

FORBIDDEN LOVE IN ISTANBUL: PATTERNS OF MALE–MALE SEXUAL RELATIONS IN THE EARLY-MODERN MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

I

In the summer of 1588, the Venetian *bailo* in Istanbul — in effect, the resident ambassador there — investigated a sexual scandal. His residence, known as the ‘bailate’ and located on the outskirts of Galata, just across the Golden Horn from Istanbul proper, functioned as the embassy, and also contained a small number of youths undergoing training as ‘dragomans’ or interpreters.¹ The scandal involved the suspicion that homosexual acts — or, to use the pre-modern term now generally adopted by historians, sodomy — had been committed by a trainee dragoman and a junior member of the staff.²

Since the 1550s adolescents known as *giovani di lingua*, language youths, had been sent from Venice to live in the bailate and learn Turkish. However, because the supply of suitable Venetians was insufficient, Italian-speaking Christians from Galata were also accepted. The trainee in this case, Giancesino

¹ On the *baili* and bailate, see Eric R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, 2006), 25–40; on the trainees, Francesca Lucchetta, ‘La scuola dei “giovani di lingua” veneti nei secoli XVI e XVII’, *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, vii (1989).

² Historians now avoid the terms ‘homosexual’ and ‘homosexuality’, which indicate a distinct type of disposition or personality, as the applicability of such a category in the pre-modern period is problematic. It will be apparent that the sexual behaviour discussed in this article diverges significantly from familiar modern forms of sexuality. For a classic discussion of some of the conceptual issues involved, see David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago, 2002).

Salvego or Salvago, had such a background, coming from a local family of Genoese origin. Unlike the Venetian trainees, he had already become a fluent speaker of Turkish as a child; presumably his training in the bailate was devoted to learning how to read and write it. In fact, he was first installed in the bailate not as a trainee but as an informal interpreter in the period 1582–5, dealing with the many Turkish-speakers who came there every day.³ But at some point thereafter he became a *giovane di lingua*; this meant that he would receive a salary and live inside the bailate, although he had a parental home nearby.⁴ Lorenzo Bernardo, who served as *bailo* from 1585 to 1587, wrote in his final report that Giancesino had ‘recently’ gained this status, and that he was ‘of a very lively spirit’.⁵ While his age was not stated, the fact that he was performing a responsible job before 1585 suggests that by 1588 he may have been in his early twenties.

The other person under suspicion in 1588 was the barber of the bailate, whose name is given only as Gregorio. He had arrived in the entourage of the new *bailo*, Giovanni Moro, in 1587. His origins were Venetian: during the investigation it was mentioned that the ‘Dottore’ (perhaps the *bailo*’s secretary) had urged Gregorio not to be a cause of shame to ‘la Patria’, the fatherland. The Dottore had also cited a letter sent by Gregorio’s mother, telling him to behave well and not to do anything that would make people talk about him — which suggests that Gregorio was quite young.⁶ His job involved some skills, but would not have required long experience. Apart from hair-cutting and shaving, barbers performed simple medical tasks, such as setting broken bones. Venice had its guild of barbers; a barber sent to the bailate would probably have undergone an apprenticeship with the guild, but it is hard to assign precise ages to that process. One recent study notes that most such apprenticeships ended between the ages of eighteen

³ Eugenio Albèri (ed.), *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto*, ser. 3, *Relazioni dagli Stati Ottomani*, 3 vols. (Florence, 1840–55), ii, 319–20.

⁴ Archivio di Stato, Venice (hereafter ASV), Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci, Dispacci (Lettere) di Ambasciatori (hereafter CCD, DA), busta 6 (Costantinopoli, 1581–99), item 99, letter of *bailo* Giovanni Moro, 10 Sept. 1588.

⁵ Maria P. Pedani-Fabris (ed.), *Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, xiv: *Costantinopoli: relazioni inedite, 1512–1789* (Padua, 1996), 392.

⁶ ASV, CCD, DA, busta 6, item 103, fo. [1^r].

and twenty.⁷ So perhaps Gregorio was just a few years younger than Giancesino.

At some point before 8 July two disciplinary orders had been issued: first the two young men had been forbidden to speak to each other, and then Giancesino had been expelled from the bailate. The initial reason for questioning members of staff was to find out whether contacts persisted between the two; this quickly turned into an investigation of their previous relationship. On 8 July the stableman, Vido of Zadar, was questioned. Had he spoken to Giancesino since his expulsion? Yes: Giancesino had told Vido to invite Gregorio to visit him at his home. And what did Giancesino want from his friend? 'I don't know; but many times I saw them kissing here in the house'. Had others seen this? 'All those who eat in the servants' hall saw it, because they were kissing at the window of Mr Giancesino's little room; people standing in the servant's hall could see it'. Asked further about their relationship, Vido said: 'I don't know, but I do know that everyone in the house said that they were performing shameful acts with each other'. What did he mean by 'shameful acts'? Told to speak plainly, he said: 'As if they were having sex'. And where did they do this? 'I don't know, but many times they were locked in that little room, and the whole household could see'.⁸

With one partial exception, the statements of the thirteen other household members interrogated over the next three days followed this pattern: they had seen signs of close affection, but the claim that the two men were having sex was a matter of (widely held) assumption rather than evidential knowledge. One indication of their relationship was the fact that Giancesino had given Gregorio various keepsakes: a length of silk, a pair of white gloves, a cap made of purple or dark blue satin, and a knife.⁹

⁷ Giovanni Colavizza, Riccardo Cella and Anna Bellavitis, 'Apprenticeship in Early Modern Venice' (2017), 12–13, available at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318284139_Apprenticeship_in_Early_Modern_Venice>; William Eamon, 'Science and Medicine in Early Modern Venice', in Eric R. Dursteler (ed.), *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400–1797* (Leiden, 2013), 722–3.

⁸ ASV, CCD, DA, busta 6, item 100, fo. [1^v] ('tutti quelli che mangiano al Tinello, perche si basciauano alla finestra del camerino di esso m[esser] Giancesin, che stando nel tinello si poteuano uedere', 'no[n] sò, mà sò bene che tutti di casa diceuano che si faceuano uergogne l'un l'altro insieme', 'come se si negoziassero', 'no[n] sò, mà sono stati molte uolte serrati nel camerino, et tutti di casa lo han[n]o potuto uedere'). The last phrase presumably means that everyone could see them in the room, not that they could see them having sex.

⁹ *Ibid.*, item 102, fo. [1^v] (silk, gloves, cap); item 103, fo. [1^v] (knife).

Another was the way that the barber had spoken about Giancesino: he told one servant that ‘there was nothing that he would not do for him’, and informed another that he would go to see him ‘even if the gallows were prepared for him’.¹⁰ Several times after Giancesino’s expulsion, Gregorio had left the building at night by climbing through a window, returning in the morning. That window was finally blocked; when Gregorio saw this, he stood there cursing, and uttered — according to the kitchen boy — the ominous words that he might as well lose his soul.¹¹

Two other allegations were made. One servant reminded the *bailo* that he had warned him, during their overland journey to Istanbul, that Gregorio would be ‘the shame of the household’. Apparently a rumour had arisen about Gregorio and the Ottoman courier who travelled with them: it was said that ‘Gregorio had offered himself to him for sex’.¹² And when the kitchen boy was asked whether Gregorio had ‘fooled around’ with anyone else, he said: ‘He may have done with Mr Marc’Antonio, the carver [approximately: butler], since they went to the lavatory together, and stayed there for hours’.¹³

The strongest evidence of sexual activity came from the baker, Dominico. He was well placed to supply it, since he shared a bedroom — indeed, a bed — with Gregorio; yet the information was extracted with difficulty. Dominico began by quoting Gregorio as saying that ‘they loved each other, but not in a sinful way’. Asked if Giancesino and Gregorio had slept together, he replied:

I slept with the barber, and on some nights Mr Giancesino came, but I noticed only in the morning, when he wanted to get dressed ... I was on one side, and didn’t take up much room; they slept on the other side. On a few occasions I noticed that he came in the evening, and for that reason I didn’t want to sleep there any more.

Had he heard them moving during the night, or talking? ‘I heard them talking, but I couldn’t make out the words; they also seemed to be kissing, but if they did anything else I couldn’t say

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, item 101, fo. [1^v] (‘se fussero le forche preparate’, ‘no[n] è cosa, ch[è] no[n] facesse per lui’).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, item 104, fo. [1^r].

¹² *Ibid.*, item 102, fo. [1^r] (‘Gregorio si era offerto di dargli da negotiar’).

¹³ *Ibid.*, item 104, fo. [1^r] (‘fatto poltronarie’, ‘potria esser co[n] M[esser] Marc’Ant:° Scalco, perch[e] andauano al necess:° insieme, doue stauano le hore’).

for sure, but if it had been a woman I would have thought that they were doing that business [sc. sexual intercourse] together'.¹⁴

Finally, on 11 August, the *bailo* summoned Gregorio and asked about his friendship with Giancesino. 'I shall tell you the truth', Gregorio replied. 'I loved him greatly, I took pleasure in his company, and I slept with him several times'. Had he had carnal relations with him? 'I did kiss him, and anyone might think it was true [sc. that they had carnal relations], but it was not like that'. The next question was notably direct: had he been the active partner, or the passive? 'No, my lords'. Had he had carnal relations with anyone else? 'Yes, my lords, with Mr Antonio the carver'. How often? 'Twice, when he sought me out for it'.¹⁵

The questioning ended there; that same evening, Gregorio was put on a Venetian galleon, to be taken to Crete. Later, sending his record of the interrogation to Venice, the *bailo* explained that he would have dismissed Gregorio as soon as he discovered the scandal, were it not for the fact that the barber 'decided to let it be known that he would convert to Islam'. (That was the significance of his reported remark that he might as well lose his soul.) Therefore he had delayed 'in order to obtain first of all an order allowing me to send him away in chains, so that he could not be taken off the ship on that pretext [sc. an intention to convert] or any other'. He also dismissed the carver, and refused to accept Giancesino back into the bailate, despite the great need for his services.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, item 102, fo. [1^v] – item 103, fo. [1^r] ('si uogliano bene, mà no[n] per peccato', 'io dormiuo co'l barbiero, et alcune notte è uenuto m[esser] Giancesin, mà io no[n] me ne accorgeuo seno[n] la matina, quando el si uoleua uestir ... io mi trouauo da una banda, et teneuo poco luoco, et loro dormiuano dall'altra banda; me ne son anco accorto alcune uolte, ch'è uenuto la sera, et per q[ue]sto no[n] uoleuo più dormir là', 'sentiuo ch[e] ragionauano insieme, mà no[n] poteuo intender le parole; pareua anco ch[e] si basciassero, mà se facessero altro no lo posso dir certamente, ma se'l fusse una donna hauerei creduto, che si facessero quel seruitio insieme').

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, item 104, fo. [5^v] ('dirò il uero. Io l'ho amato grand^{te}, haueuo piacer di trouarmi con lui, et hò dormito più uolte seco', 'Io l'ho basciato, et ogn'uno crederia che fusse uero, mà però no[n] è così', 'Sig.^{ri} nò', 'sig.^{ri} sì co[n] m[esser] M. Antonio Scalco', 'due uolte, ch'egli me ne ricercò').

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, item 99 ('perche fù egli persuaso à lasciarsi intender che si farebbe Turco ... per ottener prima un commandamento di poterlo mandar in ferri, accioche sotto questo, ò altro pretesto non mi fusse leuato dal Vassello', carver, Giancesino). Giancesino was restored to his position by 1591–2: Albèri (ed.), *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto*, ii, 417.

The full record, which runs to sixteen pages, giving the responses of fifteen members of the household and two Venetian merchants, is a document of a possibly unique kind. Most of our knowledge of particular cases of same-sex relations in early-modern Europe comes from trial records. Trials focused on determining whether specific acts had occurred: typically, the only people questioned were the accused and the small number of witnesses whose testimony might prove those facts. In this case, however, attention is paid to the whole nature of an affective relationship; and the questioning of a large number of people gives a much broader sense of the attitudes of Gregorio's colleagues. Several said they thought the two were having sex; two, however, insisted that the relationship had been affectionate but non-sexual.¹⁷ The terms used by those who did impute sexual relations were negative but mostly euphemistic. As we have seen, the baker was slow to condemn Gregorio, yielding the most serious evidence only after careful questioning. The relationship had lasted quite a long time, it seems, without anyone reporting it to the *bailo*; anyone in the servants' hall had been able to observe — with disapproval, indifference or amusement — the spectacle of the two men kissing in Giancesino's room. The baker had become upset that his colleagues 'were joking at my expense', poking fun at him for being aware of, or complicit in, sexual acts in his own bed.¹⁸ Moralistic outrage was not the dominant tone, even if some were genuinely disapproving.

The *bailo* was a product of the same Venetian world, and would have been familiar with the attitudes underlying that range of responses. Yet, as the thoroughness of his investigation and the severity of his decisions show, his own reaction was very different. One feature of his questioning sheds special light on this. In no fewer than eight interrogations, he asked whether they had heard the matter discussed outside the bailate. Why this strong fear about the wagging of tongues in Galata and Istanbul? Same-sex relations between men were, as we shall see, far from unknown in Italian society during this period, and neither was their presence in Venetian society a secret so far as other westerners were concerned. It is hard to believe that a

¹⁷ ASV, CCD, DA, busta 6, item 104, fos. [4^v–5^r].

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, item 103, fo. [1^r] ('mi dauano la burla').

Venetian ambassador in Rome or Naples would have felt so troubled by such an affair between two lowly employees, or by the thought of it becoming public knowledge. But Istanbul was different. Built into the cultural and moral self-image of western Christians was the idea that sodomy was prevalent in, and characteristic of, Muslim society generally and Ottoman society in particular. This was something that distinguished 'them' from 'us'. To have the population outside the bailate — Christian or Muslim — gossiping about a sodomitical affair within it would be to undermine a significant assumption of superiority.

II

Diplomacy involves contact between cultures, and diplomats may be particularly exposed, or sensitive, to cultural differences. Ottoman envoys in western Europe came under scrutiny for their 'unnatural' sexual interests: in 1520 the Venetian authorities exiled one of their (male) citizens for having had sexual relations with an Ottoman ambassador, and in 1533 they forbade a departing Ottoman envoy to take 'a beautiful boy' with him to Istanbul.¹⁹ Similarly, the envoy Ibrahim pasha, who went to Vienna in 1700 to organize the return of Ottoman prisoners of war, was found to have included in his list of returnees a number of handsome young Germans to whom he had offered enticements.²⁰ Such issues could also impinge on early-modern western diplomats in the Ottoman Empire. The Dutch traveller Joris van der Does, who was in Istanbul in 1597–8, noted an incident in which a good-looking youth, belonging to the retinue of the Polish ambassador, was abducted in the street: 'For the beauty of such boys makes them liable throughout Istanbul to the ambushes of boy-kidnappers'.²¹ Here the sexual element of the story was assumed rather than proven; in other cases there could be no mistake. In 1702 Aaron Hill was staying with the English ambassador, Sir Robert Sutton, at a summer house on the riverside at Edirne, when they saw a middle-aged Turk lead 'a Boy of about Fourteen' to a point on

¹⁹ Maria Pia Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore: inviati ottomani a Venezia dalla caduta di Costantinopoli alla guerra di Candia* (Venice, 1994), 84.

²⁰ Karl Teply, 'Vom Loskauf osmanischer Gefangener aus dem Grossen Türkenkrieg, 1683–1699', *Südost-Forschungen*, xxxii (1973), 68.

²¹ Joris van der Does ['Georgius Dousa'], *De itinere suo constantinopolitano epistola* (Leiden, 1599), 30.

the riverbank where they were out of sight of the nearby village. The man 'began ... to prepare himself and his *consenting Catamite*' for sex; the Englishmen shouted at him, but he persisted until Hill threatened him with a gun.²² Roughly fifteen years later, at the English consulate in Algiers, an awkward misunderstanding arose when the young men of the consulate were working in the courtyard, wearing only their underwear because of the heat. A button on one man's underwear failed, causing it to drop to the ground, whereupon his colleagues amused themselves by spanking his bare buttocks. In the words of a French consular official, a passing Turk 'thought they were taking a different kind of pleasure, and wanted to have his share. With his half-sabre in his hand he scattered the other servants, and took possession of the man they were trying to spank'. The others ran to the consul's office (where the Frenchman was present), but even the consul had some difficulty in persuading the Turk that he had misunderstood the situation.²³

If it was true that Gregorio the barber was thinking of converting to Islam, the prime reason would have been to free himself from the *bailo*'s jurisdiction. From the *bailo*'s point of view, however, such action would have constituted a diplomatic incident in which disloyalty, unnatural sexual interests and Islam were all combined. Five years later, the steward of the Imperial embassy in Istanbul, Ladislaus Mörth, did abandon his post and convert to Islam, apparently in order to escape punishment for a sexual affair with a kitchen boy in the embassy.²⁴ Such episodes could only reinforce existing assumptions about a connection between sodomy and conversion to Islam.

'Renegades' (converts to Islam) were widely accused, by westerners, of moral depravity. But the association with sodomy was especially common. The French traveller Nicolas de Nicolay, visiting Algiers in 1551, noted that the renegades were all addicted to lewdness and sodomy; the Portuguese cleric Antonio de Sosa, captive there in the late 1570s, observed that their main reason for converting was 'to live as they please,

²² Aaron Hill, *A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire in All Its Branches* (London, 1709), 80–1.

²³ J. P. Laugier de Tassy, *Histoire du royaume d'Alger, avec l'état présent de son gouvernement* (Amsterdam, 1725), 120–1.

²⁴ Tobias P. Graf, *The Sultan's Renegades: Christian-European Converts to Islam and the Making of the Ottoman Elite, 1575–1610* (Oxford, 2017), 84–5, 99–101.

wallowing in every kind of lust, sodomy and gluttony'.²⁵ Spanish texts, commenting on the prevalence of sodomy in North African society, portrayed the renegade Europeans as the worst offenders.²⁶ While all generalizations of this kind are hard — perhaps impossible — for the historian to substantiate, there are many known cases of individual renegades who were described as engaging in such sexual practices: the corsair captain Bartolomé Catalan, for example, who in 1589 was accused by the Sicilian Inquisition of effecting the conversion to Islam of a young captive whom he had then made his *paciente* in Algiers, or the renegade Jorge Mendes Morato (Murad), who in 1576 was accused by the Lisbon Inquisition of keeping two young converts as his catamites in Tangier. In his response, Morato declared that 'it is customary for all the renegades to keep boys for sexual pleasure instead of women; they commit the sin of sodomy with them, and boast about it'.²⁷

As those cases illustrate, young male captives could be targeted for either or both of two purposes: sexual exploitation by their masters, and conversion to Islam. (The latter was a common occurrence with captive boys, since it was Muslim practice not to require the converts' consent at ages below the early teens.) There was no objective link between the two, but that did not stop western writers from treating them as connected; listing reasons for conversion in Algiers, de Sosa said that in some cases it happened because 'since the time when they were boys, their masters got them acquainted with the vice of sodomy, which they then came to like'.²⁸ Whether or not they converted, there are many records of young captives being used as *bardaches* or *bardassi*, catamites, by their masters — both

²⁵ Nicolas de Nicolay, *Dans l'empire de Soliman le Magnifique*, ed. Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud and Stéphane Yérasimos (Paris, 1989), 65; Antonio de Sosa ['Diego de Haedo'], *Topographia e historia general de Argel* (Valladolid, 1612), fo. 35^r.

²⁶ Miguel A. de Bunes Ibarra, *La imagen de los musulmanes y del Norte de África en la España de los siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid, 1989), 239.

²⁷ Anita Gonzalez-Raymond, *La Croix et le croissant: les inquisiteurs des îles face à l'Islam, 1550–1700* (Paris, 1992), 216 (Catalan); Luiz Mott, 'Musulmani sodomiti in Portogallo e bardassi cristiani in Africa del Nord nei secoli dell'età moderna', in Umberto Grassi and Giuseppe Marcocci (eds.), *Le trasgressioni della carne: il desiderio omosessuale nel mondo islamico e cristiano, secc. XII–XX* (Rome, 2015), 180 (Murad).

²⁸ De Sosa, *Topographia e historia general de Argel*, fo. 9^v.

renegade and native Muslim.²⁹ Certain galley captains had reputations for this; two of the most famous in the late-sixteenth-century Ottoman navy, Uluç Ali and Hasan Veneziano (both of them Italian renegades who had been corsairs in Algiers) were said to have become rivals over a boy, and Uluç Ali was described in a western intelligence report as keeping more than fifty 'beardless boys' for the benefit of his crew.³⁰ In Algiers, according to de Sosa, 'sodomy is regarded as honourable, since the man who maintains the greatest number of boys is honoured most'.³¹ Against this background, stories of pious Christian youths resisting the advances of their Muslim masters cannot be entirely dismissed, despite the obvious motives of the clerical authors who celebrated them. An account of the Franciscan mission in Tripoli in the late seventeenth century mentions that the friars, who were long-term residents there, tried to engage each young male Christian captive soon after his arrival in a 'very candid conversation' about the unspeakable vice of the Moors, urging resistance. (They also boarded the vessels of Christian merchants, telling them not to allow their adolescents to leave the ship.)³²

It might be thought that the North African ports, with their military and corsairing elites, heavy dependence on slavery and constant flow of new captives, were untypical; but the picture was broadly the same elsewhere in Ottoman territory. The teenaged Václav Vratislav, released from a prison outside Istanbul in 1596, was warned by an Ottoman official not to accompany the other freed prisoners to a meeting in the city, because 'on account of my youth, I might easily be seized by

²⁹ See, for example, Bartolomé Bennassar and Lucile Bennassar, *Les Chrétiens d'Allah: l'histoire extraordinaire des renégats, XVI^e-XVII^e siècles* (Paris, 1989), 174, 278; Gonzalez-Raymond, *La Croix et le croissant*, 216; Mott, 'Musulmani sodomiti in Portogallo e bardassi cristiani in Africa del Nord', 181; Jaume Riera i Sans, *Sodomites catalans: història i vida (segles XIII-XVIII)* (Barcelona, 2014), 216-17.

³⁰ Albèri (ed.), *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto*, iii, 224 (relazione of 1583: rivals); Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, MS Cod. Ital. 6, fos. 430^r-434^r, [Giovanni Barelli,] 'Relatione delle cose di Constantinopoli' (1575), at fo. 430^v ('sbarbati').

³¹ De Sosa, *Topographia e historia general de Argel*, fo. 38^v.

³² Mathias Tanner, *Societatis Jesu apostolorum imitatrix*, pt 1 (Prague, 1694), 841 (Jerónimo López, resisting); Miguel Herrero García, *Ideas de los españoles del siglo XVII* (Madrid, 1966), 545 (Alonso Rodríguez, resisting); Antonio Maria de Turre, *Orbis seraphicus*, ii, pt 2, ed. A. Chiappini (Quaracchi, 1945), 87a-b (Franciscans).

some pasha and converted to Islam. For the Turks, and above all the renegades, are disgraceful sodomites, and young people are in great danger'.³³ The twenty-two-year-old Robert Bargrave, imprisoned in Istanbul in 1650, experienced the advances of his gaoler, which were 'unfitt to Discourse, & horrid to remember'.³⁴ As for the practice of keeping catamites: it was on the basis of a visit in 1579 to Istanbul that the traveller Jean Carlier reported that 'they are very much given to the vice of sodomy, and the great men more than the common folk, given that there is hardly a single captain who does not have one or more catamites'.³⁵

Compulsion or slave status was not necessarily a factor. The Lutheran chaplain at the Imperial embassy in Istanbul, Stephan Gerlach, recorded a conversation in 1577 with a Hungarian slave in the household of a high official: 'He tells me what the Turks get up to, very shamefully, with boys. But the boys themselves dress up for it, and walk in front of the houses of the great lords, in order to be seen ... they also receive large payments'.³⁶ In 1634 the English traveller Sir Henry Blount encountered pashas leading their troops, each accompanied by his '*Catamites*, which are their serious loves ... Boyes likely of twelue, or fourteene yeares old'.³⁷ And in 1709 Aaron Hill made the same observation: 'They have their favourite *Pooshts*, or *Catamites*, as common as their Concubines, and ride attended to the Wars or distant Governments, by rich and splendid Numbers of these young *Male Prostitutes*'.³⁸

Many western writers generalized freely on the subject of Ottoman sodomy. Some were describing a society in which they had lived for years. The Greek author Theodore Spandounes, who in the late fifteenth century had spent part of his boyhood in Ottoman Macedonia, wrote that 'sodomy is commonly and

³³ Václav Vratislav ['Wáclaw Wratislaw'], *Prihody Wáclawa Wratislawu swobodného pána z Mitrovic* [The Experiences of Václav Vratislav, *Freiherr* of Mitrovic], ed. F. M. Pelzel (Prague, 1777), 199. Cf. the episode recounted by van der Does (above, n. 21).

³⁴ Michael G. Brennan (ed.), *The Travel Diary of Robert Bargrave, Levant Merchant, 1647–1656* (London, 1999), 106.

³⁵ Jean Carlier de Pinon, *Voyage en Orient*, ed. E. Blochet (Paris, 1920), 119.

³⁶ Stephan Gerlach, *Stephan Gerlachs dess Aeltern Tage-Buch*, ed. Samuel Gerlach (Frankfurt am Main, 1674), 313.

³⁷ Sir Henry Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant* (London, 1636), 14.

³⁸ Hill, *Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, 80 ('pusht' was a Persian word for 'catamite').

openly practised without fear of God or man'; Luigi Bassano, writing in the 1540s on the basis of several years' residence (probably as a captive) in Ottoman territory, explained the high price of boys in the slave market by saying that 'that nation is stained with the vice of sodomy'.³⁹ Such claims were taken up by western travellers whose own experience was less immersive: Nicolas de Nicolay, for example, or Jean Thévenot in the mid-seventeenth century, who declared that the Turks were 'great sodomites . . . it is an extremely common vice among them'.⁴⁰

III

What is the historian to make of such general claims? Many modern accounts downplay or dismiss them, attributing them to prejudice and/or a desire to titillate.⁴¹ And there are indeed two reasons for approaching them with some scepticism. One is the well-known practice, among early-modern authors, of borrowing statements from previous writers; this is a reason to be cautious about any particular claim, especially one couched in general terms. However, where similar experiential statements are made by a wide range of writers in different contexts, one must doubt whether they are all engaged in mere textual repetition.

The other reason for scepticism is the link made by western writers with Islam. Since the Byzantine period, Christian anti-Muslim polemicists had harped on the theme of lust and sensuality.⁴² The main focus was on the alleged vengery of Muhammad, but this included a highly prejudicial interpretation of a verse in the Qur'ān (2:223), 'Your women are a tillage for you; so come unto your tillage as you wish', where 'as you wish' was taken to imply both vaginal and anal intercourse.⁴³ From

³⁹ Theodore Spandounes, *On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors*, ed. and trans. Donald M. Nicol (Cambridge, 1997), 130; Luigi Bassano, *Costumi et i modi particolari della vita de' Turchi*, ed. Franz Babinger (Munich, 1963), 89.

⁴⁰ De Nicolay, *Dans l'empire de Soliman le Magnifique*, 215; Jean Thévenot, *L'Empire du Grand Turc vu par un sujet de Louis XIV*, ed. François Billacois (Paris, 1965), 165. Cf. also Dominique Carnoy, *Représentations de l'Islam dans la France du XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 1998), 130–1, 266.

⁴¹ See, for example, Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice*, 2nd edn (London, 2010), 108.

⁴² See, for example, Adel-Théodore Khoury, *Polémique byzantine contre l'Islam, VIII^e–XIII^e s.*, 2nd edn (Leiden, 1972), 92–3; John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York, 2002), 93, 166, 237.

⁴³ Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford, 1998), 31.

there it was only a short step to asserting that Islam permitted anal intercourse between men — a claim made explicitly, for example, in the oft-reprinted fifteenth-century work *Fortalitium fidei*.⁴⁴ This prejudice became current in Spain, and was used by some there to justify the expulsion of the Moriscos. It may also have been a factor in the sometimes harsher treatment of North Africans, Muslim slaves and Moriscos indicted for sodomy by Spanish tribunals (though other factors were involved, such as the marginality of some of these groups, and Moriscos were in fact statistically under-represented in such trials).⁴⁵ Overall, this assumption may have influenced the attitudes of many westerners who spent time in any Muslim territory, making them both more inclined to notice signs of same-sex activity and more likely to generalize on the basis of such evidence. But that does not mean that the signs and evidence did not exist; too much personal testimony suggests otherwise.

One modern scholar has presented a different argument for scepticism. Discussing the ‘stereotyping of the Muslims as sodomites’ in early-modern British writings, Nabil Matar writes: ‘Given that the North African Muslims had not been defeated . . . the need to demonize and alterize them became paramount’. As he argues, in relation to Spanish colonialism in the New World, ‘Sodomy became the devastating justification for conquest and possession; it served to distance, dehumanize, and ultimately render the Other illegitimate’. He then suggests that references to sodomy in British accounts of Ottoman society were all expressions of such a priori ideological prejudice, not of observation.⁴⁶ This argument is unsatisfactory, not least because it has an a priori character of its own. It was hardly necessary, for political purposes, to ‘demonize’ Muslims by making sexual

⁴⁴ Alfonso de Spina, *Fortalitium fidei* (Lyon, 1487), sig. A6^v. On this development, see Vincenzo Lavenia, ‘Tra eresia e crimine contro natura: sessualità, islamofobia e inquisizioni nell’Europa moderna’, in Grassi and Marcocci (eds.), *Le trasgressioni della carne*, 103–30, esp. 108–22.

⁴⁵ Lavenia, ‘Tra eresia e crimine contro natura’, 127–8 (justifying expulsion); Cristian Berco, *Jerarquías sexuales, estatus público: masculinidad, sodomía y sociedad en la España del Siglo de Oro*, trans. Ester Cano Miguel (Valencia, 2009), 145, 149 (harsher); Rafael Carrasco, *Inquisición y represión sexual en Valencia: historia de los sodomitas, 1565–1786* (Barcelona, 1985), 171–4, 213–14 (marginality); William Monter, *Frontiers of Heresy: The Spanish Inquisition from the Basque Lands to Sicily* (Cambridge, 1990), 292 (under-represented).

⁴⁶ Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York, 1999), 109, 112–13, 125–7.

accusations; the idea that the Ottoman Empire (and/or the corsairs) posed a threat to western Christians was sufficiently established without resort to such ideological artifice. As for the actual claims about sodomy: while there are in fact some first-hand accounts by British authors describing individual experience, to narrow the field to British writings is to set needless limits. Much more evidence is available in other European languages; and, as we shall see, there is clear evidence derived from Ottoman subjects themselves.

At one point, however, Matar sketches a different argument. Noting several disapproving references by British travellers to sodomy in Muslim lands (including one by William Lithgow, who said he had seen it performed openly in Fez), he comments: 'The practice of sodomy was . . . crudely public — much as it was in London, where Donne had satirized the "prostitute boy" (Satyre 1) and Shakespeare the "masculine whore" (*Troilus and Cressida*) . . . Neither did the Jacobean traveller seem to know of King James's public dalliances with male companions'.⁴⁷ By employing the *tu quoque* argument to convict the travellers of hypocrisy, this seems to acknowledge some reality on the Muslim side. But whereas the travellers' accounts cited here report actual experiences, the evidence given on the British side is weak: some literary expressions, from a satire imitating Juvenal and a vituperative speech put in the mouth of an ancient Greek, plus the behaviour of King James towards his favourites (which, while it challenges precise sexual-psychological classification to this day, certainly never involved sexual intercourse in public). That some acts of sodomy took place in Britain is undeniable; that the practice was culturally prominent and widely observed is much harder to believe. This point is explored further below.

Here too the argument is greatly weakened by confining it to British evidence. In fact the *tu quoque* approach can have real force — so long as it is applied to other, more relevant societies. It is to the Christian lands of the western Mediterranean that we should now turn.

IV

Only in the last few decades have historians realized the extent to which same-sex relations between men were part of the fabric of

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

life in early-modern western Mediterranean societies.⁴⁸ Michael Roche's *Forbidden Friendships* (1996) presented the most striking example, Florence in the late fifteenth century, where a special magistrature, the 'Office of the Night', processed the accusations. Its archive revealed that in the period 1459–1502 more than thirteen thousand men and boys were implicated, of whom at least two thousand were convicted; by the time they reached the age of forty, an absolute majority of Florentine men had been named in these processes.⁴⁹ Subsequent monographs have shed light on same-sex relations in Lucca, and on gangs and young male prostitution in early-modern Rome; several studies (beginning in the 1980s) have illuminated the situation in Venice.⁵⁰ While Florence seems to have been an extreme case, the patterns of social behaviour revealed by these Italian sources are remarkably consistent. Essentially the same picture has emerged from Sicily, several parts of Spain, and Portugal.⁵¹

One constant factor is age differentiation. In Florence, 90 per cent of the passive partners were under the age of nineteen, with an average age of sixteen, and 83 per cent of the active ones were nineteen or over (with the majority of these under thirty). The watershed age in Lucca was eighteen; in Valencia it was nineteen,

⁴⁸ For simplicity's sake I shall use 'western' here for western Christian territories, thereby excluding North Africa.

⁴⁹ Michael Roche, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1996), 60, 115.

⁵⁰ Umberto Grassi, *L'Offizio sopra l'Onestà: il controllo della sodomia nella Lucca del cinquecento* (Milan, 2014); Marina Baldassari, *Bande giovanili e 'vizio nefando': violenza e sessualità nella Roma barocca* (Rome, 2005); Patricia H. Labalme, 'Sodomy and Venetian Justice in the Renaissance', *Legal History Review*, lii (1984); Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York, 1985), 109–45; Gabriele Martini, *Il 'vizio nefando' nella Venezia del Seicento: aspetti sociali e repressione di giustizia* (Rome, 1988); Nicholas S. Davidson, 'Sodomy in Early Modern Venice', in Tom Betteridge (ed.), *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester, 2002); cf. also Romano Canosa, *Storia di una grande paura: la sodomia a Firenze e a Venezia nel Quattrocento* (Milan, 1991).

⁵¹ See Carrasco, *Inquisición y represión sexual en Valencia* (Valencia); Monter, *Frontiers of Heresy*, 276–99 (Sicily, Aragon); Tomás A. Mantecón Movellán, 'Los mocitos de Galindo: sexualidad *contra natura*, culturas proscritas y control social en la edad moderna', in Mantecón Movellán (ed.), *Bajtin y la historia de la cultura popular: cuarenta años de debate* (Santander, 2008) (Seville); Riera i Sans, *Sodomites catalans* (Barcelona); Luiz Mott, *O sexo proibido: virgens, gays e escravos nas garras da Inquisição* (Campinas, 1988), and Luiz Mott, 'Le Pouvoir inquisitorial et la répression de l'abominable péché de sodomie dans le monde luso-brésilien', in Gabriel Audisio (ed.), *Inquisition et pouvoir* (Aix-en-Provence, 2004) (Portugal).

and the average age of the under-nineteens was fifteen and a half. All the cases tried in Bologna, and most of those heard by the Portuguese Inquisition, involved an adult man and an adolescent.⁵² The transition from boyhood to adulthood was identified in general terms with the first growth of a beard, which typically occurred between eighteen and twenty.⁵³ 'Beardless' was a term normally used to describe boys at the age when they could be objects of adult desire. It was apparently a common assumption that many adult men would naturally be attracted to such youths, not because the men were homosexual in the modern sense but, on the contrary, because the youths did not yet have all those properly male characteristics that would make them undesirable. As Rafael Carrasco puts it, the idea was not that the men had a perverted form of desire, but simply that they had a greater quantum of desire, and/or allowed it to operate in a more uncontrolled way.⁵⁴ The vast majority of adult men who engaged in such practices turned, sooner or later, to sex with women instead; in Florence their same-sex activities declined markedly after their early thirties, which was typically the age when men married.⁵⁵

Generally, same-sex relations seem to have been merely physical; long-term affective relationships were rare. Carrasco even states that there was 'a radical separation between affection and sex'; the Roman evidence studied by Marina Baldassari yields, likewise, no signs of lasting affection.⁵⁶ But one case in Bologna did involve a three-year relationship, and the Florentine records reveal some cases of men in love with boys (though never vice versa). In those cases, the man would typically give the boy a succession of small gifts — items of clothing, trinkets,

⁵² Roche, *Forbidden Friendships*, 96, 116–17; Grassi, *L'Offizio sopra l'Onestà*, 79; Carrasco, *Inquisición y represión sexual en Valencia*, 222; Ugo Zuccarello, 'La sodomia al tribunale bolognese del Torrione tra XVI e XVII secolo', *Società e storia*, lxxxvii (2000); Mott, *O sexo proibido*, 75–129. The significance of this feature, which was connected also to power relations and hierarchical assumptions, is explored by many of the monographs cited here; see, for example, Roche, *Forbidden Friendships*, 87–111, 161–75. Note also that the term 'partner' is used here in a narrow sense, meaning participant in the sexual act.

⁵³ Roche, *Forbidden Friendships*, 116; Mott, 'Musulmani sodomiti in Portogallo e bardassi cristiani in Africa del Nord', 163.

⁵⁴ Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1999), 115 (assumption); Carrasco, *Inquisición y represión sexual en Valencia*, 131–2.

⁵⁵ Roche, *Forbidden Friendships*, 117, 171.

⁵⁶ Carrasco, *Inquisición y represión sexual en Valencia*, 107; Baldassari, *Bande giovanili e 'vizio nefando'*, 163.

and so on.⁵⁷ The fact that such gifts passed, in the bailate, from Giancesino to Gregorio must indicate who was the older (and, very probably, the active) partner; such behaviour fits an established practice, even if the expressions of passionate affection on both sides make their case a very unusual one.

This whole pattern of behaviour corresponds quite closely to the one described by visitors to the Ottoman lands. Almost all the examples given earlier in this article involved the sexual desire of adult men for boys or youths, the only — marginal — exceptions being the case of the twenty-two-year-old Robert Bargrave, and possibly that of the young man spanked at the Algiers consulate. There is a mass of evidence from Ottoman sources that confirms this pattern. The classic study by Khaled El-Rouayheb comments that ‘Homosexual relations in the early Ottoman Arab East were almost always conceived as involving an adult man ... and an adolescent boy’, with the latter described as ‘beardless’; Leslie Peirce notes that the Turks used the special word *emred* (from the Arabic *amrad*) to mean a beardless boy, and that males became ‘off limits as sexual objects once they acquired full physical (and thus legal) maturity’.⁵⁸ That sexual attraction to boys was natural, not radically different from attraction to women, was an idea deeply embedded in the culture. Peirce cites a fatwa issued by the Grand Mufti Kemalpaşazade (d. 1534): asked whether an imam could forbid a teenaged boy from standing at the front of a group of men saying their prayers, on the grounds that he would distract them, Kemalpaşazade answered ‘yes’, so long as he was *müşteha*, meaning sexually desirable.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Zuccarello, ‘La sodomia al tribunale bolognese del Torrione’, 40 (Bologna, gifts); Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 167–9 (men in love, gifts). I leave aside the case of men undergoing ludic marriage in Rome in 1578, which is highly untypical: see Giuseppe Marcocci, ‘Matrimoni omosessuali nella Roma del tardo cinquecento: su un passo del “Journal” di Montaigne’, *Quaderni storici*, new ser., xlv, no. 133 (2010); Gary Ferguson, *Same-Sex Marriage in Renaissance Rome: Sexuality, Identity, and Community in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 2016).

⁵⁸ Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago, 2005), 26; Leslie Peirce, ‘Seniority, Sexuality, and Social Order: The Vocabulary of Gender in Early Modern Ottoman Society’, in Madeline C. Zilfi (ed.), *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era* (Leiden, 1997), 174, 177.

⁵⁹ Peirce, ‘Seniority, Sexuality, and Social Order’, 178; on the presumed naturalness of such desire and its relation to heterosexual desire, see Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, NC, 2005), *passim*.

As the basic pattern of same-sex relations in western Mediterranean societies was so similar to that in Ottoman territory, it should not be surprising that many of the practices observed in the latter by Europeans could also be found in western Mediterranean Christendom. Evidence of the sexual exploitation of slaves in those western societies is, admittedly, much rarer; but that probably reflects the huge asymmetry in documentation, since, where slaves in the 'west' are concerned, we have nothing like the mass of personal testimonies of former western slaves in the 'east'. Given what is known of the sometimes predatory treatment of free youths by men in Italy and Iberia, it would be surprising if the unfree ones were not similarly treated. Fragmentary evidence suggests that they were: a sixteenth-century Sicilian, for example, warning about the danger of keeping good-looking 'pages or slave boys'; or the testimony of Pedro de León, who acted as confessor to condemned criminals in late-sixteenth-century Seville, that some male slaves were bought there specifically to be hired out as prostitutes.⁶⁰

The practice of slavery was a pan-Mediterranean phenomenon; so too were corsairing and galley warfare, with an all-male social world enclosed in the galley and its onshore *bagno* of slave or convict rowers. A report, commissioned by the Pope, on the moral failings of the Christian fleet during the Lepanto campaign (1571) devoted a special section to sodomy. Each galley had several boys, brought there by senior officers, often for sexual purposes; 'many other wicked Christians, who are not sailors or junior officers, commit abominable acts with those youths, paying them money'. The author recommended allowing only adults on the galleys, to avoid 'the great dishonour to Christianity that comes from behaving like the Muslims, who bring youths on board'.⁶¹ The problem was a familiar one; at the outset of the campaign the Pope had forbidden 'beardless boys' to board the

⁶⁰ Argisto Giuffredi, *Avvertimenti cristiani*, ed. Luigi Natoli (Palermo, 1896), 77; Carrasco, *Inquisición y represión sexual en Valencia*, 213–14.

⁶¹ Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Vatican City, MS Misc., Arm. II, vol. 110, fos. 394^r–396^r ('molti altrj malj Xr[ist]ianj, che non sono ne marinarij, ne inferiorj officialj, con il mezzo del denaro, con gli detti giouani fanno cose abomineuolj', 'tanto dishonore al Christianesimo che si faccia come fanno i Turchi; che menano li giouani').

papal vessels.⁶² Such details suggest that the Christians did indeed behave like the Muslims. One of the claims mentioned above, that Uluç Ali kept a supply of boys for his crew and rowers, may seem more extreme, perhaps stretching credibility; but in late-seventeenth-century Marseille the convicts who rowed in the naval galleys had their own *gitons* or catamites, street boys aged between fourteen and eighteen, a hundred of whom slept in the barracks.⁶³ As for soldiers: the Florentine records contain several accounts of young servants or pages who were exploited by soldiers in the field or at military outposts, and in one instance the authorities cancelled the fine imposed on a sodomite because he 'frequented soldiers, who are commonly profligate in that vice'.⁶⁴

Where same-sex relations more generally are concerned, the claims made by visitors to the Ottoman lands can again be broadly matched in western Mediterranean territory. That some boys went actively looking for men (as noted by Gerlach in Istanbul) is clear from the Florentine evidence; payments or gifts were common, and in some cases the boys were clearly prostituting themselves. In Seville several youths signalled their interest or availability more subtly by wearing the finery they had been given.⁶⁵ As for sex in public places: Lithgow's claim that in Fez he had witnessed buggery 'at mid-day, in the very Market places' is unusual, but only in respect of the time of day and therefore the literal visibility. In the Florentine records, 28 per cent of the locations where sexual acts had occurred — typically after dark — were public spaces such as alleyways, or the fields outside the city walls.⁶⁶ (The episode witnessed by Hill and Sutton on the outskirts of Edirne fits this locational pattern too.) The figure for taverns was 15 per cent; and in Rome there were

⁶² Alessandro Barbero, *Lepanto: la battaglia dei tre imperi* (Rome, 2010), 385; cf. Manuel Rivero Rodríguez, *La batalla de Lepanto: cruzada, guerra santa e identidad confesional* (Madrid, 2008), 140.

⁶³ André Zysberg, *Les Galériens: vies et destins de 60,000 forçats sur les galères de France, 1680–1748* (Paris, 1987), 161–2.

⁶⁴ Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 163.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 164–6; Pedro de León, *Grandeza y miseria en Andalucía: testimonio de una encrucijada historia, 1578–1616*, ed. Pedro Herrera Puga (Granada, 1981), 435–9.

⁶⁶ William Lithgow, *The Totall Discourse of the Rare Adventures and Painfull Peregrinations* (Glasgow, 1906), 323; Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 153. In the Aragonese Inquisition records the figure was 26 per cent: Berco, *Jerarquías sexuales, estatus público*, 57. Lithgow's 'Market places' probably meant the alleyways of the souk.

many inns known as venues for male–male sexual encounters, some with rooms set aside for the purpose.⁶⁷ The same phenomenon could be found in Ottoman territory: a set of queries sent to Rome by a priest in Tunis in 1630 included the question whether Christians working in inns sinned mortally if they offered customers ‘some more private rooms for their meals, even though they know that those rooms are most commonly requested for the purpose of practising sodomy more conveniently’.⁶⁸ Other locations in the urban geography of sodomy included commercial venues where all-male company could be found. A fourteen-year-old in a bathhouse in Lucca, who was sodomized by many men, was said to be used by the owner as a way of attracting customers; similarly de Sosa wrote that the barbers in Algiers kept attractive boys in their shops to bring in more business, so that the barber-shops were in effect ‘public brothels’.⁶⁹ One study of sodomy in Venice has observed ‘a strong relationship between barbers and homosexuality, suggesting that they may have provided important links to the subculture’; possibly Gregorio, the barber in the bailate, had acquired experience of this during his apprenticeship.⁷⁰

Western records confirm the reality of these practices in western Mediterranean Christendom. Their reality in Ottoman territory is amply confirmed, in turn, by Ottoman authors. El-Rouayheb adduces numerous writings by Arabs, concluding that ‘the idea that pederastic liaisons were a common and visible part of the culture’ can be demonstrated ‘on the basis of the biographical, homiletic, and juridical literature, as well as the Western travel literature’.⁷¹ Many works written by Turks outside the Arab lands could also be cited; one example must suffice here. A treatise by Mustafa Ali of Gallipoli, composed in Istanbul in 1599–1600, comments disapprovingly that more men prefer ‘beardless, smooth-cheeked, handsome, and sweet-tempered servant boys’ than prefer women, but immediately points out the advantage that ‘beardless youths can

⁶⁷ Baldassari, *Bande giovanili e ‘vizio nefando’*, 55, 73.

⁶⁸ Johannes a Sancto Felice, *Triumphus misericordiae, id est sacrum ordinis SSS. Trinitatis institutum redemptio captivorum* (Vienna, 1704), 103.

⁶⁹ Grassi, *L’Offizio sopra l’Onestà*, 111–12; de Sosa, *Topographia e historia general de Argel*, fo. 38^r. For Ottoman evidence of this practice in baths and coffee-houses, see El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World*, 41–3.

⁷⁰ Ruggiero, *Boundaries of Eros*, 138.

⁷¹ El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World*, 79.

be a companion whether at home or on journeys', and then supplies a rather lyrical list of types of boy — Turks, Arabs, Bosnians, etc. — and their differing attractions. (Some Bosnians, he notes, are still beardless and beautiful in their twenties, 'causing distraction of the mind to whoever sees them'.) Only when he talks about pirates does he return to his disapproving mode: 'They single out beardless boys and use them as did the people of Lot'. And there is a critical tone also in his account of wine taverns: 'Some come to the tavern with their boy lover, they eat and drink, and when evening falls they make their way over to the tavern's private room. According to the demands of their lust, they extract milk from the sugar cane [sc. ejaculate]'.⁷²

V

Thus far, it has been argued that the basic forms of male–male sexual behaviour discussed here belonged to a single, pan-Mediterranean pattern, and that this is the essential background against which any claims about the greater prominence of these relations in the Ottoman world must be judged. There is one further issue that has to be addressed in order to support this 'Mediterranean' categorization: the difference between the western Mediterranean lands and the territories of northern Europe, where evidence for this as a general pattern is largely lacking.

Proving a negative has its familiar problems; nevertheless, some indicative points can be made. While there were many variables that could affect statistics for prosecutions and convictions, the overall comparison between southern and northern Europe is striking. The huge figures for Florence have already been mentioned. (Note, however, that the largest figure includes those who were implicated, but not tried.) In Lucca 1,167 were prosecuted for sodomy in 1539–99, and 464 convicted. In early-sixteenth-century Venice there were more than five trials for sodomy per year.⁷³ Spanish statistics are lower but still significant, given the greater severity of the punishments: in Seville, at least seventy-one were executed in

⁷² Douglas S. Brookes (ed. and trans.), *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century: Mustafa Ali's Meva'idü'n-nefa'is fi kava'idü'l-mecalis* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 28–9, 37, 131.

⁷³ Grassi, *L'Offizio sopra l'Onestà*, 40; Davidson, 'Sodomy in Early Modern Venice', 68.

1567–1616; in Valencia, 109 were prosecuted in 1566–1629; in Barcelona there were 124 trials, involving 137 individuals, in 1540–1640.⁷⁴ As for northern Europe: in Denmark only four cases, involving five men, are known before 1700; four pre-1700 cases are known in Sweden, two in Norway, and two in Scotland.⁷⁵ Two sodomites were punished in Frankfurt in 1562–1696, and two in Nuremberg in 1600–92.⁷⁶ In Geneva, closer to the Mediterranean world, sixty men or boys were tried for sodomy in 1400–1650; of those, one was Greek, three were ‘Turks’, six were Italian and seventeen were French, some from France’s Mediterranean provinces.⁷⁷ In France, the Parlement de Paris was the highest court for a huge area — mostly but not exclusively northern — with a population of 8–10 million; in the period 1540–1700 it dealt with appeals from 131 men convicted of sodomy. (Nearly thirty of these cases were from the southern half of France, and/or involved Italians.)⁷⁸ The church courts of the fifteenth-century diocese of Troyes heard no sodomy cases at all.⁷⁹ In Amsterdam there were only two convictions for sodomy in the sixteenth century, and combining Amsterdam, The Hague and Utrecht yields only thirty-four for the whole period 1400–1650 (thirty-three if we subtract one Italian).⁸⁰ Seven of the largest cities of the southern Netherlands, taken together, yield higher totals: in 1400–1700, 181 trials were held, with 305

⁷⁴ Mary E. Perry, ‘The “Nefarious Sin” in Early Modern Seville’, *Journal of Homosexuality*, xvi (1989), 67 (Seville); Carrasco, *Inquisición y represión sexual en Valencia*, 172 (Valencia); Riera i Sans, *Sodomites catalans*, 182–416 (Barcelona).

⁷⁵ Wilhelm von Rosen, ‘Almost Nothing: Male–Male Sex in Denmark, 1550–1800’, in Katherine O’Donnell and Michael O’Rourke (eds.), *Queer Masculinities, 1550–1800: Siting Same-Sex Desire in the Early Modern World* (Basingstoke, 2006), 79–81; Fredrik Silverstolpe, ‘Inledning’, in Silverstolpe *et al.*, *Sympatiens hemlighetsfulla makt: Stockholms homosexuella, 1860–1960* (Stockholm, 1999), 18–20 (Sweden); Øystein Rian, ‘Mellom straf og fortieelse: homoseksualitet i Norge fra vikingtiden til 1930-årene’, in Marianne C. Brantsæter *et al.* (eds.), *Norsk homoforskning* (Oslo, 2001), 33–5 (Norway); Jeffrey Meek, *Queer Voices in Post-War Scotland* (Basingstoke, 2015), 14.

⁷⁶ Richard van Dülmen, *Theater des Schreckens: Gerichtspraxis und Strafroutine in der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1988), 190–3.

⁷⁷ E. William Monter, ‘Sodomy and Heresy in Early Modern Switzerland’, *Journal of Homosexuality*, vi (1981), 44–5, 54–5.

⁷⁸ Tom Hamilton, ‘Sodomy and Criminal Justice in the Parlement of Paris, ca. 1540–ca. 1700’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, xxix (2020), 310, 314–15.

⁷⁹ Sara McDougall, ‘The Prosecution of Sex in late Medieval Troyes’, in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times* (Berlin, 2008), 698.

⁸⁰ Theo van der Meer, *Sodoms zaad in Nederland: het ontstaan van homoseksualiteit in de vroegmoderne tijd* (Nijmegen, 1995), 21, 459–60.

people convicted (of whom 234 were executed).⁸¹ Yet since the population involved was between 250,000 and 300,000 for much of that period, the rate of prosecution was still much lower than in Barcelona or Seville. (The figures are, in any case, swollen by the one puzzling exception to the general rule about northern Europe: half the convictions were in Bruges, where a vigorous anti-sodomy campaign occurred in the fifteenth century. The reason is unclear, though one historian has suggested that sodomy was more prevalent there because of close commercial contacts with Italy.)⁸² Overall, the evidence of a north-south divide is very clear. The lack of an Inquisition in the north is irrelevant, as the Inquisition did not exercise general jurisdiction over sodomy in most of southern Europe. And while there are obvious reasons to suppose that the offences prosecuted were a fraction of those committed, those reasons would mostly apply in the south too. It is true that northern punishments tended to be severe, but that is true also of Seville, for example.

Early-modern England, with its wealth of primary documentation, has not lacked attention from historians, yet the known evidence here is very scanty. Before the 'Buggery Act' of 1533, sodomy was tried in the church courts. At the bishop of London's commissary court in 1470–1516 one person was accused of it out of 21,000; a study of all courts in Kent for 1460–1560 has found no prosecutions at all; a general study of sexual crimes in this period calls the 'paucity' of such evidence 'striking', even in defamation cases.⁸³ After 1533 the offence was

⁸¹ Jonas Roelens, 'Fornicating Foreigners: Sodomy, Migration, and Urban Society in the Southern Low Countries, 1400–1700', *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies*, xli (2017), 230, 240.

⁸² Marc Boone 'State Power and Illicit Sexuality: The Persecution of Sodomy in Late Medieval Bruges', *Journal of Medieval History*, xxii (1996); Wannes Dupont, Elwin Hofman and Jonas Roelens, *Verzwegen verlangen: een geschiedenis van homoseksualiteit in België* (Antwerp, 2017), 37 (half); Mariann Naessens, 'Seksuele delicten in het laatmiddeleeuwse Gent: de grenzen van een kwantitatieve benadering van de bronnen', in Aude Musin, Xavier Rousseaux and Frédéric Vesentini (eds.), *Violence, conciliation et répression: recherches sur l'histoire du crime, de l'Antiquité au XXI^e siècle* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2008) (Italy). Note that the first two studies apparently include women in their totals (c.15 per cent according to Naessens); Roelens's total also includes 6–8 men from the Mediterranean region ('Fornicating Foreigners', 236–7).

⁸³ Richard M. Wunderli, *London Church Courts and Society on the Eve of the Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981), 83–4; Karen Jones, *Gender and Petty Crime in Late Medieval England: The Local Courts in Kent, 1460–1560* (Woodbridge, 2006), 129; Martin Ingram, *Carnal Knowledge: Regulating Sex in England, 1470–1600* (Cambridge, 2017), 35 ('paucity').

typically tried at the county assizes. In five Home Counties only six cases occurred in 1559–1625; Essex, with a population of around a hundred thousand, had no cases at all.⁸⁴ The suggestion, by Alan Bray, that the lack of prosecutions confirms that sodomy was present on a ‘massive’ scale and was simply ignored by the legal system, is very unconvincing. And while there may be some truth in Bray’s broader argument that the authorities were most concerned with cases that threatened the social order, it is noteworthy that acts of bestiality, committed in barns or remote fields and not threatening the social order at all, were prosecuted much more frequently.⁸⁵

Other quantifiable evidence from England is mostly lacking. One historian, taking a small and untypical sample from the monastic visitations of 1535–6 (reporting men accused of sodomy), has extrapolated to claim that at least one quarter of all Englishmen engaged in male–male sex.⁸⁶ But these visitations were hugely prejudicial exercises, designed to discredit monasticism; during the process, the definition of sodomy was altered to include masturbation, and the entire ‘Northern Visitation’ seems to have recorded accusations as facts, making little or no effort to validate them. Even so, without the masturbation cases the men accused of sodomy (in the usual sense) form only 1.1 per cent of the monastic population in the Norwich Visitation and 1.3 per cent in the Northern one — a far remove from 25 per cent or more.⁸⁷

Again, in southern Europe, texts denouncing sodomy could contain specific descriptions of actual contemporary behaviour — as in Bernardino of Siena’s sermons, which described boys soliciting sex, and parents complicit in the liaisons of their sons with influential men.⁸⁸ Moral treatises and sermons in northern

⁸⁴ See the relevant volumes of J. S. Cockburn (ed.), *Calendar of Assize Records* (London, 1975–).

⁸⁵ Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 2nd edn (New York, 1995), 73–9; for bestiality cases, see again Cockburn (ed.), *Calendar of Assize Records* (indexed under ‘buggery’).

⁸⁶ Randolph Trumbach, ‘Renaissance Sodomy, 1500–1700’, in Matt Cook (ed.), *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex between Men since the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007), 50–1.

⁸⁷ Anthony N. Shaw, ‘The *Compendium compertorum* and the Making of the Suppression Act of 1536’ (Warwick Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2003), 93, 335, 346–7, 349–50, and 446–51 (statistics used here, with nunneries excluded).

⁸⁸ Mormando, *Preacher’s Demons*, 132–9. Rocke confirms the accuracy of these descriptions: *Forbidden Friendships*, 164–7, 175–8.

Europe, including ones by English Puritans excoriating their society's vices at length, lack almost any such sense of *actualité*, resorting instead to rhetorical tropes, historical examples, and biblical or patristic references. 'Sodom' often stands for debauchery in general, or a range of sins. This is true, for example, of Philip Stubbes's *Anatomie of Abuses*, which offers vivid descriptions of women's fashions, church-ales and cockfights, but no observation of male-male sexual behaviour whatsoever. (Its references to 'playing the Sodomit' — including the one mistakenly treated as a *locus classicus* by Bray and almost all subsequent historians of male-male sex in this period — are in fact to heterosexual debauchery.)⁸⁹ This contrast does suggest a relative lack of observable behaviour.

As for more qualitative aspects of the evidence: the key question is whether age-differentiation was systematic here, as in the Mediterranean region. Cases involving men and boys certainly were recorded in England. That most monastic accusations took this form is hardly decisive; we may doubt the typicality of the sex lives of monks, with their access to choristers, schoolboys and teenaged novices in a largely all-male context. In the general population — in England and elsewhere in northern Europe — the fact that there were cases involving adults with boys is unsurprising, given the role in these societies of juvenile employment and apprenticeship, and the power relations entailed thereby. In some of these cases the boys may have been willing partners. But the northern European evidence yields no sense whatsoever of a generally recognized or accepted pattern in which a young man would pass at a certain age from passive sodomy to active, before settling finally into marriage. Cases involving two adults, extremely rare in southern Europe, were quite common in the north. Existing studies yield twenty-one cases of men prosecuted for sodomy in England between 1390 and 1650 where the age-status of their partner or victim was recorded; subtracting one (a man from Spanish territory) and adding seven other similarly recorded cases (an Englishman tried in Ireland, four defamation cases, an Oxford Fellow expelled from his college, a clergyman deprived of his living) gives twenty-seven adults. Of these, eighteen were accused of sex with

⁸⁹ Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (London, 1583), sigs. D2^v, D6^v, L8^v; Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 35.

boys and thirteen with men, while four, double-counted here, were accused of both; so 48 per cent of these adults were thought to have had or sought sex with other adults.⁹⁰ In Florence, if we exclude a transitional age-range of nineteen to twenty-two, the cases of adults sodomized by adults came to just over 1 per cent.⁹¹ France, a country both northern and Mediterranean, offers a mixed picture; but with more than 25 per cent of passive partners aged over twenty (and more than 40 per cent of active partners over forty), the Parlement of Paris cases did diverge significantly from the Florentine pattern.⁹² The scanty German records also offer instances of adult men having sex with other adults, sometimes in a small circle of mutual partners — an extraordinarily rare phenomenon in southern Europe.⁹³ In fifteenth-century Regensburg only two sodomy cases are known, both involving adult–adult sex. One of the accused had offered to be active or passive — again, something almost unknown among adults in southern Europe.⁹⁴ Cases of adult–adult sex have also been noted in pre-1675 Holland.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Cockburn (ed.), *Calendar of Assize Records* (indexed under ‘sodomy’); Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 38, 43, 72–3; G. R. Quaipe, *Wanton Wenches and Wayward Wives: Peasants and Illicit Sex in Early Seventeenth Century England* (London, 1979), 176–7; Wunderli, *London Church Courts and Society on the Eve of the Reformation*, 84; Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago, 1991), 51–3, 84; Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560–1640* (Oxford, 1996), 271; Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2002), 81–2; Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven, CT, 2002), 305 (with boys: the accused said he had acquired the habit in Italy); Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), 116–18; Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia, 2006), 244 (n. 67); Robert Mills, ‘Male–Male Love and Sex in the Middle Ages, 1000–1500’, in Cook (ed.), *Gay History of Britain*, 35, 41–2.

⁹¹ Locke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 243 (or 3 per cent if the transitional age ends at 20).

⁹² Hamilton, ‘Sodomy and Criminal Justice in the Parlement of Paris’, 323–4.

⁹³ Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, *Sodom and Gomorrah: On the Everyday Reality and Persecution of Homosexuals in the Middle Ages*, trans. John Phillips (London, 2001), 42–3; Helmut Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400–1600* (Chicago, 2003), 24, 40, 79, 92.

⁹⁴ Christine Reinle, ‘Zur Rechtspraxis gegenüber Homosexuellen: eine Fallstudie aus dem Regensburg des 15. Jahrhunderts’, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, xlv (1996).

⁹⁵ Theo van der Meer, ‘“Are Those People like Us”: Early Modern Homosexuality in Holland’, in O’Donnell and O’Rourke (eds.), *Queer Masculinities*, 60.

Finally, recognizing this north–south divide not only clarifies the special nature of the Mediterranean pattern; it may also contribute to the larger debate about the emergence of ‘modern’ homosexuality. A widely accepted argument proposes that something like the modern form, involving effeminacy, adult cōteries, and perhaps social self-identification, emerged around 1700 in northern Europe, appearing only much later in the south.⁹⁶ (The significance of that delay has never been explored.) Even the leading proponent of this argument, Randolph Trumbach, admits that the reasons remain very obscure.⁹⁷ But the problem has been intensified by a general assumption that the Florentine evidence can be used to supplement the scanty northern evidence, or indeed to form the template for its interpretation. This approach has generated the near-impossible problem of explaining an apparently rapid transition from the Mediterranean pattern to the modern one, which differs from it almost entirely.

VI

To return to the Mediterranean: if the basic patterns of same-sex relations were the same throughout the Mediterranean world, it may be tempting to conclude that when observers from the western Mediterranean lands remarked on the prominence of such behaviour in the eastern ones, they were just being hypocritical. And yet, even when allowance is made for their desire to assert superiority and their prejudice against Islam, there are reasons to think that this behaviour really was more salient in Ottoman territory — more socially visible, more culturally accepted. One indicative detail is the testimony of a young Morisco who emigrated to Algiers but returned to Zaragoza in 1581, informing the Inquisition that he had come back scandalized because ‘he saw how the Moors practised sodomy in public’.⁹⁸ But once again, the clearest evidence comes

⁹⁶ See Randolph Trumbach, ‘London’s Sodomites: Homosexual Behavior and Western Culture in the 18th Century’, *Journal of Social History*, xi (1977), and Randolph Trumbach, ‘Modern Sodomy: The Origins of Homosexuality, 1700–1800’, in Cook (ed.), *Gay History of Britain*; Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap’s Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England, 1700–1820* (London, 1992); van der Meer, *Sodom’s zaad in Nederland*; Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (London, 2012), 128–32.

⁹⁷ Trumbach, ‘Modern Sodomy’, 78.

⁹⁸ Monter, *Frontiers of Heresy*, 293.

from Ottoman sources. A wide range of early-modern texts show that the sexual affairs of prominent men (officials, writers, scholars) with boys, sometimes involving open infatuation, were matters of common knowledge and gossip. Officials prompted such gossip by proudly displaying their handsome slave-boys; in some cases it became known that men had ruined themselves by showering gifts on their beloveds.⁹⁹ This does not mean that the sexual behaviour itself was completely open. While libertines propositioned boys in public, and some urban sites of sexual activity lacked privacy (as they did in western Mediterranean towns), most men preserved some discretion.¹⁰⁰ But to anyone interested in sexual gossip, information was easily available. And while discretion was normally applied to one's own sexual acts, at least by those who had a social position to keep up, cultural references to such acts were freely made. The seventeenth-century traveller Evliya Çelebi, for example, wrote about his visit to the 'Fountain of Luck' near Sofia, an intermittent spring which allegedly refused to flow for any man who had been sodomized in his youth; he described how people made fun of those for whom it stopped, or who were reluctant to try, commenting that out of seventy who tried while he was there, only five succeeded. (He himself was fearful, though he did in fact succeed.)¹⁰¹ It is possible to conceive of a group of seventeenth-century Italian men having such an awkwardly jocular discussion in private, but very hard to imagine one of them presenting it in a first-person narrative designed for a wide readership.

The reason for discretion in one's actual conduct was, of course, that official norms, religious and legal, condemned such acts; those norms had some influence on social attitudes, and were relevant to judicial processes and punishments. The situation here was similar on both sides of the Mediterranean, but not identical. It is very common to find, in a given society, some disjunction between norms and practice: many societies

⁹⁹ El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World*, 33, 40 (display), 42–3, 80–4; Lutz Berger, *Gesellschaft und Individuum in Damaskus, 1550–1791* (Würzburg, 2007), 240–54, esp. 250 (ruined).

¹⁰⁰ Zoltan Szombathy, *Mujūn: Libertinism in Mediaeval Muslim Society and Literature* (n.p., 2013), 134 (libertines, discretion); Arno Schmitt, 'Liwāṭ im Fiqh: Männliche Homosexualität?', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, iv (2001–2), 108–9 (discretion).

¹⁰¹ Robert Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi*, 2nd edn (Leiden, 2006), 119–20.

have strongly reprobated fornication, for example, while tolerating prostitution. To summarize in advance: where early-modern attitudes to sodomy were concerned, the differences between the two parts of the Mediterranean involved both norms and actual conduct. On the one hand the western norms had taken a harsher line; while this widened the gap between norms and practice, it also put pressure on the practitioners to behave less openly. And on the other hand, while the eastern norms were less severe, the disjunction there was more noticeable because the sexual practices could afford to be more visible, enjoying as they did some cultural legitimization.

The general disapproval of same-sex acts in Christian moral theology, based on biblical passages, was greatly intensified in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by writers who linked the sin of sodomy to both idolatry and, especially, heresy.¹⁰² Such views dictated the harsh line taken by ecclesiastical courts, including the Inquisition when it had jurisdiction over sodomy.¹⁰³ They could also generate powerful feelings of disapproval in parts of the population. Many came out to witness the execution of sodomites, and more could be swept up in occasional moral panics. In 1519, when a Franciscan preaching in the main church in Valencia declared that the current attack of plague was divine punishment for sodomy, brought into the city by foreign merchants, the congregation rushed out and seized four such merchants, taking them immediately to a judge, who ordered them to be burnt.¹⁰⁴ (Different attitudes coexisted uneasily, however, in western Mediterranean societies; while most trial processes had begun with a denunciation, historians have found a significant degree of tolerance of sodomy in the wider population.)¹⁰⁵ Islam also

¹⁰² Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, *Krötenkuss und schwarzer Kater: Ketzeri, Götzendienst und Unzucht in der inquisitorischen Phantasie des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Warendorf, 1996); Fernanda Molina, 'La herejización de la sodomia en la sociedad moderna: consideraciones teológicas y praxis inquisitorial', *Hispania sacra*, lxii (2010), 556–8.

¹⁰³ See Vincenzo Lavenia, *Un'eresia indicibile: Inquisizione e crimini contro natura in età moderna* (Bologna, 2015).

¹⁰⁴ Francisco Tomás y Valiente, 'El crimen y pecado contra natura', in Tomás y Valiente *et al.*, *Sexo barroco y otras transgresiones premodernas* (Madrid, 1990), 52.

¹⁰⁵ Nicola Pizzolato, "'Lo diavolo mi ingannao': la sodomia nelle campagne siciliane, 1572–1664', *Quaderni storici*, xli, no. 122 (2006), 450; Baldassari, *Bande giovanili e 'vizio nefando'*, 121; Berco, *Jerarquías sexuales, estatus público*, 67. The *bailo's* investigation in 1588 also tends to confirm this.

reprobated sodomy. Hostile references to the sin of the ‘people of Lot’ in the Qur’ān were supplemented by several hadiths (sayings attributed to Muhammad) that denounced it and called for strong punishments.¹⁰⁶ Yet, although sodomy was always sinful in Islam, some Sufi thinkers in the early-modern period developed an aesthetic-mystical view of human beauty — as a pathway to contemplating divine perfection — that enabled them to justify gazing at beautiful boys as a quasi-devotional act. (This attitude reinforced much popular anti-Sufi comment of a ribald nature.)¹⁰⁷ No real equivalent to this can be found in early-modern Christianity.

Where legal codes were concerned, the western societies, influenced by their religious norms, were quite draconian. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries a range of fierce punishments were instituted by Italian cities, including execution, castration, mutilation and flogging, with fines and banishment as the most lenient options.¹⁰⁸ Spanish legislation decreed death by burning, and the application of the law could be savage: in one case in Seville in 1579 two seventeen-year-olds, convicted only of ‘frolicking’ together in bed and ‘touching each other’, were burnt.¹⁰⁹ The Aragonese Inquisition was less severe, but still harsh: of those condemned to punishment by its tribunals, 17 per cent were executed and 39 per cent sent to the galleys, where life expectancy was short.¹¹⁰ In Venice the official penalties prescribed in the fifteenth century, death or extended exile (or sometimes amputation of the nose), were gradually moderated in practice, with more recourse to the galleys or fixed-term exile, though mutilation and branding persisted.¹¹¹ Only in Florence and Lucca were the punishments relatively mild, with whippings, fines and one-year exiles but few executions — which must be the main reason why so many were willing to implicate others or even accuse themselves.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Schmitt, ‘*Liwāt im Fiqh*’, 61–9.

¹⁰⁷ El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World*, 37–8, 95–110; Dror Ze’evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900* (Berkeley, CA, 2006), 82–94.

¹⁰⁸ Hergemöller, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 32.

¹⁰⁹ Tomás y Valiente, ‘El crimen y pecado contra natura’, 39–44 (legislation); Pedro de León, *Grandeza y miseria en Andalucía*, 399.

¹¹⁰ Berco, *Jerarquías sexuales, estatus público*, 100.

¹¹¹ Canosa, *Storia di una grande paura*, 108–45; Labalme, ‘Sodomy and Venetian Justice in the Renaissance’, 235, 246, 258.

¹¹² Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships, passim*; Grassi, *L’Offizio sopra l’Onestà*, 41–2, 81, 166.

Islamic law distinguished regular crimes (*jīnāyāt*) from ones specially proscribed by God (*hudūd*) — the latter including fornication and drunkenness. Although some legal traditions assimilated sodomy to fornication, the Hanafite school, dominant in the Ottoman Empire, did not; this meant that, unlike in late-medieval and early-modern Christianity, sodomy was mostly viewed as a ‘normal’ crime. The authenticity of hadiths calling for the stoning of both active and passive partners was downgraded by Hanafite scholars, who preferred to leave the punishment to judicial discretion. In practice, these matters were dealt with under the *Kanun* or sultan law-code, which embodied principles of Islamic law but differed from it; and it specified only fines for sodomites, plus beatings for boys who yielded to them.¹¹³ Islamic law also placed high demands on witnesses (two were required by the Hanafites, four by other schools), who had to be free Muslim men of good character; they were required to have seen the act itself and to report it immediately. The *Kanun*’s evidentiary requirements were significantly lower; but the culture was also influenced by hadiths that condemned spying on one’s neighbours or gossiping about them.¹¹⁴ It became a common trope in western writings that, despite the formal Islamic prohibition, sodomy was positively encouraged by the demand for impossible proofs and/or the imposition of feeble penalties.¹¹⁵ While the charge of deliberate encouragement was baseless, the assessment of the effects of those two aspects of the legal system was not entirely mistaken.

But the greatest difference of all between the eastern and western Mediterranean in these matters was cultural. In the literary traditions that predominated in the Ottoman Empire, love between men and boys was not just a permitted theme where love-poetry was concerned; it was the primary one.

¹¹³ Schmitt, ‘*Liwāt im Fiqh*’, 71–90 (schools); El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World*, 118–19 (Hanafite); Dror Ze’evi, ‘Changes in Legal-Sexual Discourses: Sex Crimes in the Ottoman Empire’, *Continuity and Change*, xvi (2001), 225–8 (*hudūd*, *Kanun*); Uriel Heyd, *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law*, ed. V. L. Ménage (Oxford, 1973), 102–3 (*Kanun*).

¹¹⁴ Schmitt, ‘*Liwāt im Fiqh*’, 103–7; Ze’evi, ‘Changes in Legal-Sexual Discourses’, 222–3; El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World*, 123.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Tolan, *Saracens*, 238 (Ramon Marti); Spandounes, *On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors*, 130–1; Lodovico Marracci, *Prodromus ad refutationem Alcorani* (Padua, 1698), pt 4, 6.

The Arabic tradition in this regard went back to at least the eleventh century; one scholar describes Arabic literature in the following centuries as 'saturated' with 'homoerotic sentiment'.¹¹⁶ Entire genres, which were taken up also by Turkish writers, were devoted to this: epigrams on young male beauty (one fifteenth-century Arabic anthology contains 2,500 of these); poems celebrating the handsome youths of particular cities; poems about the coming of 'beard-down' on the chin of the beloved; and comparisons between the attractions of boys and girls, usually favouring the former.¹¹⁷ In some cases the genre could imply merely Platonic admiration, but it was common for sexual desire to be clearly expressed. (Some western observers were aware of this: Lithgow commented on their songs about 'Lovers, whom they openly name in their rimes, without rebuke or shame'; Thévenot noted that the vice of sodomy was so openly acknowledged that 'all their songs are about nothing other than these infamous loves, or wine'.)¹¹⁸ The contrast here with the western Mediterranean lands is especially striking. Only a handful of works celebrating or explicitly describing sodomy appeared in Italy. Antonio Beccadelli's scabrous Latin poems, inspired by Catullus and Martial, caused a wave of denunciations in the 1430s, and he eventually made a craven recantation.¹¹⁹ Antonio Vignali's *La cazzeria* (printed probably without his permission in the 1530s) and Antonio Rocco's *Alcibiade* (printed surreptitiously in 1651) were also seen as scandalous.¹²⁰ A Portuguese cleric who had written, but not published, Latin couplets celebrating the

¹¹⁶ Everett K. Rowson, 'The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists', in Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (eds.), *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (New York, 1991), 74.

¹¹⁷ See J. W. Wright and Everett K. Rowson (eds.), *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature* (New York, 1997); Vančo Boškov, 'Zum Problem des Objekts der Liebe in der osmanischen Divan-Poesie', in W. Voigt (ed.), *XVIII. Deutscher Orientalistentag, vom 1. bis 5. Oktober 1972 in Lübeck* (Wiesbaden, 1974); Andrews and Kalpaklı, *Age of Beloveds*; El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World*.

¹¹⁸ Lithgow, *Total Discourse of the Rare Adventures and Painefull Peregrinations*, 325; Thévenot, *L'Empire du Grand Turc*, 165.

¹¹⁹ Antonio Beccadelli, *The Hermaphrodite*, ed. and trans. Holt Parker (Cambridge, MA, 2010), xiii-xvi.

¹²⁰ Antonio Vignali, *La cazzaria*, ed. Pasquale Stoppelli (Rome, 1984) (where male-male sex is a minor theme in a mostly heterosexual work); Antonio Rocco, *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, ed. Laura Coci (Rome, 1988).

beautiful boys in his town was arrested and exiled in 1619.¹²¹ Spanish poetry of the 'Golden Age' contains only a few fiercely satirical references to sodomites, and not a single positive depiction of sexual intimacy between men, not even in unpublished works.¹²²

In a carefully calibrated judgement on the Ottoman Arabic materials, Khaled El-Rouayheb notes that literary conventions have their own force: the fact that a given writer composed a poem in a homoerotic genre need not mean that he was expressing his personal feelings. But, he points out, if a whole culture accepts and enjoys such genres, that must tell us something about the underlying social reality.¹²³ El-Rouayheb's perspective at this point is that of a historian using literature as evidence of actual conduct. Yet in any complex matter of human behaviour, the same things may be both consequences and causes; the widespread cultural celebration of homoeroticism was not only a reflection of the social reality but also, surely, a stimulus to it. And what it stimulated was not just the same-sex behaviour itself, but the degree of avowability with which it could be conducted.

To conclude: western observers in Ottoman territories were not wrong to notice the visibility of same-sex relations there, which was generally greater than in their homelands, even though their tendency to attribute this difference to Islam was almost entirely prejudicial. Those who came from the western Mediterranean lands were also entitled to notice some differences, although the underlying patterns of behaviour were essentially the same as in their societies; within this pan-Mediterranean sexual culture the degree of openness differed between the two areas, as did the severity of the official norms.

And this prompts a final thought about the 'renegades', very many of whom had western Mediterranean origins. Recognizing the Mediterranean pattern as a whole makes it possible to offer a simpler and better explanation of the alleged link between their sodomy and their conversion to Islam. De Nicolay's comment on the renegades of Algiers was that they were 'above all, many

¹²¹ Mott, 'Le Pouvoir inquisitorial et la répression de l'abominable péché de sodomie dans le monde luso-brésilien', 217.

¹²² José Ignacio Díez Fernández, *La poesía erótica de los Siglos de Oro* (Madrid, 2003), 247–55.

¹²³ El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World*, 77.

from Spain, Italy and Provence, the islands and coasts of the Mediterranean, all addicted to lewdness, sodomy, theft, and all other detestable vices'.¹²⁴ Most had been slaves before they converted. Salomon Schweigger, Gerlach's successor at the Imperial embassy in Istanbul, remarked about the inhabitants of the slave *bagno* there that 'they are addicted to all vices; but especially the Spaniards and Italians do shameful acts against nature, as is their custom'; Reinhold Lubenau, apothecary to the Imperial ambassador in the late 1580s, said it was the Italians in the *bagno* who enacted 'horrible vice and sodomitical behaviour with one another'.¹²⁵ (Note that it is southern Europeans — not northerners, who were also present — who are singled out in these descriptions.) In many cases, it seems, for a renegade to be a sodomite was not to display some new vice occasioned by Islam or by the abandonment of western life; rather, it was to continue with a previous form of behaviour (acquired in the western Mediterranean), merely doing so with a sense of greater freedom from constraint.

If Gregorio the barber had succeeded in escaping from the bailate and converting to Islam, he too might have followed that pattern, enjoying that greater liberty. Giancesino, as a native resident of Galata — a place both Ottoman and cosmopolitan, described by the sixteenth-century Turkish poet Lâtîfi as 'the greatest tavern in the world, famous for its wine and its beauties, and reputed to be a place of debauchery' — may have enjoyed it to a large extent already.¹²⁶ But the *bailo* felt that a cultural distinction of real importance was at stake, and it was his decision that prevailed.

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¹²⁴ De Nicolay, *Dans l'empire de Soliman le Magnifique*, 65.

¹²⁵ Salomon Schweigger, *Ein neue Reyssbeschreibung auss Teutschland nach Constantinopel und Jerusalem*, ed. Rudolf Neck (Graz, 1964), 97; Reinhold Lubenau, *Beschreibung der Reisen*, ed. W. Sahm, 2 vols. (Königsberg, 1914–30), i, 208.

¹²⁶ Lâtîfi, *Éloge d'Istanbul*, ed. and trans. Stéphane Yerasimos (Paris, 2001), 115.