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האינקוויזיציה והיהודים בוויניציאה במאות

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THE INQUISITION AND THE JEWS IN 17TH AND 18TH CENTURY VENICE

PIER CESARE IOLY ZORATTINI

Twelve years ago, on the occasion of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies, I presented a study on the attitude of the Venetian Inquisition with regard to the crimes which concerned the Jews and the Jewish world during the second half of the 16th century¹. Now I want to carry this analysis to cover the last two centuries of the activity of the tribunal, that is the 17th and the 18th centuries up to 1794 when the last proceedings were held ².

While during the second half of the 16th century the Holy Office had found occasions to institute about eighty proceedings against Jews and Judaizers, less than fifty were celebrated in the following two centuries, exactly forty-six. Only half a score of them, however, can be considered as real trials, while the rest have to be regarded as mere denunciations not followed by a judicial proceeding. Furthermore, as concerns the issues of the trials, it may be interesting to note that there are no records of capital punishments, there are only three defendants sentenced to the galleys and one to one year's imprisonment³.

As regards the sorts of crimes committed, the most frequent one, with about thirty cases, continued to be -as in the 16th century- that of Judaizing, a term by which the Venetian Holy Office actually meant a whole range of crimes going from open apostasy to social relations between Jews and Christians. Second in number, with five proceedings, are the cases connected with sorcery, witchcraft and magic arts on which, as it has been remarked, the Holy Office increasingly focused

¹. Cf. P.C. IOLY ZORATTINI, *The Inquisition and the Jews in Sixteenth Century Venice, Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies. History of the Jews in Europe*, Jerusalem 1981, pp. 83-92.

². Cf. R. CANOSA, *Storia dell'Inquisizione in Italia dalla metà del Cinquecento alla fine del Settecento*, II, Venezia, Roma 1987, p. 190.

³. Cf. Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter referred to as A.S.V.), S. Officio, *Processi*, b. 87, Felice Magalotti; b. 89, Pier Vincenzo Sandoval; b. 94, Francesco Leoncini; b. 91, Andrea Nunciata.

its attention after the year 1585⁴. Finally there are proceedings due to a variety of charges that range from Jews charged with abusing the Catholic faith, or with contempting it in public, to their having sexual intercourses with Christians; from neophytes eating forbidden food to problems rising from preventive censorship of the press or even a case of kidnapping, a Jew from the ghetto of Ferrara who kidnapped his sister in order to prevent her from converting to Christianity. In this lot there are also some curious abuses of power: such is the case of a New Christian who, pretending he was a minister of the Holy Office, confiscated a Hebrew book from some Jews⁵.

As far as the geographical origin of the defendants is concerned, most of them -about twenty- are either Iberians or Levantines (i.e. the Jews subject to the Turkish Empire), while a good portion, seventeen in all, are Italian Jews, plus half a score of Ashkenazims. As for what concerns their social standing, the Venetian proceedings show that the social composition was most varied and rich in different elements. We therefore come across rich merchants, such as Jorge and Fernão Diaz, as well as poor neophytes such as Francesco Leoncini *alias* Iseppo Bon, *alias* Mosè Israel, sentenced on the accusation of *iteratio baptismi*, who had obtained a licence for begging from the Bishop of Vicenza⁶. Even from the point of view of their level of education, the composition of the defendants appear to be quite varied. There are rabbis like Leon da Modena and his nephew Isaac Levi⁷, or restless Portuguese *Conversos* such as doctor Pinto, once hearer of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and such as Fernão Almeda Pereira⁸, a young student in philosophy and arts, who had run away from Lisbon and got to wander about Europe in order to "enrich his experience". But there are also poor women like Maria or Mariana, daughter of Moisè Polacco⁹, who ignored how old they were and were willing to come to any compromise, even that of pretending to be Christian, in order to get some means of support. Finally, as concerns the distribution of the proceedings over the two centuries, it appears

⁴. Cf. E.W. MONTER - J. TEDESCHI, *Toward a Statistical Profile of the Italian Inquisitions, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, The Inquisition in Early Modern Europe. Studies on Sources and Methods*, ed. by G. Henningsen and J. Tedeschi in ass. with Ch. Amiel, Dekalb - Illinois 1986, pp. 130-157: 134.

⁵. Cf. A.S.V., S. Officio, *Processi*, b. 79, Maria; b. 75, Agata Aghitella; b. 82, Libermann; b. 94, Leon da Modena; b. 115, Salomone Caspi; b. 73, Francesco Gritti.

⁶. Cf. A.S.V., S. Officio, *Processi*, b. 77, Jorge and Fernão Diaz; b. 94, Francesco Leoncini.

⁷. Cf. A.S.V., S. Officio, *Processi*, b. 94, Leon da Modena; b. 108, Isacco Levi.

⁸. Cf. A.S.V., S. Officio, *Processi*, b. 106, Fernão Pinto; b. 78, Fernão Almeda Pereira.

⁹. Cf. A.S.V., S. Officio, *Processi*, b. 79, Maria.

that the greatest number was held in the course of the 17th century, and mostly in the first half, while only three -two denunciations and one trial- took place in the 18th century.

As previously mentioned, the crime of Judaizing -that is apostasy from the Catholic faith- was still the one mainly pursued. In fact the three hardest sentences were passed on defendants charged with this crime: Felice Magalotti *alias* Samuel Levi from Salonika, Pier Vincenzo Sandoval *alias* Salomone de Cameo from Rome and Francesco Leoncini *alias* Mosè Israel also from Salonika¹⁰. They were all sentenced to the oars in the galleys of the Serenissima, respectively for eighteen months, for three and seven years. But, when considering the proceedings instituted on the accusation of Judaizing on a whole, it is specially worth of notice that the greatest portion, about a score, consists of mere denunciations which issued with non-suit. Moreover, when the trials were actually celebrated, either they did not bring to an issue or the defendants were condemned to spiritual punishments, except for the four cases mentioned above. This apparently contradictory attitude of the Holy Office may find an explanation in the Venetian policy towards the Marranos. In fact, notwithstanding the two sentences of banishment against them that were ratified in 1497 and in 1550¹¹, with the Charter promulgated in 1589¹² the authorities ended by practically tolerating apostasy with all those New Christians who would settle in the ghetto as Jews. This Charter strongly promoted not only the immigration of *Conversos* from Iberia and from other regions of Western Europe, the so-called *Ponentini*, but also the immigration of the *Levantini* many of which were actually former *Conversos* who had gone back to Hebraism in the hospitable lands of the Turkish Empire.

The Venetian Holy Office had always had great difficulties, notwithstanding Pope Paul IV's severe provisions against the Marranos¹³, in defining its attitude towards these apostates descendands of those Jews who had "chosen" to be baptized in order to remain in the lands of the Catholic or the Portuguese Kings, forced to it by the decrees of king Manuel at the end of the 15th century. In fact already in 1573 when in December the Council of the Ten and the

10. Cf. A.S.V., S. Officio, *Processi*, b. 87, Felice Magalotti; b. 89, Pier Vincenzo Sandoval; b. 94, Francesco Leoncini.

11. Cf. D. KAUFMANN, *Die Vertreibung der Marranen aus Venedig im Jahre 1550*, «The Jewish Quarterly Review», v.s., XIII, 1900, pp. 520-532.

12. Cf. B. RAVID, *The First Charter of the Jewish Merchants of Venice, 1589*, «Association for Jewish Studies Review», I, 1976, pp. 187-222.

13. Cf. E. MASINI, *Sacro Arsenale ovvero Pratica dell'Officio della S. Inquisitione*. Roma 1705, p. 389.

*Zonta*¹⁴ had voted a proposal to grant safe-conduct to the *Levantini* and *Ponentini Viandanti*, provided they would settle as Jews in the ghetto, the Apostolic Delegate in Venice, Giovan Battista Castagna, had clearly foreseen the risks in matter of faith involved in such a privilege and had opportunely informed the Secretary of State, Tolomeo Galli Cardinal of Como:

«These *Signori* need money and consequently a great number of Marranos formerly baptized and gone back to Hebraism, who make themselves called *Levantini*, while they are probably mostly *Ponentini*, taking the opportunity, offer large sums of money so that they may be let live peacefully in this town»¹⁵.

Therefore urging for instructions, he pointed out the terms of the dilemma: should the New Christians let be free to live outside the ghetto as Christians, they might get together becoming «a synagog of false Christians and true Jews»¹⁶; on the contrary, should they be forced to live in the ghetto as Jews, as the authorities required, the fact would mean an outrage to the baptism they had received. In spite of the assurance given by the Doge Alvise I Mocenigo that only true Levantine Jews and not former *Conversos* would be accepted inside the ghetto, the Delegate noticed with concern that in case they would be permitted to live in Venice as Jews, the authorities would certainly not take pains to inquire on their origins and previous behaviour, considering them just like all other Jews. Actually he had good ground for being worried although, for the time being, the proposal did not pass. But after the 1589 Charter the situation of the *Conversos* Judaizers kept on improving up to the point that, during the last ten years of the century, just one sentence is recorded for the crime of Judaizing: a three year's punishment to the galleys inflicted in 1589 on António Rodrigues, self-confessed guilty of apostasy¹⁷.

Although it is undeniable that Brian Pullan is right when he states that «since comparatively few trial records have survived for the period from 1594 to 1616, it is hard to be entirely confident that no Marranos were tried by the Venetian Inquisition»¹⁸ after the issue of the 1589 Charter, there are other sources that testify to the difficulties of the Venetian Holy Office in judging the accused with

¹⁴. Cf. B. PULLAN, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice, 1550-1670*, Oxford 1983, p. 183.

¹⁵. *Nunziature di Venezia*, ed. by A. Buffardi, XI (18 giugno 1573 - 22 dicembre 1576), Roma 1972, p. 137.

¹⁶. *Ivi*.

¹⁷. Archivio della Curia Patriarcale di Venezia, *Criminalia S. Inquisitionis*, b. 4, António Rodrigues.

¹⁸. PULLAN, *The Jews of Europe* cit., p. 192.

this crime. For example the anonymous author of a memorial on the relationship between Venice and the Holy See in the years from 1590 to 1620, who recorded that in this period there had «almost always been insuperable difficulties in proceeding against Jews and Marranos»¹⁹. And a similar situation is to be found in the documents of the Inquisition regarding the following years. In fact, as we noticed before, out of the about thirty cases of Judaizing, twenty are simple denunciations that did not lead to trials. If we now more carefully analyse such proceedings, we may notice that the ones issued with sentences to the galleys or to imprisonment share some peculiarities: the defendants had all been baptized in Italy whatever their origin, and the documents certifying their baptism were well known to the Court. In such a way the judges of the Holy Office were able to prove with the greatest evidence their conversion to Catholicism and, consequently, their apostasy. Moreover these defendants were all sons of Jews and not of New Christians who had been baptized for generations. Their recent condition of neophytes who had spontaneously embraced Christianity set them in a very specific situation, such as to justify the strictness of the judges. On the other hand, when the Judaizers were of Iberian origin the proceedings consist mostly of mere denunciations fully acquitted or giving way to few trials which issued in spiritual punishments. At this point we cannot help remembering the great trials of the 16th century against the Marranos -for example those against Abram Righetto, Gaspar and João Ribeiro and Felipe Nis²⁰, just to remember the best known ones- to realize the role played by the 1589 Charter which marked the true turning point in the history of the Marranos living in the lands of the Republic of Venice.

Of course the Holy Office did not stop pursuing the *Conversos* Judaizers during these two centuries, but it must be pointed out that its action met the firm opposition of the Venetian authorities, which is evidenced by some clamorous cases occurred in the first half of the 17th century like that of the Diaz, a Portuguese family of *Christãos Novos*²¹. In July 1621 Jorge Francisco Diaz and his son were arrested by the Holy Office under the charge of having lived as Christians with their family from 1602 to 1615 in Venice in the parish of St. Marcuola. As a matter of fact Jorge Diaz was now living in the ghetto with his family, behaving as a Jew under the name of Rafael Abendana. As he was arrested, Rafael produced a safe-conduct issued by the Doge Antonio Priuli on October 27th 1618, granting him, his family and his son-in-law, David Senior, the permission

19. *Ibidem*.

20. For Righetto cf. *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia contro Ebrei e Giudaizzanti*, ed. by P.C. Ioly Zorattini, III (1570-1572), Firenze 1984; for the Ribeiros cf. *V (1579-1586)*, Firenze 1987; for Nis cf. *VII (1585-1589)*, Firenze 1989 (in print).

21. Cf. *supra*, note 6.

«to contact people, deal with them, sail and negotiate, and live in the ghetto of this town [Venice] as freely as the other *Ponentini* Jews, in spite of the fact that they had lived in this town for a few years under Christian name, profession and garments».

Because of this privilege the Senate sentenced that Raphael and his son were to be let free, but ordered them and the other people mentioned in the safe-conduct to leave the lands of the Republic within three days. The judges of the Holy Office were much vexed by this sentence as they considered themselves deprived of all authority. But when the Apostolic Delegate expressed the dismay of the Inquisition to the members of the Senate, pointing out that two of Francisco Diaz's sons had been baptized in Venice, the Doge Priuli himself replied defending the conduct of the Venetian authorities: the Jews had been deprived of their safe-conduct and banished from the lands of the Republic as soon as their crime had been evidenced, while their release had been inevitable owing to the respect due to the given word. At this point the Holy Office could but regret the way the release had taken place, rather than objecting to the release itself²¹.

The feeling of safety and impunity the Marrano Judaizers felt living in Venice in the first half of the 17th century is testified, although indirectly, by other sources, such as the notarial acts. In some wills drawn up by a notary of Venice, Giovanni Piccini, on behalf of some Portuguese Jews, both the Jewish and the Christian names appear one next to the other, which is an indisputable evidence that all of them were Judaizers. For example in the earliest testament dated March 1st 1625, the testator appears both as Abram Baruch and Diogo Nunes ²³. The fact that Iberian Jews could safely refer to their past as Christians in front of a Christian notary tells much of the atmosphere of protection and of impunity which the Marranos enjoyed in Venice throughout the 17th century. A situation the Holy See could not approve of. In fact Cardinal Francesco Albizzi²⁴, *assessore* of the Roman Inquisition, complained that the ghetto had become a shelter for anyone who might want to judaize and that by no means such crimes could be pursued since the Judaizers were protected by privileges granted by the Republic to the Sephardic Jews:

²¹. Cf. A.S.V., Collegio Esposizioni Roma, reg. 19 (1619-1621), cc. 53r-54r, 23 luglio 1621. PULLAN, *The Jews of Europe* cit., p. 194.

²³. Cf. A.S.V., Notarile, *Testamenti*, notaio Giovanni Piccini, b. 756/18, 1 marzo 1625, Abram Baruch *alias* Diogo Nunes.

²⁴. On Cardinal Albizzi cf. A. MONTICONE, *Albizzi Francesco, Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 2, pp. 23-26.

«neither will it be possible to punish them under the pretext that they are granted with a public promise»²⁵.

Second in importance, as I have mentioned above, are the proceedings regarding witchcraft. Generally the crimes are acts of sorcery *ad amorem* or divining, done by Jews in favour both of Jews and Christians. They are very interesting in as much as they give an insight into the everyday life relations between Jews and Christians, relations which were certainly much more extensive and complex than one might think at first sight. In the Venetian ghetto there worked a consistent number of Christians mostly poor, whose activities were not restricted to low and servile works. Such is the case of Valeria Brunaleschi who, in the second half of the 16th century, lived in the ghetto for two years carrying on a sort of primary school teaching for about seventy to eighty Jewish little girls²⁶.

The most interesting of these proceedings is the one against Isacco Levi in 1658²⁷ due to the personality of the defendant. He has been identified with Isaac min Ha-Leviim²⁸, nephew of Leon da Modena whom he had succeeded as a preacher in the Italian synagogue. In our opinion such an identification is further confirmed by their common interest in magics. In fact, Modena was interested in some forms of magic and astrology, and he was also involved in teaching occult practices²⁹, while Isaac was reported as a diviner by Giovan Giacomo Moro who claimed that Isaac had tried to find stolen objects by means of magic practices. Even in this case, however, in spite of the evidence and the witnesses gathered against rabbi Levi the Court did not prosecute him.

The last proceedings against Jews and new Christians -amounting to three, out of which two were denounces that did not lead to a trial- were instituted in the first half of the 18th century: they concerned the contempt of the Sacraments by a few neophytes, one case of apostasy by a New Christian of Iberian origin, and the case of a

²⁵. *Risposta all' Historia della sacra Inquisitione composta già dal R.P. Paolo Servita*, s.l. et autore, p. 195.

²⁶. Cf. A.S.V., S. Officio, *Processi*, b. 59, Valeria Brunaleschi or Brugnaleschi; PULLAN, *The Jews of Europe* cit., p. 161. M. MILANI, *Indovini ebrei e streghe cristiane nella Venezia dell'ultimo '500*, «Lares», LIII, n. 2, 1987, pp. 207-213.

²⁷. Cf. *supra*, note 14.

²⁸. Cf. *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah*, transl. and ed. by M.R. Cohen, Princeton N.J. 1988, pp. 40-41.

²⁹. Cf. *ivi*, pp. 40-41.

neophyte involved in sorceries *ad amorem*³⁰. Only in this last case the proceeding was concluded with the abjuration of the neophyte, Nicolò Saracca, son of Moisè Mondolfo.

If we now compare the whole situation of the second half of the 16th century with its nearly eighty proceedings to the situation of the following two centuries when the total of the proceedings against Jews and New Christians were not fully fifty, we are forced to remark what a meaningful difference there is between the two. It is clear that the times had changed and the attention of the Holy Office had turned to different crimes. Nevertheless if we consider the whole activity of the Venetian tribunal over about two hundred and fifty years in which about 1565 proceedings were celebrated, we cannot but notice that the proceedings against the Jews cover less than the ten per cent of the whole, while severe punishments (but no capital sentences) amount to less than twenty. But if the Venetian tribunal was never very severe towards the Jews and Judaizers, we must remember that this attitude was mainly due to the constant control over its activity by the Serenissima, an indirect proof of the constant, although not unselfish protection Venice offered to the Jews, thus becoming one of the main centres of the Diaspora in Western Europe at the beginning of the 17th century.

³⁰. Cf. A.S.V., S. Officio, *Processi*, b. 130, Bernardo Lazzaroni; b. 135, Raffaele Brandori; b. 138, Nicolò Saracca, Antonio Pasquali, Valentino Petris; b. 142, Giovan Maria Fattori.