Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

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Volume 45, Number 4, Fall 2022

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1105489ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i4.41380

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)
2293-7374 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Kerton-Johnson, C., Whitsit, B. & DeSilva, J. (2022). Mala Vicinanza: Female Household-Heads and Proximity to Sex Work in Sixteenth-Century Florence. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, *45*(4), 59–108. https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i4.41380

Article abstract

In mid-sixteenth-century Florence the need to fund Santa Elisabetta delle Convertite, the convent sheltering retired sex workers, prompted the introduction of a higher tax on sex workers that offered freedom from identifying signs, geographic restrictions, and the title of meretrice. The result was precisely the diffusion of sex workers across the city that previous legislation has sought to avoid. While legislation identified sex workers' mala vicinanza (evil proximity) as the justification for creating buffer zones around convents, conversely it also allowed sex workers to live within those buffer zones if they exhibited modestia e bontà (modesty and goodness). This unlikely loophole privileged Santa Elisabetta's needs while allowing the segregation policy to fail. Using the 1561 decima census, this article tracks the residence of sex workers near to unenclosed female household-heads in an effort to explore the effect of Florentine magistrates' ambivalence towards poor working women and the segregation policy's failure.

Mala Vicinanza: Female Household-Heads and Proximity to Sex Work in Sixteenth-Century Florence*

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In mid-sixteenth-century Florence the need to fund Santa Elisabetta delle Convertite, the convent sheltering retired sex workers, prompted the introduction of a higher tax on sex workers that offered freedom from identifying signs, geographic restrictions, and the title of meretrice. *The result was precisely the diffusion of sex workers across the city that previous legislation has sought to avoid. While legislation identified sex workers'* mala vicinanza *(evil proximity) as the justification for creating buffer zones around convents, conversely it also allowed sex workers to live within those buffer zones if they exhibited* modestia e bontà *(modesty and goodness). This unlikely loophole privileged Santa Elisabetta's needs while allowing the segregation policy to fail. Using the 1561* decima *census, this article tracks the residence of sex workers near to unenclosed female household-heads in an effort to explore the effect of Florentine magistrates' ambivalence towards poor working women and the segregation policy's failure.*

Dans la Florence du milieu du XVI^e^ *siècle, la nécessité de financer Santa Elisabetta delle Convertite, couvent accueillant des travailleuses du sexe retraitées, a entraîné l'introduction d'une taxe plus élevée sur les travailleuses du sexe qui les dégageait de l'obligation de porter des signes d'identification, des restrictions géographiques et du titre de* meretrice. *Le résultat fut précisément la dispersion des travailleuses du sexe dans la ville que la législation précédente avait cherché à éviter. Alors que la législation considérait la* mala vicinanza *(proximité néfaste) des travailleuses du sexe comme justification pour la création de zones tampons autour des couvents, elle permettait également, à l'inverse, aux travailleuses du sexe de vivre dans ces zones tampons si elles faisaient preuve de* modestia e bontà *(pudeur et bonté). Cette faille inattendue a privilégié les besoins du couvent de Santa Elisabetta, tout en permettant que la politique de ségrégation échoue. En recourant au recensement* decima *de 1561, cet article suit la résidence des travailleuses du sexe à proximité des femmes cheffes de maison non recluses afin d'explorer l'effet de l'ambivalence des magistrats florentins envers les travailleuses défavorisées et l'échec de la politique de ségrégation.*

In July 1561, Florence's urban authority acknowledged the continued growth of female monasteries and the difficulty of maintaining a zone of quiet religious contemplation within the high-density city. The decree singled out "*meretrici* and shameless women," who coincidentally also appeared to be growing in

* The authors are grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments and suggestions. We would also like to thank Jonathan DeSilva Corson for his assistance with the revised figures.

https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i4.41380

number, as the chief barrier to female monastic life. The scarcity of appropriate housing had forced *meretrici* (licensed sex workers) to live dangerously close to convents. Their *mala vicinanza* (literally, "evil proximity") and scandalous example prevented enclosed women from concentrating on sermons and the divine service. This distraction could lead to the subversion of their individual and communal virtue. Not only were the nuns' souls and quality of religious life at stake, but so was their ability to attract the alms that sustained their communities. Acknowledging this encroachment, Duke Cosimo I de' Medici declared a 100-braccia (60-metre) exclusion zone around convents.[1] Sex workers of any sort who resided or worked within this zone would be fined 200 lire for each infraction of the law. This fine was far greater than the 15-lire fee paid by registered sex workers for a three-month license,[2] and it signalled the urban authority's concern for protecting Florentine convents' spiritual and financial health.[3] Notably, the decree expressed no concern for unenclosed women and offered no suggestions for solving the housing crisis that caused nuns and *meretrici* to live in close proximity.

This decree characterizes the ambivalence of sixteenth-century Florence's *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* (Officials of Decency). After centuries of maintaining a segregation policy designed to prevent sex workers from mixing with other women, the state and the Onestà magistrates had allowed it to fail. This article reveals the close geographic proximity in which some working women and nuns lived with sex workers and explores the paradoxical and pragmatic measures that cultivated prostitution in order to defend enclosed female virtue. The need to protect and fund female monastic communities, and the desire to protect sex workers' earning potential so that they could fund the city's convent for retired *meretrici* (Santa Elisabetta delle Convertite, also called Monastero delle Convertite, or simply the Convertite), preoccupied Florentine authorities. As this article shows, virtue and wealth were entwined for Florentine women: wealthy *meretrici* could pay a tax to avoid restrictions and fines, including the trade's reputation for *mala vicinanza*. Setting this decree alongside an

1. This zone included a 50-braccia quiet zone that was created around convents in the 1440s and 1450s. Strocchia, *Nuns*, 173; Terpstra, "Sex," 89n33.

2. Twenty soldi equalled 1 lire. When the city first introduced gold Florentine scudi in 1530, they traded officially for 7 lire, and through the 1560s remained in the range of approximately 7 lire. Cipolla, *Money*, 64–65, 69.

3. Cantini, *Legislazione toscana*, 3–4:184.

investigation of sex workers and female-headed households reveals the tension between virtue and the economic pragmatism of the Florentine sex trade. As Florence's female monastic population grew, geographic proximity to sex work was the price that many Florentines paid to fund the Convertite through the second half of the sixteenth century.

The 1561 decree adopted language categorizing behaviour and space that supported Florentine magistrates' ability to exempt or ignore, as well as enforce, regulations. Convents sought neighbours who "live with that modesty and goodness that is appropriate, without perturbing any of their neighbours or the Monastery."[4] While to contemporaries *far mala vicinanza* meant "to be a bad neighbour," when applied to sex workers it had a deeply gendered meaning that drew on expectations of female weakness.[5] To be a bad neighbour to nuns meant behaving in a way that transformed the area's character into a *malborghetto* (neighbourhood of ill repute) or a *loca inhonesta* (indecent place).[6] From the high Middle Ages, Florentine authorities had tried to prevent the entire city from becoming a *malborghetto*, with geographic restrictions applied to work and play. In 1403, the city established a public brothel (also called a *loca inhonesta*) where citizens could engage in the paradox of avoiding vice and imitating virtue by fornicating with licensed women.[7] The value system that encouraged women vowed as brides of Christ to be celibate and continent also designated (and often denigrated) sex workers as *feminine impudiche* (shameless women) and *donne di mala fama* (women of evil reputation). As the 1561 decree indicates, Florentine magistrates were willing to negotiate their definition of *mala vicinanza* to accommodate a pragmatic belief that both nuns and sex workers needed to share the city and each attract financial support and pursue salvation. Amid this pragmatism, many of the spatial protections previously accorded to unenclosed women were lost or undermined, even as new institutions sheltering at-risk women opened.

4. Our translation. "viva apparentemente con quella modestia, e bontà che conviene, senza perturhatione alcuna delli vicini o del Monasterio." Cantini, *Legislazione toscana*, 3–4:185.

5. Altieri, *Dizionario*, 1:583.

6. Mazzi, *Life*, 30–31.

7. Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASF), *Ufficiali dell'Onestà* (hereafter *Onestà*) 1, "Rubriche e Statuti, 1403–1597," fol. 3r (obviare vitia et imitare virtutes).

Using Florence's geo-located 1561 census provided by the DECIMA Project (https://decima-map.net), this article investigates the paradoxical concern about women's proximity to sex work, which resulted from the need for cheap accommodation, the pressure of civic regulations, and the presence of large numbers of single male workers. While late medieval Florentine authorities had tried to separate *meretrici* from popular commercial areas, such as zones of entertainment (i.e., inns and taverns) and sacred spaces, many of these regulations had failed to prevent sex work from spreading throughout the city. Over time, new laws privileged identification through clothing and residency, thereby reducing the physical distance between *meretrici* and city inhabitants but making the *meretrici* easier to spot. The geographic restrictions on Florentine sex workers culminated in 1547 and 1558 in the identification of twenty-two streets on which they could live and work, which initially corresponded with areas already inhabited by a high density of *meretrici*.[8] As this article shows, in 1561 these streets were characterized by low rents and attracted some of the city's poorest households, which were often led by women. Although these permitted zones were supposed to house only licensed sex workers, Florentine magistrates could not or did not enforce this law and actively undermined it by selling exemptions to women who could afford the price. The quest for inexpensive housing and the failure to prevent sex workers living outside the chosen streets (called permitted zones) sometimes resulted in women who sold sex residing next door to the unmarried or widowed women whose virtue these regulations originally sought to protect. This situation left city authorities no closer to their goal of shielding honest women from licensed sex workers; rather, it facilitated the continued anxiety over poor clandestine and unlicensed (called "dishonest") workers who were more likely to live in proximity to *meretrici*.

Diminishing protections and increasing intervention

Reviewing Florentine legislation to 1561 reveals the truth of John Brackett's observation that the early fifteenth-century strategy of containing sex work

8. ASF *Onestà* 1, "Rubriche e Statuti, 1403–1597," fols. 34v–37r. On the magistracy that supervised prostitution, see Brackett, "Florentine Onestà," 273–300; and Terpstra, "Locating the Sex Trade," 112.

within the Mercato Vecchio district "was either a failure, or allowed to fail."[9] The first legislation imposed on Florentine sex workers in the 1280s and 1290s required that they live and work 1,000 braccia (600 metres) beyond the old city walls and at least 400 braccia from suburban settlements. From the late thirteenth century onward, there was a gradual reduction in the measures that separated sex workers from clergy, religious sites, civic buildings, and "honest" households. In 1325, sex workers were allowed to work inside the city only on Mondays, and from 1403, they were encouraged to work in a new centrally located civic brothel area close to Mercato Vecchio. In 1454, the *Otto di Guardia* reduced the extent of the exclusion zone around all public buildings, churches, convents, and monasteries from 300 to 100 braccia (180 to 60 metres). In 1547, a policy designed to collect sex workers, while maintaining client access, involved all licensed sex workers residing on one of eighteen (later twenty-two) approved streets.[10] The revisions of that list in 1558 and 1577, and the 1561 decree reiterating the reduced exclusion zone to 100 braccia, reflect the difficulty of finding city blocks that did not host important public sites.[11]

Even in the months before the 1561 announcement, the Onestà magistrates enforced the exclusion zone around convents. In 1560, the magistrates fined at least five *meretrici* for living too close to three convents: Sant'Orsola, Sant'Ambrogio, and Santa Maria dei Candeli. As Fig. 1 shows, Sant'Orsola occupied almost an entire block and was situated between several permitted streets (i.e., Via Chiara, Via dell'Amore, and Via Mozza). While the convent did not sit on a street in which sex work was permitted, and although there were few *meretrici* located in these streets in 1561, Via Mozza led directly to the convent. Sant'Ambrogio was in an even more difficult position.[12] As Fig. 2 shows, the square in front of the convent church was a permitted zone, as were four of the five streets that led to it.[13] Similarly, Santa Maria dei Candeli sat at the

9. Brackett, "Florentine Onestà," 288.

10. Terpstra, "Sex," 74–78.

11. See ASF, *Onestà* 1 and 3 for legislation issued and revised from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries. For a map showing how close certain monastic houses were to the 1547 permitted zones, see Terpstra, "Locating the Sex Trade," fig. 6.1.

12. ASF, *Camera e auditore fiscale*, 2110, fols. 509r (La Madalena di Girolamo da Lucca), 533r (Ginevra di Giuliano).

13. ASF, *Camera e auditore fiscale*, 2110, fol. 566r (Lucretia d'Agnolo di Luca da Monte Marciano); 2111, fols. 671r (Lena di Stephano di Papia), 673r (Sandrina di Mona Antonia Pistolese).

juncture of two long permitted streets: Via de Pilastri and Via dei Pinti (see Fig. 3).[14] In 1561, Via dei Pilastri was home to twenty-two *meretrici*. In these cases, the legislation protecting convents from the sights and sounds of the sex trade appeared to conflict with the legislation that concentrated *meretrici* in specific streets to protect Florentine society more generally. These cases protecting enclosed communities reveal the close proximity of Florentine nuns and *meretrici* as well as the importance of fines in the Onestà's strategy.

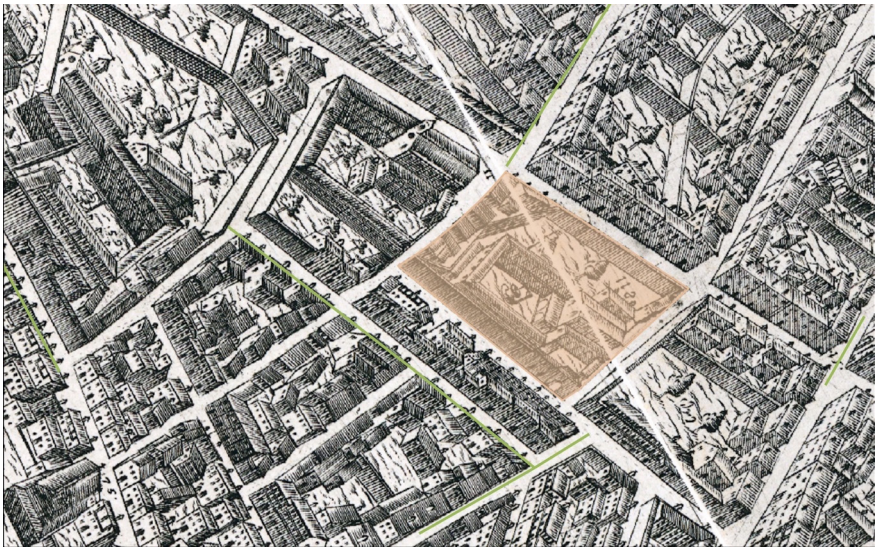

Fig. 1. Map of Florence showing the area around the convent of Sant'Orsola (shaded orange) and sex work permitted zones (green lines).

14. ASF, *Acquisti e Doni*, 291, unpaginated (Signora Giulia Napoletana).

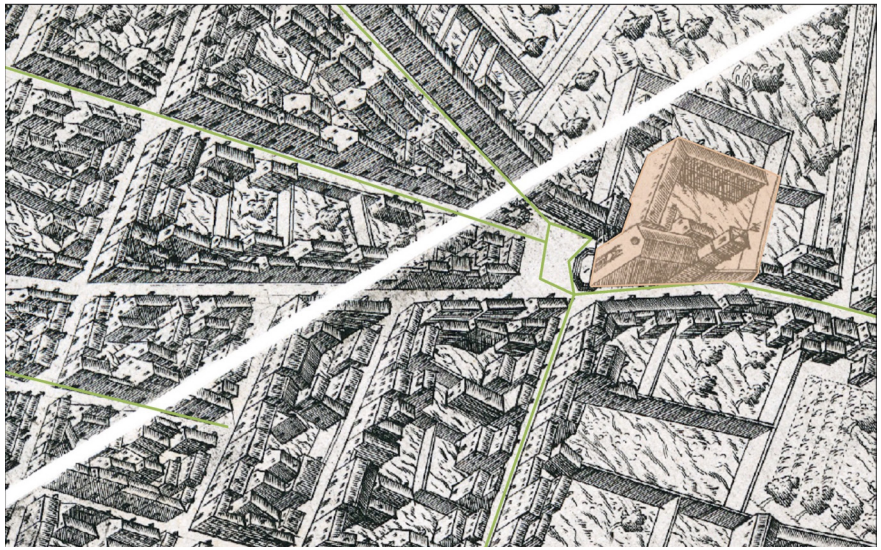

Fig. 2. Map of Florence showing the area around the convent of Sant'Ambrogio (shaded orange) and sex work permitted zones (green lines).

Fig. 3. Map of Florence showing the area around the convent of Santa Maria dei Candeli (shaded orange) and sex work permitted zones (green lines).

While the identification of specific streets for sex work should have kept the rest of the city free of *meretrici*, through the sixteenth century the Onestà magistrates introduced a series of exemption certificates (also called licenses) that could be bought to avoid living in the permitted zones, paying to work at night, needing a license, or wearing the sex worker's customary bell, veil, or ribbon.[15] The cost of these exemptions was far less than the fine for infraction, and the reduction of protected buffer zones meant that sex workers could reside in almost any neighbourhood that they could afford and dress as any other "honest" woman.[16] The sex workers who were fined in 1560 for living too close to convents highlight one difficulty of raising funds with fines: two women took more than a year to pay the fine in full.[17] The absence of notarized cancellation statements suggests that some women never paid their 200-lire fines. Considering that this was equivalent to more than three years of licenses, these fines show the upper limit of what many *meretrici* could pay.

Reflecting on the state of licensed sex work, arrests, and fines in early modern Bologna, which has more extensive surviving records, Vanessa McCarthy has encouraged caution. Although legislation shows the state's attention and investment in the issue and cooperation with local institutions (e.g., magistracies and convents), tracking the thorough application of regulations is impossible, and documented fines are conservative estimates. The magistrates' ability to extract partial payment from women at the site of an infraction contributed to their salary, but it may not have always been documented if the woman was unlikely to pay the entire fine.[18] Likewise, regulations served many purposes, including the articulation of the city's shared moral values. The absence of

15. For example, see the decrees restricting *meretrici* from riding in carriages (ASF, *Onestà* 3, fols. 13v–14, 37r–37v, 40r–40v) and the decrees offering licenses to allow riding in carriages (ASF, *Onestà* 3, fols. 43–45v, 58, 59v–60v, 64). On exemptions in the 1560s, see ASF, *Onestà* 1, fols. 41v–42, 39v–40. While there were fees and fines for almost every aspect of sex work, in the seventeenth century more capacious exemptions appeared. In 1614, *meretrici* could pay 20 scudi for permanent removal from the Onestà's rolls, and by 1625, unregistered women could pay 2 scudi for four months of relief from the Onestà surveillance. ASF, *Acquisti e Doni*, 292, unpaginated (1614); ASF, *Onestà* 3, fols. 33v–35v (1625).

16. Breaking the dress code or working at night without a license could result in a fine of 10 gold scudi, while living outside of the permitted zone led to a 50-lire fine. ASF, *Onestà* 3, fols. 13v–14v, 17v; Terpstra, *Lost Girls*, 21.

17. Lucretia d'Agnolo's fine was paid after fifteen months, and Lena di Stephano's fine was paid after twenty-six months.

18. McCarthy, "Prostitution," 147–49, 154–56, 161–64.

financial records from the 1560s detailing the revenue that fines and exemption fees produced for the Convertite prevents knowing precisely how successful these measures were.[19]

While the sale of exemptions visualized the economic pressure on the Onestà, it also undercut the decrees that segregated sex work. In 1559, the introduction of *la tassa maggiore* (a higher tax) further weakened the segregation strategy while funnelling more money to the Convertite.[20] Initially this higher tax was only 1 scudo (or 7 lire) paid every three months on top of the regular license fee (an almost 50 percent increase), but it was quickly raised to a pledge of one-quarter of a *meretrice*'s estate. While magistrates continued to fine *meretrici* after 1560, the focus turned to women who lived outside the permitted zones (assigned few fines) or who worked after dark without a night license (assigned many fines at 2 scudi).[21] Although magistrates stressed the voluntary nature of these choices, in practice fines could be an opportunity for *meretrici* to see the benefit of the higher tax. In 1560, the Onestà noted that 79 out of 234 *meretrici* (33.8 percent) were paying the higher tax.[22] Mante di Pratese, who lived on Piazza Sant'Ambrogio opposite the convent church, was one of those *meretrici*.[23]

Paradoxically, at the same time that some sex workers had greater freedom of movement within the city, a larger number of women were becoming cloistered nuns. A convent census of 1548–52 revealed that Florence's female religious community was at an all-time high with 2,658 professed nuns, representing approximately 4.5 percent of the city population and 11 percent of the female population.[24] Whereas wealthy *meretrici* could purchase exemptions that allowed them to live almost anywhere in the city and dress as they

19. For some communications between the Convertite and the Onestà about funding, see ASF, *Onestà* 3, fols. 26r–26v (1559); and Galligo, *Antichi e singolari documenti inediti*, 9–16 (1569). For the Convertite's extant records, see ASF, *Conventi Soppressi*, 126.

20. ASF, *Acquisiti e Doni*, 291, "Varietà–Onestà," fols. 6v–7r.

21. A good example is Sandrina di Luca *barbiere* who was fined 1 scudo for not having a license and chose to pay the higher tax in January 1560. ASF, *Camera e auditore fiscale*, 2110, fol. 553r.

22. ASF, *Acquisiti e Doni*, 291, "Varietà–Onestà," fol. 10v.

23. ASF, *Acquisiti e Doni*, 291, "Varietà–Onestà," fol. 9v.

24. In contrast to the small number of *meretrici*, the female religious population continued to rise to approximately 16.8 percent of the city's female population by 1632. Strocchia and Rombough, "Women," 87; Rombough, "Noisy Soundscapes," 451; Trexler, "Florentine Prostitution," 381.

wished, a nun's wealth anchored her to a single prestigious convent.[25] Similarly, a *meretrice*'s influence could access ducal intervention and categorize her as *libera* (free), whereas a nun's influence led to legislation that surrounded the convent's walls with a quiet zone that dampened the noise of the outside world. Both women profited from wealth and influence, but in very different ways.

The provision of 1561 that established a buffer zone around convents reflects the larger pragmatic, interventionist, and even absolutist character of Florence's ducal regime.[26] As other historians have noted, Cosimo I's early reign was characterized by efforts to systematize the duchy's hospitals and to bring their resources under central control. From 1548, he turned his attention to Florentine convents in an attempt to regularize and improve the funding of institutions housing women. Information gathering played a key role in these campaigns, as it illustrated available resources, quantified needy dependents, and highlighted potential inefficiencies. Cosimo initiated surveys of Florence's convents (1548), Jewish community (1567), businesses (1551), and residents (1561). This attempted reorganization of ducal systems was meant to be implemented by new administrative bodies, especially (from 1560) the *Nove Conservatori del giurisdizione e de dominio fiorentino* (Nine Conservators). As Leah Fabisoff has noted, the duke's primary intention was to improve "mechanisms for collecting and organizing fiscal information" in order "to generate more complete, accurate and easily accessible knowledge about property-based income."[27] In a related way, Cosimo also strove to increase central governmental control and to have more decisions made by administrators close to the ducal throne, particularly via the members of the Pratica Segreta.[28] Having greater control of civic systems further entrenched Cosimo's rule.

This paradox of strengthened systems that could still be overturned by specific empowered individuals is characteristic of the early modern absolutist state. James E. Shaw has described ducal Florence as "an interventionist

25. As R. Burr Litchfield has shown, by 1551 forty-eight Florentine convents were located in the districts between the second and third sets of city walls (Litchfield, *Florence Ducal Capital*, 122 and map 3.03a).

26. Edigati, "Cosimo I"; Dooley, "Cosimo I de' Medici."

27. This was supposed to combine the *Otto di Pratica* and the *Cinque Conservatori*. Faibisoff, "Route of Governmentality," 37–38.

28. This is clear from Cosimo's decision in 1544 to place the Onestà under the supervision of the *Conservatori di Legge* and the Pratica Segreta's communications about rising fees and fines. Brackett, "Florentine Onestà," 290; Najemy, *History*, 470–71, 473.

approach to justice" that suited a new ruler seeking to root out opposition, cultivate popularity, and bend Florence's administration and institutions to his will.[29] Tullia d'Aragona, the famous courtesan-poet, provides a well-known example of how this strategy worked. In 1547, she wrote to the duchess, Eleonora di Toledo, seeking her support for an exemption from the sumptuary restrictions imposed on courtesans and sex workers.[30] The ducal couple supported Tullia's exemption, as they did for other wealthy and elite *cortegiani* (courtesans).[31] A list from 1569, annotated by the magistrates of the Pratica Segreta, identified sex workers who should be ignored by the Onestà on the duke's instructions.[32] Just as Brackett has described success in the Florentine sex trade as being exempted from the Onestà's restrictions, this list adds wealth and access to power to that model: all of the women who were to be left alone were classified at the time as wealthy.[33] Their ability to evade the Onestà depended on attracting ducal support to suborn the law, not on their willingness to live with *modestia e bontà*. The 1561 decree establishing a buffer zone between convents and *meretrici* shows a similar situation; by allowing magistrates to ignore the 100-braccia ban, the decree protected absolute power within the system that it created. Generally, magistrates could protect convents, but they could also use the loophole to protect *meretrici* (and to fundraise from the sex trade) when Cosimo deemed it appropriate.

The result of this potential subordination is a tension between the *mala vicinanza* that the 1561 decree argues is the normal state of sex workers and the *modestia e bontà* that should surround convents. As the decree and Tullia d'Aragona's example illustrate, only magistrates and the ducal couple could resolve this tension. Julia Rombough has explored concerns about *baccano* (racket) in the same period and has argued that "policing the sex trade was often synonymous with policing noise" rather than enforcing geographic

29. Shaw, "Writing to the Prince," 56.

30. Russell, "Tullia d'Aragona," 27.

31. Generally, courtesans had greater wealth and education as well as the ability to be more discerning in choosing their clients, which distinguished them from other sex workers. Russell, "Introduction," 21–27.

32. "per parola del Principe che si lasci stare" (on the Prince's word, leave it be). Galligo, *Antichi e singolari documenti inediti*, 12; our translation.

33. Galligo, *Antichi e singolari documenti inediti*, 12; Brackett, "Florentine Onestà," 292.

segregation.[34] Exploring the area around the civic brothel shows how untenable the Onestà's regulations were even before 1561.

Access to *meretrici* versus proximity to churches

In 1415, accessibility to segregated sex workers was a primary governmental concern, so the *Signoria* chose the area around the Mercato Vecchio (particularly the adjacent Piazza di Chiasso) for its cluster of taverns and hostels and its proximity to the city's trading centre. However, as the poet Panormita wrote in 1425, the brothel was also uncomfortably close to the cathedral, baptistery, and the archbishop's palace.[35] A two-block walk of approximately 160 metres separated the Piazza di Chiasso's *meretrici* from the steps of the cathedral. From the fifteenth century, the parish of San Christofano rented the rectorate's first floor to the Onestà magistrates who issued licenses and collected fines there.[36] In the mid-sixteenth century there were no convents in the city's ceremonial centre, but there was plenty of local religious traffic. A second brothel area developed to the west in the Chiasso dei Buoi and Piazza Padella, which continued to thrive through the sixteenth century. Situated between these two sites were several parish churches. Richard Trexler identified the blocks between them as being at risk of enlarging the sex trade rather than being a bulwark between the areas.[37]

In 1561, there were nine households sheltering between twenty-three and thirty-five *meretrici* within the ring of parish churches.[38] In this area there were several *meretrice* households located within the 100-braccia (60-metre)

34. Rombough, "Noisy Soundscapes," 454. See, too, Terpstra, "Locating the Sex Trade," 116–18. Trexler's study of the Onestà's *Liber Sententiae* (1441–1523) does not include noise as one of the common complaints brought against *meretrici*, suggesting that concern about noise grew as integration of *meretrici* increased (Trexler, "Florentine Prostitution," 398–402).

35. Beccadelli, *L'ermafrodito*, 195.

36. The 1514 episcopal visitation complained about this practice. Trexler, "Florentine Prostitution," 384–85.

37. These included Santa Maria Maggiore, San Ruffillo, San Salvatore, San Tommaso, San Leo, Santa Maria in Campidoglio, San Christofano, and San Michele Berteldi. Trexler, "Florentine Prostitution," 386, 408–9.

38. One household reported unclear data to the enumerator. The tenant was named "12, *meretrice*," but only three women were listed as living in the household. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 79v (San Giovanni 1251).

buffer zone established in 1454 by the Otto di Guardia.[39] For example, as Fig. 4 shows, the Chiasso dei Buoi had two households and the Piazza Padella three households that faced the church of San Michele Berteldi.[40] In the Piazza di Chiasso, there were three households sheltering *meretrici*,[41] and further east, the parish church of San Leo sat across the street from another *meretrice* household.[42] The latter church was already several centuries old when the city established the first civic brothel close by, which suggests that even early on there was little room to respect the buffer zones in the dense city centre.

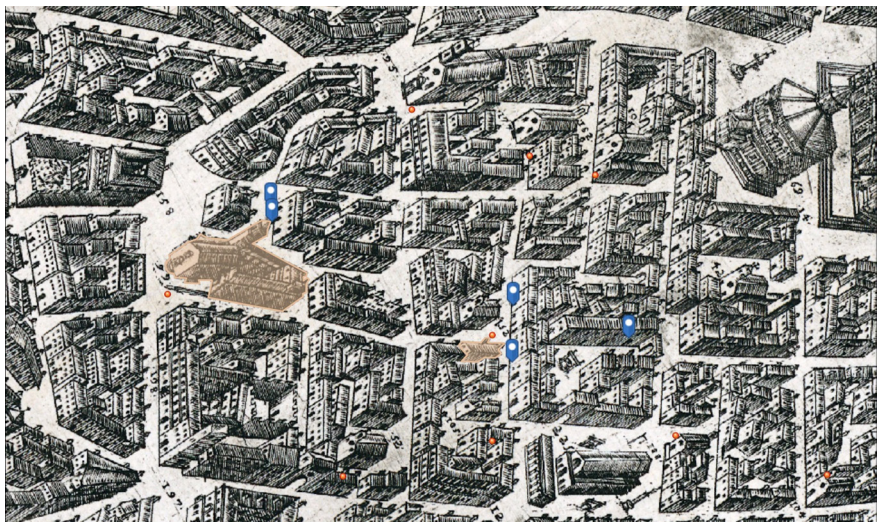

Fig. 4. Map of Florence showing the area west of the baptistery and the churches of San Michele Berteldi and San Leo (both shaded orange) as well as the nearby *meretrice* households (blue flags) and the other parish churches (orange pins).

39. Using the DECIMA Project's measurement tool, from San Tommaso facing the Colonna dell'Abbondanza west to San Michele Berteldi on today's Via Tornabuoni was a distance of approximately 250 metres.

40. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fols. 71r–71v (La Pippa di Francesco,San Giovanni 1135), (La Lancia, La Gentile and La Lena, San Giovanni 1136), (La Giovanna di Domenico Ferravese, San Giovanni 1138), (La Piera di Bastola Prazolese, San Giovanni 1139), (La Cecca del Antella, San Giovanni 1140).

41. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 79r (twelve *meretrici*, San Giovanni 1241).

42. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fols. 79r (San Giovanni 1238 with four *meretrici*), 79v (San Giovanni 1241 and 1251, both with twelve *meretrici*).

The popular discomfort with brothels and the *stuffe* (bathhouses) operating so close to local religious sites[43] manifested itself in a narrative about the parish church of San Michele Berteldi.[44] In November 1506, Luca Landucci's diary reported that an image of the Madonna placed on an external wall was said to have closed her eyes to avoid seeing the shameful people and activities at the nearby *stuffe* on Piazza Padella. Landucci notes that lit candles and other votive offerings were placed before the image, and that a wall was built to shield the Madonna from the bathhouse. While the account suggests an enthusiastic response to the image's revelation, Landucci notes that it was not appropriate for women to visit the image due to its close proximity to the *stuffe*. To protect themselves from the unchaste people and sights, women reluctantly avoided the miraculous image.[45]

While the sculpted relief eventually moved inside San Michele Berteldi and is now found in the adjacent Cappella Antinori, the miraculous Madonna stands as a reminder that Florentine women were thought to be safe only when behind walls.[46] There was no similar separation for the neighbourhood's many other women who lived next door or down the street from *meretrici*. Like the decree of 1561 that worried about convent life, Landucci's account suggests that women curtailed their devotional activities in response to unchaste neighbours. However, Landucci was a prosperous apothecary who wrote from a privileged economic perspective. He may not have wanted his wife to walk two blocks north to see the Madonna for fear of passing unchaste sites, but many working women had no choice. Even then, as Natalie Tomas asserts, upper-class women travelled to church, to meet friends and family, and to enter and exit the city.[47] Landucci's account highlights Florentine gender ideals and ambivalent enforcement while underscoring popular knowledge of the local sex trade.

43. Public baths had a similar reputation to brothels, as contemporaries believed that alongside taverns, bathhouses facilitated the sex trade and homosexual encounters. Here there was a secret door that allowed visitors to come and go, which resulted in threats from the Otto di Guardia in 1480 and 1484. Mazzi, *Life*, 39; Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 154.

44. On Buonsignori's map, San Michele Berteldi is numbered 99, but it was rebuilt in 1604 as Santi Michele e Gaetano. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 71v (La Cecca del Antella, San Giovanni 1140).

45. Landucci refers to the Stuffa degli Obizzi. Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 222–23 (13 November 1506); Ciappelli, *Memory*, 84.

46. For a discussion of the image and the Antinori family's patronage, see Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 98–99.

47. Tomas, "Did Women Have a Space?," 324.

Wealth and honour

Between 1403 and 1561 the Florentine population grew from approximately 40,000 to 59,000, chiefly in the decades of the sixteenth century.[48] The city's economic requirement—a need for large numbers of inexpensive workers—exerted pressure on the protection of supposedly vulnerable communities, like cloistered nuns. In the sixteenth century, the convent of San Pier Martire fought an extended battle with its neighbours over disruptive noise and eventually relocated to the area around the Palazzo Pitti in 1557. Unfortunately, as with the convents noted earlier, this new location sat at the juncture of two streets where sex work was permitted.[49] While the city authorities responded to geographic tension by adjusting the buffer zones and engraving public warnings on convent walls, the laws protecting nuns also pushed *meretrici* closer to unenclosed women whose virtue was lamented (by Landucci and others) as easily conquered.

Rombough has noted that "notions of class and honor" motivated sixteenth-century Florentines to protect elite cloistered women with repeated legislation, restrictions, and fines while ignoring women from the working class who had less influence and fewer financial resources.[50] Even as the urban authority described women who sold sex as being an impediment to female virtue, there was a sliding scale to whose virtue was deemed important. A recent study of conservatories has shown that the most vulnerable girls, who were bereft of all resources, social credit, and potential guardians, were considered a danger to the girls already sheltered.[51] Where did this situation leave women who could not afford to join a convent or had no religious vocation, and who did not wish to make their living as licensed sex workers? This group made up the majority of Florentine women. What of their virtue and place in a city where profession and virtue were inscribed on the streets?

48. In the early fifteenth century, Florence's population was declining due to a high death rate in recurrent plague cycles. Najemy, *History*, 225, 477.

49. Although the convent sat close to the juncture of Via San Piero Gattolini and Via del Ronco, the DECIMA Project lists only three *meretrici* living on those streets in 1561. Rombough, "Regulating Sense," 5–6.

50. Rombough, "Noisy Soundscapes," 452, 468.

51. Terpstra, *Lost Girls*, 14, 36.

Not five years after Landucci's Madonna closed her eyes, the Otto di Pratica received an anonymous denunciation about Caterina, who lived close to the cathedral chapter house in the city centre. Allegedly, Caterina ran a brothel staffed by servant girls, the wives and daughters of poor artisans, and destitute widows.[52] The accusation reinforced the contemporary fear that poverty would drive women, especially young and unmastered women, into sex work. The brothel's encouragement of gambling, theft, and lechery reflected the ongoing expectation that sex work would breed other vices. However, Caterina's location close to the cathedral contrasted with the 1415 decree that brothels should be run "in places where the exercise of such scandalous activity can best be concealed, for the honor of the city and of those who live in the neighborhood."[53] Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, sex workers moved out of the traditional brothel areas around the Mercato Vecchio and the Chiasso del Buoi, increasing the likelihood that more citizens might encounter the *mala vicinanza* of houses like Caterina's. At the same time, according to the Florentine mindset, it increased the possibility that unregistered women who were spread across the city might use sex work as a way to avoid destitution.

In a 1433 sumptuary law, Florence's governors wrote that "women were created to replenish this free city, and to live chastely in matrimony."[54] This justification expressed a widely held vision that a virtuous woman was either chastely married to an honest man or enclosed by convent walls and dedicated to Jesus Christ. However, throughout the sixteenth century, women from Florence's working class found it increasingly difficult to afford the essential dowry that led to marriage. Lower-class women who never married or were widowed or abandoned by their husbands formed an essential and inexpensive working population, many of whom powered the city's textile industry. Some working-class, woman-headed households were caught between the economic reality that women must work and the supposed crisis of virtue that Florentine authorities and philanthropists continued to lament. Beyond marriage and the convent, patriarchal societies saw few honourable alternatives that would not leave a woman suspiciously independent. Underlying this suspicion of female virtue was a related concern for female poverty. Unfortunately, early modern

52. ASF, *Carnesecchi Spoglio*, Tamburazioni (8 March 1511), described in Trexler, "Florentine Prostitution," 410.

53. ASF, *Provvisioni*, 105, fols. 248r–248v, translated in Brucker, *Society*, 190.

54. ASF, *Deliberazioni,* 42, fols. 5v–6r, translated in Brucker, *Society*, 181.

women were more likely than men to be poor, and the connection between female wealth and virtue made female independence particularly fraught.

Women who were single and without family were particularly vulnerable to economic destitution, as they were not expected to be financially self-sufficient.[55] Women whose husbands abandoned them were often similarly deprived of support. Since women married much younger than men, they often outlived their husbands. Inheritance laws resulted in many widows being left with only their repaid dowry to live on, or nothing at all.[56] Monica Chojnacka has noted that early modern women were nearly as likely to be widowed as they were to be married.[57] Between widows, abandoned wives, and unmarried women, Florence had a relatively large population of women who led households, in a period when the wider community was uncomfortable and even threatened by women living without a male household-head.[58]

In the increasingly difficult period of 1550–1600, when cold weather reduced Italian grain yields, the desperation of poor women and girls was an ongoing concern. Noting the contemporary expectation of natural and necessary female dependence, Nicholas Terpstra has stated that "it was their dependence and their dependents that made women more vulnerable to poverty."[59] Florentines feared that, to feed themselves and their children, female household-heads would succumb to prostitution's economic and moral temptations and join the city's licensed prostitutes. Through the early modern period, governing female sexuality became an even more important priority as civic brothels and stringently enclosed convents served the same community in different ways.[60] In Florence, this fear found expression in the development of charitable institutions to shelter single women and girls from poverty and the coercion of sex work. From the mid-sixteenth century, Florence opened at least five institutions designed to shelter at-risk women who lacked resources or an appropriate moral guardian.[61] These shelters provided protection and a

55. Mazzi, *Life*, 25–26.

56. Chabot, "Widowhood," 291–311.

57. Chojnacka, *Working Women*, 12–13; Gavitt, *Gender*, 94–121.

58. Terpstra, "Sex," 77.

59. Terpstra, *Cultures of Charity*, 59.

60. Pluskota, "Governing Sexuality," 87.

61. The Monastero delle Fanciulle Abbandonate della Pietà (early 1550s), San Niccolò (1556), the Monastero del Ceppo (first known as Santa Maria al Vergine from 1556), the Monastero delle Stabilite

variety of opportunities for girls and women, but space restrictions meant that they could not accommodate every woman, even as they repeated the threat to female virtue that independence posed. Work by Sharon Strocchia, Rombough, and Terpstra has shown that convents, conservatories, and women's shelters were located between the city's second and third walls, in areas that might be called "inner suburbs."[62] In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this was where convents could find land for growing communities, but in the mid-sixteenth century these institutions sat at the edges of working class neighbourhoods and some permitted zones.

As the city revised its regulations regarding legal sex work, it privileged protecting the growing convent population and encouraged a pragmatic fee scheme that funded the convent for "reformed" and retired sex workers on Via dei Serragli, called Santa Elisabetta delle Convertite. In 1559, there were over one hundred residents at the Convertite, and the Onestà was negotiating ways to acquire a larger portion of *meretrice* wealth in both the short term (fees, taxes, and fines) and long term (*meretrice* estates).[63] In 1553 and 1559, the Onestà repeated that sex workers who wished in the future to retire to the Convertite could pledge it one-quarter of their inventoried estate.[64] Referring to courtesans, Michele Dati, governor of the Convertite, wrote to Duke Cosimo in 1569: "it would still be good to submit them [the women with exemptions] to [officers of the Onestà], and enable them to be received at the monastery, when they might convert, even though they were not described [as *meretrice*]."[65] *Meretrice* wealth made exempt and free women legally honourable, potentially reconcilable, and financially desirable.

Although fines for breaking the Onestà's rules rose from 1577, the rate of conviction for women who were caught practising outside of the permitted

(established 1589), and the convent of Santa Caterina (1591). Cohen, *Evolution*, 18–21, 81–85.

62. Strocchia, *Nuns*, 13, 76, 149; Rombough, "Noisy Soundscapes," 464–66; Terpstra, "Locating the Sex Trade," 117–20.

63. Rombough and Litchfield record the following increases at the Convertite: 92 residents in the 1548–52 convent census, 125 residents in 1561, 166 residents in 1566, and 239 residents in 1632. Litchfield, *Florence Ducal Capital*, 130; Rombough, "Noisy Soundscapes," 449.

64. "Rescritto" (1559), in Cantini, *Legislazione toscana*, 3–4:302–3.

65. Our translation. "sebbene sarebbe forse bene sottoporvele, et all'incontrario habilitarle a potere essere ricevute nel monastero, quando si convertissero, non ostante che non fussino descritte." Galligo, *Antichi e singolari documenti inediti*, 10.

zones without a license or paying for an exemption was low.[66] Instead, Onestà magistrates targeted "the noise and disorder of the public sex trade."[67] Their concern was directly tied to the dispersal of sex workers throughout the city and the effects of *mala vicinanza*. By encouraging exemption purchases and ducal interventions protecting wealthy sex workers, the duke and Onestà had accepted the possible distribution of *malborghetti* across the city. The new regulations left some working-class women living in close proximity to sex workers, thus increasing the threat of clandestine prostitution that the city had long feared.[68] Yet, from the perspective of the Onestà and Convertite administrators, the greater calamity was that unregistered women pursued sinful lives out of financial necessity, faulty virtue, and without contributing to the upkeep of their repentant sisters. If the city's segregation strategy was to be allowed to fail, the sex workers who lived freely should support the convent that justified its failure.

Working women and clandestine sex work

Although many Florentine sex workers paid the higher tax or received an exemption through ducal privilege, their proximity to low-income women sustained anxiety about clandestine sex work. Reflecting on contemporary fears, Maria Serena Mazzi has argued that unlicensed and clandestine sex work "represented the best possible situation for women" since it imposed the fewest constraints on a woman's movement and reputation.[69] The presence of *donne dishoneste* (dishonest women) remained a preoccupation of the Florentine authorities throughout the sixteenth century. In 1560, the Onestà magistrates enumerated 243 *meretrici* in a city of almost 60,000 residents (approximately 0.4 percent of the population).[70] The Onestà continued to suspect that women avoided registration and periodically drafted lists of women to investigate. In 1614, the magistrates listed 142 suspected *donne dishoneste* and succeeded in

66. There were twelve prosecutions between 1441 and 1523. Trexler, "Florentine Prostitution," 399.

67. Terpstra, "Sex," 77, 79.

68. On the relationship between the fines and exemptions paid by sex workers and funding the Convertite, see Brackett, "Florentine Onestà," 291–300; and ASF, *Onestà* 1, fols. 39v–40r (1553), 40r–41v (1558), 41v–42r (1559).

69. Mazzi, *Life*, 42, 44.

70. In 1561, Florence's population was approximately 59,216 residents living in 8,726 households. Terpstra, "Introduction," 7.

forcing 101 women to registers as *meretrici*.[71] While taxation needs usually spurred these campaigns, officials were always on the lookout for clandestine sex workers. In a similar way, Michele Dati's letter of 1569 estimated how many women he imagined were wealthy enough to pay the varied fees and referred obliquely to other women who were not on his list. Dati's calculations highlight his ambivalent position as a convent governor charged with protecting repentant women from sex work's lure, while also evaluating sex workers with an eye to profit from their work.

Exploring the limited ways that independent Florentine women could earn a living wage puts clandestine sex work and contemporary fears in context. A woman who could find a long-term placement as a domestic servant with a family was fortunate in that she might complete the contract in exchange for a dowry or shelter in the household for decades. Some unfortunate women found abusive domestic service positions to be, in Guido Ruggiero's words, "at times merely a step on the way to prostitution."[72] While the dowry system was supposed to provide widows with some financial security, Isabelle Chabot has used Florentine *Libri di ricordi* to track inflationary pressure that made marriage prohibitive. In 1400–99, dowries hovered between 925 and 954 florins, rising to 1,388 florins in the period of 1500–20.[73] Similarly, from 1475 to 1525, Anthony Molho has tracked the average size of dowries from Florence's civic dowry fund, the *monte delle doti*, as rising from 1,430 to 1,852 florins.[74] Undoubtedly, these averages are much larger than the dowries offered to at-risk young women who married out of Florentine's charitable shelters, the old-age home for women (the Orbatello), or with the help of confraternities. Using Florentine domestic service contracts, Philip Gavitt identified a range of dowries of 70 to 100 lire that were provided to marriageable girls after eight to twelve years of satisfactory work. Gavitt noted that these were even lower than a peasant's dowry.[75] This is underlined by the fact that girls who married after living at the Orbatello, with dowries based on service, received

71. Brackett, "Florentine Onestà," 296–97.

72. Ruggiero, *Boundaries*, 15; Mazzi, *Life*, 45–46.

73. Chabot, *La dette des familles*, 103.

74. Molho, *Marriage Alliance*, 310.

75. Gavitt, *Gender*, 110–12.

a 50-lire bonus.[76] In addition to small dowries, widows might face legal battles that delayed or prevented them from receiving their dowry repayments from their husbands' estates. Consequently, Chabot notes that poorer widows often had to "diversify and to take on several different occupations" for survival.[77] This practice was not limited to Florence: according to Chojnacka, in Venice, survival forced some women to take on more than one occupation.[78] That diversification drove the fear of women turning to sex work or procuring.

Florence's textile industry provides a useful frame for thinking about women's work in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Gavitt and Terpstra have shown how Florentine charitable associations hoped to prevent these women from falling into prostitution by opening residential institutions (conservatories) that doubled as workhouses.[79] These shelters paid women on a piecework basis with earnings credited to a dowry account. While the intention aligns with the community's greater belief that a woman with a dowry and practiced skills would find a suitable husband and be free from prostitution's lure, the details are fuzzy.[80] Conservatory records provide little evidence of individual work leading to specific dowry amounts.[81] In 1557, the Florentine government established a fixed wage of 1.1 soldi per pound of wool spun.[82] To put that into perspective, 150 soldi was equal to 1 scudo, therefore 1 lire would equal about 21.43 soldi. Thus it would take spinning about 137 pounds of wool to make a single scudo, or about 19.48 pounds to equal a single lire. These lower wages likely made financially struggling women more likely to supplement respectable income with sex work.

As these calculations suggest, although from the late sixteenth century more Florentine women worked than ever before, their work might not have provided enough stable income to support a household. Some of the work available was in seasonal or informal sectors, such as silk processing, weaving,

76. Terpstra, *Lost Girls*, 24.

77. Chabot, "Widowhood," 302.

78. Chojnacka, *Working Women*, 55.

79. Gavitt, *Gender*, 160–95.

80. According to Cohen, this was also the strategy pursued by Florence's Casa delle Malmaritate (Cohen, *Evolution*, 84–85).

81. Terpstra, "Mapping Gendered Labour," 77.

82. Edler de Roover, *Glossary*, 279.

cooking, or laundering.[83] Tessa Storey has described how early modern women in Rome engaged informally or occasionally in sex work to supplement their income.[84] Diane Ghirardo has noted a similar pattern in her study of Ferrara, as has Joanne Ferraro in Venice.[85] This underlines the possibility that some poor Florentine women did the same thing: used informal, unregistered, and undeclared prostitution to earn the extra income necessary for their survival. Storey explains that many women who sold sex to supplement their wages "rejected the identity of the prostitute" because "it was not their main source of income."[86] In court testimony from early seventeenth-century Rome, some women who were arrested on charges of prostitution framed sex work as something insignificant or as simply another form of women's work to defuse its immorality. Referring to more elite courtesans, Brackett suggested that some prostitutes refused to be identified as sex workers to ensure that the fantasy of access without purchase was not undermined.[87] Some of these women followed Tullia d'Aragona's path and presented themselves as courtesans—educated and independent women, who were attractive companions for elite Florentine men. These women were most likely to pay the higher tax and live in more expensive lodging, as the following two examples show: Laura Venetiana lived on Via Nuova and paid 14 scudi in rent,[88] and Mona Camilla (called la Spiritata) lived on Via de' Canacci and paid 20 scudi in rent.[89] Neither woman bore the occupation of *meretrice* in the 1561 census, yet in 1560 and 1569, the Onestà noted that they were paying the higher tax.[90]

The majority of clandestine sex workers were probably not hiding relationships with elite men, and the majority of *meretrici* were not wealthy. Many women who avoided licensing may not have been able to afford the license fees. In Florence, a license to sell sex was comparatively expensive, costing 15

83. Brown and Goodman, "Women and Industry," 78–80.

84. Storey, *Carnal Commerce*.

85. Ghirardo, "Topography," 406; Ferraro, "Youth," 766.

86. Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 119.

87. Brackett, "Florentine Onestà," 277.

88. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 26v (Santa Maria Novella 442).

89. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 16r (Santa Maria Novella 242).

90. ASF, *Acquisti e Doni*, 291, "Varietà–Onestà," unpaginated, fols. 8r–8v; Galligo, *Antichi e singolari documenti inediti*, 12.

lire every three months, while in Bologna, an annual license cost only 3 lire.[91] Licensing also resulted in giving up other forms of work, requiring an economic commitment that might seem disproportionate for women who combined different types of labour to make ends meet. A license that cost at least 60 lire every year surely seemed a high price to pay to women who spun 20 pounds of wool to earn a lire. The prospect of being imprisoned for non-payment of fines and fees likely made licensing appear even more daunting.[92]

Florence: the city of female workers

In mid-sixteenth-century Florence there were many female household-heads who experienced financial stress. Some might have engaged in periodic clandestine sex work, but most did not. The remainder of this article uses data from the 1561 Florentine *decima* census to identify neighbourhoods where women lived in close proximity to sex workers, revealing the failure of segregation. As more *meretrici* lived outside brothels and sought low-rent accommodation in areas close to clients, they increasingly occupied working-class neighbourhoods.[93] Like the area west of the baptistery, there were clusters of sex workers living across the city, both within and outside of permitted zones. Unlike Luca Landucci's wife, female household-heads could not avoid their neighbours, who might have been sex workers or their clients. The DECIMA Project allows a clear view of this situation, which animated contemporary fears about women at risk of participating in clandestine sex work. As a collaborative Spatial Humanities study created at the University of Toronto, the DECIMA Project has made it possible to map demographic data from the censuses of 1551, 1561, and 1632 onto Stefano Buonsignori's 1584 map of the city. The census data from 1561 was chosen for this study as it includes distinctions between occupants' gender, profession, the number of occupants per residence, and the amount of rent paid for each household, and thus offers the most detail about Florentine women's lives. This information allows the observation of risk

91. A monthly license in Bologna cost 5 soldi. McCarthy and Terpstra, "In the Neighborhood," 62.

92. Brackett, "Florentine Onestà," 288.

93. In 1569, the Onestà acknowledged brothels at five sites: "le Stufe [at San Michele Berteldi], Piazza Padella, Via Romita, Via dell'Ariento, and Il Postribolo cioè i Padronaggi [at Mercato Vecchio]." Galligo, *Antichi e singolari documenti inediti*, 15.

factors that contemporaries agreed might encourage women to engage in sex work: poverty, the absence of a male household-head, and proximity to sex workers.

To identify neighbourhoods where at-risk women lived, female-headed households listed in the 1561 census were located using the DECIMA mapping tool. Areas where these households clustered were then compared against streets where prostitution had been officially sanctioned by the authorities. Generally, sex workers lived and practised near potential customers. Studies of late medieval and early modern towns in England and Europe by A. Lynne Martin, Beat Kümin, and David Rosenthal have shown that *osterie* (taverns), *alberghi* (inns), and other places that served alcohol were associated with sex work solicitation.[94] In Venice, Paula Clarke has noted the importance of taverns as sites of sociability and sex for merchants who visited the city alone, and Rosa Salzberg has located many taverns close to the Rialto Bridge and market area.[95] For this reason, plotting the location of inns or taverns on the DECIMA map is helpful for identifying sites that drew licensed and potential clandestine sex workers, as well as their clients. A large group of male workers, most of whom were single and lived in low-rent housing, would find both male and female companionship at the tavern.

As Fig. 5 shows, in the city centre, there was an *osteria* called Frascato located in Piazza di Chiasso, just doors away from sex-worker households.[96] Looking towards the second brothel district, there was a second *osteria* behind San Michele Berteldi, and a third *osteria* at the end of the block shared with San Leo's church.[97] Both of these *osterie* were only a block from a *meretrice* household, and together they created an east–west chain running from one brothel area to the other. While the movement between brothels and taverns might have been good for business, the parish atmosphere was hardly conducive to public chastity. The distance from San Leo to San Michele Berteldi passing

94. Martin, "Alehouses," 58–78; Kümin, "Public Houses," 60–61; Rosenthal, "Barfly's Dream," 14–29; Mazzi, *Life*, 36–39.

95. Clarke, "Business," 423–24; Salzberg, "Spaces of Unrest?," 114–15.

96. The Frascato tavern was next door to La Marsilia di Piero da Bologna and a house of several unnamed *meretrici*. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fols. 79v (San Giovanni 1251), 80r (San Giovanni 1253).

97. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fols. 80r ("hosteria del frascato" in Piazzo di Chiasso, San Giovanni 1252), 75r ("una casa a uso di osteria, detta l'hosteria di piazza padella" behind San Michele in Berteldi, San Giovanni 1182), 81r ("osteria chiamata delle chaivi" on Piazza dei Pollaiuoli, San Giovanni 1162).

by each of the two taverns was a short 155 metres, which would have brought *meretrici* and their clients travelling back from the taverns well within 60 metres and shouting distance of the churches.[98]

Further south, the area between Ponte alla Carraia and Ponte Santa Trinità also illustrates this situation (see Fig. 6). Seemingly named after Dante Alighieri's famous *La divina commedia*, an *osteria* operated on Via del'Inferno, just down the street from a household of six men (porters and slipper-makers) and blocks from another household of six men (more slipper-makers).[99] In 1561, Via del'Inferno was one of the streets where *meretrici* could work. On Canto del Purgatorio (now called via Parioncino), which ran towards the Arno River, *meretrici* resided at two houses, presenting a spectrum of commercial options.[100] Another *meretrice*, Pasquina Fiorentina, lived on Via del Limbo, which ran perpendicular to Purgatorio.[101] She shared the block with a house occupied by two *lavandaie* (laundresses), Mona Benedetta and Sandra, in relatively cheap accommodation.[102] Given the small number of households on Canto del Purgatorio, it is unlikely that they were unaware of each other.

These women would have encountered members of another large household on Via del Parione, which intersected with Purgatorio and Limbo. In 1561, the papal nuncio and his household of thirty-eight men lived within a stone's throw of the *meretrici* and *lavandaie*.[103] Members of all of these households might have met for food, drink, or sociability at the *osteria*, and the nuncio's staff may well have employed the porters, laundresses, and sex workers. Only a few houses away, what did Mona Baccia, a weaver, think of this community?[104] Did she accept it as the proper exchange of cash for labour? Did

98. These measurements were made using the DECIMA Project's measurement tool.

99. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fols. 77v (Bartolomeo di Domenico, "oste," Santa Maria Novella 1316), 75v ("facchini e ciabattini," Santa Maria Novella 1288), 78r ("ciabattini," Santa Maria Novella 1324).

100. La Pierina and la Margarita paid 13.5 scudi in rent, while Mona Rosa Pistolese paid only 5 scudi. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 80r (Santa Maria Novella 1358 and 1360).

101. Pasquina paid 3 scudi in rent. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 80r (Santa Maria Novella 1356).

102. While the house was assessed at 8 scudi, the census records rents of 3 lire and 7 scudi, respectively. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 80r (Santa Maria Novella 1357).

103. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 78v (Santa Maria Novella 1335).

104. Mona Baccia, a married weaver, paid 8-scudi rent for her two-person all-female household. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 79v (Santa Maria Novella 1348).

she consider taking in laundry or *faccia la scappata* (getting laid) to meet her expenses? Or did she avoid the *osteria* with its single male clients as a source of *baccano* and lecherous sociability?

None of the streets on which these *meretrici* lived were classed as permitted zones, which underlines the failure of the city's segregation policy. The area between the bridges exemplifies the combination of elements that worried contemporaries: low-rent housing, female-headed households, and proximity to all-male households and a tavern. While traditionally *lavandaie* were poorly paid and bore a low-status reputation based on their close proximity to the body and intimate items, they did not attract elite male anxiety. The *decima* census lists many of the hundreds of female household-heads who participated in Florence's textile industry, but who experienced little of the economic stability that the guild system provided its male workers.[105] To track this community of working women whose income was sometimes precarious, this study plotted the residences of female textile workers to find areas where there may have been a risk of destitution. The chief criterion for potential economic hardship was rent paid by female household-heads, and specifically, zones in which women paid rent in lire (smaller coins) rather than scudi (larger coins) (see Fig. 7).

The resulting maps illustrate that there were 1,297 female-headed households recorded in the 1561 census, making up 15 percent of all 8,691 households recorded.[106] Widows made up 71 percent of female-headed households, while 85 licensed *meretrici* made up another 7 percent of all female-headed households. Poverty appeared to spread out towards the city's permitted prostitution zones located between the second and third sets of city walls.[107] Indeed, Litchfield found that independent widows tended to live in smaller and poorer households further from the city centre.[108] Two particular neighbourhoods proved to be of interest: Via Palazzuolo (in the Santa Maria Novella quarter) and Via

105. Robinson, "Dirty Laundry," 1–6; Rawcliffe, "Marginal Occupation?," 147–69.

106. This is consistent with Litchfield's analysis of the 1551 census in which widows led 17 percent of households, and these households were smaller than the mean family size of 4.64 people (Litchfield, *Florence Ducal Capital*, 34).

107. A similar situation appeared in Bologna, where sex workers clustered in the "low-rent inner suburbs" and eschewed the city centre. McCarthy and Terpstra, "In the Neighborhood," 56.

108. Most widow-led households occupied rented accommodation, as secondary households, in multiple-family dwellings. Litchfield, *Florence Ducal Capital*, 34.

dell'Ariento (in the San Giovanni quarter). In these areas, the factors identified as creating vulnerable conditions for single women converged on two or three streets. Both neighbourhoods had a significant population of textile workers, low-rent residences, female- or widow-headed households, and permitted prostitution zones nearby.

Fig. 5. Map of Florence showing the area west of the baptistery, the *osteria* (shaded blue), the parish churches (orange pins), and the sex work permitted zones (green line).

The presence of textile workers, both male and female, in these neighbourhoods is important for illustrating the local character and the possibility of both licensed and unlicensed prostitution. Male textile workers that lived in these neighbourhoods served as potential clients for both licensed and unlicensed sex workers. Female weavers' low wages inevitably made them vulnerable to destitution. Given that these neighbourhoods were in or near permitted zones, some female textile workers lived close enough to witness the soliciting practices of *meretrici* and the opportunity for extra income this could provide. These women might have had one or two *amici fermi* (literally, "firm friends," or

exclusive lovers), whose financial contributions sustained their households.[109] It is possible that neither these women nor these men were in a position to marry or desired to be wed. Much as Florentine society feared, *amici fermi* might have allowed women to maintain their independence as household-heads in a city that viewed autonomous women with suspicion.

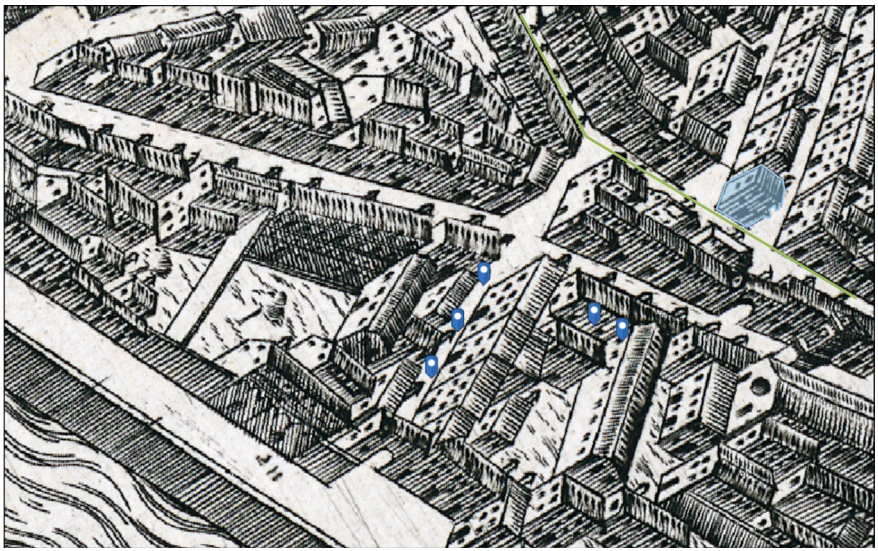

Fig. 6. Map of Florence showing the area between Ponte alla Carraia and Ponte Santa Trinità, the female-headed households on Canto del Purgatorio and Via del Limbo (blue flags), the local *osteria* (shaded blue), and the sex work permitted zones (green line).

109. McCarthy and Terpstra, "In the Neighborhood," 61.

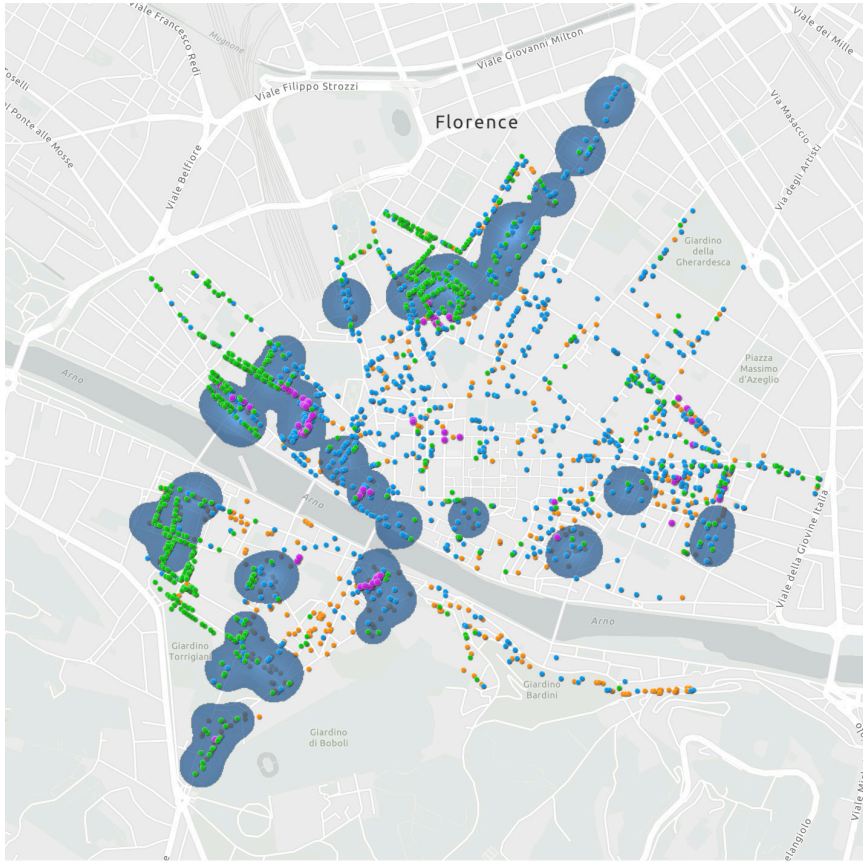

Fig. 7. Map of Florence with data from 1561 *decima* census showing the low-rent zones where women paid rent in lire (blue circles), the female-headed household (orange dots), the widow-headed households (blue dots), the *meretrice*-headed households (purple dots), and the weaver-headed households (green dots).

Via Palazzuolo

Via Palazzuolo was situated in the western portion of Florence, in the Santa Maria Novella quarter that ran parallel to the Arno River. From 1560, the street was a permitted zone for sex work with another smaller permitted zone on Via

dell'Albero intersecting it.[110] Via Palazzuolo and the streets that ran parallel and perpendicular to it had a high concentration of textile workers, widow-headed households, *meretrice* households, and taverns. In 1561, there were 135 textile-worker households, 32 *meretrice* households (with a total of 52 *meretrici* living within them), 160 widow-headed households, and 8 taverns located around Via Palazzuolo (see Fig. 8). This street reflects the impossibility of the city's expectation that only *meretrici* would live in permitted zones.[111]

Examining one block (approximately 94 metres long, shaded pink in Fig. 8) on Via Palazzuolo with twenty households shows the mingling of sex workers with other Florentine renters. Table 1 lists the households that stretched southeast along Via Palazzuolo, from Via Benedetta to Via Porcellana, all of which sat within one of the permitted zones of 1561.[112] Half of the twenty households recorded by *decima* enumerators were led by sex workers. Three more households had female household-heads without occupations, and another three households were empty.[113] Each of the three female-headed, non-*meretrice* households lived next door to a sex worker. There was little manufacturing or trade on this block outside of sexual commerce and the tavern.[114] Overwhelmingly, these households were occupied by women (71 percent of the block's occupants). Beyond the tavern, there were only four non-*meretrice* renters, but these households do not reflect any greater trend. The presence of non-*meretrice* households suggests that there was little effort made by property owners to uphold the terms of the 1547 decree that required only sex workers to live in permitted zones.

The high density of sex workers on this block also suggests that people living on Via Benedetta (90 metres long), which intersected with Via Palazzuolo to the north, could have had little ignorance of the sounds and sights of the sex trade. There was far more diversity in household occupation on this street, but several households reflect the risk factors of poverty and female household-heads. Of the thirty households listed in the 1561 census, eleven (37 percent)

110. ASF, *Acquisti e Doni*, 291, unpaginated, fol. 3r (Varietà–Onestà).

111. Terpstra, "Locating the Sex Trade," 112.

112. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fols. 18v–19v (Santa Maria Novella 296 to 315).

113. One of the three empty households was owned by two widows from the Pitti family who lived elsewhere.

114. The block also included a shoemaker and a *bottega di treccone* (braid workshop).

were widow-headed and often without stated occupations. Nine of these widows (30 percent) rented in multi-household buildings, and five of those nine widows (16.7 percent of all households on the block) lived in buildings with other widowed tenants. Dividing the multi-household rents evenly by the number of tenants suggests that these widows might have paid less than the average rent and been attracted to this area for its low-rent character.[115] This area had low-rent residences on Via Palazzuolo, Via Montebello, and Via del Porcellana. The first group of lower-rent households consisted of the *meretrice* households themselves, which paid an average rent of approximately 8.59 scudi. In their study of property values and rents using the 1561 census, Walden and Terpstra asserted that the average annual income per property for Florentine property owners (averaging all owner types) was 14.9 scudi.[116] In this neighbourhood, *meretrice* households paid less rent than the average Florentine household. Moreover, eight widow-headed households in this region had their rent recorded in lire, ranging from 18 to 56 lire, with an average of 37.88 lire, or 5.41 scudi.[117] Although Via Benedetta was not a permitted zone, the women who lived here were in close proximity to sex workers on Via Palazzuolo, as well as on Via dell'Albero to the north and Via della Scala to the east. This neighbourhood, with its high number of widows often living in low-rent accommodation close to sex workers, shows how difficult it was to avoid proximate living even beyond the permitted zones.

115. Rents on Via Benedetta ranged from 4 to 20 scudi for multi-tenant buildings with the median building rent (or assessment) being 10 scudi.

116. There was a considerable range of rents even within different categories of property owners. Ducal properties rented for an estimated average of 25.5 scudi, while properties owned by individuals, guilds, and religious organizations rented for an estimated average of 16.6 scudi, 15.2 scudi, and 10.7 scudi, respectively. Walden and Terpstra, "Who Owned Florence?," 229, esp. table 1.

117. Six of these women were listed without surnames or place-of-origin nomenclature. Customarily, having no surname indicated a woman's lower economic standing, relatively recent migration from outside the city, and no connection to families of status. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fols. 15v, 16v, 28r, 35r, 38v.

Fig. 8. Map of Florence with data from 1561 *decima* census showing the area around Via Palazzuolo, the sex work permitted zones (red lines), the female-headed households (orange dots), the widow-headed households (blue dots), the *meretrice*-headed households (purple dots), and the weaver-headed households (green dots).

Table 1. Occupants and owners on Via Palazzuolo (eastern side only) from Via Benedetta to Via Porcellana, 1561.

DECIMA number (Santa Maria Novella)	**Occupant name(s)**	**Occupation**	**Rent (scudi)**	**Household occupants**
296	Caterina da Santa Maria in Bagno	*meretrice*	8	2 females
297	Antonia Romano; Antonia da Pistoia	*meretrice*	12	2 females

DECIMA number (Santa Maria Novella)	Occupant name(s)	Occupation	Rent (scudi)	Household occupants
298	Sandrina del Pistoia da Pistoia	[*meretrice* in Onestà 1560 list]	17	2 females 1 male
299	"Fontana di […]"	bookseller	8 assessed[118]	empty
300	Lucretia Modonese	*meretrice*	7	1 female
301	Lisabetta Pazza di Jacopo delle Donne	unknown	12	1 female
302	La Sandra da Montughi	*meretrice*	8	2 females
303	Mona Lucretia moglie gia di Giovanfrancesco di Giovanmaria Ferrini	unknown	8 assessed, owner-occupied	2 females 1 male
304	Antonio di Rinaldo Baldesi	unknown	25 assessed, owner-occupied	2 females 6 males
305	Francesco di Bartolomeo	shoemaker	5 assessed, owner-occupied	2 females 2 males
306	Owned by Mona Nannina and Mona Maria Pitti	widow-owned	14	empty

118. Assessments for non-rents show that the *decima* census reported an estimated value for this property, counted in scudi, which represents the expected annual return (customarily 7 percent), not the property's value.

DECIMA number (Santa Maria Novella)	Occupant name(s)	Occupation	Rent (scudi)	Household occupants
307	La Margarita di Lorenzo Buti	*meretrice*	10	1 female
308	La Ginevra Pistolese and her sister	*meretrice*	11	2 females
309	La Lisabetta Fiorentina	*meretrice*	8	2 females
310	Tavern rented by Giovan Gualberto di Maffio	tavern-keeper	13	N/A
311	Owned by Jacopo di Bartolomeo Martelli da Ronta	unknown	4	empty
312	La Cecchina da Livorno	*meretrice*	8	1 female
313	La Maddalena detta la Lena Fiorentina	*meretrice*	8	2 females
314	La Geva di Barberino	*meretrice*	12	1 female
315	Jacopo di Bartolomeo Martelli da Ronta	house with a "bottega di Treccone"	2	1 female 1 male

On Via Palazzuolo and its surrounding streets, widows, weavers, and *meretrici* lived and socialized near eight taverns. As Martin argues, women who worked in these places of entertainment and hospitality were often considered

donne di partito (common women), who were publicly available sex workers.[119] Trexler noted that between 1441 and 1523, 74.2 percent of the clientele of Florentine brothels were foreign men.[120] The occupations of the clientele consisted of "petty shop owners, artisans, and day laborers."[121] Moreover, the men who were drawn to brothels would have provided potential clientele for nearby licensed *meretrici* and any unlicensed *donne dishoneste* who might have worked in this area. Foreign men living in Florence who were single or away from their families were most likely to patronize *meretrici* and perhaps develop relationships with *donne dishoneste*. The all-male household of Stefano di Bartolomeo da Querceto on Piazza di Santa Maria Novella is a good example of this situation. From a town in the area around Pisa, Stefano shared his home with eight other men and lived on a block that was bounded by three streets permitting prostitution. The household's low rent (7 scudi) and high-occupant density suggests that this was a group of unmarried men living together to save money. If any of his housemates sought female company, they did not need to travel far.[122] As they walked towards the taverns of Via Palazzuolo where they purchased food and drink, they would have encountered several *meretrici*. Many low-income households lacked cooking facilities and depended on prepared food made elsewhere.[123] Indeed, cooking was one of the tasks that women in Rome combined with clandestine sex work.[124] Moreover, the records of Florence's *Camera Fiscale* show that some sex workers lodged at inns and taverns, or were kept there illegally by *oste* (inn-keepers), to provide companionship and sexual services for clients.[125]

Via Palazzuolo and its surrounding streets bring together all the factors that typified areas where sex work was a common practice: poverty; places of food and entertainment; industries that employed women seasonally; men

119. Martin, "Alehouses," 58.

120. Trexler, "Florentine Prostitution," 391.

121. Trexler, "Florentine Prostitution," 393.

122. Unfortunately Stefano's occupation (*riscafitore*) provides no information about the group's professions. The Vicentine wool weaver, Filippo di Jacopo, lived in a similar household with three other men on Via del Campuccio, just two blocks from the permitted zone of Via San Piero Gattolini. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fols. 21r (Santa Maria Novella 355), 98v (Santo Spirito 1553).

123. Freedman, "Eating Out," 113–14; McIver, "Let's Eat," 164.

124. Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 119, 131–32.

125. See ASF, *Fondo Camera e auditore fiscale*; and also ASF, *Acquisti e Doni*, 291.

travelling for trade and commerce, as well as apprentices and other local single men; a concentration of female-led households; and nearby permitted sex work zones that would draw clients from other areas in the city. Although they dominated certain blocks, *meretrice* households were not the only renters in this permitted zone, suggesting that in 1561 enforcement of the Onestà's regulations in this area was not rigorous.

Via dell'Ariento

Much like Via Palazzuolo, the area around Via dell'Ariento shows the success of the city's sex trade and the failure of its segregation policy. Via dell'Ariento was a four-block-long street (219 metres) situated to the north of Via Palazzuolo and across town (see Fig. 9). The street was not a permitted zone in 1561, but it hosted fourteen *meretrice* households sheltering a total of sixteen *meretrici*. Three permitted zones—Via Chiara, Via Taddea, and Borgo la Noce—ran parallel to Via dell'Ariento. Notably, the 1561 census listed only one self-identifying *meretrice* household on these streets in contrast to the many on Ariento. On Borgo la Noce, l'Agnola di Lorenzo da Figlione's household shared a building with the weaver Tomme di Arezzo's household.[126] Most of the households around them were also led by weavers or other textile workers. Beyond l'Agnola, there was la Smeralda, also on Borgo la Noce, and la Mante da Prato and la Domenica da Fegghine living on Via Chiara, who seem to be the other likely sex workers living in this permitted zone.[127]

To dig deeper into the geographic clustering outside of the permitted zones, consider a single block stretch of Via dell'Ariento (shaded pink in Fig. 9), from Via Porciaia south to where the street met the juncture of the modern Via del Canto dei Nelli and Via de' Pucci at the basilica of San Lorenzo (see Table 2). This approximately 60-metre block occupied the southern-most stretch of Via dell'Ariento. In total, the two sides of the street were home to seventy-nine people. On the east side, there were twelve buildings with fourteen households sheltering forty-eight people. On the west side, there were eight buildings with thirteen households sheltering thirty-one people. Most inhabitants rented, few renters lived in multi-household buildings, and the rent paid for each building

126. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 56r (San Giovanni 900).

127. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fols. 34r (San Giovanni 510), 56v (San Giovanni 904).

ranged from 8 to 23 scudi.[128] This information suggests a spectrum of wealth, from the comparatively rich widow Mona Gostanza, who paid 23 scudi, to Lena, Margarita, and Sandrina, who split the 8-scudi rent.

Such a high-density area with mixed household wealth offers a useful sample of a non-permitted zone in which to consider proximity between *meretrice* and non-*meretrice* households. Taking both sides of the street together, there were ten *meretrice* households (37 percent of households) and four more female-headed households (14.8 percent) bearing the notorious pronoun "la."[129] To have one-third to one-half of households participating in the sex trade is striking on a block that was not a permitted zone and was relatively close to the basilica and monastery of San Lorenzo. This block hosted more than half of all the *meretrice* households residing on Via dell'Ariento and is another forceful argument for the failure of Florence's segregation policy. Notably, on both sides of the street, all fourteen licensed and possible sex workers lived in a row, creating a sort of brothel district. Aside from this high concentration of *meretrici*, another striking characteristic of this block is its many female residents (67 percent), even outside *meretrice* households. If the Onestà hoped to keep "honest" women unaware of the sex trade, even by *meretrici* clustering together in non-permitted zones, it had failed. Ten *meretrice* households on a 60-metre block could not go unnoticed. What did the women living in the Ciampelli and Gaddi households think of their neighbours? Both houses carried a high value assessment, and the Gaddi men played an important role in Florentine politics and culture. Their *meretrice* neighbours did not pay high enough rents to suggest that they were courtesans (i.e., 8–13 scudi as opposed to 20 scudi or more), eliminating one possibility that would lessen the social sting of living next to a mini-brothel district.

128. In the 60-metre block, 78.6 percent (east side) and 76.9 percent (west side) of households rented, while 28.6 percent (east side) and 61.5 percent (west side) of households lived in multi-household buildings. The median rent per building was 12 scudi (east side) and 9.5 scudi (west side). ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fols. 51r–51v, 54v–55r.

129. There were five *meretrici* on the east side and five *meretrici* on the west side. These other households include La Maria di Gruolo di Lodovico di Romagna (San Giovanni 811), L'Agnoletta, donna di Pagolo (San Giovanni 812), La Gostanza di Giovanni da Capello (San Giovanni 869), and L'Antonia, vedova (San Giovanni 870). ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fols. 51r–51v, 54v.

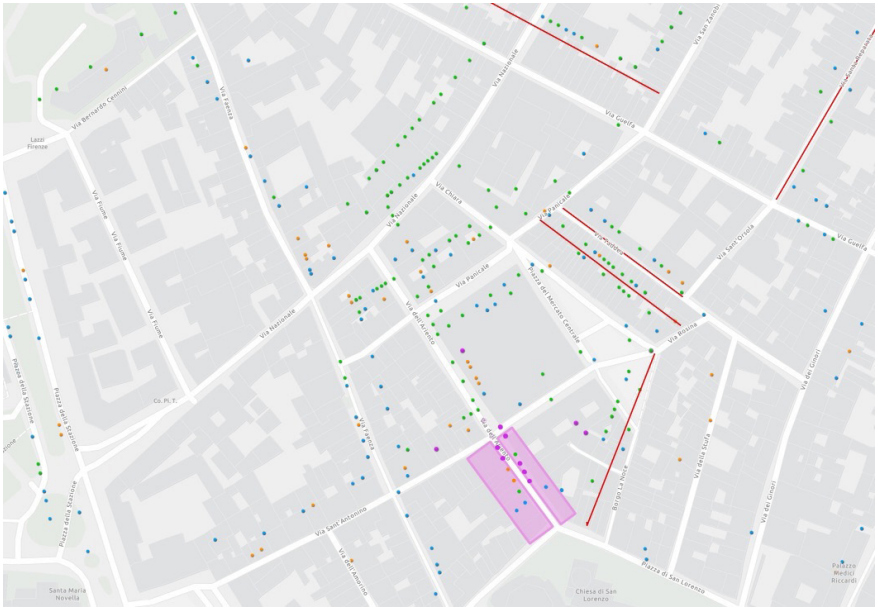

Fig. 9. Map of Florence with data from 1561 *decima* census showing the area around Via dell'Ariento, the sex work permitted zones (red lines), the female-headed households (orange dots), the widow-headed households (blue dots), the *meretrice*-headed households (purple dots), and the weaver-headed households (green dots).

Table 2. Occupants and owners on Via dell'Ariento from Via Porciaia south to the Basilica of San Lorenzo, 1561 (east side occupants followed by their facing west side occupants).

DECIMA number (San Giovanni)	**Occupant name(s)**	**Occupation**	**Rent (scudi)**	**Household occupants**
East side of Via dell'Ariento				
808	Jacopo di Giovanni Piceuioli *casa con bottega sotto*	unknown	6 assessed	empty
809	La Diandra	*meretrice*	8	2 females
810	La Gena Pisana	*meretrice*	12	2 females
811	Lorenzo d' Antonio Marmini; La Maria di Gruolo di Lodovico di Romagna	unknown	20	2 females 1 male
812	L'Agnoletta, donna di Pagolo, battilano; Patrino di Prospero di Rezzo, tessitore	unknown	10	3 females 3 males
813	La Lucia, donna di Bernardo, tessitore di drappi	*meretrice*	10	3 females 1 male
814	La Cecia d'Arno Fernandi	*meretrice*	13	3 females
815	La Catarina Anconettana	*meretrice*	11	2 females
816	Cristofano di Francesco Ciampelli	unknown	28 assessed, owner-occupied	4 females 1 male

DECIMA number (San Giovanni)	Occupant name(s)	Occupation	Rent (scudi)	Household occupants
817	Agnolo di Girolano Gaddi	unknown	34 assessed, owner-occupied	8 females 5 males
818	Mona Gostanza, donna fu di Borgianni Iaddei	unknown	23	2 females 0 males [4 people total][130]
819	Gherardo di Guglielmo Scarapucci	unknown	18	2 females 2 males
West side of Via dell'Ariento				
874	Domenico di Gimignano	materassio	9 assessed, owner-occupied	2 females 1 male
873	La Sandra di Piero di Damello da Empoli	*meretrice*	9	2 females
872	La Lena, donna di Fiamel de Ripo; La Margarita di Stefano da Firenze; La Sandrina di Borrettetto	all *meretrici*	8	3 females
871	La Julia di Mariano, *meretrice*; Urio di Batista da Venetia; Mona Mea, donna fu di Chimenti Pierolese	*meretrice*	12	3 females 3 males

130. There was an error in this census record. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 51v (San Giovanni 818).

DECIMA number (San Giovanni)	**Occupant name(s)**	**Occupation**	**Rent (scudi)**	**Household occupants**
870	L'Antonia, vedova	unknown	7	2 females 1 male
869	La Gostanza di Giovanni da Capello	unknown	10	2 females 1 male
868	Francesco di Giovanni da Vicchio	*tessitore*	16	1 female 2 males
867	Nello di maestro Francesco Nelli; Mona Bartolomea, vedova, donna gia di Bartolomeo di Giovanni Nelli	unknown	30 assessed, owner-occupied	5 females 3 males

Table 2 highlights a challenge in working with the census data. How should historians view women who the census enumerator identified with the pronoun "la" preceding their name? On this block lived three women next door to each other: "La Gena Pisana, *meretrice*," "La Maria di Gruolo di Lodovico di Romagna," and "La Agnoletta, donna di Pagolo, battilano." Generally, the pronoun "la" indicates a certain local renown or notoriety. The sex worker Gena bore that pronoun, as did other women who were known to be sex workers and who were not identified as *meretrici*. Should the census enumerator's application of "la" before a woman's name indicate that she was a sex worker or that she had a reputation for loose living? Since women could pay the higher tax and avoid identifying as *meretrici*, it is dangerous to ignore them.[131] However, the presence of the pronoun "la" without complete registration and exemption lists problematizes drawing this conclusion. Historians might be wise to consider whether Gena's next door neighbour "la Maria di Gruolo di Lodovico di Romagna" was also a sex worker, but what about "la Agnoletta, donna di

131. Also, *meretrici* appear with varied names across Onestà documents, and several women named Maria, Agnoletta, and Gena are listed at this time.

Pagolo," who identified as the wife of a *battilano* (wool processor)? Was she known as a textile worker who periodically sold access to her body when textile work was slow? Examining the contextual information that the census provides helps draw a firmer conclusion about Agnoletta's financial circumstances, but it does not reveal anything about her sex life. She lived in a building with another renter, the weaver Patrino di Prospero di Rezzo. Their two households combined included six people (three males and three females), but they paid only 10 scudi in rent, suggesting that they had little space and little wealth.[132] As a married working woman, seemingly with an absent husband, who lived in low-rent accommodation in close proximity to sex workers, Agnoletta is a good example of the kind of at-risk woman that worried Florentine authorities.

Moving north on Via dell'Ariento further contextualizes the neighbourhood and potential sex-worker clients. The block north was home to even more female-headed households, a few of whom worked in the textile industry as a *tiraloro*, a *battilano*, or a *filatoiaio*. Three more female household-heads worked as *meretrici*.[133] This block also had more low-rent households with a high density of inhabitants. Also, following the street north, there were more household-heads whose names included a geographic identifier and more male household-heads who identified an occupation in the textile industry.[134] While there were fewer female-headed households further north, they tended to occupy the buildings with lower rents, more of whom paid in lire.[135] The absence of *meretrici* or women identified with the pronoun "la" in those blocks might have been offset by the *stuffe*.[136] In 1569, this building was listed with the city's other brothel sites.

132. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 51v (San Giovanni 812).

133. Because regularly updated lists of who purchased exemptions or paid the higher tax do not survive, it is difficult to know how the Onestà related to *meretrici* who lived outside permitted zones over time. The three households were "Mona Betta da Camelli già meretrice," "La Tanua d'Antonio, meretrice," and "La Maria di Borgi, meretrice." ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fols. 46r (San Giovanni 708), 52v (San Giovanni 833), 53r (San Giovanni 839).

134. For example, "Agnolo di Bastiano da Cortina" and "Bartolomeo di Pellegrino da Marciano," whose two households paid a combined 32 lire in rent. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 40v (San Giovanni 616).

135. For example, "Mona Catarina, moglie gia di Bastiano Becherucci," who paid only 18 lire in rent. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 37v (San Giovanni 566).

136. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 40r (San Giovanni 613).

What is most striking about the region around Via dell'Ariento was that it was occupied by groups of a lower economic status. Between Via dell'Ariento, Borgo La Noce, Via Nazionale, and the permitted zone north of Via Taddea there were eighty-three textile worker residences, thirty-three widow-headed households, sixteen *meretrice* households, and fifteen female-headed households. Of this last group, there were seven female-headed households in this area that paid a lower rent in lire. The rent for these households ranged between 18 and 74 lire with an average of 37.29 lire (approximately 5.33 scudi). In contrast, the average rent for *meretrice* households on Via dell'Ariento was 9.35 scudi, which was well below the average property income for individual Florentine residential owners and the overall average annual property income (16.6 scudi and 14.9 scudi, respectively). Given their lower socio-economic status and proximity to the nearby permitted zones, these households reflect the situation that Florentine authorities feared would lead to prostitution. By not enforcing the 1547 decree that prevented women other than sex workers from renting in permitted zones, the Onestà tolerated this *mala vicinanza*, which could have turned from proximity to professional emulation.

Neighbours and finances

As noted earlier, *meretrici* were required to pay 15 lire (about 2.14 scudi) every three months for a basic license. At 60 lire (about 8.56 scudi), annual license fees were greater than what many of the female-headed households mentioned above paid in rent. Using Jacques Rossiaud's work and civic brothel legislation, Maria Serena Mazzi estimated that most licensed sex workers charged prices that were accessible to day-labourers and journeymen artisans. While Mazzi lamented the lack of data concerning daily income and costs for sexual encounters, the extant contracts between indebted sex workers and male pimps identify amounts in florins, suggesting their poverty and desperation. Although chronic indebtedness plagued Florentine brothel workers, poor female household-heads living near *meretrice* households witnessed the economic demand and benefits of engaging in sex work firsthand along with any *baccano*.[137]

La Lucia, the *meretrice* and widow of Bernardo the wool worker who lived on Via dell'Ariento, is an example of women's and especially widows'

137. Mazzi, *Life*, 116–23.

economic vulnerability. Lucia might have fallen into prostitution after the death of her husband to make ends meet in an economy that rewarded female wool weaving with lower wages. Immediately north of Lucia was a house divided into two apartments, which were occupied by Patrino, a weaver, and Agnoletta, the wife of Pagolo a wool worker, who lived apart from him. On all sides, their house was surrounded by *meretrice* and widow-headed households. If either Patrino or Agnoletta ever wondered about the economics of sex work, their neighbours provided ample evidence.[138] Just as Terpstra suggested that permitted zones mirrored already established sex workers, Chojnacka also illustrated their tendency to cluster together in Venice so that clients "knew where to seek them out."[139] In these areas the proximity of *meretrici* to women who struggled financially provided this group with models for engaging in unlicensed sex work.

Mona Margaritta, widow of Mariotto, a *contadino*, lived in one of the lower income households between the permitted zones around Via Taddea. According to the census, Margaritta's rent was about 3.71 scudi (26 lire), and she headed a household of three other women.[140] Mona Catarina, widow of Bastiano, lived on Via dell'Ariento just up the street from the *meretrice* households, and her rent was about 2.57 scudi (18 lire). Unlike Margaritta, Catarina had no occupation listed for either herself or her late husband.[141] Both women were widowed household-heads who lived in a lower economic region of the city and likely struggled financially. They also lived near permitted zones and could hardly avoid evidence of the sex trade. Closer to the Arno, on Canto del Purgatorio, was a house with two female-headed households that rented for only 4 scudi (28 lire). In one apartment lived the *meretrice* Mona Brigida, and in the other apartment lived the widow Mona Anna.[142] Did the latter woman assist and support her neighbour, act as a *ruffiana* (procuress), and covertly emulate her as a *donna dishonesta*, or did she despair for her soul and the house's virtue? To Florentine authorities, their poverty and independence suggested that Margaritta, Catarina, and Anna could have engaged in unlicensed sex work or knew women who did.

138. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 51v (San Giovanni 812 and 813).

139. Chojnacka, *Working Women*, 54; Terpstra, "Locating the Sex Trade," 112.

140. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 33v (San Giovanni 498).

141. ASF, *Decima Granducale*, 3782, fol. 37v (San Giovanni 566).

142. ASF, Decima Granducale 3782, fol. 80r (Santa Maria Novella 1359).

Conclusion

In 1561, Via Palazzuolo and Via dell'Ariento revealed the failure of Florence's strategy of separating *meretrici* from other women. The Onestà's desire to fund the Convertite with taxes that suborned its segregation policy ensured that low-rent neighbourhoods were home to many other types of workers, including male clients, families, and female-headed households. The *mala vicinanza* that nuns identified as spiritually distracting was believed to have an even greater effect on unenclosed women, which reinforced the fear that clandestine sex work proliferated. As a group, female household-heads were more likely to be poor, and, without a male breadwinner, many struggled to earn sufficient income. In the mid-sixteenth century, new shelters for poor young women opened in Florence, just as the city's burgeoning silk industry demanded cheap seasonal labour. While some women found a life in these new workhouses, other women accepted diversified work in order to maintain their independence and support their dependents. There was a persistent fear that poverty, proximity to sex work, and the absence of a male household-head would lead to clandestine prostitution. No government wished to encourage *donne dishoneste*, but the city's increasing population put pressure on the buffer zones around churches and monasteries. Throughout the 1560s, the Onestà continued to protect wealthy women who could afford a convent dowry and wealthy or repentant *meretrici* who retired to Santa Elisabetta delle Convertite. Towards other women who might encounter *meretrici* in their neighbourhoods, the magistrates were ambivalent. The extent of the Onestà's involvement was performing periodic campaigns to force licensing on clandestine sex workers, encouraging taxes that exempted women from its own regulations, and arresting *meretrici* and clients for their noise and violence. These compromises protected wealthy women and did nothing to allay the suspicion that poor women might abandon their virtue without male supervision or protective walls.

As this article has shown, John Brackett's suggestion that the Onestà allowed its segregation policy and restrictions on sex workers to fail is generally correct. The *decima* census reveals a confluence of demographic trends in several areas across Florence that lends weight to contemporary suspicions. By not enforcing geographic restrictions and offering exemptions, the Onestà facilitated the proximity of low-income female household-heads, *meretrici*, and potential clientele. The financial fragility of sixteenth-century female labour

makes it a reasonable concern for contemporaries that poor, at-risk women engaged in sex work to supplement their wages. Women's ability to choose this path embodied contemporary Florentine fears about female independence and reinforced the ambivalent position of the Onestà.

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