly saw him go as a Christian without him wearing anything Jewish. Then eight months ago, while I was in Florence, I saw the said Salomone dressed with the sign of a Jew...And in Venice at the aforementioned time I spoke with him and I thought and considered him to be a Christian; the others who conversed with him also thought him to be a Christian. This year in the month of April, finding myself in Florence, I spoke with him and saw the sign he bore as a Jew.⁸²

⁸² Io son venuto a questo Santo Offitio per denunciare un Salomone Dardero hebreo, il quale più tempo fa se fece christiano in Venetia et dappoi è tornato al Giudaismo...mi trovavo in Venetia et mi son ritrovato in luoco dove si è ragionato di lui et sentito dire che prima detto Salomone era stato ebreo et poi christiano. È ben vero che non l'ho visto battezzare ma l'ho ben visto andare da christiano senza che portasse cosa alcuna da giudeo. Dipoi otto mesi sono che, stando io in Fiorenza, ho visto detto Salomone vestito con il segno da giudeo...et in Venetia nel tempo sopradetto ho ragionato con lui et lo tenevo et reputavo da christiano et così era tenuto et reputato dagli altri che conversavano con lui et questo anno del mese d'aprile ritrovandomi in Fiorenza, ho parlato con lui et visto il segno che portava da giudeo. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 64.

Giacomo told his tale to the most reverend father master Umberto Locato, a member of the Dominican Order of preachers and General Commissioner for the Holy Office.⁸³ Locato had also been the bishop of Bagnorea, a diocese fifty-six miles from Rome, for three years by this point.⁸⁴ As evidenced by his name, Giacomo was likely from Montevarchi, a town about twenty-five miles from Florence. Though Giacomo gave his accusation in Rome, the matter, if it went any further, was likely dispatched to Venice for the local Inquisition to deal with. The locations of Giacomo's testimony paint a picture of the international character that Italy possessed in the late-sixteenth century: in only one paragraph, we have a man from a suburb of Florence who has gone to Rome to accuse someone of committing a crime in Venice and Florence. Since Italy was not one nation then, traveling to each of these areas would entail crossing physical borders and passing into new jurisdictions. And yet, though individual rulers might change, that did not mean that faith was meant to be mutable, at least according to Church doctrine.

Giacomo is narrating a story in which Salomone flits across religious boundaries. In Giacomo's account, Salomone was born a Jew, then became a Christian in Venice, then was a Jew in Florence, and then again a Christian in Venice. In this telling, Salomone continually moves back-and-forth between religions. It is as though faith were simply a matter of donning a certain outfit, an idea that certainly offended Giacomo and that Giacomo thought would have the same effect on Locato. And yet, for Salomone, religion may truly have just been about attire. Though it is impossible to know what kind of self-image Salomone possessed, there are several options that a historian must consider. Was he a Jew who sometimes pretended to be a Christian?

⁸³ Benignus Millett, "Maurice MacBrien, Bishop of Emly and the Confiscation of His Baggage, March 1578," *Collectanea Hibernica*, no. 34/35 (1993), 10. and Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 63.

⁸⁴ "Bishop Umberto Locati, O.P.," Catholic-Hierarchy, accessed January 6, 2024, <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/blocat.html>.

A Christian who sometimes masqueraded as a Jew? Or perhaps he saw himself as belonging to neither tradition? Each of these possibilities would have had its own advantages, while also carrying with it the risk of punishment.

There are certainly plenty of reasons that a Jew in sixteenth-century Italy would convert to Christianity. While a genuine change of religious belief is always a possibility, there were also more prosaic factors. Becoming a Christian carried with it a whole host of benefits, the most obvious of which was no longer being consigned to the ghetto. In this way, the majority Christian society of early-modern Italy was structured so as to lead to conversion. The preoccupation with conversion was not only for the Jews' benefit, but was a part of Catholic eschatology, whereby the conversion of the Jews would signal the Second Coming of Jesus.⁸⁵ Conversion was so important that Jews in Rome were forced to attend weekly sermons that were designed to convert them. These sermons were open to the public, and thus the point was not only to convert the Jews but also to assert the supremacy of the Church before an audience both Roman and international; Jews became agents to showcase the Church's triumphalist attitude.⁸⁶

Venice did not have mandatory conversion sermons, but the Church's superiority, and thus Judaism's inferiority, were still daily on display throughout society. Salomone may have been tempted by the expanded horizons that conversion offered, becoming a Christian while still internally holding to his Judaism. If so, his conduct would not have been too out of place in Venice.

Despite its famed stability, Venice in the sixteenth century contained many heresies and religious heterodoxies, as some contemporaries noted. Bernardino Ochino, a friar who later

⁸⁵ Marina Caffiero, *The History of the Jews in Early Modern Italy: From the Renaissance to the Restoration* (London: Routledge, 2022), 11.

⁸⁶ Emily Michelson, *Catholic Spectacle and Rome's Jews: Early Modern Conversion and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 5.

turned to Protestantism, stated: “Almost everyone has his own set of beliefs [there]. Articles, sects, heresies, faiths, and religions have so multiplied that everyone wishes to treat faith after his own manner...everything is up in the air, with so many precepts...that we risk losing our heads.” Baldassare Altieri, secretary to the English embassy in Venice, wrote to Martin Luther in 1542: “We do not have public churches, everyone is a church unto himself, according to his own individual whim and will...Everything is done here without order, without decorum.”⁸⁷ With the mid-century establishment of the Venetian Inquisition, the climate grew less favorable to those who professed ideas potentially deemed heretical. Italian evangelicals—a loose term denoting those with ideas similar to Protestantism who did not fully break with the Catholic Church—who did not flee were forced to hide their views, outwardly professing orthodox Catholicism, while inwardly holding to their beliefs. Such dissimulation was common enough to receive a name: Nicodemism.⁸⁸

Salomone’s situation was not exactly the same as that of the evangelicals, as Judaism was not considered a heresy. However, in his pretending to follow one faith while potentially believing something different, Salomone would not have been alone. Such behavior existed in Venice, perhaps more than historians will ever fully know.

Later on, the tribunal asked the delator to describe Salomone and where he lived:

*And when he was told to point out the person of the said Salomone and to say where he would live at the present time, he answered: This Solomon is of average height, thin, with a chestnut beard starting to turn gray at the edges. He is dressed in black clothes and most of the time I have seen him with an honest man's long hair and he wears a black hat tied in the Levantine style under his cloth hat. I don't know the house or the street where he currently lives in Florence but I have seen him frequenting the Mercato Novo and the palace of the podestà and this is well known by everyone.*⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Both quotations are from John Martin, *Venice’s Hidden Enemies: Italian Heretics in a Renaissance City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 9-10.

⁸⁸ Martin, *Venice’s Hidden Enemies*, 15-16, 126.

⁸⁹ Et sibi dicto ut designet personam dicti Salomonis et dicat ubi ad presens habitet, respondit: Questo Salomone è di mediocre statura, magro, barba castagnaccia cominciando dalle bande a

The kind of hat that Salomone wore is of great importance. The requirement for Jews to wear a yellow badge actually originated in the Muslim world, when a ninth-century caliph in Baghdad created the distinguishing mark. Eventually, this practice was taken up in Europe.⁹⁰ The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 had decreed that Jews were to wear distinguishing badges, in order to more easily separate them from Christians. What that specific badge was to be, though, was left up to individual secular authorities. Over the centuries, Venice expended a great deal of thought as to what kind of badge Jews should wear, to whom it should apply, and what exceptions there should be. In 1408, the state mandated that Jewish men must wear a yellow circle made of rope on their clothing, with the rope to be at least a finger wide, so as to ensure visibility; in 1443, this requirement was extended to Jewish women.⁹¹ However, despite the regulations regarding thickness, some Jews still managed to conceal the circle and thus destroyed the purpose of having the badge in the first place. Determined to make clear who was a Jew, in 1496 the Venetian Senate changed the requirement from wearing a yellow circle to wearing a yellow *cappello* or *beretta*, meaning hat.⁹² Yet this did not settle the issue.

To complicate matters further, the Venetian government sometimes exempted certain Jews from wearing the yellow hat and allowed them to don the black hats of citizens instead.

incanutire, va vestito de panni neri et il più delle volte // l'ho visto con un feraiolo honestamento longo et porta un beretino negro trapontato alla levantina sotto la beretta di panno et non so la casa né la strada dove habiti al presente in Fiorenza ma l'ho visto praticar in Mercato Novo et al palazzo del podestà et è assai conosciuto da tutti. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 65.

⁹⁰ Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, "Introduction," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, eds. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1982), 5.

⁹¹ Benjamin Ravid, "From Yellow to Red: On the Distinguishing Head-Covering of the Jews of Venice," *Jewish History* 6, no. 1/2 (1992), 182-183.

⁹² Flora Cassen, "From Iconic O to Yellow Hat: Anti-Jewish Distinctive Signs in Renaissance Italy," in *Fashioning Jews: Clothing, Culture, and Commerce*, ed. Leonard J. Greenspan (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2013), 35.

Occasionally, Jews would be allowed to spend the night outside the ghetto, in which case they could wear the black hat, so that ordinary Venetians would not harass them, as Jews were not allowed to roam around the city at nighttime. Jewish doctors were also given permission to wear the black hat.⁹³ In one notable instance, David Mavrogonato, a Jew from Crete (then ruled by Venice), acted as a spy for Venice against the Ottoman Empire in the late-fifteenth century. To reward him, he and his descendants were freed from wearing the yellow hat.⁹⁴ Assuming that Salomone was not a spy or a doctor and had not obtained permission to wear the black hat, he would be subject to a fine of 200 ducats.⁹⁵

At the end of the interrogation, Bishop Locato asked a formulaic question that appears in many Inquisition *processi*.

*Asked whether he had, or still has, any hatred or enmity with the said Solomon, and with what zeal and insight he had laid down the aforesaid, he answered: I have never had, nor do I currently have hatred or enmity with the said Solomon and what I have laid down, I have laid down out of good zeal and to free the country of a similar generation.*⁹⁶

The tribunal was well aware that people could take advantage of the Inquisition, weaponizing the institution by accusing enemies of crimes.⁹⁷ Attempting to prevent this kind of score-settling accusation, the tribunal asked the delator if they harbored any grudges against Salomone. The delator said that he did not have any ulterior motive for complaining about Salomone, but only denounced for the “right” reason: to ensure the land would not be beset with people like Salomone in the future. Essentially, he did what he did out of a sense of loyalty, or patriotism.

⁹³ Ravid, “From Yellow to Red,” 185, 196.

⁹⁴ See *Passover of Blood: The Jews of Europe and Ritual Murders* by Ariel Toaff.

⁹⁵ Ravid, “From Yellow to Red,” 184.

⁹⁶ Interrogatus an aliquod odium seu inimicitiam habuerit vel ad presens habeat cum dicto Salomone et quo zelo et intuitu predicta deposuit, respondit: Io non ho mai havuto né al presente ho odio né inimicitia con detto Salomone et quanto ho deposito, l’ho deposito a bon zelo et per liberar la patria di simil generatione. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 65.

⁹⁷ Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, 71.

Italy was not a unified nation until the nineteenth century, and even then it took time for an Italian nationalism to take hold.⁹⁸ The delator is likely referring either to Christendom or a vague idea of Venetian-ness, rather than an actual strong, national identity.

Ultimately, there are no further documents concerning Salomone: either the Inquisition did not take up the case or the records have been lost to time. While Salomone Dardero may not have aroused the Venetian Inquisition's interest, the same cannot be said for the next person that I will investigate: Filipa Iorge.

The *Processo* of Filipa Iorge

Dramatis Personae

Filipa Iorge (not interviewed): also known as Donna Benvenutta da Guiar, a Portuguese woman, mid-40s to 50s, twice-married (the second time, to Odoart da Guiar), sold sweets in Antwerp, living in Ferrara

Michael Vas Mondegos: a Portuguese knight, 50, knew Filipa in Antwerp

Giovanni Ribera: a Lisbonese merchant, 36, son of Gaspar Ribera, arranged for Filipa to return some items to Ambroso Vas

Ludovico Lopes: a merchant, 24, knew Filipa in Antwerp when he was an adolescent

Andrea Pas: merchant, knew Filipa in Antwerp

Giovanni Pas: son of Andreas Pas, 16, knew Filipa in Antwerp

Gaspar Ribera: father of Giovanni Ribera

Jorge Lopes: a merchant, knew Filipa in Antwerp for seven or eight years

In 1575, the Inquisition received a denunciation:

⁹⁸ Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2.

There is a Christian woman who came from Portugal and lived for a long time in Lyon of France and in Flanders in Antwerp and always as a Christian. And she came to Ferrara to be a Jew and judaize with the other Jews. Then she returned to Lyon of France to live as a Christian and from Lyon she came with her husband to Antwerp, where for seven, eight, or more years they lived as Christians. Then, at another time, they returned to Ferrara to judaize and in Ferrara her Jewish husband died. And then on the death of her husband she returned once again to Antwerp, where she lived as a Christian as she had always lived and she called herself and performed all the acts of Christian and remained from this time for five or six years. And she had a shop in Antwerp selling preserves and other sweet things and now she has come to Ferrara to become be Jewish and judaize with the other Jews. Her Christian name is Filipa Iorge and now in Hebrew she is called Donna Benvenutta da Guiar.⁹⁹

In this delation, Filipa was accused of judaizing; “Judaizers were Christians who allegedly continued to practice Jewish ceremonies and espouse Jewish beliefs.”¹⁰⁰ This could range from observing the Sabbath to not eating pork to praying in Hebrew. To the Inquisition, judaizing was a heresy.¹⁰¹ According to the delator’s statement, Filipa was a Portuguese Christian who lived in France and Antwerp as a Christian, before acting as a Jew in Ferrara. Then, she returned to France and later to Antwerp, with both she and her Jewish husband presenting themselves as Christians. After at least seven years, she and her husband traveled back to Ferrara and lived as Jews. Once her husband died, she went back to Antwerp and was a Christian once more.

⁹⁹ Questa hè una donna la quale hè venuta di Portogallo christiana et seti molto tempo in Leon de Francia et in Fiandra in una villa nominata Anversa et sempre come christiana. Et se vene a Ferrara a far zudia et zudaizava con le altri Hebrei et poi una volta se rotornò in Leon di Francia a vivere de christiana et di Leon se vene con il suo marito in Anversa, ove setti otto anni o più vivendo de Christiani et poi altra volta si ritornaronno in Ferrara a zudaizare et in Ferrara morsi il marito zudeo. Et poi la morte dil marito lui si ritornò altra volta in Anversa, ove viveva de christiana como sempre fu tenuta et lui si nominava et faceva tutti atti di christiana et steti da questa volta sinco o sei anni. Et haveva in Anversa una boteca in conserve et altre cose dolci et adesso hè venuta in Ferrara a farsi zudia et zudaiza con l’atri Hebrei. Il nome suo de christiana hè Felipa Iorge et adesso in hebreo se nomina donna Benvenutta da Guiar. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 71.

¹⁰⁰ Homza, *The Spanish Inquisition*, xv.

¹⁰¹ Naomi Leite, *Unorthodox Kin: Portuguese Marranos and the Global Search for Belonging* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 48.

This description set in motion a thorough investigation that would eventually involve seven different witnesses, all of whom had met her. All the men gave essentially the same physical description of her: a woman in her late 40s or 50s, medium height, with brown hair. Other elements of the testimonies sometimes line up with each other, while sometimes they contradict each other.

Much of the disagreement that there was stemmed from whether Filipa was Jewish or Christian. The first accuser certainly considered her to be a Christian, as seen by his accusation of judaizing: in the logic of the sixteenth century, by definition, only non-Jews could judaize. The inquisitorial authorities, at least in the beginning, were possibly unsure over how to classify her, with the delation of the *processo* saying that it is “Against Filipa Jorge or Benevenuta de Guiar.”¹⁰² All the witnesses whom the Inquisition later interviewed referred to her only as Filipa; however, this just means that they did not employ the delator’s neat dichotomy, with two names for two religions.

The denunciation continued:

There is another man, a Christian, who came from Portugal named Toderico da Guiar. Toderico is the brother-in-law of Filipa and is married to a Christian woman who came from Portugal. Filipa, Toderico, his wife, and their son spent many years in Antwerp living among Christians and now they live in Ferrara...And Toderico and his wife had two or three children born in Antwerp and baptized and now they have become Jews. Others do the same and judaize with other Jews. They become Christians sometimes. If by chance Toderico is caught by the Holy Office of the Inquisition, he responds that he is not circumcised and does not circumcise in this way. Now he lives as a Jew in Ferrara...and does all the Jewish ceremonies like other Jews.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 73.

¹⁰³ Che un altro huomo che vene de Portogalo chirstiano il nome Toderico da Guiar et h  cognato da questa donna et maritato con con una donna portuguesa venuta di Portogalo, cristiano, nepote de la sopradetta donna et furonno molti anni in Anversa vivendo de cristiani et adesso sonno in Ferrara...Et havevano doi o tre filli // nati in Anversa et baptizati et adesso fati zudei et cossi tutti i altri che fanno et zudaiza con l’altri Hebrei et si fa christiano quando volte perch , si per caso fussi preso per il Sancto Officio de la Inquisitione, responde che non h  circunsizo et non si circuncida per questa via et vive adesso de hebreo in Ferrara...et fa tutte le cerimonie hebraice come li altri Hebrei. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 71-72.

The delator then goes on to give over twenty names, a mix of Christians and Jews, all Portuguese, who are said to be aware of Filipa and her activities. With this information, the denunciation expanded from Filipa to a whole network of co-conspirators, people who supposedly not only had knowledge of Filipa's transgression of religious boundaries, but may have been complicit in the same kind of activity.

According to this narrative, Filipa had a brother-in-law named Toderico da Guiar ('Guiar' may refer to Guia, a Portuguese town). Filipa's husband, who would be mentioned later, was likely Toderico's brother. Toderico and his wife had children in Antwerp who had been baptized, but at the time of this *processo*, the family lived in Ferrara as Jews, along with others who followed a similar path. If the Inquisition takes note of them, though, they pretend to be Christians.

Though the word is never mentioned here, what certainly would have crossed the Inquisitors' minds was whether or not Filipa and her family were marranos, a derogatory term for New Christians or *conversos*, meaning Jews from Iberia who had become Christians.¹⁰⁴ The historical background here is important. In 1478, Pope Sixtus IV had agreed to create the Inquisition in Spain, then under the rule of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile; the two monarchs were in the midst of uniting Spain, a process called the *Reconquista*. Accomplishing unification in 1492, the rulers then ordered all of Spain's Jews to either convert to Christianity or leave the kingdom. Many converted but many also fled to neighboring Portugal. Unfortunately, only a few years later, in 1497, King Manuel ordered Portugal's Jews to convert or leave. However, he did grant Portuguese *conversos* a twenty-year grace period, during which they

¹⁰⁴ Caffiero, *The History of the Jews*, 24.

would not be persecuted.¹⁰⁵ Thus, both Portugal and Spain had a substantial population of New Christians or *conversos*.

However, the mass conversions did not pacify the authorities, but led to new fears of “crypto-Jews,” meaning Jews who outwardly pretended to be Christian but secretly practiced Judaism behind closed doors.¹⁰⁶ Both the Spanish Inquisition and the Portuguese Inquisition focused much of their energies on ensuring that *conversos* were sincere in their Christianity. In particular, the Portuguese Inquisition, which began operating in the 1540s, became a vehicle for oppression of *conversos*.¹⁰⁷ Throughout Iberia, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the authorities were concerned with crypto-Judaism, barring descendants of New Christians from holding office, with Purity of Blood statutes.¹⁰⁸ In the wake of inquisitorial activity, many Iberian *conversos* fled East, some as far as the Ottoman Empire, others to Italy, or any place where “commercial and financial interests, familial ties, and ethnic-cultural solidarity guaranteed the possibility of settlement.”¹⁰⁹ One common place of refuge for Portuguese *converos* was indeed Antwerp, which may have been why Filipa traveled there, enticed by the prospect of meeting people in a similar situation.¹¹⁰

How to interpret marranos has been a large source of historical debate. The word, which means ‘pig,’ became synonymous with crypto-Jews, or *conversos* who only pretended to be Catholic but were really still Jews. Historians have offered a wide range of views on which faith

¹⁰⁵ Homza, *The Spanish Inquisition*, xxxii.

¹⁰⁶ Marianna D. Birnbaum, *The Long Journey of Gracia Mendes* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 6-7, 8.

¹⁰⁷ Katherine Aron-Beller, *Jews on Trial: The Papal Inquisition in Modena, 1598-1638* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 39.

¹⁰⁸ Giuseppe Marcocci, “Toward a History of the Portuguese Inquisition: Trends in Modern Historiography (1974-2009),” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 227, issue 3 (2010). Found on OpenEdition Journals, 10, <https://journals.openedition.org/rhr/7622>.

¹⁰⁹ Caffiero, *The History of the Jews*, 24-25.

¹¹⁰ Leite, *Unorthodox Kin*, 47.

those labeled ‘marranos’ followed. Some see marranos as clinging to their Judaism, even if, after several generations of hiding, and unable to practice rabbinical Judaism, they did not have full knowledge of how to be Jewish. A minority of scholars views them as committed Catholics who were sadly rejected by a Catholic society that could not discard its fear of crypto-Judaism.

Another intriguing possibility: that marranos acted as both Christians and Jews, depending on what was needed, meaning that, according to religious authorities, they were neither.¹¹¹

Marranos, in this sense, were the experts at blurring religious boundaries. They were an “example of religious and cultural syncretism and hybridism, as well as of ‘disguised identity.’ They have been fittingly defined as ‘souls in conflict.’ The frequent adoption of a type of religious *latitudinarianism* by these figures has led historians to make them spokespersons for already modern identities.”¹¹² The marrano’s skirting the outer limits of religion, while condemned by both professing Jews and Christians of the time, cannot help but fascinate modern readers. It is almost as though the marrano, in seeming to push back against religious orthodoxy, anticipated the contemporary fluidity of religious identity.

Of course, there is no such thing as one singular type of marrano, but ultimately, a range of identities. Some may have fit squarely into the above categories of secret Jew, full-throated Christian, or feigning either faith depending on the moment, while others may have placed themselves at various points in the spectrum, depending on where they lived. And even if a person might have placed themselves at one point on the spectrum at a certain point in their lives, there was always the possibility of them changing their beliefs over time.

The Inquisition could spend much time trying to ascertain the religious identities of people and would do so with Filipa. To the men on the tribunal, what religious community one

¹¹¹ Pullan, *The Jews*, 205.

¹¹² Caffiero, *The History of the Jews*, 25.

belonged to determined a person's identity. Historians have sometimes worked from the same assumption, but such an idea is too simple to accommodate the multiple groups that a person can be a part of and that can shape a person's identity.¹¹³ People also make choices for many reasons and "religious faith does not determine the responses and decisions an individual makes with respect to all the questions that person's life poses; nor is religion the only factor involved."¹¹⁴ The point is not to act like an inquisitor and determine whether Filipa was really a Jew or a Christian, but to note the possibilities that were open to her, how she may have navigated the options available, and how those around her, including the Inquisition, reacted to her actions.

While it is difficult to generalize across different places and times, many Italian states adopted a policy of openness to marranos, provided that, once they entered that new state, they kept to one religion. It was those in the middle, those unable or unwilling to choose, who often aroused the wrath of the authorities and the Inquisition. In the 1540s and 1550s, Popes Paul III and Julius III, intent on luring in Jewish merchants for the profit of the Papal States, granted safe-conduct to *conversos*, promising that there would be no investigation of their religious past.¹¹⁵ Venice followed a similar policy, allowing former marranos to live in the ghetto openly as Jews. While in theory this should have reduced the need for religious dissimulation, in practice, especially when a large family was involved, such policies could increase the confusion. Children of marranos could choose to follow their parents back into Judaism or keep to the Christianity that they were raised with, creating divisions among families that sometimes

¹¹³ Juan Ignacio Pulido Serrano, "Plural identities: the Portuguese New Christians," *Jewish History* 25, no. 2 (2011): 130-131.

¹¹⁴ Serrano, "Plural Identities," 133.

¹¹⁵ Benjamin Ravid, "A Tale of Three Cities and Their Raison d'Etat: Ancona, Venice, Livorno, and the Competition for Jewish Merchants in the Sixteenth Century," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 6, no. 2 (December 1991): 143-144.

spilled over into Inquisition records.¹¹⁶ All this turmoil regarding marranos and who they really were and what religion they really followed provides important context for Filipa's case.

On Saturday, July 15, 1575, the Inquisition questioned Michael Vas Mondegos, one of those whom the delator of Filipa had named. Mondegos was a knight of the Portuguese King Sebastian of Aviz and lived in the Venetian parish of Saint John at this time.

*When asked if he knew Filipa Georgi, he answered: Signor yes. Asked how long he knew her, he answered: I met her in Flanders about nine years ago...In Flanders I was familiar with her and her husband, whose name I don't remember now but I know that he was Christian. Asked if he knows whether she lived a Christian life, he responded: She practiced with the rest of us and as far as we could see she lived in a Christian way. When asked if he knows whether she went to church for mass, he replied: I don't know.*¹¹⁷

Here, Michael narrates his dealings with Filipa and her husband: to the knight, Filipa appeared to be a Christian, though he hesitates to make any firm statements. Despite knowing Filipa, he and she were evidently not close enough to attend mass in the same church. This lack of closeness, coupled with the lack of certainty regarding her faith, suggests that Michael and Filipa traveled in similar circles, rather than being close friends: the overall impression is one of acquaintanceship. Being Portuguese and (outwardly) Christian, Filipa was likely part of an expatriate community in Antwerp, as seen by Michael's talk of 'the rest of us.'

Antwerp at this time was part of the Habsburg Netherlands, ruled by Philip II of Spain. The city was an economic powerhouse that rivaled even Venice. With a population of over 100,000 by the middle of the sixteenth century, Antwerp was the second-most populous city

¹¹⁶ Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, 144.

¹¹⁷ Et primo interrogatus de nomine et cetera, respondit ut supra. Interrogatus se conosce Filipa Georgi, respondit: Signor sì. Interrogatus da quanto tempo in qua, respondit: L'ho conosciuta in Fiandra et sono cerca nove anni...In Fiandra teneva familiarità con lei et con suo marito, el nome del qual hora non mi ricordo ma so che era christiano. Interrogatus <dixit> se sa che lei viveva christianamente, respondit: Lei praticava con noi altri et per quanto si vedeva la viveva christianamente: Interrogatus se sa che lei andasse alla chiesa a messa, respondit: A questo non ho posto a mente. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 73-74.

north of the Alps, surpassed only by Paris; its port was so busy that Italian historian Ludovico Guicciardini, nephew to famed historian Francesco Guicciardini, considered Antwerp to be the most important city in Europe.¹¹⁸ Antwerp was a place where “Peoples from all over Europe came to make their home...including French, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Bohemians (Czechs), Danes, and Germans.”¹¹⁹ In such a polyglot city, people of the same nationality naturally relied on each other at times. With its cosmopolitanism and economic activity, Antwerp was almost like the Venice of the north.

Despite being ruled by the Catholic Habsburgs, Antwerp was home to a thriving marrano community in the sixteenth century. In 1570, there were around 400 Portuguese New Christians in the city.¹²⁰ When Filipa lived in Antwerp, she would not have been alone; she also was not rare in her traveling, as many Portuguese New Christians temporarily stayed in Antwerp before heading to Venice. Because of this, the Sephardic community of Venice and the marranos of Antwerp had mercantile and social connections with each other.¹²¹

Since Filipa and her husband were friendly with a knight who served the King of Portugal, they probably possessed a fair amount of wealth, even if they did not have official titles.

Michael’s knowledge of Filipa, however, extended beyond Antwerp:

When asked if Michael had heard anyone speak about her, he replied: Many people have told me and it is also said publicly that she lives in Ferrara and lives as a Jew.
Interrogated, Michael responded: Our Portuguese who told me this and also Jews whose

¹¹⁸ Kristine K. Forney, “16th-Century Antwerp,” in *The Renaissance: From the 1470's to the end of the 16th century (Man & Music)*, ed. Iain Fenlon (Hampshire, United Kingdom: Macmillan, 1989): 361.

¹¹⁹ Donald J. Harreld, “Sources for Tracing Antwerp’s Sixteenth-Century Immigrants,” *The BYU Family Historian* 6 (Fall 2007), 8.

¹²⁰ Jonathan Israel, *Empires and Entrepreneurs: Dutch, the Spanish Monarchy, and the Jews, 1585-1713* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1990), 420.

¹²¹ Jonathan Israel, “Sephardic Immigration into the Dutch Republic, 1595-1672,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 23 (Fall 1989), 46, 49.

names I don't remember at the moment. *And Michael said:* A certain young Portuguese man, whose name I don't know, lives in the house of the Spanish ambassador and is a friend of mine. He asked me to do him a favor in this matter because he had come from Flanders to look for this woman, to whom he gave gold and clothes. And they had been together as husband and wife in Flanders... *When asked if Michael could remember the name of this young man, Michael responded:* I don't know the name but the nickname seems to me to be Vas. I know his father and mother well, who lived downstairs in a house of mine in Coimbra... *When questioned about the appearance of that young man who is in the house of the Ambassador of Spain, Michael replied:* He is a young man aged 22 to 25 who I knew to be a good young man, son of a good father and a good mother.¹²²

With this testimony, Michael extended his, and Filipa's, circle by a large degree. According to the knight, Filipa's Jewish life was anything but a secret, practically being common knowledge, something both Portuguese and Jews alike were aware of. Michael knew her in Antwerp as a Christian, but now he heard that in Ferrara, she was a Jew. It makes sense that Filipa would go to Ferrara to practice Judaism, as the territory, ruled by the Este family, had historically been quite tolerant towards Jews. In the late fifteenth century, the Este guaranteed the Jews of Ferrara freedom to practice their own religion; in 1481, the community created their own *scuola*.¹²³

Many Portuguese *conversos* who had lived in Antwerp moved to Ferrara in the early sixteenth

¹²² Interrogatus se ha sentito parlar di lei da alcuno, respondit: Molta gente me ha detto et questo si dice anco publicamente che costei sta in Ferrara et vive da hebrea. Interrogatus, respondit: Sono nostri Portughesi che me l'hanno detto et Hebrei ancora de quali al presente non me ricordo el nome. Et dixit ex se: Un certo giovane portughese, che non so il nome, sta in casa del signor ambasciador di Spagna et è mio amico mi ha pregato che in questa cosa volesse farli favore perché l'era venuto da Fiandra in qua per cercar questa donna, alla quale diceva haver dato a questa donna purassé robbe, oro, zoie et soi vestimenti. Et che erano stati insieme come marito et moglie in Fiandra... Interrogatus: Vi potete aricordar el nome de questo giovane? Respondit: Non so il nome ma il soprano me par si Vas ma conosso ben suo padre et sua madre che stavano in una mia casa da basso in // Coimbria... Interrogatus della effigie di quel giovane che sta in casa dell'imbasciador di Spagna, respondit: Lui è giovane de anni 22 in 25 qual ho conosciuto per bon giovane, figlio di bon padre et de bona madre. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 74-75.

¹²³ Nicolas Davidson, "The Inquisition and the Italian Jews," in *Inquisition and Society in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Stephen Haliczer (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987), 27.

century, so by the time Filipa arrived, she would have found a community of people who belonged both to her religion and were from her homeland.¹²⁴

What is perhaps most significant about Michael's testimony is not Filipa moving between religions, but that Michael claimed that he knew of her switch and yet did not report it. It was illegal for Christians to judaize, and still he did not inform the authorities about Filipa. This suggests a certain comfort surrounding the issue of unstable religious identities. He may not have fully approved of Filipa's actions, but they were evidently not important enough for him to report to any body of law enforcement—he did not disclose Filipa's story to the Inquisition until officially summoned. And if her story was unimportant to him, it was also likely not abnormal.

Being Portuguese, Michael came from a more anti-Jewish background than the Venice that he inhabited. In 1497, King Manuel I had ordered all of Portuguese Jewry to convert.¹²⁵ Around forty years later, the Portuguese Inquisition was formally established. Thus, by the time of this *processo*, it had been several generations since Jews had officially been allowed in Portugal (though they did have a twenty-year period during which their religious backgrounds would not be investigated). Yet Michael was a worldly fellow, having lived in Antwerp, currently residing in Venice, and sharing a friend with the Spanish ambassador. He knew the religious rules, yet likely recognized that one had to make practical accommodations and that bending the rules of religious identity did not always imply malice.

Michael also introduces a new figure, that of Vas; Michael claimed that Vas and Filipa had lived together as husband and wife in Flanders, but a future witness would disagree with that idea. Before this *processo* began, Vas had come to Italy to collect the gold and clothes that he

¹²⁴ Caffiero, *The History of the Jews*, 25.

¹²⁵ François Soyer, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal: King Manuel I and the End of Religious Tolerance (1496-7)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1.

had previously given to Filipa. Michael knew Vas because Vas's parents had lived in a house that Michael had either lived in or owned (or possibly both) in Coimbra, a city in Portugal. A branch of the Portuguese Inquisition was founded in Coimbra in 1541, disappeared by 1548, but was refounded in 1565.¹²⁶ The vast majority of Inquisition trials in Coimbra were for crypto-Judaism: from 1566—1580, 93% of trials were against New Christians.¹²⁷

The next witness that the Inquisition interviewed was Giovanni Ribera, whom the delator had also named at the end of his denunciation. On the *processo*, there is no day listed for this part, as there is for some other witnesses—the document simply continues. Either the questioning took place on the same day as Michael's interrogation (July 16), or the notary forgot to write the date, both of which are possible. The next date noted on the document is July 19, so this interview took place sometime within four days of the first questioning.

Master Giovanni Ribera of Lisbon, son of Master Gaspar, a merchant residing in the city of Venice in the parish of Santa Maria Formosa, aged 36 years... answered as below... Asked if he knows a Portuguese Filipa Iorge, he replied: Sir, yes. When interrogated, he said: The Spanish Ambassador, my patron, has a young man in his house whose name is Ambroso Vas; Vas was recommended by Don Fulgentio from Portugal, who was in Antwerp. And Don Fulgentio sent for me about three months ago and asked me to arrange for Filipa Iorge to return to the said Ambroso some belongings which he said were given to her in Antwerp. Filipa had come from Antwerp to Venice and was in the house of David Pas, a Jew in the ghetto. And so I found the said David to whom I told the present things. David promised to send the said Filipa to my house... this Filipa came to my house from a long way away and I told her that she should return certain items to Ambroso Vas. I asked her if she was married to Ambroso Vas, to which she said no, but being in Antwerp she was friends with Ambroso out of respect for the aforementioned Don Fulgentio.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Francisco Bethencourt, *The Inquisition: A Global History, 1478—1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 72.

¹²⁷ Bethencourt, *The Inquisition*, 345n61.

¹²⁸ *Supervenit illustrissimus et reverendissimus omin legatus apostolicus. Dominus Ioanne Ribera Lisbonensis, filius domini Gaspari mercator commorans in civitate Venetiarum in parrochia Sancte Marie Formose, testis etatis sue annorum prout asseruit 36... respondit ut infra videlicet... Signor sì. Interrogatus dixit: El signor ambasciador di Spagna, mio patron ha un giovane in casa sua raccomandato dal signor don Fulgentio da Portogallo, che era in Anversa, el nome del qual giovane è Ambroso Vas. Et mi mandò a chiamar già tre mesi in circa // qual mi ricercò che io procurasse che una Filippa Georgi, che era venuta da Anversa in questa città et era*

Giovanni agreed with Michael that Vas (now with the first name Ambroso) and Filipa knew each other, and that Vas had come to the area to retrieve some items that he had given to Filipa.

However, according to the merchant, Vas and Filipa were not married, but Filipa was merely friends with him because they shared a common friend, a Don Fulgentio from Portugal. Giovanni then adds a new figure to this story: David Pas, a Jew living in the Venetian ghetto. Filipa is staying at Pas's house.

Pas was a notable Jew of the time, who presided over a semi-salon that was sometimes frequented by wealthy Venetian Christians "of most ancient lineage." It was rumored that Pas came from a Spanish background and had been baptized in Portugal.¹²⁹ Even if she did not know him before arriving in Venice, Filipa likely soon learned of him from talking to other Jews in the ghetto. Coming from a similar background as he, she probably sought shelter with a fellow compatriot, one who had connections to elite circles. Giovanni then went to Pas, perhaps dropping in on one of his salons, and told him to send Filipa over. Pas presumably did tell Filipa, as she then visited Giovanni's house, where the merchant informed her that she needed to give back the gold and clothes that Vas had gifted her.

In this version, Ambroso Vas and Filipa were just friends then, though the fact that he had given her such expensive gifts suggests that he wished for their relationship to go further. Filipa and Vas existed in similar social circles and they both knew Don Fulgentio. This is the

in casa de David Pas hebreo in getto, dovesse restituir a detto Ambroso alcune robbe quale lui diceva havergehele date in Anversa. Et così io trovai detto David al qual dissi li presente cose, qual David promesse mandarmi detta Filipa a casa mia...de longo via venne a casa mia questa Filipa, a la qual dissi che dovesse restituir certa robba a quel Ambroso Vas, <qual diman fi> alla qual [Feli]pa domandai se era mandata con detto Ambroso Vas, qual mi respose che non, ma che stando ella in Anversa haveva havuto amicitia con detto Ambroso rispetto a monsignor don Fulgentio predetto. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 75-76.

¹²⁹ Pullan, *The Jews*, 172.

second titled Portuguese man encountered in this *processo*, after Michael. Combined with the influential David Pas, it is almost certain that Filipa was a woman of considerable means and status, someone who rubbed shoulders with Portuguese knights, Spanish ambassadors, and cosmopolitan Jews. Considering Michael's and the delator's testimony, it is hard to imagine that no word of her religious transgressions reached any of these people. Don Fulgentio, the Spanish ambassador, and Michael were all prominent Christian Iberian men, living in Venice. They likely understood better than the delator the flexibility that was required in such an important port city. Venice was undoubtedly Catholic, but sheltered many faiths, provided that they stayed in their place. Sometimes commerce trumped religious purity.¹³⁰ Venice's multiethnic population was a source of its strength and Filipa was a part of that diversity.

Giovanni said more, elaborating on Filipa's origins:

And she told me how she came to this city with Mendes when she was a little girl and the said Mendes married her to a Jew here and that after he died, she went to Flanders and married a Christian from Guair. I don't know if he was Spanish or Portuguese, and since the said husband died, Ambroso fell in love with her.¹³¹

The mystery of whether Filipa married a Christian or Jew thus appears to be solved: she married both, but by the time of this *processo*, they had each died.

Also dead was Mendes, the man who brought her to Venice when she was young. The document contains no further mention of the said Mendes: he may have been an uncle or distant relative, or perhaps a family friend who adopted an orphaned Filipa. Mendes was likely a crypto-Jew fleeing the Portuguese Inquisition. Based on descriptions of Filipa's age, the Inquisition was created when she was a little girl and so, for those pretending to be Christian while secretly

¹³⁰ Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies*, 52.

¹³¹ Et mi narrò come l'era venuta in questa città con la Mendes che era puta piccola et che detta Mendes la maridò in uno hebreo qui, qual qual morto handò in Fiandra et se maridò in un christian da Ghier non so se era spagnuol o portoghese et che essendo morto detto suo marido, questo Ambroso se innamorò in essa. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 76.

holding to their Judaism, the climate grew more dangerous. Mendes took Filipa in tow to the more tolerant Venice and there he ensured that she was integrated into Judaism by marrying her off to a coreligionist.

But after her Jewish husband died, Filipa went to Flanders and married a Christian man. The years that she spent as a crypto-Jew in Portugal may have given her the skills to seamlessly integrate into Christian society: essentially, she had been trained in dissimulation. While in Antwerp, she met Ambroso Vas, the Portuguese young man. After Filipa's Christian husband died, Ambroso tried to woo Filipa, presumably gifting her gold and clothes. She, it appears, did not reciprocate his feelings and left for Venice. Ambroso also came to Venice and, realizing that his love was unrequited, asked for his gifts to be returned.

When she was younger, Filipa had lived in Venice and married a Jew. Later, she moved to Antwerp and married again. And now she had returned to Italian soil and lived again among Jews. Whether living as a Christian or a Jew, she had a community around her, often consisting of fellow Portuguese. Religion was not the only identity that could bind people together—so could nationality.

The next witness was Ludovico Lopes, one of those whom the delator had named:

Master Ludovico Lopes, the son of Master Francis, a merchant in Venice, residing in the parish of Sancte Marine, named as a witness, aged 24 years, responded to his oath as follows... When asked whether he knew a Portuguese Filipa Iorge, he answered: Yes sir. I met this Filipa Iorge in Antwerp when I was twelve or thirteen years old. Interrogated: Was this woman married? He replied: Yes sir, to a man who made me clothes and was called Odoart da Gier. I don't know if he was Portuguese or Spanish. I thought he was Christian because Jews cannot live in Antwerp. When asked if he had met the said Filipa elsewhere, he replied: I saw her in Venice the other day when I went with Giovanni Ribera on a trip. Giovanni was looking for her at the request of the Spanish Ambassador and they met them in the house of David Pas the Jew. When interrogated, he responded: I believe that she was Jewish and lived as a Jew because she was in the house of a Jew. Interrogated, he said: I didn't know this woman in this country because, as I said, I saw

her in Antwerp and I understand that she is currently in Ferrara and I believe that there in Ferrara she lives as a Jew, but I don't know anything else.¹³²

Lopes corroborated much of the information that previous witnesses had given. As Michael Vas Mondegos and Giovanni Ribera said, Filipa was in Antwerp and married to a Christian, now given the name Odoart, before coming to Venice. Currently, she lived in Ferrara and practiced Judaism. Lopes not only agreed that Giovanni had found Filipa in the house of David Pas, but also said that he had accompanied Giovanni on that trip.

Here, Lopes first mentioned what future witnesses will repeat: that Jews are not allowed in Antwerp. This was technically true, although his answer does not give the full picture.

Antwerp was ruled by the Habsburgs in the sixteenth century, first by Charles V from 1506-1555, then by his son Philip II, from 1555 until his death in 1598. These staunchly Catholic monarchs had a fractious relationship with Antwerp and the Low Countries in general, which led to the Eighty Years' War, beginning in 1568. Antwerp's wealth came from trade, which flowed through the hands of many peoples, from Calvinists to Lutherans to Jews and the city resented

¹³² Dominus Ludovicus <Lopes > Rui Lopes, filius domini Francisici mercator Venetiis commorans in parrochia Sancte Marine testis sue etatis annorum 24 nominatus, iuramento suo quod prestitit respondit ut infra videlicet... Interrogatus se conosce una Felipa Georgi portoghese, respondit: Signor sì. Ho conosciuto questa Felipa Georgi in Anversa essendo io de anni dodese over tredese. Interrogatus: Questa donna erala maridata? Respondit: Signor sì, qual mi feva le vesti da vestirme et chiamava Odoart da Gier, non so se era portoghese o spagnolo et io l'haveva per christiano perché in Anversa non possono star Hebrei. Interrogatus: Questa donna erela hebraea o christiana? Respondit: Similmente la donna l'haveva per christiana, perché come ho ditto, li non possono star Hebrei. Interrogatus se ha conosciuto detta Felipa in altro loco, respondit: io la vidi in Venetia l'altro giorno che andai con Zuan Ribero in getto <ad> // qual Zuane cervava costei ad instantia del signor ambasciator de Spagna et li intrassero in casa de David Pas hebreo. Interrogatus, respondit: Io credo che costei era hebraea et vivesse al hebraea perché era in casa da un hebreo. Interrogatus, dixit: Questa donna non l'ho conosciuta in questa terra perché come ho detto l'ho vista in Anversa et intendo che al presente la sta in Ferrara et credo che li in Ferrara la viva al hebraea, non so però del certo altro. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 76-77.

the monarchs' attempted imposition of Catholic orthodoxy.¹³³ Jews were officially not allowed to live in Antwerp, but, as has been said, there was still a community of crypto-Jews in the city. There is even evidence to suggest that these crypto-Jews created a secret synagogue from 1565-1594.¹³⁴ For Jews who did not permanently settle in Antwerp, it was still “the essential turntable for Portuguese Jews making the exhausting trek from Portugal to some kind of freedom in Ferrara or Salonika or Istanbul.”¹³⁵ Antwerp thus appears as a midway-point between Portuguese intolerance and Italian openness.

When Filipa moved to Antwerp as an adult, she likely found a community of crypto-Jews who had fled Portugal, as she had. She also met Lopes, then an adolescent. Perhaps, having been only twelve at the time, Lopes was unaware of the marrano presence in Antwerp when he met Filipa. However, by the time of this *processo*, as a fully-grown man whose father was a merchant, it seems unlikely that Lopes would have been oblivious to Antwerp's secret Jewish community. By simply stating that Jews cannot live in Antwerp, but not saying anything else on the matter, he may have been trying to shield himself, as Lopes may himself have been a marrano: the original denunciation includes him in the list of Portuguese judaizers. In Venice, Lopes was not officially a Jew, as the *processo* says that he lives in the district of Castello.¹³⁶ Had Lopes lived openly as a Jew in Venice, he would have resided in the Ghetto, located in the Cannaregio district.¹³⁷ While he did cooperate with the Inquisition, Lopes would have also had reasons for deflecting attention away from himself.

¹³³ Michael Pye, *Europe's Babylon: The Rise and Fall of Antwerp's Golden Age* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2021), 151.

¹³⁴ Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 27-28.

¹³⁵ Pye, *Europe's Babylon*, 8.

¹³⁶ Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 72n4.

¹³⁷ Bruce Haynes and Richard Hutchison, “The *Ghetto*: Origins, History, Discourse,” *City & Community* 7, Issue 4 (December 2008), 347.

The next person questioned was Andrea Pas, a merchant who, along with his wife and son, had been named in the original delation. Andrea did not offer new information, but his son Giovanni, whom the Inquisition next interviewed, did.

*Giovanni Pas, the son of the aforementioned master Andrea, aged 16 years was questioned: I met this Filipa in Antwerp where she had a confectionery shop. I took her to be a Christian because Jews cannot live in Antwerp but I don't know anything else. Asked if he saw her in Venice, he replied: Yes, sir, she was staying in David's house—he was a Jew and because she was there it seems to me that she was a Jew. Asked how he knows, he replied: Because I heard it said by David Pas the Jew, that he had her his house. David is a merchant and is currently in this city and has been for about two or three months.*¹³⁸

Giovanni Pas corroborates the delator's detail of how Filipa made a living: she had a sweet shop.

On July 19, the Inquisition again questioned Master Gaspar Ribera:

It's been about six and seven years since this Filipa Iorge came here to Venice. She came to my house here in Venice to ask me if I was Portuguese....She also told me that she was Jewish and that she was in the ghetto and that she made sweets...*When asked if he ever knew her as a Christian, he replied: I have not known her except as I said. I heard later that she had gone to stay in Antwerp but I don't know if she lived as a Christian there. When Gasar was asked if Jews are tolerated in Portugal or are forced to baptize all their children who are born, he replied: There, everyone is baptized and written in a book and no one behaves as a Jew.*¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Ioannes Pas, filius suprascripti domini Andree veteris, etatis sue annorum 16 prout asseruit, citatus, monitus, interrogatus, dixit iuramento suo quod prestit: Io ho conosciuta questa Filipa in Anversa dove teneva una botega de confeti et io non la teneva se non per christiana perché in Anversa non possono star Hebrei ma <ad interrogationem dixit> io non so altro. Interrogatus se l'ha vista in Venezia, respondit: Signor sì, qual alloggiava in casa de David Pas hebreia et perché la stava in geto me par che l'era hebreia. Interrogatus come lo sa, respondit: Perché l'ho inteso a dir da David Pas hebreo, che lui l'haveva in casa sua, qual David è mercante et è al presente in questa città et de questo pol esser doi o tre mesi in circa. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 77-78.

¹³⁹ Sono circa sei anni et sette che vene qui in Venetia quest Filipa Georgi, qual venne a casa mia qui in Ve Ioly netia a domandarmi se era portoghese et nova de altri Portoghesi...La me disse anco che l'era hebreia et che la stava in geto et che la fava delle confeture...Interrogatus se l'ha mai conosciuta christiana, respondit: Non l'ho conosciuta se non come ho ditto. Intesi <a poi> che l'era andata a star in Anversa né so che la sia vissuta alla christiana in luoco nissuno. Interrogatus se in Portogallo si soporta <hab in> Hebrei overo si soleno batizare tutti li figliuoli che nascono, respondit: Li tutti si battezano et si scrivono in un libro et non si comporta starvi Hebrei. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 78.

According to Gaspar, it has been several years since Filipa arrived in Venice, where she also kept a sweet shop. At some point she came to him, possibly for some kind of assistance. The Inquisition also asked Gaspar about Portuguese policies towards Jews and Gaspar states that Jews are not allowed in Portugal. The fact that the tribunal asked Gaspar about Portuguese policies is somewhat puzzling, as they likely would have already known the answer. The *processo* notes Giovanni Aloysius Bragadeno, an *Assistente*, as being present. The *Assistenti* were the three Venetian noblemen who made up half of the Inquisition in Venice; they were usually older than sixty with much governmental experience and acted as stand-ins for the Council of Ten, one of the most powerful bodies in Venice.¹⁴⁰ With all his time spent in the government, Giovanni Aloysius Bragadeno likely already knew that Portugal did not allow Jews, at least officially. He may have wanted to see if Gaspar thought that the reality really lined up with the law.

The final witness that the Inquisition dealt with was Jorge Lopes. His name was not one of those that the delator had named, but the *processo* does state that Jorge was a merchant with Master Francis, the father of Ludovico Lopez, a witness interviewed earlier. Jorge may be related to Master Francis as part of a family of merchants:

When asked if he knew and knows Filipa Iorge, he answered: I knew her in Antwerp for seven or eight years, where I took her for a Christian and she had a husband who was a tailor and his name was Doart Agiar, Portuguese. *When interrogated, he said:* I thought this Filipa was Portuguese. She made jams in her house and she was everyone's friend...I saw her in the ghetto four or five times in the house of a Jew who at the time was called Navaro. As far as I can tell, I don't know if she lived as a Jew or as a Christian. *When interrogated, he said:* Everyone born in Portugal is baptized but I don't know where she was born. *When interrogated, he said:* I have heard that this Filipa is in Ferrara and I have heard a rumor that she lives there as a Jew. *Interrogated about why he had taken her for a Christian in Antwerp, he replied:* Because she dressed like a Christian, she was

¹⁴⁰ Pullan, *The Jews*, 39.

married to a Christian, and in Antwerp there are only Christians and there can be no Jews.¹⁴¹

Thus ends the *processo* against Filipa Iorge. Jorge's testimony agrees with what previous witnesses have said and what by now has become familiar: Filipa resided in Antwerp, where she was married to a Christian and lived as a Christian, but now she lives as a Jew in Ferrara. Jorge corroborates Giovanni Pas's earlier statement that Filipa owned a sweet shop, which it seems that she ran out of her house.

There is, however, some new information that Jorge adds. This is the only time in the whole *processo* that we hear of a Jew called Navaro and so, unfortunately, there is very little that can be done with this tantalizing tidbit. Jorge does give us, though, one of the few traces of personality in this whole document, when he says that Filipa was a friend to everyone. Perhaps it was her openness that allowed her to make such wide connections and move about so freely: people liked and trusted her. The tribunal asked questions about times and places and religion—they were not interested in Filipa's character traits. Because of the Inquisition's dispassionate questions, and the fact that we never hear from Filipa herself, it can be easy to forget that she was an actual person, as were all of the people interviewed (along with those who did the interviewing).

¹⁴¹ Interrogatus se ha conosciuto et conosce Filipa Georgi, respondit: Signori, io l'ho conosciuta in Anversa già sette over otto anni, dove io l'ho tenuta per christiana et haveva marito qual era sartor et si chiamava Doart Agiar, portoghese. Interrogatus, dixit: Questa Filipa io l'ho avuta per portoghese et faceva confetture in casa sua, era amica de tutti...o l'ho veduta costei in geto zà quattro o cinque in casa di un hebreo che alhora si chiamava Navaro, per quanto me par, non so mo' se lei <mava> viveva al hebreo over alla christiana. Interrogatus, dixit: Non nasce nissuno in Portogallo che non sii battizzato ma lei non so dove la sii nata. Interrogatus, dixit: Ho <ab> inteso che questa Felipa è in Ferrara // et per fama ho inteso che la vive al hebreo. <Et he> Interrogatus per che causa l'havevi per christiana in Anversa, respondit: Perché vestiva da christiana, era maridata in un christiano et in Anversa non stanno se non Christiani né possono star Hebrei. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 79.

In the end, the Inquisition did not prosecute Filipa.¹⁴² They likely figured that she was not a danger to Venice, as she was only accused of being Christian in Antwerp. In Venice, she had been a Jew, which was allowed. Also, it appeared that she currently resided in Ferrara, ruled by the Este family. Ferrara had its own Inquisition, just like Venice, and the tribunals of the two cities enjoyed a close relationship, sending reports and requests to arrest certain people.¹⁴³ Had the Venetian Inquisition wanted to find Filipa in Ferrara, they likely could have. That they did not seek her out suggests that they did not think that she was worth the trouble of extradition. Perhaps they assumed that the co-conspirators that the delator had named were only guilty of acting as Filipa had. While traveling from one faith to another and back again was not officially allowed, the Inquisition could look the other way, or simply refuse to look.

The *Processo* of Samuel Maestro

On April 30, 1579, Sir Fernando de las Infantes, a Spaniard from Córdoba made a delation to the Venetian Inquisition:

In the past few days I happened to be among the Jews. I saw a young black man, 14 years old, with the yellow cap like the Jews wear, on his head. At this I was very amazed and I asked him if he was Jewish. He replied yes and I scolded him, since God did not make him of the Jewish race. I asked him [the black man] if he wanted to stay among these perfidious and blind people. He [the black man] said to me: “Sir, it's better to do this than to steal things!” Then I found out from a broker in the said ghetto, whose name is Marco, that, in addition to this young man, there are also some black women. According to Marco, these Jews buy these [people] for slaves in Constantinople, where they are sold and then circumcised and made according to their law and live among Jews.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Pullan, *The Jews*, 96.

¹⁴³ Pullan, *The Jews*, 55-56.

¹⁴⁴ *Alli giorni passate me imbaté andar in getto de li Hebrei, vidi un giovinetto di età di anni 14 in circha, nigro, con la bereta gialla come portano li Hebrei in capo, de la qual cosa io me maravigliai molto et, domandato a lui se era hebreo, mi respose de sì et riprendendolo io che // non havendolo fatto el Signor Dio de quella razza, volesse star <il Signor> in questa gente perfida et ciecha, lui mi disse: “Signor, l'è meglio far così che andar a robar!” Poi me informai da un sensale di detto ghetto che ha nome Marco, el qual me disse che, oltre questo giovine, sono anco alcune done nigre et che lui, secondo intende, questi Hebrei comprano questi per schiavi in*

Sir Fernando had seen a black person acting as a Jew: he reasoned that this boy could not have been born a Jew, and so therefore he must have converted, which led to the Spaniard's scolding. However, Marco the broker then informed Sir Fernando that Jews bought slaves in Constantinople and circumcised them, which may have signaled conversion, which disturbed Sir Fernando so much that he told the Inquisition.

As a Spaniard, Sir Fernando would have been familiar with the fear of non-Christians converting slaves to their own religion. In 1567, Philip II of Spain issued five edicts in Granada, a city that, like Córdoba, lay in the southern region of Andalusia. The area was full of Moriscos, descendants of Muslims forcibly converted between 1502 and 1526, soon after the *Reconquista*. Just as Spanish society feared crypto-Judaism from insincere converts, so there was also a parallel panic over crypto-Muslims. Philip II's edicts in 1567 placed new restrictions on the Moriscos. One of these laws banned them from owning black slaves, out of concern over Moriscos converting their slaves to Islam.¹⁴⁵ Sir Fernando likely knew that his homeland did not allow non-Christians to own slaves and believed that Venice should be worried about this practice as well.

Setting out to find the black person that Sir Fernando had spoken with, the authorities arrested an adolescent named Samuel Maestro. First, Samuel was interrogated by the Council of Ten about his background. Created in the fourteenth century to deal with an insurrection, the Council of Ten functioned as an intelligence agency, gathering information from a network of spies.¹⁴⁶ As time went on, the Council grew in power and stature, acquiring a fearsome

Constantinopoli, dove se vendono et poi li circoncidono et li fano de la Legge loro et li conducono in queste bande. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Ufizio di Venezia*, 101-102.

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth R. Wright, *The Epic of Juan Latino: Dilemmas of Race and Religion in Renaissance Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 63, 66.

¹⁴⁶ Christopher Hibbert, *Venice: The Biography of a City* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 45.

reputation. The body took charge of matters of national security, as its small number of members could act quicker than the larger Great Council.¹⁴⁷ The Council of Ten may have questioned Samuel out of concern over Sir Fernando's story of slaves coming over from Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Venice and the Ottomans were frequently at war with each other and there was already a history of slaves from Ottoman lands helping Venice: right before the fourth Ottoman-Venetian War (1570-1573), a slave who had fled from the Ottoman Empire warned the city that the Ottomans were gathering weaponry, likely for an assault on Cyprus, a Venetian colony. In response, the Council of Ten had its spies work to confirm the slave's story, which they eventually verified.¹⁴⁸ In the case of Samuel, the Council of Ten might have wanted to see if Samuel had any useful information on the enemy to the east.

After they were finished, the Council of Ten turned him over to the Inquisition, who imprisoned him while waiting for questioning. On July 28, during interrogation, Samuel was asked about his previous questioning and his origins:

When questioned where he was born and of what relatives and what his name was, he replied: I was born in Ferrara, my mother was named Donna Luna, my father was named Moses Maestro and I'm 16 to 17 years old. My father is in Ragusa and my mother is in Ferrara and it has been perhaps 5 or 6 years since she has been in this land. When asked if his father is black, he replied: "Signor no! He is white." When asked if his mother is white, he replied: A little whiter than me. And at questioning, he said: It's been 5 years since I have seen or spoken to my mother, the said Luna. I am in the ghetto in the house of David Maestro, my uncle, who is my father's brother. When asked if he had been examined elsewhere by someone else, regarding his birth and who his father and mother were, he replied: I was held for this same reason in the House of Catechumens and I was examined by the most excellent Lords of the most illustrious Council of Ten and I was released by their judgment. When asked what he said to the Council of Ten of his birth and his father and mother, he replied: Why do you want me to remember what they said to me. I don't remember this! He was asked how long it has been since he was examined by the Council of 10. He replied: Maybe a month or two, about. He was told that, taking

¹⁴⁷ Eric R Drusteler, ed. *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400-1797* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 57.

¹⁴⁸ Ioanna Iordanou, *Venice's Secret Service: Organizing Intelligence in the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1.

into account the time of the previous few days and the matter with which we are dealing, it isn't true that he doesn't remember what he said to the Council of Ten. He replied: Most honored gentlemen, why do you want me to remember everything if I don't remember! He supplied: I told them that I was born in Ferrara and that my father from Ferrara took me to Ragusa. And I told them my father's name is Moses Maestro and I also told them my mother's name is Luna.¹⁴⁹

Samuel said that he had been born in Ferrara to a Jewish man named Moses Maestro and a woman named Luna, but he now lived with his uncle David Maestro. His father was white and his mother was, according to Samuel, lighter-skinned than he, though not to the extent of Samuel's father. This begs the question of how the youth could have been identifiably Black, if his father was white and his mother was lighter than him. There are a few possibilities: Samuel was mistaken in how dark his mother was, Samuel lied, or the notary incorrectly transcribed Samuel's words. The first option makes a fair amount of sense, as Samuel said that he had not seen his mother for five years; perhaps he simply misremembered what she looked like. He could also have been lying, maybe in order to prevent the Inquisition from finding his mother. The

¹⁴⁹ Interrogato dove è nato et de che parenti, come habi nome, respondit: Io son nato in Ferrara, mia madre haveva nome done Luna, mio padre haveva nome Mosè Maestro et io posso haver da 16 in 17 anni. Mio padre è a Ragusi e mia madre sta a Ferrara et sono forse 5 o 6 anni che la non è stata in questa terra. Ei dictum se'l padre è moro, respondit: Signor no! L'è bianco. Ei dictum se la madre è mora, respondit: Un puocho più biancha di me. // Et ad interrogationem, dixit: Sono 5 anni che io non ho visto detta Luna mia madre né vista né parlato et io sto in ghetto in casa di David Maestro, mio barba che è fratello di mio padre. Interrogato se esso è stato examinato altrove et da chi sopra el suo nassimento et chi fosse suo padre et madre, respondit: Io per questo medesimo conto son stato ritenuto una volta nelli Cathacumeni et sono stato examinato per li eccellentissimi signori Capi dell'illustrissimo Consilio de X et sono stato liberato per sententia. Ei dictum esso che disse alli illustrissimi signori Capi del suo nassimento et de suoi padre et madre, respondit: Che volete che me ricorda quel che li dicesse et non mi ricordo di questo! Ei dictum quanto tempo è che fu examinato da li // eccellentissimi signori Capi dell'illustrissimo Consilio de X, respondit: È forse un mese o doi in circa. Ei dictum che, atento el tempo de pochi giorni precedenti et de la materia de la qual si tratta, non esser verissimile che non si ricordi questo che dicesse inanti i eccellentissimi Capi dell'illustrissimo Consilio de X, respondit: Clarissimi signori, che volete che mi ricorda d'ogni cosa se non ho ben a mente! Subdens: Io li ho detto che son nato a Ferrara et che mio padre da Ferrara me ha menato a Ragusi et li ho ditto el nome de mio padre che è <ra> Moysè Maestro et li ho ditto anche el nome de mia madre che è Luna. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 103-104.

third option, the notary making an error, seems unlikely: notaries could spell words wrong, but writing out a whole phrase by mistake, with perfect grammar and spelling, is highly improbable. Samuel's words in the manuscript are recorded as 'Un puocho più biancha di me.' Those same words of 'più biancha' (whiter) were sometimes used to describe slaves bound for the Italian market because that phrase increased their value.¹⁵⁰ Ultimately, there is no satisfactory answer to the mystery of Samuel's skin color and that of his parents.

In his testimony, Samuel also said that the Council of Ten had already asked him similar questions, but he protested to the Inquisition that he could not remember what answers he had given. At this point, Samuel had been imprisoned for over a month: the stress was clearly wearing on him. In 1579, the Venetian Inquisition did not yet have its own prisons (it would acquire them a year or two later). At this point, the Inquisition used debtors' prisons, where typhus was a constant risk.¹⁵¹

The Inquisition, however, did not believe Samuel's protestation of forgetfulness. Presumably having spoken with the men of the Council of Ten or read the interrogation transcript, the men of the Inquisition were able to compare what Samuel had just told them with what he had said a month or two ago.

He was told that he appears to be a liar, because in front of the Council of Ten he had said that he did not know his father's name nor his father's relatives. (Now) he replied: The first time I was questioned I didn't say it because my father is an old man and my mother is a poor servant in her house and I remembered it later and I said it in the second questioning. It's been 7 years since I came from Ragusa here to Venice and I stayed in Ferrara for two years and from Ferrara I came here to Venice to stay at the home of David Maestro, my uncle. He was told that in this too he turns out to be a liar, since before the Council of Ten he said that he went to stay in the house of the said David Maestro at the age of 2 or 3. He responded: "Clarissimi, that's another thing! I don't remember many things! He (Samuel) has shown himself to be a liar...and was exhorted

¹⁵⁰ Sergio Tognetti, "The trade in black African slaves in fifteenth-century Florence," in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, eds. T.F. Early and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 217.

¹⁵¹ Pullan, *The Jews*, 135, 137.

*to tell the truth. The Inquisition made the comparison regarding his age and it appears that being 17 years old, as he said, he left from Ragusa 7 years ago. Since then, he spent two years in Ferrara and 5 in the house of the said David. It follows that when he went to the house of the said David he had been around 10 years old and not two or 3 as he said to the said most excellent gentlemen (of the Council of 10).*¹⁵²

The men of the Inquisition thought that Samuel was a liar, and warned him to tell the truth.

When Samuel was questioned by the Council of Ten, he had said that he did not know his father's name, but now, before the Inquisition, he told the tribunal his parents' names. His excuse for not having said their names the first time was his father's advanced age.

However, the Council of Ten and the Inquisition may have been predisposed to distrust or denigrate Samuel, because of one key difference between him and all the other Inquisition interrogatees that I have analyzed so far: his skin color. The *processo* describes Samuel with the words 'niger' and 'moro,' although the words never appear next to each other. Early-modern terminology to describe Black people was often maddeningly vague, as 'moro' could denote an Arab, Berber, Ethiopian or sub-Saharan black African.¹⁵³ Almost all of "the words that could be used to indicate African origin or dark skin color—*nero, negro, moro, saraceno*—were nearly all

¹⁵² Ei dictum che dica esso se appareva che in ciò è buggiardo et che denanzi a quelli illustrissimi signori disse de non sapere el nome del padre né li parenti del padre, // respondit: Nel primo costituito io non lo dissi perché mio padre è un uomo vecchio et mia madre è poveretta massara in casa sua et me ricordai doppoi et lo dissi nel secondo costituito. Ed ad interrogationem, dixit: Sono 7 anni che io son venuto da Ragusi qui in Venetia et son stato doi anni a Ferrara et da Ferrara son venuto qui a Venetia a stare in casa con David Maestro, mio barba. Ei dictum che anche in questo si scopre bugiardo, poiché dinanzi li illustrissimi signori Capi del Consilio de X ha detto che esso andò a stare in casa ha detto David Maestro de età de dui in 3 anni, respondit: Clarissimo signor, quella è un'altra cosa! Non mi ricordo tante cose! Ei dictum che chi è bugiardo bisogna ricordarse et che perciò si scuopre che // non ha dito la verità, però exortato a dir la verità, et che fatta la comparatione <respondit> de le dette anni appare che havendo esso anni 17, come lui disse, è partito da Ragusi zà 7 anni, de quali dui ne è stato a Ferrara et 5 in casa del detto David. Ne segue che quando esso andò in casa del detto David haveva da 10 anni in circa et non dui o 3 come ha detto alli detti eccellentissimi signori Capi. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 103-104.

¹⁵³ Nelson H. Minnich, "The Catholic Church and the pastoral care of black Africans in Renaissance Italy," in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, eds. T.F. Early and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 282.

fluid or ambivalent.”¹⁵⁴ To complicate matters further, in Italy, just because a document uses the word ‘*moro*’ to describe someone, does not mean that that person was necessarily Black.¹⁵⁵ However, as the Inquisition, after hearing the original delation, would have been looking for someone Black, we can safely assume that Samuel had darker skin, at least dark enough to noticeably set him apart in Venetian society. Sadly, this *processo* does not record how the authorities found Samuel and imprisoned him.

By the late-sixteenth century, black skin had acquired negative connotations in European society—black skin was associated with criminality, uncivilized behavior, stupidity, laziness, and irresponsibility.¹⁵⁶ In being a minority at the margins of European society, Africans and those with black skin shared some similarities with Jews. Africans in European art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance are often depicted adorned with gold earrings. As has been previously discussed, Jews in Italy were usually forced to wear a distinguishing badge, something that marked them as Jew. This could consist of a hat or a circle, but for women, it sometimes consisted of gold earrings.¹⁵⁷

After asking about his parents, the tribunal moved on to whether he had been the one who had spoken with Sir Fernando.

Samuel was asked if anyone...had asked why he, being black, was in the service of Jews and if he had responded: 'It's better to do this than to go and rob!' He replied: "No one has asked me that question nor have I responded with those words. This could have

¹⁵⁴ Kate Lowe, “Black Gondoliers and Other Black Africans in Renaissance Venice,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2013), 416.

¹⁵⁵ Nelson H. Minnich, “Notes on the text,” in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, eds. T.F. Early and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xvi.

¹⁵⁶ Kate Lowe, “The stereotyping of black Africans in Renaissance Europe,” in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, eds. T.F. Early and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 26-28.

¹⁵⁷ Hughes, “Distinguishing Signs,” 22-24.

happened with a dark-haired man who was older than me and who was a black Saracen.”¹⁵⁸

Samuel insisted that he was not the one who spoke those words, volunteering that a black Saracen may have said them. “Saracen” was another vague word, but one that generally referred to Muslims.¹⁵⁹ The Black youth whom the Inquisition were looking for was supposedly a slave: right after Sir Fernando had seen the mysterious Black boy in the ghetto, a broker named Marco had told the Spaniard that Jews bought these Black people as slaves in Constantinople. However, there is nothing in this *processo* to suggest that Samuel was ever a slave.

On July 28, the same day as Samuel’s first interrogation by the Inquisition, the tribunal also interviewed David Maestro, Samuel’s Jewish uncle. They asked David about Samuel’s mother, to which David answered:

This Samuel was born in Ferrara in my house and was born to a housekeeper called Luna who is neither black nor white. She is Jewish and I believe she is alive and I have not seen her for more than 7 years and at that time she was middle aged. The woman served for several Jews in Ferrara and was now here, now there.¹⁶⁰

According to David, Luna was of an indeterminate skin color and she was a servant in his household. It may have made more sense for David to have been the father, as Luna worked in his house, yet David and Samuel both insist that David is the uncle, and the Inquisition never questioned that. David does not use the word ‘schiavo’ or ‘servus’ to describe her, so it does not

¹⁵⁸ Ei dictum se è stato mai richiesto da alcuno...che essendo lui moro stesse alli servitii de Hebrei et che lui ghe respondesse: “Meglio è far questo che andar a robar!” Respondit: Nissun me ha domandà tal cosa né mancho io ho resposo dette parole. Potria esser che ciò fussi accaduto con un moro che stava in getto che era maggior di me il qual era moro sarasin. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 103-104.

¹⁵⁹ John Tolan, Gilles Veinstein, and Henry Laurens, *Europe and the Islamic World: A History*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 3.

¹⁶⁰ Questo Samuel è nato in Ferrara in casa mia et è nato da una massara di casa che si chiama Luna che non è mora né bianca et é hebraea et credo che sia viva et sono più de 7 anni che non l’ho vista et de quel tempo era de era meza età. La qual donna serviva per diverse de Hebrei in Ferrara et ora stava qua ora stava là. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 104-105.

appear that she was a slave in his house. However, she could have been a slave previously—most African slaves brought to Venice, an important city in the slave trade, labored as domestic servants. Either after the death of a master or a certain number of years, slaves would be freed.¹⁶¹ Perhaps Luna was a freed slave, trained in housework, who made a living by putting her skills to work in various households in Ferrara.

On July 29, the Inquisition again questioned Samuel and his frustration, perhaps desperation, is palpable.

*When asked if he planned to tell the truth, he replied: I don't know anything else, I told the truth that I am Jewish, I have always been Jewish, born to a Jewish father and Jewish mother and my mother is in Ferrara. My father is Moses Maestro (born in Ferrara), but my mother Dona Luna and I believe she was born in Ferrara. Asked if he knows where his mother is located in Ferrara, Samuel replied: I don't know the district.*¹⁶²

Samuel was forceful in his insistence that he was Jewish and had always been Jewish; therefore, he could not have been the Black youth whom the Inquisition had in its sights. The Inquisition's last question suggests that the tribunal wanted to find Luna and determine whether Samuel's story was correct. Samuel's response that he didn't know where his mother was located could certainly have been true, but if so, then he was lucky: his ignorance would have protected his mother, who would be imprisoned for interrogation by the Inquisition. As it was, Samuel's ordeal was almost at an end.

On August 6, eight days after Samuel's last interrogation, Sir Fernando was brought in to verify whether Samuel was the youth whom he had encountered in the ghetto. The Spaniard said that Samuel was not the same person and so the Inquisition released him. Though the story has a

¹⁶¹ Lowe, "Black Gondoliers," 421.

¹⁶² Interrogato se ha pensato de dir el vero, respondit: Io non so altro, ho dito la verità che io sono hebreo, son stato sempre hebreo, nassiuo de padre hebreo et madre hebra et mia madre sta a Ferrara, mio padre è Moysè Maestro [nato in Ferrara], ma mia madre dona Luna et credo che sia nata in Ferrara. Ei dictum che dechiari dove la ditta sua madre stia in Ferrara, respondit: Non so la contrada. Ioly Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia*, 105-106.

happy ending, the whole ordeal must have been a harrowing experience for Samuel. Ultimately, the Inquisition could not find the Black person that they were looking for and so had to abandon their investigation.¹⁶³

The *processi* of Salomone Dardero and Filipa Iorge illustrate the contradictions of early-modern Europe. In the sixteenth century, the status of Jews was degrading, as the Church's Counter-Reformation increased its power, with the creation of ghettos and conversionary sermons that Jews were required to attend. The Roman Inquisition, which functioned throughout most of Italy, fought against heresy and apostasy. Jews who converted but then relapsed back to Judaism committed those crimes, and were certainly within the Inquisition's jurisdiction.

The Inquisition functioned as pressure from Catholicism, but rabbinic Judaism also exerted a force to choose: both normative faiths did not accept "in-between-ness."¹⁶⁴ And yet, the cases of Salomone and Filipa show some of the possibilities for people to straddle both faiths, whether out of conviction (or lack thereof) or pragmatism or some mix of the two. Both Filipa and Salomone were helped by people who were either complicit in covering up their crimes or likely knew of their transgressions and did nothing. The state had its laws, but could only go so far in its ability to enforce them, especially when much of the citizenry did not care to help the state. The boundaries defining who was Christian and who was Jewish could be so blurry that not even trained Inquisitors could figure it out.

¹⁶³ Pullan, "The Jews," 75.

¹⁶⁴ David L. Graizbord, *Souls in Dispute: Coverso Identities in Iberia and the Jewish Diaspora, 1580—1700* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 172.

Chapter 3: Communities in Contact

For this chapter, I will be analyzing three Inquisition *processi*, two from Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini's *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia contro ebrei e giudaizzanti* and one from the Archbishop of Florence. The Florentine document I found in the Archbishop of Florence's online archive in the summer of 2023, with the help of Dr. Piergabriele Mancuso, an Italian scholar and Director of the Eugene Grant Research Program at the Medici Archive Project.¹⁶⁵ After taking photographs of the online document, I sent them to Frank Lacopo, a Ph.D. Candidate in History at The Pennsylvania State University. He then transcribed the document, written in sixteenth century script, into legible Italian. From there, I again translated the document using a mix of translation websites, my knowledge of Italian, and help from my Italian professor.

All the same warnings that I gave in the previous chapter apply to these documents. Inquisition *processi* are imperfect sources to discover what really happened, as they were written by and for an organ of the state. My translations are not perfect and may miss some nuances. Some of these documents do not record what happened in the end to the people involved. Despite the caveats, these *processi* still have value in showing how different groups of early-modern Italy could interact.

This chapter uses the *processi* to focus on how the Jewish and Christian communities dealt with each other, in both Venice and Florence. Of course, it is an oversimplification to speak of the "Christian community" in either city as one, monolithic entity: as in any city, people of the same religion were divided in many ways, such as age, class, and gender. The idea of a "Jewish

¹⁶⁵ "Parte 2 - Processo 8," 450-451, Digital Archive of the Diocese of Florence, accessed August 22, 2023, http://archividigitali.diocesifirenze.it/MC/ARCHIVIO_eb2/eb2/13/Q1316/Q1316_fr.htm.

community” is less problematic, as Jews constituted a distinct minority in Venice and Florence and were “othered” by both state laws and their own traditions. Even so, there were differences among the Jews in the Florentine and Venetian ghettos. Some of these distinctions were due to the same previously-mentioned factors (age, class, gender) as in the city at large, while differences in ethnicity and nationality could also be fault lines. In the first seven decades of the Florentine Ghetto’s existence, there was only one synagogue for people to worship in. However, not everyone agreed on which rite and prayer book to use and so in 1639, the ghetto’s Levantine Jews (Jews from Ottoman lands, who often had Iberian ancestry) won the right to be considered a separate community and thus were granted their own synagogue.¹⁶⁶ Jews in Venice and Florence were by no means of one mind on all matters, and could come into conflict with each other, which could sometimes lead to violence. And just as there existed tensions within the Jewish community, there were also disagreements within the Christian community. Sometimes this disagreement concerned interactions with Jews and what the nature of those meetings should be. This point brings me to my first case.

The *Processo* of Giorgio Moreto

On Thursday, April 6, 1589, a delator in Venice denounced the sailor Giorgio Moreto for socializing with Jews in the ghetto.

I, your unnamed informant, being a Christian and your most loyal servant, do not wish to conceal from you the wicked ways pursued by Giorgio, known as Moreto, mariner, who shows no respect for the holy ordinances you have posted in Santi Giovanni and Paolo, or for the justice of God. For he, in contempt of the holy decrees of mother Church, habitually eats with Jews and associates with them at all times of the year, and he eats and goes masked and makes merry in such a manner as to make no distinction between Lent and Carnival, a thing that is not to be tolerated by your most excellent lordships.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Siegmund, *Medici State*, 400-402.

¹⁶⁷ Brian Pullan, “The trial of Giorgio Moreto before the Inquisition in Venice, 1589,” in *Judicial tribunals in England and Europe, 1200–1700*, ed. Maureen Mulholland (Manchester:

Moreto was not only fraternizing with Jews but doing so during the holy season of Lent, when Christians were supposed to abstain from celebrations and from certain food and drink. The delator's concern for the distinction between Carnival and Lent was a real issue for many moralists in early modern Europe. These writers sought to "distinguish recreation which was "lawful" or "useful" from that which was not, to ensure, for instance, that Carnival did not invade the space of Lent...In Counter-Reformation Italy, there was even talk of compiling an Index of Prohibited Games."¹⁶⁸ Just as Jews and Christians were not to mix, so sacred time and profane time were not to mix.

The divisions between Christians and Jews and holy time and normal time were occasionally related. When Jews and Christians did mix during Christian holy days in Europe, the results could be dangerous. Christian violence against Jews burst out particularly during Holy Week, as the reenactment of the Passion incited attacks against Christ's supposed murderers. Sometimes this disorder took the form of spontaneous mass riots, but more frequently there was less intense, ritualized violence, such as stone-throwing at Jews. These ceremonial attacks had an air of play to them, with children often involved in the festivities. The annual violence of Holy Week against Jews, paradoxically, could serve to sustain Jewish-Christian relations, as the degradation of the Jews served to highlight Christianity's triumph. This violence sustained a rationale for keeping the Jews around.¹⁶⁹

The delator then listed a series of Jewish celebrations inside the ghetto at which Moreto was allegedly present. These included two wedding feasts and the vigils before boys were

Manchester University Press, 2003), 167. The translations in the case of Giorgio Moreto come from Brian Pullan and are the only ones in this thesis that I had no hand in translating.

¹⁶⁸ Peter Burke, "The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe," *Past & Present*, no. 146 (February 1995): 143.

¹⁶⁹ Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 211, 223, 228.

circumcised. The first wedding was the marriage of Solomon Maestro, which took place on March 22. The second was for a man named Moses Moresco. During these festivities, Moreto supposedly ate capons and other meats that Christians aren't allowed to consume during Lent. The delator provided a litany of witnesses, both Christian and Jewish, to these events: Abram Levi, Jacob di Oresi, Benedict Scocho, and the Christian warder of the ghetto supposedly witnessed Moreto's scandalous activities.

The delator's final accusation was the most serious: Moreto was courting a Jewish girl and because the girl's family would not let him have her, he was willing to convert to Judaism, just to be with her. David Medici, Samson the butcher, and the Jewish girl's uncle were all said to have heard Moreto make this rash statement. Ending his tale, the delator then entreated the authorities to give him some kind of reward to help support him and his family.¹⁷⁰

The delator expected, or at least hoped, that he would be compensated in some way for rendering the state a service in denouncing Moreto, but whether he was actually given anything is unknown.¹⁷¹ It is highly unlikely that the delator received financial compensation, as there is no evidence of the Venetian Inquisition paying delators.¹⁷² The delator's eagerness to be rewarded could have undermined his story, but his specificity and attention to detail—giving names and dates—bolstered his credibility. This denunciation led to a fascinating *processo*, which appears in two phases. The first phase lasted from March 22 to April 15 and consisted of the denunciation, witness interviews, and Moreto's first imprisonment and interrogation. The

¹⁷⁰ Pullan, "Giorgio Moreto," 167-168.

¹⁷¹ Black, "The Italian Inquisition," 72.

¹⁷² Pullan, "The Jews," 138.

second phase began on June 10 and involved the rearrest of Moreto and his second interrogation, along with the interviews of a few witnesses. June 10 is the only date listed for this phase.¹⁷³

On April 8, two days after the initial denunciation, the Holy Office began interviewing witnesses. From April 8 to April 15, the Inquisition questioned twelve of them, as well as the suspect Moreto. All were men, ranging in age from seventeen to forty-five, with most being in their twenties. Ten of the interviewees were Jewish; the other two consisted of a man named Alessandro and another named Antonio. Alessandro had gone into the ghetto that year (1589) as well as the previous one, to cook matzos for Jews during Passover. Meanwhile, a certain Antonio, along with his father Domenico, was a warder of the ghetto, meaning that he was in charge of locking the ghetto up at night. Though Antonio had been named as a witness in the original delation and Alessandro had not, both men, by virtue of their duties, had cause to associate with Jews, though—crucially—in a limited manner and for a specific reason. For instance, Alessandro may have cooked for the Jews, but there is no evidence in this *processo* that he ever ate with them, an important distinction. Antonio and Alessandro are both examples of men who dealt with Jews for the ‘right’ reasons and they stand in contrast to Moreto. The Inquisition asked every witness whether they ever saw Moreto eat in the ghetto or with Jews, as the delator had originally testified. While the witnesses sometimes disagreed on whether Moreto had eaten in the houses of Jews, all corroborated the story that the sailor was wooing a Jewish girl, whose name eventually appears as Rachel, daughter of Isaac the Deaf, a cook.

On Thursday, April 13, the Inquisition interviewed Moreto. The members of the tribunal asked him whether he had committed any of the many crimes that witnesses had alleged, such as eating with Jews in the ghetto, eating forbidden food during Lent in the ghetto, and staying in the

¹⁷³ This division into two phases is my own system, done for the reader’s sake; in the *processo*, everything appears as part of one document.

ghetto overnight. Moreto denied some of the allegations, saying that he had never eaten meat or dairy products in the ghetto during Lent and had never slept overnight in the ghetto. He admitted that he went to Jewish festivities and danced with Jewish women, though he did not offer a defense for his behavior. When confronted with his attempt to marry a Jewish woman, he had an explanation ready:

Asked if he thought of taking her to wife or had had her in some other way, he answered: ‘If the said Rachel had been willing to come with me as she promised, I would have had her baptised and taken her to wife, and I would have done so willingly, and I hope in God that she may still resolve to convert. It is true that I boasted and bragged to many people that I wanted to lead the said Rachel away, but I always meant to do so with her consent, because she promised to come with me, as I said. And because her relatives became aware of this they stopped up the doors and balconies and hatched a thousand plots and wanted to injure me.’

Asked whether he had ever had occasion to say or had thought in his heart that if he could not lead this Rachel away he would want her on any terms, even if he thought of becoming a Jew, he answered with a smile: ‘I never said or thought or imagined such a thing. I’d have had to be out of my mind.’¹⁷⁴

Moreto conceded that he had been courting Rachel, but supposedly only with the intention of marriage and making her a Christian. According to him, when Rachel’s family discovered his seduction, they blocked the doors and balconies, attempting to keep the sailor away from her. This is a bit ironic, considering recent Venetian regulations. In 1560, the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia* (Board of Trade) had mandated that Jews in the Ghetto Vecchio, which faced the Rio di Ghetto and Rio del Battello, wall up their windows, balconies, and doors that had a view to canals. Just two years before Moreto’s case, in 1587, the *Cinque Savi* had ordered that all Jewish balconies facing Christians had to have bars on them. Windows and balconies in the ghetto provoked a whole host of anxieties among Venetian authorities. A desire to keep Jews in their proper place, along with accusations of Jews mocking the Eucharist from their windows, led the State to control what Jews were allowed to see. Jews had been forced into the ghetto in order to

¹⁷⁴ Pullan, “Giorgio Moreto,” 173.

keep them both contained and separate from the rest of the city, and unimpeded vistas punctured that separation. Jews viewing Christians could potentially disturb Christians, who were not meant to be looked at by Jews.¹⁷⁵ Balconies themselves were fairly common in Venice and perfect sites for observing others and spreading gossip. Some reports to the Inquisition (not related to Jews) came from people watching their neighbors and seeing something unusual.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps the Inquisition did not want to give Jews that power of sight.

And yet, in Moreto's case, we have a Christian trying to access a Jewish house and a Jewish maiden through its weakest areas (doors and balconies) and being denied that opportunity by Jews. In this aspect, both Jewish families and the Christian state were of the same mind: women were to remain celibate before marriage. The state's interest in keeping young people sexually innocent would only grow larger over the course of the sixteenth century. Large peasant migrations into the city (due to famine) and the increasingly pious Counter-Reformation climate led to a tighter regulation over sexual immorality. Venice created the *Bestemmia* in 1539—originally charged with policing cursing, the body's purview expanded over the decades to include gambling and sexual assault.¹⁷⁷ Sex between Christians and Jews was not only a crime, but a particularly heinous one, for it was thought to actually injure the Christian God, as “God was a deity close to man, personally involved in this world and personally touched by human actions.”¹⁷⁸ Venice needed to defend God, and then God would defend them.

¹⁷⁵ Dana E. Katz, “‘Clamber not you up to the casements’: On Ghetto Views and Viewing,” *Jewish History* 24, no. 2 (2010), 135, 139-140, 143-144.

¹⁷⁶ Alexander Cowan, “Seeing is Believing: Urban Gossip and the Balcony in Early Modern Venice,” *Gender & History* 23, Issue 3 (November 2011): 728.

¹⁷⁷ Joanne M. Ferraro, “Youth in Peril in Early Modern Venice,” *Journal of Social History* 49, no. 4 (Summer 2016), 762-763.

¹⁷⁸ Ruggiero, *Boundaries of Eros*, 88.

Moreto's situation also resembles one found in fiction, involving the most famous Venetian Jew ever, who "lived" at the same time as Moreto's *processo*. In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock, going out to dine with Christians, tells his daughter Jessica to

Lock up my doors, and when you hear the drum
 And the vile squealing of the wry-necked fife,
 Clamber not you up to the casements then,
 Nor thrust your head into the public street
 To gaze on Christian fools with varnished faces
 But stop my house's ears (I mean my casements)...
 Do as I bid you. Shut doors after you.¹⁷⁹

Shylock does not want his daughter to look at Christians, presumably fearing her interacting with them, and potentially leading her astray (a fear that ultimately proves justified). In real life, Rachel's family must have felt a similar way. Whether they truly feared that she would elope and convert, no good could come of a Christian sailor conversing with a Jewish woman. In fact, Rachel's family had good reason to keep her away from Moreto. Even if her parents did not believe that she would actually run away, even expressing a vague desire to convert was enough to cause trouble. Jews in Venice who flirted with the idea of converting could be forced into the House of Catechumens, a place to educate neophytes, on the words of only Christian witnesses.¹⁸⁰ Rachel's parents were no doubt aware that Moreto's courting could have begun a chain of events that would have led to their daughter being taken away from them. And if Rachel's parents had tried to dissuade her from converting, they would have been liable to prosecution: impeding baptism was a crime.¹⁸¹ Thus, they prevented Moreto from entering Rachel's house and, according to Moreto, plotted to harm him.

¹⁷⁹ II.v.30-35, 54.

¹⁸⁰ Aron-Beller, *Jews on Trial*, 168.

¹⁸¹ Aron-Beller, *Jews on Trial*, 163.

As for the most serious allegation against Moreto—that he was thinking of becoming a Jew—he emphatically denied it. He practically had no choice but to deny that accusation, whether or not he had really said it, as there was no excuse for even contemplating such an action. Indeed, as he said in the *processo*, he would have to have been out of his mind to say such a thing.

A few days after the interview, the tribunal officially banned Moreto from entering the ghetto or even lingering around the gates, on pain of being sent to row in the galleys for three years. However, one month later, on Saturday, June 10, the Inquisition records Moreto as having been arrested the prior day and sent to prison for again frequenting the ghetto and wearing the Jews' yellow hat—numerous people saw him as well as some butchers all wearing a yellow hat, of the kind that Jews were required to wear. After interviewing five witnesses, the tribunal again questioned him:

He was asked: Have you in the last few days, since you were released from the prisons of the Holy Office, been in a boat with other men, wearing a Jew's hat upon your head? *He answered:* It is more than twenty days since I went to Murano for a joke with two others who are butchers, and one is called Bortolo and the other Giacomo. And for a jest we wore the yellow hats of Jews on the way out...and we wore the yellow hats for a joke, not realising that there would be any objection. *Asked whether this last Thursday he was within the ghetto of the Jews of Venice and if so for what purpose, he answered:* On Thursday, when I was here at St Mark's, I hailed some young men and we went to a tavern at San Girolamo and ate and drank there, and being tipsy with the wine the young men said: "We want to go down through the ghetto" I said to them: "Let's go." And so I passed through the ghetto, and I went in by the gate of the Ghetto Nuovo and out through the gates of the Ghetto Vecchio, and with me were Fabio, silk-mercator, and Luca, tailor.¹⁸²

Moreto had worn, supposedly in jest, attire mandated for Jews, which was proscribed for everyone else. The hat-wearing, along with his excursion back to the ghetto with his friends

¹⁸² Pullan, "Giorgio Moreto," 176.

Fabio the silk-mercator (silk merchant) and Luca the tailor, did not impress the tribunal, nor did Moreto's plea of drunkenness.

It was said to him: 'Did you not know that when you were released by the Holy Office a month or two ago you were charged and warned not to enter the ghetto and forbidden even to approach it? You have treated this order with contempt, and have indeed made so bold as to go out in public in a boat, wearing upon your head the yellow hat of a Jew.'
*He answered: I knew it, I was always aware of it, and to extricate myself from this affair I wanted to join up with the captain of the gunners. This is the first time I have been at fault, I ask for your pardon and mercy, the wine was my undoing.*¹⁸³

Having disobeyed the Inquisition, Moreto was sentenced to three years rowing in the Venetian galleys and had 100 lire confiscated from him. With his first arrest, Moreto had been given a warning, as his behavior crossed a line but could have, in theory, happened out of ignorance and carelessness. But having been warned, there was no excuse for Moreto's continued frequenting of the ghetto and wearing of Jewish attire. If Moreto got drunk and disobeyed the Inquisition, that was his choice, and he would be punished for it.

How to interpret the *processo* of Giorgio Moreto? Was he truly so desperate to be with Rachel that he was willing to convert to Judaism or was he simply trying to win another soul for Christianity, as he asserted? Ultimately, there is no way to know. Neither Rachel nor her father were ever interviewed, or if they were, the records have not survived. What is more significant is the spirit of sociability that surrounds all of Giorgio's activities. He attended Jewish weddings and pre-circumcision vigils, dancing with Jews and eating their matzos; when he was arrested the second time, it was for wearing the Jewish hat and going through the ghetto, both done with friends. All of his activities were done in, and with, the company of others. Moreto's friends were not arrested (at least not as part of this *processo*), but they clearly shared his contempt for the proper boundaries between Christian and Jew, boundaries that the Venetian state worked so

¹⁸³ Pullan, "Giorgio Moreto," 176.

hard to implement. As regards Moreto at Jewish festivities, none of the Jewish witnesses give any hint that Moreto attended their ceremonies against their will; at least some of the Jews must have enjoyed his company at their weddings. The same is likely true for the vigils.

It was traditional to hold a vigil the night before the circumcision. This watch served both a pragmatic function, as it was meant to ward off evil spirits, and a social function, as Jews gathered in prayer and study.¹⁸⁴ That Moreto should have been allowed to participate in such a ritual speaks to the familiarity he must have had with certain members of the Jewish community and the affection they must have felt towards him.

The case of Moreto cannot be taken as a representative example of Jewish-Christian relations in early modern Italy. Most Christian men did not woo Jewish women. The point of examining stories like Moreto's is not to find universal truths about society, but to "raise questions that prompt us to further explore the complexity of interfaith relationships and to scrutinize the assumptions that have often been taken for granted in the study of relationships between Jews and Christians."¹⁸⁵ One of those assumptions that many scholars have taken for granted is that Jews and Christians lived separate lives that almost entirely precluded the possibility of true friendship.¹⁸⁶ Jews and Christians were indeed divided into two separate communities, set apart spiritually, legally, and (beginning in earnest in the sixteenth century) physically. Perhaps, though, scholars have been too strict in drawing a line between the two groups, discounting the possibility of relationships that went beyond merely professional or mercantile. Friendship is a two-way street and if Moreto was friends with Jews in the ghetto,

¹⁸⁴ Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 252.

¹⁸⁵ Daniel Jütte, "Interfaith Encounters between Jews and Christians in the Early Modern Period and Beyond: Toward a Framework," *The American Historical Review* 118, Issue 2 (April 2013): 399.

¹⁸⁶ Jütte, "Interfaith Encounters," 378-381.

such that he could attend their weddings and dance with their women, then Jews were also probably friends with him.

The *Processo* of Salvatore Romano

My next case takes place in Florence. The document I have is a summary report, only one page, of what was very likely a much longer case. This *processo* is about Salvatore Romano, a Jew in the Florentine Ghetto in 1599.

Inquisitor Father Luccete is aware that in the ghetto of Florence there is a certain Salvatore Romano, a Jew, who is noted by a scrofula-eaten neck and a chestnut beard and...he has a wife and children in the Florentine ghetto. Now this Salvatore had a long affair over and over again with a Christian woman and in addition he has had a son who is Christian and is about a year old. You should know the name of this woman and know that she makes buttons and goes to sell them every day in the ghetto. She lives behind a second-hand dealer's shop next to an image of the Virgin that stands in the corner of a street. Moreover you (Inquisitor Father Luccete) know that said woman has slept several times with the said Salvatore. Bon'aiuto, the Roman Jew, who lives in the ghetto and Fuccio, the son of master Davitte da Poppi, a Jew, and other neighbors (Christians) who live around there and live next to them are aware of this. Salvatore returned several times (to the woman) due to the tender and close relationship that said Salvatore maintains with said Christian woman. You (Inquisitor Father Luccete) can examine (Salvatore). And moreover, the said Christian woman gave two golden rings to the said Salvatore, who carries them at the same time.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ P[ad]re Inquisitore Luccete a sap[er] [ciò] nel ghetto di Firenze si trova un certo Sal[vato]re hebreo Romano, il q[ua]le ha p[er] con/segno il collo mangiato dalle scroffule e di barba castagna e di giusta statura et ha moglie e figlioli in ghetto Fior[entin]a hora q[uest]o Saluatore ha havuto et fare longamente piu e piu volte con u[n]a donna christiana e di piu di lei ne ha havuto un figlio il quale è christiano e [---] essere di età d'un'anno i[n] circa, e p[er] sapere il nome di q[uest]a donna e da sapere che lei fa bottoni e giornalm[ente] li va à vendere in ghetto e sta a casa dietro a rigattieri a lato ad u[n]a Verg[in]e che stà nella ca[n]tonata d' u[n]a strada e di più hav[er]e à sap[er]e che d[ett]a Donna è stata à dormire più volte con d[ett]o Saluatore se [ciò?] sanno Bon'aiuto Romano hebreo ch[e] stà in ghetto e Fuccio fig[lio]lo di m[astro] Dauitte da Poppi ebreo et altri vicini che di li intorno stanno e Apppresso[sic.] hau[er]e anco a sapere ch[e] i vicini [christiani] d[e]lla casa d[e]lla donna più volte ha fatto [tornare] p[er] la pratica con ten[---]a e stretta ch[e] d[ett]o Saluatore tiene con detta donna [x.na; christiana] i q[ua]li potrete esaminare. E di più d[ett]a donna [christiana] ha donati due anelli d'oro a d[ett]o Sal[vato]re q[uel]lo esso se li porta contemporaneamente. Summary of the case of Salvatore Romano, 1599, 450-451, Parte 2-Processo 8, Tribunale della Inquisizione, Archivi Digitali di Diocesi di Firenze.

The married Salvatore was having an affair with a Christian woman, a union that had produced a child. The woman, who is not named in this document (an indication of women's lesser importance when compared to men), sold buttons in the ghetto. Here we have a perfect example of the permeability of the ghetto as an institution: while it was meant to isolate and contain the Jews, it was not meant to, and was not able to, completely remove them from society.¹⁸⁸

Gentiles were free to come into the ghetto during daytime and they did, for Jews, despite their segregation, were still a part of cities' economies, whether as merchants or dealers in the *strazzaria* (rag trade).¹⁸⁹ The papal bull *Cum nimis absurdum*, which had ghettoized Rome's Jews in 1555, also restricted Jews to working in the rag trade, an important business, though one that was looked down upon.¹⁹⁰ *Strazzaria* was one of the few ways of earning a living that Tedeschi (German) Jews in Venice were allowed to participate in, though the prohibition on other kinds of business was difficult to enforce.¹⁹¹ When Jews and Christians interacted with each other in the ghetto, it was usually because of the rag trade, and this was not seen as dangerous. However, as this *processo* demonstrates, there were inherent risks from Jews and Christians mixing for the sake of business, as commerciality could lead to sociability. Salvatore and the woman may have met when she came into the ghetto selling her buttons. The *processo* makes it clear that their relationship was no brief dalliance, but long-lasting and affectionate.

As was to be expected, considering the relatively small confines of the Florentine Ghetto, Salvatore's affair did not remain a secret. At least two Jews, named Bon'auto and Fuccio, knew of his affair, as did some Christians who lived by the woman's house. Being a Christian, the

¹⁸⁸ Caffiero, *The History of the Jews*, 84.

¹⁸⁹ Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 97.

¹⁹⁰ Moses A. Shulvass, *Jews in the World of the Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 136.

¹⁹¹ Ravid, "Cum Nimis Absurdum," 91.

woman would have lived outside of the ghetto, alongside Christian neighbors. Presumably, some of those neighbors saw Salvatore entering and leaving the woman's house or heard the pair's activity.

Indeed, considering the likelihood of discovery, and the length of time of the affair, Salvatore and the woman must have truly cared for each other. Though he receives little attention in this document, their son would have been an anomaly for this era, a child of a Christian and a Jew. Jewish law (*halakha*) traces descent matrilineally: a child with a Jewish mother and gentile father is Jewish, while a child with a gentile mother and Jewish father is not.¹⁹² As Salvatore's son did not have a Jewish mother, the governors of the ghetto may not have wanted the boy to stay and be raised as a Jew. However, the Florentine Ghetto did not have a permanent rabbi by this point, so the governors may not have known about or acted upon the laws of descent.

The *Processo* of Elia, Isiacco, Michele, and Baruch

In the *processo* describing Salvatore and his Gentile lover, there is a break on the paper, and then the writing continues. The *processo* reads:

As you also know, on the first of August (near past) of the present year 1599, certain Jews from the northern ghetto brought a Christian prostitute into the ghetto into the house of Aronne di Viterbo, a Jew, and four Jews dealt with her...Jacob the rabbi did not want Elia to get up from his seat to go and read the Bible—as is customary—given that he (the rabbi) knew what Elia had done. The said Elia shortly afterwards willingly hit the said Jacob in the face and then ran away. The other Jew who consorted with the said prostitute was Isiacco Romano, a Jew, who also fled to Siena for the same reason. And Jacob...excommunicated both of them and told them not to return to Florence. But Elia disobeyed and returned; the other wanted to obey. The other two Jews went to Rome after what they had done with the said Christian prostitute. One is called Michele, who is the son of the Jewish host, the other is Baruch or Benedicto, who is the son of Salvatore.

¹⁹² Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Origins of the Matrilineal Principle in Rabbinic Law," *AJS Review* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1985), 19.

Baruch fled to Lipiano...But having then seen that he did not make a good impression, he made sure to return to Florence and now he finds himself in the ghetto.¹⁹³

This is quite a story. Four Jews—named Elia, Isiaco, Michele (son of a Jewish host, possibly meaning an innkeeper of some sort), and Baruch (or Benedicto)—brought a Christian prostitute into a house in the ghetto. Hearing this, the rabbi, named Jacob, would not allow Elia to come up in synagogue and read from the Torah. Enraged, Elia hit the rabbi and then fled Florence, along with Isaico (certainly Isaico, and maybe also Elia, went to Siena). The rabbi excommunicated Elia and Isaico and forbade them from coming back, but Elia returned anyway. Michele and Baruch fled to Rome, with the latter also eventually returning to Florence.

The prostitute in this *processo* is specifically noted as Christian. This identification would have been necessary, for there were Jewish prostitutes in some Italian cities, though it does not appear that those in power, Christian or Jewish, gave much attention to them. Occasionally, the prostitutes aroused the authorities' ire, as in 1598 in Mantua, when the rabbis and the Jewish

¹⁹³ Avete a sapere in oltre ch[e] il p[rim]o di d[ie] d'agosto pross[im]o pass[att]o d[el] p[rese]nte anno 1599 che certi hebrei d[el] ghetto di norte menarno u[n]a christiana meretrice nel ghetto in casa dell'hoste chiamato Aronne di Viterbo ebreo, e quattro hebrei hebbero che far con esso lei tra q[uel]li uno è chiamato Elia, il q[ua]le se n'è poi fuggito p[er] haver dato d[e]lle ferite in faccia à Jacob Rabino nella Sinagoga e/gli ha dato d[e]lle ferite con occasione di q[uell]a donna christiana meretrice, poi/ch[e] ripugnando il d[ett]o Jacob in Sinagoga ch[e] q[uell]o Elia no[n] si leuasse da sedere p[er] andar' a legger la bibbia [cioè] s'usa, atteso ch[e] sapeua q[uell]o p[er]o fatto da lui, il d[ett]o elia degnato di li a poco dette al detto Jacob Jacob i[n] faccia e se n'è poi fuggito. l'altro ebreo c[he] usò co[n] d[ett]a meretrice fu I[s]iaco Romano ebreo, ch[e] pur se n'è fuggito p[er] la med[esim]a cagione i[n] Siena. e Jacob [s'è] detto ferito [co; abb.] fattore e Rabbino d[e]lla sinagoga di Fior[enz]a hau[er]lo saputo p[er] ord[in?e] d[e]lla sinagoga di Fior[enz]a gli scomunico ambe due co[n] far' loro precc. o[parecchio] ch[e] no[n] tornassero à Fior[enz]a ma Elia se ne tornò senza obedire e l'altro havuto vol[gli]o obedire se n'è andato à Roma gli altri due hebrei poi ch[-] hanno hauu[t]o à far co[n] la d[ett]a meretrice [christiana] uno si chiama michele ch[e] è fig[li]o d[e]ll' hoste hebreo, l'altro è baruch ò bened[ict]o ch[e] uogliate dire fig[li]o di sal[vato]re il q[ua]le ancor' lui se n'era fuggito à lipiano [cioè] q[ue]llo ch[e] d'abitaua ch[e] si scoprisse tal fatto, ma hau[u]to poi ueduto ch[e] no[n] bene fa impresa si è assicurato à torna[r]sene à Fior[enz]a [et] hora si trova i[n] ghetto. Summary of the case of Elia, Isiaco, Michele, and Baruch, 1599, 450-451, Parte 2-Processo 8, Tribunale della Inquisizione, Archivi Digitali di Diocesi di Firenze.

council issued a ban on frequenting three Jewish prostitutes.¹⁹⁴ Jews were obviously a minority of prostitutes, but they did exist: in 1527 in Rome, there were about 30 Jewish prostitutes, out of 750 to 1,500 total prostitutes. A century later, in 1620, in Venice, there were three Jewish prostitutes. Rome and Venice, however, were well-known for their prostitutes.¹⁹⁵ Venice, in particular, was sometimes called “the Brothel of Europe” due to its famed reputation for the sex trade.¹⁹⁶ The city had legalized prostitution soon after the Black Death, in a desire to attract merchants who were looking for entertainment. Prostitutes were legally mandated to live in a certain block of the city that came to be called the Castelletto (“little castle”), in the Rialto section, the financial heart of Venice.¹⁹⁷ Many prostitutes, however, worked outside of the Castelletto, even plying their trade in the Piazza San Marco, Venice’s public square.¹⁹⁸

Florence was not renowned for its sex trade. This fact, combined with the city’s smaller Jewish population, means that there may not have been any Jewish prostitutes in the city at this time. There were, of course, Christian ones, though, and one of them wound up in the house of a Jew named Arrone di Viterbo, along with four Jews. By entertaining the men and being entertained, both the Christian woman and the four Jews were taking a large risk. It was illegal for Jews and Christians to have intercourse: both the man and woman could be arrested, tried, and condemned for such an act. The punishment could be severe: a Jewish man caught having sex with a Christian in Mantua in 1569 was publicly castrated.¹⁹⁹ A century earlier, in Venice in

¹⁹⁴ Aron-Beller, *Jews on Trial*, 145.

¹⁹⁵ Elliott Horowitz, “Families and Their Fortunes: The Jews of Early Modern Italy,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. Davie Biale (New York: Schocken, 2002), 297.

¹⁹⁶ Joanne M. Ferraro, “Making a Living: The Sex Trade in Early Modern Venice,” *The American Historical Review* 123, Issue 1 (February 2018), 32.

¹⁹⁷ Paula C. Clarke, “The Business of Prostitution in Early Renaissance Venice,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (Summer 2015), 426-427.

¹⁹⁸ Clarke, “The Business of Prostitution, 427n33.

¹⁹⁹ Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 133n22.

1459, a woman named Silvestra had been lashed twenty-five times for having sexual relations with a Jew.²⁰⁰ Thus, seeing a circumcised penis could cause Christian prostitutes to scream out, realizing that they were about to commit a crime.²⁰¹

In dealing with Jews and prostitutes, the Inquisition was investigating two groups that Christian society often grouped with each other. While strange to modern ears, the connection between Jews and prostitutes was normal and well-known, with both categories often appearing together in petitions. Jews and prostitutes were both necessary but unpleasant elements of society, to be tolerated for their usefulness (one as a witness to the truth of Christianity, the other as an outlet for men's lust) but never to be embraced. Less tolerant Franciscan friars railed against both Jews and prostitutes, who were likened to parasites that contributed nothing to society but drained the life from Christians and their cities.²⁰² Both Jews and prostitutes were stigmatized through a red or yellow badge, whether it be a circle on their clothing or a certain kind of hat. And just as Jews of status were sometimes granted exemptions from wearing the badge, so too for prostitutes who became elite courtesans.²⁰³

Prostitution in Florence was under the control of the *Onestà*, or the Office of Decency. This body was meant to “establish brothels in the city, licence prostitutes and pimps to work in them, regulate their activities, and adjudicate criminal cases involving the women under [its] supervision.”²⁰⁴ Composed of eight men who served six-month terms, the *Onestà* granted prostitutes licenses, for which the women had to pay a fee; they were required to carry their

²⁰⁰ Ruggiero, *Boundaries of Eros*, 185n64.

²⁰¹ Robert Bonfil, “Jews, Christians, and Sex in Renaissance Italy: a Historiographical Problem,” *Jewish History* 26, no. 1/2 (May 2012), 101.

²⁰² Diane Owen Hughes, “Distinguishing Signs: Ear-Rings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City,” *Past & Present* no. 112 (August 1986), 28.

²⁰³ Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 47.

²⁰⁴ Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 31.

documents with them when out-and-about.²⁰⁵ The *Onestà* adopted different strategies for policing prostitution throughout its existence, but by 1599, the time of this *processo*, prostitutes (or *meterici*) were required to live on certain streets, pay a tax, and wear a yellow ribbon. However, wealthier prostitutes, who were sometimes considered courtesans (the line between them could blur), were able to buy exemptions from these rules, earning them the resentment of their poorer colleagues.²⁰⁶

The four Jews and the prostitute in this *processo* do not appear to have been high-status. The unnamed prostitute would have most obviously been in trouble for having sex with Jews, but she also would have broken the law regarding where she could sell her services. The four Jews and the prostitute had met in the home of a Jewish man named Arronne di Viterbo, meaning that his house lay in the ghetto. Prostitutes were certainly not allowed to ply their trade in that area.

When it came to the offending Jews, the rabbi had no problem punishing Elia by banning him from the honor of reading Torah in synagogue. This was a real penalty, all the more so for the communal nature of it. Synagogue was where Jews in the Florentine Ghetto gathered and it structured much of their lives, as both a place of prayer and association. Because there was only one synagogue in the Florentine Ghetto, all the attendant socializing, good or bad, became even more concentrated. The potential for conflict was heightened by a custom in Italian synagogues of the era, whereby a person who had a grievance to voice would interrupt prayer and do so. The governors of the ghetto took steps from the very beginning to ensure the quiet of the synagogue. In 1571, when the ghetto was first created, a group of Jewish men submitted a set of eight rules, or *capitoli*, to Grand Duke Cosimo I, who duly approved them. The first section stated:

²⁰⁵ John K. Brackett, "The Florentine *Onestà* and the Control of Prostitution, 1403-1680," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 24, no. 2 (Summer 1993), 284, 286.

²⁰⁶ Brackett, "The Florentine *Onestà*," 292, 296.

First, that when the Jews are in the synagogue to pray the service, that as soon as it has begun everyone must be quiet and not talk, under penalty of 1 scudo, to be applied half to His Highness's chambers and the other half to the chest for the poor.²⁰⁷

Such regulations evidently did not stop Elia from attacking the rabbi. We cannot know for certain who this rabbi was, but the historical record gives some clues. The Jewish community in the Florentine ghetto evidently took some time to fully mature, as the first mention that we have of a hired rabbi in the city is in 1611, forty years after the ghetto's creation.²⁰⁸ That does not mean, however, that rabbis from other areas did not come and stay in Florence for a bit, helping out the community as needed. The rabbi in this *processo* may have been Iacobbe Diovaglia, who was one of the elected governors of the ghetto in 1603. He might also have been Iacobbe di Miele, who appears in sixteenth-century burial records. Iacobbe Diovaglia and Iacobbe di Miele could also have been the same person.²⁰⁹

After assaulting the rabbi, Elia fled, along with Isaico, and the rabbi excommunicated them both. This was the gravest penalty that the community could impose on its own for "Jewish society had no more effective means of coercion than excommunication...and this was the exclusive prerogative of the rabbis."²¹⁰ The Medici dukes did not delegate the ability to punish, beyond excommunication, to the Jewish community for half-a-century. It was only in 1620 that the Jews were allowed to set up their own courts, though they were secular (not presided over by a rabbi) and mostly dealt with civil law.²¹¹ Thus, excommunication functioned as a way for the community to discipline its members.

²⁰⁷ Siegmund, *Medici State*, 246-248.

²⁰⁸ Siegmund, *Medici State*, 509n115.

²⁰⁹ Siegmund, *Medici State*, 399, 562n65.

²¹⁰ Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 199.

²¹¹ Mancuso and Vigotti, "From Centuries-old Squalor," 129n1.

In this *processo*, we see excommunication being used as a way to punish Jewish men for disrespectful and violent behavior. By having sex with a Christian, the men put the Jewish community in jeopardy, as Ferdinando I, the Medici duke in 1599, could have responded by cracking down on the ghetto's inhabitants. Fortunately, Ferdinando I was a relatively liberal ruler, having granted a wide array of freedoms to the non-Catholic inhabitants of Pisa and Livorno in 1591, including freedom of movement and religious tolerance.²¹² Still, out of a desire to protect his community and his own person, Jacob the rabbi excommunicated the men and banned them from returning to the ghetto. Elia and Benedicto did return, however; the two men had fled to other cities but were not welcomed there. What happened to them next is not recorded.

This *processo* is certainly the most salacious of all the documents analyzed here. Whereas Salvatore's case, despite his transgressions, involved some affection and perhaps love, this *processo* carries no hint of warmth. The situation of the four Jewish men who brought a prostitute into the ghetto speaks to the self-control (or lack thereof) of the Jewish community in Florence. Evidently, the ghettos governors could not prevent young men of the community from breaking Florentine laws in such a scandalous way.

Not only the Inquisition, but also Jewish authority figures, tried to enforce the separation of Jews and Christians in Italian society. It was in the interest of leading Jews to keep members of their own community in line, both so as not to arouse the wrath of the Christian state and also to ensure that the community stayed whole. For having relations with a Christian prostitute, Jacob the rabbi banned the offending Jews from reading the Torah in synagogue. This was a very

²¹² Lisa Kaborycha, "‘We do not sell them this tolerance’: Grand Duke Ferdinando I's Protection of Jews in Tuscany and the Case of Jacob Esperiel," *Sixteenth Century Journal* XLIX/4 (2018), 991.

public humiliation, for which Elia attacked the rabbi and fled, along with his friends. In turn, the rabbi excommunicated Elia and Isaico.

Without courts of their own, excommunication was the most serious punishment that the Jewish community had at its disposal. Even in this, though, Jews were dependent upon Christians, for the rabbis had to receive approval from magistrates before publishing excommunications. Christians in positions of power “naturally did not oppose the publication of excommunications as long as they served their interests...as a rule, disturbers of morality and public order were also permitted to be excommunicated.”²¹³ Elia and his friends certainly acted immorally and against the public order, so it makes sense that the Florentine authorities would have given their permission for Jacob the rabbi’s excommunication.

This punishment, given by a Jew against other Jews, under the auspices of Christians, illustrates a fascinating tension, one that did not just exist in early-modern Italy. When there are majority and minority groups in a society and the majority clearly (and legally) has more power, assertions of agency by some minority members can hurt others in the same group. Jacob the rabbi used the Jewish practice of excommunication, and this does show Jewish agency, but it could not be characterized as resistance to Christian domination; agency by the oppressed does not always equal resistance.²¹⁴ Jews in this era could find ways to exercise some power, but that power could also be conditional and dependent upon Christian support and rule.

What do the *processi* of this chapter tell us about Jews and northern Italian society in the late sixteenth century? They show the division between Christian society and Jewish society and the consequences for ignoring that division. As the sixteenth century progressed and the Counter-Reformation gained steam, Jews were increasingly marginalized. Ghettos were instituted in

²¹³ Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 204.

²¹⁴ Johnson, “On Agency,” 116.

various cities and the various Italian states created new measures or enforced previously ignored laws regarding how Jews were to comport themselves in the Christian world, such as the mandatory yellow hat or badge.

In making clear who the Jews were and isolating them, the next assumption was that Jews and Christians were not to mix, unless absolutely necessary. A Christian could come into the ghetto to pawn an object, or for some other financial service, but that was meant to be the extent of contact. Giorgio Moreto flagrantly violated the rules, going into the ghetto day and staying there at night, dancing at Jewish weddings, eating food with Jews, and even wooing a Jewish maiden. While given a warning the first time, he could not help himself and continued his illegal behavior; he eventually paid for it, with a three-year sentence on the galleys. There were consequences for disobeying the Inquisition. The four Jews who brought a Christian prostitute into the ghetto committed too many blatant crimes (interfaith sex, prostitution outside of a designated area, assault) involving multiple despised groups (Jews and prostitutes) for the Inquisition or the Jewish authorities to ignore them. Once again, violating the legal and moral rules of society had consequences.

And yet, these *processi* also tell another story. Laws and enforcement bodies, such as the Inquisition, did exist and hold power, but their power was not absolute, especially in the premodern era, when the state had more limited abilities than today. Inevitably, there were people who slipped through the cracks. Even those who are mentioned in the extant records, such as the mysterious Black youth, were never punished for their transgressions. Despite what the law said, Jews could at times participate in the larger society, outside of the prescribed boundaries, sometimes with the tacit assent of their coreligionists, sometimes with the help of Christians who turned a blind eye, as seen in the case of Salvatore. To Christians, Jews could be

a despised Other, someone to do business with, a friend whose weddings one attended, a forbidden lover, or perhaps not even a Jew. The Roman Inquisition looked askance at most of these relationships and tried to stamp them out, but reality and religion could never so neatly follow the law.

Conclusion

The sixteenth century was the age of confessionalization.²¹⁵ Throughout Europe, the authorities paid more and more attention to enforcing religious boundaries, separating communities, whether through segregation or expulsion. And in such an interconnected Mediterranean world, the actions of one state could not help but ripple out and affect other states. The forced conversions and banishments of Iberian Jews led to an influx of Jews and Marranos into the Italian lands.

At the same time, the Protestant Reformation created fears of religious dissent and heresy in Catholic lands. Prodded by Cardinal Carafa, Pope Paul III created the Roman Inquisition in 1542 to combat heresy and enforce Catholic orthodoxy. Cardinal Carafa became Pope Paul IV in 1555 and issued the bull *Cum nimis absurdum*, which imposed a whole host of measures on the Jews of the Papal States, and encouraged other states to adopt similar measures. These practices ranged from ghettoization to a prohibition on building synagogues to banning the employment of Christian servants in the homes of Jews.²¹⁶ Ghettos were established in Rome and Ancona (1555), Florence (1571), Siena (1572), Verona (1600), and Padua (1603), to name just a few.²¹⁷ Both ghettos and Inquisition branches spread around Italy during the second half of the sixteenth century, making clear the worsening status of the Jews.

Unlike the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions, the Roman Inquisition was not founded with a focus on Jews or crypto-Jews. Nevertheless, as a religious minority closely linked to Christian society (economically, geographically, psychologically), Jews did sometimes end up in

²¹⁵ Heinz Schilling, "Confessional Europe," in *Handbook of European History 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, eds. Thomas A. Brady, Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 641-642.

²¹⁶ Aron-Beller, *Jews on Trial*, 23, 56, 89.

²¹⁷ Siegmund, *Medici State*, 424n53.

the crosshairs of the various branches of the Roman Inquisition. The *processi* that I have analyzed in this thesis are examples of such scrutiny.

All these laws were meant to both degrade the Jews and separate them from the rest of society and make the dividing line quite clear. Of course, if a Jew wanted to cross over and convert, Christian society would gladly take them, provided that they were sincere. Staying as a Jew, while not preferable, was still acceptable. What was not acceptable, in the eyes of the Church and the Inquisition, was moving back and forth across the line. Religion was not something to experiment with, to try on like a cloak and discard if it didn't suit a person. Doing so could get a Jew reported by a concerned citizen: Salomone Dardero and Filipa Iorge were denounced for acting like Jews at various times and as Christians at other moments. Their denunciations by ordinary people—people who were not members of the Inquisition or the State—demonstrates that it was not just the authorities who policed religious boundaries. Indeed, the Roman Inquisition could not have lasted as long as it did, all the way into the nineteenth century, without the cooperation of a significant segment of society. That cooperation could come even more readily when the person being investigated had black skin, physically marking them as different, as happened to Samuel Maestro.

The Inquisition did not just investigate people who acted as both Jew and Christian, but also those individuals of one faith who mixed too much with those of the other. It was not only the Filipa Iorges and Salomone Darderos who were concerning, but also the Giorgio Moretos and Salvatore Romanos. Giorgio was a Christian man who celebrated with Jews at their festivals and pursued a Jewish woman, while Salvatore was the opposite, a Jewish man who got too close to a Christian woman, even having a child with her. But regardless of which religion the men were, they each refused to abide by legislation separating the two communities. Giorgio did not

break the law in such an explicit way as Salvatore and so received only a warning from the Inquisition the first time. However, when he disregarded the tribunal's orders to avoid the ghetto, he was punished with a term in the galleys.

Again, we see participation of common people in the Inquisition's activities, for Giorgio's *processo* began with a denunciation from someone claiming to seek money for his family. There were no doubt many in Venice, Rome, and Florence, along with the rest of Italy, who believed in and supported the Inquisition's mission of enforcing orthodoxy and combating heresy, which sometimes involved Jews. But there were no doubt many people who did not care about the rigid partition between Christian and Jew: this indifference may not have come from some deep opposition to the Inquisition or a particular desire for religious toleration, but such lack of enthusiasm hampered the Inquisition, nonetheless. The body depended upon delations by people who knew of, or suspected, criminal activity; if the delations would not come, then there were limits as to what the Inquisition could do.

Of course, the only way that we are able to know of these religious renegades—crypto-Jews, Marranos, Christians seducing Jews, Jews seducing Christians—is because they were caught. All these groups would have had a vested interest in keeping their activities quiet, or at least not broadcasting them to those in power. The people in these *processi* were unsuccessful in their attempts to escape notice, but that does not mean that others similarly failed. How many more Filipas are there out there, whom we will never know about?

The interactions between Christians and Jews in the various *processi* are a record, seen through disapproving eyes, of the positive relations that Jews and Christians could have. To return to a concept that I discussed in the introduction, the lachrymose view of Jewish history has some truth to it, for the Jews seen in these cases. Filipa's family likely found themselves outside

of Iberia due to the persecution of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions. Rachel, the woman whom Giorgio Moreto had his eye on, could easily have been confined to the House of Catechumens if she had said that she wanted to convert, even in passing. There was plenty to be lachrymose about.

But the lachrymose view cannot account for Filipa's success in traveling Europe, living as a Christian at some points, a Jew at other times. Neither can the view explain Giorgio Moreto dancing with Jewish maidens at weddings. One cannot generalize about all of Jewish history based off of a few Inquisition *processi* in the sixteenth century. Jewish history does indeed have much suffering in it and that pain is quite eye-catching, but that should not blind people to the less-conspicuous (often by design) moments of friendship between Jews and those surrounding them. The Roman Inquisition and its cases illustrate both the limits that professing Jews and those whose Judaism was uncertain faced in Christian society and how those groups maneuvered within their constraints.

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