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5-29-2019

Translation of "Three Jewish Men Are Accused of Sodomy (Rome, 1624)"

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Magid, Shaul. "Constructing Women from Men: the Metaphysics of Male Homosexuality Among Lurianic Kabbalists in Sixteenth-Century Safed." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 17 (2010), 4–28.

45. Three Jewish Men Are Accused of Sodomy (Rome, 1624)

Numerous sources testify to a flourishing culture of homoeroticism in the urban centers of Renaissance Italy, including Rome, Florence, Mantua, Bologna, and Venice; according to the research of Michael Rocke, two out of every three men in Florence in the fifteenth century were implicated in homosexual activity at some point in their lives. At the same time, religious and legal authorities were anxious to root out this "abominable vice," and surveillance, prosecution, and harsh punishment of sodomy became increasingly common between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. We know that Italian Jews in this period also participated in homosexual activity, although we have only a few legal sources which document it. The excerpts presented here are testimonies from a trial that took place in Rome in the spring of 1624, a rare and lengthy example (the original records for this case in the municipal archives of Rome stretch over 200 double-sided pages) of the prosecution of Italian Jews for sodomy. Rumors had been spreading that two Jewish cloth merchants—Leone di Montefiore and Lazzaro Abbina—were living together in the Jewish ghetto of Rome with their teenaged apprentice Simone del fu Giuseppe di Pesaro, and practicing sodomy. The investigating officer found two men half-naked in bed together and a third in the room, and arrested them all, confiscating the sheets as evidence. However, despite the testimonies of several witnesses, the evidence of semen-stained sheets, and the opinion of 10 barber-surgeons who examined Simone and found evidence of anal penetration, the judge concluded that there was not enough direct evidence of sodomy and allowed the men to be freed.

[Testimony by captain Jacobus Spellatus, March 15, 1624:]

Having been directly ordered to inspect the house of Stella [daughter] of Dattiluccio, a Jew, and of Sabbato, another Jew in the ghetto, to see if

Leone, another Jew, was sleeping in the same bed as the Jew Simone son of Giuseppe, it being published loudly and known in the ghetto that he had been sodomizing him for a long time, around 4 [o'clock] in the morning, I went into said house.

[Testimony by Angelo di San Lazzaro, no date mentioned in the text:]

As a matter of habit, said Jews engage in strangenesses and live in the house of Stella [daughter of] Leuccio the Jew [in the area of the] Butchers, and said Leone left and returned many times, as did Lazzaro too.

I mean to say this of Lazzaro. In the room where they live they hold a lad named Simone [son of] Giuseppe, a Jew, and they lead him around publicly, and it's said that they even let him sleep in their bed and that they sodomize him, [and] this is said publicly.

[Testimony by Leo di Corneto, no date mentioned in the text:]

Lazzaro and Leone take freedoms, [and though] said Simone observes differently, however, Leone and Lazzaro bring him along to the markets and wherever they go, it seems [...] in Rome. Simone is a handsome lad of sixteen and it is said that said Leone and Lazzaro bring him and keep him in the room and that they sodomize and abuse him, and this is well known in the ghetto, though whether or not it is true I don't know.

[Testimony by the defendant Simone, March 24, 1624:]

We used to go throughout the year to the markets and since Lazzaro and I had been in Perugia, about two months ago, [and because] Leone was also travelling, I asked him for the key of this room for said Lazzaro [...] and he gave it to me, we then came [back] to Rome, Lazzaro and I, and because said Leone was staying with said Lazzaro here in Rome, we both slept in the same bed, since there is no other bed in said room [...] from Friday at 5 P.M. until around three, in the house of Stella where I have a room—that is, it's kept by my [acquaintance] Lazzaro Abbina who, having gone away, left me the room together with another named Leone [...] said Leone had stayed with said Lazzaro here in Rome, all sleeping in the same bed, because there isn't another bed in the room [...] On some days we slept even four together, the other [person] sleeping with us being another Jew called Sforza who is the brother of Leone,

who is 35 or 36 years old [...] We had been sleeping together for a month, I on one side, Leone in the middle, and Lazzaro on the other side.

[Testimony by the defendant Simone, April (about a week after the 17th), 1624:]

I say that no evidence will ever be found, that it isn't true what the surgeons say, and their words have no value, they are a bunch of dunces, because I swear on my conscience that I never did such a thing, and moreover I want to say that I saw the copies of the trial and I found information that one is a public surgeon, and the other isn't a surgeon but a barber who doesn't understand these things, and while they want to testify, they are nothing but enemies of the Jews and are extremely deceitful as my defense will demonstrate, and the court will be able to call two capable men and two capable men who can say the truth [...] because I stand here in the hands of Justice [and may] truth follow the evidence.

Processo, Tribunale Criminale del Governatore (Archivio di Stato di Roma), Processi r. 189, cc. 1050–1272. As published in Serena Di Nepi, “Che questo è pubblico in ghetto. Se poi sia vero o no io non lo so’: Un caso di studio sulla struttura sociale del ghetto di Roma attraverso un processo per sodomia (1624),” in *Storia economica e storia degli ebrei Istituzioni, capitale sociale e stereotipi, secc. XV–XVIII* (FrancoAngeli, 2017). Reprinted by permission of FrancoAngeli. Translated from Italian by Dr. Shira Klein. Copyright © 2019 Print-O-Craft Press. I thank Dr. Serena Di Nepi for sharing her research on this case and clarifying its context.

Further Reading

Ferguson, Gary. *Same-Sex Marriage in Renaissance Rome: Sexuality, Identity, and Community in Early Modern Europe* (Cornell University Press, 2016).

Herzig, Tamar. “The Prosecution of Jews and the Repression of Sodomy in Fifteenth-Century Italy.” In *L'inquisizione Romana, i giudici e gli eretici: Studi in onore di John Tedeschi* (ed. Anne Jacobson Schutte and Andrea Del Col, Rome: Viella, 2017), 59–74.

Rocke, Michael. *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

46. Poetry of Sarmad Kashani (Delhi, Mid-Seventeenth Century)

Sarmad Kashani (Sarmad of Kashan; also known as Muhammad Sa'id Sarmad) was born into a well-to-do Jewish family of merchants and scholars

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