

1 A Sixteenth-Century Libertine Priest

Francesco Calcagno

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The case of Francesco Calcagno perfectly exemplifies the problem of sixteenth-century libertinism, with its expressions of moral transgression and religious heterodoxy. A former Benedictine monk, Calcagno faced the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Brescia and was charged with sodomy, heresy, and blasphemy. On December 23, 1550, he was condemned by the Council of Ten in Venice and paid dearly for his crimes: his tongue was cut out, he was beheaded, and his body was burned at the stake. In 1993, Giovanni Dall’Orto published Calcagno’s trial proceedings, already characterizing his beliefs and practices as a significant example of the newborn libertinism.¹ This analysis, however, deserves further investigation, especially in light of more recent studies on the libertine movement and on sodomy, which have redefined these experiences and traced their development since the fourteenth century.

The “classic” paradigm that presented libertinism as a movement of seventeenth-century France has been thoroughly revised. A comparative and prolonged study has shown the great variety, complexity, and extension of this phenomenon and its vitality as early as the sixteenth century. The notion of libertinism has become manifold and applicable to various historical periods as well as geographical and thematic areas.² Sixteenth-century libertine ideas and currents flowed into a movement with many cultural roots—from classical antiquity to Medieval *Goliardia*, to Renaissance thought, to religious radicalism. In the era of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, these ideas and currents were conveyed, with different levels of theoretical elaboration, through various expressions of irreligiosity, moral transgression, and political criticism, before reaching their full development in the following century. Therefore, libertinism represents an umbrella term for a phenomenon definable, according to Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, as “the more or less radical [...] questioning” of “theological dogmata,” “moral rules,” and “behaviors directly or indirectly connected to Christian faith,” which, however, is “not reducible to simple denominational dissidence.”³ These various attitudes are united by the quest for complete individual freedom. According to Luca Addante, such a quest was expressed by sixteenth-century religious

radicalism and, in Italy, particularly by the Waldensians. They shared with other currents and figures of European dissent “a common individualistic attitude towards critical doubt and freedom,” albeit hidden behind the veil of dissimulation.⁴ Miguel Servet (1511–1553), David Joris (1501–1556), Sebastian Franck (1499–1543), and Otto Brunfels (1488–1534) appear among the identified figures.⁵ Therefore, in his *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des libertins qui se nomment spirituelz* (Against the Phantastic and Furious Sect of the Libertines who are Called “Spirituals,” 1545), John Calvin attacked members of a multifaceted universe.⁶ Calvin, however, was not the first to use this new understanding of the old term “libertines” in the modern age, and the semantic change did not even initially occur in French regions but rather in Italy, more precisely in the Tuscan cities of Siena and Florence. Barthes discovered that libertines “universally” meant the most radical republicans, the most extreme supporters of the last Florentine Republic of 1527–1530, as well as the Sienese republicans who had opposed the terrible Medici-Papal siege in 1526.⁷

Sexual transgression, the *libertinage des mœurs*, was also a component of sixteenth-century libertinism. Scholars have especially highlighted the libertarian inclination in behaviors and theories that are anomic on a sexual level.⁸ Furthermore, the reconstruction of the history of sodomy has demonstrated how dangerous this has been for states and churches since the Middle Ages, as it subverted the established civic, natural, and religious order. Since the time of St. Augustine, sodomy had been condemned within a general denial of sexuality as a *crimen nefandum* (despite the semantic ambivalence of this definition). In the Code of Justinian, it became a crime against nature. The extreme severity of state laws underscored the conception of sodomy as the “shameful crime,” with the cases of Venice and Florence being particularly significant.⁹ In the Church’s canon law, sodomy represented a crime *mixti fori* (mixed jurisdiction), to be punished in agreement with political authorities, with respective areas of responsibility for clergy and laymen; however, the balance between the two powers was often unsteady and renegotiated, given the greater leniency of ecclesiastical justice. The Church was much stricter with laymen: crimes against nature were equated with crimes against the faith, building the demonic paradigm of the “enemy of Christianity.” This process was further accelerated during the Counter-Reformation. During the papacies of Paul IV (1555–1559) and Sixtus V (1585–1590), sodomy was recorded as heresy, with a strict connection drawn between nonconformist sexuality and religious dissent.¹⁰ Notably, the hereticalization of sodomy went hand in hand with the development of Islamophobia, since Muslims were considered the first to commit the sin *contra naturam*.¹¹ Therefore, both its supporters and its detractors believed sodomy played an instrumental role in dismantling the entire ecclesiastical and social doctrinal system. As demonstrated by current research on

cultural history, social practices, and emotions, homoeroticism spread widely among laymen and clergymen, despite policies of repression, producing theoretical legitimizations and intense shared feelings, as well as violent, unpunished abuse, especially within the Church.¹²

From this perspective and within this historical framework, Calcagno's trial acquires new value. His views appear interesting because of their peculiarity, but also as a synthesis of the many positions on heterodoxy and moral transgression present in the Republic of Venice and more generally in sixteenth-century Italian society, positions that are often impossible to reduce to precise denominational categories. His story offers enlightening insight into social spaces and means of communicating dissent within the *Serenissima* as well as elsewhere. His destiny is emblematic of the aspects, tensions, and difficulties inherent in the project of controlling religious dissent and deviant morality. These efforts launched by Rome, sometimes in concert and sometimes in conflict with political authorities, all aimed at establishing a new order in Italy after the division created by the Reformation. Such tension surfaced vividly in the unique environment of the Republic of Venice, in a historical moment when civil authorities were attempting to control ecclesiastical institutions.¹³ The fight against sodomy was also a testing ground for the strength and hegemony of the power of the *Serenissima* against Rome, given the habit of the Curia to claim for itself all trials involving its members, even for the most serious crimes, in order to bury them or settle them with light sentences.¹⁴ In short, Calcagno's case sheds light on the state of Italy and its culture during the Counter-Reformation, enriching our reconstruction and analysis of this environment.

Brescia, 1550: Francesco Calcagno on Trial

In February 1550, Francesco Calcagno, a professed Benedictine monk in the monastery of Sant'Eufemia in Brescia, who, at the time, was a priest in the "apothecaries' district in Barbisino" (*contrada aromataria di Barbisino*), was called to appear in front of the local inquisitor, the Dominican Stefano de' Conforti, and the vicar of the bishop of Brescia, doctor *in utroque iure* Paolo de' Aleni. According to decisions reached in 1547, and as representatives of the political authority of the Republic, the city rectors were kept informed of the trial proceedings. After creating the *Tre Savi sopra l'eresia* in Venice, with the purpose of controlling the Inquisition and centralizing control in the capital, the Council of Ten decided to assign this task to two laymen deputies in some peripheral areas of the Inquisition in the *Terraferma*, including Brescia. They had to claim for the supreme political authority of the *Serenissima*—the Council—all cases, such as blasphemy and sodomy, that infringed on the state's sovereignty and on public order, even when churchmen were involved.¹⁵ As we will see, this particular articulation of repressive power was disastrous for Calcagno.

He was denounced by the city notary Giovanni Antonio de' Savarisi with the following accusations:¹⁶

- 1 He said that Christ never was and that he who is called Christ was in his person a man in the flesh, and that he often laid with St. John and that he considered him a catamite
- 2 Item he said that the host and the chalice are all just blabber, and he does not at all believe that the good lord is in them
- 3 Item he said that a nice ass was his altar, his mass, the host and the chalice and the paten
- 4 Item that he would rather adore a nice young boy, lying with him, than the good lord
- 5 Item that he goes looking for, and pays many people to get him males so that he can lay with them
- 6 Item that faith should be put in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* rather than the Gospel
- 7 Item he blasphemed against God
- 8 Item he constantly leads a dirty life
- 9 Item he often dresses as a layman
- 10 Item that he is defrocked, and that he did not appear in front of his superior, and that he has committed all these things and keeps committing them, which is scandalous for many.¹⁷

These were very severe charges that involved acts against the State and against morality, transgression of the *status* as member of the clergy, not to mention Calcagno's atheist and heterodox positions (on the nature of Christ, on sexuality, and on the Eucharist): a unique and highly subversive mixture of ideas and unscrupulous practices. Yet, it was the result of a strong and probably common culture, as it appeared from the statements of the witnesses heard in July and listed by de' Savarisi: Lauro de' Glisenti, the clergyman Giovita Balino, the priest Niccolò Ugoni, and the bookseller Pietro delle Grazie. They belonged to the same circle, which also included Gian Antonio da Presceglie, Ludovico Calini, and Paolo Boldrino, assistant of messer Giovan Francesco da Gambarà, who must have had religious positions and sexual tastes similar to Calcagno's or, at least, must have accepted them. It is very likely that de' Savarisi was pressured to break the solidarity of the group by his maid Caterina, whose "young boy" was the object of a strong homoerotic passion on the part of Calcagno. Ultimately, the trial caused the circle to collapse on its latent tensions, provoking different reactions among the members, depending on the relationship maintained with Calcagno, despite the common goal of protecting themselves. In fact, the witnesses' replies oscillated between numerous evasive "I don't recall," statements more or less detailed revelations on Calcagno's positions, and tales of their reprimands to their mate's beliefs. One witness intentionally accused him, and another one decidedly tried to cover for him by avoiding mentioning

Calcagno's beliefs or saying that they were intended as "jokes", and alternated with orthodox declarations. Calcagno himself initially responded in the same way, but soon after he abandoned this course of action in favor of a full confession of his crimes, with one significant exception.

The witnesses had learned about Calcagno's views a year earlier, during their meetings in the homes of Calcagno, de' Savarisi, and Giovan Antonio di Val di Sabbia—all located in the district of Santa Maria della Pace—and in the nearby library close to the Duomo delle Grazie. In their social gatherings, while "practicing" (i.e., entertaining in the bookseller's shop), "considering many things," "together," and "talking with familiarity,"¹⁸ Calcagno had spoken freely about his opinions and sexual activities, some of which were even more reprehensible than those revealed by de' Savarisi.

According to Calcagno, Christ was not the son of God, but a simple man who entertained a sexual relationship with St. John, the latter assuming a passive role. He said that this was proven by the evangelical passage: "Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23–25),¹⁹ as well as by the image of the Son sitting next to John in the circle of apostles: "the one who is called Christ is a man of the flesh, and that St. John was his catamite, and he kept him close at the table and loved him a lot for such reason."²⁰ With regard to God the Father and to individual and universal destiny, he believed that God and Heaven did not exist and that the soul was mortal, because the universe is ruled by the naturalistic law of chance ("there is no God, and that there is no Heaven nor anything else, but that once the body is dead the soul is dead"; "all was ruled by chance").²¹ From these materialist beliefs, Calcagno had drawn logical as well as heretical conclusions: he had often declared that the Mass with all its rites was "blabber"²² and that there was no "Good Lord inside." He had also interpreted his positions according to a homoerotic perspective, claiming that for him "the altar, the mass, the host, chalice, and the paten" were a "nice ass." When Lauro de' Glisenti had protested, attempting to bring him back to the Catholic faith, Calcagno had called him a "beast," since his belief was shared by the "populace" and the "pope and these great men." The witnesses cited Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as the source of his ideas, given that he considered them more believable and more suitable than the Gospel to explain mundane and celestial reality. One witness declared that "many times he said that the Bible and the Gospels are *Metamorphoses* and one should believe in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* rather than in the Gospels";²³ another one said that he was addressed in the following way by Calcagno: "Oh you are mad if you give faith to the Holy Scripture, what difference is there between this scripture and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*? Ovid is even more truthful than the same Scripture."²⁴ Calcagno drew a hedonistic conclusion from his denial of the supernatural: the "wisest and most cautious thing" was "having a good time in this world, since all other things were fables."²⁵ But, according to the priest, these "fables of the Gospel" had been skillfully composed and exploited by the Church in order to fully exercise its power

over the population. Quoting the verse from Lucretius (but actually Petronius Arbiter, fragment 27), “fear was the first in the world to create gods” (*Primus in orbe deos fecit timor*), he had claimed that the authors of the Scripture “were people of the devil and that they did this to hold the people in fear, and rule the world in their way.”²⁶

The greatest attempt to exonerate Calcagno from these charges came from Giovita de’ Ballini, a nineteen-year-old clergyman who enjoyed benefices, and probably also Calcagno’s homoerotic attentions. Among the most absent-minded of the group, he kept repeating that Francesco was joking when he said that he did not believe in the truths of the Catholic faith, to which he fully conformed (“now sometimes he said that he did not believe in these things of the faith and sometimes he said that he believes in the holy mother church, and that he was jesting” at the time, because “he was very Christian”).²⁷ The clergyman was the one for whom Calcagno had declared that a “nice ass” represented his way of communing with God rather than the Eucharist, by his own admission: “I have indeed told messer Iovita Ballino that he was a pretty young boy and that he was my altar, my mass, the host and the paten”;²⁸ de’ Ballini downplayed the most severe charge—“that he adores a nice young boy, lying with him, rather than the good lord”—to the hedonistic and materialist declaration that for Calcagno the height of happiness was sexual satisfaction with a nice young boy (“he knew no other happiness than enjoying a nice young boy”).²⁹ Only the bookseller confirmed that the account was truthful. The others steered the conversation toward Calcagno’s repeated request to find him paid youths—something that they clearly did and knew how to do even for themselves. De’ Glisenti said that “many times priest Francesco told me and begged me to let him have some young boys and that he would have given me four scudi to get them for him.”³⁰ De’ Ballini pointed at the bookseller as one of the intermediaries, giving even more precise information: Francesco had asked him for some specific youths in order to have sexual relations with them (“I know that that priest Francesco has asked master Piero to get him a young boy from the Cinalij and a young boy from the Camarlangi to lie with them”);³¹ Pietro delle Grazie admitted only that he had asked him once.

Clearly, Calcagno’s preference for sex “against nature,” with young boys as well as women, with whom it appeared he had had stable paid relations, was undisputed. However, he not only practiced sodomy but also theorized the moral and social superiority of such relations on those “according to nature,” completely and defiantly overturning common opinion. As we have seen, the trial was triggered by a case of pederasty. De’ Glisenti described the details of the case reported by de’ Savarisi: Francesco slept every night with the son of a woman named Caterina, at that time a maid for Giovanni Antonio Savarisi, holding him between his legs, and during the day he hugged and kissed him; and when he saw a nice boy he declared that he would have gladly paid to have him.³²

The witness worsened Calcagno's position by stating that he had seen the priest "dressed as a secular man,"³³ with a velvet beret on his head, and that he slept with prostitutes, with whom he had sodomitical relationships because only beasts and plebeians had intercourse "according to nature."³⁴ Furthermore, Calcagno had confessed to Pietro delle Grazie that he had also lain "contra naturam" with a woman with whom he had a relationship, for the same reason.

According to the proceedings, within the group, Calcagno's positions had elicited disapproval from the priest Nicolò de' Ugoni and de' Glisenti. The former, according to delle Grazie, having heard Calcagno explain his theory on Christ and St. John in his shop, severely reprovved him, saying that he should be ashamed of his beastly behaviors ("Go, be with the beasts, you should be ashamed").³⁵ But the strongest protestations had come from de' Glisenti—or at least de' Glisenti wanted it to appear so, probably to get back at Calcagno for his disaffection, or to conceal sins they shared. In fact, in front of the inquisitors he assumed the role of informer and judge, taking care to state that he had never hated Francesco, but only his debauched life, and that this is probably why the priest was resentful toward him.³⁶ De' Glisenti stated that he had reprimanded him "more than once in friendly terms ... about his impious behaviors,"³⁷ reminding him that the Holy Scripture considered sodomy the worst of sins ("blames and considers this vice of sodomy such an abomination that there could be no greater one"),³⁸ with the result that, as we have seen, he was called a fool because he put faith in the Bible instead of Ovid.

How did Calcagno reply to these accusations? During the first questioning, he hid behind a supposedly failing memory. Calcagno claimed that in the shop there was a lot of chatter ("so many things have been said in that shop that I do not recall exactly")³⁹ and "jesting."⁴⁰ He stood by his devotion to the Church's doctrine in spite of a few mistaken declarations and instead pointed the finger at other members of the group, starting with de' Glisenti. Calcagno was clearly looking for retaliation. With regard to the first charge, Calcagno said that only in response to de' Glisenti's incredulity regarding the supernatural and metaphysical dimension ("he did not believe in anything at all, unless in what he saw")⁴¹ had he given the example of Jesus and his homoerotic relationship with St John ("Therefore, one may believe and state all the evils in the world about Christ, and that he had St. John as his catamite").⁴² Then it was priest Ugoni's turn. Calcagno turned the charges against him: it was Ugoni who gave the Bible as much credit as Aesop's fables. As far as he was concerned, during a meeting of the group he was in fact asked about the matter of Christ's relationship with the evangelist, but he had merely explained the biblical passage and anything unorthodox was "in jest" ("one of them whom I can't remember asked me what I believed about little Saint John, of whom I had told him many times—meaning the aforementioned words about St. John—and I explained to him what 'ille quem diligebat, et qui recubuit super pectus eius' meant,

as if I were saying the words mentioned above about Saint John, and I said this as a joke”).⁴³

Calcagno confessed that he regretted his statements about the human nature of Christ and his relationship with St. John, since he was “absolutely Christian,”⁴⁴ but when delle Grazie threatened to accuse him, he had become angry with him. With regard to the other related charges, he confirmed Giovita’s version about his referring to him as an “altar,” etc., while he vehemently refuted the most severe statement, that sodomy was the foundation and support of his atheism (“that he would rather adore a nice young boy, lying with him, than the good lord”).⁴⁵ The requests for “putti,” young boys, were jokes; refusing the Bible was the statement “of a man” and “not of a Christian”;⁴⁶ he dressed as a layman only in “honest” places.

The following day, during the second questioning, the situation changed completely. The judges of the faith asked for and obtained a confirmation from Calcagno regarding his positions on Christ, God, Heaven, the Eucharist, and blasphemy. Calcagno added that he had taken his ideas on atheism and sodomy from a book lent to him by de’ Glisenti, *La cazzaria*, by Antonio Vignali (first published in 1531). And yet it is significant that the inquisitors did not insist on these heterodox positions, but were content with a summary confession, and focused instead on the infractions regarding his status as a clergyman. They ascertained the reasons why he had left the Benedictine order and dressed as a secular man. They inquired whether he had administered the sacraments after leaving the order, in which places, and with what license. In response to their questions, Calcagno explained that he had abandoned the priesthood after reconsidering a vow that had been made lightly (“seduced, and with a certain carelessness”),⁴⁷ and he celebrated the Mass because he considered valid the permission he had obtained from the Apostolic Penitentiary, despite a ban for former members of priestly orders. Having received satisfying answers, the inquisitors accepted his petition for compassion and mercy, since he had made mistakes “with ignorance and as a madman,”⁴⁸ expressing things he was “unhappy”⁴⁹ with and that he did not really believe (“I never intended them to be true”).⁵⁰ This was enough for the inquisitors. Their behavior was in agreement with the current approach of the Church toward crimes committed by clergymen, i.e. never judging them too harshly, even in the most severe cases. Indeed, instead of handing out heavy punishments, they were most interested in avoiding scandal and reprobation and potentially weakening an institution whose power was already under attack by state institutions and the Reformation.⁵¹

However, this was not enough for the lay deputies of the Republic. Quite the contrary. After Calcagno had confirmed his confession before the rectors in Brescia, the machine of secular justice of the *Serenissima* moved swiftly and relentlessly in order to convict the offender according to the city’s very strict legislation relating to blasphemers and sodomites.⁵² On August 16, after unremitting appeals, the *podestà* Giovanni Mocenigo and the captain of Brescia, marquis Michiel, sent the former monk’s file to the Council of Ten,

along with the file of two Protestants, Luca d'Arcoli and Stefano Giusti da Cremona, a doctor in Gardone, so that they could be tried with friar Gerolamo Allegretti da Spalato, already incarcerated in Venice. While keeping silent on the Protestants, in the letter accompanying the proceedings, the governors clearly condemned Calcagno's ideas: he was not only a Lutheran (i.e., heretic), but the most impious enemy of Christ, who had been blasphemous against Christ and St. John. His conception of the sexuality of Christ seemed unmatched by the main enemies of the Messiah: demons, Jews, and especially Muslims, who were generally associated with sodomitical practices and filled the Venetian State at the time.⁵³ The sentence stated:

a man not only Lutheran but the most impious enemy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said words and blasphemies for which, when you noble sirs will hear them with your so chaste ears, it will not be possible for you not to be horrified, words so heinous and foul about Our Lord and John the Baptist [actually the Evangelist] that no Turk or Jew or even the Demons not only have ever heard but even imagined.⁵⁴

Calcagno's fate was sealed. The Church, however, did not give up on trying to assert its jurisdiction over clergymen, attempting to force that balance of power with state authorities that in the *Serenissima* was entirely to their advantage, and constantly the object of attempts to redefine it on the part of the organs of the Holy See. In fact, the cardinal's vicar asked the rectors that the case be judged by ecclesiastical authority, which was entitled to intervene in crimes committed by the clergy.⁵⁵

But all was in vain. On August 23, Calcagno was transferred, along with others accused of Lutheranism, to Venice, in the prison of the Holy Office, where he awaited his final sentence, drafted by a commission of theologians and doctors. The sentence was communicated to the rectors of Brescia on October 14, so that they could implement the penalty in the city where the convicts had committed their criminal acts ("spread and made the mistakes");⁵⁶ the show had to be exemplary in order to prove to the people the severity of the laws ("so that they be of example and fear to others").⁵⁷ Actually, the only horrifying moment was Calcagno's execution, because the ones charged with favoring the Reformation abjured.⁵⁸ In order to make it even more significant, the Ten decided first to degrade the heretic and blasphemous priest ("apostate, heretic and blasphemer")⁵⁹ with a spectacular ceremony ("solemnly and effectively")⁶⁰ in piazza San Marco in Venice, and then to send him back, safely in custody, to Brescia, in order to carry out the death sentence in the area of the city intended for executions, with a public and grandiose reading of the sentence by the rectors ("with loud and clear voice in front of the population").⁶¹ On December 23, 1550, the sentence of the cutting of the tongue, beheading, and burning at the stake was carried out according to the instructions in front of a great crowd ("the sentence decided

against priest Francesco Calcagno, heretic, sinful and blasphemer, was read and published, and, as it was carried out, the tongue was cut out by the master of justice to said priest Francesco, his head was cut, and his body burned and incinerated with blazing fire in the place filled with a crowd”).⁶² The “putrid member”⁶³ had been eliminated with the purifying fire.

Calcagno, a Libertine of the Sixteenth Century

Calcagno’s opinions, as we have seen, were marked by atheism and an overall refusal of the Catholic Church. His beliefs were expressed as an avowal of a pagan and naturalistic vision of creation and of the otherworldly dimension instead of the biblical narration and its doctrinal and cultural expressions; as criticism toward religious deception aimed at power; and as a legitimation of sexual transgression, considered an opposing value to the order of traditional society. Such a vision appears to be the result of a personal revision of elements of the Italian culture of the Renaissance, from classical literature and philosophy (in his case, Ovid, Lucretius, and Petronius), to the mortalist and materialist tradition, to anticlericalism, to Neoplatonism, to libertine positions: a mixture with different and often atomized outcomes, which in the sixteenth century were destined to flow into nonconformist conceptions of religion and in certain cases even of Catholic morality. In the following centuries, such ideas resulted in disbelief, atheism, and libertinism that became widespread in the Venetian Republic.⁶⁴

Where did Calcagno get these ideas from? The cultural environment of Brescia was certainly very fertile for the development of dissent and anomie. A land of heresy and witches in the Middle Ages, during the sixteenth century, the city was the scene of “violence, parties and revelry.”⁶⁵ It was also receptive toward intellectual and religious novelties and critical toward tradition thanks to its contacts with Venice, with the universities of Padua, Bologna, and Ferrara, and with commercial exchanges beyond the Alps.⁶⁶ The crucial role played by these cities and by intellectual and commercial contacts in the dissemination of heterodoxy in Italy, even in its most radical movements, is well known.⁶⁷ In fact, anabaptists, antitrinitarians, extreme Waldensians, and the sect of the “arcieretico” Giorgio Siculo (d. 1551) spread to this area.⁶⁸ Equally important was the presence of a philosophical, anticlerical milieu descending from the Renaissance and from Erasmus that often represented the breeding ground for these tendencies, with significant implications for our analysis. In the duchy of the Este family, for example, nonconformism, both religiously and culturally, was altogether very common among the court and intellectual elite. A significant example is Celio Calcagnini (1479–1551), trusted diplomat for Ercole II and a protonotary apostolic in the service of cardinal Ippolito d’Este, a man of science and letters with an encyclopedic knowledge, who built up a library with several heterodox texts, supported naturalistic positions which were basically antichristian—and consciously dissimulated—and composed erotic verses.

He shared his ideas with the intellectual Pacifico Massimi, author of the famous erotic composition *Hecatelegium* (1489), the first to openly celebrate.⁶⁹ Returning to Brescia, it was through those channels that the Reformation began to spread to the city in the 1520s, penetrating city elites and the clergy, creating strong communities sympathetic to protestant beliefs, and also circles with a tendency toward religious radicalism. The centers were the houses of the Ugoni, the Martinengo, and the Donzellini, as well as the convents of St. Faustinus, St. Francis, and St. Afra, where the dissenters Vincenzo Maggi (d. 1564), Gomezio Lovisello, Celso Martinengo (1515–1557), and Ippolito Chizzolla (d. 1565) lived. The *Accademia dei Dubbiosi*, a learned society that had a marked vocation toward philosophical skepticism and religious heterodoxy, became active in the 1550s and saw the participation of the nobleman Fortunato Martinengo and Girolamo Ruscelli (1518–1566); its relations extended to Pietro Aretino (1492–1556), Ortensio Lando (1512–1560, both dates are uncertain), Jacopo Bonfadio (1508–1550), Giovanni Andrea Ugoni (b. 1540), the Paduan and Neapolitan heterodox circles, and more. Other city academies and printing houses were sensitive to the charm of Eastern, Neoplatonic, and Hebrew literature, particularly with regard to divination and messianism. The forbidden books of the Protestant reformers were sold in the city by Benedetto and Ludovico Britannico, and by Pietro Antonio Piacentino in a workshop run directly by German printers.⁷⁰ The religious situation was very fluid, and full of demands and ideas, but united by the search for a new spirituality. As Adriano Prosperi has observed, in Brescia in the 1530s and 1540s, one passed with ease “from the sectarian mysticism of certain Benedictine circles of the Cassinese congregation, close to Giorgio Siculo, to the confidant and active charity of Angela Merici, from the visionary preaching of charismatic religious such as the mysterious Brother Raphael to the devotion of the confraternities of the Body of Christ.” Very different reforming attitudes intertwined in the city between clergy and laymen, men and women, aristocrats and “ordinary” people.⁷¹ Therefore, in Brescia, between philosophy and religion, the environment was overflowing with potential for the creation of cultural positions that provided alternatives to tradition.

We do not know how much of this mixture of ideas and stimuli reached Calcagno. There was no lack of channels: the monastery, the meetings at the bookshop with his friends (one from the Ugoni family: Da Presceglie, possibly convicted for Lutheranism), and the readings.⁷² In the Venetian Republic as well as elsewhere, in the sixteenth century and beyond, shops were essential venues for the circulation of ideas and books on religious, political, and cultural topics centered on freedom and nonconformism.⁷³ Furthermore, the space of the shop (especially pharmacies, barber shops, and patisseries) was considered by the Venetian magistrates during the Renaissance to be the favorite place for homosexual practices.⁷⁴

Both manners of communicating and interacting were present in the circle gathered in *delle Grazie's* bookshop, thanks to which Calcagno came into

possession of a book that was, by his own admission, the main source of his thinking: *La cazzaria, o del cazzo e della sua cognitione*. This work, written in 1525/1526 (and published in 1530) by one of the founders of the Sienese *Accademia degli Intronati*, Antonio Vignali, also known as Arsiccio Intronato, is a masterpiece of sixteenth-century erotic literature because of the novel subject and the extremely realistic and erudite narrative techniques. According to Borsellino, hidden behind the title (literally “tangle of dicks”) was a sort of philosophical narration, with ideological and political aims, inspired by libertinism.⁷⁵ The cultural depth of the text was quite significant, with its multiple critical motives related to the Christian vision of creation and morality, to the superiority of the condition of the clergy and its costumes, to the use of Latin instead of the vernacular, to political power—particularly with a phallocratic allegory of the oligarchy that had gained power after the fight between factions in Siena, among which were the republicans defined as libertines, and so on. Such a gathering of topics was fatal to the fortune of the book and its author; the text, hidden by the Sienese academics, was reprinted only at the end of the nineteenth century, while Vignali himself was forced into exile.⁷⁶

Here we will discuss only the resemblances with Calcagno’s position and the stimuli Vignali could have provided to the development of Calcagno’s thinking. Similarities include the philosophical naturalism that lay behind the promotion of sexuality, especially homoerotic sexuality, coupled with the related dismantling of the theological and moral Catholic system; the anti-ecclesiastical polemic; and the practice of sodomy, both personal and in their respective circles (i.e., the *Accademia degli Intronati* in Vignali’s case) with a unique intertwining of literature and life. The work appears as a burlesque dialog between Arsiccio Intronato and Sodo, the telling pseudonym of Marc’Antonio Piccolomini, a learned man who practiced sodomy. The exchange was born from the trivial question “why don’t the balls enter the ass and the cunt when fucking?,”⁷⁷ which was posed to the group after another academic, Bizzarro (i.e., Marcello Landucci) had found a manuscript in Vignali’s library while attending to a street prostitute. The conversation which was focused on sexuality—specifically on “dick, cunt, ass, fuck, and sodomizing”⁷⁸—was presented as a primarily philosophical argument since “philosophy is nothing other than the understanding of natural things”⁷⁹ and therefore celebrated as entirely positive for its naturalness and perfection within creation. Vignali was singing a true hymn to nature and its benevolence, painting it as a perfect thing just like its laws and fruits: “Nature is so perfect that it is necessary that all things that are made to follow its laws are perfect things: nature was always benign, munificent and mindful.”⁸⁰ Therefore, knowing the secrets of sex was not shameful; it deserved public recognition and social distinction, since it was the exclusive dominion of learned men and gentlewomen.⁸¹ The great authors of classical antiquity, Plato, Ovid, Apuleius, Martial, Horace, and Virgil, were called as witnesses together with great authors of Italian literature such as Dante, Boccaccio,

Petrarca, Bembo, and especially Pietro Aretino.⁸² Calcagno's atheistic naturalism and his sexual elitism, founded on classical references, echoed these views. These were based on the idea that "the dick is a natural thing and the cunt and fuck completely natural and necessary things for our being."⁸³ Vignali made a very concrete description of the sexual organs and their functions, presenting them as fundamental components of human procreation, the most perfect expression of creation, "of such a noble animal as a human is."⁸⁴ However, a primary position was assigned to the bottom, the "first honored"⁸⁵ since antiquity—to the point that the Romans had erected a monumental "Culiseo"⁸⁶ With a clear reversal of current religious and juridical paradigms, sodomy with both men and women was considered not *contra naturam* but *secundum naturam*, "who, had she not wanted man to sodomize, she wouldn't have made it such a sweet thing and she would have made that the ass could not endure the dick."⁸⁷ However, Vignali did not avoid the polemic against current legislature that condemned sodomites to capital punishment.⁸⁸ According to Vignali—and to Calcagno as well—anal and homosexual relationship represented the highest expression of pleasure, a pleasure that could be compared to Heaven, but was an entirely earthly pleasure: "I don't think that in Heaven the nectar and the ambrosia are as sweet as the sweetness you feel with the dick in a soft, white and young ass."⁸⁹ The materialist vision of the otherworldly, connected with the notion of homoeroticism, was also shared with other members of the *Accademia degli Intronati*. One member had redesigned the entire geography of creation, believing Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory to be in this world, and the angels to be "nice young boys."⁹⁰ Vignali's polemic against the clergy for their immorality, weariness, despotism, sinfulness, hypocrisy, and, conversely, the favor toward the condition of layman, was quite significant in such a desecrating context. Criticism was particularly directed at the abuse (sexual and of power) committed by friars against fellow brothers and worshipers in convents and through confession, the favorite means to access erotic and especially homoerotic life, which they generally practiced thanks to the protection of their *status*, while laymen were instead harshly reprimanded for it.⁹¹ Vignali's criticism seemed more than just a moral reproach; such a position hinted at the polemic against ecclesiastical celibacy and confession, of Erasmian if not Reformed origin. Calcagno did not only share it, he added a stronger and more critical twist against ecclesiastical power. Equally more extreme was his manner of promoting sodomy, which implicated the figure of Christ himself. If the sexuality of Christ was present in artistic depiction, with the symbolical function of the double nature of the Son and his power, and such iconography of John was common, Calcagno's interpretation found new endorsement from the end of the sixteenth century onwards, for example in Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593).⁹² In Calcagno's thinking, on the other hand, the misogyny that was evident in Vignali—who believed women to be the embodiment of negativity with their imperfection,

lewdness, falseness, boundless sexual desire—seems to be absent; this view made the homosexual, sodomitical relation entirely superior. It is unclear whether the former priest embraced the Platonism that, according to Maria Teresa Ricci, was behind Vignali's positions: in particular, his depreciation of the testicles, excluded from the sexual act, would have signified the refusal of a man's reproductive capacity, turning sodomy into "the expression par excellence of a platonic love with no other aims than pleasure," a love that is "productive for the soul," unencumbered by reproduction.⁹³ However, the superiority ascribed by Calcagno to homoerotic relations, experienced with no moral or religious prejudice, seems certain. In conclusion, it is for this reason that Calcagno can be considered an exponent of sixteenth-century libertinism. Like many others, he paid with his life for his aspiration toward freethinking and an unrestrained way of life in Italy in that century and beyond.

Notes

- 1 Giovanni Dall'Orto, "Adora più presto un bel putto che Domenedio. Il processo a un libertino omosessuale: Francesco Calcagno (1550)," *Sodoma* 5 (1993): 43–55, 43; see also Giovanni Dall'Orto, "La natura è madre dolcissima. L'accettazione nel libertinismo italiano dei secoli XVI e XVII," *Sodoma* 5 (1993): 27–41 (http://www.giovanndallorto.com/saggistoria/calca/calca1_e_2.html). This chapter further expands on a previous article I wrote on Calcagno's case: Lucia Felici, "Ateismo e sodomia nella Repubblica di Venezia: ancora sul caso di Francesco Calcagno (1528–1550)," *Riforma e movimenti religiosi* 8 (2020): 59–80.
- 2 Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, "Libertino, libertinage, libertinismo: una categoria storiografica alla prese con le sue fonti," *Rivista storica italiana* 2 (2008): 604–655, 636; and *Les Déniaisés. Irréligion et libertinage au début de l'époque moderne* (Paris: Garnier, 2013), in particular 373–413. In this regard, see also the fundamental essay by Luca Addante, "'Parlare liberamente': i libertini del Cinquecento fra tradizioni storiografiche e prospettive di ricerca," *Rivista storica italiana* 123, no. 1 (2011): 927–1001.
- 3 Umberto Grassi, *Sodoma. Persecuzioni, affetti, pratiche sociali (secoli V–XVIII)* (Rome: Viella, 2019), 148–156; Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, "Libertinismo," in *Dizionario storico dell'Inquisizione*, eds. Adriano Prosperi, Vincenzo Lavenia, and John Tedeschi, 4 vols. (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2010), 2: 904.
- 4 Luca Addante, *Eretici e libertini nel Cinquecento italiano* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2010), 138.
- 5 Addante, *Eretici e libertini*, xi; see also Addante, "Dall'eresia al libertinage e al deismo: vecchie e nuove prospettive sugli esiti del radicalismo religioso italiano," in *Ripensare la Riforma protestante. Nuove prospettive degli studi italiani*, ed. Lucia Felici (Turin: Claudiana, 2015), 173–183.
- 6 John Calvin, "Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des libertins qui se nomment spirituelz (1545)," in *Iohannis Calvini Opera omnia denuo recognita et adnotatione critica instructa notisque illustrata, series IV, Scripta didactica et polemica*, ed. Mirjam van Veen (Genève: Droz, 2005), 1: 45 qq.
- 7 Jérémy Barthas, *Nuovi sguardi sul libertinismo europeo. Machiavelli e i libertini fiorentini (1522–1531). Una pagina dimenticata nella storia del libertinismo* (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 2008); Addante, "Parlare liberamente," 979–980.

- 8 Grassi, *Sodoma*, 148–156.
- 9 Ruggiero Canosa, *Storia di una grande paura. La sodomia a Firenze e a Venezia nel Quattrocento* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1991); Guido Ruggiero, *Boundaries of Eros: Sex, Crime, and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); in general see Giovanni Dall’Orto, *Tutta un’altra storia. L’omosessualità dall’antichità al secondo dopoguerra* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2015).
- 10 Pierroberto Scaramella, “Sodomia,” in *Dizionario storico dell’Inquisizione*, eds Adriano Prosperi, Vincenzo Lavenia, and John Tedeschi, 4 vols. (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2010), 3:1445–1450; Fernanda Alfieri and Vincenzo Lagioia, eds, *Infami macchie. Sessualità maschili e indisciplina in età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2018).
- 11 Vincenzo Lavenia, “Between Heresy and ‘Crimes against Nature’: Sexuality, Islamophobia and the Inquisition in Early Modern Europe,” in *Mediterranean Crossings: Sexual Transgressions in Islam and Christianity (10th–18th Centuries)*, ed. Umberto Grassi (Rome: Viella, 2020), 65–88.
- 12 Giovanni Romeo, *Amori proibiti. I concubini tra Chiesa e Inquisizione. Napoli 1563–1656* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2008); Michele Mancino and Giovanni Romeo, *Clero criminale. L’onore della Chiesa e i delitti degli ecclesiastici nell’Italia della Controriforma* (Rome and Bari, Laterza, 2013); Francesco Benigno and Vincenzo Lavenia, *Peccato o crimine. La chiesa di fronte alla pedofilia* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2021).
- 13 On this subject, see Gaetano Cozzi, “Venezia dal Rinascimento all’Età barocca,” in *Storia di Venezia*, eds Gaetano Cozzi and Paolo Prodi (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1994), 6: 3–125; Federico Barbierato, *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop: Inquisition, Forbidden Books, and Unbelief in Early Modern Venice* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012); Andrea Dal Col, *L’Inquisizione in Italia dal XII al XXI secolo* (Milano: Mondadori, 2006); Addante, *Eretici e libertini*; Massimo Rospoher, *Oltre la sfera pubblica. Lo spazio della politica nell’Europa moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013); Massimo Firpo, *La presa di potere dell’Inquisizione romana 1550-1553* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2014).
- 14 Romeo Mancino, *Clero criminale*.
- 15 Dal Col, *L’Inquisizione in Italia*, 342–394.
- 16 The passages of the trial proceedings quoted throughout this chapter are an English translation of the original vernacular, which is reported in the notes; a patina of Venetian dialect—in terms of vocabulary as well as syntax—characterizes the accounts of several witnesses as well as Calcagno himself, making a literal translation impossible.
- 17 1. Ha ditto che non ge fu mai Christo, et che quello Christo che così è ditto de la persona era homo carnale, et che conosceva spesse volte carnalmente S. Iohanni et che lo teneva per cinedo / 2. Item ha ditto che l’hostia, et calice son tutte cianze, et non crede niente che li sia dentro domenedio / 3. Item ha ditto che un bel culo era el suo altar, la sua messa, l’hostia et calice et la patena / 4. Item ch’adora più presto un bel putto carnalmente conoscendolo che domenedio / 5. Item che va ricercando et paga molte persone che gli facciano haver di maschi per conoscerli carnalmente / 6. Item che se diveria più presto dar fede alla Metamorfofi d’Ovidio che al Evangelio / 7. Item che biastemato al dispetto de Dio / 8. Item che tien continovamente vita sporca / 9. Item che spesso si veste da mondano / 10. Item che è sfratato, et che non si è presentato all’ordinario, et ha commesse tutte queste cose, et continovamente commette, a scandalo de molti.
- 18 “praticando”; “ragionando de più cose”; “insieme”; “parlando familiarmente”

- 19 In the Vulgate version, “Erat ergo recumbens unus ex discipulis eius in sinu Iesu quem diligebat Iesus.” I refer to the 1945–1949 translation of the Clementine Vulgate of 1592 by Monsignor Ronald Knox.
- 20 “quello Christo che così è ditto è homo carnale, et che quello santo Iohanni era suo cinedo, et che se lo teneva appresso a tavola et l’amava tanto per simel effetto”
- 21 “non vi è Dio, et che non vi era né Paradiso né altro, ma che morto il corpo, è morta l’anima”; “il tutto se governava a caso”
- 22 “ciance”
- 23 “più volte ha detto che la Bibbia e li Vangeli sono Metamorphosi, e che se doveria più presto credere alli Metamorphosi d’Ovidio che alli Evangeli”
- 24 “Oh tu sei matto se tu dai fede alla Sacra Scrittura, che differentia è tra questa scrittura et li Metamorphosi d’Ovidio? Anci esso Ovidio è più verace che non è essa Scrittura”
- 25 “cosa più savia e prudente”; “darse bon tempo in questo mondo, che tutte le altre cose erano favole”
- 26 “erano persone del diavolo et che facevano questo per far star la gente in timor, et governar il mondo a loro modo”
- 27 “ora alle volte diceva che non credeva de queste cose della fede et alle volte diceva che crede la santa madre chiesa, et che alhora bertezava”; “era christianissimo”
- 28 “ho ben ditto a messer Iovita Ballino che era un giovine bello et che lui era el mio altar, la mia messa, l’hostia et la patena”
- 29 “non sapeva che fusse altra felicità che goder un bel putto”
- 30 “più e più volte esso prete Francesco m’ha ditto et pregato, se gli voleva far haver certi putti, che mi haveria datto ... per fargeli haver quatro scudi”
- 31 “Io so che esso prete Francesco ha recercato esso maestro Piero che gli volesse far haver un putto di Cinalij et un putto di Camarlengi per conoscerli carnalmente”
- 32 “prete Francesco quasi ogni notte teneva con seco a dormir un putino figliolo de una Caterina già massara de Meser Giovanni Antonio Savarisio, et me diceva che la notte lo teneva fra le gambe, et il giorno lo teneva in braccio, basandolo, et come vedeva qualche bel putto diceva: “Oh se lo potessi haver pagaria una bella cosa”
- 33 “vestito da secolare”
- 34 “andava de notte a putane, et me diceva che non li voleva se non sodomitare, dicendo che era cosa da plebei et bestie usare con donne secondo natura”
- 35 “Va’, sta’ con le bestie che tu doveresti avergognar”
- 36 “mai portato odio a ditto prete Francesco, ma sempre son sta’ inimico della sua vita scelerata, et potria essere che per questo me volesse male”
- 37 “più volte amorevolmente [...] de queste sue empietà”
- 38 “biasima et ha tanto in abominatione questo vitio della sodomia che non potria esser più”
- 39 “se ne è ditte tante in quella bottega che non me ricordo espressamente”
- 40 “parlar per burla”
- 41 “ch’ el non credeva in cosa alcuna, se non quel che se vedeva”
- 42 “Adoncha se po credere et dire de Cristo tutti li mali del mondo et ch’el teneva s. Giovanni per suo bardassa”
- 43 “uno de loro che non mi ricordo, me disse che credeva de quello san Gioanino, del quale gli aveva ditto altre volte – intendendo delle parole che ho sopraditte de s. Giovanni – et io gli respose che cosa voleva dir “ille quem diligebat, et qui recubuit super pectus eius,” quasi volendo dire quelle parole che io disse de sopra de san Gioani, et questo disse burlando.” Rumors about a homosexual relationship between Jesus and St. John were widespread in libertine circles from across Europe. On this theme, see Vittorio Fràjese’s contribution to this volume: “The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved,” 40–55.
- 44 “christianissimo”

- 45 “ch’adora più presto un bel putto carnalmente conoscendolo che domenedio”
 46 “da homo”; “non da christiano”
 47 “seductus, et ex quadam animi lenitate”
 48 “ignorantemente et da pazzo”
 49 “malcontento”
 50 “mai avuto intentione che le fusse vere”
 51 Mancino, Romeo, *Clero criminale*.
 52 Mancino, Romeo, *Clero criminale*; Canosa, *Storia di una grande paura*.
 53 Lavenia, “Between Heresy and ‘Crimes against Nature’”; Giuseppina Minchella, *Frontiere aperte. Musulmani, ebrei e cristiani nella Repubblica di Venezia (XVII secolo)* (Rome: Viella, 2014).
 54 “homo non solamente lutherano ma sceleratissimo nemico del nostro Signor Gesù Christo, [il] qual ha ditto parole e biasteme che quando le signorie vostre le aldirano con le sue castissime orecchie non potrà esser che non li facino grandissimo orrore, parole così neffande e turpissime del Nostro Signor e de san Zuan Battista [in realtà evangelista] che né mai turco né hebreo neanche i demoni non solamente le hanno mai dite, neanche imagnate”: Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV), Sant’Uffizio, Processi, b. 8, f. 10: letter of the Rectors of Brescia to the Council of Ten, dated August 16, 1550. In the file there are other letters from the Rectors about transferring the convicts, and there are references to letters of June 21, July 28, and August 13 concerning the transfer of the case to Venice: cfr. Dall’Orto, “Adora più presto un bel putto che Domenedio,” 53 and foll.
 55 ASV, Sant’Uffizio, Processi, b. 8, f. 10: letter of the Rectors of Brescia to the Council of Ten, dated August 18, 1550.
 56 “seminato e fatto li errori”
 57 “si che siano exemplo et terror alli altri”
 58 ASV, Sant’Uffizio, Processi, b. 8, f. 10; see infra for the other accused.
 59 “apostata heretico, et biastemator”
 60 “solennemente et con effetto”
 61 “alta et intelligibili voce astante populi moltitudine”: ASV, Sant’Uffizio, Processi, b. 8, f. 10.
 62 “la sentenza fatta contra prete Francesco Calcagno heretico, vicioso et bestemmiatore, fu letta et pubblicata, et quella ponendo in esecuzione, dal maestro di giustizia è sta’ tagliata la lingua ad esso prete Francesco, troncata la testa, et il suo corpo arso et brugiato con ardentissimo fuoco sopra essa piazza piena di moltitudine”: ASV, Sant’Uffizio, Processi, b. 8, f. 10: lettera dei Rettori di Brescia agli inquisitori di Venezia del 30 dicembre 1550.
 63 “membro putrido”
 64 Barbierato, *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop*; Addante, *Eretici e libertini*; Ottavia Niccoli, *Rinascimento anticlericale. Satira e propaganda in Italia tra Quattro e Cinquecento* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2005).
 65 “violenze, feste e bagordi”
 66 Gabriele Rosa, *Studi di storie bresciane* (Brescia: Studi tipografici, 1886), 154; Enrico A. Rivoire, “Eresia e Riforma a Brescia,” *Bollettino della Società di studi valdesi*, (1959): 33-57; 59-90, 105-154; Antonio Cistellini, “La vita religiosa nei secoli XV e XVI,” in *Storia di Brescia*, ed. Giovanni Treccani degli Alfieri, 5 vols (Brescia, Banca San Paolo, 1963-1964), 2:399-473; Aldo Stella, *Dall’anabattismo al socinanesimo nell’Italia del XVI secolo. Nuove ricerche storiche* (Padova: Liviana, 1969); Massimo Zaggia, *Tra Mantova e la Sicilia nel Cinquecento*, III: *Tra Polirone e la Sicilia. Giorgio Siculo, Benedetto Fontanini, Teofilo Folengo* (Florence: Olschki, 2003); Giuseppe Fusari, “L’eresia a Brescia,” in *Aspirazioni e devozioni. Brescia nel Cinquecento tra preghiera ed eresia*, ed. Ennio Ferraglio (Milano: Electa, 2006), 52-59; *Riformatori bresciani del ‘500. Indagini*, ed.

- Roberto Andrea Lorenzi (San Zeno Naviglio: Grafo, 2006); Addante, *Eretici e libertini*; Adriano Prosperi, *L'eresia del Libro grande. Storia di Giorgio Siculo e della sua setta* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2011); Giorgio Caravale, *Predicazione e Inquisizione nell'Italia del Cinquecento. Ippolito Chizzola tra eresia e controversia antiprottestante* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012); Brigit Blass-Simmen and Stefan Weppelman, *Transcultural Exchange in the Early Modern Age* (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2017).
- 67 Massimo Firpo, *Juan de Valdés e la Riforma nell'Italia del Cinquecento* (Rome and Bari: Laterza 2016), 99–100; Lucia Felici, *La Riforma protestante nell'Europa del Cinquecento* (Rome: Carocci, 2016).
- 68 See above, note 66.
- 69 Lucia Felici, “A regola d’arte. Letteratura e dissimulazione religiosa nell’Accademia ferrarese degli Elevati (1540–41),” in *Dis/simulazione e tolleranza religiosa nel mondo urbano dell’Europa moderna*, eds Elise Boillet and Lucia Felici (Turin: Claudiana, 2020), 127–148; Alessandra Mulas, “Per l’Hecatelegium primum di Pacifico Massimi,” *Letteratura cristiana antica* 10 (2009): 593–614.
- 70 Marco Faini, “A Ghost Academy between Venice and Brescia: Philosophical Scepticism and Religious Heterodoxy in the *Accademia dei Dubbiosi*,” in *The Italian Academies 1525–1700. Networks of Culture, Innovations and Dissent*, eds Jane E. Everson, Denis V. Reify, and Lisa M. Sampson (Oxford: Modern Humanities Research Association and Routledge, 2016), 112–115; Evelien Chayes, “Réforme, messianisme et divination dans les marges vénitiennes. Empreintes et emprunts orientaux dans la production littéraire de Brescia, XVI^e-XVII^e siècle,” in *The Italian Academies 1525–1700. Networks of Culture, Innovations and Dissent*, eds Jane E. Everson, Denis V. Reify, and Lisa M. Sampson (Oxford: Modern Humanities Research Association and Routledge, 2016), 243–273; Marco Faini, “Fortunato Martinengo e Ortensio Lando. Dubbi e dubbiosi alla metà del Cinquecento,” in *Fortunato Martinengo. Un gentiluomo del Rinascimento fra arti, lettere e musica*, eds Marco Bizzarrini and Elisabetta Selmi (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2018), 75–97.
- 71 Adriano Prosperi, “Teologi e pittura: la questione delle immagini nel Cinquecento italiano,” in *La pittura in Italia. Il Cinquecento*, ed. Giuliano Briganti, 2 vols (Milano: Electa, 1988), 2:582–591, 591; Querciolo Mazzonis, *Spiritualità, genere e identità nel Rinascimento. Angela Merici e la Compagnia di Sant’Orsola* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2007).
- 72 The information is in Giovanni Dall’Orto, “Adora più presto un bel putto che Domenedio,” 43, but the source quoted there is incorrect.
- 73 Massimo Rospocher, *Oltre la sfera pubblica*; Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Federico Barbierato, *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop*.
- 74 Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, 138–140.
- 75 Antonio Vignali, *La cazzaria*, ed. Pasquale Stoppelli (Rome: Edizioni dell’elefante, 1984).
- 76 Vignali, *La cazzaria*. Vignali was forced to leave Siena and the few published copies of the work disappeared until the eighteenth century. See Maria Teresa Ricci, “Antonio Vignali e la Cazzaria,” in *Extravagances amoureux. L’amour au de là de la norme à la Renaissance. Actes du colloque international du groupe de recherche Cinquecento plurale Tours 2008*, eds Elise Boillet and Chiara Lastraioli (Paris: Champion, 2008), 181–190.
- 77 “perché i coglioni, nell’atto del fottere, non entrano nel culo e nella potta?”
- 78 “cazzo, potta, culo, fottere e buggerare”
- 79 “la filosofia non è altro che cognizione delle cose naturali”

- 80 “La natura è cosa perfetta, così che ancora vuol che le cose, che sono fatte per osservare le sue leggi, siano cose perfette: la natura fu sempre benigna, larga e provveduta”: Vignali, *La cazzaria*, 37–52.
- 81 Vignali, *La cazzaria*, 42–53. Ignorance was a “great insult” (“grandissimo vituperio”) for learned men, as much as it was for women the fact of having relations with plebeians so that their “sexual escapades are talked about in barber shops and public squares [...] so that in bakeries and laundries their actions would be often practiced” (“fottisferi si bandiscano per le barberie e per le piazza [...] che a’ forni e lavatoi si tenga scuola di suoi fatti”). Nor would they have received true pleasure from the “idiots” (“idioti”), only capable of expressing themselves with the common love phrases.
- 82 Vignali, *La cazzaria*, 45 and foll., 58, 79, 86, and foll.
- 83 “il cazzo [è] cosa naturale e la potta e il fottere cose naturalissime e necessarie a l’esser nostro”
- 84 “del sì nobile animale quanto è l’uomo”: Vignali, *La cazzaria*, 51 and foll., 74 and foll. and *passim*. The male reproductive organ was called “matter,” because “of such perfection and such necessity among the created things, that without it neither men nor animals could be in the world” (“di tanta perfezzione e di tal necessità tra le cose create, che senza quello né uomini né animali possono essere al mondo”), the female one “nature” to indicate its importance in human generation; with regard to sexual activity, such matters were discussed as “why a woman’s ass is not hairy” (“perché il culo delle donne non sia peloso”), “why does a man after defecating look at the shit, why do women often want to be fucked, why does man strive to fuck often” (“perché l’uomo che ha cacato miri la merda, perché le donne desiderano spesso di essere fottute, perché l’uomo si ingegni a fottere spesso”).
- 85 “primo onorato”
- 86 Vignali, *La cazzaria*, 61.
- 87 “la quale, se avesse voluto che l’uomo non buggerasse, non l’arebbe fatto così dolce cosa e inoltre averebbe fatto che il culo non potesse patire il cazzo,” Vignali, *La cazzaria*, 61 and foll., 67 and foll.
- 88 Vignali, *La cazzaria*, 63.
- 89 “Non credo che in paradiso sia così soave il nettare e l’ambrosia, quanto è quella dolcezza che si sente col cazzo in un morbido, bianco e giovanil culo”
- 90 Vignali, *La cazzaria*, 60 and foll. Heaven was one’s own house, Purgatory was prison, Hell poverty, and life’s sorrows were the devils.
- 91 Vignali, *La cazzaria*, 53 and foll.; Romeo, *Amori proibiti*; Mancino, Romeo, *Clero criminale*.
- 92 Dall’Orto, “La natura è madre dolcissima,” 30 and foll.; Leo Steinberg, *La sessualità di Cristo nell’arte rinascimentale e il suo oblio in epoca moderna* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1986) does not mention it. On these subject, see the following chapter by Antonio Frajese.
- 93 Ricci, “Antonio Vignali e la cazzaria,” 188.