The pingolo\textsuperscript{1}: a locus for fantasy

I have been here for 30 years and never did I hear anyone say or reflect upon the fact that Jews yelled or shouted in any way, especially at the said times, when they used to be withdrawn and modest. This year they did the worst.\textsuperscript{2}

Like many micro-histories, this chapter, which studies the tension between Jews and Christians during the frequent clash of Passover and Easter, is based on one processo in 1604, which uncovers the boisterous and intrusive actions of a group of Jews in the home of Davide de Norsa, a Jewish banker in the small town of Soliera, 9 kilometres north of Modena. Six Jewish men were charged with two offences, mocking the Passion and disturbing Christian prayer from an apartment in a castello, located within both sight and earshot of the San Giovanni Battista church.\textsuperscript{3} Working on slippages between event and perception and thought, between thought and testimony, between testimony and narration, which allow micro-historians to see the discrepancies between what happened and what people perceived, and between what they perceived and what they said in court, an effort is made to decode and analyse the Jews’ disturbance in this small town, where Jews had seemingly more freedom away from the watchful eyes of Inquisitorial authority.

Up in the attic of the castello, three young Jews, cooped up by Jewish exclusion from Easter, had with innocent fun, or so it seems, vented their spirits by swinging on a pingolo, singing mountebank songs of love, playing at selling perfumed balls and generally fooling around. It brings to mind the pioneering studies of Kenneth Stow, Thomas Cohen and Elliott Horowitz, who have explored Jewish social custom and comportment in Italy in the early modern period, and reflect upon these cultural norms as a direct result of acculturation with the surrounding Christian society.\textsuperscript{4} In his study of Roman Jewry, Stow argues that Jews often acted as if they were indeed Romans, having convinced themselves that they could act accordingly.\textsuperscript{5} Thomas Cohen contends that a group of Roman Jews accused by the local governor of pretending to be police officers of the Campidoglio had in 1551 ‘turned the tables, donning the robes of power.’\textsuperscript{6} But the
Jews’ actions of 1604 suggest an alternative paradigm, and as a result a different *raison d’être* of Jewish acculturation. Here the Jews’ defiance is interpreted as imitation, not with the intention of challenging the norm, but as epitomizing their own desire for deeper inclusion in Christian society.

The de Norsa family, originating from Norcia in the Papal States, had established themselves in the Estense territory from the end of the fifteenth century. Family members served as bankers in many different parts of the duchy besides the capital, in Soliera and Bondeno, as well as throughout the duchy of Mantua. De Norsa family members who had previously lived in Ferrara followed Duke Cesare to Modena. In 1598, Davide de Norsa sent a letter of supplication to the Duke, asking him to favour and safeguard his family in Soliera. In 1602, he established his own bank as well as a private synagogue, which served the few Jewish families living there. Often lacking the ten men needed for Jewish prayer services, the small community relied upon visitors to make up the quorum. In 1617, thirteen years later, Cesare de Norsa, Davide’s son, told Inquisitor Massimo Guazzoni that their synagogue was still only used for services on the main festivals.

In medieval Spain, the proximity or clash of Passover and Easter had occasionally resulted in violence against Jews, since Christians celebrating the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross suspected Jews of doing the same out of mockery. David Nirenberg reports that in Segorbe Jews were indicted for moulding the crucified Jesus in bread dough and baking him in their ovens. In Zaragoza, Jews had purportedly built a tower over their home so that they could watch Holy Week services in a neighbouring church and throw meat bones onto it on Good Friday. Suspicious of Jewish reaction to their solemnities, ecclesiastical decrees imposed a curfew on the Jews during the four days of Holy Week from Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday. This curfew was in due course implemented in Italy by secular rulers in the fifteenth century. Jews were to remain locked and silent in their homes, removed from any contact with Christians, protected from the potential wrath of their neighbours as well as the accusations of ritual murder which were often levelled at this precarious time. This move enabled the annual stoning, or *Sassaiola*, instigated at the end of the Easter procession, in medieval Spain and then in Italy and France, to be controlled by the ruling authorities without, it seems, inciting broader violence. Here Christian children, in particular, threw stones against the doors and windows of Jews’ houses, frequently damaging shutters and blinds and leaving visible disarray but rarely harming the inhabitants.

Complaints about Jews disturbing Christian services in adjacent churches or monasteries were voiced many times by ecclesiastical authorities during the Middle Ages and the early modern period, in Italy as well as elsewhere in Europe. A second *processo* in the Inquisitorial archives, against another Solieran banker,
Davide Diena, in May 1623, records disturbances made from the Jews’ house just after the festival of Easter. Here Diena had held a party, attended by Christian servants and singers in particular Joannes Bernardino, who had disturbed neighbouring Christians at prayer. What bothered Inquisitor General Giovanni Vincenzo Reghezza more than the disturbances was that local Christians had attended this celebration and danced and fraternized in the Jew’s house. Diena was fined 50 scudi and was ordered to attend a public shaming the following Sunday on 17 July, where he was forced to kneel for an hour with a candle in his hand and an inscription around his neck stating his offence.

In medieval times, Jews were usually allowed to transfer their synagogues to other locations, since canon law recognized the right of the Jews to free worship. On occasions, local churches attempted to prevent the construction of new synagogues. Correspondence between the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office and the Inquisition in Modena reveals the attempts by the Holy Office, after the de Norsa proceedings in 1604 to move his synagogue from the proximity of the San Giovanni Battista church, as mandated by the cardinals in Rome. Davide de Norsa had been sentenced to pay a fine of 70 ducats, 40 to the Inquisition building fund and 30 to Panini, and at the same time ordered to leave this habitation or change the location of his synagogue. Yet four months later, on 27 November, Cardinal Camillo Borghese (later Pope Paul V 1605–21) wrote to Calbetti, reiterating the Congregation of the Holy Office’s refusal to allow the Jews of Soliera to erect a new synagogue in the castello. The Holy Office was helpless to enforce the order, and instead the Duke allowed the Jews to build a new synagogue in the same castello next to the church. Almost four years later, in June 1608, Cardinal Arrigoni (1552–1616) ordered Inquisitor General Michelangelo Lerri, who had replaced Calbetti, to verify whether de Norsa was continuing to use the synagogue next to the church, whether he actually held a licence from the Duke, and if not to imprison and punish him. A denunciation was made immediately by the vicar general Ercole Agaggi, the rector of San Michele in Soliera, against de Norsa for re-erecting a synagogue in his house.

The Jews were able to manipulate the Duke’s sovereignty over the issuing of synagogue licences to their advantage when facing Inquisitorial prosecution. Davide de Norsa was summoned in November 1608 and testified that six to seven years previously he had acquired a ducal licence to establish a synagogue in his house. When Inquisitor Lerri accused him of using the synagogue that should have been eliminated as a result of his prosecution in 1604, Davide argued that the Duke had re-issued him a licence, granting him permission to have a new synagogue in the castello, implying at the same time that he had refused to heed the Inquisitorial order as a result of his prosecution in 1604. Regarding this new synagogue, Davide testified that the Duke’s minister Giambattista Laderchi
de Imola had told him that the Duke, not the Pope, had the authority to authorize licences to build synagogues.27 The Inquisitor noted at the end of the investigation that the synagogue in Davide’s house had in fact been moved to a different room:

This place which they use for a synagogue is in a more internal section of Davide’s house. And it is not the same place that it was the other time. They have surrounded it with a wall so that one cannot hear the voices.28

When De Norsa produced his licence, the Inquisition had no choice but to drop proceedings.

That the Inquisition had little authority to eliminate or determine the status of synagogues in the duchy of Modena, despite Papal demands, is clear. When the Pope reminded Inquisitor Lerri in 1610 that the Duke was not allowed to provide licences for Jews to erect new synagogues, according to the canonical rulings of Pope Nicholas V in 1451, there was little reaction from the Holy Office.29 On the back of the letter from the Pope on 10 January 1610 it was noted [probably by Lerri] that the Duke had responded:

that he did not think that the most Holy father the Pope would want to detract from the privileges already granted to his family by other pontiffs and that he would have his own laws promulgated.30

This case was not unique in our period. Collisions continued between the Duke on the one side and the Inquisition on the other, both keen to gain a position of supremacy on the matter. Generally contention was confined to the building of additional synagogues in the small but growing communities of Spilamberto, Spezzano and Finale Emilia on the peripheries of the city-capital, a policy which contradicted the Papal order underlined in Cum nimis absurdum, which had brought about the destruction of additional synagogues in the middle of the sixteenth century, by specifying no more than one synagogue for each location.31

The proceedings of the 1604 de Norsa disturbance are recorded on 73 folios. As one reads through them, it becomes clear that Inquisitorial accusations and investigations hoped to force the testimonies of the event into the mould of what was required or perceived to be required to designate the Jews’ offence as that of mocking the Passion. Some of the Christian testimonies remained fictitious. Witnesses and suspects spoke of hearing sounds and singing that resembled Christian worship. Sometimes they said that the Jews sounded like priests, or even that they were imitating priests in their offices. Finally, one Christian witness testified that amidst all the noise she heard the Jews mocking Christ and the Passion. All of this amounted instead to a charge of blasphemy. It was also grounds for pursuing the previous goal of keeping synagogues closed. But, as noted above, the Inquisition did not realize its aim. The witnesses never spoke with one voice, the Jews when interrogated and tortured denied all the charges, and the synagogue was never shut down.32
What follows is a description of the various testimonies in the processo, provided in response to leading questions of the Inquisitor, and in addition an interpretation of the Jews’ noise, defiance and commedia dell’arte during the clash of Easter and Passover in 1604.

The processo

Inquisitorial enquiry began with the appearance of the Inquisitorial Vicar Giovanni Battista Panini at the Modenese Holy Office on 26 April 1604 in order to denounce the Jews. It ended with the Jews’ sentencing three months later on 30 July. During the trial seventeen people were interrogated, nine Christians and eight Jews. The Inquisition moved swiftly to obtain sufficient proof from Christian witnesses before it imprisoned and began interrogating the Jews. A month after the investigation began, on 25 May, six Jewish men were arrested and imprisoned. There followed twenty-seven short, repetitive and intensive interrogations of these Jews (see Table 4).

The Christians

Giovanni Battista Panini

The 70–year-old Inquisitorial vicar of Soliera, himself a witness and a prime mover in the proceedings, stressed in his interrogation on 26 April that the Jews made terrible noises on the night of Holy Thursday that were audible both from his house and from the sacristy of the church. At that time, three men were participating in the quarantore, a ritual to watch a consecrated host in the sacristy of the church for the forty hours that Christ, according to the New Testament, had been placed in his tomb. Panini complained that the Jews imitated Christian priests, singing in a high voice. The Jews also kept their windows open, disturbing the Christians at prayer and preventing young Christian boys from participating in the Sassaiola ceremony. Panini told the Inquisitor that he had heard the Jews make

the most insolent confusion, yelling and shouting, almost intolerable, but we did not understand the words of their shouting, … and it seemed they were playing, … responding to each other in a form of dialogue.

He added that the Jews had also thrown household waste from a window towards the church, ‘which was interpreted by everyone as a sign of contempt’. He was unable to provide specific information as to what the Jews were doing.
Barbara Rubbiano

A 34–year-old Christian neighbour, she was summoned next on the following day, 27 April. She confirmed the account of terrible noises that the Jews made, but added that the noises did not originate from the synagogue. She told the Inquisitor that she believed that the Jews had created some kind of theatrical recreation of the Passion, but could not provide witnesses who shared her opinion, since she had witnessed the disturbances alone in her home. Panini described her testimony in his letter:

that when she was at home doing housework, she heard those Jews making loud noises and that they said these words: ‘hang the man’, ‘hit the man’, ‘the man is dead’ and ‘kill the man’, that these words or similar ones they uttered many, many times and she was greatly dismayed at hearing them, not knowing what they meant.

Rubbiano clearly claimed to have been witness not to a saying but to a hearing of mysterious words through a window. Tellingly, she knew only five of the Jews personally, Davide de Norsa, one of his sons Cesare, Davide’s son-in-law Raffaele, Davide’s wife and one of his daughters. Yet living directly opposite the Jews’ house, she seemed to have a detailed knowledge of the apartment where the Jews lived and where different rooms, in particular the synagogue, were situated. She admitted that she had become accustomed to the voice of Cesare de Norsa, Davide’s son, and so could confirm that he was one of the people involved in the disturbance. She also believed that Davide’s guests had come to Soliera precisely at this time in order to disturb the Christians. She showed no knowledge that the Jews were celebrating Passover.

Caterina

Panini’s sister, interrogated next on the same day – told the Inquisition that she heard loud noises (strepito grande) on Holy Thursday. When asked to provide witnesses, she suggested her cousin Ludovico Rubbiano and the local barber, Bernardino di Florenzo.

Genesio, son of the late Geminicani Capriani de Bastia

Officer of the Podestà of Soliera, who had been sent by Panini to quieten the Jews on Holy Saturday, Genesio testified also on 27 April that he had already heard loud crashes on the evening of Holy Thursday, while he was attending services in the church, but it was not until the Saturday evening that Panini gave orders to silence the Jews, because they were insolently preventing the Sassaiola from taking place by refusing to shut the windows.
Giulio Renini

The Inquisitor then interrogated one of the three Christians who had stood watch over the Sacrament on the night of Holy Thursday. He told the Inquisitor:

At night between Holy Thursday and Friday, I was keeping vigil at the Holy Sacrament, which was in the ‘tomb’, and I heard the Jews, who were in the house of Davide, the banker, at about 4 or 5 hours of the night, making deafening noises and shouting, singing festively, in the same way as our priests do, when they sing Vespers or the other offices. First a few people sang and then the others joined in, first one group singing and then the other. And while they sang, they twice threw a lot of household waste down from their windows towards the door of the Church. I could not see exactly where they threw it but I heard the waste hitting the ground and I can say for sure that it was thrown from the Jews’ windows.

Renini’s testimony resembles that of the second Christian watcher, Balthasar Giosi, interrogated on 28 April. However, Giosi went further than Renini, suggesting that the Jews were imitating Christian singing: ‘They were heard clearly and they sang in such a way imitating our song and not in the Jewish way as I have heard at other times.’

He testified that he believed that women were singing and not men.

Paulo, son of Captain Herculis Cosatti of Modena

The third Christian watching the sacrament was interrogated next, on 27 April. He testified that he believed that the Jews present in Davide’s house were foreigners (alcuni hebrei forestieri) and were involved in some kind of comedy:

‘I myself heard their cackling and between their songs they broke into laughter at times.’

At this point the Inquisitor summoned the wife and daughter of Davide for interrogation, perhaps impatient and frustrated that no Christian could confirm Rubbiano’s testimony.

Stella de Norsa

The second wife of Davide admitted that three younger Jews had created their own entertainment during Passover, by making a pingolo – a swing, or plank of wood held on each side by a rope, which the youngsters attached to a roof beam inside the granary/attic of Davide’s house. Although confirming that the Jews would be ashamed to do something inappropriate, there is a hint in her testimony that the young Jews had acted rather carelessly.

The young men made a swing, a toy, which is a rope attached to a beam by a wheel, and they swung on it, pulling each other back and forth. This they did for some enjoyment. I myself and my daughter stayed to watch them.
Nonetheless she refused to admit that the Jews had said anything derogatory against Christianity.

Sannucisa de Norsa

The daughter of Davide was summoned and appeared immediately after her step-mother. After demonstrating fear as she stood before the Inquisitor, she managed to calm herself and admit:

On Holy Thursday as you call it, which is our Passover, after dinner some Jews who were in our house, one Cesare a mercer, Cesare my brother and another called Simone da Carpi, made a game with some balls [pomanders] on a swing, a child's plaything. I do not remember precisely the words they said, nor what they were doing from where they were, with their shouting and noise.58

She denied that she was aware of any orders to stop the disturbances, nor did she admit that the Jews had shouted any derogatory words.

Antonio Fogliano

The Captain of the Guard, and the eighth witness to be interrogated on 27 April, Fogliano testified that a certain baker had gone to warn the Jews to stop their disturbances, otherwise they would be ‘treated as they deserved’.59 At the end of his short interrogation, he added: ‘This was well known. All Soliera knows about it.’60

Bernardino de Florenzo

A Christian barber, named as a witness by Panini’s sister Caterina, he confirmed that he heard noises, but was unable to testify as to what the Jews said. He then expressed his surprise that the Jews acted so stupidly, although with no sign of emotional transport:

I was amazed that these Jews let themselves be brought to commit these acts of insolence, a thing that was not the custom in other years.61

He admitted that during this Holy Week he had lost patience with them and nearly came to blows because they would not close their windows.62

The Jewish suspects

At this point in the trial pamphlet, the notary begins to record the interrogation of the six Jews, without a reference to their previous arrest or incarceration. Table 4 shows the dates and numbers of interrogations each Jew faced, as well as which Jews were tortured by the strappado.
The 70–year-old banker Davide de Norsa was released on 27 May, two days after his first interrogation, since his son Cesare petitioned Inquisitor Archangelo Calbetti to release his father due to ill health and old age. Davide was ordered to appear before the tribunal whenever he might be summoned for future interrogations.

Below is a summary of their interrogations and torture sessions.

**Davide son of the late Angelo de Norsa**

He testified that during the festival of Passover his family and guests participated in celebrating the Seder – a festive evening meal which includes the recitation of the *Haggadah*, containing the Exodus story, through liturgy and song:

> after dinner, when people are jollier, the men and women sing together, and each has his own book [a *Haggadah*]. And before Easter [i.e. during Holy Week], while the bells are bound, we stay home and eat well and mind our own business. 63

Davide admitted to the Inquisition that he had refused to close his windows during this time, and testified that since he was deaf and in bed and never went up to the granary, he did not witness the young men’s activities. But he still hinted at maintaining some control over their actions. He testified that on the eighth day of Passover:

> young men amused themselves and returned to the swing. I made them stop at the time of your Holy Days. Then [on Wednesday] I did not want to stop their enjoyment. 64

**Table 4 Dates and numbers of interrogations faced by Jews in Davide de Norsa’s trial of 1604**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number of interrogations</th>
<th>Dates of interrogations</th>
<th>Number of times tortured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Davide de Norsa</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25 May, 1 June, 14 June</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leone de San Felici</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25 May, 31 May, 3 June, 10 June, 11 June</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cesare de Norsa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25 May, 3 June, 8 June, 18 June, 1 (19 June)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cesare de Comari</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25 May, 31 May, 1 June, 8 June, 11 June</td>
<td>1 (18 June)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simone da Carpi</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25 May, 31 May, 3 June, 4 June, 11 June</td>
<td>1 (18 June)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raffaele Finzi de Reggio</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28 May, 31 May, 3 June, 10 June, 11 June</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding the throwing of household waste out of the castello, Davide argued that it did not signify disrespect, or an aggressive act by the Jews, but was thrown out every day, although he had ordered that on holy days, out of decency, they should not throw slops out on the public street but on a side street which David claimed to own, control or otherwise possess. But the waste thrown out of a window had still been heard from within the church. He also implied that Barbara Rubbiano had her own vendetta against the Jews. When the Inquisitor asked for more details, Davide told him of an altercation between his son-in-law Raffaele and Barbara. The precision of David's comment is telling. He insinuates that Rubbiano, probably offended by Raffaele, had decided to retaliate against the Jews. David did not allege general untruth, but precisely transformation or substitution.

A woman called Rubbiana, who lives right across from my windows . . . said to my son-in-law that it was necessary to do to us exactly what had been done to those other Jews in Mantua. My son-in-law said, 'Get along with you! I don't want to have an argument with you because you are a woman.' And she, once the window was up, began to shout loudly and this is why she took one thing and called it something else out of malice.

Leone de San Felici

An elderly Jew, he had been on his way to Cento, but had stopped and lodged at Davide's house for Passover, fulfilling the request of the old Jew to do so. He denied having anything to do with the young men who had made the swing. In fact, he testified to having read a book during the entire event. He testified that he had refused to be associated with the young Jews' actions, believing they were looking for attention which he refused to give them. He denied that he had heard any sort of blasphemous expressions from the young Jews on the pingolo.

Cesare de Norsa

The 16–year-old son of Davide explained that since the young men had nothing to do on Holy Thursday, they made a swing in the granary, as far away as possible from the church, participated in swinging and sang various kinds of Italian songs. He denied singing in the style of Christians. In fact the Jews were singing love songs, and stopped only when Captain Antonio reprimanded them. Cesare testified that the swing was made in the granary and not the synagogue, since he argued that their frivolous actions were not suitable for a house of worship. The young men went on the swing after they had finished reciting the Passover Haggadah. Cesare denied that when he and the other Jews were reciting the Haggadah in the kitchen or singing on the swing, they had been deliberately provocative in their actions and words.
Cesare de Comari

A young Jewish pedlar, who according to Davide often came with his wife to eat in Davide’s house because they were poor, he told the Inquisitor that at Passover he went ‘to [play] chess, and to swing from under the roof tiles, and Davide’s wife and daughter were there, laughing at what we did.’

Cesare explained that due to curfew during the week of Easter [which that year coincided with Passover], the six Jews were ‘locked’ in Davide’s house and thus made the swing for diversion on Thursday, Friday and Saturday for an hour or two after dinner. When asked why Jews had gone on the swing the following Wednesday, he argued that it was no longer Easter, and the Jews had believed that they would not be disturbing their neighbours. Cesare also testified that Simone pretended to be a charlatan, to sell pomanders and ointment, and sang some Italian love songs, such as ‘This is the place where I lost my heart.’

Simone da Carpi

A young, unmarried servant, he had been working in Davide’s house since Carnival. He refused to confess that he had mocked the Passion. He confirmed, however, that he had taken on the role of a charlatan, pretending to sell pomanders of musk, garlic and ointment, but that he, Cesare the son of Davide, and Cesare de Comari had not imitated Christian singing.

Raffaele Finzi de Reggio

He told the Inquisitor that he spent the festival in Davide’s house ‘to be with my wife’, Davide’s daughter. He confirmed that he had nothing to do with the actions of the young Jews on the swing, which suggests that he did not socialize or fit in with these rather boisterous young men. He admitted that he saw the swing suspended from the ceiling of the granary, and also hinted that there was a sharp exchange between him and the young Jews.

On 20 October, the six suspects were summoned to hear the verdict in their case – a verdict that Pope Clement VIII had issued at Rome and dispatched by Cardinal Camillo Borghese on 24 July. Interest and involvement by the Pope rather than just the Congregation of the Holy Office was unusual and occurred very infrequently. But Calbetti admitted that the consultori had not been able to prove that the Jews had mocked the Passion, nor that they had maliciously tried to disturb the offices in the Church, but were still found guilty of the lesser offence of disturbing Christian services. For this reason they were not altogether absolved and the consultori felt a need to consult with the Pope and his College of Cardinals. The Pope had decided that the Jews were
to receive an extraordinary punishment for the disturbances and the said deafening noises which caused great scandal and disturbance to the Christians in performing their ceremonies and offices … in the church.  

In seventeenth-century legal systems, John Langbein has shown, an ‘extraordinary punishment’ *(poena extraordinaria)* was issued when evidence was insubstantial and guilt could not be established under Roman canons of proof, but the court remained convinced that the accused were still guilty. The punishment could signify too that the court was taking into account mitigating or aggravating factors enabling them to intensify the punishment. The Inquisition believed that the Jews had overstepped their place by disturbing Christian prayer. Moreover, even though according to Inquisitorial law the young Jews, after being subjected to torture which had not proven their guilt, should have been released without punishment, they still received a punishment, which Langbein confirms could occur in the ruling of *(poena extraordinaria).* As noted above, Davide de Norsa was fined 70 ducats.

**Judicial issues**

Although initially the Inquisition was anxious to prosecute Jews for mocking the Passion, it soon found little evidence to substantiate the charge. Rubbiano’s testimony was far more extreme than that of the other Christian witnesses on three accounts. First, she conjectured that the Jews involved in the disturbances had come to Soliera precisely at that time in order to disturb the Christians. Second, she was the only one to testify that she had heard cries that sounded as though the Jews were hänging a man and putting him to death, inferring that the Jews were enacting some sort of blasphemous parody of the Passion. (In fact ‘the hanged one’ was a pejorative Jewish expression. Third, and directly related to the second reason, she was the only witness to associate the Jews’ actions in 1604 with a supposed blasphemous outburst by local Jews in Mantua two years earlier. It was this event, the visit of a Franciscan friar, Bartolomeo campi de Saluzzo, to Mantua on Saturday 7 August 1602 which had influenced her perception and thought.

In 1602, de Saluzzo had preached at the cathedral and condemned the ‘malevolence’ of the local Jews. That evening Jews in the courtyard of a Mantuan synagogue had, according to one Christian chronicler:

*made a performance and to be exact a pulpit, in their desire to imitate the afore-said reverend father in order to mock him and make sport of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The official record of the event, published by Duke Vincenzo of Mantua on 13 August 1602, and distributed all over the city of Mantua, was transcribed by the
Modenese chronicler, Giovan Battista Spaccini. It is in fact a far more detailed account of the event, and certain similarities can be noted between the alleged Jewish actions in Mantua and Rubbiano’s own testimony as to what she believed the Jews of Soliera had been doing. Spaccini recorded:

Finding himself in the magnificent city of Mantua, Friar Bartolomeo Saluzzo of the order of the Minorites, of Saint Francis, came to preach with great spirit and fervour. Since there was a large number of people, he had to preach in the main square of the city. In a discourse, he expatiated on the malevolence of the Jews, since there were many of them in attendance. Subsequently the preacher had words about it with His Highness, Duke Vincenzo. On another day, in the said piazza, and speaking likewise on the subject of the Jews, he said:

‘Go to their synagogue. Out of wickedness and evil intention against our Holy Faith and the servants of God, you will find that they have made a figure. And because they are unable to vent their wickedness against the servants of God, they direct it against the said figure.’

Then the most illustrious bishop went immediately to the synagogue, and found those wicked Jews had attached that figure to the rope, and tormented it, inflicting insults and scorn upon it. Finding that the allegation was true, the most illustrious bishop told the Duke. He immediately closed the gates of the city, and took seven of the Jews, who were found to be the instigators of such a crime in contempt of the servants of God, and he had them hanged on Tuesday, 13th of the present month. The names of the Jews were: Giacabe Sacerdote, Salamone de Meli, Salamone Forlani, Luzio Soavi, Gioseffe de Nati, Moisé de Fano the son of Lazzaro, and Rafaelle Franziosi. Apart from this [the Duke] banished from his city and dominions the wives, children, brothers and descendants [of those Jews].

Condemnation and punishment seem to have happened very quickly – without the involvement of any Inquisition, within about six days, and at an unusual time of the year – in August, not around Easter. The document stated that the Jews had purportedly ‘attached’ a rope to an image or effigy, tormenting and scorning it. If it was an effigy, it bears a strong resemblance to what Rubbiano imagined that the Jews of Soliera had done, although she made no mention of a figure.

This particular incident represents a strange throwback to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries when certain Franciscans (particularly Observants, the founders of the Monte di Pietà) had been vociferous enemies of the Jews. They were often restrained by governments, both Florentine and Venetian, who objected to their rabble-rousing sermons, especially if they excited crowds to attack Jewish banks which were holding Christians’ property as pledges. Yet, at the same time, Spaccini transformed the story from being one of mockery and dire punishment to a tale of ritual murder by proxy. Such stories were not unusual, as can be seen from the ones David Nirenberg and Kenneth Stow have uncovered. Stow reports that in the tales told by Gonzalo de Berceo of thirteenth-century Toledo Jews persecuted Christ-like figures made out of wax...
and crucified them. Rubbiano, for whatever reason, wanted to use the Mantua story and developed her theories into testimony. Her words probably resulted from the diffusion of popular beliefs and the persistence in her memory of this particular episode of Jewish accusation and execution. Was her allegation a result of personal grievances or malicious feelings she harboured towards her neighbouring Jews? Or was it something more generic, deep-seated in Christian society? As though suggesting an answer to this question, Davide implied that the Jews were subject to insult as a result of the events in Mantua:

I do not know why, but inhabitants of the county and ordinary folk sometimes say to Jews that it would be necessary to do as was done in Mantua.

Rubbiano did not succeed. The Modenese Inquisition had a clear sense of limitations, it made no effort to accept the Mantuan connection and was not willing to condemn the Jews for an offence for which it had no real proof. Instead, it preferred to have the disturbing synagogue moved and determine whether the unwelcome Jewish noise verged on mockery and blasphemy. How much worse the fate of the Jews in 1604 could have been!

**Jewish noise**

Certain kinds of noise were associated with organized disturbance or protest in seventeenth-century Italy. Important research has been done on the medieval mattinata and the early modern charivari, which was usually a disturbance created by nocturnal musicians whose intent was of both ‘a joyous and insulting variety’. But the noise that came from Davide’s house during Holy Week in 1604 was called a strepito – that is, loud yelling or shouting. Its Latin form strepitum, as well as the verb ululare, meaning to howl like dogs, was used regularly throughout the Middle Ages to describe Jewish prayer. King Henry III of England had referred to Jewish noise as ululare and strepitum in 1253, and Philip V of France used these terms in 1320 to justify his order that a local synagogue be removed ‘since its noise competed with the prayer of a nearby church’.

Although this Jewish song and laughter was given the label strepitum in the trial proceedings, it was never proven that the noise was associated with Jewish prayer rather than Jewish disturbance. Barbara Rubbiano told the Inquisitor:

Jewish people never shout the way we do, and I am judging from the way the voices sounded, because my house is close by and across the street. The Christians on that day would never have held such a big feast, and I knew that there were only Jews in that house.

The Jews, the Christian witnesses argued, made the strepiti specifically when the Christians were attending offices in the local church. Furthermore, there was
common knowledge among the Jews as to how they were supposed to behave even at the time when the two festivals coincided. Christians were also likely to take offence at any noise made by Jews at a time when they were supposed to be silent. This explains why there was no clear understanding by the Christian witnesses whether what they heard was the recitation of the Haggadah or the swinging on the pingolo. The Seder liturgy includes a large number of songs and the singing of prayers both before and after dinner. It terminates with the singing of traditional songs to well-known tunes, which invites boisterous participation. It is possible that the noise heard by the Christian witnesses on Thursday night was made by both the Jews singing the Haggadah in the kitchen (as Giosi and Renini testified) and the games in the granary (as the testimonies of Panini, Caterina, de Bastia, Cosatti, Fogliano and de Florenzo suggest), since according to Cesare de Norsa the first action followed the second. The Haggadah was read for the first three hours (from around seven to ten Italian time) of the night and then afterwards from about the fourth or fifth hour of the night (meaning eleven or twelve o’clock), the time when young men were on the pingolo. Yet none of the witnesses stated that they had heard the strepiti on exactly the same occasions as Rubbianio. There was no real agreement among the Christian witnesses as to what the noises were, as Table 5 shows.

Only when the Christian witnesses were in the immediate vicinity of the church could they hear the strepiti. This was confirmed by Antonio Fogliano, Captain of the Guard, and the three watchers in the church who heard the strepiti only on Holy Thursday and Good Friday when they were actually in the church, guarding the sacrament.

Nor was this the first time that Jews participating in a Seder had disturbed neighbouring Christians. In Umbria in 1485, despite the accusation that Jews

### Table 5  Days when Christians reported hearing Jewish disturbances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of witness</th>
<th>Holy Thursday</th>
<th>Good Friday</th>
<th>Holy Saturday</th>
<th>Following Wednesday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panini</td>
<td>n sh l</td>
<td>n sh l</td>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubbianio</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caterina</td>
<td>sh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Bastia</td>
<td>n sh</td>
<td>n sh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renini</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giosi</td>
<td>n s</td>
<td>n s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosatti</td>
<td>s l</td>
<td>s l</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fogliano</td>
<td>n sh</td>
<td></td>
<td>n sh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Florenzo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: s = singing, n=noises, sh= shouting, l =laughter according to testimonies.
Plate 3 The Church of San Giovanni Battista in Soliera
Plate 4  The back left side view of the church

Plate 5  The front left side view of the church
were attempting ritual murder, Jewish suspects confirmed in their testimony that the source of the noise they had made on Good Friday was their celebration of the Seder. In the Inquisitorial archives in Modena, two letters from Cardinal Giovanni Garzia Mellini (1608–27) of the Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome, dated 8 April 1623 and 13 May 1626, refer to the problem of noise and scandal caused by the Jews of Vignola praying in their house during the festival of Passover.

Jewish ‘noise’, therefore, was real. Whether it was what Christians believed it to be, however, is another story. The long history of this problem reveals that the Christians insisted that Jews remain completely silent or that no sound that the Jews made should be audible to them during Holy Week. Jewish prayer-noise was offensive by definition and particularly during this time.

Jewish defiance

From the descriptions in various testimonies, the actual location of the granary was dangerously close to the church, its windows facing it directly. One can speculate that the loud clashing noises occurred when the young Jews, Cesare de Norsa, Cesare de Comari and Simone da Carpi, swung as high as they could, shouting and singing and perhaps colliding with beams of wood which supported the roof in the attic. Tellingly, it was the three young men who were swinging. These men, cooped up in a house and forbidden to show themselves during the Christian Holy Week, would seek diversion and cause a disturbance, completely
THE **PINGOLO**

4 forgetting that they could be heard outside.\(^{107}\) Cesare de Comari admitted to the Inquisitor that his purpose for going to Davide’s house at the time of Holy Week was not, as one would have thought, to observe the festival of Passover, but only to have *spasso*, a term implying ‘fun, delight, entertainment, or amusement’.\(^{108}\) Simone da Carpi, the Jewish servant, not afraid to join his contemporaries, also testified ‘that what we did, we did to have some enjoyment’, as did Cesare de Norsa.\(^{109}\) Raffaele Finzi de Reggio also used the term *spasso* in his reference to the young Jews’ actions on the swing.\(^{110}\) Its usage before the Inquisitor was to play down the Jews’ behaviour and prevent the Inquisition from being suspicious of their activities. At certain points in his interrogations, Davide also stressed that he had ordered the boys to stop their fun and games, and they had obeyed.\(^{111}\) But he implied that at other moments he had not restrained them: ‘I made them stop at the time of your Holy Days but at that time I did not want to stop their enjoyment.’\(^{112}\)

Before the Inquisition, Davide would certainly do his best to excuse the young men for their actions. He referred to the young Jews as *putti*, which represented his effort to pass off their behaviour as boyish pranks that merited no serious consideration, much less retribution and penalties.\(^{113}\) But whether Davide had his own grievances against the Christian community cannot be confirmed. Had he failed to close his windows because he wanted to prevent the local *Sassaiola* from taking place? According to Panini’s testimony, Davide had told him that the Podestà had said that the boys would not be throwing stones at the house and this might explain why he had left his windows open.\(^{114}\) Did Davide want to ensure that this would not happen, whereas Panini had given orders to bring this about? Was this dispute not perhaps representative of a deeper struggle between the religious and secular powers as to who should take charge of the Jews during curfew? We can only speculate.

In regard to the young men’s denials about offending Christians, denials they made insistently, even under torture, one should question how likely it was that they would have ever risked mocking the Passion. The calculated conformity of their testimony, their consistent argument during a series of interrogations and torture, suggests that they were at least telling a partial truth that was sufficient to cover up their ‘real’ rowdy behaviour. The Jews consistently argued that the point of their masquerade was only to imitate Christian vendors of ointments, herbs and unguents. Simone da Carpi testified:

> I swear as if I were before God, that I and the others, and I in particular pretended to sell pomanders of musk, garlic and ointment.\(^{115}\)

The young Jews testified that their actions represented frivolous masquerading, but even by frivolous masquerading the Jews were flouting the Holy Week curfew imposed on them for many centuries.\(^{116}\) David Gentilcore has
drawn historians’ attention to the early modern Italian practice of charlatans or ‘mountebanks’ (*monta’ inbanch = mounting a platform), as they were called, who were permitted to sell their wares on the public *piaze* as long as they followed the necessary local licensing procedures. He records the existence of different types of ‘medical’ charlatans – some who used theatre more than others, posing as entertainers, inviting spectators and entertaining them from a stage, but at the same time collectively preventing the ‘professionalization of medicine’. Most of these mountebanks sold a ‘variety of fairly unglamorous specific remedies; a “conserve” of a powder for teeth, a plaster or an oil for “chill pains”, coral oil or powder for worms and an ointment for scabies.’ Their success relied upon convincing their audience of the authenticity of their wares, and fraud was often thought to lie behind their selling technique. At this time too there was an established use of botanical plants and herbs as ingredients for these ointments that began to be brought from Crete, Cyprus and wherever they could be found. According to Peter Burke, these seventeenth-century Italian charlatans dealt not only with illnesses but also with other personal problems, from disappointment in love to the loss of valuables.

An English visitor to Italy, Thomas Coryat, noted his own experiences of a charlatan in the Piazza San Marco in Venice in the early 1600s. The ‘amorous song sheets’ he referred to certainly matches the Jews’ actions. Coryat reported:

Twice a day, that is, in the morning and in the afternoone, you may see five or sixe severall stages erected for them . . . . After the whole rabble of them is gotten up to the stage, whereof some weare visards being disguised like fooles in a play . . . the musicke begins. Sometimes vocall, sometimes instrumentall, and sometimes both together . . . after the musicke hath ceased, he [the leader] maketh an oration to the audience of halfe an houre long, or almost an houre. Wherein he doth most hyperbolically extoll the vertue of his drugs and confections . . . After the chiefest Mountebankes first speech is ended, he delivereth out his commodities by little and little, the jester still playing his part, and the musitian singing and playing upon their instruments. The principal things that they sell are oyles, soveraigne waters, amorous songs printed, Apothecary drugs, and a Commonweale of other trifles.

Another important aspect of these charlatans was their performance in the form of *commedia dell’arte*, derived from the medieval traditions of clowning, trickery and farce, offering laughter, fear, play and surprise and particularly escape. Often their most effective selling techniques were surprisingly dexterous gymnastic feats, acrobatic tricks and multifarious disguises. The grand finale was ‘a theatrical performance which, in the comic tradition, entertained the people for about two hours with revelry, laughter and amusement. Interestingly enough, these performers were generally forbidden to perform on Church feast days or during Lent near the local church.
So were the young Jews in fact parodying a common phenomenon? Was their singing an accompaniment for their staged rituals of healing? If so, why would they be interested in imitating Christian mountebanks? What did these Christian figures and therefore this local knowledge signify for the Jews? I would like to suggest that, when pieced together, the various stories present an allegory about community and about attempts to break boundaries, or erase lines people draw between themselves and their neighbours. The Jews during Lent were forbidden to watch any Christian processions in the street, the issue being that, by seeing or hearing Eucharistic processions, they defiled them. But at the same time, these Eucharistic Lenten processions were pageantry of sorts for the Christians and it could well be that the Jews felt the need to create their own imitation pageantry, in the form of entertainment and songs on the swing. Their imitation of the ciarlatano — a type they would have come across on the piazzes of Italian cities — suggests imitation of an Italian Christian experience which they watched but were not expected to share.

On a day-to-day basis, physical proximity to the surrounding Christian community had the effect of confirming the Jews’ cultural and religious otherness. And yet from within closed quarters Jews could sally forth, at least implicitly, imitating the Christians who enclosed them. Similar actions had already taken place in the Venetian ghetto. A Venetian Inquisitorial investigation of 1571 revealed that these Jews followed an annual ritual of pelting a baker’s assistants with bread and dirty brushes brought into the ghetto at Passover’s end. Here within the walls of the ghetto the Jews had become the Christians, in a ritual stoning of sorts, whereby Jewish children instead of Christian ones threw dirty brushes instead of stones at the Christian porters who brought them their bread when Passover was finished. Interestingly, both this and the Soliera case were reported as disturbances carried out by Jews in the years 1571 and 1604, when the festival of Easter coincided with the festival of Passover. Perhaps these Jewish outbursts served somehow to counter the impotence and frustration the Jews felt during enclosure.

In the confines of the granary in Soliera in 1604, at an ‘extraordinary’ time, a theatrically encoded performance may have permitted these players, like the Venetian Jews, to create a locus for fantasy, to act by a process of amalgamation and illusion as though they themselves were the defiant insiders. Were their real audiences at this moment the Jewish women peering up at the pingolo or the Christians outside, purposely being disturbed in their Christian prayer?

In reality, the Jewish nocturnal masquerade, however primitive, in the privacy of Davide de Norsa’s granary might well have been a call for inclusion in the wider Italian society. Their activity nested, contained, restrained and metamorphosed their essence of otherness into one of momentary belonging. However, the key word here is momentary, for when they were told to stop,
they did. Nor did they do anything that implied blasphemy or the mockery of Christianity or the Christian clergy. Their imitation surely suggests then that desire for inclusion played a bigger part in Jewish cultural experience than has previously been thought.

Notes
1 A pingolo is a makeshift swing. A plank of wood is held on each side by a rope attached to either an overhead beam or a tree.
2 Testimony of Giovanni Battista Panini, the Inquisitorial vicar of Soliera, in the trial against Davide de Norsa, 1604. This trial is found in ASMOfIP 25 f.6. (4r) (perché sono da 30 anni ch’io sono qua, né mai ho sentito né sentito dire che facissero gli hebrei strepiti alcuni massime in detti tempi, che solevano stare tutti ritirati e modesti, e questo anno hanno fatto alla peggio).
3 The word castello suggests an enclosed place with only one entrance – public brothels were sometimes called castelli or castelletti for that reason. Moreover, the intention of having Davide live there may have been not so much to isolate the Jews, as to protect pledges in the hands of the banker against theft. The Church of San Giovanni Battista was built at the beginning of the eleventh century and still stands today. (See pictures on pages 206–8). It was originally used as a Benedictine monastery.
5 Stow, Theater, p. 4.
8 Ibid., Part 2, p. 29.
9 Regarding his banking activities, Davide de Norsa again appears in local records in 1616, where a condotta (a charter) is granted to him to bank ‘cum solitis capitulis et taxis’ in Soliera. See Balletti, Gli Ebrei, p. 67. See also ASMOfIP 25 f.6 (70v). In the records of the punishment read to Davide, the notary confirms that he received a licence to open his synagogue in 1602. See also ASMOfI Modena – Lettere della Sacra Congregazione di Roma, busta 251, 27 November 1604.
10 See the testimony of Fredianus de Biccochis, the rector of Soliera in 1617 in ASMOfICH 244 f.17. Cesare de Norsa, the suspect in this trial, accused of trying to dissuade his sister from being baptized, told the Inquisitor that his synagogue was only used for the main festivals.
12 The first reference to a curfew in ecclesiastical documents appears in the Third Council of Orleans in 538. See Ammon Linder, The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 471. The first reference to the curfew in Papal sources was a letter from Pope Alexander III, who between 1159 and 1181 answered the query of the bishop of Marseilles whether Jews were supposed to keep their doors and windows shut on Good Friday. See also Simonsohn, Apostolic See, docs 48 and 79. During the reign of Clement IV (1265–68) the prohibition was incorporated into canon law. See Simonsohn, Apostolic See, doc. 232.
13 See Toaff, Love, pp. 181–6. For the specific case of Modena see the Archivio Storico Communale,
Memoriali del Consiglio dei Conservatori, Gridario 1566–1760. Here a grida of 8 March 1599 called ‘Ordine che non siano molestati e offesi, particolamente né giorni della settimana santa’ also declared that Jews were not to leave their homes during this period.

14 For examples of documents concerning the curfew in Italy see Segre, Jews of Piedmont, docs 165, 2638, 2773; Toaff, Jews of Umbria, docs 841 and 1223.


16 Toaff, Love p. 185.

17 In the sixth century, the reason given why Jews had to close their synagogue in Terracina was that their chanting offended the local Christians. See Simonsohn, Apostolic See, doc. 8. For other complaints see documents 3, 5 and 300. Grayzel, Church and the Jews, vol. I, doc. 14 and Simonsohn, Apostolic See docs 79 and 825. See also Simonsohn, Jews in the Duchy of Milan, doc. 3409.

18 ASMoFIP 67 f.21.

19 See Friedberg, Corpus, X.5,6,3.

20 The 1222 Council of Oxford passed a resolution to this effect, as did the 1246 Council of Chichester and other English and continental councils.

21 Cardinal Camillo Borghese sent Inquisitor Archangelo Calbetti a letter from the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, instructing the synagogue in Davide’s house to be completely removed. This letter appears in its original form in ASMoFI Modena — Lettere della Sacra Congregazione di Roma 1568–1608, busta 251.

22 ASMoFIP 25 f.6 (68r–69r); Davide de Norsa paid the fine immediately.

23 The original letter is in ASMoFI Modena — Lettere della Sacra Congregazione di Roma 1568–1608, busta 251.

24 ASMoFIP 25 f.6 (72v). The letter is almost illegible, but there are a few fragments that can be understood. Referring to the 1604 trial, Lerri wrote: ‘Not only then against our orders, but from the trial in the name of our Lord Clement VIII and of the Father Inquisitor General Archangelo Calbetti and of the episcopal vicar, that the aforesaid Davide de Norsa should destroy the synagogue. Now, I know and have information that the same Davide de Norsa has built in his house a new synagogue, which is already in use. But it is being reported that he has done it with a licence and under the authority of Alberto Soninero of the Signor Duke. Therefore I did not want to take any action and give him malicious satisfaction, … unless you give me instructions on what to do about it.’


26 See ASMoFI Modena — Lettere della Sacra Congregazione di Roma 1609–1621, busta 252.

27 Ibid. ‘I built the synagogue with a licence from the Signor Duke, I have brought the licence with me. The Signor Imola told me that the Duke and not the Pope had the authority to give licences to build synagogues.’

28 ASMoFICH 244 f.9.

29 See ASMoFI Modena — Lettere della Sacra Congregazione di Roma 1609–1621, busta 252.


31 ASMoFI busta 295, n. 2 Miscellanea, letter of Tinti to Cardinal Sant’Onofri, 24 May 1631. On disputes regarding the Finale synagogue see Balboni, Gli Ebrei, p. 9; ASMoAME Memoriale dei banchieri ebrei 1633, busta 8; ASMoFICH 245 f.67; ASMoFICH 246 f.14; ASMoFI Modena: Lettere della Sacra Congregazione di Roma 1629–1638, busta 254, where there is much correspondence on the matter. See also ASMoFI busta 295, Letter of Inquisitor Tinti to the Sacred Congregation on 18 March 1634.

32 It is interesting to note that in a processo against Cesare de Norsa in 1617 for dissuasion of his sister from baptism, one Christian witness, Herculio Agagio, the Inquisitorial vicar of Soliera in 1617, still referred to David’s synagogue in Soliera as a place where Jews gathered together and caused disturbance. See ASMoFICH 244 f.17.

33 ASMoFIP 25 f.6 (1v–1r).
The three men were probably members of the local parish confraternity of the Holy Sacrament. It was important that at Easter time the sacrament should not be left alone. The ritual would involve placing the host inside some sort of vessel or container which symbolized the tomb or sepulchre of Christ. The origins of this ritual have been traced by O.B. Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), p. 136, to Augsburg and the year 950. The Forty Hour ritual originated in the sixteenth century and is traced to one Father Joseph, a Capuchin of Milan who died in 1556. It could be practised at any time of the year, not just at Easter. For a description of the ritual see William E. Addis and Thomas Arnold, *A Catholic Dictionary Containing Some Account Of The Doctrine, Discipline, Rites, Ceremonies, Councils And Religious Orders Of The Catholic Church* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2004). Note also Miri Rubin’s references to it, in *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 294 and 296. Under Catholic reform there was a move to restore proper reverence for the sacrament, of which this was part – the more so because Protestants were attacking the belief that it really was the body of Christ, and some were reducing the bread to a mere symbol. It may have seemed doubly shocking to the Christians of Soliera that the Jews should disturb such an important ritual (as Giulio Renini said they did).


In Barbara’s embellished testimony she also accused the Jews of shouting ‘gride tutti mena...’ The word *mena* has a squiggle on top of it which denotes that the word has been shortened. Whether this is a reference to the Hebrew term *minim* or *mumar*, both implying that Jesus was an apostate, cannot be confirmed. On the Jews’ usage of these terms in their texts and the prosecution that resulted because of it, 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. 100 and 138. From Rubbiano’s repeating the word, it should be inferred that she did not know how to pronounce this Hebrew term or what its meaning was. Calbetti did not question Rubbiano on the term, nor was it mentioned by any of the other Christian witnesses. The Jews were not even interrogated specifically regarding it. It also remains unclear what the Inquisition knew about this word or whether the Jews understood the Inquisitor’s reference to it.

There is no indication that Ludovico is the husband of Barbara. Panini had mentioned Genesio in his letter to the Inquisition. See ASMoFIP 25 f.6, Panini’s letter at the beginning of the dossier. See (9v–r) and (46r) Cesare de Norsa later admits to the Inquisitor that it was not until Saturday night that they were ordered to stop by Captain Antonio.
THE PINGOLO

49 Ten or eleven o’clock at night.
50 ASMoFIP 25 f.6 (10r–11v).
51 Ibid. (19v).
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid. (11r).
54 Ibid. (io proprio sentii di chiesa il loro schiamazzo e tra cantione intromesse erano de i risi alle volte).
55 Beatrice Gottlieb, The Family of the Western World from the Black Death to the Industrial Age (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 28 notes that it was common for the upstairs rooms of houses to be used for the storage of grain.
56 ASMoFIP 25 f.6 (13r). ‘We would be ashamed to do or say something that is improper and although we sometimes have a laugh among ourselves, this does not mean that we are doing wicked things.’
57 Ibid. (13v–r). (Questi giovani havevano fatto un pingolo o ninigatta che è una corda attaccata a un travo con un asse un andava sopra tirare l’altro spingendo in qua, e in là, per spasso, et io istessa e mia figlia stasano a vederli). The term ‘ninigatta’ is probably the scribe’s personal abbreviation for something longer like ninigiocattolo, a child’s plaything.
58 Ibid. (16v).
59 Ibid. (17v).
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid. (18v).
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid. (21r). The bells did not ring during the forty hours when Christ was in his tomb. The ringing of the campanile bells symbolized in some cities, including Perugia and Milan, that the Holy Week curfew had ended. See Toaff, Jews of Umbria, doc. 841. Cecil Roth makes an interesting point in his article ‘The Eastertide Stoning of the Jews and its Liturgical Echoes’, pp. 366–7. Here he shows that ‘when Passover and Easter approximately coincided, as they so often did, Holy Thursday or one of the following days was termed by the Jews Yom Hesgoror the day of shutting in, and additions to prayers were made in the synagogue service referring to the occasion but converting the segregation from a token of contempt to one of distinction’. It almost seems as if the Jews had their own programme of activity for the duration of the curfew.
64 ASMoFIP 25 f.6 (22r).
65 Ibid. Davide, as he tells the Inquisitor, would not have known the time, since during Holy Week the clock tower’s bells were tied. Although by this period more and more people were acquiring portable clocks to use in their homes, it would appear from his testimony that Davide did not yet have one. On such portable clocks, see Carlo M. Cipolla, Clocks and Culture 1300–1700 (London: Collins, 1967), pp. 40–55.
66 ASMoFIP 25 f.6 (35v). He testified: ‘Those words have never been said in my house, but is a malicious allegation by someone who quarreled with my son-in-law.’
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid. (46r). Cesare de Comari described Leone disparagingly, as a ‘tramp’ (vagabondo), in his testimony. He is the only one to do so.
69 Ibid. (24v). ‘The youngsters made the swing above in the granary, and I remained downstairs. I was reading a book and did not hear any of the said words. I obviously heard the loud noises, the singing and the racket, but I did not understand their words.’
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid. (44v) and (60v).
72 Ibid. (27r). ‘It is not true that we sang in the style of Christians, except for love songs. We did not know that it was forbidden until Captain Antonio came to scold us and we stopped.’
73 Ibid. (44r): ‘because such things are not done in the synagogue.’
74 Ibid. Cesare de Norsa’s statement as to how long the Jews were on the swing was also different. According to Simone da Carpi the three had stayed on the swing for an hour; according to Cesare de Comari, two to three hours. This, however, contradicts Leone de San Felici’s testimony. He maintained that the reciting of the Haggadah had taken approximately three hours.

76 ASMoFIP 25 f.6 (47v). This contradicts Simone da Carpi’s testimony, which specified that the swing lasted an hour. See 44r–v.

77 Ibid. (48v).

78 Ibid. (47v).

79 Ibid. (29–30v). There is no mention in the trial of Raffaele’s wife’s name.

80 Ibid. (49r–50v). ‘Passing by, I saw the swing which was in the granary before the door that led to the synagogue and there was a rope attached to a beam . . . when I saw the swing, the young men were not there and I saw it only in passing.’

81 Ibid. (67r–68v).

82 Ibid. (68r).

83 Ibid., p. 50.

84 Ibid., p. 59.

85 ASMoFIP 25 f.6 (7r–8v).


89 See Simonsohn, *History*, p. 35. For a Jewish description of the event, see Kann Almbladh (ed.), *Joseph Ha-Kohen Sefer Emeq Ha-Bakha* (The Vale of Tears) with the Chronicle of the Anonymous Corrector (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1981), p. 122/7. See also Antonio Bertolotti, *Martiri del libero pensiero e vittime della Santa Inquisizione nei secoli XVI, XVII, e XVIII* (Rome, 1902), p. 116. In his list of martyrs of the Roman Inquisition, the only Jews whom Bertolotti mentions are these seven Jews who were hanged in 1602. The reason he gives is similar to the Christian chronicler: ‘because of the suspicion, or the truth, many Jews in their synagogue had ridiculed the fanaticism of the preacher, many were arrested and seven of them were hanged.’ The hanging of the Jews had little to do with the Mantuan Inquisition but was carried out by the Duke in collaboration with the bishop.


91 In the medieval period, during the festival of Passover, Jews were often accused of enacting some sort of blasphemous parody of the Passion. See Horowitz, *Reckless*, pp. 151–62. See also Cecil Roth, ‘The Feast of Purim and the Origins of the Blood Accusation’, *Speculum* 8 (1933), 520–6; and Joseph Shatzmiller, ‘Desecrating the Cross: A Rare Medieval Accusation’ (in Hebrew), Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel 5 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), pp. 159–73.

92 See Nirenberg, *Communities*, p. 220.

93 Stow, *Jewish Dogs*, pp. 27, 58, 238.

94 ASMoFIP 25 f.6 (31v). Raffaele de Reggio told the Inquisitor that ‘what the woman said was out of maliciousness’.

95 Ibid. (36v).

THE PINGOLO


98 Ibid.
99 ASMoFIP 25 f.6 (6r).
100 Ibid. (4r). Jews had to be careful all the time not to do anything that might disturb or offend Christians. The earliest text I have found that refers to Jewish noise is in Linder, *The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages*, doc. 477. For other texts see note 6. It is interesting that in Rome, when Jews were forced to race in the *pallio*, any Jew who in the middle of the race made a noise in front of a church or monastery had to pay a fine. See Martine Boiteux, ‘Carneval annexé: essai de lecture d’une fête romaine’, *Annales, Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 32 (1977), 356–80, 368. Papal decrees had specified that Jews must not disturb Christians.
102 ASMoFI 25 f.6 (50r). Raffaele de Reggio confirmed this: ‘We all sang the *Haggadah* in the kitchen where we ate near the church by the side of the small street and the courtyard. Nothing else was sung in the house, except the psalms of David, the Passover [*Haggadah*] and the benedictions at the table.’
103 See ibid. (16r) for Antonio Fogliano’s testimony: ‘On Holy Saturday, when the Holy Offices were recited, … They yelled and shouted so insolently, that I, being inside the church, a little behind the doors, heard this, and I believe that everyone in the church heard this, because they were shouting in the part of the house overlooking the church.’ See also 10r, 12v, 19r.
106 Simone told the Inquisitor (42v) that this granary had two windows which looked out towards the public street from one window and the other faced the church. The point is also the proximity of the Jews to the church, even from the kitchen where they were holding the Seder.
107 Ibid. (14v). Stella, Davide’s wife, hinted that the young Jews had acted rather carelessly: ‘Your Serenity knows well, that when there are lads around, they often play tricks, pulling a chair out from underneath somebody and similar things.’
109 Ibid. (55r). Cesare de Norsa reports that the reason they made the *pingolo* was ‘to have some enjoyment’. Ibid. (80v).
110 Ibid. (51r–v).
111 Ibid. (22v). ‘I said to Captain Antonio Fogliano that they would not make the noises and immediately they [the lads] obeyed.’
112 Ibid. (22r).
113 Ibid. (23r–24v).
114 Ibid. (22v). ‘When they were throwing the stones at our windows and I had begged the *Podestà* to stop this disturbance, [he told me] that if I did not want them to throw stones, I should close the windows. I believe he did this to me as an order and it seemed to me that he did not have the authority to make such an order. I said that I did not want to close them, because it was not the custom and I had never done it during previous years when I closed the windows only at night.’
115 Ibid. (31v).
116 Simonsohn has shown that the Jews in Mantua had by the beginning of the seventeenth century been disobeying the regulations of Holy Week curfew for a quarter of a century. See Simonsohn, *History*, p. 115. Toaff has identified a case in 1511, of Mosè, a Jew of Gualdo Tadino, who was prosecuted in Perugia before the ducal court for mocking ecclesiastical ceremonies during Holy Week. See Toaff, *Il vino*, p. 225.
119 Gentilcore, ‘Charlatans’, 303.
122 Burke, *Historical Anthropology*, 217.
124 Gentilcore, *Healers*, p. 117.
125 Ibid., p. 119.
126 For musical accompaniment to these types of actions, see Burke, *Historical Anthropology*, pp. 214–15.
127 On such processions, see Edward Muir, ‘Images of Power: Art and Pageantry in Renaissance Venice’, *American Historical Review* 84 (1979), 16–52, 40. Portable platforms used in these processions were called solari. See also Stow, *Catholic Thought*, p. 70. Stow notes that from the early medieval period canons had forbidden Jews to watch Eucharist processions from their open windows, ‘suggesting that any Jewish contact, even visual, with the Eucharist was considered contaminating’.
128 ASMoFIP 25 f.6 (26v). Cesare de Comari admits that ‘Simone faciva il ciarlatano con fingere di venderi delli balli e delli unguento, e cantava qualche canzone’.
130 Development of these ideas was helped greatly by reading Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).