

***Exploring the Existential Dimension of Heresy:
Between Inquisition Repression and a “Secret Sociability”***

What did it mean to be a heretic in sixteenth-century Catholic Italy? This paper adopts a networked methodology, aiming to represent the *existential* dimension of religious dissent.

Inquisition sources construct a one-dimensional meaning of the term *heretic*. “*Eretico marcio*”, “*eretico pertinace*”, “*hereticus pestilentissimus*” were some of the expressions the Inquisitors used to label the people who questioned the Roman Church’s authority. However, to understand the “everyday life” of a heretic, we need to examine the contexts, patterns of connection, religious practices, cultural views, and strategies of support experienced by the people defined as “heretics”.

In this paper, using digital humanities tools, I will provide a bird’s eye view of heretical networks related to a specific group of religious dissenters: Italian heretical physicians. Reconstructing their social and cultural environment, and examining the networks of certain relevant characters, I will investigate the “secret sociability and scandalous lives”¹ that these so-called heretics lived.

Keywords: heretic; religious dissent; networks; sixteenth-century; Italy

¹ Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité* (Paris, Gallimard-Seuil: 2009), p. 171