

subjects in consecrated cemeteries and churches. While at the BSR, I decided to focus my research solely on this aspect and across the Italian peninsula, thanks to the BSR's assistance in gaining access to the Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede in the Vatican. The archive holds documents produced by the Holy Office, and letters sent by the Inquisition from different cities of the Mediterranean area, providing an overview of the issue of non-Catholic burial practices and rituals in different cities of the peninsula. The holdings of the BSR library were also significant in developing my research on secondary literature which was also enhanced thanks to access to other institutions in Rome such as the Biblioteca Hertziana, the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale and the Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea.

My stay at the BSR was essential for the development of my current postdoctoral project on Death and Religious Minorities in Early Modern Italy. My current research aims at investigating issues of non-Catholic burials and funerals to understand the relationship between the dominant Catholic society and religious minorities, from permanent communities to transient ones, including travellers and slaves. The experience as a Rome Awardee was invaluable and has enriched me both as a researcher and as a person, thanks to the multidisciplinary environment and close contact with other scholars and artists.

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*Maria Mancini and the development of female equestrian culture in Rome, 1661–72*

During my three-month stay at the BSR as a Rome Awardee, I investigated the role of noblewoman Maria Mancini (1639–1715) in diffusing the French taste for female horseback riding during her residence in Rome between 1661 and 1672.

My doctoral thesis and recent publications argue that Louis XIV's court provided a fertile ground for the development of a thriving female equestrian culture that allowed some elite women to exercise and display their proficient skill in the saddle. Following the completion of my PhD, I have been exploring how aristocratic women marrying abroad played a key role in spreading equestrian habits from the French court to other European centres such as Madrid, Turin, Florence and Rome.

Maria Mancini was a niece of Cardinal Giulio Mazzarino, Louis XIV's closest adviser and chief minister during the early years of his reign. Born in Rome, Maria moved to France aged thirteen and spent the next twelve years at court, where her charm and intellect succeeded in beguiling the young king. To break the young lovers' idyll and avoid diplomatic troubles, the cardinal arranged for Maria to move back to Rome and marry the Conestabile Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna in the spring of 1661. After a few years of happiness, the relationship between the two spouses progressively deteriorated until, convinced that her husband planned to poison her, Maria escaped from Rome in

1672 and spent the remaining 40 years of her life separated from her husband, wandering across Europe.

Even before her daring flight, the Conestabilessa cut an unusual figure amongst the Roman nobility. Soon after her return to the papal city, she shocked the conservative local families with her adoption of liberated French fashions in dress and behaviour. Investigating her role as salon hostess and patroness of theatre and music, historians have shown that several cultural trends inaugurated by Maria eventually became an attractive feature of the Roman social scene, where the gatherings at Palazzo Colonna provided a meeting space for the progressive fringes of the aristocracy and foreign visitors.

Like her love of musical and theatrical entertainments, Maria's passion for riding and hunting challenged contemporary conventions and played an important part in the fashioning of her striking public persona. While this fact has been noted by her biographers, its cultural significance and impact have remained unquestioned. To explore Maria's equestrian activities and how they were perceived by her contemporaries, I embarked on a systematic study of the *avvisi di Roma*, seventeenth-century anonymous manuscript periodicals that reported on the daily lives and fashionable recreations of Roman high society alongside local and international political news. The Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana holds the largest surviving collection of *avvisi*, of which I examined fifteen volumes encompassing the period between 1661 and 1672.

The thorough perusal of these documents not only provided precious information about Maria's equestrian exploits but also about various outdoor pursuits such as swimming in the Tiber and trekking across the Roman countryside. I found that, while most accounts betray the puzzled reaction of local observers, others instead testify to the enthusiastic response from some young noblewomen who were eager to embrace a more liberated athletic lifestyle, going so far as joining hunting parties, organizing female-only chariot races or even taking fencing lessons.

Focusing initially on Maria Mancini's riding habits, my investigations ended by considering how physical exercise played an important role in the performance of a new, emancipated and distinctly French model of elegant femininity. Traditionally regarded as the marker of a bizarre character, her corporeal freedom inspired other Roman elite women to challenge contemporary gender conventions.

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**RALEGH RADFORD ROME AWARDS**

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*Protesting celebrity: mass culture and the 1968 Venice Biennale protests*

My research at the BSR investigated the role of celebrities and the media in communicating ideas about social change in Italy's 1968, with a focus on the Venice Biennale. Why go to Rome to study protests in Venice? The student protests in Rome and the Battle of Valle Giulia on 1 March 1968 became a symbol of the national protests. And, as I learned