

The Inquisition, Professing Jews, and Christian Images in Seventeenth-Century Modena

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In seventeenth-century Italy, Christian relics and images were scattered through urban spaces, not only because the faithful were expected to acknowledge and touch them, but because their moving through city streets in processions celebrated communitas, the sense of belonging that was so much part of early modern civic existence.

The Inquisitorial archive in Modena holds at least twelve processi against professing Jews (who lived for the most part in the city capital or in smaller Jewish communities scattered through the duchy) for the offence of desecrating Christian images during its most active period of prosecution between 1598 and 1640. Denunciations accused Jews of removing crucifixes from walls, stoning or tampering Christian statues and religious paintings, and failing to show the necessary respect to images carried through the streets. This paper explores the frequency of the image desecration charges against Jews in early modern Italy and in particular the duchy of Modena, the pivotal impact of internal Christian processes about their own images and whether these objects did in fact have inherent or stable meanings for Jews at this time.

ON August 9, 1617, Michele Sanguinetti, a thirty-seven-year-old Jew appeared spontaneously before Fra Massimo Guazzone, the Inquisitor General of Modena, with a fabricated charge against a co-religionist, the wealthy Jewish banker, Simon de Sanguinetti (no relation). In his denunciation, Michele reported that when he had gone to pledge in de Sanguinetti's bank, the banker had "in a scornful fashion" blatantly broken open a crucifix filled with relics in front of him and tossed the relics out of the window.¹ Giovanni Spaccini, a local chronicler, who rarely commented on the

This article is dedicated to the memory of my dear uncle Dennis E. Samuel who passed away in January 2012. His generous support accompanied all my years of study. I would like to thank both Dana Katz and Brian Pullan for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this essay.

¹This *processo* is found in the Archivio di Stato in Modena, *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Causae Hebraeorum 244, folio 18. Here Michele Sanguinetti reports "sei mesi prima essendo andato insieme ad Abramo Saunguine, fu Calmo e a Giuseppe Pontasso da Simon Sanguinetti ad

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local Inquisition's prosecution of converted or practicing Jews, chose to mention Michele Sanguinetti's false allegation with these words:

If the Jews had been charged with the desecration of Christian images there would have been a general rising against all Jews, these Jews would have been killed and their possessions burned, and all other Jews would probably have been permanently banned from Modena.²

Although Spaccini undoubtedly exaggerated the potential consequence of this trial, Michele Sanguinetti's choice of image desecration as the accusation against his co-religionist is significant. It raises questions concerning the Jews' attitude towards Christian images and the widespread belief that Jews did in fact desecrate them. In early modern Italy, Christian statues and paintings were commonly found in communal places, not only because the faithful were expected to acknowledge and contemplate them, but because their being carried through city streets in processions celebrated communal piety or *communitas* as Edward Muir has described it, the sense of belonging that was so much part of early modern civic existence.³ The ubiquity of these images created a landscape in which reverential behavior was expected and any deviance was immediately noticed. The search for significance and meaning of accusations of Jewish image desecration rests on the assumption that as a historical phenomenon it uncovers an uneasy equilibrium between fear of idolatry and popular practices of veneration in Christian society. These accusations become a paradoxical and bivalent reflection of the way early modern Jewish existence was embedded in that of the surrounding

impegnare 'uno sparviero' di Abramo, vide che Simon rompe una Croce con un Christo, al quale era stato attaccato 'un boletino' per 'sprezzativo,' cioè per manifestare disprezzo. Il crocifisso cadde a terra e da esso uscirono delle reliquie: Simon le raccolse e le gettò dalla finestra." The idea of relics somehow falling out of a crucifix sounds odd. It suggests a false denunciation clumsily concocted by somebody who was not very familiar with the ritual objects of Catholicism. A crucifix by definition consists of a cross with the body of Christ nailed to it and is not generally used as a container for anything else. Relics are not usually kept inside crucifixes but stored in vessels called reliquaries. On the shapes of reliquaries, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1995), 202ff.

²Albano Biondi, Rolando Bussi, Carlo Giovannini, eds., *Giovan Battista Spaccini, Cronaca di Modena*, Vol. IV, 1617-1620 (Modena: F. C. Panini, 1993), 342.

³See Edward Muir, "The Virgin on the Street Corner: The Place of the Sacred in Italian Cities," in *Religion and Culture in the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Steven Ozment (Kirksville, Mo., Sixteenth Century Studies Publishers, 1989), 25–40, 28. Muir was influenced by Victor Turner's groundbreaking anthropological study on the rituals of the Ndembu in Zambia where he developed the concept of *communitas*. See Victor Turner *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977). Here Turner proves how the analysis of ritual behavior and symbolism may be used as a key to understanding social structure and processes.

Christian culture. At the same time, they illustrate an unstudied aspect of hidden Jewish violence and the actualization of emotions that might otherwise remain unnoticed.

The dossier of Simon de Sanguinetti's trial is not the only image desecration trial that exists in the Inquisitorial archive in Modena. Here there are at least twelve trial proceedings (6%) out of a total of 186 against professing Jews, during its most active period of prosecution between 1598, the year the Holy Office was raised to full Inquisitorial status, and 1638, the year Modenese Jews were confined to a ghetto. Besides image desecration, the Roman Inquisition was authorized to judge Jews for nine other offences.⁴ These included denying belief in one God, sacrificing to demons or causing Christians to dabble in diabolism, devil worship, blaspheming Christ and the Virgin, proselytizing Christians or neophytes, dissuading or abusing potential converts from baptism, sheltering heretics, possessing blasphemous books, and housing Christian wetnurses or servants in their homes.⁵ The Inquisition's intention was not to encourage the Jews' conversion or expulsion but to try and keep Jews apart from Christians and so purify Catholic society. In the twelve proceedings for image desecration, Modenese Jews were accused of removing crucifixes from walls, stoning, defacing or ridiculing religious paintings and failing to show the necessary respect to images carried through the streets. Half of these *processi* (and four of the six completed) involved Jewish suspects who lived not in the city capital, but in smaller Jewish communities scattered through the countryside. Here, the political and religious decentralization may well have generated retaliatory hostility between Jews and Christians more spontaneously than in the city. Altercations seemed to flare up and settle down quickly, as Jews struggled or negotiated for their own spatial autonomy.

In order to place Sanguinetti's accusation in its historical context this essay begins with the historical background of the allegation against Jews and then argues that by the early modern period the ubiquity of images and their desecration in Italy had removed the allegation from a specifically Jewish context. By the late sixteenth century, Protestants or Jews were accused of image desecration; (even Catholics, but from entirely different motives—chiefly out of frustration and resentment, because a saint or image has failed to give

⁴See the Papal Bull of Gregory XIII, *Antiqua iudearum improbitas* of 1st July, 1583 in *Bullarium Diplomatum et Privilegiorum Sanctorum Romanorum Pontificum*, eds. Sebastiani Franco and Henrico Dalmazzo (Augustae Taurinorum, 1857–1872), VIII:378–79. For commentary and a summary of the bull, see Kenneth R. Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy 1555–1593* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1977), 33–34.

⁵For more information on other Inquisitorial proceedings against professing Jews in Modena, see Katherine Aron-Beller, *Jews on Trial: The Papal Inquisition in Modena 1598–1638* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

them the help which they required).⁶ Drawing heavily on Inquisitorial records, trial activity in Modena is analyzed in order to reconstruct the Inquisition's policies and administration over the Jewish community for this offense. Finally, instigators and victims of the offenses are considered as well as Christian imaginings of how Jews behaved toward images of the sacred.

I. THE INITIATION OF AN ALLEGATION

There is disagreement among scholars as to the date and provenance of the first Christian allegations of Jews desecrating images. Some suggest that these stories originated in the sixth century in the west, since tales of Jews desecrating images and then converting to Christianity upon realizing their power appear in Gregory of Tours's *Glory of the Martyrs*.⁷ Others argue it was eighth-century Byzantium, torn by the iconoclastic controversy, which disseminated similar narratives.⁸ Although both Judaism and Christianity shared an elementary fear of idolatry, the point of these stories was to disseminate the fact that Jews absolutely rejected images as props to facilitate devotion. The Third Commandment refuted the suggestion that images had any power of their own. Catholic authorities, on the other hand, encouraged image adoration, and relied on images as mediums of mass veneration, seeing them as forms by which to reach God, so long as the created objects were not treated as idols.

From the twelfth century, accusations spread as the veneration of sacred images particularly of the Passion became increasingly popular in the Catholic west.⁹ Impressive Romanesque churches began to house large numbers of sumptuous images, objects, and utensils that not only decorated and enhanced altars, but were dispersed throughout these consecrated buildings, absorbing the sacred

⁶Regarding Christian reliance on particular saints and their images to protect them from harm, see Robert Hertz, "Saint Besse. Étude d'un Culte Alpestre," *Mélanges de sociologie religieuse et folklore* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1928), 131–191; and Michael P. Carroll, *Veiled Threats: The Logic of Popular Catholicism in Italy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

⁷James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (London: The Soncino Press, 1934), 291 and Christopher Ocker, "Ritual Murder and the Subjectivity of Christ: A Choice in Medieval Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review* 91, no. 2 (April 1998): 153–92, 177.

⁸See Joshua Starr, "An Iconodulic Legend and Its Historical Basis," *Speculum* 8, no. 4 (October 1933): 500–503, 501 and Eric M. Zafran, "An Alleged Case of Image Desecration by the Jews and its Representations in Art: The Virgin of Cambron," *Journal of Jewish Art* 2 (1974): 62–71, 62.

⁹See Elliott Horowitz who in *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), chapter 6 "The Fascination of the Abomination: Jews (and Jewish Historians) Confront the Cross," presents an enticing and provocative thesis by arguing that Jews have in the past demonstrated a strong attraction or "illicit desire" for crucifixes. Drawing upon examples from the eleventh century onwards, a time when crucifix imagery became prominent in Western Christian piety, he suggests a collective and standardized Jewish reaction and subtext to the crucifix in diverse historical periods and geographical settings rather than an entire spectrum of reactions ranging from abhorrence to tolerant bemusement.

powers traditionally ascribed to relics. Life-size graphic and gruesome crucifixes were erected to stand on the choir screen or hang from the chancel arch. A century later, icons (those images with standard compositions, whose didactic messages would be easily understood by people who saw them) were brought out of the church, and erected in public and communal spaces in the hope that their ideas would be contemplated daily, thereby blurring the boundaries between holy and secular spaces.¹⁰ In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Franciscans, more in touch with developing popular opinion, propagated the use of images which depicted Christ as a defenseless victim to stimulate affective piety.¹¹ Ivory, metal and wooden statues, and carved and painted panels with scenes from the Gospels or other select holy figures isolated from larger narratives began to appear in domestic homes, where individuals and families of varying rank and spiritual standing enjoyed the intimate and tactile contemplation of these moveable items.¹² In sparsely decorated domestic spaces, Madonna images were hung predominantly in the antechambers and bedrooms of urban homes, where they sometimes served as substitute for church attendance.

As the miracle tale genres of host desecration increased in Europe from the thirteenth century, it is not surprising that traditional stories of Jewish mistreatment of Christian icons also multiplied. Jews were seen as the murderer and torturers of Christ, re-enacting his passion—by scourging crucifixes, torturing consecrated hosts, or murdering Christian children at the time of the Passover. Accusations spread that Jews desecrated Christian images such as paintings or crucifixes (either by stealing them from churches or uncovering them in their own homes). The offended images then revealed their miraculous and retaliatory power, resulting in the conversion, execution or death by other means of the Jewish persecutor. These allegations rested on the belief that a sacred image, just like a consecrated host, displayed its miraculous powers by bleeding or weeping as a result of being hammered, pierced, or scourged.¹³ One case in thirteenth

¹⁰See Samuel Y. Edgerton Jr., *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution during the Florentine Renaissance* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 14. Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art*, Cambridge Studies in New Art History and Criticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 47 notes that at this time there was a rise in the number of professional painters and sculptors who worked outside monastic patronage by forming guilds of similar workers.

¹¹See Ann Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies and the Levant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 161.

¹²Jacob Burckhardt has argued that this was a particularly Italian trait, since Catholics here had an advanced sense of aestheticism. See *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 299.

¹³See Petra Schöner, "Visual Representations of Jews and Judaism in Sixteenth-Century Germany," in *Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in 16th Century Germany*, ed. Dean Philip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2006), 357–391, 379 who takes this argument further and connects host desecration and image desecration charges to ritual murder.

century Cologne reported in the chronicles of Abbot Richer of Senones, local Jews (particularly women) were accused of stabbing a painting of the Passion and icons of the Virgin and Child hidden on the interior walls of a house they were renting. These images began to bleed so profusely that the offense was uncovered by neighboring Christians. The Jews were arrested, their goods confiscated, some baptized, others were executed or exiled. A church was constructed on this site, and as Julius Aronius, the nineteenth-century German historian notes “here the highly respected painting was preserved.”¹⁴ In these tales generally, little description is made of the purported damage done to the sacred image or of any attempts to repair it. Its sanctity seemed to lie in its defaced appearance.¹⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum argues saliently in her study of blood piety in late medieval Germany, that the appearance of blood in these accusations was not random.¹⁶ It seems that Jews, by providing miraculous blood, humanized the images, and confirmed for the Christian that the sanctity of their images could only be maintained in their own hands.

The Jews’ association with miraculous images would also emerge in more sophisticated ritual murder and host desecration discourses toward the end of the medieval period. Mitchell Merback’s detailed study of the “Man of Sorrows altar” (a statue of a suffering Christ holding the chalice or the host) in Pulkau, Lower Austria, shows how the image was seen to bleed after a host desecration charge resulted in the massacre of its Jewish community in 1338.¹⁷ This bleeding was seen as a purification process, turning the place where sacrilege had been committed into one of atonement, and, then, into a hallowed and prosperous pilgrimage site.¹⁸ Dana Katz points out that as the cult of the two year-old Simon of Trent (allegedly murdered by local Jews during Easter 1475) spread at the end of the fifteenth century, images of the

¹⁴J. Aronius, “Ein Wunder in Köln und die Juden,” in *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* II (Braunschweig: C. A. Schwetschke und Sohn, 1888), 76–81. I would like to thank Evelyn Schiff for helping with a translation of this passage.

¹⁵On the wide range of visual images depicting the Jews’ desecration of Christian images, see Eric M. Zafran, “The Iconography of Antisemitism: A Study of the Representation of the Jews in the Visual Arts of Europe, 1400–1600,” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1973), 195–216. For another interesting example in Germany, see Annette Weber “New Attitudes towards the Jews in the Era of Reformation and Counter-Reformation: The Patronage of Bishop Echter von Mespelbrunn,” in *Beyond the Yellow Badge: Anti-Judaism and Antisemitism in Medieval and Early Modern Visual Culture*, ed. Mitchell B. Merback (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2008), 347–69, 358.

¹⁶*Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 78.

¹⁷Mitchell B. Merback, “Fount of Mercy, City of Blood: Cultic Anti-Judaism and the Pulkau Passion Altarpiece,” *Art Bulletin* LXXXVII, no. 4 (December 2005): 589–641.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 625.

“Blessed Simon,” particularly printed ones in the Tridentine and Valcamonica regions, were also believed to possess miraculous powers.¹⁹

Image desecration allegations could also arise from the fear that Jewish money-lenders naturally chose to profane church images and objects that came into their hands as collateral for credit pledged by impecunious clergy. Here Jews were seen as iconoclasts unwilling to tolerate graven images and believed to be seizing opportunities of defacing or defiling them. Jews were known to accept these items as pawns, even though the Church and numerous rabbinical authorities continually prohibited such dealings.²⁰ Philip Augustus’s ecclesiastical chronicler Rigord argues that one of the reasons why Jews were expelled briefly from France in 1182 was that a Parisian Jew had taken ecclesiastical objects as pledges and then thrown them into a latrine.²¹

II. SACRED IMAGES OR IMAGES OF THE SACRED?

In Spain, the association of Jews with miraculous image desecration charges continued well into the seventeenth century.²² In 1630, Portuguese new Christians in Madrid were accused of ritually beating an image of the Cristo de la Paciencia in the home of Miguel Rodriguez. The image was alleged to have bled and wept on several occasions. Seven *conversos* were punished with life imprisonment and six were burnt at the stake.²³ The Jewish philosopher, physician, and polemic writer, Isaac Cardoso complained in *Las excelencias de los Hebreos* of 1679 that Jews alone were continually accused

¹⁹Dana Katz, *The Jew in the Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 142. I thank Dana Katz for bringing these examples to my attention.

²⁰On ecclesiastical prohibitions against Jews receiving church vessels as pawns, see Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 7 vols., (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, c1988–c1991), docs. 6, 210, 538, 3132 and *History* 185. Jews urinating in church vessels that were pawned by Christians is a subject of discussion in the sermons of Bernardino of Siena; see Franco Mormando *The Preacher’s Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 176–77. On the discouragement of rabbinical authorities, see *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts*, edited with commentary by Vivian B. Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), in particular 11–12, 17, 32 and 42. In the twelfth century Eliezer of Metz (c. 1115–1198) prohibited Jews from using Church vessels, even when they were received as pledges for loans. The thirteenth-century German Rabbi and poet Meir of Rothenburg prohibited the Jews from using Christian ceremonial items for their own ritual purposes.

²¹See Ivan G. Marcus, “A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Early Culture of Ashkenaz,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (Schocken Books, 2002) 449–516, 479.

²²See William A. Christian Jr. *Moving Crucifixes in Modern Spain* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 6.

²³Juan Ignacio Pulido Serrano, *Injurias a Cristo: religión, política y antijudaísmo en el siglo XVII (análisis de las corrientes antijudías durante la Edad Moderna)* (Instituto Internacional de Estudios Sefardés y Andalusíes: Universidad de Alcalá, Servicio de Publicaciones, 2002), 124–153.

of destroying miraculous images or hosts, because they had no power to dispute these false allegations:

when Calvinists or the Protestants or the Muslims drag Christs on the ground, trample hosts, destroy images or demolish altars, no miracles are invented claiming that the statues speak or the hosts leap or shed blood, but it is only when those [deeds] are attributed to the Jews, who are like shorn sheep and tame lambs. There is no one to protect or defend them, and they lack the power to defend themselves, and the voice with which to complain.²⁴

In Italy iconoclastic charges against Jews that mention thaumaturgical powers of desecrated images are harder to find. According to Censius Camerarius (the chamberlain of Pope Clement III [1187–1191] who wrote his *Liber Censuum*, in 1192), papal inaugurations in Rome included a procession from St. Peter's to the Lateran basilica after the installation of the new pope.²⁵ An image of Christ was engraved on the main arch of the Lateran Basilica, which had been allegedly struck on the forehead by a Jew and had consequently bled. Bitterness regarding this misdeed was, according to Adriano Prosperi, still felt during such papal processions in the seventeenth century.²⁶ Another iconoclastic case against a Jew involving a miraculous image occurred in August 1493 in Florence; a young *marrano*, Bartholomew de Cases, was accused of slashing three Marian images, one of which was credited with miraculous powers, and was stoned to death by an enraged crowd before the *Otto di Guardia e Balia* could have him executed.²⁷

The reason why iconoclastic charges against Jews in Italy rarely mentioned the thaumaturgical powers of desecrated images in the early modern period needs to be asserted. It seems that the Catholic Church had become so fearful of Protestant iconoclasm reacting forcefully to the materialism of Catholic piety, that Jewish image desecration was no longer a primary concern. Protestantism argued that since the end of the Apostolic era, it had become impossible to persuade saints to intercede with God and bring about

²⁴Yosef Yerushalmi, *Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Apologetics: Columbia University Studies in Jewish History, Culture and Institutions*, No. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 454–55.

²⁵See Censius Camerarius, *Le liber Censuum de l'eglise Romaine* I, ed. P. Fabre and L. Duchesne (Paris, 1910), 290–316; S. Twyman, *Papal Ceremonial at Rome in the Twelfth Century*; Henry Bradshaw Society, *Subsidia* 4 (London, 2002), 115–39; and Amnon Linder “The Jews too were not absent . . . carrying Moses's Law on their Shoulders,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 323–95, 350–52.

²⁶See Adriano Prosperi in “Incontri rituali: il papa e gli ebrei,” *Storia d'Italia* XI (1996) 495–520, 497–98.

²⁷See Umberto Cassuto, *Gli Ebrei a Firenze nell'età del Rinascimento* (Firenze: Tipografia Gallettie Cocci, 1918), 64–65 and Dana Katz's salient discussion of this offense in *The Jew in the Art of the Italian Renaissance*, 107–17.

miraculous events (that is interruptions of the ordinary course of nature), while the Council of Trent vigorously endorsed and affirmed the value of venerating images and relics associated with cults that dispensed favors.²⁸ Some forms of Protestantism, especially Zwinglianism and Calvinism, were fiercely iconoclastic and wanted to see churches and public places purged of images, so that worshippers could concentrate on the Word of God alone, as preached from the pulpit.²⁹

At this time too, popular religious folktales in Italy continually transmitted stories of the veneration of miraculous images, (more often on the *edicole* or porticos of buildings where people congregated and passed through).³⁰ Here too Jewish offenders were replaced by Catholic ones, whose own desecration of miraculous images reflected their frustrations that sacred images were unhelpful. Michael Carroll has shown the popularity of tales involving the playing of a game near a sacred image, which in anger one of the players strikes. The image then bleeds and the offender dies, after which the figure begins to dispense divine favors. In fact, the Papal Inquisition dealt with a number of miraculous image cases in the decades from the mid-sixteenth century.³¹ Chiara Franceschini counts thirty cases in the peninsula that were investigated by the Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome from 1607 to 1723, particularly between 1637 and 1639, concerning at least eight wooden engraved crucifixes in Assisi, Pesaro, Cagli, and Rome that had miraculous tendencies. By policing the boundary between orthodox piety and popular veneration, ecclesiastical tribunals tried to take control of the adoration of sacred images and prevent miracles from backfiring badly against the Catholic church. None of these cases involved allegations against Jews.

Outbreaks of popular fury against Jews for image desecration did continue as both the work of Michele Luzzati and Dana Katz have shown. But these cases against the prominent moneylenders, Isaaco di Vitale of Pisa in 1467 and Daniele di Leone da Norsa of Mantua in 1493, involved non-miraculous images both inside and on outer walls of their own homes. Dana Katz has shown in her recent monograph just how awkward it was for Jews who uncovered Christian images on or near their premises.³² These Jews were often in trouble even if they had obtained official permission to remove them. Their cases were also regulated by the ducal courts, able to judge lawsuits involving religious offenses attributed to Jews and led by dukes keen to protect their Jews rather

²⁸See Hubert Jedin, "Genesi e portata del decreto tridentino sulla venerazione delle immagini," in his book, *Chiesa della fede, Chiesa della storia: saggi scelti* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1972), 368.

²⁹See Joseph Leo Koerner *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 27.

³⁰Michael P. Carroll, *Veiled Threats: The Logic of Popular Catholicism in Italy*, 30–31, 57.

³¹*Ibid.*, 60.

³²Dana Katz, *The Jew in the Art of the Italian Renaissance*.

than expose them to perilous allegations.³³ What is fascinating, as Luzzati points out, is that these particular Jews were confident enough to believe that they would be able to have Christian images depicted on the walls of their homes removed without endangering their positions.³⁴ Such too was the conviction of Simone de Sanguinetti, a Jewish banker who lived in Spilamberto, a small town in the duchy of Modena in 1635 who when summoned before the Inquisitor regarding an image of the Blessed Virgin and Child that had been damaged in a spinning mill he was renting, anxiously testified that he had appealed to both secular officials and the local Archpriest, Filippo Mossa to whiten the wall because he hoped in this way to prevent an accusation of desecration against him: “because I knew from experience that Jews can be tricked, by someone or other damaging the painting and then blaming us [Jews].”³⁵

Did these cases lead governments and ecclesiastical courts to ensure that the enclosure of Jews in sixteenth and seventeenth century Italy did not house any Christian images that Jews might desecrate? In the effort to separate Jews from Christians, it would be natural to remove or obliterate Christian images found in an area designated as a ghetto. In Bologna on the eve of the expulsion of the Jews in 1557, the ecclesiastical authorities had removed an image of St. Christopher from their ghetto, and whitened another eight images that were within the enclosure.³⁶ Michele Luzzati has confirmed that measures were also taken to remove or cover such images in the ghettos of Cremona in 1580 and Mantua in 1613.³⁷ But it cannot be established at this stage whether this was standard practice for all the ghetto enclosures in Italy.

III. TRIAL ACTIVITY

Unlike books, religious images were never considered sufficiently dangerous to compel the Counter Reformation papacy to create a disciplinary congregation for the offense of desecrating them. Nor was the control of Christian images ever placed officially under the jurisdiction of the early modern Roman Inquisition, re-established by the Papal bull *Licet ab initio* in 1542, despite Francesco Peña's 1607 commentary on Nicolau Eymeric's manual

³³Michele Luzzati, “Ebrei, Chiesa locale, ‘principe’ e popolo: due episodi di distruzione di immagini sacre alla fine del Quattrocento,” *Quaderni storici* 54 (1983): 847–77 and Katz, *The Jew in the Art of the Italian Renaissance*, 44–68.

³⁴Michele Luzzati, “Ebrei, Chiesa locale, ‘principe’ e popolo,” 220.

³⁵Archivio di Stato, Modena, *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum busta 256 f. 17, 24v.

³⁶See Guido Dall'Olio, “Ebrei, papi, vescovi e inquisitori a Bologna alla metà del Cinquecento. Le premesse dell'espulsione del 1569,” *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* XXV (1999), 164–65. The list of images is in Maria Gervasio, “Il ‘Chiuso degli ebrei,’ Contrade, case e portoni del ghetto” in *Verso l'epilogo della convivenza. Gli ebrei a Bologna nel XVI secolo*, ed. Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli (Firenze: Giuntina, 1996), 177–86.

³⁷I thank Michele Luzzati for this information.

Directorium Inquisitorium, which defined the “destruction of images” as a heresy or deviant behavior.³⁸ Nevertheless, as Chiara Franceschini has shown, from the late sixteenth century Inquisitorial tribunals in Italy together with episcopal courts conducted judicial proceedings against those who attacked sacred images or crafted suspect images that could potentially foster deviant piety.³⁹ In 1593, the Bolognese Inquisition promulgated an edict on the subject in reaction to an incident of vandalism against images of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. Further edicts were issued in 1622 and 1637.⁴⁰

In Rome, the Papacy had exclusive legal authority over Jews, and the latter were subject to the papal vicar, the *Tribunale criminale del Governatore* and the *Senatore*. Although, as Marina Caffiero has shown, Jews were summoned before the Holy Office, the loss of *processi* makes it impossible to quantify the number of trials.⁴¹ Antje Bracker argues that the tribunal in Rome focused its efforts more upon the annual censoring of Hebrew books, the number and size of synagogues in the Papal States as well as the supervision of Jewish cemeteries.⁴² But Simona Feci has uncovered two cases where Jews were actually caught desecrating images.⁴³ The *Tribunale Governatore* in Rome prosecuted in 1625 a case in which an image of the Virgin and Child in the alley of the Savelli in the ghetto of Rome had been badly damaged either by shoes or stones thrown at it.⁴⁴ That such images existed inside the Jewish enclosure seemed to be a surprise to the court; it would have been logical to remove them all from the ghetto, from the time

³⁸See Nicolau Eymeric, *Directorium Inquisitorium, cum scholiis seu annotationibus eruditissimis d. Francisci Pegnae Hispani, S. Theologiae et iuris Utriusque Doctoris* (Rome, 1578). See Directorii, 221.

³⁹See Chiara Franceschini's entry “Arti figurative: la rappresentazione” in *Dizionario storico dell'Inquisizione* vol.1, diretto da Adriana Prospero (Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore, 2010), 102–05.

⁴⁰See Francisco Bethencourt, *The Inquisition: A Global History, 1478–1834* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009), 208–09.

⁴¹See, for example, the unique juridical position of Jews in Rome as described by Kenneth R. Stow, *The Jews in Rome* vol. I, 1536–1551, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1995), xxxv, and the recent work of Marina Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati. Storie di ebrei, cristiani e convertiti nella Roma dei papi* (Rome: Viella, 2004), 12–15. Irene Fosi has shown how Roman Jews appealed to the *Tribunale criminale del Governatore*, which in the sixteenth century had become the main authority in criminal cases for the city and district of Rome. See Irene Fosi, ‘Criminalità ebraica a Roma fra Cinquecento e Seicento: Autorappresentazione e realtà,’ *Quaderni Storici* 99 (1998), 553–73.

⁴²Antje Bracker Trier's article “‘The Series “Stanza Storica” of the Sanctum Officium in the Archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as a Source for the History of the Jews,” in *The Roman Inquisition, the Index and the Jews: Contexts, Sources and Perspectives*, ed. Stephan Wendehorst (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2004), 169–76.

⁴³Simona Feci, “Guardare e vedere al di là del muro. Immagini sacre e iconoclastia ebraica a Roma in età moderna,” in *Le Inquisizioni cristiane e gli ebrei: tavola rotonda nell'ambito della Conferenza annuale di ricerca, Roma, 20–21 December 2001*, ed. Giuseppe Galasso (Rome, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2003), 407–429.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 410ff.

of its establishment in 1555. The Jews' guilt was unambiguous in a second case that Feci discusses. In the spring of 1611, a group of four Jews had dined in the tavern next to S. Paolo in Rome outside the walls of the ghetto. On their way back, probably inebriated, they had begun to throw stones at the effigy of a Madonna depicted on the gate of a vineyard in the vicinity of Monte Testaccio. Their punishment was very severe. The two younger Jews were whipped "through Rome" and the older two sent to galley service for ten years.⁴⁵

In Modena, the Inquisition handled its cases of Jews in a restrained and non-persecutory manner—a combination of its own legalism and its position *vis à vis* the secular power which prevented it from assuming full jurisdiction over the Jewish community.⁴⁶ In 1598, Jews who had previously lived in Ferrara followed Duke Cesare d'Este, attracted to Modena because they preferred the relative tolerance of the Estense family to the harsh and often unpredictable policies of the papacy.⁴⁷ The Jewish population in the city increased, reaching 750 in December 1638 on the eve of the creation of the ghetto, almost the same number (700) as had entered the Venetian ghetto in 1516. As noted above there are twelve *processi* between 1598 and 1638 against professing Jews for this offense in the Inquisitorial archive of Modena.⁴⁸ The Modenese tribunal showed itself as a court which focused on efforts to ascertain the truth by seventeenth-century standards, which meant distinguishing between innocence and guilt, and, within the category of guilt, recognizing the difference in degree of transgressions and framing the punishments of Jews according to those gradations alone. Its control was tight and regulated, but it was also checked by competing jurisdictions and even more intensively by its own legalism, a paradox Inquisitorial research has affirmed time and again.⁴⁹

⁴⁵Ibid., 421ff.

⁴⁶The efficiency of the Holy Office in Modena was often impaired by the tribunals' unstable relations with the Duke. See Katherine Aron-Beller, *Jews on Trial*, 32–34.

⁴⁷Most Jews resided in the San Bartolomeo area of Modena, in the Cervetta quarter which from 1622 was nicknamed the Contrada Sanguinetti, the Via del Sole, Via dei Coltellini and Rua del Muro. Some resided until 1616 in the Contrada de Servi, but had to surrender their homes and shops, as a result of the Jesuits establishing their church and college there. Jewish shops were situated under the porches of the Via Maestra (now Via Emilia) even though at times this disturbed their Christian neighbors.

⁴⁸See Archivio di Stato, Modena, *Fondo dell'Inquisizione* in chronological order: Causae Hebreorum 244, folio 8; Processi Busta 29, folio 19; Processi Busta 35, folio 10; Processi Busta 38, folio 16; Causae Hebreorum 244, folio 16; Causae Hebreorum 244, folio 18; Processi Busta 244, folio 23; Processi Busta 244, folio 29; Causae Hebreorum 245, folio 38; Processi Busta 85, folio 11; Causae Hebreorum 245, folio 58; Causae Hebreorum 246, folio 17.

⁴⁹See, in particular, the works of Paul Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press 1540–1605* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977); Anne Jacobson Schutte, *Aspiring Saints: Pretense of Holiness, Inquisition and Gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618–1750* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) and Stephan Wendehorst, ed., *The Roman*

For Christians, Inquisitorial procedure was didactic and corrective, with the intention of providing the Christian with spiritual penances and sanctions, as well as tools to reenter Christian society at large. When in 1623 a twenty-two-year-old Christian painter, Julio Cesare Mellato admitted that he had soiled an image of San Sebastian that had been recently painted on the main door of the new church of that name, he told Inquisitor General Fra Giacomo Tinti di Lodi that he had intended only to soil the words written underneath the image and not the image itself. He requested a pardon for his actions and a series of penances were considered a sufficient punishment for his misdeed.⁵⁰ For Jews the process remained a disciplinary one as set out in the papal bull of 1581, *Antiqua iudaeorum improbitas*, to ensure that they would be wary of breaking ecclesiastical regulations and offending Christian piety.⁵¹ When the Inquisition promulgated its edicts against Jews in Modena in 1603, not only did they prohibit Jews from selling, holding, or pawning objects of the church, they also demanded that no Jews should be present when religious processions passed through the duchy.⁵²

It is interesting then that most allegations against Jews in seventeenth-century Modena usually revolved around inexpensive images, such as small silver, gold, or wax crucifixes or reliquaries and broadsheets of the Passion scene, rather than large crucifixes or panel paintings that had been the object of allegations in earlier periods. (Only one trial involved the painting of the

Inquisition, the Index and the Jews: Contexts, Sources and Perspectives (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2004).

⁵⁰ Archivio di Stato, Modena, *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Processi Busta 67, folio 2.

⁵¹ Sebastiani Franco and Henrico Dalmazzo, eds., *Bullarium Diplomatum et Privilegiorum Sanctorum Romanorum Pontificum*, (Augustae Taurinorum 1857–72), VIII:378–79. Clause 10 stated that Jews were to be punished: “If anyone mocks Christians, or makes fun of or holds in disrespect Christ the lord, who was sacrificed on the altar of the cross for our redemption, and specially on the holy day of Good Friday fixes or hangs a lamb or sheep or anything on the cross, or spits on it or does anything else against it.”

⁵² Albano Biondi, “Gli ebrei e l’Inquisizione negli stati estensi,” in *L’Inquisizione e gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Michele Luzzati (Roma: Laterza, 1994), 265–85, 270. See the transcribed Inquisitorial edict of 21 June 1603, *Contra gli abusi del conversare de Christiani con Hebrei*. Clause 7): “To Jews, we expressly prohibit and order that they do not sell or hold in their shops, nor take as pawn objects of the church like goblets, plates, bodies, vestments, crosses, figures, images, relics and such things.” Clause 9): “They are not to meet in processions of Christians, and particularly when the most holy sacrament is being brought.” This regulation was first ordered by the Council of Vienna in 1267 which had prohibited Jews from occupying the streets during Eucharistic processions and ordered them to stay behind closed doors and windows when the consecrated host passed in the vicinity of their homes. See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 289. In the fourteenth century, Jews were considered capable of the “most dangerous threats” by the papal court in Avignon, when they did not kneel and mumbled harmful words in Hebrew while it was carried through the streets.

Virgin on the outside wall of a building, and another the Virgin and Child in the inside of a spinning workshop). The invention of the printing press and the distribution of paper as an inexpensive medium facilitated the production of pictorial broadsheets depicting the stages of the passion, to be pinned up in domestic homes and used by the clergy to disseminate religious content as channels of sacred power.⁵³ This shift from the stable to the mobile, from the permanent to the transient was brought about by the proliferation of small, portable devotionalia and paraphernalia which were on occasions allegedly or actually broken, damaged, or verbally attacked as the result of altercations between Jews and Christians.

In 1620, Isacco Sacerdote (the future rabbi of Finale), Giuseppe Melli and Abramo Collorni were accused of showing contempt to a broadsheet sold by a local book vendor in a Finale piazza, in particular a drawing that depicted Jesus being crowned with a crown of thorns.⁵⁴ The three young men were accused of ridiculing the image with the words "*Queste sono favole che contano quelli del l'istoria!*" (These are fables they recount about the history!). The three Jews were quickly imprisoned and interrogated in Modena, but their sentence of a year's imprisonment was commuted to a fine, due to the aid of ducal officials who accepted the plea of Isacco's father, Salomone.⁵⁵ In 1607, Abraam de Sacerdote had discovered a similar broadsheet depicting the crucifixion with John the Evangelist at Jesus's feet attached to the entrance of the shop that he was renting in Modena. It was in an effort to protect himself from allegations of image desecration that Abraam appeared before Inquisitor General Fra Serafino Borra, who immediately sent one of his ministers to remove the image. The investigation was discontinued.⁵⁶ The actual broadsheet is affixed to the back of the *processo* in the archive.

In seven of the proceedings, the delators were neighboring Christians, who had been encouraged by their local priests to denounce the Jews for this offense. Local priests also occasionally delated Jews themselves although their testimony was not always reliable. In July 1627, a priest, Father

⁵³See Petra Schöner "Visual Representations of Jews and Judaism in Sixteenth-Century Germany," 357–391, 372. On broadsheets and their effect during this period, see R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1981).

⁵⁴Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell' Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum 244, folio 29.

⁵⁵Ibid. See also Maria Pia Balboni, *Gli Ebrei del Finale nel Cinquecento e nel Seicento* (Firenze: Giuntina, 2005), 55–6.

⁵⁶Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Processi busta 29, folio 19. We are reminded here of the official removal in August 3, 1492 of the image inside Isacco di Vitale's house in Pisa, scrupulously recorded by the archiepiscopal notary. See Luzzati, "Ebrei, Chiesa locale, "Principe" e popolo: due episodi di distruzione di immagini sacre alla fine del Quattrocento," 222.

Dominico Bartholomeo, denounced Simone Camerino of Modena and Zaccharia Sano for failing to report the fact that there was a Christian image on the walls of a house that they rented.⁵⁷ The allegation proved false and the Jews were neither imprisoned nor punished.

Six of the twelve proceedings were discontinued due to lack of evidence. Another three resulted in the acquittal of the Jewish suspects and the remainder being fined, with amounts ranging from 50 to 80 scudi. The fine of the Jew was almost a standardized penalty, a punishment for bad behavior and a form of retribution that meant financial benefit for the Holy Office, which used these fines to help construct and then maintain the Inquisitorial headquarters and prison in the city.⁵⁸ Jewish offenders were usually transformed into debtors without any costly sanctions needing to be applied, or the involvement of the secular arm in the Jew's punishment. Only one Jew, Alessandro de Sanguinetti of Spilamberto was sentenced to imprisonment by the Inquisition because he was believed to be guilty of removing and destroying images from a tavern room where he had lodged in Piumazzo in 1635. Nor is it clear for how long he was imprisoned for.⁵⁹

In general when fined, the Jewish offenders were told that they were being punished not necessarily because their guilt had been proven, but because there was a suspicion that they had committed the offense. Suspicion was in itself an offense punishable both by spiritual and by physical penalties, and it was a charge suitable to persons who (however compelling the judges' belief in their guilt) could not be conclusively shown to have committed the deed with an altogether evil intent.⁶⁰ When in 1606, the teenager Columbino was accused of having threatened to beat Joannes Magnanini, a Christian teenager who was selling crucifixes made of white wax, he was also blamed for snatching and trampling one of the crucifixes, since Jacob, the young Jewish boy who had allegedly broken the crucifix, had died suddenly before

⁵⁷ Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell' Inquisizione*, Processi busta 85, folio 11.

⁵⁸ See Andrea del Col, *L'Inquisizione in Italia dal XII al XXI secolo* (Milan: Oscar Mondadori, 2006), 467 and Vincenzo Lavenia, "Gli ebrei e il fisco dell'Inquisizione. Tributi, espropri e multe tra '500 e '600," in *Le Inquisizioni cristiane e gli ebrei: tavola rotonda nell'ambito della Conferenza annuale di ricerca, Roma, 20–21 December 2001*, Giuseppe Galasso (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2003), 323–56. See also Archivio di Stato, Modena *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Libri di Spesa (Libro della fabbrica dell'S. Ufficio di Modena), busta 283. This document, entitled *Condennazioni e commutazioni pecuniarie fatte nel S. Ufficio di Modena dall'anno 1600, dicembre sino al l'anno 1604, maggio*, lists the date, offence and the fine the Jews faced, and gives some indication of the sum the Inquisition collected from the Jews. According to Albano Biondi, "Gli ebrei e l'Inquisizione negli stati Estensi," in *L'Inquisizione e gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Michele Luzzati (Rome: Laterza, 1994), 265–85, 278, the Jews contributed 4,408 lire out of the 9,200 needed for the building.

⁵⁹ Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione Causae Hebreorum* 246, folio 17.

⁶⁰ This was true for accused Catholics as well.

the investigation was initiated. After being imprisoned for two months, (April 28 to June 20) Columbino was forced to pay a fine of 50 scuti.⁶¹

Two of the twelve proceedings were opened *ex officio* which means that the Inquisitor did not need a delator to start the proceedings, but decided on the strength of a “common report” to investigate the matter himself. Under this procedure, Salvatore de Modena was accused in 1619 of moving and tampering with a statue of the Holy Virgin, but the testimony of Hercules de Coccopani was considered improbable and the Jew was not even summoned for investigation.

Another way in which Jews could offend religious images was by their physical presence as witnesses to the holy processions that moved through city streets and towns. Christians were required to doff their hats and bow to the image, while Jews were expected to move away, since their presence was interpreted as polluting the sanctity of the procession and its images.⁶² Father Jacobus de Lauda came before the Inquisition in 1636 to express his annoyance at seeing the Jewish banker Jacobo Donato and his wife Stella, as well as their Christian wetnurse, standing at the window of their house while the Feast of the Holy Rosary procession had passed by their home. His expectation of finding a Jew present at the procession is even suggested in his testimony: “I looked at the window of the said Jacob to see if some Jew was at the window while the procession passed.”⁶³ Nevertheless, Inquisitor Tinti concerned himself with the more serious crime of Jacobo Donato’s hiring of a Christian wetnurse and the Jew was given a six-month prison

⁶¹Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell’Inquisizione*, Causae Hebrerorum 244, folio 8. On the subject of people who incur fines for suspicious behavior even when their offence has not been fully proved, see Brian S. Pullan, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice 1550–1670*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 62–63.

⁶²For other examples of Jews being accused of this offense, see Simonsohn, *Apostolic See* doc. 818; Dana Katz, *The Jew in the Art of the Italian Renaissance*, 49, 114–16 for the case of Zaccaria d’ Isacco in 1518; Brian Pullan, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice 1550–1670*, 124 for the case of the convert Gian Giacomo de’ Fedeli who was accused of living as a Jew since he did not take off his hat when passing street altars and had avoided the sacrament when it was carried through the streets. In Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell’ Inquisizione*, Processi busta 111, folio 12, Simone Donati and Israel Rubiera of Finale were prosecuted for irreverence towards the Holy Cross, carried by friars of San Nicola while they went to collect a corpse. These Jews had failed to leave the environs of the procession. See also *ibid.*, folio 10 where in May 1639 Davide Salomone Remelenghi was prosecuted for the same offense. See also Adriano Prosperi, “L’Inquisizione Romana e gli ebrei,” in *L’Inquisizione e gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Michele Luzzati (Roma: Laterza, 1994), 67–120, 101, who records a similar case in Rome, of Mosè di Castro, who in 1677 was denounced to the Inquisition because according to his accuser “he turned his back on a crucifix and the Madonna of Montenero.”

⁶³Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell’Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum 247, folio 24, 1v. See the testimony of Father Jacobo de Laudo. On the spatial politics of the window in early modern Italy and England, see Dana Katz “‘Clamber not you up to the casements’: On ghetto views and viewing,” *Jewish History* 24 (2010): 127–153.

sentence for this offense alone and warned not to appear during processions in the future.

Let us return to Michele Sanguinetti whom we left delating before the Holy Office on August 9, 1617 at the beginning of this paper.⁶⁴ Even though within a few days the Inquisition had received two further delations from fellow conspirators, Abramo Sanguinetti and Giuseppe Pontasso, which would have ensured the indictment of the wealthy Jewish banker, the court neither interrogated nor imprisoned Simon de Sanguinetti, clearly unwilling to risk wrongfully accusing a prominent member of the Jewish community. Michele Sanguinetti's iconoclastic accusation transpired to be the main component of a wide-scale fabricated accusation against the wealthy Jewish bankers with the intention of irreparably damaging their reputation and prominent position, not only in Modenese society but in the neighboring cities also.⁶⁵ When on October 10, 1617, Inquisitor General Massimo Guazzoni interrogated Doctor Camillo Jaghel da Correggio, a neophyte and corrector of Hebrew books, who had willingly agreed to act as the spokesperson for the *massari* (lay leaders) of the Jewish community, he confirmed that the conspirators' false accusation was being investigated by one Rondanelli, an ordinary judge of the Palazzo, who had accepted their request for action against these Jewish conspirators.⁶⁶ Although Michele Sanguinetti and Giuseppe Pontasso had fled in time, Abramo Sanguinetti was left standing trial alone and was tortured during one of his interrogations. Since he did not confess, Rondanelli accepted his story that he was not part of the conspiracy and released him. The Jewish community clearly preferred secular jurisdiction and envisaged themselves under the protection of the Duke and outside the jurisdiction of the Church—whatever the Holy Office had to say about the matter.

In five of the proceedings the Jewish suspects were imprisoned during their investigations, but requests that they be allowed home on the grounds of ill

⁶⁴Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum 244, folio 18. It is interesting that the Inquisitor does not ask the Jewish conspirators why they waited five months before bringing the accusation.

⁶⁵Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione* Causae Hebreorum 244, folio 18. These conspirators tried hard to convince neighboring Christians of the Jews' infamy.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 6–7v-r. Jaghel mentions a fourth conspirator—Salomon Sacerdote who did not give a delation to the Inquisition. See the correspondence between the Inquisition and the Congregation of the Holy Office on this case. Archivio di Stato, Modena; *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Modena: Lettere della Sacra Congregazione di Roma 1609–1621, busta 252, letters of 7, 14, 29 October 1617, 25 November, 15 December, Januar 1618 and 12 April 1618. There is also an incomplete letter written to Duke Cesare d'Este dated 1618, probably from the ordinary judge about this matter, also discussing what should be the appropriate action for Jews who had falsely delated fellow Jews and tampered with Christian images. See Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem. Files on Modena, A.S.E. archivi per Materie "ebrei" busta 4 Processi 1-LXXXIII 1600–1629 pezzi n. 83, HM 5407 microfilm c, 113–116.

health made by family members or doctors or due to pressing business concerns were usually treated positively by the Inquisition, as it was for Christians.⁶⁷ Naphtali de Sermide of Finale was accused in June 1631 of a “certain contempt and irreverence for the most holy crucifix” by failing to move away from a procession of the *Compagnia della Morte* (a procession which accompanied criminals to execution, exhorting them to repent and bear their sufferings patiently).⁶⁸ When the Jew appealed he was released before his sentencing to allow him to attend to his business.⁶⁹

The Inquisition’s intention here was to monitor the Jews for simple disrespect for Christianity, construing these incidents as slighting the power of the church rather than symbolizing heretical actions. At the same time it maintained that delicate theological questions did not arise in offences involving physical attacks on images. When over thirty years later, in 1665, ten prominent Jewish bankers of Modena (including Teseo Bandiera, Benedetto Modena, and Abramo Norsia) were accused of casting spells on some small silver and gold crucifixes that were held as pledges in their banks, the Holy Office, after seizing these crosses as well as a medallion depicting Pope Innocent X, nonetheless remained unwilling to prosecute the Jews for sorcery, and instead released them with a caution, to pay 50 *aurei* if they took such crucifixes again as pledges.⁷⁰

It seems that it was only in cases which involved public paintings or image cults that the Inquisition took investigations of Jewish and Christian suspects more seriously. Here allegations against Jews could potentially get out of

⁶⁷See Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell’ Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum 245, folio 44. In this *processo* against Leone Usilio and Paris Bellintano in 1628, a doctor was summoned by the Inquisition on 9 August 1628 and testified that Bellintano was too sick to be kept in prison.

⁶⁸See Adriano Prosperi, “Il condannato a morte: santo o criminale?” in *Il delitto narrato al popolo. Immagini di giustizia e stereotipi di criminalità in età moderna*, R. de Romanis, R. Loretelli (Palermo: Sellerio, 1999), 219–227 and Nicholas Terpstra, *The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy*, Early Modern Studies 1 (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2008). *Della morte* confraternities were established in Italian cities between 1350 and 1550 to offer prisoners the chance to rid themselves of sins before their execution and therefore enter purgatory.

⁶⁹Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell’Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum 245, folio 58. The text states: “Since the said Naphtali had asked to be released from prison because of pressing business which he could not postpone without incurring very serious loss, at the same time protesting that he was innocent of the charges against him: it was without malice but rather through foolishness that he turned his back on the crucifix although it was true that he had been present on the bridge when it crossed over . . . The Lord Inquisitor decided that he should now receive a stern warning that in future he should abstain from such behavior and take pains to absent himself or to hide as Jews ought to do on the approach and appearance of the most holy crucifix, otherwise in future he would be more severely punished all of which he promised to bear in mind.”

⁷⁰See also Archivio di Stato, Modena; *Fondo dell’Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum busta 250; and Romano Canosa, ‘L’Inquisizione e gli Ebrei,’ in *Storia dell’Inquisizione in Italia dalla metà del Cinquecento alla fine del Settecento*, vol. I, Modena (Rome: Sapere 2000, 1986), 51–52.

hand, causing popular unrest and provocation among the two communities. In a *processo* against the five Carpi Jews in 1627 for stoning a painting of the Blessed Virgin, Fra Domenico Greco meticulously investigated the case when two Christian witnesses, Theodoro de Theodoro and Gio Batesto Soleri, testified that Beatrice, the mother of two of the young Jewish suspects, had mumbled while standing near the damaged Madonna image: "What does it matter whether that statue bleeds or not? No harm will come of it!"⁷¹ That Beatrice seemed to be referring to the thaumaturgical powers of the image worried Greco. He decided to imprison her and conduct three interrogations in which Beatrice continually denied that she had spoken such words. At the end of the interrogation, Greco even sent his vicar to study the painting; who noted that there was no evidence of bleeding, thereby confirming that the damaged image was not a miraculous one.

IV. INSTIGATORS, OFFENDERS, AND VICTIMS

No Jew could walk many steps in any direction in the town or city where he or she lived without being confronted by some kind of representation of Christianity, in the form of a crucifix, a sacred image, a church, or a Christian procession. Rabbinical authorities consistently reminded Jews that they were expected to regard the Christian usage of symbols as idolatry and resist the fascination that some icons might arouse.⁷² But in their contact with these symbols, Jews demonstrated a mixture of reactions. The majority appeared to be cautious and wary around Christians' images of the sacred, conforming to the type of gestures that were expected. Various Jews fell prey to fabricated allegations while a few, on occasions, did actually desecrate them.

Not surprisingly, Jews standing trial before the early modern Inquisition in most cases expressed their absolute respect for and sensitivity to the Christian icons that surrounded them. When in 1613 Raffaello Moreno was brought before the Holy Office in Pisa, accused of defacing an image of a Madonna in the house that he rented, he argued that he and his family understood clearly what an offense it would be to deface a Christian image and that he would never have dared behave in such a manner. As a result of his testimony, he was absolved.⁷³ Such statements are similar to our Modenese examples. Here Jewish suspects hid any emotional content towards the purported offense or the image itself. Their

⁷¹Ibid., 3v.

⁷²See the responsa of Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg (1215–1293) no. 125 in *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts*, Vivian B. Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 46. Also see the responsa of Rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra (1479–1573). Ibid., 54.

⁷³Michele Luzzati, *L'insediamento ebraico a Pisa prima del Trecento: conferme e nuove acquisizioni*, in *Società, istituzioni, spiritualità*. (Studi in onore di Cinzio Violante, Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo: Spoleto, 1994), 1:509–517.

concern was to behave in a way that might bring an end to their prosecution as soon as possible with limited damage to themselves. When Emmanuele Rava was accused with other young men of throwing stones at the image of the Blessed Virgin in Carpi, he testified:

God is our guard. We would never do anything to displease the Blessed Virgin, or the other saints.⁷⁴

Naphtali de Sermide who had failed to avoid the oncoming religious procession and had been present as a crucifix passed him, hinted to the Inquisitorial Vicar that he was well aware of the type of behavior that was expected from Jews towards these images:

My Lord, certainly I did not see the crucifix and if I had seen it I would have withdrawn, as is my duty.⁷⁵

Later in the same interrogation he expanded:

Father, I say to your Reverence that if I had known I had committed any fault against the Holy Office, I would of my own accord have come to ask pardon and thrown myself in your arms but I am not aware of having erred.⁷⁶

To show his ignorance of the approaching procession was indeed a safe bet for the Jewish suspect. No Christian witness could confirm that they had told Naphtali to leave, nor did they know the reason why he had tarried. Despite the lack of evidence, it remained difficult for Inquisitor Giacomo Tinti di Lodi to believe that when another Jew had left the scene, Naphtali had remained oblivious of what was going on. Obliviousness to Christian icons was also used by Isaac de Sacerdote, who argued in 1621 that although he had been in a stall buying books, he had never seen nor mocked an image of the crucifixion since:

we [Jews] are not able to look at such images.⁷⁷

When interrogated further, Sacerdote began to suggest that his mocking words might have been misinterpreted by the Christian delator:

It is possible that we said these words speaking of some other picture, but God is my guard, never have we said these words as the witnesses reported.⁷⁸

⁷⁴Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum busta 245, folio 38, 8r (*Dio ci guardi di far mai dispiacere alcuno alla B.a Virgine et ad altri santi.*)

⁷⁵Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum busta 245, folio 58, 11r.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 12v.

⁷⁷Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum busta 244, folio 29, 8v.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 9v.

Not only did Jews face the aggression of co-religionists on this charge, but on occasions, as we have seen, they fell prey to fabricated accusations by their Christian neighbors, keen to absolve themselves of the blame of desecrating images. Investigations in Carpi in 1627 revealed that the five Jews accused of throwing stones at an image of the blessed Virgin were innocent of the transgression. Instead, two poor Christians, Silvestro Bucchina and Vincenzo Stambacino, who had been sleeping under a portico and angered when they were suddenly awoken by the Jews' rushing to nocturnal prayers, had tried to stone the Jews themselves, and missing their targets in the dark had hit the image instead.⁷⁹

When Beatrice, the mother of Emmanuele and Prospero Rava, was imprisoned and interrogated, she reported that not only had one of her sons been hit and wounded by the stones hurled at them by the Christians, but the group of Jews had heroically continued on their way to synagogue to carry out their offices. She provides a vivid picture of the embarrassment she faced the morning after the nocturnal violence, as she passed through the streets of Carpi:

The following day, towards the middle of the morning, I went out on business to visit a Christian laundress and when I passed by the house of one Moriscalco which has a figure painted on it (I do not know which saint it portrays)⁸⁰; there were some people standing on the corner. I heard one of them say, (I do not know who it was who said this) pointing her finger at me. "Here is the mother of those that did the bad thing." I did not respond at all, but carried on with my errands. When I passed through the street, all of them were saying "Here is the mother of those that have done evil." I was completely beside myself. I went to the house of one Signora Antonia, a Christian seamstress, and I said to her that I was more dead than alive.⁸¹

It took some weeks before the Inquisitor was able to track down the two Christian offenders, who were then handed over to the secular authorities for punishment.

One *processo* hints at a Jew's lack of respect for the Christian veneration of images. When accused of breaking a wax crucifix in 1606, Columbino, a teenage Jew argued that he and his friend Jacob (who had died) were consistently being attacked by poor Christian children and the crucifix had been broken by them and not the Jews.⁸² Although Columbino was probably exaggerating the extent of his victimization, one Christian witness, Antonio,

⁷⁹Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum busta 245, folio 38.

⁸⁰It is interesting that Beatrice shows complete ignorance that the painting depicts the Blessed Virgin.

⁸¹Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum busta 245, folio 38.

⁸²Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum busta 244, folio 8, 18v.

the son of Domino Cristoforo, was able to give testimony about Columbino constantly remonstrating with the youth, and threatening repeatedly to damage his wax crucifixes.⁸³ Probably on account of this one eye-witness, and as a disciplinary caution to a defiant lad, Columbino was sentenced to pay a fine.

Another Inquisitorial investigation in Modena does provide compelling evidence of desecration. In 1632, a worrying delation was made by Francisco Bartolomeo de Marco, a Christian artisan to the Inquisitorial vicar of Spilamberto (a small town in the Modenese duchy, about twenty-five kilometers west of Bologna). Bartolomeo denounced Simone de Sanguinetti, a Jewish banker and an important entrepreneur, (no close relative of the above named Jews) who had acquired a silk spinning mill from an insolvent Marchigiano nobleman in 1631 and had, according to him, desecrated sacred Christian images.⁸⁴ Investigations revealed that not only had de Sanguinetti and his sons Alessandro, Raffaele and Buonaiuto run the mill and appointed over thirty Christian laborers to serve them, but there was an image of the Madonna and Child painted on an inside wall of the workshop which had been bordered, locked up and subsequently damaged, to the anger and disgust of the Christian workers who wished to pray before it. Although it was unlikely that the Jews had tampered with this image, De Sanguinetti and his sons were accused of further desecration. Andrea Cavreti, one of the Christian supervisors of the mill, testified that images of saints pasted to a portable altar, which the Christian workers had used for prayer had repeatedly been removed, torn up and thrown across the floor during a Christian festival while the Christian workers were absent.⁸⁵ The Jews were arrested, imprisoned and tortured, although they continually denied all charges. Alessandro de Sanguinetti was also charged with a case of iconoclasm outside the mill. The young Jew had stayed in a tavern in Piumazzo during his travels in 1635, where, according to Thomaso de Garagnana the innkeeper and Caterina his wife, the sacred images of the Blessed Virgin and other saints which had hung on the walls of his room had been removed and taken away. It seemed too much of a coincidence that Alessandro had been accused of the same offense in different settings, and consequently the Inquisition found him guilty and punished him harshly with imprisonment. During this long and complex *processo* the Jews maintained that they were being unlawfully prosecuted, a consequence of a malevolent conspiracy by their Christian workers.⁸⁶ It is difficult though to believe that

⁸³Ibid., 7v.

⁸⁴Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione* Causae Hebreorum busta 246, folio 17.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶This *processo* which spans nine years from 1635 to 1644, is in fact the longest trial proceeding against professing Jews housed in the Papal Inquisitorial archive in Modena. It covers over 400

the Christians would have repeatedly torn up their own sacred images, and the Jews' desecration might well have been an indirect attack on their Christian workers through their images. If so, this desecration represents a form of conflict, the expression of social and economic tensions between Jews and Christians rather than grievances against the images themselves.

Ioly Zorattini provides us with an interesting insight into the Jews' emotional response to Christian images behind the closed doors of empty Venetian *palazzi* in the eighteenth century. In his study of Giulio Morosini alias Samuel Nachmias, the neophyte who wrote *Derech Emunah: Via della fede* to encourage *marranos* who had reverted to Judaism in Italy to consider baptism, Morosini reported how wealthy Venetian patricians often deposited the keys of their *palazzi* with Jewish merchants, allowing them to use their homes while they were away. Morosini then described how he and other Jewish merchants had been able to act out aggression to religious images in the rooms of the *palazzi*: "we acted with as much disrespect as we could, with physical gestures, with shouting and spitting."⁸⁷ Like many neophytes, Morosini may be a fairly tendentious writer. Nor should we place too much trust in the anecdotes of a neophyte bent on making new converts. But his comments do indicate the basic understanding among Jews that to do any real damage remained an absurdly impolitic thing to do.

V. CHRISTIAN IMAGININGS

The search for meaning and significance of allegations of Jewish image desecration rests on the assumption that Christian imaginings rather than the actual behavior of the Jews were the cause of most of these allegations. Hence, one needs to explore the Christian motivations in spreading these rumors and how in particular Christian imaginings and Jewish reality converged and diverged in early modern society.

There is no suggestion in any of the trials that the Christians' community was mobilized by the Church or, in particular, the Holy Office regarding Jewish image desecration. Nor are there any presumptions displayed by Inquisitors in their questionings that Jews would naturally desecrate images. While the

pages of parchment and holds a collection of different documents, including Inquisitor General Giacomo Tinti di Lodi's personal notes that he wrote in preparation for interrogations, and various correspondence between the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome, local secular courts and the Papal Inquisition in Modena.

⁸⁷P. C. Ioly Zorattini, "Derech Teshuvah: La via del ritorno," in *L'Identità dissimulata. Giudaizzanti iberici nell'Europa cristiana dell'età moderna*, ed. P. C. Ioly Zorattini (Firenze: Olschki, 2000), 195–248, 243.

Inquisitors showed a measured response, the hostility and suspicion came instead from Christian neighbors, townspeople, and villagers. In 1606 Johannes Caceri in Carpi, with a certain belligerence toward Jews as potential iconoclasts, told the Inquisitor:

I would not have been able to contain myself and would have given that animal Columbino what for.⁸⁸

The purported words of the Jewess Beatrice in 1627 regarding the bleeding of the Blessed Virgin painting in Carpi, in particular, are revealing. Beatrice was said to have uttered words regarding the bleeding of the statue, while standing underneath it the morning after the stoning. This allegation was presented by two witnesses, Theodoro de Theodoro and Gio Batesto Soleri told Theodoro that Beatrice had said:

What does it matter whether that statue bleeds or not? No harm will come of it!⁸⁹

When Soleri gave testimony, he mentioned a slightly simpler utterance. He told Domenico Greco, the Inquisitorial vicar of Carpi:

I saw the Jewish woman, shaking her head and looking at the said Madonna. She said "you will bleed, you will bleed".⁹⁰

These words provide an image of a Jewess contemplating the statue in regards to its supernatural attributes, its potential means of power. Theodoro had clearly adjusted the expression slightly since hearing it from Soleri. When Beatrice was interrogated on October 9 and 10, 1627, she reacted nervously when the Inquisitor accused her of uttering these words as if she clearly understood the implications of the accusation. The notary recorded that she said while crying:

Never did I say such words. No Jew would ever say such words. If I had said these words, the Christians would have attacked me.⁹¹

It is unlikely that she would have risked making such a statement in front of Christians, at a time when she was conscious of her sons being suspected of desecrating the image. But if we suggest that these words were transposed by a Christian into the mouth of a Jewess, involving her in an offense she clearly did not commit, the question is why.

The *processo* makes no suggestion that the Blessed Virgin was known to have previously demonstrated thaumaturgical powers. But at the same time,

⁸⁸Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum 244, folio 8, 33v.

⁸⁹Archivio di Stato, Modena. *Fondo dell'Inquisizione*, Causae Hebreorum busta 245, folio 38, 3v.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid, 12v.

the image was seen to connect people, their utterances, and the spaces in which they revered and experienced the images. Perhaps these Christians were hopeful, or had emotional or psychological expectations, that the desecrated Blessed Virgin would become a miraculous image? Her bleeding would feed popular hopes of assembling new sources of sanctity. Adriano Prosperi and David Gentilcore have shown how shrine formation in rural areas was particularly frequent from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries since there was a strong need for sacred objects to link devotions to specific rural spaces.⁹² Many shrines started out as images with a reputation for healing which were later substantiated by legends detailing their miraculous discovery and numerous cures. At the same time, these words put in the mouth of Beatrice indicate that deep-seated suspicions that Jews desecrated images were genuinely entrenched in Christian consciences.

VI. CONCLUSION

Although Jews could react in a demonstrable way to images, both in their public and private behavior, these were spontaneous outbursts of desecration rather than any ritualized destruction of images. Some cases involved carelessness—somebody failed to avoid a religious procession in good time and did not do the correct thing when encountering it—and others in which actual verbal disrespect to, or physical damage to, or removal of images were alleged. The prime movers in the second group of cases seem to be teenagers or other young people, which suggests that juvenile rashness, radicalism, or inexperience may lie at the root of these cases, and that adults generally behaved more cautiously—they knew all too well what the consequences might be of a serious accusation against Jews. The trials also indicate that specific Christian images did not hold inherent or stable meanings for Jews but were rather construed in the context of their apprehension, association and usage. The Roman Inquisition remained skeptical about the allegations of malicious image desecration and, in these twelve cases, was inclined to believe that if a Jew did any damage it was accidental or careless. The trials then reveal a substantial gap in attitudes between the common folk and the more measured response of the Holy Office regarding popular accusations of image desecration. Jews were accused of desecrating cheap images such as broadsheets or waxen crucifixes,

⁹²See Adriano Prosperi, “Madonne di città e madonne di campagna. Per un’inceista sull dinamiche del sacro nell’Italia post-tridentina,” in *Culto dei santi, istituzioni, e classi sociali in età preindustriale* edited by Sofia Boesch Gajano and Lucia Sebastian (L’Aquila: Japadre Editore, 1984), 615–47 and David Gentilcore, “Methods and Approaches in the Social History of the Counter-Reformation in Italy,” *Social History* 17, no.1 (1992): 73–98. None of these cases involved Jewish desecration.

or even more substantial wall paintings mainly because neighboring Christians harbored suspicions which were quick to surface. These accusations then prompted the Inquisition to act as a buffer, moderating potential acts of violence against the Jews of Italy in the early modern period.