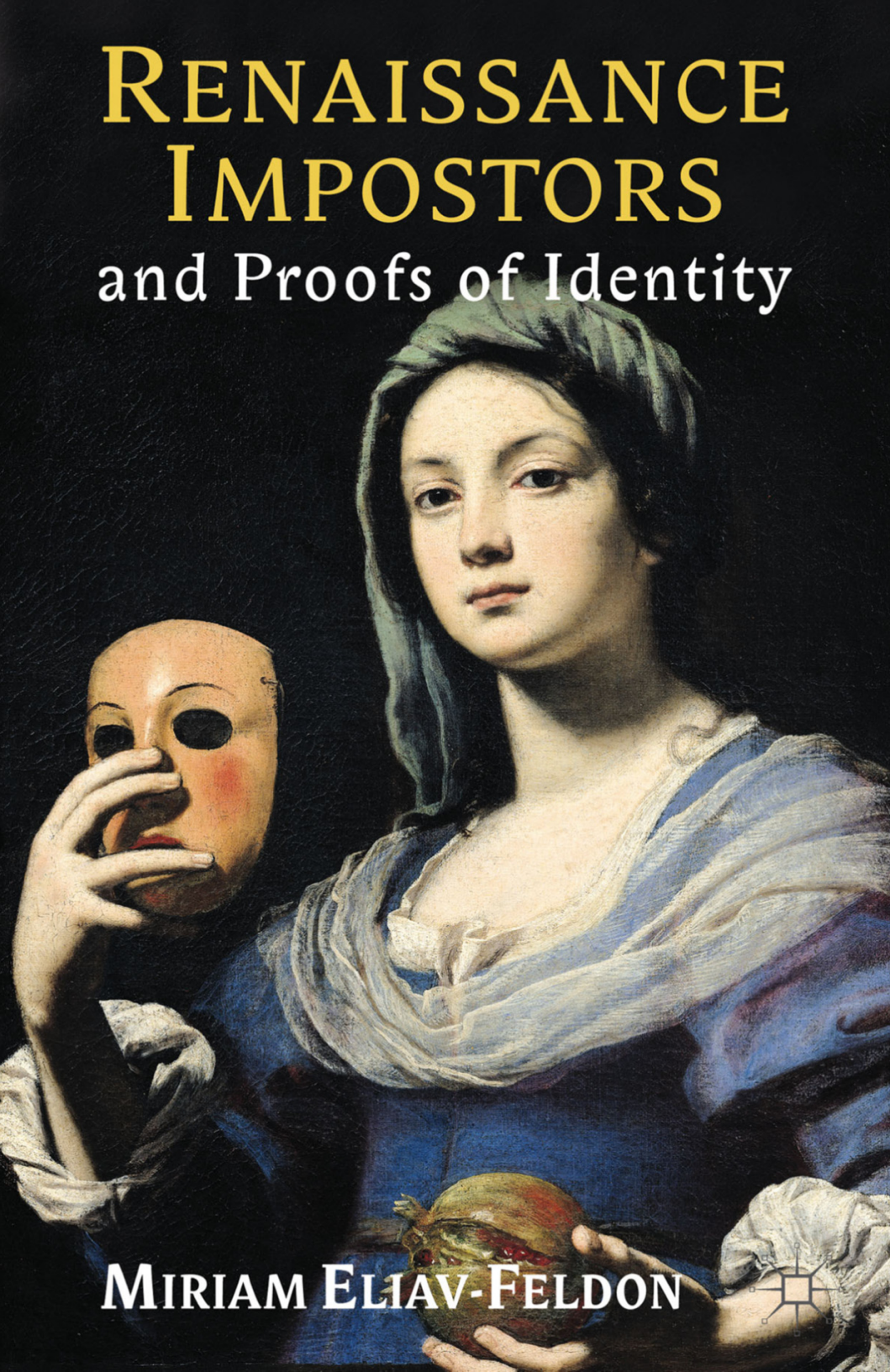
Renaissance Impostors

and Proofs of Identity



Miriam Eliav-Feldon

Renaissance Impostors and Proofs of Identity

Also by Miriam Eliav-Feldon

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In Hebrew

THE "DISCOVERY" OF AMERICA AND ITS HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

THE PRINTING REVOLUTION

Renaissance Impostors and Proofs of Identity

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Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements vii

1 Introducing an Age of Impostors 1
2 Religious Dissimulation 16
3 False Ambassadors, Fabulous Lands 68
4 Underworlds 97
5 Gypsies, or Such as Do Counterfeit 121
6 The Body as Evidence 137
7 Judging by Appearances 162
8 Paperwork: Identification Documents 194
9 Conclusion: Reserving Judgement 218

Notes 222
Bibliography 249
Index 277

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Many years ago, more than I care to remember, I met my first impostor. I was doing my national service as a school teacher in a remote village of new immigrants in the south of Israel, sharing a small house with five other young women. One of them, the prettiest among us, was dating a farmer from a nearby kibbutz who would come in the evenings bearing fruit and vegetables, which we all enjoyed. One day, however, the girl came back from town highly excited: she had met a young, handsome physician who began courting her. Dressed in a white coat with a tag identifying him as "Dr Abrabanel" (considered an aristocratic name in Jewish society), he took her on a tour of the local hospital. When he come calling, his gifts – a transistor radio, jewellery, books – were far more impressive than the cucumbers from the kibbutz. He charmed us all off our feet: intelligent, witty, well-mannered, sophisticated, the perfect gentleman. How we envied her! Needless to say, she broke off her relationship with the farmer.

A few blissful weeks passed and Dr Abrabanel asked our roommate to marry him right away, as he was being sent to an African country to help build a new hospital. She consented of course, and for a few days we were all absorbed in making plans for the wedding. But then, one afternoon, the police arrived … The "doctor" was in jail; the gifts were all stolen goods and had to be returned; the deposit on the wedding dress was forfeited; our poor friend was broken-hearted. Some months later I would learn from a lawyer acquaintance that the guy who had duped us all was a well-known pretender and had succeeded in passing himself off not only as a doctor but also as a high-ranking military officer, a pilot and a lawyer. He was the 1960s Israeli version of Frank Abagnale Jr (*Catch Me If You Can*).

Ever since then the question of gullibility and credibility was on my mind. It followed me when I studied the mixture of fact and fiction in travellers' reports during the age of discovery, even making me suspect that some readers of Renaissance utopias accepted them as *bona fide* accounts of newly discovered lands. It nagged at me when I tried to understand how a learned man such as John Dee fell under the spell of the talented ventriloquist Edward Kelley. It became central to my study of the reception accorded by cardinals and kings to the self-proclaimed prince of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. I was fascinated by Natalie Zemon Davis's questions about the doubts surrounding the man who claimed to be Martin Guerre. And then, as every historian would, I began asking myself whether credulity was a human disposition with a history of its own. Were people in past generations more naïve? Are modern-day frauds and impostors more sophisticated

and therefore less frequently detected? Are we today better equipped with all manner of lie detectors and means of identification? Does every period evolve its own types of myth and dissimulation?

There is unique fascination in the stories of impostors. Indeed, whenever I mentioned that I was working on these topics, the eyes of my interlocutor would light up and I was immediately regaled with imposture tales from around the globe and of all periods – from India and Iran to Peru, from ancient Rome to twenty-first-century New York. Yet both the phenomenon of invented identities and the methods of handling it have specific characteristics in each society. Not surprisingly, Renaissance Europe, undergoing such rapid changes in every aspect of life, was a time and place which presented many opportunities and reasons for adopting new identities and plenty of causes for authorities to fear fraud and disguise. So this was the map I set out to draw. It turned out to be a project far more ambitious than anticipated, and eventually I had to accept that, rather than a modern detailed map of all the ways and byways of inventing identities and of combating imposture, it would be rather a drawing resembling a Renaissance image of the world or of a city: outlining the space contours and dotting it with pictures of a few important landmarks. And in a manner similar to medieval and Renaissance mapmakers, who designed their artworks mainly to illustrate an idea, I intended the following chapters to elucidate an argument about the deep concern regarding identification which was particular to early modern European society.

During the long years I have been working on and off on this project I have incurred innumerable debts. In the relevant notes I express my gratitude for specific information and for references provided by many colleagues (and I sincerely apologize if I have forgotten anyone as a result of the book's long gestation period). For support, ideas and encouragement throughout I owe a huge debt to many friends as well as to a number of my graduate students in the Department of History at Tel Aviv University. Special thanks are due to my oldest and dearest friend, Benjamin Arbel, who not only scoured books and archives with my interests in mind, but also kept prodding me to get on and complete this work; and to another dear friend, Ami Ayalon, for listening and helping in more ways than one.

Finally, as a modest token of my deep love, I dedicate this book to my children, Michal and Benjamin, whose wonderful qualities (none of which would help them succeed as impostors) fill my heart with joy.

1
Introducing an Age of Impostors

Early modern Europe was teeming with impostors. Men and women from all walks of life were inventing, fabricating and disguising themselves, lying about who they were or pretending to be someone they were not. As a result, authorities, both religious and secular, were frantically creating new means for ascertaining each person's identity. The story told in this book is one chapter in the long history of a contest between the forgers of identities and the creators of new and more efficient methods of identification, methods which in their turn bred new imaginative ways for evading the removal of masks. It was a race which began with the dawn of civilization – for example Odysseus disguising himself as a beggar to enter the city of Troy, or the biblical Jacob stealing his father's blessing by impersonating Esau (Genesis 27) and the Gileadites identifying the Ephraimites by their inability to pronounce Shibboleth (Judges 12:5–6) – and has never ended. Today, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, despite the most sophisticated means of identification based on the latest advancements in science and technology, the battle against impersonation and the invention of identity is still far from won. "Identity theft" has become the number one crime in the USA, and the media are inundated with films, television series and books on every manner of impostor – many of them based on real-life sensational stories, such as *Catch Me If You Can*, which recounts the adventures of Frank Abagnale Jr in the 1960s, or *L'Adversaire*, which tells the story of Jean-Claude Romand who succeeded for 18 years in masquerading as a doctor and in 1993 murdered his family when he was about to be exposed. In a recent case in England (reported in the media on 5 May 2011), a conwoman, Alison Reynolds, posed not as a single daughter of the poet T.S. Eliot, but as his twin daughters and – with the ease offered by Photoshop – concocted a double picture of herself as two separate persons.

Yet, although a universal and perennial phenomenon, every age has bred different kinds of imposture and new methods for verification of identity according to its bureaucratic and technological possibilities. Therefore, examining particular ways of forging identities, as well as the authorities'

persistence at unmasking impostors during a certain period, can be a fruitful endeavour towards understanding some of the fears, anxieties, hopes, aspirations, limitations and feasibilities typical of a specific time and place. As Natalie Zemon Davis convincingly argues, it is an historiographical error to transpose an imposture story from one environment to another: Arnauld du Tilh, Martin Guerre's *Doppelgänger*, Bernarde, the deceived wife, and the judges' hesitations in that drama, were all products of sixteenth-century France; the plot would have unfolded very differently had the story taken place in the United States during the Civil War.[1]

In a similar manner one could say that, although royal pretenders have appeared in practically every country and every century, from Nero impostors in 69 CE[2] down to Kumar of Bhawal in Bengal[3] and Anna Anderson, claiming to be Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna of Russia, in the 1920s and 1930s, each one bore the unique features of his or her age and circumstances. Each episode can tell us far more about the mentalities of its period than about the mentality of an archetypical false pretender. Also, the stakes when claiming a throne were so high that suspicion and close scrutiny were particularly intense and chances of success minimal, if at all. It is in fact surprising that such pretenders did rally a large number of followers, many of whom were sincere believers in the royal identity of the impostor, however unlikely. Indeed, expectations for a return of "the hidden king" were sometimes so high that there was all of a sudden a large cluster of false princes. The centuries which separated the Middle Ages from the modern period were undoubtedly such a time with several Sebastians in Portugal, several Dimitris in Russia, several York princes in England, a leader of a revolt in Aragon in 1522 calling himself *El Rey Encubierto* (the Hidden King), a number of heirs to the Sultan's throne and even one prince of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.[4] Such a wave requires historical explanations which go deeper and further than the psychological makeup of individual impostors or the opportunistic motivations of supporters.

Then there are those kinds of false identities which are rife in one period and almost non-existent in another. Dangers threatening members of particular groups loom large in one age and then disappear; benefits to be had by claiming affiliation to a certain ethnic group or profession are there one historical moment and gone the next; people's gullibility waxes and wanes: easily fooled by simple ruses at one time, men and women may become over-suspicious later on (though by no means should one assume a linear progress from naïveté to sophistication); and, obviously, available means for establishing veracity, distinguishing fact from fiction, have been piling up at a very rapid pace in modern times. It was not only recent discoveries of fingerprinting,[5] DNA profiling and biometrics which created a wholly new world of identification, but it was also the nineteenth-century art of photography, as well as earlier continuous improvements in means of communication ever since the development of public postal services,[6] which

greatly facilitated the detection of fraud – though they still have far to go to eliminate the endless forms of deception.

While attempting to comprehend the success (if temporary) of a number of individual impostors, I soon discovered that Renaissance and Reformation Europe suffered from an obsession concerning identification and from a deep anxiety that things were not what they seemed and people were not who they said they were. If one accepts Jean Delumeau's "Age of Fear" as a definition for the period of the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries,[7] the anxiety about misleading appearances should undoubtedly be numbered among its major factors.

The wave of witch persecutions throughout Western and Central Europe between the 1480s and the 1720s was probably the most blatant expression of the fear that appearances were deceptive. Old Nick, the greatest of all pretenders, the master of all deceptions, was suddenly busy everywhere recruiting an army of faithful accomplices who appeared to the naked eye to be one's innocent, harmless neighbours – such was the prevalent belief for approximately two-and-a-half centuries despite the protestations of a number of sceptics. So long as Satan was playing his tricks behind the scenes, nothing was certain: a cat was not just a cat but an incubus or a witch's familiar; a pitchfork could change from an agricultural implement into an aviation vehicle; the woman peacefully sleeping in her bed could very well be just a simulacrum of the real person who was participating at the very same time in the Witches' Sabbath on some distant mountain top – an altogether nightmarish reality. This panic, the Devil's Renaissance, as we have been taught by the enormous number of scholarly works in recent decades, led to the creation of huge machinery for a counter-attack on the forces of evil: appointment of special witch hunters, special courts, new manuals and guidebooks for inquisitors and other judicial authorities and a desperate search for reliable means for identifying witches. The Devil supposedly always left his mark on the body of each of his recruits in one form or another, and the witch hunters became experts at finding and diagnosing moles, scars, birthmarks and extra teats (for feeding the familiars) as the insignia of the soldier in Satan's army.[8]

And yet, some said, it could very well be that the anxiety itself was engendered by Satan in order to sow confusion and fear among God's creatures, and that the whole phenomenon of satanic witchcraft was nothing but a delusion. What is more, even the most ardent believers in demonological *maleficia* accepted the possibility that more than one poor soul succumbed to the temptation to masquerade as a witch in order to attain a degree of power in the community; and not infrequently even a fierce witch-persecuting judge would doubt the honesty of persons claiming to be victims of sorcery. Young girls faking possession, talking in tongues, spitting nails and showing signs of excruciating pains could sometimes cause a snowballing witch hunt, but they could also find themselves proclaimed insane or criminally malicious.[9] How then was one to say what was real and what illusory?

The "witch craze" was but the most notorious and sensational aspect of the early modern obsession with deception and hallucination, and it coloured the entire gamut of questions about the separation between what was seen and what was known.[10] More perhaps than any other phenomenon, it emphasized the limitations of human reason and led some philosophers to scepticism, questioning the senses and doubting accepted notions, a prefiguration perhaps of the late seventeenth-century *crise de la conscience*.[11] For this reason alone, if not for any other, the early modern chapter in the history of imposture and identification is unique. Many a successful impostor in that period, when unmasked, was suspected of wielding magic or witchcraft in his deception, or – at least – was considered a prodigious marvel, which defied logical explanation.

However, attribution of satanic or supernatural powers to impostors was not the sole feature which distinguished the issue of invented identities of the early modern period from the same question at other times. Another specifically early modern phenomenon, of far larger proportions than the persecution of imaginary witches, but also destined to lose its centrality with the advance of secularization, was that of religious dissimulation. Beginning in Iberia in the late fourteenth century and then, following the Reformation, enveloping all of Latin Europe and the entire Mediterranean world, mass conversions were changing the religious face of a great number of communities. Innumerable men and women went through the process of abjuring their old faith and embracing another: Muslims and Jews became New Christians, Christians "turned Turk" and converted to Islam, Catholics became Protestants, Lutherans went over to the Calvinist Church and thousands joined new sects. Many of these conversions were coerced rather than voluntary, and a significant percentage of the converts continued to adhere in secret to their former beliefs, sometimes bequeathing the habits of subterfuge to future generations of their families while outwardly practising the new faith. If we were to include the natives of other continents, particularly in the Americas, among the forced converts who only pretended to change their religious affiliation, the number of religious dissimulators would be numbered in the millions. But even within the Old World, camouflaging one's true religious identity was a very extensive phenomenon. Perez Zagorin, when investigating this particular "way of lying" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was so overwhelmed by the evidence that he spoke of "a submerged continent" of genuine religious identities under a sea of pretence.[12] Thus, in ways very different from those in other times, this particular Age of Fear was also the Age of Dissimulation; and the suspicion that many of the people were hiding their true beliefs and clandestinely keeping faith with their old religion and with their former co-religionists only served to increase the fear.

The Spanish Inquisition, notorious for the terror it inspired, was founded precisely because of the anxiety generated by the suspicion that so many of

the Catholic monarchs' subjects were Catholics in name only. This institution developed sophisticated means for ferreting out religious impostors. The religious dissimulators, in their turn, developed a whole array of techniques for deceiving both neighbours and authorities. Such techniques would later serve members of sects and secret societies in other regions. In addition, Nicodemites (a term initially used by Calvin to reprove his followers in France who did not have the courage of their convictions, but later applied to Christians of all denominations who hid their true beliefs) were soon to develop ideologies which justified religious dissimulation, similar in their arguments to Muslim and Jewish justifications for dissimulation based on the Shi'ite doctrine of *taqiyya* and the advice offered by Maimonides to Jews who had been forced to convert to Islam. In other words, while ecclesiastical authorities were grappling with the issue of thousands and thousands of false Christians, many theologians – Muslim, Jewish and sectarian Christians – were offering their followers a licence to lie and recommendations on how to avoid detection.

New converts, both false and sincere, were often drawn to millenarian circles and added fuel to the heated eschatological fervour of the time. It was an atmosphere that encouraged an endless parade of prophets, visionaries, saviours and heresiarchs with messianic pretensions. Ecclesiastical authorities were as wary of these self-appointed divine messengers as they were of men and women who were suspected of having dealings with Satan. Diligent inquiries were made into their claims of direct encounters with godly entities, and in the majority of cases they were pronounced frauds feigning sanctity; a few, on the other hand, were canonized. Both Catholic and Protestant theologians feared the rise of radical eschatological movements and did the utmost to expose their leaders as impostors. Even messianic outbursts among non-Christians – such as the fervour generated by false Jewish messiahs from Asher Lemlein through Solomon Molcho to Shabbetai Zvi – was cause for concern to state and church authorities, for they affected the Christian community as well.[13]

While most of the messianic figures were men, the majority of visionaries who communicated with Christ and the saints, particularly with the Virgin Mary, were women – the *beatas* in Spain, "living saints" and nuns in convents throughout Catholic Europe – a fact which bred one of the very few motivations for men to masquerade as women. On the other hand, there were countless reasons for women to try and pass for men: from a sense of adventure and a wish to escape the tyranny of a father or a husband to finding employment and climbing the social ladder to rungs higher than those permitted to females. Cross-dressing as a long-term disguise, rather than for a brief hour on stage or for a day during carnival, was one of very few avenues open to women who wished to attain autonomy and fulfilment. Yet, since (as with all impostors) we hear only of those who failed and were unmasked, it is difficult to determine how widespread was the phenomenon of gender

impersonation and whether it was more prevalent during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than at other times. However, in no other period, so it seems, was it such a central topic in literature – from Shakespearean comedies to scurrilous pamphlets – or such a frequent charge in courts. Not surprisingly, the possibility of gender confusion evoked a very deep anxiety and several of the dress regulations and sumptuary laws stressed the necessity of clear distinctions between male and female apparel. The idea of unisex clothing could not have been farther from people's minds.

"Identity is concealed for many reasons, although in general the goal is participation in activities from which the disguised individual would otherwise be excluded", writes Valerie Hotchkiss in her book on female cross-dressing in the Middle Ages.[14] And indeed, women disguised themselves as men most often in order to practise professions reserved for men: reports on females studying and practising medicine, for example, begin with the (perhaps apocryphal) story about the Greek gynaecologist Agnodice (c.300 BCE) down to the account about the nineteenth-century army surgeon, James Barry, who was only exposed as a woman posthumously.

But false female physicians were not the only people who pretended to have the training and the right to practise a certain vocation. It was no coincidence that the word "charlatan" first appeared in the sixteenth century in several European languages. Initially designating mountebanks – vendors of medications in the public square – the term was later extended to mean any person pretending to knowledge or education he or she did not have. When diplomas attesting to acquired skills were still relatively rare and when degree and status were normally indicated by apparel and accessories rather than by certificates, it could not have been too difficult to masquerade as a physician, surgeon, lawyer, notary or university master. In many such cases the impostor was not simply adopting a profession but also crossing gender boundaries or class boundaries, especially once these "trades" were rising in social importance and were endowed with a higher dignity. Examples of social climbing by impersonating a highly regarded professional are far from rare even in modern times, despite the stricter observance of issuing proper diplomas. Fake doctors, pilots, diplomats and academics fill the pages of present-day tabloids. Inventors or thieves of identities at all times, it is assumed, do so in order to rise above their social station. Interestingly, however, the largest population of professional impostors in the early modern period was made up not of false physicians and lawyers, but rather of men and women who dressed below their station, as fake licensed beggars.

Historians have established that, due to various economic and social developments, large sections of the population in early modern Europe suffered pauperization and dispossession. The numbers of homeless, jobless and masterless men and women were growing daily, sowing panic among rulers whose efforts to stem the tide seemed useless. One of the notorious notions of the era was the distinction between the able-bodied poor,

considered shirkers and severely punished when caught wandering, and the truly helpless people who could legitimately depend on charity. The latter were given various licenses to beg – and such a license became one of the most coveted of all documents. The largest group of impostors in early modern Europe was therefore that of false "deserving poor" and fraudulent collectors of alms for the needy. Frequently reiterated laws and statutes concerning vagrancy, as well as policy decisions in regard to public charity, were indications of how acute was the problem of alms collection under false pretences. As the masses of wandering beggars grew, many of them carrying forged permits, the panic level of the authorities and of the settled population rose. The "counterfeit vagrant" was undermining the social order not only because of his or her criminal activity, but also because of the refusal to accept the identity that society prescribed for him or her and the construction of an alternative persona.[15] Not surprisingly, the image of great bands of rogues roaming the roads was translated into visions of criminal underworlds threatening the very fabric of society.

Books of vagabonds appeared in the late fifteenth and throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in many European languages purporting to be genuine reports from those underworlds, and listing the various types of mendicants faking disease or inventing disasters. Practically the entire corpus of the Spanish picaresque genre dealt with the faking of identities, with rogues, vagabonds and tricksters taking advantage of people's gullibility. Reading rogue literature became a titillating pastime for the bourgeoisie all over Europe. The literary depiction could have been an exaggeration and glorification of the rogue scene, but it contributed to the intensification of anxiety and to an increase in the efforts to find measures to distinguish between the truly deserving poor and the impostors.

Looming large (far larger than their actual numbers) in the picture of dangerous elements undermining the existence of a law-abiding society were the newly arrived Gypsies. In many respects they came to symbolize the entire problem of uncertainty about reality. Myths surrounded their origins; they obtained safe conduct by simulating repentant pilgrims, and they soon became masters at obtaining forged papers; they practised deception and trickery in order to rob innocent people of their pennies; and like a mirage, their caravan was seen on the horizon one morning and was gone the next. What is more, their lifestyle was apparently attractive enough to draw a significant number of persons who joined their groups and pretended to be Gypsies; so much so that legislation everywhere referred to these groups of undesirables as "Egyptians and those calling themselves Egyptians".

Pilgrimage to and from holy shrines had been a common excuse to be on the road without any source of income but alms. The wandering clans of Gypsies latched on to that pretext as they moved into Central and Western Europe in the early fifteenth century. Other justifications for begging in town and on country roads were natural sickness or a demonically induced

illness such as madness and possession. Abram-men, for example, were beggars armed with a license from the Bedlam hospital in London, mostly considered swindlers whose licenses had been forged by jarkmen (an early modern name for professional producers of counterfeit documents).

Faked madness, however, was not only a way to making a living; it could also be a means for staying alive. The insanity or mental disorder defence, accepted today by most legal systems, has been known in criminal cases since ancient times. The literary *topos* of evading the wrath of a ruler by pretended lunacy appears in the Old Testament – when David "feigned himself mad" in the presence of Achish, the king of Gath, and his servants (1 Sam. 21:10–15) – and in Greek mythology when Odysseus ploughed his field with salt. It served as the central theme in one of Lope de Vega's earliest plays, *Madness in Valencia* (c.1590–95), in which a boy and a girl fleeing the law and an oppressive father find love and refuge in a mental asylum. Such deception was to save a number of travellers who, in ignorance, breached some local taboo and were in danger of paying for it with their lives (as, for example, Ludovico di Varthema who reported on how he feigned madness in Aden when suspected of being a Portuguese spy).[16] But it also helped save a number of dissident intellectuals – Guillaume Postel and Tommaso Campanella among them – from the Inquisition's ultimate sentence for unrepentant heretics. Inquisitors' manuals since the twelfth century included instructions for testing the genuineness of lunatic behaviour, which revealed a sophisticated understanding of mental disorders. Feigned madness, therefore, although not a novel category of imposture, belonged in early modern Europe both to the realm of religious dissimulation and to the domain of false beggars.

The Renaissance, as Stephen Greenblatt taught us in 1980, was an age of self-fashioning in more respects than one.[17] While Baldassare Castiglione and others advocated *sprezzatura* to men aspiring to become ideal courtiers, political thinkers were insisting on the importance of disguise and guile in business of the state: a new prince must be a master of deception, affirmed Niccolò Machiavelli, and a citizen should use "as much diligence to hide [his or her] secret thoughts [from a tyrant] as [the tyrant] uses to discover them", exhorted Francesco Guicciardini. The fullest exposition of the gamut of situations in which an honest citizen would need to practise disguise came from the pen of Torquato Accetto in his *Della dissimulazione onesta* (1641): in an age of repression, dissimulation was an essential form of self-defence, necessary in order to circumvent censorship and in order to survive in a world of dissimulators – the political version, in fact, of the justifications for religious dissimulation offered by the Nicodemites.[18] To judge by the complaints of contemporary social critics, such advice was heeded by a great number of people. Consequently many humanists, who resented the cynicism of contemporary realpolitik and the practice of political prudence, dreamt of a Golden Age of simplicity, honesty and sincerity, far removed from their own world either in time or in space.

It needs to be stressed, however, that these types of "self-fashioning", although involving role playing and a certain amount of deception, were not the same as the forms of imposture which concern us here. In a recent study Jon Snyder clarifies the differences between the various discourses of the elites and the actual practice of dissimulation. He writes,

> The chief early modern discursive fields in which the legitimacy of dissimulation was an issue included: (i) civility or good manners, (ii) the court, (iii) the prince and reason-of-state politics, (iv) moral philosophy, and (v) religious dissent. The last of these is excluded from this book.[19]

My study, on the other hand, centres precisely on the individuals and groups who – although probably encouraged by "the culture of secrecy" analysed in Snyder's book – not only hid their inner thoughts but actually took on an identity different than their own. The presentation of an insincere public persona to suit contemporary ideals was not the same as impersonation (i.e. borrowing another person's identity) or invention of identity (i.e. creating a new persona). The latter forms were usually regarded as a criminal offence; the former was an accepted (even expected) behaviour among the upper classes. Nevertheless, the widespread norm of affectation, of public conduct as constant performance, of imitation of social models and of the concealment of one's interior self – what the Italians called *la dissimulazione onesta* – undoubtedly exacerbated the feeling that things were not what they seemed, that reality was hidden behind a veil and real identities behind masks.

The discourse on the necessity of political and cultural simulation and dissimulation was paralleled by the separation between the inner and the outer self and the idea of a visible and an invisible church which were reintroduced by Luther. Humanists and Protestant reformers equally praised honesty and sincerity as a primary virtue, yet in both groups several central thinkers encouraged duplicity – a concealed inner persona (known only to God) and a public one, which was to act according to society's rules. And among both humanists and theologians there were those who accepted the existence of two strata of reality – one of appearances and the other hidden from the eye. In the second half of the sixteenth century, The Jesuits' emphasis on the doctrine of strict mental reservation, as philosopher Sissela Bok explained in her analysis of the ethics of lying and concealment, was but another permission to dissemble.[20]

Admittedly, learned discourse was unlikely to have had any influence on the decision of the dispossessed to take to the road disguised as licensed beggars or on the determination of a clever trickster to impersonate a prodigal son returning to claim an inheritance. On the other hand, the concept of two separate selves probably helped authors of imaginative autobiographies (as, for example, the braggart Benvenuto Cellini) to overcome any

scruples they might have had about distorting facts, and it may have also served as self-justification for a great many people who for various reasons led a double life or lived a lie. The verb "to live" in this context is important for the distinction between simply lying – something all people do (except, of course, George Washington) – and living a lie, that is, adopting a false identity.

In addition to justifying certain forms of concealment, the discourse of humanists and reformers on dissimulation and the distinction between the inner and outer self could have been a contributing factor to the flourishing of secret societies. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a profusion of such confraternities – some real, some only suggested in blueprint but never established, others imaginary, but all by their very nature difficult to pin down even after four centuries of research. Between the Family of Love and the Rosicrucians, we find references to Postellani, Giordanisti and various other hermetic invisible colleges, all inspired by the belief that esoteric knowledge could bring about a true reformation of the world, but all leaving very few verifiable traces of their existence.

And, while intellectual and religious trends legitimized certain forms of lying, and economic necessities forced the destitute to adopt various ruses, the opening of geographical horizons and the fantastic news reaching Europe from across the world created another early modern setting for the invention of identities. By escaping to one of the "new worlds", far away from the watchful eyes of family, neighbours and friends, to places where church and state controls were at least more lax than at home if not non-existent, women could join the army as male soldiers, *conversos* and their offspring could more easily pass for scions of Old Christian families, and commoners could pass for nobles. Frontier societies have always been fertile grounds for cultivating new selves – and from the fifteenth century on such fertile grounds were available to Europeans in great abundance.

Furthermore, it must have been very tempting to show up in Europe in the guise of an emissary from an exotic state. Reports about the wonders discovered in far-away continents, about strange peoples and even stranger cultures and customs, reinforced the ancient and medieval beliefs in legendary kingdoms and mythological races. Prester John and the Lost Tribes of Israel, amazons and cannibals, the Earthly Paradise and El Dorado, pygmies and sciopods, were believed to reside just beyond the next hill or river, and they would continue to appear on the maps long after the voyages of discovery reached the furthest corners of the earth. "Reality strengthened the illusion", concluded Delumeau[21] – for how was even the most learned of Europeans to distinguish between truthful reports and tall tales?

Self-appointed ambassadors could still play on the fears and the hopes which had initially motivated the search for new lands: a desperate need for precious metals and luxury goods, a quest for allies against Muslim powers, and eschatological visions of establishing a Christian world empire.

Thus, when delegates and messengers – whether from a Persian prince or a Turkish sultana, from Prester John in Abyssinia, from the Lost Tribes of Israel in the Arabian Peninsula, or from an Amerindian royal house in the Andes – arrived appropriately dressed for the part, offering alliances and promising riches and secret knowledge, they were never dismissed out of hand, no matter how far-fetched their claims, but treated with cautious respect. Once the *ecumene* encompassed for Europeans the entire globe and communication channels improved, such ruses became much more difficult, though not impossible as evidenced by the (temporary) successes of several tricksters in later centuries: George Psalmanazar of Formosa in eighteenth-century England,[22] His Highness Sir Gregor MacGregor, Prince of Poyais in the 1820s,[23] or the international scam by self-appointed representatives of a "Dominion of Melchizedek" in the Pacific Ocean, including one such "diplomat" who, posing as the consul of that virtual state, made a handsome sum for himself by selling Melchizedek passports and visas to naïve Israelis in 2002–03.

However, *bona fide* ambassadors, it appears, were treated in the early modern period with no less caution than emissaries which were later exposed as impostors. As in many other fields, it was the city-states of Northern Italy that introduced a novelty: they established permanent delegations to neighbouring states as early as the fourteenth century together with many of the characteristics of diplomatic protocol. Yet from the beginning, ambassadors and the embassy's staff were suspected of espionage – a suspicion which was to accompany diplomatic history and international relations down to our very day. Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth I's "spymaster", probably represented better than any other figure this new world of secrecy and international intrigue. The cloak-and-dagger atmosphere of mistrust, shadows, double agents, coded messages, forgeries and conspiracies surrounding his days as the Queen's advisor has led prominent modern historians to suspect every person who had any contact with Walsingham as being a spy with a false identity, and to depict embassies as hotbeds of espionage and intrigue.[24] Foreign delegations were therefore another (relatively new) arena evoking worries about dark dealings and camouflage.

It is important to remember that fraud of every kind is an historically determined phenomenon. In Renaissance Europe men would try to pass for accomplished courtiers, for gentlemen, pilgrims or monks, Jews would pretend to be Catholics, Familists would adopt any religious feathers that suited their momentary circumstances, mystery men brought news from far-away lands – all inventions of identities which were to become mostly irrelevant in later times, just as the efforts to "pass for white" of men and women who were defined by American laws as "black" were to cease as racist discrimination gradually diminished.

But forgeries, too, are typical of specific historical circumstances. Much scholarly attention has been devoted to Renaissance forging of ancient texts and classical artefacts. One such case was the collection of counterfeit

Latin and Etruscan texts produced by a precocious Tuscan teenager, Curzio Inghirami, who succeeded in duping many a serious scholar in the seventeenth century.[25] The temptation to prey upon the Renaissance fixation with antiquity and its relics was apparently not resisted even by singular geniuses such as Michelangelo and Erasmus.[26] Counterfeit coins produced during those centuries have also been the subject of close expert scrutiny. But far less work has been done to date on the forging of mundane objects such as identification documents, certificates, badges and insignia.[27]

Yet, when following the careers of the various types of impostors, the existence of a vast forging industry of such objects emerges – quite astonishing in its extent, especially for a period when the majority of the population was illiterate. However, since handwritten paper passes, safe conducts, certificates and letters of introduction (the equivalent of today's passports and visas), as well as tin badges which served as permits to beg or as food tokens, were ephemeral objects, few survived to enable modern scholars to study them and determine how, when, where and by whom they were fabricated. Exposing forgers of past centuries is, in fact, a task even more arduous than exposing the impostors. The handful of surviving accounts of the way a document was forged and the few court cases against forgers constitute, therefore, a small goldmine for an historian attempting to uncover the battle scene between impostors and authorities.

In frustration, members of the establishment were constantly trying to devise new methods to overcome the ingenuity of deception artists and to determine as clearly as possible who was who. Some of these were but refinements of old techniques; some were newly invented in response to novel circumstances such as plagues, geographical expansion, commercial expansion, greater mobility, a significant growth of the "society of strangers" in towns and cities, and the kaleidoscopic changes in the confessional map – all factors which intensified the anxiety about deceptive identities.

The clearest indication of increased efforts to establish identity was the rapid growth in bureaucracy and paperwork: registration officers, border controls, health inspectors, passes and licenses of every kind. And, as in most administrative matters, the Italian city-states led the way in devising new documents and greater officialdom, particularly after the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century; but soon other states followed suit both in order to contain epidemics as well as to prevent the spread of additional "plagues": prostitutes, vagrants in general and Gypsies in particular, heretics, enemies and spies, and carriers of "disease" in the form of an "unclean" lineage or subversive literature. The fight against imposture, one could therefore say, played a significant part in the formation of the modern state.

But this was (if you would forgive the cliché) a period of transition as far as means of identification were concerned – personal documents which one needed to show to various officials were indeed multiplying, but identity was still established most often by other means: physical marks (both natural

features as well as markings inflicted on the individual), insignia, articles of clothing and forms of behaviour. Therefore, in the second part of this book, before surveying the novel forms of documenting identity on paper, the use of other systems of recognition will be examined. These systems, whether physical markings or dress codes, have been studied by historians in various contexts, but rarely as part of the identification campaign launched by authorities all over Europe with the waning of the Middle Ages.

The reader of this introduction may be wondering if I am not overstating my case. Is it not an exaggeration to speak of an Age of Impostors (and in capital letters, too)? Is not the use of such words as "obsession", "paranoia" and "battle scene" much too melodramatic? I am hoping the following chapters would dissipate such doubts and reinforce my argument that the early modern period witnessed an unusual increase in several forms of deception concerning identity, which (together with other causes of uncertainty about reality and appearances) bred a fear or an anxiety of unparalleled proportions, and that in order to overcome the crisis, authorities all across Europe led an intensive search for reliable means of identification.

The case for the prevalence of anxiety about deception can be made by collecting numerous quotations from the sources, of which I shall cite here but two. Leon Battista Alberti put the following lines into the mouth of one of the interlocutors in *Della Famiglia* (began in 1432): "The world is amply supplied with fraudulent, false, perfidious, bold, audacious, and rapacious men. Everything in the world is profoundly unsure. One has to be far-seeing in the face of frauds, traps and betrayals."[28] These bitter words, one should note, came from the pen of the humanist who is regarded by modern scholars as the "father of Western cryptography"[29] (another field of concealment to emerge from the development of Renaissance diplomacy and espionage). Almost two hundred years later, Francisco de Quevedo, author of a well-known picaresque novel, *El Buscón* (*The Swindler*), devoted his entire satirical work on visions from hell, *Sueños y discursos* (*Dreams and Discourses*, 1627), to all manner of hypocrisy and pretence. His conclusions echo Alberti's words: "not only are things not what they seem, they are not even what they are called! [...] Everything about man is deception and falsehood". But in addition to such pessimistic quotes, the case may also be made persuasively, or so I believe, by presenting the very many new methods of identification and verification invented during those centuries.

As for the claim that imposture was indeed particularly rife during the Renaissance and Reformation period, I try to demonstrate it by following two avenues: first, by looking at the astonishingly large groups of dissemblers, whether false converts or false beggars or others, and attempting to explain why so many men and women at the time had to resort to camouflage in order to survive or to maintain their dignity; second, by observing the modus operandi of certain individual impostors (some well known, others obscure) with the aim of understanding not only their motivations but also

why they succeeded in their masquerade and why eventually they failed (since, after all, we only get to hear of those who were unmasked). In other words, this is – among other things – a study of the measure of credulity, a tendency determined by historical circumstances no less than any other.

One further point needs to be made: this study concerns the false presentation of the self and means of identification; it is *not* an attempt to explain early modern identity. "Identity" (or "selfhood") remains a very elusive essence or idea despite heroic efforts by scientists in many fields to define it. It is certainly not a fixed entity: the components that make up an individual's identity vary from period to period and emphases shift. To give but a simple example: under authoritarian regimes in the twentieth century, belonging or not belonging to the ruling party was an element of the first order in defining a person's identity. This was obviously not the case in earlier times, nor does it have much meaning today. In the Latin West religion had become a major element of a person's identity ever since the Christianization of Europe; confessionalization in post-Reformation Europe made it all the more important for at least another two centuries – but afterwards church affiliation was gradually pushed aside or removed altogether from definitions of identity except in a small number of communities or in marginal regions. On the other hand, nationality has become an integral component of personal identity in large parts of the modern world, appearing on most documents of identification. But when and to what extent nationality replaced regional or local loyalties is notoriously difficult to answer. Even gender, a seemingly biological fact, "male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27), has undergone such radical changes in recent decades that soon authorities would need to adjust many of their forms to accommodate sexual identities which are not necessarily determined by chromosomes and genitalia. Defining identity is thus a quagmire safer to avoid.

Finally, it is important to point out that the word "impostor" had a slightly different meaning in pre-modern times than it does today. Beginning to appear frequently in texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it referred mostly to deceivers, that is to individuals who led other people to believe in lies. A few compilations of stories about such figures – such as *The History of Infamous Impostors, or, the lives* & *actions of several notorious counterfeits, who from the most abject, and meanest of the people have usurped the titles of emperours, kings, and princes*, by Jean-Baptiste de Rocoles (London, 1683) – were quite successful and ran into several editions. Leading others astray was still the emphasis in the use of the word in the seventeenth-century atheistic discourse on "the three impostors", Moses, Christ and Mohammed. In modern usage, however, the term is reserved for persons who either present invented identities or impersonate other individuals. Some false messiahs as well as a few other figures in the gallery presented in the following chapters were impostors in both the pre-modern and the modern senses of the word.

The following chapters offer a tour of Central and Western Europe during a period that could be named – as one of the many headings it has been given by scholars – "The Age of Impostors". It is an age that had no clear-cut chronological boundaries. The origins of some types of imposture and some types of identification measures can be traced back to the High Middle Ages or even earlier; and certain of the phenomena discussed here would continue to plague Europe throughout the early modern period until the end of the *ancien régime* and beyond. But it was, I believe, roughly the century and a half between the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition and the outbreak of the Thirty Years War which saw the largest concentration of impostors, and, as a result, the greatest efforts to invent and improve means for determining who was who. It is thus these 150 years of great upheavals in European history which are looked at in this book (through special "binoculars", not used until now by other historians) – upheavals which either forced or enabled innumerable men and women to become impostors.

2
Religious Dissimulation

The infamous Spanish Inquisition, which existed for approximately 350 years, was established precisely for the purpose of uncovering the innumerable "Christians in name and appearance only" who, according to the Catholic Monarchs in their appeal to Pope Sixtus IV in 1478, were endangering the integrity of Spanish society. Fear of religious dissimulation in early modern Europe – perhaps the most prevalent and most acute of all anxieties about impostors at the time – was mainly the result of the widespread phenomenon of forced conversions. Three major categories of people who had been coerced into changing their religious affiliation constituted the cause of this grave concern:

New Christians: hundreds of thousands of men and women in the Iberian Peninsula who had converted to Christianity from Judaism or from Islam, mostly out of necessity and not out of conviction.

Nicodemites: people who, in the wake of the fragmentation of Christendom as a result of the Reformation and the imposition of the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, outwardly adhered to the official church of the land while secretly practising or believing the teachings of another denomination.

Renegades: Christians who had converted to Islam under various circumstances and then, on coming back to their homeland, sought reconciliation with their church, claiming that they had kept the Christian faith at heart all along. Such feigned adherence to Islam, a "mirror image" of the phenomenon of false Christianity, was to pose complex dilemmas for ecclesiastical authorities who as a rule were unforgiving towards religious dissimulation.

A fourth category – possibly the most significant numerically – was made up of the converts among the natives of other continents (mostly the Amerindians) who continued to practise their former beliefs in some syncretic form or subterfuge. This was an issue hotly debated among missionaries

and worrisome to all ecclesiastical authorities involved in the spread of Christianity overseas. Yet, although it did have an influence on the discourse concerning sincere and insincere conversions, the uncertain devotion of the Amerindians did not become part of the phobia about religious dissimulation plaguing early modern Europe.

Besides suspicions regarding insincere converts, accusations of religious deceit and dissimulation in both Catholic and Protestant Europe were directed at men and women who were believed to be secret spiritualists, members of clandestine sects or persons feigning direct contact with divine and preternatural powers. All these issues together formed the largest arena for the battle over private and public identity.

How can one person know what is in the heart and mind of another? Queen Elizabeth of England allegedly did not worry about her subjects' inner thoughts or beliefs (at least according to the aphorism attributed to her, that she "was reluctant to make windows into the souls of men") so long as everyone behaved properly, regularly attended Church of England services and did nothing to undermine their church. But waves of anxiety about subversive elements harbouring dangerous designs and unacceptable beliefs swept from time to time over early modern England, while most other monarchs and church dignitaries were continuously concerned with their subjects' beliefs and innermost thoughts and not only with their actions and behaviour. Throughout Christendom a hunt for "hidden enemies" began in earnest during the sixteenth century.

The Age of Conversion

For approximately two hundred years large segments of Europe's population had to face a dreadful tripartite choice: either convert to a faith which would imperil one's salvation, or emigrate, or die a martyr's death. Many elected to travel the easier road of adaptation and with time fully internalized the tenets of the new religion; others, not deterred by the hardships of exile, uprooted their families and moved to foreign lands where they established émigré communities and "strangers' churches"; quite a few went bravely (or not so bravely) to the stake, thus supplying novel material for hagiographies and martyrologies. Dissimulation was not on the menu, but it was the choice of those men and women (how many thousands, possibly millions, we shall never know) who had neither the stomach for martyrdom nor the appetite for the upheavals of migration, but could not fully digest what they regarded as a false creed. These are our protagonists, these people who, from the authorities' point of view, created a new category of "hidden enemies", typical of an age of religious wars and religious persecution.

The three groups named above – *Cristianos nuevos*, Nicodemites and "renegades" – have been studied extensively (although separately and by different historians). It would be an impossible task, as well as a superfluous

one, to discuss them in full in a single chapter. The aim of the present study is to suggest the extent of apprehension evoked by the phenomenon of religious dissimulation by presenting the measures adopted by ecclesiastical and lay authorities to extirpate it, and to examine how effective those measures were and to what lengths dissemblers went in order to survive under such policies.

It should be emphasized that the battle discussed here was not the fight against the regular enemies of Christianity – pagans, Muslims, Jews or outright heretics, the visible "others" who by then had been successfully expelled, segregated or clearly marked – but rather the struggle against concealed enemies, believed to be a whole clandestine "army" or "fifth column" undermining church and society from within. And as we all know, secret enemies, real or imaginary, are always far more terrifying than open foes, and they move governments to adopt extraordinary precautions and extreme measures.

The suspicions about religious undergrounds and the search for methods to ferret them out constitute the link between Jean Delumeau's "Age of Fear"[1] and Perez Zagorin's "Age of Dissimulation".[2] Zagorin expressed astonishment when he discovered a whole "submerged continent"[3] of religiously motivated liars in early modern Europe – people who dutifully participated in public rituals of the official church, but held dissenting views and practised a different faith in private. Among the "liars" he identified "Judaizers" ("Marranos", *conversos*) in the Iberian states and in their colonies, Protestants of various colours in Catholic lands, Catholics in Protestant states (particularly the Jesuits in England)[4] and spiritualists as well as atheists everywhere. His book was a first attempt to view all these groups as different facets of one phenomenon. Strangely, Zagorin ignored the Moriscos in Spain, the Christians who embraced Islam out of necessity, and several other categories of religious behaviour which were regarded by contemporaries as fraudulent. But by using expressions such as "a submerged continent" and "the tip of the iceberg", the twentieth-century historian was accepting, in fact, the images that had haunted early modern inquisitions and consistories.

Unfortunately, despite enormous strides made in recent decades by historians who mined the archives, it still remains practically impossible to estimate the numbers of those "hidden enemies". Many of the men and women who were caught and tried for "Judaizing" or for similar heresies were probably merely victims of malicious denunciations or of the authorities' paranoia. On the other hand, as with all other categories of imposture, many dissemblers succeeded in appearing sufficiently orthodox to avoid suspicion and thus entered neither contemporary inquisitors' lists nor the historian's statistics.

However, there can be no doubt as to how central was the issue of religious dissimulation to life in several regions in early modern Europe. Heightened spiritual emotions, millenarian traditions, a plethora of heterodox ideas,

were "all swirling just beneath the surface of outward conformity".[5] Countless men and women were finding ways and means to cover up their true beliefs and developing theories and ideologies which justified the presentation of a false religious face; ecclesiastical and secular governments, on the other hand, were either erecting complicated machineries to unmask and punish the dissemblers, or at least constantly warning against the dire consequences of treating religious impostors too leniently. From papal bulls to popular sayings, from learned theological treatises to picaresque novels, from volumes of jurisprudence to hastily scribbled letters smuggled out of prisons, an entire array of contemporary documents was filled with questions, debates and anecdotes concerning religious dissimulation.

Edicts of Faith

The most explicit of these documents were the instructions to inquisitors on how to unmask religious impostors. In a manner similar to the changes introduced through time to the indices of prohibited books, the variations in inquisitors' manuals are also a useful gauge of contemporary fears. Studies, for example, of Francisco Peña's sixteenth-century commentary on the fourteenth-century *Directorium Inquisitorum* of the Catalan inquisitor Nicolau Eymeric, or of Iacobus Simancas's (Diego de Simancas's) *De Catholicis Institutionibus Liber* (1575), or of Eliseo's Masini's *Sacro arsenale* written in the early seventeenth century, have added a great deal to our understanding of the changes which occurred with time to the concerns about heresies.[6] These guidebooks – from the fourteenth century onwards – were essentially manuals for the detection of fraud and deception. To such handbooks written for the professional, the Spanish Inquisition added another type of manual intended for the entire community of the faithful – edicts of faith.[7] The need to advertise warnings to the public at large about dissemblers, and to issue exhortations to become informers of the Inquisition, is an indication of how grave and how widespread the threat of dissimulation appeared to church authorities in the Iberian Peninsula. The edict of faith, wrote Henry Charles Lea in 1906, "rendered every individual an agent of the Inquisition. [… It] filled the land with spies and it rendered every man an object of suspicion."[8] He concluded his chapter on the edicts of faith with a chilling description of the long-lasting effects of living under a totalitarian regime (a passage which could be taken as a prophecy of twentieth-century Big Brothers):

> In the life of a nation, outward calamities can be survived and recovery from their effects is but the work of time. Far more lasting and benumbing are the results of the perpetual and unrelaxing vigilance which seeks to penetrate into the secret heart of every man, to control his thoughts, to stifle their expression, to repress every effort to move out of a beaten

> and prescribed track, to destroy mutual confidence and to lead each individual to regard his fellows as the possible destroyers of his reputation and career. Such was the system imposed on Spain by the Inquisition, and its appropriate expression is found in the Edict of Faith.[9]

Recent historiography of the Spanish Inquisition has taught us that Lea's picture of Spain as a country living for centuries in the shadow of a totalitarian *Suprema* was almost certainly a gross exaggeration and in some respects part of the anti-Spanish "Black Legend". Clearly the Inquisition was far from efficient enough to maintain for centuries a rule of terror over the entire population.[10] Nevertheless, these frequent admonitions to the public from the early sixteenth century onwards signalled the death knell of the (possibly romanticized) *convivencia*: while it might have been possible to live peacefully next to an infidel, it was considered inconceivable to tolerate a hypocrite, a heretic and an impostor as one's neighbour. The fact that much of the population was exposed to admonitions to be on their guard against "secret enemies" must have raised the level of mistrust considerably.

Edicts of faith were published annually from about 1500 in Spanish cities, which were seats of Inquisition tribunals, by being read aloud during solemn ceremonies on a Sunday in Lent. In other districts these catalogues of suspicious manners of behaviour were read during visitations of inquisitors or arrived as printed copies sent to parish churches throughout the country. It is difficult to ascertain how effective the edicts of faith were and how many denunciations they actually triggered. They were part and parcel of the "pedagogy of fear", to use Bartolomé Bennassar's term. Together with the edicts of grace, which offered pardon to clandestine heretics who would "come clean", and together with the *autos de fe* staged to flush out heretics and to publicize the dishonour of those who had been found out, the edicts of faith were one of the more blatant methods of exposing the "underworld" of dangerous enemies.[11] Exposing hidden enemies, as Francisco Peña admitted explicitly, was meant to instil fear in everyone's heart, but (more importantly from the point of view of this study) it was also an indication of a deep-seated fear in the hearts of rulers and elites – the fear of the unseen.

These edicts were very much an Iberian device, wielded by the Spanish Inquisition in the metropolis and in the colonies and later adopted by the Portuguese Inquisition. In Rome, however, such a catalogue of signs of unorthodox affiliations, not mentioned in the sixteenth century, was addressed to the public by the Holy Office only a couple of times during the seventeenth century.

Although many of these texts survived, few were published in modern works[12] and only one appeared (in part) in English translation. This was *El Edicto de Fe, catálogo de herejias para uso popular* (*An Edict of Faith: A Catalogue of Heresies for Popular Use*) issued in Cuenca in 1624.[13] In addition, Lea in his history of the Spanish Inquisition published the Spanish text of an edict

of faith of 1571 from Mexico and summarized a similar edict of 1696.[14] What can we learn from these documents? Who were the disguised heretics included in such catalogues and how were they to be recognized?

First on the list and presented in greatest detail were the followers of the "Ley de Moisés"; second in both place and length of discussion were those belonging to the "Secta de Mahoma"; then – relatively briefly – appeared the "Secta de Lutero", "Secta de los Alumbrados" and finally "Diversas herejias", a category which included clergymen who were secretly married, people who passed themselves as clerics or as Inquisition officials, and those who feigned diabolic possession, worshipped the devil or performed witchcraft. The general warning was against men and women who dissembled, the "double men" in contemporary jargon: "The double man is to be shunned, because he is evil: he is evil according to his language, and also according to his heart", stated the *Repertorium inquisitorum* published in Valencia in 1494.[15]

Judaizers

That fear of crypto-Jews loomed so large throughout the centuries of the Spanish Inquisition's existence is one of history's strange conundrums. Apart from a few *Judíos de permiso* (or *Judíos de senãl*, mostly merchants who were allowed to enter the Iberian kingdoms for the value of their trade, but not to settle permanently), there were no openly professing Jews in Spain from 1492 until the late nineteenth century, altogether for nearly four centuries. Yet the issue of "Judaizers" or crypto-Jews (*conversos* and Marranos in Spanish texts) remained prominent in Iberian consciousness. This in itself is a unique phenomenon, just as astonishing as the fact that there were indeed numerous families who, despite all risks, did in secret cling tenaciously to some vague form of Judaism for so many generations. Was it a widespread reality of Marranism that maintained and fuelled the Inquisition, or was it the activity of the Inquisition which inspired the continued clandestine adherence to Judaism? This is an ongoing debate among historians,[16] which I am not qualified to enter. Equally a matter of contention is the number of secret Jews feigning loyalty to the Catholic Church. The elusiveness of quantitative answers is but another aspect of the difficulties of measuring the size and impact of any secret society (all the more so when discussing pre-modern times for which there are no definite numbers even for non-hidden population groups). However, there are enough indications that surreptitious adherence to Judaism was not an insignificant phenomenon and (as the edicts of faith underline and the records of the Inquisition tribunals demonstrate) that there was definitely a long-lasting Iberian obsession with the dangers of a secret community of Marranos.

The story of the development of this obsession is well known. Between the pogroms of 1391 and the expulsion in 1492 there were several waves

of mass conversions of Jews to Catholicism, creating a new "caste" of New Christians. Since many were baptized under duress (though it is hard to say whether forced baptisms were the majority of the conversion cases or not) and because until 1492 they continued to maintain close relations with the Jewish community, it is not surprising that suspicions arose concerning the sincerity of their Christian faith, and it was these suspicions that led the Catholic Monarchs to demand the establishment of a permanent inquisition whose main task, as mentioned above, was the unmasking of "Christians in name and appearance only".

Around the middle of the fifteenth century, at the time when Spain was taking its first steps on the road to centralization and to becoming a New Monarchy, the attitude towards its population of Jews and *conversos* diverged into two almost opposing views. One was the traditional universalist Christian attitude of wishing for the largest number of converts, hoping for their complete assimilation into Christian society and aspiring to a homogeneous community of believers within the state; the other, verging on racism, was the refusal to accept the newly baptized and their descendants as full members of the community, and the insistence on discrimination on the basis of lineage. It was the former – the desire for religious unity – which was expressed in the Inquisition's argument that complete assimilation of the converts was impossible so long as they continued to live in close proximity to a Jewish community. The Edict of Expulsion promulgated in March 1492 was the result of the Inquisition's lobbying. However, the expulsion of the Jews led in turn to a significant increase in the numbers of potentially insincere converts, since some of the Iberian Jews opted for conversion rather than forced emigration. But while many churchmen and magistrates adhered to the policy of integration of the New Christians and the obliteration of any distinguishing marks of former Jews, there were those who – out of envy or malice – wished to perpetuate the separation between Old and New Christians. This ideal of a "racial" hierarchy and an anti-integration stance, officially expressed for the first time in the Toledo statutes on *limpieza de sangre* in 1449, not only perpetuated the distinctions and suspicions for centuries to come, but also created a whole new arena of deception and forgery as people were struggling to prove the "purity" of their ancestry.

Moreover, whenever the "purity of blood" barriers were down or could be circumvented, former Jews and their descendants entered all echelons of Iberian society, some marrying into Old Christian families. Jealousy of their success was often at the root of accusations of "Judaizing" brought by neighbours to the Inquisition tribunals (in the same manner as accusations of *maleficium* were frequently invented in order to settle scores with neighbours or rivals during intensive witch-hunts in other parts of Europe). Yet whether false or true, motivated by religious outrage or personal vendetta, these thousands of charges reflect an atmosphere of mistrust and reveal

another aspect of the fear that appearances were misleading and that even persons in one's vicinity were not whom they pretended to be. The trials, the *autos de fe*, the *sanbenitos* hanging in parish churches for generations, all served as a constant reminder that the community was infected by impostors.

How was one to tell if a seemingly good Catholic was in fact a follower of the Law of Moses? The edicts of faith offered long lists of signs, most of them utterances regarding dogmas, "errors" which the suspect might let slip, as well as acts of commission or omission in ritual matters. Words, gestures, objects, customs and associations were all to be closely monitored by vigilant neighbours and colleagues. In the absence of efficient police forces, and before the establishment of regular secret services, European authorities depended on denunciations by informers in identifying deviant behaviour, particularly secret behaviour. The obligation to inform on one's delinquent family members, friends, neighbours, acquaintances or parishioners was presented by the Inquisition as a religious duty, one that if neglected could mark the negligent person as a delinquent themself. The central importance of informing on Judaizers was evidenced, among other things, by the frequent appearance of the Hebrew word *malsín* (delator) to designate the figure of the snitch in Golden Age Spanish literature.

Words – what a person said, failed to say, read or wrote – were the most obvious telltale signs. These of course included overt expressions of Jewish beliefs (e.g. the messiah has yet to come) or reservations about Christian dogmas, ridicule of saints and doubts concerning the efficacy of the sacraments, but also disapproval of the Inquisition and misgivings about the justice of its verdicts. Failing to recite Catholic prayers or ignorance of Christian tenets were admissions of guilt; but protesting one's Catholic faith too strongly or ostentatious observance of orthodox practices would also constitute grounds for suspicion.

Behaviour – customs, habits and gestures – in church and in everyday life could easily expose a crypto-Jew. Since Judaism has far more commandments and proscriptions regarding every aspect of life than the other two monotheistic religions, there was a very long list of acts of commission or omission by which to identify an adherent of the Law of Moses. Attempting to keep at least the fundamental dietary laws, a Marrano would avoid pork and the use of lard in cooking – thus a preference for olive oil carried with it a whiff of heresy (in fact, some contemporaries claimed that it was more than a whiff and that crypto-Jews and crypto-Muslims, who also avoided pork products, had a different body odour than Christians because of their eating and cooking habits – I shall return to the question of smells later on). Fasting on certain days of the year or ignoring the food restrictions of Lent, if detected, could lead to denunciation. In this, too, there were ways of protesting too much – secret Jews, it was said, would parade on the street munching on a hambone or with a toothpick between their teeth

on Jewish days of fasting (the Day of Atonement or the Fast of Esther) in order to throw the Inquisition spies off the scent. The Edicts of Faith went on to list favourite "Jewish" foods, specific dishes prepared for certain holy days (unleavened bread and celery on the date of Passover, hard-boiled eggs and olives during mourning periods etc.) as well as methods of killing animals in a kosher manner or preferring butchers of Jewish origins. Crypto-Jews, it was stated, avoided eating at a Gentile's table – therefore, when a suspected "Judaizer" accepted a neighbour's invitation for a meal, it did not clear the suspect but tarnished the neighbour.

Cleanliness was next to heresy in early modern Iberia. The Jewish and Muslim traditions of washing and changing clothes and linen in preparation for the Sabbath (or for Friday in the case of Moriscos), ablutions before meals or prayers, women cleansing during the forty days after childbirth – all these were customs not observed by Old Christians and when kept they apparently enhanced the smell of imposture.

Conversos, unlike Jews in the past or in other countries, did not wear distinctive clothes nor were they required to display a badge or any other distinguishing mark (in accordance with the principles of those who desired complete integration, but to the regret of some contemporary observers, as we shall see below). The only dress issue mentioned in regard to Judaizers in the edicts was the question of the *sanbenito*, the garment of shame (usually a yellow tunic with a St Andrews Cross on its back and front), which convicted heretics were supposed to wear as an outer garment for a specified period of time. Such a garment, as we shall see, was meted out as punishment to heretics by the Roman Inquisition as well (the *habitello*) – it was, one could say, the Catholic equivalent of the pillory but designed for longer periods of public shaming. The Spaniards, however, not satisfied with castigating the guilty individual, devised a method of marking his or her family for perpetuity by demanding that the *sanbenito* remain for ever hanging in the parish church together with an inscription stating the sinner's name, crime and punishment – it was consistent with the idea of *vergüenza publica*, public shaming, which exemplified the need to expose to the light of day all crimes and heresies hidden under a cloak of darkness. The number of petitions for the removal of these public records of shame indicates that it was an efficient method for keeping potential impostors harassed and under surveillance. The Edicts of Faith demanded that any attempt to take off the garment or to hide it under a cloak, or to remove a *sanbenito* from a church, be reported immediately to the tribunals, for such steps were considered an additional crime of disguise (*inhabilidad*).[17]

As is well known, the sixteenth century witnessed the criminalization of reading, of owning certain books and of distributing them. Unless one had a special exemption to read censored material, books defined a person's identity: you were what you read. Thus the objects most often mentioned

as signals of a secret adherence to Judaism were books: Hebrew bibles, any books in Hebrew (in fact, any document written in Hebrew characters, including Ladino, *Judeo-Español*, which was written in the Hebrew alphabet), and all books proscribed by the Spanish versions of the Index[18] – a prohibition which would have particularly adverse effects on Hebraism and on humanism in general in Spain. Burning books suspected of spreading dangerous Jewish ideas, a time-honoured tradition of purification in Christian Europe, became part of the *autos de fe* spectacle – for example, a special bonfire was lit in Valladolid in January 1558 to burn the heretical books that the *Suprema* had been steadily accumulating.[19]

Monitoring personal correspondence was obviously more complicated in those days, before the establishment of regular postal services (another fact that mitigated control over the population and prevented existing regimes from becoming totalitarian). Inquisitors therefore urged faithful Catholics to inform on people who exchanged letters with friends or relatives abroad, and they were quick to indict anyone who used the Hebrew alphabet in correspondence. Furthermore, communications in writing with the wrong people were but one aspect of risky associations: socializing with New Christians, employing them or using the services of a *converso* physician or butcher – all could be construed as evidence of at least sympathy for the hidden enemy if not actually being one of his or her ranks.

Finally, albeit not listed in the edicts themselves, there were the physical signs, either natural marks or such that were self-inflicted, which could expose a Marrano. Body odour, nose size, male menstruation and more, were becoming marks of the secret Jew in the proto-racist literature of the time (see Chapter 6 below); circumcision was mentioned in regard to both crypto-Jews and crypto-Muslims, but it is doubtful whether there were many New Christians in Iberia, after the expulsions of the Jews, the Muslims and the Moriscos, who would have risked marking a child with such an indelible sign. There is evidence that when Marranos left Spain and reverted to Judaism in safe places such as Italy or Holland, adult males sometimes asked to be circumcised despite the danger involved in such an operation.

Is it possible to recreate the actual beliefs and traditions of crypto-Jews in Spain and its colonies on the basis of these catalogues of identifying marks? There are enough reasons to reply in the negative, the main one being that the edicts were copied down from one year to the next with few updates for many decades, thus they could hardly be accurate reports containing reliable information.[20] Yet, these edicts together with trial records as well as a few memoirs enabled a number of scholars to reconstruct an approximate picture of the slowly fading Jewish culture of the crypto-Jews. Our concern here, however, is not with the historical reality of crypto-Judaism, but rather with beliefs instilled by Inquisition propaganda about the prevalence of religious deception and how crucial it was to unmask it.

"That Ye May Live"[21]

It could come as a startling surprise to discover that the most elaborate justifications for lying were presented on religious grounds. But, since so much human history is the story of religious persecution of minorities, perhaps such justifications were only to be expected. The youngest religion today, which encourages its adherents, dispersed as they are throughout the world, to conceal their faith in times of danger, is the Bahá'í faith;[22] during the twentieth century several other sects and churches issued warrants for dissimulation under persecuting regimes.

Jewish communities in the Diaspora had had to face more than once the choice between conversion and death. On the whole, Jewish Law as well as Jewish historiography (down to modern-day school books used by the secular education system in the State of Israel) tend to glorify the martyrs, those who had chosen death "for the Sanctification of the Divine Name", and were willing to sacrifice their families, wives and children rather than see them transgress the laws of the Torah.[23] Exile, considered the less heroic option, was chosen by many Jews who uprooted themselves from the country they had regarded for many generations as their homeland to a place of relative safety – thus enhancing the stereotype of the Wandering Jew. Nonetheless, perhaps more often than the annals of the Jewish nation care to admit, large numbers of Jews in the past accepted conversion to the dominant religion – either Islam or Christianity – most of them losing eventually all remnants of a Jewish identity, others continuing to practise dissimulation for several generations.

Opinions among Jewish theologians about the status of crypto-Jews were divided, ranging from fulminations and absolute rejection to compassion and acceptance. When the zealous Almohads overran North Africa and Muslim Spain in the twelfth century, Rabbi Maimon, father of the illustrious Moses Maimonides, wrote a "Letter of Consolation" to the Jews of Morocco, assuring those who outwardly converted to Islam that whoever said their Hebrew prayers even in their shortest form and did good works remained Jewish. His son Maimonides, however, penned in 1165 his "Epistle on Martyrdom" (also called "Letter on Forced Conversion" or "Letter on the Sanctification of the Divine Name") in which he advocated exile as the lesser evil. Although he criticized those Jewish sages who had never experienced severe persecution themselves but found it in their heart to condemn the people who had accepted forced conversion, his own conclusion was that a Jew should leave the land of persecution, as he and his family had done when they emigrated from Andalusia to Fez. But in his monumental *Mishneh Torah*, compiled in 1180, Maimonides took a slightly different position: it was better to be put to death than abandon one's faith in times of persecution, "nevertheless, if he transgressed and did not choose the death of a martyr [...] since he transgressed under duress and could not escape,

he is exempted from punishment". Crypto-Jews, though they sinned, according to Maimonides, remained Jews.

Doubts and differences of opinion concerning the justification of religious dissimulation continued to divide Jewish scholars during the sixteenth and seventeenth century when the problem was relevant for thousands of *conversos* throughout the Sephardi diaspora. Responsa literature contains various rulings in regard to the rights of crypto-Jews (inheritance, marriage etc.) from the point of view of the Jewish *Halakhah*.

Yet it seems unlikely that New Christians in post-expulsion Spain or Portugal read Maimonides or were aware of rabbinical debates over forced conversion. For the majority a more accessible consolation was to be found in the Book of Esther, obtainable even where all Judaic books were proscribed. The biblical Jewish queen, who had hidden her true faith in order to save her people, became in their eyes the exemplary heroine; the Fast of Esther, which was observed in mid-February, became the most important day on the calendar of the Marranos.[24] The more learned among the crypto-Jews would make similar use of the Apocrypha, of certain verses in the so-called *Epistle of Jeremiah* and in the last chapter of the *Book of Baruch*, in which the prophet warns his brethren: "When you see masses before you and behind you bowing down, you must say to yourselves, 'You must worship the Lord'". The Marranos interpreted this to mean that under duress it was permissible to follow the observances of another religion, provided that in their hearts they kept faith with the Jewish God.[25] "Whosoever keeps his inner self distinct from the face that he shows to the world, his real actions being kept within for fear of the Gentiles, is exempt from heavenly condemnation", would write the learned Venetian rabbi, Samuel Aboab, at the end of the seventeenth century.[26]

In the aftermath of the shocking apostasy of the false messiah, Shabbetai Zvi (in 1666), some ex-Marranos wished to endow the crypto-Jewish experience with a positive religious significance, to turn necessity into a virtue. Forced conversion was the equivalent of the crucifixion, they claimed, which atoned for the sins of the People of Israel; redemption will begin when the slate is wiped clean, the suffering of Jews who were forced to dissemble end, and all the *conversos* return openly to Judaism.[27] Spanish Marranos and Jews who converted to Islam were, therefore, preparing the way for the (real) messiah, in the same manner as certain Nicodemites discussed below believed that they were paving the road for the establishment of a New Jerusalem.

Moriscos

The term "Morisco" ("Little Moor") first appeared in the 1550s and implied from the start a problem for Christian authorities. Nevertheless, anachronistic though it may be to apply the name to new converts from Islam

prior to the mid-sixteenth century, and though it could be regarded as derogatory from a Muslim point of view (as the term "Marrano" was for Jews), "Moriscos" has become the universal term in historical works for the people in Spain who were either converts from Islam or their descendants. The "problem" of secret adherents to the *Secta de Mahoma*, however, should have disappeared from Spain (in fact, from all of Europe) after the expulsions of the Moriscos in 1609–14, and yet – at least according to the edicts of faith – it did not.

Not long after the expulsion of the Jews and the fall of Granada, between the years 1500 to 1526, and as a further step towards the religious homogenization of Spain, all *Mudéjares* (Muslims who had remained on Iberian soil under Christian rule) were forced to convert to Catholicism, thus giving birth to another worry about a category of "Christians in name and appearance only". Entire communities, particularly in southern Spain, in that part of the peninsula that had once been Al-Andalus, stubbornly adhering to their Moorish customs, were suspected of being secretly faithful to Islam. In 1609, when it appeared that all policies, applied for almost a century, which should have led to their assimilation out of fear or by adjustment, had failed, the king of Spain, Philip III, took the advice of one faction among his advisors and decreed the expulsion of all Moriscos, regardless of how sincere was their devotion to Christianity. But, although this ethnic cleansing should have eliminated the "Morisco problem" once and for all, the issue of crypto-Muslims remained on the Spanish agenda, if to a diminished extent, for generations to come.

Parallel in many respects to the concern about Marranos, the nature of the preoccupation with the Moriscos was nevertheless quite different. On the one hand, the traditional confrontation between church and mosque was not the same as the bitter centuries-old *ecclesia* vs *synagoga* conflict. Muslims were neither defined as "killers of Christ" nor encumbered with the mission that St Augustine had prescribed for the Jews, to be "witnesses among all nations to the prophecies which were sent before concerning Christ".[28] Also, rather than being, as the Jews were, a thorn in the flesh of all of Christendom, Muslims throughout the Middle Ages were present as a significant minority only within the Iberian Peninsula. On the other hand, a large population of Muslims or crypto-Muslims – in contradistinction to the Jews – could be perceived as a serious political and military threat, a veritable fifth column, loyal to Christendom's greatest and worst enemy. Furthermore, Morisco rebellions were no imaginary threat but actually occurred several times after the promises of toleration, made by the Catholic Monarchs at the surrender of Granada, had been violated. The unrest which began as a local revolt in Granada in 1499 culminated in the large-scale armed rebellion in the Alpujarras in 1568–71. This ended with the deaths of thousands of Moriscos, thousands sold into slavery and about 80,000 expelled from their homes and forced to disperse throughout Castile – probably

one of the most brutal among the many savage confrontations of the sixteenth century. The various decrees of forced conversion, compulsory cultural assimilation, restrictions, deportation, dispersal and removal of children from their families, were perceived by many Spaniards as a continuation of the *Reconquista*, part of an early modern version of a "clash of civilizations" or, at least, of the great struggle between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans. "The continued existence of a potentially disloyal minority at the centre of the Empire", wrote the historian Andrew C. Hess in 1968, "became more dangerous".[29] "Self-defense", he concluded in a justification of the expulsions, "dictated some sort of action".[30] The "sort of action" which took place in 1609–14 was the dislocation of hundreds of thousands of people (the accepted number today is about 300,000), uprooted from their homes and sent into exile – to North Africa by boats or to France across the border.

Hess may have been right (though far from politically correct even in the 1960s) in assuming that the overriding and (possibly not unfounded) fear which motivated the Spanish crown was of the Moriscos as potential spies and collaborators with Spain's enemies: he quotes documents indicating that the Ottomans were attempting to create an espionage network and to forge an alliance with all Habsburg enemies, "Lutheran" (i.e. Protestant) forces and Muslims, including Mediterranean corsairs and frustrated Moors. Gerard Wiegers, in a more recent article, also mentions a planned anti-Spanish Ottoman–Dutch coalition in which Moriscos were involved.[31] Nevertheless, political and military "self-defence", or for that matter competition over the silk trade, did not exclude religious motivations for the confrontation and the expulsions. Many churchmen as well as laypeople (especially once the spirit of the Counter-Reformation permeated the educated strata of Spanish society) aspired to attain the full assimilation and sincere conversion of the Moriscos; but when it seemed that all policies of integration had failed, frustration coupled with the constant fear of successful dissimulation won the day (despite protests from nobles who tried to protect their productive Morisco population).[32]

Yet, except for Aragon, Valencia and Granada between 1560 and 1614, where secret adherence to Islam constituted the bulk of Inquisition accusations, in other regions of the peninsula and at other times crypto-Muslims played second fiddle to "Judaizers" in the edicts of faith and in the obsessions of Inquisition tribunals. There were several reasons for this, one possibly being the fact that, on the whole, Moriscos provoked less envy since they did not succeed as much as Spaniards of Jewish origins in penetrating the higher echelons of society. But it was also due, I believe, to the fact that their adherence to an alien culture remained quite open. Although after 1526 all Spaniards of Muslim extraction were nominal Christians, they continued to live in semi-autonomous communities, speak Arabic and publicly maintain their customs. On the whole they were the visible "others", not disguised and lurking everywhere, as Marranos were thought to be.

While the debate about the Marranos revolves about the question whether such crypto-Judaism would have survived had it not been for the persecution by the Inquisition, the debate about the Moriscos revolves around the question to what extent they adhered to Islam rather than to an ethnic culture. There is no doubt that the majority of Moriscos refused assimilation. Yet it could be assumed, so say some modern-day scholars, that had the Spanish authorities been as tolerant of Arabic customs as they were of the syncretic religion of the Amerindians, the Moriscos would not have revolted and would have eventually assimilated completely. Nevertheless, most historians agree, there is no denying that the greater part of the Morisco population were feigning their Christian devotion and accumulating resentments against their oppressors for several generations after they had been coerced to abandon the faith of their ancestors – as was frankly expressed in a Moorish ballad in 1568, shortly before the second rebellion in Granada:

> We are forced to worship with them
> in their Christian rites unclean,
> To adore their painted idols,
> mockery of the Great Unseen,
> No one dares to make remonstrance;
> no one dares to speak a word;
> Who can tell the anguish wrought on us,
> the faithful of the Lord?
> […]
> Vain were hiding, vain were flight,
> once the spies were on one's track.
> Should he gain a thousand leagues,
> they would follow and bring him back.[33]

The edicts of faith continued to warn against the secret sect of Muhammad well into the eighteenth century. The persistence can be explained mostly by bureaucratic inertia – no one took serious trouble to update those annual proclamations, and although additions were made (Lutherans and Alumbrados after 1525, Freemasons in the eighteenth century) nothing seems to have been deleted. But the tenacity of the concern could also be attributed to the fact that small numbers of Moriscos did remain on Iberian soil: a few descendants of the more distinguished families from among the *Moriscos Antiguos* (Muslims who had been baptized before the times of forced conversions), some who had been very young children at the time of the expulsions, spouses of Old Christians and some who succeeded in concealing their lineage. Inquisition archives reveal that there were former Moriscos who had been allowed to return home from North Africa. Moriscos in disguise appear among the swindlers in seventeenth-century picaresque

novels, like Ricote, a Morisco disguised as a German merchant who was met by Sancho Panza in *Don Quijote*.[34] One of the Moriscos involved with the production of the *Plomos del Sacromonte* (see below), Alonso de Luna, was tried by the Inquisition for messianic pretensions in 1618.[35] A significant number of Muslim slaves were held by Spaniards, and some of them converted to Christianity or had their children baptized without real religious conviction; there were also reports of Morisco communities hidden in the mountains. Thus secret adherents to the *Secta de Mahoma* continued to appear in the Iberian catalogues of impostures, even if only as a leftover item from the major problem they had constituted for Spanish religious authorities throughout the sixteenth century.

In any case, whether before or after the great expulsion, how was a secret Muslim to be identified? In the lists drawn up by the inquisitors of crypto-Muslim practices, many of them were identical or very similar to those listed for crypto-Jews: keeping certain dietary laws such as avoiding pork and cooking in olive oil rather than in lard; buying meat only from certain butchers; avoiding wine; observing fasts (such as the *pascua de Ramadán*) which were not on the Christian calendar; taking baths on Thursday and Friday nights. Cleanliness in general, as we have seen, was a legacy of Jewish and Muslim cultures. Other telltale signs, unique to the crypto-Muslims, were playing music at night, dancing the *zambra*, eating couscous, staining nails with henna, sitting on the ground and a reputation for generosity. Obviously, speaking Arabic and keeping books in that language[36] became signs of heresy for Moriscos as well as for Old Christians who fraternized with members of the suspicious caste.[37] In other words, the Moorish way of life became identified with inner Islamic beliefs, with an anti-Christian – thus anti-Spanish – worldview, with "Mohammadizing".

The Moriscos, like the Marranos, learnt to guard jealously the separation between the public and the private sphere or, to borrow a term from John Jeffries Martin, they each developed a "prudential self".[38] A newborn child was taken to be baptized in church and then taken home where the baptismal water was washed off (a procedure called *descristianizar*) and sometimes – though rarely – the male child would be circumcised. A bride was brought home from church and a new wedding celebrated according to the traditional Moorish way. Thoughts expressed and gestures made at home were not voiced or made outside its walls. And it was precisely this other life behind closed doors which worried early modern authorities. That is why the restrictions imposed by the royal decree of 1567, which sparked off the rebellion in 1568, called not only for the abolition of all Islamic practices, but also demanded total visibility: house doors to be left open, women to remove their veils,[39] prohibition on speaking Arabic and submitting all *aljamíado* texts (written in Romance in Arabic characters) for inspection. Nothing better expresses the fears of authorities of what they could not see or understand than these demands – made by both church and state. These

laws clearly show how much the struggle against the Moriscos was – among other things – part of the campaign for complete transparency and against secrecy and privacy. Needless to say, such restrictions only sent the persecuted deeper underground, their literature becoming all the more encoded and defiant.

Taqiyya

Moriscos, as much as Marranos, sought vindication for electing conversion to an inferior faith over death or migration. Islam provided such justification in the teaching on *Taqiyya*.[40] Attributed to Muhammad, it is generally associated with Shi'ite Muslims and not with the Sunnis, who traditionally condemned the practice of dissimulation. Spanish Muslims were mostly Sunnis, but when forced to abandon Islam they, too, had to obtain permission to dissimulate. The Mufti of Oran, Ahmad Bu Jum'a, provided them as early as 1504 with a legal decision (*fatwa*), which served not only as a sanction of pretence but also offered clear instructions on how to simulate and dissimulate correctly. The Mufti's response, originally in Arabic, was translated into Aljamía and provided the guidelines for crypto-Muslims in Spain for several generations (notwithstanding the controversy and the condemnation that their clandestine behaviour aroused among other Muslim theologians).

According to Ahmad Bu Jum'a, when in mortal danger, crypto-Muslims were allowed to break the dietary laws by eating pork and drinking wine, to pray in churches and face idols, and even to denigrate the Prophet Muhammad – so long as their intentions at heart were pure. If possible, he advised, they should continue to give alms and to perform the required ablutions. It was the intention that counted, what was in one's heart and not on one's lips; Allah, unlike the Inquisition, could see into a person's soul.

This religious dualism under *taqiyya* was as psychologically and socially difficult as dissimulation practices were for crypto-Jews and for Nicodemites everywhere – arousing compunctions, doubts and soul-searching, and complicating the relations of the Moriscos with both their Christian compatriots and their Muslim co-religionists, some of whom dubbed them "infidels". In this limbo between two worlds, Moriscos, like all other persecuted minorities, sought not only theological justifications for their dissimulation, but also consolation and comprehension of their tragedy. Aljamía literature, as well as works written in the Morisco diaspora, presented their trials and tribulations as part of a divine plan, sometimes as divine punishment for past sins, sometimes as necessary steps on the road leading to the ultimate triumph of Islam over Christianity. As all other groups forced to accept an unwanted religion, they developed messianic hopes, while inventing traditions extolling the merits of remaining in al-Andalus.

Forging a Past

Among the efforts to make sense of their history, Moriscos were involved in some fantastic literary forgeries. Miguel de Luna, a Morisco translator in the service of Philip II, published in 1592 a book entitled *The True History of King Rodrigo*, claiming it was a translation of an Arabic manuscript he had discovered at the Escorial. No such manuscript was ever found, and it is now accepted by scholars that Miguel de Luna was himself the author of this "entirely fictional [...] highly imaginative rewriting of the legend of the last Gothic king".[41] The purpose of the work was to show that Muslim rulers in Spain had been just and tolerant towards their Christian subjects. Miguel de Luna's son, Alonso de Luna, was involved (as Gerard Wiegers persuasively shows) in the production of the *Gospel of Barnabas*, a book of anti-Christian polemic purported to have been hidden in the Vatican archives and found there by a monk, a certain Fra Marino, who converted to Islam immediately upon discovering the "truth". The text was in fact probably produced in Morisco circles in Istanbul around 1600, originally in Italian and then translated into Spanish.[42] It was the same father and son, as well as Alonso's maternal grandfather, Alonso del Castillo, who were responsible for the most sensational of all pro-Morisco forgeries – the *Plomos del Sacromonte*.[43]

The term *Plomos* now designates a treasure of documents and relics discovered in and around Granada between 1588 and 1606, including 22 "Lead Books", written in Arabic, crude Latin and "antique" Spanish, purportedly authored by Arab disciples of St James, among them St Cecilio, the first bishop of Granada.[44] These documents were produced with several aims in mind: to argue that Granada had been Iberia's most ancient Christian settlement, to legitimize the existence of Arabic-speaking groups in Spain, and to supply them with a noble past and direct connection to the Apostles and to the Virgin Mary. Indeed, according to the *Plomos*, Moorish Christianity constituted the heart and soul of Spain. Proving the ancient origin of the Moriscos should have served to underscore their right to remain in Andalusia.

These lead tablets not only fabricated a past, but also presented a diluted version of Christianity which could easily accommodate Morisco beliefs, downplaying the veneration of saints, cults of images, the Trinity and the use of wine in the Eucharist. Therefore, when in 1682 Pope Innocent XI condemned the lead tablets as forgeries, he also declared them to be full of heresies typical of Islamizing Spaniards. From our point of view, however, such creative fabrications are a further example of the invention of identities (in this case forging a past for a collective identity of the Moriscos – a group existing on the margins of both the Muslim and the Christian world); from the point of view of early modern authorities they constituted another proof of the prevalence of fraud and deception.

Crypto-Muslims or crypto-Moors (for as we saw, it was the Spanish-Arab culture which many of them wished to maintain rather than the Islamic faith) were an almost exclusively Iberian problem. The total number of Muslims who converted to Christianity in all other regions of Europe was small, made up mostly of slaves who were baptized by their masters. These non-Iberian neophytes left as a rule little evidence for posterity, and we have no way of knowing whether they were genuine or false converts. Leo Africanus, however, was an exceptional case.

Born in Granada as al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Fasi, he became a diplomat and emissary of the Sultan of Fez but was caught by corsairs and brought to Rome where he was baptized by Pope Leo X. Leo Africanus then became the leading authority in Europe on the history and geography of Africa as well as a collaborator in several scholarly projects with Hebraists and other humanists. But despite his fame and his contacts with some of the most erudite men in Renaissance Italy and in other parts of Europe, al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Fasi remains an enigmatic figure or a "trickster", as Natalie Zemon Davis chose to dub him. How truthful were the biographical details he provided in his *The Description of Africa*? How sincere was his conversion? Should he be numbered among religious impostors as a crypto-Muslim? Did he return to North Africa after 1527 and revert to his former faith? He disappeared from view, leaving us with many questions unanswered.[45]

Illuminated

The third specifically Spanish category of heresy was that of *Alumbradismo*. A special edict of faith issued in 1525 by the Inquisitor General condemned Alumbrados ("the illuminated") on the basis of statements heard from men and women who formed a group under the leadership of Isabel de la Cruz and were tried by the Toledo tribunal between 1524 and 1529.[46] The label "Alumbrados" would later be attached almost indiscriminately to mystics, spiritualists, evangelists, Erasmian humanists and any other proponents of a personal inner faith who belittled the value of ceremonies and ritual. This secret heresy would continue to appear in the general edicts of faith in third or fourth place – after Judaizers and Moriscos, and either before or following "Lutherans" (i.e. all Protestants) – for several centuries.

Almost all the persons persecuted in the first wave of trials during the 1520s were *conversos* and associated with the Franciscans, traditional rivals of the Dominican friars who filled the ranks of the Spanish Inquisition.[47] The fact that many New Christians were drawn to the irenic views of those who minimized the differences between the monotheistic religions by disparaging ceremonies and dogmas is not surprising. Monastic reformers who advocated spiritual renewal and mystical exercises, Ignatius Loyola and Teresa of Ávila among them, would also come under suspicion of *Alumbradismo*.

So would humanists such as Juan de Valdés and his circle of followers in Italy, who, although not mystics, aspired to a reformed Christianity, Erasmian in spirit and closer in some respects to Protestantism than to Catholicism. Therefore, quite a few people in Spain – many of them eminent figures in government, intellectual life and the Church – if "tainted" by *converso* blood, overzealous in their spiritual devotions, associated with humanist circles, or exhibiting any leaning towards Protestant *solafideism*, could find themselves in front of an Inquisition tribunal with *Alumbradismo* added to the charges brought against them (eventually, however, some of the suspects would be sanctified, for it was a very thin line between illuminism or pretended holiness and veritable sainthood acknowledged by the Church).

With only a vague notion of who and what they were, the Alumbrados were ascribed few outward distinguishing marks by which to unmask them. According to the 1525 edict of faith, they were to be recognized mainly by "errors", which they either let slip or expressed defiantly: disrespect for the cult of saints, mockery of relics, of the Host or of the cross, criticism of indulgences, preference for mental over vocal prayer, rejection of intermediaries between God and man – the edict listed 48 such heretical propositions.[48] The indications that they might constitute a secret sect were their insistence that religion was first and foremost a matter of the heart, not of external and public rituals, their gathering for prayer in private homes, as well as some writings, such as letters found in the possession of Alumbrado leaders in 1529 containing a cryptic language.[49]

But *Alumbradismo* would gradually acquire a slightly different meaning. The group of men and women accused specifically of being Alumbrados in Llerena in 1574 and in Seville in 1623 were known not simply for *dejamiento* (abandonment, surrendering to the love of God) but for "spectacular exhibitions of their mystical experience, encouraged ecstasies and trances".[50] The edicts of faith issued in connection with those trials identified the heresy of *Alumbradismo* with pseudo-mysticism and with imposture. Their name would be used "well into the eighteenth century for fraudulent visionaries, lecherous confessors, and mystics whose inspiration was of dubious origin", writes Alastair Hamilton.[51] In a text summarizing the case against the Alumbrados of Seville in 1623, there was a section "On the Frauds, Feigned Revelations, and Illusions of the Alumbrados".[52] By then these heretics could be more easily detected, since they performed to an audience. In addition, the edicts of faith from the 1570s onwards pointed out other possible external signs for the identification of illuminism, such as long hair and cross-dressing.

Once the word "Alumbrado" became synonymous with "hypocrite" and "impostor", Spaniards accused of feigning sanctity (see below) were often suspected of belonging to the secret sect of the Alumbrados, as illustrated by the case of Mateo Rodríguez, "the Holy Mat-Maker", analysed by Andrew Keitt,[53] and as stated explicitly in a manual for Spanish inquisitors which

warned against the "*Alumbrados*: those hypocrites […] pretending to be saints".[54] In other words, as the sixteenth century progressed, the Spanish Inquisition was finding it more difficult to distinguish clearly between various heterodox doctrines and associations, and was growing more wary of any belief not expressed in full public view and precisely according to post-Tridentine guidelines. *Conversos*, Moriscos, Alumbrados and evangelical humanists were keeping secrets, lying and hiding behind masks – both as individuals and as sects. The vaguer the definitions and the more ambiguous the information about their creeds and deeds, the fiercer became the suspicions of the religious establishment.

Spiritualists of all shades, however, were suspect not only in Spain. Emphasis on religion of the heart and direct communication with God could become a license to dissemble; it was also (in some cases) an encouragement to condescension towards "simpletons" who needed to rely on material objects, rituals and the intercession of priests or pastors for their dealings with the Holy. Needless to say, the established churches did not appreciate such an attitude.

By the time the Alumbrados were beginning to worry the Spanish authorities, religious dissimulation, as we shall see, was quickly becoming a large-scale problem outside the Iberian Peninsula – various sectarians first, and then growing numbers of groups and individuals who only nominally accepted the religion imposed by the rulers. The small islands below the surface inhabited by religious frauds were acquiring the dimensions of Zagorin's "submerged continent".

False Saints

Although it did not appear on the edicts of faith as a separate category, religious authorities all over Europe, and for obvious reasons particularly in Catholic countries, were increasingly troubled by another form of imposture: the false saint. Theological treatises, instructions for investigators, various kinds of reports on sensational events, dissertations on contemporary ills, and – especially from the second decade of the seventeenth century onwards – records of trials and inquiries, were filled with discussions of the phenomenon of clergy and lay persons claiming direct communication with a transcendental source. The profusion of visions and apparitions, conversations with angels, ecstasies, spiritual gifts, Christ's hearts and wedding rings, stigmata and miracles, apparently reached unprecedented dimensions. This, one could say, was the other side of the coin of the "witch craze", and more or less contemporaneous with it. In fact, in Catholic countries the same individual could be sometimes investigated simultaneously for witchcraft, faking demonic possession and adopting the persona of a visionary and prophet. Caterina Rossi, for example, was examined by the Inquisition of Brescia in 1642–43 for pretence of holiness; diabolical

involvement was suspected because she had previously been prosecuted for witchcraft and because she was born in the Valtellina – an area notorious for Protestantism.[55] In Spain accusations of feigning holiness often overlapped accusations of *Alumbradismo*. A verdict of an inquisitor in 1639, for instance, stated,

> I judge Eugenia de la Torre, the principal defendant in this case, to be a sacrilegious fraud, a heretical alumbrada who has deceived much of the public by means of false virtue […] She has described visions, spoken reckless and scandalous propositions, affected pains, feigned visions […] and demonic possessions, consented to exorcisms and prayers of the church, all in order to establish and maintain her reputation as a holy woman and prophet.[56]

Early modern investigators were obviously bewildered by the plethora of symptoms displayed by persons claiming to have direct contact with the world of the supernatural. Gradually, however, pretence of holiness became an independent theological and juridical category, a serious deception for inquisitions to uncover when seeking to protect church and society from harm. In 1531 Francisca Hernández, previously charged with *Alumbradismo*, was tried again for conning her audience by offering her special spiritual services for money; a few years later she would have been charged, most probably, with pretence of sanctity.[57] And this particular heresy, like witchcraft, was mostly associated with women.

Imposture in all its forms has always been an escape route from the way of life imposed by circumstances. While Marranos, Moriscos and Nicodemites chose dissimulation in order to escape the consequences of enforced conversion, women in early modern Catholic Europe discovered they could fashion their own fate and fortune by forging for themselves the identity of a living saint. Barred by social norms from most careers, ambitious women could either masquerade as men, or (increasingly under risk of being accused of *maleficium*) claim to have magical powers, or – the most appealing of roles – be a devout woman who was rewarded for her piety by direct contact with the Holy. Becoming known for mystical experiences, receiving divine revelations and performing miracles, all could earn a woman (even of the humblest origins) position, fame and power. These were the "aspiring saints" and the *beatas revelanderas*, inspired by the model of a Bridget of Sweden, a Catherine of Sienna or a Teresa of Ávila. The printing press provided them with an abundance of guide books on how to impersonate a saint: not only hagiographical literature but also the numerous manuals on the "discernment of spirits" which revealed to the reader what the inquisitors would look for when authenticating supernatural experiences.

Not all "false saints" were women,[58] of course, but trial records and other sources show that the majority of persons tried for the crime of

feigned sanctity were members of the "weaker sex". As with witchcraft, the preponderance of females among the accused could be explained by the misogyny of their accusers and ingrained assumptions that women were more prone to fall victim to the devil and that duplicity was predominantly a feminine characteristic. But it is also safe to assume that the social ethos which left women few paths for self-fulfilment was another reason for their large percentage among aspiring saints.

Not all "false saints", of course, whether women or men, were consciously perpetrating a fraud – many truly believed they had received divine revelations, others experienced genuine ecstasies, and some suffered from delusions. In both Catholic and Protestant literature, though not dismissing divine or diabolic origins, a medical interpretation was becoming more frequent: humoral imbalance, melancholy or insanity were diagnosed by the examiners. But in the seventeenth century investigators tended more and more frequently to define such visionaries as "impostors". The fear that deceitful women were leading astray large circles of gullible followers, in high places as well as among the ignorant masses, was fast becoming a major concern. It was not a new problem: the task of differentiating between fake and genuine sanctity had been thrust upon confessors, church dignitaries and inquisitors for many centuries. Verses 17–23 in Ezekiel 13 were interpreted as a warning against false female visionaries: "you will no longer see false visions or practice divination. I will save my people from your hands. And then you will know that I am the Lord." False prophets and deceitful apostles were identified as a danger in the New Testament (2 Cor. 11:13–15; 1 John 4:1; Matt. 24:24) and denounced by several Church Fathers. The problem of "discernment of spirits" (*discretio spirituum*) became a major topic in theological works in the thirteenth century and by the early fifteenth century special treatises were dedicated to the subject, most famously those by Jean Gerson.[59] In his *On Distinguishing True from False Revelations* he introduced the comparison to the moneychanger who had to tell the difference between authentic and counterfeit coins, and proposed that visions be judged according to three themes: the attributes of the visionary, the circumstances in which the revelation took place and the character of the things revealed there. It was Gerson who identified the three sources of revelations – divine, diabolic or fabricated; it was he who stressed that false revelations were far more frequent among "little women". Gerson was to be followed by many other theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – from Girolamo Savonarola, through Teresa of Ávila (whose *Life* provided a model for aspiring saints but also instructions on how to distinguish between genuine and counterfeit contact with the divine), to the Jesuit Martin Del Río (one of the great experts on identifying witches as well as false saints) and Juan de Orozco y Covarrubias.[60] Each of the treatises stressed different aspects of the complicated art of discernment of spirits, which was considered mainly as a battle of wits against the cunning

machinations of the devil. Much of the literature was concerned with the visions themselves: were they real or not? How were apparitions produced? Were there "real" angelic spirits and "real" ghosts or only illusions and delusions?[61] But – and this is the aspect relevant here – some of these discussions turned from the apparitions to the person who saw them. It was becoming clear not only to Protestants attacking Catholic "conjurors", but to Catholic divines, too, that many visionaries were lying, that many of the *beatas* were impostors. As the numbers of pretenders to holiness multiplied, scholars of all denominations were becoming increasingly sceptical of so much supernatural intervention in earthly affairs, and pure human duplicity became the explanation favoured by investigators.[62]

Fakers of holiness were different from other religious dissimulators in one important respect: while most dissemblers used every available strategy to evade attention, aspiring saints and self-proclaimed prophets longed for an audience. In some cases they even welcomed the Inquisition trial as an opportunity to tell the world about their direct communion with the Holy and to advertise their divine mission. María Bautista, for example, a member of the group of visionaries who served as the case study for Andrew Keitt's book, *Inventing the Sacred: Imposture, Inquisition, and the Boundaries of the Supernatural in Golden Age Spain*, reiterated her desire for an audience throughout her testimony.[63] In John Martin's terms, while it was the "prudential self" which predominated in the identity of the *converso*, Morisco or Nicodemite, the person pretending to have visions and revelations or to be possessed by demons was governed by his or her "performative self".[64]

It was this desire to attract attention that provided the investigators with the clues for identifying the deliberate impostors among the visionaries. False saints, although attempting to simulate all the virtues proper to a true mystic as listed by Gerson, often displayed pride rather than humility, and rebellion rather than obedience. Against all admonitions, they would carry rites, mortification and asceticism to inordinate excesses: craving the Eucharist to the point of taking communion several times a day, claiming to survive on communion bread alone (but discovered feasting furtively) or fasting to the point of "holy anorexia".[65] Breaking religious rules and social norms – from wearing inappropriate clothes to outright antinomianism – would always raise the alarm among the censors of behaviour, as would frequent attacks of fits and trances. Finally, sham saints, in the manner of all performing impostors, required props:[66] objects manufactured by unauthorized persons used as sacramentals to execute miracles, gifts from God, special relics and even letters dictated to a mortal by some divine boss. Bendetta Carlini painted Christ's wedding ring on her finger with diluted saffron;[67] Pietro Vespa, prosecuted by the Venetian Holy Office in 1633–34, paraded a vase that had belonged to Mary Magdalene, as well as two letters specifying his mission dictated by the Virgin Mary to a Carmelite

novice.[68] Apocryphal or invented letters were often used by holy women or their disciples to prove their special status, and in Italy at least, there was a tradition of missives from the Virgin Mary giving instructions to local authorities.[69] Being such important means of identification and authentication in pre-modern times, letters were the most commonly forged item: as envoys from imaginary lands were carrying signed missives from Prester John or from the King of the Lost Tribes of Israel, it was not surprising that self-proclaimed divine delegates would produce such documents as well.

From the multitude of women (and some men), both within abbeys or outside them, accused of faking visions and divine powers, some only caused a local stir for a while, which soon died out. Others received a great deal of attention throughout Catholic Europe: the trial of the revered Franciscan nun, Magdalena de la Cruz, by the Córdoba tribunal in 1544–46, was a credulity-shaking scandal throughout Iberia;[70] the unmasking in 1588 of María de la Visitación, prioress of the Convent of the Annunciation in Lisbon, known as "the nun of Portugal", whose raptures and ecstasies were discovered to be fake and her stigmata easily washed off by water, resulted in a panic among theologians and inquisitors who feared that an epidemic of feigned sanctity would ensue. An interesting case, which was part of the wave of visionaries and prophetesses in Spain following the trial of the "Nun of Lisbon", was that of the former black slave, Catalina Muñoz, in Valencia in 1588. She was charged with dissimulation and with sorcery that had caused "deceit and turbulence".[71] The spread of these forms of excessive zeal worried the authorities of the Church because they were regarded as "scandalous" – that is, leading others to sin and error and thus constituting a danger to the community. The danger was threatening not only the gullible masses but also the higher echelons of society, for *beatas* were adopted by courtiers, supported by their confessors[72] and applauded by the affluent burghers who basked in the fame and glory of the town's living saint.

Recent historiography has uncovered the immense efforts invested in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in separating the wheat from the chaff, particularly by the post-Tridentine Church, which was concerned that its emphasis on devotion, on works and on the miraculous would get out of hand.[73] The Inquisitions in Spain and in Italy dedicated hundreds of folios to minute analysis of the visions and the behaviour of aspiring saints in an attempt to determine whether they were divinely inspired or not. This early modern obsession, I would argue, went beyond the specific question of proof of sanctity for the purpose of canonization, which preoccupied the Catholic Church for many centuries; it went beyond the growing scepticism about the veracity of sensory perception; it derived not only from the centralizing and controlling efforts of the Curia. In addition to all these contexts, the compulsive questioning of visions and supernatural powers was part and parcel of the deep anxiety about imposture, the fear that in respect to religious identity there was no way of knowing who was who.

The vast number of theological and juridical discussions on the issue of pretence of holiness left a treasure trove of documentation for the historian, which would not have existed had the phenomenon of visions and ecstasies been attributed solely to illness. It is not for us to judge whether these visionaries were deliberately seeking to deceive and gain renown by their faked holiness or whether they were suffering from delusions and hallucinations.[74] For the purpose of my argument, the important point is that the conception of church authorities that their times were afflicted by a "plague" of *falsa santità* – partly induced by the devil, partly caused by malady and some of it spread by malicious human ploys – did much to reinforce the obsession with imposture.

Enthusiasts and Popish Impostors

Schwärmer or "enthusiasts" constituted the equivalent problem in Protestant Europe.[75] Among them were the "Zwickau Prophets", Anabaptists, spiritualists, Familists, millenarians, and other followers of charismatic leaders who claimed that God's voice spoke to them directly and who led their disciples away from the established churches. Lutheran, Calvinist and Anglican theologians repeatedly warned the public against these false prophets, accused such radicals of cheating and of being in league with the devil, and called upon the authorities to rid the country of their presence by every possible means. Although not aspiring to sainthood – a Catholic superstition according to magisterial and radical reformers alike – the "enthusiasts" shared many of the characteristics of the Iberian, Italian and French false saints. They saw visions and revelations, went into ecstatic trances, believed that a divine mission had been thrust upon them, scorned the need for mediation with the divinity, and in some cases advocated extreme antinomianism.

Protestants, however, fulminated not only against the delusional enthusiasm of the radicals but also against various "popish" impostures. The Catholic clergy – priests, monks, nuns, exorcists – were attacked for their pretensions to supernatural powers in performing the sacramental or any other kind of magic or miracle. Polydore Vergil in his *De Prodigiis* (published in 1531) believed that monks who claimed to have visions were impostors, while nuns were victims of the devil. The German physician Johann Weyer in his famous *De Praestigiis Daemonum* (1563), regarded witches and the possessed as melancholics fooled by the devil, and denounced the entire Catholic clergy as a bunch of impostors for applying counter magic. In his *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603), Samuel Harsnett, later to become Archbishop of York, used the term "imposture" to designate exorcists and anyone who was taken in by such charlatans. He dismissed any belief in the preternatural as nonsense fostered by Catholicism, medieval romances and rustic folklore. In this he was of the same mind as Robert Burton, who defined exorcisms as "ordinary tricks only to get opinion and

money, mere impostures". In an earlier chapter Burton attributed imposture to melancholy, a malady caused by the devil, and he put Mass-performing Catholic priests, exorcists and tricksters all in the same basket:

> I may not deny, but that oftentimes the devil deludes them, takes his opportunity to suggest, and represent vain objects to melancholy men, and such as are ill-affected. To these you may add the knavish impostures of jugglers, exorcists, mass-priests, and mountebanks.[76]

Harsnett's diagnosis, however, was not of melancholy or of devil-inspired delusions, but only of ploys instigated by wicked "Romish Priests", particularly by the Jesuits who infiltrated England under disguise – guilty of faking expulsions of demons as well as of plotting against the Queen.[77] George Hakewill, in *The vanitie of the eie* (1608), blamed delusions "on the imposture of Priests and Friers".[78] This handful of examples out of the rich Protestant literature which was presenting the entire Catholic Church as a deliberate grand deception, however, indicates that the word "impostor" and "imposture" – so widely used in a religious context – had several meanings, not all of them necessarily signifying the presentation of a false identity.[79]

Disenchantment?

Put together, this widespread dismissal of claims of direct access to sacral power could be viewed as part of the process of secularization or as an early stage in what Max Weber called the "disenchantment of the world". Needless to say, no serious historian today shares the naïve post-Enlightenment belief in the Reformation as a major step forward in a linear progression towards "modern rationality". Equally in both Catholic and Protestant lands, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were governed by heightened religious experiences and tensions, by an obsession with demonology, by fears and expectations that were anything but rational or reasonable. The critique of faked holiness or of enthusiasm employed demonic or diabolic explanations for these phenomena no less than medical and psychological diagnoses.[80]

Nevertheless, in both Catholic and Protestant civilizations it was (paradoxically, one might say) the theologians and church authorities who contributed indirectly to the process of "disenchantment" by becoming increasingly suspicious of excessive claims to supernatural powers. In other words, the obsession with deceit and imposture together with the fear that things were not what they seemed (the subjects of this study) were at one and the same time involved in the spread of Satanic beliefs as well as in the retreat of the supernatural and the slow rise of secular, scientific, medical and common-sense human explanations for out-of-the-ordinary phenomena. By declaring excessive expressions of piety to be a form of madness or fraud, theologians and inquisitors helped to open the door a little further to

atheism and to the naming of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad themselves as The Three Impostors.[81]

Fraudulent Witches

What can be said of the witch persecutions in the early modern period which has not already been said? The explosion of research on the subject in recent decades could well be described as a "witch craze" afflicting historians today. Hence I shall only refer briefly to its links to the obsession with religious dissimulation and imposture (and elaborate some more on the fear of witchcraft in Chapter 4, on underworlds).

Witchcraft was undoubtedly the occult crime par excellence. Witches made secret pacts with the devil; they practised their devilish art in the dark; Satan's designs, to be effected by his army of human (mostly female) recruits, constituted the greatest conspiracy of all time. And belief in a world-threatening conspiracy could drive even the most level-headed of philosophers to frenzy:

> Since Satan and witches enact their mysteries at night, and witches' works are hidden and concealed and they cannot be easily sighted, the investigation and proof are difficult. [… It] is absolutely necessary to bear in mind that the crime of witchcraft must not be treated in the same way as others. One must, rather, adopt an entirely different and exceptional approach,

wrote Jean Bodin in his detailed justification of the need to abandon all legal restraints in the attempt to uncover those devilish plots.[82]

Demonology, as Stuart Clark has so ably demonstrated,[83] was the main cause of the mistrust of sight as a source of information about the world: the devil filled the world with hallucinations, delusions, apparitions. The less gullible dismissed the possibility that Satan had the power to transform objects, to create simulacra of human beings, to metamorphose humans into animals or to transport women from their beds to the Witches' Sabbath, but even they were certain that he could make people see such fantasies. It was mostly the devil's fault, according to everyone's opinion, that things were not what they seemed.

And people were not who they said they were. The culture of witchcraft and possession greatly increased the number of people suspected of trickery and fraud. First of all, witches, as was well known, always assumed the persona of an innocent, harmless, sinned-against member of the community; then there were men and women from the margins of society pretending to have preternatural powers in order to make a living, to protect themselves from harassment and to gain social status; some adults as well as children feigned possession for a wide range of reasons;[84] exorcists, whether Catholic

priests or laymen, were often accused of imposture and lies. Thus, from every angle one looked at it, Satan had created an entire world of make believe.

Witchcraft and demonology was also the field richest in instructions on detection methods. A new profession, witch-finders, emerged during the Renaissance[85] (one of the few professions which admitted women). These professional detectives looked for Satan's marks on the body – unusual moles, defects in the eye, an extra teat, patches insensitive to pain (hence the need for "pricking" and the name "prickers" for the examiners) – or specialized in ordeals (a method of getting at the truth which was neglected after the introduction of Roman law and revived for witchcraft trials in the fifteenth century) and in sophisticated methods of torture. Thousands of pages of manuals and guidebooks, from Johannes Nider's *The Ant Hill* (1437) and the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), down to Lodovico Maria Sinistrari's *Demoniality* (composed c.1700 but first published in 1875), were written about the means and methods to unmask the devil's accomplices. On the other hand, in the drawn-out dispute between demonologists and sceptics, much ink was spent on exposés of the tricks and deceptions employed by those who were *pretending* to be able to perform witchcraft, to be possessed or to exorcize demons. Most famous among these was Reginald Scott's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), which presented the entire phenomenon of demonic magic as the art of the conjuror.

Nicodemism

Returning from the concern with individuals feigning sanctity or devil worship to large groups practising dissimulation, we encounter the post-Reformation large-scale phenomenon which came to be called "Nicodemism". The term "Nicodemite" was used from the early stages of the Reformation to denote Protestants or Evangelicals in Catholic countries who hesitated in professing their beliefs openly and continued to attend the ceremonies of the Catholic Church. John Calvin furiously attacked such an attitude of compromise and deceit in several of his letters and treatises from the 1530s onwards, equating it with cowardice. Calvin himself, however, in his later writings preferred to call them "*false* Nicodemites", for the biblical Nicodemus, he said, although he had first come to Jesus under the cloak of darkness, eventually became a courageous Christian, while the timid evangelicals of his own day, for fear of persecution, never exhibited the courage of their convictions. Modern-day historians borrowed the term to designate crypto-Protestantism, but each scholar offered his own explanation for religious dissimulation and attached the label to a different group of people. Marcel Bataillon, viewing European intellectual and religious developments from a Spanish perspective, attributed Nicodemism to the influence of the Marrano diaspora. He was right in pointing out the

similarities between these two populations of dissemblers and the fact that some descendants of New Christians were attracted to the irenic teachings of Nicodemistic groups, yet the phenomenon of Nicodemism was independent of the Iberian problem of *conversos* and would have probably developed in the wake of the confessional split in Europe even had the question of crypto-Judaism never arisen.

"Nicodemism was composed of various types of dissemblers whose intellectual motivation was diverse and far from unified", wrote Carlos Eire in an article published in 1979.[86] He analysed the different interpretations offered by historians in the 1960s and 1970s and concluded, rightly I believe, that Nicodemism was neither exclusively the specific Italian spiritualist movement described by Delio Cantimori,[87] nor an ideology spreading from Strasbourg, based on the ideas put forward by Otto Brunfels in his *Pandectae veteris et novis testamenti* of 1527, as was claimed by Carlo Ginzburg.[88] Nicodemism, Eire asserted, was an amorphous phenomenon, a widespread attitude among Anabaptists, spiritualists, irenics, "Moynneurs", libertines, atheists, Lutherans in non-Lutheran lands and Calvinists who were subjects of "tyrannical" rulers. I should like to extend Eire's definition and apply the epithet "Nicodemistic" to the behaviour of all Christians in Europe who were "two-faced", that is, who believed one set of doctrines but outwardly practised according to another, an extension that should allow for the inclusion of crypto-Catholics in Protestant lands.

Pretending conformity to the established church became a strategy of survival in times when a new sect needed to protect its members from persecution by the henchmen of religious authorities or when rulers adopted a new faith and attempted to impose it on their recalcitrant subjects. Thus it is not surprising that the sixteenth century, the Age of Conversion, when both these developments were taking place all over Europe, saw the proliferation of Nicodemistic practice and theory almost everywhere. And this widespread practice of dissimulation in its turn obviously deepened the concern that things were not what they seemed and that too many people were camouflaging their true religious identity.

Many who practised dissimulation simply lied out of fear, but for others the surreptitious behaviour in matters of faith evolved from a necessity of self-protection into an ideology: outward manifestations of faith were defined as meaningless; the one thing that mattered was inner belief. It was a convenient creed for a wide array of individualistic spiritualists, indifferent to all forms of organized religion; it also became a cementing doctrine for certain sects, most famously the Family of Love, the members of which believed that an underground existence of the Just would hasten the End of Days.[89]

The botanist and physician Otto Brunfels, whom Ulrich von Hutten had helped to escape from his Carthusian monastery after his conversion to Protestantism, published as early as 1527 a text, *Pandectae scripturarum*

veteris et novi Testamenti, which contained a few passages explicitly justifying dissimulation: "Among unbelievers and the obstinate we can dissimulate and feign, especially if there is no hope, because God will weigh our hearts […] It is permitted to feign and simulate before the impious in order to avoid or to prevent danger."[90] Even more explicit was Giorgio Siculo, a former Benedictine monk, who in 1550 furiously denied the assertions of Protestant leaders that those who outwardly participated in Catholic ceremonies denied Christ.[91] Similar sentiments were expressed by numerous other Christian theologians of different denominations. The harsher the repression or restrictions, the wider spread the phenomenon of simulation and dissimulation, and the more numerous became the justifications for lying – penned by non-conformists all over Europe, from Venice's Anabaptist "hidden enemies" to Catholic recusants in England.

One of the books which rationalized feigned conformity by a doctrine, and which became quite popular in the Netherlands and Germany and later in England, was Hendrick Niclaes's *The Glass of Righteousness*, printed in full between the years 1555 to 1560 and regarded as the "bible" of the Family of Love. Ceremonies, Niclaes declared, were of no importance, and wherever members of the sect found themselves they had to accept whichever religion was imposed by the authorities. Familism was probably the most elaborate and coherent Nicodemistic doctrine. The solidarity of the group was essentially built on deception and on making themselves invisible to outsiders. Familists lied to the authorities as a matter of policy: as crypto-Jews paraded with a toothpick or a hambone on Jewish fasts, as Anabaptists wore weapons to conceal their pacifism, and as other heretics feigned repentance when caught, followers of the Family of Love vehemently denounced the practice of lying. "They preserved their group solidarity by verbally denouncing it", is the succinct way in which Richard Trexler defines the solution to the problem of cohesion for members of a dispersed secret society.[92]

The extent of dissimulation and the quantity of teachings justifying religious imposture, uncovered by historians in recent decades, helps in explaining the seemingly erratic and self-serving behaviour of several prominent figures in the sixteenth century. Edward Courtenay, for example, the English aristocrat of Yorkist lineage, who had spent more than half his life in prison, was suspected of political plots against the Tudor monarchs; but since he veiled his genuine religious beliefs so well, he was also believed to be a Protestant under a Catholic government and a Catholic in Protestant lands. He then spent the last years of his life in Italy in the company of other English Nicodemites.[93] The printer Christophe Plantin, the cartographer Abraham Ortelius, the scholar and Escorial librarian Benito Arias Montano and the Neostoic philosopher Justus Lipsius are today mostly regarded as members or sympathizers of the Family of Love. Although, like the authorities at the time, we still have no way of determining with any certainty what their true faith was, there seems to be no doubt that they embraced the

Familist principle of hiding religious beliefs and that they practised outward conformity wherever their peregrinations took them.

David Joris: An Arch-Heretic in Disguise

In May 1559 the citizens of Basle witnessed a terrible spectacle: a body, buried three years earlier, was exhumed and burnt at the stake. The event must have shocked the peaceful town, with its population of approximately 10,000 people, many of them foreigners seeking asylum. Basle, a centre of the printing industry and a seat of learning which preserved the legacy of Erasmus although officially adhering to the Helvetic Confession, was probably the least zealous of the Swiss cities obeying Geneva. Montaigne, when visiting Basle in 1580, expressed admiration for its tolerant atmosphere that allowed for the peaceful co-existence of several denominations: "some calling themselves Zwinglians, others Calvinists, other Martinists [Lutherans]"; and indeed he was informed that "many still fostered the Roman religion in their heart".[94] Several of the spokesmen for toleration (such as Sebastian Castellio) resided undisturbed in Basle at the time, and almost all irenic literature of the sixteenth century was published in this city's printing establishments.[95] What, then, led the authorities to build a pyre and burn human remains in public?

To their consternation they had discovered that Johan von Brugge (Jan of Bruges), a respectable wealthy resident, who, together with his large family, had for 12 years occupied an elegant house in the centre of town and regularly attended the local Calvinist church, was in fact an impostor. He was none other than the arch-heretic David Joris, leader of a sect whose members had regarded him as a messiah – the Third David.[96] In 1544 Joris had taken on a new name and a new life of a leisured gentleman. After settling in Basle, he and his entourage, writes Gary K. Waite, "did not experience any qualms in giving the oath of allegiance, in providing their assent to the city's statement of faith, or in having their infants baptized".[97]

Joris adopted Nicodemism only after moving to Basle. The glass painter from Delft, who had been first a Lutheran and then a follower of Melchior Hoffman, became the most important Anabaptist leader in the Low Countries in the years between the fall of Anabaptist Münster in 1535 and the mid-1540s. In 1536 he experienced visions which led him to believe in his divine calling as a Third David who would usher in a new spiritual age. His pretensions to a divine mission alarmed even other Anabaptists, and Menno Simons in his *Fundamentboek* (1539) decried him as a false prophet. Joris and his followers were hounded by the authorities throughout the Netherlands and Germany; they were constantly on the run, hiding and seeking refuge with sympathizers.[98] At that stage Joris was still praising those who died a martyr's death (including his own mother in 1539), for true Christians, he believed, should be baptized by suffering.[99] In the years

1539–44, while living in Antwerp, he gained the patronage of a wealthy family and wrote the first version of his major work, *Wonder Book*.

Although David Joris shared some beliefs with the radical Anabaptists, he also came under the influence of the spiritualist Sebastian Franck, and therefore emphasized – from an early stage in his career as a sectarian – the precedence of a spiritual inner truth over externals; and he was always an opponent of religious persecution.[100] In Basle, so he promised his disciples, they would establish the New Jerusalem in their own hearts. Spiritualism eventually took precedence over Anabaptism, and in the second edition of his *Wonder Book*, published in 1551, Joris no longer identified the Third David with himself but with the Holy Spirit. This second edition of his major work enables the historian to view the shifts and changes that occurred in Joris's thoughts after his move to Basle. Unfortunately, Joris's anonymous biography (or possibly, autobiography)[101] ends with his settling in Antwerp, a few years before his transformation into Johan von Brugge. Thus his life as a religious impostor remains opaque to this day.

It is hard to believe that for 12 years, despite his flowing red beard, his striking appearance, and the hole that had been bored in his tongue in 1528 when he was found guilty of denouncing the veneration of the Holy Virgin, no one identified Johan von Brugge as the notorious heretic of the 1530s. It would not be unreasonable to assume that many of Basle's residents knew his real identity; nevertheless, the Third David died of natural causes on 25 August 1556. It was after his death that his followers split into two factions and one of the Basle Davidites made an official complaint to the city council, perhaps because of a dispute over an inheritance. Sentence on the dead heretic was passed in April 1559 and in May his body was disinterred and burned at the stake along with his books and portraits. The camp of the "Moynneurs", not as yet recovered from the burning of Michael Servetus in Geneva in 1553, experienced a second shock by the violent posthumous punishment of another non-conformist in a town that was still considered a haven for all manner of dissidents. Had there been no denunciation, however, Johan von Brugge would have rested in peace forever and historians would have continued speculating about David Joris's end.

Joris's story constitutes one of the best illustrations of religious dissimulation in the age of the Reformation, for he combined both in his teachings and in his biography the diversity of options for a non-conformist facing persecution. As a personal link between Anabaptism, spiritualism and Nicodemism, Joris experienced the entire gamut of punishment, suffering, flight, exile, dissimulation, eventually developing a justification for pretence to the extent of assuming a completely new identity. He is also a good illustration of the fear evoked in the hearts of men in authority upon the discovery of imposture – the deep anxiety which might help to explain the decision taken by the Basle magistrates (relatively tolerant of dissidents until

the 1580s) to make such a public spectacle of the posthumous punishment of David Joris, a.k.a. Johan von Brugge.

A Nicodemite Utopia

While most religious dissemblers were practising dissimulation to weather the storm, "for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast" (Isa. 27:20), there was at least one visionary who believed that the long road to the ideal Christian society ought to be paved with pretence, secrecy and nonviolent subversion. Francesco Pucci (b.Florence, 1543), a heretic even in the eyes of radical sectarians, travelled around Europe in the last three decades of the sixteenth century seeking religious truth among dissidents of all colours and gradually developing a unique utopian vision of his own. Outspoken, naïve, irascible, confused by the profusion of teachings, horrified by the slaughter caused by persecution and wars of religion, his quest for peace and unity carried him on a route winding through the widely dispersed community of radical reformers, and eventually to his death at the hands of the Roman Inquisition in 1597. Pucci's writings, ideas and itinerary were studied mainly by Italian historians in the context of the Italian heretical diaspora, but – although he himself was unable to hold his tongue, had no talent for dissembling and therefore should not be counted among impostors – at least one of his works, *Forma d'una Republica Catholica* (c.1581), has a particular relevance to any study of the early modern culture of dissimulation.[102]

Authors of blueprints for ideal societies relied in every age on a different element which could bring about the desired reformation. Renaissance utopists pinned their hopes as a rule on the goodwill of enlightened princes. Francesco Pucci, however, was proposing to save the world (or at least Christendom) with the help of several agents of change – some traditional, some unique and original. The *Forma*, together with its appendix, "Disciplina domestica", is probably the single text which could be named a "Nicodemite utopia",[103] expressing not only an ardent desire to find a solution to the worst troubles afflicting post-Reformation Europe – all of them due to the disintegration of religious unity and to religious persecution – but also faith in the efficacy of means and methods available at that particular historical moment.

The *Forma* opens with the following sentence:

> If it were possible, in a way understood by men, to find some remedy to the confusion that is seen today in our religion and Christian republic, it can be none other than by a free and holy council, to which it seems are inclined the good people in all provinces.[104]

However, this "libero e santo concilio", the good-old conciliar ideal of the past, says Pucci, would be always blocked by the evil prelates of the Church.

Therefore he proposes organizing a secret "republic" of all good people everywhere who would prepare the world for the desired council, a republic that "would compete against the corrupt body with such virtue, that within a short time it would fashion it in the desired form and restore it to health".[105] But even the virtue of all good people would not suffice without assistance from more powerful quarters:

> the hand of God which will accompany us will be more powerful than the bands of our adversaries, and with time our forces will be greater than those of our enemies […] with favour from above it is easy to overcome all difficulties, and we who have put our faith in the supreme God cannot but prosper by His hand.[106]

To his clandestine avant-garde and the help of a divine hand, however, Pucci felt he should also add the assistance from worldly powers: he urges his followers to concentrate their efforts on recruiting to their camp princes and other men of influence from among the secular authorities, for they alone could constitute a force equal to the evil might of the prelates. Yet oddly, although Pucci did show some interest in the occult (particularly during his association with the magus John Dee and his scryer Edward Kelley), he added no magical ingredients to the mixture of forces that were to bring about the establishment of the perfect republic.

Pucci was clearly not expecting his ideal society to be realized in a foreseeable future, despite the recruitment of all those powerful elements. Therefore, his text offers a plan for a secret society that should maintain itself for at least several generations, and thus it is as detailed and as concerned with practical matters as other utopias of the sixteenth century.

Wherever there were to be found a few people of integrity, "lovers of truth", who would wish to follow Pucci's plan, they should organize themselves into a "college". Each college elects three officials: a provost, a chancellor and a censor. These are elected for a term of four years by direct democratic vote of all male members over the age of 25. The officials administer the finances of the college, settle disputes, regulate marriages, select tutors for the children and arrange transfers from one college to another. The censor supervises the morals of all college members, including those of the two other officials. Moral discipline, Pucci believed, was the essential requirement for the attainment of perfection, and therefore the citizens of his secret republic would be encouraged – as in Savonarola's Florence, in Calvin's Geneva and in most Renaissance utopian societies – to spy on other members in the republic and to denounce sinners. Those found guilty would bear penalties which ranged from fines to expulsion from the secret republic. The colleges, dispersed throughout Europe, send their deputies to a central governing body, a senate or a diet. The senate meets in places where the prince is a friend of the "republic" or in large centres where the delegates can disguise themselves as merchants.

Pucci's blueprint unmistakably resembles the organization of certain Anabaptist sects (as, for example, that of David Joris's followers before their leader chose to hide under an assumed name in Basle) in several respects: clandestine cells dispersed throughout Europe, delegates meeting in friendly territories or in disguise, moral supervision and exclusion from the sect as the maximal penalty. Pucci, however, preached the opposite to Anabaptist separatism: his "citizens" would serve the local magistrates in total obedience, since his citizens – as was taught by all the magisterial reformers – were appointed by God to govern and to keep the peace. The members of his secret society were not the Godly *elect*, who should keep themselves apart from this world of evil and await heavenly reward, but rather a *select* group of honest people who would strive by peaceful (clandestine) means to restore the world to its prelapsarian harmony.

If there was at the time a group that could have served as a model for Pucci's society it was the Family of Love: an organized and clandestine spiritual church composed of "lovers of virtue" dispersed throughout Europe, tied by masonic bonds promising mutual assistance, indifferent to ceremonies and justifying confessional simulation, aspiring to unity and harmony, obedient to the civil magistrates and preparing the ground for the great reform. A basic concept shared by Pucci and Hendrik Niclaes, the founder of the Family of Love, was perfectionism – the belief in the fundamental goodness of humanity which could overcome original sin and allow human society to attain perfection. In his restless peregrinations Pucci encountered several persons known to have contacts with the Family of Love such as the great Neostoic philosopher, Justus Lipsius, whose frequent change of religious affiliation was typical of the Nicodemistic behaviour of the Family. Nonetheless, it seems doubtful that Pucci was actually a member of the *Familia Caritatis* – particularly since he never expressed the sectarian need for a charismatic leader (as Niclaes saw himself) nor did he share the social aspirations of the other varieties of Familism which developed on the continent and in England. Most importantly, there is no church in Pucci's republic where all religious rituals are to be conducted within the family home: the father leads the prayers and readings from the Bible at family gatherings; there is neither an ecclesiastical hierarchy nor any form of public worship; its theological doctrines are only the fundamentals accepted by all Christians. Except for a daily expression of faith in God the creator, in his son Jesus Christ who was crucified and resurrected, in the Holy Spirit, in the holy and universal Church, and in eternal life, no other dogmas are imposed and all matters pertaining to form and practice are left to each paterfamilias. Such basic Christianity, toleration of variety and absence of ecclesiastical structure and discipline were practically the opposite of the *Ordo sacerdotis* (c.1568), which had been Niclaes's plan for an elaborate and rigid priestly hierarchy that would rule over a theocratic society to be established in some eschatological future.

Francesco Pucci's own activities were all carried out in the open, and it seems that by temperament this Italian exile and wanderer had little patience for prudence and concealment. He expressed his radical opinions so loudly and openly that he was expelled not only from Oxford but also from the relatively tolerant town of Basle, from the séances organized by John Dee and Edward Kelly and from the company of the Antitrinitarians in Cracow. Nevertheless, he was constantly moving in circles of known dissenters, and could easily be suspected of transmitting radical ideas from one hotbed of heterodoxy to another. By the time the Roman inquisition finally laid its hands on him (1594), he had openly published enough heretical material to have all his works put on the Index of Prohibited Books and for him to be convicted as a relapsed heretic. But, appropriately, his plan for a Nicodemite secret society, the *Forma d'una Republica Catholica*, remained concealed for centuries as an anonymous single manuscript, hidden from the eyes of all impostor-hunters.

Pucci's ideal society, had the authorities laid their hands on it, was certainly their worst nightmare: an organized underground of dedicated reformers. It had all the dangerous components: disguise and dissimulation, conspiratorial cells, covert actions to recruit influential patrons, secret signals known to members only, ambivalent language, elusive leadership, cells modelled upon the organization of heretical-revolutionary groups, and explicitly directed at toppling the existing religious order.

In the Inquisition prison in Rome, where he spent his final years, Pucci shared his ideas with his cellmate, Tommaso Campanella. Campanella (who by feigning madness succeeded in evading the fate of contemporary heretics such as Giulio Cesare Vanini, Pucci, Giordano Bruno and other dissemblers),[107] was later to influence another major utopist, Johann Valentin Andreae. Pucci can thus be regarded as a link between the Family of Love and the Rosicrucians.[108] For it was not only the utopian urge which these radical thinkers had in common, but also the association with secret societies – organizations which were to raise a new wave of fear in the early seventeenth century and anxieties which were related to concealment outside the realm of religion.[109]

Crypto-atheists?

Much historiographical water has gone under the bridge since Lucien Febvre's dismissal of the possibility of speculative atheism existing in the sixteenth century.[110] However, notwithstanding the rejection of Febvre's thesis by most historians of religiosity, finding clear-cut examples of "free-thinkers" before the early Enlightenment remains a difficult task. Hardly anyone in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries openly admitted repudiation of all religious belief, although the words "atheist" or "libertine" were often hurled as terms of abuse and accusation. As with the word

"Nicodemite", it was Calvin – in his fear of all sorts of "scandals" – who introduced these terms into the vocabulary of religious polemics,[111] although he apparently did not make a clear distinction between spiritualists who negated the need for rituals and people who denied the existence of God. And as with "Nicodemite" (and "charlatan"), the appearance of a new word did not necessarily mean that the phenomenon itself was either new or that it even actually existed. But it did indicate that more than a few contemporaries believed that there was some particular form of behaviour or a particular identity which merited a new term. Unbelief and the claim that all gods and all religious dogmas had been human inventions were, of course, attitudes with a long history by the time of the Reformation, though for obvious reasons hardly ever openly declared during the Christian era. However, should we include crypto-atheists among the various categories of early modern impostors?

Some of the religious chameleons discussed below were quite probably unbelievers, although there is no way of knowing whether it was their repudiation of all religion which allowed them to move so easily from one denomination to another or whether their unbelief was the end result of their close acquaintance with a variety of creeds. Also, some well-known suspects, particularly from among Italian humanists – Pietro Pomponazzi Niccolò Machiavelli, Francesco Guicciardini, Girolamo Cardano, Paolo Sarpi, to name but a few – are still subject to debates about the extent of their repudiation of Christianity. Christian Francken – in turn Lutheran, Jesuit, Antitrinitarian and author of *Disputatio de incertitudine Religionis Christianae* – should very probably be on both lists: a chameleon who ended up denying the validity of all religions.[112]

Yet there is a line, fine though it may be, between disguising one's thoughts and practising prudence on the one hand, and presenting to the world an identity different from your own on the other hand. Mental reservation is perhaps a "way of lying", but it is not necessarily a form of imposture. There were undoubtedly numerous intellectuals who avoided expressing their scepticism about the teachings of the official church, but this did not make them fully fledged Nicodemites. Also, while hunts were conducted for crypto-Jews, crypto-Muslims, clandestine Alumbrados and Familists, false beatas and popish plotters, there was no systematic search for atheists: the concern with the danger posed by freethinkers remained mostly within the realm of theological polemics.

Condescension towards the masses for their naïve and vulgar beliefs, dissociation between inner views and public conformity, practising prudence in publications by employing all necessary devices to throw authorities off the scent – these were the common attitudes held by most intellectuals who dissented from the official state religion. Nevertheless, a few did cross that fine line between simply keeping silent about their doubts and practising all the subterfuges of religious impostors; one or two of them were eventually found out and punished for their scandalous opinions.

Giulio Cesare Vanini (1585–1619), "prince of the libertines",[113] was probably one of the earliest genuine atheist impostors to be uncovered and (savagely) executed. Pierre Bayle crowned him "Europe's only martyr for atheism". He began his short adult life as a Carmelite friar, but then he – like many other troubled souls of his time – left the order, fled (to England), apostatized back and forth, was imprisoned, moved from one place to another, lived in Toulouse under an assumed name (Pompeo Uciglio) and apparently made his living by practising medicine – a profession for which he had no training. His first book, *Amphitheatrum aeternae providentiae divino-magico*, published in France in 1615, was ostensibly an attack on atheists, but in fact he employed in it the tactic (used earlier by Pierre Charron and soon after by Tommaso Campanella)[114] of leaving the defence of Christianity to the weaker interlocutor who offered lame arguments. A year later, at the age of 31, he wrote an open and very audacious attack on revealed religion in general and on Christianity in particular, *De admirandis naturae reginae deaeque mortalium arcanis*, arguing that the universe was governed only by the laws of nature and depicting Jesus Christ as a full-blown impostor.[115] After that neither his strategies of dissimulation nor his charisma, which earned him the support of many influential patrons, could save him from condemnation and the stake.

In sum, although it is by now no longer possible, in view of the evidence uncovered by historians in texts and in trial records of people of all levels of society, to firmly deny that there were atheists in sixteenth-century Europe, it is nevertheless still the accepted opinion that the pivotal period for the emergence of atheism was the early Enlightenment, during "la crise de la conscience européenne", as Paul Hazard described the years 1680–1715. Furthermore, in their hunt for subversive thought and behaviour, at least until the mid-seventeenth century, the authorities were far more concerned with groups of religious dissemblers than with the isolated cases of crypto-atheists.

Turning (Turk) and Returning

The other side of the coin of mass conversions to Christianity was the conversion of Christians to Islam. Although few such converts within Christian states are known to historians (except for a handful of cases of Christians who embraced Islam in Spain, particularly the small community of renegades in the Kingdom of Granada), research in recent decades has revealed the astonishing extent of the early modern phenomenon of Islamizing and "turning Turk" all around the Mediterranean and further to the east. The masses of Christians who turned Muslim included local populations in the territories conquered by the Ottomans; children forcibly taken from their parents and brought up as Muslims in Istanbul or in other parts of the Empire, some of whom destined to attain the highest positions among the

ruling classes; tens of thousands of captives of the North African corsairs (often "renegades" themselves) who elected to convert for a whole array of reasons; and an unknown number of Christian merchants and travellers who changed their religion for safety, for gain or in order to escape some unpleasantness at home. Dressed as Arabs and disguised as Muslims, the last explored foreign lands even before the age of exploration. Some of them lived to tell or write the tales of their experience.

The Venetian Nicolò de' Conti, whose travels in the 1420s were related by Poggio Bracciolini,[116] learned Arabic while in Damascus and Persian while in Kalhat, where he also "adopted the dress of the country and this he continued to wear during the whole of his journey". He appears to have been one of the first among many "travellers in disguise" in the East who reported their adventures and admitted feigning apostasy. As a penance for his renunciation of Christianity during his wanderings, Pope Eugenius IV ordered him to relate his history to Poggio Bracciolini, the papal secretary, who would write about Conti, "when on his return from the Indias he had arrived at the confines of Egypt on the Red Sea, he was compelled to renounce his faith, not so much from fear of his own death as from the danger which threatened his wife and children who accompanied him".[117]

Half a century later a more colourful report was penned by the Bolognese Ludovico di Varthema. Varthema, who apparently travelled for no other reason but to satisfy his curiosity, and was perhaps the first European to visit Mecca and Medina, was a master of disguise. If we believe his stories, his roles during six years of travel (1502–08) included a Mameluk guard for a caravan from Damascus to Mecca, an artillery engineer, a pilgrim, a madman, a lover of a Muslim princess, a poor Moorish beggar, a physician, a Muslim saint, a military spy and a Christian knight – a wonderful picaresque figure *avant la lettre*. His behaviour appeared more shocking to his nineteenth-century editor than to his own contemporaries: "Such a violation of conscience is not justifiable by the end which the renegade may have in view [...] deserved odium which all honest men attach to apostasy and hypocrisy", expostulated George Percy Badger in the pages of the first English edition of the adventurer's story.[118]

Varthema's description of an episode in Aden, where he simulated madness when suspected of being a Christian spy, is worth quoting (though these lines should come with a warning for animal lovers among the readers):

> A sheep was passing through the king's court, the tail of which weighed forty pounds. I seized it and demanded of it if it was a Moor, or a Christian, or, in truth, a Jew; and repeating these words to it and many others I said: "Prove yourself a Moor and say, Leila illala Mahometh resullala"; and he, standing like a patient animal which could not speak, I took a stick and broke all its four legs. The queen stood there laughing, and afterwards fed me for three days on the flesh of it; I do not know that

> I ever ate better. Three days afterwards I killed, in the same manner I had killed the sheep, an ass which was carrying water to the palace, because he would not become a Moor.[119]

Such was Ludovico de Varthema's way of expressing a trenchant satire on every kind of forced conversion. He was ridiculing the policy of forcing Christians, Jews and pagans to become Muslims, but in the first decade of the sixteenth century his satire was just as pertinent to Spain and its colonies, where Muslims, Jews and pagans were being forced to become good Catholics – and when they did not comply, their compatriots would beat them with a stick and feed well "on their flesh".

The necessity to travel in Muslim disguise through North Africa and Arabia seemed obvious to the Portuguese emissaries to Prester John, and it became such a *topos* in travel literature of the period that David Reuveni, the false ambassador of the Lost Tribes of Israel (see Chapter 3), in imitation of such travelogues and in order to glorify his adventures, also claimed to have gone disguised as a Muslim from the Desert of Habor in Arabia, through East Africa, Egypt, Gaza and Jerusalem. And if not as Muslims, Europeans who wished to visit the Ottoman-ruled Holy Land were at least forced to disguise themselves as subjects of rulers who were considered to be the Sublime Porte's allies. Thus, for example, the Czech nobleman and composer, Kryštof Harant, who had served his emperor, Rudolf II, as a soldier against the Turkish army, related in his travelogue how he and his companions disguised themselves as Venetian Franciscan friars when they travelled to Palestine in 1598–99.[120]

But disguise in order to facilitate travel was not a major concern for European churches and rulers; it was rather the very large number of persons who left their homelands and adopted other masters, other countries and another religion, because, as Geoffrey Vaughn Scammell explains,

> economic disaster, poverty, religious bigotry, intolerance, oppression and lack of opportunity at home drove ambitious or disgruntled Europeans […] to flee from their mother countries to neighbouring states, to join the Ottomans in the Levant, to become Muslim corsairs in North Africa, to take their chance among the Africans of Guinea or the Indians of North America. But no call was stronger and more insistent than that of the Orient.[121]

Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, in her study of the major Portuguese chroniclers of the empire in Asia, discovered thousands of European renegades who had entered the pay of local rulers in India or Persia, teaching their new masters the use of gunpowder and other European "secrets".[122]

Since all Iberian ships in the early modern period were at least partly manned by vagabonds or other "criminals" whose punishment was commuted

to exile and service in the colonies and *feitorias*, it was hardly surprising that so many chose the freedom and far better employment conditions offered by African and Asian rulers over their life as over-worked sailors on Spanish and Portuguese ships. Others sought not freedom but adventure. Many converted to Islam and settled down in the East, raising a family and sometimes amassing fame and fortunes, some became interpreters for new European arrivals, others served as double agents. Varthema reported meeting in the early years of the sixteenth century two Italians, Giovanni Maria and Piero Antonio, who were manufacturing artillery in Calicut. He tried to rescue them and obtained for them a safe conduct from the Portuguese Viceroy, but they were murdered before they succeeded in escaping and returning to the Christian community.

Such European expatriates, whether deserters, mutineers and desperadoes, or simply adventurers, fill not only the pages of the Portuguese and Spanish chronicles, but are also encountered in practically every European travelogue – from the fifteenth century until well into the eighteenth century. Most frequently the definition of the converted Christian was as someone who had "turned Turk", accepting not only the Muslim faith but also the enemy's garb and culture. The turban represented the most distinguished characteristic of Turkish appearance; wearing a turban was therefore the clearest sign of belonging to the enemy's camp in both a religious and a political sense.

The numbers of Christians who converted to Islam during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries must have run to many tens of thousands of people if not more.[123] Recent historiography has taught us that during those centuries, in many parts of Europe and not necessarily only in the regions bordering on Ottoman territories, the spectre of losing believers to Allah became one of the major concerns of authorities and simple folk alike. The convert to Islam, writes Nabil Matar, "developed into an important dramatic type in English drama […] he represented the enemy within".[124] The fear was enhanced by propaganda, which would often present the converts to Islam as both religious and political traitors, as well as by the continuous campaign to raise ransom money to release the captives from their terrible sufferings at the hands of the Moors (see Chapter 4).

My concern here, however, is neither with all captives nor even with all "renegades", but only with those among the converts to Islam who returned to Europe and then claimed that their apostasy had been external only while they kept faith with Christ in their hearts. In other words, the relevant group for the purpose of this study is of those among the apostates who presented European authorities with the same problem which, as we saw, was so high on their agenda for several other reasons – the question of false conversion. How was one to know if they had "turned Turk" only to save their skins while remaining faithful to Christ in their hearts? How genuine was their remorse? Could they be serving more than one master?

An excellent example of such worries and suspicions is to be found in John Evelyn's 1669 treatise, *The History of the Three Late Famous Imposters*, which he wrote as a warning against men who converted from one religion to another with dishonest intentions. Although Evelyn borrowed the title for his work from the anonymous "De tribus impostoribus", he used the term "imposter" in a sense closer to our own today – an inventor of identity – than to its meaning in mid-seventeenth literature on the founders of the three monotheistic religions (see below). His first rogue was one Padre Ottomano, who claimed to be the legitimate heir of Sultan Ibrahim ("the Mad");[125] another was the Jewish false messiah, Shabbetai Zvi (see below), and in-between the two he narrated the "story of Mahomed Bei, who calls Himself Joannes Michael Cigala; Being at the Writing hereof in the Court of England". Cigala claimed that he had converted to Christianity while dissembling Islam in order to serve the Christian cause in the Ottoman Empire. But, Evelyn continued, the "Bei" was in fact born a Christian and converted to Islam for self-serving reasons. He first attempted to deceive the French monarch and then, in 1668, tried his ruses at the court of England, but was unmasked by a Persian convert, Pietro Cesii, living in Rome, who had also exposed Padre Ottomano. Cigala, according to Evelyn's sources, was a Wallachian adventurer, a "monstrous imposter" and a "perfect Renegado".[126] The man calling himself Joannes Michael Cigala was presenting himself as the son of one of the most famous "renegades" of his day, Cigalazade Yusuf Sinan Pasha (or Scipione Cicala according to his Italian name) – scion of an aristocratic Genoese family who had converted to Islam to become eventually Grand Admiral and Grand Vizier in the Sultan's service. According to Gino Benzoni, author of the entry on Scipione Cicala in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, the man pretending to be the Grand Vizier's son, the pseudo-Bei, was accorded at first a warm welcome in European courts because it was believed that his conversion to Christianity constituted a form of compensation for the apostasy of the man whom he claimed had been his father.[127]

In the end Cigala was exposed as an impostor and a liar in more respects than one. But it was not his kind of bluff that was troubling ecclesiastical authorities. Their problem was with penitent Christians who had forsaken Christ and had lived part of their life dressed as Turks or Moors, professing faith in Islam. Could their assertion that they had apostatized under duress and only feigned adherence to Muhammad be believed? Was their remorse genuine? How far could renegades be trusted? What could be regarded as reliable evidence that they remained true Christians in their hearts throughout their years in Muslim lands?

It was mostly the Catholic Church, however, with its inquisitions, which spent much time and effort on the question of how to treat these ex-renegades. And it is thanks to the meticulous records kept by its tribunals, together with the new books of instructions for inquisitors and theological

treatises on the matter, that historians were able to draw the perimeters of this particular phenomenon of religious dissimulation and its impact on early modern European fears and worries.

Bartolomé and Lucille Bennassar studied 1550 such cases of repentant renegades in the archives of the Spanish tribunals; Lucetta Scaraffia checked many inquisition archives in Italy as well as inquisitors' manuals in order to comprehend the mind of the returning convert; Giorgio Rota examined a dozen cases of subjects of the Spanish Crown who appeared before the Venetian Inquisition; Nabil Matar and Daniel Vitkus combed through sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English drama, diaries and other documents for descriptions of captivity in Muslim lands and attitudes to those who "turned Turk" and then returned to their homeland.[128] All these studies reveal the complex and ambivalent attitudes of the churches and of public opinion towards those returnees from Dar-al Islam.

The sheer number of the returning "renegades", and the need to facilitate reconciliation, forced the Catholic Church to draw a clear distinction between those who converted to Islam "with their heart" ("anche con il cuore") and those who did so only under duress and only went through the motions. For the latter the penance was very light. Even Jesuits advocated to the Christian inhabitants of the island of Chios, while it was under Ottoman rule, to adopt Islam publicly and to practise Christianity in secret.

Such a distinction had far-reaching consequences. First of all, this was the one case in which the Church openly condoned lying, defining this form of dissimulation as a positive thing, *pietosa menzogna* (the religious equivalent of the *dissimulata onestà*). Second, if the Church accepted the notion that what mattered was faith "in the heart" and secret practices at home – then was not the Catholic Church accepting in fact a Nicodemistic argument? Indeed, John Calvin and Johannes Oecolampadius warned against leniency towards Christians feigning fidelity to Islam, since they realized that such an attitude might open the floodgates of acceptance of other forms of dissimulation. Moreover, was not the acceptance of the precedence of inner belief only one step away from the Lutheran recognition of the difference between the inner soul and the outer person, and only a very short distance from Lutheran *solafideism*? Furthermore, if Christian converts to Islam were to be judged by their beliefs only, why were Marranos and Moriscos condemned by their actions – was that not an unacceptable double standard? And why, reflected even Pope Clement VII, if forced conversion of Christians to Islam was so easily condoned, should the Church not allow forced converts to Christianity to return to Judaism or to Islam without penalizing them as heretics?[129] Thus, Clement VII's bull *Sempiterno regi* (1533), admitting that forced conversion could often lead to dissimulation, pardoned *conversos* who had been accused of Judaizing. Similar sentiments were expressed in his letter to Solomon Molcho in 1530,[130] an indication perhaps that the Pope's sympathy for the Jewish prophet was an additional reason for

his re-evaluation of the Church's policy towards coerced conversions. However, the debate on how to treat false Christians did not last beyond the 1530s and the Catholic Church continued to maintain the double standard: willingness to erase conversion to Islam from the biography of a penitent Christian, but refusal to allow Jews to expunge their adherence to Christianity, however feigned.

Secret Converts to Judaism?

In contrast to the very large numbers of Jews and Muslims who converted to Christianity and of Christians who converted to Islam in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we know of no more than a handful of cases of Christians who converted to Judaism during those same centuries[131] (that is, if we exclude Marranos who *re*verted to Judaism whenever and wherever they could do so without fear). A few Hebraists and other Renaissance intellectuals flirted with Judaism, a number of Antitrinitarians stressed their close affinity to the Jewish faith, but not many actually took the bold step of apostatizing, as would be done towards the end of the eighteenth century by Lord George Gordon.[132]

There were no social or economic benefits to be had from abandoning Christianity for Judaism; on the contrary, until the Enlightenment it would have been a most dangerous step in most European countries. Furthermore, Jewish proselytizing has always been negligible and Jewish communities have never been very welcoming to converts: when one or two Moriscos tried (for reasons unknown) to convert to Judaism in Amsterdam in the mid-seventeenth century, the community refused to accept them.[133] Therefore, the few who adopted Judaism despite all these risks and hurdles did so out of conviction and not out of necessity or a wish to improve their situation.

Nonetheless we do know of one or two persons in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who, though having no Jewish background, chose to convert and lived secretly as Jews until they were unmasked, tried and executed. One such story, made famous by Pierre Bayle, who used it as an example of Calvinist intolerance, was that of Nicholas Antoine. Born c.1602 in Lorraine to a Catholic family and educated by Jesuits, Antoine first converted to Calvinism in his early twenties and studied at the academies of Sedan and Geneva, but then he reached the conclusion that the truth was contained only in the Old Testament. Rabbis in Venice and Padua refused to circumcise him and advised him to adhere to his Jewish faith in secret. Thus he lived for a number of years as a tutor in Geneva and then accepted a position of a pastor in a small village near the city, where he observed the Jewish Law at home and preached to his flock sermons with as little Christian content as possible. His disguise, however, was not good enough to protect him. After he was denounced he suffered from what today would have been diagnosed as a nervous breakdown – real or feigned we have no

way of knowing. But the asylum did not save him from a charge of heresy, arrest and trial in Geneva, during which he continued to insist on his adherence to Judaism. Appeals for clemency were refused particularly because of his "hypocrisy" – hiding his Jewish identity under a pastor's frock. In April 1632 the young impostor was sentenced to be strangled and then burned at the stake – a death slightly more merciful than the one suffered by Giulio Cesare Vanini for his atheism 13 years earlier in Toulouse.[134]

Antoine, however, was undoubtedly an exceptional case. Conversions to Judaism in general were rare and secret conversions to the Jewish faith even rarer. A subterfuge more common, in order to avoid falling under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition, was adopted by Marranos who reverted to Judaism in Italy and pretended that they had never been baptized, in some cases claiming to be Levantine Jews who had never resided in Catholic lands. From our point of view they, too, were impostors in a certain sense, for they rewrote their autobiography or falsified their personal history by denying an entire chapter in their life in which they had possessed a different religious identity – all because the Catholic Church regarded baptism as an indelible mark of affiliation. The Venetian State authorities, on the other hand, tended to turn a blind eye on such subterfuges, preferring their subjects to be living openly as Jews, unmolested, than as feigned Christians who were always under suspicion.

The messianic movement led by Shabbetai Zvi gave birth to several new forms of religious dissimulation among Jews and former Jews. After Shabbetai's conversion to Islam in 1666, whether genuine or feigned, a few hundreds of his followers formally adopted Islam and became known as *dönmeh* ("those who turn"). They established communities of their own and continued to live in the Ottoman Empire, mostly in Salonika, as both crypto-Jews and crypto-Sabbateans for generations to come. Some *dönmeh* communities survive to this day and their hybrid culture attracts a fair amount of scholarly attention. A number of converts to Islam – how many of them we shall never know – later returned to the Jewish community and concealed the Muslim chapter in their history, in the same manner and partly for similar reasons that returning *conversos* denied their Christian past. In addition, some Jews who remained Sabbateans despite the trauma caused by their leader's apostasy, hid the devotion to their messiah and returned to the bosom of their Jewish communities. In some cases these crypto-Sabbateans even signed excommunications issued by rabbis against the followers of Shabbetai Zvi, thus covering their dissimulation by another coat of deceit. Following his apostasy Shabbetai Zvi himself continued to move between devotion to Islam and loyalty to Judaism. The Turks eventually accused him of attempting to proselytize and convince Muslims to adopt his Kabbalistic-Jewish doctrines. But even if these accusations were true, the number of non-Jews who "Judaized" under the influence of the messiah from Smyrna was insignificant.[135]

Nevertheless, despite the minute proportions of the phenomenon of conversion (rather than reversion) to Judaism, certain regions in Europe were overcome from time to time by a wave of panic that Jews were trying to tempt large sections of society away from Christianity. Such rumours circulated, for example, in Poland and Lithuania in the 1530s,[136] and apparently also accompanied Solomon Molcho's meeting with Charles V in Regensburg in 1532, alarming even the level-headed Melanchthon and provoking his attack on false messiahs. These anxieties were enhanced by the circulation of stories, mostly in German lands, about the Red Jews who were expected to descend on Europe from the Land of Gog and Magog, and by recurring rumours that Jews were buying arms with the intention of rising in order to take their revenge on the Gentiles.[137] An even more frightening legend in German vernacular was about the Antichrist presenting himself to the Jews as their messiah: according to this tale of horror, in order to persuade the Jews to follow him and aid him in the struggle against the forces of faithful Christians, the Antichrist circumcised himself and established his seat in the Jewish temple which was rebuilt in Jerusalem.[138] Antichrist impersonating a Jewish Messiah was a unique variation on the many connections invented down the ages linking Judaism to the forces of evil.

Divided Souls

Despite the astonishing prevalence of religious dissimulation in all its forms, we have few ways today to penetrate the mind of the religious impostor. Since the necessity to hide one's religious beliefs is, with few exceptions, quite foreign to life in the modern Western world, it is as difficult for us to think with dissemblers as it is to think with demons. The closest comparable experience in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is that of dissidents living under totalitarian regimes (such as crypto-Zionists in the Soviet Union or Communists under fascist governments). Although the inquisitions or consistories of the sixteenth century could not have created anything resembling the Stalinist or Nazi machineries of oppression, the psychological problems for the individual dissembler were probably similar in both situations.

In a period when nationalism provided only a very weak component, if at all, of a person's identity, religious affiliation played a major role in one's self-definition. Changing such an affiliation, even by genuine conversion, would necessarily have had deep-reaching implications for one's psychological integrity; and feigning loyalty to one faith while inwardly belonging to another would have been, undoubtedly, a painful fracture in one's sense of identity – "divided souls" is thus a most apposite epithet for religious impostors.[139] In addition, even without resorting to psychohistory, it would seem obvious that living a lie, leading a double life, being constantly on guard, mistrusting neighbours and one's own family members,

would exact a heavy mental toll. It is plain that the psychological makeup of those thousands of men and women who felt forced to adopt duplicity was a far cry from the mental disposition of the daredevil impostor who thrives on the excitement of risk-taking (the "catch me if you can" type). Autobiographies and confessions of dissemblers reveal that they often suffered painful anguish and despair.

These torments could arise as a result of being torn between religious loyalty and family affection when – as so often happened in the Age of Conversion – one member of the family converted and another did not; children could be a source of anxiety, since they needed to be taught secrecy at a young and tender age, which could result in all sorts of trouble. Some dissemblers were tormented by guilt over their renunciation of the truth; others lived in fear of divine punishment. A good example was Francesco Spiera, a lawyer with 12 children to feed and a leader of a small secret evangelical community near Vicenza, who experienced all these torments of religious imposture.[140] Such deep anxieties intensified messianic expectations or found expression in dreams about paradises of toleration or about promised lands: for Marranos the havens were Holland, Italy, the Ottoman Empire, including Palestine, or a hidden kingdom of the Lost Tribes; for Moriscos, North Africa and the entire Muslim world; for Anabaptists and other radical sects, Moravia, Transylvania or the New World.

When dissemblers finally reached a refuge, where they hoped they could safely revert to their old religion and finally practise openly the faith proscribed in their homeland, they often did not find the transition easy or simple. Amsterdam in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed some tragic attempts at integration into the Jewish community after several generations of familiarity only with the diluted Judaism of the Marranos;[141] Spanish Moriscos frequently encountered hostility and scorn when they settled among their co-religionists in North Africa; returning "renegades", as we saw, were not always welcomed with open arms; political upheavals could cause the reversal of tolerant policies, as happened in Basle and Poland at the end of the sixteenth century, which would force the refuge-seekers to take once more the road to exile or to dissimulation.

The fact that quite a few people asked to return to their former "vale of tears", to the homeland where they had once suffered suspicion and persecution, is evidence that relocation was not always the hoped-for solution for forced converts. "It is a hard thing to cut oneself from one's roots", simply stated Abraham Israel when describing the crisis he experienced by the move to Amsterdam and the return to Judaism.[142] And for many a Spanish Marrano and a Morisco the roots were in the Iberian Peninsula, deeply planted in Spanish civilization. Antonio Enríquez Gómez, son to a family of "Judaizers", returned to Spain, after living for 12 years among Marranos in Bordeaux and Rouen. In Spain he lived under several false names; as Fernando de Zárate he became a popular playwright; under another alias he

was burnt in effigy in Seville in 1660 (while he stood in the crowd watching the *auto de fe*); in 1661 he was arrested by the Inquisition for bigamy, his real identity was discovered and he died in prison in 1663. Why did he go back to Spain? "Quite simply because his identity was Spanish. He wanted to be both Spanish and Jewish in a country which held such divided loyalty to be treasonous. As a writer, he feared losing his attachment to his language, and as a playwright he needed a Spanish audience", writes Constance Rose.[143]

Thus, while the Spanish-Jewish poet of the twelfth century, Judah ha-Levi, expressed his longing for the Land of Israel, "My heart is in the East, and I am at the ends of the West", half a millennium later ex-Marranos in Istanbul or in Italy were complaining, with a deep sigh of longing, that their heart had remained behind in the West.

However, despite risks and agonies, dissembling had its own advantages. All historians who examined the experience of religious impostors noticed that being a member of a clandestine group created strong bonds of fellowship, a sense of belonging to an extended family (Hendrick Niclaes's choice of "Familia" for his group of followers expressed it well). As with other types of secret societies, there was a sense of exhilaration in fooling the authorities and all outsiders, satisfaction in evolving a secret handshake, a coded language and a hidden world.[144] Furthermore, while sincere converts became quite often the worst enemies of their former co-religionists, holier-than-thou fanatics who assisted in digging deeper chasms between religious communities (a typical example being the figure of Antonius Margaritha, author of the 1530 book, *Der gantze Jüdisch Glaub* [*The Whole Jewish Belief*], which influenced Luther's anti-Jewish views), dissemblers on the other hand were mostly irenic, seeking common denominators and attempting to build bridges over those chasms. The many thousands of these men and women who lived in the grey areas between worlds served, in the long run, to blur differences and to reduce animosities.

Finally, there was a small group among the many religious dissemblers who had not two but multiple identities. They were the ones who changed their religious adherence several times, adapting to their surroundings, adopting the defence tactics of the chameleon. "Conversion to another religion became a sort of passport for those who were forced to live, quite literally, on the margins of society",[145] write Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers of persons such as Samuel Pallache, a North African Jew who travelled in Europe as a Catholic or as a Protestant according to necessity. In Italy and in Iberia an unknown number of Jews, many of them members of an Ibero-Jewish underclass (to use David Graizbord's term), shunned by the Jewish elites, underwent baptism more than once, either to take advantage of the benefits accorded to neophytes or to facilitate their travel back and forth between countries. All of them repeatedly re-invented themselves.[146] In German lands, too, Jews converting several times solely for the "gift of baptism" (*Taufgeschenk*) was a well-known phenomenon, which deepened

the suspicion that all converts remained Jews at heart and that their Jewishness could not be erased by baptism.[147]

Other types of chameleons were intellectuals, such as Justus Lipsius who, as a Neostoic philosopher and a friend of Familists, apparently had no compunctions about pledging his allegiance to whichever confession was dominant in the university where he was teaching. And then there were some free spirits who, like Christian Francken, travelled through almost all churches and sects. Multiple allegiances and existence on the margins, say some scholars, enabled the impostor to choose the most beneficial and suitable elements with which to build their own identities, and this could mark them as the first autonomous, modern individuals.[148]

The true thoughts and feelings of the religious impostor, despite the expansion of research into the *identita dissimulata*,[149] will always elude us, partly because of the culture of secrecy, partly because our main avenue of approach into such a person's inner self is by Inquisition and other trial records – documents which are notoriously problematic as a reliable reflection of the defendant's mind. The quantity of ego-documents from the early modern period is altogether quite small and practically non-existent for dissemblers. The few autobiographical pieces which were written by religious impostors were often part of their camouflage or were offered by way of an *apologia pro vita sua*. Hopefully the growing number of books dedicated to such individuals – Luis de Carvajal (based on his unique autobiography),[150] Isaac Orbio de Castro,[151] Isaac Cardoso,[152] Samuel Pallache,[153] Leandro Tisanio,[154] Benedetta Carlini,[155] Cecilia Ferrazi,[156] Lucrecia de León,[157] Francisca de los Apóstoles[158] – will serve as shafts that may help us peer into the inner world of religious impostors who lived half a millennium ago.

From Dissimulation to Atheism

An overview of religious life in Christian Europe during the Age of Confessionalization (or the Age of Conversion, or the Age of the Inquisition) inevitably leads to the conclusion that a common denominator in the preoccupation of all church authorities, spilling over to the lay authorities, was the fixation on dissimulation. It was not only the widespread preoccupation with the "plague of heresy", but the predominant fear of clandestine heresies, faked identities and invented religious personae.

Spanish and Portuguese Catholics who were in fact crypto-Jews or crypto-Muslims; Jews shedding their Catholic past; *Alumbrados* hiding their light under a bushel; penitents claiming (falsely?) that their identities as converts to Islam had been faked; Calvinists emulating the persona of Nicodemus before he had gathered up the courage to admit his faith in Jesus in the light of day; Catholics attending Anglican rites; Anabaptists everywhere wearing a mask or inventing new identities for themselves; spiritualists advocating pretence; clandestine "families" who turned imposture into an ideology; indifferent

atheists; feigned contrition; false *beatas*; false prophets and messiahs; false witches – wherever one looked, there was no way of knowing what was the "real" or "true" confessional identity of one's neighbour and what was a mask or a form of deceit. The criminalization of religious imposture may have occurred only in post-Tridentine Catholic countries, but the preoccupation with the problem existed long before dissimulation was defined as a separate category of heresy. Contrary to the declaration attributed to Queen Elizabeth I, governments everywhere did desire to make windows into their subjects' souls and to be able to control not only their behaviour but also their innermost thoughts.

Michel Foucault's "disciplining paradigm" emphasized the growing centralization of European governments and their quest for as much social control as the state could muster. Some such tendencies could be seen in the policies towards dissidents in general and towards "hidden enemies" in particular. But Foucault and his disciples ignored the reciprocal relations between the various "ways of lying" and the obsession of early modern authorities, not so much with control, but primarily with transparency and visibility. The war conducted by the centralizing establishments of Renaissance and Reformation Europe was against illusion and imposture, against building opaque walls around the private sphere to enable concealment, and not specifically against individual freedoms.

The prevalence of the preoccupation with religious dissimulation was a phenomenon specific to the early modern centuries, not a chapter in the course of modernization. It grew into immense proportions at the time of the great religious clashes and of the attempts by governments to impose on all their subjects a single unified religious identity. However, this specific preoccupation would disappear in the West long before the tribunals of the inquisitions were officially dismantled – once it became more or less generally accepted that one's religious belief or unbelief was a private matter.

Tension or contradiction between the post-Tridentine stress on emotional life and the focus on meditation and a rich interior life on the one hand, and the fear that personal spirituality would become a clandestine and subversive position on the other hand, shaped the policies of the Catholic Church and its inquisitions. Protestant societies, too, had to face in practice the contradictions inherent in Lutheran and Calvinist teachings between *solafideism* and the precedence of the inner person on the one hand, and the need to control ritual and behaviour of the outer person on the other. It was almost impossible for early modern authorities to tolerate the idea of an "invisible church", even in the Lutheran sense of a body recognized only by God.

Yet, precisely this obsession with religious dissimulation was perhaps a contributing factor to the eventual rise of unbelief. Hearing again and again that certain religious phenomena were faked, that many a devout behaviour was a charade, that so many confessions of faith were lies, helped no doubt

to instil misgivings about all religious matters. Atheists in the sixteenth century, if they existed, were well hidden under the cloak of dissimulation, but by the second half of the seventeenth century, with the first buds of the radical Enlightenment, there appeared– anonymously at first – direct attacks on revealed religion. The meaning of "imposture" in a religious context gradually shifted in the early eighteenth century. It was no longer directed at all the groups discussed above, who either covertly practised a proscribed faith or pretended to have supernatural powers, but was used to ridicule the historical founders of the various religions. The *Treatise of the Three Impostors* (first published in 1719) signalled the birth of atheism proper. "A page has been turned […]. We are clearly a long way from the culture of dissimulation", writes Silvia Berti.[159]

To sum up, by the end of the period under discussion the word "impostor" was primarily associated with religion – as a nickname for Satan or the Antichrist, a synonym for a false Christian or a person wearing "the painted mask of false piety",[160] an insult hurled at Catholic priests and exorcists by Puritan divines or at heresiarchs who promised their followers immediate entrance into a New Jerusalem, and – at the dawn of the Enlightenment – as the epithet for the founders of the three monotheistic religions.

The culture of (religious) dissimulation in Reformation Europe had many facets. Many of the means of subterfuge, the fears of both persecuted and prosecutors, the tribunals, the guidebooks for detection, the shaming and warning methods, would disappear without a trace. Although some of these symptoms would have parallels in modern times, an entire *Weltanschauung* became foreign to later generations. More than any other type of imposture discussed in this study, the ubiquity of religious dissimulation with all its implications was a phenomenon unique to early modern Europe.

3
False Ambassadors, Fabulous Lands

A Jewish Prince

> I David, son of King Solomon, may the just rest in peace, younger brother to King Joseph, who sits on his throne in the desert of Habor ruling over three hundred thousand people, the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh, sallied forth from the king my brother and his council of seventy elders, who ordered me to go first to Rome to His Majesty the Pope.

Thus begins the journal of a man who became known to posterity as David ha-Reuveni (David the Reubenite, of the tribe of Reuben, whom I shall henceforth call Reuveni) – a self-proclaimed Jewish prince, ambassador, military commander and world-wide traveller, who during the 1520s stirred up, intrigued and alarmed Jews and non-Jews, simple folk and princes, in several parts of Europe.

His journal is a unique historical document.[1] It is one of very few pre-modern Jewish travelogues, and the only one among them to include reports on meetings with a pope, with African and European monarchs and with many other dignitaries. Written in Hebrew in the first person, it describes a journey from the "Desert of Habor" in Arabia, through East Africa and Egypt, to Italy and Portugal, ending with a shipwreck and capture by the Duke of Clermont. It is also one of the very rare ego-documents written by an impostor.

Who was he? How much of his story was true? What did he really want? Why did certain people believe him and even hail him as a harbinger of redemption while others were suspicious and hostile towards him? And what was his purpose in writing a journal? These are some of the questions that continue to baffle historians – although mostly in the context of Jewish history. The affair of the ambassador of the Lost Tribes of Israel, however, did not take place only within the Jewish world (indeed, Reuveni himself insisted that his mission was entirely to the rulers of the Gentiles)

and should therefore be viewed within larger fields: European contacts at the time with other continents, rising political and millenarian expectations during the Age of Discovery, the (in)ability to distinguish between truth and fiction in travel literature, and as one case among several of bogus ambassadors. The behaviour towards these foreign emissaries with dubious credentials is a good yardstick for gauging credulity and for understanding the means of exposing imposture during a period when, as was emphasized above, an anxiety concerning deception and falsehood was constantly increasing.

It was in the early months of 1524 that a "small dark man"[2] disembarked in Venice and announced to certain Jews in the recently established ghetto that he had come from the Desert of Habor[3] on a mission to the rulers of Europe. A Jewish portrait-painter, Moses da Castellazzo, arranged for his passage to Rome and for an introduction to Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo, who in turn procured for him an audience with the newly elected Pope. It was to Clement VII that Reuveni first divulged the purpose of his mission: his brother, King Joseph, wished to forge an alliance with Christian monarchs in order to fight the Ishmaelites and liberate the Holy Land from the hands of the Turk. King Joseph was capable of raising the troops as he ruled over a population of 300,000 (or, according to one of Reuveni's letters – he could raise an army of 300,000 soldiers),[4] but he lacked ships and artillery, which he was hoping to obtain from Europe. Reuveni, the military commander of that distant land, offered to assist the Pope in mediating peace between the emperor and the King of France so that they would combine their forces and, together with the Haborite army, wage a crusade against the Turk. The Pope, however, suggested instead that Reuveni submit his plans and requests to the King of Portugal, who was then the monarch "most involved in such matters". After a year's (unexplained) delay, the Pope provided him with letters of recommendation to John III of Portugal and to "David Alnazarani [i.e. David the Christian, Emperor Dawitt II, known by his birth name, Lebna Dengel] Abbassiae et Aethiopiae Regi illustri".[5] Through the Portuguese ambassador in Rome, Reuveni eventually also obtained a safe conduct from the King of Portugal allowing him, a Jewish prince, to enter a kingdom that had recently expelled or forcibly converted its entire Jewish population.[6] In October 1525 Reuveni landed in Tavira, from where he sent a letter to the king,[7] and received in reply an invitation to attend the court that was then residing at Almeirim. Accorded at first the ceremonial honours befitting a foreign dignitary, he was, after several audiences with John III and his queen, promised ships, artillery and experts in arms. But, within a few months, his influence over the *conversos* (the large number of Portuguese and Spanish New Christians), who were hailing the ambassador as a great Jewish lord and a harbinger of redemption, began to alarm the king. Worst of all from the monarch's point of view was the affair of the high-ranking government official, Diogo Pires (or Dioguo Pirez), who became so impressed with Reuveni that he circumcised himself and fled the country

(to become later an adept of the Kabbalah and a messianic figure known as Solomon Molcho). Following this incident, the king revoked all his favours and promises to Reuveni and firmly ordered him to leave Portugal, granting him nonetheless in June 1526 a safe conduct to allow him to leave the realm and return to Rome, and a polite letter addressed to King Joseph of Habor. From that date on Reuveni's days of glory were over.

The ship which took him away from Tavira was detained in Spain and Reuveni almost fell into the hands of the Inquisition. He was saved, apparently, thanks to the intervention of Queen Isabella, Charles V's new bride and John III's sister, who had known Reuveni at the Portuguese court. But he was only to escape the Inquisition's clutches to be shipwrecked somewhere in the Gulf of Lions, where he was arrested by the Duke of Clermont. All his possessions were confiscated and almost two years of his life were spent in the Duke's prison. Released thanks to a heavy ransom paid by the Jews of the Comtat, and perhaps by the intervention of the Pope and an order from the King of France, Reuveni turned towards Italy once more.

The journal ends in 1526; for the subsequent adventures of Reuveni we need to rely on the occasional surviving sources which refer to the prince of the Lost Tribes. There is no evidence for his whereabouts and activities during four years. Then, in the early months of 1530 he met in Sabbionetta a Jewish physician, Lazzaro Portaleone, who persuaded him to seek an audience with the Marquis (soon to become Duke) Federigo Gonzaga of Mantua. The marquis agreed to see him and Reuveni told him of his intention to meet with the emperor. It was in Mantua, while he was staying at the house of the physician Abraham Portaleone, Lazzaro's brother, that "informers" (of whom he was constantly complaining) finally caught up with him and reported to the marquis that Reuveni was forging letters from his brother King Joseph. Federigo immediately passed on the information to his ambassador at the papal court in Bologna (where preparations were being made for Charles V's coronation), who in turn warned both Clement VII and Charles V that the Prince of Habor was an impostor.

But his unmasking did not deter the adventurer. Several months later he resurfaced in Venice, where the *Signoria* sent the geographer Giovanni Battista (or Giambattista) Ramusio to interview him and to investigate his credentials. The following sequence of events remains hazy: did Reuveni join Solomon Molcho in 1532 on his trip to Regensburg (Ratisbon) to see the emperor, as he had told Federigo of Mantua and Ramusio he was planning to do? Were they both brought back as prisoners to Mantua, where Solomon Molcho was burnt at the stake? And how did Reuveni end up in Spain, in an Inquisition prison in Llerena, to be executed there in 1538? As with the last years of Leo Africanus, so far no documents have been found to shed light on the ambassador's final escapades. One thing is clear, however: the Prince of Habor basked in success for approximately three years and then his fortune went from bad to worse. Discredited and pronounced an

impostor, most (though not all) references to him after 1530, particularly in the Hebrew chronicles, were disparaging.

The main source for Reuveni's adventures, his own journal, ends abruptly, as mentioned, with his brush with the Spanish Inquisition in Cartagena in 1526, before he embarked on the ship that was to be wrecked on the coast of France. Appended to the journal is a list, signed by Solomon Cohen, Reuveni's servant-cum-secretary, of his master's expenses and of the property which was confiscated by the Lord of Clermont. Information on the next episodes in his adventures is to be found in correspondence among certain Jews, in the Mantuan documents which throw light on how Reuveni was caught forging letters,[8] in Ramusio's interview with the foreign "prince" reported in Marino Sanuto's diary and in Inquisition sources which indicate that Reuveni died in Llerena in 1538, burnt at the stake despite a last-minute conversion to Christianity.[9]

The first part of the journal, about a fifth of the total number of pages, relates Reuveni's journey from the Desert of Habor, through the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, Egypt and Palestine up to his arrival in Venice. Some of the places and several of the personalities on this route can be identified. Also, certain messages which arrived in Italy from Palestine before 1524 describe the activities of an emissary from the Lost Tribes, who is believed by some historians to have been the same David "the Reubenite", although his name was not explicitly mentioned.[10] On the whole, however, there is no documentary corroboration for his travels prior to his arrival in Europe.

His travelogue for those parts, too, closely resembles in many of the details the information supplied by earlier works in Hebrew or in European languages, such as the book attributed to the ninth-century Eldad ha-Dani (first printed in 1480, in Mantua), or the twelfth-century peregrinations of the Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela (first printed in Istanbul in 1543) or the account of the Renaissance explorer Ludovico di Varthema (published in Italian in 1510; see Chapter 2), who described, among other strange phenomena in Arabia, a mountain populated by a race of wild pygmy-like Jews. The remaining and larger part of Reuveni's manuscript, on the other hand, relating his movements in Europe between the winter of 1523/4 and the autumn of 1526, is essentially confirmed by other accounts.

Unless some unexpected new evidence should come to light, the questions regarding his true identity will probably remain unanswered. Clearly no one today accepts his claims at face value, but all answers offered so far are mere speculations based on the flimsiest evidence. By analysing his language, and on the basis of contemporary descriptions of his physique, several theories concerning his origin have been proposed: that he came from the Yemen, or that he was a Falasha from Ethiopia, or perhaps from the Jewish community in Cochin in western India, or maybe from Palestine, or even – as Max Brod's wonderful novel portrays him – that he was originally an Ashkenazi Jew from Prague, inspired by an earlier false messiah, Asher

Lemlein.[11] Aescoly, the modern-day editor of the journal and the scholar who collected most of the early modern references to the Jewish ambassador, also suggests that the Reubenite could have been a European Jew who had spent several years in the Near East, where he learned Arabic and became familiar with some of the history and geography of those lands.[12] Reuveni himself, according to all reports, never spoke in any other language but Hebrew or Arabic, and relied on interpreters in all his dealings with European authorities.

Some minor points, however, might help in eliminating certain possibilities. First, it is unlikely that he was an Ethiopian Jew, for the simple reason that the *Beta Israel* (as scholars now prefer to name this community) never used Hebrew.[13] Second, he was more familiar with European matters than could be expected from someone who hailed from a distant community in the Orient. Let us look at a single example: when describing his arrival in Rome, barely a few weeks after his first appearance in Venice, he writes,

> I, David son of Solomon of the Desert of Habor, arrived at the entrance of the state of Rome on the fifteenth of the first[14] month of Adar of the year 5284 [29 February 1524], and one gentile from Venice came and spoke to me in the language of Arabia, and he made me angry. And I went to the papal court riding on a white old horse and my servant and the Jews came with me. And I entered the house of the Pope, and I was riding the horse, and later I came to see the Cardinal Guideau [Egidio].[15]

Needless to say, it is highly unlikely that anyone would have entered the Pope's residence at the Basilica of St Peter riding a horse and accompanied by a procession of Jews. The only plausible explanation for such a boast is that Reuveni was aware of the proliferation of contemporary prophecies about the Turkish Sultan who would enter St Peter's on his white horse and tether it to the altar. Some of these were apocalyptic visions in which the Sultan's horse feeding at the altar of St Peter symbolizes the penultimate humiliation of the Church; in others, ending optimistically, rider and horse (*sic*) see the light and convert to Christianity.[16] If Reuveni were a newcomer to Italy, completely ignorant of any European language, how could he have known of these prophetic omens? Or, for that matter, how could he be so up-to-date as to know that Clement VII was most anxious to attain cooperation between France and the emperor in order to launch a new crusade? And how could he be familiar with recently published books on travels in Arabia?[17]

The vignette about his regal entrance to Rome is, however, atypical of the journal as a whole. Mostly Reuveni describes his activities in a dry, matter-of-fact manner. The majority of his entries are concerned with his expenses, with servant problems, with physical comforts and discomforts, as well as with "informers" and enemies who were trying to discredit him and to

obstruct his mission. He often admits to losing his temper and becoming violent, for which he is slightly apologetic. There are no references in the text to major current events, with the exception of the preparations for Charles V's marriage to Isabella of Portugal and the death of John III's son, both occurring in 1526 when Reuveni was an almost daily visitor to the Portuguese court, and several references to outbreaks of plague which drove the people he wanted to meet to other places. This very personal nature of the diary, combined with the external evidence for his meetings with the persons he names – both well-known Jews as well as Christian dignitaries – lend this part of the journal its feel of authenticity.

Doubts concerning the accuracy or veracity of his account could be raised on the basis of odd lacunae. For example, at the time when Reuveni was, according to his journal, a regular visitor to Cardinal Egidio's house, some other interesting guests were also present there. One of them had been residing in the cardinal's house for over a decade: Elijah Levita (in Hebrew sources, Eliyahu ben Asher ha-Levi Ashkenazi, named "Bahur", "Young Man" or "Chosen"), a German Jew, writer, Hebrew and Yiddish grammarian, philologist and lexicographer who taught Hebrew to many of the major Christian Hebraists of the time including Egidio da Viterbo. The fact that he and his family resided at Cardinal Egidio's house in Rome for 13 years (1514–27, until the Sack of Rome) raises some intriguing questions on the way in which a Jew could properly observe the commandments in a non-Jewish household, and not in just any household but the residence of a prince of the Church in Rome. How many compromises did he have to make? Did he practise some form of dissimulation? We do know that his grandchildren converted to Christianity and became censors of Jewish books; we do know there were members of the Jewish community who strongly disapproved of Levita's fraternization with Christian clergy – but we have no clear idea of the way in which this Jewish scholar conducted his daily life during those years in Rome. Later, in Venice, he worked for the great printer of Hebrew books, Daniel Bomberg, who employed many Jews and Jewish converts to Christianity. In fact, it was precisely these milieus – the circles of the Christian Hebraists and the printing houses owned by Christians but printing Hebrew and Jewish works – that were the middle ground where Jewish and Christian intellectuals exchanged ideas.[18] This exchange led in some cases to the conversion of Jews to Christianity; the sincerity of their conversion and the extent to which they maintained their adherence to the old faith remain uncertain.

It was Elijah Levita who instructed Egidio in the Kabbalah and translated some of its texts for him. Hence one would have expected to find him at Egidio's side during the meetings with the Reubenite prince, whom Egidio regarded as fulfilling Kabbalistic prophecies. Yet, oddly enough, Levita never mentioned the exotic Jewish ambassador in any of his writings; nor did Reuveni refer to the eminent Jewish scholar, although he did name

two other Jews whom he met in Egidio's entourage: Joseph Ashkenazi, another of Egidio's teachers of Hebrew and the Kabbalah, and Joseph Sarfati, a physician and Hebrew poet.[19]

Another colourful figure moving in scholarly and ecclesiastical circles in Rome in the mid-1520s was al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Fasi who became known to Europeans as Leo Africanus. A former ambassador of the Sultan of Fez, brought to Italy as a pirates' captive, he converted to Christianity in Pope Leo X's household and remained in Rome until after its sack in 1527. He, too, was welcomed by popes, cardinals and intellectuals because, like Levita, he could provide a useful service by teaching the language and translating the works of the infidel. He had close contacts with Italian Jews and collaborated in the production of a Latin–Hebrew–Arabic dictionary with Jacob Mantino. Natalie Zemon Davis, in her book on the author of the *Description of Africa*, speculates about the possibility that the North African and the Jew from Arabia did meet, but the fact remains that neither of them mentioned the other.[20] One would assume that Reuveni would have been glad of the opportunity to converse in Arabic; the two foreigners undoubtedly could have found much to talk about, if only to compare notes on their experiences as ambassadors travelling in Africa before arriving in Europe (even if in Reuveni's case those travels were probably all fantasy while in Leo's case at least partly true); and had they dared, they could have also compared notes on practising dissimulation and living a lie. Reuveni claimed in his journal to have travelled in Arabia and Africa disguised as a Muslim (as did Varthema, who could have been one of his sources of information); al-Hassan al-Wazzan, as Davis assumes, relied on the Islamic principle of *taqiyya* when he converted to Christianity for the duration of his sojourn in Europe. In any case, these two ambassadors were both enigmatic foreigners passing through early modern European courts, whose past history and credentials could not be fully verified and they remain a mystery to this very day.

Nevertheless, despite the odd lacuna and a few embellishments, the second – European – part of Reuveni's journal is basically true. But who were its potential readers? Was he planning to have his journal published, as Leo Africanus's *Description of Africa* would be in 1550? His purpose in writing the journal is part of a third enigma concerning Reuveni: what were his intentions? What was he hoping to achieve? Why did he go to so much trouble, risking not only his reputation but also his life? For personal gain? For a brief hour of glory? To instil hope in the hearts of his people who had not as yet recovered from the trauma of the expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula? Did he himself believe in his own fantasy and could therefore be regarded as suffering from delusions? Almost half a millennium after the event, these are difficult questions to answer, partly because the evidence is scant and inconsistent, but also because the psychological state of mind of a sixteenth-century adventurer was, inevitably, very different from our own. Again, one can offer only some suggestions for the elimination of certain theories.

Personal financial gain could hardly have been his motive: although he did accept donations from supporters, all his money was invested in his efforts to persuade various authorities to accept his claims as genuine.[21] Had his main goal been to offer hope and consolation to the oppressed, one would have expected to find in his book a more detailed description of life in the Jewish Kingdom of the Lost Tribes – but Reuveni gave no indication that his homeland was in any way an ideal society. Furthermore, he hardly addressed the Jews but concentrated all his efforts on attaining an alliance with Christian rulers.

As for being delusional, the evidence is baffling to a modern-day reader: throughout the journal Reuveni recorded his frequent long fasts – to Ramusio he explained that these ascetic exercises helped him to communicate with angels and to receive divine guidance – but this is the sole indication that Reuveni ever presented himself as hearing voices from above.[22] On all other occasions he vehemently insisted that he was not a visionary but a simple soldier sent on a political mission by earthly powers:

> I am neither a scholar, nor a kabbalist, nor a prophet nor a son of a prophet; I am only an army lord and the son of King Solomon descendant of the house of David son of Jesse […] I have been a sinner and a man of war since my youth until now;

and, he said, he had a hundred battle scars on his body to prove it.[23] These are not the words of a man hearing voices or wanting to persuade his listeners to acknowledge him as a divine messenger.

The theory offered by the historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi as regards Reuveni's intentions seems the most plausible: Jewish communities throughout the diaspora, during the last decades of the fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century, were teeming with various prognostications and messianic expectations; Reuveni would have been exposed to them wherever he had come from. Thus, believing in the imminent war of Gog and Magog, which was to precede the End of Days, Reuveni could have been attempting to hasten an apocalyptic confrontation between Muslims and Christians. It is possible to assume that he first tried to bring this about by persuading the Ottomans to start a Holy War against the Christian infidel, turning to the Christian monarchs only after his efforts with the Ottomans had failed. Such a theory would explain his activities in Cairo, where, so he claimed, he had revealed "secrets" to Abraham de Castro, the influential head of the Egyptian mint,[24] as well as his messages to the Emir of Fez[25] and his report to Ramusio that he had sent Solomon Molcho to Ibrahim Pasha in Istanbul[26] – all endeavours in warmongering.[27]

Since Reuveni's story is so closely linked to that of Solomon Molcho, the two – false prince and false messiah – have often been discussed together, and the Reuveni episode is thus included in surveys of messianic

movements in Jewish history. There is no doubt that Molcho was indeed hailed as a messiah in several parts of the Jewish Diaspora – some historians even claiming that his was the largest Jewish messianic movement prior to Shabbetai Zvi's in the seventeenth century.[28] But was David Reuveni also a messianic figure? Did he regard himself as the redeemer of the Jews? This question is still under debate. The agitation that he stirred amongst the *conversos* in Portugal could be attributed to their encounter with a proud Jewish lord, bringing marvellous news about the existence of a strong Jewish state to those who had suffered so many tribulations (similar, if you like, to the reactions of Soviet Jews to the arrival of Golda Meir, the first Israeli ambassador to Moscow, in 1948). Nevertheless, some historians believe, on the basis of documentary evidence from North African communities as well as on the merit of Reuveni's statements to Ramusio in 1530 (*lui spera di esser questo condur ditto populo nella terra di promission* ["he hopes to be the one who would lead his people to the Promised Land"]),[29] that despite his frequent protestations to the contrary, he did regard himself as a messiah or a harbinger of the messiah, if not from the very beginning, at least by the time that his political-military mission seemed to have failed.[30] On the other hand, those historians who insist that Reuveni's concerns throughout had been purely political and military without any messianic pretensions portray him as a kind of proto-Zionist leader, a sixteenth-century precursor, however odd, of Theodor Herzl.[31] This ongoing debate is well summarized by Moshe Idel, with whose conclusion I am inclined to agree:

> messianic elements were inherent in the military plan; they did not become part of the plan as a result of a particular disappointment, or only in consequence of a projection of Reuveni's messianic image in the eyes of the *conversos* of Portugal, on Reuveni himself […] Reuveni's main effort was invested in his contacts with the Christian elite and with some of the Jewish dignitaries who served as mediators between him and the Christians.[32]

Yet if his efforts were mainly, though not solely, directed at military and political ends, and since we assume that there was, in fact, no Jewish kingdom in the Desert of Habor with an army of 300,000 soldiers – what would he have done had the King of Portugal actually kept his promise and supplied him with ships and artillery? Was he perhaps planning to recruit, in the manner of contemporary *condottieri*, an army from among Italian Jews, Portuguese *conversos* and Ethiopian Falashas – all described by him as stronger and braver people than the Jews of the Orient – and wage war on the Turks to regain the Promised Land?[33] Such a plan would accord well with his ties with the renowned *condottiere*, Guido Rangone, in whose house he resided during his second sojourn in Venice (see below).

No less baffling than his origins or his purpose is the fact that some members of the Christian elite actually accepted his invented identity, or at least did not immediately dismiss his fantastic claims. The answer lies partly in those early modern conditions already mentioned: the absence of reliable means of identification, slow and haphazard communications with distant lands, a desperate need to believe in potential allies against the expanding Turks in particular and the might of the Muslims in general, and the inability to distinguish between the fictitious and the authentic in the enormous amount of information that was reaching Europe during those decades of world discovery. Other contributing factors may be found if we examine closely a few "victims" of Reuveni's fraud.

Let us turn first to Egidio da Viterbo's household. Egidio, like so many Renaissance men of the Catholic Church, had several faces: a very learned humanist, polished poet and orator, a connoisseur of art and collector of ancient manuscripts, a Platonist philosopher, a student of Etruscan antiquities and a great believer in the glory of Rome; he was also a devout monk, Prior General of the Augustinian order and its reformer. When Luther, a member of his own order, rebelled against the Church, Egidio was horrified and blamed Erasmus for causing the crisis in Christendom.[34]

The cardinal became a student of the Kabbalah approximately a decade before Reuveni's arrival in Rome. He studied with several renowned Jewish scholars, including Elijah Levita "Bahur" mentioned above,[35] and was a leading member of the growing group of Christian Hebraists and Kabbalists. In the early 1530s he would support Solomon Molcho, and is said to have been one of the opponents of the introduction of the Inquisition to Portugal. For these actions, Jewish historians hailed him as a philosemite, one of the "righteous of the nations" in times of tribulation.[36] Yet, as even the most hagiographical modern works (Christian as well as Jewish) on his life cannot deny, Egidio's fascination with the secrets of ancient civilizations – unlike that of other universalist Platonists such as Ficino – was motivated solely by the desire to find proof for the supremacy of Christianity. The arch-enemy for him was Islam, and the study of Hebrew and the Kabbalah was only a means to confirm the Christian truth. Furthermore, as evidenced by a letter he wrote to an abbot in Spain, he could be quite scathing about Jews and was extremely suspicious of *conversos* whom he did not want joining the Augustinian order.[37] It was not love or respect for Judaism and Jews that prompted him to support Levita, Reuveni and Molcho, but rather his expectations for a fulfilment of prophecies – in other words, it was eschatology rather than any kind of philosemitism.

God's grand design was unfolding; all the great events of his day were signs of an imminent golden age: "In the tenth age all secrets will be revealed, those of the divine world through the cabbala and those of the created world by voyages of discovery. Mankind will be brought into an intellectual and religious unity under the Papacy", he declared in his 1507 oration in

celebration of Portuguese victories in the East.[38] Therefore, when in 1524 an emissary from the Lost Tribes came knocking on his door, Egidio (no less than his visitor) was well aware that in the *Zohar*, the most important medieval book of the Kabbalah, the tribe of Reuben was assigned an important role in the scheme of redemption: it would be the first of the tribes to arise and lead the Jews to a final confrontation with their enemies. Another secret was being revealed: the whereabouts of the Lost Tribes of Israel; an alliance between the Pope and their king against the Turk could hasten the destruction of Islam – a precondition to the *renovatio mundi*. Reuveni was thus offering Egidio an opportunity he could not refuse: to play a small role in the cosmic drama that he was so eagerly awaiting. In 1530, when he was to meet Molcho, he would hope that this Kabbalist prophet-cum-magus would endow him with further keys to the unlocking of God's mysterious plans. Both figures in this minor Jewish episode fitted very well with the great expectations of the polished humanist philosopher.

Jean Delumeau wrote about the "siege mentality" of Europeans during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance – the Great Fear which led them, on the one hand, to see enemies lurking everywhere (Jews, witches, Turks, heretics) and, on the other hand, to dream of utopian lands, distant in space or in time, where sin and the devil were excluded.[39] This state of mind was particularly intense in Italy following the invasions of foreign armies. Prophetic tensions there, and especially in Rome, reached a peak in the 1520s. André Chastel, when describing the atmosphere in Rome on the eve of the Sack and immediately following it, calls it "a state of collective madness".[40] Ottavia Niccoli has demonstrated how widespread were the apocalyptic and eschatological expectations in all classes of society in the two generations between 1480 and 1530.[41] And although in many of these prophecies the Jews or the Lost Tribes appear as allies of the Turk, it would have been just as plausible to imagine them allied with the Christians.[42] Learned Italian Jews at the time shared in many aspects of Renaissance culture, not least in its millenarian expectations. Egidio's house was one of several sites where eschatological and mystical ideas were exchanged.[43] Reuveni could not have chosen a better time to appear with a revelation about the existence of a strong Israelite kingdom and the promise of defeat of the Turks which would liberate the Holy Land. He could not have chosen a more suitable person than Egidio da Viterbo as his first patron and usher into the courts of Europe. And the learned cardinal certainly could not be accused of "simplicity and ignorance" (Michel de Montaigne's explanation for gullibility); if anything, his credulity should be attributed to a surfeit of erudition.

The search for signs and omens continued to occupy some of the best minds of the sixteenth century, and they were those responsible for the recurrence of Reuveni's name in later works. For example Guillaume Postel, another Renaissance scholar fascinated by all kinds of esoteric keys to divine wisdom, and also awaiting a *concordia mundi* (although different

in substance than Egidio's Catholic vision), must have heard rumours of Reuveni's mission when he visited Italy in the 1520s. In his writings he reported briefly the appearance of an envoy from a Jewish kingdom in the "land of Mount Tabor" who came to convert the emperor and the King of France to Judaism (*sic*).[44] It was probably through Postel that the renowned geographer and Familist Abraham Ortelius heard the story, and Giovanni Botero was to repeat it verbatim at the very end of the sixteenth century.[45]

Clement VII, as the carefully phrased letters of introduction which he gave to Reuveni indicate, was clearly less enthusiastic than Cardinal Egidio about embracing the prince of the Lost Tribes. A few years later, after the Sack of Rome, he too was to become susceptible to all manner of prophets and would then give his full-hearted support to Solomon Molcho, when prophecies of this Portuguese Jewish messiah seemed to be coming true.[46] But in 1524, Giulio de' Medici, barely a year on St Peter's throne, was still a practitioner of realpolitik and inclined to caution. One of his most urgent tasks was to unite Christendom against the advancing Turks, and he would have welcomed any offer of assistance. It is difficult to assess whether he believed Reuveni or not. In his letter to John III, dated 17 September 1524 (penned by the papal scribe at the time, Jacopo Sadoleto) he wrote of the claims of "David son of Solomon the Hebrew, resident – so it is told – of the Desert of Chabor", that

> We, who are very remote from those places, could not thoroughly know the nature of these things from the story of the same David; on the other hand, we did not wish to dismiss them completely. Therefore, we decided to send him to your Excellency, as you have a multitude of people travelling often to these places and frequenting those regions, and through them you should be able to know all this with more certainty. […] After all, there is hope that some good may come to the Christian republic from his works and advice.[47]

As we shall see, Clement VII's policy of reserving judgement was the attitude adopted by most contemporary rulers towards tall tales and impostors.

It is interesting to note, however, that Ludwig Pastor, when writing the history of the papacy during the last decades of the nineteenth century, reported the incident of the envoy from Arabia who brought a proposal of an alliance against the Turk without any reference to doubts concerning his veracity.[48] Clearly he found none in his sources, nor did he (four centuries later) find it necessary to express surprise or criticism at the papal policy of not dismissing such stories out of hand.

The appearance and proposals of the ambassador of the Lost Tribes must have evoked in the papal court memories of another bogus delegation that had come from the East in 1460 to Pope Pius II and offered cooperation in a crusade against the Ottomans. That delegation, headed by a Franciscan

friar, Ludovico da Bologna, was sent by the Pope (in the same manner that in the following century Reuveni would be sent to Portugal) to the King of France and the Duke of Burgundy, but the charade was soon exposed, leading the Pope (the learned humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini) to conclude his report of the episode in words which should have served as a warning to his successors:

> In matters carried on from a distance there is abundant opportunity for deception and the truth can seldom be discovered. From that time the Pope was suspicious of any communications from the East, especially when they were brought by men who were poor and unknown.[49]

However, the lesson apparently was not learnt. Popes and kings of the sixteenth century "did not wish to dismiss completely" the possibility that poor and unknown men were truly bringing good tidings of potential powerful allies beyond the sphere of Islam.

Messengers from Prester John

In following Reuveni to Portugal, we find ourselves in an atmosphere quite different from the one in Rome. Admittedly King Manuel I (d.1521) had been inclined to interpret geographical discoveries in a millenarian light: in a letter written in 1499 to the Portuguese cardinal in Rome, for example, he interpreted the arrival of the converted Jew, Gaspar da Gama, and the information he supplied about India as divine signs (Gaspar, as later sources revealed, was an adventurer and liar with a fertile imagination no less than David Reuveni).[50] But the mood at John III's court in the 1520s had none of the characteristics of Egidio da Viterbo's omen-searching entourage.[51] The Portuguese court was busy then with news from overseas: Alfonso de Albuquerque was reporting great victories as well as some worrying defeats and the Ottomans were frustrating the Portuguese plans to dominate in the Red Sea. Stronger than ever was the need to combine forces against Islam with any potential ally ("as God sometimes decrees to take revenge against his enemies by enemies", was the Pope's dispensation for cooperation with the Jewish Prince).[52] The obvious candidate for such an alliance was the legendary figure of Prester John, ruling over a Christian nation, somewhere beyond the Muslim Empire.[53] And at the time of Reuveni's arrival in Portugal, the dream of such a pact seemed to be materializing.

Preceded by rumours, a letter from a priest-king of a vast Christian empire in "India", addressed in its early versions to the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Comnenus, began circulating in Europe in the twelfth century. It soon had versions in several languages including Hebrew (to lend it "authenticity"?) and was apparently widely popular, for there are over one hundred manuscript copies of it remaining from the pre-Gutenberg era. This text,

with thirteenth- and fourteenth-century additions, was a compilation of legendary material to be found in classical and medieval works, from Pliny through the ninth-century Book of Eldad ha-Dani (Eldad the Danite, of the tribe of Dan, a Hebrew text containing the earliest literary allusion to the existence of a strong kingdom of the Lost Tribes beyond the Sambatyon river), to the geographical lore at the time of the Crusades. Some twentieth-century historians were perplexed: "It is absolutely astonishing that this nonsense was believed, and continued to be so, for more than five hundred years", wrote the Soviet historian, Lev Gumilev.[54] Others have argued that the letter should not be called a "forgery", since its readers only regarded it as an entertaining piece of fiction.[55] I would agree that the term "forgery" may be misleading: it is safe to assume that many of its medieval and early modern readers did not believe that the text they were holding in their hands was actually penned by a "real" person named Prester John; the most learned could perhaps identify passages borrowed from classical texts. However, not until the very end of the sixteenth century was there any explicit doubt concerning the existence of the realm of Prester John, that is, a distant land inhabited by Christians and ruled by a mighty king-priest who would one day join forces with other Christian nations to defeat the infidels. By the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century it was mostly identified with Ethiopia. Thus, when the first Portuguese delegations arrived at the court of the *negus*, they addressed his royal highness as "Presbyter Johannes" or "Preste João" – to the total bafflement of the locals.

Yet while most sophisticated Portuguese were already using "Prester John" simply as an epithet for the Christian King of Ethiopia, Columbus was still searching for him in the "Indies" across the Atlantic, and other explorers were seeking him in the far reaches of Asia. A popular Spanish work, the *Book of the Infante Dom Pedro of Portugal, Who Traveled Over the Four Parts of the World*, written by Gómez de Santisteban and first printed in Seville in 1515, still located the king-priest's territory somewhere in East Asia, in the neighbourhood of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel and the terrestrial paradise. And although some scholars were by then critical enough to denounce the work as imaginative fantasy, many still commented upon it as if it were a genuine travel book.[56] The discovery of a real Christian kingdom in East Africa did not exclude the legendary empire in East Asia from maps of the world (including Behaim's globe of 1492).[57] The new factual reports from around the globe did not immediately replace the figments of medieval imagination; the European world picture continued to maintain the real alongside the fanciful for a very long time.

Moreover, as explorers were reporting so many novel and astonishing facts, there was even less reason to discard the old myths. Indeed, the great feats of the explorers, and the wonderful news from across the oceans, created an atmosphere of rising expectations, enhancing the anticipation for all kinds of revelations. How could they possibly sort out the fictitious

and the imaginary from the enormous amount of material pouring in from the four corners of the world? As we have all learned in the age of the Internet, an "explosion" of accessible knowledge is by no means less conducive to credulity than ignorance.[58]

Thus the great Christian priest-king, invented in the twelfth century to offer hope to the besieged Crusaders' state, was now actively sought after by a European empire-building government. By a fortunate coincidence such an alliance was apparently desired at that particular moment not only by Portugal but by the Ethiopian emperor as well. Furthermore, the two hope-inspiring legends – the Kingdom of Prester John and a kingdom of Israel's Lost Tribes – were linked in more ways than one.

Ethiopia has always had "Jewish" connotations. The Ethiopian ruling dynasty was "Israelite", in the sense that they regarded themselves as the descendants of (the biblical) King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Ethiopian Christianity to this day has many rites and rituals resembling Judaism, and during the fourteenth century reports began to trickle out about battles of Jewish tribes (*ayhud*) in Abyssinia – reports that were interpreted by some eschatologically minded Jews as indicating the promised rise of the Lost Tribes.[59] In the late fifteenth century, Jewish writers refer to those tribes as "Jews from the Land of Prester John". Furthermore, as mentioned above, ever since Prester John's twelfth-century "letter", world maps located the Lost Tribes on the borders of the king-priest's kingdom. Reuveni in his journal located two-and-a-half tribes in Arabia, but the others, according to him, were to be found in the Land of Kush, that is, in Abyssinia; in his report to Ramusio he traced the ancestry of his compatriots in Arabia to the Judean exiles, while the "many of the Jewish tribes, descendants of Moses", were subjects of "Prete Giani".[60]

When Reuveni arrived in Portugal, the court was still awaiting news from a delegation that had been sent to Ethiopia ten years earlier. This delegation was a real embassy to a real foreign monarch, but it had been prompted by an emissary who seems today no less suspicious than David Reuveni. A certain Mateus, described variously as an Armenian merchant, an Egyptian Copt or a recent convert from Islam, arrived in India in 1512. He said that he was bearing a letter to the King of Portugal from Queen Helena (Eleni, in Ethiopian sources), the regent of Ethiopia, as well as a crucifix made from the wood of the True Cross. The Portuguese in India were not easily convinced of his reliability, some suspecting that he was a Muslim spy. But eventually he was put on a boat headed for Europe and arrived at King Manuel I's court in 1513. Queen Helena's requests, written in Arabic and (for some unexplained reason) in Persian, were very similar to those of "King Joseph of Habor": her people were strong, she wrote, but they were inferior to their Muslim enemies in guns and ships. She was offering an alliance, promising to help with the conquest of Mecca, in return for military aid. According to some reports, King Manuel responded with joy and immediately sent word

to the Pope that the Kingdom of Prester John had finally been discovered. Nevertheless, Mateus was still regarded with suspicion and it remains unclear whether Duarte Galvão's delegation organized in 1515 was indeed sent in response to Queen Helena's letter. The embassy encountered many difficulties and, reconstituted and headed by another man, Rodrigo de Lima, reached Ethiopia only in 1520. Mateus died en route, on Ethiopian soil but before the delegation arrived at the Negus's court. Lebna Dengel (Dawitt II), Queen Helena's stepgrandson, denied at first that Mateus had been sent by any Ethiopian authority.[61]

The only detailed source for the Mateus episode is the account written by Francisco Álvares,[62] the priest who accompanied the delegation sent out in 1515. His book is the earliest serious description of Ethiopia by any European and most of it tallies with Ethiopian chronicles or with later evidence. As regards Mateus, Álvares reports throughout his journal that the man was regarded with suspicion right to the very end. On the other hand, at least one of Portugal's humanists, Damião de Góis, was deeply impressed by Mateus, translated the letters he had brought from Portuguese into Latin and became an ardent advocate of the reunification of the Ethiopian and Catholic churches.[63] Nevertheless all records of Mateus and his claims indicate that "Prester John's ambassador" was a very clever charlatan – but his fraud, unlike Reuveni's, did bear fruit. In any case, Lebna Dengel's letter to King Manuel, delivered by Álvares in 1527 to Manuel's successor on the throne, is the first extant *bona fide* diplomatic communication of an Abyssinian monarch. It arrived in Portugal when Reuveni was no longer there, but the news about Lebna Dengel's offer of alliance had reached Portugal before the return of the embassy, and it could have contributed to John III's loss of interest in the Jewish "prince".

The Mateus episode bears close resemblance to the Reuveni story (so much so, in fact, that in later chronicles the two were sometimes confused). Obviously the main difference lies in the fact that Ethiopia was indeed a Christian kingdom outside Europe, threatened by Muslim neighbours, and Helena was a real figure. Yet the fact that Reuveni's mission was foiled by Portuguese officials while Mateus's was acted upon was not due to the one being totally spurious and the other plausible. The reason that Reuveni eventually lost his bid for Portuguese military aid was the fear he aroused about the Judaizing of New Christians. Had the Portuguese authorities been absolutely certain that Reuveni was an impostor, they would not have allowed him to leave in peace, nor would King John have given him a letter to King Joseph expressing Portugal's good wishes.[64] Even if they suspected that it was all a hoax, they still preferred to err (as with Mateus) on the side of caution. A century later, the policy of the Iberian decision-makers in regard to claimants with doubtful credentials was still the same: Philip IV, for example, was willing to consider an alliance with a false Sultan Bulaqi, because, as historians Jorge Flores and Sanjay Subrahmanyam put it, a "good impostor" could be as useful as the real thing.[65]

In the following decade, when Reuveni had already disappeared from view, probably in an Inquisition prison in Spain, another adventurer was trying to benefit from the tenuous links between Portugal and Prester John's kingdom in Ethiopia: Dom João Bermudes, an organist, painter and barber serving as a physician, was a member of the mission to Lebna Dengel which arrived in Ethiopia in 1520. Bermudes apparently stayed behind in Ethiopia when the rest of the legation went home, detained by the king as a kind of hostage. In 1535, when the Ethiopian Kingdom was under threat of annihilation by the forces of the Muslim Ahmad Grañ, Lebna Dengel decided to send Bermudes to Portugal with a desperate plea for help. In late 1536 or early 1537, according to the autobiography which Bermudes published many years later (like Reuveni's journal, another ego-document by an impostor), he reached Rome and presented himself to the Pope as the newly appointed Abuna, head of the Ethiopian Church. Bermudes reports that Pope Paul III acknowledged his claims and even appointed him Patriarch of Alexandria. Papal documents bear no witness to this story. He then went on to Portugal, where he was warmly received by the king and promised troops – a promise which materialized in the form of an expedition headed by Estevão da Gama that was to reach Ethiopia in 1541. On arrival Bermudes announced to Emperor Claudius (Galawdewos) that he had been nominated Patriarch of Abyssinia and demanded Ethiopian submission to the religious authority of the Pope. The Ethiopian king, suspecting that Bermudes's story was a tissue of lies, wrote to the King of Portugal asking for instructions. John III replied:

> Of the powers which he says the Holy Father granted him I know nothing; from the letters of His Holiness you will learn better what has passed in the matter; although for this he merits very severe punishment, it appears to me that you should not inflict it, except in such a way that, his life being saved, he may be punished according to his errors.[66]

Bermudes succeeded in causing a lot of mischief in Ethiopia before he finally fled the country and returned to Portugal. Yet his autobiography was accepted as a reliable historical narrative down to the early decades of the twentieth century.[67] Once more we have a case of deceit which, although more easily verifiable, was given the benefit of the doubt, not only by sixteenth-century kings, but also by uncritical historians in the following centuries.[68] Bermudes's scam echoes the fourteenth-century affair of the Greek known as Paulus Tigrinus who pretended to be the Patriarch of Constantinople: he first appeared in Cyprus and Rome, where he was unmasked and imprisoned, but later he succeeded in duping the Duke of Savoy and the antipope in Avignon, Clement VII, and made his escape laden with rich presents. But while the false patriarch of the fourteenth century had simply wished to line his own pockets, the false Abuna was clearly after

much more: power, fame, glory and entry into the annals of Portuguese and Catholic accomplishments.

Props

Early modern inventors of false identities often used similar props to help them with their act. First of all, one must assume, they would have had to dress the part. Concerning Reuveni we have indeed a short description of his costume: Daniel of Pisa, the Jewish banker who was host and translator for Reuveni in Rome, announcing the good tidings of the Jewish Prince's arrival, informed his correspondent that "his dress at home is black and when he goes outside he wears *vergato* [striped] silk in the manner of the Ishmaelites, and on his head a white scarf which covers him from head to foot so that all who see him mock him and think him a woman".[69] Clearly Reuveni would not follow the advice "when in Rome, do as the Romans do", and he was willing to attract attention and brave mockery for the sake of impression. His insistence throughout that he could speak only Hebrew and Arabic, which made him inconveniently dependent on interpreters, could also have been part of the performance, as perhaps was his practice of religious rituals different from those of European Jewry. Daniel went on to say, "and this man has no knowledge of the Talmud, and his ways in actions and his version of the prayers and blessings of the Torah and of the daily bread are according to his custom",[70] leaving us with the regret that the banker did not elaborate further on "his custom", thus depriving us of more hints about Reuveni's origins. Having (or pretending to have) no knowledge of the Talmud was supposed to indicate hailing from a Jewish community that had been cut off from the rest of the Jewish Diaspora for many centuries. In general, his manner was that of an oriental lord as imagined by latter-day Westerners – spoilt, regal, lavish with expensive gifts, impatient, short-tempered – but we have no way of knowing how much of all this was part of his act.

In Daniel of Pisa's letter there is also confirmation of the entry in Reuveni's journal about his genealogy: he carries with him a book tracing his ancestry 32 generations back to King David son of Jesse. This book was read out to Clement VII and to three cardinals who were present at Reuveni's first audience with the Pope, and was later also presented to the King of Portugal. Strangely neither the Pope and the learned cardinals, nor the sophisticated Daniel of Pisa, nor the Portuguese monarch, raised the obvious questions: how could the tribes of Gad, Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh (who had been part of the kingdom of Israel and exiled by the Assyrians in the eighth century BCE) be ruled by the House of David of the tribe of Judah, which according to Jewish tradition was exiled after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE? And surely, even with the limited abilities possessed by people in the sixteenth century to date past eras, 32 generations should have seemed to them much too short a lineage.

The basis for Reuveni's pretensions, however, is clear: in all medieval Jewish prophecies of redemption, kingship over the ingathered exiles had always been reserved for the House of David; and 32 was the number of generations mentioned by the ninth-century traveller, Eldad ha-Dani, when tracing his ancestry back to Dan, the son of Jacob. Admittedly, the Prince of Habor never introduced himself as anything but "David son of Solomon, brother of King Joseph"; the name ha-Reuveni, "the Reubenite", was an addition of later chronicles, but in the journal he repeatedly stated that his brother ruled over the two-and-a-half tribes of Israel. In later communications his version would change.

Then there were the banners. At first there was only one, donated by Dona Benvenida Abrabanel of Naples, made of silk with the Ten Commandments embroidered in gold. Realizing no doubt that flying such a splendid flag added much dignity to his procession, Reuveni procured four other flags during his stay in Portugal, each with a different symbolic meaning.[71] In several places in the journal we are told how people, mostly New Christians, gathered to admire these splendid objects – the words of God so richly embroidered in Hebrew letters were surely a match for Mateus's piece of the True Cross.

But the most common objects carried by pretenders, and probably the easiest to fabricate, were letters from a foreign potentate. All three men – Reuveni, Mateus and Bermudes – who attempted to exploit Portugal's dream of linking up with allies at the rear of the Muslim Empire, brought with them appropriate epistles from the ruler they were representing, and collected en route further written recommendations, safe conducts and tokens of appreciation from European authorities. In Reuveni's story we are told how important it was that such documents appear impressive: when John III presented him with a letter to his brother, King Joseph, Reuveni furiously insisted (thus probably breaking every rule of protocol) that it be copied from paper to parchment, so that it remain as "proof and memorial for our children and children's children".[72] Even more astonishing, however, is the detailed report on how such credentials were manufactured.

In what is perhaps the finest description of forgery in pre-modern times, a letter sent by the Marquis Federigo of Mantua to his ambassador at the Curia, Francesco Gonzaga, on 19 February 1530, has the following: Reuveni, claiming that all his original papers had been confiscated by the Duke of Clermont, sought out in Mantua scribes who could write Italian and Hebrew. When two Spanish Jews offered him their services, he swore them to secrecy and asked them to prepare four letters from his brother, King Joseph: for the Pope, for the Emperor, for Federigo and one addressed to the Jews. He demanded that the letters be written on parchment and dated five years earlier, saying that he knew how to tint the document so as to make the script appear old. Since these were purported to have been from his government, he also wished them to have signatures of "seventy elders". Thus he convened as many Jews above the age of ten as he could muster and requested that they sign by fictitious

names; unfortunately he succeeded in obtaining no more than 20 signatures. Consequently he decided that the letters should be rewritten and signed with a seal, and he gave instructions to a Jewish goldsmith to make a seal of "King Joseph son of Solomon of the Desert of Habor". But the scribe tried to avoid rewriting the letters and, on the pretext that he had no time, offered instead to erase the signatures. Then he intentionally proceeded to botch the job: the signatures were not properly erased, and the scribe signed his own name under the seal in order to make the forgery obvious – for no one would believe, writes Federigo, that the King of Habor could avail himself of the services of a Spanish scribe from Mantua. The entire plot was conveyed by the Jews to the authorities: released by their rabbis from the oath of secrecy, Reuveni's accomplices not only disclosed the process but also supplied the marquis with copies of the letters with signatures of the Mantuan scribes and samples of the seal; such proof, together with the intentionally botched job of the scribe, were sufficient evidence of fraud, perhaps even more than sufficient. But the Marquis of Mantua, knowing that five years earlier Reuveni had been supported by the Pope, apparently wanted to leave no room for doubt: the Jewish Prince, he declared, was nothing but a *Baro et Ribaldo*.[73]

It would be interesting to compare this episode with an incident at the Council of Florence in 1441: the Byzantine Emperor was offended because the Duke of Burgundy had failed to send him the same written expression of respect as the one delivered to the Pope; to prevent an international crisis, the Duke's delegates hastened to fabricate a letter from their prince to the Emperor. In 1441 no one regarded this as forgery; rather it was thought of as a legitimate act by official envoys who had no means of urgently communicating with their government. Reuveni, on the other hand, already a suspect figure, attempting under a cloak of secrecy to manufacture documents from a prince whose existence was also dubious, attempted too much of an invention even by sixteenth-century standards.

Venetian Caution

Yet in the absence of sensation-seeking newspapers, the unmasking of an impostor was not an item of information quickly to become general knowledge. Therefore, several months after his exposure in Mantua, the "small, dark Jew" continued with his charade in Venice. He had succeeded for a while in duping Egidio da Viterbo and Clement VII in "Prophetic Rome"; he had almost succeeded in obtaining ships and guns in ally-seeking Portugal; if he had not been caught forging letters, he might have recruited the Gonzagas as supporters – but what were his chances in the Most Serene Republic, governed by such astute, down-to-earth, politically experienced merchants? Would they be less gullible than others?

A few years prior to Reuveni's first appearance in Venice, in May 1518, a pretender to the throne of Cyprus (at the time a Venetian colony) presented

himself to the Venetian ambassador in London. The ambassador, Sebastian Giustinian, reported the following in a letter to the *Signoria*:

> An individual, who styled himself the son of the late King of Cyprus, had arrived in London. Supposed him to be one of the two sons of the late King Zacho (Jaques [James]) who escaped from Venice, but his [Giustinian's] secretary, who had seen this individual, declared be neither of these. He called himself Zuan da Luigano [John de Lusignan], legitimate son of a brother of the late King Zacho. He had been at the Court, but was held in small account there, because he begged for money and personal favours. Had been informed this Cypriot purposed visiting him; would give him a gracious reception, elicit what he could, and announce the result.[74]

Two other Venetian incidents involving a foreign envoy occurred later in that century. In 1558, a certain Hassan, armed with all necessary credentials, presented himself to the Venetian *bailo* in Istanbul as a secret emissary from Prince Selim and his favourite consort, Nûr-Banû, who – so Hassan claimed – was seeking information about her Venetian relatives.[75] Despite some doubts, Hassan was received in Venice in March 1559 as an official Ottoman envoy and there he presented the Sultana's inquiries as well as Selim's request for 500 German arquebuses. Although he was soon exposed as a habitual impostor by certain members of the Greek community in Venice, the Venetian authorities, fearing embarrassment and opting to play it safe, sent him back with gifts and an official letter to Selim. Shortly afterwards this same Hassan reappeared before the Venetian *bailo* with letters bearing Nûr-Banû's seal, was allowed to go on a second mission to Venice, was once more received with due honours and was once again exposed as a liar and a fraud by one of his companions and by an Armenian interpreter. The last revealed that Hassan had attempted in the past to present fraudulent letters to the Duke of Ferrara. The Venetian authorities nevertheless decided once again to continue to treat him as an official Ottoman delegate: no action was taken against Hassan, and although his requests were not met, he was dispatched back with all the customary ceremonies. The *bailo*, on the other hand, was instructed to carry out a thorough investigation as to the man's true identity and motives. It is interesting to note that the Venetians stated that Hassan's letters were suspect because they did not bear any date or place of composition – an indication that by then there were clear rules regarding the form of official missives.

This is a most revealing case for several reasons: first, Istanbul was not as remote or as cut off from Venice as Ethiopia was from Rome or Portugal, and it certainly was no imaginary land. People, goods and correspondence were travelling to and fro constantly. It should have been no problem, once suspicion was aroused, to find out the exact truth. Second, the Venetians

were probably the shrewdest no-nonsense people of their day, with the longest and most sophisticated tradition in diplomacy. They also had the best linguists and geographers and the most reliable information about distant lands. Yet even they preferred to reserve judgement and to act cautiously twice (!) in a case of such blatant fraud.

A similar attitude was adopted by the *Signoria* 13 years later. In October 1571, a certain Schias Muralla, described as "a Persian Turk" (*turco persiano*), appeared in Venice claiming to be an emissary of the King of Persia. The Council of Ten noted that he had not brought with him proper letters of introduction, and that there were quite a few discrepancies between what he told the interpreter in Venice and what he had relayed to Jacomo Ragazzoni, a Venetian citizen who had met the "ambassador" in Ragusa. It was therefore decided to give back the presents that he had given to the *Signoria*, with a note saying that it was not customary to receive presents from private individuals. But, although unacknowledged as an official delegate, Schias Muralla was allowed to stay in Venice or leave whenever he pleased.[76]

With Reuveni they exercised caution from the beginning of his second sojourn in the city: when news of his arrival in town reached the authorities, the *Signoria* nominated Ramusio, as the expert in oriental languages, to investigate the man who "dava sospetto di essere un impostore".[77] Ramusio's report, dated November 1530 and copied verbatim in Sanuto's diary,[78] is the fullest account of the story outside Reuveni's own journal, but differs from it on several important issues: the ambassador's origins, his itinerary, his education and the purpose of his mission. First of all, to Ramusio Reuveni identified his people as descendants of the Judeans who went into exile following the destruction of the Second Temple, while the Lost Tribes of Israel, he now said, resided in Ethiopia, in the land of Prester John. Reuveni now claimed that he had been to Ethiopia (not mentioned in the journal) and spoken to *Prete Giani* prior to his coming to Europe; in passing he also refers to visiting Medina and Mecca (also absent from his journal) before crossing from Arabia to East Africa. Second, according to Ramusio, "the Jew David" was a biblical scholar and an adept of the Kabbalah, who was moved by divine guidance to arouse the Jews throughout the diaspora and to gather all the exiles in the Promised Land, where their redemption was soon to come. Although still depicted as a battle-scarred warrior, he no longer claimed to be on a military mission; his people's victory over their enemies, he was assured in a revelation, would not be achieved by the power of guns and artillery to be obtained in an arms deal with European powers, but by divine intervention – in the final confrontation God would prevent the enemy's arquebuses from firing. The Jewish ambassador, Ramusio says, did not go out of his residence at Count Guido Rangoni's house (and one cannot but wonder why this learned *condottiere* offered hospitality to someone already branded as a suspected impostor), but many Jews came from the ghetto to listen to his sermons about the imminent

redemption: "Li iudei veramente lo adorano come un messia".[79] Clearly, then, either the famous Jewish grapevine had failed in this case to transmit the redeemer's disgrace in Mantua, or – if it had not failed – the Venetian Jews must have seen his attempts at forgery as legitimate.

The discrepancies between Reuveni's journal and Ramusio's report to the *Signoria* defy any simple explanation. They could be attributed to misunderstandings by Ramusio (who was perhaps not proficient enough in his interlocutor's Arab dialect), or to a change that had come over Reuveni either as a result of his ordeals or due to the influence of Solomon Molcho with whom he had just been reunited. The interesting fact, however, for the understanding of attitudes towards imposture is that Ramusio – about to become Europe's leading authority on geography and exploration – reported the interview quite dryly and refused to comment on the Jewish Prince's credibility, despite the fact that the Venetian authorities explicitly asked him to do so. He did not dismiss Reuveni as a liar or a charlatan and simply emphasized that the man was absolutely certain of his mission and determined that nothing would deter him – "altro non li so dir", "that is all I can say", he concluded. And Sanuto, the wise and diligent commentator on the affairs of his day (but a person not averse to making regular pilgrimages to a fashionable prophet),[80] copied down Ramusio's report faithfully, offering no critical views of his own. "Better to err on the side of caution" seems to have been everyone's rule of thumb.

Finally, a few words need to be said about Jewish reactions to Reuveni's quixotic figure. There is no doubt that many believed in him: simple folk in the ghetto as well as learned physicians and bankers in Italy; community leaders in North Africa, who levied a special tax to support his mission; and New Christians in Portugal, clandestinely clinging to their old faith, who became openly exuberant when the ambassador of an independent Jewish state haughtily addressed their persecutors. But as he himself admitted in his diary, he also had many "enemies" (i.e. people who dismissed him as a liar) amongst his co-religionists. One, for example, was Jacob Mantino, who collaborated with Leo Africanus in the production of a Hebrew–Arabic–Latin dictionary and would later be appointed physician to Pope Paul III and professor of medicine at the University of Rome. Mantino may have feared that the furore caused by the Jewish prince might in some way harm his own privileged position among the non-Jewish elites.[81] Another "enemy" was Rabbi Azriel Diena who, oddly enough, was to become an ardent supporter of Molcho but regarded Reuveni as a dangerous villain.[82] Two generations later, in the 1570s, we hear a surprisingly modern voice of scepticism in the words of the Jewish scholar Isaac Akrish:

> For although I have seen Prester John's letter and the Travels of R[abbi] Benjamin [of Tudela] and the Book of Eldad ha-Dani, which are in print, and the Reubenite who came to Constantinople [*sic*] and went to

> Portugal in 1522, as told in R. Joseph ha-Kohen's chronicle, we can say that these are but inventions made up to strengthen weakened knees and to fortify depressed hearts.[83]

Yet the most honest and typical Jewish position on the question of Reuveni's veracity was the one penned by Daniel of Pisa. The same letter in which he described his guest so fully ended with the words, "and I wrote all these things for you omitting none, and you may judge them as you see fit"[84] – in other words, exactly as Ramusio would say in 1530: *altro non li so dir*.

Utopias, Legends and Travel Lies

It was no coincidence that utopias re-entered European literature when sensational news about other civilizations were flooding the market. But, despite the difficulties in separating fact from fiction, it seems that the majority of early modern readers did not confuse the descriptions of imaginary ideal societies with travel literature, whether reliable or fanciful – and neither should we. Despite similarities in intentions, despite the integration of legendary elements in both utopias and the tales told by those bogus ambassadors, the sixteenth-century descriptions of the lands of the Lost Tribes or of Prester John did not belong to the genre introduced by Thomas More in 1516.

Halah, Habor, Gozan and the Medes, named in 2 Kings, were real places, rivers and peoples in central Mesopotamia. The Bible, however, does not tell us exactly whether the deportees from Samaria were all the tribes of Israel, or only the Israelites of Transjordan, or only members of the Israelite elites (an Assyrian inscription describing the accomplishments of Sargon II says that he had deported 27,290 prisoners after the conquest of Samaria in the eighth century BCE). The ambiguous biblical verses would serve as the basis for the legend of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, which has kept its hold over the imagination of Jews, Christians and Muslims for many centuries – but the location and the history of this hidden nation would undergo many permutations.[85]

The first-known written description of a powerful kingdom of the lost tribes, somewhere in the East, is attributed to the ninth-century Jewish traveller, Eldad ha-Dani (Eldad the Danite). One of its versions, often labelled "the first Jewish utopia", was first printed in Hebrew in Mantua in 1480, and it contained the following description of the land of the "Sons of Moses":

> A river flows round their land for a distance of four days' journey on every side. They dwell in beautiful houses provided with handsome towers, which they have built themselves. There is nothing unclean among them, neither in the case of birds, venison, nor domesticated animals; there are no wild beasts, no flies, no foxes, no vermin, no serpents, no

> dogs, and, in general, nothing that does harm; they have only sheep and cattle, which bear twice a year. They sow and reap, they have all kinds of gardens with all kinds of fruits and cereals, beans, melons, gourds, onions, garlic, wheat, and barley, and the seed grows a hundredfold. They have faith; they know the Law, the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the Aggadah. […] No child, be it son or daughter, dies during the life-time of its parents, but they reach a third and fourth generation. They do all the field-work themselves, having no male nor female servants. They do not close their houses at night, for there is no thief or evil-doer among them. They have plenty of gold and silver; they sow flax, and cultivate the crimson-worm, and make beautiful garments. […] The river Sambatyon is two hundred yards broad, about as far as a bow-shot. It is full of sand and stones, but without water; the stones make a great noise, like the waves of the sea and a stormy wind, so that in the night the noise is heard at a distance of half a day's journey. There are fish in it, and all kinds of clean birds fly round it. And this river of stone and sand rolls during the six working-days, and rests on the Sabbath day. As soon as the Sabbath begins, fire surrounds the river, and the flames remain till the next evening, when the Sabbath ends. Thus no human being can reach the river for a distance of half a mile on either side; the fire consumes all that grows there.[86]

According to Eldad's story, some sons of Israel seemed to be enjoying an idyllic pastoral life, marred by neither crime nor inequality. But if his intent (or that of those authors who later embellished his stories) was to offer consolation to the Jews of the Diaspora, it was not with a promise of reaching a better world but with implicitly suggesting that God had not entirely forsaken his people: parts of the nation were leading somewhere a proud and independent existence. It should not, however, be regarded as a utopia proper: the Sons of Levi were transported *miraculously* to an *extraordinary* land where unclean beasts and reptiles did not dwell, where nature supplied most of their needs and an unnatural river rolled torrents of sand and stones to protect them from the evil world. There are very few details about social life, organization and institutions in this land beyond the Sambatyon River – in other words, it has little in common with the ideal imaginary societies established by human efforts alone in places that are not wonderlands.[87]

Eldad's Kingdom of the Lost Tribes protected by the river Sambatyon was considered by scholars to be one of the sources for the medieval portrayals of the Kingdom of Prester John. However, at least one scholar suggested that the influence flowed in the reverse direction, and that the letters of Prester John, which first appeared in Europe in the twelfth century, were in fact the source for the description of the Jewish kingdom behind the river of sand and stones.[88] One way or the other, the two legendary kingdoms were often linked in the medieval and early modern imagination and regarded as

neighbouring states, with one sometimes ruling over the other. Both fulfilled perhaps a function similar to that of utopian literature in later generations – fabulous lands, free of the miseries and the dangers threatening the present existence. Reuveni, Mateus, Bermudes and their like could each be said to be real figures of the Raphael Hythlodaeus prototype (though lacking the irony attributed by Thomas More to his utopian messenger); yet they did not entirely resemble More's imaginary friend, for these bogus ambassadors seldom indulged in detailed descriptions of their alleged countries of origin. Reuveni, for example, had very little to say about his homeland in the Desert of Habor. The information offered in his journal about the Jewish kingdom in Arabia could be encapsulated in one of those boxed encyclopaedic entries:

Location: Arabian Peninsula, a ten-days walk (or ride) east of the port of Jeddah.
Population: 300,000, descendants of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh who had been deported from Samaria by the King of Assyria.
Government: Monarchy (in the 1520s the reigning king was Joseph son of Solomon) and a Council of Seventy Elders.
Languages: Hebrew and Arabic.
Religion: Judaism.
History: Frequent wars with neighbours; a strong army commanded by the King's brother, fierce, but lacking modern military technology.

A more detailed image emerges from his interview with Ramusio as entered in Sanuto's diary in November 1530:

> Above the mountains that separate the Arabian desert from [Arabia] Felix and [Arabia] Petrea, only a few days away from Mount Sinai, there is a multitude of Jews, about 300 thousand souls, who live in the manner and customs of the Arabs, that is they camp in the fields and ride facing backwards, with only a cotton saddle over the [horse's] flesh, carrying a pole for a lance. And they say that they are exiled Jews from the time when Titus son of Vespasian destroyed Jerusalem, and they have always resided in those mountains with their ruler of Jewish extraction, and each time a caravan of Moors that carries spices from Mecca or the port of Jedda towards Damascus and Aleppo, so he says, and the said caravan having to stay for a day near these mountains to stock on water in order to traverse the deserts of sand, these armed Jews, often together with their Arab neighbours, attack the said caravan. At the head of these [Jews] stands now the lord Joseph, eldest son of King Solomon.[89]

The location remained more or less the same, but the origins of his people have undergone a radical change: they were no longer descendants of Gad,

Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh, exiled by the Assyrians in 720 BCE, but rather victims of the exile of Judah after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Did Reuveni suddenly realize, after almost seven years of "selling" his story to Jews and Gentiles in Europe, that a scion of the House of David from the tribe of Judah could hardly rule over the lost tribes of Israel?

Furthermore, his countrymen were now depicted as a fierce desert tribe, highway robbers who collaborated with their neighbours in attacking merchant caravans. This picture resembled Varthema's Arabian pygmy Jews much more than Eldad's peaceful kingdom beyond the Sambatyon. The Bolognese Ludovico di Varthema, whom we met in Chapter 2, travelled in the Middle East and Arabia in the first decade of the sixteenth century. He was the first European to report a visit, disguised as a Muslim, to Mecca and Medina. The first edition of his travelogue was published in Italian in 1510 and soon after in other languages. It is not impossible to assume that Reuveni read this book, at least before his report to Ramusio, or that both he and Varthema based their stories on a common source. Varthema depicts a Jewish community that he saw from afar (and, were it not anachronistic, one could say he was describing what he saw through the wrong end of the binoculars). Travelling from the north, in the opposite direction to the caravans that Reuveni's people would attack, he and his fellow travellers crossed "the sea of sand, which we left before we found the mountain of the Jews, and through which we travelled five days and five nights"; and then

> we found a mountain which appeared to be ten or twelve miles in circumference, in which mountain there dwell four or five thousand Jews, who go naked, and are in height five or six spans [about 70–80 cm], and have a feminine voice, and are more black than any other colour. They live entirely on the flesh of sheep, and eat nothing else. They are circumcised, and confess that they are Jews; and if they can get a Moor into their hands, they skin him alive. At the foot of the said mountain we found a tank of water, which is water that falls in the rainy season. We loaded with the said water 16,000 camels [*sic*], whereat the Jews were ill-pleased; and they went about that mountain like wild goats, and on no account would they descend into the plain, because they are mortal enemies of the Moors. At the foot of the mountain, by the said water, there were six or eight feet of beautiful thornbushes, in which we found two turtledoves, which circumstance appeared to us like a miracle inasmuch we had travelled fifteen days and nights and had not met with a single animal or bird.

Two days later he reached Medina.[90] Varthema, on the whole, was regarded as a reliable reporter by his contemporaries and by later scholars; Jean Louis Burckhardt and Richard Burton, nineteenth-century European travellers

who followed in his footsteps in the Hejaz, praised him for his accuracy (although, as we saw above, the nineteenth-century editor of the English translation, George Percy Badger, expressed disgust at the fact that Varthema apostatized in order to travel freely throughout the Muslim world). If so, did he really see pygmy-like black Jews scampering like goats on a mountainside in the middle of the Hejaz? And were they the subjects of King Joseph son of Solomon?

However, if Reuveni's compatriots in the Desert of Habor were descendants of the exiles from Judea, in what part of the world were to be found the Tribes of Israel exiled by the Assyrians? In his interview with Ramusio, Reuveni claimed to have encountered them in the land of Prester John ("Prete Giani") in Ethiopia, where, as several of his co-religionists were claiming at the time, they were rising against their oppressors.

The image of a strong kingdom of the Israelites could serve, in the words of Isaac Akrish, to "strengthen weakened knees and to fortify depressed hearts". Yet Reuveni's promise to the Jews was not for a blissful life in an ideal society in Habor or in Ethiopia but for a return to the Holy Land. Thus, although offering hope – the Lord has not abandoned his people and they could redeem themselves by helping to reconquer the Promised Land – Reuveni's journal should not be numbered among the early modern utopias. Actually, Jewish utopias proper only began to be written in the last third of the nineteenth century when Jewish *maskilim*, like the European humanists in the sixteenth century, would overcome religious inhibitions (such as the prohibition in the Talmud to predict the eschatological future: "The eye hath not seen, O Lord, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him")[91] that had prevented imagining social redemption attained on this earth by human powers alone. Reuveni's journal was not modelled on Thomas More's ideal republic but rather on the contemporary genre of personal travelogues.

Authors of travel journals in the eighteenth century, whose sins against the truth ranged from slight exaggeration to total fabrication, are named "travel liars" in the title of Percy G. Adams's book.[92] The Giants of Patagonia, those Indians in southern Argentina described by several travellers as eight to twelve feet tall, were a new monstrous race imagined by Europeans during the second phase of world discovery, alongside various other ethnographic and geographic inventions presented to the readers as reliable reports. If travel liars were still accepted in the late eighteenth century, should we be surprised (as was Lev Gumilev quoted above) that Ludovico di Varthema, David Reuveni, Leo Africanus, Gomez de Santisteban, Mateus and Bermudes, Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci and many others blended fact with fantasy, truth with lies?[93]

Are we more immune today? Many of my students, for example, accept at face value Umberto Eco's account of how he discovered the existence of a medieval manuscript which he used as the basis for *The Name of the Rose*.

David Selbourne convinced readers as well as editors that he had uncovered an authentic medieval manuscript in his *Jacob D'Ancona, the City of Light*, and it was only through the exercise of good old-fashioned philological means that Bernard and David Wasserstein exposed his deception.[94] A very learned twentieth-century historian was conned by the forger of the Hitler Diaries. Every generation has its share of tricksters, forgers and travel liars; credulity and gullibility have diminished perhaps, but only very slightly.

Most of the false ambassadors in the sixteenth century – Mateus, Bermudes, Hassan – neither attained their goals nor suffered the fate of criminal offenders. David Reuveni was eventually executed, but he did not die for his crimes as a liar and a forger; he died (on 8 September 1538 in Llerena, Spain) for his sins: for leading New Christians astray and for contradicting the "truth" of the Holy Catholic Church.[95] Sixteenth-century inquisitors had few doubts concerning the demarcation between truth and falsehood in matters of faith, and the Reformation only led to further entrenchment behind those lines. But in other matters the common attitude was caution: early modern men and women were painfully aware of their constraints in attaining certainty. During the Renaissance, when certain time-honoured authorities were being discarded as laughably wrong, and amazing new "facts" were added to the stores of knowledge, they learned to reserve judgement. On the whole, the authorities who had dealings with Reuveni, as with other cases of impostors or inventors of travel journeys, were neither stupidly credulous nor haughtily dismissive: how could they be absolutely certain of a fraud? After all, if the ambassador's story were true, it could have been an answer to their prayers: a further revelation of God's great plan for the ultimate reign of Christ, or the discovery of a strong potential ally against the Turks. So long as there was no high price to pay for gullibility, why not (tentatively) welcome the notion of an earthly paradise near the Orinoco River, or an offer of alliance from the legendary Prester John in Ethiopia or a powerful state of the Lost Tribes of Israel in the Desert of Habor?

4
Underworlds

The world picture of Europeans during the Age of Discovery was dotted with realms created by fantasy; but, in addition to the search for the Kingdom of Prester John, the Lost Tribes of Israel, or the land of the Amazons, and in addition to visions of a heavenly world above and an infernal hell below, many men and women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also imagined – and feared – an earthly underworld, where all manner of anti-societies conducted a covert existence.[1] This was a realm populated entirely by impostors, for each of its inhabitants possessed (at least) two different identities, one of an individual living in the ordinary world and another of a citizen of a hidden kingdom.

The underworlds of the early modern imagination were of four kinds: one (discussed above in Chapter 2) was a hidden international network believed to have been created by members of a clandestine or semi-clandestine religious minority (crypto-Jews and Moriscos in the Iberian world, Catholics in England, Huguenots in France, Anabaptists and Nicodemites everywhere); another, bogus and preposterous as it may appear to modern students but by far the most frightening hidden society in the eyes of contemporaries, was the realm formed by a Satan who was ceaselessly recruiting an army of witches; a third, a secret organization formed by certain illuminati, offering esoteric knowledge to the initiates (e.g. the Rosicrucians in the early seventeenth century), was the precursor of the eighteenth-century world of Masonic fraternities both in its intentions and in the concerns it aroused, although it still remains unclear to what extent this republic actually existed beyond a furore generated by publications; and last and probably the largest and most ubiquitous, the criminal underworld, believed to be a structured society established by members of the marginal classes.

To the list of clandestine organizations one could have added political conspiracies (a fashionable topic among sociologists and historians in recent years), for Renaissance history certainly offered innumerable plots, both real and fanciful.[2] However, although moving in the shadows and depending on

cloak and dagger tactics, these small bands of men (early modern women rarely participated in such activities) were not perceived as forming subcultures or counter-societies: they were part and parcel of politics in every Renaissance state, one of the few means available at the time to whoever desired to overthrow a ruler or a regime. The Pazzi conspirators, for instance, were sons of a respectable Florentine patrician family who wished to remove the Medici from power; they could not be regarded as residents of a different world.[3] And once a plot, whether successful or foiled, was uncovered, it ceased to be a part of the establishment's paranoid fears.

Another dark side of the world of international politics in Renaissance Europe was hidden behind the walls of foreign embassies and in the chambers of "spymasters" such as Francis Walsingham. It was a new world of intrigue, plots and counter-plots, networks of "intelligencers", encryption and decryption of secret messages, and all manner of disguise.[4] It was Venice, of course, that led the way in this as in so many other political innovations.[5] Other states soon followed suit, and government centres throughout Europe were suddenly being spied upon by foreign agents, many of them in disguise. For example, in 1601 Henry Wotton, disguised as an Italian named Octavio Baldi, was sent by the Grand Duke of Tuscany to the court of King James in Scotland in order to expose a plot to poison the king. Wotton remained in the Scottish court for three months without revealing his true identity.[6]

Imaginary underworlds had effects similar to the two sides of a magnet, repelling and attracting at the same time. On the one hand, they were regarded as the dark, dangerous and ugly habitat of the outcasts, but they also held the promises of esoteric knowledge, camaraderie, power, freedom from regular constraints, opportunity to refashion one's identity and compensation for contempt one might have suffered in the real world. Neither quite utopian nor necessarily dystopian (more like the "evil twin of respectable society"),[7] the clandestine communities of the Renaissance had a strong hold over the imagination.

For the sake of the argument put forward in this study, however, the central issue is not to what extent they actually existed or posed a real threat to Christendom, but rather the growing alarm among the authorities and the populace, an alarm which greatly increased and intensified the search for methods for uncovering hidden realities and for firmly identifying those persons whose true allegiance was to some secret society.

Each type of these (at least partly invented) associations has received ample scholarly attention, yet they have rarely been discussed together and never in the context of the early modern obsession with identification. Things were not what they seemed, people were not who they said they were, and hidden alternative societies, which could pose a serious threat to the world of honest citizens, were lurking under the surface – such seemed to be the frame of mind of governments and of many ordinary people who

conducted a sustained campaign to bring everything into the open and to re-establish certainty.

Dual Loyalties: Between Nation and Faith

The fear of "Popish plots" in England, beginning during the reign of Elizabeth I (especially after her excommunication in 1570) and lasting until late in the eighteenth century,[8] is a subject well known to any student of English history. It was a paranoia which came in waves, at times fomented by high-ranking political figures for concrete political purposes.[9] The authorities' mission in this case was to identify not only spies and messengers sent by the Pope and Catholic monarchs, in particular those sinister Jesuits in plain clothes who succeeded in infiltrating the country and hiding in "priest holes" in manor houses, but also any potential local collaborators. It was not simply fear of a political conspiracy, but of a whole underground movement of people who concealed their primary allegiance. If one were inclined to make analogies, it would be this fear of Catholics in England (rather than the "witch craze") which most resembled the "Red Scare" in the USA during the 1950s; except that the English obsession with the Catholic danger lasted far longer than the fear of secret Communists in America. The loyal subjects of the Pope, it was believed, were not averse to donning any disguise, and to participating in any subversive or underhanded activity, including assassinations and terrorist attacks. What is more, the Catholic menace was perceived as hiding under many garbs: sectarians of all shades were suspected at times of being crypto-Catholics, and in the eighteenth century even Methodists were accused by some of their enemies of being papists in disguise.

Admittedly, for members of the elite, those who identified stability with the Church of England, the fear of potential Puritan plots was at times just as deep.[10] In Protestant polemic, however, and not only in England, the Antichrist – the archetype of the clandestine subversive, wrecking the Church from within – was most often identified with the Pope, and a Popish underworld remained a perennial menacing image in Protestant countries. Anti-Catholic propaganda in times of crisis disseminated not only scary predictions of terrorist plots against the establishment, but also a stereotypical hate-figure of the Catholic murderer. The figure of the "bloody papist" was found in English murder pamphlets from the 1580s until the last decades of the seventeenth century, particularly when specific conspiracies were uncovered (after the arrival of the English Jesuits, Edmund Campion and Robert Persons, in 1580; following the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 and the Popish Plot in 1678; and during the Exclusion Crisis which lasted until 1683). Catholics were thought "to possess a blood lust which threatens to pollute both public and private spaces".[11]

The equivalent in France was the fear of Huguenot plots (real or imaginary), of an international conspiracy of Calvinists and an underground

movement of French subjects receiving their directives from Geneva. Official warnings expressed and spread the worries about the smuggling of foreign spies, weapons and letters containing instructions for insurrection.[12] The French Huguenots were sometimes referred to as "leeches", writes Charlotte Wells, in order to evoke an association with witchcraft. She points out that the term was also used for foreigners, and that political propaganda created for ordinary Frenchmen an image of France being sucked dry and ruined by the combined forces of witches, foreigners and Huguenots (or Catholic extremists, as the case may have been).[13] As we shall see below, different fears and obsessions were sometimes combined together, and distinctive types of underground societies would often overlap in the popular imagination.

In Spain, as we saw, the suspicion that Moriscos, the converts from Islam and their descendants, constituted a "fifth column", secretly adhering to their former faith and loyal to the Muslim empire, was one of the major arguments in favour of their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula in the early seventeenth century. While the continued presence of "Marranos" in Spain and Portugal and in their New World colonies, despite the fact that no Jewish empire or even a small Jewish state were then in existence, was accompanied in some circles by the firm notion that these *conversos* were actively involved in some worldwide Jewish network and devising ways to bring about the downfall of Christendom.

At the same time authorities throughout Europe were constantly on the alert against secret sectarian organizations, which were frequently considered to be part of a large international clandestine conspiracy. Anabaptists of all colours, tarnished by the memory of the Münster insurrection, were believed to be organized in covert cells and – no matter how pacifist they claimed to be – to have plans for forcibly overthrowing all existing governments in order to establish a godly kingdom on earth. Familists in the Netherlands, Germany and England, precisely because of their Nicodemite and antinomian proclivities, were also thought to be a dangerous subversive underground movement – although in England they had sympathizers in court, perhaps as high up as Queen Elizabeth herself.[14] Explicit texts, such as Francesco Pucci's *Forma d'una Republica Catholica* (c.1581), had they been read by members of any establishment, would have served as definite proof that an army of moles was swiftly digging its way under the foundations of society and into the carefully laid-out gardens of law-abiding and God-fearing decent people.

The Jewish Danger

The myth of an international Jewish conspiracy to take control of the world was a nineteenth-century invention, which reached its widest dissemination with the book known as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, concocted by

agents of the Russian Okhrana.[15] This myth, however, had medieval roots, going back at least to the twelfth century and the appearance of the earliest blood libels. Since there was no Jewish power threatening Christendom from outside, the Jews of Europe, and later also Jewish converts to Christianity and their descendants for many generations, were accused of serving the most feared enemies of the time, whether Mongols, Muslims in general or Turks.[16] In order to adapt existing notions and beliefs to new phenomena, medieval authors found it necessary on occasion to attribute Jewish ancestry to new enemies which suddenly appeared on the horizon, such as the Mongol hordes invading Europe from the East in the thirteenth century. Either the Mongols (Tartars) themselves were said to have Jewish ancestry or to be descended of the Ten Lost Tribes, or at the very least, according to medieval propaganda, to be welcomed by the Jews of Europe as liberators. The Lost Tribes in these fantasies were often conflated with the peoples enclosed according to legend by Alexander the Great beyond the Caspian Mountains or with Gog and Magog, the destroyers of nations in many an apocalyptical vision.[17]

Throughout the Middle Ages and the early modern period non-Jews were very much aware of the messianic expectations awakened among Jews every time the Christian nations came under an external attack. These eschatological stirrings, interpreted as an expression of a desire on the part of Jews to take revenge and to retaliate for centuries of oppression, constituted further proof that the "enemy within" was planning to join forces with the attacker from without. Matthew Paris, for example, described a secret assembly of Jews in 1241, in which their leaders urged them to collect arms and provisions for the Tartars who would soon come to liberate them from their Christian oppressors. The plot was providentially discovered by a bridge keeper who opened the casks the Jews were carrying and found them to be full of swords and daggers.[18] Such fangled notions about connections between European Jews and foreign enemies were bequeathed to future generations and embellished in every century according to novel circumstances.

In chapter 29 of the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (second half of the fourteenth century), describing what lay beyond the land of Cathay and near the Kingdom of Prester John, we find:

> In that same region be the mountains of Caspian that men crepe Uber in the country. Between those mountains the Jews of ten lineages be enclosed, that men clepe Goth and Magoth and they may not go out on no side. There were enclosed twenty-two kings with their people, that dwelled between the mountains of Scythia. There King Alexander chased them between those mountains, and there he thought for to enclose them through work of his men. But when he saw that he might not do it, ne bring it to an end, he prayed to God of nature that he would

> perform that that he had begun. And all were it so, that he was a paynim and not worthy to be heard, yet God of his grace closed the mountains together, so that they dwell there all fast locked and enclosed with high mountains all about, save only on one side, and on that side is the sea of Caspian. […]
>
> And also ye shall understand, that the Jews have no proper land of their own for to dwell in, in all the world, but only that land between the mountains. And yet they yield tribute for that land to the Queen of Amazonia, the which that maketh them to be kept in close full diligently, that they shall not go out on no side but by the coast of their land; for their land marcheth to those mountains. […]
>
> And though it happen some of them by fortune to go out, they can no manner of language but Hebrew, so that they cannot speak to the people.
>
> And yet, natheles, men say they shall go out in the time of anti-Christ, and that they shall make great slaughter of Christian men. And therefore all the Jews that dwell in all lands learn always to speak Hebrew, in hope, that when the other Jews shall go out, that they may understand their speech, and to lead them into Christendom for to destroy the Christian people. For the Jews say that they know well by their prophecies, that they of Caspia shall go out, and spread throughout all the world, and that the Christian men shall be under their subjection, as long as they have been in subjection of them.[19]

If in Jewish lore the Lost Tribes were cut off from the world by the Sambatyon river, in certain non-Jewish legends they were enclosed beyond the Caspian mountains; if in Jewish stories (as those of Eldad the Danite of the ninth century) these tribes of Israel constituted a strong independent kingdom, in Christian descriptions of the far corners of the earth they were subjects of the mighty Prester John, or – as in Mandeville – serving both Gog and Magog and "the Queen of Amazonia". Therefore these legendary tribes could be expected, as we saw in the case of Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo's attitude to David Reuveni, to serve as potential allies against Islam in an imminent apocalyptical confrontation, but more often they were regarded as allies of one or the other of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

The Hebrew language, which became for certain humanists (Egidio da Viterbo among them) a key to the unlocking the secrets of the Kabbalah, was also regarded as the conspiratorial secret language of Jews around the world, including the Lost Tribes who would come to redeem them. A secret language, as we shall see below, or at least a set of secret signs, was ascribed to every one of those underground organizations, whether a religious group or a vagrant "nation".

Despite the fact that by the sixteenth century, following the expulsions, there were very few Jewish communities in Western and Central Europe,

and most people in those parts had never encountered a Jew, the myths and fears persisted and gained an ever-growing audience with the advent of print. *The Travels of John Mandeville*, for example, an early modern bestseller, even reached and affected the worldview of an uneducated miller such as Menocchio of Friuli.[20]

The vernacular printing industry in the sixteenth century took up a different version of the old myth about Jewish tribes descending from the northeast to wreak vengeance on Christendom, and turned it into a terror-striking campaign. "Red Jews" suddenly became another spectre hovering over Christendom, as a spate of pamphlets prophesying their imminent coming to devastate Christendom enhanced the fears and anti-Jewish sentiments throughout the German-speaking lands.[21]

Thus, three hundred years after the imaginary Jewish-Mongol plot, similar stories about Jews collaborating with an external force were still circulating and new conspiracies were frequently exposed. For instance, two letters written in 1540 by prominent Lutheran humanists – one in German by Georg Sabinus, Philip Melanchthon's son-in-law, and the other in Latin by Sebastianus Theodoricus, known as Winshemius, a professor at the university of Wittenberg – speak of "a Jewish conspiracy" (*De Conjuratione Judaeorum*) to reconquer the Holy Land.[22] A man, calling himself King of the Jews and the Goths (or Gots), and claiming to be an Amalekite, reported Sabinus, was collecting money from the Jews in Europe to conquer Gotland (*sic*, meaning perhaps the Swedish island, then under Danish rule) and then to raise an army of 200,000 men to march eastwards and conquer the Land of Israel and restore it to the Jews. It has become known, the letter said, that the Jews of Cracow collected forty wagonloads of gunpowder and that the Jews of Prague bought all the saltpetre that could be obtained in Germany. It was also rumoured that a few German princes were involved in the plot. The "King of the Jews and the Goths", according to one of these letters, was caught and arrested by Joachim II Hector, the prince-elector of Brandenburg. Several German noblemen offered money for his release, but the prince refused and the pretender was to be delivered to the Emperor. In the other letter, however, Winshemius voiced a suspicion that the "Amalekite" was nothing but a charlatan who had wanted to deprive rich Jews of their money, wealth which they had accumulated by extorting exorbitant interest rates and by "sucking the blood" of Germans.[23]

No evidence exists, apart from these two letters, that such an affair ever took place. No record of a trial of such a charlatan has come to light. The story could be a muddled echo of the Reuveni-Molcho episode (see Chapter 3) – for Solomon Molcho (though probably not David Reuveni) did come to Regensburg in 1532 to meet with Charles V, bringing with him the news about the Prince of the Lost Tribes who had come to Pope and kings to gather an army in order to liberate the Land of Israel from the hands of the Turks, thus raising messianic hopes as well as fears among the small Jewish

communities in Germany. Molcho was arrested and taken by the Emperor's men to Mantua. Alternatively, the story of the "King of the Jews and the Goths" could be a reflection of some rogue's poor attempt to capitalize on the "Red Jews Scare", which was reaching its height at the time. The report in these letters also contained echoes of the story about the swords in wine casks that Jews had tried to smuggle to the Mongols, which appeared in Matthew Paris's chronicles. One way or the other, this correspondence indicates that the anxiety about Jews – regarded as rich, wicked, but politically weak when on their own – secretly conspiring with the enemies of Christendom was still going strong.

Even without external allies, the Jews of Europe were frequently depicted as conspiring against Christendom, awaiting their messiah – the Antichrist – to dominate Christians and take their revenge upon them. Luther's polemical work "On the Jews and Their Lies", written late in his life, gained respectability and a very wide public for these diabolical stereotypes.[24] Hence, whenever Jewish false messiahs appeared and gathered a following, the movement provoked expressions of anxiety among theologians. On the one hand, they ridiculed the credulity of the Jews for believing an impostor, and expected a wave of conversions to Christianity after the inevitable disappointment; but they also imagined apocalyptic scenarios. Furthermore, converts everywhere were now suspected of being crypto-Jews, still bent on undermining Christendom. The accusation of being a crypto-Jew became, in Protestant German lands no less than in Iberia, one of the many insults hurled at adversaries, second perhaps only to being called the Antichrist or one of his minions. Martin Luther, for example, said the following of Hieronymus Aleander (Girolamo Aleandro, cardinal and papal nuncio): "He was born a Jew [...] whether he was baptized is uncertain [...] his pretended profession of Christianity has been successful to him".[25] In sum, despite the fact that by the sixteenth century the Jewish population in Western and Central Europe was but a miniscule minority, the fear of some monstrous Jewish international conspiracy grew even stronger for several reasons: heightened eschatological tensions in the wake of the Reformation; Christian Hebraists delving into Jewish writings and customs and in some cases interpreting their content (with the help of Jewish apostates) as anti-Christian; printed versions of medieval myths reaching an ever growing public; and the large numbers of converts, many of them suspected of clandestinely adhering to their old faith or remaining loyal to their brethren – and thus becoming in popular imagination another cohort in the large and terrifying army of hidden enemies.

The Magi's Fraternities

One of the reasons for the pan-European fear of hidden realities during the early modern period was the culture of secrets (distinct from the "culture

of secrecy" referred to by scholars such as Jon Snyder, who analysed the practice of equivocation and pretence among the elites),[26] which enveloped both popular and learned experience. The printing press, particularly the cheap print industry, was peddling "books of secrets" of various kinds – for housewives, for craftsmen, for the alleviation of disease, as well as allegedly ancient revelations and explanations of the mysteries of the universe.[27] And new centres of learning were coming into existence throughout Europe, some of them established by intellectuals who thought experimental science needed to be practised covertly. Although not all were necessarily dabbling in the occult, they were nevertheless studying nature in ways which were not acceptable to the traditional authorities on knowledge. Beginning with the founding of "academies of secrets" in Italy – first Girolamo Ruscelli's *Accademia segreta* in the 1540s, then Giambattista della Porta's *Accademia dei segreti* in the 1560s, both in Naples, and later the *Accademia dei Lincei* in Rome in 1603[28] – experimental science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries often became associated with secrecy and esoteric knowledge reserved for initiates. Even in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, the utopian model par excellence for a community which glorifies science, the scientists – members of Solomon's House – were sworn to secrecy and revealed to the public only what they deemed necessary.

Furthermore, whether one accepts the "Frances Yates thesis" or not, there is no disputing the fact that the world imagined by sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europeans was populated, among other clandestine organizations, by "hermetic" secret societies which were attempting to manipulate the universe. Mostly associated with the followers of major magi – Guillaume Postel, John Dee,[29] Tommaso Campanella or Giordano Bruno – but also composed of Christian Kabbalists and Rosicrucians, they were believed to be in possession of a secret knowledge that enabled them to manipulate nature and to bring about a world reformation. Some of these "brotherhoods" actually existed, however briefly and however small their membership; others were only intellectual constructs, programmes on paper which never materialized, but were thought to exist and to be clandestinely active; and others were pure figments of the imagination. Precursors of the Freemasons and of the Illuminati of the Age of Enlightenment,[30] the secret societies of the late Renaissance usually combined social utopianism, religious idealism and scientific interests – mostly a harmless brew, with no sinister or subversive elements, but often perceived as dangerous by various establishments.

Francesco Pucci, whose plan for a secret fraternity of "lovers of truth" was, as we saw, modelled on Anabaptist sects and on the Family of Love, could have been a link in a chain connecting the utopian impulses of religious dissidents across post-Reformation Europe to the brotherhoods of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which flourished particularly in Protestant Germany and then in England.[31] During the last months of his

life Pucci expounded his ideas to Tommaso Campanella in the Inquisition cell they shared in Rome.[32] The assumption that Campanella's works had been circulating in Germany in the first years of the seventeenth century, and that they influenced Johann Valentin Andreae and his circle, has been shown by several scholars to be based on solid evidence. In his letters Andreae referred to the clandestine Christian society he was trying to found as *Civitas solis* (obviously named after Campanella's utopia). Furthermore, there is today no doubt concerning Andreae's involvement in the "Rosicrucian furore" of the second decade of the seventeenth century, nor of his influence on other utopian brotherhoods in Germany and on the circle of Dury, Hartlib and Comenius in England. Although Pucci had shown no interest in science, and only a passing connection to the occult during his participation in the séances held by John Dee and Edward Kelley, his vision of a spiritual elite that would work covertly towards a new reformation – described in such detail in his *Forma* – was replicated in several of Andreae's pamphlets (the *Fama Fraternitatis*, for example, published in 1612), as well as in the blueprint for a society named Antilia, inspired by Andreae's works, probably composed in Rostock in the 1620s by Johann Abraham Pömer and found among Hartlib's papers.[33] Antilia (like Pucci's *Forma*), had it been established, would have been a realization of the authorities' worst nightmare, for it combined sectarian rules of obedience, silence and secrecy, with scientific "secrets" of alchemy and iatro-chemistry, and megalomanic aspirations for a world reformation. Antilia, writes Donald Dickson, was "certainly the most concretely imagined utopian community of its time". However, despite efforts to find a patron and to establish it in Virginia or in Livonia, "it metamorphosed instead into an epistolary network of reformers".[34]

Authors of plans for the creation of secret societies all practised subterfuges: they published anonymously or under pseudonyms; they chose symbolic and mysterious names for their organizations and attributed them to mythological figures of the past (for example, Andreae's *Chymische Hochzeit: Christiani Rosenkreutz. Anno 1459*, written c.1605);[35] they demanded secrecy and absolute loyalty from the society's "citizens", insisted on passwords and signs for recognizing other members, and gave instructions on how to cloak their activities under various disguises.

It is safe to assume that all these utopian esoteric plans and aspirations came to naught, or at least posed no serious threat to society and to the powers-that-be. Most of them were no more than intellectual games or "epistolary networks". But since there were many of them, and since the study of the occult carried ominous undertones, there was a real fear that men who appeared to be honest citizens (Andreae, for example, was an upright Lutheran pastor), were in fact constructing underground societies, covert and invisible to the naked eye, which could bring down the whole social structure.

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, often defined as one of the leading occultists of the Renaissance, has left even modern scholars bewildered. How was one to reconcile his statement of 1510, in a letter appended to *De occulta philosophia*, that his life was devoted to redeeming ancient magic, with his *De vanitate* (*De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium, atque excellentia Verbi Dei, declamatio invectiva*) written in 1526, which denounced all occult arts as deceptions and lies?[36] Did he undergo a complete change of heart or was he practising dissimulation in order to cover his activities and associations? Did his followers form a secret society? As legends about his pact with the devil multiplied, creating the image which would emerge in various Faustus stories, the figure of Agrippa von Nettesheim could be regarded as a link between the secret confraternities of the magi and the imaginary underworld established by Satan and his recruits.

Satan's Kingdom

The most terrifying of all imagined underworlds was, without a doubt, the realm of the witches. It was also the one most peculiar to the early modern period. Although there had been accusations of witchcraft against certain individuals during the Middle Ages, the enormous conspiracy of devil worshippers, holding meetings in wood clearings or on hilltops, to which members would come flying from all over the country and then disperse again with orders and special powers to create havoc and to inflict disasters on innocent people, was a nightmare dreamt up by men of the Renaissance. Then, within a very short period, and mostly through the medium of print, it took hold of many of the best minds of the era, leading to an unprecedented attack – not on heretics or deviants, not on foreigners or pariahs, but on ordinary members of the Christian community. In early modern Europe, writes Johannes Dillinger, evil was suspected among everyday life and regular people.[37] Repeated panic waves in various locations in both Catholic and Protestant countries between the end of the fifteenth century and the early eighteenth century cost the lives of 40,000 to 50,000 of these "regular people", women and men outwardly leading normal lives, but accused by neighbours and officials of being impostors – pretending to be decent members of the community while being in fact Satan's minions and citizens of a dark underworld.

The amount of literature on the "witch craze" has reached by now such enormous proportions that it seems there is very little one could possibly add to the subject.[38] In the context of this study, however, it should be emphasized that everything pertaining to witchcraft beliefs and to the persecution of witches revolved around issues of deception and dissembling. The devil himself, of course, was the "great pretender", wearing innumerable disguises and endlessly playing tricks; his recruits (who were themselves victims of his deceptive arts) kept on the masks of honest citizens after adopting their

new identity as witches; and as witches they in their turn were capable of all manner of deceit, including being in two places at the same time – sleeping peacefully in their beds while participating in a Witches' Sabbath on a distant mountaintop. Indeed, in the phantasmagorical world of witchcraft everything could be both *sic* and *non*, proof and disproof, ridiculous and sublime. In the great debate at the time over the reality of witchcraft and the credibility of the trials, both believers and sceptics used the deception argument. Supporters of the persecution insisted that the more innocent the accused appeared to be, the more suspect he or she was, since only devilish powers could mask evil so effectively; several of those who objected to the trials did not deny Satan's existence but argued that the panic itself was the result of his greatest deception, a mischievous way of undermining Christendom; while other sceptics (such as Johann Weyer or Reginald Scott) regarded all occurrences of witchcraft, possession and exorcism as delusions or a bag of man-made tricks. The best-known sceptic of the era, Michel de Montaigne, cited the witch trials as the most convincing illustration of the weakness of human understanding and of the elusiveness of certainty. The old women accused of witchcraft, he said, should be offered hellebore (a plant considered a cure for madness) rather than hemlock.[39] The entire realm constructed on the shifting sands of witchcraft beliefs, as Stuart Clark has so convincingly demonstrated, was therefore a major cause for early modern uncertainty about the reliability of perception.[40]

Despite a significant amount of criticism and ridicule, enormous efforts and resources went into the campaign of exposing the witches. Most scholars now agree that this campaign was, on the whole, motivated by sincere fears of Satan, and not by a desire of the centralizing "New Monarchies" to instil obedience by terrorizing the population, nor by some friars' misogynist fears and hatred leading to indiscriminate persecution, as some interpreters have suggested in the past.[41] Although there were undoubtedly accusers and prosecutors who exploited the widespread paranoia for cynical or political purposes, the foundations of this entire incredible phenomenon were built on genuine fears of hidden evil powers. Had the trials been a charade cynically instigated to serve some political agenda, the immense efforts to prove beyond doubt the pact with the devil would have been inexplicable. Europe's inner demons (to borrow Norman Cohn's term)[42] were perceived by many as very real and very dangerous, justifying – as even the irenic humanist Jean Bodin would insist – the fiercest methods for unmasking and extirpating them.[43] Witch-finding became a new profession and a new science, employing large numbers of men (as well as women, for the task of examining the witches' bodies for the devil's marks was assigned at times to midwives or other females)[44] and occupying some of the best minds of these centuries. There is no better example of the fear of underworlds in Renaissance Europe than the witch trials, but it should not entirely overshadow all other anxieties about hidden dangers.

When a witchcraft panic reached a peak, the strict rules of evidence were often abandoned, and judges would then require neither bodily marks nor voluntary confessions, but would be satisfied with any form of antisocial behaviour as proof of utter evil. As a result, vagrants, Gypsies, magicians, jugglers and other outcasts could at times find themselves accused of satanic *maleficium*, or suspected of both arson and witchcraft – thus "citizens" of one underworld could be transported for a moment to another. But this was the exception rather than the rule. As a rule, people who were branded as witches, both women and men, although mostly coming from the poorer classes, did not belong to the floating population of petty criminals or wandering performers. In fact, the most alarming element in the fantasy about the satanic army was the belief that its recruits were one's neighbours, seemingly normal members of the community who crossed the line into the underworld.

Kingdoms of the Poor

Did sixteenth-century Europe live in terror, not only of the witch, but also of the tramp, as proclaimed by R.H. Tawney?[45] For, while the danger from old women undermining society and killing babies in the service of the devil was all delusional, there were good reasons to feel anxious when walking the streets of London or Seville or travelling the roads between towns in Germany – outdoor activities which could indeed be quite hazardous at that time. Robbers, bandits, thieves, pickpockets, swindlers, "cony-catchers", constituted a very large population, which posed a real threat to property and even to the lives of innocent travellers and passers-by. However, to judge by the literature of the time and by some modern scholarly works, all these beggars and petty thieves were not simply a floating population of the dispossessed, but rather constituted a large fraternity of criminals, ruled by an invisible government, a veritable underworld and an alternative society.

Beliefs in a criminal underworld were not entirely new (François Villon was celebrating a rascals' confraternity in Paris as early as the mid-fifteenth century),[46] but it is impossible not to be struck by the sudden proliferation of rogue literature during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and by the similarities in the descriptions of the villains' subculture in works published in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and England.[47]

Organized crime and a criminal underworld are still with us today – both in reality as well as fodder for pulp fiction. How authentic are depictions found in innumerable books, tabloid articles, films and television series about the Mafia and other similar organizations? There appears to be far more fiction written about them than actual records of investigations and trials. Something similar could be said about the underworld of beggars and vagrants in early modern Europe.[48]

All economic historians today agree that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a rapid process of pauperization, which inevitably led to a growing rate of petty crime. A parade of marginal figures, innumerable poor men and women with no clear social place or identity, appeared on the roads and on city streets, in taverns, courts and gaols, but they also became the protagonists in a flood of pamphlets, plays, poems and ballads, as well as in medical manuals and records of prodigious phenomena,[49] all expressing concern about the dangers arising from the social and economic upheavals of the time.

That poverty and vagrancy had become the major social and economic problem is also attested by massive quantities of harsh legislation, regulations, court procedures and travellers' reports. Nevertheless, the evidence for the existence of organized crime, and all the more so, of a structured underground society of *les misérables*, is practically all literary. Some scholars in past decades (mostly in the 1970s, when interest in the "silent" classes and in popular culture was the height of academic fashion), particularly specialists in Renaissance and Baroque literature, accepted the literary evidence at face value. Rogue literature in England, picaresque novels and novellas in Spain, books of vagabonds in Switzerland and in Germany, the *Commedia del'Arte* in Italy, were a fast-growing industry in the sixteenth century, providing light entertainment for honest members of the community who clearly enjoyed the *frisson* of peeking into the dark corners of their world.[50] Authors of such rogue literature often presented their work as a service to the honest public – providing information as well as a warning about all the tricks and deceits played upon the gullible. However, in the scholarly community today there is almost a consensus that this kind of literature and "yellow journalism" of the time were themselves, at least in part, a form of deception or invention, which duped contemporaries and future generations of scholars alike.

"It is clear that the London underworld was highly organized", wrote Gāmini Salgādo, a professor of English literature, in 1977.[51] Drawing on Elizabethan pamphlets and plays, he assumed that all those who felt themselves exiled from good society – discharged soldiers, masterless men, beggars, thieves, whores, vagrants, cripples and tricksters – actually established a society of their own. This anti-society, at least in London, had its own lifestyle, and the rogues who comprised it had an outward appearance and idiom that set them apart, a security system and an intelligence network, weekly meetings, places of refuge in special quarters of the city, and schools for training young thieves. Outside London, Salgādo wrote, similar roadside fraternities existed, with "the upright man" as their king.[52] These underworld rascals, not unlike the city gentleman and the courtier, practised self-fashioning (i.e. deception or invention of identity) and relied on their wits and cunning to survive on the roads. In a more recent work, also based primarily on early modern literary representations, the Shakespeare

scholar Bryan Reynolds similarly argues that the community of rogues and vagabonds had an "amalgamated criminal culture, consisting of a diverse population with much racial, ethnic, and etiological ambiguity, [and] was united by its own aesthetic, ideology, language, and lifestyle. In effect, this criminal culture constituted a subnation".[53]

Since vagrancy was prohibited by law throughout Europe, and a licence was required for begging and collection of alms, whether within the boundaries of the parish or on the roads, citizens of the kingdom of the poor, according to the rogue literature, were almost all impostors, that is, "false beggars" bearing false permits and pretending to be sicker and more destitute than they actually were. In fact, the very word "rogue" (coined in the 1560s, possibly by Thomas Harman in his *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, vulgarly called vagabonds*)[54] may have designated originally a sturdy vagrant who used stratagems of disguise and went about with forged papers. According to the pamphlet literature and the many Books of Vagabonds, the variety of (invented) justifications for begging was enormous. There were men who claimed to be disbanded soldiers, "masterless" during the lull between wars. "Demanders for glimmer" was the term used in England for women who travelled with false documents certifying that they had lost all their worldly goods through fire. As in the poorest third-world countries today, children were deliberately mutilated in order to become more profitable beggars. Sham lunatics, called in England Abraham men or Tom O'Bedlam, since they posed as former inmates at the Bethlem Royal Hospital (Bedlam) became familiar figures. This last fraudulent practice had become apparently so widespread that in 1675 the governors of Bedlam, (taking advantage of the novel medium for mass communication, the newspaper) issued a public notice in the *London Gazette*:

> Whereas several vagrant persons do wander about […] pretending themselves to be lunaticks under Cure in the Hospital of Bethlem, commonly called Bedlam, with Brass Plates about their arms and inscriptions thereon. These are to give notice that there is no such liberty given to any patients kept in the said Hospital for their cure, neither is any such plate as a distinction or mark put upon any lunatick during their being there, or when discharged thence. And that the same is a false pretence, to colour their wandering and begging, and to deceive the people.[55]

Adorning the body with sores ("artificial palliards" in England)[56] was another frequent trick to arouse pity. Court rulings provide an idea of its prevalence at the time: one particularly interesting example is offered by historian Lee Beier in support of his argument that rogue literature was not entirely baseless. Thomas Harman, in his famous *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors* (first published in 1566),[57] told the story of Nicholas Jennings, who had been brought before London's Court of Aldermen, as an

example of the crime of "counterfeiting oneself". And indeed the records show that the story was no fiction. In *The Case of Nicholas Jennings alias Blunt before the London's Court of Aldermen, 13 January, 9 Elizabeth I (1567)* we find the following:

> At this Court it was ordered and agreed that Blunt being a sturdy vagabond who is lawfully convicted and attainted as well by good and sufficient witness as by how own pp [*sic*] confession of that that he has diverse and sundry times heretofore used and counterfeited himself to be a diseased person with the grievous disease of the falling sickness and has also of a set purpose disfiguring his body with diverse loathsome spots and other filthiness in his face and other parts of his body to the only intent to be thereby the rather permitted to beg and still to delude (as he hath already of a long time done) the good and charitable people before whom he hath or might come, shall upon Wednesday now next coming being tied naked to the girdlestead at a cart's tail be whipped throughout all the common market places of this city having a picture of his own personage deformed in the manner and form aforesaid as he was wont to use, the same carried before him upon a long pole and then to be re-committed to Bridewell there to be set to labour by the governors of the said house in such wise as they shall think mete and convenient, etc.[58]

The impostor's punishment and the unusual use of a picture to demonstrate his deceit to the whole town are matters to which I shall return.

There were those who carried a counterfeit licence testifying that they had suffered loss through shipwreck or piracy; some pretended to be mute and others feigned epilepsy or were "counterfeit cranks". And, of course, there was no lack of fake students or phony mendicant friars. Another method of preying on people's charitable inclinations was to pose as Proctors or Fratres who had authorization to collect alms on behalf of institutions or the deserving poor – this too being neither a new method of deceit nor one to disappear from the modern world. Warnings against false collectors of charity abound in most civilizations. Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet (Solomon son of Aderet, known in Hebrew by the acronym Rashba, one of the leaders of Spanish Jewry in the thirteenth century), for example, warned in one of his *responsa* against those who practise the "ugly art" of deception and claim to be official emissaries sent by community leaders to collect donations; "do not believe them", he wrote, "until my signature is confirmed by those who know it".[59] The same distinguished Spanish Rabbi also wrote against prophetic pretensions and seemed to be sensitive to other forms of forgery.

Among the numerous sixteenth-century pretexts for raising funds was the collection of money to ransom captives. "Curiously enough, one of the commonest forms of licence", wrote Salgādo,[60] who was probably unaware of the large number of Englishmen, among tens of thousands of

other Europeans, who had been captured by Barbary pirates, and of the well-advertised efforts to have them released and returned.[61] "The 'corsair hysteria' that gripped much of Europe during these centuries was fuelled in good part by fear and fantasy, but there were also some hard figures to back it up", writes Robert Davis, who gives the estimate of "a million and quite possibly as many as a million and a quarter white, European Christians enslaved by the Muslims of the Barbary Coast". Between 1530 and 1780 the corsairs captured hundreds of ships in the Mediterranean and in the Atlantic and carried many coastal raids – including on coasts as far away from North Africa as Iceland.[62] The terror instilled by these slaving expeditions and by piracy in the Mediterranean was as important an element in the "Fear of the Turk" as were the advances of the Ottomans in the Balkans.

The "corsair hysteria" itself was not perhaps directly related to the apprehension arising from beliefs about secret underworlds and prevalent imposture, but the Mediterranean "ransom economy" which resulted from the corsairs' activities was enveloped in scams, fraud and deception. Religious dissimulation, of those who pretended conversion to Islam and of those who simulated contrition on their return to Christendom, was but one facet of the uncertainties surrounding this world. Many other ways of lying and pretending characterized the behaviour of the captives. In order to minimize the ransom demanded for them, captives assumed the identities of persons of a lower social position; others, on the contrary, adopted the identities of persons higher up in the social hierarchy in the hope of better treatment or faster release. Released captives on their return to their homeland filled their reports with exaggerated tales of the horrors they suffered. The whole situation offered vagabonds another excellent excuse for lawful begging – to raise money to free a relative from slavery at the hands of the fearsome Turk or to repay a loan which they allegedly had received for their own ransom.[63]

There is no disputing the existence of very large numbers of vagrants and beggars playing their endless gimmicks of pretence. Martine van Elk, who examined the Bridewell Court records, shows how the governors of the Bridewell Hospital were attempting to expose the trickery of rogues – for by adopting unauthorized identities these counterfeit vagrants were undermining the social order. But like most historians today, van Elk, too, dismisses the picture of a criminal counter-society as an exaggeration if not pure fiction.[64] No historian today would argue with Linda Woodbridge's assertion that the rogue pamphlets, including the ones most often quoted, were not "transparent windows into social history".[65] Yet, as Lee Beier insists, "the literature was still a valuable source because it crystallized and reflected the *discourses* of official and learned opinion".[66] And the discourses are indeed the aspect relevant to my argument: they are evidence that authorities and the public at large did believe that hordes of petty criminals, most of them impostor-beggars, were organized, and that they formed a subculture which posed

a real threat to decent society. Peter Burke argues that the rogue literature in Italy, as in England or France, presented readers "neither with pure fact nor with pure fiction, but […] with stereotyped perceptions of social reality";[67] and Anna Bayman succinctly summarizes this point in a footnote:

> That there were not, in fact, such organized communities of rogues indicates that the entire rogue genre is itself a trick, played on a more or less unsuspecting readership: by inventing a threat, the rogue pamphlets created their own niche.[68]

A Brotherhood of Rascals

Like the rogue pamphlets in England, the picaresque novel of "Golden Age" Spain was also all about masquerade and deceit. The *pícaro* himself was a master of disguise, constantly changing identities, and therefore best able to see under other men's disguises. And, indeed, if one were to be guided by these novels, everyone in the Iberian Peninsula was suspect of being a crypto-Jew or a crypto-Muslim, a camouflaged witch or whore in disguise. The anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599, second part 1604), Francisco de Lugo y Dávila's *De la hermanía* – a novel specifically about a rogues' underworld (1622) – Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and several of his *Novellas Ejemplares*, Francisco de Quevedo's *El Buscón* (*The Swindler*, written c.1604, published 1626) are only some of the more famous of these bestsellers of their time, which provided their readers with a picture of the seamier side of life as well as entertainment with stories about hero-delinquents and underworlds inhabited by thieves, tricksters, prostitutes and swindlers who succeed in outwitting the representatives of the law and law-abiding society.[69]

One Spanish author, the philosopher Pedro Fernandez Navarrete, in his *Conservación de Monarquias* (1626; not a picaresque novel but a book in the mirror-for-princes tradition) preferred to place the society of rogues away from his homeland. He claimed that an entire community of French exiles, who lived in Cerreto di Spoletto in Umbria, carried false begging permits, roamed throughout Italy and specialized in innovative methods of maiming their children in order to arouse greater pity and increase the alms they collected.[70]

Once more, as with rogue literature for England, it is not clear how reliable was picaresque literature as a window into the real world of vagrants and beggars in Renaissance and Baroque Spain. Some historians insisted (again, particularly in the 1970s) that there did exist a criminal underworld, where inhabitants thought and behaved in ways very similar to those described in the poems and novels. Two leading historians of early modern Seville, for example, Ruth Pike and Mary Elizabeth Perry, in describing Seville's society during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, seem to agree that "there

was a large and well organized class of professional thieves in Seville. They were divided into many kinds, perhaps a dozen or more and all bearing fantastic cant names."[71] These robbers, among them substantial numbers of black and mulatto slaves and many Moriscos, worked in groups. They were very transient and seldom caught. Pike accepts, mostly on the basis of literary sources, the existence of an organization of criminals – *gente del hampa* – with a jargon of their own (the thieves' cant, *germanía*), an honour code, heroes and martyrs of their own, and places of assembly such as the Cathedral's courtyard where they enjoyed immunity. In addition to the vagabonds, she says, who seldom committed violent crimes, there was also a group of professional murderers and assassins, described as ruffians (*jácaros* or *rufos*).[72] Although Seville began to decline in the seventeenth century and to lose its importance as the centre of the Spanish empire, its large underworld, according to Perry, did not diminish in size or in its impact on the city's life. The city government, she asserts, actually depended on the collaboration of citizens of this underworld, who served it as spies and thugs (not unlike the way certain modern governments exploit mafia resources). She writes,

> Ostensibly enemies of the city oligarchy, underworld people actually supported it. They were conservatives, as determined to preserve the social order as they were to exploit it. For its part, the city oligarchy used the underworld as a symbol of a common enemy, an embodiment of evil that all city residents could recognize and oppose. The presence of underworld people justified the extension of political power and more vigorous governmental action to control the use of violence.

Thus, the criminal underworld in Seville (as in other places, according to Perry) did constitute a subculture or a subversive anti-society, but it was also a useful element to the authorities in constructing urban political power.[73] However, even such scholars who seem to have been mesmerized by the picaresque world of rogues and ruffians had to admit that, "although the literary sources describe these elements in vivid detail, very little information can be obtained from the documents about them because of their low capture-rate".[74] For France, Erik V. Kraemer published as early as 1944 an impressive collection of literary descriptions of societies of false beggars. From the well-known anonymous *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris* (first half of the fifteenth century), through Ambroise Paré's *Des Monstres et Prodiges* (1571), to *De la mendicité legitime des pauvres seculiers* by Jean Pierre Camus, Bishop of Belley (1634), it seems all contemporary observers were aware of the endless ruses beggars were using in order to be accepted as "deserving poor". In France, too, there was no shortage of books and pamphlets describing the organization of these rogues in clandestine "monarchies", including details of their ceremonies, customs and language. *La Vie genereuse des Mercelots, Gueuz et Boesmiens, contenant leur façon de vivre, subtilitez et Gregon*,

by an anonymous author who styled himself "gentilhomme breton" using the pseudonym Pechon de Ruby (first published in Lyons in 1596), was an immediate hit and went through several editions in the seventeenth century. It even provided a short dictionary of their secret argot.[75] Erik Kraemer concluded that "there isn't even a shadow of a doubt" that there actually existed organizations of beggars and thieves during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[76]

But recent historiography, as mentioned above, is more cautious in its conclusions about an early modern criminal underworld. Florike Egmond, for instance, in discussing organized crime in the Netherlands on the basis of individual case studies, court records and interrogations (rather than solely on rogue literature), paints a different picture than the one offered by the studies of the 1970s and earlier. Vagrants and beggars, she says, worked in groups, or "families". These people were known by expressive nicknames and were probably in contact with fences and other crooks. Contrary perhaps to accepted notions, her documentation demonstrates that women were just as active as men in these gangs. Furthermore, orphaned or abandoned children were "adopted" by such rogues and trained in the craft.[77] Indeed, a life of such an early modern German "Artful Dodger" is revealed in the tragic story of a 16-year-old boy, Jörg Mayr, known as "the Little Castle Seventh", who was interrogated by the magistrates of Nuremberg. This youngster evolved from a little boy stealing a loaf of bread to a fully fledged criminal and member of a gang.[78] Egmond does recognize the criminal activity of such gangs as an "interurban phenomenon", and she does use the term "criminal infrastructure" for groups of 50–80 people – but, despite the title of her book, she denies the existence of one large centralized organization.[79]

A similar picture emerges from the collection of articles about the German underworld edited by Richard J. Evans, who states in the introduction that outcast and marginal groups did to a large extent constitute a world of their own, with customs, institutions and even a language (known as *Rotwelsch*), customary routes through the countryside, and contempt for the law and for the "straight world". But, he continues,

> The fears and fantasies of officialdom could sometimes produce confessions of vast underworld conspiracies of a complexity and scale that defies belief, whether those allegedly involved were incendiaries, witches, or bandits. Upon popular fears, authority imposed more systematic forms of anxiety.[80]

Robert Jütte agrees that

> Although the legendary *monarchie d'argot*, the kingdom of the socially marginal people in sixteenth-century France, certainly did not exist,

> there can, however, be no doubt that outlaws and outcasts had some kind of informal organization in order to survive in a hostile world [...] "companies" or professional gangs.[81]

Was argot – the language used by the poor and particularly by criminal gangs of criminals, whether *Rotwelsch*, *germanía*, canting and so forth – "an anti-language of an anti-society"?, asks Lee Beier.[82] There is clearly no question that vagrants and rogues developed in each region a slang of their own, and that some members of the educated classes in most European countries showed a fascination with these lexicons – partly out of the humanist interest in philology, partly out of the curiosity and excitement aroused by the "underworld". Early modern books offering word lists of these "secret" languages are quite numerous, while court records offer some non-literary evidence of the actual use of these jargons. These special vocabularies were invented as means of protection from the law, for communication within the rogue community and for erecting another boundary between the outlaws and law-abiding society. However, although meant to cover minor plots for stealing or for duping the innocent, these slang words hardly qualify as a "secret language" of an entire anti-society or counter-culture.[83]

The fear of great conspiracies and of "underworlds" affected the way authorities and intellectuals regarded any use of verbal communication not understood by the majority. It was during these centuries, as we saw, that Moriscos in Spain were forbidden the use of Arabic or *Aljamía*; Caló, the Romani dialect spoken by Gitanos in Iberia, was sometimes confused with the rogues' jargon and therefore criminalized; and Hebrew, as even Luther suggested, was also believed to be a language of a criminal underworld (later, from the late seventeenth century onwards, it was Yiddish rather than Hebrew which was defined by some as an argot of a society of crooks and swindlers).[84] Thus language – foreign words, invented dialects – was one of the attributes of those fear-inspiring (mostly imaginary) hidden societies acting under the surface to undermine the world of respectable people.

In sum, the early modern criminal world, as it emerges from scholarly research in the last decades, was not an independent subculture and there was little that was romantic about it. Very poor and very desperate men, women and children travelled in small groups – gangs of a kind – from town to town, eking a living in any way they could. When caught, by equally desperate authorities with inadequate means for controlling the floating population and the wave of petty crime, they were most often whipped, branded and banished, until that final time when they were publicly executed. The myth of an anti-society of criminals was probably invented by middle-class or upper-class authors who either inflated true stories or plagiarized from one another for their readers' entertainment and titillation. But since there was so much deceit involved, and since the numbers of the destitute were constantly growing, the fear was real: progressively

harsher laws and punishments of poor delinquents indicate the growing frustration of the authorities. Every feasible means was adopted to uncover, identify and eliminate these bands of false beggars and criminals, which were regarded as the worst social problem and the most dangerous threat to ordinary society.

Disasters

It was easy to accuse the homeless and the masterless of major disasters. One of the greatest dangers in the pre-modern world was fire, and thus one of the worst crimes ascribed to vagrant gangs was arson. In the case against Jörg Mayr, the German youngster mentioned above, the most serious accusation brought against him, as his criminal activities began to unfold, was setting fire to a barn, and it was for this crime that he was sentenced to death despite his young age. Although urban fires were quite frequent in the Middle Ages, it appears that arson scares were peculiar to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[85] When a fire destroyed 300 houses in Troyes in 1524, writes Penny Roberts, some reports claimed that it was lit by arsonists who had been sent by the German Emperor, Charles V, in order to demoralize the French: these arsonists, travelling disguised as vagabonds, were in fact an invisible army of France's major enemy at the time. Consequently, many poor people and all foreigners were expelled from the city.[86] Bob Scribner describes similar scares in Germany, particularly of Catholic plots to burn down Protestant cities in the early 1540s. Although there undoubtedly were cases of arson, they were often inflated into public alarms. Belief in bands of *Mordbrenner* throughout the sixteenth century created a major concern for authorities everywhere: the incendiaries were said to be gangs paid by some foreign enemy, composed of vagrants and beggars or of *Landsknechte*, travelling under codenames and having their own distinctive signs. Arrests and interrogations led to confessions which increased the panic. But eventually only very few were actually convicted of arson and many were only punished for being fake beggars.[87] The fear of fire-raising, according to Scribner, was part of the "authorities' paranoia" concerning the "dangerous classes".

Dillinger compares the early modern paranoia about vagrant arsonists to the witch scare, and points out not only the parallels but also some connections between the two; he also sees the resemblance between these two anxieties and the fear of terrorism in the West today. Arsonists and witches, like al-Qaeda terrorists, he says, were regarded as huge "conspiracies of Evil", destructive and ever-growing secret organizations, in the service of a foreign power – causing the powers-that-be to think in terms of a "clash of civilizations" between the forces of evil and the forces of light. However, Dillinger emphasizes, perhaps unlike present apprehensions about Muslim terrorists, early modern fears of vagrant fraternities wanting to sow destruction by fire and of an army of witches in the service of the devil had been

obviously baseless; yet both authorities and populace accepted them most seriously and wasted huge resources on the combat against all those enemies in disguise.

Scapegoats needed to be found for the other fearsome disasters of the pre-modern world – epidemics. Thus, like the fourteenth-century phantom plot of Jews and lepers poisoning the water sources in the service of the King of Granada and the Sultan of Babylon,[88] there were now fears that vagrants (or mercenaries disguised as itinerant beggars) were deliberately spreading the plague at the behest of one arch-enemy or another – whether the Turk or the princeling across the border. Beliefs in anti-social conspirators planning to overthrow Christian society by disaster-spreading means (magic, poison, arson, terror) go at least as far back as the early fourteenth century when they were voiced in the trials of heretic sectarians and of the Templars; similar accusations against the traditional scapegoats of European society – Jews and lepers – spread far and wide during the Black Death. It appears that in the minds of the paranoids during the sixteenth century witches and paupers were added to heretics, Jews and lepers, or even took precedence over them.

Fears of the "Jewish Danger", as indicated above, did not abate following the age of expulsions and ghettoization in Western Europe. Sensational blood libels and accusations of host desecration against individuals did not cease; converts and their descendants were still under suspicion of maintaining a secret allegiance, if not to their former faith at least to their former co-religionists; feverish minds invented Red Jews and Lost Tribes descending on Europe; and, in addition, Jews, particularly poor Jews in Germany and the Netherlands, were lumped together with other vagrants and accused of the same heinous crimes attributed to the malicious vagabonds. However, Jewish beggars and vagrants – wandering *Bettlejuden*, as they were called in Germany – when prosecuted for such criminal acts, would suffer harsher penalties than those inflicted upon non-Jewish masterless transients. Like Gypsies, vagrant Jewish criminals were persecuted and prosecuted not only because of their ethnic affiliation or their religion but also for their way of life, and they provoked fears and hatred which were stronger and deeper than could possibly be justified by their numbers. Furthermore, most scholars agree that specifically Jewish gangs did not come into being earlier than the eighteenth century.[89] So it appears that the ingrained suspicions of the Jew caused the myth to precede reality, and thus old-time scapegoats were joined to the newer targets of collective hatred bred by irrational fears.

The "conspiratorial mentality", that is, a worldview in which major disasters (or even personal and minor misfortunes) are attributed to a group of people secretly planning to sow havoc, was not born at the time of the Enlightenment as claimed by some historians.[90] In the Renaissance, an age which had lost confidence in the reliability of perception, grand conspiracies were spied everywhere, plots of such a scale that the old intrigues of

the past (a handful of Jews or lepers poisoning wells) paled in comparison. All the processes that every textbook defines as harbingers of modernity – the Reformation, centralizing monarchies uniting their subjects by enforcing one faith on all, new technologies of mass communication, a growing scientific interest in the "secrets" of the universe, budding commercial and agricultural capitalism, social and geographical mobility – served to increase the numbers of people who had good reasons to feel dispossessed, but also to strengthen the fears from hidden malevolent organizations. How could society defend itself against these clandestine enemies? How could these (mostly phantom) underground movements be brought to light and their evil designs frustrated? Armed only with the traditional weapons of spies, torture to extract denunciations and confessions, and severe punishments of expulsion and execution, authorities throughout early modern Europe were desperately seeking new and more efficient means for exposing all these underworlds and identifying the men and women who constituted their membership.

5
Gypsies, or Such as Do Counterfeit

Origins

The ethnic identity and origins of the Romani people remain unsolved enigmas to this day, generating many hypotheses but no universally accepted theory.[1] If still puzzling today, one can easily imagine the consternation caused by the appearance of bands of unidentifiable aliens on the roads and at the gates of towns and cities in Western Europe during the first half of the fifteenth century. These exotic-looking foreigners, I should like to propose, constituted one of the irritants which bred the early modern malady of doubt about reality. "Who are these guys?" was a question that accompanied the strangers wherever they went. Were they Egyptians? Greeks? Bohemians? Tartars? Pseudo-Jews? Red Jews? Babylonians? Or perhaps just a bunch of local riff-raff adopting an exotic identity?

The earliest sightings of foreign beggars who could have been the vanguard of Gypsies migrating westward from Eastern Europe and the Balkans were noted in various town records from the first decade of the fifteenth century. By 1417 they appear in larger companies, headed by mounted dukes or counts, claiming to be on a pilgrimage to atone for abandoning Christianity under duress.[2] The uncertainty about their origins is evident in all documents, but gradually Egypt became the land most frequently cited as their place of origin. Municipal accounts of Hildesheim in Lower Saxony record the giving of alms to "Tartars of Egypt" in 1417. The *Cronica di Bologna* reported the arrival of a group of one hundred people led by "Andrea Duke of Egypt" on July 18 1422. On 7 August, however, according to the *Chronicon Foroliviense*, the group which arrived in Forlì – perhaps the very same group observed in Bologna a few weeks earlier – was rumoured to be from India (though "India", as we know, was a very vague geographical notion, which could refer to South-East Asia in general as well as to East Africa). In Italy, it seems, the name "Indians" would continue to be ascribed to them occasionally until the end of the fifteenth century: "We are Indians, true *Cinguli* by nature; we live in strange places and can tell good fortunes",

were the words of an anonymous Florentine carnival song from the second half of the fifteenth century.[3] Early sources mention them in a variety of ways, including unlikely combinations such as Saracens from Bohemia or Christians from Numibia – a variety which only served to emphasize the mystery.[4] Their language – which would eventually allow linguists to trace their origins to India, and which today is referred to as Romany – was unlike any other dialect heard in those parts of the world. Was it some ancient Eastern tongue? Was it thieves' cant? *Rotwelsch*? Was it gobbledygook or *jerigonza*? Who were those guys? Where did they come from? Were they indeed who they claimed to be? Such questions continued to intrigue everyone who encountered them for several centuries.

Surviving documents containing information about the Gypsies in Western and Central Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are basically of three kinds: legislation and court records, chronicles and rogue literature. These would continue to serve as the basis for their descriptions in learned treatises and encyclopaedias at least until the late eighteenth century. Since the Romani people had no written culture of their own, all that is known about their history and behaviour was handed down by observers who were mostly hostile towards the itinerants, and since so much of early modern documentation on any subject is fragmentary or unreliable, the history of the Gypsies was, and much of it still is, shrouded in mystery.

Humanists and other arrogant scholars during the Renaissance refused to admit ignorance and offered learned theories. Enea Silvio Piccolomini (the future Pope Pius II) described them as originating in the Caucasus and called them *Zigari*; Polydorus Vergilius called them *Cilici* and claimed they were descendants of the goddess of Syria; Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, an expert on everything pertaining to the occult, wrote in 1526 that among the multitude of beggars one could meet

> that sort of Cattle which they call *Cyngani* or Gypsies […] having their Original from a certain Country between *Aegypt* and *Ethiopia*, of the Race of *Chus*, the Son of *Cham*, the Son of *Noah*, still suffer under the Curse of the Progenitor.[5]

Sebastian Münster was one of the first learned geographers to suggest India as a possible place of origin of these nomads.[6] Nevertheless the dominant belief was that they had come from Egypt.

Why Egypt? It was, apparently, the country the Gypsies themselves named as their homeland in some of their accounts of their history and in their claim of being pilgrims atoning for abandoning Christianity. Did they know that Egyptian Christianity had always held a fascination for Europeans?[7] Was it simply a coincidence that they named Egypt as their homeland precisely at the time when Egyptian Copts as well as Ethiopian Christians were

being recognized by Catholic Europe? It was during the Council of Florence in 1439 that a decision was made to invite a Coptic delegation to the Pope's curia; Coptic manuscripts were being diligently sought after for European libraries; a few years later the first Ethiopian church was founded in Rome. Moreover, Egypt had biblical connotations and an aura of antiquity: it was there that Moses had been raised as a prince and from thence that he led the Hebrew Exodus; it was to that land that the Holy Family fled from Herod's persecution; and, particularly during the Renaissance, it was associated in the minds of the learned with a *prisca theologia* and Hermeticism. Finally, one should not completely dismiss the possibility that some of these nomads did actually arrive in Western Europe, not directly from Byzantium through the Balkans, but rather via Egypt. Thus in most European languages this group of total aliens, the first to have entered Western Europe in over a millennium, became known as "Egyptians" – Gitanos, Gitanes or Gypsies; in Hebrew they are called *Zoanim*, that is, people who came from the Land of Zoan in Egypt (Num. 13:22). The etymology of the name "Tsiganes", "Cingari" or "Ziguener", however, is more obscure, derived perhaps from geographical or family names in Hungary, Transylvania or Croatia, or possibly from the Byzantine sect of Athinganoi;[8] yet some scholars maintain that these words, too, were variations on "Egyptians". In certain parts of Europe the designations "Greeks" or "Bohemians" were applied to the nomads. Ironically, however, and as a result of the same ignorance regarding geography, natives of America were to remain "Indians" while the people who perhaps actually hailed from India were destined to remain "Egyptians".

Andrew Boorde in his *The First Book of the Introduction of Knowledge* (1547) offered the first lexicon of "Egyptian" vocabulary, which he most probably learnt from Gypsies in England or on the Continent (as he learnt Hebrew from Jews in Europe). Egypt, he says, was a country next to Judea, "in the which wilderness lived many holy fathers […] The people of the country be swart, and doth go disguised in their apparel." But then he goes on to declare that only a few of these people – who are light-fingered and poor but good dancers – reside in Egypt itself, for the land on the banks of the Nile had become a country of infidels.[9] "The speech which they used was the right Egyptian language", would write Samuel Rid in 1612, "with whom our Englishmen conversing with at last learned their language".[10] The Romany language thus acquired in the eyes of some contemporaries the status of a foreign tongue, "Egypt speech", rather than thieves' cant.

While modern-day Gypsiologists are still trying to determine the history and the routes taken by Romani people throughout the ages, a pertinent point to remember is that the question of their origin was far more important to the host society than to the Gypsies themselves. With no written records, and seemingly no transmitted memories of a country which they had left many centuries earlier, they had no patriotic attachment to any homeland (in this matter being radically different from Jews, the other

persecuted minority in Europe).[11] Yet the vagueness regarding their ancient and recent history, as well as all the various "nationalities" ascribed to them, left open the further question of whether or not they were all members of the same ethnic group, a single homogenous "nation". No one was quite sure then nor is there certainty today.[12]

Little Egypt

Throughout the sixteenth century, however, it was not simply the land of Egypt but rather a new geographical entity – Little Egypt (or Lesser Egypt, Lower Egypt, Egypt Minor) – which was named as their place of origin in almost all references. Another puzzle then for contemporaries to worry about: where was the exact location of this unmapped territory? Was it somewhere on the banks of the Nile? Or on the banks of the Euphrates in ancient Babylon? Perhaps in Asia Minor? Or was it somewhere in the Balkans or by the Black Sea? Once again, no one was quite certain. One possibility is that the term was born when an observer in the early fifteenth century saw a camp of these nomads, by then widely known as "Egyptians",[13] near the town of Modon (Methoni, a Venetian colony on the south-western coast of the Peloponnesus, where a Gypsy settlement was first recorded in 1384) and exclaimed that it was a veritable "little Egypt"[14] – in the same manner as one would speak today of a neighbourhood being "Little Italy" or "Chinatown". However, the explanation could be reversed: the hill near Modon where the Gypsies were camped was called Gype or Gyppe, and could have been named "Little Egypt" either because of the similarity in sound or because Modon "lies not half way from here, Cologne, to Egypt"[15] – and then people simply assumed that "Little Egypt" was part of the North African country and named the aliens from the East "Egyptians". Both etymological theories seem equally plausible.

Of the many descriptions of first encounters with Gypsies in Western Europe one of the better-known is to be found in the journal of the anonymous Bourgeois of Paris who expressed no curiosity about the whereabouts of their country of origin:

> On the Sunday after mid-August day, August 17th 1427, twelve penitents as they called themselves came to Paris – one duke, one count, and ten other men all on horseback [the rest of their company, approximately 100 men and women were not allowed to enter the town but were confined in La Chapelle as *cajoux* – undesirables]. They said that they were good Christians; they came from Lower Egypt,

a country which according to their story had been conquered alternately by Saracens and Christians (a complicated history resembling more the vagaries of the religious fate of populations in Byzantine territories or in areas

conquered by the Ottomans in Hungary than any events near the Nile).[16] In the following century, however, we find the erudite Sebastian Münster in his *Cosmographia Universalis* (1550) questioning a Gypsy who claimed that his people had come from Lesser Egypt, a land which lay – so he said – beyond Babylon and the country of the pygmies (!). Surely then, replied Münster, it was a country somewhere on the banks of the Ganges or the Indus rather than on the banks of the Nile?[17] In any case, once "Aegypta Minor" entered the lexicon, it was engulfed by the same fog which still covered much of the world picture at the time, and it only served to accentuate the mystery.

False Pilgrims

The sojourn in Modon, a port on the route from northern Europe to the Holy Land, could have inspired the Gypsies' cover story of pilgrimage and penitence. It was their "great trick", according to Angus Fraser.[18] For several decades the newcomers – disliked and feared though they may have been – were generally perceived as Christian pilgrims doing penance for having too lightly abandoned the true faith. The account of their history in the Parisian journal is a complex plot about conversions back and forth from Christianity to Islam, but eventually it reaches the point where the Christian "Emperor and other lords, after much deliberation, said they should never hold land in their country without the Pope's consent and that they should go to Rome, to the Holy Father. There they all went" – ten or twelve hundred of them departed but only about one hundred reached Paris as the others died on the arduous journey. The Pope heard their confession and "imposed on them this penance: that for seven years they should go to and fro about the world without ever sleeping in a bed". He also ordered all prelates of the Church to give them "ten pounds *tournois*" to support them on the road.[19] The idea of wandering the earth as divine punishment was not foreign to European-Christian folklore, whether associated with the biblical Cain who was cursed to be a wanderer upon the earth (sometimes confused by early modern authors, as we saw above in Agrippa's text, with Canaan son of Ham, cursed by Noah to become a servant of servants unto his brethren), or with the legend of the Wandering Jew which had begun to spread in Europe in the thirteenth century.

Like the Wandering Jew who would not die, the seven-year penance imposed on the Gypsies seemed to last forever: at least a hundred years after the date of their alleged meeting with the Pope in 1422 they were still presenting Martin V's letter of protection or that of Emperor Sigismund who supposedly granted them his support five years earlier. The "great trick" had a very long shelf life.

The phenomenon of false pilgrims, like other kinds of false beggars, was well known in the fifteenth century, particularly after the trial of the

Coquillards in Dijon in 1455.[20] The Coquillards, pretending to be pilgrims returning from Santiago de Compostela (wearing the "coquille" – shell – which was the mark of those who had visited this shrine), were bands of vagrants or brigands, perhaps ex-soldiers who fought in the battlefields of the Hundred Years' War, with an argot of their own (immortalized by François Villon). Furthermore, the various Books of Vagabonds, as we saw in Chapter 4, list a variety of ways to masquerade as legitimate mendicants. Therefore, suspicions in regard to the Gypsies' cover story were there from the very beginning even if, out of caution, some authorities in the early decades did issue instructions that they be given alms before being told to move on (preference to err on the side of caution in handling impostors, as we saw, was exhibited by most governors). But with time these century-old letters of pope and emperor, permitting the "pilgrims" not only to beg but also to steal without repercussions,[21] would lose their efficacy.

False Gypsies

Suspicious though it may have been in the eyes of many, the pilgrimage tale was apparently regarded as good enough by other vagrants who sought an acceptable excuse for roving the countryside. At least as early as the mid-sixteenth century much of the legislation concerning vagrancy (particularly in England) referred to both Gypsies and to those pretending to be Gypsies: men and women "counterfeiting, transforming, or disguising themselves by their apparel, speech or other behaviors like unto Egyptians", stated the "Acte for the punishment of certayne persons callynge themselves Egiptians".[22] Yet "contrary to what they pretend", when it suited them these counterfeit Egyptians claimed to be native Englishmen.[23] The English authorities continued to refer to sham Gypsies throughout the sixteenth century: for example, the Elizabethan Statute of 1597–98 regarding vagrants referred to "all tynkers wandering abroade, and all such p'sons, not being felons, wandering and p'tending to be Egipcians or wandering in habite, forme or attire of counterfayte Egipcians."[24] In fact, the examination of court records in Elizabethan England leaves us wondering whether it was a worse crime to be a genuine Gypsy or to be an English person consorting with Gypsies.[25]

Many references to "false Egyptians" can also be found in Spanish records and literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Pedro Salazar de Mendoza, in his *Memorial de el hecho de los gitanos*, wrote in 1618,

> The Gypsies have taken with them many idlers and vagabonds to live their life of freedom. For it is well known that many of those going around with Gypsies, both men and women, are Spaniards, and the same thing happens in other provinces.[26]

The authorities' gravest concern in this matter was that there was no certain method of distinguishing one from the other. By the early seventeenth century some voiced the suspicion that none were true Egyptians:

> By a by-name they are called gypsies; they call themselves Egyptians; others in mockery call them moon-men. If they be Egyptians, sure I am they never descended from the tribes of any of those people that came out of the land of Egypt. Ptolemy king of the Egyptians, I warrant, never called them his subjects; no, nor Pharaoh before him.[27]

Thus another category of impostors – "counterfeit Egyptians" – was born; yet another mask to worry contemporaries. There is no way of determining today whether these worries had any basis in reality: were there indeed many individuals who willingly adopted the Gypsies' dress, customs and way of life? And if so, why? Simply in order to enjoy the flimsy protection of (mostly fake) safe conducts? Or was it because the bohemian way of life afforded means of earning a living as fortune-tellers and entertainers? Were some people attracted to the freedom and picaresque lifestyle and so ran away from their homes to join the Gypsies? The last two explanations seem to be a projection of modern-day tales, although here and there we do find hints that such cases were not unknown:

> There was very lately a Lad in the *University of Oxford*, who being of very pregnant and ready parts, and yet wanting the encouragement of preferment; was by his poverty forc'd to leave his studies there; and to cast himself upon the wide world for a livelihood. Now his necessities growing daily on him, and wanting the help of friends to relieve him, he was at last forc'd to joyn himself to a company of *Vagabond Gypsies*, who occasionally he met with, and to follow their Trade for maintenance.[28]

It could very well be that there was some intermixing between foreign and indigenous travellers and that "authentic" Gypsies in England were joined by Irish tinkers and other itinerants quite early on. In Holland, where the Estates made several attempts to banish all Gypsies from the entire province, both the Gypsies and those who joined them were designated as *heiden* (heathen). It is also not impossible that entire bandit groups in other parts of Europe pretended to be Gypsies in the same manner and for the same reason that the Coquillards were claiming to be pilgrims returning from Compostela. Similar phenomena were those of Christians in German lands pretending to be converted Jews in order to enjoy the benefits accorded to neophytes, and of the *wermerin* in fifteenth-century Basle – women wandering the countryside who falsely claimed to have been converted from Judaism and to be able to communicate with the dead.[29] It seems there were times when profits could be had by joining the pariahs.

The fact that some vagrants were believed to be masquerading as "Egyptians" could be the reason why certain authors insisted that the Gypsies' dark skin was not their natural colour but a dye: "they are not born so, neither has the sun burnt them so, but they are painted so", writes Dekker.[30] Juan de Quiñones, an outspoken racist whom we shall encounter in the following chapters, described in his *Discurso contra los gitanos* of 1631 how they made a brew of plants with which they blackened their skins.[31] There is some evidence that in northern parts of Europe locals who wished "to pass" for Gypsies did darken their face artificially.[32] In any case, adopting the Gypsy lifestyle and their tatty but flamboyant dress – including large silver earrings[33] – was a relatively simple disguise to adopt.

Pretending to be a Gypsy was one thing; actually becoming one was another matter. The Romani people were, and still are, very endogamous. Therefore, although some cases of mixed marriages appear in various court records,[34] there could not have been large numbers of *gadže* (the Gypsies' name for non-Gypsies) joining their nation by marriage. On the other hand, or so people believed, Gypsies enlarged their companies by abducting children. The myth about child abduction, which has not been completely obliterated to this day from common beliefs about the Gypsies, has its roots in the early centuries of their presence in Western Europe. This legend could be regarded as the equivalent of the blood libel against Jews. Such innocent children, allegedly stolen from their homes and turned into thieves and rogues, were numbered among "false Gypsies", yet regarded as captives who should be rescued from a terrible fate – if only there were clear signs by which to identify them. The best-known figure of such a false Gypsy in European literature is Preciosa, Miguel de Cervantes's protagonist in his exemplary novel *La Gitanilla* (1613).

Following Américo Castro's lead, many scholars have claimed that Cervantes was of New Christian origins and therefore felt empathy for other marginalized groups including the Gypsies.[35] But in *La Gitanilla* the feelings he expresses about them are not empathic at all but rather communicate dislike and contempt. Cervantes apparently accepted without hesitation the assumption that they kidnapped children of "better stock" and brought them up as their own. And, as he says in the opening lines of the story, bringing them up as their own meant training them to become thieves:

> Gypsies seem to have been born into the world for the sole purpose of being thieves: they are born of thieving parents, they are brought up with thieves, they study in order to be thieves, and they end up as past masters in the art of thieving. Thieving and the taste for thieving are inseparable from their existence.[36]

So how was one to know if the Gypsy one encountered was an authentic "Egyptian" or in fact an abducted child of Old Christians? "Blood will tell"

was the comforting conclusion offered by Cervantes, as by other Spaniards who adopted the notion of blood purity. Preciosa was too beautiful, too gentle, too white, "despite the rough upbringing she had received", to be a real Gypsy. In other words, the uncertainty about the identity of those "calling themselves Gypsies" was an additional incentive to search for clear ineradicable physical identifiers. First in Spain, the land where fear of religious dissimulation and the desire to maintain "racial" purity were strongest, and then in other parts of Western Europe, racist ideas were appearing in response to the need to ascertain the "real" identity of people suspected of imposture.[37]

In the twentieth century, the Center for Research on Racial Hygiene and Demographic Biology in Nazi Germany, headed by Robert Ritter, set out to classify the racial types of the Romani people. The Gypsies, these "scientists" declared, had once been Aryan as they originated from India, but during their long journey they had mingled with inferior races, hence as *Mischlinge* they were subjected to the Nuremberg Laws and eventually to genocide. The roots of this racist distinction between "pure-blooded" Romani and those of mixed blood can be detected in early modern attempts to distinguish between the general population of itinerants and the Gypsies, or between "Egyptians" and "counterfeit Egyptians".

Tricksters

Moreover, even "real" Gypsies, rather than counterfeit ones, were regarded as people who "*do* counterfeit" – that is, as tricksters and deceivers who play on people's gullibility. Early modern literature and chronicles, from the first appearance of these nomads, were full of warnings and stories about their methods of conning simple folk. The Parisian Bourgeois had already heard such tales during their first appearance in France: "it was said that when they talked to people they contrived – either by magic arts or by other means, or by the devil's help or by their own skill and cunning – to make money flow out of other people's purses into their own". Yet he was not convinced that the accusations were true: "I must say I went there three or four times to talk to them and could never see that I lost a penny".[38] The *Cronaca Fermana* described the group which arrived in Fermo in 1430 as "bad people, who tried to defraud and deceive [whomever] they could, they said they were fortune-tellers, and when they could, stole everything in sight".[39] In Spain the Catholic Monarchs issued an ordinance in 1499 concerning the Gypsies which were occupied with "stealing, deceiving people, and engaging in sorcery, fortune-telling, and other activities which are neither proper nor decent".[40] Samuel Rid's *The Art of Juggling* (1612), a pseudo-history of the Gypsies, purported to be an *exposé* of their tricks and legerdemain. Although the scholar-turned-Gypsy in Joseph Glanvill's book attempted to persuade his friends that the Gypsies "were not such *Impostours* as they were taken for,

but that they had a *traditional* kind of learning among them, and could do wonders by the power of the *Imagination*",[41] the word "Gypsy" nevertheless became practically synonymous with cheating. Elizabethan officials in 1572 warned that "Fayninge themselves to have knowledge in Phisnomye, Palmestrye or other abused Scyences, whereby they Beare the people in the Hand they can tell their Destinyes, Deathes and Fortunes, and such lyke fantasticall Imaginacions".[42] And though certain authors in the sixteenth century had already defined their language as proper "Egypt Speech", many continued to believe that it was an invented jargon, a secret language especially devised to hide and deceive. In 1610 the beadle of Bridewell described them thus:

> another sort of vagabonds [...] calling themselves by the name of Egyptians. These were a sort of rogues that lived and do yet live by cozening and deceit, practising the art called legerdemain, or fast-and-loose, whereby they got themselves no small credit among the country people by their deep dissembling and deceitful practices [...] And first of all they think it fit to devise a certain kind of language to the end of their cozenings, knaveries and villainies.[43]

Palm-reading and foretelling the future became the "arts" most frequently associated with Gypsies. In an age obsessed with physiognomy, that is, with the method of discovering the nature of a person by sight, the talents of Gypsies might not have seemed necessarily forms of trickery to most people,[44] but they were nevertheless so defined by ecclesiastical authorities. "They had sorcerers among them who looked at people's hands and told them what had happened to them or what would happen", wrote the Bourgeois of Paris, but the Bishop of Paris excommunicated all men and women who had their hands looked at and believed the Gypsies' lies.[45]

Strangely enough, although the arrival of these practitioners of palmistry and fortune-telling coincided with the so-called "witch craze" in Western Europe, they were officially accused of witchcraft only rarely. On the contrary, they served the sceptics as living testimony that what appeared to witch-hunters as machinations of the devil could be explained as simple tricks. Samuel Rid's *The Art of Juggling* was actually a plagiarized adaptation of Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) – a book which was intended to refute the beliefs in the existence of witches. In fact, modern-day research has revealed that persons accused of pacts with the devil were practically always members of the local community, even if mostly of the indigent classes, and hardly ever passing strangers. Moreover, *maleficium* was seldom attributed to known sorcerers, magicians, healers or wise women. Satanic witchcraft was regarded as so terribly dangerous precisely because it was practised in secret by people who outwardly had nothing to do with magic yet belonged to a very clandestine conspiracy. The Gypsies may have

been suspected in certain times and places of being Turkish spies, but they were too flamboyantly different to be considered capable of undercover operations under Satan's orders within the community.

False Christians

These were not the devil's apprentices perhaps, but hardly devout Christians. Yet, in a period when every person in both Catholic and Protestant countries seemed to be constantly under scrutiny regarding his or her religious behaviour and beliefs, the authorities' almost complete indifference to the orthodoxy of the Gypsies is perplexing. The Romani people, throughout their peregrinations, adopted the official religion of the country in which they resided. However, they never made much of an effort to appear devout. Being vagrants, they were not members of a particular parish throughout much of their life and thus avoided the watchful eyes of other parishioners and church authorities.

Admittedly, King Francis I, in response to many complaints, did voice doubts regarding their faith in an edict against the so-called Bohemians travelling in large groups "sous umbre d'une simulée religion ou de certaine penitence qu'ils dissent qu'ils font par monde".[46] In some countries, particularly in Holland and Germany, they were called *heiden* (heathen) and at times were refused church services,[47] but they were rarely listed among heretics. Even in Spain, where the Inquisition's main task, as we saw, was to unmask "Christians in name only", the inquiry into the Gypsies' religious beliefs was negligible.[48] Ecclesiastical inquisitors were much too preoccupied with heresies among the influential elites, or of whole communities (the Moriscos, for example) suspected of adhering to their former proscribed faith, or (infrequently) with the clandestine activities of satanic cohorts, to spend their time and energy on searching the souls of the illiterate members of the small Gypsy bands. Their persecution was left to the secular authorities who viewed them basically as a social menace. Yet, when enumerating the conundrums surrounding the "Egyptians", the incertitude about their religious identity should not be forgotten.

False Princes

Then there were their leaders: (self-proclaimed?) dukes, voivodes, princes and kings dressed in tatty royal clothes, riding on (stolen?) horses, displaying coats-of-arms, claiming to have privileges which gave them juridical autonomy over their people. In 1470 and in 1485, for example, two groups led respectively by Michele and Giovanni, *Conti del Piccolo Egitto*, appeared at Carpi.[49] There was hardly a town – from Italy to Sweden and from Poland to Portugal – which was not forced to face the dilemma of how to treat them. Should they be accorded the respect due to foreign princes?

Chronicles and city archives contain many references to safe conducts granted to Gypsy leaders – a Thomas, a Pierre, a Martin, a Comte Jacques with his wife Comtesse Louise – by kings and nobles or by local authorities, on the basis of imperial or papal requests. Those letters of protection also served to confirm the status of the named counts or dukes as leaders of their companies and to grant them legal jurisdiction over their own companies. But there were no indications how these leaders acquired their noble status. Did they inherit the title or was it conferred on them? Were they elected or nominated by the tribe elders? Were they themselves of Gypsy origin? All these were but more mysteries to baffle the settled population.

Some resemblance to the David Reuveni episode comes to mind. Exotic and mysterious, hailing from the East, belonging to a wandering nation, speaking a strange language, travelling under the protection of safe conducts from pope and kings, forging documents – both the Prince of Habor and the Dukes of Little Egypt aroused curiosity, suspicion and eventually hostility. However, unlike David Reuveni and other bogus emissaries and pretenders, Gypsy leaders were travelling with their entire tribe and became the concern of practically every local authority and of large sectors of the population.

Forged Documents

In 1417, during the Council of Constance which ended the papal schism, a group of Gypsies obtained a letter of recommendation from Emperor Sigismund, or perhaps from one of the court officials, or – most likely – from one of the expert forgers who followed courts and curia. The safe conduct was granted to a certain Duke of Little Egypt and his company and it later helped several groups obtain letters from local rulers, among them the Duke of Savoy in 1419. The chronicler Andreas of Ratisbon wrote that he had seen such a letter, dated 1423, given to Ladislaus, voivode of the Gypsies; copies of that letter were still being shown by Gypsies in the middle of the sixteenth century.[50]

Realizing perhaps that Imperial authority did not extend to all parts of Western Europe, the Gypsies sought the protection of a more universal power. In 1422 several groups of Gypsies were making their way to Rome (a route which can be traced through the Italian chronicles quoted above). In later years they would present papal letters of protection granted to them, so they said, by Pope Martin V – though a record of such a document or of their presence in Rome is yet to surface in the Vatican archives. The copies shown around Europe bore different dates and various names of the counts or dukes heading the band.

Alfonso V of Aragon provided a safe conduct to "Don Johan of Egipte Minor" in 1425 and a few months later to Count Tomás (a royal permit which is kept today in Huesca, with a guarantee of its authenticity). Some 30 safe conducts to Gypsies are kept in Spanish archives.[51] In 1431

in Middleburg, a Duke of Egypt presented a letter from Philip of Burgundy. Charles of Egmont, Duke of Guelders, provided *heiden* with safe conducts for their pilgrimage in 1496, 1506 and 1518, though with some reservations and limitations.[52] It was said that they received letters of recommendation from both James IV and James V of Scotland.[53] These various documents were mentioned by almost all observers: the Bourgeois of Paris, Arnold von Harff, Herman Cornerus, Sebastian Münster and many others. The names of the leaders vary from document to document and the dates of the letters received from the highest authorities were changed, pushed forward to make the "seven-year pilgrimage" seem plausible.[54]

The French scholar François de Vaux de Foletier, in a meticulous search through chronicles and archives in France, the Low Countries and Spain, found mention of visits of Gypsy groups armed with such immunity documents until the early 1540s.[55] He also discovered in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris a French translation of the letter allegedly granted by Pope Martin V to "notre bien amey fils noble homme Andreu, duc de la petite egipte", dated 15 December 1423.[56] Its contents, with slight variations, would appear in every other papal document presented by the bands from Little Egypt: ecclesiastical and civil authorities were asked in all of them to let the duke, with his family and troupe, to pass without a hindrance wherever they went, by land or sea, together with their horses and goods, without paying any tolls or taxes. Special absolution was promised to Christians who would treat these pilgrims with generosity (a sentence which was sometimes interpreted to mean that half of the sins of the pilgrims themselves would be forgiven). As it was a translation – done around the middle of the fifteenth century – the paper carries neither validating signatures nor seals nor an attestation by a notary.

In 1499 Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain rescinded all safe conducts issued to the Gypsies. The fact that their heir, Carlos I (Charles V), had to repeat the 1499 repeal several times in the first half of the sixteenth century is a good indication that the Gypsies continued to use these documents for many decades.[57] As mentioned above, an official expression of doubt regarding the authenticity of the letters was voiced in June 1539 by the King of France. Yet five years later the same King, Francis I, issued a letter of protection to another captain of Egyptians, saying that the papal documents he presented had been examined by the King's council and found to be "saines et authentiques". In 1551, however, a decree of the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire ordered the confiscation of all documentation carried by Gypsies as obvious forgeries.[58] It is interesting to note that the Diet's decision to rescind all their identity papers was justified by the argument that the Gypsies were notoriously deceitful, and thus, *ipso facto*, their documents had to be forgeries. With few other means to determine authenticity, it was the reputation of the bearer which could discredit or lend credence to an official document. In 1560 the Estates General at Orléans demanded that

"all those impostors known by the name of Bohemians or Egyptians leave the kingdom under penalty of the galleys".[59] And this seems to be the point at which the Gypsies' attempts to be recognized as *bona fide* pilgrims under the protection of emperor, pope or local prince came to an end.

However, even after the myth of imperial and papal protection to penitent pilgrims had evaporated, the nomad Gypsies still needed to carry travel documents of some sort so as not to be arrested for vagrancy. Surviving records indicate that many of them were caught carrying forged passports. "They had been masters at conjuring up safe conducts. Some became just as adept at procuring false passports needed to meet vagrancy laws", summarizes Angus Fraser.[60] Here and there the record even identified the forger, as in the case of a group of Gypsies arrested in Berkshire in 1576–77 with a passport forged by a Cheshire schoolmaster.[61]

In the battle against what was perceived as the Gypsies' inherent tendency to deceive, an additional type of document required from them in Spain from 1586 onwards was an affidavit signed by a notary which listed their place of residence and all items they intended to trade – animals and goods – identified by distinguishing marks in order to prevent them from trading in stolen merchandise (in a manner similar to the registration of car ownership today).[62] Was this ordinance implemented? Did the Gypsies also find ways to obtain such affidavits by illegitimate means?

Authentic, or updated and revised copies, or complete forgeries – these remain to this day the three possibilities regarding the documents carried by the Gypsies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Scholars are not quite certain today how many, if any, of their travel papers were genuine; obviously they were regarded as suspect from the start. There seems to be no doubt, however, that even if some of those travel permits were indeed granted by a proper authority, all later copies, with names and dates changed, were fabrications made to deceive.

David Reuveni, as we saw, was caught red-handed forging a letter from his imaginary prince brother ruling over the land of the Lost Tribes. But prior to this desperate measure, he did receive letters of safe conduct from Pope Clement VII and from the King of Portugal who would not dismiss his pretensions out of hand. In the case of the Gypsies, too, some could have been *bona fide* letters obtained by means of the Great Trick from various chancelleries – their veracity attested by official records found in the archives. But it seems safe to assume that such genuine articles would serve them for many years later as models for forged copies, and that the majority of their "passports", too, were clever counterfeits.

If the greater part of the documents they carried were forgeries, the most intriguing question of all would be, How did they obtain them? Who forged them for these illiterate people who had no alphabet of their own, certainly no Latin and only a smattering of vernacular languages and dialects? If these documents were purchased from professional forgers – how could these

poor vagrants afford to buy them? It may have been true, as Beier asserts, that counterfeit passports were cheap and readily available,[63] but this could hardly have been the case with papal, imperial or royal safe conducts. One may well imagine how someone as powerful as the Count d'Armagnac could afford to bribe a bishop (who forged a papal seal in order to grant the count a dispensation to marry his own sister),[64] but how was it possible for these poorest of the poor? These questions lead us to a more general query: if so many forgeries were floating around, who were the forgers in an age when the vast majority of the population was illiterate? Was there a veritable industry of counterfeit documents of identification?[65]

Elusive Vagrants

The story of the Gypsies in Western Europe has been told many times, especially in recent decades as Romani scholars have joined the quest for the tragic history of their people. But in early modern records the voice of the Gypsies themselves was never heard. Thus, although it seems quite obvious that they were "impostors" in more sense than one, it is impossible to know to what extent they themselves were the inventors of the myths surrounding them, to what extent they collaborated in disseminating these invented traditions, or whether they only took advantage of certain accepted practices and theories of the time, such as the notion of long pilgrimages for the expiation sins, or of the credulity accorded to fortune-telling and physiognomy.

In view of so much mystery surrounding them and their chameleonic existence, it is not surprising that Thomas Dekker dubbed these changeable elusive people "moon men": "their name they borrow from the moon, because, as the moon is never in one shape two nights together, but wanders up and down heaven like an antic, so these changeable-stuff-companions never tarry one day in a place".[66] "Some gypsies", writes Florike Egmond, "fabricated a multitude of continually changing identities [...] until it had become both impossible and useless to try to establish what was true or false about their histories".[67] And in Spain, too, as amply demonstrated by Richard Pym, "the civil and ecclesiastical authorities often found it difficult to establish the precise identity of those [Gypsies] involved in cases they wished to investigate".[68]

The Romani people chose a bad time for their migration into Central and Western Europe, a time when, for various economic and social developments, the acutest issue seemed to have been the large masses of poor "masterless" men whom the authorities were desperately seeking to control. There is a consensus among scholars that the Gypsies in early modern Europe were principally considered part of the vagrancy problem and were therefore victims of the criminalization of poverty.[69] And since they were also aliens and stubbornly refused to be integrated into the sedentary

law-abiding populace, they were the targets, more than other itinerants, of policies of expulsion, incarceration, drafting to the galleys and even man-hunts. However, there was a further reason why their arrival in Western Europe was at an inopportune time: they arrived when anxiety about false appearances was at its height, and thus the uncertainty and confusion surrounding so many aspects of their existence also made them a significant part of the problem of imposture.

6
The Body as Evidence

Wishful Thinking

> One and all are dressed in clothes of the same color. Their hair is not shaved but cropped a little above the ears, from one of which the tip is cut off […] How could a man so cover his flight as to elude the observation when he resembles ordinary people in no part of his attire – unless he were to run away naked? Even then his ear would betray him in his flight!

Thus exclaims Raphael Hythlodaeus – Thomas More's alter ego – when describing various ideal social arrangements he discovered on his travels. The penal system of the Polylerites ("people of much nonsense") in Persia, he says, where criminals are sentenced to hard labour rather than executed for every minor offence as in England, guarantees the easy identification of convicts should they try to escape.[1]

More's suggestion of cropping felons' ears, however, like many other features of early modern imaginary societies, was hardly revolutionary. Renaissance utopias, in fact, often presented a blueprint for a community which was to be better than existing society merely because rules and regulations enacted in the real world were to be more efficiently enforced in the imaginary society. Indelibly marking the bodies of offenders was a measure adopted throughout Europe, with increasing frequency in the sixteenth century, not in emulation of More's imaginary Persians. In those times of pauperization, criminalization of poverty, masses of vagrants resorting to petty crime in order to survive, and with incarceration as a long-term punishment still a rare option, identifying recidivist offenders was a top-priority issue on the authorities' agenda. Garments could be shed, changed or serve as a disguise rather than as an identifier; activities could be stopped altogether, modified or carried out clandestinely. The body on the other hand – limbs, features, skin – could neither be discarded nor (in the absence

of plastic surgery) radically altered. The body could therefore serve as a billboard to which authorities were able to attach identity kits. Registering the natural physical features of a person, and better still, marking the body, were presumed at the time to be almost fraud-proof measures.

Circumcision

Various forms of physical alterations have been performed in most societies throughout history as ways of indicating inclusion in the community or a specific social status. Male circumcision is the first such surgical means that comes to mind: whatever its origins and motivations, by the Middle Ages it came to be identified in the Christian world solely with Jews and Muslims, the two groups who circumcised their male children in order to mark a covenant with God and fellowship in the religious community. Unlike Christian baptism, the removal of the foreskin was a permanent and inerasable mark of identity. Solomon Molcho, for example, wishing to shed his New Christian identity and to impress David Reuveni with his sincerity, circumcised himself – an operation which was, no doubt, very painful and dangerous both medically and politically.[2] Tomas Treviño de Sobremonte, arrested by the Inquisition in Mexico in 1625, was circumcised by a cellmate; he would later circumcise his son when the child was ten years old. Interestingly, when he was arrested again he denied that these operations had been performed, relying on the fact that the scars he and his son bore were longitudinal; several other Jews were similarly circumcised in an attempt to vary the traditional circular cutting of the foreskin and thereby deceive the inquisitors if apprehended.[3]

Christians taken into slavery in North Africa or in the Ottoman Empire, who were forced, or who elected, to "turn Turk", were sometimes (though not always) obliged to undergo circumcision. Upon returning to Europe such a mark constituted undeniable proof of their conversion to Islam, a sign that could not be shed like the turban.[4] In the Iberian peninsula, after the expulsions of all Jews and Muslims, a circumcised penis constituted in the eyes of Inquisitors irrefutable evidence of conversion and therefore of heresy.[5] It is unknown, however, how many of the *cristianos nuevos*, who either kept their former religion in secret or returned to it on leaving Iberia, were actually circumcised – it was, after all, a mark mostly hidden from prying eyes.

Yet under certain circumstances it could become exposed. Sixteenth-century Jewish *responsa* literature on matters pertaining to the identification of a missing husband (see below) relates a story about the fate of a handsome young man whose body was found on the beach (in Corfu?) by Greek shepherds: after undressing him they could see he was a Jew, so they left the corpse on the beach and did not accord him a decent burial.[6]

On a more humorous note, irreverent humanists pondered the question whether or not this indelible physical mark of the Jew and the Muslim

disappeared after conversion to Christianity. The spurious letters, composed by Crotus Rubeanus, Ulrich von Hutten and their impudent friends in order to ridicule Dominican friars, offer such an imaginary quandary. A certain Lupold Federfusius requests Ortwin Gratius to take advantage of his much-too-close a relationship with Johann Pfefferkorn's wife and to find out if her husband (the Jewish apostate who sparked off the Reuchlin affair) had grown a foreskin. For if converted Jews remained circumcised, solemnly continued the caricatured friar, how would they be told apart on the Day of Judgement from those who stubbornly clung to the Jewish faith? In fact, the letter went on, circumcision could be an uncertain identifier altogether, as even clerics might have a deformed organ due to syphilis (which they obviously contracted in the baths and not, God forbid, from sinful sexual encounters).[7] The obsession with reliable ways to identify Jews or traces of Judaism, as we shall see, was a frequent target for the arrows of mockery directed at the obscurantists by the sharp pen of the humanists.

The infliction of physical signs as indications of belonging to a certain group has indeed a long history and is not unknown today: circumcision for male Jewish infants and adolescent Muslims is still widely practised, as are special tattoos for gangs and *Yubitsume* (finger shortening) among the Yakuza in Japan. However, branding and mutilation as a mark of Cain or a stigma – mostly in lieu of a criminal record – were never as prevalently used as in early modern Europe.

Tattooing

Although the word "tattoo" is of Polynesian origin and entered the English language only after the return of Captain James Cook's voyage in 1771, the practice of permanently marking the skin by pricking and ingraining it with an indelible pigment was known in the West long before the eighteenth century. The word *stigma* in classical literature, we are told by historians of ancient Greece and Rome, usually meant tattooing rather than branding with hot irons. It was used for decoration, for religious purposes and for degradation.[8] Recalcitrant or fugitive slaves in ancient Rome were often marked by tattoos on their faces.[9] After the fall of the Empire, however, the sources are silent on the matter of painting the body until some Crusaders returned from the Holy Land in the thirteenth century with a cross tattooed on their hand. The wonder expressed by Europeans on discovering the practice of decorative tattooing in the Middle East and later in the South Pacific is an indication that tattooing was not performed in medieval and early modern Europe. The traveller William Lithgow, for example, on his visit to Jerusalem in the early seventeenth century, had his arm "engraved" with the name of Jesus, the Holy Cross and the crown of King James – tattoos which, according to his travelogue, were later cruelly torn off his flesh by an inquisitor in Malaga.[10] In any case, either because it had become a forgotten art in

Europe or because it was too painstaking and slow a process to be used on a wide scale, tattooing was not a method for marking offenders in the West until its comeback in the nineteenth century. With the same enthusiasm expressed three centuries earlier by Thomas More, Jeremy Bentham believed he had stumbled upon the ideal method for preventing crimes, as we find in the chapter entitled "To facilitate the Recognition and the finding of Individuals":

> There is a common custom among English sailors, of printing their family and christian names upon their wrists, in well-formed and indelible characters; they do it that their bodies may be known in case of shipwreck.
>
> If it were possible that this practice should become universal, it would be a new spring for morality, a new source of power for the laws, an almost infallible precaution against a multitude of offences, especially against every kind of fraud in which confidence is requisite for success. Who are you, with whom I have to deal? The answer to this important question would no longer be liable to evasion.[11]

How all European authorities would have loved to adopt such "an invisible chain" – as Bentham called this method – if only it had been possible to implement it in the sixteenth or seventeenth century! Clearly marking everyone would have been the perfect solution to all their problems of identification. The idea indeed was never to die, particularly in connection with felons, despite the development in means of identification and the improvement of penal measures in modern times. The British army would have deserters tattooed with the letter "D" and soldiers "with bad character" with the letters "BC" until late in the nineteenth century; and an American District Attorney in 1922 was "in favor of placing a tattoo mark on the body of alien criminals so that when an alien criminal is deported he cannot find his way back into this country under another name".[12] (For us, needless to say, of the post-Holocaust generation, the notion of tattooing an identifier on each person's arm evokes nightmarish associations.)

Branding and Mutilation

While tattooing disappeared from Europe for several centuries, branding and mutilation gradually became quite prevalent throughout Central and Western Europe – directly as a result, I believe, of the struggle to control the floating population and to prevent changes of identity.

Indelible marking of slaves was a phenomenon known since the beginning of recorded history. Although in the Old Testament it was prescribed solely for the Hebrew slave who refused to be freed – in such a case, "his master shall bore his ear through with an awl" (Exod. 21:6) – branding persons who, like cattle, were regarded as another man's property was practised

in practically all slave-holding societies around the globe. Thus, not surprisingly, when European nations embarked upon the transatlantic slave trade, the use of branding irons on humans became part and parcel of the traffic – leaving the marks of companies or private owners (or both) on the bodies of many millions of men and women. Descriptions of the process are to be found in diaries of traders, ship surgeons, ministers and plantation owners from the late fifteenth century until the final abolition of slavery in the West at the close of the nineteenth century. Some of these descriptions were simple, straightforward reports; others were expressed apologetically or even tinged with revulsion. Instructions to slave-ship captains of the Middelburg Commercial Company in the second half of the eighteenth century, for instance, included specific guidelines regarding "humane" branding:

> As you purchase slaves you must mark them at the upper right arm with the silver marker CC N, which is sent along with you for that purpose. Note the following when you do the branding: (1) the area of the marking must first be rubbed with candle wax or oil; (2) The marker should be only as hot as when applied to paper, the paper gets red. When these [precautions] are observed, the slaves will not suffer bad effects from the branding.[13]

Some African slaves were branded more than once, first when they were purchased by a European company in Africa and later with the mark of the plantation owner on the other side of the Atlantic, and in some cases even a third and fourth time as they were bought and sold in the marketplace. In colonies which depended on a constant flow of African labour – in the Caribbean or in Brazil – branding was more widespread than in North America, where the population of Blacks increased naturally and skin colour became a sufficient marker of belonging to the category of chattel.

Was it the banality of slave branding which inspired authorities in Europe to increase the use of hot irons and mutilation of limbs as a method not only for marking living property but also for punishing and controlling vagrants and other offenders? Contemporary sources do not elaborate on the rationale of these penal measures, nor do they offer enough information to compile quantitative analyses of frequency and geographical distribution of the practice. Yet there are enough indications that such measures were applied in most European countries, quite often to a wide range of delinquents, well into the eighteenth century.[14]

The pillory, the stocks and carting through the town had been established in the late Middle Ages as means for corporal punishment and for shaming, as well as for retaliation and deterrence and for imprinting the image of the offender on public memory so that he or she would be recognized by everyone on an unlawful return to the city. These contraptions, always erected in a very public place and preserved today as tourist attractions in some

European towns, were known throughout Europe (*pilori* in French, *picota* in Spain, *pelourinho* in Portugal, *Pranger* in German, *schandpaal* in Dutch, *gogna* in Italian) and were in use in certain localities until the mid-nineteenth century. Another form of stigmatizing and shaming was the shaving of the head – prescribed, for example, in Venice for prostitutes who attempted to wear their hair in a style that would make them resemble boys.[15] (Shaving the hair of thousands of women accused of collaboration with the Germans in France after the Second World War was probably the last time this particular method of shaming was used in Europe.) The *sanbenito* left to hang in the sinner's parish church, though not a physical mark, was also designed to leave a record and to disgrace the offender's family for generations to come. In Italian cities portraits of criminals exhibited in public could serve a similar purpose as the pillory when offenders absconded.[16]

But with the rise in geographical mobility and the growth of the "strangers' society" of the cities, local and temporary measures such as the "shaming poles" were no longer considered effective. As the vagrant population grew larger and a great number of "masterless" men and women moved from community to community, convicted felons were less likely to suffer temporary stigmatization by being put on display in the market square, or for that matter having their hair shaved or half their beards cut off (as King Hanun had done to King David's servants [2 Sam. 10:4–5]). Thus governments and city councils increasingly resorted to permanent marking of the body – whipping, branding and mutilation.[17]

All the violent ways of marking the body were intended to serve several purposes, though no jurist explicitly elaborated on the rationale of this penal system. Painful punishment, shaming and stigmatizing, deterrence of others from committing the same crime and deterrence of the offender from recidivism, as well as creating a visible and indelible criminal record – all these and more could be attained by a single (brutal) act of branding or disfigurement. Both courts and potential employers – however far from the place where the marked person was first sentenced – could immediately recognize a malefactor. Not surprisingly, attempts were made by the marked offenders to erase the "record" by cutting out the mark or removing it with quicklime – but then a suspicious scar would still remain.[18] In most cases the mark conveyed the nature of the crime as well, for the statutes prescribed specific mutilations for specific felonies, and the policy of branding had its own use for the alphabet – "V" for vagrancy (or "M" for *mendiant* in France), "R" for rogue, "B" for blasphemy, "J" for Judaizing and so on. Robert Jütte writes,

> Whipping, branding and ear-boring was for a long time and until the eighteenth century the easiest way of dealing with sturdy beggars and vagabonds. Whether these corporal punishments alleviated the problem of poverty and its concomitant, vagrancy, is doubtful. But it had at least

> one great advantage: it gave the local governments the feeling that they were at least doing something against the rising numbers of "masterless men" on the roads.[19]

And, one should add, it also gave the local governments the feeling that they were at least keeping some sort of lid on imposture, preventing the numerous rogues and felons from adopting new identities and hiding their criminal records. Even Thomas More, straining his imagination to describe a perfect society, would not tolerate men neglecting their duties and avoiding surveillance by idly roaming the countryside:

> If any person gives himself leave to stray out of his territorial limits and is caught without the governor's certificate, he is treated with contempt, brought back as a runaway, and severely punished. A rash repetition of the offense entails the sentence of slavery.[20]

The fact that Renaissance Europe witnessed such an upsurge in very harsh and painful measures to mark human beings raises several questions not sufficiently discussed by historians: what led authorities to approve by legislation and to implement such drastic means on a far larger scale than ever before? How effective were those methods? Were early modern magistrates, hangmen and members of the public more callous and indifferent to human pain? And why did these measures gradually disappear?

It would be presumptuous to attempt to answer all these questions, which are quite similar to questions and quandaries raised by the witch persecutions during the same centuries as well as by the prevalence of all public and cruel executions and corporal punishments. One element though needs to be emphasized: the sense of desperation which accompanied the often-reiterated laws and trial verdicts, as authorities – state, church or local – felt they were facing frightening threats on a scale of immense proportions with which they were ill equipped to contend. And the threats were not only the (exaggerated) numbers of vagrants and the (imaginary) legions of Satan, but also – as evidenced by so many aspects of early modern life – the general inability to determine who was who.

Laws

The most brutal forms of mutilation, practised (or at least prescribed by law) in the early and high Middle Ages – such as blinding, castration, lip removal and amputation – almost disappeared from legislation and custom in late medieval Europe.[21] Branding, ear-boring and tongue-cutting, however, remained on the lists of punishments in most early modern penal codes and in recommendations for the proper handling of certain offences. The eleventh-century Bishop Burchard of Worms, complaining of

the proliferation of homicides, prescribed whipping, shaving of the head and branding;[22] the *Siete Partidas*, the thirteenth-century Spanish law-code, recommended fifty lashes for first offenders and branding the lips with the letter "B" for second offenders.[23] In England branding and ear-cropping were statutory punishments from the late fourteenth century, but it was during the Tudor "Revolution in Government" that legislation repeatedly emphasized the importance of these measures for the control of offenders among the poorer classes: whores, rogues and vagabonds, Gypsies and brawlers. Edward VI's Statute of Vagabonds of 1547 demanded that all unemployed able-bodied persons and declared vagabonds – even if their crime was only "idle living" – be branded with a "V" on their breast and then enslaved for two years; if they ran away they were to be branded with an "S" and made slaves for life; a second escape meant death. This extremely harsh act was repealed two years later, but the practice of marking "sturdy beggars" was to continue.[24] A statute passed in 1572 required that all apprehended vagabonds be "grievously whipped and burned through the gristle of the right ear with a hot iron", an inch in diameter.[25] In the first year of his reign James I ordered that rogues be branded on the left shoulder with "a great Roman R", the size of an English shilling.[26]

Beginning with a statute of 1489 and until 1822, English law prescribed for first offenders who claimed benefit of the clergy to be branded on the thumb – "T" for theft, "F" for felon, "M" for murder – in order to ensure that the benefit could not be claimed more than once.[27] In *Holinshed's Chronicles* (1577) William Harrison describes the practice thus:

> Thieves that are saved by their books and clergy, for the first offence, if they have stolen nothing else but oxen, sheep, money, or such like, which be no open robberies, as by the highway side, or assailing of any man's house in the night, without putting him in fear of his life, or breaking up his walls or doors, are burned in the left hand, upon the brawn of the thumb, with a hot iron, so that, if they be apprehended again, that mark betrayeth them to have been arraigned of felony before, whereby they are sure at that time to have no mercy.[28]

In sixteenth-century Castile, although attempts by the Cortes to introduce branding thieves with the letter L (for *ladrón*) were rejected by the king, all convicts who were sent to the galleys were supposed to be branded with the letters GAL (for *galera*).[29] Madre Magdalena de San Jerónimo, in a proposal for a special prison for delinquent women (mainly prostitutes), which she presented to King Philip II of Spain in 1608, recommended that the women be branded upon leaving the prison so that they would be recognized as recidivists deserving harsher sentences if they were to return to their evil ways.[30]

Certain fiery theologians and reformers called for the application of such stigmas on an even wider scale. Philip Stubbes, the Puritan author of

The Anatomy of Abuses (1583), for example, would have men and women executed for fornication or, at the very least,

> wod God they might be cauterized and seared with a hote yron on the cheeke, forehead or some other parte of their bodye that might be seen, to the end that honest and chast Christians might be discerned from the adulterous Children of Sathan.[31]

In New England, as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) imprinted on our memory, the courts preferred to impose the public wearing of a badge with the appropriate letter indicating the offence ("D" for drunkard, "A" for adulterer). However, if an offender were discovered without the badge – so we are told, for example, by the sentence of Mary Mandame, found guilty of fornication with an Indian in Plymouth in 1639 – he or she was to be "burned in the face with a hott iron".[32]

State Violence

Historians of crime and punishment admit that it is difficult to assess how common were branding and disfigurement in practice. "Laws and proclamations were often not enforced: they too were propaganda as much as prescriptions of viable solutions to real problems", writes Paul Slack.[33] James Sharpe states that before the eighteenth century there is little by way of easily accessible materials from which statistics might be derived; that there was little by way of public debate on such methods since they were taken for granted; and that sentences were often mitigated or not carried out for various reasons.[34] Nevertheless, in addition to the physical evidence of branding rods on display in some museums, there are plenty of references to mutilation and branding not only in statutes and court sentences but in all manner of chronicles and biographies written at the time to provide us with at least an impressionistic picture of the not-insignificant numbers of men and women traipsing around Europe with the mark of Cain branded on their foreheads, cheeks or other parts of their bodies.

A number of men, known to posterity for their deeds or for their writings, carried such physical marks for most of their lives. Let us look at some of them. In 1528, many years before he became the arch-heretic known as the Third David, Jan Jorisz, or David Joris, was sentenced, for disturbing a procession of the Host in Delft, to be

> bound upon the scaffold built upon the marketplace in the city of Delft and there to be severely lashed and then an iron is to be bored through his tongue and left there for half an hour. He is then to be banned from the city for the next three years. He is not to return inside this time except at the loss of his right hand.[35]

Nevertheless, despite the bored tongue, the scars left by the lashings and his flowing red beard, Joris succeeded – as we saw – in hiding his identity from the authorities in Basle for many years.[36]

Edward Talbot, known as Edward Kelley, "the grand imposter of the world" according to Gabriel Plattes,[37] was sentenced in 1580 to have his ears cropped for counterfeiting coins. Although there is no documentation proving that the sentence was carried out, he was depicted in all his portraits with his ears covered by his hair or by a cap with earflaps. In 1582 he became John Dee's amanuensis and scryer and continued with a life of deception. Accused at various points in his life of necromancy, magic and forgery, his criminal past evidenced by his cropped ears did not prevent him from continuing a career as a charlatan and alchemist, conning illustrious men and women such as Dee, Francesco Pucci, Emperor Rudolf II, Count Albrecht Laski and possibly Queen Elizabeth or her advisers Sir Edward Dyer and William Cecil, Lord Burghley. Even his end eludes us: did Kelley get arrested by Rudolf II's officers and die in prison in Bohemia c.1595? Or did he escape and continue with his shenanigans for several years more?[38] No less than his contemporaries, historians today are still unable to pin him down.

The Puritan minister, John Traske, suffered a multitude of penalties for being a Judaizer or "broaching Jewish opinions". He was sentenced on 19 June 1618 to life imprisonment, a fine of a £1000 and expulsion from the ministry. In addition he was

> to bee whipped from the prison of the Fleete to the Pallace of Westminster with a paper on his head […] then to bee sett on the Pillory and to have one of his ears nayled to the Pillory, and after hee hath stood there some convenient tyme, to bee burnte in the forhead with the letter J. [He was then to] bee whipped from the Fleete into Cheapside […] sett in the Pillory and have his other Eare nayled thereunto.

Amazingly Traske survived all these ordeals, was released from prison after two years and resumed his ministry despite the mark on his forehead.[39]

The Star Chamber in England in the 1630s issued brutal sentences to men who published "seditious and scandalous" works. The Puritan Alexander Leighton was whipped at Westminster, had one of his ears cut off, his nose slit and one side of his face branded. Then a week later the mutilation was repeated on the other side of his face. John Bastwick, Henry Burton and William Prynne were hauled into the Star Chamber in 1637, charged with seditious libel for writing pamphlets that criticized royal actions, and were sentenced to "perpetual imprisonment" without access to writing materials, and to loss of ears. Prynne was actually arrested and maimed twice; on the second time his cheeks were branded with the letters "S.L." for "seditious libeller", which he preferred to interpret as "stigmata laudis".[40]

The Quaker James Nayler was convicted in 1656 by Oliver Cromwell's second parliament and sentenced to be branded on the forehead with the letter "B" (for blasphemer), to have his tongue bored with a red-hot iron, to be whipped through the streets of London and Bristol and to suffer imprisonment with hard labour for two years.

In addition to these branded and disfigured "celebrities", we meet other marked felons in various records and reports, which indicates that such measures were prevalent across Europe though not everywhere inflicted with the same frequency. Maria R. Boes, who scanned the *Strafenbuch* (*Book of Punishments*) of Frankfurt am Main for the years 1562 to 1696, found that out of 1321 convicts only seven persons had been branded, six of them Jews. And while the single non-Jew was branded on his back, the Jews were marked on the forehead or on the cheek. She also mentions that only a single person had his ears cropped in that town in all those years, and he too was a Jew.[41] But in Nuremberg Master Franz Schmidt, public executioner of the city in the years 1573–1617, unemotionally lists seven such cases, none of them Jews, out of the 275 entries in his journal:

for the year 1582:
Anna Bischoffin of Augsburg, *alias* die Feyhl, formerly whipped out of Würzburg and *branded on the cheeks*. Set fire to a shed at Kützen farm at Lauff on St. John's Baptist's day on account of a purse, which she had mislaid and thought it had been stolen from her. Beheaded with a sword;
for the year 1584:
February 11th. Maria Kürschnerin of Nuremberg, *alias* Silly Mary, who had formerly been whipped out of town with rods, and had *her ears cropped* [continued to steal and was therefore] hanged at Nuremberg;
for the year 1591:
April 19th. Andrew Brunner […] blasphemed and railed against the Almighty […] was stood for one quarter of an hour in the pillory. A *piece of his tongue was torn from him* on the Fleischbrücke;
for the year 1595:
September 25th. Ursula Grimin, otherwise called Ploben […] a prostitute, bawd and procuress […] she was stood in the pillory; flogged as far as the stocks, there *branded on both cheeks*, and afterwards whipped thence out of the town;
for the year 1599:
February 16th. Hans Rössner of Nuremberg, who had eight times broken the Ban […] *two of his fingers were cut off*;
for the year 1600:
January 22nd. Veyt Willet of Güntersbühl, a horse-dealer who swindled people over purchases. […] he had previously been whipped out of Pappenheim, likewise out of Schwabach, where *his ears were also clipped*;

and for the year 1609:

> February 23rd. Margaret Schreimeri of Megeldorff, an old beggar woman of some sixty years, who at various times deceived people […] was *branded on both cheeks* as a swindler.[42]

From such diaries and official records it would appear that, at least in Germany during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, flogging and banishment were the most common punishments for offenders who were brought to trial but not executed. Flogging, one should not forget, also marked the body for life, and these scars, too, were means by which to determine whether a delinquent had been judicially punished previously. Nonetheless, though infrequent in some German principalities, branding and mutilation seemed to have been taken for granted. The Nüremberg youth, Sebald Welser, recorded in his journal in 1577 seeing in Neuenwald five women being burned on the cheeks for illegally soliciting customers on the street.[43]

In the Netherlands corporal penalties appear to have been far more frequent. Pieter Spierenburg, in a thorough study of judicial punishments in early modern Europe, found 427 cases of branding in Amsterdam between 1651 and 1750, including two in which the convict was branded twice.[44] According to his findings, convicts in the Netherlands during the later Middle Ages were usually branded somewhere on the face, either on the cheek or on the forehead. From 1551 onwards, however, branding on the shoulder became the dominant mode, but the ear and the ball of the thumb were also possible places for the mark. Spierenburg believes that the gradual change to less visible marks implied a budding revulsion at the sight of inflicted pain – in the same manner as executions would gradually disappear from the public arena.

> The decline of deformations of the face and the body is a trend in several European countries in the early modern period, although the exact chronology varies. In England mutilation was common under the Tudors. It apparently became less so in the course of the seventeenth century. The *Parlement* of Paris reduced the frequency of sentences involving mutilations in the middle of the sixteenth century. […] The trend towards the disappearance of disfigurement of persons staying alive clearly preceded the rise of an aversion against public executions in general.[45]

This conclusion does not quite accord with the data he provides for the rise in the practice of branding in the Netherlands during the eighteenth century or with the increase in the practice of public whipping. There is no indication of revulsion as Dutch courts added the arms of the city to the crossed stripes branded on the convict's back by a heated sword. He also mentions tongue-piercing and the cutting of ears and thumbs in the seventeenth

century, although severe mutilations, according to the tables in *The Spectacle of Suffering*, did decrease towards the end of the century.

Meanwhile back in England, the entry for 17 March 1573 in the Middlesex County Records tells us that seven "masterless vagrants" – five men and two women – were sentenced to "to be whipt severely and burnt on the right ear"; altogether the records of the Sessions of Middlesex for the years between 1572 and 1575 show 44 vagabonds sentenced to be branded; and 71 rogues (possibly unemployed soldiers and sailors after the battle with the Spanish Armada) were whipped and burned through the ear between 6 October and 14 December 1588.[46]

End of an Era

Pillorying, public whipping and branding remained on the penal codes of most European countries well into the nineteenth century, but in practice, by the second half of the eighteenth century, corporal punishments as well as executions were generally carried out indoors, away from the cheering crowds. Michel Foucault, in his well-known portrayal of the "shift from the scaffold to the prison", wrote,

> a few decades saw the disappearance of the tortured, dismembered, amputated body, symbolically branded on face or shoulder, exposed alive or dead to public view. The body as the major target of penal repression disappeared. By the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the gloomy festival of punishment was dying out.[47]

And Spierenburg, although he counts five cases of cutting off thumbs in Amsterdam after 1650 and a case of a man severely whipped and his tongue pierced with a burning awl in 1708, basically agrees with Foucault, yet he locates the shift approximately a century earlier: "on the whole, after 1650 it was unusual for a convict to walk about with a visibly mutilated body".[48]

Was it Norbert Elias's "civilizing process" of gradual humanization and refinement that provoked revulsion in view of acts of brutality, whether carried out by individuals or by the state? Was the change in policy caused by ideas of the Enlightenment spreading and infiltrating the penal systems in Europe and its colonies? Possibly. However, in Florence and in some other Italian states, where prisons and sentences of long-term incarceration existed as early as the fourteenth century, flogging, mutilation and branding were far less common than in other countries,[49] a fact which seems to strengthen Foucault's thesis that "the festival of punishment" was mostly celebrated as a result of the absence of penitentiaries. The emergence of effective state machineries, the "birth of the prison", the establishment of police forces and more efficient official record-keeping – all these greatly reduced the need to mark offenders and enabled the removal of undesirables

from the public eye and their keeping under government control. Foucault's age of the "Great Confinement" began in small steps with the establishment of correction houses or work houses in the seventeenth century, but the system of incarceration became well organized and widespread enough only towards the end of the eighteenth century. In other words, institutional developments were probably more influential than ideas or sensibilities in putting an end to the marking of bodies as means of identification. Hence, after the abolition of slavery and the emergence of prisons, branding with hot irons became associated in the West only with marking livestock as property.

Godly and Satanic Stigmata

During the same centuries when European society relied on the hangman to impress identifying marks on the bodies of convicted felons, it also trusted supernatural powers to place their marks on those human beings with whom they had direct contacts – thus guaranteeing that impostors would be easily detected.

The Old Testament verse "in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25) was interpreted by some theologians as a promise that God would reveal His designs for certain individuals by marking their bodies. "Ego enim stigmata Iesu in corpora meo porto" – Paul's words (Gal. 6:17) were to be the basis for the Catholic recognition that certain holy people physically displayed their union with Christ. The officially recognized dynasty of people bearing the signs of Jesus' crucifixion on their body begins in the thirteenth century with St Francis of Assisi and ends (so far) in the twentieth century with Padre Pio Pietrelcina, canonized in 2002. There is no official list of confirmed stigmatics, but of all the persons canonized or beatified, only 62, most of them female, were recognized as having been inflicted with the Saviour's wounds.

The meaning of sanctity, the role of saints in the Catholic Church, the increase in apparitions and prophecies during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the changes in the perceptions of mystical experience and psychological explanations for ecstasies among young Catholic girls – all subjects discussed in innumerable scholarly studies – do not concern us here. What is relevant to my argument is the systematic and meticulous fashion by which church authorities tried to establish the genuineness of the physical signs of the divine presence either as stigmata or as an odour of sanctity. Records of investigations throughout early modern Catholic Europe offer clear evidence that the investigators were very thorough and not easily duped. They obviously acted on the assumption that all stigmata were a forgery until proven otherwise.

The case of Benedetta Carlini, Judith Brown's "lesbian" nun, is now one of the better-known episodes of faked stigmata. It could have been her sexual

relations with a younger nun in her convent that led to the closer scrutiny of her visions, her wounds and the wedding ring she claimed to have received from Jesus; but it was for her pretences that the young abbess was pronounced a fraud and imprisoned within her convent for the rest of her life. The surviving reports of the investigation provide detailed descriptions of how her wounds were examined and how her credibility as a visionary soon evaporated.[50]

The opposite of the holy stigmata was the devil's mark, sometimes referred to as Satan's stigma. The search for the evil signature on the body of persons suspected of *maleficium* became an obsession in some parts of Europe during the worst episodes of the witch hunts; it also gave birth to a new profession – witch-finders or "prickers" – and a whole new "science" of identification.[51] And this new profession offered fertile ground for the growth of an altogether new breed of frauds and charlatans.

Witchcraft suspects in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were still subjected at times to an ordeal, most often to the test by cold water. This type of trial as a way to prove guilt or innocence has a very long history, dating back to Babylonia and last mentioned in Europe (in the Ukraine) in 1885. The logic behind the idea to throw witches and wizards into the water in order to see whether they would sink (if innocent) or float (if guilty) had always been muddled. Were witches unsinkable because waters rejected evil? Was it God's hand – as in all ordeals – which intervened in the natural order of the universe to point out the guilty person? Or was it Satan's doing that made the witch's body so light that it would not drown? In any case, in early modern Europe more and more critics doubted the validity of the test and many demonologists dismissed the swimming of witches as useless and illegal.[52] Therefore, the search for other reliable means of identifying witches continued for as long as the hunts were in full swing.

Male prickers as well as female midwives were employed to find the devil's mark on the witch's body: in England it could be an extra teat with which to feed familiars; in all centres of the witch hunt it would be any unusual birthmark, mole or scar, insensible to pain and emitting no blood (as the antithesis of holy stigmata with their continuous flow of fresh blood). Repeatedly pricking the suspect's body was a multi-purpose method: not only was it expected to provide indisputable evidence of the pact with the devil, but it was also a form of torture, which would either extract a confession or drive out the evil. Other identifying signs could be a mark resembling a toad's foot in the witch's left eye (mentioned by Pierre De Lancre) or scratches on the forehead revealing the devil's attempt to remove the baptismal imprint.[53] Furthermore, based on the assumption that "it takes one to know one", women who claimed to be witches themselves and said they could detect another witch at a glance were hired by the hunters. Margaret Aitken, known as "the great witch of Balwery" in Fife, for example, was employed in such a capacity, taken from town to town, sending many

women to their deaths, until she was exposed as a fraud by being presented with the same person two days running, declaring them guilty one day and innocent the next.[54]

"If there was one thing people found difficult about the recognition of witches", writes P.G. Maxwell-Stuart in the afterword to his book,

> it was the ever-present realisation, sometimes overt but usually tacit, that appearances are deceptive […] Nothing, then, was as it seemed to be. […] Whatever method of identification worked, or appeared to work, was therefore a Godsend, almost literally.[55]

In the Blood

During the witch-hunts women were sometimes indicted for witchcraft simply because they were daughters or granddaughters of "notorious witches" and therefore inclined to evil by their very nature. The idea of hereditary qualities being carried in the blood was not a Renaissance innovation. But what, besides the inclination to evil, were the qualities believed to be transmitted from one generation to the next?

"In Roman culture, blood had a strong symbolic value and was associated with nobility and family descent", writes Charles de Miramon.[56] However, blood as a vessel of nobility almost disappeared between the seventh and twelfth centuries, only to return in the late Middle Ages, at first in the discourse about noble races of animals. The proverb *bon sang ne saurait mentir* ("good blood cannot lie" or "blood will out") appears in the sources for the first time in the fourteenth century;[57] the expression "the princes of the blood" also appears around the same time, together with the notion of royal blood or noble blood, in France and England;[58] while in Venice *La purezza del sangue*, that is, proving a legitimate line of descent from noble families, was demanded from patricians from the fourteenth century onwards.[59] In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, writes Sergio Bertelli, in discussing the status of children sired by the king, it was suggested that "one drop of royal blood" would legitimize sons who were born out of wedlock.[60]

It was but a short distance between the idea of noble blood, implying genealogical determinism, to biological determinism or racism. By the middle of the fifteenth century Spaniards were elaborating a theory on how the blood of descendants of Jews and Muslims was tainted for all generations to come. Although far from being accepted by all Spaniards or Portuguese, the Toledo statutes of *limpieza de sangre* (1449) may be safely regarded as marking the genesis of racial theories: for the first time in Christendom's history, it was openly pronounced that baptism did not obliterate the sin of the infidel, and that some measure of evil was biologically inherent to the enemies of Christ.[61]

The Edicts of Faith, as we saw in the chapter about religious dissimulation, enumerated means of identification of crypto-Jews, crypto-Muslims, crypto-Lutherans and more, which were based on words, customs and artefacts. But once the ideology of *limpieza de sangre* took hold, some thinkers, judges and inquisitors asked themselves how one could tell – even if a suspect's behaviour appeared blameless – whether the fluid in their veins was indeed pure and not tainted with Jewish, Muslim or Gypsy blood. According to some inquisitorial protocols and learned essays, it appears that during the sixteenth century (in Iberia at any rate) "race" and "heresy" were integrated, both regarded as tainting the blood and thus transferred from generation to generation.

Yet unlike, for example, skin colour, qualities transmitted in the blood were invisible to the naked eye; so how could blood tell identity? Some contemporary answers to this question were discussed above in regard to the Gypsies. Not surprisingly, the same persons who wanted to rid their country of the presence of the nomad Gypsies, and who described them as thieves and deceivers by nature, were also advocates of policies against descendants of Jews and Moriscos. One of the fiercest persecutors of Gypsies both in writing and in the sentences he passed on them, the *alcalde* Juan de Quiñones, shortly after publishing his *Discurso contra los gitanos*, composed in 1632 a long treatise on the physical attributes of "New Christians".[62] Quiñones strongly believed that, 140 years after the expulsion of the Jews, it was clear that the integration of the converts' descendants had failed – it had failed because their tainted blood prevented them from becoming honest members of Spanish society and, despite all their stratagems, they remained Jewish by nature. Fortunately, gratefully continued Quiñones, God provided physical signs by which one could detect frauds who were attempting to pass for true Spaniards and faithful Christians. The Almighty would not leave the faithful in the dark regarding the impostors in their midst who were endangering the integrity of the community; while kings and other earthly rulers could only impose external marks – branding, mutilation, special garments and insignia – the Lord had the power to mark people from within by natural means.

Inherited bodily marks, admitted Quiñones, were not necessarily signs of infamy, and he listed many distinguishing signs and abilities of certain families, including royalty's inherent power to cure disease. Most important to him, however, was the fact that the Good Lord made certain that men and women would be marked for ever by their forefathers' guilt. Jews and all their offspring would carry for eternity the mark of Cain in their blood as punishment for their crimes against Jesus. Baptismal water would not efface the sins nor erase the signs (though the *alcalde* remained vague on the question whether this was true only when conversion to Christianity had been insincere). He urged inquisitors to look for the hidden signs, those that were not as immediately evident as long noses: in addition to

the evidence of circumcision – a mark crypto-Jews and crypto Muslims, he believed, continued to inscribe on their bodies – and remnants of tails that had been surgically removed, there were other afflictions with which they were cursed. Persons with Jewish or Muslim blood emitted a particularly unpleasant odour (the so-called *foetor judaicus*, the opposite of the heavenly odour of sanctity; it was also attributed to the Cagots [see Chapter 7]), which was not a result of the food they ate, as some authors suggested, but of their corrupt nature. Furthermore – and this was the main topic of his dissertation – male Jews bled every month from their posterior, and "all their descendants remained with this blemish, plague, and perpetual sign so that every month they suffer the flow of blood like women".

Much has been written on the medieval myth of Jewish male menstruation, though it was probably less widespread than some historians of anti-Semitism have claimed.[63] Quiñones quoted several earlier authorities who had written about this "known fact", among them Thomas Cantimprantanus (Thomas de Cantimpré), the thirteenth-century anatomist. The same authorities would later serve other writers, Thomas Calvert in England in 1648 among them.[64] The notion that Jews were especially prone to haemorrhoids can be traced back to Galen, but the interpretation that this was a form of male menstruation and a punishment for their sins against Jesus seemed to appear for the first time in the thirteenth century, together with other virulent expressions of anti-Judaism. The need of Jews to drink the blood of innocent Christian children (another myth born but a little earlier) was explained by a few theologians as the Jews' attempt to restore their monthly loss of blood. Quiñones mentioned this medical-cannibalistic explanation, but expressed doubts regarding its veracity; on the other hand, he was certain that this frequent blood loss was the cause of the pale and yellowish complexion of the Jews.

Juan de Quiñones's treatise, addressed to the king (though never published in print, but to be found in several manuscripts in Iberian libraries), attracted the attention of scholars who studied the Spanish "persistent preoccupation with racial, religious, and cultural otherness", which was also reflected in attitudes to women – since attributing menstruation to the despised Jew was degradation by feminization.[65] It was also quoted by students of Spanish literature and culture who pointed out the centrality of race and blood in Spanish physiological discourse.[66] But Quiñones is most often referred to by historians of anti-Semitism, ever since his text was quoted at length by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi in his 1971 book on Isaac Cardoso.[67]

The immense emotive significance of attributing menstruation to men – with all the connotations of blood, blood libels, menstrual blood as both impure and as having curative powers, and feminization as a form of ridiculing the "other" – is amply discussed in learned books and articles, but it is of less concern to us here. Most relevant to my argument is Quiñones's assertion that he was presenting incontrovertible "means for *knowing*

and persecuting the Jewish race" (emphasis mine), and his advice to the inquisitors that "when recognition by facial features is difficult, one should resort to hidden signs". In other words, new racist theories were gradually emerging out of the desperate need to overcome the uncertainty about identity and identification. Because of the fear (which did not abate for several centuries after the Iberian expulsions of all the Jews, Muslims and Moriscos) that great numbers of false Christians were lurking around every corner and threatening the Catholic Tower of Faith, racism was to gain more ground in Spain than anywhere else at the time. Quiñones, the venerable judge (who, so we are told by Yerushalmi, would himself be afflicted by haemorrhoids and would need to turn to a crypto-Jewish doctor for treatment), was also, as we saw, a persecutor of Gypsies – another race of people, so he believed, who had ineradicable characteristics which endangered the fabric of the Christian society.[68]

In addition, almost half a century after Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* immortalized the story and more than two-and-a-half centuries after Giovanni Fiorentino first put it in writing in *Il Pecorone* (written between 1378 and 1385; first printed in 1558), Quiñones provided his own original version of the cannibalistic depiction of the Jewish moneylender demanding a pound of flesh. In his memorandum the episode takes place not in Venice but in Turkey; the Jew demands two ounces rather than a pound of flesh as interest on the loan; and the wise Sultan gives the Jew permission to cut out with a knife those two ounces from the borrower's body, but stipulates a condition that, should the Jew cut even a tiny bit more or less, he would be summarily executed; the Jew obviously refuses to take the risk and abandons his claim. This version of the story, like its literary renderings, was undoubtedly borrowed from medieval anti-Semitic lore and related to the fear of circumcision, to ritual murder accusations and to hints at Jewish cannibalism, but it was also another expression of hope on the part of the Spanish jurist that blood will tell and truth prevail.[69]

Physiognomy and Race

The human body as a text was not, of course, a novel idea. However, the "text" was written in a code which was not always easy to decipher, the characters signifying different things according to time and place. Some features had a universal meaning, of course, such as the physical differences between male and female: in theory, when an individual was suspected of cross-dressing, it was a simple enough matter to uncover his or her true sexual identity. However, early modern thought did accept that nature could play tricks by creating hermaphrodites,[70] and contemporary observers soon also learnt that gender identifiers could be different on other continents. Almost every explorer and conquistador commented on the absence of important male attributes in Amerindian men: their smooth, hairless skin signified for

Europeans the weaknesses and unmanliness of American natives, attributes which justified their subjugation by the virile men of Europe.[71]

The assumption that the human body offers the observer much information not only about a person's gender, but also about one's inner nature, and – at times – about origins and affiliation to a certain *ethnos* or class, was accepted since antiquity. It was part and parcel of the medical, physiognomic and philosophical legacy of the Greeks. Ethnic stereotypes existed in Western civilization from time immemorial; some of them – as Benjamin Isaac convincingly argued – could be termed at least "proto-racist".[72] Not all images of "the other", however, were necessarily racist or even proto-racist in the biological sense, especially not during times when a universalistic ideology – such as Roman imperialism or Christian Catholicism – predominated. Universalism implied that every person could shed (not easily or immediately perhaps, but in due course) all distinctive marks of otherness and become a true Roman or a true Christian.

Medieval physiognomy could be said to be non-ethnic, as there was no systematic attempt to categorize groups according to distinctive physiognomic signs, yet there were nevertheless enough ethnic specificities in medieval texts and art to serve as references for Renaissance humanists. To give but a few examples: the medical scholar of the thirteenth century, Pietro d'Abano, wrote that the Tuscan head was long and mallet-shaped; a spherical head was a distinguishing mark of the French; the English had soft hair, the Germans thick, rough and darker hair, while the Indians had soft and pleasant hair. According to Bartolommeo della Rocca Cocles (d.1504) the inhabitants of each town and province in Italy had distinctive marks on their body. Like accents today, voices were thought to differ according to regions. Tartars in literary sources were described as small in stature, with short legs, a broad and almost hairless face with widely spaced heavy-lidded eyes and high cheekbones.[73] None of these descriptions of regional physical differences, however, came anywhere close to the taxonomic scheme offered in 1684 by the doctor of medicine and traveller, François Bernier, in his anthropological essay, *Nouvelle Division de la Terre par les différentes Espèces ou races d'homme qui l'habitent*. Although to speak of Bernier as espousing a racist theory would be an anachronism, his classification of humankind by "races" or "species", each with its own distinct characteristics, can surely be defined as at least, as Siep Stuurman writes, "anticipating later racial discourse".[74] In general, then, it seems safe to say that racist-biological theories, first budding in the Iberian Peninsula in the mid-fifteenth century, only began to spread throughout Christian Europe in the late seventeenth century.

Three developments are commonly regarded as contributing factors to this novel state of mind, each in different measure. The first and most notable, obviously, was the mastery attained by Europeans over other peoples and continents, most importantly the transatlantic slave trade and the

enslavement of Africans in the Americas. Europeans set out on their voyages of exploration, trade and conquest in the fifteenth century with very few, if any, prejudices or feelings of superiority over other races of people. By the late seventeenth century, on the other hand, fearful "whites" were already asking themselves in the colonies, How would one recognize a member of the black race even if he or she looked white? This fear of "passing" – the American term for a specific type of imposture – was expressed in court cases and in literature from the eighteenth century onwards, and received its most extreme expression in the "one-drop rule", which was first adopted as a law in Tennessee in 1910 and then in several other states.

However, referral to the skin colour of Africans and Native Americans, though frequent in the early modern period, was not necessarily made in a racist context. The immediate identification of a darker complexion with inferiority or with slavery was a relatively late development, a result, as many historians agree, of the transatlantic slave trade rather than one of its causes. "Black and ugly" was used frequently in reports about Gypsies, Africans and other foreign nations, but also about local peasants or vagrants. Even if not ubiquitously, "fair" was often equated in Western culture with external and internal beauty, "black" or "swarthy" with ugly and bad – yet again, not necessarily with racist connotations. Skin colour and other physical traits could refer to individuals and just as easily to class-specific marks, such as peasants (*rudes rustici*) having copious hard flesh.

The single novel biological theory that was coherently put forward prior to the late seventeenth century in regard to physical identifiers of certain population groups was thus the one developed around the notion that blood would not lie. But blood, whether noble or tainted, told the truth in complex ways, not easily discernible. Therefore, early modern Europeans would have undoubtedly welcomed with delight more identity detectors of the kind of Morocco the Intelligent Horse, a celebrity for over 20 years from 1588, who could "pick a virgin from a whore and an Englishman from a Spaniard".[75]

Exposing Individual Identity

Despite problems, "body language" in the sense of natural and artificial signs did offer early modern observers considerable information about a person's group identity. But did the human body also provide individual identifiers?

Stories about lost princes and returning prodigal sons recognized by an unusual birthmark are known to all civilizations. From among Renaissance impostors, Perkin Warbek, for example, claimed to have three distinct hereditary marks on his body which would identify him securely as Richard, Duke of York.[76] Memorable scars or birthmarks, which revealed a person's true identity, became a literary *topos* ever since Homer's Ulysses returned

home in the guise of an old beggar (book 19 of *The Odyssey*). Other physical attributes could serve just as well. Marks left by disease were beneficial to the poet and soldier Théodore-Agrippa d'Aubigné, who returned from the wars of the late sixteenth century to find that a piece of land he had owned in the Loire Valley was taken over by someone else. The claimant said the real Aubigné had died on the battlefield, but a local peasant recognized his true lord by the scarring caused to his body by the plague.[77] Scars left by venereal disease served not only as identifiers but also as a mark of the sinner and a visible sign of God's retribution; and leprosy, more than any other, was a "disease written on the skin" in very large letters, so large in fact that they could not be disguised or counterfeited.[78] One of the most significant pieces of evidence against Arno du Tilh, who stole the identity of Martin Guerre, as everyone who read Natalie Davis's book or saw the film would remember, was presented by the village shoemaker: Martin Guerre's shoe size when he left as a young man was larger than Arno's foot; and feet – even illiterate peasants knew – do not shrink. Physical resemblance to parents and other relatives had always been, at least until DNA results offered a more reliable method, a way to test the claims of a long-absent son or daughter, especially if they demanded an inheritance. Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy, in an emotional letter to Isabella of Spain, described how she recognized the pretender Perkin Warbeck as her nephew, the Duke of York, primarily by his looks:

> He did not have just one or another sign of resemblance, but so many and so particular that hardly one person in ten, in a hundred or even in a thousand might be found who would have marks of the same.[79]

At times the identity in question was not that of the living but of the dead – an issue which nowadays supplies material for so many episodes of television drama series about forensic pathologists. The question whether an absent person was dead or alive has always been relevant to potential heirs and to spouses wishing to remarry. In Europe, an inheritance claim based on evidence of the owner's demise was adjudicated by the civil courts; claiming widowhood on the basis of the presumption of the spouse's death was a matter for the ecclesiastical courts. Canon Law summarizes the matter quite succinctly:

> Can. 1707 §1. Whenever the death of a spouse cannot be proven by an authentic ecclesiastical or civil document, the other spouse is not considered free from the bond of marriage until after the diocesan bishop has issued a declaration of presumed death.
>
> §2. The diocesan bishop is able to issue the declaration mentioned in §1 only if, after having carried out appropriate investigations, he attains moral certitude of the death of the spouse from the depositions of

witnesses, from rumor, or from evidence. The absence of a spouse alone, even for a long time, is not sufficient.

§3. The bishop is to consult the Apostolic See in uncertain and complicated cases.

But there is little in early modern European legal sources concerning ways of ascertaining the identity of a body rumoured to be that of the absent spouse.

Jewish *halakhic* and *responsa* literature of the time, on the other hand, indicates how crucial for Jews was the question of freeing an *agunah* (an abandoned wife, literally meaning "anchored", that is, tied to the marriage; pl. *agunot*). Rabbis would even permit the opening of a grave if it could lead to the release of the abandoned woman. The Talmud decrees that a missing man is not to be declared dead until reliable witnesses recognized his body "by his face and nose".[80] Much of the *halakhic* discussion, however, revolved around the question of who could be regarded as trustworthy witnesses and what evidence should be considered solid enough not to endanger the "released" spouse with a bigamous liaison. In Jewish Law adultery of a married woman was defined as one of the gravest sins, with harsh consequences for her offspring as well; hence the extraordinary caution prescribed in cases when an abandoned woman was to be released from her marriage bonds to a man presumed dead.

Following the expulsions and the geographical expansion of the diaspora during the early modern period the problem of finding missing husbands acquired even larger proportions in the Jewish world. Jews, particularly Jewish men (many of them merchants), would travel far and wide by land and sea, at times under disguise or assumed identity, and not return – either because they fell victim to the innumerable hazards of travel and died incognito en route, or because they chose to disappear. Thus rabbinical literature of the period contains numerous debates, disappearance stories and curious incidents involving body parts surfacing in distant lands, as well as rulings concerning the identification of dead bodies.

Rumours, hearsay, gossip, witnesses who stood something to gain, were all discounted. Yet when testimonies could be cross-checked, even non-Jews, women and children – normally disqualified from giving testimony – would be relied upon. When the testimony of non-Jews about the discovery of a circumcised body on the beach (see above) tallied with an eyewitness account provided by a Jew about his companion with his hands tied being thrown by pirates into the sea near the same shore where he was later found, rabbinical authority accepted that as sufficient proof of the man's death and thus of his wife's status as a widow who was permitted to remarry. The same *responsum* then continues with other possible endings to the story: for example, what if only the man's leg turned up – would he be considered dead? Not necessarily, as the proximity to the place where the man was thrown

into the water by the pirates constituted only circumstantial evidence, and, after all, a man could very well lose his leg and still survive and emerge alive from the deep waters, could he not?[81]

Bodies which turned up without their heads could not be reliably identified, unless the man was known to have had major deformities by which he could be recognized; minor peculiarities would not suffice. Severed heads, on the other hand, could be accepted as proof of death, because, essentially, a man was identified by his facial features – "forehead, nose and visage", or such distinct features as a beard which was half white and half black, a wart on the nose or a very crooked nose.[82] Bodies which have been lying on the ground for more than three days, Joseph Caro's *Shulhan Arukh* (literally, "the set table", the sixteenth-century authoritative compilation of Jewish law) tells us, undergo such changes in appearance that they can no longer be reliably identified; not so corpses which were immersed in water for a number of days – these, it was assumed, suffered fewer transformations.[83] So much for pre-modern forensic medicine; non-Jewish sources do not offer more on the subject.

Records of Physical Appearance

Although ignorant of biometrics, early modern authorities obviously did take into account that individuals had physical identifying marks. Where it seemed important not to confuse one person with another, and where human memory alone could not be relied upon, different registers (the equivalent of our databases) listed various physical characteristics such as scars, birthmarks and unusual features of every individual in the group.

As Valentin Groebner quaintly puts it, from the late Middle Ages onwards, bodies were not only signed but also registered; and as an early example he cites the register of slaves bought and sold in Florence for the years 1366–97, a record which included descriptions of each slave's features: skin colour, height, special marks, scars and tattoos – that is, both natural and artificial bodily marks.[84] To avoid false claims of personal property, pilgrims who deposited valuables in pilgrim hospitals in Florence and Siena before travelling to Rome were registered in the account books together with a detailed description of their outward appearance, with particular attention to scars. A register of soldiers in 1464 in Castel S. Angelo described their scars, moles and birthmarks. Bertrandon de la Broquière, in his *Le Voyage d'Outre Mer*, recounting his travels as an envoy of Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy in 1432–33, described the way in which the Muslims in Jerusalem registered all pilgrims proposing to go to Mount Sinai, listing not only their names and ages but also their facial features, height and distinguishing marks such as scars. They sent a copy of the list to their chief dragoman in Cairo in order to ensure that desert Arabs would not be tempted to kidnap the pilgrims or substitute one for another.[85]

One of the most detailed registers of the sixteenth century was that of the Jewish community in Istanbul for the years 1595–97. For fiscal purposes the authorities required the fullest possible description of each individual adult male (as so many of them bore the same name): skin colour, hair colour, colour and shape of eyebrows, colour and shape of eyes, shape of nose, length, colour and shape of beard, shape and place of scars, beauty spots, moles, pierced ears and more.[86]

Galleys in sixteenth-century Spain kept records of the rowers, whether volunteers, or convicts who had completed their sentence, or convicts still doing their time, or slaves. The lists included name, father's name, place of origin, skin colour, status as free or slave, ethnic group such as Morisco or Gypsy, branding marks and even conditions such as deafness.[87] Distinguishing features were also noted in verdicts or in announcements about wanted offenders who escaped justice. Records of the Catholic Church sometimes reward us with vivid verbal portraits of neophytes – "Francisco de San Antonio, of the Hebrew nation, with a red beard, thin face with a scar over his right eyebrow and a mole next to his ear, and Mariana de los Reyes, of the Hebrew nation, pale and blond, and of medium stature"[88] – so as to prevent identity frauds and the subsequent denial of baptism in order to escape the Inquisition's jurisdiction, or (a practice not unknown, particularly in Italian cities) multiple baptisms that offered economic benefits. Finally, some private contracts, especially those signed with foreigners, included pen portraits of one or both parties: for instance, a contract signed in Verona in 1430 between two Veronese brothers and a Jew of French origin, Bonaventura del fu Ruben, setting up a partnership for the production of soap, described the outsider as "a man of small stature, with a certain curvature on the left side of his upper lip".[89]

In sum, in their battle against imposture early modern European authorities – civil, ecclesiastical, medical and intellectual – elaborated an entire lexicon of ineradicable body signs to ensure identification of pariahs, felons, witches and saints. A growing attention to physical features was expressed in Renaissance art, of course, but also in official records, registers and contracts. Yet the system was far from satisfactory and certainly not foolproof, as was clearly evident from the constant increase in the number of identity inventions. Assumptions about inherited biological identifiers – early versions of racist theories – or hopes that God had provided the means to unmask hidden enemies, were merely wishful thinking. Consequently, the desperate quest for reliable methods of identification and for techniques to expose impostors was to continue in several other ways.

7
Judging by Appearances

During carnival all sumptuary laws and dress codes were suspended: in a world turned upside down, cross-dressing and the wearing of all manner of costumes were permitted for the day. But such demonstrations of social chaos only served to emphasize that, apart from a few designated times during the year, established as "safety valves" to enable malcontents to let out steam, disorder and anarchic behaviour were not to be allowed. Authorities all across Europe were equally determined that, in order to preserve an orderly society, each person needed to dress according to his or her gender, class, rank, religion, office, and profession. The goal was that, when standing in the town's central square, an observer would recognize at a glance the status and condition of each of the passers-by. Clothes, ornaments and accessories in late medieval and early modern Europe were supposed to be – to borrow one of Erving Goffman's terms – identity kits,[1] used not only for the presentation of the self in a favourable light, but also as an official statement of identity.

Needless to say, a social hierarchy regulated by strict dress codes made it all the easier to assume a false identity: "When identities can be donned, they can also be appropriated", writes sociologist Lyn Lofland.[2] The obsession with sumptuary legislation and the great number of complaints about changing fashions and about liberties taken in regard to dress were an expression of a deep anxiety that, unless clothing were regulated and fixed, it would become impossible to distinguish between man and woman, noble and commoner, gentleman and rogue, prostitute and decent woman, Christian and non-Christian, local resident and foreigner. Ulinka Rublack adds other distinctions:

> By the sixteenth century clothing had become a focus for European anxieties about political change and the meaning of history itself, the fear being that everything was always in flux and change could not be influenced by moral ideas. Many wondered whether cultures would simply merge, as Christians became indistinguishable from non-Christians or Catholics from Protestants.[3]

In the realm of clothes we encounter the same perennial battle between, on the one hand, authorities aspiring to absolute clarity and certainty concerning each person's identity and group affiliation, and on the other hand, hordes of "impostors" attempting to appropriate a false identity. Dress displays, continues Rublack, "were symbolic visual techniques that tell us how different groups in this society enacted and remade identities".[4]

The early modern city, so we were told by sociologists (mostly during the 1970s), became a "strangers' society".[5] This concept was later disputed by historians who stressed the close relationships within neighbourhoods, among patrons and their clients, within the guilds and confraternities. Nevertheless, it remains undisputed that the larger cities and even small market towns were frequented by a stream of strangers who were unknown to the locals and could present themselves any which way. Or, as summarized by Peter Burke, "because you are not known in most parts of the city, you can experiment with alternative identities outside your neighbourhood, invent and re-invent yourself, 'pass' for what you are not".[6] It was undoubtedly easier to present a false identity in the city than in a village community (Martin Guerre being an exceptional case of imposture precisely for this reason). By the sixteenth century there were more than 100 towns in Europe with a population of over 10,000 and several metropolises with over 100,000 persons residing in each. Many contemporary observers remarked about the anonymity experienced in the cities. As much as the court, "the city was a stage […] for everyday performances of identity".[7] The age of the Baroque, continues Peter Burke, was "a time of particularly acute concern with the gap between appearance and reality, *ser* and *parecer*, *être* and *paraître*, *Sein* and *Schein*. Is it too much to suggest that this concern was encouraged by the rise of the anonymous city?"[8]

The anonymous city, the gradual disappearance of the feudal order, greater mobility in every respect, the nobility moving into the city and parvenus buying titles and privileges – all these made all the more urgent the need to fix appearances as a text from which one could read the social order. Not being able to "read" social positions or professions from apparel must have been a perplexing experience and it is this bafflement that the sociologist of law, Alan Hunt, has named "a crisis of recognizability".[9]

It is important to stress, however, that the complex and varied connection between dress and social hierarchy was predominantly an urban matter – it was the city (and in a different manner, the royal court) which served as the stage on which social roles were enacted.[10] Sumptuary legislation and the various dress codes were therefore irrelevant for the great majority of the population, the agrarian classes who were unaware of the social performances in the cities and could hardly afford any of the urban costumes, for "clothes could be excellent means of disguise, but one should take into account that they were expensive items, even if bought second-hand or hired", as Patricia Allerston points out.[11]

Hic Mulier, Haec Vir

Cross-dressing, as far as we can tell from surviving sources, was also mainly an urban phenomenon, but in early modern Europe it took many forms. Most famous or notorious, of course, was the theatre, where female actors wore men's costumes (Spain) or male actors donned women's clothes (England and Italy), and sometimes, as with Shakespeare's Viola, Rosalind and Julia, male actors played roles of women disguised as men. Then there were charivaris, carnivals and festivals, when gender inversion for the day was common practice – in Jewish communities as much as in Christian society.[12] Puritanical moralists inveighed against these performances, but on the whole they were accepted as harmless fun.

A few women who occasionally dressed as men in order to snub social norms achieved notoriety. The thief Mary Frith, alias Moll Cutpurse, who wore a doublet and breeches and smoked a pipe, was arrested once for her indecent behaviour and required to do public penance. Later in life she spent some time in Bedlam until pronounced cured of insanity. Yet, despite attempts to tame her, she was to become a mythological figure, heroine of plays and popular pamphlets, which make it difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction in her story. However, she was no impostor – there is no evidence that she tried to pass herself as a man but only that she took the liberty to dress and act as her male brothers in crime. More or less in the same years of the seventeenth century, but at the opposite end of the social scale, Queen Christina of Sweden also preferred to dress in masculine attire and left her contemporaries, as well as future generations of playwrights, scholars and psychologists, speculating about her sexual nature. Nevertheless, not only was Christina not reprimanded for her choice of attire, after her abdication she was granted a special dispensation from the Pope to continue wearing men's clothing. As with Moll Cutpurse, Christina's case was not that of an impostor – she did not adopt an identity different than her own.

A more complex problem arose in Virginia in the 1620s as Thomas/Thomasine Hall refused to choose a gender. The ruling of the colony's General Court was exceptional for it declared Hall to be "a man and a woeman" allowed to "goe Clothed in mans apparel, only his head to bee attired in a Coyfe and Crosecloth with an Apron before him".[13] Not only was this an acceptance of a hermaphrodite identity (a biological fact attested to in classical and medieval medical texts), it was an unprecedented break with the rule of strict differentiation of the sexes by garments.

The story about the Quattrocento painter Onorata Rodiana from Castelleone who, after killing a man who had molested her, dressed in male attire and served for several decades as a condottiere, is probably a myth. The adventures of the "Lieutenant Nun", on the other hand, though they might have been embellished and exaggerated, were not completely legendary. Catalina de Erauso, a young Basque woman who ran away from

a convent at the age of fifteen, departed in 1600 for South America dressed as a man and participated as a soldier in the conquest of Peru and Chile, calling herself Alonso Díaz Ramírez de Guzmán. Her imposture, so her autobiography as well as contemporary stories relate, was discovered after more than two decades of fights and adventures when she decided to confess her true identity to a bishop. Strangely, on returning to Spain she not only received a soldier's pension from the king but was also granted a dispensation to continue wearing men's clothing by the Pope, Urban VIII, and was destined to become a heroine of novels and plays.[14] A century and a half earlier, Suor Eugenia di Tommaso da Treviso, if the story is true, lived for several years as a monk in two male Observant Franciscan monasteries in Rome, before embarking for the Holy Land where she established a hospice and hospital for pilgrims. Despite her cross-dressing, she was regarded as a heroine by contemporaries and hagiographers.[15]

Such relatively lenient treatment of a few exceptional female figures could be ascribed to the sneaking admiration manifested in Western culture for "transvestite saints", women who dressed as men in order to preserve their faith or their chastity, or for heroines who succeeded in attaining manly virtues such as valour in the battlefield.[16] Several false "Joans of Arc" tried to capitalize on this admiration in the mid-fifteenth century: one of them, Jehanne de Sermaises, was arrested in Anjou in 1457 for her imposture, but released on condition she would never again put on male dress. Yet this indulgence, as well as the relaxed acceptance of cross-dressing on stage and during festivals, should not disguise the fact that the prohibition on transvestism was one of the oldest and strictest laws regarding clothes.

"The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God" (Deut. 22:5). This appears to be one of civilization's earliest universal taboos, and would only begin to be ignored in the West sometime in the mid-twentieth century when unisex garments and hairstyles came into fashion. Cross-dressing has always aroused anxiety and animosity on religious and moral grounds: it was an "abomination unto the Lord", related to all manner of sexual "perversions" and regarded as the worst kind of inversion. Puritan pamphleteer William Prynne, for example, inveighed against cross-dressing on the stage and against contemporary hairdressing styles. Together with many other Renaissance moralists, Prynne was dismayed by the way identifiable gender markings were perversely undone by fashion.[17]

Yet the objection to cross-dressing was not only based on moral arguments; it was also one of the central issues of the "recognizability crisis": of all possible confusions, the worry that it would be difficult to tell the sexes apart was probably the strongest. In medieval and early modern times, children traded their unisex smocks for adult garments distinct for each sex at the age of six or seven. The biblical prohibition was frequently repeated by church councils as well as by civil codes, and could serve as the obvious

justification for the persecution or prosecution of rebels such as Joan of Arc. And, while the reputation of the Maid of Orleans would also benefit from that admiration for women warriors, no such respect was ever accorded to men who dressed as women. They would be suspected of homosexuality (a crime sometimes punishable by death) or ridiculed for degrading themselves to a lower position in the chain of being.

Our concern here, however, is not with the possible erotic meanings of transvestism or with psychological explanations of the fears aroused by the crossing of sexual boundaries, but only with the problem of disguise and imposture. "Gender inversion is perhaps the most radical form of disguise because it contravenes not only societal rules but also biological fact", writes Valerie Hotchkiss regarding female cross-dressing in medieval Europe.[18] For this reason European explorers found the appearance of the Amerindians so disturbing: they had few of the "normal" external signs of masculinity and femininity; their men had neither beards nor bodily hair and they wore their tresses long; in many regions of the New World both sexes moved about practically naked and none of them, before they adapted to European ways, wore the distinct clothes associated with either gender. "But then, they do not wear breeches", was the sarcastic final sentence in Montaigne's analysis of the Europeans' obtuse refusal to admit that the Indians had admirable qualities.[19]

Was the anxiety about gender confusion more acute in the early modern period than before or since? This is a difficult question to answer. To judge by the large place the issue occupied in the literature and drama of the period as well as in sermons and moralist treatises, it appears that "Cross-dressing clearly touched a raw nerve and produced […] a recirculating rhetoric of anxiety and fear", writes David Cressy.[20] Perhaps because of the prevalence of gender disguise in Shakespearean comedies as in other Elizabethan plays and pamphlets, much literary and historical research has concentrated on cross-dressing in early modern England, some scholars even claiming the existence of a veritable "female transvestite movement".[21] But in recent decades the multi-layered significance of young male actors playing roles of women disguised as men has also been analysed in relation to the early modern Italian theatre,[22] and attention has been drawn to cross-dressing, on stage and in real life, in other countries as well.[23] Pedro Calderón de la Barca's most famous play, *Life Is a Dream* (*La vida es sueño*, c.1635), revolves, as its title indicates, around the question of the unreliability of perceptions. It begins with Rosaura, disguised as a man, heading for the court of Poland to take revenge on the man who abandoned her. In Act I, scene VIII she declares to Clotaldo (her father),

> How with bold face here to tell you
> That this outer dress is simply
> An enigma, since it is not
> What it seems.[24]

Was transvestism a more common phenomenon in Renaissance Europe than before or since? Did the subject become more prominent in the period's discourse? Or does it merely seem so to us because, among other things, cheap print offered the opportunity to pass on to future generations the banter, humour and imaginary tales of popular culture? Figures such as Moll Cutpurse were part of the lore which found its way into the rogue literature discussed above (Chapter 4). Works of another genre, which also leave the modern-day reader wondering who wrote them and why and to what extent they reflected any sort of reality, were satirical pamphlets such as *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir* (1620).

Too many females at the time were "overstepping their bounds" by putting on men's apparel, thus sinning against nature, religion and society, wrote the author of the pamphlet on the "He-Woman". The second leaflet, concerned with the "She-Man", was supposedly a retort to the first, explaining that women only found it necessary to adopt masculine ways because men at the time were too effeminate. This dialogue between two pamphlets was remarkably similar in form and in some of its contents to another, later pair of brochures: *Women's Petition against Coffee* and *Men's Answer to the Women's Petition* (1674). Coffee, the first leaflet claimed, not only kept men away from their lusty wives, it also severely enfeebled their manliness: "For the continual sipping of this pittiful drink is enough to *bewitch* Men of two and twenty, and tie up the *Codpice-point* without a Charm". Then the men replied that they would not need to resort to the consolations of the coffee-house if only their wives would fulfil their womanly duties properly. Both these pairs of mock complaints were the contemporary humorous and popular version of the "battle of the sexes" or the "*querelle des femmes*" – tongue-in-cheek, for the reader's amusement.[25] And yet the historical value of such literature is not insignificant. The complaint about the coffee-houses (from which women were at first excluded) does reflect the fact that in the second half of the seventeenth century these institutions were indeed fast becoming the competitors of the public houses. Hence it seems reasonable to assume that the assertion in *Hic Mulier* was also not totally divorced from reality and that some women at the beginning of the seventeenth century were indeed practising a "monstrous imposture" by

> exchanging the modest attire of the comely Hood, Cowl, Coif, handsome Dress or Kerchief, to the cloudy Ruffianly broad-brimmed Hat and wanton Feather; the modest upper parts of a concealing straight gown, to the loose, lascivious civil embracement of a French doublet being all unbuttoned to entice, all of one shape to hide deformity, and extreme short waisted to give a most easy way to every luxurious action; the glory of a fair large hair, to the shame of most ruffianly short locks; the side, thick gathered, and close guarding Safeguards to the short, weak, thin, loose, and every hand-entertaining short bases; for Needles, Swords; for

> Prayerbooks, bawdy legs; for modest gestures, giantlike behaviors; and for women's modesty, all Mimic and apish incivility.

Despite relatively rapid changes in fashion, there were very clear conventions as to garments and hairstyles appropriate for each sex (even if those conventions – such as noblemen showing off their shapely legs wearing tightly fitting hose and high-heeled shoes – were very different than, for example, the dress rules of the nineteenth century). What would the world come to if all visible distinctions between men and women were to disappear?

Even Juan Luis Vives, although one of the few humanists who could not be accused of misogyny, when writing in the early sixteenth century his instructions for princesses, warned that women who dressed as men were "past both honest and shame".[26] And Rabelais who, despising hypocrisy, would unhesitatingly invert all conventions and post the anarchistic slogan "Do What Thy Will" at the gates of his monastery-in-reverse, still prescribed in minutest detail the sumptuous, luxurious outfits of the beautiful residents of the Abbey of Thélème: the elegant ladies wearing smocks, corsets, skirts, gowns and fashionable head-dresses; the young gentlemen sporting doublets, mantles, belts and swords on their hips, and caps with plumes on their heads.[27]

If sumptuary legislation did not repeat too frequently the prohibition on cross-dressing, the reason was undoubtedly the assumption that it went without saying. Nonetheless, some such laws are to be found in various codes. As early as 1480 a decree of the Council of Ten, for example, prohibited Venetian women from wearing their hair in the "mushroom" style, which hid their forehead and made them appear as men, thus – it was assumed – attracting other men who were seeking male prostitutes. A woman wearing such a hairdo would have her head shaved. All Venetian women were instructed to be appear feminine, that is, to wear their hair drawn back and tied behind the head, and the forehead and face to be made free of it.[28] In the frontier colonies in America, too, where it could have been expected that women should prefer men's apparel, as they often had to carry out men's work for which feminine frocks were hardly suitable, the authorities were by no means more tolerant: although Massachusetts adopted a law against cross-dressing only in 1696, cross-dressers had been convicted in New England long before the passing of the law.[29]

Yet for evidence concerning the prevalence of and attitudes towards transvestism, one should not rely solely on literary anecdotes, pamphlets, laws and impressions based on a handful of famous or infamous cases. As with other questions pertaining to the enforcement of social norms, relevant court records may provide the best answers. Such a pioneering study was done by Rudolf Dekker and Lotte van de Pol, who presented in their 1989 book 119 cases of women, mostly from the Netherlands, prosecuted for cross-dressing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[30] They offer

a close look at women who donned masculine clothes for a wide variety of motivations that were determined by contemporary events and developments. Many of them succeeded in passing for males for many years. Obviously, since records exist only for the transvestites who were unmasked, it is safe to assume that the phenomenon of cross-dressing was of greater proportions than those registered by the courts.

All the evidence indicates that transvestism in early modern Europe was mostly a female phenomenon. The reasons for the imbalance seem quite obvious: by passing for men women upgraded their status and could enjoy better opportunities, while men dressed as women downgraded themselves on the social scale and, if caught, would face either ridicule or – worse – prosecution for homosexuality. The often-cited sensational story of the Chevalier d'Eon belongs to a later period and, since it concerned one eccentric noble(wo)man, it can tell us but little about attitudes to such imposture among the public at large.[31] Occupations reserved for women, that could have perhaps tempted men to impersonation, were very few. In early modern Spain, for example, it was probably easier for female visionaries to recruit followers than for men. Thus, Mateo Rodríguez Cardoso, known as the "holy mat-maker", who was charged with feigning ruptures and revelations, had occasionally dressed as a woman. He was arrested by the Inquisition in 1635, and his cross-dressing was described in detail during his trial. On the whole, however, the Inquisition was much more concerned with his feigned sanctity than with his transvestism. Rodríguez's cross-dressing was part of the performances he put on in his house for the benefit of his followers who were accustomed to associate visions with young *beatas* such as Sor María de Santo Domingo.[32] Midwifery could be another reason for a man to pose as a woman, for it was probably the one exclusively female vocation (until the mid-seventeenth century); for a man to learn what went on in a delivery room he had to put on a disguise, as did one physician, Dr Wertt, who was executed in Hamburg in 1522 for not resisting the temptation to intrude on a domain which was still strictly out-of-bounds for men.[33]

Despite the rarity of men posing as women, there must have been some worry among upper-class men that fashions of the day might render them effeminate-looking in the eyes of their beholders. Otherwise it is difficult to explain the bizarre short-lived custom of the codpiece. It appears to have been the most obvious indicator that clothes were considered means of emphasizing gender identity. The codpiece, which made the penis the central focus of the male dress, was a display of virility typical of the sixteenth century. Montaigne, an acute observer of the period's social and moral quirks, and (as will be mentioned below) a harsh critic of sumptuary laws, called on the royal court to "stop liking those vulgar codpieces which make a parade of our hidden parts".[34] Other moralists and reformers also regarded it as an outrageous display, but on the whole the portraits of princes such as Henry VIII or Charles V constituted "a relaxed presentation of masculinity

as a natural component of rulership", in the words of Thomas Lüttenberg.[35] Modern-day historians wondered whether this pouch could tell us something about the emotions of shame and embarrassment in the Renaissance,[36] whether it expressed some Freudian penis complex or was perhaps the snub of youth at the sombre culture of their elders.[37] Be it as it may, in addition to the demands of modesty vs the allure of fashion, the codpiece presented contemporaries with a dilemma similar in nature to the one posed by the veil: modesty (covering the face, not parading genitals) vs the need for identification (uncovered face, display of masculinity). The dilemma was solved when this particular article of clothing went out of fashion by the end of the sixteenth century; afterwards men of the upper classes had to do with the sword as a symbol of virile prowess.

Pariahs: Infidels

Second only to the norms concerning clear distinctions in clothing between men and women, the oldest use of clothes, accessories and special badges as identifying signs, and the only one to re-appear in Europe in modern times under Fascist regimes, was invented for the differentiation of believers from non-believers. Apparently a dress code (*Ghiyār*) designed to distinguish religious minorities from the majority of adherents to the "true faith" was first introduced in the Muslim world, where Jews and Christians, the *dhimmi*, the tolerated People of the Book, were forbidden by law (perhaps as early as the eighth century in accordance with the "Pact of 'Umar", attributed to the Umayyad Caliph Umar II) to wear the same apparel as Muslims and were required by law to wear garments, emblems and headgear of special shapes and colours.[38] Due to a concern that without their special clothes non-Muslim men would not be recognized, Jews and Christians were required at times to wear medallions or bells on cords around their necks when visiting the public baths. Throughout the Domain of Islam these rules were more strictly enforced from the twelfth century onwards, and the Almohads in Spain applied them also to Jews who had converted to Islam. In the Ottoman Empire not only green but white garments, too, were forbidden to non-Muslims; Jews had to wear yellow head gear and Jewish women had to dress in yellow (the question why yellow was the colour of so many marks of infamy in both Christian and Islamic worlds is still in need of an answer).

From sculpture, paintings, illustrations and a few texts, it is known that similar rules were applied to Jews and Muslims in Christendom during the Middle Ages – and the question whether Muslim jurists borrowed the idea from early Christian codes or vice versa is still being debated. However, the earliest surviving explicit pronunciation in Europe of regulations concerning the dress of non-believers seems to be the infamous canon 68 of the

Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which did indicate that the rule had been enforced in some parts of Europe even earlier:

> In some provinces a difference in dress distinguishes the Jews or Saracens from the Christians, but in certain others such confusion has grown up that they cannot be distinguished by any difference. Thus it happens at times that through error Christians have relations with the women of Jews or Saracens, and Jews and Saracens with Christian women. Therefore, that they may not, under pretext of error of this sort, excuse themselves in the future for the excesses of such prohibited intercourse, we decree that such Jews and Saracens of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress. Particularly, since it may be read in the writings of Moses [Num. 15:37–41], that this very law has been enjoined upon them.
>
> Moreover, during the last three days before Easter and especially on Good Friday, they shall not go forth in public at all, for the reason that some of them on these very days, as we hear, do not blush to go forth better dressed and are not afraid to mock the Christians who maintain the memory of the most holy Passion by wearing signs of mourning.[39]

Shortly after this pronunciation by the Church, kings and cities began to pass laws of a similar nature. However, since Saracens were a significant minority only in the Iberian Peninsula, in other European countries these laws pertained exclusively to Jews. King Henry III in England ordered the Jews in 1217 to wear a badge in the form of Tablets of the Law (*tabula*); in France the badge took the form of a wheel (*rota*) in yellow or in red and white; a law in Castile in 1258 demanded that

> No infidel whomsoever may wear any but white, black or brown clothing […] No Jew may wear white fur, sendal [light silk] in any form, gilded or silvered war saddles, bright red stockings, or any dark-coloured cloth except light green, brown, blackish, *engres*, or black silk, except those whom the King permits.[40]

And Law XI of Alfonso X's *Siete Partidas* (1265) ordered that "Jews shall bear certain marks in order that they may be known":

> Many crimes and outrageous things occur between Christians and Jews because they live together in cities, and dress alike; and in order to avoid the offenses and evils which take place for this reason, We deem it proper, and we order that all Jews, male and female, living in our dominions shall bear some distinguishing mark upon their heads so that people may plainly recognize a Jew, or a Jewess; and any Jew who does not bear such a mark,

> shall pay for each time he is found without it ten maravedís of gold; and if he has not the means to do this he shall receive ten lashes for his offense.[41]

From then on – in some European territories until the late eighteenth century – laws, statutes and regulations imposed on Jews, wherever they were permitted to reside, the wearing of distinguishing marks: a yellow hat in France,[42] red or yellow headgear in the cities of northern Italy ("a man wore his religious allegiance upon his head", writes Brian Pullan),[43] special pointed hats, badges of various shapes and colours on their outer garments, long hair and beards, special stripes on women's veils, red capes, red aprons, even bells worn around the neck in certain German cities.[44]

In almost every European state throughout the early modern period such laws were made, rescinded and reiterated, rigorously enforced at times and entirely ignored at others. Exemptions were frequently granted to individuals or to whole communities; the wealthier and more influential members of the minority group could buy an exemption and go unnoticed among the Gentiles. The purpose of all these laws, however, was similar in all cases and was already clearly stated in the canon of the Fourth Lateran Council: to put an end to confusion, to prevent intimate relations between believers and infidels, prevent contamination of the pure congregation by close contacts with the "unclean".

Humiliation of the pariah was undoubtedly also intended: if the Jews were to be suffered among Christians as witnesses to the truth of the gospel, as some church teachings demanded, they obviously needed to be readily visible as a miserable downtrodden people. Yet, as we learn from similar measures adopted against other pariah groups, the main motivation was to have clear means of identification in order to prevent confusion and contamination. That physical separation was the principal rationale was indicated by the fact that in towns which tolerated the existence of a large Jewish community, the same officials (as, for example, the *Ufficiali al Cattaver* in Venice) who were in charge of enforcing the wearing of distinctive marks were also the supervisors of the newly founded ghettoes – the walled Jewish quarters established in the sixteenth century to facilitate segregation.

As with other means of identification, the language of attire could be complex and nuanced. Members of the marked group exercised some choice within the spectrum of signs imposed on them. For example, in Venice from the seventeenth century onwards, all male Jews were required to wear a red hat except for Levantine Jews who were prescribed yellow turbans. Apparently some Ponentine (Western) Jews favoured wearing the yellow turban because it signified that they were not former *conversos* and thus did not come under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition.[45]

In order to stay out of the Inquisition's grasp, Jews of *converso* origin found various ways to hide the fact that they had a Christian chapter in their past history– it was, as we saw in Chapter 2, one of the many forms of religious dissimulation. At the same time, however, some men who had reverted to

their Jewish identity were still attracted to Gentile society and moved back and forth between the two communities; some still hankered for Iberia and continued to visit their former homeland under a false name and in disguise. In all such cases they needed to put on and to shed the marks of the Jew according to the circumstances of the moment. Brian Pullan, in telling the story of Enriques Nuñes, or "Abraham called Righetto", writes that conflicting emotions led Enriques/Abraham "to regard the Catholic and Jewish faiths as mere protective skins, to be donned and discarded at convenience. Literally he wore two hats" – a yellow hat (*biretta zhalla*) among the Jews, a black cap (*biretta negra*) in the company of Venetian non-Jews.[46]

David Reuveni's journal is the first extant Hebrew document to mention the Venetian ghetto. Shortly after his arrival in Venice in 1524 he was taken by the painter, Moses da Castellazzo, to "the ghetto, where the Jews reside",[47] but he himself stayed outside the Jewish quarter at the house of the captain of the boat which had brought him from Alexandria. On his second visit to Venice, in 1530, he would be a guest of the *condottiere* Guido Rangoni, again outside the ghetto. Apparently lodging outside the ghetto was not considered a felony for visitors to the city, and so it was to Rangoni's house that the *Signoria* sent Ramusio to interview him.[48] Nor did Reuveni conform to the regulations concerning the distinguishing marks of the Jews but adhered to his oriental prince's costume. As Daniel of Pisa describes it, "his dress at home is black and when he goes outside he wears *vergato* [striped] silk in the manner of the Ishmaelites, and on his head a white scarf which covers him from head to foot so that all who see him mock him and think him a woman".[49] Throughout Reuveni's journal and in all documents relating to his adventures in Europe, no mention is made of him wearing any of the marks assigned to Jews. This disregard for the code could be attributed to a courtesy accorded to a foreign ambassador, or to the fact that his dress was so distinct that he needed no further mark to identify him as the "other". Similarly, Gypsies, as we have seen above, were so easily distinguishable by their clothes, earrings and general appearance that they did not evoke the fear that they might blend into the crowd, and hence they were exempted from wearing the identity marks demanded of Jews or of other pariah groups in Europe.

There were indeed various ways in which a Jew could disguise his or her affiliation. It is the documentation from Venetian archives, as Brian Pullan, Benjamin Ravid and other scholars have shown, which best enables us to follow the endless struggle between authorities wishing to mark a group as infallibly as possible, and members of such groups finding sophisticated means to evade the impositions and to disguise their identities – a struggle which in Venice was conducted between officials and Jews for almost four centuries. A typical example was the legislation of 26 March 1496, explaining that the decision to require the Jews to wear a yellow head-cover was the result of the devious manner in which the Jews hid the yellow circle under their outer garments.[50] Equally an expression of frustration was the complaint made by the *Cattaveri*

in 1623 about the fraudulent ways in which Jews obtained permissions to wear a black hat or to reside outside the ghetto and thus disguise themselves as Christians. The counter-measure adopted in the seventeenth century was the issue of permits, stamped with a seal, which would also be recorded in the books, giving full details of legitimate bearers and the reasons for their exemption from the dress code.[51] This is a fine example of the way in which authorities would gradually turn from judging by appearances to identification by documents.

Brian Pullan provides a good illustration of how appearances could cause confusion when two separate sets of signs collided in the story about the black youth encountered in the ghetto in 1579 wearing a yellow hat.[52] In this case the issue for the Inquisition and for the secular authorities was not a breach of dress laws, but of Jews violating another prohibition – on converting slaves to Judaism. From the point of view of this study, however, the puzzlement aroused by the presence of a Negro in Jewish clothing is but another example of the expectation to be able to determine who was who merely by sight. Another incident of such confusion, fictitious and humorous, is reported in the *Letters of Obscure Men* (1517):

> Recently I was at the Frankfurt [book] Fair, and as I was walking along the street with a certain Bachelor, we encountered two men, who, to all outward appearance, were reputable men. They wore black cassocks and great hoods with flaps. Now, Heaven be my witness, I took them for two Doctors of Theology, and I greeted them, taking off my cap. Immediately the Bachelor nudged me and said, "By the love of God! What are you doing? Those fellows are Jews, and you have taken off your cap to them!" At this I was as terrified as if I had seen the devil. […] The Bachelor insisted […] "you should have been on the lookout, and the Jews always wear a round yellow patch on their cloaks in front".[53]

The humanist who composed the collection of these spurious letters might have only intended to mock the ignorance of the Dominicans, but the fear that – despite the marks – the Jew would not be immediately recognized, was voiced in other documents and led in certain cases to new prescriptions of even clearer marks. John Evelyn in 1645 described a similar incident:

> The Jewes of Rome wore red hatts till the Cardinal of Lions, being short-sighted, lately saluted one of them, thinking him a cardinal, as he passed his coach; on which an order was made that they should use only the yellow colour.[54]

It seems that there was another constant layer of anxiety: the fear that all the designated marks of identity would not suffice and would leave enough margins for error (even margins for sin – such as expressing respect to a Jew) and confusion. The battle never seemed to be won.

One should remember, however, that certain measures of differentiation were adopted by some minority groups voluntarily, without the authorities' intervention. The Gypsies' way of dressing, like their music and dances, was an important manner of expressing their ethnic identity and separateness. Their clothes, described in the chronicles which noted their arrival and depicted by contemporary painters, would change but little down the ages and during their peregrinations: tattered perhaps, but colourful and distinct, exotic in the eyes of all their beholders. Gypsy women often wore turbans on their heads and cloaks tied over one shoulder; both men and women had loop silver earrings; in some early modern paintings male Gypsies are portrayed as bearing arms with a feather in their hats in the manner of contemporary mercenaries.

Jews had strict prohibitions of their own on dressing up as Gentiles, although in times of trouble such restrictions were relaxed. For example, *Sefer Hasidim* (*The Book of the Pious*, composed during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries),[55] reacting no doubt to the multitude of dangers awaiting Jews moving around Europe, devoted numerous clauses to special permissions for disguise: a convert to Christianity who desired to return to Judaism was permitted to wear a cross while on the road until he reached a destination where it was safe to shed his Christian identity (201 in the Parma manuscript); a Jew fearing for his safety on the road was not permitted to dress as a priest or monk, but was allowed to wear garments which would not immediately identify him as a Jew (202) – although if his disguise included a fabric made of the forbidden mixture of wool and linen (*shaatnez*), he would need to atone for it (204); a Jewish woman on the road, fearing rape by Gentiles, was permitted to dress as a nun – for nuns were normally safe from harm – but if her fear was of Jewish hooligans (!), she was to disguise herself simply as a Gentile lay woman and threaten the hoodlums with denunciation to the authorities (261); in very dire circumstances (such as the pogroms and forced conversions of 1096 during the first crusade) Jewish women were given the dispensation to hide in convents in order to evade a forced marriage to a non-Jew (262). Protecting one's life or chastity from enemies was thus a justification among Jews for disguise and even for prolonged concealment, as it was for Christian Europeans who would put on a Muslim garb on their travels in the East and for female saints who dressed as men to guard their purity. But these exceptions seem to prove the rule: that in addition to marks imposed upon them, Jews in medieval Europe elected to wear clothes according to their custom and refrained as much as they could from adopting the dress of the Gentiles.[56]

Even in modern times, long after most governments removed the barriers that had prevented the assimilation and integration of their Jewish citizens, some Jews continued to cling to their traditional garments and headgear – often as means to display affiliation to a specific community within the Jewish world. (Such a rigid conservatism can still be observed today in

Jewish Orthodox neighbourhoods, where followers of different Hassidic sects are able to tell with which rabbi's court each passer-by is affiliated by the colour, shape or material of kaftans, hats and socks. It is worthwhile noting that these orthodox costumes are not of very ancient origins but, in the same manner as clan kilts in Scotland, are mostly products of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.)

As certain styles or accessories became associated with undesirables, whether enforced upon them by law or kept voluntarily, members of the majority began avoiding such items of apparel with or without prodding from church and state. A good example is loop earrings: as Diane Owen Hughes has demonstrated in her well-known study, these became associated with Jewish women (and then also with Gypsies) and were therefore not worn by respectable non-Jewish females between the twelfth and the sixteenth century.[57] It was the understanding of this psychological mechanism – decent people shunning articles associated with undesirables – which led Thomas More to propose adorning slaves with gold, Montaigne to call for the restriction of ostentatious dress to society's riff-raff, and early modern legislators to allow prostitutes to dress as garishly as they pleased (see below).

Pariahs: Heretics

It was not only infidels, that is, Jews and Muslims, who were punished, humiliated and marked by "garments of infamy" in medieval and Renaissance Europe. Another manifestation of the "persecuting society" was the marking of heretics as well as other pariahs. In the decade following the Fourth Lateran Council, the Council of Toulouse decreed (in 1229) that heretics who repented and were reconciled should wear two crosses on their outer garment (there was no need to mark unrepentant heretics, of course, as they did not normally survive their punishment). Penitential garments would remain among the chastisements employed by the Church for centuries to come. Usually made of coarse material, they would come in different shapes and different colours, often marked with a cross on both front and back, to be worn for a fixed period of time or for life.

Domenico Scandella, better known to posterity as Menocchio the Friulian miller, was sentenced after his first trial by the Roman Inquisition "to wear forever a penitential garment, the *habitello*, decorated with a cross, and spend the rest of his life in prison at the expense of his children". But in the same manner that his "life imprisonment" lasted for two years only, he also stopped wearing the *habitello* not long after his release, despite the fact that his request for dispensation was not granted. The wearing of this garment clearly had the effect that the Church desired, for Mennochio recounted that when he put it on people treated him as if he had been excommunicated.[58] Mennochio was not alone. There were many instances in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the Papal Inquisition imposing

a penitentiary garb on heretics who recanted, whether in the Waldensian villages or in the territory of Naples.[59] In Venice in the 1620s and 1630s those convicted of heresy paraded in yellow garments with paper signs on their chests describing their offences.

In Spain and Portugal penitents wore a *sanbenito* (or *sambenito*), often with a St Andrews Cross on its front and back, together with a *coroza* – a pointed paper hat or dunce cap. Tomas Treviño de Sobremonte, arrested in Mexico in 1625 for Judaizing, was incarcerated for a year and sentenced to wear a *sanbenito* for life; but his petition to remove it a year later was granted. In the 1640s, however, when he was again tried by the Inquisition (ending his life on the stake in 1649), his young daughter, aged 14, was exiled to Spain where she was required to wear a *sanbenito* for life.[60] *Sanbenitos* are documented in Spain well into the eighteenth century, depicted by Goya in his 1797 etches known as *Los caprichos*, as well as in his drawings of Inquisition scenes produced between 1814 and 1824.

In both Iberian countries and in their colonies the use of these garments did not end with the death of the penitent but would continue to serve as a document of family history, particularly in cases where the heresy had been that of "Judaizing", that is, of people who had been found guilty of secretly maintaining Jewish customs and beliefs. The *sanbenito* was hung in the parish church with a notice bearing the name of the offender, the date of his or her sentence and the crime committed, thus perpetuating the family's humiliation.[61] The large number of petitions for the removal of these memorials of shame from parish churches is a good indication that, on the whole, the device attained its intended purpose.

Heretics who either took off the garment of infamy which they had been sentenced to wear, or hid it under their outer garments, were guilty of imposture in the eyes of ecclesiastical authorities; family members who succeeded in removing the *sanbenito* of their heretic relative from the Church could also be considered as impostors who falsified their family's history. For several centuries (though mostly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) astonishing amounts of energy and resources were invested in Catholic countries to prevent all such forms of deceit.

Finally, garments of shame were not reserved exclusively for crypto-Jews and heretics: church courts in England and in New England, in their efforts to impose moral discipline in public and private life, included, among the punishments they inflicted on persons convicted of immoral behaviour, public confession and humiliation by wearing a white sheet or sackcloth for a specified period of time.[62]

Pariahs: Undesirables

The term "lepers" has become synonymous with undesirables and untouchables, a category of human beings to be religiously shunned. Leprosy, as

Sander Gilman pointed out, was a "disease written on the skin […] making one's stigma visible".[63] Causing terrible disfigurement and known to be very contagious, it has generated alarm in all societies. In medieval Europe *leprosaria* were established and prohibitions introduced to limit the access of those afflicted with the disease to the public sphere, demanding that they wear distinctive clothing and announce their approach by bells or shouts. Although leprosy was at times defined as a sign of divine election, lepers on the whole were feared and, like other marginal groups, suspected of plotting against Christian society. The signs they were required to wear, however, were mostly intended as warning signals rather than as means of humiliation or punishment – the disease itself, after all, was punishment enough. This was evidenced by the fact that in some places the same markings were imposed on the altruistic persons who cared for lepers, most of them members of the religious orders. In 1529, for example, Louis Guillard, Bishop of Chartres, decreed that the friars of Grand-Beaulieu, a Lazar house, should wear a large red letter L on their robe. In the same manner plague victims as well as people with whom they came into contact were required by the sixteenth century to wear special marks, which were identical to those worn by Jews and prostitutes: a yellow badge in Italian cities, a white wand in England.[64]

Leprosy as an endemic disease was already gradually disappearing from Europe during the Renaissance, although it would be some time before it was to vanish altogether from the repository of European terrors. In certain areas of southwestern France and northern Spain, however, a group of "false lepers" was to remain a pariah minority for several centuries to come. And while the fear of coming into contact with contagious diseases is understandable, the extraordinary measures of discrimination against those who were regarded as carriers of some invisible hereditary "white leprosy" seem senseless. Often called today "the last untouchables of Europe", the Cagots (or Gahets, or Crestians, or various other appellations) were a despised and shunned minority for reasons unrelated to religion or foreignness – perhaps the only group of native Europeans to be treated in this manner. They were required to live in special quarters, restricted to a small number of lowly trades, not allowed to enter the local church through the main door, prohibited from touching the baptismal font – in other words, segregated as much as possible from the rest of the community for being "unclean". The Cagots were considered inherently evil by lineage (hence the frequent comparison to the untouchables in India). At least one of the myths about them bore a striking resemblance to the stories about the Jews: many Bretons believed that Cagots bled on Good Friday – but from their navel rather than from their posterior. Their persecution lasted from the early Middle Ages well into the twentieth century.[65] In contradistinction to other minorities, hatred towards the Cagots emanated from their neighbours and would not abate despite efforts made throughout the centuries by churches and governments

to protect them from abuse. A bull by Pope Leo X, instructing Catholics to treat them with kindness, went unheeded. Their own lame attempts to hide their ancestry, for example by burning birth certificates during the French Revolution, failed to erase their identification as spreaders of pollution. The sole way for them to obliterate the mark of Cain was by emigration, a road which many of them took in modern times. Although well known to every resident of the villages in the region, the Cagots were nonetheless required to wear distinctive clothes and hats, and in some places to announce their coming by percussion instruments – as if they were real lepers. Their badge was unique among identifying patches: attached prominently to their outer garment, it was in the shape of a duck's foot – "de pied de guit".[66]

Finally, another group which was somehow tolerated (as a "lesser evil") throughout Europe, but for long periods and in many cities clearly marked as impure, was that of the prostitutes (including at times their pimps as well).[67] They too were relegated to certain streets or neighbourhoods, they too suffered expulsions when a morally minded new ruler wanted to clear his domain from all undesirables, and they too were forced to wear particular colours, special articles of clothing, badges or hairstyles. Queen Jeanne of Naples, Duchess of Provence, decreed in 1347 that prostitutes should wear a red badge on their shoulder; in England in 1352 the Parliament ordered them to wear colourful clothes and a different hairstyle than the one worn by decent women. In Spain the rule was that they wear yellow head coverings, but when honourable women also began to favour yellow scarves, a tinsel ornament was added to the obligatory dress of the prostitute.[68] In Florence regulations from the end of the fourteenth century required that prostitutes wear gloves, bells on their head and high-heeled slippers,[69] a yellow scarf was their mark in Venice, and a fustian cloak, first white and later black, was prescribed in Milan.

Platform shoes, those extraordinary *zoccoli di altezza eccessiva* or chopines, were a subject for fierce debates during the Renaissance in the cities of northern Italy and they still bewilder scholars. Municipal authorities tried to turn them into another mark of the harlot; in some towns they were prohibited to servants and explicitly required of the prostitute and the courtesan; in Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun*, women who wore those high-heeled shoes were to be executed.[70] The numerous sermons, statutes and paintings, however, make it is clear that the campaign to turn the *zoccoli* into an article of shame was not successful.[71]

The battle over platform shoes was but one aspect of the contradictory tactics adopted by authorities in regard to the differentiation between dishonourable and honourable women. When merely positioned low on the city's hierarchical scale, prostitutes were only denied fashionable and expensive dress by laws and regulations; but when the public mood demanded modesty and sobriety from decent women, sumptuous attire with all fashionable trappings was permitted only to prostitutes so as to discourage

wives and daughters of respectable citizens from wearing them (on the same assumption that induced Thomas More to adorn slaves with gold chains). Such inconsistency on the part of the legislators created, one suspects, an ambiguity which bred the frequent complaints that it was impossible to distinguish between a countess and a common whore.

Turning Turk

No other costume defined identity for Europeans more clearly than the Muslim dress. "L'habit fait le Musulman" is the title of a chapter in Bartolomé and Lucile Bennassar's path-breaking book, *Les Chrétiens d'Allah*, which was the first comprehensive study of the "renegades", those tens of thousands of Christians who converted to Islam during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[72] In regions with a mixed population, such as Salonika after it fell to the Turks, Jews, Muslims and Orthodox Christians intermingled in the marketplace but could easily be recognized by their clothing and headgear, the colours designating their religious affiliation.

The expression "turning Turk" first appeared in English in the sixteenth century and referred to the adoption of the Muslim attire whether as disguise or as sign of conversion. Leaving behind breeches and tailored doublets which revealed the contours of the body, the man who crossed the boundary from Christendom into the Domain of Islam would put on a turban and some kind of a loose long overcoat or kaftan. "Nothing revealed conversion and transculturation more than the change of dress", writes Nabil Matar, "when clothes were made and worn in a style that defined them nationally, losing that garment and wearing another invariably changed the way an individual looked and walked and moved, implying a loss of personal nationhood and character".[73] European travellers in Muslim lands had been disguising themselves as Muslims long before the Ottomans controlled the shores of the eastern and southern Mediterranean. We encountered several of them in previous chapters, and there were many others who reported having to dress as the locals during their travels. For example, the Burgundian Bertrandon de la Broquière, envoy of Duke Philip the Good, recounts in his *Le Voyage d'Outre Mer* (written in 1432–33) how he was required to dress as a Turk when he joined a caravan from Damascus to Bursa on his way to Constantinople. Practically all other travellers in the East described similar experiences well into the twentieth century, but in most of these cases it was just a disguise for the sake of safety during one leg of the journey.

Captives of the Barbary corsairs and many of the corsairs themselves, however, not only donned the dress but actually converted to Islam, or at least pretended conversion (see above in the chapter on religious dissimulation). Some of these converts, but not all, were circumcised; some, but not all, shaved their heads, leaving only one lock (*la mèche*) at the

back. But all of them put on the Muslim garb, according to the custom of the place: "L'habit est ainsi une prevue non equivoque d'appartenance à l'islam", write the Bennassars. This rule applied not only to Christians who Islamized but also to Jews: most famously, Shabbetai Zvi, the Jewish false messiah who, when brought before the Sultan Mehmed IV in 1666, converted to Islam (either willingly and wholeheartedly or forcibly and outwardly only) by casting off his Jewish garb and putting on a Turkish turban; a few hundred families of his followers followed suit. And since conversion to Islam was such an extensive phenomenon, and one which could be depicted so colourfully on stage simply by dressing actors in the right costumes, "turning Turk" became a favourite subject for early modern drama.[74]

Needless to say, "renegades" who wished to revert back to their Christian identity had, first of all, to discard the turban and the kaftan and put on breeches. This change of costume was most probably required also of the few Muslims, such as Leo Africanus, when they converted to Christianity. In the early modern period dress was therefore a relatively clear line dividing the civilizations of East and West (even if with time and with the increasing frequency of contacts, some mutual influences served to blur the differences).

National Dress

Awareness of national apparel was not limited to Islamic dress. Books of costumes began to appear in the mid-sixteenth century – "moral geographies in print", as Ulinka Rublack describes them. The humanist and diplomat Lazare de Baïf published in 1526 his *De re vestiaria*: based on a study of Roman sumptuary laws, this small book described for the first time the costumes worn in classical times. A generation later humanists, artists and printers began publishing compilations of contemporary apparels: Hans Weigel's *Trachtenbuch*, printed in Nuremberg in 1577, was one of the most comprehensive and lavishly printed costume books printed in Europe up to that time, followed by the Venetian Cesare Vecellio's two costume books of 1590 and 1598.[75] The desire to trace his life history and his rise to an important position by recording the outfits he had worn at various stages in life and on major occasions led Matthäus Schwarz to commission 137 watercolours of himself and publish them in a book – a book which, according to Valentin Groebner, could be regarded as an expression of the urge to document everything in "a world where talk of fraud and deception was omnipresent".[76] In addition, paintings of town scenes depicted figures in various national costumes with captions identifying each one.[77]

Such books with their illustrations, together with travellers' reports of their impressions of foreign lands, descriptions of manners and costumes

provided in compilations such as Andrew Boorde's *The First Book of the Introduction to Knowledge*, as well as sermons and pamphlets denouncing "foreign fashions" – all these helped fix images of the masculine and feminine apparel of other nations in people's minds. Impostors, whether false ambassadors or spies, now had the necessary information on which to rely for a convincing disguise.

Donning the local garb was the path for Europeans to go native in the new worlds recently discovered. It could offer protection when travelling, but it could also signify cultural conversion and a change of identity, whether voluntary or enforced. Similar to the phenomenon of "turning Turk", though on a far smaller scale, the "Indianization" of English people in North America was beginning to concern those responsible for the project of colonization. By shaving hair and beard, painting the face and wearing Indian clothing, a European could join the native population and discard his or her "civilized" identity.[78] Similar cases were described in the annals of the Spanish conquest,[79] most famously in the report written by the explorer Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, who lived among Indian tribes in Florida for several years. No less famous were certain occurrences of identity change in the other direction: the Indian girl Pocahontas turned into Lady Rebecca Rolfe by being packed into an English lady's dress, with tall hat, lace collar and velvet cloak, is an image preserved for posterity by Simon van de Passes's engraving (1616), which was commissioned for the propaganda campaign in favour of British colonization of the Americas.

Uniforms

Modern-day experience teaches us that the uniformed professions are the easiest to simulate: all one needs is to obtain the outfit. Stories of false pilots, physicians, scientists, policemen and other counterfeit professionals fill our newspapers and serve as fodder for the industry of detective fiction. Admittedly, medieval and early modern Europe knew fewer categories of uniformed personnel, yet no fewer cases of impersonation.

A uniform, by definition, erases individual identity, but it serves as a declaration of group identity. Strictly speaking, military uniforms as a standardized form of dress for regiments or national armies had to wait until the eighteenth century, but colours or shapes of articles of clothing, weapons or headgear, were familiar means of identifying certain fighting units at least since Roman times. In the non-military context, liveries indicated belonging to a noble household or to a corporate body at least since the fourteenth century – with special badges, collars, heraldic signs and particular colours. But the most ubiquitous of all uniforms (and the one most often used for disguise) was clerical garb. If the expression "man of the cloth" initially indicated any person clad in a uniform, it came to designate exclusively clergymen. The medieval Catholic Church gradually developed a most

elaborate gallery of costumes specific to each rank and order within it. The clerical dress code was so minutely ordered so as to become a rich lexicon. Not surprisingly it served both as a model for those who wished garments to be clear identifiers as well as a target for satire. Erasmus had this to say about the "Religious":

> They work out the number of knots for a shoe-string, the colour of a girdle, the variations of the colour in a habit, the material and width to a hair's breadth of a girdle, the shape and capacity (in sacksful) of a cowl, the breath (in fingers) of a tonsure [...].[80]

Both medieval and Renaissance literature are full of stories about the abuse of clerical uniforms. Feste, in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (Act 4, scene 2), knows he is not the first to put on a gown and beard to "dissemble himself" as a curate. In another satirical work, the *Letters of Obscure Men*, we hear of the Dominican monks in Strasburg who

> brought women-folk to their cells by way of the river beneath their walls; and they trimmed their hair, so for a long time they passed for monks, and went to market, and bought fish from their husbands the fisherman, but at last they were unmasked.[81]

And we have seen above how magistrates were desperately trying to combat false claims for benefit of the clergy by felons donning a clerical gown and shaving the crown of the head to form a tonsure.

University students and teachers were initially dressed as the clergy but gradually evolved an elaborate dress dictionary of their own, denoting degree and affiliation to nation or college by shape, cut, colour or hood.[82] As in the Catholic Church, in many of the old universities of Europe traditional uniforms may still be seen during ceremonies (such as the Encaenia procession in Oxford) – parades which can only be "read" correctly by the uninitiated with the aid of a chart.

Professionals outside the universities such as physicians were identified by their robes, gloves, beret, ring and the adornments of their horses.[83] The ceremony of conferring a degree or a title with the right to wear certain insignia mattered more in medieval and early modern Europe than any diploma of parchment or paper. Falsely obtaining such robes or insignia in order to pose as a university-trained doctor was probably no more difficult than forging documents.

Nor was it a complicated matter to dress up as a pilgrim, an occupation which carried with it significant benefits. All that was needed were a staff, a satchel, a special coat and hat, and various badges and brooches proving visits to particular shrines. The most famous of these badges was the Compostela scallop shell, which became a metonym for pilgrimage. Badges

depicting the shrine itself (as that of the Virgin of Chartres or of Thomas Becket's in Canterbury) or scenes from the life of a particular saint, although not as easily collected as shells on the beach, were cheap souvenirs sold by the thousands and therefore obtained without trouble.

Thus, unless deceived by impostors, a sixteenth-century sharp-eyed and knowledgeable observer standing in the central square of his large city should have had no problem in distinguishing men from women, local from foreigner, honest woman from prostitute, Christian from Jew or Muslim, the healthy from the diseased, the former heretic from the devout Catholic. He would have also been able to identify members of certain guilds or noble households by their liveries, physicians and doctors of theology by their gowns and hats, pilgrims by their staff and badges, not to mention priests and the various orders of monks, friars and nuns.[84] Nevertheless, complaints about social confusion were abundant.

"Mingle-mangle of Apparel"

As late as 1761, the *London Chronicle* (3–6 January) expressed in its editorial an outcry because "dress, fashion, and affectation, have put all upon an equality", which made it difficult to tell the milliner from her ladyship, a lord from the groom or "his grace in Pall Mall from the tallow-chandler at Wapping".[85]

Hundreds of similar complaints could be quoted from early modern sources. The fear that members of the poorer classes would worm their way into decent society by dressing up and feigning gentility was part and parcel of the paranoia about the rogue underworld: they "will so clothe themselves for that time as any should deem him to be an honest husbandmen", wrote Edward Hext, a Somerset justice.[86] Most commentators, however, were bemoaning the less dramatic breach of the social hierarchy, but just as worrisome: that the urban classes were dressing up like the nobility. Such displeasure was voiced all across Europe by members of the upper classes themselves as well as by moralists, reformers, social observers and travellers. Niccolò Machiavelli in *Istorie fiorentine* (1526) attributed to Cosimo de' Medici the complaint: "come due canne di panno rosato facevano uno uomo da bene" ("how two yards of pink cloth can a gentleman make").[87] From a completely different viewpoint, the Puritan moralist, Phillip Stubbes, dedicated chapter 2 of his *Anatomie of the Abuses in England* (1583) to "A particular description of pride, the principal abuse", in which he wrote that

> Nowhere is such confused mingle-mangle of apparel and such preposterous excesse thereof, as anyone is permitted to flaunt it out in what apparel he lusteth himself, or can get by with any kind of meanness, so that it is very hard to know who is noble, who is worshipful, who is a gentleman, who is not.[88]

The Spanish *arbitrista* Pedro Fernandèz Navarrete declared that the fact that "On a festive day the craftsman and his wife do not differ from the nobility […] caused a great deal of harm to the republic, due to the lack of difference between craftsman and noble."[89] Henri III of France even had doubts about God's ability to see beyond appearances, claiming in the sumptuary law of 1583 that the Almighty was angry because he could no longer recognize a person's quality by his clothes. And Fynes Moryson defined the sorry situation as a "Babylonian confusion", when everyone "goe apparelled like a gentleman".[90]

Hugh Latimer, preaching in 1552, after alluding to the prevalent excess in apparel and the aping of one class by another, expressed the frustration that there "be laws made and certaine statutes, how every one in his estate shall be appareled but God knoweth the statutes are not put in execution".[91] And indeed, determined to resolve the "crisis of recognizability", authorities endlessly legislated laws which stipulated exactly who should wear what – but, as Latimer rightly noted, few of these rules and regulations were enforced with any success.

In Zurich in 1628 the introduction to the sumptuary legislation stated that "no one is dressed according to his rank". In Basle the prologue to the legislation of 1637 stated that "no condition or rank can be recognized".[92] In Strasburg in 1660 the Burgomaster and the Rath issued a proclamation beginning with the complaint,

> We have for many years observed with great governmental displeasure that not only all good ordinances alike are trodden underfoot, that arrogance and pride without shame have been exhibited by more and more from day to day, and finally, almost no difference between upper and lower ranks has been observed.[93]

The ordinance then divided the population into six classes and stated explicitly what clothes and ornaments were permitted to each.

Insignia of Worth

This enormous amount of legislation which comes under the heading of "sumptuary laws" – a trickle in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a flood by the sixteenth century and only dammed by the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century – was undoubtedly "one of the most curious of all episodes in the history of social organization"[94] and of government interference in the daily life and private practices of their subjects. It has aroused a great deal of scholarly interest,[95] since these laws offer insights into a great number of historical issues: fashions, prices, materials, consumption, apparel makers, dowries, as well as law enforcement and policing methods. Thus they constitute a goldmine for historians, as John

Martin Vincent already emphasized in 1935. Writing, inter alia, about a law promulgated in Strasbourg in 1660, he expressed his enthusiasm:

> With a wonderful intricacy of detail in describing costume or jewelry, the document not only paints the people as the law expected them to look, but reveals the circles in which they moved, the trades they followed, and the privileges of wealth exempt from labor.[96]

Sumptuary legislation, in regard to attire as well as to other consumption goods, was directed only at the population of the cities and towns. The princely courts, being the highest platforms for the parade of fashion and elegance for both sexes, developed their own very elaborate dress codes, while social hierarchy among the peasants was rarely displayed by differences in costume and in any case did not appear to concern the authorities – only rarely did rulers find it necessary to explicitly forbid silk or the colour crimson to peasant women. It was the public square in town which was to be the stage for the parade of rank and status. As nobility moved into towns and the rich bourgeois were ennobled, it became all the more important for distinctions to be clearly visible.

Motivations for sumptuary legislation were many and often contradictory. At first, especially in the wake of the Black Plague, the preponderant reason was the attempt to curb extravagance so as to avoid waste of resources. Ronald Rainey cites many such examples among the regulations decreed in Florence in 1349. Not only was ostentation a cause of economic ruin to individual families and to the commune, but also "on account of these unbearable expenses, men are avoiding matrimony", says the legislator in Florence in 1433, and this in turn leads to other evils such as prostitution and sodomy.[97] Venetian authorities stubbornly blamed female conceit for all waste since women, so it was commonly believed, were constantly buying new expensive outfits according to every novelty in fashion: in 1504, in a fit of frustration, a preposterous law decreed that "for the future no new style may be adopted in the garments of the women, save those in use at present".[98] A Scottish Act of 1621 expressed the same unrealizable wish: "It is statuted that the fashion of clothes now presently used not be cheingit by men or women".[99]

Economic motivations would continue to give birth to these laws. They expressed the budding mercantilist policies of discouraging imports by prohibiting foreign fashions and encouraging consumption of local products – in England authorities even went so far as to demand shrouding the dead only in cloth produced in England and not abroad. Justifications were to be found in political treatises, which presented side by side ethical and economic arguments. Sir Thomas Smith in the *Discourse of the Common Weal of this Realm of England* (1549) railed against imported luxury goods because they caused a waste of national resources; a century later John Evelyn in his

Tyrannus, or, The Mode in a Discourse of Sumptuary Lawes (1661) insisted that copying French fashions was bad both for the nation's morale and for its economy. But Smith and Evelyn both, together with other authors, emphasized that adopting foreign fashions was not only economically and morally wrong, it also led to confusion in the visible social order.

Economic considerations were frequently marginal or camouflaged with ethical and religious rhetoric. Modesty and frugality were commendable Christian virtues; luxury, the moralists kept saying, diverted people from the work of God. Both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation were movements which deplored ostentation, idleness, waste and indecency. "Pride, mother of all vices", was the undoing of men who wasted all their money on costly apparel, claimed a 1533 law in England.[100] In the spirit of Catholic devotion the Bavarian authorities issued in 1593 "A Mandate against All Worldly Pleasure".[101] Furthermore, the social confusion created by the absence of legally enforced dress codes was politically dangerous: if one could not tell at a glance a noblewoman from a servant, the very fabric of society might unravel.

Laws directed at curbing consumption and ostentation – whether for economic or religious motives – aroused the anger and complaints of the wealthier classes. A strongly worded text, penned by a woman, expressed the frustration bred by Cardinal Basilios Bessarion's attempts to limit ostentation and waste in Bologna. Cloth of gold and silver, crimson silk, ermine fur and expensive jewels – all emblems of nobility – had been forbidden by Bessarion in 1453.[102] Nicolosa Castellani, wife of Nicolo Sanuti, count of Porreta, a knight, doctor of law and adviser to Sante Bentivoglio, addressed a Latin oration to the austere papal legate, protesting the curtailment of extravagance in dress. The laws of 1453 were bad, she wrote, because they did not allow display of distinction in rank and they deprived the noblewoman of the only means to show her status in public. She ended her diatribe with the words: "ornament and apparel, because they are our insignia of worth, we cannot suffer to be taken from us".[103]A similar reaction met the legislation in Mantua in 1551: "we are considered at the same level as the lowermost and meanest people in this city", wrote a few noblemen in a letter to the Duke.[104] Two books penned by Venetian women and published in 1600 – *Il merito delle donne* by Moderata Fonte (a pseudonym of Modesta Pozzo de'Zorzi) and Lucrezzia Marinella's *La nobilità e l'eccellenza delle donne* – furiously protested against all restrictions imposed by men on women including the limitations enforced by sumptuary legislation. It was, however, that exceptional Venetian nun, Arcangela Tarabotti, in her *Antisatira* (1641), who denounced these laws against "lusso donnesco" as part of an anti-feminist policy, which stemmed from the avarice and the vanity of men who only wished to prevent women from exhibiting their divinely given beauty.[105]

Nevertheless, most of the laws concerning apparel in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not motivated by economic, moral or anti-feminist

goals but by the desire to make the social hierarchy conspicuous: "The urban sumptuary legislation of the early modern period can best be understood as a response to the quest for recognizability", is Alan Hunt's conclusion.[106] At the early medieval stages of such legislation, the attempt was only to draw a boundary between royalty and all the rest. Hence, for example, the decree of the *Córtes* held in Valladolid in 1258, which was meant to endow the royal family with a splendour befitting the earthly representatives of the Lord: only royalty were permitted to wear garments of silk adorned with gold and jewels.[107] But with time dress codes became progressively more elaborate and hierarchical symbols minutely defined. According to Diane Owen Hughes, the process reached its peak as Renaissance society "described itself through clothes […] the ordering of dress became for legislators a metaphorical way of talking about social distinction, a way of ordering human relations".[108]

Sumptuary regulations provide the historian with a veritable catalogue of masculine and feminine fashions almost decade by decade. We can see how the prestige of different colours and fabrics waxed and waned as fluctuations in trade and production increased or decreased the availability of certain dyes, furs and textiles. Crimson or blue, initially reserved to royalty, gradually became the colours of gowns worn by all nobility, then by rich burghers and finally they needed to be explicitly forbidden to servants when dyestuffs such as cochineal were imported in large quantities from Mexico. Fabrics such as silk, brocade and velvet, or types of fur as ermine and sable, retained their significance as emblems of nobility or high professional status for a longer period. The laws and statutes also provide much information about trains of dresses, depth of necklines, puffed sleeves, ruffs, hose, pointed boots, height of heels, pearls in hair and jewellery of every kind. Angry prohibitions on slashed sleeves and fur linings reveal the measures adopted by parvenus for circumventing the regulations.

Michel de Montaigne, being one of the more astute observers of his generation, understood that the attempts to fix the social hierarchy by dress codes, which reserved the more luxurious items to the higher echelons, only led to excessive consumption as men and women tried to emulate their "betters" often beyond their means. Thus, although he definitely wished to maintain the social hierarchy and was eager for class and rank to be clearly visible, in his essay on sumptuary laws (perhaps the most explicit articulation of his social conservatism), he proposed to turn the dress code upside down: the king and the aristocracy to dress as plainly and as modestly as possible and all "pernicious superfluities and luxuries" to be left to the lower classes. "The Law ought to state, on the contrary [to existing laws], that purple and goldsmithery are forbidden to all ranks of society except whores and travelling-players".[109] We have here then another "utopian" element in the famous *Essais*: shaping society by shaming and conditioning, in the same manner that Thomas More would train the Utopians to associate gold with slaves. Two generations later the

Duc de Sully, with his Calvinist background, tried to follow Montaigne's advice and implement this manoeuvre of reverse psychology (needless to say, without much success).[110]

Much of modern research on sumptuary legislation has been dedicated to northern Italy, but a concerted campaign to curb class fluidity was conducted in most European cities and states. A lament about the reign of confusion was expressed, as we saw, in the preambles to many of the laws and statutes in Germany, Switzerland, England, France and Spain, providing the explanation for the urgent need to regulate the visibility of social status. In England the very long list of sumptuary regulations, beginning in the reign of Edward III in the fourteenth century and frequently repeated until 1604 (when all the laws on consumption were repealed by Parliament, earlier than in any country or city on the continent), expressed simultaneously both the economic and the "recognizability" motivations: limiting the importation of foreign goods and ensuring the visibility of class distinctions. In the German Empire we find that the Diet of Worms of 1521, for example, was no less concerned with the need to ensure observation of the hierarchical dress code than with the need to silence Martin Luther, and it urged all the free cities of the empire to legislate and to enforce laws concerning attire;[111] sumptuary legislation was also high on the agenda of the Augsburg Diet in 1530 and continued to be discussed by all future meetings of the Reichstag until the eighteenth century. Imperial cities published innumerable decrees on the obligatory differences in apparel; their laws and ordinances became more and more complex, dividing the population into categories according to rank attained by birth or by profession.[112] Surprisingly, even in Puritan New England, where one would have expected to find severe modesty equally enjoined on everyone, class distinctions in apparel were as important as in "decadent" Europe: the Massachusetts General Court in 1651 expressed "utter detestation and dislike, that men or women of mean condition should take upon them the garb of gentlemen, by wearing gold or silver lace, or buttons, or points at their knees, or walk in great boots".[113]

Efforts invested everywhere were immense, yet the results were never satisfactory: "the different classes are barely to be known apart", was still the opening sentence of a Nuremberg edict in 1657.[114] Alan Hunt's words in the introduction to his book, that "by the mournful tone of their preambles and by the frequency of the reenactments it would appear that the observance left much to be desired",[115] is very much an understatement. The centuries-long all-European campaign to make social hierarchy clearly visible by clothes and ornaments consumed vast resources – deliberations in councils, processes of legislation, publicizing, bureaucracy, policing, encouragement of denunciations, court procedures and punishment of offenders (including producers of "illegal" garments) – comparable probably only to the resources invested in those decades in the public battle against the

spread of epidemics. Nevertheless, as evidenced by the innumerable laments and complaints, repeated legislation and the rising tone of anxiety about the blurring of all distinctions, the campaign to order society by apparel was a colossal failure.

Why was this utopian project so unsuccessful that later historians would define it as merely "expressions of a pious opinion"?[116] First of all, it would appear, because of its incoherence and inherent contradictions: authorities everywhere were moralizing against luxury while dictating what measure of luxurious display was permitted to each rank in society;[117] governments were restricting consumption while competing with other states in the production of luxury goods; leaders were enjoining modesty while wishing to display the elegance and prosperity of their subjects (hence the suspension of sumptuary laws during visits of foreign dignitaries); and most importantly perhaps, sumptuary legislation was an attempt to control the uncontrollable, that is, to stem the flow of fashions and the ubiquitous habit of copying styles of other groups.[118]

In addition, the absence of regular police forces and insufficient prison facilities, as we saw in other contexts, made social engineering practically impossible. Special magistrates and inspectors – the sixteenth century equivalent of modern-day traffic wardens, you could say – were appointed specifically for the enforcement of dress codes. Beginning in 1561, officers appointed by Queen Elizabeth I received briefs of the statutes listing in tabular form the apparel allowed to each class.[119] In Venice the *proveditori alle Pompa*, or *Proveditori sopra le Pompe de le donne*, were organized into a permanent *Magistrato alle Pompe* in 1514 – an office which would continue to function until the end of the eighteenth century. That these inspectors were resented by the citizens was plainly indicated by Marino Sanuto, who despised the laws and the officials in charge of them, calling the institution "oficio odioso".[120] The reliance on denunciations (institutionalized malicious gossip), particularly in Italian cities, where special boxes for informers may still be seen today, did not produce the desired number of accusations.

Furthermore, the possibility to pay for infractions, *pagare le pompe*, nullified the effectiveness of the legislation – a situation which emphasizes the resemblance to parking policies in our cities today: like traffic wardens, certain inspectors would go around counting the number of pearls in a woman's headgear or checking the fabric of her dress, imposing fines for violations of the rules. But these inspectors would often find that the fine had been paid in advance and that the dress and ornaments had already been stamped with a *bulla* indicating that permission was granted to overstep class boundaries. With such a source of income, why would the authorities wish for the laws to be strictly observed?[121] Finally, as with all laws, people soon found ways to circumvent them. The fashion which spread from Italy across Europe during the sixteenth century, of slashes in the outer garment

to reveal a luxurious (forbidden) fabric underneath, gives a whole new meaning to the word "loopholes".

The fact that historians cite a greater number of laws than of actual court cases could be the result of the easier access to legal codices than to early modern court records; it could, however, serve as another indication that sumptuary legislation was not strictly enforced. Catherine Kovesi Killerby insists that the laws were not merely wishful thinking and believes that "the legislative process was not a sterile exercise",[122] but quotes more laws (over 300) in 40 Italian cities for the years between 1200 and 1500 than cases of persecution for their violation.[123] Altogether, the number of reported trials for infringement of dress codes cited by scholars is relatively small when compared to indictments for other misdemeanours: a handful of men sentenced to paying a fine when their wives or daughters were caught dressed above their station,[124] a case or two of a servant put on trial for wearing fur or lace. The one exception was the large number of cases adjudicated by the *Reformationskammern* ("reform chambers") in Basle, Bern and Zurich: from the records that survived it appears that in the seventeenth century these tribunals for supervising morals attended to hundreds of infringements of the dress laws.[125]

In addition to garments and ornaments, hairstyle was another element in a person's appearance which served (in all societies) as an identifier of a person's gender, marital status, profession, ethnic group, class or religion. Hair has always had the widest spectrum of meanings.[126] Changing a hairstyle was often the first step taken by a person attempting to pass for someone else – clerical tonsure being perhaps the best-known hairdo to be adopted for fraudulent purposes; as early as the fourteenth century it was referred to as the "sign of the scoundrel".[127] Growing a beard or shaving it off could immediately define a man's status according to local customs and current fashion: in Venetian Crete, for example, a beard identified a person as Greek, and thus as not free. Yet, except for rare cases, such as the prohibition on Venice's prostitutes to wear their hair in boys' style, official laws did not prescribe hairstyles. Custom and fashion were dictatorial enough in matters pertaining to coiffure, which included in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the size and style of wigs for both men and women.

Identification could be based on other personal belongings. Weapons signified more than rank and unit among the *miles*: only males went armed, but not if they were clerics, Jews or Muslims; no slave in the colonies was allowed to carry a gun or a sword; some sectarians wore a wooden sword attached to their belts to indicate their pacifism. Means of transportation could also be vehicles of ostentation indicating social and economic status; hence horses, carriages and gondolas were often included in sumptuary codes. Ideally, so reformers, legislators and administrators believed, each and every person should be recognized by what he or she wore, rode or carried.

Vestis virum facit

Governments of early modern Europe were very conscious, perhaps more than at any other period, of the conception that "clothes make the man (or woman)". Consequently, since people were identified mostly by their attire, clothes became the principal means for disguise and imposture. Undesirables, we saw, could hide or shed their markings; females could pass for males by donning breeches and cutting their hair in masculine style; cassock and tonsure would make one a monk; an academic gown with its fur trimmings could turn an illiterate into a university master; horse and sword made a knight; a blue velvet dress could make a countess out of a servant girl.

Dressing up – in the sense of wearing clothes associated with a social class higher than one's own – was the most frequent of pretensions. Some of these were but harmless ways of putting on airs, forms of dissembling which became the stuff from which Don Quixotic figures were created. The poor nobleman encountered by Lazarillo de Tormes (1554), for example, sold all his worldly goods to be able to appear in public in a nobleman's attire: "who wouldn't be fooled by his good mood and his respectable cloak and tunic / And who would think that that gentleman spent all yesterday eating nothing?"[128] Antoine Furetière, in his satirical novel *Le roman bourgeois* (1666), described "an amphibious man", a lawyer by day and a courtier by night, who "wanted to pass for people of fashion" by dressing up and putting on a blonde wig.[129] It was probably no coincidence that Furetière named his hero Nicodème, as the term "Nicodemites" for those who practised religious dissimulation was still familiar to his readers. But many men dressed up for less benign reasons. The cities of Renaissance Europe had a high proportion of "gentlemen crooks", who adopted not only the clothes but also the gestures, accent and style of men of quality in order to cheat and steal and generally deceive the innocent.[130] After all, Renaissance Europe was where men and women were judged, and very frequently misjudged, by appearances – more perhaps than at any other time anywhere.

Finally, fabrics could not only declare who you were but could also cover up your identity. The debate raging today in several European countries over the *burqa*, *hijab* and *niqab*, which some female Muslim citizens insist on wearing, has precedents in early modern European cities in regard to the veil (in the sense of a piece of cloth which covers the face, not just a head scarf or a nun's habit), the dilemma being the same then as nowadays: modesty versus recognizability. Although covering the face in Renaissance Europe was far from universal for all women, nor was it as impenetrable as a *burqa*, neither was it associated solely with the oriental harem as it would be in the eighteenth century.[131] The biblical verse "The king's daughter is all glorious within" (Ps. 45:13) was interpreted by strict moralists to mean that women should not show themselves in public, and if obliged to go out of

the house, they should dress very modestly and cover their faces. Apparently the idea was adopted in certain towns in Catholic Europe during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. However, under the guise of propriety and modesty "various dishonest acts have been and every day are committed", stated a Venetian law in 1443, which proceeded to prohibit women from covering their face except when going to church.[132] Officials of the commune of Siena were empowered by a law passed in 1347 "to demand, on encountering a veiled woman, the name of her father and husband, her 'terzo', 'popolo' and 'contrada'".[133] Kovesi Killerby quotes a large number of examples of laws in the Italian cities against masks, veils and cloaks, which made it easier, for both men and women, to act dishonestly or dishonourably by hiding their identity.[134]

State interference and attempts at coercion in matters of dress and appearance reached their peak in the West during the second half of the sixteenth century and early seventeenth century; afterwards they would gradually fade away, in some places earlier than in others. The policies changed, it would seem, partly because of the enormous gap between the huge efforts invested in such attempts and their very poor results. In addition, several other developments led to the authorities' surrender on this front: the birth of the "age of consumption" accompanied by laissez-faire policies in economics; certain liberal attitudes adopted even before liberalism became a coherent school of thought; and population growth particularly in the cities, which made the desire to supervise and restrain everyone's private life in all its minutest details a proposal all the more utopian. From the "recognizability" point of view, however, it could be said that the idea of identification by appearance was gradually abandoned in favour of more efficient and more prevalent methods such as registration and documentation. The entire project of state control over appearance was explicitly rejected by the French revolutionaries, who regarded it as one of the most blatant expressions of repression. The law of 8 Brumaire year II (29 Oct. 1793) decreed freedom of dress to be a basic human right. Indeed, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the exception of uniforms, authorities throughout Europe no longer interfered with what people wore (apart from the restrictions on nudity in public, the requirement of wearing protective gear when driving and, in recent years, the attempts to prohibit the Muslim coverings for women). From then on it was the fickle dictates of fashion rather than of the law which determined dress codes.

8
Paperwork: Identification Documents

"Let him depart; his passport shall be made
And crowns for convoy put into his purse"
– William Shakespeare,
Henry V, Act 4, scene 3

Moving on from the subjects of physical marks and dress regulations to documentation brings us closer to familiar territory. An official document (made of paper, or more likely nowadays, of plastic), which has a registration number and some personal information, is required today practically everywhere: an ID card, driving licence, passport, visa, library permit, student card, membership card – you cannot leave home without one; or, in other words, these days you are assumed to be an impostor unless you have the papers to prove otherwise. Yet what we are experiencing today could very well be the last phase in the history of portable identification documents, as new technologies – DNA databases, biometrics, electronic identification by fingerprints or retinas – are, for better or for worse, making documents superfluous. The early modern centuries, on the other hand, were the first phase in this history.

Physiognomic observations, clothes and the marking of the body were mostly means to determine a person's group identity: gender, race, nation, class, profession. To be identified as a specific individual, distinct from all others, and to prevent what we call nowadays "identity theft", other means and methods were needed, some of which were invented with the dawn of civilization. The first step had been to give each individual a name, but quite early on these given names were found to be insufficient for the complexities of organized society: in matters pertaining to taxation or in legal transactions, for example, identifying a person by a single personal name was not enough.

When executing a contract or demanding repayment of a loan, how was one to tell, for example, one Demetrios from another in the Hellenic world? A papyrus, published in 1980 by William Brashear and dated by him to the

third century BCE, has a law which regulated the contents of legal contracts in Ptolemaic Egypt. Lines 4–12 of the document lay down the rules for identifying the contracting parties:

> let the creditors and the debtors be recorded in the document. Let those stationed in the army record their city of origin, from which division they are and the *epiphorai* they possess. And let the citizens record their fathers and their *demes*, and if they are also in the army their divisions and the *epiphorai* they possess as well. Let everyone else record his father, his city of origin and in what *genos* he is.[1]

Similar "identifiers" were to be used in all manner of legal documents for centuries to come: patronymics, place of origin, occupation. In addition, even prior to the introduction of surnames – a practice which began in different regions of Europe at different times from the eleventh century onwards – soubriquets and descriptive nicknames were given to every John, Thomas and William.

Later on descriptions of physical attributes would fulfil the function that photographs and personal details provide in modern-day ID documents: height, colour of hair and eyes, distinguishing marks. We find these verbal depictions in letters of credit, contracts and registrations of loans and deposits,[2] as well as on lists of residents, passengers or recruits. We saw in Chapter 6 how the Jews of Istanbul were described in minutest detail for a survey done between the years 1595–97 for fiscal purposes: 2604 persons (heads of households) were listed by given name and patronymic, address, occupation and place of work. The officials followed very precise instructions as to what details should be given to ensure identification and to avoid confusing persons who had the same name.[3] The physical description – one of the most detailed list of features in the early modern period ("une véritable photo d'identité", writes the modern historian in admiration) – included approximate height (tall, medium, small), hair colour, shape and colour of eyebrows, shape and colour of eyes, shape of nose, shape and colour of beard, and special marks such as scars, moles and so on. Similar detailed descriptions were given in the lists of rowers condemned to the galleys in Spain or of craftsmen enlisted to the Venetian galleys.[4] In houses of correction, which were beginning to appear in some European cities from the middle of the sixteenth century, in order "to put a stop to counterfeiting" and deception by vagrants, records were kept with information about the personal history, family and appearance of each inmate. "Such interest in simple, straightforward identification in the court records", writes Martine van Elk, "is of course a reflection of a larger obsession on the part of the authorities in general, as laws of carrying passports, badging, branding, and boring holes through ears of vagrants testify".[5]

However, the idea that a picture could be worth a thousand words did occur to our ancestors long before the invention of photography – at least

when it came to catching a prominent enemy. The earliest reference to a "wanted" poster dates from the end of the eleventh century: Anselm of Canterbury could not take the direct route from Rome to Lyons in 1099 since the Antipope Clement III (Guibert or Wibert of Ravenna) circulated his picture: "quod ferebatur Wilbertus picture Romam misso, imaginem ejus in tabula pingi fecisse, ut quocumque se habitu effigiaret, non lateret" ("Wilbertus sent from Rome a picture, his [Anselm of Canterbury's] image portrayed on a tablet, so that whoever sees his face would recognize him").[6] Four centuries later, in 1497, when Perkin Warbeck was diligently sought by Henry VII's constables, his description was disseminated throughout the land on placards signed by the King, offering a reward to whoever caught him alive, but no portrait of the pretender was attached to the poster; in 1586, on the other hand, in the chase after the Babington conspirators, a royal proclamation called for "portraits of their faces" to be put up in public places around London.[7] Such "wanted" ads were a feasible method only when the fugitive was a person important enough for the rulers to invest in drawing his image; alternatively it was possible where there were enough affordable artists at hand. Life-size pictures of criminals who had left town or could not be brought to justice for other reasons were posted on the walls of central buildings in Florence, sometimes with captions listing their offences.[8] However, these Florentine *pittura infamanti*, as their name indicates, were a substitute for the pillory or the *habitello*, intended for public shaming rather than for finding and bringing the offenders to justice.

Without photographs then it was all the easier to evade pursuers as well as to impersonate another person. Literature of all cultures is rich in both comical and tragic tales of attempts to steal an inheritance by posing as the rightful heir[9] – from the biblical story of Jacob cheating Esau of his birthright down to the 1998 film *The Tichborne Claimant* based on the nineteenth-century Roger Tichborne/Arthur Orton affair. A fourteenth-century Jewish story, entitled "The Inheritance", is to be found in the *Mahbarot* of the Jewish Italian poet, Immanuel ha-Romi (Manuello Romano, Immanuel of Rome), which relates how the Jews in the Byzantine city of Sibmah (an imaginary place given the name of a biblical town) failed in the task of verifying the identity of a young man claiming to be the son of the deceased: because they were deeply impressed by his show of grief and copious tears, they neglected to ask for authentication by a notary public as they would have done at the time in Florence or in Rome.[10] Authentication of identity by a notary, one should bear in mind, could be obtained only by persons of means who were either known to the notary himself or able to recruit reliable witnesses.

Signatures as means for verification of identity are mentioned only infrequently in the sources (we saw one such case in Chapter 4, of the thirteenth-century Spanish Rabbi who warned his correspondents not to believe people claiming to be his emissaries without first verifying his

signature). Official documents and much of private correspondence in the Middle Ages and early modern period were written and copied by professional scribes and signed with a seal; consequently, authenticating autographs was not common practice. Yet from extant archives of merchants and bankers, such as those of Francesco di Marco Datini (late fourteenth century) we learn that, in addition to official seals, handwriting (*la mano*, *grafia*) was also examined as means of confirming the identity of the author and the honesty of the bearer, particularly in bills of exchange.[11]

Occasions when individuals were required to prove their identity were multiplying from the late Middle Ages on. In addition to the circumstances mentioned above – financial or commercial transactions with strangers, claiming a legacy or a privilege or reclaiming a deposit – almost all travel, not only when going abroad, would necessitate carrying some form of "passport", particularly in times of epidemics or of political upheavals. Furthermore, as mobility increased, licenses and diplomas were more frequently demanded as proof of qualifications for practising certain professions. Population growth, recurrent waves of epidemics, migrations caused by religious revolutions, larger armies, mobility over larger territories including overseas, expanding commercial activities – all these increased manifold the number of unfamiliar faces coming and going and demanding benefits or privileges to which they were not necessarily entitled. In what appeared to some observers as a collapse of stability and order, licensing became the panacea of authorities for most social problems, as well as the method by which they hoped to distinguish the genuine from the fraudulent.[12]

"Bureaucracy" (or, to use a less pejorative term, "administration") seems to be a key word in this story. The growth of the State and its machinery is one of those major subjects which have occupied historians, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and other scholars for many generations. Incontestably, the need to establish people's identities has always been one of the main causes for the enormous amounts of paperwork and for the ever-growing battalions of officials. The panic, which overtook early modern European authorities as a result of the prevalence of imposture, adds a further explanation for the fast spread of personal documentation and bureaucracy at the time. Valentin Groebner suggests that it was the development of a growing number of means of identification and the growth of public administration that gave rise to the awareness of imposture.[13] However, I believe that, if there was a causal connection, it was the reverse: the growing fear that people were cheating and that they were not who they claimed to be led to a stream of inventions of identifiers; and, the larger the volume of paperwork, the greater the number of officials required to inspect, control, license and issue the documents. The cycle then continued: the more numerous and sophisticated the documents, the more elaborate and clever the forgeries, which in turn led to a further increase in the number of inspectors and scribes.[14]

Family

Despite the rapid increase in bureaucracy and paperwork, however, one area in which few changes occurred during the Renaissance period was in the registration and documentation of family relations. In all regions of Europe and its colonies matrimonial matters remained under ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Births, marriages and deaths continued to be recorded in parish registers and not in personal certificates; divorce or the annulment of marriage were, as a rule, granted by church authorities even in Protestant states. While many modern-day identification documents include, besides the bearer's date and place of birth, names of parents, marital status (single, married, widowed or divorced) and often the number and names of children, this was rarely the information found in the portable licences and certificates enumerated below. Hence the greater ease by which it was possible then to adopt the identity of the heir to the property of another man's family or to procure a second spouse. It was all the easier when moving to a place very distant from one's home town.

Age was difficult to prove, unless the people conducting the inquiry had access to the parish register. And age mattered for many reasons as the laws prescribed a minimal age for matrimony, for receiving an inheritance, for being free of guardianship, for holding ecclesiastical benefices and more. Proofs-of-age were a late medieval English procedure by which jurors gave sworn testimonies regarding a claimant's date of birth or date of baptism based solely on memory.[15] In the Renaissance, as in the Middle Ages, most people had only a rough idea of their age and – if at all – only a seasonal awareness of their birthdate. When it served their interest they lied about their age, adding or detracting from their years, and administrators would have been hard put to call their bluff.[16]

But surely it should have been more difficult to conceal a spouse? Not necessarily. Francisco Noguerol took a second wife in Peru without a hindrance when his first wife was still alive and well in Spain, and the bigamy would not have been discovered nor left a record in the archives if it were not for his intention to return to Spain with a substantial fortune, which provoked a series of litigations in both civil and ecclesiastical courts.[17] Sir Robert Dudley was undoubtedly one of England's most notorious chameleons: himself the illegitimate son of a bigamous marriage of the Earl of Leicester, he abandoned a wife and five children and ran off to France with his first cousin (who disguised herself as a page). Declaring himself a Catholic, Dudley received papal dispensation to marry his cousin despite having a legal spouse in England.[18] Louis de la Pivardière, a French nobleman, returned from the wars not to his legal wife and aristocratic life but rather to a marriage with an innkeeper's daughter in a remote village – thus making it not only an affair of bigamy but also a strange case of a man taking on a new identity beneath his station. This

story later evolved into a dramatic murder investigation and a suspicion that the real (bigamist) Louis de la Pivardière was impersonated by a stranger to cover up a murder, and the whole affair became a *cause célèbre* in late seventeenth-century France.[19]

These are but three sensational cases of bigamy which attracted the attention of historians, but many more cases of pretended celibacy – together with other transgressions of marriage laws – reached the courts.[20] Nevertheless, apart from the banns, the announcement in the parish church of an impending marriage and (in cases when the couple did not wish to wait for the length of time prescribed by the banns) a special marriage licence issued by a bishop, no attempt was made during the early modern period to prevent transgressions by means of certificates containing the information about a person's marital status. Here I would hazard a speculation: not only were family relations an ecclesiastical issue, they were also a private concern, which might have repercussions for a person's salvation but which did not affect much the world of politics, trade and public order. Therefore, secular authorities were not in a hurry to issue personal certificates of birth, marriage and death, nor to supply information on marital status in passports or other documents; these would have to wait until well into the nineteenth century. In other words, false bachelors (or false spinsters) were not a high-priority concern for authorities battling against forged identities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

On the other hand, as we saw in the discussion of purity of blood (Chapter 6), another aspect of family relations did become an important social question in certain European communities: the right lineage. A ledger listing the members of the Venetian patriciate was drawn up in 1414; a century later the Council of Ten instituted the *Libri d'Oro* in which all legitimate noble births were to be recorded.[21] The requirement to provide proofs of untainted genealogy in Spain bred registers kept by Inquisition tribunals and other magistracies.[22] But aristocrats in places such as Venice or France who wished to prove descent from old noble families, and Iberians wanting to demonstrate descent from Old Christians, obtained documents attesting to their lineage by means fair or foul.

Travel

It was upon exiting the family and the "face-to-face" society, however, that means of identification became increasingly required. The roads of early modern Europe were bustling with people. Despite the hazards, deficient and uncomfortable means of transportation and the very lengthy duration of any journey, a surprisingly large number of people were on the move: merchants, soldiers, students, labourers in search of work, migrating families in search of a better life, couriers and envoys, missionaries, pilgrims and

religious exiles, even some tourists, not to mention the growing numbers of homeless vagrants including the small but attention-captivating companies of Gypsies. And when away from home and from the community, where familiarity and reputation left little room for manoeuvre, re-invention of identity could be a tempting option. Thus, as a result of the significant growth in geographical mobility, authorities intensified the search for reliable means of identification,[23] and particularly for *portable* identity documents since in the pre-telegraph era local registers – parish records, university matriculation records and such like – were of little use as proofs of identity in distant places.

Jane Caplan and John Torpey, in their introduction to the volume *Documenting Individual Identity*, rightly point out that the history of identification has been virtually ignored by scholars until quite recently. However, they claim that this neglected history begins only *after* the French Revolution, and hence they define Valentin Groebner's contribution to the volume, on late medieval and early modern methods, as a chapter in the "prehistory of identification".[24] Yet, as research on ancient history, particularly on Roman history, has shown, various forms of portable personal identification devices, although not necessarily written documents, had been part and parcel of government controls over their populations practically since the beginning of public administration – tokens, badges, tattoos, branding, special apparel, insignia or objects cut in half, were widely known in antiquity and in the Middle Ages. The growth in literacy and, more importantly perhaps, the availability of paper from the thirteenth century onwards, were major factors in the gradual replacement of insignia with documentation – with "papers" – a stage reached long before the French Revolution. By the sixteenth century most, if not all, people on the road were required to carry some sort of identity documents – for reasons connected neither to Renaissance individualism nor to the New Monarchies erecting elaborate state machineries, but rather to the general struggle against fraud and imposture. The quantity and the variety of this documentation in early modern Europe were such that it seems absurd to dub them the "prehistory" of the practice.

Travellers in early modern Europe carried a wide variety of permits, passes, certificates and licences – all precursors of the modern passport. Until the eighteenth century they were all issued upon request for a specific journey and were mostly written by hand (though a few types of printed forms began to appear in the seventeenth century). Some evolved from the medieval *passeport* – a permit to leave or enter a port without hindrance – issued in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to merchandise rather than to people.[25] But other types of travel permits soon appeared, answering particular needs according to time and place.

The best known pre-modern non-European travel document was the Mongol *paiza* (or *gerege*) – an inscribed metal tablet which allowed its bearer

to travel and to confiscate provisions en route. It was issued to officials as well as to important foreign merchants. Here is what Marco Polo reported:

> When the Great Khan […] had heard all about the Latins […] he made up his mind to send emissaries to the Pope, and asked the two [Polo] brothers to go on this mission with one of his barons. […] Thereupon the Great Khan had letters written in the Turkish language to send to the Pope [and he…] also gave to the brothers and his baron a tablet of gold, on which it was written that the three emissaries, wherever they went, should be given all the lodging they might need and horses and men to escort them from one land to another.[26]

From the beginning of the fourteenth century *paizas* were inscribed with the name of the bearer – apparently in response to the abuse and uncontrolled circulation of such "passports" and badges of office by unauthorized persons.

In Europe, however, travel permits became widely known only in the aftermath of the Black Death, first in Italy and then in most other countries. How stringently were licence requirements enforced? How often and where were travellers asked to produce these documents? How efficient were border controls? These questions, neglected until recently, are now discussed in several collections of articles which shed light on some of these corners of daily life in medieval and Renaissance Europe. The focus of the following discussion, however, will be on the increasing pace in the race between the efforts to control people's movements and the creative means of circumventing these measures through forgery, disguise and imposture.

Safe conducts or letters of protection were a privilege granted by a monarch or a high-ranking official to individual travellers or to leaders of small groups.[27] Some such letters are mentioned in Roman sources and in medieval chronicles and charters (most famously in the Magna Carta, in which "a safe and secure conduct" was promised to all merchants) on occasions when an important personage had to pass through or arrive at enemy territory. By the late Middle Ages these licences were heard of much more frequently, but we have no way of knowing how many of all the people on the move actually carried safe conducts or a king's licence.

The medieval Jewish diaspora, too, relied on such written letters of recommendation. Signed by a leader of the bearer's community of origin, this document (*iggeret orhit*, literally meaning a letter for the road) attested that the bearer was a decent Jew and should be aided by his brethren on his mission of collecting donations for the needy of his community or for his daughter's dowry. Following the wave of forced conversions in Spain in 1391, such missives sometimes also stated (in flowery Hebrew and with many biblical references) that the bearer had not been baptized, or – if he were – that he remained a devout Jew in his heart. With time these

documents became very formulaic and not infrequently forged, thus leading to the insistence on verification of signatures.[28]

Not many safe conducts survived in archives, and we only hear of them either when some serious mishap forced the traveller to produce the letter, or when an author of a journal or a diary described the efforts to obtain such a document. We saw how Pope Clement VII eventually granted David Reuveni letters of introduction to the King of Portugal and to Prester John. Such letters were given not only to envoys and persons of substance but to pilgrims as well. The Gypsies, we saw, carried such letters allegedly granted to their leaders by Emperor Sigismund, Pope Martin V and other rulers throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Letters issued by the authorities of the country of departure were one form of a *laissez passer*, the other could be a letter issued by the ruler of the country of destination, promising the traveller he or she would come to no harm on the way and during sojourn in a foreign land or on enemy soil. A very famous example is the safe conduct accorded to Martin Luther by Charles V, at the insistence of Frederick the Wise, when the reformer was ordered to appear before the Diet of Worms in 1521:

> Honorable, well-beloved, and pious! We and the States of the Holy Empire here assembled, having resolved to institute an inquiry touching the doctrine and the books that thou hast lately published, have issued, for thy coming hither and thy return to a place of security, our safe conduct and that of the empire, which we send thee herewith. Our sincere desire is that thou shouldst prepare immediately for this journey, in order that within the space of the twenty-one days fixed by our safe conduct, thou mayst without fail be present before us. Fear neither injustice nor violence. We will firmly abide by our aforesaid safe conduct, and expect that thou wilt comply with our summons. In so doing, thou wilt obey our earnest wishes.
>
> Given in our imperial city of Worms, this sixth day of March, in the year of our Lord 1521, and the second of our reign. Charles.
>
> By order of my Lord and Emperor, witness my hand, Albert, Cardinal of Mentz, High-chancellor. Nicholas Zwil.[29]

Luther – by then already excommunicated by the Pope – received safe-conduct letters not only from the emperor, but also from Duke George, the Elector of Saxony, and from the Landgrave of Hesse, whose territories he needed to traverse on his road from Wittenberg to Worms.

David Reuveni was given such a letter, which permitted him to enter Portugal at a time when Jews were no longer allowed to reside in that kingdom.[30] But his was not a unique case: during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a number of Jewish merchants were allowed to enter *judenfrei* Iberia to conduct their business affairs. These were the *judíos de*

permiso or *judíos de señal*, who were required by law, in addition to obtaining the special permit, to wear clothes that would immediately identify them as Jews.[31] In a similar manner, Europeans who came to trade or negotiate with Muslims in North Africa would also carry special permits from local authorities. As we shall see below, the entire Mediterranean world with all its *gens de passage* – Jews, Christians and Muslims – was one of the central hotbeds for the growth of identity documentation as well as for innumerable creative methods of subterfuge.

But with time, as Valentin Groebner points out, travel documents evolved from a privilege to an obligation.[32] At first the obligation was not universal but limited to certain groups or certain destinations, whenever and wherever the authorities had reasons to wish to control travel and migration. It became a necessity in brigand-infested areas: for example, as early as 1483 Bartolomeo Minio, Venetian governor of Nauplion (Nafpion in modern-day Greece), devised, together with the Ottoman governor of Morea, a "lettera aperta", a kind of passport-visa-letter of transit in order to prevent bandits from entering the territory.[33] An entry warrant such as this was designed to exclude undesirables; in other words, not so much to identify a person for who he was but more for who or what he was not: not a brigand, not a vagrant, not a Jew, not a carrier of disease (the equivalent of today's efforts by border controls to identify potential terrorists). When documents were unknown or unavailable, other proofs could be accepted, in Europe as in other parts of the world: Leo Africanus related how, when still travelling In Africa as al-Wazzan, he failed to have adequate papers on him at an Arab toll-station where Jews had to pay a special fee, so in order to prove his religious identity he recited Muslim prayers[34] – a method reminiscent of the one which had been used as proof of entitlement to benefit of clergy until illiterate impostors learnt to recite the *Miserere*.

One of the better-known early modern travel documents was the one issued, at the end of the most complicated bureaucratic process, to Spaniards who asked to travel or to migrate to the colonies. These papers were, in fact, a combination of passport, residence permit and work permit for a specified territory in Spanish America. The applicant had to prove he did not belong to any of the groups barred (since 1501) from emigration to the New World – Moors, heretics, *conversos* and even *reconcilados* whose sins had been forgiven by the Church. The list of *prohibidos* became longer with time, as foreigners, Berbers, Gypsies, slaves and their descendants, prostitutes, sodomites, coin forgers and smugglers were also declared undesirables by the Spanish monarchs in their attempt to create a perfect and unblemished society in New Spain. Thus licences to cross the ocean were issued regularly since 1539, first by the *Casa de Contratación* and later by the Council of the Indies (*Real y Supremo Consejo de Indias*). They specified the applicant's age, marital status, profession, place of origin and place of residence at the time of application, descent from *Cristianos viejos*, as well as the number and identity

of dependents travelling with the applicant. A detailed physical description of the bearer and his companions stressed deformities and scars. Obviously, the larger the population barred from travel, the more complex the process; and the more numerous the required proofs of eligibility, the more sophisticated became the inventions of circumventing the barriers: forgeries, bribing ship captains, embarking as a stowaway, usurping the identity of a permit bearer, masquerading as a soldier or a sailor and more.[35] Apparently it was not too difficult to enlarge the holes in the sieve: Inquisition and criminal court records in the Indies provide ample proof that the vision of an ideal society of unblemished settlers never materialized.

Border controls became stricter during the sixteenth century in most European countries, including England, where certain groups were decreed unwelcome: Gypsies and other "vermin" spilling over from the Continent,[36] and most significant perhaps, Jesuits or other Catholics perceived as seditious. Again, there is enough evidence to show that whoever so desired could easily enter the island by means of disguise or forged papers, or by landing on unguarded shores. In Jesuit martyrology one may find abundant information on the various routes by which this infiltration was achieved.

English travellers were also required to obtain "exit visas" when travelling abroad. John Bennett, James I's envoy to Rome, for example, was accorded such a pass, dated 12 September 1621, from the Secretary of State, stating that "this bearer John Bennett, gentleman, is upon spetiall occasion concerning his Majesties service to make his repaire into forraigne partes".[37] Where such documents survive, they offer a glimpse into otherwise little-documented corners of life, as for example slave-owning Jews residing in seventeenth-century England: on 29 September 1692 travel passes to the West Indies were issued to "Joshua Salvador, Isaac Pachecho, Abraham Excixa, and two negroes".[38]

During the upheavals of the Civil War and its aftermath, when many persons who were pronounced "malignant" fled across the channel, regulations became even stricter. An unusually frank and detailed description of overcoming the obstacles was left to posterity by Lady Fanshawe, whose Royalist husband summoned her to join him in France:

> At Wallingford House, the Office was kept where they gave passes: thither I went in as plain a way and speech as I could devise, leaving my maid at the gate, who was much a finer gentlewoman than myself.
>
> With as ill mien and tone as I could express, I told a fellow I found in the Office that I desired a pass for Paris, to go to my husband. "Woman, what is your husband, and your name?" "Sir," said I, with many courtesies, "he is a young merchant, and my name is Ann Harrison." "Well," said he, "it will cost you a crown:" – said I, "That is a great sum for me, but pray put in a man, my maid, and three children." All which he immediately did, telling me a malignant would give him five pounds for such a pass.

> I thanked him kindly, and so went immediately to my lodgings; and with my pen I made the great H of Harrison, two ff, and the rrs, an n, and the i, an s, and the s, an h, and the o, an a, and the n, a w, so completely, that none could find out the change. With all speed I hired a barge, and that night at six o'clock I went to Gravesend, and from thence by coach to Dover, where, upon my arrival, the searchers came and demanded my pass, which they were to keep for their discharge. When they had read it, they said, "Madam, you may go when you please;" but says one, "I little thought they would give a pass to so great a malignant, especially in so troublesome a time as this."[39]

The diarist John Evelyn (who, incidentally, was Richard Fanshawe's cousin) relates problems he encountered both in England and abroad with guards and soldiers demanding to see valid passes. Evelyn admitted that he evaded guards, counterfeited a pass and offered bribes, since "at Dover Mony to the Searcher and officers was as authentique as the hand and Seale of Bradshaw himselfe".[40]

In a manner similar to practices in modern authoritarian states such as the Soviet Union, people on the move in many parts of early modern Europe needed to carry an "internal passport" of one kind or another. Only members of the aristocracy or men who were able to boast the liveries of a noble household were exempt, their apparel serving as an alternative to papers.

In an effort to stem the tide of vagrant paupers and of able-bodied persons posing as "deserving" of charity, authorities experimented with various means of control. In Elizabethan England, writes Steve Hindle, during the two centuries between 1550 and 1750, "four such technologies – the granting of licences to beggars; the issuing of passports to vagrants; the collection of settlement certificates by parish officers; and the insistence that even the deserving poor wear badges – were developed and applied".[41] Begging licences allowed the pauper to ask for handouts within the parish. The document identified the bearer and explained why he or she was destitute enough to be given permission to beg. Usually engrossed on parchment, many such documents survived in local archives. And, because the licence was limited to a specific area, the beggar was usually known to the parishioners – thus forgery of these particular licences was rare. Passports, on the other hand, given to vagrants who were ordered to return to their own parish, allowing them to travel for a limited time, were probably the documents most often counterfeited.

"The passport", wrote Frank Aydelotte, "was as much a part of the ordinary beggar's equipment as ragged clothing or a dog".[42] Such internal travel permits, however, were required not only of vagabonds but of anyone who no longer had a reason to be away from his or her regular place of residence. In England in 1589, after hundreds of seamen and soldiers were dismissed from the Drake and Norris expedition against Portugal, a proclamation required all mariners, soldiers and masterless men to procure

passports to their homes within two days – or face execution. A similar set of laws was passed by Parliament in 1597.[43]

Historians today, even those who criticize the representation of a rogue underworld, agree that the elites' anxieties about the scale of forgery were not unfounded. English archives contain sufficient recorded evidence which shows that a trade in counterfeit passports was flourishing.[44] In 1596 Edward Hext, a justice in Somerset, sent to the Privy Council a forged passport of a man who tried to claim for himself an inheritance of land.[45] Paul Slack mentions a Salisbury vagrant who had a certificate made "by a stranger under a hedgge"; another who paid 3s. for such a paper in London, while the price in Dorset was 2s. Even more useful were forged certificates attesting to losses by fire, or travel permits for maimed soldiers: two rogues, claiming to have been wounded in Ostend, were given money by a string of county treasurers in 1602 before they admitted that their passports had been forged by a man in Shoreditch.[46] And the efforts to localize the problems created by the masses of homeless and destitute were not limited to England. Henry Kamen writes that in Spain

> under Philip II this method of control was centred on the parish: the parish priest alone issued begging licences, each parish created officials to superintend the poor, and an attempt was made to register all vagrants. The licence system failed completely, partly because it was so easy to counterfeit licences. […] By mid century, then, the licence system was being discarded.[47]

The statement that the system was rejected by the 1550s seems inaccurate, as we have evidence from several parts of Western Europe of begging licences and travel permits being issued well into in the seventeenth century. However it is true that, on the whole, this type of licensing was very much a sixteenth-century phenomenon. Identification discs for the poor appeared a bit earlier and disappeared a little later than the licences. But eventually the entire system was discarded not because the problems of vagrancy and poverty had been solved, but because it was a policy most difficult to implement with any degree of success.

A system which endured much longer was parish registration, not only of baptisms, marriages and burials, but also of documents issued locally and of migrants who passed through the town: "some constables, when certifying justices of the number and names of the vagrants they had punished, chose to add pen portraits which emphasised the distinguishing features of itinerants whose assertion of identity they patently did not believe".[48] In addition, special tribunals dealt with problems caused by "travellers". Since fairs and markets had always been places where strangers met, often under a cloud of suspicion of shady dealings, town and state governors found it necessary to establish special courts at the fairs – courts for persons with "dusty feet", *pieds pudrés*, which became "court of piepowder" in English – dispensing swift justice and dealing, among other things, with trading licences and forged documents.

Ships and Captives

In the Mediterranean, then a theatre of war between Europeans and Maghreb corsairs in which a unique "ransom economy" was in operation, the need for means of identification was particularly acute. Both sides needed to identify ships by means other than flags, as there was nothing simpler than flying a misleading banner; cargo and passengers also had to be identified. In a treaty signed in 1662 by England and Algiers, a system of passes was agreed upon: the document was to be engraved on parchment and decorated with an image of a ship or of sea gods; scalloped indentures were made in the engraved images; the top portion of the document was sent to Algiers where the authorities were instructed to allow a ship that produced the lower half of the pass to travel without hindrance (a sophisticated improvement on the cut-in-half objects which had been serving merchants since ancient times). But caution needed to be practised even with such elaborate documents, warned the English factor in Tunis in a letter to King Charles II in 1680, for if too many blank forms of these passes were prepared and signed in advance, they were soon abused by dishonest traders.[49]

In addition to portable documents, the efforts to free captives and to ensure that ransom was paid only for the right person and not for an impostor led to the creation of special registers in which exact details and descriptions of the captives were provided. The inquisitions, as Bartolomé and Lucile Bennassar have shown, adopted similar methods of identification when examining returning "renegades".[50] It is becoming increasingly clear, thanks to the burgeoning research on the subject, that this particular arena, where traditional methods of recognition were no longer sufficient or reliable, was a central field for the growth of means of identification and of the careful observation of individual features.[51] Detailed descriptions of the captives' physical appearance were collected from their relatives by the various confraternities and religious orders of redemption, such as the Trinitarian and the Mercedarian in Spain, charged with liberating enslaved prisoners from the Ottoman Maghreb.[52] In England it was the Corporation of the Trinity House, established by Henry VIII to help sailors, travellers and explorers, which collected information about the captives and issued certificates to "collectors" to raise the money needed to free them. Hundreds of such certificates were issued during the sixteenth century.

"Given the geographical breadth of the ransom enterprise", writes Nabil Matar, "corruption and fraud were inevitable".[53] William Lithgow, for example, when reporting on his travels around the Mediterranean in the second decade of the seventeenth century, attributed such deceits to the Greeks: "vagabonding Greeks and their counterfeit Testimonials […] as these lying rascals report unto you, concerning their Fathers, their Wives, and Children taken Captives by the Turke: O damnable invention!"[54] Well aware of the fact that so much deceit and forgery were involved, including tall tales told by released captives, governors supplied certain returnees with testimonials confirming the veracity

of their stories and asking that they be treated charitably. John Fox, for example, who escaped from slavery in Alexandria in 1577 with 258 (or 266) other captives, received such letters of authentication from the prior of a convent in Gallipoli, from bishops in Rome and from the King of Spain.[55]

Preventing Contamination

Residence permits, the equivalent of our modern-day visas, were required of foreigners who wished not only to enter a state for a short duration but to stay there. These documents included information on where the bearer was permitted to reside and what were his or her rights compared to those of local citizens. The Italian states, for example, had been granting *condotte*, resident permits, to immigrating Jews since the thirteenth century;[56] in the sixteenth and seventeenth century some of the permits included an exemption from the obligation to reside in the ghettoes. The travel permits issued by the Council of the Indies mentioned above also specified in what part of the colonies the bearer and his family were allowed to reside.

The magistrates' concern was with the possible harm that new arrivals might cause to the community. Renaissance Italy witnessed the earliest attempts to screen out carriers of disease, indigents who might become an economic burden on the community, criminals, and persons who could lead to social, political or religious unrest. It was shortly after the first great outburst of the plague in the mid-fourteenth century that the Italian city-states introduced documentary proof of health and restrictions on immigration and residence. Other European cities and states gradually followed suit, with various degrees of success.

While state borders were relatively porous, walled cities could control the movement of people in and out of town more easily. Maria Boes writes,

> All travellers wishing to enter a town had to pass through gates, for Frankfurt [am Main], like most other German towns, was encircled by walls and only accessible via supervised entrances. These urban checkpoints were locked at night and unlocked in the morning. […] Gates were thus of the utmost importance. And they gained in significance during the latter part of the fifteenth century, when Frankfurt, and other towns for that matter, increasingly used them not so much to admit, but to prevent people from coming to town.[57]

She explains how towns like Frankfurt from the late fifteenth century onwards ousted groups of people who were regarded as undesirables – Jews, Gypsies, prostitutes and the "undeserving" poor. Frankfurt, however, introduced passports only towards the end of the seventeenth century, and then "individual, written attestations were to replace general visual dress symbols". Documents, Boes believes, put an end to the "cat-and-mouse

game" between city authorities and those "undesirables" who succeeded in circumventing controls based on identifiers other than "papers".[58]

A health certificate was a document indicating that the bearer arrived from an area which had not been infected by the plague in previous months. The confrontation with epidemics, combined with the impotence of the medical profession, was undoubtedly a major cause of the increase in all manner of administrative measures and the growth of bureaucracy in states and towns across Europe – beginning, as all innovations in administration, in the Italian city-states. Carlo Cipolla devoted several of his works to the Italian system of health administration instituted during the Renaissance and in his books he published some photocopies of health certificates.[59] Measures similar to the Italian system were later adopted by German towns and a few other places (though evidence for such controls outside Italy is rather scant). As with all laws and statutes, it is difficult to know how strictly health certificates were enforced; and, as all regulations, it appears that they were imposed more often on the indigent than on the rich and aristocratic – the assumption being that vagabonds and other unfortunates were more likely to be infected by disease.

Poverty and vagrancy in themselves were regarded as a form of disease, a type of "epidemic" which the authorities were trying to contain by administrative measures. Vagabonds, masterless men, Gypsies and poor people in general were suspected not only of carrying disease but also of spreading every manner of sin and crime, in addition to leading a parasitic existence at the expense of local public funds. The desperate measures adopted by governments throughout Europe to control the vagrant population were discussed above (Chapters 4 and 5). In the context of the development of identity documents, however, it is important to emphasize that it was those undesirable poverty-stricken wanderers who were the main cause of the introduction of compulsory possession of identification papers. The documents demanded of the indigent were in fact a combination of travel licence and proof of profession – in this case, the profession of a legitimate beggar, a "deserving poor". The list of reasons and conditions justifying begging or collecting alms was extremely long: mendicant friars in Catholic lands, soldiers released from service, poor students, victims of fire or ship loss, relatives of captives or representatives of organizations collecting money for ransom, residents of mental hospitals such as Bedlam, neophytes, widows, orphans and all those who were too old, too young or too ill to work – we have met all of them and the industry of forgery and deceit surrounding them in the discussion above of the anxiety about an underworld of rogues.

Diplomas

But what of other, more exalted occupations? How was one to prove a university degree or other professional qualifications? It was easy enough if one stayed in the same town where the necessary training was received – then

the university register could be checked, the guild consulted, reputation verified. But what documents did one show when attempting to practise a calling elsewhere? What if a professional wanted to enjoy the privileges of peers in a town where his reputation was unknown? The system of documented credentials was still very much in its infancy and still far from uniform.

The Muslim world had a long tradition whereby the teacher – of law, of theology or of medicine – conferred a personal diploma on the student who had completed a course of studies in a particular field. This certificate, *ijazah*, specified the texts the scholar had studied, authorized him to teach them to others and (in some instances) to practise the methods he had learnt. From among the men we met in this study so far, it was probably only al-Wazan (Leo Africanus) who would have been travelling with such a certificate received from his law professor.[60] Whether the bachelor degree conferred by European universities was an imitation of the Islamic *ijazah* system or not remains in dispute.[61] In any case, written certification of learning or training was to appear in Europe several centuries later than in Muslim countries. University graduates who successfully passed their examinations were known by various insignia and academic dress; we hear only occasionally of written diplomas before the fifteenth century. Well into modern times it was the ceremony, rather than any piece of parchment or paper, which conferred the degree in most European guilds and universities.

Matriculation records of many European universities are extant from the fourteenth century onwards, but these do not provide accurate information regarding the number and the identity of their graduates. Most men who began their studies in one institution either never completed them or took their final examinations elsewhere. Thus credentials were difficult to check and posing as a Bachelor, Licentiate, Master or Doctor would not have been too difficult a ruse, so long as one had a smattering of Latin. It would have been perhaps harder to impersonate a master of a craft as that would require demonstration of real skills.

The fear that a person was a fake scholar and a bogus expert in his field was particularly acute in regards to medicine. The Black Death, a cause of so many administrative developments, also led to attempts at stricter control over the medical profession and a closer scrutiny of all healers. In Valencia, for example, as we are told by historians, "the upheaval produced by the plague of 1348 set in motion a broadening of medical supervision to include all the health occupations".[62] A large number of extant documents indicate that, particularly from the fourteenth century onwards, in several regions in Iberia as well as in some Italian territories, all healers – including women and non-Christians – were required to be examined by a board of physicians in order to obtain a *licentia practicandi*. The sources also indicate that many failed the examination but went on practising nonetheless.[63] In 1353 and 1391 laws in Florence were amended to prevent the influx of

"idiots and mechanicals" into the physicians' guild, since they posed a real health threat, as "patients treated by such pretenders are harmed and injured"; physicians and some surgeons were required from then on to have a university diploma as well as a guild permit.[64] But even in well-regulated Florence, doctors were still identified more by the insignia of their profession than by their diplomas: the doctor's long gown, clothes lined with expensive furs, a silver or gold belt-buckle, a gold ring and so on.

A college of physicians existed in Venice since the thirteenth century and in the fifteenth century it was granted permission to award degrees. A special *notarius* was in charge of preparing the certificates. Although the students studied elsewhere, mostly in Padua, they often preferred to take the examinations in Venice and to receive their degrees from the College of Physicians. Richard Palmer in his study of the Studio of Venice describes the elaborate graduation ceremony and the insignia bestowed upon a student entering the life of a practitioner and teacher. In addition he provides in an appendix the full Latin text of the certificate awarded to one, Alexander Sanguinetus (Sanguinetti) of Verona on 19 August 1566, which is to be found in the *Archivio de Stato Verona*. The diploma is a small book of seven parchment folios in tooled binding; the text is written in black and gold ink and finely decorated with, among other things, the arms of the Sanguineti family. It was clearly not designed to be framed and displayed on the wall in the doctor's surgery as is the practice today, but it was small enough to be carried and shown to authorities in other places where these Venetian degrees were recognized.[65]

An informal hierarchy of the medical profession was in place in most parts of Western Europe since the late Middle Ages: at its top were the physicians, university graduates in medicine, then came the surgeons, followed by barber-surgeons and apothecaries. Below the latter was a motley population of healers. Nevertheless, not in all places was the system rigidly maintained or strictly regulated to the same extent. Furthermore, people of all classes had a healthy suspicion in regards to the knowledge of the university-trained physician and frequently preferred to trust the skills of healers on the lower rungs of the medical hierarchy.

Jewish doctors in Europe are an interesting case in point. Apart from a handful of men, and apparently also one Jewish woman, Mona Antonia di Maestro Daniele, who studied at the university of Padua from the fifteenth century onwards (David Ruderman counted some 250 Jews who received medical diplomas from Padua between 1517 and 1721),[66] all Jewish physicians in medieval and early modern Europe acquired their medical knowledge either from books (in Hebrew, Arabic or Latin), from their fathers, or – as many surviving contracts indicate – by private tuition or apprenticeship. A few, but not the majority, were examined by special boards and received licences to practise. Yet, despite the lack of university training and notwithstanding ecclesiastical disapproval, Jewish physicians

(where Jews were allowed to reside) were greatly sought after and often rose to high positions in the social hierarchy, receiving at times exemptions from wearing the Jewish hat or badge, from residing in the Jewish quarter and from other restrictions. Their reputation was considered of far greater importance than testimonials of any formal training.[67] In addition to names of those privileged Jews who were asked to teach or heal the Gentiles (such as those of Samuel Sarfati and his son Joseph, who treated popes and cardinals), we find frequent complaints about the popularity of Jewish healers among Christians. The apostate Anton Margaritha in his *Der gantz Jüdisch Glaub*, for example, warned that Jews in Germany, who were in fact ritual butchers and examiners (*shochet ubodek*), presented themselves as doctors, though they had no Latin and never read Galen and Hippocrates, yet Christians admired them and sought their services.[68]

Officially the only field of medicine which women (who, like Jews, were barred from the universities in most places until the nineteenth century) were allowed to practise was midwifery. But in fact women have always been healers – in their households or as "wise women" skilled in treating various complaints and in preparing remedies – mostly without any licence or diploma.[69] Records show that a few women had been examined in medieval Valencia and accorded a licence to practice.[70] Later, in some large urban centres, midwives were also required to obtain a licence.[71] Beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century, Parisian midwives were required to conform to regulations, to receive training (from a licensed midwife or at the Hôtel Dieu), to be examined and to obtain permission to practise. But the great majority of midwives throughout Europe were taught the arts of delivering babies and treatment of female illnesses by their mothers or neighbours and did not need any papers to prove their skills. And early modern authorities took advantage of the unique social position of the midwife for purposes which had nothing to do with medicine. Since they shared the most intimate moments of women's lives and were invited into their homes, they were also required to inform on all manner of sins and crimes committed by their patients and patients' relatives – and thus they became, *nolens volens*, members of the army of informers recruited to uncover witchcraft, fraud and dissimulation.

In certain regions of Europe, however, the policy of tolerance towards unlicensed professionals in the field of medicine was beginning to change during the fifteenth century. The institution of the Protomédico, writes David Gentilcore, established first in Aragonese territories and in southern Italy in the fourteenth century, was introduced in Castile towards the end of the fifteenth century to examine and license doctors, surgeons, pharmacists and "empirics". Charles V issued a royal privilege to the protomédico in the Kingdom of Naples in 1530. By the end of the sixteenth century no one in that kingdom was allowed to practise healing without a written permit from that office.[72] And although there was no equivalent to the centralized

Spanish and Italian institutions in other countries, the faculties of medicine, the guilds and the town councils everywhere sought to control the medical profession and to ascertain that only those who had proper training should practise the arts of healing.

A few diaries written by physicians offer us a glimpse of how the system worked. Felix Platter, for example, passed his final examination for the baccalaureate in medicine in Montpellier on 28 May 1556, and received a diploma written in Latin on parchment and bearing a large seal. A year later he would present this elegant certificate with his other diplomas from Montpellier to the professors of Basle University in order to receive a licence to practise medicine in the city.[73] On the other hand, some illustrious doctors left us in the dark about how, where and when they had completed their medical studies, if at all. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim – who, as we saw in Chapter 4, has left scholars bewildered on several scores – claimed to be a doctor of both laws (civil and canon) and of medicine. While there is no record that he had received a university degree in either subject, his official duties as city orator and *advocatus* at Metz implied legal training, and in the city's records he was referred to as a doctor of laws; while the most persuasive evidence of his medical degree was his apparently successful practice of medicine in several cities. Many medical faculties in the sixteenth century granted doctorates within a few months of matriculation, and Agrippa spent considerable time in university towns where he could have studied law or medicine. During his residence in Geneva in 1521–23, the city licensed him to practise medicine; he also became city physician for the Swiss city of Fribourg in March of 1523; when he joined the French court at Lyons (May 1524), he became a personal physician to Louise of Savoy, mother of the king; at Antwerp in 1528, he supported his family by practising medicine until he secured an appointment at the imperial court – yet one needs to remember that some of his other claims to fame were also suspect, such as the statement that he had been knighted in battle while in Italy. Michael Servetus, with his exceptional talent for getting into trouble with the censors of his time, was forced to leave the medical faculty in Paris, perhaps without obtaining a degree, but then practised for 12 years as personal physician to the Archbishop of Vienne, calling himself Doctor of Medicine Michel de Villeneuve (the name he assumed when he had fled the Spanish Inquisition).

Clearly, then, the entire population – from popes and kings down to the pregnant peasant woman – continued to employ the services of healers on the basis of their reputation rather than out of respect for their diplomas. But the sixteenth century also witnessed the beginning of a concerted attack by university-trained physicians and other scholars on "vulgar errors", on the credulity and gullibility of the masses, and on the entire world of unlicensed healers and remedy peddlers. This particular battle between learned and "popular" culture has received ample scholarly attention.[74] What

specifically concerns us here is that, in addition to economic competition and prestige struggle, the motivations for these attacks on the sellers of cures and medical "secrets" included the desire for transparency and recognizability: a genuine healer was one who had a diploma or a licence to prove it, any other was an impostor.

It was no coincidence that the word "charlatan" (possibly from the Italian *ciarlare*, to chatter) entered several European languages during the sixteenth century.[75] At first it was reserved for mountebanks, those itinerant peddlers who mounted a stage in the public square and sold remedies with promises of miraculous cures. At first it was not necessarily a derogatory term, at least not in Italy, where there was a special category of "licensed charlatans", men who were permitted to sell their concoctions in the marketplace or in special shops.[76] But there seems to have been less tolerance towards them in other countries, where – though sometimes enormously successful – they were regarded as quacks or "empirics". Gradually the word "charlatan" acquired its modern meaning of someone who pretends to knowledge and expertise he or she does not possess – in other words, an impostor. From the sixteenth century onwards warnings against charlatans in the medical field, expressed by learned men to the rulers and by the authorities to the public, were becoming abundant.[77] In 1580 André du Breil, a physician teaching at the university of Paris, warned the French king, Henri III, that "empirics" were ruining the country. He was particularly worried about those people who presented false diplomas – for in such cases it would have been all the more difficult to call their bluff.[78] It is interesting to note that on Breil's list of groups who were prone to charlatanism we find many of the sects suspected of imposture: "vagabonds, atheists, exiles, priests, monks, shoemakers, carders, drapers, weavers, masons, madames and prostitutes".[79] It was not solely a fight put up by the learned elite against popular culture, for among those accused of being charlatans were often included very erudite Paracelsians or magi such as Simon Forman, that is, all those who were not officially licensed to practise orthodox medicine.

Fears of charlatans lasted well into the eighteenth century when the scholar Ludovico Antonio Muratori would write,

> Because charlatans, medicasters and the sellers of specific and secret remedies appear and grow in number during time of plague more than in other years [...] it is necessary to remedy the disorder of such remedies by means of public and rigorous laws.[80]

The authorities were well aware that the panic and deterioration in public order in times of an epidemic created opportunities for the unscrupulous to deceive gullible people, but in the absence of effective medical solutions, they could still rely only on administrative measures: licensing, supervision,

quality control. These measures in their turn led to more ingenious methods of circumventing the bureaucracy and to an increase in the number of forgeries. In any case, the public continued to demonstrate a healthy scepticism toward university-trained physicians: to the warnings against charlatans issued by the faculties of medicine, a retort was often voiced "that the profession itself was quackery in camouflage".[81]

Expert Forgeries

As documents of identification became an almost ubiquitous requirement, an industry of counterfeiting them began to flourish. Admittedly, Europe had by then a long history of forgery: it is impossible not be astounded by the enormous amount of medieval and Renaissance false artefacts, works of art, coins, literary works, letters and all types of documents. The subject merited a six-volume publication of the proceedings of a 1986 conference, *Fälschungen im Mittlealter*, edited by Horst Fuhrman.[82] Authentication problems were just as grave as the obstacles to verifying identity, and – as with means of identification – a contest between forgers and authentication experts has been going on since antiquity to this very day.[83]

Documents, particularly those handwritten on paper, were probably quite easy to forge. Even papal bulls were not immune from fabrication, to the extent that most bulls of the early centuries of the Catholic Church are regarded nowadays as suspect. In the majority of cases fraudulent charters were created to ensure property rights or privileges of institutions such as monasteries. In the mid-fifteenth century, on the other hand, we find a papal bull forged in order to serve the interests of one individual: when Count Jean V d'Armagnac requested permission to marry his sister, and Pope Calixtus III, as could only be expected, refused to grant the dispensation, the Count bribed Antoine d'Alet, Bishop of Cambrai, to forge a bull permitting the incestuous marriage.[84]

Seals or *bullae* were the traditional proofs of authenticity for documents issued by authorities or by men of distinction. "Seals identified the senders and bound them to their words, as clearly as if their owners had appeared and spoken", writes Ann Wroe in her book on one of the (in)famous pretenders of the time, Perkin Warbeck.[85] But how could seals be authenticated? The *Catholic Encyclopedia* informs us that

> one of the principal tests of the genuineness of bulls seems to have been supplied by counting the number of points in the circular outline of the leaden seal or in the figure of St. Peter depicted on it. The *bullatores* apparently followed some definite rule in engraving their dies.[86]

Yet, rules or no rules, seals of all authorities were being forged everywhere throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.[87]

Medieval historian Giles Constable quotes a number of letter writers and addressees in late antiquity and the Middle Ages who were worried that the epistles had been falsified.[88] He explains, however, that "falsification of letters" could mean a variety of things,

> from innocent foolery and joking, which was mostly a matter of ideas and feelings, through fictional and literary letters, of which the nature was understood by most readers, to deceits and falsifications which affected property and the conduct of public affairs.[89]

In addition, political necessity dictated at times – in the absence of fast means of communication – resorting to forgery as a rapid solution to a crisis. For example, the Byzantine Emperor, while attending the Council of Florence in 1441, was offended because the Duke of Burgundy had failed to send him the same written expression of respect as the one delivered to the Pope, but was appeased by an epistle hastily prepared by the Duke's envoys – an unimaginable act in modern international negotiations.[90] Similarly, al-Wazan related how, with the approval of the sultan's captain, he had forged a letter in the name of the Sultan of Fez in order to persuade rebellious townsfolk to cease their disobedience.[91]

Constable's view of forged letters as part of the long-existing tradition of apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings sheds a different light on the Prester John letters as well as on Reuveni's attempt to forge a letter from his brother, the (imaginary) King of Havor, and the seventy elders.[92] Although the Duke of Mantua may have regarded Reuveni's clumsy efforts as scandalous, it is not impossible that Reuveni sincerely thought it was legitimate practice – which would also explain why, even after his exposure as a forger, many Jews and some non-Jews in Italy continued to regard him as a genuine prince of the Lost Tribes. Letters received from preternatural figures – Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Devil – which served as props to aspiring saints and offered as evidence in witch accusations, were sometimes also read from the pulpits and accepted as epistolary fiction, which was nonetheless somewhat genuine.

But there was no ambiguity regarding counterfeit passes, certificates, diplomas, passports and letters of safe conduct. When exposed as forgeries no one accepted them as "somewhat genuine". And since licences to beg and travel permits were the most numerous of all personal papers, the industry of fabrication was busy with these particular certificates more than with any other. Many of the forgers, it appears, came from the ranks of the rogues themselves. "Another sect there be of these, and they are called Sturdy Rogues", who walk from county to county carrying all kinds of papers, but "all these writings are but counterfeit, they having amongst them (of their own rank), that can write and read, who are their secretaries in this business", were the words of Thomas Dekker.[93] In the categories of rascals listed

by Teseo Pini in his *Speculum cerretanorum* (written between 1481 and 1486) the *bianti* or *pitocchi* were beggars who specialized in forging ecclesiastical documents.[94] In England full-time forgers of passes, licences and certificates for beggars were known as jarkmen.[95] One cannot but wonder wherefrom did all those literate counterfeiters emerge and how they had acquired elegant calligraphy and enough Latin or familiarity with official vernacular style in order to produce documents that could fool at least some of the people some of the time. If one accepts rogue literature as a reliable reflection of reality, it would seem that there were no limits to forgers providing the needs of the vagrant masses. Gāmini Salgādo, in addition to quoting from the works of Thomas Dekker, John Awdley, Robert Greene and Thomas Harman, cites a missive of the Privy Council to London aldermen in 1569, instructing them on how to make the licences foolproof: to give full details of the bearer, of the route he is to take and of the terms of validity, and in addition to ascertain that

> the passports would be so discreetly sealed, subscribed and written as they should not easily counterfeit the same, which, as it is reported, some of them can readily do, and do carry about with them certain counterfeit seals of corporate towns, and such like to serve their purposes in that behalf.[96]

Such guidelines, if they were indeed observed, did not stem the tide of passport forgeries. We hear of one, Arthur More, who appeared before the Justices in Essex in 1590 charged with carrying a forged licence of a former soldier; the forgers named were John Crofts, himself a former soldier, and Kit Miller who had made the seal. Thomas Elm, a crippled tailor from Dedham, charged twopence for a forged passport, but he was eventually caught, convicted and locked for two days in the village cage, wearing a paper around his head with the inscription "For counterfeiting of passports".[97] Robert Vaughan confessed in 1580 that he had purchased his passport for fourpence from one David Jones at Great Dunmow (Essex). The master-forger of passports in Elizabethan Essex was Davy Bennett: it was reported in 1581 that he could counterfeit any magistrate's seal.[98]

The pamphleteers described, among other forms of "cozening" in Elizabethan England, a thriving trade in forged Bedlam licences. Thomas Dekker even gave account on how sham lunatics "branded" themselves with marks of the Bedlam asylum (but then, Dekker was also the author who claimed that all those calling themselves Gypsies were in fact regular beggars with painted faces).[99]

9
Conclusion: Reserving Judgement

> Test the pretenders, don't believe them all,
> Don't believe me either, be nobody's thrall,
> Believe in God, and you will know.
> I don't believe everything people profess –
> This makes me such a bothersome pest:
> They wish to hear yes, but I say no.[1]

Bewildered by the proliferation of religious beliefs and horrified by the fanaticism which accompanied religious wars and persecutions, Dirck Coornhert, a most radical proponent of toleration, was voicing the religious scepticism which was increasingly heard from sixteenth-century intellectuals. Since people were incapable of reaching absolute truth, anyone who attempted to dictate another's creed was *ipso facto* an impostor, pretending to knowledge he or she did not possess. Do not persecute the other, Coornhert warned, for only God knows if you are right and the other wrong; avoid judgement and let a thousand flowers bloom, was what the Dutch philosopher implied – thus advocating an ideology of toleration based on the belief in the positive value of pluralism and freedom of conscience rather than on temporary political necessity.

Scepticism and doubt were also creeping into spheres other than religious faith. "Testing the pretenders" was becoming a major preoccupation of early modern elites and authorities throughout Europe. Michel de Montaigne, often presented as exceptional among his contemporaries, was not alone in asking himself, *Que sais-je*?, although he undoubtedly provided the best-articulated aphorisms on the need to suspend judgement. "That it is folly to measure truth and error by our own capacity" is the title of one of his *Essays*, and "On the uncertainty of our judgement" of another.[2] We met Montaigne several times on our tour of the battlefield between impostors and identifiers: after attending one court session in the trial of Arno du Tilh, Martin Guerre's *Doppelgänger*, he expressed misgivings concerning the ability to be certain of a person's identity beyond a shadow

of a doubt; he was a severe critic of the witch trials and ridiculed reports of miracles; he was ironic about the Europeans' identification of the civilized male – the apex of human hierarchy in their view – by the breeches he wore; he was scathing about the codpiece as proof of virility; and when it came to sumptuary legislation, while not dismissing the idea of identifying social rank by costume, he suggested turning the customary table of signs on its head.

Montaigne was very much aware that pretence and imposture were all around him: "Dissimulation is among the most notable qualities of this century", he wrote in his essay "Of giving the Lie".[3] Yet, he continued, if simple folk were more gullible and hence easily duped by tall tales because of their "simplicity and ignorance", it did not follow that the learned condescension towards popular beliefs was always justified. "We should at least preserve an open mind", he wrote. And indeed suspending judgement seems to have been the rule of thumb followed by early modern authorities in many cases of suspected imposture.

Chronicles, diaries, pamphlets, legislation and court records of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries all reveal the feeling of contemporaries that Europe had never known so much "imposture" (the term itself, then fairly new and with a meaning still rather vague, appearing with increasing frequency in contemporary sources). Yet the very existence of such acute awareness of deception in general and of fraudulent identity in particular was, in fact, an indication of *non-gullibility*. Proof was demanded then as much as it would be in modern society, although of course what constitutes proof has changed over time.[4] Antony Grafton believes it is unjustified to conclude that "early periods did not share our notion of truth and authority".[5] People in early modern Europe, I would agree, knew the difference between truth and falsity; however, the line of demarcation between the two was drawn by our forefathers in a somewhat different place than where it is drawn today. And while they, like us, recognized authority in support of "facts", some of their authorities were different than our own.

Medieval authors, such as Gervase of Tilbury at the turn of the twelfth century, already expressed scepticism about some marvels reported by travellers, but they accepted those supported by the authority of Pliny or Aristotle; and they literally put their faith in the miraculous.[6] By the sixteenth century voices were already heard doubting some classical and theological authorities, and there was little respect left for tall tales: Thomas More poked fun at "stale travellers' wonders" (before beginning, in typical ironic fashion, his own report about a marvellous imaginary land). A century later, Fynes Moryson complained that impostors tarnished the reputation of genuine travellers;[7] and in 1631 Richard Braithwaite pronounced in *The English Gentleman* that "travellers, poets and liars are three words of one significance".[8] Nevertheless, it was still difficult to separate

the factual from the fictional, and even a geographer as knowledgeable and shrewd as Giovanni Battista Ramusio could not decide whether or not David Reuveni was a liar.

Renaissance humanists gradually developed sharp philological tools to expose as forgeries texts purported to be of ancient provenance: in 1360, 80 years before Lorenzo Valla's *De falso credita et ementita Constantini Donatione declamatio*, Petrarch wrote to Boccaccio that the alleged letters of Caesar and Nero could fool perhaps "a credulous old woman or hillbilly, but certainly not an intelligent man".[9] But sophisticated Latin philology was of little use to magistrates and constables who tried to determine if a beggar's passport was genuine or forged.

It thus appears safe to say that attitudes towards dissimulation, identity theft, forgery and pretence during the Renaissance were characterized neither by simplicity nor by credulity but rather by anxiety and frustration. In their introduction to the collection of essays *Fear in Early Modern Society*, William Naphy and Penny Roberts reiterate Jean Delumeau's argument: "Historians have broadly accepted that the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries witnessed a 'climate of fear' or 'unease' [...] that the population of Europe at the time experienced unprecedented levels of anxiety and pessimism."[10] Their conclusion accords well with Stuart Clark's emphasis on the deep anxiety caused by the unreliability of perception. The awareness that so many people were lying about who they were only served to deepen these worries – worries which could turn into a veritable panic attack with the realization that extant means of identification were useless.

Consequently, when a suspected impostor was not likely to cause too much damage, authorities throughout Europe preferred to err on the side of caution: no matter how far-fetched their stories, false ambassadors, as we saw, were treated with a measure of respect and were hardly ever dismissed out of hand. At times it appeared that the rulers were saying about the tale of such a fantasist: *se non è vero, è ben trovato*, for who knows? Not only may there be a grain of truth to his account, it may be of some use to us even if totally spurious.

No such relaxed attitude met individuals or groups who were regarded as dangerous to the community. And in this matter, too, the criteria for deciding what was harmful according to early modern European thinkers were distinctly different from our own. Religious dissimulation, for example, was believed to constitute the most serious of threats: men and women who professed one faith but secretly practised another were the hidden enemies par excellence – at least as dangerous to society as Communists were thought to be in mid-twentieth-century America. Not to mention those women and men who pretended to be innocent neighbours while serving in the devil's army, causing havoc at every opportunity. And the masses of paupers and vagabonds, forging entitlement to charity, were not only too heavy a burden on the community's resources, but were also suspected of forming

a criminal counter-society or of spying and aiding Christendom's worse enemies. Lastly, social upstarts dressing up as their betters were a threat to a divinely ordained social order. These were all typical early modern fears, and the response was a frantic quest for rigorous tests to uncover true identities and for forgery-proof means of identification.

The tests and methods developed in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, like the types of imposture itself, were partly peculiar to that period and partly universal and perennial. Branding and mutilating offenders, looking for stigmata or the devil's marks, badges and yellow scarves for undesirables, confessions obtained under inquisitorial torture, colour, shape or material of dress as social identifiers – were all techniques invented at the time or borrowed from past societies and adapted to the needs of early modern civilization. Most of them would disappear with the fall of the *ancien régime* (although some would re-emerge when modern political powers declared – as philosopher Carl Schmitt pointed out – "states of emergency", which would allow for exceptional measures such as torture or tattooing numbers on the arms of "enemies"). At the same time, however, authorities across Europe, both ecclesiastical and secular, were also experimenting with novel methods which are still very much with us today: compulsory registration and portable identification documents.

Nonetheless, in matters pertaining to false identities and identification there is clearly a wide gap separating early modern from modern Western society. The impostors who populated the landscape then – among them Nicodemites, witches and bogus ambassadors – have practically disappeared from view in our times. Advances in science and technology have produced by now far more reliable devices for identification and for detecting forgeries. Most significantly, the attributes which together constitute a person's identity have undergone considerable changes. Yet the past is not such a foreign country after all. Our landscape is still filled with "hidden enemies" of many stripes – some real, some imaginary – and our governments are still responding by frantically introducing ever-new methods of surveillance and control (which encroach on civil liberties and hence spark lively debates): proposals to introduce national identification-card systems in Britain and the United States, biometric databases, "Big Brother" CCTV systems and similar means of monitoring each and every person's movements. Modern technological and administrative sophistication, however, hardly warrants attributing credulity and ignorance to men and women of former times. Would it not be best to heed Montaigne's advice about reserving judgement and keeping an open mind – not only in regards to unverifiable claims but also when studying the mentalities of the past?

Notes

1 Introducing an Age of Impostors

1. Davis (1997a).
2. Pappano (1937).
3. Chatterjee (2002).
4. Bercé (1990) and Lecuppre (2005). On claimants to the Ottoman throne, see Le Thiec (1996). For one of the Sebastian impersonators in Portugal, see Brooks (1964), and for another, Olsen (2003). For royal pretenders in seventeenth-century India and Iran, see Flores and Subrahmanyam (2004).
5. Fingerprinting, of course, is not a recent invention but approximately 150 years old. See Sengoopta (2003).
6. Behringer (2006).
7. Delumeau (1978).
8. For a recent study of the verification of the identity of witches in England, see Alyagon Darr (2011).
9. See, for example, Sharpe (2000).
10. Clark (2009) provides the most comprehensive survey and analysis of the obsession regarding the gulf separating appearance from reality.
11. Hazard (1953).
12. Zagorin (1990 and 1996).
13. On the comparison made by early modern authors between the dangers posed by Jewish messianic movements and those presented by "enthusiasts", see Heyd (2004); on responses to Jewish messianism in German lands see Carlebach (2001b).
14. Hotchkiss (1996), p. 10.
15. Van Elk (2004).
16. See below in Chapter 2.
17. Greenblatt (1980).
18. Villari (1987); Johnson (2011), pp. 88–93.
19. Snyder (2009), p. 19.
20. Bok (1978 and 1982).
21. Delumeau (1990), p. 257.
22. Keevak (2004).
23. Sinclair (2003).
24. Bossy (2001).
25. Rowland (2004).
26. Grafton (1990).
27. Exceptional in this respect is Hiatt (2004). But his book is concerned mostly with the production of institutional histories – such as those of monasteries and colleges – and not with private documents.
28. Quoted in Weissman (1989), p. 272.
29. Kahn (1967).

2 Religious Dissimulation

1. Delumeau (1978).
2. Zagorin (1990). The last paragraph of this book reads, "The sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries have long been known primarily as the Age of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The results of our inquiries here indicate that we might add to this designation a further title and name this era the Age of Dissimulation" (p. 330). My chapter here is, in some respects, an elaboration of Zagorin's argument, although – as will be clarified below – my emphasis is on imposture rather than on lying.
3. Zagorin (1990), p. 14.
4. Tutino (2006) argues that the dissimulation of the Jesuits was "offensive" and thus of a different category than the Nicodemism practised by Protestants in Catholic countries.
5. Nalle (2001), p. 63.
6. Peters (1974); on the instructions for the careful unmasking of witches, see articles by Tedeschi in the volume of his collected articles (1991), and Martin (2004), pp. 28–9. A comprehensive study of these directories is to be found in Errera (2000).
7. Although it might be perceived as an anachronism and an exaggeration, a comparison between the fear of imposture in early modern Europe to the terrorist scare in the West following September 11 2001 seems to suggest itself. The two types of publications, manuals for inquisitors and edicts of faith, could then be compared to different types of modern warnings about terrorist attacks: on the one hand instruction booklets on detonation of bombs or on interrogating suspects, studied by professional security squads; on the other hand, leaflets or television broadcasts – issued in countries such as my own – on how to identify and report "suspicious objects" (see also in Chapter 4).
8. Lea (1922), 2:91.
9. Lea (1922), 2:101.
10. For criticisms of Lea's views see, for example, Kamen (1987) and articles in Alcalá (1987).
11. B. Bennassar (1987). See also Lunenfeld (2000).
12. For documents pertaining to the Spanish Inquisition see the Harley L. McDevitt Collection on the Spanish Inquisition at the University of Notre Dame Library, which can be accessed online. See also Villa Calleja (1987).
13. The full text in Spanish appeared in 1980 in a collection of documents for the study of the Spanish Inquisition: Monteserin (1980), pp. 503–37; Gitlitz included the section on the followers of the "Law of Moses" in English translation as an appendix to his book (1996), pp. 625–8 (Salomon, reviewing Gitlitz's book, pointed out that the Cuenca Edict of Faith was but "the umpteenth revised edition" of a text that had been appended to Tomás de Torquemada's *Instrucciones* of 1484 [1998, p. 136]).
14. Lea (1922), 2:93 and in the documents to vol. 2, pp. 587–90.
15. Quoted in Root (1988), p. 127.
16. Netanyahu (1966), p. 3: "it was not a powerful Marrano movement that provoked the establishment of the Inquisition, but it was the establishment of the Inquisition that caused the temporary resurgence of the Spanish Marrano movement".

17. For example, both the father and brother of Antonio Enríquez Gómez, whose return to Spain is discussed below, were tried for *inhabilidad* and for wearing expensive clothes not permitted to family members of a condemned Judaizer.
18. Spain's first printed index of prohibited books was issued in 1551.
19. On the significance of protecting society from dangerous notions, see Hillerbrand (2006), pp. 593–614.
20. See for example Salomon's criticism of Gitlitz's book, referred to above in n. 13.
21. Amos 5:14.
22. Maneck (1996).
23. Jewish martyrology and the glorification of death to avoid apostasy have a very long history. An interesting hypothesis about the origins of the Ashkenazi phenomenon of entire families sacrificing themselves for "the sanctification of God's name" is offered by Yuval (2006), ch. 4.
24. See, for example, in the file on the trial of Francisco Dies Mendes Brito, in Beinart (1974–85), leg. 142, exp. 6, fol. 22r.
25. Yerushalmi (1971), pp. 38–9 n. 56.
26. *Devar Shemu'el (Responsa)*, Venice, 1720, quoted in Kaplan (1989), p. 333.
27. Kaplan (1989), pp. 213, 343; Yerushalmi (1971), pp. 303–9.
28. St Augustine, *City of God*, Book VIII, ch. 46.
29. Hess (1968), p. 5.
30. Hess (1968), p. 25.
31. Wiegers (2006), pp. 498–518.
32. These frustrations are best exemplified by the Archbishop of Valencia Juan de Ribera's change of heart. See Ehlers (2006).
33. Written by Mohammad ben Mohammad aben Daud, the chief agitator in the movements which led to the rising. Quoted in Lea (1968), pp. 434–7.
34. Cervantes Saavedra (1999), chs 54 and 63 in book 2.
35. Wiegers (2006), p. 20.
36. "Sebastian de Alcaráz, *Morisco*, pig-keeper, resident of Granada. A book written in Arabic with four Moorish prayers and other things from the Qur'an of Muhammed was found in a certain hole in his house. The hole was plugged up with plaster." From an account of people who appeared at the *auto de fe* in Granada on 18 March 1571, quoted in Homza (2006), p. 240.
37. See the story of an Old Christian tried by the Inquisition mainly because of "Maurophilia", in Surtz (2006), pp. 519–32.
38. Martin (2004), p. 32.
39. On the complex attitudes to veils see Chapter 7.
40. The Druze, a Muslim sect, keep the tenets of their faith secret and are therefore said to practice *taqiyya*. In their case, however, the word does not refer to dissimulation but to the secrecy by which their religious leadership, the initiates, conceal the sacred literature and its precepts from the rest of the community and from the rest of the world.
41. Gerli (2004), p. 191.
42. Wiegers (2006).
43. Barrios Aguilera and García-Arenal (2006); A.K. Harris (1999, 2007); Harvey (2005) provides full translation of the lead books in appendix III.
44. These lead books inevitably remind one of the plates of gold from which Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, translated his book in the nineteenth century, except that Smith's gold plates, unlike the lead books, conveniently ascended to heaven. A more recent forgery in the form of lead tablets was "discovered"

in Northern Jordan sometime between 2005 and 2007 – a large number of books made up of lead leaves and bound by lead rings, with cryptic messages in Hebrew and Greek, allegedly from the very early years of Christianity, were published by David Elkington.

45. Davis (2006).
46. The text of the edict in English translation in Homza (2006), pp. 80–92. For a general history of the *Alumbrados* in Spain see Hamilton (1992).
47. Boon (2006), pp. 133–5.
48. Homza (2006), doc. 8, pp. 80–92.
49. Hamilton (1992), p. 91.
50. Hamilton (1992), p. 154.
51. Hamilton (1992), pp. 3, 115.
52. Quoted in Keitt (2005), p. 82.
53. Keitt (2005), pp. 32–4; 78–86.
54. Quoted in Keitt (2005), p. 82.
55. Schutte (2001), p. 10.
56. Antonio de Bolívar, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Inq. Leg. 102, exp. 4, quoted in Keitt (2005), p. 175; on the merging of accusations in Inquisition trials see also Homza (2006).
57. Homza (2006), doc. 10, pp. 103–7.
58. See, for example, Sallmann (1991); see also accusations against Antonio de Medrano brought to the Toledo tribunal in 1530, in Homza (2006), doc. 11, pp. 108–11.
59. The problem had been discussed earlier, for example by Alfonso of Jaén (d.1389), who established criteria for judging visions in order to validate Bridget of Sweden's mystical experiences, but not as fully and with far less influence than in Gerson's works.
60. For a survey of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature on discernment of spirits see Schutte (2001), ch. 3, and Sluhovsky (2007).
61. For a detailed analysis of the debate on the reality of visions and apparitions, see Clark (2009), especially ch. 6. Clark, in this magisterial work on doubts about the reliability of human vision, is naturally interested in what was said in regard to the apparitions, not so much in the doubts raised about the character of the visionaries.
62. Keitt (2005) writes on p. 1 of the introduction that he was struck during his research of Inquisition records in Madrid by the "profusion of terms such as *finigir* (to feign or dissimulate), *embuste* (a trick or fraud), *imposture* (imposture), and *embaucar* (to fool or to deceive). […] The language was religious, and it was being used in a legal context, directed at prisoners of the Inquisition accused of feigning divinely inspired visions, supernatural raptures, and miraculous revelations. Inquisitors described these defendants as 'frauds,' and 'impostors'." On the widespread assumption among Italian authorities that the majority of cases of revelations, apparitions and stigmata were in fact *santità affettata*, see the collection of articles edited by Zarri (1991) and Schutte (2001). For Spain see Christian (1981), Haliczer (2002) and Keitt (2005). For France see Sluhovsky (2007).
63. Keitt (2005), p. 136.
64. Martin (2004), ch. 2, "The Inquisitors' Questions".
65. Bell (1985) and Bynum (1987).
66. Schutte (2001), ch. 9, "Rings and Other Things", pp. 155–74.
67. Brown (1986), p. 93.

68. Copies of the "Virgin's letters" are to be found in the documents related to Pietro Vespa's trial in the Archivio di Stato in Venice. See Schutte (2001), p. 157, p. 280 n. 11.
69. See Palumbo (1999), pp. 167–77.
70. Doc. 16 in Homza (2006), pp. 168–75.
71. See Ehlers (1997) and in Homza (2006), doc. 25, pp. 252–6.
72. For the support given to holy women by their confessors, see Bilinkoff (1993).
73. Whereas in 1991 Gabriella Zarri could write that the collection of articles on *Finzione e santità* covered a subject that was relatively "storiograficamente poco consosciuto" (p. 10), by now it is widely discussed and quite a few historians have collected the evidence to show that from the last quarter of the sixteenth century to the last quarter of the seventeenth it was a major concern for inquisitions and other religious authorities.
74. Schutte (2001) ends her book with a chapter entitled "Pretence?" and concludes that "self-fashioning with an intent to deceive […] played a part in the behavior of a few Venetian subjects investigated and tried by the Holy Office for pretense of Holiness. It is virtually absent in other cases." But she concedes that while our modern society is practically free of "fear of widespread conspiracies and suspicion of people who are pretending to be something they are not […]. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italy it was otherwise" (pp. 227–8).
75. Heyd (1995).
76. Burton (1862), 2:94, 62. Attribution of enthusiasm to a malady or to a form of madness was most explicitly made by Meric Casaubon, *A treatise concerning enthusiasme* (1655).
77. Brownlow (1993).
78. Clark (2009), p. 29.
79. On the various pejorative terms used in Protestant literature to describe the activities of the Catholic clergy, see Iliffe (1999).
80. Heyd (1995). See also Scribner (1993).
81. "The Three Impostors" is an interesting case of rumours or a myth about the existence of a book long before it was actually written. For a new translation into English of the early eighteenth-century text, see Anderson (1997). For discussion of the meanings and implications of this treatise, see Berti (1995) and idem (1999), an article which investigates the later stages of the processes discussed here.
82. Bodin (1995), quoted in Levack (2004), pp. 128–34.
83. Clark (1997, 2009).
84. Cf. Sharpe (2000).
85. See Maxwell-Stuart (2003) and Alyagon Darr (2011).
86. Eire (1979), p. 69.
87. Cantimori (1970).
88. Ginzburg (1970).
89. For an introduction to the history of the *Familia Caritatis* see Hamilton (1981).
90. In Martin (2003), p. 129.
91. Both quoted and discussed in Martin (2003), pp. 127–30.
92. Trexler (1985), pp. 189–90.
93. Overrell (2004).
94. *Montaigne's Travel Journal* (1983), p. 14. On Basle as a haven for non-conformists and intellectuals of various shades, see Guggisberg (1982) and Barnavi and Eliav-Feldon (1988).

95. Grell, "Introduction", in Grell and Scribner (1996), p. 3. On the limitations of toleration in Basle, see Guggisberg (1982, 1996).
96. The best book on David Joris is still Bainton (1937); see also Waite (1994) and Zagorin (1990), pp. 113–16.
97. Waite (1994), p. 24.
98. Waite (1987), pp. 46–57.
99. See his "Letter concerning Martyrdom", in Waite (1994), pp. 264–7.
100. Shortly after the execution of Michael Servetus in Geneva, as Sebastian Castellio was writing his famous plea against persecution, *De haereticis an sint persequendi*, Joris wrote and published a *Christian Warning to all Regents and Governments […] that nobody must be […] persecuted, let alone killed because of his faith.*
101. Waite (1994).
102. For a fuller discussion of Francesco Pucci's utopia see Eliav-Feldon (1984); on Pucci and the colourful circles in which he moved, see Barnavi and Eliav-Feldon (1988). The texts of Pucci's works are to be found in Firpo (1957), Firpo and Piattoli (1959) and Pucci, *De praedestinatione* (2000). All of Luigi Firpo's articles on Pucci are now collected in Firpo (1996). The single extant manuscript of Pucci's utopia is to be found in the British Library, Cod. Sloane 92683/h 6-3/1. It was first attributed to Pucci and published by Cantimori (1937). The *Disciplina domestica* was first published by Firpo (1957), pp. 92–104. The most recent study of Pucci's extraordinary life and ideas is Caravale (2011).
103. Unless one also defines two works by Hendrik Niclaes, *Terra Pacis* (c.1550) and *Ordo sacerdotis* (c.1568) as utopias. But the former is more a description of a mystical journey, a "pilgrim's progress" towards salvation, and the latter is a detailed description of the priestly hierarchy and its functions in an ideal society.
104. Cantimori and Feist (1937), p. 171.
105. Cantimori and Feist (1937), p. 172.
106. Cantimori and Feist (1937), pp. 173–4.
107. Inquisitions were on their guard against heretics hiding their errors by simulating insanity. See the insanity defence discussed in Francisco Peña's edition of Nicolau Eymeric's *Directorium Inquisitorum* (first published in Rome in 1578), quoted in Nalle (2001), p. 155.
108. On Pucci and Campanella see Firpo (1996), pp. 207–32. The contact between these two visionaries raises a point worthy of further exploration: the conditions of incarceration in the early modern period and the extent to which they allowed the dissemination of radical ideas.
109. On the fear of secret societies, see below in Chapter 4.
110. Febvre (1942), Zagorin (1990), ch. 12, Wootton (1992). For a return to the position that there was no atheism proper before the end of the seventeenth century, see Hyman (2007).
111. Fatio and Rapin (1984).
112. Firpo (1996), pp. 195–203.
113. Namer (1980).
114. Pierre Charron, *Les trois véritez contre les athées, idôlatres, iuifs, mahumetans, hérétiques, & schismatiques* (1593); Tommaso Campanela, *Atheismus triumphatus* (1631).
115. Spini (1950), Berti (1999), p. 30, Davidson (1992). Berti and others have pointed out that Vanini's work was probably one of the sources for the *Traité de trois imposteurs*.
116. Bracciolini and Varthema (1963).

117. Bracciolini and Varthema (1963), p. 6.
118. Ludovico Varthema (1963), p. xxvii.
119. Bracciolini and Varthema (1963), p. 93.
120. Kryštof Harant (2010), part I, ch. 4. I am grateful to Orit Ramon for this reference.
121. Scammell (1995), p. 293.
122. Lima Cruz (1995).
123. Davis (2001) estimates that there were over a million Europeans captured by Muslim corsairs during the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries. However, it is practically impossible to tell how many of them converted to Islam. Matar (1998) speaks of at least 20,000 Britons as slaves in Muslim hands before the mid-eighteenth century. See also Matar (2005).
124. Matar (1993).
125. The man who appeared in Europe in the 1660s claiming to be the son of the Turkish Sultan had been captured as a child by the Knights of Malta together with his mother, who was supposed to be one of the concubines in the Sultan's harem. He was brought up as a Christian and became a Dominican friar. Campoy and Freller (2006).
126. Evelyn (2011). Cigala is mentioned in the *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, 1666–1668*, vol. 35, 14 September 1668, p. 265, but not described there as a renegade; other references to him are cited in *The Diary of John Evelyn* (1955), 3:522.
127. I am grateful to Giorgio Rota for his help in identifying this particular impostor.
128. Bennassar and Bennassar (1989), Scaraffia (1993), Rota (2007), Matar in Vitkus (2001).
129. Scaraffia (1993) and Scaraffia and García-Arenal (1999).
130. The safe conduct given to Solomon Molcho by Pope Clement VII in 1530, exempting him from accusations of "Judaizing" because his conversion to Christianity had been forced, and permitting him to publish his books if not containing explicit anti-Christian sentiments, in Sanudo (1969–70), 54:147–8; to be found in Hebrew translation in Aescoly (1993), pp. 181–2.
131. Mulsow and Popkin (2004). See M. Bodian's review of the book (*Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 1 [Spring 2005], p. 218) for an explanation of why the title is misleading, as the individuals discussed in the various articles either *re*verted rather than *con*verted to Judaism, or only showed an interest in the Jewish religion, and the very few who actually converted made no secret of it.
132. Bindman (1991).
133. García-Arenal and Wiegers (2003), p. 59.
134. The story of Nicholas Antoine is briefly recounted in Mulsow and Popkin (2004), pp. 4–5.
135. Scholem (1973), Goldish (2004).
136. Muslow and Popkin (2004), p. 5.
137. Gow (1995). For more on the story of a Jew arrested in 1540 on suspicion of buying and smuggling arms for an uprising of Jews in Germany, see Chapter 4.
138. Gow (1995), pp. 240–44, gives an English translation of the pamphlet *Der Antichrist und die fünfzehn Zeichen* (c.1450).
139. *Divided Souls* is the apt title chosen by Elisheva Carlebach (2001a) for her book on converts to Christianity among German Jews. The theme of duality

is emphasized by other scholars as well, e.g. Graizbord (2004); contemporaries also used the term "two-faced" (see Martin [2003]).
140. On Francesco Spiera see Martin (2003), p. 128; similar episodes can be found in the lives of crypto-Jews.
141. One of the best descriptions of the world of the ex-Marranos in Amsterdam is provided by Kaplan (1989). One of the psychological strategies of *conversos* reverting to Judaism, claims Kaplan, was amnesia – erasing from memory the whole chapter of living as Christians.
142. Kaplan (1989), p. 346.
143. Rose (1987).
144. See, for example, Marsh (1994), p. 256.
145. García-Arenal and Wiegers (2003), p. 39.
146. Graizbord (2005).
147. Carlebach (2001a), pp. 43–4.
148. Scaraffia (1993).
149. Zorattini (2000).
150. Cohen (2001). Another Marrano autobiography is Uriel da Costa's *Exemplar humanae vitae* (1640), which opened a window into the difficulties of reverting to orthodox Judaism after several generations of Marranism. For a selection of life stories written by Inquisition prisoners during their investigations, see Kagan and Dyer (2004).
151. Kaplan (1989).
152. Yerushalmi (1971).
153. García-Arenal and Wiegers (2003).
154. Zorattini (1984).
155. Brown (1986).
156. Ferrazi (1996).
157. Kagan (1990).
158. Ahlgern (2005).
159. Berti (1995), pp. 561–2.
160. Erasmus (1974–79) in a letter to Richard Pace, English ambassador to Venice, 22 April 1518, p. 393.

3 False Ambassadors, Fabulous Lands

1. An autograph of this rare document no longer exists. It survived, apparently, until the late 1860s but was then lost and can be seen now only in a nineteenth-century facsimile copy at the Bodleian Library in Oxford (Ms. Heb. f.14: *Diary of David Reubeni*, copy of Ms. Michael [old No.] 560). A few editions of the Hebrew text, in part and in full, were printed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the most reliable printed version, however, fully annotated and prefaced by a thoroughly researched introduction, is still the one edited by Aescoly (1993). I shall refer to the text of Reuveni's journal and to the appended documents in this edition as *The Story* and to the editor's introduction as Aescoly. The pages of the introduction, numbered in Hebrew letters, are here given in Arabic numerals. The translations from Hebrew are mine.
2. He was described thus by his contemporaries, both Jews (such as Abraham Farissol or Daniel of Pisa) as well as non-Jews (e.g. Giovanni Battista Ramusio).
3. "In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan,

and in the cities of the Medes" (2 Kgs 17:6; also in 2 Kgs 18:11). In 1 Chron. 5:26, however, the verse is more detailed: "And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tiglath-pilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gaddites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and brought them unto Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river of Gozan, unto this day." In Hebrew there is no "even" in the verse, thus it seems to imply that, according to Chronicles, only two-and-a-half tribes, which had resided in Transjordan, were carried away by the King of Assyria. This confusion will also appear in the different versions presented by Reuveni. For recent conclusions by biblical historians, see Na'aman (1990). On the legend of the Lost Tribes through the centuries, see Ben-Dor Benite (2009).

4. In Reuveni's letter to King John III; a photocopy of the original letter and a Hebrew translation of it in Lipiner in Aescoly (1993), pp. xlvii–xlviii. The number 300,000 is given by Benjamin of Tudela, the twelfth-century Jewish traveller, for the population of one of the cities in Yemen, where, according to him, he found the descendants of the Lost Tribes.
5. These letters are reproduced (in Latin with a Hebrew translation) in the *The Story*, pp. 172–8.
6. After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 many of them settled in Portugal. As a result of political pressures exerted by Spain, however, the Portuguese king, Manuel I, forced all the Jews in Portugal to be baptized in 1497. In 1506 hundreds of New Christians were massacred in Lisbon. Yet an Inquisition only began to operate there, after protracted negotiations with the papacy, in 1540.
7. Lipiner, in Aescoly (1993), pp. xlvii–xlviii.
8. Simonsohn (1961).
9. Lipiner in Aescoly (1993), pp. xlv–lxvi; Lipiner (1993a).
10. Aescoly (1993), pp. 54–9, 93–100, Shohat (1970).
11. On Reuveni as a Yemenite Jew: Shohat (1970); as an Ethiopian: Cassuto (1963); as a Jew from Cochin: Birnbaum (1958), Brod (1925).
12. Aescoly (1993), pp. 205–7.
13. Kaplan (1992), p. 76.
14. As Aescoly notes, this was an error, as the year 5284 (1524) in the Hebrew calendar was not a leap year and thus had only one month of Adar.
15. *The Story*, pp. 33–4.
16. Niccoli (1990), pp. 168–9.
17. See below the comparison with Ludovico Varthema's text.
18. An important book on the Hebrew printing houses in Italy is Raz-Krakotzkin (2007).
19. *The Story*, p. 34.
20. Davis (2006), pp. 76–7. The silence of David Reuveni and Leo Africanus about each other is most mysterious in view of the many acquaintances they had in common. In addition to Italian Jews and Hebraists, the orientalist Johann Albrecht von Widmanstetter, who had written to Egidio in Hebrew and expressed in 1531 a wish to visit Leo Africanus in Tunis, was also familiar with the fate of the Jewish messiah Solomon Molcho and mentioned seeing his banner in Ratisbon in 1541 (quoted in *The Story*, p. 191). Lacunae in tricksters' journals deserve the historian's attention no less than what they contain.
21. Reuveni, therefore, belongs to a different category than "confidence men" who practised various methods of fraud to enrich their own pockets. For a fascinating

story of an impostor of the swindler type in the sixteenth century, see Davis (1997b), pp. 274–83.
22. Ramusio's report, as it appears in Sanuto's diaries, is reproduced in the *The Story* (in Italian with a Hebrew translation), pp. 183–9.
23. *The Story*, p. 76.
24. *The Story*, p. 19.
25. *The Story*, pp. 77–9.
26. Aescoly (1993), p. 189.
27. Yerushalmi (1983), pp. 460–487.
28. Scholem (1973); Aescoly (1987), pp. 273–302.
29. *The Story*, p. 189.
30. Cassuto (1969).
31. Roth (1963).
32. Idel in Aescoly (1993), p. xlii.
33. This is Aescoly's view (pp. 191–2), based on Joseph ha-Kohen's opinion in his *Divre ha-Yamim le-Malke Zarfat we-'Otoman* (*Chronicles of the Kings of France and Turkey*, first published 1554).
34. On Egidio see Secret (1963), Martin (1959, 1960), Voci Roth (1990), O'Reilly (1992), O'Malley (1981), pp. 1–11, Reeves (1992), pp. 91–177.
35. Weil (1963). See also Davis (2006), pp. 75–6, 195–6.
36. Beginning with Moritz Steinschneider and Heinrich Graetz down to Aescoly (1993), pp. 104–5, and Weil (1963), p. 206.
37. "To the vicar of an unnamed congregation in Spain", in O'Reilly (1992), pp. 190–94.
38. O'Malley (1969).
39. Delumeau (1978, 1995).
40. Chastel, quoted in Niccoli (1992).
41. Niccoli (1990). See also Crouzet (1999).
42. Oberman (1983). See also Gow (1995). "The Red Jews", a conflation of the legends about Gog and Magog, the Lost Tribes of Israel and the "unclean peoples" enclosed by Alexander the Great, were popular topics of German pamphlet literature (see above in Chapter 2); however, as Gow points out, even these terrifying tribes could sometimes be depicted as allies.
43. Ruderman (1992), Idel (1992a, 1992b), Sharot (1982), Bonfil (1994a, 1994b).
44. Guillaume Postel, *De orbis terrae concordia*, Basle, 1543, p. 20, quoted in Secret (1963), p. 125 n. In several early modern letters and chronicles Reuveni's country of origin is named "Mt Tabor" instead of "Habor" (for the first time in Clement VII's letter concerning Reuveni to the king of Ethiopia, see below), and he is said to have come with the intention of converting Christian monarchs to Judaism.
45. Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum orbis terrarum* 2, Antwerp, 1572, p. 83 (reproduced in *The Story*, p. 168); *La Relationi universali di Giovanni Botero*, Vicenza, 1595, Part I, Book 2, p. 120 (reproduced in *The Story*, p. 167).
46. Solomon Molcho appeared in Rome in 1530 and, so the story goes, sat with the beggars on the bridge over the Tiber and prophesied about floods and earthquakes.
47. "Haec nos, qui remoti ab illis locis longe absumus, neque cognoscere penitus cuiusmodi sint, ex huius David relatione potuimus, neque voluimus omnino negligere; sed instituimus eum dirigere ad serenitatem tuam, quae hominum assidue commeantium ad ea loca et cursus ilus frequentantium copiam habet. [… Deinde] vero si quod commodum ex eius opera aut consilio christianae

speret posse evenire reipublicae." *Monumenta saeculi XVI. Historiam illustrantia. Edidit Petrus Balan… Vol. I. Clementis VII Epistolae per Sadoletum scriptae. Oeniponte 1885*, pp. 28–9 n. 21). Clement VII's letters to John III and to the King of Ethiopia, in the Latin original with a Hebrew translation are reproduced in *The Story*, pp. 172–8.

48. Pastor (1950), 10:171.
49. Pius II in his autobiography, *Commentaries* (English edn, 2007). Also quoted in Bryer (1980), p. 195.
50. Lipiner (1986).
51. Subrahmanyam (1997), pp. 282–4.
52. In the letter quoted above (n. 47): "statuat tamen saepe Deus cum inimicis se vindicare de inimicis".
53. There is a vast amount of literature on the legend and letters of Prester John. Beckingham and Hamilton (1996) include a comprehensive bibliography; see also Silverberg (1996).
54. Gumilev (1987), p. 6.
55. Beckingham (1983), p. 19.
56. Rogers (1961).
57. Silverberg (1996), pp. 225–31, Rogers (1962).
58. An example of a false ambassador in our "virtual" age: a young man from a small town in Israel presented himself in 2002 as Consul General of the Dominion of Melchizedek and began issuing passports on demand for a few hundred dollars each. His proof for the existence of this country was a website: www.melchizedek.com. Israel's foreign ministry invited a UN official to testify at the impostor's trial that Melchizedek was an imaginary state. On the international scam of the Dominion of Melchizedek see also Chapter 1.
59. Aescoly (1993), pp. 47–9; Kaplan (1992), pp. 80–82.
60. In his report to Ramusio, in *The Story*, p. 187.
61. Silverberg (1996), pp. 211–45. Aubin (1976) seems to be the only modern historian who tries to argue that Mateus was a *bona fide* delegate of the Ethiopian court.
62. First published in Portuguese in 1540; a shorter version in Italian was included in Ramusio's *Navigationi et Viaggi*; in English: Álvares (1961).
63. Lawrance (1992).
64. The letter was reproduced by Lipiner in *The Story*, p. I.
65. Flores and Subrahmanyam (2004), p. 104.
66. Whiteway (1967), p. 86.
67. Bermudes's story was to be included among serious Portuguese reports until well into the twentieth century; a recent translation of the autobiography into French, however, presents the author for the fraud that he was: Bermudes (2010).
68. Silverberg (1996), pp. 278–98, Jones and Monroe (1978), pp. 83–7.
69. Daniel of Pisa's letter reproduced in *The Story*, p. 151.
70. *The Story*, p. 152.
71. A sixteenth-century German scholar, Johann Albrecht von Widmanstetter, reported that he had seen Solomon Molcho's banner embroidered with Hebrew letters (in *The Story*, pp. 190–91, Latin text with Hebrew translation). Such a flag as well as a long white robe, allegedly Molcho's, can be seen today at the State Jewish Museum in Prague.
72. *The Story*, p. 102.
73. Federigo's letter reproduced (in Italian) in Simonsohn (1961), pp. 205–6.

74. From: "Venice: May 1518", *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, 2:1509–19 (1867), pp. 441–4. The incident is mentioned in Hill (1948), p. 655.
75. Nûr-Banû herself remains an enigmatic figure, with three different traditions regarding her origins. See Arbel (1992).
76. Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti secrete, reg. 9, f. 180v (10 October 1571). For these cases of impostors related to Venice, I am most grateful to Benjamin Arbel who brought them to my attention. Two other pretenders, claiming affiliation to the Sultan's court, who appeared in England in the mid-seventeenth century, are described by John Evelyn (2011; see Chapter 2).
77. The document concerning Ramusio's appointment as Reuveni's investigator is reproduced in *The Story*, p. 183.
78. Reproduced (in Italian with Hebrew translation), *The Story*, pp. 183–9.
79. *The Story*, p. 189.
80. Niccoli (1990), pp. 22–3.
81. Aescoly (1993), pp. 165–70, Carpi (1989), pp. 85–95.
82. His letters, dated 1532 and 1536, reproduced in *The Story*, pp. 159–62.
83. Isaac Akrish in his critical survey of stories about the Ten Lost Tribes, published in Istanbul in the 1570s, quoted in Gross (1991).
84. In *The Story*, p. 152. A similar sentiment was expressed by Abraham Farissol in his book on world geography, *Iggeret Orhot Olam*, written in 1525, shortly after Reuveni's first appearance in Italy. On Farissol, see Ruderman (1981).
85. Ben-Dor Benite (2009).
86. Epstein (1891).
87. Eliav-Feldon (1983).
88. Wasserstein (1996).
89. Reproduced in *The Story* in Italian with Hebrew translation, pp. 183–4.
90. Varthema (1963), pp. 22–5.
91. Tractate *Sanhedrin*, trans. H. Freedman, London 1935, vol. II, p. 670.
92. Adams (1962).
93. See Martels (1994). The Czech writer Karel Čapek (1997) illustrated in a wonderful story, "Ophir", how Renaissance scholars would accept any tall tale that could be confirmed by classical authority, but would reject new facts – such as the existence of the zebra.
94. Wasserstein and Wasserstein (1997).
95. Inquisition documents related to Reuveni, quoted by Lipiner in Aescoly (1993), pp. lv–lvii. A copy of a verdict passed by the Inquisition tribunal against a certain Afonso Fernandes de Medelin indicates that he had abjured his errors in the same *auto de fe* in which the foreigner David, named "the Jew of the shoe", was burnt at the stake. The description of this "O judeu do çapato" supports the assumption that he was indeed the same David "the Reubenite".

4 Underworlds

1. The underworlds discussed in this chapter were man-made alternative societies (mirror-images of Renaissance utopias) and not visions of imaginary creatures living under the crust of the earth, such as Athanasius Kircher's giants of fire.
2. Graumann and Muscovici (1987) and Bercé and Fasano Guarini (1996).
3. Lowe (2004).

4. On Renaissance cryptography see Kahn (1967); on secret codes used by Venetian agents in the Ottoman Empire, see Arbel (1995), pp. 145–68, with a photocopy of two pages of Saruq's code book (1571) preserved among papers of the Venetian Council of Ten, p. 148.
5. Couto (2007).
6. Ord (2007), p. 147.
7. Dillinger (2004).
8. Haydon (2004) discusses the fears of Catholic plots in England in the eighteenth century.
9. Lemon (2007) notes that during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I treason was almost entirely verbal rather than actual. There were no successful treasonous enterprises at the time and the fears were in fact groundless. Later in the seventeenth century, of course, this situation would change.
10. See Peacy (2004).
11. Robson (2004), p .4.
12. Roberts (2004).
13. Wells (1999).
14. Wootton (2009) presented evidence suggesting that Queen Elizabeth I was a member of the Family of Love.
15. Still the best book on the history of the *Protocols* is Cohn (1967).
16. For discussions of specific medieval imaginary plots of Jews with Christendom's enemies see Menache (1996) who analyses the story in the version included in the *Chronicles of Matthew Paris*; and Barber (1981).
17. Ben-Dor Benite (2009). As we saw in Chapter 3, the Ten Lost Tribes could also be regarded as potential allies of Christendom against Islam, but in most medieval and early modern references to them they represented the riders of the Apocalypse.
18. Matthew Paris *Chronica Majora*, iv, 131–3, in Menache (1996), p. 339.
19. *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, ch. 29.
20. Ginzburg (1992).
21. Gow (1995).
22. The original letters are to be found today in the archive of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg (NM Nbg. Archiv, Autographen K. 41, Winshemius). They were first printed and published in a collection of letters edited by Schornbaum (1911).
23. The texts of these letters were recently published in the original German and Latin with a Hebrew translation by Rosentahl (2008).
24. Carlebach (2001b).
25. Quoted in Jortin (1808), p. 224.
26. See above in Chapter 1.
27. Kavey (2007).
28. Eamon (1994).
29. On John Dee's connections with secret fraternities, see Yates (1982) and Heisler (1992).
30. Roberts (1972).
31. See Chapter 2; Barnavi et Eliav-Feldon (1988) and Eliav-Feldon (1984); on the Rosicrucians and the proliferation of secret societies in Germany, Dickson (1998); on connections between Continental and English projects, Mas (1976).
32. Firpo (1996).
33. The text of the *Leges Antiliae* is reproduced by Dickson (1998) in appendix B.

34. Dickson (1998), p. 129.
35. Dickson (1998), p. 66.
36. Nauert (2011).
37. Dillinger (2004), p. 176.
38. The literature on the witch hunts is by now so extensive that there is no point in attempting to list here even the most important works. For an excellent sample of the various aspects of the witch hunts and the different schools of thought regarding the phenomenon, see Oldridge (2002); for a useful collection of extracts from sources, Levack (2004).
39. Montaigne's *Essays*, III: 11, "Of Cripples".
40. Clark (1997).
41. For witch persecutions as a conspiracy of the state see, for example, Robert Muchembled (2002): as a conspiracy of men against women, see, for example, Dworkin (1973).
42. Cohn (1975).
43. Bodin (1995), chs 4 and 6.
44. On women as witch examiners see Holmes (2002).
45. Tawney (1967), p. 268.
46. François Villon (c.1431–after 1463), bohemian poet, thief, vagabond and possibly a ringleader of a gang of student-robbers, was arrested several times and only escaped execution by sheer good fortune.
47. Two excellent volumes on rogue literature in England are: Woodbridge (2001) and Dionne and Mentz (2004). On the general European scene see Hanawalt and Grotans (2007).
48. Reynolds (2002) makes the comparison between the Mafia and the early modern English "underworld" but offers the reverse argument: that the fiction written about both indicates the severity of the problem then and now.
49. For example in the 19th book of Ambroise Paré's *Oeuvres* (1573–79), and in Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim's *De Incertitudine et Vanitate Scientiarum et Artium atque Excellentia Verbi Dei Declamatio*, published 1531, ch. 35. See Kraemer (1944).
50. Just as a sample of works on early modern literature on the adventures and wrongdoings of the poor: Aydelotte (1967), Camporesi (1973), Carroll (1996), Cockburn (1977), Forster and Ranum (1978), Griffiths (2009), Henke (2007), Judges (1965), Kinney (1990), McCall (1979), Mormando (1999), Reynolds (2002), Woodbridge (2001).
51. Salgādo (1977), p. 30.
52. Salgādo (1977), pp. 124, 140.
53. Reynolds (2002), p. 1.
54. Dionne and Mentz (2004) p.1.
55. Quoted in Ribton-Turner (1972), p. 172.
56. Artificial deformities and wounds are depicted in all texts of the rogue literature and in the Books of Vagabonds. A non-literary description of how a man thus "counterfeited himself" is to be found in the punishment of Blunt discussed below.
57. Harman's text is included in Judges (1965), in Salgādo (1977) and in Kinney (1990).
58. Repertory of the Court of Aldermen, vol. XVI, fol. 149a, Corporation of London Records Office. Spelling and dates modernized. Quoted in Beier (2003).
59. Dimitrovsky (1990), ch. 34, p. 100. I am indebted to Avriel Bar-Levav for this reference.

60. Salgādo (1977), p. 153.
61. Davis (2001). On the intensive campaign to raise ransom money, see for example Matar (2005). See also Chapter 2 on religious dissimulation.
62. Davis (2001), p. 118.
63. Hershenzon (2011).
64. Van Elk (2004).
65. Woodbridge (2003).
66. Beier (2003), p. 3 (emphasis mine).
67. Burke (1987), p. 71.
68. Bayman (2007), n. 2. For a similar conclusion about the rogue literature, see Van Vaeck and Verberckmoes (2002).
69. To name but three of the innumerable works on the Spanish picaresque novel: Alpert (1969), Bjornson (1980), Maiorino (2003).
70. Quoted in Kraemer (1944), pp. 25–6.
71. In Pike (1975), p. 14. See also Pike (1972, 1983), Perry (1980), García (1998).
72. Pike (1975), p. 11.
73. Perry (1980), pp. 264–5.
74. Pike (1975), p. 14.
75. Kraemer (1944), p. 239; Delaplace (2007), Chartier (1982).
76. Kraemer (1944), p. 258.
77. Egmond (1993).
78. Harrington (2005). Egmond (1993), p. 30, reports a similar case of a young vagrant from Amsterdam, who by the age of 20 had been convicted nine times and flogged and branded several times.
79. Egmond (1993), pp. 38–40.
80. Evans (1988), pp. ix, 2, 5.
81. Jütte (1994), p. 180.
82. Beier (1995), pp. 64–101.
83. Woodbridge (2001), pp. 9–11, expresses certainty that "thieves' cant", like their fraternities, was largely a literary fabrication.
84. I am grateful to Aya Elyada for information provided about attitudes to Yiddish in early modern Germany.
85. Roberts (1979), Scribner (1988), Dillinger (2004), pp. 170–72.
86. Roberts (1979), p. 4.
87. Scribner (1988), p. 36.
88. The similarities to the fear of lepers and Jews poisoning wells, sometimes with financial aid from Muslim powers, are quite striking. In Dillinger's terms, lepers and Jews were the "terrorist" bogeys of the late Middle Ages, even decades before the Black Death. See also Barber (1981).
89. On Jewish gangs see Boes (1999), Ulbricht (1995), Guggenheim (1995), Egmond (1988), Spierenburg (1998). In England we encounter in 1771 the "Chelsea Gang", headed by Dr Levi Weil who recruited several Jewish ruffians from Holland – a *cause célèbre* which aroused a wave of anti-Semitism in London (see Katz [1994], pp. 262–5).
90. Pipes (1997).

5 Gypsies, or Such as Do Counterfeit

1. Piasere (1989) described the Indian origin theory as a paradigm in crisis. Mayall (2004) outlines the ongoing controversy about Gypsy identities: "The question

'Who are the Gypsies?' is still asked and the debates about the positioning and permanence of the boundary between Gypsy and non-Gypsy are contested as fiercely today as at any time before" (from the book blurb). Some leading scholars of the history of the Romani people (Gypsiologists or Tsiganologists), Judith Okely, Thomas Acton and Jean-Pierre Liégeois among them, disagree with those who attribute a single ethnic identity to all Gypsies – i.e. groups of nomads who migrated from India at the beginning of the second millennium. See also the collection of articles edited by Marsh and Strand (2006).

2. Much of the information and known facts about the Gypsies in Central and Western Europe during the early modern period is summarized in Fraser (1995).
3. Campigotto and Piasere (1992), pp. 15, 19.
4. A summary of all early modern theories concerning the Gypsies' origins is offered by Piasere (1989).
5. Agrippa von Nettesheim, *The Vanity of Arts and Sciences* (1676), p. 213.
6. Piasere (1989). See also Fraser (1995), p. 65.
7. See Hamilton (2006).
8. The *Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies*, ed. Donald Kenrick (2007), has the following entry: "ATSINGANI (ATHINGANI) ('UNGODLY'). Heretical Christian sect that flourished in the Byzantine Empire during the eighth and ninth centuries. The term was used pejoratively and two Byzantine emperors (Michael II and Nikephorus I) were referred to by their enemies as *athingani*. When the Gypsies arrived from the east, they did not practice Christianity but were probably still following Hinduism or Zoroastrianism. As a result, they, too, were called *athingani*. The Atsingani who settled in Thrace (near the modern town of Plovdiv in Bulgaria) from 803 may well have been Gypsies. The term has survived in the names given to the Gypsies in many countries, including *cingene* in Turkey, *tsigan* in most Slav-speaking countries, and the German *Zigeuner*, Italian *zingari*, and French *tsigan*e."
9. Boorde and Furnivall (1870), ch. 38.
10. Rid in Kinney (1990), p. 265.
11. Okley (1983), Bhopal and Myers (2008).
12. Ian Hancock (2006), today's leading historian of the Gypsies, has reached the following conclusions: that the Romani people were made up of various groups, only some of which could be traced back to India; that they acquired an identity and a language while in the West (including the Byzantine Empire); and that they entered Europe from Anatolia in several small migrations spanning two centuries; see also Marsh (2003).
13. There are indications that they were already known as Egyptians in the Byzantine Empire in the fourteenth century (Fraser [1995], p. 48).
14. Fraser (1995), p. 53.
15. Arnold von Harff in 1497, quoted in Fraser (1995), p. 54.
16. Anon., *A Parisian Journal* (1968), p. 216.
17. Fraser (1995), p. 65.
18. Fraser (1995), ch. 4.
19. Anon., *A Parisian Journal* (1968), p. 217.
20. Toureille (2007); see above in Chapter 4.
21. "Letters by which they might steal from anyone who gave them no alms" were mentioned in an anonymous German chronicle, *Chroniken der deutschen Städte* (1424); an anonymous Italian chronicle reported that "they had a decree of the King of Hungary who was emperor, by virtue of which they could thieve during

those seven years [of their pilgrimage], wherever they might go, and that they could not be subjected to justice" – both quoted in Fraser (1997), pp. 292, 295.
22. 1 and 2 Philip and Mary c.4, quoted in Kinney (1990), pp. 266, 310.
23. Samuel Rid in Kinney (1990), p. 266.
24. Quoted in Mayall (2004), p. 65.
25. Thompson (1923). See also Hug (2009), pp. 112–15.
26. Pym (2007), pp. 16–18, 74–7.
27. Thomas Dekker, *Lanthorne and Candle-Light*, in Judges (1965), p. 344.
28. Joseph Glanvill, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*, 1661; repeated in verse by Matthew Arnold in 1853; quoted in Morris (1978), p. 98. Morris entitled this story "The Scholar-Gypsy: An Oxford Legend" – but could it be that the story was based on real cases of Oxford students joining the Gypsies?
29. Carlebach (2001a), pp. 43–4.
30. Dekker in Judges (1965), p. 344.
31. Pym (2007), p. 30.
32. Spierenburg (1984), p. 174.
33. The earrings worn by Gypsy women, men and children were mentioned in most of their descriptions. The association of loop earrings with Gypsies could be an additional explanation to the one offered by Diane Owen Hughes for their disappearance from ladies' attire and from early Renaissance paintings. See Hughes (1985, 1986).
34. Sánchez Ortega (1988).
35. See, for example, Ricapito (1966). A very different interpretation of Cervantes's attitude to Gypsies is offered by Charnon-Deutsch (2004).
36. Cervantes Saavedra (1972), p. 19.
37. On racist attitudes towards the Gypsies see Donovan (1992) and Eliav-Feldon (2009). For a further discussion of racial identifiers see Chapter 6.
38. Anon., *A Parisian Journal* (1968), p. 219.
39. Campigotto and Piasere (1992), p. 15.
40. Pym (2007), p. 24.
41. Glanvill in Morris (1978), p. 99.
42. 14 Elizabeth c.5, quoted in Kinney (1990), p. 13.
43. S.R., *Martin Markall, Beadle of Bridewell* (1610), in Judges (1965), pp. 420–21.
44. Porter (2005), p. 150, defines the Gypsies as "physiognomators" and he does not dismiss the possibility that they possessed some ancient Indian knowledge of this science.
45. Anon., *A Parisian Journal* (1968), p. 219.
46. Quoted in Vaux de Foletier (1965), pp. 18–19.
47. Fraser (1995), p. 185.
48. Sánchez Ortega (1988), p. 406, Pym (2007), pp. 105–8.
49. Campigotto and Piasere (1992), p. 17.
50. Fraser (1995), p. 75.
51. Pym (2007), p. 5.
52. Fraser (1995), p. 104.
53. Mayall (2004), p. 57.
54. The various letters of protection carried by the Gypsies are listed in Fraser (1995), pp. 63–78.
55. Vaux de Foletier (1965).
56. Bibliothèque Nationale, Nouv. Acq. franç. 6729, n. 7, quoted in Vaux de Foletier (1965), pp. 14–15.

57. Pym (2007), p. 25.
58. Fraser (1995), p. 89, Groebner (2007), p. 194.
59. Quoted in Kamen (1984), p. 171.
60. Fraser (1995), p. 181.
61. Thompson (1923), p. 81.
62. Pym (2007), p. 53.
63. Beier (1985), pp. 142–4.
64. On Count d'Armagnac and the forging of a papal bull, see Chapter 8.
65. Beier (1985), pp. 140–44, believes that such an industry existed, in England at any rate. For further discussion of forged passports see Chapter 8.
66. Dekker, *Lanthorne and Candle-Light*, in Judges (1965), p. 344.
67. Egmond (1993), p. 198.
68. Pym (2007), p. 114.
69. This is the argument presented by most historians who researched the social and economic problems of early modern Europe, beginning with R.H. Tawney, through A.L. Beier, Bronislaw Geremek, Robert Jütte, Henry Kamen and others, but also by many authors on Romani history: for example, Lucassen, Willems and Cotaar (1998).

6 The Body as Evidence

1. More (1964), pp. 31–3.
2. Aescoly (1993), p. 93 and appendix A.3, Molcho (1938), pp. 13–14.
3. Liebman (1980), pp. 63–74.
4. Davis (2003), p. 104.
5. Kagan and Dyer (2004), p. 147.
6. Alshekh, *Responsa*, par. 122. The entire *responsa* literature is available online thanks to the Responsa Project of Bar-Ilan University: www.responsa.co.il.
7. *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*, I.37; in English: Von Hutten (1964), pp. 75–6.
8. Jones (1987).
9. George (2002), p. 47.
10. Lithgow (1906).
11. Bentham (1838), vol. 1.
12. "Prosecutor would brand criminals: favors a mark on forearm, District Attorney Ruston tells Kings Grand Jurors", *The New York Times*, 14 January 1922.
13. Postma (1990), appendix 8, p. 368.
14. Shoham and Rahav (1982).
15. Chambers and Pullan (1992), pp. 123–4.
16. Edgerton (1985).
17. Van Dülmen (1990), p. 51, Weisser (1979), pp. 100–101.
18. Egmond (1993), p. 27.
19. Jütte (1994), p. 165.
20. More (1964), p. 82.
21. Bellamy (1973), p. 181.
22. Smail (1996), pp. 28–9.
23. Flynn (1988).
24. Davies (1966).
25. Jütte (1994), p. 164.
26. Kinney (1990), p. 51.
27. Sharpe (1990), pp. 22, 40.

28. *Holinshed's Chronicles*, vol. 3, ch. 17, "Of Sundry Kinds of Punishments Appointed for Offenders". Both the editions of 1577 and 1587 are accessible online: www.english.ox.ac.uk/holinshed.
29. Pike (1975), p. 16.
30. Perry (1990), pp. 142–3.
31. Stubbes (1877–82), vol. 1, p. 99.
32. Hair (1972), p. 97.
33. Slack (1984), pp. 5–13.
34. Sharpe (1990), p. 18.
35. Waite (1987), p. 257.
36. On Joris's appearance and why Basle authorities chose to burn his portrait together with his exhumed body, see Rublack (2010), p. 25.
37. Quoted in Bäcklund (2006), p. 296.
38. Nicholl (2001), pp. 3–8.
39. Bodleian Library, additional MSS C 303, fols 38v–45r; quoted in McDowell (2005), p. 348. See also Roberts (2009).
40. Thompson (1998), Dwyer Amussen (1995).
41. Boes (1999), pp. 407–25; Van Dülmen (1990, table 3.2, p. 45), using the same source, counted six people branded and two ears cut off.
42. Keller (1973), pp. 122, 125, 226, 230, 232, 236 (emphasis mine).
43. Ozment (1999), p. 209.
44. Spierenburg (1984), p. 70.
45. Spierenburg (1984), p. 77.
46. Kinney (1990), pp. 17, 47.
47. Foucault (1995), p. 8.
48. Spierenburg (1984), pp. 76–7.
49. Wolfgang (1960), Geltner (2008).
50. Brown (1986).
51. Maxwell-Stuart (2003), Alyagon Darr (2011).
52. Maxwell-Stuart (2003), pp. 117–22.
53. Maxwell-Stuart (2003), pp. 48, 100–106.
54. Normand and Roberts (2000), p. 105.
55. Maxwell-Stuart (2003), p. 149.
56. Miramon (2009), p. 209.
57. In the anonymous chanson de geste, *Beaudoin de Sebourc*, quoted by Miramon (2009), p. 211.
58. Miramon (2009), pp. 212–13.
59. Crescenzi (1996), pp. 6–7.
60. Bertelli (2001), pp. 171–6.
61. Nirenberg (2007), pp. 71–87.
62. Quiñones, MS. 868 (Colecção Moreira), fols 73–89, Biblioteca Nacional Lisbon.
63. Ziegler (2009), p. 187, found the allegation of Jewish male menstruation mentioned in only two learned medieval physiognomic texts, by Michael Scotus and by Michele Savonarola.
64. Resnick (1998), Katz (1999).
65. Dopico Black (2000), p. 2.
66. Mariscal (1991). Mariscal also quotes *Discurso contra los judíos traducido de lengua portugesa en Castellano por el Padre Fray Diego Gavillán Vela* (1630), which had a slightly different version of the myth, saying that all Jewish men and women experienced a flow of blood on Good Friday, and for that reason they were almost all pale (p. 43 n. 8).

67. Yerushalmi (1971), Katz (1999), Johnson (1998), Beusterien (1999). Yerushalmi's error in describing Quiñones as a physician rather than an *alcalde* (an official with judicial powers) was copied from one scholarly work to another. It appears that no more than half a dozen sources from the early modern period refer to the myth about Jewish male menstruation.
68. Quiñones (1631).
69. Shapiro (1997).
70. Kagan and Dyer (2004), pp. 43, 55, 58.
71. Kerner (2010).
72. Isaac (2004).
73. Ziegler (2009). See also Porter (2005).
74. Stuurman (2000), p. 4.
75. Fudge (2004), p. 22.
76. Wroe (2003), p. 119.
77. Agrippa d'Aubigné (1986), pp. 74–5. I am grateful to Oded Rabinovich for this reference.
78. Gilman (1995), p. 76; on lepers see Chapter 7.
79. Quoted in Wroe (2003), p. 116.
80. Tractate *Yebamoth* 16:3.
81. Alshekh, *Responsa*, par. 122.
82. David Abi Zimra (Radbaz), *Responsa*, pt. 1 par. 211. I am indebted to Prof. Benjamin Arbel for these two references to sixteenth-century *responsa*. The distinction between major and minor deformities was based on Joseph Caro's *Shulhan Arukh*, Even ha-Ezer, section 17, par. 24. For all references to *Shulhan Arukh*, I am very grateful to Avigdor Haneman. Rabbeinu Tam (Jacob ben Meir), the foremost *halakhic* authority in the twelfth century, dedicated a long paragraph in his *Sefer haYashar* to the question of identifying the dead, adding to the accepted prescriptions the notion that visionaries could identify the deceased even six months after death, because in the vision the dead man appeared whole with all distinctive features. I am grateful to Avraham (Rami) Reiner for the reference.
83. *Shulhan Arukh*, Even ha-Ezer, section 17, par. 26.
84. Groebner (2007), pp. 108–11.
85. Wade Labarge (1986), pp. 184–7.
86. Yerasimos (1995), pp. 114–15.
87. Thompson (1968). Thompson based his research on the lists for 45 galleys in the years 1586 and 1589.
88. Kagan and Dyer (2004), p. 110.
89. Quoted in Rovigo (2005), p. 6. I am grateful to Benjamin Arbel for the reference.

7 Judging by Appearances

1. Goffman (1961), p. 20.
2. Lofland (1973), p. 50.
3. Rublack (2007), pp. 286–7.
4. Rublack (2010), p. 259.
5. Cf. Lofland (1973).
6. Burke (2006), p. 25.
7. Burke (2006), p. 36.
8. Burke (2006), p. 32.

9. Hunt (1996, 2004).
10. Belfanti and Giusberti (2000).
11. Allerston (2000).
12. For a survey of the evidence on cross-dressing during Jewish festivals in the late medieval and early modern period, see Spiegel (2009). I owe this reference to Avrahahm (Rami) Reiner.
13. Quoted in Norton (1997), p. 187. I am grateful to Michael Zakim for bringing this story to my attention.
14. Erauso (1996) and Velasco (2000).
15. Lowe (2003), pp. 165–8.
16. Legends and admiration for women who dressed as men and fought bravely were known in most societies. For Chinese heroines, see Handlin (1975), pp. 20–24. I am indebted to my student, Ron Atazky, for bringing this reference to my attention.
17. Garber (1997), p. 180.
18. Hotchkiss (1996), p. 10.
19. Montaigne, *Essays*, I:31.
20. Cressy (1996), p. 443.
21. Cf. Woodbridge (1984), p. 141.
22. Günsberg (2000).
23. Bullough and Bullough (1993), Dekker and van de Pol (1989); Harris (2005).
24. Calderón de la Barca (1872), vol. 1, p. 6: "Que no me atrevo a decirte / Que es este exterior vestido / Enigma, pues no es de quien / Parece: Juzga advertido, / Si no soy lo que parezco". I am indebted to Alex Kerner for this reference.
25. The texts of these pamphlets are to be found today in several websites online: www.archive.org/details; http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Women's_Petition_against_Coffee; www.uni-giessen.de/gloning/tx.
26. Vives (1585), p. 28.
27. Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Book I, chs 52–7.
28. Chambers and Pullan (1992), pp. 123–4.
29. Reis (2009), p. 16.
30. Dekker and van de Pol (1989).
31. Kates (1995).
32. Keitt (2005), pp. 13–34.
33. This case is cited by many scholars but none give a reference to the sources.
34. Montaigne, *Essays*, I:43.
35. Lüttenberg (2005).
36. Lüttenberg (2005), p. 76.
37. Roper (1994), pp. 117–18.
38. Kalfon Stillman (2003).
39. Schroeder (1937).
40. Anon., "A Thirteenth-Century Castilian Sumptuary Law" (1963).
41. In Marcus (2000), pp. 38–45.
42. Robert (1891).
43. Pullan (1983).
44. For the history of distinctive signs demanded of Jews throughout history, see the article "Badge, Jewish", *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1972), vol. 4, cols 62–73; for the distinctive attire Jews chose voluntarily for themselves at different times, see the article on "Dress", ibid., vol. 6, cols 212–23.
45. Ravid (1992).

46. Pullan (1983), p. 219.
47. Aescoly (1993), p. 32.
48. See Chapter 3 above.
49. Daniel of Pisa's letter reproduced in Aescoly (1993), p. 151.
50. Ravid (1992), p. 183.
51. Ravid (1992), p. 187.
52. Pullan (1983), pp. 74–5.
53. In Rummel (2002), p. 111.
54. Rummel (2002), p. 123 n. 4.
55. *Sefer Hasidim* survived in a several versions (see the *Sefer Hasidim* Princeton Project: https://etc.princeton.edu/sefer_hasidim). The instructions summarized here are based on the Parma Manuscript and the numbers in parentheses refer to passages in that version.
56. For a useful collection of all Jewish laws regarding clothes see Chaimovitz (1991); on dressing as Gentiles for camouflage, see his ch. 8, pars 27, 28, p. 82. I am very grateful to Avraham (Rami) Reiner for providing me with the references to this booklet and to *Sefer Hasidim*.
57. Hughes (1986).
58. Ginzburg (1992), pp. 93, 97, 100, 104.
59. Lea (1922).
60. Liebman (1980).
61. Bethencourt (2009), pp. 298–9.
62. Wiesner-Hanks (2000), pp. 231, 242.
63. Gilman (1995), p. 76.
64. Hunt (1996), p. 293.
65. Bériac (1990), Robb (2007).
66. Robert (1891).
67. On attitudes to prostitutes and pimps in the ancient world see, for example, Vanoyeke (1990).
68. Perry (1990), p. 49.
69. Brucker (1971), pp. 191, 195.
70. Campanella (1981), p. 61.
71. Hughes (1983), pp. 91, 92.
72. Bennassar and Bennassar (1989), pp. 325–32. On Muslims and Christians in Venice, see Pedani (2002), pp. 90–98.
73. Matar in Vitkus (2001), p. 36.
74. Cf. Vitkus (2002).
75. Rublack (2010), pp. 146–61.
76. Groebner (1990).
77. Wilson (2005).
78. Little (2001).
79. Operé (2008).
80. Erasmus (1971), p. 165.
81. Von Hutten (1964), Letter I.47, p. 97.
82. Hargreaves-Mawdsley (1963).
83. Gilded stirrups and a richly ornamented cloth known as a *valdrappa* were prohibited to healers who were not university doctors. Gentilcore (1998), pp. 59–60.
84. Although pertaining to the eighteenth century, the sentiments of the anonymous bourgeois in Montpellier in 1768 could have been expressed, *mutatis mutandis*, by any city resident in the sixteenth century as well. See Darnton (1984).

85. Quoted in Lemire (1990).
86. Quoted in Woodbridge (2001), p. 199.
87. Quoted in Kovesi Killerby (2002), p. 61.
88. Quoted in Hunt (1996), p. 108.
89. Quoted in Belfanti and Giusberti (2000), p. 360.
90. Quoted in Belfanti and Giusberti (2000), p. 363 n. 7.
91. Quoted in Hooper (1915), p. 447.
92. Quoted in Vincent (1935), pp. 139, 141.
93. Vincent (1935), p. 68.
94. Harte (1976), p. 133.
95. In addition to the works already cited, see Moyer (1997).
96. Vincent (1935), p. 73.
97. Rainey (1991), Brucker (1971), p. 181.
98. Quoted in Newett (1907), p. 249.
99. Harte (1976), pp. 154–5.
100. Harte (1976), p. 139.
101. Quoted in Beringher (1997), p. 108.
102. After he moved from Byzantium to Italy Bessarion continued to wear a beard, although forbidden to Western clergy, and was thus immediately recognized as a Greek – this distinguishing mark may have cost him the election to the Holy See.
103. Bridgeman (2000), Günsberg (2000), p. 347.
104. Quoted in Belfanti and Giusberti (2000), p. 360.
105. De Bellis (2000).
106. Hunt (1996), p. 395.
107. An English translation of this Castilian law is to be found in Anon., "A Thirteenth-Century Castilian Sumptuary Law" (1963), pp. 98–100.
108. Hughes (1983), p. 88.
109. Montaigne, *Essays*, I:43.
110. Sully (1817), vol. 3, pp. 181–2, Freudenberger (1963).
111. Greenfield (1918), pp. 130–31.
112. Rublack (2010), p. 199. For a full text of the Nüremberg law of 1693, see Vincent (1935), pp. 144–51.
113. Quoted in Miller (1966), pp. 114–15.
114. Quoted in Hunt (1996), p. 1.
115. Hunt (1996), p. 4.
116. Tawney (1967), p. 377.
117. Hunt (1996).
118. Rublack (2010), p. 266.
119. Hooper (1915), p. 439.
120. Quoted in Bistrot (1912), p. 22
121. Bridgeman (2000).
122. Kovesi Killerby (1994), p. 100.
123. Kovesi Killerby (2002), ch. 7.
124. Kovesi Killerby (1994), pp. 116–17.
125. "Very few prosecutions", writes Harte (1976), p. 146; for cases brought before the *Reformationskammern* of the Swiss cities, see Vincent (1935), pp. 102–9.
126. Bartlett (1994), pp. 43–60.
127. A letter of the Valencia *jurats* to their king in 1399, quoted in García-Ballester, McVaugh and Rubio-Vela (1989), p. 25.

128. Anon., *Lazarillo de Tormes* (2001), p. 59.
129. Burke (2006), p. 33.
130. Salgādo (1977), p. 16.
131. On the meanings of the veil in various societies see Heath (2008).
132. Quoted in Newett (1907), p. 268.
133. Hughes (1983), p. 91.
134. Kovesi Killerby (2002), pp. 63–4.

8 Paperwork: Identification Documents

1. Papyrus BGU XIV 2367. I am grateful to Uri Yiftach-Firanko for allowing me to read his unpublished paper, "Creating Identity: Identifiers in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt"; on means of identification in ancient Rome, see Moatti (2007).
2. Mueller (2007).
3. Yerasimos (1995), p. 107.
4. Thompson (1968); for Venice see Chambers and Pullan (1992), pp. 293–4.
5. Van Elk (2004).
6. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta pontificum*, ed. N.E.S.A. Hamilton (Rolls Series, 1870), p. 103. I am indebted for this reference to Robert Bartlett.
7. Wroe (2003), p. 294; "Proclamation 683", quoted in Hug (2009), p. 36.
8. Edgerton (1985).
9. Thompson (1955–58), 4:457, Childers (1977).
10. Malkiel (1996).
11. Mueller (2007), p. 317, Roover (1963), p. 127.
12. Gentilcore (2006), p. 5.
13. Groebner (2007), p. 12.
14. For the development of various means of identification in the pre-modern world, see Noiriel (2007), Von Moos (2004), Gutton (2010), Crettiez and Piazza (2006).
15. Deller (2010).
16. Youngs (2006), ch. 2.
17. Cook and Cook (1991).
18. Role (2003).
19. Ravel (2008).
20. Seidel Menchi and Quaglioni (2004).
21. Chojnacki (1994).
22. See, for example, Martínez (2008).
23. Moatti and Kaiser (2007), Moatti (2004), Kleinschmidt (2003), Maczak (1995), Céard and Margolin (1987).
24. Caplan and Torpey (2001), pp. 1–12. Most other books on the history of travel documents define as pre-history examples from periods preceding the nineteenth century; see, for example Torpey (2000), Lloyd (2003).
25. Nordman (1987).
26. Polo (1958), p. 36. Since the Mongol "passports" or insignia of officials were made of metal, several fourteenth-century examples survived and can be viewed in a number of museums.
27. The earliest reference to such letters is to be found in the Book of Nehemiah (2:7–9) in the Old Testament, when Nehemiah left Persia to go to Jerusalem.
28. Ben-Shalom (forthcoming). I am grateful to Ram Ben-Shalom for letting me read the article before its publication.

29. The text of Charles V's safe conduct to Luther is cited in ch. 49 of D'Aubigné (2001).
30. Reuveni's account of the Pope's letters and of the safe conduct he received from the hands of the Portuguese ambassador in Rome in Aescoly (1993), pp. 47–9. Lipiner, in Aescoly (1993), pp. xlvii–xlviii, has a Hebrew translation and a photocopy of the 1526 letter from King John III allowing Reuveni to leave Portugal safely. For safe conducts and other identification documents used in the frontier areas between Ottoman and Christian countries, see Pedani (2002), chs 6–7.
31. See, for example, the case of Samuel Pallache in García-Arenal and Wiegers (2003).
32. Groebner (2007), pp. 172–5.
33. Wright (1999).
34. Davis (2006), p. 47.
35. Salinero (2007).
36. Eliav-Feldon (2009).
37. Quoted in Questier (2006), p. 391.
38. Quoted in Schorsch (2004), p. 423 n. 62.
39. *Memoirs of Lady Fanshawe, Wife of Sir Richard Fanshawe, bart., ambassador from Charles the Second to the courts of Portugal and Madrid*, quoted in Maczak (1995), p. 113.
40. Quoted in Maczak (1995), p. 115 (John Bradshaw presided over the court that sentenced Charles I to death in 1649, and was President of the Council of State until 1653).
41. Hindle (2006).
42. Aydelotte (1967), p. 26.
43. Kinney (1990), pp. 23–4.
44. A photocopy of such a false document from 1596 is reproduced in Aydelotte (1967), plate 3.
45. Kinney (1990), pp. 49–50.
46. Slack (1974), p. 364.
47. Kamen (1984), p. 180.
48. Hindle (2006), p. 25.
49. Vitkus (2001), appendix 7, pp. 369–70.
50. Bennassar and Bennassar (1989).
51. Kaiser (2004).
52. Kaiser (2007).
53. Matar in Vitkus (2001), p. 27.
54. Lithgow (1906), p. 75.
55. For the texts of these letters, published in Richard Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1589) together with John Fox's narrative, see Vitkus (2001), pp. 67–9.
56. Bonfil (1994a), pp. 85–90. See also Bonfil (1994b).
57. Boes (2007), p. 92.
58. Boes (2007) p. 110.
59. Cipolla (1976, pp. 26–7) provides examples of health passes: those issued in the fifteenth century were written by hand, but by the sixteenth century they were printed forms with blank spaces left for the bearer's name and identifying details (age, complexion, height). See also Carmichael (1986). More than Cipolla, Carmichael stresses the fear of the poor as spreaders of disease, and demonstrates that it was therefore the "socially undesirable individuals" who were made the target of preventive plague controls (p. 124).
60. Davis (2006), p. 52.

61. See, for example, Makdisi (1989) and Daniel (1984).
62. García-Ballester, McVaugh and Rubio-Vela (1989), p. 39.
63. See, for example, Shatzmiller (1994), especially ch. 2.
64. Park (1985), pp. 37, 64–5.
65. Palmer (1983), pp. 38–9, 61–5. Bonfil (1994b), p. 285, describes the similarities between rabbinical and university certificates in early modern Italy.
66. Ruderman (2001). Medical diplomas of Jewish graduates in Padua were accorded by a secular appointed procurator rather than by the bishop, but except for secular formulas in place of the Christian wording, and a non-Christian iconography, their diplomas were identical to those accorded to other graduates; see the description of the medical diploma of Emmanuel Colli (1682) in Mann (1989), pp. 235–6. Shatzmiller (1994) mentions names of a handful of Jews who might have studied in Bologna, Montpellier or Perpignan during the High Middle Ages – but even these cases are doubtful.
67. For information about the training of Jewish physicians see Shatzmiller (1994) as well as older works by Friedenwald (1944) and Roth (1953). See also Park (1985) and Jütte (1995).
68. I am indebted to Jacob Deutsch for the reference to Anton Margaritha. See also Efron (2001).
69. Dangler (2001).
70. García-Ballester, McVaugh and Rubio-Vela (1989), pp. 30–34.
71. Siraisi (1990).
72. Gentilcore (1998), p. 38.
73. Le Roy Ladurie (1997), pp. 216, 319.
74. Davis (1975), Lingo (1986).
75. Margolin (1979).
76. Gentilcore (2006).
77. See, for example, Oberndoerffer (1602). On France see Du Breil (1580), p. 42, Sonnet (1610) p. 58, and Duret (1858), p. 258, all quoted in Lingo (1986).
78. Du Breil (1580), quoted in Porter (2001), p. 7.
79. Du Breil (1580), quoted in Lingo (1986), p. 584.
80. Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Del governo della peste e delle maniere di guardarsene*, Brescia, 1721, p. 119, quoted in Gentilcore (2006), p. 118.
81. Porter (2001), p. 207.
82. Fuhrmann (1988–90).
83. On the endless battle within the art world over forgeries and authentication, see Hoving (1996), as well as the astonishing story of Peter Paul Biro, who claims to be able to authenticate paintings by fingerprints and DNA, in Grann (2010). As a motto for his book Hoving chose the epigram attributed to Horace: "He who knows a thousand works of art, knows a thousand frauds." In this chapter I avoided the vast subject of the subterfuge methods in the publication of prohibited ideas: publishing anonymously or under pseudonyms, falsifying the name of the publisher and more, although these, too, could be regarded as forms of imposture.
84. Russell Major (1994), p. 13.
85. Wroe (2003), p. 115.
86. Thurston (1908).
87. Bellamy (1973), pp. 64–5.
88. Constable (1988–90), pp. 11–37, and idem (1983).
89. Constable (1983), p. 15.

90. Ullendorff and Beckingham (1982), p. 4.
91. Davis (2006), p. 49.
92. See above in Chapter 3.
93. Dekker, *Bell-Man of London* (1608), in Pound (1971), p. 98.
94. Camporesi (1973).
95. Kinney (1990), p. 42, Grose (1811).
96. Salgādo (1977), p. 154 (Salgādo unfortunately does not provide references for his non-literary sources). See also Long (2004).
97. Salgādo (1977), p. 56.
98. Hindle (2006), p. 15.
99. Salgādo (1977), pp. 214–16; Dekker, *Lanthorne and Candle-Light*, London, 1608, in Judges (1965), p. 344.

9 Conclusion: Reserving Judgement

1. Coornhert (2000), p. 73.
2. "That it is folly to measure truth and error by our own capacity", I:27; "On the uncertainty of our judgement", I:47, in Montaigne (1958).
3. Montaigne, *Essays*, II:18.
4. Daston (1991), pp. 93–124.
5. Grafton (1990), p. 49.
6. Gervase of Tilbury (2002). On the distinction between the marvellous and the miraculous in the Middle Ages see, for example, Schmitt (1999), pp. 79–92.
7. Quoted in Warneke (1995), p. 274.
8. Quoted in Martels (1994), p. xiv.
9. Quoted in Hiatt (2004), p. 158.
10. Naphy and Roberts (1997), p. 6. See also Bouwsma (1990).

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Index

Abagnale, Frank, Jr, 1
Aboab, Samuel, 27
Abyssinia, 82, *see also* Ethiopia
academies of secrets, Italy, 105
Accetto, Torquato, 8
Adams, Percy G., 95
Age of Conversion, 17–19, 45, 63
Age of Discovery, 69
Age of Dissimulation, 4, 18
Age of Exploration, 81–2
Age of Fear, 3, 18
Age of Impostors, 13–15
Agnodice, 6
Agrippa von Nettesheim, Heinrich Cornelius, 107, 122, 213
Aitken, Margaret, 151–2
Akrish, Isaac, 90–1, 95
Alberti, Leon Battista, 13
Albuquerque, Alfonso de, 80
alchemy, 106
Alfonso V of Aragon, 132
Alfonso X, King, 171–2
Algiers, 207
Allerston, Patricia, 163
alms, false collectors of, 112
Alonso del Castillo, 33
Alumbradismo, 34–6
Alumbrados, 21, 30, 53, 65
Álvares, Francisco, 83
ambassadors, false, 10–11, 68–91, 220; acceptance as genuine, 77–80; and credulity, 69, 78; David Reuveni, 68–80, 85–7; documentation, 86–7; Dom João Bermudes, 84, 86; exposure, 70, 71, 87–91; fate of, 96; inaccuracies of accounts, 73–4; the Mateus episode, 82–3, 86; modern, 232 n. 58; motivation, 74–5; papers, 86, 89; Prester John, 80–5; props, 85–7
Amerindians, 16–17, 155–6, 166
Amphitheatrum aeternae providentiae divino-magico (Vanini), 54
Amsterdam, 60, 63, 148, 149, 229 n. 141, 236 n. 78
Anabaptists, 41, 47, 48, 51, 100, 105–6
Anatomie of the Abuses in England (Stubbes), 184
Anderson, Anna, 2
Andreae, Johann Valentin, 52, 106
Andreas of Ratisbon, 132
Anselm of Canterbury, 196
anti-Catholic propaganda, 99
anti-Semitism, 154, 236 n. 89
Antichrist, the, 62, 66, 99, 104
Antilia, 106
Antisatira (Tarabotti), 187
Antoine, Nicholas, 60–1
Antonio, Piero, 57
apocalyptic expectations, 72, 75, 77–8, 101, 102, 104
apparitions, 36, 39, 43, 150, 225 n. 61
Arab dress, adopting, 55, 57
Aragon, 2, 29, 212
Aristotle, 219
arson, 118
aspiring saints, 37–41, 216
atheism, 43, 52–3, 65–7
Aubigné, Théodore-Agrippa d' 158
Aydelotte, Frank, 205

Babington conspirators, 196
Bacon, Francis, 105
Badger, George Percy, 55, 95
badges, 145, 183–4
Bahá'í faith, 26
Baïf, Lazare de, 181
Barry, James, 6
Basle, 47–9, 51, 52, 63, 127, 146, 185, 191, 213, 226 n. 94
Bataillon, Marcel, 44–5
Bautista, María, 39
Bayle, Pierre, 54, 60
Bayman, Anna, 114
beatas, 5, 37, 39, 40, 53, 66, 169
Bedlam (Bethlem Royal Hospital), 8, 111, 164, 209, 217
beggars: capture-rate, 116; descriptions of, 115; false permits, 112, 114;

fraudulent, 6–7, 111–12, 112–13, 115; justification, 112; travel documentation, 205, 206
Beier, Lee, 112, 113, 117, 134
Benjamin of Tudela, 71, 230 n. 4
Bennassar, Bartolomé and Lucille, 20, 59, 180, 181, 207
Bennett, John, 204
Bentham, Jeremy, 140
Benzoni, Gino, 58
Bermudes, Dom João, 84, 86, 96, 232 n. 67
Bernier, François, 156
Berti, Silvia, 66
bigamy, 198–9
biological determinism, 152
birthmarks, 157
births, registering, 199
Black Death, 12, 186, 201, 210
blood: hereditary qualities carried by, 152–5; noble, 152; odour, 154; tainted, 152–5; as truth, 157, *see also* Purity of Blood
blood libels, 101, 128, 154
bodily marks, inherited, 153
Bodin, Jean, 43, 108
body as evidence, 137–61; branding, 140–1, 221; circumcision, 138–9; ear-cropping, 144, 146; end of era of mutilation, 149–50; hereditary qualities, 152–5; mutilation, 140–50, 221; mutilation laws, 143–5; race, 155–6; registering appearance, 160–1; state violence, 145–9; stigmata, 150–2; tattoos and tattooing, 139–40
body odour, 25
Boes, Maria R., 147–8, 208–9
Bok, Sissela, 9
Bologna, 70, 121; sumptuary laws, 187
book burning, 25
Book of Baruch, 27
Book of the Infante Dom Pedro of Portugal, Who Traveled Over the Four Parts of the World (Santisteban), 81
books of secrets, 105
Boorde, Andrew, 123, 182
border controls, 204–5, 208
Botero, Giovanni, 79
Bracciolini, Poggio, 55
Braithwaite, Richard, 219
branding, 140–1, 221; alphabet, 142–3, 144; end of, 150; England, 146–7, 149; erasing, 142–3; Netherlands, 148–9; statistics, 145
Brashear, William, 194–5
Breil, André du, 214
Brescia, 36–7
Bridewell (prison and hospital), 112, 113, 130
Brod, Max, 71
Broquière, Bertrandon de la, 160, 180
Brown, Judith, 151–2
Brunfels, Otto, 45, 45–6
Bu Jum'a, Ahmad, Mufti of Oran, 32
Burckhardt, Jean Louis, 94–5
bureaucracy, 12, 197
Burke, Peter, 114, 163
Burton, Richard, 94–5
Burton, Robert, 41–2

Cagots, 178–9
Calixtus III, Pope, 215
Calvert, Thomas, 154
Calvin, John, 5, 44, 53, 59
Campanella, Tommaso, 8, 52, 54, 106
Campion, Edmund, 99
Cantimori, Delio, 45
Cantimprantanus, Thomas (Thomas de Cantimpré), 154
Caplan, Jane, 199–200
Cardano, Girolamo, 53
Cardoso, Isaac, 65
Carlini, Benedetta, 39, 65, 151–2
carnival, 162
Carvajal, Luis de, 65
Castellani, Nicolosa, 187
Castellazzo, Moses da, 69
Castellio, Sebastian, 47
Castiglione, Baldassare, 8
Castile, 28–9, 144, 171, 212
Castro, Abraham de, 75
Catch Me If You Can (film), 1
Catholic Church: and forced conversions, 59–60; and lying, 59–60; preoccupation with religious dissimulation, 65–6; and turning Turk, 58–60
Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, vulgarly called vagabonds, A (Harman), 111, 112–13

Cellini, Benvenuto, 9
Center for Research on Racial Hygiene and Demographic Biology, Nazi Germany, 129
Cervantes, Miguel de, 114, 128–9
charity, false collectors of, 112
charlatan, origin of term, 214
charlatans, 6, 214–15
Charles II, King of England, 207
Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, 118, 202, 212–13
Charron, Pierre, 54
Chastel, André, 78
child abduction, 128–9
Chios, 59
Christianity: Ethiopian, 82; false converts, 4–5; false converts to Islam, 57–60; Muslim converts, 34; repudiation of, 53; secret converts to Judaism, 60–2, *see also* religious dissimulation
Christina, Queen of Sweden, 164
Chronicon Foroliviense, 121
Church of England, 17
Cicala, Scipione, 58
Cigala, Michael, 58
Cipolla, Carlo, 209
circumcision, 25, 31, 60, 62, 69, 94, 138–9, 154, 155, 159, 180
Civitas solis, 106
Clark, Stuart, 43, 108, 220
cleanliness, as sign of heresy, 24, 31
Clement VII, Pope, 59, 69, 72, 79, 84, 85, 202, 228 n. 130
clerical uniforms, 182–3
Cocles, Bartolommeo della Rocca, 156
codpieces, 169–70
coffee, 167
Cohen, Solomon, 71
coins, counterfeiting, 12
Columbus, Christopher, 81, 95
Conservación de Monarquias (Navarrete), 114
conspiracy theories, 118–20
conspiratorial mentality, 119–20
Constable, Giles, 216
Conti, Nicolò de' 55
Convent of the Annunciation, 40
Coornhert, Dirck, 218
Coptic Christians, 122–3
Coquillards, 126, 127
Córdoba, 40
corporal punishment, 141, 148, 149–50
corsairs, 29, 34, 55, 56, 113, 180, 207, 228 n. 123
Cosmographia Universalis (Münster), 125
Costa, Uriel da, 229 n. 150
Counter-Reformation, 29, 187
Courtenay, Edward, 46
credulity, 69, 78, 96, 104, 213, 220
Cressy, David, 166
criminal underworld, 97, 109–18; belief in, 109; capture-rate, 115; culture, 111; discourses, 113–14; England, 110–11; existence, 114–16; fear of, 117–18; fraudulent beggars, 111–12; gangs, 116–17; honour code, 115; infrastructure, 116; Jewish, 119; language, 116, 116–17; literature, 110, 112, 113–14, 114–17; members, 110–11; myth of, 117; and poverty, 110; ransom economy, 112–13; vagrants and vagrancy, 109–14; women in, 116
criminals, classes of, 115
Cronaca Fermana, 129
Cronica di Bologna, 121
cross-dressing, 5–6, 155, 162, 164–9; actors, 164, 166; attitudes to, 168–9; and gender confusion, 166–7; male, 169; objections to, 165–7; transvestite saints, 165; women, 6, 164–6, 167–9
Crusades, 81, 82, 139, 175
crypto-Jews, *see* Judaizers
crypto-atheists, 52–4
cryptography, 13
culture of secrets, 104–7

Daniel of Pisa, 85, 91
David, King, 8
Davis, Natalie Zemon, 2, 34, 74
Davis, Robert, 113
De admirandis naturae reginae deaeque mortalium arcanis (Vanini), 54
De Catholicis Institutionibus Liber (Simancas), 19
De Praestigiis Daemonum (Weyer), 41
De Prodigiis (Vergil), 41
De re vestiaria (Baïf), 181
dead, the, identification of, 158–60

death, proof of, 159–60
Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures (Harsnett), 41–2
Dee, John, 50, 52, 106, 146
dejamiento, 35
Dekker, Rudolf, 168–9
Dekker, Thomas, 128, 135, 216, 217
Del Río, Martin, 38
Della dissimulazione onesta (Accetto), 8
Della Famiglia (Alberti), 13
Delumeau, Jean, 3, 10, 18, 78, 220
demonology, 42, 43–4
Der gantze Jüdisch Glaub (*The Whole Jewish Belief*) (Margaritha), 64, 212
Description of Africa (Leo Africanus), 74
Desert of Habor, 69, 76, 93–4
Devil, the, 3, 38–44, 108, 109, 118, 129, 130, 216, 220; as great pretender, 107
devil's mark, 151–2, 221
Dickson, Donald, 106
Dienna, Rabbi Azriel, 90
dietary laws, 23–4, 31
Dillinger, Johannes, 107, 118–19
diplomas, 6, 209–15
diplomatic protocol, 11
Directorium Inquisitorum (Eymeric), 19
Discourse of the Common Weal of this Realm of England (Smith), 186
Discoverie of Witchcraft, The (Scott), 44
Discurso contra los gitanos (Quiñones), 128, 153–5
disease, 12, 119
disenchantment, and religious dissimulation, 42–3
divided souls, 62–5
DNA profiling, 2
doctors, 210–15; charlatans, 214–15; Jewish, 211–12; reputation, 213–14
documentation: authentication, 215; begging licences, 205, 206; and the development of bureaucracy, 197; diplomas, 6, 209–15; emergence of, 200; false ambassadors, 86–7, 89; family relations, 198–9; forgeries, *see* forged documents; Gypsies, 132–5; health certificates, 209, 246 n. 59; identification documents, 194–7; identifiers, 195; parish registration, 206; passports, 197, 200, 205–6, 217; renegades, 207–8; residence permits, 208–9; seals, 197, 215; signatures, 196–7; travel, 199–206, 228 n. 130
Documenting Individual Identity (Caplan and Torpey), 200
Dominicans, 34, 174, 183
Don Quijote (*Don Quixote*), 31, 114
double men, 21
dress codes, 6, 13, 24, 85, 162–3, 168, 221, 224 n. 17; canon, 68, Fourth Lateran Council, 170–1; enforcing, 190–1; freedom of, 193; gender distinctions, 6; hairstyles, 191; heretics, 176–7; and identity, 162; inconsistency, 179–80; infidels, 170–6; Jews, 170–6; loop earrings, 176, 238 n. 33; modesty, 187, 192–3; Muslims, 170–1, 180–1, 192; national dress, 181–2; platform shoes, 179; prostitutes, 179–80; and social hierarchy, 184–5, 188; state interference, 193; sumptuary laws, 185, 185–91; turning Turk, 180–1; undesirables, 177–80, 192; uniforms, 182–4; veiling, 192–3
dressing up, 192, 221
Dudley, Sir Robert, 198

ear-cropping, 144, 146
Eco, Umberto, 95
edicts of faith, 19–21, 153; and Alumbrados, 35; dress regulations, 24; heretic categories, 21; and Moriscos, 29–31; publication, 20–1; and recognition of Jews, 23–5
effeminacy, 167, 169–70
Egidio da Viterbo, Cardinal, 73–4, 77–8, 102
Egmond, Florike, 116, 135
ego-documents, 65
Egypt, as place of origin of Gypsies, 121, 122–3
Eire, Carlos, 45
El Buscón (*The Swindler*) (Quevedo), 13
El Rey Encubierto (the Hidden King), 2
Eldad ha-Dani (Eldad the Danite), 71, 81, 86, 91–2, 101
Elias, Norbert, 149
Elizabeth I, Queen of England, 17, 66, 99, 100, 190
émigré communities, 17

England: border controls, 204–5; branding, 146–7, 149; criminal underworld, 110–11; false Gypsies, 126; Familism, 51; fear of Popish plots, 99; forgers, 217; Gypsies, 130; Jews, 171; mutilation laws, 144; passports, 205–6; penitential garments, 177; prostitutes dress codes, 179; rogue literature, 110, 114; secret societies, 105–6; state violence, 146–7, 149; sumptuary laws, 186–7, 189, 190; threat of Catholics, 99; treaty with Algiers, 1662 207; and turning Turk, 59; witch-finders, 151
English Civil War, 204–5
English Gentleman, The (Braithwaite), 219
Enlightenment, the, 54, 60, 66
enthusiasts (*schwärmer*), 41
Epistle of Jeremiah, 27
Erasmus, Desiderius, 12, 47, 77, 183
Erauso, Catalina de, 164–5
Esther, Book of, 27
Esther, Fast of, 24, 27
Ethiopia: Bermudes and, 84; Christian King of, 69, 81; Christianity, 82; David Reuveni said to be from, 71; Israelite kingdom of, 82; Lost Tribes residing in, 89, 95; the Mateus episode, 82–3; Portuguese delegation to, 82–3
Eugenius IV, Pope, 55
Evans, Richard J., 116
Evelyn, John, 58, 174, 186–7, 205
Exemplar humanae vitae (Uriel da Costa), 229 n. 150
exorcisms, exorcists, 41–2, 43–4
Eymeric, Nicolau, 19

Fälschungen im Mittlealter (Fuhrman ed.), 215
false Christianity, 16
false Gypsies, 126–9
false lepers, 178–9
Family of Love, Familism, 45, 46–7, 51, 52
family relations, documentation, 198–9
Fanshawe, Lady, 204–5
Faustus, 107
Fear in Early Modern Society (Naphy and Roberts), 220
Febvre, Lucien, 52
Ferrazi, Cecilia, 65
fingerprinting, 2
First Book of the Introduction of Knowledge, The (Boorde), 123, 182
flogging, 148
Florence, 179, 186, 196, 210–11
Florence, Council of, 87, 123, 216
Flores, Jorge, 83
forced converts, 4–5, 26–7; categories, 16–17; Catholic Church attitude to, 59–60; Muslims, 28; satire on, 55–6; turning Turk, 54–60, 59
forged documents, 11–12, 215–17; begging licences, 112; Gypsies documents, 134–5; identifiers, 220; letters, 40; of medieval manuscripts, 96; papal bulls, 215–16; production, 12, 86–7, 135; travel documentation, 206
forgers, 216–17
Forma d'una Republica Catholica (Pucci), 49–50, 52, 100, 106
Foucault, Michel, 66, 149
Fourth Lateran Council, 170–1
France: criminal underworld, 116–17; Gypsies, 133–4; Huguenot plots, 99–100; Jewish dress codes, 172; rogue literature, 114, 115–16; sumptuary laws, 189
Francis I, King of France, 131, 133
Francis of Assisi, St, 151
Francisca de los Apóstoles, 65
Franciscans, 34, 40, 56, 79, 165
Francken, Christian, 53, 65
Frankfurt am Main: residence permits, 208–9; *Strafenbuch* (*Book of Punishments*), 147
Fraser, Angus, 125–6
French Revolution, 193, 200
Frith, Mary (Moll Cutpurse), 164, 167
frontier societies, 10
Fuhrman, Horst, 215
Fundamentboek (Simons), 47
Furetière, Antoine, 192

García-Arenal, Mercedes, 64
garments of infamy, 176–7, *see also sanbenito*
Gaspar da Gama, 80

gender confusion, 6, 166–7
gender impersonation, 5–6
genealogical determinism, 152
genealogy, 85–6
Geneva, 47, 48, 50, 60–1, 100, 213
Gentilcore, David, 212–13
geographic and ethnographic inventions, 95
Germany: arson scares, 118; criminal underworld, 116; Gypsies, 131; health administration, 209; Jewish doctors, 212; Jewish dress codes, 172; Jewish threat, 103–4; Jews, 119; rogue literature, 110; secret societies, 105–6; state violence, 147–8; sumptuary laws, 189
Gerson, Jean, 38, 39
Gervase of Tilbury, 219
Gilman, Sander, 178
Ginzburg, Carlo, 45
Giustinian, Sebastian, 88
Glanvill, Joseph, 129–30
Glass of Righteousness, The (Niclaes), 46
Goffman, Erving, 162, 203
Gois, Damião de, 83
Gómez, Antonio Enríquez, 63–4
Gordon, Lord George, 60
Gospel of Barnabas, 33
Grafton, Anthony, 219
Granada, 28, 29, 30, 33
Great Confinement, the, 150
Great Fear, the, 78
Greenblatt, Stephen, 8
Groebner, Valentin, 160, 181, 197, 200
group identity, 182
Guerre, Martin, 2, 158, 163, 218
Guicciardini, Francesco, 8, 53
Gumilev, Lev, 81, 95
Gunpowder Plot, 99
Gypsies, 119, 121–36; changing identities, 135; child abduction, 128–9; documentation, 132–5; dress codes, 173, 175, 176; earliest sightings, 121; Egypt as place of origin, 121, 122–3; etymology of names for, 123; false, 126–9; fear of, 7, 12; first encounters with, 124; forged documents, 134–5; health certificates, 209; as impostors, 135–6; India as place of origin, 121, 122; and indigenous travellers, 127; leaders, 131–2; and Little Egypt, 124–5; loop earrings, 176, 238 n. 33; and Nazi Germany, 129; origins, 121–4, 236–7 n. 1, 237 n. 12; perceptions of, 130–1; persecution, 136; pilgrimage and penitence, 122, 125–6; Pope hears confession, 125; religion, 131, 237 n. 8; Romany language, 122, 123, 130; safe conducts, 132–4; skin colour, 128; tainted blood, 153; travel documentation, 202; tricksters, 129–31; as unidentifiable aliens, 121; vagrancy problem, 135–6; and witchcraft, 130–1

Haec Vir, 167–8
hairstyles, 191
Hakewill, George, 42
Hall, Thomas/Thomasine, 164
Hamilton, Alastair, 35
Hancock, Ian, 237 n. 12
Harant, Kryštof, 56
Harman, Thomas, 111, 112–13, 217
Harrison, William, 144
Harsnett, Samuel, 41–2
Hassan (false ambassador), 88–9, 96
Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 145
Hazard, Paul, 54
head shaving, 142
health administration, 209
health certificates, 208, 209, 246 n. 59
Hebrew, 102
Helvetic Confession, 47
Henri III, King of France, 185, 214
Henry III, King of England, 171
hereditary qualities, 152–5
hermaphrodites, 155
hermetic societies, 10, 105
hermeticism, 123
Hernández, Francisca, 37
Herzl, Theodor, 76
Hess, Andrew C., 29
Hext, Edward, 184, 206
Hic Mulier, 167–8
hidden enemies, 17, 17–18, 20, 66, 221
hidden king, the, 2
Hildesheim, 121
Hindle, Steve, 205
History of Infamous Impostors, The (Rocoles), 14

History of the Three Late Famous Imposters, The (Evelyn), 58
Hoffman, Melchior, 47
holiness, feigning of, 36–7
Holinshed's Chronicles, 144
Holland, 63, 127, 131
Holy Land, liberation conspiracy, 103–4
homosexuality, 166, 169
Hotchkiss, Valerie, 6, 166
Hughes, Diane Owen, 176, 188
Huguenot plots, 99–100
humanists, 8, 9, 35, 77, 122, 220
Hunt, Alan, 188, 189

ideal societies, 49–52
Idel, Moshe, 76
identity, 14; changing, 135; and dress, 162; establishing, 12, 129, 157–60; fractured, 62–3; group, 182; hiding, 65–6; invention of, 9; multiple, 64–5; private, 17; props for false, 85–7; public, 17; sexual, 155–6; verification of, 196–7
identity theft, 1, 194
illuminism, 34–6
impersonation, 9; stories of, 196
impostor: definition, 14, 58, 66; religious definition, 42
imposture: as perennial phenomenon, 1–2; religious definition, 42, 66
India, as place of origin of Gypsies, 121, 122
Indianization, 182
individual identity, establishing, 157–60
infidels, dress codes, 170–6
informers and informing, 25
Inghirami, Curzio, 12
insanity defence, 8
interior self, the, 9–10
Inventing the Sacred: Imposture, Inquisition, and the Boundaries of the Supernatural in Golden Age Spain (Keitt), 39
Isaac, Benjamin, 156
Isabel de la Cruz, 34
Isabella, Queen, 70
Islam: Christian converts, 16, 54, 57; dress codes, 170; false converts, 57–60; *ijazah* system, 210; Jewish converts, 61; Moriscos, 27–8; secrecy, 224 n. 40; turning Turk, 54–60, *see also* Muslims
Israel, Abraham, 63
Istanbul, 88, 161
Istorie fiorentine (Machiavelli), 184
Italy, 61, 78; academies of secrets, 105; false saints, 40; health administration, 209; humanists, 53; Jewish dress codes, 172; residence permits, 208; sumptuary laws, 189

Jacob (biblical figure), 1
Jehanne de Sermaises, 165
Jennings, Nicholas, 112–13
Jesuits, 9, 59, 99, 204, 223 n. 4
Jews and Judaism, 5, 23; adultery laws, 159–60; and the Antichrist, 104; attitude to, 28; attitude to Judaizers, 27; blood libels, 101, 128, 154; books, 24–5; cannibalism, 154, 155; circumcision, 138–9, 154; cleanliness, 24; conservatism, 175–6; conspiracy to re-conquer the Holy Land, 103–4; converts to Islam, 61; criminal underworld, 119; days of fasting, 23–4; doctors, 211–12; dress codes, 24, 170–6; establishing individual identity, 159–60; Ethiopian, 72; exile, 26; expulsion from Spain, 21, 22, 230 n. 6; and external threats, 101, 103–4; false messiahs, 5, 27, 62; and Gentile dress, 175; the House of David, 86; identification, 23–5, 139, 153–5; identification of the dead, 159–60; international conspiracy, 100–1; kingdom behind the river, 91–6; language, 102; linked to evil, 62; male menstruation, 154–5, 240 n. 66, 241 n. 67; martyrs, 26; mass conversions, 22; messianic expectations, 75–6, 101; in a non-Jewish household, 73–4; physical signs, 25; in Portugal, 230 n. 6; and Prester John, 82; proselytizing, 60; reactions to Reuveni, 90–1; registering appearance, 161; residence permits, 208; *responsa* literature, 138, 159–60; as scapegoats, 119; secret converts, 60–2; Sephardi diaspora, 27; Spanish, 21–2; stereotypes, 104; tainted

blood, 152–5; threat of, 100–4, 119; travel documentation, 201–2, 202–3; underworld, 100, 100–4; view of, 104, *see also* Judaizers
Joachim II Hector, prince-elector of Brandenburg, 103
Joan of Arc, 166; false, 165
John III, King of Portugal, 69–70, 79, 80, 83, 84, 85, 86, 246 n. 30
Joris, David, 47–9, 51, 145–6
Judah ha-Levi, 64
Judaism, *see* Jews and Judaism
Judaizers, 18, 21–5, 224 n. 17; experience, 26–7; Jewish attitudes to, 27; penitential garments, 177; punishments, 146; rights, 27
Jütte, Robert, 116–17

Kabbalah, the, 77–8, 89, 102
Kamen, Henry, 206
Keitt, Andrew, 35–6, 39, 225 n. 62
Kelley, Edward, 50, 52, 106, 146
King of the Jews and the Goths, 103–4
Kovesi Killerby, Catherine, 191, 193
Kraemer, Erik V., 115, 116
Kumar of Bhawal, 2

La Gitanilla (Cervantes), 128–9
L'Adversaire (film), 1
language: criminal underworld, 116, 116–17; and fear, 117; Hebrew, 102; Romany, 122, 123, 130; secret, 102, 117, 130
Latimer, Hugh, 185
Lazarillo de Tormes, 114, 192
Le Voyage d'Outre Mer (Broquière), 160, 180
Lea, Henry Charles, 19–20, 20–1
Lebna Dengel, 83, 84
Lemlein, Asher, 5, 71–2
Leo Africanus (al-Hassan al-Wazzan, al-Hasan ibn Muhammad), 34, 74, 181, 203, 210
Leo X, Pope, 34, 179
leprosy, 177–8
Les Chrétiens d'Allah (B and L Bennassar), 180, 181
letters: forged, 40; of introduction, 89, 202; of protection, 132; of recommendation, 132
Letters of Obscure Men, 174, 183
Levita, Elijah ("Bahur"), 73–4, 77
Lima, Rodrigo de, 83
Lima Cruz, Maria Augusta, 56
Lipsius, Justus, 46, 51, 65
Lisbon, 40
literary forgeries, Morisco, 33–4
literature: criminal underworld, 110, 112, 113–14, 114–17; false saints, 38–9; and gender impersonation, 6; picaresque, 114–15; *responsa*, 138, 159–60; rogue, 7, 110, 111, 112, 113–14, 114–17; travel, 69; witches and witchcraft, 107
Lithgow, William, 139, 207
Lithuania, 62
Little Egypt, 124–5
living saints, 5
Llerena, 35
Lofland, Lyn, 162
London Chronicle, 184
London Gazette, 112
Lope de Vega, 8
Lost Tribes of Israel, 56, 81, 82, 91–6, 101–2, 119, 229–30 n. 3; ambassador of, 68–80
Loyola, Ignatius, 34
Lucrecia de León, 65
Ludovico da Bologna, 80
Luna, Alonso de, 31
Luna, Miguel de, 33
Luther, Martin, 9, 64, 77, 104, 202
Lüttenberg, Thomas, 169–70
lying, 9–10; Catholic Church and, 59–60; religious justifications, 26

MacGregor, Sir Gregor, 11
Machiavelli, Niccolò, 8, 53, 184
madness, faked, 8, 55–6, 112
Madness in Valencia (Lope de Vega), 8
Magdalena de la Cruz, 40
Magna Carta, 201
Maimon, Rabbi, "Letter of Consolation" 26
Maimonides, Moses, 5, 26–7; "Epistle on Martyrdom" 26
male menstruation, 154–5, 240 n. 66, 241 n. 67
Mantino, Jacob, 90
Manuel I Comnenus, Emperor, 80–1

Manuel I, King of Portugal, 80, 82–3, 230 n. 6
Marco Datini, Francesco di, 197
Marco Polo, 201
Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy, 158
Margaritha, Antonius, 64, 212
Maria, Giovanni, 57
María de la Visitación, 40
marital status, 198–9
Martin V, Pope, 132, 133
Martin, John Jeffries, 31, 39
martyrdom, 17, 26, 47–8, 54
masculinity, display of, 169–70
Masini, Eliseo, 19
Massachusetts, 168, 189
Matar, Nabil, 57, 59, 180, 207
Mateus, 82–3, 86, 96
Maxwell-Stuart, P.G., 152
Mayr, Jörg, 116, 118–20
Mecca, 55
medical professionals, 210–15; charlatans, 214–15; hierarchy, 211; Jewish, 211–12; pretenders, 211; the Protomédico, 212–13; reputation, 213–14
Medina, 55, 94
Melanchthon, Philipp, 62
Melchizedek, Dominion of, 11
Menocchio (Domenico Scandella) the Friulian miller, 103, 176
mental reservation, 53
Merchant of Venice, The (Shakespeare), 155
messianic expectations, 63, 101
Mexico, 21, 138
Michelangelo, 12
midwifery, 212
millenarianism, 5, 80
Miramon, Charles de, 152
Mishneh Torah (Maimonides), 26–7
mobility, geographical, 120, 142, 163, 197, 199–200
Modon, 124, 125
Molcho, Solomon, 5, 59–60, 62, 75–6, 77, 79, 90, 103–4, 138, 228 n. 130, 231 n. 46, 232 n. 71
Mongols, 101, 103, 104, 200–1
Montaigne, Michel de, 47, 78, 108, 166, 169, 176, 188–9, 218–19
Montano, Benito Arias, 46
More, Arthur, 217
More, Thomas, 91, 93, 95, 137, 143, 176, 219
Moriscos, 27–32, 63; definition, 27–8; and edicts of faith, 29–31; expulsion from Spain, 28, 29; identification, 31; justification, 32; literary forgeries, 33–4; persistence of, 29–30; prudential self, 31; rebellions, 28–9, 30; religious dualism, 32; returners, 63–4; *taqiyya*, 32; threat of, 29
Moriscos Antiguos, 29
Mormonism, 224 n. 44
Moryson, Fynes, 185, 219
Moynneurs, 48
Muhammad, the Prophet, 30, 32, 43, 58
Muñoz, Catalina, 40
Münster, Sebastian, 122, 125, 133
Münster insurrection, the, 45, 100
Muralla, Schias, 89
Muratori, Ludovico Antonio, 214–15
Muslims: circumcision, 138–9; cleanliness, 24; converts to Christianity, 34; diplomas, 210; dress codes, 170–1, 180–1, 192; religious dissimulation, 5; Shi'ite, 32; Sunni, 32; tainted blood, 152; *taqiyya*, 32; travel documentation, 203, *see also* Islam
mutilation, 140–50, 221; end of era of, 149–50; laws, 143–5; state violence, 145–9; statistics, 147–8
mystics, 35

Name of the Rose, The (Eco), 95
Naphy, William, 220
national dress, 181–2
nationalism, 62
nationality, 14
Navarrete, Pedro Fernandez, 114, 185
Nayler, James, 147
Nazi Germany, Center for Research on Racial Hygiene and Demographic Biology, 129
Nero, Emperor, 2
Netherlands, 43, 133, 148–9; criminal underworld, 116; cross-dressing in, 168–9; Jews, 119, *see also* Holland
New Christians, 4–5, 16, 22, 25, 27, 34, 45, 69, 83, 86, 90, 96, 153

New England, 168, 177, 189
Niccoli, Ottavia, 78
Niclaes, Hendrick, 46, 51, 227 n. 103
Nicodemism, 5, 8, 16, 44–7; definition, 45; English, 46; persecution of, 47–9; Pucci's ideal society, 49–52
Nicodemus, 44
Nider, Johannes, 44
Noguerol, Francisco, 198
Nouvelle Division de la Terre par les différentes Espèces ou races d'homme qui l'habitent (Bernier), 156
Nuñes, Enriques, 173
Nuremberg, 116, 147–8, 189
Nuremberg Laws, 129

Odysseus, 1, 8
Oecolampadius, Johannes, 59
On Distinguishing True from False Revelations (Gerson), 38
"On the Jews and Their Lies" (Luther), 104
Orbio de Castro, Isaac, 65
Orozco y Covarrubias, Juan de, 38
Ortelius, Abraham, 46, 79
Ottoman Empire, Ottomans, 29, 54–59, 61, 63, 75, 79–80, 88, 113, 125, 133, 170, 180, 203, 207
Ottomano, Padre, 58

Palestine, 56
Pallache, Samuel, 64, 65
Palmer, Richard, 211
Pandectae veteris et novis testamenti (Brunfels), 45, 45–6
papal bulls, forged, 215–16
pariahs: heretics, 176–7; humiliation of, 172; identification, 172; infidels, 170–6; undesirables, 177–80, 192
Paris, first encounters with Gypsies, 124
Paris, Matthew, 101, 104
parish registration, 206
"passing" (for white), fear of, 157
passports, 197, 200, 205–6, 217
Pastor, Ludwig, 79
Patagonia, Giants of, 95
Pazzi conspirators, 98
Pechon de Ruby, 116
Peña, Francisco, 19, 20
penitential garments, 176–7
perfectionism, 51
performative self, the, 39
Perry, Mary Elizabeth, 114–15
Persons, Robert, 99
Petrarch, 220
Philip II, King of Spain, 144
Philip III, King of Spain, 28
Philip IV, King of Spain, 83
physical alterations: branding, 140–1, 221; circumcision, 138–9, 154; ear-cropping, 144, 146; end of era of mutilation, 149–50; head shaving, 142; mutilation, 140–50, 221; mutilation laws, 143–5; state violence, 145–9; stigmata, 150–2; tattoos and tattooing, 139–40
physical appearance, 137–61; birthmarks, 157; and individual identity, 157–60; physiognomy, 155–6; race, 156–7; registering, 138, 160–1, 195; resemblance to parents, 158; scars, 158; as text, 155–6
physical markings, 12–13, 157–8
physicians, 210–15; charlatans, 214–15; diaries, 213; female, 6; hierarchy, 211–12; Jewish, 211–12; reputation, 213–14, *see also* medical professionals
physiognomy, 156–7
picaresque literature, 7, 13, 30–1, 55, 110, 114–15
Piccolomini, Enea Silvio, 80, 122, *see also* Pius II
Pietrelcina, Padre Pio, 151
Pietro d'Abano, 156
Pike, Ruth, 114–15
pilgrimage and penitence, 7, 125–6
pilgrims, false, 122, 125–6, 183–4
Pini, Teseo, 217
Pires, Diogo (Solomon Molcho), 69–70
Pius II, Pope, 79–80, 122
Pivardière, Louis de la, 198–9
plague, 119, 186, 208, 209
Plantin, Christophe, 46
Platter, Felix, 213
Pliny, 219
Plomos del Sacromonte (Luna), 31, 33
Pocahontas, 182
Poland, 62
police forces, emergence of, 149–50
political conspiracies, 97–8

Pömer, Johann Abraham, 106
Pomponazzi, Pietro, 53
popish impostures, 41–2
Popish Plots, 53, 99
Portaleone, Abraham, 70
Portaleone, Lazzaro, 70
Portugal, 2, 27, 40, 76, 87, 90–91, 100, 205; David Reuveni in, 69–70, 202; delegation to Ethiopia, 82–3; Jews, 230 n. 6; the Mateus episode, 82–3, 86; penitential garments, 177; and Prester John, 80–5; search for allies, 80
Portuguese Inquisition, 20, 21, 77
Postel, Guillaume, 8, 78–9
Prester John, 10, 11, 80–5, 90, 101, 102, 202, 216; emissaries to, 56; and the Lost Tribes of Israel, 91–6
prickers, 151
printing press, the, 105
prisons, 149–50
private/public separation, 31
professional garb, 183
professional qualifications, 209–15
professions: documentation, 209–15; exclusion from, 6
props used by impostors, 85–7
prostitutes, dress codes, 179–80
Protestants: reformers, 9; religious dissimulation, 18, 41–2
Protocols of the Elders of Zion, 100–1
Protomédico, the, 212–13
prudential self, the, 31
Prynne, William, 165
Psalmanazar, George, 11
pseudo-mysticism, 35
Ptolemaic Egypt, 195
Pucci, Francesco, 49–52, 100, 105–6
Pullan, Brian, 172, 173, 174
punishment: branding and mutilation, 140–50; deterrence, 142; end of era of mutilation, 149–50; flogging, 148; Germany, 147–8; posthumous, 47–9; shaming, 141–2; state violence, 145–9
Purity of Blood (*limpieza de sangre*), 22, 152, 153, 199
Pym, Richard, 135

Quevedo, Francisco de, 13
Quiñones, Juan de, 128, 153–5

Rabelais, François, 168
race, and appearance, 156–7
racial purity, 129
racism, 152
racist theories, 155
Rainey, Ronald, 186
Ramusio, Giovanni Battista, 220
Rangone, Guido, 76
ransom economy, 112–13, 207–8
Ravid, Benjamin, 173
reading, criminalization of, 24–5
recognition, systems of, 12–13
Red Jews, 62, 103, 104, 119, 231 n. 42
Reformation, the, 16, 42, 96, 187
religious dissimulation, 4–5, 8, 16–67, 220; advantages, 64; Age of Conversion, 17–19; Age of Dissimulation, 18; Alumbrados, 34–6; Catholic Church condones, 59–60; and conformity, 19; contemporary debate, 19; criminalization of, 66; crypto-atheists, 52–4; culture of, 66; David Joris, 47–9; denunciations, 20, 22–3; disenchantment, 42–3; divided souls, 62–5; edicts of faith, 19–21, 23; ego-documents, 65; enthusiasts (*schwärmer*), 41; false saints, 36–41; fear of, 16; Francesco Pucci, 49–52; and hidden enemies, 17, 17–18, 20; informers and informing, 25; Jews, 5; Judaizers, 18, 21–7; justification, 32, 46; liars, 18; literary forgeries, 33; Moriscos, 27–32; motivation, 45, 62–5; multiple identities, 64–5; Muslims, 5; Nicodemism, 44–9; popish impostures, 41–2; preoccupation with, 65–6; prominent figures, 46–7; Protestants, 18; punishments, 24; returners, 63–4; and the rise of atheism, 65–7; Roman Catholics, 18; secret converts to Judaism, 60–2; Spain, 18; techniques, 5; torments of, 63; turning Turk, 54–60; unmasking instructions, 19–21; witches and witchcraft, 41, 43–4
religious homogenization, *cuius regio, eius religio*, 16, 22, 28
religious infiltrators, 99
religious underworlds, 18, 99–100

renegades, 16; documentation, 207–8; dress codes, 180–1; identification, 207–8; repentant, 59–60; turning Turk, 56–7
Repertorium inquisitorum, 21
residence permits, 208–9
responsa literature, 138, 159–60
Reuveni, David, 56, 68–80, 216, 220; acceptance as genuine, 77–80; banners, 86; and Cardinal Egidio, 73–4; comparison with the Mateus episode, 83; costume, 85; death, 71; encounter with lost Jews, 95; entry into Rome, 72; execution, 96; exposure, 70, 71, 87, 89–91; fasts, 75; genealogy, 85–6; homeland, 93–4, 231 n. 44; influence, 69; Jewish reactions to, 90–1; journal, 68, 71, 72–3, 74, 85, 89–90, 95, 173; language, 72, 85; last years, 70–1; and Leo Africanus, 74; as messianic figure, 76; military plan, 76; mission, 68, 69; motivation, 74–5; Papal letters of introduction, 79, 134, 202, 246 n. 30; papers, 86, 86–7; props, 85–7; timing of appearance, 78; travelogue, 71; travels, 69–71, 74; true identity, 71–2
Reynolds, Alison, 1
Reynolds, Bryan, 111
Rid, Samuel, 123, 129
Ritter, Robert, 129
Roberts, Penny, 220
Rocoles, Jean-Baptiste de, 14
Rodiana, Onorata, 164
Rodríguez Cardoso, Mateo, 35–6, 169
rogue, origins of word, 112
rogue literature, 7, 111, 112, 113–14, 114–17, *see also* picaresque literature
Roman Catholics: arson plot accusations, 118; infiltrators, 99; religious dissimulation, 18; threat of, 99
Romand, Jean-Claude, 1
Romany language, 122, 123, 130
Rome, 20, 34, 52, 58, 68–74, 77–79, 84, 85, 87, 90, 105, 106, 123, 125, 132, 165, 174, 196, 204
Rosicrucians, 52, 105
Rossi, Caterina, 36–7
Rota, Giorgio, 59
Rublack, Ulinka, 162–3, 181
Sabinus, Georg, 103
Sacro arsenale (Masini), 19
safe conducts, 86, 132–4, 201–3, 228 n. 130
saints, false, 36–41; documentation, 40–1; identification, 38–40; investigations, 40–1; literature, 38–9; living, 5; medical interpretation, 38; need for attention, 39–40; props, 39–40; sources of revelations, 38; transvestite, 165; trial records, 37–8; women, 37–8, 40
Salgādo, Gāmini, 110–11, 112–13, 217
Salonika, 61
Samaria, 91
sanbenito, the, 23, 24, 142, 177
sanctity: holy stigmata and, 151–2; pretence of, 37
Sanguinetus, Alexander (Sanguinetti), 211
Santisteban, Gómez de, 81
Sanuto, Marino, 71, 89, 90, 93, 190
Sarpi, Paolo, 53
Satan, 3, 5, 43, 44, 67, 97, 107, 108, 143, 151, *see also* Devil, the
Savonarola, Girolamo, 38
Scammell, Geoffrey Vaughn, 56
scapegoats, 118–20
Scaraffia, Lucetta, 59
Scarlet Letter, The (Hawthorne), 145
scars, 3, 138, 146, 148, 157–8, 160–1, 195, 204
scepticism, 218–20
Schmidt, Franz, 147–8
Schmitt, Carl, 221
Schutte, Anne Jacobson, 226 n. 74
schwärmer, 41
Schwarz, Matthäus, 181
Scotland, 186
Scott, Reginald, 44, 108, 130
Scribner, Bob, 118
seals, 197, 215
secrecy, culture of, 9
secret languages, 102, 117, 130
secret societies, 10; hermetic, 105; names, 106; rules, 106; threat of, 106; underworld of, 97, 104–7
Selbourne, David, 96
self-fashioning, 8–9
Servetus, Michael, 48, 213
Seville, 35, 64, 81, 109, 114–15

sexual identity, 155–6
Shabbetai Zvi, 5, 27, 58, 61, 181
Shakespeare, William, 6, 155, 166, 183
Sharpe, James, 145
Siculo, Giorgio, 46
siege mentality, 78
Sigismund, Emperor, 132
signatures, 196–7
Simancas, Iacobus (Diego de Simancas), 19
Simons, Menno, 47
Sixtus IV, Pope, 16
Slack, Paul, 145, 206
slaves and slavery, 140–1, 160, 165–7
smells, 23, 25
Smith, Joseph, 224 n. 44
Smith, Sir Thomas, 186
Snyder, John, 9, 105
social hierarchy, 162–3, 184–5, 188
Spain: Alumbrados, 34–6; anti-Islamic restrictions, 31–2; *beatas*, 5; Black Legend, 20; circumcision in, 138; cleanliness, 24; David Reuveni in, 69–70; dress regulations, 24; expulsion of Jews, 21, 22, 230 n. 6; expulsion of Moriscos, 28, 29; false Gypsies, 126–7; false saints, 36–41; fraudulent beggars, 114; Gypsies, 129, 131, 133, 134, 135; Jewish population, 21–2; Judaizers, 21–5; mass conversions of Jews, 22; Morisco rebellions, 28–9, 30; Moriscos, 18, 27–32, 63, 100; Muslim forced conversions, 28; mutilation laws, 144; penitential garments, 177; picaresque literature, 114–15; pogroms, 21; prostitutes dress codes, 179; the Protomédico, 212–13; the *Reconquista*, 29; registering appearance, 161; religious dissimulation, 18; religious homogenization, 28; returners, 63–4; rogue literature, 110; sumptuary laws, 188, 189; travel documentation, 203–4, 206
Spanish Inquisition, 4–5, 15, 16; and Alumbrados, 35–6; Black Legend, 20; and David Reuveni, 71; edicts of faith, 19–21; and false saints, 40; and Gypsies, 131; and Jews, 21; and Moriscos, 31; tribunals, 20, 22; and turning Turk, 59
Speculum cerretanorum (Pini), 217
Spiera, Francesco, 63
Spierenburg, Pieter, 148–9, 149
spies and spying, 11, 29, 98
Spiritualism, 18, 36, 41, 48
state violence, 145–9
stereotypes, 104, 156
stigmata, 36, 40, 150–2, 221
strangers' society, 142, 163
Strasburg, 183, 185, 186
Stubbes, Philip, 144–5, 184
Stuurman, Siep, 156
Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, 83
subversion, 17
Sueños y discursos (*Dreams and Discourses*) (Quevedo), 13
Sully, Duc de, 189
sumptuary laws, 6, 162, 163, 168, 185, 185–91
supernatural powers, suspicion of claims for, 42
Switzerland, 110, 189

Talbot, Edward, 146
taqiyya, 5, 32, 74, 224 n. 40
Tarabotti, Arcangela, 187
tattoos and tattooing, 139–40, 160, 200, 221
Tawney, R.H., 109
Teresa of Ávila, 34, 38
terrorism, 223 n. 7
Third David, the, 47, 48, *see also* Joris, David
Thirty Years War, 15
Three Impostors, the, 43
Tigrinus, Paulus, 84
Tilh, Arnauld du, 2, 158, 218, *see also* Guerre, Martin
Tisanio, Leandro, 65
Toledo, 22, 34, 152
Torpey, John, 200
Torre, Eugenia de la, 37
Toulouse, Council of, 176
Trachtenbuch (Weigel), 181
transvestism, 166–7; attitudes to, 168–9
transvestite saints, 165
Traske, John, 146
travel documentation, 199–206; entry warrants, 203; exit visas, 204; forgeries, 206, 217; Gypsies, 202; internal passports, 205; Jews, 201–2,

202–3; Mongol, 200–1; Muslims, 203; need for, 197; obligations, 203; passports, 197, 200, 205–6, 217; safe conducts, 86, 132–4, 201–3, 228 n. 130; Spanish, 203–4; vagrants and vagrancy, 205–6
travel lies, 91–6
travel literature, 69
Travels of Sir John Mandeville, 101–2, 103
Treatise of the Three Impostors, 66
Treviño de Sobremonte, Tomas, 138, 177
tricksters, 7, 129–31
True History of King Rodrigo, The (Miguel de Luna), 33
turning Turk, 54–60; adopting Muslim disguise, 55–6; Catholic Church and, 58–60; circumcision, 138; dress codes, 180–1; false converts, 57–60; numbers, 57; renegades, 56–7; repentance, 59–60; threat of, 57
Twelfth Night (Shakespeare), 183
Tyrannus, or, The Mode in a Discourse of Sumptuary Lawes (Evelyn), 187

Ulysses, 157–8
underworlds, 97–120, 220–1; criminal, 97, 109–18; and disasters, 118–20; fear of, 120; Jewish, 100, 100–4; as mirrors, 98; religious, 99–100; secret societies, 97, 104–7; threat of, 98–9, 100; types, 97; witches and witchcraft, 97, 107–9
undesirables, dress codes, 177–80, 192
uniforms, 182–4
universities, 209–10
untouchables, 177–9
Urban VIII, Pope, 165
utopias and utopianism, 49–52, 91–6, 137

vagrancy laws, 7, 126, 144
vagrants and vagrancy, 7, 109–14; false Gypsies, 126–9; Gypsies, 135–6; health certificates, 209; mutilation laws and, 144; state violence, 149; travel documentation, 205–6
Valdés, Juan de, 35
Valencia, 29, 40, 210
Valtellina, 37
van de Pol, Lotte, 168–9
van Elk, Martine, 113, 195
Vanini, Giulio Cesare, 54, 61
vanitie of the eie, The (Hakewill), 42
Varthema, Ludovico di, 8, 55–6, 57, 71, 94–5
Vaux de Foletier, François de, 133
Vecellio, Cesare, 181
Venetian Inquisition, 59
Venice, 61; College of Physicians, 211; Council of Ten, 168, 199; David Reuveni in, 69, 70, 72, 76, 87, 89–91, 173; dress codes, 168; exposure of false ambassadors, 87–91; ghetto, 173–4; head shaving, 142; Jewish dress codes, 172–4; *Libri d'Oro*, 199; penitential garments, 177; prostitutes dress codes, 179; sumptuary laws, 186, 190; veiling, 193
Vergil, Polydore (Polydorus Vergilius), 41, 122
Vespa, Pietro, 39–40
Villon, François, 109–14, 126
Vincent, John Martin, 186
virility, display of, 169–70
visions, 36–41, 47, 72, 151, 169, 225 n. 59, 225 n. 61, 225 n. 62
Vitkus, Daniel, 59
Vives, Juan Luis, 168

Waite, Gary K., 47
Walsingham, Sir Francis, 11, 98
Wandering Jew, the, 26, 125
wanted posters, 196
Warbek, Perkin, 157, 158, 196, 215
water supplies, poisoning, 119, 120
Weber, Max, 42
Weigel, Hans, 181
Wells, Charlotte, 100
wermerin, the, 127
Weyer, Johann, 41
Widmanstetter, Johann Albrecht von, 232 n. 71
Wiegers, Gerard, 33, 64
Winshemius (Sebastianus Theodoricus), 103
witch-finders, 44, 108, 151–2
witch trials, 108–9
witches and witchcraft, 3–4, 38, 41, 43–4, 220; beliefs, 107–8; bilocation, 108; deceit, 108; devil's mark, 151–2; evidence of, 109; Gypsies and, 130–1; hereditary, 152; identification, 44,

151–2; literature, 107; numbers killed, 107; panic waves, 107, 118; persecution, 108; powers, 107; trial by ordeal, 151; trials, 108; underworld of, 97, 107–9
witnesses, 159–60
women: in the criminal underworld, 116; cross-dressing, 6, 164–6, 167–9; false saints, 37–8, 40; Gypsies, 175; midwives, 212; modesty, 192–3; pretence of sanctity, 37; and sumptuary laws, 187–8; transvestite saints, 165
Wonder Book (Joris), 48
Woodbridge, Linda, 113
Wotton, Henry, 98
Wroe, Ann, 215

Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim, 75, 154, 155, 241 n. 67
Yubitsume (finger shortening), 139

Zagorin, Perez, 4, 18, 36, 223 n. 2
Zarri, Gabriella, 226 n. 73
Zurich, 185, 191
Zwickau Prophets, 41