

Contra medicos: *Physicians Facing the Inquisition in 16th-century Venice*

Abstract

Since the Middle Ages ecclesiastical authorities considered medical activity worthy of their attention and control. During the Counter-Reformation, they toughened their disciplining action, aware of the peculiarity of an *ars* which mixed together cure of the body and cure of the soul. Moreover, they became increasingly suspicious of professionals that were highly involved in the Reformation movement and who found the motivation to distance themselves from Catholicism in the epistemological premises of their job. Examining original sources from the Venetian Inquisition archive, this paper discusses the reasons which opposed the Roman Church and the medical profession, and describes the professional solidarity put forward by physicians. Also, it examines the problematic relationship between doctors and the Inquisition, dealing with the former as effective agents of heretical propaganda.

Introduction

The Venetian Inquisition has long attracted the interest of historians and historians of medicine for innumerable themes at the intersection of medicine, culture and religion in the early modern Republic of Venice. The extremely rich Inquisition archives, now held in Venice's *Archivio di Stato* and in other provincial sites in the former Republic, have proven invaluable addressing topics such as witchcraft, pretense of holiness, natural magic, possession and mental illness, popular healing practices.¹ Some scholars have also recently investigated the role of medical doctors in the repressive apparatus of the Inquisition². Outstanding figures of the medical world whose works were prohibited have also been dealt with in detail.³ Curiously, however, although the spread of evangelism and Lutheranism has, per se, been the object of a vast body of scholarship, the reception of Protestantism in medical

¹ Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice, 1550-1650* (Oxford, 1989); Jonathan Seize, *Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge, 2011); Anne Jacobson Shutte, *Aspiring Saints: Pretence of Holiness, Inquisition, and Gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618-175* (Baltimore and London, 2001); Sabina Minuzzi, *Sul filo dei segreti. Farmacopea, libri e pratiche terapeutiche a Venezia in età moderna* (Milan, 2016).

² Federico Barbierato, "Il medico e l'inquisitore. Note su medici e perizie mediche nel tribunale del Sant'Uffizio veneziano fra Sei e Settecento", in Alessandro Pastore e Giovanni Rossi eds., *Paolo Zacchia, Alle origini della medicina legale. 1584-1659* (Milan, 2008), 266-285.

³ Ugo Baldini, Leen Spruit, *Catholic Church and Modern Science: Documents From the Archives of the Roman Congregations of the Holy Office and the Index* (Rome: 2009).

circle was only dealt once.⁴ In a paper titled *Physicians and the Inquisition in Sixteenth-century Venice*, Richard Palmer described the problematic relationship between physicians and the Holy Office, focusing in particular on one relevant case-study, that of Girolamo Donzellini (of whom I will speak in the following pages too).⁵

In this paper, I widen the scope of the inquiry to the whole territory of the Republic. Grounding in a systematic analysis of original Inquisition archive sources, I will trace medical doctors investigated by the *Savi dell'Eresia* in the period 1540 - 1575. This examination will allow me to take into account the peculiarity of the medical profession in its relationship with religious non-conformity, from an epistemological, methodological and social point of view. I argue that, although Venice's ecclesiastical authorities were most worried by the alleged incredulity of medical *milieux*,⁶ the spread of reformed ideas in the medical environment was more than a sociological phenomenon in an age of general spiritual turmoil. Indeed, there was a deeper intellectual connection between medicine and religious dissent. Medical practitioners were additionally targeted by the Inquisition because of their heretical propaganda activity. Practicing with all sort of people, being well respected because of their specific professional mission (unless they behaved avidly), and as men of culture accustomed to the more sophisticated philosophical discussions, they could propagate heretical beliefs from a very favorable social position.

Medicine and the Inquisition in sixteenth-century Venice

In the sixteenth century Venice was notoriously “the gateway of the Reformation” in Italy.⁷ It was one of the most prosperous Christian cities, a cosmopolitan town hosting people from all over Europe, and a highly developed printing centre. The university of Padua – at the time probably the most renown for the study of medicine and philosophy in Italy and abroad – also contributed to making the Republic a very dynamic centre in cultural, philosophical and theological debates. Because the *Serenissima* was a fierce opponent of Roman political and jurisdictional claims, Venetian authorities created an autonomous Inquisitorial tribunal, the

⁴ On the Reformation movement in Venice see at least: John Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies. Italian Heretics in a Renaissance City* (Berkeley, 1993); Paul F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605* (Princeton, 1975).

⁵ Richard Palmer, “Physicians and the Inquisition in Sixteenth-Century Venice: the Case of Girolamo Donzellini”, in Ole Peter Grell, Andrew Cunningham eds., *Medicine and the Reformation* (London - New York, 1993), 118-133.

⁶ See Maria Pia Donato's article in this volume.

⁷ See the letter that Bernardino Ochino wrote on December 7, 1542, quoted in Massimo Firpo, *Riforma protestante ed eresie nell'Italia del '500: un profilo storico* (Rome – Bari 1993), 17.

Savi dell'Eresia, in which laymen worked side by side with clergymen; this, in turn, fuelled the reputation of the *Serenissima* as a tolerant place.

The Republic, therefore, appealed to people interested in religious experimentation. Especially in Venice, the circulation of books by Protestant authors was wide and doctrinal discussions were held in the streets, the houses, the book shops and the apothecaries. Among those men of culture interested in the theological debate, physicians were numerous and they often held leading positions in the Venetian heretical cliques. It should therefore not come as a surprise that the profession caught the eye of the Inquisition.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, while the repression of heresy strengthened throughout Italy, the whole medical profession was put under the control of the Holy Office. Theoretically, all physicians had long been subject to the rules imposed by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In particular, they had to fulfil the most basic one, the canon issued in 1215 by pope Innocent III, which required patients to confess in order to be cured. Yet, when in 1558 the patriarch of Venice summoned the *Priore* of the city's College of physicians and asked him to compel all physicians to abandon those patients who did not confess after the second medical visit, the College, firmly and unanimously, replied that physicians could not be forced to such a thing.⁸ This was the beginning of a long fight. A file in the Venice Inquisition archive titled «Contra medicos» documents how the tensions between the physicians and the Holy Office increased over the course of the century.⁹

Since Antiquity, medical theory had been grounded in the connection between body and soul.¹⁰ As a result, medical care inherently swung between a physical and a spiritual dimension. This circumstance put physicians in a peculiar position, and made them worthy of the special attention of any ecclesiastical institution. This is why in 1566, in the context of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, pope Pious V issued the bull *Super gregem dominicum*. Referring to *John* (8, 1-11) and to Innocenzo III's *decretale*, the bull directly linked the

⁸ Venezia, Biblioteca Marciana. Ms Ital VII (2342=9695), *Notizie cavate dai libri dei priori*, f. 9v.

⁹ Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV), Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contra medicos*, Busta (hereafter B.) 35. The episode is also examined in Palmer, "Physicians and the Inquisition", 120-121, and Alessandra Celati, "A Peculiar Reformed Minority: Italian Protestant Physicians between Religious Propaganda, Inquisition Repression and Freedom of Thought", forthcoming in Simon Burton, Michal Choptiany, Piotr Wilczec eds., *Reformed Majorities and Minorities, Confessional Boundaries and Contested Identities* (Göttingen, 2018).

¹⁰ This link has been broadly analysed by historiography. See in particular: Vivian Nutton, "God, Galen and the Depaganization of Ancient Medicine", in Peter Biller, Joseph Ziegler eds., *Medicine and Religion in the Middle Ages* (York, 2001), 17-32; Jole Agrimi, Chiara Crisciani, "Carità e assistenza nella civiltà cristiana medievale", in Mirko Grmek ed., *Storia del pensiero medico occidentale*, I, *Antichità e medioevo* (Bari, 1993), 217-259; Joseph Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion, c. 1300. The Case of Arnau de Vilanova* (Oxford, 1998); John Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul* (New Haven, 2006); Maria Pia Donato, Luc Berlivet, Sara Cabibbo, Raimondo Michetti, Marilyn Nicoud eds., *Médecine et religion: compétitions, collaborations, conflits (XIIe-XXe siècles)* (Rome, 2013).

physical and the spiritual sides of illness, which in turn was described as caused by both natural and moral causes.¹¹ Physicians were therefore put in charge of the purity of the souls as well as of the health of the bodies of their patients, and they were required to convince their patients to confess. In this respect, the *Super gregem dominicum* aggravated the regulations already contained in the 1215 *decretale* and established that, any doctor breaking the rule concerning the confession of patients would be expelled from the College of Physicians, deprived of the academic qualification of “doctor in medicine and philosophy”, and fined.¹² What is more, such violation entailed that the guilty physician was listed among those suspected of heresy in the city.

However, soon after the bull was issued, the College refused to apply it and stood against the Inquisition’s demands to interfere in medical practice. This led to the most clamorous case of professional solidarity among Venetian physicians. On September 20, 1571, a parish priest named Antonio Rocha denounced all physicians in the city to the Inquisition, asserting that, “in their own interest”, they did not make any effort to convince patients to confess and take the holy communion.¹³ Rocha was referring to a specific episode which had recently happened in his parish, but which was clearly not a rare occurrence. A member of the College, Antonio Secco, allegedly did not warn his patient to confess, and, what was worse, when the patient himself asked to see the priest, Secco replied that it was not necessary. As a consequence, the *gentil’uomo* died without sacraments, which caused Rocha to file a complaint to the Inquisitors. The judges acknowledged that the episode was serious, and quickly summoned Aloisio Bagnolo, the *Priore* of the College, in order to remind him of his religious duties and to insist that he ordered his colleagues that they respect the bull. Soon afterwards, the Holy Office published an official document which established that every breach of the bull (committed by whoever was in charge of people’s health, whether a

¹¹ Charles Cocquelines, *Bullarum, privilegiorum ac diplomatum Romanorum Pontificum amplissima* (Rome, 1745), 281.

¹² ASV, Sant’Uffizio, *Processi, Contra Medicos*, B. 35. On the *Super Gregem Dominicum* Bull, the role of confession in the ecclesiastic authorities’ strategy against the spread of heresy and the involvement of physicians in the Counter-Reformation see: Alessandro Pastore, *Le regole dei corpi: medicina e disciplina nell’Italia moderna*, (Bologna, 2006), 136-137. On the application of the *Super Gregem Dominicum* papal bull in some Italian cities see: Rosario Romeo, *Ricerche su confessione dei peccati e Inquisizione nell’Italia del Cinquecento* (Reggio Calabria, 1997), 107-114. The medical debate on the obligation to ensure confession to the dying patient, and on the opportunity to disclose a negative prognosis, continued between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century: see Maria Pia Donato, *Sudden Death. Medicine and Religion in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (Burlington, 2014), 162-165. In the same book the author also shows the extent to which death, especially if sudden, became a disciplining instrument in the hands of the Post-Tridentine Catholic Church.

¹³ “Jo son venuto per discargar la coscienza [...] perche mi par una cosa mal fatta che li medici sotto pretesto di non voler gli infermi, o per qualche altro suo particolare interesse non si cureno di persuader li infermi a dover confessarsi et comunicarsi si come è intervenuto nella parrocchia mia”. ASV, Sant’Uffizio, *Processi, Contra medicos*, B. 35, see the denunciation dated September 20, 1571. See also Palmer, “Physicians and the Inquisition”, 120-121.

collegiate physician or not) was to be interpreted as an act of rebellion and a declaration of heresy, and was to be punished with the prohibition of practicing medicine and the banishment from Venice.¹⁴ At the same time, an inquisitorial decree was spread all over the city by parish priests, announcing that, if sick, citizens had to call the confessor: if they did not, physicians would be compelled to abandon them.

Such a strong action by the Inquisition forced the *Priore* to obey: reluctantly, Aloisio Bagnolo summoned his colleagues and asked them to respect the bull (nonetheless, Antonio Secco was not prosecuted in any way). However, the Inquisition did not obtain the expected result. The file *Contra Medicos* shows that already in May 1572, that is eight months after that the whole professional category had been denounced to the Inquisitors, a member of the College, Prospero da Foligno, did not apply the Roman rules, leading his patient to die without confession. He was denounced by the priest of the San Zuan Grisostomo parish and was promptly summoned by the Inquisition in order to be interrogated. When Prospero was asked about the reason of his negligence he failed to adduce any convincing justification for that, and just replied: “I have no answer for this”.¹⁵ The source is incomplete, so we cannot know what happened to Prospero – who was summoned for a second interrogatory to be held in the following week, and which is not recorded in the file. Nevertheless, we do know that he attended the College’s meeting in the 1570s: enjoying the protection of his colleagues, he was able to get away with his breach of the Roman rules.

Indeed, while the Inquisition insisted on trying to make physicians bend to its will, the latter kept attempting to evade the ecclesiastical control. In 1579 and in 1589 the *Priore* was summoned again, and again he was asked to make his colleagues respect the papal bull, which is an indictment that, in their ordinary practice, medical doctors did *not* observe the Roman injunctions. In fact, on both occasions, speaking on behalf of the whole professional category, the *Priore* stated that applying the *Super Gregem Dominicum* was “not doable” because of “many difficulties”.¹⁶

The Venetian physicians’ reaction to the interference of the Church was somewhat peculiar in mid-16th-century Italy. At that time, most Colleges of physicians included the rule that imposed the confession of patients in their statutes, and approved repressive measures

¹⁴ ASV, Sant’Uffizio, *Processi, Contra medicos*, B. 35, see the Inquisitorial decree dated October 16, 1571.

¹⁵ “Io non vi so rispondere di questo”, *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Ms Ital VII (2342=9695), *Notizie cavate dai libri dei priori*, f. 17v. In 1579 «i 4 savi ordine (sic!) dell’inquisizione al collegio che li medici non visitino li infermi che non si confessano. Risposta del collegio non potervisi questo eseguire per cinque ragioni”. Ten years later the *Priore* was summoned again «perché faci osservare da medici la bulla di Pio V circa il visitar chi non si confessa. Risulse il collegio rispondere et addir le difficoltà», f. 21r.

against heretical physicians, in order to please the Roman Church and thereby consolidate the honour of the professional category.¹⁷ It is worth comparing the Venetian College of physicians to other contexts in the perspective of doctors' professional resistance to ecclesiastical intrusion. In Modena for instance, heterodox doctrines had been spreading out since the 1530s, and the medical community played an important role in the local heretical movement.¹⁸ For this reason, in 1550, the local College of physicians approved new regulations, meant to guarantee that the therapeutic activity was not controlled by the Inquisition. More precisely, it established that the College meetings were secret, and that physicians were not compelled to fulfil the city laws if these contrasted their deontological duty. The Statutes bore no reference to the *decretale* by Innocenzo III, which was obviously dangerous for professionals involved with heresy. The reform of the statutes was actually approved a few months after that Giulio III had issued a decree which assured mercy to every heretic who "spontaneously" surrendered and denounced his/her accomplices. The decree also established that, in case of a suspicion of heterodoxy, the confessor could impose the *spontanea comparizione*, under the threat of an Inquisitorial trial.¹⁹ Domizia Weber has argued that Modenese physicians, who probably shared non-conformist religious ideas and books with their patients, now feared that their heretical tenets could be exposed, and tried to protect themselves by reducing their patients' opportunities to get in touch with confessors.²⁰ Bearing this in mind, we can suppose that in Modena and even more in Venice, where the Reformation movement had been strong and where physicians had played an important part in the spread of heresy, the medical profession opposed the Roman interferences in a particularly tenacious way. The Modenese College's statutes did not even include the rule in 1580, when the *Super Gregem Dominicum* was published in the city (the delay was due to the persisting

¹⁷ On the acceptance of the Roman Church's pressures on controlling medical practice see in particular the case of the College of physicians in Verona, and the one of the College of physicians in Cremona: Alessandro Pastore, "L'onore della corporazione. Il Collegio medico di Verona tra il tardo Quattrocento e gli inizi del Seicento", in *Studi di storia per Luigi Ambrosoli* (Verona, 1993), 7-28; Luigi Belloni, "Gli statuti del Collegio dei Fisici di Cremona", *Bollettino storico cremonese* (1995-1997), 5-46.

¹⁸ On the spread of heresy in Modena see: Massimo Firpo, "Gli «spirituali», l'Accademia di Modena e il Formulario di Fede del 1542: controllo del dissenso religioso e nicodemismo" in *Idem, Inquisizione romana e controriforma. Studi sul cardinal Giovanni Morone e il suo processo d'eresia* (Bologna, 1992), 55-130; Susanna Peyronel Rambaldi, *Speranze e crisi nel Cinquecento Modenese. Tensioni religiose e vita cittadina ai tempi di Giovanni Morone* (Milan, 1997); Matteo Al Kalak, *L'eresia dei fratelli. Una comunità eterodossa nella Modena del Cinquecento* (Rome, 2011).

¹⁹ Elena Brambilla, entry *Spontanea comparizione (procedura sommaria)*, in *Dizionario Storico dell'Inquisizione*, 3 (Pisa, 2010), 834-836.

²⁰ Domizia Weber, *Sanare e maleficiare. Guaritrici, streghe e medicina a Modena nel XVI secolo* (Rome, 2011), 97-121.

refusal of bishop Morone to publish the bull as long as he was alive)²¹. So, if it is possible to consider the bull as a sort of “weapon” meant to eradicate once and for all the resistance of the medical profession, it is also arguable that, at least in some cities, that was ineffective a means. In Venice and in Modena, the solidarity of the professional category was stronger than its reverence to the Church.

Speaking of professional solidarity, it is also worth mentioning that the *Savi all’Eresia* archive bear evidence of physicians witnessing in favour of colleagues put on trial by the Inquisition – independently of how serious the allegations were. Antonio Secco (the same who was the protagonist in the *Contra Medicos* affair) defended Decio Bellebuono when the latter was brought in front of the judges for heresy in 1567.²² In that same year, the member of the College Lelio Rama informed his colleague Vincenzo Negroni that a trial was going to be set up against him.²³ Hercole Manzoni testified in 1588 in defence of Pier Paolo Malvezzi, who was accused of atheism and incest.²⁴ Clearly, the Venetian College rejected the Inquisition’s claims of control both because of ethical and deontological reasons, and because of the impressively high quantity of physicians involved in the city Reformation movement.

«The best physician is also a philosopher»: medicine and heresy among learned physicians

The Venetian medical world was particularly permeable to Protestantism and other strands of religious dissent. A systematic survey of the Inquisition records, combined with the study of the sources related to the activity of the College of Physicians, allows one to calculate the percentage of non-conformist doctors in the city. Roughly 25% of the total number of those who practiced medicine in Venice between 1540 and 1575 were inclined towards reformed positions.²⁵

²¹ See the letter that Giovanni Crepona sent to the Este Duke on January 22, 1580, quoted in Weber, *Sanare e maleficiare*, 119. On Giovanni Morone see Massimo Firpo, Dario Marcatto, *Il processo inquisitoriale del Cardinal Giovanni Morone. Nuova edizione critica*, voll. I-III (Vatican city, 2011-2015).

²² ASV, Sant’Uffizio, *Processi, Ad defensam Antonii Volpe de Ferrandina*, B. 23, see the deposition Secco gave on July 11th 1567. On Decio Bellebuono see William Eamon, “The Canker Friar. Piety and Intrigue in an Era of New Diseases”, in Franco Mormando, Thomas Worcester eds., *Piety and Plague. From Byzantium to the Baroque* (Kirksville, 2007), 156-176.

²³ ASV, Sant’Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Vincenzo Negroni*, B. 22, see the accused’s interrogatory dated April 12, 1567.

²⁴ ASV, Sant’Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Pier Paolo Malvezzi*, B. 46, see the deposition dated September 17, 1588.

²⁵ The calculations on which this output is based are discussed in Alessandra Celati, *Medici ed eresie nel Cinquecento italiano*, PhD dissertation, University of Pisa, 2016, 306-313. For a statistical examination of all the trials set up in Venice against religious dissenters (most of whom generically defined as “Lutherans”), see John Tedeschi, William Monter, “Toward a Statistical Profile of the Italian Inquisitions, Sixteenth to Eighteenth

The widespread circulation of reformed doctrines among medical doctors was due to many reasons, and in particular to the peculiar way physicians understood their professional role. The Italian heretical physician Girolamo Massari, who was compelled to flee from the Republic of Venice to Basel in 1551 for religious reasons, clearly maintained in his *Eusebius Captivus*, a pamphlet against the Roman Inquisition, that, as a physician, it was his duty to deal with spiritual matters as well as with natural ones.²⁶ He explains the reasons why he has decided to write about religious issues, by saying that: “Not only has the physician to know and to understand bodies, but he also has to show what the true medicine for souls is.” Quoting Galen, he adds that: “Since the good physician has to be an excellent philosopher, he is not forbidden from dealing with the aim of philosophy, that is to say: looking for the truth of things.”²⁷ And finally, as though medicine and religion were one, Massari concludes:

As a matter of fact, the writing of the holy history of the deeds of the Apostles did not cloud Luke’s medical profession, and it actually showed that those who were able to administer remedies to the bodies could reveal the celestial medicine to the souls as well.²⁸

Since the Middle Ages, religion and medicine had mixed with each other, shaping a medical learning and practice based on both the Classical and the Christian traditions. Sixteenth-century *medici-philosophi*, who graduated in arts and medicine in the Italian Universities and shared a humanistic background, considered the human being as a *sinolo* of flesh and soul, attributing to themselves the task of taking care of the wellness of the patient both from the physical and the spiritual point of view. Following Galen’s teachings, some actually thought that philosophy *was* the medicine of the soul, which possibly also inspired a peculiar sense of their professional mission. The overlap between the cure of the body and that of the soul and the references to Luke the Evangelist, the patron of physicians, were a

Centuries”, now in John Tedeschi, *The Prosecution of Heresy: Collected studies on the Inquisition in Early Modern Italy* (Binghamton, 1991), 105.

²⁶ On Girolamo Massari see Achille Olivieri, entry *Girolamo Massari* in *Dizionario Biografico Degli Italiani*, 71 (Rome, 2008), 359-380; Michaela Valente, *Contro l’Inquisizione. Il Dibattito Europeo (XVI-XVIII secolo)*, (Turin, 2009), 34-46.

²⁷ See the well-known work by Galen: *Quod optimus medicus sit quoque philosophus*.

²⁸ Girolamo Massari, *Eusebius Captivus: sive Modus Procedendi in Curia Romana contra Luteranos, in quo Praecipua Christianae Religionis Capita Examinantur: Trium Dierum Actis Absolutus* (Basel, 1553), 18. “Quanquam ne corporis quidem humani medicum dedecere arbitror, ut agnoscat, unamque ostendat, quae vera animorum sit medicina. Medico namque qui etiam optimus philosophus sit oportet, ut inquit Galenus, philosophiae scopum, qui ipsa est veritas rerum, ac morum probitas, pertractare non denegandum est. Neque enim Lucae medicam professionem obscuravit historiae sanctissimae de gestis Apostolorum scriptio, sed potius illustravit, ut qui corporibus medelam afferre noverat, idem quoque animis coelestem indicaret.”

commonplace in sixteenth-century medical culture. They legitimated a claim to deal with sacred matters, which in turn could result in a rational approach to theology: from there to the adherence to non-conformist positions the step was short.

Massari's *Eusebius Captivus* is not the only textual evidence of this. A polemicist covered behind the name of Alphonsus Lyncurius Terraconensis referred to the example of Saint Luke in order to defend and to eulogize Miguel Servetus (the well-known Spanish physician and theologian, sentenced to death by Calvin in 1553). According to Lyncurius, Servetus' shifting from a medical to a theological inquiry, with the purpose of revealing the true essence of Christianity, deserved special praise, as it mirrored the activity of the apostle.²⁹

Servetus's case is actually particularly explanatory of the intersections occurring between medicine and religion. As it is well-known, his thought combined theology, neo-platonic philosophy and anatomical research. In order to show how the Holy spirit was inhaled by men, he managed to discover the pulmonary circulation.³⁰ Servetus heresy lied in his divinization of man and in his denial of the dogma of Trinity, both being the result of the powerful action of the holy spirit. In fact, the three persons of the Trinity were nothing but different "dispositions" of the only God, who pervaded the whole universe -- as it was taught by neo-platonic philosophy -- and vivified man's soul through breath and blood circulation. Sharing Servetus' cultural background, considering themselves philosophers and being interested in a speculation which experimented in both medicine and theology, Italian physicians could naturally incline to absorb such positions. Indeed, historical sources show that Servetus' ideas, condemned by the Roman Inquisition as much as by protestant Churches, had an oral circulation and that his books, *De trinitatis erroribus* and *Christianismi restitutio*, reached other cities in Italy moving precisely from Padua.³¹ Even after Servetus was burnt at

²⁹ «Michael Servetus Villanovanus Tarraconensis, medicae artis peritissimus, Lucam illum medicum, cuius plurima in evangelio laus est, imitatus, quum plurimum ingenio valeret, et de veritate religionis mundum tumultuari nec non plurimorum scriptis et voluminibus infarciri satis aegre conspiceret, animum suum ad sacras literas subinde transtulit, in eisque omne suum Studium et ingenium collocavit". *Alphonsi Lyncurii terraconensis, Apologia pro M. Serveto*, in John Calvin, *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, vol. XV (Brunsvigae, 1863-1900), 53. Traditionally, historiography identified Lyncurius with the Italian exiles Matteo Gribaldi or Celio Secondo Curione. According to Ángel Alcalá, nonetheless, it is not possible to rule out that behind the pseudonym there was an unidentified Spanish Antitrinitarian, see Ángel Alcalá ed., *Miguel Servet, Obras completas*, 6 vols, (Saragozza, 2003), 287.

³⁰ On Servet see at least: Roland Bainton, *Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus, 1511-1553* (Boston, 1960); Claudio Manzoni, *Umanesimo ed eresia: Michele Serveto* (Neaples, 1974); Ángel Alcalá ed., *Miguel Servet, Obras completas*, 6 vols, (Saragozza, 2003);

³¹ Aldo Stella, *Anabattismo e Antitrinitarismo in Italia nel XVI secolo* (Padoa, 1969); Giuseppe Ongaro, "La scoperta della circolazione polmonare e la diffusione della Christianismi restitutio di Michele Serveto nel XVI secolo in Italia e nel Veneto", *Episteme*, 5 (1971), 3-44.

the stake in Geneva, his work circulated in northern Italy, thanks to some professors of Padua university and physicians who worked in Veneto.³²

The link between medicine and heterodoxy had epistemological grounds, but it was also rooted in the vibrant cultural environment physicians were breathing during their study (especially, but not exclusively, those who graduated in Padua). Not only could they get in touch with dangerous doctrines such as that of Servetus (not to mention the spread of radical Aristotelianism)³³, but the very philological method they became familiar with had an impact on their religious attitude.

Agostino Gadaldino, a physician from Modena who moved to Venice in the late 1530s/early 1540s is a case in point.³⁴ When he presented himself before the Inquisition in Venice in 1557 (taking advantage of the above mentioned edict of grace issued by Giulio III), he claimed that, as a man of culture, he was a curious person and, as such, he did not expect that “questioning the faith [in the Roman Church] was sinful”. His whole recantation is grounded in the legitimacy of “reasoning” on, and “questioning” Roman doctrines, while he never admitted to have outwardly embraced reformed tenets – actually diverging enough from some of Protestants’ doctrinal key points. He questioned the Pope’s authority, the necessity to pray to Saints, the real presence of the body of Christ in the holy host, and the feasibility of the chastity vow, but he kept believing in the authority of the Councils and he accepted confession as a sacrament.³⁵ Of course, when on trial, Gadaldino would minimize his crimes, and he would rely instrumentally on his profession, in order to justify his involvement in the heretical movement. Yet, the *topos* of the man of culture interested in the religious debate because of his mental *habitus* must have not been mere rhetoric. Moreover, if all physicians were obviously familiar with books and were used to systematic critical-philological textual analysis, for a man like Gadaldino it was even more so. Agostino was the son of a Modenese bookseller, well-known for his reformed positions: growing up attending a bookshop filled with heretical works, Agostino got to become familiar with heterodox readings. Even more important still, in 1541 he was in charge, as the chief editor, of the publication of Galen’s

³² Thanks to a letter written in 1560 by the Calvinist physician Guglielmo Gratarolo we find out that Servet’s books (for instance the one titled *De trinitatis erroribus*) was smuggled in northern Italy (from Pietro Perna’s print house in Basel) since the 1550s, especially through the action of the Padua professor Matteo Gribaldi (but the above mentioned Girolamo Massari was involved in this business as well), see Leandro Perini, “Note e documenti su Pietro Perna libraio-tipografo a Basilea”, *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 50 (1966), 162.

³³ Martin Pine, *Pomponazzi Radical Philosopher of the Renaissance* (Rome - Padoa, 1986).

³⁴ Historians have never dealt in detail with this physician. For some information about him see the entry about his father: Alessandro Pastore, entry *Gadaldino, Antonio*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, LI (1998).

³⁵ ASV, Sant’Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Agostino Gadaldino*, B. 13.

Opera Omnia.³⁶ He was supposed to check the philological accuracy of the texts and the precision of the translation from the Greek, and he so much devoted himself to this enterprise that he eventually fell ill.³⁷

The case of Gadaldino illustrates the extent to which, in the humanistic context,³⁸ the innovative interest in reading authors in their original version stimulated a potentially heretical inquiry into Scriptures, just as much as into ancient medical and philosophical works. Thanks to their familiarity with ancient and modern texts, and to their philologically oriented approach to learning, some humanist physicians were arguably receptive to a *sola scriptura* approach to religion. Moreover, sharing a critical attitude towards knowledge, they were inclined to question religious dogmas and scholastic truths, while their very religious experience seems to have been the result of a rational, free-thinking, “doubtful” approach to the sacred.

In other words, the intellectual, epistemic and methodological framework of renaissance medicine made it easily compatible with the Reformation. What is left to examine is the heretical physician’s social role in the sixteenth-century Venetian context, and to highlight the significance of this aspect with respect to the Inquisition’s persecution of medical doctors.

3. *Salus and heretical propaganda: a few cases*

The very medical practice put physicians in a peculiar social position, as they were able to build up a wide network of relations with people belonging to all social groups. This circumstance, along with their cultural dynamism and with the contacts they had with colleagues, humanists and printers all over Italy and abroad, put them at the core of the heretical web. More specifically, patient and doctor developed an intimate relationship at the sickbed, which included, according to the Hippocratic-Galenic precepts, the discussion of the past, the habits, and the interior life of the patient. To contrast pain and sickness, the physician was supposed to talk with his patient and help him recover an emotional and physical balance. Medical doctors were supposed to prescribe the correct *regimen*, giving advice on food as well as on sexual habits, suggesting how much to move, sleep, and work, and describing the physiological consequences of different emotional states. In so doing, physicians became

³⁶ Stefania Fortuna, “The Latin Editions of Galen’s *Opera Omnia* (1490–1625) and Their Prefaces”, *Early Science and Medicine*, 17, (2012), 391-412.

³⁷ Charles Donald O’Malley, *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels, 1514-1564* (Berkeley, 1964), 102-104.

³⁸ On physicians’ academic education see Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore, 2002). On the heretical potential inherent even in the speculation of a catholic humanist physicians, see Jean-Michel Agasse, “Girolamo Mercuriale – Humanism and physical culture in the Renaissance”, in Concetta Pennuto ed., *Girolamo Mercuriale, De Arte Gymnastica* (Florence, 2008).

“global counsellors” of their patients. Following Galen, “the doctor believed that his treatment would be more effective if he had the trust of the patient”.³⁹ The physician aimed to become «the faithful companion of the body of his patient»: as part of his deontology, and as a necessary condition for the cure, he had to strike up a relation of empathy with the ill.⁴⁰ The relation which saw on the one side men of culture, accustomed to philosophical discussion and interested in theological debate, and on the other side people weakened by illness, sometime socially and intellectually inferior, could lead the way to a pervasive propaganda, developing in mutual protection and complicity.

Inquisitors were well aware of the religious potential inherent in medical practice. When in 1571 the aristocrat from Pordenone Alessandro Mantica⁴¹ was put on trial for having held radical ideas, the judges asked him to prove that he had respected the *Super Gregem Dominicum* rules during the long illness from which he had suffered in 1566. Moreover, they repeatedly tried to obtain information about the physician who had cured him -- an unnamed medical doctor from Udine. One year before, during the interrogation of Niccolò da Pavia, a heretic who had fled to Chiavenna before being caught by the Inquisition, the judges overtly asked whether “any physician had helped him to escape or had been an accomplice to his religious mistakes”.⁴²

In the *Savi all'Eresia* sources, there is sound evidence of Venetian physicians' attempt to carry out heterodox propaganda. For instance, Teofilo Panarelli, the leader of a Calvinist clique in Venice, made fun of the relatives of a young patient of his who wanted to call the priest in order to bless the girl. The physician laughed at this suggestion, asserting that this was a superstition and saying that: “People do so many things which offend God!”.⁴³ What is more, soon before being caught by the Inquisition, Panarelli assisted his comrade in faith and colleague Giuseppe Moscardo at the time of the latter's mortal illness, persuading him to stick to his Protestant beliefs and to refuse confession till the very end.⁴⁴ Likewise, the medical doctor Girolamo Donzellini, repeatedly put on trial by the Holy Office, was able to convert

³⁹ Roger French, *Medicine Before Science. The Business of Medicine from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2003), 146. Sandra Cavallo and Tessa Storey, *Healthy Living in Late Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 2013).

⁴⁰ Roger French, “The Medical Ethics of Gabriele de Zerbi”, in Andrew Wear, Johanna Geyer-Kordesch, Roger French eds., *Doctors and Ethics: the Earlier Historical Setting of Medical Ethics* (Amsterdam, 1993), 84.

⁴¹ ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contra Alessandro Mantica*, B. 34.

⁴² Mariano Mantese, Giovanni Nardello, *Due processi per eresia. La vicenda religiosa di Luigi Groto, il Cieco di Adria e della nobile vicentina Angelica Pigafetta-Piovene* (Vicenza, 1974), 99.

⁴³ ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contra Ludovico Abioso e Teofilo Panarelli*, B. 32, see the deposition that Grazioso Percacino gave on July 18, 1568. On Panarelli see Palmer, *Physicians and the Inquisition*, 121; Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies*, 159-160, 180-182.

⁴⁴ ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contra Ludovico Abioso e Teofilo Panarelli*, B. 32, see Panarelli's interrogatory dated December 6, 1571. See also Palmer, “Physicians and the Inquisition”, 121.

two nuns in the convent of Santa Lucia while treating them.⁴⁵ He taught the two women heretical doctrines, and convinced them to break their vows and flee. The case of Donzellini is well-known by historians. Drawn into the reformed movement because of his intellectual curiosity, he was open-minded enough to develop his own approach to religion (a spiritual, irenic, ethical sort of Christianity). Being curious about the most innovative medical theories (such as those of Paracelsus and Fernel), he was able to combine them with Galenism in an eclectic way; as an expert smuggler of prohibited texts and an insatiable reader, he was sentenced to death (after having survived four trials and one plague) for the possession of prohibited books.⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly, his propaganda was pervasive and effective. In fact, Donzellini somehow embodies the archetypical heretical medical doctor.

Although not as renowned as Donzellini's, the most significant case of religious propaganda by a Venetian medical doctor is probably that of Vincenzo Negroni, a collegiate physician put on trial in 1567.⁴⁷ Witnesses testified that for eight years Negroni had attended the holy Mass without making any effort to dissimulate his hostility toward Catholicism, and overtly mocking the preacher (whom he later tried to convert too).⁴⁸ Negroni had been converted to Protestantism by a man called Pasqualino Boccalier; Pasqualino had assisted him during illness, and "as a sign of gratitude for that service", Negroni got more and more involved in the Reformation movement.⁴⁹ As I pointed out above, the condition of illness was in itself exploitable for the construction of heterodox relationships -- even in the case that the sick person was himself a physician. In 1569 Negroni was sentenced to public recantation, something which was particularly humiliating for a man who made a living on a "profession nourished by honour"⁵⁰. The Inquisition's strategy was to marginalise dissenting doctors and expulse them from any therapeutic context, if not physically eliminate them. As for Donzellini and Panarelli, they were sentenced to death despite their recantations.

⁴⁵ The figure of Girolamo Donzellini, a Venetian heretical doctor, has been examined in Palmer, "Physicians and the Inquisition". For further information on Donzellini see: Anne Jacobson Schutte, entry *Donzellini, Girolamo*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 41 (Rome, 1992); Pastore, "L'onore della corporazione"; Alessandra Quaranta, *La rete di scambi epistolari fra medici italiani e di lingua tedesca nel XVI Secolo: libertà di ricerca, circolazione del sapere ed esperienze confessionali*, PhD dissertation, University of Trent, 2016. As far as original archive sources are concerned, see: ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Girolamo Donzellini*, B. 39.

⁴⁶ Alessandra Celati, "Medicine, Heresy and Paracelsianism in Sixteenth-Century Italy: the Case of Girolamo Donzellini (1513-1587)", *Gesnerus*, 71, 1 (2014), 5-37.

⁴⁷ ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Vincenzo Negroni medico*, B. 22.

⁴⁸ ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Vincenzo Negroni medico*, B. 22, see the deposition that one Antonio mercadante gave on March 22, 1567.

⁴⁹ ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Vincenzo Negroni medico*, B. 22, interrogatory dated June 21, 1567.

⁵⁰ I draw this expression ("ho fatto professione di mia arte che vive dell'onore") from the *apologia* that Girolamo Donzellini wrote for the judges in 1560, ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Girolamo Donzellini*, B. 39, f. 52r.

The role of physicians as agents of heretical propaganda was even more successful outside the urban context. In small villages and in provincial towns, physicians enjoyed a relatively higher social status. This allowed them to take on a role of cultural and social mediators, promoting complex theological doctrines by teaching them to the illiterates in a familiar and comprehensible way. The doctor in Arts and Medicine Antonio Massimo opted for a *condotta* outside Venice with the declared intention of converting as many people as possible. As it is reported in the denunciation, he thought that in the countryside the inquisitorial action was not as dangerous as it was in Venice. Already when he was living in the capital, Massimo used to speak overtly about his religious ideas, and to express them during his therapeutic activity. For instance, he lampooned the apparition of the Virgin Mary in front of a young patient of his, and scorned the patient's family suggestion of making a vow to the *Madonna della Lanna* in order to help the girl recover⁵¹. However, according to the deposition the denouncer gave in 1560, Massimo was feeling disappointed about the results of the heretical activity he had been carrying out in Venice. He therefore decided to leave the city. First he moved to the area around Bergamo, and after a while he settled down in Oderzo, convinced that "this city was softer a ground [compared to Venice]."⁵² Massimo had to reduce his hopes and ambitions over the course of the decade, until he totally abandoned them: in 1571 he was listed among the Italian religious exiles that had sheltered in Geneva.⁵³

In rural context, amidst peasants and artisans, *medici condotti* (who did not share the high standards of their city colleagues)⁵⁴ did sometimes emphasise the social message of the Gospels in order to gain the trust and the favour of the population. Stefano de Giusti, an Anabaptist *medico condotto* who worked in Gardone, near Brescia, used to say that there was no point in making a difference between working and non-working days, especially for poor people who had to work in order not to starve, insisting on the fact that "God is happy with people's work, as much as with them going to the Mass".⁵⁵ Moreover, he proved his evangelical and charitable conception of Christianity by buying meat to feed all the ill in Gardone. Arrested in 1550, De Giusti soon accepted to recant.⁵⁶ Because of his willingness to

⁵¹ ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Antonio Massimo medico*, B. 32, see the deposition a woman called Lucia gave on October 29, 1560.

⁵² ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Antonio Massimo medico*, B. 32, see the denunciation, undated.

⁵³ Jean-Pierre Gaberel, *Histoire de l'église de Genève*, 1 (Geneva, 1855).

⁵⁴ On the role and the characteristics of early modern Italian *medici condotti* see Richard Palmer, "Physicians and the State in Post-medieval Italy", in Andrew Russell, Herzog August eds., *The Town and State Physician from the Middle Ages to Enlightenment* (Wolfenbüttel, 1981), 47-61.

⁵⁵ ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Stephano medico de Gardon*, B. 8, see De Giusti's interrogatory dated November 17, 1550.

⁵⁶ ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Stephano medico de Gardon*, B. 8, see De Giusti's interrogatory dated December 13, 1550.

collaborate, his sentence was light. Nonetheless, the judges imposed that he retracted both in Venice and in Gardone in front of his fellow villagers and would-be patients.

The case of De Giusti was not exceptional. Mixing up popular and erudite elements, socio-economic and spiritual claims, Anabaptism attracted many physicians -- like Niccolò Buccella⁵⁷ or the medicine student in Padua Lorenzo Tizzano, alias Benedetto Florio⁵⁸. As Aldo Stella has shown, Venetian Anabaptism absorbed the radical views that inspired the German Peasants' War, thanks to the mediation of the Tyrolese refugees who crossed the border after that the insurrection was repressed.⁵⁹ Moreover, as a result of the "Anabaptists council" that took place in Venice in 1550, the movement embraced the very radical doctrines put forward by the Neapolitan Valdesians who migrated to the Republic.⁶⁰ Possibly, the charitable attitude typical of the radical branches of the Reformation matched the ethical sensitivity of many Italian medical doctors, whereas the daring doctrinal speculations put forward by the Valdesians (on whether Jesus Christ had a divine or a human nature, as much as on whether one had to believe in the virginity of Mary) appealed to men of culture accustomed to a philological, rational interpretation of the Scriptures.⁶¹ Generally speaking, in fact, most heretical physicians held positions which did not fit into any of the existing denominations of Christianity, which was *per se* something dangerous from the point of view of the Inquisition.

Therapeutic activity also enabled learned doctors, as much as other healing figures, to spread heresy in potentially highly receptive environments like hospitals. These had been founded as sacred places aimed at poor sick, and were conceived as spaces in which the patient could enjoy a healthy environment, both from the spiritual and the physical point of view.⁶² Arguably then, the reception of heterodox ideas inside a hospital environment was precisely due to the highly religious atmosphere which pervaded these places, to the condition of suffering and anguish in which the inpatients lived and to the isolation the ill were forced to. The persistence of heretical ideas inside the Venetian Hospital for the Incurable and inside the Hospital of the *Derelitti* in the second half of the century suggests that these institutions, a

⁵⁷ Aldo Stella, *Dall'Anabattismo al Socinianesimo nel Cinquecento veneto: ricerche storiche* (Padua, 1967), 121-143; Caccamo, *Eretici italiani*, 51-60; Idem, entry *Buccella, Niccolò*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 14 (1972); Joanna Kostylo, *Medicine and dissent in Reformation Europe*, (Oxford, forthcoming).

⁵⁸ Mario Biagioni, Lucia Felici, *La Riforma radicale nell'Europa del Cinquecento* (Rome – Bari, 2012), 80.

⁵⁹ Stella, *Dall'anabattismo al socinianesimo*, 14 and following.

⁶⁰ On the radical Valdesians see Luca Addante, *Eretici e libertini nel Cinquecento italiano*, (Rome - Bari, 2010) -- on the Venetian Anabaptist council, 108-110.

⁶¹ On the significance of the concept of *caritas* in Christian medicine see Jole Agrimi, Chiara Crisciani, "Carità e assistenza".

⁶² John Henderson, Horden Peregrine, Alessandro Pastore eds., *The Impact of Hospitals, 300-2000* (Berna, 2007), 34.

product of Catholic action and devotion, could paradoxically become suitable spaces for the spread of heretical doctrines.⁶³ Here, the theme of salvation was omnipresent, fuelling a special attention to the spiritual dimension, often in a way that radically diverged from the Counter-Reformation discourse.

The *barbier agli incurabili* Zanetto Cipolla, passed religious non-conformist doctrines on to desperately poor and “incurable” patients of the hospital, gathering them in front of the hearth at night. Being an unlearned surgeon (who had been raised in the hospital as an orphan) Zanetto belonged to a different social class compared to most of the characters I am analysing. It was probably for this reason that he used to divulge his ideas focusing on socio-economical claims as much as on doctrinal issues. For instance, he used to argue that priests should give food to the patients of the hospital rather than waking them up in the very early morning in order to gather them for the Mass; or that priests were deceiving poor people regarding the evangelical doctrine in order to steal money from them.⁶⁴ His heterodox propaganda, his continuous outpourings of hostility toward the Catholic rituals performed in the hospital, and his refusal to admit his crimes caused him a one-year long trial, which resulted in a serious sentence. Zanetto had to publicly recant at the hospital, apologising with the inpatients that he had scandalised; in addition, he was to attend the Mass twice a week for five years, and pray the rosary in front of an image of the Virgin Mary every Saturday.

In a similar direction went the case of the *speziale* Francesco Castellano who run the apothecary at the *Derelitti* hospital in Venice.⁶⁵ What is most interesting about his case is the *speziale*'s radicalism, which led him to assert that it only existed “one law” of God, which worked for Jews, Muslims, Protestants and Catholics.⁶⁶ In asserting that it only existed one God, praying whom was sufficient to be safe, Castellano shared the same conception embraced by other heretics belonging to the medical context, although coming from different

⁶³ On Venetian hospitals see Bernard Aikema, Dulcia Meijers eds., *Nel regno dei poveri. Arte e storia dei grandi ospedali veneziani in età moderna, 1474-1797* (Venice, 1989). In this volume, see in particular: Richard Palmer, “L’assistenza medica nella Venezia cinquecentesca”, 35-42.

⁶⁴ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio, Contro Zanetto Barberotto*, B. 23, see the depositions given on February 4 and on March 10, 1568, respectively by Giorgio Veneto and Augustin di Zuan Battista (one hosted in the hospital for being sick, the other for being poor).

⁶⁵ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio, Contro Francesco Castellano*, B. 32. As archive sources show, in the sixteenth century apothecaries and barbers’ shops acted like important centres for the scientific and the religious discussion and contributed to the spread of heterodox ideas. See Federico Barbierato, “Dissenso religioso, discussione politica e mercato dell’informazione a Venezia fra seicento e settecento”, *Società e storia*, 102 (2003), 707-757; Filippo De Vivo, “Pharmacies as Centres of Communication in Early Modern Venice”, in Sandra Cavallo, David Gentilcore eds., *Spaces, Objects and Identities in Early Modern Italian Medicine* (Hoboken, 2007), 505-521.

⁶⁶ “Non intendeva tante leggi, di cristiani ebrei turchi ecc, Dio doveva fare una sola legge” ASV, *Sant’Uffizio, Processi, Contro Francesco Castellano*, B. 32.

cultural backgrounds, from the *barbiere* Zanetto Cipolla⁶⁷ to the above mentioned learned doctor Girolamo Donzellini,⁶⁸ to the alchemist Claudio Textor⁶⁹ and many others, who, led by their rationalistic approach to the sacred, ended up overcoming all religious denominations. As I already pointed out, medical radicalism did not match the disciplining ambition of the Roman Church. This contributed in digging a scar between the medical *milieux* and the ecclesiastical authorities, possibly fuelling the reputation of physicians as incorrigible atheists.

Conclusions

Analysing the range of charges cast against Venetian physicians, we can reconstruct how, why and to what extent medical doctors drew the attention of ecclesiastical authorities. There were specific spheres of people's lives and opinions that Inquisition judges thought it was their duty to inquire into: physicians' activities fell into all of them. The possession and distribution of prohibited books was the most common charge among physicians, which is unsurprising since medical doctors were men of culture. The excess freedom in expressing religious ideas, bringing out the original meaning of the Holy Scripture and/or *doubting* canonical interpretation, were widespread charges too – which is again explainable given physicians' intellectual liveliness. Finally, conscious, often radical, propaganda activity was certainly what scared the ecclesiastical authorities most and what represented the most serious charge to be faced by the accused within the trial. Because of their intellectual and social role in the community, doctors were indeed very well positioned in order to spread non-conformist religious views. In some cases physicians were also put on trial for faults directly related to their professional practice like breaking the Church's instructions expressed in the *Super gregem dominicum* papal bull, which was perceived as being opposed to the medical mission.

There was an intellectual proximity between medicine and heresy: the philological accuracy applied by physicians to the texts of Hippocrates and Galen could go hand in hand with the stress that the Reformation put on the concept of *sola scriptura* and on the biblical

⁶⁷ “L'ho udito anche a dir che non bisognava adorar tanti santi ma che bastava adorar un solo Dio” ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Zanetto Barberotto*, B. 23, see the deposition of Augustin di Zuan Battista given on March 12, 1569.

⁶⁸ In his treatise on anger, the *Remedium Ferendarum Iniuriarum Sive de Compescenda Ira*, (published in 1586, one year before the author was executed by the Inquisition), Donzellini maintained that: “Arbitramur enim unam solam, ac veram philosophiam esse, cum vera ac germana religione penitus consentientem, cuius finis sit veritas sincera Dei cognitio & cultus.” Girolamo Donzellini, *Remedium ferendarum iniuriarum sive de compescenda ira* (Venice, 1586), 2r.

⁶⁹ For information about the French alchemist Claudio Textor, put on trial twice by the Inquisition and sentenced to death in 1587 see ASV, Sant'Uffizio, *Processi, Contro Claudio Textor Francese*, B. 59 and Aldo Stella, *Dall'anabattismo al socinanesimo*, 159-185. As Stella has shown, although close to Calvinist doctrines, Textor was not a partisan of any religious denomination, claiming that: “A me basta che si creda in un solo Dio”.

exegesis practice. Furthermore, healing the body and healing the soul continued to be understood as the same mission throughout the century. This conception, already typical of the Christian medieval medicine, in the sixteenth century was emphasised by the re-discovery of the Galenic conception of philosophy as the medicine of the soul. This implied that the philosophers-physicians were supposed to deal with sacred matters as well as with profane ones. Physicians were often inclined to transfer the humanistic lesson from medicine to theology, especially in a context, like the Venetian, where the religious Reformation took roots so easily. In times of religious crisis, physicians found themselves involved in the theological debate and contributed to making it more radical, as they were used to theological and philosophical speculation. Finally, they stayed firm in their tendency to slip out of the control of the Church, as long as their professional practice and deontology were concerned. And this proved to be a long-lasting feature of medical *milieux* in early modern and modern Venice, Italy and beyond.