Graffiti as Living Archive: Carceral Aesthetics at an Inquisitorial Prison in Sicily

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ABSTRACT

From around 1600 to 1782, the Palazzo Chiaramonte-Steri in Sicily functioned as the site of the Spanish Inquisition's prison. During this period thousands of prisoners accused of crimes and heresy against the Catholic faith made their marks on the Steri prison's walls, leaving inscriptions and images that reference early modern popular culture, history, literature, art, and religious iconography while also testifying to a traumatic experience that was both deeply personal and collectively felt. Often, the graffiti was scratched and etched into the walls with mixtures of food, clay, plaster, and bodily fluids; regular white-washing of the cell walls over the years has preserved at least five layers of graffitied plaster. I argue that the Steri constitutes a type of 'living archive,' as its walls hold layers of creatively reconfigured genetic and corporeal matter now nestled within the structure and fabric of the building itself. In my analysis of the graffiti, I utilize art historian Nicole R. Fleetwood's notion of carceral aesthetics, which considers how art-making in prison is shaped and formed by the experience of penalization. While the notion of carceral aesthetics has commonly been applied to the contemporary experience of mass incarceration, my use of this framework seeks to establish currents of solidarity and shared experience between imprisoned individuals throughout history.

RESUMÉ

Le Palais Chiaramonte-Steri en Sicile servit de prison à l'époque de l'Inquisition espagnole, d'environ 1600 à 1782. Pendant cette période, des milliers de prisonniers accusés de crimes et d'hérésie contre la foi catholique laissèrent leurs marques sur les murs de la prison Steri. Leurs inscriptions et dessins font référence à la culture populaire, à l'histoire, à la littérature, à l'art et à l'iconographie religieuse du début de l'ère moderne. Ces images témoignent de l'expérience traumatisante des prisonniers, tant sur le plan individuel que collectif. Les graffitis furent généralement gravés et griffés sur les murs avec un mélange de nourriture, d'argile, de plâtre et de fluides corporels. Le blanchiment régulier des murs des cellules de prison au cours des années préserva au moins cinq couches de plâtre graffité. Je soutiens que le Steri constitue une sorte « d'archive vivante » en raison des couches de matière génétique et corporelle reconfigurée de manière créative dans ses murs, nichée et conservée dans la structure et la fabrique même du bâtiment. J'utilise dans mon analyse des graffitis la notion d'esthétique carcérale proposée par l'historienne de l'art Nicole R. Fleetwood, qui examine comment la création artistique en prison est façonnée et formée par l'expérience de la pénalisation. Alors que la notion d'esthétique carcérale a généralement été appliquée à l'expérience contemporaine de l'incarcération massive, mon utilisation de ce cadre cherche à établir des courants de solidarité et de partage d'expérience parmi les individus emprisonnés à travers l'histoire.

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To the imprisoned, to the breaking of chains, to the abolition of the prison.

And finally, to my family; Maman, Baba, and Yalda; may you be *azad* always.

Hādhā kitāb katabtuhu bi-yadī sawfa tablā yadī wa-sawfa yabqā al-kitāb.
This is an inscription I wrote with my own hand; my hand will wear out, but the inscription will remain.
— Ancient graffiti in Palmyra, Syria, c. 640-800 CE.[1]

Become the sky.
Take an axe to the prison wall.
Escape.
— Rumi, *Quietness*

Introduction: Carceral Aesthetics and the Steri as Living Archive

Next to Palermo's historic Piazza Marina square stands a rather unassuming palace complex known as the Palazzo Chiaramonte-Steri, or simply, the Steri (Fig. 1). The fortress-like structure was constructed by Palermo's ruling Chiaramonte family between 1307 and 1320 in the prevailing Norman Gothic style of its time. Upon venturing past its stony facade, we are confronted with a visual cacophony of overlapping inscriptions, drawings, marks, and messages which dominate the inner rooms of the building. One of the most striking images is that of a crescent-shaped, horned monster with a mouth weaponized by sharpened incisors (Fig. 2). Descending out of its gaping jaws are labelled figures from the Old Testament, such as Abraham, Abel, Jacob, Joseph, Adam, and Eve, amongst others. Upon the creature's curved throat and under a depiction of a sealed arched gate is the memorable yet chilling line from Dante's *Divine Comedy*; the statement, etched in Sicilian, warns the would-be visitor to "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." From around 1600 to its abolition in 1782, the Steri hosted and facilitated the Spanish Inquisition's activities in Sicily, while also functioning as the tribunal's main prison.

[1] Quoted in Ikka Lindstedt, "Writing, Reading, and Hearing Early Muslim-era Graffiti," *International Qur'anic Studies Association* (Jan., 2, 2017), accessed at https://iqsaweb.wordpress.com/2017/01/02/writing-reading-and-hearing-in-early-muslim-era-arabic-graffiti/.

During this period thousands of prisoners accused of crimes against the Catholic faith made their marks on the Steri's walls.[2]

In 1906, Italian folklorist and ethnologist Giuseppe Pitrè stumbled upon the Steri graffiti as the building was undergoing regular restoration work, when some plaster accidentally fell away from the wall and revealed an image. Under Pitrè's direction, layers of whitewashed plaster were peeled back, revealing a palimpsest of inscriptions and drawings, long forgotten as the building became a storage for Palermo's civil and commercial courts and offices throughout the 19th century.[3] In spite of Pitrè's revelatory discovery, the Steri's walls were re-plastered and the building continued to function as an office for Palermo's law courts until World War II. In 1964, the Sicilian writer Leonardo Sciascia snuck into the Steri during another period of ongoing restoration work, and happened upon the "secret prison" of the Steri.[4] This external structure, meant to keep prisoners in total isolation from the outside world, was built within the palace complex and hidden from public view.[5] It held an equally overwhelming amount of graffiti authored by Inquisition prisoners, which Sciascia surreptitiously photographed and recorded. When he returned a decade later, the walls had been whitewashed again. Sciascia lamented the destruction of "historical evidence of perhaps unique importance."[6] While many inmates were held in rooms within the Steri itself, final restoration work on the secret prison conducted from 2000 to 2007 would eventually recover the many cycles of life and loss also buried between its walls.[7]

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[2] Giovanna Fiume, "Soundless Screams: Graffiti and Drawings in the Prisons of the Holy Office in Palermo," *Journal of Early Modern History* 21 (2017), 194.
[3] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 189.
[4] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 189.
[5] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 189.
[6] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 190.
[7] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 190.

While the notion of what art historian Nicole R. Fleetwood calls "carceral aesthetics" has often been applied to the contemporary experience of mass incarceration, my study of the Steri graffiti applies this theoretical framework to the context of Inquisitorial Sicily.[8] In *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration,* Fleetwood proposes that one of the most dehumanizing and debilitating aspects of modern incarceration is the rupture of time, routine, and one's freedom of access to resources and their community. She writes that "[c]arceral aesthetics is the production of art under the conditions of unfreedom; it involves the creative use of penal space, time, and matter. Immobility, invisibility, stigmatization, lack of access, and premature death govern the lives of the imprisoned and their expressive capacities. Such deprivation becomes raw material and subject matter for prison art."[9] While penal space aims to enforce a sense of hopelessness, depersonalization, and complacency, it also paradoxically creates "a site for the production of culture"— a condition of mandated, and often violent relationality in which people from a variety of different socioeconomic, religious, and cultural backgrounds must cohabitate under restrictive and inhumane conditions.[10]

These ever-fluctuating, interactive, and hierarchical dynamics of carceral life are markedly present at the Steri, where Inquisitors often attempted to divide prisoners by gender and social ranking.[11] In the cells of more elite prisoners who could afford to have supplies brought in, the graffiti is often more detailed, pictorial, and composed with pigments and paint. In the cells of the poorer prisoners, the graffiti has been scratched and etched into the walls with

[8] Nicole R. Fleetwood, "Carceral Aesthetics: Penal Space, Time and Matter," in *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 25.
[9] Fleetwood, "Carceral Aesthetics," 25.
[10] Giovanna Fiume, "Justice, Expiation and Forgiveness in the Graffiti and Drawings of Palermo's Secret Prisons," *Quaderni Storici* 1, vol. 157 (April 2018), 75.
[11] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 196.

mixtures of food, clay, plaster, and bodily fluids such as blood, saliva, feces, or urine.[12] The inscriptions and images reference early modern popular culture, literature, art, and religious iconography, while also testifying to a traumatic experience of captivity and repression that is both deeply personalized yet collectively felt. I argue that the Steri constitutes a type of 'living archive,' as its walls hold multiple layers of creatively reconfigured genetic, organic, and corporeal matter—what Fleetwood calls the "raw material of deprivation" inherent to carceral art.[13] As historians Giovanna Fiume and Mercedes Garcia-Arenal write, "the biographical traces of the prisoners have literally been *incorporated* into the prison."[14] This thesis probes the ways in which prisoners re-appropriated the carceral space of the Steri in order to represent and testify to their own experiences in an environment built to silence and repress all expressions of identity, solidarity, and communicability. Writing and drawing on the walls constituted a world-building exercise for the prisoners held captive at the Steri, and thus the graffiti can be seen as a part of the architecture and the structural fabric of the building itself. Since many of the cells are covered from floor to ceiling in mural-like, layered compositions, I will strive to analyze the images and words *in situ* and as part of a larger decorative program and collective work of space-making emerging over the course of several decades.

Susan Stewart has characterized graffiti as a "stylization inseparable from the body, a stylization that, in its impenetrable 'wildness,' could surpass even linguistic reference and serve purely as the concrete evidence of an individual existence and the reclamation of the environment through the label of the personal."[15] The uniqueness of the Steri graffiti allows us to

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[12] Giovanna Fiume and Mercedes García-Arenal, "Introduction: The Graffiti of the Inquisitorial Prison in Palermo: New Perspectives," *Quaderni Storici* 157 (April 2018), 2.
[13] Fleetwood, "Carceral Aesthetics," 25.
[14] Fiume and Garcia-Arenal, "The Graffiti of the Inquisitorial Prison in Palermo," 7.
[15] Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 212.

imagine and construct overlooked modes of life, ways of being, and interacting during the early modern era that rupture reductive, hierarchical, and traditional conceptions of history-telling. The graffiti's stark, rough materiality and the deeply personal content leads one to imagine the space as if it was truly lived in, occupied and utilized by its inhabitants; hearing perhaps the slow footsteps of Inquisition guards approaching the cells, murmured arguments between a mismatched group of cellmates, or the methodical scratching of a chiseled object scraping away bits of plaster from the walls.

Carceral aesthetics takes as its main subject of study the visual and cultural output of prisoners "across states of un/freedom" who "redeploy penal matter, penal space, and penal time" towards creative expressions of their life experiences and time in captivity.[16] By utilizing contemporary discursive frameworks rooted in the concept of carceral aesthetics, I seek to establish currents of solidarity and shared experience between those persecuted by penal systems throughout history, while emphasizing how acts of creative self-representation within carceral space can become valuable tactics of self-preservation and survival for imprisoned individuals. My analysis will focus on the graffiti found at the Steri's secret prison, seeking out expressions of interiority, transcultural and hybrid religious experiences, and testimonials to prison life made by Inquisition prisoners, whose stories have for so long been told solely through the biased reference points of condemning Inquisition documents.

The following sections of this thesis will discuss several examples of the Steri inscriptions and drawings in relation to what we know about the conditions of everyday life in the prison, as well as the socio-political atmosphere of Spanish-ruled Sicily. Attention will be paid to the role of images, iconoclasm, and idolatry in Inquisitorial epistemology, as well as the

[16] Fleetwood, "Carceral Aesthetics," 54.

interaction of popular cultures, languages, religions, captors and captives in the highly mobile, early modern Mediterranean region. This is also, in some respects, a project of biographical recuperation, in which I will attempt to center the individual and collective identities, lives, and experiences of the prisoners against the bureaucratic record-keeping practices of the Inquisition, whose ideologically-laced documents must always be read with an air of doubt. To begin, I will provide a brief historical outline of the socio-political climate in Inquisitorial Sicily.

The Spanish Inquisition in Sicily: Policing a Global Empire

The expansive geographical reach of the Spanish Inquisition, with a network of tribunals functioning across the 'New World,' Europe, and even parts of Asia, has led some historians to emphasize a scholarly approach that considers "the history of the Inquisition as a *global* history."[17] The most stark reminder of the Inquisition's hegemonic presence throughout the early modern world is in the variety of languages and dialects that appear on the Steri's walls. There are writings in Sicilian, Latin, Italian, English, Spanish, Hebrew; some of the writings and drawings even respond and relate to each other.[18] In a related vein, Robert Clines has described the early modern Mediterranean as "a fraught contact zone in which imperial powers and religious confessions competed for subjects and souls."[19] Reformist religious movements such as Lutheranism and the circulation of humanist edicts and publications investigating the diversity of the material and subjective world threatened the Holy Office's established order and codified doctrines of an omnipresent and singular religio-political authority. Spanish Inquisitors were

[17] Emphasis mine. François Soyer, "Enforcing Religious Repression in an Age of World Empire: Assessing the Global Reach of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions," *History* 100, no. 3 (341) (July 2015), 333. See also Robin Vose, "Beyond Spain: Inquisition History in a Global Context," *History Compass* 11, no. 4 (2013): 316-329, and Francisco Bethencourt, *The Inquisition: A Global History, 1478-1834* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[18] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 200.

[19] Robert John Clines, "The Converting Sea: Religious Change and Cross-Cultural Interaction in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *History Compass* 17, no. 1 (October 2018), 2.

faced with the difficult task of halting the spread of heretical beliefs throughout vast and disparate geographical and temporal contexts. They were keenly aware that cultural contact and interchange between differing groups could often lead to increased understanding and acceptance of non-Catholic beliefs, and, in some cases, even conversion; Clines notes that "the very nature of imperial borders—permeable and fluid with very little bearing on the everyday lives of individuals—meant that conversion often caused a certain level of anxiety for those charged with safeguarding confessional purity."[20] This transcultural and interreligious dynamic was reflected in the social fabric of early modern Sicily, a culturally-pluralistic island which had been co-inhabited and ruled by Byzantines, Normans, Arabs, Romans, and Greeks throughout its tumultuous history.[21]

Sicily was also dangerously close to North Africa, and Palermo's coastal location allowed it to function as a hub for international trade and travel, and, consequently, piracy and the exchange of enslaved peoples, captives and prisoners.[22] Spanish Inquisitors suspected Sicilians of harbouring a romanticized attachment to folk cultures and a more tolerant view of so-called heretical belief systems such as Islam, Judaism, and Protestantism. William Monter writes that in Sicily, the Spanish Inquisition was "overtly colonial and resented as such" by the local populace, who perceived the religious institution as arrogant, foreign, and illegitimate.[23] Henry Kamen has also noted that "it was in the Italian provinces of the Spanish Crown that the greatest and most successful revolts against the Inquisition occurred."[24] In fact, the Inquisition's initial establishment in Palermo in 1509 had been met with protests from Sicilian authorities and

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[20] Clines, "The Converting Sea," 1.
[21] Robert S. Stone, "The Roles of a Saint in Spanish Sicily," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 20, no. 1 (2017), 208.
[22] William Monter, "Sicily: Italian Wine in Spanish Bottles," in *Frontiers of Heresy: The Spanish Inquisition from the Basque Lands to Sicily* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 168.
[23] Monter, "Sicily: Italian Wine in Spanish Bottles," 52.
[24] Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition* (New York: The New American Library, 1965), 288.

widespread rioting by locals, which ultimately failed to deter the Inquisition's zealous pursuit of religious and political dissent.[25]

In the thirteenth century, the island of Sicily came under the rule of the Crown of Aragon.[26] By February 1481 Ferdinand II of Aragon had appointed Sicily its own inquisitor, who would report to the Spanish Crown, "de facto independent of the Holy See."[27] However, strained relations between civil authorities, the local populace, and Spanish Inquisitors, alongside bureaucratic disorganization and inertia hampered the early activities of the tribunal. In 1516 the Inquisition was temporarily forced to cease operations in Palermo after a violent uprising whereupon an "immense crowd, with artillery taken from the arsenal, besieged the vice-regal palace" before turning their anger towards the religious tribunal, then housed at the royal palace of Castel San Pietro.[28] The crowds sacked the palace, released the prisoners, and destroyed Inquisitorial records and property. Amid the chaos, Sicily's Chief Inquisitor fled for his life, returning to Spain "amid the jeers and insults of the people, who cried that he was an Inquisitor and hunter of money, not heretics."[29] However, these rebellions were short-lived and often ineffective in the face of royal letters and bulls from the Spanish Crown demanding cooperation and obedience from Sicilian viceroys and authorities.

By 1519, the tribunal had re-established its presence in Palermo with renewed vigor and severity, but popular distrust towards the institution guaranteed its perpetual illegitimacy in the eyes of the people, a milieu that guaranteed an endless stream of prisoners accused of blaspheming against the Holy Institution.[30] Yet despite its initial unpopularity with the local

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[25] Monter, "Sicily: Italian Wine in Spanish Bottles," 179.
[26] Henry Charles Lea, *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies* (London: MacMillan & Co, 1908), 1.
[27] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 190
[28] Lea, *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies,* 17.
[29] Lea, *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies,* 16.
[30] Lea, *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies,* 16.

population, "to be enrolled as an Inquisition official was soon regarded as a great privilege by the Sicilian nobility."[31] While the chief Inquisitors were almost always Spaniards, Sicilian nobles eventually became eager to ingratiate themselves with the new ruling elite, working as non-paid officials known as *familliares* (familiars) and *comissarios* (commissioners).[32] This network of voluntary informants functioned as a type of "secret police" for the Inquisitorial tribunal, registering local denunciations as well as collecting and compiling evidence and testimonies against the accused.[33] In 1568, the Inquisition moved to the viceroy's coastal palace, the Castello a Mare, before an accidental gunpowder explosion in 1593 forced its final and permanent relocation to the Palazzo Chiaramonte-Steri.[34]

"This Tomb": The Steri's Secret Prison

Shortly after establishing their new headquarters at the Steri in 1600, Inquisitors commissioned architect Diego Sanchez to construct a special, free-standing structure within the palace complex to be used as a secret prison for imprisoned heretics.[35] Built between 1603 and 1605, the secret prison was funded by wealth confiscated by the accused and followed a simple, two-level longitudinal plan, equipped with a ground floor and upper floor (Figs. 3 & 4).[36] The ground floor held eight rectangular cells, measuring about five meters wide and seven meters long, with high, barrel vaulted ceilings.[37] All eight cells faced "a long corridor, at the end of which a double-ramped staircase led to the upper floor."[38] Constructed within the inner courtyard

[31] Stone, "The Roles of a Saint in Spanish Sicily," 208.
[32] Sara T. Nalle, "Inquisitors, Priests, and the People During the Catholic Reformation in Spain," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 no. 4 (Winter 1987), 559.
[33] Nalle, "Inquisitors, Priests, and the People," 559.
[34] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 191-2.
[35] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 191-2.
[36] Laura Inzerillo, "Augmented Reality: Past, Present, Future," *SPIE Journal* 8649 (2013), 4.
[37] Gianclaudio Civale, "Animo carcerato: inquisizione, detenzione e graffiti a Palermo nel secolo XVII," *Mediterranea* no. 40 (August 2017), 261.
[38] Giovanna Fiume, "Justice, Expiation and Forgiveness," 75.

of the Steri complex, the secret prison was purposely designed to be hidden from public view. Much like the plague, Inquisitors considered heresy akin to "a contagious disease which spread through gestures, speech and behaviour," an illness which was to be treated by isolating and extracting the heretic from their community.[39] The Steri's strategic location by the city's main Piazza Marina square also provided a convenient stage for its Inquisition's *autos-da-fé* (or "acts of faith"), the punitive spectacle in which accused heretics were condemned and burnt at the stake before a mass audience.[40] Curiously, despite Inquisitor's attempts to restrict public access to the secret prison, there exist two written references to the "show" of the *auto-da-fé* as witnessed by prisoners inside the Steri.[41] These grand processions were particularly well-attended in Palermo, where they served as a form of popular entertainment for the city's elite social circles, igniting fierce philosophical debates regarding the sincerity of the accused and the validity of the charges brought against them.[42]

In 1630, overcrowding at the secret prison necessitated the construction of more cells. A second floor was added with six more rooms, "transform[ing] the secret prisons into a two-storey building."[43] Inquisitors divided the cells between 'high' and 'low' rooms, with the second-level reserved mainly for women, confessing and repentant prisoners, nobles, or Inquisition associates accused of bad behaviour.[44] These high cells were more spacious and brightly lit, and even equipped with semi-private latrine cubicles. The upper-level prisoners may have had access to cheap paints and pigments, as evidenced by the cleaner, more detailed and polished style of

[39] Valeria La Motta, "Writers of the Inquisitorial Secret Prisons of Palermo" (Presentation, Graffiti Art in Prison Project, The University of Palermo, Sicily, October 26, 2021).
[40] Robert S. Stone, "Autos-da-fé: The Roles of a Saint in Spanish Sicily," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 1, vol. 20 (2017), 210.
[41] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation and Forgiveness," 77.
[42] Inzerillo, "Augmented Reality: Past, Present, Future," 4.
[43] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, and Forgiveness," 73.
[44] Civale "Animo carcerato," 264.

graffiti. Many of the drawings uncovered on the second level are done in crisp black, suggesting the availability of coal or ash from stoves, oil lamps, or braziers, privileged implements reserved for these higher-status prisoners.[45] In contrast, conditions were much harsher in the low cells, which were dimly lit and poorly ventilated, their habitation designated for lower-class, unrepentant, and more 'difficult' prisoners. Interestingly, it is between the ground and first floors of the secret prison where the majority of the graffiti has been discovered.[46]

Since paper and more formal writing implements were largely unavailable to Steri inmates, much of the graffiti was made with the limited materials and tools which were available to the prisoners within their immediate environment. In most cases, dyes were combined with clay or plaster so as to achieve a reddish-brown pigment similar to Sanguine, a red chalk favoured by Renaissance artists for sketching and drawing.[47] This colour was most often found in the lower cells and was composed by mixing rust with clay bricks and milk, egg whites, and organic materials. Next, a natural binder such as lemon juice or wax was used to stabilize the colour.[48] Once the clay had dried, it could take on different colours that ranged from yellow to purple. Paints were generally applied using fingers or spatulas, while dried bars of clay and plaster were used in a method similar to pastels.[49] As Gianclaudio Civale has argued, the complex and innovative methods used to create these rudimentary pigments in the prison suggest that over the course of generations, many prisoners of the Inquisition in Palermo may have possessed knowledge of dye processing.[50] Civale also theorizes that this information must have been circulated between prisoners, as similar recipes and methods of creating pigment were used

[45] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 268.
[46] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 264.
[47] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 267.
[48] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 267.
[49] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 267.
[50] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 268.

in both the lower and ground floor cells.[51] In one case, chemical analyses have revealed that "a mixture of dark black shoe polish and a sauce made from tomatoes" was used to depict a bird's-eye-view map of Sicily.[52] For more detailed images, coal, lampblack, and clay were mixed with bodily fluids such as saliva or urine, while "metal objects of various types (including possibly [the prisoner's] chains)" were used to create scratches, indents, and scrapes on the walls.[53] Since the images and writings cover nearly every inch of the rooms, from the floors to the ceilings, we can assume that the prisoners were afforded a limited level of mobility and were able to walk around their cells. Trial records have also described examples of prisoners climbing onto ledges or standing on their mattresses to reach certain areas of the walls.[54]

According to official Inquisitorial regulations, prisoners were to be held in solitary cells, separated from one another so as to prevent the planning of conspiracies, attacks against guards, or escape attempts. In actual practice, the sheer abundance of accused individuals made isolation impossible, so cells were generally co-habited by three or four prisoners.[55] The size and visual prominence of the graffiti in the Steri also indicates that the Inquisitors must have known about and tolerated the activity to some degree.[56] Moreover, many trial records reveal that prisoners were often punished for disrespecting or not properly praying to images of saints or crucifixes drawn on the walls. Such disciplinary measures indicate that both Inquisitors and prisoners understood how images and likenesses could be weaponized as powerful vehicles of communication and performances of faith, or, conversely, expressions of dissent and disagreement.[57]

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[51] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 268.
[52] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 203.
[53] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 204.
[54] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 204.
[55] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 261.
[56] Fiume and García-Arenal, "New Perspectives," 6.
[57] Fiume and Garcia-Arenal, "New Perspectives," 6.

While the prison officials were tasked with regular inspection of the cells to ensure the maintenance of hygienic and humane conditions, the damp, dirtied cells were often considered unpleasant by Inquisitors, who were reluctant to interact with prisoners beyond their judicial duties.[58] Aside from the prison steward, who would visit the cells daily to distribute food rations and meals, and a barber who would administer monthly shaves and haircuts, the prisoners were left alone for the majority of their days unless they were scheduled for interrogation, torture, or trial.[59] Furthermore, Inquisitorial trials could drag on for decades as Inquisitors exchanged information with the Supreme Council in Madrid and compiled a comprehensive case against an accused individual.[60] Inmates lacked a formal routine, while access to recreational activities or educational materials was limited and could often only be procured through the risky act of bribing one's jailors.[61] Documents and letters dispatched overseas commonly arrived months after they were initially dated and sent, at the expense of prisoners, who languished in jail with no recourse. If they passed away during this period, their property was confiscated, and, assumed guilty, they were posthumously burnt in effigy at the *auto-da-fé*.[62] Furthermore, those accused of witchcraft, political transgressions, or serious religious offences often faced perpetual imprisonment and periodic torture sessions until they repented in a manner that satisfied the Inquisitors.[63]

Measuring Penal Time at the Steri

Like Fleetwood, I want to consider the prisoner's use of "penal time—that is, time as punishment" as part of the materiality of the Steri graffiti. [64] Penal time can be considered a

[58] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 265.
[59] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 265.
[60] Soyer, "Religious Repression in an Age of World Empires," 335.
[61] Guy Geltner, "Coping in Medieval Prisons," *Continuity and Change* 1, vol. 23 (2008), 151.
[62] Soyer, Religious Repression in an Age of World Empires," 338.
[63] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 196.
[64] Fleetwood, "Carceral Aesthetics," 23.

material aspect of the carceral aesthetics of the Steri; both conditionally, in that the extended periods of isolation and confinement gave the prisoners an impetus to write, draw, and document their time at the prison, and literally, in the many references to dates, years, and the visible cycles of generational graffiti layered on top of one another. Restoration work at the Steri throughout the past two decades has identified at least five different layers of graffitied plaster.[65] Regular whitewashing of the walls by Inquisition jailers has created a monumental "graphic space" consisting of words, images, and forms which emerge from beneath one other through the successive coats of paint and pigment. [66]

Many drawings and texts provide an unmediated yet complex glimpse into the subjective experiences of the accused as they grappled with their time spent in confinement. Among these personal testimonies we find poignant yet chilling records of penal time: "On 30 August 1645 I was tortured; on September 9, this happened to me again"; "On July 21 there was a spectacle [*auto-de-fé*] in S. Domenico involving thirty-three men and women"; "On May 6 it was no longer possible to drink the water since it was polluted and full of limescale"; "[He who] painted this picture spent three years in jail for blasphemy and was moved here in 1646."[67] Prisoners kept track of their days spent in the cells in a rudimentary fashion, by drawing or carving vertical and horizontal lines on the walls, "but when they were certain about the day and month they always wrote it with extreme precision next to their drawings."[68] Examples include signed inscriptions such as "On 7 June 1610, I, G.F.B. Migliaro painted this," and "Paulo Mayorana made this on 30 September 1617."[69]

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[65] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 269.
[66] Petitjean, "Inscribing in the Prisons of the Inquisition," 21.
[67] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 201.
[68] Valeria La Motta, "Saints in Prison: Francesco Baronio's Calendar," *Quaderni Storici* 157 (April 2018), 128.
[69] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 128.

In many cases marking the passage of time on the cell walls not only functioned as an antidote for boredom or a personal document of presence, but also as a way to restore a sense of control over one's uncertain fate. One such example can be found on the first floor of the Steri secret prison, termed the St. Rocco cell (Figs. 5) by a note left by a prisoner which declares that "Of all the cells this is the best; this cell is called after St. Rocco. May you be devout."[70] The cell is decorated with an assortment of saints and martyrs rendered in varying scales and sizes (Fig. 6); each saint stands on a crudely rendered, three-dimensional pedestal inscribed with their name. Alongside these depictions we find quotations from the Scriptures and prayers in Latin, and even a cartographic map of Sicily (Fig. 7), its details largely lost due to decay. The island's major landmarks are delicately labelled, and the author has left an inscription inviting the viewer to draw in or label any missing areas or buildings. Both the map of Sicily and the images of the saints are cryptically signed with the single capital letter 'B,' which was "a widespread method among prisoners to attribute the authorship of a piece of graffiti while retaining anonymity."[71] Through archival comparisons, Pitré had identified the author 'B' as Francesco Baronio Manfredi, a priest from the Sicilian town of Monreale who was arrested under "unclear circumstances in 1647, shortly after the revolt that, in May of that same year, set the city of Palermo ablaze."[72] Building upon Pitré's initial research, Valeria La Motta has argued that Baroino's drawings of the saints functioned as a liturgical calendar, in which Baroino "marked the days by carefully painting their corresponding patron saint on the wall."[73] Having uncovered records from Palermo's State Archive which document that Baronio was held at the prison from

[70] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 201.
[71] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 110.
[71] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 110.
[72] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 110.
[73] Fiume and Garcia-Arenal, "New Perspectives," 113.

June 4th, 1647 to December 28th of the same year, La Motta has demonstrated that Baronio's drawings present a chronological list of saints whose saints days were celebrated in Sicily during the months that he was imprisoned at the Steri.[74]

The calendar of saints in the St Rocco cell are all signed with the letter B, and there are more than twenty individuals depicted. In chronological order, they appear as:

> St Onuphrius, celebrated on 12 June, St Vitus on 15 June, Saints Peter and Paul on 29 June, St Benedict the Abbot on 11 July, St Alexius on 17 July, St James on 25 July, St Margaret of Antioch on 20 July, St Lawrence on 10 August, St Sebastian on 11 August; St George on 14 August, St Joseph on 18 August, St Rocco on 19 August, St Eufemia on 16 September, St Matthew on 21 September, Saints Cosma and Damian on 26 September, St Leonard on 6 November and St Elizabeth of Hungary on 19 November.[75]

Rendered centrally and in monumental scale, St Rocco visually dominates the other saints. His awkwardly long, thick legs are stuffed into blackened, paw-like boots or hose. The saint holds a staff in one hand and points to a pustule on his bare thigh with the other, identifying himself as the patron saint of plague victims. He is dressed in contemporaneous attire; a short black mantle covers his shoulders, under which he wears a doublet. His long black hair falls to his shoulders and is accented by a circular halo that frames his head, while a crisp, sharply outlined goatee dominates the lower half of his face, splitting into an upside 'V' at the center of his chin.

St Rocco's image appears amongst the Steri graffiti numerous times, frequently invoked not only for protection from illness and plague, but also likely because of his association with the falsely accused and imprisoned. According to Christian doctrine, the fourteenth-century saint had devoted himself to a pious life after the death of his parents, taking a vow of poverty and beginning a pilgrimage to Rome. On his journey he stopped at the plague-stricken town of Acquapendente in Lazio, Italy, where he "immediately devoted himself to the care of the sick."[76]

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[74] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 126.
[75] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 112.
[76] George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 141.

After years of travelling "from place to place, wherever the plague was raging, to aid its victims," St Rocco became infected himself in the town of Piacenza.[77] Retreating to the woods, he isolated himself and prepared for death, visited only by "his faithful dog, [who] refused to abandon him and daily brought him a loaf of bread."[78] Thanks to the efforts of his eternally loyal canine companion, Rocco eventually recovered, re-emerging from his quarantine having undergone a drastic change in appearance; upon returning to his hometown of Montpellier in France, St Rocco was unrecognizable to his fellow townspeople. Suspected of being a spy, St Rocco was thrown into the town prison, where he died five years later. According to the canon, when he was found dead in his cell, the room was luminescent with a heavenly glow. Beside St Rocco's body was an inscription on the cell wall: "All those who are stricken by plague and pray for help through the intercession of Roch, the servant of God, shall be healed."[79] As a learned, religious man having once enjoyed rather friendly relations with the Inquisition, perhaps Baronio felt particular affinity or identification with St Rocco's story and his fall from grace, leading the prisoner to emphasize this depiction of the popular saint.

Underneath a depiction of a horse-riding St George slaying a double-tailed dragon (Fig. 8), Baronio has left an inscription which pleads to the likeness of the male saint: "You Holy Warrior, who saved a maiden, release us from this tomb."[80] The dramatic scene takes place on a series of overlapping hills which are decorated with thin, mushroom-like bushes and spade-shaped trees; the rectangular outline of what seems to be a fortress tower is visible at the left of the uppermost hill. The princess kneels at the top of a lower hill, her arms clasped in prayer and a crown on top of her head. Below her, a serpentine, winged dragon duels with St George, whose

[77] Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art,* 141.
[78] Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols,* 141.
[79] Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols,* 141.
[80] Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols,* 141.

horse rises in an attack posture as the haloed saint raises his shield and draws his sword. Other images in the cell include a faded but ornate balustrade done in 'Sanguine,' which wraps around the top of the main three walls of the cell, much like a decorative frieze. There are also chalices, pine and cypress trees, snakes, cannons, crosses and churches, as well as a prominent depiction of a sun framed with jutting black rays, perhaps originally containing a monogram in its center which has now faded.

La Motta's reconstruction of Baronio's biography provides vital information for understanding his time and experiences at the Steri, including possible motivations behind his choice of imagery and text. Born in the urban centre of Monreale on January 10th, 1593, Baronio studied Latin, Hebrew, and Greek at the Jesuit College in Messina. After working as a grammar teacher in Caltagrione, Baronio was eventually asked to resign from the Society of Jesus in 1625 due to his "excessive intemperance, litigation, insubordination, and slander.""[81] Baronio subsequently dedicated himself to defending the superiority of Palermo as Sicily's capital over the city of Messina, becoming passionately involved in ongoing civic debates regarding the future of the island under Spanish rule. Publishing several celebratory screeds on the majestic history and cultural legacy of Palermo, Baronio was widely "known for his particular interest in the arts and in Latin poetry."[82] He produced hagiographies and had training in drawing, having created woodcut illustrations to accompany his publications; a fact that may help shed light on his frequent presence as a graffiti author in this cell.

Alongside literary, artistic, and architectural studies of Palermitan history, Baronio also documented local "news events which included the eruption of Vesuvius in Naples in 1631 and

[81] Emanuele Aguilera, *Provinciae Siculae Societatis Jesu, ortus e res gestae,* Angelo Felicella, Palermo 1737-1740, vol. II (ab anno 1612 ad annum 1672), 272. Quoted in La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 112.
[82] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 125.

the auto-da-fé celebrated in Palermo in 1640, about which he wrote a detailed account on behalf of the Inquisition."[83] Baronio's prior links to the Inquisition in Sicily further complicate questions regarding the exact nature of the charges against him and the reasoning behind his arrest. In his writings, he had previously praised the Inquisitorial tribunal in a rather dramatic tone, as "a venerable court where Truth, Justice, and Mercy kindly meet, amicably hug, and gently kiss each other."[84] To paint a fuller picture of how Baronio's relationship with the Holy Office in Sicily soured, we must further investigate the context of the 1647 uprising in Sicily.

The revolt was largely stoked by economic crisis, after a period of poor harvests, plague, and exuberant taxes instituted by Spanish viceroys had decimated Sicily's wheat trade and the livelihoods of the peasant classes.[85] As H.G. Koenigsberger writes, the revolts against the Spanish Crown were "a reaction against a system of government which […] had been driven to a progressively increasing exploitation of its dependencies— putting unbearable financial burdens on the lower classes or infringing the political privileges of aristocracies and commercial middle classes in traditionally autonomous states, in its efforts to create a centralized Spanish State."[86] Although "there had been a gradual increase of prosperity" throughout Sicily in the early 1600s, this wealth was mainly concentrated in the hands of a "largely Hispanicized absentee class of nobles and prelates" as well a burgeoning merchant bourgeoise who politically dominated the island's major cities.[87]

In Southern Italy, the majority of people "lived just above starvation level," and so the failed harvest of 1646 became one of the major triggers behind the uprisings throughout Sicily

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[83] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 115.
[84] Francesco Baronio, *Ristretto de'processi nel pubblico spettacolo della fede divolgati, ed ispediti a IX di settembre 1640 dalla Santa Inquisitione di Sicilia, Alfonso dell'Isola* (Palermo, 1640). Quoted in La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 120.
[85] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 117.
[86] H.G. Koenigsberger, "The Revolt of Palermo in 1647," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 8, no. 3 (1946), 130.
[87] Koenigsberger, "The Revolt of Palermo," 131.

over the next couple of years.[88] On May 19, 1647, the viceroy, Marquis de los Velez, once again issued a decree raising the tax on wheat, which upon announcement immediately stoked the enraged citizens of Palermo into open revolt. Gathering around the Praetorian Palace, "[t]he crowd set fire to the gate while the praetor and jurors fled."[89] Next, the angry mob marched towards the city's Vicaria prison, where they broke the gates and freed all eight hundred prisoners held inside. The homes of Senators and foreign dignitaries were also set ablaze, but curiously, "the prison of Chiaramonte Palace, the headquarters of the Inquisition, was the only prison not attacked."[90]

However, the revolt quickly spread to Monreale and then to other Sicilian towns, eventually forcing Velez to concede to the demands of the rebels. The "hated 'five *gabelles*,' the taxes on grain, wine, oil, meat, and cheese" were abolished, and amnesty was provided for prisoners who had broken out of Vicaria during the commotion.[91] In addition, Velez agreed to institute Senate reforms and "grant[ed] the people the right of electing two Popular Senators."[92] These latter political concessions may have formed the basis of Baronio's arrest and detention at the Steri, as the largely lower-class, illiterate crowd was suspected to have been influenced by Baronio, alongside "a number of middle-class intellectuals" and artisan guild leaders who advocated for local-led government against that of the foreign viceroys.[93] Shortly after the revolts had been contained, Baronio, "whom the Government regarded as its most dangerous opponent, was imprisoned by the Inquisition, ostensibly on grounds of heresy."[94] However, as La Motta reminds us, the actual extent and reality of Baronio's influence in the uprising must be

[88] Koenigsberger, "The Revolt of Palermo," 131.
[89] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 118.
[90] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 118.
[91] Koenigsberger, "The Revolt of Palermo," 133.
[92] Koenigsberger, "The Revolt of Palermo," 133.
[93] Koenigsberger, "The Revolt of Palermo," 133.
[94] Koenigsberger, "The Revolt of Palermo," 135.

analyzed in light of the possible intentions of his accusers and detractors. Baronio was well known as "a contentious and argumentative man."[95] His publications extolling the virtues of Palermo as Sicily's ultimate *urbs regia,* or royal city, had drawn the ire of intellectuals in Messina vying for the Crown's favour and attention. One such example was that of Placido Reina, a philosopher and professor from Messina, who published "a chronicle of the revolt […] that highlighted Messina's loyalty in comparison to rebellious Palermo," and explicitly named Baronio as one of the main instigators and intellectual forces behind the events of 1647.[96]

After his arrest, Baronio's supposed participation in the revolt and organizational influence on the rebels only added to his fame and notoriety throughout Sicily. In July 1647 Giuseppe D'Alessi, an artisan who had emerged as a leader of the 1647 revolts in Naples which led to the establishment of the Neapolitan Republic, returned to his hometown of Palermo.[97] Energized by his success in Naples, D'Alessi began planning a similar course of action in Palermo, hoping to secure Baronio's release and establish republican rule in Sicily. Inspired by Baronio's writings on the glories of Palermo's ancient past as *Republica Panormi,* D'Alessi sought Baronio out to be his personal secretary for a future Palmerian Republic.[98] However, D'Alessi's disorganized but hopeful rebellion was defused rather rapidly by Inquisitors. In December of 1647, Inquisitors uncovered another fantastical plot, this time headed by Calabrian priest Varia Sirletti and writer Francesco Albamonte, which entailed besieging the Steri palace, rescuing Baronio, and appointing him head of a new Sicilian Republic.[99] Capitalizing on the tensions between local guild leaders and foreign authorities, Sirletti and Albamonte had allegedly

[95] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 119.
[96] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 119.
[97] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 120.
[98] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 121.
[99] Koenigsberger,"The Revolt of Palermo," 141.

conspired to kill several influential guild leaders in order "to blame this on the Government so as to rouse the people, and to follow it up by calling the Turks into the country."[100] Baronio, meanwhile, continued marking his days at the Steri prison by drawing saints on the walls, until he was transferred to Pantelleria Island in December 1647 and later to the fortress of Gaeta, where he passed away in 1654.[101]

Fleetwood writes that "imprisonment fundamentally reconstitutes *being* in time, as a human subject who senses, observes, and experiences one's environment."[102] Baronio's writings and drawings were a creative attempt to counter the disruptive and distorting effects of penal time, which made use of his ecclesiastic knowledge and education as well as his personal interests in poetry, language, and the liberal arts. He reconceptualized the religious, cultural and social worlds he had been a part of throughout his life within the bounds of the prison walls and utilizing only the penal matter available to him in that space. In a more general sense, the graffiti can also be considered a marker of presence through its very act of creation. As Johann Petitjean notes, through writing and drawing on the walls, the prisoners "positioned themselves in space and time. They defined themselves in relation to the institution as well as in relation to their fellow inmates, present, and future."[103] Through his innovative method of time-keeping, Baronio had created a biographical archive of his time at the Steri which would persist in the fabric of the building for more than 300 years after his unjust imprisonment there.

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[100] Koenigsberger,"The Revolt of Palermo," 141.
[101] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 122.
[102] Fleetwood, "Carceral Aesthetics," 39.
[103] Johann Petitjean, "Inscribing, Writing, and Drawing in the Prisons of the Inquisition: Methodological Issues and Research Perspectives on Graffiti," *Quaderni Storici* 157, no. 1 (April 2018), 33.

Political Prisoners, Rebellious Priests, and Defrauding Necromancers

Beside Baronio's drawings and writings, the abundance of Latin in the Steri inscriptions and the complex devotional imagery that dominates many of the cells support Civale's claim that a large amount of the Steri graffiti was created by "friars, monks, and ecclesiastics […] accused of necromancy and deviation from Catholic doctrine."[104] These local intellectuals and religious leaders constituted the majority of inmates held at the Steri prison during the first half of the seventeenth century. Ryan Szpiech has argued that early modern Christian narratives often framed captivity as a trial of "both sin and salvation," in which "imprisonment [was characterized] as a prefiguration and foreshadowing of future redemption."[105] This characterization may help to further explain the abundance of Roman Catholic iconography and scripture in a prison populated by supposed heretics. Many of them were imprisoned for the banal mistake of 'mis-interpreting' Roman Catholic doctrine, which, in practice essentially meant offenses against the ideological prescriptions of the Holy Office, both religious or political. While the Inquisitors saw themselves as agents empowered by the authority of their holy doctrine, their Christian prisoners identified with the iconography of religious martyrdom, experiencing a trial of suffering that would be sanctified and justified with the passage of time.

One example of this can be seen in the strangely mystical drawings and writings, including the previously mentioned Hellmouth, signed by one "G.F.B. Migliaro" (Fig. 9). The quasi-anonymous signature has been identified as belonging to Giovan Francesco Bonanno. Hailing from noble origins, Bonanno was "a person of certain prestige" and "a cultured man" who had worked as a commissioner on behalf of the treasurer of Sicily, tasked with collecting

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[104] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 122.

[105] Ryan Szpiech, "Prisons and Polemics: Captivity, Confinement, and Medieval Interreligious Encounter," *Polemical Encounters: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Iberia and Beyond,* ed. By Mercedes García-Arenal & Gerard Wiegers (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2018), 293.

debts claimed by the city of Palermo.[106] Bonanno was denounced in 1606 by a number of witnesses who accused him of practicing necromancy, magical healing rituals, and fortune-telling. Said to have been well-versed in the use of talismans, amulets, and folk medicines, Bonanno was interrogated by Inquisitors, to whom he "demonstrated knowledge in medical and devotional fields, explaining that he was using natural remedies, and that the talismans were blessed objects and charms to be used in normal prayer."[107] Evidently, this explanation was not satisfactory to Inquisitors, who then found Bonanno guilty of crimes against the faith. Considered unfit for galley duty, he was instead sentenced to seven years in prison and exiled from Sicily. As he was being transferred to another prison, Bonanno managed to escape, later killing the Inquisition official sent to track him down and apprehend him.[108] Somehow, by 1609, he had been re-captured and returned to the Steri cells, now awaiting additional charges of murder. His second trial also concluded with a sentence of exile, but Bonanno managed to escape once more, attempting to journey to Naples before being re-arrested in 1611 and imprisoned for a third time. He was eventually hanged for murder sometime in the 1610s or 20s.[109]

Bonanno's esoteric predilections are expressed in the graffiti he has left behind, which consist of "magical-religious" icons such as "the necromantic symbol of King Solomon's knot," alongside half-moons, pentacles, suns, and stars. [110] Most interestingly, a depiction of saints emerging from the jaws of a Leviathan-esque creature has been found in the corner of two different cells on the ground floor, produced in a similar style, composition, and location.[111] The

[106] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 281.
[107] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 281.
[108] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 279.
[109] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, and Forgiveness," 85.
[110] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, and Forgiveness," 85.
[111] Petitjean, "Inscribing, Writing, and Drawing in the Prisons of the Inquisition," 25.

replication of this motif suggests that Bonanno may have re-created his Hellmouth after being moved from another cell, a common occurrence at the prison as revealed by signatures which indicate that a prisoner was "*Ex alia aula*" ("From another hall").[112] Made in the imitation Sanguine, Bonanno's crescent Hellmouth has become one of the most well-known images of the Steri graffiti due to its spectacular and hybridized depiction of the Harrowing of Hell (*Descensus ad infernos*). The scene is derived from medieval Byzantine iconography which conceptualized the Passion of Christ as a pictorial cycle consisting of "crucifixion, descent to hell, liberation of the patriarchs from limbo, [and] resurrection."[113] The *Descensus* depicts Jesus as he travelled to the realm of Purgatory, located at "the edge of hell," in order to rescue and redeem the Old Testament prophets and patriarchs "condemned for not being baptized since they lived before Christ."[114]

Petitjean theorizes that the crescent moon which forms the body of Bonanno's Hellmouth "was perhaps the original drawing, before the lines were accentuated and the pointed ears, eyes, and teeth were added, followed by the Just."[115] Sixteen Old Testament saints emerge from Bonanno's Hellmouth (Fig. 10). They are rendered in profile with skeletal bodies, and sharp, jutting chins and noses atop pear-shaped bodies, stomachs accentuated with large circular navels, so as to emphasize their nakedness. The procession ascends from the depths of the Hellmouth in three rows, floating with bent legs and folded hands towards a large-scale depiction of Jesus. The Messiah is depicted with his Crown of Thorns, holding a shepherd's staff in one hand while raising his other towards the saints in a welcoming gesture. While largely standardized in their appearance, Bonanno has taken care to include certain individualized features, such as long,

[112] La Motta, "Saints in Prison," 128.
[113] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, & Forgiveness," 87.
[114] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, & Forgiveness," 86.
[115] Petitjean, "Inscribing, Writing, and Drawing in the Prisons of the Inquisition," 25.

flowing hair for Eve, horns for Moses, and a mitre for Simon. The monster whose jaws frame the ascending saints is branded with a sealed double door "similar to those used in prisons in this period," underneath which we encounter the familiar but iconic warning from Dante's *Inferno.*[116] Written in Sicilian, such references to popular literary works within the Steri can provide a glimpse into the overlap between visual, oral, and written cultures in the early modern Mediterranean and illuminate the creative ways in which individuals interacted with, referenced, and related to the cultural trends of their time.

Ornamental depictions of monstrous, bestial and fantastical creatures were commonplace in the visual iconography of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Italy.[117] The aesthetic tradition of *grotteschi,* or the grotesque, was associated with the concept of metamorphosis and hybridity, "a mixture of the organic and the inorganic, […] the outcome of a collaboration between nature and art."[118] In particular, the image of Hell as an all-consuming, devouring head defined by its massive gaping maw was often deployed in sculptural and mural forms in public spaces such as church frescoes as well as private gardens and parks. One notable example can be seen in the monumental sculpture of a wide-eyed Hellmouth which dominates the Garden of Bomarzo in Lazio, Italy (Fig. 11). Designed by Pirro Ligorio and sculpted by Simone Moschino, the sixteenth-century garden was commissioned by a mercenary captain named Pier Francesco Orsini as a monument to his grief upon his wife's passing.[119] Inscribed upon the Bomarzo Hellmouth's stony, curled lips is Dante's familiar phrase which also appears at the Steri: "*Lasciate ogni pensiero voi ch'entrate*" ("Leave all thought, you who enter here").[120] While it is

[116] Fiume, "Justice and Forgiveness," 92.
[117] Luke Morgan, *The Monster in the Garden: The Grotesque and the Gigantic in Renaissance Landscape Design,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 49.
[118] Morgan, *The Monster in the Garden,* 53.
[119] Morgan, *The Monster in the Garden*, 53.
[120] Morgan, *The Monster in the Garden*, 61.

impossible to corroborate a direct temporal connection between the influence of the Bomarzo Hellmouth and the author of the Steri Hellmouths, the similarity of these representations suggests that this iconographic tradition was widely known and encountered in the early modern Mediterranean.

Another depiction of the *Descensus* by Bonanno, done in an adjacent cell on the ground floor, follows largely the same iconographic program of his crescent Hellmouth, but this time, the monster is depicted in all black, its horns significantly sharper and closer together (Fig. 12). Across from the ascending Saints, the Messiah rises, this time from a triangular sepulcher upon which a prisoner has written: "Don Leonardo Germano/Suffering unjustly in a dark prison" (Fig. 13). The letters are shaped around the form of the sepulcher, making them slightly illegible at first glance. Germano was a 30-year-old priest and grammar teacher from the town of Melilli in Syracuse, arrested in 1610 for promoting natural folk medicines and conducting exorcisms.[121] Here, Germano protests the conditions and causes of his imprisonment as 'unjust'; during his interrogations, he had admitted to the Inquisitors that "he was guilty of fraud, but not magic, he just invented some fake rituals to earn a living."[122] Since fraud was a secular crime, supposedly beyond the jurisdiction of the Holy Office, Germano must have assumed that such admissions would have ensured his release. Yet he was still accused of heresy and locked up in the Steri until 1612, before finally being exiled from Palermo and Syracuse for three years.[123]

Bonanno's blackened Hellmouth boasts a curved arch, perhaps a window, on his throat instead of a sealed door (Fig. 14). Inside the arch is a Latin inscription which explicitly identifies the space as Purgatory. Below the Latin letters are a crowd of overlapping figures who clasp

[121] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, and Forgiveness," 80.
[122] La Motta, "Writers of the Inquisition."
[123] La Motta, "Writers of the Inquisition."

their hands in front of their chests in prayer. Rendered with shaved heads and virtually identical features, save for two subjects who are depicted with semi-circled breasts, the condemned gaze at their viewer with large, widened eyes and raised brows. The image utilizes basic perspectival techniques, depicting the mass of subjects as an unending stream of people who fade into the background. Underneath the scene, a ledge is inscribed with the word "INFERNO." By the end of the sixteenth century, Dante's *Divine Comedy* had been translated into Sicilian and widely circulated and discussed amongst the island's intellectual classes, making it highly likely that Bonanno, as a member of this class, was acquainted with the text.[124] Giovanna Fiume has argued that the immense popularity of the *Divine Comedy* throughout Europe, and particularly southern Italy, had rendered it part of "everyday language" in which certain sayings and aphorisms from Dante's verses became part of a common lexicon of popular proverbs.[125]

The influence of Dante, the *grotteschi*, and esoteric Christianity in Bonanno's pictorial program highlight the role of cultural context, memory, and appropriation in the Steri graffiti. It reminds us that each prisoner brought to the prison a set of individualized experiences, knowledge, and beliefs which were reflected, reinterpreted, and referenced in their graffiti. It also reveals the interesting relationship between orality and literacy in the early modern Mediterranean, a demographically diverse region where multilingualism, cultural transmission, and the use of pidgin and creole languages were commonplace. The intertextual, referential nature of the Steri wall-writings fall in line with Elizabeth Kassler-Taub's suggestion that "in Palermo translation was, and continues to be, a lived experience."[126] Tracing and locating such

[124] Civale.,"Animo carcerto," 285.
[125] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, and Forgiveness," 93.
[126] Elizabeth Kassler-Taub, "Inconvenient Globalism: Method Making at the Margins of Art History," *Modern Philology* 119, no. 1 (August 2021), 58.

references, many of which still hold affective and relational value today, can assist us in making palpable the range of the prisoners' textured lives and their unique worldviews.

Multilingualism, Literacy, and Vernacular Culture in the Early Modern Mediterranean

Juliet Fleming cautions against anachronistically applying contemporary notions of graffiti as "the medium of the socially disaffected" to studies of historical graffiti. She notes that early modern writing was often defined by a marked absence of subjectivity and individualism, instead operating on a "collective, aphoristic, and inscriptive" level.[127] This standpoint of non-subjectivity is highly evident at the Steri, where many of the inscriptions appear to narrate life in the prison from an omnipotent yet communal perspective. For example, some inscriptions include short, pithy introductions to prison life such as "Don't worry"; "Patience, bread and time"; "Know that here they put you to the rack and/Remember here that they torture with the rope"; "Play the fool"; "Deny" (Fig. 15); "Beware: they will put you to the rope first"; "Imagine that you have only just arrived."[128] The epigrammatic tone in these writings also suggest a sense of solidarity, in that prisoners understood their cellmates as an audience of possible compatriots, providing introductory advice to future newcomers or perhaps, more nefariously, attempting to tease and titillate the preconceived fears of a newly introduced inmate.

The many dialects and language families present in Sicily posed a particularly difficult exercise in translation for Spanish Inquisitors tasked with maintaining religious hegemony throughout Spain's growing global empire. Known for its prevalent multilingualism, early modern travel accounts often remarked on the polyglottic and linguistically heterogenous nature of the Mediterranean. Merchants, artisans, travellers, and international diplomats often required a

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[127] Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts,* 41.
[128] Leonardo Sciascia, *Death of an Inquisitor and Other Stories,* trans. Ian Thompson (London: Harvill Secker, 1994), 13.

rudimentary understanding of languages such as Italian, Spanish, Greek, Arabic, and Turkish in order to conduct business effectively.[129] There also existed a Mediterranean Lingua Franca, "a simplified hybrid Romance pidgin with significant borrowings from several regional languages" which was spoken and understood by most residents and travellers.[130] Moreover, many regional Italian dialects were divided into sub-dialects spoken by ethnic and religious minorities, which were often intertwined with and influenced by Arabic, Judeo, or Romani language groups.[131]

The repetitive use of certain languages for specific purposes at the Steri also demonstrates a linguistic pattern in which certain "discourses […] correspond to each language."[132] For example, Petitjean has deduced that in the majority of inscriptions, "Sicilian was used to transpose songs and poems, whereas devotional utterances, classically, were in Latin."[133] One example of the emotive, poetic uses of Sicilian exists in in cell number one. Concentrated in one corner, there appear many lamentations and poems in Sicilian, which are signed with emotive, mysterious monikers such as "*L'Infelici,* (The Unhappy), *L'Abbandunatu,* (The Forsaken), *Lu Dimenticatu,* (The Forgotten), *Lu Mischinu,* (The Miserable), *L'Afflittu,* (The Afflicted), *Lu Turmintatu* (The Tormented)."[134] Another example is the Sicilian poetry of Palermitan poet and bishop, Simone Rao, who, much like Baronio, was arrested on suspicions of participating in or influencing the sentiments of anti-Spanish revolt.[135] In an upper level cell, Rao has left several rhyming couplets on the walls, which bemoan the harsh conditions of the Steri and also make use of Dante's memorable and oft-repeated line:

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[129] Eric R. Dursteler, "Speaking in Tongues: Language and Communication in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Past & Present* 217 (Nov 2021), 50.
[130] Dursteler, "Speaking in Tongues," 67.
[131] R.A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe,* 228.
[132] Petitjean, "Inscribing, Writing, and Drawing," 21.
[133] Petitjean, "Inscribing, Drawing, and Writing," 21.
[134] Fiume, "Justice & Forgiveness," 83.
[135] Sciascia, *Death of an Inquisitor,* 14.

Open your eyes to this terrible gloom,
And find yourself alone in fear.
Wherefore 'tis writ upon this tomb:
Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.
Down here, we know not if 'tis night or day,
Through tears we know, of pain and cruelty.
And in this tomb, who knows if ever we may
Hear struck the long-awaited hour of liberty.[136]

There is also the case of Michele Remigio Moraschino, a lawyer and acclaimed poet who was considered "a man of letters in seventeenth-century Sicily."[137] Moraschino was arrested sometime between 1630 and 1633 under similar circumstances to Bonanno, accused of necromancy and "reading forbidden texts" in order to conduct "magical and evil rites."[138] During his time at the Steri, he wrote sonnets on the walls in the Sicilian vernacular which, much like Rao's writings and Bonanno's drawings, "compare[d] the sufferings of the [prisoners] to the sufferings of Christ."[139] Moraschino's creative abilities are further displayed in an acrostic poem in which he spells out his name vertically by emphasizing the first few letters of each line (Fig. 16).[140]

While poets, lawyers, and clerics may not fit with our modern associations of carceral life as a domain overpopulated by racially and economically marginalized groups, Inquisitorial prisons, being vested with the authority of both church and state, were filled with "religious renegades" and political prisoners from various parts of Europe.[141] Such individuals often

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[136] Sciascia, *Death of an Inquisitor,* 14.
[137] Mercedes Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices: Trials and Graffiti of the Prisons of the Inquisition in Palermo," *Quaderni Storici* 1 vol. 157 (April 2018), 60.
[138] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 288.
[139] Civale, "Animo carcerto,"288.
[140] Actual text reads, verbatim: "Attia chi di li cona ai tu primatu/MI uegnio riuirenti addi in chri nari/CHE chiara cosa tannu in curunatu/LI sagri musi pri luto cantari/MUrmuru e dogliu chi ti uio statu/RI strittu in tra lu locu di magari/CHI ssi un ueru Gioseppi Carsaratu/NUccenti comu un Giornu ta tru uari/Canzoni si uoi sappiri supra di cui effatta/Riungi li capi versi chi lu sai." From Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 60-61.
[141] Valeria La Motta, *Contra Haereticos: L'inquisizione spagnola in Sicilia* (Madrid: European Polygraphic Institute, 2019), 124.

possessed a degree of literacy, education, and worldliness that made them "powerfully motivated to write" about their sufferings at the hands of the Catholic Church.[142] In the early modern era the ability to read and write was most often directly correlated to one's socio-economic and occupational status. While the majority of printed literature available throughout medieval Europe was written in Latin, the rise of print culture in the sixteenth century, with its inexpensive and mobile nature, had led to vernacular interventions and textual dilutions "at the expense of Latin."[143] Clergymen, landowners, urban professionals, merchants, and members of the nobility composed the "most literate" classes, followed by artisans, wealthy farmers, and, finally, urban and rural labourers.[144] Many servants and enslaved people employed in noble households were literate, and, as historian R.A Houston writes, "there were literates and illiterates in each class of society, [therefore] the distribution of literacy is most accurately envisaged not as a set of clusters, but a spectrum."[145] There is also the possibility that at the Steri, literate prisoners may have written their cellmate's names on the walls for them. The signature of Giovan Battista Guido, for instance, appears several times throughout a single cell, sometimes with spelling errors. Guido was a 26-year-old silk weaver from Messina who was known to be illiterate; he was arrested and held at the Steri in 1630, accused of shouting "unspeakable blasphemies"[146] upon losing a large sum of money to gambling. The repetition of Guido's name in the cell suggests that he may have been learning to write his own name with the help of his cellmates and practicing his lettering on the walls.[147]

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[142] Thomas Freeman, "The Rise of Prison Literature," *Huntington Library Quarterly,* 2, vol. 72 (June 2009), 134.
[143] R. A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500-1800* (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 227
[144] R.A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe,* 142.
[145] R.A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe,* 143.
[146] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 290.
[147] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 291.

Gender also played a significant role in an individual's level of literacy; many women, even those hailing from the upper classes, were illiterate as they were frequently prevented from pursuing formal education, although exceptional cases do exist. Interestingly, in Southern Europe, and particularly throughout Italy and Spain, it has been noted that both men and women of the lower classes were generally able to read at a basic level.[148] One inscription in the Steri located in the women's cells on the second floor directly references the author's gender. In Italian, a solemn sentiment: "The miserable [woman] weeps because this is a place of tears" (Fig. 17).[149] Yet other findings indicate that some gendered stratifications of space in Steri could be transgressed by prisoners, in line with García-Arenal and Fiume's suggestion that the wall-writings and drawings were a potent form of communication between inmates, as "one also writes for one's cellmates, for the prisoners to come."[150] Two notes written in Sicilian and both dated to 1644 direct their fellow prisoners to a hole in the wall, located under the depiction of a cross, which allowed inmates to communicate with women accused of crypto-Islam held in the cells below: "It simply came to our notice that other ladies are below/the Graces of the Turks standing by" and "Under the guise of the cross/he pressed three palms against the wall/There's a hole going under" (Fig. 18).[151]

The scrawled notes which celebrate this discovery of access to female prisoners lead one to imagine surreptitious, whispering conversations exchanged between different floors and rooms; it also suggests the presence of clandestine efforts at communication between prisoners which could transcend the bounds of their individual cells. Considering the dialogical nature of

[148] R.A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe,* 144.
[149] Laura Leonardi, *Nega: I racconti e i disegni dei prigionieri della Santa Inquisizione a Palermo* (Los Gatos: Smashwords, 2014), 68.
[150] García-Arenal and Fiume, "New Perspectives," 6.
[151] Leonardi, *Nega,* 74.

much of the graffiti, I want to re-emphasize the 'living' aspect of the Steri-as-archive, pointing to its imaginative potential in re-animating these documented expressions of subversion and collaboration between Inquisition prisoners. The Steri prisoners re-conceptualized the same walls which confined and silenced them into a communicative interface, effectively 'un-muting' themselves while at the same time transforming the depersonalized, plastered environment into a collective marker and historical document of presence.

"Know that here they put you to the rack": Conflicts with Inquisitors

While interreligious encounters in prisons could result in transmissions of cultural, educational, and intellectual knowledge across religious and ethnic lines, they could also reassert "anger and ill will, a bitter or difficult experience that could precipitate the polemical encounter itself."[152] On the rare occasions that they did visit the cells, Inquisitors would interrogate the prisoners or install official spies as cellmates who would attempt to instill a sense of guilt in the prisoners while also urging them to report any sacrilegious behaviour by their fellow inmates.[153] At times, Inquisitors were met with caution, stubborn silence, sarcasm, or mockery; in other instances, they were confronted with more direct outbursts of violence.[154] The diary of the Inquisition-affiliated Palermitan, Doctor Vincenzo Auria, records a dramatic incident at the Steri that resulted in the death of an Inquisitor at the hands of a prisoner:

> Wednesday 4 April 1657 […] They buried in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli the Most Illustrious Senor D. Juan Lopez de Cisneros, Inquisitor in this Kingdom of Sicily. On entering the dungeons of the Inquisitorial Palace to visit a number of those imprisoned, he was approached by a monk from the Sicilian town of Racalmuto by the name of Fra Diego La Matina […] This Fra Diego, as though possessed by the Devil, broke free of the manacles about his hands and with these same irons repeatedly beat the

[152] Spziech, "Prisons and Polemics," 280.
[153] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 215.
[154] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 215.

> Inquisitor, wounding him fatally with a blow to the forehead and the top of the head, from which last he died.[155]

Auria's passage contradicts Inquisitorial reports compiled after the fatal incident note that Cisneros had visited the cells in order to conduct "work on behalf of offenders," a cryptic phrase which could encompass administering proselytizing speeches, spying on and rhetorically manipulating prisoners, or even physical torture involving the rack and rope, a common method of securing confessions testified to in many of the wall-writings ("On August 30, 1645 I was tortured/then again on September 9").[156] The fact that Inquisitorial records observe that Cisneros had summoned Fra Diego to his chambers, undoubtedly implies that the transgressive monk was about to undergo torture and interrogation.

Other, less dramatic instances of conflict are well-documented in both Inquisitorial reports and within the Steri graffiti. A humorous depiction of an Inquisitor riding a defecating horse decorates the area above the men's latrines in a cell located on the ground floor (Fig. 19). The Inquisitor is instantly recognizable by his all-black clothing, thick moustache, and capotain hat, which is decorated with a large feather that emerges from its brim. Both of his arms reach out at an upwards diagonal, leaving him powerless over his disobedient horse, despite his grand size in comparison to the animal. The horse is depicted rather naturalistically, with a proportional body and some attempt at shading on its belly as evidenced by the darker tonality of the pigment in that area. It excretes in an orderly and unceremonious manner, foiling the self-importance of the gesturing Inquisitor, who seems entirely unaware of the beast's activities below him. In another cell, an inscription in Sicilian concurs with the portrayal of Inquisitors as deceitful and

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[155] Vincenzo Auria, *Diari della città di Palermo dal secolo XVI al XIX,* edited by Gioacchino Di Marzo (Palermo, 1870), quoted in Sciascia, *Death of an Inquisitor*, 16.
[156] Sciascia, *Death of an Inquisitor,* 18.

conniving: “They bless with their mouths, but curse you in their hearts” (Fig. 20).[157] Such sardonic observations regarding the duplicity of the Holy Office and the so-called ‘divine justice’ it claimed to mete out are indicative of the tactics and strategies of self-preservation employed by Steri prisoners in their dealings with Inquisitors.

Aside from utilizing nicknames, initials, and monikers to preserve their anonymity, a code of innuendo can be observed throughout the tonality of the writings at the Steri. One inscription advises the fellow prisoners to “Always deny,” a tactic which is evident throughout the trial records.[158] “I don’t know”; “I don’t know what to say”; and “If I knew, I would say it” were the most common responses given by prisoners when interrogated at the Steri, even under conditions of severe torture.[159] While revisionist historian Henry Kamen has argued that in general, Inquisitorial tribunals had “no interest in cruelty” and their methods of torture were “honest, simple, and straightforward [with] no psychological refinements,” multiple prisoners’ testimonies at the Steri, which note the frequency and familiarity of violent methods of coercion contradict Kamen’s apologetic reasoning.[160] In the same vein, Kamen goes on to describe the various tortures employed by the Inquisition without registering the contradictory nature of his pacifying argument, claiming that prisoners who died or suffered bodily harm under torture brought their fate about “through their own obstinacy” by refusing to confess.[161]

In fact, what we do know about Inquisitorial interrogation methods reveals that they were anything but benign. Upon entering the torture chamber, the prisoners were stripped naked. Three main devices were used to conduct torture at Inquisitorial prisons: the *garrucha,* or pulley,

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[157] Fiume, “Soundless Screams,” 214.
[158] Fiume, “Soundless Screams,” 80.
[159] Fiume, “Soundless Screams,” 80.
[160] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition,* 175.
[161] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition,* 175.

the *toca,* or water torture, and the *potro,* or the rack.[162] The *garrucha* entailed hanging the prisoner from a pulley attached to the ceiling. Heavy weights were attached to the prisoner's feet, and the victim was consecutively raised to the ceiling and then thrown to the ground in a rapid jerking motion, which could result in eventual dislocation of their limbs. The *toca* was a linen cloth which was forced down the prisoner's throat, who was bound to a rack to prevent too much movement. Next, the torturers would pour water slowly into the victim's mouth, inducing the physical effect of drowning. Lastly, the *potro* also involved binding the accused to a rack, after which the executioner began applying pressure to the victim's limbs by slowly tightening the ropes winding around their body.[163]

Colourful trial records suggest that the accused rarely accepted the centrally imposed doctrines and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church but often engaged in their own hybridized religious practices and interpretations, including a surprisingly playful understanding of "blasphemy [as] an art."[164] Commenting on this phenomenon during the trial of a defendant accused of swearing by the "Holy Devil," Inquisitors wrote that the saying was "peculiar and very frequent among the Sicilians."[165] In another instance, the Steri prisoners, having been rejected after asking their jailers for an appeal to the Pope regarding their inhumane conditions, shouted "Holy Office, Holy Devil!" at the Inquisitors before mockingly calling them the "three Popes of Palermo."[166] Among the archives one finds the interesting but rather sordid case of a surgeon named Cosimo Zannata, burnt in effigy in Palermo in 1607, three years after his death, for "bigamy, calling the Virgin a whore, eating meat in Lent, arguing that homosexuality was not

[162] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 175.
[163] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 175.
[164] Monter, "Italian Wine in Spanish Bottles," 166.
[165] Monter, "Italian Wine in Spanish Bottles," 166.
[166] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, and Forgiveness," 80.

sinful; that Adam's original sin was sodomy, the Jews had not killed Christ, Moors were saved, and no one could truly judge which of these three religions was superior."[167] Such 'crimes' crossed ethnic and class-based categories, as both noblemen and peasants were recorded to have committed the ultimate sin of divine desecration by embracing the vernacular of trans-religious hybridity. In 1614, a German prisoner named David Chenic was imprisoned in Palermo for living as "a wandering hermit [and] describing himself as a "Catholic Jewish Christian."[168]

In another act of defiance, the Algerian convert and escaped slave, Gabriel Tudesco, jailed for attempting to return to the Barbary Coast and his Islamic faith alongside two other enslaved companions, was accused of feigning madness when asked to repent in the prison.[169] He "broke his dishes, tore up his mattress and wool blanket, crossed out the image of the Madonna of Itria on the wall of his cell and smeared the face of a crucified Christ with his own excrement."[170] But when it came to "an ancient-style depiction of Abraham, painted with a turban on his head," Tudesco refrained from desecration, leaving it untouched so as to demonstrate his respect for the prophet's Islamic attire.[171] Tudesco's initials appear at the very top of the cell wall upon which the crescent *Descensus* is painted, alongside "Giovan or John Andres (G.A.), Giovan Battista Guido (G.B.G.)" (Fig. 21).[172] As they are all written in the same style of handwriting, and since Tudesco was illiterate, the string of initials may suggest that the three men shared a cell and perhaps some sense of friendship or camaraderie.

Tudesco demonstrated strange reactions to the inscriptions at the Steri as well. In July 1631, the priest Don Placido La Ficarra was sent by Inquisitors into Tudesco's cell under the

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[167] Monter, "Italian Wine in Spanish Bottles," 166.
[168] Monter, "Italian Wine in Spanish Bottles," 169.
[169] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 204.
[170] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 204.
[171] Mercedes Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 53.
[172] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 44.

guise of a prisoner, tasked with spying on the unpredictable inmate.[173] Having briefly convinced Tudesco to kneel and pray before the sacred images in the cell, Ficarra pronounced the Ave Maria and recited the Creed from the texts written on the walls. However, he noted that when they reached the phrase "*Descendit ad Infernos*," Tudesco suddenly became silent and markedly disturbed, refusing "to speak or say other prayers" until he was calmed down by John Andrews.[174] Tudesco had evidently found a friend in the Englishman, whose biography will be explored further in the ensuing section of this thesis, alongside Tudesco's. According to witnesses, Andrews was "the only one who could in some way speak and reason with Tudesco."[175] From the inscriptions mentioned in this story, we can reasonably assume that the incident took place in the crescent Hellmouth cell which was so extensively decorated by Bonanno.

The crucifix in question that Tudesco assaulted was part of a larger program of images by Bonanno depicting the cycle of the Passion of Christ in a recognizably contemporaneous, early modern setting. The most interesting of these scenes is perhaps the large-scale depiction of horse-bound Inquisitors holding an *auto-da-fé* for Jesus Christ himself (Fig. 22). In Bonanno's rendition of this scene from the Passion, Christ carries a monumental cross and wears a tattered Inquisitorial *san benito* ('costume of infamy') emblazoned with a list of his crimes written in Latin.[176] Tears roll down the Messiah's wounded cheeks as a Spanish Inquisitor, identifiable by his all-black attire, teased moustache, and pointed hat, pulls the chained Messiah while another Inquisitor, armed with a halberd, looks on. Above the scene, in large block letters, is a quotation

[173] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 293.
[174] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 293.
[175] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 293.
[176] Francisco Bethencourt, "The Auto-da-fé: Ritual and Imagery," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* vol. 55 (1992), 155.

in Latin from Psalm 20:12: "COGITAVERUNT [IP-SI] CONSILIA QU[A]E NON POTUERUNT STABILIRE" ("For they have turned evils upon you/They have devised plans which they have not been able to accomplish").[177] Nearby, there are further Biblical references to Christ's journey to the Cavalry; "On the third hour they all shouted 'Crucify, crucify!' They mocked Him, dressed Him up in a red robe, set a crown of thorns on His head, and He climbed up towards the place of His execution, carrying a cross on His shoulders, condemned to a horrible death."[178] Upon the monumental cross which Christ struggles to carry, Bonanno, or perhaps another cellmate, has painted the phrase "O thou venerable cross thou who didst bring salvation to the miserable/For us men, for our salvation."[179]

The drawings and quotations place Jesus' crucifixion within the contemporary, immediate setting of the Inquisition itself, and reveal a relationship of doubt and suspicion which was dualistically recognized and constantly negotiated in overtly religious tones by both Inquisitors and their prisoners. The portrayal of the ultra-orthodox Catholic Inquisitors as the true murderers of their own Saviour also directly challenges and inverts Inquisitorial doctrines which framed Jews as eternally cursed by their decision to crucify Christ. Such logic is outlined in disturbingly clear terms in a 1632 letter sent from court official Juan de Quiñones to the Inquisitor General Fray Antonio de Sotomayor, suggesting that Jews could be identified by a "perpetual sign" that causes them to suffer "bodily and spiritually, inside and outside the body, for having persecuted the true Messiah, Christ our redeemer, to the point of placing him on a Cross."[180] Moreover, the artwork suggests that prisoners understood, to some degree, that the

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[177] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation and Forgiveness," 84.
[178] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, and Forgiveness," 84.
[179] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, and Forgiveness," 84.
[180] Juan de Quiñones, *Memorial de Juan de Quiñones dirigido a Fray Antonio de Sotomayor, inquisidor general, sobre el caso de Francisco de Andrada, sospechoso de pertenecera laraza judía, discutiendo sobre los medios de conocer y perseguir a ella* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional,VE, box no. 16, 1632), quoted in Georgina Dopico Black, "Visible Signs: Reading the Wife's Body in Early Modern Spain," in *Perfect*

Inquisition's fanatical, obsessive pursuit of heresy was ultimately a hypocritical and self-defeating endeavor. Despite the violence enacted against them by the Inquisitors, and the further punishment which would await them for blatantly doing so, prisoners utilized the graffiti and their own creative imaginations as a tool to retain a sense of individuality and personhood as well as to resist their oppressors and torturers.

Informing on the Others: Iconoclasm and Conflicts between Prisoners

Violence was not only restricted to the relationship between Inquisitors and their prisoners; it was also directed by prisoners at each other, as well as towards the images, which were viewed as part of the living economy of penal space at the Steri. When Inquisitors happened upon prisoners willing and eager to condemn their fellow cellmates in exchange for a reduced sentence, their reports often played into, utilized, and emphasized these religious, racial, and cultural conflicts of the era. Cellmates of Francesco Guicciardino, a young man who was captured by Tunisian privateers as a child, converted to Islam, and made captain of a fleet of galleys in Bizerte, testified to an egregious list of blasphemies committed by Guicciardino in 1624:

> To his prison companion who was praying in front of a cross painted on the cell wall he shouted: "This is nothing" ('*Esto non es nada'*), at the same time hitting the wall. Turning to an image of the Madonna painted next to the crucifix he declared: "You shouldn't believe that this is Mary" and hitting the image with his hand, added, half in Spanish and half in Italian: "God did not have and does not have a mother, because he is in heaven and so this [image of Mary] is nothing." He then cursed this "Holy Office pig! ('*Santo Officio canzir/khinzir'*); Holy Office Holy Devil!" repeating this in fury many times over.[181]

The previously mentioned Messinese silk weaver, Giovan Battista Guido, was harshly reprimanded after engaging in a fight with Michele Moraschino and beating the poet quite

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Wives, Other Women: Adultery and Inquisition in Early Modern Spain (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 2.

[181] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 214.

severely over the head. After Guido's outburst, "he was punished with 40 lashes, dealt to him in the prison's corridor so that he would serve as an example to the rest of the prisoners."[182] His unrepentant and argumentative behaviour in prison may have also contributed to the length and severity of his sentence for a simple charge of blasphemy. Guido was held in prison for three years, during which he consistently clashed with prison guards and Inquisition officials, in addition to his own cellmates; records document that he often "fought with the food provider, accusing him of giving him only part of his due ration of food, and of diluting the wine with water."[183] He also roused the anger of his fellow accused by aggressively insulting the sacred pictures in their shared cell:

> Apparently, he had addressed a picture of the Virgin Mary, saying "You bitch, I don't want to believe in you." When the others rebuked him, he cursed even more strongly, then took out his penis and, holding it in his hands, "bawdily" insulted the picture. He wore a rosary with a cross, and several *agnus dei* around his neck. When he lost his money gambling, he cursed the Virgin Mary, calling her a "whore" and a "bitch," and even calling the crucifix a "vile cuckold." One night, he apparently even told a prison mate that God was dead.[184]

Yet Guido was a complicated and capricious man whose relationship with his own faith seemed to have wavered and waned depending on his particular situation and context. Evidently, he identified with or drew some solace from devotional objects such as rosaries and *agnus dei.* In addition, despite his fight with Moraschino, Guido was agreeable enough to have earned the friendship, or at least assistance of Tudesco and Andrews in writing his initials on the wall alongside theirs. Thus, Guido's dramatic repudiation of the Marian imagery in his cell may have been more a deliberate act of belligerency and defiance against the codified doctrines of his Roman Catholic captors and their stringent followers, than a genuine expression of renunciation

[182] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 60.
[183] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 60.
[184] Fiume, "Justice, Expitation, and Forgiveness," 98-99.

and disbelief. Fiume has even theorized that despite having proclaimed his illiteracy to the Inquisitors, Guido may have been the author of a poem dated to 1633 found in one of the cells.[185] The lamentation echoes the sentiments of Rao and Moraschino, comparing Christ's suffering to that of the prisoners at the Steri, and acknowledging the author's sense of guilt, confusion, and uncertainty.

For Christian prisoners, the drawings and wall-writings, particularly those that replicated or cited familiar religious imagery such as popularly venerated Saints and the Virgin Mary (Fig. 23), often took on a protective, narrative function. These icons also became a way to sacralise and express a sense of ownership over the "hostile, unknown territory" of penal space.[186] Christian prisoners physically performed devotional acts before these images; they "embraced, kissed, threatened, shed tears before and made promises to these drawings," treating them much like personal altars or votive shrines.[187] In addition, many of the saints venerated in the Christian canons were central characters in tales of injustice, violence, repression, and posthumous redemption, narratives which may have felt very comforting and relatable to many of the more devout prisoners. As John Hale writes, "without violence the Catholic Church would have lacked the martyrs whose fates sustained the prayers of the devout."[188] In contrast, Islamic discourses lacked a similar "theological legacy where torture, humiliation, and defeat/crucifixion were part of victory over the wicked."[189] The primacy afforded to sacred images and icons in Roman Catholic theology often inspired its detractors to express their opposition to such doctrines through the equally performative and physical acts of iconoclasm and blasphemy.

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[185] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, Forgiveness," 98.
[186] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, and Forgiveness," 99.
[187] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, and Forgiveness," 97.
[188] John Hale, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance* (New York: MacMillian, 1993), 426.
[189] Nabil Matar, "Popular Sources: Accounts of Muslim Captivity in Christendom," *Europe Through Arab Eyes, 1578-1727* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 40.

In the early years of its establishment in Sicily, the Inquisition was highly concerned with prosecuting individuals accused of crypto-Islam and crypto-Judaism. In 1492, King Ferdinand and his co-regent and queen, Isabella I of Castille had issued the Alhambra Decree, an edict demanding that Jews convert to Christianity or otherwise face expulsion from Spain as well as its foreign dominions.[190] This was soon followed by several edicts issued throughout the sixteenth century which targeted the Spanish Empire's Muslim population, also decreeing conversion on pain of excommunication.[191] While many chose to leave the Spanish territories rather than abandon their faith, the remaining communities of Jews (*conversos*) and Muslims (*moriscos*) who converted in order to avoid deportation were viewed with suspicion and disparagingly referred to as *marranos* ("swine") and turncoats.[192] As Kim M. Phillips writes, within countries dominated by Latin Christendom, "Jewish, Muslim, and other outsider groups were increasingly identified by alleged physiognomic traits, color, or by imagined shared qualities of 'blood.'"[193] Paradoxically, the more visually assimilated and integrated these New Christians appeared, the more they were mistrusted and admonished by Old Christians. Despite publicly professing their acceptance of Christianity and participating in everyday rituals of Christian life, *conversos* and *moriscos* were still viewed as imperceptible threats to the social order. They were continually suspected by Inquisitorial authorities and their Old Christian neighbours of practicing and spreading crypto-Judaism and crypto-Islam in their personal and private lives, harbouring a

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[190] Lea*, The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies,* 3.
[191] Leonard Patrick Harvey, *Muslims in Spain: 1500 to 1604* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 20.
[192] Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 92.
[193] Kim M. Phillips, "The Grins of Others: Figuring Ethnic Difference in Medieval Facial Expressions," *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 8, no. 1, (2017): 85.

nostalgic view of Muslim rule and superficially miming Christian doctrine in order to avoid persecution.[194]

Between 1604 and 1614, a wave of *morsicos* emigrated to the island after being expelled from the Spanish peninsula; they soon became eager targets of the Sicilian Holy Office.[195] Muslims were known for their denial of the "mysteries of Christianity" such as the 'fact' of Mary's virginity, or the transubstantiation of the Eucharist.[196] As Amy Remensynder writes, "the Virgin offered Christians a symbolic field on which to articulate the nature of their encounters with non-Christians."[197] Particularly significant within the Italian context, the Madonna and her collective public worship served as a sacred symbol of civic and religious unity and communal piety, in which an individual's behaviour in relation to her image became a defining method of identifying so-called heretics.[198] The Virgin's role in the experience and representation of early modern captivity also "belonged to the conflictual dialogue between Christians and Muslims [..] enacted with actual weapons of war."[199] The most significance of these confrontations was The Battle of Lepanto, which took place within the Gulf of Patras in the Ionian Sea. On October 7th, 1571, an allied coalition of papal-affiliated states formed a fleet of warships off the coast of Messina, preparing to confront the formidable forces of the Ottoman Empire.[200] The Holy League, comprised mainly of Spanish and Italian forces, then sailed to the Gulf of Patras off southwestern Greece, where they achieved a surprising victory over their long-time nemesis in

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[194] Renée Levine Melammed, "Judeo-Conversas and Moriscas in Sixteenth-Century Spain: A Study of Parallels,"*Jewish History* 24 (2010), 156.
[195] Maria Sofia Messana, "La resistenza musulmana e i martiri dell' Islam: moriscos, schiavi e cristiani rinnegati di fronte all' inquisizione spagnola di Sicilia," *Quaderni Storici* 42, no. 126 (December 2007), 755.
[196] Messana, "La resistenza musulmana," 758.
[197] Amy G. Remensynder, "Christian Captives, Muslim Maidens, and Mary," *Speculum* 82, no. 3 (Jul 2007), 645.
[198] Remensynder, "Christian Captives," 645.
[199] Katherine Aron-Beller, "The Inquisition, Professing Jews, and Christian Images in Seventeenth-Century," *Church History* 3, vol. 81(Sept 2012), 648.
[200] Aron-Beller, "Inquisition, Jews, and Christian Images," 646.

the region. Subsequently, celebrations throughout these Christian Kingdoms attributed their rare military victory to the protection and blessing of the Virgin Mary.[201]

In some respects, the treatment of Mary's image was considered equal to, if not more important, than the image itself. In particular, Jews and Muslims, viewed as being "in league with each other"[202] when it came to the practice of iconoclasm, were often accused of "removing crucifixes from walls, stoning, defacing, or ridiculing religious paintings and failing to show the necessary respect to images carried throughout the streets."[203] Such anxieties were representative of the "uneasy equilibrium between fear of idolatry and popular practices of veneration in Christian society."[204] Steri prisoners tasked with securing confessions accordingly tested devotion to the Virgin as a device to gage their cellmates' faith. Joachin Mirallas y Torrellas, a lawyer from Valencia with *morisco* heritage, had moved from Spain to Sicily after the expulsion decree. He was imprisoned by the Holy Office in Palermo after he was denounced by witnesses for not having any images of Christ or the Saints in his home. Once imprisoned, he was "put to the test" by his fellow cellmates, who asked him to write on the wall that he was a "slave of Our Lady the Madonna."[205] Torrellas refused, retorting that "God has no mother," thus betraying his Islamic sympathies and sealing his conviction; he was later made to do penance and appear at the 1640 *auto-da-fé*.[206]

Two examples of Marian imagery in the cells (Figs. 24 and 25) that may have retained the imprints of their attacks are the depictions of the Madonna of the Assumption in the adjacent cells on the ground floor. Both large-scale representations depict the Virgin in a similar pose,

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[201] Aron-Beller, "Inquisition, Jews, Christian Images," 647.
[202] Spziech, "Polemical Encounters," 283.
[203] Aron-Beller, "Inquisition, Jews, Christian Images," 577.
[204] Aron-Beller, "Inquisition, Jews, Christian Images," 576.
[205] Messana, "La resistenza musulmana," 753.
[206] Messana, "La resistenza musulmana," 753.

style, and fashion. However, while one is much more well-preserved than the other, the faces of both figures have faded significantly more than the rest of their bodies, suggesting the frequency of erasure attempts directed at the icon's visage. In the more well-preserved and detailed depiction (Fig. 25), the Virgin raises her arms towards a pointed arch, resting on two columns, which frame her ascending figure. The arch is depicted as a series of thick dots which form a triangular shape, mimicking the effect of bush-hammered stone. It is an innovative attempt at naturalism, despite the limitations of the rudimentary materials available to the Steri prisoners. Fiume theorizes that such minute details suggest that the graffitist responsible for creating the image may have possessed technical knowledge or skill in architecture or masonry.[207] In addition, the rest of the figure is composed of a series of geometric forms; the Madonna's dress and body follows the symmetrical shape of a triangle, while her bodice, veil, and skirt are also intricately decorated with triangle patterns, asterisk-like stars and swirling lines. She is flanked by two horizontally floating angels, who place a crown on her head, coronating her as the Queen of Heaven. However, the otherwise meticulously rendered picture is interrupted by the loss of detail in Mary's face, which is markedly more faded than the rest of her body. In light of the examples discussed, which note the use, or abuse, of the Virgin as a device to express inter-faith conflict, it is reasonable to assume that the faded effect of the face in this image may have been the result of consecutive attacks or attempts at erasure.

Many Steri prisoners, despite their supposed crimes of heresy or unorthodox beliefs, were nevertheless reared in Roman Catholic-dominated societies; thus, in the penal state of abjection and uncertainty they turned to the sacred Christian iconography that would have been most familiar to them. They drew from a paradigm of Christian captivity and martyrdom which was

[207] Fiume, "Justice, Expiation, and Forgiveness," 95.

"investigative, confessional, dramatic/melodramatic, and often, longish."[208] These prisoners utilized the religious images that they created in their cells to facilitate their prayers and hopes of redemption and salvation, becoming greatly offended upon the interruption or disavowal of such practices (recall how Guido was collectively rebuked by his cellmates for insulting the image of the Virgin). Therefore the images, and the act of their creation, can also be seen as pre-emptive discussion points or even instigators for conflict, inspiring inmates to conduct raucous and sometimes violent debates on their veracity and suitability for worship, particularly between more devout Catholic prisoners and those who had Protestant or Islamic sympathies.

To be 'Taken by the Turks': Muslim Pirates, Protestant Captives

As early as 1579, the Inquisitor Haedo had complained to King Phillip II in a letter which outlined the difficulties of policing unorthodoxy in "a kingdom with people from various nations […] with their own laws and ceremonies, filled with infidels in such calamitous times, with such a slippery people who, without better reasons than the desire to live as they please, go to Barbary and renounce their faith."[209] Haedo's reference to Barbary is indicative of European fears surrounding the heavy presence of North African and Ottoman privateers throughout the Mediterranean sea. The legend of this decentralized, anarchic network of heavily-armed Muslim corsairs "menacing coasts from Iceland to England to southern Spain and Sicily," enslaving thousands of Christian captives, and compelling them to convert to Islam or face galley slavery was a common anxiety of the age.[210] There was even a popular Sicilian saying, '*pigliato dai turchi'* ('taken by the Turks'), which came to mean being surprised or caught off guard.[211] The

[208] Matar, "Popular Sources," 39.
[209] Inquisitor Diego de Haedo to Phillip II, Palermo, Sicily, 1579, quoted in Monter, "Italian Wine in Spanish Bottles," 171.
[210] William J. Brenner, *Confounding Powers: Anarchy and International Society from the Assassins to Al Qaeda* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 152.
[211] Brenner, *Confounding Powers,* 152.

following section of this thesis will examine some of the graffiti made by Steri prisoners who were held on charges of participating in Islamic piracy, or accused of working for 'the Turks,' a catch-all term used to refer to Spain's rival empire, the Ottomans.[212] These seafaring renegades offered "a substantial contribution" to the Holy Office's Islamic nemesis, constituting "not only a workforce, but also an apparatus of expert navigators and connoisseurs of the Christian coasts."[213] Many Europeans taken captive by Barbary pirates converted to Islam under duress; upon their return to Christian lands after mutiny, escape, or rescue, they were urged to present themselves to the Holy Office in order to be reconciled to the Catholic Church, who promised to treat them leniently due to the force involved in their conversion.[214] Yet fear of the Inquisition was almost equal to the fear of Barbary captivity, and many Europeans chose to continue working in the service of Barbary ships rather than risk facing the social, civil, and oftentimes literal, death that accompanied an Inquisitorial trial. Others went to Barbary of their own accord, drawn to "Islam's theological and social latitude" and its concept of *dhimmi* ("people of the covenant"), which allowed for the toleration of different monotheistic faiths and viewed them as part of a temporally connected Abrahamic tradition.[215]

Indicative of this context, maritime battle scenes and drawings of ships are common at the Steri; a large-scale drawing of the Battle of Lepanto (Fig. 26) has been attributed to Francesco Mannarino, whose name appears prominently as an epigraphic header above the maritime scene. Next to Mannarino's scene, inside a cartouche (Fig. 27), appears the name of Paolo Mayorana, a noble and soldier from Messina who was imprisoned twice at the Steri, once

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[212] Godfrey Fisher, *Barbary Legend: War, Trade and Piracy in North Africa, 1415-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 154.
[213] Fisher, *Barbary Legend,* 154.
[214] La Motta, *Contra Haereticos*, 120.
[215] Matar, "Popular Sources," 32.

in 1612 and again in 1617, both times on charges of blasphemy.[216] Also inside the cartouche is the signature of Paolo Confaloni, whose style of large block letters Mayorana may have been imitating. Confaloni was a fisherman from Trapani who at twenty-two years of age was thrown into the Steri, accused of necromancy and dark magic.[217] As Confaloni was held at the prison between the years of 1609 to 1612, it is likely that the two Paolos may have encountered each other within the cells at some point, or perhaps their double inscription was merely prompted by the familiarity of their shared first names. It is also likely that Mayorana assisted Mannarino in his monumental depiction of Lepanto and, from the similarities in the style of block text, may have even signed Mannarino's name for him, as Mannarino was known to be illiterate.[218]

Mannarino was a twenty-two-year-old "renegade sailor" originally from the coastal neighborhood of Sant'Erasmo in Palermo.[219] One day while fishing with his father, Mannarino was captured by Barbary pirates and taken to Bizerte in Tunisia. At the age of thirteen, the young Mannarino was forced to convert to Islam and sold into galley slavery. He was made to work for a cruel and domineering *rais*, or captain of a Muslim privateer ship; the *rais'* severe mistreatment of his galley slaves eventually led to a mutiny in which Mannarino eagerly took part.[220] The crew killed the *rais* and sailed the ship to Venice, where they sold the schooner and split the profits. While in Venice, Mannarino also presented himself before the Inquisitorial court, confessing that he was "forced to renounce his faith by being beaten," and asking for reconciliation and absolution from the Roman Catholic Church.[221] The Venetian Inquisitors took pity on Mannarino and granted him an acquittal, upon which he returned to Palermo, finally reuniting with his father

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[216] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 275.
[217] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 276.
[218] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 276.
[219] Civale, "Animo carcerto," 206.
[220] Maria Sofia Messana. *Il Santo Ufficio dell'inquisizione: Sicilia 1500–1782* (Palermo: European Polygraphic Institute, 2012), 52-55.
[221] Messana, *Il Santo Ufficio dell'inquisizione*, 53.

in 1609. Yet Mannarino's acquittal was evidently not enough to save him from the wrath of the Holy Office in Palermo, which had already received reports that Mannarino had told his fellow escapees "that in Berberia you live better than in Christian land" and had tried to convince them to return to Islamic territory.[222] While Mannarino was eventually able to prove his innocence by presenting evidence that his accusers were thieves with bad intentions, he still spent almost a year in the Steri jails until the investigations and trials concluded. On June 13, 1610, Mannarino was acquitted of all charges at the *auto-da-fé,* and finally released.

Drawing comparisons to examples of Lepanto iconography from the period, Fiume has argued that Mannarino's battle scene may have been "painted from memory [from] images which he had seen elsewhere… [now] reimagined in prison conditions."[223] One of the first Italian representations of Lepanto was published in 1572 by Venetian cartographer, Giovanni Francesco Camocio, (Fig. 28) who took great pains to document, from an aerial perspective, "the League's galleys according to their order of battle, giving their captains names and describing their liveries" as well as depicting their particularized pennants, insignias, and emblems.[224] Camocio's print probably served as a guide for Giorgio Vasari's well-known cycle of frescoes depicting the *Battle of Lepanto* (1572-3) at the Sala Regia in Vatican City.[225] There were also the two famous paintings of Lepanto by Paolo Veronese in Venice (*Allegory of the Battle of Lepanto*, 1572-73 (Fig. 29) and *Allegory of Lepanto,* 1578) which presented Lepanto as "a victory of Christian faith over the infidel," embellishing the scene by adding a markedly religious element.[226] In Veronese's version, the sky opens up before the fighting ships to reveal

[222] Messana, *Il Santo Ufficio dell'inquisizione*, 54.
[223] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 210.
[224] Rick Scorza, "Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes: 'Apparati,' Medals, Prints, and the Celebration of Victory," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 75 (2012), 149.
[225] Scorza, "Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes," 152.
[226] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 48.

the floating Virgin, accompanied by the Saints Peter, Roch, Justine and Mark, who urge the Madonna for her divine intervention, to assist the Christian fleets to victory. In response, a crowd of angels on the top right fling burning arrows at the mass of Ottoman ships below, which are surrounded by a thick fog of cannon smoke.

The iconographic similarities between Mannarino's *Battle of Lepanto* and Vasari's and Veronese's depictions are clearly evident. Like Vasari's fleets, Mannarino's ships are also organized in three main rows. The central row consists of three larger ships while the two rows that frame the schooners are made up of identically rendered, smaller fleets. It is a frenzied scene of sharp, jutting lines, as the masts and spars of the ships overlap and point towards each other. Mannarino has taken care to include minute details which individualize and identify the alliance of the ships; the central ships are of the Holy League, as they are brandished with large, towering crosses and the emblems of the Catholic empires. Their flags depict a lion (Venice), what seems to be two crossed keys under the papal tiara (the coat of arms of the Holy See), a crucifix, and the saw-toothed, diagonal cross of Habsburg Spain (Figs. 30 & 31). The surrounding Ottoman ships fly their ever-recognizable half-moon flags. These banners were relatively accurate depictions of the coat of arms and emblems used by the participating maritime powers at Lepanto in 1571, as represented by the many prints depicting the battle which circulated throughout Christian Europe in the months and years after the victory.[227]

In another inscription, a desperate prayer of repentance in English is prominently dated and signed by its author: "And so he ended his days in fear of God and in the belief of our lord Jesus Christ who is in Heaven and who died on the cross for our sins. John Andrews the

[227] Víctor Mínguez, "A Sea of Dead Turks: Lepanto and the Iconography of Hell and the Flood," in *Lepanto and Beyond: Images of Religious Alterity from Genoa and the Christian Mediterranean*, ed. Laura Stagno and Borja Franco Llopis (Leuven University Press, 2021), 114.

Englishman of Padstow in the year 1632."[228] The twenty-three-year-old Andrews was a Catholic-born sailor who had first converted to Calvinism during his maritime travels before embracing Islam on the Barbary Coast.[229] Upon his return to Christian lands in July 1630, Andrews was arrested by the Holy Office in Palermo and accused of apostasy. Andrews was likely "a captive taken from a North African galley" who had converted to Islam under duress.[230] Yet he displayed an affinity for certain Islamic traditions, as well as the Calvinist precepts that were popular in his Cornish hometown, as further study of his wall-writings and behaviour in prison will indicate. He was subjected to torture by Inquisition officials in August 1633 who sought to unveil the depth of his conversion and attachment to Islam and later sentenced to five years in the royal galleys as punishment for his apostasy.[231]

During his imprisonment Andrews signed his Hispanicized name "Juan Andrés Inglés," interchangeably with an Italianized version several times on the Steri walls. In one signature, Andrews identifies himself as "IOAN ANDRES INGLES OF PASTA anno 1632" (Fig. 32), and in another as the Italianized version, "GIOVAN ANDRES." Andrews also wrote the Apostle's Creed on his cell walls (Fig. 33), directly quoting from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayers*, a popularly distributed text which formed the "basic theological tenets of the English Reformation."[232] His writing style is neat and ordered in straight lines, in comparison to the more sporadic, scrawling inscriptions which more commonly characterize the Steri wall writings. Andrews also seems to place more emphasis on the written word itself, as the letters are clearly and patiently outlined in rounded, thick lines of 'Sanguine' pigment. In addition, Garcia-Arenal

[228] I have made some edits to assist with legibility; the actual wall text reads, verbatim: "and so hi ende his/daies in fere of god/an[d] in the belife of our lorde jesu christe wich his in heuen abo ue wich died in crose for our s[ins]." Quoted in Mercedes Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 45.
[229] Fiume, "Soundless Screams," 207.
[230] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 46.
[231] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 46.
[232] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 47.

notes that "simply by writing the Creed in English instead of Latin, Andrews was taking a clear stance" against the rigid doctrines of the Catholic Church while also declaring his knowledge and adherence to Protestant teachings instead.[233]

Furthermore, Andrews, along with Tudesco, were both accused by their cellmates of consistently disrespecting the sacrament of communion:

> When they played the *Sancto,* this Juan Inglés not only failed to kneel, but did not even want to remove his hood even though the witness advised him beforehand several times. Rather, he was painting a Turk on the wall and while the *Sancto* was sounding he kept at his painting, which he believes he painted as a pastime.[234]

Witnesses went on to accuse Andrews of working "in league" with the "treacherous and obstinate Moor" Tudesco, to whom he was reported to speak with "in *Moorish*" or Arabic, thus further convincing them of his apostasy and true embrace of Islam.[235]As Garcia-Arenal writes, Andrews' fluency in Arabic was unlikely, and it is more probable that Tudesco and Andrews "spoke to each other in lingua franca, the pidgin spoken among oarsmen, captives, and slaves."[236] Andrews was also said to have debated the superiority of Christian doctrine with his cellmates, claiming that "The Turks say their law is good, the English that theirs is good, the Christians that theirs is good, meaning that they are all good, and that whoever is a good person is saved in their own law."[237] Upon being refuted by a cellmate, who replied that "they were all false, and that the Christian law alone was the true one, and that only through it can a Christian be saved, Juan Inglés answered: I am a better Catholic than you, sir."[238] A similar sentiment had been expressed by Tudesco, who had once told his interrogators that "the law of the Christians

[233] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 48.
[234] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 54.
[235] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 54.
[236] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 55.
[237] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 55.
[238] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 56.

and of Muhammad are the same, that all laws are the same, even that of the English, (which he would have learned about from John Andrews) and that he does not believe in image-worship or in miracles."[239]

Brought before the Inquisitors to answer to these claims of sacrilegious collaboration, Andrews denied that he knew how to speak Arabic and attempted to circumvent his charges by redirecting attention to the ever-defiant Tudesco, reporting that he had heard the Algerian ex-slave respond to Christian prayers and litanies with the words "Leyla mahometto rezulila."[240] Considering the similarity of the phrase to "the Muslim profession of faith: *La ilaha illa Allah wa Muhammad rasul Allah*" ("There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger"), Garcia-Arenal theorizes that Tudesco may have been reciting the *Shahada*.[241] Yet Andrews was also evidently "a compassionate man" who testified that he truly believed in Tudesco's display of insanity, thus perhaps attempting to lessen Tudesco's punishment.[242] Guido was also brought in for questioning and testified that "Gabriel does not talk like someone in his right mind," thus corroborating Andrews' perception of Tudesco's true insanity.[243] In contrast, Tudesco's Catholic cellmates, the priests Fray Hipólito de Aydon, Jerónimo Batalleri and Placído Laficarra, were less convinced of his dramatic performances; they describe Tudesco as "a skillful player of tic-tac-toe, checkers and *marella,* which they play with nine little rocks, and which he frequently wins."[244] They testified further that "when they tell each other stories or jokes to pass the time he listens attentively and laughs at the funny parts, all of which points to his sanity."[245] They complained that when they reprimanded him for his constant blasphemies, he replied

[239] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 58.
[240] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 55.
[241] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 55.
[242] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 56.
[243] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 56.
[244] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 53-54.
[245] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 54.

sarcastically that "it is only so he can confess afterwards, 'so as not to deprive the confessor of the power to absolve me.'"[246] He often declared that "he had nothing to thank God for, if anything just bread, wine, meat, and couscous."[247] To these doubtful cellmates, Tudesco's sacrilegious behaviour was not the result of spontaneous bouts of madness. Instead, they saw it as a willful expression of his self-reflexivity and defiance.

The twenty-eight year old Tudesco had been arrested in June 1627 alongside two other escapees after a botched getaway, which, despite its failure, was quite a bold and innovative plan:

> They had attempted to flee Catania by scaling down the city walls, after the gates had already been closed. They seized a small fishing boat, which they knew always had a small store of food and water on board, as well as oars; in addition, they took bread and three shotguns with them. They were able to set out, but the owner of the boat alerted the authorities and they were captured off Capo Passero […] as all of them were of Muslim origin and were fleeing, it was assumed that they were trying to go to Barbary, where it was suspected they intended to renounce Christianity.[248]

Tudesco's owner and previous owners testified to Inquisitors that "Gabriel had been baptized in 1618"; they also confirmed that he was illiterate and described him as "lazy, stupid and disobedient, but mentioned nothing about his behaviour that might indicate he was Muslim."[249] In light of the complex plan enacted by Tudesco and his fellow escapees, it might be safe to say that Tudesco's behaviour was inspired by a sense of defiance and belligerency against his enslavement and imprisonment, rather than indicative of his simple-mindedness. During his interrogations, he claimed that "It was not Christianity he wanted to flee from, but the abuse he was subjected to as a slave. Part of one of his ears is missing, cut off at the behest of the Duke of

[246] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 53.
[247] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 55.
[248] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 50.
[249] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 50.

Osuna, infamous for his mistreatment of slaves."[250] He testified that that he came from a lineage of Muslims from the city of Algiers. His father was a merchant and often implored the young Tudesco to study, but he would skip his classes instead. Finally, "one day when he was seven or eight years old, his father flogged him for not going to school" upon which Tudesco "ran way from home and stowed away on a merchant ship headed for Tunis."[251] However, the ship was captured by a Florentine fleet and taken to Messina, where Tudesco was sold as a slave to a Sicilian nobleman.[252]

As the time he spent in the prison cells increased, Tudesco exhibited signs of mental distress and illness which may have been compounded by the traumas he had suffered throughout his tumultuous life. He refuses to eat, constantly shouts blasphemies, and "goes into a sort of seizures where he throws himself to the ground."[253] Two years after his initial imprisonment, Tudesco was tortured with the *garrucha*. On November 26, 1629, in a state of agony, he finally confesses what the judges wanted to hear: "Let me down, I was escaping to Barbary to renounce the Holy Faith, I want to be absolved immediately!"[254] He was then offered "reconciliation through penitence" and sentenced to five years in the royal galleys. But when he was paraded publicly at the next *auto-da-fe*, Tudesco embarrassed his Inquisitors in front of the massive crowd by causing a scene:

> His attitude as his sentence is read out seals his fate: he stares directly into the inquisitor's eyes with a look of anger and desperation, displaying "great anxiety, hatred and resentment" with "angry eyes", "like a demon," repeating "oh God, God is not just." He then attempts to flee, at which point they bind his hands and feet, but cannot manage to calm him down: "His hands were bound and he was gagged and still he stared at the distinguished inquisitors." When he is ordered to kneel and renounce the errors of the Mahometan faith, "he [will] not kneel to make the renunciation", and proves himself to

[250] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 51.
[251] Garcia-Arenal. "A Polyphony of Voices," 50.
[252] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 51.
[253] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 51.
[254] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 51.

> be a "false and feigned believer", an impenitent apostate who even appears intent on assaulting the inquisitors, who "with all their love awaited him in order to reconcile him, and through absolution join him and reincorporate him into the ranks of the faithful of the Holy Roman Catholic Church". The fact that this does not come to pass causes great "astonishment and outrage" among the faithful who are in attendance.[255]

He was therefore returned to the Steri prison, now facing a second trial on charges that he had "stubbornly and disobediently rejected the benefit of absolution, of having deceitfully persevered in his apostasy, and having feigned being a believer."[256] The inquisitors were now considering the possibility that he could be "relaxed to the secular arm," a euphuism for the ultimate punishment of burning at the stake.[257] His behaviour became markedly more extreme during this second trial; he began soiling the religious images in his cell, tearing his clothes "into strips of cloth to fashion a turban" and asking the food provider for pigeons and beef; "when they tell them this is not allowed, he replies […] in Spanish, 'if only.'"[258] At the conclusion of his second trial, two more years were added to his five year galley sentence, and since Tudesco appeared at his second *auto-da-fe* without commotion, the judges were satisfied that his rebellious spirit may have finally been broken. Yet merely a few days after receiving his sentence, Tudesco returned to the prison for a third time. While it was "customary for those sentences to the galleys to be shackled and have their heads shaven upon boarding," Tudesco had apparently refused to submit to the procedure and had instead asked that "they give him a mustache and tuft of hair like a Moor, as was the common practice among janissaries and oarsmen on Muslim corsair ships."[259] He had even brazenly introduced himself to the crew with the Islamic name "Amet de Brissa."[260] At the conclusion of his third and final trial, Tudesco was burned alive at the stake and "died

[255] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 52.
[256] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 52.
[257] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 52.
[258] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 52.
[259] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 58.
[260] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 58.

without repenting."[261] His desire for freedom of body, thought and expression persevered until the last moments of his life.

For Tudesco and Andrews, penalization not only changed the ways in which they related to and understood the various faiths they had been exposed to throughout their travels. They were men with "uncertain identities" who, in their interactions with other prisoners and with the images in their cells demonstrated a markedly fluid and relativist position in regards to religious and ecclesiastical questions.[262] They gave "mixed answers to the problem of spiritual salvation" and retained a sense of autonomy and self-preservation through their actions.[263] Evidently, the torture and mistreatment they experienced at the Steri prison further radicalized their ambivalent feelings towards Catholic doctrines. Despite the inevitable punishments and condemnations that would await their unorthodox behaviours in the prison, they demonstrated an unstoppable drive to live beyond the bounds of constraint and force.

Conclusion: Reconceptualizing the Inquisitorial Archive and Future Implications

The Spanish Inquisition's initial establishment and its conflation of secular and religious law in an attempt to root out unorthodox behaviour can be seen as a response to the general "crisis of uncertainty" and "atmosphere of intellectual and religious restlessness" that prevailed in Counter-Reformation Europe.[264] When their religious hegemony was threatened, Roman Catholic authorities created a carceral infrastructure and bureaucratic machinery which attempted to replicate the portability and globalized conditions of the early modern world while also seeking to control the movement of ideas and individuals across its increasingly fluid borders

[261] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 59.
[262] Garcia-Arenal, "A Polyphony of Voices," 64.
[263] Fiume, "Justice, Expitation, and Forgiveness," 76.
[264] Barbara Fuchs and Mercedes Garcia-Arenal, eds. *The Quest for Certainty in Early Modern Europe: From Inquisition to Inquiry, 1550-1700*. (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 3.

and trade routes. They evoked judicial policies and representational frameworks that painted the heretic as a savage, foreign inversion of humanity and civilization, utilizing legalized tactics of secretive confinement, torture, censorship, and surveillance to form a massive intelligence gathering network. These strategies are eerily reminiscent of how modern 'terrorists' are identified, disciplined, and rooted out in contemporary geopolitical conflicts, such as the US-led 'War on Terror.' Cullen Murphy has even gone so far as to propose a temporal lineage between the "mindless," self-reinforcing cruelty and "myopic imperatives" of Inquisitorial bureaucracy and the global machinations of American (and Western) foreign policy.[265] It is certain that secrecy and perpetual confinement has become a defining operational feature of modern intelligence agencies such as the CIA, as well as the military prisons and 'black sites' where they keep their international captives. At both the Steri Inquisition prison and contemporary 'detention centers' such as Guantanamo Bay, torture was, and continues to be conducted under the benign and self-deluded rubric of punitive reform and duty, whether it be to the church or the nation-state.

Returning to Fleetwood's framework of carceral aesthetics, the study of historical prison graffiti and carceral art allows for a reconfiguration of the very meaning of the archive itself, providing us with spectral yet deeply illuminating glimpses into the lives and experiences of Inquisition prisoners. As Fleetwood writes, "such practices of [artmaking in prison] are fundamental to envisioning freedom and a world without cages."[266] One of the most powerful yet equally devastating effects of an institutional archive is its structural ability to create, manipulate and erase place and presence. Perhaps it has been this meticulous practice of record-keeping and

[265] Cullen Murphy, *God's Jury: The Inquisition and the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2012), 230.
[266] Fleetwood, "Carceral Aesthetics," 33.

the veracity implied in the concept of the archive which has led many Inquisition scholars to paint the institution as a benevolent and lenient legal body based off its self-authored anecdotes. In light of these revisionist trends in Inquisition studies, the Steri graffiti makes palpable the self-expressed experiences of individuals who have been silenced, ignored, or outright forgotten since their trials with the tribunals.

Juliet Fleming also reminds us that relying solely on the surviving remnants of early modern literature means privileging the cultural production of "people who had the technological and financial resources for the laborious procedures of securing paper, pen and ink."[267] In contrast, what Fleming terms the "the undisciplined practice" of graffiti, wall-writing, and wall-drawing is theoretically and materially engaging precisely *because* of its association with spontaneity, informality, and vernacular culture.[268] In a similar vein, Susan Stewart classifies graffiti as "a kind of hysterical writing—a writing moving not simply from position to position but between positions as well; a writing incapable of 'an ordered account,' and yet a writing that is in crucial ways symptomatic of history, in that it continually asks questions regarding its place in history."[269] The tangled web of words and pictures that decorate the Steri's interior stand in stark contrast to the documents of the Inquisition, whose ideologically-laced texts must always be read with an air of doubt. The Steri graffiti, addressed to and done for both no one in particular *and* any one in general, thus serves as a rare form of historical testimony that is intimately site-specific, culturally and temporally referential, and socially dynamic.

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[267] Fleming. *Graffiti and the Writing Arts*, 50.
[268] Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts,* 50.
[269] Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 4.

Figures

Figure 1. The facade of the Palazzo-Chiaramonte Steri complex. Built between 1307 and 1320, Palermo, Sicily.

Figure 2. Hellmouth with Dante quotation, Palazzo-Chiaramonte Steri, c. 1600s-1650s

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Figure 3. Front view of the Steri Secret Prison.

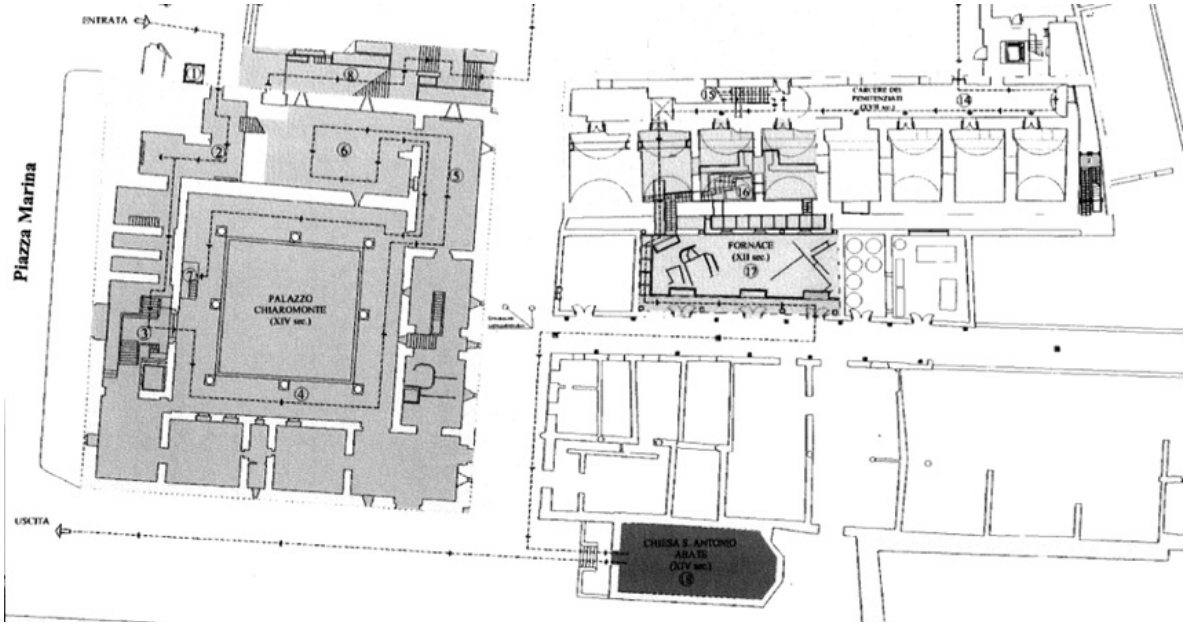

Figure 4. Floor plan of the Steri and the Secret Prison. From Giovanna Fiume, "Justice, Expiation and Forgiveness in the Graffiti and Drawings of Palermo's Secret Prisons," *Quaderni Storici* 1, vol. 157 (April 2018), 74.

Figure 5. St. Rocco, with the inscription "Of all the cells this is the best; this cell is called after St. Rocco. May you be devout."

Figure 6. Full view of St. Rocco.

Figure 7. View of 'St. Rocco cell’ and Baronio's Saints.

Figure 8. Map of Sicily in the St. Rocco cell.

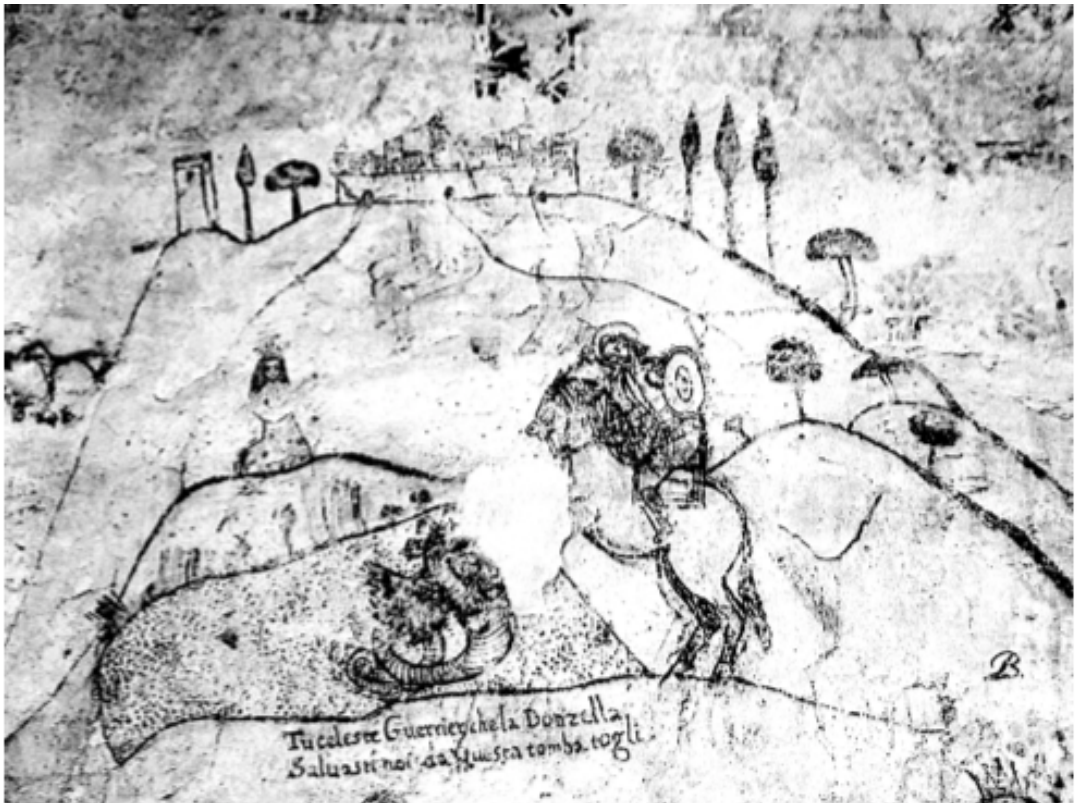

Figure 9. Illustration of St. George and the Dragon.

Figure 10. Old Testament saints ascending from Bonanno's Hellmouth.

Figure 11. Hellmouth at the Gardens of Bomarzo, Lazio, Italy. C. Sixteenth century. Designed by Pirro Ligorio, sculpted by Simone Moschino. Commissioned by Pier Francesco Orsini.

Figure 12. Hellmouth #2, by Bonanno.

Figure 13. "Don Leonardo Germano/Suffering unjustly in a dark prison" on a sepulcher.

Figure 14. Window to Inferno, Hellmouth #2.

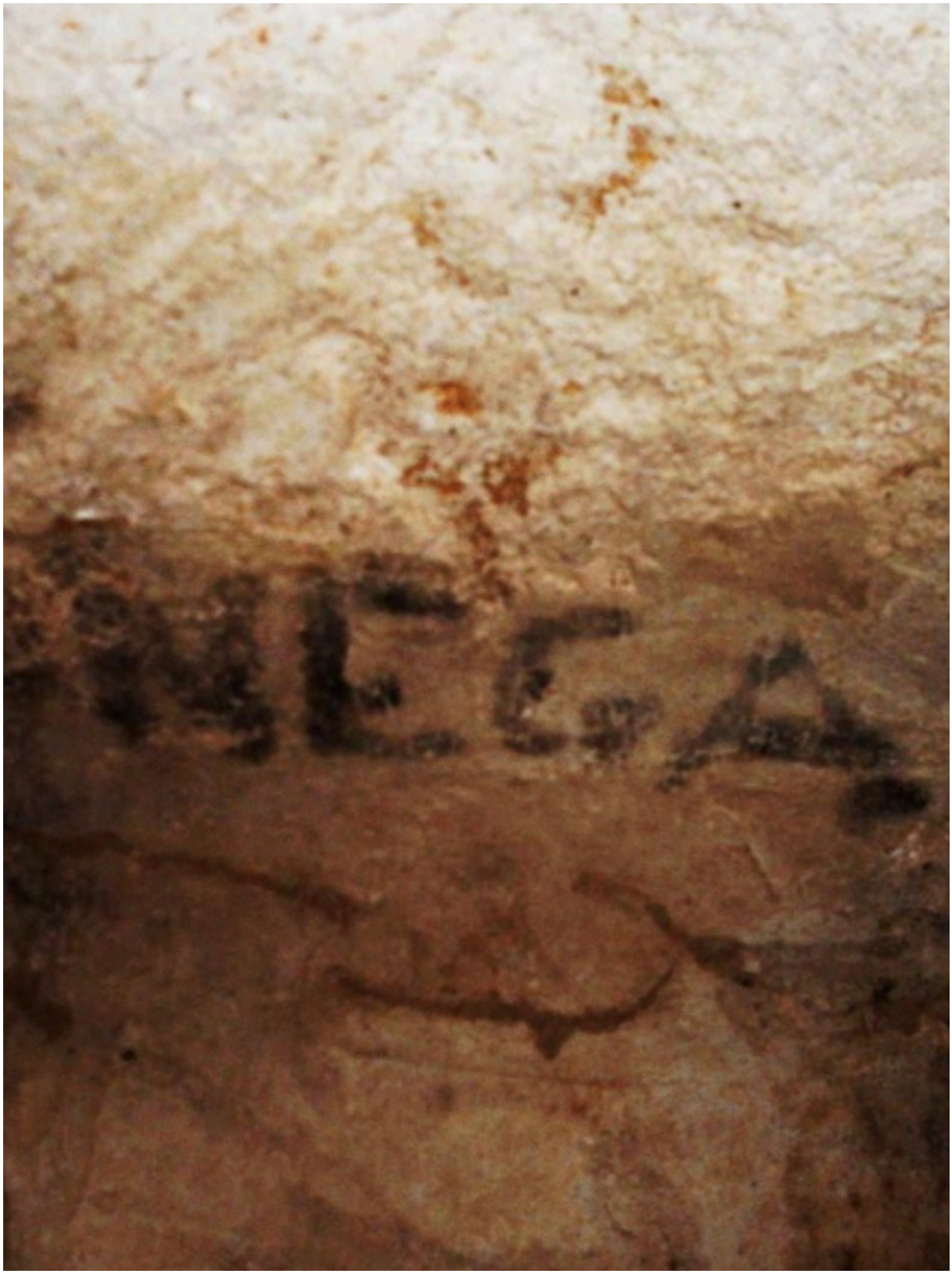

Figure 15. Inscription reading "Deny."

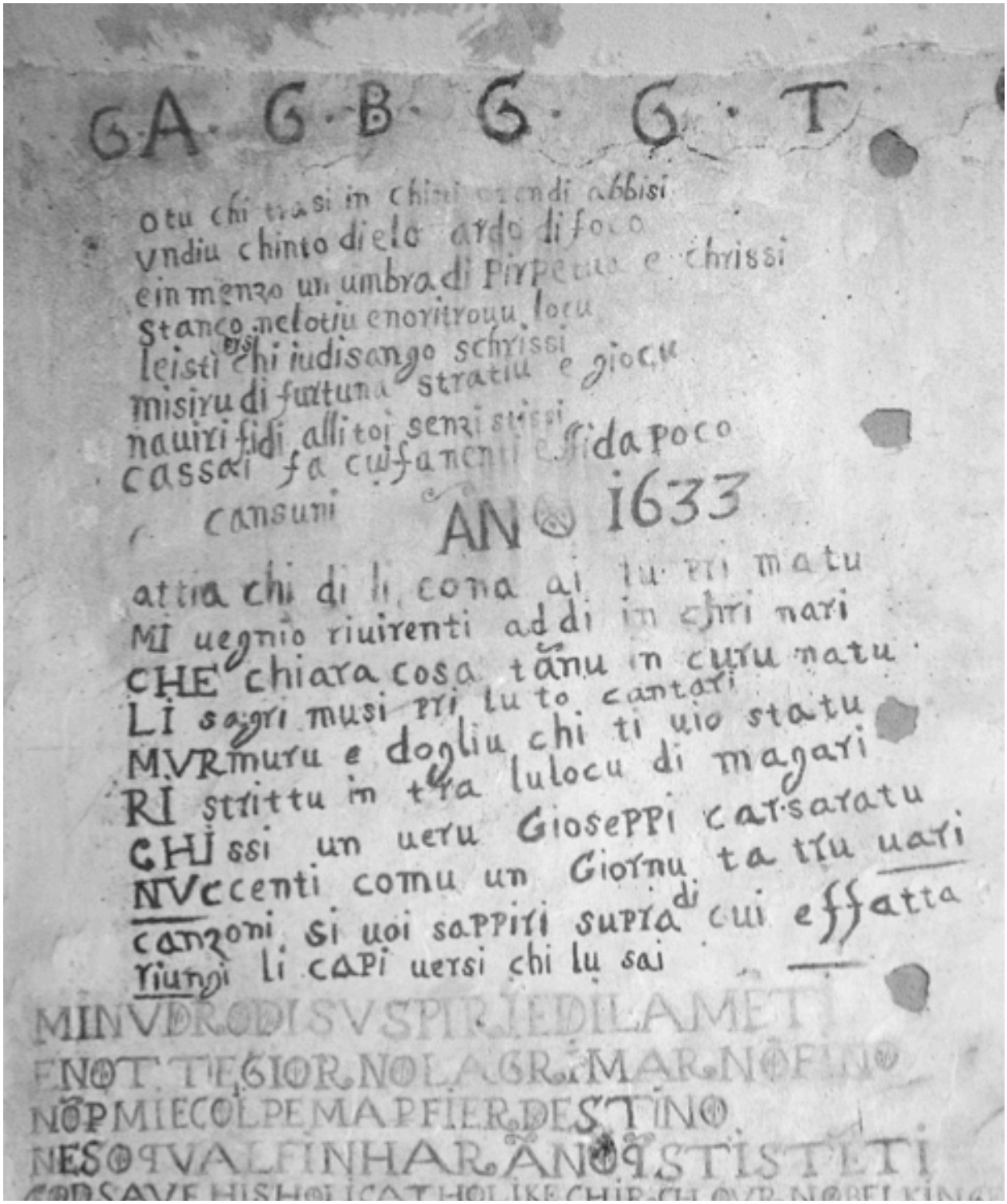

Figure 16. Acrostic poem by Michele Moraschino.

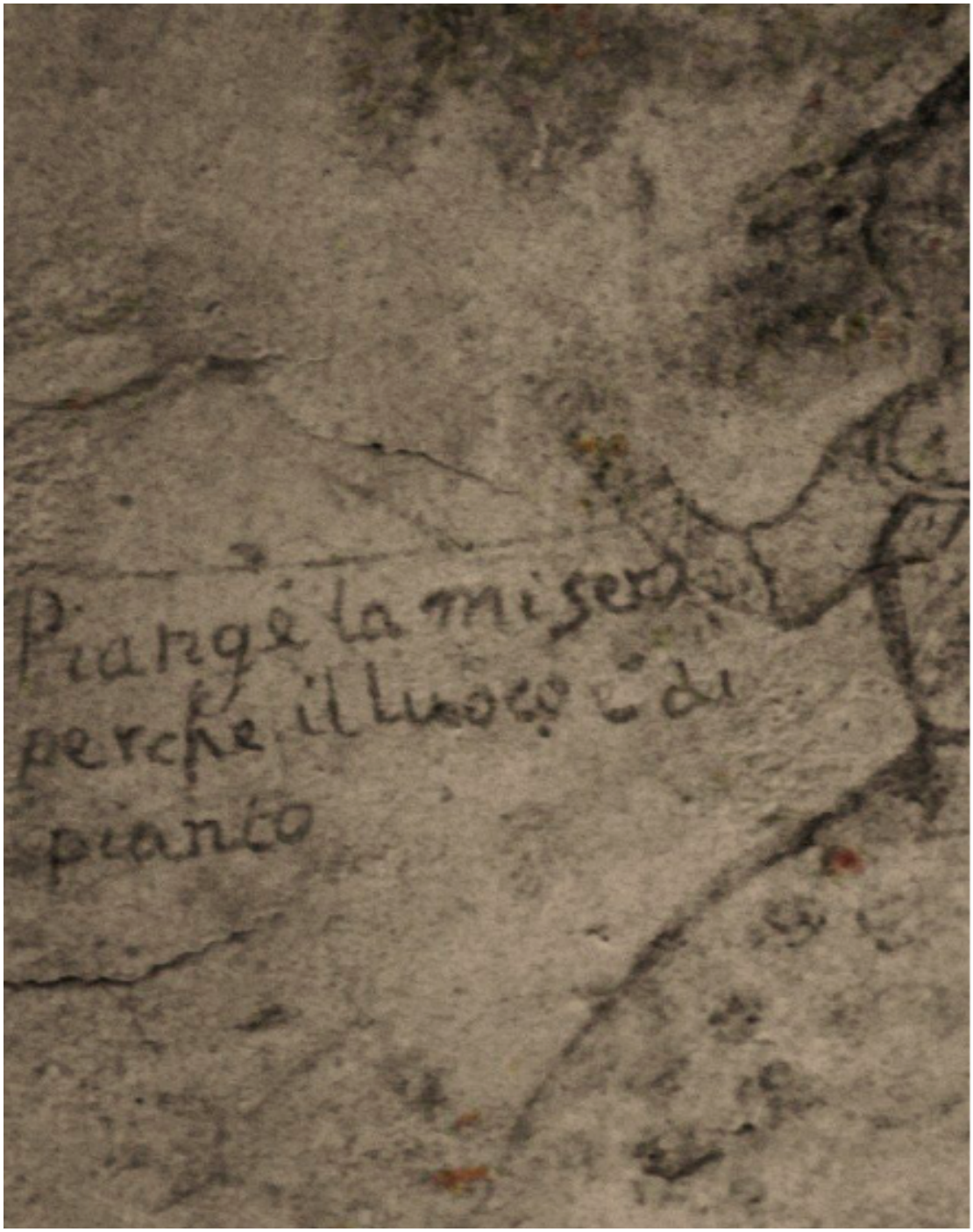

Figure 17. "The miserable [woman] weeps because this is a place of tears."

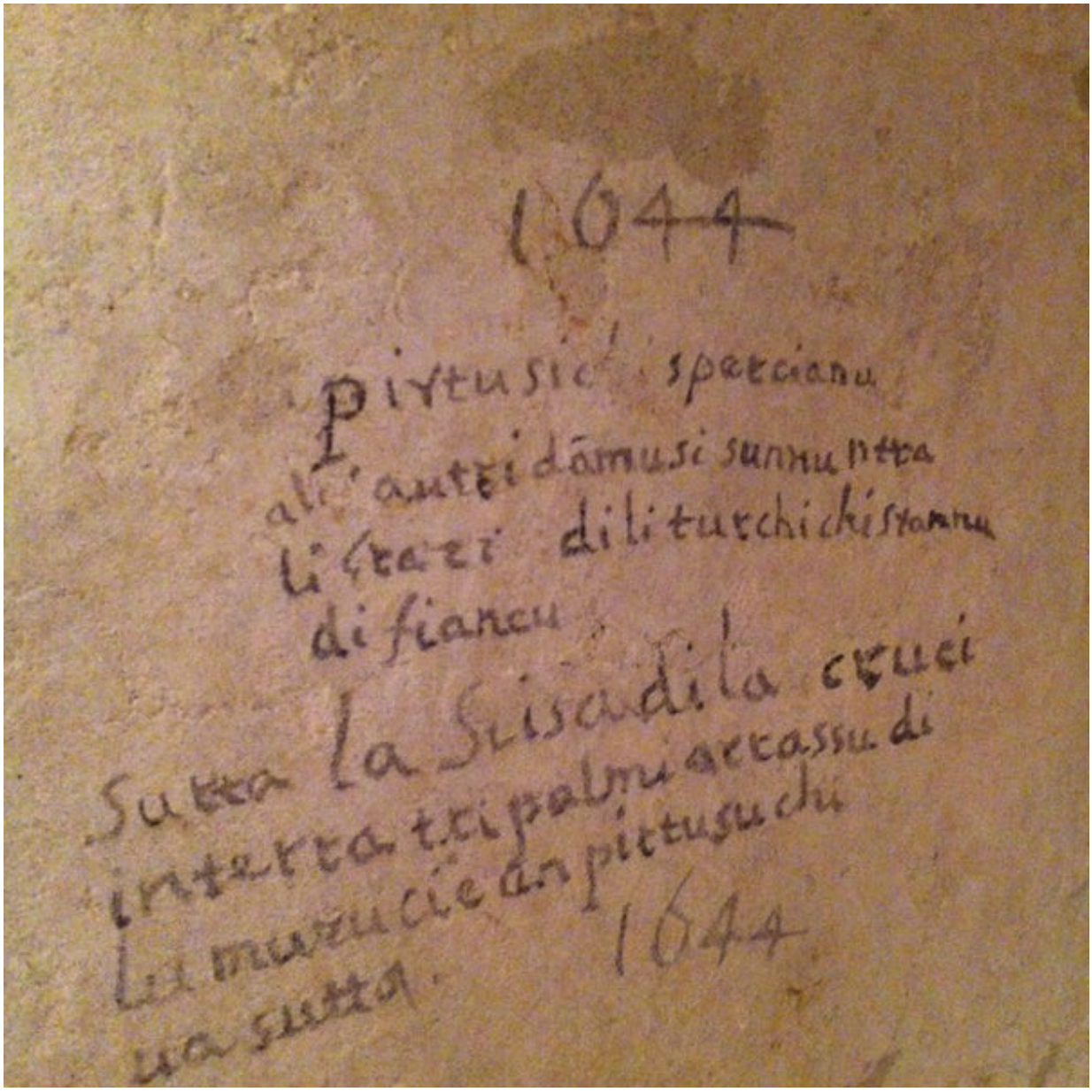

Figure 18. “It simply came to our notice that other ladies are below/the Graces of the Turks standing by.” and “Under the guise of the cross/he pressed three palms against the wall/There’s a hole going under.” Signed 1644.

Figure 19. Inquisitor on defecating horse, by the men's latrines.

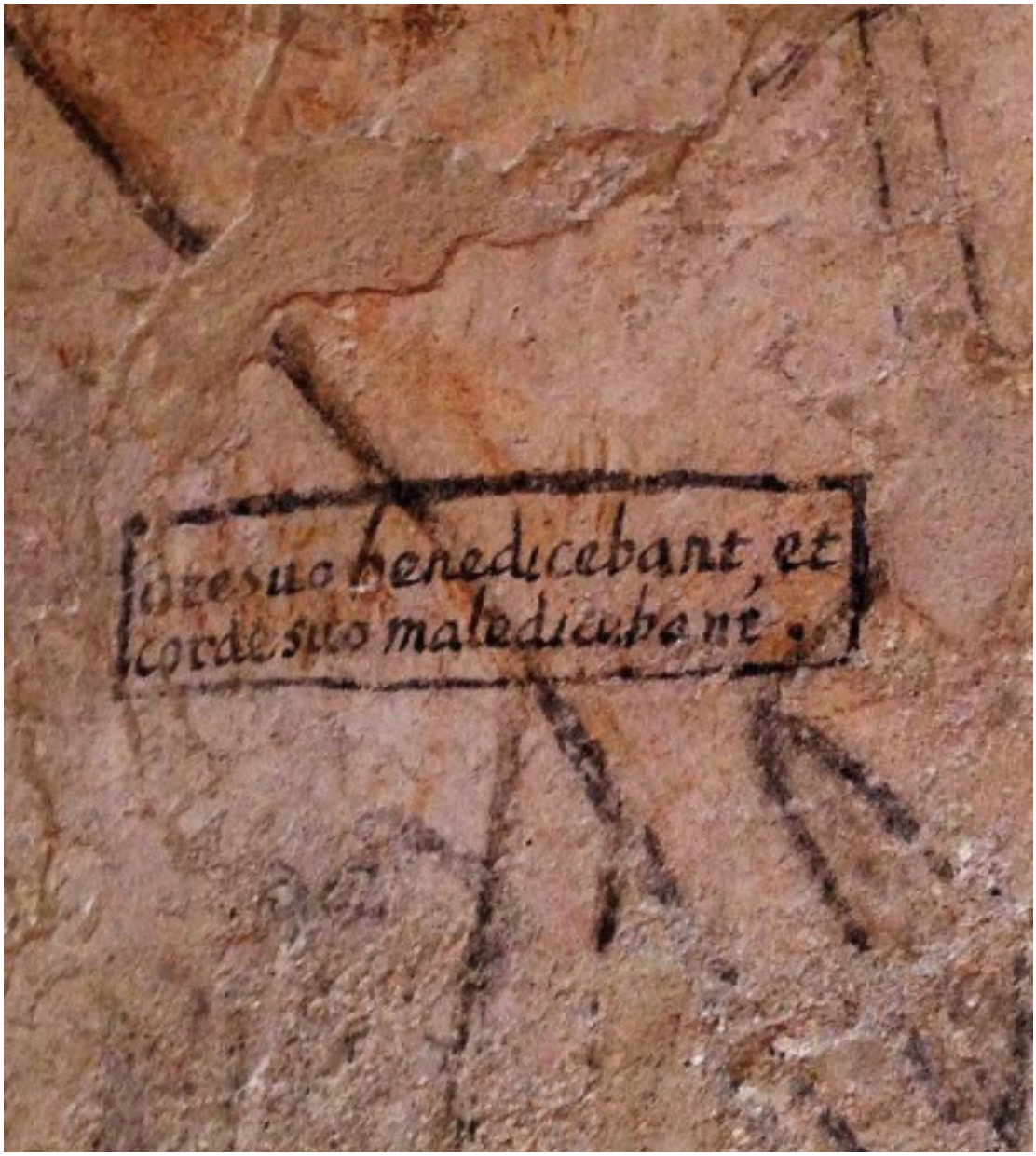

Figure 20. Inscription reading “They bless with their mouths, but curse you in their hearts.”

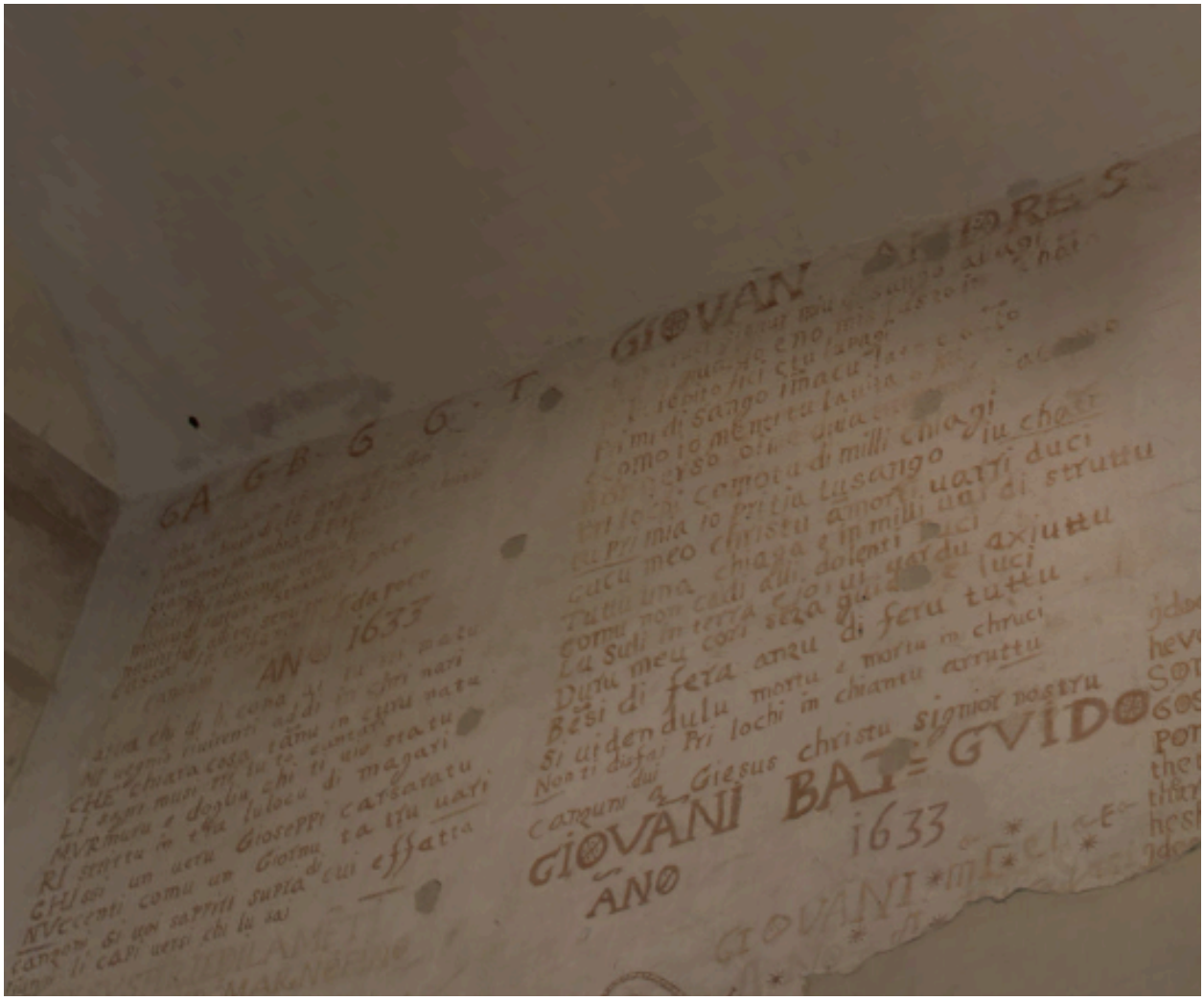

Figure 21. Initials of John Andrews (G.A.), Giovan Battista Guido (G.B.G.), and Gabriel Tudesco (G.T.)

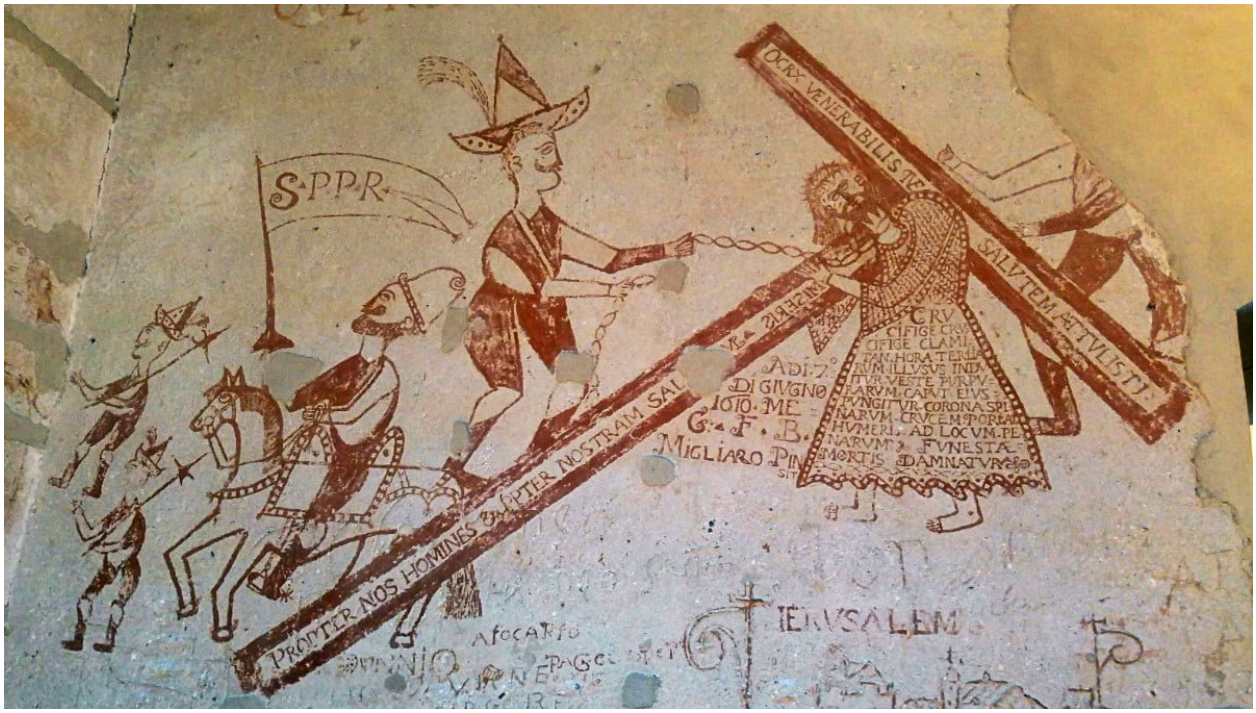

Figure 22. Inquisitors hold an auto-da-fé for Jesus Christ.

Figure 23. Example of Marian imagery in the cells.

Figure 24: Example of defaced Marian imagery in the cells.

Figure 25. The Madonna of the Assumption.

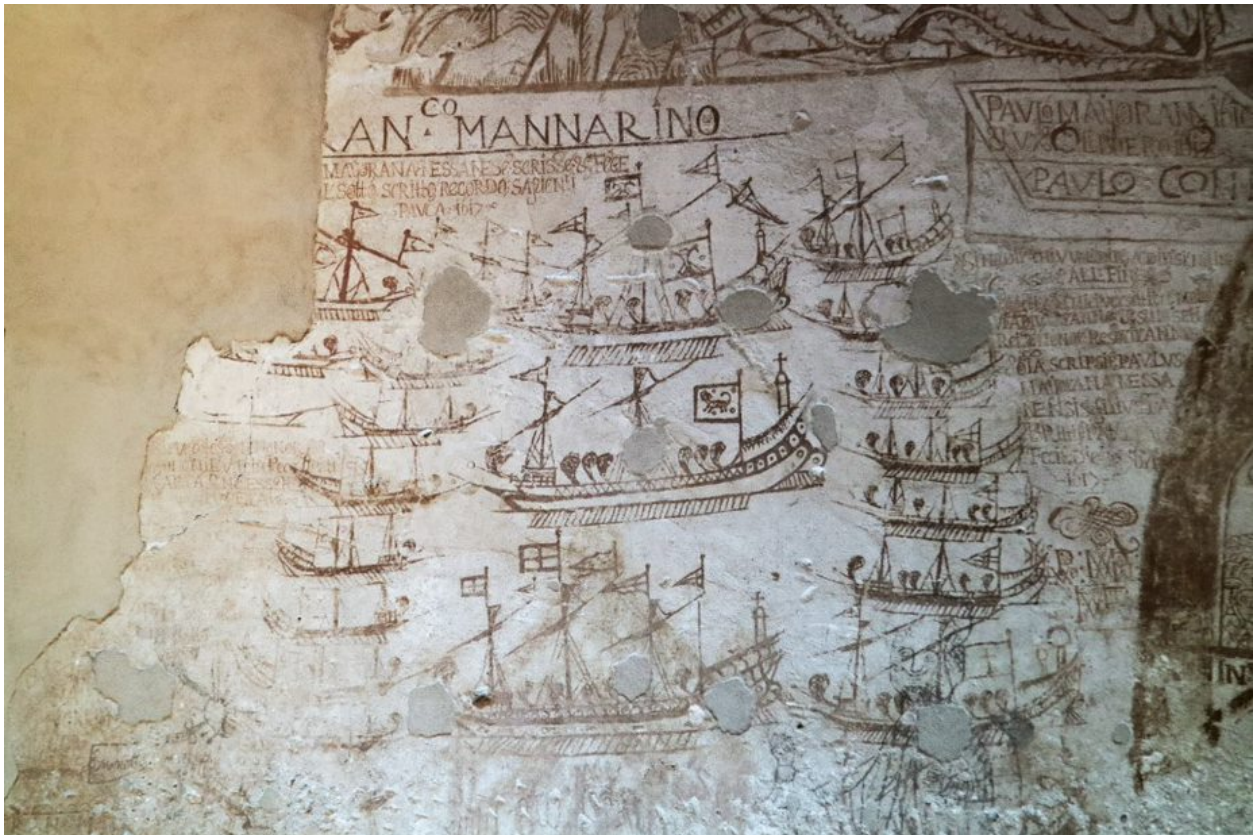

Figure 26. Francesco Mannarino's depiction of The Battle of Lepanto.

Figure 27. Cartouche with the names of Paolo Mayorana and Paolo Confaloni.

Figure 28. Gioan Francesco Camocio, *The Battle of Lepanto*, c. 1572. Print.

Figure 29. Paolo Veronese, *Allegory of The Battle of Lepanto,* c. 1572. Oil on canvas, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Figure 30. Flags of Mannarino's Battle of Lepanto.

Figure 31. Flags of Mannarino's Battle of Lepanto.

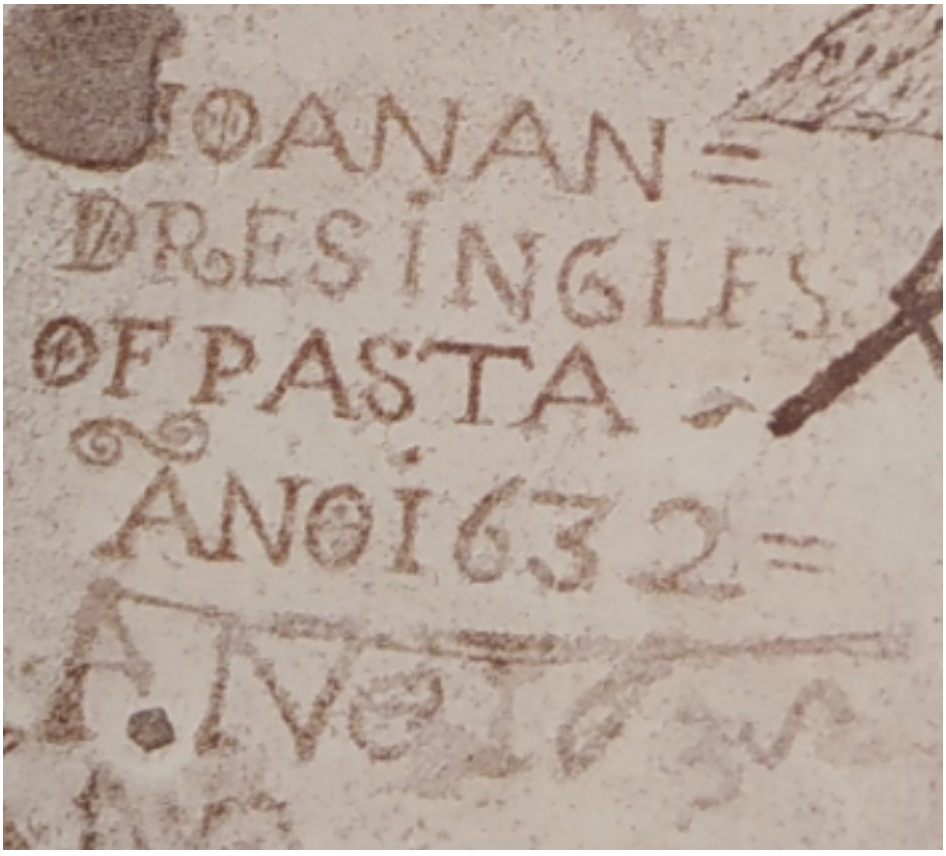

Figure 32. The signature of John Andrews of 'Pasta, Anno 1632.'

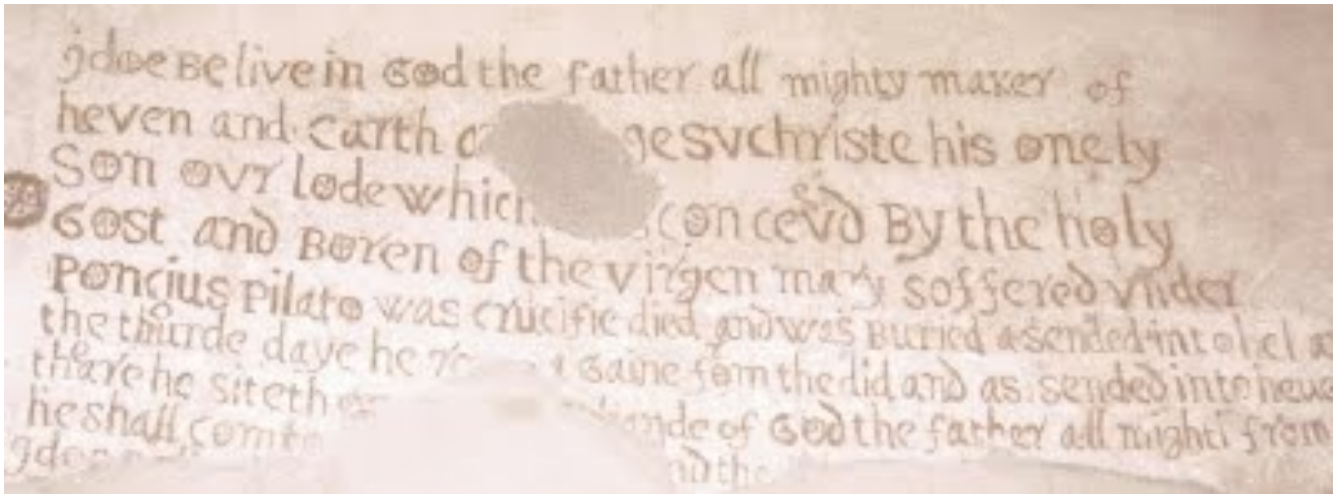

Figure 33. The Apostle's Creed as written by John Andrews at the Steri.

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