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Introduction, with Pig

WE HAVE TO START with the pig. The pig reminds us that words—however dry, eloquent, or erudite—have meaty physical consequences. The sermons at the heart of this book were built from high-minded words, but at least once they coalesced around a living and energetic pig stuffed in a box.¹

The pig was a surprising and unwelcome guest at a funeral. The funeral marked the passing of a famous and learned rabbi in Rome, Tranquillo Corcos the Elder, who died in the late 1640s. Jewish funeral processions in Rome left the cover of the ghetto, proceeding eastward, passing by the ancient church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin and near the Circus Maximus before arriving at the Jewish cemetery. Funeral processions provided one of the few occasions when Christians could observe large groups of Jews gathered together outside the ghetto for their own purposes, rather than to fulfill some ceremonial role foisted on them by others. Funerals were fraught with discomfort and the threat of violence.

This book is concerned with another kind of occasion when Christians observed a crowd of Jews in public: forced conversionary sermons, which became a defining feature of early modern Rome. Anxieties about conversion—effecting it, policing it, and proving its authenticity—saturated the early modern period. Conversionary preaching was the balm. Sermons to Jews in Rome, pressing them to convert to Catholicism, were mandated by a papal bull. They were staged weekly in public for roughly 250 years. Jewish attendance was compulsory and enforced. The content of the sermons themselves was either densely theological or sneeringly hostile—so much so that one preacher coolly informed his Jewish listeners, “I am certain that you will dislike this.” But Jews were never the sole audience in

1. BAV Borg. latini (Borg. lat.) 481, fols. 172r–74r.

the room. Crowds of Christian onlookers, Roman and otherwise, also regularly attended these sermons. Their presence was expected, celebrated, and understood from the outset to be necessary; preachers played to the gallery. The position of Rome's "preacher to the Jews" soon became a fixed and prestigious post. Although the legislation to establish similar sermons extended to other parts of Italy, in Rome conversionary preaching was more public, more consistent, and above all, utterly fundamental to early modern Catholic self-fashioning.

Sermons and funerals differed on the surface. Sermons were imposed from outside and resented. At heart they were intellectual, fusing theology, scholarship, and rhetoric. Funerals, in contrast, were internal, communal, and traditional; they fused ritual, movement, and death. This pig, however, reminds us that the two spheres were not so distant. They aggregated violence; anger could ferment in one context and erupt in another.

The pig arrived at the rabbi's funeral courtesy of a conversionary polemicist of exceptional zeal, Melchior Palontrotti. Perhaps it was no surprise at the time that Palontrotti did not simply seek to disrupt Corcos's funeral but also took a coarse and satiric approach: he organized a mock procession of local young men to counter the solemn funeral procession of mourners. At the head of the counterprocession, corresponding to Corcos's coffin, was the box containing the live pig. At intervals, the box was opened, the boys sang a song, and the pig's head emerged.

I don't wish to belabor the obvious here: that a pig is the primary anti-Jewish symbol, both culturally and religiously, habitually adopted by antagonists who wish to insult Judaism and signal their disgust with it.² But neither do I wish to ignore it. Pigs and Jews had history; Palontrotti's choice was deliberate.

Palontrotti was an expert in Hebrew language and scripture who had devoted his life to fighting Judaism.³ At the time of the funeral, he had

2. On January 25, 2014, three packages containing pigs' heads were posted to the Great Synagogue of Rome, the Israeli embassy, and a museum then showing an exhibition on memories of the Holocaust. An antisemitic letter was included in one of the packages. http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/01/25/news/teste_di_maiale_inviolate_alla_sinagoga-76891584 (January 25, 2014); <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/roma-teste-maiale-nei-luoghi-comunit-ebraica-liberman-986053.html> (January 26, 2014).

3. For Palontrotti, see Benjamin Ravid, "'Contra Judaeos' in Seventeenth-Century Italy: Two Responses to the 'Discorso' of Simone Luzzatto by Melchior Palontrotti and Giulio Morosini"; Fausto Parente, "Il confronto ideologico tra l'ebraismo e la Chiesa in Italia," 334–37; Giulio Busi, "La Breve raccolta (Venezia, 1649) del polemista antiguidaico Melchiorre Palontrotti"; Wipertus Hugo Rudt de Collenberg, "Le baptême des Juifs à Rome de 1614 à 1798 selon les registres de la 'Casa dei Catechumeni': Pt. 3: 1730–1798," 131.

recently capped off a decade's worth of angry treatises with a general compendium of antirabbinic arguments—the same kind that propped up forced sermons.⁴ He had also played godfather to at least one convert from Judaism, giving him his own surname on February 9, 1642.⁵ Palontrotti's aggressive personality comes through in the pig incident and in the fiery titles of some of his compositions, such as “A Whip against the Obstinacy and Stubbornness of the Jews.”⁶ In addition to his many publications *contra Judaeos*, says the manuscript describing the event, Palontrotti liked to hurl abuse (*sburlacchiava*) at synagogues. He commonly attended Jewish sermons in order to interrupt the rabbi and question his interpretation. He had a particular beef with Corcos, the chief rabbi, known as “Our Teacher” or “Our Rabbi.”⁷

When the funeral procession paused, so did the counterprocession. The youths would open the casket and let the pig stick out its head as one of them shouted, “Moreno [our teacher] is in the coffin. Let's see the proof,” and another, “That big head watches me; his wisdom has swelled even his bones,” and yet another, “Mazel ra [the opposite of mazel tov, meaning congratulations or good fortune]! The soul of the rabbi inside a pig!”

Besides shouting, they sang a taunting song celebrating the death of Corcos. The song mocks his character and the sorrow of his followers; it describes him as cunning, lacking in faith, and full of legal and grammatical learning, but ultimately the slave of Satan.

The students cry
That the rabbi died,
Who wore tefillin
But believed like Lavan . . .

4. Melchiorre Palontrotti, *Breue raccolta d'argomenti, cauati dalla sac. Scrit. & dall'antiche tradizioni di rabbini, con le quali chiaramente si prouano i dogmi della religion christiana contra l'hebraica perfidia*.

5. ASVR Casa dei Catecumeni 178, Liber Baptizatorum 1634–75, fol. 33r.

6. Melchiorre Palontrotti, *Sferza contro l'ostinatione, et peruicacia de gl'ignoranti Ebrei*.

7. BAV Borg. lat. 481, 172r. The full passage (translated here) reads, “Melchior Palontrotti [*sic*] of Rome was very expert in the Hebrew language and severe against the Jews. He printed [works] against their stupidities, went to synagogues and hurled abuse at them, and was often found at their sermons and interrupted them, noting their errors to the rabbi. In his time lived the principal rabbi and teacher (*morenu*), highly esteemed by all the ghetto, Rabbi Manoah. And when he died, Pallontrotti made a masquerade of the Jews who were on their way to bury Rabbi Manoah, carrying him in a coffin. But in his own [casket] he had put a live pig, with a device so that he opened the box a little bit whenever he wanted to, and the pig, called a *chazir* by the Jews, would stick its head out. The song that Pallontrotti wrote, he taught to the youths who made up his masquerade, and it is believed to be the first *giudiata* in Rome. It pretends to praise him, but it mocks him.”

Our teacher is dead,
Expert in giving judgment.
We could call him Our Rabbi,
Confederate of demons.⁸

The song, we are told, was composed by Palontrotti, who taught it to his troupe. It made full use of Palontrotti's expertise as a Hebrew polemicist.⁹ The song is in Italian, but almost every one of its seventy-eight lines contains at least one Hebrew word, frequently a biblical or Talmudic reference. The song concludes with a mocking stanza about the pig:

Have you read in the [Talmudic] tractate "Avoda Zara"
That pig is eaten in the world to come?
Behold our Teacher
Who, to reassure men and children,
Shows himself in the shape of a pig to everyone
Happiness to the wise! Joy to the elders!
Make a celebration, O Jews!¹⁰

Nobody in this scenario thought words were meaningless. Words, not pigs, gave Palontrotti his livelihood. And the carefully preserved, emotionally laden story of this song shows that Palontrotti was no lone wolf. He acted with the support, tacit or explicit, of a much broader Catholic establishment.

8. Piangen' Talmidim
ch'è morto lo Rabban
Che portava i Tephillin
Ma credeva come Laban . . .
È morto lo Moreno
Ch'era maskil nelli Dinim
si poteva dir Rabbeno
Confederato coi scedim

9. For further background and a full transcription, see Martina Mampieri, "When the Rabbi's Soul Entered a Pig: Melchiorre Palontrotti and His Giudiatà against the Jews of Rome." Mampieri and I each independently came across the manuscript that describes this event, unbeknownst to each other.

10. Hai letto mai nello Trattato Ngavoda Zara
Che si accola (גזר) il Chazir nel Ngolam Haba!
Ecco il nostro Moreno
Che per assicurar huomini e putti
In forma di chazir si mostra a tutti
Tutti insieme gridano
Simcha ai chachamim, sascion a Parnassim
Fate Chagh o Jehudim
(n.b. The transliteration of the letter ץ with "ng" reflects local Roman pronunciation.)

The manuscript that preserves the pig story was written up by Giovanni Pastrizio, an influential and well-connected professor of Hebrew; it is preserved in his collected papers. Pastrizio taught at the College of the Congregazione di Propaganda Fide, a new and robust branch of the Holy See's deliberate mission to proselytize the entire known world in the early modern period. He frames the story by describing Palontrotti's skill and erudition, recounting approvingly his history of disruptive actions. The song itself is transcribed in full, with exquisite care and meticulous attention to language. Annotations run alongside the lyrics throughout, providing both a Hebrew language original and an Italian translation for every transliterated Hebrew word, each numbered and keyed to the translation column. It is bound together with other sonnets, poems, and odes alongside material linked to Pastrizio's activities as a Hebraist, such as a poem on the Trinity, written in refutation of Judaism by a new convert on the occasion of his baptism.¹¹ Palontrotti's actions, carnivalesque as they seem, came straight from the world of intellectual conversionary rhetoric that animates this book.

Palontrotti's song was meant to change its listeners as well as wound them; it frames Jewishness as something to abandon in favor of Christianity. Forced conversionary sermons, too, were meant to change their hearers. They were intended to transform the lives and souls of Jewish listeners, and also their bodies, as they underwent baptism and might later birth Christian offspring. Indeed, sermons were meant to bring the death of the Jewish self and its rebirth as a Christian soul. This story, and others that will follow, encourage us to see rhetoric and violence as contiguous spheres. The pig in its box was carried directly along the thin line between speech and violence, and that line remains blurred or half erased, and sometimes eliminated entirely.

Forced preaching matters, in part because it served both as a symbol of that blurry line between speech and violence, and simultaneously, as the mask that enabled the fiction that the two were separate. Sermons to Jews were designed for this purpose. They provided the polished and public showpiece of a much broader, grimmer campaign to assert the triumph of Catholicism in Rome by subjugating and converting its Jews. As sermons earned praise and attention, they drew focus to an act of conversion by persuasion. By doing so, they enabled the more violent, coercive aspects of Rome's campaign, embodied by Palontrotti, to continue more silently at the same time, sometimes led by the very same people. Supporters of conversionary preaching could remain willfully ignorant of its darker side.

11. BAV Borg. lat. 481, 241r.

Sermons to Jews proved immensely useful to the early modern church and therefore they penetrated the society of Catholic Rome far more deeply than they penetrated Rome's ghetto. They offered many other uses and benefits for Catholic Rome besides self-congratulation. Sermons mattered most to the many people and institutions that launched and took pride in them, and so it was natural that the bulk of their impact would fall outside the ghetto. As this book will establish, sermons to Jews helped to define the New Rome of the early modern era in the eyes of locals, tourists, and visitors, including Protestants. They provided a prestigious step on the career ladder for ambitious curialists and showed off the city's intellectual heft. They became a point of pride for its Christian population. For Jews, forced preaching remained an unwelcome imposition. But out of necessity, it nonetheless fostered a tradition of creative Jewish resistance that took many forms and could even influence the direction of the sermons themselves.

Above all, sermons to Jews became a platform for debating and defending the new aspects of Catholicism that defined the early modern era. Sermons supplied an ideal opportunity to articulate and even proclaim what Catholicism now meant in the post-Reformation world, and why it was worth embracing. And no pulpit was better suited to this purpose than the conversionary one: sermons to Jews purported to address nonbelievers, who needed to learn the basics of Catholicism, but their messages also reached the many watching citizens, converts, and tourists, who were explicitly, though less openly, target audiences. Sermons to Jews rose to prominence in a tumultuous era. After the Protestant Reformation, Christian denominations in Europe competed for souls, and the Roman church sought triumphal validation for surviving the challenge. In this context, no spectacle could be more powerful than a robust public justification of Catholicism that starred its oldest antagonists. Conversionary sermons contained a paradox. They were never really intended for the conversion of Jews, at least not primarily, and Jews were never their sole audience. Their power lay in their spectacle, their widespread popularity, and the self-congratulatory fictions they allowed a population to believe about its noble missionary efforts.¹²



This book tells a story of early modern Catholicism in Rome with Judaism and Roman Jews at its center. In the early modern period, the city

12. On this point, see especially Anna Foa, "Il gioco del proselitismo: Politica delle conversioni e controllo della violenza nella Rome del Cinquecento."

of Rome re-created itself as a beacon of piety from which to proclaim a resurgent, global, triumphalist Catholicism. In the wake of the Protestant threat and Council of Trent, the Papacy and other religious institutions deliberately sought to transform the city into a model of Christian virtue. Their efforts brought not only the promotion of new devotional activities and the rebuilding of the city but also new attempts to regulate outsiders through segregation or integration. Rome's ghetto was established in 1555 amid a range of other conversionary measures.

In this grand display of devotion, Jews, the church's most ancient and challenging adversaries, were refashioned into key symbols; the great global campaign that would transform the early modern Catholic Church started at home. Rome's Jewish community was the only continuous Jewish settlement in Europe, and the oldest; Jews predated Christians in Rome. As a series of European traumas uprooted many Jewish populations, Rome's Jewish population was also growing rapidly and becoming increasingly visible. At the same time, as the beating heart and ancient seat of the Catholic Church, Rome generated most of Europe's anti-Jewish rhetoric, imagery, and conceptualizations. Thus in the *caput mundi*, the premier manufacturer of symbolic, imagined Judaism confronted Europe's most religiously symbolic population of living Jews at a fraught moment in both their histories.¹³ Much of Rome's anti-Jewish policy reflected, more than anything else, these imaginings and projections. To be sure, violence and diatribe also characterized relations with Jews, real or imagined, across Europe. Often the consequences were bloodier, deadlier, and more unjust than in Italy. But theological and physical assaults are not opposites so much as sliding points on a scale, sometimes distant, yet sometimes touching. In Rome, unlike nearly everywhere else in Europe, fictive, polemicized Jews and the actual local Jewish community were in equilibrium. Living Jews and imaginary Jews had equally deep roots and equal claims to antiquity, and were equally impossible to ignore. This mixture of symbolism, realism, and performance made the case of Rome uniquely potent.

13. On imaginary Judaism and other parallel terms, see David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*; Emily Michelson, "Conversionary Preaching and the Jews in Early Modern Rome"; Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*; Jeremy Cohen, "'Synagoga Conversa': Honorius Augustodunensis, the Song of Songs, and Christianity's 'Eschatological Jew'"; Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism*; Eliane Glaser, *Judaism without Jews: Philosemitism and Christian Polemic in Early Modern England*; Eva Joanna Holmberg, *Jews in the Early Modern English Imagination: A Scattered Nation*.

This juxtaposition, unprecedented and unique, took physical form at weekly conversionary sermons. At this event, both the living Jews of Rome and imaginary Jews of Catholic theology converged in a public, spectacular way. Conversionary preaching was a staged, ritualized performance that also carried complex social implications throughout the city. It fostered street violence and pamphlet wars, drew tourists and spectators, and blurred the boundaries between real and imaginary Jews. The weekly sermons held tremendous symbolic weight for the early modern Catholic Church. From the outset they were always also a public performance, designed to address Christian spectators as well as Jews. Conversionary sermons had a broad appeal to many in Rome. They drew support, attention, and labor from Catholic institutions and innovators from across the city. Clerics, citizens, pilgrims, and tourists all flocked to the weekly spectacle, aware of its novelties and significance. Sermons to Jews remained a defining feature of Roman life throughout the early modern period. As European tourists increasingly visited ghettos, and as ethnographic interest in Jews grew, sermons to Jews gained renown as one of the features that most defined and distinguished the city of Rome. In a city known as the theater of the world, public ceremonies proclaimed Rome's most important values.¹⁴ As a newly instituted spectacle with a broad audience, conversionary preaching offered a valuable opportunity to acknowledge interfaith tension, and transform it into an assertion of Roman piety and early modern Catholic identity.

Rome's roughly three thousand Jewish people comprised about 3 percent of its population, but their imaginary presence loomed much larger. The real Jewish people who heard the sermons were targets for proselytization and subject to the kind of deliberately offensive rhetoric they had heard from Palontrotti—or from the later preacher who made a point of telling Jewish readers how much they would dislike the book he had written from his sermons. But Jews at a sermon were also actors, playing symbolic versions of themselves for the benefit of a broad audience with other priorities than conversion. Unlike medieval public disputations between Jews and Christians, sermons took place consistently and frequently over a long period, and bespoke an increasingly international and global Catholicism. The performance of weekly sermons took its place alongside other newly created spectacles of public piety in Rome,

14. Pamela M. Jones, Barbara Wisch, and Simon Ditchfield, *A Companion to Early Modern Rome, 1492–1692*. See also Maria Antonietta Visceglia, *La città rituale: Roma e le sue cerimonie in età moderna*.

also intended to strengthen Catholic devotion. Conversionary sermons became the city's most powerful platform for promoting both conversion and Catholicism in a changing world. While preachers publicly offered theological critiques of Judaism as they understood it, they made their best case for choosing Catholicism over other faiths. Before a mixed audience of Jews, converts, Catholics, and other spectators, conversionary sermons celebrated the grand scope of early modern Catholicism.

This celebration thus relied on both the physical presence of Roman Jews and imagined notions of Judaism as necessary rhetorical props. It demonstrates that Jews, ideas about Jews, and rhetoric related to Jews were central to both the general evolution of early modern Catholicism and the religious landscape of early modern Rome. Conversionary preaching became a sort of vortex that absorbed the wide and contradictory variety of Catholic ideas about Jews. Early modern Catholicism cannot be understood without reference to these Jews and this spectacle. Attention to conversionary preaching rewrites the story of how the early modern Catholic Church, at the moment when it became a global religion, learned to present itself to the world.

Beneath all of these layers of meaning was a group of a few hundred people that assembled, willingly or begrudgingly, every Saturday afternoon in the Oratory of Rome's grandest new confraternity: Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini. This book reconstructs the priorities of the preachers who ascended that pulpit, the patrons who supported them, and the Jews who resisted them. It retells some tales that are well known to scholars, but presents many others for the first time. These characters and incidents reveal the vibrancy and violence that surrounded conversionary preaching. This book brings new material to the fore as well by examining an enormous cache of nearly unknown conversionary sermons and related manuscripts begging for further study. It offers close readings of sermons, but also situates these sermons and their stories in the broader history of Rome—its spaces and people. Through these investigations, it reminds us that high-concept anti-Jewish typologies (“imaginary Judaism”) never remained sealed away on an intellectual level. And it shows how living Jews, responding to these tropes, also influenced the course of early modern Catholicism.



Conversionary preaching has left a strong cultural memory, and continues to be evoked among Roman Jews and for the benefit of visitors to Rome's

Jewish sites.¹⁵ My approach to the topic throughout this book integrates, in innovative ways, fields of study often considered separately: Jewish studies and church history, social and theological perspectives, and urban and global histories. It seeks to balance a history of people with a history of texts to the extent that these can ever be separated. It builds on a surge of pioneering studies on both religious conversion and global Catholicism in the early modern era.¹⁶

This book also contributes to two long-standing historiographical challenges regarding the place of Jews in European history. The first, powerfully articulated by Debra Kaplan and Magda Teter, argues that scholars of early modern Europe continue to treat Jewish history as something isolated from mainstream historical subjects.¹⁷ The second challenge is inherent in the ongoing scholarship on “imaginary” Jews as a permanent aspect of western European thought that has served flexible, even contradictory, political and theological purposes. As an abstract category, it bears only tenuous ties to actual Jewish communities and their history. David Nirenberg’s work has provided one compelling demonstration of the deep roots of these “imaginary” or “hermeneutic” Jews. Literature on this topic, addressing many different historical periods, has mostly focused on Europe as a whole and largely theoretical concepts of Judaism, removed from its social contexts.¹⁸ It leaves unaddressed a critical question, especially for the early modern period: How did such abstract notions relate to actual Jewish communities in Europe?

15. See, for example, the following tour guide sites: <https://theromanguy.com/italy-travel-blog/hidden-gems-rome-jewish-ghetto/>; https://promptguides.com/rome/attractions/jewish_ghetto.html; <https://www.througheternity.com/en/blog/history/jewish-ghetto-in-rome.html>.

16. For some recent examples, see Theodor Dunkelgrün and Pawel Maciejko, *Bastards and Believers: Jewish Converts and Conversion from the Bible to the Present*; Tamar Herzog, *A Convert’s Tale: Art, Crime, and Jewish Apostasy in Renaissance Italy*; Robert John Clines, *A Jewish Jesuit in the Eastern Mediterranean: Early Modern Conversion, Mission, and the Construction of Identity*; Nicholas Terpstra, *Global Reformations: Transforming Early Modern Religions, Societies, and Cultures*; R. Po-chia Hsia, *A Companion to Early Modern Catholic Global Missions*; Erin Kathleen Rowe, *Black Saints in Early Modern Catholicism*; Karin Vélez, *The Miraculous Flying House of Loreto: Spreading Catholicism in the Early Modern World*.

17. Debra Kaplan and Magda Teter, “Out of the (Historiographic) Ghetto: European Jews and Reformation Narratives.”

18. In addition to Nirenberg’s *Anti-Judaism*, for different iterations of this theme, see Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*; Jeffrey S. Shoulson, *Fictions of Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Cultures of Change in Early Modern England*; Bruno Feitler, *The Imaginary Synagogue: Anti-Jewish Literature in the Portuguese Early Modern World (16th–18th Centuries)*.

Recent histories of late medieval and early modern religion have begun to address both of these challenges. Some scholarship analyzes a deeply held Christian attitude toward Jews, as with Nirenberg's 2013 *Anti-Judaism* or Teter's 2020 *Blood Libel*. Other works rewrite broad Christian or seemingly secular narratives in a way that irrevocably integrates Jewish people, such as with Kenneth Austin's 2020 *The Jews and the Reformation* and Francesca Trivellato's 2019 *The Promise and Peril of Credit*.¹⁹ A third approach focuses closely on the dynamics of local settings: Strasbourg and Poland for, respectively, Kaplan and Teter; Bohemia for Howard Louthan; and Rome for Marina Caffiero.²⁰ This book, by virtue of its close focus on one event, draws on all three approaches. It shows the involvement, and even preoccupation, of Catholic clergy and institutions with Judaism and the idea of converting Roman Jews. It also connects that interest in Judaism with wider attempts by those same institutions to evangelize the known world and make their church global. Third, it takes into account a local setting that was arguably the most compelling and high-stakes site in Europe for Jewish-Christian relations. Within the Eternal City, interreligious encounters and dynamics always bore additional symbolic weight, and especially so during the era of Roman renewal and Catholic expansion.

In layering cultural history with religious and theological approaches, this book examines the triple interaction of living Jews, living Christians, and the weighty preconceptions burdening them both. It shows, first, just how much Rome's global mission relied on interactions with Judaism, both theoretically and practically. Second, it demonstrates that imaginary and real Jews served overlapping functions in early modern Rome: conversionary rhetoric evoked imaginary Jews in the presence of real Jews. When preachers compared imaginary Jews to Catholics, Muslims, or pagans, living Jewish people in Rome suffered tangible consequences. Third, it reveals how the particular local context could also become

19. On this point, see Austin's argument that the Reformers' treatment of Jews undermined narratives of the Reformation as the herald of modernity and tolerance, and until recently remained an embarrassing topic for historians. Kenneth Austin, *The Jews and the Reformation*, xvi.

20. Debra Kaplan, *Beyond Expulsion: Jews, Christians, and Reformation Strasbourg*; Magda Teter, *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland: A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era*; Magda Teter, *Sinners on Trial: Jews and Sacrilege after the Reformation*; Howard Louthan, *Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation*; Marina Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati: Storie di ebrei, cristiani e convertiti nella Roma dei papi*; Marina Caffiero, *Legami Pericolosi: Ebrei e cristiani tra eresia, libri proibiti e stregoneria*; Marina Caffiero, *Il grande mediatore: Tranquillo Vita Corcos, un rabbino nella Roma dei papi*.

universal. The patterns of that triple interaction, as set in Rome, created a powerful paradigm that could then be applied universally to a global church and its missionary targets. Ultimately, both imaginary and real Jews aided the expression of a new early modern Catholic identity.

Finally, this book also promotes recent new approaches to studying early modern Catholicism by arguing for more attention to religious minorities. A vast edifice of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship was built on institutional records of the church's many congregations; these often-prescriptive sources portrayed a monolithic, uniform, and largely successful church. In response, current scholarship emphasizes porousness and flexibility at all the borders of early modern Catholicism: geographic, theological, and personal. Recent studies stress the marginal and peripheral, domestic, and transitory as well as shifting identities, reception, appropriation, and adaptation. Some of the most fruitful results have studied interactions and reciprocal influence between Catholics and non-Catholics in distant missionary contexts.²¹ This book provides a needed advancement of that approach by examining the contribution of Jews and Judaism, against which the church had so frequently defined itself. It shows that we must write the history of early modern Catholicism not only as a world religion but also as a religiously interdependent enterprise even at its core.



This book begins by re-creating the range of conversionary efforts that animated early modern Rome. The idea of “conversion” could be applied in different ways to all of Rome’s religious innovation, starting with the growing desire to create committed, educated Catholics, their hearts converted from sin. But the term’s more common meaning—switching religious confessions or affiliations—applied as well. In launching concerted missionary activity across the world, from Canada to Cochin, early modern Catholicism became the world’s first global religion. Both internal and confessional conversion also required the physical conversion of the city of Rome into the church’s exemplary capital, a new Jerusalem. At the core of these efforts lay a sweeping conversionary campaign targeting Jews.

21. For an overview of this trend, see Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen, and Mary Laven, *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*. For an exemplar, see Tara Alberts, *Conflict and Conversion: Catholicism in Southeast Asia, 1500–1700*; Matthew Coneyes Wainwright and Emily Michelson, *A Companion to Religious Minorities in Early Modern Rome*.

Forced preaching to Roman Jews must therefore be seen as part of—and indeed an emblem of—the broad range of conversionary efforts that characterized the whole of early modern Rome.

For these reasons, sermons to Jews were tightly woven into both elite and popular Roman society. Chapter 2 identifies the many sorts of patrons and supporters that kept them afloat. For even one conversionary sermon to take place at all, a few weighty Catholic organizations had to contribute. Enforcing the sermons almost every week over centuries required the deep investment of many more, from confraternities to print offices to treasuries. Such institutions committed enthusiastically. Conversionary preaching looked to them like a sure success story—a self-congratulatory initiative to be proud of. It made a stellar talking point for Catholics. Preaching to Jews gained cachet and lasted. Over time, the status of conversionary preachers came to lend prestige and authority to many other initiatives in early modern Rome. Many of these other initiatives had to do with conversion, but ultimately, conversionary preaching to the Jews touched groups and people ostensibly far removed from the Saturday sermon, becoming ever more deeply woven into the religious and institutional fabric of Catholic Rome.

Conversionary preaching also drew the attention of ambitious clerics from across and outside Rome. Chapter 3 traces the varied and sometimes erratic careers of conversionary preachers, drawn in the early days from many different backgrounds. The conversionary pulpit served some of these men as a stepping-stone to greater glory. For others it was a strategic career obligation; still others found it a lifetime calling. In introducing these men and reconstructing their lives, this chapter shows that preaching to Jews immediately became a point of prestige for preachers, and remained so even as the office itself transformed from a fashion to a fixture.

Sermons to Jews always took place in the public eye, with Christians present, observing the scene. This secondary audience of Christians remained intrinsic to the entire enterprise, even though conversionary sermons ostensibly addressed only Jews. Chapter 4 details how these various onlookers—a mix of local Romans and foreign visitors—became as much a target audience as the Jews. Preachers often spoke to them directly from the pulpit. Attending a conversionary sermon formed part of the Roman devotional landscape. It joined other new acts of public piety in Rome celebrating the city's resurgence, such as the pilgrimage to the seven churches or the forty-hour devotion. It also recalled the frequent public ceremonies that enlisted Jews, such as carnival and the papal investiture. Conversionary preaching fed the voyeurism of curious tourists too, especially those whose

homelands lacked large Jewish settlements. Grand tourists came to identify Rome with public sermons to Jews. Published conversionary sermons and related polemical literature extended that multilayered audience into print. In all of these ways, conversionary preaching reinforced early modern Catholic piety to a mixed and international Christian audience.

The last three chapters of the book turn more closely to the content of the sermons themselves, and the ways that preachers and audiences developed, shaped, and responded to them. Chapter 5 takes up the medieval European precedents that established “imaginary Judaism” as an enduring and powerful concept in Christian thought. Patristic conceptions of Jews reached their rhetorical peak in the public disputations of medieval Spain and Paris. Disputations determined the standard tropes and exegetical techniques for demonstrating the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. I compare this stylized rhetoric with another precedent that influenced early modern preachers: the sermons of fifteenth-century Italian mendicants. These fiery preachers addressed their preaching to Christians, but devoted ample pulpit time to practical relations between Jews and Christians in medieval towns. Their sermons resulted in palpable consequences: violence, expulsion, and economic transformation. This chapter seeks to account for continuities and differences between these two precedents, and the evolving conventions of conversionary sermons in early modern Rome.

At the same time, conversionary preaching reflected and promoted early modern Catholicism’s innovations and triumphalism. Its unusual departures are best revealed in an untapped cache of over 750 manuscript sermons by Gregorio Boncompagni Corcos, the subject of chapter 6. Boncompagni Corcos, a respected conversionary preacher of the late seventeenth century, held his position for nearly forty years, and left all of his handwritten sermons in good working order, almost entirely unknown to modern scholars. In these sermons he introduced unprecedented topics discussing Catholicism’s newest triumphs: recent religious orders, new saints, and the church’s global reach. He made these topics into tools of Jewish conversion as well as general Catholic education. He also formulated influential arguments for the continued importance of sermons to Jews in the Roman devotional landscape, and in so doing, revealed his own personal doubts and insecurities. His preaching confirms that Judaism, the church’s oldest antagonist, directly helped a resurgent early modern Catholicism to define itself while providing a context for the new “others” and new devotional priorities of the early modern period.

From the outset, Jews in Rome found ways to challenge the sermons forced on them. The final chapter reveals the evidence that Jewish people

regularly and consistently resisted and refuted conversionary sermons. By the late seventeenth century, they made formal protests to objectionable content in conversionary sermons, publishing letters and treatises advocating for better treatment. Preachers, in turn, sometimes responded to Jewish protests with letters of their own. These sources also expose the many ways, small and larger, that Jewish resistance forced changes in conversionary sermons in both content and delivery. I place these interludes against the backdrop of ongoing tension and frequent, sometimes staged acts of violence between Christians and Jews in Rome. At times sermons themselves provoked further violence and ritualized mockery, blurring the distinction between theological objections to Jewish ideas and social objections to Jewish neighbors.



This book reconstructs a history of violence, trauma, and tragedy, carried out by people who firmly believed they were doing the right and moral thing. I wrote it, in part, in the knowledge that this still happens. Between the time I first began this research and its final publication, we have all moved sharply into a new political world, in which the treatment of marginalized peoples, and indeed, the shifting locations of those margins, remain current and burningly important questions. Governments fall or rise over the question of precisely how to define who is foreign and who is native, and how much so. Debates persist over whether coercion or persuasion is more just or effective, especially in cases where antagonists regard each other with suspicion, ignorance, or fear. Both my native and my adopted countries are riven by such disagreements; both unjustly continue to unsettle, expel, or enclose people in defiance of legal and human rights. The COVID-19 pandemic has only clarified how quick and deep-rooted is the general instinct to find scapegoats, however unjustified. And in both of my countries, as in many others, political and religious leaders continue to invoke Jews and Judaism, frequently disconnected from actual Jewish life or tradition, as a way of tacitly addressing or dehumanizing other audiences.

Rome's Jews provide a valuable model for considering these problems. They were simultaneously natives and foreigners, or "intimate outsiders" in Tom Cohen's useful phrase.²² Jews had lived in Rome continuously

22. Thomas V. Cohen, "The Case of the Mysterious Coil of Rope: Street Life and Jewish Persona in Rome in the Middle of the Sixteenth Century," 221.

since before the dawn of Christianity. But the era with which this book is concerned saw a clear and deliberate shift in Rome's policy toward Jews. Where they once had been fairly well (though not entirely) tolerated, accepted, and integrated—unlike many places in Europe—they were now segregated, deliberately impoverished, and more thoroughly derided. Other minorities, less well rooted in the city, suffered from similar treatment. As Caffiero has suggested, Roman Jews, through a process of small redefinitions and legislative tweaks, found their status gradually altered; they were reimagined as heretics and so placed under the supervision of the Holy Office.²³ Although they were native Romans, they were recast as legal outsiders.

The religious polarization of early modern Europe presages the polarizations of our own era. Indeed, the stakes surely seemed even higher to early modern preachers than they do to us. For many of us, our own convictions, however strongly held, primarily concern the fate of the living, not the destiny of the dead. Preachers in the early modern world, in contrast, would have said that their mission was eternal. Any soul they failed to save faced damnation and hellfire for eternity. Their road to respectful interaction between faiths was narrow, with precipices on each side.

Then again, the stakes feel plenty high to us today as well. What does this history of early modern Rome offer to our own fraught society? In this book, I try to show how fears and concerns specific to early modern Rome were projected onto Jewish people, who suffered largely because of the preconceptions of others. It examines the particular ways that early modern Roman Jews were despised less for who they were than for what they symbolized. But it takes little imagination to see that many groups targeted today are equally victims of unjust projections, specific to the circumstances. At the risk of seeming to preach in a book that identifies preaching with violence, I want my research to make it clear how layers of misunderstanding, false labeling, and stereotyping build up gradually and take ever deeper root over centuries. Good intentions alone cannot dislodge these deeply entrenched attitudes, but an understanding of their history can help us to begin.

23. Marina Caffiero, "Gli ebrei sono eretici? L'Inquisizione romana e gli ebrei tra Cinque e Ottocento," 246–50.

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