

Dissimulation and Deceit in Early Modern Europe

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A Hybrid Identity: Jewish Convert, Christian Mystic and Demoniac

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The following pages focus on a story that involves various aspects of the theme of religious dissimulation. First of all because its protagonist, the convert Alvisa Zambelli, AKA Lea Gaon, was questioned by the Holy Office in Venice as a suspect in demonic possession and simulated ('feigned') sanctity. This was a crime prosecuted by the Roman Inquisition from the late sixteenth until the late eighteenth centuries.¹ One of the charges brought against Alvisa, corroborated by her neighbours, was that she had simulated sanctity in order to benefit financially from the alms that were given to her. However, the theme of dissimulation also arises on another level, that concerning the neophyte's Jewish identity. It is her simulated identity, constantly obliterated yet continuously resurfacing in her life and in the 'autobiographic' narrative of Alvisa/Lea, and a defining trait of her religious culture and of her identity, that I have defined as hybrid.²

The case of Alvisa Zambelli is documented in trial records preserved in the section of the Holy Office at the State Archives in Venice.³ The story, in brief, is as follows: Lea Gaon, born at the end of the seventeenth century, converted from Judaism and was christened Alvisa Zambelli. She entered the Pia Casa dei Catecumeni (Holy House of Catechumens) in 1718. This Jesuit-inspired institution was operating in Venice since 1557, and was aimed especially at facilitating the conversion and the catechization of Jews and Muslims.⁴ Nine years later, when she went to Giovanni Maria Fattori, a priest from the parish of S. Giacomo dall'Orto, to confess, she appeared 'absent' at times, which could have been interpreted as a sign of ecstasy, diabolic possession or even as 'natural malady'.⁵ Fattori's first supposition was that it indicated in fact demonic possession, and he thus subjected the woman to a series of exorcisms, recorded in the report kept among the Inquisition documents.

The current state of research makes it impossible to determine whether or not the Inquisition decided to take further action against Alvisa and subsequently initiate a trial, as it did in many other similar cases. Nonetheless, it is most likely that the episode did not lead to any further consequences and that Alvisa's case came to a quiet end, just as it had begun, without the commotion of a trial. Regardless of the use that the Inquisition eventually made of the information that it obtained about Alvisa, the documents about this convert, presumed mystic and supposedly possessed woman were preserved among the records of the Holy Office at the State Archives in Venice. It was the outcome of Alvisa Zambelli's 'encounter' with the repressive institution that brought her story to the fore.

The source

The documentation concerning Alvisa Zambelli is preserved in two files, each consisting of about 50 sheets. The first file contains a report of her exorcism; a long and supposedly 'autobiographical' account; and a kind of diary covering ten days from 1 to 10 January 1730, with detailed reports of the visions and fights against demons that Alvisa said she experienced on a daily basis. The second file, which begins in April 1730, includes an account of Alvisa's visions and of the tests carried out by Fattori to appraise his penitent's soul; a report on Alvisa's case by an anonymous friar; and a report on the whole affair written by Fattori in 1734 – after Alvisa had finally broken away from her confessor – from which we may glean the epilogue of the entire affair. The confessor's voice emerges more directly in this last text, and his notes help clarify to what extent the documentation in fact met the Inquisition's expectations.⁶

This fragmentary and composite source, which consists of two inquisitorial files, is written partly in the first person and partly in the third person and documents Alvisa's relationship with Fattori as her spiritual director, which was maintained from 1727 until 1734. The composition seems to have taken shape in several stages, and it is very probable that – at least in part – the authors relied on other texts that have not survived. For example, when the Dominican inquisitor Tommaso Gennari ordered Fattori to write a 'summary of the life' of Alvisa in 1734, the priest clearly had at hand texts written previously, papers that he himself had asked Alvisa to draft.⁷ Furthermore, in addition to the documents preserved in the Venetian archive, it seems highly likely that Alvisa herself also kept some kind of diary.

Writing was a device frequently employed as part of the practice of spiritual direction in Catholic Europe, especially – but not exclusively – in the case of women who seemed to display extraordinary mystical tendencies. The recourse to autobiographic writing was required for the exercise of what has been defined as *discretio spirituum* (discernment of spirits).⁸ The practice involved the director and/or confessor's assessing of the penitent woman's spiritual experience and his passing a judgement on the precise origins of her presumed mystical powers, which could be divine, diabolical or human in nature, the latter in cases of simulation or self-deception.⁹ The suspicion of pretence of holiness, understood in its broadest sense – which ranged from deliberate simulation to the intense desire to emulate saintly conduct that gave rise to self-deception – was a key aspect that accompanied mystical experiences, especially (though not exclusively) those of women, throughout the early modern era.¹⁰ Catholic ecclesiastics were charged with controlling and disciplining the mystical experience, which, by definition, was unattainable and uncontrollable, and writing seemed like the preferred instrument for exercising this kind of control. The female mystics wrote at the behest of their confessors and/or spiritual directors who were supposed to be, at least theoretically and according to the original intentions, their sole addressees.¹¹

Fattori stated that he had suspected Alvisa of dissimulating and of pretending to be a holy woman in order to obtain a reputation for sanctity that would enable her to gain wealth from the alms she hoped to receive. It was for this reason that Fattori had ordered the woman to recount her life story in writing, beginning with childhood. Although Alvisa was initially quite reluctant to comply, she obeyed and narrated her story every night, one bit at a time. As part of the close examination of a person's holiness (which was often suspect), obedience to one's superior was required as the fundamental criterion, the touchstone for establishing its genuineness. Whether an individual has taken a vow of obedience, as all women in religious orders were required to do, or has willingly chosen to do so, it was in any case always necessary to submit to the requirements of obedience either to religious superiors or to the confessor. Moreover, since the seventeenth century, one of the requirements expected from aspiring saints as a result of the new canonization procedures was the demonstration of 'heroic virtues', among which the exercise of obedience played a key role.¹² The 'obedient' story told by Fattori, but constructed and devised for the most part by Alvisa herself, is long and absorbing, and it takes up a large part of the file. In my opinion, it can be considered to be an autobiographical document or an ego-document, even with the prudence required in a case like this, acknowledging that

it was a text that grew out of a relationship of spiritual guidance and was therefore the result of a well-defined 'narrative transaction'.¹³ It is a self-presentation modelled on a hagiographic outline, and focuses on an account of a conversion: a story with a happy ending in which Alvisa tries to tie together many different threads into a single heaven-sent storyline, creating a clear linear path. The evolution of this conciliatory story, however, also reveals dissonant aspects, jarring notes, ambiguity, silences and overlapping elements, which sometimes emerge forcefully. These only seem to form a united whole in the complicated make-up of an individual identity, or to use Adriano Prosperi's words, in the 'different forms of individuality that the same ego can accommodate'.¹⁴

Here I should like to draw on the case of Alvisa Zambelli in order to address the relationship between autobiographical sources or ego-documents and hybrid identities.¹⁵ I will therefore focus on the tension between a story that by its very nature strives for unity and reformulation, and a biographical experience characterized by the suffering brought about by conversion and the fragmentary nature of a multiple identity.¹⁶

Alvisa's story

Alvisa recounted that she was born in Verona in 1697, the daughter of Rabbi Moisé Gaon and his wife Rachele, 'who gave me the name Lea, which is Elena in Italian'.¹⁷ Shortly afterwards, the family moved to Split (in present-day Croatia). In keeping with the typical methods of hagiographic discourse, which the story is modelled on, signs of saintliness or at least of a pious life have already appeared at a tender age. In this case, however, the model and the signs of early 'saintliness' also had to feature other signs: those of conversion, of an initially unconscious childhood conversion, which prefigures – in the story – Lea's future destiny. In the *incipit* of the narrative, the aspect of her name assumes a strongly representative value, as she already refers to herself as Elena before her conversion, rejecting her Jewish name Lea. It almost constitutes a 'micro-narrative' in itself, and bears the mark of the linear identity that Alvisa constantly affirmed.¹⁸ The conversion – tying together the converted Alvisa and Elena – is presented as the progressive unveiling of what Lea/Elena has always known, and which is constantly shown as her destiny: 'I always abhorred the Law of Moses, so my father was extremely displeased'.¹⁹ In keeping with the hagiographic canon, her life appears to have been marked by constant obstacles of an increasingly challenging nature, with episodes that took her away from the centre of her being into a labyrinthine journey following the course

of her pilgrimage through Mediterranean cities and, metaphorically speaking, the wandering and suffering of her soul.

Alvisa said that she had learned the basic tenets of Christianity from a Christian maidservant, and that she had felt a strong attraction to sacred images, places of worship and Christian books since childhood, something which had naturally been a source of serious strife between her and her family. It should be noted that references to Christian families – for example, a neighbouring family in Split – are very common in Alvisa's descriptions, which feature not only servants and beggars but also neighbours and acquaintances.²⁰ What emerges is the permeability of the borders between the two communities, which facilitated regular contacts and close everyday relationships that went beyond the religious affiliation of those involved, and the constraints that derived from it.²¹

According to her own account, Alvisa began to have visions during her childhood and continued to have them as an adult. The visions are a key element of both her experience and the narrative development of her story. She is usually visited by an angel in the form of a 'zaghetto' (a term used to describe altar boys in Veneto dialect)²² with surplice and alb, who stays with her almost all the time, giving her relief and comfort in her many moments of torment and tribulation. She is also visited by the Virgin Mary, often accompanied by baby Jesus,²³ but perhaps even more often by the devil under various guises, with whom Alvisa has to fight with all her might. As an angel, in a certain sense the 'zaghetto' can be considered a figure of mediation between Alvisa's old and new faiths, given the importance that angelic beings have in both Judaism and Catholicism.²⁴ However, the sacred paraments of an altar boy give Alvisa's little angel strong Christian and Catholic connotations.

When the girl turned 13, in accordance with the Jewish custom prevalent at that time, her father agreed to a marriage contract with a certain Abramo Fiamengo, who soon turned out to be a scoundrel addicted to gambling, alcohol and various forms of illicit trafficking. According to Alvisa, throughout their married life he constantly mistreated her and subjected her to violence, in addition to squandering the family's belongings. She bore a son, Mardocheo, in the ghetto of Venice in 1714. Much of the autobiographical text is devoted to the long adventurous travels, over land, river and sea, which she undertook with her son to follow Abramo, who in the meantime had become a Christian in the Greek island of Zakynthos (which formed part of the Venetian empire) and changed his name to Lorenzo Zambelli. The historical sources do not disclose the reason(s) for Abramo's religious choice, but it seems likely that he converted primarily for economic reasons.

It would take too long to discuss here all of the couple's travels, which took them first to Castelfranco Veneto and then to Trent and Verona, before they returned to Venice. At this stage, I would like to point out the ways in which ties with the Jewish community in Venice, and with the spouses' families of origin, appear to have played a fundamental role in the whole affair, much more than the written account actually reveals. Alvisa's decision to convert, I propose, must have been far more anguished than she acknowledges, as shown by the large number of divine and diabolical visions that gave form and voice to her deep unease. For example, we can read in the story that despite their attempts to conceal their Jewish identity while visiting Trent (prior to Alvisa's baptism) Lea, her husband and her son were recognized as Jews by the innkeeper's wife at the inn in which they were staying, and their presence was duly reported to the city authorities. Alvisa recalled how two Jesuits and then the prince-bishop himself had tried to convert her but to no avail.²⁵ By the time these events, which culminated in the moment of her conversion, were incorporated into her providential story, Alvisa was already a Christian. Yet although her earlier vicissitudes were seen as the acknowledgement and manifestation of her pre-existing Christian identity, it is clear to the reader that she really did put up strenuous resistance to the persisting attempts to convert her.²⁶ Alvisa the narrator does not deny this resistance; indeed she seems to emphasize it, probably in order to highlight the authenticity and 'truth', on a spiritual level, of her subsequent decision to embrace Christianity.

In the long period of uncertainty before her conversion, Lea/Elena seems to have been in a constant state of deep anguish and fear that if she remained Jewish her son would be taken away from her to be baptized.²⁷ The story renders these agonizing tensions clear, along with the strong opposing pressures that she felt subjected to, from her family and environment of origin on the one hand,²⁸ and from her husband – who threatened to kill her several times – and other neophyte acquaintances and family members, as well as the officials of the House of Catechumens on the other hand. The torment in her soul was expressed through contrasting visions, often in open conflict with each other. While the 'zaghetto' urged her to convert and reassured her, horrible demons, mostly in the form of ferocious beasts or sinister-looking men, warned her with the most atrocious threats. For instance:

After I had gone to bed at night a man appeared before me. He looked frightening and called me by name, saying: 'Poor Elena! I can see what a deplorable state your soul is in as a result of deciding to become a Christian! Do you think that the fasting you have done is

good for you? Listen to me: I want to subject you to great torment before you convert, to make sure that you do not make this decision. I want to drown you, and before that I want to drown your son'. At this I cried out: '*Addonai Cevaot*, release me from this anguish!'²⁹

Or to give another example:

At night I went into my room and wept, begging God to enlighten me and make me understand if the Christian faith is the true one, and I said to Him: 'if it is a false faith, I would rather you killed me!'. While I was saying these words, a horrible man appeared before me and said: 'Oh poor Elena, all those who become Christians go to hell! Make sure that you do not let yourself be deceived, as those who change their religion lose their souls! You will be carried away in chains of iron and fire, which will burn your delicate flesh!'. This man came closer and closer to me and took me in his arms. I said: '*Adonai Cevaot* help me'. When the man heard these words he fled and left me trembling all over and almost unable to speak. I started reciting the psalms of David and saying: 'oh God, who freed the people of Israel from the hands of Pharaoh, release me from the hands of the devil and put me on the right path so that I can save my soul'.³⁰

At the time Lea/Elena was still a Jew who invoked the God of Hosts for help. Her visions – whether heavenly or infernal – gave form and voice to the suffering that the decision to convert brought with it, to the difficulty of embracing the state of being a convert, which on the one hand signalled detachment and rejection with regard to her community and culture of origin, and on the other hand involved an element of insurmountable extraneousness to her new faith and from the community that she joined.³¹ The narration was a retrospective one, devised and constructed after the conversion, when Alvisa was already a devout Catholic, yet it is peppered with indicators that attest to a concept of religion with features that are in many respects hybrid. There are various examples of this, especially in the frequent prayers and invocations of God that fill the narrative:

While I was in Revere, when I was still a Jew and my son was still a baby, I found myself in an inn [*osteria*] in which there was a large group of Germans. They were planning to get my husband drunk and abduct me at night, but as I knew their language I understood

everything. They managed to get him drunk, but after he came into the bedroom I made him go to bed and then, in tears, I took my baby and hid under the stairs among the hens, locking myself in. As I was crying, I started reciting the psalms and invoking the God of Israel, saying: 'If you [God of Israel] do not want to help me, then at least may the mother of the God of Christians help me, I beg you'. The *zaghetto* appeared at once and said: 'Why are you so desperate?' He gave me a handkerchief so that I could dry my tears, telling me: 'Believe me, you will not be abducted'.³²

It seems that at least during a certain phase of her life Alvisa had no difficulty in invoking both the God of her ancestors and the Madonna, who as a maternal female figure – 'the mother of the God of Christians', and what is more, both a Jewish woman *and* a mother – would understand the anguish that she felt as a mother. The invocation of the Virgin Mary was a recurrent feature in the narratives of Jewish conversions to Christianity, and especially in those of female converts. Mary, a Jewish woman and the mother of Christ thus attained the traits of a mediating figure *par excellence*.³³

Although transfigured in the hagiographic code of reference in the autobiography, the transition to Christianity was a long and turbulent process for Lea/Elena Gaon. It was also marked by violent changes of mind, and was definitely not a sudden turnaround. When her husband took her to the Giudecca in Venice and a Dalmatian convert, Iseppo Dente (formerly known as Giacob Penso) urged her to convert with some insistence, together with a group of other neophytes, an inner 'voice' exhorted Lea/Elena to resist, even if this would entail becoming a martyr. When the prior of the House of Catechumens Antonio Zambelli³⁴ came to take her and her son and urged her to convert once again, threatening even to take away her baby, she answered that neither she nor her son would become Christians and in the end tried to escape from him by resorting to an extreme and desperate act:

I turned towards the window overlooking the canal, meaning to throw myself into the canal rather than go with him and become a Christian, and so *with the utmost gracefulness* I threw myself down together with my son, and if two men had not been there [to save us] we would have both drowned. Afterwards I threw myself down the stairs with the baby in my arms, but I escaped unharmed, and while I was suspended in the air I saw a *zaghetto* who took me and the baby and put us on the landing. After watching this scene, the prior

(of the House of Catechumens) took my baby away from me and left me with those people.³⁵

Although Alvisa's story reports the event in keeping with the traditional hagiographic tropes, marked by miraculous events and embellished by features from popular culture, the tragic nature of her act – a suicide attempt – and the violence with which her baby was taken away stand out forcefully. From the records at the House of Catechumens in Venice we learn that Lea/Elena Gaon joined the House of Catechumens on 20 May 1718 together with her son, Mardocheo; the latter was baptized four days later and was christened Francesco Targhetta,³⁶ while Lea was baptized eight months later, on 12 December.³⁷ When she was baptized she received a new name, which represented a new network of relationships and affiliation, elective 'kinship' and protection of a heavenly and earthly nature. Her new names were Alvisa, like her 'susceptible'³⁸ Alvisa Campalti; Lucia, because her baptism took place on the eve of the feast day of Saint Lucy; and Aleotti, because her 'godmother' was a certain Cecilia, Pietro Aleotti's wife.³⁹ This new 'micro-narrative' now told of her adherence to her new faith and, above all, of her ties to another community. After her baptism, Alvisa stayed at the House of Catechumens for a few more months, before deciding to follow her husband once again. Her son was soon taken back to the House of Catechumens to ensure his Catholic upbringing, as was the common practice in such cases, since young children were regarded as more promising converts, and their more sincere conversion could later become an instrument for conditioning – or rather, forcing – the religious choices of their parents.⁴⁰ The couple stayed on in Venice, where Lorenzo tried in vain to lead Alvisa back to Judaism, probably for financial reasons, in the hope of benefiting from reconciliation with their families of origin, and then undertook a new series of adventurous travels, which brought them to Ferrara by boat and then to Bologna, Florence, Pisa and Livorno.

With all the anguish caused by the constant uncomfortable travelling, sojourns in places that were unpleasant and unsafe, encounters with people of ill repute and the brutality and unpredictable nature of her husband, the image of the Madonna offered Alvisa, who was now pregnant again, a heavenly shelter from her earthly miseries, but at the same time it also provided her with the opportunity to identify with Mary's earthly human features and maternal physicality.⁴¹ The couple travelled by sea from Livorno to Messina, which was under siege by Austrian troops by the time of their arrival in 1719, and Alvisa gave birth to a daughter in a military camp.⁴² The time Alvisa spent in

Messina was marked by her husband's usual tyranny, a series of health problems and a state of visionary delirium (however improper and anachronistic the use of this definition may appear), in which dreams, waking hours, visions and hallucinations seem to have become intrinsically intertwined.

As in the rest of the story, this phase constantly features an obsession with wanting to return to Venice: a homecoming that was symbolic as well as spatial and which seemed to correspond to her path of conversion, described in Alvisa's story as a return to herself. It is thus a journey to the core of her own being, opposing the centrifugal forces that seem to have been pushing her into a labyrinthine journey following the course of her peregrination through cities in the Mediterranean and, metaphorically speaking, the wandering and suffering of her soul. In the end her desire was fulfilled: after many vicissitudes, with the help of her Jesuit spiritual guide, Alvisa managed to leave the Sicilian city and escape mistreatment by her husband, who in the meantime had left, alone, bound for Izmir. She embarked on a Venetian ship with her daughter and finally reached Venice, after a number of mishaps and a two-month long journey.⁴³

The story becomes confused from this moment onwards and seems to lose its chronological order. Alvisa started moving once again in a network of relations centred around the House of Catechumens: she and her daughter were hosted by a number of different families of converts, and then she was sent to work as a domestic servant in the house of a nobleman, who took advantage of the situation to sexually harass her, in a period in which molesting female servants was rather common. Finally, with the help and protection of another noblewoman, she moved to a house in the parish of San Giacomo dall'Orio, in the *sestiere* of Santa Croce.

This marks the start of the second part of Alvisa's life: her husband and children are not mentioned any more, her travels come to an end and from this moment on she moves only in and around the parish of San Giacomo. Venice provides the setting for the rest of the report, but it is dominated by the interior scene of the convert's soul, tormented by ongoing battles with demons. Alvisa's autobiographical account, reported in the third person by her confessor Giovanni Maria Fattori, takes the form of a series of visions, some of which appear to present themselves as divine revelations, while others come across as diabolical illusions in which the devil generally assumes the form of ferocious beasts, a handsome young man who addresses her with 'lascivious or loving words', or a 'horribly ugly' man of 'sullen' appearance but also,

more often, of angels and saints, or even of Mary and Christ and, in many cases, of the parents and other relatives who threatened her. Alvisa was thus frequently tormented by figures from her past, a past which was as sinister as it was familiar and therefore intrusive, constantly forcing her to relive her inner suffering as a convert who had been compelled to abandon her roots and renounce the faith of her ancestors and her family ties. It was precisely these roots that constituted the most serious stain, the original sin, of which the devils who tormented Alvisa frequently reminded her. They seemed to want to repeat obsessively that this would always gain the upper hand over anything else, over any other identity or any other obedience or submission to the ministers of the Holy Mother Church. Diabolical voices and visions tried to lead her to desperation and suicide, attempting to convince her to leave her safe haven in Venice and be thrown back into the labyrinth of error. Above all, they reminded her of the indelible trait of her Jewish origins:

'Alvisa, you are completely mad if you think that you can be saved [...] Don't you know what people are saying around Venice? They are going around saying that you are a scoundrel and a whore, and in order to mask yourself you say these things [namely, that you are holy] and if you do not believe me, as soon as you go to your home, you will see what they say to you, and one day sooner or later this priest of yours, a rogue, will tell you to your face that you are a whore. And it is quite enough that you are a Jew converted to Christianity and that you have that [Jewish] name for you to be considered a slut'. Alvisa told him to go to hell and that people could say what they liked; she did not care at all and wanted to put up with everything for Jesus so that he would save her soul. After this she heard a great commotion and terrible shouting: 'You think', it said, 'you poor mad woman, that you can save your soul, but you are losing it by doing this'. Alvisa got up and warded off the devil; she did not hear anything else.⁴⁴

The devils also tried to undermine the foundations of Alvisa's relationship with Fattori, her spiritual director, instilling doubts in her mind and raising the suspicion that the priest did not trust her, that he wanted to 'betray her' by denouncing her to the Inquisition and that he was 'bleeding her dry' by dint of obedient writing.⁴⁵ After being subjected to various examinations and tests by Fattori and by the Carmelite Pietro Paolo di Santa Teresa, Alvisa decided to free herself

from obedience to her spiritual director. She subsequently went to live in a little house in the parish of San Pantaleone with a certain woman named Bernardina Manzini, who was sincerely devoted to her. The two women then undertook what seems to have been a full-blown defamation campaign against Alvisa's former spiritual director.

The final trace of the convert in the documents dates back to 8 August 1735, and shows how her 'project' had been successful, at least in the eyes of some: it seems that a number of people were prepared to consider her as a 'living saint'. Whether and to what extent she was able to hide her own Jewish identity, and whether and to what extent she succeeded in fashioning herself as a holy woman, notwithstanding the suspicions of simulation or 'pretence', are questions to which our sources provide only partial and contradictory answers. In the documents pertaining to 1735, Alvisa no longer provides the narrative voice.⁴⁶

The aforementioned Alvisa Zambelli still lives with the aforementioned Bernardina Manzini in a little house located in the district of San Pantaleon [...]; and she continues to have the assistance of reverend father master Chelini of the church of the Frari. This Alvisa has a widespread reputation as a new Catherine of Siena, as she bears – both on her hands and on her feet – the marks of the stigmata, and is greatly venerated by the people, having (according to reports) as much help and support from nuns and a few noblewomen as from common people [...].⁴⁷

Conclusion

Alvisa chose a single name and a clear coherent religious identity: the only one by which she now wanted to identify herself and be recognized. She built her bio-hagiographic story around the Catholic identity of a mystic and woman of saintly life, and as far as we know she wanted to cling to it obstinately to the bitter end. She must have felt that it was the only way to free herself from fragmentation, a release from all the social and biographical factors that seemed to act as disruptive centrifugal forces on her identity, even though it is difficult for those reading her story today to understand at which point in her life this desire became a conscious wish.

In conclusion I would like to mention briefly one of the other texts in the Inquisition file, a report by an anonymous friar who was given the task of 'discerning' Alvisa's spirit. He seems to endorse the divine nature

of her visions and revelations – which he analysed in detail – thereby confirming her saintliness. Among other things, the report states that on several occasions Alvisa had been ‘rapt in spirit’ and had been taken to heaven, where the Virgin showed her the place reserved for her by divine mercy, notwithstanding her Jewish birth. She had also been taken to hell several times, and had seen her parents, brothers and sisters in ‘that horrible cave’. She would have been destined to meet this end had she not converted: ‘See what hell is, Alvisa, and if you had not become a Christian, this would have been your home, your rightful place.’

Even the vision of the place that she would later occupy in the ‘kingdom of heaven’ marked out Alvisa’s identity as irreducibly hybrid as a result of the taint of her Jewish origins. By endorsing the image of herself that Alvisa put forward, the anonymous friar who wrote the report seems to have accepted its internal coherence. This redeemed her from the stain of her origins, which had saddled her with a hybrid identity with no way out.

Notes

1. On simulated sanctity in early modern Italy see especially G. Zarri (ed.) (1991), *Finzione e santità tra medioevo ed età moderna* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier); A. Jacobson Schutte (2010), ‘Finzione di santità’, in: A. Prosperi (ed.), *Dizionario Storico dell’Inquisizione* (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale): Vol. 2, 601–604. On pretence of holiness in Venice see A. Jacobson Schutte (2001), *Aspiring Saints: Pretense of Holiness, Inquisition and Gender in the Republic of Venice (1618–1750)* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press).
2. See, in this context, the studies of the religious culture of New Christians of Iberian origins in early modern Europe in P.C. Ioly Zorattini (ed.) (2000), *L’identità dissimulata: Giudaizzanti iberici nell’Europa cristiana dell’età moderna* (Florence: Olschki). On New Christians in Venice see especially B.C.I. Ravid (2000), ‘Venice, Rome and the Reversion of New Christians to Judaism: A Study in “Ragione di stato”’, in: P.C. Ioly Zorattini (ed.), *L’identità dissimulata*, 151–193; F. Ruspio (2007), *La Nazione Portoghese: Ebrei ponentini e nuovi cristiani a Venezia* (Turin: Silvio Zamorani).
3. Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Sant’Uffizio [hereafter: ASV, SU], busta 142, unpaginated, file ‘Giovanni Maria Fattori’. The trial records concerning Alvisa Zambelli have been published by P.C. Ioly Zorattini (1994), *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia contro ebrei e giudaizzanti (1682–1734)* (Florence: Olschki): Vol. 12, 99–199. On this case see also P. Ioly Zorattini (2008), *I nomi degli altri: Conversioni a Venezia e nel Friuli Veneto in età moderna* (Florence: Olschki): 210–214; A. Malena (2012), ‘Fra conversione, penitenza e possessione: La vita di Alvisa Zambelli, ebrea convertita (1734–1735)’, in: A. Bellavitis, N.M. Filippini and T. Plebani (eds), *Spazi, poteri, diritti delle donne a Venezia in età moderna* (Verona: QuiEdit): 281–289; A. Malena (2011), ‘I demoni di Alvisa: Il racconto autobiografico di Alvisa Zambelli alias Lea Gaon’, in: G. Dall’Olio,

- A. Malena and P. Scaramella (eds), *La fede degli italiani: Per Adriano Prosperi* (Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore): Vol. 1, 383–402.
4. On the Pia Casa see: Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri*, 75–90; E.N. Rothman (2006), ‘Becoming Venetian: Conversion and Transformation in the Seventeenth Century Mediterranean’, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 21, no. 1, 39–75; E.N. Rothman (2012), *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects Between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press): 87–164.
5. On diabolic possession, exorcism and *discretio spirituum* in the early modern era, see especially M. Sluhovsky (2007), ‘Believe not Every Spirit’: *Possession, Mysticism and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press). For the medieval background see N. Caciola (2003), *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).
6. For a more detailed description of this documentation see A. Malena, ‘Fra conversione, penitenza e possessione’, 281–283.
7. ASV, SU, b. 142, unpaginated:

Avendo avuto ordine il sudetto pre’ Giovanni Maria Fattori dal sudetto padre reverendissimo inquisitore che debba fare un ristretto di tutto quello che gli aveva esposto esser accaduto alla suddetta Alvisa e di tutto quello aveva operato la medema Alvisa, avendogli determinato il tempo, che fu li 13 dicembre 1734 sino il mezo genaro 1735 a nativitate Domini.

8. On this practice in Catholic spiritual direction see Sluhovsky, ‘Believe not Every Spirit’, 207–229; A. Prosperi (1994), ‘Diari femminili e discernimento degli spiriti: Le mistiche della prima età moderna in Italia’, *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica*, 2, 77–103; M. Lollini (1995), ‘Scrittura obbediente e mistica tridentina in Veronica Giuliani’, *Annali d’Italianistica*, 13, 351–369; J. Billinkoff (2005), *Related Lives: Confessors and Their Female Penitents, 1450–1750* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press). On Spain, see especially I. Poutrin (1995), *Le voile et la plume: Autobiographie et sainteté féminine dans l’Espagne moderne* (Madrid: Casa de Velazquez, 1995); S. Herpoel (1999), *A la zaga de Santa Teresa: Autobiografías por mandato* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi). On eighteenth-century Italy see E. Bottoni (2009), *Scrittura dell’anima: Esperienze religiose femminili nella Toscana del Settecento* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura).
9. See note 1, above.
10. Cf. *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* ‘quinta impressione’, Florence 1863, s.v.: ‘Affettare’ in the sense of ‘ostentare, far mostra, simulare’, but also ‘affettare per bramare, cercare con ansietà, con passione, di conseguire alcuna cosa, ambire, aspirare a checchessia’.
11. On such forms of writing and on the modalities of drafting them see also G. Pozzi (1987), ‘Il “parere” autobiografico di Veronica Giuliani’, *Strumenti critici*, 2, 161–192; Lollini, ‘Scrittura obbediente e mistica tridentina in Veronica Giuliani’, 21–42. On this practice see also the synthesis offered by O. Niccoli (1998), *La vita religiosa nell’Italia moderna, secoli XV–XVIII* (Rome: Carocci): 186–187.
12. Cf. A. Vauchez (1989), *La santità nel Medioevo* (Bologna: Il Mulino), Chapter 4; R. De Maio (1972), ‘L’ideale eroico nei processi di canonizzazione della

- Controriforma', *Ricerche di storia sociale e religiosa*, 2, 139–160; A. Prosperi, 'L'elemento storico nelle polemiche sulla santità', in *Finzione e santità*, 88–118. The expression 'heroic virtues' appears for the first time in 1602, in the beatification procedure of Teresa of Avila. In 1629, Pope Urban VIII issued an official declaration on this issue.
13. On 'narrative transactions' see N. Zemon Davis (1987), *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press): 5. On 'obedient writings' as ego-documents see A. Jacobson Schutte (2005), 'Escrituras de vida en colaboración/Collaborative Life-Writing', *Cultura Escrita & Sociedad*, 1, 114–115; A. Malena (2012), 'Ego-documents or "Plural Compositions"? Reflections on Women's "Obedient Scriptures" in the Early Modern Catholic World', *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 1, no. 1, 97–113 [URL: <http://www.fupress.com/bsfm-jems>, ISSN 2270–7149].
 14. A. Prosperi (2002), 'L'identità individuale nell'età confessionale', in: P. Prodi and W. Reinhard (eds), *Identità collettive tra medioevo ed età moderna* (Bologna: Clueb): 169–186, on p. 174.
 15. For a general discussion of ego-documents as historical sources in a transnational and interdisciplinary perspective, see especially the section entitled 'De la autobiografía a los ego-documentos: un forum abierto / From Autobiography to Ego-Documents: An Open Forum', coordinated by J.S. Amelang, *Cultura Escrita & Sociedad* 1 (September 2005). See also W. Schulze (ed.) (1996), *Ego-dokumente: Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte* (Berlin: Oldenbourg Akademieverlag); K. Von Greyerz, H. Medick and P. Veit (eds) (2001), *Von der dargestellten Person zum erinnerten Ich: Europäische Selbstzeugnisse als historische Quellen (1500–1850)* (Köln, Weimar and Berlin: Böhlau); R. Dekker (ed.) (2002), *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in its Social Context Since the Middle Ages* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren); M. Fulbrook and U. Rublack (2010), 'In Relation: The "Social Self" and Ego-Documents', *German History*, 28, no. 3, 263–272; Von Greyerz (2010), 'Ego-Documents: The Last Word?', *German History*, 28, no. 3, 273–282; C. Ulbrich, H. Medick and A. Schaser (eds) (2012), *Selbstzeugnis und Person: Transkulturelle Perspektiven, Selbstzeugnisse der Neuzeit*, vol. 20 (Köln, Weimar and Wien: Böhlau); S. Mouysset, J.-P. Bardet and F.-J. Ruggiu (eds) (2010), *'Car c'est moi que je peine': Ecritures de soi: Individu et liens sociaux en Europe du Moyen Age à 1914* (Toulouse: CNRS-Université de Toulouse).
 16. There seem to be some parallels between Alvisa's writing and the autobiographical writings of Cecilia Ferrazzi (1609–1684): both of the accounts were written in post-Tridentine Venice, and both women in question were self-proclaimed saintly mystics instructed by the Holy Office to describe their supernatural experiences in writings. On Cecilia Ferrazzi's case, and on her 'presentation of self' in the course of her inquisitorial process as an autobiographic text in the broad sense, see C. Ferrazzi (1996), *Autobiography of an Aspiring Saint*, ed. A. Jacobson Schutte (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
 17. '... [Q]uali mi posero il nome di Lea, che vuol dire in italiano Elena' (ASV, SU, b. 142). On the Jewish community in Verona see N. Pavoncello (1960), *Gli Ebrei in Verona (dalle origini al secolo XX)* (Verona: Vita Veronese); G. Borelli (1987), 'Momenti della presenza ebraica a Verona tra Cinquecento e

- Settecento', in: G. Cozzi (ed.), *Gli Ebrei e Venezia, secoli XIV–XVIII, Atti del Convegno internazionale organizzato dall'Istituto di storia della società e dello stato veneziano della Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Venezia, Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, 5–10 giugno 1983* (Milan: Edizioni Comunita): 281–300. See also A. Castaldini (2008), *La segregazione apparente: Gli Ebrei a Verona nell'età del ghetto (secoli XVI–XVIII)* (Florence: Olschki), which contains many references to the Gaon family.
18. On the name as representation, and on the importance of names in Jewish culture see Prosperi, 'L'identità individuale', 170–171 and 175. On 'micronarratives' inscribed in names see C. Ginzburg (1998), 'Mito: Distanza e menzogna', in C. Ginzburg, *Occhiacci di legno: Nove riflessioni sulla menzogna* (Milan: Feltrinelli): 40–81, on p. 70.
 19. 'Io ebbi sempre abborrimento alla Legge di Moisé così ché mio padre provava non poco dispiacere' (ASV, SU, b. 142).
 20. On the frequent relationships between Jews and Christians in everyday life in early modern Italy see M. Caffiero (2012), *Legami pericolosi: Ebrei e cristiani tra eresia, libri proibiti e stregoneria* (Turin: Einaudi). On the Jewish community in Split and its relationships with Venice, see R. Paci, 'Gli ebrei e la "scala" di Spalato alla fine del Cinquecento', in: G. Cozzi (ed.), *Gli ebrei*: 829–834.
 21. The ghetto in Verona was established in 1599–1600; in Split the Jews were confined to the ghetto as early as 1738. See Castaldini, *La segregazione*, 1–36; Ioly Zorattini, *Processi*, Vol. 12, 22.
 22. Cf. F. Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto veneto*, Venice: Andrea Santini e figlio, 1829, p. 729 s.v. 'zaghetto': 'cherichetto, chericuzzo' (i.e. 'altar boy').
 23. See for instance:

Alvisa cominciò a piangere e il zaghetto gli disse: 'Che piangi Alvisa?'. Gli rispose: 'Piango perché non posso ricevere il mio Gesù nel mio cuore'. Il zaghetto gli rispose: 'Tu sarai consolata'. E Alvisa gli rispose: 'Quando sarò consolata?'. Il medemo gli disse: 'Non dubitare che sarai consolata'. Doppo gli disse: 'fa il ringraziamento, e piangeva mentre lo faceva e senza lume alcuno leggeva per il gran splendore. Vidde la beatissima Vergine con il bambino Gesù', e gli diceva: 'Alvisa, non piangere figlia mia, perché quest'orazioni che tu dici sono molto grate al mio figlio Gesù Christo, perché le dici di vero cuore, ma non dubitare che sarai consolata, intanto ralegrati il cuore'. E gli porse il bambino Gesù, dicendo Alvisa: 'Cara madre, lasciatemelo bacciare'. E glelo porse acciò lo baccia, e lo bacciò tre volte e gli disse: 'Gesù, cuor mio, vi prego abbrucciare il mio cuore del vostro santo amore, ma caro mio Gesù, io morirei contenta adesso'. Gesù gli ha risposto: 'Non ancora è il tempo di morire'. Doppo disse ad Alvisa Gesù: 'Figlia mia, ti dono il mio amore'.

(ASV, SU, b. 142, unpaginated)
 24. See especially J.H. Chajes (2003), *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press); M. Goldish (ed.) (2003), *Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press).
 25. Li gesuiti [venero] incontro a me e mi dissero chi son io, e mio figlio gli rispose: 'Siamo Ebrei'. Li padri mi dissero: 'Dunque voi, figlia,

siete ebrea'. Io gli risposi di sì e mi dimandorno com'era capitata in quel paese. Io gli risposi: 'Padre, la mia cattiva fortuna mi ha fatta capitare'. Subitto cominciorno a discorere della santissima Trinità. Io gli risposi: 'Queste cose stanno tutte bene, ma non voglio acconsentire di alcuna cosa che mi ditte'. Poi mi dissero che Gesù Christo è morto per tutti li peccatori. Io gli risposi che so benissimo queste cose. Loro mi risposero: 'Dunque sappette e non volete osservare'. Io gli dissi: 'Padre no, perché non ancora è la mia ora'. Doppo mi narorno de miracoli che fa sant'Antonio ogni momento. Io gli risposi: 'Padri benedetti, tanto mi fa che mi dicano tanto questo quanto quello, io non voglio ascoltare'. Mi dimandorno se sapeva leggere, uno de questi cavò fuori un libretto e mi disse: 'Vi prego, leggette e poi dimattina venite da me'. Io gli risposi: 'Padre, non voglio leggerlo, voglio andare a casa e non star qui'. Allora voltossi il più vecchio e disse al compagno: 'Sapette cosa è questa donna? Un altro Saule'. Io gli dissi 'Cosa ditte?'. Lui rispose al padre compagno le sudette parole: 'E sapette bene cosa vuol dire, che Saule era persecutore della fede di Gesù Christo e con una sola voce di Gesù Christo è divenuto quel santo che è'. [Lui mi] rispose: 'Spero che sarete ancor voi così'. Io gli risposi: 'Giusto domani mattina sarò così'. Il padre mi rispose: 'Mi spiace ch'io non sarò al mondo a vedere queste cose'. Il gli risposi: 'Ora lei parla bene, ch'io non sarò santa né lui mi vederà'. Il padre mi rispose: 'Così fosse sicura l'anima mia come voi ve la salverete'. Doppo li salutai e mi partì. Questo padre vecchio mi disse: 'Dio e la Santissima vergine vi benedica benché non siete cristiana'.

(ASV, SU, b. 142)

26. On a very well-known case of a Jewish woman's strenuous resistance to conversion in eighteenth-century Italy see M. Caffiero (ed.) (2008), *Rubare le anime: Il diario del rapimento di Anna del Monte, ebrea romana* (Rome: Viella).
27. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italy, forcibly taking young children from their Jewish mothers' custody – thereby forcing them to accept baptism – was a rather common practice of Catholic institutions intent on facilitating conversions to Catholicism. See Caffiero (2011), *Forced Baptisms: Histories of Jews, Christians, and Converts in Papal Rome* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press).
28. See for instance:

Mentre facevo orationi venne una mia zia dicendomi che non pianga e che, se mio marito volesse il figlio, bisognarebbedargelo, che già non sarei sola. Io gli risposi che dove anderà mio figlio vorò andar ancor io. Mia zia mi disse: 'Dunque volete farvi cristiana? O' se sapessi che cattivo fine fanno li Ebrei fatti Christiani, moiono sopra un ponte e perdono l'anima e il corpo, se farete quello vi dico, doppo la mia morte vi lasciarò padrona di tutto quello possedo'. Io gli risposi ch'io non vi penso e che sarà quello Dio vorrà. Mi volevano farmi condurre alle Smirne con il figlio perché non andassi ove era mio marito, perché non facesse disonore alla casa, vilipendendomi e minacciandomi.

(ASV, SU, b. 142)

29. 'Andata la notte in letto m'apparse un uomo d'aspetto tetro, chiamandomi per nome, dicendomi: 'Povera Elena, in qual stato deplorabile vedo l'anima tua perché hai risolto di farti cristiana, pensi che ti giovano que' digiuni c'hai tu fatti, ma senti, avanti che tu ti facci cristiana voglio molto tormentarti perché non farai al certo questa rissoluzione, voglio an[n] egarti ma prima tuo figlio'. Allora io gridai: 'Addonai Cevaot, liberatemi da quest'angustia!'. (ASV, SU, b. 142).
30. The horrible man speaking was, of course, the devil in disguise: 'Andai la notte nella mia camera e diedi in un dirotissimo pianto supplicando Dio che mi illumini se la fede cristiana è la vera e 'se è fede bugiarda fatemi morire'. In quello diceva queste parole mi apparve un uomo brutissimo e mi disse: 'O povera Elena, tutti quelli che si fanno Christiani vadono all'inferno, guarda bene non ti lasciare ingannare, perché chi muta religione perde l'anima e sarai strassinata con catene di ferro e di fuoco che t'abbrucierano quelle tue carni delicate'. Quest'uomo sempre più mi s'andava vicinando, e m'aveva presa nelle braccia. Io dicevo: 'Adonai Cevaot mi aggiuti'. Quando questo sentì le parole fuggì e mi lasciò tutta tremante che non poteva appena parlare. Cominciai recitare li salmi di Davide e diceva: 'Dio mio ch'avete liberato il popolo d'Isdraele dalle mani del Faraone, liberatemi dalle mani del demonio e ponetemi nella buona strada perché salvi l'anima mia' (ASV, SU, b. 142, unpaginated).
31. On the liminal status of Italian converts see especially Renata Segre (1973), 'Neophytes during the Italian Counter-Reformation: Identities and Biographies', *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 2, 131–142.
32. Mentre era a Revere, essendo ebrea, avendo il fanciulo da latte, mi trovai in un'osteria ove si trovavano molti tedeschi; questi avevano concertato la notte di rapirmi, volendo ubbriacare mio marito, ed io che sapevo la lingua penetrai il tutto. L'ubbricorno però, ma doppo entrato in camera lo fecci andare a letto e doppo mi ritirai piangendo, assieme con il fanciulo, in un sottoscilla ove stavano le galline e mi chiusi dentro. Cominciai piangendo a salmeggiare e chiamando Dio d'Isdraele, dicendo: 'Non mi volete aggiutare, aggiutatemi almeno voi, madre del Dio de Cristiani'. Subitto venne il zaghetto e mi disse: 'Che cosa è che sei così disperata?'. Mi porse un fazzoletto acciò m'asciughi le lacrime, dicendomi: 'Non dubitare, che non venirai rapitta'.
- (ASV, SU, b. 142)
33. Miri Rubin (2008), 'The Passion of Mary: The Virgin and the Jews in Medieval Culture', in: Marcia Kupfer (ed.), *The Passion Story: From Visual Representation to Social Drama* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press): 53–66.
34. On Antonio Zambelli, prior of the House of Catechumens from 12 February 1717 to 16 August 1725 see Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi*, 136–137.
35. ASV, SU, b. 142: 'Mi voltai ove era una finestra sopra canale e volevo più tosto gettarmi nel canale che andare con lui e farmi cristiana e con gran legiadria assieme col figlio mi gettai, che se non v'erano due uomini mi [an]negavo. Doppo mi gettai giù d'una scalla con il figlio nelle braccia e restai il[les]a e vidi per aria un zaghetto che mi prese con il figlio e mi poggiò sopra il patto [= pianerottolo]. Il prior, avendo veduto questo, prese il fanciulo e lasciomi con quella gente'.

36. Archivio della Curia Patriarcale di Venezia [hereafter ACPV], *Neofiti*, b. 2, c. 134v (first column): 'A dì 20 maggio 1718. Mardocheo hebreo di anni 4, di padre al presente christiano per nome Lorenzo Zambelli, olim Abraham Flamengo, fu condotto nella pia casa da me don Antonio Abbate Zambella, prior, per rassegnarlo al santo battesimo'; (ibid., second column): 'A dì 24 maggio 1718. Francesco, olim Mardocheo fu battezzato nella nostra chiesa da me don Antonio abbate Zambella, prior. Patrino fu il paron Francesco Targhetta del quondam Andrea dalla Zuecca sta a Santa Eufemia'.
37. ACPV, *Neofiti*, b. 2, c. 134r (first column): 'A dì 20 maggio 1718. Lia hebreo di anni 25, di padre Moisé Gaon da Spalato, madre di suddetto Mardocheo, venne in questo pio luoco per abbracciar la santa fede per mezzo del sacro battesimo'; (second column) 'A dì 12 dicembre 1718. Alvisa e Lucia, olim Lia fu battezzata nella nostra chiesa da me don Antonio abbate Zambella priore. Patrino fu la signora Cecilia moglie di Piero Aleotti sta a San Gregorio'.
38. On the role of the 'suscipient', who helped the baptized child or adult convert in the course of the baptism ceremony, E. Cattaneo, s.v. 'battesimo' in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, Città del Vaticano 1948-1953, Vol. 2, coll. 1026-1038, on col. 1032.
39. ACPV, *Neofiti*, b. 2, c. 134 r.
40. As noted in Caffiero, *Forced Baptisms*.
41. On the female devotion to Mary's maternal body see especially M. Rubin (2009), *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press); K. Schreiner (1994), *Maria: Jungfrau, Mutter, Herrscherin* (Munich and Wien: Anaconda).
42. ASV, *SU*, b. 142:

La sera ho partorito una figlia in mezzo la campagna sotto un padiglione senza letto e ho partorito sopra la terra. Nel parto viddi il zaghetto e moltitudine d'angeli e splendore che pregavano per me. Il zaghetto mi disse: 'Non dubitare che sarai assistita e la santissima Vergine t'assiste'. Quando ho partorito mi diedero per capezzale una pietra e per letto la terra e la bambina la involsi in una traversa.

43. ASV, *SU*, b. 142:

Mio marito la mattina mi disse che vuol andare alle Smirne ed io gli risposi ch'io voglio andare a Venezia. Lui mi vilipese. Andai in chiesa e lo narrai al mio padre spirituale quale era il padre Girolamo Gionta, gesuitto. Questo religioso mi fece fare la novena di sant'Ignazio, acciò Dio dispona quello deve essere per salute dell'anima mia. La cominciai e il giorno dietro mio marito mi spogliò di tutto, io gli narrai al mio padre spirituale che voglio andare Venezia e il padre spirituale mi fece ricovrare in casa di mio compadre e sono stata quattro mesi. Il zaghetto si fece vedere in que' quatro mesi quatro volte e sempre mi consolava perché sempre piangeva. Doppo m'imbarcò sopra un vascello di san Francesco di Paola veneziano, montato dal capitano Francesco Bronza, stati in quel vascello con la figliolina mesi due e tre volte provorno tempesta di mare. Venne il capitano da me acciò mi raccomandai a Dio perché eravamo perduto. Quando sentì questo, avevo un'immagine di Maria e mi rivoltai

a quella e dissi: 'Maria santissima, volete ch'io m'anneghi e che perisca? Voglio pigliare mia figlia in braccio e morire con essa, ma vi raccomando l'anima mia'. Mentre diceva queste parole mi venne un accidente e mi trovavo sola con la figliolina. Venne il zaghetto e mi fece rinvenire, dicendomi: 'Non dubitare che questo vascello non perirà ed io t'assicuro'. Quando intesi questo respirai e benché sentisse gridare la marinaresca e tagliare arbori, stava gioconda et allegra. Venne il capitano a basso allegro e mi prese la figliolina in braccio e mi disse: 'Sapette per chi siamo salvati? Per questo angelo'.

44. ASV, *SU*, b. 142:

Alvisa, tu sei molto paza se tu credi di salvarti [...] Non sai tu *cosa va dicendo la gente per Venezia*, va dicendo che sei una furfantona e una putana e per volerti coprire tu dici queste cose e se non mi credi, la prima volta che tu vai alla tua casa, tu vederai cosa che ti dirano e oggi o dimani questo tuo prette qua in fazza, pocco di buono, ti dirà che sei una puttana e basta che tu sii ebrea fatta christiana, basta aver quel nome, per esser pocco di buono.

Alvisa gli rispose che vada alla malora, che la gente dica quello vuole, che nulla gl'importa e per Gesù vuole tutto soportare purché salvi l'anima sua. Sentì doppo un grande strepito e urlì orribilissimi: 'Tu pensi - diceva, povera paza - ,di salvare l'anima tua, ma tu la perdi in questa maniera'. Alvisa si levò e gli fece il precetto e non sentì altro'.

45. ASV, *SU*, b. 142: 'Il t'assassinerà a far quelle scritte, già t'ho detto un'altra volta ch'è tanto sangue della tua vitta, adesso te lo confermo perché, *sino che tu n'averai una goccia, anderà scrivendo*' (emphasis added).
46. On the Italian 'living saints' (*sante vive*) see G. Zarri (1990), *Le sante vive: Profezie di corte e devozione femminile tra '400 e '500* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier). In this respect, too, she could be compared to Cecilia Ferrazzi, who was also believed to bear the marks of the stigmata. To the best of my knowledge, Alvisa was not aware of the Ferrazzi affair, although, in light of the chronological and geographic proximity between the two cases, the possibility should not be dismissed *a priori*. Moreover, other women in the Veneto region were reputed stigmatics in those days (Ferrazzi and other *sante vive* of her era are discussed in Schutte, *Aspiring Saints*).
47. ASV, *SU*, b. 142: 'Continua la sudetta Alvisa Zambelli ad abitare assieme con la sudetta Bernarda Mancini nella casetta situata nella contrada di San Pantaleon [...] e continua avere l'assistenza del reverendo padre maestro Chelini della chiesa de' Frari, della qual Alvisa è dispersa fama essere una nuova Catterina da Siena, portando sì nelle mani come nelli piedi li segni delle stif[g]mate, essendo appresso la gente in molta veneratione, avendo, per quello viene riferito, soccorso sì dalla gente plebea come anche da monache e anche da qualche nobildonna [...]'.