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# A Rupture in the Salon (1619–1621)



### Overview

Copia Sulam's salon was gaining in prominence when the salonnière began a discussion about the immortality of the soul with the priest and dramatist Baldassare Bonifaccio in fall 1619. Their discussion – which would eventually be broadcast in the Venetian presses – started in person when Copia Sulam challenged Bonifaccio with “difficult philosophical [and] theological questions” about the soul's immortality.<sup>1</sup> He continued the conversation with a letter of new year's greeting in late 1619 or early 1620. She responded with a letter in which she poses several challenges to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Later reprinted by a vengeful Bonifaccio, this letter, the most developed extant example of Copia Sulam's philosophical and theological argumentation, ventures far afield of both Christian and Jewish orthodoxy. When he responded to her letter not with a manuscript letter but with a printed work, *Dell'immortalità dell'anima*, in which he accuses her of denying the validity of the doctrine, Bonifaccio thrust Copia Sulam into the public light as never before.

This chapter will examine the initial volleys in Copia Sulam and Bonifaccio's debate over the immortality of the soul. By the seventeenth century, this tenet had attracted intense attention in Venice among both Christian and Jewish intellectuals. We thus begin with a history of earlier debates that prepared the terrain for Copia Sulam and Bonifaccio's battle.

### **The History of the Debate over the Immortality of the Soul**

#### *Ancient Philosophers and Commentators on the Immortality of the Soul*

The immortality of the soul was a doctrine fundamental to both Christianity and Judaism. Belief in the concept dated back to ancient Greece. Plato (ca. 429–347 BCE) proposes in the *Phaedo* (Φαίδων, also