

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01129-8 - Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice

Jonathan Seitz

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice

In early modern Europe, ideas about nature, God, demons, and occult forces were inextricably connected, and much ink and blood were spilled in arguments over the characteristics and boundaries of nature and the supernatural. Jonathan Seitz uses records of Inquisition witchcraft trials in Venice to uncover how individuals across society, from servants to aristocrats, understood these two fundamental categories. Others have examined this issue from the points of view of religious history, the history of science and medicine, or the history of witchcraft alone, but this work brings these sub-fields together to illuminate comprehensively the complex forces shaping early modern beliefs.

Jonathan Seitz received his Ph.D. from the Department of the History of Science at the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 2006. He is an Assistant Teaching Professor at Drexel University, where he has lectured since 2006. Seitz's awards include an American Historical Association Schmitt Grant, a Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowship, and a John Neu Wisconsin Distinguished Graduate fellowship. He researched this book in the libraries and archives of Venice and of the Vatican, supported by a Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation fellowship and a National Science Foundation Dissertation Research fellowship. He has been published in *Renaissance Quarterly*, *Isis*, *Gender and History*, the *Sixteenth Century Journal*, and at H-net.org (H-ITALY).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01129-8 - Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice

Jonathan Seitz

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

# Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice

JONATHAN SEITZ

*Drexel University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-107-01129-8 - Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice  
 Jonathan Seitz  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,  
 Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press  
 32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA  
[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107011298](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107011298)

© Jonathan Seitz 2011

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
 no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
 permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2011

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Seitz, Jonathan, 1974–  
 Witchcraft and Inquisition in early modern Venice / Jonathan Seitz.  
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-01129-8 (hardback)

1. Trials (Witchcraft) – Italy – Venice – History – 16th century. 2. Inquisition – Italy – Venice – History – 16th century. 3. Trials (Witchcraft) – Italy – Venice – History – 17th century. 4. Inquisition – Italy – Venice – History – 17th century. I. Title.

KKH172.W58S45 2011  
 I33.4'3094531-dc22 2011005507

ISBN 978-1-107-01129-8 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs  
 for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not  
 guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

## Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page vii
<i>A Note on Transcriptions and Citations</i>	ix
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	I
1. Witchcraft and Inquisition in the Most Serene Republic	30
2. Blackened Fingernails and Bones in the Bedclothes	59
3. Appeals to Experts	73
4. “Spiritual Remedies” for Possession and Witchcraft	96
5. The Exorcist’s Library	133
6. “Not My Profession”: Physicians’ Naturalism	149
7. Physicians as Believers	169
8. The Inquisitor’s Library	196
9. “Nothing Proven”: The Practical Difficulties of Witchcraft Prosecution	219
Conclusion	245
<i>Appendix I: Glossary</i>	261
<i>Appendix II: Selected Venetian Religious Institutions</i>	263
<i>Bibliography</i>	265
<i>Index</i>	283

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01129-8 - Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice

Jonathan Seitz

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Acknowledgments

In researching and writing this book it seems I accumulated debts almost as fast as I accumulated historical data. Though the errors and omissions that still remain are mine alone, I can only claim partial credit for the rest. And so, a long and very heartfelt list of thank-yous:

My research and writing were enabled by generous support from the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, the National Science Foundation (award no. 0115198, though be advised that any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation), a Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowship, a University fellowship, and a John Neu Wisconsin Distinguished Graduate fellowship, the last endowed by a longtime, tireless champion of University of Wisconsin graduate students. My work was eased by the uniformly helpful and diligent staff members at the Archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican Library, the Vatican Secret Archives, the Archivio di Stato in Venice, the Archivio Storico del Patriarcato di Venezia, the Newberry Library in Chicago, and the University of Wisconsin libraries. Robin Rider and Micaela Sullivan-Fowler of the last were especially welcoming and provided indispensable assistance. Parts of this work were previously published in *Renaissance Quarterly*, volume 62, and I thank the Renaissance Society of America for allowing me to include that material here.

The guidance of Tom Broman, Florence Hsia, Christopher Kleinhenz, Lee Palmer Wandel, and, above all, Michael Shank saved me from going too far astray as I concocted this strange brew of Italian history, religious history, medical history, history of science, and history of magic.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01129-8 - Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice

Jonathan Seitz

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

*Acknowledgments*

At various points in my research and writing I profited from the advice and questions of Chucho Alvarado, Jana Byars, Andrea Del Col, Ralph Drayton, Libbie Freed, Matt Lavine, Laura McGough, Erika Milam, Brent Ruswick, Alison Sandman, John Tedeschi, and others. Two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press improved the manuscript substantially by their careful readings and constructive criticisms, pushing me to both greater breadth and greater depth.

Finally, I must also mention the support offered by my family (nuclear and extended) over the years. Most of all, my wife, Cari, may be as pleased as I am to see this book finally take physical form. It is she who sparked my initial interest in things Italian – her own love of the country and its history is infectious. Her support while I did my research in Venice cannot be overstated, from visiting the *frutariòl* while I was in the archive to listening to countless stories of Inquisition trials and odd finds among the documents to correcting errors in my Italian. She took this project's competition for my time with ultimate good humor and never failed to encourage me when needed. I very literally could not have done it without her. And so, in very small recompense, I dedicate this book to her.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01129-8 - Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice

Jonathan Seitz

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## A Note on Transcriptions and Citations

I have left spellings, capitalization, and punctuation as in the original texts; the only exception is that *i/j* and *u/v* have been modernized. I have generally avoided the use of [*sic*] as it would quickly have become tedious to the reader given the variant spellings, strange constructions, and outright malapropisms in many of the documents. (Early modern Venetians held a distinctly relaxed view of the rules of orthography and grammar.) Questionable transcriptions are marked with [?]. I have silently expanded common abbreviations and left out cancellations unless particularly informative. I have silently integrated marginalia and interlineations into the text, again unless otherwise informative. [Square brackets] indicate my changes or additions to the original text. {Curly brackets} indicate fully or partially illegible passages in the document – any text inside the brackets is my interpolation. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Many of the archival sources used here lack reliable – or any – pagination or foliation, especially the trial dossiers. Where present and reliable I have included that information; in the remaining cases the name of the witness (or the incipit if anonymous) along with the date should be sufficient to identify any individual citation.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01129-8 - Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice

Jonathan Seitz

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Abbreviations

ACDF	Archivio della Congregazione della Fede, Vatican City
APV	Archivio Storico della Patriarcato di Venezia, Venice
ASV	Archivio di Stato, Venice
ASVa	Archivio Segreto, Vatican City
b.	<i>Busta</i> , that is, (archive) box
BAVa	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City
Boerio	Boerio, Giuseppe. <i>Dizionario del Dialecto Veneziano</i> . Venice: Giovanni Cecchini, 1856. Reprint, Florence: Giunti, 1998.
const.	<i>Constitutus</i> , that is, the deposition of the defendant in a trial
CSI	Criminalia Sanctae Inquisitionis (series of Holy Office files in the APV)
denunc.	Denunciation
m.v.	<i>Modo veneto</i> . The civil year in Venice began on 1 March, but the documents of the Holy Office use the modern calendar. I have labeled those few documents that use the Venetian style with “m.v.” in the notes.
spont. comp.	<i>Sponte comparente</i> , that is, a voluntary appearance before the Holy Office
St. St.	Stanza Storica (section of the ACDF archives)
SU	Sant’Uffizio (series of Holy Office files in the ASV)
test.	Testimony or witness deposition