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DEPARTMENT
OF HISTORY
AND
CIVILIZATION

Variations on a Religious Theme

Jews and Muslims From the Eastern Mediterranean
Converting to Christianity, 17th & 18th Centuries

Daphne Lappa

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization
of the European University Institute

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European University Institute
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Abstract

This study explores the religious conversion of Jews and Muslims to Christianity from the mid-17th to the 18th centuries in the international city of Venice and the port-city of Corfu. It does not focus on the subjective experiences and identity formation of candidate converts, but rather on the background situations that acted as catalysts for these people's decision to convert.

More concretely, the study connects, on the one hand, the conversion of Jews to the impoverishment of a large part of the Jews in Europe in the period under consideration, while it also traces the existence of a minority of educated and wealthy Jewish converts, whose conversion it considers in connection to the crisis of Jewish identity in the late 18th century. On the other hand, the study traces two core elements in the lives and itineraries of Muslim candidate converts: a background of sustained familiarity with Christianity, and an extensive physical mobility that exposed them to and entailed interaction with multi-ethnic and multi-religious contexts .

Additionally, the study argues that despite the diversity of social status, backgrounds, circumstances or incentives for conversion that candidate converts displayed, a common element transcends the majority of their life-stories: the fact that before reaching the Christian institutions, they were already embedded in cross-faith and cross-cultural social networks. These networks, which often operated as agents of conversion, formed the wider framework within which the various catalysts –from straightforward coercion and poverty to intense cross-faith intimacy, physical mobility, identity crisis or the prospect of professional and status gain- were played out.

The study draws mostly, but not exclusively, on material from the archive of the institution of the *Casa dei Catecumeni* and the church of *San Giorgio* in Venice, as well as on material from the *Megalos Protopapas* and the Latin Cathedral archival series in Corfu.

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Preface

In the early 2000's the conversion story of a fifteen-year-old boy from Albania captured the attention of the Greek audience. The boy had migrated to Greece with his family in the late 1990s. They were part of the wider migrant waves from Albania that reached Greece during the 1990s and which unsettled a country that had never received before immigrants in such numbers.¹ The family lived near the city of Thessaloniki, and the boy attended school there. According to a custom established in Greece in the 1930's, during national days school parades take place. Each parade is headed by the student with the higher grades, who also carries the country's flag. As the boy from Albania had excelled in school in 2000, he was to be heading his school parade holding the flag. Yet due to the fact that he was not native Greek, the parents' council of the school reacted, arguing that foreigners couldn't carry the national symbol. The incident became a national issue and public opinion was split. Soon after, the boy's family decided that the boy should be baptized as an Orthodox Christian.

Although this story became widely known, it was not an exception. Albanian immigrants in Greece faced for many years the open hostility of Greek society – which today is targeted mostly against immigrants from Asia and Africa. Within this first generation of Albanians immigrants, many were baptized as Orthodox Christians, in individual or collective ceremonies. In their cases, baptism was used as a strategy of assimilation in the Greek society, for religious assimilation was expected to somehow counterbalance or even remedy the absence of effective social assimilation.²

Stories like this one showcase the pertinence that religion has in the late-modern world, challenging the modern secularization narrative according to which religion was important only to pre-modern Western societies, where it organically belonged to the public sphere and constituted a criterion of legal categorization and social incorporation, endowed as well with

¹ According to the Mediterranean Migration Observatory, in 2001 Albanian immigrants in Greece constituted the 55.6% on the total number of immigrants in the country, see the 'Immigrants Census GR 2001', http://www.mmo.gr/pdf/statistics/greece/general/Immigrants_Census_GR_2001.pdf

² For other contemporary cases where religion and conversion constitute part of the migration process see Jacqueline Hagan and Helen Rose Ebaugh, 'Calling Upon the Sacred. Migrants' Use of Religion in the Migration Process', *International Migration Review* 37, no. 4 (2003): 1145-1162; Sebnem Koser Akcapar, 'Conversion as a Migration Strategy in a Transit Country. Iranian Shiites Becoming Christians in Turkey', *International Migration Review* 40, no. 4 (2006): 817-853; idem, 'What's God Got to Do With It? The Role of Religion in the Internal Dynamic of Migrants' networks', *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 119-120 (2007): 81-100.

important negotiatory value and an external, or ‘instrumental’, character. The external and public character of religion in pre-modern societies was in this narrative juxtaposed to what was understood as the internal and private character of religion in modernity, where religion was the outcome of personal, internal, sincere choice. Thus, within the modern Western European context, religious identity was not supposed to be as important an element or instrument on both individual and collective levels. The modern state focused its attention instead on national identities, which it claimed to bear a secular character, even if more often than not national identity presupposed and incorporated also a religious one.³

This scheme was first challenged during the 1990s, with the revival of religion in post-communist countries and the fatal ethno-religious wars in the Balkans. Nevertheless, in Western Europe these events were to a certain extent still dismissed as pertinent to the ‘backward’ Eastern Europe and, accordingly, ‘irrelevant’ to the highly secularized Western societies, where allegedly the heart of modernity beat. Today, of course, we see the equation between modernity and secularization being similarly challenged within Western European societies, where division along religious lines is played off more and more frequently. The reason for this shift is to a large extent the phenomenon of migration, which has become a constant reality in Western Europe.⁴ The continuous, and indeed accelerating, flow of people from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa or Latin America raises urgent political and social issues of identity and heated debates as well as policies of exclusion in the host countries, the European Union and Europe as a whole.⁵

Within this reality, religion is in center-stage again as a principal signifier of cultural and ethnic identity and difference, while, as in the past, religious conversion and migration

³ Michel de Certeau used the concept of conversion in order to describe the transformation of belief from paganism to Christianity, then to political monarchy and finally to the national state, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 178 and generally the chapter ‘Ways of believing’, 177-189.

⁴ See for instance Eurostat’s report on migration of 2007, where it is stated that ‘the contribution of migration to EU-27 population growth has become more significant than natural change since 1992’, or the 2012 report entitled ‘Nearly Two-Thirds of the Foreigners Living in EU Member States Are Citizens of Countries Outside the EU-27’, see respectively Giampaolo Lanzieri, ‘Population in Europe 2007. First Results’, *Population and Social Conditions* 81 (Eurostat, 2007) and Katya Vasileva, ‘Nearly Two-Thirds of the Foreigners Living in EU Member States Are Citizens of Countries Outside the EU-27’, *Population and Social Condition* 31 (Eurostat, 2012).

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3433488/5583236/KS-SF-08-081-EN.PDF/ff7fa28e-6f67-4d50-8a43-05f90e209f93>

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3433488/5584984/KS-SF-12-031-EN.PDF/be48f08f-41c1-4748-a8a5-5d92ebe848f2>

⁵ Antony Molho, Diogo Ramada and Niki Koniordos, eds., *Finding Europe. Discourses on Margins, Communities, Images ca. 13th-ca. 18th Centuries* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books), 37.

become anew inextricably connected. What's more, socioeconomic and cultural hierarchies between host societies and immigrants are being concealed behind religious difference, bringing about the development and diffusion of theories like the 'clash of civilization' between 'East' and 'West'. What these theories actually demonstrate is that religious issues are instrumentally used in order to fill vague notions, substantiate 'imagined geographies', form hierarchical categories,⁶ and ultimately sustain internal conflicts within European societies or justify wars on the international level.

In the context of this ideological battle, history is quite regularly manipulated and abused so as to offer legitimization to assumptions of the present. The eastern Mediterranean as a supposedly natural border between East and West, and a quintessential space for the supposedly perennial clash between Islam and Christianity serves well these anachronistic approaches. Against this discourse that distorts and de-historicizes early modern cross-faith interaction, what this study suggests is that early modern Eastern Mediterranean was a space where difference and familiarity existed side by side among people of diverse ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, creating forms of coexistence that the nation-state's legacy and structures of thinking and being have made difficult to imagine.

⁶ Edward D. Said, *Οριενταλισμός* (Athens: Nefeli, 1996), 67-93.

Introduction

i. Rachel Vivante: a unique case?

The interest I developed in the theme of religious conversion came after I stumbled upon the following story, which took place in 1776 in the Venetian city of Corfu. In the night of Thursday 17th April, a young woman, Rachel, escaped from her house with a young man, conte Spiridione. The young woman was about fifteen years old. She was Jewish, daughter of the deceased Maimon, and belonged to the prominent merchant family of Vivante, which controlled the oil trade in Corfu, the island's main staple at that time. The young man was about twenty-five years old. He was Christian of the 'Greek rite',⁷ son of the priest Giovanni-Battista, and belonged to the local noble family of Bulgari, which owned and controlled the church and shrine of the popular *Ayios Spyridon*, saint-protector of the island. On the day after the escape, and while the local Venetian garrison was already searching for Rachel, she was brought to the church of *Antivouniotissa* and, amidst a shouting crowd of Greeks, she was baptized Christian of the Greek rite and then married to Spiridione. The alleged abduction or escape of Rachel caused initially the interference of the local Venetian authorities, but soon the *Inquisitori di Stato* in Venice were also involved, commissioning extensive investigations and ordering several arrests. The story, though, did not end there, as Rachel's family appealed to the authorities in Venice challenging the validity of the conducted ceremonies. Thus forty days after her marriage, Rachel was obliged to depart for Venice, where she was directed to the *Casa dei Catecumeni*.

⁷ The word 'rite' (*rito*) generally refers to the way the liturgy and sacraments are performed in a given Church, and it is defined by the place of its origin. The 'Greek rite' (*rito Greco*) refers to liturgy as it was performed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Although in both the Venetian documents and secondary literature this term is usually used to indicate affiliation with the Eastern Orthodox Church, as Molly Green observes the 'Greek rite' was in reality followed by Orthodox and Catholics alike: 'the most widely used liturgy in the East, [the Greek rite] was employed by both Catholics and the Orthodox, since the Catholic Church, by and large, did not insist on substitution of the Greek rite as long as papal supremacy was acknowledged', see Molly Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants. A Maritime History of the Mediterranean* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 157. This is for example the case of the Maronite Church of Lebanon, which in the 11th century recognized the Pope as the head of their Church, but kept following the Eastern liturgical and canonical traditions, see Felix Wilfred (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 19.

The intriguing event preoccupied the local society and authorities long after Rachel was sent to the *Dominante*.⁸ Yet, would the same have happened if Rachel did not belong to one of the most important and wealthy Jewish families of the island? In other words, was her behavior so uncommon and extraordinary? Or, was it actually resonating with similar trends among the Jews of her time? To approach these questions, I needed to strip the story of its vested uniqueness, and place it within its historical framework. Regarding Rachel's story as an exceptional case would not be very enlightening in any historical sense. Embedding it, instead, in the wider social and cultural context where it belonged, would help me better understand it, and provide some answers to my questions. I thus turned to the study of religious conversion within the spatial and institutional contexts where Rachel had lived: the Venetian island of Corfu and the *Casa dei Catecumeni* in Venice. The initial timeframe, the 18th century, was extended a little back in time, to the second half of the 17th century, when I realized that this would allow me to trace more fully several trends.

In Corfu, conversion of Jewish residents or migrants and Muslim enslaved captives in the 17th century and migrants in the 18th century was not uncommon, even though the phenomenon had never been massive. At the same time, Corfu beyond being a Christian realm where Jews and Muslims could convert, functioned also as, what I call, a 'religious transit' leading to the metropolitan city of Venice. Jewish and Muslim merchants, mercenaries or peregrinators from Istanbul, Algeria, Morocco or Bosnia, while heading to Venice passed through Corfu, where they were often provided with a reference letter from the Latin Archbishop or the Venetian *Provveditore Generale*, and then followed Rachel's trajectory towards the *Pia Casa dei Catecumeni*.

Venice, on the other hand, was a metropolitan city, a 'node of movement in the preindustrial world';⁹ Christians and non-Christians from across the Italian peninsula, the wider Mediterranean and Northern Europe flocked to the city.¹⁰ The Venetian *Casa*, accordingly, gradually acquired a highly interreligious and 'international' profile, and unlike similar institutions in Italy that targeted specifically local Jewries, it addressed 'infidels' from all religions and all geographical areas. And indeed, the *Casa* was a place where people of

⁸ The archival material of the investigation is now kept in Inquisitori di Stato, b. 139, 1110, Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV). Rachel's story can be also found in Cesare Vivante, *La memoria dei padri* (Firenze: Giuntina, 2009), 50–72.

⁹ Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans. Migration in Western Europe Since 1650* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 44.

¹⁰ Donatella Calabi, 'Gli stranieri e la città', in *Il Rinascimento. Società Ed Economia*, ed. Alberto Tenenti and Ugo Tucci, vol. 5, *Storia di Venezia* (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1996), 913–946.

diverse origins, religions, or status met, people who had usually followed completely diverse paths and itineraries before reaching the institution: Muslim soldiers, traders or captives from the nearby Balkans or coming from as far as Erzerum in Anatolia met there with Jewish merchants or entire families from Venice, the Italian Peninsula, the Ionian islands or Istanbul.

The *Casa* owed its multicultural profile not merely to the attraction that Venice exerted to non-Christian or non-Catholic foreigners, but also to a proselytization network that the institution carefully developed and sustained, and which extended well beyond the city. Within this system, Corfu, along with other Mediterranean territories of Venice like Spalato or Zante, assumed the intermediary role of ‘religious transit’ and kept operative a closely-knit network of religious and secular officials.¹¹ This network, which hinged on and at the same time complemented Venice’s Mediterranean policy, enabled the institution to build its role and fame as one of the primary places for conversion within the Italian and the broader eastern Mediterranean geographical area, and therefore to ‘participate in a more general, imperial enterprise of projecting Venice’s self-image as a Christian republic beyond its frontiers’.¹² At the same time, by ‘linking the metropole with its colonies and frontier regions’, the institution’s network also contributed to the institutionalization of Venetian power over the *Serenissima*’s territories.¹³

ii. Early modern mobility and fluidity

As I delved into the archival documents from Venice and Corfu, I noted an element that emerged as both prominent and recurrent in the narratives I encountered: the actual geographic mobility that characterized the lives of the people that reached the Venetian institution. As already mentioned in passing, these were people that had travelled not only within the Venetian state or the Italian peninsula. They had come to Venice from the Ottoman Balkans, Anatolia, the southern Mediterranean coasts of Tunisia or Algeria, and to a lesser extent from northern Europe and cities like Amsterdam or London. In short, I realized that the world of candidate converts was to a significant extent a microcosm on the move. At the same time, as I was getting more familiar with the literature on early modern identities and early modern religious conversion, I became aware of a conceptual framework that was apparently

¹¹ E. Natalie Rothman, ‘Becoming Venetian. Conversion and Transformation in the Seventeenth-Century Mediterranean’, *Mediterranean Historical Review* 21, no. 1 (2006): 42.

¹² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 42.

shared among the majority of these studies: the idea that early modern communities' boundaries and early modern identities were 'fluid', 'ambiguous', 'malleable' or 'imprecise'.

While I will be discussing these concepts at length in the following chapter,¹⁴ it seems pertinent to briefly observe here that both 'fluidity' and 'mobility' are fruits of the same historical experience and intellectual process that took place in the post-1989 world, namely the crisis of the nation-states and the interlinked identity crisis as well the influx of large waves of migration and the interconnected emergence of issues of cultural and religious diversity or integration.

Within this context, late-modern subjects, whether imagining themselves as unbound by social, economic, cultural or political constraints and thus free to move beyond limitations in the contemporary world of 'light and liquid modernity'¹⁵ or, on the other hand, overwhelmed with the experiences of instability and uncertainty that this same world conveys, they project these experiences to a romanticized version of the pre-modern past. They thus 'acknowledge' a selective affinity or even identify with the early modern subjects¹⁶ that are seen to have navigated, at times with ease and at times perplexed and confused, a world of networks and nodes, and crossed diverse political, geographical and cultural entities.¹⁷

iii. Before conversion: the importance of social and cultural frameworks

Taking into account the above-mentioned remarks, this study will take a closer look at the cases of religious conversion within the institutional frameworks of the *Casa dei Catecumeni* in Venice and -to a lesser degree due to the scarcity of documents- the Christian churches, Greek and Latin, of Corfu. While studying the available archival material from these institutions, I gradually became aware that it did not permit me to address the common questions that come to mind when one studies conversion, namely the converts' motivation and their actual subjective experience of the process of conversion. And this is due to at least two reasons. First, as it will be explained in further detail, any recorded expression related to the candidate converts' wish to be baptized was crafted and formulated in such a way as to fit

¹⁴ See here, 41-63.

¹⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2000).

¹⁶ The same is also observed by Ian Morris about how the ancient Mediterranean is envisaged today, see Ian Morris, 'Mediterraneanization', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 18, no. 2 (2003): 32.

¹⁷ Dennis Smith, 'Social Fluidity and Social Displacement', *The Sociological Review* 58, no. 4 (2010): 687-688.

into the expectations of the priests who interrogated them. Second, this material either captured the moment of these people's arrival in the respective institutions in Venice and Corfu; or referred to their past, providing an account of candidate converts' lives before reaching the institutions. Even when post-baptism itineraries were recorded, they only take the form of brief allusions to occupational engagement for men or marriage for women, thus not providing any further evidence on these people's lived experience of conversion – let alone address the elusive issues of the possibly transformative qualities of conversion and the recrafting of religious identities.

At the same time, though, I gradually became more aware that the social and cultural contexts from which these people came before reaching the religious institutions played an important role in their decision to convert. As Marc Baer observed in his book on Islamization in the 17th century, noting a certain interlinked neglect towards the spiritual aspect of conversion,¹⁸

Most scholars writing about religious conversion today have moved away from the school of thought associated with the eminent William James, based on an uncritical reading of converts' narratives that emphasizes the (Protestant) individual's psychological experience of conversion. Instead of such an interiorist approach, which focuses on an individual in isolation, scholars emphasize the social and historical context and aspects of conversion, arguing that conversion is motivated by social relationships and interpersonal bonds. ... It is not only the life of the mind that matters, but also the life of the social being, for conversion is not only deeply private, but also deeply social.

I thus embarked on the effort to reconstruct the contexts within which candidate converts lived before reaching the institutions in Corfu and Venice, a realistic endeavor in respect to the available archival material, and which could provide a meaningful way to frame, at least partly, the recorded conversions. To this end, I approach religious conversion in those spaces in two, sometimes interconnected, ways. First, by embedding them into the local social, cultural and religious frameworks where they belong. That is, instead of reducing the complex phenomenon of religious conversion and more generally early modern plurality in an assumed fluidity or lack of boundaries, I try to trace the content of early modern religious boundaries, and then understand why and when these boundaries were transgressed.

¹⁸ Marc David Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam. Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 14-15.

Treating candidate converts separately, according to their religious affiliation, is therefore selected as a way to approach the different contexts in which they had previously lived, and at the same time to highlight the variety of these contexts, thus offering an overview of the rather diverse backgrounds of the people that reached the institution. Second, when mobility comes into play, I attempt to connect conversion with the experience of travel and, when possible, with the candidate converts' mobility patterns. I am not implying here that early modern mobility *led* to conversion, but that it is interlinked with conversion as one of the factors that smoothed its way.

But, as already mentioned, conversion is not influenced only by contextual situations; it is also conditioned by personal relations.¹⁹ Hence, when possible, I also trace those relations that, within the wider frameworks, seem to have played an important role in the candidate converts' life-stories and, often, in their decision to convert. More concretely, although the Jewish and Muslim candidate converts that reached the Venetian and Corfiot institutions displayed a wide diversity of social status, backgrounds, circumstances or incentives for conversion, there is nevertheless a common element that transcends the majority of their stories: the fact that before reaching these institutions they were already highly embedded in cross-faith social networks, either on a local level, or within wider webs that were constructed through physical mobility –or on both local and wider scales. And, to a significant extent, the entanglement of the networks maintained by the institutions that promoted conversion with these cross-faith social networks made proselytization and conversion effective, especially in the 18th century, when the factor of coercion was largely absent.

So, within this wider scheme, I follow more closely, but not exclusively, two groups that feature rather prominently in the Venetian institution's records: (a) the Jews of Venice and the Venetian territories, whose conversion I consider in connection with the gradual waning of the Jewish communities and the crisis of Jewish identity in the 18th century –I place Rachel's story within this scheme; and (b) Muslims originating from the Ottoman Balkans, whose conversion was closely interlinked with the Venetian army –either as its captives during the Ottoman-Venetian wars, or, in the case of men, as its mercenaries.

Treating early modern religious conversion in this way, that is situating it within historical, geographical and cultural frameworks, makes clear that this process was neither

¹⁹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 15.

fluid in structure nor unpredictable or arbitrary. On the contrary, it had its internal coherent logic, following the hierarchies of the highly structured universe where it took place and which rendered it each time meaningful. Additionally, this approach unearths and draws attention to the diversity of experiences and reasons that drove different people to religious conversion. For, if religious conversion has been a continuous phenomenon throughout human history, the patterns, agents, reasoning, circumstances, processes and density with which it actually occurred, varies extensively over time.

Last but not least, such an approach contributes to ‘de-essentializing’ and ‘de-Christianizing’ religious conversion. Within the context of humanities and social sciences, religious conversion was mostly seen, even if not deliberately, through the lenses of Christianity. That is, the questions posed in the disciplines of history, sociology and psychology were to a greater or lesser extent influenced by the Christian tradition of religious conversion. Consequently, the notions and analytical tools used in these disciplines reflected the Christian perception of conversion: the desire to fit conversion into the twin model of conversion narratives, Paul’s and Augustine’s; the cardinal notion of sincerity or insincerity of conversion; the idea of transition from the old world to the new. During the past decade, though, studies have moved beyond this predetermined set of inquiries and widened the research on religious conversion, mostly through the use of concepts and tools from the fields of historical anthropology and cultural studies.²⁰

Following this line of thought, and as it would be elaborated further below, religious conversion is here understood as an action situated within the field of the study of everyday life,²¹ and approached as a consequence of the everyday interaction between non-Christians and the dominant Christian cultural and political system, within a context of asymmetrical power relations. Implementing Michel de Certeau’s distinction between the *strategies* of the ‘strong’ and the *tactics* of the ‘weak’,²² religious conversion can be thus understood as a process structured on the basis of two interdependent practices: on the one hand, the strategies that ecclesiastical officers adopted in order to implement their conversionist policy, and on the other hand the tactics non-Christian adopted in order to negotiate their inclusion in the dominant culture.

²⁰ More extensive reference on these works will be made in the next chapter.

²¹ On the concept of the ‘everyday life’ see Derek Schilling, ‘Everyday Life and the Challenge to History in Postwar France. Braudel, Lefebvre, Certeau’, *Diacritics* 33, no. 1 (2003): 23-40.

²² Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xvii-xix, 17, 29, 34, 37.

iv. Archival sources

As it will be described in more detail hereafter, this work is primarily based on documents from the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni* and, to a more limited extent, on documents from the Latin and Greek Churches of Corfu. As a general remark, for reasons related to the nature of the consulted archival material, the 17th century is mostly approached on the basis of serial documents, while the 18th century through a combination of serial and narrative sources. Finally, the material from Corfu is used only to the extent that it complements the archival evidence from the Venetian *Casa*. With this, I do not imply or endorse a traditional understanding that reduces peripheries, in this case the Venetian island of Corfu, to merely a reflection of trends and policies taking place in the centre, that is Venice. But, as the dynamics between Venice and Corfu remain out of the scope of this study, I only use the material from Corfu for specific and limited purposes: to shed some light on the institution's network or the trends traced there, and to help me better contextualize Rachel's history- which was ultimately the incentive for this study.

a. Venice

As already mentioned, this study is based first and foremost on the archival collection of the *Casa dei Catecumeni* in Venice. The collection is today split in two and located at the *Archivio Storico del Patriarcato di Venezia* (hereafter ASPV)²³ and the *Archivio delle Istituzioni di Ricovero e di Educazione* (hereafter AIRE).²⁴ The material that I consulted from the *Casa*'s archival series can be roughly divided in two categories: (a) those that have a serial form, which include the registers where the candidate converts' arrival was recorded (*Registri dei Neofiti*)²⁵ and the registers of their baptisms (*Registri dei Battesimi*);²⁶ and (b) those that

²³ *Archivio Storico del Patriarcato di Venezia*, accessed 3 October 2013, <http://www.archivistoricodelpatriarcatodivenezia.it/index.html>.

²⁴ For an overview of this material, see Giuseppe Ellero, *L'archivio IRE. Inventari dei fondi antichi degli Ospedali e Luoghi Pii di Venezia* (Venice: AIRE, 1987), 212–214.

²⁵ Although the term *neofito* in Italian is used with reference to those recently baptized (and this is how it is used in the institution's statue as well), in these registers only non-baptized, candidate converts are recorded.

²⁶ These two series together cover the whole period under examination here (1645-1797). They are recorded in the following registers: Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, Registro dei Battesimi 1676-1693, and Registro dei Battesimi 1693-1734; Registro dei Neofiti 1676-1693, Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734 and Registro dei Neofiti 1734-1911, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

have a narrative form, namely the registers containing the examination of non-Christians by the institution Prior's upon their arrival there (*Costituti*).²⁷ Another series that I consulted is the notebooks of the institution's Priors (*Libri da rassegnare le notizie importanti alle pie Case de' Catecumeni*)²⁸ that actually incorporate both the serial and narrative forms, and which must have been a sort of personal notebooks of the institution's Priors, where they noted all the important information they needed to share with the institution's Board.²⁹ The information found there was usually afterwards incorporated into the above-mentioned Baptisms' and Neophytes' Registers.

The first two archival series, the Neophytes' and Baptisms' books, were the institution's official registers compiled by the *Casa's* Priors.³⁰ Although there are internal inconsistencies in the mode of registration in these registers, they generally reserve for each candidate convert a separate entry, which 'crystallizes converts' biographies into a limited set of pre-given categories of vital data'.³¹ More concretely, in the Neophytes' registers Priors recorded information related to candidate converts, who were accepted there and were to be catechized before receiving baptism.³² The Prior recorded their personal details -including name and parents' name, origin, age and rarely profession- as well as the date of their arrival, and often that of their official acceptance at the institution. Priors also noted in these books, rather briefly, information about the network that brought candidate converts to the institution. For example, in the case of the two Venetian Jewish sisters, Bona forty-eight years old and Zaffilla thirty-eight years old, who appeared before the Prior asking to be baptized, the latter specified that they were brought there by 'Sig[no]ra Orsetta Rinaldi, e ... Camillo servitor del Sig[no]r Gio[vanni] Batt[is]a Zechini, fattor dell' Ill[ustrissi]mo, ed Ecc[elentissi]mo Sig[no]r

²⁷ These series cover only partly the period under examination here. They are recorded at *Costituti* 1744-1762 and *Costituti* 1779-1836, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

²⁸ These cover the first half of the 18th century, and are preserved today at *Libro da rassegnare le notizie importanti alle pie Case de' Catecumeni* 1702-1718-G6; *Libro in cui si notano le cose che il priore va proponendo in Cong[regazio]ne ogni Martedì e altre per memoria al nostro Signore Cancelliere* [1705-1710]-G7; *Libro da rassegnare nella Congregat[i]one le cose importanti alle pie Case de' Catecumeni* 1718-1725-G8; *Libro da rassegnare alla V[enerand]a Congregazione le cose importanti alle pie Case de' Catecumeni* 1725-1744-G9, Catecumeni, AIRE.

²⁹ Ellero, *L'archivio IRE*, 213.

³⁰ *Capitoli ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia a cognizione de' Signori Governatori delle medesime, ristampati e raccolti dalli notatori della Pia Congregazione, consecrati alla protezione di S. Gio: Battista Protettore del Pio Luogo* (Venice: Vincenzo Rizzi, 1802), 30-31, 42.

³¹ Ella Natalie Rothman, 'Between Venice and Istanbul. Trans-Imperial Subjects and Cultural Mediation in the Early Modern Mediterranean' (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2006), 154.

³² The style of Neophytes' registers was not consistent through time. Initially candidate converts were recorded there after their acceptance at the institution was officially confirmed by the Board of Governors, while later they were recorded there on the day of their arrival, yet this was not strictly followed by all Priors.

Anzolo Maria Labia'.³³ Priors also recorded in these registers the cases of candidate converts who left the institution without baptism, while reference to the actual dates of baptism is rather infrequent. The Baptismal books are stricter in their format, including less additional information. There, the details of the ceremony of baptism were recorded, including the new and old name of converts, the church where the baptism took place, the administering priest and the godparents' names. In the Baptisms' Registers, Priors also made reference to the date that converts left the institution, adding occasionally some information about their life and itineraries after leaving the institution.

The *Costituti*, on the other hand, are probably the most interesting and rich documents of the *Casa*'s archival material. The word *costituti* comes from the phrase *costituti verbali* that refers to 'oral testimonies'.³⁴ These registers include the depositions that candidate converts gave to the Prior of the Venetian institution upon their arrival there, replying to his questions that concerned their previous lives, and the reasons and motives they had to convert to Christianity. The Prior recorded their answers, and composed a one-to-two pages long mini-narrative of candidate converts' life stories. In these registers the Prior occasionally also noted in brief the post-baptism itineraries of converts, as well as the cases of candidate converts that fled the institution –giving sometimes short but colorful descriptions of their flight, like in the case of Mehmed Curzovich, seventeen years old from Bosnia, who after spending a month and a half there, finally decided to escape, and descended from the institution's balcony by tying together 'due mantili di tavola et una corda'.³⁵

These documents followed a mode of inquiry already elaborated by the Inquisition of Venice in the 16th century³⁶, and later adopted by the *Casa dei Catecumeni* in Venice. In fact, these mini-narratives can be found among the *Casa*'s archival material before the *Costituti*. As of 1725, they were recorded in the previously mentioned *Libri da rassegnare* [...]. In the last notebook of this kind preserved (1725-1744), depositions were for the first time recorded there, yet in a rather haphazard way, intermingled with all other information, and in reported

³³ Registro dei Neofiti 1676-1693, c. 14r, Catecumeni, Sezione antica, ASPV.

³⁴ 'Costitutu [...] cioè i verbali dell'interrogatorio cui erano sottoposti i catecumeni prima dell'ammissione alla Pia Casa per verificarne le motivazioni alla conversione', in 'Sistema Informativo Unificato per le Soprintendenze Archivistiche (SIUSA)', accessed 31 March 2013, <http://siusa.archivi.beniculturali.it/cgi-bin/pagina.pl?TipoPag=comparc&Chiave=391870&RicFrmRicSemplice=catecumeni&RicProgetto=ev&RicSez=complessi&RicVM=ricercasemplice>.

³⁵ *Costituti* 1744-1762, c. 38r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

³⁶ Rothman, 'Between Venice and Istanbul', 123–124.

speech form.³⁷ As of 1744, depositions were consistently recorded in the especially designated registers of *Costituti*, where their style changed into direct speech.

Beyond the above-mentioned archival material, I supplementarily consulted the *Notatori* series from the Venetian institution, consisting of the decisions made by the institution's Board. Beyond the *Casa*'s documents, I also consulted the Baptismal Registers from the church of *San Giorgio dei Greci* in Venice, since I noted that several Ottoman subjects and candidate converts, who either were Greek-speaking themselves or came from Greek-speaking areas, took refuge there after fleeing the Venetian *Casa*.

b. Corfu

As it will be further explained in the following chapters, in the island of Corfu both the Latin and Greek Churches controlled and promoted religious conversion. Unfortunately the greatest part of the archives of the Latin Church was burnt during the bombardment of the city by the German army in September 1943, thus few series of documents survive today. They are kept in the Latin Archdiocese of Corfu (hereafter LAC), and they mainly consist in the registers of baptisms and marriages performed at the Latin Cathedral of *San Giacomo*³⁸. These registers cover roughly the Venetian period between the mid-17th and the 18th century. No relevant documents survive from the other Latin churches of the city, nor -most significantly- from the two important monasteries of Saint Francis and *Annunziata*.³⁹

The documents I consulted from the Latin Church archival material were the Baptismal Registers.⁴⁰ In these, among the various baptisms administered in the Latin Cathedral, one can spot those Muslims and Jews that were baptized there. As with the *Casa*'s Baptismal Registers, this material is of a serial nature, characterized by regularity and uniformity. Emphasis is given on the converts' details (new and old name, religious adherence, gender,

³⁷ Libro da rassegnare... 1725-1744-G9, Catecumeni, AIRE.

³⁸ The Latin Cathedral designated the only Latin parish in the city of Corfu, see Spyros Karydis, 'Λατινικές αδελφότητες λαϊκών στην Κέρκυρα στα χρόνια της Ενετοκρατίας (1386-1797)', *Ekklisiastikos Faros* 68 (1991): 277-278.

³⁹ Afroditi Agoropoulou-Birbili, 'Η αρχιτεκτονική των λατινικών ναών της Κέρκυρας και η θέση τους στον ιστό της πόλης κατά τη Βενετοκρατία', in *Ζ' Πανιώνιο Συνέδριο. Λευκάδα, 26-30 Μαΐου 2002. Πρακτικά. Τόμος Β'. Δεύτερο τμήμα. Ο χώρος και τα δημογραφικά μορφώματα. Οι κύριοι συντελεστές της οικονομίας* (Athens: Etaireia Leukadikon Meleton, 2004): 225-271.

⁴⁰ They are now kept in the Latin Archdiocese of Corfu (LAC): Battesimi 1678-1694, Battesimi 1695-1706, Battesimi 1707-1715, Battesimi 1716-1722, Battesimi 1723-1741, Battesimi 1742-1764, Battesimi 1765-1777, Battesimi 1744-1796, Battesimi 1796-1825. I want to thank here once more the secretary of the Latin Archdiocese, Spyros Gaoutsis, for his unreserved help and trust.

origin, age, confirmation that they have already been catechized, and very rarely occupation), and on the details of the baptism ceremony (date, name of the priest, name, origin, and sometimes quality of the godparents). Although these registers generally cover the period 1679 to 1777, not a single baptism of a non-Christian is found there after 1748.

The surviving material from the office of the *Megalos Protopapas*, that is the head of the Greek Church of Corfu, kept today in the General State Archives of Corfu (hereafter GSAC), covers a broad spectrum of affairs, from documents related to marriages and their dissolution or the election of priests to excommunication orders. Documents related to conversion are scattered within sixteen folders of mainly *miscellanea*, covering in continuous the period 1675-1784.⁴¹ In principle, all baptisms of Jews and Muslims performed in the various Greek churches of the island should have been reported by the priests to the secretarial office of the *Megalos Protopapas* and therein registered; yet it seems that this only rarely actually happened.

Documents gathered in the archive of the *Megalos Protopapas* concerning religious conversion are thus quite diversified. They follow the various stages of the conversion process, yet in a highly fragmented mode: permissions provided to priests by the secretarial office of the *Megalos Protopapas* for the catechesis or the baptism of prospect converts; recordings of baptisms performed in the Greek churches of the city and beyond; certificates of catechesis or baptisms provided by the above mentioned secretarial office; and very few narrative documents (*κοσσιτούτι*)⁴² resulting from the depositions of candidate converts to the secretarial office, and modeled after the Venetian *Costituti* - interestingly, the *Costituti* found among the *Megalos Protopapas* archival series date from the second decade of the 18th century onwards, thus coinciding with the period when the Venetian institution started recording candidate converts' depositions. Beyond these, patents for collecting alms bestowed to converts, matrimonial examinations carried out when a member of the couple was foreigner and marriages registers provide diverse glimpses into the lives of converts. Fragmentation and discontinuity are the main characteristics of the documents gathered in these series. Beyond the *Megalos Protopapas* folders, I supplementarily consulted the Baptisms' Register of *Ayios*

⁴¹ The folders that I consulted are the following: Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 5, 14, 15, 19, 23, 25, 30, 32, 38, 51, 62, 63, 65. Folders 12, 13 and 60 are indicated as 'Marriages', GSAC.

⁴² The Italian word 'costituti' is accommodated into the local Corfiot dialect, and used in these texts both as a noun (*κοσσιτούτο*) and as a verb. When, for example, in 1738 an Ottoman Muslim woman from the city of Trikala came to convert in Corfu, the *Megalos Protopapas* secretarial office engaged an officer '[...] ίνα κοσσιτονίρη αυτήν εις τα της γεννήσεως, ζωής και θρησκείας αυτής' ('in order to examine her in regard with her birthplace, life and religion'), in Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 30, c. 27r and 249r, GSAC.

Spyridon, this church being among the most significant of the city and the island, due to the fame of the allegedly miracle-worker saint and patron of the city, who rose in great prominence from the 17th century onwards.⁴³

As with the archival material from Venice, documents from the archives of Corfu are divided between those of a narrative character, consisting in the few depositions given to the *Megalos Protopapas*' secretarial office, and those of a more or less serial character, including all the rest. The regular and uniform character of the serial documents enables us to gather quantitative figures concerning converts, as well as sketch their mini-biographies. Yet, they tell us very little about the procedure and stages of religious conversion. It is, instead, the diversified documents from the *Megalos Protopapas* archive and primarily the candidate converts' depositions that enable us to reconstruct, to a certain extent, this procedure – of course, it should not be taken for granted that it was a procedure identical within both churches, Greek and Latin.

c. Few remarks on the sources

When Gayatri Spivak published her by now famous article 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', she sparked off a discussion within the field of post-colonial studies about the possibility of actually discerning the 'Other's' voice within documents produced by a dominant structure and culture.⁴⁴ To her own question, Spivak responded in the negative.⁴⁵

From a certain viewpoint, the 18th-century *Costituti* from Venice and Corfu do qualify as objects of this critique, for they are indeed products of a dominant mechanism speaking of the 'Other'. Yet, as I will hereby argue, these documents can be useful or not, depending on the questions one asks them. If the question posed concerns the fleeting concept of identity and how much these documents can tell us about these people's identity in the sense of 'self-identification',⁴⁶ the answer would be disappointing. For, what we can actually grasp through these vivid micro-stories are only the ways Jews and Muslims, who requested to convert,

⁴³ For the veneration of *Ayios Spyridon* see the recent article of Theodossios Nikolaidis, 'Η λατρεία του αγίου Σπυρίδωνα στην Κέρκυρα', in *Ιστορικά* 29, no. 56 (2012): 101-130 and *Ιστορικά* 29, no. 57 (2012): 313-344; idem, "Local Religion" in Corfu. Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 29, no. 2 (2014): 155-168.

⁴⁴ Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxist Interpretations of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1987), 271-313.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴⁶ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, 'Beyond "Identity"', *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 17-19.

chose to present their identities. If, on the other hand, one is interested in contextualizing their request to convert by unearthing the social, economic or cultural framework within which these people had lived before approaching the ecclesiastical administrators, then these documents will prove to be valuable.

But let me first turn briefly to the critique that was articulated against similar documents within the study of religious conversion. This critique had mostly targeted the use of Inquisitorial documents,⁴⁷ stressing the mediated character of these documents in a two-fold way. On the one hand, it was argued that the practicalities of the process, like the scribe's intervention, the use of standard formulas or the use of interpreters and translation, might have distorted the words of the accused. On the other hand, it was maintained that not only the cultural gap between the supposedly learned culture of the judges and the popular one of the accused could create misunderstandings, but most of all that what the documents relate is just a representation tailored to the preconceived category of the 'Other'.⁴⁸ Objection to these arguments maintained that although mediation cannot be discarded, its extent has been overstressed, adding as well that judges and scribes were very precise in keeping detailed accounts of the verbal exchange.⁴⁹

When comparing the inquisitorial procedure and the produced narrative documents with the conversion procedure as it was recorded in the *Costituti* of the *Casa dei Catecumeni* in Venice and the *Megalos Protopapas* in Corfu, one cannot but notice a major dissimilarity, as well as a significant similarity. The dissimilarity consists in the largely uncompelled character that the conversion process in the cases of Corfu and Venice in the 18th century had.⁵⁰ By using the term 'uncompelled', I do not intend to underestimate the existence and significance of a proselytization network supported by the institution and the pressure that this could exert on both practical and psychological levels. Nonetheless, in Venice and Corfu both parts implicated in the conversion process, the ecclesiastical administrators and the candidate converts, shared to a significant extent a common aim: that the candidate convert would be accepted at the institution, in order to be catechized and later baptized.

⁴⁷ John Edwards, 'Was the Spanish Inquisition Truthful?', *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 87, no. 3–4 (1997): 351–366.

⁴⁸ Georgios Plakotos, 'The Venetian Inquisition and Aspects of "Otherness": Judaizers, Muslim and Christian Converts (16th-17th century)' (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2004), xx-xi, xl-xli.

⁴⁹ Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton, 'Introduction', in *Conversion. Old Worlds and New*, eds. Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2003), xiii-xiv; Plakotos, 'The Venetian Inquisition and Aspects of "Otherness"', xxii.

⁵⁰ Obviously, in the 'uncompelled' character of religious conversion I do not include the conversion of children or slaves.

It goes without saying that this was not at all the case in the inquisitorial process. In the court of Inquisition, the two parts had diametrically opposite ‘agendas’. Persecuted people, accused of heresy and often already detained, were compelled to present themselves before the judge. Crafting an image of themselves, their conduct, their past and their identities that would present them as truly devoted Christians was among the means they employed in order to escape a highly probable punishment. The judge, on the other hand, tried to dissolve any ambiguity and to identify contradictions or lies in the narrative that the accused presented, in order to ultimately spot the deviant behaviour of the accused.⁵¹

The element of a ‘shared agenda’ that candidate converts and administrators had in the conversion process studied here can be also traced in the form of the procedure as it was recorded in the narratives of the *Costituti*. Inquiries of candidate converts in 18th century Venice and Corfu present a largely standard form, where no special, tricky, or clarification questions were asked, which could manipulate the respondents’ reply. As previously mentioned, there were three or four standard questions that candidate converts had to reply: (a) what was their name, origin and family condition; (b) what was their trajectory before appearing there; (c) what were the reasons or motives behind their desire to convert to Christianity; (d) what was their occupation, if this had not been previously mentioned. Responses were recorded with more or less detail, depending on the accuracy of the scribe. Candidate converts were aware that they had to present themselves in a coherent and convincing way in order to be accepted at the institution. The chances to be refused at that stage were rather slim,⁵² nevertheless candidate converts’ mini-narratives should conform to ideas, models or categories that would befit the expectations of the ecclesiastical administrators, who were generally eager to ‘save more souls’. In other words, candidate converts should present their mini-narratives in a way that these would support and justify their acceptance at the institution.⁵³

And this is where the similarity between these two procedures, the inquisitorial and that of conversion, comes to the fore: what the conversion narratives share with the inquisitorial narratives is that they were both the product of a double mediation. More concretely, in the

⁵¹ Plakotos, ‘The Venetian Inquisition and Aspects of “Otherness”’, xxxvii-xxxix.

⁵² For such cases in the *Casa* see Anna Vanzan, ‘La Pia Casa dei Catecumeni in Venezia. Un tentativo di *devshirme* cristiana?’, in *Donne e Microcosmi Culturali*, ed. Adriana Destro (Bologna: Patron Editori, 1997), 245.

⁵³ Of course, this was just the beginning of a long process, as administrators were following closely and vigilantly candidate converts throughout the whole period of catechesis, which in the Venetian institution could be rather long, lasting several months.

conversion narratives, as in the inquisitorial narratives, along the undeniable mediation of the scribes or interpreters who left their imprints on the documents, candidate converts themselves mediated their narratives in order to be in line with what they thought it was expected. Their answers and self-presentation as candidate converts were molded within a dialectic of power, that is vis-à-vis religious authorities. In other words, the narratives that we are reading today were the outcome of a meeting⁵⁴ between the candidate converts on the one hand, and the ecclesiastical administrators, scribes, and occasionally interpreters on the other. The latter, interpreted the people they saw in accordance with already internalized constructed, and probably stereotypical, notions about Jews and Muslims, and tried to fit their stories into already existing religious conversion narratives.⁵⁵ On their part, the way candidate converts presented their brief autobiography was part of the tactics that they pursued in order to obtain their target and be accepted in the *Casa*. They narrated versions of their past lives that must have been tailored to the ecclesiastical administrators' standards, at least as they perceived them. More importantly, in order to emphasize the sincerity of their desire and the firmness of their decision, Jews and Muslims requesting conversion tried to connect their past lives with their present desire to convert. Using phrases like 'it had always been my desire to convert' was a usual narrative strategy they followed to underscore the continuity and coherence of their desire between past and present.⁵⁶

One cannot thus deny that, due to this double mediation, what it is ultimately, possible to grasp from these miniature 'life-stories',⁵⁷ are fragments of the candidate converts' past lives, tailored by themselves to their understanding of conformity, and recorded by the ecclesiastical administrators according to their often normative notions. But is this enough for us to dismiss these conversion stories and discard their content as merely discursive or confined into the sphere of fiction? Of course, we are in no position to know to which extent these narrations reflect exact facts or, much less, 'sincere motivation'. What's more, as

⁵⁴ James L. Peacock and Dorothy C. Holland, 'The Narrated Self. Life Stories in Process', *Ethos* 21, no. 4 (1993): 368, 372.

⁵⁵ Kim Siebenhüner, 'Conversion, Mobility and the Roman Inquisition in Italy Around 1600', *Past and Present* 200, no. 1 (2008): 30.

⁵⁶ Paula Fredriksen, 'Paul and Augustine. Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions and the Retrospective Self', *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986): 33-34.

⁵⁷ I use this term here following the comments that J.L. Peacock and D.C. Holland did in their article: 'Rather than "life-history", we prefer the term "life story". By "life story" is meant simply the story of someone's life. For our purposes, "story" is preferable to "history" because it does not connote that the narration is true, that the events narrated necessarily happened, or that it matters whether they did or not', in Peacock and Holland, 'The Narrated Self', 368.

anthropologists have argued, the quest for sincerity within the religious realm is not a neutral category, but connected with established Christian ethical understandings.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, distinguishing between two different levels of narration, which actually also follow the structure of these conversion narratives, can help us understand how these documents are ultimately valuable. As already mentioned, upon their arrival at the respective institutions in Venice and Corfu, candidate converts were invited to briefly narrate their past lives, and then explain why they wanted to become Christians, what their motivation for conversion were. As acceptance at the institutions depended on the apt demonstration of their present determination and solid desire to embrace the Christian faith, demonstrated through its conformed wording, we can legitimately be skeptical about whether this actually represented a 'true desire'. On the other hand, these people's acceptance at the institutions as candidate converts did not depend that heavily on their past life; for instance, men stating that they had committed murder in the Ottoman Empire were accepted at the Venetian *Casa*. Of course, there were certain things that could not be disclosed, for example a previous conversion, as this would impede their acceptance as candidate converts. Nevertheless, even if the stories of their past lives that Jews and Muslims presented were manipulated or cleansed of any 'unfitting details', they still represented a roughly true-to-life version or at least could include several parts that did so.

Most significantly, though, the stories that Jews and Muslims offered to the ecclesiastical administrators had to be certainly situated within the realm of the possible and credible, otherwise they would be deprived of their convincing potency. From this viewpoint, the stories' accuracy, or even their truth or falsity, is of less importance, since they had to be crafted with, at least, patches from stories that would somehow correspond to their contemporary reality; they had to be crafted, in other words, 'with a palpable awareness of what could be truth'.⁵⁹

Let me give two examples from the Venetian *Casa*. In July 1675 the Muslim Iusuf from the village of Gastuni in the Peloponnese, soldier in one of the mercenaries' companies stationed in Padova, appeared before the institution's Prior.⁶⁰ He said that he wanted to

⁵⁸ Rothman, 'Between Venice and Istanbul', 40.

⁵⁹ Tobias Hecht, *After Life. An Ethnographic Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 12. Hecht's very interesting introduction explores the relation and affinity between what *truly* happened and what *could* have happened, when the latter is understood as being 'consequent with what we know as historical processes', see *ibid.*, 5 -12.

⁶⁰ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 82r, Catecumeni, Sezione antica, ASPV.

convert to Catholicism and was accepted at the institution. After about a month Iusuf was discovered to be an impostor: in reality he was Zaccaria, a ‘Greco schismatico’,⁶¹, that is a Christian of the Eastern Church, originating from Crete. He was thus presented before the Holy Office and then sent back to Padova. Several years later, in 1735, Giani, from Crete, a mercenary in a company stationed in Mestre, appeared at the institution.⁶² He said he was a Muslim and that he came from a family of mixed religion: his father was a Muslim and his mother a Christian of the Greek Church. Ten days later he was also discovered to be Christian of the Greek Church, and was then sent back to his mercenary company. The prior noted that he pretended to be a Muslim desiring conversion in order to avoid for a short time his duties as a soldier, and the same could have applied to Zaccaria as well. Sojourn in the *Casa*, which included shelter and food, was restricted only to non-Catholics; Eastern Christians seeking ‘reconciliation’ with the Church had to address their request to the Venetian Inquisition.⁶³

The significant element in these stories is that both men did not invent an inappropriate identity, but rather an identity corresponding to the historical realities of their time, and therefore plausible enough to convince the institution’s Priors to accept them there. Indeed, a lot of the Muslims soldiers that appeared at the *Casa dei Catecumeni* originated from the Peloponnese and to a lesser extent from Crete, and some of them actually came from families of mixed religious background. From this point of view, whether *individual* stories truthfully corresponded to the life facts of those that narrated them, or whether they were actually distorted and facts were omitted, is of little interest. What actually matters is that these stories, even if individually altered, do represent as a whole a historical mosaic that falls within the limits of possible. In other words, particular stories’ truth or falsity does not substantially alter their overall correspondence to possible and plausible itineraries of early modern people. And this is why they can be of valuable use in our study of religious conversion.

v. Chapter structure

The work is structured around five chapters. The first chapter offers a theoretical overview of the conceptual frameworks within which religious conversion has been mostly studied in humanities, social sciences and cultural history, as well as an overview of the concepts that

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Libro da rassegnare... 1725-1744-G9, c. 75v-76r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁶³ Plakotos, ‘The Venetian Inquisition and Aspects of “Otherness”’, 135.

frame this study, namely the ideas of mobility, fluidity, and religious conversion as a practice of everyday life. In chapter two I deal with the specific contexts of this study, that is with the nature of the sources that I use as well as the way that I use them, and the religious institutions and local structures that hosted conversion in Venice and Corfu. The third chapter considers the Jewish presence at the institution -Jews coming from the communities of Venice and the Veneto as well as migrant Jews coming from the Italian peninsula, the Ottoman Empire or central and northern Europe- and identifies the two principal driving forces behind these people's conversion in the period under examination here. More concretely, this chapter connects these predominantly unforced religious conversion to the impoverishment of a large part of the Jews in Europe in the late 17th and 18th centuries, while it also traces the existence of a minority of educated and wealthy Jewish converts to Christianity, whose conversion it considers in connection to the crisis of the Jewish identity in the late 18th century. In the fourth chapter I examine the Muslim presence in the institution. Between the years 1645 and 1720 the *Casa* received a great number of Muslim candidate converts, and I argue that their presence there was predominantly connected to the three Ottoman-Venetian wars that took place. More concretely, these Ottoman Muslim subjects were war captives, who were brought to the institution and baptized there, while after baptism, these men, women and -quite often- children became mostly servants in Venice and, to a lesser extent, in the Venetian state. In the years following 1720, the numbers of Muslim candidate converts dropped sharply. This quantitative shift was also followed by a major qualitative one, namely that the few Muslim candidate converts recorded in the institution's registers in the 18th century reached the institution on their own will, entangled of course in the institution's network. By briefly focusing on a rather distinct group of Muslim converts, those enrolled as mercenaries in the Venetian army, I trace two major elements that characterize their lives and itineraries: a) that they originated from backgrounds where high familiarity with Christianity prevailed, and b) that they led a life of high mobility, which both exposed them to and entailed interaction with multi-ethnic and multi-religious contexts as well as required the ability to adapt within diverse environments. Moreover, I maintain that these elements actually transcend the military milieu and can be considered fundamental characteristics of the early modern Mediterranean contact zones. Finally in chapter five I identify a central early modern characteristic that Jewish and Muslim candidate converts, although coming from different political social and cultural contexts, shared: namely, those cross-faith social networks of coexistence in which they were

embedded, and which rendered their mobility sustainable, and, often, their conversion a sort of a familiar transition.

Chapter 1. Religious conversion in context

i. The humanities and social sciences

The term that is used in order to define the passing from one religious system to another, *conversion*, is a term borrowed from alchemy, denoting the transformation of one substance into a completely different one through a ‘mysterious’ process.⁶⁴ Within the religious context, the term was used from the 12th century onwards in order to describe a total, radical, and deep transformation, a regeneration.⁶⁵ As already mentioned, in the humanities and in social sciences the study of religious conversion was to a great extent defined by questions already posed and notions already constructed within the Christian framework, namely a quest for the sincerity of the converts’ motivation and of their conversion as well as the consideration of conversion as a cardinal transformative moment or process in an individual’s life, as a life-changing, complete transition from one system of belief into another, and as an exceptional, determinative and definitive experience.⁶⁶

These understandings are informed from a long Christian narrative tradition, given that stories of conversion had been common readings already during the first Christian centuries.⁶⁷ Within this narrative tradition, two models have been defined as archetypical: that of apostle Paul and the other by the church father Augustine.⁶⁸ Although Augustine’s conversion was influenced by that of Paul,⁶⁹ these two narratives bear a fundamental distinction, which was reproduced in subsequent conversion narratives. In Paul’s narrative conversion is experienced as a sudden moment of illumination, while in Augustine’s narrative it is experienced as a gradual process of introspection and of philosophical and theological

⁶⁴ Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls. Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500-1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 1.

⁶⁵ Before the 12th century the term was used to denote accession into a religious order, see Rika Benveniste, ‘Η μελέτης της θρησκευτικότητας στη μεσαιωνική ιστορία’, *Τα Ιστορικά* 44 (2006): 135.

⁶⁶ See for instance James A. Beckford, ‘Accounting for Conversion’, *British Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 2 (1978): 249-262; Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), where the author says ‘I see “genuine” conversion as a total transformation of the person by the power of God’, *ibid.*, xii.

⁶⁷ Fragkiski Ampatzopoulou, ‘Πρόλογος’, in *Αγίου Αυγουστίνου. Εξομολογήσεις*, vol. 1 (Athens: Patakis, 2001), 12.

⁶⁸ Fredriksen, ‘Paul and Augustine. Conversion Narratives’, 3-34; Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 90; Siebenhüner, ‘Conversion, Mobility and the Roman Inquisition’, 30.

⁶⁹ As it is well known, Augustine’s conversion took place when he heard a voice inducing him to read. He found the Epistles of Paul, opened the book haphazardly and read an extract that made him assume his vocation, see Ampatzopoulou, 43.

quests. From the early Christian centuries up to medieval times elements of visions and dreams as mystical calls and decisive or revelatory moments in the process of conversion were added to these narratives.⁷⁰

Informed by this tradition, religious conversion within the field of historical studies has been primarily and intensely studied in the context of Jewish history. Studies were originally dedicated to the Iberian *conversos*, and discussed the formation of their new identity by focusing on the sincerity and commitment of their conversion to Christianity.⁷¹ Cecil Roth was the first to introduce the notion of ‘crypto-Jew’, a notion that assumed the continuity of Jewish faith after conversion to Christianity,⁷² and his view was shared by other scholars mainly during the 1960s.⁷³ Ellis Rivkin and Benzion Netanyahu, on the other hand, maintained that *conversos* were genuine Christians and that crypto-Judaism was nothing more than the creation of the Inquisition.⁷⁴

In the following decades approaches multiplied and moved beyond the often essentialist approaches of the Iberian *conversos*. These studies shifted their focus both geographically and in terms of interpretation. Following the Jewish diaspora, they often incorporated new areas: initially from within Europe, as in the works of Brian Pullan and Jonathan Israel,⁷⁵ and relatively recently from the ‘New World’, as in the work of Nathan

⁷⁰ Ampatzopoulou, 68; Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 90.

⁷¹ Miriam Bodian has remarked that in order to discuss about the *conversos* identity ‘there has been a tendency to isolate and examine what appears to be the “religious sphere”, thus neglecting other aspects such as ethnicity’, see Miriam Bodian, “Men of the Nation”. The Shaping of Conversos Identity in Early Modern Europe’, *Past and Present* 143 (1994): 49-51.

⁷² Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1932).

⁷³ For instance Yitzak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961); Israel S. Révah, ‘Les Marranes’, *Revue des Etudes Juives* 118 (1959-1960): 29-77; Haim Beinart, *Conversos on Trial. The Inquisition in Ciudad Real* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1981).

⁷⁴ Ellis Rivkin, ‘The Utilization of Non-Jewish Sources For the Reconstruction of Jewish history’, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 48, no. 2 (1957): 183-203; Benzion Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain. From the Late 14th to the Early 16th century According to Contemporary Hebrew Sources* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966); idem, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York: Random House, 1995). In the same line see also António José Saraiva, *The Marrano Factory. The Portuguese Inquisition and Its New Christians 1536-1765* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). Netanyahu’s view was also shared by his student Norman Roth, see his *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

⁷⁵ Brian Pullan, ‘A Ship with Two Rudders. Righetto Marrano and the Inquisition in Venice’, *The Historical Journal* 20, no. 1 (1977): 25-58; idem, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice 1550-1670* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550-1750* (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1985).

Wachtel.⁷⁶ At the same time, new interpretations contributed to the development of more nuanced and historicized views of conversion and self-definition. During the 1980s, under the influence of social history, religious conversion studies stressed the rather pragmatic approach on the part of converted Jews, often connected with economic interest and a presumed religious neutrality.⁷⁷ Since the 1990s and the profusion of cultural and identity studies, emphasis shifted to the duality, liminality and split identity of the *marranos*, elements considered as typically modern.⁷⁸ Thomas Glick, for instance, coined the term ‘cultural commuters’ to describe the *conversos*’ facility in crossing religious and cultural borders, while Nathan Wachtel in his work outlined the hybrid and syncretic character of the ‘marrano religiosity’ that synthesized elements from both Judaic and Catholic theology and practice.⁷⁹

Building on these directions, recent studies on religious conversion in the early modern Mediterranean, including studies on islamization and confessional border-crossing,⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Nathan Wachtel, *La foi du souvenir. Labyrinthes marranes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2001). Translated recently in English: *The Faith of Remembrance. Marrano Labyrinths* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

⁷⁷ Pullan, ‘A Ship with Two Rudders’; idem, *The Jews of Europe*.

⁷⁸ John Edwards, ‘The *Conversos*. A Theological Approach’, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 62, no. 1 (1985): 39-49; idem, ‘Religious Faith and Doubt in Late Medieval Spain. Soria circa 1450-150’, *Past and Present* 120 (1988): 3-25; Thomas F. Glick, ‘On Converso and Marrano Ethnicity’, in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic world, 1391-1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 59-76; Robert Bonfil, ‘Dubious Crimes in Sixteenth-Century Italy. Rethinking the Relations Between Jews, Christians, and Conversos in Pre-Modern Europe’, in *The Jews of Spain and the Expulsion of 1492*, eds. Moshe Lazar and Stephen Haliczer (Lancaster, California: Labyrinthos, 1997), 299-310; Daniel Lindenberg, *Destins marranes* (Paris: Hachette, 1997); Yirmiyahu Yovel, ‘Converso Dualities in the First Generation. The *Cancioneros*’, *Jewish Social Studies* 4, no. 3 (1998): 1-28; David L. Graizbord, *Souls in Dispute. Converso Identities in Iberia and the Jewish Diaspora, 1580-1700* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within The Marranos. Split Identity and Emerging Modernity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁷⁹ Wachtel, *La foi du souvenir*. Wachtel’s description of the syncretic aspects of ‘marrano religiosity’ brings to mind the syncretic practices followed by Ottoman Muslims and Christians in the Balkans and Anatolia. It is worth noting, though, that while in Jewish studies religious syncretism, and the relativism, skepticism, ambiguity or outright rejection of given orthodoxies that syncretism is supposed to generate, are related to modernity, in Ottoman historiography religious syncretism is viewed as a pre-modern element pertaining to the imperial era and conducive to a practical tolerance obliterated by 19th and 20th century modernity and nationalism. Such discrepancy in the approach of early modern syncretism has to do, to a significant extent, with the different definitions of modernity. Whereas in Jewish studies modernity is understood to be encapsulated in the rise of a gradually independent subjectivity and the questioning of tradition, in Ottoman studies modernity is linked to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of Balkan and Turkish nationalisms that brought about rigid and mutually exclusive categories. For these opposing views see for example Yovel, *The Other Within Marranos*, and Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference. The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); idem, ‘Religious Pluralism, Shared Sacred Sites, and the Ottoman Empire’, in *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites. Religion, Politics, and Conflict Resolution*, eds. Elazar Barkan and Karen Barkey (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). For a critique of Yovel’s approach see David Nirenberg, ‘Unrenounceable Core’, *London Review of Books* 31, no. 14 (2009): 16-17.

⁸⁰ Lucia Rostango, *Mi faccio turco. Esperienze ed immagini dell’Islam nell’Italia moderna* (Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente C. A. Nallino, 1983); Bartolomé and Lucile Bennassar, *Les chrétiens d’Allah. L’histoire extraordinaire des renégats, XVIe-XVIIe siècles* (Paris: Perrin, 1989); Molly Green, *A Shared World. Christians*

incorporate insights from social history, cultural history, anthropology and the linguistic turn in history, embracing the concepts of identity-construction, narrativity or connectivity. Additionally, whereas previous works had primarily focused on just one religious group, recent studies adopt a ‘connected histories’⁸¹ perspective and focus on a variety of shared frameworks between Jews, Muslims and Christians, resulting in a richer and more complex exploration of the geographical area. Among these studies, the works of Giorgos Plakotos, Tijana Krstić, Nathalie Rothman, and Eric Dursteler are especially pertinent to the Eastern Mediterranean. Plakotos, drawing on the archival material of the Venetian Inquisition in the 16th and 17th century, traces the process of construction of the analytical category of crypto-Jew and crypto-Muslim and studies the way the accused crafted their own self-presentations before the tribunal as well as the way they were presented by others.⁸² Krstić’s work approaches the conversion of Ottoman Christians to Islam in 16th century Rumelia through the lenses of the Sunnization process, which, she argues, run parallel to and in connection with the confessionalization process in Europe. Additionally, Krstić argues that, unlike Christianity where conversion was linked to a spiritual journey as well as to a period of spiritual and practical preparation before baptism, conversion to Islam was actually a process that followed the pronouncement of *shahada* and involved the acceptance of new ritual practices and the gradual integration in the community.⁸³ In her study, Rothman views Jewish, Ottoman and Protestant converts to Catholicism, along merchants and dragomans, as cultural brokers between Venice and the Ottoman Empire, and defines religious conversion in the context of the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni* as ‘a set of interlinked social practices employed in the project of subject making, ... the perpetuation of imperial power relation in

and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000); Nicholas Griffiths, ‘The Best of Both Faiths. The Boundaries of Religious Allegiance and Opportunism in Early Eighteenth-century Cuenca’, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 77, no. 2 (2000): 13-40; Anton Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004); Keith P. Luria, *Sacred Boundaries. Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early-Modern France* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005); Marc David Baer, *Honored By the Glory of Islam* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁸¹ The concept was first introduced by Sanjay Subrahmanyam arguing for a common understanding of early modern Eurasia through the interlinked local, regional and supraregional contexts, see ‘Connected Histories. Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia’, in ‘The Eurasian Context of the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Asia, 1400-1800’, special issue, *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735-762.

⁸² Plakotos, ‘The Venetian Inquisition and Aspects of “Otherness”’.

⁸³ Tijana Krstić, ‘Narrating Conversion to Islam. The Dialogue of Texts and Practices in Early Modern Ottoman Balkans’ (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2004), especially 104-127. Her PhD was recently published as *Contested Conversions to Islam. Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011). See also Krstić, ‘“Illuminated by the Light of Islam”. Self-Narratives of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalization’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 1 (2009): 35-63.

the Venetian state' and the consolidation of Venice's image as the bulwark of Christianity.⁸⁴ Rothman also revisits conversion narratives and, following Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, suggests a division between the *chronotope of conjunction* that 'depicts the transition from one religious community to another as an unintentional outcome of the deponents' contingent insertion at a particular historical moment into spatially-defined religious communities', and the *chronotope of purposive journeying* that 'describes deponents' journeys from non-Catholic to Catholic space as the outcome of a prior spiritual transformation'.⁸⁵ Rothman identifies the *chronotope of conjunction* with the Muslim⁸⁶ pattern of conversion to Catholicism and the *chronotope of purposive journeying* with the Protestant pattern.⁸⁷ Last but not least, Dursteler in his *Renegade Women* combines Mediterranean studies with a gender perspective, and through the narration of the lives of seven women, Christian and Muslim, who all crossed religious, cultural and political boundaries, traces the 'distinctive Mediterranean' strategies that these women employed when dealing with complex familial situations.⁸⁸

ii. *Conversion in everyday life: a dialectic between strategies and tactics*

In the present study the focus of attention is not so much on the role that institutions like the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni* or the Latin and Greek Churches in Corfu played in the process of religious, but on conversion as it was actually practiced by Jews and Muslims. For this reason, and in order to stay away from notions of 'totalizing' or 'complete' enterprise',⁸⁹ I turn to the study of everyday life in order to frame religious conversion.

⁸⁴ Rothman, 'Between Venice and Istanbul', 156. Her PhD thesis was published as *Brokering Empire. Trans-Imperial Subjects Between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

⁸⁵ Rothman, 'Between Venice and Istanbul', 125–126.

⁸⁶ Yet, in fact all the cases Rothman studies involve renegades, that is Christians turned Muslims, who later on sought for reconciliation with the Catholic Church.

⁸⁷ For the importance attributed to spirituality within the Catholic and Protestant religious space see Keith P. Luria, 'The Politics of Protestant Conversion to Catholicism in Seventeenth-Century France', in *Conversion to Modernities. The Globalization of Christianity*, ed. Peter van der Veer (New York: Routledge, 1996), 23–46.

⁸⁸ Eric R. Dursteler, *Renegade Women. Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

⁸⁹ Mills and Grafton, 'Introduction', in *Conversion. Old Worlds and New*, ix–xvii; Eric Dursteler, 'Fatima Hatun née Beatrice Michiel. A Renegade Woman in Early Modern Venice', *The Medieval Historical Journal* 12, no. 2 (2009): 355–382.

The study of everyday life is a field that has gradually developed within the social sciences in post-war France.⁹⁰ Fernand Braudel in the first volume of his *Civilization matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XVe-XVIIIe siècle*,⁹¹ used the concept of ‘material life’ or ‘material civilization’ in order to define a system of economic activity largely persistent and immobile, which he deemed appropriate as an object of study since it actually prescribed the ‘limits of the possible’.⁹² It is thus in his work that for the first time food products, manners or clothing asserted the status of objects of investigation. From a quite different point of view, but roughly during the same period, the Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre established the everyday as a legitimate scientific object by publishing his *Critique de la vie quotidienne*. In his three-volume work, whose publication lasted from 1947 to 1981, Lefebvre argued that engagement with everyday urban life would alter the ‘transformed, disalienated everyday’ and liberate the working class.⁹³

Yet, more pertinent to the study of religious conversion is the work of Michel de Certeau. De Certeau, in his two-volume book *L’invention du quotidien*, whose first volume was published in 1974,⁹⁴ understood the everyday as a ‘locus of a voluntaristic neohumanism’,⁹⁵ and the inventiveness of ordinary action that takes place within the everyday as a way of resistance to the control of institutions. If Foucault focused his attention on disclosing the disciplinary mechanisms of institution and institutionalized power,⁹⁶ de Certeau was eager to show the possibility of subtly resistive actions taking place ‘between the interstices’⁹⁷ of power systems. Moving the discussion from the producers and the products of a certain dominant culture to the consumers or users, he argued that the latter are not passive receivers. On the contrary, de Certeau sustained, by using the dominant cultural products consumers put

⁹⁰ Schilling, ‘Everyday Life’, 23-40.

⁹¹ The work was commissioned by Lucien Febvre in 1952, see Schilling, ‘Everyday Life’, 27. The first volume was published in 1967, while in 1979 the three volumes were published together, see Charles Tilly, ‘Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XV-XVIII siècle (Book Review)’, *The American Historical Review* 86, no. 2 (1981), 368-369.

⁹² Schilling, ‘Everyday Life’, 27.

⁹³ In fact, within these twenty-four years and three volumes one can trace the waning of Lefebvre’s belief in the radical and transformative power of the study of everyday life. In the third volume he identified the everyday with a ‘normative everyday existence’ defined by middle-class living, and observed that ‘in daily life everything is already dead’, see Schilling, ‘Everyday Life’, 34.

⁹⁴ Michel de Certeau, *L’invention du quotidien. Arts de faire*, vol. 1 (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1974); Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayo, *L’invention du quotidien. Habiter, cuisiner*, vol. 2 (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1980). All references here are from the English edition of the first volume: *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

⁹⁵ Schilling, ‘Everyday Life’, 26.

⁹⁶ Certeau is referring mostly to Foucault’s *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), see Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 45-49.

⁹⁷ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 37.

together another form of production. As he wrote, '[...] users [...] make (*bricolent*) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant culture economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules'.⁹⁸ He thus underlined the ability to 'operate within and yet against a dominant culture' by using it,⁹⁹ and ascribed active agency to consumers, who were previously recognized only as passive receivers. To demonstrate his argument, de Certeau gave the paradigm of indigenous Indians that transformed according to their own needs the Spanish colonizers' culture that was imposed on them.¹⁰⁰

In order to express the ways and modes that cultural producers and cultural consumers operate in everyday practice, de Certeau borrowed the terminology of military jargon.¹⁰¹ He thus identified the consumers' modes with *tactics*, juxtaposing them to *strategies*, which he understood as types of operation pertinent to institutions and institutionalized power: modes of acting that 'seek to create places in conformity with abstract models',¹⁰² and through these places manage their dominant relationships with others. On the contrary, tactics, he argued, is 'the art of the weak',¹⁰³ when confronting the strong: the astute use of the dominant spaces according to certain needs combined with the utilization of circumstances and the 'manipulation of events in order to turn them into opportunities'.¹⁰⁴ If the locus of power for strategies is space, then for tactics it is time.

Following de Certeau's ideas, I suggest considering early modern religious conversion as an ordinary practice that the 'weak', in this case non-Christians, undertook in their everyday encounter with the dominant Venetian religious, cultural and political frameworks. Beyond concepts that define it as an exceptional experience and a fundamental decisive moment in an individual's biography, religious conversion can thus be seen as a social practice, a mode of operating within a hierarchically structured context characterized by asymmetrical relations of power. What's more, de Certeau's concept of the 'weak' being and

⁹⁸ Ibid., xiii-xiv.

⁹⁹ Priscilla P. Clark, 'Review of Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*', *The Journal of Modern History* 58, no. 3 (1986): 706.

¹⁰⁰ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xxi.

¹⁰¹ Certeau used this war terminology as he maintained that it is within power relationships that 'the battles or games between the strong and the weak' take place. In the division between strategy and tactic he followed the definition of the German statesman Bernhard von Bülow: 'strategy is the science of military movements outside of the enemy's field of vision; tactics, within it', see Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 34, 212, n. 14.

¹⁰² Ibid., 29.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 37.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., xix.

acting in the interstices of a place that ‘belongs to the other’,¹⁰⁵ and the juxtaposition of and complementarity between tactics and strategies as a practice of the everyday life is also pertinent to the study of religious conversion. Jews and Muslims, living in the interstices of Christianity, used tactics to integrate in the dominant society and culture, while the latter articulated its strategies to recruit candidate converts by crafting and employing proselytization policies, and establishing an institution exclusively designated to promote and manage conversion. If religious authorities, like the Venetian *Casa* or the churches of Corfu, functioned within their established places of power, through which they managed ‘relations with an exteriority’,¹⁰⁶ converts moved between these places and tried to ‘make the most of their dominated position’.¹⁰⁷ From this point of view, any motivation -religious or material, which could in fact go hand in hand¹⁰⁸ - behind religious conversion, was after all determined by the hierarchically structured relation between Christians and non-Christians within a Christian space.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., xix.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 38, 36.

¹⁰⁷ Schilling, ‘Everyday Life’, 36.

¹⁰⁸ Griffiths, ‘The Best of Both Faiths’, 28.

iii. Mobility in early modern Europe

In 1744 Abram Levi, a thirty-one-year old Jew from Algiers, presented himself at the *Casa dei Catecumeni* and, responding to the Prior's usual questions about his past, gave a brief narration of his life. He recounted that he had fled his home at a very young age due to the cruel behavior of his elder brother. He travelled to Livorno, where his uncle lived and became his servant. Five years later Abram decided to leave his uncle's house, since as he said his uncle harassed him sexually.¹⁰⁹ Abram then worked as a servant in other Jewish houses for another three years. Tired of the life of a servant, he decided to leave Livorno and 'travel around the world'.¹¹⁰ During the next three years, he travelled to northern Europe -France, Holland, England- and then to the Mediterranean part of the Ottoman Empire -Alexandria, Cairo and Jerusalem. From there, he got back to Italy and continued moving from one city to another, before finally reaching Udine, from where he planned to cross to Germany. In the meantime, Abram said, he developed the desire to convert to Christianity. So, in Udine he decided to approach the apostolic society of *Padri Filippini* established there.¹¹¹ When he shared with them his desire to convert, the Filippini accommodated him -maybe also catechized him- for four months, and then sent him to Venice, to the *Casa dei Catecumeni*. Abram spent about a year at the institution. He was baptized with the name Domenico Tomaso Micheli, and few months later he was sent to the Venetian consul in Genoa, 'per ivi impiegarsi nell' arte di far coralli'¹¹² – a craft he could have learned during his days in Livorno.¹¹³

Abram Levi's itinerary, if accurate, was rather impressive. Yet, the scale of his geographical mobility apart, Abram was not an exception among other candidate converts. Travel and geographic mobility,¹¹⁴ more or less extensive, are elements that keep reemerging

¹⁰⁹ 'Con questo [the uncle] hò dimorato anni cinque, e perche voleva usar meco sodomiticamente, perciò son fugito', see Costituti 1744-1762, c. 5v, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

¹¹⁰ "Stuffo di servire risolsi *d'andar girando il mondo*", ibid. (italics are mine).

¹¹¹ The Oratory of Saint Philip Neri was established in Rome in 1548 and received papal approval in 1575, see Lillian H. Zirpolo, *Historical Dictionary of Baroque Art and Architecture* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 385.

¹¹² Costituti 1744-1762, c. 6r, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni ASPV.

¹¹³ For the processing and trade of corals in Livorno see Israel, *European Jewry*, 148.

¹¹⁴ I am using the term 'geographic mobility' in the sense that Leslie Page Moch deploys it: '[H]uman mobility defines migration as a change in residence beyond a communal boundary, be it a village or a town. Geographically, then, migration includes moves from one village to another as well as those across national borders and oceans. Temporally, migrations may be short-term or permanent; seasonal harvest movements and permanent departures from home are both migrations'. See Leslie Page Moch, 'Dividing Time. An Analytical Framework for Migration History and Periodization', in *Migration, Migration History, History. Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, ed. Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (Bern & Berlin: Peter Lang, 2005), 43.

in these people's mini-narratives of their life-stories: during the period 1645-1797, all Muslim candidate converts at the *Casa dei Catecumeni* were, naturally, immigrants, along with about half of all Jewish candidate converts.¹¹⁵ In other words, the microcosm of candidate converts was to a significant extent a microcosm on the move.

From this point of view, mobility and conversion were closely interconnected. More concretely, mobility that preceded these people's conversion, or their attempt to do so, was indeed a decisive factor linked to their conversion in at least two ways: (a) conversion was a direct consequence of their coerced mobility, like in the case of Muslim captives and slaves transferred to Venice; (b) more indirectly yet more importantly, a significant part of the Jewish and Muslim candidate converts who showed up at the Venetian institution had previously led a life where mobility was at the center of their personal and professional itineraries. As in the case of the above-mentioned Abram from Algiers, their life itineraries often exposed these people to, and could entail every-day interaction with, certain multi-ethnic and multi-religious contexts. Through these experiences Jews and Muslims elaborated diverse modes and varying degrees of acquaintance with Christianity, which could in turn facilitate, when needed, their adaptation to new environments – and religious conversion was often a mode of adapting to a new environment and its internal hierarchies.

This is not to say that geographic mobility would lead to religious conversion, or that it was a prerequisite to conversion. Nonetheless, Muslim and Jewish journeymen, servants, soldiers, sailors or merchants, who had lived and interacted within multi-religious milieus, were part of wider cross-faith networks that could operate as agents of conversion. At the same time, though these experiences, Jews and Muslims came to share a culture of familiarity with Christianity, which eventually rendered conversion not a sharp transition from an old world to a completely new, but an ordinary tactical practice of adaptation that they undertook within the boundaries of the dominant Christian space.

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The concept of a mobile early modern Europe is a relatively new one in the field of historical studies, as for the better part of the 20th century pre-modernity was understood as a rather

¹¹⁵ A more detailed analysis of these numbers will be presented in the following chapters.

static and immobile period.¹¹⁶ Although in Fernand Braudel's narration of the Mediterranean, first published in 1949, migration and mobility are omnipresent, in the studies of Braudel's contemporary colleagues of the *Annales* circle,¹¹⁷ the emphasis shifts towards immobility. More concretely, in his version of the Mediterranean Braudel described the constant movement of people mostly from the poor mountainous areas, from both the land and the islands, down to the wealthy and prosperous plains and cities as seasonal migrants at harvest time, permanent migrants, traveling merchants and peddlers, sailors, servants, soldiers, apprentices, or simply visitors on special occasions;¹¹⁸ he described noblemen and landed proprietors attracted in the cities in the 16th century, and drove out of them in the 17th and especially 18th century; while he also described the various forms and rhythms of the Mediterranean transhumance.¹¹⁹ On the contrary, the studies of his colleagues, as for example Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Pierre Goubert, and Gérard Bouchard,¹²⁰ privileged the study of 'structures and conjunctures' -economy, demography, agrarian technique and agricultural production- in France's rural areas and during wide stretches of time, often integrating quantitative approaches.¹²¹ Visiting France from these vantage points, the emerging picture is one of a rural society where 'a peasant population from 1300 to 1700-1720, during the course of 12 or 13 generations, was busy reproducing itself within the limits of certain finite possibilities whose constraints proved inexorable'.¹²² In these studies physical mobility remains out of the scope of their authors' main interests.

It can more broadly be argued that roughly up to the 1960s and early 1970s historians studying both the modern and pre-modern Europe along with social scientists following the

¹¹⁶ In the following pages I offer a brief overview of the development of the studies on mobility. Although scholarship on early modern migration from a global perspective in the Americas and Asia is growing, I limit myself here in studies considering intra-European mobility. For an indicative literature see here, note 141.

¹¹⁷ What Peter Burke called 'The Age of Braudel', see Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution. The Annales School 1929-89* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 53-64.

¹¹⁸ 'In fact, no Mediterranean region is without large numbers of mountain dwellers who are indispensable to the life of towns and plains, striking people whose costume is often unusual and whose ways are always strange', in Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World of the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1 (New York, London: Harper & Row, 1972), 45. See also 41-51, 133-135, 145-146, 158-160, 168-230, 276-338.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 85-102.

¹²⁰ Pierre Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730. Contribution à l'histoire sociale de la France du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Ecole pratique des Hautes-Etudes, VIe section, S.E.V.P.E.N, 1960); Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Les paysans de Languedoc* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N, 1966); Pierre Goubert, *L' Ancien Régime*, vol. 1, *La société* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1969); Gérard Bouchard, *Le village immobile: Sennely-en-Sologne au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1972); Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, 'Motionless History', *Social Science History* 1, no. 2 (1977): 115-136. First published in *Annales E.S.C.* 29 (1974): 673-682.

¹²¹ Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*.

¹²² Le Roy Ladurie, 'Motionless History', 122.

seminal work of Karl Polanyi published in 1944,¹²³ viewed the early modern world as stable and sedentary.¹²⁴ Among historians there was recognition that there were indeed a number of itinerant people, but they were considered a minority and were connected with the phenomenon of vagrancy; in other words, they were considered as the exception to the ‘immobile’ rule. As Zelinsky put it, ‘the universe of premodern, traditional communities was one of an array of cells firmly fixed in space with rather strong, if invisible, membranes surrounding each unit’.¹²⁵ In the same narrative, it was the ‘rise of modernity’, located in the late 18th century, and its correlated phenomena -industrialization, urbanization and the emergence of nation-states- that disrupted the pre-modern immobile society. More concretely, according to the ‘demographic modernization paradigm’,¹²⁶ geographic mobility was the outcome of industrialization and caused the displacement of people from rural areas to urban centers. Migration was hence understood as ‘the hallmark of modernity’,¹²⁷ signaling the transition from the stability of the early modern world to the mobility of the modern era.

Criticism towards this dominant bipolar scheme that the modernization paradigm endorsed, emerged in the 1970s and was associated with the developing interest and discipline of migration case studies which covered a wide geographical and temporary scale, from the early modern Europe¹²⁸ to contemporary Asia, Africa and Latin America, and which either used so far unexploited sources or posed new questions to previously used sources. These studies pointed out that the understanding of migration through the modernization theory entailed, among other elements, a highly ethnocentric as well as dualistic and linear approach together with a complete underestimation or disregard for rural immigration, so prominent in the early modern world. Accordingly, migration historians and early modern historians alike argued against the sharp antithetical division between an allegedly stagnant and self-sufficient

¹²³ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart Inc., 1944).

¹²⁴ The relevant literature is vast, see only indicatively: Edward A. Wrigley, ed., *An Introduction to English Historical Demography from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966); Wilbur Zelinsky, ‘The Hypothesis of the Mobility Transition’, *Geographical Review* 61, no. 2 (1971): 219-249.

¹²⁵ Zelinsky, ‘The Hypothesis’, 234.

¹²⁶ Leo Lucassen, ‘Between Hobbes and Locke. Gypsies and the Limits of Modernization Paradigm’, *Social History* 33, no. 4 (2008): 426.

¹²⁷ James H. Jackson Jr. and Leslie Page Moch, ‘Migration and the Social History of Modern Europe’, *Historical Methods. A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 22, no. 1 (1989): 27.

¹²⁸ Jan and Leo Lucassen reminded us that criticism towards migration studies was part of what Jan de Vries later called ‘the revolt of the early modernists’, see Jan de Vries, ‘The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution’, *The Journal of Economic History* 54, no. 2 (1994): 251-253; Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, ‘The Mobility Transition Revisited, 1500-1900. What the Case of Europe Can Offer to Global History’, *Journal Of Global History* 4, no. 3 (2009): 348

early modern world and a dynamic and mobile modernity, and conversely stressed the continuities of migration patterns, practices and networks between the early modern and modern world.¹²⁹

In 1976 Charles Tilly, published his influential article, where he devised a model for the analysis of migration and virtually set the contours of this reconsidered early modern mobility. Based on recent studies of historical demography, he argued that ‘the history of Europe shows us not so much periods of immobility and mobility as decisive shifts among types of mobility’.¹³⁰ Accordingly, Tilly ascribed to the early modern world two types of mobility: (a) high-level local mobility,¹³¹ that is frequent short-distanced moves within the boundaries of the ‘local labor market’ -the latter considered as being wider than the parish, village or commune; and (b) circular migration, like ‘seasonal work in harvest, pastoral transhumance, the sending of young people into domestic service before they marry [...], soldiers or craftsmen before their long-planned return to the mountains with the accumulated capital’.¹³² In other words, early modern mobility according to Tilly was frequent in pace and limited in distance - an exception to the latter was presented by large cities, which attracted migrants from farer away.¹³³ In Tilly’s scheme, it was the early modern landless peasants and poor laborers who decided to ‘hit the road’ in search of work, while marriage or the dissolution of marriage were also incentives for migration.¹³⁴ These people formed a ‘substantial minority’, moving around the generally stable peasantry¹³⁵ --yet, their numbers augmented in North-Western Europe since the 16th century.¹³⁶ Tilly’s mobility outline concluded with the era of industrialization and nation states, when long-distanced chain¹³⁷ and

¹²⁹ Jackson and Moch, ‘Migration and the Social History,’ 27-29.

¹³⁰ Charles Tilly, ‘Migration in Modern European History’, Working Paper no. 145, Center for Research on Social Organization (Ann Arbor MI: The University of Michigan, 1976), 14.

¹³¹ Tilly used the term *mobility* in two ways: as a general term describing all human geographic movement, and in counterpoint to *migration*. Within the latter context, *migration* describes moves that are long-distanced and definitive in terms of breaking the ties with the area of origin, whereas *mobility*, which he seems to equate with *local migration*, describes human movement within ‘a geographically contiguous market -a labor market, a land market, or perhaps a marriage market’, and with limited break with the place of origin -yet, he himself noted that the distinction could be arbitrary enough, see Tilly, ‘Migration’, 4-6, 14, 23-24, 30-31.

¹³² “‘Circular” migration takes a social unit to a destination through a set of arrangements, which returns it to the original after a well-defined interval’, *ibid.*, 7.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 24, 28-29.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³⁶ Lucassen and Lucassen, ‘The Mobility Transition Revisited’, 348-349.

¹³⁷ “‘Chain” migration moves sets of related individuals of households from one place to another via a set of social arrangements in which people at the destination provide aid, information and encouragement to new migrants’, Tilly, ‘Migration’, 8.

career¹³⁸ migration prevailed. Nevertheless, throughout his account, Tilly fully recognized the relativity of such distinctions, and that the various types of mobility he proposed were no strict and impermeable categories.

From then onwards, and especially since the 1990s and the developing awareness of the importance of space and mobility in human experience often labeled as *spatial turn*,¹³⁹ a proliferation of migration studies within the fields of historical demography, migration history and global history was produced.¹⁴⁰ In these studies, scholars of early modernity continued building on Tilly's core scheme, but also moved beyond this, putting forward a number of suggestions. To name but a few of them that relate to our subject, it was pointed out that long-distanced migration was not that uncommon in early modern societies, and it was usually 'the very poor, the very wealthy and refugees that travelled farther afield'¹⁴¹ - while the rest of migration was regional. The notion of vagrancy has also come under scrutiny. More concretely, the problematic moralistic aspect linked to such characterization was underlined as well as the fact that authorities categorized and recorded as 'vagrant', and consequently dangerous and unwelcome, people who were more often than not either just poor labor migrants not lucky enough to find a job or seasonal workers arrested on their way to or back

¹³⁸ "'Career' migration, finally, has persons or households making more or less definitive moves in response to opportunities to change position within or among large structures: organized trades, firms, governments, mercantile networks, armies and the like', *ibid.*, 9-10.

¹³⁹ Barney Warf and Santa Arias, 'Introduction. The Reinsertion of Space into the Social Sciences and Humanities', in *The Spatial Turn. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Barney Warf and Santa Arias (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 3-6. A more recent outgrowth of the *spatial turn* in the intersection between geography and the social and human sciences is the *mobility turn* which adopts a theoretical approach of the meaning and power dynamics in any form of moving, see Tim Cresswell, 'Mobilities I. Catching up', *Progress in Human Geography* 35, no 4 (2011): 550-558.

¹⁴⁰ The relevant literature is huge, see indicatively Jan Lucassen, *Migrant Labour in Europe. The Drift to the North Sea* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Jackson and Moch, 'Migration and the Social History'; Silvia Pedraza-Bailey, 'Immigration Research. A Conceptual Map', *Social Science History* 14, no. 1 (1990): 43-67; James B. Collins, 'Geographic and Social Mobility in Early Modern France', *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 3 (1991): 563-577; Moch, *Moving Europeans*; Dirk Hoerder, *People On the Move. Migration, Acculturation, and Ethnic Interaction in Europe and North America*, German Historical Institute Washington D.C. Annual Lecture Series No. 6 (Providence, R. I. & Oxford: Berghahn, 1993); Nicholas Canny, ed., *Europeans On the Move. Studies on European migration, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Nancy L. Green, 'The Comparative Method and Poststructural Structuralism. New Perspectives for Migration Studies', *Journal of American Ethnic History* 13, no. 4 (1994): 3-22; Dirk Hoerder and Leslie Page Moch, *European Migrants. Global and Local Perspectives* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1995); Dirk Hoerder, 'Europeans On the Move. Studies of European Migration, 1500-1800, Review', *Journal of World History* 7, no. 2 (1996): 309-312; Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, eds., *Migration, Migration History, History. Old Paradigms and New Perspectives* (Bern, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2005); Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact. World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Klaus J. Bade, *Migration in European History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003); James B. Collins, "'Translation de domicile": Rethinking Sedentarity and Mobility in the Early Modern French Countryside', *French History* 20, no. 4 (2006): 387-404; Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen and Patrick Donnelly Donnelly, eds., *Migration History in World History. Multidisciplinary Approaches* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010).

¹⁴¹ Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 47.

from work.¹⁴² Finally, the notion of coerced migration has come under scrutiny. The absence of references to coerced migration in narratives of European mobility has been critically pointed out, while, more crucially, even the usefulness of the distinction between free and coerced migration has been challenged. More concretely, it has been argued that, with the exception of cases of direct persecution leading to migration, the distinction between free and unfree incentives to migration is not clear, as for example in the cases of debtors fleeing their lenders or of women giving birth out of wedlock. In addition, it has been noted that even if mobility is due to a variety of reasons and motives, the experiences of migrants are common.¹⁴³

Yet, beyond these various refinements that have built on Tilly's concept of migration, recent migration studies actually uncovered and adopted a new object of inquiry. Since the 1970s, these studies moved their focus from large-scale migratory moves, such as the migration of Jewish population eastwards in the 15th century, the religious refugees of the 17th century, like the Huguenots, or the refugees that the Thirty Years war created.¹⁴⁴ Instead, they looked into other patterns of migration, more impermanent, volatile or difficult to trace, but nevertheless persistent: the movement of itinerant, seasonal or temporary workers, of soldiers, servants and apprentices.¹⁴⁵

This turn in the object of study privileged hitherto neglected and underestimated objects of research, while at the same time it implied and brought about a shift from a quest to identify the 'general laws' that dominated migration currents, to a close-up look into individuals and families, agency and decision-making processes.¹⁴⁶ More significantly, this turn gradually reflected a shift in the broader understanding of the phenomenon of mobility. By focusing on the everyday, ordinary aspect of mobility instead of the exceptional, scholars of early modernity slowly but steadily pushed mobility from the backstage of human

¹⁴² Lucassen and Lucassen, 'Migration, Migration History, History', in *Migration, Migration History, History*, ed. Lucassen and Lucassen, 17-21; Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled. The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006). It has to be noted that Tilly himself considered 'vagrants' as 'landless laborers [...] who had failed to find work', Tilly, 'Migration', 24.

¹⁴³ Lucassen and Lucassen, 'Migration, Migration History, History', 11-14; David Eltis, ed., *Coerced and Free Migration. Global Perspectives* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002); Lucassen, Lucassen and Manning, 'Migration History. Multidisciplinary Approaches', in *Migration History in World History*, ed. Lucassen, Lucassen and Manning, 8-9.

¹⁴⁴ Hoerder, *People on the move*, 7-11; idem, 'Europeans on the move' 309-310.

¹⁴⁵ Collins, "'Translation de domicile'".

¹⁴⁶ David Siddle, 'Introduction' in *Migration, Mobility and Modernization*, ed. David Siddle (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 1-8.

experience to the center, shifting from the notion of a ‘dual society’, where mobility was considered a peripheral, if important, phenomenon in the background of an essentially sedentary and stable society, to an understanding of a society largely on the move. This important transition underlies for example the somewhat different picture of 17th century France that James Collins drew in two articles he published between 1991 and 2006. In his 1991 article, Collins argued that the old model of an immobile society should be replaced by a new scheme, according to which:

[t]here was not one [early modern] French society, but two: the stable core villages and the massive floating population that swirled among them. Early-modern France certainly had a stable society at its core, but it was also a remarkably fluid society, both geographically and socially.¹⁴⁷

Fifteen years later, Collins re-elaborated the concept, this time reversing the image and leaning towards a model that put the emphasis on mobility:

In fact, the most stable regions were almost certainly those in which small-scale winegrowers owned their vineyards. The poor mountain regions, such as the Midi, had extensive seasonal migrations; the seaside towns and villages welcomed a bewildering variety of newcomers (in part because of high mortality among sailors); the cities lived from in-migration; the poor, young day-labourers wandered from village to village each year, in search of a new contract; upon the husband’s death, older widows often moved to a city or to live with a child; beggars flocked to the roads, although that phenomenon seems to have become worse in the eighteenth century, because adults lived longer. Historians seem reticent to add together all these ‘exceptional’ groups, who, taken along with other frequent migrants, such as students and artisans, constituted a substantial portion of the population.¹⁴⁸

In other words, what changed since the 1970s is that through the study of the dense, everyday movement of early modern people, mobility gradually emerged as a structural element of early modern society. It did not refer any more to the displacement of specific ethnic or religious groups in the background of an allegedly sedentary society. Travel and spatial movement came to be considered a common and recurrent experience and practice for

¹⁴⁷ Collins, ‘Geographic and Social Mobility’, 564, see also *ibid.*, 572.

¹⁴⁸ Collins, “‘Translation de domicile’”, 3.

a significant part of the early modern population. Mobility was placed in the core of early modernity. It wasn't any more regarded as an exception to the rule; on the contrary it belonged to the regular patterns and practices of early modern life. As Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen put it in a recent article:

[T]he early modern period was bustling with movement, both temporary and definitive. A high level of early modern mobility resulted largely from ubiquitous local and regional moves from parish to parish, both temporary and permanent. There was also the demand of an international labour market for soldiers and sailors. Finally, there was the constant draw of cities, which needed many migrants. In other words the unruly phenomenon of migration has now been placed centre stage.¹⁴⁹

This new understanding of early modern mobility was part of a greater shift in the understanding of the role of migration in human history in general, an understanding that now regarded migration 'as a normal and structural element of human societies throughout history' and stressed the continuity of the phenomenon,¹⁵⁰ while it also gave rise to the notion of connectedness or connectivity that envisages the world as a web of nodes and links.¹⁵¹ Within this wider context, the term *migration* seemed gradually less appropriate to capture the phenomenon in its entirety, as it had been for a long time connected to the 'modernization paradigm' and, therefore, to a series of more or less implicit assumptions: that it was associated with moments of crisis, since allegedly 'in principle human beings lead a settled life';¹⁵² that it was related with a quest to identify the 'mechanisms' and 'laws' of human movement;¹⁵³ and that it mainly referred to the movement from rural areas to cities and was tied to the concept of urbanization.¹⁵⁴ *Migration* was thus progressively used along with, or

¹⁴⁹ Lucassen and Lucassen, 'The Mobility Transition Revisited', 349.

¹⁵⁰ Jackson and Moch, 'Migration and the Social History', 27-29; Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 6; Jan and Leo Lucassen wrote: '[g]enerally, migration is no longer viewed as a sign of crisis, as a phenomenon exclusive to the industrial period, as an element of the 'modernization' transition, or as a typically Western occurrence. [...] The new paradigm [...] teaches us that migration is part of the general human pattern', in 'Migration, Migration History, History', 9.

¹⁵¹ One of the most well-known examples of the connectedness model within the Mediterranean studies is Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2000).

¹⁵² Harald Kleinschmidt, *People on the Move. Attitudes toward and Perceptions of Migration in Medieval and Modern Europe* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 10. Kleinschmidt coined the term 'residentialism' to describe this assumption.

¹⁵³ Jackson and Moch, 'Migration and the Social History', 33; Siddle, 'Introduction'.

¹⁵⁴ Jackson and Moch, 'Migration and the Social History', 29.

altogether replaced by, *mobility*, a term that became associated with an emphasis on micro-scale, everyday life stories, personal agency and complex or multiple itineraries, yet without losing sight of the structural causes and wider mobility patterns or migration streams, into which these newly highlighted elements were embedded. In other words, *mobility* became a broader notion, encompassing the magnitude and complexity of the phenomenon of human movement in both a micro- and macro-scale.

Last but not least, quite recently, early modern historians and migration historians, in order to test but also further strengthen their arguments, make an effort to pin down the scale and character of early modern mobility and its variations within the early modern era. They thus try, when possible, to quantify the various types of early modern migration¹⁵⁵ as well as reconsider the validity of arguments that had been raised within the previous model.¹⁵⁶ Their studies flesh out and historically contextualize the often-criticized model of mobility and connectivity for overlooking change through time,¹⁵⁷ while also acknowledging the rise in migration figures after the mid-19th century, as the modernization theory had maintained. Yet, they attribute this rise rather to the improvement of transports, which resulted to easier, cheaper and faster transportation, than to industrialization. In other words, what they detect in 19th century is predominantly a change in the scale of movement, thus enriching and reinforcing the critique that has targeted the idea of a transition from a sedentary, isolated early modern world to a mobile modern one.

iv. Fluidity in early modern studies

Fluidity as a concept was introduced to historical and cultural studies through the anthropological studies of ethnicity, an ever-growing field since the late 1960s and the publication of Frederik Barth's influential work in 1969.¹⁵⁸ More concretely, anthropologists

¹⁵⁵ Lucassen and Lucassen, 'The Mobility Transition Revisited', 347-377; Josef Ehmer, 'Quantifying Mobility in Early Modern Europe. The Challenge of Concepts and Data', *Journal of Global History* 6, no. 2 (2011): 327-338; Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, 'Discussion. Global Migration. From Mobility Transition to Comparative Global Migration History', *Journal of Global History* 6, no.2 (2011): 299-307.

¹⁵⁶ Lucassen and Lucassen, *Migration, Migration History, History*.

¹⁵⁷ See for example Ian Morris, 'Mediterraneanization', 30-55.

¹⁵⁸ Fredrik Barth, 'Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance', in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference (Results of a Symposium Held at the University of Bergen, 23rd to 26th February 1967)*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Bergen, Universitetsforlaget; London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), 117-134; David N. Gellner, 'Fluidity, Hybridity, Performativity: How Relevant Are Social-Scientific Buzzwords to

studying tribes and tribal identities in Asia and Africa concluded that members' affiliation to their tribes was not fixed nor clear-cut, while they also examined the impact that the colonization process had in cementing tribal affiliation.¹⁵⁹

During the 1970s and 1980s the notion of fluidity entered history's realm. Historians studying the formation of western nationalism and nation-states borrowed from anthropologists their skepticism towards clearly delineated political communities with ethnically, and sometimes religiously, homogenous population and for the first time challenged the so far established knowledge.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, within the context of 'softening' or straightforward deconstructing the notions of nation, nationalism and national identity, cultural historians further inquired into the nature of identities.¹⁶¹ The vocabulary of history thus became populated with concepts like ambiguity, adaptability, and permeability.

Yet, not incidentally, the idea of fluidity acquired its greatest diffusion since the late 1980s as a response to the social and conceptual developments of the post-Cold War era, at a time when the modern state and the interlinked modernization theory were critically revisited for they failed to adequately address the political, social and intellectual concerns.¹⁶² It was at that same period that the concepts of multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalization were articulated.¹⁶³ Ian Morris, in an article published in 2003 where he approached the concepts of fluidity and mobility both in a broad theoretical treatment and in relation to his own field, wrote: 'The discovery since the late 1980s of fluidity, interconnection, and openness where others had seen rootedness, barriers and tradition is a response to the greatest social phenomenon of the past twenty years: globalization. Historians are seeing in the ancient Mediterranean the same kind of connectedness that is convulsing our own world'.¹⁶⁴

Nepal's Constitution-Building?', in *Ethnicity and Federalization in Nepal*, ed. Chaitanya Mishra, Om Prasad Gurung and Tribhuvana Viśvavidyālaya (Kathmandu: Tribhuvan University, 2012), 92–94.

¹⁵⁹ Aidan W. Southall, 'The Illusion of Tribe', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 5, no. 1–2 (1970): 28–50.

¹⁶⁰ For an overview of this production see Josep R. Llobera, *Recent Theories of Nationalism* (Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 1999).

¹⁶¹ Brubaker and Cooper, 'Beyond 'Identity'', 1–47.

¹⁶² Antonis Hadjicyriacou and Daphne Lappa, 'Exploring the Conceptual Boundaries of the Concept of Fluidity. Early Modern "Contact Zones" in the Adriatic and the Eastern Mediterranean' (paper, *Well-Connected Domains. Intersections of Asia and Europe in the Ottoman Empire*, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 10.11.2011–12.11.2011).

¹⁶³ Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, 'Methodological Nationalism and Beyond. Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences', *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 321–327; Morris, 'Mediterraneanization', 30–55; Smith, 'Social Fluidity', 688–689.

¹⁶⁴ Morris, 'Mediterraneanization', 32.

Accordingly, since the 1990s, the conceptual tool of fluidity and the enquiries on ethnicity, community construction and identity formation, entered and gradually predominated the discourse of early modern scholarship.¹⁶⁵ Within the early modern Mediterranean context, the discourse related to shifting identities and porous boundaries was also endowed with a distinctive significance: it became interconnected with a quest to challenge the dichotomic perception of East and West. Due to its geography, the Mediterranean region had ideally encapsulated the idea of a boundary between the East and the West or between Islam and Christianity, and was traditionally considered as the place *par excellence* where cultures and civilizations had clashed for centuries.¹⁶⁶ The fluidity discourse

¹⁶⁵ The literature treating or adopting the concept of pre-modern fluidity is vast, mostly published since 2000. One of the first studies discussing the porosity of boundaries can be found in Keith P. Luria, 'Catholics and Protestants in Seventeenth-Century Poitou', in *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500-1800). Essays in Honor of Natalie Zemon Davis*, ed. Barbara B. Diefendorf and Carla Hesse (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 65–81. For literature published since 2000, see indicatively: Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie, eds., *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003); David L. Graizbord, *Souls in Dispute*; Keith P. Luria, *Sacred Boundaries. Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early-Modern France* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005); Ethan H. Shagan, ed., *Catholics and the 'Protestant Nation'. Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England* (Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, Palgrave, 2005); Eric R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople. Nations, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Amila Buturovic and Irvin Cemil Schick, eds., *Women in the Ottoman Balkans. Gender, Culture and History* (London; New York: I.B.Tauris, 2007); David B. Ruderman, 'Michael A. Meyer's Periodization of Modern Jewish History. Revisiting a Seminal Essay', in *Mediating Modernity. Challenges and Trends in the Jewish Encounter with the Modern World. Essays in Honor of Michael A. Meyer*, ed. Lauren B. Strauss and Michael Brenner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 27–42; Melissa Franklin-Harkrider, *Women, Reform and Community in Early Modern England. Katherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, and Lincolnshire's Godly Aristocracy, 1519-1580* (Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2008); Ian Almond, *Two Faiths, One Banner. When Muslims Marched with Christians Across Europe's Battlegrounds* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); Brinda Charry and Gitanjali Shahani, *Emissaries in Early Modern Literature and Culture. Mediation, Transmission, Traffic, 1550-1700* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009); C. Scott Dixon, Dagmar Freist, and Mark Greengrass, eds., *Living with Religious Diversity in Early-Modern Europe* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009); Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic Diasporas. Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire. Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); Caroline A. Williams, ed., *Bridging the Early Modern Atlantic World. People, Products, and Practices on the Move* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009); Jill Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith. Catholics and Protestants in the Diocese of Geneva* (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2010); Eric R. Dursteler, *Renegade Women*; Jørgen Nielsen, ed., *Religion, Ethnicity and Contested Nationhood in the Former Ottoman Space* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Nadine Lewycky and Adam David Morton, eds., *Getting Along? Religious Identities and Confessional Relations in Early Modern England. Essays in Honour of Professor W.J. Sheils* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012); Babak Rahimi, *Theater State and the Formation of Early Modern Public Sphere in Iran. Studies on Safavid Muharram Rituals, 1590-1641 CE* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012). Within the Ottoman context, fluidity seems pertinent not only to community and identity formation processes, but also to institutions and the state: Eunjeong Yi, *Guild Dynamics in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul. Fluidity and Leverage* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, eds., *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁶⁶ Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 6–8; Almond, *Two Faiths, One Banner*, 1–8.

challenged this perception and the ‘stark boundaries that are too easily erected to divide the [Mediterranean] region into seemingly irreconcilable and antithetical block’,¹⁶⁷ and brought attention instead to the Mediterranean as a privileged place for cultures to peacefully meet and interact. The Mediterranean was not any more a boundary, but a contact zone.¹⁶⁸

Studies that worked with the concept of fluidity were also often driven from and in dialogue with the legacy and repercussions that an oppositional understanding between East and West has inherited to contemporary politics and public notions towards Islam.¹⁶⁹ And if reference to the catch-phrase ‘clash of civilization’ that Huntington’s work so effectively popularized has by now become rather banal,¹⁷⁰ one has to sadly admit the ramification and endurance of the concept among both academic and non-academic audiences. Declarations like the one that the German Chancellor Angela Merkel made in 2010, when she stated that in Germany the ‘multicultural concept has failed utterly’, more or less directly contribute to the legitimization and ratification of the alleged incompatibility of different cultures.¹⁷¹

The fluidity literature’s contribution to the enhancement of historical knowledge and understanding is significant. By challenging and moving beyond stereotypical views and fixed categories, it unraveled the dynamic processes engaged in the crafting of boundaries, communities and identities. In a sense, this literature rendered processuality to notions, categories or affiliations, as for example religion, which were previously perceived as permanent and frozen in time, while it also rendered agency and humanity to hitherto petrified figures captured within these structures. Within the Mediterranean context, this literature deepened our understanding of the plurality of the Mediterranean culture by challenging and demythologizing the East versus West discourse, and bringing into light the multiplicity of interactions between the two supposedly oppositional frameworks.

Maybe more importantly, several studies within this literature moved beyond the emphasis on the facets of peaceful coexistence across religious or ethnic divides and, without denying the shifting of identities, sought to trace and account for the range of relationships

¹⁶⁷ Dursteler, *Renegade Women*, 108.

¹⁶⁸ The concept of ‘contact zone’ was introduced by Mary Louise Pratt in her article ‘Arts of the contact zone’, *Profession* 91 (1991), 33-40.

¹⁶⁹ Dursteler, *Renegade Women*, 6–10.

¹⁷⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’, *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1 July 1993): 22–49; idem, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).

¹⁷¹ Kate Connolly, ‘Angela Merkel Declares Death of German Multiculturalism’, *The Guardian*, 17 October 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-germany-multiculturalism-failures>.

that could be developed among people of different and competing faiths; relationships that could go from coexistence to antagonism and to persecution, and which could sometimes take place simultaneously. In order to achieve this, these relationships were placed firmly within concrete geographical and temporary frameworks. As Keith Luria suggested in his book on the varied relationships between Catholics and Huguenots in 17th century France:

How, then, are we to arrive to a conceptual framework that can help us understand peaceful coexistence, continuing suspicion, and at least occasional violence between the two sides? ... The answer lies in shifting our interpretative focus away from opposed religious cultures toward an examination of how groups identities were constructed and reconstructed, a process that led at *specific* times in *specific* places to greater peace or conflict. With such a reorientation, we no longer need to assume either good relations or bad ones as the normal state of affairs between the confessional groups.¹⁷²

Nevertheless, the concept of a fluid early modern world carried along certain pitfalls,¹⁷³ which its widespread diffusion and use accentuated. If ‘dynamic’ was the positive way of viewing the constant process of construction and reconstruction of identities, the flip side of the coin was the ‘uncertainty’, ‘ambiguity’, ‘disorder’ and ‘confusion’ that supposedly characterized the early modern identity-formation process or even governed early modern people’s minds, hearts and beliefs. To give an example, in an article referring to the conversion of Christian mercenaries to Islam the author attributed these conversions to the ‘confusion, incertitude [and] doctrinal ignorance’ of the Balkan people.¹⁷⁴ Or, in relation to the renegade women that Dursteler presents in his book,¹⁷⁵ a reviewer observed that ‘these women’s stories inspire the reader to appreciate the fluidity of some Mediterranean regions,

¹⁷² Keith P. Luria, *Sacred Boundaries*, xxiii. Italics are the author’s.

¹⁷³ Within the context of Ottoman studies, fluidity along with the notions of flexibility and brokerage, form part of the overarching ‘pragmatism’ that the Ottoman Empire supposedly endorsed, and to which it owes its successful longevity. For a very comprehensive critique of this approach see Murat Dağlı, ‘The Limits of Ottoman Pragmatism’, *History and Theory* 52 (2013): 194-213.

¹⁷⁴ Giuseppina Minchella, ‘I processi del Sant’Ufficio di Aquileia e Concordia per apostasia all’islam contro i soldati della fortezza di Palma (1605-1652)’, *Metodi e Ricerche, Rivista Di Studi Regionali* 24, no. 1 (2005): 20–21.

¹⁷⁵ Dursteler, *Renegade Women*.

such as Croatia and the Greek islands, considered liminal spaces, or at the very least contested spaces *where subjects could hold any faith*'.¹⁷⁶

Examples like these can be easily multiplied. And they more often than not strip early modern boundaries from their content and complexity, and create of early modern people disorientated and empty caricatures that, reduced into a state of naive confusion, could indiscriminately and with characteristic ease take on any identity and affiliation. Such an understanding of early modern identities resonates with the 'incomplete' identity concept, elaborated within developmental psychology –an academic field clearly influenced by evolutionist theories- according to which a person goes through various stages of incomplete identity development before forming a clear cut, integral one.¹⁷⁷ This might be one of the reasons why contemporary readers often find these stories quite amusing – like stories with children.

However, instead of regarding early modern identities as 'primitive', and thus endorse a rather teleological understanding of the identity-formation process, we might better think that it is from the viewpoint of the contemporary observer, trained to think and perceive the world along different and often stricter categories, that they seem so 'malleable', following incomprehensible and undecipherable courses to the 'modern mind'. In other words, fluidity might bespeak the contemporary observer's failure to grasp the content and transformations of early modern religious boundaries and identities. As Peter Marshall put it in reference to the religious attitudes in Henry VIII's England, 'disorientation may well be the response of religious historians lacking the appropriate conceptual and linguistic tools to bring into focus the priorities and perceptions of their subjects, rather than the felt experience of those subjects themselves'.¹⁷⁸

A second drawback that the use of the concept of fluidity entails is that it has often been placed at the core of the coexistence of religiously diverse groups during early modernity, and used as its explanatory framework and a hermeneutical tool with which to approach it. As Dursteler put it in his book about the Venetian merchants in Istanbul: 'Coexistence between Muslim and Christian, Venetian and Ottoman, was possible, and even

¹⁷⁶ Céline Dauverd, 'Review of Dursteler, Eric, *Renegade Women. Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean*' (H-Italy, H-Review, February 2013), <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=37071>. Italics are mine.

¹⁷⁷ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity. Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968).

¹⁷⁸ Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 4.

common on the Mediterranean frontier, and this was facilitated by the fluidity of both individual and collective identity'.¹⁷⁹

Nonetheless, when using the concept of fluidity to account for cross-ethnic or cross-religious interaction, one is indirectly replying to the question 'how come diverse communities managed to live together?', a question implying that hostile relations were the natural state of affairs among them. And this assumption is actually informed by the modernization and secularization theories and their teleological understanding of interactions between religiously or ethnically diverse groups as a course from intolerance to tolerance: in the pre-modern era diverse groups formed by default hostile and opposite blocks and religious violence was the norm, while since the 17th century ideas of tolerance were gradually cultivated, culminating in the Enlightenment, which heralded the age of tolerance in the modern secular world.¹⁸⁰ In other words, even if the employment of the notion of fluidity actually aimed at challenging and deconstructing the modernization narrative, it implicitly endorsed its rationale by accepting and addressing the central and fundamental question that the latter had posed.

What's more, when employing fluidity to account for coexistence and toleration, it is - even unintentionally- implied that coexistence is possible only under circumstances of fluidity. James Grubb, in his review of *Venetians in Constantinople* concluded: '[t]he overriding lesson [from the book] is implicit but not hard to discern: where identity can be kept fuzzy and elastic, there is still hope for coexistence'.¹⁸¹ Which could be interpreted also in a different way: that in historical contexts when identities are not 'fuzzy and elastic', coexistence will be either difficult to achieve or will altogether fail, and people from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds will be unable to live side by side or will face each other with hostility.¹⁸²

Last but not least, the wide diffusion of the notion of fluidity within early modern cultural studies have transformed it to a hallmark of the period, removed from specific spatial,

¹⁷⁹ Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 22. Italics are mine.

¹⁸⁰ William Jr. Swatos and Kevin J. Christiano, 'Secularization Theory. The Course of a Concept', *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1 September 1999): 209–228.

¹⁸¹ James S. Grubb, 'Eric C. Dursteler. *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean*,' *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (2007): 314.

¹⁸² For a similar point stemming out of a critical assessment of the concept of syncretism in Ottoman historiography, see Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam*, 17; idem, 'The Ambiguous Politics of "Ambiguous Sanctuaries"'. F. Hasluck and Historiography on Syncretism and Conversion to Islam in 15th- and 16th- century Ottoman Rumeli', in *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia. The Life and Times of F.W. Hasluck, 1878-1920*, ed. David Shankland, vol. 3 (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2013), 247-262.

temporal, social and cultural contexts, and unqualifiedly projected into and taken as a granted for the whole of early modernity. At the same time, considering fluidity as a quintessential early modern quality is further problematic as it implies the existence of modern 'stable identities', vis-à-vis which 'fluidity' becomes meaningful.¹⁸³

So, what is to be done with the concept of fluidity? How can it become useful? Eric Dursteler warns his readers against attempting any categorization of early modern identities:

The temptation in confronting the multiple elements of identity ... is to try to order them, to categorize them, to create a hierarchy or taxonomy of identity that ranks its various elements according to importance. In the infinite variety of the past, historians are trained to try to make order where disorder exists. In the case of identity, we must be very careful in doing this. When attempts are made to reduce identity to its essence or even to its various constituent parts, we run the risk of making fixed and concrete what was really a fluid and protean process rather than an apprehendable object; identity in the early modern era was 'a bundle of shifting interactions' and a step along 'a continuum.' Early modern identities were not defined by some essence or 'primordial quality.' They did not necessarily depend on political boundaries, linguistic, religious, or cultural factors though all of these could and often did come into play. Rather, early modern identity was a process of definition and redefinition, of imagining communities, of perceiving or creating boundaries, as well as challenging these boundaries. It was, as it is today, 'contingent and relational.'¹⁸⁴

Eric Dursteler is right. Identities were indeed crafted and re-crafted within a variety of contexts. Yet, how are we to convey any meaning out of the quality of 'disorder? I would suggest that the answer lies not in fostering 'disorder', but in the kind of tools that one uses and the question one poses so as to make order. If one tries to reduce multilayered identities into one core element, as nationalist projects attempted in the 19th and 20th centuries, this will surely not enhance our understanding. On the other hand, tracing the trajectories of identities within specific power relations and hierarchies,¹⁸⁵ examining why concrete patterns were followed and preferred over others, and unearthing the lines along which these

¹⁸³ For a similar point of hybridity versus purity and syncretism versus orthodoxy, see Philipp W. Stockhammer, 'From Hybridity to Entanglement, From Essentialism to Practice', in 'Archaeology and Cultural Mixture', ed. W. Paul van Pelt, special issue, *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 28, no. 1 (2013), 12-14; Krstić, 'The Ambiguous Politics of "Ambiguous Sanctuaries"', 248-249.

¹⁸⁴ Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 104.

¹⁸⁵ Krstić, 'The Ambiguous Politics of "Ambiguous Sanctuaries"'.

identities' itineraries were organized and the internal logic pertinent to them would indeed enhance our understanding of early modernity.

Accordingly, I suggest that if fluidity is to be used, it should be understood not as an explanatory tool with which to approach early modernity, but as an analytical category that, along other analytical categories like gender, space, or the Mediterranean, in order to convey any meaning, need to be properly historicized and embedded in the various contexts where it belongs, from the geographical and social-economic to the cultural and religious.¹⁸⁶ Following this line of thought, in the subsequent pages I will attempt to make meaning of fluidity as manifested in the cases of conversion that took place in Venice and Corfu in the late 17th and 18th centuries. I will thus try to understand why and when religious boundaries were transgressed by embedding the converts' life-stories into the specific framework of the elaborately structured early modern world and its internal hierarchies, from where they gained meaning, coherence, and consistency.

¹⁸⁶ Hadjicyriacou and Lappa, 'Exploring the Conceptual Boundaries of the Concept of Fluidity'.

Chapter 2. Religious conversion in Venice and Corfu

i. Venice. A brief sketch of the Casa dei Catecumeni

a. The Case dei Catecumeni in historiography

The establishment of houses for candidate converts or neophytes, the *Casa dei Catecumeni*, has been studied within the framework of the reform process that the Catholic Church undertook, especially in the 16th century after the Council of Trent (1545-1563), and which transformed the medieval Church into the early modern Church. This process of ‘modernization’ was originally interpreted as a reaction to the Protestant Reformation and the general crisis, rupture and counteraction that it produced within Christianity. This understanding was challenged especially by the German Catholic Church historian Hubert Jedin. In his influential article published in 1946, Jedin built on past literature and supported writers that had previously argued for the existence and continuity of an independent reform process of the Catholic Church.¹⁸⁷ This process, Jedin argued, had its origins in the internal reform movements of the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th, collectively formed after 1517 and finally crystallized in the Council of Trent, after which they were broadly implemented during the centuries that followed. In order to describe this long process, he proposed the term ‘Catholic Reform’. Some thirty years later, two other German historians, Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhardt, offered a more comprehensive view of the reform movements that took place in the Catholic, Protestant and Calvinist Churches, proposing the term *confessionalization* in order to describe what they understood as parallel processes undertaken in all Churches:

Under the pressure of mutual competition the religious groups [Calvinists, Lutherans, Catholics and to a certain extent Anglicans] had no choice but to establish themselves as ‘churches’, i.e., stable organizations with well defined membership. These new ‘churches’ had to be more rigid than the old pre-Reformation Church, where membership was self-evident and required no careful preservation.

¹⁸⁷ Hubert Jedin, ‘Catholic Reformation or Counter-Reformation?’, in *The Counter-Reformation. The Essential Readings*, ed. David Luebke (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 19-46. In this article Jedin also discussed the history of the terms ‘Counter Reformation’, ‘Catholic Reformation’, and ‘Catholic Restoration’.

Particular confessions of faith served to distinguish these separate religious communities from each other.¹⁸⁸

Within this process, Schilling and Reinhardt argued, Church and State collaborated for the creation of a more religiously homogeneous and disciplined society, while parishes and parish priests acquired new importance as respectively spaces of control and discipline, and agents that would impose these to parishioners. They accordingly argued that this process had an impact not only on religion and the Church, but more broadly on the ways that Protestant and Catholic societies were structured and organized, and that confessionalization paved the way for political centralization and absolutism –and, eventually, for modernity. In other words, according to Schilling and Reinhardt, confessionalization went hand in hand with the transformation of the medieval state into the early modern state.¹⁸⁹

The confessionalization thesis was highly influential and triggered a lively discussion among historians. It has been criticized for adopting a statist, top-down approach while ignoring the micro-level and the discrepancy between reformist normative aspirations and everyday pious and religious practices that did not conform to these aspirations, as well as for having evolutionist and teleological overtones, by endorsing the modernization theory and approaching early modernity through it. Additionally, the application of the concept within the Catholic context has been altogether questioned.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, confessionalization remains a useful concept within which to frame the establishment of religious institutions like the *Casa dei Catecumeni* and the rationale behind them, even if, in the period under consideration, the aspirations of these institutions remained more often that not in the sphere of intentions.

From another point of view, Brian Pullan in his work studied the changes that occurred in the structure of charity and poor relief within this reform process. He used the notion of ‘new philanthropy’ in order to define the 16th-century novelties, which he summarized in three major points. First, along the mostly private and rather haphazard initiatives of the past,

¹⁸⁸ Wolfgang Reinhard, ‘Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State. A reassessment’, *The Catholic Historical Review* 75, no. 3 (1989): 390.

¹⁸⁹ Heinz Schilling, ‘Confessional Europe’, in *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600. Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Thomas A. Brady Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, James D. Tracy, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 641-681.

¹⁹⁰ Ute Lotz-Heuman, ‘The Concept of “Confessionalization”. A Historiographic Paradigm in Dispute’, *Memoria y Civilización* 4 (2001): 93-114; Susan R. Boettcher, ‘Confessionalization. Reformation, Religion, Absolutism, and Modernity’, *History Compass* 2 (2004): 1-10; Kaspar von Greyerz, *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42-49, 53-55, 65.

for the first time initiatives endowed with more centralizing aspirations and often supported by the state took place or were remarkably enhanced.¹⁹¹ Second, the idea of discriminating between those unworthy and those worthy of charity emerged, interlinked with a quest to prevent charity from being dispensed haphazardly. Unworthy of charity were considered the able-bodied and fraudulent beggars, who would be henceforth obliged to work. Worthy of charity were considered the really sick and impotent or those descending from ruined noble families, occasionally called *poveri vergognosi*,¹⁹² but also those placed in the margins of society, ‘the outcasts of the society ... men and women outside the framework of the brotherhoods, deprived of the security afforded by families and native towns or villages, beyond the pale of respectability and conventional morality, ... the habitual sinner[s], or the person[s] whose way of life exposed [them] to the prospect of near certain damnation’.¹⁹³ Third, the medieval alleviating approach was now transformed into one that aimed at educating, disciplining and eventually integrating outcasts into the Christian society:

[O]rganized charity ... became not merely supportive, but actively redemptive as well. In other words, it was now directed not only towards relieving the respectable, and ensuring that they continued to behave circumspectly and piously, but also at amending the character, morals and behavior of the outcast poor in such a way as to integrate them into a highly disciplined Christian society, and to cause that society to prosper thereby. [...] Its concern was not to speed souls through purgatory, in the manner of some of the older confraternities, but rather to save them from hell, by a reformation of conduct in [their] li[ves].¹⁹⁴

The establishment of the *Case dei Catecumeni* can thus be understood within the framework of confessionalization to the extent that these institutions reflected and resonated with quests for centralized structures that would deal with poor and outcasts, and for a society sharing wide conformity of religious doctrine and practice, with little or no room for religious minorities. In this scheme, Jews, Muslims and other infidels, qualified as ‘sinners’ in need to

¹⁹¹ Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice. The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 221, 238.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁹⁴ Brian Pullan, ‘Support and Redeem. Charity and Poor Relief in Italian Cities from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century’, *Continuity and Change* 3 (1988): 181, 194. See also Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘Poor Relief, Humanism, and Heresy. The Case of Lyon’, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France. Eight Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 17-64.

be saved from ignorance, infidelity and sin, while quite often they also qualified as outcast immigrants, in need to be controlled and suppressed.

To these ends, the *Case* assumed the task to organize, centralize, control and scrutinize the process of conversion, endowing it with a 'hard institutional shell'.¹⁹⁵ Up to then, religious conversion was performed rather unsystematically. It depended on the initiatives of parish churches and the involvement of pious parishioners that accommodated candidate converts in their own houses and provided them with the required catechism before baptism.¹⁹⁶ These two patterns of conversion, the new centralized and institutionalized one and the older based mostly on the initiative and voluntary engagement of the parish priest and the parishioners, continued to run parallel even after the establishment of *Case dei Catecumeni*.¹⁹⁷

b. The Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni*

The first *Casa dei Catecumeni* was founded in Rome in 1543 by the Jesuit order, the confraternity that Ignatius of Loyola established in 1534 and which became one of the most prominent orders of the reformation era.¹⁹⁸ Fourteen years later, in 1557, some Jesuit sympathizers created a similar institution in Venice, inspired from and modeled on the one in

¹⁹⁵ Pullan, 'Support and Redeem', 195-6.

¹⁹⁶ 'Vero è, che fino dall' anno 1557 non erasi eretto alcun Pio pubblico Edifizio a questo fine di ricoverare tali infedeli, supplendo a tale mancanza la Pietà di Persone particolari, e benestanti, che li alloggiavano nelle proprie Case a misura del loro comodo', *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia*, 4. See also Giuseppe Tassini, *Curiosità Veneziane, ovvero origini delle denominazioni stradali di Venezia* (Venezia: Filippi, 2009, 1st edition: 1863), 154-155; Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 255.

¹⁹⁷ Pullan has argued that the coexistence of old and new notions and institutions was characteristic of the Catholic states since the 16th century: '[...] the situation in Catholic societies contrasted with that among Protestants, in that in contrast with the Protestant countries where a radical break with past notions and institutions was pursued, in the Catholic states there was no ostensible break with the supposedly mistaken principles of the past, nothing comparable to the dissolution of confraternities and chantries or the conversion of religious houses into hospitals [...]. Rather, new foundations were added while old ones survived and sometimes continued to flourish, new concerns and approaches coexisting with the products of older traditions', see Pullan, 'Support and redeem'; idem, *Rich and Poor*, 198-215.

¹⁹⁸ Lance Gabriel Lazar, *Working in the Vineyard of the Lord. Jesuit Confraternities in Early Modern Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Greyerz, *Religion and Culture*, 35.

Rome.¹⁹⁹ Throughout the following years and centuries, nine more similar institutions were created in various cities in the Papal States and Florence.²⁰⁰

In Venice, since the late 16th century the institution was located in Dorsoduro, an area in the southern part of the city, rather peripheral, ‘remote and uninviting’,²⁰¹ which nonetheless in that century became the seat of various institutions of the confessionalization era. Before moving to Dorsoduro, the *Casa* was located in the *sestier* of Canareggio, first in the parish of *Santissimi Ermagora e Fortunato*, not far from the commercial district of Rialto, the district of the Jewish Ghetto and the *Fontego dei Turchi*, and soon after in the nearby parish of *Santissimi Apostoli*. In these early years the *Casa* accommodated mostly Jews.²⁰² The turning point was during and after 1571, the year of the battles of Cyprus and Lepanto,²⁰³ as the institution literally overflowed with Muslim women, children and men captured during the wars and brought to the *Casa*, sharply increasing the overall numbers of candidate converts and outnumbering Jews. The institution was in need of more space and with the help of a Theatine priest, Andrea Lippomano,²⁰⁴ patron of the Jesuits in Venice and Prior of the adjacent church of S. Trinita, an edifice was bought in the parish of *San Gregorio* in Dorsoduro, very close to where the first Jesuit College had settled in 1549. Gradually the *Casa* was enlarged, as it also acquired adjacent buildings.²⁰⁵

A fair number of medieval hospitals already existed there, but during the 16th century Dorsoduro and the opposite island of Giudecca became the site where most new charitable institutions settled. Among them, in 1517 the *Ospedale degli Incurabili*²⁰⁶ was established

¹⁹⁹ There was at least one important feature that distinguished the Roman *Casa* from the Venetian one. In the former the prescribed period of catechesis was forty days, while in the latter eight months. Consequently the Roman institution hosted mostly recently baptized non-Christians or non-Catholics, while the Venetian one hosted mostly prospect converts, see Lazar, *Working in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 112-117; Pietro Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri. Conversioni a Venezia e nel Friuli Veneto in età moderna* (Firenze: Olschki, 2008), 30-46.

²⁰⁰ In Bologna it was founded in 1568, in Mantua in 1574, in Ferrara in 1584, in Pesaro in 1611, in Reggio Emilia in 1632, in Florence in 1636, in Napoli in 1637, in Torino in 1653, and in Modena as late as 1700, see Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri*, 46-47.

²⁰¹ Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 405.

²⁰² Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 256.

²⁰³ *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia*, 6.

²⁰⁴ Andrea Lippomano belonged to an ecclesiastical family loyal to the Pope. With his financial support the first Jesuits were established in Venice and Padua, see Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 263-4, 300, 384. For the Theatine order, ‘probably the most aristocratic [order]’, among whose leaders was Giampietro Carafa, Bishop of Chieti or *Theate* in Latin (this toponym gave the order its name), and later cardinal in charge of the Roman Inquisition and Pope Paul IV (1555-1559), see John Patrick Donnelly, ‘New religious orders for men’, in *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Reform and expansion 1500-1660*, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 163, 165-166.

²⁰⁵ According to the *Capitoli* the rest of the buildings were bought in 1572 with the financial support of thirty benefactors, see *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia*, 6.

²⁰⁶ Franca Semi, *Gli ‘Ospizi’ di Venezia* (Venice: IRE, 1983), 254, 273-274.

there for the care of invalids and orphans, and few years after the transfer of the *Casa* in the neighborhood, the *Casa del Soccorso*, which gave temporary shelter to prostitutes or adulterous wives, moved there.²⁰⁷ In Giudecca, two important institutions were established during the 16th century: the *Casa delle Zitelle*, designated to host temporarily needy unmarried women in order to save them from prostitution, and the *Casa delle Convertite*, addressed to ex-prostitutes.²⁰⁸ In short, the *Casa dei Catecumeni* was standing in a neighborhood densely populated with institutions of the reformation era.

Unlike other similar Italian institutions that targeted exclusively the Jewish residents of their towns, the Venetian *Casa* was far more open. In the institution's statute it was stated that every 'Turco, Moro, Ebreo, Idolatra, o altro Infedele, sì dello Stato Veneziano, come d'ogn' altro Dominio' would be accepted there,²⁰⁹ a feature resonating with the international character of the city of Venice. According to the statute, any non-Christian or non-Catholic could approach the institution on her/his own or accompanied. Upon their arrival, the Prior should examine her/him, that is '[...] udirlo, esaminarlo et esattamente informarsi del suo Nome, Cognome, Padre, Patria, età, condizione, ed impiego, come pure dell'intenzione, volontà, e di quello che potrà per scoprire, se vi fosse qualche simulazione, o qualch'inganno'²¹⁰—reference to the alertness with which Priors should treat candidate converts is made repeatedly in the statute.²¹¹ The final decision about acceptance at the institution of those seeking to be baptized would lie upon the Board of Governors; only after the Board's confirmation, would they be officially considered *catecumeni*. Candidate converts would then be instructed for a period of at least eight months.²¹² After the end of catechesis, they would be examined by a committee, and if found adequately instructed, a permission

²⁰⁷ Semi, *Gli 'Ospizi'*, 256; Monika Chojnacka, 'Women, Charity and Community in Early Modern Venice. The Casa delle Zitelle', *Renaissance Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1998), 71.

²⁰⁸ The *Casa delle Convertite* was settled there in the beginning of the fourth decade of the 16th century and the *Casa delle Zitelle* was established in 1559, see Bernard Aikema and Dulcia Meijers, 'Chiesa e Ospedale di Santa Maria Maddalena', in *Nel regno dei poveri. Arte e storia dei grandi ospedali veneziani in età moderna, 1474-1797*, eds. Bernard Aikema and Dulcia Meijers (Venice: Arsenale, 1989), 191; Chojnacka, 'Women, Charity and Community'.

²⁰⁹ *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia*, 9, 41.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

²¹¹ For example, following the Prior, the *Presidenti e Visitatori* should also examine those wanting to convert in order to find out the sincerity of their intentions 'e scoprire se vi fosse qualche falsità, o doppiezza', while after a prospective convert was officially accepted in the *Casa* the Prior should continue 'inspiando ... tutti i suoi andamenti e parole, per ricavare quanto può la sua intenzione', *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia*, 42.

²¹² On this issue the Venetian *Casa* followed the prescription of the Council of Agde, summoned in 506 A.D., where it was stated that those Jews that wanted to become Christians should spend eight months 'in the threshold of the Church' among the catechumens before getting baptized, *Capitoli ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni*, 43.

would be issued for their baptism. Neophytes will then spend some more time in the *Casa* in order to learn ‘[...] a viver da buoni cristiani’.²¹³ The decision to leave the institution would lie, again, upon the Board of Governors and only under the condition that the institution has procured for them a certain occupation.²¹⁴

In a sense, the *Casa* was conceived as an institution of the confessionalization ideal *par excellence* for a variety of reasons. First, due to its close ties with the local Jesuit confraternity, at least until its expulsion from the city in 1606. The Jesuits, who first went to Venice after a request of the doge in 1542, established in Dorsoduro a college, transformed soon after into a *Casa professa*,²¹⁵ where candidate converts were regularly instructed.²¹⁶ What’s more, among the founders of the institution there were people that belonged or sympathized with the Theatine and Jesuit orders,²¹⁷ while various members of the Board of Governors of the *Casa dei Catecumeni* belonged to the Jesuit order.

Second, the institution’s mission was endowed with a distinctive centralized character: to promote, carry out and control the conversion of ‘infidels’ in the whole city of Venice, and also beyond. And on this mission, the *Casa* did not function on exclusively private initiative; it rather adopted a kind of ‘semi-public’ structure, on both administrative and financial levels. The *Casa* was under the formal jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Venice, its ‘perpetual President’,²¹⁸ who had an active engagement with the institution: he was a perpetual member of the governing Board, he met every time the newly appointed Prior of the institution, he was informed about all the baptisms that were going to take place there,²¹⁹ and participated in the process of conversion by giving neophytes the confirmation or occasionally baptizing them. Most importantly, he was one of the four members of the committee that decided on the dispensation of the *Casa*’s most significant bequest, the *legato Garzoni*.²²⁰ Additionally,

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 42-47.

²¹⁵ ‘The first communities that Loyola envisioned for the Jesuits were called Professed Houses “where the professed fathers would live”’, in Donnelly, ‘New religious orders’, 173.

²¹⁶ Bernard Aikema and Dulcia Meijers, ‘I catecumeni. Chiesa e ospedale di San Giovanni Battista’, in *Nel regno dei poveri*, 215.

²¹⁷ Ibid. The Jesuits in Venice had an active role in the creation of another charitable institution, the *Ospedale dei Derelitti*, about thirty years earlier before the *Casa dei Catecumeni*.

²¹⁸ ‘Presidente perpetuo’, *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de’ Catecumeni di Venezia*, 15.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 30.

²²⁰ This was the bequest that the nobleman Vincenzo Garzoni left to the institution in 1588 and was actuated in 1594. According to this, a total of one thousand ducats were to be dispensed annually to twenty of its baptized members (*Figli di Casa*). This supply had the form of a pension and was thus provided through the neophytes’ lifetime. The committee that decided upon its dispensation comprised the Patriarch of Venice, the

beyond nobles and citizens, in the institution's extended Board of Governors also participated priests from several churches in Venice, as well as religious officers from the wider Venetian state²²¹ - and when religious officers from the Venetian state did not officially belong to the Board of Governors, they were nevertheless invited to the Governors' meetings when in Venice.²²² Moreover, Venetian political and military officers, as for example the *Avogadori di Comun* or the *Savi alla Scrittura*, were often part of the institution's network, supporting and collaborating with the *Casa* either by directing there candidate converts or by assuming the role of the converts' godparents and providing with them post-baptism assistance.²²³

On the financial level, although the *Casa* was mainly funded by individual alms and bequests,²²⁴ it was among the institutions that were benefited from the parish-based structure for collecting alms,²²⁵ and belonged to the list of institutions that notaries were by law obliged to mention to testators upon the reduction of their wills.²²⁶ Occasionally it was financed directly from the state,²²⁷ while it was also annually endowed with valuable flour, timber, salt and soap.²²⁸

Third, by providing shelter for several months to a large number of poor locals and immigrants from both the Italian peninsula and the Ottoman Empire, the *Casa dei Catecumeni* contributed to the 16th-century effort to control urban space and preserve public order.

Guardian of the Franciscan church of *San Niccolò dei Frari*, and two of the oldest and most respectable Governors of the institution, one nobleman and one citizen, see *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia*, 27; Pullan, *The Jews of Venice*, 258.

²²¹ And these officers were expected to bring not only candidate converts, but also financial support to the institution through the collection of alms in their own dioceses, see *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia*, 15. In the year 1786 all bishops and archbishops of the Venetian state are recorded as members of the Board, see *Nomi di Governatori del Pio Luoco di Catecumeni e loro Cariche-G* 5.2, c. [1r], Catecumeni, AIRE.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ See here, chapter 5.II.

²²⁴ Ibid., 26.

²²⁵ Ibid., 25.

²²⁶ The 1571 Senate's decree stating the decision not to renew the *condotta* of the Jews, and consequently to expel the Jews from the territories of the Venetian state, was accompanied by a piece of legislation containing the provision that the *Casa dei Catecumeni* should be among the institutions that Venetian notaries were obliged to mention when drafting a will, see Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 248.

²²⁷ According to the *Capitoli*, the establishment of the Venetian *Casa* was initially financed by the Procurators of Saint Mark, see *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia*, 5. In the above-mentioned 1571 decree, it was also included the provision that the *Casa* should be added to the list of institutions that the *Collegio* would regularly back financially through almsgiving. As Pullan had observed, the proposed expulsion of the Jews from Venice was expected to bring about several conversions, Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 248.

²²⁸ Every year the *Casa* received 'stara cento di Formento riddotto in Farina' as an endowment to the institution by the Doge, and another fourteen 'stara di Formento' as an endowment provided to each one of the *Luoghi Pii* of the city - one of which was the *Casa dei Catecumeni*, see *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia*, 49-51.

Additionally, the extended period of catechesis and seclusion along with a quasi-monastic everyday life bespeak a concentrated effort to ‘reform’ converts and prepare their integration in Christian society after baptism through disciplined training. Instruction in the rudiments of Catholic faith would cultivate religious devotion to converts, while regular work and apprenticeship in an art would equip them with skills necessary for their integration in Venetian society. Everything was strictly regulated and managed in the *Casa*, from the amount and kind of daily food,²²⁹ to the spatial allocation of candidate converts and neophytes within the institution as well as their daily schedule. Candidate converts often lamented about this seclusion, like the Jew Giuseppe from Arta, who after spending few hours at the institution, said he wanted to leave, ‘[...] per non potersi far christiano in prigione, onde volse che se gl’aprisse la porta non potendo soffrir di star ristretto in queste mura’.²³⁰ For those who endured the experience of the institution, integration after baptism would be materialized through the Governors’ networks, which would provide converts with work, marriage opportunities, or the necessary capital to take the monastic vows or, seldom, follow a religious career.

Finally, the institution extended its control over the converts’ lives and conduct well after their departure from the institution and often throughout their lifetime. The most effective way to exert this kind of control was through almsgiving. Alms and bequests from the *Casa* would be distributed to the neophytes on two conditions. First, neophytes should keep on frequenting the public catechesis that the Prior of the *Casa* gave in the institution’s church twice a month. Upon the fulfillment of this condition, neophytes would not only become potential beneficiaries of the various bequests and the regular alms distributed during Christmas and Easter time, but if they had regularly attended the catechesis they would also receive a small amount of money, as well as an extra one if they had actively participated in it.²³¹ Second, after their departure from the institution the neophytes should continue leading the life of a devoted Christian. To ensure this, the *Visitarori per li sei Sestieri* -one for each of the city’s districts- had the duty to visit the converts living in the city at least twice per year and inspect their way of life.²³² The neophytes’ financial support from the *Casa* depended on the *Visitatori*’s judgment.²³³ What’s more, in a provision indicative of the collaboration

²²⁹ Ibid., 48-52.

²³⁰ Libro da rassegnare... 1725-1744-G9, c. 18v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

²³¹ *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de’ Catecumeni di Venezia*, 32, 57-58.

²³² ‘[...] inquirendo il viver Cristianamente delli medesimi [neofiti]’, Ibid., 23.

²³³ Ibid.

between and complementary roles of the institution's officers and the parish priests, almsgiving would be proposed by the *Visitatori* only for those converts that had obtained from their parish priest a certificate confirming their Christian conduct and their observance of the sacraments, the *Fede de vita & moribus, e dei Sacramenti*, and only for those sick converts that possessed the relevant certificate, *dell'infermità, e miseria*, again issued by their parish priests.²³⁴

In short, the *Casa dei Catecumeni* in Venice embodied the 16th century ideal of combining religious, moral and social discipline. It sought to create through '[...] buona disciplina, e Santa educazione',²³⁵ the post-Tridentine, reformed human type, the exemplar Christian that would comport '[...] con modestia, moderazione, e buona creanza spirituale, e civile',²³⁶ -values about which Peter Burke wrote, 'it is tempting to call the "petty-bourgeois ethic"'.²³⁷

c. Candidate converts at the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni*

Regarding the candidate converts at the Venetian institution, as mentioned before, the turning point was after the battles of Cyprus and Lepanto. It was a decisive moment as from this point onwards the *Casa* became closely interlinked with Venice's imperial aspiration and complemented the Venetian policy in the Mediterranean. Accordingly, it was also deeply affected by the latter's mutations. Thus, during the 17th century, when Venice adopted a rather aggressive attitude vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire and was involved in three wars in order to defend its Eastern Mediterranean territories,²³⁸ a remarkable number of Muslims, most of them war captives from the Ottoman Balkans, were admitted to the *Casa*. More

²³⁴ Ibid., 23-24, 28, 57-58.

²³⁵ Ibid., 21.

²³⁶ Ibid., 46.

²³⁷ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper & Row), 213; Greyerz, *Religion and Culture*, 59-62.

²³⁸ The first war lasted almost twenty-five years (1645-1669), during which Venetians and Ottomans combated for the conquest of the Venetian territory of Candia, and concluded with the defeat of the Venetians. After fifteen years (1684) Venice undertook another war with the Ottomans. Very soon the Venetians occupied the Ionian island of Santa Maura (Lefkada), and asserted the region of Morea (Peloponnese). The war ended in favour of the Venetians with the treaty of Carlowitz in 1699. Apart from Santa Maura, the Venetians gained several areas in Dalmatia and Albania, as well as the whole region of Morea. The peace though did not last long, and in 1714 the Ottomans begun the final Ottoman-Venetian war, which lasted until 1718. According to the following treaty of Passarowitz, Venice gained the continental fortresses of Vonitsa and Prevesa, but lost the region of Morea, see Eugenio Bacchion, *Il dominio veneto su Corfu, 1386-1797* (Venezia: Altino, 1956), 137-140, 144, 175-177, 180, 191-200.

concretely, during the period 1645-1718 around 1,080 women, men and children were baptized there, representing 70% of all converts of that period. At the same time, in parallel to the Mediterranean enterprises the institution acted on a local or regional level, targeting primarily the Jewish communities of Venice and the Veneto. Nevertheless, due to the institution's established role in matters of religious conversion as well as its receptive policy towards foreigners, Jews beyond the Venetian state were also attracted there. The Jewish presence at the institution grew progressively in numbers between 1645 and 1718, reaching the number of 520, and resulting into a roughly steady flow of Jewish candidate converts in the *Casa*, which would likewise continue in the 18th century. A bit more than half of these 520 Jews were residents of the ghetto of Venice.

Following the 1718 military defeat, and while facing an economic turndown due to a certain extent to the previous expenditure on military enterprises, Venice observed a strict neutrality in relation to European affairs,²³⁹ and her naval forces were only engaged in dealing with the corsairs based along the African coast in the city of Tripolis, and in Tunisia and Algeria, and threatening the Venetian mercantile marine. This military activity, which took place in the second half of the century,²⁴⁰ was practically the only one into which Venice was engaged throughout the century -as Giacomo Nani, a Venetian nobleman with a naval career, lamented, the Venetians had irrevocably lost their appetite for war adventures: 'la vista di un coltello, il solo rumore di un' arma da fuoco mette [il popolo nostro] in iscompiglio e lo fa immediatamente fuggire'.²⁴¹

As Venice limited considerably its Mediterranean ventures, the institution likewise practically disentangled its activities from war enterprise. This resulted into a sharp decline in the overall number of converts. During the years 1719-1796, only 625 Jewish and Muslim converts were recorded in the institution's registers: 500 of them, or about 80%, were Jews, and only 125 were Muslims. These numbers indicate that the presence of Muslims at the institution was closely interlinked to wars. On the contrary, the pace of arrival of Jews in the *Casa*, beyond annual fluctuations, was practically stable during the whole period under examination (1645-1796). The *Casa* in the 18th century thus hosted mostly Jews from Venice, while the rest of the candidate converts were immigrant Jews and Muslims who reached the

²³⁹ Freddy Thiriet, *Histoire de Venise* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1969), 117.

²⁴⁰ Frederic C. Lane, *Storia di Venezia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1991), 487-489; Piero del Negro, 'Le istituzioni militari della Serenissima tra Sei e Settecento', in *Società, economia, istituzioni. Elementi per la conoscenza della Repubblica Veneta*, vol. 1, *Istituzioni ed Economia* (Verona: Cierre, 2002), 142-143.

²⁴¹ Quoted in del Negro, 'Le istituzioni militari', 147.

city from the Veneto, the Italian peninsula, Venice's Maritime State, the Ottoman lands in the East and the Maghreb.²⁴²

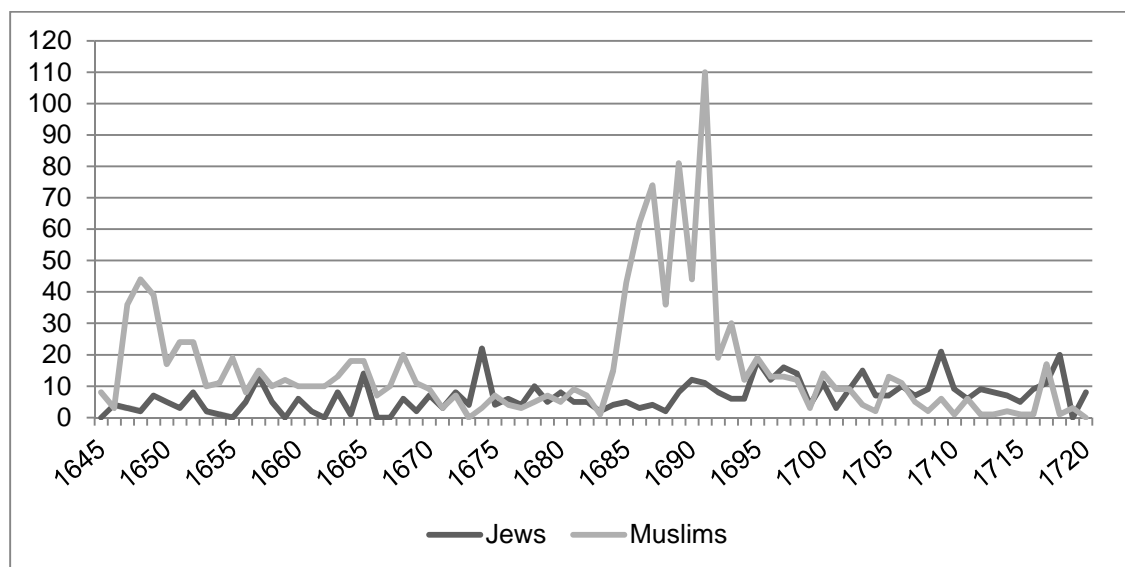


Chart 1. Jews and Muslims in the Venetian *Casa*, 1645-1720.

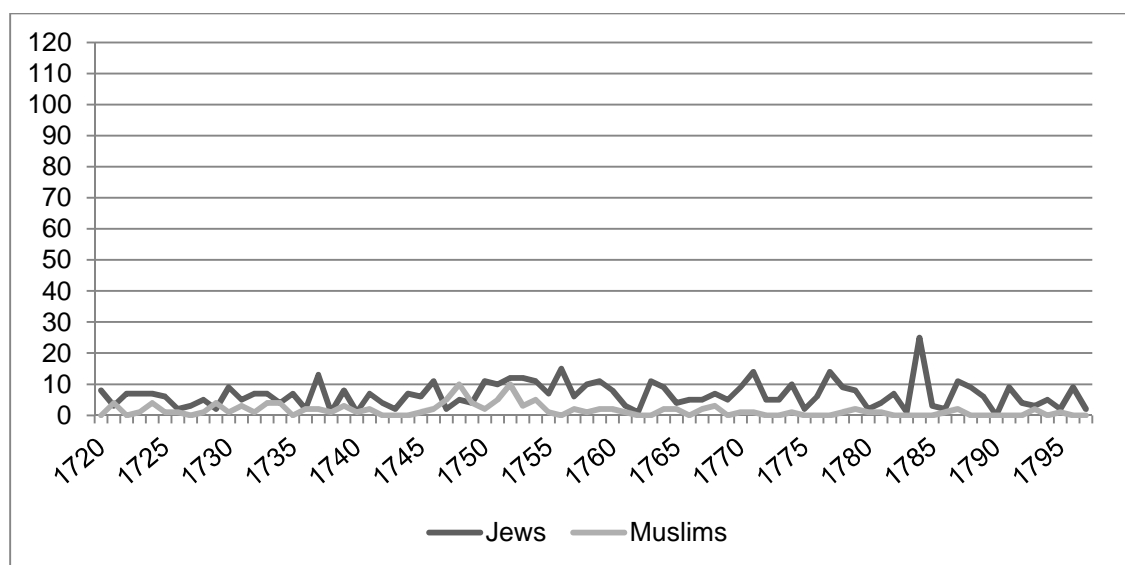


Chart 2. Jews and Muslims in the Venetian *Casa*, 1720-1797.

ii. Religious conversion in the city of Corfu

Contrary to the centralized character that religious conversion acquired in the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni*, in Corfu the process followed pre-Reformation patterns. It was thus managed

²⁴² Thiriet, *Histoire de Venise*, 116, 120-121; Lane, *Storia di Venezia*, 502-505.

by and shared between the island's two Churches, the Latin and Greek, and the local Christian population, the latter being, as we will see, rather actively involved in the process.

a. *Latini, Greci, Ebrei and Turchi* in Corfu

Before further proceeding, a few words about the Venetian city of Corfu are in order.²⁴³ The city, in the late 17th and 18th centuries was a border town, separated from and connected to the adjacent Ottoman lands by a relatively thin strip of sea. Being the administrative and military center of the Venetian Maritime State after the loss of Venetian Crete as well as a transit node in the commercial route from the Ottoman Empire to Venice, the city qualified as an early modern 'contact zone', for it hosted a religiously and ethnically diverse population who lived there, and 'met, clash[ed], and grapple[d] with each other'²⁴⁴: Christians following the Greek and Latin rites; two distinct and antagonistic Jewish communities, one of Greek origin and the other of Italian and Iberian origin; and Ottoman Muslims or converts from Islam to Christianity, who were mostly slaves or servants in local households. It is important to note though that this rich and diverse mosaic of people is not adequately represented in the historiography on Corfu, both Greek and Italian, where the island is treated as a predominantly Christian space, and focus is mostly on discussions regarding the legal and institutional status of the two Christian denominations, and the rivalry between them.²⁴⁵

The two communities to which Christians were attached, the Latin (*Latini* in the Venetian documents), that is the Catholic, and the Greek (*Greci* in the documents), that is of the Eastern rite, were already established in 1386 when the island became part of the Venetian

²⁴³ For a comprehensive sketch of the city see Nikos Karapidakis, 'Το τοπίο και ο φόβος της πόλης. Επεμβάσεις και σχεδιασμός στην Κέρκυρα τις αρχές του ΙΣΤ' αιώνα', *Ta Istorika* 12-13 (1990): 93-112; idem, 'Η ποιητική της πόλης', *Ta Istorika* 32 (2002): 1-51.

²⁴⁴ Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', 34.

²⁴⁵ For 19th-century historiography see indicatively the work of Ermannos Lountzis, *Περί της πολιτικής καταστάσεως της Επτανήσου επί Ενετών* (Athens, 1856, reedition *Η Ενετοκρατία στα Εφτάνησα*, Athens: Kalvos press, 1969); Panayotis Chiotis, *Ιστορικά απομνημονεύματα Επτανήσου*, vol. 1-3 (Zakynthos: 1863-1888). For contemporary historiography see indicatively Alfredo Viggiano, *Lo specchio della Repubblica. Venezia e il governo delle Isole Ionie nel '700* (Verona: Cierre Edizioni 1998); Chryssa A. Maltezou and Gherardo Ortalli, *Italia-Grecia. Temi e storiografie a confronto. Atti del convegno di studi organizzato in collaborazione con il Dipartimento di Studi Storici dell' Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, 20-21 Ottobre 2000* (Venice: Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, 2001); idem, *Venezia e le Isole Ionie* (Venezia: Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, 2005). Additionally in the series of the ten 'Pan-Ionian Conferences', which have been organized since 1914, one can trace the development and priorities of the Greek historiography on Corfu and the Ionian islands.

Maritime State.²⁴⁶ Although a minority of 1.252 people in a city with a population of 8.257 people, thus representing 15% of the city population,²⁴⁷ the Latin community included the local Venetian ruling elite. The Latin Archbishop, head of the Latin Church appointed by the Pope, was the higher religious authorities on the island.²⁴⁸ The community's pronounced symbolic presence was spatially articulated in the *San Giacomo* Cathedral and the two major

²⁴⁶ These terms were used until the end of the 18th century, see Olga Katsiardi-Hering, 'Cites-port de l'Adriatique. Coexistence ou vie en commun de leurs habitants? Proposition de recherche', *Εώα και Εσπέρια* 4 (1999-2000): 15. During this period, both terms had primarily religious connotation, denoting the followed rite. For instance, various ethnic communities in the Balkans, in Albania or Dalmatia, were characterized as *di rito greco* or were recorded just as *greco*, see It. VII, Cod. 1655, 9511, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (hereafter BNM); Paschalis Kitromilides, "'Imagined Communities" and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans', in *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy. Studies in the Culture and Political Thought of South-Eastern Europe* (London: Aldershot, 1994), 149-192; Eva Faber, 'Il problema della tolleranza religiosa nell'area Alto-Adriatica nel secondo Settecento', in *Veneto, Istria e Dalmazia tra Sette e Ottocento. Aspetti economici, sociali, ed ecclesiastici*, ed. Filiberto Agostini (Venice: Istituto per le Ricerche di Storia Sociale e Religiosa – Marsilio, 1999), 107-108; Larry Wolff, *Venezia e gli Slavi. La scoperta della Dalmazia nell'età dell'Illuminismo* (Rome: Il Veltro Editrice, 2006), 349; Plakotos, 'The Venetian Inquisition and Aspects of "Otherness"', 126; Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants*, 157-158. Nevertheless, within the Greek national historiographical production, from the 19th century onwards, the term *greco* was conceived as the point of convergence of two elements, the religious and the ethnic/national. This historiography appropriated the term *greco* and within a process of 'hellenization' invested it with a modern Greek content, in order to sustain the idea of the continuity of Greek identity throughout the centuries. It is only since the mid-90s that this content of the term has been reconsidered, see Antonis Liakos, "'Προς επισκευήν ολομελείας και ενότητος". Η δόμηση του εθνικού χρόνου', in *Επιστημονική συνάντηση στη μνήμη του Κ. Θ. Δημαρά* (Athens: ΕΙΕ, 1994), 175-199. The English version of this article: 'The Construction of National Time. The Making of the Modern Greek Historical Imagination', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 16, no.1 (2001): 27-42; Dimitris Arvanitakis, 'Un viaggio nella storiografia neogreca. Immagini della Dominante e degli ordini sociali delle città Ionie (secoli XVI-XVIII)', in *Italia-Grecia. Temi e storiografie a confronto*, 95-96.

²⁴⁷ In an official analytical census (*anagrafe*) of the *Isole del Levante* conducted towards the close of the 18th century (1770) there were recorded 1.252 *Latini*, 1.171 *Ebrei*, and 5.834 *Greci* in the city of Corfu, and a total of 48.484 people on the island, see Biblioteca, A5-I, Deputati e aggiunti alla provvision del denaro pubblico, ASV. This census, as well as one conducted about a decade later recording both the Venetian *Stato da Mar* and the *Terra Ferma*, formed part of a general effort made by the Venetian administration during the 18th century to reorganise fiscal control over its subject population in the territories of *Levante* and *Terra Ferma*, as well as to deal with religious matters, see Sevasti Lazari, 'Η συγκρότηση του Επτανήσιακού πληθυσμού. Η απογραφή του Πέτρου Καστροφύλακα (1583) και του Fr. Grimani (1760)', in *Ζ' Πανιώνιο Συνέδριο. Λευκάδα, 26-30 Μαΐου 2002. Πρακτικά*, ed. Dimitris Sklavenitis and Triantafyllos Slavenitis, vol. 2, *Ο χώρος και τα δημογραφικά μορφώματα. Οι κύριοι συντελεστές της οικονομίας* (Athens: Etaireia Leukadikon Meleton, 2004), 301-347. A different estimation of the Latin population is that of the Latin archbishop of Corfu Antontio Nani, who in his dispatch to the Pope in 1752 gave the number of 2000 *anime latine* in the island, see Aliko Nikiforou-Testone, *Δημόσιες τελετές στην Κέρκυρα κατά την περίοδο της βενετικής κυριαρχίας, 14ος-18ος αι.* (Athens: Themelio, 1999), 125-126.

²⁴⁸ During the Angevin period the Latin Church was made the official Church of the island and the new office of *Megalos Protopapas* was established as the head of the Greek Church. The *Megalos Protopapas* was under the Latin Archbishop's authority, see Constantinos G. Pitsakis, 'Η Ανατολική Εκκλησία της Βενετοκρατούμενης Επτανήσου σε αναζήτηση μιας "ανέφικτης κανονικότητας"', in *Ζ' Πανιώνιο Συνέδριο. Λευκάδα, 26-30 Μαΐου 2002. Πρακτικά*, ed. Dimitris Sklavenitis and Triantafyllos Slavenitis, vol. 1, *Ζητήματα πολιτισμικής ιστορίας* (Athens: Etaireia Leukadikon Meleton, 2004), 481-512; Panayotis D. Michailaris, "'Ημείς προεβιάσαμεν... και η αρχή των Ενετών εκυρώσατο". Η εκκλησιαστική διοίκηση των Επτανήσων στη συνάφειά της με την πολιτική διοίκηση', in *Ζ' Πανιώνιο Συνέδριο. Λευκάδα, 26-30 Μαΐου 2002. Πρακτικά*, vol. 1, 468-480.

abbeys located in the city, Saint Francis and *Annunziata*.²⁴⁹ Ethnically, the Latins were a diverse community, for beyond the civil officials of the local government that came from the Venetian state, the military officials and soldiers of the local garrison often came from the Eastern Balkans, or from as far as Germany and Ireland.²⁵⁰

The Greeks were in the majority, representing 71% of the city's population -and 95% of the population of the island.²⁵¹ They were mainly Venetian subjects –either native Corfiots or immigrants from the territories that Venice gradually lost, like Crete in 1699.²⁵² Although in Greek historiography it is generally assumed that Greeks were outright Eastern Orthodox Christians, so as to stress the continuity of belief between the past and the present, it is worth noting here that the Greeks of Corfu were not a 'typical' Eastern Orthodox community. For while the Greek Church followed the Greek rite,²⁵³ its head, the *Megalos Protopapas*, was not under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople.²⁵⁴ During the first centuries of the Venetian period, he remained under the jurisdiction of the Latin Archbishop. And later, in the 16th century (1578), Venice removed him from the Latin Archbishop's authority and put him instead under that of the local Venetian government,²⁵⁵ in an initiative that intended to articulate Venice's independence from the papal authority²⁵⁶ as well as its intention to claim

²⁴⁹ Agoropoulou-Birbili, 'Η αρχιτεκτονική των λατινικών ναών της Κέρκυρας'.

²⁵⁰ Documentation on this community can be found in the marriage registers preserved at the Latin Archdiocese of Corfu.

²⁵¹ Biblioteca, A5–I, Deputati e aggiunti alla provvision del denaro pubblico, ASV.

²⁵² Maria Patramani, 'Οι Κρητικοί πρόσφυγες (1645 - 1669) και οι τύχες τους στις νέες εστίες εγκατάστασής τους', *Πεπραγμένα του Η' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου*, vol. 2 (Heraklion: Etaireia Kritikon Istorikon Meleton, 2000), 187 – 196.

²⁵³ For the Greek rite, see here, note 7.

²⁵⁴ The Patriarch of Constantinople was also never involved in the election of the head of the Greek church. Instead, the *Megalos Protopapas* was elected by a body of local Greek priests along with the local Council, where both Latins and Greeks participated, while his election had to be approved by the local Venetian administration (*Reggimento*). Yet the priests of Corfu were ordained by Eastern Orthodox bishops in the island of Kefalonia or elsewhere, as the *Megalos Protopapas* did not have such authority, an issue that often created frictions within the Greek religious community of the island, see Evangelia Skoufari, 'La Chiesa ortodossa nelle Isole Ionie. Un bilancio sulla storiografia greca', in *Geografie Confessionali. Cattolici e ortodossi nel crepuscolo della Repubblica di Venezia (1718-1797)*, ed. Giuseppe Gullino and Egidio Ivetic (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2009), 171-172. For the election of the *Megalos Protopapas* see Spyridon K. Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της εκκλησίας της Κέρκυρας από της συστάσεως αυτής μέχρι του νυν* (Corfu: Aspiotis, 1920), 63-65 and Athanassios Tsitsas, *Η Εκκλησία της Κέρκυρας κατά την Λατινοκρατίαν, 1267-1797* (Corfu: A. Geromeriatis, 1969). For the local council and its gradual crystallization during the 16th and 17th centuries see Nikos Karapidakis, *Civis fidelis. L'avènement et l'affirmation de la citoyenneté corfiote, XVIème-XVIIème siècles* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992).

²⁵⁵ Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της εκκλησίας της Κέρκυρας*, 60; Dimitrios Kapadochos, *Η απονομή της δικαιοσύνης στην Κέρκυρα από τους Μεγάλους Πρωτοπαπάδες την Ενετική περίοδο (1604-1797) σύμφωνα με τα ανέκδοτα έγγραφα του ιστορικού αρχείου Κερκύρας* (Athens, 1990), 66-67; Michailaris, "'Ημείς προεβιβάσαμεν... και η αρχή των Ενετών εκυρώσατο"'; Pitsakis, 'Η Ανατολική Εκκλησία της Βενετοκρατούμενης Επτανήσου'; Skoufari, 'La Chiesa ortodossa nelle Isole Ionie', 172.

²⁵⁶ Cecilia Cristellon and Silvana Seidel Menchi, 'Religious Life', in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400–1797*, ed. Eric R. Dursteler (Brill: Leiden, Boston, 2013), 398-399, 403-406.

control over religious matters on the island, but also to establish and protect alliances with the local elite.

It seems then that by the 18th century the two Christian communities of the city of Corfu, Greek and Latin, had become rather entangled in a common local urban religious culture²⁵⁷ that owed as much to everyday coexistence as to the ‘syncretic strategies’²⁵⁸ that the Venetian authorities crafted. The latter although ostensibly adopted a ‘neutral stance’,²⁵⁹ at the same time they carefully encouraged and regulated this common culture, through the institutionalization of joint public ceremonies and masses,²⁶⁰ the authorization of cross-rite marriage,²⁶¹ as well as the gradual appropriation of the veneration of *Ayios Spyridon*, the island’s patron-saint, and his incorporation into a shared local religious cult.²⁶² On the other hand, this common culture did not necessarily obliterate difference²⁶³ nor did it absorb inter-confessional tension.²⁶⁴ On the contrary, sometimes it even sharpened it, as the local religious authorities tried to preserve the limits of their jurisdiction and maintain their flocks by adopting a polemical rhetoric as well as drawing and reiterating confessional difference -a

²⁵⁷ Nikos Karapidakis, ‘Οι σχέσεις διοικούντα και διοικουμένου στη βενετοκρατούμενη Κέρκυρα’, in *Κέρκυρα, μια μεσογειακή σύνθεση. Νησιωτισμός, διασυνδέσεις, ανθρώπινα περιβάλλοντα, 16ος-19ος αι. Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου, Κέρκυρα 22-25 Μαΐου 1996*, ed. Alikì Nikiforou (Corfu: Società Culturale ‘Korkyra’, 1998), 183-184; Nikolaidis, “‘Local Religion’ in Corfu”. This culture is also reflected in the religious art produced on the island, see Alkiviadis Charalambidis, *Συμβολή στη μελέτη της επτανησιώτικης ζωγραφικής του 18ου και 19ου αιώνα* (Yannena: Etairia Epeirotikon Meleton, 1978); Miltiadis Papanikolaou, *Η ελληνική τέχνη του 18ου και 19ου αιώνα* (Thessaloniki: Vaniás, 2005).

²⁵⁸ Krstić, ‘The Ambiguous Politics of “Ambiguous Sanctuaries”’, 254.

²⁵⁹ Alfredo Viggiano, ‘Venezia e la Chiesa greca. Forme del potere e modi del conflitto nelle isole del Levante’, in *Il Mediterraneo centro-orientale. Tra vecchie e nuove egemonie*, ed. Massimo Costantini (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1998), 21-32.

²⁶⁰ Nikiforou, *Δημόσιες τελετές στην Κέρκυρα*. Common rituals were held in Venetian Crete already from the 13th century, and were also established in the Peloponnese during the second Venetian period (1685-1715), see Consultori in iure, b. 423, ASV.

²⁶¹ Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της εκκλησίας της Κέρκυρας*, 56-58.

²⁶² Nikolaidis, ‘Η λατρεία του αγίου Σπυρίδωνα στην Κέρκυρα’.

²⁶³ During the last decade or so, studies on the themes of coexistence or syncretism are revisiting and reflecting anew on the notion and dimensions of difference in multi-confessional and multi-religious settings – a shift that is not independent from the contemporary crisis of the multi-cultural model. For such a critique see Robert M. Hayden, ‘Antagonistic Tolerance. Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans’, *Current Anthropology* 43, no. 2 (2002): 205-219; Christine Kooi, *Calvinists and Catholics during Holland’s Golden Age. Heretics and Idolaters* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Tijana Krstić “The Ambiguous Politics of “Ambiguous Sanctuaries”.

²⁶⁴ As the case of Rachel Vivante fleetingly indicates, this culture would be seriously challenged towards the end of the 18th century, when the Russian influence on the Ionian Islands played an important role in the reiteration on the part of Greeks of religious difference between the two denominations, see Despina Er. Vlassi, ‘Η συμμετοχή των Επτανησίων στα Ορλωφικά (1770) και η αντίδραση της Βενετίας’, *Mnimon* 8 (1982): 64-84; Nikos Rotzokos, *Εθναφύπνιση και εθνογένεση. Ορλωφικά και ελληνική ιστοριογραφία* (Αθήνα: Βιβλιόραμα, 2007); Nikolaidis, ‘Η λατρεία του αγίου Σπυρίδωνα στην Κέρκυρα’, 103-104, 330-344.

stance adopted mostly by the Latin Archbishops, who seem to have been in bad terms with both the Greek Church and the Venetian government of Corfu.²⁶⁵

Yet, beyond the Venetian Greek subjects, in the city of Corfu there were also Ottoman Greek subjects -merchants, immigrant workers like those making fur coats, and travellers-coming from the opposite continental land, mostly Epirus.²⁶⁶ Towards the end of the 17th century (1687) these Ottoman Christians established their own church in a prominent location in the city center opposite *Ayios Spyridon*, known as the ‘Virgin of the Foreigners’. This was supposedly the only church in the city ‘where the eastern byzantine music was sung’,²⁶⁷ a hint that allows us to assume that for those Christians coming from the Ottoman Empire, the local religious blend of Latin and Greek elements described above seemed quite strange and unfamiliar –while we know that and at times this culture was altogether rejected, as in the notorious libel, dated in the 16th century and produced by monks from Mount Athos, entitled ‘The errors and faults of Corfiots for which we hate them’, where eleven transgressions of the Greeks of Corfu were listed, including cross-rite marriages and godparenthood, shared funeral masses, common Easter celebration, and incorporation of Latin rituals in the Greek Church.²⁶⁸

Along with Christians, in the city of Corfu also lived a Jewish population numbering roughly as much as the Latins.²⁶⁹ The Corfiot Jewry was organized, as already mentioned, around two rather adversary and antagonistic communities.²⁷⁰ The Greek one (*Sinagoga*

²⁶⁵ See Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της εκκλησίας της Κέρκυρας*, 52-59.

²⁶⁶ Gerassimos Pagratis, ‘Γιαννιώτες έμποροι στη Βενετία (1550-1567)’, *Θησαυρίσματα* 28 (1998): 129-174.

²⁶⁷ ‘Υπεραγία Θεοτόκος Φανερωμένη των Ξένων’, see Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της εκκλησίας της Κέρκυρας*, 208.

²⁶⁸ The document ‘Τα σφάλματα και αιτιάματα των Κερκυραίων, ήγουν Κορυφιατών, δι’ α αυτούς αποστρεφόμεθα’ by Spyridon Lambrou. The whole text can be also found in Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της εκκλησίας της Κέρκυρας*, 61-62.

²⁶⁹ See here, note 246.

²⁷⁰ The dating of the distinct organization and institutionalization of the two communities, the Greek and the Italian, is rather unclear. Doctor de Mordo, writing in 1865, stated that the Jews ‘[f]ino da antico dividevansi in rito greco, o nazionale, e latino, spagnuolo’, and the same viewpoint was adopted by Salo Baron, who wrote that ‘[f]rom time immemorial the Jewish population of the island was divided into a “Greek” and an “Italian” community’, and later followed by Preschel, see Donato de Mordo, *Saggio di una descrizione geografico-storica delle Isole Ionie (Eptanesia) proposto ad uso della gioventù studiosa* (Corfu: Tipografia Ionia dei Fratelli Caos, 1865), 65; Salo Baron, ‘Jewish Immigration and Communal Conflicts’, *The Joshua Starr Memorial Volume. Studies in History and Philology*, ed. Abraham G. Duker et al. (New York, 1953), 170; idem, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 17 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 175; Pearl Liba Preschel, ‘The Jews of Corfu’ (PhD diss., New York: New York University, 1984), 22. Romanos, on the other hand, argued that it was only after 1540 that the division was created, a viewpoint followed also by Costas Dafnis, see Ioannis Romanos, ‘Η εβραϊκή κοινότητα της Κέρκυρας’, *Κερκυραϊκά Χρονικά* 7 (1959): 394-397; Costas Dafnis, *Οι Ισραηλίτες της Κέρκυρας. Χρονικό επτά αιώνων* (Corfu, 1978), 8. The idea that there had been two distinct communities before the Venetian period is largely based on the text of an embassy sent to Venice in 1663, where

Greca Corfiotta) was considered the oldest and consisted of Romaniotes that originated mostly from Corfu, yet there were also some Jews from the Ottoman city of Yannena that had connections with Corfu.²⁷¹ Nevertheless, the Greek Jewish community was in decline since the 17th century, while in the 18th century it numbered only few members.²⁷² The Italian Jewish community (*Sinagoga Italiana Corfiotta*), where the Vivante family belonged, hosted early on people of both Iberian and Italian origin,²⁷³ and had been significantly enhanced after the second half of the 16th century,²⁷⁴ when it first incorporated those Jews that were expelled from Apulia in 1540, and several decades later Iberian Jews, to whom Venice had granted freedom of trade in all its territories.²⁷⁵ If the Jews of Apulia left their deep imprint on the Italian community's organization and cultural profile, the 'various Ponentine and Spanish and other foreigner Jews'²⁷⁶ rendered it an economically vibrant community.²⁷⁷

Although there was a Jewish quarter (*ebraica*) in the city of Corfu, the Jewish population was never confined to a ghetto in the sense of a compulsory, segregated exclusively Jewish quarter, with enclosing walls and guarded gates controlling the movement of the Jews in and out of their quarter.²⁷⁸ In fact, the Corfiot *ebraica* was dotted with Greek

the Italian Jewish community of Corfu wrote that upon the annexation of the island by the Venetians in 1386 there were 'doi Giudaiche'. This was interpreted as 'two communities', yet the term *giudaiche* could equally refer just to residential settlements, and not to distinctly organized communities, see also David Jacoby, 'Venetian Jews in the Eastern Mediterranean', in *Gli Ebrei a Venezia, secoli XIV-XVIII. Atti del convegno internazionale organizzato dall'Istituto di Storia della Società e dello Stato Veneziano della Fondazione Cini, Venezia, Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, 5-10 giugno 1983*, ed. Gaetano Cozzi, (Milano: Edizioni Comunità, 1987), 37, 41; Maria Georgopoulou, 'Mapping Religious and Ethnic Identities in the Venetian Colonial Empire', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 26, no. 3 (1996): 481.

²⁷¹ Christos Zambakolas, *Η ιστορική παρουσία των Γιαννιωτών Εβραίων μέσα από την εμπορική τους δραστηριότητα* (Yannena: Iosif and Esther Gani Institution, 2013).

²⁷² Provveditori da terra e da mar e altre cariche (PTM), b. 1189-1190, numero 152, ASV.

²⁷³ Nadia Zeldes, 'Jewish Settlement in Corfu in the Aftermath of the Expulsions from Spain and Southern Italy, 1492-1541', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 27, no. 2 (2012): 175-188.

²⁷⁴ For Jewish migration towards Corfu see Romanos, 'Η εβραϊκή κοινότης', 394; Cecil Roth, *Gli Ebrei a Venezia* (Bologna: Cremonese, 1933), 359-361; Baron, 'Jewish immigration', 171; Dafnis, *Οι Ισραηλίτες*, 8-9, Preschel, 'The Jews of Corfu', 21-22.

²⁷⁵ For the charter of 1589 that targeted primarily Ponentine Jews see Benjamin Ravid, 'The First Charter of the Jewish Merchant of Venice, 1589', *Association for Jewish Studies Review*, 1 (1976): 187-222; Benjamin Arbel, 'Jews in International Trade. The Emergence of the Levantines and the Ponentines', in *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*, ed. Robert C. Davis and Benjamin Ravid (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 86-94.

²⁷⁶ '[D]iversi Hebrei Ponentini, Spagnoli et altri forestieri con saluocondotto di V[ostr]a Ser[enissim]a'. The extract is from the embassy sent to Venice by the Italian Jewish community of Corfu in 1663 published in Baron, 'Jewish Immigration', 175.

²⁷⁷ The double legacy of the Italian Corfiot Jewish community can also be traced in its synagogue that was also called 'Apulian' or 'Spanish', see Romanos, 'Η εβραϊκή κοινότης', 394-395; Roth, *Gli Ebrei*, 361; Dafnis, *Οι Ισραηλίτες*, 8; Preschel, 'The Jews of Corfu', 22, 33-34.

²⁷⁸ Since the 16th century there were constant attempts on the part of the local Council to establish a ghetto, nevertheless these were never successful. In 1630, the nobleman Stefanos Mastracas in his description of the city and island of Corfu commented that Jews 'habitano più tosto sparsi per le case de christiani da loro

churches,²⁷⁹ while members of the Jewish elite lived among Christians and even in the city's Old Fortress,²⁸⁰ a space reserved for the local elite, a fact indicating that the local Jewish elite enjoyed close ties to the local Christian elite.

Admittedly, the most difficult presence to trace in the city of Corfu was that of the Ottoman Muslims or converts from Islam to Christianity who resided there or travelled through the city.²⁸¹ Studies focusing on the commercial relations between Venice and the Ottoman lands attest to the presence of Ottoman Muslim merchants in the city of Corfu, along with Ottoman Jewish and Christian merchants.²⁸² Yet there was also another, less prominent Muslim presence in Corfu: that of Ottoman Muslim captives, mostly women and children, caught during the Ottoman-Venetian wars that took place between the mid-17th and the early 18th century. As we will see,²⁸³ most of them were made to convert, and after conversion, they entered the domestic service as slaves or servants in local households. Information on their post-baptism itineraries is scarce. We can only catch glimpses of their presence, when for instance the -almost always- 'illegitimate' offsprings of Muslim women or converts were

affittate, che uniti, ma però la maggior parte stanno ritirati verso la contrada della Nostra Donna Odigitria che è verso fortezza nova', see *Descrizione dell'Isola di Corfu fatta nel 1630 di Stefano Mastraca* (Venezia: Tip. di Pietro Naratovich, 1869), 18-19. And about a century later, in 1713, three captains travelling from Venice to Corfu commented on the Corfiot Jewry, again confirming the absence of spatial segregation: 'nell'Isola di Corfù li Ebrei non hanno Ghetto, et abitano per la Città, dove negotiano liberamente d'ogni sorte di mercanzie niuna eccettuata, così all'ingrosso, come al minuto, tenendo anco molti di loro bottegge aperte, così nella Piazza, come per la Città, nelle quali vendono, così all'ingrosso, come al Minuto ogni sorte di mercantie, e cose di uso et anco comestibili d'ogni sorte così à cristiani, come ad ebrei; et fanno molti sorti di proffessioni, et Arti', see *Inquisitori agli Ebrei*, b. 31, f. 392r, ASV. See also Preschel, 'The Jews of Corfu', 23; Afroditi Agoropoulou-Birbili, 'Η εβραϊκή συνοικία της Κέρκυρας', in *Η εβραϊκή παρουσία στον ελληνικό χώρο (4ος-19ος αι.)*, ed. Anna Lambropoulou and Kostas Tsiknakis (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation-Institute for Byzantine Research, 2008), 123-133; Photis Baroutsos, 'Privileges, Legality and Prejudice. The Jews of Corfu on the Way to Isolation', in *'Interstizi'. Culture ebraico-cristiane a Venezia e nei suoi domini dal medioevo all'età moderna*, ed. Uwe Israel, Robert Jütte, and Reinhold C. Mueller (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2010), 306, 310-312.

²⁷⁹ Agoropoulou-Birbili, 'Η εβραϊκή συνοικία της Κέρκυρας'.

²⁸⁰ In the 1760s census, twelve Jews are recorded to reside in the Old Fortress, while we know that in 1776 the local Rabbi lived there, see *Biblioteca*, A5-I, *Deputati e aggiunti alla provvision del denaro pubblico*, ASV; *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1110, c. 121r, ASV.

²⁸¹ During the last decade there is a growing literature, especially in French historiography, on the theme of the Muslim presence in Europe. See David Do Paço, 'Institutionnaliser la coexistence religieuse? "Turcs et sujets turcs de Vienne", dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle', in *Des religions dans la ville. Ressorts et stratégies de coexistence dans l'Europe des XVIe-XVIIIe siècles*, ed. David Do Paço, Mathilde Mogne, and Laurent Tatarenko (Rennes: Presse Universitaire de Rennes, 2010), 143-164; Jocelyne Dakhli and Bernard Vincent, *Les musulmans dans l'histoire de l'Europe*, 2 vols (Paris: Albin Michel, 2011-2013); Lucette Valensi, *Ces étrangers familiers. Musulmans en Europe (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris: Payot et Rivages, 2012).

²⁸² Pagratis, 'Γιαννιώτες έμποροι στη Βενετία'.

²⁸³ A more analytical presentation will follow in the next chapter.

baptized in the Latin Cathedral;²⁸⁴ or when convert women got married in the Greek churches of the city to men coming from the poorer milieus of the suburbs.²⁸⁵

b. Conversion between the Latin and Greek Churches

The two established Churches, the Latin and the Greek, worked side by side as parallel and complementary systems. As stated in a decree issued in 1714 by the *Provveditore e Capitano di Corfu* Angelo Malipiero, '[...] quelli volessero rinascere nel Grembo di Santa Chiesa, debbano portarsi voluntariam[ent]e dall Il[ustrissi]mo MonSig[no]r Arcivescovo, o pure dall Rev[erent]e Protopapa perche possino esser Cattechizati giusto li Sacri Canonì', thus officially bestowing competence on the matter of conversion on both churches.²⁸⁶ At the same time, it seems that the two churches targeted to a certain extent different groups.²⁸⁷ During the second half of the 17th century and the first decades of the 18th century, when –as in the Venetian *Casa-* the presence in Corfu of Muslims converts, most probably captives, was gravely increased due to the Ottoman-Venetian wars, it was the Latin Church that managed these conversions, presumably with the cooperation of the local political-military authorities. The Latin Church also dealt with the conversion of the very few Protestants that reached Corfu, and partly of the local Jewry. Indeed, judging by the available family names of Corfiot Jewish converts baptized in the Latin Cathedral, it seems that the Latin Church was more 'popular' among the local Italian Jewry.²⁸⁸ Ester daughter of Abram Forte, Salamon son of Samuel Belleli and Chiona, Hamda daughter of Giosua Cesana and Smeralda, Rachel daughter of Daniel Vivante and Saffira, Gratia daughter of Rafael Damosto and Stamo, Giosua son of Micael Dente and Stamo, Samuel son of Caim Coen²⁸⁹ or the four children of the Corfiot Naccamuli Dente and the Venetian Diamanto.²⁹⁰ Additionally, the majority of non-Corfiot Jewish converts were either from Venice and the Venetian territories, like Perla

²⁸⁴ Duomo-Battesimi, b. 6, c. 102v, 148v, 161r, 176r; b. 7, c. 5r, 12r, 87r, LAC.

²⁸⁵ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 12, c. 311v, 332r, b. 13, c. 495r, 765v, 841r, 913v, GSAC.

²⁸⁶ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 15, C. 1142r-v, GSAC.

²⁸⁷ Although in the *Megalos Protopapas* archival series there can be found few certifications of baptisms conducted in the Latin Church, these must have been brought in the *Megalos Protopapas* office by converts themselves in order to attest their baptism, and it cannot be assumed that this was a regular practice, see Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 14, c. 568r; b. 15, c. 632r, 633r, 853r, GSAC.

²⁸⁸ Of the 67 Jewish converts whose origin or the origin of their parents is indicated, 38 were Corfiot, and 25 of these bore Italian family names.

²⁸⁹ See respectively Duomo-Battesimi, b. 4, c. 3v, b. 9, c. 102r, b. 10, c. 135v, b. 10, c. 119v, b. 7, c. 25r, b. 10, c. 199r, b. 6, c. 119v, LAC.

²⁹⁰ Duomo-Battesimi, b. 10, c. 7r, 8r, LAC.

daughter of Lion Rieti from Venice and Cipora Bon from Zante,²⁹¹ or from other Italian towns, like Ancona and Modena.

The Greek Church, on the other hand, was almost exclusively directed towards the local Jewry. Unfortunately there is little information in the *Megalos Protopapas* series referring to which community these Jews belonged, but the scarce evidence from both this archival series as well as the *Ayios Spyridon* church indicates that members of both Jewish communities were baptized there, like for example the sons of the Greek Jewish families of Panghali and Mustachi as well as Mene Beleli or the two daughters of Lieto Mordo.²⁹² When compared to the Latin Church, significantly fewer Muslims were baptized in the Greek Church, but this Church managed a lot of cases of ‘reconciliation’, that is of Christians that had turned to Islam and now wanted to become Christians again.²⁹³

The impression that each Church addressed, to a certain extent, different groups is also supported by stories of candidate converts who expressed the desire to be baptized within a specific Church. I will refer here briefly to four women whose cases were recorded in the *Megalos Protopapas* documents. In 1738 the Muslim Rebbie from Trikala²⁹⁴ and the Corfiot Jew Sylá, daughter of the deceased Chaim Mustachi,²⁹⁵ appeared before the *Megalos Protopapas* office. Both women expressed their desire to be baptized in the ‘Greek rite’. Indeed, both of them had an affinity with the Greek Church or the Greek milieu. In her deposition, Rebbie told the officer and the priest who examined her that as a child in Trikala she was raised by a Christian nurse, Maro. This nurse took care of her also when her Muslim parents died and she was still at a very young age. Maro brought up Rebbie as a Christian of the Eastern rite, and it was her desire to bring the girl to Corfu and baptize her. But this did not happen as Maro died, and thus Rebbie made a vow to reach on her own Corfu and be baptized at the church of *Ayios Spyridon*. Sylá, on the other hand, said in her testimony that ‘from my soul and heart I want to be baptized in the Eastern Church’.²⁹⁶ In her case, the preference for the Greek rite could have come from the fact that her family, judging by the

²⁹¹ Perla was born in Corfu, see *Duomo-Battesimi*, b. 9, c. 48r, LAC.

²⁹² Άγιος Σπυρίδωνας, Βαπτίσεις, b. 148, c. 7v, 9v, 10r, Ληξιαρχικές Πράξεις Εκκλησιών, GSAC.

²⁹³ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 15, c. 719r-720v, 1014r-1018v, b. 23, f. 9, c. 547r-v, b. 30, f. 1, c. 17r, b.32, f. 10, c. 10r-v, b. 39, f. 32, c. 8r-v, GSAC.

²⁹⁴ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 30, f. 1, c. 27r-v, GSAC.

²⁹⁵ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 30, f. 1, c. 38r-v, GSAC.

²⁹⁶ ‘[Κ]ράζοντάς με ο υψηλότατος αυθέντης Γενεράλης, και εροτόντας με αν θέλω να γενώ χριστιανοί του απεκρίθηκα πως επεθιμώ, και θέλω εκ ψυχής και καρδίας να βαπτιστώ απο την ανατολικήν εκκλησίαν, και να τελειώσω εις την χριστιανικήν πίστιν χάριτι χ[ριστ]ου, και έτζι με έπεμψεν εδώ’, Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 30, f. 1, c. 38v, GSAC.

family name Mustachi, must have belonged to the Greek Jewish community of Corfu –twenty five years earlier, a member of the same family was baptized in the church of *Ayios Spyridon*.²⁹⁷

Several decades later, in 1762, the fifteen-year old Corfiot Chanaa, daughter of the Jew Cocoraki, appeared before the *Megalos Protopapas* asking to be baptized.²⁹⁸ When answering the questions of the officer, Chanaa recounted that initially she had recurred to the Latin Archbishop, but due to her ‘inclination and predisposition towards the Greek rite’²⁹⁹ she then turned to the *Megalos Protopapas*. Our last case is that of Sterina,³⁰⁰ daughter of the butcher Mordochai, again from the family of Mustachi.³⁰¹ She appeared before the *Megalos Protopapas* office in 1766 asking to be baptized, and especially to become ‘an Eastern Christian’.³⁰² In both these cases, again, we can assume that the women came from Jewish families that had a greater familiarity with the Greek milieu.

Due to the lack of a centralized institution managing religious conversion in Corfu, the procedure was spread across various agents and various physical spaces. As the archival material from the Latin Cathedral is of an exclusively serial character, almost nothing can be derived from there in relation to the followed conversion procedure and its stages. It is instead the documents from the *Megalos Protopapas* that permits to a certain extent such a reconstruction - though it should not be taken for granted that the procedure was identical for both Churches. The first step that candidate converts would take was to approach an agent who would help them get in touch with the religious institutions – in other words, the first and fundamental step for candidate converts was to approach and connect with a local network that would help them navigate the political and ecclesiastical structures. Although this was not a prerequisite, and there were few cases of people reaching a religious institution on their own, the common practice was to appear before religious authorities with an agent, who would introduce candidate converts and assert their sincere intentions. Various people were willing to act as agents: clerical and other ecclesiastic officers, but also representatives of the local or Venetian administrative and military authorities – and in the case of physical absence

²⁹⁷ Άγιος Σπυρίδωνας-Βαπτίσεις, b. 148, c. 7v, Ληξιαρχικές Πράξεις Εκκλησιών, GSAC.

²⁹⁸ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 51, f. 3, c. 178r-v, GSAC.

²⁹⁹ ‘[...] κατά πρώτον εκατάφυγε εις την επίσκεψιν και βοήθειαν του Ιταλικού Αρχιερέως Κερκύρας, και δια να έχη περισσότεραν έφεσιν, και προαίρεσιν εις το ρωμαϊκό ρίτον, επρόστρεψε εις την αυτού Παναιδεσιμότητα’, Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 51, f. 3, c. 178r, GSAC.

³⁰⁰ Her name must have probably been ‘Esther’, yet in the documents it is recorded as ‘Sterina’.

³⁰¹ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 51, f. 7, c. 354r-v, GSAC.

³⁰² ‘[Ε]γώ είμαι εβραία, το ονομάμου είναι στερίνα, θ[υγατέρα] του Μορδαχή Μουστάκη Μακελάρη, και θέλω να γίνω χριστιανή ανατολική’, Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 51, f. 7, c. 354r, GSAC.

of a certain person, an official letter from a trustworthy authority, both secular and religious, could play the same role. Additionally, in some cases, the network had more than one nodes, for several people were involved in supporting, accommodating or even hiding candidate converts before they actually reached the ecclesiastical authorities. Indeed, in the previously mentioned decree issued in 1714 by the *Provveditore e Capitano di Corfu* Angelo Malipiero it was stated that no one should ‘insidiosam[ent]e ricever nelle proprie case ebrei cossi grandi come piccoli, sotto pretesto di battezarli’.³⁰³ Although this decree was issued after the three children of Elia Mordo were abducted from their house, and presumably baptized,³⁰⁴ it nevertheless indirectly confirms that this was not an uncommon practice.

Let me turn to some stories that illustrate this first stepping stone in the procedure towards conversion. The previously mentioned Corfiot Sylva, daughter of the deceased Chaim Mustachi, had escaped her house and had gone to the house of a Christian woman to hide. After consultation between the woman and the authorities, Sylva was summoned at the Palace of the *Provveditore* Grimani, from where she was escorted to the office of the *Great Protopapas* accompanied by an adjutant and two confident men of the *Provveditore* Grimani.³⁰⁵ Another young Corfiot Jew, Stamo nineteen years old, daughter of the deceased butcher Elietzer Pangali, had also escaped her home several years earlier, in 1714, and was accompanied to the *Megalos Protopapas* office by Christodoulos Tzaousopoulos - although he was not a priest, he assisted her later in her catechization.³⁰⁶

Contacting an agent was not a concern only for local Jews seeking conversion. Jewish and Muslims travellers followed the same pattern.³⁰⁷ In 1714, the twenty-three -year old Jew Iosif Barbasai from Crete appeared before the *Megalos Protopapas* office accompanied by a priest, Michalis Miaros.³⁰⁸ Several years later, when the previously mentioned Rebbie from Trikala appeared before the *Megalos Protopapas*, she was accompanied by an adjutant of the *Provveditore Generale* Grimani and a letter of recommendation from the latter clarifying that

³⁰³ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 15, C. 1142r-v, GSAC.

³⁰⁴ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 15, C. 1143, GSAC.

³⁰⁵ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 30, f. 1, c. 38r-v, GSAC. The increased number of those escorting her can be explained then by the fact that the girl had escaped her house and was probably looked for by her family and other members of the Jewish community.

³⁰⁶ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 15, c. 1144r-1145v, GSAC.

³⁰⁷ Eric Dursteler recounts the story of the Christian Maria from Milos, widow of the local Ottoman military official, who fled with her three daughters the island in 1637 and took refuge to Corfu. Before meeting the Latin Archbishop Bragadin, Maria had contacted a local nobleman, Santo Burlion, who represented her in the audience with the Archbishop, see Dursteler, *Renegade Women*, 85.

³⁰⁸ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 15, c. 1161r-1162v, GSAC.

it was he who sent her there after ‘she had asked for it’.³⁰⁹ Before arriving there, Rebbie had stayed in the house of a woman named Drosoula, wife of the deceased *Capo* Giorgaki Degente.

It is thus clear that when the majority of candidate converts approached the *Megalos Protopapas* office, they were already embedded into a local Christian network woven of political, military and ecclesiastical authorities and, at times, the local Christian population. Residents in Corfu, or travellers that reached the city, these non-Christians seem to fall ‘in the nets of discipline’³¹⁰ -or indeed take advantage of them. The next step in the conversion procedure was the deposition that the candidate convert gave to the *Megalos Protopapas* in person, or another ecclesiastical officer, with the presence of a scribe and the assistance of an interpreter, if necessary. The process in Corfu was practically the same as in Venice: a standardized set of question was asked that sketched a mini-narrative of the candidate converts’ past and established the reasons for their present desire to become Christians. Then, after the issue of the necessary permission, the period of catechesis, or ‘istruzione, che fasi colla viva voce’,³¹¹ as the *Megalos Protopapas* Cappadoca described it, followed.

The prescribed period of catechesis was not standardized. As we saw, in the case of the Venetian *Casa* it was typically eight months. In the Greek Church of Corfu the prescribed period of catechesis was forty days,³¹² and it seems that it was the same in the local Latin

³⁰⁹ ‘[[Π]ροσήχθη η παρούσα γραφή εις χείρας της αυτού παναιδεσιμότητος παρά της κάτωθι ρεβιές απεσταλθείσας παρά του πανυψηλοτάτου αυθέντος προβλεπτού Γγενεράλ Θαλάσσης Γριμάνη δι’ ενός αγιουτάντε του παλαιού μετά της αυτής τούρκας αναζητούσης’, Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 30, f. 1, c. 27r, GSAC.

³¹⁰ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xiv-xv.

³¹¹ Inquisitori di Stato, b. 1110, c. 23r, ASV. *Megalos Protopapas* Cappadoca also gave a definition of the state of *catecumeno*, which is very close to Van Gennep’s and Turner’s concept of liminality in ritual societies: ‘[[L]a Chiesa riconobbe i Catecumeni, val a dire coloro che sono sotto l’istruzione per esser capaci di ricevere il Santo Battesimo, e della loro situazione ne compose uno stato medio tra gl’infedeli, ed i battezzati, che intitolò Catecumenato’, Inquisitori di Stato, b. 1110, c. 23v, ASV (italics are mine). For the concept of liminality see Arnold Van Gennep, *Les rites de passage. Étude systématique des rites de la porte et du seuil, de l’hospitalité, de l’adoption, de la grossesse et de l’accouchement, de la naissance, de l’enfance, de la puberté, de l’initiation, de l’ordination, du couronnement, des fiançailles et du mariage, des dunérailles, ses Saisons, etc.* (Paris: Emile Nourry, 1909); Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

³¹² Yet, in 1782 a Jewish couple with their daughter originating from the city of Yannena in Epirus, arrived at Corfu. They recounted that before coming to Corfu they had stayed in the island of Cephalonia, where they received catechesis for about two months, but they were not baptized as the time of catechesis was not deemed sufficient: ‘[...] και εκατηχίσαν το καταδύναμιν εξ ημών, αλλ’ επειδή και φοβούμενοι εις αυτό μήπως και επιστραφούν εις τα οπίσω δεν τους εβαπτίσαμεν έως να απεράση καιρός δια να ειδοούμεν την σταθερότητα της γνώμης αυτών’, Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 65, f. 3, c. 84r-v, GSAC.

Church as well.³¹³ The location where catechesis could take place varied, as there was not an especially designated place for this purpose. Information about the location of catechesis conducted by the Latin Church and residence of converts during this period is practically inexistent. The only insight provided on this issue is from a baptism entry in 1688: Fatime, a thirteen-year old Muslim girl from the area of Gastuni at the Peloponnese³¹⁴ was instructed on a boat by the owner and sailors and then for two days at the Latin Cathedral;³¹⁵ probably then the *Duomo* could have been one of the places of instruction. According to the richer information in the *Megalos Protopapas* archival series, often the candidate converts' catechesis took place in the house where they were temporarily hosted. Occasionally the house of a nobleman was chosen, usually from the religious milieu. This is the case, for instance, of the above mentioned young Stamo from Corfu. After her examination, the *Protopapas* ordained her catechesis:

The venerable [*Protopapas*] having heard [Stamo's deposition], and accepting [her], but having no means to keep her in his sacred residence, he ordained that the catechesis should take place within the next forty days in the house of the nobleman *sior* Marino, present secretary [of the office of *Protopapas*], who is going to accept her with mercy, and that the preacher mister Victor Klapantzaras and the priest mister Evangelistis Fortzigos, along with the devout mister Christodoulos Tzaousopoulos should catechize the above mentioned Jew Stamo with diligence according to religious order, and afterwards they should inform the venerable [*Protopapas*].³¹⁶

³¹³ On the 19th of March 1679 a little Muslim boy two years old was baptized in the *Duomo*. In the correspondent entry it is noted that his mother was being catechized. Roughly forty days later, on the 5th of May, the mother was baptized, see *Duomo-Battesimi*, b. 6, c. 5r, 6v, LAC.

³¹⁴ From this area came the majority of Muslim converts baptized in the Peloponnese, see Georgios Nikolaou, 'Islamisations et Christianisations dans le Péloponnèse', 1715-ca. 1832 (Phd diss., Strasbourg: Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg, 1997), 63-64.

³¹⁵ '[...] è stata chatechizzata in Tartana dal Padrone, et Marineri, et per giorni due anco in questa Catedrale dal R[everendissi]mo S[igno]r Vic[ari]o G[e]n[era]le Assimopulo', see *Duomo-Battesimi*, b. 6, c. 128v, LAC.

³¹⁶ 'Ταύτα ακούσας η αυτού παναιδεσιμότης, και προσδέχοντάς την, μην έχοντας τρόπο να την κρατή εις την παρούσαν ιεροκατοικίαντου, εδιόρισε να ήθελε γενή η κατιχίσις της δια ταις τεσσαράκοντα ημέραις ερχομέναις εις το οσπίτιον του ευγενούς s[i]o r μαρίνου παρόν καγγελαρίου, οπίος θέλη να δεχτή με σπλάχνα χριστιανικά, και να ήθελαν προσταχθή ο λογιότατος κ[υριο]ς Βεκτορ Κλαπαντζαράς Ιεροκίρικας, και ο λογιότατος κ[υριο]ς ευαγγελιστής ιερεύς ο φόρτζιγος, σιμάτους δε και ο ευλαβέστατος κυρ χ[ριστο]δουλος τζαουσόπουλος να ήθελαν με πάσαν επιμέλειαν κατιχίσουν την άνωθεν στάμο αιβρέα κατά την εκκλησιαστικίν τάξιν, και μετά ταύτα να ήθελαν προσφέρουν ήδισι του αυτού παναιδεσιμωτάτου', *Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες*, b. 15, c. 1145v, GSAC.

In other cases it was the house of a priest that was going to accommodate the candidate convert.³¹⁷ The Jewish girl Sylva was to be instructed by the priest-monk Ieremias and accommodated at the house of the priest Stamatis. But most commonly, candidate converts were secluded in one of the monasteries of the Eastern Church, and preferably away from the city, in the suburbs: in Saint Nicolas of the Foreigners at the suburb of Garitsa,³¹⁸ in Saint George at the suburb of Mandouki,³¹⁹ in Saint Athanasios at the suburb of Anemomilos,³²⁰ in Saint Efymia at the suburb of Stratia,³²¹ in the monastery of Saint Catherine,³²² or even in the village Couramades.³²³ The choice of such segregated places seems to fit into conversion policies and notions that sought for a radical and profound transformation of the individual not only through instruction and catechesis, but also through dissociation with the converts' coreligionists or other former ties.³²⁴

As far as the financial support of the catechumens is concerned, there is scarce relevant information. In 1766, the *Megalos Protopapas* Cappadoca asked the vicars of all parish churches of the city to collect alms after the Sunday masses in order to support a Muslim family, currently dwelling at the Lazaretto for the necessary quarantine, that wanted to be baptized according to the Eastern rite.³²⁵ It is also plausible to suppose that while remaining in a private house or a monastery for the catechesis, some sort of support would have been provided to candidate converts, and this assumption is supported by a document of 1779, where it was specified that a candidate convert was accepted at the monastery of Saint Catherine, yet without assuming responsibility for his sustenance.³²⁶ In other cases, patents for alms-collecting were issued to candidate convert families, as in the case of a Jewish woman in 1780, to whom the *Megalos Protopapas* Chalichopoulos issued a patent in order to help her raise some funds to support herself and her three children during their catechesis period.³²⁷ Yet, a more important initiative was that undertaken by the *Megalos Protopapas* Aloyzios,

³¹⁷ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 30, f. 1, c. 38r-v, GSAC.

³¹⁸ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 15, c. 927r, GSAC. For the monastery see Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της εκκλησίας της Κέρκυρας*, 213.

³¹⁹ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 19, c. 13v-14r, 15r, GSAC. For the monastery see *ibid.*, 220.

³²⁰ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 62, f.3b, c. 58r, GSAC. For the monastery see *ibid.*, 217.

³²¹ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 32, f.10, c.8r-v; b. 51, f. 7, c. 354r-v, b. 62, f. 3a, c. 21r-v. For the monastery see *ibid.*, 215, 235

³²² Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 62, f. 3 Miscellanea, c. 165r, GSAC.

³²³ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 14, 333r-335v, GSAC. This is the case of a Jew, son of Menachem Coen of the deceased Calef who was kidnapped during the catechization period.

³²⁴ Rothman, 'Between Venice and Istanbul', 122.

³²⁵ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 62, c. 55v, GSAC.

³²⁶ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 62, f. 3 Miscellanea, c. 165r, GSAC.

³²⁷ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 65, f. 3, c. 28r, GSAC.

who decided in 1779 to establish a box for alms-collecting destined for the ‘Jews that often appear in the Saint Church of Jesus Christ in order to receive the baptism’, after taking into consideration ‘the hardship that [they] suffer during the catechesis’.³²⁸ After mass a Christian would carry about the box in churches but also in workshops in order to collect the alms.³²⁹

After catechization candidate converts underwent an examination. As the priest Arsenios Kontos asserted in 1766 when examining the Jew Yaouda, he found him ‘firm in his faith, cursing the heresies of the Jews according to the interpretation of the prayer book and believing in a triune God, [consisting of the] Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’.³³⁰ The outcome of the examination was then communicated to the office of the *Megalos Protopapas*, from where the permission for the baptism was issued.

Baptism ceremonies in the Eastern Church were held in the various churches of the city on days of religious feasts, so as to obtain more popularity and achieve greater solemnity. Accordingly, most of the baptisms were performed on Sundays,³³¹ after the end of the mass. Occasionally, more important feast days were chosen, like the day of the Holy Spirit or All Saints’ Day.³³² In the Latin Cathedral entries for the baptism of converts are always similar to those of children of Christian origin. What seems to make the difference here is that often

³²⁸ In a letter that the *Megalos Protopapas* addressed to the vicars of the city churches informing them about his forthcoming initiative, he made no specific reference to Jews; he only mentioned ‘the poor catechumens’: ‘θέλει γενεί ένα κουτίον, ήτοι σκάτουλα να ζητούν ελεημοσύνην προς βοήθειαν εκείνων των πτωχών κατηχουμένων, οπου κατά καιρόν ήθελαν φωτισθούν να γενούν χριστιανοί εις την παρούσαν πόλιν. Όθεν, απαξάπαντες να ηθέλετε εις καιρόν Λειτουργίας δηλώση εις τους συναθροισθέντας θεοσεβείς χριστιανούς το τοιούτον θεάρεστον έργον, και να παρακινήσετε αυτούς να βάνουν εις το αυτό κουτίον με εκτεταμένην χείρα πλουσιοπάροχον την ελεημοσύνην προς αυτών βοήθειαν.’, Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b.62, c. 858r, GSAC.

³²⁹ ‘Όθεν ημείς θεωρούντες εις τους καθ’ ημάς χρόνους πολλάκις προσερχομένους τινάς εξ Ιουδαίων εις την αγίαν του χ[ρι]στ[ου] Εκκλ[η]σίαν να λάβουν το θείον βάπτισμα εν καιρώ ευθέτω, δηλαδή μετά την διατεταγμένη κατήχησιν, λαβόντες τας αφορμάς εκ του ζήλου τινών χριστιανών, οίτινες μας επαράστησαν φανερώς την στέρησιν των αναγκαίων, οπου πολλάκις υποφέρουν οι κατηχούμενοι εν όσω καιρώ μάλιστα διαμένουν προσεύχοντες τη κατήχησει, εκρίναμεν εύλογον, και αναγκαίον, και προς τον θ[ε]όν ευπρόσδεκτον να δώσομε δια το παρόν μίαν κάπιν μερικήν αρχήν προνοήσεως. Και λοιπόν εδιορίσαμεν να είναι από του νυν, και εις το εξής μια σκάτουλα εις το όνομα των κατηχημένων μετά μιας κλειδός κεκλεισμένη, περιφερομένη υπό του λαχόντος χριστιανού, και εις τας εκκλ[η]σί[ας] εν ώρα λειτουργίας, και ετέρας Συνάξεως, και εις τα εργαστήρια, και εν παντί τόπω της πόλεως ταύτης, δια να εμβάλλεται εκεί η ελεημοσύνη, όπου ήθελε προθυμηθή να δώση κάθε χριστιανός.’, Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b.62, c. 170r, GSAC. As we will see in the next chapters, this initiative practically imitated the one undertaken in Corfu more than sixty years earlier and destined for the support of the Venetian *Casa*’s converts.

³³⁰ ‘[...] και ήβρικα αυτόν περεον εις την ορθόδοξον πίστιν, αναθεματίζοντας τας ερέσεις τον ιουδαίον σαδουκέον και τα εξής, κατά την ορμινίαν του ευχολογίου και πιστευοντας έναν θεόν τρισυπόστατον, πατήρ ιών, και άγιον πνεύμα’, see Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 51, f. 7, c. 347r-v, GSAC.

³³¹ Αγ. Σπυρίδωνας-Βαπτίσεις, b. 148, c. 7v, 10r, 11r, Ληξιαρχικές Πράξεις Εκκλησιών, GSAC.

³³² Rachel, daughter of Jacob Pangali was baptized on May 17th 1714, ‘ημέρα Δευτέρα του αγίου πνεύματος’, while the two daughters of Lieto Mordo were baptized in a common ceremony on May 23rd 1714, ‘των αγίων πάντων’, see Άγιος Σπυρίδωνας-Βαπτίσεις, b. 148, c. 9v, 10r, Ληξιαρχικές Πράξεις Εκκλησιών, GSAC.

Latin Archbishops themselves baptized them, thus conferring more solemnity to the ceremony.³³³

As far as the baptism ceremony is concerned, there is only one available description, recorded in the *Ayios Spyridon* baptismal registers. The description conveys the impression of a solemn and imposing process, while at the same time it gives us a glimpse of the supportive network consisting of local noblemen, which in the absence of a specialized institution would both assist neophytes in their life after baptism, and control them as to avoid an undesired relapse: ‘On Sunday the 9th of June 1712 a Jewish boy was baptized, son of Iona Mustaki de Caim, his mother is Stella, the godfather was his Excellency *sior* Arsenio Prosalendi. [The boy was baptized] with magnificence, and with the assistance of a lot of noblemen and others, who went ahead and followed until the oaths of parenthood were uttered, with joy, elation and the sound of joyous trumpets’.³³⁴

c. Candidate converts at the Latin and Greek Churches in Corfu

Within this context, conversion in Corfu was a phenomenon not numerically prominent but symbolically important. For a period of about hundred years that information is available, that is between 1679 and 1782, the cases of Jews, Muslims or other non-Catholic Christians³³⁵ converts that are recorded in both the Baptism registers of the Latin Cathedral and the archival series of the *Megalos Protopapas* of the Greek Church are 319, along with 13 more cases registered in the baptismal register of the church of *Ayios Spyridon*³³⁶ -in total 332 cases.³³⁷ Of course, this should be considered only a part of the conversions that actually took place within these years in the city of Corfu, as many more baptisms and conversions must have

³³³ For example, Archbishop Marc’Antonio Bargarigo, who stayed in Corfu for a decade (1678-1688), conducted twenty-five baptisms within seven years (1679-1685).

³³⁴ ‘1712 ιουνίου 29 ημέρα Κυριακή, εβαπτίσθη ένα παιδί αρσενικόν εβραϊόπουλο υός του Ιωνά μουστάκι δε καίμ και η μητέρα του στέλλα, όντος αναδόχου του εκλαμπροτάτου s[io]r αρσενίου προσαλέντη, μεγαλοπρεπώς, και μετά συνδρομής πλήθους αρχόντων, [...] και άλλους πολλούς, προπορευομένων και ακολουθόντων έως τους όρκους της αναδοχής οπού χαρά, αγαλλίασις, και ευφροσύνων σαλπγγών ηχούντων’, see Άγιος Σπυρίδωνας-Βαπτίσεις, b. 148, c. 7v, Ληξιαρχικές Πράξεις Εκκλησιών, GSAC.

³³⁵ Non-Catholic Christians are found exclusively in the registers of the Latin Cathedral.

³³⁶ This is the only Church baptism register I had the chance to consult so far.

³³⁷ This amounts to an average of four converts per year. Brian Pullan has maintained that the phenomenon of conversion at the *Case dei Catecumeni* in both Venice and Rome was not important from a numerical point of view but from a symbolic one. For the case of Rome between the years 1614-1676 Pullan gives an average of ten Jews and nine Muslims per year, see Brian Pullan, ‘Support and Redeem’, 196. See also idem, *The Jews of Europe*, 265.

taken place in the various Greek churches³³⁸ or the Latin churches³³⁹ and monasteries³⁴⁰ of the city.

	<i>Jews</i>	<i>Muslims</i>	<i>Non-Catholics</i>	<i>Of unknown religion</i>	<i>Total</i>
Latin Duomo	77	168	9	1	255
Megalos Protopapas	36	28	0	0	64
Ayios Spyridon	9	4	0	0	13
Total	122	200	9	1	332

Table 1. Conversion in the city of Corfu, 1679-1782.

Of these 332 cases, 255³⁴¹ were recorded in the baptismal registers of the Latin Cathedral or *Duomo*, the only parish of the city designated by a Latin church, and cover the period 1679 to 1748, after which date not a single baptism of a Christian is recorded there.³⁴² These 255 baptisms include 168 Muslims (66%), 77 Jews (30%), 9 non-Catholics,³⁴³ and a slave girl whose religion is not specified. The most part of these baptisms are recorded in the last two decades of the 17th century and the early 18th century. Concretely, between the years 1679 and 1703, 172 of the 255 baptisms were conducted, of which 145 (84%) were of Muslims, and 27 (16%) were of Jews.

³³⁸ It is estimated that in the mid-18th century there were thirty-five Greek churches in the city of Corfu, see Afroditi Agoropoulou-Birbili, *Η αρχιτεκτονική της πόλεως της Κέρκυρας κατά την περίοδο της Ενετοκρατίας* (Athens, 1976), 225. As already mentioned, baptisms performed in the various churches were only occasionally reported to the office of the Protopapas. For example of the 13 baptisms performed in the church of *Ayios Spyridon* only one, that of the Corfiot Jew Mene Belleli is found in the *Megalos Protopapas* series, and in fact it is not the baptism certificate, but the certificate of his catechization and the licence given for his baptism, see *Άγιος Σπυρίδωνας-Βαπτίσεις*, b. 148, c. 4v, *Ληξιαρχικές Πράξεις Εκκλησιών*, GSAC.

³³⁹ During the 18th century there were six Latin churches in the city of Corfu, see Agoropoulou-Birbili, *‘Η αρχιτεκτονική των λατινικών ναών της Κέρκυρας’*, 227-228.

³⁴⁰ Three major convents existed in 18th century Corfu, occupying an essential part of the city’s urban space: San Francisco and the Virgin of Tenedos, which belonged to the Franciscan order (*Conventuali* and *Osservanti* respectively), as did the majority of the Catholic monasteries in the Ionian Islands, and the *Annunciata* that belonged to the Augustinian order, see Agoropoulou-Birbili, *Η αρχιτεκτονική της πόλεως της Κέρκυρας*, 266; Nikiforou, *Δημόσιες τελετές στην Κέρκυρα*, 51. In the *nunziatura* sent to Venice by the Council of Corfu in 1774, the abbey of *Annunciata* was described as decadent, with no monks to take care of it, see Elli Yotopoulou-Sisilianou, *Πρεσβείες της Βενετοκρατούμενης Κέρκυρας (16ος-18ος αι.). Πηγή για σχεδίασμα ανασύνθεσης εποχής* (Athens: GSA–Archives of the Prefecture of Corfu, 2002), 141.

³⁴¹ In the Latin Cathedral’s baptismal records we find 21 more cases of baptized Jews and Muslims that figure as parents in the baptism of their child or, very few, as godparents –that is to say, in their cases it is not clear whether they were baptized in Corfu or not. They nevertheless lived there, and appeared to belong to the parish of the Latin Cathedral.

³⁴² The *Duomo*’s baptismal registers reach until the year 1777.

³⁴³ These include 6 Anabaptists, an Arian, a Quaker, and one recorded as Atheist.

In the Greek Church there are in total 77 cases of conversions of Muslim and Jews. Sixty-four³⁴⁴ of them are recorded in the *Megalos Protopapas* series, spanning between the years 1688 and 1782. As already mentioned, the documents referring to these cases are not limited to baptismal certifications. They are, instead, of a diversified nature, covering various stages of the conversion procedure. Of these 64 cases, 36 (or 56%) concerned Jews, and 28 (44%) Muslims. Unlike the Latin Church, the majority of these 64 conversions took place in the 18th century –in the 17th century only 12 cases are recorded, of which –similarly to the trend in the Latin Church these years– 10 concern Muslims. The other 13 cases within the Greek Church are to be found in the baptismal registers of *Ayios Spyridon*, where 4 Muslims and 9 Jews –all but one coming from Corfiot families– were baptized between 1710-1769.

³⁴⁴ In the 18th century there are 31 more cases of converts who were married to Christians. These cases are found in the marriage registers of the *Megalos Protopapas*, since during this period all marriages conducted in the various churches of the city and suburbs were supposed to be declared and recorded also in the office of the *Megalos Protopapas*, an obligation though that, as in the case of baptisms, was not fully respected. It is thus plausible to conclude that much more marriages among converts and Christians must have taken place.

Chapter 3. Jewish candidate converts

i. The underprivileged

a. Jews living in Venice

Within the field of Venetian Jewish historiography it is usually prominent figures of the Jewish communities³⁴⁵ that are being studied, like merchants and bankers, doctors and rabbis. Yet there was also a more numerous, far less privileged –and less well identified in the relevant Jewish literature- group of people living in the ghettos, whose existence somehow goes unnoticed within the dominant narrative of ‘the Jewish Community of Venice’, which stresses its economic and demographic development after the settlement of Jews from the Ottoman Empire (Levantines) and the Iberian peninsula (Ponentines) in the city in the late 16th century. This rather understudied category of Jews emerges frequently in the archival documents of the Venetian *Casa dei Cateceumeni*: people cramped in the Jewish ghettos of the city, very often immigrants from the Venetian territories, the Ottoman Empire or other European cities, who tried to make a living in the metropolis of Venice. It is these people that Brian Pullan, in his book on Jews and Inquisition in early modern Venice, identified as one of the two types of Jewish converts in Italy during the 16th and 17th centuries: ‘the shabby creature who would embrace Christianity in response to the pressures of poverty’ –the other type being ‘the zealot who allies aggressively with his adoptive church’.³⁴⁶

As it is indicated in the table below,³⁴⁷ in the course of the 17th century, with the exception of the 1681-1690 decade, the numbers of Jewish candidate converts that reached the institution progressively rose, reaching their highest peak in the last decade of the century (1691-1700). Throughout the 18th century, the Jewish presence in the *Casa* fluctuated, reaching its highest peak in mid-century (1751-1760); yet, the overall number of Jews was higher when compared to the 17th century.

³⁴⁵ As it will be discussed further below, it is somehow imprecise to treat the Jews of Venice as one community, since they were characterized by significant internal diversity. Any mention to the ‘Jewish Community’ hereafter will be used only in reference to the common administrative and governing structure, the *Università degli Ebrei*, which superseded the various ethnic communities.

³⁴⁶ Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 244-245.

³⁴⁷ The decades 1631-1640 and 1641-1650 are missing from the table as the available material covers them only partly. More concretely, between 1631 and 1634, ten Jews are recorded in the Venetian *Casa*, while between the years 1645 and 1650 twenty-one Jews are recorded there. For the earlier years of the 17th century, we also know that between 1616 and 1620 five Jews were recorded in the institution’s archives. Nevertheless, even in this scant data, a rise in the Jewish presence can be traced.

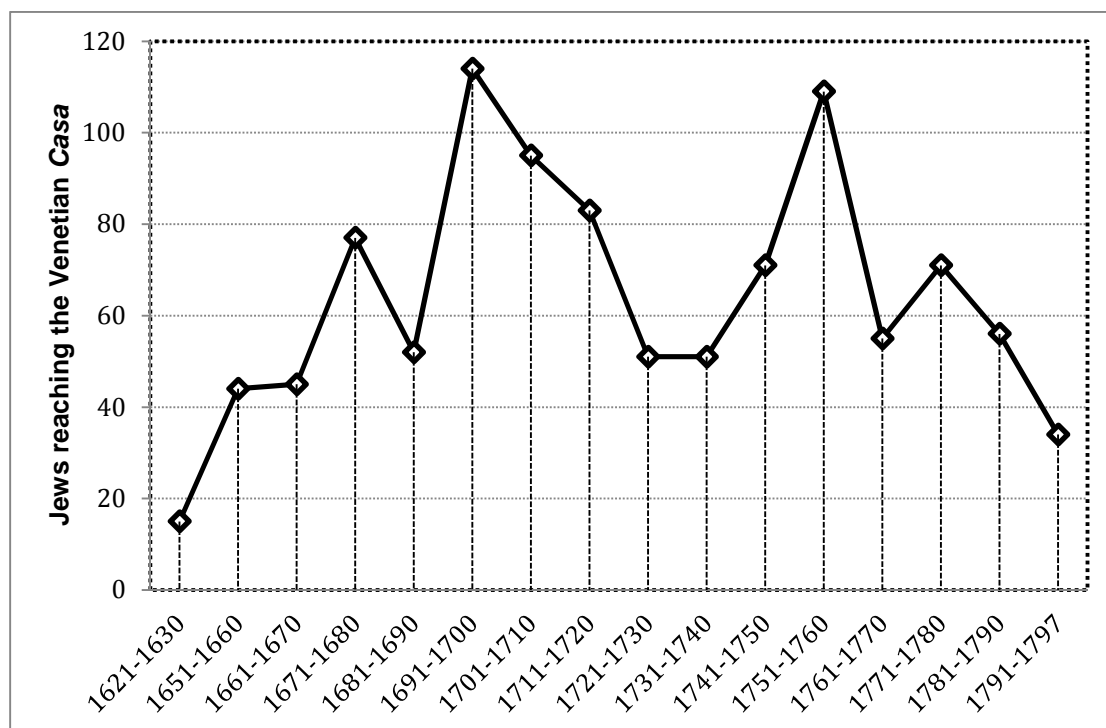


Chart 3. Jews reaching the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni* in the 17th and 18th centuries.

This gradual rise of the Jewish presence at the Venetian institution can perhaps be understood within the context of the slow demographic and economic waning of the Venetian Jewish communities, a process that roughly started in the 1630s, after about forty years of growth. From 1589 onwards, following the arrival and settlement of Levantine and Ponentine Jewish merchants³⁴⁸ as well as of New Christian merchants³⁴⁹ in the city, the Venetian Jewish communities witnessed a significant growth, both demographic and economic, until the end of the 1620s. Yet, it seems that the plague that broke out between 1630 and 1631 unsettled to a certain extent this growth. The communities faced a demographic decline due to deaths and migrations,³⁵⁰ as well as a disruption in their commercial activities.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Cecil Roth, 'La ricondotta degli Ebrei Ponentini. Venezia 1647', in *Studi in onore di Gino Luzzatto*, vol. 2 (Milan: A. Giuffrè 1950), 237-244; Benjamin Ravid, 'The First Charter of the Jewish merchants of Venice', 187-222.

³⁴⁹ Federica Ruspio, 'La nazione portoghese a Venezia (fine XVI-XVII sec.)', in *'Interstizi'. Culture ebraico-cristiane a Venezia e nei suoi domini dal medioevo all'età moderna*, ed. Israel, Jutte and Mueller, 371-404.

³⁵⁰ During the plague one fourth to one third of the whole Venetian population perished, see Kenneth Meyer Setton, *Venice, Austria, and the Turks in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: American Philosophy Society, 1991), 105-106; Gaetano Cozzi, *Giustizia contaminata. Vicende giudiziarie di nobili ed ebrei nella Venezia del Seicento* (Venice: Marsilio, 1996), 71; Giovanni Favero and Francesca Trivellato, 'Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia. Dati e ipotesi', *Zakhor. Rivista di storia degli ebrei d'Italia* 7 (2004): 13. Yet it seems that compared to the Christian population of the city, the Jewish communities had been less affected by the plague. According to a survey carried out in 1632-1633, the Jewish population after the plague counted 2.420

In demographic terms, the Jewish population of the city grew again after the plague - even though, without ever reaching its previous levels.³⁵² This growth was due to immigrants, mostly Ponentine and Levantine Jews -indeed, in an effort to repopulate the Jewish Community, the Venetian state granted in 1633 a new ampler space adjacent to the *Ghetto Nuovo*, the *Ghetto Nuovissimo*, in order to attract there Levantine and Ponentine Jews 'of good reputation'.³⁵³

Nevertheless, the years following the plague were rather difficult for the Jews living in Venice. The Community was obliged to contribute significant sums of money to the Venetian state to support its recovery,³⁵⁴ while during the whole decade of the 1630s the relation between the Jews and the state was quite tense. Right after the end of the plague, the Jewish Community was accused that its self-government was actually violating the privileges granted to Jews by the Venetian state, and thus of being disloyal to the state (*lesa maestà*), a case that lasted for two years.³⁵⁵ Later on, in 1636 several Jews, who were initially accused of having hidden stolen goods in the Ghetto, were prosecuted for bribing the Venetian court of *Quarantia Criminal*, a rather serious offense that symbolically affected the Jewish communities as a whole.³⁵⁶

individuals. Adding to this number the 454 deaths registered between 1630 and 1632, the number of Jews in the city before the plague is estimated at around 3.000 individuals. This results to a loss of about one sixth of the Jewish population during the plague, see Favero and Trivellato, 'Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia', 11, 14, 41-43.

³⁵¹ Riccardo Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice* (New York: M. Evans & Co, 1987), 201; Mark R. Cohen, ed., *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi. Leon Modena's Life of Judah* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 134-135; Israel, *European Jewry*, 93; Donatella Calabi, 'The "City of the Jews"', in *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*, ed. Davis and Ravid, 35; Favero and Trivellato, 'Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia', 13.

³⁵² This gradual overall demographic decline would continue throughout the 18th century only to be temporarily inverted after 1785, see Israel, *European Jewry*, 238; Favero and Trivellato, 'Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia', 10-50.

³⁵³ In order to repopulate the Jewish communities, the Venetian state granted in 1633 a new space adjacent to the *Ghetto Nuovo*, the *Ghetto Nuovissimo*, in order to attract in Venice Levantine and Ponentine Jews 'of good reputation', see Calabi, 'The "City of the Jews"', 36-38. See also Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice*, 202-203; Brian Pullan, 'Jewish Moneylending in Venice. From Private Enterprise to Public Service', in *Gli Ebrei a Venezia, secoli XIV-XVIII*, ed. Cozzi, 681-682; Roberta Curiel and Bernard Dov Cooperman, *The Venetian Ghetto* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 145-147.

³⁵⁴ Cohen, *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi*, 135; Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 149.

³⁵⁵ Gaetano Cozzi, 'Società veneziana, società ebraica', in *Gli Ebrei a Venezia, secoli XIV-XVIII*, ed. Cozzi, 361-368; David Malkiel, 'The Tenuous Thread. A Venetian Lawyer's Apology for Jewish Self-government in the Seventeenth Century', *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (1987): 223-250.

³⁵⁶ For this case, which prompted Simone Luzzatto to write his apologetic treatise, see Benjamin Ravid, *Economics and Toleration in Seventeenth Century Venice. The Background and Context of the Discorso of Simone Luzzatto* (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1978); Cohen, *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi*, 143-146; Cozzi, *Giustizia contaminata*; Favero and Trivellato, 'Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia', 18.

Not a decade had passed, and in 1645 the fifth Ottoman-Venetian war -also known as the war of Crete (1645-1669)- broke out, followed soon after by two more Ottoman-Venetian wars (1684-1699 and 1714-1718). This long series of Ottoman-Venetian wars ushered in an unstable era that accelerated the economic decline of the Jewish Community. Venice's importance in the maritime trade routes declined and commerce was destabilized or at times interrupted³⁵⁷ -nonetheless, the importance of several Jewish merchant families for the Venetian commerce actually increased during these years.³⁵⁸ More importantly, though, throughout these years, along with the obligation to maintain the rather unprofitable loan banks,³⁵⁹ the Jewish Community was again expected to repeatedly contribute to the Venetian state significant sums of money in the form of forced loans, while in the aftermath of the last Ottoman-Venetian war, and despite the fact that it was virtually impoverished, the Community was obliged to an increase of its annual fiscal obligation.³⁶⁰

From this point onwards, the Venetian state, along with the Jewish Community, was engaged in continuous efforts to avert the economic collapse of the latter, with an eye to maintaining the Community's ability to pay taxes and to continue financing and operating the indispensable loan banks. In 1722 a new magistrate was established composed of three Venetian noblemen, the *Inquisitori sopra gli Ebrei*, with the aim of putting forward possible solutions for the economically devastated Community. Several years later the Jewish communities, through their common governing body, the *Università degli Ebrei*, sought financial support from the economically flourishing communities of Amsterdam, London and Hague. Yet in 1735 the Community went bankrupt,³⁶¹ and until the end of the Venetian Republic in 1797, the *Inquisitori sopra gli Ebrei* along with other Venetian magistracies and the Jewish Community struggled to deal with the financial issues of the Community and to preserve the function of the loan banks.³⁶²

³⁵⁷ Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice*, 205-209, 222-224; Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 148-149; idem, 'Jewish Moneylending in Venice', 671.

³⁵⁸ Certain Jewish families continued nevertheless to play an important role in the Venetian commerce, see Salvatore Ciriaco, *Olio ed ebrei nella Repubblica veneta del Settecento* (Venezia: A spese della Deputazione, 1975), 23-34, 64-69.

³⁵⁹ Gino Luzzatto, 'Sulla condizione economica degli ebrei veneziani nel secolo XVIII', *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 16 (1950): 161; Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice*, 222-225; Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, *Battesimi di fanciulli ebrei a Venezia nel Settecento* (Venezia: Doretti, 1984), 21; Benjamin Ravid, 'The Venetian Government and the Jews', in *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*, ed. Davis and Ravid, 26-27.

³⁶⁰ Favero and Trivellato, 'Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia', 19.

³⁶¹ Favero and Trivellato, 'Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia', 20; Marino Berengo, 'Gli ebrei veneziani alla fine del Settecento', *Italia Judaica* 3 (1989): 23.

³⁶² Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice*, 228-230, 238-244.

Nevertheless, as it has been observed, ‘an impoverished community did not mean that all of its individual members were impoverished’.³⁶³ It thus seems that while the situation of the Jewish Community as the common governing body and fiscal entity representing all the Venetian Jewish communities was deteriorating, and while the Community became progressively unable to meet its financial obligations towards the Venetian state, several Jewish merchants’ importance and wealth increased during the 17th and 18th centuries, as Venetians withdrew altogether from commercial activities³⁶⁴ and Jewish merchants came to control the commerce of several staples, like grain, oil and other foodstuffs through their networks in the Venetian port cities and other Italian and Mediterranean commercial cities.³⁶⁵

But, while the prominence and prosperity of several Jewish merchants was increasing within an indebted Community, at the same time a significant gap was increasingly taking root among the Jews living in Venice. This gap was, on the one hand, drawn along the lines that divided the various communities that constituted ‘the Jewish Community’ - as David Malkiel has put it, ‘the Venetian Jewish community was not really one community at all but rather an association of discrete Jewish communities resident in the Venetian ghetto. What we think of as the Venetian Jewish community was merely the umbrella organization for the coordination and administration of matters common to all the city’s Jews, first and foremost their obligations toward the state’.³⁶⁶

In brief, after the arrival of the Levantine and Ponentine Jews in Venice in 1589, the population was internally organized in four communities (*Askenazim, Italiani, Levantini, Ponentini*), each one with its own synagogue, structure and status.³⁶⁷ Moreover, each community was assigned a distinct professional and thus economic role --as it is well known, Venetian Jewish men were by law obliged to exercise only concrete occupations. Accordingly, the oldest communities, the German and the Italian, were to run the loan banks and deal in second-hand items. Levantine and Ponentine Jews, on the other hand, enjoyed the

³⁶³ Ravid, ‘The Venetian Government and the Jews’, 26.

³⁶⁴ Luzzatto, ‘Sulla condizione economica’, 162.

³⁶⁵ Israel, *European Jewry*, 93.

³⁶⁶ David Malkiel, ‘The Ghetto Republic’, in *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*, ed. Davis and Ravid, 120.

³⁶⁷ The Venetian authorities categorized them, nevertheless, in the following three *nazioni*: *Tedesca, Levantina*, and *Ponentina*, see Daniel Carpi, ‘Le convenzione degli anni 1624 e 1645 tra le tre “nazioni” della comunità di Venezia’, in *Shlomo Simonsohn Jubilee Volume. Studies on the History of the Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance period*, ed. Daniel Carpi (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1993), 25-26; Malkiel, ‘The Ghetto Republic’, 120-121, 124.

much-coveted privilege to engage in commerce with the East and the West, a privilege that was accorded to the other two communities a bit later, in 1634.³⁶⁸

Since 1589, the Venetian Jewish communities did not grow at an equal pace. As in the case of Corfu, it was the Ponentine community that flourished both demographically and economically. The Ponentines gradually came to control an important part of the Venetian trade, to contribute the greatest share for the sustainment of the Jewish loan banks, and to exert control over the Community's governing bodies, while the old German and Italian communities were gradually losing their power, significance and political supremacy.³⁶⁹

Nonetheless, the growing gap among Venetian Jews transcended the various ethnic communal boundaries and created internal disparities within each community. Already in the 1630s, after the plague, two prominent Venetian figures, Simone Luzzatto and Leon Modena, commented on the fact that few Jewish families were able to contribute to the Community's tax obligations³⁷⁰ as the majority of them were too poor. A document produced by the Jewish community in the early decades of the 18th century suggests a similar situation. It was a document drawn up for tax purposes, and indicated that among the 465 Jewish families that lived in the Venetian ghettos in 1720, 155 or one-third of them could afford to contribute to the Community's tax obligation, while among the rest two-thirds, a 25% lived on the Community's charity.³⁷¹ This situation remained roughly the same throughout the 18th century. Gino Luzzatto, writing about the second half of the century, estimated that around two-thirds of the Venetian Jewish communities consisted of 'famiglie povere o che dal loro lavoro potevano trarre a fatica il sostenamento quotidiano' – or, as Umberto Fortis, in a slightly dramatic tone, described these Jewish figures: 'il piccolo venditore ambulante o [quello che fa] un piccolo commercio quotidiano, [imagine] legata alla vita misera del ghetto, cui erano costretti soprattutto gli ebrei con obbligo di stabile residenza'.³⁷²

By contrast, the remaining one-third, Luzzatto wrote, 'esercitava attività decorose e spesso lucrose, che la ponevano al livello della migliore borghesia cittadina; e da essa emergeva un gruppo di famiglie, che per la mole e l'importanza degli affari esercitati e per la

³⁶⁸ Ravid, 'The Venetian Government and the Jews', 3-30; Arbel, 'Jews in International Trade', 73-96.

³⁶⁹ Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 196; Malkiel, 'The Ghetto Republic', 127-128; Cozzi, *Giustizia contaminata*, 73-74.

³⁷⁰ Malkiel, 'The Ghetto Republic', 122, 125-127. For other parts of Europe see Israel, *European Jewry*, 248.

³⁷¹ Favero and Trivellato, 'Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia', 18-21

³⁷² Umberto Fortis, 'Riferimenti agli ebrei in un inedito del Settecento veneziano', *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 38 (1972), 274.

ricchezza di cui disponeva, erano ormai in prima linea nella vita cittadina'.³⁷³ More significantly, these prominent Jewish families were actually trying to gradually dissociate themselves from the Jewish Community of Venice. Since the 1630's, the wealthy members of the indebted Jewish Community attempted either to leave the city of Venice in order to altogether avoid contributing to the Community's fiscal obligations³⁷⁴ or, later on, to change their status into that of 'foreigners' or *viandanti* through the payment of an annual sum that would enable them to avoid full participation in paying back the Jewish Communities' pending debts.³⁷⁵ These actions caused the intervention of the Venetian state, while they also resulted in disputes between the Jewish elite families and the heads of the Community, as well as in the weakening not only of the Community's economic strength but also of its prestige and moral significance.³⁷⁶

Not surprisingly, this trend was also reflected in the social profile of Jews migrating to or from the city of Venice. As we have seen, in the two main past migratory movements, those after 1589 and after 1633, it was mostly Jewish merchants that were coming to Venice, attracted from the privileges and advantages offered to them there. However, as the importance of Venice in the Mediterranean maritime trade was diminishing, and the maintenance of the Jewish Community and its obligations towards the Venetian state were becoming a non-offsetting burden, a shift in migration seems to have occurred: it were now the prominent Jewish families emigrating from the city, while those immigrants heading to Venice came mostly from underprivileged groups, people expecting that in the metropolis of Venice they would find an opportunity to work as servants or do other low-paid survival jobs – as Luzzatto put it, in the 18th century migratory movements towards Venice were 'immigrazioni –è vero- di poveri'.³⁷⁷

Nevertheless, this century's immigration to Venice remained significant in numbers. As Giovanni Favero and Francesca Trivellato have argued, the Jewish population living in

³⁷³ Luzzatto, 'Sulla condizione economica', 172. See also Roth, *Gli ebrei in Venezia*, 205; Fortis, 'Riferimenti agli ebrei', 269.

³⁷⁴ Luzzatto, 'Sulla condizione economica', 162; Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice*, 223-224.

³⁷⁵ They were also called 'separati', see Luzzatto, 'Sulla condizione economica', 169; Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice*, 227-229.

³⁷⁶ Ricardo Calimani, *Storia del ghetto di Venezia* (Milano: Rusconi, 1985), 227-229; idem, *The Ghetto of Venice*, 369-371, 377-379. For similar trends in other part of Europe see Israel, *European Jewry*, 243-244.

³⁷⁷ Luzzatto, 'Sulla condizione economica', 162; Berengo, 'Gli ebrei veneziani alla fine del Settecento', 9-10; Favero and Trivellato, 'Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia', 26-27.

Venice witnessed only small contractions but not any sharp decline³⁷⁸ -and this, despite not only the declining Venetian economy but also despite the charter of 1777, which was imbued with a rather anti-Jewish spirit.³⁷⁹ Following Luzzato, they argued that this population stability should be attributed to the constant waves of immigrant Jews arriving at the city. And, as Berengo has demonstrated, presence of immigrants among the Jews living in Venice remained high even as late as 1797, when a 38% of the Jewish population living in the ghettos of Venice was of non-Venetian origin.³⁸⁰

These people came from various places: from cities in the Italian peninsula or from the central and Eastern Europe, from cities in the Ottoman Empire or the Venetian *Stato da Mar*. But first and foremost, they came from the Venetian *Terra Ferma*, not only due to its geographical contingency, but because the Jewish communities of the Veneto, especially that of Padua, Rovigo and Verona, were in a similar state of crisis like the Venetian Community: obliged since 1591 to contribute to the maintenance of the loan banks,³⁸¹ these heavily indebted communities were at the same time supporting an increasing number of Jews living on charity, while experiencing internal communal conflicts between the communities' heads and their most prominent families.³⁸² In addition, the 1777 charter obliged the Jews of *Terra Ferma* to dissolve their factories, a decision that resulted in the migration of many of the Jews residing in these areas towards Venice and beyond.³⁸³

b. Jewish candidate converts in the *Casa dei Catecumeni*

Within this framework, the Jews that reached the Venetian *Casa* since the mid-17th century bore the demographic and social characteristics of the Jews living in the city of Venice. First, to a significant extent they belonged to the underprivileged two-thirds. Although for the 17th century there is scarce indication of these people's status or occupational engagement before

³⁷⁸ According to Favero and Trivellato, the Venetian ghettos had 1.783 residents in 1761, 1.673 in 1766, 1.624 in 1771, 1.521 in 1780, 1.570 in 1785, 1.517 in 1790 and 1.626 in 1797, in Favero and Trivellato, 'Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia', 21-28. The demographic decline of the Jewish population of Venice is traced between the early decades of the 18th century, when in 1720 the communities numbered 2.069 residents, and the mid-century, when the Jewish population decreased to 1.600-1.700 residents.

³⁷⁹ Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice*, 241-245. For the consequences of the charter see Favero and Trivellato, 'Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia', 25-26.

³⁸⁰ Berengo, 'Gli ebrei veneziani alla fine del Settecento', 10.

³⁸¹ Malkiel, 'The Ghetto Republic', 125.

³⁸² Ioly Zorattini, *Battesimi di fanciulli ebrei*, 22-24; Federico Luzzatto, 'La comunità ebraica di Rovigo', *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 6, no. 11-12 (1932): 515.

³⁸³ Luzzatto, 'La condizione economica', 163, 167-168; Ioly Zorattini, *Battesimi di fanciulli ebrei*, 22; Favero and Trivellato, 'Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia', 27; Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice*, 245.

baptism, as we will see further below, their post-baptism itineraries, namely becoming mostly domestic servants in Venetian households or apprentices in workshops, give us an idea of their modest previous situation -and this assumption is corroborated by the far richer documentation on Jews in the 18th century. Secondly, half of the Jews that reached the institution were migrants. More concretely, throughout the whole period under consideration here (1645-1797), about 51% of the 1.020 Jews³⁸⁴ were recorded as originating ‘di questo ghetto’ -but, of course, this category of ‘Venetian’ Jews included a lot of immigrants, born elsewhere, that had spent part of their lives in Venice, like the fifty-three-year old Vita Gomez who was from Malaga in Spain, but had lived twenty-six years in the ghetto of Venice.³⁸⁵ Among the rest of Jewish candidate converts, 16% came from one of the Jewish communities of Veneto, mostly Padua and Verona, and 9% from the Venetian Maritime State, mostly Corfu. There was also a small but stable presence of Jews coming from other Italian cities mostly in the north of the peninsula (10%), like Modena, Mantova, Ferrara, Livorno and Florence, as well as from cities of the Ottoman Empire and the Barbary coast (7%), like Smyrna, Istanbul, Salonika or Tripoli. Finally, few Jewish candidate converts (7%) came from the Holy Roman Empire or cities of the Jewish migration like Amsterdam and London.

In other words, for a large number of Jewish candidate converts, locals or immigrants, conversion was indeed a means to cope with economic pressure within a gradually declining Jewish Community, and with actually few professional choices available in the city of Venice -as mentioned above, the legal restriction and obligation of Jews to engage only in specific activities, seriously limited their access to crafts and other occupations.³⁸⁶ Aware of these restrictions, or actually taking advantage of them in order to promote its conversionary policies, the Venetian institution of the *Casa dei Catecumeni* in 1676 petitioned the Senate to officially ratify the already customary practice that allowed converts to undertake any profession they wished. As it was stated in the Senate’s decision, it was decreed that it will be permitted ‘ai Turchi, Ebrei e Mori, che escono dalla Casa dei Catecumeni di poter senza altra opposizione, e senza spesa alcuna applicarsi a qualunque Arte, o Professione, che più loro

³⁸⁴ Information about the origin of prospective converts is available for about 90% of them.

³⁸⁵ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 19v, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

³⁸⁶ Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 159; Israel, *European Jewry*, 143, 148; Berengo, ‘Gli ebrei veneziani alla fine del Settecento’, 11.

aggradisce'.³⁸⁷ Jewish converts could, in this way, be employed both in and out of the Ghetto³⁸⁸, this time as Christian laborers and craftsmen.

In fact the institution, with the help of its network in and out of the city of Venice, assumed the responsibility of providing converts with an occupation before leaving the institution. As it is stated in the *Casa*'s statute, 'non si devono licenziare dalla Casa li neofiti Figliuoli Battezzati, se non li sarà convenientemente provveduto d'esercizio non però a loro capriccio, ma come parerà alla carità della Congregazione'.³⁸⁹ In the case of young male neophytes, the institution would offer them the acquisition of knowledge and skills: 'Se [i Neofiti] saranno di minor età potrà [il Priore] con licenza de' Presidenti, mandarli alla Scuola per imparar a leggere, scrivere, e conti; e per imparare altre scienze, doverà dipender dalla Congregazione, che secondo l'indole e capacità, ed il profitto del Neofito doverà esser informata dalli Visitatori della Casa degli Uomini, per resolver quello parerà proprio di farli imparare'.³⁹⁰ And then, when they would reach the age of fourteen, they should be assigned 'qualche Professione, e posti in qualche Bottega per Garzoni'.³⁹¹ From this vantage point, converting in the Venetian institution meant for uprooted or impoverished Jews having access to a local or regional network and some professional prospects –or, at least, the hope of doing so.

As already mentioned, brief information on converts' post-baptism itineraries, that is on the city of their settlement and their occupational engagement, was occasionally recorded in the institution's registers, a practice that should be understood within the wider policy of the *Casa* to keep track of its converts and exert significant control throughout their lives. According to the notes kept in the consulted registers, in the 90% of the cases Jewish converts remained in Venice, while the most regular option that seem to have opened up for baptized Jews, or at least the one that the institution could readily provide, was to be employed as 'servants',³⁹² –a broad early modern category that indicated an asymmetric relationship, and which depending on the context could range from various positions in the domestic service to

³⁸⁷ *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia*, 68-69.

³⁸⁸ Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 162. See also Calabi, 'The "City of the Jews"', 45.

³⁸⁹ *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia*, 47.

³⁹⁰ *Capitoli, ed ordini per il buon governo delle Pie Case de' Catecumeni di Venezia*, 45-46.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁹² In the institution's statute there is a concrete provision permitting 'figliuoli e figliuole di casa a servir in questa città', see *Ibid.*, 61.

employment in artisan workshops, and on a salaried or indentured basis.³⁹³ Indeed, providing and recruiting servants from the various charitable institutions was a rather common early modern practice that permitted the institutions to both admit new people and continue exerting a certain control on their lives after they left the institutions, while at the same time providing the households and workshops with supposedly morally disciplined, trustworthy, and possibly skilled servants and workers³⁹⁴.

Accordingly, during the 17th century, Jewish converts were allocated predominantly as domestic servants to the houses of Venetian noblemen, of the Patriarch of Venice and other religious officers while only few of them were sent as apprentices to the houses of merchants and the workshops of artisans. By contrast, since the first decades of the 18th century onwards, references to converts allocated as domestic servants are very infrequent. Although post-baptism information about converts is recorded in a rather inconsequent manner and should thus be used with caution, it is nevertheless plausible to assume that the great influx of Muslim captives during the two ottoman-Venetian wars -and especially during the second one- baptized or not, overfilled the servant market in Venice, thus displacing the employment of Jewish converts. So, in the 18th century, Jewish converts became mostly *giovani in botteghe*, apprentices and workers, while as we will see few of them even managed to set up little shops. Throughout these years, the Jewish converts placed as internal domestic servants or as assistant personnel, apprentices and workers came mostly from Venice and the Veneto (66%), and they were predominantly men (80%), while their average age was twenty years old –yet there were also children of ten or eleven years old among them.

The practice that the institution followed in order to allocate converts as servants or apprentices is not thoroughly documented, but it was usually through the institution's network and the converts' godparents. Indeed, quite often, the people that actually employed them

³⁹³ Indicatively see Michael Mitterauer, 'Servants and Youth', *Continuity and Change* 5 (1990): 11-38; Dennis Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft. Domestic Service in Renaissance Venice, 1400-1600* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), xxiii-xxv, 99, 102-104, 129-132; Christopher C. Black, *Early Modern Italy. A Social History* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), 96-97; Raffaella Sarti, 'Who are Servants? Defining Domestic Service in Western Europe (16th-21st Centuries)', in *Proceedings of the 'Servant Project'*, ed. Suzy Pasleau and Isabelle Schopp with Raffaella Sarti, vol. 2 (Liege: Éditions de l'Université de Liège, 2006), 3-59, esp. 3-11.

³⁹⁴ Giovanna da Molin, 'Family Forms and Domestic Service in Southern Italy from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth century', *Journal of Family History* 15, no. 4 (1990): 503-527, esp. 522-523; Daniela Lombardi and Flores Reggiani, 'Da assistita a serva. Circuiti di reclutamento delle serve attraverso le istituzioni assistenziali (Firenze-Milano, XVII-XVIII sec.)', in *Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "C. Datini" - Prato, La donna nell'economia, sec. XIII-XVIII*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Florence: Le Monnier, 1990), 301-319; Sarti, 'Who are Servants?', 5; Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, 193-222; Monica Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 121-136.

were the ones that had ‘assisted’ converts in reaching the institution, or their godparents, or members of the institution’s Board of Governors. To give two examples, in 1680 Laura olim Canaa, nineteen years old and daughter of Salomon Netto, right after her baptism went to the house of the nobleman Pietro Garzoni, a Governor of the institution, to work there as a servant, while a year later, in 1681 Salomon Todesco, eighteen years old from Venice, right after his baptism went as a servant to the house of his godparent, Signor Giulio Panzirotto, a butcher.³⁹⁵

It also seems that to a certain extent people looking for servants approached themselves the institution. In 1705, for example, it is noted that ‘Antonio peruchiere nella contrada di S. Moise dimanda per massera Anna [...] figlia in questa Pia Casa’.³⁹⁶ Sometimes the institution was also disposed to pay a monthly or annual amount of money for allocating these converts, thus presumably facilitating their way out of the institution. At the same time, the *Casa* tried to keep an eye on the people that received the converts. In a rather well-recorded case in 1681, a woman from the San Vio quarter of Venice, Arminia Bodina, asked the institution to take at her house two Jewish converts girls, Cecilia olim Raina, ten years old, and Francesca olim Colomba, nine years old. They had both arrived at the institution in 1674. Raina was the daughter of the convert Steffano Maria olim Abram Aboaf, who reached the institution in 1672 with two of his children, a girl and a boy, aged six and four respectively. Two years later his other daughter Raina, three years old at that time, was also brought in the *Casa*. Colomba, on the other hand, was the daughter of Antonio olim Salvador, twenty-four years old from Frankfurt, who was ‘in fusta per esser condannato’. Ten days after the arrival of Salvador at the institution in 1674, his wife Rosa, twenty-two years old from Bohemia, and their daughter, Colomba two years old arrived there as well and were baptized.³⁹⁷

Before fulfilling Arminia’s request, the institution asked for and obtained a certificate of her moral conduct from the parish priest, who was also one of the three presidents of the institution. Her request was then fulfilled and the two little girls sent to her ‘con obbligo di farli le spese, vestirle del suo proprio guadagno et insegnar li lavori, et ben educarle, non lasciandoli andar fuori di casa per strade vagando’. On its part the *Casa* undertook the

³⁹⁵ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 45v, 60r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. In both cases the recorded phrase is ‘ando a servir’.

³⁹⁶ Libro da rassegnare le notizie importanti alle pie Case de’Catecumeni, 1702-1718-G6, c. 19v Catecumeni, G6-9, AIRE. See also *ibid.*, c. 20v.

³⁹⁷ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 76r-v, 79r-v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

obligation to give Arminia twelve ducats per year.³⁹⁸ Finally, the institution also provided the option to receive back the converts if they failed to meet their masters' demands, as in the case of Andrea Michel olim Emanuel from Frankfurt, twelve years old, who in 1671 was sent 'in casa alla prova dall'Illustrissimo Signore Comitta Vidman', but a month later was restituted in the institution 'per esser piccolo'.³⁹⁹

The information available in the registers of baptism and neophytes are not detailed as far as the concrete position that converts held within this large category of servant. The most common phrases used in the 17th-century documents, 'andò star dal/col Signor...' and andò [star] in casa del Signor...', or just 'andò star', are far from revealing.⁴⁰⁰ To give some examples, in 1647 Rica olim Marietta from Crete, eighteen years old, 'andò star a San Simeon Piccolo con un mercante di lana'; in 1648 Giovanni Francesco olim Abram from Venice, twenty-seven years old, 'andò star in casa dell'Illustrissimo Monsignor Patriarca della città'; and in 1657 Zuanne olim Mose son of Marco Cigala from Ferrara, eighteen years old, right after his baptism 'andò in casa del Nobile Huomo Giovanni Battista Foscari' in San Trovaso.⁴⁰¹ Occasionally more concrete indications are found. In 1660 the Venetian Paolo Antonio olim Abram Israel, eighteen years old and of unknown parents, 'andò star per camerier'⁴⁰² coll' Eccellentissimo Signor Girolamo Lorenzo in Rio Marin'; in 1676 Elisabetta olim Rachel, fourteen years old, 'andò star da Mastro Girolamo fenestrer [...] dattagli dalla Congregatione per serva'; or, in 1680 Domenico olim Isac Todesco, eighteen years old, 'andò a servir l'Illustrissimo et Eccellentissimo Signor Zorzi Baffi nostro governatore'.⁴⁰³

Jewish converts allocated as apprentices and workers, few in the second half of 17th century and rather regularly throughout the 18th century, covered a wide variety of crafts and professions: doctor assistants like the nineteen-year old Pietro olim Abram from Venice, son of the Jewish doctor Gabriel Moreno, who in 1656 was sent to doctor (*medico fisico*) Pietro

³⁹⁸ Notatori-B12 (1680-1686), c. 56r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

³⁹⁹ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 74r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁰⁰ That these terms actually referred to domestic service is indicated in cases like the following. In 1632, Madalena olim Stella, along with her two daughters, is recorded to have left the institution, and 'è andata a stantiare à Spalato disse in casa dell'Illustrissima Signora Margarita', while few lines below it is noted: 'si parti per andare a Spalatro [...] disse per star alli servizi della Eccellentissima Signora Margarita', in Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c.16v-17r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁰¹ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 20r, 23r, 47v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁰² 'Camerier' denotes a certain social distinction, since it referred to the servants of the elite Marino Berengo, 'Gli ebrei veneziani alla fine del Settecento', 13.

⁴⁰³ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 53r; Registro dei Battesimi 1676-1693, 33r, 25r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. A similar expression, 'to be in service' is used in 18th century England, see Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 22.

Caffis, ‘essendo stato [Pietro] della professione di barbiere’;⁴⁰⁴ jewelers like Lorenzo olim Mordocleo, son of Abram from Smyrna, thirty-four years old, who in 1663 after his baptism ‘andò via per lavorar di zogieler’; chair-maker apprentices, like Antonio olim Abram son of Isaac Montalto from Smyrna, ten years old, who in 1682 was consigned to Antonio Petrelli, his godfather and chair-maker, in *San Marcuola* ‘ad imparar l’arte del caregher’; quite few tailors, like Nicolo Venturini olim David, son of Abram Semeia from Venice, eighteen years old, who in 1706 ‘parti di casa et andò à far sartor’; greengrocers like Nadal Bonaventura Colombo olim Daniel son of David Bendana, twelve years old from Split, who in 1709 ‘fù impiegato nell’arte dei frutaroli in bottega di miser Andrea Garibaldi’;⁴⁰⁵ working in coffee-shops, like Sebastian Gasparo Lipomano olim Mir bar Abram, twenty-five years old from Etting in ‘Germania’, for whom it was agreed in 1745 to work as a ‘Principale di Bottega da Caffé ed Aquavita’.⁴⁰⁶ Relevant information about women, who as we will see were most commonly given in marriages, is really scarce. One of the few that we have refers to Marta olim Rosa who was sent away as a weaver apprentice. Marta was eight years old when she was brought with her sister at the institution in 1660 after their father had initially arrived there, and five years later, at the age of thirteen, the institution decided to send her to Bortollo Mozachi, a weaver in the quarter of *San Geremia* ‘ad imparar la profesion del tesser’.⁴⁰⁷

Beyond these quite common options for occupational engagement that the institution could offer, few Jewish converts were recruited as mercenaries in the Venetian infantry and light cavalry companies, often stationed in cities of the Veneto, like Salò, Bergamo and Palmanova, or in the Venetian navy, where they were also employed as sailors⁴⁰⁸ -as we will see, by contrast, Muslims converts were much more often enrolled in the Venetian *compagnie*. In the 17th century, most Jewish converts who enrolled in mercenary companies

⁴⁰⁴ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 46r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. For the relevance of barbers with medicine and the profession of barber-surgeon see David Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing in Early Modern Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); idem, ‘Was There a “Popular Medicine” in Early Modern Europe?’, *Folklore* 115 (2004): 151-166; Sandra Cavallo, *Artisans of the Body in Early Modern Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰⁵ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 53v, Registro dei Battesimi 1676-1693, c. 5r, Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 97r, 104v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV; Libro ... 1702-1718-G6, c. 47v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴⁰⁶ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 7r, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁰⁷ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 53v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁰⁸ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 29r, 56v, 76v, Registro dei Battesimi 1676-1693, c. 47v, 50v, 85r, 87v, Registro dei Neofiti 1734-1911, c. 79v, 110r, 113v, 118r, 126r, 132r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. For the first half of the 17th century see Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 5v, 17v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

after their baptisms were non-Italians, originating predominantly from cities of the Ottoman Empire, like Istanbul and Salonika, while in the 18th century, also Jews from the Venetian Mediterranean colonies and Italy enrolled. There are also cases of Jews already serving in the Venetian army before their conversion, like Cain Copio from Zante,⁴⁰⁹ who was a soldier at the castle of Lido and was sent to the institution in 1706 with the mediation of the *Savio alla Scrittura*, the main administrative officer responsible for the Venetian army.⁴¹⁰

As will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter, the mercenary milieu was a space conducive to conversion. Coexistence and association of non-Christians with the Christian mercenaries within this rather secluded and predominantly Christian framework⁴¹¹ provided the appropriate circumstances that rendered the more or less indirect pressure for conversion exerted by Christian fellows and the military priests fairly effective. Quite revealing to this direction is the case of the eighteen-year old David Lopes from Granada in Spain, who was baptized in 1743 in the island of Corfu. David had enrolled in the Slav regiment⁴¹² of the Venetian army and stationed in Verona, where he frequented the house of the regiment's chaplain. According to his deposition to the *Megalos Protopapas* office, it was this encounter with the chaplain that made him develop his desire to become Christian.⁴¹³ Moreover, the two witnesses that were invited to verify David Lopes' testimony, both mercenaries in the same regiment, pointed more or less directly to the pressure exerted within the regiment. Agosto Desoria confirmed that David indeed belonged to the Slav regiment, and added that there 'everybody said that he is Jew, and many prompted him to become a

⁴⁰⁹ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 93r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV; Libro in cui si notano le cose che il priore va proponendo in Cong[regazio]ne ogni Martedì e altre per memoria al nostro Signore Cancelliere, [1705-1710]-G7, c. 24v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴¹⁰ Michael Edward Mallett and John Rigby Hale, *The Military Organization of a Renaissance State* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 255-256, 258, 281.

⁴¹¹ Almond, *Two faiths, One banner*.

⁴¹² David's appearance must have impressed the priest-scribe at the *Protopapas* office, since it is the only case that he gave a detailed description of a candidate convert. He noted that David was short, blond and with no beard, and dressed in the way of the Slavs with a red coat, sky-blue breeches, and his shoes garnished with black silver tufts: 'ένας άνθρωπος νέος τη ηλικία χαμιλός, ξανθός εις το χρώμα δίχως γένια με μαλιά ξαθά, ενδεδυμένος σκλαβούνικα με βελάδα κόκκινη από ρούχο φορεστό [...] με σκαλτζούνια Γαλάζια, με παπούτζια εις τα ποδάρια μαύρα με φούμπες μπρούζινες, με σκούφια σκλαβούνικη σολδαδίτικη, και με σπαθί ήτι παλόσο', *Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες*, b. 30, f. 5, c. 248r, GSAC.

⁴¹³ 'Είναι ένας χρόνος οπου έφυγα από την πατρίδα μου, και ήρθα εις την Ιταλία, και εγράφηκα εις τα ρεγγιμένα σκλαβούνικα, και εις την Βερόνα οπου ήμουνα επρατιγάριζα εις το σπίτη ενός παπά οπου ήτον καπελάς εις το ρεγγιμένο μας, και από τότες είχα την γμώμην να γενώ χριστιανός', *Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες*, b. 30, c. 5, c. 248r, GSAC.

Christian’,⁴¹⁴ while Yures Mavrovic from Dalmatia, confirmed that ‘we all called him Jew, and himself used to say that he is a Jew from Spain, and that he wants to become a Christian’.⁴¹⁵

After their baptism, converted Jews usually returned back to their place in the mercenary companies. Yet, the conversion of Jewish mercenaries could occasionally entail a higher office within their companies, as in the case of Isak son of Pinkas Avadala, twenty-eight years old, originating from Istanbul⁴¹⁶ but living in Corfu. Isak was serving in the ‘compagnia Pala’, and after a brief stay of a month and a half in the *Casa dei Catecumeni* in 1717, he was baptized, and then returned to his company, where he was upgraded to *capitano* -‘Capitano Zan Battista Soranzo’.⁴¹⁷

Another post-baptism alternative that the institution could offer was a religious career. To follow this path, converts should first receive the appropriate education. Most commonly, this education was provided in the religious seminary of the nearby city of Padua, which in the 17th century was under the control of the Cardinal Barbarigo,⁴¹⁸ who was also a very active member of the Governing Board of the *Casa dei Catecumeni* and steadily provided the institution with candidate converts. This is, for example, the case of Venturino, who was brought to the institution as a foundling in 1705. Venturino was raised there and in 1717 sent to the seminar of Padua, while a year later he is recorded as ‘chierico’ in the church of S. Barnaba.⁴¹⁹ Religious education could also be offered privately by a priest, like in the case of Iseppo olim Abraam Baruch Caravaglio from Venice, sixteen years old, who three months after his baptism was sent to the house of a priest ‘per studiare’ -indicatively of the maybe limited but existing margins of choice that converts had, two years later Iseppo, dissatisfied with his way of life, went back to the *Casa* and requested from the institution to provide him

⁴¹⁴ ‘Εδώ και χρόνον ένα οπού ευρισκόμεουν σολδάδος εις την ιταλίαν, τον εγνώρισα, οπού ήτον εις τα ρεγγιμένα τα σκλαβούνικα σολδάδος οπού όλοι ήλεγαν πως είναι εβραίος, και τον επαρακινούσαν πολλότατοι να γενή χριστιανός’, Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 30, c. 5, c. 249r, GSAC.

⁴¹⁵ Όλοι τον εκράζαμαι εβραίον, και ο αυτός ο ίδιος το έλεγε πως είναι εβραίος από την σπάνιαν, και πως επεθύμα να γενή χριστιανός’, Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 30, c. 5, c. 249r-v, GSAC.

⁴¹⁶ In all the documents I consulted the city is referred to as ‘Costantinopoli’. Nevertheless, here I invariably use the current name of the city, Istanbul, unless it is a quoted phrase.

⁴¹⁷ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 132r, 137r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴¹⁸ The ecclesiastical seminary of Padova was renewed in 1679 by cardinal Gregorio Barbarigo. For Barbarigo see Liliana Billanovich and Pierantonio Gios, eds., *Gregorio Barbarigo. Patrizio veneto, vescovo e cardinale nella tarda Controriforma (1625-1697). Atti del convegno di studi, Padova, 7-10 novembre 1996* (Padova: Istituto per la Storia Ecclesiastica Padovana, 1999).

⁴¹⁹ Registro dei Battesimi 1676-1693, c. 3v, Registro dei Neofiti 1734-1911, c. 87r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

with ‘qualche Maestro da Conti per potersi con quello approfittarsi e apprendere la virtù [...] sino che si ritrova un mercante conforme la sua intentione’.⁴²⁰

Marriage was, as expected, the most common option available to women,⁴²¹ and the institution used to provide unmarried convert women with a dowry in order to get married. In 1687 the *Casa* prepared a dowry of 450 ducats⁴²² for Maria Antonia olim Alegrezza, daughter of Abraam Castro and Stella from Venice, who had arrived at the institution at the age of five in 1665 along with her parents and her three siblings; Maria Antonia was married to Ventura, son of Santo de Ventura, ‘marangon dall’ Arsenal’.⁴²³ In 1691 the previously mentioned Francesca olim Colomba, who at the age of nine had been allocated to Arminia Bodina, now nineteen years old, was married to ‘Antonio Pavan detto Michielin barcariol’ and was given a dowry of 250 ducats.⁴²⁴ Marriage was also an incentive for conversion or its rejection. In 1649 Allegra daughter of Isach Saraval, eighteen years old from Venice, after spending one month and a half as a catechumen in the *Casa* returned to the ghetto without receiving the baptism ‘perchè un tal Cristiano non voglia sposarla conforme promesse’.⁴²⁵ In another case in 1669, Steffano Michielino from Genoa brought in the *Casa* two Jewish women from Istanbul, the sisters Raffaella, aged seventeen, and Isabella, aged fourteen. Few days after their baptisms, he kept his promise and married Rafaella, now named Maria, and took both sisters to Genoa⁴²⁶. Finally, the previously mentioned Capitan Zan Battista Soranzo olim Isak brought in the institution in 1718 a twenty-two-year old woman from Corfu, Patienza daughter of Josua Muschio and widow of David Nissil, with her two children, Luna aged three and Josua

⁴²⁰ Libro ... 1702-1718–G6, c. 70v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴²¹ In the available baptismal registers there are recorded only two cases of Jewish men converts that got married in Venice, both dating before 1645. In 1630 Giovanni Battista from Mantua after his baptism moved into the house of Signora Alba Venetiana, ‘quale la volse per sua moglie’. A year later Tomaso established himself as a tailor in 1631, got married to the daughter of a carpenter, and as the priest notes, ‘esercita la sua arte honorosamente da buone giovane et si puo dire che fa honore veramente alla casa’ –a unique expression of contentment from the part of the institution. See Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 15v, 16v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. The fact that these marriages are the only ones found in the registers does not mean that that they were the only ones conducted. It is plausible to assume that the registration of women’s marriage was of far greater interest to the institution since it entailed the provision of dowries, something that did not stand for men.

⁴²² Compared to the dowries that the Ponentine Jewish dowry society of Venice provided in the 17th century ranging between 100 and 300 ducats, this was a fairly good dowry, see Miriam Bodian, ‘The “Portuguese” Dowry Societies in Venice and Amsterdam. A Case Study in Communal Differentiation within the Marrano Diaspora’, *Italia* 6, no. 1-2 (1987): 33.

⁴²³ Catastico-Rubrica-C2, c. 402v-403r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴²⁴ Catastico-Rubrica-C2, c. 403v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴²⁵ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 27r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴²⁶ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 71v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

aged one. After Patienza's conversion, she got married to Zan Battista, as must have been the plan right from the beginning.⁴²⁷

What all these cases highlight is that through baptism, converts had the chance to follow paths that they could have not otherwise pursued, and which ranged from crafting survival strategies to offering a relative upward social mobility. The 18th century mini-narratives can provide us with a richer understanding of Jews living within a waning Community and coping with economic pressure, as well as showcase the variety of their experiences.

A quite illustrative example of the 18th Jewish figure that could barely scrape out a living was that of the nineteen-year old Daniel Navarro from Venice. Daniel arrived alone at the institution in September 1741. When, the Prior asked him the usual question, why he wanted to convert, surely he expected one of the standard answers that candidate converts had learned to give, like 'hò avuto sempre la inclinazione di farmi cristiano', or something similar. Yet, Daniel answered: 'Mi voglio far christiano perchè non hò con che vivere, e moro di fame, e se avessi delli soldi, mi saprei impegnar e guadagnare, e cosi campar la vita'.⁴²⁸ The Prior went on asking about Daniel's occupational and family situation. Daniel replied that his parents were dead and that he had three brothers. Two of them were married. The first lived as a second-hand items dealer, 'e sta commodamente'. The other 'si impegna col fare delli pegni'. The third brother, with whom Daniel shared a room, 'è povero, e v`a per le fiere, per impegnarsi a campare, et attualmente è andato alla Fiera di Chiozza'. Himself, Daniel said, was a second-hand items dealer,⁴²⁹ but not at all successful. The Prior insisted and asked him again what the reasons of his desire to convert were. Daniel repeated: 'la volontà di farmi Cristiano m'è venuta, saranno due settimane circa, e questa, come disse, per non poter campar la vita, essendo senza soldo'. He also added that two Christians, one of them a merchant of eggs and butter, had talked him round, as well as that by converting he would avoid 'dell'insolente, che mi usavano li putti Christiani, li quali continuamente mi turbavano, fino di tirarmi contro delle pietre'.

Daniel's poor situation and despair made him a good candidate for conversion, and his Christian acquaintances, eager to 'save' one more soul or simply aware of the options opening

⁴²⁷ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 136v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV; Libro da rassegnare nella Congregat[i]one le cose importanti alle pie Case de' Catecumeni 1718-1725-G8, c. 22, 29, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴²⁸ Libro da rassegnare alla V[enerand]a Congregatione le cose importanti alle pie Case de' Catecumeni 1725-1744-G9, c. 125v-126r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴²⁹ 'Il mio mestiere era di comprare, e di rivendere le robbe, nè so altro mestiere', Registro dei Neofiti 1734-1911, c. 125v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

up through the institution, must have been conscious of this. Interestingly enough, the Prior was not discouraged by Daniel's sincerity and his direct acknowledgement of strictly mundane incentives. After spending there eleven months he was baptized by the Patriarch of Venice himself, and the institution took care of Daniel, now named Giovanni Battista Loredan, and placed him as a 'scaleter', a kind of bread roll maker and seller,⁴³⁰ in a shop owned by another neophyte woman. The shop, situated at the district of Santa Maria Formosa, bore the name 'Mondo Novo' – a name that, it is tempting to think, could have been chosen intentionally, for or from neophytes, to denote the latter's entry into the 'new world' of Christianity.

Indeed, the majority of Jews arriving at the institution were second-hand items dealers.⁴³¹ Some of them had their own shop, like Iosef Fua from Padova, twenty years old, who initially managed a 'bottega di merci' and then 'a bottega [...] di strazzariol'.⁴³² Others travelled around the cities. Clemente Todesco, thirty-one years old from Verona, recounted that 'il mio mestier era, andar comprando e vedendo per la Città di Verona strazze e altri sortimenti di drappe',⁴³³ while Gabriel Bechun from Prague, who was obliged to abandon the city when the Jews were expelled in 1745, since then he went 'gir[ando] il mondo vedendo bagatelle'.⁴³⁴ The second-hand trade was fairly variegated. Simon Olivetti from Modena, twenty-seven years old, who had three of his brothers baptized Christians, described his merchandise as follows: 'retagli di setta, bottoni vecchi d'oro et argento da bruciare e vendere poi [...]; e di più sò far borse di perruche'.⁴³⁵

The majority of these second-hand items dealers that approached the institution are presented as rather impoverished. For example, Mose Aron from Modena, twenty-two years old, a servant himself, described his father as being 'pover uomo, e fà il mestier di comprar e

⁴³⁰ According to Boerio's dictionary 'scaleter' is one that makes and sells a certain from of pastries ('scaleta' or 'ciambella'), Giuseppe Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto Veneto* (Venezia: Reale Tipografia di Giovanni Cecchini, 1867), 615.

⁴³¹ Patricia Allerston has written extensively on the importance and variety of second-hand commerce in Venice, see Patricia Allerston, 'Reconstructing the Second-Hand Clothes Trade in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Venice', *Costume* 33 (1999): 46-56; idem, 'Clothing and Early Modern Society', *Continuity and Change* 15, no. 3 (2000): 367 – 390; idem, *Rags and Riches: The Second-Hand Trade in Venice, 1500-1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). For the 18th century, see Madeleine Ginsburg, 'Rags to Riches. The Second-Hand Clothes Trade 1700-1798', *Costume* 14 (1980), 121-135; Laurence Fontaine, *History of Pedlars in Europe* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 35-49; idem, 'The Exchange of Second-Hand Goods Between Survival Strategies and "Business" in Eighteenth-century Paris', in *Alternative Exchanges. Second-Hand Circulations from the Sixteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Laurence Fontaine (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2008), 97-114.

⁴³² Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 138v (1742), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴³³ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 35v (1748), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴³⁴ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 48v (1750), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴³⁵ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 35v (1748), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

vender panni vecchi, onde apena puo mantenere se stesso',⁴³⁶ while the Venetian David Todesco, who reached the institution in 1717 with his three-year old son, referring to his father and brother said: 'Il padre fà la professione di Sanzer, et il fratello v`a in volta per la cita comprando strazze vecchie. Sono miserabili e mendichi'.⁴³⁷ And the above-mentioned Clemente Todesco recounted that he was in a rather destitute condition, when his brother, already a convert of the *Casa*, convinced him to convert.⁴³⁸

Beyond second-hand items dealers, the presence of small-scale food traders was also frequent in the institution. Giuseppe Vita, thirty-nine years old, born in Istanbul but living in Venice for twenty-six years, came with his ten-year old son to the institution and said that he was 'nella professione di vender chicare di caffè sotto le procuratorie', that is preparing cups of coffee.⁴³⁹ Vitta Dallatorre from Venice was a 'caffetiere', that is an owner of a shop selling coffee, before quitting and engaging in second-hand items commerce.⁴⁴⁰ Isach Forti from Verona but living in Adria, twenty-two years old, was an assistant in a food shop, but also prepared 'le vivande, [...], quali io solo scanava [slaughtered], per avere avuto tal privilegio dalli Rabbini di Verona'.⁴⁴¹ The Venetian Daniel Todesco, worked with his father, who was selling 'pastizzi', but also maintained a shop preparing fibers. The Venetian Pellegrin Lezer, eighteen years old, was a 'galliner', that is a merchant of chickens,⁴⁴² and Lion Todesco, also an eighteen-year old Venetian, was a butcher.⁴⁴³

Not many Jewish craftsmen reached the institution. Emanuel Pesa, thirty-five years old, a native of Spalato⁴⁴⁴ but living in Livorno, was a "negoziante in coralli [...], quali anche lavorava di sua mano".⁴⁴⁵ Emanuel Pollaco, forty-seven years old from Cracovia, who arrived at the Venetian institution with his wife and young son in 1733, was a Chandler: "[sa]

⁴³⁶ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 147v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴³⁷ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 134r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴³⁸ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 35v (1748), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴³⁹ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c.49v (1735), Catecumeni, AIRE. According to Boerio's dictionary *chicara* is a 'vasetto notissimo per uso di bere caffè, cioccolatta e simili', see Boerio, *Dizionario*, 166.

⁴⁴⁰ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 21v (1746), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁴¹ Libro ...1725-1744-G9, c. 121v (1741), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴⁴² After about ten days Pellegrin escaped the institution 'sormontato il muro della cortisella'. Ten years later he went back to the institution, but left again after nine months, see Costituti 1744-1762, c. 89v-90r, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁴³ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 135v, 136v (1742), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴⁴⁴ For the foundation of the commercial post of Spalato see Renzo Paci, 'La scala di Spalato e la politica veneziana in Adriatico', *Quaderni Storici* 13 (1970): 48-105.

⁴⁴⁵ Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 2v-3r and 8v-9r (1725), Catecumeni, AIRE. Polishing the red coral obtained from off Naples and the Tunisian coast was one of the main Jewish occupations in Livorno, see Israel, *European Jewry*, 148.

di far perfettam[ent]e la cera spagna', the Prior noted.⁴⁴⁶ Abraam Iacob Accaioli from Venice, twenty years old, was 'stampador, e difatto stavo per garzone nella stamperia di Cà Bragadin, qual stamparia è in lingua Ebraica',⁴⁴⁷ but he also knew how to print in the Italian language.⁴⁴⁸ Iosef Romano, who reached Venice and the institution from Corfu in 1742, bearing -like many others candidate converts coming from the Venetian Mediterranean cities- a letter of recommendation from *Provveditore General di Mar* Loredan, was a tailor.⁴⁴⁹ Isach Coen, twenty-one years old from Jerusalem, who had travelled extensively before reaching Venice, was a shoemaker 'all'uso però Levantino, cioe sò far e cusir Papuzze, Stivali [...]; ne saprei far scarpe all'Italiana'.⁴⁵⁰ Moise Levi from Istanbul, twenty-two years old, was in the jewelry business: 'il mio mestier è di partire l'Oro dall'Argento, e questo raffinare'.⁴⁵¹

Finally, few servants reached the institution, like the above-mentioned Mose Aron from Modena, who worked as a servant in the house of the Jew 'Salvo Sanguinetti, che fà pegni al luoco de Monti'. Mose explained to the Prior that he aspired to become a tailor, but he had to work as a servant due to his own and his family's poverty.⁴⁵² One of the few women with 'proper' employment recorded,⁴⁵³ the fifteen-year old Saretta Arietti, born in Amsterdam but her father originating from Venice and her mother from Praga, had worked as a 'massera' at the house of Aron Coen in Venice and was now serving at the house of the Jew Giacob Gentili in Ceneda.⁴⁵⁴ Several other cases of Jewish servants underline the conflation between servanthship and apprenticeship, as well as the transient nature of this occupation. The above mentioned Mir bar Abram, who after his baptism was employed as 'principale di Bottega da Caffé ed Aquavita', recounted that at the age of eleven he was sent to Livorno as a servant in the house of a jeweler, where he stayed for thirteen years. During these years, he was not paid,

⁴⁴⁶ Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 57v (1733), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴⁴⁷ For the printing of Hebrew books in Venice see Ravid, 'The Venetian Government and the Jews', 24-25; Joseph R. Hacker and Adam Shear, eds., *The Hebrew Book in Early Modern Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 6-10, 76-78.

⁴⁴⁸ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 143v (1743), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴⁴⁹ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 134v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴⁵⁰ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 31v (1748), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁵¹ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 41v (1748), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁵² Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 147v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴⁵³ Early modern women were generally defined by their skills, not their professions. Thus, the Prior noted in detail the skills that the women who reached the institution possessed, as these would be important for their after-baptism itineraries, mostly as servants or skilled spouses. For example, in the case of Sara Amadio from Venice, twenty-five years old, daughter of a rabbi and wife of a goldsmith, the Prior noted that she knew how to 'fare scufie, calze [...] e cucire', and in the case of Pasienza Giosua from Corfu, sixteen years old, daughter of a tailor, and her fifteen-year old cousin Semica or Alegra Giosua, he noted that both knew how to 'fillar bombaso', that is spin cotton, but also 'far calze [e] berette', see Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 123v (1741), 139v (1742), 140v (1742), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴⁵⁴ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 81v (1752), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

but his master taught him ‘il lavorare le gioie’. After the death of the jeweler, and before coming to Venice, Mir bar Abram worked as a ‘servitore e garzone di bottega’ with a Jewish merchant of textiles.⁴⁵⁵ Abram Lombroso, thirty years old from Izmir, prior to his arrival in Venice had spent a year in Corfu serving the Jewish merchant Isac de Mordo, but before that he had worked six years in Istanbul and four years in Salonika as a porter (*fachino*) and a barber.⁴⁵⁶ Jacob Calabi, twenty-three years old from Verona, recounted that in the past he worked as a servant at the home of the Jew Cesi, but that at the moment he was unemployed, and he made little money ‘alle Porte del Ghetto facendo il sensale’.⁴⁵⁷

c. Religious conversion as a family venture

The suggestion that to an important extent baptism was for Jews a response to the growing economic pressure exerted on them is also corroborated by an important shift that occurred in the last decades of 17th century, namely the transformation of conversion from a rather individual male venture to a whole-family venture. In fact, the frequency with which Jewish families reached the institution accelerated significantly, and reached its peak in the 1690s.

Before the 1690s, it was only every two years that a Jewish family would reach the institution, and it was usually small families like the one of the Venetian Abram Aboaf, thirty-three years old, who reached the institution in 1672 with his daughter Venturina, six years old and his son Lazaro, four years old.⁴⁵⁸ Since the 1690’s onwards, the frequency with which Jewish families reached the institution increased to one every six months. Almost all of these families were of Venetian origin, and they were often quite extended, consisting of up to ten members, like the family of the Venetian Daniel Cusin, thirty-seven years old, and Bianca, aged forty, who reached the casa in 1690 with their eight children, four girls and four boys aged between four and seventeen.⁴⁵⁹ A year later, 1691 Moise Zavali from Venice, forty-five years old, and his wife Corona, forty years old, reached the institution with their five sons: Samuele aged twenty-two, Natan eighteen, Zimele sixteen, Consiglio thirteen and Simone ten.⁴⁶⁰ In 1693 David Alterras or Bigarello from Venice, sixty-two years old, reached the

⁴⁵⁵ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 6v (1745), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁵⁶ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 87v (1752), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁵⁷ Costituti 1779-1836, c. 36v (1787), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁵⁸ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 76v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁵⁹ Registro dei Battesimi 1676-1693, c. 16r-v, 26r, 54v, 76r, 83r, 101r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁶⁰ Registro dei Battesimi 1676-1693, c. 26v, 59v, 63v, 101v, 113v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

Casa accompanied by his son Samuele, twenty years old, and his five daughters: Anna aged twenty-three, Giustina seventeen, Giuditta sixteen, Rachel fourteen, and Sara ten. His daughter Anna came along with her husband, David Abuaf, aged thirty-two, and their one-year old little daughter Lea.⁴⁶¹

Sometimes one member of the family, usually one of the parents, took the first step and approached the institution, while other members of the family, maybe the other spouse,⁴⁶² refused to follow and remained in the ghetto. This is the case of the Israel family from Venice in 1670. First, the two elder sisters from Venice, Chiona sixteen years old and Sara fourteen years old, daughters of Isach Israel arrived at the institution. Two days later, their mother Besagna, aged forty-one, along with her other three children, Ester nineteen years old, Luna twelve years old and Iosef seven months were escorted at the *Casa* by the Prior and 'col brazo dell'Avogaria'. It seems that Besagna had decided to convert against the will of her husband. To this end, she had initially sent her two elder daughters to the *Casa* in order to ask for the institution's help to bring the rest of her family over. And as it happened often in similar cases, the institution had asked from the Venetian magistrate of the *Avogaria di Comun* to intervene so as to take the mother and the three children out of the ghetto.⁴⁶³

In another case, in 1718, the institution's Prior recorded in his notebook a vivid description of a dramatic story –or, at least, his version of it. Lia, twenty-five years old, daughter of Moise Gaon from the Venetian colony of Spalato was the wife of Lorenzo Zambelli olim Abraham Flamengo and the mother of Mordochéo, four years old. The mother and the son were located in the house of Iseppo Dente, a Jewish convert also from Spalato,⁴⁶⁴ who presumably must have tried to convince her to convert along with her son. Lia refused to do so, and Iseppo called the institution's Prior, Abbate Antonio Zambelli –Iseppo's house was

⁴⁶¹ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 2v-3r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. After a month and a half the whole family decided to abandon the institution, but Lea, who was already baptized, was kept in the *Casa*.

⁴⁶² According to Jewish law, in the case that a man converted, her wife could not remarry, unless he petitioned for the dissolution of their marriage. In the case that a woman converted, the unconverted husband simply dissolved the marriage, see Howard Adelman, 'Italian Jewish Women', in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith R. Baskin (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 150.

⁴⁶³ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 73v-74r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. Pullan has suggested that it was since the beginning of the 17th century that the *Avogaria di Comun*, that is the public prosecutors, started handling the controversial cases concerning the baptism of Jews or the baptism of converts' children, while Ioly Zorattini dates this slightly later, in 1641, see Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 88, 273; Ioly Zorattini, *Battesimi di fanciuli ebrei*, 15.

⁴⁶⁴ Iseppo Francesco Dente olim Giacob Penso arrived at the institution in 1708 at the age of twenty and was baptized about six months later. Apparently he maintained a rather close relationship with the institution throughout these years, see Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 102v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

in the district of Giudecca, that is quite near to the *Casa*. The Prior tried to change Lia's mind, but in vain. Lia 'nè voleva rendersi capace della verità evangelica, nè lasciare il Figlio nel potere del Padre'. Then, in a moment of despair and under the threat that the Prior would take away her son, Lia 'prese [il figlio] nel braccio procurando di precipitarlo dalla Finestra, e qui non potendo, corse alla scala, [e] lo lasciò dal braccio al precipitio', but the Prior managed to catch the little boy. As he puts it, after having saved the child from death, he took it with him at the *Casa*. That same day Lia approached the institution and asked the Prior to accept her there. Although she faced the Prior's doubts concerning the 'sincerity' of her intentions –as the Prior noted, 'in tanto s'andarà esaminando la sua vocazione se proviene dal retto fine, ò dalla disperatione per raggion del suo Figlio' – she was nevertheless accepted. After spending more that six months in the institution, Lia was baptized and along with her son, they went to live in the house of her husband.⁴⁶⁵ Even if the Prior made up this dramatic scene in order to justify his decision to take the child from the mother, he could have been inspired by scenes that he may have heard of or even witnessed in similar cases.

But, most often, after a member of the family took the first step, the rest of the family followed. From this point of view, families functioned as a network bringing candidate converts to the institution of equal efficiency and importance as the one that the institution had established through its Board of Governors. The family network created an environment, pressing or comforting, where the oblique force exerted on Jews for converting could be both accommodated and increased. Thus, a converted family member could invite, encourage, help, advise or even compel relatives to approach the institution. Here are some cases. In 1673 the Venetian Menachem, twenty-six years old, and his daughter Ester, five years old, got baptized and after their baptism they found shelter in the house of his sister, a convert herself.⁴⁶⁶ In 1694 the Venetian Rachel, thirty-four years old, approached the institution accompanied by a noble woman, Camilla Bassadona. She said she wanted to be baptized, but requested permission to remain during the period of catechesis 'nella casa del Nobile Huomo Zan Battista Barbaro ove si ritrova una sua sorella già fatta Christiana, e figlia di questo pio Luogo' –most probably Rachel's sister was a servant at the house of Barbaro.⁴⁶⁷ In November 1706 the Venetian Jose Iseppo Semeia, sixteen years old, was brought at the institution and

⁴⁶⁵ The story is in Libro ... 1718-1725-G8, c. 1v, 27, Catecumeni, AIRE. Both baptisms are recorded in Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 134v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁶⁶ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 77v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁶⁷ Registro dei Battesimi 1676-1693, c. 16r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

two months later his brother David Semeia, eighteen years old arrived there: both were accompanied by their uncle ‘Signor Francisco Venturini Fante delle Beccarie’, a convert as well.⁴⁶⁸ In 1709 Abraam, twenty-five years old from Lepanto, son of the deceased Ezechiel Sachi, arrived in Venice and was conducted to the *Casa* by his brother Angelo Geregni olim Gioseffo.⁴⁶⁹ In 1748 Simon Olivetti, twenty-seven years old from Modena and a merchant of second-hand objects, was accompanied at the institution by his three converted brothers –one of them had become a priest, and another had become a mercenary.⁴⁷⁰ Towards the close of the century, in 1779, the fifty-five-year old Sara, widow of Moise, also from Venice, who was living on the charity that she received from her ‘nazione’, was initially indecisive on whether to convert or not, as one of her two sons had already converted three years ago, while the youngest son, aged ten, declined to follow her –yet finally, she converted.⁴⁷¹

Another case few years later illustrates both the efficiency of the family networks and the cooperation between converts, the institution and the *Avogaria di Comun*. In 1717 Zaccaria Canton, thirty-one years old from Venice, reached the institution with his wife Sara Pollaco, twenty-six years old, and their three children: Benetto aged nine, Moise six and Gratia three.⁴⁷² About a year after their baptism, Zaccaria now named Francesco approached his brother-in law, the thirty-year old Benetto Todesco from Venice, and convinced him to convert.⁴⁷³ Few months after Benetto reached the institution, his sister Hana Todesco, forty years old, arrived there with her husband Lion Negri Todesco and their five children: three girls and two boys, the eldest sixteen years old and the youngest twenty days old.⁴⁷⁴ Moreover, sometime before approaching the siblings Benetto and Hana, Zaccaria olim Francesco had also approached another member of that family, David Todesco, and convinced him to convert along with his three-year old son.⁴⁷⁵ A month after David Todesco’s baptism, his daughter, a little girl nine days old, was brought in the *Casa*, ‘coll’ordine dell’Ecc[ellentissi]mo S[igno]r Avogador Querini e [...] ad istanza di [...] Antonio suo padre’. Indeed, the little girl had been already baptized one night in the house of a Christian

⁴⁶⁸ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 95r, 97r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. Niccolo Venturini olim David left the institution a month and a half later and ‘andò a far sartor’.

⁴⁶⁹ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 97r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁷⁰ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 34v, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁷¹ Costituti 1779-1836, c. 1v, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁷² Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 133r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁷³ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 135r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV; Libro ... 1718-1725-G8, c. 8, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴⁷⁴ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 135v-136r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁷⁵ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 134r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

‘per imminente pericolo’ –a clarification that raises suspicion, considering that the mother, Rachella, had denied to follow her husband and remained in the ghetto.⁴⁷⁶

Family ties also worked efficiently and steadily in depth of time, entangling unconverted family members into the process of conversion. This is, for example, the remarkable case of the Castro family: within a timespan of fifteen years at least eleven members of the family were baptized in the *Casa*. It was Salomon, nineteen years old, son of Isaac Castro the first to be baptized in 1649. In 1652 another member of the family, Moise aged twenty, was baptized. A year later, in 1653, when Isaac Castro was now dead, his daughter Sara, aged twenty, received the baptism. In 1657 the widow of Isaac Castro, Bianca aged sixty, with her daughter Rachel, aged eighteen, reached the institution and were both baptized. And in 1665, Abram Castro, forty years old, son of Isaac and Bianca, arrived at the *Casa*, bringing along his wife Stella, aged thirty-six and their five children: Bianca aged fifteen, Dolcetta seven, Legrezza five, Leon two and Giacob six months.⁴⁷⁷

Another case was that of the Venetians Bella and Salvador, both from the Todesco family. In April 1708 Bella, thirty-three years old, and her daughter Dolce, nine years old, reached the institution accompanied by the vicar of the *San Marcuola* Church, who also belonged to the institution’s Board. Less than a month later the mother decided to leave the institution; her daughter was nevertheless kept in *Casa* and baptized. In July 1708, after the baptism of her daughter, Bella returned at the institution and asked anew to be accepted there. This time she stayed and was baptized in December 1709.⁴⁷⁸ Bella and Dolce stayed in the institution for a year, when in December 1710 her husband Salvador Todesco, forty-one years old, arrived there with Giacob, their eighteen-year old son.⁴⁷⁹ The family, now reunited, left the institution, and got a house right across of it, where the father, now named Salvador, was established as a ‘frutariol’.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁶ Nevertheless, in the institution’s registers there are few cases of explicitly forced baptisms, that is of children’s baptisms before the age of fourteen without their parents’ consent, see Ioly Zorattini, *Battesimi di fanciulli Ebrei*; Benjamin Ravid, ‘The Forced Baptisms of Jewish Minors in Early-Modern Venice’, *Italia* 13-15 (2001): 259-301. The situation was much more different in Rome, see Marina Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati. Storie di ebrei, cristiani e convertiti nella Roma dei papi* (Roma: Viella, 2004), also recently published in English as *Forced baptisms. Histories of Jews, Christians, and Converts in Papal Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

⁴⁷⁷ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 27r, 37r, 40v-41r, 48r-v, 63v, 64r, 65r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁷⁸ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 100v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁷⁹ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 115v-116r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁸⁰ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 122v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

With the increase of Jewish families in the institution, the number of children also increased, thus enhancing the role of the institution as a possible pool for those seeking *figli d'anima*. This term described the position of children adopted and raised in a household, but also often used as domestic servants or apprentices, or both.⁴⁸¹ In a sense, their condition must have been something in-between that of a child and a servant, as they were not associated with sheer economic ties with the household, but were also sharing a certain degree of both intimacy with and obligation towards the family. The Venetian *Casa*, as other charitable institutions,⁴⁸² had assumed the role of providing *figli d'anima* even before the rise in the number of Jewish children at the institution.⁴⁸³ For example, the previously mentioned doctor Pietro Caffis, who in 1656 had received as an assistant the nineteen-year old Pietro olim Abram Moreno from Venice, had visited the institution several years before, in 1632. In that occasion, he kept in his house a little Jew, the Venetian David Cohen, during the period of his catechesis. He later became his godfather, and after his baptism he kept the child, now named Fausto e Ignatio, 'per figlio'.⁴⁸⁴

But, as the number of Jewish families in the institution increased during the last decades of the 17th century, the young children did not always follow their parents after baptism. This is for example the cases of Raina and Colomba, who as already mentioned were sent to the house of Signora Arminia Bodina, or the case of a two-year old girl, daughter of Abraam Mantovi. Abraam, twenty-four years old from Mantova, had approached the *Casa* with his two little daughters in 1682. After his baptism, Abraam established himself in Venice and took with him his youngest daughter, twenty-four days old. However, the other little girl, was given to 'Illustrissima Signora Bembo quale disse volere tener e custodir sempre la medesima appresso di se'.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸¹ Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, 99-104, 151-152. In her book *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* Monica Chojnacka refers to two cases of adoption of children converts from the *Casa dei Catecumeni* in the 16th century. Drawing on the wording used in the requests of adoption, which stresses that adoptive parents will take good care of the child, Chojnacka seems to slightly exaggerate the parents' 'good intentions'. There is no indication that these expressions were anything more than the standard phrasing used in such procedures, as it is also suggested by other similar cases, see Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*, 132.

⁴⁸² Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, 119-120.

⁴⁸³ The increase of children in the institution, as we will see, was mostly due to the Muslim children that were seized during the years of Ottoman-Venetian wars.

⁴⁸⁴ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 16v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁴⁸⁵ Registro dei Battesimi 1676-1693, c. 4v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

ii. A new type of convert emerging in the 18th century

a. In the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni*

In December 1741, Marco Bassan, thirty-five years old and born in Verona, appeared before the institution's Prior.⁴⁸⁶ Marco was a figure rather different from the ones we have so far encountered. He was an educated physician, having probably studied at the university of Padua. Marco was also a professor, and had spent many years teaching 'Retorica, Filosofia, et altre scienze' in Istanbul, and the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. He had also travelled extensively in Western Europe, London Amsterdam and Paris.⁴⁸⁷ Marco made quite clear to the Prior that he reached the institution out of pure intellectual interest, adding that he nurtured the desire to convert to Christianity already back in Istanbul, but could not find there the right teachers. Yet, Marco did not remain long in the institution. He left after a month, as both the teaching and the way of living at the institution failed to meet his expectations.⁴⁸⁸

Of course, intellectual and religious pursuits and motives for conversion were not absent during the 17th century, although it is difficult to trace them in the available records of the Venetian institution. The most widely known case is that of the brothers Samuel and Giosef Nemias,⁴⁸⁹ who were accepted at the institution in 1649, along with Samuel's son, David.⁴⁹⁰ The Nemias brothers came from a distinguished and wealthy Sephardic family who had fled Castile for Albania and then Thessaloniki, where they were established as merchants, travelling also to Venice where they traded as *viandanti*. After their conversion, one of the two brothers, Samuel, now named Giulio, became the ardent conversionist and Capuchin friar

⁴⁸⁶ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 129v-130r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁴⁸⁷ Pietro Ioly Zorattini suggested that this Marco Bassan could be identified with Marco, son of David Bassan who received his diploma in philosophy and medicine from the university of Padova in 1728, see Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri*, 96.

⁴⁸⁸ The Prior noted that during the month that Marco spent there, he was always 'in tutto impaziente, et affatto alieno, e per dire meglio disprezator delli amaestramenti, e divotioni spirituali'. What's more, he could not bear the strict discipline and austerity of the institution. He told the Prior that he could not suffer 'la clausura di questa Casa che nomava Chiostro'. The Prior, rather unable to understand what Marco was looking for, yet without altogether doubting his motives, concluded: 'Però in una parola per quanto à me pare lo giudico essere Atteista'.

⁴⁸⁹ Although in secondary literature the brothers are referred to as Nahmias, I am here maintaining the way their name was recorded in the registers of the *Casa*.

⁴⁹⁰ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 29r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. The Nemias brothers were baptized in less than two weeks, a fact suggesting that they had already received some catechesis elsewhere -maybe they were in contact with friars from the Convent of the Frari, where they were hosted during their catechesis.

Giulio Morosini, known also from his anti-Judaic treatise *Via della Fede* that he published in Rome in 1683.⁴⁹¹

Yet, what changed since the first decades of the 18th century, and most prominently after the 1740s, was the frequency with which such figures of the Jewish intellectual or economic upper class approached the institution. This new ‘type’ of Jewish converts emerged and coexisted along the previously described ‘type’ of converts who sought through conversion to deal with poverty,⁴⁹² the latter still representing in the 18th century the majority of converts at the Venetian institution. Nevertheless, along the destitute or underprivileged, Jews belonging to more privileged families, like the families of those engaged in the various communal duties or the families of merchants, educated physicians and rabbis, started frequenting the institution. In order to approach this shift, we need to briefly refer to the intellectual and cultural environment of the 17th and 18th centuries.

As it is well known, the 17th century, especially the second half, was a period of profound spiritual and intellectual crisis for the Jews of Europe, witnessing the Spinozist critique of rabbinic Judaism and Jewish observances, but also witnessing an upsurge of messianic expectations that were widely invested in the figure of rabbi Shabbatai Zevi from Izmir, who in 1665 proclaimed himself the Messiah of Jews. The Shabbatean movement, ‘the most enduring and widespread phenomenon of this [messianic] type within Judaism since the rise of Christianity’,⁴⁹³ resonated among both the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities and their leaders all over Europe, appealing to Jews of every wealth and status. The conversion of Shabbatai Zevi to Islam under the threat of death in 1666 provoked a shock to the Jewish communities, while subsequently their leaders tried to restore confidence to their authority and to traditional Judaism in general. Nevertheless, Shabbatai’s conversion did not deprive the movement from its dynamic altogether, causing the conversion of several Jews to Islam and thus the development of a new path for the movement.⁴⁹⁴ Shabbatean supporters, awaiting for

⁴⁹¹ Giulio Morosini’s case is used by Pullan in order to exemplify his second category of Jewish converts, ‘the zealot’, see Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 245-246, 250-251. For Morosini’s treatise and information on his life see Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice*, 189-200.

⁴⁹² For a similar trend in Germany see Deborah Hertz, ‘Seductive Conversion in Berlin, 1770-1809’, in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. Todd M. Endelman (New York, London: Holmes and Meier, 1987), 52, 59-62; Steven M. Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community. Enlightenment, Family, and Crisis, 1770-1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴⁹³ Israel, *European Jewry*, 208; Ruderman, ‘Michael A. Meyer’s Periodization of Modern Jewish History’, 35-38.

⁴⁹⁴ For the *dönme*, that is the converted crypto-Jews followers of Sabbatai Zevi see Marc David Baer, *The Dönme. Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010), 1-21.

the second coming of the Messiah, were active throughout Europe well into the 18th century, raising skepticism towards or outright challenging and undermining traditional and rabbinic Judaism.

This 17th century criticism, leveled internally against traditional Judaism as well as against rabbinic and communal authority, acquired a new dynamic in the 18th century. Combined with the intellectual claims of Enlightenment that drew, among other sources, on this criticism⁴⁹⁵ and dismissed the ‘Jewish erudition and observance as archaic, obscurantist and barbaric’,⁴⁹⁶ it resulted in the further waning of the Jewish status amidst impoverished and indebted communities with dissolving communal structures,⁴⁹⁷ bringing about a profound crisis of the Jewish identity.⁴⁹⁸ And this sweeping trend seems to have reached a much wider spectrum than before, covering almost the whole social structure of the Jewish communities, from the destitute to rich merchants and educated rabbis: ‘The Jewish critics of religion and the religiously lax came from the prayer house, from among the wandering teachers, from the houses of commerce and court agents, from families of the grand bourgeoisie, who became deeply involved in the European elite as a result of their commercial ties, from among the servants who sought to escape from their harsh lives, and the Jewish students and physicians, who were among the few who acquired a European education’.⁴⁹⁹

These fundamental changes, which constituted part of the secularization process of the 18th century European Jewish communities, have not yet been comprehensively addressed within the Italian context.⁵⁰⁰ Nevertheless, during the last two decades new studies have been reconsidering the prevalent notion of the decline of the 18th century Italian Jewish communities, through which these changes were hitherto approached, and suggested a reinterpretation of the recurring elements that characterized the state of Italian Jewish

⁴⁹⁵ Israel, *European Jewry*, 231.

⁴⁹⁶ Israel, *European Jewry*, 249.

⁴⁹⁷ Israel, *European Jewry*, 243, 248-251.

⁴⁹⁸ Shmuel Feiner, *The Origins of Jewish Secularization in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 16-21.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁰⁰ These processes have been studied much more extensively within the context of German Enlightenment, the *Haskalah*, and the figure of Moses Mendelssohn, see indicatively Michael A. Meyer, *Judaism within Modernity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001); Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); *idem*, *Moses Mendelssohn. Sage of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); or within the wider context of northern Europe, see Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714-1830. Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Philadelphia : Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979); Jacob Katz, ed., *Towards Modernity. The European Jewish Model* (New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Books, 1987); Feiner, *The Origins of Jewish Secularization*.

communities throughout the century. In this direction, the decline of rabbinical authority, the indifference of the Jewish elite towards community life and their parallel cultivation of a taste for a Christian aristocratic lifestyle are no longer seen as indications of decline but as part of the Jewish emancipation and social integration processes, or in other words, as the “Jewish path” towards modernity’.⁵⁰¹

Conversion to Christianity in the 18th century was therefore one of the consequences entailed within these profound changes that Judaism had undergone.⁵⁰² It constituted in the minds of several contemporary Jews a means of dissociating themselves from a religion, a community and a condition that not only seemed outdated and anachronistic, but more importantly impeded their integration into the Christian society, which was seen as both the space of ‘enlightened’ and ‘civilized humanity’⁵⁰³ associated with the ideas of progress and emancipation,⁵⁰⁴ as well as a space where they could meet their aspirations for better professional options beyond the limited and often stigmatized ‘Jewish professions’.⁵⁰⁵ As Israel put it, ‘[in the 18th century, Jews’ ambition] was not for Jewish status but for standing in Gentile society’.⁵⁰⁶

Against this background, the presence of figures like that of Marco Bassan in the Venetian institution can be better understood. Although it was after the 1740s that their presence at the institution became relatively more pronounced, in the previous years we can trace few of these figures, like the physician *Dottor* Jones Cohen, who approached the institution in 1710. He was twenty-eight-year old, originating from Augusta in the Holy

⁵⁰¹ For the Jewish modernity in the Italian context see Francesca Bregoli, ‘Jewish Modernity in Eighteenth-Century Italy. A Historiographical Survey’, *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 6 (2007): 67-78, esp. 73-74; Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers. . The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Francesca Bregoli, “Two Jews Walk into a Coffeehouse”. The “Jewish Question”, Utility, and Political Participation in Late Eighteenth-Century Livorno’, *Jewish History* 24 (2010): 309-329; Francesca Bregoli and Federica Francesconi, ‘Tradition and Transformation in Eighteenth-Century Europe. Jewish Integration in Comparative Perspective’. In ‘Jewish Integration in Comparative Perspective’. Special Issue, *Jewish History* 24 (2010): 235-246; Francesca Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment. Livornese Jews, Tuscan Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Reform* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁰² Feiner, *The Origins of Jewish Secularization*, 95-99, 218-220.

⁵⁰³ Deborah Hertz, ‘Emancipation Through Inter-marriage in Old Berlin’, in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Baskin, 198.

⁵⁰⁴ For the 18th century see Israel, *European Jewry*, 237-255.

⁵⁰⁵ Todd M. Endelman, ‘Gender and Conversion Revisited’, in *Gender and Jewish History*, ed. Marion A. Kaplan and Deborah Dash Moore (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 175.

⁵⁰⁶ Israel, *European Jewry*, 200.

Roman Empire but leaving in the Venetian ghetto, and after his baptism, he went to live and work with 'Ill[ustrissi]mo Signor Dottor Fisico Girolamo Lodoni'.⁵⁰⁷

Quite early on in the 18th century several rabbis, itinerant preachers and others engaged in religious tasks also approached the institution. Initially these Jews were not Venetians. In 1718 Salomon from Berlin, a 'sacerdote nella sua seta' or 'coem' came at the *Casa*,⁵⁰⁸ and later that year the rabbi Matatia from Jerusalem approached the institution, after having travelled for some time. Matatia received the baptism and was later sent to work as a 'muschio', that is a glove-maker in the shop of his godfather Alessandro Armani, but he soon left from there in order to become a Franciscan friar.⁵⁰⁹ From then onwards, the presence of Jewish religious officers at the institution became more frequent. In 1726 the twenty-two-year old rabbi Abram Naim from the city of Tripolis was brought by the Jesuits to Ancona and then directed to the *Casa*.⁵¹⁰ In 1737 Elia Cohen Sabbatachi came at the *Casa*. He was from Zante, had spent several years in Venice as a child, and then went back to Zante, where he was a 'sacerdote' and a merchant engaged in the oil commerce.⁵¹¹ In 1756, Giacob Bonfili from Istanbul, a 'sacerdote all'uso levantino' and his wife Giuditta Ascoli from Ancona reached the institution. They lived in Corfu, and they returned there after their baptism.⁵¹² Since the mid-18th century, few local religious or communal officers also reached the institution, like the Venetian Abram Pesach who came at the institution in 1751. He said he had assistant duties in the Spanish synagogue, 'sono nonzolo della scuola Spagnola',⁵¹³ and that he had vowed to God to convert, if he helped him recover from a disease. Several years later, in 1783, the Venetian Moise Morpurgo, a rabbi sixty years old, converted at the institution.⁵¹⁴

Among those privileged Jews there were also merchants or others living on their income from property. Vitale Cantarini, thirty-three years old, born in Padova but living in Rovigo, made a living out of the income of his family estate, but had also studied medicine.⁵¹⁵ Pelegrin Treves from Verona, twenty-one years old, was a nephew of the famous Venetian

⁵⁰⁷ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 113r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁵⁰⁸ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 7v, 10v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁵⁰⁹ Libro ... 1718-1725, c. 3v, 31v, 32r, 33v, 34r, 35v, 37v, Catecumeni, AIRE; Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 135r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁵¹⁰ Libro ... 1725-1744, c. 2v-3v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁵¹¹ Libro ... 1725-1744, c. 98v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁵¹² Costituti 1744-1762, c. 136v-137v, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁵¹³ After his baptism he became a 'ligator di libri', Costituti 1744-1762, c. 73v, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁵¹⁴ Registro dei Neofiti 1734-1911, c. 121r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁵¹⁵ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 144v (1743), Catecumeni, AIRE.

merchant, into whose house he resided. Pelegrin also said that one of his brothers had also converted.⁵¹⁶ Salomon Nacamuli from Corfu, said his profession was ‘ora di sanser d'olio, ora di far pegni, ed il vero e quasi continuo era, d'andar con mio padre in pratica di solicator delle liti’.⁵¹⁷ Moise Luzzatto, born in Rovigo but living in Venice, son of the wealthy merchant Abraham Luzatto, was accompanied to the institution by the nobleman Andrea Civran. He said to the Prior that it's been many years that he had been nursing the desire to convert, but that nobody wanted to assist him in this desire, because of his father: ‘tutti hanno declinato [...] a riguardo e tema del mio padre, che ha aderenze forti, stante l'opulenza sua de beni di fortuna’.⁵¹⁸ Originating from a rather well established family was also Iseppo Abenacar, forty-nine years old, from Venice.⁵¹⁹ His two brothers were working in one of the loan banks that belonged to a relative, and himself was a ‘sollicitador alle liti, onde giornalmente praticava in Palazzo’. What's more, Iseppo and his brothers were the owners of four houses in the ghetto that they rented, and himself was the heir of three more houses there. Abram Castro from Corfu, twenty-six years old, was a son of a doctor, a profession that both his brothers had also followed. Abram himself was an *agente*, working with the established merchant Emanuel Giacur,⁵²⁰ while back in Corfu he owned a house, ‘ben proveduta [la casa] di mobili’.⁵²¹ Abram Geremia, fifty-eight years old, the son of the famous and by 1787 deceased Venetian rabbi Simon Calimani,⁵²² has spent his life as a *sensale*: ‘Dell’ età d’anni 17 circa mi sono impiegato a fare il sensale; indi sono passato al quanto tempo come agente in un negozio di strazzarie, e poi in figura di sensale mi sono fermato nello stesso negozio sino al giorno d’oggi’.⁵²³

⁵¹⁶ Libro ... 1725-1744, c. 137v, Catecumeni, AIRE. Right from the beginning, Pelegrin expressed his desire to become a friar, and indeed, after his baptism he joined the Observant Franciscans in Venice, and later moved to Corfu.

⁵¹⁷ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 62v (1751), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. Salomon was sent away from the institution, because he developed a ‘corrispondenza amorosa’ with a girl in the neighborhood.

⁵¹⁸ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 28v (1747), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. Eight members from the branch of the Luzzatto family in San Daniele in Friuli converted during the 18th century, see Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri*. 263-264.

⁵¹⁹ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 71v (1751), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁵²⁰ The Jacur family was one of the most prominent Jewish merchant families in Venice originating from Corfu. Emanuel Jacur moved in Venice around 1740, see Berengo, ‘Gli ebrei veneziani alla fine del Settecento’, 10; Vivante, *La memoria dei padri*, 45.

⁵²¹ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 96v-97r (1754), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁵²² For the rabbi Simon Calimani see Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice*, 235-237.

⁵²³ In his lengthy deposition, Abram Geremia displayed his thorough knowledge of Christianity through his readings, see Costituti 1779-1836, c. 47r, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. For his baptism see also Registro dei Neofiti 1734-1911, c. 129r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

A smart and educated entrepreneur was also Isach Levi from Adrianopolis (present-day Edirne in Turkey). He came from a family of merchants and was dealing in ‘argenti vecchi, scatole di tabacco, topazzi, granate, e ogni altra spezzie di pietre preziose’, which he imported from Germany to Adrianopolis and then to Istanbul. Isach was also well-versed in many languages, and had travelled a lot along a Muslim merchant, for whom he worked as an interpreter.⁵²⁴ Several years later, Benetto della Bella came at the *Casa* with nine more Jews, all Venetians: six men, merchants in the city, two women and a little boy.⁵²⁵ Benetto said they all wanted to convert, but they needed at the same time to take care of their businesses, and most importantly ‘l’appalto dei vini d’Arsenale’, that is the provision of wine to the Venetian Arsenal. For this reason they had agreed with the Patriarch of Venice to reside outside the institution during their catechesis. Finally Salamon Michiel Fiuzi, a twenty-five-year old goldsmith originating from Carpi in Modena, was the son of a ‘maestro di Scola Ebraica’.⁵²⁶ Judging by his signature at the end of his deposition,⁵²⁷ Salamon must have been well educated. When explaining to the institution’s Prior the reasons that made him convert, he offered an answer that could somehow resonate with the 18th-century background of crisis of and disappointment from Judaism: ‘perque la legge Christiana sia migliore della Ebraea, ... perche vedo abassato l’ebraismo, per non aver ne Re, ne Tempi, ne Sacerdoti’.⁵²⁸

b. The story of Rachel Vivante from Corfu

Embedded in the above-analyzed framework of religious conversion in the 18th century, the story of Rachel can be better understood. Of course, this story, as it will be shown, evolved into a multifaceted incident, gaining a prominent if infamous place in the history of the island of Corfu during the Venetian period, and could thus be approached from various different points.

When one reads the interrogations conducted, she realizes that the life of the city is captured with great vividness there, momentarily but with an almost theatrical dimension,

⁵²⁴ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 115v (1754), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁵²⁵ Registro dei Neofiti 1734-1911, c. 121r-122v (1784), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁵²⁶ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 24v (1754), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁵²⁷ Signatures are very rare in this *Costituti* register.

⁵²⁸ Another glimpse of an articulated critique towards his contemporary Judaism can be traced in the deposition of Gabriel Bechun. As already mentioned, Gabriel was not a Jew of standing. He was a wandering merchant from Prague, who had left the city in 1745 when the Jews were expelled and reached the Venetian *Casa* in 1750. Gabriel, while explaining to the institution’s Prior the reasons he had to convert, he added that ‘oggi nell’Ebraismo da Rabbini in materia di credenza sono introdotte tante favole che movono e meritano risatte’, Costituti 1744-1762, c. 48v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

thus enabling to an important extent the reconstruction of the society of Corfu. In the drama that evolved around the conversion of Rachel, various people across religious doctrines, ethnic origins and social status were involved, composing and presenting a fascinating mosaic of people living in the city in parallel and, at times, in crossing realities: noblemen with their wigs and swords and *civili* imitating them; violent henchmen that were said to provoke fear not only in the city but in the whole island, closely connected with both noblemen and *civili*; zealous Greek priests; women in their balconies, windows, or streets receiving and transmitting information, and incarnating to a certain extent the constantly mentioned ‘voce pubblica’; a few frightened and reserved Jews; the rather weak local Venetian authorities; higher military officers, mainly of Italian or German origin, who intermingled with local nobility, and poor foreign mercenaries working also as servants in local noble houses. Thus, this archival material provides the researcher with a context to reflect on issues of symbiosis and interaction between this diverse population living within the Venetian setting.⁵²⁹

Nevertheless, within the context of this study and for the purpose of approaching the literally spectacular conversion of Rachel, I will point out two aspects of the story: (a) the legacy of conversions of young Jewish women in Corfu in the 18th century; and (b) the waning of the Jewish status, as suggested in the case of Rachel. But before proceeding, I would like to make a brief reference to the available sources, and then a description of the events as these unfolded since April 1776.

Sources

The alleged escape or abduction of Rachel caused at a first stage the interference of the local Venetian authorities, and then the interference of the *Inquisitori di Stato* in Venice. Extensive investigations and several arrests were commissioned, a material preserved today in the State Archive of Venice.⁵³⁰ The incident also caused the production of several texts, of which one is known to have survived until nowadays. Written in Italian in the form of a lampoon, probably by a certain Cerulli, resident of Corfu but of Cretan origin, it is an elliptic description of the event that mostly praised the Vivante family, and severely criticized the local Christian

⁵²⁹ Olga Katsiardi-Hering, ‘Cités-port de l’Adriatique’, 9-21, esp. 13-16.

⁵³⁰ *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1110, ASV.

nobility as being corrupted.⁵³¹ The story was also briefly recorded by Nicolaos Arliotis in his chronicle.⁵³² Other contemporary information can be found in the private correspondence between the brothers Petros and Pavlos Filis, consuls of Russia, the first living in Corfu and the latter in Trieste.⁵³³

Account of the event

The story of Rachel's escape, conversion and marriage is like a detective novel. As already mentioned in the introduction, Rachel left her home in the night of 17th of April 1776. According to her deposition, she had decided to abandon her family house because she did not want to marry her cousin, Menachem Vivante, to whom she was promised since she was a child 'secondo l'uso della Nazione'.⁵³⁴ Rachel had a Christian hairdresser named Nicoletto, with whom she maintained a quite close relationship. She had confessed to him her intention to leave her house, and had also mentioned to him the developing romance with Spiridon Bulgari -she told Nicoletto that she had noticed Spiridon frequenting the street of her house, and spending time in a shop that was opposite to her balcony, towards which '[Spiridon] teneva sempre fissi gli occhi'.⁵³⁵

Spiridon Bulgari was not highly regarded in the local society. Rachel's friends told her that Spiridon was 'vano, e mal veduto, perchè aveva fatte diverse baronate',⁵³⁶ while Rachel's uncles in their deposition called him 'nobile giovinastro [young thug] della Città di Corfù', pointing also to the fact that he was a debtor 'a ll'onesta negoziante famiglia Ebreia Vivante'.⁵³⁷ What's more, Spiridon was already engaged with Anna, daughter of the priest Nicolo Cassimati.⁵³⁸ Still, Rachel was not discouraged by this information, and stuck to her

⁵³¹ The text is now kept in cod. CXLI (in fine senza numerazione), Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze (hereafter BNF), and published in Athanasios Ch. Tsitsas, *H απαγωγή της Παχήλ Vivante. Χρονικό*, (Corfu: Etaireia Kerkyraikon Spoudon, 1993), 51-54; see also 6-10.

⁵³² Nikolaos Manesis, *Περί Νικολάου Αρλιώτη (1731-1812) και των χειρογράφων χρονικών αυτού*, (Corfu, 1873), 10-11.

⁵³³ Consolato Russo, b. 1, ASV.

⁵³⁴ Tsitsas, *H απαγωγή*, 70.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 66.

⁵³⁶ Ibid..

⁵³⁷ Tsitsas, *H απαγωγή*, 63-64. Other references seem to converge on this point. The *Provveditore Generale* wrote about Spiridon that he is a 'giovine disfamato di mal costume' and Cerulli in his text reported a story, somehow exaggerated, that the young man 'nei tre giorni primi della Settimana Santa si tranggiò in credenza tre piatti di fior di latte, e non sapendo poscia come pagare il venditore, gli restitui tre ferite una di essa mortale, che non furono denunziate per timore dei partiti', see Inquisitori di Stato, b. 1110, c. 25v, ASV; Tsitsas, *H απαγωγή*, 53.

⁵³⁸ Inquisitori di Stato, b. 1110, c. 71r-74r, ASV.

decision. She thus asked Nicoletto, the hairdresser, to inform Spiridon that she was willing to escape with him, and that she would do it as soon as possible. Nicoletto did not reach Spiridon directly, but approached him through another man, named also Spiridon, ‘che lavora di setta dirimpetto la bottega della famiglia [Vivante]’,⁵³⁹ and with the latter’s intervention the escape was arranged.

When the agreed night came, Rachel did not escape on her own. She was accompanied by two servants of the Vivante family, the young Jewish woman Viola Dosmo, an orphan brought up in the Vivante family, and Iseppo, an Italian soldier who had been serving at the house of the Vivante.⁵⁴⁰ Rachel also took with her a quite respectable quantity of jewelry, clothes and money, the total value of which was estimated at around 2.000 *zecchini*. In the list that she prepared for the investigation appear, among other things, silver and golden rings, earrings, bracelets and necklaces adorned with pearls, rubies, diamonds and emeralds, as well as valuable ‘drappi di Francia e di Fiandra’.⁵⁴¹ The three of them, Rachel, Viola and Iseppo, left from the basement of the house. Out in the street Spiridon Bulgari, the hairdresser Nicoletto and Spiridon the silk-worker were waiting for them. They first resorted to the house of the Bulgari family, and before dawn moved to the house of a Greek priest, Pietro Tassi.

In the meanwhile, in the house of Vivante, Leonardo Sinch, a German soldier who was also working there as a servant, woke up in the middle of the night because of some unexpected light, as he said.⁵⁴² He informed another servant, ‘un vecchio Galeoto che pur serviva da molti anni’, and together they got down to the basement where they found the door open and an oil lamp still warm. They ran to wake up their masters and tell them that thieves had broken into the house, as they thought. After a while, they realized that Rachel was not there, nor were the two servants. They then ran to the local guard and asked for help.⁵⁴³ An order was given to start searching the city and find the girl.

The next morning, officer Orobon and colonel Campo from the local guard were informed by Signor Zuanne Trivoli, a noblemen belonging to a family adversary to the Bulgari, that Rachel was hiding at the house of the priest Pietro Tassi.⁵⁴⁴ Accompanied by a servant of Zuanne Trivoli and a patrol, Orobon and Campo reached the house of Pietro Tassi.

⁵³⁹ Ibid..

⁵⁴⁰ Inquisitori di Stato, b. 1110, c. 4r, 6v, ASV.

⁵⁴¹ Tsitsas, *H απαγωγή*, 60-63, 69-70; Inquisitori di Stato, b. 1110, c. 5r-6r, ASV.

⁵⁴² Inquisitori di Stato, b. 1110, c. 50v-54v, ASV.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., c. 42v-43r.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., c. 64r-68r, 79v-80r.

But the noise that they made betrayed them, and Rachel with Viola and Spiridon managed to escape from the balcony and hide in a little yard close to the house of the nobleman Antonio Pieri. When the patrol left, they all went to hide to the house of Pieri. They stayed there until another nobleman, Agostino Varucca, along with two companions of his, Pietro Nocca and Demetrio Mamuna, all three of them quite notorious in the island for their violent behavior, came along. They argued that the two women weren't safe there, and offered to take them in the house of Varucca. But before going to Pieri's house, the three men had met Rachel's uncle, Lazaro Vivante, and promised him that they would bring the girl back in exchange of an enormous amount of money.⁵⁴⁵ Indeed, they conducted the two women at the house of Varucca, but their plan did not work, as Spiridon Bulgari's father, Giovanni Battista met in the street a friend of Pieri's, Antonio Rodostamo, who informed him that the women were being transferred to Varucca's place. Rather worried, Giovanni Battista ran to Varucca's house along with Antonio, and after arguing with Varucca, they managed to take Rachel out of his house. Due to the commotion that the scene triggered, a crowd gathered outside Varucca's house. As Rachel described it, 'apena sortita da quella casa mi trovai circondata da quantità grande di persone, che credo vi fossero tutti li gentiluomeni del paese, e moltissimi altri Greci'.⁵⁴⁶

Spiridon's father, accompanied by the crowd, led the young Rachel through the city's streets to the *Antivouniotissa* Church,⁵⁴⁷ where preparations had already been made for her baptism. While they were leading her there, they stumbled upon the above-mentioned officer Orobon, but eventually managed to escape from him and reach the church. There, in the long and wide street stairway leading to the church, a 'numeroso soccorso di popolo con armi di fuoco, e da taglio' was gathered according to colonel Campo, 'e tutti a far guardia alla giovane Rachel', while in the surrounding houses people had stepped out in their balconies. Inside the church there was also 'quantita di gente armata e pronta alla disposizione del papa Bulgari'.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., c. 119v-121r.

⁵⁴⁶ Tsitsas, *Η απαγωγή*, 67.

⁵⁴⁷ Today the church is used as a museum of Byzantine Art, see <http://www.antivouniotissamuseum.gr/index.php/en/antivouniotissaxmmonument-church-museum-xm>

⁵⁴⁸ Tsitsas, *Η απαγωγή*, 55-56, 58. All the statements made by the Italian military officers and soldiers agreed on this point. Captain Carlo da Craimburgh described the situation as follows: 'miglaia di persone quasi tutti Greci stavano intorno alla Chiesa occupandone tutta la lunga scallinata sentendosi un fermento grandissimo di persone', see Inquisitori di Stato, b. 1110, c. 18r, ASV; see also ibid., c. 19r, 21r, 25v.

Rachel and Spiridon's father entered the church, and the ceremony of baptism began, but was soon interrupted by colonel Campo, who had come knocking on the church's locked doors and shouting that he was carrying orders from the *Provveditore Generale* to stop the ceremony. Agostino Varucca unexpectedly opened one of the church's door, letting colonel Campo in. Violent scenes followed: the priests shut the girl into the sanctuary, Giovanni Battista Bulgari attacked Varucca, whose '[peruca] gli fu gettata di testa', and colonel Campo was finally pushed out of the church.⁵⁴⁹ The mass went on and Giovanni Battista obliged Varucca to become Rachel's godfather. After the baptism was concluded, Spiridon Bulgari entered the church by forcing the guards that colonel Campo had installed outside the doors of the church, and the marriage followed. Then, the newly married young couple was escorted by the crowd to Bulgari's house. On the same afternoon Viola, Rachel's servant, was baptized and then transferred to the house of Bulgari as well.⁵⁵⁰

Rachel, who after baptism took the name of Catterina or Cattina, stayed in the house of Bulgari for forty days. On the 29th of May, the *Provveditore Generale* Renier received orders from the *Inquisitori di Stato* in Venice to take the girl out of the house and sent her to Venice. In the meantime Rachel's family had sent a petition to the Council of Ten in Venice, exposing the situation and, most importantly, asking for the removal of Rachel from the house of Spiridon and her transfer to Venice. Following the orders of the *Inquisitori*, in the morning of 30th of May 1776, a number of soldiers escorted Rachel from the Bulgari house to the palace of the *Provveditore* in the Old Fortress, where Rachel remained for about a week, before she was sent to Venice.⁵⁵¹ There she was directed to the *Casa dei Catecumeni*, and was later moved to a sister's college in the city.

The documentation from the *Inquisitori di Stato*, which follows the incident until the beginning of August 1776, reveals that after Rachel's departure, the whole Vivante family gradually abandoned Corfu and moved to Venice.⁵⁵² Back in the island of Corfu, investigations carried on and several arrests took place, while an order of arrest was also commissioned for Spiridon Bulgari, but was never carried out, as he had already left for Preveza and then Trieste.⁵⁵³ Further information about Rachel's story can be found in the correspondence of the Fili brothers, from which we know that Spiridon Bulgari acquired

⁵⁴⁹ Tsitsas, *Η απαγωγή*, 68; *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1110, 25r, ASV.

⁵⁵⁰ Tsitsas, *Η απαγωγή*, 69.

⁵⁵¹ *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1110, c. 26v-29v, 38r-41v, ASV.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, c. 41.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, c. 114r-v.

permission from the *Inquisitori di Stato* to travel to Venice, while in January 1777 the couple was living together in Venice -in fact, Petros Filis from Corfu wrote to his brother in Trieste that ‘qui si dice che Bulgari pagò a Venezia e si uscì con sua moglie’⁵⁵⁴ - and Catterina was in an advanced stage of pregnancy.

Thanks to a recently published book by a descendant of the Vivante family, Cesare Vivante, we now know the end of Rachel’s story.⁵⁵⁵ After the reunification of Rachel and Spiridon, the couple was expected to return to Corfu. Yet, due to reasons not mentioned in the documentation, Rachel refused to abandon Venice. Rachel’s refusal provoked tension within the couple, which ended with the intervention of the *Casa dei Catecumeni*, as the latter helped Rachel to leave her house in May 1777 and request the dissolution of her marriage to Spiridon. Her request was sanctioned a few months later, marking the end of this turbulent relationship that proved so critical not only for her life, but for the life and itinerary of the whole Vivante family. Within three years, Catterina remarried to a young Christian physician and had three children with him. Yet, this marriage was also dissolved. Catterina died in 1799, at the age of forty.

Rachel’s conversion in the 18th-century context

In 1750 Isach Israel, a twenty-two-year old Jew from Corfu, reached the *Casa dei Catecumeni*. He said he was a tailor, like his father. When the Prior asked him why he wanted to convert, Isach said: ‘Il motivo è perche ho veduto molti e molte ebrei che si sono fatti cristiani, e così ancor io voglio farmi cristiano’.⁵⁵⁶ Although his comment might have been only an narrative cliché, there was actually some truth in it, as since roughly the second decade of the 18th century there was an increase in the number of Jews that converted in Corfu, as well as an increase in the number of Corfiot Jews leaving for Venice and converting there in the *Casa dei Catecumeni*.

In Corfu this trend engaged native (60%) and foreigner (40%) Jews alike, who were baptized in both the Latin and Orthodox Churches of the city. But, what is remarkable about the conversions of Corfiot Jews is that around 69% of them concerned women. These women were either quite young, at the age of around sixteen, but also married women with their

⁵⁵⁴ Tsitsas, *Η απαγωγή*, 49-50.

⁵⁵⁵ Vivante, *La memoria dei padri*, 63-71.

⁵⁵⁶ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 46v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. After his conversion Isach went to live with the tailor Mistro Pietro and work ‘in qualità di sartore per giovane nella [sua] bottega’.

children. We have already seen the case of Stamo, nineteen years old and daughter of the deceased butcher Elitzer Pangali, who abandoned her house in 1714 and resorted to the *Megalos Protopapas*.⁵⁵⁷ Maybe not incidentally, in the same year another member of the Pangali family, Rachel, daughter of Giacob Pangali and wife of Salamon Pangali, was baptized at the church of *Ayios Spyridon*, as was a year later, in 1715, the daughter of Arsen Pangali. Again in 1715, the two daughters of Lieto Mordo were baptized in the same church.⁵⁵⁸ Few years later, in 1719, the twenty-five-year old daughter of Jauda Levi, along with her 9 months old child were baptized in the *Duomo*.⁵⁵⁹ In 1720, Sara Vivante, aged twenty-eight, was also baptized there.⁵⁶⁰ In 1723 Diamante, wife of Nacamuli Dente, and four of their children aged between seventeen and twenty, were baptized, again in the *Duomo*. It was first the boy of the family, Rafael, who converted, and a month later the women of the family followed.⁵⁶¹ And then, in 1730 the two daughters of Gesua Cesana and his wife Smeralda were baptized in the *Duomo*; first the elder, Hamda aged twenty-six, and then, a month later, the younger aged five. In the meantime their mother seems to have converted as well, and she was supposedly the one who brought the younger child there.⁵⁶² And in 1738, as we already saw, the young Sylva, daughter of the deceased Chaim Mustachi, escaped her house and went to the house of a Christian woman to hide before approaching the office of the *Megalos Protopapas*.⁵⁶³

If the female predominance in local conversions can to a certain extent be explained by the fact that married women with children generally tended to travel less⁵⁶⁴ and thus convert locally where they lived, it is quite noteworthy that there was also a female predominance (62,5%) among the Corfiot Jews that reached the Venetian *Casa*, a proportion totally dissimilar to the general one among Jewish converts who reached the institution, where the overall numbers of Jewish men were usually slightly more than double of that of women.⁵⁶⁵ These women were again either young and single, or women carrying along their children,

⁵⁵⁷ See here, 93-94, 96.

⁵⁵⁸ Άγιος Σπυρίδωνας-Βαπτίσεις, b. 148, c. 9v-10r, Ληξιαρχικές Πράξεις Εκκλησιών, GSAC.

⁵⁵⁹ Duomo-Battesimi, b. 9, c. 79r, LAC.

⁵⁶⁰ Duomo-Battesimi, b. 9, c. 109v, LAC. In 1729, Sara Vivante's sister, twenty-seven years old, was also baptized at the *Duomo*, along with her husband, Gesua Dente aged thirty-seven, and their fourteen-month daughter, Duomo-Battesimi, b. 10, c. 119r-v, LAC.

⁵⁶¹ Duomo-Battesimi, b. 10, c. 7r, 8r, LAC.

⁵⁶² Duomo-Battesimi, b. 10, c. 135v, 137r, LAC.

⁵⁶³ See here, 91, 93, 97.

⁵⁶⁴ Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 32-33, 39, 56.

⁵⁶⁵ Between 1658 and 1796, fifty-three Corfiot Jews reached the Venetian institution. Among them there were twenty-five women (62,5%), fifteen men (37,5%), and thirty-three children, eight girls and five boys.

often widows⁵⁶⁶ or abandoning their husbands or abandoned by them. They had travelled without their kin, but of course entrenched in the local and Mediterranean predominantly male protective network of the institution, most commonly represented by the local Latin Archbishop and the Venetian *Provveditore General del Mar*.

These female conversions at the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni* span the whole 18th century, if slightly moderated after the 1740's. Thus, in 1709, eight women from the Corfiot Dente family reached the institution: Sara, forty years old and widow of Isac Dente, with her four daughters and her three grandchildren.⁵⁶⁷ In 1718, as we have already seen, the widow Patienza and her two children were brought to the *Casa* by the Corfiot neophyte Captain Zan Battista Soranzo olim Isak, whom Patienza married after her baptism.⁵⁶⁸ In 1724 Camilla, forty-six years old, daughter of Abram Pereira, left her husband Vitta Dente in Corfu, took her two daughters, aged eighteen and twenty, and went to the *Casa*.⁵⁶⁹ In 1741 Rachel, daughter of Elia Osni and wife of Salamon Forte, said to the Prior that her husband had escaped in the Ottoman empire and was probably by now dead, and that she decided to follow the example of her sister, who converted and was now married to a chair-maker in Treviso.⁵⁷⁰ In 1742, two young cousins of the Giosua family, Pasienza and Alegra, sixteen and fifteen years old respectively, both daughters of tailors, arrived there. Back in Corfu they were assisted by a noblewoman, a priest and the *Provveditore General*, who kept them for fifteen days at his palace, before sending them to Venice.⁵⁷¹ In 1743 Bianca Abuaf Fonseca, twenty-five years old, followed her sister who was at the time already at the institution. After her baptism she was married to Antonio Clemente, who maintained a 'bottega di biavarol', a shop for the sale of grain.⁵⁷² In 1745 Stametta, daughter of Abram Placcha, sixteen years old said in her deposition that she had tried to convert back in Corfu, but a friend of hers, who had also converted, disclosed Stametta's intentions, and since then she had been 'guardata da miei

⁵⁶⁶ Both women and men Jewish converts usually present the death of the spouse or of the parents as a catalyst in their decision to convert.

⁵⁶⁷ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 107r, 110v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. It was the eldest daughter of Sara, Mazaldo, twenty-five years old, pregnant and mother of two little girls, who first took the step to convert in Corfu, in the Latin Cathedral, in 1709. Five months later, after she gave birth to a girl also baptized in the Latin Cathedral, she moved with her mother and sisters to the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni*, see Duomo-Battesimi, b. 8, c. 27v, 30r, LAC.

⁵⁶⁸ Libro ... 1718-1725-G8, c. 19v, 22v, Catecumeni, AIRE. See here, 124-125.

⁵⁶⁹ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 147v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. Let me just repeat here that the year before, in 1723, four of the kids of Nacamuli Dente and his wife Diamante, aged between seventeen and twenty, were baptized at the Latin cathedral of Corfu, see here, 155.

⁵⁷⁰ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 131v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁵⁷¹ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 139v-140r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁵⁷² Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 141v-142r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

fratelli con grande gelosia', until the day she escaped from her house and took refuge to the house of the Latin Archbishop Nanni, who sent her to the institution. After her baptism, Stametta, now named Giovanna Maria Billini, got married to a converted Jew.⁵⁷³ In 1758, Sara forty-two years old, wife of the butcher Giosef Forte, left her husband and moved to the institution with her three children aged fifteen, nine and five. In her case it was the oldest daughter, Ricca, who first took the initiative to convert. She had escaped her house and took refuge to the house of the *Provveditore General*, where her mother and siblings joined her few days later.⁵⁷⁴

Further research needs to be carried out on the Jewish communities of Corfu before we can adequately account for the rise in the numbers of women among Corfiot Jewish converts in the 18th century.⁵⁷⁵ Most of these women originated from low-class or small traders' families, while their conversions seem to have been to a significant extent interlinked with marriage issues, ranging from avoiding an unwanted marriage to obtaining better marital prospects for unmarried or widows women. In any case, in the eyes of these women, the Christian world in Corfu and Venice seemed to offer more or better opportunities than the Corfiot Jewish context did, and they were open to taking up these opportunities.

Nevertheless, it is within this 'legacy' of women's conversions, both local and in Venice, that the case of Rachel Vivante in 1776 should be understood. All these stories must have circulated from mouth to mouth within the Corfiot Jewish households and families, forming a commonly shared knowledge of which Rachel was surely aware, or even forming a common family memory, as women of the wider Vivante family had also converted in the past. And, in this line, probably Rachel's own conversion must have inspired and encouraged the conversion of another woman from the family that followed soon after: that of Diamantina Vivante, twenty-seven years old, wife of Sabbatai Romano, who arrived at the institution in 1777, and then through the magistrate of the *Avogadori di Comun* brought also at the Venetian institution her two daughters from Corfu.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷³ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 11v-12r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁵⁷⁴ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 154v-155r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁵⁷⁵ A similar rise in the number of women converts has been traced in conversions in Berlin during the three last decades of the 18th century. These women came predominantly 'from lower-middle-class families and far less often from elite families', and their conversion are seen as interconnected with the prospect of intermarriage, see Hertz, 'Seductive Conversion in Berlin', 62-76; Endelman, 'Gender and Conversion Revisited', 174, 180-185.

⁵⁷⁶ Registro dei Neofiti 1734-1911, c. 113, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

Indeed Rachel, when interrogated by the Venetian authorities about her escape and conversion, presented her actions as clearly connected with her desire to avoid an unwanted marriage with her cousin. And then she added: ‘cercavo l’occasione di fugire di casa, se anche avesse dovuto essere con qualche soldato’.⁵⁷⁷ To make more evident the superficiality and instrumentality of her conversion, Rachel also said that she knew nothing about Christianity except for how to do the sign of the cross, and that the reason she had chosen the Eastern Rite was because of Spiridon. She added that although she knew the Greek language, at the moment of the baptism she could not understand a word of what was said; she was just mechanically repeating in Greek the words that she was told by the Greek priest next to her.

⁵⁷⁸ This instrumental use of religion in the whole incident was repeated by both the Venetian authorities and the Vivante family, who against the religious argumentation of the Bulgari family⁵⁷⁹ maintained that what happened had no religious motivation, but was simply ‘coperto da manto appunto spazioso di Religione’.⁵⁸⁰

Yet, as it is indicated in the previously mentioned lampoon written by Cerulli and published shortly after the events, Rachel’s behavior can also be seen as resonating with the general waning of the Jewish identity at that time -and this is why it can be therefore connected with the emergence of the above mentioned new ‘type’ of convert in the 18th century, which consisted in people coming from families that belonged to the more privileged groups of the Jewish communities, wealthy merchants included. More concretely, in his lampoon Cerulli alluded to the social advantages and the interlinked ‘lifestyle’ changes⁵⁸¹ that

⁵⁷⁷ ‘[E]ro inclinata a soltrarmi dalla casa paterna, perchè quel matrimonio non mi è mai andato a genio, e con la disposizione di sottrarmi dalla casa ho concepita anche quella di farmi Cristiana’, see Tsitsas, *H απαγωγή*, 65, 70.

⁵⁷⁸ ‘[S]ebbene parli il Greco volgare [...] perchè [le cerimonie praticate erano] nel idioma Greco leterale’, see *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1110, c. 41v, ASV; Tsitsas, *H απαγωγή*, 72.

⁵⁷⁹ The Bulgari family insisted in giving the incident a religious dimension, especially in regard to the tension between the Venetian guard and the gathered crowd outside the *Antivouniotissa* Church. Indeed, Giovanni Battista Bulgari, Spiridon’s father, was accused of ringing the bells of *Ayios Spyridon* Church and inciting the Greeks of the city to run to the church and defend their religion that was at stake as well as support the fugitive couple and impede their arrest. One witness added that while Giovanni Battista was ringing the bells of *Ayios Spyridon*, he was shouting ‘Cristiani ajutate la vostra fede’, and another witness mentioned that while Spiridon Bulgari was trying to enter the church, he was accompanied by a priest who was shouting ‘fratelli per il crocifizio’, see Tsitsas, *H απαγωγή*, 55, 57; ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1110, c. 24r-26v, 54r, 67r, 79v, 156v, 161v.

⁵⁸⁰ *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1110, c. 115r, ASV. The Vivante brothers used exactly the same expression when they argued that ‘non è mai credibile che possa [il Bulgari] coprire tanti misfatti con l’apparente manto d’abusata e sacrilega profanazione della religione’, see Tsitsas, *H απαγωγή*, 64.

⁵⁸¹ Correct and strict adherence to a prescribed lifestyle was of outmost importance within the Jewish tradition, whose regulatory aspirations were all-encompassing, ranging from the observance of religious duties to issues of dressing or hair-style and food consumption. Any lifestyle changes influenced by fashion were received with great suspicion by the Jewish Communities, and were indeed understood as a form of ‘crossing of

he thought Rachel expected her conversion and marriage would bring about, thus describing them as a means for transcending the Jewish environment and gaining upward social mobility.⁵⁸² He wrote: '[conversion] gli avrebbe recata una piena libert  di se stessa, e sarebbe entrata nel corso di quei piaceri, e divertimenti, che ella invidiava a tante del suo sesso, circolanti in carrozza per la citt , che gli assiggevano i tributi dell'altrui rispetto'.⁵⁸³

Finally, quite indicative of the 18th century privileged Jews' trend towards social and cultural assimilation is also the case of Rachel's brother, Iseppo Emanuele. Iseppo, one of the seven children of the deceased Maimon, was about five years younger than Rachel -so when the Rachel's story took place in 1776, after which the family gradually moved to Venice, he was about eleven years old. Several years later, Iseppo also converted to Christianity.⁵⁸⁴ He was baptized in 1793, at the age of twenty-eight, and took the name of Giuseppe Giacomo Albrizzi. But already some time before his conversion, Iseppo had distanced himself from the Vivante family business. He requested and received his share of the patrimony and moved out of the ghetto, probably under the protection of the Venetian family of Albrizzi -yet, even after his conversion his bonds with some of his siblings were never severed. Iseppo belonged not only to the economic but also to the cultural elite of his time. The *Inquisitori di Stato* reported in 1791 that among the books of his library were not only works by the subversive nobleman writer Giorgio Baffo⁵⁸⁵ and other 'libertine' writers,⁵⁸⁶ but also books of Voltaire and Rousseau, while Iseppo was one of the founding members of the *Fenice*, the famous

boundaries and a breakdown of discipline and norms, ... thought to diminish the sacred space of life and to be implicit secularization', see Feiner, *The Origins of Jewish Secularization*, 21.

⁵⁸² During the same period that Rachel's conversion took place, but within the completely different social and cultural setting of Berlin, educated Jewish women coming from well-off families choose a similar path to Rachel's, that is conversion and marriage to a Christian man. This trend, situated between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, forms part of the wider 'feminization' of conversion in the late 18th century Germany mentioned above. These Berlin women lived within the intellectual environment of German Enlightenment and early romanticism, and following the fashion of their time, maintained literary salons frequented by Christian noblemen and commoners. There, the Jewish *salonnières* run and moderated intellectual conversations on poetry, plays, and novels. One of these women was Rahel Varnhagen, whose life Hannah Arndt has narrated, and whose name became closely interlinked to this wider trend of Jewish *salonnières*, as the term *Rahelzeit* was later coined to refer to it, see Hannah Arndt, *Rahel Varnhagen. The Life of a Jewish Woman*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974); Deborah Hertz, *Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin* (New Haven: Yale University, 1988), 1-22, 156-250.

⁵⁸³ Tsitsas, *Η απαγωγή*, 54.

⁵⁸⁴ For Giuseppe Giacomo Albrizzi olim Iseppo Emanuele Vivante see Vivante, *La memoria dei padri*, 101-103.

⁵⁸⁵ Piero del Negro, 'Politica e poesia nella Venezia di met  Settecento. La "poesia barona" di Giorgio Baffi "quarantotto"', *Comunit *, 184 (1982): 312-425; Margaret Plant, *Venice. Fragile City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 11.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 93-94, 102. Interestingly, Lazzaro Vivante's library, Iseppo's uncle, also comprised Enlightenment literature, see *ibid.*, 95-96.

Venetian theatre.⁵⁸⁷ After his conversion, he became a notable collector with a preference in religious art. His desire for complete assimilation is even further demonstrated by the fact that after his baptism he moved to a palace in the Grand Canal of Venice, petitioned to receive the status of *cittadino originario*, and later the title of *conte*.⁵⁸⁸ In one of his testaments, he left to his 'beloved sister' Catterina olim Rachel two loges in the theatre of San Fantin, the future *Fenice* theatre.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁷ Vivante, *La memoria dei padri*, 93-94, 102.

⁵⁸⁸ The first petition was addressed to the Venetian authorities, while the second one to the Austrian authorities. Yet, it seems that both were rejected. Nevertheless, Giuseppe Giacomo adopted the title of *conte*, see Vivante, *La memoria dei padre*, 102.

⁵⁸⁹ Vivante, *La memoria dei padri*, 70.

Chapter 4. Muslim candidate converts

i. War captives: Conversion as part of the Ottoman-Venetian warfare

a. Venice

When taking a close look at the registers of baptisms and those of neophytes, one swiftly realizes that the conversions of Muslims that took place in the Venetian institution during the second half of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th were intrinsically connected with the war enterprises between Venice and the Ottoman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean. As it has been already mentioned, the mid-16th century signaled a turning point for the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni*. If up to then the Casa targeted mostly the local Venetian Jewry and summoned a rather modest number of prospective converts, following the war of Cyprus (1570-1573) and the battle of Lepanto (1571) the institution received a large number of Muslim candidate converts, the majority of them war captives. Since then the Venetian institution must have established a network, consisting of military authorities, slave merchants and slave owners, which linked warfare to religious conversion, and which was especially active between the years 1645 and 1720, when the three consecutive wars between the Venetian state and the Ottoman Empire over predominance in the Eastern Mediterranean took place: the war over the island of Crete (1645-1669), and the first (1684-1699) and second (1714-1718) wars over the Peloponnese.⁵⁹⁰

Throughout these years of wars, a substantial number of candidate converts was drawn to the *Casa* by the institution's network -of which only the final, local node, that is mostly Venetian noblemen, can be identified in the archival sources of the period, although the network surely involved army officers and other intermediaries. More concretely, during these years the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni* received a remarkable number of Ottoman Muslim candidate converts, as about 1,080 Muslim men, women and children are recorded in the institution's registers,⁵⁹¹ representing roughly 68% of all the candidate converts during these years.⁵⁹²

⁵⁹⁰ For more details see here, note 237.

⁵⁹¹ The general terms that the institution's Priors used to refer to Muslims was *Turca/o*, terms that generally denoted both a political and a religious identity, that is their status as subjects of the Ottoman Empire and their Muslim religion, while these terms also carried negative connotations, see Paolo Preto, *Venezia e i turchi* (Florence: Sansoni, 1975), 116-124; Ann Thomson, *Barbary and Enlightenment. European Attitudes Towards the Maghreb in the 18th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 15-17. When the Priors referred to the few Muslim candidate converts that originated from *Barbaria*, that is the Maghreb coast, they used the terms 'Turca/o mora/o'. They often, but not always, used these same terms when referring to the residents of *Morea*,

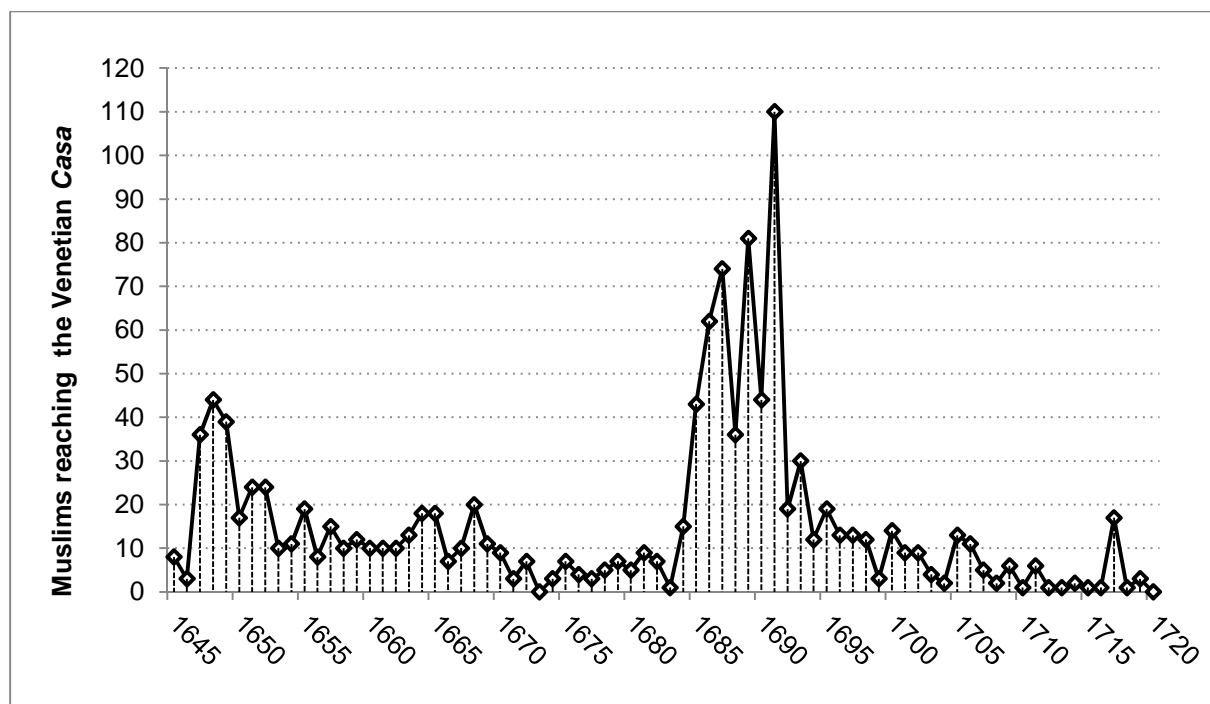


Chart 4. Muslims reaching the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni*, 1645-1720.

Although specific information about Muslim prospective converts is only seldom recorded, we can estimate that about 80% of these converts were war captives -and then probably they were traded as slaves.⁵⁹³ Since the 13th century, when Thomas Aquinas articulated the legal concept of ‘just war’ prescribing that non-Christian enemies captured during war entered directly the state of penal servitude, it was generally accepted by both church and secular authorities that war captives could and would be legitimately enslaved.⁵⁹⁴ The conversion of non-Christian slaves, on the other hand, must have gained momentum since

that is the Peloponnese, yet they must have done so due to the phonetic similarity between the geographical term *Morea* or *Mora*, and the ethnic qualifier *moro/a*.

⁵⁹² During the same years the Jews recorded in the institution’s Baptismal and Neophytes registers were 520, see here, 77-79.

⁵⁹³ For the presence of Muslim slaves in Italy and their conversion see Wipertus Rudt de Collenberg, ‘Le baptême des musulmans esclaves à Rome aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles’, *Mélanges de l’Ecole Française de Rome* 101, no. 1 (1989): 9-181 and no. 2 (1989): 519-670; Rafaella Sarti, ‘Bolognesi schiavi dei “Turchi” e schiavi “Turchi” a Bologna tra cinque e settecento. Alterità etnico-religiosa e riduzione in schiavitù’, *Quaderni Storici* 107 (2001), 437-471; Giovanna Fiume, ed., ‘Schiavitù e conversioni nel Mediterraneo’, special issue, *Quaderni Storici* 126 (2007); Peter A. Mazur, ‘Combating “Mohammedan Indecency”. The Baptism of Muslim Slaves in Spanish Naples, 1563-1667’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 13 (2009): 25-48; Samuela Marconcini, ‘Una presenza nascosta. Battesimi di “turchi” a Firenze in età moderna’, *Annali di Storia di Firenze* 7 (2012): 97-121.

⁵⁹⁴ Jennifer D. Selwyn, *A Paradise Inhabited by Devils. The Jesuits’ Civilizing Mission in Naples*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 89; Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati*, 83

the mid-16th century and the Reformation era, a period as already mentioned imbued with quests for religious conformity and piety. Within this context, in the eyes of both ecclesiastical and lay authorities as well as in the eyes of the slaves' masters, conversion was a means to effectively control and discipline the slaves, make them accept their place in the social hierarchy, and become more obedient and docile.⁵⁹⁵

Accordingly, the Muslim people recorded in the registers of the Venetian *Casa* must have been for the most part captured during the Ottoman-Venetian wars, and then most probably traded as slaves⁵⁹⁶ by the Venetians who were typically the ones authorized to manage them.⁵⁹⁷ In few cases, their servile status is quite clearly stated. In 1652, Marco Manolesso, an ex-administrative officer in the coastal Dalmatian city of Almissa, brought a five-year-old Muslim 'morlacho'⁵⁹⁸ to the institution. He clarified that he had acquired the boy during his days in Almisssa, and he insisted that after baptism the boy should be 'alla [sua] dispositione'.⁵⁹⁹ The same year, a fourteen-year old boy, Ali, was brought to the institution by the nobleman Pietro Badoer, with the clarification that the boy was captured during the naval battle of 1651 and it was expected that right after baptism he should be restituted to Badoer.⁶⁰⁰ Several years later, in November 1690, eighty-eight Muslim men and women, all originating from the area of Bosnia, were brought to the institution. Forty-eight of them belonged to a certain Baron Androk,⁶⁰¹ while the rest, almost all of them women, were brought there by some *Maltesi*. In both cases they were recorded as 'schiavi'.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁵ Sue Peabody, "'A Dangerous Zeal": Catholic Missions to Slaves in the French Antilles, 1635-1800', *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 1 (2002): 67-68; Mazur, 'Combating "Mohammedan Indecency"', 27.

⁵⁹⁶ In the relevant literature captives and slaves are often considered different categories, the first regarded as having an exchange value for their masters, while the latter as having a use value. It seems, though, that these were closely interlinked categories, and as Bono has argued, it was possible to distinguish between a captive and a slave only after a captive was ransomed and freed, see Salvatore Bono, 'Slave Histories and Memoirs in the Mediterranean World. A Study of the Sources (Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries)', in *Trade and Cultural Exchange in the Early Modern Mediterranean. Braudel's Maritime Legacy*, ed. Maria Fusaro, Colin Heywood and Mohamed-Salah Omro (London, New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2010), 99-100; Daniel Bernardo Hershenzon 'Early Modern Spain and the Creation of the Mediterranean. Captivity, Commerce, and Knowledge' (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2011), 25-33.

⁵⁹⁷ According to the contracts between Venice and other states, as for example the duchy of Brunswick-Lüneburg, providing the Venetian army with mercenaries, all Muslim captives were to be given up to the Venetians, see Setton, *Venice, Austria, and the Turks*, 293.

⁵⁹⁸ The Morlacchi were people living in the inland mountains of Dalmatia, the Dinaric Alps. They mostly engaged in semi-nomadic pastoralism, and they were largely Christians of the Eastern Orthodox Church, see Larry Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs*, 3, 6, 11.

⁵⁹⁹ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 38v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶⁰⁰ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 39r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶⁰¹ Registro dei Neofiti 1676-1693, c. 10v, 11r, 16r-v, 27r, 29v, 45r-v, 46r, 52v, 53r, 54v, 94r-v, 100v, as well as pages some without numbering, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶⁰² Registro dei Neofiti 1676-1693, c. 11r, 16v, 27r-v, 29v, 30r, 46v, 54v, 73v, 75r, 94r-v, 101r-v, 102r, 108r, as well as some pages without numbering, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

That the ebb and flow of Muslim candidate converts in the Venetian institution was closely connected with warfare is further supported by the fact that during peacetime periods, that is in the intervals between the wars of the 17th century and during the largest part of the 18th century, the Muslim presence in the institution was virtually insignificant. More concretely, while between 1645 and 1670, that is during the war of Crete, about fourteen Muslim candidate converts per year were brought at the institution,⁶⁰³ in 1671 only two were recorded. Their average numbers remained very low, around three per year, until 1684, when war broke out again. Then, and for the next fifteen years their numbers increased dramatically, reaching an average of thirty-nine persons per year.⁶⁰⁴ After the end of the war, their numbers dropped again. During the peacetime interval (1700-1713) about five Muslims per year are recorded in the institution's registers. Finally, in the course of the last Ottoman-Venetian war (1714-1718), the numbers of Muslim candidate converts in the institution increased only slightly. This should be attributed to the fact that on the part of the Venetians this was a defensive war,⁶⁰⁵ not providing many opportunities for the seizure of Muslim captives –on the contrary, contemporary sources speak of brief warfare in the Peloponnese as most of the Venetian castles capitulated and of large numbers of Christians captured and enslaved by the Ottoman army.⁶⁰⁶

Several other indications support the conclusion that around 80% of Muslim candidate converts during this period were war captives. A first indication is that Muslim candidate converts were often brought to the institution by their *patron*, a term bespeaking ownership or more broadly the jurisdiction that Christians had over the Muslim they had led to the institution⁶⁰⁷ –indicatively enough, this term was never used in relation to Jewish candidate converts. The term *patron* mostly referred to noblemen -and only rarely to noblewomen, as in

⁶⁰³ A fluctuation in converts' numbers can be traced also within the years of wars. More concretely, between the years 1647 and 1652, when the Venetian military campaign in Dalmatia was rather successful, about 185 Muslims were conducted to the institution, thus increasing the annual average rate to thirty people per year. In the following years and up to 1670 the annual average rate dropped to twelve people.

⁶⁰⁴ Again, there was a significant internal fluctuation in the number of Muslim candidate converts reaching the institution during the years of war. Between 1685 and 1691 the average annual rate rose to the impressive number of sixty-five persons –between these years, 450 Muslims were brought to the institution. For the rest of the war years (1692-1700) their numbers fell again, reaching the levels of the previous wartime period, that is an annual average rate of fifteen persons.

⁶⁰⁵ Setton, *Venice, Austria, and the Turks*, 430-433.

⁶⁰⁶ Nikolaou, 'Islamisations et Christianisations dans le Péloponnèse', 86-93.

⁶⁰⁷ There are very few cases of Muslim owners of Muslim slaves. For example in 1707, the twenty-year old Ali 'moro turco ... schiavo del capitan Hagi Mehmet turco' was conducted to the institution by a converted Muslim, 'figlio di Casa', see Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 95v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV; Libro ... 1702-1718-G6, c. 15v, 17v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

the case in 1658 of the five-year old Ibrahim from Castel Novo (present-day Novigrad in Croatia), who right after his baptism was sent to the house of 'sua Patrona N[obil] D[onna] Camilla Vidmana'.⁶⁰⁸ The leaders of the mercenary companies, who had the privilege of immediate access to captives, were also described as *patron*, as they presumably kept some of the captives for themselves. In 1663, captain Paolo Vianello sent to the *Casa* the nineteen-year old Resuam from Canea (present-day Chania in Crete), in order to receive catechization and baptism and then be sent back to him after baptism.⁶⁰⁹ Even when there is no direct reference to a *patron*, the right that Christians had over the Muslim converts that they had introduced to the institution is indicated by the fact that for most of these converts there is a note in the registers that right after their baptism they were 'returned' to them. Occasionally the expressed desire of the *patron* was recorded, like in the case of the nobleman Francisco Querini Stampalia who in 1650 brought to the institution a ten-year old boy from Clissa 'acciò sia instrutto, catechizzato et battezzato, et poi restituito al med[essi]mo'.⁶¹⁰ Additionally, rather frequently Muslim candidate converts never actually stayed at the institution, but were brought there only in order to get baptized. In 1648, *signora* Betta Conti had in her house two little girls aged four and five from Salona (present-day Solin, a suburb of Split in Croatia) and Clissa (present-day Klis in Croatia) respectively. In the baptism entry of both these girls it is noted: 'non fù mai nella Casa pia'. They were instructed at the house of Betta Conti, baptized at the *Casa* and then returned to her.⁶¹¹

A second indication of the captive status of these Muslim candidate converts is their places of origin, as for the most part they came from areas where warfare between Ottomans and Venetians had taken place. During the war of Crete about half of the Ottoman Muslim candidate converts, many of them children and women, came from the geographical area of Bosnia.⁶¹² Zemonich (present-day Zemunik in Croatia), Clissa, Obrovazzo (present-day Obrovac in Croatia), Nadin (in present-day Croatia), Castel Nuovo (present-day Novigrad in Croatia), Scardona (present-day Skradin in Croatia), Cnin (present-day Knin in Croatia) and

⁶⁰⁸ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 51r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. On women owning servants and slaves see Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 132. The Widman family was among the first families that bought their way into nobility in 1646 as part of the exchange of money for title, and was actively involved in the war, see Setton, *Venice, Austria, and the Turks*, 138.

⁶⁰⁹ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 56v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶¹⁰ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 32r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶¹¹ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 23r-v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶¹² Among the 202 converts that can be recognized as captives and whose place of origin is identifiable, 73 came from the Ottoman Eyalet of Bosnia and 7 from the Eyalet of Kanije, on the east of Bosnia.

Licha (present-day Lika in Croatia) are cities that feature as places of origin of these converts, and which had been significant sites of battles.⁶¹³ Fewer Muslims came from the areas of Albania and Istria, as well as from the Aegean islands of Limno (in present-day Greece), Zia (present-day Kea in Greece) and Tine (present-day Tinos in Greece), all of them being sites where battles had been staged.⁶¹⁴ During the first Morean war (1684-1699), candidate converts in the *Casa* originated again extensively from the battlefields in Bosnia, especially a great number of captive women, but many also came from the Peloponnese. Another significant part, almost exclusively men, came from the coast of the Maghreb, as vessels and soldiers from the Barbary states of Algeria and Tunis had joined the Ottoman forces, while remarkably fewer men and women came from the Aegean.⁶¹⁵

The presence among converts of high percentages of women and children also points to their captive status. Although Muslim men represented 70% of Muslim candidate converts at the Venetian *Casa*, during the years of the Ottoman-Venetian war of Crete and the first war over the Peloponnese, the numbers of Muslim women reached or at times even surpassed that of men, while during the same years around 40% of the Muslim captives brought to the institution were children under fourteen years old. According to Venetian law, a person under fourteen years old was still under paternal authority,⁶¹⁶ and baptizing her/him without the paternal consent was considered illegal as it constituted a direct violation of the paternal authority.⁶¹⁷ Nevertheless, when children were considered to be in fatal danger (*pericolo di morte*) or ‘abandoned’, as is the case of the captive children brought to the institution, they could and should be baptized irrespectively of their age. Due to the pronounced presence of Muslim children accommodated and baptized at the Venetian institution, especially in the late

⁶¹³ Setton, *Venice, Austria, and the Turks*, 142-148

⁶¹⁴ Among the 202 Muslim converts, 25 came from the Aegean region, 11 from the area of Albania and 6 from Istria. For the sites of battles see Setton, *Venice, Austria, and the Turks*, 146, 150, 162, 164, 184, 189.

⁶¹⁵ Setton, *Venice, Austria and the Turks*, 271-388; Negro, ‘Le istituzioni militari’, 139-140, 145-146.

⁶¹⁶ Venetian law prescribed the age of fourteen as the age of *usum rationis*, that is the age after which a person was no longer under paternal authority and was considered capable of reasoning and making decisions; in other words, it signaled the passage from childhood to adulthood, see Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 279.

⁶¹⁷ The determination of *usum rationis* had been an important and controversial issue in relation to religious conversion, as it was interlinked to its legitimacy or the lack of it. Although there was no general accordance on the issue, up to the 18th century childhood was usually defined between the age of seven and twelve for girls, and between seven and fourteen for boys. In the mid-18th century (1747) and within a general hardening of the Papal State’s policy against the Jews, pope Benedetto XIV issued the bull *Postremo mense*, where he established the age of seven as the one when children ceased to be under paternal authority. See Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 146-147; Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati*, 9-12, 74-76, 81-82, 87-89, 281-284. Some jurists of the 16th and 17th century challenged altogether the right of Jews to paternal authority, arguing that Jews were in a servile state and thus no citizenship nor paternal authority was recognized to them, see Laura Luzi, “Inviti non sunt baptizandi”. La dinamica delle conversioni degli ebrei’, *Mediterranea* 4 (2007): 233-234; Caffiero, *Battesimi Forzati*, 83-84.

17th century, the *Casa* acquired an important role among those charitable institutions from where one could adopt *figli d'anima*.

As already mentioned, the status of *figli d'anima* entailed for children the possibility of being used as domestic servants or apprentices,⁶¹⁸ like in the case of the seven years old Ahmet, who after his baptism in 1665 was sent to the house of the weaver Bortollo Mozachi 'ad imparar la professione del tesser'.⁶¹⁹ In fact, not surprisingly, with remarkably few exceptions, converted Muslim captives after their baptisms became servants in Venetian households,⁶²⁰ predominantly in noble houses, and more rarely in the houses of merchants and artisans, but also in the houses of military and religious officers –quite a few of whom were Governors of the institution.⁶²¹ The information available in the registers of baptism and neophytes are not detailed as far as the position that Muslims converts held within the wide category of *servant*.⁶²² The phrasing used in the documents is, as in the cases of the Jewish converts, far from revealing. The most commonly used, and at the same time the most vague phrase is 'andò star dal/col' and andò [star] in casa/dal'. Very rarely this phrase is complemented by specific reference to domestic service, as in the case of Chademse Bralich from Bosnia, thirty-five years old, who after her baptism in 1647 'andò star dal S[igno]r Gasparo Olivier mercante di vin a San Anzolo Raffael, dove fu instrutta, et al presente serve'.⁶²³ In other cases just the phrase 'andò [a] servir' or 'serve' is used, as in the case of a twelve-years old boy from Vrana in Croatia, who in 1647 'andò servir il Clar[issi]mo S[igno]r Paolo Cremona', one of the Governors of the institution⁶²⁴ –about a year later, another captive,

⁶¹⁸ Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, 99-104, 119-120.

⁶¹⁹ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 63r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. In the same year, Bortollo had also received as an apprentice the Jewish convert Marta, thirteen years old, see here, 120.

⁶²⁰ Salvatore Bono, 'Schiavi Musulmani in Italia nell' età moderna', *Erdem* 3, no. 9 (1987): 831. Although Preto argued that the presence of Muslim servants in Venetian households was sporadic, given the significant numbers of captives during the wars, this might not be the case, see Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi*, 125-126.

⁶²¹ The trend was the same among the small percentage (14%) of Muslim converts who left Venice after baptism, of whom around 80% entered the domestic service mainly in the Venetian *Terra Ferma*. Beyond *Terra Ferma* Muslim converts also moved to the Ionian Islands, mostly Zante, while several women in 1647 were sent to the Venetian Istria, in Villa Nuova near the coastal city of Parenzo, presumably in a policy of populating the Venetian-Ottoman borderland, see Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 20v, 21r, 21v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV; E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 113. There must have been a steady effort to populate the Ottoman-Venetian borders, since Nani, in his *Historia della Repubblica Veneta* mentions that in 1669, following a Senate's decision, a number of refugees from Crete were also sent to Parenzo, see Battista Nani, *Historia della Repubblica Veneta* (Venice, 1686), 581.

⁶²² For the concept of early modern servanthship see here, 115.

⁶²³ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 22v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶²⁴ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 21r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

an eight-years old boy from Clissa was also sent to serve at his house.⁶²⁵ Several years later, in 1707 Elena olim Cadice was requested ‘per camarera’ by the nobleman Angiolo Memo,⁶²⁶ but such detailed indication of the servants’ position within a household are extremely rare.

Another category of captives and candidate converts was that of *huomeni da remo* or oarsmen in the Venetian galleys. Using Muslim oarsmen, along with both free and convicted Christians and Jews, was a practice followed broadly in the Venetian fleet since the battle of Lepanto.⁶²⁷ During the years of the Ottoman-Venetian wars, oarsmen represented a small part (10%) of the Muslim captives conducted to the Venetian *Casa*, and they mostly originated from the geographical areas of Bosnia and Albania. Although the conversion of oarsmen might at times have been linked with their manumission,⁶²⁸ this is not the case in the Venetian *Casa*, as all slaves, oarsmen included, who reached the institution and converted, afterwards they returned to their original place in a household or in the galleys. Indeed, when the oarsman Ahmet twenty-nine years old from the island of Schiatta (present-day Skiathos in Greece) informed the institution’s Prior in 1659 that he would convert only ‘con patto che fosse libero della catena’, the Prior dismissed his request and did not baptize him.⁶²⁹ What’s more, a significant part of these oarsmen never actually set foot in the institution, but were instructed, baptized and maintained on board.⁶³⁰ Nonetheless, even if baptism and the status of Christian did not entail liberation, it could entail better treatment –or the hope for it- and this could be an incentive for conversion. This was what Antonio olim Mehmet from

⁶²⁵ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 23v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶²⁶ Libro ... [1705-17010]–G7, c. 44v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁶²⁷ David Nicolle, *The Venetian Empire, 1200-1670* (Oxford: Osprey, 1989), 24; Bono, ‘Schiavi Musulmani’, 832-833; David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 143. More generally on slaves and oarsmen see Luca Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo. Galee e galeotti del Mediterraneo in età moderna* (Milano: Selene, 2003); Robert Davis, ‘The Geography of Slaving in the Early Modern Mediterranean, 1500-1800’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 37, no. 1 (2007): 57-74; idem, *Holy War and Human Bondage. Tales of Christian-Muslim Slavery in the Early-Modern Mediterranean* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger/ABC-CLIO, 2009).

⁶²⁸ Bono, ‘Schiavi Musulmani’, 836. Since the 12th century, the Church adopted an ambiguous stance towards this issue, stating that although it was morally right to free a converted slave, it was by no means the obligation of the slave-owner, ultimately relegating the matter to the custom of the land and individual conscience. But in the mid-16th century (1549) Pope Paul III issued a decree, confirmed later (1566) by Pius V, according to which all converted slaves could approach the seat of the municipal administration in Rome, the Capitoline Hill, and request to be granted their freedom. Although this decree raised high hopes among slaves in Rome and elsewhere, there is no indication that it was widely observed, as it conflicted with the rights of slave-traders and slave-holders, see Mazur, ‘Combating “Mohammedan Indecency”’, 30, 41-43. In the case of Christian slaves in the Maghreb, conversion improved the slaves’ status and condition, but here too manumission was upon the master to decide, see Hershenzon ‘Early Modern Spain and the Creation of the Mediterranean’, 52.

⁶²⁹ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 51v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶³⁰ For such cases see indicatively Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 20r, 47v, 49v, 51r-v, 54r, 58r, 65v, 66r, 69r-v, 70v, 76v, 77r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

Salonicchio (present-day Thessaloniki in Greece) must have had in mind when he converted in 1705, for after his baptism he asked for clarification as to whether his oarsman status in the galley would now be that of ‘turcho ò cristiano condannato’. As indicated by another example, this maybe apparently subtle distinction must have had vital consequences in converted Muslim oarsmen’s everyday lives: in 1706 the institution’s Prior noted in his notebook that converted Muslim oarsmen insisted in making sure that after baptism ‘sia loro il biscotto ed altro somministrato come à Cristiani’.⁶³¹

Although one would tend to think that the conversions of captives and slaves were exclusively cases of forced baptisms,⁶³² these cases of oarsmen point to a more complex reality. Another example is that in 1692 of the servant Ahmet, nine years old from Mistra in the Peloponnese, who presented himself on his own at the institution. He said that several times he had asked his ‘Padrona [...], una donna libera’ to bring him to the *Casa* in order to convert, but she insistently refused. So eventually he decided to go there alone, ‘contro la [sua] volontà’.⁶³³ Similar cases are very sporadically recorded in the documentation available for the 17th century, which as already mentioned is restricted to brief serial entries in the registers of baptisms and neophytes. Yet, through this kind of marginal notes we can catch some rare glimpses suggesting that Muslim captives and slaves in Venice were to a certain extent aware of the ‘new possibilities for constituting themselves’⁶³⁴ that conversion to Christianity might entail, and at times actively pursued them.

b. Corfu

Due to the role of the island of Corfu as the seat of the Venetian administration of the *Stato da Mar* as well as a cardinal Mediterranean transport node between the east and the west for both military and commercial fleets, the process that connected warfare, captivity and conversion

⁶³¹ Libro ...[1705-1710], c. 16r, 22v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁶³² Early modern slave-dealers’ and slave-owners’ attitude towards the conversion of their slaves depended to a significant extent on whether the latter were seen as an ‘investment’ or simply as labor force. Davis has pointed out that Muslim slave-dealers in the Maghreb often did not want their Christian slaves to convert, as their conversion would lower the chances of receiving ransom for them from their relatives or from a Christian charitable organization. On the other hand, in the case of the French Antilles where African slaves were ‘imported’ to work in the farms and plantations, since the late 17th century it was legislated that all slaves were to be baptized Catholic Christians, see Davis, *Holy War and Human Bondage*, 160-173, 246-248; Peabody, “‘A Dangerous Zeal’”, 70-71.

⁶³³ Registro dei Neofiti 1676-1693, c. 12v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶³⁴ Talal Asad, ‘Comments on Conversion’ in *Conversion to Modernities. The Globalization of Christianity*, ed. Peter Van der Veer (New York, London: Routledge, 1996), 265.

was also played out there. Thus, part of the Ottoman Muslims captivated during the Ottoman-Venetian wars was conducted to Corfu -sometimes on their way to Venice or to other cities of Italy. To give an example, Alessandro Locatelli in his *Racconto storico della Veneta Guerra in Levante* published in 1691 recounted that in August 1685, a year after the first Ottoman-Venetian Morean war had broken out, three boats full of Muslim captives mostly from Coron (present-day Koroni in the West Peloponnese in Greece) stationed in Corfu. Some of these captives were later transferred to Rome and then baptized there in the *Casa dei Catecumeni*,⁶³⁵ while others must have remained in the island and been baptized there. Indeed, during the first war over the Peloponnese (1684-1699) and for the next few years (1700-1703), there is a significant increase in the baptisms of Muslims in the Latin Cathedral of the city of Corfu - 76% of all the recorded baptisms of Muslims in the *Duomo* of Corfu took place during these years.⁶³⁶ Of course, numbers here seem insignificant when compared to those of the Venetian *Casa*, nevertheless within the scale of conversions in the city of Corfu and of baptisms taking place in only one church, the baptism of 128 Muslim women, men and children in the Latin *Duomo* within twenty years' time is rather unique.

⁶³⁵ Nikolaou identified them in the registers of the *Casa dei Catecumeni* of Rome, see Nikolaou, 'Islamisations et Christianisations dans le Péloponnèse', 56.

⁶³⁶ Of the 168 baptisms of Muslim people that were recorded in the Latin *Duomo* of Corfu (see here, 101, Table 1), 128 took place between the years 1684 and 1703.

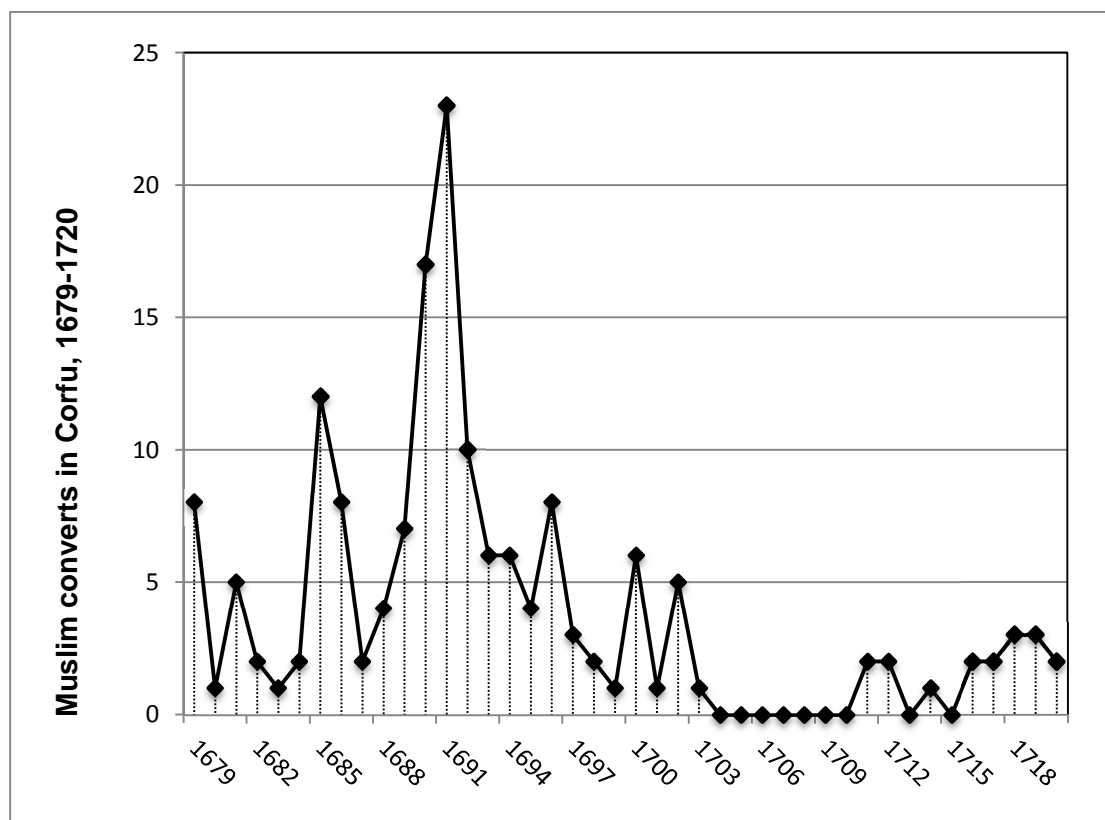


Chart 5. Muslims baptized in the Latin Cathedral of *San Giacomo* in Corfu, 1679-1720.

In their cases, as in the majority of the cases of Muslim converts in the Venetian *Casa*, no concrete reference to their captive status can be found in the registers of the Latin *Duomo*. Yet, when the increase of the baptism of Muslims during and shortly after the first Morean war period is taken into consideration along with their places of origins, gender proportion and age, these elements all indicate that the connection between captivity and conversion was at work here too. More concretely, as far as origin is concerned before the war, that is between the years 1679 and 1683, the few Muslim converts' origins available indicate a dispersion within the Ottoman Empire: Gran Cairo (present day Cairo in Egypt), Valona (present-day Vlorë in Albania), Croatia, Hungary, the island Chios (in present-day Greece). During the following years (1684-1703), the vast majority (75%) of Muslim converts came from the Peloponnese where warfare was continuous, leading to the conversion, migration or captivity of the local Muslim population. Indeed, the Peloponnesian cities of origin of the Muslim baptized in the Latin *Duomo* reflect the cities where battles took place during the years of war: Coron and Patras in the West Peloponnese from where half of these Muslims originated, but also Calamata, Castel Tornese (present-day Chlemoutsis), Corinth, Mistras,

Modon, Napoli di Romania (present-day Nafplio), and Zarnada (only the ruins of the castle remain today). Beyond the cities of the Peloponnese, Muslims baptized in the Latin *Duomo* of Corfu also came from places where less extensive warfare had taken place, like Clissa and Billai (present-day Bilaj in Croatia) in the Dalmatian coast, Preveza and Arta in Epirus (in present-day Greece), Santa Maura (present-day Lefkada) in the Ionian Sea, Athens, Negroponte (present-day Chalkida in Euboea, Greece) and Carababà (in mainland Greece opposite Chalkida, of which only a castle remains today), and several islands in the Aegean Sea.

Gender-wise, Muslim women were practically absent both before and after the war, while they slightly outnumbered men⁶³⁷ during the years and shortly after the war.⁶³⁸ The same goes for children,⁶³⁹ almost all of which originated from the Peloponnese⁶⁴⁰ and were baptized there during the war years.⁶⁴¹ In about all the cases of children, no name of parents is recorded. Information about women and children's post-baptism itinerary is scarce in the baptism registers of the Latin *Duomo*, yet most likely they must have entered the domestic service,⁶⁴² as Muslim converts did in Venice.⁶⁴³ More information can be found in the marriage registers of the *Megalos Protopapas*, where twenty-three converted Muslim women appear to be married to Christians.⁶⁴⁴ For sixteen of them, occupation is indicated: all of them had become domestic servants in the various households of the local nobility, like that of Gianpaolo Petretin, Gianetto Chalikiopoulos and Arsenios Palatianos, but also in more

⁶³⁷ Between 1684 and 1703, the baptisms of sixty-seven women and sixty-one men are recorded in the registers of the *Duomo* in Corfu. In total (1679-1743) Muslim women recorded in the *Duomo* registers are seventy-three and Muslim men ninety-five.

⁶³⁸ During the first phase of the war (1684-1690), when the majority of battles took place and which concluded with the occupation of the Peloponnese, men prevail in numbers. In the second phase (1691-1699), when the Venetians were already established in the Peloponnese, it is women that prevail. For the phases of the war see Nikolaou, 'Islamisations et Christianisations dans le Péloponnèse', 55.

⁶³⁹ In quite a few cases, girls and boys between eight and thirteen years old were recorded as *adults*, maybe an indication that the Latin Church of Corfu was not in line with the official Venetian policy, defining the *usum rationis* at the age of fourteen, but adopted instead the harsher position that defined it at the age of seven. See here, note 616 and *Duomo-Battesimi*, b. 6, c. 100r, 126r, 128r, 136v, 146v, 148r-v, 159v, 173r, 179r, 187r, LAC.

⁶⁴⁰ There is only one exception in 1691 of a little boy from Clissa in Dalmatia, see *Duomo-Battesimi*, b. 6, c. 159v, LAC.

⁶⁴¹ Thirty-two out of the thirty-five children were baptized between 1684 and 1689.

⁶⁴² *Duomo-Battesimi*, b. 6, c. 121v, 135v, 136v, 137r, LAC.

⁶⁴³ Salvatore Bono, 'Schiavi musulmani in Italia', 831.

⁶⁴⁴ In total twenty-nine women are recorded there, six converted Jews and twenty-three Muslims. This high rate of Muslim women should be attributed to the Ottoman-Venetian wars of the era that provided the lucrative slave trade with captives. Maybe the predominance of Muslim women could be also read as an indication that Jewish women who had converted in Corfu, the majority of whom was originating from the island, must have migrated after their baptism, yet much further research is needed before endorsing or dismissing this hypothesis.

modest, artisan households like that of the shoemaker's Ioanni Goli. The words used in the documents to describe the situation of these women reveal a slight distinction between three different status of the domestic service: *σκλάβα* or *δούλη*, presumably a condition and legal status corresponding to that of a slave; *δουλεύτρα* or *εις την δούλεψιν*, the latter probably translating the Italian expression 'al servizio' and indicating free servants employed on contracts; and *ψυχοπαίδα* or *αναθρευτή*, the equivalent of the Italian *figlia d'anima* indicating as already mentioned the permanent status of an adopted child that nevertheless entailed the possibility of being treated also as a domestic servant.⁶⁴⁵

There is no indication as to how these women managed to accumulate the necessary dowries, but probably their masters played an important role in this.⁶⁴⁶ In any case, as it has been argued, 'marriage was the most important transition in the lives of servants, for it changed not only the circumstances of their lives but also their status. It allowed them to be identified as something other than servants. Now they were husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, in their own right –in other words, 'persone da bene'.⁶⁴⁷ We also know very little about the Christian husbands of these women, four of whom were married to second marriage. It is though suggestive that the majority of them were not from the city of Corfu. They came from the labor, artisan and rural milieu of suburbs⁶⁴⁸ like Mantouki, where most residents were boatmen and fishermen;⁶⁴⁹ Potamos, where a lot of workers in the salterns resided;⁶⁵⁰ and San Rocco, a mixed artisan suburb;⁶⁵¹ or from the various villages of the island like Korakiana, Sinies, Kynopiastes, Ayioi. Theodoroi,⁶⁵² and even from the more remote islands in the north of Corfu, Othonoi.⁶⁵³ Yet, after marriage, all couples moved to the city of Corfu, or in the nearby suburbs of Garitsa and Mantouki.

Some more detailed and extended information about the life itineraries of Ottoman Muslim captives can be found in the series of matrimonial examination. In 1691 Giacomo Saiano, a Christian of the Eastern rite and sailor on the battleship of the Venetian nobleman Filippo Dona, presented before the *Megalos Protopapas* Angioletta, a pregnant converted

⁶⁴⁵ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 12, c. 311v, 332r, b. 13, c. 495r, 765v, 841r, 913v, GSAC.

⁶⁴⁶ Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, p. 155, 164.

⁶⁴⁷ Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, 167.

⁶⁴⁸ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 12, c. 48v, GSAC.

⁶⁴⁹ 'Barcaroli' and 'pescatori', see Ενετική Διοίκηση, Registro 1692, c. 18r-v, GSAC.

⁶⁵⁰ 'Salineri', see Ενετική Διοίκηση, Registro 1692, c. 21v-24v, GSAC.

⁶⁵¹ There is no professional specialization at the suburb of San Rocco. Among the professions included in the censure of 1692 there are mentioned *boari*, *beccheri*, *aquaroli*, *hortolari*, *callegheri*, *macinatori*, *fachini*, *formaseri*, *marangon*, *barbieri*, see Ενετική Διοίκηση, Registro 1692, c. 16r-17v, GSAC.

⁶⁵² Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 12, c. 311v, b. 13, c. 877r, 913v, GSAC.

⁶⁵³ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 12, c. 295r, b. 13, c. 600r, GSAC.

Muslim woman with whom he already had two children, and whom he now wanted to marry.⁶⁵⁴ Angioletta must have originated from the Peloponnese, captured during the first Morean war, and then traded as slave. Giacomo had bought her from the nobleman Dona for twelve *zecchini* during the war, in 1687 or 1688.⁶⁵⁵ Six months after purchasing her, Giacomo convinced her to convert to Christianity, and the baptism took place in the city of Nafplio. Soon after, Giacomo said, they had the two children, a boy and a girl.⁶⁵⁶ They spent some years in Nafplio and then left for Corfu –where, as the invited witnesses testified, Angioletta was living in the Christian way, attending mass ‘mostly vespers and matins’.⁶⁵⁷ In Corfu Angioletta was employed as a wet nurse in the house of Spyridon Voulgaris, a clergyman who also hold the office of *Ekklesiarchis* in the religious council of the local Greek Church.⁶⁵⁸ Now, after about thirteen or fourteen years that Giacomo had spent with Angioletta, he decided to marry her ‘reflecting on the promise that I had given and on what is good for my soul’.⁶⁵⁹

Several years later, in 1697 a converted Muslim from Coron, Ioannis Kardakis, presented himself before the *Megalos Protopapas*’ office.⁶⁶⁰ Ioannis intended to marry Andriana, a Corfiot Christian woman, and to this end he had first to present there the necessary witnesses that would testify that he was indeed single. Ioannis in the past had been an enslaved Muslim child, in all probability captured during the first Morean war –one of the two witnesses, Georgios Valsamis or Valsamakis from the Ionian island of Cephalonia and oarsman in a battleship from the same island, stated that he had first seen Ioannis on board as

⁶⁵⁴ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 15, c. 638r-641v plus an unnumbered page in the end, GSAC.

⁶⁵⁵ Giacomo testified that he bought Angioletta in the Peloponnesian city of Corinth in the years ‘that the most Serene ruler of Venice won the battle of Athens’, that is in September 1687 when the Venetians occupied the city of Athens. One of the witnesses he had invited to testify, Capo Alexandros Kouris, stated on the other hand that Giacomo had purchased and baptized the woman in the city of Nafplio ‘in the first years that the most Serene Prince conquered Nafplio’, that is one year before, in 1686, see Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 15, c. 638r, 639r, GSAC.

⁶⁵⁶ Sexual relations between master and servants were a quite common practice, see Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, xvii, xix.

⁶⁵⁷ Among the six witnesses there were the priests of two churches, Georgios Ongaros from Yrapanti and Evangelistis Fortzigos from Kremasti, as well as the clergyman Spyridon Voulgaris, see Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 15, c. 640v, GSAC.

⁶⁵⁸ It was married servants that were used as wet nurses or governesses, Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, 165.

⁶⁵⁹ ‘λογιάζοντας καλλήτερα την υπόσχεσίν μου και το καλόν της ψυχής μου’, Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 15, c. 639r, GSAC.

⁶⁶⁰ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 14, c. 525r-526v, GSAC.

a slave.⁶⁶¹ After some time, the captain of the ship gave the child as a gift to Simos Kardakis, a nobleman from Cephalonia. Eventually in 1695 the nobleman Kardakis decided to baptize Ioannis⁶⁶² and also to give his freedom.

The story of the second witness that Ioannis presented, Francesco Basini, is also of some interest to us. Francesco was from the Italian city of Brescia and a soldier enrolled in a mercenary company. He recounted that his acquaintance with Ioannis (his Muslim name is never recorded) dates back to the latter's birthplace, Coron, when Ioannis 'was almost a child' and Francesco was a slave of the Muslims.⁶⁶³ After Francesco was freed, he travelled to Cephalonia, where he met again Ioannis. Although now things had changed, as Francesco was a free man while Ioannis was slave of the nobleman Kardakis, Francesco befriended Ioannis, and several years later, he was witness to Ioannis' baptism. Finally, Francesco moved to Corfu, where he got married to Ioannis' first cousin, a former Muslim baptized there, as he recounted, by the *Megalos Protopapas*.

ii. Religious conversion beyond warfare

When moving further into the 18th century and away from the context of Ottoman-Venetian warfare, the overall numbers of Ottoman Muslim candidate converts in the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni* present a sharp decline,⁶⁶⁴ confirming the hypothesis that their marked presence there during the 17th century and early 18th century was intimately linked with the two Ottoman-Venetian wars. Thus, if as already mentioned during the years 1645 and 1720 around 1,080 Muslim candidate converts reached the institution, between 1721 and 1797 there were only 127 recorded. These people originated again mostly from cities or villages of the frontier areas of Albania, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Croatia.⁶⁶⁵ A significant number came from

⁶⁶¹ 'κατά την συνήθειαν μου έτυχε να υπάγω ως κουπολάτης εις το κάτεργο το κεφαλωνίτικο και εκεί ύβρα ένα παιδίον τούρκον οπού ήτον σκλαβωμένον από τους χριστιανούς', Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 14, c. 525r, GSAC.

⁶⁶² Ioannis' godfather was his master, Simo Kardakis, from whom he also took his surname. The baptism took place in the city of Argostoli in Cephalonia.

⁶⁶³ 'εγώ τον εγνώριζα εκεί οπού ήμουν σκλάβος εις την κορόνην ... εις χείρας αγαρηνών, ο οποίος [Ιωάννης] ήτον τότε σχεδόν παιδίον', Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 14, c. 525r-526v, GSAC.

⁶⁶⁴ The same sharp decline can be traced in the baptisms of Muslims in the Latin *Duomo* of Corfu. Between 1704 and 1710 no baptism of Muslim is recorded, while during the years 1711 to 1720 there are seventeen cases of baptized Muslims. After 1720 and until 1743 the decrease is even more pronounced: only six such cases are recorded.

⁶⁶⁵ Georgios Plakotos, 'Christian and Muslim Converts from the Balkans in Early Modern Venice. Patterns of Social and Cultural Mobility and Identities', in *Developing Cultural Identity in the Balkans*.

the Maghreb coast, while the rest were from cities of the central and southern Balkans such as Sofia, Belgrade, Thessaloniki, or villages of the Peloponnese, but also from Istanbul and Anatolia.

The significant quantitative change among Muslim candidate converts went hand in hand with a qualitative change of equal importance, namely that these few Muslims that reached the institution in the 18th century were not captives nor slaves, and converted largely on their own initiative –of course, entangled within and assisted by the institution’s network. Various elements characteristic of this period point to this direction. First, the term *patron*, used extensively in the 17th century to denote the jurisdiction that Christian had over their Muslim captives and slaves, is altogether absent from the 18th century registers. Second, the number of Muslim women recorded in the institution’s registers, already significantly reduced since the beginning of the 18th century, is even further reduced,⁶⁶⁶ and the same goes for children of unknown parents.⁶⁶⁷ Third, Muslim converts entering the domestic service in the 18th century are virtually absent. Already in the 17th and early 18th century, there were few Muslim converts that did not end up serving in Venetian households, yet their percentage was remarkably small, representing only 1,5% of baptized Muslims. To give an example, in 1663 Iusuf, twenty years old from Craina in Albania (present-day Krajina region in Montenegro), son of a Muslim convert, was baptized and then was recorded to have left for Dalmatia, but twenty-two years later, in 1685, the institution’s Prior added a note in his baptism entry saying that he had become a ‘sacerdote [...] in S. Francesco della Vigna col nome di Nicolò’.⁶⁶⁸ In 1664 Mehmet from Tunisi after his baptism settled in the sestier of San Nicolo, where he would ‘esercitar sua professione del tesser de Veludi’.⁶⁶⁹ In 1667, Durse from Clissa, twenty years old, after his baptism moved to the sestier of Santa Marta ‘a far l’ortoliere’.⁶⁷⁰ In 1707 Giovanni Antonio olim Abdulah and Nicolo olim Mehmet became ‘fachini’.⁶⁷¹ But these, along few other cases, were just exceptions, while the vast majority of Muslim converts entered the domestic service, fulfilling the demand of Venetian households for servants.

Convergence vs. Divergence, ed. Raymond Detrez and Pieter Plas (Brussels: P.I.E.,-Peter Lang, 2005), 131. On the Venetian notion about Dalmatia in the 18th century see Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs*.

⁶⁶⁶ Of the 127 Muslim candidate converts between 1720 and 1797, only 21 (16%) were women.

⁶⁶⁷ There can be found only four recorded cases, see Libro ...1725-1744-G9, c. 42v-43r, 49v-50r, 60v-61r, 125v-126r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁶⁶⁸ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 56r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶⁶⁹ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 58v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶⁷⁰ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 66r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶⁷¹ Libro ... [1705-1710]-G7, c. 49v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

On the contrary, after 1720 very few Muslim converts were captives and slaves, like the twelve years old boy from Congo who was bought in 1734 by the famous castrato singer Farinelli from Livorno;⁶⁷² or the eleven years old Chiolle from the region of Bengal in Asia, who was brought at the institution in 1749 by his master, the Venetian Andrea Mutti.⁶⁷³ More generally, after 1720 only few Muslim converts were employed as domestic servants -and of course their status now was substantially different, as they were free people. To give an example, in 1734 Mustafa, twenty-years old from Giannina (in present-day Epirus, Greece), arrived on his own to the institution. He was directed there by the *Provveditore General* Erizzo, who wrote for him a letter of recommendation, in order to be accepted at the institution. After his baptism, Giovanni Antonio Priuli olim Mustafa, was sent to the house of the nobleman Bortolo Mora, Governor of the institution, as a domestic servant. But six months later, Giovanni Antonio returned to the institution, and was then sent to Vicenza to enroll in the guard of the city's *Podesta*.⁶⁷⁴ Towards the close of the century, in 1779, Abdelai 'maometano moro', twenty years old from Africa, who had spent his life as a slave first in Tripolis and then in the island of Cerigo, after baptism became a 'camaroto' at the house of a *Capitano* Pietro Petretin.⁶⁷⁵

Nonetheless, the majority of Muslim converts after baptism was employed in various salaried positions, thus following the same itineraries that Jewish converts had followed since the mid-17th century. In 1735 Antonio Grimani, olim Amet, an eighteen-years old boy from Armenia, after spending two years at the institution, was employed as a worker in a certain 'fabrica'.⁶⁷⁶ In 1747 Bechir from Crete became a 'giovane Caffetiere' and Mustafa from Navarin was employed in a 'bottega di Caffè in Rialto'.⁶⁷⁷ In 1748 Assan Mulcanovich from Bosnia left for Dalmatia in order to be employed there 'in qualche Bottega di Fabro, tale essendo il suo mestiere'.⁶⁷⁸ Another common professional option for Muslim converts was to become mercenaries in the Venetian army. In 1728 Saban Semali, twenty years old from Scutari (present-day Shkodër in Albania), decided to convert to Christianity. He said to the

⁶⁷² Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 60v-61r, Catecumeni, AIRE. For two more cases of slaves see *ibid.*, c. 125v-126r; Costituti 1744-1762, c. 20v-21r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. On Farinelli see Patrick Barbier, *Farinelli. Le castrat des lumières* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1994).

⁶⁷³ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 42v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶⁷⁴ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 58v-59r, 70v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁶⁷⁵ Costituti 1779-1836, c. 3v-4r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶⁷⁶ Libro ... 1725-1744, c. 38v, 40v-42r, 50v, 52v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁶⁷⁷ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 26r, 27r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶⁷⁸ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 39r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

Prior that he was a merchant and had spent two years in Venice, living in the *Fontego*,⁶⁷⁹ but now he wanted to convert. Five months later he was baptized, and then he left for Verona to join the ‘Compagnia de’ Croati’.⁶⁸⁰ In 1739 Osman Aga from the city of Scopia (present-day Skopje in the Republic of Macedonia), forty-two years old, son of a Muslim convert, abandoned his wife and children and took refuge at the *Casa*, where he was baptized and later recruited in the mercenary company of *General Cavalli* stationed in Dalmatia, in the city of Zara.⁶⁸¹

Indeed, among the institution’s Muslim converts, mercenaries formed a rather distinct group representing 20% of all the converted Muslims there.⁶⁸² As the above cases suggest, a part of them joined the Venetian army after their conversion – probably through a network linking the *Casa* with several mercenary companies’ captains. This network must have also worked the other way round, as the story of Mustafa from Tunisia suggests. Mustafa reached the institution in 1741, at the age of twenty-six. He was the son of a Tunisian man ‘di color bianco’, and a woman from Algiers, ‘e percio di color Moro’ –his mother was probably bought as a slave, as Mustafa relates that she had been seized in Algiers by the Tunisians. Mustafa was kept in captivity on board of a Venetian galley, where he met the galley’s corporal, a Muslim convert, and with the latter’s help he was liberated. Mustafa was then enrolled in the mercenary company of captain Antichevich, who soon after suggested to Mustafa that he should be baptized ‘alla greca’. In the version of the story that Mustafa presented to the institution’s Prior, he maintained that as he did not want to be baptized to the Eastern rite, he enrolled in another company that was travelling to Venice, with which he reached the *Casa dei Catecumeni*.⁶⁸³

There is also some indication that there might have been a certain link in the 17th and early 18th century between Ottoman Muslim captives or slaves and those converts enrolling in the Venetian army as mercenaries during the same period. In 1663 two young Ottoman Muslims, Zafar and Husein, were brought to the institution.⁶⁸⁴ The area of their origin is

⁶⁷⁹ On the *Fontego dei Turchi*, see Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi*, 130-134.

⁶⁸⁰ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 20v-21r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁶⁸¹ Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 10v-109r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁶⁸² Mercenaries were among the more mobile social groups in the early modern period, see Lucassen and Lucassen, *The Mobility Transition Revisited*, 366-369.

⁶⁸³ Libro ...1725-1744-G9, c. 124v-125r, Catecumeni, AIRE. For the same case see also here 204-205, 222.

⁶⁸⁴ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 56r-v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

described with the wide term ‘Natolia’⁶⁸⁵ and there is no specification as to how they reached the institution. Yet, in their entries there is a note stating that before arriving there, both were liberated ‘dalla catena dal Ecc[ellentissi]mo Senato per esser stato in Fusta in deposito’.⁶⁸⁶ Zafar and Husein, after spending about three months at the institution, were baptized, and then two weeks later they were sent to Bergamo to serve in a mercenary company stationed there. About fifteen years later, in 1707, Ali ‘moro turco’ and slave of the Muslim *Capitan* Hagi Mehmed, after baptism was sent to the Brancovich mercenary company that stationed in Lido.⁶⁸⁷ Although no further information is provided in any of the cases, they both suggest that captives available and judged capable of fighting could have been sent to enroll in the Venetian army.

Most interestingly, though, many among the mercenaries were already serving in the Venetian mercenary companies, sometimes for many years, without being baptized. For example, in 1718, Suleiman, fifty years old from Banjalucka in Bosnia and at that time enrolled in the company of Andrea Gini stationed in Verona, said he had spent eighteen years between Dalmatia and Italy as a Muslim soldier in the Venetian army.⁶⁸⁸ So, if it is well known that the Venetian army, as all early modern armies, recruited mercenaries of diverse origins and even from distant regions,⁶⁸⁹ it is less known that it also recruited men of different religious affiliations. These cases are interesting and important as they present a palpable challenge to the constructed dichotomies of East and West and therefore a questioning of the supposedly exclusive affiliation with either the Venetian state or the Ottoman Empire.

The Venetian army was not exceptional in adopting a cross-faith composition of its forces. On the contrary, this practice was common among medieval and early modern European armies, which recruited both Muslim and Christian men, especially within the

⁶⁸⁵ The Anatolia Eyalet, along with the Rumelia Eyalet, were the two core administrative units of the Ottoman Provincial administration. Anatolia covered the geographical area of central and western Asia Minor, see Selçuk Akşin Somel, *Historical Dictionary of the Ottoman Empire* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 18, 88, 288.

⁶⁸⁶ ‘Fusta’ was a galley stationed near the San Marco Square, where those condemned to serve in the galleys, captives included, were provisionally kept ‘in deposito’ before being distributed to the various galleys, see Boerio, *Dizionario*, 292.

⁶⁸⁷ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 95v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶⁸⁸ Libro ... 1702-1718-G6, c. 19v-20r, Catecumeni, AIRE; Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 136r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶⁸⁹ In the Venetian army, men for the infantry and to a lesser extent for the cavalry were recruited from other parts of Italy as well as from Dalmatia, Albania, Bosnia and Croatia - cavalymen were mostly from Venice and the Veneto. The Venetian army also employed mercenaries from areas beyond the Alps - thus recruiting at times French, Corsicans, English, Dutch or Swiss foot soldiers, the latter being ‘the most famous of European soldiers’, see Mallett and Hale, *The Military Organization*, 315-330. See also John Childs, *Armies and Warfare in Europe, 1648-1789* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 41-42, 46-49.

region of the Balkans, but also in Anatolia and Andalusia, and used these cross-faith forces even in battles as crucial as the Ottoman attack against Vienna, when Hungarian Protestants marched along the Ottoman army.⁶⁹⁰ The Venetian army recruited for the infantry and light cavalry Muslim men from the Ottoman Empire, and much more rarely Jewish men mostly from the Venetian Mediterranean colonies but also from the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the idea of recruiting Ottoman Muslims, especially from the Balkan region, for the Venetian army dates back to the beginning of the 16th century and happened in virtual agreement and knowledge of both the Venetians and the Ottomans.⁶⁹¹

Approached from such a vantage point, the Venetian military milieu can be also understood as a kind of ‘contact zone’. And, as Mary Louise Pratt has illustrated, within these spaces of cultural encounter and mingling, interactions take place ‘often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today’.⁶⁹² In the case of the early modern Venetian army, Muslim mercenaries along with the few Jewish mercenaries recruited encountered daily this asymmetric power structure. They lived in a predominantly Christian setting, and frequently under circumstances of war that entailed danger and fear. This military milieu thus constituted a privileged field for their religious conversion to Christianity. Their constant association and coexistence with Christians, enhanced by the circumstances of war as well as by the possibility of better employment prospects, rendered rather effective the more or less indirect pressure to convert exerted by their Christian fellows and the military chaplains.⁶⁹³

The presence of converted Muslim mercenaries is recorded in the institution’s registers already in the mid-17th century, when the war of Crete began. In the summer of 1645, shortly before and right after the war broke out, eight Muslim men appeared before the Prior of the Venetian *Casa*. They were all *soldati*⁶⁹⁴ in the Venetian army. One of them was from Montenegro, another was from Ottoman Bosnia, while the rest came from the area of

⁶⁹⁰ Victor Gordon Kiernan, ‘Foreign Armies and Absolute Monarchy’, *Past and Present* 11 (1957), 79 (66-86); Almond, *Two faiths, one banner*.

⁶⁹¹ In the beginning of the 16th century, when the Venetians were engaged in the war against the League of Cambrai, they thought of using Muslim soldiers on a large scale, but eventually did not realize their plan. About a century later, in 1606, the Venetian bailo in Istanbul, Ottavio Bon, asked the permission of the Grand Vizier to enroll in the Venetian army Muslim soldiers from the frontier areas, see Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi*, 36-58; Mallett and Hale, *The Military Organization*, 73, 80, 315-318.

⁶⁹² Pratt, ‘Arts of the Contact Zone’, 34.

⁶⁹³ See the case of David Lopes from Granada in Spain, who was baptized in 1743 in the island of Corfu, see here, 121-122.

⁶⁹⁴ *Soldati* were the troops raised by mercenary leaders in time of war and were used on land, on sea or both, see Nicolle, *The Venetian Empire*, 24.

Ottoman Albania.⁶⁹⁵ That is, at the same time that Muslim men, women and children from the Ottoman Empire, especially the western Balkans and the Peloponnese, entered the Venetian *Casa* as captives and possibly traded slaves, other Ottoman Muslim men followed quite different paths: either converted to Christianity and then returned to the Venetian mercenary companies where they already served, or converted to Christianity and then, after enrolling to the Venetian army, were sent to fight in the war.

Throughout the following years and the three Ottoman-Venetian wars the places of origin of mercenaries altered. If before the Cretan war the Muslim mercenaries in the Venetian army who reached the institution came mostly from Bosnia and Albania, after 1647 their numbers in the *Casa* decreased, and they were to a certain extent replaced by mercenaries from the central and south Balkans (from the cities of Sofia, Ochrida, Belgrade, Andrianopoli, Xanthi) and Anatolia, as well as from the city of Istanbul. This shift in the origin of Muslim mercenaries who reached the institution could be linked with the fact that since 1647 and practically throughout the 17th and early 18th century, the Ottoman-Venetian wars were simultaneously staged in Dalmatia, Bosnia and Albania along with Crete firstly and the Peloponnese later. It seems then that during these years, these geographic areas were turned from a pool of mercenaries for the Venetian army into a pool of slaves and domestic servants for Venetians households. After the end of the second Morean war (1714-1718) Muslim mercenaries in the Venetian army originating from the western Balkans appear once again in the institution's registers.

Mercenaries were among the candidate converts that spent the least time in catechesis. As already mentioned, in the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni* the required period of instruction was significantly extended, reaching eight months, when compared to the period of forty days that canon law prescribed.⁶⁹⁶ In the case of mercenaries this was hardly ever respected, since they had to join their companies rather soon. In 1703 Mehmet Ali from Albania specified to the institution's Prior that the captain of his company gave him only three months for his catechesis and baptism, before returning to his company.⁶⁹⁷ Thus, Muslim converts, already enrolled as mercenaries or about to enroll after their baptism, remained at the institution for an average of between two and five months. After baptism they mostly moved to cities of the *Terraferma* where mercenary companies were stationed, such as Verona, Padova, Vicenza,

⁶⁹⁵ Registro dei Battesimi 1616-1676, c. 19r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁶⁹⁶ See here, note 213.

⁶⁹⁷ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 74v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

Brescia, Legnago, Bergamo. Fewer were also directly or later sent to Dalmatia and the Levant. Those who were already serving in the Venetian army were sent back to their former posts, most probably now with better professional prospects.⁶⁹⁸

During wartime and due to the urgency of the situation the period of indoctrination for the mercenaries and candidate converts was even shorter. The cases of the above mentioned eight Muslim men who arrived at the institution shortly after the outbreak of the Cretan war are rather characteristic of this trend. On the 22nd of July, about a month after the war had broken out and while the Ottomans were besieging the Cretan city of Chania, Mehmet from Valona (present-day Vlorë in Albania), twenty-two years old, appeared at the institution. He was accepted there, baptized and then sent back to his company all in the same day. On the 23rd of August 1645, one day after the Ottomans occupied the castle and city of Chania, Giuzo from Monte Negro, twenty-two years old as well, reached the institution. A week later, he was baptized and on the same day he left for Crete with the Venetian infantry. On the 30th of August 1645, four men from Cimara (present-day Himarë in Albania) and Cuzzi (Kuç, to the north-east of Himarë) were accepted at the *Casa*. They were all baptized after four days, and they left for Crete a week later.

a. A structured familiarity

The cases of these mercenaries present an interesting challenge to the neat categorization between the two supposedly opposing early modern blocks, the Christians and Muslims, not only because these men were Muslim mercenaries enrolled in a Christian army, but also because their narratives reveal a background of an already formed high level of familiarity with Christianity –yet, as the mercenaries and other cases will reveal, this was a structured familiarity that followed the internal hierarchies of the social and cultural framework where cross-faith interactions took place. Indeed this element of structured familiarity transcend the narratives of mercenaries, and can be found among the majority of narratives of Muslim candidate converts that reached the Venetian institution in the 18th century. In this sense, this structured familiarity can be considered an essential quality of the Mediterranean contact zones.

In the western Balkans, from where the majority of candidate converts originated in the 18th century, the proximity and cross-cultural interaction between Christian and Muslims

⁶⁹⁸ Plakotos, 'Christian and Muslim Converts', 134-135.

dated back at least to the beginning of the 17th century, when ethnically and religiously mixed towns, villages and even families were not unusual. When Marino Bizzi, Archbishop of Bar, visited Albania and a part of the inland area of Dalmatia in 1610, he wrote of mixed villages and mixed village councils, of mixed marriages, which he presented –unsurprisingly– only in terms of a bargain between the groom and the father, and of Christian religious ceremonies, where he presided, attended both by Christian and Muslim residents.⁶⁹⁹ For the village Kalivac near Vlorë, he even mentioned that there were sixty Christian households and ten Muslim, ‘which also contribute to maintaining the priest because almost all of them have Christian wives’.⁷⁰⁰

Several years later, in 1662, Evliya Celebi visited the area around Montenegro and noted the ease with which the residents of this geographical area, mostly occupied in the military profession, would alternatively provide their services to the Venetians and the Ottomans.⁷⁰¹ Evliya continued his trip and some years later, in 1670, he visited the adjacent districts of Vlorë and Dukat in southern Albania, from where, he noted, both the Venetians and the Ottomans respectively recruited men for their armies. A bit further to the south, in the town of Gjirokaster, he also observed the common feasts where Muslims and Christians participated, and lamented that Muslim people had adopted the bad customs of the ‘infidels’.⁷⁰²

In all, the image that both Celebi and Bizzi conveyed was that of a close cross-faith coexistence, which also led to the formation of several shared local qualities that were presented as prevailing over religious difference. And, as it has been suggested and is confirmed by the Muslim candidate converts’ narratives, this kind of familiarity and cross-cultural interaction was not confined only in the frontier areas of Dalmatia or Albania, but can be found in several areas of Anatolia in the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁰³

⁶⁹⁹ Robert Elsie, ed., *Early Albania. A Reader of Historical Texts, 11th-17th Centuries* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 77-129.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁰¹ ‘Half the mountains are called Montenegro and the other half Kelmendi. They are home of 47,000 infidel Albania musketeers. Formerly they were subject to Shkodër, but since the war of Crete they have gone over to the Venetian side and have departed to assist the fortress of Candia. On the Cape of Kelmendi are seven fortresses ruled by the Venetians. While the naval commanders are Franks (i.e. Venetians), the garrison soldiers are all Albanian infidels’, in Robert Dankoff and Robert Elsie, eds., *Evliya Çelebi in Albania and Adjacent Regions (Kosovo, Montenegro, Ohrid)* (Leiden, New York, Cologne: Brill, 2000), 51. See also Palmira Brummett, ‘Visions of the Mediterranean. A Classification’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37, no. 1 (2007), 20.

⁷⁰² Dankoff and Elsie, *Evliya Celebi*, pp. 85, 143, 145.

⁷⁰³ Elizabeth A. Zachariadou, ‘Co-existence and Religion’, *Archivum Ottomanicum* 15 (1997), 119-129; idem, ‘À propos du syncrétisme islamo-chrétien dans les territoires ottomans’, in *Syncrétismes et hérésies dans*

It is not clear to which extent, on the one hand, the confessionalization and sunnization processes that started in the mid-16th century and continued throughout the 17th century or, on the other hand, the three last Ottoman-Venetian wars altered this dynamic.⁷⁰⁴ Still, in the 18th-century depositions of Muslim candidate converts in the *Casa* this shared culture is a recurrent theme. In 1744, Ibraim from the city of Tyrnavo (in present-day Greece), twenty-six years old, appeared before the institution's Prior and said he wanted to convert to Christianity.⁷⁰⁵ Following the usual procedure, the Prior asked Ibraim more questions about himself and his desire to convert. Ibraim said that he was a merchant of tobacco and coffee. He narrated that in one of his trips and while he was in Belgrade in order to buy there tobacco and coffee, and trade them back in this town, he met a Greek priest, with whom he had long conversations on religious issues and who convinced him to convert to Christianity. When he returned back home, he met a Greek young man with whom he developed a close friendship. They taught one another to read and write in Greek and Turkish and they talked about religion and his possible conversion to Christianity. Finally, Ibraim, convinced that he should convert, left Tyrnavo for the Venetian island of Zante from where he was directed to Corfu, and then to Venice. After spending two months at the institution, he escaped and was later found to have gone to the church of *San Giorgio dei Greci* in order to be baptized there.⁷⁰⁶ In this story, as in other similar ones, personal interaction and conversation played an important role. In 1751 Ahmet from Mostar, twenty-six years old, a merchant of textiles and clothes, said he maintained a little shop with a religiously mixed clientele.⁷⁰⁷ Near his shop there was a Christian Church, and Ahmet was always amazed by the reverence with which Christians treated the priest of the church. He also often had the chance to talk with him about religion and other issues and, as he presented it, this was fundamental to his decision to convert. Ahmet, after spending a month at the institution, was baptized there and then recruited into the Venetian army, in the regiment of the *Oltramarini*.

Mixed marriages between Muslim men and Christian women were also a recurrent element in the depositions of Ottoman Muslim candidate converts. In 1733 a mixed couple

l'orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVe- XVIIIe siècle), ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris, Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005), 395-403.

⁷⁰⁴ Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam*.

⁷⁰⁵ Costituti 1744-1762, c.3v-4r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷⁰⁶ Atti di Battesimo 1702-1800, c. 32v, Chiesa, Archivio dell'Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia (hereafter AIESBPV).

⁷⁰⁷ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 59v-60r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

with a child and its servant reached the institution.⁷⁰⁸ The father, Mustafa Aga, was a Muslim from Cyprus, but had spent his life in Adrianopolis as a military officer ('offitiale di patuglia') in the Ottoman army. The mother, who was pregnant, along with the twelve years old servant were 'cristiani greci, si credono scismatici', while the couple's offspring was a Muslim. About a decade later, in 1746, Muzio Assani, a fifty-year-old Muslim from Albania appeared before the prior of the *Casa dei Catecumeni*.⁷⁰⁹ He was a mercenary enrolled in the Venetian army.⁷¹⁰ When asked about his origin and family, Muzio replied that he originated from the village Cuzzi and that he was married to a Christian woman, and had four children alive: three girls, all married to Muslim men, and a son, married to a Christian woman and father of a Muslim boy. And then he explained: 'In Cuzzi vi sono metà Turchi, metà e forzi più della metà Christiani [e] si costuma, che un Turco possi prender, et aver per Moglie una Christiana'. At the end, he added that he had been escorted to Venice to convert by the sergeant of his regiment, who was a relative of his – most probably, a converted Muslim as well.

A similar familiarity with Christianity is described by Muslims who were born to Christian mothers, usually slaves who were bought by Muslim men and later had children with them. In 1737, 'Ali Panaiotti Moro [...] di Bornò del Africa» (probably in present-day Algeria), a fugitive slave who had spent eleven years in Napoli di Romania where he was sold to a Muslim, said he was the son of a Muslim father and a Christian mother.⁷¹¹ Ibraim from Diyarbakir, thirty years old, who appeared at the institution in 1751, was son of a Muslim father and a Christian mother. Ibraim came from a family of soldiers and mercenaries. Himself along with his brother and his father they were all soldiers in the Ottoman army, while his second brother had become a Christian and was in the service of the Imperial army.⁷¹² Iusuf from the island of Kos, who reached the institution in 1754, was also the child of a mixed marriage. After spending sometime in the *Casa*, he escaped and it was later found

⁷⁰⁸ IRE, Libro 1725-1744, c. 58v-59r. The father and son were baptized, and the mother and servant abjured their faith and turned to Catholicism.

⁷⁰⁹ Costituti 1744-1762, c.12v-13r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷¹⁰ Muzio belonged to the regiment of soldiers recruited from the geographical area of Albania, the so-called *Reggimento Cimariotto*.

⁷¹¹ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 94v-95r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷¹² Costituti 1744-1762, c. 70v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

out that he had gone to the church of *San Giorgio dei Greci* in order to be baptized there - which was actually true as his baptism is recorded in the baptism registers of the church.⁷¹³

Similar stories of Muslim-Christian familiarity come also from the few available narratives from Corfu. In 1738 the Muslim Rebbie from Trikala (in present-day Greece) appeared before the *Great Protopapas*' office accompanied by an adjutant of the *Provveditore Generale* Grimani and a letter of recommendation by the same *Provveditore*.⁷¹⁴ Rebbie told the officer and priest who examined her that as a child in Trikala she was entrusted by her Muslim parents to a Christian wet nurse, Maro. But as her parents died while she was still at a very young age, Rebbie was raised by Maro, and she was thus raised as a Christian.⁷¹⁵

Since I was a little child my parents had given me to the above mentioned wet nurse Maro to take care of me, and in short time both [my parents] died, and I was left at the hands of that wet nurse at a very young age, and when I grew up I thought I was a Christian, for my wet nurse had never told me that I came from Muslim parents, indeed she had in mind to bring me here in this city and baptize me (which I did not know), but she died prior to that two years ago, and just before dying she called me and told me that I was a Muslim, and that she intended to bring me here and convert me to Christianity, and I thus did everything [to come here], in spite of the wrath that tried to prevent my good intention, but God, who does not turn away anyone, helped me to come here in order to escape from atheism, and as she [Maro] had taught me the Christian faith since I was a child, I thus loved Christianity, because I considered her a mother and she considered me as a child.

It is this personal affinity that made Rebbie convert, and following her wet nurse's unfulfilled wish she had already decided to embrace the Eastern Church. Indeed, her determination to come to Corfu was such that Rebbie took great pains to reach the island, as her trip was far from easy. First, she took an English boat from Arta, presumably from the

⁷¹³ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 102v-103r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV; Atti di Battesimo 1702-1800, c. 141r, Chiesa, AIESBPV. Indeed, another indication of this Muslim-Christian familiarity was the fact that the majority of the Muslims baptized in the church of *San Giorgio dei Greci* originated from areas where they have enjoyed a certain familiarity with the Eastern rite. See also Plakotos, *The Venetian Inquisition*, 176.

⁷¹⁴ Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 30, f. 1, c. 27r-v, GSAC, see also here 91, 94.

⁷¹⁵ 'εμέ από μικρόν παιδί με ήχουν οι γονείς μου δοσμένην εις τα χέρια της όπισθεν βάγια μάρος δια να με κουνάρη, και εις ολίγον καιρόν απέθαναν και οι δύο, και έμεινα εις τα χέρια της αυτής βάγιας μικροί ολότελα, και ωσάν εγνώρισα τον κόσμον επίστεβα πως να ήμαι χριστιανοί διατί η αυτή βάγιαμου δεν μου είπε ποτέ πως ήμαι από γονείς τούρκους, μάλιστα είχε κατανού (το οποίο εγώ δεν ήξευρα) να με φέρη εδώ εις την παρούσαν χώραν και να με βαπτίση, όμως προφθάνωνντάστην ο θάνατος τώρα δυο χρόνοι απερασμένοι πριν να αποτήχη της παρούσας ζωής, κρίζοντάςμε μου είπε πώς ήμαι τουρκοπούλα, και πως ήθελε να με απεράση εις τούτα τα μέρη να με κάμη χριστιανή, και έτζη εγώ βεβαιομένη έκαμα παντίω τρόπω, και ανκαλά η οργή έπασχεν να εμποδίση την καλήνμου βουλήν, όμως ο θεός οπου δεν διόχνη τινάν με εκαταξίωσεν να έλθω όθεν επόθεν δια να γλυτόσω από την αθειαν, επιδή και να με εδιασκάλεβεν από παιδί την χριστιανικήν πίστιν και έτζη ηγάπησα την χριστιανοσύνην ότι την είχα δια μητέραν, και αυτή ως παιδίτης είχεν εμέ', Μεγάλοι Πρωτοπαπάδες, b. 30, f. 1, c. 27r-v, GSAC.

nearby Amvrakikos Golf, which was heading to Corfu. However, bad weather prevented the boat from approaching the island, and it thus continued to Messina of Sicily. From there Rebbie took another boat that brought her back to the Ionian Sea and to the island of Santa Maura. There she stayed about eight months, before finally taking another boat and reaching Corfu. To the priest's question why she was not baptized in Santa Maura, she replied: 'I had made a vow to God to come here and get baptized in the church of *Ayios Spyridon*.

The fame of the shrine of *Ayios Spyridon* must have been quite important in the areas geographically adjacent to Corfu, exerting significant attraction over faithful pilgrims or candidate converts. The most notable conversion story where *Ayios Spyridon* holds a prominent role is that of Ismael 'Bascià Serdar Aga', an Ottoman military officer from the island of Chios, who reached Corfu a few years before Rebbie, in 1734. Ismael was finally directed to the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni*, where he was catechized and baptized. After his baptism Antonio Spiridione Erizzo olim Ismael withdrew in the monastery of San Antonino in Venice, and several years later, the narrative of his conversion was published in Rome.⁷¹⁶ Quite interestingly though, in this narrative Ismael placed his baptism not in Venice, but in the church of *Ayios Spyridon* in Corfu. I quote here the whole passage of his deposition to the institution's Prior, for its detailed and vivid description:⁷¹⁷

Adi 10 Agosto 1734. Ismael Bascià Serdar Agà d'anni 40 in c[irc]a Turco figlio d'Abdolla Ciavis Comandante in Napoli di Romania, oriundo da Scio; il detto Ismael era Comandante di tutte le milizie, e governo della città di Corinto in Morea, e di tutto suo territorio; e fu sua conversione di q[uest]a maniera, essendogli venuto un accidente apopletico restando secco da capo à piedi tutta la parte drittae per il tempo di cinque mesi in c[irc]a con li medici, e cerutici senza verun profitto, et cosi una sera a due ore di notte gli comparve S. Spiridione in forma di Caoliro Greco dicendo fatevi Cristiano che vi salvarò del tutto, che sono io Spiridione vescovo di Corfú, andá lá et fa quello che ti diranno li Cristiani, che io sempre ti assisterò; a questo Ismael non volse accosentire, fin a tanto che il S[ant]o lo sanó del tutto, con dargli la benedizione subito restó sano, con q[uesto] lasciò la moglie, e figlie, e schiavi, e comando, e palazi, e possessioni, senza veruna cosa, se ne venne con una bona maniera con l'assistenza del S[ant]o sempre in sua comp[agni]a da Corinto fino a Corfú, ma prima dal Zante, e dopo a Corfú

⁷¹⁶ I would like to thank Professor Theodossis Nikolaidis for kindly letting me know about this document.

⁷¹⁷ Registro dei Neofiti 1734-1911, c. 3r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. A shorter version of the story can be found in Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 66v-67r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

dove il N[obile] H[uomo] Provveditore Erizo lo trató con ogni distinzione, e lo fece vedere il corpo del S[an]to Spiridione che al vederlo gridó dicendo q[uest]o e quello che sempre mi accompagna e mi ha sanato baciando li piedi, e da ivi fu accompagnato a q[uest]a Congreg[azio]ne dal sopra detto G[enera]le Antonio Erizo con lettere di raccomandazione, et per essere instruito nella S[ant]a Fede, e poi battezzato.

b. A world on the move

A second element that characterizes the narratives of converted Muslims mercenaries, but which should not only be thought as confined to them is a shared Mediterranean culture of peregrination, an experience that entailed interaction in multi-ethnic and multi-religious contexts, while it also constructed and required the ability to adapt within diverse ethnic and religious environments. In 1726 Cusma, sixty years old, narrated to the Prior his adventurous life.⁷¹⁸ At the age of four he was enslaved by the Maltese and sold to a Cavalier in Malta, who instructed him the Catholic faith, but never baptized him. Several years later Cusma left Malta for Italy, and from there he travelled a lot and lived in different countries ‘or tra catolici, ed or tra luterani’, but always pretending that he was a Catholic Christian. Convinced that he could not save his soul without baptism, and presumably feeling that he was reaching the end of his life, he disclosed his secret to a friend, and with the help of ‘a persona religiosa, Signor Dottor Cassimati’, he reached the institution. Ten months later he was baptized and then employed at the institution. Another equally engaging story is that of Soleiman, thirty-one years old from Tripoli (in present-day Libya). Soleiman, who reached the institution in 1751, recounted that in the past he had been a soldier in the Ottoman army and had spent some time in Jerusalem ‘per guardia del Santo Sepolcro’, where he had met a Catholic monk who tried to convince him to convert to Christianity.⁷¹⁹ He then abandoned the Ottoman army and began travelling in the Mediterranean, spending nine years in the sea: he first embarked on a Neapolitan ship, and then travelled ‘or con Francesi, or co’ Maltesi, or co’ Svidezi e con gli Pugliesi sino al Presente, e or con mercanzie, or in corso, or in qualità di mariner, or in qualità di Piloto’. A final story is that of Mussali Cossich from Bosnia, who was a mercenary in the Venetian army. Mussali approached the institution in 1759, and recounted to the Prior that before

⁷¹⁸ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 12v-13r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷¹⁹ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 66v-67r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. Soleiman was baptized after several months and was employed in the Venetian navy.

enrolling as a mercenary, he had been travelling with the French corsairs, and had gone with them as far as Martinique in the Caribbean Sea.⁷²⁰

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Such cases that highlight the two fundamental early modern Mediterranean elements, that is the cross-faith familiarity and the culture of peregrination that characterized Muslim candidate converts, can be multiplied manifold. These Muslim candidate converts, mostly men, often lived in cities or villages with religiously mixed population, had daily social and cultural encounters, formed and maintained cross-faith interactions and even friendships, and at times had a family background of mixed religion. In addition, professional itineraries like that of mercenaries or merchants entailed a physical mobility that exposed them to interaction with multi-ethnic and multi-religious contexts.

Admittedly, it is not easy to account for the motives and reasons that made Muslim men convert to Christianity in this century. If for mercenaries and seamen conversion could have been a tactical choice that offered better professional prospects, it is difficult to understand what made, say, Ibrahim from Tyrnavo wanting to convert to Christianity. Nevertheless, the backbone of these miniature life-stories remains the same: the molding of a wide cross-faith ‘religious culture,’⁷²¹ which encompassed a matrix of encounters including contact, coexistence, conflict, and interdependence, and established various degrees of familiarity among Muslims and Christians. Regardless of their nature, these interactions weaved the networks of cross-faith coexistence that existed in the ‘contact zones’ of the early modern Eastern Mediterranean. From this point of view, religious conversion in these settings should not be understood as a life-changing experience, but rather as an ordinary practice that they undertook when moving within the limits of the dominant Christian space and according

⁷²⁰ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 162v-163r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷²¹ In his introduction of the book *A Faithful Sea* Adnan Husain defines the notion of ‘religious culture’ very broadly and comprehensively as one ‘embrac[ing] more comfortably than simply “religion” the vast range of phenomena that characterize the living, historical experience and diverse practice of Muslims, Christians, and Jews during the medieval and early modern periods, from the anthropological to the theological, from devotional practice to doctrinal formulation, from conceptions of collective and individual identity to its expression, contestation, and grounding in the rich fields of religious tradition. Likewise, the term accommodates more easily a sense of the intercourse and interaction, conflict and competition among and within these traditions than does ‘civilization’, which evokes a sense of a self-subsistent and essential isolation, exploited recently in contemporary discourse and thereby further burdened with associations that deny or minimize precisely the long and mutually informing dialectics of Mediterranean religious cultures at issue’. See Adnan A. Husain and Katherine Elizabeth Fleming, eds., *A Faithful Sea. The Religious Cultures of the Mediterranean, 1200-1700* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 6.

to the exigencies of Christian religious culture, yet a practice accommodated by their already existing acquaintance with Christianity. What's more, as the story of Muzzio from Cuzzi permits us to think, in settings of intimate cross-faith interaction, conversion and shifting between religious identities seems to have been a transition taking place *within* one's own religious and cultural boundaries, as these boundaries encompassed elements from both Islam and Christianity -elements that at that specific time and place were not considered mutually exclusive.⁷²²

In a sense these two factors, cross-faith familiarity and the culture of peregrination, represented at least a part of the eastern Mediterranean world, a world with increasing 'border porousness'.⁷²³ If it is not easy to thoroughly chart the lines along which religious coexistence was crafted or to understand how religious difference was actually experienced, it is at least clear that people living within this region did not perceive those with a different faith as estranged 'Others' altogether. Religious difference existed and was perceived as such, nonetheless this did not prevent them from crafting varied but important relationships of interdependence and familiarity. The eastern Mediterranean, then, was to an important extent 'a shared world':⁷²⁴ its structure challenged the neat categorization of East and West, Muslims and Christians that was gradually devised since the late 18th century, revealing a multitude of links still in need of being fully articulated.

⁷²² Seen from such a vantage point, these religious cultures were not characterized by 'ambiguity'. They were bearing content and practices that did not coincide with the modern understanding of Islam and Christianity.

⁷²³ Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 161.

⁷²⁴ Molly Greene, *A shared World*.

Chapter 5. A connected microcosm

i. Cross-faith networks

In order to reconstruct the cross-faith social networks we need to rely on the 18th-century narrative documents from the Venetian *Casa* -the serial character of the 17th-century documents practically impede such an attempt, while the survival of a very limited number of narrative sources from Corfu make this reconstruction possible only to a very small extent. As we witnessed in the previous pages, cross-faith social networks could take on many different forms. The most intimate one was of course the formation of mixed families in the Ottoman Balkans, as the ones described by the Muslim mercenary Muzio from Cuzzi in south Albania: both Muzio himself and his son were married to Christian women as this was rather common in their village; or, as in the story of Mustafa Aga, an Ottoman military officer living in Adrianopolis who had a son with a Christian woman of the Greek rite.⁷²⁵ In another case, the Muslim Bechir, twenty-six years old from Crete and ‘di mestier caffettiere’, travelled to the Ottoman island of Tinos, where -as himself or the scribe put it- ‘strinzi amicizia’ with the Catholic Marina.⁷²⁶ Together they left for the Ottoman island of Chios, where they spent seven years and had four children, only two of whom survived. Eventually they decided to travel along with their children to Venice so that the father and children would convert.

There were also, scattered throughout the Ottoman Empire, the cases of Christian women that were bought as slaves and then bore children from their Muslim masters, the latter sometimes also becoming formally their husbands. We have already seen the story of the Muslim Angioletta, who was bought by the Eastern Christian sailor Giacomo Saiano for twelve *zecchini* during the first Morean war (1684-1699), and then converted, had two children with him, and about four years later was married to him in Corfu.⁷²⁷ Another telling story is that of the Muslim Zelicha, seventeen years old from Droboglizza (present-day Tripolis in Greece), who reached the Venetian institution in 1747.⁷²⁸ Zelicha was the child of a ‘Greca di Nazione e di Religione’ and a Muslim. The latter had bought the Greek woman as a slave during the last Ottoman-Venetian war (1714-1718). After her purchase, the enslaved

⁷²⁵ See here, 193 (1746).

⁷²⁶ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 25v-26r (1747), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷²⁷ See here, 179-180 (1691).

⁷²⁸ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 30v-31r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

woman converted, and was then married to her master, with whom she had seven children - Zelicha was the only one who survived. But as Zelicha's father died when she was nine months old, Zelicha was raised by her mother. Finally Zelicha convinced her mother, and two other members of her mother's family -whose religion is not specified- to escape to Venice.

Cross-faith acquaintances along with the importance of conversation on religious matters were also often described in the stories that both Jewish and Muslim candidate converts recounted. We have seen the story of Ibraim from Tyrnavo, a merchant of tobacco and coffee, who became friend with a Greek young man, and they spent time together teaching each another to read and write in Greek and Turkish as well as talking about religion and Ibraim's possible conversion to Christianity.⁷²⁹ When reaching the institution in 1747, the goldsmith Salamon Michiel Fiuzi from Carpi in Modena was already familiar with Christianity for, as he claimed, 'ho letto de' libri che trattano della legge Christiana; ho praticato Religiosi; e spesso andavo alle Prediche nelle Chiese de Cristiani'.⁷³⁰ The Jew Consola, sixteen years old from Zante, when interrogated by the institution's Prior, recounted that back in the island she maintained friendship with various Christian women, and she also sometimes attended the Greek church –a fact that preoccupied her father, who decided to move her away from this environment and thus sent her to live with a relative in Corfu.⁷³¹

Sometimes cross-faith interaction formed part of the professional experience. Sara, thirty-three years old from Venice and a midwife, frequented Christian houses and assisted Christian women in giving birth.⁷³² The Muslim Ahmet from Mostar, twenty-six years old and a merchant of textiles and clothes, maintained a little shop with a religiously mixed clientele. Near his shop there was a Christian church, and Ahmet had often the chance to chat with the priest of the church.⁷³³ The Jew Abram Levi, eighteen years old from Istanbul, who had reached the institution from Corfu along with the above-mentioned Ibraim from Tyrnavo, was a 'balarin del gran Signore'.⁷³⁴ Abram recounted that he used to converse with a Greek woman, slave in the Sultan's palace, who eventually convinced him to convert. Simon Olivetti, a Jewish dealer in second-hand goods who lived in Modena, said he frequented

⁷²⁹ See here, 192-193 (1744).

⁷³⁰ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 24v, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. See also here, 146.

⁷³¹ Costituti 1779-1836, c. 1r (1779), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷³² Costituti 1744-1762, c. 8v (1745), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷³³ See here, 193 (1751).

⁷³⁴ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 4v (1744), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

almost daily the Theatine monastery of *San Vincenzo*⁷³⁵ where he conducted business with the monks, and it is there that he met with a Theatine preacher from Vicenza who convinced him to convert.⁷³⁶ The Venetian Aaro Vita Rietti, thirty-six years old, due to his occupation as a broker he frequented the various markets like the fair of Sinigaglia and ‘speso mi fece girare qua e la in compagnia de’ Cristiani’, with whom he always shared his wish to become a Christian.⁷³⁷ Moreover, cross-faith acquaintances could also lead to marriage, as in the case of the Venetian Sara eighteen years old, who maintained a relation with Zanetto Batistini, the *camariere* of the noblewoman Maria Labia.⁷³⁸ Zanetto promised Sara that he would marry her if she would convert –which they eventually did.

On the other hand within the world of converts, this ‘microcosm on the move’, mobility presupposed and was facilitated by, but also eventually entailed, a variety of cross-faith networks. Slavery, professional employment in the sea as sailors or pirates and corsairs, enrollment in mercenary companies, or engagement in commerce, all of these elements - separately or sometimes combined- formed the background of cross-faith mobility. We have already seen several related stories.

The Muslim Cusma was enslaved at the age of seven by the Maltese and sold to a Cavalier in Malta, who taught him the Catholic faith. In Malta Cusma met a servant of the Prince of Piombino, through whom he became employed in the Prince’s service, and thus moved to Italy. He later left this position, and spent his life travelling in many different countries in Europe, both Protestant and Catholic, where he always presented himself as a Catholic, confessing and receiving communion. He had also been married with a Christian woman for nineteen years. When he reached Venice, he entrusted his desire to convert to a Christian friend of his, who helped him reach the institution.⁷³⁹

Mustafa from Tunisia had a quite adventurous story to tell.⁷⁴⁰ Captured at the age of eight, he was sold twice as a slave. First he was sold to a Muslim who lived in the city of Nafplio in the Peloponnese and supplied the Ottoman army with munitions. Three years later Mustafa was sold to the Ottoman commander of Artà, with whom he stayed for fifteen years.

⁷³⁵ The monastery was constructed in the mid-17th century by the Modenese architect Guarino Guarini, see Frank N. Magill, *Dictionary of World Biography. The 17th and 18th Centuries*, v. 4 (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers; Pasadena: Salem Press, 1999), 583-584.

⁷³⁶ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 34v (1748), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. See also here, 127 135.

⁷³⁷ Costituti 1779-1836, c. 39v (1787), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷³⁸ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 7v (1745), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷³⁹ See here, 197-198 (1726).

⁷⁴⁰ See here, 184-185, 222 (1741)

Due to the maltreatment that his master gave him, Mustafa decided to escape. He first went to hide ‘in una Casa de’ Greci’, and the people there tried to convince him to become a Christian of the Eastern rite. He then boarded on the galley of the Venetian nobleman Balbi, who promised to conduct him in Corfu and help him convert there. Nevertheless, Balbi’s real intention was to keep Mustafa as a *galiotto* in his ship, and he thus chained him in the ship. Fortunately for Mustafa, while on board he had made an acquaintance with Corporal Giano, a converted Muslim that was baptized by the *Provedditore General da Mar* stationed in Corfu. Giano activated his own network in order to help Mustafa: he informed the dragoman of Corfu, who in his turn informed the *Provveditore*, and Mustafa was eventually set free – and then, as we have already seen, he enrolled in a Venetian mercenary company, with which he reached Venice and the institution.

Soleiman from Tripoli in Libya had spent his life first as an Ottoman soldier in Jerusalem, and then as a sailor in French, Maltese, Swedish and Apuglian ships.⁷⁴¹ Isach Levi from Adrianopolis, the educated merchant dealing in second-hand luxurious goods, had worked for many years as the interpreter of a Muslim trader, for Isach spoke six languages: ‘Tedesco, Valacco, Turco, Spagnolo, e alquanto Francese Provenzale, oltre l’Italiano’.⁷⁴² The Muslim Mussali from Bosnia, a mercenary recruited in the Venetian army, before joining the Venetians he had been travelling for years with French corsairs and had even reached with them the Caribbean island of Martinique.⁷⁴³

To these cases we can indicatively add few more related stories. In 1721 the Jew Michiel Algazi, twenty-four years old, reached the institution.⁷⁴⁴ Michel was originally from Nafplio in the Peloponnese, but at the age of nine he was sold as a slave in Istanbul. He spent there four years, and during his time in Istanbul he converted to Islam. When his master died, the master’s wife sold him in Cairo. Michiel spent four more years there, before finally escaping to Alessandretta (present-day Iskenderun in Turkey), where he boarded on an English boat that brought him to Venice. While he was in quarantine in the *Lazzaretto*, Michiel made an acquaintance with two monks that had travelled from Jerusalem, and the latter eventually convinced him to convert. Several years later, the Muslim corsair Ali

⁷⁴¹ See here, 198 (1751).

⁷⁴² See here, 145 (1754).

⁷⁴³ See here, 199 (1759).

⁷⁴⁴ Libro ... 1718-1725 – G8, c. 83v-84r, Catecumeni, AIRE; Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 141v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

Bechenet from Meknes in Marocco, twenty-six years old, reached the institution.⁷⁴⁵ Ali recounted that in 1744, ‘mentre seguiva il corso con gli altri della mia nazione per far schiavi i cristiani’, their ship was attacked by a Portuguese ship, and the Muslim corsairs were captured and enslaved. Along with the other enslaved captives, Ali was conducted to Lisbon, from where he escaped. Then he roamed around in southern France, in Bayonne and Lyon, and later he enrolled in a mercenary company, with which he travelled to Flanders. He then abandoned the mercenary company, and went on travelling to London, and then to Bergamo in Italy. There he fell seriously ill, and while being treated at the local *Ospedale*, he was approached by a priest, convinced to convert and later sent to Venice. Another case was that of Chiolle, a slave from Bengal in Asia.⁷⁴⁶ Chiolle had travelled quite a lot as a slave: he was first sold to some English men who took him to the commercial port town of Surat (in the present-day Indian state of Gujarat). The English sold him to a Dutch captain, who took Chiolle to the Ottoman city of Bassora (present-day Basra in Iraq) and sold him to the Dutch consul there. The latter sent Chiolle to the Venetian Andrea Mutti living in Aleppo (in present-day Syria), in order to instruct and baptize him, and Andrea brought Chiolle along him to Venice and eventually to the institution.

Finally, during the same years, the Muslim Giuseppe, twenty-one years old, whom the institution Prior described as ‘di nazione, di viso, e di tutto il corpo Etiope o sia moro’, approached the institution. Giuseppe had been sold at a very young age as a slave to a captain in England.⁷⁴⁷ He remained with him for about ten years, and was then sold to a Genovese merchant, who entrusted Giuseppe to a captain from Genova, Giacomo Geferi, with the obligation to teach him Italian, as Giuseppe had thus learnt to speak English and Portuguese. Giuseppe travelled with captain Geferi for seven years. During their voyage to Venice, Giuseppe tried to escape, and captain Geferi chained him in the port of Lido for four months. Yet, one night ‘mentre tutti erano nel profondo de sono’ Giuseppe eventually escaped with a small boat and rowed to nearby Chioggia. After his escape, Giuseppe managed to activate a remarkable web of people that assisted him in remaining hidden for about two months. Initially he encountered a priest in Chioggia, to whom he expressed his desire to convert to Christianity, and the priest hid him in the local *Ospedale*. But as Giuseppe was informed that

⁷⁴⁵ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 33v, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷⁴⁶ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 42v, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. See also here, 183 (1749).

⁷⁴⁷ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 20v, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

captain Geferi was looking for him, he left the *Ospedale* and found refuge in the monastery of the *Monache di Santa Croce*, where they hid him in the Sacristy for forty days. After he was informed that the ship of captain Geferi had left, Giuseppe travelled to Venice and stayed hidden for about a month at the house of a Venetian shoemaker before reaching the Venetian *Casa*. Once at the institution, the Prior interrogated Giuseppe about his relation to Christianity. Giuseppe answered that back in England, along with his master, he used to attend mass and to listen to the sermons, while in Italy he had learnt from the sailors in the ship several prayers in Latin. Unfortunately for Giuseppe, all his impressive efforts had a bitter end. After he spent about twenty days in the *Casa*, he was eventually handed to a man claiming that he had bought him for eighty *zecchini* and, thus, he was his 'legitimo padrone'.

ii. The proselytizing network

The Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni* had developed and operated its own network, which attracted Jews and Muslims, giving promises of a better life or salvation of the soul. This network was created, managed and staffed by the members of the governing body of the institution. On local level, the governing body consisted mostly but not exclusively of members of the local elite.⁷⁴⁸ These Governors ‘recommended’ non- Christians so as to be accepted at the institution, while they also assumed the role of the converts’ godfathers, and often provided them with an occupation after baptism -as we have seen, many converts after leaving the institution were employed as servants in the Governors’ households or were accommodated with people the Governors were acquainted with.⁷⁴⁹

Members of the governing board on local level also included several key Venetian magistrates, of which the *Avogadori di Comun* was the most deeply involved with the institution. The *Avogadori* were mainly responsible for all issues related to the baptisms of under-aged Jewish children. In the case of the afore mentioned Aaron Vitta Rietti, as he wanted to take along with him to the institution his two ‘picciole creaturine’, Scipora or Cipriana six years old and Bonna three years old, he resorted with the intervention of the Patriarch of Venice to the *Avogadori*.⁷⁵⁰ The latter then sent their guard to pick the father and his daughters from the ghetto and conduct them to the institution. The *Avogadori* were also involved in the examination of prospective converts who expressed the desire to abandon the *Casa*. To give an example, in 1733 Moise Mugnon, twenty-two years old from Venice, after spending a month at the institution was suffering from ‘profonda malincolia’ and wanted to go back to the ghetto. For this reason, *Avogador* Lamipiero personally talked to him, and since he could not dissuade him, ordered the institution’s Prior to let him go.⁷⁵¹

More importantly, though, the *Casa*’s Venetian network extended well beyond the Board of Governors that constituted the core structure of the institution, involving a wide range of different agents: parish priests and clergymen, devoted parishioners, and of course converts, most of them baptized at the institution. These people were entangled with or even

⁷⁴⁸ Collaboration between institutions and local elite was a rather common element, see for example the case of Napoli, Mazur, ‘Combating “Mohammedan Indecency”’, 38-39, 40.

⁷⁴⁹ See here, 117, 171-172, 183. For other cases see indicatively Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 29v, 58v, 70v, 94v, 96v, 108v, Catecumeni, AIRE; Costituti 1744-1762, c. 7v, 9v, 50v, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷⁵⁰ See here, 203.

⁷⁵¹ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 59v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

formed part of the cross-faith networks that we discussed previously and thus operated as the mediating nodes between the candidate converts and the institution, ‘facilitating’ candidate converts, both locally and from abroad, to reach the institution. The outcome of this extended collaboration was a loose but at the same time highly operative network - which as we will shortly see did not function only on a local level, but covered as well the Venetian territories in the *Terraferma* and the Mediterranean, while it also bore on the Italian peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Parish priests in Venice were key figures in the proselytizing process, as they could come in direct contact with candidate converts or their Christian acquaintances. Although the most consistently active figures throughout the period under consideration here were the parish priests of the adjacent to the Ghettos quarters of *San Geremia* and *San Marcuola*⁷⁵² - sometimes they were also members of the governing board of the institution- most parish priests of the city appear involved in the process. To give just one of the far too many examples, in 1731 *Padre Cacciatur*, the parish priest of the Armenian Church of *San Lazzaro*, accompanied to the institution *Amet*, a sixteen years old ‘turco persiano’. *Amet* had travelled from his village located near the city of Yerevan to Izmir. There he had met two Armenians, and decided to follow them to Venice and convert there, and it was these Armenians that put *Amet* in contact with *Padre Cacciatur*.⁷⁵³ The previously mentioned *Aaron Vitta Rietti* for some time before approaching the institution was in contact with the parish priests of *San Simeon Grande* and *San Stae*, who had also instructed him in the basics of the Christian faith.⁷⁵⁴

At the same time, other clergymen or friars that came in some contact with Jews and Muslims, encouraged them to convert and helped them approach the institution. The Jew *Stella*, twenty-five years old from Venice and daughter of the deceased doctor *Isach Romanin*, had confided to various Christian women her desire to convert, but none of them wanted to help her. So, when a priest from Udine visited her family house ‘a far spese’, she took the chance to disclose to him her desire to convert. The priest from Udine contacted a countryman living in Venice, and the latter informed the nobleman *Alvise Bragadin*. So on a Friday night,

⁷⁵² See indicatively Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 34v, 94v, 143v, *Catecumeni*, AIRE. Other parish priests also held offices in the *Casa*. For example the priest of *San Geminiano* held the office of *visitador*, see *ibid.*, c. 50v.

⁷⁵³ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 38v, *Catecumeni*, AIRE.

⁷⁵⁴ See here, 203, 209.

Stella escaped from her house and went to hide to the house of Bragadin, who conducted her to the institution the next day.⁷⁵⁵

As is rather apparent in most of cases, the institution's local network was densely populated by parishioners –some of them converts.⁷⁵⁶ In the previously mentioned story of the Muslim Cusma who presented himself as a Christian, when he decided to convert he entrusted his desire to convert to a Catholic friend of his, and the latter contacted '[una] persona religiosa, Sig[no]r D[otto]r Cassimati', through whom Cusma reached the institution.⁷⁵⁷ When in 1727 Giacob Navarro from Venice, sixteen years old, decided to convert, he entrusted his wish to the *chirurgo* Giovanni Batta Magri.⁷⁵⁸ The latter kept him in his house overnight, and the next day accompanied him to the institution. In 1735, the Jew Leon Zamile, forty years old, had confided his wish to convert to the *camariere* of the nobleman Zorzi Contarini, and the latter recommended Leon at the institution.⁷⁵⁹ In the same year another Jew, Isach from Algiers, thirty-six years old, reached the institution.⁷⁶⁰ He had travelled from Alexandria in Egypt to Venice with an English ship. While in Venice he confided his wish to convert to an Armenian merchant, Anastasio Bonaventura, who in turn contacted the convert Marco Bolani, and they together brought Isach to the institution.

Within the local network framework, the *Lazaretti*, where foreigners from the Levant reaching the city by sea would stay for the necessary quarantine, must have been a crucial spatial node. Indeed, it seems that at least for some years there must have been a close relation between the *Casa dei Catecumeni* and the *Lazaretto Vechio*, as one of the board members, Conte Giacomo Schietti, was also the Prior there.⁷⁶¹ Candidate converts also probably knew that these were the right places to express their wish to convert. In 1739, Moise Cohen from Polonia got there. He had travelled from Corfu, where he was a soldier in the local Venetian regiment. But, according to his deposition, as the local Jews in Corfu were giving him a hard

⁷⁵⁵ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 50v (1750), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷⁵⁶ This was a widespread practice. For example African slave converts were used by Jesuits and Dominicans in the French Antilles in order to attract and pressure the slave population of Ameridians and Africans to convert, see Sue Peabody, "A Dangerous Zeal", 67.

⁷⁵⁷ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 13v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁵⁸ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 13v, Catecumeni, AIRE; Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 150v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷⁵⁹ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 76v (1735), Catecumeni, AIRE; Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 150v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷⁶⁰ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 69v (1735), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁶¹ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 125v, Catecumeni, AIRE. For the *Lazaretto Vechio* and the *Lazaretto Nuovo*, as well as for the office of the Prior see Ennio Concina, 'Lazaretti degli "stati da mar"', in *Venezia e la peste 1348–1797* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1979), 178–84; Jane L. Stevens Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals. Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012).

time, he decided to travel to Venice and covert. So when Moise reached the Lazaretto, he made his intentions known, and soon after he was 'recommended' to the institution by the nobleman Contarini, the latter being also a member of the board.⁷⁶²

Beyond locally in Venice, the institution maintained an extended network in the Veneto and the Venetian Mediterranean territories, the latter operating as 'religious transits' in the candidate converts' itinerary towards Venice. As in Venice, this network involved both the ecclesiastical and secular Venetian authorities as well as the local Christian population. The Jew Isac Termi from Padova came to the institution in 1739 equipped with three letters of recommendation. Two of them were from a noblewoman and a nobleman of the city, and the third from *Cavalier* Nicolo Tron *Capitan Grande di Padova*.⁷⁶³ Few years later, in 1742, it was the *Podesta* of the city, noblemen Marino Cavalli, who sent the twenty-year old Jew Iosef Fua to the Patriarch of Venice, through whom he was accepted at the institution.⁷⁶⁴ Another Jew from Padova, Salamon Dirossi, while he was incarcerated there he met a Jesuit monk, who had presumably suggested Salamon to convert.⁷⁶⁵ After he was released, Salamon approached the monk, and the latter provided a recommendation letter for him addressed to a certain priest in Venice, who in turn sent Salamon to nobleman Mora, Governor of the institution.

When the Jew Abram Todescho from Verona, thirty years old, decided to convert after seeing a dream, he talked about it with 'alcuni miei Amici Christiani'. His friends convinced him to approach the city's Archpriest Muzel, who provided Abram with a recommendation letter addressed to the institution.⁷⁶⁶ When Jacob Calabi also from Verona decided to convert, he escaped from the ghetto and went to find a Christian acquaintance of his, with whom he must have been discussing about his conversion. This friend put him in contact with the *Podesta* of the city, who sent him to a local priest. The latter procured for him a letter of recommendation written by the Archpriest of the city, and sent him to the Patriarch of Venice, by whom he was finally conducted to the institution.⁷⁶⁷

In another case, the abandoned wife Gentile from a village near Treviso along with her three children, approached a nobleman in Ceneda (present-day Vittorio Veneto) and asked for

⁷⁶² Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 108v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁶³ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 106v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁶⁴ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 138v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁶⁵ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 71v (1734), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁶⁶ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 132v (1741), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁶⁷ Costituti 1779-1836, c. 37r (1787), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

his help to convert. The nobleman sent the family to the bishop of the city Da ponte. The latter kept them in his house for several days, and then the whole family was forcibly conducted to the Venetian *Casa*.⁷⁶⁸ In the case of the above-mentioned Ali from Marocco, the priest that approached him while being treated at the *Ospedale* in Bergamo, also secured for him a recommendation letter by the Bishop of Bergamo addressed to the institution.⁷⁶⁹ We have also seen the story of the Jew Abram Levi from Algiers, who had spent several years in Livorno and then travelled extensively in Europe and the Ottoman Empire before returning to Italy. While in Udine Abram contacted the *Padri Filippini*, and after spending four months with them, he was sent to the institution to complete his instruction and conversion.⁷⁷⁰ And Isach Menes Forti, living in Adria, decided to convert, he approached a local priest, who informed a doctor in the town. In his turn, the doctor recommended Isach to the Venetian institution, while he also promised him that once Isach went back, he would employ him.⁷⁷¹

Finally, the eighteen years old Giuseppe Coen from Rovigo, who reached the institution accompanied by *Signore* Tomaso Costantini and by a letter from the bishop of the nearby city of Adria, had been discussing the prospect of converting with a Christian acquaintance of his, Francisco Gianella, a merchant of iron. When Giuseppe finally took his decision, he resorted to Francisco. Francisco agreed to help and conducted Giuseppe to the chaplain of the Cathedral of Rovigo, who activated a chain of agents that eventually took Giuseppe to the institution. This is how Giuseppe narrated the events:⁷⁷²

Sarà un mese cir[c]a che di nascosto ho parlato al d[et]to Sig[no]r Gianella, che voglio positivam[en]te farmi Christiano. Esso mi accolse, e mi ha comesso, che alle ore due della notte,⁷⁷³ mi portassi al Duomo, che mi condurrebbe dal Sig[no]r Capellanno. Io pontualm[en]te all' indicatami ora e sito accompagnato dal Gianella sono andato dal d[et]tto Sig[no]r Capellanno. Ricercato dal medesimo sù la mia vocazione, gli risposi, che voglio professare la Legge di Christo, sapendo che niuno può salvarsi, se non professa la Cattolica Santa Religione. ... Con tutto ciò il medesimo Sig[no]r Capellanno per provare la costanza della mia

⁷⁶⁸ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 1r-3r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷⁶⁹ See here, 206.

⁷⁷⁰ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 5v (1750), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV. See also here, 41.

⁷⁷¹ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 121v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁷² Costituti 1779-1836, c. 35r-36r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷⁷³ According to the *ore italiane* this should have been around nine o'clock in the evening. The *ore italiane* were numbered from one to twenty-four. The first hour started right after sunset, see Ephraim Chambers and Giuseppe Maria Secondo, *Ciclopedia ovvero Dizionario universale delle arti e delle scienze*, vol. 6 (Napoli, 1752), 383.

chiamata, mi rimandò al ghetto per giorni dieci. Io prontam[en]te ho obbedito, e passati li detti giorni, occultam[en]te sono fuggito dal Ghetto in giornata di Venerdì fu li 16 corr[ent]te e ... mi sono portato alla cura del d[et]to Sig[no]r Capellanno, dal quale sono stato accolto con tutta carità, e mi ha condotto nel convento de' R[everendi] P[adri] Cappuccini con consegnandomi al loro Padre Guardiano. Avissato della mia conversione Monsig[no]r Vesc[ov]o [of Adria] mi ha diretto con ogni pastoral zelo, e fervore a questo catecumenato onde apprendere le necessarie istruzioni per rendermi capace di ricevere il Santo Battesimo.

The institution's network at the Venetian Mediterranean territories had a very similar structure: ecclesiastical and secular officials, often collaborating, linked with the existing cross-faith networks, and made the institution's network running. The Jew Prospero Todesco originated from Mantua, but had been raised between Padua, Split, Ragusa and Sarajevo. He spent some time as a servant in Izmir, but then as he put it, 'stufandomi, di servire, risolsi andar birbando per il mondo', and had since then travelled in various cities of the Ottoman Empire. When he reached Capo d'Istria (present-day Koper in Croatia), he was assisted by a nobleman, who convinced him to convert and then sent him to the local Bishop. The latter provided him with a recommendation letter, and sent him to the Venetian institution.⁷⁷⁴ In another case, Gerson Parente from Trieste reached the Venetian institution carrying along two recommendation letters: one written by the *Podesta* of Capo d'Istria, and the other written by the Bishop of the city, nobleman Condumier, and addressed to his brother in Venice.⁷⁷⁵

Zara (present-day Zadar in Croatia) and Spalato (present-day Split in Croatia) were also significant nodes in the institution's Mediterranean network. Osman Aga from the city of Skopje forty-two years old, whose father was a Muslim convert, while in Zara approached *General* Cavalli and asked him to help him convert. The latter sent Osman to Venice to his brother nobleman Cavalli, who conducted Osman to the institution. After his baptism, Giovanni olim Omar returned to Zara, where he was employed in the military company of *General* Cavalli.⁷⁷⁶ Another Venetian nobleman residing in Zara, *Cavalier* Morosini, who was also Governor of the institution, sent the Jew Mardocheo Coen to Venice in order to convert.⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁴ Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 145v (1743), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁷⁵ Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 118v (1740), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁷⁶ Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 108v (1739), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁷⁷ Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 58v (1733), Catecumeni, AIRE.

The Muslim Ebraim Muslich, eighteen years old, who had said to have escaped from his village located close to the city of Skopje and travelled to Spalato in order to convert, was sent to the institution by the *Provveditore General in Dalmatia and Albania* nobleman Girolamo Querini who resided there. *Provveditore* Querini took Ebraim under his protection. He became his godfather, giving him also his name, and after baptism accommodated Ebraim, now named Girolamo Stefano Querini, back to Spalato.⁷⁷⁸ Haim or Vita Bongiu, 'Ebreo Levantino' and particularly from Izmir, had travelled widely before reaching Spalato.⁷⁷⁹ He was a merchant, and while travelling to Cairo with a merchandise of oil, his ship sunk in the Nile and all his merchandise was lost. He decided to return home, but was then informed that his whole family was dead due to the plague that had hit the city.⁷⁸⁰ So, he travelled to Bergamo and from there to Istanbul, and then to Skopje and Serajevo. In Serajevo, he was employed as servant to a rabbi from Jerusalem, and with him he travelled to Spalato. It was in Spalato that he decided to convert, and to this end he approached the Prior of the *Lazaretti* there. The Prior wrote him a letter of recommendation and sent him to the Patriarch of Venice. The Patriarch sent him to the priest of San Trovaso, and the latter eventually conducted Haim to the *Casa*.

The island of Zante also maintained the role of 'religious transit', especially during the years when Remondini was Latin Archbishop (1736-1777). In 1737, the Muslim Panaiotti, twenty years old from Maghreb, approached Remondini. Panaiotti was captured at a very young age by Tunisian Muslims and sold to another Muslim in Nafplio. He spent there eleven years, until he finally escaped and travelled to Zante. There he approached the Latin Archbishop, who sent him to the *Casa* in Venice.⁷⁸¹ Elia Sabbatachi Coen, the Jewish rabbi who had spent his life between Venice, Crete and Zante, was also sent to the institution by Remondini, who also provided him with a letter of recommendation addressed to both the institution and the Venetian Patriarch.⁷⁸² In 1739 Remondini sent to the institution Spiridione olim Ibraim, twenty-six years old from Lepanto in the Peloponnese. Spiridione had been previously baptized in the island of Kefalonia by Christians of the Greek rite. Then he

⁷⁷⁸ Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 117v (1740), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁷⁹ Costituti 1779-1836, c. 37v-39r, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷⁸⁰ In 1785, one-sixth of the population of Egypt died in the plague, while during the 18th century Izmir was hit by an epidemic almost every second year, see Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 114; Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 651; Karl Kaser, *The Balkans and the Near East. Introduction to a Shared History* (Berlin: Lit, 2011), 197.

⁷⁸¹ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 94v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁸² Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 98v (1737), Catecumeni, AIRE. See also here, 143.

enrolled in a Venetian mercenary company, which he later abandoned and returned to Lepanto. But his countrymen learnt about his conversion and so he had to leave again, this time taking with him his brother Amet, whom he had convinced to convert. The two brothers travelled to Zante and approached Remondini, who sent them both to Venice.⁷⁸³

Yet the most important node within the institution's Mediterranean network must have been the island of Corfu. We have previously seen that Corfu was a local center of conversion, with efficient local cross-faith and proselytizing networks.⁷⁸⁴ The institution had established an equally efficient network there. The main figures in this network were the *Provveditori Generali da Mar* stationed in the island, and the Latin Archbishops – indeed, the Latin Archbishop Antonio Nani, who held this office between 1742 and 1765, was also a member of the institution's governing board.⁷⁸⁵ Moreover, at least since 1730, it was decreed by *Provveditore* Erizzo that an alms-collecting box should be displayed during Sundays and holidays in all churches of the city, where money would be collected for the sake of the catechumens living in the *Casa dei Catecumeni* in Venice.⁷⁸⁶ This decree was repeatedly issued at least for the next two years by the *Megalos Protopapas*, and it addressed not only the vicars of the churches in the city of Corfu – of both Latin and Greek rite – but all the churches' vicars throughout the island, as well as the vicars in the adjacent island of Paxos. It was additionally decreed that not only should alms be collected, but also that the vicars should gather a part of the annual olive production, sell it and send the profit to the Venetian *Casa*.⁷⁸⁷

The institution's network in Corfu attracted candidate converts both from Corfu and from abroad. We have already referred to Rachel Osni from Corfu, the childless widow with a convert sister that lived in Treviso, who decided to convert after the death of her parents. Rachel was conducted to the Latin Archbishop of Corfu, who helped her board on a Venetian *Pubblica Nave* that conducted her to Venice, equipped also with a letter of recommendation from *Provveditore* Loredan.⁷⁸⁸ And we have also seen the Corfiot cousins Pasienza and Alegra Giosua, sixteen and fifteen years old respectively, who when they decided to convert, they took refuge to the house of a local noblewoman. The latter hid them in the house of a priest. Soon *Provveditore* Contarini was informed, and after examining the two girls and

⁷⁸³ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 107v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁸⁴ See here the cases of Sylva, Stamo, Iosif Barbasai and Rebbie as well as the case of Rachel Vivante, 91-94, 96-97, 194.

⁷⁸⁵ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 11v, Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV

⁷⁸⁶ Μεγάλοι Προτοπαπάδες, b. 25, c. 3, 120r, GSAC.

⁷⁸⁷ Μεγάλοι Προτοπαπάδες, b. 25, c. 3, 117r-v, 120r-v, 121r; b. 26, c. 88r, 89r-v, GSAC.

⁷⁸⁸ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 131v (1741), Catecumeni, AIRE. See here, 157.

making sure ‘di voler rendersi Christiane, e voler esser battezzate alla Latina’, he kept them for fifteen days at his palace, before sending them to Venice and to the *Casa* accompanied with a letter of recommendation addressed to his father nobleman Contarini.⁷⁸⁹

The Corfiot Jew Lazzaro Leze, while he was in detention arrested by the garrison of *Provveditor* Loredan, became acquainted with a sergeant in the Venetian guard who was a Jewish convert. The latter convinced Lazzaro to convert, and then informed about it Loredan, who wrote a recommendation letter for Lazzaro and then boarded him ‘su d’un Vascello per mariner sopranumerario’ and sent him to the Venetian institution.⁷⁹⁰ The seventeen years old Corfiot Rachel Moro, who had escaped from her family house in order to convert, spent eight months hidden in the house of *Signora* Tomina, wife of the Venetian *Capitano di Navi* Zuanne Collonelli, before *Provveditore* Dolfin boarded her on a ship destined to Venice. Rachel was also equipped with a recommendation letter addressed to the Venetian institution and written by the vicar of the Latin Cathedral in Corfu.⁷⁹¹

Beyond Corfiot Jews, the *Provveditori* also assisted foreigners and passers-by. The already mentioned Ibraim from Tyrnavo and Abram from Istanbul were first met in Zante, where they had travelled with the hope to convert. Yet, the Latin Archbishop of Zante sent them both to Corfu, where *Provveditore* Dolfin provided each one with a recommendation letter and sent them to the Venetian *Casa*.⁷⁹² The Muslim Maomet, born in Istanbul but raised in Napoli di Romania had seriously injured a fellow of his in a quarrel, and left the city so as to avoid being caught. He travelled to Zante, where he approached the Latin Archbishop Remondini and asked him to convert. Remondini sent Maomet to Corfu, to *Provveditore* Dolfin ‘perche [lui] mi dirigisse à questa pia Casa’. Indeed, Dolfin gave him a letter of recommendation and sent him to Venice. A year later, after Maomet was baptized and was now named Giovanni Battista Dandolo, he was boarded on a ship owned by *Conte* Demetrio Peruli and sent back to Corfu, this time with a letter of recommendation written by the institution’s President and addressed to the *Provveditore* in Corfu, asking him to employ Giovanni Battista ‘in qualche impiego militare’.⁷⁹³ Finally, Mustafa from Navarino, twenty years old, following the example of his brother who had converted, abandoned his mother and

⁷⁸⁹ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 139v-140r, Catecumeni, AIRE. See here, 156-157.

⁷⁹⁰ Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 136v (1742), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁹¹ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 16v (1746), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷⁹² See here, 192-193.

⁷⁹³ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 10v-11r (1746), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

travelled to Corfu, where *Provveditore* Cavalli supplied him with a letter and boarded him on a ship directed to Venice.⁷⁹⁴

Beyond the Venetian territory, the institution kept a network that was less dense, but nevertheless efficient. It seems that the Venetian *Casa* maintained certain relations with the other *Case dei Catecumeni* in Italy.⁷⁹⁵ But it was mostly the interpersonal cross-faith and proselytizing networks that facilitated people to move around. Sara Amadio, a Venetian Jew who had spent about fifteen years in ‘viaggio, e peregrinaggio’ travelling with her husband, her three children and her father in Europe and the Ottoman Empire, was in Pesaro when she decided to convert. When the institution’s Prior asked her how she arrived in Venice and the *Casa*, she gave a quite eloquent answer: ‘da Vescovo in Vescovo’.⁷⁹⁶ In 1744 the Jew Mose Aron from Modena arrived at the institution accompanied by the nobleman Francesco Bonfadini. Back in Modena Mose had expressed to one of the heads of the Community of Modena his wish to convert, and the later took him in his home, where Mose spent forty days. While staying there, Mose made an acquaintance with a young nobleman from Venice who was also hosted there. Eventually this young Venetian nobleman sent Mose to his father in Venice, and the latter escorted Mose to the *Casa*.⁷⁹⁷

The aforementioned mixed family of the Muslim Bechir and the Catholic Marina, who had met in the Ottoman island of Tinos and then moved to Chios,⁷⁹⁸ reached the institution with their children accompanied by Fra Giacomo of the order of Reformed Franciscans. The family, who had taken a boat to Izmir and then another boat to Venice, came in contact with Fra Giacomo through Fra Antonio, a clergyman from Vienna living in the island of Chios and belonging to the same Franciscan order. From the Ottoman Empire came also a Jewish couple, the merchant Israel Conigliano and his wife, Zafira. They were living in Istanbul, and it was the Venetian *Bailo* there that ‘recommended’ them to his brother in Venice, nobleman Antonio Erizzo, through whom they reached the institution.⁷⁹⁹

Several years later, an extended family of six Muslims approached the institution: Sultana, a mother of fifty years old, with her two daughters, Hanom and Mariem, and with

⁷⁹⁴ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 26v (1747), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷⁹⁵ There is evidence of relations with the *Case* in Ferrara, Rome and Modena, see respectively Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 2v, 116v, Catecumeni, AIRE; Costituti 1744-1762, c. 34v, Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁷⁹⁶ Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 123v (1741), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁹⁷ Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 146v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁷⁹⁸ See here, 201.

⁷⁹⁹ Libro 1725-1744-G9, c. 127v (1741), Catecumeni, AIRE.

Hanom's three children. According to their story, they had travelled from Maghnassia (present-day Manissa in Turkey) 'terra discosta da Smirne ore otto di camino' accompanied by Zuanne Stacchini, a Catholic from Izmir. They took a Neapolitan ship from Izmir to Ancona, where they were provided with a letter of recommendation from a local nobleman addressed to the Patriarch of Venice. From Ancona they reached Chiozza, and then Venice – yet soon after they were found to be already baptized.⁸⁰⁰

Last but not least, as we have already seen, enrollment of non-Christians in Venetian mercenary companies was conducive to religious conversion.⁸⁰¹ In this context, the Venetian military structure formed another branch of the institution's extended network. This branch consisted of the *Savio alla Scrittura*, who was the main administrative officer responsible for the Venetian army, and the captains, military officers and soldiers of the mercenary companies. We have already seen the Jew Cain Copio from Zante, who was a soldier at the castle of Lido and was accepted at the *Casa* in accordance with the orders of nobleman Pasqualigo, *Savio alla Scrittura*.⁸⁰² In his case, the institution's Prior himself went to Lido to collect Cain and conduct him to the *Casa*. The mercenary Ali from Delvino (present-day Delvinë in Albania), twenty-eight years old, again following orders from the *Savio alla Scrittura* Giovanni Battista Molin, was sent to the *Casa* accompanied by a sergeant of his company.⁸⁰³ In Ali's baptism, which took place five months later, godfather was the nobleman Alvisè Molin, presumably from the same family as the *Savio*. Another Ali, again from Albania, was brought to the institution by the captain of his company, *Conte* Giovanni Battista Borrelli, who also became his godfather.⁸⁰⁴ In the case of Mustafa from Tunisia, whom we have previously mentioned,⁸⁰⁵ soon after he was freed from nobleman Balbi's galley, he enrolled as a mercenary in the company of a Christian of the Eastern rite, who suggested that he should be baptized. As Mustafa preferred to be baptized in the Latin rite – at least this is how he presented the story to the Prior⁸⁰⁶ – he joined another mercenary company,

⁸⁰⁰ Costituti 1744-1762, c. 39v-40r (1748), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁸⁰¹ See here, 181-200.

⁸⁰² Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 93r (1706), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV; Libro ... [1705-1710]-G7, c. 24v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁸⁰³ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 73v (1703), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV; Libro ... 1702-1718-G6, c. 6v, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁸⁰⁴ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 98r (1707), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV.

⁸⁰⁵ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 124v, 126r, Catecumeni, AIRE. See also here, 184-185, 204-205.

⁸⁰⁶ '...hò osservato che li Greci non sono buoni Christiani, non operano bene; e hò veduto che li Latini operavano meglio, e non sono così furbi, come li Greci, e per questo desidero e voglio battezzarmi alla Latina', *ibid.*

that of Captain Piero Rado, which was heading towards Venice. Interestingly, along Captain Rado and his lieutenant escorting Mustafa to the *Casa dei Catecumeni*, there was a member of the Balbi family, who later became Mustafa's godfather. And after his baptism, Girolamo Maria Balbi olim Mustafa went 'al servizio' of another member of the Balbi family.

The Christian men that were part of the network of the military structure were also entangled with the secular and religious officers of the cities where mercenary companies stationed, especially in the *Terraferma*.⁸⁰⁷ Umer, twenty years old from Scutari in Albania, reached the institution accompanied by Francesco Staverio, a soldier and convert himself.⁸⁰⁸ Umer was rather enmeshed in the noble family of Soranzo: he was a soldier of the mercenary company of Francesco Soranzo; he was sent to the institution by the *Capitan Grande* di Padova nobleman Soranzo; and his godfather at the baptism was the nobleman Andrea Soranzo, also a member of the governing body of the institution. Mustafa eighteen years old from Athens escaped from his house and travelled by boat to Italy. He reached Padova and the house of the Dima family, 'grechi da Cimara' who ran a mercenary company 'appreso il Capitan Grande a Padova S[ua] E[ccellenza] Giustiniani', and they accompanied Mustafa to the institution.⁸⁰⁹ Finally, the mercenary Mehmet Ali from Albania twenty-three years old was sent to the *Casa* accompanied by the priest of the church of Concordia, following the orders of the Bishop of Rovigo. Later the priest also became Mehmet Ali's godfather.

⁸⁰⁷ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 103v (1709), Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁸⁰⁸ Registro dei Neofiti 1692-1734, c. 73v (1703), Sezione antica, Catecumeni, ASPV; Libro ... 1702-1718-G6, c. 7r, Catecumeni, AIRE.

⁸⁰⁹ Libro ... 1725-1744-G9, c. 82v-85r, 88v-89r (1735), Catecumeni, AIRE.

Epilogue

The Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni* was a crossroads, a place where people of different origin, different religion, and different status met, people who had often followed very different paths and itineraries before reaching the institution, and had been motivated by different reasons. As we have seen, in the late 17th and early 18th centuries both free and slave people mingled there: Ottoman Muslim war captives originating mostly from the western Balkans –whenever they were actually brought at the institution- lived for some time side by side with Ottoman Muslim mercenaries from the south and central Balkans and Anatolia as well as poor Jews - often entire families- mostly from Venice, the Veneto or the Italian peninsula. In the 18th century, Jews predominated in the institution as the numbers of Muslims now sharply declined. The new element of this era was the presence at the institution of members of the Venetian elite, as the Jewish status progressively waned in the 18th century.

The city port of Corfu, on the other hand, was both a religious transit node in the route towards Venice, as well as a center for conversion *per se* attracting Jews and Muslims from the island and the adjacent Venetian and Ottoman territories. If in the 17th century it is the great numbers of Muslim captives, mostly women and children, that prevail among the converts in the city, in the 18th century it is mostly Jews, and more particularly Jewish women, that seek out conversion and the prospects it could offer them –the adventurous story of Rachel Vivante, although unique in the extent of its detailed documentation and maybe in its abundance of twists and turns, belongs nevertheless to this wider trend.

Drawing on this material, what I explored in this study was not the subjective experiences and identity formation of Jews and Muslims that reached the Venetian *Casa dei Catecumeni*, or the *Megalos Protopapas* office in Corfu with the intention to convert. I instead focused on the background situations –from straightforward coercion and poverty to intense cross-faith intimacy, physical mobility or the prospect of professional and status gain- that acted as catalysts for these people's decision to convert. At the same time, these catalysts were played out within a wider framework of sustained cross-faith social networks, for as it has been observed 'opportunities for the crossing of religious borders demanded pre-existing connections to and support within networks in the new religious community'.⁸¹⁰ And, as we

⁸¹⁰ Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 'Webs of Conversion. An Analysis of Social Networks of Converts Across Islamic-Christian Borders in Anatolia, South-Eastern Europe and the Black Sea from the 13th to the 15th

have seen, the people that approached the institution came from rather entangled environments, where Jews, Muslims and Christians were invariably exposed to each other, and where a high degree of structured familiarity among people of different doctrines and religions prevailed, at times even forging a common religious culture. The network that the institutions promoting conversion had established in order to attract converts touched to a significant extent upon these cross-faith social networks, and this can also partly account for the non-coercive character that conversion took on especially during the 18th century.

By approaching conversion in this way, I sought to place firmly early modern religious conversion and the shifting of identities as recorded in Venice and Corfu within its pertinent historical, geographical and cultural frameworks, so as to avoid an essentialist approach that understands conversion as a cardinal moment in a person's life-story. On the other hand, I equally wished to go beyond the 'early modern fluidity/ambiguity' approach that wraps everything up in this vague interpretative notion, which alone cannot provide much insight into the early modernity, while it mostly reveals that we are after all still thinking within the legacy, framework and constraints that modernity and the modern nation-state devised.

Indeed, what seems to emerge from this study is that at the core of coexistence as described in these conversion stories from the 'contact zones' of Eastern Mediterranean did not stand fluidity or an alleged ease with transgressing boundaries, but the existence of sustained cross-faith social networks –created and operating of course with the consent, tacit or not, of central political power. These networks generally followed the internal social hierarchy upon which early modern societies were founded, while at the same time they were meaningful and beneficial to all agents involved in them.

Early modern cross-faith or interdenominational realities were of course in no way limited to the existence of social networks. Equally, early modern coexistence cannot be invested with exclusively positive qualities. On the contrary, interaction among people of different denominations or faiths operated within a 'continuum of practices ... ranging from greater exclusion ... to great inclusion'.⁸¹¹ Seen from such a vantage point, cross-faith and interdenominational networks as described in this study represented but a facet of this reality, a reality that in other times, or even at the same time, could also take on forms ranging from

Centuries', Paper presented at the workshop 'Cross-Cultural Life-Worlds in Pre-Modern Islamic Societies. Actors, Evidences and Strategies', University of Bamberg 2012, 11.

⁸¹¹ David A. Frick, *Kith, Kin, and Neighbors. Communities and Confessions in Seventeenth-Century Wilno* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 400.

indifference to open hostility.⁸¹² Early modern interaction thus followed various itineraries. It rests to us to trace the construction of these itineraries, unpack their structure, unearth their rationale, and reveal their complexity that at times permitted to the elements of difference and familiarity to meld into a seamless continuum.

⁸¹² David Do Paço, 'Introduction. Coexister dans la diversité religieuse des villes de l'Europe moderne, XVe-XVIIIe siècle', in *Des religions dans la ville. Ressorts et stratégies de coexistence dans l'Europe des XVIe-XVIIIe siècles*, ed. David Do Paço, Mathilde Monge et Laurent Tatarenko (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010), 11-23; Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, 'Introduction. Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands', in *Shatterzone of Empires. Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2013), 1-21.

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