

FORBIDDEN FRIENDSHIPS

HOMOSEXUALITY AND
MALE CULTURE IN
RENAISSANCE
FLORENCE



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Making Problems: Preoccupations and Controversy over Sodomy in the Early Fifteenth Century

Those marvelous competitions of fencing, tournaments,
and high jousts are no longer furiously performed for
women; he who best can, now does his shows for young
lads. Domenico of Prato (1389–1432?)¹

Domenico of Prato, a notary and rather old-fashioned poet from a small town near Florence, depicted this evocative scenario of men competing fiercely for the attentions of boys in a poem he composed “in opprobrium of sodomy” probably in the 1410s or 1420s. Not content to follow the divinely ordained example of Adam and Eve, he lamented, men were abandoning “just matrimony” to pursue this “filthy infamy,” and “it seems that blessed is he who most satiates himself.” According to the poet, the love of men for boys was so widespread, and not only in Florence, that it no longer troubled anyone. Now more than ever before, as he put it, everyone visited the seductive lands of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Whether the erotic desires of Florentine men were undergoing the dramatic transformation Domenico of Prato imagined is hard to determine. But the preoccupations his verses manifest expressed well a current of fear and anxiety over sodomy that had been gaining force in his society since the beginning of the fifteenth century. A sense of urgency about the “abominable vice” troubled a generation of civic leaders and moralists, producing, over three decades, numerous laws against it and leading in 1432 to the creation of the Office of the Night, the special commission charged with policing sodomy.

To be sure, sodomy was not the sole moral and sexual concern of the governors of Florence in this period. The disorderly excesses of prostitution and the sacrilege of sex with nuns, among other aspects of public morality, also fell subject to tighter regulation in what amounted to a vast, if piecemeal, governmental program to reform and discipline the community’s morals and behaviors. But of all the carnal sins it was sodomy, thought to

flout not only the edicts of God and man but also the very laws of nature, that most came to embody the evils and uncertainties of an imperfect world and to evoke the terror of divine vengeance. Voicing such fears in a law of 1418, the government proclaimed its desire “to root out the vice of the Sodomites and Gomorrhans, contrary to nature itself, for which the anger of the omnipotent God is incited in terrible judgment not only against the sons of men, but against the country and against inanimate objects.”² An exemplary passage from a sentence that the recently instituted Night Officers pronounced against a sodomite in 1436 catalogued the universal ills that sodomy was believed to incarnate and affirmed the safe-guarding function its repression was intended to serve. Sodomy was so evil and offended God so grievously, it was said, that God declared sodomites sinners against nature and rebels from his mercy, and damned them to the eternal flames. The diligent exercise of justice against such wicked ones, however, helped appease the divine essence and stay his wrath. “In this way,” the officials sweepingly asserted, “the city and its upright citizens may be freed from all commotion, wars ended, plague abolished, enemy plots curbed, and cities turned toward good government and praiseworthy conduct.”³

Sodomy certainly acquired a portentous rhetorical meaning in the early fifteenth century, with its control acclaimed as a sort of panacea for society’s ills. Yet on close examination, the official response to this “vice” was not as coherent or resolute as such extravagant claims and the various laws against it imply. Marked by hesitation, bland or failed initiatives, and apparent divisions within the regime, the troublesome issue of how to control sodomy effectively dragged on unresolved for thirty years before the creation of the special magistracy in 1432. These discordant responses played a large role in determining the radical innovations adopted at that time, and provide a telling indicator of the problematic nature of sodomy in Florence.

Traditional Controls

The institution of the Office of the Night marked a decisive turning point in the policing of sodomy, culminating a thirty-year period of agitation and legislative measures aimed at rendering its control more incisive. Yet long before the creation of this magistracy, sodomy had been an extremely serious offense. Since at least the late thirteenth century—the century when growing hostility toward homosexual activity was being codified across Europe—sodomy had shared the legal status of murder, repeated theft, and counterfeiting as an “atrocious crime” (*enorme delictum*).⁴ A study of prescriptive norms and judiciary practice regarding sodomy before the founding of the Night Officers helps to illuminate the clamor for reform and to explain the nature of the sweeping changes introduced with the new magistracy.

Before 1432 the surveillance and punishment of sodomy fell indiscriminately to the city's three main tribunals: the podestà, the capitano del popolo, and the *esecutore degli ordinamenti di giustizia*. According to the statutes of the podestà of 1325, both his court and that of the capitano were responsible for investigating evidence of sodomy in the city at least once every month, proceeding either *ex officio*—that is, on the court's own initiative—or in response to denunciations. In the latter case, informers' identities were to be kept secret, and if a conviction were handed down they were to receive a reward of half of any fine levied.⁵

Florentine law prescribed harsh punishments for sodomy and for facilitating it in any way, though penalties changed considerably over the course of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The earliest surviving legislation, the fragmentary statutes of the podestà of 1284, lacks penalties for sodomy but reveals indirectly that it was punishable at least by exile.⁶ By 1325, when new statutes were redacted, penalties were severe. This code prescribed castration for a man found to have sodomized a boy; boys aged fourteen to eighteen who allowed someone to sodomize them were to be fined 100 lire, and those under fourteen fined 50 lire or flogged nude through the city.⁷ The last punishment was stipulated as well for women over fourteen (presumably this refers to females sodomized by males, not to sexual relations between women). These statutes also drew a sharp distinction between the persons just mentioned and *trapassi* or *malandrini*, evidently foreign vagabonds or common criminals, who forced Florentine boys to commit sodomy with them. The latter were treated in a separate rubric seething with fiery rhetoric and images that are completely lacking in the first rubric, which seems to refer only to residents. Unlike others caught sodomizing, such foreigners found abusing local boys could be caught and beaten by people of the community without fear of penalty, tortured by the authorities and, if found guilty, burned to death.

Already by this time, the Commune had also attempted to extend its controls over the social and urban environment thought to foster sodomy. The 1325 statutes set a fine of 500 lire for pimps or intermediaries, for men who enticed boys by offering them money or gifts for sex, and even for fathers who persuaded or allowed their sons to commit sodomy. The house or building where sodomy was committed with the owner's permission, or simply his knowledge, was to be burned down. If a man was found in a garden or an edifice with a boy unrelated to him, in circumstances deemed suspicious, he could be fined 500 lire merely on the presumption of his evil intentions. This code prescribed a fine of 10 lire even for composing or singing poems or songs about sodomy, which authorities evidently feared might help popularize the practice. Following a typical medieval assumption that rich foods and sensuality went hand in hand, the statutes of the capitano (1322–1325) forbade innkeepers to serve a long list of delicacies and sweets, because they were said to attract “many boys

and men” who might fall into vice and “perpetrate wicked sins that are abominable before God and men,” clearly meaning sodomy. Innkeepers also had to deny entrance to *malandrini* or *trapassi* and to any boy with them; if they allowed anyone to commit sodomy in their establishment, it was to be burned to the ground.⁸

A new law in 1365 increased and made more arbitrary many of these penalties, for unknown reasons; the law’s preamble cites only the usual fear of divine wrath erupting against the city.⁹ Dropping the distinction between *trapassi* or *malandrini* and other offenders, this law mandated that anyone who committed sodomy, whether “active” or “passive,” or who facilitated it in any way, could be burned to death. The podestà, however, retained wide discretion to apply this penalty depending on the “age, quality, and condition” of the persons involved. The one exception was for “passive” minors under the age of eighteen, who could not be executed under any circumstances; their punishment was left to the court’s choice and could even be waived altogether. For a man who sodomized someone against his will or who aided a violent sexual assault, the law unconditionally prescribed death by burning, while the victim was to be absolved. Harsh penalties were also set for attempted sodomy, ranging from fines or corporal punishment to execution if the perpetrator used violence.

Moreover, the 1365 law included new measures to facilitate the identification of suspects and to encourage confessions. For example, if a boy under eighteen who had been sodomized, or a close relative, voluntarily revealed his sexual relations before he was denounced or arrested, then he was not to be punished, a strong incentive for him to implicate his partners. Traditional standards of proof were also lowered, the normal tax on accusations was abolished, and a reward was assured to informers even when the courts levied nonmonetary penalties. Finally, this law gave judges exceptionally broad authority to torture persons accused or suspected of sodomy.

The wide-ranging norms contained in the laws of the fourteenth century imply that homosexual activity was fairly common, for they suggest that male prostitution existed, that fathers sometimes promoted their sons’ trysts, that innkeepers and property-owners often accommodated them, that people sang and wrote of sodomy’s pleasures, and that any encounter between nonrelated men and boys could be suspect. These laws also give an impression of tight surveillance and unrelenting repression of sodomy. But a study of how the courts prosecuted sodomy, rather than of prescriptive norms, provides a different picture. Despite the seemingly broad surveillance, the harsh rhetoric and penalties, and evidence that sodomy was rather commonplace, convictions were both infrequent and limited in scope.

Although a full survey of the massive extant judiciary records is impossible, several samples point to similar conclusions. First, up through the early fifteenth century the courts, which normally pursued sodomy ex of-

ficio, handed down very few convictions. Often they condemned no one for this crime in any given year or even in several consecutive years, as at least two studies found.¹⁰ Another survey, for the years 1352 to 1355 and 1380 to 1383, documented respectively eight and five convictions.¹¹ My own study of all extant court sentences from 1390 to 1410 located thirty-three persons convicted in cases involving sodomy, including ten for attempted sodomy only, and in twelve of these twenty-one years there were no condemnations at all.¹² As will be discussed later, it was in these years around the turn of the century that new concerns over sodomy appeared, and in fact half of the convictions followed calls in 1403 and 1404 for rigorous repression. Except for this brief reaction, sodomy failed to attract much attention from the courts in Florence, a situation analogous to that of fourteenth-century Venice.¹³

Second, if prosecution was infrequent, the character of the sexual activity the courts pursued was also highly circumscribed. Most often, these cases dealt with homosexual rape or other assaults, with sodomy perpetrated on young children, or with men who committed serious crimes in addition to sodomy; few individuals were condemned in this period for what might be considered, on the basis of the descriptions provided, consensual or non-coercive sexual relations alone. In sufficiently documented cases involving fifty-six persons condemned for sodomy or related crimes between 1348 and 1432, the year the Office of the Night was created, over three-quarters of the convicted were found guilty of violent attacks, child abuse, or multiple crimes. The courts levied forty-four death sentences and two of castration, while the other penalties were usually huge fines of 1,000 lire or more. Not all of these cases involved homosexual sodomy: three men had sodomized girls aged five, six, and seven, and one woman had prostituted her daughter to men for sodomy (for which she was beheaded).¹⁴ Another seventeen cases dealt either with sodomy committed on a boy aged twelve or under, with an assault with the intent to commit sodomy, or with rape, which often resulted in severe anal injury.¹⁵ And twenty-two men were convicted not for sodomy alone, but because they had also committed theft, assault, murder, or extortion; had attempted suicide; or had kidnapped someone for ransom and repeatedly raped him.¹⁶

Although the few remaining cases reportedly did not involve violence or child abuse, they usually dealt with another special class of offenders—men who engaged in sodomy with several partners or habitually over a long period. Often such a man was labeled a *publicus et famosus sodomita*, implying notoriety and a long history of sodomitical activity. For example, in 1352 Miniato di Lapo was charged with having sodomized Antonio di Salvestro “many, many times,” the motive for his prosecution, but his sentence also noted that Miniato, who had fled, was known to be a “public and notorious sodomite, defiled with wicked desire and the sodomitical vice, who has practiced the vice of the sodomites for a long time in the city of Florence publicly and openly, with many, many boys.”¹⁷ In another

exemplary case from 1348, Agostino di Ercole, described as “dedicated . . . to the vice against nature,” first recounted his attempt to sodomize a youth in an inn, foiled by the suspicious host, who threw them out. Then he named ten others he had sodomized on various occasions. Finally Agostino admitted that he had engaged regularly in sodomy—escaping the courts’ notice and certain punishment—for the previous twelve years.¹⁸ These and similar cases suggest that a good deal of noncoercive homosexual activity probably went on in Florence “publicly and openly,” as it was said, without arousing much concern among either the community or the authorities.

In the cases examined, the courts normally punished only men who took the “active” role in sex, in part because “passive” partners were so often hapless victims of violence or abuse and hence considered innocent. Yet as far as can be determined, even those who willingly let themselves be sodomized usually went unpunished, probably out of regard for their consistently young age.¹⁹ Of the fifty-six persons convicted in these cases, only four—at least three of whom were in their teens—were sentenced for voluntary “passive” sodomy, even though numerous others were implicated in relations of an apparently noncoercive nature. Most of these cases involved unusual circumstances that may account for the convictions and harsh punishments; it is also probably no coincidence that three cases date from 1404 and 1405, in the wave of condemnations mentioned earlier after the repressive appeals of 1403 and 1404. One youth of nineteen was the companion of a married man for two years; a second, aided by three of his lovers, murdered another unwelcome suitor.²⁰ A third, fifteen-year-old Giovanni di Giovanni, convicted in 1365, had willingly let himself be sodomized for some time by many men, including several reputedly infamous sodomites. His sentence unusually labels Giovanni himself a “public and notorious passive sodomite,” and for this reason the podestà inflicted on him an exemplary and barbaric punishment. After being paraded on an ass to the “place of justice” outside the city walls past the Franciscan basilica of Santa Croce, he was to be publicly castrated. Then, so that he would be punished “in that part of his body where he allowed himself to be known in sodomitical practice,” he was to be mutilated between his thighs with a red-hot iron.²¹ With this gruesome spectacle played out on the body of a mere fifteen-year-old, coming shortly after the passage of the harsh 1365 law, the authorities undoubtedly intended to terrorize other youngsters who might have been tempted to yield obligingly to men’s desires.

Of all these cases, only one, from 1404, was said to involve a long and captivating affair, and in its very singularity it illustrates the sort of consensual relations that the courts in this period apparently tended to ignore. Salvestro di Niccolò Alamanni and Jacopo d’Amerigo da Verrazzano came from well-to-do and prominent families in the neighboring parishes of Santa Lucia de’ Magnoli and San Niccolò. Salvestro was thirty-six years

old and married with a two-year-old son when, according to his confession, he and Jacopo, probably aged seventeen, began their relationship in 1402. For the next two years, they carried on a steady affair, perhaps aided by influential friends: among the places where they had slept together were houses of the patrician families Ardinghelli and Bardi, the Peruzzi bank where Salvestro worked, and the palace of the podestà in the town of Fucecchio. Clearly enamored of his young friend, Salvestro admitted that he had given him gifts of clothing and money worth the considerable sum of 250 florins or more, and even confessed that he preferred Jacopo to his own wife.²²

It is hard to imagine that a relationship of this length, sentiment, and relative visibility completely escaped the notice of authorities. In fact, it might only have been in response to new calls to repress sodomy in 1403 and 1404 that the *escutore* finally investigated and arrested the two early in 1404. Both confessed and were penalized severely: Salvestro was fined the staggering sum of 1,500 gold florins and exiled to Genoa for six years, while Jacopo was fined 1,000 lire (roughly 250 florins) and exiled to Venice for four years, and both were interdicted from public office.²³ But tellingly, by the end of the year, in response to their appeals, the government significantly reduced Salvestro's sentence and canceled Jacopo's altogether.²⁴

To summarize the characteristics of the policing of sodomy in this period, then, the courts rarely prosecuted this crime, and when they did, they proceeded on their own initiative and not on accusations. The few cases they pursued overwhelmingly involved violent acts of assault or rape, the violation of young children, sodomy committed together with other crimes, and, less frequently and often only after years of illicit sexual activity, publicly known habitual sodomites. These cases undoubtedly capture some common and frankly deplorable features of sexual and social life in late medieval Florence. Yet it is improbable that the picture that emerges from them, mainly one of reckless child abuse and of a violent criminal underground, accurately represents homosexual behavior in the city at this time. Indeed, these cases differ dramatically both in number and in character from the homosexual relations that were prosecuted from the 1430s on. Their peculiar emphases suggest that in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries the authorities singled out only the most brutal, morally reprehensible, or conspicuous cases of sodomy for exemplary punishment, while they willfully ignored a good deal of sodomitical activity that was more discreet or less troubling to collective sensibilities.

At least one man understood, and resisted, his being made an expiatory example by the courts' discriminatory practices. The words of Agostino di Ercole, the "dedicated sodomite" convicted in 1348 after admitting his twelve-year involvement in sodomy, are all the more extraordinary since the censorious machinery of the judiciary system so seldom allowed the voices of sodomites to filter through. According to his trial protocol, Ago-

stino, “as a man who was and is totally inflamed by such a serious crime, said he did not believe this crime was so serious, and that if for this reason he, the guilty Agostino, should be sentenced to death, then many others were also to be considered deserving of death.” At this point the censor prevailed, for before being dragged off to be burned at the stake, Agostino also said “many other detestable and unpleasant things, which are thought best to leave in silence.”²⁵ The stifled protest of one common man who defended his homosexual relations as a relatively innocent practice shared by many others reveals some small sense of a system of values and behaviors quite at odds with official representations of sodomy.

Agitation for Reform, 1400–1432

Against this background of selective and sporadic punishment, concerns about sodomy and about how to control it more effectively emerged forcefully in the early fifteenth century. Poets in public squares and preachers from city pulpits derided and condemned the practice and demanded harsher measures against it. At the same time, the Commune adopted wide-ranging measures to intensify the repression of sodomy, to promote sexual alternatives for males, and even to screen sodomites from the governing class, before finally creating the special magistracy for sodomy in 1432.

Before examining these developments, it might well be asked whether this sudden agitation was a response to a conspicuous growth or a new visibility of sodomitical activity in Florence. Some contemporaries, such as Domenico of Prato, as quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, and Bernardino of Siena in his sermons from the 1420s, did imply that sodomy, while perhaps not new, was flourishing as never before. Moreover, although convictions for sodomy in these years remained low, they would soon soar, from one or two a year to more than fifty a year after midcentury. This might seem to indicate a corresponding increase in sodomy. In Venice, too, where new concerns about repressing sodomy were appearing in the same decades, prosecutions rose considerably. On the basis of this expansion and, in particular, of the more frequent conviction of noblemen and of what look like extended circles of males with the same homoerotic tastes, Guido Ruggiero has proposed that this new rigor was the Venetian government’s response to the emergence or greater exposure in the early fifteenth century of a distinctive and socially diversified homosexual subculture.²⁶

The problem of “homosexual subcultures” will be taken up at greater length at a later point (chapter 5). Here it should be said, however, that if indeed the practice of sodomy was becoming more open and assuming new and characteristic collective features, this probably did not resemble anything like the highly visible, organized subcultures of the modern world populated by a consciously distinct and coherent category of persons who

today might be called “homosexuals,” an anachronistic model that hardly applies to these traditional societies.²⁷ More to the point here, it is questionable whether any of the available evidence proves sufficiently that sodomy was increasing or assuming new traits, or that this in itself provoked the reactions of Italian civic leaders in the early fifteenth century. The pious complaints of moralists that sodomy was spreading can scarcely be taken at face value (in any case, the preacher Giordano of Rivalto had already claimed as early as 1305 that “nearly all . . . or at least the majority” of Florentine men were sodomites).²⁸ Such charges might have made for good polemics, but they were far from being objective observations. The explosion of prosecutions for sodomy can also be misleading. It may be tempting to deduce that more trials mean more sodomy or that changes in the character of prosecuted activity mirrored real variations in behavior. Yet the judiciary records are not so transparent. It has already been seen how selective the fourteenth-century Florentine courts were. And the huge increase in convictions in the fifteenth century, both in Venice, as Ruggiero points out, and in Florence, was so clearly the result of new, specialized institutions and more effective methods for policing sodomy as to render comparisons of the extent or the nature of this practice over the two centuries problematic at best. While laws and prosecutions can reveal something about fluctuating concerns and the administration of justice, what they can convey about the incidence of sodomy over time or about the chronology or causes of possible changes in its character is much less certain.

Indeed, it may be that the agitation over sodomy was related in only a limited or an indirect way to this sexual practice in itself. In Florence, at least, other social and political factors played a decisive role in shaping the new repressive orientation in the early fifteenth century. Florentine society in this period was undergoing a series of crises and transformations that, on the one hand, led to broad changes in the administration of justice and, on the other, induced a stronger preoccupation about regulating many aspects of public morality, especially sexuality.

Between the 1380s and the 1430s, Florence undertook a campaign of expansion that made it the region’s dominant power, but also created serious fiscal strains and new challenges in governing a vast regional state. At the same time, the corporative foundations of the old medieval commune were eroding as the social base of the political class shrunk and power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of a more managerially oriented merchant oligarchy.²⁹ All this generated political and social demands for a more centralized and efficient system of justice and a more direct role for the local elite in the maintenance of public order.³⁰

One manifestation of this process was the creation of several permanent judicial commissions to confront special problems, especially matters of public morality. These commissions were staffed by citizens rather than by the foreign dignitaries who presided over the traditional courts (*podestà*,

capitano, and esecutore). Empowered to administer summary justice, the new magistracies helped to weaken the roles of the foreign rectors and gave the local patriciate more flexibility and influence in regulating these sensitive areas. The regime instituted citizen magistracies in these years to uncover and prosecute political conspiracies (1378),³¹ to regulate prostitution and administer municipal brothels (1403),³² to protect the inviolability and sexual purity of convents (1421),³³ to enforce the norms of public office holding (1429),³⁴ and, finally, to pursue and punish sodomy (*Officers of the Night*, 1432).³⁵ The policing of sodomy was only a single facet of a broad effort to manage sexuality and public morality, all part of a more concentrated and efficient program of social control.³⁶

Other social concerns, interwoven with these developments, heightened a sense of urgency about controlling sodomy. In particular, the demographic catastrophes linked to recurring plague, and related insecurities about marriage, children, and family life, nourished perceptions that the nonprocreative sins “against nature” posed a threat to the very foundations of human society. The cultural resonance of this continent-wide demographic crisis may go some way toward explaining similar shifts in attitudes toward sodomy and in efforts to control it that occurred at roughly the same time in numerous Italian and European cities.³⁷

In Florence and Tuscany, the effects of this crisis were especially sharp. The Black Death of 1348 swept away as many as 80,000 Florentines, two-thirds of the estimated population of 120,000 in the 1330s. The second great wave of plague in 1363 and 1364 took its highest toll among children, while the brutal “plague of the Bianchi” in 1400 claimed 12,000 lives out of a populace that had recovered to some 60,000. Serious outbreaks occurred again in 1417, 1423/1424, and 1430. The population of Florence fell to its lowest point probably in the 1410s and remained stagnant for several decades at around 40,000 inhabitants. Only after 1460 did population growth show signs of renewed vigor.³⁸

To be sure, none of the laws of this period explicitly linked demographic crisis and stronger controls over sodomy, though it is suggestive that laws and public discourse on sodomy often followed close on the plague.³⁹ The connection, however, did not escape contemporaries such as the influential preacher Bernardino of Siena, who made it a major theme of his terrifying sermons against sodomy in Florence and Siena in the mid-1420s. As will be seen, Bernardino not only blamed sodomites for causing the plague, which he claimed was God’s retribution for their sins, but also attributed local population losses to sodomites’ alleged erotic apathy toward women, reluctance to marry, hatred of children, and sterile sexual practices.

High mortality and uncertainty over the future also engendered fears about the survival and stability of family lineages. Such concerns were reinforced by local marriage practices and were sometimes perceived to be related to sodomy. As noted earlier, Florentine men normally put off marriage until the average age of thirty or thirty-one, and a large proportion

never took a wife. Among other social consequences, the abundance of virile young and not-so-young bachelors denied legitimate sexual outlets tended to foster an environment in which unauthorized sexual activity of all sorts flourished.⁴⁰ Such sexual “debauchery” was surely not new to Florence, but it is likely that with family lines dying out at alarming rates, it now came to be seen as more detrimental and dangerous. Again, Bernardino of Siena plainly drew out these connections, especially with regard to sodomy. He insisted that sodomy deterred young men from marrying, that bachelorhood fostered sodomy, and that most sodomites were unmarried.

Against this background of demographic instability and worry over family survival, new sensibilities toward children, marriage, and the family and new concerns for their tutelage appeared in Florence and elsewhere.⁴¹ Since sodomy was often perceived to be associated with these issues, the growing preoccupation about regulating it was likely related to this context. The new sentiments were expressed in myriad ways. Domestic themes proliferated in Tuscan art, as artists relaborated traditional scenes of mother and child and introduced new ones portraying family life, marriage, and childhood. Although they masked more sobering realities, these idealized images mirrored an attention to children and an interest in their upbringing and welfare that can also be found in family diaries and domestic manuals, in humanist writings on the family and in new pedagogical methods, in the founding in 1419 of the hospice for abandoned children, the Innocenti, and in the confraternities for the moral training of adolescents that sprang up in the 1410s and 1420s.⁴² This solicitude toward the very young might have stiffened Florentine resolve to repress sodomy, perhaps seen as a way to control adolescent sexuality more firmly or to protect boys from the sexual lust of adult men, which all too often involved intimidation, abuse, or outright rape.

Marriage also received new impulses and support from various quarters. Against traditionally negative and misogynous views, humanists like Coluccio Salutati, Leonardo Bruni, and Francesco Barbaro began to champion a more positive outlook on marriage that stressed both its personal pleasures and its social benefits. As David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber suggest in their study of the Tuscan family, this humanistic campaign in favor of marriage was plainly a response and challenge to the social, moral, and sexual problems of Tuscan towns, especially sodomy.⁴³

The Florentine Commune also intervened to aid and reinforce the institution of marriage. In this regard, its most notable achievement was a celebrated dowry fund created in 1425 to help families amass the money needed to dower and marry off their daughters and, initially, to provide savings for future husbands.⁴⁴ In 1421 the government even tried to make marriage a requisite for civic office for all citizens from the ages of thirty to fifty, an extraordinary measure intended to pressure men to marry, and perhaps indirectly to bar sodomites and other unmarried rakes from public

life. But this heavy-handed tactic aroused a storm of protest, above all from youths and bachelors who saw their personal freedoms menaced, and the government had to withdraw the proposal.⁴⁵

The regime's activism in regulating morality also aimed in part at safeguarding the family. When civic fathers decided in 1403 to promote prostitution in public brothels, they acted in part on the medieval truism that prostitution, however distasteful or sinful, was needed to prevent the even worse excesses of sodomy with boys or the rape of "honest" wives and daughters.⁴⁶ Sumptuary laws were also justified by appealing to conjugal ideals. As legislators affirmed in a 1433 edict, women's costly clothes and ornaments discouraged men from marrying (and, Bernardino of Siena added, drove them to sodomy), while such vanities distracted women from their duties "to bear men" and "replenish the city."⁴⁷ Even sex between laymen and nuns was now condemned by likening the fidelity these cloistered women were to show toward their spiritual husband, Christ, to the sexual loyalty required of earthly marriage.⁴⁸ Although laws and other civic discussions on sodomy did not adduce similar arguments, the sense of urgency about the "sterile sin" probably derived much of its force from this contemporary discourse on the family.

Given this political and social context, it is hardly surprising that sodomy came increasingly under attack. What is striking is how falteringly the official response to sodomy evolved, a revealing indicator of how problematic the issue was for the governors of Florence. During the early decades of the fifteenth century, appeals rang out from government chambers, public squares, and churches demanding that sodomy be brought under control. Civic leaders discussed or implemented numerous initiatives, testifying to the resolve of at least part of the governing class that something be done about the "vice." Yet the regime seemed divided and uncertain about how best to confront the problem, and was plainly unable or unwilling to undertake a campaign of harsh repression. The various measures that were adopted were repealed, undermined, or so bland that they could have had little real effect. Tellingly, sodomy was the first of the great moral issues that caught the regime's attention and initiated the wave of institutional reforms, but it was the last to find a workable solution, after three decades, and then only in the radical innovations that accompanied the creation of the Office of the Night. A review of the expedients the government took in the early fifteenth century reveals how difficult it was in Florence to effect a more thoroughgoing control of homosexual activity.

The first clear sign of official concern over sodomy and over new methods to police it appeared with novel legislative proposals in 1403. A law of April 24 specially authorized the Signoria, the city's nine-member executive body, to draw up new regulations and spend whatever sum was necessary "for the elimination and extirpation of this vice and sodomitical crime, and for its purging and its punishment."⁴⁹ Recommended measures included either the creation of a magistracy made up of citizens or the

investment of a new foreign rector, to be charged with searching out and punishing sodomy. The law also stipulated that before assuming office, each new Signoria and all the foreign judges were to swear an oath "to pursue sodomites and to condemn and punish them."

These proposals aimed to intensify the repression of sodomy, and the spurt of convictions that followed suggests that they had a brief echo in the courts. Yet a surprising turn of events produced quite a different outcome, revealing apparent dissension within the regime over how or even whether to confront the problem. On April 30, just six days later, the Signoria did create a citizen magistracy, but not to police sodomy, as the original law intended. The priors subverted the task delegated to them by instituting a commission, the Officers of Decency, charged instead with overseeing the public administration of female prostitution. These officials were to establish brothels in the city, license prostitutes and pimps to work in them, regulate their activities, and adjudicate criminal cases involving the women under their supervision. Nothing in their statutes indicates they were to prosecute sodomy.⁵⁰

The motives behind the government's sudden reversal remain obscure, and no evidence has surfaced that might help to elucidate the matter. The institutionalized encouragement and tolerance of prostitution was a common phenomenon in fifteenth-century Europe, and better management of the unruly and often violent world of prostitution was an essential part of the moralizing designs of the Florentine regime throughout the century.⁵¹ Also, in line with the typical medieval belief that prostitution served a positive social function, civic leaders might have tacitly assumed that furnishing men with an abundant supply of professional whores with whom to satisfy their sexual desires would help to keep them away from boys and to channel their erotic impulses in more acceptable directions. Whatever the explanation, the government clearly seems to have decided to avoid confronting the original problem of sodomy directly and to abandon, or at least postpone, plans to repress the "vice" in a more thoroughgoing fashion. The control of homosexual activity evidently presented greater complexities and met with greater resistance than a more rational management of prostitution.

This unexpected move did not satisfy everyone, however, and signs of division within the regime soon surfaced. In advisory councils in January 1404, dissenters raised the issue of sodomy and the original repressive aim of the 1403 reforms. Speakers pressed the government not only to carry through with the delayed creation of the Office of Decency, but also to take decisive action against sodomy by passing a new law and urging the foreign rectors to repress the "vice" more rigorously.⁵² When a proposed law stemming from these suggestions was later submitted to the councils for approval, tougher repression of sodomy indeed seemed to be its highest priority. The version passed by the Council of the Popolo on March 12, 1404, was summarized as "the Officers of Decency must make a law on

the vice of sodomy and must suppress it."⁵³ Yet once more, those who advocated harsher controls were to be disappointed. Inexplicably, and quite unusually, the measure passed into law by the Council of the Commune the next day was considerably altered, again deflecting attention away from sodomy. This edict merely revoked the special powers granted the Signoria the previous April to coordinate the control of sodomy, and reconfirmed the authority of the Officers of Decency without once mentioning any jurisdiction over sodomy or any intention of policing it more aggressively.⁵⁴ Although the dynamics of this intricate maneuver remain obscure, the government's unwillingness to implement repressive measures evidently brought to the surface tensions and divergences over sodomy within the core of the regime.

Some of the difficulties faced by advocates of strenuous controls on sodomy can be inferred in the striking changes in the revised statutes drawn up in 1408 and 1409 and adopted in final form in 1415. Here the government implicitly admitted that the draconian penalties of the past, which no doubt motivated the narrow judiciary focus on violent or notorious acts of sodomy, had come to be seen as an obstacle to its effective and widespread control. Penalties were now considerably mitigated, with the candid reasoning that magistrates would consequently be able to enforce the law with greater care and diligence, and thus would not let sodomy go unpunished, as the text revealingly states, "out of fear of the truth."⁵⁵

The new statute expressly forbade the exile, mutilation, or execution of sodomites for a first conviction, prescribing instead a fine of 1,000 lire, an enormous sum but clearly a more humane punishment. It also allowed judges to impose an optional flogging or other humiliation depending on the offender's age and status. Only persons condemned a second time were to be put to death. Reinforcing this more lenient approach, the statute also decreed that men convicted of sodomy for the first time could not for this reason be denied civic office or other communal honors, not even if their sexual behavior provoked "talk, scandal, uproar, or disturbances."⁵⁶

Apparently the regime had determined that only by making penalties less cruel and by guaranteeing—up to a point—the physical safety and civic identity of sodomites could it broaden its effective control over sodomy. This pragmatic response marked a sharp departure from the past, and heralded what would come to be the typical approach to policing sodomy in Florence throughout most of the Renaissance. By assuring convicted men of their political privileges, moreover, this ruling tacitly acknowledged the presence of sodomites in civic life. Concern over what was feared to be the potentially subversive influence of sodomites in government would recur frequently in the future, as will be seen later. Such influence might in fact help explain the often ambivalent public reactions to sodomy in Florence.

Echoing the preoccupations expressed in ruling circles, an unprecedented wave of popular poetry against sodomy swept Florence in the early

fifteenth century. The best known of these poems are two long satires, “La buca di Montemorello” and “Il gagno,” composed probably between 1407 and 1412 by Stefano Finiguerra, known as Za.⁵⁷ On the simplest level, both deride spendthrifts and profligates seeking easy money, whether in the treasure buried in a cave on Mount Morello overlooking the city of Florence, or in the soft life on the “isle of earnings” (*gagno* or *guadagno*). But erotic double entendres pervade both poems, and on a second level both can be read as vast metaphors of sodomy. The titles themselves have obscene allusions: in contemporary Tuscan burlesque literature, *monte* was a metaphor for buttocks, while both *guadagno* and *buca* or *buco* (hole) referred to the anus.⁵⁸ There was also a tavern in Florence called the Buco, whose host, Antonio Guardi, was depicted in “Montemorello” as a sodomite and around which much of the poem’s action revolves; judiciary evidence shows that in the later fifteenth century, the Buco was a common haunt of sodomites.⁵⁹ “La buca di Montemorello” describes a procession of over 200 local men, many portrayed as sodomites, who are eagerly taking their turn at descending into the treasure-filled cavern on the mount.⁶⁰ In Za’s metaphor, the treasure/pleasure they seek is anal penetration.

These satires, probably recited to raucous audiences in city squares, mocked sodomites with typical Florentine wit and ambivalent morality. Yet in his third poem, “Lo studio d’Atene,” Finiguerra openly decried sodomy and criticized the negligence of the courts. Reproaching a notary, who was also a prior of the Signoria, for his lascivious attraction to boys and his indifference to the law, he complained, “Oh how many of them lie there in that den [of sodomy]! But if justice had its due, the evil beast would be humbled.”⁶¹

Other contemporary verse condemned sodomy in more straightforward terms. Probably about this time, Domenico of Prato composed his moralistic poem said to be “in opprobrium of sodomy,” in which he railed against the widespread “vice” and augured terrible misfortune to those who practiced it.⁶² The anonymous poem “L’Aquetino,” dated between 1417 and 1425, ironically recounts several men’s efforts to woo a stunning fourteen-year-old boy. But the author intended less to entertain his audience than to exhort it to greater vigilance and severity, a goal all the more significant if its author, as has been suggested, was the herald of the Signoria and, in virtue of his office, recited his poem before the assembled priors.⁶³ This is one telling passage:

This is the wicked sodomy, which in its foulness offends nature and irritates Him who sends us on this path.

It may well be that the world is full of that filth, but so much the more is it unbecoming to you [Florence], risen to such great heights.

So without being obstinate any longer, do such that the stern law is observed, the one created for you, which you find ineffective:

So that a few arrogant ones aren't the reason your loftiness is abased, but upon them may the vendetta fall.⁶⁴

At the end of his tale, the poet again urged his listeners to join him in rooting sodomy out of the city: "I who together with you suffer this irritation humbly request your aid to throw off that which both you and I despise."⁶⁵

Around the mid-1410s, local clergymen were also promoting a campaign against sodomy, which contributed to a new wave of governmental discussions and reform proposals. In a meeting on December 7, 1415, counselors urged the Signoria to commend the churchmen who were condemning sodomy, since, as one noted, "the city was exceedingly corrupted [by it]."⁶⁶ He advised the priors to convene the magistrates and press them to enforce the law more zealously, and to appoint a committee of citizens to propose ways of controlling sodomy more effectively. A second speaker suggested that new laws be drafted and reminded the assembly of "how abominable [these acts] are in the sight of God, and how [their suppression] will redound to the honor and reputation of the Signoria and the city."⁶⁷ The next day, another adviser, speaking, he said, for a group of twenty-one eminent citizens whose names were entered into the record, praised the motions already made and proposed that new ordinances be drawn up. To resolve the persistent problem of lax enforcement, he also recommended the appointment of a single judiciary official to ensure that the laws against sodomy were observed.⁶⁸

It appears that the government did not at this time name a commission to review the laws or propose new ones, but it did act immediately on the final suggestion. A law was quickly approved that gave exclusive responsibility to the *esecutore* to enforce the laws against sodomy.⁶⁹ He was also required to proclaim publicly at least once a month that all sodomites were to abandon the city or risk punishment. The regime was thus moving toward an institutional solution that would concentrate the policing of sodomy in a single magistracy. But this effort to intensify judiciary pressure on sodomy was soon overturned, like similar attempts in the past. In less than a year, the measure was eviscerated when the *esecutore's* staff was reduced and his exclusive jurisdiction revoked.⁷⁰ Again, the regime betrayed a lack of determination about controlling sodomy in a more systematic fashion.

By now, this equivocation risked undermining the regime's credibility, or so an adviser implied in a meeting in 1418 when he urged the government to act so that "it will be shown to the people that the priors and the councils wish to take measures [against sodomy]."⁷¹ Accordingly, new laws were passed in 1418 and 1419, with two general aims. The first was to exhort magistrates to repress sodomy more rigorously. At least once a month, the priors were to summon the foreign rectors and incite them, "using those efficacious words . . . which will most fervently induce [their

souls to the said effect,” to enforce the ordinances and to seek out and punish sodomites diligently. To sweeten their task, the government was prepared to offer magistrates who pursued sodomites with special zeal an “honorarium” of money or of gifts bearing the city’s insignia up to a value of 100 florins. Moreover, to ensure that no sodomite went unpunished through the influence of powerful friends and patrons, the priors were forbidden to interfere in trials for sodomy.⁷² The obvious difficulty of enforcing the laws even raised suspicions that judges might themselves be sodomites. Thus the law of 1419 decreed that candidates for the offices of *podestà*, *capitano*, and *esecutore* be screened for evidence of sodomitical activity, and if any doubts arose, electors were ordered not to vote for them.⁷³

The second aim of these ordinances was to thwart the potential influence of sodomites in government by filtering them out from among citizens eligible to hold office. The 1418 law ordered that when scrutinies were held to draw up electoral lists for any civic or guild office, the notary had to warn the presiding officials and accept their sworn oaths not to qualify anyone they knew or suspected was a sodomite.⁷⁴ In 1419 the same injunction was extended to those who appointed the electoral committee itself.⁷⁵ Evidently it was feared—perhaps with good reason—that politically active sodomites might constitute a sort of conspiratorial support network.⁷⁶

Still the government must have recognized that these measures, insipid and of dubious feasibility, were inadequate to solving the problem. The law of 1418 in fact authorized the Signoria to appoint a commission of eight irreproachable citizens who, during the following year, were “to ponder and to search their souls for ways and methods by which [sodomy] might be eradicated from the city and county of Florence.”⁷⁷ Evidence of this group’s activities or recommendations has not surfaced, though its mention again in the law of 1419 implies that the commission was formed. According to this law, the eight had to approve the bestowal of the honorarium on magistrates who excelled in pursuing sodomy. They were also to meet once a month with the priors, their advisory bodies, and the foreign rectors to recall their duty to enforce the laws against sodomy.⁷⁸ Apparently, city leaders envisioned this group as a sort of civic morals committee that was to keep vigil over successive governments and magistrates as well as to devise new techniques for policing sodomy.

Yet again, as far as extant documentation shows, little or nothing came of these efforts. They fell victim to the same wavering and irresolution, or perhaps outright sabotage, that had frustrated similar attempts in the past to intensify the repression of sodomy. Prosecutions remained rare, and the Commune maintained intact its traditional apparatus for controlling the “vice” through the 1420s up to the creation of the Night Officers in 1432. Unfortunately, the mainly public and prescriptive character of the available sources makes it difficult to identify or better comprehend the nature of

the differences over sodomy that clearly seem to have divided the regime. Whatever the reasons, Florentines' chronic inability to repress sodomy decisively set the stage for the detailed and withering critique of homosexual activity by Bernardino of Siena in the mid-1420s.

The Attack from the Pulpit: Bernardino of Siena

At the Commune's invitation, Bernardino, a Franciscan friar and one of the most charismatic and influential preachers in fifteenth-century Italy, came to Florence to preach the Lenten cycles in 1424 and 1425. In his sermons, he denounced a wide variety of local sins, but he reserved some of his most vitriolic passages and chilling threats for sodomy. He devoted three consecutive sermons in his 1424 cycle and one more in 1425 exclusively to sodomy, and he commented often on it in others. In Siena, his nearby natal city, he preached at least one full sermon on sodomy in 1425 and a second in 1427.⁷⁹ Tellingly, unlike elsewhere, not even Bernardino's moral standing and alarming warnings induced the Florentines to make any changes in the policing of sodomy.⁸⁰ Still, his sermons focused people's attention on sodomy and on those practices that he believed fostered it. Over time, his teachings might have helped mold public sentiment and dispel indifference about controlling sodomy more vigorously. Yet whatever their effects, Bernardino's sermons, a rich mixture of popular wisdom and his own acute observations but also replete with gross contradictions and caricatures, are an invaluable source of information about local sexual behaviors and attitudes in the early fifteenth century. And more often than not, the wealth of information from court records in the later part of the century corroborates his descriptive remarks.

One of Bernardino's goals was to convince his audiences of the danger sodomy ostensibly posed. He skillfully manipulated the arsenal of invective that the Church had assembled over the centuries. Everything unpredictable or calamitous in human experience he attributed to sodomy, from wars and floods to pestilence and plague. A vengeful God threatened to rain down fire on Florence as on Sodom and Gomorrah, an ominous refrain running through his sermons. Sodomy also dragged with it an endless train of other mundane sins: gambling, blasphemy of God and the saints, gluttony, frequenting taverns and other places of ill repute, lying, mistrust, deception, theft, "and a thousand curses: you see well the damage it does to your country."⁸¹

Such notions were traditional, of course. Bernardino struck a more sensitive and timely chord by calling attention to demographic problems. In this city wracked by plague, he insisted that there was an obvious link between its rampant sodomy and population decline: "You don't understand that this is the reason you have lost half your population over the last twenty-five years. Tuscany has the fewest people of any country in the world, solely on account of this vice."⁸² He told the Sieneese that they too

would have more children were it not for sodomites, and contrasted their stunted growth with that of Milan, rich in marriageable girls and brimming with children.⁸³ Sodomites did not want offspring of their own, he claimed, thus giving up a comfort in their old age; indeed, since they hoped that no children would be born at all, they enmitized God, who for this reason sent pestilence.⁸⁴ This was not homicide but, “even more dreadful to imagine,” filicide.⁸⁵ Above sodomites’ heads, he told the Siense, one could hear the ghastly cries of unborn babies urging “vendetta, vendetta, vendetta” against their sterile fathers. He recounted how he awoke one night to find every courtyard, corner, and tower in the city alive with the eerie voices of unborn children crying out “to the fire, to the fire, to the fire!”⁸⁶

In addition to terrorizing his audiences with tales like these, Bernardino derided them with taunts about their reputation. The “stench” of sodomy, as he put it, that came from Italy and, above all, from Tuscany rose to the heavens and reeked throughout the world, giving its inhabitants the “pretty name” of sodomites. He claimed to know of a country where no Tuscan was allowed to live on account of their infamy and said that in Genoa, Tuscans were forbidden to teach school for fear they would corrupt the boys: “Oh Tuscany, what a cuckolding this is, what a disgrace for you throughout the whole world!”⁸⁷

Bernardino’s attention to social problems and local self-esteem also led him to attack Tuscan family life and child-rearing practices, issues high among local concerns, as has been seen. Here, in his view, lay the root of the problem of sodomy. However hard they may be to verify, his opinions on the causes of sodomy and its development in domestic and daily life help illuminate contemporary representations and interpretations of this practice.

According to Bernardino, parents were responsible for disposing their sons toward sodomy, whether through their bad example and lack of moral guidance, their failure to discipline them, or, worse, their encouragement. Some boys, he claimed, learned about the vice from their fathers, who were sodomites themselves (evidently not those child-hating sodomites he parodied elsewhere).⁸⁸ But most parents were simply negligent or uncaring. Although they taught their boys when little to behave properly, parents left them to their own ways when they reached puberty and began to experiment with sex, and then they excused their misdeeds by saying they were “only boys” and did not make them go to confession.⁸⁹ Parents seemed to love their horses more than their own sons, he charged, since if their horse fell into a ditch they would do everything they could to pull it out, yet they stood idly by when they saw their sons falling into sodomy. Because they did not care, parents in effect became their sons’ “pimps.”⁹⁰ They failed to forbid them to frequent sodomites, those “congenial, stylish, merry companions who love [their sons] so much” and corrupted them with flattery, money, and gifts.⁹¹ Bernardino advised parents to inspect their son’s stockings and hood when he returned home after an eve-

ning out to learn whether they were a gift from a suitor. Or after he was asleep, his mother should hold his coin bag to her ear and listen carefully; if the coins cried out “fire, fire, fire!” they surely came from a sodomite.⁹² He reproached mothers for not demanding to know the source of the money in their sons’ pouches, for in their willful ignorance they sent them straight to the house of the devil.⁹³ While we might find his sleuthing methods amusing, the preacher’s concern about ill-earned gifts and money did reflect common practices. As will be seen, men typically bestowed gifts of money, clothes, or other items on the adolescents they courted or sodomized.⁹⁴

Above all, as he often remarked, parents sinned by dressing their young sons too fashionably, grooming them too well, making them too attractive. For this only made them alluring targets for sodomites, if not sodomites themselves. “It’s a serious crime,” he taught, “to have a short doublet made for [your sons] and stockings with a tiny patch in front and another in back, so that they show a lot of flesh for the sodomites.”⁹⁵ He warned Sieneese parents that such attractive boys ran the risk of being taken by force and raped on the streets, a reality that was common enough and so disturbing that he urged mothers to lock their sons in the house and send only their daughters outdoors; according to him, girls were in no danger. But even if their daughters were raped, he coolly reassured them, he could “consent” to this, since it was “less evil” than sodomy perpetrated on their sons.⁹⁶

Yet what troubled Bernardino most about boys being too “spruced up” was the danger of confusing gender distinctions. “Send [your boys] out [dressed] decently, not like girls!” he insisted. “They’re the beautiful color of hyacinth, these boys of yours become girls. Shame on you, fathers and mothers! Punish them, keep them at home at night or take them with you, fathers, and don’t send them out spruced up like maidens!”⁹⁷ Displaying a misogynous habit of mind typical of late medieval moralists, he thought women were especially guilty of “effeminizing” their sons through fancy dress and refined manners: “Oh silly, foolish woman, it appears you make your son look like yourself, so that to you he’s quite becoming: ‘Oh, isn’t he the handsome lad!’ and even ‘Isn’t he the pretty girl!’”⁹⁸ Now it is unlikely that boys actually cross-dressed, and even more improbable that their parents dressed them as girls; in hundreds of sodomy denunciations to the courts and thousands of trial proceedings I have reviewed from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, not a trace of transvestite boys has yet come to light.⁹⁹ Bernardino’s fears and criticisms were directed more against male ornament and finery than outright transvestism. Still, his comments reveal a strong association in this culture between boys’ passive role in homosexual acts and feminine gender imagery, which emerges even more vividly from denunciations for sodomy.¹⁰⁰

According to Bernardino, self-interest, more than vanity or negligence, sometimes led parents to consent to their sons’ involvement in sodomy.

His intriguing interpretation of parental compliance situates the dynamics of this sexual practice within a vast commerce in goods and favors that was a basic feature of social and political relations in late medieval Italy. Hard to prove, his views are nonetheless suggestive. Some parents, he alleged in Siena, “permit their sons to do every disgraceful, evil, and sinful thing possible,” referring to sodomy, “and the reason they allow it is to obtain civic offices or money. Mothers permit it for the money,” he specified, “and fathers to gain influence with people.”¹⁰¹ In Florence he charged that parents accepted their sons’ relations with men as long as they brought their suitors home, made them feel welcome, and secured a promise to promote their fathers’ civic careers.¹⁰² Bernardino was suggesting that sodomy functioned at times as an exchange of favors or influence, the son’s sexual companionship in return for his father’s political advancement or other benefits. If true—and other supporting evidence will be reviewed later—homosexual affairs could be seen as yet another strand in the ubiquitous networks of friendship and patronage that bound this society together.¹⁰³ As actors in this male prestige game, fathers might well have been pleased and proud to see their attractive boys win the attentions of other men, as the preacher indicated elsewhere.¹⁰⁴

Bernardino also had much to say about men who pursued boys. Although he painted a detailed psychological portrait of sodomites designed to make them appear unstable, selfish, and dangerous,¹⁰⁵ his characterizations of their social traits are more original and more valuable.

Age, Bernardino thought, had a crucial bearing on sexual activity. He believed that young men were especially susceptible to sodomy and to sensuality in general, a view of youth his contemporaries widely shared. Between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five, he asserted, young males lost all sense of reason because of their sexual lust.¹⁰⁶ In one sermon, he sketched an outline of sexual behavior according to age groups. The *giovanani*, or youths, a category that in Florentine usage included young men roughly in their twenties and thirties, would all be consumed by fire, he said, for all “unbridled and crazy young men” engaged in sodomy. Of mature and old men, however, he rather inconsistently alleged that some had never been stained by sodomy, others had practiced it only in their youth but later abandoned it, while a third group had by now grown old and obstinate in their attraction to boys, and were incorrigible or “inveterate” sodomites.¹⁰⁷ These patterns roughly resemble later, better-documented homosexual activity, in which youths were prominent, mature and aged men were relatively less visible, and a small number of men were implicated throughout much of their lives.¹⁰⁸

As his attention to age suggests, Bernardino recognized that life stages shaped homosexual experience in important ways. Indeed, he specified the age of thirty-two or thirty-three as a crucial turning point in males’ sexual lives. He believed that it was especially hard for men past this age to give up a passion for sodomy, so he urged youths to do so while still young:

“This cursed vice is rarely abandoned, especially when you have grown old in it and pass 32 years of age.”¹⁰⁹ Again: “The devil blinds him so badly that if he passes 33 years of age, it’s nearly impossible for him to reform. He can, but it’s very hard to stop . . . it’s nearly impossible.”¹¹⁰ Although perhaps derived from a patristic source,¹¹¹ and a traditional reference to the age of Christ at his death, Bernardino’s insistence on the critical age of thirty-two or thirty-three might also have been related to a basic event in the life course of local men, who typically married at around this age. His typology of sexual behavior probably reflected a social reality in which many youths indulged their sexual desires in a variety of illicit ways before marrying in their early thirties.

Correspondingly, Bernardino was certain not only that marriage raised a bulwark against sodomy, a common Christian perspective, but also that most mature sodomites were not married. “Woe to those men who fail to take a wife when they are the right age and have a legitimate reason!” he thundered in Florence in 1424. “For if they don’t marry they become sodomites. Make this a general rule: when you see a grown man in good health who doesn’t have a wife, you can take this as an evil sign about him, especially if he hasn’t chosen for spiritual reasons to live in chastity.”¹¹² Again evidence from later in the century suggests that the preacher’s remarks had some substance, for most men of all ages implicated in sodomy appear to have been unmarried.¹¹³

Bernardino apparently assumed that sodomites often rejected marriage not simply because they were dissolute rakes, but because they had little erotic interest in women or were rabid misogynists. “The sodomite hates women”; indeed, he “can’t bear the sight of women,” he claimed, arguing that it was natural and just for women to despise sodomites in return.¹¹⁴ Some men were so “wrapped up” in sodomy, he asserted, “that they don’t esteem a single woman, so base do they consider them.”¹¹⁵ Preaching on husbands’ and wives’ duty to love each other, he proposed that God made Eve from Adam’s rib, not his head or foot, because women were to be the equal of men, a notion he thought sodomites in particular would repudiate:

Isn’t there any sodomite here who dislikes this, and says that woman isn’t worth as much as man? . . . We shall speak here of the cursed sodomites, who are so blind in this wickedness of theirs that no matter how beautiful a woman may be, to him she stinks and is displeasing, nor will he ever want to yield to her beauty.¹¹⁶

Disdain of women pervaded this intensely male culture; Bernardino would have found few, if any, late medieval Tuscan men willing to admit that women were their equals. In part, the attitude he ascribed to sodomites was his society’s typical misogyny exaggerated to the point of caricature. But it is significant that Bernardino also attributed some sodomites’ rejec-

tion of women to their erotic disposition. Sodomites were not aroused or attracted, in his view, by even the most desirable of women. In a culture and age in which sodomy was usually not considered a condition of certain people but a sin that anyone could commit, and men were commonly thought capable of (and can be found) desiring both boys and women, still Bernardino believed that the sexual tastes of at least some sodomites focused one-dimensionally on males and more or less precluded relations with females.¹¹⁷

Yet at the same time, Bernardino knew that some sodomites married, not an unlikely proposition even for him in a society in which marriage alliances had little to do with romance or sexual tastes but were inextricably tied to families' economic and political strategies. Consistent with his views on sodomites' erotic propensities, however, he predicted unhappy consequences for such unions. To the Florentines he offered "a general rule: the greater a sodomite he is, the more he will hate his wife, as pretty as she may be," and he warned fathers not to marry off their daughters to such men.¹¹⁸ He believed that a woman married to a sodomite would face constant conflict over her husband's inclinations toward boys and his faint interest in fulfilling his conjugal duties, or worse, she might be forced to submit to his "unnatural" passions, thus endangering her own soul.¹¹⁹ Although he feared that the frustrated wife of a sodomite could do little to change her husband's nature, he still offered advice on how she should behave toward him: when opportune, she should use "sweet words" to entice him away from his male friend; she should stop trying to seduce him by using cosmetics and wearing provocative clothes "like prostitutes wear," for she would only repel him further and drive him to boys; she should never reveal to her spouse that she was menstruous, for he would welcome this excuse to avoid having sexual relations with her and would turn instead to a boy.¹²⁰ As he once summarized, emphasizing again the threat of sodomy to family extinction,

When young men are seized by this pestilential ruin, they are hardly ever cured, and scarcely or belatedly, if at all, do they allow themselves to be united in matrimony. If by chance they take a wife, they either abuse her or they do not love her. For this reason they do not procreate children.¹²¹

Nor did Bernardino ignore the implications of sodomites' presence in public life. Just as the government's attempts to disqualify them from office suggested, so too he feared that sodomites formed a potentially dangerous interest group in politics. This was one reason he insisted that bachelors be deprived of office and banished, on the grounds they were probably sodomites.¹²² This also illuminates his charge that when a man was arrested for sodomy, someone—often another sodomite—usually rushed to plead his case with the court.¹²³ As seen earlier, he depicted sodomy almost as part of political-patronage networks, assuming that sodomites often had

power and influence to use on behalf of their boyfriends' fathers. In fact, on the few occasions he alluded to sodomites' social status, he usually spoke of the wealthy or those he said were capable of serving the Republic.¹²⁴ In his comments on age groups noted previously, he claimed that some middle-aged men—that is, men who were socially established or competing for political office—justified their interest in boys by arguing that “all men of the elite [*uomini da bene*] belong to that trade,”¹²⁵ as if sodomy were a virtual status symbol.

Speaking in Florence in 1425 of the “custom” of sodomy there, he was even more explicit about the seductive links between political and sexual bonds:

Sodomy is a custom in all of Tuscany. Go ahead, justify yourself with this excuse that it's a custom, and don't let it bother you that the sin increases with this excuse. . . . It is a custom among you men of parties, whether Guelf or Ghibelline; you will abandon it only when the devil carries you off. If someone tells you not to swear loyalty to one party or another, you won't obey on account of this custom.¹²⁶

One cohesive element of group loyalties in factions, the preacher intriguingly suggested, was partisans' common homoerotic interests.

Bernardino's accusations have broad implications for the social and political life of Florence, habitually plagued by factionalism and party strife. However, they assume special import in light of the long power struggle within the ruling class that broke out into factional conflict in 1426 and led in 1434 to the political supremacy of the Medici family, one of the most decisive events in the history of the Republic. The Medici's astute nurturing and exploitation of an intricate web of kinship, neighborhood, and patronage relations were crucial to their ascendancy and to their later exercise of power.¹²⁷ Given Bernardino's conviction that homoerotic bonds played some role in creating and maintaining party loyalties, he was perhaps alluding subtly to sodomites who enjoyed the protection of the Medici when, preaching in Florence in 1425, he demanded, with a possible play on words, “Do justice quickly with this sin [sodomy], so that the doctors [*i medici*] don't run to cure the wicked!”¹²⁸

There are, indeed, some suggestions that the cultural and political interests of the Medici in these years were fostering an environment in which sodomy could be discreetly, if not openly, condoned. As noted earlier, neither the Medici nor any of their known allies were among the prominent civic leaders who in 1415 attached their names and their influence to proposals to intensify repression of sodomy, an absence that may indicate their indifference or even their opposition to such an effort.¹²⁹ Perhaps more revealing, it was to Cosimo de' Medici, the great cultural patron who was soon to become head of the family and unofficial lord of the city, that the young humanist Antonio Beccadelli (“il Panormita”) in 1425 dedicated his *Hermaphroditus*, a collection of sexually explicit Latin epigrams whose

first book (of two) unabashedly praises love and sex between males, while the second celebrates the joys of heterosexual intercourse.¹³⁰ The work scandalized moralists across Italy, and Bernardino himself publicly burned it and effigies of its author in various cities. Later reputed a sodomite, Beccadelli lived in Florence in 1419 and 1420, when he was about twenty-five, and frequented the brilliant circle of humanists around Cosimo. By dedicating the book to Cosimo, he probably hoped to gain the eminent benefactor's patronage, perhaps not so much because he would have fully approved of its subjects or shared its sentiments as out of his appreciation of its elegant Latin form and imitation of the classics. Nonetheless, Beccadelli must have had good reason to believe that Cosimo would have found the sexual content and message of the *Hermaphroditus* inoffensive.¹³¹

Furthermore, as the final conflict that would secure the ascendancy of the Medici neared, one of their most devout partisans worried that their "soft" attitudes toward sodomy might have adverse political effects. This is implied by a letter in 1432 from Niccolò Tinucci to Cosimo's cousin Averardo, a key figure in the family's rise to power. Tinucci reproved Averardo for his intimacy with a Florentine condottiere, Micheletto degli Attendoli of Cotignuola, who Tinucci inferred was suspected of sexual unorthodoxy in part because poems of his circulating in Florence were considered "indecent." He warned his patron that his reputation was at stake, and urged him to reassure his fellow citizens that "the blemish does not come from the doctor [*dal medico*]," a plain allusion to the family that echoes Bernardino's phrase. Finally he came to the point, evidently referring to Micheletto's sexual behavior and hinting euphemistically at sodomy: "To tell you the truth, it is deemed far too great a shortcoming that you have spent so much time with him, and yet you are unable to say whether he is a man or a woman; I would therefore do everything possible to clarify this, and may the smoke fly wherever it will!"¹³²

This was the context, then, that allowed Bernardino to depict sodomy as woven so tightly into the social, familial, and political fabric of his society. The solution, in his view, was to burn it out. He condemned the ease with which sodomites escaped punishment in Florence and Siena, due to authorities' lack of will, and demanded that the strict laws be enforced.¹³³ He gave examples from elsewhere, urging his audience to be equally cruel: in Verona a man convicted of sodomy was quartered and his limbs hung from the city gates; in Genoa they burned sodomites, and he advised the Siense to do the same even if they had to execute every male in the city.¹³⁴ In Florence he recounted the gory details of the burning of a sodomite he had witnessed in Venice. There they really applied justice, he taunted: "They don't pardon the gentleman or the important citizen for sodomy, but banish irrevocably even the greatest citizens. Unlike you Florentines, who before the wound has healed have already rescinded the culprit's exile."¹³⁵ He advised that they erect a pyre on every street corner

and burn fathers, mothers, and companions, all guilty of spreading sodomy.¹³⁶

None of these directives, however, matched the power and imagination of the spectacle he orchestrated in the 1424 Lenten cycle in Florence. Between April 5 and 8 he preached three consecutive sermons on sodomy. On April 6, building up to the final entertainment planned, he told the congregation to deride sodomites by spitting whenever they heard sodomy mentioned: “If they won’t change their ways otherwise, maybe they’ll change when they’re ridiculed. Spit hard! Maybe the water of your spit will extinguish their fire. Like this, everyone spit hard!”¹³⁷ The scribe recording the event wrote that the spittle striking the stone pavement of Santa Croce “seemed like thunder.” On April 9, Bernardino gave a fourth sermon, on lust. Returning at the end to the theme of sodomy, he roused the people to fever pitch and then shouted, “To the fire! They are all sodomites! And you are in mortal sin if you try to help them!” The faithful packing the basilica then thronged outside to the great church square, where a huge pile of “vanities” had been prepared. As they reverently looked on, Bernardino set the heap ablaze, a searing warning to sodomites and to the society of which they were part.¹³⁸

Deep divisions over sodomy were emerging in Florence in the first third of the fifteenth century, perfectly captured in the conjuncture in 1424 and 1425 of Bernardino’s harsh critique and the *Hermaphroditus*’s open embracing of sodomy. Over some three decades of growing concern and strong ideological and social pressures to react against sodomy, the regime failed to implement any significant program to repress the “vice” directly and more effectively. Despite appeals from church pulpits, public squares, and government councils for decisive action, civic leaders seemed reluctant or unable to confront the issue. These contradictory responses, whose social and political contours unfortunately remain vague, and the long procrastination they produced, played an important role in shaping the unusual measures the regime finally adopted in 1432 with the institution of the Office of the Night. We now turn to a study of this magistracy, which so thoroughly altered the regulation of sodomy in Florence.

2

The Officers of the Night

You are called Officers of the convents and sodomites,
magistracies all too useful in every city and village.

Anonymous informer (1461)¹

Be ardent about rooting out this vice, which is the cause
of the ruin of our city.

Anonymous informer (1496)²

“[The government] wishes to root out of its city the abominable vice of sodomy, called in the holy scriptures the most evil sin, and having decided that if what is written herein is done, for the most part this will be accomplished.” Thus began the law resoundingly approved on April 17, 1432, with which Florence finally instituted a special magistracy to pursue and prosecute sodomy.³ Culminating a thirty-year period of agitation for repression, on the one hand, and of contradictions, indecision, and failed expedients, on the other, the founding of the Office of the Night and the reforms introduced along with it signaled a watershed for homosexual activity and its regulation. For long prosecuted rarely and selectively, sodomy now became subject to systematic and routine control. During the next seventy years, until it was suppressed in 1502, the Office of the Night played what many Florentines deemed an indispensable role, as the informers’ comments suggest, in the community’s efforts to discipline the sexual behavior of its members.

The government’s decision to assign the policing of sodomy to a special magistracy was quite unusual, reflecting the peculiarly problematic nature of this “vice” and its control in Florence. True, the growing recourse to citizen commissions with jurisdiction over public morals had been heading toward an institutional solution of this sort. But the repeated failure in the past to adopt similar measures for sodomy made such a choice far from inevitable. This may explain in part why the founding law of the Office of the Night included stiff penalties of 1,000 lire both for the governing priors, should they fail to implement the law, and for men who declined to accept their election to the office.⁴ Furthermore, an autonomous magistracy dedicated solely to the surveillance and punishment of sodomy, as

this office was conceived, had no exact precedents and remained an exception among judicial institutions in Italy and Europe. Previously only Venice possessed something roughly analogous: the *collegium sodomitorum*, a subcommittee of the city's main criminal court, the Council of Ten, which was set up in 1418 to apprehend sodomites and expedite proceedings against them before sentencing by the full tribunal.⁵ In 1448 Lucca, the western rival of Florence, also founded a magistracy to police sodomy, the Officers of Decency, which appears to have been similar to its Florentine predecessor.⁶ Other Italian cities had general "public morals" offices, which probably also had jurisdiction over sodomy, like the Office of Virtue created in Genoa in 1482,⁷ but none besides the cities just mentioned is presently known to have had a magistracy with this single competence. That Florence had the dubious distinction of possessing such a peculiar and self-incriminating "office of the sodomites" or "of the buggers," as townspeople often called it, came eventually to weigh negatively on citizens' sense of civic pride and reputation, and this was one persuasive reason why the magistracy was abolished in 1502.⁸

The original purpose of the Office of the Night was solely to pursue and punish sodomy, which in practical terms was surely understood as sexual acts between males. Although "sodomy" normally included relations "contrary to nature" between persons of both the same and the opposite sexes, the wording of the magistracy's founding law unusually implied that it was intended only to police male homosexual activity. Unlike past injunctions against sodomy, neither this nor any other law pertaining to the office until the 1490s explicitly mentioned women.⁹ And in fact, the Night Officers began to prosecute heterosexual sodomy with some frequency only as late as the 1480s and 1490s; earlier, convictions were rare and almost always involved the special case of the sexual abuse of very young girls.¹⁰ Not long after the founding of the magistracy, in 1433 its jurisdiction was expanded to include safeguarding the inviolability and sexual purity of female convents, formerly the duty of a commission created for this purpose in 1421.¹¹ This involved granting licenses to men, usually workers or provisioners, to enter nunneries, and prosecuting illicit entries and sexual trafficking between laymen and nuns. In 1454 the Night Officers were also authorized to guard convents from the contaminating presence of prostitutes and other "dishonest" women in their immediate vicinity.¹² Nonetheless, the crimes of the violation of convents and of sodomy between males and females constituted only small fractions of the cases the Office of the Night prosecuted (in the last quarter of the century, respectively 1 percent and 3 percent). The Night Officers' main responsibility was and always remained the policing of sexual acts between males.

Whether the Office of the Night served as an effective deterrent to sodomy is questionable. But to judge by the sheer amount of homosexual activity it brought to light, its success, however partial, was nothing short of remarkable. Largely as a result of this magistracy, prosecutions and con-

victions for sodomy in fifteenth-century Florence far exceeded those in any other late medieval or early modern city on record, both in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. In the much larger city of Venice, from 1426 to 1500, roughly the same years as the Night Officers' tenure, authorities prosecuted 411 individuals, and from 1406 to 1500 convicted 268.¹³ Reliable figures for most other Italian cities are lacking, but it is known that 8 men were executed for sodomy in Ferrara from 1440 to 1520; although aggregate figures are unavailable, convictions in sixteenth-century Lucca were probably rather high (43 in 1556 and 20 in 1579).¹⁴ In Geneva only 5 persons were convicted from 1444 to 1500, 33 from 1501 to 1600, and 32 from 1601 to 1700.¹⁵ In Palermo, under Spanish dominion, an estimated 100 men were put to death for homosexual sodomy between 1567 and 1640.¹⁶ In Spain itself, secular courts executed between 100 and 150 men in Madrid from the 1580s to the 1650s and over 100 in Seville from 1575 to 1620; from 1570 to 1630, the Inquisition in Barcelona prosecuted 102 cases of homosexual sodomy and put 14 men to death, in Valencia tried 156 and executed 34, and in Saragossa tried 187 and executed 27.¹⁷ In contrast, during the Night Officers' seventy-year tenure from 1432 to 1502, between 15,000 and 16,000 individuals implicated in homosexual activity came to their attention, and they probably levied over 2,400 convictions. Taking into account the sentences handed down by other magistracies, the total number of convictions for homosexual sodomy in these years approached 3,000.¹⁸

These remarkable figures reveal something of how widespread homosexual activity was in Florence, and offer a compelling measure both of the revolution the Office of the Night effected in the policing of sodomy and of its social impact. But they also raise doubts about the efficacy of this institution, and even about the regime's intention, to "root out" the practice entirely, as the law of 1432 stated. In fact, the Night Officers represented a new, "benevolent," and somewhat accommodating strategy of social control and discipline, aimed less at repressing homosexual activity rigorously than at containing it within tolerable bounds. How this strategy of managing sodomy was deployed in the structure, evolution, and praxis of the Office of the Night is the main subject of this chapter.

The Institution

Although no governmental discussions on the founding, form, and procedures of the Office of the Night have come to light, it was clearly conceived with a view toward remedying inadequacies in the existing judicial apparatus and effecting a broader and more efficient control of sodomy. In part, this was facilitated by the institution's structure and limited competence. Unlike the cumbersome courts of the *podestà*, *capitano*, and *esecutore*, presided over by foreign dignitaries with large professional, administrative, and police staffs, the Office of the Night, like the other "mor-

als” commissions, comprised a small number of lay citizens assisted by few personnel. Their jurisdiction over limited problems—in this case, sodomy and, later, convents—rendered control of these sensitive areas more flexible and effective, while the local patriciate had a more direct hand in their regulation. In other respects, however, especially its novel penalties, the Office of the Night possessed innovative, indeed radical features that reflected the specific problem of sodomy. They had the effect of making this ostensibly most dreaded and dangerous of sexual sins appear much less menacing, little more than a common misdemeanor.

There were six Officers of the Night, elected annually. From the beginning, the Signoria and its councils closely supervised their election by drawing on a limited pool of hand-picked citizens, presumably to keep the office firmly under the regime’s control.¹⁹ Normal electoral procedures like those for other offices were conceded only in 1446.²⁰ The officials’ staff included a notary, a treasurer, and two or three retainers who carried out executive tasks (issuing citations, making arrests) and also acted as informants.

The Night Officers had to meet certain qualifications that, in effect, ensured the dominance of the social and political elite. Five had to be members of the seven major guilds, made up mainly of substantial merchants, bankers, industrialists, and professionals, while only one represented the fourteen minor guilds of artisans and shopkeepers. Each had to be at least forty-five years old, one of the highest age requirements for any city office. Evidently this reflected a common worry in this society that the passions of younger men might sway their judgment, especially with regard to this particular sexual crime. Finally, in a notable exception to the norms for most civic offices, the Night Officers had to be married—that is, publicly committed to the lay and Christian ideal of “licit” sexuality within matrimony.²¹ These qualities, as will be seen, sharply distinguished the officials from those whose sexual behavior they tried to discipline. From this perspective, the management of sodomy had strong social and generational foundations: well-established, powerful, mature or elderly men, whose age and married status were thought to make them less prone to erotic license, sat in judgment over the homosexual activity of adolescents and mainly young men and bachelors, who came from the powerless poor and artisanal classes or were the dissolute sons of the wealthy.

According to the law of 1432, the modest monthly sum of 12 florins derived from convicted sodomites’ fines was to cover the salaries of all the officers and their staff plus operating expenses, including the rent of their meeting quarters, normally in guild halls.²² But by 1444, the Night Officers were evidently collecting enough money from fines that the government raised each official’s salary plus those of their notary and treasurer to a respectable 5 florins a month.²³ Account books from the mid-1450s show that in addition to basic expenses, a good deal of money was spent on candles or food—geese, ducks, capons, young goats—for celebrating various feast days.²⁴ The officials also took part, along with the city’s other mag-

istrates, in the annual ceremonial offering to the patron saint, John the Baptist, the city's major civic ritual event.²⁵ These celebrations probably helped mold a sense of unity among the officers and their staff, and also indicate that the Night Officers had a collective public identity reinforced by their participation in the city's ritual life.²⁶

Empowered to exercise summary justice, the Officers of the Night, laymen with no special legal training, were not required to observe the inquisitorial procedures of the traditional courts. In this regard, one important innovation was their simplified mode of opening proceedings. They were instructed to proceed on the basis of secret denunciations, formal accusations, or by any other means, "disregarding any legal or statutory custom or principle."²⁷ In contrast with the professional courts, they almost never acted *ex officio*, or on their own initiative, which put the burden of proof on the court. Nor did they proceed on formal charges brought by an injured party (*accusatio*), which also required supporting evidence. Rather, they initiated proceedings on the basis of denunciations, usually anonymous (*tamburatio* or *notificatio secreta*, a "render of notice"), which did not require the accuser to provide proof. Dependence on secret accusations was typical of all the citizen magistracies, and their use grew substantially in the fifteenth century.²⁸

To encourage the community to make accusations, the Night Officers offered informers a reward of one-fourth of the convicted sodomite's fine and guaranteed their anonymity to protect them from retribution.²⁹ Informers sometimes handed denunciations to an official or a retainer, but more commonly they dropped them into boxes, called *tamburi*, affixed in churches in Florence and in several provincial towns. In the second half of the century, when their locations are known, the Night Officers had *tamburi* in San Piero Scheraggio, Orsanmichele, and the cathedral in Florence, and at different times in Prato, Pistoia, Pisa, Empoli, and Arezzo. At least once a month, the boxes were opened and the denunciations they held were reviewed and copied into the office's registers.³⁰

The widespread use of secret accusations made the whole community potential participants in the policing of sodomy. Of course, this system encouraged some people to indulge their morbid curiosity about other people's lives, and no doubt led to false denunciations to defame one's enemies or avenge old disputes. Anonymous charges could as easily express social and neighborhood tensions as sentiments against sodomy. For this reason, they had obvious drawbacks for the magistrates, as they do for the historian, and many were simply ignored. Still, they created an enormous pool of suspects: lists of accusations from 1452 to 1502 yield roughly 4,750 names.³¹ And while the denunciations must be used with all due caution, they preserve not only important descriptive evidence but also a more or less authentic "popular" voice against sodomy whose value cannot be overstated.

As their herald warned the townspeople in their annual proclamation

upon assuming office on April 23, the Night Officers also employed a number of “spies” or “secret explorers.” In general, these spies were probably their retainers, who may have looked into charges before the officials proceeded but also ferreted out information and made denunciations on their own.³² Like all informers, retainers who denounced people who were later convicted got one-fourth of the fine, a sure incentive to perform their duties ardently.

Although simplified, the Night Officers’ procedure was not arbitrary. They followed guidelines set down in law; at times, they also sought the advice of professional lawyers.³³ With the required agreement of four of the officers, after a denunciation an investigation proceeded with the arrest and interrogation of one of the alleged partners.³⁴ While the law did not specify which, the officials almost always first questioned the “passive” partner, probably because they assumed that his young age made it easier to elicit a confession, especially with the threat and sometimes the application of torture.³⁵ To convict someone, they normally had to have the confession of at least one (but not both) of the partners. A conviction could also be obtained without a confession, provided they had the testimony of two eyewitnesses, one eyewitness and two people who attested to public knowledge of the fact, or four people who confirmed its public knowledge.³⁶ Usually, however, the Night Officers depended on the confession of only one partner and seldom heard other witnesses. Also, by law they could prosecute persons only for sexual relations they had had within the previous year. After a confession, the magistrates cited or arrested the partner(s) implicated and gave them a chance to confirm or deny the charge.

Finally, after swearing to follow the dictates of their conscience, disregarding “hatred, jealousy, love, entreaties, bribes, and any other human passion, and turning their mind and attention to God, justice, and the good government of the city,” the officials voted on the sentence. Usually a simple majority sufficed to convict, but five votes were needed in cases that called for one of the maximum penalties—that is, exile, interdiction from office, or execution. In the last case, the citizen magistrates had no authority to execute the convicted man, but had instead to transfer him to one of the professional judges for the application of the sentence.³⁷

The institution of the special magistracy alone ensured that sodomy would now receive unprecedented attention. The most remarkable feature of this plan to “eradicate” sodomy, however, was the radically new penalties associated with it. In fact, as the government moved to intensify the surveillance and repression of sodomy, it sharply reduced the penalties for it. This measure, more than anything else, opened the floodgates to the subsequent wave of convictions. Little attests more eloquently to the problematic nature of sodomy in Florence or to the ambivalence of efforts to control it.

The harsh penalties for sodomy in the fourteenth and early fifteenth

centuries had discouraged the consistent and widespread repression of this crime, and helped determine that the courts prosecuted only the most violent or morally offensive cases. That the regime recognized the problem is clear from the attempt to resolve it in the proposed statutes of 1408 and 1409, and their definitive redaction in 1415, by introducing a fine and barring penalties of mutilation, death, exile, or loss of political rights for a first conviction. But penalties were still severe—a large fine of 1,000 lire and optional public humiliation for a first offense, and death by burning for a second. Passive partners under age eighteen were to be punished at the court's discretion.³⁸

With the institution of the Night Officers, the Commune introduced new penalties and other innovations as part of its strategy of "benevolent" but more effective control. The penalty for the first conviction of an adult aged eighteen or above, whether as the active or the passive partner, now fell from 1,000 lire to 50 gold florins. This was still a very high sum—roughly what a skilled artisan in the construction trade earned in one year—but it was only one-fifth of the previous fine.³⁹ The 1432 law also established an extensive scale of graduated penalties for multiple convictions. An adult's second conviction brought a fine of 100 florins; his third, a fine of 200 florins plus interdiction from office for two years; his fourth, 500 florins and privation from office for life. Finally, his fifth conviction brought death by burning.⁴⁰

Penalties prescribed for minors also diverged sharply from previous norms. For the first time in a sodomy law, adolescents between the ages of twelve and eighteen were treated as a separate category based solely on their age, regardless of their role in sexual relations. In the past, boys this age who took the active role were subject to the same penalties as adults; passives under age eighteen received special consideration, probably because they were assumed to be more or less involuntary victims. Now, however, "since youth is less capable of deceit and should be punished for crimes with lighter penalties," the law of 1432 prescribed for all minors lower and even more extended graduated fines than those for adults. They incurred a fine of 10 florins for a first conviction, 25 for a second, and 50 for a third. A fourth offense raised the penalty to 100 florins and one hour in the pillory (*gogna*). A fifth brought a fine of 200 florins and exile from the territory for one year; a sixth, a 500-florin fine and ten-year exile. If convicted a seventh time, a youth could be sentenced to death, but only if he had passed his eighteenth birthday.⁴¹

Importantly, the age up to which one was legally considered a minor in sodomy, eighteen, was significantly higher than the statutory age of majority in Florence for all other crimes, which was only sixteen.⁴² In part, this exception probably reflected and accommodated the prevailing age configuration of sodomy, since the passive role was mainly limited to boys up through age eighteen.⁴³ Moreover, as will be seen, the Night Officers only briefly observed the norms on punishing minors. For most of their

seventy-year tenure, they regularly absolved all adolescents aged eighteen or under, whatever their role, thereby reinforcing the notion of their sexual innocence and, in effect, tacitly sanctioning their homosexual activity.⁴⁴ This legal and practical recognition of the special status of twelve- to eighteen-year-olds perhaps reflected the growing attention in Florence to adolescents as a particular age-defined social group.⁴⁵

Finally, two other important provisions of the 1432 law allowed for all these penalties to be reduced further or avoided altogether. First, if a person whom the magistrates arrested or cited freely confessed his alleged misdeeds, then they would reduce his fine by one-half.⁴⁶ The government in 1449 added a threat to this incentive by declaring that if accused sodomites were condemned without confessing, their names and crimes would be proclaimed in the legislative councils, an embarrassing public admonition in the city's main civic forum.⁴⁷ With these measures, the authorities hoped to encourage people to divulge the names of others with whom they had engaged in sodomy. More dependable than secret denunciations, such revelations could give officials direct, first-hand access to larger networks of homosexual activity.

The same logic even more clearly motivated the second provision, one of the most remarkable and unusual features of the new system of policing sodomy. In essence, the regime agreed to absolve sodomites who denounced themselves to the Night Officers. If a person voluntarily turned himself in before he was implicated by other means, confessed his sexual relations, and named his partners, then he was guaranteed full immunity from prosecution.⁴⁸ Sodomy was the single crime for which the judiciary system in Florence granted immunity.⁴⁹ This unique benefit for self-confessed sodomites is a telling indication of how far the regime was willing to go in order to cast its controls over sodomy more widely. When the Venetian government passed a similar measure in 1516, it was greeted with disbelief and derision.⁵⁰ Over the years, many hundreds of individuals exploited this loophole to avoid a conviction and a heavy penalty. In the 1470s and 1480s, the only period in which self-accusations were regularly noted in extant registers, an average of some forty people denounced themselves for sodomy every year.⁵¹

Taken together, the changes introduced with the Office of the Night could hardly have been more sweeping or, given the past clamor for repression, more unexpected. As noted earlier, an institution solely to prosecute sodomy was nearly unique in Italy. The new penalties, moreover, broke sharply with a long tradition of severe punishments for this crime.⁵² Compared with the other major Italian republic, Venice, where sodomites were exiled, maimed, and burned throughout the century, the Florentine approach appears even more unusual.⁵³

Despite the appearance of lenience, however, these changes should not be mistaken for a newfound tolerance of sodomy. Viewed against the backdrop of three decades of tough-sounding enactments but few concrete

results, the 1432 revisions have a plain strategic and pragmatic cast. If the regime hoped to expand its effective control over sodomy, it probably had little choice but to reduce and extend penalties for it. In part, the harsh sanctions of the past apparently ran counter to community sensibilities toward nonviolent sodomitical acts, which many Florentines perhaps disapproved but regarded as not so serious as to merit cruel punishment. Evidence to be reviewed later, moreover, suggests that sodomy was common enough across the social spectrum that rigorous repression might have created unpredictable tensions in a city already torn by internal strife.⁵⁴ Instead, the regime chose a less confrontational, “benevolent” approach that was more likely to gain social consensus.⁵⁵ Considering the controversies and failed initiatives of the previous thirty years, along with evidence that citizens even of eminent families engaged in sodomy, this “benign” strategy was conceivably a compromise struck to overcome indifference or covert opposition within the governing class itself.

There were also patent financial motives behind the new institution and especially the novel fines. From the early 1420s, Florence had been undergoing a severe fiscal crisis that reached alarming proportions in the early 1430s, just when the Office of the Night was created.⁵⁶ This magistracy was clearly no solution to the city’s fiscal plight, though one compelling attraction of all the self-financed citizen commissions was their minimal cost compared with that of the expensive bureaucracies of the traditional courts. More important, the pragmatic merchant-bankers who ruled Florence seem to have reasoned that if sodomy was impossible to “eradicate,” they could at least raise money from those who practiced it. To some extent, the (relatively) low and graduated fines can be seen as a “tax” on sodomy instead of the retribution required by past laws, much like the taxes on prostitution or sumptuary abuses. In fact, men who denounced themselves to win immunity had to pay a small sum, 2 lire and 9 soldi, that was literally called a “tax.”⁵⁷

Certainly the fines sodomites paid could make no more than a tiny dent in the city’s huge budget deficit.⁵⁸ But their payments were put to worthy civic uses, such as rebuilding convents or assisting hospitals or poor nuns, a kind of ritual cleansing and recycling of sex-offenders’ money. In 1435, when Pope Eugenius IV ordered that seven convents on via San Gallo be combined into two, the government directed the Night Officers to contribute 100 florins from fines to finance the renovations; in 1440 half their fines were allotted for this purpose.⁵⁹ From 1447 on, they gave a portion of fines plus regular gifts of flour, meat, and wine to support the nuns known as the *Convertite*.⁶⁰ Later, convicted sodomites had to pay a tax to the foundling home of the *Innocenti*.⁶¹

Furthermore, the regime carefully kept its repressive options open. While the 1432 law limited the new penalties and benefits to those persons tried by the Night Officers, the traditional courts were directed to continue prosecuting sodomy according to the severe regulations of the past.⁶² This

reinforced the peculiar status and function of the Office of the Night, at the same time retaining the regime's prerogative of punishing sodomites in certain cases with harsher penalties. Later laws clarified this implicit division of labor. In 1440 the Night Officers were forbidden to prosecute persons who allowed others to use their houses for sodomy. Hereafter, this crime was reserved to the foreign rectors and the penalty prescribed was death by burning.⁶³ A law of 1449 prohibited the Night Officers from trying men who committed sodomy "in unusual and horrible fashion, that is, with damage to the anus" of their partners; reportedly as a result of violent assaults, several boys were gravely ill and some had died from their injuries. According to the law, the "leniency" of the Night Officers' penalties failed to deter men from perpetrating such serious crimes, and even gave them "audacity and incentive." Again, the government restricted such cases to the professional courts and, later, the Eight of Watch.⁶⁴ The same courts also had exclusive competence over acts considered sacrilegious, such as sodomy between Jews and Christians and sodomy committed in churches, and they usually gave offenders exemplary punishments.⁶⁵ These violent or especially disturbing cases, however, had always been severely punished. With the Office of the Night, the control of sodomy expanded to include much more common consensual or nonviolent homosexual relations, which for the most part local courts had long ignored.

The creation of the Office of the Night thus marked a crucial turning point in the policing of sodomy in Florence. Despite the law's stated goal of "eradicating" sodomy, this magistracy was a tacit admission of the extent of its practice and the unlikelihood of eliminating it. Reserving the option of harsh repression for sensational or especially reprehensible cases, the government instituted a more conciliatory response for more common and evidently tolerable forms of sexual relations between males. The regulation of sodomy would become less severe, on the whole, but more pervasive. The more than 15,000 males implicated for homosexual activity to the Night Officers in just seventy years are eloquent testimony to the shrewdness of this sexual politics. The problem of managing sodomy, however, was not resolved definitively in 1432. It remained a dynamic issue throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Politics and Sodomy in the 1430s

The debut of the Night Officers on the Florentine stage was little short of spectacular after the inconclusive thirty-year prelude. Convictions for sodomy multiplied rapidly, striking even prominent members of the regime. Yet at the same time, the novel magistracy and the publicity it gave sodomy exposed the problematic nature of homosexual activity in Florence and highlighted a certain ambivalence that would long characterize its control.

Almost predictably, a flood of accusations overwhelmed the new magistrates. Far from satisfied, however, the government construed these

charges as a malicious attempt to slander innocent men or, more alarmingly, as a concerted effort to undermine the Office of the Night. Less than three months after the office was founded, the preamble to a law of July 5, 1432, noted that “many men have been denounced who, in the opinion of the Night Officers and others, have never been known to be suspected of such vices.”⁶⁶ Two possible sources of the defaming allegations were indicated. Perhaps they had been written by “perverse and wicked men, so that the lives of others will suffer dishonor,” a familiar practice in these factious years.⁶⁷ Alternatively, the government suspected a crafty resistance by sodomites: that is, men who “could not openly attack such a virtuous law” were covertly trying to sabotage it “to protect their own shameful way of living.” Their goal, it was feared, was that “either by means of a multitude of disgraceful and unjust denunciations and infamies, which usually have a damaging effect among the ignorant, or out of disgust over useless absolutions and inquisitions, [the new] law will be destroyed or rendered completely ineffective.”⁶⁸

Little could be done to halt the flow of ostensibly false charges, but their damage could be blunted by censoring them. Foreseeing this problem, the framers of the Night Officers’ founding law had ordered that when notaries sent the required notice of acquittals to the cameral offices, they were not to record the accusations. Innocent men would thus not suffer “calumnies” because of “filthy and indecent denunciations.”⁶⁹ The July law reinforced this by forbidding notaries even to notify the cameral offices of absolutions for sodomy.⁷⁰

If these denunciations were perhaps an effort to subvert the new court, they also reflect the explosive political climate of the early 1430s. The years around the creation of the Office of the Night were decisive for the future of the Republic. Long-standing differences within the ruling class had flamed into open factional conflict after the mid-1420s, and by 1432 partisan struggle dominated the city’s political life. In October 1433, the conservative regime in power banished Cosimo de’ Medici, leader of the opposing “popular” party, and other members of his family. The apparent victory of the Albizzi faction was short-lived, however. In September 1434, a pro-Medicean Signoria recalled Cosimo from exile.⁷¹ His return and the subsequent punishment or exile of many of their opponents marked the beginning of the Medici ascendancy, a position the family would maintain, with two notable interruptions, through the fall of the Republic in 1532 and beyond, under the Medicean principality, until 1737.

No evidence has emerged that directly links the founding of the Office of the Night to this struggle or to one faction or the other. Nonetheless, it appears that the control of sodomy, a sensitive problem open to abuse, became entangled to some extent in this political conflict. The purportedly false accusations in part suggest as much. But it is even more indicative that several of the Night Officers’ early convictions for sodomy struck the very center of the governing class and at least one of the main factions.

Remarkably, the first person they condemned was none other than the recent Gonfalonier of Justice, the highest official of the Republic, Doffo di Nepo Spini, member of an ancient and illustrious family. There is some irony, if not political motive, to Spini's conviction, for it was under his administration in April that the Office of the Night had been founded. On May 22, 1432, fourteen-year-old Francesco di Giovanni, who worked for a barber in piazza Santa Trinita, site of the imposing Spini palace, confessed that Doffo had sodomized him in his house. Three days later, the seventy-year-old patriarch confirmed his charge. Since he confessed, he was fined the reduced sum of 25 florins.⁷² Spini's conviction evidently caused a public sensation, enough to move Pagolo del Pagone to mention it in his domestic chronicle, a rare thing indeed in such sources. That he wildly exaggerated the details may suggest something of the marvel and gossip that surrounded the case: "At the time of [Doffo di] Nepo Spini the law of the sodomites was created. It so happened that the first man investigated on this account was [Doffo di] Nepo Spini. He was fined 1,000 florins, and he paid them."⁷³

Spini's conviction alone points to the possibly potent mix of politics and sodomy in Florence and suggests that this "vice" attracted even the highest ranks of society. Yet charges of prominent men's involvement in or connection to homosexual activity did not end here. The boy who named Spini also inculpated another man who, unlike the former Gonfalonier, had little status, a sixty-year-old German horse trainer named Ciamberlano di Giovanni; he, too, confessed and was fined 25 florins.⁷⁴ All this would be unremarkable except for the fact that Ciamberlano's master happened to be Palla Strozzi, the wealthiest man in Florence and an eminent figure in the regime. Strozzi, moreover, took a personal interest in his employee's case, for Ciamberlano's fine was paid by his distinguished son-in-law, Giovanni Rucellai.⁷⁵

Soon afterward, another patrician of note was implicated in sodomy. After a secret accusation, Sandro di Cristoforo, a trumpeter of the Comune, confessed that he had been sodomized by Antonio di Lionardo Dell'Antella, scion of an ancient family.⁷⁶ Like Doffo Spini, Dell'Antella had recently held high political office as a prior (May–June 1432). But in contrast with the former Gonfalonier, who simply confessed, Dell'Antella evoked the privilege of judiciary immunity for recent members of the Signoria. After hearing a defense by his brother Roberto—who, as it happens, had also just pledged surety for a man suspected of hosting sodomites in his house—and after seeking the opinion of a lawyer who decided in his favor, the officials absolved him.⁷⁷ Antonio's reprieve was short, however, for after his immunity elapsed at the end of June 1433, new officials cited him again on the same charge, and when he failed to appear they condemned him in absentia and fined him 50 florins.⁷⁸ After Dell'Antella's attempt to escape conviction was foiled, and probably with his case in mind, the Medicean-backed government in late 1434 decreed that former

priors and Gonfaloniers of Justice who were accused of sodomy could no longer claim immunity.⁷⁹

In their first year, the Night Officers convicted a few other men, but Spini, Dell'Antella, and Ciamberlano (Palla Strozzi's horse trainer) were the most conspicuous, due to their own prestige or, in the last case, to his master's standing. Yet what is especially significant about these men is their common bond as partisans or friends of the conservative, anti-Medicean faction. Palla Strozzi was a leading exponent of the aristocratic party, and was banished after the Medici returned in 1434.⁸⁰ Doffo Spini was not an active partisan, but he was linked to this faction through both kinship and neighborhood ties. He rented his house from Palla Strozzi, his neighbor, and his kinsman Bartolomeo Spini, described as a "hardcore" conservative, was stripped of office after the Medici's return.⁸¹ Both Dell'Antella brothers were Albizzi stalwarts and staunchly opposed the Medici. Roberto was held to be a ringleader of a secret society in 1429, along with two other men exiled in 1434, and both he and Antonio were banished after Cosimo reentered the city.⁸²

The conviction of these men, all connected to the same faction, hardly seems a coincidence. Was this an example of what Bernardino of Siena had alluded to a few years earlier when he said that homoerotic bonds played a role in clientage relations and party alliances in Florence? The evidence is too inconclusive to do more than raise the question, though it will later be seen how common and extensive networks among sodomites could be.⁸³ Recent laws had also made it clear that officeholding citizens engaged in sodomy, so it will not do to dismiss these charges as merely "political."

Still, the factious context probably had a telling role in these events. Notably, only members or friends of the Albizzi faction were condemned as sodomites, while partisans of the Medici escaped unscathed.⁸⁴ Perhaps these convictions were part of a campaign by the Medici party to discredit its enemies, an effort evidently being waged through other magistracies as well.⁸⁵ If so, the identity of the officials must have facilitated matters, for Medici supporters dominated the Office of the Night in these years.⁸⁶

The convictions of Doffo Spini and Antonio Dell'Antella and the case that indirectly touched Palla Strozzi illustrate perhaps how the regulation of sodomy could have had political ends. Defamation was a common risk, fostered by the system itself. But such abuses should not be exaggerated. The institution of the Office of the Night expressed a genuine concern to control widespread homosexual activity.

This broader sexual politics evolved quickly, as convictions for sodomy escalated to unprecedented levels. From eight in 1432/1433, condemnations by the Night Officers climbed to eleven the following year, sixteen the next, and thirty-seven in 1435/1436. From 1432 to 1440, they convicted 109 individuals for homosexual sodomy.⁸⁷ Most were of modest means and status, mainly artisans or textile workers; few bore surnames that would indicate a higher social or political rank.

The more than thirteen convictions annually in the first eight years of the operation of the Office of the Night represented a tenfold increase compared with preceding decades. It is highly unlikely, however, that the rising condemnations reflected a sudden upsurge in homosexual activity. They tend rather to confirm the thesis that before the creation of this magistracy sodomy was seldom reported or prosecuted. What appears to have been a massive increase in sodomy was instead a product, a fiction, of the reorganized policing apparatus.

The proliferation of convictions brought sodomy even more insistently and disturbingly into public view, and this had at least two discernible effects. One was an outpouring of fear and hostility in trial rhetoric. Never before in laws or judiciary proceedings had authorities so graphically portrayed sodomy as an outrage to God that threatened to wreak havoc on their society, or so piously proclaimed their role as protectors of the community's well-being. This outburst peaked in 1435 and 1436, the same year convictions reached the highest annual number (thirty-seven) known up to that time in the city. This heightened rhetoric and the wave of condemnations coincided both with the sojourn of Pope Eugenius IV in the city, a strong incentive to repress immorality, and, perhaps more important, with the return of Cosimo de' Medici from exile and the subsequent efforts to consolidate the power and position of the Medicean party. The absence of known anti-Mediceans among men condemned at this time for sodomy suggests that the Medici were not overtly using the Office of the Night as an instrument of personal and political vendetta (they had other, more effective, ways to achieve this end). Nonetheless, the office probably was a vehicle for affirming the authority of the new regime at a time of extreme social and civic tension. The rhetoric that the repression of sodomy stayed God's wrath, pacified subversive passions, and reinforced good civic order expressed an apt political message for the Medicean regime that was seeking to impose and legitimate its rule. According to the pregnant assertion of the Night Officers in a sentence in 1436, when those men who defied the laws of God, man, and nature by committing sodomy were punished, then "the city and its upright citizens may be freed from all commotion, wars ended, plague abolished, enemy plots curbed, and cities turned toward good government and praiseworthy conduct."⁸⁸

More concretely, the wave of convictions for sodomy after 1432 also soon elicited a conservative backlash against the alleged liberality of the new penalties. Citing the opinion of the Night Officers, a law of 1440 stated that due to the "lenience" of the penalties adopted in 1432, "many men were not restrained from committing this vice, and, what is worse, many keep and lend houses for perpetrating this abhorrent crime."⁸⁹ Accordingly, the government abolished the lowest penalties for both adults and minors and made those who lent their houses to others for sodomy punishable by death. Revealingly, this attempt to deter sodomy by making its punishment more severe quickly proved a failure, as will be seen, and

was abandoned. Nonetheless, it points to a sense of unease and to possible discord within the governing class about the “benevolent” system of policing sodomy instituted with the Office of the Night.

Despite the explosion of convictions, fiery rhetoric, and increase in penalties, however, a certain pragmatism also emerged that tempered the control of sodomy and indicated future trends. A remarkable passage from a sentence against a sodomite in 1436 expressed this more sober realism. The officials candidly admitted that sodomy was widespread and that even their best efforts had failed to stem it. The conclusion they drew from this appraisal eloquently accents the difficulties local authorities had in managing sodomy:

[The Officers of the Night] are watching with unceasing diligence so that the horrible crime of sodomy might be rooted out of the city and its territory, and they devote themselves to almost nothing else. Yet after all their labors, words, threats, and punishments against many persons, they believe that, in effect, it is nearly impossible for any good to come about, so corrupt and stained is the city. Nonetheless, they prudently reason that if despite every sort of punishment these men are still not restrained, at least some might control themselves, and perhaps those defiled by such ignominy will not do it so openly; and if out of a thousand sodomites the authorities punish even one well, all of them experience fear. Although their crimes may not be completely prevented, they may in part be contained.⁹⁰

The pragmatism of this passage probably reveals more about Florentine reactions toward sodomy than does the rhetoric of divine retribution. While far from a policy statement, it does express a clear tendency in the regime’s efforts. The very magistrates empowered to police the “vice” admitted its ubiquity and the stubborn tenacity of those who engaged in it. They were not abdicating their duty, but resolved merely to contain sodomy within acceptable limits rather than repress it consistently. Unable to thwart males’ illicit passions, they reasoned that by penalizing someone occasionally to intimidate others they could at least force sodomites into clandestinity and keep their sexual behavior out of public view. Sodomy might thus be held in check even though in fact it would often go unpunished.

This realistic appraisal may help explain the sharp decline in convictions that immediately followed. From thirty-seven in 1435/1436, they fell to eight in 1436/1437, eight again the next year, and five in 1438/1439, settling at an average of thirteen a year from 1432 to 1459.⁹¹ Trial rhetoric also lost its fervor, and not even the Dominican reformer Savonarola’s terrifying campaign against sodomy at the end of the century would fully resuscitate it. Only in the early 1460s would convictions surpass the level of 1435/1436. By then, however, the prescriptive norms for regulating sodomy had undergone another significant change.

The Turning Point in the Late 1450s

After around 1460, prosecutions for sodomy increased remarkably. Between 1459 and 1502, the Night Officers' convictions for homosexual sodomy nearly quadrupled to a yearly average of 48, with some 270 other persons implicated but absolved every year. Over roughly the last four decades of the fifteenth century, these officials alone levied 2,000 convictions or more, and over 13,000 individuals were denounced to them (or denounced themselves) for homosexual activity; other courts added several hundred additional convictions and countless more incriminated.⁹² These astounding numbers were surely higher than in any corresponding period in Florentine history.

The main impetus for this huge increase was, typically, another substantial cut in the penalties for sodomy in 1459. As will be seen in detail later, this decrease resulted in the lowest penalties for this practice ever known in late medieval and early modern Florence, perhaps the lowest in Italy, if not all of Europe. They remained at this historical nadir for the next thirty-five years, half the institutional life of the Office of the Night. Only the fall of the Medicean regime in 1494 and the influence wielded afterward by Savonarola and his followers would sweep away the low penalties and end this "classic" era in the regulation of sodomy. Just eight years later, in 1502, the Commune added the finishing touch when it suppressed the Office of the Night.

At the root of the reforms in the late 1450s lay a growing crisis in the Night Officers' revenues, caused by irregularities in their administration and by their tendency to hand down very few convictions. Such problems had begun to surface long before, when the government in 1440 raised the penalties implemented in 1432 with the argument that low fines only encouraged people to sodomize. The futility of this measure soon grew apparent, however, compelling its repeal. In 1446 the government restored the original penalties.⁹³ The justification offered reveals some of the problems that plagued Florentine attempts to control sodomy more effectively:

It has been learned that the Night Officers have very often been accustomed to absolving crimes when they should have condemned them—yet not without the offer of money, which is ceded with no profit to the Commune. Things like this might occur as a result of the increase and doubling of the penalties that were later introduced. [The priors] do not want such errors to be committed in this magistracy with this pretext, and want the said magistracy to be administered and governed well.⁹⁴

This explanation confirms one motive implicit in earlier reductions in penalties in 1415 and especially in 1432: harsh penalties did not deter men

from engaging in sodomy, but discouraged magistrates from convicting them and, as this text implies, might well have fostered corruption.

Continuing disorders in the office's management again provoked government intervention in the late 1450s. A law intended to restore discipline was passed on April 14, 1458.⁹⁵ This law, however, had the opposite effect, for it precipitated a crisis. These developments are worth examining in detail, since they expose some important problems and tendencies in the policing of sodomy in Medicean Florence.

"Considering how abominable the cursed and detestable vice of sodomy is, how annoying it is to God, how mortifying to the soul, and how harmful to the Republic because of the evils it draws with it," as the preamble to the April 14 law reads, the government reproached the Night Officers for their lax observance of their regulations. The text mentions few specific violations, but it implies that they sometimes levied fines below those prescribed, distorted their records to mask convictions, and manipulated their finances. The law commanded the officials to follow ordained procedures to the letter, and threatened them with heavy fines should they fail to do so. Moreover, since "the penalties against sodomites are intended not only to punish those who have erred, but also to strike terror in those who might want to err," the law directed them to record with care the name, family, guild, and parish of those they convicted "so that they will be clearly recognized." Finally, the text revealed that the Night Officers had adjudicated certain cases of sodomy even though they fell outside their jurisdiction because "the sin was so grave." The government consequently annulled the sentences from the previous six months in cases in which the Officers of the Night had overstepped their authority.

These charges of wrongdoing or laxness cannot be fully verified, since records for the mid-1450s are missing, but what evidence there is tends to support them. For example, officials did not always punish recidivists as prescribed. In 1446 they fined the wool-shearer Bartolomeo di Lorenzo only 50 florins even though the record states that this was his third conviction, for which the fine ordered by law was 200 florins.⁹⁶ They also seldom convicted minors or passive partners, ignoring the law that mandated their punishment. In their first nine years, up to 1441, they convicted twenty-three active minors and sixteen passives (all minors); but in the twelve years between 1441 and 1458 for which records survive, they condemned only nine active minors and one passive (also a minor). Magistrates' waning attention to adolescents suggests that they considered their homosexual activity relatively harmless, an attitude that tacitly sanctioned it. Most important, the Night Officers were levying very few convictions. Records show that in the twenty months before the law of April 14, 1458, two separate groups of officials together condemned a mere two men.⁹⁷ Yet they did not lack suspects, for since April 1456, nearly 200 persons had been denounced for sodomy.⁹⁸

It was above all this apathy, combined with the other violations, that

compelled the government to intervene with the April 14 law and to order the magistrates “to be swift and diligent in doing their duty.”⁹⁹ Remarkably, this pressure backfired. In a surprising show of passive resistance, the Night Officers responded by virtually suspending operations. The next day, they concluded one conviction, and after this they registered not a single condemnation during the following fourteen months.¹⁰⁰

Faced with the officials’ obstinacy, the government had to step in again. A second law of December 9, 1458,¹⁰¹ referred to the collapse of the Office of the Night, noting that since the passage of the edict in April that had raised penalties “above what was usual, the said office has been virtually abandoned, for there have been almost no or very few convictions.” In addition, collecting these few fines and many others that remained unpaid would be difficult “on account of the heavy fines, which for the majority are impossible to pay, since they are very poor persons” (*persone miserbiles*). This observation finally revealed the merchant mentality that had underpinned declining penalties for sodomy since the early fifteenth century.

This emerged even more clearly in the following comment on “two evils” that stemmed from the current impasse. The first and most obvious was that sodomy “went unpunished,” presumably because officials hesitated to levy fines they knew could not be paid. The second was the waning support for the Convertite, “to whom those fines are in large part allotted [and] which used to give their lives great succour.” The Convertite, as the nuns of Sant’Elisabetta were known, were former prostitutes or other “anomalous women” who had converted to the religious life or retired to the seclusion of the convent.¹⁰² Since 1447 half of the fines the Night Officers collected from sodomites and convent violators had gone to subsidize these poor nuns.¹⁰³ Already by 1455, however, this aid was seriously deficient, as a law of that year acknowledged, because the Night Officers’ debtors were “in large part very poor,” or else they had fled or gotten dispensations relieving them of payment. The government then agreed to cancel these men’s obligations if they paid just one-fourth of their fines to the nuns.¹⁰⁴ Early in 1458 another attempt was made to boost the nuns’ resources by letting the Night Officers renegotiate the fines of all their outstanding debtors and by channeling all the money collected from them to the Convertite.¹⁰⁵ Yet the basic problem persisted, and now, since convictions had collapsed, the subsidies from sodomites to these nuns had virtually wasted away, with dire results. As the law of December 1458, put it, “during the past nine months or so, in which they have been without [that aid], they have nearly died of hunger, and are dying.”¹⁰⁶ The revision of the fines for sodomy, then, came partly from the need to provide the famished Convertite with a steadier source of income. Ironically, these former whores, whom the state had once enlisted in part to entice men away from boys, now depended on men’s sodomy for their very subsistence.¹⁰⁷

To overcome these problems, the government proposed an unusual solution. It repealed the previous law and empowered the Night Officers to levy any fine they deemed appropriate, depending on the "quality of the person and the crime." It also recognized that of the men convicted in the past "many remain debtors, some of whom are in prison and others have fled, men who are so poor that without some indulgence they may never be able to pay their fines. Yet it is better to exact something than nothing from them, or to let them die in prison or live by begging from others."¹⁰⁸ With this fiscal reasoning, the government directed officials to renegotiate and reduce the fines of all their debtors. Their payment would release these men from any further obligation.

Finally, after convictions still did not increase, the regime acted to resolve the problem definitively with a third law, passed on October 23, 1459.¹⁰⁹ Now it drastically reduced the fines for sodomy. The official justification for this move speaks for itself: "[I]t is evident how much sodomy is presently practiced in this city, especially by artisans and the poor [*maxime pe' mechanici e poveri*], who cannot be sentenced to pay the fines ordained by the old laws."

The government accordingly lowered the penalty for an adult's first offense to 10 florins, one-fifth the previous penalty. Second and third convictions now brought fines of 25 and 50 florins, while men convicted a fourth time were to be given over to the foreign judges, presumably for harsher punishment. This law, moreover, mentioned neither minors nor persons implicated in the passive role in sodomy (who were almost always minors), a tacit ratification of officials' tendency since at least 1441 to ignore them. Hereafter, this was the general rule. Until well into the sixteenth century—with the important exception of the Savonarolan years—minors and passive partners went unpunished. What induced officials to absolve "receptive" partners in homosexual relations (like minors in general) was their young age, not a special regard for sexual passivity in itself, which on the contrary was highly scorned.¹¹⁰

Further, "since nearly all those accused . . . of practicing those vices are very poor men, who cannot be fined since they have no money, yet should not go unpunished," the Night Officers were authorized to punish the poor with imprisonment or ritual humiliation instead of fines. Such penalties, the law stressed, served both to punish offenders and to strike "fear and terror" in the hearts of others who were tempted to commit sodomy. In effect, this meant that well-to-do men who were convicted of sodomy could pay up discreetly, while poor sodomites would often be made to suffer the public spectacles of the pillory, mitering with a fool's cap, flogging, or ass-riding through streets filled with jeering and violent crowds.

That "nearly all" alleged sodomites were wretchedly poor was a convenient fiction, as an analysis of their social composition will show. For men of means, therefore, the low fines greatly reduced the financial risks of sodomy. Yet many men accused of sodomy were in fact poor artisans

and laborers, and for them and their families a fine of 10 florins was still a crushing burden. Partly for this reason, the regime would continue to have to deal with humble men who could not pay their fines and with magistrates who skirted rules to accommodate them. In a law of 1474, it was revealed that the Night Officers often let convicted men go free after they paid only 1 or 2 florins of their fine, and then juggled the records to hide the maneuver. Again the government threatened to fine the officials if they disregarded regulations, but the practice continued all the same.¹¹¹ In a law of 1490, in response to a complaint by the officials, the government noted that they found it hard to enforce prescribed penalties and, indeed, often ignored them, since “the delinquents denounced to them were commonly poor, yet the fines are very high. It has gone so far that nearly everything is done arbitrarily. If they punished [men] as they should, there would be few who could pay; therefore few people would make accusations, and the crimes would practically go unpunished.” Faced with the collapse of the entire policing apparatus, the government now allowed the Night Officers to punish “arbitrarily” those men who could not afford a fine yet who, “out of a certain respect,” did not merit corporal punishment.¹¹²

The reduced fines and financing schemes thus continued and accentuated a typical two-sided response to sodomy in Florence. On the one hand, these were plainly fiscally oriented maneuvers to boost convictions and increase revenues. This pragmatism had worked in 1432, and met with even greater success now. From very few condemnations from 1456 to 1459, convictions rose immediately to thirteen in 1459/1460, mounted to fifty-five in 1461/1462, and peaked in 1472/1473, when the Night Officers convicted a total of 161 men.¹¹³ The low fines ultimately permitted the Medicean regime to extend its controls deep within the sodomitical underground.

On the other hand, these changes were symptomatic of a certain ambivalence in the policing of sodomy noted earlier. The problems revealed in the laws underline the officials’ inability, or reluctance, to punish sodomites consistently. This was explained in the only acceptable way, as a humane response to the financial plight of humble men. Nonetheless, the difficulties that authorities had encountered in applying harsh punishments in the past, and the Night Officers’ rather indulgent enforcement of the laws, to be reviewed later, suggest that accommodating social attitudes to sodomy might also have played a considerable role in mitigating penalties.

Finally, it may be that more subtle political considerations also influenced the new policy. Perhaps not coincidentally, these developments came at a critical moment for the survival of the Medicean regime. In early 1458, the Medici were facing a serious challenge to their hegemony from disaffected members of the oligarchy. To block this threat, an assembly of the citizens was convened in July, under pressure from the Medici, to approve the creation of a commission (*balìa*) with extraordinary powers to reform

the constitution in defense of the existing regime.¹¹⁴ It was this commission that overturned the April law ordering the Night Officers to observe prescribed regulations and penalties, and authorized them instead to punish sodomites at their discretion. After the regime was again securely under Medicean influence, the fines were sharply reduced. Could these changes have been connected somehow to the political designs of the Medici?

As noted earlier, one goal and the ultimate effect of the low fines was to cast the regime's controls more widely, since they made convictions easier to gain. Yet at the same time, the reduced penalties and debt-financing schemes must have seemed like substantial concessions to sodomites and to working men and the poor, among whom the 1459 law said the "vice" was widespread. This is significant, since as part of their pattern of domestic control the Medici deftly courted the loyalty of lower-class and young men, social groups excluded from power and among whom, as the evidence shows, sodomy was common.¹¹⁵ Perhaps, then, the reduction in penalties, coming at a critical juncture for the family's continuing dominance, was partly intended to attract the support of these groups.

The evidence is too circumstantial to make this any more than a tentative hypothesis. Still, it is notable that the low fines were maintained under four generations of Medici leaders, from Cosimo to his great-grandson, Piero, and it was only in this period that laws on sodomy expressed concern for the humble. Later, opponents of the Medici associated the low penalties with their "tyranny" and their style of exercising power. After Piero was expelled in 1494, the reformed regime condemned "the evil government of those who ruled in the past" when it substituted harsh corporal and capital penalties for the fines.¹¹⁶ When a new generation of Medici resumed the family's dominion in 1512, they quickly reduced punishments for sodomy again and reinstated graduated fines, in part, it seems, in recognition of the crucial role youths played in restoring them to power.¹¹⁷ These developments take us some way from 1458 and 1459, but they perhaps help articulate the political contours of the policing of sodomy in Medicean Florence. With the benefit of hindsight, it may not be unreasonable to see the controlled lenience toward sodomy from the 1460s through the early 1490s as one aspect of Medicean domestic policy directed in part at youths and commoners.

In any case, the reforms of 1459 introduced a new period in the management of sodomy in Florence. The impressive dimensions of homosexual activity now began to come to light with the huge increase in prosecutions. By some unexplained coincidence, the Night Officers' proceedings from 1459 on also survive with few lacunae.¹¹⁸ Transcriptions of secret denunciations, notice of self-accusations, summaries of testimony, and records of both absolutions and convictions finally permit a detailed reconstruction of the praxis of policing sodomy in the late fifteenth century.

The Magistrates at Work

By now it should be clear that considerable differences often existed between prescriptive norms and practice, between laws against sodomy and their enforcement. This section focuses on the praxis of the Officers of the Night and, to a lesser extent, of the Eight of Watch, by this time the city's main criminal magistracy, to explore some of the dimensions of the control of sodomy in the late fifteenth century. The regulation of sodomy changed substantially in the 1490s, related to the death of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1492, the collapse of the Medicean regime in 1494, and the rise and fall of Savonarola. But since my intention here is to derive a general picture, the political circumstances and institutional adjustments of these years will largely be ignored. These events and their impact on the policing of sodomy will be examined at a later point.

A quantitative study of prosecutions for sodomy in the late fifteenth century furnishes a useful framework. This study covers the last twenty-four years of the operation of the Office of the Night, from November 1478, to November 1502; full proceedings survive for seventeen years.¹¹⁹ In these seventeen years, 4,062 individuals implicated in homosexual sodomy came to the Night Officers' attention, many more than once. They convicted 582, some twice or more, for a total of 638 convictions, an average of 37 or 38 per year. In this period, other institutions also had jurisdiction over sodomy—the court of the podestà, the Eight of Watch, and from 1495 the Guardians of the Law—of which the most important was the Eight.¹²⁰ Knowledge of the Eight's work is limited, however, since their records, which cover nearly twenty-two years between 1478 and 1502, preserve only those cases that ended in conviction and lack the rich detail of the Night Officers' proceedings. These records permit the identification of some 364 persons implicated in homosexual sodomy, of whom the Eight sentenced 241 in 247 different convictions, on the average 11 or 12 convictions per year.¹²¹ Between 1478 and 1502, then, Florentine courts together convicted an average of at least 50 males annually for homosexual sodomy, in addition to numerous others, males and females, for heterosexual sodomy.¹²²

The character of the cases tried by the two institutions differed markedly, especially before the Eight gained full jurisdiction over sodomy in 1494. These differences confirm that the Night Officers' role was to police mainly consensual and nonviolent forms of homosexual activity, while other courts were also meant to handle cases deemed more serious. Of the Eight's 128 convictions before 1494, 39 (30 percent) involved relations in which the passive partner, always a boy (*puer*), had suffered anal injuries. As noted earlier, a law of 1449 forbade the Night Officers to proceed in such cases, though they sometimes ignored the ruling.¹²³ Another 13 (10 percent) dealt with sodomy involving Jews, over whom this magistracy had near-exclusive jurisdiction.¹²⁴ Finally, the Eight condemned several men who

had committed sodomy or related “lascivious” acts in churches, a sacrilege over which the Night Officers had no competence.¹²⁵ In general, in keeping with its “benign” character, the Office of the Night dealt mainly with more mundane sexual activity.

An examination of the operations of the Night Officers, whose records are more comprehensive, illuminates a number of features of their “benevolent” control of sodomy. As noted earlier, they opened an investigation usually on the basis of two kinds of denunciations: anonymous accusations and self-incriminations. If they proceeded, they normally questioned the person implicated in the passive role, almost always an adolescent. Officials’ responses to denunciations, their first direct intervention, reveal a good deal about their effective policing of sodomy.

In fact, the Night Officers were far from zealous, for they pursued only a small proportion of accusations. In the 1478–1502 survey, a total of 1,276 persons were implicated as the passive partner in homosexual sodomy (1,218 individuals, some more than once during the terms of different officials). Yet as far as the records show, only 466, under 37 percent, were interrogated.¹²⁶

This disregard might be understandable when anonymous accusations were involved, since the officials could easily have doubted their motives and veracity. Of the 765 passive partners who first came to their attention through secret denunciations, they questioned only 204 (27 percent). They probably ignored some charges because their authors provided too few details to identify the persons named.¹²⁷ In other cases, they might not have acted on anonymous accusations because they believed they were false, stemming from personal enmity and a thirst for vendetta, or even from a rejected suitor—as some suspects claimed in their defense.¹²⁸ Officials in 1496, for instance, during the factious Savonarolan period, dismissed 22 accusations against members of eminent families as slanderous and inflammatory.¹²⁹ False denunciations were common enough to discourage officials from believing every secret allegation. Also, given their often tight financial constraints, the Night Officers might have tended to ignore anonymous charges to avoid having to pay the percentage of convicted sodomites’ fines that the law guaranteed informers.

More revealing is their inattention to boys implicated through their partners’ self-denunciations. Presumably this was the most dependable evidence on which officials had to act. Before this benefit was curtailed in 1490 and in effect abolished in 1496 (discussed later), self-denunciations were also the single most common means by which passive partners were incriminated in the 1478–1502 survey. A total of 243 first came to the officers’ attention this way, while another 19 were named by both a self-accuser and an informer (in this survey, 243 persons denounced themselves for having sodomized 272 different passive partners). Self-disclosures offered a potentially high return if the Night Officers intended to pursue sodomy aggressively. Not only could they assume that they were true, but

as they knew by experience, the boys so named and later questioned often confessed to having been sodomized by numerous others, who could then be prosecuted.

Nonetheless, of the 262 passive partners first implicated through a companion's self-accusation, the Night Officers ignored the vast majority and interrogated only 51 (19 percent). To cite one of many examples, four men denounced themselves in 1478 and 1479 for having sodomized sixteen-year-old Filippo di Giovanni Benizzi, but the officials did not question him, nor did they do so after four secret allegations named him again in 1481.¹³⁰ In contrast, the few boys who were named by self-accusers and were then interrogated admitted on average to sex with 11 partners, compelling proof of the utility of the immunity clause. The case of Andrea di ser Antonio Bonsi offers a fine illustration. In 1480 a former soldier accused himself of having sodomized sixteen-year-old Andrea and two other youngsters "many times up to the present day," but officials questioned neither Andrea nor the others.¹³¹ The following year, however, when six other men voluntarily disclosed their sexual relations with Andrea, he was arrested and confessed that he had been sodomized by 33 partners in the past year, of whom the officials convicted 24. Over the next days and months, another 7 men came forward to denounce their affairs with Andrea, two secret accusations naming him arrived, and the officials questioned him twice more, when he named 2 other partners.¹³² Yet two years later, in 1483, after 2 more men denounced themselves and named Andrea as their partner, officials again chose not to interrogate him despite his past record of promiscuity.¹³³

By failing to pursue most accusations of all kinds, then, the Night Officers willfully ignored an inestimable number of prosecutable homosexual relations. Why they did so is hard to determine, though some possible motives will be discussed later. A second and equally important conclusion regards the limited nature of the judiciary evidence and the extent of sodomy in this community. Despite the remarkable numbers of persons implicated whose names the records preserve, they represent only a small, visible tip of a much more pervasive world of sodomy, a world that is now lost to view but was a thriving part of Florentine life.

The promise of immunity for persons who denounced themselves was such an unusual feature of the management of sodomy in Florence that it merits closer attention. Most of the information on how this loophole worked or who utilized it pertains to the years 1469 to 1490. No self-accusations have surfaced before 1469, probably indicating that notaries did not record them in the procedural ledgers. Between 1469 and 1490, self-disclosures appear commonly in these registers, but whether all were recorded cannot be known. In 1490 a law limiting sodomites to only one self-denunciation also ordered notaries to keep a separate book, no longer extant, for self-accusers' and their partners' names; consequently, with a few exceptions, self-accusations vanish from the procedural records.¹³⁴ And

they came virtually to an end in 1496 when the benefit of immunity was abolished for all but passive partners.¹³⁵ Although the records contain indirect notice of a few self-accusers after 1490 and even 1496, most of what can be learned about them comes from the 1470s and 1480s.

In the twenty-three years for which records survive from 1469 to 1502, at least 1,199 individuals either denounced themselves or were implicated as the partner of a self-accuser. Usually it was the active partner who incriminated himself, since it was he who risked conviction and punishment: as noted, the Night Officers normally absolved those implicated in the passive role, a fact that must have been widely known. Some 484 individuals thus denounced themselves and identified 664 different partners they sodomized. Although virtually exempt from conviction, 11 passive partners also accused themselves, naming 47 persons who had sodomized them.¹³⁶

Since this benefit provided such an easy means to escape punishment, it is surprising that even more men did not take advantage of it. While motives for avoiding self-accusation must have varied, some may have felt there was a certain shame attached to a voluntary admission of sodomy, especially for patrician men who had to confess to their peers. This may explain in part why relatively few men from prominent families denounced themselves; probably for the same reason, officials in 1485 suppressed the identity of one self-accuser "whose name," they candidly admitted, "we do not want made public."¹³⁷

The motives that led men to denounce themselves might also have varied, but the majority probably did so to avoid paying a heavy fine. Most were of humble social extraction, and for them a fine of 10 florins could mean ruin.¹³⁸ At times, however, officials treated self-accusation as a form of repentance and made these men promise they would no longer engage in sodomy. Notaries often wrote variations on the phrase "He says he repents of these things and that from now on he will not commit this sin, and he says this to avoid the penalty."¹³⁹ Cristofano di Giovanni from Lodi, who denounced himself in 1470 for having sodomized seventeen boys, explained that he turned himself in on the advice of a former Night Officer, to whom he had sworn fervently that he would never commit sodomy again ("if I ever fall again, have me burned, and don't ever have mercy on me").¹⁴⁰ Of course, it is hard to know whether beneath the formulaic professions of penitence lay a sincere sense of contrition. In some cases such claims clearly rang hollow. In 1470 twenty-year-old brassworker Jacopo di Lorenzo del Cietina denounced himself for having sodomized two boys, and solemnly "promised not to get involved in this sin any more in the future"; yet four years later, he incriminated himself again, and in 1476 was also named in a boy's confession (but absolved).¹⁴¹ Others who made similar pledges disappear from the records, however, perhaps indicating they kept their word—or were unusually skilled at keeping their relations secret.

Others self-confessed to protect themselves because they sensed or knew

they were at risk. Some might even have been alerted by friends among the officials or their staff that they or their boyfriend had been denounced. They would then hurry to incriminate themselves before the magistrates took action against them. It was probably no coincidence, for example, that the same day the Night Officers received an anonymous charge in 1482 naming sixteen-year-old Baldovino di Giovanni Baldovini, six men showed up to denounce themselves for having sodomized him.¹⁴² Others, after learning that a boy they had sodomized had been arrested, came forward hoping, or knowing, that he had not already divulged their names. In 1480, the day after Luigi d'Agnolo Peruzzi confessed that eleven men had sodomized him, three other lovers he conveniently "forgot" to mention rushed to self-confess that they had each been carrying on with him "up to the present day."¹⁴³ Sometimes word spread among men involved with the same boy that one of the group had denounced himself, and the others hastened to follow suit.¹⁴⁴ Finally, a few men seem to have denounced themselves preventively, but then turned around and recanted. In 1473 the wool merchant Zanobi di Simone Folchi self-confessed that he had sodomized Lorenzo di Francesco Strozzi "many, many times" and then immediately retracted his admission, claiming he was incriminating himself only because he feared Lorenzo would accuse him "for money."¹⁴⁵ This example may raise questions about the veracity of self-accusations, but officials normally took their truth for granted.¹⁴⁶

Men who engaged often in sodomy also made good use of the benefit conferred by self-denunciations to win impunity. Of the 484 active partners who self-confessed, 50 did so at least twice, and 13 three to five times. Tommaso di Damiano, called Lasca, accused himself at least four times between 1481 and 1487, identifying a total of eight partners.¹⁴⁷ One of the most notorious sodomites in late-fifteenth-century Florence, the baker Jacopo d'Andrea, called *il Fornaino* (the little baker), denounced himself at least five times between 1473 and 1480, admitting that he had sodomized twenty-four boys.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, 125 self-accusers, one of every four, named a total of at least two partners and often many more: 74 named two or three, 30 named four to six, 10 named seven to nine, and 11 named ten or more partners. In a single self-accusation in 1473, Amerigo di Niccolò d'Amerigo indicated seven boys he had sodomized, each "many times," in a series of affairs stretching back eight years.¹⁴⁹ In three self-denunciations between 1475 and 1487, the butcher Francesco di Bartolomeo, called Rosaino, identified thirty-four boys he had sodomized.¹⁵⁰

Some sodomites thus quite consciously exploited this loophole to their own advantage. The case of Bartolomeo di Folco, called *Spezialino*, is illustrative. He reportedly committed sodomy frequently, and not only denounced himself afterward to the Night Officers but also collected a reward for naming his partners. Condemning this clever abuse, the Eight of Watch intervened to end it in 1488 by giving him a public flogging and banishing him for ten years.¹⁵¹

Whether the Night Officers learned of sodomitical activity through self-

denunciations or anonymous accusations, they generally levied sentences only after the confession of the passive companion(s) named. Of the 466 passive partners who were questioned in the 1478–1502 survey, 387 (83 percent) admitted that they had been sodomized by at least one person, and often by many more. Virtually all those named by self-accusers, but only two-thirds of those named by informants, confessed, results that tend to confirm both the veracity of self-disclosures and the greater unreliability of secret charges. The 387 who confessed named a total among them of 2,366 partners who had sodomized them.¹⁵²

Of course, the testimony of these boys and adolescents, perhaps easily intimidated because of their young age (most were between twelve and eighteen), was not always dependable. They were probably interrogated in the palace of the podestà in front of the instruments of torture, and some were actually tortured, rendering their confessions suspect. However, only eight youngsters later admitted that their charges against some forty-six partners were false and retracted them. Their motives for lying varied. Some said they feared being tortured or wanted to be released from prison.¹⁵³ A few claimed that someone had incited them to accuse another person unjustly.¹⁵⁴ Others admitted that they wanted to avenge themselves against someone who had wronged them—for instance, a former employer with whom they had argued or who had fired them without their proper pay.¹⁵⁵ False accusation was a serious offense, however, and could be punished severely. In 1496 a boy who lied about his employer was whipped through the city and given thirty lashes in his master's neighborhood, to restore the man's reputation with his neighbors.¹⁵⁶ That same year, fourteen-year-old Torrigiano di Taddeo, who admitted that he wrongly accused several of the men he claimed had sodomized him, was given twenty-five lashes and had to pay a bushel of flour, beg forgiveness of these men, and pay their prison expenses; in addition, to shame him publicly the officials had his long hair cropped short, and requisitioned a pair of his fashionable hose, half purple and half checkered, which they made him cut to pieces.¹⁵⁷

Other boys tried to protect their partners, sometimes because they had been bribed or intimidated. One fourteen-year-old admitted that he left two companions unnamed when he was first questioned because they had promised him a jacket and a pair of boots.¹⁵⁸ Domenico di Zanobi Biliotti, a sixteen-year-old from a prominent old family, confessed in 1497 that, on his brother's advice, he had retracted his earlier charge against their influential neighbor Luigi Pitti "because they did not want to enmitize the Pitti family."¹⁵⁹ Before reasserting his claim, he also recanted an accusation against Francesco di Benedetto Bonsi, from another eminent family of their quarter, after Bonsi's brother paid a visit to the Biliotti house and promised to rehire the boy or to give him anything he asked.¹⁶⁰ No doubt other magistrates also faced problems like these, but the young age of the boys involved might have made cases of sodomy especially prone to such manipulation.

Like their rather lax responses to accusations, how the Night Officers

acted on the confessions of passive partners—that is, how they sentenced the individuals they named—betrays a similar lack of rigor. Normally they convicted only persons named in such confessions, after citing them to respond to the charge or, less commonly, after arresting them. According to their records, less than 10 percent (224) of the active partners named ever testified. Of these, nearly three of every four admitted the charges against them were true. Those who denied were absolved, but revealingly, officials also absolved seventeen men who confessed.¹⁶¹

Altogether, in the 1478–1502 survey the Night Officers levied 618 convictions of persons implicated in the active role. Subtracting those who denied (62) or whose accusers recanted (46) from the total number of active partners named in confessions (2,366), their conviction rate comes to about 27 percent. This would rise to around 32 percent if cases involving minors, who were normally absolved, and clergymen, who could not be prosecuted, were also removed.¹⁶² The number and rate of convictions for sodomy was thus far from insignificant. Nonetheless, considering the majority of denunciations the officials ignored, the large number of self-accusations, and the high proportion of active partners named in confessions who were absolved, over four of every five cases of homosexual activity revealed to the Officers of the Night eluded punishment.¹⁶³

Correspondingly, the same was true of individuals who came to the attention of the Night Officers, even though in absolute terms the number convicted was impressive. Of the 4,062 individuals who were implicated in homosexual sodomy in the 1478–1502 survey, 582 (14.4 percent) were convicted at least once. Normally these were men aged nineteen or over who were incriminated in the active role, since officials in effect stopped convicting boys up to eighteen and passives after the late 1450s. They did condemn 20 of the 387 passives in the survey who confessed (5 percent, or under 2 percent of the total), but in most cases these were youths past the age of eighteen or younger boys prosecuted during the repressive Savonarolan years, when officials punished both passives and minors with slightly greater frequency.¹⁶⁴ The remaining 562 persons convicted had taken the active role in sodomy. The Night Officers condemned approximately one-third of the active partners eligible for conviction, or fewer than 1 in 5 of the total 2,906 persons incriminated in the 1478–1502 survey. Some 80 percent escaped conviction altogether.

Of these 562, the officials convicted 43 men more than once during the period of this survey: 35 twice; 5, three times; 2, four times; and 1, six times. The last is an excellent example of how the Night Officers often waived regulations. This was the same Jacopo d'Andrea, il Fornaino, who denounced himself at least five times, naming 24 adolescents he had sodomized. Between 1470 and 1487, he collected a striking record of thirteen documented convictions for sodomy, twelve by the Night Officers and one by the Eight of Watch. Not only did the former condemn him at least twelve times even though the 1459 law prescribed that sodomites con-

victed a fourth time be given over to one of the foreign judges, presumably to be exiled or put to death, but they also bent the principle of graduated penalties for him, and the punishments they imposed were never excessive. He received a six-month jail term once, and of his fines, five were the minimum 10 florins; five, 25 florins; and only one, 50 florins.¹⁶⁵

Many other men were also incriminated repeatedly, and how the Night Officers dealt with them is consistent with the general indulgence that has so far been revealed. Some 437 individuals, 15 percent of the total, were implicated in the active role more than once in the seventeen years of this survey; 201 appear more than twice. Yet 268 (61 percent) escaped conviction. Between 1473 and 1490, Francesco di Lazzaro de' Medici, for example, was incriminated in confessions or denunciations at least eight times, yet he was always absolved; in this case, it was no doubt Francesco's connections to the virtual lord of Florence, his distant cousin and employer Lorenzo de' Medici, that protected him, but officials also "overlooked" many others.¹⁶⁶ The 268 who avoided conviction included 45 men who admitted involvement in sodomy by denouncing themselves at least once, but on other occasions when they could have been prosecuted the officials ignored or absolved them. And of the 169 convicted at least once, 80 percent (135) were absolved of another charge. Repeatedly implicated men were more likely than others to be convicted, but odds were that they too would go unpunished.¹⁶⁷

On the whole, then, the Night Officers sentenced men in a rather lenient and often arbitrary fashion. Although over the course of their seventy-year tenure they handed down several thousand convictions, the evidence shows that they neither pursued nor punished sodomites consistently or rigorously. Their restraint probably reflects a fair degree of popular and official accommodation, if not outright tolerance, of sodomy in Florence. Within this general context, patterns of prosecution could fluctuate considerably, depending, as will be seen, on such elements as the political climate at a given time, the composition of single groups of officials, or certain social prejudices. The Night Officers' records, however, also point to other factors that contributed to their overall moderation. These shed further light on some of the problems of policing sodomy in this community.

Living and working in this small, "face-to-face" society, the Night Officers were subject to many influences that at times conditioned their responses. That they were often called on to judge men or boys of their own social class, acquaintances, friends, and even relatives, probably helped dissuade them from pursuing certain cases. Some informers feared conflicts of interest between the demands of justice and the bonds of status and kinship, as this warning in 1467 attests: "Remember the flogging you gave a poor man a few days ago, that is, not justice for the poor and mercy for the powerful. And for a relative, don't let kinship constrain you more than the honor of God."¹⁶⁸

This informant's worries had some substance, for nearly two-thirds of

the Night Officers or their treasurers from 1478 to 1502 had members of their lineage who were implicated in sodomy in the same years. While it is not always possible to determine exact relationships, at least one of every five probably had close family members—brothers, sons, grandsons—accused and sometimes even convicted.¹⁶⁹ Niccolò di Jacopo Panuzzi, a Night Officer in 1460/1461, had two sons, Jacopo and Salvi, who were among the city's most notorious sodomites, both incriminated and convicted several times from the 1460s to the 1490s.¹⁷⁰ Guccio di Niccolò di messer Guccio de' Nobili, member of an old aristocratic family who was an official in 1462/1463, had three brothers who were implicated many times between 1459 and 1494.¹⁷¹

Even some men who served on the magistracy evidently found it hard to resist the temptation of sex with boys. Nofri d'Antonio Lenzone, a Night Officer in 1480/1481, was implicated with at least four boys during the 1490s; in 1495 he was convicted and fined the large sum of 150 florins.¹⁷² Bernardo di Taddeo Lorini, an official in 1484/1485, had been named by an adolescent but absolved in 1476, and was named by another and absolved again in 1487. But when in 1496 a third boy claimed that Lorini had sodomized him, he was now—at the height of Savonarola's moralizing crusade—inclined to disclose the truth. The sixty-five-year-old patrician could not bear the disgrace of confessing in person to his peers, however, so he sent his son Taddeo to confess in his stead and to plead with the officials to act with discretion to salvage what they could of his father's honor.¹⁷³

Beyond such intimate considerations, how the Night Officers proceeded after an accusation of sodomy might have been affected, despite their vows of impartiality, by bonds of friendship, favors or obligations toward clients or patrons, or pressures exerted by men of power and influence. That people with money, prestige, and well-placed friends could manipulate justice in their favor was nothing new in Florence, and informers commonly alerted officials to such intrigues. An accuser in 1496, for instance, warned that a wealthy man in the town of Montelupo would use his resources and the "recommendations" of important friends in Florence to ensure that his son, denounced for passive sodomy, would not be interrogated.¹⁷⁴ During the Savonarolan years, when the policing of sodomy was very much in the public eye, accusers alleged more than once that officials or their staff accepted bribes to dismiss cases.¹⁷⁵ An informant in 1467 indicated a network of eminent citizens who allegedly sponsored a brothel of boys for sodomy that was run by a blacksmith, Zanobi di Baldo, and he cautioned that these powerful notables would use their influence to shield the man from prosecution: "[A]nd worse, with his own mouth he claims he does it at the request of leading men of the regime, and he names ten or twelve of them. Two he names are knights, and at least two others are presently officials of the Dieci di ballia. . . . I think that as soon as it is known that

this has been disclosed, you'll see some of those wicked ones come to his defense."¹⁷⁶

Charges of malfeasance, protection, or influence-peddling were seldom proved, but a few cases of blatant corruption were uncovered which show that abuses did occur. In 1470, Cristofano di Giovanni from Lodi revealed that a friend of a friend of his, whose brother was at the time a Night Officer, having learned that Cristofano had been denounced for sodomy, got his hands on the denunciation and gave it to his friend, who in turn informed Cristofano and then ripped up the note in his presence. In return, the official's brother was now asking Cristofano for a "present" of 12 florins to guarantee that the whole affair would be hushed up and he would never be convicted. Realizing that he was being blackmailed, Cristofano sought the advice of an acquaintance, a former Night Officer, who counseled him to abstain from sodomy in the future and to protect himself by denouncing his sexual relations voluntarily. This he did, naming seventeen boys he had sodomized in the past year.¹⁷⁷ In 1501, Bartolomeo Del Bianco, a patrician accused by a woman of sodomizing her, enlisted the aid of one of the Officers of the Night, Mariano Brancacci, who obligingly threatened the woman with a public flogging if she did not retract her charge, and also bribed two of the other officials. When their scheming was revealed through the woman's courageous denunciation, Del Bianco was condemned and fined 200 florins; the Guardians of the Law also convicted the three Night Officers of corruption and expelled them from the office.¹⁷⁸

Sometimes allegations of sodomy had sensitive political implications that moved authorities to dismiss them. When in 1500 a foreign ambassador to the city was incriminated for sodomy, the Signoria pragmatically intervened to acquit him, "considering the quality of his person and of his lord, [and] that saving him can be of some utility."¹⁷⁹ Acting evidently on their own initiative, two notaries connived in 1498 to get a case dropped, not only because it involved a young relative of Pandolfo Petrucci, the lord of Siena, but also because if the boy were interrogated he might have revealed his none-too-secret sexual affair with a prominent Florentine citizen. According to the case protocol,¹⁸⁰ ser Bartolomeo Filippi confided to ser Lorenzo Vanelli, assistant notary and chancellor of the Eight of Watch, "I have learned that the Night Officers want to arrest a Sienese who is a servant and relative of Pandolfo Petrucci of Siena. If he is disgraced like this, he might make some reprisal against one of our Florentines. What's more, I know that a notable who holds a high office has had the boy, and it would be a good thing to protect him." Vanelli, in turn, advised the attendant whom the officials had ordered to arrest the boy not to do so "because it might cause a great scandal, and you will also be doing a favor for one of the Dieci [di ballia]." As a result of these machinations, the boy went free. As the report states, the two notaries had brought "shame and dishonor" on the Officers of the Night, and they were punished accord-

ingly. The Eight exiled ser Bartolomeo from the city for one year, and suspended ser Lorenzo from his post as their chancellor and deprived him of all municipal offices for one year.

The regulation of sodomy in Florence was thus in part bound up in considerations of political prudence and in the dynamics of kinship, clientage, and friendship, which led at times to corruption. Sodomy was probably no more susceptible to such abuses than were other illicit activities, though its apparent ubiquity, the involvement of prominent people, and perhaps its semiclandestine nature and potential for defamation might have encouraged them. But this cannot fully explain officials' relative apathy for pursuing cases that came before them. Their disregard of most accusations and the ease with which most people, especially those with influential connections, escaped conviction also reflect a climate of controlled lenience toward sodomy.

Despite the large number of alleged sodomites who eluded conviction, the Night Officers and the Eight of Watch did condemn many, and many paid dearly. The punishments imposed on sodomites varied widely, mainly because penalties were made much harsher after the Medici were expelled in 1494, but also because the two institutions operated in quite different ways. The punishments they levied in the two periods 1478 to 1494 and 1494 to 1502 are shown in Tables A.1 through A.4, along with the alternative penalties they often provided (usually a reduced fine as an incentive to pay at least something, or sometimes a substitute for a fine or for corporal punishment). A comparison of their penalties highlights again the relative indulgence of the "office of the sodomites," but also reveals the sterner approach of the Eight, yielding a more balanced and complete picture of the policing of sodomy in Florence.

In general, the penalties levied by the Night Officers tended to be much lighter than those of the Eight of Watch. Unsurprisingly, given their "benign" role, the former usually let sodomites pay for their sins in cash rather than through public humiliation or punishments like prison or exile. Overall, 90 percent of their sentences were fines (96 percent before and 82 percent after 1494). The Eight imposed fines more sparingly, in only 38 percent of their convictions (36 percent before and 40 percent after 1494). Both magistracies were flexible with monetary penalties, however. Especially before but also after 1494, both fined many men well below prescribed sums, even in the cases of repeated offenders, such as the "little baker," Jacopo d'Andrea, with his fluctuating fines. In contrast, on rare occasions they levied enormous fines, such as the penalty of 1,000 florins the Night Officers imposed in 1477 on the recidivist Simone di Giovanni del Barbigio.¹⁸¹

The Officers of the Night occasionally and the Eight of Watch regularly also sentenced men to prison, exile, public humiliation, or a combination of such penalties, and at times they added a fine as well. Both levied few prison sentences, the Night Officers only nine (1.5 percent of their total)

and the Eight, twenty-seven (11.4 percent). Prison terms imposed by the Night Officers ranged from just five weeks to three years, while those of the Eight were commonly two to ten years or even life. Many other men no doubt spent some time in the Stinche, the municipal prison, before putting up a surety for their fine, while others, unable to pay their fine or secure a guarantor, probably served a term in prison instead.

The Eight, in particular, often banished sodomites: they exiled sixty-five men (27.5 percent of their sentences), while the Night Officers exiled just seven (1.1 percent). Some men were banished only from the city, others from the dominion, and still others to specific places, commonly to Sarzana and Livorno, which apparently served as virtual penal colonies. Again, the Eight usually imposed longer terms of exile than the Night Officers. Those of the latter ranged from one to two-and-a-half years, with one man expelled for life, whereas the Eight frequently banished men for periods of between two and ten years and imposed life exile on ten men.

After fines, the penalty both institutions inflicted most often on sodomites was public humiliation, either by itself or sometimes before sending men to prison or into exile. These ritual shamings were intended to affirm the power of the Commune, guarantor of order and decorum, and to deride before the populace those who offended its honor by contravening its laws (in the case of sodomites, the laws of God and nature as well).¹⁸² The Night Officers sentenced a total of forty-two men (7 percent) to public humiliation, all but five after 1494; the Eight, sixty-seven men (28.4 percent). The most frequent penalties were a one- or two-hour stint in the pillory, or a flogging through the streets or, commonly, at the column in the Old Market. Some men were whipped through the city while riding an ass, a traditional sign of ignominy. After 1494 a few repeat offenders were branded on the forehead with the insignia of the Florentine Commune. To add to their disgrace, men who stood in the stockades or were flogged often had to wear a miter, a fool's cap, on which was sometimes painted the epithet *sodomita* or the letter *B*, perhaps for *buggerone* (bugger).¹⁸³ A chronicler's depiction of a much later shaming of sodomites in Florence, in 1703, evokes the raucous violence that probably accompanied such spectacles two centuries earlier as well: as a man and his young partner, wearing placards that publicized their crime, were driven through the city on asses, onlookers hooted and whistled, and when the two passed through the marketplace the jeering crowd pelted them with fruits and vegetables.¹⁸⁴

The Eight staged especially creative spectacles to shame sodomites. Twice they ordered men to process nude, bearing a candle, to the church of the Santissima Annunziata, where they were to offer the candle to the miraculous image of the Annunciation housed there.¹⁸⁵ In 1484 they levied unusually harsh sentences on two Jews: they sentenced the passive partner to pay a fine of 1,000 florins and to be given fifteen *tratti di corda* (jerks of a rope tied around the neck), and fined the active partner 1,500 florins;

in addition, on a Saturday, the Jewish sabbath, both were to be whipped while riding an ass to the “place of justice” outside the walls, where the former’s nose and the latter’s nose and both ears were to be cut off.¹⁸⁶ In 1488 they ordered four men who had sodomized a ten-year-old boy to be mitered and led to the column in the Old Market, tied facing the column, and given multiple lashes on their nude buttocks, after which they were to be paraded, still naked, to the city gates and exiled.¹⁸⁷

Descriptions of public humiliations are rare, but Simone Filipepi recorded a stunning account of the shaming the Eight imposed on an infamous sodomite nicknamed Pacchierotto in 1486. His portrayal so vividly brings to life this ritual aspect of policing sodomy that it is worth citing the entire passage:

It happened that [Pacchierotto] was arrested as a sodomite; and under torture he confessed unheard of and extraordinary filth, and also a few petty thefts. Whence he was convicted, and a very large miter was placed on his head, and then he was whipped around the Piazza [of the Signoria], and when he was in front of the lion he got twelve lashes. Then he was led into the center of the New Market, and here he was given twelve more. From here he was conducted to the street of the Furriers [via tra’ Pellicciai] where he had been caught several times at such ribaldry, and here he got another twelve lashes. Then he was led to the Stinche, where he was confined for life, and he was put in the prison of the sodomites, the thieves, and the blasphemers, who were all waiting gaily for him. When he arrived they made him their new captain, merrily singing together for a little fun. Since he was so well esteemed by the group, they sat him at the head of the table with another miter, bigger than before. Poor Pacchierotto was weeping because of his shame and the pain of the flogging, but seeing among those ribalds some who had their foreheads branded, some without noses or ears, some with only one arm, and others who were worse off than he, he was somewhat consoled. And thus he remained very honorably in that place for several years.¹⁸⁸

The traveling spectacle of Pacchierotto’s insult ritual united a number of important symbolic elements. He was humiliated first in the space and before the signs of the Commune’s authority, the government square and the statue of the lion, or Marzocco, the symbol of the city (or perhaps before the caged lion nearby); then in the city’s commercial district, the foundation of its civic identity and emblem of its merchant values of decorum and respectability; then in the street of the Furriers, not only the scene of his own crimes but also a well-known haunt of Florentine sodomites.¹⁸⁹ After asserting the municipality’s sovereignty, the message was carried into the territory of the “enemy” to deride not only this sodomite but all sodomites.¹⁹⁰

Finally, and quite significantly, the two magistracies condemned only a handful of men to death for homosexual sodomy: the Night Officers, three; the Eight of Watch, eight. They levied all but one of these sentences

after 1494, evidence of the post-Medicean regime's harsher stance toward sodomy. Aggravated circumstances usually dictated the severity of the penalty. The three men condemned to death by the Officers of the Night were all repeat offenders; five of the men sentenced by the Eight had severely injured the boy they sodomized, and a sixth was said also to be an infamous thief. Yet only three of the eleven sentences seem to have been carried out, for the Night Officers condemned two of these men in absentia and commuted the sentence of the third to a fine, while the Eight condemned five men in absentia. In fact, despite the thousands of convictions it is certain that very few sodomites in Florence were put to death in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: a list, incomplete but roughly indicative, of condemned criminals accompanied to their deaths by the confraternity of Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio, or "Neri," identifies only six men between 1420 and 1500 and three men during the entire sixteenth century who were executed for sodomy.¹⁹¹

The reluctance on the part of Florentine authorities to put men to death for sodomy, especially when they were men of some status and even if they were notorious sodomites, is well illustrated by the case of Salvi di Niccolò Panuzzi, the man whose death sentence the Night Officers commuted. Panuzzi was a retail cloth merchant from a well-to-do minor guild family of the Medici neighborhood of San Lorenzo.¹⁹² He was fairly prominent in civic life, having served in the highest municipal offices three times (as prior in 1485, ward captain in 1490, and one of the twelve Buonuomini in 1491), and on various criminal magistracies (the Office of Decency in 1473, the Eight of Watch in 1485, and as podestà in four provincial towns in the 1470s and 1480s).¹⁹³ He was also one of the city's better-known sodomites: he was incriminated several times between 1466 and the mid-1490s, and denounced himself at least once, in 1478; in 1492 the Eight fined him 300 florins, exiled him for three years, and interdicted him from office for fondling the genitals of a young cleric in the cathedral choir during a sermon.¹⁹⁴ Finally, in 1496, when the now sixty-three-year-old Panuzzi not only confessed to other sexual relations with youths but also admitted that he had solicited several young men to sodomize him—a rare and abhorred reversal of a mature male's sexually "dominant" and "active" role¹⁹⁵—the Night Officers condemned him to be burned after being beheaded. Nonetheless, they agreed that if he paid the large sum of 300 florins they would stay his execution and commute his penalty to life imprisonment on bread and water in the ward for the insane (*la paz[z]eria*).¹⁹⁶ Panuzzi or his family came up with the money, which saved him not only from a beheading but also from his confinement as a madman.¹⁹⁷

Clearly, levying sentences was one thing, but whether or how they were carried out was another and in some ways is more indicative of how effective the policing of sodomy was. The records provide limited information on the results of sentences, but do give a sense of the problems involved. First, nearly three-quarters (456) of the active partners convicted by the

Night Officers in the 1478–1502 survey and one-half (114) of those convicted by the Eight were in contumacy, indicating that they had fled or in any case had not responded to the officials' summons. Some absentees might eventually have paid their fines or served their sentences, but many probably did not. Moreover, as noted earlier, after levying a penalty both magistracies often offered a reduction or substitution, which usually mitigated the original punishment considerably. The Night Officers did so in 43 percent of their convictions and the Eight in 54 percent. If a person intended to pay his fine or serve his sentence, no doubt he made every possible effort to take advantage of the alternative penalty.

Finally, the Night Officers' account books for 1495 to 1502 survive,¹⁹⁸ and these give some indication of how many fined sodomites settled with the court. In the five years for which procedural records survive in the same period, the officials levied fines for active homosexual sodomy on 214 men and offered an optional fine to another 35 on whom they imposed nonmonetary punishments. Yet only 104 of these men (41 percent) made any payments at all. Of these, a mere 2 paid their original fine in full, while another 9 paid their alternative fine in full. The rest paid much lower sums, often just a few florins of a 50-florin fine, bearing out the repeated complaints that convicted sodomites, often poor, seldom fulfilled their financial obligations. The original or optional fines of the 104 who made payments totaled 5,465 florins, and the fines levied on all active partners in these five years amounted to a substantial 12,366 florins. But in these cases the Night Officers collected little more than 1,350 florins.¹⁹⁹ If the policing of sodomy potentially represented a considerable source of income for the Commune, the concrete results were disappointing.

Community Controls

The emphasis here on the city's judiciary apparatus should not obscure the community's traditional and "informal" methods for regulating sodomy. The information is limited, but evidence from judiciary or other sources shows some of the ways in which Florentines, outside the courts, sought to discourage homosexual activity or punish offenders. These could take several forms, from private reprimands of relatives and friends to collective ridicule by an entire neighborhood.

Some families probably tried to dissuade or discipline their sons or other relatives who engaged in sodomy; such efforts form the subject of several local anecdotes, or *facezie*.²⁰⁰ According to an informer in 1492, when Martino Martini found his son Marco's lover in the house, "he punished [his son] severely, and took away his slippers," perhaps, as was common, a gift from his suitor.²⁰¹ Another father reportedly threw his son out of the house for having a young boyfriend.²⁰²

Normally parents or relatives do not appear to have instigated accusations, for understandable reasons: it was in a family's interests—both fi-

nancial and in terms of their honor—that word of their son’s or other family member’s sexual activity not reach the Night Officers. Indeed, some families might have settled privately with men who sodomized their sons or relatives and agreed not to take legal action against them. When one boy’s brother-in-law and guardian found that the doctor who employed the boy as a servant had sodomized him many times and injured his anus, he reportedly accepted 2 florins from the doctor in return for letting the case drop.²⁰³ Such arrangements would seldom have been recorded, so perhaps they were more common than they appear.

The case in 1465 of the horse dealer Simone di Bino reveals a glimpse of the informal pressure that disapproving family members and friends might have applied, in this case to persuade Simone to leave his friend, twenty-year-old Rinaldo di Niccolò Benizzi. The informer, seemingly part of Simone’s intimate circle, said that the youth Rinaldo had been interrogated several times but had not confessed, and the two continued to see each other daily. Further, Simone “has been scolded by his business partner, by his brothers-in-law, by his godparents, and by other friends, yet to no avail. Even the Captain of the Guard has spoken to him about it, threatening to arrest him if he doesn’t leave the boy. But it is of no use.”²⁰⁴ Well aware of his relationship with Rinaldo, Simone’s close-knit network of relatives, friends, and associates apparently tried to cajole and threaten him privately before turning, as the circumstances imply, to the authorities.

Some parents did come to the Night Officers for justice, either when the offense was more serious or involved very young boys, or when their own discipline was insufficient. Several fathers and one widowed mother brought accusations when their sons, in most cases under ten years of age, had been sodomized with anal injuries.²⁰⁵ Another father told officials that after two of his field-workers discovered a man sodomizing his eight-year-old son, he beat the boy with a broom to make him confess before bringing him to them to take action against the man.²⁰⁶ In 1495 a distraught widow in a provincial town turned to the Night Officers with an unusual request to impose their discipline on her son and the man who sodomized him, evidently because she had failed:

Lord officials, I implore you. I am a poor widow with a son named Niccolò. Here in Gambassi there is a man named Francesco di Piero Benghi, who takes him out every evening and sodomizes him. He gives him a half-*grosso* [a coin] each time. Arrest the boy secretly. Put a little fear in him with a whipping and he’ll confess everything. My name is Maria Angelica, widow of Torme di Gallo.²⁰⁷

The experiences of Guerrieri di Tribaldo de’ Rossi, as told in his father’s journal, illustrate the misadventures that could befall a young Florentine involved in sodomy and reveal several family and community responses.²⁰⁸ Born in 1485 into an old and once illustrious magnate family now fallen

into modest circumstances, Guerrieri had a troubled adolescence. At age eleven he was already gambling with other boys and began to miss school, escapades for which his irate father beat him and temporarily threw him out of the house. He was apprenticed in 1499 to a wool merchant, but his employer fired him after only eight months, as his father recorded, “because of his wickedness and because he would obey neither him, his father, nor his mother.” Placed in school again, he ran away from home after ten days, staying two nights with a young friend, Francesco Della Rena, who like Guerrieri was soon after implicated in sodomy.²⁰⁹ Francesco mediated with Tribaldo, who agreed to take his son back into the household and promised not to punish him. He soon placed Guerrieri in another shop, but with little optimism, as he wrote, “because we don’t see much discipline in him.”

In fact, around this time Guerrieri had evidently been engaging in sodomy with numerous men. After an anonymous denunciation,²¹⁰ on May 6, 1500, the Night Officers arrested the fourteen-year-old and questioned him, releasing him upon the intervention of none other than Niccolò Machiavelli, the Rossi’s neighbor. Unfortunately, the register that contained his confession is missing, but his father ruefully reported that “he confessed about many” who had sodomized him. And, as Tribaldo painfully admitted, “it was a great humiliation for him throughout all of Florence, for him and for all of us [*e gran verghongnia gli fu per tutto Firenze a lui e tutti noi*].” Disgraced at home, Guerrieri also had problems in his workshop, where his master wanted to fire him because other boys were harassing and teasing him. He eventually agreed to keep him on without pay for several months. But the boy’s troubles were not over. His employer changed his mind and fired him on May 23, and in his chagrin over losing his job he ran away from home again. A friend who worked in Guerrieri’s shop told Tribaldo on May 26 that he had seen the boy, and that he did not want to return home because of his “fear and shame.” Finally, on May 30 the same friend brought him home. Mortified as much for himself as for his son, however, Tribaldo was forced to keep Guerrieri shut up in the house “so that he is not made fun of outside [*perché non avese la bacia fuori*].”

Personal accounts like this are rare, so it is hard to know whether other boys suffered similar punishments or humiliations. There is no reason to believe, however, that Guerrieri’s problems or the reactions to his sexual misdeeds were unique. Although the courts seldom penalized boys who let men sodomize them, families and the community evidently had their own ways of punishing, shaming, and even ostracizing them. Not only did Guerrieri de’ Rossi, for example, suffer the taunts of his peers, lose his job, and undergo family discipline, but his father was so shaken and humiliated that even he turned his back on him. Previously Tribaldo had proudly and meticulously recorded Guerrieri’s school and work experiences, but after his anguished account of the boy’s sodomitical escapades until the journal

ended a year and a half later, he never again mentioned his wayward son, who had apparently so disappointed his paternal aspirations.²¹¹

Along with the family, the neighborhood community in traditional Europe, with its strong sense of shared moral obligation and vigilance over behavior to maintain local tranquillity, was a potent source of social control.²¹² It is not too surprising, therefore, that whole neighborhoods acted at times in collective, informal ways to rid themselves of a sodomite or to convince a neighbor to reform. According to an informer in 1496, someone spied the parish priest of Sant'Ilario, whom local people had long suspected was a sodomite, in the church's garden with another man and a fifteen- or sixteen-year-old adolescent. When the news spread, some fifty parishioners descended on the place to chase the priest from the church.²¹³ Two other men, one a priest and one a layman, were also reported in the 1490s to have been driven from churches, hospitals, and other places as sodomites.²¹⁴ The efforts of neighbors to defend the peace and virtue of their streets and districts might also have included the collective writing of denunciations, as a number of them suggest.²¹⁵

In another striking denunciation in 1468, an informer recounted how Antonio di Jacopo, a mercer at the Canto del Giglio, was twice found in compromising situations with boys in his shop, and was treated to a chorus of ridicule by his neighbors.²¹⁶ Antonio had locked himself into his shop one evening with Zanobi, a young painter with whom he had been in love for three years, according to the informant. Someone passing by saw smoke coming from the window and, assuming the shop was on fire, raised the alarm. Unable to find Antonio, neighbors began to break down the door to put out the flames. By this time the commotion had drawn about a hundred people to the shop, with others peering from their windows. When Antonio, whose inclinations were reportedly well known in his neighborhood, finally opened the door and sheepishly emerged with Zanobi, the crowd derided and scolded him as he made his way along the street. "He has also been reprimanded by the neighbors," the accuser continued, "and by those who are fond of him so that he will mend his ways and leave the evil."

Despite the public shaming, however, Antonio apparently had no intention of renouncing his pleasures. On another evening, he was closed inside his shop "in his usual way" when someone (greedy neighbors, the informer said) who had made a point of keeping an eye on him spied Antonio inside with a boy. They hung two big lanterns outside the shop to attract the neighbors. After a crowd had gathered and the windows along the street were filled with women with candles in hand, someone beat on the door of the shop. "And Antonio, unable to avoid this disgrace . . . decided to open up, and emerged to great ridicule. And he's even an old man, around 60, with three grown sons."²¹⁷

Such traditional forms of social control within intimate circles of family and friends or wider groups of neighbors were probably fairly common. From these and other examples, it seems that the Night Officers were at

times considered a last resort to be called on only when the efforts of loved ones and acquaintances had failed. Like families, neighbors might have preferred to use customary methods of rebuking and shaming wayward friends rather than to risk rupturing bonds of local solidarity by denouncing them to the authorities. When a woman in 1467 reportedly found her husband in bed with a boy and ran angrily into the street to complain to neighbor women, the informer warned officials to question these women under oath, since “otherwise they wouldn’t admit it, because they are neighbors.”²¹⁸ Even anonymous denunciations—which might have been less secretive than they appear—could have worked much like neighborhood gossip to encourage people to modify their behavior or to conduct their sexual affairs more discreetly. Officials’ lax reactions to accusations possibly suggest, among other things, a tendency to give room to such traditional, informal modes of regulating sexual behavior.

In any case, within a context of limited acceptance, sodomy was subject to close surveillance and regulation both by customary methods and by formally constituted authorities. Although divergent attitudes abounded, many Florentines throughout the Renaissance continued to view sodomy as a transgression, both a sin and a crime, and its control was a matter of abiding concern to them. The continual elaboration of punitive norms and the thousands of convictions over the course of the fifteenth century attest strongly to this lively and enduring preoccupation. But though it was a sin and a crime, perhaps to many Florentines it was not so “abominable” or dangerous as Church doctrine and official rhetoric portrayed it.

Homosexual activity in Florence was widespread and deeply rooted, a tenacious social and sexual reality that the community’s disciplinary efforts had to acknowledge and, to a certain extent, shrewdly accommodate. In concluding this chapter, it is worth recalling the pragmatic judgment expressed by the Night Officers in the sentence against a sodomite they condemned in 1436:

If despite every sort of punishment these men are still not restrained, at least some might control themselves, and perhaps those defiled by such ignominy will not do it so openly; and if out of a thousand sodomites the authorities punish even one well, all of them experience fear. Although their crimes may not be completely prevented, they may in part be contained.²¹⁹

With its innovative and flexible apparatus for policing sodomy, a complex mix of lenience and pervasiveness, the governors of the city were unable and probably did not really intend to “eradicate” the “vice,” but they did hope to confine it within tolerable limits. The ambivalence and contradictions of managing sodomy fully reflected the problematic but integral place of homosexuality—as the following chapters will show—in Florentine male culture.

Chapter 1

1. A. Lanza, ed., *Lirici toscani del '400* (Rome, 1973–1975), 1:570–71.
2. PR 108, 2v (Apr. 15).
3. GAN 79 (2), 57r (Feb. 15, 1435/1436).
4. G. Rondini, ed., *I più antichi frammenti del costituito fiorentino* (Florence, 1882), 56 (from the statutes of the podestà of 1284). On the increasing intolerance toward sodomy in this period, see M. Goodich, *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Medieval Period* (Santa Barbara, Calif., 1979), 51–88; J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, 1980), 269–332.
5. *Statuti 1325*, 219–20. On laws against sodomy and its prosecution in the fourteenth century see U. Dorini, *Il diritto penale e la delinquenza a Firenze nel secolo XIV* (Lucca, [1923]), 71–76; R. Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze* (Berlin, 1896–1927; Florence 1956–1968), 7:614. The most comprehensive study of the administration of criminal justice in Florence is A. Zorzi, *L'amministrazione della giustizia penale nella Repubblica fiorentina. Aspetti e problemi* (Florence, 1988). See also the special issue of *Ricerche storiche* 18, no. 3 (1988), on “Istituzioni giudiziarie e aspetti della criminalità nella Firenze tardomedievale”; L. I. Sterns, *The Criminal Law System of Medieval and Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore, 1994). Other recent studies for the fourteenth century include H. Manikowska, “Polizia e servizi d’ordine a Firenze nella seconda metà del XIV secolo,” *Ricerche storiche* 16 (1986): 17–38; A. Zorzi, “Contrôle social, ordre public et répression judiciaire à Florence à l’époque communale: Éléments et problèmes,” *Annales, E.S.C.* 45 (1990): 1169–88. Older but still useful studies for this period, in addition to the work by Dorini cited earlier, are Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze*, 5:479–639; J. Kohler and G. Degli Azzi, *Das florentiner Strafrecht des XIV Jahrhunderts* (Mannheim and Leipzig, 1909).
6. Rondini, ed., *I più antichi frammenti*, 56. Not directed against sodomy per se, this law simply posted a reward for denouncing or capturing infamous thieves or persons banished for other serious crimes, including sodomy, who had illegally reentered Florentine territory.
7. *Statuti 1325*, 218–20. This is the only law between 1300 and 1550 that focused exclusively on man-boy relations in sodomy. Unlike later laws, it failed to mention males over the age of eighteen who took the “passive” role, probably not because this was condoned but because it was (or was assumed to be) so rare as to be unworthy of notice. Moreover, its wording (*quod quicumque sodomita pollutus cum aliquo puero inventus fuerit*) seems to refer only to men caught in the act, though it is unlikely the courts interpreted it this way.
8. *Statuti 1322*, 243–44.
9. PR 52, 128r (Apr. 3).
10. S. Cohn, Jr., *The Laboring Classes in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980), 275–80, Appendices H.1 (1344–1345) and H.2 (1374–1375), where no cases of sodomy are recorded (despite Cohn’s assertion on page 196 that there were cases of homosexual rape prosecuted in the two samples). In a personal communication, Gene Brucker informed me that his surveys for 1344–1346, 1360–1361, and 1390–1391, yielded no prosecutions for sodomy. I wish to thank Brucker for sharing these findings and his extensive notes on other sodomy cases with me.
11. Dorini, *Il diritto penale*, 71–72.

12. My sources were seventy-four “books of sentences” of the podestà, capitano, and esecutore from 1390 through 1410. I found no absolutions for sodomy. The figures reported here may be slightly low, since some 25 percent of the relevant volumes were damaged in the flood of 1966 and cannot now be consulted, and some surviving volumes are incomplete. The thirty-three individuals include six noted by Gene Brucker in volumes now unavailable for consultation.

13. See G. Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York, 1985), 127–28, Table 6; E. Pavan, “Police des mœurs, société et politique à Venise à la fin du Moyen Age,” *Revue Historique* 264 (1980): 266.

14. Respectively, Pod. 4592, 26v (June 20, 1428); EOG 1288, 53v (Aug. 12, 1396); Pod. 640, 39r (Nov. 6, 1350); EOG 2045, 15r (Dec. 12, 1424).

15. For example, in 1352 two men assaulted three young sons of Boccaccio Brunelleschi with the intention of raping them, but were driven off. Both men, described as habitual sodomites, were sentenced to death by burning; Pod. 826, 351r (Sept. 22), 354r (Oct. 1). For a 1429 case of a man who gagged and raped a ten-year-old boy, severely lacerating his anus, for which the man was burned at the stake, see G. Brucker, *The Society of Renaissance Florence: A Documentary Study* (New York, 1971), 205–206.

16. In 1352 seven men kidnapped a citizen and held him for ransom for a month, and six of the gang raped him repeatedly. They were sentenced (five in absentia) to be dragged by an ass through the city, then burned to death; Pod. 873, 31r (Oct. 31). In 1404 five men, rebuffed by a boy they desired, attacked and tried to rape him, but he escaped with the aid of two customs officers; that night the five men assaulted the officers, injuring one and killing the other. All five, in absentia, were fined enormous sums, their property was confiscated, and they were sentenced to be beheaded; Pod. 4003, 31r (Nov. 10). In 1409 a notary charged with theft, simony, corruption and extortion while in office, and sodomy with four youths was beheaded; CPDA 2374, 29v (June 27).

17. Pod. 826, 141v (Oct. 4). Miniato was sentenced to death in absentia.

18. Pod. 279, 96r (May 15). See further later. I thank Halina Manikowska for this reference.

19. Ages were seldom or imprecisely recorded in the records of this period, but available information indicates that passive partners were normally adolescents or “teenagers.” See chapters 3 and 4 for detailed discussions.

20. Respectively, EOG 1520, 2v (Feb. 9, 1403/1404), fined 1,000 lire and exiled to Venice for four years; Pod. 4003, 24r (Feb. 23, 1404/1405), sentenced in contumacy to be beheaded.

21. Pod. 1656, 45r (May 7, 1365). Part of Giovanni’s sentence, describing his sexual activity, is published in Kohler and Degli Azzi, *Das florentiner Strafrecht*, 109–12; the editors, however, omitted his brutal punishment.

22. EOG 1520, 2v (Feb. 14, 1403/1404). Biographical information on Alamanni comes from Catasto 64, 194v–195r (1427). He seems to have reconciled with his wife, for a second son was born around 1406 and a third around 1408.

23. EOG 1520, 3r (Feb. 14, 1403/1404).

24. Salvestro’s petition for clemency is in PR 93, 137r (Nov. 27, 1404), 163r (Dec. 19); that of Jacopo, brought by his father, is in *ibid*, 96v (Oct. 9, 1404).

25. Pod. 279, 97rv (May 15).

26. Ruggiero, *Boundaries*, 127–38. See also P. Labalme, “Sodomy and Venetian

Justice in the Renaissance,” *Legal History Review* 52 (1984): 222–25; Pavan, “Police,” 266–68.

27. See my comments in the Introduction. Ruggiero’s casual use in chapter 6 in *Boundaries* of the term “homosexual” as a noun or adjective referring to persons may give rise to misunderstanding about the nature of the “subculture” he describes and about the conceptual model of the “sodomite” that lies behind his analysis. Though he astutely suggests elsewhere (chapter 7) that homosexual behavior in Renaissance Venice might have been particularly associated with the prolonged period of adolescence and bachelorhood, implying a model different from the one which “homosexual” typically evokes, this is not readily apparent in his discussion of sodomy in the preceding chapter. See Randolph Trumbach’s comments on the anachronistic application of modern models to sexual experience before 1700, including a critique of Ruggiero, in “Gender and the Homosexual Role in Modern Western Culture: The 18th and 19th Centuries Compared,” in *Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality?* (Amsterdam and London, 1989), 161–64; the reviews of *The Boundaries of Eros* by Trumbach and Alan Bray in *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, ed. K. Gerard and G. Hekma (New York, 1989), 506–10, 499–505. On the sodomitical milieu of Florence, and whether it is useful to represent it as a distinctive subculture, see chapter 5.

28. *Prediche inedite del beato Giordano da Rivalto dell’Ordine de’ predicatori, recitate in Firenze dal 1302 al 1305*, ed. E. Narducci (Bologna, 1867), 449.

29. On these developments see M. Becker, *Florence in Transition* (Baltimore, 1967, 1968); P. Herde, “Politische Verhaltensweisen der Florentiner Oligarchie, 1382–1402,” in *Geschichte und Verfassungsgefüge: Frankfurter Festgabe für Walter Schlessinger*, Frankfurter Historische Abhandlungen, Vol. 5 (Wiesbaden, 1973), 156–249; A. Molho, “Politics and the Ruling Class in Early Renaissance Florence,” *Nuova rivista storica* 52 (1968): 401–20; Molho, *Florentine Public Finances in the Early Renaissance, 1400–1433* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971); R. Witt, “Florentine Politics and the Ruling Class, 1382–1407,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 6 (1976): 243–67; G. Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, 1977); J. M. Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus in Florentine Electoral Politics, 1280–1400* (Chapel Hill, 1982). For a general overview of Florentine political institutions and processes in the early fifteenth century, see G. Guidi, *Il governo della città-repubblica di Firenze del primo Quattrocento* (Florence, 1981).

30. On the transformations in the Florentine judicial system see Zorzi, *L’amministrazione*, 1–63; see also L. Martines, *Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, 1968), 130–45; M. Becker, “Changing Patterns of Violence and Justice in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Florence,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 18 (1976): 281–96; S. Cohn, Jr., *Laboring Classes*, 179–203; Cohn, “Criminality and the State in Renaissance Florence, 1344–1466,” *Journal of Social History* 14 (1981): 211–33.

31. The Otto di guardia, created after the defeat of the workers’ uprising known as the Ciompi Revolt. The Otto eventually became the city’s main criminal tribunal. See G. Antonelli, “La magistratura degli Otto di guardia a Firenze,” *Archivio storico italiano* 92 (1954): 3–39; Becker, “Changing Patterns”; Zorzi, *L’amministrazione*, 42–45.

32. The Ufficiali dell’onestà (Officers of Decency). See R. Trexler, “La Prostitution florentine au XV^e siècle: Patronages et clientèles,” *Annales, E.S.C.* 36 (1981):

983–1015; M. S. Mazzi, *Prostitutes and leprosy in Florence in the Quattrocento* (Milan, 1991), esp. 200–31. See also the discussion later.

33. The Conservatori dell'onestà dei monasteri; PR 111, 45r (June 25, 1421). This office's duties passed to the Ufficiali di notte in 1433 (see chapter 2). On the sociology and functions of convents in Florence, see R. Trexler, "Le Célibat à la fin du Moyen Age: Les religieuses à Florence," *Annales, E.S.C.* 27 (1972): 1329–50. On sex with nuns in Venice, see G. Ruggiero, "Sessualità e sacrilegio," *Studi storici* 22 (1981): 751–65; Ruggiero, *Boundaries*, 70–88.

34. The Conservatori di legge. See A. Zorzi, "I fiorentini e gli uffici pubblici nel primo Quattrocento: Concorrenza, abusi, illegalità," *Quaderni storici* 66 (1987): 725–51; Zorzi, *L'amministrazione*, 62–63.

35. See M. Rocke, "Il controllo dell'omosessualità a Firenze nel XV secolo: Gli Ufficiali di Notte," *Quaderni storici* 66 (1987): 702–704, and chapter 2; cf. Zorzi, *L'amministrazione*, 57–61.

36. For a discussion of the moral reforms promoted by the regime in the early fifteenth century, see Mazzi, *Prostitutes*, 141–81; also Zorzi, *L'amministrazione*, 56–63. On the policing of sexual behavior in the Florentine territorial state in the same period, M. S. Mazzi, "Cronache di periferia dello Stato fiorentino: Reati contro la morale nel primo Quattrocento," *Studi storici* 27 (1986): 609–35.

37. See J. Rossiaud, *La prostituzione nel medioevo* (Bari, 1984), 111–33, on new approaches and attitudes toward sexuality in the period 1390–1440.

38. D. Herlihy and C. Klapisch-Zuber, *Les Toscans et leurs familles: Une étude du catasto florentin du 1427* (Paris, 1978), 165–88; A. Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge, 1986).

39. Although no causal relationship can be proved, nearly every Florentine law against sodomy in this period—those of 1365, 1403, 1418 and 1419, and 1432—as well as Bernardino of Siena's sermons against sodomy in 1424 and 1425, came during or shortly after outbreaks of plague (1363, 1400, 1417 and 1418, 1423 and 1424, 1430).

40. Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Les Toscans*, 204–209, 393–419; D. Herlihy, "Vieillir à Florence au Quattrocento," *Annales, E.S.C.* 24 (1969): 1346–49.

41. In general, see Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Les Toscans*, 523–613, with additional bibliography.

42. On attitudes toward children see generally *ibid.*, 552–84; C. Klapisch-Zuber, "L'Enfance en Toscane au début du XV^e siècle," *Annales de démographie historique* (1973): 99–122; J. B. Ross, "The Middle-Class Child in Urban Italy, Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Century," in *The History of Childhood*, ed. L. de Mause (New York, 1974), 183–228; R. Goldthwaite, "The Florentine Palace as Domestic Architecture," *American Historical Review* 77 (1972): 1009–11; O. Niccoli, "Compagnie di bambini nell'Italia del Rinascimento," *Rivista storica italiana* 101 (1989): 346–74; Niccoli, *Il seme della violenza: Putti, fanciulli e mammoli nell'Italia tra Cinque e Seicento* (Rome and Bari, 1995); Niccoli, ed., *Infanzie: Funzioni di un gruppo liminale dal mondo classico all'Età moderna*, Laboratorio di Storia, vol. 6 (Florence, 1993). On the Commune's provisions for abandoned children, R. Trexler, "The Foundlings of Florence, 1395–1495," *History of Childhood Quarterly* 1 (1973–1974): 259–84; P. Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence: The Ospedale degli Innocenti, 1410–1536* (Ann Arbor, 1990). For the history of boys' confraternities in Florence, which Trexler argues were seen as a partial response to adolescent homosexuality, see "Ritual in Florence: Adolescence and

Salvation in the Renaissance,” in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, ed. C. Trinkaus and H. Oberman (Leiden, 1974), esp. 234–48, and Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980), 368–87.

43. Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Les Toscans*, 586–88. It is worth stressing the role of leading humanists in the growing campaign against sodomy, since it is often assumed that humanists’ passion for antiquity contributed univocally to an acceptance of homoeroticism among the Italian elite.

44. See A. Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994); also J. Kirshner, “Pursuing Honor While Avoiding Sin: The *Monte delle doti* of Florence,” *Studi senesi* 87 (1977): 175–256; A. Molho and J. Kirshner, “The Dowry Fund and the Marriage Market in Early *Quattrocento* Florence,” *Journal of Modern History* 50 (1978): 403–38; Molho and Kirshner, “Il monte delle doti a Firenze dalla sua fondazione nel 1425 alla metà del sedicesimo secolo: Abbozzo di una ricerca,” *Ricerche storiche* 10 (1980): 21–47; A. Molho, “Investimenti nel Monte delle doti di Firenze: Un’analisi sociale e geografica,” *Quaderni storici* 61 (1986): 147–70.

45. The original proposal has not survived, but it is summarized in the *priorista* of Paolo Pietrobuoni (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, Conventi Soppressi C.4.895, 105r) and in the *ricordi* of Pagolo del Pagone (Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence, Fondo Moreniano, ms. 301, 50v–51r). Advanced by the Signoria and colleges, the proposal was approved only by the Council of the Popolo, where it carried against the highest number of nays for measures voted that day; LF 52v, 125v (Dec. 9, 1421). There is no evidence it was submitted to the Council of the Commune, implying the government dropped it. In fact the proposal met with bitter opposition, as records of an advisory meeting of December 11, 1421, reveal: “Many are complaining,” a speaker reported, “and saying that they would not be free as their elders were,” suggesting a generational conflict; CP 44, 152v. Del Pagone also noted that the proposal provoked a “huge debate in the city.” That this was an indirect measure against sodomites is implied by the insistence of Bernardino of Siena that all unmarried men were sodomites and should be driven from office; *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:47.

46. Belief in the deterrent function of prostitution was widespread in the Middle Ages. Giordano of Rivalto (or of Pisa), for example, preached in Florence in 1306 that if the admittedly “great evil” of prostitution were suppressed, the much worse evils of sodomy and adultery would increase; *Quaresimale fiorentino 1305–1306*, ed. Carlo del Corno (Florence, 1974), 210. In laws from the Tuscan cities of Lucca and Siena, combatting sodomy was the motive given for promoting and protecting prostitution; see S. Bongi, ed., *Inventario del R. Archivio di Stato di Lucca* (Lucca, 1872–1888), 1:213–14; T. Compton, “Sodomy and Civic Doom,” *Vector* 11, no. 11 (1975): 57. Trexler stresses the role of municipal prostitution as a perceived deterrent to homosexuality in Florence in “La Prostitution,” esp. 983–84. Mazzi also acknowledges this as one of the government’s possible motives; *Prostitute*, 157.

47. Brucker, *Society*, 180–81. See also PR 153, 241v (Feb. 9, 1462/1463), where sumptuary controls are justified as a spur to marriage in Pisa. For Bernardino’s claims, see *Opera omnia*, 2:83; *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:141; (Siena, 1427), 853.

48. Brucker, *Society*, 206–7, from a case prosecuted by the Night Officers in 1435.

49. PR 92, 9r (Apr. 24, 1403). The summaries of the law in the voting register

also clearly stress its intent to repress sodomy; LF 47, 138r (Apr. 20), 140r (Apr. 24).

50. UO 1, 3r–7v (Apr. 30, 1403). This deliberation does not appear in the corpus of municipal law, the *provvisio*ni, perhaps because it was an executive decree issued in virtue of the extraordinary authority (*balìa*) granted to the Signora on April 24. In the source just cited, the April 30 deliberation is incorporated with a copy of the April 24 law on sodomy, and these two measures appear the same way, in successive rubrics, in the statutes redacted in 1408/1409 (*Statuti* 23, 85r) and in 1415 (*Statuta* 1415, 3:41 ff.). These linkages seem to confirm an ideological connection between the two measures, yet they were clearly distinct, and the difference is important for the interpretation of the government's actions and aims. On this unusual and intricate turn of events see Rocke, "Il controllo," 704 and n. 19, and Mazzi, *Prostitute*, 149–59. On the Officers of Decency see Mazzi, 200–31; Trexler, "La Prostitution." The distinction between the two moments of the government's action escaped Trexler's attention (984), an oversight that reinforced his narrow interpretation of this magistracy as serving mainly to combat male homosexuality as part of a broader effort to stimulate population growth. The limits of this perspective are underlined by Mazzi in *Prostitute*, 158, and in "Il mondo della prostituzione nella Firenze tardo medievale," *Ricerche storiche* 14 (1984): 344–45.

51. See Mazzi, *Prostitute*, 141–231, and "Il mondo della prostituzione"; also Trexler, "La Prostitution." On institutionalized prostitution in Venice, Pavan, "Police," 241–66. For a general study of prostitution in early modern Italy, see R. Canosa and I. Colonnello, *Storia della prostituzione in Italia dal Quattrocento alla fine del Settecento* (Rome, 1989). For southern France, see Rossiaud, *La prostituzione*; L. Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society: The History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc* (Chicago, 1985).

52. CP 37, 14v (Jan. 7, 1403/1404) and again on 16v (Jan. 8). I thank Gene Brucker for this reference. Mazzi convincingly argues that the Office of Decency was not fully operational until 1415; *Prostitute*, 200–210.

53. LF 47, 187v. The measure passed 146–54, the highest number of nays for any proposal voted that day.

54. PR 92, 323r (Mar. 13, 1403/1404); see LF 47, 188r, for its summary in the voting register of the Council of the Commune. It is unclear whether the proposal was altered after its approval by the Council of the Popolo or whether the first summary grossly misrendered its sense. While there is no evidence the Officers of Decency were granted specific jurisdiction over sodomy, a number of sodomy laws appear in the compilation of laws pertinent to this office (see UO 1). And apparently they did prosecute sodomy, though rarely, if it involved prostitutes who worked in the public brothels. For an early case in which a pimp was convicted—but only after repeated warnings by the Onestà—of sodomizing several brothel whores, see GAN 74, 237r (Feb. 1, 1415/1416). Gene Brucker kindly passed on this reference. For later cases, see Trexler, "La Prostitution," 995–96, and Table VII.

55. "Nec metu veritatis crimen prefatum impunitum relinquent"; *Statuti* 23, 86v. The 1408/1409 statutes, which would have reinforced authoritarian tendencies within the regime, were successfully blocked, and only after further changes were the definitive statutes approved in 1415. The measures on sodomy in the early version were carried over in the later with slightly more concise language; *Statuta*

1415, 1:320–23. These measures probably originated with the 1408/1409 statutes, though this cannot be determined with certainty. A review of all legislation from 1365 to 1408 failed to turn up any law on sodomy that might have been incorporated in the statutes. On the code of 1408/1409 and its reception see R. Fubini, “La rivendicazione di Firenze della sovranità statale e il contributo delle ‘Historiae’ del Bruni,” in *Leonardo Bruni cancelliere della Repubblica di Firenze*, ed. P. Viti (Florence, 1990), 46–50; Zorzi, *L’amministrazione*, 13–17.

56. *Statuti* 23, 86v; cf. *Statuta 1415*, 1:321.

57. The third of Za’s poems, “Lo studio d’Atene,” also alludes to sodomy but less clearly so. See D. Guerri, *La corrente popolare nel rinascimento: Berte, burle e baie nella Firenze del Brunellesco e del Burchiello* (Florence, 1931), 33–48; A. Lanza, *Polemiche e berte letterarie nella Firenze del primo Rinascimento (1375–1449)*, 2d ed. (Rome, 1989), 271–97, 312–19. Lanza’s edition of the poems appears only in the first edition (Rome, 1972), 309–25, 348–57. Lanza suggests only that Za’s satires grew out of the climate of jubilation after the death of Giangaleazzo Visconti in 1402 and the defeat of Pisa in 1406 (pp. 223, 272). This may be, but the growing concern over sodomy in this decade also had a decisive and more direct influence.

58. J. Toscan, *Le Carnaval du langage: Le lexique érotique des poètes de l’époque de Burchiello à Marino (XV^e–XVII^e siècles)* (Lille, 1981), 4:1671, 1705, 1720; he suggests (1720) that Monte Morello is once used as a metaphor for the female sexual organs, but in Za’s poem the allusion is plainly to sodomy. The poems should be read with Toscan’s work to grasp their rich sexual content. In Florentine slang today, *buco* is a derogatory term for homosexual, but it does not seem to have had this sense in the late Middle Ages. Another possible allusion comes from the so-called *compagnie delle buche* or *di notte*, names given to penitential confraternities that practiced especially strict forms of discipline; see J. Henderson, “Le confraternite religiose nella Firenze del tardo medioevo: Patroni spirituali e anche politici?” *Ricerche storiche* 15 (1985): 90–91. In general on Florentine confraternities, see R. Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1982); J. Henderson, *Piety and Charity in Late Medieval Florence* (Oxford, 1994).

59. Guardi was one of the organizers of the events recounted in the poem. As Za wrote, “he was the companion of a member of the Fracassini family, and they committed a lot of sodomy together”; Lanza, *Polemiche e berte*, 284. On the *Buco* later in the century, see chapter 5.

60. An annotated list of many of the people named in Za’s poems is found in *La buca di Monteferrato, Lo studio d’Atene, Il gagno*, ed. L. Frati (Bologna, 1884), 187–255. For the most obvious depictions of sodomites, see Lanza, *Polemiche e berte*, 284–85.

61. Lanza, *Polemiche e berte*, 300–1.

62. In Lanza, ed., *Lirici toscani del ‘400*, 1:570–71.

63. Guerri published this poem in *La corrente popolare*, 149–71, and suggested it was roughly contemporary with the poems of Za. Lanza offers the 1417 to 1425 date and attributes the poem to the herald Antonio di Matteo di Meglio, who was responsible for entertaining the priors while they dined; *Polemiche e berte*, 321–35.

64. Guerri, *La corrente popolare*, 153. A similar appeal to lawmakers follows this one.

65. *Ibid.*, 171.

66. CP 43, 76v.

67. *Ibid.*; excerpts in Brucker, *Society*, 201.

68. CP 43, 77r (Dec. 8). Following the minutes of the speaker Vieri Rondinelli's remarks is the list of citizens he represented; their names appear in M. Rocke, "Male Homosexuality and its Regulation in Late-Medieval Florence" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1990), 69n.84. They included a number of the leading men of the regime. Within the spectrum of the governing class this group had a decidedly conservative cast, yet it is unclear whether their interests in intensifying repression of sodomy had a more articulated political purpose. Significantly, however, the list does not include the Medici, who were on the threshold of their rise to power and were sometimes accused of being "soft" on sodomy, nor any of their partisans (see later).

69. PR 105, 236r (Dec. 13, 1415). I am grateful to Andrea Zorzi for bringing this to my attention.

70. PR 106, 164v (Oct. 23, 1416).

71. CP 43, 185r (Mar. 31). The speaker was Felice Brancacci. I thank Gene Brucker for this reference.

72. PR 108, 2v–3v (Apr. 15, 1418); excerpts in Brucker, *Society*, 202–203.

73. PR 108, 245rv (Feb. 24, 1418/1419).

74. *Ibid.*, 3rv. Bernardino of Siena warned Florentines who voted for sodomites after taking an oath not to that they committed a mortal sin; *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 2:157.

75. PR 108, 245r.

76. See the remarks of Bernardino of Siena, later, and chapter 5.

77. PR 108, 3v.

78. *Ibid.*, 245v. According to the same law, at the end of the commission's one-year term their duties were to pass to the *Ufficiali dell'onestà*. This perhaps strengthens the implicit association between the state's encouragement of prostitution and the control of sodomy.

79. The sermons on sodomy are in *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:30–36, 37–56, 57–71; (Florence, 1425), 2:270–90; (Siena, 1425), 2:98–112; (Siena, 1427), 893–919; and "De horrendo peccato contra naturam," in *Opera omnia*, 3:267–84. The social content of Bernardino's commentary on sodomy is reviewed in M. Rocke, "Sodomites in Fifteenth-Century Tuscany: The Views of Bernardino of Siena," in *Pursuit of Sodomy*, ed. Gerard and Hekma, 7–31. See also Trexler, *Public Life*, 380–82.

80. Revised under Bernardino's direction, the statutes of 1425 in Perugia and Siena set harsh penalties for sodomy. But in both places his reforms were soon weakened or revoked; I. Origo, *The World of San Bernardino* (London, 1963), 152–53.

81. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 1:34.

82. *Ibid.*, 2:20.

83. *Prediche* (Siena, 1425), 2:107.

84. *Ibid.*, 106, 107; *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 906, 908.

85. Bernardino of Siena, *Opera omnia*, 3:275.

86. *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 906–907. Bernardino's stress on the link between demography and sodomy contrasts sharply with Savonarola's silence on this issue at the end of the century, when population growth had strongly recovered.

87. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 1:35; *Prediche* (Siena, 1425), 2:103, 104. On the reputation of Italy in general, *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 899, 901, 902, 905.

88. *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 898.
89. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:41; *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 3:42.
90. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:40–41.
91. *Ibid.*, 44; on gifts and flattery, *ibid.*, 40, 47; *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 903.
92. *Prediche* (Siena, 1425), 2:100.
93. *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 3:42.
94. See chapter 5.
95. *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 3:42–43. On parents “sprucing up” their sons until they became sodomites, *ibid.*, 2:184.
96. *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 908.
97. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:40, 35.
98. *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 904. For other passages in which he singled out mothers, *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 2:275 and 3:42; *Prediche* (Siena, 1425), 2:102; *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 904. On mothers who make their sons “effeminate” by feeding them “superfluous delights,” Bernardino of Siena, *Opera omnia*, 3:269. For other allusions to “males making themselves females” through sodomy, see *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:45, 141; *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 3:33; *Prediche* (Siena, 1425), 2:106. David Herlihy argues that moralists’ complaints about mothers’ effeminizing effects on sons might have reflected what he depicts as the considerable influence women often had in Florentine families. Since husbands were on average thirteen years older than their wives, fathers were often aged and distant models or dead by the time their sons reached adolescence, and this ostensibly gave mothers a decisive role in passing on cultural values to them; Herlihy, “Vieillir,” 1341–45; Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Les Toscans*, 394–400, 435–37, 603–6. Yet as Bernardino’s remarks here show, he reproached fathers for the same influence Herlihy ascribes exclusively to mothers. Lauro Martines rightly cautions that moralists’ fears about mothers’ pernicious effects on sons were a “caricature” with ancient roots; “A Way of Looking at Women in Renaissance Florence,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1974): 23.
99. A *travestito* does appear in a case in 1497, but with an uncertain meaning and in a context quite unlike that suggested by Bernardino; see chapter 5. Guido Ruggiero discusses a case of male transvestism in fourteenth-century Venice (*Boundaries*, 136), but his conclusions are questioned by Trumbach in “Gender and the Homosexual Role,” 162–63.
100. See chapter 3.
101. *Prediche* (Siena, 1425), 100.
102. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:40, 41.
103. Patronage has increasingly come to be seen as a key to understanding social and political relations in late medieval Florence and Italy. For an interpretation of sodomy in this light, and relevant bibliography, see chapter 5.
104. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:47.
105. For example, *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 2:270–87.
106. *Ibid.*, 3:44. On attitudes toward youths see Trexler, *Public Life*, 387–99 and *passim*; D. Herlihy, “Some Psychological and Social Roots of Violence in the Tuscan Cities,” in *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200–1500*, ed. L. Martines (Berkeley, 1972), 135–37.
107. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:49–51.
108. See chapters 4 and 5.
109. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:35.

110. *Prediche* (Siena, 1425), 2:109.
111. His source was apparently a remark by Jerome in the Decretals; *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 916.
112. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 1:416.
113. See chapter 4.
114. *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 2:276; *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 917, 910–11.
115. *Prediche* (Siena, 1425), 2:105.
116. *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 410.
117. On relations between sodomites and women see also Rocke, “Sodomites,” 20–22, and this work, chapter 4.
118. *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 2:276.
119. *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 2:184, 273; *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 434–36, 897; *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 1:387.
120. *Prediche* (Siena, 1427), 436, 853, 897; *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:141. According to Jean Toscan, in Carnival songs and burlesque poems women’s menstrual period was the justification most often given for practicing heterosexual anal intercourse; *Le Carnaval*, 258–63.
121. Bernardino of Siena, *Opera omnia*, 2:83.
122. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:47.
123. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:35; *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 3:104.
124. For example, *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 2:273; *Prediche* (Siena, 1425), 2:103; see also chapter 4, 135.
125. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:51. Bernardino used the phrase “sono di quella arte,” which reappears in other remarks (e.g., “Qui se ne fa arte! Annole posto nome l’arte gentile della seta!” *ibid.*, 35) and in some denunciations for sodomy (e.g., UN 20, 40v and 57v). According to Toscan, in burlesque literature the word *arte*, which means “art, skill, or guild,” indicated the anus, sodomy, or sexual activity in general; *Le Carnaval*, 4:1663. In its sense as a form of association, the term strengthens the notion that sodomites were thought to constitute a special interest group.
126. *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 2:116.
127. See D. V. Kent, *The Rise of the Medici: Faction in Florence (1426–1434)* (Oxford, 1978); Brucker, *Civic World*, 472–507.
128. *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 2:118; the editor, Cannarozzi, noted Bernardino’s possible allusion to the Medici family. See also Trexler, *Public Life*, 381.
129. CP 43, 185r (Mar. 31).
130. Modern editions and Italian translations include *L’Ermafrodito*, ed. R. Gagliardi (Milan, 1980); *L’Ermafrodito*, ed. J. Tognelli (Rome 1968). On Beccadelli, the work, and its reception, with additional bibliography, see these editions, and G. Resta, “Antonio Beccadelli,” in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome, 1965), 7:400–406.
131. For unknown reasons, Cosimo declined to sponsor him. However, the legend that he burned the book (see *L’Ermafrodito*, ed. Tognelli, 23) is apparently belied by the presence in his son Piero’s library of a manuscript of the work bearing the inscription “COSMI CODEX HIC EST.VALE,” and its appearance in an inventory of 1456 (before Cosimo’s death in 1464); see F. Ames-Lewis, *The Library and Manuscripts of Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici* (New York, 1984), 249.
132. *Mediceo avanti il principato* 3n.125 (Mar. 13, 1431/1432); excerpts are

in C. Guasti, ed., *Commissioni di Rinaldo degli Albizzi per il Comune di Firenze dal MCCCXCIX al MCCCCXXXIII* (Florence, 1867–1873), 3:523n.1. The meaning of Tinucci's "man or woman" is not clear; the phrase possibly referred to Micheletto's preferred sexual role or, more plausibly, to his sexual ambiguity.

133. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:35, 42.
134. *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 3:27; *Prediche* (Siena, 1425), 2:101.
135. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:66.
136. *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 2:275.
137. *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 2:48.
138. Sermons of April 5 to 8, *ibid.*, 2:30–36, 37–56, 57–71; scribe's remark, 48; "burning of the vanities," 87.

Chapter 2

1. UN 5, 47r.
2. UN 31, 35r.
3. PR 123, 31v–36v. Votes were 189–39 in the Council of the Popolo and 199–25 in the Council of the Commune. Translated excerpts are in G. Brucker, *The Society of Renaissance Florence: A Documentary Study* (New York, 1971), 203–204.
4. PR 123, 31v–32r.
5. P. Labalme, "Sodomy and Venetian Justice in the Renaissance," *Legal History Review* 52 (1984): 224 and *passim*; G. Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York, 1985), 134; E. Pavan, "Police des moeurs, société et politique à Venise à la fin du Moyen Age," *Revue historique* 264 (1980): 268.
6. Archivio di Stato di Lucca, Consiglio generale 16, 796v (Mar. 8); the magistracy operated until 1649. No specific studies exist of this office or of sodomy in Lucca. Useful if limited information can be found in L. Marcello, "Società maschile e sodomia: Dal declino della 'polis' al Principato," *Archivio storico italiano* 150 (1992):115–38; R. Canosa and I. Colonnello, *Storia della prostituzione in Italia dal Quattrocento alla fine del Settecento* (Rome, 1989), 57–73.
7. G. N. Zazzu, "Prostituzione e moralità pubblica nella Genova del '400," *Studi genuensi*, n.s., 5 (1987):60.
8. See chapter 6.
9. Earlier laws on sodomy referred explicitly to both males and females; e.g., *Statuti* 1325, 218, and *Statuta* 1415, 1:320–21. Mention of women returns to the laws only in the mid-1490s.
10. I have found only four convictions by the Night Officers for heterosexual sodomy before 1478. See also chapter 6.
11. PR 124, 148r (Aug. 5): hence the officials' new title, Ufficiali di notte e conservatori dell'onestà dei monasteri. The founding law of the original magistracy is PR 111, 45r (June 25, 1421). In 1436 Pope Eugenius IV attempted to have this function of the Office of the Night abolished as an infringement of ecclesiastical privilege; G. Brucker, *Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1969), 192.
12. PR 145, 2v (Apr. 10).
13. The first number is from Ruggiero (*Boundaries*, 128, Table 6), the second from Pavan ("Police," 276).

14. W. L. Gundersheimer, "Crime and Punishment in Ferrara, 1440–1500," in *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200–1500*, ed. L. Martines (Berkeley, 1972), 115; Canosa and Colonnello, *Storia della prostituzione*, 67, n. 25.

15. E. W. Monter, "Sodomy and Heresy in Early Modern Switzerland," in *Historical Perspectives on Homosexuality*, ed. S. J. Licata and R. P. Peterson (New York, 1981), 54–55.

16. W. Monter, *Frontiers of Heresy: The Spanish Inquisition from the Basque Lands to Sicily* (Cambridge, 1990), 289.

17. *Ibid.*, 288–89. Total conviction figures from 1566 to 1620 for Barcelona, Valencia, and Saragossa, respectively, are 86, 107, and 178; R. Carrasco, *Inquisición y represión sexual en Valencia: Historia de los sodomitos (1565–1785)* (Barcelona, 1985), 76. For Seville see also M. E. Perry, "The 'Nefarious Sin' in Early Modern Seville," in *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, ed. K. Gerard and G. Hekma (New York, 1989), 67. In Portugal the Inquisition tried 408 men for sodomy between 1587 and 1744, and convicted only about 30; L. Mott and A. Assunção, "Love's Labors Lost: Five Letters from a Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Sodomite," in *Pursuit of Sodomy*, ed. Gerard and Hekma, 99.

18. Conviction estimates for the Night Officers are based on a count of all condemnations in extant records. Convictions are preserved both in the incomplete registers of the Ufficiali di notte and, for many of the missing years, in GAN 77–88 (*Condanne profferite dagli Ufficiali intrinseci*). Together these sources account for roughly fifty-six of the seventy years from 1432 to 1502 and document 1,953 convictions. Based on average numbers of convictions for different periods, it can be estimated that the Night Officers levied a total of approximately 2,416 convictions for homosexual sodomy.

The estimate of individuals incriminated for sodomy to the Night Officers derives from an analysis of their proceedings from 1478 to 1502 (UN 19–35). In the seventeen years for which registers are extant, 4,062 different persons were implicated and 582 convicted, some more than once for a total of 638 convictions (see later for more details on this survey). Assuming that the ratio of 6.4 persons implicated to every one conviction also held in earlier years, it can be estimated that nearly 15,500 individuals came to the Night Officer's attention for homosexual sodomy from 1432 to 1502.

Convictions by other magistracies over the same period amounted to several hundred, although a complete survey is impossible. From 1455 to 1466 the podestà and capitano condemned nine men for sodomy; S. Cohn, Jr., *The Laboring Classes in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980), 279–80, Appendix H.3. From 1478 through 1502 the Eight of Watch levied at least 247 convictions for homosexual sodomy and an estimated 800 up to 1532 (see further later).

19. Electoral procedures are described in PR 123, 32r, 35v–36r.

20. PR 137, 257rv (Dec. 30).

21. Officeholding qualifications are in PR 123, 32r. Their notaries also had to be at least forty years old and married; *ibid.*, 143v (July 5, 1432).

22. PR 123, 34v.

23. PR 134, 253v (April 8). According to account books, by the 1490s their salaries had declined to three florins; UN 37–45.

24. UN 36, 98v, 104v, 114v, 121v, 128v, 133v, 137v.

25. PR 145, 75v (June 7, 1454).