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The Florentine Onestà and the Control of Prostitution, 1403-1680

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This article examines the structure and operation of the Onestà (Office of Decency) from its inception in 1403 in Florence to its absorption by the city's chief criminal court in 1680. The Office was created ostensibly to control prostitution but ultimately became more interested in exploiting prostitutes to support the convent of the Convertite, established paradoxically as a refuge for repentant single prostitutes. The Office failed because of resistance to the process of registration, which conferred a particular negative public identity on women designated as prostitutes and, by the sixteenth century, on some of their powerful clients.

There is a magistracy of Florence, that they call the Officials of decency: theirs is the particular competence over the affairs of prostitutes, governing them in the entire city without disturbance....

Poggio Bracciolini, Chancellor of Florence (1453)¹

IN THE RENAISSANCE even the illiterate were familiar with the legend of Saint Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, who saved an impoverished nobleman from the necessity of prostituting his daughters by providing dowries for all three of them.² A woman's fate was indeed determined by the availability of a dowry, large or small. With a dowry two positive destinies opened up: marriage or enclosure in a convent.³ Although marriage did not always save poor women from the necessity of using their sexual attractiveness as an economic asset, it was a protective, if confining, insti-

¹Poggio Bracciolini, *Facezie*, Marcello Ciccutto, trans. (Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1983), 241. "CXIV. De Meretrice Conquerente De Tonsoris Malefici" Magistratus est Florentiae, quem Officiales honestatis vocant: horum praecipua cura est in iure meretricibus dicendo, curandoque ut in omni civitate absque molestia esse possint..." I thank Daniel Bornstein for this reference.

²Julius Kirshner, "Pursuing Honor While Avoiding Sin; The Monte Delle Doti of Florence," in Domenico Maffei, ed., *Quaderni Di Studi Senesi*, 41 (1978): 11-12.

³*Ibid.*, 10-11. The key to achievement of the two honorable states was, as Kirshner makes clear, control of sufficient financial resources to provide dowries for one's daughters. David Herlihy, "Some Psychological and Social Roots of Violence in the Tuscan Cities," *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities 1200-1500*, Lauro Martines, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 146, states that by the age of twenty almost 85 percent of Florentine girls appearing in the census of 1427 (taken for implementation of the *catasto*, or income tax or that year) were already married, while most others were safely enclosed in convents.

tution. The convent was often a less than perfect haven for a family's daughters but its walls provided some protection and containment. At issue was the successful control by men of female sexuality, represented by marriage and the convent, compared to the failure to impose restraints typified by prostitution. The Florentine preoccupation with saving undowered women from the *mala vita* tells us that the woman who had fallen into dishonor was perceived as socially dangerous by her contemporaries.⁴ Simultaneously, prostitution was held to be impossible to eradicate, admittedly necessary, and even desirable, but its practitioners too had to be contained in some way.

Between 1403 and 1680 the control of prostitution was primarily assigned to the office of the Onestà.⁵ The Office of Decency served as a surrogate of male control over prostitutes who, along with all other women, were treated as property by a male-dominated society. Registrants who had suffered physical abuse were provided legal redress; protection was

⁴Ibid., 13. For the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Kirshner cites the evidence of countless testamentary bequests of dowries to needy young women. It was also the case that the Captains of Or San Michele (founded in 1291) acquired a special reputation in fifteenth century Florence for assistance to the poor, which included providing dowries for unfortunate young girls. See Raimonda Giorgi, "Cultura della Carità e dell'Assistenza A Firenze nel Medioevo e nel Primo Rinascimento." *Storia della Solidarietà a Firenze* (Firenze: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1985), 28-9. Private support for the poor seems to have declined in Florence towards the end of the fifteenth century, as perceptions of the poor changed (not only in the Arno city, but all over Italy); thereafter the poor were a danger to society, especially uncontrolled women. See Flavio Baroncelli and Giovanni Assereto, *Sulla povertà* (Genova: Herodote, 1983). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries then, care for the well being of poor young women was entrusted to privately endowed and publicly directed hospitals, convents operated by the church assisted by the government (the *Convertite*, founded in the early fourteenth century to recover repentant prostitutes, and the *Malmaritate*, founded in 1579 to provide refuge for married prostitutes); private persons continued to give, but the character of assistance was now clearly public rather than private. See Gaetano Imbert, *La vita fiorentina nel Seicento, secondo memorie sincrone (1644-1670) con quattordici illustrazioni* (Firenze: Bemporad, 1906), 38. On the *Convertite* and the *Malmaritate* see Sherrill Cohen, "Convertite e Malmaritate: Donne irregolari e ordini religiosi nella Firenze rinascimentale," *Memoria, Rivista di storia delle donne* (Torino: Rosenberg and Sellier, 1982), 46-63, and Sherrill Cohen, "The Convertite and Malmaritate: Women's Institutions, Prostitution, and the Family in Counter-Reformation Florence" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1985). After 1621 the government itself became more directly involved with the decision to open the Pia Casa Dei Mendicanti, initially with the idea of enclosing all of the wandering poor, but later coming to focus attention on women and children. See Daniela Lombardi, *Povert  Maschile Povert  Femminile L'Ospedale Dei Mendicanti Nella Firenze Dei Medici* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988).

⁵From its inception in 1403, the Onest  was located on the ground floor of the church of San Cristofano, near the intersection of Via Calzaiuoli and Piazza Duomo (Richard Trexler, "La Prostitution Florentine au XVe Si cle: Patronages et Client les," *Annales ESC* 36 (1981): 989). By the sixteenth century the Onest  was located in the same building which housed the Butcher's Guild in a little street named Vicolo dell'Onest  which joins the piazza dei Tre Re with Via Calzaiuoli. G. Carocci, *Il Mercato Vecchio di Firenze* (Bologna: A. Forni, 1974), 44, 168, cited in Maria Serena Mazzi, "Il Mondo della Prostitutione nella Firenze Tardo Medievale," *Ricerche Storiche* XIV (1984): 343-44, n. 19.

given to those who were menaced by non-Florentine creditors; the office also regulated the business and private lives of prostitutes. But through the implementation of special rules for women who neither expressed their sexuality solely within marriage, nor suppressed it in a convent, as well as segregation in undesirable areas of the city and in bordellos, the very act of registration created a negative public identity known as *meretrici*, or merchants of sex without honor.⁶ By the sixteenth century the flowering of courtly society had created new opportunities for prostitutes to achieve financial independence as courtesans. But submission to the Onestà's jurisdiction and assumption of the public identity that it conferred severely limited the possibility of realizing the social and financial benefits which courtesanship offered. Compliance came very close to being a guarantee of poverty. Ultimately the Onestà's ineffectiveness was the result of resistance by prostitutes and their clients to the process of identification and its consequences in a society where public reputation defined the individual.⁷

This article will discuss the strategies of control and exploitation of both compliant prostitutes and those who remained unregistered. Their form of work was viewed paradoxically as immoral but also desirable, and taxable by the state for the public good. The Onestà was a flexible instrument of exploitation, bending to the exigencies of institutions designed to rehabilitate fallen women. By the sixteenth century the rest of Europe, outside of northern and central Italy, locked in the contest between Protestants and Catholics to seize the high moral ground, witnessed the erosion of the bases supporting tolerance. A shift in strategy to criminalization was the result.⁸ However, only in late seventeenth century

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) serves as the fullest statement and application of his ideas concerning the operation of power in the West since the Enlightenment. See also the Introduction of *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 3–29. Marginality is the result of the negative perception by society of the person or group identified, defined, and separated by this particular operation of power.

⁷See Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 10, where Burke describes Italian society as a "theatre society." In such a society the public face which one presents defines the individual in terms of honor or dishonor. Honor is maintained, even though a good reputation may be no more than a well-known facade, as long as it is not challenged in the public area. Registration with the Office of Decency constituted just such a public challenge to the reputation of women who complied with its regulations.

Florence was the policy of toleration and taxation replaced by attempted repression through criminalization.

Justifications for tolerance existed from the medieval period when prostitutes were argued to have had in Christian society a certain public utility as defined by St. Augustine and St. Thomas.⁹ Augustine argued that clandestine prostitution blocked grave effects on the ordinary life of the community because it provided a legitimate outlet for the libidinous desires of men, which otherwise would circulate within the community and pollute it.¹⁰ St. Thomas followed Augustine but also added from Aristotle a concern to avoid sodomitic sexual practices reportedly common among Spartan soldiers while in the field.¹¹ Prostitution was a vice but a lesser vice when compared to the pollution of honorable women through fornication, or the practice of sodomy among men.¹² Churchmen recognized that periods of economic need drove even some married women into occasional prostitution; since poverty could not be eliminated, prostitution would always exist.¹³ These were obviously rationalizations presented in defense of the well accepted practice of female prostitution; the real concern of theologians was to provide a theoretical basis, no matter how flimsy, to convince men to control their own sexuality. At this point the prostitute's form of work was viewed as distasteful but its practitio-

⁸For a survey of the situation in Europe from the fourteenth through the beginning of the sixteenth, see James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 436–548. Important studies also exist for southern France. See Jacques Rossiaud, *La prostituzione nel medioevo* (Bari: Laterza, 1986); and Leah Lydia Otis, "Prostitution and Repentance in Late Medieval Perpignan" *Women of the Medieval World*, ed. Julius Kirshner and Suzanne Wemple (London: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 137–60, and Leah Lydia Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society, The History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). For a survey of Italy see Romano Canosa and Isabella Colonnello, *Storia della Prostituzione in Italia dal quattrocento alla fine del settecento* (Roma: Sapere 2000, 1989). Prostitution in Venice has received attention from Elizabeth Pavan, "Police des mœurs, société et politique à Venise à la fin du Moyen Age," *Revue Historique* 536 (1980): 241–88. Diane Owen Hughes, "Distinguishing Signs: Ear-Rings, Jews, and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City," *Past and Present* no. 112 (1986): 3–59 presents interesting comparisons made between the conditions of Jews and prostitutes in Italy. Literature concerning prostitution in Florence is cited in the text. On the history of courtesans in sixteenth-century Italy, see Lynne Lawner, *Lives of the Courtesans* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987); Paul Larivaille, *La Vie Quotidienne des Courtisanes en Italie au temps de la Renaissance*, Rome et Venise, XVe et XVIe siècles (Paris: Hachette, 1975); Georgina Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975). The books cited on courtesans are anecdotal in approach rather than analytical.

⁹Canosa and Colonnello, *Storia della Prostituzione*, 175.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, n. 1.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 175.

¹²Cohen, *The Conventrite and the Malmaritate*, 5.

¹³See Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 463–64. Although Brundage does not state explicitly that prostitution was impossible to eradicate, since poverty was viewed as its cause by some, and poverty would always be with us, I think the meaning is there implicitly.

ners were not yet a marginalized group: they were sinners who could be saved.

Italians decided to set limits on prostitutes' behavior after attempts to expel them from society had failed in cities such as Bologna (1259), Venice (1266 and 1314), and Modena (1327).¹⁴ Identification was aimed at through the implementation of sumptuary laws for prostitutes.¹⁵ In Florence, after a series of changes initiated in 1287¹⁶ had failed in their design to keep prostitutes out of the city, identification and segregation began in 1325. A Statute of the Podestà of 1355 allowed prostitutes into the city only on Mondays and Saturdays.¹⁷ By 1384 Florence had joined the universal trend towards the establishment of sumptuary legislation for meretrici, forcing them to wear bells on their heads, gloves and high-heeled shoes.¹⁸ Thus, their status was becoming similar to that of marginal groups such as Jews and lepers, whose special dress and segregation from the community also marked them as dangerous.¹⁹

A prostitute's success could depend upon not being identified as a sexual entrepreneur. The business of prostitution involved more than the direct exchange of sex for money: images from Tuscan *novellieri* help us to understand that those clandestine prostitutes who hoped to make good livings sometimes identified and played to the sexual fantasies of wealthy men to exploit them more effectively.²⁰ *Novelle* are an especially valuable source, since they were often intended to reflect reality (sometimes cast in

¹⁴Ibid. In 1287 Florentines reversed the legalized status of prostitution by the cancellation of contracts between prostitutes and procurers or bordellos under penalty of 500 lire for those attempting to establish or enforce such documents. Recidivists were to suffer death on the wheel. Bordellos were to relocate at least one-half kilometer outside of the city walls. See Robert Davidsohn, *Storia Di Firenze* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1965), 7: 616-17.

¹⁵Giulio Rezasco, "Segno delle meretrici," *Giornale Liguistico* 17 (1980): 161-220.

¹⁶Mazzi, "Il Mondo della Prostituzione," 340, n. 6.

¹⁷Rezasco, "Segno delle meretrici," 164. The author mistakenly dates the enactment of this statute in 1350.

¹⁸Ibid., 165. The author notes that Florentines resorted to this type of legislation late in comparison to other cities in Italy.

¹⁹Owen Hughes, "Distinguishing Signs," 17-23. The marginalization of Jews through distinguishing dress made only slow progress in fourteenth-century Italy. It was under the influence of the preaching of the Observant Franciscans in the early fifteenth century that the use of signs and then segregation in space (in ghettos) became common in the peninsula. There is thus a coincidence in the change in treatment by civil governments of both Jews and prostitutes, which, while they are significant, still did not measure up to the expectation of the Observants.

²⁰Mazzi, "Il Mondo della Prostituzione," 337-39. Mazzi clearly outlines the structure of this world in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Prostitution in bordellos represents only the tip of the iceberg; much more significant was the secret practice, even though it cannot be quantified. In addition to what she calls "residential" prostitution (those women operating out of their homes), there also existed an itinerant variety focussed on fairs, baths, markets, the movements of seasonal laborers, soldiers and sailors, and groups which moved between taverns and hotels.

a humorous vein) to teach some lesson about life. The essential parts of two of the best known stories from Boccaccio's *Decameron*—"Andreuccio da Perugia," and "A Sicilian Woman Cunningly Conveys..."²¹—provide us with some remarkable images of prostitutes before the age of registration and the municipalization of bordellos in Italy.

Andreuccio is a young merchant on a visit to Naples to buy horses in the marketplace, where a beautiful prostitute ("a very beautiful young Sicilian woman, but accustomed to giving pleasure to any man for a small price")²² spots him flashing his money around in a way which reveals his inexperience. She plans to relieve him of his purse through the concoction of a story in which she will play a role designed to take advantage of his ignorance of her real identity. Her ruse plays upon family loyalty (she poses as an illegitimate sister) at the same time that she creates the illusion of her sexual availability. Through a fortunate coincidence, her female servant knows Andreuccio, so she is sent to lure him to her mistress's home in a disreputable part of town called the "Evil Hole" (*Malpertugio*). The elegantly dressed prostitute greets the young man in her bedroom, which is well furnished, and where there are expensive dresses hanging on the bed. The scene is designed to arouse Andreuccio's sexual desire at the same time that it creates the impression that this common prostitute is really a respectable, well-to-do young woman. When she succeeds in stealing the merchant's purse, he is prevented from retrieving it by the woman's male protector.

The second story involves the Sicilian woman, Iancofiore, and the Florentine merchant, Niccolò. The ignorance and inexperience of a young foreign merchant is exploited by a prostitute posing as a sexually available but respectable local woman ("in Palermo in Sicily, where similarly there were, and still are, many women with beautiful bodies but who are enemies of decency, who, for those who do not know them might be and are held to be great and very decent women");²³ clothes play an important part in the deception. This time, though, Iancofiore has sex with Niccolò (in a bathhouse and in her well appointed bedroom); as a necessary element in her plan to relieve him of a large sum of money, she has had to create the illusion of love. She is successful at first, but Niccolò, like Andreuccio, ultimately has some measure of revenge in this battle of wits, through leaving with more money than he originally lost.

²¹Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Firenze: Presso L'Accademia della Crusca, 1976), a cura di Vittore Branca: "Seconda giornata, novella 5," "Ottava giornata, novella 10," "Nona giornata, novella 5," respectively.

²²*Ibid.*, 98. "Seconda giornata, novella 5," "una giovane ciciliana bellissima, ma disposta per piccol pregio a compiacere a qualunque uomo."

²³*Ibid.*, 574. "Ottava giornata, novella 10." "...in Palermo in Sicilia, dove similmente erano, e ancor sono, assai femine del corpo bellissime ma nemiche dell'Onestà, le quali, da chi non le conosce, sarebbono e son tenute grandi e onestissime donne."

What comes across in these stories is the necessity that these women escape identification as prostitutes in order to succeed in their various ventures. The creation of illusion—by lying, the use of fine clothes, furnishings and servants—was vital. For the occasional or the professional sexual entrepreneur, to be unmasked was to increase the difficulty of exploiting ignorant but wealthy foreigners who fantasized about dishonoring their host city through the defilement of decent women. Lest it be suggested that this is only literature, Vecellio, the sixteenth-century Venetian author of *Habiti antichi e moderni di tutto il mondo* (1590), writes concerning similar tactics used by courtesans of the sixteenth century:

Courtesans who wish to get ahead in the world by feigning respectability go around dressed as widows or married women....When a foreigner expresses the desire to enjoy the favors of a highborn lady, a procuress dolls up some common prostitute, then leads her and him to a secret meeting place with so much ceremony that he is taken in and believes she's a noblewoman....²⁴

Compared to the extreme of expulsion, labeling techniques represented a liberalization in the treatment of prostitutes, but the intent was to expose their immorality against the background of supposedly decent women.²⁵ Rossiaud, Brundage, and Otis have established that, by the beginning of the fifteenth century, much of Western Europe witnessed the municipalization of prostitution as secular authorities intervened more energetically in the business.²⁶

²⁴Lawner, *Lives of the Courtesans*, 17, 19

²⁵Sumptuary legislation continued to be enforced even after the period of municipalization in Florence, as will be demonstrated below. The records of the city's chief criminal magistracy, the Otto di Guardia e Balìa, and of the Onestà contain many instances in which prostitutes were fined for violation of the limitations on their display of finery over the entire period covered by this study. Even some registered prostitutes had jewelry and fine clothes to wear, and they wished to wear them to demonstrate their success, to attract clients, and to show their self-esteem. A typical example is that of Vicenzia Sereni from Rome, then a prostitute in Florence, who was denounced for living outside of the deputed streets, and for wearing clothes made with gold and silver thread, and for wearing jewels and pearl necklaces (ASF, *Acquisti e Doni*, 291, "Onestà," "Partiti, 1607-1619," unpaginated, Vincenzia Sereni, romana, case of 1607) Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASF).

²⁶Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*, 77. While there is agreement about what happened, there is no consensus on the question of why this phenomenon occurred. Rossiaud suggests that publicly controlled brothels appeared as the result of a new, more open attitude towards sexuality; they served primarily to integrate young men into the community. Brundage echoes Otis in suggesting that municipalization was designed to improve working and living conditions so as to attract women into the profession after the Black Death had reduced their number, although neither offers proof for a decline in the relative numbers of prostitutes. Otis also argues that by the interventionist policy, Languedocian authorities hoped to guarantee more effectively the maintenance of public order by making sure that the business of prostitution was conducted discreetly, without inconvenience or scandal to the community. All acknowledge the concerns expressed in the preambles of municipal legislation, which instituted the new regulations: these were usually faint echoes of St. Augustine and St. Thomas, but the emphasis varied from place to place. Some accented the need to protect decent women from seduction and sexual assault; others cited the need to control sodomy. In Florence, no emphasis is discernible in the official language.

In Florence the Onestà was created on April 30, 1403 by the major executive bodies of the Florentine government—the Priors, the Standard-bearer of Justice, the Twelve Good Men, the representatives of the *gonfalone* (heads of the neighborhood militia)—and their colleges gathered together for the good of the citizenry, “to avoid vice and imitate virtue.”²⁷ Unfortunately, the vague justificatory rhetoric of this statute does not tell us precisely which vice or vices were being avoided. By way of further example, another provision dating from 1415, renewing the authority of the Onestà, states only that a greater vice was to be avoided through the practice of a lesser one.²⁸ These formulations are typical of such legislation in Italy;²⁹ however, neither of the usually cited religious justifications explains the “policy” of municipalization. While prostitutes could be tolerated, this was not to say that their activities ought to be directed by the state.

Florentine policies were not unique but exemplified a trend present in much of Europe. A unitary explanation would be that suggested by Otis: since prostitution could not be eliminated, it made more sense to attempt to confine it within the city and to turn it to some good in fiscal service to the community, if that were possible.³⁰ But the scheme of government management was controversial since it put the community in a position to profit from female immorality; this policy might be made palatable if prostitutes’ dwellings could be contained out of the sight of “decent”

²⁷ASF, *Ufficiali dell’Onestà* 1, “Rubriche e Statuti, 1403-1597,” fol. 3r: “obviare vitia et imitare virtutes.” (Until 1749 the Florentine year began on March 25. All dates to follow will be given according to the modern style.)

²⁸Ibid., fol. 8r: “inhonesta magis per minus remove cupientes.” Preamble of the statute renewing the authority of the magistracy dated December 4, 1415.

²⁹Richard Trexler, “La Prostitution Florentine,” 983-1015, and Michael J. Roche “Il Controllo Dell’Omossessualità a Firenze nel XV Secolo: Gli Ufficiali di Notte,” *Quaderni Storici* 66/a.XXII (1987): 701-23. Both Trexler and Roche argue, on different evidenciary bases however, that the reason for the founding of the Office of Decency is not in a desire to control prostitution. Rather, Florentine authorities were much more concerned with the repression of male homosexuality; prostitutes were to have served as instruments to lead men back to natural sexual practices. This argument is contested by Serena Mazzi and by Leah Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*.

³⁰Canosa and Colonnello, *Storia della Prostitutione*, 21, 225. Here it is stated that taxation of regulated prostitution was a common feature in Italian cities, realized through public organs, such as the Uffici delle Bollette in Bologna, or indirectly by farming or lease arrangements. The “gabella delle meretrici” instituted in Naples in 1401 was another example of the former. PaVia’s bordello was given in lease to a certain Anastasia de Venetis for 200 gold fiorini in 1398. Also, Paul Larivalle, *La Vie Quotidienne des Courtisanes en Italie, 174-75*, gives primary position to financial motives for the continued toleration of prostitution in sixteenth-century Rome. Leo X taxed prostitutes in 1517 for the repair of an important street. In 1549, Paul III levied a similar tax for the repair of a bridge across the Tiber. Venice also imposed taxes on its prostitutes in 1413 and again in 1514. Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*, 58, 195, notes that funds raised from PaVia’s bordello in 1399 were used to support the convent for repentant prostitutes; in Pezenas in southern France, revenues earned from its bordello were used to buy bread which was distributed as alms to the poor.

people in poor neighborhoods.³¹ Moralistic preambles to legislation thus served as thin justifications for actions of dubious ethical legitimacy.

There is good evidence that Florentines did not care to witness prostitutes' solicitations in the streets, nor live next door to them.³² For example, "rubric CLXI" of the Statutes of the Podestà of 1355 was implemented:

To extirpate the evils and sins which might enter the city of Florence stemming from the indecency of whoring women who circulate continuously through the city, for which reason in the city are committed shameful acts, behavior and many sins for which, God is angered and the honor of the city is mocked.³³

Individuals also demonstrated their displeasure in a less formal fashion. In a case before the Giudici degli Appelli in 1398, a certain Angela, wife of Nofri di Francesco, was approached by her neighbor, Bartolo Gadini, in the name of many of her neighbors, with an offer to supply her with a basket of bread per week if she would abandon her prostitute's career and live decently. She replied that they must give her two florins per week instead since she earned more through prostitution than what they had offered her.³⁴ The constant traffic to the home of a prostitute gave great scandal to the woman's neighbors. The reputation of the entire neighborhood was at stake. By 1403 many Florentines were no doubt at least initially pleased to see government create an agency purportedly designed to ensure that community standards of behavior were not publicly flouted. But concern with public morality was only one part of the equation of control and fiscal exploitation which explains the Onestà's creation.

The evidence which suggests that the Florentine Onestà might have been expected to generate revenue through the municipalization of prostitution is circumstantial but compelling when set in the context of changes in political (which were administrative and fiscal) and social life

³¹Canosa and Colonnello, *Storia della Prostituzione*, 19–22. In 1359 and again in 1456, prostitutes in Perugia were ordered to live in the Malacucina area because of complaints from citizens.

³²*Ibid.*, 19–22. The authors cite as the reason for the appearance of publicly owned bordellos in PaVia, Perugia (1359), and Milan earlier, the offense given to neighbors and citizens who witnessed the transactions of prostitutes with their clients.

³³ASF, *Statuto del Podestà*, volgare-1355-epoca repubblicana-Lib. III, "rubrica CLXI," cited in Isacco Galligo, *Circa ad Alcuni Antichi e Singolari Documenti Inediti Riguardanti la Prostituzione tratti dall'Archivio Centrale di Stato di Firenze* (Milano: 1869), 1–6. "A stirpare li mali et li peccati che potrebbero advenire nella citade di Firenze dalla disonestà delle femine meretricanti che vano continuo per la citade predetta, per la quale cosa in essa citade isvergonati atti et costumi et molti peccati si comettono per li quali s'offende Idio et honore si scema alla detta citade...."

³⁴Gene Brucker, *The Society of Renaissance Florence: A Documentary Study* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 191–201.

(the increasing costs of marriage among the patrician class, a problem addressed by the creation of the Dowry Fund in 1425)³⁵ over the long term.

Florence went to war frequently during the fourteenth century, and the post-Black Death period witnessed an intensification of warfare rather than its diminution. Between 1375 and 1432 these costly undertakings led to Florentine control of most of Tuscany.³⁶ Florence's subsequent fiscal problems were of crisis proportions and solutions were not easy to come by. Because of the policies designed to attract immigrants, the taxbase in the countryside declined.³⁷ The gabelles increased by 1402, under the direction of a special *balia* (excise taxes) created in 1400, to the highest levels of the fourteenth century, and stayed that way for the first half of the fifteenth century. This commission listed twenty-five pages of taxable items, yet revenues still only reached the levels of the 1350s and 1360s.³⁸ Decisions concerning taxation and war were made by the Dieci di Balia during the period 1384–1406; total expenditures for the years 1390–1402 reached the astronomical figure of five million florins.³⁹ Interest payments on forced loans reached 150,000 florins per year by 1406.⁴⁰ While no other issue drew more attention during this period of time, Florentines felt that all alternatives, apart from levies of more forced loans, had been exhausted.⁴¹

As one solution, the government may have been moved to experiment with the fiscal potential of controlling and "taxing" behavior. Already at

³⁵Kirshner, "Pursuing Honor While Avoiding Sin," and Julius Kirshner and Anthony Molho, "The Dowry Fund and the Marriage Market in Early Quattrocento Florence," *Journal of Modern History* 50 (1978): 403–38.

³⁶Charles M. De La Roncière, "Indirect Taxes of 'Gabelles' at Florence in the Fourteenth Century: The Evolution of Tariffs and Problems of Collection," *Florentine Studies, Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein (London: Faber, 1968), 140–92. Roncière notes the growth all over Europe in the fourteenth century of new fiscal institutions: "New demands created the need for new resources" (140). He goes on to analyze the growth and acceptance of indirect taxes on items of consumption such as foodstuffs and wine. Initially meeting great opposition from workers and members of Florence's minor guilds, they came to be accepted as permanent by 1378, when in any case, concern over indirect taxation receded into the background as the size of the public debt and the burden of forced loans loomed as a larger problem.

³⁷Anthony Molho, *Florentine Public Finances in the Early Renaissance 1400–1433* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 27. Legislative decrees encouraged workers from other parts of Italy to settle in the area around the city. These immigrants were offered tax exemptions for from ten to twenty years, or, if they had fled from territory which had come under Florentine control to avoid imprisonment for non-payment of taxes, they were offered amnesty for up to ten years. More generally, Molho notes the tendency to exploit the newly conquered territories through the imposition of heavy taxation during moments of crisis

³⁸*Ibid.*, 49.

³⁹Anthony Molho, "The Florentine Oligarchy and the Balie of the Late Trecento," *Speculum* 43 (1968): 30, 39. For the *balie* more generally, see Molho, *Florentine Public Finances*, 23–51; and Guidobaldo Guidi, *Il Governo della Città-Repubblicana di Firenze del Primo Quattrocento* (Firenze: Olschki, 1981), 1:93–95, on their authority and place in government.

⁴⁰Molho, "The Florentine Oligarchy," 39.

the end of the thirteenth century some unacceptable behavior had been criminalized: sumptuary controls were placed on female dress; prostitution and sodomy were punished; prohibitions against the molestation of clerics were enacted; gambling, blasphemy, and corrupting officials in public office were likewise criminalized. But in the fourteenth century enforcement had been sporadic and ineffective, the penalties often afflictive. In the first decades of the fifteenth century, new institutions of government assumed enforcement in these areas.⁴² In addition to the Onestà with its jurisdiction over prostitution, were established the Conservatori dell'Onestà dei Monasteri (1421);⁴³ the Otto di Guardia, which, though not new, saw its jurisdiction widened in 1420-21;⁴⁴ the Conservatori di Leggi (1429)⁴⁵ to punish official corruption, gaming, violations of sumptuary legislation, blasphemy, crimes occurring at night;⁴⁶ and the Ufficiali di Notte (1432).⁴⁷ Common to each of these magistracies were the imposition of fines as the common form of punishment, and the use of summary procedure. This gave them great advantages over the regular criminal courts since, apart from the Ufficiali di Notte, they could initiate investigations ex officio (on their own authority); the procedural protections afforded to suspects under the traditional system of justice were greatly reduced. Laws already on the books had not been adequately enforced because judges could not bring themselves to subject real people to harsh afflictive

⁴¹Ibid., 47. The Onestà may have been created by one of the special *balia* which made fiscal decisions in 1403, but we will never know with certainty, since the pertinent volumes of the *Balie* no longer exist. At any rate, the magistracy's enabling statute is not found in the registers of the provisions as would normally be expected with offices created by the *Signoria* and its legislative bodies; neither is there any discussion leading up to the proposal to create such an office in the *Consulte e Pratiche*, nor in the ordinary or extraordinary deliberations of the *Signori e Collegi*. Instead, the only copy of the founding statute, authorized however by the *Signoria* and the legislature, is located in the records which pertain only to the Office of Decency. The omission from all other pertinent records may be taken to strengthen the case for the creation of the magistracy by special commission, which in turn, supports that part of our argument which relates to fiscal motivations.

⁴²Andrea Zorzi, "Aspetti e problemi dell'amministrazione della giustizia penale nella Repubblica fiorentina," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 533 (1987): Disp. III, 446-53.

⁴³Rocke, "Il Controllo Dell'Omosessualità," 719, n. 5. There is no specific study on the operation of this office, which becomes joined to that of the *Ufficiali di Notte* in 1433.

⁴⁴Giovanni Antonelli, "La magistratura degli Otto di Guardia a Firenze," *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 1954, 1:5-39; Zorzi, "Aspetti e problemi," 452.

⁴⁵Giuseppe Pansini, "I Conservatori Di Legge e la Difesa Dei Poveri Nelle Cause Civili Durante Il Principato Mediceo," *Studi di storia medievale e moderna per Ernesto Sestan* (Firenze: Leo Olschki, 1980), II, 529-570; Zorzi, "Aspetti e problemi," 452.

⁴⁶Zorzi, "Aspetti e problemi," 452-53.

⁴⁷Rocke, "Il Controllo dell'Omosessualità," 705, for the moderate system of fines which became characteristic of this magistracy, and which largely replaced the afflictive penalties of the fourteenth century.

penalties.⁴⁸ Changes, then, seem to have been intended to produce control and revenues through the establishment of a structure of pecuniary penalties which the conscience of a judge would allow him to enact quickly. Close examination of the structure and operation of the *Onestà* demonstrates how it was designed to serve these ends.

The 1403 law, and others which came thereafter, established the structure of the Office of Decency. As was often the case with Florentine magistracies, the *Onestà* was composed of a rotating board of citizens, assisted in their duties by a subordinate group of minor functionaries. The members of the rotating board were chosen by extraction from a purse containing the names of eligible citizens. Eight in total, two from each of the city's four quarters, they could not be Ghibellines (supporters of the imperial party), and could not refuse to serve without first having received twenty-eight votes supportive of refusal in these legislative assemblies.⁴⁹ Four at a time were chosen; terms of service were staggered to ensure the presence at all times of experienced people.⁵⁰ These men served six-month terms and were not able to succeed themselves in office or have their terms extended without legislative approval (of the new Grand Council by 1495).⁵¹ No salaries were paid to these magistrates; they received emoluments only, that is, percentages of fines and fees collected from registrants and violators of the office's regulations.⁵² This scheme of payment probably served to remind the magistrates of the public service element of the office's function. When the officials entered their twice-weekly meetings on Tuesday and Friday mornings, their duties, under the direction of one of their number elected as *proposto*, were administrative (to issue the various licenses and permissions granted to meretrici on a fee basis), and judicial (to investigate the behavior of suspect women, and to adjudicate violations of the *Onestà*'s regulations).

At the next level of officials were a notary, the treasurer and his assistant (*camarlengo*), and a secretary; all authorized in 1404.⁵³ Each of these men was elected to his post for the two-month term of the magistracy's sit-

⁴⁸ Brucker, *Society of Renaissance Florence*, 201. In the *Consulte e Pratiche* of 1415, the *Signoria* is urged, in the case of sodomy laws: "There exist laws [against sodomy], although they are flawed in their implementation. The *Signoria* should provide for their execution."

⁴⁹ ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* 1, "Rubriche e Statuti, 1403-1597," fol. 3r-v; Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze (hereafter BNF), MS. Miscellanea, II, II, 212, "Sommario degli statuti del magistrato dell'Honestà et riforma fatta alli 30 Aprile 1403," fol. 10r.

⁵⁰ ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* 1, "Rubriche e Statuti 1403-1597," 4 dicembre 1415, fol. 8v. It is not clear that this is a new consideration; yet it is not found in the statutes of 1403.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 30 aprile 1403, fol. 7r, and 4 febbraio 1495, fol. 16v.

⁵² Arnaldo D'Addario, "Burocrazia, economia e finanze dello Stato Fiorentino alla metà del Cinquecento," *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 439, Anno CXXI, 1963, 414-15. Indeed, no salary figures are given in the statutes.

⁵³ ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* 1, "Rubriche e Statuti, 1403-1597," 30 aprile 1403, fol. 3r.

ting; they must also have been good Guelfs as the only major qualification for office, and only the notary could succeed himself in consecutive terms (to give added continuity to operations). The notary's duties are not specified at this date, but they certainly included recording the transactions of the magistracy. The secretary functioned as a kind of executive officer, ensuring that the records of the Onestà's business were kept and filed in the *cancelleria*. He also had a prominent role in the issuance of the permissions and safe conducts to prostitutes, as well as providing assistance to the eight magistrates during judicial proceedings. The treasurer received and administered the funds disbursed to the Onestà by the Signoria; he kept a record of expenditures, which would be submitted to the Standard-bearer of Justice (the chief executive officer of the Signoria) and his colleagues, which was then approved by a vote. He was assisted in the performance of these tasks by his aide. These functionaries were paid through a combination of emoluments and base salaries. The secretary received emoluments only, the notary received a base salary of three scudi a month, and the treasurer was paid a sum not specified in the fifteenth century records, but recorded as one and one-half scudi per month in the sixteenth century.⁵⁴

At the lowest level were six messengers who were chosen to perform various duties such as making arrests, carrying communications, and notifying suspects to appear before the tribunal.⁵⁵ Once again, no salaries are specified, but the two messengers who remained during the first half of the sixteenth century were paid one and one-half scudi a month.⁵⁶ Also by the sixteenth century a minor functionary (*tavolaccino*) had been added at a salary of only two lire per month,⁵⁷ along with an assessor to pursue the magistracy's interests in civil cases which involved the estates of deceased prostitutes. In contrast to the low levels of pay and light supervision, the duties of the magistrates and their functionaries were onerous.

Segregation was the Onestà's first responsibility, to be accomplished by identification and separation of prostitutes from the general population. One bordello was established within Florence, to be paid for with a disbursement from the Signoria in the amount necessary, which would serve the city along with two others (probably those outside of the city walls). Women denounced as prostitutes were led there, and then desig-

⁵⁴Ibid., fols. 3r-v, 4r-v, 5v, 74, and BNF, MS Miscellanea II, II, 212, fol. 11v. D'Addario, "Burocrazia," 414-15. This undoubtedly represents a reduction from the fifteenth century, since Cosimo I routinely cut back salaries and personnel in the bureaucracy which he inherited from the republic. See Elena Fasano Guarini, "Potere Centrale e Comunità Soggette nel Granducato di Cosimo I," *Rivista Storica Italiana* 89 (1977): 490-538.

⁵⁵ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* 1, "Rubriche e Statuti, 1403-1597, 30 aprile 1403, fol. 7r.

⁵⁶D'Addario, "Burocrazia," 414-15.

⁵⁷Ibid.

nated as meretrici by two-thirds vote of the magistrates to live under the supervision of a *matrona* (a woman of good repute), with or without the presence of procurers and procuresses who had also to be licensed by the magistrates.⁵⁸ Prostitutes who wished to register voluntarily were to be granted safe conduct passes to the bordello. The Office of Decency enforced collection of fees for sexual services but did not set these prices.

Further control over the movements of registered prostitutes was accomplished through the issuance of licenses that also generated revenues to defray expenses through fees paid to the magistracy. These licenses were to be carried by prostitutes when they went outside of the public bordello. No other police agent was to interfere with or molest prostitutes who carried of these licenses. Meretrici were to continue to wear some special sign chosen by the magistrates when outside the bordello.⁵⁹

To facilitate punishment of prostitutes, procurers, and procuresses, the magistrates were granted the power of *arbitrio*, the ability to punish heavily or mildly, as the circumstances of a violation required, and to establish penalties in cases not already covered by existing statutes.⁶⁰ The bordello may have been viewed in a positive light by Florentines. Antonio Beccadelli's *L'ermafrodito*, dedicated in 1425 to Cosimo de' Medici, praises the Florentine establishment and its women:

There is in the middle of the city where you will go to a pleasant place. And so that you can find it I will give you directions. Where there is the grand edifice of Santa Reparata. That splendid temple of God which holds the lamb, Hold true, one block more, on the right, in a bit. Stop, tired book; and ask of the Old Market. The center is near, where is a pleasant bordello... You will meet the sweet Elena, the blond Matilde.... You will see Gianetta followed by her little dog.... Then will come Clodia with her naked painted breasts, Clodia a girl whose caresses are priceless....⁶¹

The bordello was seen as a source of local pride and pleasure, or at least, Beccadelli, a resident of Milan and thus a foreigner in need of female

⁵⁸ASF, Ufficiali dell'Onestà 3, "Rubriche e Statuti, 1403-1597," fols 3r-4v.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., 12 marzo 1404, fol. 7v.

⁶¹Panormita (Antonio Beccadelli), *L'ermafrodito*, ed. Jole Tognelli, (Napoli, 1969), 195: "C'è in mezzo alla città d'ove sei diretto un luogo piacevole. / E perche ti lo possa identificare ti darò / l'indicazione / Dov'è l'alta dimora di Santa Reparta/Dello splendido tempio del Dio che reca l'agnello, / Tiene, una volta giunto, la destra, e dopo poco / Fermati, stanco libro; e domanda del Mercato Vecchio. / La metà è prossima, qui c'è un allegro lupanare... / Ti verrà incontro la dolce Elena, la bionda Matilde... / Ti vedrà Giannetta seguita dalla sua cagnolina.... / Poi verrà Clodia dalle mammelle nude dipinte, / Clodia fanciulla impagabile per le sue carezze...."

sexual companionship, calculated that it was. If the bordello was so viewed by some Florentines this may have been because many registered prostitutes were of foreign origin in this period. Richard Trexler reveals that in 1436 a total of seventy-six prostitutes had registered with the Onestà, and that the largest group of women (twenty-six, comprising 36.6 percent of the total) came from the Low Countries. A second group (sixteen, amounting to 22.5 percent) were of German origin, while another thirteen (18.3 percent) arrived in the Arno city from northern Italy. Only one was identified as being Florentine in origin.⁶² The sexual favors of these women could be enjoyed without fear that the honor of Florentine women and of the city would be diminished.

The period 1415-1463 was a time of transition when an expanded policy of containment in publicly supported brothels was abandoned. In 1415 the Onestà was to have received a disbursement of 1000 florins to build two new brothels,⁶³ one in the neighborhood of Santo Spirito, and the other in Santa Croce, in poorer areas of these quarters of the city. Yet, these were never built.⁶⁴ At the same time the police power and judicial authority of the Onestà were expanded so that it could issue ordinances and sentences.⁶⁵ The death penalty was added to its arsenal on March 7, 1416; by 1454, segregation and division were to be accomplished by banning prostitutes from areas near churches and those places where they could easily be seen by persons entering the city.⁶⁶ These same areas had been prohibited in 1325 and again in 1355. To protect neighborhoods from the scandalous activity, prostitutes were not allowed to use their homes to receive clients; thus they could not shape their surroundings to disguise their work. These modifications were in fact a return to the old strategy of control which had been abandoned in 1403.⁶⁷ Those women found in violation of the ordinances could be fined from 50 to 200 lire, whipped through the streets (though this rarely occurred), and then expelled from their homes. This greatly increased burden of surveillance required the trans-

⁶²Trexler, "La Prostitution Florentine," 985-88.

⁶³ASF, 1, "Rubriche e Statuti, 1403-1597," 4 dicembre 1415, fol. 8v.

⁶⁴Trexler, "La Prostitution Florentine," 1008, n. 13. It is impossible to say exactly why Florence gave up on this policy, since there remains no documentation which explains the decision. Perhaps the first bordello built at public expense did not produce revenues which might have justified the heavy outlays in cash needed to construct and maintain new ones. By 1566 the old bordello in the Mercato Vecchio had been leased to a consortium of three individuals from the city's best families (Chiarissimo dei Medici, Alessandro della Tosa and Albiera, widow of Noferi Strozzi). They paid to the Office of Decency 120 lire and 10 soldi per year, which was collected from the women who lived there, who were poor (*meschine*). ASF, *Acquisti e Doni*, 291, "Onestà Varietà," 1560, unpaginated and "Onestà, 1619-24" luglio 1566, unpaginated.

⁶⁵ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* 1, "Rubriche e Statuti, 1403-1597," 4 dicembre 1415, fol. 9v.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 7 marzo 1416, fol. 9r.

⁶⁷Galligo, *Circa ad Alcuri Antichi e Singolari Documenti*, 1-6.

formation of the magistracy into a tribunal with *balia* (special powers of lawmaking and enforcement).

Changes also occurred in this transitional period which were designed to enhance the *Onestà's* ability to produce revenue. In 1425 the magistrates were conceded the important power to arrest in their homes at night those who owed fines and fees. Access to prostitutes by the Office of Decency's competitors was limited; the court was forbidden to issue permissions, take security payments or extend safe conducts to known procurers; by October of 1460 prostitutes were invited to enter the brothels in the old market area in the center of the city and enjoy immunity from their non-Florentine creditors, who could not seek their prosecution before the merchant's court. Certain sumptuary restrictions were lifted as well: registered prostitutes no longer had to wear the hood with bells which had distinguished them since the fourteenth century.⁶⁸ These last two measures were designed to increase the attractiveness of registration.

But if some concessions were granted, prostitutes registered or not were confronted with harsh new penalties for the commission of certain violations. In 1463 an iron collar (*gogna*) was set up outside of the *Onestà* to punish those prostitutes who: blasphemed God or the Virgin, did not honor contracts, became involved in thefts or frauds, or lent their bodies to be used for sexual acts against nature, that is, to sodomy ("*Quecunque meretrix que turpissimo modo, contra naturam pretiterit corpus suum*").⁶⁹ Apparently, the authorities took new cognizance of certain kinds of immoral behavior believed characteristic of prostitutes and responded with a new (for the Office of Decency) form of public humiliation as a corrective measure. A new level was reached in the definition of a negative reputation for prostitutes.

Between 1463 and 1502 no changes of any significance occurred. Prostitutes were banned from the area of the Palazzo della Signoria, and from the area of the church of San Bernabà in 1477. A provision of 1498 banned *meretrici* from the zone around the church of San Romeo.⁷⁰ These few proclamations, limited in scope, stand in stark contrast to the flurry of legislation (which signaled an interest in this agency) characteristic of the first half of the century.

From 1415 on, the strategy of containment in brothels was either judged a failure, or allowed to fail. When the decision was made to build no other *postribuli*, return to attempting to control the movements of prostitutes in Florence would have required that the staff of the Office of Decency be greatly expanded. No such expansion occurred. Instead the

⁶⁸ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* 1, "Rubriche e Statuti, 1403-1597," 8 giugno 1425, fol. 9-9v, 10r; 5 ottobre 1460, fol. 13v.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, fols. 14r-v.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, fols. 19v, 22r-v.

construction of the *gogna* (pillory) in 1463 to strike terror into the hearts of prostitutes, indicates some frustration of the achievement of control, while costs were kept down through stabilization of the numbers of underpaid and poorly supervised personnel (the magistrates only met twice a week). In fact, a decided lack of interest on the part of government in the second half of the fifteenth century made it impossible for the Office to have any real chance at effectively controlling prostitution.⁷¹

The Onestà's effectiveness after 1463 allowed unsupervised prostitution to reestablish itself in the city. In his *History of Florence*, Giovanni Cambi claims that the city was invaded by prostitutes at the beginning of the sixteenth century, many of whom lived wherever they wished. Drawing upon a census of 1551 taken by order of Cosimo I (1537-1574), Pietro Battara believes that immigrants supplied the majority of Florentine prostitutes in the middle of the sixteenth century, but most of these were now Tuscans or northern Italians.⁷² Of the 5,594 immigrants identified in the census, only 4.6 percent were non-Italians; most Italian immigrants came from the Medici dominions; by far, the majority of non-Tuscans came from northern Italy. Although Battara cites Umberto Dorini's estimate of 200 as the total number of prostitutes working in the city, he is able to document a list of only seventy-nine names (the author believed that the actual number, although unknowable, exceeded even Dorini's estimate). Many of these women lived wherever they wished. But, Battara himself seems to have had as much trouble with identification as any sixteenth-century Florentine official, since he proffers the assumption that most of the immigrant female heads of households listed in the census were, in fact, prostitutes because no occupation was listed for them.

Perception or fact, whatever the case may have been, the Onestà was not dramatically reformed to cope with a new "invasion." Instead, on October 28, 1502, when the Ufficiali di Notte was suppressed, the magistracy received nominal jurisdiction to punish sodomy (but it was the Conservatori di Legge and the Otto di Guardia which actually punished this offense). It was nine years later that the magistrates took new action to control prostitution through new sumptuary legislation. A provision of April 8, 1511, forbade street walkers (*meretrici cantoniere*) to leave home without wearing a veil of red, green, or yellow, under penalty of a fine of ten fiorini; this law was renewed in 1527, and again in 1558. Less than a month later the Onestà, the Otto, and the Conservatori were required to quickly notify any woman accused ex officio or privately, or find her innocent within fifteen days. No doubt the magistrates were dilatory in the

⁷¹ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà*, "Libro di Condarne, 1441-1523," in this period of time only about twenty-one convictions per year were registered, not enough to indicate the presence of strict enforcement.

⁷²Pietro Battara, *La Popolazione di Firenze alla Metà del' 500* (Firenze: Olschki, 1935), 17-18, 41-45.

pursuit of these investigations while the reputations of the accused were stained.

Perhaps corruption in the administration of the office was the reason for delayed notification. On October 31, 1544, Cosimo I set the Conservatori di Legge as watchdog over the Office of Decency to address certain "disorders and inconveniences" which had occurred due to the "avarice of the officials."⁷³ Excessively high fines and fees were being collected by the magistracy's functionaries from suspected or actual prostitutes, before charges had been filed or court processes completed. The Secretaries also colluded through cancellation of charges; this power was restricted thereafter. Corruption was present in another area. Claimed expenses surpassed acceptable limits. Thus a schedule of expenditures was established, listing charges not to be exceeded, for example, for the transportation of prisoners to the *bargello*. No fines or court costs were to be exacted without a completed court process. The treasurer received a raise to help ensure his cooperation but no one else received an increase. Inadequate levels of pay and slack supervision were the root causes of this deplorable situation. D'Addario notes that in 1551 the government recorded having spent only forty-nine scudi on the Office of Decency, the lowest sum spent on any magistracy in that year.⁷⁴ Functionaries thus tried to exploit their offices in any way that they could to augment their low incomes.

From this low point in its existence, interest in the Office of Decency was resuscitated by the vigorous leadership provided by Cosimo I and his fine corps of aides, who largely restructured republican magistracies between the 1530s and 1560s.⁷⁵ But Cosimo's goal was not really the control of prostitution so much as it was to find some way to manipulate its practitioners into providing support for the Convertite.⁷⁶ Already in 1553 one-fourth of the goods of deceased prostitutes was to be given to the convent for its maintenance.⁷⁷ Living meretrici could be exploited as well, and the Office was now used to serve this end. Throughout the second half of the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century, the effects of this

⁷³ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà 1*, "Rubriche e Statuti, 1403-1597," fols. 27r-31v.

⁷⁴D'Addario, "Burocrazia," 373.

⁷⁵R. Burr Litchfield, *The Emergence of a Bureaucracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). This is a fine examination of important changes in the general development of the grand-ducal bureaucracy between 1530 and 1790, which provides a framework for studies such as this.

⁷⁶Cohen, "Convertite e Malmaritate," 47. The convent was at the point of failure until 1620 in its existence as a refuge for reformed prostitutes and other "irregular" women.

⁷⁷Cohen, *The Convertite and the Malmaritate*, 85. ASF, *Acquisti e Doni*, 291, "Ufficiali di Onestà e Meretrici, 1557-1610," unpaginated, a supplication from the Convertite to Cosimo I in 1558 states that the convent received very little from the estates of prostitutes who died while registered with the Onestà.

relationship were to have important repercussions on the structure and on the practice of prostitution in Florence.

Cosimo began to move quickly to bring the Onestà under princely control. On March 17, 1544, he ordered that revenues collected from all condemnations achieved through criminal processes, including those of the Onestà, were to go directly into his treasury. In the next year all state officials were put on notice that their behavior could be denounced anonymously by private citizens. From at least 1549, Lelio Torelli, Cosimo's chief legal advisor, began to take an active role in the resolution of supplications which came to the Onestà.⁷⁸

What was for Florence a new method of controlling prostitution was initiated in 1547 and renewed in 1555 with the first creation of official streets of residence for prostitutes. These were located in the central part of the city near the Mercato Vecchio (which had been an unofficial district of prostitution since soon after the Onestà's foundation). Under penalty of incarceration, property owners were forbidden to rent to meretrici seeking to reside outside of these streets. Later on in the same year, women who wished to practice prostitution were required to give notification to the Onestà; then, in 1557 two members of the court were to investigate these notifications, and others which they were empowered to undertake ex officio. The number of red light streets was expanded in 1558 at the end of August. There was not in the period covered by this study a single prostitution district, instead, the policy was to assign single streets where registered women could live.⁷⁹

In 1559 the financial relationship between prostitution and the Conventite became official and continued into the eighteenth century. That year witnessed the first tax ordered on registered prostitutes to be paid directly to the convent.⁸⁰ The next year saw a special lifetime tax levied on the unregistered and hence wealthier prostitutes (*tutte ricche*), which was to

⁷⁸ASF, 1, "Rubriche e Statuti, 1403-1597," fol. 31v; 8 agosto 1545, fol. 32r; fols 33r and 40v, which cover the period 1459-1564.

⁷⁹Ibid., proclamation of 12 dicembre 1547, renewed 8 luglio 1555 by Lelio Torelli; 15 febbraio 1556, and 6 maggio 1557, fols. 34v-37r. ASF, *Acquisti e Doni*, 291, "Onestà Varietà," unpaginated. For 1560 these streets were authorized as areas where prostitutes could reside: Via del Giardino, Via Pentoline, Via dei Pilastri, Borgo la Noce and Via Chiara, alla Cella di Ciarda, Via Palazzuolo, Via Codarimessa, canto ai Quattro Pagoni (or Pavoni), Via Boffi and Piazza Padella. In addition there were three bathhouses, one each in Piazza Padella, Via Romita, and Via dell'Ariente. The Onestà had also received permission to register prostitutes working in the nearby towns of Prato (7), Empoli (3), and Figline (1). With those prostitutes authorized by the Office of Decency to live dispersed throughout the city (145), there were a total of 159 prostitutes registered in 1560. But there were more who were not registered either because they were sick or too poor to pay the fees; others were always in the process of transferring themselves into, or out of the city, and thus could not be counted.

⁸⁰ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* 1, "Rubriche e Statuti, 1403-1597," 17 novembre 1559, fol. 39v-40r.

go to the support of their repentant sisters, who numbered then more than 100 hungry mouths.⁸¹ The tax on success was renewed again on September 26, 1584, and became permanent thereafter.

To levy these taxes effectively, censuses of prostitutes were taken. The first census record which survives comes from 1560; another which survives from 1569 was done by the *Practia Segreta*, one of the more important policy-making bodies of the grand dukes.⁸² In that year three levels of wealth were identified; rich, mediocre, and poor. Most of these women (159) lived in the red-light areas and paid the smaller tax, while seventy-nine of the rich paid the heavier tax of one scudo, which was divided between the *Convertite* and the *Onestà*. These rich ones could live where they pleased. Bureaucracy defined levels of prostitution according to categories of wealth and poverty, thus of success and failure. Success became so closely linked to exemption from the *Onestà's* regulations that the state decided to profit from this situation.

Those women who registered were not ignorant of their plight. Rezasco cites a carnival song sung during the middle of Cosimo's reign by meretrici who marched in the city's pre-Lenten parade:

The clothes and the veil and the hat demonstrate to you / The art which we pursue / Now to show disdain for your law / Another place we seek to live / Because to us it seems strange / That many who are our equal / o have more cash / Do not dress as your Florence wishes.⁸³

⁸¹*Ibid.*, no precise date, fols. 41v-42r. In addition, a tax which amounted to just over 1 lire to be paid at intervals not stated was also levied on registered women.

⁸²Galligo, *Circa ad Alcuni Antichi*, 18-20. The data for 1560 in note 95 above came from a similar census.

⁸³Rezasco, "Segno delle meretrici," 169: "L' abito el'velo e'l cappell vi dimostra / L'arte che noi facciamo; / Or per isdegno della legge vostra / Altra stanza cerchiamo; / Perche ci pare strano, / Che molte nostre pari; / Per aver più danari / Non vestan come vuol vostra Fiorenza." By 1595 registered prostitutes forced to live in Via Mozza found conditions in that street so deplorable that they refused to live there: "since they are so many those who, even though they are not public women, use their bodies to earn money, that the registered women are bankrupt and live discontentedly in the public places..." (ASE, *Acquisti e Doni*, 291, "Officiali di Onestà e Meretrici, 1557-1610," unpaginated, from gennaio 1596: "essendo che tante sono quelle che, sebbene non sono pubbliche, danno il corpo a guadagno, che le descritte sono fallite e vivono nei luoghi pubblici scontente." It is likely if not demonstrable that fear of syphilis played some role in the registration-poverty, nonregistration-wealth nexus. There is some evidence drawn from literature that brothels became associated with the spread of syphilis in the sixteenth century. See Pietro Aretino, *I Ragionamenti* (Paris: Liseux, 1984), 105. The only place in Tuscany where prostitutes were required to be examined for syphilis by doctors was in the port city of Livorno, and there not until 1599.

The connection between the observation of the Office's dress code and financial success or deprivation leads us to a brief consideration of the rise of courtesans in Florentine society.

By the middle of the sixteenth century much of Europe, Catholic as well as Protestant, accepted the positions being advanced by Spanish theologians which rejected the justifications for the toleration of prostitution based on St. Augustine and St. Thomas. In his *Manuale de' Confessori* (1578), Martin Navarro argued that those who went to bordelli became more intemperate in their sexual practices, and that continence was greater where those establishments did not exist. Men who went to prostitutes began to disdain them and turned to vent their sexual desires on decent women. One more short step took the frequenters of bordellos to the point of boredom with normal sex and across the threshold of the desire to experience the forbidden. Juan Mariana also rejected brothels for the same reason, and added that toleration was one of the points which Protestants could exploit to the disadvantage of Catholics.⁸⁴

While reformed morality established itself in northern Europe, continued regulation remained preferable to suppression in Italian cities like Florence, and even Rome. But why in Italy, the center of the Counter-Reformation? The revenue that came from regulation is one explanation but there is another to consider. It was necessary in the society of the High Renaissance and Baroque periods that a certain type of woman be present at court as the target of male fantasies of sexual conquest. First, she must have been sexually accessible through routes which did not transgress systems designed to channel female sexual activity. Thus, women who were already enclosed in marriages or convents, along with their younger sisters who were at the crossroads of destiny, were not legitimate prey for sexual ravishment. Nor were they allowed in the majority of cases the chance to acquire the veneer of culture which would have made them fit companions at court. Thus, the advent of a sexually heated courtly society generated the new phenomenon of courtesanship, which provided the only real opportunity for poor or middle class women to rise to the apex of society, as cultivated, sexually available companions to courtiers. This is not to say, however, that aristocratic men ignored the attractions of common, even registered prostitutes, but that the social function of courtesans was distinctly different from that of their poorer compatriots.⁸⁵

⁸⁴Canosa and Colonnello, *Storia della Prostituzione*, 176-79.

⁸⁵Eric Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 150, 205, 277-78, 351. Here Cochrane discusses noble and patrician patronage of courtesans and prostitutes in the seventeenth century. The subject of courtesans in sixteenth-century Florence has not attracted much attention from scholars whose efforts have been directed towards an examination of this phenomenon in the glittering cities of Rome and Venice. The courtesan first appears in Rome in 1479, in the person of a certain Fiammetta, mistress or concubine of perhaps a relative of Sixtus IV. The golden age of courtesans in Rome lasted until the sack of 1527 by the troops of Charles V. In the aftermath, many ambitious women transferred themselves to Venice where, amidst the wealth and size of the Serene Republic, courtesans flourished.

Like Boccaccio's prostitutes, the success of courtesans was dependent upon their ability to present themselves as lovers, as complete personalities.⁸⁶ Women succeeded who had talent, beauty, spirit, and good training. Those who rose to the top thus escaped lives of poverty in the bordellos. Florence was a minor attraction by comparison with Rome and Venice, but it was not a market which was completely ignored; it was simply that only one of the stars of the courtesan world, Tullia D'Aragona, was found there.

Between 1544 and 1548 Tullia D'Aragona established one of her academies in Florence where intellectual matters were discussed among gatherings of aristocrats and other courtesans. Women described as *cortigiane* by the Onestà and the Otto di Guardia e balia were present in the city. In January of 1562 for example, it was recorded by the Office of Decency that a "signora Leonora cortigiana" had bought a house in Via dei Pilastrini in 1546 from Giovanbattista Gini and his father for a price of 200 scudi. In 1621 the servant of "Cammilla di Leandro Visconti milanese cortigiana" plotted to murder her and her servant woman, and escape with the many silver and gold items, and the jewels which she possessed.⁸⁷

⁸⁶Otis, *Prostitution In Medieval Society*, 12-16. It is not an easy task to define the sixteenth-century courtesan. Our understanding is complicated by the fact that by the seventeenth century, and perhaps even earlier, the term "cortigiana" served as a euphemism for "prostituta." Johann Burchard, the papal Master of Ceremonies for Alexander VI, defined the courtesan in 1498 as a *meretrix honesta*, which only serves to highlight the confusion over just how to define and locate these women in a society which was only nominally Christian. Historians writing about courtesans have not bothered to define the term any more precisely than did Burchard. Otis, on the other hand, argues that *meretrice* lost its original Roman Law definition as a woman who exchanged sex for money and was thus indelibly stained for life, in the different society of the Middle Ages. Professional prostitution is a phenomenon of urbanized societies, she states. The application made of the word by medieval canon lawyers and enthusiasts of the revival of Roman Law was thus meant to define the actions of women whose sexual behavior brought shame on their families. Thus, *meretrix publica* meant "public woman" in the sexual sense, and its use was designed to distinguish professional prostitutes from amateurs. Burchard's term might therefore be taken to mean "decent public woman," which indicates a professional standing for these women. The *Dizionario Italiano-Latino* of Ferruccio Calonghi (Torin, 3d ed., vol. 1) defines *cortigiana* as *pelex lecis*, which means concubine or lover of a married man. This definition denies the status of professionalism, and thus does not seem to be what Burchard or his contemporaries had in mind. The *Vocabolario della Lingua Italiana* of 1986 defines *cortigiane* as "donne di liberi costumi, non prive però di cultura e raffinatezza." This was not likely to have been Burchard's meaning when he wrote in his diary that fifty courtesans had been brought into the Vatican in 1502 by Cesare Borgia, to help papal courtiers celebrate his sister's marriage. I would argue that it makes sense to understand courtesans as professional prostitutes who became relatively wealthy through their relations with churchmen, nobles, and patricians, rather than to insist on the presence of any real depth of culture or learning among the vast majority of these women. The courtesan was a professional prostitute, but she projected an image which combined elements of all of the above definitions.

⁸⁷ASF *Acquisti e Doni*, 291, "Onestà, 1619-24," unpaginated; idem, "Partiti degli'Otto, 1617-50," unpaginated.

Eric Cochrane also provides a number of examples of relations between courtesans and prostitutes, patricians and nobles in early modern Florence.⁸⁸

Registration with the Office of Decency in Florence separated the courtesans from the simple meretrice in the all-important arena of public reputation. Tullia was denounced early in 1544 as a prostitute who violated the Office's regulations, but she requested and received a pardon from Cosimo I, which had been arranged by his wife, Eleonora di Toledo.⁸⁹ The fine itself was not the problem; rather, it was the fact that if had she complied with the Office's ruling, she would have been required to move to one of the designated streets and wear the identifying yellow ribbon. Thus, her career in Florence would certainly have come to an end before it began.

Although the Office of Decency was created to regulate prostitutes in Florence, its jurisdiction ultimately extended beyond the city walls. By 1560 the magistracy registered prostitutes who resided in the nearby towns of Prato, Empoli, and Figline. In 1572 the small Apennine village of Castrocaro, located at the very eastern limits of the grand-ducal state, was brought under the jurisdiction of this office. That same year the Onestà asked Cosimo I to make its authority effective throughout the entire state, but this supplication was denied. Undeterred by this initial rebuff the magistracy renewed its request in 1577 only to be turned down again. The cited justification was conflict with local magistracies and tribunals.⁹⁰ The motivation for these requests was clearly fiscal. The attainment of no moral goal would have been facilitated had such a policy been enacted. The Onestà simply sought to boost its revenues by forcing all prostitutes in the state to register in Florence and pay their fines and fees in the city, even though they continued to live elsewhere.

Some of the most important changes listed in the *Pratica Segreta's* reform of 1577 demonstrate the increased control over the resources of the prostitutes aimed at by the Office of Decency. An elected assessor participated in the settlement of civil litigation before the *Ruota*, which involved the estates of deceased registrants.⁹¹ No sales of property were allowed by prostitutes without a prior inventory by the court's examiners; violation of this rule brought the imposition of the heaviest fine, twenty-five gold scudi. Prostitutes who expected to be absent from their homes for eight days or more must first have received permission and supplied bondsmen to ensure their return.

⁸⁸See n. 85 above.

⁸⁹Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance*, 109.

⁹⁰ASF, *Acquisti e Doni*, 291, "Officiali di Onestà e Meretrici, 1557-1610," unpaginated, supplication of 1572; supplication of 1577. By 1670 prostitutes working in Pisa and Pistoia were required to register with the Florentine office. ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* 3. fol. 59r, 23 gennaio 1670\1.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, fols. 29v-30v, 6 maggio 1575: since that date the assessor was authorized to participate in the settlement of civil suits, along with the ever-present fiscal auditor.

New restrictions had been placed on the movements of meretrici so that they would not be confused with decent women. They were not allowed to ride in coaches during the daytime, or within the city walls, but must enter and exit them at the city gates. Prostitutes could not traverse the city at night without a permit which they could purchase from the Onestà; they were not to exit dressed as men or masked to facilitate their appearance at taverns after dark, a common enough practice; nor were registered women to change residence without permission. All of these were offenses which drew fines as punishment. Sumptuary regulation was reintroduced: failure to wear the identifying piece of yellow ribbon brought a fine of ten gold scudi,⁹² prostitutes were not to wear cloth made with gold or silver, nor were they to wear pearls.⁹³ One fourth of the fines collected for these violations went to the Convertite. But exemptions to most of these regulations were also sold to those able to pay, which was a quicker method of generating revenue than was the collection of fines.

Once again streets of authorized habitation were recognized. These included: Via Mozza in the quarter of Santa Croce; piazza Padella, one of the oldest streets from the fourteenth century; Chiasso dei Buoi in San Giovanni, the Canto a Quattro Pavoni (Santo Spirito); Via del Giardino (also in Santo Spirito), Via Pentoline (Santa Croce) and Via dei Pilastrini (Santa Croce); as well as the others first designated in 1560. All of these were in poorer neighborhoods of these quarters in the city, inhabited by artisans and workers. A variety of establishments of prostitution existed which were subject to the jurisdiction of the Office. "Dancing Schools" (*scuole de ballo*) were to be conceded space in certain streets (Canto a Quattro Pavoni, for example).⁹⁴ Several privately owned brothels were located in these streets, and bathhouses continued to exist as well. Prostitution as an urban institution flourished in Florence.

The continued link between the world of prostitution and men from every level of Florentine society, even the Medici court, as well as concern over the financial condition of the Convertite, kept the Onestà from being used as a real weapon of suppression even in early seventeenth century Florence. A letter from Taddeo Bucetti, Treasurer of the magistracy, sent to the *Practica Segreta* on July 2, 1613, sheds light on the situation. Bucetti wrote that "the Office of the Onestà ... [was in a] ... bad state ... [that about 150 meretrici] between those paying the greater and lesser tax, are not

⁹² *Ibid.* fols. 17r-18r-v.

⁹³ Lawner, *Lives of the Courtesans*, 17. Lawner cites Vecellio on the effects of banning the wearing of pearls in Venice: "Finally, courtesans are forced to open up at the neck, and one recognizes at once who they are, for the lack of pearls speaks loud and clear." A law in Venice from 1562 specified that decent women could wear one stand of pearls around their necks.

⁹⁴ ASE, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* 3, "Statuti e Legge, 1577-1747," fols. 5r-v.

enough to meet the all around expenses of that Office."⁹⁵ And this while the unregistered prostitutes, then called *zimarrine*, a word from Spanish which indicated women who wore long cloaks, prospered without having to pay taxes of any kind to the Onestà, while the sight of these women was very offensive to honorable and decent people. Belisario Vinta then ordered an immediate investigation, which led by August of 1614 to the compilation of a list of *zimarrine* to be taxed. The list contained about 142 names, 101 of whom were forced to register. Once again three classes of women were distinguished based on the level of their earnings. Payment of their fees was to have rescued the Onestà from imminent financial collapse.

Another desperate letter was sent in 1614 to Cosimo II himself, this time from Michele Dati, Canonico and Governatore of the Convertite. He wrote:

...with the greatest modesty we must make L'A. V. S. aware that if this list is not moderated it will cause grave damage to our needs, because many of those forced to register as public whores will leave the state, others will seek the protection of single men, and still others will stay with their husbands, but live the same life, and thus the officials will not get what they expect in taxes, because this reform will only affect the poor, who do not mind staying in the designated streets paying the lesser tax....⁹⁶

Since the fiscal goals of the Convertite and of the Onestà were clearly in conflict, a compromise was reached. Women who agreed to pay a one-time tax of twenty scudi to the convent, would then be exempted from the necessity of registration after 1614.⁹⁷ The Medici functionary Lorenzo Usimbardi argued in favor of the plan, stating that registration might pre-

⁹⁵Giovanni Cipriani, "Le 'Zimarrine' E 'L'Ufficio dell'Onestà' nella Firenze di Cosimo II De'Medici," *Ricerche Storiche* 8(1978): 801. The author cites ASE, *Pratica Segreta*, fol. 20, fols. 134r-v. Earlier, in 1610, another census had been taken for the purpose of levying a *balzello*, a gratuitous tax, on the city's unregistered prostitutes for the Convertite. In that year a total of ninety-eight were identified, of whom sixty-two were made to pay, while a few of the thirty-two others, were exempted by request of their protectors, such as Caterina Mazzafirra, who was spared by *commissione* of the duke out of his regard for the painter Bronzino, and Caterina, a young widow, who was staying in the home of Gino Ginori, another Florentine patrician. See ASE, *Acquisti e Doni*, 291, "Officiali di Onestà e Meretrici, 1557-1610," unpaginated.

⁹⁶Galligo, *Circa ad Alcune Antichi*, 7, "Supplica delle Convertite a Cosimo Secondo dei Medici," 1614: "con quella maggior modestia che doViamo far consapevole L'A.V.S. che se questa Lista non viene moderata tornerà in danno grave alle nostre necessitá, perche molte delle descritte in detta Lista per non essere dichiarate meretrici pubbliche, se ne andranno fuori degli stati, altre se ne ritireranno con huomini soli, e altre coi lor mariti per tenere in ogni modo la medesima vita, e cosi non si potranno risquoter le tasse, a tal che questa riforma verrebbe solamente a cadere sopra le povere, a le quali non da fastidio star nei luoghi pubblici e pagar la tassa ordinaria.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 8

vent the voluntary emendation of behavior of some of these women, while it would also have embarrassed their families and their patrons at court.⁹⁸ The year 1625 saw a reaffirmation of the policy of selling exemptions in return for payment for the Convertite of a yearly tax of six scudi and seven lire, broken down into quarterly payments.⁹⁹ Three years later a big step was taken when voluntary registration was allowed: The Office of Decency was at the point of having outlived its usefulness. Resistance to the process of identification was about to prevail.

Perhaps as an answer to this situation, beginning with laws of May 12 and 18, 1633, real attempts were made to reduce the number of women engaged in prostitution through, in effect, its criminalization. In that year married meretrici could be prevented from registering with the magistrates if their husbands desired to prosecute them for adultery before competent lay or ecclesiastical tribunals.¹⁰⁰ All exemptions for them were revoked as well. In 1635 A modification was made in this policy which restricted prosecutions to the Otto di Guardia, since the Church continued to tolerate prostitution (for the good of the Convertite?), causing damage to spiritual and temporal matters.¹⁰¹ But, the Archbishop then reversed his position to support the new policy. Married prostitutes must register with the Onestà, and could only be freed from its jurisdiction by returning to their husbands. In 1673 the right of prosecution was extended to fathers, mothers, and uncles (maternal and paternal).¹⁰² The Medici grand dukes sought to strengthen the hand of families in the control of these sexually wayward women by offering their relatives access to the criminal court.

A look at Table One indicates what seems to have been a great deal of success for this new strategy. Motivation for the change may have sprung from the realization that most registrants were either Florentines (279) or recent immigrants from Medici territories (205) between the years 1606 and 1627. The period 1627–50 saw a sharp drop in all types of enrollments, although Florentines continued to predominate (111). We note especially the decline in numbers of women who admitted to having been married, from a total of eighty-one to only ten. In fact, however, what probably happened was that many prostitutes simply refused to register and went

⁹⁸Cipriani, "Le Zimarrine," 807.

⁹⁹ASE, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* 3, "Statuti e Legge, 1577–1747," 3 luglio 1625, fols. 33v–35r.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, fols 39v–40v.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 15 gennaio 1636, fols. 40v–41r.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 2 agosto 1673, fol. 61v.

underground, as Michele Dati had predicted would happen in similar circumstances in 1614.¹⁰³

Prostitutes Registering with the Onestà, 1606-1650

Table 1: By citizenship¹⁰⁴

CITIZENSHIP	1606-26	1627-50	TOTAL
FLORENTINE	279	111	390
NON-FLORENTINE			
South Italian	26	8	34
North Italian	45	20	65
Non-Italian	16	4	20
Tuscan	205	53	258
TOTALS	571	196	767

Table 2: By marital status

STATUS	1601-26	1627-50	TOTAL
Widowed	73	36	109
Married	81	10 ^a	91
Single	417	150	567
TOTALS	571 ^b	196 ^c	767 ^d

a. All registered 1634-50; none 1627-33.

b. Includes 49 entered Convertite and 10 minors.

c. Includes 87 entered Convertite and 1 minor.

d. Includes 136 entered Convertite and 11 minors.

In addition, the data reveal that of the 136 total registrants who chose to enter the Convertite, almost double the number (eight-seven as compared to forty-nine) entered between 1627 and 1650 as did in the earlier period. Since a total of only 196 women entered in the later period, 44.39 percent of all registrants entered the convent. For many poorer women enclosure within the Convertite was now viewed as a Viable alternative to

¹⁰³ASF, *Acquisti e Doni*, 291 "Partiti degl'Otto, 1617-50," unpaginated, and "Otto Filze di Suppliche, 1619-41," also unpaginated. Here are listed the prosecutions for adultery executed by the city's most important criminal tribunal for the period 1633-50: 1633, eight; 1634, five; 1636, three; and 1640, one. Obviously there were not a great number of prosecutions, but the serious intention of the court to punish these new violations, usually with fines of say 100 lire and three to six month's imprisonment in the city prison, was conveyed by the number of such women prosecuted in 1633.

¹⁰⁴Source for tables: ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà*, "Libro Rosso," 1606-1650.

other choices. By 1648 this fact was made known to Ferdinando II by the abbess of the Convertite. She wrote:

...many women, for the most part girls, in effect register only to enter the Convertite, to flee the stain [since their relatives might have been meretrici, but these girls may have paid the taxes for only a few days before the morning of the sermon for the Maddalena ...[many did this because of] ...the small dowry reserved only for converted meretrici ...that morning they decide with resolve inspired by God to enter that convent to leave behind their bad lives.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* 3, "Statuti e Legge, 1577-1747," 20 marzo 1648, fol. 54v. "...molte donne, e per lo piu fanciulle, con questa dichiarazione che si fanno descrivere a effetto solo di farsi monache nelle Convertite, per fuggire la macchia, si a loro, come a loro parenti esser state meretrici che non apparisce che mai queste tali habbino pagate tasse di sorte alcune per seguire quasi sempre questo la mattina della predica della Maddalena, o pochi giorni prima ...con questa poca dote riservata solo per le meretrici Convertite, et che in tal mattina si risoluono ispirate da Dio riservarsi in detto monastero per lasciar la lor malavita."