

Riccarda Suitner

# Venice and the Radical Reformation

Italian Anabaptism and Antitrinitarianism  
in European Context



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## Abbreviations

ASD	Archivi Storici Diocesani di Udine
ASVE	Archivio di Stato di Venezia
ACDF	Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
DBI	Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, ed. by the Enciclopedia Italiana, Rome 1960–
NDB	Neue Deutsche Biographie, ed. by the Historische Kommission der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1953–

## 0. Introduction

### 0.1 The Venetian setting

This book aims to shed new light on the history of the Radical Reformation in the Italian peninsula, and at the same time to write a chapter in research on the Reformation overall. We should first explain its title and subtitle. Why does the title refer to the Radical Reformation in the Republic of Venice and the subtitle to *Italian Anabaptism and Antitrinitarianism*?

The Republic of Venice is the only geographical area of the Italian peninsula in which a true Anabaptist movement developed in the sixteenth century, connected to that of other territories. As we shall see over the course of this investigation, Venetian Anabaptism and Italian Anabaptism are the same thing. Antitrinitarian conventicles also had a significant presence in the Kingdom of Naples.<sup>1</sup> These conventicles, too, form part of our narrative, as they were closely connected to (and partly influenced by) Venetian Anabaptism. In short, any discussion of the spread of Italian Anabaptism and Antitrinitarianism largely coincides with its Venetian history.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the establishment of the Roman Inquisition and some key trials had succeeded in radically undermining the network of Venetian non-conformist groups. The result was a diaspora whose history is known to the international scholarship: Bernardino Ochino, Celio Secondo Curione, Lelio and Fausto Sozzini, Matteo Gribaldi Moffa are intellectuals who, outside the Italian peninsula, took Antitrinitarianism to the heights of theological sophistication and have been the protagonists of Reformation studies in various European countries.<sup>2</sup>

However, there is another, lesser-known history that is the subject of this book: that of the Radical Reformation in the Republic of Venice during the sixteenth century. This history begins with the phase immediately following the Lutheran Reformation and preceding the European dispersal of the Italian exiles, and concludes with the partial survival of Anabaptist conventicles and individuals, who were often also Antitrinitarian, in the second half of the century.

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1 Firpo, *Riforma protestante ed eresie nell'Italia del Cinquecento*; Id., *Juan de Valdés and the Italian Reformation*; Addante, *Eretici e libertini nel Cinquecento italiano*.

2 See Cantimori, *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento*; Id., *Prospettive di storia ereticale italiana del Cinquecento*; Firpo, *Antitrinitari nell'Europa orientale del '500*; Rotondò, *Studi e ricerche di storia ereticale italiana del Cinquecento*; Hein, *Italienische Protestanten und ihr Einfluss auf die Reformation in Polen*; Caccamo, *Eretici italiani in Moravia, Polonia, Transilvania*; Church, *The Italian Reformers*. For a broad geographical perspective cf. Terpstra, *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World*.

Focusing on the Republic of Venice was thus not one option among many, but a necessary choice. During this book, it will become clear that the unique nature of the Radical Reformation as it spread in the Italian peninsula cannot be understood without analysing the situation in Venice.<sup>3</sup> We can only gain a full comprehension of this phenomenon if we consider the factors typical strictly of the Republic of Venice in the sixteenth century: specific characteristics not only favoured the spread of Anabaptism and Antitrinitarianism, but also made the Republic (and especially its largest city) an Italian stronghold of the spread of Protestantism and Calvinism.<sup>4</sup> The constant attempt to maintain independence from the Roman Inquisition, a relative (albeit self-interested) toleration, the substantial presence of religious and ethnic minorities, the anticlerical tradition, the centuries-old history of political independence (which lasted until Napoleon), Republicanism, humanist philology and the rationalist mindset developed at the University of Padua all helped to create fertile ground for the spread of intentions to break with Roman Catholicism.<sup>5</sup>

The book's Venetian focus does not mean that the story I will tell is a local one. The Republic of Venice was famously a 'global player' in the early modern period. This international dimension emerges not only from the point of view of trade or university studies, but also from that of religion. One of the aims of this book is thus to contextualise these events within a broader comparative framework, systematically linking the local and the transregional dimensions, with particular attention to the development of the Reformation in the Swiss cantons, southern Germany, Poland, Transylvania, Moravia, and Tyrol. The Kingdom of Naples, the Papal States and Trieste are also very significant foreign territories for this study. At the time they were politically dependent on Spain, the Pope and the Habsburgs respectively, and had their own armies and institutions responsible for persecuting religious dissent.

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3 This book will principally use the expression *Italian peninsula*. *Italy*, however, is not an incorrect term, despite its division into independent and generally competing states. The term *Italia* is often found in the contemporary sources used for this study, showing a degree of existing awareness of the linguistic and geographical features shared by the territories of the peninsula.

4 There is a vast literature on religious dissent in Renaissance Venice. See for example Martin, Venice's Hidden Enemies; Ambrosini, *Storie di patrizi e di eresia nella Venezia del '500*; Gullino (ed.), *La Chiesa di Venezia tra Riforma Protestante e Riforma Cattolica*.

5 See for example the verses of the *Contemplationes* by Pietro Speziali da Cittadella: "Impune ut liceat vestris decernite regnis/dicere evangelium, dicere verba Dei! [...] / Consilium hoc praestat vobis, qui vos amat, auctum/vestrum ac aeternum qui cupit imperium./Pro vobis stabit Christus, vos quaerite honorem/Christi, vos tanto nulla timete duce! [...] / Vos urbes aliae, pagi, castella sequentur!" (*Contemplationes Petri c.*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 1905, *Carmina Variorum auctorum*, fols. 256r–261v). On Speziali see Rothkegel, Caspar Schwenckfeld's Contacts to Venice and the Prison Poems of Pietro Speziali da Cittadella.

Within the Republic of Venice, the second city featuring in this book is Padua, which fell under Venetian control in the early fifteenth century. The presence of the university is crucial to giving developments in Padua their own specificities; in other respects, its geographical and political proximity to Venice makes it a typical example of the spread of the Radical Reformation in areas governed by the *Serenissima*. Thirdly, though the narrative of this book will focus principally (for reasons of both significance and availability of sources) on the Republic's two largest and most international cities, it will also make some forays into smaller towns and provincial villages. There, small Anabaptist and Antitrinitarian conventicles developed, in communication with the events and people of the two major cities.

The 1540s and 50s are key decades for this discussion, thanks to a multiplicity of concomitant factors. First, these specific years (and the preceding decade, the 1530s) saw numerous conversions to Protestantism and simultaneously the high point of the local Anabaptist movement, during which most of the figures discussed in this book are known to have been active. Second, these decades saw the first trials conducted by the Inquisition, established in 1542 with the papal bull *Licet ab Initio* of 21 July, but only coming into full force very slowly. For some considerable time after its establishment, the Inquisition found itself unable to decisively undermine the organisation of Venetian Anabaptists and Antitrinitarians as it did in the second half of the century. Since there was a remarkable disproportion between the trial itself and the punishment for the crime, extremely active conventicles coexisted in this period with fairly regular inquisitorial proceedings that can still be documented.

## 0.2 Before Sozzini and the "Italian Heretics"

The protagonists of this book do not include the best known members of the Sozzini family, who will play only a minor role in our history: they are named in the sources, but do not occupy a prominent place in the history of the Italian Radical Reformation before their exile. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the perception of Antitrinitarianism changed radically with respect to previous decades. In the wake of the international renown attained by Lelio and Fausto Sozzini, Antitrinitarianism was increasingly identified with Socinianism, which came to function ever more as a part for the whole, a label that both reduced doctrinal complexities and completely disregarded the Italian origins of the movement.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> On this issue cf. Suitner (ed.), *Early Modern Antitrinitarianism and Italian Culture/Antitrinitarismo della prima età moderna e cultura italiana*, especially the article by Brogi, *Arminiani e sociniani nel Seicento*, 86–109.

A similar phenomenon still frequently affects present-day historiography. Current scholarship is wont to consider the members of the Sozzini family, alongside Michel Servet, as emblematic of sixteenth-century Antitrinitarianism and among the most important exponents of the Radical Reformation as a whole, associated with the European popularity of ideas on tolerance and Christology. Many worthwhile studies have rightly been devoted to Socinianism, particularly in recent years.<sup>7</sup> However, the defining ideas of this movement are generally treated as if they originated with the Sozzinis, though many of them, as we shall see, are in fact typical of the Venetian Radical Reformation. The story of Socinianism cannot therefore be fully understood without knowing what preceded it.

Even more neglected in international historiography is the Italian contribution to the Reformation. Ample space has been devoted to topics such as the relations between Italian exiles and Michel Servet in the Swiss cantons and their importance for Reformation history, the role of Socinianism in the birth of Unitarianism in east-central Europe and its importance for later cultural history (for example for its influence on the later Enlightenment, for the history of numerous religious communities, especially Dutch and American). Yet these events are usually treated as if they originated entirely outside Italy from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards, with no discussion or even brief mention of prior developments on Italian soil. This book seeks to demonstrate that our story is not a mere *prequel*, to use a contemporary expression, to a better-known and more important one, but represents a fundamental chapter in the history of the European Reformation in its own right.

The phase of interest to us here is that preceding the migration of the so-called “Italian heretics of the sixteenth century”, to cite the famous and now canonical expression coined by Delio Cantimori: a less familiar phase, but one in which Anabaptism and Antitrinitarianism were already widespread in the Veneto. It has been rightly noted that Cantimori’s work, focusing mainly on the exile of Italians abroad, did not actually solve “the problem of the Italian roots of those same exiles”.<sup>8</sup> Brief references to the migrations of Italian dissenters into Switzerland and east-central Europe (Poland, Transylvania, Moravia) in the second half of the sixteenth century will therefore be made only insofar as they help us to understand the Venetian contribution to later Anabaptism and Antitrinitarianism.

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7 Salatowsky, *Die Philosophie der Sozinianer*; Daugirdas, *Die Anfänge des Sozinianismus*; Priarolo/Scribano (ed.), *Fausto Sozzini e la filosofia in Europa*; Schmeisser (ed.), *Sozinianische Bekenntnisschriften*; Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution*; Biagioni (ed.), *Sozzini e il socinanesimo*, with contributions by Id., Girolamo Imbruglia, and Emanuela Scribano; Quatrini, *I sociniani*.

8 Addante, *Giampaolo Alciati della Motta e gli eretici piemontesi nell'Europa del '500*, IX.

It is an extremely important fact (though one that is virtually never explicitly pointed out) that, especially in some areas, almost all the Italian-speaking exiles *religionis causa* came from the Republic of Venice. I will generally not consider migrations following the exiles *from* the Republic of Venice in the second half of the sixteenth century, but rather the role of migration *within* the Republic and *towards* the Republic and its importance in shaping the Radical Reformation in that area, which differed from how it took shape in other regions.

As well as being a centre of religious dissent, in the mid-sixteenth century the Republic of Venice was a hub for migratory movements of various types. German-speaking miners and mercenary soldiers populated areas of present-day Veneto, bringing with them the egalitarian aspirations of Tyrolean Anabaptism. Students migrated from northern European territories, introducing new books and theories into the Republic, where they mingled with the anticlerical tradition already well-rooted in the region. The Paduan professors who migrated to east-central Europe in the second half of the sixteenth century had often converted in Padua thanks to exchanges with their own students. A third migratory dynamic typical of this context was that of the descendants of 'new Christians' from the Iberian peninsula to Italy, establishing non-conformist groups particularly in the Naples area: some affiliates of this group, in turn, migrated to the Republic of Venice. Another type of migration was that from other Italian-speaking states and smaller towns of the Republic itself. This involved both people who moved to the Republic or to Venice specifically to be able to express – albeit obviously illegally – their religious beliefs in a more or less organised community, and people drawn by the various attractions of the area (like students, merchants or printers) who then embraced the Radical Reformation after their arrival.

Understanding these migratory movements is key to understanding the origins of the Venetian Radical Reformation itself: its characteristics are the consequence of converging migrations from different geographical directions. Overall, this study will show that it was the intersection of a combination of influences that gave the Radical Reformation in the Veneto its original character. These included Moravian Anabaptism, Judaism, Paduan medical humanism, and Tyrolean Anabaptism.<sup>9</sup>

Previous research on Venetian Anabaptism and Antitrinitarianism has remained almost exclusively confined to Italian historiography, which is also partial. The problematic issue of relations between Italian and transalpine Anabaptists has often been stressed,<sup>10</sup> but rarely addressed in reference to the Italian origins of the movement, preceding the international diaspora of Anabaptists and Antitrinitarians.

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9 In his classic *The Radical Reformation*, 851, George H. Williams had already hypothesised a multiplicity of concomitant causes, but without an in-depth discussion. Aldo Stella's studies have instead principally stressed the issue of philosophical mortalism and the Tyrolean component.

10 Caccamo, *Eretici italiani in Moravia, Polonia e Transilvania*, 12.



The exceptions are two monographs by Aldo Stella of 1967 and 1969, which are almost unique in acknowledging the autonomy of Venetian Anabaptism.<sup>11</sup> These monographs represent a fundamental starting point, although they fall short in terms of integration into the European context and doctrinal analysis, and require reconsideration in light of new international research. Another fundamental bibliographical precedent is the edition, published in 1970 by Carlo Ginzburg, of the trial of the key witness Pietro Manelfi.<sup>12</sup>

There are excellent overall reconstructions of the Reformation in Italy, studies on individual figures and specific areas, reflecting the extreme heterogeneity of the political situation in the states of the time.<sup>13</sup> During this book, moreover, I will occasionally cite short articles in Italian, mostly published between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, following the wave of anticlericalism that spread through Italian academia after the Unification, or in the second half of the twentieth century. These articles often provide valuable biographical information and contain some transcriptions of sources, but do not contextualise them within an overall picture (either Italian or broader), and generally do not even recognise their Anabaptist character.<sup>14</sup>

International Reformation studies are virtually silent on Italian events. In surveys and in classic studies on Anabaptism, Switzerland, southern Germany/Austria, northern Germany and the Netherlands, and east-central Europe are usually considered comparatively.<sup>15</sup> Even dictionaries of the history of Christianity largely fail to note the existence of Italian Anabaptists.<sup>16</sup> This absence can be explained

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11 Stella, *Anabattismo e Antitrinitarismo in Italia nel XVI secolo*; Id., *Dall'anabattismo al socinianesimo nel Cinquecento veneto*. Addante, *Eretici e libertini*, mainly centred on Valdesianism, also considers Venetian Anabaptism a religious movement in its own right.

12 Ginzburg (ed.), *I costituiti di don Pietro Manelfi*.

13 On individual figures see e. g.: Biagioni, Francesco Pucci e l'*Informazione della religione cristiana*; Biasiori, *L'eresia di un umanista*. Celio Secondo Curione nell'Europa del Cinquecento; Caravale, *Il profeta disarmato*; Camaioni, *Il Vangelo e l'anticristo*; Jacobson Schutte, *Pier Paolo Vergerio*. On individual geographical contexts: Adorni-Braccesi, *Una città infetta*; Dall'Olio, *Eretici e inquisitori nella Bologna del Cinquecento*; Olivieri, *Riforma ed eresia a Vicenza nel Cinquecento*; Peyronel, *Speranze e crisi nel Cinquecento modenese*; Addante, *Giampaolo Alciati della Motta*. Fundamental bibliographical repertoires on the Reformation in Italy are: Tedeschi/Lattis (ed.), *The Italian Reformation of the Sixteenth Century and the Diffusion of Renaissance Culture*; Albertoni (ed.), *Italian Reformation and Religious Dissent of the Sixteenth Century*.

14 Del Col (*L'inquisizione in Italia*, 270 and 272) has also emphasised the scarcity of studies on the 'radical' wing of the Italian Reformation conducted using modern historiographical criteria.

15 For instance Roth/Stayer (ed.), *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism* (particularly relevant to the topic covered in this book are the articles by C. Arnold Snyder and James M. Stayer on Swiss and German Anabaptism and by Martin Rothkegel on Moravian and Silesian Anabaptism); Clasen, *Anabaptism. A Social History, 1525–1618*; Brand, *They Had Said Nothing about Re baptism*, 155.

16 Es. Klötzer, entry *Täufer*, *Täuferturn*.

by many factors: linguistic barriers, but also the need to take a different approach to analysing the Republic of Venice, which was the major outpost of the Radical Reformation in the Italian peninsula thanks to some unique circumstances: an anti-Roman, anticlerical and satirical tradition, the presence of numerous foreigners, (relative) religious toleration, and the mobility and commercial vocation of the population. One purpose of this book is therefore to offer an analysis of the sources that is as comparative as possible.

Since the 1970s, various English-language publications have emphasised the internal distinctions within Anabaptism, moving away from the previously dominant thesis that supported an exclusively Swiss origin for the movement. Some studies, such as James Stayer's *Anabaptists and the Sword*, have focused on the issue of violence and resistance. Others have adopted the so-called *polygenesis paradigm*, named after a successful article that explained the doctrinally pluralistic character of Anabaptism with its relatively independent and polycentric origins (Switzerland, Austria and southern Germany, northern Germany and the Netherlands).<sup>17</sup> A later approach in international historiography has opposed these paradigms, noting the existence of a series of unitary theological beliefs that made Anabaptism, with all its linguistic and doctrinal differences, a recognisable movement with specific distinguishing features.<sup>18</sup>

In recent decades, a similar debate has taken place in Italian historiography, focused not specifically on Anabaptism but on the history of the Reformation in Italy as a whole, and resulting essentially in two contrasting interpretations. Some scholars, chief among them Silvana Seidel Menchi, have emphasised the systematic nature of the Reformation that took root in the Italian peninsula, the role of everyday life and of social aspects, and of doctrinal fluidity, in a phase prior to an ecclesiastical organisation that never took place. Erasmus was particularly popular for his promotion of a return to primitive Christianity and of an inner religiosity thought to constitute the essence of the Reformation in Italy. Susanna Peyronel, Andrea Del Col and other scholars have instead placed greater emphasis on the theoretical awareness of the Italian Reformation and the importance of the major theological themes of the transalpine Reformation on Italian soil.<sup>19</sup>

The sources that are the subject of this book and their interpretation and contextualisation within a broader geographical framework paint a very complex picture, which does not fully correspond to any of the theses just outlined yet at the same time

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17 Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*; Stayer/Packull/Deppermann, *From Monogenesis to Polygenesis*. For an analysis of the main twentieth-century historiographical orientations in English and German cf. Roth, *Recent Currents in the Historiography of the Radical Reformation*.

18 Cf. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*.

19 Del Col, *L'Inquisizione in Italia*; Peyronel, *Dai Paesi Bassi all'Italia. Il Sommario della Sacra Scrittura*.

finds elements of truth in both.<sup>20</sup> The Venetian Anabaptists belonged to ephemeral and precarious conventicles with a rudimentary clandestine organisation, not to a movement with a well-defined structure. All attempts to give it such a structure failed. Their theology was immature and peculiarly syncretistic with respect to that developed in other areas (though even elsewhere it was very far from complete and coherent).

Those who espoused the Radical Reformation, however, were neither eccentric outsiders cut off from each other and from developments in other regions, nor inexperienced and lacking in theoretical awareness. The protagonists of this book knew that they were the branch of an international religious organisation, and they were also cognizant of the differences that distinguished them from other groups born following the watershed of the Lutheran Reformation. From both the point of view of practical organisation and of doctrine, this awareness resulted in communication, however difficult, with other territories. Traces of this emerge in theological doctrines, in the means of communication and in some striking attempts to give the movement a centralising momentum. If we examine the ideas of the Venetian Anabaptists and compare them with those of the Radical Reformation in other countries, we will see that they do in some cases appear somewhat unsophisticated. However, overall their doctrinal elaboration, especially in some spheres (such as the doctrines on the mortality of the soul), achieved a significant degree of refinement.

This book aims to present the Republic of Venice as one of the strongholds of sixteenth-century Anabaptism, and Venetian Anabaptism as fully belonging to the main branches of European Anabaptism. Obviously, we do not intend to consider the Italian peninsula, where Anabaptism arrived fairly late compared to other areas, as one of its founding places. The geographically peripheral location with respect to Reformation territories does not mean, however, that the story told here is of secondary importance. First, the relatively ephemeral history of Venetian Anabaptism is highly original in the European context: this is the only area of southern Europe in which it developed, grafted onto a cultural tradition completely different from that of other regions. Second, with the migrations of its adherents, Venetian Anabaptism (including its Antitrinitarian component) played a leading role in the shaping the Radical Reformation in many other regions in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Although there are recognisable differences between conventicles, and sometimes between individuals, and the Inquisition itself (which tried many Anabaptists for Lutheranism) was frequently unclear on confessional boundaries, from a theological

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20 Guido dall'Olio came to similar conclusions but with reference to the spread of the Reformation in Italy as a whole: cf. *Id.*, *La storiografia italiana sulla Riforma in Italia (1975–1997)*, 46–49. However, in my opinion these reflections are better suited to the context of Venetian Anabaptism than to those inspired by the Reformation of Luther or Calvin.

point of view the Venetian Anabaptist movement had some specific characteristics. We are not dealing with imitators or mere repeaters of ideas developed elsewhere, but with an attempt at an original doctrinal elaboration, albeit short-lived and highly fragmented from many points of view. At the same time, the story told in this book fits fully into the European history of the Reformation and of Anabaptism.

To better understand the genesis, development and decline of this 'eccentric' Italian history, a two-pronged approach is needed. An in-depth discussion of its historical genesis and of the specific context in which it spread will explain its distinctive aspects within the broader European framework. On the other hand, attention to the aspect that we might describe as 'contingent' will not prevent us from incorporating the Venetian movement fully into the history of early modern Anabaptism, with constant recurring features that need to be analysed and understood.<sup>21</sup>

Both doctrinally and in terms of the practical organisation of the movement the situation is very complex. Some ideas, such as the rejection of infant baptism or scepticism towards the state, allow us to frame the Venetian movement unequivocally within a wider phenomenon. For this reason, although definitions such as *Anabaptism*, *Antitrinitarianism* or *Valdesianism* are somewhat approximate and not always fully accurate, we have tried to be as precise as possible in the terminology, clarifying the doctrinal nuances of a movement still in the making but evidently distinct from Lutheranism and Calvinism.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, other doctrines are typical exclusively of Venetian Anabaptism or more prevalent within it: these include a degree of pro-Judaism or mortalism. Yet other approaches, such as the attitude to violence or to the Trinitarian dogma, split Venetian Anabaptism into distinct camps, as in other territories, such as Moravia or the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The rejection of the Gospels or scepticism towards any form of religion were more individual developments, associated with figures who came to more radical conclusions than Anabaptism itself. Identical considerations can be made from the point of view of practical organisation. The Venetian Anabaptists tried to draw inspiration from some forms of organisation already tested elsewhere, and were aware that they belonged to a specific organisation that had an interna-

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21 Anselm Schubert highlighted the importance of combining research on historical development and theological analysis in Anabaptism studies: *Täuferium und Kabbalah*, 27–29.

22 On the term *Anabaptism* see further 2.2.1. Seidel Menchi, for example, chose instead to make very parsimonious use of confessional connotations in *Erasmus in Italia* (see in particular 21). She motivated this approach by the application of overly rigid dogmatic parameters to the study of the Reformation in the German historiography of the period, unsuited to the Italian movement, and by the very transversal object of investigation (Erasmianism). However, this approach proves unfruitful in reference to Venetian Anabaptism.

tional counterpart, but their attempts ran up against the difficulties of establishing a pro-Reformation enclave in Catholic territory.

### 0.3 From Paduan medical milieux to pro-Judaism: the specificities of the Venetian Radical Reformation

This book is divided into four sections to better illustrate the specificities of the Radical Reformation in the Veneto region. Diverse influences, ranging from sixteenth-century humanism and Aristotelianism, medical research, pro-Judaism and Antitinitarianism give developments in the Republic of Venice a peculiarly multifaceted character. Yet my intention here is not to claim that Italian events were radically separate or 'other', but rather to insert them into a broader context, bringing to light the links between the Radical Reformation in the Republic of Venice and that in southern Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Transylvania and Moravia, and with the Valdesianism of the Kingdom of Naples.

The first part of the book focuses on the practical aspects of the organisation of the Anabaptists: where did they meet? Who were they? How did a Catholic inhabitant of the Republic of Venice become an Anabaptist, and through what channels did he/she enter the organisation? We will see that this was a movement with a precarious but widespread organisation; that the number of Anabaptists active in the Republic of Venice in the sixteenth century was far greater than has been assumed in the few existing estimates; we will review the treatment that the Inquisition reserved for men and women, and also the expectations of their 'brothers and sisters.' Also significant is the overview of the places where the Anabaptists first came into contact with other Anabaptists, or met to administer and receive adult baptism: some of these may seem surprising (prisons and university classrooms), others have been considered controversial since the earliest histories of Anabaptism (the *collegia vicentina*).

The second part centres around the only attempt by the Venetian Anabaptists to organise an ecumenical meeting, the Venetian Council of 1550. This is the only aspect of the history of Venetian Anabaptism that has truly been debated at the historiographical level, but that will be considered here from a new perspective in light of the overall picture emerging from this research. We shall see that, although scholarship has often argued to the contrary or simply ignored this aspect, Venetian Anabaptism is closely connected to similar movements in other regions. At the same time, a systematic analysis of the confessions of faith of the Venetian Anabaptists will illustrate their originality and differences from the groups active in other areas. This section will also fully explain the book's title: in the Veneto region, Anabaptism and Antitrinitarianism were two distinct schools of thought, that in one phase intertwined closely and influenced one another. There was never a true transition

from Anabaptism to Antitrinitarianism, and neither ever really prevailed over the other. As such, it is both possible and appropriate to subsume both Anabaptism and Antitrinitarianism under the expression *Radical Reformation*.<sup>23</sup>

This section will illustrate the differences and similarities between Venetian Anabaptism and other comparable phenomena. Shared features such as the refusal to baptise children (albeit with a variety of approaches), the lack of a reference territory, and pacifism tell us that this was anything but an isolated movement (as previously thought). The proximity of Venetian Anabaptism to other versions of European Anabaptism was also spatial, thanks to the mobility of many of its members (a mobility which, as recent studies also confirm, was much greater in early modern societies than one might think).

The third part of this study will consider one of the most distinctive aspects of the Venetian Radical Reformation: the role of the University of Padua and of exchanges among its students and between students and professors, especially in medical circles. One of its signature doctrines, that of soul sleeping, arises directly from the debates that took place in the university's *Facultas artistarum*. This is the doctrine *par excellence* of Venetian Anabaptism and demonstrates the exceptional degree of sophistication and originality attained by the movement on some issues.

The fourth section will argue that the Venetian case study (thanks, above all, to the spatial proximity between different religious communities typical of urban life in Venice and of student life in Padua) lends itself particularly well to demonstrating a connection between some radical fringes of the Reformation, Judaism and, in part, Islam. For some time, scholars have attempted to investigate the links between Judaism and the Radical Reformation (partly in light of the recent tendency to

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23 The appropriateness of the historiographical category of *Radical Reformation* has been questioned on various occasions, especially considering the fluidity characteristic of the period immediately following the start of the Lutheran Reformation. There were strong theoretical divergences both among the Anabaptists themselves (for example in the attitude towards violence) and within the Magisterial Reformation (consider the greater 'radicalism' of the early Luther). The boundaries between the Radical and Magisterial Reformation are anything but clear; at the same time, the Anabaptists also experienced a phase of 'institutionalisation'. However, the expression *Radical Reformation* is in many cases unavoidable and is widely used in Anglo-Saxon, Italian and English historiography and to some extent in German historiography: see for instance Packull (ed.), *Radical Reformation Studies*; the anthology Baylor (ed.), *The Radical Reformation*; Williams, *The Radical Reformation*; Biagioni, *The Radical Reformation and the Making of Modern Europe*; Id./Felici, *La riforma radicale nell'Europa del Cinquecento*; Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism*; Kaufmann, *Die Täufer. Von der radikalen Reformation zu den Baptisten*. Recently, Thomas Kaufmann has rightly emphasised the legitimacy of using of the expression *Radical Reformation* considering the 'radical' nature of some of its typical ideas. The term does not necessarily imply, as has been argued in the past, isolating the Radical Reformation from the Magisterial Reformation or considering its constitutive ideas to be the sole result of traditions of religious non-conformism prior to the Reformation: Id., *Radical Political Thought in the Reformation Era*.

consider the Reformation in a global and transregional perspective).<sup>24</sup> In very recent times, good studies on the subject have appeared for other territories. The various Venetian districts were not completely isolated, but rather porous environments; despite the danger posed by mutual contacts, the lives of Jews, Catholics, Lutherans and Anabaptists crossed paths every day.

The various sections of this book also intend to consider the history of the Radical Reformation in the Italian peninsula in a new way, combining different research methodologies. The history of medicine, the comparative history of religions and the history of knowledge in particular play an important role, as do theories relating to sociology and mobility studies.

The Epilogue will briefly trace the history of the Venetian Radical Reformation following the violent and systematic repression by the Inquisition. Existing scholarship postulates the total disintegration of the movement in the second half of the sixteenth century, due to various concurrent factors. But was this truly the case? Conventicles and individuals (of all social backgrounds) actually survived throughout the sixteenth century and beyond. This will be followed by a consideration of the legacy of the history narrated here.

#### 0.4 The sources: a few preliminary observations

The main sources used for this study are the trial minutes of the Venetian Inquisition preserved in the Venice State Archive, the only large collection documenting the history of the Radical Reformation in the Republic. These materials are supplemented by those in the Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede in Vatican City (which holds various collections on individual cities of the Republic), and by documents preserved in other archives and libraries. For example, Trinity College library in Dublin has since 1854 held documentation concerning the Venetian trials originally from the Vatican archives. These sources have hitherto been used very little by scholars of the history of the Inquisition and the Reformation, and never in reference to the Radical Reformation.<sup>25</sup>

The trials of the Venetian archive are divided into numbered boxes (*buste*), each of which contains an average of 500–1000 folia distributed in trial dossiers named

24 Schilling/Seidel Menchi (ed.), *The Protestant Reformation in a Context of Global History*; Terpstra (ed.), *Global Reformations*.

25 Library of Trinity College Dublin, *Archivium Sancti Officii Romani, Sentenze, Ms. 1225 and Ms. 1226*. The Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome also holds inquisitorial material (Mss. 4204, entitled *Compendium Processuum Sancti Officij Romae Qui fuerunt compilati sub Paulo 3<sup>o</sup>. Julio 3<sup>o</sup>. et Paulo 4<sup>o</sup>.*); however, this proved useless for this study, as it contains helpful information on Venetian Protestantism, but not on the Radical Reformation).

in various ways: using the name of the accused, numbers, or more rarely the years in which the trial contained in a dossier took place (see figure 1 for an example: this is the beginning of a dossier in *busta* 41, containing the trial of Costantino Tessera). As we will see over the course of the book, each dossier holds not only the interrogations, in the form of questions and answers, but also the depositions of witnesses who knew the accused, sometimes abjurations, autograph letters, or specifications of the penalty to be inflicted.

This is a corpus of thousands of folia, and thus very substantial, but also one that has numerous shortcomings. One problem is that the documentation dates mainly to the period following the introduction of the Inquisition. Inquisition sources are notoriously biased and not always reliable.<sup>26</sup> The minutes of a trial are the product of three different agents: the individual(s) responsible for the transcription, the members of the commission, and the individual(s) questioned.

These are also very heterogeneous sources: some were transcribed while the interrogations were under way, others at a later point. The folia belonging to one or the other group are easily recognisable because in the former case the handwriting is much more difficult to read. It is extremely important to attempt to distinguish within each source between what has been deliberately distorted by the commission, what has simply been misunderstood, what has been reported using standardised expressions typical of legal language, and what is more 'genuine' and reflective of the words and thoughts of the accused because it does not conform to schemes already familiar to the inquisitors.<sup>27</sup>

The Venetian Anabaptist movement explicitly theorised an abolition of social hierarchies. For this reason, and for the social issues it advocated, the defendants (including the movement's 'theorists') represent a very varied social spectrum: peasants, shopkeepers, artisans, former friars, cloistered nuns, aristocrats and landowners. Overall, the transcripts of the speech of the defendants reflect, at least approximately, the general tone of their language. For example, there is a clear difference between the interventions of the more educated among the accused and those of humbler defendants. My translations from Italian into English (or more accurately from Venetian dialect, depending on how the witness and the note taker expressed themselves) attempt to reflect the sophistication or simplicity of expression of each speaker.

Despite the relative abundance of sources, there are very few autograph documents written by those directly involved in the events recounted here. These are mostly letters or abjurations or excerpts from doctrinal reflections. Other sources

26 On this point see 2.1.3.

27 A classic example is Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, which shows that behind the often standardised language of transcriptions the originality of the ideas of the miller Menocchio is fully apparent.



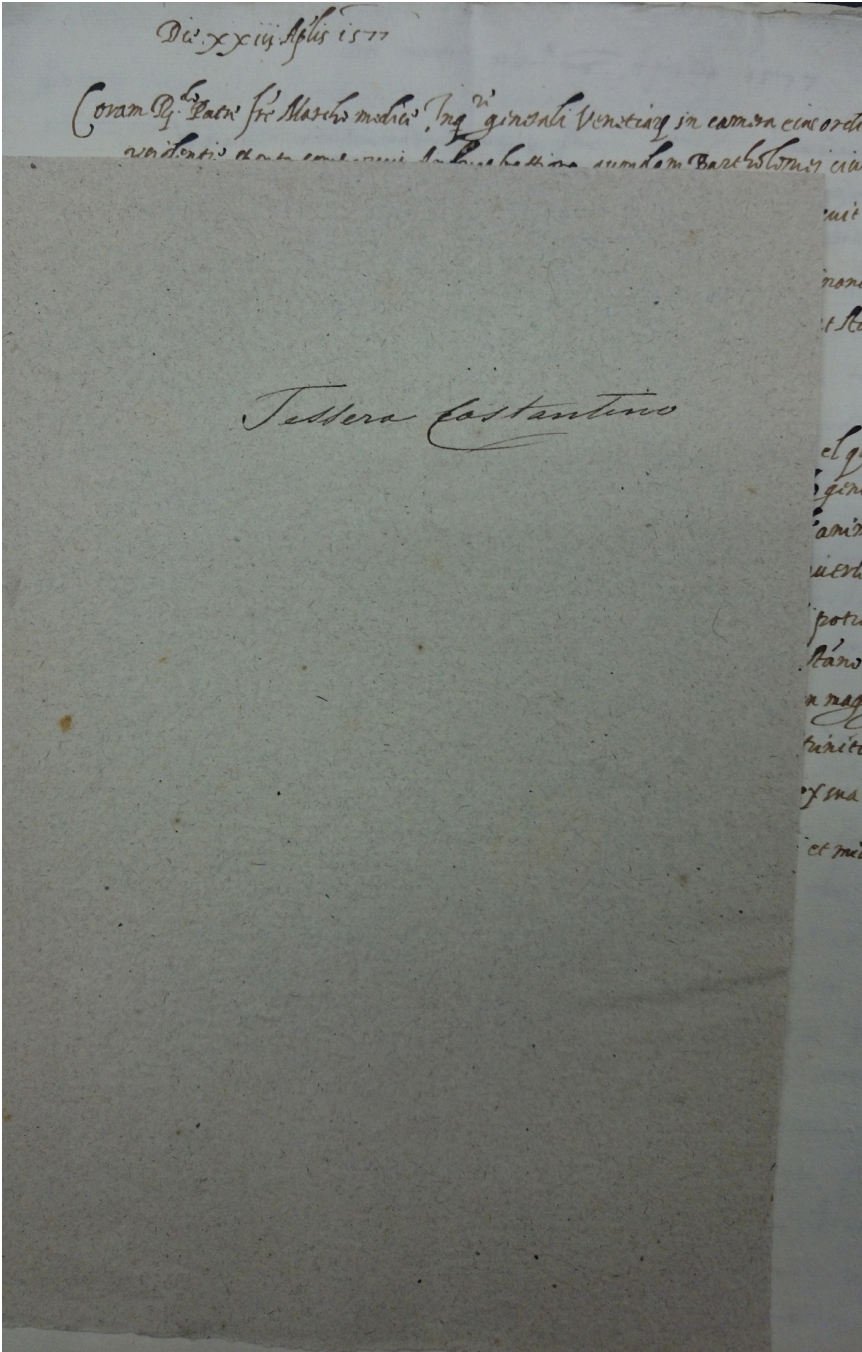


Fig. 01

to which I have found sporadic references in other testimonies have almost completely vanished: the transcripts, written or printed, of articles of faith, and the *libelli famosi*, or defamatory writings attacking inquisitors and bishops. These scant traces represent just the tip of an iceberg of lost material (in both manuscript and print), designed to evade censorship and rapidly reach a large number of recipients. The printed sources cited mainly concern comparisons with the Anabaptism of other regions; those in Italian mostly do not directly concern religious issues, but are texts on other topics (such as medicine) produced by people who, for reasons of prudence, did not wish to publicly express their religious views.

The surviving trials represent just one perspective on the overall history. Additionally, they concern only a small portion of the Anabaptists active in Venice and in the Republic. Identification of individuals was made difficult by witnesses' constant use of first names, by the use of pseudonyms and fictitious identities, by the clandestine nature of the Anabaptist network, by sudden flights.<sup>28</sup> The strong disproportion between surviving and lost sources has forced me in some cases to formulate hypotheses that are difficult to support with unequivocal documentary proof. Many of the hypotheses advanced are based on the concurrence of various types of clues, on textual comparisons, on the interpretation of the gap between the language of the Inquisition and the language of the witness, and on comparisons between the situation in Italy and that in other territories.

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28 See further 1.1.3.