Preface

From 1988, the final year of my undergraduate studies, I had the privilege of being a student of Brian Pullan, the distinguished scholar of Venetian social history. Brian instilled in me a love of Italian history and a fascination with the complex pattern of religious change and non-conformity in early modern Europe. His generous support and critique have accompanied all my years of study, and words cannot express my debt to him.

But a love of learning does not usually start or end in the seminar rooms of a university campus, and I must thank a number of people who have helped me along the way. My dear mother has been my closest friend, unswervingly loyal in her support and encouragement, and my late father gave me a love of learning and, as a Holocaust survivor, showed me how one’s personal history can dominate one’s life and thoughts. At school it was Ann Woodings, my history teacher, who helped me articulate a love of history, and Dennis Samuel, my uncle, spent many a Sunday afternoon discussing my S Level history essays with me.

After coming to live in Israel with a young family in 1993, my research interests eventually came to focus on the Italian Inquisition and I was able to take my studies further under the tutelage of Kenneth Stow, thanks to a doctoral grant from the University of Haifa. During this period, I became intrigued by the significant number of unknown ‘voices’ of professing Jews I uncovered in the Inquisitorial archives of Modena, and my aim became not only to get to know them but to decode their testimonies. The staff of the Archivio de Stato in Modena were most accommodating and welcoming, as were those of the many libraries and institutes where I have worked over the years. I also wish to express my deep thanks to Kenneth for his continuing support, advice and precise attention to detail, as well as to Enrico Angolini, Reuven Bonfil, Bernard Cooperman, Anna Foa, Federica Francesconi and Benjamin Ravid for their helpful suggestions and assistance at various stages of my research.

My time in the Judaica Department of the Israel Museum brought me into contact with many wonderful people who helped broaden my interests and my understanding of Jewish culture and ethnography, including Nurit Bank, Lorna Carmel, Rosemary Eshel,
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Susan Hazan, Chen Mellul, Joseph Shadur z’l and Nurit Shilo-Cohen. In 2007–8 I had the pleasure of serving as a Visiting Assistant Professor in the History and Judaic Studies departments at the George Washington University, where I was blessed with supporting colleagues including Tyler Arbinger, Daniel Schwartz, Ronald Spector, Lauren Strauss and Max Ticktin. Special thanks go to Rob Eisen, whose advice and encouragement in writing this book have been a tremendous help and from whom I have learned much. He is also a dear friend. My students on my Inquisition and Jews seminar course asked crucial questions, which helped me articulate my opinions further. They include Aviva Berman, Jamie Chassen, Eric Goodstein, Arielle Gumer, Jacqueline Stricker and Ross Sarraf. My continual teaching online at Gratz College of Jewish Studies in Philadelphia has enabled me to sit quietly during this past year to finally write my manuscript.

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