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The Jew’s balcony: a tale of a Jewess’s flirtation with Christianity

Alack, what heinous sin is it in me
To be ashamed to be my father’s child!
But though I am a daughter to his blood,
I am not to his manners, O Lorenzo,
If thou keep promise I shall end this strife,
Become a Christian and thy loving wife.

(Jessica in The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare, Act II, Scene iii)

In The Merchant of Venice, Jessica, the daughter of Shylock the Jew, fell in love with a Christian. With his assistance, she fled her father, her house and her faith. She displayed surprisingly little grief at leaving the world of her father, or robbing him of his riches. It is a similar story that we find in the Inquisitorial archives in Modena, though this tale is historical, not a fiction. It also finishes differently. Miriana Sanguinetti, the daughter of the wealthy Jewish banker Viviano Sanguinetti, although tempted to convert and marry her Christian admirer, Ludovico Mirandola, in the end remained a Jew and married her first cousin Michello Sanguinetti.

This judicial proceeding is one of a number of tales in the archives that revolve around the accusation of dissuading others from being baptized. From 1598 to 1638 there were eighteen processi executed by the Inquisition in Modena against professing Jews for this offence. The tribunal, almost as a matter of course, brought charges of hindrance or dissuasion against the parents of any young person who had purportedly toyed with the idea of converting and had then experienced a change of heart. But it was not just parents of the potential convert who were arraigned; brothers, sisters, cousins and supposed friends or business acquaintances were also indicted. The clause regarding dissuasion of baptism in Gregory XIII’s Papal bull Antiqua iudaeorum improbitas was based upon the bull Turbato corde, issued by Pope Clement IV (1265–68) in 1267, intended to bring Jews who committed this offence under Inquisitorial jurisdiction. In medieval times this rarely occurred, but in seventeenth-century Modena
Jews were sentenced to various punishments for this offence including public shaming and fines of up to 250 scudi.4

This chapter opens with a survey of the eighteen proceedings in our period, followed by a micro-historical analysis of the trial against Viviano Sanguinetti, mentioned above, who was accused of dissuading his oldest daughter Miriana from being baptized in 1602.5 This processo in particular reveals invaluable information regarding the self-representation of a young, wealthy and engaged Jewish woman, as well as her behaviour and musings regarding baptism on the eve of the establishment of the ghetto in Modena. Such first-hand information is not recorded elsewhere.6 The Inquisition’s interrogation of protagonists and witnesses allows the micro-historian to view Miriana’s relationship with a Christian man as well as the intimate and indiscreet conversations that were had with Christian tradespeople and servants from neighbouring houses. As such the chapter questions the relationship between Miriana and Ludovico according to an analysis of the testimonies. Finally, the roles of neighbouring witnesses and Viviano Sanguinetti in this tale are assessed, as are Miriana’s ambivalent feelings towards her Jewish fiancé.

Of the eighteen cases, eight involved the purported dissuasion of potential male converts, nine potential female converts, and one a neophyte who had actually been baptized already for two years by the time the Jews were indicted for having tried to dissuade him.7 Eleven of the eighteen cases involved the impeachment of a family member or a future spouse of the potential convert. In seventeen of the cases, the main suspects were men, although in two cases wives of the suspects were indicted with their husbands. In one processo, that of Mariana Mantuano of 1633, Mariana came to denounce herself, testifying that she had wanted to convert but had then changed her mind, clearly believing that this was the best way of defending herself and preventing further exposure to judicial proceedings.8 Although she was imprisoned, she was released without punishment. Of the eighteen processi, six ended with the fining of Jews, one with a public shaming, two with the acquittal of the suspect, while nine processi were discontinued.

Ten of the processi opened with a delation by a Christian who had heard rumours that neighbouring Jews were contemplating conversion and contended that they were doing their Christian duty by denouncing those who obstructed their conversion. One processo opened with the delation of a Jew, Michele Sanguinetti, who in 1617 accused Gabriele Sora and Davide Diena, two prominent bankers in Modena, of dissuading their cousin Francesco Maria Novi, previously Rabbi Salomone Datti, a ‘maestro da scola degli’Hebrei’ in 1615 prior to conversion.9 Allegations were soon dropped when it became clear that the accusation was a ruthless attempt by fellow Jews to bring vengeance on co-religionists. The seven remaining processi had no specific delators but were opened ex officio.10
The eight potential male converts were of mixed ages, from teenage boys to middle-aged men. Four of the processi provide short accounts of single teenage boys, most of them poor, two of whom worked as apprentices in Jewish shops, attracted to conversion in order to advance their financial standing or escape familial confinement. All four investigations were discontinued for lack of evidence. Testimonies suggest that these teenagers independently sought out Christians to help them. In 1601, Stephano de Malvertio delated that he had been approached by Israel, the 15-year-old son of Davide Sacerdote, while visiting the latter’s tailoring shop in Vignola. Realising that the boy was considering baptism, he took him to the Archpriest of the Cathedral, who suggested that he go straight away to the Bishop. According to the testimony of de Malvertio, Bishop Gaspare Silingardi did not have a place to keep the boy during the day and requested that de Malvertio take him home. During this interval in de Malvertio’s home, the delator reported that Israel had taken flight and gone back to his father’s house. He believed that Israel’s father Davide Sacerdote was responsible for dissuading him. When Israel was interrogated he told the Inquisitor that he had only wanted to convert for a brief moment, an instant when he had been angry with his father. In 1609 Emmanuel de Corrigio, a teenager had come to Modena from Carpi and toyed with the idea of conversion after coming to the big city. He soon changed his mind, although his father Leone was indicted and imprisoned by the Holy Office. The trial was dropped due to lack of evidence.

As Brian Pullan has shown, prisons could often be fertile grounds for Jewish prisoners to consider the idea and then convert to Christianity. Such a transition could bode well for a Jewish convict, especially if his sentence was lengthy. The attention and care of Christian protectors would certainly have been an incentive, although the Jewish prisoner Francesco Bono, dying of typhus in 1584 in a Venetian gaol, needed no incentive and chose to convert for what seems purely religious zeal. Two of the potential converts in the Modenese processi were themselves prisoners in the civil gaol of the city, Joseph de Cerra in 1600 and Angelo de Thodeschi in 1602, who was serving a sentence for possession of stolen goods. Joseph de Cerra had been visited in prison by several prominent Jews, who had discovered that he was waning in his faith. The Jews were punished for their interference with fines. In Angelo de Thodeschi’s case, it was his immediate family members who were indicted, since they had purportedly overheard him shouting from his cell that he wished to convert to Catholicism. According to witnesses, they had come five or six times a day to shout at him in Hebrew from the outside of his prison, causing a huge disturbance and clearly bringing attention upon themselves. When Angelo de Thodeschi was interrogated he denied that he had any intention to convert, although his family members were sentenced to pecuniary punishments ranging from 10 to 225 scudi.
A study of the nine processi for dissuasion of Jewish women shows that although most of them were young, they came from different economic situations and circumstances. Like Miriana Sanguinetti, there were two other cases of wealthy, young unmarried girls, Laura de Norsa in 1617 and Sarza Levi in 1630 (both of whose ages are not given), who purportedly contemplated conversion. Like Miriana too, Sarza Levi had a Christian admirer, Francesco Grappi — her violin, clavichord and Spanish guitar teacher — who testified that he was ready to take charge of Sarza’s transition to Christianity, should she choose that path. Sarza Levi herself was never summoned to the Inquisition; nor is there any indication from Francesco Grappi, who had been persuaded to ‘court’ Sarza by two clergymen after hearing a rumour that Sarza was contemplating conversion, that there was any feeling on his side for Sarza. Sarza’s father, Benedetto Levi, was given a 50–scudi fine.

Whether these women really pondered conversion must be doubted. Laura de Norsa’s brother Cesare de Norsa of Soliera was imprisoned, and argued that his delation was a conspiracy by neighbouring Christians, all of whom had recently clashed with him or his wife. In 1614, Cesare had been imprisoned by the ducal court, accused by Pietro Cavallo of raping the wife of an innkeeper in Carpi while her husband was away. Proceedings were suspended when it was discovered that there had been no violence behind the adultery. As aggressors of the Jew, then, these Christians testified that the young Jewess had toyed with the idea of conversion and disclosed her conviction to them, but was dissuaded from being baptized by her brother Cesare de Norsa with whom she lived. Ursolina Bonzaga, in particular, testified that Laura’s desire to be converted was based on her dejection and the ill treatment that she received in her brother’s house. Moreover, she reported that Laura was even beaten by Cesare. These witnesses argued before Inquisitor Tinti that Cesare had sent his sister away to Carpi to thwart her conversion, with the excuse that she was to attend the pregnant wife of his cousin, Donato Levi, who lived there. During his interrogation, Cesare brought a letter from Donato, confirming that this was the reason why Laura had gone. The real motive was probably to protect Laura from the clutches of the Inquisition. Laura herself was never summoned before the Inquisition, and de Norsa was absolved with a warning that if more information was uncovered against him he would be re-tried.

Examples of poorer Jewish women who were potential converts included a young girl Brunetta, whose father Leone Montesanto had already begun the process of conversion with his younger daughters in 1605. Brunetta’s case was taken up by the wealthy Donato Donati of Finale, who had already suffered the loss of his niece to Christianity, and now offered Brunetta a dowry of 1,000 scudi as long as she remained a Jew. His plea was to no avail, since Brunetta decided to accept baptism with her whole family. The processo remained a preliminary
investigation and neither Brunetta nor Donato Donati was summoned to the Inquisition for investigation.

Bribing poor young women to remain firm in their religion was certainly a ploy that was used on numerous occasions. Bella de Praga, a poor young Jewish woman, known as the ‘Tedeschina’ (whose profession is unclear), considered conversion in 1615 and came before the Inquisition to denounce not her father, but an old Jewish banker, Samuel de Sanguinetti, for dissuading her. She reported: ‘Samuel Sanguinetti said to me that if I did not convert he’d give me money.’ When the Inquisitor asked her if she still wanted to convert, she said no and the trial was discontinued without the impeachment of Sanguinetti.

Of the two ‘potential’ female converts who were married, neither showed any real interest in conversion. In 1634, Livia Leoni, the wife of Mattasia, who had already accepted baptism with the rest of his family, was approached in her convent by Rabbi Natanael Trabotti, among others, who attempted to dissuade her by forcing entry into the institution. Trabotti was not called to testify and Livia was ordered to leave the duchy, as a result of her supplication to Duke Francesco I to help her ensure that her dowry, the meagre sum of 40 scudi, be returned by her husband.

In Modena, at best, Inquisitors were able to fine Jewish suspects found guilty of dissuading the baptism of others, rather than bring about the conversion of those who had been dissuaded. The Holy Office was not supported by any formal or organised methods to encourage conversion or by bureaucratic assistance from any other authorities, leaving conversion of Jews, as Andrea Zanardo has confirmed, to rely upon the public conscience (pietas) of individual citizens or ecclesiastics. In Modena, the Opera Pia del Neofiti was established as late as 1671, and the Casa dei Catecumeni, which was to be administered by the Inquisition, was not established until 1700, 157 years after its establishment in Rome in 1543 and 143 years after its establishment in Venice in 1557.

The tribunal’s limited authority over those who impeded conversions in Modena was far different, then, from its position in Venice, where Brian Pullan has shown a link between the activities of the Holy Office and the Casa dei Catecumeni particularly during the 1580s, when the Casa worked to support the Inquisition in finding suspects who impeded the baptism of others, as well as monitoring gossip among neophytes. In Rome, too, as Marina Caffiero has confirmed, the cardinal vicar and the Casa dei Catecumeni assisted in the controversial cases of conversions and baptisms dealt with by the Holy Office.

In 1749 Anna del Monte — a wealthy young Jewish girl living in the ghetto, the direct granddaughter of Angelo Zevi, one of the fattori (communal heads) of the Jewish community in Rome — was arrested and sent to the Casa dei Catecumeni, as a result of an allegation by Sabbato Coen, a neophyte, that she had promised to marry him. According to Sermoneta, the reason why Coen...
had denounced her to the ecclesiastical authorities was a personal vendetta against her family, and not against herself. But her diary, which was discovered by Sermoneta, reveals the traumatic consequences that she faced as a result of his denunciation. During her thirteen days’ stay, she faced, according to Sermoneta, ’fifty-four meetings, discussions and conversations with thirty-eight different people and was forced to listen to at least eighty consecutive hours of preaching’, as well as promises of riches and a ‘good marriage’. According to her diary, the priests who questioned del Monte accused her of having a relationship with Coen. She told her interrogators that she did not even know him:

Believe me, Signore, that young men have never frequented our house, nor can anyone boast of having spoken to me, either in the house, or outside it, or of having seen me at the window talking to any living soul. For our custom is different from that of your Lords, since our maidens don’t go out before they are married. I have never been able to associate with anyone.

Potential converts living in Rome and Venice who flirted with the idea of baptism were incarcerated in the Casa dei Catecumeni and induced to convert, on the testimony of the Christian witnesses alone. The differences between the situations in Rome and Venice and that in Modena are astounding. In Rome from 1577, Pope Gregory XIII had re-established the obligatory practice of Jews attending weekly proselytizing sermons, but in Modena the lack of conversionary tactics meant that Jews were not forced to attend conversionary sermons until 1637, on the eve of their enclosure in the ghetto.

Tellingly, the Inquisition would have wanted to do more. In Miriana Sanguinetti’s case, in 1604, by the time the Inquisition opened investigations against Viviano Sanguinetti, Miriana had already been married for seven and a half months. Neither the episcopal vicar nor Dr Emilio, a secular priest and Miriana’s clavichord teacher, who had clearly tried to encourage her, had denounced Viviano to the Holy Office in the hope that, if he was imprisoned, Miriana might have the courage to convert. The conversion and baptism of a wealthy Sanguinetti would surely have been a major source of victory for the church, yet there was no official mechanism to bring this about.

Here follows a skeletal outline of the trial proceedings of 1604.

**Dramatis personae of the processo of Viviano Sanguinetti**

Archangelo Calbetti de Recanati – Inquisitor General of Modena from 1600 to 1607.
Viviano Sanguinetti – a Jewish banker.
Miriana Sanguinetti – daughter of Viviano Sanguinetti.
Ludovico Mirandola – Miriana’s Christian admirer.
Alberto de Bassio – Miriana’s Christian tailor.
Dr Paulo Emilio – Miriana’s Christian clavichord teacher.
Caterina de Bonai – a Christian servant in a neighbouring house.
Sebastiano de Ludignani – a 26–year-old Christian servant in a neighbouring house.
Antonia Barozzi – a Christian and wife of the local vendor of brandy.39
Faustina – a Christian wetnurse in the Sanguinetti house.
Giovanna de Alexandri – a 22–year-old Christian servant in a neighbouring house.
Michello Sanguinetti – Miriana’s Jewish fiancé.

20 May 1602: Ludovico Mirandola recounted his relationship with Miriana and the arrangements that were to be made regarding her catechism and conversion. He told the Inquisitor that in the end she had changed her mind. Ludovico blamed Viviano for dissuading his daughter from baptism.40

22 May 1602: Alberto de Bassio informed the Inquisitor that he had spoken to Miriana on many occasions, that he had urged her to become a Christian, as was his duty, and that she had confirmed her love for Ludovico. He even admitted to informing Ludovico of Miriana’s feelings.41

Same day: Dr Paulo Emilio told the Inquisitor that he had taught Miriana the clavichord, once a week, every Thursday, for eighteen months prior to her wedding and that they had held various conversations. He confirmed that he knew of Miriana’s relationship with Ludovico and knew too of Miriana’s fear that Mirandola would abandon her after she had converted to Christianity.

Same day: Caterina de Bonai admitted to being Ludovico’s messenger, sent to Miriana on a number of occasions to persuade her to convert. She also confirmed that Miriana did not trust Ludovico. However, Caterina was unable to confirm that Viviano had dissuaded his daughter from being baptized.

Same day: Sebastiano de Ludignani confirmed that he had talked to Miriana, both at her window and inside her house, when he had accompanied his aunt Faustina, a Christian wetnurse, to Viviano’s house to nurse Viviano’s son. Sebastiano also said that Miriana had been unable to trust Ludovico. Sebastiano also testified that Viviano had dissuaded his daughter from being baptized. But such an accusation, he told the Inquisitor, was hearsay, since it came from his aunt and not directly from Miriana.

Same day: Antonia Barozzi testified that Miriana had told her ‘twenty-five times’ that she wanted to convert and marry Ludovico.42

Same day: Faustina accused Viviano of dissuading his daughter from being baptized and even of threatening to kill Miriana. According to Faustina, Miriana had openly discussed Christianity with her, criticized Jewish ritual, and carried a ring engraved with the Madonna of Reggio.
23 May 1602: Viviano Sanguinetti was imprisoned, as a result of Faustina’s testimony the previous day. On the same day, a notary and vicar of the Inquisition called at Miriana’s new home, the home of Samuele Sanguinetti, Michello’s father, to interrogate her regarding her intention to convert and the role her father had played in that decision. Miriana admitted only that she had spoken on many occasions to Caterina and Antonia.

Same day: Giovanna de Alexandri admitted to having two short conversations with Miriana in Miriana’s house. The first conversation had occurred when Giovanna had gone to style Miriana’s hair. She told the Inquisitor that although she had tried to persuade the young woman to convert, Miriana was continually doubtful whether she could trust any Christian and whether she could hurt her father. Giovanna told the Inquisitor that she could not testify who it was who had dissuaded Miriana from being baptized.

25 May 1602: Miriana was summoned before the Inquisition and admitted that she had been enamoured of Ludovico, and had said that she would convert. When asked if her father knew that she wanted to convert, she admitted not only that her father knew, but that she had obeyed him and stopped seeing Ludovico. However, she said that her father was not the reason why she had not converted.

Same day: Viviano Sanguinetti was summoned from his prison cell. He admitted that he had discovered that his daughter was considering conversion, but did not state his source. He also admitted that he had begged his daughter not to convert. Once the examination was completed, Viviano petitioned the tribunal to release him from prison so that he might return to his family and his business. His petition was granted, on condition that he appear whenever summoned.

4 June 1602: An assembly of Inquisitorial consulti met to discuss Viviano’s case. Eight of the nine consulti believed that the trial was not complete and that Viviano should undergo further interrogation.

26 June 1602: Viviano was summoned for a second and final interrogation. At this point there was a fundamental shift in the trial and the Inquisitor tried to condemn him for uttering careless words against Christianity. He did not confess, refused legal counsel and was dismissed.

17 July 1602: Viviano Sanguinetti was fined 76 scudi for dissuading his daughter from being baptized.

21 July 1602: Viviano paid his fine.
The problems of the processo

Before analysis is possible in a trial of this nature, the historian must overcome two obstacles. The first is to determine the level of truth in the testimonies, given that some of the responses made by witnesses, in particular to probing questions, sound too well versed. These witnesses were keen to show the Inquisitor that they had done their Christian duty in persuading Miriana to convert, but none of them asserted that she had made a hard and fast statement of her intention to convert. They provided conjectures and suggestions but nothing concrete. Moreover, Miriana also presented her encounter with Christianity as a musing, an equivocation:

It is true that my father Viviano was anxious and imagined that I was being courted by Signor Mirandola, and that I had said that I might become a Christian. The whole trial, then, hinged on this equivocation, and Miriana’s testimony remains hidden behind her determination to defend her father, her intimidation as she stood before her interrogator, and the heavy psychological pressure she feared she faced should she give any indication that she still held a genuine desire to convert.

The second challenge of the trial is that the Inquisitor was seeking information about events that had taken place eleven to fifteen months earlier. Miriana had already been married for seven and a half months, and had moved away from her home to the household of her father-in-law Samuele Sanguinetti. Alberto the tailor testified that the ‘courtship’ between Miriana and Ludovico started three or four months before her wedding to Michello, Memories were already fading.

On a more positive note trials of this kind have been used before by historians to reconstruct events or relationships that led to the denunciation of the suspect. Thomas Kuehn warns against historians doing this, arguing in response to Gene Brucker’s Giovanni and Lusanna that trial records should be used to reconstruct ‘not the history of a love-affair, but rather the history of a trial’.

One may argue however that the testimony in Viviano’s processo does allow for some historical reconstruction with respect to the limits of Miriana’s temptation and the thoughts she held regarding Ludovico and conversion, although one can never truly know what she genuinely felt.

The relationship

Prior to ghettoization, the windows and balconies of Jewish houses looked out at other windows across alleyways and piazze, and it was from Miriana’s window, the quintessential liminal border between her Jewish world and that
of the Christian, that she conducted most of her conversation and relationship with Ludovico.\footnote{47} At the beginning of the seventeenth century, depending on the economic status of the family, wealthy Jewish women spent most of their time in their own households, with which their social and economic identity was associated, either those of their parents before marriage, or their husband (or parents-in-law as was the case of Miriana) after their wedding. Respectable women had no reason for spending time in the local piazze or markets.\footnote{48} Christian neighbours or their servants would see them at their balconies, as they passed through the piazze or, as often happened, when they entered the Jews' homes.\footnote{49}

Ludovico Mirandola’s age, address and profession are not stated in the processo. That he lived locally can be assumed because of his familiarity with Antonia, Caterina and Alberto, and their frequent communication during his courtship with Miriana.\footnote{50} There is also no written record of Miriana’s age at the time of the processo. But Miriana was Viviano’s oldest daughter and, to judge by customary marital ages of the time, she was probably in her late teens.\footnote{51} Ludovico gives no indication in his testimony how his relationship with Miriana began. He told the Inquisitor:

\begin{quote}
I was enamoured at one time of Miriana, a Jewess, the daughter of Viviano Sangiulietti of Modena and at that time was so taken with the young woman that I was inclined, seeing her good qualities to persuade her to become a Christian promising that I would marry her and take her as my wife so long as she received baptism rather than go to a Jewish husband.\footnote{52}
\end{quote}

Nor did Ludovico mention how many times they met over their four-month ‘courtship’ prior to Miriana’s wedding. Ludovico does indicate that he had gone into Miriana’s house and on one occasion had met her outside her house, but there is no suggestion of clandestine meetings or sexual intimacy.\footnote{53} What then did this ‘courting’ really mean? Miriana going to the window and seeing Ludovico does not provide real evidence that they met and spoke often.\footnote{54} Ludovico testified that his relationship with Miriana took place mostly through intermediaries.\footnote{55} One senses then a major flirtation rather than a full-blown relationship, an infatuation perhaps that led the young man into the false belief that he could enhance his personal and economic status and win a wealthy Jewish girl, and Miriana onto dangerous paths – so dangerous, in fact, that she herself pulled back, her father’s anger an important consideration but not the decisive motive.

From an early stage of her ‘courtship’, Miriana was uncertain and doubtful that Ludovico would marry her and so had rejected the engagement rings that he had sent her.\footnote{56} Ludovico might well have been a dubious character, with a reputation for seducing young women, a reputation Miriana would have probably known.\footnote{57} Ludovico testified:
She [Miriana] replied to me at the time that she did not believe my words, fearing that when she had converted to Christianity, I would not marry her and wondering whether I was deceiving her. We went on like this for many months.\textsuperscript{58}

Perhaps Miriana had particularly strong reasons for suspecting his intentions, because he proposed that when Miriana escaped her father’s house, she should go to his house and not a neutral place.\textsuperscript{59} He could have found some other safe house to lodge Miriana in before they got married. In fact, Miriana’s inability to trust Ludovico or ‘any Christian gentlemen’, as she allegedly told Giovanna, was no doubt real.\textsuperscript{60} At stake was the usual issue, documented over and over again, of young men courting, seducing and abandoning young women.\textsuperscript{61} Sebastiano also testified to this lack of trust of Ludovico by Miriana.

Ludovico was keen to emphasize to the Inquisitor that he had done everything possible to win Miriana. He had gone out of his way to provide a variety of different rings to confirm his devotion, not the type of rings that lovers normally gave when they were betrothed, but rings with strong Christian motifs, a gold crucifix ring inscribed with the words \textit{domine peccavi} and a ring sculpted with the Madonna of Reggio with the words \textit{quem genuit adoravit} carved inside it, in token of the fact that he was trying to convert her, as well as promising her that his intentions were sincere.\textsuperscript{62} The main function of such a ring, according to Michael Carroll, would have been to protect the ring bearer from danger.\textsuperscript{63} It was certainly easier to blame Miriana for the arrangements of her catechism which she, according to Ludovico, had demanded. Ludovico testified:

\begin{quote}
Finally she resolved to make herself a Christian and to become my wife, on two conditions. First, when she had fled her father’s house, she would come directly to my house, and I would arrange for her to be catechized and instructed in the faith. Second, a companion and I would go to Miriana’s house and accompany her for her security to my home. That is, we would meet up by means of another woman, Madonna Antonia Barozzi, the wife of the man who sells brandy in the district of the Jews.\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

Was Miriana intelligent enough to realise that neither situation was attractive? If she placed herself in the hands of a dubious suitor she might be seduced and then abandoned. If, however, she chose to put herself in the care of a Christian gentlewoman, she feared that Ludovico would not fulfil his promise and this would lead to poverty after baptism, or so she told Caterina: ‘women who become Christian go begging’.\textsuperscript{66}

Miriana’s fears regarding the poverty of Jewish women after conversion were well founded. A large number of Jewish women (as well as men) living in misery approached the ducal court to request stipends as well as licences to beg for alms in Modena as a result of conversion.\textsuperscript{67} Had Miriana seen these women from her window, or heard about them? Caterina had testified that Miriana had
told her ‘that all the Jews who had been baptized were poor.’ Perhaps Miriana might have been more content to convert if she had known for certain that she could take her dowry with her or that her father would have been forced to give it to her. Did she speculate instead that any dowry she would receive from Christian institutions, surmising that Ludovico could not provide one, would not have been equivalent to the dowry she knew was hers if she married her Jewish fiancé? Some of the Christian witnesses confirm that Miriana was unable to escape with her riches at this time since they had been locked up in preparation for her wedding and marriage. Ludovico in particular testified that ‘her parents had taken away all the keys of the chests as was customary for them to do a month before the wedding.’

The Inquisitorial archives reveal another case of a Jewish woman, Sara Spagnola, who in 1623 had converted to Christianity and became Isabella Buzzali rather than marry her Jewish fiancé. (Whether she had a Christian suitor is not clear from the text.) Instead of Sara stealing her dowry, she stole precious items that her prospective Jewish husband had given her as wedding gifts. The Inquisitor described the case in a letter to the Congregation of the Holy Office:

Sara Spagnola, a Modenese Jewess, was to be married to a Jew, who had given her precious things. She became a Christian and called herself Isabella (Buzzali). When she fled the house of her parents, she took these things away with her and was ill-treated by her mother-in-law to be and her fiancé. Without these goods, Isabella will be a derelict.

Most women who converted did so out of desperation of finding a dowry and not at risk of losing one. In Luciano Allegra’s study of the ghetto in Turin, he notes that most of the Jewish girls in the ghetto who converted were girls who lacked dowries and had not been able to secure Jewish fiancés. In Rome at this time too, according to the research of Pier van Boxel, Jewish women considering conversion were given special treatment and offered dowries as incentives to convert. These dowries were double the amount usually given to Christian brides by charitable organizations.

Thus conversion for Miriana was truly or, to be precise, would have been truly a matter of choice. But one should not hastily come to conclusions about the frequency of this happening. Miriana’s case was far different from the norm, if only because her origins were wealthy. She had room for pause and reflection, and certainly physical security. Her withdrawal from her ‘courtship’ with Ludovico was almost surely an act of her own initiative, a combination of her own hesitancy and inability to trust Ludovico and her fear of being a neophyta without support — financial or otherwise. The temptation to leave her Jewish surroundings was real for Miriana at the beginning — she was curious about the Christian world beyond her window — but it seems that the longer she contemplated conversion the more doubts and problems arose in her mind.
The Christian witnesses

Seven Christian men and women told the Inquisitor that Miriana Sanguinetti had spoken to them during her courtship with Ludovico. One assumes that if her circle of confidants had been bigger, the Inquisition would have found additional witnesses. These seven witnesses were servants, a teacher and an artisan either in Miriana’s household or in neighbouring ones, all of whom had had individual conversations with the Jewess. Almost all were people of lower status, who enjoyed a degree of social autonomy, moving freely in the streets and gossiping with their neighbours in the piazze and in the households where they worked. The servants were probably close to Miriana’s age and strong attachments might have developed.77 It is unlikely that she would have risked discussing her thoughts with family or Jewish friends, since any of them might have seen the need to report her or her plans to fellow religionists.

Spatial and social closeness made gossip between these seven Christians inevitable. In fact, most of them confirmed that they had discussed and gossiped about Miriana’s predicament among themselves, which ultimately was the surest source of Inquisitorial information. To be involved in helping a potential convert move towards Christianity gave them a self-importance which was clearly reflected in their testimonies before the Inquisition. In the processo against Cesare de Norsa in 1617 for dissuading his sister from baptism, it was neighbouring Christians who furnished the information to start proceedings. Although it was found that they were personal enemies of Cesare, their intimate and frequent conversations with Laura showed a close connection between Jew and Christian, with Laura as a rather naive teenager freely discussing her unhappiness and thoughts of conversion in her brother’s home with these Christians.

Ludovico himself had clearly discussed the matter with Caterina, Antonia, Dr Emilio and Alberto the tailor. Faustina discussed the matter with her nephew Sebastiano, and Antonia with Giovanna, the servant who styled Miriana’s hair. Antonia and Caterina proved themselves useful to Ludovico, secretly carrying messages and rings to Miriana. Some of the testimony of the Christian witnesses is similar if not identical. Antonia had related the incident of Miriana’s preference from the rings that Ludovico tried to offer her, for a gold crucifix ring rather than a ring sculpted with the Madonna of Reggio. Her testimony on 22 May stated:

[Miriana] said to me while putting the ring with the figure of Christ upon her forefinger that it pleased her. I told her that this is our Lord who wants to convert you, and she said to me that I should return the ring to Signor Mirandola, because she feared that she could not keep them near her, lest her people find them. I added: ‘Are you not able to hide it in a chest?’ and she replied ‘My mother looks in all the chests and I would not want her to find the rings’.78
Caterina provided the same information, presumably as a result of discussing the event with Antonia:

on one [ring] there was a Christ on a cross and that ring pleased her more. The ring on which was Christ on the cross, and not the other one where there was the Madonna of Reggio.79

Perhaps the Christian witnesses in gossiping with each other compared notes. According to Ludovico’s testimony, Miriana had supposedly sent him a message through Antonia or Caterina:

Miriana sent me a message through Antonia or Caterina. She said that her father Viviano had found out that I had sent her rings and a message. That is, when Viviano knew that I had sent the rings to his daughter he shouted and said these words: ‘You want to be the cause of such dishonour to your father? It would be better that I take a dagger and kill you. Christians go to the house of the Devil but Jews go to paradiso because they have faith’ … One morning, after I had sent the rings, as I have said before, Antonia told me that Miriana sent her a message through a young girl. The message said that I should no longer step into her house because her father had discovered our agreements. He had said these words, as I have said above, that the Christians go to inferno. The whole house was full of noises.80

Ludovico, Alberto and Faustina all reported that Viviano had threatened to kill Miriana. Alberto and Faustina probably received their information from Ludovico. Perhaps Viviano did make the threat in anger, but the Christian witnesses might have been convinced from local gossip that Jewish fathers, rather than taking back baptized girls into their homes, preferred to kill them. This opinion was stated by a priest Agostino da Correggio, regarding a certain Jewish girl Esther Cabazza, who had converted to Christianity in 1626.81

Sebastiano, Alberto and Faustina told the Inquisitor that Miriana had used the term bestiale in her conversations, but Ludovico told the Inquisitor that he had only heard it from others and not Miriana: ‘It was repeated to me that she had said she would voluntarily leave that bestial life and become a Christian.’82 The local chronicler Spaccini used the same word in his description of Jews as they mourned the death of a local Jew Iseppo di Fano in November 1599: ‘I think these beasts will make a martyr of him, and honour his memory,’83 reflecting a belief that only Christians could be human. Perhaps then the term never originated from Miriana. Not only are there strange echoes in the language of The Merchant of Venice, in the references to Jews as ‘bestial’, since Shylock is called a dog, a cur and a wolf, but in sixteenth-century state legislative documents, such as the poor relief scheme of Cosimo de Medici, Duke of Florence, devised in 1542, poor beggars are described as ‘more like brute beasts than rational creatures, for they live without any knowledge of divine commandments and
good morals’, suggesting that people cannot be fully human unless they are Christians and observe the sacraments. It is clearly questionable how much contact these Christians really had with Miriana. Antonia, Caterina, Sebastiano and Giovanna were not servants in Miriana’s household, nor would their contact with Miriana have been frequent. The picture of Giovanna holding a conversation with Miriana while styling her hair reveals some level of concentrated interaction between a mistress and a neighbouring servant, but it is limited, as Giovanna herself admitted: ‘I was at most only twice in her house.’ Whether Miriana truly relied upon these Christians is doubtful, but her need to confide in them must be noticed. Miriana might well have been airing her potential plans to discover what support she could expect from these Christians, if any. She had supposedly said to Sebastiano: ‘I don’t want anyone to know that I talk about these things.’

Nevertheless, there remains discrepancy between the wetnurse Faustina’s testimony and that of the other six witnesses. Faustina probably had more contact with Miriana than other witnesses because she actually served in the Sanguinetti household as a wetnurse for the month prior to Miriana’s wedding. She testified that Miriana had kept a ring of the Madonna of Reggio with her, whereas Antonia, Caterina and Ludovico had all testified that Miriana had returned the ring to Ludovico. Furthermore, Sebastiano and Antonia stated that Miriana had considered taking her riches with her, but Faustina told the Inquisitor: ‘I heard that Miriana’s parents had taken away her things, the gold, silver and other precious items, fearing that she, Miriana, might flee.’ That Faustina embellished her conversations with Miriana must be suggested. As she stood before the Inquisitor, she probably boasted and exaggerated her knowledge of the matter and what she had heard from Miriana. Faustina testified that Miriana said Christian prayers rather than Jewish ones, although this is probably Faustina’s exaggeration since it is doubtful that Miriana knew any. Faustina also invoked the image of Miriana disliking eating on a table-carpet or bathing in the Jewish ritual bath (bagno) once she was to be married. According to Peter Thornton, table-carpets during this period covered most of the tables in occupied houses, and a linen tablecloth would then be spread on top of it when eating. During the sixteenth century these table-carpets became more exotic, luxurious, colourful and showy, and clear evidence of the possessor’s wealth. Was Miriana really reacting to the use of a table-carpet without a linen cover or had Faustina misunderstood everything, particularly the exact terms of Miriana’s lament? Regarding the ritual bath, it is possible that Faustina was really referring to a negative comment that Miriana had made in regard to being a Jewish wife, and frequenting the mikveh. Alberto, Miriana’s tailor, reported her continuous weeping during his conversations with her and her explanation of why she was distressed:
Miriana told me many times that she knew the life of the Jews was a bestial life and that also when she was married, because at that time she was about to marry, she would be worse off and imagined she would be living in the house of the Devil.91

Whether this reticence about some Jewish practices, even admitting the accuracy of Faustina’s report, would have been enough to make Miriana desert family and everything else in her past is unlikely.

Finally, there is Dr Emilio, Miriana’s clavichord teacher. Although he is described as a priest (sacerdote) there is no indication whether he was a secular or regular cleric. It seems most unusual that Viviano would have allowed a Christian priest to teach his daughter, but a lay Christian teaching Jewish girls music was a familiar practice in seventeenth-century Italy.92 Emilio clearly held a contractual position in the Sanguinetti household to teach Miriana the clavichord every Thursday, and this he had done for a period of eighteen months. That he and Miriana talked together is clear. He told the Inquisitor:

At times when I questioned her and persuaded her to become a Christian, she replied to me that she knew it was an evil life being a Jew, but that she was not able to do what she wanted. I do believe that if the young woman had not been dissuaded by others, and held back, she would have become a Christian.93

He also admitted that he had been sent by the episcopal vicar to speak to Miriana on her wedding day. His intention was to ascertain whether she was still willing to convert, should Ludovico marry her. But there is also the possibility that he, as a priest, had tried to convert Miriana himself.94 Perhaps his last visit to Miriana was a final attempt to offer her his assistance in converting and marrying Ludovico. He told the Inquisitor:

Father, yes, Monsignor Vicar Bascato sent me secretly to speak with Miriana, to ask her whether she would become a Christian, because Signor Mirandola would marry her. She replied, ‘Matters have gone too far ahead. I must marry today. I have no choice.’95

Perhaps his failure to win a tempted soul weighed heavily on him. But neither the episcopal vicar Bascato nor Dr Emilio had reported their finding to the Inquisition.96

In short, we must proceed with great caution. We can see that Jews and Christians had regular day-to-day contact, that these Christian servants and neighbours hovered, ready to provide the young vulnerable Jewish woman with a support system should she really make the transition, but we cannot easily infer from the texts any of its detail. The witnesses seem to be like stock figures in a Counter-Reformation play rather than real people, each trying to play his or her part in the drama in so far as they could discover what it was. Yet it is still possible to learn something about the Jews themselves as they figure in the
processi. The ideal picture of behaviour painted by recent scholarship, the effects of discipline, here stand out clearly in a way that prescriptive evidence, or even the testimony at a trial of a Christian for heresy, with the witnesses possibly motivated by fear and anxiety, would never reveal. This is no small thing.

Viviano Sanguinetti

In the transcript, Viviano Sanguinetti, approximately 49 years old, remains the most elusive character, harder to decipher than Miriana, since we have no character witnesses. Paradoxically, then, there is less evidence on Sanguinetti, the suspect standing trial before the Inquisition, than any other character. Testimonies suggest that Miriana’s rejection of Ludovico in part responded to a sense of duty or obedience that she felt towards her father. Apparently Miriana told Giovanna that ‘she did not want to give such offence to her father because it would kill him.’ But how do we judge Sanguinetti? Ludovico, Caterina, Antonia and Miriana all testified that Sanguinetti had ‘shouted’ at his daughter when he had discovered her courtship. Even Sanguinetti admitted to his anger in his testimony.

[Ludovico] passed frequently under the window of my house where my daughter Miriana used to stand at times. Suspecting that my daughter might be courting this young man or he her, I admonished her saying that she should remember her duty to live according to Jewish Law, that she was a Jewess and had to live as a Jewess. More importantly, it was not permitted to court a Christian and she should remember to live as a Jewess all her life.

That Sanguinetti intervened to stop Miriana’s and Ludovico’s courtship was normal. Sanguinetti wanted to protect his daughter, as he understood this. But even more, he surely wanted to safeguard his honour and the binding religious, social and legal restrictions that strengthened his family unity. Federica Francesconi has made a study of the Formiggini, de Modena and Sanguinetti families in Modena between 1600 and 1810. She argues that, when it came to marriage, these prominent and elitist Jewish families worked hard to maintain a familial network to ensure that dowries and inheritances were redistributed and transmitted within the patrimony of these families. In the records of the Ducale Camerale, there is clear indication that in 1613–14 the Sanguinetti family were keen to ensure that their large dowries and conditions of marriage as well as the wedding would be legally bound before the Duke’s court. Were these Jews ridden with arguments regarding the precise provisions and conditions of the 1,780–ducat dowry to be paid by Viviano Sanguinetti to the household of his brother Samuele, as another of their children was to be married, this time Esther the daughter of Viviano, and Simone, Samuele’s son? Should we surmise too
then that perhaps these pressures and antagonisms were already present when Miriana was to be married in 1602? Sanguinetti desired to prevent his daughter’s baptism, which to him was beyond doubt unthinkable, and his testimony depicts his own authoritarianism based on religious and legal intent:

I suspected that my daughter had said she wanted to convert. I begged and pressed her not to convert, but persevere in the Jewish laws into which she was born. I told her to court only her intended, to whom she was promised, and no other.103

Moreover, according to the research of Roni Weinstein, the period between engagement and marriage was a time of intense supervision by fathers of young wealthy girls to ensure exemplary behaviour of the engaged couple at this fragile time when pre-marital sexual relations might lead to the man’s refusal of his bride.104 But what one senses here is almost a negligence on Viviano’s part. Miriana had already been involved in a form of ‘courtship’ with Ludovico for a few months before her father realised its serious nature. If Miriana had really wanted to escape, she could have arranged it with the aid of her Christian neighbours, without her father knowing.

What may be proposed, therefore, is that if upper-class women like Miriana actually did convert, something weighty indeed was at stake. It was not disgrace, hers and her family’s alone, that was being put on the line, an added issue was that it mocked the Jewish community, as a community, as it faced ever growing conversionary and disciplinary pressures. The potential damage Ludovico could do to Sanguinetti and his family was huge. Sanguinetti would have also lost much money, since the Church would have forced him to give a substantial dowry, paying it off all at once, too. If, as Antonia stated, Sanguinetti locked up Miriana for three days, little explanation is needed.105

Miriana’s ambivalent feelings towards Michello

Although the relationship between Michello and Miriana ought to be considered, one is frustrated by the fact that no testimony refers to it. At the point when Miriana met Ludovico, she was probably engaged but not betrothed, since she told the Inquisitor that she had not received a ring from her fiancé.106 Among Italian Jews, engagement was a pre-nuptial agreement (tena’im) drawn up between the families confirming the conditions of marriage.107 Betrothal followed engagement any time from the engagement to immediately before the wedding and involved the giving of the ring by the groom and the acceptance of it by the bride.108

Courting practices between a Jewish couple during the period between engagement and betrothal varied from ‘polite and courtly’ interaction to ‘virtually sexual’, usually dependent on the status and economic position of the
families involved and how much freedom the young couple were given. Roni Weinstein argues that, on the one hand, wealthy Jewish bankers and merchants in general did not allow their daughters to meet future husbands unless an adult chaperone was present. On the other, engaged Jews from lower classes usually met without restraint. But there is no indication in the trial records that Miriana and Michello wrote letters or sent gifts or even courted. Nor can one be sure whether Miriana had misgivings regarding Michello in particular as her future spouse, or was reacting against Jewish marriage in general.

But could Miriana have broken her engagement without having to convert to Christianity? Did Jewish women have the right to reject the spouse proposed for them, or did their parents hold the unchallengeable authority to impose their selection on their children? From the sixteenth century daughters had the option to break an unwanted engagement according to Jewish law. Kenneth Stow reports:

This had been achieved through the novel application of an ancient halachic rule which had extended to orphan girls under twelve a right known as ‘refusal’ (me’un), allowing them to dissolve not just an engagement but a full betrothal unilaterally, and without the need for a formal bill of divorce. In the Renaissance, the term metaphorically began to be applied to engagements as well as betrothals and the age limit in the case of engagements had begun to blur. Adolescent girls older than twelve, orphaned or not, were claiming – and winning – the right to terminate engagements just by saying they refused.

Stow found twenty-three cases of broken engagements out of 560 (4.1%) registered by Jewish notaries in Rome during the years 1536–85. But it is not known how many of these cases involved a consanguineous marriage, nor who had been responsible for breaking them. Almost without exception, broken engagements in Rome are recorded as simply being annulled. No reason was provided, except for the one or two occasions where it was reported that ‘the match was not made in heaven’ or ‘the pair did not like each other or get along.’ Whether one should accept these excuses as genuine is questionable. Stow believes that the broken engagement could have been the result either of the bride’s personal decision or of a change of heart by those who surrounded her. The texts do not allow one to speculate further. What is clear is that Miriana did have the possibility and legal loophole to extricate herself from her engagement. Whether the sense of duty to her parents and their choice of husband was too strong for her to challenge their authority can only be surmised.

But were consanguineous marriages appealing to wealthy Jewish families or was it out of necessity that Jews married relatives because other suitable choices were unavailable? Miriana could well have been reacting to the Sangi netti policy of marrying within the family. Unlike Catholicism, which granted special church dispensation to cousins who wanted to marry each other, Judaism
accepted cousin marriages without censure. Unfortunately, the testimonies give us no indication of an answer.

The question remains whether Miriana’s case was really unique. If one looks further afield, it is still difficult to find similar cases of wealthy Jewish women who toyed with the idea of conversion. Luciano Allegra, after exploring the archives of the local Casa dei Catecumeni established in Turin in 1653, found only eighteen cases of Jewish women – mostly poor girls and young women between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one – who, out of misery and failure to procure dowries that could entice Jewish husbands, had converted to marry Christians, but no cases of wealthy Jewish women who converted or had considered conversion but then recanted. Michele Luzzati has described a case of a Jewish woman, Clemenza, the daughter of a wealthy Jewish banker who on 22 June 1480 had married David de Guglielmo di Dattilo da Montalcino and, after consummating the marriage, ran off with a penniless Christian nobleman, Brancalone di Giovanfrancesco da Piandimeleto. Clemenza was baptized ten days later and her father was forced to bestow a dowry of 1,000 ducats upon her. Luzzati stresses the exceptional nature of the case but the situation was far different from Miriana’s. Clemenza’s conversion broke a marriage bond, not an engagement. Even though the Church would have anulled Miriana’s marriage to Michello once she converted, she had to decide before her marriage if she wished to marry Ludovico, her Christian admirer, since he was willing to marry her ‘so long as she received baptism rather than go to a Jewish husband’.

This chapter is best ended by returning to the start. Brian Pullan has speculated about the sources of Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice. Towards the end of the essay, he refers to the case of Giorgio Moreto, who had pressed his attentions upon a Jewish girl, Rachel the daughter of Isaac the Deaf, in the Venetian Ghetto in 1589, and was tried by the Inquisition. Moreto was charged with judaizing. He in defence said that he intended to convert her to Christianity and then marry her. But:

because her family noticed, they barred the doors and balconies and engaged in a thousand intrigues and were determined to injure me.

This was much, Pullan adds, as Shylock says to Jessica:

Lock up my doors . . .
Clamber not you up to the casements then,
Nor thrust your head into the public street
To gaze upon Christian fools.

The Inquisition did not interrogate Rachel, nor did it believe Moreto, who eventually served three years in the galleys. Rachel, Moreto’s hoped-for Jewish love, was saved because of his failings. Ludovico Mirandola’s somewhat better social position, despite his grey character, seems to have made it necessary for the
Jews to defend themselves before the Inquisition. But the lack of conversionary support circumscribed Inquisitorial action at the beginning of the seventeenth century and saved Miriana from being taken off to a house of converts, as she would have been had her case been brought before the Inquisition one hundred years later.

Yet in the very constraints and procedures which conditioned Miriana’s narrative before the Inquisition, as well as the artificiality of witness testimonies, one can hypothesize Miriana’s entanglement in a self-inflicted conflict between repressive familial restraints and personal escape as well as an underlying modesty and intelligence, which led her to conclude that the Christian world beyond her balcony could offer her no suitable future. She remained different from Jessica, Shylock’s daughter, who clearly preferred a Christian life, and was happy to be saved not so much by her own choice as by Lorenzo’s decision to marry her.

Notes
1 This chapter is based on a previous article, ‘Miriana Sanguinetti’s Flirtation with Christianity’, in Michele Luzzati and Cristina Galasso (eds), Italia Judaica: Donne nella storia degli ebrei d’Italia (Florence: Giuntina 2007), pp. 179–206.
2 This trial is found in ASMoFIP 20 f.22.
3 See James Given, ‘The Inquisitors of Languedoc and the Medieval Technology of Power’, American Historical Review 94 (1989), 336–59; and Grayzel, The Church and the Jews, vol. II, doc. 26. See also Spaccini, Cronaca, p. 384. Here reprinted is the Modenese Inquisition’s edict of 1600. The second part of clause 8 referred to the possibility: ‘that a Jew has dissuaded from baptism, or in some way pulled back and impeded another Jew, or indeed another infidel inspired by God to come to the Holy Faith of Christ after that Jew and infidel (so inspired by God) has declared with deeds or words or gestures that he wishes to be baptized and come to the Christian faith (or in truth any Jew who possesses Talmudic works, or other prohibited and heretical books).’
5 Viviano Sanguinetti was the brother of Calman de Sanguinetti, who was prosecuted for hiring a Christian wetnurse in 1602.
6 If Miriana had converted, her name would probably have appeared on the list of neophytes kept in the archives of the Curia Reggiana, which contains the reports of investigations of neophytes in three registered files, Opere Pie: Catucchemi ed Ebrei, the first of which lists neophytes in Modena between 1511 and 1725. See Balletti, Gli Ebrei, pp. 192–3. If she had chosen to revoke her engagement to her first cousin, this might well have been recorded in the Jewish community’s notarial archives. The fact that she did neither of these things means that, without this trial, her tale would not have been uncovered.
7 Interestingly there is one case, ASMoFIP 44 f.3 of 1615 which uncovers the unusual case of a Christian, Giovanni Antonio Balugani who had tried to dissuade a Jewish servant boy Israel from being baptized. According to the record, Israel was still baptized on 25 March 1615 in the church of San Domenico in Modena. I have chosen not to discuss the additional cases of dissuasions of baptism in Finale, revealed by the research of Balboni, Gli Ebrei, since these are not cases that related specifically to the Inquisition. See her chapter 4, ‘Le Conversioni nel corso del Seicento’, pp. 75–110.
8 ASMoFICH 246 f.10.
10 ‘Ex officio’ means that the Inquisitor did not need a delator to start the proceedings, but acted on the strength of a ‘common report’ and decided to investigate the matter himself.
11 ASMoFICH 244 f.5.
12 ASMoFICH 244 f.11.
13 Pullan, Jews of Europe, p. 271.
14 Ioly Zorattini, Processi, vol. VI, pp. 69–70; and Pullan, Jews of Europe, pp. 271, 296.
15 See ASMoAME busta 4, Processa I–LXXXIII, 1600–1629, 21 March, 1602. Here two Jews, Leone Fiorentini and his son Abramo, pay the 50 ducats to have Angelo released.
16 ASMoFICH 244 f.17 and ASMoFICH 245 f.52.
17 ASMoFICH 245 f.52. The two clergymen were Lodovico Signorio de Picino, a Minorite Friar, and Brother Lorenzo de Tuccati, an Augustinian monk.
18 ASMoFICH 244 f.17 (17v–20r).
19 See ASMoAME busta 4, Processi I–LXXXIII 1600–1629, 7 September 1614.
20 ASMoFICH 244 f.17 (5v).
21 Ibid. See the letter of Donato’s at the beginning of the file.
22 Ibid.
23 ASMoFIP 26 f.9. The trial was discontinued due to lack of evidence. See also Balboni, Gli Ebrei, pp. 78–80.
24 ASMoFICH 249 f.10. In 1662, Alessandro Sanguinetti and Mosè Sanguinetti were investigated for giving money to the Jew Lazzaro to stop him converting. I was not able to find any suggestion in the Jewish Community archives in Modena that there was a Jewish confraternity or grouping that tried to prevent conversions. In ACEMo filza 2.52 Neofiti: Recapiti riguardanti i medesimi 1570–1727, there is a copy of a ‘mendato’ of the government in Venice, which on 4 June 1585 recorded that ‘nuovo persone dissuase alcuno dellﬁgli si senza volere del Padre, e madre sotto on prospetto, anco di battesimo, no meno d’età d’anni dodici e desciende tutto quelle si facesse nella persona di quella creature non sia di alcun valore’, but no suggestion that the Jewish Università acted upon this.
25 ASMoFIP 44 f.44. The denunciation was made by Lerri Bartolomeo Bontempino, the guard of the Holy Office, on 8 January 1615.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 ASMoAME busta 14/b, letter 163 January 1633 from Scipione Sacratii to the Giudice di Modena. See also Balboni, Gli Ebrei, p. 93.
29 Zanardo ‘Catecumeni’, p. 122. This situation changed in Modena once the Casa dei Catecumeni was established. See Balletti, Gli Ebrei, pp. 204–5. In 1735 Rachel, the daughter of Jacobo Tedeschi, fled from her home to the Casa. Giuditta, her mother, devastated, ran after her and pretended that she also wanted to convert. While in the house with her daughter, Giuditta tried hard to persuade Rachel to recant, even ordering her other children to come to the Casa to persuade Rachel to reconsider. When Giuditta told the Rector of the Casa that she wanted to return home, the case was referred to the Pope, who ordered that the woman be held in the House for forty days, separate from her children – the oldest three who were also to be held for the same period and the younger two who were to be forcibly baptized. In the end the whole family, including all five children, were converted.
30 See ASMo Archivio del Magistrato, Giunta Superiore di Giurisdizione Sovrana, which contain documents of the Opera Pia Neofiti assisting converted Jews to Christianity.
32 See Caffiero, Battesimi forzati, pp. 25–7. Caffiero provides interesting information regarding the intervention of the Holy Office in the abuses carried out by the rector of the Casa dei Catecumeni towards Jews around the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century. See also Lazar, Working in the Vineyard of the Lord, p. 123. Lazar argues that the Casa dei Catecumeni in Rome provided bureaucratic and formal support for the new convert.
34 Ibid., p. 263. According to Sermoneta, an edict published in 1635 by Cardinal Antonio Barberini allowed for the removal to the Casa de Catecumeni of all close relatives of the neophyte, and those of his wife, a promised spouse, children or nephews.
Girls and women were not allowed out of the Casa. See Lazar, *Working in the Vineyard of the Lord*, p. 117.


38 The earliest document in Modena of Jews being forced to attend sermons is in 1635. ASMoAME busta 15, f.12. The Jewish community wrote a letter of complaint on this subject to the Duke, saying that they were unwilling to obey the recent ecclesiastical demands on this subject. They asked permission that instead they attend only once a month, that women would sit separately from men during the sermon and that not all the members of the family attend, but just one representative from each family.

39 Antonia was the wife of Hippolito Barozzi, who was a witness in the two of the blasphemy *processi* discussed in Chapter 4. There were clearly certain Christians who had ongoing relations with Jews, were somehow privy to what they said, and were thus sitting ducks for the Inquisitors to pester.

40 The *processo* was brought ex officio. See ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (1v). At the beginning of the trial, the notary Tomaso Panini merely reports: ‘When it came to the ears of the most Reverend Brother Archangelo Calbetti de Recanati, Inquisitor General of Modena, that Viviano Sangiunetti, a Jew of Modena, had discouraged and held back his own daughter from embracing the Christian faith as she had declared she wanted to, he [Calbetti] wishing to establish the facts in this court, as he wanted to proceed against the aforesaid in accordance with the intent of the Bull of Pope Gregory XIII, *Antiqua iudaeorum improbitas*, sent Reverend Brother Vincenzio de Zabia, a reader and vicar of the Holy Office to ascertain the abovementioned facts of the case, and to interrogate the woman on her own, to [decide] what should be done under the law, should the truth of the report be established.’

41 Ibid. (6r).

42 Ibid. (19r).

43 Ibid. (28r).

44 It is interesting to note that Miriana did not sign the record of her two interrogations, either the one conducted in her father-in-law’s home on 23 May, or the one conducted in the Inquisitorial courtroom on 25 May. In her home, her husband Michello Sanguinetti signed, and after her second interrogation it was her uncle Calman who signed her interrogation for her. This does not necessarily imply that Miriana was illiterate.


47 In fact Ludovico, Miriana and Viviano testified that most of the courting took place while Miriana was standing at her window balcony and Ludovico in the street. See ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (31v); Viviano in particular testified in his interrogation: ‘he [Ludovico] passed frequently under the window of my house where my daughter Miriana was at times, and I feared she might court or be courted by him.’


49 See ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (28v). Miriana told the Inquisitor who came to her house, ‘I was familiar with many Christians who came on different occasions into my house’.

50 Ibid. (15v). Caterina told the Inquisition, ‘I recounted everything to Mirandola’. See also (6r) how Alberto told the Inquisitor, ‘I related the words of the young woman to Signor Mirandola’.

51 Ibid. (29r). Viviano reported, ‘I have five sons and daughters. My sons are called Samuele and Simone. My daughters are Miriana, Esther and Leah.’ On contemporary marital ages, see Roni Weinstein, *Marriage Rituals Italian Style: A Historical Anthropological Perspective on Early Modern*

ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (2v).

Ludovico indicates that he had stepped into Miriana’s house – see ibid. (5v): ‘Miriana sent me a message . . . that I should no longer step into her house.’ He also reports that he had seen her outside her house (3r): ‘I met her, in fact I saw her close by an area of her house.’ On clandestine meetings with young couples see Roger Chartier (ed.), A History of Private Life, vol. III, Passions of the Renaissance (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 1. On sexual intimacy between young couples see Sandra Cavallo and Simona Cerutti, Female Honor and the Social Control of Reproduction in Piedmont between 1600 and 1800, in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds), Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 73–109. This study and the above stress the little opportunity that young courting couples had for privacy.

Italian short stories and plays tell quite a few tales of young men falling in love with girls they have seen only at windows or balconies – Juliet is not alone. See also Nino Tamassia, La famiglia italiana nei secoli decimoquinto e decimosesto (Rome: Multigrafica, 1971), reprint of the Milan: Sandron, 1910 edition, and Weinstein, Marriage Rituals, p. 204.

The testimony in this processo stands in interesting contrast to that in the processo of Giorgio Moreto, as transcribed by Brian Pullan in The Trial of Giorgio Moreto before the Inquisition in Venice, 1589, in Maureen Mulholland and Brian Pullan (eds), Judicial Tribunals in England and Europe, 1200–1700, The Trials in History, vol. 1 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 159–81. Moreto, a Christian sailor, had frequent contact with Rachel, the Jewess he fell in love with. He told his interrogator (p. 172): ‘I have been at many Jewish festivities and do not remember any in particular, but there was one in the house of the Jew Scocco, another in that of Abraham Boaf, and various others which were held at night, and I went to their banquets and ate with them, . . . and danced unmasked at their balls upon several occasions, and I danced with the Jewish women . . . both the wives and the maids, and they took me for a partner and I them.’

Ludovico told the Inquisitor: ‘As a sign of my promise that I would take her as my wife, I sent her a gold ring that I had shown her. This ring was engraved with the words domine peccavi and upon it was sculpted a crucifix also of gold. I sent her the ring via Antonia and this was a Monday, which I believe was 22 October. Antonia brought the ring to Miriana. Miriana said to her that now I was sending the ring, as a sign of trust that I would marry her and that I was swearing to her by the God in whom we believe, who was sculpted upon the ring, she believed that I would keep my promise. Antonia gave her the ring, she accepted it and then returned it saying that she did not know where to hide it, because the people in her house had taken away all the keys of the boxes as was customary for them to do a month before the wedding. In the same evening, after I had heard this, I sent another ring together with the same ring that I had sent in the morning, which was engraved with the words quem genuit adoravit carved inside the ring, and I repeated my promise as above. I sent both rings with the same Antonia. Miriana sent a message, saying that gladly she would keep the ring with the crucifix, which she liked more than the other, but she did not know where to hide it. The following morning, I sent the two rings with the same Antonia with an additional ring, on which were set seven white stones with the same words as above. The young woman sent them back with the same reply.’

Viviano testified that he had believed Ludovico to be courting another woman rather than his own daughter Miriana. Ibid. (30v). He told the Inquisitor: ‘I heard that Signor Mirandola was courting the granddaughter of Signor Camillo de Levizzari.’

Ibid. (2v–2r).

See Ibid. (13v–13r). Caterina testified that Miriana feared that Ludovico would sexually exploit her and then abandon her without marrying her. She told the Inquisitor that Miriana had said: ‘These men when they have what they want, they abandon it, and women that become Chris-
tian go begging.' Miriana was perhaps right to be suspicious. Quite a few men were tried every year in secular courts for 'seduction under promise of marriage', which was treated as a kind of statutory rape; if arrested and found guilty, they could be compelled either to marry the girl or to provide her with a dowry which might enable her to marry somebody else. This sort of thing usually happened when the alleged promise had been made in secret, with no witnesses. Again there is a striking contrast to the testimony of Samson, son of Vital, a Jewish butcher regarding Moreto's relationship with Rachel in Giorgio Moreto's processo transcribed by Pullan in 'The Trial', p. 172. Here Samson reports that Moreto was even willing to convert to Judaism, if it meant that he would be able to marry Rachel. Samson testified: 'Giorgio has told me on many occasions that he is courting her and that if he could lead her away he would, and if he cannot, then to have her he is willing to become a Jew.'

ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (26v–26r) [Miriana] replied to me, if I put my trust in any of these gentlemen who say they really like me, I would become a Christian.'


ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (17v): 'From her words, I assumed that she would become a Christian if she had trusted Signor Mirandola.'

Spaccini, Cronaca, p. 33, records visitors coming to Modena to visit the miraculous pilgrimage site of the Madonna of Reggio.

Michael Carroll, Madonnas that Maim: Popular Catholicism in Italy since the Fifteenth Century (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 138, has shown how Italians worshipped a range of madonnas, especially those associated with the area in which they lived.

ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (2r).

Ibid. (13v). See Zanardo 'Catecumeni', p. 122. Zanardo refers to potential converts in Modena being catechized by priests in the homes of noble gentlemen and supported, and subsidized or the Opera Venosa before conversion.

ASMo Giurisdizione Sovrana, 140, Opere Pie del Neofiti e dei Catecumeni di Modena e di Reggio (con un fascicolo sugli Ebrei), 1491–1796 includes supplications for alms from Cesare d'Este in 1617, Catrina in 1625, Joseph Calcabre in 1628, Isabella Francescconi in 1629 and Giulio de La Rosa in 1630. Also see Balletti, Gli Ebrei, p. 196. Here Balletti lists licences given by bishops to neophyte women without any financial means. Zanardo shows in 'Catecumeni e neofiti alla fine dell’antico regime', 134, that even after the establishment of the Casa dei Catecumeni in Modena in 1700 the donations awarded at baptism and the subsidies that were provided after baptism were insufficient to support the neophyte on a continuing basis. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it was the Opera Calori which gave initial income to the neophyte, and the Opera Venosa which tried to subsidize neophytes who stayed in Modena.

ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (15v). Perhaps this was an idea that Jewish parents placed in the heads of...
their children in order to indoctrinate them against conversion. Some Jews in Venice also believed the same. See Pullan, Jews in Europe, p. 268.

69 A dowry was a woman's advance on her inheritance, which was given to her at her wedding, at the moment when she most needed it to start a new family. See Pullan, Jews in Europe, p. 252. Viviano Sanguinetti would have been compelled to provide a dowry for his daughter even if she converted. Paul III's bull Cupientes iudaeos of 1542 specified that even those who had converted against their parents' wishes had to be entitled to their share of the patrimony.

70 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (19r). According to the testimony of Antonia, Miriana wanted to take her riches and give them to Ludovico. Antonia testified: 'She [Miriana] said to me often that she wanted to escape with all those things, silver, gold and precious things, to flee and to give them to Signor Mirandola, who promised to take her as a wife if she became a Christian.'


73 Ibid.

74 Luciano Allegra, Identità in bilico: Il ghetto ebraico di Torino nel Settecento (Turin: S. Zamorani, 1996), p. 120.

75 See Pier van Boxel, 'Dowry and the Conversion of the Jews in Sixteenth-Century Rome: Competition between the Church and the Jewish community', in Dean and Lowe (eds), Marriage in Italy, pp. 116–27, p. 127.

76 Sermoneta, 'Il mestiere', p. 216. Sermoneta, in his research on the neophytes of Rome in the eighteenth century, argues more generally that he never found a case of a Jew who converted due to religious or philosophical conviction, but only out of social or economic motives.


78 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (20r).

79 Ibid. (14v). Caterina also acted as a messenger for Ludovico. This explains Ludovico's uncertainty later in his testimony about who had acted as messenger on a particular occasion in his relationship with Miriana. He recorded: 'Miriana sent me a message through Antonia or Caterina', ibid. (4v).

80 Ibid. (6r–v).

81 See Balletti, Gli Ebrei, p. 203. Agostino da Correggio wrote: 'Esther the Jewess who was in the hands of a certain Cabazza, the said Esther will die, because she will be killed.'

82 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (5r).

83 Spaccini, Cronaca, p. 280.

84 See Brian Pullan, Poverty and Charity: Europe, Italy, Venice, 1400–1700 (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994), Item V, p. 194. See Horodowich, Language, p. 102 for a case when a Jew had used the term 'beast' in Hebrew to offend a recent neophyte in Venice.

85 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (27v).

86 Ibid. (17v).

87 Ibid. (21r–22r). As Romano notes in Housecraft, p. 159, dowries were made up of a combination of both goods and money.

88 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (23r).

89 See Thornton, The Italian Renaissance, p. 216.

90 Elliott Horowitz, in a lecture at Ben Gurion University, September 2000, entitled 'The Price of Purity: Reflections on the Use and Abuse of the Ritual Bath', (unpublished) argued that, in North Italy, Jewish women abhorred going to the Mikveh, because it was so filthy.

91 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (7v).

93 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (10v).
94 Grazia Biondi in her article ‘Le Lettere’, p. 100, notes as above the case of Sara Spagnola, who was aided by the Inquisitor and the bishop in her conversion. See also Allegra, *Identità in bilico*, pp. 111–62, p. 113, which shows the involvement of a local vicar in the conversion of Isach Treves in 1768.
95 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (11v–11r).
97 See ASMoFIP 15 f.3. In this trial of seven Jews for possessing prohibited books in 1601, Viviano Sanguinetti, who is one of the Sanguinetti suspects, is noted by the notary as being around 46 years old.
98 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (26r).
99 Ibid. (30v).
100 Brian Pullan, ‘The Conversion of the Jews: The Style of Italy’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 70 (1988), 53–70, 66. Pullan notes the tedious and long litigations instigated by Jews through different courts to quarrel over for example inheritances and dowries of family members who had converted. In Modena, such conflicts between the Jewish community and individual neophytes are recorded in the Jewish communal archives ACEMo, in the buste labelled *Neofiti*.
103 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (29r).
104 See Weinstein, *Marriage Rituals*, p. 74 and p. 258. In rabbinical literature, the father is responsible for the marriage of his children. The father’s primary role in the matchmaking process in Italy is also confirmed by Bonhil, *Jewish Life*, p. 256. Also see Kenneth Stow, ‘The Knotty Problem of Shem Tov Soportino: Male Honor, Marital Initiation, and Disciplinary Structures in Mid-Sixteenth Century Jewish Rome’, *Italia* 13–15 (2001), 137–49, 138. Stow notes that disgruntled husbands arguing that their wives were not virgins could insist on a divorce.
105 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (29v). See Lieberman, ‘Between Tradition’, p. 69. In the sermons of José Penso de la Verga entitled ‘Moral and Sacred Academic Discourse’ (*Discurso Académico Moral y Sagrado*), Lieberman notes, Penso discusses ‘good parenting with the metaphor of the musician tuning his string instrument; the string should not be so lax as to be dissonant nor so tight that it will snap. Parental love should be a combination of affection and discipline, and the ideal father is, according to Penso, the one who knows how to discipline his children when necessary but who is not too strict with them.’ Also on parental discipline see Kathryn Sather, ‘Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Child-Rearing: A Matter of Discipline’, *Journal of Social History* 22/4 (1989), 735–43. Steven Ozment in *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) has reconstructed contemporary attitudes towards marriage and parenthood in Reformation Germany and Switzerland. See pp. 148–9 for the description of a similar sort of punishments inflicted on German children.
106 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (28v). ‘I did not have, nor wear, any ring, because we Jews when we are young do not wear rings.’
110 Ibid.
111 In fact the rabbinic authorities began to get involved in marital arrangements in the fourteenth century. Rabbinic responsa at the time confirm this. See Menachem Azariah da Fano, *Sefer
she’elot ve-teshuvot, be’urim u-ferushim (Venice, 1599), p. 142.

113 Ibid., p. 473.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., 475.
116 See Stow, Theater, p. 84. Rabbi Menachem Azariah da Fano (1548–1620) authorized as an ‘intrinsic right the decision of a young woman to “refuse” and break an engagement.’
118 Allegra, Identità in bilico, pp. 110–58.
120 Ibid., p. 77.
121 ASMoFIP 20 f.22 (2v) (se pure si battezzava prima d’andare a marito hebreo).
124 Ibid., p. 173.
125 William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, Act II, Scene v.