

FEMALE PRACTITIONERS OF MAGICAL
HEALING AND THEIR NETWORKS
(17TH-18TH CENTURIES)*

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This paper will draw on the work conducted for my PhD thesis on *Magical Healing and the Greeks in Seventeenth Century Venice* which is based on the records of the Sant'Uffizio related to the prosecutions of practitioners of magical healing, the vast majority of whom were women.

One summer morning of 1634 Maddalena Marangoni, 40 years old, resident of Giudecca, appeared in front of the Sant'Uffizio, by her own free will, to denounce a certain Cecilia Ganasse, widow of a «barcariol», her age-peer and neighbour.¹ In her description, her neighbour was «of black

* I would like to dedicate this paper to the memory of my advisor Ms Julian Chrysostomides, Director of the Hellenic Institute at Royal Holloway University of London, who passed away recently.

¹ Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASV), Sant'Uffizio (SU), b. 90, Case of Ganasse Cecilia, (8 June 1634), testimony of Maddalena Marangoni «Son venuta spontaneamente a denontiare a questo Santo Officio una Cecilia relita del q. di un barchariol chiamato per sopranoime Ganasse, laquale sta poco lontana da mi in Rio della Crose della Zudecca, mia coetanea».

complexion, with black, untidy hair, which seem to be permanently like that, and her face is like the devil's. She is considered by everybody to be a witch and goes everywhere bewitching people».² The case did not go any further, the description of Cecilia – although full of the preconceptions and the stereotypes of how a witch should be – failed to convince the Tribunal.

Denunciations and testimonies such as the one mentioned above provide a wealth of information on various aspects of everyday life in Venetian neighbourhoods. On the one hand they offer an insight into what type of people allegedly practised magical healing: their age, occupation, gender, marital status and perceived status within the nucleus of the neighbourhood. Moreover, the depositions can be used to gather an idea of how the supply of magical services worked, how well known were magical practitioners, what was the level of acceptance of their practices and how an accusation eventually developed. The material offers in fact considerable information on these issues, and points in particular to the role of the neighbourhood and of the quality of relationships that developed in this close knit community in the emergence of witchcraft accusations. On the other hand, the cases throw light on the relationship between the magical healers themselves and make it possible to ask whether this was dominated by rivalry or cooperation, whether an *esprit de corp* existed between them, how magical knowledge was

² *Ibid.* «[lei è] negra, con capelli negri che parono impegolati, rizza di che parono fisse, e la sua faccia pare come del demonio, laquale e tenuta per publica striga, et va da per tutto a far strigarie».

regarded by the healers and how it was acquired. More generally, they reveal the social networks the healers had formed with other occupations to facilitate their practice of magical healing.

Who practiced magical healing? The gender-specific characterisation of the witch signalled by many studies is confirmed in my cases. From the material studied it emerges that the majority of the people involved in popular magical practices were women. Moreover, many of the women who were thought to be witches were from the poorest strata, some were marginal members of the society, such as prostitutes, others were working in domestic service or as wet-nurses. Some were living with relatives, or in family arrangements, others alone: widows or spinsters, who were renting a room from an old lady. It also emerges that Greek people were involved in cases of magic of every kind in disproportionate numbers to their presence in Venice in general, probably because they capitalised on their reputation as people particularly knowledgeable in magical practices.

Although the practice of magic was not age specific, and one could start very early in life by *buttar fave*, *buttar la cordela*, *pizja* and *inghistera*, it is safe to say that magical healing was practised by older women, presumably because they needed to be able to convince the public of their medical knowledge, and such experience was built over a life-course, learning from the more experts.

Was there a geography of magic? Castello and Arsenale feature prominently, these are areas where rents were relatively low and where a high percentage of poor Greeks

and Slavonic people concentrated.³ This confirms Davis's observation that «the Arsenal district was one of the regions of the city particularly favoured by cunning women, fortune tellers and folk magicians».⁴ Davis, however, presents these districts as spaces somewhat specialised in the supply of magical services: «Diviners and wise women were so common in the area, according to one witness, that any outsider seeking their services just had to ask among the greek and slavic women who always hung around the small *campielli* behind the San Martino parish church, and he would be quickly led to the nearest and most suitable practitioner».⁵ This suggests that magic was on offer in these areas to any visitor and certainly the reputation especially of the most famous healers travelled from mouth to mouth, reaching also foreigners who were just visiting Venice, even if by pure coincidence.⁶ The clientele of a

³ S. Koutmanis, *Aspetti dell' insediamento dei greci a Venezia nel Seicento*, "Thesaurismata", XXXV (2005), pp. 325-327 «At San Giovanni in Bragora the rent was only 14,5 ducats per year, whereas in San Severo , the richer area of Castello, it was around 84». [My translation]

⁴ R.C. Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal. Workers and Workplace in the Preindustrial City*, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, p.109. In terms of geography: roughly, the Greek area according to J.G. Ball stretched to the «east of a line drawn along Calle dei Albanesi, through S. Giovanni Nuovo to S. Maria Formosa; its northern boundary was along Calle Lunga S. Maria Formosa to S. Lorenzo». In J.G. Ball *The Greek Community in Venice (1470- 1620)*, PhD Thesis, London, 1985

⁵ R.C. Davis, *Shipbuilders*, cit. p.109 The case cited is the one Contra Maddalena (ASV, SU, b. 85)

⁶ ASV, SU, b. 90, Case of Maria Colonna, (5 September 1634) spontaneous denunciation of Maria Colonna, by D. Cesar Bonettus,

healer could be very wide indeed: the Sant' Uffizio was trying to find out how many people had used Maria Colona's services, but their number was so great that it proved an impossible task.⁷ But in many cases, the spatial dimension of magical services was relatively small. Witch and client tended to be neighbours, at least in the cases which reached the Inquisition, and so were those who were summoned to testify in court. What I will be referring to as

Cremonensis et an 28 q. Cesaris Bonetti medicus, habitans in parochia Sti Sanivelis in camera locanda della Colombina, «Lamentandomi della mia infirmità nel passar il traghetto della Charità, una tal donna che io non conosco nel sò dove stia, perchè fù accidente puro che m' incontrasse in ella. Diceva però di esser stata in casa di detta marietta, à chiamarla per altre persone che haveva guarito, et diceva che haveva guarita delli altri che si erano posti nelle sue mani, segnandoli con oglio [...] So che medica delli altri, perchè lei ha ditto à me et ad altri che lei fa delle visite. Et io ciò dessi ad un certo forestier, che è giovine, grande, con colaro pien de merli, et io lo vidi hieri, et è amico del S. Guido Lagremani, che poco fà è stato da questo S. Officio interrogato».

⁷ ASV, SU, b. 90, Case of Maria Colonna, (16 March 1638) c. 15v Testimony of Magdalenna rta q. cesaris luci medici; et an. 40 in ca de parochia S. Samuelis Veneti «Inta. Chi mise per le mani à detta donna essa testa. Rt. Una tal donna chiamata Betta moglie di un sanser che è qui di fuori, me la messe per le mani. Et credo che anche essa era stata segnata da detta gobba, ma ricascò, et nel cadere prese una fattura» And exactly afterwards testimony of Betta marzera uxor Natalin Bevilaqua sansari et an. 50 in ca da parochia Sti. Samuelis Veneti (c. 15v) «io havendo sentito à dire da una certa Isabella che stava de là dall'acqua, ma adesso non sò dove stia, è vedova et vecchia, che vi era una tal donna gobba, piccola, della quale non sò il nome, ne dove stasse, segnava dalla scontraure, et lo disai alla detta maddalena. Laquale si servi di detta donna per farsi ungere, per quanto Madda et quella donna mi dissero. Mi feci poi ongere anch' io di detta Gobba [...]»

‘the neighbourhood’ was a social microcosm defined not so much by districts, such as Castello or Arsenale, but parishes, or even smaller areas, such as the same calle or web of calli. For instance, in the case against Giacomina, called Caballada, both the accused and the accuser, Maddalena Vedova, were living at the Contrada of San Giacomo dell’Orio and so did Camilla, a witness.⁸ The same stands for the people testifying against Girolama, wife of Antonio Spezier, resident of San Luca⁹ and against Annetta dei Forneri detta Rizzetto who was resident at the parish of San Stefano of Murano,¹⁰ like both her accusers and supporters. In one of the cases against Bellina Loredana, on

⁸ ASV, SU, b. 75, Giacomina detta Caballada, vidova di Francesco Cimadore per fattucherie. Denunciation by Magdalena vidua rta. q. Bapte Bureniensis stammazzavi, de contrata Sti. Jacobi de Lupio Veneti et an. 56 in ca. of Jacobina seu Jacomina uxor rta. q. Francisci de Mattheo de Ambrosinis cimatoris de contrata Sti. Jacobi de Lupio Veneti (26 May 1620). Testimony of Camilla uxor Barthei stammazarii de contrata Sti. Jacobi de Lupio Veneti et an. 40, (14 July 1620).

⁹ ASV, SU, b. 73, Girolama moglie di Antonio Spezier ab. a S. Luca. Testimony of Ants q. Petri Fasioli Paduani marangonus et an. 48 de contrata Sti Luci Veneti (28 August 1619), testimony of Barbara de Vienna Austris Theutonica f. q. Jois Sereni, habitans in Calli Fabror in confo Sti Luci Veneti et an. 48 (3 September 1619), testimony of Hieronyma uxor Antonii spechiari habitans in curia campana de contrata Sti Luci Veneti et an. 60 (5 September 1619).

¹⁰ ASV, SU, b. 77, Annetta dei Forneri detta Rizzetto fu Gio Maria. Testimony of Catherina rta q. Andrea de furnarii muranien et an 50 de parochia Sti Stephani de muriano (11 January 1622), testimony of Francischina uxor Baptes Blondi muranien venditor vitros et an. 52 de parochia Sti Stephani de muriano (11 January 1622), testimony of Dominicus q. Francisci Possetti muranien fontegarius de parochia Sti Stephani de muriano et an. 35 in ca (27 January 1622).

1625, Antonio Bonadeo, resident at San Martin admits that he was living in the same street as Bellina, «al ponte dei corrazeri», and that Bellina gave ointments to a grandson of his, who then died. Also the next witness, Orsino, was living in that street,¹¹ whereas in the case against Catterina, both the accused and the accuser, Antonia, were living in the same house, as was Maddalena, who not only testified in support of Catterina but informed her about the *processo* formed against her at the Inquisition, so that she could escape.¹²

This proximity between the accusers and the accused could also be explained by the architectural features of the city: it was not really the administrative boundaries that divided the districts of Venice, nor those of the parishes,

¹¹ ASV, SU, b. 77, Contro Bellina Loredana, Giulia Pisana, Giulia Terzi, Vienna Terzi per stregherie. Testimony of Antonius q. Bonadei Bergomen fructarioli de parochia Sti Martini Veneti et an. 54 in ca. (30 January 1625) «Rt. Possono esser 18 ò 20 anni che Bellina Lorendana stà al ponte dei corrazzeri, et che li stò vicino nell' istessa calle. Et fù una volta in casa mia, che vene ad ungere un mio nepote che è morto». And also testimony of Ursinus q. Jacobi Grisonus lucanicarius prope pontem corrazzarii et an 45 in ca.

¹² ASV, SU, b. 77, Case of Catterina. Denunciation by Antonia Mediolanensis f. q. Andrei de somenza, uxor rta q. Angeli Antonii mediolanensis laboratoris pannos inauratos, habitans in curia Bollana propè pontem dalle tette in parocia Sti Apollinariii Veneti et anni 33 in ca (18 June 1624), (c. 3r). Testimony of Magdalenna f. q. Jois Maria dalla Philippa de Cadubria et an. 40 in ca. habitans prope pontem dictum dalle tette, (1 October 1624) «Rt. Jo conosco una donna che stà sotto de mi, chiamata Catte.» On 15th October 1624 the *Capitano* of the Sant' Uffizio confirms that «Catte è fuggita [...] per esserli stato detto da donna Maddalena, che lei è stata querelata qui al Sto Offo».

closely knit communities formed around a church, or even a well, where people could get the water necessary for the domestic use; even the canals played a major role in defining the size of the ‘neighbourhoods’.

Most of the denunciations which reach the Sant’ Uffizio are by people who accuse individuals from their neighbourhood. They provide details of their whereabouts, their familial condition, their ways of earning a living, demonstrating to know everything about them. The *fama* of the witch – that is the reputation of the accused within the neighbourhood – is of great importance. Catharina de Gaspare accused Cecilia Culata that «she has the reputation of prostitute and witch. She always plays betting games and is offending the divinity even in the presence of the Friars of San Giacomo and has all the vices».¹³ Another witness, Nadalina, accused Cecilia of killing her daughter using magic, because «she is considered by everybody to be a witch using also herbs, and that she is not doing anything else apart from magic, and that she has also bewitched her own husband, as it will be declared by witnesses deemed to be trusted». The list of the witnesses recorded after her deposition includes five people, three women and two men, all from the neighbourhood.¹⁴

¹³ ASV, SU, b. 90, Case of Cecilia Culata, testimony of Catharina de Gaspare, (22 June 1634) «Int. De fama dete Cecilia / Rt. Ha fama di putana, ruffiana et striga. Gioca sempre alla bassetta et biastema anco alla presentia delli frati di San Giacomo et ha tutti viti».

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, denunciation of Nadalina, «Essendo questa per publicha voze et fama tenuta donna striga, arbera et che non tende ad altro che far

Within the nucleus of the neighbourhood people are informed of other people's affairs, they know what disease they suffer from, how they have treated it, and they also remember previous suspicious episodes, which can be regarded as signs of witchcraft. There really seems to be a communal memory, people remember incidents that occurred years ago, obviously because they were repeatedly discussed in the neighbourhood. It is remarkable however that although the healers are under close scrutiny, they do seem to hide neither their practice nor the 'instruments' of their practice [powders, ointments, Holy oil, Holy water]. What they keep for themselves are their spells, they do not want anyone to hear these, presumably in order to preserve the mystical aspect of their profession. All this activity in the open seems to say a lot about the acceptance of magical practice as an occupation in its own right.

The belief in witchcraft was widespread and resort to it was part of daily life. Magical healing, in particular, gave the poor the hope of a treatment. Certainly, everyday coexistence in the narrow streets of Venice often led to tension and friction within the neighbourhood, but that does not mean that any situation of tension led to

strigarie avendo ancho strigato il suo proprio marito come da testimonii degni di fede sara dichiaritto». List of witnesses:

Francesco ortalan ditto bacho sta alla zuecca in corte da cha corner

Giulio Petolla barchariol traghetta alli colonne

Piero barchariol traghetta alli colonne

Donna Cattarina de Giacomo barchariol sta in Rio della Croce (the one whose testimony we have)

Elena bionda sta alla Zuecha in detto Rio della Croce

Catherina de Zacho vedova sta in detto Rio alla Zuecca

witchcraft accusations. It is important therefore to examine why, despite the fact that performing magic was very common, accusations arose, targeting specific people.

The case of Giulia Donini provides some clues to answer this question. She was denounced to the Inquisition in 1611 and the Inquisitors sent the *fante* at Giulia's house where he found two boxes with suspicious «witchcraft instruments». On the 7th of June 1611 Giulia testified that she had enemies, a certain Giulia from Este, her servant, the nobleman Signor Giacomo Vendramin, a Biancha mastellera, an Andriana speziera, widow, two Greek women and Antonio Colona, namely the people who denounced her, and said that their conflict had a long judicial history.¹⁵ Apparently Andriana speziera, Giulia from Este, Antonio Colona and Catherina and Maddalena Greca had already denounced Giulia at the *esecutori contro la bestemia*, where she was physically punished and sentenced to three months in prison¹⁶ During this period, she complained, the aforementioned people robbed her, and Giulia, in her turn denounced them at the Criminal Justice and at the *sindici*.¹⁷

¹⁵ ASV, SU, b. 70, Case of Giulia Donini, (7 June 1611) testimony of Giulia Donini, uxor Pauli Baldi patroni super Navi Reata mula, de confo Sti Pauli in Domo D. Jois Alvisi Bernardi «Signori si che io hò nemici. Primamente io hò un Antonio Colona, Fante all' Auditor Vecchio, et una Catherina Greca, et Madda, sua madre, con lequali hò lite et l' ho avuto anco per il passato».

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, «mi dettero una querella all' Offo della Biastema, con dir che io havevse sedotto un testimonio à non dire la verità alla Giustitia. Mi che non haveva falsato mi presentai, et mi fecero passar et mi dettero la corda».

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, «et io per tal causa li querelai al criminal et alli sinici».

In the end, taking all this into account the Tribunal acquitted her, despite the existence of the two 'incriminating' boxes.

This is not the only case in which a witchcraft accusation appears to be just the last episode of a series of disputes and criminal cases heard by different types of courts. Although often the Inquisition could be but one of the courts which have been used in a long-lasting dispute, in other cases resort to the Inquisitors is the result of an enduring climate of suspicion which can however become a precise accusation only when a more conclusive piece of evidence manifests itself.

Neighbourhood friction, competition over resources such as space and quarrels over economic issues are the motives for many denunciations, although an element of genuine fear for suspected witchcraft practices was normally also present. Most of the times individual denunciations are supported by the testimonies of several inhabitants of the neighbourhood, a fact that reveals the existence of a common problem and of widespread anguish. It would seem that the decision to bring the case to the Inquisition depended on the number of people willing to support the claim. Typically, therefore, during her spontaneous testimony against Marietta Passamanera, Angelica assured the Inquisitor that other witnesses would confirm Marietta's *stregherie* and named them.¹⁸ Local

¹⁸ ASV, SU, b. 70, Case of Passamanera Marietta, (3 June 1610) Angelica, uxor Jo Andrei Michelis, habitans in contrata Sti Antonini: «Et il sudetto Azzolino lo dirà, et questa et altre cose grande che lui sà di queste streghe, la Signora Vittoria Schiavona, che stà in Calle della

tensions had to reach a point where there was no other alternative. As it has also been observed in the case of Lorraine, these tensions were building up for many years but resulted in an accusation only when people felt they had the support of the majority of the neighbourhood.¹⁹ Moreover, the very fear that the alleged witches provoked, initially deterred people from denouncing them.

The fact that the offer and consumption of magical services were highly localised exposed therefore the practitioners of magic to close scrutiny and, eventually, to accusations of malpractice. Relationships between neighbours had many parameters and can turn sour allowing the development of widespread hostility against those involved in magic. The authorities seem to have been

Regola in Corte del Tagliapiera, ancor lei potrà dire le stregarie che fanno le dette donne, perche anchor lei per stregarie e stata costretta partire da detta casa».

¹⁹ R. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, London, Fontana, 1997, pp.354-362 «Unless a wave of persecution was launched, bringing any witch to trial was almost bound to be a tense, protracted business. Very few individuals were prepared to initiate legal action without knowing that a significant number of neighbours were prepared to back them, yet it was hard to get such assurances without making one's intentions public, thereby running a risk of a pre-emptive strike by the witch. [...] To overcome these restraints it was usually necessary for several families or individuals to pool their grievances and suspicions, perhaps egging one another on in the process – but it was hard to manage this secretly. One of the most striking aspects of the procedure was its jerkiness, with matters seeming to stick at a certain point, often for many years, until an invisible threshold was passed, with a sufficient number of neighbours committed to action on what now became an all-or-nothing principle».

well aware of the complex local origins of many accusations. Often the role of the Sant'Uffizio seems to have been that of arbiters and settlers of neighbourhood frictions.

While in their practice they were embedded in a web of local relationships, in their contacts with other practitioners of magical healing, the healers actually transcended the boundaries of the neighbourhood. Two sorts of contacts characterised the magical healer's network: there is evidence, on the one hand, of techniques and knowledge being communicated between them, and, on the other hand of cooperation between different types of magical healers. Let us look at the transfer of expertise first. This is important for it points to the fact that magic was seen as a transmittable form of knowledge in early modern Venice, in contrast with what we know about the practice of magic elsewhere in Europe. The expertise of magical healers was regarded as a set of techniques that could be shared and taught rather than as an innate supernatural power, as was widely the case across Europe. An example is provided by Girolama who revealed in her deposition to have learned her healing art from her husband's mother.²⁰ Other examples are those of Menega, the servant of Don Marcellini, accused of having killed by means of witchcraft the latter's wife, Margherita Marcellini. In his testimony, doctor Paolo de Rossi implicitly suggested that Menega

²⁰ ASV, SU, b. 73, Case of Girolama moglie di Antonio Spechier ab. a S. Luca, (5 September 1619) Testimony of Girolama, 60 years old, resident of S. Luca: «questo [medicare] me l' insegnò la madre del mio marito».

might have learned her secrets from Maddalena, a notorious witch, whom she had dealings with;²¹ moreover, he suggested that Menega had taught the niece of the late Margherita a wide range of magical practices.²² In other cases, too, it is revealed that magical knowledge was passed on. In the case against Santa of San Polo, for example, a woman called Betta accused Santa of having taught her magical practices to keep her lover and to perform magic on the host «so that she will find out the name of the noble person who is going for the election.»²³

This somewhat ‘secular’ notion of magical healing, as something that can be learned and taught as any other art or skill, could explain, in my view, the ‘rational’ approach

²¹ Most probably this Maddalena is the notorious Maddalena Greca, who had appeared in front of the Inquisition before and at around the same time as this case. The surname of this witness is the same as the surname of Maddalena’s husband, so the fact that this is the same Maddalena cannot be dismissed.

²² ASV, SU, b. 72, Case of Domenica Cameriera della Signora Margherita moglie del Don Marcellini, (13 August 1617) denunciation presented at the Inquisition by Paulus de Rubeis q. Olivi di Pordenomo, habitans in parochia Sti Agnetis, probably a doctor. He testified that Menega «haveva stretta prattica d’ una strega grega chiamata Madalena processata dal Sant’ Ufficio, et cio forse ad istanza d’ altri, come anchora si sa, che la detta Menega ha insegnato strigarie, et secreti diabolici per indovinare, et farsi voler bene ad’ una giovanne Mada Lucietta nezza della sudetta ma signora Margherita». For all the twists and turns of this case see G. Ruggiero, *The Strange Death of Margarita Marcellini: Male, Signs, and the Everyday World of Pre-Modern Medicine*, “American Historical Review”, CVI (2001), pp. 1141-1158

²³ ASV, SU, b. 72, Case of Santa ab. a San Polo (23 April 1618) «acciò che gli sia manifestato il nome di quello che hà da andar in election».

towards it that characterised the attitude of the Inquisitors and could be seen as one of the reasons why there was no witch-craze in Venice: as others have also noted, the effort of the Inquisitors was to establish whether those accused of using magic were simply 'naïve' or heretic, they did not believe that these people could really mobilise supernatural powers.

On the other hand, magical healers often sought their colleagues' advice in spheres of practice different than their own. The high demand for their services did in fact encourage magical healers to specialise in the treatment of certain illnesses and then to cooperate with one another according to their specialisms. One example is offered by the case of Maria Colonna, who was arrested and imprisoned on charge of healing and harming by means of witchcraft. Maria was accused, among the rest, of having examined the shirt of a sick person to establish if he or she had been bewitched. This was the result of the belief that the illness or the witchcraft could also be found in the things that had touched or had belonged to the afflicted person.²⁴ In court, Maria admitted to be a healer but denied any ability to examine shirts. This was the specialism of a friend of hers, a Greek woman. When someone brought

²⁴ ASV, SU, b. 90, Case of Maria Colonna, (5 September 1634) spontaneous denunciation of Maria Colonna, by D. Cesar Bonettus, Cremonensis et an 28 q. Cesaris Bonetti medicus, habitans in parochia Sti Sanivolis in camera locanda della Colombina, «et questo si sà con occasione che uno di quelli chi era lì per vedere se costei diceva il vero, disse mandemogli tra le camise una che sia di morto, che vederemo se costei sà indovinare».

Maria shirts to examine, she was giving them to this Greek neighbour of hers, at the time of the interrogation, most conveniently, back to Crete.²⁵

Apart from the exchange of knowledge, there was therefore a kind of specialisation of the healers which encouraged the development of networks of co-operation based on the complementarity of services.²⁶ This fact, too, is in sharp contrast with the received picture, which portrays the early modern supply of medical services in the market-place as highly competitive and characterised by the rivalry between different types of practitioners, official and unofficial, at war with one another.

Finally, Maria Colona's case illustrates another usage of healers' networks, the fact that their existence could be exploited for self-protection. Once someone was summoned to court with charges of practising magic he/she tended to put the blame on someone else, most

²⁵ ASV, SU, b. 90, Case of Maria Colonna (6 May 1638) testimony of Marietta, brought from the prison (c. 19r) «Rt. Io non sò guardar sopra le camise. Ma vi era una Signora Anzola Fortis greca, in casa della quale io stavo da basso, ma spesso andavo di sopra da ella, et l' hò veduto à guardar le camise delli infermi. Ma io non me ne intendo. Costei è andata fuori di Venetia». And again (18 May 1638) testimony of Marietta, brought from the prison (c. 21r) «Io li risposi che non mi intendeva di questa professione, [guardare camise] ma che però l' haverei mostrata ad una mia amica, laquale si chiama Anzola marchiora di Candia, che credo si trovi in Candia. Andai per portargli detta camisa, ma non trovai detta Anzola in casa».

²⁶ S. Cavallo, in her book *Artisans of the body in Early Modern Italy. Identities, Families and Masculinities*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007 stresses the importance of complementarity as a basis for cooperation between artisans of the body.

conveniently absent from Venice at that specific moment, or in any case gone from the neighbourhood without leaving any trace behind.

In order to give stability to their practice and have a regular clientele these healers, apart from forming networks between themselves, had to cooperate closely with two other types of mainstream professionals: the *speziers* and the *barchariols*. Most of the times the spells were used in conjunction with remedies made of ordinary compounds on sale at the apothecary shop, as well as with the ministration of Holy water. The *speziers* supplied the healers with powders and the other medical ingredients and substances they needed. Second, the healers cooperated regularly with specific *barchariols*, who would take them to the houses of the sick people, but also let them use their boats as a practising area, or take them away from prying eyes to perform their spells. Neither the *speziers* nor the *barchariols* seemed to have minded that these healers were not mainstream professionals. It would seem that this cooperation gave them some special economic benefits for there is evidence they were entitled to a percentage of the gain the woman made with the treatment. Their cooperation with the healers was common knowledge within the neighbourhood. When the Inquisitors asked Perina how she knew that Maria Colona was a healer, she replied that she knew through ‘her’ *barchariols*²⁷ These

²⁷ ASV, SU, b. 90, Case of Maria Colonna (25 February 1638) (c. 11r) testimony of Perina uxor Pauli Zocholani et an. 28 de parochia Sti Moysis Venetis «Inta. Se essa sappia che la detta Marietta habbia mai

figures also played a protective function for they advised and warned their healers if they heard any rumours of imminent denunciations to the Inquisition, also out of fear that they might be in trouble themselves for cooperating with heretics. For example, the *spiczier* of the neighbourhood warned Maria Colona not to succumb to the blackmail of the Fanti.²⁸

In this paper I have tried to offer a wide picture of the patterns of relationship that characterised the links between the magical healer and her accusers, and those she entertained with other healers and with other occupations. Probably the most important finding that emerges from this investigation of the magical healer's networks is the fact that they were not marginalised, nor their practice was considered illegal and therefore carried out underground. Their activities were accepted as a form of occupation in its own right. It was only when fear – after inexplicable deaths, or threats that became reality – could not be subdued and had acquired a collective dimension in the community that some practitioners were denounced to the Inquisition. Like any other occupation magical healers acquired their skills

medicata persona alcuna. Rt. Sò per via dei suoi barcaroli; cioè che un suo barcarolo veniva ogni matina à levarla per andar à medicar persone ongendole et sanandole».

²⁸ See note 7 above and ASV, SU, b. 90, Case of Maria Colonna (13 March 1638) (c. 14r) testimony of Marietta, brought from the prison «perchè mi fu detto dal spiczier dal Paladino che sta à San Biasio, et da Ms Bortolo strazzarol stà alla crosera di S. Zane Bragola, che costoro erano furbi, et che mi volevano mangiar dei soldi».

learning from those already established, practised professional consultations and exchanged specialised services between them. Moreover, they worked in close cooperation with members of other well-established occupations. My evidence confirms that, as it has been argued in the case of medical charlatans, there was a high degree of collusion between irregular and regular healers.²⁹ These categories, dear to traditional accounts of medical history, do not seem to apply to the social position that magical healers occupied in early modern Venice.

²⁹ On the collusion between medical charlatans and apothecaries see D. Gentilcore, *Medical Charlatanism in Early Modern Italy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.