In this paper I want to bring together three things—Inquisitions, Spanish, Portuguese or Roman; the city-Republic of Venice; and the problem of Marranism. In its most generally accepted meaning, Marranism is the practice of secret Judaism by people of Spanish or Portuguese origin who outwardly conform to Christianity. I wish to build the discussion round the trial, before the Roman Inquisition in Venice in 1580 and 1581, of Gaspare Ribeiro. Eighty-seven years of age, merchant, money-lender and tax-farmer, he was doyen of the Portuguese community in Venice and had once been employed on diplomatic missions by the kings of Portugal. He was accused specifically of consenting to the marriage, four years earlier, of his son João Ribeiro to a certain Alumbra, a young Jewess of distinguished family and a cousin of the richest, most powerful and most notorious figure in international Jewry—João Miquez, Duke of Naxos and the Archipelago. At the time of the match the Duke had been living in splendour at the right hand of the Sultan in Constantinople; he had died in August 1579. In November João Ribeiro followed him, and inquiries then redounded on the puzzled, petulant figure of his aged father. In addition to his specific crime—some said he had actually planned the forbidden marriage and negotiated the contract of betrothal—Gaspare was
accused of living privately as a Jew whilst publicly he masqueraded as a respectable, if not startlingly enthusiastic, Christian.

Let me try by this means to raise a few general questions about the utility of Inquisition documents as an historical source. Interest is, I think, shifting from the consideration of Inquisitions as instruments of state or church policy, as tools of repression or fiscalism, as precursors of totalitarian rule, to reflection on what can be discovered from their records about the beliefs and religious practices of the unlearned in the early modern centuries. By the unlearned I do not necessarily mean the illiterate, or those who would otherwise have left no mark at all upon the archives. Even without the trial which bedevilled the last fourteen months of his life, Gaspare Ribeiro could well have bequeathed us some account books, a few business letters, notarial contracts, perhaps a tax return, a last will and testament, the traces of his name on the matriculation rolls of a religious fraternity. But they would have told us little of his mental state, his domestic routines or his turbulent relations with his children and servants; they would never have caught the rhythm of his speech, of the eccentric mixture of Italian and Portuguese which he still used after twenty years residence in the city.

To take such eloquent records at their face value is tempting indeed. But inquisitions in general are suspect, as a result of the forceful and damnatory accounts of their activities composed by such pioneering liberal historians as Alexandre Herculano and Henry Charles Lea. Their doubts as to the value of evidence culled from the Inquisition were not merely the result of anachronistic misgivings, produced by the habit of judging the sixteenth century by the standards of the nineteenth. Rather, these reflected the grim anticipation of injustice felt by contemporaries, when they faced the prospect of an Inquisition on the Spanish pattern being introduced into Portugal during the 1530s.¹ They echoed such unsavoury episodes as that of Diego Rodriguez Lucero, Inquisitor of Cordova from 1499 to 1508, who was eventually found by a Catholic congregation to have

fabricated on a huge scale evidence of a conspiracy to convert Spanish Christians to Judaism by means of synagogues and a network of prophetesses.¹

The Spanish documents have had their defenders,² and I am not qualified to contribute to the debate about them. Let me, instead, put a rather different question. What are the possibilities of using the records of a milder Inquisition such as the Venetian in order to discover a few more fragments of truth about the Marranos? Marranism was not a native growth in Venice. According to traditional views at least, it was the product of the forced conversion of Jews to Christianity in the Iberian peninsula. But the Venetians saw many Marranos, whether as refugees in transit from Spain and Portugal to the Levant, or as settlers, or as visitors from Ferrara. A small number committed indiscretions grave enough to bring them before the Holy Office and cause them to undergo prolonged and elaborate trials. Much larger numbers were sweepingly denounced to the Inquisition in Venice by Portuguese compatriots, who did not however succeed in spurring the tribunal to action.

Since the Marranos of Venice were all immigrants, let us begin with them on their native territory. In what sense is there a problem of Marranism for the historian? It was, in one respect only, a delinquency similar to Satanism or sorcery. Most of the evidence for its existence derives from the records of courts. These have been accused, not so much of fabricating evidence, as of perpetuating a rather recondite type of offence by showing some people how to commit it, and by encouraging others to recognize it from simple and commonplace signs. Satanism and Marranism were not the kind of crime one could commit, like robbery or homicide, out of instinct or passion and without elaborate knowledge. Did Marranism exist objectively, or did Inquisitions create it? It once seemed entirely clear that Marranism did exist: it was wholly logical that forced conversion should have resulted in the creation of

¹ See H. C. Lea, A History of the Inquisition of Spain (4 vols., New York, 1906-7), i. 190-211.
large numbers of secret Judaizers. Influential Jewish historians have been eager to believe in the tenacious loyalty of the Jewish race to Judaism, and in the ability of succeeding generations to hand on a clandestine, simplified version of Jewish ritual under the veil of conformity to Christianity. More recently, however, consciously radical scholars have begun to question such belief. It seems that from the close of the fourteenth century some rabbis in Algiers and elsewhere held that even forced conversion in Spain led almost inevitably to assimilation to Christianity. In their eyes, Spanish Jewry was failing the tests it had been set by Christian hostility and persecution. A secularizing philosophy, demanding intellectual freedom, had undermined its willingness to suffer and accept the restrictions and disabilities imposed on an orthodox Jew. The contrast between the prosperity of the convert and the sordid poverty of the loyal Jew was too great to be borne. Many of the conversions to Christianity had in fact been voluntary and not directly forced.

Crypto-Judaism may have been the creation, at the close of the fifteenth century, of the Inquisition. In its turn the Inquisition may have been the product and instrument of a society more concerned to eliminate the social and economic competition of New Christian converts than to counter any genuine threat from secret Jewish beliefs and practices. To some Jewish polemicists of the late fifteenth century, such as Isaac Arama, the Inquisition was an instrument of God’s providence which drove back to the religion of their fathers converts who had had every intention of becoming good Christians. And, wrote Arama, “although they assimilated among those nations entirely, they will find no peace among them; for they, the nations, will always revile and beshame them, plot against them and accuse them falsely in matters of faith. Indeed, they will always suspect them as Judaizers and subject them to tremendous dangers, as was the case throughout this period of innovations, and especially in our own time, when the smokes of the [autos da

1 Cf. Cecil Roth, A History of the Marranos (Philadelphia, 1932), p. 4: “The phenomenon of Marranism is more... than the commonplace occurrence of forcible conversion, followed frequently by the practice of Judaism in secret. Its essential element is that this clandestine religion is passed on from generation to generation.”
Marranism did not exist of its own accord, but because the Inquisition destroyed security its potential victims became refugees and Judaizers. The converso of the fifteenth century and the Judaizer of the sixteenth were not inevitably linked by the loyal, secret Jew. It may have been, as Ellis Rivkin suggested a few years ago, that the economic opportunities unfolding in the Ottoman Empire created a positive incentive to return to Judaism in the East at exactly the same time as the Portuguese Inquisition was destroying all certainty in the West. And perhaps the monitoria and Edicts of Faith of the Portuguese Inquisition, issued from 1536 onwards, were necessary in order to perpetuate the memory of Judaism. Those who confessed to it most rapidly, wrote João Pinto Delgado in Lisbon some time in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, would be the first to emerge from the accursed labyrinth of the Inquisition—even if they confessed falsely. And there are well-authenticated cases of confused or adventurous people whose interest in Judaism was plainly stimulated by an encounter with the Inquisition. Amongst them was Estêvão de Arês da Fonseca, who was born in Coimbra in 1598 and confessed to Judaizing in Lisbon in 1621, though he was later to tell the Spanish Inquisition that he had then known nothing of Judaism and had confessed only to save his life. But his curiosity had been aroused by the experience, and he toured the Jewish communities of Europe, ranging from Amsterdam (where he had himself circumcised) through Venice to the Ottoman

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Empire. He eventually chose to return to Catholicism in Rouen in 1633. In the face of such confusion from Spain and Portugal, how can we be certain of the objective existence of Marranism? Perhaps Venetian evidence will help us—or perhaps it will not.

There is another difficult question. If Marranos were frequently not Jews, except by descent, did they really become good Catholics, or were they a people of two worlds, in a condition of indifference or scepticism? Their experience had given them a sense of the relative value of confessions and creeds: could they believe whole-heartedly in any one? Towards 1500 Isaac Caro, a rabbi in Portugal, spoke of a belief among the Gentiles that “These people did not convert because they believed in our religion, but because they were afraid that we might kill them. Actually, they observe neither our religion nor theirs.” And there are scraps of Venetian evidence to show that by 1580 this suspicion was current among Jews also, for in the course of the Ribeiro trial Chaim Saruc, consul to the Levantine Jewish nation in Venice, said that he and his co-religionists thought of Marranos as ships that had two rudders, sailing now with one wind and now with another. There are other well known instances of adventurers who, like Estêvão de Arês da Fonseca or Hector Mendes Bravo, returned to Catholicism after an acquaintance with Judaism, or of troubled souls who, like Uriel da Costa, found themselves quite unable to accept orthodox Judaism when they left Portugal to seek it out. We know—though more sketchily—of other Marranos alternating between Naples and Padua who, about 1550, were creating for themselves a kind of hybrid version of Christianity and Judaism which attacked the Trinity and the divine nature of Christ, and went under the generic name of Anabaptism. Hence in September 1551 one Benetto Napolitano, a medical student, told the Anabaptist community in Padua of “a new sect of heretics in great numbers, including some of the leading figures of Naples, who among

1 Ibid. pp. 81-83.  
2 Netanyahu, op. cit. p. 167.  
3 A.S.V., S.U., b. 45, testimony given on 26 January and 3 September 1580.  
their other heresies hold that Christ is not God but a great prophet, and that he did not come as the Messiah but as a prophet, and that he died for the truth and has not yet been revived; but that he will be brought back to life and come as the Messiah, and after him the elect will return to life in order, one after another. And they deny the whole new Testament, and call it an invention of the Greeks and Gentiles".1

Arguably, then, Venice and its mainland provinces were exposed to a form of Marranism which was far from being mere Crypto-Judaism. Venice itself was a place of transition, a point of departure from Christendom to the world of Ottoman Turkey, the point at which the last drastic choice would often be made between Christianity and Judaism. The man who, arriving in Venice, went straight to the Ghetto, would be asked few questions by the Venetian authorities. Although they gave no formal security until 1589 to Iberian Jews with a Christian past, they concerned themselves very little, even before that date, with the way a Jew had lived before he entered Venice.2 But there were other families of Jewish stock who came to Venice and did not disappear behind the Ghetto's protective wall, to live cheek-by-jowl with the public bankers, the second-hand dealers and the turbanned traders from the Levant. These are the ambivalent people, poised between Christianity and Judaism, hesitant, avoiding commitment, that we are most likely to meet in the records of the Holy Office; and among them were the Ribeiros.

From the problem of the Marranos let us pass to the problem of the Inquisition itself. In its defence it can be said that prosecutions of people such as Gaspare Ribeiro were very rare. Very likely the Venetian government was reluctant to countenance any move that might disturb a highly valued mercantile community, unless there was a strong prima facie case based on very specific evidence. In Venice, therefore, there was little

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2 For the agreement with the so-called Ponentine Jews in 1589, see Benjamin Ravid, "The First Charter of the Jewish Merchants of Venice, 1589", *Association for Jewish Studies Review*, i (1976), 187-222.
risk of being arrested for Judaizing merely because one eschewed pork, changed one's linen on Saturdays, or failed to cross oneself in a manner that suggested habituation. Gaspare Ribeiro and his son João were unfavourably described to various branches of the Inquisition by witnesses in Venice, Rome, Parma and Ferrara at intervals from 1569 onwards. Only when documentary evidence of an illicit marriage appeared as a result of a law-suit in a secular court did the Inquisition choose to take any action—in 1580. There was always reason to fear malicious denunciation, but it could be dangerous to those who made it. Early in 1579, a private tutor, Antonio Saldanha, and a young Portuguese soldier, Stefano Nogera, denounced two members of the Portuguese community as Judaizers, and their report threatened to involve several others. But the denunciation backfired spectacularly on one of its authors, when João Ribeiro helped to organize retaliation and the unfortunate Saldanha was found to be a renegade Franciscan implicated in a circle of necromancers hunting after buried treasure guarded by demons. The principal targets of his original attack were forgotten as the Inquisition chose instead to investigate the antics of these demonolaters. This implies that the Inquisition would not lightly start a prosecution for Judaizing, however difficult it might prove to escape its clutches once the ponderous process had begun.

1 Cf. Lea, op. cit. ii. 565-8. For evidence of secret Judaism propounded by Spanish and Portuguese witnesses in Venice, see the denunciation by Antonio Saldanha of the Portuguese Miguel Vaz and Jorge Lopez, 11 January 1579, and the testimony of "Giovanni di Vichifo", servant to the Spanish Ambassador, 2 June 1579, both filed with the records of the trial of Fra Cesare Lanza and others "Negromanti" in A.S.V., S.U., b. 44; also the denunciation by Maria Lopez of her father and stepfather, 27 March to 18 April 1582, in A.S.V., S.U., b. 49.

2 A.S.V., S.U., b. 24, testimony of Nicolò Malipiero, Francisco Gomes and Enriques de Mello, October 1569; copies of the testimony of Enriques de Mello in Rome, 31 October and 15-16 November 1575 (referring to earlier delations he had made in Parma), and of the testimony of Isabetta, a neophyte, and of Antonio Machado or Macchiato in Ferrara, 31 May 1579, both in S.U., b. 45; testimony of Antonio Saldanha and Stefano Nogera in the case of the "Negromanti", 11 and 20 January 1579, S.U., b. 44.

In consequence the number of Venetian prosecutions was very small, and the activity of the Venetian Inquisition pales into insignificance when compared with the insatiable ferocity of the tribunals of, say, Lisbon and Coimbra. Statistics for Lisbon between 1549 and 1594 suggest that nearly 2,000 cases of Judaizing were tried, that there were more than 1,500 reconciliations and 110 relaxations to the secular arm. Imperfect statistics compiled about a century ago from the Venetian archive suggest that the Holy Office tried only forty-three cases of Judaizing over a similar period, whereas the total number of cases considered was 1,553. Closer investigation reveals that quite a high proportion of those forty-three cases consisted only of denunciations which were never followed up, and that there were only three full and elaborate prosecutions of Spanish or Portuguese Marranos. But this scantiness had its advantages, in that the Inquisitors had little chance to create a stereotype and force people to conform to it: neither they, nor the Venetians summoned as witnesses, had any clear idea of what they were looking for, and were generally prepared to be surprised.

Furthermore, certain features of the Portuguese Inquisition were conspicuous by their absence from the Venetian. It did not proclaim Edicts of Faith which told the public how to recognize a Judaizer. In Portugal it was customary to interrogate an accused person both in genere and in specie: in genere, by asking him whether he had committed any of a long list of standardized offences, and in specie, by interrogating him about the charges laid against him by his accusers. Plausibly enough, it can be argued that interrogation in genere would indicate clearly to the accused what was expected of him, and that since incomplete confession could mean death, there would be a strong incentive

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1 Révah, “Marranes portugais”, p. 515.
2 See Bartolomeo Cecchetti, La Repubblica di Venezia e la Corte di Roma nei rapporti della religione (2 vols., Venice, 1874), ii. 3-7. Cecchetti’s figures ostensibly relate to the whole sixteenth century; in reality most of the surviving material is of the period from about 1540 to 1594.
to admit to imaginary crimes. Of the Venetians it can at least be said that they did not use interrogation *in genere* in the type of case we are examining here, and, more positively, that they built their investigations round a hard core of factual issues: in the Ribeiro case, round the question of Gaspare's complicity in his son's marriage. In another trial, a few years earlier, the Inquisition had concentrated on resolving two closely related factual questions, on which the outcome was made to depend. Had the accused been baptised, and had he been born in Lisbon or in Ferrara?

In other respects, too, Venetian inquisitorial records deserve to be treated as rather less suspect than those of Portugal or Spain. Venice's Holy Office was not an *imperium in imperio*. It was not a privileged jurisdiction accountable to no-one outside itself and functioning in total secrecy, in the same sense as the Spanish tribunal. Its constitution marked an attempt to reconcile potentially conflicting interests—those of the central authority within the Church (represented by the papal nuncio), those of the diocese (represented by the Patriarch) and those of the state (represented by so-called Assistenti who took no part in the issuing of sentences, but who were entitled to advise the Inquisition as to what was expedient, and also to report on its activities to the secular authorities). The presence of the Assistenti made it less self-contained, and may have accounted for some of its restraint in matters impinging on the economic interests of the state. In a commercially minded society, concerned with the attraction of settlers and the renewal of wealth through trade, there was less risk of disingenuous prosecution for the purpose of making short-term fiscal gains through condemnations for heresy. The state itself had formally renounced its interest in confiscations in 1568, and at the same time the tribunal was guaranteed modest support from ecclesiastic.

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2 Pullan, op. cit. pp. 45-47.
3 Cf. Lea, op. cit. i. 341 ff.
astical revenues: the papal nuncio Bolognetti, writing in the early 1580s, agreed in principle that it was better that the Holy Office be freed of any suspicion of acting out of mercenary motives. It was customary to deprive the convicted person of his goods, but to hand them over to his heirs on condition that they allowed him no part in them.¹ For reasons not explained, however, an exception was at least in theory to be made of the goods of persons convicted of Judaizing: it may have been supposed that Jewish tendencies would have penetrated the entire family of the convicted person. Hence, if wealth remained in their hands, there would be a grave risk of its being exported to the Levant and strengthening the enemies of Christianity.² In the Ribeiro case the dire possibility of confiscation was certainly present, although the threat itself caused the aged Gaspare’s son-in-law (as an interested party) to organize an exceptionally vigorous defence.³

There is some reason to think that Inquisition proceedings were actually less lop-sided than those of many secular courts; the records sometimes contain an argued case for the defence, presented in a professional manner by persons other than the accused. It is well known that Inquisition tribunals, from Spain and Portugal to Venice, did allow the accused to retain the services of advocates. Admittedly, the great liberal historians were deeply sceptical of their value in Spain and Portugal.

¹ For contrasting interpretations of the 1568 decree, see Paolo Sarpi, “Sopra L’Officio dell’Inquisizione”, in his Scritti giurisdizionalistici, ed. Giovanni Gambarin (Bari, 1958), pp. 127, 182-3, and Francesco, Cardinal Albizzi, Risposta all’ historia della sacra Inquisizione composta gia dal R. P. Paolo Servita (2nd ed., date uncertain, but prob. c. 1680), pp. 276-8. Bolognetti chose to say that “it is the way of Venice that the confiscated goods of heretics do not go to the Holy Office, but rather to the Signory, which then for the most part gives them to the heirs—with the exception, however, of the goods of Judaizing Christians . . .” (Stella-Bolognetti, op. cit. p. 294; cf. also p. 137).

² For the fear that rich Jews would export capital to Constantinople for the benefit of the Turk, see, e.g. A.S.V., Collegio, Esposizioni Roma, registro 4, fols. 5r-v, 26 March 1588; Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Dispacci del Nunzio a Venezia alla Segretaria di Stato, filza 26, fol. 268, copy of a letter of Archbishop Matteucci to the Cardinal of Santa Severina, 2 July 1588 (known to me through the collection of microfilms on Venetian history in the Fondazione Cini, San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice).

³ A.S.V., S.U., b. 45, Ribeiro trial, under dates 28 February 1581, 7/11 December 1582, 27 October 1584.
They saw them as hacks chosen from a panel drawn up by the court, hampered in any case by an obligation to withdraw their protection if they became personally convinced of the guilt of the accused.\textsuperscript{1} Venetian advocates incurred the same obligation, but in practice this did not preclude quite strenuous effort on their part. In only one of the three serious cases of Marranism did the advocate declare his client’s case indefensible, and in that of Gaspare Ribeiro the defence was conducted by two advocates appointed by the court and one chosen by the accused himself.\textsuperscript{2} His son-in-law found most of the defence witnesses, who were generally casual or business acquaintances, from Rialto, the Ghetto or the parish where the accused and his son had lived. They were called to establish, \textit{inter alia}, the diminished responsibility of the accused person, his senile incapacity, and the extent of his late son’s domination over him. So vigorous a campaign was possible because the accused was not kept in total isolation from family or friends, and indeed was permitted to spend almost the whole period of his detention under house arrest, guarded by Holy Office wardens paid at his expense.\textsuperscript{3} Torture was seldom used to extract admissions in cases of Judaizing, and there was certainly no question of its use in the Ribeiro case.

Wherever Inquisition procedures are discussed, other caveats are likely to be raised. A subject of great contentiousness, especially over the introduction of the Inquisition into Portugal, was the right of the tribunal to conceal the names of hostile witnesses from the accused. This was an extension of a much older proviso that they could be concealed in cases in which the accused was a powerful man capable of retaliation against his accusers. All men, for this purpose, became “powerful”; and attempts by the Papacy to define and restrict the use of the

\textsuperscript{1} See Herculano, op. cit. pp. 346, 377-8, 380-1, 417, 559; Lea, op. cit. iii. 43-52.

\textsuperscript{2} For the appointment of advocates in the Ribeiro case, A.S.V., S.U., b. 45, 23 June, 20 and 25 August, 15 September 1580. For their role in other important cases of Marranism, see Pullan, op. cit. pp. 48-50.

\textsuperscript{3} A.S.V., S.U., b. 45: twenty-seven witnesses were interrogated for the defence alone between 15 November 1580 and 4 March 1581. In that period four witnesses who had appeared for the tribunal were further examined on behalf of the defence.
term "powerful" found no favour in Portugal. This could be especially serious for the accused, since one of the few standard forms of defence was to allege malicious prosecution on the part of personal enemies, who had of course to be identified.\(^1\) As far as I can tell, concealment was already common form in Venice, even in the late sixteenth century. By the 1630s it had certainly become so; the records contain statements of prosecution testimony furnished to the accused, with the names of hostile witnesses excluded and with the omission of all testimony that might have identified them to him.\(^2\) However, accused persons in Venice were not treated like those Portuguese who had to contend in the dark with large numbers of delators claiming them as accomplices and must strive to identify them all, at the risk of being charged with incomplete confession and insincere repentance.\(^3\) Mass delation of this kind was rare or unknown in Venice, and in practice few accused persons failed to identify their accusers. In the Ribeiro affair this problem did not arise because the Inquisition trial had arisen from a civil lawsuit over a dowry, so that there was no secret about its beginnings.\(^4\) In any case, the defence was chiefly one of insanity, or at least incapacity, rather than of malicious prosecution.

Again (to meet another standard objection) it is perfectly true that Inquisition trials, though not in principle concealed from all members of the government, took place behind closed doors. Their justice was not seen to be done by the people at large. In theory this might have diminished the tribunal's sense of responsibility. But the Inquisition can be exonerated from any charge of designing show-trials for propaganda purposes. Secrecy also protected the accused from the vagaries of hostile public opinion—the Inquisition, unlike the secular court which dealt with blasphemers, did not respond to the crowd.\(^5\)


\(^2\) E.g. in the cases of Felice Magalotti (1629-30) in A.S.V., S.U., b. 87, and of Giovanni Battista Bonaventura (1632), ibid. b. 89.

\(^3\) Cf. Révah, "La religion d'Uriel da Costa ", pp. 52 ff.


\(^5\) Cf. two letters of the bishop of Amelia, 16 and 30 November 1596, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Dispacci del Nunzio a Venezia alla Segreteria di Stato, filza 32, fols. 379v-380, 385v-386.
Finally, the Venetian records themselves are their own best guarantee. Dialogue between the accused or witness and the court is generally fully recorded. It shows how each statement was obtained: whether it was volunteered (in which case the stage direction is *subdens ex se*), or what question the witness was answering. Sometimes the witness's demeanour is described, especially where he showed obvious signs of stress, and incriminating admissions are signposted by the insertion of a pointing finger in the margin. The Venetians' passion for recording trivialia tried the nerves of the nuncio Bolognetti very sorely, but the tribunal's close attention to the exact words of the witness proves outstandingly valuable to the historian. It disarms the suspicion that the Inquisitors were either fabricating evidence or pouring all the testimony into the mould of their own minds. Painstakingly, in the Ribeiro case the notary recorded the everyday greetings of Venetians—"Come steu? Come fai? Ste aliegro!" or "Stai a Dio", "Come ti porti?" He captured the peevish answers of the indignant Gaspare to the court's questions—"I'm not going to say anything, do you want me to tell you what I don't know? I can't guess. I'm not a wizard" ("Io non dico niente, volete che io dica que che io non so? Non so indovinare. Non son strighiero"). And he was determined to reproduce the attempts of servants and acquaintances to imitate Gaspare's Italo-Portuguese—"Vedes a chi questo todos sarà vostra plazando a Dios che Ioan guanisca e sia levado delo lettos". That was the servant girl Mattea's impression of Gaspare showing his daughter-in-law round the house and telling her that all would be hers one day if it pleased God that his son should be cured and rise again from his bed. These observations are certainly far from the language of the learned, from the vocabulary of bureaucrats, or from the suspiciously neat and well-rounded statement to the police.

Having attempted at such length to establish the essential reliability of Venetian Inquisitional trial documents, let me try, through the Ribeiro case, to give some impression of what they

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1 Stella-Bolognetti, op. cit. p. 291.
2 A.S.V., S.U., b. 45, Ribeiro trial, 23 February, 2 March 1581.
3 Ibid. 15 March 1580.
4 Ibid. 8 April 1580.
can tell us about the psychology of Marranism. This can best be done by trying to piece together an account of the Venetian career, devotional habits and family of the Ribeiros, as they emerge from the trial records. Since these records admit of so much confusing and contradictory testimony, the picture they draw must needs be a very ambiguous one—but ambiguity is of the stuff of Marranism.

Gaspare Ribeiro, born at Palmella near Lisbon in 1493 or 1494, came to Venice about 1560 with his wife Isabella and his daughter Violante. He was careful to insist that he had come on a diplomatic mission for the Cardinal-Regent—perhaps because employment in the royal service would help to disarm the suspicion that a Portuguese merchant was a Jew. He and his family arrived in Venice from Ratisbon, and he claimed to have been a merchant of international scope, whose operations had once extended to India and the East, and whose bases had included both Paris and Lyons. In his old age he loved to discuss "the affairs of Spain and Portugal, and the places where pepper and cane-sugar grew". His son João came to join him in 1563, and they lived first in the parish of Santa Maria Zobenigo and then—from 1570 onwards—at Santa Maria Formosa. Father and son traded jointly under the names of Gaspare and João Ribeiro, and their business activities drew them into partnership with Levantine Jews, through whom they could establish desirable trading connections with the Ottoman Empire. They lent money; they handled consignments of pearls and nutmegs; Gaspare was later to show a refined taste in oriental jewellery; and at one time he managed the city’s meat supply, paying—or so he said to a man in the market place—some 25,000 crowns to the government for this right. Gaspare emerges as a curiously Shylockian figure, if only because

1 Ibid. : Gaspare’s own statements of 8 and 15 March 1580; his articles of defence, dated August 1580; testimony of David David, 20 December 1580. On 21 November 1580 Giovanni Cornuca, consul of the Spaniards and Portuguese, said of Portuguese in Venice that "unless they were sent upon the King’s service I would take them for Jews".

2 Ibid. Moses Cardiel, 25 August 1580, testifies to his trading partnership for about eighteen months (1569-70) with João Ribeiro.

3 For various references to their mercantile activities, ibid. 23 November, 1 December, 29 December 1580, 9, 18, 25 February and 27 May 1581.
he and his son got into serious trouble on account of a usurious loan for the Shakespearian sum of 3,000 ducats in 1567, because he was notoriously miserly, because he had an unhappy and even violent relationship with domestic servants, and because he lost a daughter to the Catholic Church. Unlike Shylock, he was never a professing Jew in his lifetime, although his memory was at last to be condemned as that of a Jew, lapsed from Catholicism.

Prophetically, an anonymous delator told a secular magistracy that "We see by experience that many foreigners flock to this city and among them are some who have no respect for the laws of God or Man, and to the deadly peril of their own salvation seek to lend upon usury and drink the blood of those who fall into their hands, and having amassed great wealth they depart from this city...". In later years witnesses spoke of the intention of the Ribeiros to tidy up their business during their time in Venice and then emigrate to the Levant. One said of Gaspare "that he had scattered his goods throughout the world, and that he wished to assemble them and come to Saphet in Constantinople [sic!] to live in the manner of Jews". It is hard to be sure that this was always the goal of the Ribeiros, if indeed it ever was: they were content to live in Venice for fifteen or twenty years, perhaps believing that they had reached an accommodation with their Christian surroundings, that opportunities for making money were very fair, and that there was no compelling reason to leap into the darkness of the Ottoman Empire. Many Marrano odysseys from West to East were slow ones, marked by long intervals of procrastination or inertia between the stages of the journey.

1 For the usurious loan, A.S.V., Giudici del Piovego, busta 1, Capitolare 1254-1568, second foliation, fols. 61v-74v (I owe this reference to Mr. N. S. Davidson). In the Ribeiro trial the witness Benetto Locatelli (18 February 1581) described the imprisonment of Gaspare and João about 1573, when they were detained for about two months on charges of burning a slave girl with a lighted torch.

2 A.S.V., Giudici del Piovego, Capitolare cited above, fol. 61v, 14 July 1567.

3 A.S.V., S.U., b. 45, Ribeiro trial, testimony of Lissabona Berrão, 31 August 1580; compare her evidence of 24 March 1580, and that of Canaan of Città di Castello, 1 September, and Isaac Abibi, 5 October 1580.

4 Cf. Pullan, op. cit. pp. 41-42.
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informer Saldanha, said that in order to transfer their assets to Constantinople with greater ease the Ribeiros had resolved on obtaining Venetian citizenship,\(^1\) which was generally necessary for the purpose of transporting goods through Venice from West to East without relying on middlemen. The acquisition of such a status would be a comfortably slow process, which could not normally be completed in less than twenty-five years\(^2\): for Gaspare, about 1585, and for his son, about 1588.

It was to be established by the Inquisition that the Ribeiros had close relatives, children of Gaspare's brother and sister, living in Ferrara and most of them returning to Judaism.\(^3\) We know of at least one other family, the Galindos from Flanders, where a rather similar division between Christianity and Judaism existed—one brother living as a Christian in Venice and trafficking with the fortune of his late father, a goldsmith, and three other brothers, Samuel, Juda and Jacob, living as Jews in Ferrara and working as goldsmiths and jewellers who specialized in the cutting or selling of diamonds.\(^4\) Relations between Venice and Ferrara were close, and according to prosecution witnesses Gaspare kept in close touch with his relatives, only rejecting the one among them who chose to return to Christianity. One wonders whether both the Ribeiros and the Galindos were making an arrangement designed to give them the best of both worlds, by blending Christian prosperity with Jewish piety and by opening, through Venetian citizenship, the way to transferring accumulated wealth to the Levant. Or should we merely conclude that the choice between Christianity and Judaism was a matter for individuals, and not for families, to decide?\(^5\)

Be this as it may, the immediate family of Gaspare Ribeiro was split by a religious division which cannot have been contrived. By 1569 the conflicting roles of Gaspare himself, his son João and his daughter Violante were clearly outlined. That year they were first denounced to the Inquisition. It heard tell of an ugly scene, in which Violante burst forth from the house as

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\(^1\) A.S.V., S.U., b. 45, Ribeiro trial, 6 September 1580.


\(^3\) A.S.V., S.U., b. 45, Ribeiro trial, 21 June 1580, 26-28 January 1581.

\(^4\) Ibid. : described by the witness "Franciscus Hispanus", 26 January 1581.
though to fling herself into the canal and thereby escape a beating administered by her brother. Meanwhile she screamed to the neighbourhood: "Help me, Signori, these dogs would give me by force to a Jew, and for this they are beating me." Plans were afoot to marry her into a very distinguished Jewish family, the Abravanel. A Portuguese priest, Father Enriques de Mello, gave a graphic account of relations within the family and made it clear that these impious plans stemmed chiefly from the son, João. He treated Violante "always in the manner of a Jewish dog, and it was he who perverted his father, for the father, it seems to me, is neither Christian nor Jew nor Turk, and could not himself tell you what law he follows, save that of making money."¹ He was presenting one of the classic pictures of the Marrano—not as a secret Judaizer, but as one who believes in nothing.² According to one later story, negotiations for the Abravanel marriage had already broken down because of Gaspare's meanness over the dowry; whatever the truth about this, he responded to de Mello's admonitions by meekly agreeing to a Christian marriage for Violante, and the Inquisition took no further action. About 1572 Violante was committed decisively to the Catholic world by her honourable marriage to a young Vicentine nobleman, Vincenzo Scrova. If she had hoped for happiness and a pious husband, she was disappointed, for Scrova's violent personal enmities barred him from the communion table. She was to tell the Holy Office in 1580 that, although she was in the habit of confessing four or five times a year, her husband had not done so for eight years. After the production of an heir, her marriage had gone sexually cold.³ None the less, Violante had clearly established herself as a determined and devout Catholic, and the Ribeiro family had a foot firmly planted in nominal Christianity: Vincenzo Scrova might despise his cantankerous father-in-law, but he cared about the family honour and his wife's inheritance enough to defend him with impetuous vigour.

By 1569 Gaspare's wife Isabella had died. Among witnesses

¹ A.S.V., S.U., b. 24, 18-19 October 1569.
³ A.S.V., S.U., b. 45, Ribeiro trial, 12 March 1580.
at the trial there was general agreement that she at least had been devoted to Judaism. A relative told the tribunal in 1581: "I will say of Gaspare Ribeiro that in the lifetime of his wife, Isabella de Medina, she would observe the Jewish faith and eat meat brought her from the Ghetto, or so my stepmother told me, saying that this Isabella de Medina had always been a Jewess at heart and strove always to perform the rites of Jews whenever she could." After her death Gaspare seemed readier to conform to Catholic practice, if not to accept Catholic belief. After moving to the parish of Santa Maria Formosa about 1570, he soon became Custoso or president of the parish Scuola del Sacramento, one of a number of devotional societies in the city dedicated to ensuring respect for the sacrament, housing and keeping it properly, and guaranteeing a decent following on its way through the streets to visit the sick. He contributed quite generously to the chapel and to housing the sacrament in a fine new tabernacle; his name was recorded for posterity as a benefactor of the parish church. "And if I were a bad Christian, I would never have had that done", he said with real or feigned naiveté at the trial. It would be uncharitable to suspect him of making this gesture purely as an act of camouflage. He lent hangings to the church, usually seeking a receipt (for he was very careful of his property); he was seen to accompany the sacrament on Good Fridays with a torch or a candle in his hand; and one of his book-keepers, who had served him between 1570 and 1574, remembered taking communion with him in the parish church. This last piece of evidence implied that his link with the church was a sacramental one, and not forged merely through philanthropy, church attendance and appearance in ceremonies. Rumours that he had spat out the consecrated wafer in the fireplace at home after his visits to communion were never substantiated; nor did the Inquisition make strenuous efforts to follow them up.

In 1574, Gaspare further identified himself with Venice by

1 Ibid.: testimony of "Franciscus Hispanus", 31 January 1581; similar information in the denunciations of 1569.
2 A.S.V., S.U., b. 45, Ribeiro trial, 15 March, 14 June, 15, 19, 21, 22 November 1580, 19 January 1581.
3 Ibid. 7 April, 14 June 1580.
taking a second wife, Helena, daughter of the late Giorgio Teodori, jeweller at San Zulian, who had been introduced to him by the wife of an advocate in a nearby parish.\(^1\) True, this marriage of convenience between two elderly people could be seen merely as a cunning device to improve the family’s chances of obtaining citizenship—but Gaspare’s devotional life and dietary habits would henceforth be subject to scrutiny by an old woman who was nothing if not conventionally devout, and it is hard to see why he acted thus if his heart was really in Judaism. Accounts of his domestic routine by Madonna Helena herself and by a servant girl, Mattea da Rippa Sicca, were ambiguous; they laid some stress on the fact that he always prayed standing and never kneeling in his own home. It is tempting to believe that he was creating his own private fusion between Christianity and Judaism. As Mattea described it during the trial, “The truth is that of an evening he would stand upright in the middle of the room whilst I warmed the bed, and I think that he was saying the prayer because he moved his lips and kept his hands joined, but he remained on his feet and not on his knees. And he faced the image of the Madonna, but from afar off, and I never saw him kneel, not even at Mass, where he went, not often, but every fifteen or twenty days, saying that he could not go [more frequently]”.\(^2\) Madonna Helena claimed to have heard the prayer, which ran: “To God I give myself, to the Holy Spirit I commend me: my sin is great, but great is your mercy”.\(^3\) When the Inquisition tested him after his arrest, his acquaintance with the Christian liturgy was none too impressive. As the record reported, he “said the Ave Maria in the Portuguese or Spanish vernacular, but with some Latin words; and he said the Pater Noster in Latin, but he left some words out and omitted ‘Forgive us our debts’. But the Creed he could not say, crying ‘Pardon me, gentlemen, for I am not in my right mind’”.\(^4\) Confusion, or indifference, or a variety of religious experience had put him in a transitional state which exposed him

\(^1\) Ibid. 9, 12 April 1580.

\(^2\) Ibid. 7 April 1580.

\(^3\) Ibid. 12 April 1580.

\(^4\) Ibid. 15 March 1580.
to deep suspicion, once other events had set in motion an investigation of his habits.

If Caspare was turning, at least half-heartedly, towards Christianity and identification with the Venetians, his hosts, his son João had taken other steps towards Judaism. Between the two men the relationship was tense and punctuated by violent quarrels; Gaspare's growing eccentricity prompted him at intervals to sally forth to Rialto and tell brokers, bankers and exchange dealers not to do business with his son—uttering shrill and peevish protests which he proved too weak to sustain. His declining business sense found a new outlet in the art of housekeeping and going to market, which he would entrust to no-one else. Effective authority over his son was gone. João was by nature an extrovert and a libertine who in his time took several mistresses and was wounded in the face for dishonourable behaviour towards a Portuguese girl of the family of País. Evidence about his devotional life seemed to point in two directions. Some witnesses were very precise about his visits to confession at San Francesco della Vigna and his willingness to take communion; others reported counter rumours to the effect that he was a sceptic and an unbeliever. In 1579, a month or two before João's death, Antonio Saldanha was said to have remarked that "João Ribeiro was a traitor and a man no-one could trust, that he took him for neither a Christian nor a Jew, but for a man without law..." The one indisputable fact was that in 1575 João secretly married a Jewess of noble blood, Alumbra, cousin to the Duke of Naxos, almost certainly

1 Ibid. 20 October, 5, 23 November, 1, 15 December 1580, 19 January 1581. The fullest testimony was that of Nicolò da Ponte of Savona, employed as bookkeeper to Gaspare and João for most of the four years from 1570 to 1574.
2 A.S.V., S.U., b. 44, trial of the "Negromanti", testimony of Stefano Nogera in Milan, 27 January 1579, and of João himself, 23 July 1579. See b. 45, Ribeiro trial, 8 March 1580, for Gaspare's assertion that his son had four mistresses, but to the best of Gaspare's knowledge never married.
3 A.S.V., S.U., b. 44, trial of the "Negromanti", 2 June 1579; b. 45, Ribeiro trial, 14 June 1580.
4 A.S.V., S.U., b. 44, testimony of Francesco Oglies in the trial of the "Negromanti", 2 September 1579. On 15 September Saldanha said that the Jew David Pas had told him "that João Ribeiro was neither Christian nor Jew, and that he did not believe in anything".
promising her that in the near future he would emigrate to Constantinople and declare his Judaism. Whether he was sincere in this proposal none can tell. His decision was probably a resumption of the earlier Abravanel project—a means of winning acceptance in the Jewish world where Marranos, who had compromised with Christian idolatry, were notoriously unpopular. He may have been seeking a form of insurance in case the Christian world rejected him, or his action may have been what Ellis Rivkin has called an "entrepreneurial decision"—one intended to secure the material advantages of a highly profitable family connection. As his cousin put it, João Ribeiro "took this wife to ennable himself, and for her beauty, and so that he could say that he was a relative of the great Duke, and because she was of good blood, and he had promised that he would bring all his wealth and property together and they would go to Constantinople and live there as Jews". As it was, he died four years later, still in Venice, attended by a Levantine Jewish doctor. He was still ostensibly a Christian: did he purposely avoid communion on his deathbed, or was he genuinely choked with vomit and unable to receive the communion? Disputes over the dowry brought the whole affair to light, and the degree of Gaspare's complicity was laboriously investigated by the Inquisition. It reached the understandable conclusion that he could hardly have been ignorant about the marriage and that he had in fact acknowledged Alumbra as his daughter-in-law, exchanging presents with her and encouraging her to come and live in his house to look after João in his last illness. Legitimamente enough, it rejected the defence that he had taken her for

1 For the marriage negotiations and the contract, see A.S.V., S.U., b. 45, Ribeiro trial, 21, 26 January, 22, 24 March, 12 April, 9 July, 23, 25, 31 August, 23, 24 November 1580, 16 February 1581. According to Alumbra's mother, Lissabona Berrão (24 March 1580), the marriage took place according to the Hebrew rite in the house of a Venetian nobleman, Giorgio Cornaro, on the island of Murano.

2 Rivkin, op. cit. p. 150.

3 A.S.V., S.U., Ribeiro trial, testimony of "Franciscus Hispanus", 26 January 1581.

4 Ibid.: testimony of Fabrizio Locatelli, parish priest of Santa Maria Formosa, 26 November 1579; of the Jesuit Flaminio Riccheri, 26 January 1580; of Domingo de Paz, a theologian and philosopher from Lisbon, 23 April 1580; and also of the maidservant Mattea da Rippa Sicca, 8 April 1580.
another of her son’s concubines and had believed that if João did intend to marry her he would convert her to Christianity first; it heard, but probably did not accept, a good deal of evidence that João was in the habit of forging his father’s signature to business documents to increase his own credit, and could therefore have reproduced it frequently on the marriage contract.1

No sentence was pronounced on Gaspere Ribeiro during his lifetime. Death took him on 12 May 1581 in a house at San Barnabà, surrounded by priests and officials of the Inquisition still eager for some acknowledgment of his sins and some sign, however tenuous, of repentance. No convincing evidence of such sentiments was forthcoming, despite the ingenuity of two Jesuits. One spoke to him in Italian, caused a servant to address him in Spanish, and finally (on hearing of the suspicion that Gaspare was a Marrano), tried a few words of the Psalms in Hebrew. The other obtained the answer “Si, si” to the question, Did he want to confess his sins? But he drew no further sign of penitence, not even a tug of the hand. The Holy Office ordered the body to be placed in a wooden coffin and lodged in a storeroom on the ground floor of the house, by night, without the presence of any clergy or any ceremony of the Church. Inquiries into the deathbed were launched2; the tribunal, released from the sense of urgency imposed by Gaspare’s living presence, came slowly to its last conclusions. More than three years later his memory was finally condemned as that of a Judaizer and his body was marked for burial without light and in unconsecrated ground. For another year or more, the corpse was still kept in a storeroom, now in a house at Santo Stefano where Gaspare’s son-in-law, Vincenzo Scrova, was lodging. On 12 February 1586 officials of the Holy Office opened the coffin, found that the body had not been totally consumed, and briefly locked the room again. On 13 February, at dead of night, the chief constable of the Inquisition buried the corpse of Gaspare “in the place where the bodies of dead Jews are buried”. We do not know what happened to his estate.3

1 Ibid. 8, 22 March, 7, 12, 26, 28 April, 2, 3 July, 25, 31 August, 30 September 1580.
2 Ibid.: entries for 11 May to 1 June 1581.
3 Ibid. 27 October 1584, 12-13 February 1586.
Should Gaspare indeed have lain with the Jews on the Lido, or should he have gone to rest, supposedly with his first wife and his son, in a family vault at the Hieronymite monastery of Santa Maria della Grazia outside Venice? João was buried in that place, clad in the habit of a Franciscan. Rumours that Donna Isabella’s bones had been dug up and sent to the holy city of Safed in Galilee were investigated, but found no proof.¹ I hope to have shown that the problem with Inquisition documents from Venice is not that they offer neat solutions, but rather that they faithfully record a mass of conflicting evidence. The tribunal’s conclusions may seem perfectly legitimate, but they can seldom command unquestioning agreement. The tense, unhappy Ribeiro family demonstrates the vanity of dogmatizing about Marranism, since the attitudes of individuals within the same household appear to have been dramatically different. One can find examples of Marrano families acting in concert, where maternal or paternal authority was firm and respected; this was not one of them. Donna Isabella seems to confirm the suggestion that secret Judaism was generally passed on by wives and mothers rather than by husbands and fathers,² her daughter Violante to support the theory that conversos were ready and willing to convert to Catholicism. João Ribeiro can be cast as a cheerful devotee of expediency, seeing Venice as a free city but making, through his marriage to Alumbra, shrewd preparations against the day it might turn him out. Both he and his father were seen by contemporaries not only as secret Jews, but also as men without law, who believed in nothing. Gaspare, however, may in his unintellectual way have groped (in devotion if not in doctrine) towards a kind of private synthesis between Christianity and Judaism, possessing a perfect understanding of neither. One solid fact—the marriage of João to Alumbra—demonstrates beyond doubt that the frontiers between Christian-

¹ A.S.V., S.U., b. 44, case of the “Negromanti”, testimony of “Antonius Macchiatus”, a Portuguese, to the Inquisition in Ferrara, 31 May 1579; that of Pompeo Sansoni, Prior of the monastery, in Venice on 16 June 1580, in b. 45 with the Ribeiro papers.

ity and Judaism were being illegally crossed. As for Gaspare, let us leave him with the words of his son's friend and sometime partner, the Levantine Jew Moses Cardiel: "Of Gaspare I know nothing save that I found him a good Christian. God alone can know the secrets of the heart".\(^1\)

\(^1\) A.S.V., S.U., b. 45, Ribeiro trial, 6 September 1580.