



Moral Transgression and Enslavement in Early Modern Livorno (17th-18th Centuries)

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This article investigates how sodomy involving enslaved and formerly enslaved Muslim men was perceived and prosecuted in early modern Livorno, focusing first on the *Bagno degli schiavi* and then on the shops and taverns where enslaved Muslims worked. Drawing on court records and administrative sources, it shows that cases involving Muslims were viewed with particular suspicion, shaped by long-standing Christian stereotypes that linked Islam to vice and moral disorder. The first part of the article examines the *Bagno* and the galleys as spaces of confinement, coercion, and close male proximity, where Capuchin reforms introduced after 1677 increased vigilance without eliminating these practices. The second part turns to more open urban settings, such as dockside taverns and workshops, where the relative autonomy of enslaved Muslims facilitated inter-faith encounters, especially pederastic relations involving vulnerable, often Christian, youths. Overall, the article argues that prosecutions for sodomy reflected wider anxieties about religious contamination, social hierarchy, and the ambiguous integration of enslaved Muslims into Livorno's urban life.

Keywords: Slavery, Sodomy, Galleys, Religion, Livorno - *Bagno degli schiavi*

Until the first half of the seventeenth century, the Tuscan fleet was one of the main protagonists of Mediterranean corsairing. Between 1563 and 1693, the Medici galleys captured approximately 16,000 people¹. By 1601, en-

¹ This paper is part of the ERC Advanced Grant project *FemSMed. Female Slavery in Mediterranean Catholic Europe, 1500-1800* (101097386), P.I. Tamar Herzig, Tel Aviv University. Funded by the European Union (ERC, FemSMed-101097386). Views and opinions expressed in, however, are those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.
F. Angiolini, *Il Granducato di Toscana, l'Ordine di Santo Stefano e il Mediterraneo secc.*

slaved Muslims comprised around 20% of Livorno's total population. This figure declined to 8% by the early 1640s, due to the decrease of conflicts with the Muslim world, which, in turn, led to a decrease in corsairing². While these figures are already substantial, they do not account for the unknown number of enslaved women, primarily employed in domestic service, who remain largely absent from archival records. Unlike enslaved men, women were rarely able to return home, instead becoming assimilated into the society that enslaved them³.

This article focuses on the perception and prosecution of sodomy committed by enslaved and formerly enslaved Muslim men in early modern Livorno. The analysis considers two principal settings in which such cases emerged: the galleys, manned by a mixed population of enslaved Muslims, Christian convicts, and free rowers, and the city's port, a more open and socially diverse environment where galley slaves and formerly enslaved Muslim men worked in shops and taverns. Livorno, the principal port of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and home to the *Bagno degli schiavi*, provides the broader context for this study. Drawing on letters, criminal trials, and administrative records, the article demonstrates how sodomy involving Muslim slaves was interpreted through the lens of religious otherness and moral corruption.

While the act itself was not confined to any one group, cases involving Muslim men were perceived as particularly threatening because of their association with Islam and its alleged tolerance of vice. This perception was especially evident on board the galleys and within the *Bagno*, where proximity among men of different faiths, coerced labor, and moral disorder were thought to foster sin. Yet, as contemporary sources suggest, these same assumptions were sometimes questioned in less marginalized settings such as the port, where social and religious boundaries were more fluid.

In this context, the categories of "minority" and "majority" appear unstable and contingent, shaped not simply by numerical presence but by intersecting social, legal, and spatial hierarchies. More broadly, the article argues that sodomy was viewed less as a sexual offence than as a manifestation of spiritual corruption, reinforcing Christian fears of contamination and conversion in a multi-confessional port city.

XVI-XVIII), in *Ordens militares: guerra, religião, poder e cultura. Actas do III encontro sobre Ordens Militares, Vol. 1*, Colibri / Câmara Municipal de Palmela, Lisboa 1999, pp. 39-61; *Slaves and Slavery in the Early Modern Tuscany (1500-1700)*, in "Italian History and Culture", 3, 1997, pp. 67-82.

² C. Santus, *Il «turco» a Livorno: incontri con l'islam nella Toscana del Seicento*, Officina Libreria, Roma 2019, p. 42.

³ See the ongoing ERC project *FemSMed*, P.I. Tamar Herzog, Tel Aviv University, ERC-Advg *Female Slavery in Mediterranean Catholic Europe, 1500-1800*.

Despite being foreigners and adherents of a different faith, enslaved Muslims were not entirely isolated from the broader Livornine community. This was for domestic “slaves” and even more so for “public slaves” (i.e., galley slaves), who worked in taverns and workshops when they were not engaged in maritime labour. In Livorno, interactions between enslaved Muslims and Catholic people were part of daily life, facilitating a degree of cultural exchange and even a limited integration into Christian society. Moreover, once freed, many of them remained in the city, continuing to work and participate in its social and economic life⁴. As suggested by Giovanna Fiume, slavery, while undeniably inhumane, paradoxically provided a structured role for foreigners, regulating their presence within an otherwise unfamiliar society⁵. The “Turk”⁶ could thus also become a familiar figure, while remaining the archetypal adversary of Christianity, subject to prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination, he could also become a familiar figure⁷. However, despite this limited inclusion, enslaved individuals remained the ultimate representation of otherness within Christian culture. Their social stigma, particularly regarding morality and customs, was profound. Indeed, enemies of Christianity were often depicted as barbaric, engaging

⁴ S. Bono, *Schiavi. Una storia mediterranea (XVI-XIX secolo)*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2016; A. Marotta, *The Muslim Friend: Cross-Confessional Male Intimacy in Eighteenth-Century Italy*, in “Journal of Early Modern History”, 28(3), 2024, pp. 230-52; B. Pomara Saverino, *Rifugiati. I moriscos e l'Italia*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2018; Santus, *Il «turco»*, cit.

⁵ G. Fiume, *Schiavitù Mediterranee. Corsari, rinnegati e santi di età moderna*, Mondadori, Milano 2009, p. 33; Bono, *Schiavi*, cit.

⁶ The term “Turk” in early modern European sources referred broadly to Muslim people rather than specifically to the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire or present-day Turkey. It functioned as a generic label encompassing diverse Muslim populations, from North African corsairs to Levantine merchants and enslaved individuals in Christian territories. “Turk” was often used interchangeably with “Moor,” “Saracen,” or “infidel,” reflecting a Christian vocabulary that conflated geography, religion, and moral identity. The term thus conveyed not an ethnic category but a confessional and ideological one, signifying the archetypal enemy of Christendom. See N. Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998; G. MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2007; P. Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1994; D. Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002; N. Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1960, rev. ed. 1993.

⁷ See G. Ricci, *I turchi alle porte*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2008; Fiume, *Schiavitù*, cit.; L. Valensi, *Ces étrangers familiers: Musulmans en Europe (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)*, Payot & Rivages, Paris 2012; Bono, *Schiavi*, cit.; Santus, *Il «turco»*, cit.; Pomara Saverino, *Rifugiati*, cit.

in unrestrained vices, particularly of a sexual nature, with no regard for moral decency⁸.

A prominent example of such stereotyping is the notion of the “sodomite Turk”⁹. Anti-Islamic propaganda frequently attributed unholy qualities to Muslims, with unnatural sexual practices seen as emblematic of their rebellion against God and the natural order. While this form of propaganda was particularly intense in the Iberian Peninsula – a region profoundly shaped by the rhetoric of the *Reconquista* – the stereotype of the sodomite Muslim became widespread throughout Christendom, reaching its peak during the Cyprus War (1570-1573), which soon became a symbol of the ongoing struggle between the Christian West and the Muslim East¹⁰.

This representation had deep intellectual and theological roots. Since the Crusades, Christian polemic had linked Islam to moral disorder, as seen in the *Passio Sancti Pelagii*¹¹ and the writings of Peter the Venerable¹². These narratives cast the Muslim ruler as a sexual aggressor and Islam itself as heretical and corrupt. As Vincenzo Lavenia has shown, early modern condemnations of Islam associated sodomy not with sexual behavior in a modern sense but with religious deviance. Muslims were imagined not as effeminate but as virile, brutal figures whose sexuality symbolized moral and spiritual depravity¹³.

Notably, Muslims were not depicted as effeminate, but rather as strong, virile figures. They were sometimes viewed as a divine instrument of punishment against Christian sin¹⁴. In this context, sodomy was not associated

⁸ V. Lavenia, *Tra eresia e crimine contro natura: sessualità, islamofobia e inquisizioni nell'Europa moderna*, in U. Grassi, G. Marocci (a cura di), *Le trasgressioni della carne. Il desiderio omosessuale nel mondo islamico e cristiano, secc. XII-XX*, Viella, Roma 2015, pp. 103-30; Id., *Between Heresy and “Crimes against Nature”: Sexuality, Islamophobia and the Inquisition in Early Modern Europe*, in U. Grassi (ed.), *Mediterranean Crossings Sexual Transgressions in Islam and Christianity (10th-18th Centuries)*, Viella, Roma 2020, pp. 65-88.

⁹ K. Babayan, A. Najmabadi, *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2008; N. Malcolm, *Forbidden Love in Istanbul: Patterns of Male-Male Sexual Relations in the Early-Modern Mediterranean World*, in “Past & Present”, 2022, pp. 55-88; Id., *Forbidden Desires in Early Modern Europe. Male-Male Sexual Relations, 1400-1750*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2024; J.A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2007.

¹⁰ N. Capponi, *Lepanto 1571: La lega Santa contro l'Impero Ottomano*, trad. di N. Poo, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2010.

¹¹ Lavenia, *Sessualità, islamofobia*, cit., p. 108; Id., *Sexuality, Islamophobia*, cit.

¹² U. Grassi, *Sodoma. Persecuzioni, affetti, pratiche sociali (secoli V-XVIII)*, Carocci, Roma 2019, p. 64.

¹³ Lavenia, *Sessualità, islamofobia*, cit., pp. 110-1.

¹⁴ U. Grassi, G. Marocci, *L'intreccio dei desideri, la tolleranza della carne: per una nuova*

with weakness but with brutality and moral corruption. Instead of symbolizing sexual deviance in terms of effeminacy, it was framed as another manifestation of the moral and spiritual depravity attributed to Muslims.

Thus, sodomy became increasingly associated with individuals whose actions or religious beliefs were deemed immoral or blasphemous. A clear example of this can be found on board early modern galleys, where the widespread practice of sodomy was not regarded by the authorities with surprise but rather as expected behavior, an expression of the presumed moral depravity of galley rowers, whether convicts or enslaved men¹⁵. The ideological association between Islam and sodomy helps explain why, although the offence was common among all rowers, contemporary sources focused predominantly on Muslim slaves. Their acts were not necessarily more frequent but were interpreted through the lens of religious otherness and enduring stereotypes that conflated Islam with heresy and moral corruption. On early modern galleys, sodomy was thus not merely a sexual transgression but a behavior that, in the eyes of Christian authorities, confirmed the supposed vice and irredeemable nature of the infidel. Consequently, while the practice was widespread across different groups, cases involving Muslims attracted particular attention and harsher moral condemnation¹⁶.

Therefore, it is possible to affirm that, in early modern thought, inclinations toward sodomy were already recognized, though not in terms of contemporary understandings of sexual identity. Instead, sodomy was viewed as a behavioural habit that could be either innate or acquired through corrupt customs¹⁷. Furthermore, while enslaved individuals

storia delle relazioni tra musulmani e Cristiani, in *Le trasgressioni della carne*, cit., p. 14.

¹⁵ On sodomy aboard galleys see P. Calcagno, F. Ferrando, *Practices of Sodomy in Port Spaces and Aboard Galleys in the Eighteenth-Century Mediterranean*, in F. Alfieri, V. Lagioia (eds.), *Infamous Stains, Unbridled Masculine Sexualities in Early Modernity*, Viella, Roma 2024, pp. 147-60; B. Chizzolini, *Between Cure and Control: Doctors, Convicts and Slaves in Tuscan and Papal Galleys (16th-18th centuries)*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2025.

¹⁶ As Achille Marotta has recently observed, numerous sodomy trials reveal interfaith relationships in which Christian men were prosecuted for assuming a sexually passive role with sexually active Muslim partners. In contrast, the reverse scenario was never legally pursued. Marotta argues that authorities only targeted relationships that threatened the perceived virility of Christian subjects. Marotta, *The Muslim Friend*, cit. See also Lavenia, *Sessualità, islamophobia*, cit.; Id., *Contaminating Infidels, Burnt Bodies, and Saved Souls: Sodomy and Catholicism in the Early Modern Age*, in E. Fischer, X. von Tippelskirch (eds.), *Bodies in Early Modern Religious Dissent: Naked, Veiled, Vilified, Worshipped*, Routledge, London and New York 2021, pp. 155-73.

¹⁷ As Marina Baldassarri has pointed out, in early modern Rome, sodomy was indeed perceived as a consequence of marginality, violence, and deviant behavior. At the same time, it was

constituted a numerical minority in Tuscan society, they represented the majority of galley rowers and were deeply integrated into Livorno's social fabric¹⁸. The condemnation of sodomy in early modern society must therefore be understood within this broader framework of religious, social, and cultural tensions. Furthermore, while enslaved individuals constituted a numerical minority in Tuscan society, they represented the majority of galley rowers and were integrated into Livorno's social fabric. This fact challenges conventional notions of minority and majority groups, necessitating a deeper examination of marginality within specific historical contexts. The condemnation of sodomy in early modern society must, therefore, be understood within this broader framework of religious, social, and cultural tensions.

The condemnation of sodomy in early modern time

A full definition of what constituted sodomy in the early modern period would require far more space than is available here; the following offers only a brief overview of a legal, moral, and social category that was historically contingent and conceptually complex. In the early modern period, sodomy was condemned both as a sin and as a crime "against nature", thereby emerging as a *crimen mixti fori*. Indeed, sodomy was regarded not only as contrary to the natural order of creation (*peccatum*) but also as a violation of the social and ethical order upon which the civil community

widely accepted that the majority of sodomites had themselves been sodomized in their youth and had thus become accustomed to and internalized the practice, thus becoming a true habitus. M. Baldassarri, *Bande giovanili e "vitio nefando": violenza e sessualità nella Roma barocca*, Viella, Roma 2005, pp. 28-9. On the critics to this considered too rigid see T. Scaramella, *Un doge infame: sodomia e nonconformismo sessuale a Venezia nel Settecento*, Marsilio, Venezia 2021; V. Lagioia, «Valse gli occhi verso l'immagine del crocifisso». *Sodomia, conforto e patibolo nella Bologna del XVIII secolo*, in "Riforma e movimenti religiosi", 8, 2020, pp. 111-3; Id., "Agitato da passione amorosa". *Tracce omoerotiche a processo (secc. XVII-XVIII)*, in T. Scaramella (a cura di), *Alla prova delle passioni. Sessualità non conforme e soggettività fra età moderna e contemporanea*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2024, pp. 85-102.

¹⁸ As noted in L. Lo Basso, *Uomini da Remo. Galee e galeotti del Mediterraneo sec. XVI-XVIII*, Atene Edizioni, Arma di Taggia 2008, pp. 345-6, in 1680 just one of the five Tuscan galleys had a crew of 56% slaves. According to Franco Angiolini, up until the first half of the 17th century, the Tuscan fleet was «the great protagonist of the Mediterranean corsairing»: between 1563 and 1693, some 16,000 slaves were captured by the Medici galleys. In 1601, "Turkish" slaves accounted for about 20% of Livorno's total population, falling to 8% in the early 1640s and steadily decreasing as conflicts with the Muslim world diminished, as did corsairing. Angiolini, *Il Granducato di Toscana*, cit.; F. Angiolini, *Slaves and Slavery in the Early Modern Tuscany (1500-1700)*, in "Italian History and Culture", 3, 1997, pp. 67-82; Santus, *Il «turco»*, cit.

was founded (*crimen*)¹⁹. Since late antiquity, sodomites were accused of bestiality, reduced to an animal-like state, and their behaviour was also associated with other socially reprehensible acts, such as the molestation of children and paganism²⁰. Libido, understood as a legacy of concupiscentence, was conceived as a disordered and destructive force. Within this framework, it was not merely beyond the control of the will but indicative of a fallen nature, and thus came to be associated with what lay outside the bounds of rational self-mastery. Accordingly, its renunciation was interpreted as an expression of spiritual strength and moral freedom²¹.

The intertwining of the moral and criminal spheres was fully legitimized by the legal system's tendency, evident from the Middle Ages and peaking in the sixteenth century, to politicize even religious and/or moral offences. Behaviours traditionally classified as sins were redefined as political crimes, transforming them from private matters into public concerns. This blurred the boundaries between crime and sin, reinforcing that crime and immorality were inextricably linked²².

Within this shifting framework, sodomy occupied a particularly fraught position at the crossroads of moral, legal, and political discourses, a position that demands careful disentanglement. While inquisitorial institutions contributed to the fusion of sin with crime²³, the treatment of sodomy varied widely across time and place. In some contexts, sodomy and blasphemy were framed as threats to the moral fabric of society; in others, they were prosecuted as political crimes, even likened to *crimen laesae majestatis*, acts of treason against the sovereign order²⁴. Yet such associations were neither systematic nor consistent. Rather than a straightforward equation of moral transgression with political rebellion,

¹⁹ See Grassi, *Sodoma*, cit., pp. 53-5.

²⁰ J. Boswell, *Christian, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality. Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, The Chicago University Press, London and Chicago 1980, pp. 143-5. Although considered outdated, John Boswell's thesis still represents a starting point for the study and reflection of sodomy during antiquity and the early modern period. On the critiques see M. Kuefler (ed.), *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2006.

²¹ Grassi, *Sodoma*, cit., p. 29.

²² M. Sbriccoli, *Crimen laesae maiestatis. Il problema del reato politico alle soglie della scienza penalistica moderna*, Giuffrè, Milano 1974; M. Bellabarba, *La giustizia nell'Italia dell'età moderna (XVI-XVII secolo)*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2008.

²³ P. Prodi, *Una storia della giustizia. Dal pluralismo dei fori al moderno dualismo tra coscienza e diritto*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2015, pp. 93-7.

²⁴ See Sbriccoli, *Crimen laesae majestatis*, cit.

what emerges is a complex and often ambivalent negotiation between ecclesiastical and secular powers, shaped by local dynamics and evolving notions of authority, governance, and public morality.

Florence provides one of the most revealing case studies. By the fourteenth century, the city's reputation as a "*sodomite city*" was already widespread across Europe, so much so that the German term "*florenzer*" came to signify a sodomite, and "*florenzen*" the act of sodomizing. Contemporary chroniclers and moralists, such as Matteo de' Griffoni, attributed natural disasters like the flood of 1333 to divine punishment for the spread of sodomy, while Pope Gregory XI denounced both sodomy and usury as the Florentines' characteristic sins²⁵.

The city's preachers, alarmed by what they perceived as moral decay, responded with increasing vehemence. Among them, Saint Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444) stands out as one of the fiercest opponents of sodomy. During his sermons in Florence between 1424 and 1425, Bernardino portrayed sodomy as a bestial and contagious vice that corrupted youth and endangered the entire civic body. He condemned the negligence of parents and the tolerance of rulers, especially the Medici, who, he argued, allowed the vice to flourish for political convenience. In his view, Florence risked sharing the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah unless it purged itself through exemplary punishment²⁶.

The city's statutes reflected this moral and religious anxiety. As early as 1325, the *Statuto del Podestà* prescribed severe penalties for sodomy, including mutilation and, in certain cases, death by burning²⁷. In 1432, the Florentine government institutionalized repression by establishing a magistracy specifically devoted to investigating and punishing the crime: the *Ufficiali di Notte* ("Officers of the Night"). Their task was to eradicate the "abominable vice" through denunciations (*tamburazioni*), fines, and, for repeat offenders, capital punishment. Yet practice diverged from theory: by the later fifteenth century, the death penalty had become rare, replaced by fines and public humiliation²⁸. As historians such as Michael

²⁵ R. Canosa, *Storia di una grande paura. La sodomia a Firenze e Venezia nel Quattrocento*, Milano, Feltrinelli 1981, p. 24.

²⁶ M.J. Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*, Oxford University Press, New York-Oxford 1996, pp. 36-43. On the figure of San Bernardino da Siena see the works by M. Benedetti, *Medioevo inquisitoriale: manoscritti, protagonisti, paradossi*, Salerno, Roma 2021; B. Roest, J.D. Mixon (eds.), *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2015.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Canosa, *Grande paura*, cit., pp. 41-3.

Rocke have argued, the Florentine authorities, aware of the impossibility of eradicating a largely private and hidden practice, aimed instead to control and contain it. The system of vigilance and exemplary punishment thus served less to eliminate sodomy than to reinforce civic morality and the city's image as a godly commonwealth²⁹.

In this way, Florence illustrates how, in early modern Italy, the repression of sodomy was embedded in a broader framework of moral governance. Through the close cooperation between Church and State, sexual transgression was recast as a political offence threatening both divine and social order³⁰.

Sodomy in the *Bagno degli schiavi*

Testimonies regarding the practice of sodomy within the *Bagno degli schiavi* in Livorno are relatively numerous. The *Bagno degli schiavi*, a prison built between 1598 and 1604 under the orders of Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici, was modelled after similar structures in Constantinople and Algiers³¹. The *Bagno* was primarily a prison for forced rowers who were locked up at night or during periods when they were port-bound to prevent escape. Between 1598 and 1604 alone, approximately 3,000 galley rowers were imprisoned in the *Bagno*³². According to Father Filippo Bernardi's (1649-1721) account of the Capuchin administration of the prison, the *Bagno degli schiavi* served a dual purpose: it improved the physical care for the convicts, who otherwise had to remain cramped in the galleys, day and night, and it ensured that they could not escape at night³³.

²⁹ Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, cit., pp. 36-43.

³⁰ On the repression on sodomy in early modern Italy see Grassi, *Sodoma*, cit.; Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, cit.; V. Lavenia, *Un'eresia indicibile. Inquisizione e crimini contro natura in età moderna*, EDB, Bologna 2015; C. Casanova, *Crimini nascosti: la sanzione penale dei reati "senza vittima" e nelle relazioni private (Bologna, 17. secolo)*, Clueb, Bologna 2007; T. Herzig, *The Prosecution of Jews and the Repression of Sodomy in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, in A. Del Col, A. Jacobson Schutte (a cura di), *L'inquisizione romana, i giudici e gli eretici: studi in onore di John Tedeschi*, Viella, Roma 2017, pp. 59-74; Alfieri, Lagioia (eds.), *Infamous Stains*, cit.; T. Herzig, *A Convert's Tale: Art, Crime, and Jewish Apostasy in Renaissance Italy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2019.

³¹ L. Frattarelli Fischer, *Il bagno delle galere in terra "cristiana". Schiavi a Livorno fra cinque e seicento*, in "Nuovi Studi Livornesi", VIII, 2000, p. 79.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³³ «[...] che que' poverelli stessero tutto l'anno di giorno, e di notte abbrancati come cani, e ristretti dentro una Galera [...] a fine dunque d'accomodare la ciurma delle Galere, e [perché] non potessero di notte tempo tentar la fuga, come facilmente può avvenire

The entire complex covered an area of 6,000 square meters and was structured as a trapezoidal quadrangle centred around a courtyard with a fresh-water well and a cistern for washing clothes. On the ground floor of each side of the quadrangle were dormitories for the crew of each of the four galleys. At the rear of three of these dormitories (excluding St. Anthony's dormitory) was a Turkish mosque where enslaved Muslims could gather to worship and pray. A church for Catholic worship was in St. Anthony's dormitory³⁴.

According to Father Filippo Bernardi, the practice of sodomy was not only tolerated but, in many ways, facilitated by the general promiscuity that prevailed within the *Bagno degli schiavi*. Enslaved people and convicts were reported to sleep freely with one another³⁵, and even the guards looked the other way, accepting bribes to ensure their silence. Even though the *Bagno* operated based on militaristic discipline, disturbances and violence were common, and this disorder extended to issues of sexuality. Interestingly, no special measures were initially taken to address or curtail the practice of sodomy, at least in the early years of the *Bagno's* existence³⁶.

In July 1609, the Captain of the *Bagno* issued instructions that young prisoners should not be allowed to leave their assigned rooms at night and that neither prostitutes nor "suspicious" young men should be admitted to the building. These rules were motivated by a desire to prevent the arousal of libido among the prisoners, who, lacking access to women, might direct their sexual attention towards the young men³⁷. However, these provisions were largely ignored, and the authorities often tacitly permitted the continuation of these practices, as evidenced by a 1648 investigation into cor-

stando in Galera, [si decise] la costruzione d'una gran fabrica isolata per ogni parte e circondata da alte muraglie a guisa di fortezza». F. Bernardi, *Relazione di quando i Cappuccini furono deputati alla cura spirituale del Bagno e delle Galere di Livorno, Raccolta dal Bernardi Predicatore e Cappuccino, anno 1706*, Vittorio Salvadorini (a cura di), Aracne Editrice, Canterrano 2020, pp. 13-5.

³⁴ Santus, *Il «turco»*, cit., p. 36.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁶ As we will see, things changed with the arrival of the Capuchins in the second half of the seventeenth century.

³⁷ Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASF), Mediceo del Principato (MP), 2132, dossier 7, *Costituzione, et ordinazione dell'Offitio del Capitano del Bagno*, unnumbered documents (u.dd.): «capo XXII. Et sopra tutto proveda che li Giovani stiano nelle stanze assegnateli, se parimente di giorno, e più particolarmente la notte [...] capo XXIII. Non lasci entrare nel Bagno donne di partito, ne praticarci Giovani di sospetto, accio si rimedi all'inconvenienti, che ne succede».

ruption within the *Bagno*. The inquiry was launched after accusations of bribery were made by eleven enslaved people and three *buonavoglia* (free rowers) against Captain Marco Fabbroni, who in turn accused Francesco Pepi, the vice-commissioner of the galleys and scribe general. The investigation led by Rector Domenico Puccini revealed that the Captain had instigated an elaborate bribery system in which substantial sums were extorted from convicts and enslaved people in exchange for permission to engage in sexual acts with young male inmates, both Muslim and Christian³⁸.

The situation began to shift significantly with the arrival of the Capuchins in 1677³⁹. Upon taking control of the *Bagno*, the Capuchins sought to implement stricter oversight of the slaves and convicts, recognizing the need for continuous vigilance. This led to the establishment, in 1678, of the *Vigilanti di Maria* (Vigilants of Mary), a special corps of prisoners tasked with monitoring their fellow inmates. The *Vigilanti* were described as «among the most God-fearing» and were entrusted with the responsibility of reporting any illicit behaviour, including blasphemy, lechery, sodomy, and heresy, to the Vicar of the Inquisition of Pisa, who was stationed at the *Bagno*, so that trials could be initiated for any serious offences⁴⁰.

The Capuchins also took measures to reduce the physical proximity that deemed to facilitate sodomy. The dormitories, which had previously been overcrowded, were restructured to ensure that prisoners slept separately. Wooden boxes with open fronts were installed where each convict was required to sleep alone. This change was intended to limit the opportunities for sexual interactions. If a convict was caught in the act of sodomy, he was subject to public and exemplary punishment, including being pilloried and flogged with 50 to 100 lashes, depending on the severity of the offence⁴¹. In order to “arouse terror in the others”, and thus dissuade the prisoners from committing sodomy as well, sodomites were to be punished, in addition to being beaten, by having a “ring” placed on their foot with the “iron sock” (i.e., to be chained)⁴². It is worth noting that after the arrival of the Capuchins, documentation of sodomy in the *Bagno* increased. This can be interpreted at least in two ways: first,

³⁸ ASF, MP, 2168, part 1. The episode has been analyzed in Santus, *Il «turco»*, cit., pp. 127-30.

³⁹ For an overview on the Capuchin order see V. Criscuolo (a cura di), *I Cappuccini. Fonti documentarie e narrative del primo secolo (1525-1619)*, Seconda Edizione, Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, Roma 2020.

⁴⁰ Santus, *Il «turco»*, cit., p. 42.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-7.

⁴² See for example ASF, MP, 2112, 2114, 2117 u.dd., years 1721-1736.

as evidence of heightened vigilance and monitoring of the behaviour of the rowers from the part of the Capuchins, who considered the issue of sodomy as more urgent than the precious administration; and second, as an indication that the Capuchins' system of intimidation failed in eradicating sodomy.

In 1680, to curb sodomy, the authorities at the *Bagno de' forzati* implemented a new policy that involved isolating young rowers from the rest of the crew by placing them in a separate section called the *Bagno de' giovani* (the "Prison of the Youths")⁴³. This decision was based on the belief that sodomy was particularly stimulated by the presence of young men, reflecting the early modern association of sodomy with pederasty, a model of male homosexual activity where an older man would engage in sexual relations with a younger, often adolescent, boy, a *sbarbato* (i.e., "without beard")⁴⁴. The focus on pederasty was prevalent in early modern legal and religious contexts, likely because the violent nature of these acts made them more visible and easier to prosecute. Instead, consensual same-sex relations between adult men were less frequently documented. When such cases did appear, it was typically when the act was caught *in flagrante delicto*, during the act itself⁴⁵.

Despite the Capuchins' efforts to address the issue of sodomy in the *Bagno*, these measures were not entirely effective. For instance, in 1681, two young convicts were caught engaging in sexual intercourse and were punished by being flogged with twenty-five lashes every morning for a month⁴⁶. In 1694, Father Ginestro, the head of the Capuchins involved in the *Bagno's* administration, described the *Bagno de' giovani* as «a den of vice and turpitude». This complaint not only highlights the failure of

⁴³ ASF, MP, 2099, c. 107r-v; ASF, MP, 2130, u.dd. Presumably, this was the area of the *Bagno* called of Sant'Antonio.

⁴⁴ Marotta, *The Muslim Friend*, cit., p. 234. See also the bibliography on the Islamic world quoted there.

⁴⁵ See F. Benigno, V. Lavenia, *Peccato o crimine. La chiesa di fronte alla pedofilia*, Laterza, Bari-Roma 2021; T. Scaramella, *La storia dell'omosessualità nell'Italia moderna: un bilancio*, in "Storicamente" 12, 2017, pp. 8-9; V. Lagioia, *Qualifier et poursuivre la pédocriminalité des clercs dans l'Italie des xvi^e et xvii^e siècles*, in "Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire", 52, 2020, pp. 69-92; Id., «*Volse gl'occhi verso l'immagine del crocifisso*». *Sodomia, conforto e patibolo nella Bologna del XVIII secolo*, in "Riforma e movimenti religiosi", 2020, 8, pp. 97-120; L. Benadusi, V. Lagioia (a cura di), *In segreto. Crimini sessuali e clero tra età moderna e contemporanea*, Mimesis, Sesto San Giovanni 2022; U.L. Lehner, *Staged Chastity: Sexual Offenses in the Society of Jesus in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2023; O. Niccoli, *Il seme della violenza. Putti, fanciulli e mammoli nell'Italia tra Cinque e Seicento*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2007.

⁴⁶ ASF, MP, 2099, c. 293r.

spatial segregation to prevent the occurrence of sodomy, but also deploys a rhetoric that stigmatizes and reinforces existing stereotypes surrounding same-sex acts. The persistence of these practices within the *Bagno* suggests that the deeply entrenched nature of sexual behaviours, compounded by the social and physical conditions of confinement, made such acts difficult to suppress entirely. The very structure of the *Bagno*, with its overcrowded dormitories, limited spaces for privacy, and harsh conditions, may have facilitated these practices while also highlighting the limitations of disciplinary and moral regulation in such an environment.

Evidence of sodomy among galley rowers persists into the eighteenth century, and its frequency appears to have increased, or at least, vigilance and reporting became more rigorous. Indeed, as in the previous period, there are accounts of how the same officers (and, in particular, the leaders of the *Vigilanti di Maria*) sometimes encouraged sodomy by promising to feign ignorance in return for a bribe⁴⁷. For example, on January 4, 1715, the *galeotti* denounced the guardian of the *Bagno* of Saint Anthony, (probably the so-called *Bagno dei giovani*) a certain Bartolomeo Piovani, who was accused of offering the older rowers (both slaves and convicts) the possibility to eat in other canteens in order to be free to «fare raddotto di gioventù», that is, to concentrate all the young rowers in one place, presumably to expose them to potential abuse by their older inmates⁴⁸. There were also numerous cases of sodomy, which were recorded but not punished⁴⁹.

The slaves' shops and taverns

The evidence suggesting that enslaved Muslims appeared more frequently than Christian convicts in records concerning sodomy-related incidents should be approached with caution. Rather than indicating a greater intrinsic propensity for such behavior, these patterns likely reflect the distinct social, spatial, and economic conditions under which different

⁴⁷ ASE, MP, 2106, u.dd., 1704-1705.

⁴⁸ ASE, MP, 2110, u.dd., 1715.

⁴⁹ For example, the case of a Jewish convict who was imprisoned in the *Bagno* by order of the Roman Curia for kidnapping, marrying, and impregnating a young Flemish girl, pretending to be a Christian. Although he had sodomized a young man in his tavern in October 1719, he was not punished because he was on friendly terms with the guards. For this reason, the scribe went directly to the Commissioner of the Galleys and asked for justice to be carried out and to punish and beat the Jew, as would have been done in any other case. ASE, MP, 2111, u.dd.

groups lived and interacted. The available documentation does not allow for precise quantification, but it does point to important structural disparities in daily life and vigilance.

Enslaved Muslims, unlike Christian convicts, had greater freedom of movement and access to various types of labour outside the *Bagno*, which afforded them more opportunities to engage in sexual relations, including sodomy. This is particularly evident during non-navigation periods, when slaves could work in the port's taverns and workshops, learning trades such as cooking and surgery. These trades provided some degree of autonomy and allowed them to earn money, which could be used to pay for their eventual ransom and achieve their freedom. At the end of each working day, however, they had to return to sleep in the *Bagno*, whose doors were locked and controlled by the *custode del Bagno*⁵⁰.

Such relative freedom of movement could, at least hypothetically, have facilitated a wider range of social and sexual encounters. By contrast, Christian convicts were generally subject to stricter confinement within the city's arsenal and to more continuous institutional control⁵¹. This disparity in opportunities is significant, as it may help explain why sources concerning sodomy in the broader urban context, beyond the confines of the *Bagno*, more frequently mention enslaved Muslims. Rather than indicating greater sexual irregularity, however, these references likely reflect differing degrees of autonomy, visibility, and social interaction between groups. At the same time, it would be misleading to draw a straightforward correlation between mobility and sexual behavior. As other records suggest, sodomy also occurred within the *Bagno* itself, where confinement, coercion, and the absence of women fostered hierarchical forms of intimacy and domination. What emerges, therefore, is a nuanced picture in which sexual relations were shaped less by individual inclination than by the social hierarchies and power structures that defined life under slavery and penal servitude.

However, indeed, most of the sodomy cases recorded by the Livorno Governor's Court are cases of interreligious sodomy between an enslaved Muslim as the active component and a Christian as the passive component, usually a young boy [a *sbarbato*]⁵². The model was, therefore, that

⁵⁰ Bernardi, *Relazione*, cit., p. 16.

⁵¹ See the sources preserved in ASE, MP 2101, 2107, 2115, c.n.n., which testify that, when on land, enslaved Muslims could leave the *Bagno* to work in their own shops, whereas Christian convicts, who were always chained to one another, could leave only for forced labor.

⁵² Between 1684 and 1698, eight out of ten trials for sodomy involving Muslim slaves

of classical pederasty, and the offence usually took place in slave shops or workshops. The Christian boys, often migrants from foreign cities, were vulnerable in these environments, where they had little or no means of support and often traded their labour for food, shelter, or other necessities. These slave-run establishments, with their autonomy and privacy, provided a setting conducive to illicit sexual activity.

Thus, for example, on 21 March 1684, the former slave Catera of Romorano from Tunisi⁵³ was found naked in the same bed as Domenico of Michele Secini from Firenze, a young man of about 17, embracing each other. Catera was a 55-year-old enslaved person who worked as an inn-keeper in his hut in the dockyard. Throughout his years of service, Catera kept several servants, offering them food and shelter in exchange for their services, as he had done with Domenico. The fact that they were found naked in bed together led the police to believe that they had been caught *in flagrante delicto*, and the two were, therefore, convicted of sodomy. As written in the trial: «they were found in the same bed, naked, with the second lying with his buttocks in the lap of the first, who held him embraced, having previously slept together for fifteen nights in a shack formerly used as a tavern by the latter in the dockyard arsenal». From this, it can plausibly be inferred that the first individual sodomized the second, all the more so given that he provided him with food and drink in the said shack without requiring any payment⁵⁴. According to the edict on sodomy promulgated on 8 July 1542, Catera was sentenced to pay 50 *scudi* within 10 days, with the threat of being put on a donkey and paraded through the public squares of the city with a sign around his neck reading *Sodomita*, and to two years imprisonment in the galleys. The second, as he was a minor, was sentenced to 50 lashes, to be administered in public as by the edict⁵⁵.

In October 1687, the slave Ametto of Ametto from Tripoli was interrogated about an attempt to sodomize a certain Francis of Segher,

concerned cases of interreligious relations, in which an enslaved Muslim acted as the active partner and a Christian as the passive one. Archivio di Stato di Livorno (ASLi), Capitano poi Governatore poi Auditore Vicario, 1550-1808 (Gov. Liv.), bb. 3086-3088.

⁵³ The transcription of the Arab names has respected the original Italian translations; hence spelling and grammatical errors have not been corrected.

⁵⁴ ASLi, Gov. Liv., b. 3086, trial n. 527, verdict n. 509, u.dd.: «trovati nell'istesso letto nudi tenendo il secondo il culo in grembo al primo quale sosteneva abbracciato con havere antecedentemente dormito assieme da 15 notti dentro una baracca che esso prima esercita ad uso di osteria in questa darsena arsenale, dal che se ne puole verisimilmente resumere esso primo abbia sodomizzato detto secondo tanto più che lo teneva a mangiare e a bere in detta baracca senza farli pagare cosa alcuna».

⁵⁵ Ibid.

a Flemish Catholic boy of about 23 years of age, together with an unknown enslaved person. As it turned out, the unknown slave met the boy in the dock and chatted with him. On the pretext of offering him a drink, he took him to Ametto's warehouse. According to the boy's testimony, once he entered the warehouse, the unknown slave left. Then Ametto kissed him and, promising him money in return, unfastened his trousers and sodomized him once. The Captain of the Bargello in Livorno, having received a report from a spy about the suspicious company of the unidentified slave and the boy in the streets, promptly dispatched soldiers to investigate the situation. According to Francesco, if the authorities had not intervened, the slave would have sodomized him again and would have used force if the boy had resisted⁵⁶. Since the slave was not caught in the act and had his clothes on, the boy was examined by a surgeon. Since the boy's anus was dilated and soft, and the shirt near the anus was soiled with semen, the surgeon confirmed that the act of sodomy had taken place. Surprisingly, the sentence for Ametto was relatively lenient with the only punishment being exile from the territory of Livorno⁵⁷.

More than a decade later, similar dynamics reemerged. On 12 May 1698, the galley slave Isuff of Abdocraman from Tripoli was accused of having hidden Pietro Francesco of Antonio Franceschini from San Miniato, a German boy of about 17 years old, behind a shelf in his shop so that he could stay for dinner and sleep with him to sodomize him. However, the testimonies of the two defendants were contradictory. Isuff insisted that Antonio had come to his shop to buy bread. In defence of his innocence, the slave appealed to his good reputation. He was 60 years old, a hard worker, and had never been accused of any carnal vice, especially sodomy. On the contrary, Pietro Francesco confirmed the charge of sodomy by claiming that he «went there, miserable and hungry, and the first [Isuff] kissed and touched him». We do not have the verdict of the trial

⁵⁶ ASLi, Gov. Liv, b. 3086, trial n. 64, verdict n. 46, u.dd.: «in questa darsena si messe a scorrere seco e sotto pretesto di menarlo a bere lo condusse in una stanza a terreno, posta nella strada detto il setto piccolo, dirimpetto all'albergo della croce Rossa in questa città a dove era il primo che si serve di essa per magazzino, lo ricevò di volerlo sodomizzare [...] se ne uscì dalla stanza e serrato l'usario della medesima con il chiavistello che restò per di fuori, il primo promise de denari a detto secondo lo sodomitò una volta e li dette un piastrino».

⁵⁷ ASLi, Gov. Liv, b. 3086, trial n. 64, verdict n. 46, u.dd. Evidently, in the case of Ametto, being a *galley slave*, and thus a public slave who did not possess personal freedom, the term *exile* cannot be understood in its literal or juridical sense as a voluntary banishment. Rather, it likely denoted his forcible removal or reassignment to another location under state control, possibly to Pisa or another naval base.

but given the confirmation of sodomy by the surgeons' report on Pietro Francesco's body, it is likely that the slave was sentenced to exile or some similar punishment⁵⁸.

On October 26, 1697, a trial was opened against two enslaved people who were accused of having sodomized a 23-year-old Flemish boy in exchange for money. The boy was examined by a surgeon, who found that not only was the boy's anus dilated and completely soft but also that his shirt was soiled with a substance that appeared to be semen. Given that the same two slaves were accused of trying to sodomize another 22-year-old boy two days later, the governor was asked to banish them⁵⁹.

Such cases did not only involve completed acts of sodomy. On 31 August 1698, Giuseppe Maria di Domenico Baronti from Pisa, aged 17, was found in the café of the slave Saino of Mustafâ from Tripoli, sleeping in the same bed. When questioned, Giuseppe claimed that he had recently been hired as an apprentice by Saino, who had ordered him to get into bed with him and «started to insert his member into his anus», but was interrupted by the arrival of the police. As this was only an attempted crime of sodomy, the slave was not condemned, but it was suggested that the governor forbid enslaved Muslims to employ Christian youths under the age of 25, on pain of a fine of 50 *scudi*⁶⁰.

Again, in 1699, the galley slave Isuff Abdouman from Tripoli was accused of having sodomized a 17-year-old German boy. According to the plaintiff, the two had been caught in the bedroom of Isuff's tavern just as the slave was about to insert his penis into the naked boy's anus. Given they had not been caught in the act, and there was, therefore, only a suspicion of sodomy, the governor demanded that the surgeon examine the boy's anus. There were, according to his medical opinion, no apparent signs from which it could be concluded that the young boy had been sodomized. Seeing how the slave's culpability could not be established, he was not punished. However, to prevent such cases from arising in future, the governor decided to issue an edict forbidding Muslims to keep young Christians under the age of 25 (the age when a *sbarbato* supposedly became a man) as servants in their shops and taverns⁶¹.

Indeed, sodomy was feared to spread within the population, particularly among young boys who, because they were still impressionable,

⁵⁸ ASLi, Gov. Liv, b. 3088, trial n. 172, verdict n. 173, u.dd.

⁵⁹ ASLi, Gov. Liv, b. 3086, trial n. 64, u.dd.

⁶⁰ ASLi, Gov. Liv, b. 3088, trial n. 186, verdict n. 143, u.dd.

⁶¹ ASLi, Gov. Liv, b. 3088, trial n. 172, u.dd.

could easily be corrupted and, through habit, take up the practice, becoming sodomites themselves. In this case, the interreligious nature of the act made it even more serious. Mixed sexual relations were strictly forbidden by law, driven by the concern that the heretic might “infect” the Christians, leading them to renounce their faith⁶². This anxiety was especially pronounced when the passive party was a young boy, as they were perceived as particularly vulnerable to such moral contamination.

The fear surrounding interreligious sexual intercourse is also evident in another type of trial for carnal relations found in the archives of the Livorno Governor’s Court. These cases did not involve homoerotic relations but rather sexual encounters between enslaved Muslims and Christian women, often (but not only) prostitutes. For example, in 1684, the slave Antonio of Abrigni from Tripoli was condemned to 18 months of hard labour in the new galley factory because he was found in the house of Caterina, daughter of Agostino Verlingo from Genoa, and Benedetta, her mother, who were both Christian prostitutes. The slave was found in a bedroom in the company of Caterina, wearing only his shirt. The crime was «carnal intercourse between a Muslim man and a Christian woman», which was considered such a serious offence that it was punishable by extraordinary punishment⁶³. Also in 1685, the galley slave Asaino of Vitali of Amamatta was investigated by the governor because he was found dining together with Donna Domenica of Lorenzo Bacci from Pisa, and Donna Maddalena Giovenale from Tolone, public prostitutes, in the latter’s house. As the room was locked, the police assumed that they were engaged or about to engage in sexual intercourse, which was «forbidden by law to slaves with Christian women»⁶⁴. It is noteworthy that interfaith sexual relations were sometimes categorized as a form of sodomy in various legal contexts. A particularly illustrative example can be found in Lorenzo Priori’s *Prattica Criminale* (1663), in which he defined sodomy as a grievous vice committed in several ways. The first, he wrote, occurred «when it is done with touching», the second involved carnal relations «with a male

⁶² This rule had an exception. On the absence of prosecution for the rape of Jewish enslaved women by Muslim or Catholic men in Livorno, see T. Hertzog, *Slavery and Interethnic Sexual Violence: A Multiple Perpetrator Rape in Seventeenth-Century Livorno*, in “The American Historical Review”, 127/ 1, 2022, pp. 194-222; Ead., *Religious Conflicts, Enslavement, and Sexual Violence in Early Modern Europe*, in C. Baskins, P. Bokody (eds.), *Rethinking Conflict and Sexual Violence in Early Modern Europe*, special issue of “Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme” 48/ 3, 2025, pp. 143-86.

⁶³ ASLi, Gov. Liv, b. 3086, trial n. 475, verdict n. 464, u.dd.

⁶⁴ ASLi, Gov. Liv, b. 3086, trial n. 637, verdict n. 607, u.dd.

or a female against nature», and the third included any sexual relations with an animal, a dead body, or «with a Jew or an infidel»⁶⁵. While Priori's definition explicitly applied to the Venetian context, it is plausible that similar views could have been adopted, though perhaps less zealously, in other parts of Italy, including Tuscany, even if no direct evidence of such formulations has yet been found. This reflects a broader concern about the potential moral and religious dangers posed by interfaith sexual relations, which were often framed as both a transgression of natural law and a threat to religious purity.

Pederastic sodomy by adult Muslims could also be directed against other Muslims. On 31 July 1699, the galley slave Cara Ametto of Buda, known as *Morino*, was put in chains, accused of having spent the last Sunday in a tavern with a young man called Attimo, a freed slave, and then taking him to a room in the galley warehouse and sodomizing him. Cara did not deny getting drunk with this Attimo, but claimed that he had only gone to sleep in the warehouse, which was why the guards had not found him that night. Despite the lack of concrete evidence to prove that sodomy had occurred, the *Bagno* authorities were deeply concerned about the issue. They recognized that the environment where enslaved people worked, particularly in coffee houses and barber shops, presented more significant opportunities for such acts. These establishments were seen as hubs of promiscuity. In these spaces, free Christians and enslaved Muslims often sat together, drinking and gambling, fostering an atmosphere that led to «many scandals of youth». The greatest scandal, according to the Commissioner of the *Bagno*, was not just the involvement of enslaved people in morally questionable activities but their increasing autonomy and behaviour that mirrored that of free people. Not only were the galley slaves continuing to employ young Christian boys as assistants [*«queste botteghe di barbieri si servono di giovani scapoli cristiani e non solo vi è a primo la bottega ma anche dietro stanze che possono dar de comodi a i loro volerì»*], but they had gone as far as purchasing other enslaved young boys, who were then made to sleep in their shops [*«io non so poi come siano comportati che gli schiavi di SA vadino comperando di questi schiavetti Bosinacchi»*]. Moreover, they were even taking wives (who

⁶⁵ «Sodomia è un vizio nefando, ch'è quando il coito si fa contro natura il quale si commette in tre modi [...]. Il primo è quando si usa col toccamento [...]. Il secondo è quando s'usa carnalmente col maschio, ed anco con la donna contro natura. [...] La terza è quella quando l'uomo usa con un animal brutto, con un corpo morto, con un ebreo o un infedele». L. Priori, *Prattica criminale secondo il rito delle leggi della Serenissima Repubblica di Venetia*, Francesco Brogiollo, Venezia 1663, pp. 165-6.

were evidently not baptised and thus evidently owned by Jewish masters) and even fathering children with them [*«sia a notizia esserci schiavi di AS in buon numero i quali anno preso moglie schiave di ebrei bosinache che ancor questo parmi grande abuso non più stato in passato essendovi di essi che anno figlioli»*]⁶⁶. In light of these developments, the solution appeared straightforward to the authorities. The first step, it seemed, was to curb the activities in these shops by prohibiting gambling, restricting the sale of coffee and tobacco, and forbidding the Muslims from hiring Christian servants. This approach was intended to regain control over the galley enslaved people's social activities and, by extension, to prevent further moral and religious transgressions within these spaces.

Conclusion

Sodomy was condemned as one of the most widespread crimes among galley rowers. Despite the persistence of the stereotype of the “sodomite Turk”, the authorities responsible for managing the rowers did not perceive the problem of sodomy as more prevalent among galley slaves than convicts, but rather as a pervasive issue both on board the galleys and within the *Bagno*. These environments, characterized by promiscuity, gambling, and blasphemy, conditions believed to encourage sodomy, were seen as fertile grounds for vice. Galley slaves and convicts were considered marginal and immoral individuals, as exemplified by their forced labour on the galleys. In this context, sodomy was seen as the ultimate manifestation of a morally corrupt nature associated with either blasphemous beliefs or criminal behaviour. Consequently, sodomy became not only a violation of religious and social codes but also a symptom of the broader moral decay attributed to galley rowers.

The available sources concerning instances of sodomy outside the *Bagno* initially seem to support the hypothesis that such cases were prosecuted more harshly when the active participant was a Muslim. However, the gravity attributed to interreligious male relations appears to have stemmed less from questions of virility or sexual dominance than from the transgressive and heterodox nature of the act itself. As Vincenzo Lavenia has observed, early modern discourses often framed sodomy as a manifestation of heresy rather than as a matter of sexual behavior.

⁶⁶ ASE, MP, 2089, u.dd. “Bosinacchi/e” (from *Bošnjak*, “Bosnian”): a contemporary Italian term used in Mediterranean port records to denote slaves of Balkan or Levantine origin, often Muslims captured at sea or sold in coastal markets.

References to the supposed libertinism of Muslims or to a Qur'ānic justification of such acts served to underscore Islam's perceived moral and doctrinal corruption. From this perspective, the condemnation of sodomy was detached from sexual roles and rooted instead in concerns about religious impurity and spiritual contagion.

The apparent scarcity of cases in which the Christian appears as the active participant in interfaith sodomy might be attributable to several factors. To begin with, authorities seem to have been particularly concerned that, if a Christian acted as the passive partner, such behavior could endanger his faith or even lead to apostasy. In addition, enslaved Muslims appear to have enjoyed somewhat greater mobility and a more visible presence within Livorno's social life than Christian convicts, whose movements were more strictly controlled. This relative freedom may in turn have made Muslim slaves more suspect in the eyes of the authorities, prompting closer vigilance of their behavior.

The concern for the authorities stemmed from the aggravating factor of sexual acts involving individuals from different religious backgrounds. Such acts were legally prohibited, even in heterosexual relationships. These interfaith sexual encounters were seen as doubly blasphemous: first because they violated the natural order by being non-procreative and second because they undermined the social order by blurring the boundaries between distinct groups, namely, those of different faiths, who were intended to remain separate⁶⁷.

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⁶⁷ For an overview on the topic, see N. Terpstra, *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World: An Alternative History of the Reformation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2015; K. Aron-Beller, *Sopra l'imputazione del delitto di sodomia con Cristiano: The Proceedings against Lazzaro de Norsa (Modena, 1670)*, in "Genesis. Rivista della Società Italiana delle Storie", 19/1, 2021, pp. 49-78.

