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Still a Rivalry: Contrasting Renaissance Sodomy Legislation in Florence and Venice

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In the year 1496, a total of 243 young Florentine boys confessed their participation in homosexual intercourse in front of the Office of the Night. Of them, not a single boy was executed, instead only receiving minor fines for their participation in such a taboo.¹ Yet, at about the same time in Venice, Simeone, a young boy of 18, was being publically mutilated for his participation in the same act.² How is it that two Italian Renaissance cities could punish the same act so disproportionately to one another?

Gay men have often found themselves as a persecuted minority, and this was very much the case for homosexual males living on the Italian peninsula during the Renaissance. While the recognition of homosexuality (today defined as a sexual preference for the same gender) only goes back as far as the nineteenth century, its predecessor, sodomy, was the subject of many laws forbidding its practice. So prominent was “the act which dare not be named” across Italy that throughout the Renaissance, several major cities established specialized ministries for tackling the issue: among them, Florence and Venice.³ While both cities would institute a specialized ministry to pursue cases of sodomy, each functioned in a completely different way, indicating that between the two cities existed conflicting understandings of the crime of sodomy, how to punish it, and how to investigate it. What were the differences in these institutions, and how did their procedures affect the life of everyday Renaissance gay men? An investigation into the use of sodomy laws, the methodology used to investigate cases of sodomy, and the Renaissance man’s virtú, indicate that the pursuit of sodomy in Florence came from a desire to exercise political control, while in Venice it stemmed from a theological

¹ Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships* (New York: Oxford, 1998), 67. Rocke provides for us a collection of court cases that he has personally translated for use as primary sources, all of which are accessible through his book, while the original, physical copies are held in the state archives of Florence.

² Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros* (New York: Oxford, 1985), 122. Similarly to Rocke, Guido Ruggiero provides for us the culmination of Venice State Archives, bringing cases from the Quarantia Criminale, which contains records on not just the operations of the Council of Ten but also the Office of the Night, two organizations whose functions will be investigated at length in this paper. Ruggiero provides for us some translations of his sources, making the book a resource for gathering primary sources as well as secondary.

³ Rocke, 3.

mandate to ensure the salvation of sinners.

Renaissance definitions of homosexuality were articulated through the church and state with the term “sodomy”. Sodomy was effectively an umbrella term for any act that did not serve the purpose of procreation; additionally, homosexual sex, sex with members of the clergy, acts of bestiality, and sexual intercourse in any position that was not the church-accredited missionary position were *all* considered instances of sodomy.^{4 5} United through the faith and structure of the Roman Catholic Church, Europe, by and large, subscribed to the clergy’s opinion on sodomy; unnatural acts of sex were thought to have a corrupting influence on mankind (a notion that dates as far back at the story of Sodom and Gomorrah), and were acts of abomination in God’s perfectly created world.⁶

The responsibility to act on the church’s demarcation of sodomy fell to the state, and for the lawmakers of Florence, outlawing sodomy was a win-win situation. Not only were sodomy laws thought to stop corruption in the political sphere, but they were also theorized to protect the social order. In Florence, attempts to control sodomy date as far back as 1284, where being caught in the act had the opportunity for the offender to be exiled.⁷ A statute in 1325 exacerbated the punishments, ordering castration for men who sodomized boys as well as fines for boys who were sodomized.⁸ By 1432 Florence organized the Office of the Night, a specialized magistracy with the express job of prosecuting sodomy,⁹ which, as Michael Rocke writes in *Forbidden Friendships*, “in practical terms was surely understood as sexual acts between males.”¹⁰ For 70 years the ministry pursued the eradication of sexual impurity through anti-sodomy laws, sentencing men engaged in homosexual activity to pay fines of 1000 lire (50 Florins) on the first offense, 100 on the second, 200 (plus removal

⁴ As evidenced by *The Divine Comedy* (Dante Aligheri, *The Divine Comedy, Volume 1*, transl. by Charles Eliot Norton (Stillwell: Digireads, 2005)) in Cantos XII-XVII, wherein sodomites were put in a lower circle of hell than murderers. Unnatural sexuality was considered violence against nature itself, and far worse of a crime than violence.

⁵ Rocke, 19.

⁶ Ruggiero, 111.

⁷ Rocke, 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46. See also Laura Ruggiero, “The Forbidden Fruit”, 32.

from office) on the third, a fine of 400 florins as well as a lifetime ban from holding public office on the fourth, and on the fifth, death.¹¹ As Laura Ruggiero notes in “The Forbidden Fruit,” Florentine authorities would go so far as to shut down taverns after hours in order to get rid of potential meeting places for men who wanted to engage in sodomy.¹² Although oppressive even by the standards set down in 1284, the harsh penalties introduced by the Office of the Night allowed the state to fully manage what was considered a grievous problem.

In Florence, prosecution of sodomy involved an accusation being made by a plaintiff, followed by a judicial investigation by the Office of the Night, which then classified the type of offense and prescribed a punishment. Doffo di Nepo Spini, the Gonfalonier of Justice and the first man prosecuted under the Office of the Night, was 70 when he was accused of sodomy by young Francesco di Giovanni. Spini confessed three days later, and was fined a total of 1,000 florins for what he did. Shamed, the man left his office and left the boy alone. This being the first case of the Office of the Night, Spini was charged more florins than the Office of the Night would usually come to charge. Francesco, however, was not done; he went on to accuse another man, Ciamberlano di Giovani, a 60-year old German horse trainer of the same act. Ciamberlano confessed as well, and paid 25 florins for the crime.¹³

Sodomy cases often involved members of the social elite, indicating a proclivity for the act among the Florentine aristocracy. In 1432, the accusation by Sandro di Cristoforo (a trumpet player for the city’s Commune) of having been sodomized by the regal Antonio di Lionardo Dell’ Antella carried enough weight to nearly destroy Antonio’s reputation. Antonio refused to meet the accusation head on and even enacted a form of diplomatic immunity so that the Office of the Night could not investigate the accusation. When his immunity expired in 1433, he was accused of the crime once again, and when

¹¹ Ibid., 51.

¹² Laura Ruggiero, “The Forbidden Fruit: or the Taste For Sodomy in Renaissance Italy,” *Quaderni d’italianistica*, Volume XXVII, no. 1, 2006, 32. Laura Ruggiero continues the work of Guido Ruggiero almost ten years later, and her article on Sodomy in Renaissance Italy is supported by a variety of translated poetry found throughout the paper.

¹³ Rocke, 56.

he refused to acknowledge claims of his homosexual activity, “[the court] condemned him in absentia and fined him 50 florins.”¹⁴

To say that many of those convicted by Florence’s sodomy laws were upper-crust elites would not be an exaggeration, and evidence suggests that in Florence, accusations of sodomy were used as a social tool to check the power of anybody who threatened the civil order. In both the cases of Spini and Cristoforo, citizens with high ranking positions in the government were called upon by the court for their acts of sodomy. In the case of Spini and Francesco, Francesco accused the former head of the city of the act. Francesco’s later accusation of the horse handler Ciamberlano di Giovanni was significant in that his master was none other than Palla Strozzi, a figurehead for the regime and one of the wealthiest men in all of Florence.¹⁵ Antonio di Lionardo Dell’Antella had recently held political office and was the inheritor of his family’s dynasty of trade and goods. In all of these cases, accusations of sodomy served not to enforce a code of morality, but rather to act as a tool of power that could be used against anyone. That Spini’s fine was an extravagant 1,000 florins, while later amendments to the sodomy law would make the payment only 25 florins, supports this.¹⁶

The use of sodomy laws as a tool to usurp political power did not mean that the lower classes escaped unaffected; the Office of the Night prosecuted across all social classes and ages, regardless of the accused’s prominence or status. As Rocke details, “From 1432 to 1440, [the Office of the Night] convicted 109 individuals for homosexual sodomy. Most were of modest means and status... few bore surnames that would indicate a higher social or political rank.”¹⁷ In the case of Carlo di Domenico, an eighteen year-old haberdasher was approached by a *travestito* (one who masquerades as the opposite sex) while on the way to meet with his friends at a local tavern.¹⁸ After refusing the sexual advancement of the *travestito*, Carlo ultimately gave in. After having sex outside the customs duties

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 63.

¹⁷ Ibid., 57.

¹⁸ Ibid., 153.

office, the twenty-one year-old Sandro Buondelmonti vigorously pursued Carlo with the intent to molest the boy. Carlo was unable to outwit him and was sodomized in a nearby shed.¹⁹ After confessing his crime in front of the Office of the Night, Carlo was freed and by all accounts not even fined—the ministry ruled that he had been taken advantage of, and thus was not at fault.

For an institution with the power to order the deaths of any involved in sodomy, the Office of the Night was slow to prescribe death, preferring instead to fine the prosecuted. Not only were penance laws paltry (one handbook lists the castigation for the act of sodomy with another man as fasting for only ten days, and twenty if the sex was consensual),²⁰ but as Michael Rocke notes in his introduction to *Forbidden Friendships*, the writings of the Office of the Night on the cases they reviewed are minimal, often absconding any chance to justify their decisions and instead writing down the bare-bone facts of the case.²¹ For this reason, much of the background for cases had to come from other sources, including private diaries and memoirs. For the Office of the Night, this carries the unfortunate implication that the intent of enforcing their laws was to rein in a populace, and not to exact moral justice. A dearth of executions ordered through the ministry, combined with an appallingly inconsistent number of dismissals of implicated sodomites, followed by decreasing fines for participants caught in acts of sodomy all support this.²² By 1459, the government had lowered the fine for an adult's first sodomy charge to 10 florins, as well as halving the amounts specified for those on their second and third convictions. The sentiment, it seemed, was that the price for getting caught in an act of sodomy ought to reflect the severity of the crime, as well as be a sum payable by the offenders.²³ This was an entirely secular justification for changing a religious and ethical crime's penalty; enacting lower payments meant less of a drain on the coffers of the city's consumers as a whole, as well as allowing

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁰ McNeill, John T., and Helena Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal "Libri Poenitentiales" and Selections from Related Documents* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1990), 113.

²¹ Rocke., 8-9.

²² *Ibid.*, 73.

²³ *Ibid.*, 63. Economists call this a *market equilibrium*, where the cost of something adjusts itself through market forces to better reflect the demand. That this was the reasoning behind changing the amount of fines is fitting for the merchant-utopia of Florence.

the Office of the Night to collect sustainable income from even the poorest accused citizens.²⁴ From a merchant's perspective, using fines to curb disreputable behavior was better than the alternative of executing an offender and losing a source of revenue.

Artisans found themselves under attack when even conversation on the subject of sodomy was banned thanks to legislation enacted by the Office of the Night, forcing a rich discourse of innuendo to arise as a code for speaking about the subject. The work of Renaissance poet Ercole Bentivoglio is a prime example of the measures taken by poets to get around this censor, rife with allusions to sodomy being performed by priests and likening the act to enjoyable, delicious fruit:

*Le frutta dal formaggio accompagnate
son men nocive, anzi salubri e buone
al gusto e a lo stomaco piu grate
massime I fichi e le pere e'l melon
et le pesche, che si piaccion a I preti
che le soglion usar d' ogni stagione*²⁵

Laura Ruggiero provides a translation of this poem in her work, loosely translating it to: "Fruit that comes with cheese / Is not bad, actually it is healthy and good / Quite pleasing to the stomach and to the taste / Especially figs, pears and melons / And peaches which priests most love / And normally use in every season."²⁶

In contrast, Venice's Council of Ten did not lightly absolve anyone convicted of an act of sodomy. Created in 1348, the Council's first case was that of the sexual relationship between two servants, Pietro di Ferrara and Giacornello di Bologna.²⁷ Pietro and Giacornello were found to have shared a bed, and Pietro proudly proclaimed that the two men had on many occasions participated in non-penetrative sex. Giacornello refused to verify Pietro's claims, even when tortured. With no confession and thus no evidence of any wrongdoing aside from Pietro's claims, the Council absolved

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Bentivoglio, Ercole, *Opere Poetiche Del Signor Ercole Bentivoglio* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Library, 2009), 115.

²⁶ Laura Ruggiero, 45.

²⁷ Guido Ruggiero, 110.

Giacornello. Pietro, however, was taken into custody and burned at the stake for, “his active role in ‘unnatural intercourse.’”²⁸

For the Council of Ten, the emphasis of their executions was always on the salvation of the convict’s soul. Pietro’s unnatural intercourse was seen as a form of turning away from God’s grace, which in turn implied that by continuing down the path of committing acts of sodomy he was barring himself from eternal salvation. Feeling they had no other option, the Council burned sodomites at the stake to purify their souls. Guido Ruggiero of *The Boundaries of Eros* theorizes that the extreme repercussions for the act of sodomy stem from Renaissance interpretations of the burnings of Sodom and Gomorrah, citing that, “In one case the Ten even took up the issue of sodomy aboard Venetian ships, with the expressed fear that if allowed to continue uncontrolled, the sin might lead God to destroy the city’s fleets.”²⁹ For a population founded by refugees of Attila the Hun’s pillaging of the Italian Peninsula as well as having recently survived waves of the Black Death, it’s not a stretch to imagine that the concept of deific wrath and destruction were very much a factor in deciding policies for everyday life.³⁰ On Christmas Day of 1497, the Bishop of the Church of San Marco made a plea to his congregation, and in particular, the Doge of Venice:

...“*My lord, you close the churches for fear of the plague and you do so prudently. But, if God wills it, it would not be necessary to close them. This could be avoided if you would eliminate the causes that lead to the plague, which are the horrible sins that are committed [in this city], the blaspheming of God and the saints, the societies of sodomy, the infinite usurious contracts made at the Rialto...*”³¹

The Doge’s plea to the city echoes of a long-held tradition in Renaissance Venice to persecute sodomy, a mandate which can be traced back to the 11th century writings of Saint Peter Damian, who writes that,

²⁸ Ibid., 110-111.

²⁹ Ibid., 111.

³⁰ Ibid., 109.

³¹ Ibid., 115.

*“...others commit the complete act against nature [anal intercourse]... Indeed a greater penance is imposed on those who fall with others than those who defile only themselves...The devil’s artful fraud devises these degrees of failing into ruin such that the higher the level the unfortunate soul reaches in them, the deeper it sinks in the depths of hell’s pit.”*³²

Persecution of sodomy thus came from a theological compunction and desire to not invoke the terror of God; for the Council of Ten, such a task meant saving every soul lost to the horrors of sodomy, whether or not they expressly wanted it.

Ascertaining if an act of sodomy warranted execution by fire required the Council of Ten to develop a methodology of closely examining sodomy cases. In the case of the boat owner Niccolo Marmagna and his servant Giovanni Braganza, Niccolo attempted to protect his lover by stating that Giovanni was unaware of the sex that they had, even going so far as to claim that he molested the other man while he was asleep. When the court questioned Giovanni, the man admitted that he knew what was happening all along, but that he had only submitted to his employer under threat of death. Furthermore, Giovanni contested that the two men’s sex was non-penetrative, and that Niccolo had never sullied him. Unfortunately, Giovanni later confessed that the two had begun to swap roles as penetrator and penetrated, negating Niccolo’s sacrifice. Both men were sentenced to death, and burned at the stake.³³ Had Giovanni not revealed that he and Niccolo’s sodomy was penetrative, at the very least Giovanni stood a chance at being acquitted.

For the Council of Ten, sodomy was only excusable if the act was non-penetrative. During the case of Niccolo and Giovanni, the Council searched for proof of penetration before prescribing an execution, using whatever means they had at their disposal. Giovanni had the truth tortured out of him only after his account of events did not match up with those of Niccolo’s. The Council was keen to

³²Damian, Peter, *Book of Gomorrah: An Eleventh-Century Treatise against Clerical Homosexual Practices*, Transl. by Pierre Payer (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 29.

³³ Guido Ruggiero, 116.

determine if Giovanni was truly innocent of returning physical intimacy; his execution was derived entirely from his confession that, knowing what Niccolo was doing, he did not rebuff the man. In contrast, a case on Andrea Coppo, who was accused of encouraging his coworker Marino to masturbate with him, ended in an acquittal of all charges. The Council of Ten came to the verdict that because Andrea never touched another man with his ignoble sex act, the crime could be written off as a misdemeanor, and thus execution would be too drastic of a response to the crime.³⁴

As well as a distinction between if the sex act was penetrative or not, The Council of Ten took special interest in determining who the active and passive partner was in sex. The Council explained the role of passive and active through analogy to heterosexual sex; the active participant was the man, who did the penetrating. The passive participant thus had feminine qualities, because a true man was not penetrated by anything.³⁵ Because of tendencies for the penetrated, passive partner in male-male sexual activity to be a young, 10-18 year-old boy, the Council often prescribed light penalties for the passive receiver in their court cases. The executions of Paduano d’Oltranto and Marino Alegreti in 1474 by the Council serve as an example of this. For being the aggressors in a group of six men who had group sex, they were beheaded, at which point their bodies were then burned until nothing but ash remained.³⁶ One of the boys who had been taken advantage of, Aloysio Maronerti, was given a meager ten lashings due to his, “tender age.”³⁷ His eighteen year-old friend, Simeone, was not so lucky—his age did not permit him any sort of leeway, but due to his role as the passive receiver in anal sex, he only received 25 lashes and a 5-year ban from the city. Furthermore, members of the Council decided that Simeone would be publically mutilated and have his nose cut off during Paduano and Marino’s executions, not unlike the typical kind of mutilation prescribed for females.³⁸ For his participation in the sex act, Simeone had his masculinity stripped by being punished as a female, broadcasting to the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

public a stronger message than Marino's death could; sexual passivity in sodomy was akin to emasculation and would be tried as such.

This was also a distinction made in Florence's cases; the active sexual partner was far more at fault for the act having been committed in the first place, especially if their partner was young. In cases where the active partner had physically penetrated the passive one, the active partner faced the tougher conviction; in cases where the active partner fellated the passive partner, they were then tried for being penetrated through their mouth, and given a tougher punishment than their counterpart.³⁹ Florence's 1325 statute against sodomy made it clear that, "any corrupt sodomite [who] will have been discovered with some boy is to be fully castrated; a boy who, on the contrary, will have consented to foul himself with such a crime [is to be fined]."⁴⁰ This had the connotation of the boy involved in the act being deemed foolish for participating in the endeavor, as if he was to blame not for the act, but for not knowing better. As seen in the cases of Francesco di Giovanni, Carlo di Domenico, and Aloysio Maronerti, boys were rarely at fault for being taken advantage of by an older, stronger male—their susceptibility to sodomy was accounted for in court.

Boys did not enjoy the benefits of being the passive participant in sodomy for long; the expectation that a boy would grow and become a man with *virtú* enfranchised him to experience the full brunt of the law's power. For Renaissance men, the very essence of their masculinity depended on their ability to harness the power of *virtú*. Machiavelli defined *virtú* as becoming a man of property and prosperity who would have a role in self-government; a protector of liberties.⁴¹ Machiavelli's work did not speak for everyone in Florence however, and while many found umbrage in his vision of the self-actualized Renaissance man, his opposition called for a more realistic interpretation of his ideal.⁴² The impetus became for a man to display his masculinity (a sense derived from understanding art and the

³⁹ Rocke, 92-93.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 89. See *Forbidden Friendships* 283, note #10 for more information.

⁴¹ Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, "Chapter XXVI: An Exhortation To Liberate Italy From The Barbarians," <http://www.constitution.org/mac/prince26.htm>.

⁴² Rocke 105.

humanities) by contributing to public works and becoming a man able to control their own destiny. As Nicholas Scott Baker theorized in *Power and Passion*, in their demarcation of Lorenzo d'Medici, the literati of Florence articulated a lack of virtú as an overindulgence in sex and diversions. That the same republicans would years later support a tyrant on the throne because they demonstrated qualities of virtú speaks to the high expectations men were under to showcase their strength.⁴³ Men were supposed to be impervious. A man who was taken over by anything—be it through physical combat, being penetrated in sex, or even being penetrated by mere *thoughts* of sex—was a slave to desire, and unable to create his own destiny. The man who could not be a slave was gluttonous, unworthy of respect.⁴⁴ The transition from boyhood to manhood was marked by becoming someone who could ruthlessly pursue what they wanted, but only if what they wanted was not essential to their life.

Virtú explains the flourishing life sodomy had in both Florence and Venice. Harkening back to the classical period of ancient Rome and Greece,⁴⁵ the initiator in homosexual activity was typically an older male (often a mentor or master), and the receiver of his efforts, a young, pubescent boy.⁴⁶ Among older men the pursuit of someone young and beautiful was a time-honored tradition, and through the concept of virtú an older man could justify the sexual domination of a younger, feebler boy. After all, boys were meant to outgrow that enslavement to other men and become self-actualized—hence the encouragement of stronger punishments for boys over the age of 18 who were caught in the act, as in the resolution of the case of Simeone. In a Venetian case from 1424, young Bernardo Salvador was accused by his own father of participating in homosexual intercourse with an older man. The Venetian courts, however, ruled that he was too young to be tried, acquitting him because he was still a *boy*, and thus too naïve to how he was supposed to act in society. The courts were lenient to try people who

⁴³ Nicholas Scott Baker, “Power and Passion in Sixteenth-Century Florence: The Sexual and Political Reputations of Alessandro and Cosimo I de’ Medici”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19 (2010), 456.

⁴⁴ Laura Ruggiero, 33.

⁴⁵ Locke, 88. For more on the concept of pederasty, refer to Antono Beccadelli’s *Hermaphroditus* for mentions of the term as well as Plato’s *Symposium* (in which he theorizes that the acceptance of such a relationship goes hand-in-hand with democracy) to see how pederasty was implemented in the Renaissance ideal of a republic.

⁴⁶ Locke 95.

could not be expected to have virtú, regardless that the crime was sodomy.⁴⁷

The interplay between virtú and homosexual acts came to define sodomy laws in the later years of the Renaissance. By 1542, the city of Florence enacted an edict that fined and sentenced anybody convicted of sodomy to hard labor, unless they were above the age of twenty and had taken on the passive role in the act; in that case, they were to be burned at the stake publically and denounced for their rejection of cultural norms.⁴⁸ In Venice, attempts at showcasing humanist spirituality—primarily through being nude, especially with other men—by were halted by the laws and edicts created by the Council of Ten.⁴⁹ The law is not always able to bend reality however, and despite the monolithic amount of cases taken on by the Office of the Night and the Council of Ten, sodomy came to define parts of the culture of Italian City States. The uprisings of humanist patrician male youth against Savonarola⁵⁰ as well as the internal corruption of Venice's government demonstrated an intolerance towards the persecution the anti-sodomy institutions worked so hard to achieve.⁵¹ While by mid-16th century the Office of the Night would be eviscerated,⁵² the Council of Ten would survive on until 1797, where the institution would be shut down, labelled as a failure.⁵³

Regardless of the methodology or justification, Florence and Venice were adamant about one thing: sodomy was an act that was to be punished. As legal cases from the Renaissance indicate however, their reasoning behind why it was a crime were utterly different. In Florence, sodomy laws were used as a tool to usurp political power, as evidenced by the small amount of detail given to the cases. By only issuing small fines as punishments, sodomy laws acted as little more than a way to generate revenue. Since sodomy was so rampant as well as justifiable through virtú, the Office of the Night could essentially only get away with as much. We see what would have happened had the Office

⁴⁷ Guido Ruggiero, 123.

⁴⁸ Roche 105.

⁴⁹ Guido Ruggiero, 142.

⁵⁰ Roche, 222-223.

⁵¹ Christopher Hibbert, *Venice: A Biography of a City* (New York: Norton, 1989), 187.

⁵² Roche, 45, 227-228.

⁵³ Hibbert, 187.

of the Night made their otherwise lackluster methodology more efficient with Savonarola, who, when he threatened the sanctity of sodomy (and with it, many of the sexual partners of much of Florence's male population), was lynched by a public mob.⁵⁴ In Venice, sodomy laws were the result of theological compunctions; finding salvation for those who practiced sodomy was believed to be the only way to save the city from God's vengeful wrath. The Council would thoroughly review any case before making a decision because the verdict was so drastic; salvation was on the line. Thus, the Council adopted measures of determining what the limits of forgivable sodomy were,⁵⁵ paying special attention to where and when a full conviction was or was not necessary. While the Council of Ten ultimately convicted fewer men than the Office of the Night, they were considered by both Michael Rocke and Guido Ruggiero to be the more effective of the two institutions. The amount of art celebrating homosexuality among Florentine men contributes to the conclusion that, by and large, the work of the Office of the Night had little effect on the male-celebrating populace of Florence (See Appendix A for examples of art). While it was clearly more effective than its Florentine counterpart, Rocke and Ruggiero differ on interpretations on *how* successful the Council of Ten was at curbing sodomy in its own city. While Rocke subscribes to the theory that it was the severity of Venetian laws against sodomy which embedded its status as a truly taboo act, Ruggiero staunchly argues that Venice's attempt to hang onto theology as its moral center predicated the long reign of repression the Council of Ten would hold over the city, and that while prosecution of sodomy rose, men still practiced it with one another. From the standpoint of the nobility and church it made sense to persecute sodomy; a relationship between two men in which their greatest allegiance is to one another (and not their lord) stands as the greatest possible threat to the social order. Unfortunately for the legislatures of both cities, it was too late; sodomy was already a deeply entrenched part of the male Renaissance culture. The innumerable edicts passed by the Office of the Night and the Council of Ten could do nothing to stop it.

⁵⁴ Rocke, 223.

⁵⁵ Guido Ruggiero 114-115. As explained in the *Boundaries of Eros*, forgivable acts of sodomy were considered any acts which did not cross the threshold of having the two (or more) men involved physically contact one another.

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