The piazza: verbal offences
on the streets of Modena

There were twenty-two processi in which Jews were prosecuted for blasphemy, heretical blasphemy and insults in our period. These offences were allegedly committed in public, in a street, shop or piazza where most daily contact between Jews and Christians took place. These processi are considered as legal narratives in the same genre and show the efforts of the Inquisition to control Jewish speech. One should not suggest that these narratives are static – quite the contrary: verbal offences respond to the religious, social and cultural pressures, threats and issues that surfaced in Modena during the first four decades of the seventeenth century. At the same time, these cases articulated the vision that the Inquisition had of itself as both a religious and a moral power, and its relationship with newly converted Christians and the Jewish community itself.

These verbal offences are defined here as simple blasphemy – that is, words spoken in public that attribute offensive traits to God, Christ or the Virgin – or insults made to Christians, neophytes or even neighbouring Jews. The description of the offence on the cover of the processi varied, being bestemmia, bestemmia hereticale or ingiuria. Ingiuria, the notion that hostile speech could physically harm others, was, according to Thomas Kuehn, an ‘ambiguous’ legal term that intimated insult to ‘matters of personal honor and status’. In order to understand the Inquisition’s interest in these verbal offences, and particularly in blasphemy, a wider perspective of the history of this crime is required. How did the Modenese Inquisition come to deal with a broad range of these cases and include Jews as potential offenders?

Catholic and Protestant reformers throughout Europe advocated the monitoring of blasphemous speech, even though, as David Nash points out, it is still difficult to understand the criminal implications of the offence. Civil legislation in both Catholic and Protestant lands including Italy, Spain, Germany, France, Flanders and England explicitly and frequently enforced prosecution and punishment for blasphemy. However, as Francisca Loetz has shown, there was still no effort in the secular courts to define the offence. Its definition was
blurred by a secularizing process, whereby, as Michel Foucault has shown, rebellion against God was seen as disobedience to the state. Blasphemy, primarily a spiritual sin, developed into a civil crime, which on the basis of superstition and the need to control disruptive behaviour was seen as harmful to secular authority and became a civic obsession. It is not surprising then that accusations were laid before and prosecuted by both secular and ecclesiastical courts, since, as Elizabeth Horodowich suggests, legal theorists neglected to differentiate between anti-Catholic doctrines and casual blasphemy. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, some Italian states, fearing that blasphemy was rampant, created special courts to monitor the offence. In Venice, the Esecutori contro la Bestemmia was set up in 1537 and in the republic of Lucca a specific magistratura, composed of three citizens elected annually, dealt with blasphemy from 1531 to 1700. In other states, dukes and governments issued edicts to prevent blasphemous speech. In 1598, Cesare d’Este published an edict entitled Proclamation and Decrees concerning Blasphemy, the observance of Festivals, Gaming and Concubinage (Grida e ordini sopra la Bestemmia, osservar le Feste, Giuoco, e Concubine), mentioned earlier. Bringing together a number of broad issues into one edict, the Duke echoed a tradition of political control over his duchy’s morality. But as he noted at the beginning of the decree:

The Most Serene Signor Duke Cesare da Este, by the Grace of God, Duke of Modena, wishes that his most faithful subjects live like Christians, and refrain from those vices which provoke the anger of his Divine Majesty against the people…

The Duke’s punishments for blasphemy varied according to the words said and the number of times the suspects were caught uttering them. According to the decree, the worst curses were those against God, Jesus and Mary. For these, fines varied from 30 scudi for saying the curses once, to 100 scudi for repeating them. A third offence would result in being made to stand before the cathedral door and having one’s tongue pierced, and the fourth in being sent to the strenuous and severe service on board the dreaded galleys. If offenders were caught uttering words against the holy apostles or the saints, these were fined from 15 to 30 scudi. From the twelfth century, the Church developed its own definition of blasphemy, and by the early seventeenth century this covered not only bestemmia hereticale in the real sense involving conscious intent, but also lesser offences such as profanity and various kinds of curses or oaths. This represented a technical adjustment, put in action particularly by the Modenese Inquisition, which prosecuted practising Jews under the umbrella terms of bestemmia or bestemmia hereticale. But to place this initiative in its proper perspective, it is necessary to consider how the papacy modified the terms to give the Inquisition jurisdiction over simple blasphemy.
In medieval times, popes had authorized individual Inquisitors to prosecute offenders of heretical blasphemy. From the end of the fifteenth century, in Spain and in the Italian peninsula, trial proceedings for simple blasphemy as well as heretical blasphemy began to be conducted through Inquisitorial tribunals. Old Christians were brought before the Spanish Inquisition for committing blasphemy, for ignorant outbursts against the faith, for superstitious beliefs and for loose moral behaviour. The Inquisitor's manual *Repertorium inquisitorum*, published in 1494 in Valencia, stated that those who cursed God or the Virgin were guilty of blasphemy but were not heretics if they did not query articles of faith. It was here declared that such cases should be prosecuted by civil courts, a clear suggestion that the Inquisitors were uncomfortable with the blurring of the definition of *bestemmia hereticale*. The Inquisition argued that it was only when the blasphemer attacked articles of faith that he or she could be accused of heretical blasphemy and therefore fall into the hands of the tribunal.

Given this clear categorization in Spain, even after the Council of Trent, and Pope Pius V's decree in 1564 that blasphemers should be punished by public beating, exile, galley work and piercing of the tongue, jurisdiction over casual offenders did not normally fall into the hands of the Holy Office in Italy. In Venice, for example, only cases of *bestemmia hereticale* fell under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition, while unintentional simple blasphemy was dealt with by civic magistrates and eventually the *Esecutori*. In Modena, the Holy Office insisted that its jurisdiction covered various forms of blasphemy, but also the more serious crime of heretical blasphemy. It pursued the offence vigorously and prosecuted offenders, arguing that many commonplace expletives had heretical implications, even though suspects who used them probably did not realize this. At the same time, there were often disputes with the secular courts over which authority should judge both types of blasphemy. In the case of Curzio Azzi di Ferrara, the Duke's *capitano delle lance spezzate*, who in 1600 was accused of heretical blasphemy, the Duke ordered that he be brought before the *Giudici del Maleficio* since he argued that heretical blasphemy was relevant to the Holy Office only if the blasphemer had already received a warning or blasphemed habitually. In 1609 the Congregation of the Holy Office ordered the Inquisition to proceed and prosecute the captain anew for this offence. By 1621, the Inquisition's jurisdiction over simple blasphemy was still unclear. When an inhabitant of Camporeggiano Garfagnana was denounced to the Holy Office, the Podestà of the town argued that since the accusation was that he had cursed in a moment of anger and not committed heretical blasphemy, the offence should be judged by him and not the Inquisition.

Despite the confusion, the 1607 Inquisitorial manual of Michelangelo Lerri had tried to create a comprehensive definition of heretical blasphemers:
A STUDY OF JEWISH OFFENCES

those who deny the titles given to God, those who deny God's omnipotence, saying 'in defiance of God', 'God's a traitor', 'God is unfair'... saying 'God does not trouble himself about those little things' or similar words ... saying 'Whore of God' or similar things; those who say words against the perpetual virginity of the most blessed Virgin such as whore of Our Lord or her holy motherhood; those who say words against the Holy Church and the most Holy Sacraments, like 'I deny baptism', 'I deny the faith', and against the glory of the canonized saints.  

It was in this area that Jews were prosecuted for bestemmia hereticale, despite the fact that the definition was inappropriate. Even though Jews could attack God, if they casually blasphemed Christianity they could be canonically accused only of using impious speech, or insult and not heresy. Tellingly, in 1550 the Udinese jurist Marquardus de Susannis wrote in his De Iudaeis et Alis Infidelibus, that Jews were not to be allowed to insult Christianity, but earlier in the medieval period Jews had been subject to the Inquisition only if they actually blasphemed against Christianity or belief in God in their writings or prayers. Yet in the 1581 Papal bull Antiqua iudaeorum improbitas, Clause Five stated that Jews were to be punished if they:

should suggest that our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ was an impure man, or even a sinner, or that the mother of God was not a virgin, and other blasphemies of this sort, which heretics are accustomed to utter, to the shame, contempt and corruption of the Christian faith.

The bull linked Jews and heretics together as potential offenders. This in many ways foreshadowed the Consultations canonicae of the canonist Giacomo Pignatelli (1625–98), a text which labelled Jews as heretics in certain cases, for the convenience of prosecuting them:

Although Jews are really infidels and not to be described as heretics, since one who is not baptized cannot be called a heretic nor can anyone who has never been in the church's bosom be said to be divided from it, it cannot be denied that they [the Jews] can however incorrectly be called heretics and punished just as heretics are. It follows that although Inquisitors have no jurisdiction over Jews, like infidels in so far as they are such, they can be treated as heretics in certain cases.

With this in mind, the association of Jews with the offence of bestemmia hereticale seems less radical, almost a natural 'assimilation' as Marina Caffiero suggests, allowing the inclusion of Jews in the Inquisition's jurisdiction. The Inquisition published its own edict in July 1600, which called upon Modenese inhabitants to denounce to the Inquisition anyone who was heard profanely cursing. This demonstrated its assumption that Jews should be just as liable as Christians to prosecution for this offence. Congregants were told to report to the Inquisition:
If they know of anyone (even a Jew who lives among Christians) who has profanely cursed against Christ the True Messiah and Redeemer of the World, or against his most holy Mother Mary the Virgin, the Apostles, and other heavenly saints, the most holy sacraments, the holy gospel, the most holy Cross or the sacred images and ceremonies of the Holy Church, in disrespect or insult to the Holy Faith.

Other edicts denouncing profane cursing (used here as a blanket term which included both ‘simple’ and ‘heretical’ blasphemy) were published in 1601, 1608 and 1622, but in these Jews were not specifically named as possible suspects.

As a result of the 1600 edict, many spontaneous denunciations for simple blasphemy were made to the Inquisition at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Among the offences of which Jews were accused between 1598 and 1638, the second most frequent was verbal offences including bestemmia and bestemmia hereticale. There were 22 processi of Jews in these years. It is interesting to note that in 1602–03, during an intensive period of blasphemy trials for which Archangelo Calbetti was responsible, there were five processi of Jews for profane cursing, the highest number of processi per year recorded between 1598 and 1638. Three of these processi are described in this chapter. They represent three types of cases which recur at intervals throughout our forty-year period—that is, simple blasphemy (mindless disrespect for sacred beings or things), heretical blasphemy (conscious insults to God or attacks on articles of Christian faith), and abuse of neophytes or Jews on the margins of society. They are good illustrations of the ways in which the Inquisition handled evidence, and of the ways in which delators appeared to be trying to use the Inquisition to settle personal scores.

As the research of Ronald Surtz suggests, and as our statistics confirm, heretical blasphemy was mainly a male habit, since of the 22 processi only two were directed against Jewish women, in 1603 and 1612. The words and actions of men were far more visible on the piazze. In 1603 Bellina Formiggini was accused of speaking against Christ ‘like a man’ in the tavern which her husband owned. Denounced by a fellow Jew on 25 October, she faced imprisonment during her trial and was then sentenced on 16 May 1604 to public shaming. In 1612, Laudomia, the wife of Abraham Paselli, was accused of saying Puttana di Dio (whore of God), when arguing with another Jewish girl, and abusing the brother of the girl for converting and becoming a renegade dog. Laudomia was whipped in the Jews’ street where she had committed her offence.

Jews were given a variety of punishments for this offence, including public whipping in the piazza, exile for one year, public shamings at the church door, and fines of 50–200 scudi. Table 3 shows the number of processi of Jewish and Christian men and women accused of verbal offences between 1598 and 1638. Of the total of 908 processi only twenty-two (2.4% of the total number) were of Jews.
Table 3 Processi 1598–1638

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Note: ASMoFIP 44 has 1614–1615 trials together in one busta.
The three processi studied below, although quite different from each other, have several points in common. They suggest the degree to which poor Jews in Modena, as opposed to the wealthier classes, adopted the language of their Christian neighbours and provide a commentary on the social conflict produced by their public behaviour. Delators, suspects and witnesses all knew each other and came from the same social classes. From a broader perspective they also uncover the problems facing these types of Jews as a religious minority and the enforcement of Inquisitorial prosecution which targeted them for these offences. The work of Federica Francesconi has confirmed the sharp increase in the presence of poor Jews in Modena at the beginning of the seventeenth century, enforcing a change in policy and attitude of the wealthy Jewish families towards those in their community who were needy. In 1607 the house and synagogue of the Poveri was established in Via dei Trivellari, which enabled the Jewish poor to receive licences (in Hebrew) to beg; it also set up specific Jewish trustees, who were placed in charge of their welfare.

The three trials are not presented chronologically, since certain themes demand that the first and third trials be grouped together. The first processo begins with a denunciation by an Inquisitorial spy who overheard Abraamo de Abramino uttering profane curses in the street. Abraamo was tried and convicted of bestemmia. In the other two trials, Jews accused fellow Jews of bestemmia heretica and ingiurie before the Inquisition. The Jewish suspects were imprisoned during their trial, but not convicted. In the third trial, one Jew was prosecuted and imprisoned for cursing a neophyte and another two for verbally insulting a Jewish prostitute who had given up her child to be baptized. The trial proceedings were discontinued. The latter two proceedings suggest that the Modenese Inquisition was a tribunal to which Jews, on occasion, had recourse against fellow religionists. The various relations between the protagonists as portrayed in their testimonies provide an interesting extra dimension.

The three processi

The first processo

Charge: Abraamo de Abramino de Camerini, cursed, using the words, ‘Puttana di Dio’ and ‘Puttana di Malachi’.

Scene: The piazza in the Jewish area, July 1603.


Accused: Abraamo de Abramino.

On 10 July 1607, Domenico Manfredino appeared before Archangelo Calbetti, the Inquisitor General, to present a carefully organized denunciation of Abraamo de Abramino, a fifty-year-old Jewish mattress-maker. He informed the Inquisitor General that on that specific day not only had de Abramino said ‘Puttana di Dio’ (Whore of God), but he had also heard the Jew utter a Judeo-Italian expression, Puttana di Malachi (Whore of angels) – malachi being a Hebrew word. Although he had heard this expression before, Manfredino only now realized that it was a profane curse. He did not state how he had found out about the meaning of the word, but only provided the names of two Christian witnesses. When Hippolito Barozzi, the first Christian witness, testified, he confirmed that de Abramino was often irritable and choleric, getting into a temper and blasphemy with both Puttana di Dio and Puttana di Malachi. The second witness, Vitalis Maconai, a Jew, also confirmed de Abramino’s habit of blaspheming, which he said was often done in front of his house and family. Calbetti, satisfied that he had two witness testimonies that confirmed the offence, ordered de Abramino to be imprisoned and brought to trial. On 11 and 13 July, de Abramino was summoned for interrogation from his prison cell but refused to confess. Calbetti, keen to have further confirmation of de Abramino’s offence and perhaps uncomfortable that one of his witnesses had been Jewish, decided to interrogate another Christian witness, Dionisio, son of Andrea de Nonantula, who worked closely with de Abramino. When asked if he had ever heard de Abramino curse, he replied:

No sir. On the contrary, when he was accused before the Giudici del Maleficio, I was astonished, because I have never heard him blaspheme. Maybe he did blaspheme, but I know nothing of it.

When de Abramino was brought for his third interrogation, he still refused to confess, rejected legal counsel and threw himself on the mercy of the Inquisition. The Inquisitorial council which sat to discuss his case unanimously decided that de Abramino should be publicly whipped in the piazza. That he was to be whipped rather than fined indicates that he could not afford to pay. Whipping was administered in a piazza on 15 July 1603 by Domenico Manfredino, although it is not clear from the dossier if it was done in the Jewish area where he lived, to humiliate him in front of his neighbours.

Calbetti was able to prosecute, sentence and punish de Abramino quickly. The fact that the Jew continually refuted the charges did not delay the sentencing. The trial was concluded in five days, from the denunciation on 10 July 1603 to the administering of de Abramino’s punishment on 15 July. It reveals that Calbetti considered profane cursing (irrespective of whether Jews or Christians had committed the crime) as a mindless act of disrespect. The suspect was seen not as a dangerous heretical blasphemer – even though, given the words he used he could have been charged with heretical blasphemy – but as an individual who had been caught cursing in public and needed to be silenced. In fact, this trial
bears a strong resemblance to trials against Christians such as Joannes Dominico Ferrara de Gaiato,45 Bonetti di Nonantula,46 Joanne Jacobo Terreno Carbonario and Torquanto Benvenuto de Fanano,47 who were all accused in 1627 of cursing with the words *Puttana di Dio* and sentenced to be whipped in the *piazza*. The Inquisition was using the offence as a means to control Jewish behaviour as much as Christian.

It is not clear if there was antagonism between de Abramino and the witnesses. De Abramino fails to show any aggression towards them in his interrogation, and they hide any hints of antagonism towards de Abramino. Yet de Nonantula’s testimony is more revealing. Of all the witnesses he had the most contact with the suspect, but he testified without restraint that he had never heard the Jew blaspheme, clearly refusing to incriminate him.

De Abramino was evidently one of the less fortunate individuals who ended up being punished for saying what he and others – both Jews and Christians – often said with impunity. Alain Cabantous has shown how blasphemous words and expressions were very much part of colloquial language. They ‘punctuated sentences, added flourish to the end of dialogues, lent punch to convictions in a way that reflected medieval Christianity’s venerable and customary confusion between profane and sacred’.

Surely, it was more a question of who would report the careless talk of others to air their own aggression towards them in court?

Nor was *Puttana di Dio* a profane curse that de Abramino had fabricated. It was one of the most common curses in early modern Italy, which by its very frequent usage had clearly lost its shock value.49 In the trials against Christians for *bestemmia hereticale* conducted by the Inquisition in the year 1601, this was the most frequent curse uttered.50 Furthermore, 90% of the Jews accused of *bestemmia hereticale* between 1598 and 1638 were accused of using it. That Jews adopted expressions spoken by Christians was natural. They heard Christians swearing not only in the streets, but also in shops, taverns and particularly gaming halls, places which Jews frequented just as much as Christians.51 The Judeo-Italian term *Puttana di Malachi* suggests that Jews copied common curses as well as creating their own, allowing them to share a context of verbal exchange that could express their own outrage, shock and frustration, confirming too a level of their acculturation to Christian society. One Christian witness – Laura, the daughter of Petro Engoni – told the Inquisitor in a *processo* against the Jews Abramo Pasillo and Bellina Formigine for blasphemy in 1603 that although she heard Jews blaspheme in Hebrew, she had come to understand these curses, after many years of hearing the language.
A Study of Jewish Offences

The second processo


Scene: The Egg Market, October 1602.


Delator: Angelo de Thodeschi – Jewish delator.

Witnesses: Camillo de Thodeschi, Angelo’s son – a Jew; Bastiano Barado – a Christian; Leone de Thodeschi – a Jew, Abramino Sacerdote’s shop assistant; Lorenzo de Mirandola – a Christian.

This dossier contains the first processo of a Jew accused of bestemmia hereticale after the establishment of the Modenese Inquisition in 1598. But there was no real difference between this type of offence and its prosecution and bestemmia, the offence listed in other blasphemy processi. On 16 October 1602, an illiterate Jew, Angelo de Thodeschi, whose profession remains unknown, appeared before Calbetti of his own accord to denounce a fellow Jew, Abramino Sacerdote, for profane curses that he had uttered a month earlier in public. Sacerdote was a forty-year-old shopkeeper dealing in second-hand clothing. De Thodeschi produced a calculated and well thought-out delation; he testified:

Your Reverence should know that a month ago, I was outside the shop of Abramino Sacerdote, which is situated opposite the shop of the Lombard in the Egg Market. I heard Abramino get into an argument with another Jew called Leone de Thodeschi, because they had a difference of opinion over the sale of a cloak that Leone had reserved for Monaco. Leone wanted to make Abramino give it to him. But they did not agree at the time, and on this occasion Leone wanted one price and Abramino another and they shouted at each other. Abramino in anger said a few times, ‘God’s Whore’, ‘in defiance of God’, and ‘God’s a layabout’.

Regarding witnesses, de Thodeschi replied that Leone de Thodeschi (not necessarily a relative of his) should be called, as well as his own son Camillo, whose cloak was being sold to Sacerdote at the time of the offence, and another two Christians, Bastiano Barado and Lorenzo de Mirandola, who were nearby.

Ten days later, Calbetti interrogated de Thodeschi’s son Camillo before he examined the Christian witnesses, an unusual act that suggests that Calbetti thought that Camillo de Thodeschi, as the son of the delator, would be able to endorse his father’s delation and confirm Sacerdote’s cursing. However, Camillo did not provide any such evidence. His refusal to testify against Sacerdote is revealing. Either he did not witness the blasphemy or he refused to be involved in the petty squabbles of his father, even though his father had named him as a witness. Calbetti asked de Thodeschi if there were any other witnesses. He
replied that Leone de Thodeschi, Abramino’s assistant, was the only one he could remember being present at that time.

When the two Christian witnesses, Bastiano Barado and Lorenzo de Mirandola, were called to give testimony on 28 October, neither provided evidence of Sacerdote’s blaspheming. Without any further Christian witnesses to rely upon, and confident perhaps that an interrogation of Sacerdote’s assistant Leone de Thodeschi would not bring new information against Sacerdote, the Inquisitor dropped the investigation. Yet two months later he reopened it with renewed enthusiasm, imprisoned Sacerdote, and carefully developed the proceedings into a formal trial even though he had no witness testimony. His reason for resuming the case was recorded at the end of the dossier, when he confirmed that he had believed that Sacerdote had shown obstinacy and intransigence, which he interpreted as guilt, even though at this stage the Jew had not been interrogated:

You always denied that you had ever in your life uttered any sort of blasphemous expression and in particular that which was testified – such words as *Puttana di Dio*, *Al dispetto di Dio*, and *Dio Poltrone*. We noted your stubbornness, and your denial of the truth, and wanted to proceed further with your case.58

Sacerdote was kept in prison for nine days from 17 to 26 January 1603. Calbetti interrogated Sacerdote four times, on 18, 20, 21 and 23 January. These were short interrogations in which Sacerdote, although admitting that he had enemies who were probably eager to denounce him, kept calm and denied cursing.59 When asked who these were, he named a Christian, Vincenzo Cavasse, and one Giacinto, a neophyte, as well as Giacinto’s daughter Laura, a Jewess. Calbetti told Sacerdote that he did not believe that he was speaking the truth.

In the second interrogation, Calbetti referred to the supposed argument Sacerdote had had with Thodeschi. Sacerdote testified that he did not remember the argument nor what it was about, and suggested that Calbetti interrogate Leone de Thodeschi, his assistant, or Domenico Monaco, who owned the cloak, to prove to Calbetti that he had not cursed. Sacerdote was clearly confident that de Thodeschi and Monaco would not testify against him. Calbetti acted upon part of Sacerdote’s suggestion. On the following day, Leone de Thodeschi was interrogated but refused to admit that Sacerdote had even shouted, let alone cursed on this occasion.60 In an interrogation on 23 January, Calbetti accused Sacerdote of foolishness and tried again to make him confess. Sacerdote maintained his own defence:

I do not want to add anything. I know that I did not curse even though at times I have said, ‘stupid me’ [*puttana di mio*], and this perhaps has been misinterpreted by others as *Puttana di Dio*.61

As may be imagined, suspects often pleaded that they had said something slightly different from the blasphemous words they were accused of.62 On 23 January,
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during a council meeting held to discuss Sacerdote’s case, in the presence of eight Inquisitorial consultants, Fra Serafino argued that the case should be dropped since there was no hard proof of bestemmia hereticale. Two of the legal doctors, Domino Castalutio and Alfonso Lovolo, agreed with him. However, all the other five decided that Sacerdote should be tortured in a final attempt to make him confess. This readiness to endorse torture as the last resort appears frequently during Calbetti’s generalship. On 25 January, Sacerdote was tortured, and his arms and body were tied to a rack. Once the cords were tied around his body, the notary recorded his cries: ‘Oh my God, Oh my God, I am not able to say anything else. I have told the truth.’ Sacerdote remained tied to the rack for eight minutes according to the notary’s record. Since Sacerdote had withstood the torture without confessing, Calbetti had no choice but to acquit him and set him free. Accordingly, on 25 January 1603 Sacerdote was officially absolved and released from prison, once he had heard an extensive explanation from the Inquisitor regarding the Inquisitorial procedure in his case. Here the latter hints at his disappointment that he had not extracted a confession from Sacerdote. The notary read the following declaration:

You Abramino, son of the late Emmanuele Sacerdote, Jew from Cremona of around forty years old, were denounced to this Holy Office for having cursed using serious bestemmia hereticale. We considered that through the authority that we have by the Holy Apostolic See, we ought not to permit Jews to commit errors in matters common to Christians and to them and in particular by resorting to blasphemy … We therefore resolved to imprison you in the prison of the Holy Office, where you were held by us and canonically examined many times. You always denied that you had ever in your life uttered any sort of blasphemous expression and in particular that which was testified — such words as Puttana di Dio, Al dispetto di Dio and Dio Poltrone. We seeing your stubbornness, and your denying the truth, wanted to proceed further in your case. After we had offered you the chance to defend yourself, which you refused, you put yourself in the hands of the Holy Office. We discussed your case with our ordinary council of priests in Sacred Theology, who resolved that you ought to be tortured, to make you speak the truth. Torture was administered by us but did not result in any new information … We have decided to come to the judgement set out below.

… You Abramino Sacerdote, Jew interrogated and tried on another occasion, have been arraigned before us in this place, and at the time chosen and assigned for you to hear this our decision. We say that we are not sentencing you. We declare that in the course of proceedings against you, nothing has been proven before us for which you could be punished, according to the laws and procedures of the Inquisition. We free you, absolve you and unconditionally release you.

The Inquisitor General Calbetti had tried hard to convict Sacerdote of the kind of offence that was galling, a transgression against the type of ‘disciplined’ Catholic
community that was so important for churchmen of this epoch, but yet again the attempt of the Inquisitor General to extract a confession of blasphemy was foiled. Legal restraints were real and observed by the court, despite a minor irregularity, that of Calbetti ignoring the need for two witness testimonies to ensure Sacerdote’s arrest.

Richard Kieckhefer has observed in his study of witchcraft trials that the Papal Inquisition was often used by neighbours, spurned lovers or disgruntled workers to denounce those with whom they had vindictive or petty squabbles.\(^67\) There is a background here of some hidden antagonism or deep internal dispute between the two Jews Thodeschi and Sacerdote. Thodeschi did not appear before the Inquisitor until 16 October 1602 to report Sacerdote’s cursing close to a full month earlier, in contrast to other trials where suspects were often denounced immediately.\(^68\) Furthermore, Camillo de Thodeschi and Leone de Thodeschi, who supposedly witnessed the cursing, refused to be involved in the incrimination of Sacerdote. When the two Christian witnesses presented their testimony, neither could nor would testify openly against the Jew. It is doubtful then that Thodeschi had collaborated with the Christians, or believed that they would testify in his favour against Sacerdote. Moreover, the fact that Sacerdote did not include Thodeschi in his list of enemies questions the deep-seated nature of any argument between them. Perhaps there was some sort of personal grievance on Thodeschi’s part or a quarrel over money?

Perhaps, too, Thodeschi was a marginalized Jew who held grievances against many of his co-religionists. He willingly delated fellow Jews to the Holy Office on two other occasions. On 6 November 1602, he had denounced Salvatore Formiggini, Jacobo Calabri, Angelo Stramazor and Emanuele Maroni for blasphemying while they were gambling in a tavern, which led to their torture during investigation and punishment of public shaming.\(^69\) On 21 November 1605, Thodeschi delated two other Jews, Joseph Benedi and Jacobo Elias, for blasphemy, but they were absolved.\(^70\)

Although the emotions and instincts of the suspect and delator remain inaccessible the question remains why a Jew would decide to denounce another Jew to the Holy Office. Thodeschi’s appearance before the Inquisition was always recorded as ‘spontaneous’ but this might well have hidden his need to denounce others either for his own gratification or because he had agreed to spy for the Inquisition. In Thodeschi’s case, unruly verbal exchanges could have been stylized into blasphemy to ridicule an opponent. But Thodeschi in general was not to be trusted, as the Inquisition discovered in August 1603 when Thodeschi was prosecuted and imprisoned for providing false information to the Inquisition, in his efforts to receive alms from the Jewish community.\(^71\) He was sentenced to a public shaming for damaging the reputation of the Inquisition, choosing it seems not to delate before the court again.\(^72\)
Thodeschi was not alone. It seems that at the beginning of the seventeenth century, as soon as Jews became potential offenders, certain Jews decided to use this ecclesiastical court to air personal grievances against their co-religionists. In 1603 a Jew Santorio accused Catchigia before the Modenese Inquisition of profanely cursing a neophyte and Abramino [no surname] and his daughter Esther of insulting a Jewish prostitute. \(^73\) Investigations were discontinued. Later in the same year, in a processo against Abramo Pasillo and Bellina Formigine for blasphemy, Santorio denounced Bellina, accusing her of uttering Puttana di Dio and Al dispetto Dio. Bellina was found guilty and sentenced to a public shaming. In August 1617, Michele Sanguinetti, a 37-year-old Jew, delated before Inquisitor General Massimo Guazzoni on two occasions, on 9 and 16 August, attacking in particular the elitist and wealthy bankers of the duchy, carrying on what seems to have been a personal vendetta against them. \(^74\) His first delation was against Simone Sanguinetti of Spilamberto, who he argued had broken a crucifix in front of him and his conspirators, Giuseppe Pontasso and Abramo the son of Calman de Sanguinetti, when they had gone to pledge money at his bank. \(^75\) These Jews were accused during a spontaneous appearance of the neophyte Doctor Camillo Jaghel da Correggio on 16 August 1617 of most wicked infamy, considered as evil spies, throughout the whole city, more so by Jews than Christians. \(^76\)

Spaccini even mentions the Jews’ deception in his chronicle, exaggerating the story somewhat, but shocked at the same time that Jews would so openly trick their own kind. \(^77\) Michele Sanguinetti’s second fabricated delation involved Pellegrino Sanguinetti, Davide Diena, Benedetta wife of Davide and Anna, the mother of Benedetta Diena, for dissuasion of baptism. \(^78\) The Inquisitor handed these conspirators over to the secular arm but it is unclear what punishment they received. \(^79\) Was this perhaps the same Michele Sanguinetti who in October 1634 contemplated conversion himself? \(^80\)

In 1627, Salomon Civita denounced Simone Sanguinetti for allowing his Christian servant to enter the synagogue on three occasions on the same morning to carry three of Sanguinetti’s children into the middle of the synagogue, which he said shocked the surrounding community. \(^81\) Whether Civita meant that it was shocking according to canon or Jewish law, that a Christian had walked into a synagogue during offices, he perhaps intentionally left ambiguous in his delation, ‘because in our synagogue under no pretext can a Christian enter’. \(^82\) Sanguinetti and his wife, although imprisoned during the investigation, were let off with a warning. In 1633, the Jew Lazarro Levi accused Rabbi Abraham Belgrado of using sorcery to cure him of an illness the previous year. The Rabbi was incarcerated for a month as a punishment. \(^83\)

Of the sixteen proceedings between 1598 and 1638 that were initiated by Jewish delators, only six ended in the conviction of the Jewish suspects. Jewish delators did not, it seems, always structure their accusations according to the
categorization of violations and offences listed by the Inquisition. In 1627, Abraham Sanguinetti, perhaps out of despair of being heard, had delated Isaaco Sanguinetti for taking a ring that belonged to him.84

The fact that Jewish delators denounced co-religionists, often on more than one occasion, is important.85 Their denunciations reveal instances in the Jewish community of altercations, brawls, verbal insults or vicious quarrels.86 To go outside the community, to resort to the Holy Office, was a potentially dangerous act that could cause difficulties for the community and indicates that Jewish courts of arbitration or the welfare schemes of the Università were not meeting the needs of individual Jews.87 Resort to ecclesiastical courts generally signified the Jewish delators’ considerable anger or the like, and no doubt people sometimes preferred self-interest to the interest of the larger community.88 Was this not then, as Caffiero suggests, a collaboration between ecclesiastical courts and individual Jews that bypassed the official autonomies of both communities, providing on the one hand a source for individual Jews to publicize their grievances, and on the other a chance for the Holy Office to investigate Jewish offences from the inside?89 It is not clear whether these events were isolated and unusual, or whether marginal Jews were systematically attempting to use external tribunals, outside the community, as ‘a sly substitute for personal violence’, as Brian Pullan suggests.90 The Jewish delator had the potential to bring imprisonment, torture, shame and dishonour upon his co-religionist.

There are also examples of Jews denouncing other Jews before the Holy Office in other Italian cities. Carla Boccato has described an Inquisitorial case in Verona in November 1590, in which a Jew, Matio Bassani, denounced six other Jews to the local Inquisition for persuading several neophytes to return to Judaism.91 Mauro Perani found a case in November 1661, where Leone del Bene, a rabbi living in the ghetto of Ferrara, appeared before the Ferrarese Inquisitor spontaneously to denounce certain Jews of Finale for possessing prohibited Hebrew books.92 One should not then take the words of Leone del Bene, a Jewish witness who indicted Salvatore Formiggini, Jacobo Calabri, Angelo Stramazor, and Emanuele Maroni for blasphemy in 1602 too seriously, when he affirmed that he harboured no hatred or enmity towards the suspects, and insisted instead that these Jews were his friends and relatives. But he told the Inquisitor: ‘I love the truth more than my friends.’93

The third processo94

Charges: Two accusations of ingiuria:
(a) Abramino [no surname] and his daughter Esther, were accused of insulting Hester Thodesca, a Jewish prostitute, with the term Meshumad (apostate);
(b) Catchiglia, a Jewish shoemaker, was accused of calling Giacintho, a neophyte, a Meshumad cano (renegade dog).
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Scene: Piazzetta dei Servi, October 1603.

Accused: Abramino and his daughter Esther; Catchigia, a Jewish shoemaker.

Delator: Santorio, a Jew.

Witnesses: Hester Thodesca – a Jewish prostitute; Giacintho de Bentivoli – a neophyte; Jacobo Monchino – a Christian; Francesca Diega – a Christian.

This is a transcript not of a full trial, but of an investigation in the course of which three Jews were interrogated and imprisoned for a week. The only link between the two charges is the type of accusation (ingiuria) and, in particular, the use of the term Meshumad. Catchigia was charged with bestemmia heretical and Abramino and Esther with insult. The Inquisitor went back and forth between the two cases and the transcript is frustrating because of this. Here the two stories will be told and analysed separately rather than in the precise order of the text. All the suspects were released without sentencing on 5 December 1603 and matters came to an end.

The first altercation

This processo is one of the very many examples recorded in the archives of verbal conflicts which concerned honour and superiority. These conflicts drew on common linguistic and social knowledge for purposes of provocation, alienation and the defining of social or cultural marginals, as nuisances and disruptive elements in society. The altercation pitting Hester Thodesca against Abramino and his daughter is complex and somewhat unusual, but it also gives vivid testimony to the religious uncertainty in Modena of many at this time who lived on the borders of Judaism and Christianity, the economic and psychological pressures they faced to convert and the unhinging implications it brought to relationships with co-religionists and the wider Jewish community.

On 28 October 1603, a Jew, Santorio, appeared before the vicar of the Inquisition in Modena to denounce two incidents, which he recounted. The first:

Around eight or nine days ago, I was in the Piazzetta dei Servi in Modena and I heard a quarrel between a young Jewess Esther, daughter of Abramino, who was imprisoned by the Holy Office on another occasion, and another Jewess called Hester Thodesca, who lives in the district of San Giorgio, concerning a daughter that she, the said Hester Thodesca, had given to be baptized. Among other words Esther, the daughter of Abramino, said publicly to this Hester Thodesca, shouting – ‘go and give your other girl to be made a Christian, go and sell the others as you did the first’, and she insulted her with the word Meshumad, which implies a Christian or a ‘damned soul’. Present were Jacobo Monchino at the corner of the Piazzetta dei Servi and one Francesca Diega. Hester Thodesca told me herself that the father of Esther, that is Abramino, had spoken similar words to her this summer.
The Inquisitor asked Santorio if he had other incidents to report. The delator did not answer with yes or no, but replied with the comment: ‘I do not do this because of ill will, but because I promised the Father Inquisitor that I would do it.’ Santorio’s statement suggests that either the Inquisition were paying him as a spy or he had been warned to report others after a reprimand by an Inquisitorial spy or famigliare. When Jacobo Monchino was interrogated the next day, he provided more information on the quarrel:

I heard in particular what Esther said to that Todeschina. She said these words. ‘Go and sell your other child as you did with the one you sold in Ferrara’, and La Todeschina replied to her, ‘I will make you eat your words’. This event occurred around twelve days ago, and there were many people present and we did not think it was necessary to tell your Reverence, because we did not give it much consideration.

Hester’s nickname, La Todeschina (the little Ashkenazi woman), was by no means particularly offensive, nor did it refer to her profession as a prostitute, but remained elusive. When on 30 October, Hester Thodesca was summoned, she seemed well prepared and ready to redress the insult she had received. She elaborated:

I guess I have been summoned because I had frequent arguments with one Abramino, a Jew who lives next door to me. He said all kinds of nasty things but mostly I considered it insulting and offensive when he said at the top of his voice: ‘Go and sell your other daughter as you have sold the first’. He said to me that I was worse than a Meshumad, because I had sold my own child. On Saturday, eight days ago, it was his daughter who said to me similar words, and over and over again she has said these words.

She gave the vicar the names of two Christians who, she said, had heard these words. One was Hippolito Barozzi, the vendor of brandy to the Jews, and the other Francesca Diega, whom Santorio reported in his delation. Hester Thodesca then added:

Sometimes many people were present, which caused me much embarrassment … I remember also that Abramino and his daughter Esther have said to me, bullying me, ‘You have a daughter Sarza, are you also going to give her to Christians?’ What do they want from me? I did not give the child to Turks, nor to Marranos, but I have given her to good Christians, and they said to me, ‘You did this and it shows the type of person you are’. I confess the truth, that I would willingly have also given the child that I still have to Christians, but I did not have the spirit to put up with more insults of the kind I have suffered for the last four years.

Hester’s argument did not really make sense. If she was already being insulted for giving her first child to Christians, it would hardly make a difference if she gave the second one away.
Hester could not provide specific times and places where such insults had been uttered. On 28 October, two days earlier, Abramino and his daughter Esther had been imprisoned. Their arrest was carried out before Hester Thodesca’s interrogation, which was again a slightly irregular move on the part of the Inquisition, which usually chose to imprison defendants after sufficient witness testimonies confirmed the offence. At her first interrogation, Esther was asked what she knew of the term MESHUMAD. She answered: ‘It is used by people outside one’s family both by Jews and by Christians, and people say it by way of provocation.’ When the Inquisitor informed Esther that she was accused of saying such words to a ‘Jewess who gave her daughter to Christians in Ferrara’, Esther initially denied this. She then answered:

I will tell you the truth, Father. On a day past, I do not remember when, I was at my window talking with Stella de Graziano and at the tavern of Christians, there was a young woman, called Hester who comes from so many places that no one can really say where she is from. But she is from somewhere and everywhere in Germany. I don’t know why she did it but she began to call me a layabout, a jealous cow, a streak of piss, a lousy bitch, and all sorts of rude things, and among other things she taunted me, ‘Look how your brother and sister are faring since they became Christians.’

This seems to imply that Esther was a fine one to talk, because there were converts in her family too. The Inquisitor then asked Esther what she knew of Hester Thodesca. She answered: ‘Sir, she is not an honest person and you should speak to someone else, not to me, rather than that I should say things to her discredit.’

The Inquisitor then turned to the subject of Hester Thodesca’s children. Esther said that she did not know how many children Hester Thodesca had. The Inquisitor began to lose his patience, questioning her ‘shameful and dishonourable insults’. Esther answered, with clear indication of aggression towards the prostitute: ‘I told her to mind her own business and that I did not want to get involved talking to her, since she was a whore.’

When Abramino was interrogated by the Inquisitorial vicar on the same day, the vicar asked if he knew of any Jewish woman who had given a child to Christians. Abramino answered:

It is said throughout Modena, that this Thodesca gave a daughter to Christians in Ferrara, and that she sold her in order that the child might become a Christian.

On 3 November, Abramino was brought forward for his second interrogation. Showing greater readiness to cooperate, he began:

I will tell you exactly what happened. One day, Hester the German whore had a row with my wife using every kind of insult as she called her Big Teeth, Fatty, Lousy, Shit, and saying that she had put two children to death. In the surround-
ings of the house, I was told of this, and as I was at the door of my house, I heard her also before that tavern of Christians, saying dishonest words, and idling with other prostitutes. I said to Hester, ‘Is this the way to speak? Where are the children? Let it alone.’111

Abramino denied ever saying insulting words to Hester Thodesca, despite the repeated questions of the vicar. On 5 November, a Christian witness, Francesca Diega, who was named as a witness by both Santorio and Hester Thodesca in their testimonies, provided important testimony:

During the past month I was present when some words were said by a German Jewish prostitute to Abramino the Jew when Abramino was coming from the synagogue. The said Jewess met him and said to him, Abramino, tell your daughter to leave me alone. Otherwise she will make me do something crazy. Every day she does nothing but remind me that I gave my daughter to Christians. If I gave her away, I gave her to the Lord, and if I wanted to become a Christian myself, who would stop me?’ The said Abramino did not say anything, and after hearing this he left without saying anything.112

Diega was then asked if she had ever heard Esther herself condemn Hester Thodesca for giving her child to Christians. She said no. Nor could she provide witnesses who had heard either Abramino or Esther say such words. When Esther was called to her second interrogation, she was reminded that she was accused of saying Meshumad. She replied:

Sir, I do not know what else to say. I did not insult her, nor say Meshumad, nor those other words about selling her child. She is a damned liar. She was expelled from Rome. She just wants to cause trouble for everyone.113

Esther was then told that her father, who had spoken truthfully to the Inquisitor, had already been freed, although there is no mention of this in the transcript. The Inquisitor tried a few more times to persuade her to confess but she refused. At this point the notary recorded that the examination was concluded. These words are in fact the last words recorded in the transcript of the trial. On the front cover, under a description of the offence, the word ‘incompletus’ indicates that the trial was discontinued.

Abramino’s and Esther’s trial could have evolved into an investigation of a much more serious offence, hinging on the charge that the two Jews had attempted to block the baptism of Hester Thodesca’s second child.114 The Inquisitor and vicar tried to find out exactly what insulting words Abramino and Esther had said to the prostitute and whether they had harassed her for wanting to baptize her child, but the two Jews refuted the charges. Nor could the Inquisition find witnesses who could confirm that Abramino or Esther had used the term Meshumad against Hester Thodesca. Once Calbetti had interrogated Francesca Diega, whom Hester had named as a witness and who represented
Hester as the aggressor instead of the victim, he dropped the case and released the defendants.

Hester’s marginality – due to her low class, profession and decision to baptize her first child – seemed to be the source of continuous friction between her and her Jewish neighbours. In general, the Università took care of Jewish children born out of wedlock, and the massari would, as Euride Fregni indicates, attempt to find the father, and make him admit paternity and pay the midwife. In a similar case in Venice, the Jewish community did all it could to prevent the baptism of an abandoned illegitimate child. But Hester Thodesca seems not to have taken advantage of these options, but had as she testified given her daughter to ‘good Christians’. This meant that the child, who would have immediately been baptized upon receipt, had been given to ecclesiastical authorities and relocated in a Christian environment. Perhaps it was placed in a Christian foundling hospital in Ferrara, or given charitable refuge in one of Ferrara’s Christian institutions or ‘sold’ to a Christian family, to serve in their household as a means of cheap labour. When in 1720 Rachel Carmi of Piedmont, a 24-year-old prostitute, gave up her child for baptism, she was expected to follow suit if she had any desire to bring up the child herself.

Whatever the real background to the altercation between the Jews, whether both parties had lost or given children to be baptized, or whether these unbridled verbal insults were a result of the Jews’ profound poverty and the economic temptations to convert faced by individual Jews, this was essentially a case of petty bickering, in which Jews’ personal moves towards Christianity were judged and criticized by other Jews.

The question remains why Hester would address her grievance to the Inquisition. Perhaps she had hoped to be treated well by the Holy Office and win sympathy against her Jewish neighbours – Santorio’s denunciation being an agreed move with her to revenge themselves upon neighbouring Jewish enemies. In fact, these two Jews collaborated against fellow Jews on another occasion. In 1604, Santorio denounced the Jewess Bellina for blasphemy. When Angelo de Thodeschi was called as a witness he testified that Santorio and Hester had had an argument with Bellina and her son Catchigia in Bellina’s tavern. That these same factions of Jews appear in several processi confirms the deep-seated antagonism between them. One Jewish suspect, Isaaco Sanguinetti, accused of maleficio in 1621, suggests in his testimony that poor Jews in particular were more exposed to altercations with their Jewish neighbours: ‘Everyone has enemies, especially if one is poor like me.’ Perhaps Hester thought a denunciation by a prostitute would not be taken seriously by the Inquisition, despite the fact that women did regularly use law courts in Italy at this time. Although Hester is referred to as a prostitute by witnesses and defendants, this could be misleading, since, as Elizabeth Cohen states, ‘it was routine to disparage as a “whore” any woman
with whom one was on bad terms. Because there were no official brothels in Italian cities at this time, anxious citizens and authorities often had difficulty establishing who was a prostitute or a fornicator or who merely enjoyed the company of men. The Inquisitorial vicar referred to Hester as a meretrice in his interrogation of Abramino. He asked Abramino: ‘Knowing that this prostitute had given a child to Christians, to be baptized, did you insult her for having done it?’ The vicar’s reference to Hester Thodesca as a prostitute confirms that she was one, but in terms of the legal proceedings her profession is of negligible concern. It was certainly not illegal for her to be a prostitute as long as she confined her solicitation to Jews. The Inquisition would only interfere in a case where a Jewish prostitute had sexual intercourse with a Christian or a Christian prostitute with a Jew, or more generally when there were any sexual liaisons between Jews and Christians.

Although the prostitute remains the central figure, little can be said about her with certainty. That she was a poor, unmarried immigrant and that she was driven to prostitution by poverty and destitution can be surmised from Esther’s testimony. In fact there is very limited information on Jewish prostitutes in Italy at this time. There seems to be no contemporary source, either Christian or Jewish, that suggests that civic authorities regularly monitored Jewish prostitutes. Ulinka Rublack has shown how, by the early seventeenth century, attitudes towards prostitutes had hardened in western Europe. Government policy alternated between tolerance and suppression of prostitutes, there were no civic brothels which housed Jewish or Christian prostitutes, and women were forced to solicit in private homes. They were seen as immoral and threatening to the existing social order and, as Rublack states, ‘the sight of a young wandering woman with a bastard child was meant to be a warning to all other women.’

Simonsohn has cited a number of documents relating to specific dilemmas that the Mantuan Jewish community faced in dealing with Jewish prostitutes. In 1598, the Council and rabbis excommunicated all those found to be in contact with a certain Jewish prostitute, Nahla. In another document, Simonsohn reports efforts made by the Jewish community to marry off Gila, a Jewish prostitute, in 1603. After sluggish moves by the community, the Duke intervened, and ordered the Jews to contribute to a dowry for her. That the Jewish community was concerned about prostitutes and the damages they could cause is obvious.

Our processo does provide some basic indication of the Jewish prostitute’s public behaviour. Hester Thodesca ‘idled’ with other prostitutes and spoke and shouted dishonest words in front of her neighbours. She challenged the existence of social norms which would explain Abramino and Esther’s disgust towards her in their testimony, not just as an enemy, but as an outcast. Had Hester been forced to migrate from Germany to avoid shame? Had patriarchy and partu-
rition combined to punish this woman, through the actions of individual men, but also through the pervasive influence of patriarchal values, which affected attitudes towards her? Hester Thodesca was presented as a continuous cause of disturbance, a woman of shameless behaviour, left to her own devices, operating from streets and Christian taverns. But at the same time one senses evidence of personal, psychological and economic crises as she hovered on the margins of Judaism and Christianity. It is perhaps not surprising then that the Inquisition made no effort to evangelize Jewish prostitutes.

The second altercation

Santorio also denounced another incident in his delation:

Giacintha, a neophyte, said to me [Santorio] this summer that one Catchigia, a Jew had said to him these Hebrew words while arguing with him, ‘Meshumad dog’, which means ‘destroyed’.136

On the next day, Giacintha de Bentivoli, the neophyte, was called to testify.137 De Bentivoli admitted that he knew Catchigia, and that when he had been a Jew he had lived in the home of Catchigia’s father, an innkeeper.138 The Inquisitor General then asked if Giacintha had ever argued with Catchigia. He replied:

It was perhaps four or six months ago, that I quarrelled with the said Catchigia, because he took the soles off a pair of my shoes … The said Catchigia insulted me many times and also threatened me. Among other words, he said to me ‘Meshumad’, which means ‘destroyed’, or destruction of the soul, and I said to him, ‘you will pay for this. I will make you eat that word Meshumad’. A few days later, he sent his brother, a Capuchin and a convert, telling me that I should not do anything against Catchigia, so I did not. Some people were present during this conversation but I could not tell you [all their names], although Bellina, his mother was there and one of her daughters.139

On 28 October, Catchigia was arrested and imprisoned, after Calbetti had secured evidence from one witness besides the delator. Six days later, he was summoned for his first interrogation before the Inquisitor General. Calbetti then asked him if a particular Capuchin had mediated in an argument that he had had with a neophyte. Catchigia did not at first mention the neophyte Giacintha, but referred instead to a quarrel with Santorio:

I asked my uncle, Brother Ruffino, a Capuchin, because I had a difference of opinion with Santorio, a Jew, to make Santorio let me be and let me attend to my shop. I was not annoying anyone. I do not know why we started arguing, unless it was because of my sister Capona, who was teasing him.140

Catchigia, it seems, had not severed all links with his Capuchin uncle, since he tried to use him as an intermediary to get himself out of trouble. The Inquisitor
General, refusing to be distracted by this story, asked Catchigia directly if he had quarrelled with a neophyte. Catchigia answered:

I remember, Father, that I had a row with Giacintho the Ferrarese, a Jew who became Christian, living in Modena, but I do not remember why, perhaps because he wanted to take Santorio's side. Father Ruffino made peace between us to stop him from bothering me, because he was pestering me on account of jealousy.

When asked how many times Catchigia had called Giacintho a *Meshumad*, he answered confidently: 'I have never said “*Meshumad*” to anyone. Rather, to Jews who become Christians, I say “neophyte”, which is the term used in Rome.' The Inquisitor General threatened Catchigia with torture if he did not speak the truth, but he refused to confess and was sent back to prison. On 5 November, Catchigia was brought before the Inquisitorial vicar for a second interrogation, but consistently denied that he had ever used the word *Meshumad*. The vicar pressed him again to admit the truth but Catchigia refused to confess. Proceedings were then brought to an end. The notary gives no indication when the Jew was released. Nor was Ruffino called to testify.

The Inquisitorial notary was in general meticulous in his record-keeping. However, there is an unusual carelessness about the details of this altercation. There are gaps in the text, questions and answers do not always relate to each other, and, as noted above, defendants failed to sign the copies of their interrogations. Nonetheless, Catchigia's offence was different from that of Esther and her father Abramino. Even though, according to Santorio's delation, Abramino and his daughter Esther, as well as Catchigia, had used the term *Meshumad*, Catchigia was accused of profanely insulting a Christian.

Seven years later, in a processo of 1610, the Inquisitor Michelangelo Lerri showed familiarity with this Hebrew term, describing it as: 'a Hebrew word, an insult to Jews, [meaning] those who have adopted the Christian faith.' The term had in fact been discussed by Rabbi Ishmael Hanina da Valmontone in his report of his trial before the Bolognese Inquisition in 1568. Here he refuted the accusation regarding the abusive usage of the term *Meshumad* against Christians in Jewish literature, by arguing that the rabbis never had in mind Christians or Christianity when they used the word. He argued that the word corresponded to no known Hebrew grammatical construction, but was Aramaic in origin and meant ‘something that had been divorced from its roots’. In trials before the Modenese Inquisition, the Holy Office concentrated only on determining whether the term *Meshumad* had been used by Jewish suspects or punishing them for insulting neophytes if found guilty. None of the Christian witnesses in the trial admitted that they had heard the Hebrew word *Meshumad*. When in 1610 the neophyte Paolo de Buozzi denounced two Jews, David de Mantovano and his brother Isaac, to the Modenese Inquisition for calling him a *Meshumad*, he...
indicated to the Inquisitor General that the Hebrew word was not a known term among Christians: ‘This word [Meshumad] they said to me in Hebrew, so that the Christian workers would not understand it.’

Perhaps it was a term which Jews could use to deride neophytes without being noticed by their Christian neighbours. When Francesco Cali, a neophyte, came to denounce the Jew Benedetto, a tailor in the Venetian ghetto, to the Venetian Inquisition in 1584 for calling him a Meshumad, or as he translated it a cano renegado (a renegade dog), he indicated that he saw the Inquisition as being responsible for protecting neophytes from such insults by Jews:

This Benedetto said to me in Hebrew that because I have become a Christian, I have lost my soul. And I said to him, ‘What do you mean, I have lost my soul?’ He replied in French, ‘Go away you renegade dog.’ And he put his hand on a knife and on a pair of scissors, to attack me and I in order to defend myself took a stone from the ground and threw it at him. I do not know if it hit him, because I saw only that he wanted to pull out the scissors. And he himself said to Gabriel, a broker, that he wanted to kill me with the scissors. And this was yesterday morning, near the church of San Bartolomeo and it seems to me that it is the duty of your Lordships to see to it that Jews who have become Christians are not driven crazy by Jews and treated like renegades.

Despite the accusation against him in 1603, Catchigia refused to confess. Nor did the Inquisition secure witnesses who could testify that they had heard Catchigia call the neophyte a Meshumad.

Giacinthe’s position demands consideration of the mobility of neophytes, the wavering of their religious identity and about groups of families in which some members had converted, but others had not. Eleven processi (6% of the processi against professing Jews) between the years 1598 and 1638 were initiated by neophytes and these were not delations that their family members had made moves themselves towards conversion, as often happened in Rome at the Casa dei Catecumeni. Neophytes delated Jews for holding prohibited books, blasphemy, threatening neophytes, dining with Christians and hiring Christian servants. The processi where these neophytes appear – as suspects, delators or witnesses – reveal a whole underworld of Jews who converted to Christianity, in a non-ghetto society where the Inquisition had to work so much harder to keep converts away from Jews and the possibility of their relapse to Judaism after baptism.

On no account would the Inquisition wish to admit that the Church’s campaign for conversion had created bad Christians. Neophytes who converted to Christianity in Modena in the early seventeenth century would have spent some time being catechized by priests in the homes of noble gentlemen or gentlewomen, supported and subsidized by either the Opera Calori or the Opera Venosa before conversion, since the local Casa dei Catecumeni was established only in 1700. Baptisms would normally be carried out in the Duomo in the evening.
after Vespers, amidst pomp and ceremony, and all citizens of the city were expected to attend. During catechism and after conversion, these neophytes were required to keep far away from Jewish relatives, since conversion entailed cutting ties completely with the Jewish community.

Neophytes, however, often got into trouble for returning to Judaism or associating with their former co-religionists, which exposed them to suspicion of heresy – all the more so because they could not claim that either they or their ancestors had been forced converts. Despite this, neophytes often maintained contact with Jewish relatives. Catchigia admitted that he had asked his uncle, a Capuchin monk, to intervene to try and dispel Giacintho’s anger against him. Some Jews risked the scorn of the Jewish community to maintain contact with neophyte relatives and on occasion relied upon them to help in reconciling them with neighbours. In 1620, Isaaco Sacerdote, Giuseppe Mellis and Abraamo de Collaris, Jews living in Finale, were accused of being disrespectful to Christian images in public by provocatively turning their backs on a statue of the Virgin. During investigation, Isaaco, a 24-year-old, revealed that he had four sisters, one of whom, Joanna, had converted and married a Christian, Antonio Rialli. She had converted with her young son, Francesco, from a previous marriage with Abraamo Cuniami. When asked what contact Isaaco had with his sister and her family, he told the Inquisitor that he visited her often in her house, as well as using the services of her husband who was a Christian notary and procurator. Joanna also frequently visited Isaaco’s house with her son Francesco. However, contact did not include eating or drinking, or so Isaaco testified, saying that the most he had ever eaten in their presence either in her or his home was some fruit and drink. When the Inquisitor General, Giovanni Vincenzo Reghezza, pressed Isaaco to reveal the fact that they had eaten meals together, the Jew refused to confess. In 1638 the Inquisition also discovered that the neophyte Federico Benedicto often visited the home of his daughter Hester de Susanni, who had remained a Jew, and that the neophyte Alessandro Santoro often frequented the home of his Jewish mother to do domestic chores.

In early seventeenth-century Modena, which housed neither a ghetto nor a Casa dei Catecumeni, there were few boundaries or areas which were prohibited to Jews, potential converts to Christianity, or neophytes. To date, there have been preliminary studies of continued business dealings, payments of debt, and even affectionate relationships between Jews and neophytes. Our altercation, like other processi in the archives, demonstrates a level of familial intimacy as well as unknown ambivalence and friction, and how this friction was manipulated, not only within a single family, but on an inter-family level. The argument between Catchigia and Giacintho, the neophyte, is hidden behind the various testimonies. Four to six months previously Catchigia, a young Jewish shoemaker, had an argument with Giacintho, a former lodger of his father. The two had argued
and Catchigia, or so he reports, had removed the sole of a pair of Giacintho’s shoes and called him a ‘Meshumad Cane’. The Jewish delator Santorio seemed to have joined forces with the neophyte Giacintho and often came to Catchigia’s shop to bother him or perhaps to flirt with his sister Capona. That Catchigia’s mother Bellina was also involved is confirmed in a processo of 1604 in which she too was also prosecuted for blasphemy. When Angelo de Thodeschi was called as a witness he confirmed that Catchigia and his mother Bellina had argued with Santorio and Hester in Bellina’s tavern, blaspheming as they did so.\textsuperscript{162} In our case, Catchigia’s uncle Ruffino, a neophyte Capuchin, had intervened on Catchigia’s behalf and one senses Giacintho being frightened off by the presence of Ruffino. Perhaps the source of the argument was related to debts that Giacintho had never paid Catchigia’s father when he lodged in his house. In another trial in May 1610 a neophyte, Paolo de Buozzi, appeared before the Inquisition to complain that he and his brother Simone had been branded Meshumadim by two Jews.\textsuperscript{163} During the investigations it became clear that they had both at one time been lodgers in the same house as the Jews. Simone testified:

\begin{quote}
We lived for four years in the same house with David and his brother, and then they expelled me with evil words to the master of the house and he said ‘You horrible renegade!’\textsuperscript{164}
\end{quote}

When David de Mantovano, the accused, came to testify to the Inquisition he gave his version of the altercation:

\begin{quote}
Simone was sent away because of his dirty habits. He believes that I drove him out, and that is why he is persecuting me. At Carnival he gave my brother a blow with a stick, and I think it was Simone because he said that he would do something bad to me. This he said at the synagogue of Samuel Sanguinetti in the presence of all the Jews. Simone lived with us for four years, but he never wanted to pay anything.\textsuperscript{165}
\end{quote}

It may be that in conditions of chronic poverty, the hope or expectation of escaping punishment for offences committed or debts unpaid, was an element prompting the conversion.\textsuperscript{166} But that there existed scorn, aggression and desire for vindication between neophyte and Jew is obvious.

The processi in which neophytes denounce or testify against Jews also suggest hostility, violence, deception, personal vendettas and revenge. In 1631, the 28–year-old neophyte Anna Prati harboured much resentment towards her ex-husband, Simone Vita, whom she testified had condemned not only her but also Christianity. Her efforts to arraign Simone Vita failed and investigations were dropped.\textsuperscript{167} In 1643, Francesco Estense, who had recently converted with his wife and son, denounced Jews who, he said, had injured him and threatened him by saying “Watch out, you renegade, tomorrow they will break your neck.”\textsuperscript{168} Whether the neophyte also wished to use the Inquisition to voice his grievances
against the Jewish community that had rejected him, or whether he was driven by alienation and the anxiety of integration in his new social and religious community can only be surmised. Neophytes were often unpopular among Christians, who did not trust the sincerity of their conversions and assumed that they still maintained contact with their former co-religionists.¹⁶⁹

It is probable that Santorio’s denunciation related to some prior animosity or specific quarrel between him and his fellow Jew Catchigia. Catchigia admitted to such a quarrel in his interrogation: ‘I had a difference of opinion with Santorio.’¹⁷⁰ Some neophytes clearly hid their conduct and the real causes of altercations with former Jews.¹⁷¹ They informed upon the Jews to the Inquisition, denouncing them or testifying against them as suspects. By denouncing Jews, the neophyte constituted a real threat to the Jews and a perennial source of insecurity for the Jewish community. At the same time the Inquisition remained suspicious of neophytes – certain perhaps that they would maintain some contact with Jews and anxious to investigate those who did.¹⁷²

Although the Inquisition tried to exploit the contact between neophytes and Jews, when it came to the prosecution of Jews for verbal offences the Inquisition enjoyed limited success. Most of the proceedings were discontinued, even though, on occasion, the Inquisitor had already made arrests. The offences of blasphemy and insult were in general more complicated to prosecute. Each side had a story, sometimes very different from the original delation, and it was often impossible for the Inquisition to know for sure who was telling the truth. Its use of Jews as spies or informers was not always reliable and often Inquisitors had to make arbitrary decisions to bring proceedings to an end.

Yet, simultaneously, these processi provide a rare glimpse of those Jews who were most affected by contact with Christian society. They were not the communal leaders or the well-to-do, but Jews on the fringes of the community and the stratum of poor Jews so often hidden. The Jews’ adoption of swear words and curses that they heard from their Christian neighbours and their casual use of these profanities suggest that they did not feel the need to hide their public behaviour from surrounding Christians. They maintained connections, and communicated concerns with family members who converted, expecting a level of support in return. The appearance of a Jewish prostitute here questions whether the Counter-Reformation attempts to control sexuality led to an overwhelming stigmatization of illegitimacy and abandonment of children, which in turn affected the Jewish community too.¹⁷³ The role of the poor neophyte in early modern Italy, rarely seen as successfully integrated into Christian society, assumes a new dimension, too, both qualitatively and quantitatively. This casts doubt on the extent to which the presence of what appears to be many converts who crossed the Jewish/Christian border at will affected early modern Jewish life on a daily basis, and also in the long term.
Finally, Inquisitorial *processi* for verbal offences have important implications for the issues of morality, discipline and communal conflict that were prevalent within the Jewish community. Although it is not surprising perhaps that Jewish communities, like their Christian counterparts, experienced internal discord and friction among its members, what is remarkable is that Jews, far from communal power, were clearly ready to perceive and use the Holy Office as a court they might turn to should they feel the Jewish community would not respond.

Notes
5 For an understanding of this process see Paolo Prodi, *Una storia della giustizia*.
7 Horodowich, *Language*, p. 70.
9 On 22 July 1492, the King of Spain proclaimed that any subject proven guilty of blasphemy was to be punished with a month’s incarceration for the first offence, and either a fine or six months’ exile for the second, while the sentence for a third offence would depend on the status of the guilty. If he was a noble, he would be fined and exiled, or, if a commoner, a nail would be hammered through his tongue. See Ronald E. Surtz, ‘Crimes of the Tongue: The Inquisitorial Trials of Cristóbal Duarte Ballester’, *Medieval Encounters* 12/3 (2006), 519–32, 523. Guido Kisch has shown how in Germany’s *Reichs-Polizeiordnung* of 1530, Emperor Charles V ordered the death penalty for blasphemy after two convictions. See Guido Kisch, ‘The Jewish Execution’, in Kisch (ed.), *Forschungen zur Rechts-, Wirtschaft- und Sozialgeschichte der Juden in Deutschland während des Mittelalters* (Zurich: Europa Verlag, 1955), pp. 103–32, p. 131. In 1559 the Senate of Milan issued an edict against profane cursing, and a little later the Grand Duke of Tuscany did the same. See Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 102.
10 ASMoFl. *Editti e Decreti 1550–1670*, busta 270. A copy of this edict can also be found in

See Florodovich, Language, p. 80, where it is noted that the connection between gambling and blasphemy had already been established in medieval times.

Ibid., p. 129.


Spaccini, Cronaca, p. 129.

In the twelfth century, according to Alain Cabantous, the Catholic Church classified two categories of blasphemy. The first was influenced by Augustine and later Peter Lombard, who interpreted blasphemy as ‘false things about God’. The second, promulgated by Aymon of Auxerre, was an offence or insult against God. See Alain Cabantous, Blasphemy: Impious Speech in the West from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century, trans. Eric Rauth, European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism (New York: Columbia Press, 2002), p. 7. This then allowed a blurring of details which saw the inclusion of heresy, imprecation (prayers or curses invoking evil), foul language, swear words and sacrilege all included in the universal term of blasphemy. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas debated the philosophical meaning of blasphemy (see Surtz, ‘Crimes’, p. 524). Surtz argues that Thomas Aquinas allowed for sacrilegious slips of the tongue derived from the imagination, writing that blasphemy could occur ‘unawares and without deliberation … by a man failing to advert to the blasphemous nature of his words and this may happen through his being moved suddenly by passion so as to break out into words suggested by his imagination, without heeding to the meaning of those words; this is a venial sin, and is not a blasphemy properly so called’ – see Thomas Acquinas, Summa Theologiae Thomas Aquinas, general editor Thomas Gilby (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), pt. I–II, q. 13, art. 2, 2:1231 – but it was not until the fifteenth century that three separate categories of blasphemy were underlined, the first two relating to impious speech and the third to heretical blasphemy. Francisca Loetz has shown that the first class of blasphemy – cursing – was defined as giving orders to God, for example ‘may God strike you down’, which implied that man was ordering God for his own purposes. The second category was swearing, for example ‘for God’s sake’, when you invoked God inappropriately. The third category was, according to Loetz, blasphemy as a heresy refuting the existence or omnipotence of God.


See ASMoFI Miscellanea 1620–40, busta 295. ‘Contra di quai persone proceda il Santo Officio della Inquisizione’, which confirms the tribunal’s position on this matter.

See Prosperi, Tribunali, p. 356.

Horodowich, ‘Civic Identity’, p. 12. See also Pullan, Jews of Europe, p. 82 who shows that Jews too were punished by the Esecutori for blasphemy.

See ASMoFI Miscellanea 1620–40, busta 295. Also ASMoFI Lettere della Sacra Congregazione 1609–1621, busta 252.

See ASMoFIP 52 f.3, Registro di denunce della Garfagnana (1619–1623) con allegati.

See the Inquisitorial manual of Michelangelo Lerri, ‘Breve informazione del modo di trattare le cause del S. Officio’, p. 3.

See Pullan, Jews of Europe, p. 80 who confirms that the Inquisition in Venice did not prosecute Jews for blasphemy, but only ‘former Jews with heretical blasphemy’.

Stow, Catholic Thought, p. xxx. From the time of the Theodosian and Justinianic Codes, the gravest offence a Jew could commit against Christianity was insult.

On the prohibition of Jews to insult Christianity, see ibid., p. 94.

Bernard Gui’s Inquisitorial manual of 1323–24, Practica Inquisitionis Hereticae Pravitatis, stated that Inquisitorial competence with respect to Jews included only actual blasphemy against Christianity in their prayers. See Guillaum Mollat (ed.), Bernard Gui, Manuel de L’Inquisiteur (Paris: Champion, 1927), 13 [4] ‘De Intolerabili blasfemia Judeorum contra Christum et fidem eius et populum Christianum’, See Kedar, ‘Canon Law and the Burning of the Talmud’, pp. 79–82, where he refers to Pope Innocent IV’s Apparatus of 1245, which claimed for the Pope the right to judge Jews who are unpunished by their own authorities. Innocent referred
directly to the sin of blasphemy: ‘The Pope has jurisdiction and power over all. [Whence] he may judge Jews. [He may do so] if they act contrary to their law in issues of morality, and their own prelates do not punish them, and, equally, if they fall into heresy with respect to their own law.’ Nicolau Eymeric’s fourteenth-century Inquisitorial manual, titled Directorium Inquisitorum, stated that Jews denying God were heretics by their own law but they were also heretics according to Christian law, because Jews and Christians held the same opinion regarding: ‘faith in one God and the faith in a God creator of everything’. See Nicolau Eymeric, Directorium Inquisitorum, II. Pars Directorii, 119.

27 See Caffiero, Battesimi forzati, p. 17.
28 Ibid.
29 The edict is reprinted in Spaccini, Cronaca, pp. 382–9.
31 For the 1601 edict, see ibid., p. 445, 11 March 1601; for the 1608 edict see ASMoF Editti e Decreti 1550–1670, busta 270. See the document titled ‘Editti a stampa Inquisizione 1601–1610. Edito Generale per il S. Ufficio di Modena noi frate Michel Angelo Lerri da Forli 28 Aprile 1608’. For the 1622 edict see ASMoFICH 244 f.34. See the document titled ‘Editto Generale per il S. Ufficio di Modena 24th January 1622’.
32 Maria Pia Balboni has described some of these processi that occurred in Finale, but with limited analysis. See Balboni, Gli Ebrei, pp. 56–7.
33 See Biondi, ‘La Nuova Inquisizione’, pp. 68–9. Under the rule of Calbetti, the number of trials against Jews increased, particularly between December 1602 and May 1604.
35 See the testimony of Angelo de Thodeschi, in ASMoFIP 22 f.29.
36 ASMoFICH 244 f.15.
37 ASMoFIP 67 f.17, trial against Giuseppe Melli, a 65–year-old Jew of Finale in July 1622. Melli was given a fine of 50 scudi.
38 See Francesconi, Jewish Families, pp. 104–6.
39 ASMoFIP 29 f.17, 10 July 1603. Although this processo is held in Busta 29 with other processi from 1607, it seems clear from the notarial handwriting that these proceedings occurred in 1603. Numbers appearing in footnotes in this section in parenthesis refer to the folio pages of this trial.
40 Ibid. (3r). One Jewish witness in the trial described the curse as ‘Puttana di Malachi, which means whore of the angel of God’.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid. (5v).
43 There were eleven present, six ecclesiastics and five doctors of law. The ecclesiastics were Archangelo Calbetti, the Inquisitor General; Doctor Ercole Simonello de Fingulo, the vicar general; Dominico de Papi, a vicar of the Holy Office; Don Angelo Maria Rubbini, Provost of the Cathedral; Don Fabrizio Manzoli, Theologian of the Cathedral; and Don Monsignor, Brother Archangelo of the Servite order. The doctors of law were Annibali Spaccini, Francesco Grattito, Lodovico Cattaneo, Jacopinos Leone and Don Alfonso Lovolo. It is not clear whether these canonists were clergy of any kind.
44 Martin, Witchcraft, p. 220 notes that in Venice although whipping was rarely used as a punishment in the seventeenth century, it was usually carried out in the vicinity where the offender lived to ensure the greatest humiliation for him or her.
45 See ASMoFIP 83 f.10, 1627.
46 Ibid., f.19.
47 Ibid., f.20.
48 Cabantous, Blasphemy, p. 191.
50 See, in the ASMo, Nerozzi’s I Denunziati, pp. 101–4. According to his research, Puttana di
Dio was cited forty-two times, *Al Dispetto di Dio* twenty-six times, *Dio Poltrone* ten times and *Puttana della Madonna* four times in the *bestemmia hereticale* trials of 1601. Nerozzi notes that curses against saints were rarely used.

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51 On blasphemy in gaming halls, see Prosperi, *Tribunali*, pp. 350–67. Also see ASMoFIP 22 f.29. One witness in this processo, the Jew Camillo de Thodeschi, interrogated on 21 January 1604, testified that when Jews gambled they often blasphemed.

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52 Ibid.

53 ASMoFIP 20 f.14.

54 Sacerdote (meaning Cohen or priest) was a common surname for both Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews in Modena.

55 ASMoFIP 20 f.14 (5v); Abraham admits this in his own testimony.

56 Ibid. (1v–1r).

57 Ibid. (2v): ‘I know that a month ago or a little more, the saidAbramino had an argument with his assistant over merchandise. I heard him cursing because he was angry, but I do not know what he blasphemed, or if he cursed in the Hebrew or the Christian language.’

58 Ibid. (12v).

59 Ibid. (6r). At this point Leone de Thodeschi signed his name in Hebrew.

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60 Ibid. (8v). This is the first time when Leone de Thodeschi signed his name in Hebrew.

61 Ibid. (9r).

62 See Cozzi, ‘Religione’, p. 46. In Venice, suspects argued before their judges that they had said ‘*al cospetto di Dio*’ (‘in the sight of God’) to avoid being charged with saying ‘*al dispetto di Dio*’, since one was harmless and the other blasphemous, but the *Esecutori contro la Bestemmia* passed a law saying that they would not accept this as an excuse.

63 The ecclesiastics were Friar Serafino de Cagli, the vicar of the Holy Office who had helped Calbetti by holding some of the interrogations in this case; Dominico de Papi, a reader in theology; the Franciscan monk Lucio; and the Servite Friar Archangelo. The four legal doctors Annibali Spaccini, Don Lodovico Cattaneo, Domino Castalutio and Alfonso Lovolo.

64 See Chapter 2, page 63.

65 ASMoFIP 20 f.14 (11v).

66 Ibid. (12v).


68 ASMoFIP 20 f.14 (1v). Most denunciations for cursing were reported almost immediately afterwards, while the curses were still clear in the mind of the delator. See for example, Ioly Zorattini, *Processi*, vol. VI, pp. 101–13, Trial against Benedetto, 1584. The delator Francesco Cali denounced the Jew a day after he had allegedly heard the Jew curse, as did the delators of the Christians Joannes Dominico Ferrara de Gaiato, Bonetti di Nonantula, Joanne Jacobo Terreno Carbonario and Torquanto Benvenuto de Fanano in 1627. See ASMoFIP 83 f.10, f.19 and f.20.

69 See ASMoFIP 19 f.14. Thodeschi even appeared three more times in the proceedings to provide further evidence against the Jews.

70 See ASMoFICH 244 f.7.

71 See Francesconi, *Jewish Families*, p. 106.

72 See ASMoFIP 24 f.15.

73 ASMoFIP 23 f.9.


75 ASMoFICH 244 f.18.

76 Ibid. (7v).


78 ASMoFICH 244 f.19.


80 ASMoFICH 246 f.16 for the *processo* against Samuel Levi for dissuading Michele Sanguinetti from being baptized.

81 ASMoFIP 83 f.16 (1v).

82 Ibid. (2r).
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83 Ibid.
84 ASMoFICH 24 f.39.
85 There is a third Jew, Salvatore, who delated in 1603 and 1636. I cannot confirm, however, that this is the same person.
87 See Marina Caffiero, ‘Il pianto di Rachele’, Ebrei, neofiti e giudaizzanti a Roma in età moderna’, in L’Inquisizione e gli storici: un cantiere aperto (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2000), pp. 307–29, 311–12. Caffiero shows Jews of Rome approaching the Inquisition, but not to inform, rather to complain against unwarranted use of power, although once, in 1697, to ask that a case of bigamy be quashed or to have it stop a case of adultery. On Jewish arbitration, see Robert Bonfil, Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy, p. 239 and Stow, The Jews in Rome, docs. 40, 718, 1231, 1577 and 2001, in which cases of assault or brawls were arbitrated.
88 On the resorution of two Jews of Ferrara to the episcopal court there in 1605, see del Col, L’Inquisizione, p. 524.
89 See Caffiero, Badesini forzati, pp. 30–1.
90 See Pullan, Jews of Europe, pp. 102–3.
93 ASMoFIP 20 f.14.
94 This trial is found in ASMoFIP 23 f.9. Numbers appearing in footnotes in parenthesis now refer to the folio pages of this trial.
95 There is no indication in the archives that this Jew had been imprisoned before by the Holy Office.
96 ASMoFIP 23 f.9 (1v). This trial has its own pages numbers written on the right corner of each double page. Obviously therefore I have used the notary’s pagination, and not my own.
97 Ibid. (2v).
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid. (2r).
100 See Anton Block, Honour and Violence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 162. Block infers that ugly nicknames ‘constitute in part a mocking of moral standards’ in society. He also notes (p. 167) that women did not normally receive nicknames, or if they did they were usually applied by women to women.
101 ASMoFIP 23 f.9 (4r).
102 Barozzi was also a witness in the first trial described in this chapter. His wife Antonia was a witness of Miriana Sanguinetti’s musings before her marriage to Michello Sanguinetti, as reported in Chapter 5. The Barozzi couple obviously had frequent contact with local Jews and relied on their patronage.
103 ASMoFIP 23 f.9 (5v).
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid. (6r).
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid. (7r).
109 Ibid. (8v).
110 Ibid. (9v).
111 Ibid. (11v–11r).
112 Ibid. (12v–12r).
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid. The title page of the trial transcript summed up the offence as: ‘The trial of Ester the Jewess and Abramino, and certain other Jews of Modena, on the charge, as within, that they had insulted the said Hester because she had given a Jewish girl to the Christians to be baptized.’ (Processus sup. intentione facto inter Ester ebream et Abraminu, et alios quosdam ebreos Mutinenses prout
There is a similar case in the archives which again involved the use of the term Meshumad and aggressive action among Jews regarding family members who were converting. See ASMoFiCH 244 f.15. In 1612, a Jewish girl Laudomia was denounced to the Holy Office for having said in a moment of anger to another Jewish girl whose family had argued with her own: ‘You God-forsaken brood, you know well that the devil came to take your brother to make him a Goi (Christian)’ (razza di rassegnati, tu sai bene che il diavolo è venuto a prendere tuo fratello per fartelo goi [cristiano]). Laudomia was arrested, and denied that she had ever said these words. Other Jewish witnesses confirmed the accusation. When one Jewish witness, Artemisia, was asked about the term ‘goi’, she replied that it meant ‘a Jew made Christian, and a renegade dog’.

See Fregni, ‘La Comunità’, p. 310. Fregni notes that that one of the buste in the archive is titled ‘Rapes. Providences of similar cases’ and contains eighteenth-century documentation (ACEMo filza 71 S, 1743–88). Here were reported not merely rapes but also illegitimate births. The community was concerned for the economic welfare of the newborn and did all that it could to monitor such occurrences.

See the account of work of the Università in Venice to secure the patrimony of an illegitimate Jewish baby and to prevent its baptism in Boccato, ‘Il caso’.


Segre, Jews in Piedmont, doc. 2625, 20 August 1720.

For examples of other such brawls between divided families see Simone Feci, ‘Tra il tribunale e il ghetto: le magistrature, la comunità e gli individui di fronte ai reati degli ebrei romani nel Seicento’, Quaderni Storici 99 (1998), 575–99, 587.

See ASMoFiP 22 f.29, Trial against Abramo Pasillo and Bellina Formigine for blasphemy. Here Santorio delates these Jews for blaspheming in a tavern.

ASMoFiCH 244 f.31 (21r).

Elizabeth Cohen has shown how prostitutes in Rome used law courts to conduct the ‘politics of their daily lives’. See Elizabeth S. Cohen, ‘Honour and Gender in the Streets of Early Modern Rome’, Journal of Interdisciplinary History 22 (1992), 597–625, 610.

See Elizabeth S. Cohen, “Courtesans” and “Whores”: Words and Behaviour in Roman Streets’, Women’s Studies 19 (1991), 201–8, 204.

ASMoFiP 23 f.9 (11r).

Ephraim Kanarfogel, ‘Rabbinic Attitudes towards Non-observance’, in Jacob J. Schacter (ed.), Jewish Tradition and the Non-Traditional Jew (Northvale, NJ: J Aronson, 1992), pp. 17–26, pp. 24–5. Kanarfogel provides a list of several Italian rabbinic responsa that deal with Jewish prostitutes at the end of the fifteenth century. One mentioned is that of Rabbi Judah Mintz, Padua Sheʾelot U Teshuvot (Cracow, 1882), no. 5, which states that there were Jews within the community of Padua who accepted the existence of Jewish prostitutes as a way of preventing men from committing adultery with married women, which was also a standard Christian argument. I have found one case of a Jew, Capitano Moise, who was accused of a sexual liaison with a Christian prostitute, see ASMoFiP 57 f.17, 19 March 1621. The Jew was accused ex officio, without a delator, of frequenting the home of Giacoma Vanzina, one of four Christian prostitutes who lived together. Although no one could confirm that Moise had committed the offence, one witness Laura, daughter of Stephan de Marchis, said that she had seen Jews approach the home of the prostitutes. The processo is incomplete.

Other law courts, such as the Avogadori di Comun in Venice, did interfere in cases where a Jewish prostitute had sexual intercourse with a Christian. See the case described by Ruggiero, The Boundaries of Eros, p. 184 n.64. See ASMoFiCH 245 f.44 for a case where a Jew, Leone Usilio, was accused of having sex with a Christian prostitute, Margarita Bellentina. See also ASMoFiCH 248 f.23, in 1657 and Canosa, Storia, p. 50. A Christian prostitute was brought before the Inquisition for having sex with Jewish clients. The Jews were condemned to stand
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before the synagogue for a period of time so that their offence would be observed by other Jews and warned that if they repeated this offence they would be sent to the galleys. On general cases where Jews and Christians had sexual relations, see the *processo* of 1661 in which Calman Sanguinetti was accused of having sexual relations with a Christian, Antonia Lipparini. Denounced by neighbours, both Jew and Christian admitted to having relations, although Calman argued that he had never known that the deed constituted an offence before the Inquisition and the Christian, when imprisoned, that she had been paid for the deed. In July 1735, ASMoFIP 209 f.14 and mentioned by Canosa, *Storia*, p. 50 (although with the wrong date) the Inquisitor of Modena, Marcolino Squarcioni condemned to the galley, then to seven years of prison, Abraham Latis, for having had sexual relations with a Christian women. The Jew was freed a year later.


Ibid., n.114.

Ibid.

See ibid., p. 187, where she claims, interestingly enough, that in Venice during the sixteenth century there was an increase of foreign prostitutes which the Council of Ten hastened to reduce by expelling them.

ASMoFIP 23 f.9 (3v).

Ibid. (1r).

Ibid.

Ibid. (3v–3r).

Ibid. (9r–10v) (io pregai mio barba fratello Ruffino Capucino, che havendo dispari con un Santorio hebreo, facesse che me lasciasse stari e che mi lasciare attendei alla mia bottega, che me non do fastidio a nessuno, e non so perchè causa venissimo contrasto, se non Capona, mia sorella che li sigalo).

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid. (13v).

One of the offences for which the procurators of the Jewish community of Bologna, Angelo da Rieti, Daniele da Colonia and Isacco Calabresi, were tried by the local Inquisition in 1567 arose from the allegation that rabbinic literature was replete with statements that profaned Christianity, including the term Meshumad. See Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, ‘Ebrei, Bologna e sovrano pontefice: la fine di una relazione tra verifiche, restrizioni e ripensamenti’, Verso l’epilogo di una convivenza. Gli ebrei a Bologna nel XVI secolo, a cura di Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli (Florence: Giuntina, 1996), pp. 19–53, p. 42.

145 ASMoFICH 244 f.13 against David Mantuano and his brother Isacco. See Pullan, Jews of Europe, pp. 289–90. On the meaning of the term Meshumad, see also Umberto Fortis, La parlata degli ebrei di Venezia e le parlate giudeo-italiane (Florence: Giuntina, 2006), pp. 338–9.

146 The term was referred to in the processo against thirty-eight Jews in Lombardy, conducted by the secular court in 1488. Here these Jews were accused of blaspheming Christianity in their texts. See Anna Antoniazzi Villa, Un processo contro gli Ebrei nella Milano del 1488: Crescita e declino della comunità ebraica lombarda alla fine del Medioevo (Bologna: Cappelli, 1985), pp. 88, 90, 108.


148 ASMoFICH 244 f.13, 21 May 1610. The two Jews accused in this trial, David Mantovano and his brother Isacco, were freed without punishment but were warned not to use such words again.


150 On the mobility of converts see Kim Siebenhüner’s article ‘Conversion, Mobility and the Roman Inquisition in Italy around 1600’, Past and Present 200 (2008), 5–35.

151 Caffiero, Batteismi forzati, pp. 111–12.

152 In the ASMo Giurisdizione Sovrana, buste 139 and 140, Opere Pie dei Catecumeni Modena, which runs from 1491 to 1796, does not register the names of specific neophytes who converted in our period. See Andrea Zanardo, ‘Catecumeni e neofiti alla fine dell’antico regime’, in Franco Bonilauri and E. Vincenza Maugeri (eds), Le comunità ebraiche a Modena e a Carpi (Florence: Giuntina, 1999), pp. 121–39, p. 122.

153 Spaccini, Cronaca, records each occasion when a baptism of a Jew took place: see pp. 178, 217, 368. For a discussion of baptisms in seventeenth-century Finale, see Balboni, Gli Ebrei, pp. 75–96. For a description of a baptism in eighteenth-century Modena, see Zanardo, ‘Catecumeni e neofiti alla fine dell’antico regime’, p. 123.

154 See Pullan, Jews of Europe, pp. 282–3, on contact maintained between neophytes and Jews in Venice.

155 On relations between neophytes and their Jewish families see Kenneth Stow, ‘A Tale of Uncertainties: Converts in the Roman Ghetto’, in Daniel Carpi, Moshe Gil, Yosef Gorni et al. (eds), Shlomo Simonsohn Jubilee Volume: Studies on the History of the Jews in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance Period (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Faculty of Humanities, Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies, 1993), pp. 257–81; and also Giuseppe Sermoneta, ‘Il mestiere del neofita nella Roma del Settecento’, in the same volume, pp. 213–33. Sermoneta, in his study of Roman neophytes in the eighteenth century, shows that there was daily contact between neophytes and their families.

156 ASMoFICH 244 f.29, 1620 against Jews of Finale, Isacco Sacerdoti, Giuseppe Melli and Abraamo de Collaris.

157 Ibid. 11r–v.

158 Ibid. 13r–v.
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159 See ASMoFICH 247 f.31 and ASMoFIP 107 f.12.
160 Zanardo, ‘Catecumeni’, p. 122. Zanardo notes that after the establishment of the Casa dei Catecumeni in 1700, a map was put up in the ghetto of the exact location of the Casa in Modena and a prohibition that Jews were not allowed in the vicinity of the house. See also Balletti, Gli Ebrei, p. 210, who notes that any Jew who came in the vicinity of the Casa to speak with potential converts was threatened with 200–scudi fines, whipping, galley service or exile.
161 On payments of debt see Stow, ‘A Tale’, p. 263. Stow shows that neophytes may have continued in the business of lending and also refers to the records of neophytes owing money to Jews. On the issue of affectionate relationships between neophytes and Jews, see Sermoneta, ‘Il mestiere’.
162 ASMoFIP 22 f.29, 1604.
163 ASMoFICH 244 f.13.
164 Ibid., 21 May 1610, deposizione di Simone de Anagi.
165 Ibid., 21 June 1610, deposizione di David.
166 As late as 1747 Pope Benedict XIV, commenting on the prevalence of poor Jews of a young age in the Casa dei Catecumeni in Rome, noted in a letter his suspicion that a large number of these Jews were actually escaping debts. See Attilio Milano, Il ghetto di Roma: Illustrazioni storiche (Rome: Staderini, 1964), p. 292, where he cites the Lettera della Santità di N.S. Benedetto Papa XIV a Monsignor Archvescovo di Tarsio vicegerente sopra il Battesimo degli ebrei o infanti o adulti, Roma 28 Febbraio 1747. See also Zanardo, ‘Catecumeni’, p. 127.
167 ASMoFICH 245 f.60.
168 ASMoFICH 247 f.52 (guarda quel rinnegato, domani rompono suo collo).
169 Caffiero, Battezimi forzati, p. 302.
170 ASMoFIP 23 f.9 (9r).
171 See ACEMo filza 2.52 N Neofiti: Recapit. Riguardanti i medesimi, 1570–1727. Here there are housed some papers that record information regarding the hereditary property of neophytes. The first four cases of neophytes were in 1570, 1615, 1625 and 1633.
172 Caffiero, Battezimi forzati, p. 213. Caffiero notes a seventeenth-century document which expressed strong reserve regarding the denunciation of former co-religionists by neophytes. On neophytes see also Pullan’s Jews of Europe, pp. 275–312.
173 On this subject see the work of David I. Kertzer on a slightly later period in Italy, Sacrificed for Honor: Italian Infant Abandonment and the Politics of Reproductive Control (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993).