CHAPTER THREE

“A WOMAN MARRIED AS A MAN”:
THE TRIAL OF FRANCISCO ROCA (1649–1650)

On 29 October 1649, the familiars of the Inquisition in Valencia in eastern Spain arrested a young man in his twenties and brought him under their custody to the inquisitorial palace of that city in the Calle Navellos, close by the town’s Cathedral. The young man, who was aged “between twenty-four and twenty-five”, was named Francisco Roca and was currently a resident of Valencia although he was a native of Perpignan in Catalonia. His physical characteristics were cursorily described as “tall, fair, without any facial hair and with small eyes”. Our knowledge of his extraordinary trial is entirely derived from the summary of it that was dispatched by the inquisitorial tribunal of Valencia to the Supreme Council of the Spanish Inquisition in Madrid as part of an account of the various trials that had been concluded by that tribunal in 1651. The original trial dossier in Valencia has unfortunately been lost. It was most probably destroyed when, in the wake of the abolition of the Inquisition by the liberal parliamentarian government, a mob stormed and sacked the inquisitorial palace of Valencia on 11 March 1820 and carried off a large portion of its secret archives.

The inquisitors of Valencia began their summary of the trial with a note in the margin of the summary – intended to facilitate the task of its readers in the Supreme Council – denoting that the case was that of a “woman married as a man” (mujer casada como hombre). The case of Francisco Roca was indeed to prove a particularly unusual and perplexing one for the inquisitors of Valencia as they sifted through contradictory evidence

1 The inquisitorial palace of Valencia was demolished in the nineteenth century but it was situated on the site of the building currently standing at number 14 in the Calle Navellos.

2 Perpignan was only ceded to France by Philip IV as a result of the Peace Treaty of the Pyrenees in November 1659.

3 A.H.N., Sección Inquisición, libro 941, fols. 350v–358r. The abolition of the Inquisition would be revoked after the French invasion of 1823, the defeat of the supporters of the liberal constitution and the restoration of ultra-conservative and absolutist Bourbon government of Fernando VII.
in witness testimony suggesting that Francisco was a man, a woman or perhaps even a hermaphrodite. This situation appears to have arisen as a result of Francisco’s ambiguous sexual behaviour and his hostile relationship with his wife. Furthermore, the case was complicated by accusations that Francisco Roca practiced magic and held blasphemous views concerning many of the sacraments of the church. The inquisitors were eventually compelled to order a detailed physical examination of Francisco Roca in order to determine his gender on the basis of the physical appearance of his sexual organs.

Plate 4: “Muger casada como hombre”: The opening sentences of the summary of the trial of Francisco Roca. Printed with the kind permission of the Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Spain (A.H.N., Sección Inquisición, libro 941, fol. 350v).

The Initial Evidence

Francisco Roca was brought to the attention of the Inquisition by the denunciations of three women and one man who knew him extremely well. The women included his wife, a slave woman belonging to him and a cousin of his wife whilst the male witness was described as a twenty-two-year-old coachman who was employed by Francisco Roca. The testimony of all the witnesses related to the homosexual relations that Francisco Roca had with various men. The three women formally accused Francisco Roca of having slept with men whom he had befriended and brought to his house. The women could identify two of them as military men, one a captain and the other a lieutenant (alférez), who were currently absent from Valencia. They claimed to have observed Francisco Roca lying in bed in a compromising position with each of these soldiers:

One night, they saw the captain lying in bed on top of the accused [Francisco Roca], who was lying on his back, and they were both asleep. The slave woman added that they kissed and slept together during the [afternoon] siesta and she sensed them both breathing [heavily]...