

**Lucrezia's Magic:
Stories of Women's
Survival and
Resistance in
16th-Century Italy**

by Jeanne Ernest

Over four days in late April, 1559, a Roman state notary investigated allegations of magical practice against a high-class prostitute, or courtesan, by questioning four individuals. The existing record only contains a transcript of these preliminary proceedings; we do not know if they eventually led to a formal trial. The courtesan in question was named Lucrezia the Greek, a sex worker to captains, cardinals, and colonels who either resided in or passed through the city of Rome during this period. The suspicion of magic that prompted these trials was not uncommon in this context. However, exploring the way the investigation played out for Lucrezia offers a peek into the world of a woman and courtesan in sixteenth-century Italy.

Due to our limited knowledge of everyday individuals, and particularly of women, in Renaissance Rome, there are many unknowns in Lucrezia's story. While we do know that she was accused of using magic to win the love of Giovanni Maria, a servant to the pope, we do not know if these allegations were accurate. Perhaps this was a love story — that of a woman who risked the steep punishments of Renaissance Rome to bring love into her life by way of magic.¹ Or perhaps it was a story of survival — one in which a beautiful and resourceful courtesan deployed all means available to ascend a strict social ladder. Perhaps again, this was a story of revenge — after Lucrezia insulted a member of her community, the other woman spread rumors about strange occurrences in Lucrezia's household that drove the investigation.

Due to the limitations of court documents, we will

likely never know which of these stories ring true. Yet understanding the details of Lucrezia's life can help guide modern readers through the world of a sixteenth-century courtesan, exploring the surprising breadth of her networks as well as the limits of those very networks. Lucrezia's is a story in which the grand fantasies of agency for a highly-connected woman met the realities of a middling courtesan in Renaissance Rome. Her strategies of survival and resistance mirror modern methods of fighting class and gender discrimination. While most individuals do not practice magic today, many who are constrained by structures of class and gender still construct and maintain networks of power to gain wealth and avoid harm. Women in particular still weave around the structures of patriarchal society, often strategically alternating between their relationships with men and those with women. In many ways, however, Lucrezia's is still a tale of the past, a distant past where magic was accessible and relatively common, yet bound by institutional structures such as education and law.

Between the state, Catholic Church, and family, a variety of forces in Lucrezia's world enacted different but often overlapping expectations on women, punishing them in ways ranging from loveless marriages to exile in a convent.² Yet another way of controlling women was silencing their legacy, whether intentionally or not. Women were rarely taught how to read and write, and even when they were, it could prove very difficult to get published or to be taken seriously as an author or intellectual.³ As a result, historians have comparatively little primary source material to build an understanding of the actions, thoughts, and feelings of women during this

¹ Throughout the Renaissance period, the state implemented strict penalties against those who committed crimes. This was due in part to the difficulty authorities had in apprehending criminals, yet when they did, they often sought to make an example out of them. See Thomas V. Cohen and Elizabeth Storr Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome: Trials Before the Papal Magistrates* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1993) 15, 16.

² Historian Guido Ruggiero goes so far as to describe life in the convent as “a form of social and sexual bondage that socially placed young women,” see: Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 25. See also: Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny: The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*, ed. and trans. Letizia Panizza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³ Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, xxii; Veronica Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, eds. and trans. Ann Rosalind Jones and Margaret F. Rosenthal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 5.

period than those of men. And even when such sources are available, histories of early modern women are often silenced again today. Feminist historian Judith Bennett, among many others, has spent her career fighting to give a voice to the women of this period.

Bennett and other feminist scholars argue that although women's lives in early modern Europe may have been regulated and disciplined, they also successfully resisted forces that sought to control them. Some women wrote themselves out of archival silences and sex work and convents, gaining notoriety, honor, and respect as intellectuals.⁴ Others, excluded from public and political spheres, reigned over residential neighborhoods.⁵ Still others fully resisted the confines of patriarchy by loving other women.⁶ Among these women, Lucrezia (allegedly) employed magic to survive in a world that was difficult for a woman. This essay seeks to surface such acts of resistance and survival.

Bennett reminds us that “the people who lived in the past are not us, and their difference from us compels our attention as much as those differences that we daily encounter such as class, race, religion, sexuality, and world region... differences that fractured the meanings of ‘woman’ and the experiences of women.”⁷ By reframing the women's stories included in this essay in terms of survival and resistance instead of silence and loss, I seek to explore the strategies early modern European women undertook to assert their rights while they were alive, and to establish their presence in history. These are lessons not only for the past, but also for the present.

This is not a story about loss or silence. This is a story about life. One that may have emerged from the archive because of a trial investigation, but that exists beyond it. The events captured in the transcript are only one chapter of Lucrezia's life. In fact, they may not even be true; the witnesses who testified were in disagreement about the validity of the main charges. The greatest unknown, however, is the protagonist herself; Lucrezia the Greek is never recorded as speaking in the transcript. Was she questioned at all? Did she have connections who shielded her from further investigation? Or does this record only represent the beginning of a longer trial? We cannot answer these questions, but we can draw an array of possibilities from the records that remain. My aim here is to draw out components of the life Lucrezia may have led by exploring the gaps that did not survive. Although the majority of her story has been lost, we can weave portions together by surveying what Renaissance Rome was like for a woman and courtesan alongside the claims of magic, betrayal, and love that arise in the notary's records. This investigation into Lucrezia's methods of survival and resistance highlights how she called on the tools she had access to — her body, relationships, religion, magic, and more — to construct a better life.

Lucrezia “the Greek” was likely born in Greece and arrived in Rome long before the events of the investigation. Trial records from Renaissance Rome often identify individuals by their most noteworthy features, and not necessarily by their full first and last names, which explains why we know so little about Lucrezia's background and family.⁸ Immigration to Italy during this period was commonplace. Thomas

⁴ The sixteenth-century Venetian prostitute Veronica Franco became a renowned poet, bringing together a collection of intellectuals and artists that established her place in society that would have otherwise been impossible merely through sex work. Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, 5. See also: Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*; Moderata Fonte and Virginia Cox, *The Worth of Women: Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

⁵ Monica Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 50.

⁶ Judith M. Bennett, “‘Lesbian-Like’ and the Social History of Lesbianisms.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, no. 1/2 (2000): 1-24.

⁷ Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.revproxy.brown.edu/lib/brown/detail.action?docID=3441577>, 47.

⁸ Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*, 59.

V. Cohen and Elizabeth Storr Cohen, the two historians who bring Lucrezia's story to light in *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, describe the city as a fluid society, "a town of migrants" where "most people came from somewhere else."⁹ Yet the prominence of this transience did not ensure a smooth transition. While Lucrezia may have arrived in Italy in search of a better life, it was not guaranteed.

Rome would have been a very interesting city to arrive in during the mid-sixteenth century. The Protestant Reformation had pushed the Catholic world into a frenzy, teetering on the verge of the Counter-Reformation.¹⁰ The Catholic Church was in a crisis of authority, exacerbated by the Renaissance's new emphasis on the state. At the center of this struggle in the capital of the Papal States was, of course, the pope. During this period the papal office was marked by crippling discontinuity due to the tradition of electing popes late in life.¹¹ Princely courts, cardinals, and other officials both secular and religious vied for the power that leaked out of the papal office largely through patronage.¹² Cohen and Cohen describe this as a "barter system, which passed out wealth, power, and prestige, not gratis, but in exchange for political support."¹³

Power struggles between the Church and the state sometimes played out in the courts. In Rome at this time, three courts wielded the most power.¹⁴ The vicar, as the pope's delegated overseer of Roman churches, represented religious interests. The senator, also a papal appointee, maintained Rome's

sovereign tradition by wielding "old communal authority."¹⁵ Finally, the governor oversaw courts throughout the Papal State, unconfined to issues of the Church or city alone. It is in this court that the main drama of our story takes place.

The sixteenth century saw the transformation of these courts and others in Italy. Cohen and Cohen describe "the very borders of the illegal" as caught up in this fluctuation.¹⁶ Amidst the many changes brought by the Renaissance, records from the judicial system are particularly ripe sources for understanding how common people responded to these shifting times. Trial records are thus particularly crucial to historians of social or marginalized histories because recorded within them are the actual voices and stories of members of the general public. It is no wonder, then, that these records are crucial to my study of women's strategies of survival and resistance. Lucrezia's is one of many stories that draw from such records. Our ability to peek into the lives of others, including some of the other women examined in this essay, are largely possible because of these records. While the fluctuation of the law brought these cases to the attention of the state, it also created the conditions for women's creative strategies to be brought to light.

Narrowing into women's lives, a variety of factors made it necessary for them to employ tactics of resistance and survival. A few historians of early modern Italy use the language of discipline and enclosure to describe women's roles during this period.

⁹ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome* , 21.

¹⁰ Responding to the Protestant challenge to Catholicism, Pope Paul III convened the Council of Trent in 1545 to redefine and reinforce Catholic practices and institute reforms. Over the eighteen years that this body met, the Catholic reform period known as the Counter-Reformation, Catholic Reformation, or Catholic Revival, began. Merry E. Wiesner, *Christianity and Sexuality In the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice* (London: Routledge, 2010), <https://doi-org.revproxy.brown.edu/10.4324/9780429259975> , 119.

¹¹ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome* , 13.

¹² Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome* , 13.

¹³ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome* , 13.

¹⁴ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome* , 16.

¹⁵ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome* , 16.

¹⁶ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome* , 5. See also: John Brackett, "Crime and Punishment," *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance* , ed. Paul F. Grenier (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1999), 101-106.

In *Cultures of Charity: Women, Politics, and the Reform of Poor Relief In Renaissance Italy*, author Nicholas Terpstra draws from the work of historians Mary Elizabeth Perry and Philip Gavitt to explain the origins of this culture of enclosure. Perry describes a “deep-seated gender ideology that associated women with disorder [which] lay at the heart of this push to enclose and discipline.”¹⁷ This sense of disorder was tied in part to an inability to understand or control female bodies, especially in relation to sex and reproduction.¹⁸ Womens’ reproductive capacities (and thus their bodies) were highly regulated in attempts to prevent and punish pregnancy out of wedlock among all classes, especially the wealthy whose heirs would eventually rule. Despite the relative fluidity of sex and gender in the early modern period, authorities (in the form of the state, Church, and patriarchs in the home) increasingly sought to discipline and control the body, especially those of women.¹⁹

Gavitt articulates how the sense of disorder around womens’ bodies fed a patriarchal society. He describes a “lineage ideology” that prioritized male heirs over all family members, but especially daughters, in order to maximize the potential of familial success.²⁰ Success in Renaissance Italy was defined in terms of a family’s honor and wealth, two interconnected phenomena that women could rarely contribute to directly, but could easily diminish through disorderly conduct such as mismatched marriages or an overabundance of sexuality.²¹ Women were thus often bound to private spheres like the home or neighborhood in attempts to control the seemingly

natural disorder of their gender. Gavitt notes that although this enclosure was not confined to the familial sphere, it “began at home and in the family and spiraled out from there.”²² This process facilitated women’s absence from public spheres and provided justifications for men to rule over women and their bodies both in public and private. Women required strategies to rage against their confinement and survive in a society that was actively constructed to exclude them.

The language of binding is useful to describe the expectations and restrictions on women in Lucrezia’s world. Historian Guido Ruggiero takes up this language in *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* to describe the forces that sought to enclose and discipline women in Renaissance Italy. He highlights the central role of marriage in Italian society and expands on it as a common factor in the binding of women. Ruggiero writes: “Simply stated, marriage was a significant form of social and economic placement for all involved, and the easiest and surest placement was one where both partners and their families belonged.”²³ And yet, in these structures women similar to “the lively and independent Nanna” occasionally found themselves “virtually sold into slavery” in marriage.²⁴ Due to the commonality of arranged marriages for an honorable and advantageous match, marriage became yet another site of enclosure and discipline for women.

Unmarried women also faced many challenges. In

¹⁷ Nicholas Terpstra, *Cultures of Charity: Women, Politics, and the Reform of Poor Relief In Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 5.

¹⁸ Laura Gowing, “Women’s Bodies and the Making of Sex in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Signs* 37, no. 4 (2012), 817, 814.

¹⁹ The Council of Trent reaffirmed the sanctity of marriage in the Catholic Church and added a stipulation that a valid marriage must take place in the presence of witnesses, including the parish priest. Wiesner, *Christianity and Sexuality In the Early Modern World*, 124; Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 59. Such shifts sought to prevent unofficial unions (such as in the case of Giovanni and Lusanna) that could have facilitated the births of illegitimate children, see: Gene Brucker, *Giovanni and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

²⁰ Terpstra, *Cultures of Charity*, 6.

²¹ Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 14-15, 67-68.

²² Terpstra, *Cultures of Charity*, 6.

²³ Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 14.

response to dangers like rape, murder, and dishonor, unmarried women often clustered in homes and neighborhoods for communal protection. The investigation record reveals an incident in which Lucrezia faced such dangers, yet survived by the protection of a neighbor. She had a brush with death when a client, “a captain Tomasso wanted to kill her.”²⁵ Fleeing the scene, Lucrezia sought refuge with a neighborhood friend whom she lived with for a time as a courtesan. Surrounded by a network of other women thus worked to Lucrezia’s advantage. After arriving in a strange new land, she forged relationships that offered protection.

Neighborhood relationships were a survival resource for Lucrezia and other women of her time. Historian Monica Chojnacka, in *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*, describes three reasons why early modern Italian women forged relationships in their neighborhoods. The first, companionship, could ward off the loneliness that both married and unmarried life could bring.²⁶ Isolated from many aspects of public life, the presence of another woman in the home could provide pleasure and entertainment for early modern women. This companionship may have sometimes exceeded platonic friendship. Judith Bennett, in her 2000 article “‘Lesbian-Like’ and the Social History of Lesbianisms,” calls on historians to look for “lesbian-like” behaviors, such as cohabitation or close relations between women, in the archive.²⁷ It is possible that some of the companionships that brought women together in their neighborhoods, and even in the same household, were romantic or sexual attractions. I will explore how Lucrezia may have maintained similar relationships

in her neighborhood later in this essay.

The second reason Chojnacka gives for close bonds between women within a neighborhood is economic bonds.²⁸ This could include hiring another woman in the neighborhood to perform housework or other tasks around the home. Control over household finances would have been relatively rare for a married woman, but for unmarried women and widows, it would have been necessary. Such was the case of Alessandra Strozzi, a widowed mother who took up the business of an average (and typically male) Florentine property owner by managing tenants, collecting rents, and paying taxes after her husband passed away.²⁹ Women like Lucrezia who led unconventional lifestyles may have also managed their own finances or turned to other women, such as a biological or adoptive mother who lived in close proximity, to act as their financial manager.³⁰ Finally, Chojnacka describes women facilitating neighborhood relationships out of “simpl[e] kindness,” just as we do today.³¹ Largely excluded from other public spheres, women constructed webs of relationships for these three reasons - companionship, economic bonds, and kindness - in order to survive and thrive within the neighborhood.

Bonds between women in the home could prove just as important as those outside. Two of the witnesses who testified were likely in Lucrezia’s employ, building their stories from scenes they claimed to have witnessed in her home. The first, Caterina Nanzi of Lorraine, lived with Lucrezia for only “the space of eight or ten days.”³² It seems likely that she was a servant of Lucrezia’s based on the details of their

²⁴ Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 25.

²⁵ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 190.

²⁶ Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*, 64.

²⁷ Bennett, “‘Lesbian-Like’ and the Social History of Lesbianisms,” 20-21.

²⁸ Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*, 73.

²⁹ Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi and Heather Gregory, *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 6.

³⁰ Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 36.

³¹ Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*, 73.

³² Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 189.

relationship, but had met her prior to coming to work in the house. Perhaps the neighborhood helped them form an economic bond that resulted in Caterina coming to stay in Lucrezia's home. Another woman named Lucrezia also testified against her madame, Lucrezia the Greek. She had worked in the Greek's home for almost two years prior to the investigation.³³

Caterina and the other Lucrezia provided the most damning evidence against Lucrezia the Greek during the investigation. Yet Caterina in particular did not seem afraid of the repercussions of her testimony. She concluded by reiterating that she had nothing to fear: "I said all these things to Lucrezia [the Greek]'s face and I will say them to her again when the need comes."³⁴ She did not appear concerned about her employment at all, nor about the social ramifications of testifying against a courtesan of at least some social standing.

It is possible too that Caterina did not fear testifying against her employer because Lucrezia the Greek was a courtesan. Lucrezia's profession, however, was not entirely taboo; in fact, sex work was quite common in the early modern world of Catholic Europe. Merry E. Wiesner, in *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice*, writes: "In general, major Italian cities such as Florence and Venice were the most tolerant, favoring regulation over suppression and often viewing prostitutes as significant sources

of municipal income."³⁵ In Rome in particular, where the number of men who could not marry due to religious obligations was remarkably high, sex work was not only common but facilitated important and occasionally protective connections for many women that would have otherwise been possible only through marriage.³⁶ Despite this general tolerance of sex work, however, early modern Europe was occasionally gripped by moments of moral panic over women's bodies. These fluctuating desires to control and discipline women's bodies were related to the abundant opportunities for disorder that many found there. Catholic reformers dedicated to clarifying the boundaries of acceptable sexual behavior (which to them resided solely within the sacrament of marriage) and preventing the proliferation of illegitimate children occasionally cracked down on sex work by closing licensed brothels and imprisoning or banishing sex workers.³⁷ Punishments often included sending women to convents where they could be reformed.³⁸ These efforts were often framed in terms of a patriarchal protection over women's bodies, but many women did not seek protection from this profession. For women like Lucrezia, sex work was a choice, a method of survival that also provided opportunities to thrive.

Although Lucrezia was new to town, she had the resources to become a well-connected (and thus relatively protected) sex worker — a courtesan and not a mere "whore." A courtesan, or cortigiana, was a sex worker with honor, one who was "privileged,

³³ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 191.

³⁴ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 190.

³⁵ Wiesner, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World*, 149. It was not uncommon in sixteenth-century Italy to tax sex workers based on their income. Most had to claim this profession on the census (Chojnacka 55), and in this way became required to pay. In the case of Florence in particular, these taxes often went to charities or convents where women could go if they decided to give up the profession (Wiesner 149). Additional taxes "would allow a woman to live where she wished in the city and wear whatever type of clothes she chose" (Wiesner 149). We can see by these examples that sex work was highly regulated but also provided certain freedoms women may have been unable to enjoy otherwise.

³⁶ Wiesner, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World*, 149.

³⁷ Wiesner, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World*, 149.

³⁸ Ruggiero also notes that these punishments were not always effective, as in the 1561 Convertite scandal where "reformed" prostitutes, or new nuns, continued to sell sex out of the convent where their father confessor served as a pimp. Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 52-53.

wealthy, recognized.”³⁹ Life in this profession contrasted that of lower tiers of sex workers. *Puttana* was an insult comparable to “whore” that was used to describe the poorest sex workers.⁴⁰ A courtesan also differed from a *meretrice*, which was a neutral mid-sixteenth century word for a sex worker.⁴¹ That Lucrezia the Greek was described as a courtesan rather than a *meretrice* thus conveys a higher social standing from her role as a sex worker.

We do not know the process by which Lucrezia became a courtesan after arriving in Italy, but by examining the life of an elite Venetian courtesan around the same time, we may have a better understanding of why Lucrezia pursued this profession. Born to a native Venetian family of the professional class, Veronica Franco had substantially greater connections than Lucrezia.⁴² Franco was married for a brief time to a doctor, but for unknown reasons they quickly separated.⁴³ Shortly after the dissolution of her marriage, Franco took up the life of a courtesan. Similar to Lucrezia, Franco was no ordinary meretrice. She worked with the elite of Venice in addition to merchants, ambassadors, and even kings who passed through the city.⁴⁴ Historians Ann Rosalind Jones and Margaret F. Rosenthal, who translated Franco’s works, reiterate that to be a successful courtesan, “a woman needed to be beautiful, sophisticated in her dress and manners, and an elegant, cultivated conversationalist.”⁴⁵ With success in these areas, Franco, like Lucrezia, was able to support a substantial household of servants, in addition to her children and their tutors.⁴⁶

Lucrezia clearly had knowledge of such prominent courtesans. In her trial, one of the acts of magic she is accused of engaging in is the collection of dust from the doorways of “the most favoured whores, saying that she was carrying off the good fortune from that whore and carrying it to her house.”⁴⁷ If this allegation was true, it meant that Lucrezia viewed her profession as a mode of social mobility that could bring her wealth and prominence similar to that enjoyed by courtesans like Veronica Franco. It is likely that Lucrezia did not have to travel far to collect this dust. It was common especially for unmarried women to live in proximity to those engaged in a similar profession.⁴⁸

As evident by her label, clientele, and household staff, Lucrezia had already become a relatively well-off courtesan. Cohen and Cohen note that she must have been “attractive enough in body, clothing, and domestic furnishings to entertain a cardinal,” who is mentioned in the record as one of her clients.⁴⁹ By building her clientele list to include the cardinal, Lucrezia made herself eligible for a mutually beneficial relationship with other high-ranking members of the Church such as Giovanni Maria.

The growth of her connections apparently did not happen fast enough for Lucrezia. Her alleged use of love magic appears to have been an attempt to solidify her ascension into higher-class status through associations with powerful men like Maria who was a servant to the pope. Magic, however, was an increasingly controversial tool of resistance. Over

³⁹ Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, 3.

⁴⁰ Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, 3.

⁴¹ Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, 2.

⁴² Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, 2.

⁴³ Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, 4.

⁴⁴ Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, 1.

⁴⁵ Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, 1.

⁴⁶ Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, 4.

⁴⁷ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 193.

⁴⁸ Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*, 54.

⁴⁹ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 196.

the course of the early modern period, it had become a contentious point in the battles between church and state. The Counter-Reformation sought to consolidate spirituality within the confines of the Church, and magic was seen as a threat to this process in its democratization of the sacred. Cohen and Cohen write that “sixteenth-century magic is not the negation of an orthodox religion that itself often conjures the supernatural for terrestrial good, but its extension into a zone outside clerical control.”⁵⁰ Restricting magic during this period then was yet another site where power struggles played out as the Church sought to articulate its control by suppressing magic.

Why, then, was Lucrezia’s case brought to a state court rather than an ecclesiastical court? It is possible that 1559 was a moment when the state had momentarily triumphed over Church authority in their centuries-long struggle. The regulation of magic would have fallen within the state’s control and, as Cohen and Cohen describe it: “in prosecuting magic, the state’s court thus polices the boundaries of religion and wards over the church’s prerogatives.”⁵¹ A case like Lucrezia’s would demonstrate that state authority superseded the Church. Alternatively, the unclear jurisdictions of the three Roman courts also make it possible that Lucrezia’s case had simply slipped accidentally between the authorities of church and

state.⁵² Either way, Lucrezia was lucky that her case was not pursued as part of the Inquisition, where the politicization of magic could have resulted in steeper punishments in the Church’s attempt to police the sacred and punish its misuse.⁵³

The primary accusations against Lucrezia the Greek were that of love magic. Magic to bind another individual to you in love was understandably rather common in a society that placed such an emphasis on marriage as a mode of social mobility. We do not know if marriage was Lucrezia’s end-goal, but even a less formal connection to a man of high-status would have been useful to a courtesan who was motivated to better her social standing. Thus, “to kindle the heart of Giovanni Maria, or some other heart,” Lucrezia was believed to have taken to love magic.⁵⁴

The magic Lucrezia allegedly conducted to win Giovanni’s heart took many forms. She is described reciting spells and conducting strange actions. Allegedly, “the Greek went to cut the cords of the bells and that she had them burnt in a lamp with oil and holy water so that messer Giovanni Maria might love her.”⁵⁵ In addition to this warping of religious symbols to fit her needs, Lucrezia also supposedly called on her professional connections. Her servant Lucrezia recalled:

Afterwards, whenever she slept with someone, and above all with cardinal Strozzi, she gave me certain ragged handkerchiefs, telling me, ‘Put this aside. I sponged my genitals with it because I slept with the cardinal.’ ... And with them, she took a lamp with oil and made those wicks burn... And she said certain words over them, like the others, or like them in meaning, to kindle the heart of Giovanni Maria, or some other heart.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 197.

⁵¹ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 197.

⁵² Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 16.

⁵³ Wiesner, *Christianity and Sexuality In the Early Modern World*, 155.

⁵⁴ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 192.

⁵⁵ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 190.

⁵⁶ Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 192.