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Review

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Claudio Povolo, Claudia Andreato, and Valentina Cesco, eds. *Il Processo a Paolo Orgiano (1605–1607)*.

Fonti per la storia della terraferma veneta 19. Rome: Viella S.r.l., 2003. lxxviii + 705 pp. index. append. gloss. chron. bibl. €70. ISBN 88–8334–097–3.

Lucky is the author who can find a publisher willing to publish a manuscript source hundreds of pages in length in order to buttress an argument. Claudio Povolo (with the aid of several collaborators) has convinced a funding agency to publish a massive trial instructed by the Venetian Council of Ten against a village nobleman. It is one of the rare surviving penal trials in a series reduced to pulp during the nineteenth century. Povolo considers this case to be the source of Manzoni's famous novel, *I Promessi Sposi*. Finally, the trial illustrates how the new inquisitorial rite strengthened republican institutions in the sixteenth century. This "giustizia egemonica" refused to mediate with criminals, replacing a "giustizia negoziata" whose aim was to restore a previous balance. The inquisitorial ritual of the Council of Ten "gave form and legitimacy to the words of all those whose voices were unheard or silenced" (xxi). Magistrates used the promise of secrecy to coax explicit accusations from people who would otherwise tolerate the depravity of their social superiors for fear of undergoing worse. Exceptional powers granted to these magistrates gave them scope to remove offenders who might otherwise be shielded by powerful patrons in the community and the city. Povolo correctly sees this as part of a redistribution of power from traditional elites in Terraferma cities to the Venetian republican magistrates.

Here, the village council representatives (whose individual backgrounds and resources are never directly explored) posing as "poor peasants" petitioned the supreme organs of the Republic for protection in August 1605. The Venetian podesta in Vicenza promptly sent it "upstairs." A one-sentence summary of each of Paolo Orgiano's misdeeds runs to forty-four articles and four pages of dense text. The Venetian tribunal promptly removed Orgiano's kin from the village to encourage the villagers to loosen their tongues. The villagers soon overcame their reticence: some 200 pages of pathetic testimony against Paolo Orgiano and his cronies depict him as a vicious psychopath. The Council of Ten magistrates shut him up in the new prison in Venice where he waited another sixteen months, when the Council delegated the pursuit of the trial to the Corte Pretoria of Padua. Paolo Orgiano had his day in court too. His answered the charges in forty pages of his own testimony, followed by that of his acolytes and relatives, who were also imprisoned during the period of their interrogation. The coherence of their allegations, the concordance of their views and the seventy-six witnesses they were able to marshal makes it clear that they had expert legal advice of their own. Orgiano tried to cast the accusations into the mold of vendetta between himself and the village priest, anxious to recover his concubine from the nobleman's clutches. As for the other women who brought rape charges against him, he not implausibly claimed that they were poor women who habitually exchanged sexual favors in exchange for food and protection, suborned into perjury by the priest and village council members. Included in the trial papers is the transcript of the diocesan

court's proceedings against the parish priest. Such accusations were a common and efficient way of having troublesome priests removed, but it did not succeed in swaying the judges. At the end of November, 1607, the court sentenced Paolo Orgiano to ten years' incarceration in Venice, where he died in 1613. His commoner helpers suffered long banishments while the noblemen were subjected to notable fines.

I am not sure that publishing the entire text was the best heuristic strategy. A persuasive microhistory could have been built from this document with more economy. I also doubt Povoło's claim that the inquisitorial ritual reflected "republican and aristocratic" values. There is nothing in the text that leads me to concur that the magistrates were "culturally different" from the respondents in any but the most technical sense. More centralized tribunals, with greater power to isolate criminals, multiplied during the sixteenth century. Cases of lowborn people bringing charges against nobles are fairly common in the archives of the Siense Capitano di Giustizia around the same period. Povoło evokes in footnotes Clifford Geertz, Pierre Bourdieu, and Paul Gewirtz with respect to narrative strategies, but they do not help us understand the actions of the different protagonists. The criminal behaviour, and the judicial animus it mobilized, are much better illuminated by Maurice Cusson, Martin Daly, and Margo Wilson.

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