Venetian Nunneries in the Counter-Reformation, 1550-1630

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ABSTRACT

In the period following the Council of Trent there were over fifty convents in Venice and its surrounding islands, at times housing more than 3000 nuns. This thesis treats these institutions as an integrated feature of Venetian society, and seeks to illuminate the interactions between nunneries and the outside world at a time when ecclesiastical and state authorities were united in their determination to isolate female religious both physically and emotionally.

The five chapters of the thesis explore the following themes:

Chapter I examines the web of authorities which governed the nuns of Venice. It analyses the interest which the local church and state displayed in controlling the city's convents, and assesses the degree of self-rule exercised by female religious communities.

Chapter II reappraises the circumstances in which so many women entered religion. An analysis of conventual dowries and other payments made by nuns' families casts doubt on the view that monacazione was a cheap way of disposing of superfluous daughters.

Chapter III looks at the post-Tridentine drive to enclose all nunneries. Enclosure was often a disruptive and unwelcome innovation, which was inevitably compromised by the practical and emotional demands of female religious. This tension provides a focal-point for this thesis as a case-study in the reception and negotiation of religious reform.

Chapter IV details the friendships and recreational pursuits of nuns. These women craved gossip from the outside world and tempted family and friends to visit by means of hospitality, gifts, and offers of practical help.

Chapter V extends the discussion of nuns' social interactions to take into account the motives behind their sexual exploits. Trial records provide abundant evidence of men loitering on the edge of enclosure, talking, laughing and flirting with nuns. Here the motivation behind these heterosocial exchanges is considered.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PRELIMINARY NOTES

Venetian Dating
According to the calendar used by the early-modern Venetian state, the new year began on 1 March. This dating system is referred to as more veneto, and contrasts with the 'new style' of dating, in which the new year begins on 1 January. Official papers emanating from the Venetian state comply with more veneto, as do certain other documents of a semi-official and secular nature, such as notarial records. In this thesis, the following system has been adopted. All more veneto dates have been converted to new style in the text, but the Venetian dates have been retained in the foot-notes (signalled [m.v.]) since they serve to identify and locate the documents in question.

It has not been possible to find an authoritative statement concerning the dating system used by the Venetian church. Judging from the order in which the records from patriarchal visitations are placed, they seem to adhere to the new style of dating. On this tentative assumption, the dates of patriarchal visitations have therefore been left as they are found in the documents. Two cases fail to conform: the visitations of SS. Rocco e Margherita, and of La Celestia, both conducted by Patriarch Vendramin in January 1609, are placed after visitations dated October to November 1609. This may suggest that the patriarchal authorities wavered in their dating conventions. Alternatively, the inconsistency may have been introduced by whoever was responsible for binding the visitation records. While it is clear that the visitation records were bound and numbered in what was intended to be chronological order, this appears to have been accomplished at the end of each patriarchate. By that time, the exact order of visitations may no longer have been imprinted on the minds of those employed by the patriarch, and errors may have been introduced. In the cases of the two January 1609 visitations mentioned above, the possibility that they may conform to more veneto has been indicated in the foot-notes by means of '[m.v.?]'.

The Venetian Clock
According to Goethe in Italian Journey, the Italians used a 24-hour system of timekeeping, which commenced at sunset. References to times which appear in quotes have been left as they appear in the records. The process of attempting to convert them to the modern system would be extremely hazardous.

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1 Cappelli, p. xviii.
2 Goethe, p. 61.
Spelling and Contractions
The spelling in quoted passages has not been changed in any way. References to names—of places or people—mainly follow Venetian conventions. However, frequently recurring names with variant spellings have been regularized. For example, the Venetian 'San Iseppo' is used rather than the Italianized 'San Giuseppe'; but San Iseppo is consistently spelt with a double 'p', although it commonly appears in the historical documents with just one. The standard names adopted for the Venetian convents may be clearly seen in the list of nunneries according to order in Appendix I.

Contractions occurring in passages which are quoted in the text have been expanded.

System of References
References both to primary and secondary works are keyed to entries in the bibliography by author, and where necessary by title.

Page references have been given to archival documents only where the originals are clearly foliated. Sometimes the sequence of numbering continues throughout the whole busta; sometimes it operates only within a given fascicolo. In the sources most frequently cited in this thesis, folio numbering is at its most erratic. The majority of the trial records produced by the provveditori sopra monasteri are unfoliated; some of the longer cases do supply folio numbers within the relevant fascicolo. When a whole case is unnumbered, only the identifying features of the fascicolo have been given (i.e. date of processo and name of convent involved). When a case is predominantly foliated, references to the recto or verso of the leaf are provided, with exceptions noted as 'unnumbered folios'. Of the visitation records referred to in this thesis, only two buste are foliated (in continuous sequence from beginning to end): ACPV, Vis. past., BB. 2 and 3. For these, the folio numbers have been cited; elsewhere, references must be identified by the name of the convent and the date of the visitation.
# ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACPV</td>
<td>Archivio della Curia Patriarcale di Venezia (Vis. past. Visite pastorali)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASV</td>
<td>Archivio di Stato di Venezia (Comp. Leggi Compilazione Leggi PSM Provveditori sopra monasteri)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMC</td>
<td>Biblioteca Museo Correr (Venezia) (Cod. Cic. Codice Cicogna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMV</td>
<td>Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (Venezia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRE</td>
<td>Istituto di ricovero e di educazione (Venezia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>busta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons. X</td>
<td>Consiglio dei Dieci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fasc.</td>
<td>fascicolo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fo.</td>
<td>folio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reg.</td>
<td>registro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.v.</td>
<td>more veneto</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Map 1 - Venetian lagoon
KEY TO NUNNERIES ON MAP 2

CASTELLO
1. Sant'Anna
2. Santa Maria delle Vergini
3. San Daniel
4. San Iseppo
5. San Sepolcro
6. La Celestia
7. San Giorgio dei Greci
8. San Lorenzo
9. San Zaccaria
10. San Giovanni Lateran
11. Madonna di Miracoli
12. Santa Giustina (also parish church)

GIUDECCA
26. Santi Biagio e Castaldo
27. Santi Cosmo e Damiano
28. Santa Croce di Giudecca
29. Le Convertite

MURANO
30. San Martin
31. San Bernardo
32. San Maffio
33. Madonna degli Angeli
34. Santa Chiara
35. San Giacomo
36. San Marco e Sant'Andrea

CANNAREGIO
13. Santa Caterina
14. Sant'Alvise
15. San Girolamo
16. Corpus Domini
17. Santa Lucia (parish church)

SAN MARCO
18. San Rocco e Santa Margherita

SANTA CROCE
19. Santa Chiara
20. Sant'Andrea di Zirada
21. Santa Maria Maggiore
22. Santa Croce di Venezia (also parish church)

DORSODURO
23. Santa Marta
24. Ogni Santi
25. Spirito Santo

1 Although marked on Forlani's map as accommodating 'preti Greci', there was also a community of Greek nuns attached to the church.
Using the original key to Forlani's map, in conjunction with various other cartographic resources, it has been possible to locate the positions of the 36 convents which existed in Venice and Murano in the year 1566 (Map 2). The distribution of Venetian convents did not change substantially after 1566. While communities of tertiaries came and went during the period under study, no new female monastic institutions were founded in the city before 1630 (with the exception of a house of cappuccine which was established near San Girolamo in 1612).

Of the islands, only Murano is represented with a sufficient degree of accuracy to make it possible to identify the positions of the convents. The scope of this thesis extends to the northern islands of Torcello, Burano, and Mazzorbo, as well as along the lido to Malamocco and Chioggia, south of Venice. A significant number of convents were located on these lagoon islands, and the names of those which existed during the period under study are listed below. In addition, the convent of San Servolo was situated on its own island. The nuns inhabited this site until 1615, when they took over the church and monastery of the Gesuiti in Castello. The positions of these islands may be seen on Map 1 which depicts the lagoon in its modern state.

**TORCELLO**

San Giovanni Evangelista.
San Antonio Abate.

**BURANO**

San Vito.
San Moro.

**MAZZORBO**

San Maffio.
Santa Maria della Valverde.
Santa Eufemia e Compagne Martiri.
Santa Caterina.

**MALAMOCCO**

Santa Maria dell'Orazione or delle Grazie.

**CHIOGGIA**

San Francesco fuori e dentro porta.
Santa Croce.
Santa Caterina.
INTRODUCTION

Reformations are invaluable to historians, for in the resistance they provoke they lay bare the values which a society holds dear. In a literate society they also give rise to a wealth of documentary evidence. They may be expected to yield reports on the status quo and accounts of reforming purpose. Further, reformations sanction interference: investigations, inspections, inquisitions. The reformer is given licence to probe individuals about their thoughts, words and deeds; the historian may inherit his notes. Through this documentary legacy, historians gain access to the tensions occasioned by reforms and to the success or failure of their enforcement. Incidental detail may provide them with much more besides. In terms of its structure and sources, this thesis must be seen within the context of the Counter-Reformation, the programme of measures initiated to reform the Catholic Church which ran simultaneously with the Protestant Reformation. Specifically, it is concerned with the impact of female monastic reform in Venice during the period 1550-1630. The principal objective of the reforms was to subject all nunneries to enclosure, an initiative formulated by Pope Pius V in his 1566 bull *Circa Pastoralis* and zealously adopted by ecclesiastical and temporal authorities in Venice. Enclosure meant the emotional and physical separation of female religious from the outside world. In many respects, nunneries were an integral part of the social fabric of the city. Attempts to sever them from society unsurprisingly jarred. Much of this study relates to the uneven and reluctant assimilation of these reforms on both sides of the convent wall. It contributes to the social history of the Counter-Reformation and impinges on debates concerning the wider purposes of that movement.

One of the reasons why the Reformation and Counter-Reformation remain compelling to historians is because they are events through which broad cultural changes may be monitored. In recent times this has been noticeable in studies focusing on the history of women and gender relations in early-modern Europe, a historiographical tradition to which this thesis also contributes. The outpouring of treatises and conduct literature as well as the opportunities for practical reform give historians a chance to test how women were faring as they entered the modern period. There is a strong tendency to try to weigh up the pros and cons for women of Protestantism and Catholicism during the age of reform. (Protestant women lost out on female saints, but they gained the role of the pastor's wife; Catholic women were oppressed by the celibate ideal, while their Protestant counterparts had no role outside the 'holy household', and so on). The consensus is that the two religious movements,

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1 Ginzburg's discussion of the problems and merits of using inquisition trials as historical evidence is relevant here, see esp. p. 160.
while superficially divergent, shared common cultural values and aims; in the matter of
gender, there was not much to choose between them. The case of female religious
invariably features in the equation and, yet again, the effects of the Reformation and
Counter-Reformation can be seen to balance one another neatly: the closure of
nunneries versus the enclosure of nunneries. Whether convents were shut down or
their inhabitants were shut in, women lost valuable opportunities for action and
autonomy.

This process of weighing up women's experiences under Protestant and
Catholic regimes has served a useful purpose in drawing attention to broad underlying
trends in the construction of the female. But it can lead to some pretty barren discussion
if it is not continually renewed by research on particular cases. In this thesis, one aspect
of religious reform is opened up for inspection, and its consequences for women are
given close analysis. It is no historical breakthrough to claim that enclosure imposed
constraints on nuns' lives (though the strict and novel application of the reform are
worthy of emphasis). Instead, it is the purpose of this thesis to reveal the everyday
implications of the reforms and to analyse the ways in which nuns (and the rest of
society) adapted to them. One method of gaining access to their responses has been to
unravel the relationships which nuns entered into (with servants, neighbours, family
members, clergy, lovers or whoever); relationships through which nuns fashioned their
identities; relationships which were, to an extent, governed by gender. The interactions
between nuns and outsiders resisted enclosure and were also shaped by it. Most
importantly of all, perhaps, from the historian's point of view, were it not for enclosure
and the reformers' concerns, evidence of these relationships would not have been
preserved in the archives.

If the history of religious reform and the history of gender are two axes on
which this thesis is plotted, the history of society (in this case, Venetian society)
constitutes the third. Nunneries, as has already been said, were social institutions with
social functions: they recruited from a predominantly noble constituency and served that
class, by providing an alternative destiny for women outside marriage. Once inside the
convent, these social links did not perish. The economic status of convents also
ensured interdependence with the outside world, while the contribution of nuns to the
spiritual life of the city—if weakened by the restrictions of enclosure—remained
significant. The importance of nunneries within early-modern and medieval society has
long been acknowledged but the interest of social historians has generally ceased at the
gates of the convent. The work of urban historians and demographers has often

4 Wiesner, 'Nuns, Wives, and Mothers', p. 26: 'Although the Protestant reformers did champion a
woman's role as wife and mother by closing the convents and forbidding female lay confraternities, they
cut off women's opportunities for expressing their spirituality in an all-female context. Catholic
women could still enter convents, but those convents were increasingly cut off from society'.

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touched on nuns while their primary interest has lain elsewhere. Meanwhile, 'the new cultural history' has made its mark, encouraging historians to look again at the place of religion in society. Popular beliefs and practices have been the primary concern of those who have responded to that call. Their methods have not yet been applied to formal religious communities.5

Nuns are far from being invisible in the historiography of early-modern Europe, but they have a tendency to appear on the peripheries of studies whose centre of interest is elsewhere. Collectively, the result is that rather a lot has been said about the significance of nunneries on the basis of relatively little research. (The flurry of recent studies of female religious is helping to set the balance straight). Given that the arguments presented in this thesis are continually bouncing off the assumptions enshrined in other historical works, it may be useful at this point to provide some observations on the relevant secondary literature. This is not intended as a comprehensive survey of all that has been written on nuns; nor is this discussion strictly limited to works concerning female religious. The majority of works that will be cited here focus on Italy; Venice, of course, gets more than its fair share of attention. But where research on other parts of Europe has made significant methodological or interpretative contributions, that work will also be considered.6 The range of historical approaches to female monasticism may be roughly categorized according to the primary object of each study: nunneries as religious institutions; nunneries as part of the social fabric; nunneries as communities of women. These, in turn, reflect the three principal preoccupations of this study: religion, society and gender. The luxury of being able to look at nunneries from all three directions, of course, derives in part from the focused nature of this project. However, it should be emphasized from the outset that the most stimulating work under review tends to defy the categorization which is here imposed on it.

Historiographical Contexts
The history of the Italian church in the Renaissance and early-modern period has undergone some important changes in the past two decades. Writing in 1973, Paolo Prodi spoke of a 'division [...] between a clerical, confessional historiography, increasingly local in scope, and a secular historiography which feels ill at ease in

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5 For a discussion of the methodological significance of 'the new cultural history', see N. Z. Davis, 'Possibilities of the Past'. Also, The New Cultural History, ed. Lynn Hunt, esp. the introduction, by Hunt, 'History, Culture, and Text', pp. 1-22. For a series of counter-blasts, see Himmelfarb, The New History and the Old. On the Counter-Reformation, see the excellent studies by Marc Forster and David Gentilcore, which draw on anthropological approaches to reveal the impact of reform on particular geographical areas (the diocese of Speyer in south-west Germany and the Terra d'Otranto in southern Italy, respectively).

6 Norberg, in her appraisal of the secondary literature on female religious and the Counter-Reformation, admits to having 'slighted' Spain and Italy as regions beyond her specialism, p. 134. The present emphasis, in respect of Italy, may help to redress that balance.
tackling problems arising within the church itself or simply neglects them. Prodi was urging historians to carry out work on the religious traditions within Renaissance Venice and, among other topics, he recommended the regular clergy (nuns included) as a fertile field of research. Some ten years later N. S. Davidson echoed Prodi's observation, pointing out that when the under-researched area of the Italian clergy and religious orders did receive attention it was usually from historians who 'write as if they wished to defend the Church, or the State, from criticisms which long ago lost all relevance'. The 'institutional' approach to nunneries has perhaps been most prone to influence by the personal religious affinity of historians and their reactions to ill-discipline and corruption in the story of the Church. Reading Pio Paschini's article of 1960 on female religious houses in sixteenth-century Italy, it is hard to ignore the assumption that lax discipline in convents was 'wrong' and that reform was necessarily 'right'. A far more recent study by Spinelli displays the same value judgments when the author declares his intention of concentrating on 'alcuni degli aspetti negativi della vita religiosa nell'età baroca'.

Historians like Paschini and Spinelli do not simply write on ecclesiastical reform; they believe in it. Casting the Counter-Reformation in an unequivocally positive light, they chart abuses, detail reforms and consider their efficacy. Success is not the inevitable conclusion of their research. Indeed, much energy is expended in lamenting the factors which hampered reform. The inextricability of the ruling class and the nun population is often cited as a major barrier to improving disciplinary standards in convents; so too is the customary involvement of male religious in female monastic affairs. But there is no doubt about the authors' personal distaste for laxity and transgression in female convents. This approach to the history of religious reform is surely dying out. In recent years, social historians have offered new and contrasting interpretations of the Counter-Reformation. There have been hostile accounts of

7 Prodi, p. 409.
9 Within the category of 'institutional' history are counted those works which are concerned with the foundation of nunneries, their purpose and administration. This approach treats female religious in the context of ecclesiastical history, including studies of particular orders and the recurring topic of religious reform. It is with this last area that the present discussion is principally engaged.
10 Spinelli, p. 174.
11 Giuliani, Pilot and Tacchi-Venturi, who have also turned their attentions to Venetian convents in the early-modern period, have evinced a similar commitment to reform.
12 Paschini, p. 46; Spinelli, p. 178; Tacchi-Venturi, p. 84, on the resistance of nuns and their families to reforms. Tacchi-Venturi, p. 83, on the problem of male religious.
13 This distaste is made clear in the language used by historians commenting on convent indiscipline. Giuliani speaks of 'la frivolezza mondana' and 'tanta foschia morale' to be found in Italian nunneries, p. 42; Tacchi-Venturi laments that 'ci conturbano i gravi disordini, tanto più abominevoli, quanto l'idea della vergine sposa di Cristo [...] esclude tutto ciò che non spira olezzo d'illibata purezza e non risplende per serafico ardore', p. 79. The latter author makes his sensibilities even clearer in a subsection of his chapter on nunneries entitled 'Le monache delle altre nazioni non migliori dell'italiane', p. 86.
Tridentine acculturation as well as some more nuanced interpretations of the negotiation and mediation of official reforms at a popular level. There is no reason why such approaches should not be brought to the history of female monastic reform.

This thesis aims to show how nuns negotiated the reforms that were imposed on them. It builds on the work of Raymond Creytens and Kathryn Gill, who have revealed the radicalism of the 1566 initiative to enclose nunneries. Creytens writes with implicit criticism of the genesis of the bull *Circa Pastoralis* which was hastily conceived and which refused to take into account 'open communities' of nuns who had traditionally fulfilled an active apostolate. However, his interest is avowedly with institutional reform rather than with its consequences. Gill is more forthcoming about the implications of enclosure and is struck by the ways in which 'the possibilities for autonomy, self-direction, and public contact would be so drastically curtailed by the end of the sixteenth century'. Yet her research is primarily concerned with the evolution of reforming policy up to the Council of Trent rather than with the impact of the Counter-Reformation. Harder to find in the available secondary literature is research which elucidates the interactions between nuns and reformers and looks at the ways in which female religious communities mediated and responded to the new code of conduct. Of great value, in this respect, is a collection of essays edited by Craig Monson, which focuses on the participation of women—and especially nuns—in the spiritual and cultural life of early-modern Europe. The title of the volume, *The Crannied Wall*, evokes the permeability of enclosure and several of the contributors illustrate the strategies devised by nuns to maintain a public status, against the thrust of Counter-Reformation ideology.

Nunneries owe their position in social history largely to their crucial function in absorbing celibate women. It is an orthodoxy that convents supplied the only honourable position for women outside marriage. Society relied on nunneries to

14 For interpretations of the former type, see Delumeau, Bossy, 'The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe' and Briggs, *Communities of Belief*, esp. ch. 6, 'The church and family in seventeenth-century France', pp. 235-76. By contrast, Forster has argued that the Catholic reformation was not imposed exclusively from above. It is his view that 'the beliefs, practices, and modes of behaviour of the Catholic population of Speyer changed and developed through a dynamic relationship between Catholic reform and popular reaction'. p. 5. Gentilecore suggests less popular enthusiasm for religious reform, in his study of the Terra d'Otranto, but he too demonstrates that there was change and compromise between reformers and reformed, and that there was no head-on clash between the cultures; see esp. pp. 1-17.

15 Creytens, *passim*.


17 Monson, ed., *The Crannied Wall*; see esp. Weaver whose essay on 'The Convent Wall in Tuscan Convent Drama', pp. 73-86, shows how nuns used plays to dramatize their imaginative life within the walls of the nunnery: 'Theater seems [...] to be a literary space in which convent women sought to live as much as possible like their contemporaries in the outside world', (83); also Monson's own article which sheds light on the importance of nuns' choral activities as a means of retaining contact with the city at large, pp. 191-209.
accommodate women who were not destined to become wives, whether because of personal factors (e.g. physical disability or unattractiveness) or social factors (e.g. shortage of available men or inflation of marital dowries). This is why female religious houses feature regularly but fleetingly in the historical literature on early-modern demography and socio-economics. Richard Burr Litchfield, writing on early-modern Florence, and David Herlihy, in his article on fifteenth-century Verona, both acknowledge the significance of nunneries in limiting nuptiality and conserving family fortunes. That this situation pertained in Venice has been widely acknowledged, for example in the research of Queller and Madden, or Chojnacki, on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and of J. C. Davis, on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

These historians are all only tangentially concerned with nunneries. But there are others who share their methods and have focused their attention specifically on female religious institutions. Trexler's 1972 article on the nuns of late-medieval Florence considers the number of convents and their social composition, the total population of nuns, their age at entry and life expectancy. Some of Trexler's statistical conclusions have been overturned by later research. In 1978, Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber published their ground-breaking analysis of the Florentine catasto of 1427, which demonstrated that Trexler had underestimated the number of nuns at that time. New research published by Julius Kirshner and Anthony Molho, also in 1978, suggested that Trexler had exaggerated the incidence of girls entering convents as young children. Yet Trexler had made an important step for, besides continuing the discussion of the significance of female religious within the overall population of cities, he had also set about elucidating the internal demography of nunneries. This approach has been carried forward by Judith Brown, whose work on the entrance and death registers of two Florentine communities (San Jacopo di Ripoli and Santa Maria Annunziata delle Murate) has pointed to the remarkable longevity of the women who lived in them. This conclusion has implications for our understanding of the quality of life in the early-modern convent and the relative merits of conventual and marital life for women.

The work of demographic historians provides a valuable basis for understanding the circumstances in which so many women in early-modern Europe

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18 Litchfield, p. 198; Herlihy, p. 113.
21 Kirshner and Molho, p. 425; cf. Trexler, pp. 1341-43.
22 Brown, 'Monache a Firenze all'inizio dell'età moderna', pp. 144-45. Hatcher has remarked that the detailed records bequeathed by religious communities—chronicles, necrologies and profession lists—should make them subjects of interest for the historian of population, pp. 23-24. Santschi's article on the Venetian convent of S. Daniel during the period 1577-1804 is based on a register of deaths. Primhak used necrologies and memorials in her demographic analysis of San Lorenzo and San Servolo; see esp. pp. 114-15.
took the veil. It can also provide insights into the nature of conventual life, which was inevitably shaped by the size of the community, the age distribution of the nuns, their social origins, and the incidence of sickness and death. Approaches of this kind, of course, have their limitations as well as their strengths and it is interesting that Anthony Molho, in a more recent article, has combined his demographic expertise with a more qualitative analysis of early-modern perceptions of the nunnery.\textsuperscript{23} Research for this thesis has involved looking at census records and various registers produced by the convents themselves. The lists of nuns compiled by patriarchal visitors which—to varying degrees—supply additional information about the age, profession and social origins of the women have also been studied. While much that is of interest has been inferred from these sources and incorporated within the thesis, it should be clear that this study does not aspire to derive its value from quantitative research. The principal material used in this thesis is of an anecdotal kind. It is hoped that this will complement the strong tradition of viewing nunneries in terms of their demographic significance.

Something of a model for the social history of female religious has been provided by the work of Gabriella Zarri. She encourages us to view nunneries as civic institutions but explores this significance well beyond the usual platitudes about their socio-economic function. Of critical importance are her insights into the role of the convent in familial and civic honour, and the consequent concern regarding disciplinary transgressions. These were just as likely to promote a climate of reform as indifference, though the latter has more often been assumed.\textsuperscript{24} Thus the secular and religious agenda behind the government of nunneries were not necessarily at odds. Zarri’s work is impressively comprehensive, and supplies everyday details about female monastic life, from the physical layout of a convent to the books listed on a nunnery's inventory. A less well-known study, by Carla Russo, of Neapolitan convents in the seventeenth century, manifests the same attention to detail in reconstructing a picture of life in a Counter-Reformation convent. Ritual, ceremony and recreation are closely observed through the reports of the reforming Archbishop Ascanio Filomarino. Amongst other things we learn of the prelate's failed attempts to stop nuns from squandering their resources on the production of 'dolci' to give away to their friends and relations.\textsuperscript{25} This detail conforms to the observations presented in this thesis concerning nuns' irrepressible munificence towards their contacts in the outside world. In 1895, a journal of local history published a 200-page study of Genoese nuns by M. Rosi. This author displayed a similar fascination with leisure, gift-giving and gossip in the early-modern

\textsuperscript{23} Molho, "Tamquam vere mortua".
\textsuperscript{24} Zarri, ‘Monasteri femminili e città’, p. 378. See pp. 29-32, for a thorough discussion of this issue.
\textsuperscript{25} Russo, pp. 93-98.
The third area of the secondary literature which requires discussion takes as its object the nuns themselves. Predictably, it has, in part, already been anticipated. For, in discussing nunneries from institutional and social points of view, the women who lived in them cannot be kept out of the picture. But this third field opens up to several other strands of historical writing. For example, biographical studies focusing on individual and exceptional nuns are counted within this category. The claims for this measure of historical attention are usually based on piety, cultural achievement or notoriety. Also included here are those attempts at 'Women's History' which seek to evaluate the lives of nuns in terms of opportunity and denial, and in relation to secular women. From studies of female religious visionaries to grand surveys of life in the convent, this body of historical literature has been shaped by feminist agenda. Analysis of this kind constitutes an important element of the historiographical context from which this thesis has grown.

In 1896, Lina Eckenstein published *Women under Monasticism*. Concentrating mainly on Northern Europe from 500-1500, this was a pioneering study of the opportunities offered to female religious, arguing that a type of monastic life existed 'which gave scope for independent activity among women'. Particular attention was paid to the cultural, literary, and educational activity of convents. In more recent work, scholars have pursued similar arguments. Not only did religious life offer women a certain dignity, flourishing on the image of nuns as brides of Christ, but it could offer practical possibilities for the wielding of power and the fulfilment of personal aspirations, which were not accessible to wives and mothers. One hundred years later, and the conventual life is still being celebrated. Patricia Ranft's recent historical survey, *Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe*, revolves around the concepts of creativity, determination and choice. She concludes:

> Much has been written of late about how essential the option of religious life was for women and for their ability to control their own lives. This thesis has been demonstrated time and again in this narrative.  

Indeed, much has been written of late which supports the Ranft thesis. Another longue durée study which might be cited here is Jo Ann Kay McNamara's *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millenia*. Empowered by their virginity and apartness,
nuns exercised their autonomy through mysticism, capital enterprise, education and cultural productivity. In short, nuns laid the foundations for the feminist movements of modern times.\textsuperscript{29}

Crudely speaking, feminist historiography tends to follow one of two courses. The first is to concentrate on exposing the unfairness and the subordinated drudgery of female existence. The second explores the ways in which women exploited opportunities within a male-dominated society. This division is reflected in the feminist approaches to the history of nuns. Nodding in both directions, Margaret King, devotes two sections of her book \textit{Women of the Renaissance} to female religious, and entitles them 'Convent Walls' and 'Determined Nuns'.\textsuperscript{30} But, in line with Ranft and McNamara, it is the second approach which is flourishing at the moment, even within the unpromising field of early-modern studies.

The first cluster of studies which warrant attention here focus on the practical opportunities afforded to female religious. Significantly, all relate to the fifteenth century, before enclosure became a universal requirement of nunneries. In Ranft's words, 'The history of women religious [...] indicates that this was a positive period for women'.\textsuperscript{31} Kate Lowe in her essay 'Female Strategies for Success in a Male-Ordered World' concentrates on the achievements of the Florentine community of Le Murate in raising funds and preserving its privileges against attempts to limit the convent's autonomy. One abbess, Scolastica Rondinelli, was particularly resourceful; by cultivating contacts outside the monastery, she attracted both financial donations and political support. Investigating the community of Corpus Domini, Ferrara, Mary Martin McLaughlin also looks at the practical challenges which religious life offered to women. She is especially interested in the processes by which women founded communities and she concentrates on several individual nuns to see how they exerted power and manipulated their personal financial resources. Victoria Primhak's thesis concerning the Benedictine convents in Venice, 1400-1550, takes the view that 'The convent was not necessarily an unattractive option for young Venetian girls who had anyway been brought up according to strict religious principles and who were attracted to a pious life'.\textsuperscript{32} She suggests that the conventual regime could be more lax than home life and that nuns enjoyed a longer life expectancy. Moreover, there were opportunities for office-holding and sufficient freedom to allow some nuns to participate in Venetian social life.

These positive responses to the religious life relate to the pre-Reformation period and are bolstered up by those who have written on the dissolution of the

\textsuperscript{29} McNamara, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{30} King, pp. 81-103.
\textsuperscript{31} Ranft, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{32} Primhak, p. 294.
nunneries in Protestant states. According to Lyndal Roper and Merry Wiesner, this amounted to the denial of one of the more fulfilling roles available to women. Many convents fought to remain open in territories which adopted Protestantism. Wiesner argues that 'The nuns' determination had social as well as religious roots [...] for they recognised that as women they could have no office in any Protestant church'.

Significantly, Eckenstein ended her survey of female monasticism in the middle ages with an account of the resistance to the dissolution of nunneries in Nuremberg by that most learned and articulate of Renaissance nuns, Charitas Pirckheimer. Yet, turning to the Catholic states where nunneries survived, there was surely little to celebrate in the impact of the Counter-Reformation. As has already been indicated, the twin forces of social expediency (resulting in forced vocations) and religious reform (enclosure) rendered the convents far less attractive destinies in the early-modern period than they had previously been.

A gloomy school of historical writing does indeed respond to these cheerless developments, fuelled by the testimony of literary works. A concept of the outdated tragedy of the forced vocation has been kept alive by Diderot's *La Religieuse*, set contemporaneously in eighteenth-century France, and by Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi* (first published in 1827; substantially rewritten and republished in 1840), which throws the reader back to northern Italy in the early seventeenth century, the high-point of *monacazioni forzate*. The writings of Arcangela Tarabotti, a notoriously miserable nun at the Venetian convent of Sant'Anna from 1617 until her death in 1652, have prompted a deal of scholarly interest, now aided by the publication of *Inferno monacale* in 1990.

If forced vocations have attracted no supporters, the impact of the Counter-Reformation on nuns has been embraced by some historians as a positive force. By focusing on the development of the new orders, Patricia Ranft is able to see the Catholic Reformation as an impetus for female engagement in an active apostolate. She does not ignore the efforts of the church to hamper these initiatives. Indeed, she concedes that, with the measures to enforce enclosure, 'one would be justified in

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33 An article by Grieser on convents in Munster during the Anabaptist Reformation gives evidence of how some nuns continued to live in their religious community despite converting to the Reformed faith. This was the case with the community of Uberwasser, where a small number of nuns remained after the Reformation, having taken a husband in common according to Anabaptist practice; p. 43.
35 Manzoni's book included the tale of Gertrude, 'the nun of Monza'. The episode was based on the true story of suor Virginia Maria de Leyva, of Spanish aristocratic lineage, who was forced to enter the religious life against her will as a young girl. For a volume of articles concerning the circumstances of this nun's life and trial (occasioned by her sexual transgressions), see ed. Colombo. Cattaneo, pp. 147-95, concerns the issue of forced vocations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See also Ewart, pp. 111-28. Medioli's article, 'Monacazioni forzate', also takes as its starting-point the story of the nun of Monza.
36 Ed. Medioli, *Inferno*. For a book-length study of Tarabotti and her works see Zanette. See also Labalme; Conti Odorisio; Canosa, pp. 147-60; Cox, pp. 535-41.
concluding that the hierarchy had struck a death blow at the heart of the movement to create active religious orders for women. This process of restriction is exemplified in the case of the Company of St Ursula. Founded by Angela Merici in Brescia in the early sixteenth century (episcopal approval was granted in 1536) this was not originally intended to be a religious order. The mission of the women was to carry out charitable work in the community and they sought no formal or canonical commitment. In 1544, four years after the death of Angela Merici, Paul III promulgated a bull of approbation which afforded the company the status of a women's confraternity and extended its property rights so that they were on a par with those of a canonically-erected monastery. These privileges were a mixed blessing. From the 1540s, gradual changes brought the Company into line with a formal religious order. In 1546 the bishop of Brescia insisted that the women wear a distinctive religious habit rather than obey the rule's call for simple and modest dress. Practical developments encouraged them to live within communities rather than being dispersed among their own families. The education of girls within these institutions replaced the work to which the Company had originally devoted itself. Ranft concludes that the Ursulines 'remain a great and admirable order today, but not in the form that Angela Merici originally envisioned'. But in the pioneering work of the Company of St Ursula, threads were sewn which could be picked up later: the movement to create active religious orders for women 'remained alive and eventually triumphed'.

Moving from the active to the contemplative life, St Teresa of Avila may also have done something to redeem the Counter-Reformation period in the eyes of feminist historians. Those who have studied other nuns in this mystical tradition have rejoiced in the opportunities for pious dynamism afforded by the nunnery. For example, Electa Arenal makes a bold claim in the title of her essay on two Hispanic visionaries in the seventeenth century: 'The Convent as Catalyst for Autonomy'. Picking up Virginia Woolf's famous phrase, Arenal argues that 'for centuries, most of the women who [...] had a "room of their own" found it in the cloister'. She emphasizes the semi-autonomous nature of convent culture in which women could find sustenance, exert

37 Ranft, p. 105.
38 Ibid., pp. 101-106
39 Ibid., p. 106.
40 Ibid., p. 105. For a less positive discussion of the establishment of the new female orders, see Delumeau, pp. 37-38. Particularly illuminating is his account of the genesis of the Order of the Visitation of Our Lady at Annecy, founded in 1610 by St Francis de Sales and St Jane Frances de Chantal, p. 37. This was intended as an essentially contemplative congregation in which prayer was complemented by visits to the homes of the sick and the poor. The Archbishop of Lyons refused to recognize any such uncloistered female order and the Visitation nuns became formalized by taking solemn vows. Their apostolate of visiting the sick was replaced by providing education to boarding girls. Vincent de Paul's Daughters of Charity were more successful in resisting claustration, though only by shunning monastic status, pp. 37-38. On these developments, see also Norberg, pp. 135-36. 41 Ranft, p. 107. For a discussion of recent studies of St Teresa and other female mystics, see Norberg, p. 139.
influence, and develop talents they never could have expressed as fully in the outside world. Borrowing another image from the writings of Virginia Woolf, McNamara comments on her gloomy portrayal of Shakespeare's fictional sister. She extends the speculation a stage further, arguing that if Shakespeare's sister happened to have been a nun in a Catholic country, she might have had a better life. But surely McNamara is here forgetting the impact of the Counter-Reformation in limiting the range of nuns' experience.

As we have seen, Ranft has effectively argued that the religious life provided opportunities for action and autonomy for women despite the Counter-Reformation drive for enclosure. Mary E. Perry, author of Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Spain, goes further. While acknowledging that 'It would be easy to assume that nuns were the most oppressed of all women in this patriarchal society', she jettisons such an assumption, arguing instead that

Nuns empowered themselves through community, chastity, enclosure, and mystical experiences. Accomplishing this within an authoritarian and hierarchical context that could be very hostile, these women clearly demonstrate not only strategies for survival, not merely female participation, but women's subversiveness in expressing and asserting themselves.

Perry has found virtue in compulsory enclosure. Even authoritarian oppression has its silver lining, for it is this hostility which triggers nuns' resourcefulness and subversiveness. Topsy-turvy arguments of this sort have become pretty much the norm in women's history. It is not fashionable to view women as victims of their circumstances, but rather to credit them with adaptability—the ability to dodge or exploit oppressive situations. Such an appraisal may tell us more about recent trends in historiography than it does about early-modern nuns.

It is clearly important to avoid anachronism when assessing the lives of nuns in the Counter-Reformation period. While the religious life may hold little appeal for liberated women in the late twentieth century, it offered early-modern women opportunities and advantages, temporal and spiritual, which can only be appreciated in chronological context. On the other hand, this thesis does not shy away from describing the negative features of conventual life, as revealed through contemporary records. Forced vocations and repressive reforms brought misery to many women in early-modern convents, and this is an important aspect of the historical picture.

42 Arenal, p. 149.
43 McNamara, p. 540.
44 Perry, p. 75.
Sources and Scope

This study does not set out to exclude any type of evidence. In its course, it draws upon a wide range of sources from census records to vernacular poetry. But as with most pieces of historical scholarship, practical considerations have placed constraints on the number of documents which could be given thorough treatment. Decisions to concentrate on one source rather than another have inevitably shaped the structure and content of the thesis. Two sources have been particularly influential and their importance within the thesis requires some elaboration. These are trial records and visitation reports.

Endlessly recurring throughout the following chapters are stories culled from the trial records of the Venetian *provveditori sopra monasteri*. These were noble magistrates, first appointed in 1521, with special responsibility for the city's female convents. Their jurisdiction encompassed all who transgressed the laws relating to nunneries, excluding female religious themselves who were subject to the patriarch. The obvious complement to the trial records of the *provveditori* would be the patriarchal trials of erring nuns. Unfortunately, these were lost during the last century and only an archival catalogue survives, supplying the date of each trial and the names of the convents and nuns involved. This artificial distortion in the nature of the surviving evidence has had major consequences for the nature of this study. Obviously, the loss of the nuns' trials is frustrating, but the enforced concentration on the relationship between nunneries and the outside world has helped to point to an important aspect of female monastic life during this period. Who were these outsiders whose dealings with nunneries brought them on to the wrong side of the law? What had they to do with the nuns? Why was the Venetian state so concerned about them?

The historical use of trial evidence and criminal records more generally has been the subject of ongoing debate. The most sceptical argue that records of this sort can shed light not on criminality but rather on the history of criminal justice. According to this school of thought, the incidence of trials says more about the magistrates than it does about the transgressors. In the words of Mario Sbriccoli, 'i processi *trattano* il crimine, ma *rivelano* la giustizia'. At a general and theoretical level, the narrowness of this position has been articulately challenged by Edoardo Grendi. He argues that the judicial action of a magistracy does little to 'reveal' justice; rather, it 'reveals' the social

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45 217 trials have been examined from the 'processi criminali e disciplinari' conducted by the *provveditori* during the period 1554-1630 (ASV, PSM, BB. 263-68).

46 A few of the patriarchal trials have, in fact, survived in the form of transcriptions which were sent to the *provveditori*.

47 See, for example, Sbriccoli, p. 493: 'Il fatto è che gli esercizi di storia criminale condotti su base eziologica (spesso anche criptoeziologica), e/o con altissimi dosaggi di seriale/quantitativo, riposano tutti sul falso presupposto che negli archivi giudiziari si trovi effettivamente la storia della criminalità, mentre vi è soltanto quella della giustizia criminale'.

48 Ibid., p. 494.
practices which the magistracy aims to discipline.\footnote{Grendi, pp. 270-71: 'È chiaro che l'azione giudiziaria di una magistratura, dotata di autorità criminale, si presta poco a rivelare la giustizia: si presta molto invece a rivelare delle pratiche sociali che appunto la magistratura cerca di disciplinare secondo i propri scopi: ad esempio, controllo del lavoro, eliminazione della mendicità, espulsione dei forestieri, controllo dell'approvvigionamento e degli smerci garantiti dell'Annona, eliminazione del contrabbando, controllo di pesi e misure ecc.' A helpful discussion of the problems relating to the use of criminal sources is provided in the introduction to eds Dean and Lowe, pp. 1-15.} The present thesis takes heed of Sbriccoli’s warnings, but, in line with Grendi, it embraces a wider use of criminal records. Rather than entering into the theoretical debate which has been eloquently forged by Sbriccoli and Grendi, it seems more appropriate here to offer some methodological observations with specific reference to the trial records of the provveditori sopra monasteri.

The provveditori were responsible for the practical application of the measures to impose enclosure on Venetian nunneries. As has already been suggested, the Counter-Reformation period witnessed some significant shifting of the goal-posts in defining what was and what was not acceptable behaviour in relation to nuns. Breaches of enclosure constituted an expanding field of transgression. And this dynamic has an important influence on how the trials conducted by the provveditori may be used as a historical source. There are three observations which seem pertinent here, corresponding to three problems which have been identified in the use of trial records.

Firstly, it is helpful to respond to Sbriccoli’s view that criminal records have nothing to say about the history of criminality; all that they reveal relates to the history of criminal justice. The records of the provveditori have indeed shed a great deal of light on the preoccupations of the secular authorities in Venice, and in this respect, they fulfil Sbriccoli’s positive expectations. It is certainly also true that the efflorescence of trials against lay people during the period under study was largely the result of the establishment of a magistracy and of its subsequent growth in power rather than because of a novel subversive bent in the conduct of Venetian people towards the local nunneries. Given the centrality of reformation and control as issues within this thesis, evidence relating to judicial developments is not to be sniffed at. Yet it is unnecessarily limiting to perceive this as the only function which criminal records can serve. To start with, it denies the very varied nature of this type of source. Besides rehearsing the details of the law, the documentary corpus entitled 'processi criminali e disciplinari', within the archive of the provveditori, comprises denunciations, written statements, interrogations, verdicts, letters and visual exhibits. Among these records, a variety of voices may be heard. Contradictions are registered and even linguistic particularities are retained. While the body of evidence taken as a whole illuminates the objectives and policy of the provveditori, the individual documents are far more revealing of social responses and dialogue. Sbriccoli is surely right to shun the idea of an autonomous
history of criminality (a wisdom which is well illustrated by the case of enclosure legislation with its ever expanding boundaries of the unacceptable). But he is wrong to imply that criminal records are the creation of a judicial elite with no participation from without.

If the historian manages to overcome Sbriccoli's caveats and scruples regarding the use of criminal records, the second problem which he or she confronts is their unreliability. Trial evidence is full of prejudices and lies. It includes the testimonies of the guilty who protest their innocence and the statements of a variety of partisan witnesses. Nor can the officials who conduct the trials necessarily be seen as furthering the elucidation of the truth. (Nowhere has this been shown more clearly than in the case of witch-trials). Different historians have developed different strategies for coping with 'fiction in the archives'. Natalie Zemon Davis, most notably, has embraced the untruths which are to be found in court records. Her fascination is with 'how sixteenth-century people told stories [...], what they thought a good story was, how they accounted for motive, and how through narrative they made sense of the unexpected and built coherence into immediate experience'.  

Her approach has been refreshing, but it was surely not her intention to put a bar on using court records for any purpose other than to shed light on practices of self-justification. Full of pitfalls this type of evidence may be, but there is nearly always some factual material which may be salvaged. One method is to place the spotlight away from the central interest of the trial. The criminal, while creating a fictitious alibi for himself, may incidentally be forthcoming about what he had for lunch, how much his horse cost, who his friends are and so on. Thus, a whole host of details emerge that are either designed to be plausible or which may be corroborated. In the case of the trials conducted by the provveditori, much has been learnt about Venetian nunneries by this method. But it must also be said that the specific character of these records means that they are likely to be—to an unusual degree—vehicles of artlessness and honesty. The sudden and unwelcome changes in the laws concerning nunneries must bear responsibility for this in two respects: 1) lay people could be genuinely ignorant of having broken the law; 2) defendants were apt to protest their ignorance not by denying their actions but by denying that there was anything reprehensible in their actions. What the records of the provveditori illustrate best of all is the tension between society and authority during this time of reform.

The third problem posed by a reliance on trial records is that they create an exaggerated emphasis on transgression. They draw attention to subversive behaviour and away from normal conduct. Once again, this objection does not carry its greatest weight when levelled against the trial records of the provveditori sopra monasteri. For in the case of Venetian nunneries in the Counter-Reformation, definitions of the

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50 Davis, Fiction, p. 4
criminal had been extended so far as to embrace what was unequivocally 'normal' behaviour on the part of nuns and their lay acquaintances. It is a noticeable feature of the depositions presented before the provveditori that the accused admit to having committed certain deeds without realising that they are implicating themselves criminally. True, a handful of sexual scandals have been uncovered which retain the ability to shock but these are most definitely the exceptions. To return to Sbriccoli's terms, more than revealing the history of criminality, this source reveals the history of normal social relations, undergoing a phase of criminalization.

Moving from a discussion of secular law and its practical applications to a consideration of the documentary legacy of the Counter-Reformation, it is clear that the two main sources for this thesis are generated by elitist, disciplinarian agenda. It might be argued that the use of records fashioned by male authorities is a poor way of uncovering the realities of life in the convent. Yet discipline and reform were important forces for cultural change. In this period, they had a massive impact on 'the realities of life in the convent'. And to study this impact is not to assume that the process of reform was unfettered. Of course, the reforms were deflected or mediated by those who stood at the receiving end. It is the central objective of this thesis to clarify the nature of the reforms and to assess their effects on nunneries.

The ideals of the Counter-Reformation are enshrined in conciliar, papal and diocesan instructions. In the case of the Venetian nunneries, the patriarchs produced their own series of ordini, sometimes general and sometimes directed to particular houses. Regular visitations enabled the patriarchal vicars to ascertain whether these instructions were being followed, and gave them the opportunity to pressurize the nuns into conforming to the new standards. Early-modern women--religious and lay--were subject to a barrage of prescriptions concerning all aspects of their conduct. But the institutional status of nuns meant that prescription could become practice. Away from the pipe-dreams of conduct-books, here women were subject to enforceable reformation--and that process was documented. The enclosed environment of the nunnery provided a controlled space in which the disciplinary ideals of Counter-Reformation prelates could be tested out. Besides providing a wealth of detail about

51 Kendrick, in his recent study of nuns and their music in early-modern Milan, identifies two problems with using visitation records: 'first, they record only that activity (musical and other) deemed 'irregular' at a given point by a given bishop or the curia, and therefore do not provide a well-rounded view of daily musical life inside clausura. More crucially, it is far easier to ascertain a prelate's views of nuns' music than it is to find the attitudes of women musicians themselves', p. 22.
52 The Bishop of Torcello had jurisdiction over the lagoon islands and, unfortunately, his visitations did not include the convents. The printed ordini of Antonio Grimani, Bishop of Torcello (1587-1618) addressed to the convents of his diocese, have proved a useful source. The Bishop of Chioggia was responsible for the convents of that city, included within this study.
everyday life in a Venetian convent, the patriarchal visitation records enable us to see the process by which reforms were enacted, as well as the resistance which they met.

As has already been affirmed, this thesis is shaped by its sources. Having accounted for the prominence of the two main sources, it is necessary here to consider the inconspicuousness of another body of records, namely the archives of the convents themselves. These were brought within the Venetian state archives in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries at the time when the nunneries were suppressed. They contain primarily economic material: accounts, records of property transactions and contracts. In a study which is so centrally concerned with relations between nunneries and the lay world, it might be argued that these were mapped most obviously through economic links: property rentals, livelli (a mechanism by which money was effectively loaned on the security of property) and commercial deals. This would be a fascinating area to pursue, but it would constitute a major research enterprise in itself. Besides the obvious constraints of time and space, there are historical reasons for deciding to exclude this field of evidence from the present thesis. The Counter-Reformation emphasis on enclosure meant that the practical administration of the convent's economic affairs was increasingly delegated to lay employees. It is possible to look through fascicolo after fascicolo of the documents from one of the suppressed convents, tracing the fate of its economic patrimony, without coming across a mention of the religious community itself. Of course, these records would be invaluable as the basis for an economic history of convents, but that falls outside the scope of this thesis. Instead this source has been used only in so far as it contains information relating to domestic affairs: capitolarì, recording decisions made in the chapter, and acceptance agreements or records of conventual dowry payments.

It remains to comment briefly on the chronological and geographical scope of this thesis, and on the criteria adopted to decide which institutions should count within the category of 'nunneries'. Several factors determined the time-scale of this project. Eighty years constitutes a manageable chronological span in which to assess the initial impact of the Tridentine reforms. The Council of Trent closed in 1563, and the reform of the nunneries was discussed earlier on in that same year. But in Venice, the provveditori sopra monasteri had assumed a judicial role nearly a decade before that. Thus, the starting-date of this thesis accommodates the earliest trial, which dates from 1554. 1630 seemed a particularly appropriate date at which to end, for this was the year in which Patriarch Giovanni Tiepolo died. The period under study gave rise to three fairly full sets of records from patriarchal visitations undertaken by Cardinal Priuli (1590-1600), Cardinal Vendramin (1605-19) and Giovanni Tiepolo (1619-30), as well as more sporadic reports from the other patriarchs of this period.
In choosing a geographical focus for this study of Counter-Reformation nunneries, Venice presented itself for a variety of reasons. The high number of convents and the correspondingly large population of nuns suggested that female monasticism had an important role to play in Venetian society. Moreover, Venice was one of those cities which perceived the need to establish a state magistracy specifically to deal with matters relating to convents.\textsuperscript{53} The reform of the nunneries was taken seriously here by both ecclesiastical and temporal authorities. Venice was also the home of Arcangela Tarabotti, whose writings against forced vocations and whose personal distaste for female monastic life have, in recent years, proved so influential in fashioning our impressions of the early-modern nunnery. This compelling literary testimony is, in itself, sufficient to stimulate historical interest. The city’s archives do not disappoint, for they house an abundance of documentary evidence, providing rich insights into the social history of female religious. Yet, while Florence, Naples, Genoa and Bologna have all given rise to lively studies of nuns in the late-medieval and early-modern periods, very little has been published on Venetian convents.\textsuperscript{54}

The decision to study the convents of the city of Venice and the lagoon islands but to exclude the dogado and the terraferma came very naturally. It is quite clear that the convents which were dotted around the small islands of the lagoon served the city. These institutions were founded on the islands because of the availability of land and because of their isolated conditions. Although it has not been possible to carry out a systematic analysis of patterns of recruitment, there is plenty of evidence that Venetian families were happy to send their daughters to convents on the islands and that some of these houses enjoyed a fair amount of prestige. Furthermore, these convents, although largely absent from the records of the patriarchs, do appear in the records of the provveditori sopra monasteri. It is for this reason that the convents of Chioggia have been included, despite the fact that they do appear to have recruited more locally. By contrast, convents on the mainland during this period do not appear in the processi criminali e disciplinari conducted by the provveditori.\textsuperscript{55} This fact provides coherency to

\textsuperscript{53} Similar magistracies were established in Genoa and Florence; Zarri, ‘Monasteri femminili e città’, p. 381.

\textsuperscript{54} On Florence, see Trexler, Brown, ‘Monache a Firenze’, Lowe and Molho; on Naples, see Russo; on Genoa, see Rosi; on Bologna, see Zarri, ‘I monasteri femminili a Bologna’ and Monson, Disembodied Voices. Pilot, Paschini, Giuliani, Pedani and Spinelli have published articles concerning Venetian convents in the early-modern period. All these authors embrace the institutional approach: they focus on the control, organisation and reform of the nunneries; they do not attempt to apply an internal perspective. Primhak’s doctoral thesis on the Benedictine convents of Venice, 1400-1550, constitutes a wider-ranging study of Venetian nuns in the pre-Counter-Reformation period. However, this work has never been published.

\textsuperscript{55} Two trials appear in ASV, PSM, B. 263—the first busta of processi criminali e disciplinari—which relate to mainland communities. These are named as the ‘monastero maggiore’ of Cividale di Friuli and Santa Maria Materdomini, Crema, and the trials date respectively from 1596 and 1598. However, it should be noted that in neither case was the trial conducted by the provveditori. The former was carried out by the Patriarch of Aquileia; the latter by the Bishop of Crema. These records are transcripts of the trials which were evidently sent to the provveditori for their information.
a decision based largely on practical expediency. The fifty convents situated in and around the Venetian lagoon provide ample matter for a doctoral thesis.

Within these chronological and geographical boundaries, there still remain questions as to what should and should not be counted as the nunneries of early-modern Venice. A variety of female institutions, founded with pious objectives, might have been included within this study. However, it was decided to limit consideration to those houses which could technically be referred to as 'female monasteries': that is, communities which were subject to enclosure. According to this criterion, the Greek Uniate nuns at San Giorgio—though clearly sui generis—warranted inclusion. On the other hand, the same principle resulted in the exclusion of those communities of tertiaries or pizzocare who lived according to a religious rule, but who were exempt from observing strict enclosure. This category of religious women would be a fascinating subject to pursue. However, their freedom to come and go from their communities made their experience of the religious life fundamentally different from that of the enclosed nuns. Social considerations also rendered the pizzocare distinct from the nuns proper and they were usually far less aristocratic in character.

Significantly, these women did not fall within the concerns of the provveditori sopra monasteri, the magistrates who expended so much effort in preserving the enclosed nunneries from lay intrusions. The conditions of the pizzocare as well as the sources which record them set them apart from those nuns who lived under enclosure. While pizzocare have been excluded from this study, the Convertite, which held unique status among the convents of Venice, has been included. In many ways, this religious house, which accommodated dishonoured women, must be seen within the context of two other Venetian communities: the Zitelle and the Soccorso. All three of these characteristically Counter-Reformation institutions operated to preserve the sexual honour of Venetian women. The Zitelle provided a safe haven for imperilled girls during their adolescence; the Soccorso offered temporary accommodation to women whose sexual honour had already been jeopardized; the Convertite was the ultimate destiny for fallen women who were unable to be reintegrated into respectable society. But while the first two of these institutions may have functioned according to semi-monastic principles, only the last was actually a nunnery. Unlike the zitelle and the

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56 Kendrick makes a terminological distinction between female monastic houses subject to enclosure (as well as male Benedictine houses) which he calls 'monasteries', and certain Ursuline foundations not subject to clausura (plus male mendicant houses) which he calls 'convents', p. xiv. This differs from the terminology adopted in this thesis: the term 'monastery' is not used to describe a community of nuns, unless specifically prefaced by 'female', since in English we generally associate 'monastery' with male religious; instead, 'convent' and 'nunnery' have been used interchangeably to describe the houses of enclosed nuns which are the subject of this study.

57 For a full account of the purposes of the Zitelle, see Constitutioni et regole della casa delle Citelle di Venetia, esp. the preface written by Benedetto Palmio in 1587, pp. 1-4; for the Soccorso, see the Capitolare of that institution, esp. cap. X, 'Qualità di quelle, che devono esser accettate nel Soccorso', IRE, SOC. A1.
women who took refuge in the Soccorso, convertite took religious vows; unlike pizzocare, they were subject to enclosure.

Structure
This thesis is arranged in five chapters. Each of the first three elucidates a main issue of the study. The first is concerned with authority, and seeks to establish the powers which had a vested interest in the nuns of Venice. It is split into three main sections devoted to temporal authority, ecclesiastical authority and the internal administration of convents. In terms of size, these sections could easily stand on their own. But given that the research presented here testifies to the close entanglement of these different sources of power, it seemed desirable to retain the integrity of a single chapter. The second chapter addresses the question of nuns' vocations. It confirms the commonplace that women frequently became nuns because of familial pressures but detaches this process from the rarer and far more traumatic cases of forced vocations. This was an age of little individual choice, especially for women. Most nuns met their fate with acceptance, an observation which is supported by the persistent good will which commonly existed between female religious and their families. The third chapter deals with the process of reform. Analysis of the Tridentine decrees, papal bulls and local instructions issued to the Venetian nunneries enables us to gauge the radicalism of the reforming initiatives. Not only were the new measures disruptive of custom and community; they also presented practical difficulties, as the reformers themselves were forced to concede. Thus the scene is set for tracing the reception and negotiation of female monastic reforms.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, the experience of nuns is charted through the medium of personal relationships. The first of these focuses on how nuns sought relief from the constraints of institutional life by nurturing contacts with friends, neighbours and family members. The following chapter extends the discussion of nuns' social interactions to take into account the motives behind their sexual exploits. By devoting the final chapter of this thesis to the issue of sexuality in the convent, it is not intended that pride of place should be given to the hackneyed topic of moral hypocrisy and carnal debauchery in the Church. Unsurprisingly, the constraints of enclosure meant that the Counter-Reformation was no golden age of sexual transgression for nuns. But instances of flirtation and courtship do bulk large within the cases under study. Interactions of this kind had a variety of purposes and lust was far from being the principle factor behind nuns' sexual engagements. At a time when enclosure seemed to be subsuming chastity as the highest ideal for female religious, nuns' cravings were more often for social activity than for sexual activity.
CHAPTER I
THE GOVERNMENT OF VENETIAN CONVENTS

il mondo è tutto turbato non più per conto di re, principi et popoli, che per conto di frati, monachi, monache et pizzochare. ¹

Nunneries were a civic asset. Their function in providing a home and a role for unmarried females made them invaluable within the social fabric of towns. They were, moreover, an important spiritual resource. In Venice, the contribution made by the nuns to the city's holy status was demonstrated most graphically in the rituals accompanying the investiture of the abbess at Santa Maria delle Vergini (see Figure 1). The ceremony involved a symbolic marriage of Venice's supreme temporal authority with the new abbess: by an exchange of rings, the Doge bestowed temporal power upon the nun, with which to govern her community, and the abbess invested the ducal authority with sanctity. ² That the spiritual credit afforded by the large and sacrificial presence of nuns was felt at all levels of society is witnessed by the testamentary instructions of countless individuals leaving bequests to local convents in return for their prayers. A wine-merchant, Missier Zuane di Mascaroni made amends for his sins in 1601 by leaving the communities of the Convertite and Santa Croce di Venezia 'dodeci bigonzi di vin' each, 'per l'anima sua, et in remission di suoi peccati, dechiarando the ä questi monasteri ghe sia datto buon vin'. ³

But nunneries could also be a civic liability. In this chapter, which is concerned with the practicalities of imposing authority on female religious, the nunneries of Venice will emerge as a rather troublesome quantity which continually threatened to slip out of control. The problem was partly that nuns stood in an unclear and shifting

¹ Nunziature, 1, p. 52: letter from the papal nuncio, Girolamo Aleandro, to the papal secretary, Jacopo Salvati, Venice, 24 May, 1533.
² Zarri, p. 375. Francesco Sansovino mentions the ceremony in the 1581 edition of Venetia città nobilissima et singolare, fo. 4v: 'il Principe, ceremonialmente sposa in persona, la Badessa nuova, in ricognizione dell'antica sua preminenza'. In his revision of the guide, published in 1604, Giovanni Stringa includes a description of the most recent investiture of an abbess, that of Soffia Malipietra in 1598, fos 126v-128r: 'Ft questa Chiesa anco dal sopradetto Doge delle sue proprie facoltä, che erano molto ampie, e grandi, dotata, con ordine, the fosse per sempre de' suoi successori nel Principato. Onde per ciö avviene, che'l Prencipe fin'hoggidi ha per costume di andar in persona con tutta la Signoria a questo Monasterio, con pompa, & cerimonia solenni alla investitura d'ogni nuova Abbatessa, in recognizione dell'antica sua preminenza, & della patronia, ch'egli ha di questo luogo: si come a punto avvenne l'anno 1598 li 7 di Febraro, quando il Doge Martino Grimani, the hoggidl vive, si trasferl cola insieme con la Signoria, e fece coall cerimonia tra la Messa maggiore, the ft) pontificialmente cantata da Michele de Pruli, Vescovo di Vicenza, invitato da lui a tale effetto, investendo, & isposando in Abbatessa Soffia Malipietra Nobile Veneta, laquelle dopo Messa fè recitare, in rendimenti di gratie, una breve, ma assai bella oratione da Aurelia Querini, the fÖ nel recitarla molto lodata; la copia della quale ho voluto qui sotto registrare a compiacenza de' Lettori, & perche chiaramente si conosca da tutti questa verità' (the oration is reproduced by Stringa).
³ ASV, S. Croce di Venetia, B. 3, 'Testamenti sec. XVII-XVIII', 1601, 5 March.
position in relation to temporal and ecclesiastical authority. For the Republic of Venice, which had always sought to guard its religious institutions from papal control, this was a familiar concern. But the tensions did not derive simply from a power-struggle between Rome and Venice. At a local level, church authorities ranging from the patriarch to the confessor laid claim to the nuns' obedience, and male religious from associated orders often exercised their own particular influence over their spiritual sisters. Inside the convent walls nuns were responsible for governing their own communities. This degree of self-rule was, of course, tempered by endless restrictions and regulations imposed from without. What power remained in the nuns' hands was vulnerable to manipulation by interested parties. And yet a kernel of autonomy did survive, paradoxically protected by the most overwhelming constraint on nuns' lives, enclosure.

It is the primary aim of this chapter to map the fields of responsibility that these different authorities aspired to occupy. In a study which is concerned with the reactions of female religious to an increasingly constrained existence, it is important to shed light on the agents of control. Moreover, a reliance on historical documents with clear reforming and disciplinary agenda makes it imperative to address the procedures and motives of those who fashioned the sources. The role of the nuns in governing their own institutions also warrants discussion. Internal and external authorities interacted to shape the conventual experience. Before embarking on this analysis, two case-studies will illustrate some of the problems of governing nunneries.

**Administrative instability: two case-studies**

This section briefly outlines the events which took place in two convents following attempts by external authorities to intervene in the running of the nuns' affairs. The first of these clashes arose at the Dominican convent of Corpus Domini in 1533; the second occurred among the Franciscan nuns of San Sepolcro in 1567. Although, strictly speaking, the Corpus Domini episode stands outside the chronological limits of this thesis, the two cases are worth discussing alongside each other, since certain elements of the two tales are revealingly similar.

In February 1533, the Dominican vicar-general, fra Serafino, dismissed the prioress of Corpus Domini from her office, two months before her term was due to expire. She was a respected noblewoman and sister of Polo Trevisan, one of the Capi dei Dieci. Her supporters, inside and outside the convent, were unlikely to be impressed by the intervention of the Florentine vicar-general, whose motive was to bring forward the

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4 *Nunziature*, 1, p. 30 ff. The position of vicar-general was peripatetic, with authority over Dominican houses throughout Italy. He was the direct inferior of the *maestro-generale*, head of the Dominican order in Italy (see, *D.I.P.*, sub 'Frati predicatori').
new election to occur while he was still in Venice. But if Serafino's initial action could be put down to tactlessness, his attempts to manipulate the results of the ensuing election were clearly more calculating. Not only did he violate the secrecy of the ballot, insisting that each nun make her vote openly; he also refused to confirm Veneranda Cappello, whom the nuns had elected in spite of Serafino's manoeuvres, as the new prioress. His rather specious argument for debarring the nuns' chosen candidate was that, at forty-seven, Veneranda was too young to hold the office.

In two subsequent elections, Cappello was excluded and the candidates involved failed to win sufficient votes for election. Following the intervention of the Council of Ten, Cappello took part in yet another election and on 11 February she was legitimately re-elected. The Capi dei Dieci awaited fra Serafino's confirmation of the new prioress only to find that he had suddenly left Venice and taken himself off to Bologna.

But the controversy continued to rage in Venice. Two parties had developed around the rival candidates, each commanding support throughout the city. Giacoma Torella, of citizen stock, was the favourite of the vicar-general and his local allies. Her noble opponent, Veneranda Cappello, was supported by a large party of relatives 'il quale abbraccia la maggior parte delle prime case di questa città'; members of this camp were infuriated by the fact that their kinswoman's election had been continually blocked 'come la fosse o una trista o una pazza'. The papal nuncio, who was keen to calm the troubled waters at Corpus Domini, blamed the families of nuns for the ongoing dispute: 'tutta la difficoltà di l'accordo loro nasce dalla differentia et sdegno et concorrentia di gli suoi parenti qui de fuora che sono in gran numero'. However, the divisions that permeated the outside world were reflected within the convent itself. In November 1533, when Veneranda Cappello was, at last, appointed, a clique of nuns around the unsuccessful Torella responded by refusing to obey the new prioress. The papal nuncio excommunicated the rebellious nuns, but even this was insufficient to tame them; the Council of Ten took more effective action, ordering that the convent be raided and that six sisters (two professed nuns, including Torella, and four converse) be imprisoned in six different observant nunneries around the city. In the event, the threat did not have to be carried out, for relatives of the rebellious faction came to Corpus Domini and urged the nuns to manifest obedience and humility both to the prioress and the temporal authorities.

By January 1534, the nuncio was able to report 'che subbito questo monasterio si è pacificato miracolosamente'. The new prioress was installed, and a secular priest had come to take over the post of confessor to the nuns, a service which in the past had

6 Nunziature, I, p. 96.
7 Nunziature, I, p. 154
always been fulfilled by the Dominican friars. In July, the logic of this policy was further extended when in response to the 'variae rixae, dissentiones, dissidia, & scandala' that had arisen at Corpus Domini, while under the care of the Friars Preachers, full administrative powers were transferred to the papal legate. This system pertained for twenty-six years, until control was granted instead to the patriarch, bringing the nuns of Corpus Domini securely within the fold of the Venetian Church.

As with Corpus Domini over thirty years earlier, the discord that arose at San Sepolcro in 1567 was also initiated by a male superior from the nuns' order. Once again, the crisis resulted from the removal of the community's abbess from her post, and several attempts by prominent local Franciscans to control the appointment of her successor. On 30 June of that year, news reached the provveditori sopra monasteri that nel monastero di Santo Sepulcro le monache si ritrovavano in grandissima confusione, et rumore per causa chel padre ministro del ordine di S. Francesco suo superior era stato sabado prossimo passato nel detto monastero et haveva cassa la abbadessa di esso monastero.

This time there was a disciplinary pretext for the interference of the 'padre ministro' in the affairs of the nunnery, for he held suor Michaela Beltrame, abbess for the last two and a half years, responsible for the escape of a young girl named Meneghina, who was boarding at San Sepolcro as a 'fia à spese'. Yet the determination of the friar to force through the election of his own preferred candidate, suor Daria 'da cha Navagier, sorella del magnifico Piero' suggests that factors besides the alleged negligence of suor Michaela drove him to intervene.

Statements which have survived from the investigation carried out by the provveditori indicate the fury that many nuns evinced at the conduct of the 'padre ministro'. They tell of how he came to the convent, accompanied by 'il guardian di San Francesco' (the superior of the nearby friary, San Francesco della Vigna) and set about bullying the nuns into submission. First of all, the two friars undertook to interview all the inhabitants of the convent over a period of two days. On the third day, undeterred by the decorum of clausura, the two men entered the convent:

8 Corner, I, pp. 157-60.
9 Corner, I, pp. 161-62; 1560, 8 May, 'Pius IV. Sanctimoniales corporis christi. Ab Apostolico Legatorum subjectione, ad Patriarchae Venetii obedientiam deducti'.
10 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1567, S. Sepolcro, fo. 1r. Although this was evidently a very full investigation, the middle section between fo. 12 and fo. 51 has been lost. 'Padre ministro' was almost certainly the term the nuns used to denote their confessor. This would explain why he had a 'casetta' on the convent premises; see below, pp. 70-75.
11 The implications of convents taking in boarding girls are discussed in chapter III, pp. 134-35.
el vene con il guardian de S. Francesco, et si fece aprir la 
porta alle portonere, et andorno tutti doi dentro, et fece sonar 
la campanella del capitolo, et tutte le munege andorno 
all'obedientia, et alhora el pronontio che la fusse cassa, 
ancor chel fusse contra la volunta delle piu parte.12

This nun's account describes the friars' entry almost in terms of a coup. It goes on to 
tell of how the members of capitolo, reluctant to lend their authority to the intentions of 
the two friars, walked out of the meeting, only to be summoned back by the bell. 
Again, many of the nuns refused to return, in response to which, 'lui ando fina alle 
porte delle munege à farle venir'. Several depositions refer to the friars pulling the veils 
off nuns who failed to comply. 

Eventually, after much more ringing of the bell, the capitolo reassembled, and 
the 'padre ministro' announced that they were to vote openly on whether they favoured 
the old abbess or suor Daria Navagier. Enraged by this travesty of their electoral 
system, confusion broke out among many of the nuns, enabling the friars to get 
Navagier voted in by a rump minority:

molte delle monache si cavorno li veli negri di testa, et lo 
trasse via, et scamporno su per la scala, et anche delle altre 
con elle fugirono su per la scala, che li padri li voleva tuor li 
veli, et in questa confusion fu fatta la abbadessa nova da 
alquanti munege che erano restate in capitolo.13

Another witness recalled how several votes were held before the friars achieved their 
desired result, and that this was finally accomplished by utterly unscrupulous means: 
'chel ministro toleva li bolletini et come vedeva il nome della abbadessa vechia se li 
trazeva sotto li piedi dicens quella che è sta fatta da 10 over 12 de munege 60 che sono 
in questo monastero'.14 This nun was keenly aware of the failure of Navagier to secure 
an electoral mandate.

Of course, Navagier had her supporters too: for example, suor Franceschina 
Moresini, who insisted on the legitimacy of the election with similar precision as to the 
division of votes: 'et poi fu fatta abbadessa suor Daria canonicamente per che erimo 50 
et de ditte 50 nove non intravene, alcune predindisposte et suor Michaella et la 
portonera che era state casse, et suor Daria have 23 voti talmente che la fo fatta 
canonicamente'.15 But even if suor Franceschina's figures are reliable, suor Daria

12 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1567, S. Sepolcro, fo. 3v. 
13 Ibid., fo. 4r. 
14 Ibid., fo. 7r. 
15 Ibid., fo. 52r.
could only have been elected by a simple majority, not by the two-thirds majority which was generally required.\textsuperscript{16}

In common with the disputed election that occurred at Corpus Domini, there was evidently a familial dimension to the controversy at San Sepolcro. Following her election, suor Daria was quick to summon her brother and other influential contacts to the convent: 'madonna abbadessa presente, et suor Arcanzola Contarini mandò à chiamar messer Piero Navagier, et anche messer Vicenzo Contarini, et me Hieronimo Contarini, et li parlo in parlatorio doe over tre volte'. And again,

\begin{quote}
heri poi che fo zuoba vene il magnificco messer Piero Navagier, messer Vicenzo et messer Hieronimo Contarini et parlorno con la abbadessa nova, et con suor Arcanzola Contarini, et poi andorno desuso in la casetta del padre ministro qua desuso, ne so quello che sia seguido dapoi.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

As the investigation progresses, it becomes clear that a feud between the old abbess, suor Michaela, and the Navagier family had been brewing for some time, regarding a building project which the latter wanted to put into practice:

\begin{quote}
et quando al principio che la fo fatta abbadessa suor Michaella non era acora spazada la lite con li Navagieri di certo balcon che volevano far in giesia, et suor Michaella fece spazar, chel non fusse fatto, perche si poteva veder in monastero et suor Daria have grandissimo dispiacier.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

The convent was split between the two abbesses. There were those who claimed that suor Michaela had deliberately allowed the escape of Meneghina; others protested her innocence, blaming the interference of the friars for the crisis in the convent. In the words of one deponent, the seventy-eight year old suor Cecilia Lion,

\begin{quote}
Sono anni 58 che sio in questo monastero che senpre semo in pace et quella povereta de suor Michaella che e una santa che credo che la fara miracoli alla sua morte et ha vivesto con pacientia, che non so come la sia viva, et la causa di ogni mal e sta il padre ministro che vene qua, et credo chel demonio sia sta causa.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Suor Eugenia Vianuola was also in no doubt as to whom to blame for the instability in the nunnery: 'la principal nostra discordia si ei frati, perche i mette loro tutte le discordie'.\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, the friars, who had been at the convent for more than

\textsuperscript{16} See pp. 83-87 on elections to the position of abbess.
\textsuperscript{17} ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1567, S. Sepolcro, fos 4v-5r.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., fo. 61v.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., fo. 65r.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., fo. 57v.
seventeen days, were eating the nuns out of house and home, for their allies in the
nunnery provided them with 'caponi, colombini, torte, cui [?] de late, malvasia, vin
dolce, et noi havemo de gran di magnar, un poco di fasuoli, ol verze, le ne ha
despresiade'.

Interestingly, the intervention of the provveditori sopra monasteri in trying to
restore order to the convent was greeted with complaints from Navagier's supporters,
on the grounds that outside authorities, and in particular laymen, should keep out of an
internal affair. An extraordinary deposition from one prete Battista Franzoi, a deacon at
San Marco, tells of how he was summoned by suor Arcanzola Contarini on account of
his acquaintance with Andrea Sanuto 'signor sopra li monasteri', and was instructed to
pass on a warning to Sanuto telling the provveditori to mind their own business, and to
keep out of the convent's affairs. She protested that Sanuto and his colleagues 'vien gia
alcuni zorni ad examinarne intravendo un nostro disturbo, cosa che mai seculari si
hanno impazado di questo monastero onde Dio disse "noli tangere christos meos"'.

Judging from the welcome afforded to Piero Navagier and suor Arcanzola's own
relatives, Hieronimo and Vicenzo Contarini, this principle was not always upheld.

A panoply of different interest-groups were involved in the affairs of nunneries. In this
section, the main focus has been on the interventions of power-hungry friars, seen as
acutely undesirable by the Venetian church and state, and resented by many of the nuns
too. But male religious were not the only ones interfering in the day-to-day
administration of the convents. Papal nuncios, provveditori, and the families of nuns
also left their marks. And just as conventual disputes drew in outside involvement, so
external issues impinged upon the internal politics of the nunnery. Indeed, as a complex
case like that of San Sepolcro unfolds, the reader of the processo records is left in some
uncertainty as to whether the root cause of the crisis was really the flight of Meneghina,
or whether it was rather the refusal of the deposed abess to cooperate with the
powerful Navagieri over their proposal to build a balcony in the conventual church.

It is useful to have an awareness of administrative disputes in Venetian
convents, during the early period of local reforms. For the problems which arose at
Corpus Domini and San Sepolcro provided negative examples of the kind which helped
to shape ecclesiastical and state policy regarding nunneries. Three main responses may
be seen in the provisions made for the administration of convents. First, there was the
desire to streamline the government of nunneries. Administrative diversity lessened
during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in Venice, as those stray
convents whose primary allegiances were to their Order, or to Rome, were brought
under the control of the patriarch. Secondly, there was enclosure. The obsession with

21 Ibid., fo. 58r.
22 Ibid., fo. 68r.
isolating nuns from the world was generated by a variety of causes. But the prevention of administrative chaos of the sort witnessed at Corpus Domini and San Sepolcro was surely prominent among them. In particular, the Venetian authorities recognized the importance of keeping male and female religious well apart. A third response was to protect the internal government of nunneries from interference by outsiders. That the Venetian church and state were concerned with preserving the political liberties of Christ's brides is ironic. There was little enough which was liberal in the policy directed at nuns. Yet the Venetians saw the advantage of protecting the democratic processes of convents from manipulation by external interests. Potentially, at least, nuns were afforded a remarkable degree of political autonomy. This is not to say that they always chose to use it, or that political autonomy was necessarily what they wanted.
THE STATE

According to the eighteenth-century legal historian, Vettor Sandi, from the time of the first religious communities in Venice, the state authorities had undertaken responsibility for

la tutela del buon costume, della monacale disciplina relativa alla civile società, e polizia, e la retta amministrazione delle rendite de' Monasteri sì di uomini, che di donzelle. 23

Vettor's qualification 'relativa alla civile società, e polizia' was significant, for the intervention of temporal authority in the affairs of religious communities was not unfettered, and competing interests were quick to object if the state overstepped the mark. As suor Arcanzola Contarini of San Sepolcro remarked indignantly in 1567, 'mai seculari si hanno impazendo di questo monastero onde Dio disse "noli tangere christos meos"'. It is the purpose of this section of the chapter to establish both the scope and motives of the 'braccio secolare' in controlling the nunneries of Venice. But first, it is necessary to sketch a historiographical divide which has shaped assumptions about the Venetian state's role in the government of female religious. For it is a reflection of the relatively undeveloped historiography of the subject that two potentially conflicting analyses of the situation have been put forward without prompting any direct debate.

In 1509, the diarist Girolamo Priuli wrote down his interpretation of why the Venetian government failed to enforce the law against those involved in sexual crimes with female religious:

Et questo procedeva rispetto che queste monache meretrici erano fiole over sorelle, over parenti deli primi Senatori, quali governavano la Republica Veneta, et similiter li nobeli veneti quali praticavano et lussuriosamente conversavano in simili monasterii cum simile monache erano fioi, fratelli, nepoti deli sopraditti Padri Veneti, governatori dela citade predicta, quali inclinati al sangue loro et a l'onor dela casa loro, non lassavano procedere avanti le querele et he notitie de simel mancamento, immo le ponevano sotto silentio... et quod peius est qualcuno deli primi Senatori... praticavano veneriamente in simeli monasterii cum simile monache sacrate. 24

23 Sandi, III, p. 187. See also Da Mosto, I, p. 201: 'La Reppublica non ignorò mai un controllo sulle persone e sui beni degli ecclesiastici regolari'.
24 G. Priuli, IV, p. 34. In his relazione of 1581, the outgoing papal nuncio, Alberto Bolognetti, also attributed the lax standards of the Venetian convents to the familial links which existed between female religious and the patriciate. Interestingly, however, he perceived the nuns as exercising considerable political influence, in order to secure disciplinary concessions from those in positions of temporal authority: 'quelli che governavano si muovono a favorirle non solamente per il vincolo di sangue, ma forse anche per l'aiuto che ricevono da loro nell'ottenere i gradi della Republica; perciochè esse ancora, con mandarsi a chiamare i padri, fratelli et altri parenti più stretti et con pregargli a favore di questo et di quell'altro, possono in materia de brogli et nuocere et giovare assai', Bolognetti, p. 117.
The social inextricability of Venetian nuns and the ruling class must be considered an important factor in any analysis of the state's policies regarding female religious. Thus far, there is consensus among historians. Many have gone further and, in keeping with Girolamo Priuli's view, they have agreed that the political elite deliberately opposed disciplinary reforms in order to protect the interests of their class. Of these, some have gestured towards a conspiracy of the corrupt and immoral (as depicted by Priuli); others have emphasised the pragmatic concern of those in power to preserve nunneries in order to accommodate the inevitable crop of unmarried women produced from their own ranks of society. The latter view is expressed by Giovanni Spinelli:

Consapevoli del vantaggio che i monasteri femminili arrecavano alla società ed anche della situazione penosa di tante giovani monacate senza vera vocazione, sia l'autorità laica che quella ecclesiastica largheggiavano in concessioni verso di essi, lasciando che il rigore della disciplina claustrale fosse più formale che reale.

But not all historians have worked from the assumption that the ruling class blocked reform. Equally convincing, and more consistent with the evidence presented in this thesis, is the argument that the personal association of so many noblemen with the city's convents made them eager to protect these institutions from the dishonour and scandal which would result from disciplinary laxity. David Wootton, for example, makes a clear connection between the function of nunneries in absorbing unmarried noblewomen, and the desire of the state to control these institutions. He contrasts the somewhat disinterested attitude evinced by the temporal authorities towards the clergy with the fact that 'the nunneries were closely supervised by the secular authorities'. Whereas the ruling class had no stake in the male clergy, who tended to be poor and ill-educated, the nunnery was 'one ecclesiastical institution that did play a crucial role in the life of the nobility'. For this reason, nunneries warranted more, not less control. Gabriella Zarri stresses that conventual reforms could be motivated by a concern to protect civic and familial honour. With characteristic subtlety, she sums up her perception of how the ruling class reacted to the slack standards of some convents:

25 Paschini (esp. p. 46) and Logan, 'Studies in the Religious Life of Venice' (pp. 381-86) argue that aristocratic connections were an impediment to reform of the nunneries. Spinelli (p. 195) and ed. Medioli, Inferno (pp. 120-21) emphasize the state's wish to render conventual life less unpleasant for those nuns who were victims of forced vocations. Canosa (p. 11) perceives the policy of the Venetian authorities in a more hypocritical light, arguing that laymen and clerics condemned the 'turbolenza' of disciplinary transgressions, while doing nothing to remove the cause, namely forced vocations. This side of the issue is discussed more fully in chapter II, pp. 109-114.
26 Spinelli, p. 195.
27 Wootton, Paolo Sarpi, p. 53.
Historians have therefore differed as to whether the vested interests of the Venetian patriciate in the state of the convents made it more or less keen to assert disciplinary control. Gabriella Zarri's conclusion suggests a middle way: that the ruling class held an ambivalent and changeable attitude to conventual discipline, reacting to particular cases according to the circumstances. Zarri's rejection of generalizations is certainly salutary. After all, even a state that was clearly committed to imposing religious reforms might be obliged to hush up the occasional scandal in order to preserve the reputations of members of government or their families. We should not expect the agents of temporal power to have been absolutely consistent in their actions. However, by looking more closely at the nature of measures imposed by the Venetian authorities, a more general pattern does in fact emerge, indicating those areas of conventual life where concessions might be granted, and those which were considered most needful of control.

The Venetian state was concerned above all to regulate those aspects of the convents which were public. This gives some indication of why the temporal authorities were so keen to impose enclosure, for it was easier for the state to isolate female religious than it was to regulate them. So long as nunneries appeared honourable institutions from the outside, the rigours of life inside could be relaxed. This in part simply reflected the brief of the temporal authorities to interfere in the affairs of religious communities only in so far as they had a bearing on civil society. But it also took into account both the problem of forced vocations and the need to protect the city's honour. In a report advising the Venetian government on the enforced enclosure and reform of a convent in Udine on the terraferma, Santa Chiara, Paolo Sarpi stressed two principles: first, that the Bishop should be prevented from seeking to impose austerity of life upon the nuns; second, that nuns without true vocation should not be allowed to leave the convent, since to raise hopes of escape in this way would lead countless other nuns to seek release, and the burden of these unmarried and undowered dependants would bring ruin to their families. In other words, a certain amount of indulgence should be afforded to those women within the walls, but the walls themselves should be rendered more impassable than ever.

28 Zarri, 'Monasteri femminili e città', p. 378.
29 Wright, 'The Venetian view of church and state', p. 97. The date of this case appears to be unknown, see Cecchetti, p. 409. However, it must presumably fall within the period 1606-1623, in which Sarpi held the position of consultore.
This thesis demonstrates that the temporal authorities pursued the policy of enclosure with energy and commitment. Spinelli's view that both church and state allowed 'che il rigore della disciplina claustrale fosse più formale che reale' simply does not match up with the policies which were evidently put into practice. In this section, the rationale behind the state's involvement in the reform and control of nunneries is considered in greater depth; there follows a survey of what measures were taken, and the processes by which they were enacted.

The factors which motivated the Venetian state to be actively involved in the government of nunneries were political, social, and religious. Discussion will focus first upon the political dynamic. The nunneries of Venice were one of a number of pawns in an ongoing power struggle between the Republic and the papacy. The approach of the temporal authorities to religious affairs was twofold. On the one hand, Venice jealously guarded its subjects from Roman intervention. On the other, it sought to fashion the local church in its own image, aspiring to make it the junior partner in a joint enterprise. The transference of the patriarchate to within the city in 1451, enabling the Venetian government to establish closer relations with the church, and to monitor its activities more readily, is often seen as a turning-point in this process. It was the aim of La Serenissima to prevent ecclesiastical authorities, and in particular foreign ones, from becoming overmighty within its territories, a position common among other early-modern states. It is perhaps because, in the case of Venice, this policy would eventually (in 1606) provoke the papacy into issuing an interdict against the whole Republic, and because that event is so coloured in our minds by the exceptional character of Sarpi, that historians have been tempted to conclude that Venice made a point of opposing the church on every issue, and would certainly have had no truck with implementing the Counter-Reformation in its territories.

The opposition of the state to the reform of female religious is most commonly exemplified by its refusal to allow the apostolic visitation of 1581 access to the convents. In preparing the way for the visitation, the papal nuncio, Bolognetti, reported in 1580 that it would be easier to persuade the Signoria to accept the apostolic delegation 'se si havesse a visitare solamente i Preti et Frati, et non le Monache, parendo alla maggior parte cosa dura the delle imperfettioni delle loro donne si habbino da far processi con propolare quelle cose the pill tosto si dovriano coprire'. Bolognetti's allusion to the imperfections 'delle loro donne' is surely meant to indicate
the large number of nuns who were connected by blood to members of the Signoria. Thus, the argument against a papal visitation of nunneries is that it would jeopardize the honour of the ruling class. A few months later, Bolognetti was presenting a further argument premised on the close associations of nuns and the ruling body. Apparently, the view propounded in the Senate went like this:

Again, the interests of the nobility would be prejudiced by exposing the Venetian convents to visitation by the Pope's delegates. For if the nunneries were subjected to a stricter regime, the daughters of this rank of society would refuse to take the veil, with disastrous economic implications for their families.

These were undoubtedly genuine considerations in the debate on the apostolic visitation. They do not, however, present the whole story. For the Venetian government itself both supported and undertook weighty reform initiatives within its own territory. Not only was there a state magistracy from 1521 which brought to trial those who had breached the ever-sterner laws regarding nunneries; but visitations, carried out by the patriarchal authorities (sometimes accompanied by representatives of the magistracy), were a regular occurrence at all convents. The Venetians' opposition to the proposed apostolic visitation was engendered by the prospect of having Roman officials interfering in the local convents; it was not a reaction to the visitation and reform of nuns per se.

The Venetians won in 1581, and the papal visitation went ahead without intruding upon the nunneries. But a piece of evidence from 1584 suggests that the threat of papal interference still hung over the nuns of Venice, and that the temporal authorities were anxious to preempt any reforming overtures emanating from Rome. Thus the Council of Ten resolved:

Che la lettera dell'Ambasciatore à Roma de 14 del mese presente, in materia di Monache, hora letta, sia comunicata alli provveditori sopra li Monasterii alli quali per ordini di questo Consilio sia commesso, che debbano almanco due volte alla settimana, ridursi insieme con il Reverendissimo Patriarca per proveder con ogni diligenza unicamente overo

33 Quoted in Paschini, p. 58. A similar analysis of 'l'impedimento ch'era fatto alla visita' may also be found in Bolognetti's relazione, written in 1581, following his period of office as nuncio to Venice (1578-81), see 'Dello stato et forma delle cose ecclesiastiche nel dominio dei signori venetiani', p. 175.
Following the advice of the Venetian ambassador in Rome, the Council of Ten was moved to make new provision to see that discipline was maintained in the convents, to avoid the 'grandissimi inconvenienti' which would otherwise result from inspection by a representative of the papacy. In this instance, the prospect of an apostolic visitation was actually an incentive to reform.

In 1580, protecting the nunneries of Venice from scandalous revelations and from over-zealous reforms may have been a factor in the objections to papal interference. But the underlying issue was surely that, if reform was called for, it should be undertaken by local authorities, sensitive to local issues and local interests; it was not an area for outsiders to intervene in.

The social impetus for temporal intervention in the affairs of nunneries has already been indicated. The prosperity of the upper ranks of Venetian society was thought to rest on the function fulfilled by the convents in accommodating celibate women at a price far lower than marriage. So bound up were the interests of the political elite with the nunneries that in 1553, it was complained that it was impossible to find Senators to serve as *provveditori sopra monasteri*, since so many were rendered ineligible on the grounds of being related to nuns. But although the survival of the nunneries was of paramount importance, it was also essential to preserve their good name.

While the government was determined to bring shame upon *monachini*, men who violated the honour of Christ's brides, it was careful to guard nuns from scandal. A law of 1566 demanded that the names of *monachini* who had been exiled for their crimes be published in the *Maggior Consiglio* annually on the first Sunday of Lent. This was suspended in 1572 'per conservation delli Monasteri'. In 1585, a measure concerning illicit visitors to nunneries made the following provision:

facendo publicar le loro condenationi quelle delli Nobeli nel Maggior Concilio et quelle delli altri sopra le scalle de S. Marco, et di Rialto, dicendo in general per haver contrafatto alle leggi in visitar Monache, senza nominar il Monasterio.

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34 ASV, *PSM*, B. 1, fo. 20r, 1584, 19 Dec.
35 ASV, *PSM*, B. 1, fo. 26r, 1553, 12 April, Cons. X, Collegio present.
36 ASV, *PSM*, B. 1, fo. 36r, 1571, 22 Feb. [m.v.], Cons. X.
37 ASV, *PSM*, B. 1, fo. 32r, 1584, 2 Jan. [m.v.], Cons. X.
The same principle was reiterated in 1617: noble transgressors should be named in the *Maggior Consiglio*, but convents should remain anonymous.  

The state acted to preserve the nunneries of Venice for the vital socio-economic role they played in the city's life. Scandal and debt were probably the two greatest threats to the convents. The campaigns waged against *monachini*, consisting in tougher sentences and new preventative measures, were accompanied by policies designed to safeguard the economic well-being of female religious houses. A concern to protect nunneries from sexual and economic exploitation by outsiders made the Venetian government an assiduous proponent of enclosure—the central touchstone of the Tridentine reforms. Thus, even if we take the state's concern with nunneries to have been wholly expedient, motivated by the demographic demands of the time, it would be short-sighted to expect no reforming agenda to emerge from its involvement.

A wholly secular interpretation of the Republic's interventions in the nunneries is scarcely appropriate for the culture of early-modern Venice, however. The ceremony that took place when a new abbess was invested at le Vergini has already been mentioned. Here, secular and sacred were vividly intermingled. The influence of the city's nuns on the Republic's spiritual welfare was recognised in both its positive and negative manifestations. In the wake of the humiliating defeat of Venetian troops at Agnadello, in 1509 the diarist Girolamo Priuli was quick to blame the scandalous behaviour of the nuns for bringing God's wrath upon the Republic: 'per il peccato gravissimo di queste monache meretricie se judichava fusse proceduto in grande parte la ruina del Stato Veneto'. His call for reforms to be instituted by the state was explicit: 'dondë che li Padri Venetti, considerando il gravissimo et abhorendo peccato [...] et etiam per la mormoratione deli populi, deliberaronno de fare provixione in simel materia'.

Following the calamities of 1509, a series of new punitive measures was indeed issued by the Senate aimed at transgressors of enclosure. Perpetual exile was henceforth the due of those who dared to have sexual relations with female religious. Illicit entry to a convent incurred a ten-year ban. A five-year ban was prescribed for those who gave shelter to escaped nuns, while boatmen who brought illegal visitors to nunneries, or gave transport to fugitive nuns, were liable to six months' imprisonment. These state provisions were accompanied by a host of reform measures emanating from the church, which culminated in patriarch Contarini's systematic campaign to subject all conventual houses to observancy, a policy endorsed

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38 *ASV, Comp. Leggi*, B. 288, fo. 46, 1616, 17 Feb. [m.v.], Senato.
39 *G. Priuli, IV*, p. 115; 1509, 29 June. Quoted in Pedani, 'L'osservanza imposta', p. 113. See also Paschini, pp. 44-45.
40 Pilot, p. 55. These punitive measures are discussed in greater detail in ch. V, pp. 181-82.
and aided by the government. In her recent article on the subject of these reforms, Pedani confidently asserts that

La riforma dei monasteri conventuali femminili attuata a Venezia nella prima metà del Cinquecento, si colloca sullo sfondo del rinnovamento dello Stato e della società veneziana che ebbero luogo dopo la sconfitta di Agnadello.41

Focusing on the state's role in regulating blasphemy, Derosas has also identified a concern to bring about renewal and reform on the part of the Venetian temporal authorities in the first half of the sixteenth century. In a series of repressive measures against blasphemers, prostitutes, sodomites and Jews, he perceives the 'sensibilità religiosa' of the period, in which providence was deemed to lie behind every event:

In questi anni profondamente segnati da guerre, carestie, epidemie, si fa angoscioso, per le collettività non meno che per gli individui, il bisogno di ingraziarsi il favore divino e di eliminare quei peccati che ne provocano la vendetta.42

If this was the prevailing atmosphere, how disturbing it must have been to reflect that the nunneries of Venice, which should have been a positive spiritual resource for the city, were in fact no better than 'pubblici bordelli'.

According to contemporary perceptions, the nuns of Venice had done more to jeopardise God's sympathy for the Republic than to nurture it, and consequently, the interventions of the state in the affairs of convents were predominantly negative. Legislation was passed to bring to justice those who threatened the reputations of the nunneries. The drive to isolate nuns became ever stronger, and 'il braccio secolare' was fully involved in the enforcement of enclosure. But, at a symbolic level at least, nuns were still viewed as contributing something more positive to the city's spiritual account, and certain provisions were made by the temporal authorities in recognition of this. Whereas, after Agnadello, observers had jumped to cast blame on the convents, after Lepanto, in 1571, the great Venetian victory of the century, the nuns were considered an integral element of the city's intercessory resources. On 19 October, the Senate decreed:


41 Pedani, 'L'osservanza imposta', p. 113.
42 Derosas, p. 438.
Furthermore, 2000 ducats were to be spent on the convents, *luoghi pii* and poor of the city.\footnote{ASV, *Comp. Leggi*, B. 288, fo. 355, 1571, 19 Oct. Nuns sometimes emphasised their intercessory function in order to persuade the state to grant them particular privileges. For example, in 1620, the nuns of S. Chiara di Murano petitioned the *provveditori sopra monasteri* to give licence to certain *converse* to leave the convent in order to seek food. The nuns claimed 'continuamente giorno et notte pregiamo il Signore per la conservazione et grandezza di questa santa et benedetta Republica', ASV, *PSM*, B. 266, 1620, S. Chiara di Murano. For comparative evidence of similar claims made by nuns in other Italian towns, see Zarri, pp. 373-74. She cites a Lucchese nun as giving the clearest expression to the idea that female religious served the community by mediating between God and men: 'con la loro perfezione sieno mediatrixi fra Iddio et li huomini, a placar l'ira di Dio con gli officii divini et sancte orationi di et nocte' (p. 374).}

The nuns of Santa Giustina in Castello gained particular kudos from the victory at Lepanto, for the date of the battle, October 7, coincided with the feast of their patron saint. The virgin and martyr had always figured more significantly in the Venetian liturgy than in that of Rome; from now on, her feast became one of the major events in the civic calendar. From 1572, the day was celebrated with a ceremonial *andata* to the church of Santa Giustina, which happened to have parochial status as well as serving the adjacent nunnery. Not only the doge and signoria, together with the full regalia of office, but also ambassadors and foreign dignitaries processed from Piazza San Marco to Santa Giustina. After solemn Mass had been celebrated by one of the canons of San Marco, attention focused on the nuns as the doge presented them with specially-minted coins, known as 'giustine'.\footnote{Fenlon, p. 29.}

Subsidies were another way in which the state made a positive contribution to the nunneries. A list, dated 1610, shows the annual wheat hand-outs provided by the state to hospitals and religious houses. In total, 653 *stara* of wheat were distributed among 52 institutions. Of these, thirty-nine were nunneries situated in Venice or on the surrounding lagoon islands, which together took 480 *stara*. The donations received by convents ranged from between 36 *stara*, the amount allotted to the Franciscan houses of Santa Croce di Venezia, Santa Chiara di Murano, San Sepolcro, and Santa Maria Maggiore, to two *stara*, given to a variety of less needful or deserving houses.\footnote{ASV, *S. Andrea de Zirada*, B. 21, fasc. 1196, fo. 12r: 1610, 12 June, 'formenti menudi della ser.ma sig.ra'. *Staro or staio* was a measure of capacity, equivalent to approximately 83 litres; Martini, p. 818.}

The Venetian state would also provide economic aid in response to particular contingencies. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the community of Santa Marta was experiencing financial difficulties and claimed that an increase in numbers had exceeded its economic resources. A series of supplications survive, requesting contributions of wheat, salt and wood to be granted by the state.\footnote{ASV, *S. Marta*, B. 7. The only petition which bears a date is from 1581, 22 September. It requests an increase in the state's contribution of wood, from 8 *caro* to 16.} Avoiding direct subsidies, the Venetian government nonetheless intervened to procure private funding
for the Convertite: in 1550, the Maggior Consiglio passed a law obliging all notaries to ask testators if they wanted to bequeath money to this relatively new foundation.\(^{47}\) Leaving money to this community of repentant women was an apt means of making atonement. By the Council's instruction, the gesture took on a corporate as well as an individual significance. One final example gives particularly clear expression to the religious motives which prompted the state to act. In 1627, the Senate undertook to pay the conventual dowry of a girl named as the daughter of Acuash Agà. As a convert to Christianity, 'con particolar inspiratione del Signor Dio', the girl was determined to become a nun, against the wishes of her father. Her cause suggested a fine opportunity for a manifestation of civic piety:

> è conveniente alla pietà della signoria nostra ad honore del Signor Dio, che tanto hà favorito questa Creatura con le sue gratie, darli commodità per effettuare così lodevole e santa vocazione.\(^{48}\)

A mixed rationale lay behind the readiness of the temporal authorities to engage in the affairs of female religious. More consistent were the actions which issued from the state. Apart from occasional positive contributions, which affirmed the role of the convents as a spiritual asset of the city, in the period of this study the Venetian government sought primarily to impose repressive measures on female religious. The next section explores the policies which were enacted.

The chief weapon available to the 'braccio secolare' was the law. Unfortunately no attempt has been made by historians to catalogue the laws passed by the state regarding nunneries in the period prior to the sixteenth century and it is beyond the scope of this study to do so. However, an idea of the extent and nature of legislation enacted with regard to specific convents may be gleaned from Corner's compilation of documents on the Venetian churches.\(^{49}\) Corner's concern, so far as it touched upon convents, was predominantly with their early history, and many of his transcriptions testify to the state authorizing the foundation of new religious houses, or the extension of existing ones.\(^{50}\) From an early period, the deterence of monachini also prompted government measures. In 1349, the Maggior Consiglio passed new laws against men who entered convents in order to pursue sexual liaisons with nuns, and delegated to the Avogadori di Comun the

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\(^{47}\) ASV, Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fo. 324, 1550, 19 March.

\(^{48}\) ASV, Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fo. 592, 1627, 11 June.

\(^{49}\) Corner, Ecclesiae Venetae.

\(^{50}\) We know that the state continued to control the foundation of new communities. In the period under study, the only new female monastic institution to be founded in Venice was a community of cappuccine. See Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fos 440-41, and 462, for petitions and other documents (1605-1614) concerning the nuns' quest for a suitable house. In 1612, they purchased a building near S. Girolamo; they took up residence there in 1614.
task of investigating transgressions of this kind. Those charged were to be brought before the *Quarantia Criminale* for trial. Further laws of 1455 and 1486 revised the punishments which would be dealt to the guilty.\(^{51}\)

The sixteenth century saw the onset of Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and Venice was not excluded from the marked increase in the momentum of religious reform witnessed throughout Europe. As has already been indicated, a burst of reforming energy was evident from 1509. Patriarch Contarini, elected in 1508, provided a powerful impetus from within the Venetian church, and the state's renewed legislation against *monachini* chimed with the patriarch's orders for tighter enclosure.\(^{52}\) The Council of Ten intervened in 1514, issuing a series of further penal measures against those who breached the enclosure of nunneries, and the chastity of nuns. But the most radical reforming initiative came from the patriarch in 1519. Contarini's aim was to eradicate those communities which, according to their own traditions, followed a relaxed regime, and to this end, he engineered the transfer of observant nuns to the so-called 'conventual' houses. The administration of these convents was placed in the hands of the new nuns, and a ban was placed on the acceptance of 'conventual' nuns in future.

Contarini's policy deserves to be discussed at greater length in the next section concerning the church's role in governing and reforming nunneries. In the current context, its significance derives from the part it played in precipitating the establishment of the *Magistrato sopra monasteri* in 1521, a development which transformed the state's role in governing the affairs of Venetian convents. For whereas previous temporal interventions had consisted of *ad hoc* legislative measures, three secular magistrates or *provveditori* were now employed specifically to oversee the administration of the nunneries.

The story of the magistracy's foundation is, in the light of our attempts to assess the extent of temporal involvement in the reform of nunneries, an ambivalent one. It came into being in order to resolve a series of problems, economic and administrative, which had arisen from Patriarch Contarini's policy of reforming the 'conventual' houses. Unsurprisingly, the cohabitation of the old conventual communities with the imported observant nuns led to some fiery disputes. The conventual nuns were utterly marginalized within their own communities, as the

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\(^{51}\) Canosa, pp. 29-36. The law of 30 March 1486 stipulated two years' imprisonment and a 300 ducat fine for those found guilty of breaching enclosure, or three years' imprisonment and 1,300 scudi for taking a nun out of enclosure. Canosa provides details of some of the cases brought to trial by the Avogadori di Comun. The development of legislation against *monachini* is discussed in detail in ch. V, pp. 179-84.

\(^{52}\) Pilot, pp. 54-56. The Venetian defeat at Agnadello occurred on 14 May, 1509; Contarini's new instructions against nuns straying beyond the convent walls and outsiders entering were issued on 23 May, 1509. The Senate decree which increased the punishments which could be served on those involved in illicit relationships with nuns or on those who aided the escape of nuns was passed on 29 June, 1509.
reforming nuns took over the government of their affairs, and more importantly their economic resources. The indignities to which the conventuals were subject were exacerbated by the perceived social inferiority of the observant nuns. Delegations of noble nuns petitioned the Doge 'in Collegio' (a clear illustration both of their disregard for enclosure and of their social status); the force of their high-ranking familial connections made their cause hard to ignore. On 21 August, 1521, four abbesses from conventual houses—Santa Maria delle Vergini, San Zaccaria, La Celestia, and Santa Marta—came to the assembly of the 'collegio' to address the Doge and the Patriarch, accompanied by a host of relatives. According to the account of the diarist Marin Sanuto, the abbess of Le Vergini spoke first in Latin 'facendo quasi un oration'. The next speech was delivered by sier Nicolò Michiel, a nobleman with daughters and sisters at San Zaccaria, who held the Patriarch's vicar particularly to blame:

parlo e ben di la crudeltà usata contro la nobeltà, che nostro zentil done vadano ramenghe e disperse tutto per uno vicario dil Patriarca, romagnol bandito di Roma et incoronato, qual ha fatto grandissimi inconvenienti contra queste monache per robar o lasciaviar con chi li ha parso, dicendo di S. Zacaria dove erano tutte nobele, hora sono poste monache di altro ordine, e altra regola e habito, e bastarde greche e popolari; qual anni 760 è stà cussi, hanno speso ducati 46 mília ne la chiesa e monasterio e nel refetorio belissimo, e li è stà toltò. 53

The Magistrato sopra monasteri started life as a special commission, elected from among the Council of Ten, to attend to the grievances of the conventual nuns. Innocenzo Giuliani, who has provided the fullest analysis of the formation of the magistracy, argues that the particular aspect of the reforms which required settling 'fu la questione economica'. 54 The decree which was issued by the Council of Ten on 17 September described the function of the commissioners in the following words:

per autorità di questo Consiglio sia preso et deliberato che per scrutinio de ditto consilio eleger si debbano tre honoratissimi et di primarii zentilhomini di questa città, possendosi tuor di ogni luogo, et officio, quali insieme con ditto Reverendissimo Patriarcha habbino ad udir, et intendere le lamentationi et querelle di queste Monache conventuale circa il viver suo. Havendo libertà per la mazor parte loro, non essendo stà fatta quella debita limitation del predetto suo viver, de proveder per modo, et forma, che ditte Monache conventuale possino star nelli Monasterii suoi, et viver secondo la qualità et condition loro, et cusì etiam le observanti quella portion li parerà conveniente et honesta. 55

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53 Sanuto, I Diarii, XXXI, cols 276-277.
54 Giuliani, p. 106.
55 ASV, PSM, B. I, fo 6r-v, 1521, 17 September.
Although the *provveditori* were elected to resolve the economic problems arising from the patriarch's reforms, it would be wrong to assume an indifference on the part of the temporal authorities to the reforming principles that Contarini had laid down, and even less accurate to perceive an alliance of the state with the conventual nuns and their noble supporters against the patriarch. In fact, the temporal authorities had from the beginning put their weight behind Contarini, as we may see from the provisions made by the Council of Ten to assist in the implementation of the reform programme. The support of the Council is well attested by its willingness to pledge financial backing:

Acciò che questa tanta laudabil opera di ridur li Monasterii conventuali di questa Città, ad osservantia, habbia più facilmente loco essendo necessario per la mutatione delle donne da loco a loco, come a questo Consiglio è ben noto, spender pur qualche summa de danari, che altramente non è possibile far cosa bona, però sia per auctorità di esso Consilio preso, ch'el sia consigna alli Avogadori straordinarii fino alla suma de ducati cento, da esser spesi in quello parerà ad essi Avogadori, per commodo delle predette donne, essendo tenuto di quelli conto particolare.\(^{56}\)

At least in the higher ranks of government, Contarini’s efforts were considered ‘questa tanta laudabil opera’. Far from undermining these reforms, the *provveditori sopra monasteri* were appointed to help steer them through the practical obstacles which stood in their way. But the mandate to the *provveditori* went beyond this. In the papal brief of 18 October, 1521, approving the commission, Leo X exhorted the Doge and Signoria to give every support to the patriarch and the three nobles in order to bring about conventual reform:

Nobilitates vestras plurimum in Deo hortamur, ut assistentibus tribus primaris nobilibus Civibus, eidem Patriarchae reformationi per eum pro tempore factam per eosdem tres Cives de super electos, et deputatos insistere, facere, et manum praebere velitis, ut illa ad honorem Dei, et gloriosissime Virginis Mariae, quibus ipsae Moniales qua nihil Deo potest esse acceptius, perpetuo conservari queat.\(^{57}\)

Here there was consensus between Rome and Venice in granting the 'braccio secolare' an active role in the reformation of convents, a process which—as both parties reiterated—would require the cooperation of the Venetian church and state.

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\(^{56}\) ASV, *PSM*, B. 1, fos 15v-16r, 1521, 18 May, Cons. X & Zonta; reproduced in Giuliani, p. 154. See also the other documents he reproduces, dated 1519 and expressing the support of the Council of Ten for the patriarchal policy of reform, pp. 153-54. See also, p. 109, in the text of the article, for further discussion of church-state cooperation from the outset of Contarini's reforms.  

\(^{57}\) ASV, *PSM*, B. 1, fos 5r-6r, 1521, 8 Oct; Giuliani, pp. 156-57.
The Council of Ten was quick to grant the commission further powers. Less than a week after the election of the three nobles, their functions were extended to the convents of the diocese of Torcello. Here they would work in cooperation with either the Patriarch or the Bishop of Torcello, depending on which held jurisdiction over the particular convents at issue. In the same decree, the Council took the opportunity to ban anyone from speaking against the decisions of the Council or of the three provveditori in matters relating to the nunneries. A decree of July 1522, set the date for new elections to replace Battista Erizzo (who had died) and Domenico Trevisan (who had been appointed as capitano generale da mar). At the same time the job of overseeing building works was added to the duties of the provveditori. When the elections were held in September, both nobles who were chosen to fill the vacant positions refused to take up their offices, and Zuan Marcello—the only provveditore remaining from the original appointments—retired. A decree of October 1522, responded sharply to these setbacks, calling for new elections, and forbidding anyone to refuse the office, under pain of a 500 ducat fine. Complaining that the process of reform 'par quodam modo essere derelittä et abandonata dalla Signoria Nostra', it urged a renewal of efforts, 'per non lasciar imperfetta una opera così laudabile, santa et religiosa'.

Were these early difficulties simply teething problems, or did they betray a deeper lack of commitment to the reform of the nunneries? They certainly suggest an unwillingness among members of the Council of Ten to serve as provveditori, which might relate back to the class affinities that existed between the political elite and the predominantly noble conventual nuns (though close relatives of the nuns in the convents at issue were excluded from holding the office). Yet, as the century progressed the office became increasingly established. In 1528, the provveditori were given the additional responsibility of overseeing the administration and accounts of gastaldi and fattori, employed by the convents to manage their economic affairs; if need be, they were empowered to dismiss these employees 'et di far tutte quelle altre

58 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fos 6v-7r, 1521, 24 Sept.; Giuliani, p. 158. The reference made in this decree to certain convents within the diocese of Torcello being subject to the patriarch of Venice rather than to the bishop is both intriguing and difficult to substantiate. It is, however, possible that the Council of Ten had in mind the community of S. Maffio di Mazzorbo, which had recently absorbed the now defunct community of S. Margherita di Torcello. The latter convent, prior to the merger of May 1521, had apparently been subject to the patriarch (Da Mosto, II, p. 198; Corner, XIV, pp. 345-46). It is not absolutely clear that the newly merged community, based at S. Maffio di Mazzorbo, was subsumed under patriarchal jurisdiction. However, during the period under study, S. Maffio di Mazzorbo is the only convent within the diocese of Torcello to appear in the visitation records of the Venetian patriarch—a fact which suggests an ongoing patriarchal interest (ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1564 and 1575; ACPV, PSM, B. 4, 1621; S. Maffio also appears in the contents page of ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, which contains the visitations carried out by Patriarch Priuli during the period 1592-96, though the relevant pages are in fact missing).

59 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fo. 7v, 1522, 30 July, Cons. X & Zonta.

60 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fo. 8r, 1522, 29 Oct., Cons X. & Zonta; Giuliani, pp. 157-58.
provisioni, che li parerà a beneficio delli Monasterii'. 61 This decree also provided the opportunity for a reiteration of the purpose and nature of the provveditori, and is generally taken to indicate the point at which the Magistrato sopra monasteri assumed the character of a permanent office. 62

The 500 ducat fine was quite sufficient to put an end to nobles refusing appointment to the magistracy, and it is therefore difficult to judge whether the post remained undesirable. It is likely, however, that as the magistracy gained a surer institutional footing, so the job of provveditore would have developed in status. From 1533, the field of eligibility for the position of provveditore was greatly extended, with elections being made from among the whole Senate, not just from within the Council of Ten. 63 In 1536, the term of office was increased from one year (according to the 1522 ruling) to two years, a measure imposed by the Council of Ten, 'Ricercando l'importanza dell' officio sopra le Monache'. 64 Responding to an increase in the magistracy's responsibilities, the Council also granted the provveditori the power and financial backing to appoint rasonati (accountants) and fanti (agents) to serve the magistracy as occasion arose. 65 One final development, which broke with the origins of the provveditori as commissioners appointed to deal with the particular problems arising from the reform of conventual houses, came in 1551 when their authority was extended to the observant convents. 66

Two main areas of expansion may be identified in the functions of the provveditori from the time of their inauguration as a permanent magistracy. The first of these was in the economic domain. Whereas, initially, the provveditori had been appointed specifically to sort out the economic disputes which arose between conventuals and observants, by 1531 they were granted more general powers to ensure 'che le entrate delli detti Monasterii siino governate bene et dispenseate, secondo le constitutioni, et ordini'. To this end, the powers of the magistracy over convent gastaldi which had been granted in 1528 were reiterated. 67 The provveditori and the patriarch were also responsible for enforcing the decrees issued by the Council of Ten, concerning the economic affairs of nunneries. In 1569, the Council ruled that convents were obliged to employ responsible procuratori to monitor their economic interests. 68 The same year, another ruling forebade abbesses to make arbitrary decisions

61 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fos 9r-10r, 1528, 30 Oct., Cons. X & Zonta; reproduced in part in Giuliani, p. 158.
62 Giuliani, p. 125.
63 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fo. 11r, 1533, 17 Oct., Cons. X.
64 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fo. 21v, 1536, 31 March, Cons. X, Collegio present.
65 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fos 10v-11r, 1531, 28 Feb. [m.v.], Cons. X & Zonta; ibid., fos 12v-13r, 1536, 23 June, Cons. X & Zonta; ibid., fo. 27r, 1558, 27 April, Cons. X & Zonta.
66 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fo. 25r, 1551, 18 Dec., Cons. X, Collegio present.
67 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fo. 10r- v, 1531, 15 Nov., Cons. X & Zonta.
68 Giuliani, p. 162: 1569, 10 June, Cons. X.
concerning convent finances. On no account were superiors of nunneries to borrow money or sell off assets without the approval of a two-thirds majority in the capitolo; nor were they allowed to commission building and restoration works without a similar mandate.69 At the beginning of the next century, the state's anxiety about the escalation of conventual dowries brought yet another aspect of the nuns' economic affairs under the scrutiny of the provveditori. Following the 1602 law which placed a ceiling on dowries of 1000 ducats (with the alternative option of paying a 60 ducat annuity), it fell to the provveditori to bring proceedings against transgressors.70

The other main area of expansion for the provveditori sopra monasteri was their responsibility for imposing enclosure. Judging from the trial records which have survived, this single issue overwhelmingly dominated the processi criminali carried out by the magistracy. A decree of 1551 emanating from the Council of Ten made it the responsibility of the provveditori to 'far intender a tutte le venerande Abbadesse, et Priore quest'ordine nostro in materia della Visitazione. Dandoli nota i gradi di parenti, che possono andar a visitar cadauna Monaca secondo la forma delle leggi nostre'. The decree also contained the first explicit reference to the judicial functions of the magistracy:

habiano essi tre facoltà di punire li contrafacienti delle pene statuite dalle Leggi, le quali essendo essi tre d'accordo debbano mandar ad esecuzione senza altro Consilio contra li detti contrafacienti. Et accadendo caso alcuno di maggior importantia, debbano formar Processo, et presentarlo alli Capi di questo Consilio, i quali siano obbligati, sotto debito del Sacramento, il primo di che si redunerà questo Consilio far legger il Processo al Consilio, nel quale sia espedito il caso, come ad esso Consilio parerà. Et se alli predetti tre che si eleggeranno parerà di arricordar alcun ordine in questa materia, debban venir alli Capi di questo Consilio con le opinion sue, acciocché si possa deliberar quel che a questo parerà.71

Two further decrees remind us both of the cooperation which was encouraged between the provveditori and the patriarch in enforcing enclosure, and of the subordinate role of the provveditori to the Council of Ten. In 1562, the provveditori were instructed to carry out an inspection of the nunneries of Venice and the lagoon, accompanied by the patriarch's vicar (or a delegate of the Bishop of Torcello, as appropriate). In particular, they were obliged to see that the doors leading from the confessor's quarters to the enclosed part of the nunnery were blocked up, 'stropate con muro'. The same law required that the provveditori revisit all the convents at least twice

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69 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fos 35r-36r, 1569, 31 Aug., Cons. X; Giuliani, pp. 162-63.
70 ASV, Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fo. 37r, 1602, 26 July, Senato: 'Pene à Trasgressori di Dote'. Those who ignored the new laws on conventual dowries were liable to a 25 ducat fine.
71 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fos 25v-26r, 1551, 19 Nov.; Giuliani, p. 161.
a year to ensure that the measures taken by the Council of Ten 'in materia di essi Monasterii' were observed. If these inspections brought to light 'bisogno di alcuna altra provisione', the provveditori should report back to the Capi di Dieci, who would in turn propose new legislative measures to the Council. 72 Again in 1569, the provveditori and the patriarch were instructed to inspect the convents with a view to imposing enclosure:

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\text{debbano andar à cadaun delli detti Monasterii, et veder tutte le porte et altri lochi per quali si potesse entrar et uscir di Monasterio et dove ritroveranno esser piu di due porte, una da terra et l'altra da acqua debbano immediate farle murar, et stropar si che non possano piu esser usate [...] et debbano commetter alle Abadesse et Priore, che debbano haver quella cura, che sia conveniente di far buone chiavi et ben custodir le porte che resteranno come di sopra. 73}
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These measures not only aimed at the effective imposition of enclosure. They also served to advertise the united reforming objectives of church and state. It was highly desirable that the ecclesiastical and temporal authorities should be seen to act for the common good, and in this context we might return again to the decree of 1584 which has already been mentioned. Spurred on by the threat of papal interventions, from this year the patriarch and provveditori were supposed to meet twice a week, to see that the laws relating to nunneries were enforced; the secretary of the magistracy was to report back to the Council of Ten once a month. By now, this was a familiar triangle of authority. 74

Yet the provveditori, while clearly remaining a satellite of the Council of Ten, nevertheless grew in independence. This is clearly indicated by the extension of the magistracy's powers to sentence transgressors of the laws regarding enclosure. Whereas previously the provveditori had only been authorised to fine wrongdoers, from 1584 they were able to sentence 'visitanti monache' to imprisonment or banishment up to a limit of five years (so long as all three officials were in agreement); for more severe punishments, the guilty still had to be referred to the Council of Ten. 75 These restrictions were raised further in 1589, when the magistracy gained the authority to impose exile of up to ten years, and in 1605, when the provveditori were empowered to condemn the guilty to 'bando, pregione, corda e galia eccettuata la pena di sangue, et il bando perpetuo, e diffinitivo'. 76

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72 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fo. 27v, 1561 [m.v.], 12 Feb., Cons. X.
73 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fo. 29v, 1569, 10 June, Cons. X.
74 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fo. 20r, 1584, 19 Dec., Cons. X. Discussed pp. 33-34.
75 ASV, Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fo. 44r, 1583, 27 Feb. [m.v.], Cons. X.
76 ASV, Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fo. 44r, 1589, 6 April, Cons. X; ibid., fo. 44v, 1604, 7 Feb. [m.v.], Senato.
A similar rise in the authority of the magistracy may be charted from the increases in revenue granted by the government to fund the operations of the provveditori. In 1556, they were licensed to spend a maximum of 2 ducats per month 'in ministri et altre spese'; in 1584, an allowance was granted of 10 ducats per month, and in 1605, this monthly sum was increased by Senate to 30 ducats 'per pagar salariadi, et spender in altre occorenze'. This financial backing enabled the provveditori to hire a variety of personnel to aid them in their work, ranging from one-off spies to full-time secretaries. In the preamble to the parte of 1584 which conceded a monthly revenue to the provveditori, the Council of Ten acknowledged that the magistracy needed 'persone che li servano in andar osservando quelli the fossero inobedienti alle leggi per the non havendo modo di darli alcuna utilità, non possono haver quel bon servitio the sarebbe necessario'. In 1605, the new grant of 30 ducats per month coincided with the election of a capitano to serve the provveditori. Some of these personnel are familiar to us from the trial records which have survived. Girolamo Triffon crops up throughout the trials of the early 1610s (ASV, PSM, B. 264) in the capacity of capitano, and there are several mentions of his successor, Vicenzo Fontana, in the latter half of that decade (ASV, PSM, B. 265). Also much in evidence—named by Christian name only or not at all—are the lowlier officials known as fanti, who played a vital role in patrolling the convents and apprehending transgressors of the laws relating to enclosure.

The workings of the magistracy in its disciplinary sphere are fascinating not least for the insights they offer into the mechanisms of social control in a period before the establishment of a regular police force. A precarious system of denunciations, rewards and informers served to bring to light transgressions of the laws regarding nunnery. The provveditori also relied on the vigilance and honesty of its few employees. The relative conscientiousness of these personnel could have a significant effect on the judicial activities of the magistracy. And in periods, such as 1610-12, when a high number of relatively petty breaches of enclosure were prosecuted with tremendous zeal, we should give some consideration to the influence of the particular staff who were responsible for bringing charges in the first place. The involvement of the state in the government and reform of nunnaries could, on occasion, result from the enthusiasm of a few minor officials. Not every temporal intervention need be

77 ASV, Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fo. 27r: Council of Ten decrees of 1556, 23 Sept., 1584, 5 Dec., and 1604, 7 Feb [m.v.].
78 See ASV, PSM, B. 1, fo. 31v, for the whole text of this proposal.
79 Two cases of 1612 (ASV, PSM, B. 264) indicate one of the problems to which the magistracy was prone: blackmailing imposters. The first was brought to the attention of the provveditori by the capitano, Girolamo Trifon, accusing one Zanaria, a mercer, of blackmailing people under the pretence of being Girolamo himself: 'et prochura di cavar danari da questo et quelo soto it mio nome et in particolare essendo andato dretto el giorno de Sant’Isopo a certa dona si lasio poi intondere con un altra che a nome Anzola sta sula fondamenta di San Domenego che se la non li avese dato danari la saria stata denonciata'. The second case was against Ser Vicenzo Cavacini, who posed as a fante of the magistracy and was also blackmailing a prostitute.
interpreted as the result of a constant impulse emanating from a united ruling body obsessed with religious reform.

These revisionist caveats, which take into account the importance of short-term factors and the influence of particular individuals at particular times, should be borne in mind. Yet it must be reiterated that the emergence of the provveditori and the escalation of their functions and powers were indeed part of a wider phenomenon. It was no coincidence that similar magistracies with special authority for monastic affairs were set up in Genoa and Florence, as well as Venice, all in the pre-Tridentine period. For, often anticipating programmes of ecclesiastical reform, these cities recognised the need to impose control on convents. Indiscipline at nunneries could be a civic as well as a religious issue. Moreover, as the case-studies at the beginning of this chapter showed, if the affairs of the city's convents were left in the hands of the various competing authorities and interest groups with a stake in their future, they would quickly be pulled apart. A strong 'braccio secolare' was called for to override these rival authorities and to impose order from above.

80 Zarri, 'Monasteri femminili e città', p. 381. In Genoa, a magistracy of some sorts had existed since 1462, though it did not gain official status until 1551; in Florence, the 'Deputazione sopra i monasteri' was set up in 1544.
ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY

When the Catholic Church set about formulating the programme of internal reformation which would find its clearest expression in the Tridentine decrees, the existing religious orders were considered as an object of reform, not as an agent of renewal. The corruption of monastic institutions was one of the favourite topoi of Protestant polemicists; as Aleandro's gloomy appraisal suggested, it was also a grave concern of the Catholic hierarchy. But while disciplinary laxity was clearly an important consideration of the reformers, decline was by no means uniform, and we have only to think of Boccaccio and Chaucer to be diverted from any rosy-eyed view of the piety of medieval monasticism. In explaining the ambivalent attitude of the Counter-Reformation towards regulars, we should rather look to the premeditated political upheavals which were brought to bear upon the Church. For the age of Trent witnessed a restructuring of ecclesiastical power—quite as significant as simultaneous changes in the administration of states—of which one result was certainly the marginalization of the monastic orders.

The vast European network of monasteries and nunneries had once provided the medieval church with the semblance of unity: they were a link between the Pope and the laity, and the international machinery through which missionary, charitable and devotional aims could be channelled. But the Council of Trent presented more ambitious proposals for imposing conformity on the church, and envisaged the episcopacy as the prime agent of centralization. Furthermore, although the Tridentine decrees emphasised the supremacy of the Pope, the new emphasis on episcopal authority provided opportunities for states with erastian tendencies, where the local church was to some extent subject to the temporal authority rather than to Rome. By contrast, the religious orders, which operated independently of temporal boundaries, constituted a far looser cannon (as militant new orders such as the Jesuits would make abundantly clear). Thus, the favour afforded to the diocese as the main unit of renewal happened to coincide with the interests of those state authorities which believed they might exercise control over their bishops. Neither Bishop nor Prince had much to lament concerning the declining status of the regulars.

These shifts of power away from the religious orders and towards the episcopacy will be a constant theme of this section. To appreciate their significance to Venice, it is necessary to be aware of the traditions of ecclesiastical administration.

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81 Girolamo Aleandro's view of the matter is quoted above in the text, p. 21. On the decline of the monastic ideal, see Mackenney, pp. 140-48.
82 For the centrality of the episcopacy in Tridentine reforms, see Wright, The Counter-Reformation, ch. 6, esp. pp. 187-91, and Davidson, The Counter-Reformation, pp. 23-24 (though here the supreme role of the Pope over the Bishops is emphasised). On the prestige enjoyed by French bishops in the post-Tridentine period, see Bergin, esp. pp. 44-45.
which already pertained there. In 1451, the diocese of Castello and the patriarchate of Grado were suppressed and combined in the new Venetian patriarchate. The chief prelate in Venice therefore now bore the title of patriarch, while the Republic continued to be divided into dioceses, each of which was presided over by a bishop (or, in the case of the diocese of Aquileia, a patriarch). The election of the patriarch remained in the hands of the Venetian Senate from the time of its inception. Venice retained less freedom over its mainland sees: following Agnadello, in 1510, Julius II dealt a blow to Venetian privileges when he insisted on the Pope's right to appoint to episcopal sees on the terraferma. Nonetheless, La Serenissima continued to enjoy something of the influence over its local church that the far bigger states of France and Spain acquired in the early sixteenth century.

This section explores the implications of these shifting power relations with reference to the nunneries of Venice. First, an analysis is offered of the dwindling role of the religious orders in administering female convents. Secondly, the exercise of papal authority over nuns in Venice is considered. Thirdly, attention is directed to the high profile of the patriarch and other local prelates in governing and reforming nuns. Finally, the day-to-day relations that existed between nuns and male clergy, secular or religious, are examined: nuns were dependent on the spiritual services of these men and, at the most local level, these figures could wield a great deal of influence over communities of female religious.

The Orders

The nunneries of Venice and the lagoon belonged predominantly to the old orders of St Benedict and St Augustine. During the period under study, there were twenty Benedictine and seventeen Augustinian female communities. Although the Benedictines reached a slightly higher tally overall, they were more dispersed throughout the lagoon whereas the Augustinians were more concentrated within the city itself. Trailing some way behind came the Franciscans, with a total of six communities. There were four Cistercian houses, and just one Dominican. A community of women belonging to the

83 See Logan, 'The Ideal of the Bishop', for a discussion of theoretical writings on the role of the Venetian bishop/patriarch, 1430-1630.
84 Prodi, p. 412. Although mainland ecclesiastical sees continued to be passed between Venetian noble families, by means of deals (composizioni) made with the Roman curia, Prodi argues that 'the sacrifice of public discussion and senatorial voting must have involved a real break with tradition [...] and repeated efforts to restore the original method of nomination reveal a nostalgia which must have been deeply rooted in public consciousness'.
85 Davidson, Counter-Reformation, p. 30: 'A number of governments [...] extracted concessions from the papacy which enabled them to control Church appointments and finances. After signing the Concordat of Bologna with the Pope in 1516, the French Crown acquired the right to nominate its own bishops. [...] In 1508, Pope Julius II gave the Spanish Crown the famous patronato real, the right to present to all ecclesiastical benefices in the New World; and in 1523, Rome confirmed Charles V's right to nominate all prelates in Spain'.
86 See Appendix 1 for a complete breakdown of the city's convents according to order.
reformed Franciscan order known as the Capuchins secured a house near San Girolamo in 1612. And a community of Greek nuns, following the Rule of St Basil, attached themselves to San Giorgio dei Greci from 1599.

Membership of an order was, however, only one aspect of a nunnery's identity. The geographical position, wealth, social status, and age of the institution often counted for more. For example, the ancient houses of Le Vergini, la Celestia, and San Zaccaria were noted for their aristocratic character and relaxed discipline. They were Augustinian, Cistercian, and Benedictine respectively. By contrast, Le Vergini can have felt little affinity with the Convertite, despite the fact that they shared an order. Significantly, the historical records generally fail to mention the order to which convents belonged. This is so of the trial records of the provveditori sopra monasteri, of notarial documents and census material. The patriarchal vicars who carried out visitations of the convents were also seemingly indifferent as to the nuns' order. Only Patriarch Priuli, in his sermonic preambles to the visitation reports, sometimes exhorted the community to adhere to the Rule, and to fulfil the instructions of the order's founding father (in the cases examined, this is always either St Benedict or St Augustine). Thereafter, the criticisms and commands supplied to each convent are not specific to order. Even in the remarks addressed to nuns regarding their clothes, there are no indications of dress conventions varying according to religious order.

In analysing the inconspicuousness of the orders in Venetian convents during our period it is necessary to take into account several factors both old and new. Firstly, it is instructive to look at the processes by which new foundations acquired an allegiance to one or other of the orders. In Venice, some nunnerys were founded because a group of women were inspired to set themselves up as a religious community; others were erected by pious patrons and subsequently filled with women. The choice of an order was arbitrary, though of course God often played a part in helping the mortals decide. Furthermore, in many cases the decision was not permanent, and a surprising level of fluidity between orders is evident in the history of the Venetian convents.

A clear example of the potential instability of a convent's adherence to an order is provided by the community of Corpus Domini. In this instance, we are lucky to have two contemporary written accounts of the foundation story. The convent was initially established in 1375 as a Benedictine house by Lucia Tiepolo. From the age of ten,

87 An example of this may be seen in ACPV, Vis Past., B. 1, 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada. Priuli, expounding the importance of the vow of poverty, cites St Augustine: 'Contro questo vitio della proprietà, come sapete il Padre vostro Santo Agostino dice molte cose nelli capitoli della Regola, primo, 2, 4 et 8'. He also provides references from Augustine concerning the other vows of chastity and obedience.

88 eds M-T. Casella and G. Pozzi. This edition of the Lettere Spirituali of Giovanni Dominici contains both his account of the foundation of Corpus Domini, and also the 'Cronaca del Corpus Domini' written by the nun Bartolomea Riccoboni.
Lucia spent thirty-four years at the Augustinian convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli, Murano, whence she was removed by episcopal authority to become abbess of the Benedictine convent Santi Apostoli on the (now lost) island of Ammiana. Three years later, she experienced a vision of Christ who instructed her to form a new nunnery named after 'El Corpo di Cristo'. After various trials, she successfully fulfilled her mandate, and founded the convent of Corpus Domini. The chronicle, written by the nun Bartolomea Riccoboni, does not explain why she chose the Benedictine Rule. Perhaps Lucia simply favoured continuity with the order of her previous convent. That there is no suggestion that she was divinely guided to the choice of the Benedictine Order may be a tactful omission on the part of the chronicler, since a series of unequivocal providences subsequently led the Dominican friar, Giovanni Dominici, to reestablish the convent in 1394 as a Dominican house.

Nuns appeared to be able to shift from one order to another with relative facility. In 1488, the Cistercian community of Santa Margherita di Torcello sent one of its converse, named Chiara, to Venice to seek a new property, since the buildings of the current site were in a state of ruin. But by the time that Chiara had fulfilled her mission, the convent at Torcello had been restored, and the nuns refused to leave the island. She therefore dedicated the buildings which she had secured to the foundation of a new convent, San Rocco e Santa Margherita, which assumed the Augustinian rule. In 1504, it was the turn of a group of nuns from San Rocco e Santa Margherita to spawn a new convent, San Giovanni Lateran. While the new community followed suit, and adopted the Augustinian Rule, the first abbess, Scolastica Borsa, was poached from the Benedictine community of San Servolo.

The most convincing indication of the just how labile allegiance to an order could be came in the 1510s when Patriarch Antonio Contarini introduced his policy of transferring observant nuns to conventual houses. This he conducted irrespective of order. The guinea-pigs of the scheme were the Benedictine nuns of Sant'Anna, who were to be reformed by Augustinians from San Giovanni Lateran. Thereafter, Contarini exercised no apparent consistency in his allocation of observant nuns to conventual houses. Nuns from Santa Giustina (Augustinian) were sent to Le Vergini (also Augustinian); the Benedictine houses of San Zaccaria, San Biagio e Castaldo, and San Secondo were to be reformed by Benedictine nuns; the Franciscan houses of Santa Croce di Venezia and the Madonna dei Miracoli sent observant nuns to reform the

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89 It was presumably the bishop of Torcello who commanded Lucia to go to Ammiana, though this is not explicit in the sources.
90 Pedani traces some of the other shifts of order which certain convents witnessed, in 'Monasteri di agostiniane'. The most comprehensive secondary survey of the nunnery's affiliations to orders is Da Mosto, II, pp. 123-216.
91 Pedani, 'Monasteri di agostiniane', p. 53.
92 Ibid., p. 56.
conventuals at Santa Chiara (of the same order). By contrast, Augustinian nuns from San Iseppo were sent to reform the Benedictine community of Santa Marta; the Cistercians at La Celestia were reformed by members of the Augustinian house, San Daniele, and the reformed Benedictine prioress of San Zaccaria was sent to impose observancy on the Cistercians of San Maffio di Mazzorbo. Responses to the mixing of nuns from different orders varied. It was certainly marshalled as an objection by those who opposed the very idea of reforming the conventual houses. But some communities seem to have adapted with ease. The Benedictines of Santa Marta took on the Augustinian order of their reformers, the course one might expect, given the dominance enjoyed by the delegations of reforming nuns. Less predictably, the observant nuns of San Giovanni Lateran assumed the Benedictine order of Sant'Anna during their stay; furthermore, when they returned to their own house in 1551, they took the Benedictine Rule with them.

It is important to appreciate that membership of an order did not put a convent in touch with a wide-scale association of female religious, and to dispel the view that there were 'mother-houses', controlling the activities of subordinate communities. In this respect, male and female orders functioned very differently. Zarri has considered the implications of this distinction with regard to the legacy of historical documents. As she points out, the independent status of each nunnery has made it that much harder for the historian to assess the number and whereabouts of female communities; by contrast, male religious houses were immediately subject to the jurisdiction of their respective orders, with the result that quantitative data were centrally recorded. She has argued that, for nuns, the sense of belonging to the wider community of the order was primarily felt at a local level in relations between the convent and the associate male community.

Yet ever since the invention of nuns, male and female religious had experienced a troubled relationship. Brenda Bolton has written of the reluctance of St Francis and St Dominic in the thirteenth century to incorporate women into their orders. According to tradition, Francis complained that 'God has taken away our wives, and now the devil gives us sisters'. This unease has been explained in terms of the sexual risk which

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94 See the objections raised by Nicolò Michiel to Contarini's reforms, quoted, p. 40. The Venetian nobleman spoke specifically of San Zaccaria, where four of his daughters were nuns, and complained that 'hora sono poste monache di altro ordine, e altra regola e habito, e bastardre greche e popolari' (Sanuto, Diarii, XXXII, cols. 276-77). Given that San Zaccaria was, in fact, reformed by observants from San Servolo, of the same order, we must allow for some degree of rhetoric in Michiel's complaint.
95 Pedani, 'Monasteri di agostiniane', p. 59.
96 Zarri, 'Monasteri femminili e cittá', p. 363.
97 Ibid., p. 360: 'nei monasteri femminili il legame con l'ordine, pur quando superi le mura del chiostro, pare sempre consumarsi entro le mura cittadine, nel rapporto di maggiore o minore intrinsicità con il respectivo convento maschile'.
98 Bolton, esp. pp. 90-93.
nuns posed to male religious.\textsuperscript{99} The concern was not unfounded, and suggests another reason why preference was given to bishops rather than friars when it came to reforming the nunneries in the sixteenth century. This policy was clearly enunciated by the Venetian noblemen Paolo Giustiniani and Vincenzo Quirini, in 1513, in their \textit{Libellus ad Leonem X}, which argued for all monastic institutions to be placed under episcopal control.\textsuperscript{100}

By the sixteenth century, not only had the time come to disentangle the administrative links between nuns and associate male orders, but doubts were also regularly expressed regarding the suitability of male religious to administer spiritual services to their sisters. Responding to the crisis at Corpus Domini in 1533, the papal nuncio summarized thus the views of the Signoria:

\begin{center}
mi pare che siino d'opinione del tutto proveder che frati non se impaccino con monache, ma che si habbi qualche honesto prete secular, vechio, per la confession loro et cura di anime.\textsuperscript{101}
\end{center}

Sure enough, in the following year, a secular priest was appointed as confessor to the nuns, a post which had always previously been filled by one of the Dominican friars, and full administrative powers were transferred from the Dominicans to the papal legate. The latter step turned out to be something of an intermediate provision, since in 1550, control was handed over to the patriarch of Venice. This process of streamlining the administration of Venetian convents may again be seen in the example of San Daniele, which was subject to the jurisdiction of the 'canonici regolari lateranensi' until 1604, when it was brought under the direct authority of the patriarch.\textsuperscript{102}

If the problems relating to the supervision of nunneries by male religious had been acknowledged from the outset, the reforms of the sixteenth century drew them more tightly into focus. The new emphasis on the enclosure of nuns inevitably served

\textsuperscript{99} Canosa, p. 14: 'Non pare dubbio, tuttavia, che le ragioni siano state prevalentemente "sessuali", abbiano cioè riguardato quasi esclusivamente il rischio, alla leadership di tali ordini chiaramente presente, che i rapporti frati-suore potessero "decadere" da una fratellanza soltanto spirituale ad una "carnale"'.

\textsuperscript{100} For a detailed discussion of this work, see Logan, \textit{The Venetian Upper Clergy}, pp. 92-101, esp. p. 99, on the reforms recommended for the religious orders; see also Zarri, 'Monasteri femminili e città', p. 383. There is some disagreement concerning the date of the \textit{Libellus}. Logan generally claims that it dates from 1513, though, on p. 17, he refers to it as being a work of 1515, and on p. 88 (perhaps more plausibly) he says that it was dedicated to Leo X in that year; Zarri says that it was written in 1511 (an unlikely date, given that Leo's accession was not until 1513); Leclercq claims that the work dates from 1513, pp. 76-77. In any case, the work was written for the occasion of the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-17) and appears to have conformed to a view prevalent at that gathering: Zarri points out that the Council also proposed limiting the privileges of the regulars and conceding to the bishops the responsibility for carrying out annual visitations of those convents directly subjected to the Holy See ('Monasteri femminili e città', p. 383).

\textsuperscript{101} Nunziature, I, p. 40.

\textsuperscript{102} Tramontin, 'La diocesi', p. 69.
to render more complete the separation of convents from their order. The Counter-Reformation sought to impose isolation on female religious. There was no call for nuns to be in contact with their sisters in other communities, let alone with their brothers. The regulations which restricted male visitors to the convent *parlatorio* displayed an absolute paranoia about the possibility of nuns receiving visits from male regulars. Patriarch Priuli placed an uncompromising ban on monks and friars speaking with nuns: 'non permettere, che alcun Frate, o Religioso Regolare, ancorche fusse congiunto nelli predetti gradi di parentela, possa parlare con Monache, essendo ciò espressamente prohibito'. Bishop Grimani of Torcello had much the same to say: 'è stato sotto gravi pene proibito a tutti li Regolari, che non possano parlare con Monache'.

The regulations restricting nuns' contacts with male religious betray the fact that there was indeed a tendency for local affinities between monks and nuns to evolve. The last chapter of this thesis will use trial evidence to explore the nature of the intimacies that grew up within the 'celibate' community. The efforts of the Counter-Reformation to break nuns away from male religious enjoyed only partial success, and while convents relied on men for spiritual services, there would always be opportunities for relationships of a non-spiritual kind to develop. However, the efforts of the reformers, at least in Venice, cannot be doubted. Church and state were united in their determination to bring convents under the jurisdiction of the patriarch, or episcopal authorities. Where necessary, the influence of the order was diminished, in a dual attempt to weaken the significance of extraneous authorities, and to ensure the isolation of the nunneries. But, in Venice, convents had never exercised strong links with their orders, and thus the reformers focused their assault primarily on the local attachments that existed between male houses and their spiritual sisters.

**Papal authority**

The relationship between Venice and Rome was characterized by mutual wariness and distrust. From time to time, these tensions impinged on the affairs of convents. It has already been observed that in 1580 and 1584, Venetian temporal authorities evinced distaste at the prospect of apostolic visitors intruding upon the city's nunneries. However, it would be an over-simplification to present the powers of Venice and the papacy as being locked in rigid and open antagonism. In the realm of religion, each side had genuine claims to authority, which the other was forced to acknowledge. The Venetians could not ignore the fact that the Pope was head of the universal Catholic church. This was why they employed canon lawyers to advise on how best to negotiate

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103 L. Priuli, *Ordini & avvertimenti*, cap. 8; Grimani, cap. XXIII.
104 Grimani, cap. XXIII.
105 See above, pp. 32-34.
that authority. On the other hand, the theoretical supremacy of the Pope over all matters ecclesiastical had to be set against the practical advantages of the local authorities and the web of privileges and concessions which had accrued to them over the years. Not only did formal deference often overshadow underlying hostility, but there were occasions when genuine cooperation was willingly entered into.

Papal authority manifested itself in Venice through three main channels. General reforming policies were initiated centrally and articulated in the form of papal bulls and briefs; further measures, addressed specifically to Venetian issues, were also imposed directly from Rome; within Venice itself, papal interests were represented by a nuncio. Through the written reports of this official, an impression may be gleaned of the fluidity of papal power in the Venetian Republic. The boundaries of authority were not clearly delineated. Countless issues became the object of diplomatic wrangling. The nuncio himself did not wield power over Venetian affairs; rather, it was his role to observe and negotiate on behalf of the pope. Working inwards from central to local policy, this section considers the impact of papal authority on the nunneries of Venice.

The papacy played a vital role in sponsoring many of the initiatives at the heart of the Counter-Reformation. The Council of Trent was an ephemeral institution. It had set the agenda for reform but it did not have the power or the resources to enforce it. The job of coordinating the reforms fell in large part to the authorities in Rome. In 1564, Pius IV gave formal approval to the Tridentine decrees. His successor, Pius V, embraced the reforming programme with enthusiasm and, in 1565, instituted the Sacra Congregazione del Concilio to implement and develop further the decisions of Trent. This was one of several Congregations founded by the Curia at this time to reform and supervise ecclesiastical administration. Among these, the Congregazione dei vescovi e regolari, established by Clement VIII in the 1590s, had particular responsibility for nunneries. Of the bulls which derived from this post-Tridentine phase of reform, the most significant for female religious were undoubtedly those which imposed enclosure, especially Circa Pastoralis (1566) and Decori (1570). Also of considerable import for Venetian nuns was the brief of 1594, enacted by Clement VIII and confirmed by Urban VIII in 1646, prohibiting nuns from giving presents. These reforming measures, emanating from Rome, were energetically pursued by the Venetian authorities, despite the fact that they profoundly disrupted the customs of local nuns.

By contrast, Gregory XIII's bull of 1583 to introduce the appointment of abbesses on a

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106 Zarri, 'Monasteri femminili e città', p. 399; Davidson, Counter-Reformation, p. 27. The Congregazione dei vescovi e regolari united the Sacra Congregatio super consultationibus episcoporum (established 1576) and the Sacra Congregatio super consultationibus regularium (established 1586 by Sixtus V). The exact date of the union is unknown; Del Re, pp. 330-36. Archival research for this thesis has been restricted to Venice and it has not therefore been possible to undertake analysis of the records of these curial institutions which are located in Rome.


108 A transcription of this brief may be found in ASV, Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fo. 760.
triennial basis was assimilated less readily. In 1593, the Senate sent word to the Venetian ambassador in Rome, instructing him to urge the Pope to grant a concession to the nuns of San Lorenzo in order that they might continue to elect abbesses for the duration of their lifetime. The letter emphasised the danger of forcing innovations upon this particular community: 'non possono partorire se non confusione, e travaglio, come per essere le dette Monache tutte de nobili nostri'.

Apart from these general policy decisions, affecting female regulars throughout Christendom (or, as in the case with the 1583 bull, instituting triennial abbesses, throughout Italy), the popes periodically used their authority to intervene in matters relating specifically to Venetian convents. Throughout the Middle Ages, numerous papal briefs were issued granting privileges, exemptions and indulgences to particular communities. Direct interventions of this sort were rarer in the early-modern period, perhaps due to the growing authority of the Venetian patriarchate and a commitment on the part of church and state to bringing convents within the control of the local ecclesiastical authorities. The declining culture of indulgences and other spiritual dispensations may also have played a role. However, certain communities did retain direct links with Rome. From 1463, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Murano, was directly subject to the pope, and from 1534 to 1560, Corpus Domini was under the jurisdiction of the papal nuncio. Thus, papal authority was exercised over particular convents on a rather piecemeal basis. More significant to Venetian nuns as a whole was, of course, Leo X's 'Breve Pontificalis de tribus Senatoribus super Monialium' of 1521 by which a papal mandate was given to the establishment of the provveditori sopra monasteri. This brief clearly demonstrates that the papacy could, on occasion, see the value of cooperating with Venetian secular authorities, and vice versa.

Historians are fortunate in having access to a vast number of reports written by the papal nuncios in Venice. These make intermittent references to female religious communities, though they do not emerge as a central preoccupation. Heresy and foreign policy feature far more dominantly, and the essentially diplomatic role of the

110 ASV, Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fo. 393, 1592, 9 Jan. [m.v.], Senato. The issue of triennial versus perpetual abbesses is discussed below, pp. 84-85.
111 Many of these papal briefs are reproduced in Corner.
112 Corner, XV, pp. 285-86: 1463, 26 April, 'Pius II eximit Conventum S. Mariae Angelorum de Muriano a jurisdictione Episcopi Torcellani, ipsumque subicit Sedi Apostolicae'. Da Mosto, II, p. 180, states that Santa Maria degli Angeli 'dipendeva immediatamente dalla Sede apostolica e [...] godeva di grandi privilegi ed esenzioni'. For the particular circumstances in which Corpus Domini was consigned to the jurisdiction of the papal nuncio, see above, p. 24.
113 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fos 5r-6r. Discussed above, pp. 39-41.
114 The reports of the nuncios are to be found in the Vatican (Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Nunziatura Veneta). Research for this thesis has relied on the microfilms of these records, held at the Fondazione Cini, in Venice. Some volumes of the Nunziature have also been published.
nuncio is clear. But when the reports do refer to nunneries (and a major proportion of such remarks concern the mainland communities), the nuncio appears as a rather helpless observer. In 1574, Giambattista Castagna, then papal legate to the Venetian Republic, wrote a series of reports complaining of the refusal of Paduan nuns to accept enclosure. In June, he noted that 'quelle monache, che non hanno voluto obbedire, stanno in extrema ostinatione et disperatione [...] et minacciano di tornar tutte alle case paterne'. But concerned as Castagna evidently was about the situation, he himself was unable or unwilling to act. Indeed, in May he had informed the papal secretary in Rome that it would be unwise to intervene 'perché il populo era in furia per questa materia [...] et è sempre bene lassare raffreddare li primi impieti populari'. The papal nuncio again appears in a weak position in a case of 1614 at San Zaccaria (discussed more fully later in this thesis). In June of that year, Patriarch Francesco Vendramin wrote to the papal secretary in Rome asking for permission to absolve two nuns, who had been found guilty of having engaged in sexual relations with a pair of Venetian laymen. The following month, the nuncio was corresponding with the papal secretary about the same issue. He reported that he had given Vendramin something of a pep talk on the necessity of restricting the judicial role of the provveditori sopra monasteri to the realm of the laity:

Ho parlato con Monsignor Patriarca di Venetia intorno alla causa delle Monache di San Zaccheria avvertendolo con buon modo che deve con ogni sforzo cercare che il governo de Monasterii, et la cognizione di queste cause non resti sottoposta al giudizio, et volontà de Nobili soprastanti [...] Mi hà detto di fare continuamente ogni sforzo, et quanto al processo che egli hà formato contra queste monache non lo communicerà a soprastanti per che habbino parte nella sentenza che vuole dare contra le Monache, ma solo afinché possino gastigare li laici complici degli errori, et che per tale ordine non venga ad essi pensiero di volere essaminare le istesse monache.

It was too soon to be smug. For the transcription of the trial of the provveditori makes it clear that on the first day of August, proceedings took place in the parlatorio of San Zaccaria, where both the guilty nuns were interrogated by the lay magistrates. The position of the papal nuncios in Venice was often frustrating. Earlier in the century, in

115 The papal nuncio sat ex officio on the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Venice, Martin, p. 16. It is perhaps worth mentioning that he held no comparable position which afforded him authority over nunneries.
118 See pp. 228-31 below.
119 Archivio Segreto Vatican, Nunziatura Veneta, B. 42A, fo. 130r.
120 Ibid., fo. 154r.
121 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1614, San Zaccaria, fos 20v-23r.
1534, Girolamo Aleandro complained that the Venetian temporal authorities were rendering him impotent in his efforts to clamp down on heresy:

Mi danno ben larghissime parole in Collegio, che io dichi, ordini et facci, ma quando volio proceder coi Capi del Conseggio di X, dal qual solo io ho da pigliar il brazzo secular, in questa parte sempre mi interpono qualche intopo che impedisce la via regia di procedere come saria proficuo et necessario.122

The Venetians were not above fobbing off the pope's legates with a few compliant words.

Yet the potential force of papal interventions evidently continued to provoke anxiety within the Venetian state. For this reason, recourse to Rome was a powerful threat available to Venetian subjects. In 1571, a noble woman—the mother of a nun at San Iseppo—wrote an anonymous letter to the patriarch, complaining about the conduct of the convent confessor and petitioning for his removal. After outlining the nature of his misdeeds, the woman concluded her letter with the following exhortation: 'prego ben Vostro Signore Reverendissimo che fara provision, et si non la fara, ut impropoeto da vera nobile, che io scrivero à mio cerman retor in Roma à sua santita ogni cosa'. The woman was probably right to think that she could lean on the local authorities by evoking the position of her cousin. Investigations were subsequently carried out by both the provveditori and the patriarch.123 In 1627, the Venetian Senate explicitly declared its concern at petitions regarding nunneries being sent to the pope. The issue arose following the attempts of the Barbarigo family to obtain papal permission for suor Lucrezia Barbarigo to leave the convent of Sant'Alvise. To this end, letters had been sent to the Congregazione dei vescovi e regolari. The Senate resolved that both the nun and her parents should be instructed to drop the case. The parte spoke of the confusion that the actions of the family had already brought to the convent and warned (in unspecific terms) of the terrible consequences of papal intervention. Finally, it reiterated a policy made in March 1501 which prohibited Venetians from applying to Rome for 'licentia, suffragii, o altro decreto di qualunque sorte in materia di monache solamente senza prima darne parte nel Collegio, et ottenire licenza dalla signoria nostra'.124

In conclusion, the popes did not enjoy extensive authority over the day-to-day running of Venetian nunneries. Their power, in fostering some of the grand post-Tridentine reforms, was evident more at an ideological than at a practical level. And in many respects, the Venetian authorities were happy to endorse the programme of

123 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1570 [m.v.], San Iseppo. The case is discussed in greater detail on pp. 141-42 of this thesis.
124 ASV, Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fos 595r-99r.
reforms which hailed from Rome. But Venice was highly sensitive to the threat of papal intervention in specific local cases. On the whole, the papal nuncios knew this and trod carefully. The mere possibility of interference from Rome could produce a preemptive reaction from Venice and it was, therefore, in the virtual world of diplomacy that pressure could most effectively be exerted on the Venetian church and state.

Bishops and Patriarchs
As Gabriella Zarri has observed, the chief consequence of the Tridentine decrees for the administration of convents was in ‘il ruolo assegnato ai vescovi nella responsabilità disciplinare dei monasteri femminili’.\textsuperscript{125} We have only to look to the famous decree which commanded the enclosure of all nunneries for evidence of the central role entrusted to the bishops by the Council:

\begin{quote}
Nemini autem sanctimolialium liceat, post professionem exire a monasterio, etiam ad breve tempus, quocumque praetextu, nisi ex aliqua legitima causa, ab episcopo approbanda, indultis quibuscumque et privilegiis non obstantibus. Ingridi autem intra saepa monasterii nemini liceat, cuiuscumque generis aut conditionis, sexus vel aetatis fuerit, sine episcopi vel superioris licentia, in scriptis obtenta, sub excommunicationis poena, ipso facto incurrenda.\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

Venetian prelates appear to have responded to these directives with alacrity. The visitation reports and published regulations prepared by the patriarchs for the nunneries concede nothing ‘senza nostra licenza in scritto’.\textsuperscript{127} Trent was not, however, the only impetus for placing conventual reform in the hands of the local church, particularly where—as in Venice—power to appoint to the chief ecclesiastical office lay with the state, and not with the papacy.\textsuperscript{128} The question must therefore be asked: to what extent was the patriarch a puppet of the Venetian government?

Let us look first of all at the incumbents of the patriarchate during the period of this study.\textsuperscript{129} Up until 1554, when Francesco Contarini, a layman, was appointed to the office, the patriarch had typically been chosen from members of the long-established monastic orders associated with Venice itself. From 1554 to 1630, five out of seven patriarchs were appointed from the laity. Of the remaining two, Giovanni Trevisan (patriarch 1559-1590) was a Benedictine, while Giovanni Tiepolo (1619-

\textsuperscript{125} Zarri, ‘Monasteri femminili e città’, p. 399.
\textsuperscript{127} See, for example, L. Priuli’s \textit{Ordini & avvertimenti}.
\textsuperscript{128} Zarri, ‘Monasteri femminili e città’, p. 410: ‘Il desiderio di sotporre tutti i monasteri femminili alla giurisdizione dell’ordinario diocesano era comune a molte città’.
\textsuperscript{129} See Appendix II for a list of Venetian patriarchs with their dates.
1630), a secular priest, had previously presided over St Mark's in the post of primicerio. The timing of this change in pattern fits in neatly with the wider picture of the monastic orders in decline. It also indicates a desire on the part of the Venetian state to elevate members of its ruling elite to the prelacy. It is in this context that we must view the willingness of the Signoria to entrust the care of the city's nuns to the patriarch, at times deliberately severing customary ties between female religious and their associate male orders.

The position of the Venetian prelacy in relation to the state led Carlo Borromeo to observe in 1580 that no action could be expected from the patriarch 'il quale [...] è huomo da niente e da non fare alcuno capitale'. Yet the historical documents which have survived from the period as a whole tell another story, at least regarding the government of convents. Voluminous visitation reports testify to the commitment of the patriarchal authorities to inspecting convents, regularly and thoroughly. Countless ordini, addressed to convents on general and specific matters, indicate a concern with imposing reforms. The patriarchal trials of erring nuns, which we know took place although frustratingly the bulk of the records have been lost, suggest a resolute unwillingness to overlook corruption and laxity.

Nor were these manifestations of reforming energy hampered by the Venetian government. On the contrary, the apparent desire for cooperation between the patriarch and the Venetian state, evinced in the instructions to the provveditori, appears to have been fulfilled. Clear evidence for this may be seen in the trial records of the provveditori. Temporal and ecclesiastical authorities passed information and documents between them, in their united attempts to crack down on those who threatened to bring the nunnery of Venice into disrepute. For example, the preamble to an investigation of 1569 carried out by the provveditori into a musical 'matinada' held outside La Celestia acknowledges the patriarch for having alerted the magistracy to the case:

Ritrovandosi li clarissimi signori sopra li monasterii à parlamento col Reverendissimo patriarca per diverse cose per il bon governo di monasterii di monache sua signoria

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130 In response to this tendency, in the early years of the seventeenth century, Clement VIII and Paul V attempted unsuccessfully to enforce a condition for the elections of the patriarchs Matteo Zane (1600-1605) and Francesco Vendramin (1605-1619): namely, that they submit themselves to an examination in canon law and theology before a congregation of cardinals in Rome; Prodi, p. 416. See also, Benzoni, 'Una controversia tra Roma e Venezia'.

131 Letter from Carlo Borromeo (Venice, 13 Feb., 1580) to Monsignor Speciario in Rome. Quoted in Tramontin, 'La visita apostolica', pp. 455-56. Also cited by Davidson, 'The Clergy of Venice', p. 24. At the time when Borromeo made his comment, the reputation of the patriarchate was at a particularly low ebb. The position was occupied from 1559 to 1590 by Giovanni Trevisan, who was renowned for his inconsistent commitment to his duties (Martin, p. 20).

132 On the loss of these records, see above, p. 13.

133 For example, the decree of the Council of Ten, 1584, requiring the Patriarch and the provveditori to meet twice a week, to discuss matters relating to nunnery. This is discussed on pp. 33-34 of this chapter.
Reverendissima disse che haveva inteso, che alli zorni passati una notte era sta fatta una matinada ed diverse sorte di musiche alle monache della celestia.\textsuperscript{134}

In 1614, the \textit{provveditori} were conducting a lengthy trial against two men, Andrea Foscarini and Alvise Zorzi, accused of sleeping with two nuns at San Zaccaria. It was the responsibility of the \textit{provveditori}, as state magistrates, to bring these laymen to justice. Meanwhile, it was the patriarch's concern to investigate and discipline the nuns who had admitted the men into their convent in order to pursue their base liaisons. This complementary role of the lay and ecclesiastical powers is expressed in the letter written by Patriarch Vendramin to the \textit{provveditori}, which was accompanied by a full transcript of the trial carried out by his office:

\textit{Copia di un capitolo di espeditione fatta da Monsignor Illustrissimo e Reverendissimo Patriarca à 23 di luglio 1614 alli eccellentissimi signori provveditori sopra li Monasteri.}

Illustrissimi signori. Alcune volte in certe cose, che occorrono non basta prudenza, ne accuratezza humana, tutto che con ogni spirito si invigili à prohibire che non savedino. Io nel carico che tempo non manco (et lo sà Dio) di operare tutto quello che posso, affine che le cose de monasterii commessi alla mia cura, passino senza scandollo, rettamente, et in quella maniera apponto, che si conviene. Non basta dico. Poi che nel monasterio di San Zaccaria, custodito di me al pari della pupilla de gl'occhi miei nel quale Sono quasi tutte nobili 6 occorso accidente tale the mi ha in estremo travagliato, del quale sono per pontalmente darle conto, et per farle dare dal mio Cancellorio copia del processo, fatto formare da me: per che possino esse date quel castigo alli rei, che parera alla loro prudenza, come ho deliberato di far io alle monache colpevoli nel medesimo delitto.\textsuperscript{135}

This cooperation between state and ecclesiastical powers may also be seen in the cases where a prelate other than the patriarch was responsible for the nunnery in question. In 1626, for example, when the \textit{provveditori} were called to investigate 'Disordine nel Monastero de Malamocco', they were supplied with a copy of the trial which the Bishop of Chioggia had already carried out.\textsuperscript{136} Following the escape of three Greek nuns from the convent at San Giorgio dei Greci a few years earlier in 1618, in which a Greek priest was implicated, the Archbishop of Philadelphia undertook his own investigation, which he subsequently passed on to the \textit{provveditori} to assist them with forming their \textit{processo}. After an extensive trial, the \textit{provveditori} passed sentence on the priest, Nicodemo Scandali, and also on a Greek layman, Francesco Rali, 'per

\textsuperscript{134} ASV, \textit{PSM}, B. 263, 1568 [m.v.], La Celestia, fo. 1r.
\textsuperscript{135} ASV, \textit{PSM}, B. 265, 1614, S. Zaccaria, fo. 3r.
\textsuperscript{136} ASV, \textit{PSM}, B. 267, 1626, S. Maria dell'Orazione di Malamocco'.
esser stato più d'una volta et nelli parlatorii et in un monastero di monache greche'. It was, however, beyond the jurisdiction of the state magistrates to punish the nuns. They were to await their sentence from the Archbishop of Philadelphia:

Et le monache Marta, Artusa, et Praxia siano rimesse à Monsignor Reverendissimo di Filadelfia il quale, conforme all'ordine della sua prudenza et giustitia non solo dia loro il conveniente castigo: ma anco quelli ordini, che stimeran convenienti, per la conservare et buona regola di quel monastero, il che le debba esser fatto sapere per il Secretario del Maggistrato aggiungendoli la buona mente di Sue Signorie Eccellentissime et l'affetto particolare verso tutta quella natione. 137

While Borromeo was right to perceive a close association between the patriarch and the Venetian government, he was mistaken in viewing this as being invariably an obstacle to reform. The patriarch, and indeed other prelates with interests in Venice, cooperated effectively with the temporal authorities in imposing order and discipline on female religious. The closeness of their relationship favoured the cause of reform. This was particularly so in the prosecution of those who imperilled the honour of Venetian convents by transgressing the enclosure laws or violating the chastity of Christ's brides. Such crimes overcame the barriers which were supposed to separate female religious from the outside world. They involved the complicity of nuns and outsiders. Therefore, the jurisdiction of both church and state were called into play in bringing to justice the transgressors on either side of the convent walls.

The practical interventions of the patriarch pervaded almost every aspect of convent life. In the first instance, he was responsible for vetting new nuns. The decrees of Trent were fresh in the mind of Patriarch Giovanni Trevisan when he asserted his control over monacazioni:

non debbiate haver ardimento, ne presumere per modo alcuno di accettare, ne ballotare nel vostro capitolare alcuna figliola [...] se non sarà prima presentata à noi. 138

Patriarchal permission was also necessary before professed nuns could assume their voting rights in capitolo. 139 Appointments to positions of authority within the convent, ranging from the novice-mistress to the abbess, had to be confirmed by the patriarch, and the names of external employees were subject to his approval. Attempting to

138 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 2, fo. 45v: 17 April 1573, 'Mandatum generale'. The instruction echoes the decree from Trent, sessio 25, cap. XVII; ed. Alberigo, p. 781.
139 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 2, fo. 56v: 14 June 1581, 'Mandatum generale'.
prevent scandalous electoral disputes of the kind that Corpus Domini and San Sepolcro had suffered, the patriarch and his vicars also undertook the supervision of convent elections. The degree of control which the patriarchal authorities exercised over membership of the internal hierarchy of the nunnery allowed them to influence conventual affairs.

Sometimes, control was more direct. In economic matters, Patriarch Priuli told the nuns of Santi Biagio e Castaldo that his licence was required for 'alcun atto di compreda, venditione, alienatione, pignoratione, d obligatione'. Particularly when a convent was experiencing economic problems, the patriarch's interventions could be very hands-on. Following the 1596 visitation of Santa Maria delle Vergini, commencing 15 July, the patriarchal vicars had recorded their concern over the nuns' waste of resources and the consequent debts accrued by the convent:

*Che si consuma gran farina in far bozzolai, fugazze et altre robbe quando si fà pane. Che staria bene far il pan fuori di casa, et medesimamente levar via il pane che si dà a tanti operarii e servitori. Che si spende il danaro del monastero con gran disavantaggio tolando tutto in credenza. Che vi sono debbiti di tre mille ducati, e pure le entrate sono grosse.*

In direct response to this report, Priuli prescribed a detailed programme of retrenchment for the nunnery, dated 1 August. In order to prevent the nuns from engaging in profligate baking in future, bread was to be made outside the convent; employees of the nunnery--such as builders, carpenters, and boatmen--should be paid in money 'e non più in pane ne in vino, ne in tutto, ne in paste'; the giving of 'elemosina' was to be administered by the abbess alone 'ne alcun'altra monaca ardisca dar via alcuna cosa ne per elemosina ne per pagamento sotto pena di peccato mortale'; twice a year, each nun received a ration of 'lire vinti di farina per una per far bozzolai'. By these measures, Patriarch Priuli concluded, 'speramo the si avanzerano almeno stara 200 almeno di formento all'anno delli 600 che al presente si consumano'.

One final example of the patriarchal role in supervising the economic affairs of Venice's convents comes from San Sepolcro in 1610, when the Abbess actually appealed to Patriarch Francesco Vendramin for governance. In a letter of 29 May, the abbess claimed to have awaited 'con gran desiderio' the patriarch's 'provisione', in the wake of the visitation which had taken place in March, fearing lest he had forgotten the nunnery's plight: 'credo cc el si abi scordato con tanti soi afari'. While she herself offered no sure solutions to the convent's troubles, she perceived the reckless

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140 The web of regulations constructed to ensure patriarchal control over recruitment and office-holding is discussed in the section on the internal administration of convents, pp. 77-94.
141 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1593, SS. Biagio & Castaldo.
142 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1596, S. Maria delle Vergini, fo. 588r-v.
143 Ibid., fos 590r-591r.
generosity of her nuns as the cause of the 'danno aguto' experienced by this 'povero monasterio'. The nuns of San Sepolcro were guilty of giving away wine to outsiders and of doing washing for lay folk: both activities which were heavily frowned upon, and considered to bring religious communities to ruin. This letter appears not so much as a request for financial expertise, than as a plea for the patriarch to impose order and discipline on the community.144

As the most senior Venetian prelate, with jurisdiction over the city's convents, it fell to the patriarch to enforce discipline and, where necessary, to impose punishments on female religious. The methods available to him ranged from face-to-face castigation to imprisonment of offending nuns. Among his visitation reports, records survive for several cases dealt with by Patriarch Priuli. In 1595, he intervened at the convents of San Iseppo and Santa Giustina to bring reconciliation to divided communities. His approach was direct, and paternal in style. He summoned before him the four subversive nuns at San Iseppo, who were threatening the communal ideal, and ordered 'che in virtù di santa obbedienza non dovessero più praticar ne parlar insieme se non in luoghi communi alla presenza a' altre monache'. Failure to comply with these instructions would be punished by a year-long ban on using the parlatorio. Meanwhile, the nuns were urged to accomplish 'prontamente le penitenze che le saranno datte dalla Reverenda Priora'.145 At the discordant convent of Santa Giustina, Priuli presided over an almost Borromean scene of reconciliation and penitence.146 The visitation had revealed 'Che vi sono dodeci monache contrarie alla Priora, et à tutto il resto del monastero'. Apparently of their own accord, some of the nuns came to the patriarch to express their repentance to him:

fatta l'essamina compavero alcune delle sopradette dodici pregando Monsignor Illustrissimo Patriarcha à voler metter pace tra loro, e tutte le altre del monastero promettendo di esser obedientissime alla Madre Priora et escusandosi che erano incolpate di molte cose.

There followed all-round forgiveness and exhortations to concord:

Parve à Monsignor Illustrissimo Patriarcha accettar la sua humiliatione, avertendole che se quella humiliatione non viene dal cuore, e fosse simulata aspettassero gran castigo dal Signor Dio, et essendo presente la Priora le accetto per care figliole perdonandole tutte le cose passate, et poi chiamato tutto il capitolo alla finestra, che risponde in chiesa, dove fatto parlò Monsignor Patriarcha à tutte essortandole alla pace.147

144 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1610, S. Sepolcro
145 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, S. Iseppo, fo. 516r.
146 For a discussion of Carlo Borromeo's ideas on penitence, see Bossy, Christianity, pp. 132-34.
147 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, S. Giustina, fos 470r-471v.
Priuli exercised both practical and spiritual considerations in resolving cases of ill-discipline at convents. This is abundantly evident in the punishments he prescribed for individual nuns. Following the visitation of Santa Chiara di Venezia in December 1594, it was reported that Suor Clementia da Leze was 'imputada di tener stretta amicitia co'l Buontempo fattor scrivendosi lettere, e mandandosi presenti l'una l'altro con scandolo'. The next month the patriarch wrote to the Abbess with various instructions for disciplining Suor Clementia. Predictably enough, a complete cessation of contact between the nun and Buontempo was a central measure. Clementia was also banned from going to the parlatorio without express licence from the Abbess. Priuli apparently favoured a punitive drop in status for the nun as part of her temporal humiliation: 'volemo e determinamo che la detta Suor Clementia sia per l'avenire inhabile ad salver ne dignità, ne obbedienza alcuna senza espressa licentia nostra, o de nostri successori, contentandosi però per convenienti rispetti che ella non sia priva della obbedienza, che si ritrova al presente'. But all this was only one part of the patriarchal package of punishments. In addition, there were the 'penitenze salutari da farsi da Suor Clementia':

A similar mixture of temporal and spiritual measures were prescribed for suor Paula Lippamano at San Sepolcro in 1596. She was not only the ring-leader of a troublesome clique of disobedient nuns, but was also guilty of having courted the company of 'l'Abbate da Pesaro' in the convent parlatorio—precisely the sort of liaison between female and male religious which was so heartily disapproved. Once again, the emphasis of the patriarch's provisions was on cutting Paula off from her contacts with the outside world:

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148 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1594, S. Chiara di Venezia, fo. 339v.
149 Ibid., fo. 341r-v.
della clausura si intenda caduta in pena di escomunicatione maggiore, l'assolutio della quale riservata à Sua Signoria Illustrissima.

Paula was also to be deprived of her responsibilities within the convent, especially her right to attend capitolo meetings for at least one year, 'e passato detto tempo non sia admesso senza licenza in scrittura di Sua Signoria Illustrissima'. Meanwhile, the following acts of penitence were to be undertaken by the erring nun:

Et sia obligata per un mese continuo in choro nel tempo, che si dice la compieta star sempre in ginocchioni, e doppò quella stando pure inginocchiata dire il notturno corrente per li morti con le laudi. Et finalmente ogn'altra cosa il primo giorno doppò la publicatione della presente sentenza debba inginocchiioni in Refettorio con le brazza in croce dire sua colpa con voce alta dimandando perdono all'Abbadessa et sorelle del scandolo datto, e della inobedienza nella quale è incorsa dicendo così inginocchiioni nel medesimo luogo mentre le monache disserano le settesalmi penitentiali, colle litanie, et preci bacando tre volte la terra vicino ai piedi dell Abbadessa.\textsuperscript{150}

The final example gives us evidence of severer punishments for a crime which, unfortunately, we remain ignorant of. Suor Chiara Barbaro is first mentioned in the visitation report from Santa Croce di Giudecca, dated October 1595. Having enumerated the 102 nuns currently living in the convent, the patriarchal vicar records, 'Oltre le sopradette monache si trova in priggion Suor Chiara Barbaro per suoi mensfatti fin sotto il Patriarcha passato, laquale per detto di tutte le monache non si è mai trasferita'.\textsuperscript{151} Chiara had therefore been imprisoned since before 1590, the year in which Priuli became patriarch. On a loose sheet of paper, a letter of 12 January 1596 from Lorenzo Priuli to the Abbess of the convent reviews suor Chiara's position, concluding that the nun is best left in the isolation of her cell. The letter reads as follows:

Havendo noi hoggi parlato con Suor Chiara monaca del vostro monasterio et essendosi lei dimostrata senza humiltà, et senza religione, sicome habbiamo sentito gran dolore per il mal stato nel qual ella si trova così non potemo mancar di commettermi prima che procurate col mezo dell'oration di queste Reverende sorelle del monastero aiutar questa povera monaca per ammollirgli, e intenerirgli il core, accioche abbracci volentieri li santissimi sacramenti et porti con patientia la penitenza, che li è stata imposta, Deputarete anco alcune delle monache più devote del vostro monasterio che vadino qualche volta à ragionar con lei per essortarla à viver

\textsuperscript{150} ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1596, S. Sepolcro, fo. 402r-v.
\textsuperscript{151} ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, S. Croce di Giudecca, fo. 495r.
da buona monacha, et à dar segni di humiliation, et di penitenza. Ordinarete anco, et publicarete in capitolo à tutte le monache, che niuna ardisca di ragionar, ne trattar con lei, ne darli, ne ricever da lei cosa alcuna, eccetto quelle, che saranno deputate da voi sotto pena di escomunica. Finalmente vi raccordiamo, che quanto prima facciate la cerca nella sua cella, et li leviate cortelli, et ogni altro instrumento col quale lei si potesse offender, non le dando dentro vedri ne altre massaritie, con le quali la si potesse far qualche male, le darete anco sobriamente il viver, et la farete digiunar qualche volta, se ben non ne haverà volontà per veder di domarla, et ridurla à segno, che si possa creder lei esser veramente pentita, contrita, et humiliata, procurando di far ogni esperienza ragionevole per guadagnar quest'anima; dandole dentro qualche libro da legger, il quale tratti particolarmente della pacienza, e penitenza, e Dio vi benedica.152

Here, Priuli shows his colours as a Counter-Reformation zealot, eschewing pragmatic compromise, and chasing relentlessly after the soul of this unrepentant nun. Yet he freely acknowledges that the programme of solitary confinement and penitential rigours (to be forced upon the nun regardless of her inclinations) may prompt her to suicide before contrition. For this reason, Priuli instructs the abbess to remove all knives and other instruments 'co'l quale si potesse offender' from the prisoner's reach. Tales of this kind perhaps later inspired Diderot in his depiction of the sadistic punishments administered to Sister Sainte-Christine at the abbey of Longchamp, and her efforts to kill herself while locked in the convent prison.153

It is instances like this which give Counter-Reformation convents a bad name—not that the penal practices of the secular world in the early modern period would seem to us any more humane. Moreover, it would be wrong to see the convent prison primarily as a weapon of the patriarch; for, as we shall see, it was more often resorted to by abbesses and confessors than by external authorities. Yet it is salutary to remember the psychological torture to which some nuns were subjected, and to register the unruffled tones in which a reforming prelate could prescribe measures of this sort. After all, being locked up in a cell inside the nunnery, with nothing but a few spiritual books for entertainment, was only a more intense version of female monastic experience generally.

The patriarchs of the period under study were conscientious reformers. Before being appointed to the office, most of them had served the state, not the church. But the

152 Ibid, unnumbered folio.
153 Diderot, pp. 64-65. The punishments inflicted on Diderot's nun, both physical and psychological, are far more extreme than anything we read about in the archives of the Venetian patriarchate. Yet, given Priuli's warning against knives and sharp objects, it is interesting to note Sister Sainte-Christine's reaction to imprisonment: 'My first instinct was to put an end to myself; I tried to throttle myself [...] I banged my head against the wall until I was covered with blood. In fact, I went on trying to kill myself until my strength failed, which was not very long' (p. 65).
secular backgrounds of men like Lorenzo Priuli and Francesco Vendramin did not diminish their energies in pursuing Tridentine goals for the administration, lifestyle and devotion of Venetian nuns. Visitations were not only frequent, and thorough, but as has been shown in some of the cases above, they prompted inquiries into particular problems which had arisen in the convents. There was regular contact between patriarchs and abbesses; in turn, the patriarchs kept the temporal authorities informed by means of their meetings with the provveditori sopra monasteri. Of course, no system of control is water-tight. Interests within and without the convent often undermined patriarchal policy. But the commitment to reform should not be doubted.

Priests

For all the rules and regulations which subjected them to strict enclosure, and debarred them from association with the male sex, nuns regularly came into contact with members of the priesthood. Adjacent to every convent was a church, and a wall or screen divided the 'chiesa interiore', which connected with the nuns' quarters, from the 'chiesa esteriore', which was open to the public. The chiesa interiore could either be situated to the side of the main church, or it could be raised on a balcony or 'palco', as seen in the plan of San Servolo (figure 2). Conventual churches served the spiritual needs of the community, and—as is still true today—many local people chose to attend services within them, instead of or as well as going to their parish church. Some left money to convents to pay for redemptive masses (mansonarie) to be said for themselves or for relations after their deaths, in the church which they had frequented during their lifetimes. To preside over the range of devotional activities which took place within the conventual churches, nunneries employed large numbers of priests. Besides the nuns' own confessors, numbers of capellani (chaplains), predicatori (preachers), and mansonarii (priests employed specifically to officiate at mansonarie) were often to be found milling around convents.

In his visitations, Patriarch Vendramin asked for lists to be provided stating the names and ages of priests serving each convent. These were not always supplied, or at any rate have not all survived. We know, however, that at Ognisanti (1610) there were 10 priests; at Santi Biagio e Castaldo (1610), there were 21; at Santa Caterina (1616) there were 17; at San Iseppo (1618), there were 19. Convents' economic records give us some idea of the payments made to clergymen. A set of accounts supplied to the

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154 The distinction was not, in any case, hard and fast; the churches of Santa Croce, Santa Giustina and Santa Lucia had parochial as well as conventual status. Nunneries were discouraged from allowing baptisms and weddings in their churches (see Patriarch Priuli's ordine to SS. Biagio e Castaldo, ACPV, Vis. past., B1, 1593: 'Non si facino sponsaliti in chiesa ne bategian').
155 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5. The first visitation in the busta (S. Zaccaria, 1609) sets forth the procedures to be followed in future visitations. Among other things, it requests that each convent supply a list stating the names and ages of confessors, capellani, and mansonarii. The figures in the text are all taken from Vendramin's visitation records, to be found in the above busta.
Patriarch by the nuns of Sant'Alvise itemized expenditure over the three-year period of the outgoing prioress's term. The nunnery had spent 300 ducats 'per il nostro confessor, per confessar' (an annual salary of 100 ducats), and a further 504 ducats 'per mansonarii numero 7' (on average, 24 ducats per priest per annum). At Santa Caterina, a record of accounts was drawn up in May 1616 for the previous year. The annual salary of the confessor was noted as 112 ducats, compared with the 69 ducats paid to the capelan; 7 mansonarii received between them 131 ducats (on average, approximately 19 ducats each). Finally, accounts of 1618 for San Iseppo enumerate 'Mansonarie che paga il monasterio ogni anno'. Six priests are listed, receiving payments of between 4 and 14 ducats; in total, the convent spent an annual sum of 74 ducats on paying mansonarii. It should be remembered that these costs were theoretically covered by bequests from those who had commissioned masses to be said on their behalf.

As is immediately apparent from the discrepancy in payments made to confessors and mansonarii, while the former occupied full-time positions, the latter were employed on a far more casual basis and would commonly serve in a variety of churches in order to muster an adequate income. Their status as convent employees was unstable and often temporary, and it was for these reasons that Patriarch Vendramin sought to obtain written evidence of their identities. In theory, the work of these priests was limited to the affairs of the chiesa esteriore and there was no cause for them to come in contact with nuns. In practice, the comings and goings of mansonarii were hard to control and they often developed familiarity with the nuns whom they indirectly served. For example, one prete Marc'Antonio Lippamano, was apprehended by the capitano of the provveditori sopra monasteri, 'che a San Zacharia a ore 18 in circha in giesa ala rua era caciato con la testa et le spale in la rua et parlava con una di quele reverende madre'. (An example of a 'rua', or 'ruota', may be seen in figure 2 on the right-hand side of San Servolo, immediately before the High Altar, where it is labelled 'roda'). According to the trial records, this was a repeat offence, committed 'non ostante al bando hover proibicione over sentensia contra di lui diverse volte'. Marc'Antonio was employed by San Zaccaria in the capacity of mansonario; in addition, he served as capellano to the nunnery of La Celestia (where his conduct was also under suspicion), and at the parish church of San Zulian in an unspecified post.

156 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1612, S. Alvise.
157 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1616, S. Caterina.
158 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1618, S. Iseppo.
159 In the present context, the precarious nature of enclosure is well illustrated by an ordine issued to the convent of S. Biagio e Castaldo in 1593: 'Li Mansionarii, capellani, et chierici serventi siano admessi alla Ruota per pigliar le cose necessarie per la messa con prohibitione d'ogni ragionamento et di non intromettersi in altri negotii con Monache', ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1.
The provveditori responded to this case by banning Marc'Antonio from all female convents and fining him ten ducats. 160

The trial records of the provveditori sopra monasteri are littered with cases against priests breaching enclosure and fostering social or sexual relations with nuns. These are looked at in some depth in the final chapter of this thesis. At this juncture, it is sufficient to offer a brief insight into this world of spiritual odd-job men hovering at the edge of enclosure. They were not supposed to come into contact with nuns, let alone have any authority over them. But as unattached males impinging on all-female environments, they surely shared in the privileged status which had conventionally belonged to monks and friars. Despite strict regulations, male regulars continued to exercise influence over their associate sisters, and often exploited their position as spiritual protectors to gain material perks or sexual favours. Nuns were also susceptible to the attentions of secular clergy. In 1618, the 'piovan di San Lio', Battista Bancato, was denounced to the provveditori:

lui va et frequenta landar al monesterio delle Reverende moniche dala Celestia tutti li merchori et veneri per hoficiar la sua mansionaria ma avanti che vada in sagrestia et va ala grada di giezia a parlar con una di ese madre et poi dopo fenito la mesa nel partirsi si ferma per gran spacio di hora aragionar ala grada et lui hoseva andarli aore proibite cioe soto nona et non hostante che estato condanato et amonito et di piu di continuo ogni zorno vien presentato da una di ese et lui alei et litere inanzi. 161

No verdict survives for this case here, though a copy of an earlier document, dated 28 July 1615, testifies to an earlier conviction. This banned the piovan from going to the grate to speak with nuns; somewhat optimistically, it permitted him to continue to carry out the mansionaria for which he was employed, 'non vi potendo andar in altro tempo, che in quello di officiar essa mansionaria et subitò detto la sua messa partirsi'. A recurrent theme of this thesis is the impossibility of imposing absolute enclosure on nuns. The relations between nuns and priests, often conducted at the 'grada di giezia', represented a particularly weak point in the system.

The position of the confessor deserves special attention among the priests who were employed by the nunnery. For there was no getting round the fact that enclosure had to be relaxed so far as to allow the vital sacraments of confession and communion to be administered to female religious. This was one priest who could not be banned from contact with nuns. Furthermore, his monopoly over absolution, combined with his maleness, must have made him a particularly influential figure for his spiritual

160 ASV, PSM, B. 264, 1609, S. Zaccaria.
161 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1617 [m.v.], Celestia.
charges. In some houses the confessor commanded a certain amount of personal authority over conventual affairs, and could be particularly autocratic in matters of discipline. Interference of this kind was not generally welcomed by his ecclesiastical superiors and, with this in mind, it is worth looking at the instructions of 1592, compiled by Bishop Antonio Grimani of Torcello, concerning the role of the confessor. They are characteristically detailed and show a determination to limit the need for the individual priest to use his discretion: to render him, as far as possible, an impersonal functionary.

On the appointment of the confessor, Grimani instructs that he must be virtuous, patient, at least fifty years old, and approved by the Bishop. While he is urged to assert his good influence—in keeping feast-days solemn, preventing 'vane occupationi', encouraging observance of the Rule, not permitting profane books and so on—he is afforded no role in punishing nuns. His powers are restricted to the spiritual domain, and even here they are not limitless, certain transgressions being placed beyond absolution:

Se nella Confessione troveranno (che Dio guardi) alcuna Monaca, la quale habbia permesso ad alcuna persona il proibito ingresso nel Monastero, ò ch'ella gli habbia spontaneamente aperto l'adito, ò che habbia violato la clausura, non l'assolva, perchè non lo puó fare, contrafacendo, caderà lui in gravissime pene, et la penitente non sarà bene assoluta.

Familiarity with the nuns is, of course, condemned, and in particular, the confessor is banned from receiving presents and favours from his female flock:

S'astenghino totalmente di accettare presenti da loro, ne di cose mangiative, ne d'altre. Ne meno gli diano a farli lavori di camisce, fazzoletti, collari et simil biancarie, ne gli dia drappi a lavare.

The subordination of the confessor to episcopal authority is highlighted in the oath which Grimani requires all confessors to swear, whereby they must promise to observe the 'constitutioni sinodali'—the decrees of the diocesan synod.162 In his instructions

162 Grimani, cap. LXII. The oath for confessors is as follows: 'Io N. Sacerdote di età di anni 50 et piú deputato confessore delle Monache del Monastero di S. N. di M. giuro, et prometto osservare con ogni mio potere, et spirito li prefati decreti, et constitutioni sinodali, et gli altri che si contengono nel Capitolo dell'amministrazione del sacramento della penitenza del l'estrema untione, et della santissima Eucharista, de quali si tratta qui più à basso, come spettanti al mio officio, li quali hò visto, et letto, et hò piena notitia di essi, et di non entrare nel Monastero, se non nelli casi di urgente necessità concernenti l'amministrazione di detti santissimi sagramenti, et cura d'anime commessami, et sempre con la Cotta, et Stola, et con quella essemplare modestia, che mi si conviene. Attenderò per me medesimo, ne mandarò altro Sacerdote in mio luogo senza licenza de Superiori in iscritto Cosi Dio m'aiuti, et questi Santi Evangelii'. 
concerning the sacrament of penitence, Grimani orders that nuns guilty of grave transgressions (for example, violation of enclosure or illicit meddling in the economic affairs of the convent) be referred to the Bishop for punishment. He also specifies the precise form of absolution to be used, again attempting to impose an impersonal uniformity upon confessors.\textsuperscript{163}

Ideally, even in the acts of administering the sacraments of confession and communion, the confessor would remain invisible to the nuns. Patriarch Vendramin instructed the nuns of San Girolamo in 1609:

\begin{quote}
Non conviene alla gravità, et pietà monachale, che le monache penitenti siano vedute in faccia, dal confessore, però rinovando sua Signoria Illustissima l'ordine dai predecessori dato commanda, che alla fenestra del confessorio sia fatta una lama di ferro con busi minuti, et stia sempre fitta, et immovabile, nel mezo della quale si faccia un fenestrino per trattare l'Abbadessa co'l fattore, et altre persone publiche, et al detto fenestrino si metti anco la tela negra di dentro, mentre si confessa.\textsuperscript{164}
\end{quote}

The physical lay-out of convents varied, and the 'fenestra del confessorio' would usually have connected the nuns' quarters with the confessor's working area. The 'fenestra da comunicar' (as may be seen in the plan of San Servolo, just before the high altar on the right-hand side—figure 2) was situated between the convent and the 'chiesa esteriore', and would also have allowed only minimal contact between priest and communicant. Bishop Grimani relayed detailed instructions for taking the sacraments to a sick nun. This was permissible only when the nun in question was in a state of 'grave et pericolosa infermità'. The confessor had to be accompanied by two of the oldest and most discreet nuns, and a bell was rung warning all the others to retire to their cells. While the sick nun confessed, the door was left open, and the two 'discrete' had to stand where they could see but not hear.\textsuperscript{165} The procedure for bringing communion to the sick was slightly different: all the nuns processed with the priest to the cell of the sick nun. Their anonymity was supposedly preserved by dim candle-light, and heavy veils.

Perhaps the most effective way of preventing familiarity from developing between nuns and their confessor would have been to limit their term of office. A law, instituted by the Council of Ten in 1546, decreed that:

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{163} Grimani, cap. LXIII.
\item \textsuperscript{164} ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1609, S. Girolamo.
\item \textsuperscript{165} Grimani, cap. XXX.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
li confessori debbano esser mutati ogn'anno, et che uno che haverà confessato un anno non possa confessar li tre anni sussequenti ad alcun monasterio di questa città. 166

The evidence suggests that this rule was not enforced and, surprisingly, Grimani makes no mention of any such restriction. He may have considered it too impracticable to reiterate.

Every effort was made to distance nuns from their confessor, and yet it is clear that often he maintained an allure for his spiritual charges. This could be sexual. Certainly, Protestant propaganda represented the confessional as a cover for clerical lasciviousness. 167 But it need not be so. At Sant'Andrea di Zirada in 1596, the nuns were warned against venerating the relics of the late confessor:

L'ossa di quel confessore delle monache tenute in veneratione senza fondamento che sono nella chiesa interiore si mettano in una cassa, laqual si ponga sopra terra in detta chiesiolla da una parte in luoco che non sia di incommodo.

While this personal cult smacked of blasphemy, there is nothing to suggest that it was linked to sexual misconduct. 168 More often, the deference that nuns displayed towards their confessor was played out in a more domestic context. Despite regulations to the contrary, it was common for nuns to cook and wash for their confessor, and to shower gifts upon him at every possible occasion. 169 The confessor commonly lived in accommodation which bordered on the nunnery, and it made sense for nuns to supply some of the conventional wifely services to their wifeless spiritual guardian. Similarly, if the nuns required guidance or governance, male authority was close at hand, in the shape of their confessor. By a roundabout route, patriarchy was reestablished among this community of celibates.

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166 ASV, Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fo. 316, 1546, 10 Sept., Cons. X & Zonta.
167 Roper, Holy Household, p. 17. See also pp. 241-42, for a discussion of the special relationships often enjoyed between confessors and female religious. Bell comments on the 'sexually charged nature' of auricular confession for priests and female penitents in general, pp. 123-24. Haliczer's study of Sexuality in the Confessional in Counter-Reformation Spain provides some useful insights into the 'excessive and unhealthy emotional dependence' which sometimes characterized nuns' relations with their confessors; p. 89. The theme is developed in chapter V, pp. 196-211; 220-25.
168 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada. For an interesting comparative example, see Sedgwick on the nuns of Port-Royal. Following the death of their spiritual mentor, abbe Saint-Cyran, in 1643, the nuns made a cult of the man they regarded as a saint: they venerated relics, such as pieces of his hair, or the water in which he had washed his hands, and they kept pictures of him in their cells. On the exaggerated status some nuns afforded their confessors while they lived, see ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1571, S. Iseppo, fo. 5r: defending the confessor against accusations of misconduct, suor Benedicta Gratarola (aged 65) protested 'o caro signor, podemo dir che l'e un santo in terra, chi dicesse mal de quel homo dicesse male de Me. Domenedio'.
169 Ceremonies of clothing, profession or consecration were occasions when the confessor could expect to do particularly well out of the nuns' excessive gift-giving. See, for example, ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1575, S. Maffio di Mazzorbo, in which various nuns testify to the presents given to the confessor.
In a telling case of 1556, at the beginning of our period, the confessor of San Giovanni Lateran, prete Stefano, was asked to define the functions of his office:

*Interrogatus quod nam sit officium confessoris cum monialibus super dictis* Respondit *l'officio del confessor è confessarle, ma quando intrai in detto officio di confessor dimandai questo erano soliti di far in detto monastero mi dissero l'Abbadessa et le monache che l'officio era di correggerle, admonirle et imprigionarle quando fusse bisogno.*

Stefano, therefore, claimed to have been invited by the nuns themselves to invoke full disciplinary measures against them 'quando fusse bisogno'. During the course of the trial, it becomes clear that the confessor was always a welcome guest inside the walls of the convent, where he would sit by the fire, and be served with meals. From the depositions of the nuns interviewed, it would seem that the community as a whole found nothing objectionable about the confessor's frequent presence. One nun remarked sympathetically, 'lho ben visto dentro qualche volta a scaldarse al fuogo, ma come l'era scaldato l'andava via'. Just one member of the community developed a grudge against him, a *conversa*, suor Gratia, and it is on her account that the priest came to trial.

The trouble began when the abbess refused to block up the door which connected the convent to the *confessorio*, and to fix a grate to the *finestra da confessar*, as had been ordered by the papal nuncio. Suor Gratia—marked out by the other nuns as being 'troppo superba et scandolosa de cridar'—made known her objections to this and other irregularities concerning the confessor's behaviour. Prete Stefano responded by refusing to let her back into the convent, after she had been sent out to do an errand ('come conversa io vado fuora de casa'). But the persistent suor Gratia quickly found revenge, by reporting the matter to the papal legate who had issued the order concerning the *confessorio* in the first place. (This prompted prete Stefano to resort to the counter-claim that suor Gratia was having an affair with the nuncio's assistant, prete Iacomo). This case demonstrates the way in which a convent confessor, though strictly limited in his official powers, could command considerable authority over the nuns.

By prete Stefano's own admission, he considered it within his powers to imprison nuns. Suor Gratia explained how she felt that her hands were tied because of the threat of the convent prison. Complaining in her deposition of the priest's frequent visits inside the convent, she singled out one occasion which had particularly incensed her:

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*ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1556, S. Giovanni Lateran. The bulk of the records from this case comes from the office of the papal nuncio. They were evidently handed over to the *provveditori sopra monasteri* to enable them to pass sentence on prete Stefano.*
et una volta tra le altre, che fu la sera del'ultima festa de
nadai passato vi stete fino a 4 hore a contar li danarii che si
erano riscossi del perdone nella nostra chiesa. Il che vedendo
lo andai in letto senza cena per colera, non mi parendo che
queste cose stesse bene et non li dissi cosa alcuna per paura
che non mi facessero metter in pregione.

Another instance of Stefano's use of the convent prison is relayed by suor Maria
conversa:

el ditto confessor el giorno de S. Lucia prossimo passato mi
messe in preson nel monesterio, perche io mi haveva
desmentega a tuor una lettera da M. Francesco Beltrame,
dove lui mi haveva manda, dove el mi tenne fina un hora de
notte, et poi mi libero. Dicens Interrogata il confessor tene le
chiavi della ditta preson per quanto ho inteso. Interrogata se
li confessori precessori di questo erano solitii a metter le
muneghe in preson Respondit signor no ma questo solo, il
quale ne serve da San Zuane in qua.

It would seem as though Stefano's control over the convent prison were more an
instrument of power than a genuine means of discipline. Suor Maria's imprisonment
only lasted a matter of hours; simply jangling the keys might suffice to remind the nuns
of his dominance of them.

The confessor of San Giovanni Lateran derived his excessive powers from the
nuns. The abbess had informed him from the outset that it was his role to 'correct,
admonish, and imprison' erring members of the community; she had presumably also
given him custody of the keys to the convent prison. The other nuns, meanwhile,
welcomed him to their hearth, fed and entertained him. Even suor Maria, who had been
at the wrong end of his capricious disciplinary tactics, refused to say a word against
him, though she readily condemned suor Gratia for her arrogant interventions.

In certain circumstances, female religious craved leadership and domination
from the male clergy who attended them. During the patriarchal visitation of San
Zaccaria in 1596, the complaint emerged from some of the nuns interviewed 'Che il
confessore è homo debole, puoco atto à riprender et à pacificar le monache insieme
quando sono discordi'.\(^{171}\) Admittedly, this was no direct plea for the confessor to
impose a programme of arbitrary penal measures upon the nuns. But it does suggest
that the community expected their confessor to provide a more interventionist approach
to their affairs than that prescribed by senior prelates. It would, on the other hand, be
misleading to suggest that nunneries were always submissive to the authority of their
priests. In 1617, one prete Gerolamo, accused of 'amicitia' with a conversa at La
Celestia, claimed he was victim of a conspiracy waged against him by the convent.

\(^{171}\) ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1596, S. Zaccaria, fo. 576r.
According to him, the nuns of La Celestia were united in their hostility to the priests of the neighbouring parish church of San Ternita: 'tutte mi vogliono mal di morte, come fanno à tutti li preti della nostra chiesa, perchê le disce, che le spionemo'.

The purpose of the priests' supposed spying is not made explicit here. Did they seek to catch the nuns misbehaving, and to tell tales on them; or did they watch the nuns for sexual titilation? Either way, in Gerolamo's view, the nuns of La Celestia felt smothered by the proximity of the local priests, and sought to keep them out of their affairs.

The relationship between nuns and their priests was subject to the continual tension that existed between theory and practice in the imposition of enclosure. As with other outsiders, nuns were inclined to foster contacts with male clergy, the result being that priests gained authority and influence over communities of female religious. Thus, priests spun their way into the complex web of powers which bore upon nunneries. Their influence was discouraged both by prelates and by magistrates. Every effort was made to limit their contact with nuns. Yet, operating as they did on the peripheries of enclosure, their movements were hard to police, and their clerical status bought the deference of certain female religious.

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172 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1616 [m.v.], Celestia.
INTERNAL ADMINISTRATION

Consegli le cose con le vecchie, et discrete del monastero et dove si tratterà di cose importanti riduca il capitolo, et con il parere della maggior parte faccia quelle cose pertinenti al governo temporale del monastero et con la autorità di fare da se sola.173

In this mandate to the prioress of Sant'Andrea di Zirada, following the patriarchal visitation of 1596, the conciliar principles of conventual government are laid down. Every nunnery was headed by an abbess or, in certain houses, a prioress.174 Her role was to oversee all aspects of conventual life, from economic affairs to discipline and devotion. The job carried considerable status, and elections for the post were vulnerable to interference from outside interests.175 But the position was not autonomous—in the majority of cases nor was it permanent—and many checks operated to limit the abbess's authority. A large proportion of the other nuns were also granted significant responsibilities, and consultation among the senior members of the community was encouraged. Nor was the decision-making process limited to this inner circle of advisors. In fact, the more important the decision, the wider the net of approval had to be thrown. All the professed nuns were kept up-to-date with convent business at regular meetings of the capitolo (chapter) and ballots were held to decide policy on major issues affecting their institution.

The dispersal of power throughout the professed members of the community was just one element in a system of checks and balances which sought to minimize opportunities for factionalism and corruption. The preoccupation with limiting particular interests and the emphasis on accountability were shared by those involved in civic life. Some of the safeguards used in the internal government of Venetian nunneries—rotation of offices, secret ballots, record-keeping and reports—were also familiar to the temporal administration of the city.176 Yet the prime impetus for fashioning the machinery of self-regulation inside the convents came from the local Church rather than the State. For, invested with responsibility to maintain discipline among female religious, and to impose reforms upon them, the patriarch and other

173 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1596, S. Andrea de Zirada.

174 For this distinction see D.I.P., sub'Abbadessa'. In this thesis 'abbess' is used generically to mean the superior of the convent, whether technically known as abbess or prioress. Usually, nuns adhering to the Augustinian rule (Dominicans included) were presided over by prioresses. An exceptional case in Venice was S. Maria delle Vergini. This Augustinian house was governed by an abbess, whose life-long appointment was approved by the Doge and confirmed by the Pope. Benedictine communities often referred to their second-in-command as prioress.

175 Primhak, p. 140, on the status of Venetian abbesses. Zarri, 'Monasteri femminili e città', p. 370, on the material benefits and honour which abbesses gained for their families outside.

176 See Lane, pp. 109-11; Wootton, 'Ulysees Bound?', p. 346.
prelates relied on the internal administration of nunneries to put their policies into practice.

In considering the extent to which nuns ruled themselves, it is important to bear in mind the gulf that lay between theory and practice. By the provision of detailed instructions, the ecclesiastical authorities aspired to make convents function mechanically. It is the survival of these ordini which constitute the main source for our knowledge of how convents were governed. But there were other factors which shaped the day-to-day administration of nuns' affairs. As we have seen, personal and familial interests inside the convent continued to exert an influence on particular policies or decisions. A range of external pressures existed besides that of the Venetian Church.

Questions of Status
Nunneries were ordered according to a strict sense of hierarchy. Age, social status, merit and wealth were all factors affecting a nun's standing within her convent. Power was generally shared out among those who scored highest. For although the degree to which many female religious participated in the government of their own communities is remarkable, nunneries were nevertheless far from being democratic institutions.

All nuns were categorized either as monache da coro, or as converse. From the time of entering the convent—or, more precisely, from the time that the contract of acceptance was drawn up and the dowry was fixed—each nun was placed in one or other rank, and there was no mobility between the two. Converse fulfilled the more menial tasks of convent life and were excluded from privileges and power. According to Patriarch Priuli,

Sono introdotte le converse à far quelle cose, alle quali non si possano applicare le Monache de officio per l'obligo grande che hanno di attendere al choro.

Pope Pius V, in his bull Circa Pastoralis of 1566, added the technical distinction that converse were only allowed to take simple vows, whereas monache da coro would eventually take solemn vows. However, acceptance as a conversa generally

177 Monache da coro were also known as monache da officio. It is not clear whether this term derived from their status as office-holders or referred again to their duties at religious ceremonies.
178 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1593, SS. Biagio & Castaldo. The abuse of converse being employed by noble nuns as personal servants was persistent. For example, at S. Zaccaria, it was reported that 'le monache da officio [...] vogliono esser servite dalle converse come da massare, et alcune di loro ne hanno di proprie'; ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1596, S. Zaccaria, fo. 576r.
179 For a definition of converse, see D.I.P., sub 'Converso'. According to Pius' bull, simple vows should be taken by all nuns at their clothing; solemn vows should be taken by monache da coro only at their profession. For a full discussion of the implications of the Circa Pastoralis bull for converse, see Creytens, pp. 75-79. The theological distinction between simple and solemn vows is explained in New Catholic Encyclopedia, sub 'Vow'. Simple and solemn vows differ in their effects: solemn profession renders acts contrary to the vows invalid as well as illicit; simple vows make contrary acts illicit, but not invalid. Thus, marriage attempted by one in solemn vows is invalid; marriage for one in simple
indicated a lower social background rather than a lesser vocation. Accordingly, the
dowries expected of converse were considerably lower than what was required of fully-
professed nuns. 180

Monache da coro or choir-nuns supposedly adhered to a more demanding
devotional regime. They were also distinguished by their eligibility to hold office and to
become members of capitolo. But such responsibilities came only with seniority. There
were three stages of vow-taking for a monaca da coro: first, vestizione, when the nun
was clothed and commenced the novitiate; then profession which, besides irrevocably
committing her to religion, also qualified her to sit in capitolo (though several years
experience was required before she was allowed to vote); finally, consecration. 181

Although profession made a nun eligible in theory for all posts, in practice the highest
offices were reserved for 'le vecchie', who would generally be 'le sagre', sometimes
distinguished by their black veils. 182

Considering the suitable characteristics of the discrete or madri di consiglio
(those who served as the abbess's principal advisers), Bishop Grimani of Torcello
urged the election of 'sei delle piu vecchie & piu prudenti monache'. 183 Other posts for
which age was considered a particular advantage included the ascollatrici (whose job it

vows is illicit but valid. However, it would be foolish to assume that such subtle distinctions were
necessarily understood and adhered to by nuns in early-modern Venice. Definitions of this kind were
rarely hard and fast.

180 Chapter II, p. 106, contains information on the difference in dowry levels between converse and
monache da coro. Cf. Trexler, p. 1338, on the socially inferior origins of converse in late-medieval
Florence.

181 While the Tridentine decrees established age minimums for vestizione (12) and professione (16), it
set no age requirement for the final vows, taken at consacrazione (see sessio 25, caps XV and XVII; ed.
Alberigo, p. 781). Patriarch Priuli, however, in his visitation report to SS. Biagio e Castaldo (ACPV,
Vis. past., B.1, 1593) suggested that a minimum of 25 was current in Venice: 'Non possono esser
vestite le Monache di meno di dodeci anni ne fare la professione di meno di 16 ne sacrarsi di meno di
25'. In the interviews with nuns which follow, they were interrogated about their current ages and when
they took their vows. A number of nuns who were consecrated before the age of 25, either claim to
have had special permission from Rome, or inform the visitor that they were 'sacra' before Trent,
indicating that the Council was indeed the source of the regulation. See for example the deposition of
suor Pacifica sacra, daughter of Francesco Coppo: 'Sono di anni 62, 50 che son in monastero et di 16
feci la professione et quando mi sacrai havevo anni 18 che non era il tempo del Concilio'.

182 There were no rigid rules governing nuns' attire in this period. From visitation records, it would
seem that sagre usually wore black veils, while novizze wore white veils. Whether professe wore black
or white veils was a detail which varied from one convent to another. The following examples are all
taken from ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3. At the Benedictine house of S. Servolo (1594), there were 28
'monache con vello negro' (presumably sagre); 4 'professe da vello bianco' (i.e. professe, not yet
consecrated); and 7 'non professe' (novices). Converse and putte a spese were enumerated separately, as
were 'putte da monacar' (i.e. those who were 'accettate', but not yet clothed whom, in modern usage, we
might call postulants). At the Augustinian house of SS. Rocco & Margherita (1594), there were 22
'monache da officio' (undifferentiated), 'comprese 9 da vello bianco' (i.e. novices). The report goes on to
complain 'Che le monache da vello bianco sono tutte già molt'anni in monastero senza haver fatto
professione et alcune anco si mostrano difficile à volerla fare'. It is implied, therefore, that here both
sagre and professe wore black veils. Other convents which followed the pattern of S. Servolo were the
Convertite (Augustinian, 1593), S. Croce della Giudecca (Benedictine, 1595) and S. Maria delle Vergini
(Augustinian, 1596). Other convents which followed the pattern of SS. Rocco & Margherita were S.
Marta (Augustinian, 1594), S. Iseppo (Augustinian, 1595) and S. Lucia (Augustinian, 1595).

183 Grimani, cap. VIII.
was to listen in on nuns' conversations with outsiders, held in the *parlatorio*, the *portinare* (gate-keepers), and the *maestre de novizze* (novice-mistresses). Age was prized and, perhaps more significantly, youth was mistrusted. The reason why prelates were wary of power getting into the hands of young nuns is clear enough:

> nel dare i carichi principali, come di portinare, scrivane, consiglieri, sagrestane, mistra de novizze, et quelle che conducono gl'huomini per monastero guardi che siano delle piú vechie et che passino 40 anni.\(^{184}\)

For jobs such as conducting men through the convent, optimal discretion and chastity were required, such as were considered unlikely to be found in women under forty. But it was not simply the preoccupations of male ecclesiastics which ensured that older nuns enjoyed particular status. Within the convent, the privileges afforded to those women who had been in residence the longest were self-perpetuating; senior nuns were unlikely to divest themselves of the power which was traditionally the prerogative of age.\(^{185}\)

### Distribution of responsibility

While the most prominent jobs were reserved for those elevated in age and social standing, almost all *professe* were allocated a particular responsibility or *obedientia*; moreover, the term of office for all positions (excluding the abbess) was limited to one or two years, a measure which aimed to prevent nuns from exercising their authority according to personal interests.\(^{186}\) Elections for offices were not generally contested, although confirmation of appointments by the *capitolo* was required. The patriarch or one of his vicars was present on these occasions and documents recording the process may be found sporadically among reports of patriarchal visitations. Records from the Franciscan convent of Santa Maria Maggiore give a particularly clear picture of the distribution of offices in 1594.\(^{187}\) Immediately after the visitation, the *capitolo* was summoned first of all to confirm one suor Claudia in the position of vicaria (deputy to the abbess), and then to approve appointments to *obedientie*, as shown in Table 1.

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\(^{184}\) ACPV, *Vis. past.*, B. 1, 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada.

\(^{185}\) In chapter IV, pp. 149-50, the rise to power of suor Elena Capello, a nun at S. Andrea di Zirada, is considered. Repeatedly cited as the gang leader of a disobedient clique of young nuns in 1566 [ASV, *PSM*, B. 263, S Andrea di Zirada], by 1601 she had become the prioress of the convent [ASV, *S. Andrea de Zirada*, B.7, fo. 274r.] Parallels for the privilege afforded to age may be seen in the Venetian political system. In Finlay's article, 'The Venetian Republic as Gerontocracy', it is argued that rule by the old was self-perpetuating: 'At the end of his apprenticeship, a patrician was bound to favour the status quo, to honour a process which had brought its reward in due time'.

\(^{186}\) ACPV, *Vis. past.*, B. 3, 1594, S. Servolo, fo. 168r: 'le obedientie si mutino ogn'anno, overo ogni doi anni conforme all'uso del Monasterio'. This instruction is reiterated throughout the visitation reports of Friuli's patriarchate.

\(^{187}\) ACPV, *Vis. past.*, B. 3, 1594, S. Maria Maggiore, fo. 283r-v.
Table 1: The Distribution of Offices at S. Maria Maggiore in 1594

- 3 *rudiere* (in charge of the *ruota*, or wheel, through which food and other commodities were passed into the convent)
- 4 *portonare* (gate-keepers)
- 3 *sagrestane* (sacristans, whose responsibilities were for the 'chiesa interiore' only)
- 5 *spiciere* (spicers, possibly with more general medical/culinary chores)
- 2 *marte*¹⁸⁸
- 3 *canevere* (in charge of the cellar)
- 3 *fornere* (bakers)
- 2 *ordiresse* (loom-workers)
- 2 *maestre della seda* (in charge of silk-weaving)
- 2 *correttare del choro* (choir-mistresses)
- 8 *discrete* (advisers to the abbess)
- 2 *ordiresse da pani di seda* (silk loom-workers)
- 4 *infermierie* (nurses)
- 5 *lavandere* (laundry-workers)
- 4 *hortolane* (gardeners)
- 4 *scrivane* (responsible for writing business letters, book-keeping, taking minutes and, in general, recording the business of the convent)

From the patriarchal visitors, we know that the convent comprised 73 *monache da officio*, 19 *converse*, and 'un altra giovane non ancor vestita [...] di età d'anni 15'. The above table indicates that there were 55 posts, excluding the abbess and her *vicaria*. Thus, 57 of the 73 *monache da officio* definitely held particular positions. The remaining 16 almost certainly included some novices (who, although belonging to the office-holding class of nun, had not yet been assigned an *obedientia*) and some nuns who were just too old to be able to fulfil practical duties. We may conclude that the great majority of *monache da officio* were actively engaged in the running of their own community.

As for the large number of *converse* (too large a number in the view of the patriarch's visitors), though excluded from holding *obedientie*, their greater freedom of movement meant that they could be employed to serve their community's interests in the outside world.¹⁸⁹ In the case of Santa Maria Maggiore (as in many convents) this

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¹⁸⁸ It has not been possible to find a definition for this term. It may echo the name of the New Testament figure, Martha, who busied herself with housework, while her sister Mary sat at Christ's feet, listening to his teaching (Luke, 10. 38).

¹⁸⁹ In an attempt to limit the activities of *converse* outside the convent walls, Priuli and subsequent patriarchs saw to the appointment in every nunnery of four 'di dette converse che passino 40 anni et che
concession was abused, and it was reported that 'le converse vivono con troppo libertà andando fuori su le fiere et feste'. Converse often used their greater liberty as a means of securing temporary escape from the rigours of the enclosed life. But their sorties also provided them with the opportunity to take a stake in the administration of convent business. The 1594 visitation of San Rocco et Santa Margherita revealed that 'Le monache converse mandate alla villa per negotii del monastero dove sogliono stare xv o xx giorni'. These converse were far more closely involved in the practicalities of running the terraferma properties of the convent than the monache da coro could have been.

**Capitolo**

Once a week, the superior of a convent was supposed to summon the professed nuns by 'sono di campana' to discuss matters already considered by the discrete. This forum was known as the capitolo, and while its role was to vet decisions rather than to make them, its influence was far from negligible. Bishop Grimani of Torcello listed the eventualities when the approval of the capitolo had to be sought:

Quando si deve fare alcun contratto, et instrumento d'affittazione, vendita, et compra grossa, et qualunque altro contratto si sia, se si deve licentiare ministri, et eleggere altri, investire denari delle doti (il che si deve sempre fare per aumento del Monastero) quando se ha da pigliare denari in prestito, et obligare il Monastero, overo fabricare, quando s'ha da pigliare et trattare della loro dote, quando occoresse per mancamenti suoi mandar via una conversa, et altri simili gravi negotii, et generalmente tutte quelle facende, che potessero eccedere il valore, et importanza di ducatti quaranta.  

**Capitolo** could, therefore, exercise its power over a variety of issues, from the acceptance of new nuns to the disciplining and--if necessary--the expulsion of disobedient converse. But Grimani clearly considered the dominant function of the capitolo to be the curbing of corrupt or misconceived economic strategies. The same considerations led to regulations limiting family interests in the capitolo. Patriarch Priuli instructed the nuns of Santi Biagio e Castaldo 'Non possano haver voto in capitolo piu di due sorelle'. 'Monache interessate' were to be banned from particular meetings of capitolo. And the decisions of the capitolo, though meticulously recorded, should never be divulged.

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190 Grimani, cap. XVI.
191 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1593, SS. Biagio & Castaldo.
A simple majority of votes in *capitolo* was necessary for decisions to be passed.\(^{192}\) And nuns were encouraged to exercise their vote judiciously and independently. According to Grimani, although nuns should not vote until two or three years after profession (Priuli reckoned on five) they should attend *capitolo* and listen to the proceedings, in order to learn about the government and business of the convent, 'accioche per l'inesperienza loro, non segua, che queste diano il suo voto, à persuasione delle parenti, et maestre'. Whenever a 'cosa importantissima' had to be discussed, Grimani urged that it should not be sprung on the nuns 'all'improviso'. Rather, they should be notified of the matter in advance; and it should be dealt with in a further meeting, a week later or as appropriate. It was the task of the *camerlenga* (or *scrivana*) to keep 'il libro delle atti et decreti capitolari'. In this, the date of each *capitolo* meeting would be recorded, along with the names of the superior and of all the nuns present, the resolutions and voting distributions of any ballots.\(^{193}\) The contribution of the *capitolo* to the government of convent affairs was clearly taken seriously, though its greatest authority may have been in vetoing rather than creating policy. However, the machinery of conventual administration was deliberately and tightly interconnected so as to exclude the predominance of particular interests, and it was often unclear who was controlling whom. The abbess and her deputies were not necessarily all-powerful. And they, of course, derived their authority in the first place from the *capitolo*.

**Electing the Abbess**

The abbess was elected by the *capitolo*, and a two-thirds majority was required. There was a minimum age of forty, and candidates had to have been professed at least eight years previously.\(^{194}\) As has already been indicated, members of *capitolo* were experienced in exercising their corporate authority over the affairs of the convent, but the appointment of the abbess must always have been a particularly exciting political event for religious communities. Extremely sensitive to possibilities of electoral corruption, the ecclesiastical authorities insisted on the nuns voting by secret ballot, under the supervision of a prelate. Voting by proxy was disallowed even for sick nuns.

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192 Grimani, cap. XVI: 'Tutto quello che si trattará in capitolo, vogliamo che passi con voti secreti a bossoli, et balote, et vinca sempre l'opinione, che haverà piú voti, ne se intenda passata cosa alcuna, senza la maggior parte delle balotte'.

193 Ibid. Patriarch Priuli specified that 'Non possano [...] haver voto in capitolo le Monache senon cinque anni doppò fatta la professione' (ACP V, *Vis. past.*, B. 1, 1593, SS. Biagio & Castaldo).

194 Grimani, cap. VI. Here, Grimani was adopting the Tridentine legislation (sessio 25, cap. VII; ed. Alberigo, pp. 778-79). He again repeated the Tridentine directive in the following concessions: 'Et se in quel Monastero non si trovasse monaca, che fusse soggetto, et havesse la età, et qualità sudette, facciasi elezione d'una in un'altra Monastero del medesimo ordine, se già non ci paresse a noi esser molto incommodo, et per ragionevoli cagioni consentissimo che si eleggesse una di trenta anni del medesimo Monastero, che havesse per cinque anni avanti fatta la professione'. The other regulations cited regarding electoral practice may also be found in Grimani, cap. VI.
Speaking out against the fraudulent and partial election practices which evidently operated in some nunneries, Bishop Grimani instructed

che in simili elezioni nessuna ardisca di usare così fatti officii et pratiche illecite, disconvenienti, et tanto pericolose nei Monasteri, et ciò ne per se stessa, ne per favorire altra, per amicitia parentela, ò commodo particolare, ne usare fraude, ò partialità nel balottare, mà lassare, che tutto segna con libertà, et sincerità di giudizio non offuscato da male arti, ma guidato, et illuminato dalla rettitudine, et dalla gratia della Spirito Santo.\(^{195}\)

To avoid external influences, nuns were not allowed to speak to outsiders in the run-up to an election. There was one final precaution against corruption: on no account could the ballot go ahead unless all the nuns with a vote in capitolo had first been confessed and communicated.

Grimani's detailed instructions regarding electoral probity were published at a time when the frequency of conventual elections was likely to be on the increase. While Trent had made no judgment about the relative merits of 'perpetual' and temporary appointments, a decree of 1583, issued by Pope Gregory XIII, had come down in favour of the three-year term.\(^{196}\) It was probably in response to this directive that several Venetian convents abandoned the practice of appointing 'perpetual' abbesses in the 1580s and 1590s, but there is evidence that certain communities put up quite a struggle. In 1592, the nuns of San Girolamo petitioned the Senate, regarding 'Fuso antichissimo in Venetia d'eleggersi nel monastero di San Girolamo et in alcuni altri monasteri le Badesse e Priore in vita'. It was their request that the Senate approach the papal authorities on behalf of the nuns: 'che dobbiate con opportuna occasione far in nome nostro efficace officio con S. Santità à fin che non permetta quests pericolosa innovatione'. The nuns argued primarily in terms of the confusion, scandal and disorder that could ensue if the papal policy were forced upon them, in disregard of their customary rights. But they also reasoned that 'quanto at buon governo d'essi Monasterii si puö aspettare molto meglio dalle Priore perpetue, che dalle triennali'. Temporary abbesses were 'manco diligenti', they claimed, since they were too concerned with being re-elected.\(^{197}\)

\(^{195}\) Ibid.

\(^{196}\) Bullarum diplomaturn, VIII, pp. 404-405: 'Abbatissae et aliae praefectae monasteriorum in Italia triennium tantummodo eligantur'. The justification for the measure was stated thus: 'Perpendentes igitur varia et multiplica damna, quibus plurumque afficiuntur monasteria monialium, quae per abbatissas vel alias praefectas triennales, scientes se, lapso triennio, suae administrationis rationem esse redditaras, ac sperantes de bene gestis laudem promereri, poenam vero, si male gesserint, metuentes, majori studio ac diligentia, regimen et administrationem monasteriorum sibi commissorum gerere.'

\(^{197}\) Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fo. 385, & following: 1591, 28 Feb [m.v.]. S. Lorenzo also filed a petition against the changes, dated 9 January 1592 [m.v.]. It did not institute triennial abbesses until the early seventeenth century.
Members of Senate voted overwhelmingly to support the nuns, but evidently to no avail for from 1591 onwards elections were held every three years at San Girolamo. By the end of the sixteenth century, it seems that most Venetian convents were electing abbesses on a triennial basis. Yet this shift to temporary appointments did not necessarily eliminate family interests as a factor in elections. Furthermore, re-election was common, and often the position of abbess circulated among a small group of nuns. Some women stand out as having enjoyed notable success in gaining and maintaining office. For example, Corner records how 'Benedicta de Gratianis', elected as abbess of San Girolamo for the first time in 1607, 'rursus eligitur ann. 1610, 1616, 1619, 1625, 1631 in cujus regiminis triennio obiit 1633'. Vittoria Perduci at Santi Marco et Andrea also held office for six terms (1590-93, 1599-1602, and then from 1605 to 1618, as a result of four consecutive election victories). More common than the prolonged and unbroken rule of one abbess was for the office of superior to rotate among a group of nuns.

At San Daniele from 1520, when the triennial system came into operation, until 1542, only three nuns served as abbess: Angelica Contarena was elected in 1520; Brigida Valeria in 1524; Angelica Contarena for the second time in 1527; Aurelia Savina in 1530; Angelica Contarena for the third time in 1533; Brigida Valeria again in 1536 (she was to have two more election successes in 1551 and 1557); and Aurelia Savina for the second time in 1539. The pattern became a familiar one, as convents adapted to the triennial system. Teodosia Gradenigo, who in 1547 became the first abbess of San Zaccaria to be elected for a three-year term, served again for three more terms over a protracted period, following her elections in 1562, 1587 and 1593. How Teodosia's rule was interspersed by the elections and re-elections of a group of other nuns is illustrated by table 2.

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198 Corner provides lists of abbesses for 15 nunneries during the period under study. In five of these cases, the practice of electing the abbess on a triennial rather than a perpetual basis can be clearly seen to have been introduced towards the end of the century [S. Croce di Giudecca (1596), S. Andrea di Zirada (1587), S. Girolamo (1591), SS. Cosmo & Damiano (1595), SS. Marco & Andrea (1590)]. In the cases of S. Daniele, and S. Zaccaria, the change was introduced rather earlier: in 1520 and 1547 respectively. At S. Maria Maggiore, there were triennial elections from 1509, when Maria Eufrasia Fazo assumed the position, the first superior of the convent excluding the foundress, who had governed for the previous twelve years. Corner's records provide information on the abbesses of S. Chiara only from 1548, by which time the appointments were triennial. Similarly, for S. Bernardo di Murano, Corner only supplies information from 1582, from which date elections were certainly every three years. The Cappuccine were a seventeenth-century foundation, and their first abbess was formally appointed in 1610; triennial elections occurred from then onwards. In the case of S. Sepolcro, it is not altogether clear whether Corner's list is complete, but from 1618, elections were certainly triennial. At S. Lorenzo, the nuns also seem to have held out against triennial elections until 1618. There is no evidence from Corner's records that triennial elections were ever adopted at S. Maria de Angeli, Murano. The same is true of S. Caterina, though here Corner intimates that his records were not complete.
Table 2: Abbesses elected at San Zaccaria, 1547-1593

1547: Teodosia Gradenigo
1550: Paula Lippamano
1553: Gratia [?]
1556: Maria Angelica Venier
1559: Paula Lippamano (2)
1562: Teodosia Gradenigo (2)
1565: Paula Lippamano (3)
1568: Maria Angelica Venier (2)
1571: Paula Lippamano (4)
1574: Maria Angelica Venier (3)
1577: Vittoria Vitturi
1580: Maria Angelica Venier (4)
1583: Vittoria Vitturi (3)
1586: Christina Gradenigo, 'obiit primo sui regiminis anno'
1587: Teodosia Gradenigo (3)
1590: Vittoria Vitturi (3)
1593: Teodosia Gradenigo (4)\(^\text{199}\)

Unfortunately, we do not yet have the evidence necessary to shed light on the internal politics that doubtless lay behind these patterns of election. For example, from 1599 to 1627 at Santa Croce di Giudecca, the position of abbess alternated between just two nuns: Seraphina Molino and Degnamerita Zane. Did these women represent two opposing parties within the convent? Or had the two nuns agreed to stand for the office by turns, thus enabling continuity of government to be maintained? For while some convents evidently allowed for abbesses to be successively re-elected, this appears not to have been the case in other houses, Santa Croce included. Elections for the position of abbess and other offices are intermittently recorded among the patriarchal visitation records, indicating that Venetian prelates did indeed fulfil their role in supervising the democratic processes of local nunneries.\(^\text{200}\) But again, evidence of this sort gives no insight into the political considerations of Venetian nuns in electing their superiors. Only in the two cases discussed above--at Corpus Domini and San Sepolcro--when elections generated serious controversy do the sources throw light on the factors which

\(^{199}\) From Comer, XI, pp. 344-45.

\(^{200}\) For example, the election of suor Eccelsa as abbess of S. Chiara di Venezia in 1595. After the first ballot, the votes were split between six candidates; a second vote secured suor Eccelsa's election. 'Et perché Sr Eccelsa passò solamente la mità, e non arrivò alle due terzi, si tornò a pigliar li voti delle monache [...] et detta Sr Eccelsa habbe voi affermationi 35, negationi 8 e rimase Abbadessa trienale da essere però confirmata d'anno in anno' (ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, fo. 343v).
divided nuns. These examples (dating from 1533 and 1567) offer a clear illustration of how external interests as well as internal factions could impinge on conventual politics—a situation which the Venetian authorities endeavoured to prevent from recurring.

The Role of the Abbess

'E principale suo carico di fare osservare la Regola, senza la qual osservanza và in rovina ogni monastica disciplina'. The abbess's prescribed role was as a law-enforcer rather than as a law-maker and, besides the ancient mandates of the Rule, it was her job to put into practice the countless regulations emanating from Rome and from the Venetian ecclesiastical authorities. Consequently, when we look to contemporary sources for descriptions of the office of abbess, her functions are cast in the light of responsibilities rather than powers. An abbess who conducted affairs 'a suo modo' was severely frowned upon. It was stressed that she should be accountable both to the nuns below her, and to the prelate above. But even if her opportunities for creative government were limited, the abbess's day-to-day command of matters devotional, disciplinary, and administrative gave her a very high profile within her community, as well as considerable status beyond the convent walls. A process of negotiation operated between the autonomy and individuality of abbesses on the one hand, and the manipulation of the prelates on the other.

The abbess's role as 'capo del governo spirituale' was inevitably a pale reflection of that enjoyed by the male superior of a religious house. Excluded from the priesthood, nuns were reliant on the spiritual services of men, to provide them with confession, communion, and sermons. It was simply the abbess's duty to shepherd her sisters into the choir to fulfil their devotional obligations with the required regularity. By means of example, and chastisement, it was also her responsibility to guide her flock away from sin. But the care of souls, as defined by Venetian prelates such as Priuli, was scarcely distinct from the maintenance of conventual discipline; and disciplinary failings of the convent were conceived in terms of spiritual failings of the abbess:

Sappia, che al tremendo giuditio il Signore ricercerà dalle mani sue, come da capo, et pastore, l'anime, et il sangue delle pecorelle soggette al suo governo: Et haverà da rendere strettissimo conto di ogni colpa commessa da ciascheduna monaca per negligenza della Superiore.

201 Discussed above, pp. 22-28.
202 Grimani, cap. VII.
203 ACPV, Vis. Past., B.1, 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada. Nuns should be confessed and communicated a minimum of once a month. They should be preached to at least once a week.
204 Grimani, cap. VII.
Upholding conventual discipline could be a tough task for the Counter-Reformation abbess. Regulations were written and re-written by authorities outside the convent, while it was left to the internal superiors to impose them on their often reluctant communities. Given the mood of the post-Tridentine church, it is no surprise that Bishop Antonio Grimani of Torcello considered the preservation of 'inviolata custodia della clausura' to be the 'cura principalissima delle Superiore'. She alone was responsible for checking that the convent doors were locked every night, and for keeping the keys by her side.\textsuperscript{205} She was also charged with seeing that the \textit{parlatorio} rules were observed, and with censoring nuns' incoming and outgoing correspondence. Following his visitation of Sant'Andrea di Zirada in 1596, Patriarch Priuli instructed the abbess that at least four times a year, she should carry out a 'visita all'improviso' of
tutte le celle et robbe delle monache delle cassette et armari studioli de cadauna, vedendo che in essa non vi siano ne libri, ne habbiti, ne scrittore ne quadri inhonesti, non cani, ne uccelli, ne altri animali, ne altra cosa che non sia conforme alla vita regolare

Within this culture of inspection, where any amount of privacy was deemed threatening, one visitation led to another. The patriarch viewed the abbess as an important link in the chain of reform; he expected her to act as a spy within her own convent. Yet it is important to remember that the abbess was appointed not by the patriarch (though his approval was necessary) but by the nuns. It may not always have been clear where the abbess's own allegiances lay.

In the field of administration and economic management, nuns exercised a degree of autonomy unknown to most laywomen. Particular officers dealt with certain aspects of convent affairs. But overall responsibility for managing the nunnery's resources fell to the abbess: 'Procuri con ogni spirito che sia provisto alli bisogni delle monache in sanità, et confirmità, et che il danaro, l'entrate, et le spese siano manegiate come habbiamo ordinato di sopra'.\textsuperscript{206} Above all, the abbess must act to prevent the economic crises which could plunge a nunnery into ruin: 'Si sforzi che le monache non pasichino per negligenza del suo governo, ò per sua avaritia, ma prudentemente proveda alli bisogni loro secondo la possibilità del Monastero'.\textsuperscript{207} As with other

\textsuperscript{205} Grimani, cap. IV: 'Non confidi le chiave del Monastero, et di tutte le porte à monaca nessuna, ma faccia, che ogni sera tutte siano portate alla sua cella, et visiti tutto il Monastero, et le porte avanti ch'ella se ne vada a letto'. ACPV, \textit{Vis. past.}, B. 1, 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada: 'Tenga appresso di se le chiavi delle porte del monastero sopra ogni una delle quali ne faccia esser due differenti et forti et una di quelle della portinara capo dell'obbedienza, dando buoni ordini che non si apra senza sua licenza.'

\textsuperscript{206} ACPV, \textit{Vis. past.}, B. 1, 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada.

\textsuperscript{207} Grimani, cap. VI.
aspects of conventual government, a broad distribution of power was deemed favourable, and regulations aimed to prevent family interests from taking over.

Dichiariamo, che fin'alli dieci ducati possa disponere, et governare l'Abbadessa sola senz'altro consiglio, se non gli paresse pigliare quello della Camerlenga. Dalli dieci ducati fin'alli cinquanta reputiamo, che siano spese, et negotii mediocri, de quali si debba consigliare con le Discrete, et d'altri negotii di simile. Dalli cinquanta in sù debba consigliar si prima con le Discrete, et proporlo in capitolo à bossoli, et balotte, et tra l'altre importanti cose reputiamo il fare contratti d'affittazioni, venditioni, et compre in grosso, mutare ministri, et altrì similì negotii d'importanza. Cose et negotii molto più importanti giudichiamo l'investire doti delle novitie à beneficio del Convento, far fabrice eccedenti la spesa di ducati cento, pigliare impresto, et obligare il Monastero per somma similmente eccedente li ducati cento, et altrì similì gravissimi negotii, li quali oltre l'esser stati consigliati et trattati in capitolo da tutte le Monache; vogliamo, che non si possano concludere, ne stabilire senza il nostro consiglio, et autorità, altramente sia tutto nullamente fatto, et di nessun valore, et l'Abbadessa sia punita, come ricercerà l'inobbedienza sua. Per mutare, overo alienare i beni stabili del Monastero non lo possino fare le Monache senza il consenso del Sommo Pontefice. Non si diano salarii ingordi per vanagloria, o per gratificar altrui, ma corrispondenti alle fatiche, et forze del Monastero, et s'alcuno fusse fregolato, si moderi.208

The abbess's own role was tightly circumscribed, but it was also her duty to prevent too much power getting into the hands of others. Nunneries relied on lay employees to fulfill various tasks for them beyond the enclosure. These ranged from 'feminette', who would bring food to the nuns, and run errands for them, to gastaldi, or fattori, male employees whose role it was to manage the properties of the convent, collect rents, invest capital and generally further the economic interests of the community. The abbess was required to watch over these employees with constant wariness, and to supervise her inferiors within the convent with an equal amount of suspicion:

Nel governo delli beni del Monastero, et altre cose temporali stia molto avertita con i Fattori, et altri, et con le Monache, che secondo l'obbedienza sua ricevono nel Monastero l'entrate di esso; Veda scrivere, et habbia cura a conti, come si dirà più a basso nel suo luogo, et non scarichi tutto il peso alle camerlenghe, le quali sono sue coadiutrici, mà ella ch'è dell'entrata.209

208 Ibid., cap. XLII.
209 Ibid., cap. VII.
The prelates who fashioned these regulations believed that the only way to prevent corruption from setting in was to create a climate of mistrust, in which everybody was deemed capable of abusing their responsibility, and nobody's position was secure. Logically enough, these assumptions extended to the office of abbess, and provision was made for her authority to be overruled, if the situation required it. In the words of Patriarch Priuli,

quando comandasse cosa, che fosse contraria alla gloria di Dio, et all'honor del monastero si deve avertirla con modestia et riverenza [...] provedendo farlo sapere à noi, che li rimediaremos.\(^\text{210}\)

Obedience and Discipline

According to the prescriptions of Venetian prelates, the distribution of authority in Venetian convents was to be so finely balanced as to create an administrative system which ran mechanically. The system fell back on the obedience and humility which were, theoretically, a given of female religious:

Il terzo voto che è quello dell'ubidienza [...] è il fundamento d'ogni governo tanto spirituale quanto temporale ma nel spirituale è tanto più necessario quanto ch'è fondamento vero della virtù dell'humiltà, sopra la quale si [è] fondato tutte le virtù christianee, et quanto questo fundamento è più basso, tanto più è sicura la fabrica.\(^\text{211}\)

But where the foundations of obedience broke down, as Priuli's exhortation implied, the whole edifice of government, temporal and spiritual, would also collapse. And in that circumstance, the external authorities would become remarkably helpless.

The problem of controlling and disciplining nuns was integral to their status. Since they were afforded so little liberty, women in convents did not have much to lose by transgressing the regulations. They could not have their possessions forfeited, for they were in any case denied property. They could not be sent to gaol, for they were already imprisoned within their community. As Paolo Sarpi advised his government: 'Le peni temporali che possono esser usate in queste occorrenze, havendosi da far con donne, et Religiose non sono molte'.\(^\text{212}\) All punishments had to be administered within the convent (though occasionally transferal to another house could constitute part of the penalty), and while the patriarch would sometimes specify the precise measures that were to be applied, ultimately their enforcement depended on the cooperation of the

\(^{210}\) ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada.

\(^{211}\) ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada.

\(^{212}\) ASV, Consulti in lice, B. 8, fo. 94v. The context of Sarpi's remarks was how to deal with nunneries which demanded excessive dowries. Thus the problem which he addressed was specifically one of corporate rather than individual abuse. Nonetheless, his remarks on the narrow range of punishments appropriate to female religious are of relevance here.
internal superiors. But, in the post-Tridentine climate, the external authorities brought further difficulties upon themselves. It was a paradox that the goal of absolute enclosure, which was shared by church and state, rendered female religious communities less accessible to intervention from outsiders, particularly males, regardless of their social importance. The convent walls restricted nuns, but they also protected them from the scrutiny of those very powers which insisted on their enclosure.

According to Bishop Grimani's vision of the well-run convent, transgressions which arose among the nuns were to be dealt with by a system of communal confession. Once a week, the nuns were supposed to assemble for the 'capitolo delle colpe', when of their own free will, individuals would admit to the wrongs they had committed, and the abbess would accordingly mete out appropriate punishments; the bishop himself might in addition prescribe his own penal measures. Telling tales was discouraged, and it was emphasised that nuns should concern themselves only with their own misdoings: 'Non manifesti i peccati altrui per iscusare i suoi'. The Bishop was evidently afraid that the confessions of sinful nuns might have a corrupting influence on innocent nuns, and it was presumably for this reason that he instructed, 'Dicano prima sua colpa le novizze, et poi siano licentiate per non sentire le professe, quando dicano le lor colpe'.

The role of public confession in the capitolo delle colpe overlapped with the sacrament of confession, undertaken privately and mediated by a priest. In the capitolo, the main concern was with 'public' sins—transgressions of the Rule, and of the vows. It is tempting to assume therefore that the function of the capitolo was disciplinary, while the confessor was responsible for the spiritual health of the nuns. But this distinction is confounded by the evidence. We have already seen how confessors could extend their functions to disciplining nuns; in the patriarchal visitations of Priuli, the capitolo is described primarily as a spiritual event, and an occasion for self-mortification:

Et per render lo spirito più pronto alla devotion, non mancate di essercitarvi nelle macerationi della carne rendendole obediente alla ragionne con digiuni, et discipline, et con ogni atto di humiltà particolarmente con quelle che si fanno nel capitolo delle colpe [...] perché la humiltà ne fà degni della divina gratia, il qual capitolo se riduca almeno una volta la settimana.

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213 Evidence of a nun being sent to another convent as a penal measure may be found in the case of suor Giustina Corner, dismissed from S. Maffio di Mazzorbo in 1564, for her sexual misconduct. Two receipts survive recording payments made by S. Maffio to S. Giovanni Lateran where the subversive nun was placed. (ASV, Vis. past., B. 263, S. Maffio di Mazzorbo).
214 Grimani, cap. XVII.
215 ACPV, Vis. past., B. I, 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada.
Unsurprisingly, along with complaints of devotional negligence in convents, the infrequent occurrence of the *capitolo delle colpe* was commonly recorded in visitation reports. At San Rocco e Santa Margherita, the nuns met to disclose their sins but once a year; at Santa Giustina, the *capitolo delle colpe* occurred nominally once a week, but in practice the nuns shied away from making their confessions before the community.\(^{216}\)

While the prelates urged nuns to practise voluntary confession and 'corettione fraterna' as the principle means of disciplinary regulation, the internal hierarchy often developed its own approach to dealing with disobedient nuns. That discipline could run close to persecution is demonstrated in a number of cases. For example, suor Faustina, who escaped from San Giovanni Lateran in 1555, had tried to run away on previous occasions. Neighbours of the convent told the inquiry of the sorry state in which they had found the fugitive nun. One local woman reported that Faustina had climbed onto the roof of their house and begged for shelter, crying 'aiuteme per l'amor de Dio, che se voi non mi aprivi così presto, me voleva getar giu di i coppi peroche son stata mesi sei in pregion sotto la scala del monastero di San Zuan Lateran'.\(^{217}\) Raphaela Balbi, who escaped from San Bernardo di Murano in 1558, told her sister 'che la torneria sotto un'altra Abbadesa, ma non sotto questa perche la si dubita che questa non la metta in prigion et non gli facia qualche dispiacer'.\(^{218}\)

Yet visitation records reveal an impatience with abbesses who failed to keep discipline. Indeed, nuns' complaints are less often against autocratic superiors than they are against weak ones. During the visitation of San Maffio di Mazzorbo in 1564, the remarks of suor Brodata Minio were typical: 'circa l'obediencia che vien data all'abbadessa la ghene la pocha et malissime da quelle zovene'. Evidently, the abbess failed to instil the respect which was owing to her, not only as head of the convent but also as a gentlewoman. Suor Paula di Albori attached the blame to two nuns in particular, suor Catharina Corner and suor Michaela Beliga: 'le ha tratta l'abbadesa come la fusse sta una massara et non una zentildona'. Finally, suor Andriana Basadona had this insight to offer: 'la è obedida tanto quanto la sa comandar, ma povereta la non sa comandar, et la ze pocco obedida'.\(^{219}\) Similar reports emerged from Sant' Alvise in 1595: 'Non è obedita la Priora, come si conviene massime nel osservar it silentio, e nel andar l'una nelle celle dell'altra'.\(^{220}\) Even at the noble house of Le Vergini, the

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\(^{216}\) *ACPV*, *Vis. past.*, B. 3, 1594, SS. Rocco & Margherita, fo. 237r; *ACPV*, *Vis. past.*, B. 3, 1595, S. Giustina, fo. 470v: 'Che non si fà il capitolo delle colpe se non rare volte, cioè che se ben si fà ogni venere non si dice però le colpe'.

\(^{217}\) *ASV, PSM*, B. 263, 1555, S. Giovanni Lateran, fo. 18v. This case is discussed on pp. 214-19 of this thesis. We have already seen how the collusion of the confessor and the abbess of S. Giovanni Lateran led to the expulsion of a *conversa*, suor Gratia in 1556. This case demonstrated that the confessor was also apt to make use of the convent prison to discipline nuns (*ASV, PSM*, B. 263, 1556, S. Giovanni Lateran).

\(^{218}\) *ASV, PSM*, B. 263, 1558, S. Bernardo di Murano.

\(^{219}\) *ACPV*, *Vis. past.*, B. 1, 1564, S. Maffio di Mazzorbo.

\(^{220}\) *ACPV*, *Vis. past.*, B. 3, 1595, S. Alvise. fo. 425r.
hierarchy was undermined, with the converse failing to respect the abbess: 'Che l'Abbadessa non si sa far ubidir a dette converse, lequali quando sono state cinque, o sei anni nei monasterii pretendono tanto quanto quelle da officio'.

We learn in unusual detail of the disciplinary tactics of suor Ludovica Malipiero, abbess of Santi Biagio e Castaldo at the time of the visitation in 1593. What is identified as incompetence in some superiors is recognised as restraint in her case. The ambivalence of the nuns' reactions is clear. One conversa, suor Eufemia, remarked 'La Madre Abbadesa è ubedita, et è una buona madre, è vero che si [mancha] qualche cosa, ella non castiga, nè da penitenza'. In the abbess's defence, another conversa, suor Iuliana, praised her piety, and insisted, with telling emphasis, that she did control the nuns: 'è persona molto devota et prego Dio, che mi faccia morire inanzi di lei [...] non manca di tenere in freno le monache'. She went on reluctantly to concede 'È vero che appresso le parole dovrebbe anco dargli qualche penitenza, che sarebbe anco piu ubedite, et co'l buon esempio di farle venir tutte in obbedienza, et timor d'iddio'.

Having interviewed all the nuns, the patriarchal visitor confronted the abbess herself: 'intenderemo anco, che non gli date mai alcuna penitenzia, dalche nasce che non facino le cose così bene come bisognerie'. She replied, 'l'è vero ch'io non manco di amonirle, et di reprendere, mà il penitentialre non si usa a questi tempi, che le figlieole sono messe qui dentro piu tosto in salvo, et per monache'. Ludovica had consciously decided not to impose 'penitenze' (physical penances, such as flagellation or fasting) in recognition of the fact that many of her nuns were victims of forced vocations.

In theory, the patriarch or bishop reserved the right to administer the most severe punishments to nuns guilty of serious transgressions. Antonio Grimani issued the following instructions to abbesses, on how to deal with disrespectful or insolent nuns:

Per la prima volta sia gravemente penitentiata dall'Abbadessa, come ricercarà l'insolenza sua: La seconda volta digiuni sei quarte ferie, et facia tre discipline domandando perdono alla Superiora, et alle Monache dello scandalo, che gli ha dato con la sua arroganza. La terza volta mangi otto giorni in terra in mezzo il Refettorio pane, et acqua ne pigli cibo senza domandare venia, et la benedittione dell'Abbadessa in presenza di tutte le Monache. Se finalmente con cuore indurato, et incorregibile tornarà à così scandaloso vomito dell'insolenza sia denotiata à noi, accio che con la prigione, et altri piu severi remedii de Sacri Canoni la possiamo secondo i demeriti suoi correggere.

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221 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1593, SS. Biagio & Castaldo.
222 Grimani, cap. LII.
It is hard to believe that, in reality, indecorous and ill-disciplined behaviour from nuns would meet with such schematized responses. Within the walls of the convent, it was likely that the abbess, or indeed the confessor, would not wait for the intervention of the patriarch before sentencing a nun to a spell in the convent prison, or just locking her in her cell. While prelates continued to lay down regulations, requiring their personal stamp of approval on matters of important policy or discipline in convents, abbesses and confessors had immediacy on their side.

Even in the thick of Counter-Reformation interventions, nunnery retained a significant level of autonomy. Convents were secluded and private, which made them hard to control. In the case of Venice, they were also extremely numerous and scattered throughout the city and lagoon. It was impossible to monitor all the communities all of the time. Within religious houses, nuns enjoyed a level of political participation totally unknown to women in the world. In capitolo, the majority of nuns were kept abreast with convent affairs, and casting ballots was a regular event. Appointed to their 'obedientie' democratically, individual nuns were afforded considerable responsibility in administering the economic resources of the community. While we hear of exceptional wives (and more commonly widows) who exercised similar powers, in nunnery this was the norm.

In the power struggles which focused on controlling the convents, there were no winners. During this period of flux, policies and reform objectives are well-documented; corresponding shifts in the patterns of authority may be identified. But the picture is one of tensions never quite resolved. Patriarchs rose, religious orders fell, but there were no out-and-out triumphs. This is why records detailing administrative and disciplinary irregularities are so rich. At the nub of these tensions there were the nuns themselves, endlessly adapting to, or resisting, the regulations which affected them. Hemmed in by clausura, they remained semi-independent communities. Much of this thesis is concerned with how they used their freedoms. What will become clear is that autonomy was rarely viewed as an end in itself. The Tridentine decrees isolated convents quite enough; female religious had no call to engage in separatism. In fact, in their efforts to buy contact and affection from the outside world, nuns were sometimes willing to surrender their residual liberty to external parties.
CHAPTER II
BECOMING A NUN IN EARLY MODERN VENICE

The sheer magnitude of the female monastic population in early-modern Italy is sufficient to alert historians to the likelihood that factors other than divine vocation were responsible for introducing many women to the religious life. Gabriella Zarri has commented on the impossibility of calculating the overall number of nuns throughout a given geographical area, but the evidence which has survived for particular cities speaks loud enough. In Florence, in the catasto year of 1427, there were 935 nuns out of a total population of approximately 43,000 inhabitants (an estimated 6.5% of the female population over the age of 14). By 1552, the nun population had risen to 3,400, and in 1622 to 4,200 out of a total of 76,000 inhabitants (16% of women over the age of 14). In Bologna in 1570, when the city's population was 61,742, there were 2,198 female religious. In 1595, there were 2,480 nuns out of a total population of 59,000, and the proportion of women in nunneries continued to increase over the next three and a half decades. Naples saw a rapid increase in the number of convents during our period, from 25 houses in 1591 to 37 by the middle of the seventeenth century. Small cities like Arezzo, Pistoia, Cortona and Prato could accommodate between 10 and 20 nunneries each.

In terms of numbers, the female religious community in Venice also flourished. In the city itself, census information indicates that in 1581, there were 2,508 women living in nunneries, out of a total population of nearly 135,000. By 1642, the number of nuns had risen to 2,905, while the city's population had dropped to approximately 120,000. These figures are deceptive, however, for they fail to include the convents situated on the lagoon islands. At the end of the sixteenth century there were around thirty convents in the city. With the inclusion of the surrounding lagoon islands, the

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1 Zarri, 'Monasteri femminili e città', p. 363.
2 Brown, 'Monache a Firenze', p. 119 and p. 148, n. 14. The figures for 1427 were originally arrived at by Herlihy and Klapisch, Tuscans, p. 153; c.f. Trexler, p. 1337, who provides figures for the period up to and including 1552.
3 Zarri, 'I monasteri femminili a Bologna', p. 144.
5 Russo, pp. 40-42.
6 King, pp. 83-84, provides a range of comparative figures for the number of nuns and convents in Italian and non-Italian cities.
7 BMC, MS P.D. 230 b-II: 'Descrition de tutte le aneme che sono in la Cita fata l'anno 1581'; ASV, Miscellanea Codici I, Storia Veneta, filza 128: 'Ristretto delle anime che sono nella città di Venezia'. It is highly likely that the figure for 1581 included all those women living in the city's nunneries, including educande, girls who lodged at convents before marrying or themselves becoming nuns. The figure of 1642 is explicitly broken down into 'Monache da Coro': 1,991; 'Converse': 599; and 'Putte' (i.e. educande): 315. Both figures relate only to the convents of Venice, and exclude the island communities.
8 BMC, Cod. Cic. 3677: 'Relazione e memorie storiche di Venezia'; 'Nota di tutte le anime, chiese et Monasterii che sono in Venetia l'anno 1593', p. 4. Thirty-one houses are listed, including the quasi-
number of female religious houses totalled fifty. It appears to be impossible to trace data recording the number of nuns who inhabited the convents surrounding Venice, but we may be sure that they added several hundred more women to the total.

In explaining the appeal of the Renaissance convent, historians have found little to argue about. There were two powerful and entwined socio-economic factors motivating women to take the veil. The first was that fathers often could not afford the costs of marrying all their daughters, a problem which was exacerbated by the acceleration in dowry payments from the fifteenth century onwards. The second was that many men, especially among the patriciate, deliberately avoided or delayed marriage, so as to preserve the wealth or social status of the family. There was no system of primogeniture in Venice and thus it was especially desirable that only one son should marry to avoid fragmentation of the patrimony amongst a profusion of heirs. In a society where--we are led to believe--the single woman was an unthinkable phenomenon, convents had a crucial function in absorbing the inevitable crop of unmarried females.

These conclusions have been amply supported by the research of social and demographic historians, and their findings have been lent credence by the reactions of contemporary observers. The injunctions of Trent against the common practice of placing girls in convents without genuine vocations were echoed by numerous reforming prelates. Meanwhile a more pragmatic attitude was voiced by some laymen and occasionally representatives of the Church; this opposed too rigorous a reform of the nunneries, acknowledging that those women who had been made nuns at society's convenience should not be deprived of all worldly comforts. In the wake of Trent, some sought to rid convents of the abuse of 'forced vocations', and others favoured compromise measures which would allow the continuance of nunneries as repositories for celibate women. But while contemporaries differed in how they envisaged the future role of convents, no one denied the worldly motives which had often determined monacazioni.

Writing from bitter personal experience, suor Arcangela Tarabotti—a member of the Venetian community of Sant'Anna from 1617 until her death in 1652—specifically

9 See Map 2, and the accompanying notes for the geographical distribution of nunneries in the city and lagoon. The locations of 50 convents have been indicated, but there would be a case for including other semi-monastic foundations such as the Orsoline (at San Nicolò dei Mendicoli, in the sestiere of Dorsoduro, from the second half of the sixteenth century) or the community of Dimesse (founded in Murano in 1594).

10 Cattaneo's article, though limited to the diocese of Milan, provides a fascinating and detailed survey of the writings of ecclesiastics regarding forced vocations.

11 For example, Giovanni Boccadiferro, a Bolognese notary, maintained in his Discorso sopra il governo delle monache (1550) that nunneries fulfilled an indispensable social function and that any reform measure which served to limit entrance into these institutions was, therefore, irresponsible. Zarri, 'Monasteri femminili e città,' p. 362.
addressed the issue of monacazioni forzate. The titles of her two most relevant works, the Tirannia paterna and the Inferno monacale, give an instant taste of her vehement condemnation of the practice. Direct testimony of this kind is a precious commodity for the historian, and it is small wonder that these works have held particular sway for those investigating the plight of nuns in the post-Tridentine period. But Tarabotti's writings were more than just an attack on the topical problem of forced vocations. She recognised that the tyranny of patriarchal society reached far beyond this one instance. Indeed, it is the general applicability of her articulate and forward-looking appeal against the oppression of women which has made Tarabotti such a compelling figure for recent historians and literary scholars, especially those seeking the origins of feminism.

This chapter presents a reassessment of the arguments which have been sketched above. It is in no way the intention to overturn the view held by contemporaries and endorsed by historical research that the high number of monacazioni in early modern Italy was largely a response to socio-economic utility, rather than a reflection of true vocation amongst the female population. But this is a fact which can only be understood within its historical context. It does not serve to protest rights and liberties for women in early-modern Venice which they themselves would not even have recognised, let alone aspired to possess. By pursuing the following lines of inquiry, this investigation attempts to cut through the rhetoric of the 'forced vocation' and to arrive at a more nuanced picture of the processes by which women became nuns in early-modern Venice. Firstly, by looking more carefully at the issue of dowry payments and the strategies by which parents and guardians determined the fate of their female dependants, the picture of the cruel and ruthless father dispatching his girls to the nunnery-cum-prison without any consideration of their happiness is moderated. This aspect of the argument is supported by a quantitative analysis of payments made to the convent of Spirito Santo (see Appendix III). Secondly, an analysis of contemporary statements on the subject of forced vocations casts doubt on the view that church and state conspired with the patriciate in order to ensure the survival of convents as dumping-grounds for superfluous women, manifesting indifference both to the misery of the unwilling nuns and to the disciplinary consequences for the institutions concerned. Thirdly, the oft-quoted works of Arcangela Tarabotti are reconsidered as remarkably far-sighted examples of radical polemic, far from being a reflection of the typical nun's experience.
Disposing of Daughters

Mi vien voglia di bestemmiare l'anima di monsignor nol-vo'-dire, che mi cavò di corpo questo fastidio di figliuola.\textsuperscript{12}

This is the curse of Aretino's Nanna, faced with the responsibility of settling her illegitimate daughter, Pippa, now sixteen years old, in one of the three possible destinies available to women, as wife, nun, or whore. At all levels of society, daughters could be viewed as a liability. Not only were they often a financial drain on their families; they also required protection and shelter for the duration of their lives, something which called for long-term consideration on the part of their parents. Even today, Venetians wish newly-weds 'Lunga vita e figli maschii'.

In early-modern Italy, provision for women was encapsulated in the form of a dowry. Legally, this represented a female's share of the patrimony and thus she was excluded from inheritance when her father or guardian died.\textsuperscript{13} But while the dowry was a woman's legal right, the amount her father was prepared to pay varied according to the condition she married into. An ambitious marriage alliance with potential social or political advantages for the bride's family might be deemed worth the payment of a very large dowry. At the opposite end of the spectrum there lay the relatively cheap option of the nunnery. Women who embarked on the religious life were provided with an honourable and secure environment until their deaths and conventual dowries were always small compared with their marital equivalents. It was the strategy of some noble fathers to divide their female offspring between these two lots thereby dispatching certain daughters to the inexpensive convent while concentrating their dowry expenditure on one or two others so as to secure the most impressive alliances for their families.

This was the principle which determined many monacazioni and which accounted for the high proportion of aristocratic women in Italian convents. Richard Trexler, who has conducted systematic demographic research on the nunneries of late medieval Florence, demonstrates that the great majority of women admitted to convents after 1368 came from well-established Florentine lineages. However, these nuns tended not to come from the wealthiest families, who could afford to settle all their daughters in propitious marriages, but were more often the daughters of those experiencing some degree of economic insecurity.\textsuperscript{14} Trexler estimates that a conventual dowry of 100 florins in fifteenth-century Florence should be compared with marital dowries of 300-

\textsuperscript{12} Aretino, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{13} Chojnacki, 'Dowries', p. 575; Cox, pp. 532-33. For a broader discussion of women's inheritance rights in Renaissance Italy, and especially the principle of exclusio propter dotem, see Kuehn, pp. 13 and 238-41.
\textsuperscript{14} Trexler, p. 1338.
1,000 florins for a girl of the same class. Thus, dispatching female dependants to become Christ's brides constituted a valuable financial saving for hard-pressed patricians.

Other historians have placed greater emphasis on the limited marriage prospects for women resulting from a concern among the nobility to limit nuptiality. As one Italian historian has put it, convents provided 'una specie di controllo delle nascite a livello aristocratico'. In another Florentine study, Richard Burr Litchfield used genealogies to chart the demographic patterns of the patriciate from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In the seventeenth-century generations he observed that 44% of the daughters of the families studied (who survived infancy) were placed in nunneries just before marriage age. This he perceived as being a direct result of self-imposed male celibacy: the marriage of only one son was such a common occurrence as to have been almost a general rule. Furthermore, the difference in marriage age created an inherent shortage of bachelors, since about 10% fewer of these survived to their early thirties than there were of the younger available brides.

Florence has been the object of more thorough demographic probing than has Venice. But the central elements of family strategy in the aristocratic marriage market apply equally well to the Venetian case. Historians such as J. C. Davis have attached considerable importance to the numerical decline of men in the city's marriage market and its role in increasing the number of female vocations. The dowry factor has been unanimously acknowledged. The alarming rise in the size of patrician marriage dowries from the beginning of the fifteenth century led the Venetian Senate in 1420 to impose a limit of 1,600 ducats. Significantly, as the wording of the decree records, this measure was partly motivated by concern at forced vocations; for fathers found themselves constrained 'filias in monasteris carcerare, cum dignis lacrimis et plantibus ipsarum'. Testifying to the ineffectiveness of earlier efforts to restrict dowries, in 1505 the Senate passed another law raising the official ceiling to 3,000 ducats. Still the legislation failed to achieve its object: for example, in 1532 the diarist Marin Sanuto recorded that the instrumento or contract for a high society marriage alliance had been

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15 Ibid., p. 1340.
16 Spinelli, p. 195.
17 Litchfield, p. 203.
18 Ibid, pp., 198-99-
19 J. C. Davis, Decline, pp. 62 and 67. See also Spinelli, p. 195.
20 For example, Paschini, p. 58; Spinelli, p. 194; Chojnacki, 'Dowries', p. 576; Chambers and Pullan, p. 192; Primhak, p. 30; Hunecke, pp. 460-61.
21 Zarri, 'Monasteri femminili e città', p. 366.
22 Chojnacki, 'Dowries', p. 572. Two further Senate decrees set maximum limits for marital dowries respectively at 4,000 and 5,000 ducats: ASV, Senato Terra, Reg. 28, 1535, 29 April; ibid., Reg. 37, 1551, 23 March.
concluded ‘con dota ducati 8000’. The inflationary trend continued throughout the century with noble dowries often exceeding 20,000 ducats. By the second half of the sixteenth century exorbitant dowries, combined with a policy of economic retrenchment among the nobility, meant that marriage prospects for women were drastically reduced. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Venice displayed in abundance those social and economic conditions which favoured monacazioni, and figures for the total number of nuns in the city and lagoon suggest a corresponding increase.

In the Inferno monacale, suor Arcangela Tarabotti states that ‘L’avaritia e tirania de’padrii con la semplicitä, ignoranza et obedienza intempestiva delle figlie partoriscono queste conseguenze deplorabili’. An outline has been provided of the historical context in which patrician fathers were reluctant to provide all their daughters with weighty marriage dowries. This reluctance, or indeed refusal, Tarabotti terms ‘avaritia’. But what of the ‘tirania’ with which they forced their daughters not only to accept celibacy but also to enter convents?

In examining the ways in which fathers manipulated their female dependants into taking the veil, it is necessary to consider the very limited roles available to women—a fact satirized by Aretino in the Ragionamenti. Outside marriage, the convent provided the only respectable alternative. Women from the lower orders could resort to entering domestic service, but the options available to patrician women were even narrower. Secular celibacy, we are told, was not a real possibility. Women living in the world without the governance of a husband put the family honour in jeopardy. Nor was the position of the single woman financially viable, since she was unable to claim her dowry and remained excluded from inheritance. In other words, women whose fathers would not settle them in marriage had little choice but to submit to the religious life.

Nevertheless, fathers who were keen to minimize their daughter’s resistance to taking the veil made use of several expedients. The most notorious of these was the practice of sending girls to convents in their childhood. In his study of late medieval Florentine nunneries, Trexler suggested that nuns were generally professed at the age of about thirteen but that they had commonly entered aged only nine. Trexler’s

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23 Sanuto, LVI, col. 33. ‘Heri sera fo concluso et fato l’instrumento de uno per de noze di la fia seconda di sier Hironimo Bragadin quondam sier Veton, zenero di missier Jacomo Negron el cavalier primo ricco di Cipro, in sier Lorenzo Justinian di sier Lunardo, é capitanio a Verona, con dota ducati 8000 contadi’.
24 Primhalc, p. 30; Chambers and Pullan, p. 223. Medioli suggests that in the first half of the seventeenth century, marriage dowries could be as high as 40,000 ducats, Inferno p. 113. According to Chojnacki, ‘Dowries’, it is difficult to guage the extent to which rising dowries must be perceived within the context of all-round inflation, p. 573.
25 Cox, pp. 530-32.
26 Ed. Medioli, Inferno, p. 31.
conclusions have been questioned, but it was desirable for a young girl to be admitted before puberty.\textsuperscript{28} The Venetian nobleman, Alvise Donà, when he wrote his will in 1435, wanted his wife to keep his four daughters by an earlier marriage at home until they were aged eleven. Then, he said, 'I want them placed in some decent convent [...] And I am doing this because my wife Maria has a son [by her earlier marriage] who is already a fairly big boy'.\textsuperscript{29} If a father had decided his daughter was destined for a convent, it clearly made sense for her to enter while she was still ignorant as to the temptations of the world. The question of whether infant vocations persisted into the post-Tridentine era will be returned to.

Fathers also exercised tyranny in the process by which they selected their daughters for the convent. Disregarding the personal inclinations of the girls concerned, the criteria which governed their destinies were based on their perceived marriageability or otherwise. Given the preference for young brides, elder daughters were more likely to be sent to the nunnery—a policy which enabled their fathers to conserve the hefty sum which would eventually dower their younger girls for as long as possible. Illegitimate daughters were also obvious candidates for the religious life.\textsuperscript{30} The singling out of female dependants who were handicapped or deemed unattractive for some other reason as potential nuns attracted particular notoriety.\textsuperscript{31} From the research of Enrico Cattaneo, we know that the practice was consistently criticized by ecclesiastics in Milan, who addressed the issue of forced vocations. Writing in 1584, Silvio Antoniano exhorted parents: 'non si dedichi a Dio nella religione [...] la povera zitella, perché sia nata deforme, o stopiata'.\textsuperscript{32} In a work published in 1603, Pietro Giussani condemned those responsible for sending 'quelli, o che sono mal formati del corpo, o che sono scemi d'intelletto' to the nunnery. He likened them to 'l'empio Caino', because 'fanno sacrificio al Signore Dio del peggio'.\textsuperscript{33} The arguments of these men were echoed in Venice by Arcangela Tarabotti:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Trencher, pp. 1341-43. Subsequent research undertaken by Kirshner and Molho for the same period, has cast doubt on Trencher's conclusions. They have perceived a desire among fathers who invested in the Florentine dowry fund to postpone decisions about their daughters' vocations until surprisingly late. They believe that Florentine girls usually entered convents aged about 18, the same age as they might take up an earthly husband, p. 425.
\item \textsuperscript{29} J. C. Davis, A Venetian Family, p. 110.
\item \textsuperscript{30} On the high proportion of illegitimate daughters who were destined for the religious life, see Kirshner and Molho, p. 425. Also Hunecke, p. 449.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Trencher, 1343; Kirshner and Molho, p. 424.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Cattaneo, p. 167. Silvio Antoniano was a friend and collaborator of Carlo Borromeo. His comments come from his \textit{Tre libri dell'educazione christiana dei figliuoli}.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Cattaneo, p. 168. Pietro Giussani was formerly secretary to Carlo Borromeo. The quotation is from his \textit{Instruzione a sacerdoti curati per le congregazionemi che devono fare de i Padri di famiglia in esecuzione de' Concili Provinciali e Diocesani di Milano}. Giovanni Pietro Barco, who held the position of \textit{Vicario delle Monache} in the diocese of Milan, also identified the tendency of parents to place girls in nunneries 'perché sono brutte di corpo, oovero patiscono difetti corporali' (see his \textit{Specchio religioso per le monache posto in luce d'ordine dell'Ill.mo e Rev.mo Signor Cardinale Federico Borromeo arcivescovo di Milano}, 1609); Cattaneo, p. 171. See also Carlo Andrea Basso, author of \textit{La monaca perfetta ritratta dalla Scrittura sacra, autorità et esempi de' Santi Padri}, published in Milan in...
Non danno per ispose a Giesù le più belle e virtuose, ma le più sozze e diformi e se nelle lor famiglie se rittrovano zoppe, gobbe, sciancate o scempie, quasi ch'il difetto di natura sia difetto d'esse, vengono condannate a starsi prigione tutto il tempo della lor vita. 34

Being lame herself, Tarabotti bitterly opposed this principle of selection.

Yet, however tied to her guardian's decisions a girl was, some degree of cooperation was still required of her in taking her religious vows. Perhaps anticipating this objection, Tarabotti is at pains to catalogue the tricks and lies presented to young girls by their fathers in order to persuade them to give a minimum of compliance to their own fates. In the words of suor Arcangela, 'sono tutti gli homeni mendaci in ogni occorenza, ma quando si tratta di assassinarne una di queste misere son più di mai bugiardi e mentitori'. 35 False promises of luxury and comfort in the convent and the reassuring pledge of frequent visits from relations became transparent as soon as the first vows had been secured. Fathers received assistance in duping their daughters from older nuns inside the convent, often kinswomen. 36 These 'zie' were perhaps themselves victims of forced vocations, but according to Tarabotti:

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anco esse che, invecchiate, sono vicine a finir con la vitta i tormenti temporali, usano ogni arte a satisfazione de' parenti: per rapir l'anime dell'innocenti e semplice giovinitte e unirsene ne' crucchi della Religione, incontando et intrecciando le più favolose menzogne che da niun famoso e perito poeta siano mai state machinate. 37\]

Also viewed as conspirators were the mothers of potential nuns (whose own lives had been favoured with the privileges of the marital state) who conferred all their affection on those daughters who would become brides. In Tarabotti's view, these women endeavoured to minimize the expenditure of monacazione so as to bestow handsome sums on their favoured girls at marriage. 38

Some anonymous Venetian verses from the sixteenth century shed light on the perceived role of mothers in persuading their daughters to take the veil, and indeed on the mother-daughter relationship more generally. 39 The verses consist in the mother's exhortations to her daughter, followed by the girl's objections. The mother concentrates

1627 (republished in Venice, 1653). Chapter XVIII is entitled 'A quelle, le quali per esser brutte, o perché patiscono qualche difetto nel corpo si fanno monache'.

34 From the Tirannia paterna, cited in ed. Medioli, Inferno, p. 112.
35 Ed. Medioli, Inferno, p. 47.
36 Rosi, pp. 70-71 and Russo, p. 60, comment on the pressure exerted by nuns to persuade girls to enter the convent.
37 Ed. Medioli, Inferno, pp. 31-32.
38 Ibid., p. 44.
39 Marciana, MS it ix-173: 6282, fos 36v-37r.
on the spiritual advantages of the religious life, of serving God 'fuor dei travagli del mondo'. But she also invokes negative arguments for the undesirability of marriage:

E fa che questo basti
de quanto cho à dir piú
che se ti maritasti,
meschina et trista tù
Mi el so per prova
hor sta fuor di periglio
E'attendi al mio consoglio
che bon e santo fü.

The daughter is unpersuaded, and insists 'Madre no mi far monica/ che no mi voglio far'. She feels nothing but repulsion for the religious life, as she envisages the endless services and the continual shouting of the abbess. Furthermore, she is being courted by 'un bel giovenetto', whose attentions she would be mad ('pazza') to give up in order to take the veil. In a parting shot, the girl reminds her mother of her own past, and that she herself has never been one to eschew the married life:

Madre ti maritasti
et come morto fu
un'altro ne pigliasti
il terzo el quarto tu
hor non gridar
se anche io marito piglio
fu bon il tuo consoglio,
ma nol prendesti tu.

In line with Tarabotti's condemnations, here the emphasis is on the double standards and hypocrisy invoked by those intent on pushing women into the religious life.

The evidence weighs hard against early modern fathers and, indeed, other family members, both male and female, responsible for forcing girls to take irrevocable monastic vows. Their motives were grounded in socio-economic utility rather than individual felicity and, accordingly, their methods were those of hard-headed tacticians rather than of loving guardians. But while it is easy to convert these two observations into the avarice and tyranny evoked by Tarabotti, a more detached approach to the historical data available produces a less damning view of parental policy concerning their daughters' monacazioni.

40 In the event of the father's death, uncles or brothers commonly assumed the role of guardian. Brothers, as peers and as the beneficiaries of the patrimony, may have aroused particular resentment from unhappy nuns. Even while their fathers lived, it was in the interests of these young men that certain sisters were already installed in convents; otherwise future demands for marriage dowries could fall to them, a burden which jeopardized their own chances within the marriage market. (This argument was articulated by the Milanese lawyer, Pietro Antonio Prandoni, in his De parentum in pueros disciplina of 1649, quoted by Cattaneo, p. 182).
The first element of the conventional historical interpretations which requires modification relates to dowries. Much stress has been laid on the soaring rise in marriage dowries of Venetian noblewomen, but the consequences of the simultaneous increase in conventual dowries have been insufficiently analysed. Dazzled by the excessive sums which were paid as patrician marriage portions, the Venetian government attempted to impose ceilings on them. But by the early seventeenth century laws were also passed for the containment of conventual dowries and other payments demanded by religious houses. While the Venetian temporal authorities were evidently concerned with keeping convents accessible and affordable institutions in which to place unmarried females, these laws standardized the payments which were made to nunneries, and the amounts set should therefore be perceived as minima as well as maxima. Distortions may have arisen from the temptation to compare these fixed figures for conventual dowries (which were a legal requirement of all women entering convents, in theory at least) with the very highest noble marriage portions.

The senate decrees in the first twenty years of the seventeenth century give a fairly clear picture of the costs of placing women in Venetian convents, although there was evidently some uncertainty as to the best system of payment, whether by a lump sum or an annuity. The decree of 1602 (26 July) fixed the payment of conventual dowries at 800 or 1,000 ducats. Alternatively, the nun's family could pledge an annual payment of 60 ducats until her death. In addition, the costs of vestizione (the clothing ceremony) and profession should be provided by the family: 50 ducats for each occasion. A further 300 ducats constituted the 'cassa' which was to cover the costs of clothing and cell furnishings. With small variations regarding the subsidiary payments, this system endured until 15 April 1610, when the Senate abolished the 1,000 ducat dowry in favour of the 60 ducat annuity. But a few months later (6 October) in response to an uproar from 'Monache povere mendicanti', the possibility of paying either the 800 or 1,000 ducat dowry or 60 ducats per annum was reinstated. That these laws were not observed is suggested by the introduction of an oath in 1604 (29 June) which the guardians of potential nuns were obliged to swear in front of the provveditori sopra monasteri promising to respect the relevant decrees. From 1620 this oath was to be sworn in front of the Doge, in full Council, in the hope that the increase in solemnity would reduce nuns' guardians to obedience.41

Transgression of these government measures consisted in the payment of sums either higher or lower than those specified.42 From the point of view of the

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41 A summary of legislation concerning conventual dowries from 1602 to 1620 may be found in ASV, Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fo. 405. See also Giuliani, pp. 141-43 and ed. Medioli, Inferno, p. 118.
42 For the period under study, only one case in the 'processi criminali' conducted by the provveditori sopra monasteri specifically relates to dowry payments. This involved a dispute (August 1610) between the convent of S. Croce della Giudecca and one Bernardo Balbi, acting as guardian to his niece. Seeking to overturn a former agreement, in the light of new laws, Balbi's objective was to reduce the payments
ecclesiastical authorities, a major concern was that dowries should provide sufficient income to maintain the religious house and its inmates. Dowries were an important factor in sustaining a nunnery's financial autonomy. When a community ceased to be self-sufficient, its members were forced to fall back on family support or personal earnings with undesirable disciplinary implications. Antonio Grimani, Bishop of Torcello, emphasized the importance of convents securing sufficient payment on accepting a new nun. In his *ordini* of 1592, he specified a fairly modest minimum, but made it clear that larger sums were preferable:

> che sia non accetti alcuna con manco di ducati 500 oltre la cassa, et altre solite spese, li Monasteri commodi procurino d'havere quella maggiore somma, che potranno.43

On the other hand, Paolo Sarpi, advising the Venetian government in 1611 'sopra le spese che se fanno à monacar figliuole', condemned those convents responsible for forcing nuns' dowry payments upwards.44 Patriarch Giovanni Tiepolo (in office 1619-1630) also opposed 'l'abuso dell'eccessive doti per le figliuole da monacarsi', though he levelled his criticism at the families who paid the dowries.45 Appendix III provides an analysis of dowry payments made to Spirito Santo during the period 1534-1650.

The evidence, preserved in the *capitolare* of this convent, shows the strong inflationary tendency which characterized conventual dowries during this period. The Venetian church trod a narrow path between seeking financial security without luxury for the city's convents.

From the information summarized above it is evident that the cost of entering a Venetian nunnery in the early seventeenth century was commonly 1,000 ducats, and that there was certainly the risk that wealthier guardians would be tempted to make payments in excess of the prescribed sum. The evidence from the *capitolare* of Santo Spirito, summarized in Appendix III shows the strong upward pressure which characterized dowry payments to nunneries.46 Alternatively, some families undertook

made to the convent, which were additional to the annuity of 60 ducats. He emphasised that 'la putta era così povera che fà messa ad allevar nelle cittelle'; ASV, *PSM*, B. 264. On the other hand, the remark of Patriarch Tiepolo (see below in text), regarding excessive conventual dowries suggests that the inclinations of some guardians were of an opposite kind.

43 Grimani, cap. XV.
44 ASV, *Consultori in Iure*, B. 8, fos 89r-95r.
46 This source is given close consideration in the notes to Appendix III. Dowries paid to the convent of S. Lorenzo, during the period immediately prior to the legislation (1595-1600), reveal that a standard dowry of 1000 ducats was invariably supplemented by annual payments of 60 ducats a year, ed. Battiston et al., *Un piccolo regno teocratico*, pp. 72-73. Testaments also offer useful evidence of the sums which were provided for Venetian women, depending on whether they were ultimately settled by marriage or monacazione. The will of Giovanni Widmann provides a rather exceptional example (24 Sept., 1630). Addressing the futures of his daughters, Sara and Felicita, Widmann provided dowries of 20,000 ducats if they should marry with the approval of their family. Alternatively, if either should opt to become a nun, the sum of 6,000 ducats was set as the conventual dowry—six times the prescribed
to pay an annuity of 60 ducats, an option which might be convenient to those short of capital, but could prove very expensive if the nun was long-lived. Yet in either system, the payments appear meagre when compared with the tens of thousands made over by some nobles in marrying their daughters. Oliver Logan makes the possibly conservative estimate that a conventual dowry was one tenth of that which was expected by a patrician husband. However, while the markedly aristocratic character of Venetian convents has long been recognized, it is crucial for the current discussion to note that there remained a significant proportion of nuns from more modest backgrounds. Logan estimates that well over half the monache da coro (fully-professed sisters) in Venice were noble and has found no nuns from this category coming from the artisan or shopkeeper classes. On the other hand certain convents, such as the Franciscan communities, housed a lower proportion of noble nuns. And there remains a large number of converse, those nuns who took only simple vows and often fulfilled the more menial functions within the convent, to be accounted for. These are generally assumed to have come from more humble ranks and may be expected to have paid less to enter convents.

What is striking about the laws governing the costs of monacazione is their attempt to impose uniformity on the payments made to nunneries. This meant that while the convent remained a cheap option for rich nobles, keen to settle their daughters at minimum cost, the 1,000 ducat dowry would have stretched the resources of patricians experiencing financial difficulties or more lowly members of society. Indeed, this fact was acknowledged in the laws which enabled families to supply an annuity rather than

In considering the singularity of Widmann's will, it is important to recognise that he came of south-west German stock, his family having emigrated to Venice in the mid-sixteenth century (ASV, Notarile-Testamenti, B. 1178, no. 268).


49 ASV, S. Croce di Venezia, B. 3. A document from the second half of the seventeenth century, charting dowry payments and acceptances, 1663-73, states that all professe were accepted with dowries of 800 ducats, and all converse 'portano almeno per sua Dotte ducati trecento'. The lower dowries required for converse made it possible for nunneries to take in more needy women. For example, in 1625, a girl called Anzola was admitted to S. Antonio di Torcello as a conversa with a dowry of 400 ducats: as one of the nuns commented, 'si è tolsa per l'amor de Dio, che per altro, acciò che non la vadi de mal' (ASV, PSM, B. 267, S. Antonio di Torcello).

50 The economic decline of the Venetian nobility in the late sixteenth century has become something of a historiographical cliché; see J. C. Davis, Decline, esp. ch. 2, entitled 'The Nobility Becomes Poorer', pp. 34-53. For a more detailed investigation into the mutability of patrician fortunes during the same period, see Pullan, 'Occupations and Investments', pp. 379-408. Pullan provides information on the salaries paid to nobles who held state office, pp. 394-98. In the 1580s, those serving on the Quarantie, the supreme civil and criminal courts of the Republic, were paid 130-60 ducats p.a. (p. 394). Of the provincial governorships, which could be held for a maximum of two years at a time, the most highly paid was that of Padua; Pullan calculates that over a period of 18 months (the average length of a reggimento), the podestà might receive just over 1,200 ducats from official sources (p. 407, n. 87). While such income may have been in addition to considerable private wealth, this was a period in which poorer members of the nobility relied increasingly on their revenues from service to the state (p. 393). To put these figures in a wider context: in the late sixteenth century, a journeyman mason earned about 50 ducats a year; Burke, Venice and Amsterdam, p. 13.
pay the lump sum. Besides the dowry itself, families often paid several hundred more ducats in the form of the 'cassa', ceremonial expenses or just a one-off 'donativo'; sometimes money for a new cell was provided by the nun's relations. Both temporal and ecclesiastical authorities were evidently keen to prevent such extras from mounting up, but the convents doubtless favoured the continuance of the arrangements.\(^{51}\)

Nor did the family's financial commitment cease with the nun's admission. It was perfectly common for nuns to continue to rely on additional support from their relations during their life inside the convent. Female religious might call upon their families for financial aid in extraordinary circumstances—for example, to pay for medical treatment—or they might receive a regular allowance. Lists survive, compiled by the patriarchal visitors, of those nuns who received 'entrate particolari', regular private incomes deriving from assets which had been given or bequeathed to them. But it is clear that these established revenues reveal only a part of the picture, and that financial assistance was more often provided on an ad hoc basis. According to one visitation report (which had enumerated the annual incomes of fourteen nuns, ranging from between 3 and 30 ducats), 'le altre sono proviste dai suoi parenti secondo i loro bisogni eccetto alcune poche che non hanno parenti'.\(^{52}\) While such practices appeared to undermine the vow of poverty, even zealous reformers like Patriarch Priuli recognized that they were vital for the maintenance of less wealthy convents. He permitted nuns to receive money from their families so long as they kept it in the convent's treasury, but each nun was allowed to draw on her own resources as needed.\(^{53}\)

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\(^{51}\) Those Venetians who sought to place their female dependants in convents but could not afford to pay the dowries required by nunneries in the city may well have looked to the mainland where convents charged less. An interesting comparative example comes from Cividal di Friuli. In response to a petition from the town, in 1628, the Venetian Senate decreed that conventual dowries in Cividal di Friuli should not exceed 200 ducats (in line with the ceiling imposed by the Patriarch of Aquileia in 1609), ASV, _Compilazione Leggi_, B. 288, fo. 606. Within Venice itself, one convent which had far lower dowry requirements was the Conversite, the large Augustinian community which catered specifically for fallen women. A document of 21 May, 1633 makes it clear that women entering the Conversite at this time were expected to be provided with a dowry of 250 ducats 'e le loro casse con altre spesette', ASV, _PSM_, B. 72 (loose papers, unpaginated). Poorer families may have resorted to putting their daughters in the Conversite even if they did not strictly fulfil the requirement of having been sexually dishonoured. Communities of tertiaries provided an alternative destination for poorer women. For example, the Franciscan 'pizzocare', whose main house was situated near the church of Angelo Raffaele in Dorsoduro, required a sum or 'limosina' of 100 ducats from women who wanted to be admitted (ACPV, _Vis. past._, B. 3, 1593, 'Pizzocare del terzo ordine de San Francesco Conventuali').

\(^{52}\) ACPV, _Vis. past._, B. 3, 1594, SS. Rocco e Margherita, fo. 238r-v. In the visitations carried out during the patriarchate of Lorenzo Priuli, lists supplying details of the 'entrate particolari' received by nuns were commonly compiled; see ACPV, _Vis. past._, B. 3: S. Marta, 1594; S. Alvise, 1595; S. Croce di Giudecca, 1595; S. Iseppo, 1595; S. Lucia, 1595; Corpus Domini, 1595; S. Zaccaria, 1596; S. Maria delle Vergini, 1596; Celestia, 1596; Spirito Santo, 1596.

\(^{53}\) Logan, 'Studies in the Religious Life of Venice', p. 361. This position was clearly reiterated by Vendramin, following the visitation of S. Andrea di Zirada, in 1609. He instructed the nuns, 'Non potendo le Monache per il voto della poverta, che fanno, tenir proprio, si essortano tutte di far quello, ch'è consueto in tutti gli altri Monasterii, di metter il danaro in deposito della Madre Priora, con animo, che sia del Monasterio, come e veramente di ragione, pregando la superiore, che la metti da parte, accio che occorrondole per uso suo proprio bisogno de vestimenti, et per spendere nella sua obbedienza, le usi cautamente, di darle di quei danari, che haverà deposto appresso di lei, spendendoli in cose, che il Monasterio da se e obligato di farla spesa, avvertendo, che spendendo in altre occasion, non lo ponno fare senza
In the poorer convents, nuns genuinely depended on such financial donations. For example, at San Maffio di Mazzorbo in 1564, suor Maria Electa Pisana commented 'pregemo la Signoria Vostra che non ve manca nelle cose spirituali et temporal perche certo se steta et se patisse et se travaglia molto, massimo che non ha così parenti'.

The financial commitment of putting a girl in a nunnery was thus far from negligible. The repeated efforts of secular and ecclesiastical authorities to put an end to inappropriately lavish festivities at the principal vow-taking ceremonies remind us that monacazione could be an extravagant business. Nor could the various expenses incurred be regarded as a particularly good investment for the nun's family. Monacazione did not bring with it the potential advantages of a favourable marriage alliance (though a certain amount of prestige could be derived from having relatives in senior positions in nunneries). Furthermore, whereas a woman's marriage dowry remained her own property to leave to her heirs or take back to her own kin after her husband's death, the conventual dowry could never be reclaimed. A guardian might have hoped to retain some control over the marriage portions of his female dependants; but he knew that the payments made over to a convent were lost for ever.

These considerations complicate the view that those responsible for placing girls in nunneries were guilty of avarice. In this light, it is also important to reassess the assumption that marriage or monacazione were the only two conditions available to respectable women. For in the second half of the sixteenth century, a third option, cheaper than either of the others, gained credibility among the upper ranks of society: secular spinsterhood. Virginia Cox has argued that the preoccupation with conserving family wealth which absorbed the Venetian nobility at this time resulted in many women being debarred from convents as well as marriage. In response to this situation, advice-literature began to define a role for spinsters; these 'dimesse' could act as housekeepers to their brothers or fathers and lead lives of piety and restraint.

peccate mortale, non havendo le monache alcun, che il solo uso et non il dominio di quello' (ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5: 1609, S. Andrea di Zirada).

54 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1564, S. Maffio di Mazzorbo.

55 'Nel giorno di pigliare l'abitto schivino i vani, et superflui ornamenti delle Chiese, l'immoderati strepiti delle musiche, et instrumenti, et l'concorso di molte persone', Grimani, cap. XV. Following a vestizione at San Maffio di Murano, in 1609, two relations of nuns were brought before the provveditori sopra monasteri, charged with involvement in 'una colation con diverse confection et vivande chi stete in parlatorio sarato fina ore di note' (ASV, PSM, B. 264, 1609, S. Maffio di Murano, discussed further in chapter IV, pp. 159-60). See Monson, Disembodied Voices, pp. 182-98, for a full discussion of the elaborate and sometimes decadent festivities surrounding the ceremony of consecration in Bologese convents; also Kendrick, pp. 132-37, for a discussion of clothing ceremonies in Milan.

56 Labalme, pp. 131-32, on this aspect of conventual dowries.

57 Cox, p. 544.

58 See the letter by the publisher Giovanni Giolito, originally printed as the foreword to a Trattato del Dionisio Certosino della lodeval vita delle Vergini, (Venice, 1584); later published with Agostino Valier's La istituzione d'ogni stato lodevole delle donne cristiane, ed. Gaetano Volpi (Padua, 1744), p. xxii; and Agostino Valier's Modo di vivere proposto alle vergini che si chiaman dimesse, (Venice, 1577), also republished in Volpi's 1744 compilation. Both references are supplied by Cox, pp. 546 and 548.
Interestingly, three of Tarabotti's five sisters never married, but only Elena, the eldest of the girls (who became suor Arcangela), entered a convent.\textsuperscript{59} This development is significant here in two respects. Firstly it suggests that fathers who were truly reluctant to spend money on settling their daughters could force them to assume the role of unpaid servant to their own families; by comparison, putting girls in nunneries may be perceived as manifesting paternal generosity. Secondly, the emergence of female celibates living in the world suggests that women who were absolutely determined against taking vows now had recourse to a viable alternative.

Whatever unscrupulous methods fathers attempted to employ in persuading their female offspring to take the veil, as the next section reveals, in the post-Tridentine era they had to confront a barrage of impediments imposed by the Church. It is, of course, fair to infer from the persistent ecclesiastical efforts to control the situation that paternal transgressions persisted. As has already been stated, it is not the contention here that 'forced vocations' did not occur. However, the evidence does suggest that the practice of putting women into nunneries, whether by force, by deception or in response to their own wishes, was not an inconsiderable financial undertaking; indeed, there were cheaper ways of disposing of daughters.

\textbf{A Civic Conspiracy?}

In 1574, Giambattista Castagna, papal nuncio to the Venetian Republic, wrote to Rome concerning the resistance in Padua to measures enforcing the enclosure of the nunneries:

\begin{quote}
\textit{quelli cittadini desiderano ogni sodisfattione loro, acciò che con manco forza le loro figliuole vi entrino.}\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

His interpretation of the Paduans' opposition to reform anticipated the remarks of his successor regarding attitudes to convents in the city of Venice:

\begin{quote}
\textit{le figliuole de'nobili che prima anco vi entravano mal volentieri dopo la riforma non vi vorrebbono entrare in modo alcuno.}\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

The comments of the papal nuncio, Alberto Bolognetti, in 1580, on the resistance of the Venetians to an apostolic visitation of the city's convents, have already been the object of some discussion.\textsuperscript{62} To recapitulate briefly, historians have commonly used

\textsuperscript{59} Zanette, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{60} Nunziature, XI, p. 192; 1574, 22 May.
\textsuperscript{61} Cited in Paschini, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{62} See above, pp. 32-34.
Bolognetti’s observations as evidence that the Venetian state sought to preserve convents in a state of disciplinary laxity, so as to perpetuate their valuable function as storehouses for celibate women. According to this view, the Venetians were doubly complacent with regard to conventual indiscretion and forced vocations. Research for this thesis has cast doubt on the first aspect of this interpretation. It is argued here that local hostility to the 1581 visitation signified a distaste for papal interference rather than for reform itself. Venetian nunneries were, in fact, visited regularly by representatives of the Patriarch; both church and state worked energetically to impose discipline and reform on these institutions. But the other half of the argument requires further consideration. Did the interests of the Venetian patriciate prompt conscious efforts, on the part of the local temporal and ecclesiastical authorities, to maintain a space for forced vocations, and did this preoccupation inevitably compromise discipline?

The Council of Trent, which was vague in some aspects of its proposed reform of nunneries, provided clear directives regarding monacazione. Its condemnation of any person involved in forcing a woman to enter a convent was uncompromising:

Anathemati sancta synodus subiicit omnes et singules personas cuiuscumque qualitatis vel conditionis fuerint, tam clericos quam laicos, saeculares vel regulares, atque etiam qualibet dignitate fungentes, si quomodocumque cogerint aliquam virginem vel viduam aut aliam quamcumque mulierem invitam, praeterquam in casibus in iure expressis, ad ingrediendum monasterium, vel ad suscipiendum habitum cuiuscumque religionis, vel ad emittendam professionem.

In order to ensure that female candidates for the religious life came of their own free will, they were to be examined by the Bishop or his deputy, 'quam exploravit episcopus [...] virginis voluntatem diligentem, an coacta, an seducta sit, an sciat, quid agat'. The candidate was also to be tested on the regulations and requirements of the Rule. This examination should be repeated before profession. Besides episcopal approval, the novice's profession required the sanction of the convent superiors. The Council also imposed minimum age requirements: twelve years for vestizione and sixteen years for profession. The novice had to have been clothed for at least one year prior to profession: 'professio non fiat ante sextum decimum annim expletum, nec qui minore tempore, quam per annum post susceptum habitum, in probatione steterit, ad

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63 For example, ed. Medioli, *Inferno*, pp. 120-21: 'Generalmente l'autorità, sia ecclesiastica che secolare, faceva il possibile per rendere la vita in monastero meno disagevole, poiché era cosa nota che i conventi ospitavano per la maggior parte ragazze monacate senza una vera vocazione'.

64 Sessio 25, cap. XVIII; ed. Alberigo, pp. 781-82. Excommunication was also prescribed for anyone hampering the true vocation of a woman to enter a nunnery.

professionem admittatur. Reformers emphasized the probationary function of the noviciate. As a further safeguard of the novice's freedom, the Council laid down that no dowry was to be paid to the convent until the time of profession.

The *Constitutioni et decreti* published by Antonio Grimani, Bishop of Torcello, in 1592, provide powerful evidence of ecclesiastical deference to these Tridentine decrees from within the dogado. Regarding monacazioni, much of what he instructed was translated directly from the Council's rulings. But he also added certain strictures of his own. For example, he imposed very precise limitations on kin links within the convent and required a two-thirds majority approval from the convent chapter before a candidate might be admitted to vestizione or profession. The most convincing indication of Grimani's commitment to voluntary monacation is evident in his raising of the minimum age of vestizione from twelve years to fifteen years. Slightly apologetically he explained his divergence from Trent:

Se bene il Sacro Concilio di Trento prohibisce, che avanti il 12 anno non si possi pigliare il Santo habito monacale, non però vieta, che non si possa per giusta, et ragioneveole causa tirare piü avanti il tempo, del pigliare detto habito, massimamente nelle Provincie, ora vi è consuetudine, che dopo preso l'habito, nessuna ritorna al secolo, ancorche conoscano di esser libere avanti la professione, et che lo possano fare [...] Però giudichiamo espeditente, che nelli conventi a noi soggetti nessuna possi pigliare l'habito religioso, se non finito il quinto decimo anno della sua età, acciò più maturamente possi discernere, et sapere quello, che fa, et più liberamente possi esprimere la volontà sua.

But Grimani followed the directive from Rome regarding the age of 'figliuole à spese' or 'educande', who were allowed to be accepted, with episcopal licence, from the age of seven up to twenty-five years old. In theory, these girls were not bound to become nuns. However, the strict régime to which they were subjected and their adherence to enclosure gave them little taste of life outside. It may well have been these 'bambine di poca età' that Tarabotti had largely in mind when she spoke of the deception of young innocents. The persistence of this system may have allowed parents to bypass measures intended to prevent child vocations.

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67 Sessio 25, cap. XVI; ed. Alberigo, p. 781. The implications of this ruling on *converse*, who only took the first 'simple' vows, are unclear.
68 Grimani, caps XV on *vestizione* and XIX on profession. For comparative evidence, see Cattaneo, pp. 164-66. He provides extensive quotations from the *Regole appartenenti alle monache cavate da i concili provinciali di Milano*, published by Carlo Borromeo in 1583.
69 Grimani, cap. XV [Emphasis added].
70 Ibid., cap XIV. *Educande* are discussed more fully in chapter III, pp. 134-35.
71 Ed. Medioli, *Inferno*, p. 32. In her article, 'Monacazioni forzate', p. 442, Medioli argues that a girl who felt abandoned by her family might be driven to take the vows even if she were fully conscious of her own lack of vocation, for the convent was the only refuge available to such defenceless females.
Lorenzo Priuli, who was Patriarch of Venice during this same period (from 1590 to 1600) was a particularly avid exponent of the visitation. The reports from the patriarchal visitation of Santi Biagio et Castaldo in 1593 endorse the injunctions of Trent concerning minimum age requirements and the examination of women before clothing and profession. Priuli also emphasized that the dowry should not be paid before profession, though—in order to ensure eventual payment—he made the canny provision that the money was to be handed over to a third party with responsibility for paying the sum into a bank eight days before profession, to become immediately available from the time that the nun took her solemn vows. During the visitation, all the nuns were interrogated as to the circumstances of their monacazioni. The records supply information about the age of entry to the convent, and, where relevant, the age of profession and of consecration. Clearly there was a wish on the part of the Venetian church at least to investigate the ages of monacation. The depositions of nuns also indicate that they were commonly questioned as to whether or not they had entered the convent voluntarily. There is no instance of a nun replying negatively. All the 'professe' respond with the formulaic avowal, 'ho fatto la professione voluntieri'; some add 'essaminata dal Vicario del Patriarca', and others volunteer testimony of their ongoing contentment, declaring 'et sempre son restata contenta'. It would be naïve to take such reports at face value. Yet they do indicate that the Venetian ecclesiastical authorities were not totally indifferent to the practice of forcing women into convents against their will; nor did they ignore the instructions issued by Trent as has been suggested.

It would be a distortion to deny that some Venetians favoured compromise in the regulation of the city's convents. The plea for a pragmatic approach was most famously articulated by Patriarch Giovanni Tiepolo, who urged against too strict an imposition of conventual austerity. 'Dispensando dalla qualità del cibo in magro nei giorni comuni del grasso, rilasciando l'obligo delle camiscie et lenzuoli di lana, et quello delli letti di paglia,' the Patriarch hoped that the nuns would be able to lead their lives, 'se non più consolate, almeno assai men discontente'. His liberal attitude seems impressive as he reflects on how these women 'siano nobili, allevate e nodrite con somma delicatezza et rispetto, che se fossero d'altro sesso ad esse toccarebbe il comandare e governare il Mondo'. But he goes on to reiterate the absolute necessity of forced vocations:

But while some educande became nuns, a range of indications suggests that marriage was just as frequent a destiny.

72 ACPV, Vis. post., B. 1, 1593, SS. Biagio & Castaldo.
73 This source requires cautious analysis. For example, while the age of entry frequently falls below twelve years, the Tridentine minimum, this may well be a consequence of girls having lived in the convent for several years prior to monacazione as educande.
Tiepolo clearly believed that, without recourse to this form of 'publico deposito', the city would end up in chaos and anarchy.

'Pregiudicar la multiplicitä delle figliole alla Ragion di Stato' is how Tarabotti sums up this position. But even if one accepts the most cynical interpretation of how Venice viewed its convents, it is still misguided to assume that this resulted in resignation to their disciplinary laxity. As Gabriella Zarri has argued, while nunneries fulfilled an important function in absorbing celibate women, this had to be weighed up against their image as a spiritual asset of the city. If conventual discipline could not be maintained, the honour of the city would be put at risk. Hence the involvement of temporal authorities in various reform programmes, and their emphasis on clausura. For it is significant that the areas of discipline that Tiepolo was prepared to compromise were those most concealed aspects of the religious life: fasting, hair shirts and beds of straw. While internally, therefore, he sanctioned some relaxation of conventual rigours, he did not advocate changes which would jeopardize the public image of the city's convents. Indeed, convents with a reputation for disciplinary laxity were likely to experience problems of recruitment. Running contrary to the arguments voiced by the nuncios, Castagna and Bolognetti, was the view expounded by Patriarch Vendramin, in a report sent to Sant'Anna, following the visitation of 1609: he exhorted the nuns to institute the recommended reforms, asserting that 'con le quali conditioni esseguitte it Monastero crescerà in reputatione, et concorreranno le figliole per Monacare, et a spese con molta utilità et honorevolezza del Monasterio'.

'Monacazioni forzate' had their social cost, which extended beyond the sacrifice of certain women's happiness. Unwilling nuns were unlikely to be well-disciplined nuns and the city of Venice was plagued by scandals emanating from the convents.

75 Ibid., p. 303.
76 Ed. Medioli, Inferno, p. 93. The concept of 'ragion di stato' also occurs in a report of 1644, issued by the Genoese magistracy in charge of female monastic affairs. It stated, 'Non tutte le monache sono di vocazione del suo sposo a esso consacrata, ma dell'interessi propri e di ragion di stato', Rosi, p. 73.
77 Zarri, 'Monasteri femminili e città', pp. 379-80.
78 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1609, S. Anna.
79 Bolognetti identified the phenomenon of forced vocations as the principle cause of disciplinary laxity in the Venetian convents: 'Credo si possa dire con verità ch'il vero remedio et il più efficace che si potesse trovare per la debita riforma alli monasteri di monache sarebbe quello ch'io ho già detto due volte di sopra [...], cioè che si havesse grandissimo riguardo alla disposizione delle figliuole che si accettano et fusse che si certificasse prima se si muovono a chiuersi per sempre fra quelle quattro mura per mera loro divotione et per zelo di servire a Dio con maggior commodità, o se pure sono spinte dal
The suggestion that the city authorities were not indifferent to these consequences and that considerable efforts were made to impose discipline is not made in order to excuse those with political or ecclesiastical power. Indeed, one may readily argue that it was a deplorable cruelty to allow women to be forced into convents and then to subject them to a rigorous and isolated regime. (For this reason, Tiepolo has been praised for his compassionate pragmatism). But whether or not the reforms were kind or fair, it is salutary to emphasize that they were occasioned by nagging tensions regarding the worldly nature of the convents. How much longer could the uncomfortable compromises hold out? It was against this background that Tarabotti launched her most uncompromising attacks on *monacazioni forzate*.

From Inside the Inferno

Trovate voi ragioni da oppornervi in contrario, per le quali mi si confuti che ad una mente forzata il monastero non sia tormentosissimo Inferno.

This is Tarabotti’s challenge, made with every confidence that all the arguments are on her side. Perceiving forced vocations in terms of political, spiritual and personal denial, the nunnery is portrayed variously as ‘carcere’, ‘inferno’, and ‘sepolcro’. Her treatment of these three themes in the *Inferno monacale* requires analysis.

In many ways, this splendidly cogent piece of protest literature reads much as a political treatise. Tarabotti had an advanced sense of the rights and liberties of the individual, hence her disgust at the termination of a woman’s freedom to choose her own destiny which may be effected even before she is born: ‘Ad alcune non ancora generate—o essecrabile crudeltà paterna!—vi en da’genitori assignato il monasterio per’habitatione’. As she argued in the *Tirannia paterna*, there was no natural reason why girls should be thus deprived of their liberties: referring to the animal kingdom, she reasoned, ‘Gli orsi, le tigri, le vipere, i basilichi, et ogni’più cruda, velenosa, et indomita fiera alimenta, e teneramente ama i suoi concetti, non distinguendo da maschio a femmina’. As for the unequal treatment of sisters, this found no justification even in law: ‘Non si trova già legge per la quale habbiano più ragionevoli pretensioni le maritate che le monacate sopra le case de’loro parenti’.

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82 Ibid., p. 35.
83 Quoted in Zanette, p. 93.
84 Ed. Medioli, *Inferno*, p. 44.
Angered by the imprisonment of young women against their will, Tarabotti confidently proclaims that they have the right to disobey their parents:

Devono obedirsi i genitori nelle cose lecite e giuste e non nell'irragionevoli; oltre che nell'operazioni nostre spettante al movimento interno della volontà, non è tenuta la creatura obbedire ad altri che al suo Creatore. E così il padre non deve e non può maritare quella figlia che vol esser vergine; né essa è tenuta adderir alla di lui determinazione e sforzo, sí come non può violentarla a monacarsi senza il concorso della di lei libera volontà.

The position is convincing in theory, but whether the right of resistance was a practical possibility is another matter. To begin with, as Tarabotti relates vividly, the mechanisms of deception were so well polished that the young woman or child on the point of entering a convent was unlikely to know her own 'volontà'. Then, it is important to remember that this was a period when individuals were less accustomed to enjoying the liberty of shaping their own destiny. Monacazioni forzate were one of many ways in which the individual was subjected to the interests of the family or the wider community.

Tarabotti believed that forced vocations profaned the house of God, and in this respect her position was shared by many Catholic reformers. Rather than increasing in virtue, nuns who had been placed in convents against their will 'diventano peggiori e s'incaminano nell'offesa del loro mal volontier accetato Sposo'. Vanity and vice are perpetuated by the older nuns who, embittered by their own existence in the cloister, fail to provide a model of the true religious life. When young girls are admitted to the convent, they are instructed by these 'vecchie' who

invece d'intimar loro un rigoroso silentio, le asseriscono che potranno gracciare a suo talento. Non mancano provisioni di balli, canti, suoni, mascherate e colazioni. E più tosto che obligar la loro memoria alla meditationi sopra le vitte de'santi, i bagordi e feste da celebrarsi nella sollenità di San Giovanni e San Martino si raccordano come precetti irrefragabili.

With such corruption and disillusionment pervading even the highest ranks of the community—the abess and her deputies—it is unsurprising that the convents of Venice were prone to scandal. 'Considerate voi qui un poco, o ministri di Satanasso, che sforzando le vostre figliuole ad entrar ne'monasteri, siete partecipi di tutte le loro attioni

85 Ibid., p. 37.
86 Ibid., p. 35.
87 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
scandalose'. Thus Tarabotti holds the fathers of unwilling nuns responsible for the disciplinary transgressions which often afflicted local nunneries.

But it is clear that Tarabotti viewed monacazioni forzate as profoundly damaging to character as distinct from the soul. With a keen eye for psychological developments she asserts, 'né anche si puote negar che [...] quelle che a viva forza restano chiuse ne'monasterii proprii che, di begnine, tacite e care che erano per lor natura, a torto irritate et offese, non divengono sdegnose et inviperite e perdano le naturali e proprie qualità, essendo lor dinegato l'operare secondo la general inclinatione'. Tarabotti's own grief at having been forced to take religious vows against her will is perhaps most evident in her accounts of the 'funebri cerimonie' of clothing and profession: sacrificing her 'chioma, donatale dalla natura', making the irrevocable vows and sitting in the Refectory at the 'celebratory' meal, unable to eat. Such details in fact constitute the substance of the Inferno monacale, divided as it is into three books, representing 'vestizione', 'professione', and 'consegratone'.

Perhaps contrary to the expectations prompted by the title, the Inferno monacale is conspicuously not an attack on the religious life per se. Tarabotti is keen to stress from the outset, 'mi protesto che miei detti non sono intentionati a biasmar la religione né a ragionar se non contro quei padri e parenti che con violenza imbavarono le figliole'. Just as she condemns parents who force their daughters into nunneries, so she condemns those who stand in the way of genuine vocations. Moreover, while she despises the avarice of fathers who subject girls to the 'parsimonia estrema' of convent life, willing sacrifice is to be applauded. In her most explicit avowal, she declares,

non sprezza, non biasma né religiose, né religioni, anzi col capo per riverenza chino, esalta alle stelle la santità e merito di quei monasterii e monache che son rettamente governati e che, chiamate da celeste inspiratione, vollontarie corrispondono esponendosi a pattimenti di monasticha vita.

The hell of monastic life was the permanent imprisonment of the involuntary nun. However, whereas Tarabotti is sometimes able to take a detached position and to expound on the virtues of religious life for those with true vocation, at other times her own bitterness and misery overwhelm her. Her own jealousy is evident in her comparisons between the lots of girls who marry and those who become nuns. Contrasting the ceremonies of marriage and 'vestizione', she describes how the bride is adorned with the finest cloth from Flanders and the most precious pearls from the

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88 Ibid., p. 71.
89 Ibid., p. 39.
90 Ibid., p. 27.
91 Ibid., p. 93.
Orient, but for the nun 'scielgono le più grosse e ruvide tele per le camise delle sventurate che sovente non riescono di bastevole longhezza e le maniche sono a tal'un diversa dal rimanente'. 92 How galling is the nun's obligation to provide her sister with a wedding-gift 'sopra al quale haverà l'infelice giorno e notte lavorato con assiduità'?93

Tarabotti's stance on marriage is slightly ambiguous. Clearly, she reprehends the inequality she perceives in the treatment of sisters. Not least among the injustices is the discrepancy in material provision: not only do the costs of the wedding festivities exceed the dowry of the nun (she claims) but the novice has to struggle with her father to persuade him to pay 'le necessarie spese' of profession and, thereafter, 'altre circostanze che tormentan la borsa al tenacissimo vecchio'.94 There is also, undoubtedly, a rhetorical purpose behind the constant comparison of nun and wife. But did suor Arcangela believe that marriage necessarily brought contentment? Surely the involuntary and unhappy marital union could also result in the suppression of personal liberty, economic exclusion and a sense of lifelong imprisonment. Yet Tarabotti scorned those women who--dissatisfied with their husbands--'si comincia a dubitare della posterità, a piangerla come malamente maritata od anche tal'hora s'ariva a trattare del divorzio'. If only such a wife knew anything of conventual subordination 'stimarebbe fortuna il star ritirata nella propria casa, l'haver un eunucco per marito e reputarebbe a gratia singolare un poco di libertà, una sola serva, vitto e vestito, senza haver da sospirarlo e guadagnarselo con le proprie mani e lavorando, come al più delle monache avviene'.95 The implication is that any husband is preferable to the monastic life.96

Another radical female author of early modern Venice wrote

Mirate che bella ventura d'una donna è il maritarsi: perder la robba, perder se stessa e non acquistar nulla se non li figliuoli che le danno travaglio e l'imperio d'un uomo, che la domini a sua voglia.97

Moderata Fonte's position provides a corrective to Tarabotti's conviction that marriage was intrinsically an enviable state. But it is worth remembering that suor Arcangela was also the author of a work entitled Il purgatorio delle mal maritate, unfortunately now

92 Ibid., p. 46.
93 Ibid., p. 66. As will be demonstrated in chapter IV, archival evidence suggests that some nuns delighted in furnishing their sisters with bridal gifts.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid., p. 49.
96 Recent research by Daniela Hacke has shed light on the phenomenon of forced marital unions (forthcoming PhD thesis, University of Cambridge).
97 Fonte, p. 69.
lost. In the context of the Inferno monacale, Tarabotti's reluctance to accept the possibility of marital hell derives both from the desire to serve the polemical purpose in hand and also from the work's very personal nature: marriage might have been hell for some, but it was not the condition of which Tarabotti was victim.

The rhetorical nature of the work should also be borne in mind when considering those 'factual' details it contains and others which it leaves out. Certain biographical remarks are pertinent here. For the penury and austerity of the convent were unlikely to have been a genuine reflection of Sant'Anna, scarcely renowned for its rigorous commitment to the Rule. As for the penny-pinching tactics of fathers, this is also hard to reconcile with the author's own experience: the archives record that Stefano Tarabotti paid a dowry of 1,000 ducats, as well as a 'donativo' of 200 ducats, together constituting quite a substantial outlay. Moreover, suor Arcangela stays silent with regard to some of the possible advantages, or even liberties, which monastic life afforded her. Her close contact with members of the Accademia degli Incogniti, and through her involvement with them, her wide reading and eloquence, were privileges unlikely to have been afforded to a married woman. The Inferno itself, an elegant treatise crammed with bookish references, testifies to a measure of enfranchisement granted by the cloistered life.

In 1970, Germaine Greer told British women how wretched were the lots of housewives, nurses and secretaries. But while her case may have been well-argued and substantiated, this was not to say that the female population was as miserable and dissatisfied as in her eyes it ought to have been. Having acknowledged that women were often placed in convents at the behest of their families, rather than from personal inclination, it would be a mistake to assume that the generality of nuns felt the injustice of their situation as clearly as Tarabotti did.

Conclusion
This reassessment of 'monacazioni forzate' in early modern Venice has attempted to avoid the exaggerations and anachronisms to which the modern observer is prone. But this is not to deny that some nuns were desperately unhappy in their unchosen destiny. Crestina Dolfin, for example, who escaped from the nunnery of Spirito Santo in 1561, had literally been forced to become a nun, and nursed a very coherent set of grievances. It was widely believed that her father had made her enter the convent against her will; one friend testified, 'suo padre lhavea tenua serrata et chel gle haves fatto paura con un

99 Zanette, p. 44.
100 Ibid., p. 28.
101 After her death, one of Tarabotti's spinster sisters chose S. Anna as a place to retire to (Zanette, p. 26).
102 Greer, esp. chapter entitled 'Work', pp. 116-35.
Languishing in the convent, tormented by her own bad health, and the persecutions of other nuns, Crestina claimed that ‘si contentaria più tosto di star massare di altro che star in detto monastero’. But her particular source of resentment concerned her economic exclusion. After her escape, having sought refuge in the house of her advocate, Ferraruol, ‘la diseva publicamente la in casa à madonna vechia et alla moglier del Ferraruol che la era uscita fuori perche la voleva la sua parte di quel di suo padre et di suo fratello et anco della dote di sua madre’. Forced vocations were one of the many implications of a system which essentially denied women property. Even if Crestina had married, she still would have been excluded from inheriting what she perceived as ‘la sua parte’ of the patrimony. If her father had provided her with a marital dowry, it is doubtful how much power she could have wielded over it. In any case, Crestina did not express a wish to be married. She craved economic empowerment and personal freedom.

A reminder that marriage was not necessarily a more liberated state than the religious life comes from Marieta Balbi, the sister of suor Raphaela who escaped from San Bernardo di Murano in 1558. Raphaela’s motives for leaving the nunnery were rather different from those of suor Crestina. She was not opposed to the religious life in itself, but rather to the tough disciplinary régime of the current abbess. Indeed, according to her sister, ‘la mi disse la torneria sotto un’altra Abbadessa, ma non sotto questa perche la si dubita che questa non la metta in prigion et non gli facia qualche dispiacier’. But what is interesting here is the somewhat impatient response of Marieta to her sister’s escape:

io lho sempre essortata à star a casa nel suo monastier dicendole se fuste maridada et haveste un marito cattivo che vi facesse mala compagnia bisognerebbe pur che steste con lui, io non vi voglio menar altrimente via perche anche io sto in casa de altri.

From the point of view of Marieta, her sister was being unduly self-indulgent in seeking to leave the convent. Married women enjoyed no such freedom. As for Marieta herself, presumably either a spinster or a widow, she expressed her own lack of autonomy: ‘anche io sto in casa de altri’. In her work on late-medieval Florence, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has stressed the concern with containing women in the

103 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1561 [m.v.], Spirito Santo, fo. 12v.
104 Ibid., fo. 12r.
105 Ibid., unnumbered folio. See Cox, pp. 560-61 on Moderata Fonte's awareness of the link between financial independence and self-determination.
106 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1558, S. Bernardo di Murano.
107 Klapisch portrays women in late-medieval Florence as 'passing guests' in the 'case' of male relatives, p. 118.
households either of their fathers or of their husbands; Marieta’s social insecurity derived from the fact that she belonged to neither. The convent provided the institutional equivalent of the ‘casa’, where women, deprived at birth of a share in their family wealth, could be stored safely. As the abbess of Santi Biagio e Castaldo commented: ‘le figliole sono messe qui dentro più tosto in salvo, che per monache’. 108

It is impossible to make a quantitative assessment of the incidence of forced vocations. Unlike Tarabotti, most nuns left no record of how they felt about the circumstances in which they took the veil. Limited trial evidence exists for transgressive nuns, including those who committed apostasy. Women like Crestina Dolfin, who tried to escape from the convent, often claimed to have been victims of forced vocations. 109 Suor Faustina, who ran away from San Giovanni Lateran in 1555, had tried to escape on previous occasions and had told neighbours ‘mi hanno posta per forza in monastier’. 110 After an unsuccessful attempt to flee Sant’Andrea di Zirada in 1566, suor Vittoria asserted ‘non mi ho mai contentà de star in la religion’. 111 In 1618, suor Maria Isabella Franceschi staged a dramatic escape from the Convertite with the assistance of a man, described as ‘forestaria’. There was a tussle as the other nuns tried to prevent her from leaving but to no avail. It seems that her escape was not at all unexpected. ‘La Franceschi’ had formerly been a nun at Sant’Anna and had been moved to the Convertite for disciplinary reasons. It was well known that she had embarked on a campaign to be released from her vows, ‘dicendo di esser stata posta per forza nel primo monastero di Sant’Anna, per la qual liberatione hà mandato pill volte a Roma’. She had also informed the patriarch’s vicar and the abbess of her intention to leave the Convertite, threatening to set fire to the convent. One witness reported her saying ‘questo non è il mio luogo, son sta messa qua in salvo, ho finita la mia penitentia e voglio andar via’. 112

Nuns who committed sexual transgressions also sometimes claimed to have been forced into the convent against their will. Indeed, suor Faustina, mentioned above, was the object of various sexual allegations. Laura Querini, who had conducted sexual relations with a layman inside her convent of San Zaccaria, also told the story of her own unhappy monacazione: she claimed to have been sent to the nunnery as a small child and to have taken her religious vows ‘con la bocca, ma non col core’. 113 This

108 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1., 1593, SS. Biagio & Castaldo.
109 Of the seven cases of escapes or attempted escapes handled by the provveditori during the period under study, four claimed to have been motivated by forced vocations. It should be reiterated that the interest of the provveditori in these trials was in lay accomplices rather than in the nuns themselves. A further five cases of escaped nuns are cited in the catalogue to the lost ‘Repertorium Criminalium Monialium’, formerly held in the ACPV.
110 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1555, S. Giovanni Lateran, fo. 18v.
111 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1566, S. Andrea di Zirada.
112 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1618, Convertite.
113 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1614, S. Zaccaria, fo. 9r. Discussed below, pp. 228-31.
raises the question of whether some nuns claimed to have been the victims of forced vocations in order to mitigate their subsequent misdeeds. We certainly need to be aware of rhetorical ploys of self-justification. In the cases cited above, the profound misery of the nuns rings true but there is, of course, a distinction between a forced vocation and a faded vocation. It was possible for a woman to take religious vows freely and willingly but to grow disillusioned with the conventual life. In this situation, some nuns might retrospectively fashion themselves as victims of forced vocations.

Where we might consider the early-modern church most inhumane was in its refusal to release women from their vows, however unhappy and uncommitted they were. Formal requests were made from time to time by women who sought permission to leave the convent. The standard procedure was to apply to the Sacra Congregazione dei Vescovi e Regolari in Rome. But while dispensations were theoretically possible, in fact, every effort was made to discourage them. According to the Council of Trent, the parameters within which a claim might be considered were narrow:

Quicunque regularis praetendat, se per vim et metum ingressum esse religionem aut etiam dicit, ante actatem debitam professum fuisse, aut quid simile, velitque habitum dimittere quacunque de causa, aut etiam cum habitu discedere sine licentia superiorum: non audiatur nisi intra quinquennium tantum a die professionis, et tunc non aliter, nisi causas, quas praetenderit, deduxerit coram superiore suo et ordinario. Quod si ante habitum sponte dimiserit, nullatenus ad allegandum quamcumque causam admittatur, sed ad monasterium redire cogatur et tamquam apostata puniatur; interim vero nullo privilegio suae religionis iuvetur.

Cattaneo suggests that the care which some prelates took to ascertain the sincerity of a woman's vocation was intended as a preemptive measure to forestall later claims for annulment of her vows.

In order to obtain a licence to leave the convent, the nun had to negotiate complicated legal obstacles. Without help from family or friends outside the convent,

114 The records of petitions to the Sacra Congregazione dei Vescovi e Regolari are held in the Archive of the Vatican. They have not been consulted for this thesis.
115 Medioli, 'Monacazioni forzate', p. 438. In her notes to Inferno, p. 124, Medioli points out that Tarabotti was technically incorrect in claiming that religious vows were indissoluble. However, she argues that even if a nun did receive a dispensation to leave the convent, the socio-economic realities of the situation would present enormous problems.
117 Cattaneo, p. 188: 'Sul presupposto che la monaca avesse avuto ogni possibilità di scelta del suo stato e che fosse stata lungamente preparata alla professione religiosa, quando dopo anni di amarezza, confessava d'esserse stata ingannata o di essersi ingannata, veniva, di solito, implacabilmente accusata di tradimento della propria vocazione religiosa e di mancare ai voti emessi e, quindi, era costretta, anche con la forza, a continuare la vita in monastero'.
this was virtually impossible. But it is to be expected that a *monaca forzata* would not be able to rely on the support of her close relatives. For this reason, it is interesting to note that nuns *did* sometimes receive assistance from their families in petitioning to relinquish their vows. A fascinating case may be traced back to a Venetian testament of October 1576, in which the nobleman Zacharia Muazzo made provision for his sister, suor Clementia Muazzo, a nun at Santa Maria delle Vergini. Making his intentions quite clear, he left the residue of his estate to the nun 'acico volio che pose maritarsi'. By February 1577, Zacharia was evidently no more, and we learn of suor Clementia having commenced her efforts to leave the convent in order to avail herself of her brother's wealth. In the presence of the patriarchal vicar, Clementia made the following statement:

> ho desiderato sempre qualche occasion di poter uscir et hora che quondam messer Zacharia Muazo del magnifico quondam messer Piero mio fratello mi ha lassato tuta la sua faculta con conditione che debba uscir del monastero et maridarmi ho deliberato de uscir et de volermi maritar et per tanto richiedo libertä di poter uscir liberamente et maritarmi.

Although Clementia was aged twenty-nine, and had been at Le Vergini for twelve years, she had never professed. She claimed that she had always wanted to leave the convent but did not go so far as to say that she had been forced into the religious life against her will. It may well have been on account of her lack of commitment that she had delayed taking full vows. This was undoubtedly a crucial factor in the patriarch's decision to concede her a licence to leave the religious life. In 1627, the Venetian Senate took measures to prevent Ser Sebastian Barbarigo and his mother from petitioning Rome. They were attempting to obtain a papal licence which would enable their sister/daughter, suor Lucrezia, a nun at Sant'Alvise, to quit the religious life; to this end, they had employed an ecclesiastical lawyer, dottor Rossi. But the efforts of Lucrezia's relations and of future petitioners were forestalled by the Senate's insistence that no Venetian subject could apply to Rome about matters relating to Venetian nuns without first attaining permission from the *Collegio*. It may be significant that both suor Clementia and suor Lucrezia were helped by their brothers after the deaths of their fathers. Perhaps, in earlier life, they had been genuine victims of 'paternal tyranny'. On the other hand, according to the evidence which has been cited, there was no mention of forced vocations in either case. In the case of Clementia, a manifest change in her economic prospects facilitated her desire to leave the convent. The families of nuns may

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119 ACPV, *Vis. past.*, B. 1, S. Maria delle Vergini, 1577.
120 Lucrezia Barbarigo's case is discussed above, p. 58.
sometimes have been more respectful and considerate towards their daughters, sisters and nieces than we imagine.

These two cases provide insufficient material from which to derive general conclusions about this type of suit. A full-scale analysis of the petitions which were sent to Rome would undoubtedly prove revealing but, unfortunately, it has not been possible to extend the present inquiry to the archives of the Vatican. Making use of the available evidence, the range of cases which has been considered does alert us to the inadequacy of the concept of forced vocations. There seem to be three sets of circumstances in which the terminology 'forced vocation' is commonly evoked. The first is technically precise, and refers to occasions when a woman is pressurized and duped into becoming a nun, without being afforded the freedom or the information to take that step voluntarily. The second circumstance is when a nun takes the veil freely and knowingly as the result of having no other reasonable option. This woman does not have a true vocation, in the sense of having been called by God, but she accepts her future as a nun willingly—at least, to begin with. The third category is that of the miserable nun. The circumstances in which she embarked on the religious life are of little relevance. She may have chosen her destiny freely; she may even have considered herself to have been called by God to take the veil. But, after a certain amount of time, she becomes unhappy and seeks to leave the nunnery. The post-Tridentine church was concerned to root out the incidence of monacazioni forzate according to the first definition. But it was unsympathetic towards nuns whose histories conformed to the second or third definition. They had been given their chance to refuse the religious life, and now they must live with it.

Among the thousands of women who occupied the Venetian convents, there were surely few who had experienced the violence and deception described by Tarabotti in the Inferno. A far greater number had been persuaded to take the veil because there was no feasible alternative. Of these, some lived resignedly; others found their tolerance for the religious life to be decreasing. It was this category of vocation which the Venetian authorities—both ecclesiastical and temporal—were reluctant to eradicate.
CHAPTER III
REFORMING VENETIAN NUNNERIES: THE PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE OF ENCLOSURE

At the twenty-fifth and final session of the Council of Trent, amid an atmosphere coloured by weariness and haste, the assembled prelates turned their attentions to the reform of male and female religious. The conclusions which issued from the Council were predictable enough, renewing familiar principles concerning adherence to the Rule and the vows, admission and profession of new nuns, the temporal and spiritual government of religious houses. If such policies were articulated with greater emphasis and severer threats than formerly, they certainly were not reiterated with any particular attention to clarity or detail. Forceful in tone but vague in contents, the decrees emanating from the official mouthpiece of the Counter-Reformation bore little relevance to the reality of religious life with its wide variety of traditions and special cases.¹

No less hazy but particularly influential was the Council's ruling on the enclosure of nunneries, canon V of the final decree. This reenacted the 1298 bull Periculoso of Boniface VIII, insisting on the maintenance of enclosure or its reintroduction 'ubi violata fuerit' and forbidding professed nuns to leave the convent 'nisi ex aliqua legitima causa, ab ipso episcopo approbanda'.² Superficially straightforward, this formula completely failed to address the diversity of existing communities. Where, for example, did such a ruling leave the numerous so-called 'monasteri aperti' where enclosure had never existed? In such cases it was illogical to talk of enclosure having been violated.³ What of the mendicant orders, which had always enjoyed the right to come and go from their convents and who depended on contact with the world to obtain their livelihood?⁴ Then there was the unclear area of tertiaries and converse who followed a variety of practices as regarded the taking of vows. Were they included in the new regulations laid down for 'professed' nuns?⁵ The technical ambiguities of this blunt pronouncement were debated by cardinals and others.

¹ Creytens, esp. pp. 49-52, for the hurried treatment of monastic reform by the Council; ed. Alberigo, pp. 776-84.
² Creytens, pp. 52-53; ed. Alberigo, pp. 777-78. According to Gill, 'Scandal', p. 177, the bull Periculoso of 1298 'did not constitute a dramatic turning-point [...] It neither reflected nor achieved a general acceptance of strict enclosure as a necessary and validating feature of women's religious life'.
³ Creytens, p. 53; Gill, 'Open Monasteries', esp. p. 17: she argues that the Counter-Reformation 'struck a fatal blow' to open monasteries, whose active apostolate outside the convent walls depended on freedom of movement for their members. The Venetian lawyer, Francesco Zabarella, wrote in 1581 in favour of nuns' customary rights to come and go, with special reference to the convents of his own city: 'Maxime Venetiis non debet dici moniales fore excommunicatas, cum pro maiori parte monasteria monialium sint aperta et non observent clausuram' (cited in Creytens, p. 48). Ironically, the enclosure reforms were also to have troublesome effects for some of the new orders—supposedly models of Tridentine ideals. See discussion on pp. 10-11.
⁴ Creytens, p. 54.
⁵ Ibid., pp. 63-64.
in the wake of the Council. With the bull *Circa Pastoralis* of 29 May 1566, Pius V hoped to end discussions about the interpretation of canon V. It was asserted that all professed nuns, by virtue of their profession, were bound to strict enclosure whatever the nature of their rule or their customary rights. The practical unfeasibility of this policy will be a recurring theme of the present discussion.

It should be clarified that the enforcement of enclosure, as a disciplinary instrument for curbing immorality and scandal in nunneries, was not in itself an innovation. In Venice, measures against outsiders entering nunneries and nuns leaving them abounded from the beginning of the century. The violent actions of some nuns who attempted to resist enclosure during this period are well known: in response to an attempt to seal off San Zaccaria in 1514, the diarist Marin Sanuto reported that nuns hurled stones from within. Yet, whether or not the intention of the Council, only after Trent was enclosure sought as an end in itself. Crude and ill thought-out as it was, the Tridentine decree, backed up by Pius V, provided a new authority which future reformers would evoke in their obsessive campaigns to keep nuns under lock and key.

Using records from ecclesiastical visitations and trials conducted by the *provveditori sopra monasteri*, this chapter traces the efforts of Venetian authorities to impose enclosure, and the problems which they encountered. If by the end of the sixteenth century the principle of total enclosure could no longer be challenged—as the nuns of San Zaccaria had once considered quite justifiable—in practice, nuns still managed to retain contact with the outside world. By examining the new dialectic between reform and resistance which emerged in response to the post-Tridentine emphasis on clausura, the values and aspirations of the nuns themselves become accessible. More elusive are the issues that motivated the makers of the sources which form the documentary basis of my study. What drove those reforming prelates and state magistrates who expended untold quantities of time and ingenuity in attempting to

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6 *Bullarum diplomatum*, VII, pp. 447-50. The rationale behind Pius' characteristically forthright decree was that profession implied the willing and total abdication of will. However, this was a contentious issue. A particular aspect of the problem concerned *converse*: this category of nuns traditionally enjoyed the greatest freedom of movement, and had in the past been given the option of taking either solemn vows or simple vows. This situation potentially contravened the doctrine now being espoused by Pius V that full profession (i.e. the taking of solemn vows) necessarily entailed strict enclosure. In view of the practical need for convents to allow certain members occasional access to the outside world, *converse* were permitted to venture beyond the convent walls, but henceforth were not allowed to be professed (Creytens, pp. 75-79).

7 Some historians have been slightly misleading on this point: for example, Norberg, p. 134, refers to compulsory enclosure as 'the great innovation of the Council of Trent'.

8 Sanuto, XVIII, col. 323. Discussed by Paschini, p. 49.

9 Gill has stressed the radicalism of the new drive for enclosure. In her view, it was Pius V's bull *Circa pastoralis*, not the Council of Trent, which was 'the real herald and agent of change'; 'Scandala', p. 199. A series of bulls followed *Circa pastoralis*, which adhered to the principle of compulsory enclosure for all nunneries, and which served to tighten up the details of the regulations: *Decori* (1570), *Deo sacrīs* (1572) and *Ubi grātiae* (1575). Gregory XIII issued a clarification of the last of these in 1581, known as *Dublis*. For the texts of these measures, see *Bullarum diplomatum*, VII, pp. 808-10, VIII, pp. 28-32 and pp. 113-15.
stamp out what—to the modern reader, and even the contemporary witness—often seem fairly petty irregularities? This chapter aims to shed light on the motives that lay behind the commitment of the Venetian church and state to imposing enclosure.

**Convent Walls**

Siate osservantissime della clausura, non uscendo mai fuori di essa per un passo, ne in chiesa ne in parlatorii, ne ricevendo alcuno in essa, sia di che stato, condizione et età si voglia senza nostra espressa licenza in scritta.10

Thus Lorenzo Priuli instructed the nuns of Sant'Andrea following his patriarchal visitation of 1596. At its most basic level enclosure signified the total separation of nuns from the lay world. Much as reformers such as Priuli liked to reiterate this ideal, they were all too aware that absolute isolation of female religious was an impossibility and that it fell to them to limit the concessions which were unavoidable.

Nunneries were bound to the world by two major chains, one social and the other economic. Their very existence was dependent on the continual influx of young women with their dowries. All nuns started life as members of the laity and during their time spent within the world they naturally became part of a network of familial and neighbourly relationships. True, there was a tendency to admit those girls destined for nunneries at an early age as fiole a spese. But it was still possible for women to have seen rather more of the world before they entered religion: some had experienced at least one affair of the heart before taking the veil; others entered convents in their widowhood.11 It was not easy to obliterate all connections between nuns and the rest of society; economic factors, in any case, ensured their continuance, for if no lay contact with nunneries were allowed, their inmates would simply starve to death. Food, fuel and other essential provisions had to be brought to the convents; certain economic links with the outside world had to be retained to pay for such necessities. Where religious houses owned lands these had to be administered and rents collected. Impoverished communities relied on the ongoing support of nuns' relations as well as other lay donors. Moreover, the considerable productivity that went on within the

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10 ACPV *Vis.past.*, B. 1: 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada.
11 Davidson, *The Venetian Clergy*, p. 27, cites the case of suor Mansueta who entered S. Croce at an early age possibly in penance for a teenage love affair. The same case is discussed by Martin, pp. 207-208. For the case of suor Faustina, who claimed to have been betrothed before entering her first convent, see ASV *PSM*, B. 263: 1555, S. Giovanni Lateran (discussed in detail below, ch. V, pp. 214-19). See also ASV, *PSM*, B. 266: 1620, S. Eufemia di Mazzorbo: this case tells of how Gierolamo Torre was forced to put his sister into the convent to preserve her from the advances of a builder named Lorenzo di Devere. The issue of nuns who were widows is discussed below, pp. 135-36.
nunneries themselves—the so-called 'lavorieri', which may generally be interpreted as sewing—would bring nuns into contact with a number of clients.\textsuperscript{12}

These are just a few of the more obvious ways in which female religious retained links with the laity. Even the toughest of reformers acknowledged that certain contacts with the world were necessary and would have to be accommodated alongside the dogma of enclosure. In Venice, during the period following the Council of Trent, a whole barrage of extremely detailed ordini was levelled at convents in an attempt to regulate the small amount of liberty being conceded to nuns in their external relations. These ordini constitute an important source for the overtly paranoid attitudes of ecclesiastical authorities towards nunneries in the Counter-Reformation period.

Reformers aimed at the physical impenetrability of convent buildings. Patriarch Priuli instructed that a nunnery should be

\begin{quote}
\textit{circondata di muraglie tant'alte, che possi esser sicuro alle quali ne di dentro ne di fuori sia appoggiata cosa per la quale si possa scalare, ne da luochi vicini veder dentro di esso monasterio}.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

High walls had a symbolic as well as a practical force, reminding both insiders and outsiders of the separation of nuns from the taint of society. While a physical breach of enclosure warranted 'censura di escommunicatione', far less definite contact with the laity could threaten the immaculacy of a convent. Guarding against the gaze of external admirers, Bishop Antonio Grimani of Torcello, writing in 1592, ordered that all windows looking on to the street or other public area 'esposti à gli occhi de viandanti' as well as those visible from the private houses of laypeople must be bricked up.\textsuperscript{14} In the particular orders issued to Sant'Andrea di Zirada following the 1596 visitation, the community was reminded that the 'campanile[…]' stia sempre serrata'; in 1566 the provveditori sopra monasteri had investigated the charge that certain nuns had climbed to the top of the bell-tower and had vaunted themselves before the neighbourhood.\textsuperscript{15}

Some access to a nunnery was, of course, necessary, but it was to be kept to a bare minimum. According to Grimani, convents were to have only two doors, one opening onto land and the other onto water, for unloading essential goods to the

\textsuperscript{12} Female monastic industries were sometimes more varied. A petition presented by the silk-workers in 1529, protesting against a forced loan to be levied on their proceeds, referred to the involvement of nunneries in silk production: 'ne taceremo di dirli the se essa parte havesse execution molti Monasterii di monache citadine et altri patiriano grandemente per guardagnar il viver loro' (ASV, \textit{Senato Terra}, Reg. 25, 1529, 26 Oct., fo. 204r-v). The Convertite ran their own printing press, besides pursuing the more familiar female enterprises of spinning and weaving (Pedani, 'Monasteri agostiniane', p. 60).

\textsuperscript{13} ACPV \textit{Vis. past.}, B. 1, 1593, SS. Biagio & Castaldo.

\textsuperscript{14} Grimani, cap. XXI.

\textsuperscript{15} ACPV, \textit{Vis. past.}, B. 1, 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada. ASV, \textit{PSM}, B. 263: 1566, S. Andrea di Zirada: according to one witness, 'le andorno in cima el campaniel che le poteva esser viste da tutte quelle case de S. Rocho fin ai tre ponti'.
monastery. The entrance 'da mare' was only to be used when absolutely unavoidable and deliveries could only take place under the supervision of two of the oldest and most trusted nuns. Grimani went on to give precise instructions as to the strength and quality of these doors:

\[ \text{di buone tavole doppie, et forti, senza fessura o foro per il quale si possa dentro vedere. Habbiano le soglie di pietra viva, et accommodate bene perche non sia buso alcuno.}^{16} \]

The main land door would have the additional feature of an iron grate backed by black cloth, to screen the portinara from view and enable her to respond to callers without opening the door. However, it was hoped that the convent doors would normally be quite redundant since, wherever possible, the ruota or wheel could be used. This was a most versatile device, enabling goods to be passed into the convent from outside without any contact between the nuns and those on the other side of the wall:

\[ \text{Siano benissimo adatte in maniera, che ne stando ne girando, facciano nessuna apertura, nè cagionino pur'una minima fessura, per la quale si possano vedere le monache dentro.}^{17} \]

Within tightly-defined contexts, actual communication with lay folk was sanctioned. For such purposes convents had long incorporated at least one parlatorio, a room adjacent to the enclosed area, separated by a common wall in which was set a grated window. It was in the parlatorio that convent business with the outside world was conducted and it was here that nuns were permitted to meet close relations. Many reformers considered the parlatorio as a perturbingly vulnerable spot in the convent's defences, and the concern of Priuli is evident in his publication in 1591 of Ordini & avvertimenti [...] sopra le visite et clausura. The rigour with which these ordini are formulated to cover all eventualities and to minimize every risk shows Priuli at his most paranoid. Where he was forced to make concessions to 'necessità' he tried to overcome his helplessness by insisting on his personal licence being requested at every stage.

The ordini begin by specifying the male relations permitted to visit nuns: fathers, brothers and immediate uncles. Such visitors could not go directly to the parlatorio but were first required to make their presence known at the ruota. Usually, conversations between nuns and male visitors had to be listened to by a specially appointed nun. But where family business demanded privacy, Priuli conceded that the ascoltatrice, as she was known, should stand out of earshot. It was also the task of the ascoltatrice to control the length of interviews. Moreover, she was charged with

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16 Grimani, cap. XXI; see also ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1593, SS. Biagio & Castaldo.
17 Grimani, cap. XXV.
keeping a list of all male relations allowed to visit nuns—others should seek licence from the Patriarch himself—as well as a log-book of all actual visitors. Women visitors were viewed slightly less suspiciously and even those without familial ties could arrange to talk with nuns without applying for a patriarchal licence. The approval of the rotara still had to be gained, however, and she was not to admit any but 'donne honorate & honeste & per tali da voi conosciute & reputate'.

Use of the parlatorio was, of course, limited to times when nuns were not engaged in services, eating or other communal activities. Nor was visiting allowed on days when communion was celebrated. Reports of feasts and merry-making within parlatorii involving nuns and layfolk were a familiar concern. Indeed, during the first half of the century the parlatorii of the more aristocratic Venetian convents were renowned centres of high sociability. In Patriarch Trevisan's 1564 visitation to San Maffio di Mazzorbo, the majority of nuns interviewed were keen to assert that 'non si manzino piu in parlatorii'. But the vehemence of Priuli's ordine against parties in the parlatorio suggest that the problem continued in some convents.

Bishop Grimani of Torcello, whose diocese included nunneries situated on remote lagoon islands, was forced to concede that there might be instances when nuns' families had to take a meal in the parlatorio before heading back to Venice or the terraferma. In such cases, there was to be no singing or dancing and visitors were to provide their own food, so as not to burden the community. Grimani also accepted that relations of nuns could be stranded overnight if the weather conditions prevented them from travelling home by boat and that this was a 'legitima causa' for them to stay in the forestaria or guest-house. The forestaria was also used by confessor, fattori (managing the nuns' business interests) and others working for the convent when necessary. Predictably, Grimani provided a whole list of regulations regarding its construction and purposes, arguing that 'essendo la Forestaria parte del Monastero; nella sua buona custodia ancora si concerne l'osservanza della clausura'. Hence, the building could not have any windows, however small, overlooking the monastery; the persons permitted to stay there were to be closely controlled; as with the parlatorio it should not become a venue for party-making; a ruota connecting forestaria and enclosure enabled food to be

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18 L. Priuli, Ordini 1-7.
19 Ibid., Ordine 10.
20 For example, in 1509, a group of young patricians were charged with dancing the night away at La Celestia: Paschini, p. 44.
21 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1564, S. Maffio di Mazzorbo.
22 L. Priuli, Ordine 13: 'Vi guardarette, che nelle Parlatorii non s'amettano mascare, ne suoni, nè meno si mangi: e se alcuno fosse tanto insolente, che mascarato, ò in altra maniera comparisse nelle Parlatorii, mentre le Monache sono visitate da i loro parenti, commetterete, che alla prima visita le Monache si ritirino delle grade, serrato subito le finestre de' parlatorii, & anco le porte se sarà possibile: dandoci quanto prima notizia dell'insolenza che sarà seguita, & delle persone, che fussero state conosciute, accioche possiamo opportunamente provedere'. See chapter IV for development of this theme.
23 Grimani, cap. XXIII.
passed through thus preventing any more direct contact between nuns and their guests.\textsuperscript{24}

In a very small number of cases, lay presence within the enclosure itself was permitted. It was reluctantly accepted even by the most zealous of reformers that sick nuns should be allowed to see doctors. As laymen, whose very profession brought them into close bodily contact with their patients it is no surprise that they were viewed with a high level of suspicion, prompting tight procedural guidelines to be laid down. Doctors employed by nunneries were to be of good name, approved life and over forty years old. They were to be licensed by the Bishop and were to swear an oath of obedience to his orders. Their visits were discouraged and they were only supposed to enter the convent 'quando l'urgente necessità il ricerca, et non per ogni leggiera cagione'. If the nun were capable of coming to the grate then this was preferable; even if the patient were too sick to move, then other nuns might discuss her case in the parlatorio with the doctor and seek advice which they could then implement themselves. However, if there were genuinely no alternative then the bell should be rung warning the nuns of the doctor's entry so that they might retreat into their cells. Two old and discreet nuns should accompany the doctor to the sick-bed, veiled from top to toe in black.\textsuperscript{25}

While doctors were occasionally called upon to see to the physical needs of nuns, the internal fabric of the monastery also sometimes demanded the skilled attention of laymen. It was conceded that 'maestri di Legnami' and 'muratori' might be required within the enclosure, although episcopal or patriarchal licence should be obtained. Bishop Grimani also provided an oath to be taken by workmen.\textsuperscript{26} As will be shown in the latter part of this chapter, contemporary trials give ample evidence for casual employees failing to apply for the necessary permission before embarking on what they saw as perfectly innocuous tasks.

Some taste has been given of the whole paraphernalia of devices set in place to ensure the separation of female religious from the rest of society. Physical barriers were to be backed up by vigilance -- hence the many posts reserved for 'vecchie' and 'discrete' in supervising doors, keys, and the comings and goings of outsiders; in turn, these were to be supported by the authority of the Church itself, armed with licences, oaths and punishments. But the efforts to keep nuns apart from the laity did not imply only physical separation. Female religious were to be protected from the contamination of worldly emotions. 'Non è cosa che più custodisca in innocenza lo stato virginale che la perpetua clausura', exhorted Grimani.\textsuperscript{27} Surely significant in this context is the

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., cap. XXVI.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., cap. XXXI.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., cap. XXXIII.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., cap. XXI.
ordine made to Santi Biagio e Castaldo following the Priuli visitation that 'Non si
faccino sponsalitii in chiesa ne bategian. Ne si contrazino matrimoni alli parlatorii'.
The affective ties that competed with devotion to religious life were to be severed
wherever possible; reminders of the earthly life were to be kept at bay.

Within the institutional ideal envisaged by post-Tridentine reformers like Priuli
and Grimani there was no room for personal relationships of any kind. In Grimani's
musings on the vow of chastity, he ended up by condemning affection itself:

L'occasione dunque et la radice, onde l'esperienza c'insegna
che nascono tutte i disordini et straordinario, che si porta dall'una sorella all'altra, od dalla
monaca et persona secolare dell'uno et l'altro sesso.

The absolute insistence on clausura and the zealous attentions paid to implementing it
sought to place nuns in a vacuum free from human relations. The compensatory role
offered to female religious was that of Christ's brides, providing a suitable outlet for
their unspent emotions. But many nuns were not satisfied by their lot and sought
renewed contact with the world or, at least, the opportunities for personal relationships
which were permitted within lay society. Thus the practical exigencies of religious
communities combined with the emotional needs of nuns to undermine the ideal of
enclosure. The convent walls had gaps in them, and female religious exploited these
gaps to develop relationships with those living in the world.

On the Edge of Enclosure

We have seen how the separation of nuns from the laity was not as complete as some
enclosure zealots would have wished. There existed scope for legitimate contact
between religious and lay people, albeit tightly defined. Limited access to the nunnery
was allowed to certain individuals who came on business or had family connections;
non-professed members of the community, such as converse and fiole a spese held
ambivalent status in relation to enclosure. Furthermore, the structure of the monastery
itself incorporated both enclosed and unenclosed areas where nuns and lay folk were
separated only by a grate or a ruota. When reading the records of the criminal trials
conducted by the provveditori sopra monasteri, one is immediately struck by the vast
network of lay men and women who were actively in contact with communities of
female religious. Frequently, they were the objects of the trials, having—in the view of
the magistracy—outstepped the permissible limits of such contact. But they also appear
as witnesses and, indeed, as informers. This section explores the ambiguities and
problems that arose from these semi-tolerated gaps in the ideal of enclosure. It first

28 ACPV Vis. past., B. 1, 1593, SS. Biagio & Castaldo.
29 Grimani, cap. XLV.
addresses the issue of women who lived within the convent walls but whose ambivalent status threatened the integrity of enclosure. Secondly, it considers the implications of those everyday interactions between nuns and the laity which ran contrary to the spirit of the reforms.

One of the most conspicuous compromises of enclosure was embodied in the concept of *converse da fuori*, who were given licence to leave the convent in order to carry out business on behalf of their community. In constructing the new measures regarding the enclosure of nunneries, Pius V had made this concession grudgingly, on condition that henceforth *converse* were not allowed to be professed. This principle was adopted by the Venetian prelates. Grimani issued the following instruction:

> Le converse tutte non si amettino à fare la professione et quelle converse che fussero professe sapiano di essere obligeate à servare clausura come le monache, però non escano mai per qual si voglia occasione dal Monastero. Quelle, che non sono professe, che per necessità di cercare, o per altri necessarii servitii sono mandate a Venetia o per le contrade, siano vecchie, et non manco di quaranta anni.

Referring specifically to Pius V's bull *Circa Pastoralis* of 1566, Patriarch Priuli wrote to the nuns of Sant'Andrea di Zirada in 1596, instructing them:

> farete elettione di quattro di dette converse che passino 40 anni et che per altre conditioni siano delle piu discrete del monastero purche non siano professe dopo il Concilio.

Priuli's visitations testify to the conscientious enforcement of this rule. The patriarchal vicar regularly took note of the names of the four *converse* who were licensed to serve the convent's interests in the outside world.

Yet despite the attentive monitoring of *converse*, this group of nuns consistently appears in the visitation records as a source of disruption and disorder. The patriarchal visitors were evidently sceptical about the benefits of *converse* engaging in traditional mendicant activities. Following their visitation of Sant'Alvise in 1595, they observed dismissively: 'Vanno le dette converse per Venetia cercando il pane da certe case, ma senza necessità, con perdita di tempo, e poco guadagno'. More worrying was the freedom of *converse da fuori* to travel around the *terraferma*. For example, at San Sepolcro in 1595, the patriarchal visitors noted

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30 See note 6 above.  
31 Grimani, cap. XII.  
32 ACPV, *Vis. past.*, B. 1, 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada.  
33 ACPV, *Vis. past.*, B. 3, 1595, S. Alvise, fo. 426r.
Che ogn'anno si mandano fuori due converse in cerca à Porto Gruaro, due in Paduana verso Este, e talvolta in Trivisana à un luoco del monasterio detto Rovese per sunar alcune entrade.\textsuperscript{34}

This degree of freedom of movement made \textit{converse} a troublesome quantity, even if they remained technically within the rules. Unsurprisingly, they were inclined to abuse their liberty. At Corpus Domini in 1595, it was reported that ‘Le converse di fuori vanno alla villa, et in altri luochi dove le piace con scandalo’.\textsuperscript{35} The following complaints were made by the visitors of Santa Maria Maggiore:

\begin{quote}
Che le converse vivono con troppo libertà andando fuori su le fiere et feste [...] Che le converse alcuna volta fare voti al Christo di Poveggeia et alla Madonna di Chioggia per andar à spasso, e queste sono Suor Micchiela, Suor Giustina, Suor Lodovica, Suor Chiara, le quali sono le più prosontuose. Che le 4 sopradette vanno à mangiar fuor monasterio in casa di loro parenti che sogliono andar in cerca fuor della terra, cioè à Udene, à Porto, in che suol apportar qualche disordine. Che le converse sono troppi, e però bisogneria star senza vestirne per qualche tempo.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

Life for these \textit{converse} was portrayed as being one long holiday.

\textit{Converse} who crossed the convent walls smudged the boundaries of enclosure. The problem was not simply that these unprotected women subjected themselves to the dangers and temptations of the world, but that they brought something of that corrupt world back into the cloister with them. For the same reason, the authorities were uneasy about lay women staying within the convent as paying guests, although in the past this had been viewed as a pious and honourable arrangement.\textsuperscript{37} Convents did continue to provide a refuge for women who were in special need or trouble. In 1555, one Donna Andriana testified that she had once taken up temporary residence in the convent of San Giovanni Lateran, while her husband was standing trial 'per esser più propinquia al palazzo dove havea d'andar per causa del testimonio del quondam mio marito'.\textsuperscript{38} Women who were victims of marital violence, and who initiated proceedings for separation in the patriarchal court, commonly retreated to one of the nunneries for

\textsuperscript{34} ACPV, \textit{Vis. past.}, B. 3, 1595, S. Sepolcro, fo. 397r.
\textsuperscript{35} ACPV, \textit{Vis. past.}, B. 3, 1595, Corpus Domini, fo. 559r.
\textsuperscript{36} ACPV, \textit{Vis. past.}, B. 3, 1594, S. Maria Maggiore, fos 282v-283r.
\textsuperscript{37} Lowe describes the popularity of this practice in Florence in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, p. 219.
\textsuperscript{38} ASV, \textit{PSM}, B. 263, 1555, S. Giovanni Lateran. The nature of the husband's trial is not specified here. Presumably, the 'palazzo' referred to was the ducal palace.
the duration of the ecclesiastical investigation.\textsuperscript{39} The Venetian temporal authorities pursued an ambivalent policy over the use of female religious houses as refuges for married women. In February 1622, the Council of Ten issued a decree about the matter. The preamble noted

\begin{quote}
che in monasterii di monache siano sotto pretesto di breve tempo et per urgenti cause ricevute donne maritade seben con ottimo fine d'assicurare l'onestà loro per sottrarle da imminenti pericoli, di sopir di scandalì, e di far che si accomodino in buona maniera le differenze, e discordie con li loro Mariti, ò con altri Parenti, et s'interessati.
\end{quote}

It went on to resolve

\begin{quote}
che nell'avvenire non si possa più con semplici Ordini delli Capi di questo Consilio far ricever Donne Maritate [...] in alcun Monastero di Monache, se non vi sarà aggiunta anco la licenza di questo Consilio che non possa esser data à chi si voglia se non con Parte presa con li 3/4 almeno delle ballotte di esso Consilio.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

Although the Council of Ten evidently wished to retain the function of convents as places in which unprotected women could be accommodated, it also saw the potential dangers of mixing lay and religious women and sought to regulate the arrangements ever more closely.

While the temporary admission of married women 'a spese' within the convent required special permission, the acceptance of fiole a spese or educande was a standard practice. Educande were supposed to observe all the rigours of enclosure 'come osservano le monache'. Patriarch Priuli stressed that if a girl stepped outside the convent on no account was she allowed back in, unless she intended to become a nun.\textsuperscript{41} But even while they stayed securely within the convent walls, these girls constituted a worldly element within the religious community. Following the visitation of Santa Marta in 1594, it was reported

\begin{quote}
39 Ferraro, p. 498. She cites two cases: Pasquetta Peregrini, in 1584, stayed at S. Maffio di Murano, and subsequently at S. Andrea di Zirada, p. 498; Faustina Gradaineci retreated to the convent of S. Anna in 1637, p. 508.
40 ASV, Comp. Leggi, B. 288, fo. 577, 1621, 15 Feb. [m.v.]. See ASV, PSM, B. 268, 16-42, S. Rocco e S. Margherita, for a document which alludes to Signora Contessa Sacrati being placed in the convent by order of the Capi dei Dieci while her husband undertook 'certa carica militare'.
41 BMC, Cod. Cic: 2570, pp. 180-82; 1592, 2 Nov.: 'Ordini per le figliuole a spese'. Et doppo entrate se usciranno una volta, non possano esser più ricevute, ne in quello, ne in altro Monastero, se non per occasione di Monacare et con nostra licentia in scritto'. See also, Grimani, cap. XIII: 'Ricevute, che saranno, debbano esse figliuole circa le grade, porte, parlatorii servare le presenti nostre constitutioni, et circa la clausura, et sue parti, come osservano le monache. Nessuna possi uscire del Monastero, per ritornarvi, se non per urgentissima causa d'infermità, o altra simile da essere approvata da noi'.
\end{quote}
The presence of lay girls aged between seven and twenty-five in the nunnery was not always conducive to discipline. They had taken no vows and many of them were destined for an earthly marriage.\textsuperscript{43} It was significant that the ecclesiastical authorities were particularly concerned to keep \textit{fiole} apart from nuns once their betrothal had taken place. The following \textit{ordine} was sent to San Servolo in 1610:

\begin{quote}
Le figliole che saranno per tempo à spese fatte che sono novizze siano mandate à casa loro, et non si permetta, che stiano in Monasterio vestite da maritate, nè li mariti le venghino à visitare con scandalo alle finestre il qual ordine teniamo che sia osservato, et quanto prima si maridi à casa la Michiela novizza novamente fata et se li parenti loro non mandaranno à tuor quella fiola che sarà maritata l'Abbadessa la debba metter in gondola et maridarla à casa dei parenti sotto gravi pene ad arbitrio di S S. Illustrissima.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

Although the Venetian authorities tried to control the practice of accepting 'putte à spese' within the nunneries, they did not even attempt to prevent it. Indeed the economic importance of \textit{educande} for providing a steady income was well understood.\textsuperscript{45} Once again, practical considerations allowed a convention to persist which ran contrary to the principle of enclosure, and which gave nuns scope for developing relationships with women who would one day be living in the world.

Convents accommodated a range of women of varying status. One final category deserves a mention and that is widows who became nuns. As sexually-experienced women, who had lived within the world, these represented almost a mirror image of those chaste young \textit{figliuole a spese} who were destined for marriage. A work written by Benedetto Buommattei, published in Venice in 1622, and entitled \textit{Modo di conseccar le vergini, secondo l'uso del Pontifical Romano}, provides an extensive discussion of the alternative rituals available to widows. Buommattei argued that the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} ACPV, \textit{Vis. past.}, B. 3, 1594, S. Marta, fo. 184v.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Hunecke has pointed to the proliferation of \textit{educande} in Venetian convents during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He argues that, by the eighteenth century, it was standard for noble girls to live in convents as \textit{educande} prior to their marriage, pp. 457-59. Grendler comments on the very basic education offered to \textit{educande} and affirms that they could be a disruptive presence in the nunnery. On the other hand, he suggests that these girls were valued by the nuns for their 'youthful joy and energy', pp. 96-100.
\item \textsuperscript{44} ACPV, \textit{Vis. past.}, B. 5, 1610, S. Servolo.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Grimani, cap. XIII: 'Non è alieno dalli negotii temporali del Monastero, il trattato del pigliare figliuole à spese'.
\end{itemize}
core of the consecration ceremony consisted of the virgin marrying Christ, and that this was not appropriate for a woman who had already taken an earthly husband. Instead, widows (or other non-virginal nuns) were eligible for a ceremony of conversione or continenza. The service followed the same pattern, with the words 'virgines' and 'virginitatis' being replaced by 'sanctimoniales' and 'castitatis'.

The nature of Buommattei’s comments obviously suggests that widows were not uncommon among religious communities of the early seventeenth century. And yet their absence from the extensive and meticulous regulations produced by the Venetian prelacy is most noticeable. Nor are nuns specifically referred to as 'vedove' in the lists of nuns which sometimes form part of the patriarchal visitation reports. In fact, research for this thesis has uncovered only one definite reference to a nun of widow status, and this case dates from the very beginning of the period under study.

There were two probable factors which caused a decrease in the number of widows becoming nuns. Firstly, the socio-economic factors which favoured monacazione as an alternative to marriage discouraged monacazione as a step for widows. Having already made the initial outlay of a marital dowry, the widow's family would be likely to oppose the payment of a non-refundable conventual dowry. (This was clearly a bad investment, especially if the widow was advanced in years). Secondly, most patrician widows enjoyed viable and more attractive alternatives. Whereas, in previous ages, the convent might have appealed as a comfortable place of retirement, in the climate of the Counter-Reformation, it offered little to any but the most devout widow. These interpretations are necessarily speculative. The evidence is all of a negative and rather unsatisfactory character. Yet it would seem as though, in Venice, the phenomenon of the widowed nun—which sat uneasily within the ideology of enclosure—had become nearly extinct by a natural process of evolution.

Repetedly cropping up throughout the records is that rather amorphous class of lay people who purveyed 'servitii' to female convents. That a small number of women

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46 Buommattei, pp. 4-5.
47 By comparison, 16 out of 48 nuns named in a fifteenth-century necrology of Corpus Domini were widows, eds Casella and Pozzi, pp. 295-330.
48 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1555. S. Giovanni Lateran. Following the escape of suor Faustina from the convent, it was reported that 'la portonera che e donna conversa et ha havuto marito tiene che suor Faustina sia gravida'. The remark is revealing of the worldly knowledge that a widow might be expected to have had.
should be employed to do the nunnery's shopping was accepted. Men were also sometimes necessary for carrying heavy loads and, of course, boatmen were employed for transporting goods by water. The services they supplied were essential and yet their intermittent presence at convents gave both temporal and ecclesiastical authorities endless cause for concern. For, as relationships developed between nuns and their employees, the gulf between the cloister and the outside community narrowed.

At its most malevolent, contact with the laity might undermine the chastity of Christ's brides. In 1555 at San Giovanni Lateran, 'Francesco dalle crosette' was brought before the provveditori charged with having committed 'sacrilegio' with one suor Faustina, and with helping her to escape. Francesco was known to the convent as the nephew of the prioress and was employed to fulfil a variety of tasks as need demanded. These included carrying water and stones (for building?) as well as helping nuns to make bread inside the enclosure. In the course of his depositions to the provveditori he freely admitted the frequency of his visits: 'andava X volte a'1 di quando le me chiamavano per suoi bisogni'.50 Francesco made reference to himself as 'figliuol de'l monastier' and it is easy to perceive how he grew intimate with Faustina. Suor Zuana di Thomasi testified,

Not only does this case provide evidence of the growing friendship between nun and male employee. It also exemplifies the process whereby an employee of the convent could end up doing services for particular nuns. Such a practice clearly called into question the conventual emphasis on 'vivere in commune'. So eroded was the communal spirit in Spirito Santo, according to records from a 1562 case, that the nuns refused to do the washing of suor Chrestina on account of her infected leg. Consequently, she employed Pasqua—formerly the domestic servant of Chrestina's own family—to take away her dirty clothes. Pasqua's deposition stated

> Io non andava solum quando la mi mandava a chiamar che la mi dava li soi drappi perché l'haveva stomego a lavare li soi drappi perché l'haveva una fontanella in una gamba dicens sempre che io ghe lavava li drappi la mi pagava.52

50 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1555, S. Giovanni Lateran, fo. 12r.
51 Ibid., fo. 7r.
52 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1561 [m.v.], Spirito Santo.
Paying a personal servant to do personal services was surely hard to reconcile with the monastic vow of poverty and the renunciation of property.

One case which merits particular attention in the present context is documented in two trials dating from 1567 to 1568. At the convent of Sant'Andrea di Zirada, during the period, the involvement of nuns with lay people was the root of various disciplinary lapses being investigated by the provveditori.\textsuperscript{53} Financial mismanagement, illicit relationships, disobedience and division at the convent all stemmed from the hovering presence of an inflated circle of lay contacts. Prolonged and damaging relationships were nurtured on the periphery of clausura. Of those lay people who frequented the convent there were, to begin with, the regular employees of the community. Zorzi the boatman claimed in his deposition:

\begin{quote}
faccio tutti quelli servitii che le muneghe me fa far, et vado de fuora a scuoder quando le me manda [...] vado a spender per el monasterio, et anco per el capellano.
\end{quote}

Hieronimo, 'cestaruol', explained that he had done fewer jobs for the convent since the employment of Zorzi but was still required for carrying certain goods:

\begin{quote}
servo anco adesso al monasterio al formento, alla farina, alle legne et à quel che fa bisogno, et secondo che me vien ordinato.
\end{quote}

Seemingly less legitimate were those women employed on a more casual basis, often to do particular services for individual nuns. Of one 'Zuana che si chiama la gagiarda' it was reported that

\begin{quote}
ella tiene le galine da otto o diese de madonna S. Gabriela a casa sua, et essa madonna S. Gabriela [...] la sustenta de pan et de vin et di ogni altra cosa accio la ge nutrita queste galine.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

This Zuana was one of a group of women, described disparagingly by deponents as 'petegole', who lived 'a spalle del monestier'. These gossips who took food from the convent constituted a very real threat both to the dignity and the prosperity of the convent.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{53} ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1566 [m.v.], S. Andrea di Zirada.
\textsuperscript{54} Nuns at Sant'Andrea evidently persisted in keeping chickens on a private basis. Following the 1596 visitation of the convent, Priuli instructed: 'Si levino tutti li poleari particolari in termine d'otto giorni et si mettano le galline in luoco commune' (ACPV Vis. past. B. 1, 1596, S. Andrea di Zirada).
\textsuperscript{55} The first witness, Zorzi the boatman, provides a list of the others in Zuana's category: 'Vi è anco una dona Anzola Brusa sartora, che anco ella praticca in monasterio in congregation col suor Perpetua Viatro, et essa anco vive a spalle del monastier. Et ancora vien una dona Nicolosa mogier de S. Rado
Yet more damaging to Sant'Andrea was the presence of a certain Felicità, the mistresse of the confessor. Not only did Felicità live at the confessor's home and at the convent's expense; her eight children were also provided for, and her daughter, Tesaura, was employed at the hospital for widows which was attached to the nunnery. The testimonies of the hospital inmates reveal the resentment they felt towards Felicità and the others involved in depleting the community's resources, whom they perceived as being the cause of their own material deprivation: 'se muor da fame, per el mal governo' complained one widow.

Clearly a liability was the convent's debauched and spendthrift confessor, who encouraged Felicità and her family in parasitic extravagance. But the problem was exacerbated out of all proportion by the welcome afforded to Felicità, 'la gagiarda' and various other hangers-on by certain of the nuns themselves. Consistently identified by witnesses as suor Anna Giustiniana, suor Gabriela Salamon, suor Elena Capello, suor Beatrice Moro and the conversa suor Anfrosina, these nuns formed an autonomous enclave within the community of Sant'Andrea:

quelle che tende alla porta [...] sempre stano la, ne mai vano in choro, ne in refettorio insieme con le altre, ne dano obedientia alcuna a madonna la priora.

Significantly, these disobedient nuns chose to situate themselves at the very edge of enclosure where contact with the world was at its freest. From this position, they were able to send lay people out on errands or with messages. Zorzi, the boatman, reported how he was once employed by suor Beatrice to deliver flour to a sister of hers (hidden among dirty washing being taken from the monastery):

suor Beatrice Moro mi fecce barecchiar la barca et mi mette in barca, et fecce portar via tre corbe da drappi con drappi sporchi, et sotto quelli drappi per ogni corba vi era un sacheto de farina [...] et le descargaremos a S. Catherina à casa de una sorella di essa Madonna S. Beatrice.

Nuns demonstrating their largesse with the resources of the convent was a disturbingly frequent practice—perhaps signifying a wish on the part of female religious to overcome

maragon anco ella a spalle del monastier vien sera, et mattina a tuor el suo viver del monastier, et altre. Una zotta, che sta a S. Polo che vien da suor Helena a tuor el suo viver qualche volta, et anco suo marido, che non so el suo nome, vi è anco una Pasqua non so el sora nome che sta al ponte de S. Chiara, qual vien a far servizi a S. Polonia, et porta via robba del monstier anco essa. Et una dona Dona, che sta a S. Chiara, fa anco essa servizi a S. Justina Colaredo, et a S. [?] et porta via della robbia, si che de queste el ghe ne è una bona moltitudine'.

56 In her study of Neapolitan convents, Russo has also emphasised that disciplinary transgressions often occurred literally on the edge of enclosure. At the convent of S. Maria Donnaregina several illicit banquets were reported to have taken place involving nuns and lay folk; on one such occasion, the table was described as having been positioned "nel mezzo della porta della clausura in modo che la metà di essa stava dentro la clausura e l'altra metà fuori", p. 103.
their own denial of personal property which was inherent in the vow of poverty. While Beatrice sent a gift of flour to her sister, the greatest losses were those goods which leaked out to neighbouring lay women, either as presents or in payment for their services. Helena, a witness from the hospital, testified that 'vedemo a portar fuora cesti, sachi per quelle so femene, per quelle so petegole et certi della villa che porta golani [=galline?] et se ge de pan, semolei, farina et altro.'

Besides fulfilling the occasional services for the nuns, these women, aptly referred to here as 'petegole', had another important commodity to offer those who lived within the enclosure of Sant'Andrea—gossip. The ecclesiastical authorities were keenly aware of the undesirability of allowing communities of female religious to stay in touch with the world outside. On the one hand, where nunneries had experienced disciplinary lapses, it was considered safer to suppress the information rather than to expose communities to public scandal. Hence Patriarch Trevisan urged 'che non si possi piu ne dir ne scriver li despetti et fatti delle monache et monastero con seculari'.

On the other hand, it was imperative that nuns should not be subjected to the taint of worldly gossip—a risk strongly associated with the employment of lay women.

Non potendo dare se non danno, et poca riputatione alli monasteri, la prattica di molte feminette, che conversano continuamente alle porte, et fenestre, per servitio delle monache, desideriamo di levarle, o almeno di ridurle à minor numero.

At Sant'Andrea, gossip-mongering had become a full-time pursuit for those nuns who spent their days sitting at the open gates of the convent. Their prime informant was the troublesome Felicità, whose reports were enriched by leaked intelligences from the confessional. As Maria, a widow from the hospital, related:

l'è sta continuamente et li fu anco hieri, et porta parole su et zozo, che la sta le belle hore in celleta à rasonar con quelle muneghe che ho ditto et toleva ciancie de qua, et le portava de là et me par, che la reporta le cose della confession et a ogni confessiva se feva un scandolo perche la referiva alle muneghe quel che se havea confessa.

Reading this case one gets the impression of a group of uncommitted and, probably, vocationless nuns, building up a dependence on the titillating entertainments of Felicità. Not only did she bring them news of the world, and the confessional secrets of their

57 ACPV Vis. past., B. 2, (Trevisan visitation to Corpus Domini, 1560, fo. 1r). Note also, ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1567, S. Sepolcro, fo. 54r; following the removal of abbess Michaela Beltrame from office, Michaela's sister was imprisoned in her cell 'perche l'andava facendo intender ogni cosa à seculari'.

58 Grimani, cap. LXXX.

59 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1566 [m.v.], S. Andrea di Zirada.
fellow sisters, but she also supplied them with the amusement of her own flirtatious manner. Zorzi the boatman testified,

vedo quella Felicità andar dentro della porta, sentarse su quelli banchi in compagnia con queste Reverendissime monache Madonna Suor Gabriela et delle altre, Et subito che le sono la vedo darse la man una con l'altra basarse et Felicita metter la man in sen a Madonna Suor Gabriela et basarse una parte et l'altra et dir questa brazzi che pecca.

Other witnesses confirmed these reports and, in this context, the suggestion that Felicità sometimes stayed several hours 'in celleta' must have perturbed the provveditori dealing with the case. In return for material support, Felicità and the other women could trade snippets from the world, whether verbal (gossip) or actual (flirtation). 60 The transaction is clearly articulated by the previously cited Donna Maria: 'queste porta via [robbia] et porta ciancie su et zozo'.

The exchange of food for fun and friendship could, of course, also take place between nuns and male contacts from the lay world. At San Iseppo in 1571, a trial brought to light that the confessor's brother, Gasparo, was a frequent visitor at the parlatorio and a particular friend of the prioress and her niece. 61 Both the confessor and Gasparo were charged with organising festive japes at the convent during carnival:

Anchora di piu un giorno di carneval [...] essendo esso confessor in monasterio con ditto suo fratello et sonavano di manicordo et le muneghe ballavano stravestide in presentia loro.

Called on to justify the presence of Gasparo in the convent most of the nuns claimed that he had only ever entered to help carry heavy loads. Gasparo's behaviour incurred him a ban from the convent, but the nuns appear to have felt so indulgently towards their lay friend that they secured him a home in a nearby convent property:

esse moneghe ghe hano dato una sua casa, dove al presente stancia [...] la qual casa è a rente del monasterio, et poi per li suoi balchoni varda il monasterio dentro et alla giornata per il ditto monasterio li vien mandato il viver per le moneghe converse, et per il spendador del detto monasterio.

Despite the ban imposed on Gasparo, he was able to keep in contact with the nuns of San Iseppo and continue to enjoy their favour. According to the convent's spenditor, Gasparo had only to send word to the nuns that 'l'haveva alcuni giovani in casa' and

60 Note also ASV, PSM, B. 264, 1612, Spirito Santo: Malipiera Malipiero, who frequented the parlatorio, was accused of kissing nuns and lending them clothes and jewellery during carnival.
61 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1570 [m.v.], S. Iseppo.
they would provide the required 'zuccha de vin bianco'. Regularly, the spenditor was instructed by the prioress or her niece to take round 'salate, alcuna bozzolai, frute et altre cosette' to the home of Gasparo. No wonder the authorities which presided over the administration of female monasteries were to grow impatient with that 'notabilissimo danno' resulting from the practice of 'dare fuori robba'.

Policing the Boundaries

In November 1621, Zuanne de Romiso Trentin was sentenced by the provveditori sopra monasteri to two months' imprisonment 'per esser inscientemente entrato in un horto d'un monastero di monache fuori di questa Citta per magnar frutti'. The convent in question was San Bernardo di Murano, and in his defence Zuane explained how he had entered the nunnery garden quite by accident. Apparently, the accused had been out in a boat with two friends, also Trentini, 'drio la riva da Muran' and one of them, Piero dalla Rasega, had claimed to know of a nearby orchard 'dove vi erano de i fighi, e de i pomi ingranadi'. Piero led them to the place and Zuane--having arrived from the country only a fortnight before--followed, with no idea where they were. Once among the fruit-trees, the men set about satisfying their hunger, though as Zuane ruefully commented, the fruit was of poor quality: 'et magnai solamente tre fighi e moro che non erano ne anco boni, non vi erano ne pomi ingranadi ne altro, et questo feci per grandissimo fame'. Zuane insisted that he never would have entered the garden had he known that it belonged to a convent, and since he was a stranger to Venice, the plea of ignorance appears plausible to us; yet the provveditori insisted on exerting their powers to imprison the perpetrator of this most minor crime. This final section questions the rationale behind this inflexible judicial approach, so frequently in evidence when cases of breached enclosure came before the Venetian authorities.

Members of the laity who frequented female convents, or nuns who were in contact with outsiders and even ventured beyond clausura, often claimed to have been acting quite innocently. The cynicism of prelates like Priuli and Grimani appears at times to be exaggerated. Not all contacts with the lay world needed to be treated as pernicious. Indeed, such links could breed piety. When, for example, a weaver who also supplied services to Santa Maria Maggiore was asked by the provveditori in 1565 'perche perdon tempo da lavorar 1 vostra mestier et attender à quelle cosi', he replied 'qualche volta quel che faccio è per carità et devotion che ho à quel luogo beneditto all'honor di dio'. In return for his labours his reward was modest: 'qualche pignata di panna, qualche pezzo di pan in menestra, anche aggiua'.

62 Grimani, cap. XLIII.
63 ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1621, S. Bernardo di Murano.
64 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1565, S. Maria Maggiore.
Yet, as the post-Tridentine obsession with *clausura* developed, even the most innocuous infringement of the regulations incurred rigorous investigation. During the years 1611-1612, the *provveditori* dealt with four cases of builders or other workmen entering female convents without the appropriate licence issued by the magistracy. All claimed total ignorance as to how they had transgressed the law. Maestro Battista freely admitted to having worked at Sant'Anna, introducing a dividing wall to make two cells out of one room and—on a previous occasion—repairing the convent roof. Unaware of the need for a licence from the office of the *provveditori*, he confidently asserted 'mi ho licentia, ch la Abbaddessa me l'ha mostrata'.

In April 1611, Zuane da Rivoltela was summoned before the magistracy on a similar charge of entering a convent without the requisite licence. Showing a sensitivity to the regulations concerning enclosure, he stressed that he had been employed to work only on the exterior of the convent and that the nuns employed a certain Maestro Giacomo for any jobs within the enclosed area. However, he had been required to enter the convent in order to take out wood and other building materials, and for this purpose 'madonna [abbadessa] si fece far la licentia per mi'. Chided for acting solely on the word of the abbess without knowing who had authorized the licence she presented to him, Zuane excused himself, saying

> son entrato quelle due sole volte in quel monestier, credendo che la polizza fosse bona: per che mi non so lezer, ne scriver.

Illiteracy may have been a perennial excuse for those charged with contravening the law, but on this occasion, the builder's ignorance sounds perfectly feasible.

Zuane Radichio, stonemason, was tried by the magistracy in May 1612. He had been employed to construct a staircase leading to the organ and to carry out work on the High Altar of the convent church of San Girolamo. These tasks had entailed conversations with several nuns including the abbess but witnesses attested that his meetings with the nuns had been held openly and were of a purely professional nature. Zuane was able to present the *provveditori* with a licence from the Patriarch, who reiterated the obligation to apply for permission from the magistracy itself.

It is evident that the *Magistrato sopra i monasteri* had developed a somewhat petty attitude towards defending the enclosure regulations. In none of the three cases examined above were any aspersions cast upon the moral conduct of the workmen. All

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65 *ASV, PSM*, B. 264, 1611, S. Anna. There is some uncertainty as to the date of this case. The *fascicolo* is labelled 1611. So are the first three documents: a denunciation marked 'Adi 2 April, 1611'; the order for Battista's arrest marked 'A 11 ditto'; notice of his detention 'A 12 ditto'. Then follows the interrogation of the builder which is headed '1612 à 13 di Aprile'. It seems unlikely that the interrogation should have been delayed by a year and one day. Presumably, this should read 1611.

66 *ASV, PSM*, B. 264: 1611, S. Caterina. The *fascicolo* is incorrectly labelled 'Contra Francesco Rivoltela'. The name of the accused is, in fact, Zuane [da] Rivoltela.

67 *ASV, PSM*, B. 264, 1612, S. Girolamo.
believed they were being legitimately employed to carry out standard jobs. As Zuane da Rivoltela remarked drily: ‘mi non saveva altro che quello che mi ha detto essa Abbaddessa non ghe saria entrà per 10 ducati’. But the innocence of one builder, Battista, in a case of April 1612, carries a particular irony. For Battista was employed by the convent of Ogni Santi to build a wall securing the parlatorio, in accordance with the patriarch’s orders for tighter enclosure:

\[
\text{ho serato de muro un parlatorio che era de toler da 10 ò 12 passa de muro che'l patriarca fece serar.}\]

Thus, enclosure was technically undermined as a result of one community’s concern to implement the separation from the world which reformers called for.

As the intermittent campaign to enforce clausura gained momentum, the reformers developed an increasing preoccupation with the areas immediately outside enclosure. When it came to the attention of the provveditori in 1554 that ‘forestieri che venivano da Venetia’ were going to Malamocco in order to congregate in the ‘calesella del monasterio’, the concern of the magistracy was primarily motivated by the ‘mala fama’ of the nuns and the rumour that ‘sono putane’. Witnesses reported that the men spoke familiarly with the nuns and it was fair to conclude that the virtue of the community was in jeopardy. Also suspicious was the group of musicians charged with playing a ‘matinada’ in a boat outside La Celestia in 1569.

But by the early seventeenth century it seems that any lay people caught loitering outside a female convent, regardless of their intent, would be worthy of an investigation by the provveditori. In April 1611, two Jews who had arranged to meet a business colleague ‘che vegnisse con nu a veder certi tapedi, e razzi de un mercante de Lana’ took the traghetto to Santa Croce. Awaiting the arrival of their friend’s gondola, they sought shade and sat down ‘sulla riva pubblica per mezo la porta delle muneghe del Corpus Domini’. Shortly afterwards the convent door opened and a carpenter deposited his tools outside, returning within the enclosure and leaving the door temporarily open. Two nuns appeared at the door—possibly converse—and asked the men if they were Venetian. No sooner had they answered than an agent of the provveditori popped up and arrested the Jews, bringing them to trial before the magistracy.

In June of the same year, Battista, a fruiterer’s boy, was in very serious trouble for having passed by the convent of Sant’Anna in a boat, at night, while singing drunken obscenities. The subject of his song concerned a woman called Lucia, and

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68 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1612, Ogni Santi.
69 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1554, ‘Monache di Malamocco’ [i.e. S. Maria dell’Orazione].
70 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1569, Celestia.
71 ASV, PSM, B. 264, 1611, Corpus Domini.
there is little reason to suppose his words were directed at the nuns. However, his interrogator assured him:

puoi esser sicuro di esser severamente castigato della giustitia havendo ditto parole oscene, che saranno inconveniente à luochi publici, non che di esser proferite vicino à luoco sacro, et à verginelle consagrare à Nostro Signore.

Battista was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.\(^{72}\)

The nearby presence of lay men and women and their worldly ways, even when they sought no contact with the nuns, was perceived as damaging and degrading to female religious communities. Significant in this context were the proceedings taken against prostitutes who attended services at nunneries. Between 1610 and 1612 five such cases came before the *provveditori*.\(^{73}\) Signora Novella, attending the convent church of Sant'Andrea, it was alleged, 'faceva molti chiassi'. She arrived in church ostentatiously accompanied by a group of admiring gentlemen and apparently picked a fight with a gentlewoman during the course of the service. Furthermore, it was reported that she had begun to frequent the convent *parlatorio*.\(^{74}\) The undesirability of such connections for the nunnery was obvious. But the prostitute named Laura, slipping into mass at Santa Maria Maggiore on the feast of the Madonna delle Candel, did not behave indecorously.\(^{75}\) And although Crestina, entering the church of Santa Giustina in March 1612, was conspicuously bedecked in personal ornaments, her actual behaviour does not appear to have attracted criticism.\(^{76}\)

It is hard to judge the motives of patriarchs and *provveditori* in their increasing efforts to isolate nuns from the world outside. In the case of prostitutes, were they kept away from convents because the slightest contact might come to be seen as 'the thin end of the wedge'--a route to the active corruption of female religious? Or was their mere presence in churches--albeit totally invisible to the nuns themselves who were hidden behind a screen--perceived as a means of contamination? Or had the dogmatic principle of keeping nuns apart from the world become an end in itself? The fear of sexual contamination is most explicit in the proceedings against one Pasqualin, 'sonador', the man tried in 1611 for 'mostrando il membro nelle chiese delle Monache'. Pasqualin made the rounds of the Venetian nunneries, waiting in their churches or *parlatorii* until a nun appeared at the grate, in order to reveal 'le parte oscene'.\(^{77}\) But while the concern of the *provveditori* in this case is readily understandable, the corrupting influence of the

\(^{72}\) ASV, *PSM*, B. 264, 1611, S. Anna.
\(^{73}\) ASV, *PSM*, B. 264.
\(^{74}\) ASV, *PSM*, B. 264, 1611, S. Andrea di Zirada.
\(^{75}\) ASV, *PSM*, B. 263, 1612, S. Maria Maggiore.
\(^{76}\) ASV, *PSM*, B. 264, 1612, S. Giustina.
\(^{77}\) ASV, *PSM*, B. 264, 1611 (case pertains to several convents).
laity was strongly perceived even when there was no direct risk posed to the nuns. Indeed, the women who lived inside the convents were often indifferent to or even ignorant of the lay people who were brought for trial before the *provveditori*.

Lay people who dared to traverse convent walls, however harmless their conduct or intentions, incurred severe reprisals from the *provveditori sopra monasteri*. But even without penetrating *clausura*, some individuals threatened to pollute the holy environment of Christ's brides. Jews, drunks, prostitutes and flashers: perhaps the concurrence of stories about this assemblage of subversives should alert us to a set of wider concerns on the part of the Venetian state. Among others, Renzo Derosas has observed in his work on the *Esecutori contro la Bestemmia* (another state magistracy, set up in 1537, only 16 years after the establishment of the *provveditori sopra monasteri*) that the sixteenth century saw a series of conspicuous efforts by the Venetian government to impose moral reforms on its realm.\(^7\) Measures against blasphemy, drunkenness, and night revelries aimed to preserve the quiet and decorum of the city. And there was new legislation against sodomy and other forms of sexual deviancy. Some evils were there to stay, or even necessary, and for these containment was the only viable policy. Thus in 1516, the decision was made to enclose the Jews of Venice by erecting high walls around the ghetto, and regulating their movements. As for prostitutes, they were also confined to particular parts of the city and required to wear the distinctive yellow neckband, denoting their status.\(^7\) Just as the impure elements of Venetian society were cordoned off into particular zones, so female religious were shut up in supposedly incorruptible isolation.

The strict enclosure of convents and the energetic pursuit of those who, by their very presence, smudged the boundaries between the world of sin and these islands of sinlessness (a distinction which had to be vehemently asserted since the facts did not always bear it out) may be seen within the context of what Derosas terms 'pulizia morale'. *Clausura* fitted into a programme of moral cleansing which was directed at the whole of Venetian society. That the Venetian state embraced the Tridentine calls for enclosure so wholeheartedly should not be conceived simply as a concern to impose discipline on its communities of female religious. Indeed, as we have seen, many of the trials conducted by the *provveditori sopra monasteri* had little at all to do with nuns. Yet it was those who lived behind the convent walls who were most affected by this policy of isolation. In the following chapter, the attempts of nuns to retain and nurture contact with the world outside are investigated. There was no natural limit to the efforts to separate nuns from the laity. Even where strict enclosure was attained, the ecclesiastical and state authorities still nursed apprehensions about the grey areas that lay beyond: the church, the *forestaria*, the hospital. The inherent impossibility of complete enclosure left nuns able to retain links with the laity and, through these, some degree of freedom.

\(^7\) Derosas, esp. pp. 433–46.

\(^7\) Davidson, 'Theology, nature and the law', pp. 90–92.
CHAPTER IV

SUSTAINING NETWORKS: PARENTI, VICINI, AMICI

O quanto mai è noioso il ritrovarsi sempre ad una tavola con l'istesse vivande! O quanto mai tormentoso il coricarsi ogni sera in un medemo letto, respirar sempre la medema aria, praticar sempre le medeme conversazioni e veder sempre le medeme faccie!¹

Claustrophobia was surely the natural sickness of conventual life. Professed nuns wore the ring which symbolised their marriage with Christ, but of more immediate practical significance was their commitment to the community in which they were bound to live until separation by death. The membership of a nunnery was slow-changing and commonly consisted of between 50 and 100 women. These ranged from teenagers to the very old, and varied in social status as well as hierarchical rank. That such communities were prone to internal tensions is scarcely surprising and the ordini of the Venetian patriarchs are full of exhortations to concord and reconciliation. Yet in their insistence on the communal ideal, the outside authorities which governed female religious tried to deprive them of any form of relief. Individuality was denied and intimacy disallowed, creating an environment characterized by the sameness of which Tarabotti complained.

If freedom from earthly relationships, and subjection to the institution had always been the ideals of monastic life, how much more oppressive were these tenets when combined with the mandate for total enclosure which, following Trent, now applied to every nunnery. The physical impact of the imposition of enclosure must often have been quite shaking to the cloistered inhabitants. Windows were walled up, doors were sealed, gardens were put out of bounds, and the light was shut out with blinds and curtains.² Reformers aimed to isolate nuns emotionally as well as physically, and the rules governing the reception of visitors to the convent became increasingly strict. Within the convent, the patriarchal authorities who conducted visitations complained of breaches in the communal ideal, of nuns who kept their own

² ACPV, Vis. past. B. 5, 1609, S. Anna; the following quotation from a visitation of S. Anna, 11 years before Tarabotti was clothed at the same convent, gives an idea of the uncompromising rigour with which clausura was imposed: 'Passò di là alli Dormitorii, et primo quello sopra il canale et viste le finestre grande ordine, che tutte siano di chi cella, δ stanza si voglia per la mettä siano murate, et poi all'altra mettä si mettano le trombe con gelosie fisse, et affisse et inchiodate in maniera, che non si possano levar. Le altre finestre, che sono delle converse, et à tutti li balconi, che guardono sopra detto canal si faccino le trombe si alte, che nè veder, ne esser vedute possino le Monache, ne le converse per ultime finestre da quella parte del Canal, et sopra l'horto per esser vicine all'acqua pono le Monache esser vedute, siano le grande stropate per mitä con muro, et dalla metta in sù si mettano le trombe come se fossero del tutto sopra il Canale. Alle finestre delle celle sopra la corte contigua all'horto essendo scoperte al vicinato, et confinato al Rio secco siano poste le gelosie fisse, et fisate in maniera, che non si possino levare.'
chickens, or pet dogs, or of those who fostered particular friendships. Instructions to keep candles burning throughout the night in the dormitory were regularly reiterated. While the lack of privacy which was required in the nunnery may have been common to the early-modern household, here it was a principle rather than a necessity.

This chapter addresses the ways in which nuns sought temporary escape from the institutional closeness which was imposed upon them. While some nuns found solace within themselves, and others broke out of the community by forming rebellious cliques, it will be argued that relief was most effectively secured in the maintenance of relations with friends, neighbours, relatives and other contacts outside the convent. For in defiance of the Tridentine directives, the disciplinary records of both church and state testify to parties, music, dancing, and, most commonly, simple conversation regularly occurring on the edge of enclosure. This chapter examines two main categories of relationship nurtured by nuns with outsiders: familial bonds; non-familial friendships and neighbourly relations. Those more intimate relationships which often developed between nuns and men, and especially priests and religious, will be addressed in the following chapter, for the important issue of nuns' sexuality requires separate consideration. Within this framework of relationships, the recreational possibilities that existed within the convent are investigated, providing some insights into the values and aspirations of enclosed nuns. But first, consideration will be given to the ways in which the communal ideal was already threatened by relationships and groupings that existed within the convent walls.

Particular Friendships
When interviewed by the provveditori sopra monasteri in 1620, the confessor to the nuns of Santa Marta commented, 'ho sempre generalmente persuaso à lasciar le amicitie particolari e dentro, e fuori del monasterio: perche amicitia huius mundi est inimica Deo'. This familiar principle of monastic life was one of the hardest to enforce, and it is particularly difficult to conceive of how external authorities hoped to be able to control the affective impulses of nuns for one another. The rationale behind their continued attempts was threefold: first, on purely religious grounds, that earthly friendships should not be allowed to distract from nuns' devotion to their celestial spouse and to the spiritual rigours of the Rule; secondly, resulting from a variety of disciplinary and moral concerns, that such relations might lead to lustful practices within the convent; and thirdly, that 'amori particolari' threatened the institutional stability of the community, opening up possibilities for corruption and mismanagement, as well as often souring the atmosphere. Particular intimacies and cliques did indeed

3 ASV, PSM, B. 266, 1620, S. Marta, fo. 20r.
4 Grimani, cap. XLV, emphasised the sexual risks of 'particular' relationships, whether between nuns or involving outsiders of either sex: 'ne meno questo amore, et affettione singolare da principio hà
disturb the peace of convents; records of such incidents both highlight the overheated emotional life that existed within convent walls, and point to the attempts of some nuns to escape their stifling institutional existence by forging alternative identities.

Some of the typical features of these relationships which were considered so troublesome were evident among the nuns of San Iseppo in the visitation of 1595. During the course of their inspection, the patriarch's visitors inferred that 'tre monache inquietano grandemente il monastero le quali sono Suor Marietta Dolfin, Suor Dorothea Sforza, e Suor Mansueta Pase, colla qual Dolfina s'è anco congiunta Suor Lorenza conversa.' The sexual overtones of the intimacy between 'la Dolfina' and the conversa, are implied in the report that 'la notte della oration dormi insieme con Suor Lorenza'.

But it was the more general disobedience of this group which seems to have concerned the visitors principally. Not only did these nuns 'frequentano poco il choro', they also marked themselves apart by their decadence of dress: 'Quelle che sono più vane delle altre sono le tre sopradette'; again singled out for comment was suor Marietta Dolfin, 'che à detta Dolfin sono stati trovati belletti, zoccoli alti, e porte da calze di seda con merletti d'oro'. At the end of the visitation the Patriarch called before him the four main culprits, sisters Marietta, Dorothea, Mansueta, and the conversa Lorenza and informed them

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\text{che in virtù di santa obedientia non dovessero più praticar ne parlar insieme se non in luoghi communi alla presenza d'altre monache, per cose necessarie, sotto pena di esser prive d'andar alli parlatorii per un'anno e d'altre pene arbitrarie}. \]

Whether these patriarchal sanctions were effective, we do not know, but there is little reason to believe that a group of wilful nuns should yield readily to the commands of an external authority, unless they were enforced by the internal superiors. In this light it is interesting to compare the case with the disciplinary breakdown which occurred at Sant'Andrea di Zirada during the period 1567-68, and which is discussed in chapter III of this thesis. Here the clique of nuns, consistently identified by witnesses as suor Anna Giustinian, suor Gabriela Salamon, suor Elena Capello, suor Beatrice Moro, and the conversa suor Anfrosina; shared certain characteristics with 'la Dolfina' and her associates. In 1566, the provveditori heard that the rebellious nuns of Sant'Andrea who situated themselves at the gates of the convent 'sempre stano la, ne mai vano in choro, ne in refettorio insieme con le altre, ne dano obedientia alcuna a madonna la priora'. In the ensuing processo, they were identified as one of the prime factors attracting disrepute to the community at this time. It is, therefore, enlightening to

cattiva mostra; ma per ordinario hà pessimo fine [...] perciò si debbano dare i contrassegni di questa affettione pericolosissima, chiamata da i Santi sensuale, et che suole terminare ben spesso in carnale'.

5 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, S Iseppo, fo. 516r.
6 See pp. 138-41.
trace the names of these nuns in the business records of Sant'Andrea over the following years. As early as 1570, we find the very same nuns at the abbess's side, receiving a dowry payment at the 'finestra', suggesting that they held positions of responsibility within the house. By 1601, suor Elena Capello is referred to as prioress of the convent. We do not know whether Elena and her friends had become reformed characters or whether this disobedient faction of nuns had simply bullied its way to the top. In either case it is ironic that the supposed impenetrability of the convent walls kept the authorities of church and state at bay; cooperation from the nuns' superiors could not be counted on.

To return to San Iseppo, even if we credit the disciplinary measures of Patriarch Priuli with having had some success, it is clear that the breakdown of the community had gone beyond the disobedience of the nuns specifically named. Drawing attention to two factors which commonly gave rise to union and disunion, the observations of the patriarchal visitors make it clear that groupings founded on age and kinship rivalled the convent's institutional identity. It is reported that 'La gioventù non porta quel rispetto alla superiore et alle vecchie che bisogneria' and that 'alcune di queste giovane, et altre stanno insieme nelle celle particolari fino sei hore di notte con finta di lavorare, e si fanno dei streppiti, et altre cose, che non stano bene'. Whereas young nuns looked to each other's company for more boisterous entertainments, mealtimes were an opportunity to gather with familial relations of various generations, habits which would have reflected behaviour in the lay world.

While the 1595 visitation of San Iseppo provides us with an almost full complement of the internal factors which undermined the communal ideal of female religious, concerns of this nature echo through the records of other convents. During the rounds of Priuli's visitations, his vicars reported that at Santa Giustina 'vi sono dodeci monache contrarie alla Priora', and at Santa Lucia that 'vi sono delle amighe che praticano insieme più strettamente di quello che bisogneria'. Suor Paula Lippamano headed a clique at San Sepolcro, and her 'discepole', it was said, 'mangiano sempre fuori di Refettorio la sera [...] e mangiano insieme, e tal volta anco la mattina'. At Santa Maria delle Vergini, the failure of nuns to eat together in the refectory was considered a factor in the lax devotional habits of the community: 'Che Testate le sera

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7 ASV, S. Andrea de Zirada, B. 7, fo. 6r: 1570, 28 July, 'Nota di ducati cento quali adi detto Ricevi io suor Catarina indegna Priora del Monasterio contadi alla fenestra dell' Ospedal presente suor Gabriella Salamon, suor Beatrice Moro, suor Anna Zustignan, suor Elena Cappello'. This was a partial payment for the dowry of a certain 'fiola Maria' whose guardian was evidently 'la mag.ca Paula Bragadin sorella di Suor Elena'.

8 ASV, S. Andrea de Zirada, B. 7, fo. 274r: 1601, 18 Jan. 'Procura fatta dalle Reverende Monache di Sant'Andrea in Persona del Reverendissimo Pre Nicolò Balbi....'.

9 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, S. Iseppo, fo. 514v.

10 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, S. Giustina, fo. 417r; 1595, S. Lucia, fo. 537v.

11 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, S. Sepolcro, fo. 397r.
non si va à compieta perche le monache cenano à cinque e sei per cella, e lo fanno spesso'. 12 The problem of nuns eating in separate groups throughout the convent was an enduring one. In 1609, after Patriarch Vendramin's visitation to Sant'Andrea di Zirada—a convent with a history of division—it was reported that there were 'quattro monaca che non viene in convento a manzar et manza in le sue cele over in altro locho con scuza de necessita o no'. 13 The same year, the abuse was also registered at San Zaccaria: 'E dispiaciuto assa a sua signoria illustissima l'abuso di quelle che fanno l'obbedienze di mangiare fuori del refettorio et specialmente la sera trattenendosi con quello pretesto molte ore di notte, raggionando et mormorando indubitamente'. 14

Generational divides were characteristic of convent life, and the older nuns often complained of the behaviour of their younger sisters. At Sant'Alvise in 1595, the patriarchal visitors noted that 'Le giovane sono molte di loro baldanzose, et vanno volentieri à parlar alla porta, et à chiacchiare con donnette'. 15 Again stressing the lack of sobriety among the young nuns, it was reported in 1611 at Santa Croce 'Che le giovane de dentro sono troppo gagliarde di cervello, et poco obedienti ala Badessa'. 16 Suggesting that such divisions might be more than simply a consequence of high spirits among the youthful nuns is the complaint arising from the older nuns at Santa Maria di Miracoli in 1595: 'Che le giovane non vogliono conversar con le vecchie, ma stanno insieme unite nei loro oratorii'. 17 Here the sense of a self-conscious polarization is clearly recognisable.

While there was a tendency for nuns of similar ages to club together within the convent, other divisions were imported into the nunnery from the lay world. Noble blood dominated the population of fully professed nuns or monache da coro in Venice, and convents were far from being free from snobbery. Patriarch Trevisan issued a mandate complaining of the reluctance of some houses to admit citizen women to become monache da officio. 18 Social distinctions reinforced the division between professe and converse who took only simple vows and fulfilled the menial tasks within the convent. Furthermore, converse continued to be used as the personal servants of particular nuns. 19 That nuns frequently received continued financial support and

12 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1596, S. Maria delle Vergini, fo. 589r.
13 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1609, S. Andrea di Zirada.
14 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1609, S. Zaccaria.
15 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, S. Alvise, fo. 425v.
16 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1611, S. Croce.
17 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, S. Maria di Miracoli, fo. 369r.
18 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 2, fo. 21r (undated) 'Mandatum generate pro acceptand. moniali. [...] E pervenuto à notitia nostra non senza grave dispiacer dell' animo nostro che alcuni Monasteri hanno recusato di accettar, et tuor per Monache professe da officio nelle i suoi Monasterii le figliuole deelli Cittadini di questa nostra Città di Venetia'.
19 For example, in ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1596, S. Zaccaria, it is stated that 'le monache da offitio [...] vogliono esser servite dalle converse come da massare, et alcune di loro ne hanno di proprie'. There follows a list of twelve nuns with the names of the converse who served them (fo. 576r).
bequests from their families would have made for an awareness of distinctions in wealth and worldly status which life in the religious community was supposed to obliterate. But perhaps the toughest bonds existing within the convent were those of blood and kinship. Family conventions existed concerning the choice of nunneries for their female dependants, and young girls were often eased into convent life by the comfort that their sisters, cousins and aunts would be there to look after them.

Although the deception of certain 'zie' who tricked young girls into taking the veil earned the condemnation of Tarabotti, on the whole familial closeness was enduring. At Ogni Santi in 1594, nuns from the Barbarigo clan formed an exclusive group:

Sopra il parlatorio grande retrovò una stanza grande con alcuni letti dove dorme Suor Valeria Barbarigo con alcune sue nepote, et dipendenti, il qual luogo e salizzato solamente di tavole, et hà balconi bassi che rispondono nella corte de parlatorii, et alcuni altri sopra la strada, e quivi si ritrovò diversi armari con robbe diverse cioè marcatie di cusina et una barilla di vino con qualche scandolo.

Again we learn of groups of nuns separating themselves off from the community, seeking social sustenance from each other's company and temporary relief from their institutional existence.

The special relationships which united particular groups of nuns disunited convents. Personal friendships provided an escape from the tedium of institutional life, opportunities for sociability and an outlet for cramped emotions. They also contributed to the tensions which characterised the cloistered existence: cliquiness, rivalry and disobedience. A more effective antidote to claustrophobia was, therefore,

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20 Patriarch Priuli was keen to regulate but not to forbid the practice of nuns receiving personal incomes and bequests from their families. In records of the visitations carried out during his patriarchate, lists of nuns' personal wealth are provided for the following convents: S. Marta, SS. Rocco e Margherita, S. Alvise, S. Croce di Giudecca, S. Iseppo, S. Lucia, Corpus Domini, S. Zaccaria, S. Maria delle Vergini, Celestia, Spirito Santo, ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3.

21 Cf. Trexler, pp. 1341-42, on the custom of sending more than one daughter to the same house. See Grimani, cap. XV, for his efforts to regulate kinship links in the convents of his diocese: 'Per levare le occasioni delle discussioni causate della colligenza, di molte Monache insieme, ordiniamo, che per l'avvenire non possino accettare in Monastero piu di due sorelle, ne piu di quattro di una famiglia, quando siano parenti in secondo, et in terzo grado. Il simile vogliamo se sono germane, se bene sono di casata diversa; Et nell Monasteri, che eccedono in numero di cinquanta Monache, si possino pigliare anco tre sorelle, et cinque parente delle suddette.'

**Ed. Medioli, Inferno, p. 32.**

22 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1594, Ogni Santi, fo. 261r. Zarri writes of how nuns' cells were often arranged according to family groupings (p. 388) in her useful section on 'Famiglie e "sette" dentro al monastero', pp. 386-98. Relevant here are the findings of Silvia Evangelisti regarding nuns' efforts to control the transmission of their cells posthumously, by means of testamentary instructions.

23 Tarabotti's life at S. Anna was rendered tolerable by her friendship with Regina Dona. The two nuns entered the convent simultaneously in 1617, and Tarabotti's letters reveal considerable distress following the death of Regina in 1645 (Zanette, pp. 21, 27).
the web of relationships fostered on the edge of enclosure, which reunited nuns with the wider world. Social exchange between nuns and outsiders was, of course, hampered by those external authorities who sought to impose total 'clausura' on nunneries. But the bulky weight of evidence for legislation and disciplinary proceedings against unlicensed visitors to convents testifies to the ongoing failure as well as to the persistence of these efforts. Indeed, judging from the surviving records for the period 1554 to 1630, the single biggest concern evident in the 'processi criminali e disciplinari' conducted by the provveditori sopra monasteri was with parlatorio offences. An examination of the nature of nuns' social relations with outsiders will help to shed light on the factors which made such contacts enduring. For, as will become clear, there were mutual benefits sustaining the networks.

Family Ties
As with every other aspect of conventual life, nuns' relations with their families came under strict regulation in the rush of legislation precipitated by the Tridentine reforms. Visits from family members were subject to the limitations of time and purpose laid down in the rules governing use of the parlatorio; and male relatives were only allowed to visit if they came within the required 'gradi di parentella'. Such restrictions might be considered to have served the interests of those selfish relatives portrayed by Tarabotti, who, after tricking their female dependants into 'l'ultima sentenza irrevocabile del'eternità del suo carcere', had no intention of keeping up convivial contact with their victims. Thus she writes of how, in the days running up to a nun's profession, 'padri, fratelli et altri congiunti fingano, con frequenza di visite e con liberalità di doni, d'amarle sviseratamente', but that as soon as the deed is done, 'cesan le visite'. However, just as we have already seen how Tarabotti exaggerated the miserliness of nuns' families in choosing the conventual option for their daughters, so we should be wary of taking her depiction of relatives severing their affective links with nuns at face value. For certain reciprocal processes are evident in relations between nuns and their families, suggesting emotional attachment on both sides, and even a degree of mutual gratitude. Some families surely acknowledged the sacrifice made by their daughters in agreeing to take the veil; and, by the same token, those women for whom the religious life was not anathema may have genuinely appreciated the substantial financial investment their relatives had undertaken for their 'monacazioni'. Let us assume, at least, that each party would have recognised its own sacrifice, if not

25 For a full set of patriarchal regulations governing visits to nuns, see L. Priuli, 1591. According to this, fathers, brothers and uncles were the only male relatives admitted to the parlatorio. Note how the list had shrunk from 1558 when Vicenzo Diedo, the then patriarch, had named the permitted 'gradi di parenti' as 'padre, fratelli, barbani [...], nepoti, cognati [...] et zermani'. BMC, Cod. Cic. 2570, pp. 167-68.
that of the other, and that certain favours and repayments were expected from both sides long after the nun's profession.

Although sworn to poverty, nuns inevitably had access to certain material goods, supposedly held in common, enabling them to exercise personal largesse when occasion suggested itself. Their tendency to 'dar fuor robba' was a frequent concern of the ecclesiastical authorities in Venice, not only because it was incompatible with nuns' renunciation of property, but also because it could jeopardise the economic stability of the nunneries involved. Thus we have seen how nuns would favour those layfolk who came to serve the convent with gifts of food and drink, or send out provisions to their families. Such practices of giving, it will become increasingly clear, were a means for nuns to maintain relations with the world outside. Nuns could assert their usefulness to their families by offering them some small measure of material support. At the same time, the family which had provided a nun's dowry could feel justly repaid in accepting food or hospitality from the convent store cupboards. Moreover, bearing in mind that some nunneries were powerful economic institutions, female religious could sometimes use their influence to bring more substantial benefits to their families. In 1595, we learn of how at Santa Croce della Giudecca nuns belonging to a branch of the Mollino clan were serving the interests of their relatives:

Non piace il governo temporale del monastero che è nelle mani di alcune scrivane, che sono in effetto già molti anni cioè le Molline, le quali senza consenso del capitolo hanno affittate alcune case a suoi parenti per buon mercato ne si sà quello che pagano et prima per ordine de monastero non si potevano affittar dette case a gentiluomini.

Although the 'Molline' were acting in defiance of the capitolo, it was surely in an attempt to control family interest in convents that Priuli had earlier ruled that 'Non possano haver voto in capitolo piu di due sorelle'.

Besides the possible material assets to be gained from having kinship links with the city's convents, there were also obvious spiritual perks. Testamentary evidence shows that nun-relatives were viewed as an important spiritual resource who would not only pray for the souls of their lay kin while they lived, but would also give them access to a whole package of posthumous benefits aiding their salvation. When Lucretia Corner wrote her will in 1601, she remembered her sister suor Prudentia at Santa Croce, bequeathing her a personal annuity of 20 ducats 'fino viverä'. But Lucretia was set to benefit from her familial links with Santa Croce, as her funeral instructions make clear: for although she wished to be buried in the church of San Sebastiano alongside

27 See above, chapter III.
28 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, S. Croce di Giudecca, fo. 494r.
29 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 1, 1593, SS. Biagio & Castaldo.
her late husband, she requested that she be ‘vestito dell’habito delle monache della Croce di Venetia’, and named the same nuns as the executors of her will.\textsuperscript{30} Giovanni Widman, of the famous German merchant family, in his will of 1630 asked to be buried either in his parish church of San Canciano, or ‘nella Chiesa di San Daniele di Castello dove hora è mia Figliuola Monaca’. Leaving personal bequests to his wife’s sisters, suor Giacintha at San Daniel, and suor Vittoria, at San Bernardo di Murano, of 25 silver scudi each, ‘per segno di raccordanza’, he added ‘Raccomandandomi alle loro Orationi’. To his own daughter, suor Ziglia, again at San Daniel, he left 100 silver scudi, as well as a personal allowance of 48 ducats a year, ‘Restando sicuro, che pregarà con divote Orationi ogni giorno come buona Figlia per l’anima di me suo Padre’.\textsuperscript{31}

That Giovanni Widman valued his links with nunneries is perhaps best indicated by the provision he made for the future of his remaining unmarried daughters, Sara and Felicità, living at the time of the will as educande in the favoured family convents of, respectively, San Bernardo di Murano and San Daniel. If these girls married with the consent of their family they would be allotted colossal dowries of 20,000 ducats each. If they married without the unanimous consent of their mother, brothers and closest relatives, they would forfeit half that sum; but if either of them were to become a nun, Giovanni still left provision for a dowry of 6,000 ducats, six times the sum laid down by the Venetian Senate.\textsuperscript{32} He was explicit in hoping that one of his daughters would indeed embrace the religious life: ‘Crederei, che fosse bene, et laudo, che una di esse vadi Monaca appresso sua sorella Monaca in San Daniel di Castello’. Given the extreme wealth of Widman, and his provision of such an inflated conventual dowry, his desire that yet another female relative devote herself to service of God was surely intended to reap spiritual benefits rather than conserve the wealth of the family.\textsuperscript{33}

The relations between female religious and their families reflected their mutual interests, and it was an uncommon circumstance for a nun to have built up so much resentment against her relatives that she wished to break all contact with them.\textsuperscript{34}

Generally, favours were reciprocal, though the onus fell on the nuns to ensure that they

\textsuperscript{31} ASV, Notarile Testamenti, B. 1178, no. 268, 1630, 24 Sept. I am grateful to Sybille Backmann for this reference.
\textsuperscript{32} ASV, \textit{Comp. Leggi}, B. 288, fo. 405: \textit{stampa} containing laws regarding conventual dowries of 1602, 1603, 1604, 1610, and 1620.
\textsuperscript{33} A systematic analysis of testamentary evidence would be necessary to establish how typical Giovanni Widman was in the spiritual value he attributed to placing his female relatives in convents. It is possible that Widman’s attitude owed something to the conventions of Catholic Augsburg, the city from which his family originated.
\textsuperscript{34} ASV, \textit{PSM}, B. 263, 1571, S. Iseppo: note the indignation of the other nuns in response to Suor Deodata’s lack of respect for her parents: ‘Tho mai sentita, se non à dir mal, et maledir l’anima di suo padre, et sua madre’, testified Suor Christina Arcaina among others (fo. 22r).
maintained a sufficiently hospitable establishment to attract visits from their families. The unequal degree of compulsion in demonstrations of generosity between nuns and their families is perhaps implicit in these remarks made after the 1596 visitation of San Zaccaria:

Li doni che ricevono da casa senza mostarli all'Abbadessa si tengono per loro [...] Quando mandano presenti à suoi parenti medesimamente non dicono niente all'Abbadessa [...] et in questo il monastero tuol di mezo di gran quantità di robba perche d'ogni tempo si fanno bozzolai, torte, frittole, e calissoni in quantità, e si danno terminatamente ogni anno tante volte alcuni quartaroli di farina alle monache per questo effetto, di modo che si consuma ogni anno cinquecento stara di formento, che sono ducento pil di quello che per ogni ragione dovería fare.\(^{35}\)

Such frenzies of cake-making which strained the very resources of a convent were commonly reported in the records of contemporary visitations.

The willingness of nuns to court affection and attention from their families is further indicated by their response to marriages occurring among their sisters and other female relatives. Whereas Tarabotti describes such events as the ultimate humiliation for the nun, who inevitably compared the feasting and extravagance of the marital rites with her own shabby and marginalised existence, there is some evidence that nuns were, in fact, anxious to be involved in the family festivities. In the first wave of patriarchal legislation concerned with the imposition of clausura a special law was passed condemning the practice whereby brides would visit convents in all their splendour on their wedding day.\(^{36}\) Patriarch Trevisan alluded to the same custom in his ordine to the nuns of Corpus Christi 'Che non si possi admetter, ne parenti, ne novizie alla porta maistra, ne vederle, ne manco tocarli la man'.\(^{37}\) But nuns remained keen to gather at the windows of the parlato rio to view the bride. That such occasions were routine is evident from a case being conducted by the provveditori sopra monasteri in 1617. Seeking witnesses to the presence of one Nicolo Cressi at San Maffio di Murano, in defiance of an earlier ban, the provveditori called before them members of a wedding party which had visited the nuns on the same day. A description of the occasion is supplied by Ser Marco Tiepolo, who was acting as the Best Man: 'Io andai con occasione di esser compare dall'anello del signor Marco Gonene à San Maffio de Muran insieme con li altri comparì, per dar man alla novizza, et altre, che andorno à visitatione di quelle monache'. Another of the groom's 'compari' testifies that the visit took place 'dopo disnar, che erano 24 hore passade', while yet another reveals that the

\(^{35}\) ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1596, S. Zaccaria, fo. 577r.

\(^{36}\) BMC, Cod. Cic. 2583. 1554, 26 Nov.: 'Novitie non accedant ad Monasteria Monialium'. This custom is described in Sansovino (1581 ed.), fo. 153r., in the section entitled 'Matrimonii'.

\(^{37}\) ACPV, Vis. past., B. 2, 1560, Corpus Domini, fo. 2v.
progress included a visit to San Sepolcro in Castello as well as to the Murano convent. In his *Habiti delle donne*, published in 1610, Giacomo Franco described and depicted the spectacle generated by a flotilla of gondolas taking brides to visit their relations in the convents (see figure 3). Although nuns could not attend family weddings, they were happy to let some of the festivities come to them.

One of Tarabotti’s most poignant images is of the nun staying up night and day before her sister’s wedding in order to sew the bride a gift, which the recipient derides, overwhelmed by the lavishness of her own ‘illustriissimo sponsalitio’. Yet patriarchal visitation reports suggest that some nuns were unstoppable in their desire to fête their sisters on their wedding days. For example, at San Zaccaria in 1596, the complaint was made that ‘Alcune converse, cioè Suor Agata, e Suor Cipriana hanno fatto gran presenti ad alcune sorelle sue, che si sono maritate’. In a report from San Servolo of 1610, the patriarchal visitors suggested that gifts were sent to brides in anticipation of reciprocal munificence, but urged nuns to ignore such potential benefits:

È molto dannabile ancora l’abusò del donativi eccessivi che si sogliono fare alle novizie secolari sotto pretesto che anco esse fanno altri donativi alle monache al che intendendo Sua Signoria Illustrissima [i.e. the Patriarch] di provedere ordina che non si debbano in niun modo far più tali donativi, non ostante qualsi voglia rimuneratione, che si potesse sperar.

Scholars of early-modern Europe have long been happy to assimilate the theories of the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, who noted that in some primitive societies gift-giving that appears at first to be voluntary, spontaneous and disinterested, on closer inspection reveals itself to be obligatory and self-interested. In the above example, the patriarchal authorities expressed their awareness that the nuns who gave wedding presents hoped for something in return. But the reciprocal expectations of the nuns were not always so ‘tit for tat’ as a simple exchange of ‘donativi’. While female religious relied on their families most obviously for material support, they were perhaps even more concerned to maintain some social and affective rapport with their relatives in the outside world; for contacts of this sort gave nuns an emotional identity beyond the cloistered community, afforded them a certain status among their fellow nuns, and offered precious opportunities for a change of company, and some recreational variety.

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38 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1616 [m.v.], S. Maffio di Murano. Another instance of this practice is noted in the case against Alessandro Branazzini, ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1618 [m.v.], S. Sepolcro, who apparently first came in contact with the nuns of San Sepolcro on the occasion of his own wedding: ‘et venne là anco il S. Alessandro in gondola colla sua novizza, et perche vennero à fenestra quasi tutte to muneghe per veder la novizza’ (fo. 40r).
40 ACPF, *Vis. past.* B. 3, 1596, S. Zaccaria, fo. 578r.
41 ACPF, *Vis. past.* B. 5, 1610, S. Servolo.
42 For example, Sharon Kettering, p. 132.
That nuns' relatives often responded to the needs of their cloistered womenfolk is evident from the efforts of both ecclesiastical and temporal authorities to assert control over family gatherings at Venetian convents. Indeed, the uncompromising line of the provveditori sopra monasteri, who endeavoured to stamp out even the most harmless of transgressions, leads the reader to wonder whether Tarabotti was misplacing her attacks when she blamed the families of nuns for neglecting those who were imprisoned by conventual chains. It is hard to conceive as threatening the visit of the Pisani brothers to La Celestia in 1626 to 'dar il buon zorno' to their sister, suor Benetta, yet they found themselves hauled before the provveditori for their actions. Invoking the absolute ban on male religious visiting nuns, the provveditori were again unbending in their attitude towards one fra Cornelio, who went to the parlatorio of San Girolamo to speak with his sister. When fra Comelio was interviewed and asked why he had been summoned, he replied, 'Non mi saprei immaginar perché causa, se non fosse per esser &dà à visitar una mia sorella Monaca à San Gerolemo [...] con occasione della morte di mia madre'. He had not obtained a licence 'non sapendo che vi fosse prohibizione à un fratello'. But whatever pressing family business might arise, in future, he was told, he must apply for special dispensation to visit his sister.

Following a rather charming incident of honest family fun, which nonetheless failed to charm the provveditori, Piero da Mosto was summoned before the magistracy in 1618. In his own summary of events, he explained how he had been visited over the Easter holidays by two girls from the country, hoping to enjoy the seasonal festivities that Venice had to offer. It was on the last of the feast-days that Piero's sister, a widow, suggested that 'volemo andar à cena in barca con ste putte'; accordingly 'puoco avanti le 22 hore montassimo in barca, et s'iniziassimo per andar à cena alla volta de San Servolo'. Plans for their night-time picnic at first developed fortuitously as 'nel viazo incontrassimo una barca de pesse, et comprai 10 â 12 scombri, et dell'altro pesse, et cosl ragionando dove si haveria, cusinando ste pesse mia sorella disse andemo dalla nostra Amea a San Anna'. Since Piero's sister had not seen this aunt for three or four years, he endorsed her proposal, evidently perceiving the visit as a good way to kill two birds with one stone: 'et cosi mandai un servitor in terra colla sessola piena de pesse à far reverentia à S Cherubina da Ca da Mosto nostra Ameda, et à pregarla, che la nel facesse cusinar'. Suor Cherubina, delighted by the visit of her sister, sent word that

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43 ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1626, Celestia. The particular transgressions of Piero and Alvise Pisani were 1) that they brought into the parlatorio a third man, their friend Antonio Balanzan, who had no familial connections at the nunnery; 2) that they ate in the parlatorio which was strictly forbidden. Sentenced on 4 July, 1626, the two brothers were 'pri di haver ragionamento con alcuna delle monache della Celestia, di andar in quei parlatori et in quella Chiesa, senza espressa licenza in scrittura', and fined 30 ducats. Antonio Balanzan was banned from going to the church or parlatorio of La Celestia for five years.

44 ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1626, S. Girolamo. See L. Priuli, ordine 8 and Grimani, cap. XXIII for regulations against male religious visiting nuns, regardless of their familial links.
she must disembark. When the latter protested that she could not leave the boat, being
'in zoccoli bassi, e senza capa', a compromise was devised whereby the visitors took
the boat round to the 'riva della Caneva', 'et così andassimo, dove venne detta nostra
Ameda, e due mie zermane, e Suor Nicolosa da Cà Foscariini, e Suor Costantina ca Ca
Zorzi, colle quali la ragionò'. The occasion now constituted quite a family gathering,
and the party amused itself for a quarter of an hour until sighted by an agent of the
provveditori, patrolling the area. Although no verdict for the case survives, we may
assume that the gathering was broken up before the fish was cooked, and that Piero
received at the very least a stiff warning against revels of this kind.45

In so far as they were successful, the efforts of external authorities to isolate
nuns from their families denied female religious an important means of relief from the
hemmed-in existence of the convent. In fact, the measures which attempted to stifle the
'natural' affections of familial relations met with a fair amount of resistance from nuns
and layfolk alike. One family, which was determined to assert its rights to retain
affectionate contact with particular nuns, crops up several times in the records of the
provveditori. For Ser Oratio Coreggio 'mercante' and his wife Paulina seem to have
been more than usually attentive to the young female dependants whom they had placed
in the convent of San Maffio de Murano. The first we hear of the family is in 1609,
when Oratio organised a meal in the parlatorio of San Maffio, after the vestizione
ceremony of one of his nieces.46 Although he was charged with bringing an
unnecessarily large flock of well-wishers to the convent and remaining in the parlatorio
until late at night, he perceived his own actions as utterly reputable. Oratio explained
first of all how he had raised his niece, and borne the costs of her monacation: 'gli ho
messo con il mio mezo una figliuola di una mia sorella, et questo the ho monacado gli
ho fatto cella gli ho esborsato la dotte et allevato da sei anni in suso'. He then went on
to describe the modest festivities which he had undertaken to lay on:

Et quel giorno di San Martino che si è vestito la sudetta
andasemmo là mia madre di anni 78 mia moglie, mie sorelle,
altre sei nevode da maridar et parente et altre nevode
maritate, et mia madonna et mie cognate et cugine, et per
non haver mangiato cosa alcuna volevemo ritirarsi in una
casetta et mi fù concesso in quel parlatorio vicin alla riva di
dar da mangiar un poco di bozzolai et altre cosette à queste
mie parente stretissime come in segno di nozze spirituali.

Coreggio viewed the hospitality which he had provided for his relatives not only as a
practical necessity, but as an appropriate manner in which to mark the occasion, 'come

45 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1618, S. Anna.
46 ASV, PSM, B. 264, 1609, S. Maffio di Murano. Monson, Disembodied Voices, pp. 184-5,
emphasizes how much nuns valued the festivities surrounding ceremonies of this kind.
in segno di nozze spirituali'. This opinion was not shared by the provveditori, who fined Oratio twenty ducats.

When we next hear of the family, it was Paulina who was deemed over-zealous in her attentions to her wards at San Maffio. By 1617, it would seem that she had four 'fie' at the convent, and in this year it was reported that she had offered these girls a 'colation' in the parlatorio, 'et la ghe portò un marzapan, due bozze de vin bianco, et non só che bozzoladi'. Brought before the magistracy, Paulina claimed total ignorance as to the illegality of her actions. She argued that it was 'l'uso palesamente essercitato da tutti li padri, madri, e fratelli, che publicamente nelli giorni di carnevale se ne sono andati à recreationi con le figliuole et sorelle'. Furthermore, she demonstrated an awareness that these young girls were owed a certain compensation for having been placed in the nunnery by their family. Moved by 'la ragion naturale et l'amor di quattro figliialine, destinate da me nella lor tenera età al servitio di Dio; dovendo con amorevol visite fomentarle à così degna propositione', Paulina hoped to ease the lot of her young wards, and so 'per recreatione delle figlie, et per consolar quelle tenere creaturine, le portai certa poca confettura, et un capo de latte'.

We do not know if the provveditori ever came to a verdict on this case. (A denunciation of April 1617, urging the magistracy to sentence Paulina, suggests that they may have been undecided about how to resolve the matter). But in 1621, an appeal was made to the provveditori by Elena Barbaro, on behalf of two nuns, 'Suor Chrestina e Paulina Coreggie' that their aunt, 'Paulina Coreggia vedova' might be permitted to visit them at San Maffio, 'quale zovene monache non havendo niuno piu propinquo di sangue a questo mondo'. In the first instance licence was granted for Paulina to visit the nuns on a single, set occasion; then the permission was extended indefinitely. It would seem that the provveditori could no longer resist the determination of this woman to do her duty by her nieces.

Nuns and their families frequently demonstrated the will to keep in touch with one another. Family events, such as weddings, or the nuns' own ceremonies, on feast-
days or at vestizioni, provided opportunities for kin to gather at convents. On a more
everyday basis, relations would visit the parlatorio to speak with nuns, and food and
drink would often be consumed, despite laws condemning such practices. The
affection that some laypeople retained for their relations in nunneries is well illustrated
by their testamentary instructions. We have already seen how bequests to nuns could be
quite considerable. It was also common to entrust particular relatives with the
responsibility of looking after nuns in the family. For example, Iacomo Bragadin, in
his will of 1605, instructed his wife

di pagar ogni anno alla mia dilettissima sorella suor Lodovica
Bragadin nel monasterio di Santo Andrea [...] ducati
quaranta et tutto quello che a lei li facesse bisogno per la sua
persona alla qual mia moglie pregola di haverla et tenerla per
sua cara sorella et come fusse la persona mia propria et
questo dico all' anno fin che la vive. 51

But the efforts of families to maintain contact with nuns were countered by the policies
of church and state, which aspired to cut female religious off from the rest of society.
Sometimes, those who were brought before the courts for visiting nuns could scarcely
believe the inflexibility of the regulations. In a spirited defence of her own conduct,
Paulina Coreggio argued,

thal legge, se ben questa giusta, e santa, non è però in alcun
tempo stata esequita contro madri, che incaute non per
scandalosi fini, ma dal figliol amore son capitata a tal
escusabil, et involentario accidente. 52

The energetic campaign of ecclesiastical and temporal authorities to stamp out every
petty irregularity often jarred with the customary conduct of female religious and their
families. By examining this disjunction between standards imposed from above, and
what was deemed acceptable behaviour by the nuns themselves, and by those lay
people who were involved with the city's convents, we gain insights into the particular
tensions that characterised the female religious life during the Counter-Reformation
period. Thus the nuns' determination to retain links with their families, and to nurture
other contacts with the world outside, is thrown into relief by the authorities' efforts to
break those links.

50 BMC, Cod. Cic. 2570, pp. 170-71, for Patriarch Trevisan's ruling against eating in the parlatorio of
1564, 10 Jan.
51 ASV, Sant'Andrea de Zirada, B. 23, fasc. 73; 1605, 24 Aug.
52 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1616 [m.v.], S. Maffio di Murano.
Expanding Circles

Having examined the ways in which nuns strove to kindle familial connections, consideration will now be given to the various strategies of female religious in courting and maintaining a wider range of acquaintances. But before analysing the mechanisms with which enclosed nuns created a social network outside the convent, it is worth pausing briefly to consider the possibilities open to lay women in developing their circles. In his study of 'patricians and popolani' in early Renaissance Venice, Dennis Romano argues that

patrician men and women operated at the helms of two different patronage systems that were closely linked to notions of male and female space. Male patronage was citywide, highly institutionalized, and focused on the councils of government [...] female patronage, by contrast, was parochial, private and highly personal.53

He goes on to describe how, in contrast to men, patrician women were restricted to their parish, or even their family palace, and that their movements and activities were limited by male notions of female honour. The result was that patrician women developed ties of affection and friendship with other women in their parish:

'Confinement and simple boredom drew them together', concludes Romano.54 The case of nuns at once complies with this assessment and differs from it. For on the one hand, the nunnery, of course, presented an even more confined existence than did the patrician household; but on the other hand, the city's convents and their exclusively female membership had a definite public presence which lay women did not. Although continually hampered by the limits of clausura, nuns therefore had access to two different spheres in forging patronage links. They could nurture contacts of a private and personal nature in the immediate environs of their convents, but they could also operate corporately and exploit their civic status. Addressing these two forms of social interaction by turn, this section looks at how nuns strove to overcome the handicap of enclosure in developing their own networks.

In a chapter of Agostino Valier's work of advice to nuns, entitled 'Che la monaca deve fuggire i parlatori', the Counter-Reformation Bishop of Verona urged female religious against becoming encumbered by news of the miserable world, and insisted that they could derive nothing from conversation with lay women:

Non vi dilettate della conversazione delle donne; perché sogliono molto lodare quello che amano: amano le cose

53 Romano, p. 120.
54 Ibid, p. 133.
Valier was surely well aware of how much nuns actually valued their relations with lay women, and of how important it was for them to obtain regular bulletins of what was going on in the outside world. Nuns surrounded themselves with 'petegole' or 'donnette' who acted as purveyors of gossip and gave a perspective on life beyond the convent walls. We have already seen how suspicious the Venetian authorities were of 'la conversation et pratica de donne et putte che praticano a essi Monasterii sotto specie di amministar servitii'. One consideration was the fear that nuns would disclose their own gossip to outsiders, bringing scandal upon their convents. But it was common to justify the isolation of female religious in terms of shielding them from the taint of earthly society.

Separating female religious from the outside world did not only entail denying them direct access to human contacts. All correspondence in which nuns participated was to be strictly censored by the Abbess, and in any case nuns were discouraged from writing letters 'perche non conviene alla tranquillità dello stato loro perturbarlo così spesso con questa inquietudine dello scrivere'. The reading of literature was also predictably restricted, and the inspection of nunnery libraries was a standard feature of every visitation. Vendramin told the nuns of Sant'Anna in 1609 that

We know, in fact, from the evidence of Tarabotti, herself at Sant'Anna from 1617, that nuns were sometimes able to overcome these restrictions. Suor Arcangela used her contacts in the Accademia degli Incogniti to obtain a wide range of literature on loan, and her own writings display an impressive array of references to works she had

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55 Valier, cap. XIX.
57 Ordini against the release of convent gossip to outsiders were issued by Patriarch Trevisan, ACPV, Vis. past., B. 2, 1560, Corpus Christi (quoted above, p. 140), and Patriarch Vendramin, ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1610, SS. Biagio & Castaldo: "Non ardisca alcuna monaca di dir li fatti delle monache, et monastero con seculari, né anco alli loro parenti, fuorché al Prelato; sotto pena di esser prive dalla parlatorii per sei mesi'.
58 Grimani, cap. XLVI.
59 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1609, S. Anna.
read. But for the majority of nuns, life outside the convent was represented most fully in the gossip provided by lay contacts. It is the purpose of this section to investigate how nuns secured relationships of this kind—outside the realm of family obligation—and what they had to offer in return for the company and gossip that sustained them.

It may be supposed that nuns, brought up within the systems of friendship and neighbourliness to which lay women were accustomed, had often already forged a variety of relationships before entering religion. (This would, of course, vary according to the age at which they were placed in a nunnery). In tales of nuns who escaped from their convents, it is notable how often they were able to seek refuge with lay contacts from their own previous secular existences. For example, Suor Crestina, who fled from the convent of Spirito Santo in 1562, was aided by a number of acquaintances, in particular the advocate Hieronimo Ferraruol, and Vicenzo di Lonzi, whose little girl was the godchild of the fugitive nun. Even while suor Crestina was in the convent, Vicenzo had tried to help her, particularly at the time when she was being persecuted by one of the converse. He explained to the provveditori: 'anzi quando l'era in monastier massime quando la conversa la bateto, io non mancato de mandargle qualche volta qualche cosa da mangiar del mio'. As with familial relations, it was impossible to prevent the germination of affective contacts which predated the nun's monacazione.

Moreover, given the legitimate presence of a particular category of lay person actually living within the convent, it was inevitable that such friendships would continue to be formed. Those fie à spese or educande who spent their youth in nunneries, but were destined for marriage, would often make close friendships with the nuns, and would seek to remain in contact once they had gone back to the world. A clear example of this phenomenon comes from San Bernardo de Murano in 1558. In that year suor Raffaela Balbi fled from the convent, fearful of being imprisoned by the abbess, on account of having brought a young Paduan girl, Laura Cumeni, into her cell. According to Raffaela's sister, Laura was 'una giovane padoana soa amica laqual era stata per inanti à spese nel detto monastier'. Having made her escape, the nun made her way to the house of Madonna Helena Foscarini, a further lay contact formed within the walls of Spirito Santo. For Helena also appears to have once lodged at the nunnery herself, either as an educanda, or in the capacity of a paying-guest (a practice which was to die out in the post-Tridentine climate of reform).

60 Ed. Medioli, Inferno, p. 139.
61 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1561 [m.v.], Spirito Santo, fo. 13r. Cf. ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1555, S. Giovanni Lateran, for the network of lay contacts invoked by suor Faustina, following her escape.
62 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1558, S. Bernardo di Murano.
63 From Marieta's deposition, we are informed that the nun and Helena 'le se hano cognosciente in detto monastier nel qual è stata à spese la detta Madonna Helena'. The practice whereby lay women stayed in convents as paying-guests is discussed in chapter III, pp. 133-34.
These intense affective relationships nurtured between nuns and lay women are intriguing, but they form a relatively small proportion of the instances of social intercourse documented in the records bequeathed by the Venetian church and state. The bulk of these are concerned with interactions of a far more superficial nature, and they frequently betray the fear that Christ's brides might be polluted by the trivia and impropriety of the 'molte feminette, che conversano continuamente alle porte, et fenestre'. Networks of women of slightly dubious honour had a remarkable tendency to build up on the peripheries of nunneries. This was exemplified at Sant'Andrea di Zirada in the 1560s, where the large group of 'petegole' who lived 'a spalle del monestier' threatened the dignity and prosperity of the convent. Such were the 'gran poltronarie' and 'streppiti' occasioned in 1617 by Donna Bella, and her daughter, Meneghina, outside the convent of Santa Caterina, that the priest was unable to confess the nuns. At San Servolo in 1621, it was reported that,

Bisogneria, che ghe fosse fatta la guardia la sera, e la mattina: perché ghe se delle donette de ogni sorte che ghe vien, et sono la rovina de quel convento, puttane, ruffiane, e strighe.

'Whores, bawds and witches' may have been an exaggeration. But the frequency with which nuns and prostitutes would strike up a rapport was, indeed, a major concern of the provveditori sopra monasteri. A denunciation of 1612 against the 'piava, et impudica Donna Malipiera Malipiero', for her familiarity with the nuns of Spirito Santo, began with a general condemnation of 'La temerita delle Donne pudiche [...] che sprezzano e' leze, e' ordini, e' protesti'. The crime of this particular woman involved a wholly unacceptable degree of intimacy with nuns, even disregarding her own status as a prostitute:

Questa tal Nefanda la Vigilia di Santo Tomaso Apostolo vestita in habito da Fia, ò Donzella, si è trasferita in Chiesa del Spirito Santo sia peggio è andata in uno Parlatorio, nel qual si è trattenuta molto tempo a raggiona con Suor Lucietta Foscarini, con laqual vi sono occorsi molti baci insieme con molte altre Monache, che sono venute nel detto parlatorio.

In a more standard incident, a prostitute by name of Lugretia was charged in 1625 with speaking with nuns in the parlatorio of La Celestia, 'facendo molti chiassi e bagordi'.

64 Grimani, cap. LXXX.
65 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1566 [m.v.]; 1568, see chapter III, pp. 138–41.
66 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1617, S. Caterina.
67 ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1621, S. Servolo.
68 ASV, PSM, B. 264, 1612, Spirito Santo.
69 ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1624 [m.v.], Celestia.
The same accusations are echoed in a denunciation of 1626 against 'Anzola meretrice', for her frequentation of the parlatorio of San Servolo: 'parlava con le madre bonome monège in ditto monesterio e fava molti bagorli come rider forte come fano queste putane'. That nuns should have welcomed prostitutes into their midst indicates their keenness to maintain contact with the outside world, and to sanction even the depths of worldliness to this end. But it is interesting that prostitutes should have found convents an attractive environment in which to spend their leisure-time. As has already been indicated, nunneries had a certain public status, which in some limited respects gave their occupants access to wider social networks than lay women. In the next section, the possibility that the convent parlatorio could function as a public space where even the unknown and anonymous might expect to find hospitality will be investigated. In the current context, prostitutes may be viewed as representing something from both the neighbourly circles in which lay women found their social sustenance, and also the less personal world of drifting citywide associations which characterised male networks.

In chapter III, it was argued that the employment of lay women by convents to do 'servitii' was strongly associated with nuns' propensity to gossip. The material benefits for the women concerned were obvious in this context, for they were the gainers not only of paid employment, but also of endless perks in the form of food and drink to take away. As attention is now turned more closely to the mechanisms by which nuns fostered contacts with outsiders, it is worth exploring further this unstoppable practice of 'dar fuor robba'. Nuns were notorious for their production of edible goodies to give away. Not infrequently the illicit largesse of female religious was pinpointed as the reason why a particular convent was undergoing major financial problems. For example, the report from Santa Maria delle Vergini in 1596 was quite explicit:

Che si consumano sei cento e più stara di formento all'anno essendo solamente 68 monache [...] Che si consuma gran farina in far bozzolai, fugazze et altre robbe quando si fà pane [...] Che vi sono debbiti di tre mille ducati, e pure le entrate sono grosse.  

Nuns sent food supplies to family, friends, neighbours and employees. Gift-giving was also an essential part of courting the attentions of male admirers, as will become clear later. It seems that nuns were so compelled to engage in baking cakes and biscuits

70 ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1626, S. Servolo.
71 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1596, S. Maria delle Vergini, fo. 588r. At the end of the visitation, Priuli turned his attention specifically to the financial problems which had arisen at the convent as a result of the nuns' excessive baking. He ordered that in future bread should be made outside the convent, workmen should be paid in money not in kind, and strict limits should be imposed on 'elemosine'. The patriarch hoped by this 'regolazione' to bring about a saving of 200 'stara' of flour per annum (fos 590r-591r).
for others that they would happily sacrifice some of their own rations to this end. Thus we learn from a visitation to Santa Chiara, 'Che le monache à tavola si fanno dar le ove crude, e non le mangiano, ma le salvano per far frittole, e torte per donar via'. In his research on the Venetian patrician class, Stanley Chojnacki has observed how women asserted themselves economically in order to achieve a broader empowerment. For lay women, this could manifest itself in the purchase of extravagant clothes, or in testamentary instructions, or in the giving of presents. By their persistent provision of food for outside acquaintances, nuns ensured a steady flow of visitors to their convent; and, in a small way, they too exercised their economic powers.

Besides making gifts to give away, nuns also supplied hospitality within the convent. As we have seen, the prohibition on eating in the parlatorio was invoked again and again, but the disordine of 'dar da mangiar nei parlatori' persisted. Some individuals could do very well out of the nuns' hospitable urges. At the Vergini, a convent whose extravagant generosity to outsiders has already been noted, the organist enjoyed special favour:

Che Maestro Paulo organista prattica troppo spesso, e con troppa familiartà nei parlatori, e che sempre che viene à Castello và alle vergini, si fà dar da mangiare, et anco porta via della robba doppò che hà mangiato.

Female religious also showed their willingness to fulfil other domestic chores for their acquaintances outside the convent. They were particularly renowned for offering a free laundry service to those they felt inclined to favour. In 1618, Patriarch Vendramin issued the following order to the nuns of San Iseppo:

Prohibimo parimente del tutto [...] il pigliare drappi di persone fuori del Monastero tutte comprese, et niuna eccetuata per laverli ne per cortesia ne per alcun premio ò mercede, ancora che fossero drappi di padre di madre non che d'altre più remotte persone si sangue havendo ad esser abastanza alle Monache il lavare i proprii si come sono tenute et obligate.

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72 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3 1594, S. Chiara di Venezia, fo. 339r. In her study of Neapolitan nuns in the seventeenth century, Carla Russo comments, 'È nota la vecchia consuetudine delle monache di fare "cose di zuccaro" per cui ogni casa religiosa era famosa per il suo prodotto'. She provides an extensive footnote on the various sweets produced by different convents, p. 93.


74 For example, ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, S. Giustina, fo. 470v: Che le monache danno da mangiare nei parlatori contro gl'ordini'; ibid., 1595, S. Croce di Giudecca, fo. 493r: 'Che si dà da mangiar nei parlatori massime à puttì'.

75 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1596, S. Maria delle Vergini, fo. 589r.

76 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1618, S. Iseppo.
That the provision of food and laundering services sprang from the same motivation is suggested by an earlier 'ordine' of Vendramin, this time to Santa Croce di Venezia, 'Che si deve prohibir il laver de panni à secolari et similmente il cusinar per altri'.\textsuperscript{77} Doubtless, it was the Patriarch's certainty that by supplying such services nuns would be brought continually into contact with outsiders which determined him against them. But by the same token, the nuns were reluctant to give up these precious means of maintaining a network of contacts beyond the convent walls.

The Public Parlatorio

sopra li abusi, et eccessi, che si fanno nelle chiese, e parlatorii delle Monache massimamente in questi tempi di Carnevale con collationi, mangiar, et bevere, sonar, cantar, e ballar, o in maschera entrarvi in dishonor de Dio, et della nostra questa Religione.\textsuperscript{78}

The abuses and excesses which headed this 'mandatum generale' of Patriarch Trevisan, issued in 1588, were repeatedly condemned by the Venetian authorities throughout the period. Wholly incompatible with the dignity of female religion, and with the principle of enclosure, such practices nonetheless proved enduring. This is remarkable given a climate in which even the most minor transgression would prompt a full-scale investigation, and further testifies to the extent to which religious communities were integrated into the social life of the wider community. For at Carnival or at other times of civic merry-making—as we have already seen on a smaller scale with family festivities—revellers were happy to include nunneries in their boisterous progresses. In many ways, their institutional status must have made religious houses more susceptible to intrusion than private households; on the other hand, the added subversion of creating profane confusion among Christ's brides may have enticed those whose goal it was to turn the world upside down. This last section demonstrates that, in utter contravention of the principle of enclosure, nunneries at times served as open houses, where Venetians could expect the provision not only of hospitality, but also of a public space, devoted to the entertainment of whoever cared to frequent them.

The nunneries of Venice, thirty of them in the city itself, must have constituted conspicuous physical presences, dominated as they were by their imposingly high walls. The churches which adjoined each of these religious houses played an important part in the city's devotional life: many folk attended conventual churches for regular services, chose to be buried there, or instituted redemptive masses to be said within the

\textsuperscript{77} ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1611, S. Croce di Venezia.
\textsuperscript{78} ACPV, Vis. past., B. 2, 1588, fo. 83v: 'Mandatum generale'.


walls. The large teams of clergy who were employed by nunneries testify to the high level of spiritual activity which occurred in conventual churches. But given the strict division between the *chiesa esteriore* and the *chiesa interiore*, even when nuns and lay congregation were united for devotion, they were of course separated from each other's view. According to records from Priuli's 1593 visitation of Santi Biagio e Castaldo, nuns would normally be preached to at private services when the gates of the church would be locked to outsiders; but on feast-days, where custom dictated, Priuli accepted that the laity might be admitted,

però in maniera che non si possano conoscere, ne figurar bene esse Monache, oscurando il luogo di dentro, portando le monache in testa li velli negri, coprendosi con essi, et mettendo anco inanzi la grada qualche vello negro, ò qualche tella trasparente.

Not only did reformers seek to render nuns invisible, they also aspired to make them inaudible. While nuns were not banned outright from making their traditional musical contributions to church services, efforts were certainly made to dampen their songs of praise. To this end, Patriarch Trevisan issued the following mandate:

Che [...] non possiate, ne debbiate imparar à cantar canto figurato, ne a sonar alcuna sorte d'instrumento, ne cantar tali canti nelle vostre chiese, over monasterii, et dove è costume di cantar canto fermo possiate imparar à cantar detto canto dalle Monache Maestre del Monasterio, et non da altri, et dove è costume de salmizar in parole volemo sia osservato detto costume, per ogni modo.

The singing nuns were clearly not so easily subdued, and in 1609, Vendramin instructed the convent of Sant' Anna that 'Li officii della settimana santa si facino con pia divotione con canti piu tosto flebili, che con vanità musicali.' Although in this respect, as in every other, nuns were predictably restricted in the extent to which they were able to make their presence felt, their churches nevertheless afforded them a forum in which they could advertise their existence to the community. In an article entitled 'Disembodied Voices', Craig Monson has argued that

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79 On the numbers of priests employed by conventual churches, see chapter I. pp. 68-69.  
80 Figure 2 shows that, in S. Servolo, the *chiesa interiore*, where the nuns worshipped, was a raised balcony or *palco*. On Carlo Borromeo's reform of the architecture of conventual churches in Milan, see Kendrick, pp. 47-48.  
81 ACPV, *Vis. past.*, B. 1, 1593, SS. Biagio & Castaldo.  
82 ACPV, *Vis. past.*, B. 2, undated 'Mandatum generale', fo. 48r.  
83 ACPV, *Vis. past.*, B. 5, 1609, S. Anna. Nuns' musical activities were further impeded by a crackdown on their employment of lay music-teachers. In 1610, a denunciation was submitted to the *provveditori sopra monasteri* complaining 'che aore 29 in circha era sarato solo in giesia Ms Zuane soto organista dei frari et musicho che insegnava a sonar et a chantar a quele Reverende madre'. This issue is discussed by Monson, 'Disembodied Voices', p. 195.
the efforts of the ecclesiastical authorities to control the nuns' music 'may have served, in part, to enhance its powerful fascination'. He describes how the nuns of Counter-Reformation Bologna used every means at their disposal to dodge the new wave of anti-music regulations, and in so doing adopted practices which came to epitomize the Baroque musical experience. It is indeed possible that the 'canti più tosto flebili' permitted by Vendramin, arising from the 'disembodied voices' of Venetian nuns, may have provided a mystique lacking in the more ostentatious 'vanità musicali' of which the Patriarch complained.

If the devotional function of nunneries gave their inmates public status, and possibly served to instil a certain fascination in the eyes of the laity regarding that which they could not see, conventual churches certainly did not provide a meeting-place where nuns could further social relations with the outside world. Of more use to the nuns in this respect were those moments of civic festivity when they would open their parlatori to a range of visitors including anonymous (and sometimes masked) passers-by. Nunneries were evidently in touch with the city's calendar of merry-making. At the convent of Corpus Christi in 1560, the nuns were instructed not to give presents within or without the convent on the feast of San Martino. Following a visitation of 1596 to Santa Maria delle Vergini, Priuli ordered the nuns 'Che si levi il pasto della madonna di settembre nel qual si spendono molti danari'. But, without doubt, the most sustained festivities of the year took place during Carnival, and it is surely no coincidence that a high proportion of the transgressions which were brought before the provveditori occurred in the weeks leading up to Lent.

It is no wonder that Carnival, renowned as a time for letting off steam, and releasing the tensions of everyday life, should have had a particular appeal for the women cooped up within cloisters. Equally unsurprising was the concern of the Venetian authorities; for if the powers that sought to control convents were distressed by nuns' musical contributions to religious services, how much more perturbing were

84 Monson, 'Disembodied Voices', p. 192.
85 The variety of visitors, from close family to total strangers, attracted to convents at Carnival-time is indicated by Trevisan, in his 'Mandatum generale' of 1574, ACPV, Vis. past., B. 2, fo. 45r-v: 'de non admetter ne permetter che nelli parlatori si habbi ä disnar, ne mangiar per alcuna persona sii di che condition et grado esser si voglie ne padre, ne madre, ne fratelli, ne sorelle, ne admetter mascare, buffoni, cantoni, sonadori, et de simil sorte persone sotto niuno pretesto, ne modo the imaginar si possa ne permetter, ch in essi parlatori si balli, ne si cani ne si soni per alcuna persona sii chi esser si voglia'.
86 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 2, 1560, Corpus Christi, fo. 2v.
87 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1596, S. Maria delle Vergini, fo. 589r. In 1611, certain nuns of Santa Marta themselves complained to the provveditori concerning 'certa musica che fù fatta la sera di San Piero, vicino à detto monasterio', ASV, PSM, B. 264.
88 It is not possible to posit any more concrete statistical link, since 1) not all transgressions occurring during Carnival would have been related to the festivities; 2) although we know the dates of the processi, sometimes there is ambiguity about the exact date of the disciplinary lapse, since it might have taken some time for the case to come to court.
89 For a broader picture of the Venetian Carnival, see Muir, pp. 156-81; Burke, 'Carnival', pp. 183-90; Ruggiero, Binding Passions, pp. 3-23.
the activities prompted by rejoicing of a far more worldly kind. Eating, drinking, music
and dancing, in any case prohibited in the parlatorio, were common events during
Carnival; cross-dressing and theatrical displays particularly characterised the pre-Lenten
entertainments. Within the context of the present inquiry, it is important to assess the
extent to which these activities occurred among nuns independently, and how far they
relied upon the involvement of outsiders.

Nuns who craved variety in their recreation, and an escape from the unchanging
routine of religious life, may have looked upon Carnival as a good excuse to exploit to
the full the small amount of seasonal licence afforded them. In theory, at least, nuns
were allowed to engage in convent theatre, so long as the subject was pious, and the
participants retained their religious garb.

Priuli prefaced a particularly severe
condemnation of nuns who contravened these principles with the avowal 'Siccome
intendemo di non levare a certi tempi le honeste et virtuose ricreationi alle monache,
cosi siamo in obligo d'impedire quelle, che in tutto sono contrarie alla vita regolare, et
che offendono gravemente il Signor Iddio, et gli ordini di Santa chiesa.' Clearly, it
was difficult to control the theatrical efforts of nuns performing amongst themselves.
Visitation reports suggest that certain communities did indeed take advantage of their
cloistered existence to break some of the rules in privacy. For example, at the Miracoli
it was recorded

Che alcune volte le monache cantano cose profane, che li
suona di citara, e liuto, e si vestono tal volta da huom per far
dimostrationi [...] che non si doveria lasciar pigliar robbe da
secolari per adoperar nelle dimostrationi, ma che faccino certi
habiti di tella come già si faceva.

Elissa Weaver, who has worked extensively on convent theatre in Tuscany, has noted
that 'for the most part the audience was the convent community', pointing to the laws
that sought to exclude outsiders. But while her own evidence for convent drama
suggests that it was a largely internal affair, she has observed that the subjects nuns
chose to represent were overwhelmingly concerned with life outside the convent walls.
Thus at an imaginative level, 'the insistence of convent theater to stage the secular

90 For the regulations concerning dramatic representations which were imposed on Italian convents
elsewhere, see Weaver, 'The Convent Wall in Tuscan Convent Drama', esp. pp. 74-75.
91 BMC, Cod. Cic. 2583, 1593, 15 Jan. See also Grimani, cap. XLVIII, for an even more grudging
attitude to convent drama: 'Dalle Rappresentazioni, che alle volte si costumano di fare, sarebbe molto
tempo, che le Monache se n'astenessero, come l'essortiamo sommamente a voler fare, ma se pure si
haveranno ad admettere per honesta ricreatione, le sopportarerno sempre, che siano dell'istorie della
scrittura sacra, o di vite de Santi, et Sante, et nessuna presuma di portare habito secolare, così da
huomo, come da donna, ne manco maschere, o sole barbe, sotto pena all'Abbadessa di sospensione per
anno uno'.
92 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, Miracoli, fo. 369r.
93 Weaver, 'Spiritual Fun', pp. 179-80.
world almost to the exclusion of the world the women actually knew' provided an escape from the hemmed-in life of the nunnery.94

Unfortunately, research has not yet yielded manuscripts of plays performed by Venetian nuns. However, it would appear from the repeated ordini to keep outsiders from attending convent productions, and from the cases that came before the provveditori, that in Venice, at least, a public audience was often procured. Whether or not Venetian nuns chose to represent secular scenes in their drama, they surely shared the desire of their Tuscan sisters to secure temporary relief from their oppressive conventual existence. Convent theatre was an excuse for actual rather than merely metaphorical contact with the world. Indeed, it is likely that Venetian nuns perceived events of theatre as yet another means of attracting layfolk into their midst, as well as a forum for autonomous creativity. The patriarchal visitors reported back from San Sepolcro in 1595 that

Habbiamo inteso con nostro gran dispiacere che li parlatorii del vostro monastero stanno aperti fino à un'ora di notte, e che nel piccolo particolarmente occorrono dei disordini, poiche si serrano dentro persone à parlar con le monache à hore proibite, facendo portar avanti, e indietro tutto il giorno drappi, et altre robbe per recitar tragedie, overo dimostrazioni con gran confusione nel monastier e gran scandolo di fuori.95

Following the 1609 visitation to San Giroloamo, Vendramin spelt out that nuns were only allowed to perform 'senza mai lasciarsi vedere nè anco da Donne nei parlatorii'.96

While we do not know the content of these conventual productions, we are able to infer that two features of 'dimostrazioni' appealed to female religious: firstly, playing to an audience, and secondly, dressing up. In 1570, when various nuns at San Servolo were enjoying familiarity with a group of canons regular from the Augustinian houses of San Antonio and San Salvador, the prospect of watching the nuns in dramatic productions was a fine pretext for the men to extend their visits into the night. One witness recorded

so per cosa certissima, perche cosi osservai, che Don Tranquillo permottò fuori doi notte fino alle sette oto hore con Don Concordio da Mantoa, che era alhora visitadore, et fu pensiero, che andasserò à cena à S. Servolo, et stessero li à veder comedie.97

94 Weaver, 'The Convent Wall in Tuscan Convent Drama', esp. pp. 76 and 83.
95 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1595, S. Sepolcro, fo. 398v.
96 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1609, S. Giroloamo.
97 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1570, S. Servolo, fo. 9r. This case is discussed in detail in chapter V, pp. 206-208.
The impression that convent theatre was viewed by female religious as one of several means of enticing outsiders into the convent is suggested by the fact that the friars also 'giocassero alle carte, et dadi [...] el Cameval con le Monache'. Interestingly, we learn from the deposition of a nun at San Lorenzo in 1622 that

Il Carneval si fà delle comedie, st'anno si han fatto due comedie bene, et una cattiva stampada che di questa li tolsi li libri, et brusciai. Da Nadal cominciono à giuocar alle carte et giuocano di, et perdeno per volta sin x ducati per una, et due in tre converse si mettono ancor esse à giuocar."

It would, of course, be foolish on the basis of unequal documentation to conclude that Venetian nuns lacked the intellectual creativity of the Tuscan nuns, or to suggest that the former saw theatre and gambling as totally interchangeable. However, it is also evident that we should not neglect the fact that Venetian nuns were continually looking for opportunities to attract the attentions of those living in the outside world.

Turning now to the enthusiasm nuns evinced for dressing up, we are presented with an obvious form of relief from the institutional monotony bewailed by Tarabotti. Dramatic representations could, and often did, involve putting on costumes for the stage, and nuns appear to have delighted in the chance to don 'robbe da secolari' belonging to either sex. But even without theatre, Carnival was, of course, a time for dressing up and for flirting with alternative identities. In 1614, at a time when San Zaccaria had fallen prey to the most scandalous disciplinary lapses, and two nuns had brought their male lovers to live within the confines of clausura, the abbess reported of the men in question that 'anco questi giovani erano stravestiti da monaca per il Monasterio di notte'. When questioned about this, suor Laura Querini, responsible for bringing the men to the convent, denied that they had done any such thing, but freely admitted that 'le monache in quel tempo da Carnevale sogliono vestire da huomo, et da donna, et caminar la notte per il Monasterio'. Testifying to a particular incident of this practice, suor Zaccaria, conversa, confessed, 'è vero, ch'io condussi Suor Gregoria conversa mia amica travestita da huomo alla cela di suor Laura sottetta dicendole burlando questo è un huomo'. The practice of cross-dressing is evident again in a case at La Celestia commencing in 1617, this time relating to events that had occurred in the 'carnevaletto' preceding advent. On this occasion, one Nicolo Cressi tells of how he was asked by his friend, prete Gerolemo di Grandi, to lend him a suit of men's clothing, in order that the priest could dress up his favoured nun, suor Lucia.

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98 Ibid., fo. 5v.
99 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 4, 1622, S. Lorenzo.
100 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1614, S. Zaccaria, fo. 5v.
101 Ibid., fo. 10v.
102 Ibid., fos 12v-13r.
According to Cressi, the *quid pro quo* of this arrangement was that 'mi promise lasciarmela vedere in esso habito'.

Thus we see how dressing-up and cross-dressing among nuns served both to give relief and entertainment to the women themselves, while simultaneously attracting those who entertained a voyeuristic fascination with the idea of nuns subverting their godly image, as well as their sexual identity. While the erotic implications of prete Gerolemo's designs are transparent, the aspirations of nuns who engaged in dressing-up games were not necessarily sexual. Suor Elena Badoer from the nunnery at Malamocco was denounced by her own abbess in 1626 for having organised what appears to have been a thoroughly convivial gathering of women:

sto carneval tre over quatro giorni particolarmente el giorno di santa Apolonia sie vestita in habito secolar da gentildona con beleto sul viso e anda a balar nei parlatorii alla presentia dele sue petegole e de un homo che sonava de violin.

Dressing-up had an obvious appeal for nuns, continually warned against the crime of vanity, but it could also serve a third purpose of genuinely disguising those guilty of that and other crimes. For central to the practice of wearing masks during Carnival was anonymity, and in this respect, we are brought back to the distinction between the public and private systems in which nuns created networks.

In a case of 1614, Vicenzo Trivisan, 'cancelier di Torcello' was brought before the *provveditori*, charged with having intruded upon the nunnery of Sant'Antonio during Carnival. He brought with him a friend 'in mascherato', and the two of them stayed until the early hours, 'facendoli molti giasi'. Further anonymous denunciations against Vicenzo accused him of eating, drinking and dancing with the nuns, as if the nunnery were 'un publico postibolo'. While the comparison to a brothel is probably rhetorical, the particular choice of insult nonetheless is of some significance, for it is the contention here that nunneries did indeed function in some degree as houses open to the public for their entertainment. While religious houses were actually subjected to regulations far stricter than private households, there remained a sense in which the nuns—as members of institutions—could suspend

103 ASV, *PSM*, B. 265, 1616 [m.v.], Celestia.
104 N. Z. Davis' article, 'Women on Top', based on early-modern French sources, provides insightful discussion of the cultural functions of sexual inversion and cross-dressing. She challenges the view that sexual inversion necessarily served to reinforce the traditional and stable hierarchy, and perceives subversive possibilities for changing sexual status; see esp. pp. 130-31.
105 ASV, *PSM*, B. 267, 1626, S. Maria dell'Orazione di Malamocco, fo. 4r. For the simple pleasures to be gained from dressing up, see also the case of 1612 against the prostitute, Malipiera Malipiero, for her familiarity with the nuns of Spirito Santo: it was alleged that 'tutto questo Carneval, nel qual tempo sempre è passata pratica, et familiarita domesteghezza prestando essa alla detta Monacha ori, arzenti et vestimenti d'ogni sorte', [ASV, *PSM*, B. 264, 1612, Spirito Santo].
106 ASV, *PSM*, B. 265, 1614, S. Antonio di Torcello, fo. 1r.
107 Ibid., fo. 4v.
personal responsibility for what went on within the convent walls. From the point of view of those who frequented the nunneries of Venice, there was at least an absence of husbands and fathers, even if one day the provveditori sopra monasteri might catch up with them. This mutual renunciation of accountability was, of course, bolstered up by the practice of wearing 'maschera', of concealing personal identity. The ordini issued to nuns restricting the hospitality they were allowed to offer betray a recognition that their resources were often viewed as being available to the public.

Con gran dispiacer dell'animo S.S. Illma hà inteso l'indebita corruetella di farsi dalle Monache salate, et fritte, dar vino, bozzolai, ó altro à i sollazieri, che arrivano al Monasterio.108

'Matinade' could be staged beneath the veiled windows of a nunnery, 'mascare' could enter the parlatorio for refreshments and dancing, 'sollazieri' could stop by expecting to be fed by the nuns.109 In a variety of ways, Venetians viewed nunneries as public spaces, an attitude which nuns were able to exploit in their efforts to maintain contact with the outside world. For the public status of nunneries afforded female religious opportunities for recreation and relief that were not accessible to lay women, totally dependent on their relatively small circle of neighbours, and deliberately confined to their private space.

In this chapter, attention has focused on the social networks which sustained nuns living under clausura. Even within the convent, there were ways of withdrawing into cliques and groupings which broke the suffocating institutional hold of female religious life. Nuns also found support in the myriad connections which they spawned and developed outside the convent. The people of Venice had certain expectations of the city's religious houses, which were often founded on pre-Tridentine conventions. Nuns were able to play up to the image which lay folk still held of them, in order to perpetuate practices no longer deemed acceptable by the authorities. Not only did they continue to administer alms and hospitality to family, friends, neighbours and strangers alike; these activities acquired a subversive character as female religious devised strategies to resist the increasingly rigorous efforts to keep them separate from the world.

108 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 5, 1610, S. Servolo.
109 In August 1575, the papal nuncio, Giambattista Castagna, complained that on holidays the Venetians 'sono soliti andar a spasso in queste loro isolette con le loro donne et figliuole, dove non vi è altro di coperto che un monasterio, nelli cui claustri et orti si vanno recreando', Nunziature, vol. 11, p. 401. These remarks probably referred to both male and female houses.
In the closed-in atmosphere of the convent, the parlatorio was a lifeline which 
nuns clung to.\textsuperscript{110} It was also the first privilege to be withdrawn when they transgressed 
the regulations which restricted them. In his \textit{ordini} of 1591, 'Sopra le visite et 
clausura', Priuli commanded that 'procederemo ancora contra le Monache inobedienti 
alla sospensione de loro offitii & privazione de parlatorii'.\textsuperscript{111} Deprivation from contact 
with the outside world was the most powerful threat the patriarch had at his disposal. In 
the few trials of nuns which have survived, the patriarchal authorities did indeed take 
away parlatorio privileges in response to cases of ill discipline.\textsuperscript{112} Even more tellingly, 
we know that some convents had a prison where subversive nuns were sentenced to 
periods of utter isolation. After visiting Santa Croce di Giudecca in 1596, Patriarch 
Priuli issued the nuns with the following instructions regarding suor Chiara Barbaro, 
imprisoned within the convent for unspecified misdeeds: 'Ordinarete anco, et 
publicarete in capitolo à tutte le monache, che niuna ardisca di ragionar, ne trattar con 
lei'.\textsuperscript{113} The records of Church and State for the period following Trent chart a struggle 
to impose enclosure and separation on nuns. But 'ragionamento' was a precious 
commodity, and female religious used every resource to maintain it.

\textsuperscript{110} On the significance of the parlatorio to early-modern Genoese convents, see Rosi, p. 75: 'Uno 
spasso assai frequente le monache trovavano alle grate ed al parlatorio. Parenti, amici, con un pretesto o 
con una ragione qualsiasi, vi si recavano spesso, portavano le notizie del di fuori, parlavano di persone 
prima conosciute dalla monaca, e questa riviveva in un altro mondo, e usciva dal parlatorio con 
impressioni, che dopo averla momentaneamente confortata, dovevano bene spesso lasciarla a disagio'.
\textsuperscript{111} L. Priuli, \textit{ordine} 18. 
\textsuperscript{112} ACPV, \textit{Vis. past.}, B. 3: for example, see 1594, S. Chiara di Venezia, for punishments 
administered to suor Clementia da Leze (fo. 341r-v); 1596, S. Sepolcro, for sentence of suor Paula 
Lippamano (fo. 402r-v). 
\textsuperscript{113} ACPV, \textit{Vis. past.}, B. 3, 1595, S. Croce di Giudecca (loose unnumbered folio).
CHAPTER V
OUT OF BOUNDS: SEXUALITY IN THE CONVENT

In Aretino's *Ragionamento della Nanna e della Antonia* published in 1534, Nanna describes her own brief experience as a nun. Her father had decided that the convent was to be her fate (against the will of her mother) and one day Nanna found herself being bundled off to the nunnery church, surrounded by relatives, to the ceremony where she would take the veil. While her account does not suggest that she spoke out openly against the life which had been chosen for her, it is clear that her heart was not in it. Her disinclination to the chaste life is signalled by the fact that she already enjoyed the admiration of several men, one of whom could be heard sobbing throughout the clothing ceremony. As she passed from the church to the convent, the door slammed behind her shutting out the world, not even allowing her to say farewell to her relations. Nanna recalls,

\[
\text{credetti certo di entrare viva viva in una sepoltura, e mi pensava di vedere donne morte nelle discipline e ne' digiuni, e non più dei parenti, ma di me stessa piangeva.} 1
\]

A moment later and the darkness was dispelled. Nanna received a warm welcome from the nuns, who were radiant with affection and vivacity. And in the refectory she discovered that there was no dearth of male company either: a group comprising priests, friars and even laymen were visiting the convent, whom Nanna judged to be the best and finest and most cheerful men she had ever seen.

As the account progresses, we witness the confounding of all Nanna's expectations of convent life. Far from being an environment of austerity and self-denial, every earthly pleasure was catered for. First, Nanna partook of a sumptuous feast—with food such as the pope himself had never tasted. But the highlight of the occasion was reserved until after the meal when a servant brought on a basket of dildos (made of Murano glass) to be distributed among the nuns. Once the hilarity had died down, the nuns took Nanna on a tour of the convent to admire the painted parlours depicting erotic scenes. Even the layout of the cells was arranged in order to allow maximum possibility for voyeurism. When left alone in her own cell, Nanna found herself spying through a chink in the wall, transfixed by the extraordinary displays of group sex taking place in the abbess's quarters. Nanna's own desires were finally attended to by a lusty young friar and as she contemplated her pleasure 'ringraziava l'ora e il punto del mio farmi suora, giudicando il vero paradiso quello delle suore'.

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1 Aretino, p. 11.
2 Ibid., p. 34.
It will come as no surprise that Nanna's recollections do not provide an accurate picture of life in an Italian nunnery, even for the period before the reforms instituted by the Council of Trent. But, cutting through the thick layers of satire and pornographic fantasy, Aretino's tale is revealing of some characteristic perceptions of nuns' experience. Firstly, it features the reluctant nun, compelled to enter the convent on account of family pressures. Secondly, it focuses on the transition from the world she has grown up in (and in which she has already struck the roots of affection) to the convent, presented as the burial of her earthly self within a tomb. Thirdly, it reveals the subversion of all that the nunnery stands for and, in particular, the systematic transgression of chastity, not just by individual nuns, but by the common consent of the entire community, united by their disinclination to the religious life.

The transgression of chastity provided an obvious focus for those looking to criticize monastic orders. The lascivious deeds of nuns and friars fed the authors of anti-clerical and anti-popish literature. They were also seized upon by satirists, bent on exposing the more generalized object of hypocrisy. Moral indignation joined with comic and pornographic potential to give literary prominence to the sexual antics of male and female religious. Historians too have pointed accusingly at the sexual incontinence which afflicted some religious houses, and even today there are scholars who comment upon such irregularities in blatantly judgmental terms. Others, who appear to be personally detached from the moral issues at stake, nevertheless present a history of monasticism which reads like a catalogue of sexual misdemeanours. The fascination with the sexual activities of those sworn to abstinence evidently endures.

The decision to devote the final chapter of this thesis to an analysis of sexuality in Venetian nunneries during the early-modern period is, in part, a response to the bias of secondary literature: the need to confront an issue which has been frequently discussed often at a rather unsatisfactory level. It also reflects the concerns of the period, evident in the historical documents which have come down to us. For the tendency to accuse nuns of sexual misconduct, or to use the language of sexual depravity to describe corruption and laxity of a more general nature, is often apparent in the literature and records of early-modern Venice. While such criticisms may be placed in a long tradition of attacks on the church and the monastic orders, this is not to say that the history of sexuality in the convent is an unchanging one. It is, therefore, the

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3 See Seidel Menchi, esp. p. 275, for a brief discussion of such texts. Aretino and Diderot (La Religieuse, 1796), have an obviously pornographic intent. On Italian novelle, Cattaneo writes 'Da Boccaccio a Matteo Bandello [...] la novellistica ha narrato largamente il decadimento della vita monastica sino alle colpe più gravi', p. 147.

4 Among those who cannot conceal their personal anguish in recording instances of moral laxity in the convent are Tacchi-Venturi, Paschini, Giuliani and Spinelli. For an extremely ill-digested study of nuns' sexuality, see Canosa, who provides a great many cases of nuns' sexual misconduct but very superficial discussion of them. More self-aware, if trivial, is Ewart's chapter on 'Naughty Nuns', pp. 111-29. Daichman and Ruggiero, Boundaries (see chapter IV, 'Sex Crimes against God', pp. 71-88) provide far more helpful insights into sexual transgression in the nunnery.
aim of this chapter to contextualize the Venetian case within the particular social and religious climate of the Counter-Reformation period.

This chapter begins by examining the legislation which defined sex crimes involving nuns. From here, it moves on to an analysis of the criminals—the men, lay and clerical, who were tried for transgressing the regulations relating to nuns. In the final section of this chapter, attention is directed to the nuns themselves, investigating the part they played in cases of sacrilegio, and assessing the extent to which their personal relationships had a sexual dimension.

The crime of sacrilegio
In early-modern Venice, it was a crime to have sexual relations with a nun—a crime which came under the jurisdiction of secular authorities and which, from 1605, was punishable by death. In 1551, the provveditori sopra monasteri were made responsible for trying the perpetrators of this crime. The processi criminali e disciplinari carried out by the magistracy constitute the most comprehensive source for this period of sexual transgressions involving Venetian nuns. Its primary focus is, of course, the male transgressors who dared to engage in such liaisons, rather than their lovers from the nunneries. Female religious were exempt from temporal jurisdiction and were subject instead to disciplinary proceedings by the patriarch. As has already been mentioned, the records of the patriarchal trials of nuns were destroyed in the nineteenth century. Yet the distorted nature of the surviving evidence may help to point to a genuine imbalance in the legal construction of sex crimes involving nuns: a construction which placed the full weight of opprobrium on the shoulders of the men, and which played down the role of female agency.

The greater culpability of the male transgressors derived in part from the categorization of the crime as sacrilegio. According to the definition of the eighteenth-century legal historian Marco Ferro, 'Questo termine preso nel suo significato generale s'intende per qualunque profanazione delle cose sacre o dedicate a Dio'. Of the various instances of sacrilegio which Ferro goes on to cite, sexual intercourse with a bride of Christ is presented as a particularly serious profanation.

Si commette il sacrilegio violando una vergine dedicata a Dio Signore, come conoscendo carnalmente una monaca professa, nel qual caso per dritto divino s'incorre subito nella scomunica, e secondo il gius canonico, quando il delinquente sia un chierico si depone dall'ordine, si spoglia

5 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fos 39r-41v, 1604, 7 Feb. [m.v.], Cons. X. This law is discussed below, pp. 183-84.
6 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fos 25v-26r, 1551, 19 Nov.
del beneficio, e si serra perpetuamente in un monastero, se poi sia laico incorre nella scomunica, e per il dritto civile si punisce colla pena di morte. 7

As with other acts of sacrilege, blame was directed at the subject not the object of the deed. (If a man urinated in the holy water, it was the man not the holy water who was held to account.) While critics and satirists pointed to nunneries as houses of sexual corruption, secular law was blind to the part played by female religious in forging sexual relationships.

In analysing the rationale behind the laws relating to fornication with nuns, it is helpful to consider the work of Guido Ruggiero on 'sex crimes against God'. Focusing on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, he highlights four types of sexual transgression which were deemed to injure God directly. These were 1) sex with a priest, 2) sex with a nun, 3) sex 'in an ecclesiastical setting' (e.g. under the organ of a church) and 4) sex with a Jew. According to Ruggiero, the offence paid to God by men who had sexual intercourse with nuns was conceived in particularly graphic terms: 'fornication with nuns, the "brides of Christ", literally put Christ in the same position as any other cuckolded husband'. 8 The law was fashioned in order to protect God from such dishonour; in return, Venice might hope to receive God's protection. This is a compelling interpretation, which rightfully places an aspect of the history of crime within its cultural context. However, as will become clear, Ruggiero's arguments do not wholly apply to the early-modern period.

In the years before the provveditori sopra monasteri were afforded their judicial role, the Avogadori di Comun were responsible for prosecuting transgressors, who were tried by the Quarantia Criminale. Ruggiero has analysed the rhetoric of the cases against monachini. The first legislation against fornication with nuns was passed in 1349 and was drafted in conspicuously pious language, clearly invoking the concept of divine offence. 9 The actual cases which were prosecuted were slow to pick up on this rhetoric, but by 1395, in a trial against Antonio Vianaro, charged with entering the convent of Santa Croce della Giudecca several times in order to have sexual relations with Sister Ursia Tressa in her cell, Ruggiero perceives the rhetoric to have reached 'the complexity of its mature form'. Vianaro was accused of 'not considering how much injury he caused the Highest Creator by violating the bride of Jesus Christ' and of 'committing wicked incest, fornication, adultery and sacrilege, not keeping God before

8 Ruggiero, Boundaries, pp. 70-88 (72).
9 It may be significant that this provision was made in the wake of the Black Death (1348).
his eyes\textsuperscript{10}. This case set the tone for the fifteenth century, a period in which stern legislation was followed up by action in the courts.\textsuperscript{11}

The broad perspective provided by Ruggiero's work enables us to see that 'sex crimes against God' were different from other sexual transgressions and that they demanded a different form of legal response. The disciplinary policies aimed at fornicators, adulterers and even rapists were intended to be functional and pragmatic. A man who had deflowered a young girl might be able to make good his crime by agreeing to marry her (since he had severely jeopardized her chances on the marriage market). In responding to cases of adultery, the law's priority was with reconstituting the family unit and protecting property rather than with the eradication of moral vice. But where the offended party was divine rather than mortal and where the injury was spiritual rather than material, the purpose of the law could no longer be said to be about redress and restitution, in any practical sense. Although Ruggiero stresses the immediacy with which God's injury was perceived, and the urgency with which the Venetian government stepped in aggressively to prevent such offence being caused, his interpretation is nevertheless based on the assumption that the late-medieval laws against \textit{monachini} were motivated primarily by piety. By the sixteenth century, it is clear that the protection of God's honour was no longer the guiding principle of the law, and that the discipline and control of nunneries had become the primary end.

On 29 June 1509, the Senate passed the severest legislation to date 'contra i scelesti et sacrilegi et violatori de li monasteri di monache dedicate al servitio et culto divino'. Perpetual banishment from Venice 'et del destretto' was to be the fate of the worst transgressors, who were defined as 'tutti quelli che useranno con monache, nei monasterii over fuera, et similiter quelli che trarano monache de' monasterii, \textit{etiam che se escusassero non haver con quelle usado}' [emphasis added].\textsuperscript{12} Thus the same punishment was prescribed for those who had sexual intercourse with nuns and those who led nuns out of their convent, regardless of whether they had sexual relations with them (and so regardless of whether they had cuckolded the deity). Unlawful entry to

\textsuperscript{10} Ruggiero, \textit{Boundaries}, p. 73. These quotations, taken from ASV, \textit{Avogaria di Comun}, 'Raspe', may be found in the original Italian in Canosa, p. 31. The accusation of incest (as Ruggiero explains, \textit{Boundaries}, p. 74) was premised on the notion that God was both father to all men and the spouse of all nuns: a man copulating with a nun would therefore be guilty of incest with his father's wife. Daichman, p. 104, gives a more limited definition of spiritual incest as being 'intercourse between persons who were both under ecclesiastical vows and thus in relation of spiritual father and daughter, or brother and sister'. However, she goes on to quote from a fourteenth-century source which undermines her own definition and rather endorses Ruggiero's: 'he who corrupteth a nun commitleth incest for she is the bride of God, who is our father'.

\textsuperscript{11} In 1455 and 1486, the \textit{Maggior Consiglio} passed further legislation. See Canosa, pp. 29-44, for a whistlestop tour of trials conducted against \textit{monachini} during the fifteenth century.

\textsuperscript{12} Sanuto, VIII, col. 454 and following. The 'destretto' or 'dogado' referred to the area immediately surrounding Venice. In June 1509, this would have carried a particular force since Venice had recently lost its mainland territories beyond the 'dogado' to French and Imperialist forces, following the disastrous battle of Agnadello in the Ghiaradadda.
the convent was also heavily punished with a ten-year ban. Those who facilitated a nun's departure from a convent, 'barcharuoli et altri', were liable to six months' imprisonment. The crime of sacrilegio was given a less distinct status than might be expected, and was rather perceived as one (albeit the worst) of a list of cases in which the convent's sacred integrity was violated.

Three further laws warrant examination, all of which emanated from the Council of Ten, during a period when it was extending its judicial role. The first major intervention from the Ten regarding nunneries came in 1514. On 14 August, legislation was passed which carried a preamble fit to rival Ruggiero's earlier examples in its emotive religious rhetoric. It spoke of how from earliest times, the Venetian government had made provision for every crime except 'il nefando vitio et pecato del sacrilegio, cioè contamination delle vergini sacre a Dio dedicate'. The fathers of the Republic had omitted to legislate against this for they had not believed it possible that 'effetto tanto abominevole, quanto è violar le spose di Christo Signor Dio nostro potesse mai cader in mente de homo christian'. Over the years, in response to the growth of the crime, various measures had been introduced, and yet the punishments remained insufficient to meet the enormities committed by 'tal sceleratissimi delinquenti ribelli della divina volontà'. The preamble ends by promising a very tough line on these most wicked of men:

unde è al tutto necessario in gratification del summo creator et per purgar la terra nostra da cusi horendo vitio come caso atrocissimo et che grandemente concerne crimen Divinae lesae Maiestatis, assumere et sottoporlo a quella istessa censura che giudica et punisce gli altri delitti Maiestatis lesae et insieme proceder alla remotion delle infrascritte cause mediante le quali seguisse l'effetto di tanta offension alla Divina Maestà.¹³

No holds are barred in this condemnation of the crime, styled here as treason against the Divine Majesty. Yet the provisions that follow are anti-climactic in two respects. First, contrary to the expectations given by the preamble, the penalties never quite reach 'a quella tremenda censura che si conveniva alla enormità del delitto'. Indeed, several of the punishments arguably represent a decline in severity from the 1509 legislation, though such changes might also be accounted for by a more general review of sentencing policy.¹⁴ Second, and more significant, is the failure to single out the crime

¹³ ASV, PSM, B. 1, fos 1v–4v; 1514, 9 Aug., Cons. X.
¹⁴ The 1509 laws may perhaps be construed as panic legislation since they followed so quickly after the Venetian defeat of Agnadello (see further discussion on pp. 35-36). From 1514, in place of perpetual banishment, those who fornicated with nuns were subject to a fine of 200 ducats, imprisonment for one year, and two years' exile. Nobles were then deprived from office-holding for a further year, which was substituted by an additional year's exile for 'cittadini o forestieri'. (The absence of 'popolani' is noteworthy). Those found guilty of entering a convent were subject to the same
of sacrilegio for unique treatment after a preamble which played so heavily on the uniqueness of the crime. Appearing in the middle of a long list of provisions for the greater security of convents, the penalties are prescribed for any man 'convinto de comixtion carnal con Monache sacre, o non sacre, in Monasterii o fuera over di esser entrato di zorno o di notte in essi Monasterii'[emphasis added]. According to the scale of punishments, having sexual intercourse with one of Christ's brides was no worse a crime than simply entering a convent without due cause.

By 1566, when the Council of Ten instituted the next major development in the legislation regarding monachini, the need for extravagant rhetoric was evidently deemed less of a necessity. The preamble to the new laws began with the brief exclamation 'Quanto siano stati sempre odiosi alla Signoria Nostra li sacrilegii', and went on to lament the growth in transgressions. A significant shift in the perception of sacrilegio is perhaps registered in the reference to the 'violatori delli Monasteri nostri'; in 1514, it was the 'spose di Christo' who were violated, rather than the convents, while in 1509, it was 'li monasteri de monache sacrate et dedicate al servitio et culto divino'. The sense of personal injury to God and his brides was waning, and the greater damage was now perceived as being to the institution. According to the new legislation, however, the highest penalties were reserved for any man 'convento di haver havuto comertio carnal con alcuna Monaca': this warranted ten years' banishment which could only be initiated after payment of a weighty 1,000 ducat fine; if the convicted man was unable to pay this fine, then he would have to spend three years in prison prior to beginning his exile. Introducing a novel strategy, these punishments were to be exactly halved for any man 'trovato dentro di alcun Monasterio di Monache [...] etiam che non fusse convento di comertio carnale'.

In 1605, the Council of Ten produced its toughest legislation against monachini, and the death penalty was prescribed for the first time. Yet the definition of the crime was now deliberately watered down. Rather than placing the emphasis on the sexual violation of Christ's brides, engagement in sexual relations had apparently become an irrelevance. The wording was as follows:

Et se alcuno nell'avenire sia chi si voglia, eccettuati però quelli, che sono admessi dalle leggi, sarà trovato dentro di alcun Monasterio, ovvero sarà accusato di esservi stato, così di giorno, come di notte, etiam che non fusse convinto di penalties as above (instead of the 10 years' exile prescribed in 1509). Those who led nuns out of the convent were liable to a fine of 100 ducats, one year's imprisonment and a year's deprivation from office, or alternatively, two years' exile for citizens and foreigners. (According to the 1509 legislation, these transgressors would have been subject to the same penalties as those guilty of sacrilegio). Boatmen guilty of transporting nuns away from their convents were liable to a more obvious increase in punishment: instead of the six months' imprisonment laid down in 1509, they were to be fined 100 lire de piccoli and to be banished for three years.

15 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fos 28v-29v; 1566, 29 March, Cons. X.
comertio carnale, essendo rettento, et giustificata la verità, gli sia tagliata la testa, si che si separi dal busto, et muora. 16

Unlawful entry to a convent, whatever one's business, was now punishable by death.

In the period from 1509 to 1605, the evolution of laws against monachini did not follow a thoroughly coherent pattern, nor did it break away decisively from the rhetoric of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The crime was always conceived in religious terms; the laws always vaunted their pious objectives. But there was change as well as continuity, and certain underlying developments may be identified, even if they were introduced at an uneven pace. The fear of offending God, which Ruggiero found so prominent in the period he investigated, was replaced by a concern with 'i scandali, et pericoli del mondo'. Worldly contamination, not sexual violation, was now presented as the most detestable element of the crimes against convents. Furthermore, it was more often the institution of the nunnery rather than the individual nun which was deemed to have been contaminated. 17 Bishop Grimani of Torcello wrote in 1592, 'Non è cosa che più custodisca in innocenza lo stato virginale la perpetua clausura'; 18 but it may not be an overstatement to say that, in the minds of the secular legislators, enclosure had supplanted chastity as the ultimate ideal for female monastic life.

Having established some general trends in the perception of the crime of sacrilegio, the remainder of this section is primarily concerned with the methodological problems of using criminal records as sources. 19 The analysis of the legislation of course deals with the theory rather than the practice of measures against sacrilegio. A look at the trials undertaken by the provveditori sopra monasteri from the middle of the sixteenth century alerts us to certain discrepancies between legal provision and actual enforcement. For example, from 1605, when the death penalty was introduced, to 1630 (the chronological limit of this thesis), the records suggest that it was never employed. This may sometimes be accounted for by the fact that the accused had fled from Venice and

16 ASV, PSM, B. 1, fos 39r-41v; 1604, 7 Feb. [m.v.], Cons. X.
17 These points may largely be observed in the preamble to the 1604 legislation: 'Fu sempre oggetto de' prudentissimi progenitori nostri accompagnato da perfetto, et religioso zelo verso il culto divino, che li luochi sacri, dove si rinchiudevano vergini dedicate a servire a sua divina Maestà et alle stesse ancora, fossero preservate, et custodite dalle profanabilità, et contaminazioni del mondo; il che giudicarno, et son molto fondamento che potesse più facilmente riuscire, mentre se gli rimovessero le frequenti et soverchie pratiche, et infiltrazioni, et specialmente di persone non congenite seco in quei gradi di consanguineità, et diretta affinità, che sono limitati, et specificati dalle leggi, et ordini di questo Cons. unde col mezo di così fatta proibizione vivessero le monache, non pur lontane, ma sicure da i scandali, et pericoli del mondo [italics added throughout]'. On the question of what was considered the object of contamination, the nuns or the nunnery, this passage is noticeably ambivalent. The syntax of the sentence is such that we anticipate that the 'luochi sacri' will be the objects of preservation. But it is the plural feminine 'vergini' which agrees with the past participles 'preservate' and 'custodite'.
18 Grimani, cap. XXI.
19 For a discussion of some of the more general problems of criminal evidence, see Introduction, pp. 13-16. The following remarks are concerned with the particular problems arising from the study of sexual transgressions in nunneries.
could not be found. In such cases, the only recourse left to the *provveditori* was to banish the culprits from Venetian territories, leaving the threat of death hanging over them if they should dare to break their exile. But it is also true to say that sometimes leniency was exercised.

One revealing case dating from 1604 suggests that sentencing could sometimes be governed by political motives, in particular the desire to suppress a scandal that might adversely affect members of the nobility, or other prominent figures.\(^{20}\) At the end of a lengthy trial lasting from March until September, two men, accused of having unlawfully entered the convent of San Daniel, were absolved by the Council of Ten. These were Francesco Badoer, a nobleman, and Piero Pellegrini, secretary to none other than the Council of Ten. In the case of Francesco Badoer, it took five ballots before a decisive majority was arrived at over the question of whether the Council would proceed against him. Presumably, this was a controversial matter. It was certainly politically sensitive. The concern of the Council of Ten to avoid scandal was made clear by its decision to conceal the documentation amongst the files of the *Inquisitori di Stato*:

> Che li Processi formati nel particolare delle Monache di San Daniel di questa città contra ser Francesco Badoer de ser Andrea et il circospetto et fedelissimo Secretario di questo Consiglio Piero Pellegrini siano per li rispetti ben noti a questo Consiglio posti nel Scrigno dell' Inquisitori nostri di Stato ben ligati et sigilati, dal quale Scrigno non possino mai esser cavati, ne mai in alcun tempo da alcuno disbolati, ne veduti, se non con parte posta et presa con li doi terzi delle ballotte del sudetto Consiglio.\(^{21}\)

Unlike the decision to release the two men, this final move to suppress the evidence of the case was met with near unanimity: there were 13 votes in favour and only 2 'non sincere'. No one voted against.

While there was clearly flexibility regarding sentencing, in the matters of defining crime and establishing a hierarchy of transgressions, the trials generally followed the legislation closely. As has been observed throughout this thesis, the concern to protect the sacred space of the convent is evident from the early trials of the *provveditori sopra monasteri* (1550s-70s) and greatly escalates from the beginning of the seventeenth century.\(^{22}\) The abundance of trials against petty transgressors of enclosure gives the impression that the heyday of sexual crime in the nunneries was over. According to Romano Canosa,

\(^{20}\) Lorenzi, pp. 307-339.  
\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 339.  
\(^{22}\) See ASV, *PSM*, B. 264, for a cluster of cases around 1610 which crack down on minor breaches of enclosure. Some of these are discussed in chapter 3.
La sessualità, che in precedenza aveva avuto modo di estrinsecarsi in parecchi conventi a livello di massa, a partire dalla fine del 500 divenne episodica e marginale, e fu sostituita quasi dovunque da forme di convivialità [...] (feste, rappresentazioni teatrali, incontri in parlatorio)²³

It is, however, a mistake automatically to equate the decline of sexuality in the trials with the decline of sexuality in the convents. While the new drive to reform and control the nunneries of course reduced the incidence of serious transgressions, the changes which are apparent in the trial evidence are more a reflection of where the authorities' concerns lay than of actual events in the convent.

Even those cases which stand out immediately to the modern eye as being about sexual transgressions were often construed and presented as being extreme breaches of enclosure.²⁴ The most vivid example of this may be seen in the case of 1614 against Andrea Foscarini and Alvise Zorzi, who had sexual relations with two nuns at San Zaccaria. This was an outrageous instance of sexuality in the convent, and one which will be addressed in greater detail later on. For now, it is sufficient to know that suor Laura Querini and a conversa named Zaccaria found the means to make a hole in the wall of a store-room through which they admitted the two men in order to engage in sexual activities with them. A trial was initially carried out by the patriarch, who then handed over the investigation to the provveditori sopra monasteri, and the language in which the crime is described is telling: the patriarchal vicar, responsible for passing the trial documents over to the provveditori, informed them 'che fosse stata rotta clausura del monastero di San Zaccaria, che fossero stati dentro doi [...] che non erano nobili'. No mention was made of the sexual improprieties which had clearly taken place. A subsequent document written by the patriarch himself holds forth at some length about the breach in the convent wall before finally mentioning that one of the men, Andrea Foscarini, had stayed within the convent for 10 to 12 days 'magnando, e bevendo vini, et hebbe commercio con Suor Laura'. Surprising though we may find it, sexual transgressions were not necessarily the greatest concern of those entrusted with controlling the nunneries. But this should not lead us to believe that they no longer occurred.

Glimpses of sexual scandals involving nuns do sometimes emerge, and their comparative rarity among the records of the provveditori may in part result from the success of damage limitation policies. That the Council of Ten (the body to which the

²³ Canosa, p. 11.
²⁴ Given the post-Tridentine emphasis on the importance of enclosure, it is tempting to view this aspect of temporal control as responding to the goals of the Counter-Reformation. While this may indeed be the case, it is also salutary to remember that as early as 1509, legislation was being drafted against those who took nuns outside the walls of their convent 'etiam che se escusassero non haver con quelle usado'.
provveditori sopra monasteri were subject) was not above suppressing information is
evident from the fate of records from the San Daniel case of 1604. But the loss or
survival of documents was often the result of more random factors. From the
chronological distribution of trials carried out by the provveditori during the period
1550-1630, it seems highly likely that trials from unrepresented years have been lost.25
This hunch is confirmed by cross-reference to other sources. For example, a number of
verdicts survive, recording the conclusions of trials carried out by the provveditori
which are no longer extant.26 Among this set of records, the reader's eye is
immediately caught by two documents of 30 November 1608 and 31 January 1609.27
They are copies of the lists which were published in the Maggior Consiglio bearing the
names of men who had transgressed the laws relating to nunneries, and they bring to
light a cluster of crimes worthy of note.

Ten men were named in the first list and a further five in the second. Fourteen
out of the fifteen names were noble, the exception being one 'Hieronimo Padavin,
nodaro primacio dell' Avogaria'. In accordance with the law, the identity of the
convents was withheld, but the nature of each man's crime was specified.28 Eight out
of the fifteen men, it is clearly stated, had had 'commertio carnale' with nuns. Four
more had attempted to have sex with nuns. The remaining three had taken nuns from
the convent and enjoyed some sort of improper 'prattica' with them, although they had
refrained from actual or attempted sexual intercourse. In these cases, the sexual element
of the transgressions was given a central position. Those who had actually succeeded in
having sex with nuns received the severest punishments. Those who had failed were
treated more leniently, despite the fact that no doubt is left regarding their intentions.
For example, Alvise Mocenigo, whose name appeared on the November list, was
accused of taking a nun back to his home 'dove riserrato con una Monaca hà voluto ad
ogni modo, non ostante the lei facesse reistenza haver commertio carnale'. Like Marco
Giustinian and Almoro Dolfin, who were each accused of having 'procurato con ogni
suo potere di congiungersi carnalemente', Alvise was 'relegato' to distant Venetian
territory for twelve years. The six nobles who were accused at the same time of 'copula
carnale' with nuns were relegated for fifteen years. The three cases where sexual
intercourse had not been attempted all derive from the January list. Two out of the three
nobles condemned were sentenced to ten years' relegation; for no apparent reason, the

25 There are no trials concerning Venetian convents between 1571 and 1600.
26 ASV, PSM, B. 12 contains a series of verdicts most of which derive from trials otherwise
undocumented. Ibid., B. 260 contains a number of denunciations for trials which no longer exist.
27 ASV, PSM, B. 12. The two documents are, in fact, dated 30 Nov. and 31 Jan. 1608, according to
more veneto.
28 According to laws of 1584 and 1617, the names of nobles who had transgressed the laws relating to
nunneries were to be published in the Maggior Consiglio; citizens and popolani had their names
displayed on the steps of San Marco and of the Rialto. Presumably, Hieronimo's name appeared
alongside those of the nobles by virtue of his important official position. The same laws also stressed
that the convents should not be identified (see chapter I, pp. 34-35).
remaining one was sentenced to twelve years' relegation. In general, however, within this set of cases, a hierarchy of transgressions was established, headed by fornication with nuns.

The chance survival of these documents from 1608-9 serves to remind us of what other significant material may be missing from the main corpus of 'processi criminali e disciplinari'. Contrary to the pattern discerned from the complete trials, here the sexual nature of the transgressions is clearly given pride of place over the issue of rupturing enclosure. On the other hand, while the severity of punishment corresponds to the extent of carnal engagement with the nun, there is not such a very great difference between the 15 years' relegation for successful fornicators and the ten or twelve years for those who did not attempt to have sexual intercourse, though were guilty of removing nuns from clausura. The details of how the convent walls came to be crossed are consistently supplied, and we learn of how the men commonly entered the nunnery at night via the cellar, and usually led the nuns away in a boat and then took them home or to a friend's house in order to try their luck. It is true to say that the issue of enclosure remains prominent throughout even if, in these cases, it is subsumed beneath an even greater concern with sexuality.

Perhaps the most important function served by these cases is that they bring to light the persistence of sexual transgressions involving nuns long after the "secolo d'oro" della sessualità conventuale'--to use Canosa's phrase-- had supposedly ended. The density of the crimes is striking: fifteen serious cases in the space of only two months. The anonymity of the convents involved is tantalizing: did this concurrence of transgressions occur in just one or two nunneries, or were they distributed amongst a large number of communities? Sexual intercourse, sexual violence and pregnancy all feature amongst the descriptions of the crimes, begging important questions about whether the nuns were agents or victims of these events. While the limitations of the sources make such explicit evidence rare, the sexual lives of nuns are indicated by a range of less blatant pointers. The rest of this chapter will be concerned with shedding light on the relationships they entered into.

Monachini and their motives

In Girolamo Priuli's famous tirades against the immorality of the Venetian convents, he persistently likened them to public brothels. He struck his first blow in 1501 when he dubbed the conventual nuns 'meretrize publice', and described their houses as 'honesti lupanari'. In the wake of Agnadello, his attacks came thick and fast. His lengthy entry for 6 June 1509, claimed that there were 'piui de XV monasterii de simel sorte, quali se potevano riputare publici bordelli et publici lupanari' and 'che le nobile fiole

29 Canosa, p. 226.
30 G. Priuli, II, p. 115; 1501, 21 March.
deli primi nobeli et parentadi dela citade, poste in li monasterii et dedicate et disponeate al culto divino, fusseno diventate publice meretrice. Later the same month, Priuli was again bewailing the 'publici bordelli et publice meretrice' which were nunneries in name alone. The situation warranted extreme measures, and the indignant diarist proclaimed that 'non hera altro remedio cha bruxare li monasterii predicti insieme cum le monache per salute del Stato Veneto'.

Priuli was not the first or the last to invoke the metaphor of the brothel to describe the nunneries of Venice. In 1497, the Franciscan, Timoteo da Lucca, preaching in San Marco, lamented the fact that 'quando vien qualche signor in questa terra, li mostrate li monasterii di monache, non monasterii ma postriboli e bordelli publici'. Gasparo Contarini later made use of the same imagery, writing in his De officio episcopi of 1516 'che molti monasteri di vergini, già dedicati a Dio, tengano le veci di bordelli'. Echoes of Girolamo Priuli could be heard in a supplication from the nuns of San Maffio di Mazzorbo to the provveditori sopra monasteri, dated July 1564. Harking back to 1509, the nuns warned:

Vostre Signorie Illustriissime sano come del 9 la divina giustitia percosse così acerbamente questa Republica non per altro che per simili orrori che nei Monasterii conventuali di questa Città continuamente commettevano i quali erano ridotti come publici postribuli.

The charge continued to be directed against nunneries and their occupants, as in 1620, when a denunciation remarked of S. Servolo, 'non parendo loco di religiose ma di vere meretrice' or when, also in 1620, following a quarrel, a priest sent his housekeeper along to tell the abbess of San Vito di Burano 'tu sei una publica meretrice'.

At one level, 'whore' was a common insult. It was also a standard metaphor for all that was immoral and corrupt. But there may have been more meaningful associations between the brothel and the nunnery. First, brothels and prostitutes were public (as was emphasisized in the rhetoric of insult). Convents too shared something of that public status. Despite the Counter-Reformation stress on clausura, nunneries continued to provide open house to all and sundry. Their parlatorii were often viewed as public spaces where nuns' friends and acquaintances could stop off for

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31 G. Priuli, IV, p. 34; 1509, 6 June
32 Ibid., p. 115; 1509, 29 June.
33 Conversely, in the early-modern period (at least, in England and in Germany), 'nunnery' and 'nun' in slang could be used to refer to brothel and whore; see Levin.
34 Sanuto, I, col. 836.
35 Cited by Tacchi-Venturi, I, p. 81.
36 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1564, S. Maffio di Mazzorbo. For a gloss on this passage, see Lorenzi, p. 290, notes b and c.
37 ASV, PSM, B. 266, 1620, S. Servolo.
38 ASV, PSM, B. 266, 1620, S. Vito di Burano.
refreshments, or where anonymous revellers might find hospitality. Moreover, notwithstanding the legal proscriptions which existed, there was a propensity for prostitutes themselves to hang around nunneries. Secondly, nuns, like prostitutes, were unkept women, and as such, vulnerable to sexual temptation. Prostitutes, of course, had already fallen; but, as is quite clear from the verbal attacks on Venetian convents, it was well within the bounds of the contemporary imagination to envisage nuns dropping to their level. Finally, there existed institutions in early-modern Venice which blurred the distinction between the chaste nun and the sexually corrupted woman. The Convertite was a nunnery, not for virgins, but for fallen women. The Soccorso (which succoured women who had lost their honour), and the Zitelle (which protected girls whose honour was imperilled) were both quasi-monastic institutions. As soon as confidence in the chastity of Christ's brides was suspended, the polarization of nun and whore could quickly collapse.

This focus on the association between the convent and the brothel may appear to do little more than resurrect an instance of crude misogyny from early-modern Venice. But, in one respect, the analogy provides a useful slant. For it extends our perspective beyond the nuns (the metaphorical whores) to the men who were their putative customers. Both parties were acknowledged in the contemporary rhetoric. Girolamo Priuli singled out the 'giovani nobelli venetii et forestieri giovani' as being the two categories of men who were attracted to the nunneries, and he averred that they were willing to pay in order to court the affections of the young and beautiful nuns: 'innamorati de simele monache belle et giovane, lassavano li danari per avere il contento loro'. A denunciation of 1613 against 'una masa cioe una chonpagnia di alcuni nobelli', who made a habit of frequenting the community of Santa Caterina di Mazzorbo, complained of their night-time visits in the following terms: 'ando nel parlatorio apresso laciesa et ale porte del monisterio dove queli reste gran tenpo che chiasi parole disoneste chome fose in un publicho bordelo'. Again, emphasizing the role of men in turning nunneries into bordellos, in 1614, Vicenzo Trivisan was accused of eating, drinking and dancing with the nuns of San Antonio di Torcello, as if the nunnery were 'un publico postribolo'.

It is true that nuns were receptive to the attentions of lay men and that some Venetian males spent a disproportionate amount of time idling in the parlatorii of convents. But there is a clear gulf between the hyperbole of condemnation and the reality of the situation. What follows is an exploration of some of the relationships which existed between nuns and laymen, based on trial records from the provveditori

39 See chapter IV, pp. 165-66.
40 G. Priuli, IV, p. 35; 1509, 6 June.
41 ASV, PSM, B. 260, 1612, 3 Dec.
42 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1614, S. Antonio di Torcello, fo. 4v.
sopra monasteri. On the whole, there is little justification in attempting a statistical analysis of these trials: the records we know to be incomplete, and the crimes defy categorization. But in order to shed light on the rather unsensational character of the great majority of the transgressions which were investigated, it may be helpful to present a break-down of the cases for a limited period.

The years 1625-26 have been chosen for this purpose owing to the dense crop of trials which have survived: a total of 47 processi over the two-year period. Of these, 29 trials were directed against lay men; 4 against male clergy and 10 against lay women. Three out of four of the remaining processi were, in fact, investigations into disorder at convents, and were not focused on particular individuals. The one other case concerned an attack on the capitano of the magistracy, and did not involve nuns. Of the 29 cases brought against lay men, 27 resulted from accusations of illicit contact with nuns. (Of the remaining two, one case was against Giacomo Morato for failure to obtain a licence for his niece's vestizione at San Antonio di Torcello, and the other was against 'alcuni che hanno rubate le galline' from San Maffio di Mazzorbo). Therefore, the largest single group of trials for this period (indeed, a comfortable overall majority), was against lay men who had transgressed the bounds of the acceptable in their relations with nuns.

As has already been stated, the task of categorising transgression is likely to bring certain distortions and over-simplifications to the evidence, so the break-down that follows is offered tentatively. Of the twenty-seven cases involving lay men, twelve arose from simple breaches of the laws regulating visits to the parlatorio: most commonly, either because the men were not within the permissible bounds of 'parentado' or because their visits were outside the allowed hours. To these, five more cases may be added of men eating in the parlatorio, and one further case of a group of men who took a meal in the company of two nuns in the convent cellar. Perhaps the worst of what Romano Canosa might call the 'conviviality' cases, was another in which a man was charged with eating, drinking and even sleeping in the parlatorio. A witness reported 'questo instae l'ho veduto à hora brusada che magnava, con quelle munege, et sua mogier, et ghe giera un letto postizzo in parlatorio'. The remaining 8 trials arose from more than just the standard offences of 'ragionar' and 'magnar'. Four of these were concerned with how the men behaved towards or in front of the nuns. In

43 The entire sample of trials comes from ASV, PSM, B. 267. While the range of transgressions covered in these trials is typical of the source as a whole, the distribution of defendants is unusual in respect of the scarce number of priests and male religious: as the following section will make clear, these generally constituted a far higher proportion of the accused. The reason for the higher number of men than women tried by the provveditori is immediately explicable. The laws against men visiting nuns were far stricter than those applying to women. (At least five out of the ten women prosecuted in this sample of cases were prostitutes). Therefore, this gender imbalance in prosecutions does not necessarily betray a sexual motivation behind the visits (though, of course, it does indicate a persistent concern with sexuality evident in the legislation).
44 ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1626, S. Caterina di Mazzorbo.
three cases, the men were accused of verbal abuse or other 'insolenze'; the fourth case involved three noblemen 'li quali faseva molti bargodi in parlatorio grando con de quelle moneghe'.\(^{45}\) Two further cases may be distinguished by their concern with what the men were wearing in the presence of nuns. One was accused of sporting a revealing shirt; the other was described as 'vestito lasciviamente con postoni d'horro quasi che tochano terra'.\(^{46}\) There remain just two cases, the only ones from this sample which suggest particular relationships between nuns and lay men. In 1625, the capitano dell'officio reported having seen 'nella callesella vicina al monastero del Sepulcro, la quale non hà capo: ma butta sopra il rio', a man 'attaccado ad una ferriada molto alta, il quale parlava con una di quelle monache'. This brief report may lend itself to romantic interpretation, but the evidence is insufficient to be sure.\(^{47}\) We are left, therefore, with just one trial where a particular intimacy is definitely perceived. The case relates again to San Sepolcro, and the charge is against Ser Nicolo Barbarigo, of whom it is reported 'questo zentilomo tien continuamente pratica desonesta con Suor Cintia Bembo e con fenta de esser suo parente choper o nol ge se niente, el vien ogni zorno la da ela'.\(^{48}\)

These 27 cases yield little to suggest that this culture of illicit visiting had a prominent sexual dimension. Many of the relationships revealed in the trials were founded on familial links (albeit links that were insufficiently strong for the law); most followed the patterns of sociability explored in the previous chapter. But it is worth looking beneath the surface of these apparently non-sexual acquaintanceships between nuns and men. Even if these relationships were not motivated primarily by lust, there is certainly something suspicious about the persistence with which these men made their illegal visits, often late at night, and the regularity with which certain men reoffended.\(^{49}\) Those cases which afford us some more detailed glimpses into men frequenting nunneries reveal three types of motivation which characterized their visits.

The first area of appeal is revealed in the conduct of those men who showed a penchant for talking (or acting) dirty in and around the convent: behaving in a manner wholly inappropriate to the company of virgin nuns, possibly with the intention of shocking them or titillating them, though not requiring their direct involvement. The fattori of San Daniel were prime culprits. In 1609, a petition was sent by some of the nuns to the provveditori, complaining that the two men brought 'le sue proprie

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\(^{45}\) ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1626, Convertite.

\(^{46}\) ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1626, Convertite; 1625, S. Anna.

\(^{47}\) ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1625, S. Sepolcro.

\(^{48}\) ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1625 [m.v.], S. Sepolcro.

\(^{49}\) Examples of reoffenders, all taken from ASV, PSM: Vicenzo Trivisan (B. 265, 1614, S. Antonio di Torcello; B. 267, 1621, S. Antonio di Torcello; B. 268, 1627 [m.v.], S. Antonio di Torcello); Antonio Giustinian (B. 265, 1617, S. Maria dell'Orazione; ibid., 1617, S. Servolo); Polo Loredan (B. 265, 1616 [m.v.], Celestia; B. 267, 1625, Celestia); Nicolo da Molin (B. 267, 1624, Celestia; ibid., 1624 [m.v.], Celestia); Marc'Antonio Santurini (B. 268, 1626 [m.v.], S. Sepolcro; ibid., 1626 [m.v.], S. Sepolcro; ibid., 1627, S. Sepolcro).
meretrice into their parlatorio and the convent scrittore had joined their company 'stando in continui parlamenti profani, et disonesti'. One witness later added of one of the fattori:

Mentre l'era nel Parlatorio scuro à trattar alle scrittore el trattava sempre delle cose profane et deshonesti di donne.
Digando de meretrice che la tal signora era bella che de quà et che de là.\textsuperscript{50}

The Neapolitan men who lived opposite San Giovanni Lateran also found it thrilling to behave badly in front of nuns: in 1620, it was reported 'che di giorno e di notte fa di gran furfantarie mostrando il membro a esse munege quando si ritrova a algune sue finestre, e dicono molte poltronarie con standolo di esse madre e di li vicini, che sta in quella cale'.\textsuperscript{51} From a case of 1611 we learn of Pasqualin, a musician, who hung around the churches and parlatori of Venetian convents 'e teniva el feraruol incrosado da vanti e come el vedeva munege alle fenestre, el lo slargava, e ghe mostrava le parte vergognose'.\textsuperscript{52} Although details do not always survive, the considerable number of men who were accused of the generic crimes of 'facendo chiassi' or 'facendo bagordi' in nunneries and conventual churches doubtless found their misconduct all the more delightful when spectated by Christ's brides.

The second motive of men who frequented nunneries was the expectation of material rewards. We have already seen how nuns' urges to provide hospitality and hand out food were often irrepressible. In 1619, following an incident at San Marco e Sant'Andrea, a denunciation was brought against the 22-year old Battista 'figlio di Vicenzo da i concieri', 'che era dentro nel monasterio cioè nella Clausura à Tavola, che declinava con la tavola appareciata et una monacha che le portava la Robba in tavola'.\textsuperscript{53} It was easy to see why a hungry young man might find a visit to a convent appealing in these circumstances. Vicenzo Trevisan, 'cancellier di Torcello', enjoyed a particularly long-standing relationship with the local nuns at Sant'Antonio, and was brought before the provveditori several times as a result. His father had been a 'servitore' to the community and the nuns claimed to have known him since he was a boy. In 1621, his close friendship with Suor Clementia was made known to the provveditori, an intimacy which apparently thrived on the exchange of edible goodies.

While we are assured that he sent gifts as well as receiving them, it is hard to believe that these matched the torrent of 'cestelli' emanating from Suor Clementia: 'hora torte, hora buzzolai', 'della carne, del pesce' and so on.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} ASV, PSM, B. 264, 1608 [m.v.], S. Daniel.
\textsuperscript{51} ASV, PSM, B. 266, 1620, S. Giovanni Lateran.
\textsuperscript{52} ASV, PSM, B. 264, 1611, fos 2v-3r. This case is mentioned on p. 145 above.
\textsuperscript{53} ASV, PSM, B. 266, 1619, SS. Marco & Andrea.
\textsuperscript{54} ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1621, S. Antonio di Torcello.
Some men came to rely on nuns to cook for them and carry out other domestic chores. This was especially true of male clergy (as will become evident in the next section), but also of lay men. From a trial of 1619, we learn that Alessandro Branazzini, a lawyer employed on an ad hoc basis at S. Sepolcro, enjoyed a close relationship with a certain Suor Cornelia. Their intimacy dated back to a period when he had been ill and had supposedly depended upon food being sent to him from the nuns. (He sent them fish in return.) Once he had recovered, he evidently continued to value the nuns' food parcels. A boatman reported that when Alessandro was going to Loreto on pilgrimage, he made his party stop their boat outside the convent in order that 'tolessimo delli bozzoladi e i torte'. During the course of his trial a number of sexual allegations were made against Alessandro Branazzini none of which could be proved. The more general picture painted by the witnesses is of a lower-key relationship with the nuns. One man related how Alessandro had once proposed to him 'viem che vederemo de belle muneghe, rideremo, et le ne darà delli bozzoladi'.

The third area of appeal afforded by the nunnery was that men could enjoy a low-level, non-committal form of sexual engagement with female religious: flirtation, or 'facendo il moroso' as one contemporary accuser put it. In 1617, Polo Loredan was charged with visiting the convent of La Celestia in order to further his relationship with 'una munega da Ca Pisani la qual e un pocco goba ma zovene bella'. It was reported 'et el fu visto à basar la munega, e che ella haveva el so cotal in mano la essendo ala fenestra'. Such deeds were often standardized in the trials as 'baciar' or 'toccar'. For example, two nobles, Gerolamo Giustinian and Gerolamo Dolfin, went to the parlatorio of San Sepolcro 'a far molti bagordi e tochi di mano'. Sexuality could be expressed in less physical terms such as in an engaging incident when one Santo was found in the parlatorio passing a rose to a nun through the grate.

Of course, the three strands of motivation governing the behaviour of men who sought the attention of nuns could combine with one another, and often did. Andrea Fiorelli was probably spurred on by all three to frequent La Celestia: he enjoyed behaving indecorously at the convent and flirting with nuns as well as reaping the benefits of being looked after by them. In 1619, he was denounced as 'gientil'huomo forestier', 'che vadi continuamente nelli parlatorii della Celestia raggionando, et facendo chiassi con quelle monache'. Moreover, 'era alla grada della chiesa ove era il balconcin

55 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1618 [m.v.], S. Sepolcro, fo. 18r.
56 Ibid., fo. 24v.
57 ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1624 [m.v.], S. Maffio di Murano. Of the thirty-year old 'Z. Paolo Horologio', it was claimed 'Et una sera di questo Carnevale essendo stato fin un hora di notte et facendo il moroso pur li à San Maffio di Murano'. He was also charged with 'facendo molte insolenze' in the parlatorio.
58 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1616 [m.v.], Celestia.
59 ASV, PSM, B. 268, 1630, S. Sepolcro.
60 ASV, PSM, B. 268, 1627, S. Sepolcro.
aperto et ivi rideva con una monacha et la bacciava'. When interviewed, Andrea denied the kissing, but he was happy to admit 'io son stato a portare delli miei colari per far bianchi alle Monache'.

It is not the intention of this analysis to suggest that nuns never got involved in more developed sexual relationships, or indeed that lay men were always restrained in their attentions. As has already been suggested, there are various possible explanations why the most serious cases do not feature prominently in the trials carried out by the provveditori. Occasional pieces of evidence which have survived can be quite uncompromising. Returning to the series of verdicts surviving from 1609, published in the Maggior Consiglio, we find the following account:

Che Ser Galeazzo fù de quondam Zorzi per haversi conferito più volte in sprezzo delle leggi del detto Consiglio alli Parlatorii di un Monasterio di Monache di questa Città, procurando di far amicizia con una Monaca, adoperandosi colla medesima accioche accettesse altri nella sua amicizia, come segni, portandole donativi et presenti per nome di questi suoi amici, et facendo far ritratti per mandarglieli: Et per esser anco in tempo di notte andato con altri con barche alla riva della Caneva di esso Monasterio a portar inanzi, et solo à levar in una barchetta la medesima Monaca, conducendola ad un caseno poco discosto, nel quale ella hebbe copula carnale con persona che ivi s'attrovava; Havendo anco altra volta nel medesimo modo levata questa, et un' altra Monaca, che era graveda, conducendole nel medesimo casino dove s'attrovava una comare per consigliare il modo di farla dispender. Et mentre stavano insieme la predetta comare et munega graveda habbia fatto l possibile per haver con l'altra monaca commercio carnale.

In this case, we see rather more literal parallels between the nunnery and the whorehouse. There was nothing innocent about the 'donativi, et presenti' brought to the nuns by Galeazzo in his role as procurer. Not only did he fix nuns up with his friends; he also, when necessary, fixed up an abortionist; and, undeterred by the risk of pregnancy, he tried to rape one nun while her friend sought advice on how to get rid of her baby. Speaking about the fourteenth century, Ruggiero has commented 'The rape of nuns was a popular diversion, especially for the nobility'. By the sixteenth century, a tough judicial line seems at least to have reduced the popularity of this pastime. But, of course, then as now, there was no stopping some men.

Most men who visited nuns, even those who transgressed the regulations governing such visits, did not go there in order to rape or seduce nuns. Most were not even motivated by the expectation that a nun might take 'el so total in mano'. Of

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61 ASV, PSM, B. 266, 1618 [m.v.], Celestia.
62 ASV, PSM, B. 12, 1608 [m.v.], 31 Jan.
63 Ruggiero, Violence, p. 169.
course, there were exceptions, but this thesis is primarily concerned with unearthing what was unexceptional in nunneries and, as such, has concentrated on the less sensational relationships which existed between nuns and lay men. It is the contention here that the patterns which have been revealed in the conduct of nuns and lay men were, if not overwhelmingly carnal, nevertheless what might be termed heterosocial. The players in these relationships, both male and female, were aware of the sexual potential of the situations they found themselves in and this awareness added a further dimension to their transactions, however mundane they often were. The repressed, all-female world of the nunnery was a fascinating place for men to visit.

In considering the appeal of nuns in early-modern Venice, it is worth bearing in mind the limited sexual possibilities which were available to Venetian men. The only strictly reputable place for sexual relations was the marriage bed. This applied, in theory, to men and women; in practice, a double standard operated, and it was easier for men than women to find sexual satisfaction outside marriage. Celibacy was enjoined on women who did not marry, whether they were sent to convents or lived their lives as pious spinsters. But while chastity was central to the roles prescribed for unmarried women, the possibilities for unmarried men were less tightly circumscribed. Of course, men too could enter the religious life and take vows renouncing sexual activity. This group of men will be examined in some detail in the next section of this chapter. But in Venice, fewer men than women took monastic vows, and they tended to come from a less elevated social background than their female counterparts. The patrician class, in which policies of marriage limitation for men were most marked, produced relatively few priests and male religious: military and political careers were far more favoured, and the fraternanza provided the alternative household to which unmarried men commonly belonged.

Unfortunately, demographic studies have not hitherto focused on Venetian bachelors. Chojnacki estimates that 'nearly half of male nobles who reached adulthood in the fifteenth century appear to have remained bachelors'.64 Judging from the well-stocked convents of the next two centuries, it seems likely that male celibacy persisted into the early-modern period. (In demographic terms, male and female celibacy, of course, normally correspond). With the recent explosion of studies of masculinity, the cultural impact of non-marriage (and late marriage) on Venetian men is now being addressed.65 A burgeoning literature on sexuality also helps to shed light on the bachelor experience, leaving us in little doubt that the sexual and emotional urges of Venetian men found vent in extra-marital relationships: notably, sex with prostitutes and sex with men.66 Looked at within this context, nuns may also have served to fill

64 Chojnacki, 'Subaltern Patriarchs', p. 78.
65 See work by Ruggiero and Chojnacki.
66 Davidson, 'Theology and the Law' and Pavan.
the sexual gap in bachelors' lives, though it is not always possible to judge the marital status of the men who were involved with female religious.

In his analysis of sexual transgressions involving nuns in the early Renaissance, Guido Ruggiero gives special attention to the scandal-prone community of Sant'Angelo di Contorta (which was finally shut down by the Pope in 1474). He observes that the convent provided 'a significant feature of Venice's culture of illicit sex', and suggests that among the attractions of the nuns were their 'higher social and perhaps intellectual levels'.67 This, and the fact that they came cheap, may have made nuns more desirable than prostitutes for the man seeking extra-marital contacts with women. It should be stressed that no evidence for the period under study in this thesis replicates the concentration of the sexual transgressions committed by nuns at Sant'Angelo during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Yet Ruggiero's perception of nuns contributing to a 'culture of illicit sex' has resonances even for the relatively tame early-modern convent. Even if nuns did not trade in sex, many offered company and sociability to men with time on their hands.

A community of celibates: nuns, priests and friars

In 1581, when there were 2,508 nuns in the city of Venice, there were 1,132 male religious and 586 priests.68 As will become clear in the final section of this chapter, a correlation between sexual transgressions and forced vocations among female religious has long been perceived. Those women who became nuns because of family pressures rather than personal choice were more likely to kick against the restraints of celibacy. But it is equally clear that not all men who took holy orders were committed to the ideal of chastity. Sexual scandals involving both nuns and clergy gave particularly clear demonstrations of this lack of commitment on both sides of the gender divide. It is perhaps not so very surprising that male and female religious who sought to step outside the bounds of chastity should have done so in one another's company. Spiritual and administrative functions gave clergy access to Christ's brides and, despite the restrictions of enclosure, intimate relationships between female religious and male clergy often developed.69 This section attempts to shed light on the social, sexual and domestic transactions that took place between nuns and male clergy. Given the institutional restraints of their existence, the story is as much about frustration and fantasy as it is about actual fulfilment. However, in the first case which is examined nothing was left to the imagination.

67 Ruggiero, Boundaries, p. 80.
68 B.M.C., Ms. P.D. 230 b-II, 'Descrition de tutte le aneme the sono in la Cita fata l'anno 1581'. The figure of 1,132 is the sum of 945 'frati' and 187 'poveri mendicanti'.
69 For a detailed discussion of the administrative links between nuns and male clergy, see chapter I, pp. 52-54 (on religious) and pp. 68-76 (on secular clergy).
In 1561, scandal hit the Convertite. Their confessor, Giovanni Pietro Lion, 'il più scelerato huomo del mondo', was condemned to death following revelations about his persistent sexual activities with nuns. In a letter of 9 November, the papal delegate in Venice, Ippolito Capilupi, provided Cardinal Borromeo, papal Secretary, with a detailed account of the deeds committed by Lion.70 This tale is one of unusually excessive depravity. It nevertheless anticipates themes which recur in relationships between nuns and male clergy. Giovanni Pietro's objective was simply described by Capilupi: 'si diede a voler satiare tutti li sfrenati appetiti della lussuria sua'. Appointed to a job which gave him authority over '400 Monache et la maggior parte giovani et belle', he used his monopoly as provider of the sacraments in order to gain sexual access to the nuns.71

Those who resisted their confessor's advances did not enjoy praise for long:

Ma passati alcuni di dopo l'assalto datole nella confessione, prendendo occasione da cosa di leggier momento, la faceva porre in prigione et batterla et tormentarla fieramente in diversi modi; et per questa via di crudeltä spesso haveva quello, che non haveva potuto havere con lusinghe, perché alcune di loro per non esser sempre ne'ceppi et nelle catene, vinte dai tormenti continui si disponevano a compiacerlo; alcune altre non volendo consentirgli, nè potendo come delicate sostenere l'incomodo della prigione nè la crudeltä de' tormenti si hanno data la morte con mangiare e bere cose, che le uccidevano.73

The enclosed world of the convent was potentially a paradise for the perverted priest. For the confessional gave him unrivalled access to a large number of unprotected

70 Intra, pp. 102-107. Two letters to Cardinal Borromeo, 'ministro del Pontifice', from Ippolito Capilupi, Bishop of Fano and papal nuncio to Venice.
71 The figure of 400 used in Capilupi's account is possibly an exaggeration. According to the 1581 census, there were 238 nuns at the Convertite (B.M.C., Ms. P.D. 230 b-II); at the time of the 1593 patriarchal visitation, there were apparently 214 'monache da coro' and 27 'converse' (ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, fo. 84r). However, in a second letter to Cardinal Borromeo of 15 November 1561, Capilupi related that 90 to 100 nuns had been expelled from the Convertite following the scandal, so a subsequent decline in numbers might be expected; Intra, p. 107.
72 Intra, pp. 103-104.
73 Ibid., p. 104.
women, some of whom were bound to respond to his attentions. Those nuns who were complicit would not talk; those who refused to be involved could be shut away. The convent walls, supposedly shielding the nuns from corruption, also shielded them and their lovers from exposure.

In the words of Capilupi, the errant confessor 'era solo come gran turco nel serraglio'. Surrounded by subservient nuns who looked after him and gratified his sexual desires, he lived a life of luxury: 'viveva di fagiani et di starne et di pretiosi vini, et haveva la camera piena di confetti et ristorativi et di mille ricette per poter con l'opera loro esser più forte alla battaglia'. Nor were his lusts undiscriminating. In order to ensure that he did not end up in the embraces of a nun who failed to attract him, 'voleva vederle nude'. To this end, he instituted a bizarre sort of naked beauty parade so that he might take his pick:

Laonde nel tempo della state le faceva spogliare et entrare in un luogo, dove è acqua di mare, che si chiama la Cavana, nella quale sogliono tener la gondola; et havendole a suo bell'agio considerate parte a parte, et fatta nell'animo suo elezione delle più belle et più vaghe secondo il giudizio suo procurava per l'una delle due vie predette di tirarle al suo dishonesto desiderio.

His audacity knew no bounds.

As the papal nuncio mused on the events that had taken place, he emphasized two qualities that had enabled Giovanni Pietro Lion to achieve such heights of debauchery and corruption during his employment at the Convent: 'arte' and 'tirannide'. Capilupi tells of how during a nineteen-year period, the confessor had successfully duped the city of Venice, 'coprendo i vitii suoi con mirabil arte et con faccia affumicata et con digiuni finti'. This was no ordinary priest, but was 'dotto nella lingua greca et latina, et ha notitia della Sacra Scrittura'. He used his learning to secure contacts in high places:

egli teneva amicitia di persone di bona fama, et in particolare di don Hieremia già favorito di papa Paolo III; era amato dal

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74 Haliczer's study of Sexuality in the Confessional in early-modern Spain provides excellent analysis of the sexual hold confessors exercised over female penitents. He emphasizes the particular vulnerability of nuns to the advances of their confessors, and the heightened sexual tensions which resulted from the imposition of enclosure: 'The pressure for strict enclosure meant that in many female houses the confessor was almost the only male figure with whom the nun could interact, apart from the occasional relative. The relationship between nun and confessor, moreover, was no ordinary one, as the nun revealed all her thoughts, feelings, and temptations to this man who, for his part, was presented as an exalted figure of learning and authority. [...] This excessive familiarity [...] could transform the nature of the relationship from spiritual to sensual' (pp. 89-90).

75 Intra, p. 104.
Serenissimo Principe et da tutti i Grandi del dominio, et sempre ragionava con loro di opere sante et della religione.\(^{76}\)

He also used his learning to manipulate the nuns, telling those of them who had doubts about taking communion without first being absolved from their sins that ‘egli haveva studiato, et che sapeva meglio di loro quel che si poteva fare’.\(^{77}\) But while some could be won over by persuasion and trickery, with others he resorted to tyranny:

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\text{Haveva con l'Abbadessa del Monastero contratta strettissima amicitia et con alcune altre monache per farsi tiranno di tutte come in breve spatio di tempo si fece, et per conservar l'imperio, che si haveva acquistato sopra di loro, non permetteva che si confessassero mai da altri che da lui, ancor che egli per essere fuor della città o per esser infermo non potesse confessarle, perche dubitava che colla occasione della confessione fatta ad altri non palesassero le sue scellerità, per la qual cosa è avvenuto molte volte, che ne sono morte senza confessione.}\(^{78}\)

Lion’s relations with the nuns were founded on power and exploitation. Making use of his privileges as confessor, he held the souls of these women hostage. Meanwhile, their worldly goods as well as their bodies were at his disposal: he stole from convent funds and from the earnings brought in by the nuns. As Capilupi proclaimed ‘In somma costui era padrone dei corpi, delle anime e della roba et delle fatiche di queste poverelle’.\(^{79}\)

The power of priests and male religious to manipulate nuns is an issue which crops up throughout the other cases under examination here. Even outside the vulnerable environment of the nunnery, priests were thought to have easy access to the pleasures of women. From a case of 1618, we learn of how a Paduan dyer donned the habit of a friar in order to gain the affections of nuns and other ‘donne semplice’. This denunciation was received by the provveditori sopra monasteri, concerning the fraudulent friar:

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\text{che et per Venetia et per Murano, se ne va con habito di Romito vagando un tentore Padovano, il quale ha lasciato la}
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\(^{76}\) Ibid., p. 103.  
\(^{77}\) Ibid., p. 104.  
\(^{78}\) Ibid., p. 103.  
\(^{79}\) Ibid., p. 105. On 15 November, 1561, Capilupi wrote the following postscript to this tale: ‘Nel monastero delle Convertite è stato dopo questo fatto gran confusione, et è tuttavia, ma non così grande. Sono uscite due di fa da novanta in cento monache di consenso di questi Signori, le quali non havevano fatta professione, et vi erano entrate, secondo che si dice, ingannate et dal Prete et da altri per loro interessi’, p. 107. The prioress of the Convertite, suor Petronilla, was subsequently put in the prisons of the Capi dei Dieci. Her name appears in an Inquisition case of 1562, when she was questioned about her request that two Protestants be removed from the prison, ASV, Santo Ufficio, B. 18, ‘Gherlandi Giulio’. I am grateful to N. S. Davidson for this reference.
moglie et figliuoli, sotto pretesto di viver à suo modo con ogni libertà et quello ch'è di maggior scandalò si ne và alle chiese et Parlatori delle Monache, come hoggì è stato à San Bernardo di Murano, dove essendo da me ripreso, per li prohibitioni delle leggi ecclesiastiche, et del Senato ha havuto ardire di rispondere che lo vuole fare, et che lo può fare, non conoscendo altri superiori che Dio [...] et dando ad intendere a donne semplice, che lui è vergine, et senza peccato. 80

The supposed purity of priests and friars gave them a head-start when talking their way into nunneries. It could also protect them from accusations. When certain women eventually fled from the wiles of prete Giovanni Pietro at the Convertite, they found that their word was worth little against the saintly reputation of their confessor: 'che era troppo credulo a dar fede a donne fuggite dal monastero contro una persona così santa'. 81

Male clergy were, however, far from being immune from prosecution. They regularly found themselves before the provveditori for transgressing the rules which were intended to keep them separate from nuns. Priests and friars were central among the accused in 50 out of the 217 'processi criminali e disciplinari' which passed before the magistracy in the period under study. 82 Their crimes were not in the same league of depravity as that attained by prete Giovanni Pietro (though there are echoes of the Convertite scandal in instances of priests exploiting their authority to sexual ends). But in their less shocking substance, these trials document the day-to-day interactions of men and women sworn to celibacy.

In analysing the motives of lay men who frequented convents, three areas of appeal were identified. First, subversive behaviour in the presence of female religious was an attraction in itself; secondly, there were material rewards to be gained from keeping company with nuns; thirdly, the nunnery provided opportunities for low-level sexual engagement. In the case of male clergy, the same attractions were thrown into sharper relief. Heterosociability between nuns and priests or male religious was doubly subversive, for both parties—male and female—were supposed to have shut themselves off from the charms of the other sex. As has already been suggested, non-marriage among lay men may well have contributed to the popularity of the convent. But in the case of religious celibates, the appeal of an all-female environment is easier to establish.

Many a transgression of the laws relating to nunneries in early-modern Venice seems to have been motivated by boredom. Nowhere is this clearer than in the cases

80 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1618, S. Bernardo di Murano and S. Giacomo di Murano.
81 Intra, p. 106.
82 Included in this total are a few cases where the priest was not the specific object of the trial, although his misconduct was, in fact, central to the investigation. For example, ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1624, Convertite, trial of 'Lucia fà servitii à dette monache'. Lucia was brought before the provveditori for her role in conveying gifts from prete Francesco Montenegro to one of the nuns.
involving priests and friars, who in general appear to have been an under-employed class of society. Thoroughly typical was the denunciation against the parish priest of San Lio from 1618:

lui va et frequenta landar al monesterio delle Reverende moniche dala Celestia tuti li merchori et veneri per hoficiar la sua mansonaria ma avanti chel vada in sagrestia el va ala grada di gezia a parlar con una di ese madre et poi dopo fenito la mesa nel partirsì si ferma per gran spacio di hora aragionar ala grada et lui hosava andarli aore proibite cioe soto nona et non hostante che estato condanato et amonito et di piu di continuo ogni zorno vien presentato da una di ese et lui alei et littere inanzi.83

Similarly, it was reported in 1620 that Andrea, the capellano at Santa Maria Maggiore, came to the church to say mass every morning and that he spent the rest of the day idling in the company of nuns:

questo è così arrogante, che li basta l'animo di stare tutto il giorno con le monache di fuori, et la notte sino à tre hore, et più di notte con gran scandalo di tutti, et ragionar di cose profani, et non degne del tempio de Dio, ne manco di persone religiose [...] et si bene hà la barba bianca l'arte opera in ciò molto sfuoga i suoi appetiti con una certa seconda sagrestana à sotto sagrestana con questa passano mille cose amorose, non sò se arrivino à qual fine ultimo amoroso, ma se non è, stà però in gran pericolo.84

Worthy of note are the chaplain's relations with the converse or 'monache di fuori'. Besides chatting with them, the priest was also charged with taking them on outings away from the convent: 'chel detto capelan sia stato piu et piu volte in barca a spasso con le monache converse et per la cittä, et fuori della cittä'. Given their greater freedom to leave the convent and, in particular, to oversee affairs in the 'chiesa esteriore' it is unsurprising that prete Andrea should have had greatest contact with these nuns. But there may also have been a more general class affinity between male clergy and converse than with the fully-professed and predominantly noble monache da coro. At other convents, we learn of priests consorting with converse. For example, prete Francesco Strata, chaplain of San Moro di Burano, also could not resist the pleasures of a boat-trip 'et va in gondola con le converse'.85 Monks, priests and nuns retained aspects of their lay identity which sometimes came to the fore in their interrelations. It is likely that friendships were renewed in the parlatorio which had once existed in the lay world. This is explicit in the case of fra Daniel del Grafignana (from San Sebastian), accused of frequenting parlatori of three different convents. One

83 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1617 [m.v.], Celestia.
84 ASV, PSM, B. 266, 1620, S. Maria Maggiore.
85 ASV, PSM, B. 266, 1619, S. Moro di Burano.
witness explained how fra Daniel had gained an introduction to the nuns of Santa Chiara through suor Giacinta (this time, a 'monaca da officio') 'con occasione di haver conosciuta al secolo, et di haver havuto amicitia seco, et con casa sua con una di quelle monache li, la visitavava'.

Chapter IV of this thesis emphasized the importance female religious bestowed on links with the outside world. Flirting with worldliness was a valuable release for male clergy as well as for female religious. Playing at having sexual relationships, courting and dalliance, enabled religious celibates of both sexes to experience something of what was generally denied to them. The exchange of letters and gifts was commonly observed in the trials of the provveditori. According to a trial of 1617, prete Gerolemo Grandi, from Santa Trinità wrote regularly to suor Giustignana at San Daniel and, on one occasion, 'lui messe nella lettera un'anello'. He also employed a friend to write 'un bel soneto amorozo' to send to a nun at San Sepolcro, who had sent him a 'litera amoroza'. And he was believed to be courting another nun at San Daniel for whom he had supposedly commissioned a portrait of himself, bearing the arms of her family. The exchange of sentimental tokens was also a conspicuous feature of the contemporary trial of prete Francesco Dei, arising from his relationship with the conversa suor Barbara. Brought before the provveditori as visual exhibits were love-letters written by Barbara, a letter and 'madrigale' in the priest's own hand, and the 'officio della Beata Vergine' which belonged to prete Francesco and contained pressed flowers sent by suor Barbara as well as written allusions to the nun.

The case of Francesco and Barbara warrants slightly closer attention because it reveals much which was characteristic about the restricted and unconsummated relationships which existed between nuns and priests across the barrier of enclosure. Francesco was dismissive about the letters he had received from Barbara. He insisted 'che essa me mandava, et mi scriveva di suoi humori senza che mi l'recercasce'; 'l'haveva sto humor de matta de scriver cor mio, cose simeli'. As for the writings which were in his own hand, he admitted to being their author but claimed that he had no intention of sending them. Given that they were found in his possession rather than in Barbara's hands this is technically feasible if not altogether probable. The madrigal and letter read as follows:

Amami BARBAR ella
Ama il cor mio, che brama
Di sol amar chi l'ama;
Giusta legge in amare
E fra l'altr' alte maggiore
Dar per amor amore.

86 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1614, S. Chiara, SS. Rocco & Margherita, S. Maffio di Mazzorbo.
87 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1616 [m.v.], Celestia, S. Daniel.
88 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1616 [m.v.], S. Daniel.
89 Ibid., fos 17v-18r.
Si come dolcissimo mio ben, unico mi contento, giamaï altra creatura videro l'occhi miei, laqual in alcuna parte potessero pareggiare alle celesti doti tue, così in questo tempo altra Rosa simile à queste che t'invio, puossi vedere da alcuno. Godile dunque mio bene e racordati che se queste seccaransi per uscir dalle mie mani, le tue chel nel sen porti ravivaransi quando da me come queste baciati saranno a Dio unico ben.  

Confronting prete Francesco with his own words, the provveditori made the following inference: 'Questa lettera e questo madrigale persuadono anco operationi osceni: perche difficilmente si dira in lettere à persona amata ti baccio, se non si haverà prima baciata da vero'. Francesco would have none of it: 'Non l'ho mai bacciata', he asserted. In fact, elsewhere, he claimed never even to have seen Suor Barbara, let alone kissed her, 'havendoli parlato alla ruota solamente la quale era scura, ne se vedeva cosa alcuna, alla voce sola'. This state of affairs was more or less confirmed by the convent confessor whose aim was to condemn prete Francesco rather than to excuse him, but who nevertheless claimed that his conversations with suor Barbara took place across the ruota in the sagrestia. In one of Barbara's own letters to Francesco, she informed him of forthcoming services in the church, in order that they might 'rivedersi al lontano'. Perhaps Francesco was not so far from the truth when he implied that the hottest aspects of their relationship were confined to the written word.

In their relationships with nuns, some clerics exercised fantasies which were more erotic than sentimental. Prete Gerolemo Grandi, earlier seen sending paintings, rings and letters to various nuns, nursed a particular desire regarding one of the converse at the Celestia. Thus he asked his friend, Signor Nicolò Cressi, for 'una muda de drapi da homo per vestir la sua monicha dala Celestia dita suor Lucia conversa'. Cressi evidently obliged on condition that he too would be allowed to see the nun dressed up as a man. A denunciation from the Convertite of 1624 complained that prete Francesco Montenegro 'a mandato dele nostre monache una scatola con un retrato de uomo spogliato tuto nuo'. Once again the thrill of introducing sexual subversion into the sacred world of the nunnery is apparent.

The attraction of the nunnery for male clergy often had a rather more practical basis. In a number of trials, nuns may be seen cooking, washing and mending for priests and friars. Even reports of illicit sexual liaisons between male and female

90 Ibid., unnumbered folio.  
91 Ibid., fo. 30r.  
92 Ibid., fo. 19v.  
93 Ibid., fo. 3v.  
94 Ibid., unnumbered folio.  
95 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1616 [m.v.], Celestia, S. Daniel. This case is discussed above, pp. 173-74, in relation to the issue of cross-dressing.  
96 ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1624, Convertite.
religious are almost always accompanied by evidence of nuns providing these practical, domestic, and traditionally feminine services to their lovers. The phenomenon is neatly encapsulated by a witness in the case against fra Marc'Antonio Cazzano, brought before the provveditori in 1617. Apparently, fra Marc'Antonio was accustomed to send to the convents 'hora drapi da lavare, hora imbasciate, et hora lettere amorose'.\textsuperscript{97} Significantly, the word used to describe untoward intimacy between nuns and male clergy was often 'dimestighezza', suggesting a domestic familiarity.

The enduring stereotype of the hapless male, unable to cook or look after himself, certainly reigned in early-modern Venice. The propensity of priests to keep concubines may have been as much to ensure the provision of domestic services as sexual ones. But it was common for clergy who lacked a live-in partner and could not afford to employ a permanent housekeeper to turn to nuns for assistance of this kind. In a perfectly innocent example we learn of how the nuns of Malamocco took care of prete Pietro Christiani. A neighbour testified in 1626 as to how her daughters were employed to run errands for the nuns: ‘la madre Priora mandava spesso per le mie putte hora carne, hora pesceotto, non havendo il detto Prete alcuna persona in casa che li cucinassi’.\textsuperscript{98} Converse, given freedom to leave the convent, could supply a helping hand within the priest’s own home. In a trial which pre-dates the Tridentine restrictions on the movements of converse, it was reported at San Giovanni Lateran ‘che suor Paula et suor Ganzenua monache converse vadino a casa sua del ditto confessor a darli servitii, et che suor Paula resti da lui de notte’.\textsuperscript{99} That converse continued to supply priests with services of this sort, may be seen from a case of 1614 from San Bernardo di Murano, against prete Zuanne Bertoluzzi:

\begin{quote}
Che da tutte l'hore del giorno suor Bernarda conversa di San Bernardo prattica in casa del sopradetto prete Zuanne, et che vie vista in casa sua che è proprio per mezzo le celle d'esse Reverende monache così la mattina à bon'hora, come à tutte l'altre hore sino alla notte con grandissimo scandolo et mormoramento d'ogn'uno.\textsuperscript{100}
\end{quote}

Interviews with neighbours make it clear that Bernarda went to the priest's house not at night to bring him sexual favours but first thing in the morning to bring him food for the day.

Just as nuns' magnanimous treatment of friends and relatives could threaten the economic stability of a convent [see Chapter IV], the determination of some female religious to shower favourite priests and friars with food meant that their fellow sisters

\textsuperscript{97} ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1617, S. Anna.
\textsuperscript{98} ASV, PSM, B. 267, 1626, S. Maria dell'Orazione di Malamocco, fo. 24r.
\textsuperscript{99} ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1556, S. Giovanni Lateran.
\textsuperscript{100} ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1614, S. Bernardo di Murano.
sometimes had to go without. Male clergy, on occasion, clearly exploited nuns. Returning to the case against prete Francesco Dei at San Daniel in 1617, this was a significant aspect of his relationship with suor Barbara. Throughout his defence, Francesco stressed his poverty and his family commitments: 'son poveretta, cargo de famegia'; 'reparavo alla mia povertà, et sostenta la mia famiglia che è di madre, e due sorelle una nubile, et una vedova con figlioli'. His relationship with the nuns dated back to his boyhood, on account of his aunt, the conversa suor Concordia, and he seemed to consider it his birthright to take food from the convent: 'son allevato da fantolin in suso in detto monasterio, se può dir con fregole de pan'. But while Francesco saw Barbara's gifts to him as his rightful 'carità e lemosene', there were suggestions that he was taking advantage of suor Barbara. As one witness remarked, 'el ghe magna tutto quello che la hà, la lavora di, e notte per dar da magnar al prete'. The exploitation of the nuns at Santa Chiara di Murano by their male Franciscan counterparts at San Francesco della Vigna was on a more wholesale basis: 'essi frati sono la rovina di quel Convento, et mangiano quello, che doveriano mangiar quelle poverine, le quali per questa causa in articolare, sono ridotte in estrema miseria e mendicità.

The final section of this chapter will address the question of why nuns laid themselves open to exploitation of this kind, why they played along with the sexual fantasies of frustrated priests and were such easy prey for parasites. But before shifting the focus to the aspirations and motives of the nuns, two more trials are worthy of examination, for they shed further light on how the celibate community tried to compensate for their exclusion from marital relations.

The first of these cases dates from 1570, and was brought against a group of male Augustinians from two Venetian houses: Sant'Antonio and San Salvador. They were charged with intruding upon the nuns of San Servolo. The accusations exemplify the patterns of sociability and recreation central to this discussion. The friars were accustomed to come to the nunnery for 'bancheti'. After they had eaten (and the witnesses are unclear as to whether the nuns partook of the food though they doubtless provided it) the friars and nuns played cards and dice together. Notwithstanding their vows of poverty, bets were placed and money changed hands—indeed, it was rumoured that Don Fedrigo, the Prior of Sant'Antonio, had lost his community some 800 ducats in the course of these evenings of recreation. As was typical, the nuns sent food parcels to their favourite friars, and gladly took in their clothes and sheets to be washed and mended. Suor Giacoma, a conversa from San Servolo, obligingly called on the friars of

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101 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1616 [m.v.], S. Daniel, fos 18v and 39v.
102 Ibid., fo. 19r.
103 Ibid., fo. 12v.
104 ASV, PSM, B. 266, 1620, S. Chiara di Murano.
San Salvador 'et li portava drappi, et altre facende, che loro li davano da cuser et da lavar'.

These convivial relations between the male and female communities give weight to the view that religious of both sexes were keen to create heterosocial situations. But this case is also revealing of the terms on which more personal relationships between particular nuns and friars were conducted. First of all we hear of certain friars from San Salvador having 'fie spirituali' at the convent: 'Don Tranquillo ha per fia sua spiritual una, che si domanda Suor Regina, quella de Don Concordio, salvo il vero, io credo che l'h habbia nome Helisabetha, queste sono velate, quella di Don Paulo hebreo è coversa, et ha nome Costanza'. The witness who provides this information, himself a member of San Salvador, goes on to say that 'vi hanno prattica quasi tutti li frati de San Antonio, et sento vari gloriarsi questo ha una fia spiritual, questo un'altra'. Moreover, it is rumoured that when Don Concordio (of San Salvador) began to show 'amicitia e favor' towards a nun at the Dominican convent of Corpus Domini, suor Helisabeth, Concordio's 'spiritual daughter' at San Servolo, 'era intrada in desparere per lui'.

Other accounts of the events that went on at San Servolo go further, and we learn of 'sposalitii' taking place between the friars and their 'spiritual daughters'. Don Apollinario of Ravenna, another witness from San Salvador, recalls how he heard that one Don Gregorio

Don Apollinario also relates another occasion of this sort:

The use of vocabulary in these depositions is worthy of note: the terms 'fia spiritual' and 'amica spirituale' seem designed to hold at bay the implicit but never-quite-articulated idea of the 'spiritual wife'. It is little wonder that the friars hung onto the adjective 'spirituale' in explaining the relationships that took place between their brothers and the nuns at San Servolo. It gave an air of decency and religious justification to intimacies that were, in fact, well beyond the bounds of acceptability. On the other hand, there is no evidence to suggest that these pseudo-marriage rituals led to

105 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1570, S. Servolo, fo. 9v.
106 Ibid., fos 1v-2r.
sexual liaisons. What is clear is that a definite sense of possession went with these formalised relationships. Friars boasted that such-and-such a nun belonged to them. Suor Helisabeth became 'desperate' because Don Concordio had grown close to another nun in a different convent. In the last case-study of this section, some of these themes recur in the relationships between a priest, Domenego Zon, and certain nuns at Santa Maria degli Angeli on the island of Murano.

Domenego Zon had been expelled from the convent of the Angeli in 1614, owing to misconduct, and in 1619, he was brought before the provveditori as a reoffender, for continuing to visit the nuns. The initial denunciation of this trial sets out the nature of the charges:

Come un certo prete Domenego Zon [...] huomo di cattiva vitta et malla qualità [...] continua andar al monasterio delli Angeli di Murano à visitatione di quelle monache facendo con quelle atti inhonesti come saria dir tochar bacciar vergognosamente si come questo habbi usato carnalmente con più d'una di quelle monache, scalando le mum di esso monasterio diverse volte intempo di notte.\(^\text{107}\)

In fact, these sexual allegations are not as clear-cut as they might be, since the prime witness against Domenego—a priest named Nicolo Baruzzi—turned out to have committed perjury on a grand scale. But even though some of the most incriminating details of the case were called into question, as historical evidence it remains useful in two respects. Firstly, significant aspects of the priest's relationships with particular nuns are borne out by the statements of more reliable witnesses. Secondly, the false or dubious information given by prete Nicolo Baruzzi gives us insights into another priest's fantasies regarding female religious.

During his time as a chaplain in the church of the Angeli—before he was removed from the post and banned from the convent in 1614—Domenego became intimate with four nuns in particular. Two of these—suor Gaspara and suor Gieronima—were converse, aged about 50. Following a model which has already been identified, they made a habit of visiting Domenego at his home in Venice, once he had been forced out of his job on Murano. Then there was suor Elena Bragadin, a professed nun, also in her fifties or thereabouts, of noble birth and some fortune. Finally, there was the young and beautiful suor Tecla, a conversa da dentro, therefore not afforded the same freedoms to leave the convent as those enjoyed by Gaspara and Gieronima.\(^\text{108}\)

While it is impossible to know from the web of false or exaggerated depositions exactly what Domenego and these four nuns got up to, we can unravel something of the

\(^\text{107}\) ASV, PSM, B. 266, 1619, S. Maria degli Angeli, fo. 1r.
\(^\text{108}\) The distinction between conversa da dentro and conversa da fuori is discussed in chapter III, pp. 132-33.
priest's motivation. For the nuns brought Domenego more than just themselves. Suor Elena—seemingly the most smitten of the four and also with the greatest personal wealth at her disposal—was notorious for sending the priest gifts and money, all of which Domenego meticulously noted down.

Havendoli dato letti, sdramazzi, lenziolli, coperte, paviglioni veste, camise, faceletti [...], ducati 50 / 60 alla volta de mangiative le più delicate che si trovino il tutto stà descritto in un suo zornale.\textsuperscript{109}

As for Gaspara and Gieronima, they did not have their own funds to draw upon, but were accused of embezzling money in order to provide material assistance to Domenego: thus, bequests to the convent which were intended to pay for votive masses ended up in the pockets of the corrupt priest. Only Suor Tecla was free from accusations of having given financial aid to Domenego (though she was most implicated in the allegations of sexual misconduct). According to one witness, Domenego once admitted that he preferred suor Tecla to suor Elena, 'perche la gera più zovene, e più bella di quella'.\textsuperscript{110} An alternative view on the matter came from Valerio Bognolo, the brother-in-law of suor Tecla, who claimed of Domenego: 'credo che l'havesse pitl affetto à quella, che li faceva pitl ben'.\textsuperscript{111} Valerio—who was doubtless trying to protect the honour of his kinswoman—pointed out that Tecla was just a poor conversa. Yet, while this witness had his own reasons for wanting to shift attention away from Tecla and onto Elena, Domenego was certainly in pursuit of cash, as well as youth and beauty.

Domenego exploited his relations with the nuns masterfully and managed to attain the authority of both husband and confessor. Suor Elena and suor Tecla both received the dubious honour of being styled as 'wives' by Domenego. Each was kept in ignorance of the other, and when Elena eventually discovered the truth (because a letter meant for Tecla accidentally fell into her hands), she berated the traitor who had deceived her for so long. For a period of 5 or 6 years, Suor Elena failed to mention her relationship with the priest whenever she made her confession. But, in the year of the Jubilee—a time of plenary indulgence, occurring periodically within the Catholic church—she wrote to Domenego, saying that 'voleva far una Confessione generale et liberarsi dalle mani del Diavolo'. He promptly wrote back with the following reponse: 'che bastava che li scrivesses li suoi peccatti perchè essendo sacerdote che haveva havuto cura di anime l'assolveva da qual si voglia colpa'. Further, on no account should she mention his deeds to anyone else, including those which he had committed 'come

\textsuperscript{109} ASV, PSM, B. 266, 1619, S. Maria degli Angeli, unnumbered folio.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., fo. 15r.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., fo. 46r.
maritto à moglie. Finally, Domenego told her that 'come moglie doveva obedirlo et che lasciasse à lui la cura dell'anima sua'.

The account is reminiscent of the spiritual tyranny exercised by the confessor Giovanni Pietro Lion at the Convertite and brought to light in the 1561 scandal. But with Domenego's claim to husbandly authority, he managed to pull out all the patriarchal stops at once. At the bottom of the priests's tactics was his need to secure material support, not just for himself but to keep the many nieces who were entrusted to his guardianship. (This aspect of the case recalls prete Francesco Dei at San Daniel). Evidently perceiving his dutiful role as an uncle as a point in his defence, Domenego himself was willing to admit that the nuns had assisted him with providing for his wards. He proudly testified

Che la mia Casa è stata sempre un picciol monastero de verginelle; havendomi maritate al numero di 12 trà sorelle, e nezze, e delle mie creature non vi è stata mai alcuna di cattivo nome.

Financial need was a regular characteristic of priests who courted the affections of nuns.

Despite the regulations which insisted on the separation of female religious and male clergy, priests and friars had a knack of finding their way into the company of nuns. In material terms, visiting the nunnery could be well worth their while: there, male clergy regularly received hospitality from the nuns as well as 'cestelli' to take home and even financial hand-outs. Nuns also provided invaluable domestic assistance. But alongside the social and domestic arrangements that existed between nuns and clergy, there was often a sexual dimension to their interactions. These various strands were woven to create relationships which aped marriage. The process was sometimes even solemnized, as in the 'sponsalitii' which took place at San Servolo. Less formally, the exchange of rings and other love-tokens, or the use of the terms 'marito' and 'moglie', allowed religious celibates to experience something of the world from which they were excluded. In an extraordinary detail, which formed part of prete Nicolo Baruzzi's accusations against Domenego Zon, there lies the suggestion that male and female celibates might even have shared their fantasies about procreation and parenthood with one another:

che lui haveva una camisa di detta monaca, et la sera se la metteva in dosso, et gli l'ho vista io, et lui mi hà detto questo è di Suor Tecla, et se li occorreva polutioni ò volontarie ò

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112 Ibid., unnumbered folio. This document constitutes the initial statement against Domenego, which is probably derived from the unreliable testimony of Nicolo Baruzzi.

113 Ibid., fo. 85r.
casuali, lui gli mandava dicendoli, questo è il pianto del tuo puttin, et ella versa vice faceva il medesimo havendone una di detto prete Domenego.\footnote{Ibid., fo. 7r.}

This lurid charge may have had no basis in truth (Domenego certainly denied it). But it remains indicative of the terms in which relationships between nuns and male clergy were conceived.

**The experience of chastity**

Assai sono di quegli uomini e di quelle femine che sì sono stolti, che credono troppo bene che, come a una giovane è sopra il capo posta la benda bianca e indosso messole la nera cocolla, che ella più non sia femina né più senta de feminili appetiti se non come se di pietra l'avesse fatta divenire il farla monaca: e se forse alcuna cosa contra questa lor credenza n'odono, così si turbano come se contra natura un grandissimo e scelerato male fosse stato commesso.\footnote{Boccaccio, p. 182 (terza giornata, novella 1).}

This was Boccaccio's view of the matter. Sexuality will out: it cannot be stifled by habit and wimple; to repress it will only result in scandal. This statement precedes the tale of Masetto da Lamporecchio who, pretending to be deaf and dumb, took a job as a gardener in a convent. Secure in the knowledge that he could not spread rumours about them, the nuns enjoyed many an orgy with their new employee; and Masetto was also satisfied with the arrangement. Aretino alludes to the *novella* in his *Ragionamento*; the story is depicted on one of the walls of the painted parlour shown to Nanna on her guided tour of the convent.\footnote{Aretino, p. 16.} And Aretino also echoes Boccaccio's sentiments about the ill-fated attempts of those who seek to impose chastity on women. It is Antonia who voices the attack on the 'pazze madri' and 'semplici padri',

che si credono che le figliuole che fanno moniche non abbiano denti da rodere come quelle che maritano; poveretta la vita loro! dovrebbero pur sapere che son di carne e d'ossa anche esse, e che non è cosa che accresca più il desiderio che il vietare di una cosa; e io per me allora muoio di sete quando non ho vino in casa.\footnote{Ibid., p. 49.}

It must not be forgotten that Boccaccio and Aretino had their own agenda in exposing the hypocrisy surrounding sexuality in the convent. Their avowals vindicate what would otherwise appear to be the inclusion of gratuitously salacious passages. But the
view that nuns were flesh and blood just like everyone else, that their repressed sexual desires were bound to burst out, found widespread support.

There was a medieval English saying which went 'Aut virum aut murum oportet mulierem habere'.\(^{118}\) This neatly encapsulates an enduring anxiety in medieval and early-modern Europe with the problem of controlling the sexuality of women.\(^{119}\) The nunnery served an important function in containing their lusts. But it was well known that even the highest and most secure walls could be penetrated and that enclosure failed to obliterate sexuality in the convent. The phenomenon of forced vocations presented an additional dimension to the problem. For if the adoption of chastity was not voluntary, then the chances of the vow being kept were lessened further. Girolamo Priuli wrote of Venetian noble women who became nuns: 'volendo esser maritade et habere virum, convenivano far come potevano'.\(^{120}\) Pointing the finger of blame in another direction, Arcangela Tarabotti argued that parents who forced their daughters into convents were asking for trouble: 'che sforzando le vostre figliuole ad entrar ne'monasteri, siete partecipi di tutte le loro attioni scandalose'.\(^{121}\) This is certainly the moral of Gertrude's tale related by Manzoni in _I promessi sposi._

Historians have also assumed a direct link between forced vocations and disciplinary transgressions of various kinds, not least instances of sexual misconduct.\(^{122}\) Romano Canosa goes further than most in his portrayal of female religious communities fizzing with unsatisfied desires and in his suggestion that involuntary nuns were primarily concerned with finding vent for their lusts. In his book, _Il velo e il cappuccio. Monacazioni forzate e sessualità nei conventi femminili in Italia tra 400 e 700_, he claims:

> Private di ogni possibilità pratica di realizzare le loro pulsioni affettive, incapaci spesso di sublimare l"amore" in amore di Dio, esposte, nonostante tutto, a "contatti" maschili (la direzione spirituale dei monasteri femminili rimase sempre saldamente in mano ad ecclesiastici maschi) dalla fine del Trecento alla metà del Cinquecento le suore fecero mostra di una grande capacità di resistenza alla violenza iniziale loro arrecata e, in vari modi, riuscirono a rompere il cerchio di isolamento costruito loro intorno ed a cercare, ed a volte anche a trovare, occasioni per sodisfare le pulsioni in questione, con ecclesiastici o laici che a ciò si fossero dimostrati disposti.\(^{123}\)

\(^{118}\) Daichman, p. 98.

\(^{119}\) For discussions of female sexuality, and particularly the unruly lusts of women, see Wiesner, pp. 46-56 (esp. 48); Hufton, pp. 36-46 (esp. 41, 45-6); Roper, _Oedipus_, p. 93; Fletcher, pp. 48-59.

\(^{120}\) G. Priuli, II, p. 115: 1501, 21 March.

\(^{121}\) Ed. Medioli, _Inferno_, p. 73.

\(^{122}\) Tacchi-Venturi, p. 87; Paschini, p. 37; Logan, p. 362; Russo, p. 121; Cattaneo, _passim_;

Daichman, p. 98

\(^{123}\) Canosa, pp. 10-11.
The unaddressed contradiction in Canosa's thesis is that in the mid-sixteenth century, the point at which he sees sexuality in the convent to be in decline, forced vocations were increasing. But there are more fundamental problems with his argument.

Women responding naturally to natural desires, in opposition to unnatural restrictions: this is how Canosa perceives the sexual transgressions which involved female religious. His argument has not moved on substantially from Boccaccio. Yet the preceding sections of this chapter have shown that men, rather than nuns, must take much of the responsibility for embarking on sexual relations with women in convents. Interestingly, despite the legal constructions of the crime of sacrilegio in early-modern Venice, which focused on monachini rather than monache, historians have continued to represent sexual offences in the convent as a female affair. As a result, there has been a tendency to class convents as virtuous or vicious according to the frequency with which they appeared in prosecutions against men. For example, Giuliani observes that 'ci troviamo di fronte a due stati di cose: in troppi monasteri femminili si nota tanto turbido e guasto, in altri invece incontriamo ardente fervore di vita religiosa'. Guido Ruggiero goes so far as to provide a league table of 'Leading Convents in Sex Crimes'. Spinelli also attempts to rank convents according to the number of appearances they make in the processi, but importantly he concedes: 'spesso le monache non erano affatto imputate'. As we have seen, in the most extreme cases, sexual transgressions involving nuns amounted quite simply to rape.

Whether or not a sympathetic view is taken towards nuns who were not chaste, it is naive to assume that their actions were always self-determined. It is also unhelpful to generalize about the sexual urges of women sworn to chastity. Nuns themselves were sometimes the most assiduous in protesting against scandalous occurrences which threatened the honour of their convents. One subversive nun could wreck the integrity of an entire community. Following the pregnancies of the two 'sceleratissime' Corner sisters at San Maffio di Mazzorbo in 1564, many of the nuns were concerned to distance themselves from the taint of sexual immorality. We need to be wary of inadvertently adopting early-modern clichés about the irrepressibility of female lusts, and their inevitably heterosexual turn. It is, therefore, the purpose of this section to carry out a less blinkered survey of what were termed 'amori particolari', and to investigate some of the sexual dimensions of nuns' relationships with men and women.

Three case-studies provide the backbone of this section, which aims to shed light on some of the different ways in which nuns experienced sexuality. The first focuses on sexual relationships as a means quite literally of escaping the convent. It

124 Giuliani, p. 45; Paschini makes much the same point, p. 31.
125 Ruggiero, Boundaries, p. 78.
126 Spinelli, p. 197.
127 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1564, S. Maffio di Mazzorbo.
goes back over some of the familiar ground of forced vocations, and provides the opportunity to test historical arguments about ‘monacazioni forzate e sessualità’. The second looks at nuns’ sexuality as a means of self-expression, enabling the creation of individual identity within an institutional environment. It encourages a broad understanding of sexuality which does not depend on physical desire, still less on physical acts. By contrast, the final case-study is based on an exceptional story of a nun who pursued an active sexual relationship for its own sake. Each of these cases represents nuns as the prime movers in the relationships which they fashioned. Within the constraints of the convent, here at last we may see self-determination at work.

In April 1555, the provveditori opened an investigation at San Giovanni Lateran into the escape of suor Faustina and the complicity of her supposed lover, Francesco dalle Crosette. This was sparked off by the receipt of a letter from Faustina’s father, Francesco di Polo, denouncing his natural daughter and claiming—on the authority of one suor Vittoria di Pizzoni—that she had been discovered sleeping with Francesco dalle Crosette. Before articulating these allegations, Francesco di Polo undertook to provide a history of the rather chequered monastic career of suor Faustina. He explained how a relative of the family, suor Tadia at the convent of San Theomisto in Treviso, had first suggested that the young Faustina come to join her in the community, and that he had felt obliged to let her go:

sappendo la ditta ch’io haveva questa fìa natural mi pregò et persuase che fusse contento de darghela in suo governo fin che la venisse all’Età, dove conoscendo l’amorevelezza et bontà de questa Reverendissima madonna fui sforzato a darghela.

According to Francesco, this was intended to be only a temporary arrangement, but the letters he received from Faustina made it clear that she wished to stay on in the convent and to become a nun:

ogni tratto me scriveva che era deliberata de andar monacha et io che non l’haveva messa à quel fin andai à prorrogando molto tempo et la menai un carneval à Venetia per veder se voleva mutar proposito, pur passato el carneval con pianti et lachrimi ogni giorno mi supplichava che la tornasse nel monstero pero vedendo questo animo fisso interpretai ogni cosa in bon fine, et da li alquanti mesi instigato de molte sue littere mi fu forza à vestirla monacha et li detti d’Elemosina ducati 200 come appar per l’instrumento.128

128 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1555, S. Giovanni Lateran, fo. 1r.
Francesco was at pains to stress that Faustina had opted for the religious life voluntarily and provided convincing details to cement his assertions. In the light of the accounts given by other witnesses, one wonders whether he was deliberately preempting accusations that he had forced his illegitimate daughter to take the veil.

For several years, Faustina lived 'religiosamente' at San Theomisto. But the problems began after Tadia's death, apparently occasioned 'per garra o per persecution di alcune monache'. Faustina wrote again to her father claiming 'non poter resister con tal maligne persone', and Francesco's comforts were in vain: she took her chance and escaped from the convent, finding refuge at the home of a maternal aunt, Donna Pasqualina 'tentora'. As soon as he was alerted to his daughter's whereabouts, Francesco went to retrieve her so that he could make arrangements to settle her once more in a nunnery:

Facendogli quella reprehension che die far un padre à una figliuola in tal caso, pur sappendo essa monacha professa et sacra me delib era de collocarla in qualche loco sacro, et la messi nel monastero de San Gioan Laterano; pregando quelle Reverende madonne fusseno contente de tenirla fin che ghe provedesse, et li dava de salario ducati 30 all'anno oltra l'altr e cose.*129

But there were further humiliations to come for Francesco di Polo, the father in whose mouth butter would not melt. Before two years were up, his wayward daughter had become involved with a convent employee and the abbess's nephew, Francesco dalle Crosette. (He was a married man who, according to his own testimony, carried out jobs for the nunnery 'per che son pover homo con sette figlioli'). The night before Faustina fled from the nunnery, suor Vittoria, 'che è una de quelle vecchie religiose et da ben', had entered the young nun's cell only to find 'questo ribaldo in letto con lei quali dormivano'.*130

Like so many of the cases tried by the provveditori which hinge on sexual allegations, in the San Giovanni Lateran incident it is impossible to know quite where the truth lay. Suor Vittoria was, supposedly, one of only two witnesses to the scene of Faustina and Francesco in bed together: the other, a nun who shared Faustina's cell was inconveniently (or conveniently) mute and therefore unable to testify. Suor Vittoria claimed that the speechless nun had gestured towards the sleeping couple, 'facendo segno con la mano che la dovesse veder quei che dormivano insieme'.*131 As for Vittoria, she too was struck dumb: according to the sympathetic account of the

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*129 Ibid., fo. 1r.
*130 Ibid., fo. 1v.
*131 Ibid., fo. 3r.
confessor 'vedendo questa cosa rimase tanta attonita che la non sapeva che fece'.

Her failure to alert the other nuns meant that the escape of Faustina was not discovered until the next morning when the convent doors were found open by the portonera. So this part of the story rests on the testimony of suor Vittoria alone who, it becomes clear, was far from being an impartial witness.

Vittoria had first begun to suspect a liaison between Faustina and Francesco when she saw them eyeing each other up in church:

Mi son accorsa fin sta quaresima [...] che la mattina quando l'aldiva messa, la si schiariva, et si guardavano un coll'altro perch'essa era de su in choro dentro la fenestra, et esso steva all'altar del sacramento ö in l'intorno. 133

From this time onwards, Vittoria made it her business to carry out investigations into this untoward relationship. Once, she hid under the altar in an attempt to catch the couple. And on another occasion, when she was nosing around the choir in the middle of the night, her suspicion was aroused by 'un tuffo da aglio tanto grande che mi faceva fastidio'! 134 We must be wary of the fact that she was eager to find incriminating evidence. Meanwhile, tensions were mounting between Vittoria on the one hand, and Francesco and Faustina on the other. The older nun took Francesco aside and told him that his aunt, the abbess of the convent, was having an affair with the parish priest of San Paternian 'et che cerca à usurpar questo povero monestero et dar al piovan di San Paternian tutto questo che la puol' (as was so often the case, the abbess's love was expressed through giving). 135 Suor Vittoria then put it about that Faustina had tried to poison her by putting crushed diamonds into her soup—an accusation which found some support from among the other nuns and which is as plausible as any of her other claims. 136

It is only as a wider group of witnesses are questioned that a more complicated picture emerges of suor Faustina's situation in the nunnery, and we learn that her unhappiness at San Giovanni Lateran predated her supposed affair with Francesco. Suor Zuana di Thomasi (aged 25) backed up much of Vittoria's story, but she had this to add about suor Faustina:

la steva qui dentro malissimo volentiera, la mi disse una volta, che la voleva andar via perch'èhavea promesso ad uno che mi par la dicesse forestier. Interrogata era la sacra. Respose messer si che la era sacra, et ella mi disse, che

132 Ibid., fo. 2v.
133 Ibid., fo. 4r.
134 Ibid., fo. 4r.
135 Ibid., fo. 13v.
136 Ibid., fos 5v and 7v.
This was not the first attempt that Faustina had made to escape from San Giovanni Lateran. Indeed, Francesco dalle Crosette claimed that he first encountered Faustina when she was trying to flee the convent for the first time, more than a year previously. In a story which was corroborated by a whole group of neighbours, Francesco explained the piteous story of how the nun crawled onto the roof of the home of Domenego 'fuser' and his wife. Seeing a figure through a gap in the tiles and fearing that it was a bandit, they sought help from their neighbour, Francesco. Faustina pleaded with them to let her to come in, and told them of the persecutions which she had suffered at San Giovanni Lateran: 'disse che le monache del monasteri sopradetto l'haveano tenuta in pregion et le haveano date mala vita, et che suo padre lhavae tolta via da suo marito'. She won the sympathy of these people as well as Zuane de Andrea and his wife Chiara, into whose house Faustina was eventually admitted. Chiara gave this account:

Whether or not Faustina had in the first place been forced into monastic life, it was quite clear that, by this stage, she despised the nunnery. One factor in her desperation was her belief that, by taking vows, she had been deprived of a husband. She claimed that she was 'maritata', a status which might have derived from an informal betrothal. Even if, in fact, she exaggerated the degree of commitment which had been established, married life was now the paradise which she dreamed of. But the object of Faustina's sexual—or more accurately marital—fantasies is scarcely prominent in this trial. All we have is suor Zuana's uncertain testimony that he was a non-Venetian, possibly called Zuane. The visible man in this tale, and the one who was central to the scandal, was Francesco dalle Crosette.

\[137\] Ibid., fo. 8r.  
\[138\] Ibid., fo. 13r.  
\[139\] Ibid., fo. 18v.
Having weighed up suor Vittoria's evidence against Francesco for what it is worth, it may be helpful to consider what remains in the case against him. When Faustina escaped from San Giovanni Lateran for the second time (the third time she had fled a nunnery), she was seen just outside the convent 'in corte de San Zuan Lateran' by two men, 'Francesco da Venetia ditto da i Fiori', and his companion. Fortunately for Francesco, they were able to bear witness that she was alone. (This did not prove that Francesco had not escorted Faustina out of the convent and made a quick get-away, but it is one more detail that throws suor Vittoria's testimony into doubt.) Faustina asked the men to help carry her bundle of possessions. Lying, she claimed that she had come from Treviso and that the boatman had dropped her there, some way short of her destination, near San Giovanni in Bragora. At first, the men were reluctant to help, but eventually they agreed and, at her request, they accompanied her to the home of Donna Marieta 'fornara'.\textsuperscript{140} Marieta (or Margarita, as she was known) had been a wet-nurse in the household of Francesco di Polo. She confirmed that Faustina had turned upon her doorstep in the middle of the night, and that she had asked to be taken to the nearby convent of San Lorenzo 'che alcune monache da San Lorenzo amiche soe la salvariano'. One might have thought that Faustina would have had enough of nunneries, but she chose to go to San Lorenzo for a good reason: Francesco dalle Crosette was employed by the nuns here, and they were willing to help Faustina if only for the sake of their servant.\textsuperscript{141}

Faustina turned up at San Lorenzo and asked to speak to suor Samaritana Bembo. The incident provides a fascinating glimpse into the information networks which kept convents in touch with the world and could even enable one enclosed community to be aware of what was going on in another enclosed community. The fugitive nun presented herself with the words 'non me cognoscete, io son Faustina'; according to suor Samaritana 'havendola io alhora cognoscientia', she replied sympathetically: 'o povereta vi the andate facendo'. Faustina told her dismal story, concentrating this time on the persecutions of suor Vittoria 'laqual è peggio che il Diavolo', and on how her father had threatened to send her to the Convertite (no word of her ill-fated 'marriage' here). She also stressed that her father had promised to 'portar la pena à Francesco dalle Crosette' if she should ever escape again.\textsuperscript{142} Samaritana was evidently moved by this predicament, and having initially been reluctant to get involved, she set about trying to help resolve the situation. She sent for Francesco (who was, by her account, shocked and dismayed to see Faustina), and advised him to go to the home of Donna Eugenia, the niece of one of the nuns, who lived at Santa Caterina. Thither Francesco set off; Faustina left the convent

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., fos 23v-24v.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., fos 24v-26r.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., fo. 29v.
simultaneously, though Samaritana appears to have entertained the hope that she would not follow him to Eugenia's. The next day, when a distinctly harassed Donna Eugenia turned up at the convent and expressed to Samaritana 'haver qualche fastidio delle persone che io le havea mandate', the nun responded with apparent assuredness: 'io gli dissi presto andateli à mandar via et non li tenete per niente'. According to Eugenia herself, the nuns told her to send away Faustina since her father would be searching for her, but to keep Francesco in hiding for three days. This she duly did, accompanying Faustina to a boatman and instructing him to take her to an aunt's house.

This brings us to the end of Faustina's saga, as told in the trial records of 1555. Repeated attempts by Francesco di Polo in conjunction with the provveditori failed to track down the errant nun. On November 6 1555, six and a half months after the processo was initiated, the provveditori released Francesco dalle Crosette without any punishment, save that of being banned from having any further dealings with San Giovanni Lateran. This may, in fact, have entailed a significant drop in his earning potential, but the leniency of his treatment certainly suggests that the provveditori had little faith in the rumours concerning his affair with suor Faustina. Yet that is not to say that the relationship between the two of them had not been of an intense and highly significant nature. Francesco had evidently offered a great deal of emotional and practical support to Faustina at a time when she was desperate to the point of considering suicide. In his attempts to help her, he had jeopardized his own reputation; he ended up by losing a portion of his livelihood, but the consequences could have been far worse. Undoubtedly, he was moved by the pretty young nun, who proved herself so adept at manipulating the sympathies of a whole range of individuals. Faustina's attachment to Francesco does not take much explaining either. Unhappy in the religious life, and pining for the husband she probably never had, Francesco offered her comfort, company and the chance of actual escape. The desires of a woman who was literally imprisoned in a nunnery against her will—whether she had taken the veil involuntarily or whether she had lost her sense of vocation subsequently—were manifold. Sexual desires might number among these. But in a case such as that of Faustina, it is clear that escape was the overriding aspiration.

One of the constant difficulties of analysing sexuality in the convent is that so often the evidence is unclear or evasive about the physical aspects of relationships involving nuns. The patriarchal visitation of La Celestia in 1596, revealed a long list of nuns who were engaged in relationships with men, both lay and clerical:

143 Ibid., fo. 30r.
144 Ibid., fo. 33r.
145 Ibid., unnumbered folio.
146 Medioli, 'Monacazioni forzate', p. 440, emphasizes the importance for a fugitive nun of having 'qualcuno a cui accompagnarsi'.
Apart from the occasional threesome, the nuns and their friends of the opposite sex appear to have paired up in monogamous partnerships on at least a semi-permanent basis. But we are given little insight into the sexual dimension of these relationships. Indeed, the patriarchal visitor was rather more forthcoming about the intimacy between two nuns: 'Che Suor Carità Battagia dorme con Suor Zuana Foscarini tutte due giovane il che li fù prohibito'. Here, the physical nature of the relationship was implied. But despite the vagueness of the records, we are familiar with some of the transactions which probably took place between the nuns of La Celestia and their male friends. Across the bars of the parlatorio grate, physical contact was likely to have been minimal. Far more important was verbal contact, especially valued by the nuns, who relied on conversation and gossip to keep them in touch with the world. The men who came to La Celestia presumably also valued the nuns' company, for they were free to stay away. But, if the nuns of La Celestia were at all typical, they would have provided additional incentives to persuade the men to visit regularly. Free food, darned handkerchiefs, clean laundry were the common currency of these relationships.

The question remains, even if these 'amicitie strette' were not primarily physical relationships, can they be conceived in sexual terms? Light is shed on this problem by the second case-study of this section: that of suor Deodata, who was the object of a patriarchal inquiry at San Iseppo in 1571. Deodata first attracted the attention of the authorities in January of that year during an investigation into the convent confessor

147 ACPV, Vis. past., B. 3, 1596, Celestia, fo. 603r.
148 Ibid., fo. 603v.
and his brother, Gasparo, carried out by the provveditori. She was the prime informant against the confessor (in particular shedding light on the 'grandissima baldezza et grande dimestichezza' which he enjoyed in his relations with the prioress, Suor Cipriana Moresini), as a result of which suor Deodata earned herself a good deal of unpopularity in the convent, and several months in the prison. Consequently, in August 1571, the patriarch, Giovanni Trevisan, was driven to investigate her case. Amid the accusations and counter-accusations, we gain further insights into the division and in-fighting which could split a community of female religious. But we are also given an unusual opportunity to assess the mental and emotional state of one particular nun.

Suor Deodata was the daughter of Piero da Lesina 'al presente patron della Nave del clarissimo messer Hieronimo Mocenigo'; she had been at San Iseppo since 1553. In the hostile statements that were made against her, she was described as having 'pocco cervello' (though attempts to identify her handwriting revealed that 'la sia mior scrittora che sia in monasterio'); more convincingly, she was singled out as a busy-body (the prioress complained that 'Non si puol far cosa in casa, che la non la sapia, et che la non diga mal de ogni cosa, et che la non ghe dia el so tintin'); she was consistently noted for her sharp tongue and bad language (she cursed her parents, she insulted the confessor); one elderly nun told the investigator 'Dio volesse che la fosse strupia della lengua, come l'e strupia del resto'. But for all these negative appraisals, the independence and tenacity of Deodata's campaign against the confessor mark her out as a free spirit, whose individuality refused to be subsumed beneath the corrupt interests of her community. This aspect of Deodata's identity is crucial to understanding her relations with men.

Unsurprisingly, the confessor and the prioress and the various other nuns who enjoyed the entertainments afforded by the company of the priest and his fun-loving brother, Gasparo, did not welcome Deodata's interventions. According to an anonymous statement addressed to the provveditori, her first assault was face-to-face. With a splendid contempt for hierarchy, she confronted the confessor in the confessional itself, about his relationship with the prioress and her niece and his other misdeeds:

et sendo una della feste principal che soleno confessarsi esse moneghe, vene ad esser confessata essa suor Diodata dal sodetto confessor, dove esso confessor la domandò se la

149 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1570 [m.v.], S. Iseppo. This aspect of the case is discussed in chapter III, pp. 141-42.
150 A copy of the patriarchal trial may be found among the records of the provveditori, see ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1571, S. Iseppo.
151 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1570 [m.v.], S. Iseppo.
152 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1571, S. Iseppo, fos 3r-4r.
Deodata then proceeded to threaten the priest: 'facciate provision, che non le vegna altramento si scrivera alli superiori'. This nun was prepared to pursue her case to the highest authorities. According to the prioress, Deodata had boasted 'ho ben tanto poder, se ben non son zentildonna, che andarò dal Patriarca, dai Presidenti, et se bisognerà mandarò ä Roma'. (Her inferior social status may well have contributed to the tensions at San Iseppo). Since Deodata was clearly not one to be dissuaded from her course of action, the confessor and his friends turned their efforts to undermining her credibility. They stressed that she was out on a limb in her opposition to the priest. Most of the nuns pulled rank and praised the confessor fulsomely. In the words of the sixty-five-year-old suor Benedicta Gratarola, 'podemo dir the 1'e un santto in terra, chi dicesse mal de quel homo diria male de Messer Domenedio'. As for Deodata, she was almost unanimously condemned as 'la nostra ruina'. But there were more concrete ways of injuring Deodata's reputation. And in a series of counter-attacks, the confessor and his allies determined to tell the patriarchal authorities all about Deodata's relationships with a group of male clergy.

The prioress, suor Cipriana Moresini, claimed that Deodata's campaign against the confessor was motivated solely by revenge 'perche el lha represa et perche el non vol che frati venghino da lei ne da nissuna'. Intriguingly, the friars to whom she referred came from the Augustinian houses of Sant'Antonio and San Salvador and had recently been the object of another trial on account of their involvement with the nuns of San Servolo. Deodata enjoyed close relations with fra Illuminato and fra Bastian with whom 'si facevano presenti l'uno all'altro'. The excessive magnanimity of the nun towards her clerical acquaintances is consistently reiterated throughout the depositions. Suor Cipriana provided the following summary of Deodata's gifts:

Saria longo à dir ogni cosa la ghe ha cusido una quantita de rocheti, che credo certo, che i passa vinti fatti per el ditto frate, et altri frati con lavori stupendi, et adesso lho vista à cuser per ditti frati fazzoleti, tachie camise, colari de sarza, manegheti postizi, che i porta, capelli stupendissimi de

153 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1570 [m.v.], S. Iseppo.
154 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1571, S. Iseppo, fo. 1v.
155 Ibid., fo. 5r.
156 Ibid., fo. 1v.
157 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1570, S. Servolo. The trial is discussed in some detail on pp. 206-208 of this chapter.
recami de oro, arzento soprarizzo, perche lei lavora
miracolosamente con perle et con zogie, et cestoni de
bozzolai, torte. 158

One 'pre Mathio de Castello' was also mentioned as having been the recipient of 'una bella cotta' made by Deodata. The disciplinary implications of Deodata's gift-giving were not only or even primarily derived from the impropriety of her consorting with male clergy; rather from the fact that she was pursuing her personal whims at the expense of community interest. Suor Seraphina (aged 76) saw Deodata's transgressions in economic terms: 'ella mai è stada sotto obedientia ha vivesto sempre da conventualenza, sempre ha lavorado per se medema, et per vadagno'. 159

If Deodata was not contributing much to the convent economy, her generous impulses towards her friar friends were at least self-funded. Asked how Deodata obtained her money, suor Innocentia Gambarella testified: 'lei diceva che sua sorella li dava et mandava danari, et la vadagnava de lavorieri, che la fava per se, perche la non lavorava mai per el monasterio'. 160 Deodata herself admitted to spending a considerable amount of time and money in sewing for the friars (though she stressed that Illuminato was her cousin). Some of the jobs she claimed to have been paid for, or at least provided with the materials. From within the confines of the nunnery, she established her own business:

Interrogata se ha cusito rocheti ad altri frati. Respose ne ho cusito un altro de vadagno per un altro frate vecchio de quel ordine et a fra Illuminato li ho cusito de bando per esser mio parente, et fra Sebastian mi ha pagato con tante azze
Interrogata chi ha comprato la tela di detti rocheti. Respose lori me hanno dato la tela, cioè fra Illuminato et fra Sebastian, se domandate à pre Mathio dalle verzene lui li ha dato l'ordimento per far far la tela. Interrogata se ha comprato fil sutil. Respose Monsignor si, lho comprato per mi che mi ho fatto far cavati. 161

Interviews with Anzolo Bressan, spenditor of the convent, reveal further complicated transactions relating to Deodata's sewing enterprise, for he was also central in promoting her operations. He testified, 'Chiare volte la me ha dato da comprar doi o tre saazzi de seda, et anco del'oro filado arzento da una donna che se chiama la catelana'. 162 Besides sewing and cooking for the friars, Deodata also took in washing for them. From suor Gratiosa's testimony, we again learn of the resentment the other nuns felt.

158 ASV, PSM, B. 263, 1571, S. Iseppo, fo. 2r-v.
159 Ibid., fo. 6v.
160 Ibid., fo. 8v.
161 Ibid., fos 12v-13r.
162 Ibid., fo. 19v.
concerning Deodata's efforts to detach herself from the community: 'Sempre lha voluto, che i so drappi siano lavati separati da quelli delle altre, et quando se lavava i so drappi sempre quasi la feva laver i rocheti di frati'.

Deodata pursued the tasks she undertook with almost obsessive determination. With characteristic obstinacy, she resolutely continued with her work even while she was sick and confined to the infirmary. This disgruntled account of Deodata's behaviour was given by one of the nurses who looked after her during her illness:

non lho mai sentita à dir ben, dapoi che son qua dentro che sono anni dodese [...] quando era infermiera et che la serviva ella non si contentava mai, et sempre malediva i servizi, che ghe veniva fatti, et bisognava descalzarla, scalderghe el letto da mezo avosto, metterla in letto, impiarghe la lume per el so lavorar tutta la notte, che la diceva de non poter dormir sempre sospirando, et lavorando i rocheti di frati.

Deodata's single-mindedness might be viewed as an aspect of her personal instability. She was not happy at San Iseppo and had once tried to escape. It was said that she cursed her parents 'perche lha messa munega', and one nun implied that a lack of true vocation had turned Deodata bad: 'mai lha fatto ben in vita sua, perche non lha mai vivesto da religiosa'. Her period of illness is frequently referred to in the depositions though witnesses were silent as to the physical symptoms of her condition. We know that she refused to eat 'sel medico non la fasceva', and it is tempting to speculate that Deodata's suffering was at least partly psychologically induced. One nun, suor Augustina de Rafinis was asked why she called Deodata 'povereta', to which she replied 'perche la è inferma, et perche lha poco cervello'. Some pitied the nun while others blamed her. It is clear both that she flouted the conventions of conventual life and that she was victimized. She described in some detail her months spent in the convent prison: her quest for individual identity and independence had ended in enforced isolation. As she heard the lock being fixed on the door, she wept.

Despite the alacrity with which the other nuns cast aspersions on Suor Deodata, they never described her relationships with friars and priests as being primarily sexual. The prioress claimed that she enjoyed 'intrinseca amicitia' with fra Bastian, calling him 'ben mio, vita mia, anima mia [...] et altre simili parole', a charge that other nuns backed up, and that Deodata denied. It was also said that the doting nun stood on the

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163 Ibid., fo. 23v.
164 Ibid., fo. 90r-v.
165 Ibid., fo. 24r.
166 Ibid., fo. 47r.
167 Ibid., fo. 30r.
168 Ibid., fo. 115r.
169 Ibid., fo. 2r.
balcony outside her cell 'per veder i frati nel suo campaniel'.\textsuperscript{170} The friars were easier to bring into the gutter than was their admirer. One of the \textit{converse}, suor Veronica, told a bizarre story against fra Bastian:

\begin{verbatim}
una volta tra le altre me scandalizi tanto, [...] per che el venne à dir certe parole, che ze vergogna à dirle [...] el disse, che quando si fecce la regata, son vegnuo, che ho habuo tanto piaser esser vegnu, che son vegnu in quel, che le donne feva la regata: l'era nude et haveano se non meza traversa davanti, et cosi come le deva le vogade, pense quel che se ghe vedeva.\textsuperscript{171}
\end{verbatim}

Suor Catherina had this tale to add:

\begin{verbatim}
tra le altre un zorno Don Illuminato presente Don Bastian mi adimandò, se saveva far puavole, mi ghe resposi Che non ne haveva mai fatto in vita mia, et Don Sebastian disse el ve domanda, perche el vorria insegnarvele à far.\textsuperscript{172}
\end{verbatim}

Don Illuminato and Don Bastian were a pretty scurrilous pair. (It was subsequently reported that the latter had 'deposto lhabito et ussito della religion').\textsuperscript{173} But while the friars evidently liked talking dirty in front of nuns (a common feature of men's behaviour in convents), Deodata's conduct was far more demure. She made them cakes, she sewed their surplices, and she admitted to having presented fra Bastian with 'un quadro tutto d'oro, che havea i misteri della passion suso'.\textsuperscript{174}

Isolated and persecuted by the other nuns, suor Deodata achieved self-expression and individuality through gift-giving. Alienated from her own family as well as from the other members of her community, she clung on desperately to her relationships with these none-too-salubrious members of the clergy. Making presents for the friars and for prete Matthio gave her life purpose. As suor Maria Celestia Pisani commented:

\begin{verbatim}
ha fatto questa vita cerca 14 anni lavorando sempre per se, et per o soi, et dagando intender, che la lavorava per so sorella, et per i soi, tamen la lavorava per far danari per far presenti à questi.\textsuperscript{175}
\end{verbatim}

The intensity with which Deodata devoted herself to the friars sets her relations with them outside the normal run of sociable exchanges between male and female religious

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., fo. 39r.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., fos 79v-80r.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., fo. 82r.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., fo. 103v.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., fo. 82v.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., fo. 41r.
(though there are many shared characteristics). There is no evidence that her relationship with fra Bastian (the closest of her contacts) was physical. But on Deodata's part, at least, it gave a context in which to play out her identity. If existing definitions do not allow this part of her self to be termed sexuality, then these definitions should perhaps be broadened. Before leaving this case, it is helpful to return to the substance of the initial trial which related to the conduct of the confessor and his brother, Gasparo. When the spenditor was asked for his opinion on whether the prioress's niece, suor Anzola, 'vogli ben ad esso Gasparo', he responded:

Considerando io che ella gli manda presenti et lo manda presenti et lo manda à sallutare per parte sua credo di ragione che gli debba anco voler bene perche questi sono segni d'amore. 176

In any historical study of sexuality, it is necessary to be receptive to a range of 'segni d'amore' which may be quite alien to our modern conceptions. 177

In a chapter which is supposedly devoted to sexuality in the convent, a great deal has been said about baking cakes and sewing hankies and relatively little about acts of carnal union. As will be clear by now, this is both a reflection of the evidence, and a response to the non-physical aspects of 'sexuality in the convent'. 178 But in reacting against the view that nuns were continually and consciously rebelling against chastity, driven by lust alone, the alternative interpretation which is offered here may appear to write carnal desires out of the story altogether. That is not the intention. At one level, of course, nuns were flesh and blood. And while avoiding a reductionist and ahistorical approach which boils all their actions down to 'human nature', there is still room for considering nuns' sexuality at a physical level, if only the sources allow it.

Perhaps the most obvious place to seek the physical manifestations of nuns' sexuality is inside the convent walls. 179 Here, relationships were harder to restrict, and physical intimacy did not have to take place across a parlatorio grate. The risk was recognized and patriarchal visitators made a regular point of inquiring about the

176 ASV, PSM, 1570 [m.v.], S. Iseppo.
177 The remarks of Faderman on relationships between women, prior to the twentieth century, provide some useful analogies. She argues that, in previous centuries, 'romantic love and sexual impulse were often considered unrelated', and insists on the seriousness of relationships between women even when they were probably not genital. See esp. pp. 18-19.
178 See Ruggiero, Boundaries, p. 32, for an interesting comparative example. In a case of 1418, concerning the rape of Benvenuta dela Mota—the adopted daughter of Paolo Contarini—by the nobleman Michele Morosini, it was recorded that she succumbed to Morosini's advances when he promised her "furs and pearls and many other things". Ruggiero comments: 'tellingly, it appears that she was most interested in presents'.
179 See Brown, Immodest Acts, a study of Benedetta Carlini, abbess of a Theatine community in seventeenth-century Pescia. Her sexual acts with another nun were recorded in some detail in trial documents.
sleeping arrangements of the nuns; but they also revealed lapses in the code of conduct governing nuns' relations with one another. At Santa Marta in 1594, certain 'innamoramenti d'importanza' existing between nuns and educande were exposed. In 1595, at Santa Croce della Giudecca, it was recorded that 'vi è qualche pratica sensual trA monache'. Suor Fiorenza was the prime object of concern at San Iseppo in 1626. The patriarchal visitors instructed:

Siano interogate sopra la vita che tiene Suor Fiorenza se essa vadi a parlatorio et con quele persone et se sono suoi parenti o conqioni et se hanno mai visto o sentito dire che essa sia stata trovata con Suor Elena et con Suor Chiara ne parlatorii et haver le cotole alzate et le mane in brachese et da chi et se si baciavano et altre simil sporchezzi.

If physical stimulation was what a nun sought, then satisfaction was near at hand. Same-sex activities may not have provided maximum fulfilment for all nuns, but we may be sure that a fair amount of skirt-lifting went on within communities of female religious, much of it undetected by outside authorities.

As has already been indicated, there was also scope for sexual engagement between nuns and lay women. In a case of 1558, following the escape of suor Raphaela Balbi, from San Bernardo di Murano, her ongoing relationship with a former educanda emerged. The denunciation stated that 'Pratichava anchora con Laura Cumana [...] laquale (non son molte settemane) è stata anchora nella cella de ditta suor Raphaela introdutta da lei clandestinamente'. From the trial of 1567, it is clear that there was a sexual dimension to the relationships between the serving-woman, Felicità, and certain of the nuns at Sant'Andrea. The prostitute, Malipiera Malipiero, investigated by the provveditori in 1612, had apparently exchanged 'molti baci insieme con molte [...] monache'. The rules governing nuns' contact with women were less strict than those relating to men, giving potential for sexual relationships to develop on the edges of enclosure.

Heterosexual activity involved far more risk, not least the danger of pregnancy. In the period under study, the drive for full enclosure of nunneries made...
it increasingly hard to consummate relationships between nuns and men. For this reason, the third and final case-study, from San Zaccaria in 1614, stands out among the records as unique. Two nuns, Laura Querini, and the conversa, suor Zaccaria, made a hole in the wall, and admitted two men into their convent in order to pursue sexual relations with them. They were helped by Antonia, a lay woman who had served suor Laura, and her husband, Zulian, a carpenter at the Arsenal. Informing the provveditori of the events that had taken place the Patriarch explained

che queste due monache si erano valse a rompere esso muro di grossezze di sei pietre di un ferro di pergolo, accommodating da una parte in forma di scarpello, col quale havevano lavorato più d'un mese. 187

Their efforts were rewarded: two men, Andrea Foscarini and Alvise Zorzi (using the pseudonyms of Zuanne Cocco and Gieronimo Zorzetti respectively) were successfully introduced into the love-nest prepared by the nuns. The abbess of the convent, suor Andriana Gradenigo, testified in the patriarchal inquiry that

havevano fatto un buso cusi grande, che per quello havevano introdotto due giovani in Monasterio, li quali erano dimorati in un luoghettto particolare di suor Laura, serrato con porte, con le sue chiavi, balconi et cadenazzi dove anco haveva fatto portar una lettiera con stramazzi, nella quale per alquante notti et giorni erano stati, mangiando, bevendo et dormendo. 188

In order to obscure the gaping hole in the convent wall, the nuns pulled a large stone across the outside and smeared it with 'terazzo rosso'; on the inside, they used 'un cesto di calcina bianca et negra per stroppar il buso sospetto'. 189

What motivated such risk-taking and resourcefulness? We are fortunate in having a full deposition from the main player in these events, suor Laura Querini. As with suor Faustina, in the first of these three case-studies, Laura's story begins with her entry into the nunery. And again, like Faustina, Laura's monastic career appears not to have been the most stable one:

Io venni in questo Monasterio putta piccola in tempo del contaggio che le figliole venivano dentro in Monasterio; et poi fui messa a spese nel Monasterio di San Vido di Buran

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187 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1614, S. Zaccaria, fo. 3v.
188 Ibid., fo. 5r.
189 Ibid., fo. 5v.
dove stetti cinque in sei anni fino che fui accettata Monaca in questo Monasterio, che potevo haver intorno quindese anni, et fui vestita, et feci poi la professione con la bocca, ma non col core. 190

Having spent virtually her whole life between two nunneries, it was hardly surprising that she agreed to take the veil, even if her heart was not in it: returning to the world must have seemed an alien prospect. On the other hand, a certain amount of caution is necessary. For nuns guilty of severe disciplinary transgressions may have called upon the circumstances of a forced vocation to mitigate their misdeeds. 191 Be this as it may, like the two other nuns examined in detail here, suor Faustina and suor Deodata, by the time of the scandal, suor Laura, aged about forty-five years old, was not a model of nunnish contentment.

Laura Querini was restless to the point of being suicidal (another characteristic she shared with suor Faustina), and she found comfort in forging 'friendships' with people outside the convent, through the mediation of a lay woman:

Io son stata sempre tentata dal Demonio di rompermi il collo, et sempre ho havuto per il tempo passato diverse amicitie propostemi, et messemi per le mani da Donna Cipriana, ch'è morta, ma con queste amicitie io non hò mai fatto cosa cattiva, cioè non ho perso la mia virginità. 192

The implication here would seem to be that Laura's 'amicitie' were conceived as being sexual relationships, but that she drew the line at sexual intercourse. With the arrival of the young Andrea Foscarini (Zuane Cocco, as he is called here), that would change:

et finalmente già sei anni mi fu fatto vedere da detta Donna Cipriana, che all'ora viveva, un Zuanne Cocco giovane all'ora de XX anni in circa il quale è venuto qualche volta à vedermi nascosamente alli parlatorii in maniera, che io mi inamorai in lui, et lo indussi ad'amarmi, et usai ogni arte etiam diabolici per indurlo ad'amarmi ciò scongiuri et orationi superstitiose, invocando diavolo, et hebbi queste cose da detta Donna Cipriana, per forza de danari.

Notwithstanding the repertoire of love potions made available by Donna Cipriana, Andrea Foscarini, while manifesting his interest, 'ricusava a mettersi à pericolo'. This was why Laura conceived of her ingenious plan 'di aprirli il muro della parte del canale, che riferisse in un luoghetto, dove solemmo tenere le nostre bagalie à pe piano, sopra il

190 Ibid., fo. 9r.
191 Nuns who tried to escape from their convents often claimed to have been the victims of forced vocations. This tendency is discussed in ch. II, pp. 120-21.
192 ASV, PSM, B. 265, 1614, S. Zaccaria, fo. 9r-v.
chiostro'—though, as she rightfully conceded, the scheme was, in the end, conducted 'con grandissimo nostro pericolo'.

Laura confided in her friend, the *conversa*, suor Zaccaria, and it was arranged that Andrea should come to the convent along with his cousin, Alvise Zorzi (sometimes referred to as Gieronimo Zorzetti). Thus, a tidy foursome was formed (though Laura was at pains to stress that group sex was not the idea) and at some point during Lent, the scheme came to fulfilment:

Vennero tutti due in un copano con una tavola à traverso, et noi bloccassimo il buso, et loro entrarono dentro per esso, et essendo stati due ò tre hore insieme hebbero commercio carnale il Cocco con me, et la detta suor Zaccaria col Zorzi, in detto luogo separatamente.

On that occasion, the two men went away after having had sex with the nuns. After, Easter, 'Cocco' returned alone:

With gratuitous honesty, Laura added 'et tutte quelle notti, the esso Cocco stette in Monasterio, egli hebbe da far con Me.'. Unlike her own transgressions, this admission

Laura's confession is forthright. It is as if she wished to conceal nothing of her own errors. By contrast, she protected the identities of the lay people involved in the scandal, invoking the pseudonyms of the two men, and—until pressed—keeping quiet about the roles of Antonia and Zulian, who eventually emerge as the principal 'mezzani' in the case. Only after torture did Laura admit the true name of her lover: 'questo è stato Andrea Foscarini [...] et la prego à perdonarmi, se non l'ho nominato innanzi; perche non volevo esser la sua ruina'. Unlike her own transgressions, this admission

193 Ibid., fo. 9v.
194 Ibid., fo. 10r.
195 Ibid., fo. 10r.
196 Ibid., fo. 10v.
197 Ibid., fo. 39v. This is the only case examined in which the use of torture is prescribed for nuns. The instruction emanated from the Council of Ten and was dated 13 August, 1614: 'Essendo necessario per servitio della giustizia e per continuation del processo fin'hora formato dalli Provveditori sopra li Monasterii per le cose successe nel monastero de San Zaccaria, haver le persone de S. Laura Querini
appears to have caused Laura genuine regret. The consequences of revealing the identities of the four lay people were serious indeed. Andrea Foscarini and Alvise Zorzi, who failed to attend the trial, were sentenced to exile from Venice and all its territories for twenty years. If either of them broke the ban, the death penalty awaited them. Zulian and Antonia also received harsh sentences 'per essere stati mezani et cooperatori nelli negozii amorosi trà le monache, et il Foscarini, e Zorzi [...] et esso Zulian in particolare per haver condotto in tempo di notte al monastero et levato da esso in barca il Foscarini sopradetto'. Zulian was condemned to eight years on the galleys, or if unable to do this, eight years imprisonment and the severing of his hand. Antonia was to be flogged from San Marco to the Rialto, 'con un breve sopra il petto nel quale sia scritto: Per li Signori Provveditori sopra li Monasteri'. Public humiliation was evidently the order of the day: if Antonia was ever found in a nunnery or convent church again, she was liable to have her nose and ears cut off.198

As for Laura and her accomplice, Zaccaria, we do not know what punishments they received. But from their point of view, one cannot help thinking that the venture had been something of a success. The greatest risks had been taken by the lay people involved in the scandal. And while Laura Querini was clearly distressed by their fate, it is true to say that the nuns themselves had lost little and gained a lot. This case is quite remarkable in a number of ways. Firstly, it is the most outrageous breach of enclosure recorded in the cases examined for this thesis. Secondly, it represents sexuality in its unadulterated physical form. Thirdly, and this is its most extraordinary aspect, the motivation for the sexual acts which took place came entirely from a woman and from a nun. Elsewhere, blatant acts of sex involving nuns were engineered by men. Where female religious cooperated, they nevertheless displayed another set of agenda in their sexual dealings with men. Then there were the cases of rape. For once, here were nuns manifesting their sexual frustration and sexual curiosity.

This chapter has aimed to present a more subtle picture of sexuality in the convent than is sometimes assumed. Between the pornographic images provided by Aretino and the Counter-Reformation drive to isolate female religious from all affective relationships, we see a range of sexual responses to the lifetime constraint of chastity. The evidence for nuns' sexuality has mostly been derived from trial records. In the context of the lay world, documentary evidence of this sort tends to lead the historian towards exceptional

198 Ibid., unnumbered folios.
cases and away from what was more commonly experienced. The situation is rather different for nuns. For, in the reforming climate of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, when the laws governing nuns' contacts with outsiders were being continually tightened, quite unexceptional relationships came before the courts. For the historian, this evidence is validated in two main respects. First, the records provide insights into the whole spectrum of nuns' sexual experience. Second, they place the issue of nuns' sexuality firmly within the context of the period, constantly reiterating the tensions between nuns and authorities, between individual and institution. Apart from being a fascinating subject in itself, the history of sexuality in the convent provides a cross-section of those tensions.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to uncover something of the experience of the thousands of women who became nuns in early-modern Venice. It has shed light on the stresses and strains which characterized life in a Counter-Reformation convent, as well as on the values and aspirations nurtured by female religious. Of course, individual nuns reacted differently to the cloistered life. And in setting forth some typical responses it has not been the intention to iron out those differences. Indeed, a recurring argument of this study has been that many nuns kicked against the institutional conformity which was demanded of them and sought to assert their individuality by creating alternative identities. Yet the repetition of certain quite trivial and initially unexpected details throughout the documentary evidence has acquired a cumulative force. The experience of nuns must be seen in its cultural context and not simply in terms of a series of personal reactions.

During the period under study, the principal tensions which conditioned life in a Venetian convent were twofold: firstly, the role played by nunneries as repositories for unmarried women, a function which was openly acknowledged and consciously perpetuated; secondly, a new concern with reforming female religious houses or--more accurately--imposing enclosure on them (a process which did not necessarily go hand-in-hand with commitment to internal regeneration). At a local level, the imposition of enclosure represented a response to the expedient function of nunneries within society. It recognised that women who were made nuns at society's convenience were unlikely to be model brides of Christ, and it sought to achieve discipline by repression where inclination was lacking. But enclosure rendered involuntary monacation a more bitter pill to swallow. It removed the possibilities for an active life which a religious vocation had once offered women, and it isolated nuns from their friends and families.

The picture of nuns' experience in Counter-Reformation Venice which this thesis presents has been largely pieced together from a collection of narratives recording transgressions on either side of the convent walls: they tell of nuns breaking the rules of conventual life and of outsiders infringing the secular laws relating to nunneries. It has been argued that, in this climate of reform where new constraints were imposed with increasing rigour, transgression was to be expected. This is partly because of the criminalization of customary practices. Nuns and their families could react with genuine surprise to learn that their habitual gatherings were now, for one reason or another, unacceptable in the eyes of the law. A builder employed to carry out structural repairs at a local convent was understandably annoyed to find himself hauled before the provveditori for failing to supply the correct licence. Yet the situation was not static. And, in the period under study, the dynamic of resistance
began to take effect. The persistence of parlatorio offences clearly assumed a subversive bent as it became increasingly difficult for nuns and their acquaintances to plead ignorance of the legal restrictions which applied. A familiar conventual custom such as giving out cakes to friends and neighbours developed into a deliberate strategy as nuns battled against isolation and strove to maintain a presence in the outside world.

Just as Venetian nuns refused to be isolated from the wider community, so the history of Venetian nuns cannot be wrenched from the history of Venetian society. The conclusion of this study is an appropriate place in which to make mention of a few broader implications suggested by research into the nunneries of Counter-Reformation Venice.

The first point concerns the ambiguous and much-discussed relationship between church and state in Venice. Research into temporal policy regarding the nunneries has revealed the commitment of the state to instituting the reforms which emanated from the papacy. To this end, patriarchs and provveditori cooperated and there was a notable unwillingness on both their parts to allow disciplinary compromise. Far from rejecting the dictates of Trent, the Venetian state embraced Counter-Reformation ideology as an instrument of social control.

Secondly, questions have been raised about family relationships and, in particular, the status of daughters in the early-modern period as a result of the reappraisal of the process by which Venetian women entered nunneries. The high cost of monacazioni and the additional payments made by families to convents suggests that female dependants who became nuns were better valued than we have perhaps supposed. Ongoing contacts between female religious and their familial relations, which persisted even when discouraged by the enforcement of enclosure, indicate affective commitment on both sides. While the compelling testimony of Tarabotti has led us to expect overpowering resentment on the part of nuns towards their families, an expectation which is occasionally fulfilled by other discontented nuns, it was more common for women in enclosed nunneries to cling to opportunities for familial reunions. These observations are revealing of close emotional ties within the early-modern family. They also carry implications for our understanding of gender; for it seems that if female offspring were denied opportunities by their families they were not, as a rule, denied love.

Thirdly, the exploration of the cultural consequences of enclosure, which is so central to this thesis, has revealed patterns of sociability and recreation of broader interest. It is surely telling that predominantly noble nuns were able to adapt so easily to mixing with low status women from the neighbourhood, and that educande, who might be destined for an earthly marriage, had passed their youth playing cards or putting on plays in the convent. Nuns' unstoppable tendency to shower gifts and
hospitality upon outsiders has been presented as a strategy for overcoming the constraints of enclosure. Did lay women also sew hankies and bake biscuits as a means of extending their social circle beyond the limits of their homes?

Fourthly, by investigating sexuality in the convent, new insights have been gained into how early-modern Venetians conceived of heterosexual relationships. The restrictions placed on nuns clearly made it difficult for them to engage in fully-fledged sexual relations. A few succeeded in fulfilling their sexual fantasies with men; a few were raped by men. But a great many more entered into heterosocial relations based on casual flirtation, the exchange of gifts and chat. What is interesting is that nuns' male acquaintances—lay men, as well as priests and religious—kept on coming back for more, often with little expectation that their liaisons would be consummated sexually. The example of these relationships between female religious and their male acquaintances offers a model for heterosexual behaviour in which bodily intimacy was surprisingly unimportant.

By focusing on nunneries much has been suggested about the wider community in which they functioned. It is ironic that attempts to impose enclosure, which aspired to separate nuns from the outside world, should have prompted such a wealth of documentary evidence regarding the intractable links between nuns and society.
## APPENDIX I: THE NUNNERIES OF VENICE AND THE LAGOON, 1550-1630, ACCORDING TO ORDER*

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<th>Order</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Sant'Anna (Cast.)</td>
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<td>San Lorenzo (Cast.)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>San Zaccaria (Cast.)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>San Giovanni Lateran (Cast.)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>San Servolo (on own island until 1615; moved to Cast.)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Ogni Santi (D.D.)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Santi Biagio e Castaldo (Giud.)</td>
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<td>Santi Cosmo e Damiano (Giud.)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Santa Croce di Giudecca (Giud.)</td>
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<td>San Francesco fuori e dentro porta (Chio.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Monache a San Giorgio dei Greci (Cast.)</td>
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[* The location of each convent (sestiere or island) is given in brackets. The following abbreviations have been used: Cast. = Castello; D.D. = Dorsoduro; Cann. = Cannaregio; Giud. = Giudecca; Maz. = Mazzorbo; Bur. = Burano; Mur. = Murano; Torc. = Torcello; Mal. = Malamocco; Chio. = Chioggia]
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<td>1456-60</td>
<td>Maffeo Contarini (vic)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1460-64</td>
<td>Andrea Bondumier (Augustinian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1464</td>
<td>Gregorio Correr (secular canon of S. Giorgio in Alga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1465-66</td>
<td>Giovanni Barozzi (Bishop Bergamo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1466-92</td>
<td>Maffeo Girardi-cardinal (Camaldolese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1492-1504</td>
<td>Tommaso Donà (Dominican)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1504-08</td>
<td>Antonio Surian (Carthusian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1508</td>
<td>Alvise Contarini (secular canon of S. Giorgio in Alga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1508-24</td>
<td>Antonio Contarini (canon of S. Salvatore)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1524-54</td>
<td>Gerolamo Querini (Dominican)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1554-55</td>
<td>Francesco Contarini (lay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1555-59</td>
<td>Vicenzo Diedo (lay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1559-90</td>
<td>Giovanni Trevisan (Benedictine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1590-1600</td>
<td>Lorenzo Priuli-cardinal (lay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600-05</td>
<td>Matteo Zane (lay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1605-19</td>
<td>Francesco Vendramin-cardinal (lay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1619-30</td>
<td>Giovanni Tiepolo (primicerio of S. Marco)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1631-44</td>
<td>Federico Corner-cardinal (Bishop Padua)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1644-78</td>
<td>Gianfranco Morosini (sacerdote diocesano)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1678-88</td>
<td>Alvise Sagredo (lay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1688-1706</td>
<td>Giovanni Badoer-cardinal (primicerio of S. Marco)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1706-25</td>
<td>Pietro Barbarigo (primicerio of S. Marco)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1725-34</td>
<td>Marco Gradenigo (Bishop Verona)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1734-41</td>
<td>Francesco Antonio Correr (Capuchin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1741-58</td>
<td>Ludovico Foscari (canon of Padua)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1758-75</td>
<td>Giovanni Bragadin (Bishop Verona)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1776-1800</td>
<td>Federico Giovanelli (Bishop Chioggia)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Information supplied by Niero.
APPENDIX III
DOWRY PAYMENTS MADE TO SPIRITO SANTO, 1534-1650: NOTES

One of the themes of chapter II was the considerable cost of placing a woman in a convent. The evidence adduced for this was chiefly derived from regulations controlling the levels of conventual dowries. These measures apparently aimed to secure adequate funding for the nunneries of Venice but were also intended to guard against excess and luxury in the form of unnecessarily large dowry payments. The purpose of this appendix is to provide evidence of the actual payments made to a convent during our period.

From 1534, the names of all new nuns were entered in the capitolare of Spirito Santo, along with the terms of their acceptance. (Other events in the life of the convent were also recorded, such as the deaths and appointments of abbesses and the appointment of confessors). This source provides an unusually consistent record of conventual dowry payments during the period under study. It illustrates the inflation in conventual dowries, as well as some of the practical developments that occurred in provision for female religious, for example, the introduction of annuities. It also provides insights into the range of gifts and additional payments which nuns commonly brought with them, or handed out to fellow members of their community on the occasion of their profession or consecration. The picture that is presented is roughly consistent with the development of the legislation, though a definite upward pressure on payments is registered.

Some specific features of the Spirito Santo figures shed light on the tensions between familial strategies and the restrictions imposed by secular law. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, dowry payments stabilized at around the 1000 ducat mark, in accordance with the legislation of 1602. Payments of 1400 ducats (standard between 1606 and 1613) might have been legally sanctioned if they were viewed in terms of a 1000 ducat dowry plus 300 ducats for the cassa plus ceremonial costs. However, the inflationary tendency evidently continued to prevail, with nuns' families providing the maximum which was permitted and, on occasion, making payments beyond that level. For example, Piero Bon paid conventual dowries of 1800 ducats for each of his daughters in 1613. And in 1624, Annibal Tascha made provision for an annuity of 50 ducats in addition to the 1000 ducat dowry. The possibility of making annual payments as an alternative to a dowry was clearly open to abuse. In 1637, Sebastian Stefani paid 1000 ducats to Spirito Santo for his daughter

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1 ASV, Spirito Santo, B. 1; 'Registro deli Capitoli et altro (1534-1805). The current analysis takes the beginning of the capitolare (1534) as its starting point and extends until 1650, thus providing a slightly longer view than that generally adopted in this thesis, i.e. 1550-1630.
2 While the records of Spirito Santo are the most comprehensive series of payments to have been examined, their typicality is suggested by more sporadic references from other convents.
3 For a discussion of what constituted the cassa, see below in text, p. 240.
Chiara and, at the same time, pledged an annuity of 60 ducats. In the same year, Antonio Capelo agreed to make the same provision for the monacazione of his daughter, Franceschina. At the end of the sample, the tendency for nuns’ families to push payments beyond the bounds of what was legally acceptable is clearly illustrated in the case of Domenego Biava, who paid lump sums of 800 ducats for both his daughter and his niece (1647 and 1650 respectively), in addition to annuities of 90 ducats. By contrast, the two explicit references to the acceptance of converse (in 1647 and 1650), state that their dowries were only 200 ducats.

Despite the tendency of some families to exceed the limits placed on the payment of conventual dowries, it is clear that the laws did impose a restraining force. The reduction in payments which is evident from 1623 was almost certainly a response to the recent legislation of 1620. This obliged the parents or guardians of women entering religion to swear an oath before the Doge in full Council promising to respect the decrees regarding the costs of monacazione. Without the laws which sought to control conventual dowries, it is reasonable to assume that they would have reached far higher levels than was actually the case.

**Dates**

It should be noted that, as with other documents of a semi-official nature, the system of dating is neither clear nor consistent in this source. Given this level of uncertainty, it was decided to leave all dates as they were found in the capitolare. The ambiguity, of course, arises in the two-month period of January to February, in which *more veneto* and new style dating diverge. For each entry which falls within this period, a judgment has been made, on the basis of the sequence of surrounding entries in the capitolare, as to whether it conforms to *more veneto* or new style. In the table, this estimation appears in square brackets followed by a question mark. Where there is insufficient information for even a hesitant decision, this has been indicated thus: [dating?]. Entry 29 presents a particular problem. The date of the entry is 13 January but no year is supplied. In the original source, it follows on from a series of entries from August to December 1579. The implication, therefore, is that the full date should read 1579, 13 January, *more veneto*. However, taking into account the propensity of new style during this period of the capitolare, the formula [1579/80] has been adopted. A question mark within square brackets indicates that part of the date is omitted in the source.
Sponsors
The word 'sponsor' has been used to refer to the person responsible for placing a woman in a convent and for arranging the terms of her acceptance. This was most commonly the father of the potential nun, but the records make it clear that mothers, uncles, sisters and brothers also fulfilled the role. In several instances the capitolare gives only the father's name, while indicating that he was dead at the time of the daughter's acceptance (e.g., entry 59): 'avemo acetato la ffigola del quondam clarissimo signor Zuane Foscarini'). In these cases, the father's name has been entered in the 'sponsor' column, followed by 'deceased'.

Additional Payments
The majority of women who became nuns at Spirito Santo brought with them a 'cassa'. Literally, the word means 'chest' and can also refer to the contents thereof. But, according to the legislation on conventual dowries, the cassa was a sum of money which was supposed to cover the costs of clothing and cell furnishings. (For example, the Senate decree of 26 July, 1602 specified that 300 ducats should be paid as the cassa). In these otherwise meticulous records, the cassa is never revealed to be a sum of money. Instead, it seems likely that new nuns at Spirito Santo brought an actual chest with them, containing clothes and linen, rather than a sum of money. The material nature of the cassa is alluded to by occasional elaboration in the text of the following sort: 'e la sua cassa quanto se contien nel suo aventario'.

The other payments and gifts itemised in this column fall into two main categories. First, there are provisions for entertainments---'recreation'---at the time of a nun's vestizione (and subsequent profession and consecration). This sometimes took the form of money to pay for a 'bancheto' or 'pasti' at the convent, and sometimes consisted in small hand-outs for all the nuns. Secondly, there are 'donativi' or 'lemosina', either for the convent itself or specifically for the church or 'sagrestia'. These donations could be monetary or in kind. It was apparently common for the nuns of Spirito Santo to bring cloth with them as a gift for the convent. But some donations were of a very substantial monetary nature. For example, Pompilia Carpan, who was admitted in 1597 with an annuity of 50 ducats, brought with her a 'donativo' of 900 ducats. The custom whereby nuns' families provided a gift at the time of the girl's admission or profession allowed for greater flexibility in the payments made to the convent. A so-called 'donativo' could be a means of getting a big dowry in through the back door.

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4 See p. 104
### Appendix III: Dowries Received at Spirito Santo, 1535-1650

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Secular Name</th>
<th>Religious Name</th>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Dowry</th>
<th>Annuity</th>
<th>Additional Payments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) 1535, 29 Jan [n.s.?]</td>
<td>Adoina Contarini</td>
<td>Cecilia</td>
<td>Paula Donado ('magnifica'); mother</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
<td>100 'de fondo per suo uso' + 50 per el suo vestir'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) 1537, 12 Aug</td>
<td>Marieta</td>
<td></td>
<td>Paul Donado ('magnifica'); mother</td>
<td>240</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) 1538, 8 Aug</td>
<td>Lodovica</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alejandro Bon ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>1502</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) 1538, 8 Aug</td>
<td>Elena</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nicolo Tiepolo ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) 1538, 8 Aug</td>
<td>Felipa</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lodovico 'spicier'; father</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) 1539, 6 Feb [n.s.?]</td>
<td>Cecilia di Garbini</td>
<td></td>
<td>Isabella; sister</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>'et vestida'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) 1540, 24 Feb [n.s.?]</td>
<td>Anzola</td>
<td></td>
<td>Benetto Dolphin ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) 1547, 10 Jan [n.s.?]</td>
<td>Iulia</td>
<td>Arcanzolla</td>
<td>Marietta Zanchana; mother</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td>'et la sua cassa, et la regalia inportanta al nro convento'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) 1547, 21 July</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Clementia</td>
<td>Bonifacio di Francheschi; father</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td>'et la cassa et regalia occorente al bissogno del convento'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) 1547, 21 July</td>
<td>Sareta</td>
<td>Camila</td>
<td>Julio Rotta; father; deceased</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
<td>'et la cassa et regalie'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

1 ASV, *Spirito Santo*, B. 1; 'Registro deli Capitoli et altro (1524-1805)'.
2 According to a subsequent entry of 1541, the dowry was restituted by Spirito Santo following the death of Lodovica's father and her transferal to the convent of San Daniel.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Secular Name</th>
<th>Religious Name</th>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Dowry</th>
<th>Annuity</th>
<th>Additional Payments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11) 1547, 21 July</td>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Maria Benedetta</td>
<td>'sanser'; father</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td>'et la cassa et regalia'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) 1549, 3 Nov</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paulo Marcello ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
<td>'et la cassa secundo el solito nostro con tutta la regalia del convento'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) 1551, 11 July</td>
<td>Iulia</td>
<td>Ancilla</td>
<td>Zambatista Basaio ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>'et la sua cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14) 1551, 31 Aug</td>
<td>Paula</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zan Maria Memo ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>200³</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) 1551, 31 Aug</td>
<td>Andriana</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zan Maria Memo ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16) 1552, 24 March</td>
<td>Diana Basaio</td>
<td>Letitia</td>
<td>Alvise da Mula &amp; Benetto da Canal ('magnifici')¹</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17) 1558, 10 Aug</td>
<td>Camilla</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18) 1558, 10 Dec</td>
<td>Anzola</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zan Francesco Foscarini ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19) 1559, [?]</td>
<td>Vittoria</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bortalamio &amp; Antonio Minio ('magnifici'); brothers</td>
<td>140⁵</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³ In fact, payment was made by Zan Maria Memo of 400 ducats for the dowries of both Paula and Andriana. For convenience, I have split this sum equally between the two.

⁴ Camilla's late father = named as 'q. me. Marcantonio Zorzi'.

⁵ Payment was made of 80 ducats; a further 30 ducats was promised by each of suor Vittoria's brothers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Secular Name</th>
<th>Religious Name</th>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Dowry</th>
<th>Annuity</th>
<th>Additional Payments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20) 1565, 21 Oct</td>
<td>Mansueta</td>
<td>Zan Francesco Foscarini ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21) 1565, 21 Oct</td>
<td>Anzelica</td>
<td>Marieta Baffo; ('magnifica'); mother</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22) 1565, 21 Oct</td>
<td>Eleta</td>
<td>Alvise Longo Franceschini ('magnifico'); uncle(^6)</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23) 1568, 17 June</td>
<td>Cherubina</td>
<td>Zuan Mario Pisani ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24) 1568, 1 July</td>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>Paulo Cappello ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25) 1568, 1 July</td>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>Bernardo Polani ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26) 1579, 31 Dec</td>
<td>Degnamerita</td>
<td>Marieta Cappello ('magnifica'); father</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27) 1579, 31 Dec</td>
<td>Seraphina</td>
<td>Cataruza Badoer ('magnifica'); mother</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28) 1579, 31 Dec</td>
<td>Perpetua</td>
<td>Cataruza Badoer ('magnifica'); mother</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29) [1579/80], 13 Jan</td>
<td>Maria Elleta</td>
<td>Piero Moresini (clarissimo); uncle</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30) 1584, 15 June</td>
<td>Deodata</td>
<td>Zuan Antonio Foscarini (clarissimo); father</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^6\) Suor Eleta's late father = named as 'q. me. Santo Tron.'
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Secular Name</th>
<th>Religious Name</th>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Dowry</th>
<th>Annuity</th>
<th>Additional Payments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31) 1584, 15 June</td>
<td>Modesta</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zuan Piro &amp; Iacomo Bembo ('magnifici'); brothers</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32) 1584, 15 June</td>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zuan Piro &amp; Iacomo Bembo ('magnifici'); brothers</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33) 1584, 2 July</td>
<td>Aurelia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Augustin Tiepolo ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34) 1593, 28 Aug</td>
<td>Cecilia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cecilia Polani ('clarissima'); mother</td>
<td>800</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35) 1593, 28 Aug</td>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hieronimo Foscari ('clarissimo')</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36) 1593, 18 Oct</td>
<td>Andriana</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vicenzo Querini ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37) 1593, 18 Oct</td>
<td>Faustina</td>
<td></td>
<td>Orseta Dolse ('clarissima'); mother</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38) 1593, 18 Oct</td>
<td>Desideria</td>
<td></td>
<td>Isepo Meloncin</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39) 1594, 22 Feb [m.v.?]</td>
<td>Dona</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zuane Minoto ('clarissimo'); uncle</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40) 1597, 11 March</td>
<td>Marieta</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zuan Francesco Corer ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>'con la parte e ducati 200 di donativo e la sua cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41) 1597, 11 March</td>
<td>Anzola</td>
<td></td>
<td>Iacomo Bembo ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa' + 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Secular Name</td>
<td>Religious Name</td>
<td>Sponsor</td>
<td>Dowry</td>
<td>Annuity</td>
<td>Additional Payments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42) 1597, 11 March</td>
<td>Hieronima</td>
<td>Hieronimo Bembo ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>'cassa' + 400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43) 1597, 2 June</td>
<td>Augustina</td>
<td>Agostin Moresini ('illustrissimo'); father</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>'cassa' + 300</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44) 1597, 2 June</td>
<td>Bricita(^7)</td>
<td>Zuan Francesco Corer ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>[?](^8)</td>
<td>'con la parte e ducati 200 di don. e la sua cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45) 1597, 2 June</td>
<td>Cecilia(^9)</td>
<td>Andriana Molin ('clarissima'); mother</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46) 1597, 23 July</td>
<td>Lugretia</td>
<td>Laura Trivisan ('clarissima'); mother</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>'con la parte e ducati 650'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47) 1597, 23 July</td>
<td>Eleta</td>
<td>Laura Trivisan ('clarissima'); mother</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>'con la parte e ducati 650'</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>48) 1597, 11 Oct</td>
<td></td>
<td>Signor [?] Da Mosto ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td></td>
<td>'con la parte e ducati 650 di don. e la sua cassa'</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>49) 1597, 11 Oct</td>
<td>Pompilia</td>
<td>Batista Carpan ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>'con la parte e ducati 900 di donativo'</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>50) 1598, 6 Feb [dating?]</td>
<td>Morosina</td>
<td>Francesco Moresini ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td></td>
<td>'con la parte e ducati 650 di donativo e la sua cassa'</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^7\) It is not altogether clear whether Bricita is a secular or a religious name. Since 'suor' is omitted, I have assumed the former.

\(^8\) Bricia is the penultimate of those nuns listed under 11 March, 1597. The entry suggests that she was admitted under the same terms as her sister Marieta (see 40), though it is not explicit: 'fu balota la fiolla del Clarissimo Signor Zuan Francesco Corer come e sopra dito con la parte e ducati 200 di don e la sua cassa et a nome Bricia'. In several of the following entries where neither annuity or dowry is cited, it seems possible that a 50 ducat annuity may have been taken for granted (see 48, 50, 51).

\(^9\) Assumed to be secular name, given omission of 'suor'.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Secular Name</th>
<th>Religious Name</th>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Dowry</th>
<th>Annuity</th>
<th>Additional Payments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51)</td>
<td>16[?], [?] April</td>
<td>Verginia</td>
<td>Paulina Moresini ('clarissima'); mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'con la parte e ducati 500 di don. ela sua cassa'</td>
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<td>52)</td>
<td>1601, 10 July</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pandolfo Malatesta</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>'con la lemosena di la chiesa et 150 pasti et la sua cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53)</td>
<td>1604, 16 July</td>
<td></td>
<td>Francesco Pisani ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54)</td>
<td>1604, 16 July</td>
<td></td>
<td>Domenego dei Priuli ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<td>55)</td>
<td>1604, 16 July</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alvise Bragadin ('illustissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
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<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56)</td>
<td>1604, 16 July</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lauro Querini ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
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<td>'cassa'</td>
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<td>57)</td>
<td>1604, 16 July</td>
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<td>Pandolfo Mala ('clarissimo'); father</td>
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<td>'cassa'</td>
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<tr>
<td>58)</td>
<td>1604, 16 July</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alvise Mosto; father</td>
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<td>'cassa'</td>
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<tr>
<td>59)</td>
<td>1605, 18 July</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zuane Foscarini ('clarissimo'); father; deceased</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<td>60)</td>
<td>1605, 18 July</td>
<td></td>
<td>signor Berenci Contarini ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1100</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>61)</td>
<td>1605, 31 July</td>
<td></td>
<td>Giacomo Pesaro ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Secular Name</td>
<td>Religious Name</td>
<td>Sponsor</td>
<td>Dowry</td>
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<td>62) 1605, 16 Aug</td>
<td></td>
<td>Priula Loredan</td>
<td>Priula Loredan ('clarissima'); mother</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<tr>
<td>63) 1606, 30 June</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zanbattista Basegio</td>
<td>Zanbattista Basegio ('clarissimo'); father; deceased</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<tr>
<td>64) 1606, 30 June</td>
<td></td>
<td>Piero Rimondo</td>
<td>Piero Rimondo ('illustissimo'); father</td>
<td>1400</td>
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<tr>
<td>65) 1613, 27 Sept</td>
<td>Foscarina</td>
<td>Piero Foscarini</td>
<td>Piero Foscarini ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<tr>
<td>66) 1613, 27 Sept</td>
<td>Ellen Basadona</td>
<td>Francesco Basadona</td>
<td>Francesco Basadona ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<tr>
<td>67) 1613, 27 Sept</td>
<td>Crestina</td>
<td>Giacomo Benbo</td>
<td>Giacomo Benbo ('clarissimo'); father; deceased</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<tr>
<td>68) 1613, 27 Sept</td>
<td>Maria Eccelsa</td>
<td>Lauro Querini</td>
<td>Lauro Querini ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<tr>
<td>69) 1613, 27 Sept</td>
<td>Prudencia</td>
<td>Lauro Querini</td>
<td>Lauro Querini ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<tr>
<td>70) 1613, 27 Sept</td>
<td>Maria Celestina</td>
<td>Francesco Pisani</td>
<td>Francesco Pisani ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<tr>
<td>71) 1613, 27 Sept</td>
<td>Paulina</td>
<td>Daniel Dolfin</td>
<td>Daniel Dolfin ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<tr>
<td>72) 1613, 27 Sept</td>
<td>Maria Stela</td>
<td>Pietro Foscari</td>
<td>Pietro Foscari ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1400</td>
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<td>'cassa'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Secular Name</td>
<td>Religious Name</td>
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<td>73) 1613, 27 Sept</td>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td>Pietro Foscari ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1400</td>
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<td>'cassa'</td>
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<td>74) 1613, 27 Sept</td>
<td>Cherubina</td>
<td>Francesco Molin ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>75) 1613, 27 Sept</td>
<td>Maria Fellice</td>
<td>Piero Bon ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<td>76) 1613, 27 Sept</td>
<td>Lodovica</td>
<td>Piero Bon ('magnifico'); father</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td></td>
<td>'cassa'</td>
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<td>77) 1615, 28 Sept</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Michiela</td>
<td>Bertucci Contarini ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td></td>
<td>40 'per pasto'; 15 'di lemosena'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78) 1616, 29 Aug</td>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td>Francesca</td>
<td>Anzolo Mosto ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td></td>
<td>40 'per pasto'; 60 'de lemosina'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79) 1616, [? Nov.]</td>
<td>Gabriela</td>
<td>Geronimina</td>
<td>signor Catarin Malipiero; father</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td></td>
<td>40 'per pasto'; '50 'de lemosine'</td>
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<tr>
<td>80) 1617, 16 Aug</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Leticia</td>
<td>Francesco Querini ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td></td>
<td>'et un sechin per monaca al vestir alla profession e ducati 40 per la sagra e ducati 50 de lemosina alla chiesa'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81) 1618, 2 Feb  [dating?]</td>
<td>Cornelia</td>
<td>Cecilia</td>
<td>Giacomo Corner ('illustissimo'); father</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td></td>
<td>'et un sechin per monaca uno al vestir et uno alla profession et ducati 40 alla sagra e ducati 50 per lemosina'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82) 1618, 2 Feb</td>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>Nocencia</td>
<td>Giacomo Corner ('illustissimo'); father</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td></td>
<td>[As for 81]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83) 1618, 2 Feb</td>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>Mozeniga</td>
<td>Lazaro Mosenigo ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td></td>
<td>[As for 81]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Secular Name</td>
<td>Religious Name</td>
<td>Sponsor</td>
<td>Dowry</td>
<td>Annuity</td>
<td>Additional Payments</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
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<td>84) 1618, 2 Feb</td>
<td>Benedeta</td>
<td>Benedeta</td>
<td>Gregorio Benedeti; father</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td></td>
<td>[As for 81] + 500 'al monasterio'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85) 1618, 2 Feb</td>
<td>Lugresia</td>
<td>Daria</td>
<td>Prudencia Lorrenzoni; mother</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td></td>
<td>[As for 81] + 500 'al monasterio'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86) 1623, 12 Nov</td>
<td>Camila</td>
<td>Camila</td>
<td>Piero Malipiero ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>'con la parte e ducati 50 al cetar, al vestir, alla profesion, et alla sagra'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87) 1624, 22 July</td>
<td>Biancha</td>
<td>Corona</td>
<td>Anzolo Mosto ('illustissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>50 'per ogni officio'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88) 1624, 22 July</td>
<td>Chiareta</td>
<td>Ottavia</td>
<td>Catarin Malipiero ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>50 'per ogni officio'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89) 1624, 22 July</td>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>Maria Benedeta</td>
<td>Erizo ('illustissimo procurator')</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>50 'per ogni officio'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90) 1624, 22 July</td>
<td>Faustina</td>
<td>Cicilia</td>
<td>Francesco Boldu ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>50 'per ogni officio'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91) 1624, 22 July</td>
<td>Betigra</td>
<td>Felicita</td>
<td>Domini Zen ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>50 'per ogni officio'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92) 1624, 22 July</td>
<td>Giustina</td>
<td>Maria Giustina</td>
<td>Anibal Tascha; father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50 'per ogni officio'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Secular Name</td>
<td>Religious Name</td>
<td>Sponsor</td>
<td>Dowry</td>
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<tr>
<td>93) 1640, 12 Feb [dating?]</td>
<td>Andriana</td>
<td>Maria Vittoria</td>
<td>Antonio Zustinian ('illustrissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>600 'di donativo'; 'con li suoi pasti la recreasion un scudo dargento per una et la sua gentilesa et vestir et profesion et sagra il scudo a tute et li suoi bancheti il presente di chiesa ducati 50 sento brasa di terdise et un coltor et una corda'</td>
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<tr>
<td>94) 1637, 24 Sept</td>
<td>Zaneta</td>
<td>Anzelica</td>
<td>Domenego Bafo ('illustrissimo'); father</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td></td>
<td>60 'per cadauna festa cioe vestir, profesion e sagra'; 25 'per lemosina'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95) 1637, 24 Sept</td>
<td>Lucieta</td>
<td>Lugretia</td>
<td>Fantin Zoranso ('illustrissimo'); father</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td></td>
<td>[As for 94]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96) 1637, 24 Sept</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>Fantin Zoranso ('illustrissimo'); father</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td></td>
<td>[As for 94]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97) 1637, 24 Sept</td>
<td>Dieda</td>
<td>Maria Isabella</td>
<td>Marco Querini ('illustrissimo'); father</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td></td>
<td>[As for 94]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98) 1637, 24 Sept</td>
<td>Chiara</td>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Sebastian Stefani ('clarissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>[As for 94]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99) 1637, 24 Sept</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Ellena</td>
<td>Francesco Pisani ('illustrissimo'); father</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td></td>
<td>[As for 94]</td>
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<tr>
<td>100) 1637, 24 Sept</td>
<td>Paulina</td>
<td>Vittoria</td>
<td>Pandolfo Malatesta ('illustrissimo'); father</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td></td>
<td>[As for 94]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101) 1637, 24 Sept</td>
<td>Franceschina</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Antonio Capelo ('illustrissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>[As for 94]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Secular Name</td>
<td>Religious Name</td>
<td>Sponsor</td>
<td>Dowry</td>
<td>Annuity</td>
<td>Additional Payments</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>102) 1647, 6 Feb [m.v.?]</td>
<td>Betta</td>
<td>Ana Maria</td>
<td>Gasparo Malipiero ('illustriissimo'); father</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td></td>
<td>'et cinquanta ducati di presente ala chiesa per cadauna et cento braza di cerise al acetar un scudo per testa et altre cortesie et un banceto al vestir et un a la profesion et a tutti il suo scudo per teste et a fato tute tre in deferente mente'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103) 1647, 6 Feb</td>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>Celeste</td>
<td>Piro Valier ('illustriissimo'); father</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>104) 1647, 6 Feb</td>
<td>Santina</td>
<td>Dominica Felice</td>
<td>Domenego Biave; father</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>'40 braza di cantuda'</td>
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<tr>
<td>105) 1647, 6 Feb</td>
<td>Madalena Zugnoria</td>
<td>Chiara <em>conversa</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td>'un scudo per una al acetar et uno al vestir et uno alla profession et alla sagra et una muda di manzilli' + 'ducati 50 alla sagrestia'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106) 1648, 4 Feb [m.v.?]</td>
<td>Pulisena</td>
<td>Maria Pulisena</td>
<td>Marieta Zen ('illustriissima'); mother</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>'un scudo alacetar uno al vestir et un belisimo bancheto alle monache et alle fie; e di piu a dato una muda di mansili per homo et 50 ducati di limosina alla sagrestia'</td>
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<td>107) 1650, 15 Sept</td>
<td>Meneghina</td>
<td>Maria Angelicha</td>
<td>Domenego Biave; uncle</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>[As for 107]</td>
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<tr>
<td>108) 1650, 15 Sept</td>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Maria Stella</td>
<td>signor medicho Lanceta; father</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td></td>
<td>'e doi colaori'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109) 1650, 15 Sept</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Maria Antonia <em>conversa</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>200</td>
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</table>
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- Notarile Testamenti.
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