Preface

In early July of 1570 the governors of twenty Tuscan towns received orders from the Magistrato Supremo, the highest court in Cosimo de' Medici's state, to submit a tally of the Jews who lived in their jurisdictions. This was not an ordinary revenue-oriented census: the instructions did not require a report on the number of houses Jews owned, the amount of land, the number of their livestock. The intention was neither to impose nor to reevaluate a tax on the Jews, nor was it to confiscate their goods. The point was simply to locate Jews, to count the Jewish families and the mouths at each hearth.[1] Perhaps there was a perception that their numbers had grown, that Jews had been coming in, crossing borders and entering the state. Although it ignored the barrels of wine and oil and sacks of grain, the census was thus, even in the most literal sense of the word, an "inventory."

Some of the Jews living in Tuscany at this time were bankers who had been permitted by charter to live and lend in specific towns. These bankers were now accused of having violated their charters, and their banks were shut down. If the other Jews felt safe, assuming or hoping that the moneylenders were the main or sole target of the attack, they were quickly disillusioned. About two months later, on 26 September 1570, Cosimo I, Grand Duke of Florence and Siena, issued the edict that expelled the Jews from the many villages and towns where they lived in his state (see Figure 1). This order, however, set in motion not only an expulsion but also a population transfer. For the edict continued with an invitation: "any Jew who wants to remain in the Florentine Dominion, to live and engage in trade or commerce or any business and to live with his family in this state—faculty and full license is given to him to live in the city of Florence in such streets and places and in that way and with those conditions and obligations that will be declared."[2] The Jews could leave the state or move to Florence, where certain streets would be designated for their domicile.

The choice of expulsion or relocation to a ghetto was less stark and per-

haps less violent than the choice of expulsion or conversion imposed on Jews in some Christian lands during the previous century. Jews in the diversely controlled states of the Holy Roman Empire had faced a series of local and regional expulsions in the fifteenth century and more in the sixteenth; larger, more contiguous Jewish populations were expelled when edicts were issued in Spain in 1492, in Navarre in 1498 and in the Kingdom of Naples in 1510 and more decisively in 1541. In Portugal all Jews, including large numbers of refugees from Spain, were forced to convert in 1497.

In contrast, though the forced transfer to the Florentine ghetto resulted in the expulsion of Jews from their homes in many towns and cities, it did not require their ejection from the state. It also did not force the Jews to convert or specifically offer them incentives to do so (beyond the ability they would presumably have had to remain in their homes). The act was nonetheless oppressive, socially disruptive and financially and undoubtedly personally devastating for most of the people affected—at a minimum, the 710 people identified and counted in the special census in July.[3]

The plan to relocate the Jews of Tuscany moved forward with only short delays. Ten months after the edict of expulsion, on 31 July 1571 a second edict set forth the details for the governance of the Jews in the ghetto, which had in the meantime been built near the old market in the center of Florence.[4] With these legal acts the Medici altered the relationship of the Jews to the Christian population and polity and of the Jews to one another. For the ghettoization did not affect just the demographic settlement of the Jews and their status and place with reference to Christians. The imposition of the ghetto also affected the way status was determined among the Jews, the economic and political opportunities available to them, their gender roles, their social institutions. In short, ghettoization reshaped Jewish life in Tuscany.

This book attempts to imagine and tell the story of the creation of a new community known to contemporaries as "the ghetto of the Jews of Florence." The chapters collectively address the reconstruction of a Jewish social world: its demographic, geographic and institutional locations; the ways that the "otherness" of being a Jew was defined and understood by the majority. The ghettoization was cause or catalyst in these developments. But the first question I am asked by people who are just learning about the ghetto is not how it affected the Jews but why the Jews were ghettoized in the first place. What specific, time-contingent explanation is there for this event?

The inexhaustible volume of bureaucratic and diplomatic writing that survives from this era is humbling; the art and print media and other nonarchival sources such as legal theory and theology could also be studied in pursuit of an answer. Moreover, the search for specific causes or agents of

change is often less rewarding than the effort to elucidate processes of change. Despite these inherent difficulties, it has seemed to me quite necessary to explore the reasons why the Jews were ghettoized, lest the reader imagine that the ghettoization of the Jews was predetermined by their "otherness." That is, I am concerned not to lend my tacit support to a set of commonly held presuppositions about premodern Jewish alterity: the presumption of the "despisedness" of "the Jew"; the presumption that ghettos by and large formalized a separation between Jews and Christians that already existed naturally; the presumption of an inevitable and progressive persecution of Jews in the premodern world, and of their gradual march to reintegration and emancipation in the modern. These assumptions are not supported by the documents I have had the opportunity to study in the archives of Tuscany.

My search for explanations of the ghettoization is not a hunt that ends with the satisfying catch of one specific cause or agent, although there are a number of eligible candidates. I will certainly name names, but in the end I will have made the larger argument that the ghettoization of the Jews in Tuscany is best understood in relation to the process of early modern state-building in the specific context of the Catholic Reformation.

In the sixteenth-century Italian states, where the presence of heretics was a continuing concern and focus of political negotiation between local governors, local church officials and designated inquisitors from Rome, the possibility of tolerating Jews by ignoring them and having no particular policy toward them became unsupportable. As the parish became a place where heretics could no longer reside or hide, the presence of Jews in the parish became anomalous.

Not considered heretics, Jews were "infidels" who had a long-standing right to practice their religion under canon and Roman law. The claim that the Jewish religion or specific Jewish texts were heretical had been investigated on several notable prior occasions of dramatic reorganization within the church. Thus, in the midst of thirteenth-century activity against Christian heresies there was the famous Trial of the Talmud at Paris, which ended in the confiscation and burning of Jewish books in 1240, and also the inquisition into the works of Maimonides in early thirteenth-century Montpellier.[5] In the mid-sixteenth-century environment of the Protestant Reformation in the German states, accusations against Jews and Jewish literature attended the rivalry and the process of differentiation of Protestant doctrines in the context of ongoing polemics against the Catholic Church.[6]

It must be noted, however, that though in the sixteenth-century Catholic world the Roman and Venetian indices of prohibited books included Jewish

works along with Christian and pagan, the courts of Inquisition only rarely and exceptionally brought charges of heresy against Jews.[7] Protestants of all varieties—evangelical, Lutheran, Anabaptist and others more radical—were seen as an unassimilable threat by the Roman Inquisition and others who shared the concerns of the Catholic Church because they were so clearly Christians turned heretic, preaching, teaching and publishing ideas that could turn other Catholics to the heresy.[8] In the Italian states Lutheran and other heretics could only be identified by the things they said and the books they purchased, owned or read. Inquisitorial proceedings were necessary to determine who they were. By mid-century there was no place left for those who read Luther's Bible but prison—and they were not allowed to read it there.

In contrast, a place was found for the Jews read the Hebrew Bible. And their location in that specific place, the ghetto, was possible because Jews, unlike Protestants, could be "naturalized." That is, it was possible for Christians to imagine the Jewish population as (relatively) safely contained in a communal body and residential zone, because Christians accepted the definition of Jewishness as a status conferred naturally on Jews by their birth. In the late sixteenth-century Catholic states, people were not born Protestant, they became it. Jewish religious difference, in contrast, was embodied in the Jews and understood to be an inherited condition. Despite great interest in the conversion of Jews, and despite concerns about the unstable religious identities of New Christians, in comparison to Protestants Jews were seen as having a relatively stable or permanent set of identifiable attributes. In Tuscany this attribution was not often described in terms that were racial, biological or physiognomic, but rather through a loose discourse that recognized religion and "nation"—an understanding of Jews that was in harmony with Jewish self-understanding. It is in this context that we will come to understand the ghetto as an institution of the early modern Catholic state that defined and limited the boundaries of tolerance for individuals whose religion was not that of their rulers, imagining that it rendered them inert by making them a community.

But the policy of the medieval church had always been to tolerate Jews, whether to the end that their servility would bear witness to the triumph and truth of Christianity, or to the end that they might be converted, or simply because they filled useful functions that allowed Christians to avoid sin. The "tolerance" of the ghettos was not a reluctant result of tolerance learned after decades of wars of religion, as in other parts of western Europe where Jews were allowed to settle, such as the Netherlands. What makes it remarkable is that it occurred in Catholic states whose authorities came to unequivocally

reject the presence of non-Catholic western Christians. After attempts to reconcile evangelical Christian dissidents with the Catholic Church, especially from the late 1540s and thereon, persistent and generally successful efforts were made to exclude heretics from the public conversation (spoken and written) about God by arrest, prosecution and censorship.[9] Jews, in contrast, were not to be arrested, though their Talmud and other rabbinic commentaries were burned, prohibited and censored.[10] Instead, ghettoization would draw a sharp distinction between the heretic, whose presence was unacceptable, and the Jew, whose presence could be tolerably contained.

And yet in Tuscany, although the policy can only be understood in the context of religion, the agents of the ghettoization were neither the papacy nor the inquisition. The ghettoization must be understood as an act of the state—the increasingly centralized and power-concentrating Medici state. In that state, I will argue, the great diversity of Jewish legal statuses, privileges and conditions assigned to Jews in the previous era became emblematic of the diverse and idiosyncratic legal statuses of people in the many communes, cities, castles and feudal holdings that together made up the Medici state. These varying ranks and levels of status complicated the Medici government's effort to administer and control its subjects; they were tied to the complex of hierarchies and social networks of patron-client relations and local autonomies that predated ducal rule and therefore seemed to threaten it. Cosimo broke down these relationships as he restructured the administration of his state. The status of his subjects was formally simplified and systematized. And as part of that general reorganization, the Jews were relocated and reorganized. With the ghetto—the local, well-defined semi-autonomous community—there came an end to the continual renegotiation of privileges and charters. Once the Jews were living within the ghetto, their right to remain there—and thus in the state—was never challenged. The Jews of the ghetto became its citizens, and by extension, true subjects of the state.