

**Facing the plague in an Inquisition prison:
the case of the heretical physician Girolamo Donzellini**

The epidemic of plague that affected Venice in 1576 was one of the most traumatic that the city ever experienced. Over the course of two years more than 50.000 Venetian citizens died. This paper will deal with this catastrophic moment in the life of the *Serenissima* from a very particular point of view: that of the heretical physician, and Inquisition prisoner, Girolamo Donzellini (1513-1587).

Donzellini was a very well-known physician and humanist in what he himself defined as the 16th-century *Respublica Medicorum*; he was a prolific writer and insatiable reader; and he was put on trial by the Inquisition five times before being sentenced to death in 1587. During the first phase of the outbreak Donzellini was in prison, and it was precisely because of the service he paid the city in this tragic situation that he was able to re-gain freedom.

My paper will first describe what Inquisition prisoners' daily life was like in times of plague, thanks to the rare evidence provided by the minutes of Donzellini's trial. Next, it will analyse the content of the medical treatise Donzellini wrote during his imprisonment in order to advice the *Provveditori alla Sanità* on how to handle the plague: the *Discorso Nobilissimo e Dottissimo Preservativo et Curativo della Peste*. This examination will show the medical, and, more broadly speaking, intellectual frame of a heretical physician.

In sum, this original case-study encourages us to reconsider the world that plague made at the intersection between sixteenth-century medicine, society and religion.