

**Sodomy, Homosociality and Friendship among Jewish and  
Christian Men: The Proceedings Against Lazzaro de Norsa  
(Modena, 1670)**

by *Katherine Aron-Beller*

**Abstract**

*At the heart of the sodomy trial against Lazzaro de Norsa in 1670 before the Modenese Inquisition lies a relationship between the Jewish tailor Lazzaro and the son of the household, Cesare Camicelli. Lazzaro sleeps, not in the servants' quarters, but with Camicelli. There is nothing unusual or sinister about two men sharing a bed, but when two men of different faiths and status do so it gives rise to gossip and suspicion. This essay focuses on enmity, friendship and homo-sociality among Jews and Christians in an early modern Italian Christian household. It shows how men had a primary role within this domestic space and how relationships between servants could be made and unmade. It also reveals an unusual case in which a Jew appearing before an inquisitorial tribunal was successfully defended by a Christian procurator, paid for by the head of the Christian household, Signor Enrico Camicelli.*

**Introduction**

**Bedsharing in the Camicelli household**

**Enmity, Friendship and Homo-sociality among Jews and Christians**

**Conclusion**

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## Introduction

In the late seventeenth-century wealthy household of the *cavaliere* Enrico Cimicelli (sometimes listed as “Cimiselli” in other archival documents), male servants, professional acquaintances, and local artisans were forever in motion, coming and going.<sup>1</sup> The family lived in a *palazzo* in Modena, the city capital of the northern Este Duchy, situated in the main street of the parish of San Giovanni Evangelista. In 1670, Enrico and his (unnamed) wife had seven sons aged from 28 down to a toddler and had clearly accumulated a great fortune. Enrico’s oldest son, Cesare, worked for his father.<sup>2</sup> His second son, Camillo, served as a steward to Duke Francesco II d’Este of Modena, and the third served the Prince Cardinal Rinaldo d’Este. By 1650, the number of male servants in Italian households had grown substantially, and the *padrone’s* honor depended upon his efficient management of his domestic staff.<sup>3</sup> The social world of these male servants—the contacts they made, the circles and institutions they frequented, even their degree of mobility about the city—was determined largely by the duties and responsibilities assigned to them by their masters and mistresses. The domestic structure regulated these workers’ personal lives, and free time was severely limited.

A significant number of the lower classes in early modern Italy, particularly those who were immigrants to a city, were employed as domestic labor.<sup>4</sup> Giuseppe Sauli da Forlì had left Forlì in 1665 or 1666 to take up a placement in the Cimicelli household. He probably had an informal agreement concerning his long-term

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<sup>1</sup> A *cavaliere* (cavalier or knight) was an honorific title and office that carried a degree of prestige but no nobility. See James S. Grubb, *Provincial Families of the Renaissance: Private and Public Life in the Veneto* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 171-172 and Dennis Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft: Domestic Service in Renaissance Venice 1400-1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 81.

<sup>2</sup> Archivio di Stato di Modena, Fondo dell’Inquisizione, Causae Hebreorum 250 folio 33 and continued in Processi busta 161 no 9. 19<sup>th</sup> July 1670. From here on these references will be abbreviated to ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33 and ASMo. FI P 161 no. 9 respectively. The pages are not paginated but I followed the order of the pages in the folios. Ibid., 60r. Cesare testifies that he has “the dealings of the house on my shoulders.”

<sup>3</sup> Bill Bryson, *At Home: A Short History of Private Life* (New York: Anchor Books 2010), 233.

<sup>4</sup> Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, 105 confirms that from the middle of the sixteenth century, a new style of “aristocratic servant keeping” developed: in particular an increase in the employment of male servants.

employment.<sup>5</sup> Since he was a married man and a father, it might have stated that his son Giovanni could earn his keep as an apprentice coachman (*garzone*) when he reached the age of eleven and sleep in the *palazzo* when necessary.<sup>6</sup> In 1669, perhaps more confident that this would be a long term agreement, Gioseppe had brought his wife Lucia and Giovanni to Modena, and set them up in tiny rental accommodation consisting of a single room.<sup>7</sup> Employed as a stable hand to care for horses, Giovanni's daily activities were probably confined to the stables—grooming, cleaning out the stalls and mending harnesses. Gioseppe was unlikely to have been paid a salary on a regular basis but would have lived on lucrative tips and bribes and expected Enrico to keep his salary “in salvo” for him and his son.<sup>8</sup> Lucia described her family as being “very poor.”

To become a coachman, Gioseppe must have been tall and good looking.<sup>9</sup> Outside the household his livery, which would have displayed the Cimicelli coat of arms, would have identified him as a retainer and made him a symbol of his master's status. His daily routine was determined by the Cimicellis' transportation needs as he escorted the family members around the city and to their country villa in the parish of San Pietro, 12 miles away, where they lived for five months of the year from the middle of June to the beginning of November. His duties and responsibilities probably involved waiting for his employers for hours, and at other times performing tasks such as collecting bills, delivering messages, and receiving goods.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The time period of four or five years can be calculated from Gioseppe's comment that he had known Lazzaro for this period, since he had started working as a coachman in the household. See ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 68r-69v, 129 and 135r.

<sup>6</sup> For the significant exploitation of child labor in domestic service at this time see Maria Agren, “The Complexities of Work: Analyzing men's and women's work in the early modern world,” in *What Is Work?: Gender at the Crossroads of Home, Family, and Business from the Early Modern Era to the Present*, eds. Raffaella Sarti, Anna Bellavitis and Manuela Martini (New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018), 226-242; 234.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 94 where Lucia discusses how hard it was for married servants who often had to live apart, seeing each other infrequently. ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 14r-15. On the type of accommodation of the very poor see Sandra Cavallo, “The Artisan's Casa” in *At Home in Renaissance Italy exh. Cat.*, eds. Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis (London: V & A Publishing, 2006), 65-75; 68.

<sup>8</sup> Cissie Fairchild, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and Their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 2, 147, and 149.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

Giuseppe was expected to be something more than a hired servant: he ought to be loyal, a defender of his master's honor, and an asset to the household. Pulled into the homocentric world in Enrico's household as well as in the Palace of the Duke - the center of Modenese politics - Giuseppe met other male coachmen and servants. His self-perception clearly depended upon his affiliation to this group of servants.

On May 17, 1670, Giuseppe delated to the Holy Office in Modena that his 11-year-old son, Giovanni, had been raped by the 24-year-old Lazzaro Leoncini de Norsa, a Jewish tailor working in the Cimicelli household.<sup>11</sup> Although the Roman Inquisition was no longer dealing with crimes of sodomy in general, it was gravely concerned because of the suggestion that there had been violent intercourse between a Jew and a Christian.<sup>12</sup> Had this been a matter of Christians committing sodomy it would have gone to the episcopal or one of the secular courts. The Roman Inquisition had started prosecuting Jews for this crime in 1567, the punishment authorized by the Congregation in Rome being ten years' galley service.<sup>13</sup> Despite the Modenese Inquisition being one of the busiest tribunals of the seventeenth century, conducting far more trials than its counterpart in Venice,

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<sup>11</sup> See my previous article, "Sopra l'imputazione del delitto di sodomia con christiano: The proceedings against Lazzaro de Norsa (Modena, 1670)," in *Mascolinità mediterranee (secoli XII-XVII) Genesis 20*, eds. Denise Bezzina and Michaël Gasperoni, no. 1 (2021): 65-93. Whereas this article looked particularly at the allegation of sodomy and the trial proceedings, this essay takes the lens of homosociality between Jews and Christians who are attached to a Christian household.

<sup>12</sup> See Archivio di Stato di Modena, Fondo dell'Inquisizione, Causae Hebreorum 250 folio 33, 7r. Letter of the Inquisitor. On the eighteenth-century cases see Matteo Al Kalak "Investigating the Inquisition: Controlling Sexuality and Social Control in Eighteenth-Century Italy," *Church History* 85 (2016): 529-551. See Umberto Grassi, "Emotions and Sexuality: Regulation and Homoerotic Transgression," in *The Routledge History of Emotions in Europe (1100-1700)*, eds. Susan Broomhall and Andrew Lynch (London - New York: Routledge, 2010), 133-150; 140 for work done on sodomy in the criminal sources of early modern Italy. He highlights both the increased surveillance and social tolerance of these courts.

<sup>13</sup> Even though no mention was made of sexual crimes committed by Jews against Christians in the 1581 bull *Antiqua Iudeorum improbitas* which had authorized inquisitorial supervision of Jews, the Inquisition in northern Italy had asserted its jurisdiction over these offences. For the copy of the papal bull see Sebastiani Franco and Henrico Dalmazzo, eds., *Bullarium Diplomatum et Privilegiorum Sanctorum Romanorum Pontificum (Augustae Taurinorum, 1857-72)*, vol. VIII, 378-379. For cases of sexual relations—but not sodomy—between Jews and Christians in Modena see ASMo. FI. CH 245 f.44 in 1628 and ASMo. FI. CH 248 f.23 in 1657, ASMo. FI CH 249 in 1660; and 1735, ASMo FI. Processi 209 f.14. See also Robert Bonfil "Jews, Christians and Sex in Renaissance Italy: a Historiographical Problem," *Jewish History* 26 (2012): 101-111.

it devoted an unusual amount of time and effort to investigating this case.<sup>14</sup> The record of the trial, which runs to over 480 pages, is the longest transcript of proceedings against a professing Jew to be found in the Modenese inquisitorial archive. It is also the Inquisition's only known prosecution of a Jew for sodomy in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.<sup>15</sup>

A written medical report submitted by Francesco Bisogni, the barber surgeon, on 18<sup>th</sup> May confirmed that Giovanni had been raped and his back passage ruptured (*la rottura alle parti d'abasso*). Lazarro was therefore accused by the Inquisition of committing a crime aggravated by violence.<sup>16</sup> He was arrested on 31<sup>st</sup> May and taken to the Holy Office, to be imprisoned in the convent of San Domenico. Throughout his six interrogations (on 31<sup>st</sup> May, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 18<sup>th</sup> June, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 12<sup>th</sup> July and 13<sup>th</sup> July) during his three months' imprisonment, he repeatedly denied committing sodomy and refused to deviate from his declaration of innocence.

Without obtaining a confession from Lazarro, it was impossible for the Inquisition to prove that he had committed the offense. Twenty-three days after his incarceration, on 22<sup>nd</sup> June, at his fourth interrogation, Lazarro accepted legal counsel, thereby preventing the tribunal from using torture to secure a confession.<sup>17</sup> It was immediately announced that a legal procurator, Dr. Domino Benedetto Septo, would defend Lazarro. A procurator was a private solicitor or attorney retained by supporters of the accused, rather than an inquisitorial advocate appointed by the court; Septo had been retained by the Cimicellis, and

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<sup>14</sup> Andrea del Col, *L'Inquisizione in Italia dal XII al XXI secolo* (Milan: Oscar Mondadori, 2006), 776.

<sup>15</sup> In Modena, Jews were subject to secular courts including the Giudici Ordinarii, the Ducale Camerale, the Tribunale dei Dodici Savi and the Giudici del Maleficio, which dealt specifically with heresy and blasphemy if they committed crimes and the Magistrati delle Artii regarding guild issues.

<sup>16</sup> ASM. FI CH 250 f. 33, 12r-13v. 18<sup>th</sup> May 1670, 21r. This is how Giovanni's backside was described by the barber surgeon Francesco Bisogni.

In 1647 Venetian legislation had ordered that any surgeon or barber who treated anyone for injuries resulting from anal intercourse had to report this to a court of law. Whether this was the case in Modena is not clear. See Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 117. The Modenese Inquisition ordered another examination of Giovanni on June 8, 1670, this time performed by Giovanni Manzini. By this time the rupture had healed. See ASM. FI CH 250 f. 33, 273r - 275v.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 93r-94r. Before Lazarro confirmed his decision, the Inquisitor had sent a standard letter asking for the guidance of the Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome as to whether torture should be applied to the prisoner in this case.

was handed a copy of the trial on 22<sup>nd</sup> June.<sup>18</sup> He was given 15 days to prepare a list of questions (also recorded in the file) to put to witnesses of his choice, who were to be interrogated by him in the presence of the court.<sup>19</sup> All the witnesses questioned by Septo had already been summoned by the prosecution, and he chose merely to re-interrogate those who had already given testimony.<sup>20</sup> The detailed information that he extracted during these interrogations showed his superiority over the Inquisitor in the skills of investigation and interrogation as well as his attention to detail. He threw serious doubts on the case against Lazarro and exposed the deviousness of Gioseppe Sauli and the Christian witnesses who supported his indictment.

Eventually, it would become clear to the Inquisition that the denunciation against Lazarro had arisen from malice and vindictiveness and the Jew was exonerated from the accusation. Yet the case illustrates relations between Jewish and Christian men, their arguments and jealousies as well as their loyalty, kinship, friendship, and bedsharing. It demonstrates the threat of conflict when a young Jewish male was allowed to enter a Christian household and confirms how Lazarro's position as a favorite with the *padroni* meant that he was resented, particularly by Gioseppe. The case also reveals an unusual situation in which a Jew appearing before an inquisitorial tribunal was successfully defended against this malicious allegation by a Christian procurator, paid for by his master. It uncovers how and why the false denunciation was formulated, how it was responded to, and the defense's efforts to exonerate him.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 56r, 57r and 58v. See also ASMo FI Processi 77 folio 14 19r. A similar situation had occurred in 1622 during the trial of Moise de Modena. The Jew had used his own procurator, one Andrea Ledazario, to defend him. Like Septo, Ledazario compiled a defense document purely from the testimonies and documents that the Inquisition supplied to him.

<sup>19</sup> For Septo receiving a copy of the trial, ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 34r-35v. For the notes of the procurator see 86r-88v. Ibid. 58v and see at the beginning of the interrogation of Cesare by Septo, *ibid.* 68r.

<sup>20</sup> See the interrogations of Cesare Cimicelli, Gioseppe, and his wife Lucia on 1<sup>st</sup> July, a neighbor of Gioseppe and Lucia - Lodovica on 4<sup>th</sup> July, Giovanni on 7<sup>th</sup> July, Gioseffo (another Christian servant in the household) on 8<sup>th</sup> July and Lazarro on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> July. It is unclear why Enrico chose not to give testimony himself, but perhaps he trusted Cesare to do what was necessary. As to why the Inquisition did not call him to give testimony, perhaps his proximity to the Duke of Modena meant that they preferred not to involve him. None of the children besides Cesare were called to testify.

### Bedsharing in the Cimicelli household

The scene of the alleged crime was the servants' quarter in the Cimicelli household.<sup>21</sup> The servants' room, [*una camera mezzana detta comunemente de servitori*] as it was described, was a mezzanine—a low-ceilinged space usually located between two main stories of the building. It was in the least congenial part of the *palazzo* on the lower ground floor, overcrowded and not conducive to comfort, quiet or seclusion, without any natural light and hidden from the *padroni* and visitors.<sup>22</sup> The mezzanine housed four beds in the male section, which meant that when the household was full, up to eight men could sleep there, two in each bed.<sup>23</sup>

Bedsharing was a common practice in the early modern world, not only among the poor but also among employers and householders. To demonstrate how habitual it was for men to share beds in his household, Cesare Cimicelli told the Inquisitor that he had even shared a bed with ecclesiastics and officials of the Holy Office who had passed through his home: “Ordinarily I slept alone, but I have slept with some strangers (*forestiere*) when there was a need for beds, and among those whom I know that I have slept with are Signor Archpriest of Cavezzo, and even some officials of the Holy Office here.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For the most common venues for acts of sodomy, see Umberto Grassi “Shame and Boastfulness in Early Modern Italy: Showing Off Masculinity and Exposing Sexual Submission in Class and Age Competition,” in *Gender and Status Competition in Pre-Modern Societies*, eds. Martha Bayless, Jonas Lilequist, and Lewis Webb (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 109-124; 118. The servants' quarters of a wealthy household were not listed.

<sup>22</sup> Don Giosaffat, the caretaker of the house, admitted to never going to the servants' room. It was clearly not a place one would choose to go. See ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 31r. See also Bryson, *At Home: A Short History of Private Life*, 262; Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400-1600* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961), 294; Raffaele Sarti, *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 130 and Romano, *Domestic Servants*, 95.

<sup>23</sup> Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, 94.

<sup>24</sup> ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 329 r. See also *Ibid.*, 60v-61r. Cesare stated: “When they need to come to town - whether they are masters or servants, all ordinarily, have their rooms, in which they sleep...”. See Raffaella Sarti, “Rural Life-Cycle Service: Established Interpretations and New (Surprising) Data – The Italian Case in Comparative Perspective (Sixteenth to Twentieth Centuries),” in *Servants in Rural Europe 1400-1900*, ed. Jane Whittle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 227-254; 229. ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 21r-22v and 188r. According to

In the servants' quarter, having a bedfellow did not suggest immoral behavior, but it clearly gave opportunities for sexual abuse. For about a year on and off, Giovanni was forced to sleep either in the stables or to share a bed with Galvano, who had served as a groom or a general servant (no specific title is given), or Gioseffo Romagnolo da Cesana, an apprentice locksmith [*magnano*] probably in his late teens or early twenties. Gioseffo worked for a local master locksmith and carried out some work in the Cimicelli household. Gioseffo had even been given a key to the servants' room and had permission by the *padroni* to sleep there when the family were away.<sup>25</sup> In his first interrogation on 18<sup>th</sup> May, Giovanni had not blamed Lazzaro for the initial rape as his father had done, but accused Gioseffo Romagnolo da Cesana of raping him, and then Galvano and Lazzaro for sodomizing him on other nights in the servants' quarters:<sup>26</sup>

First, I slept with Gioseffo Romagnolo da Cesana, then with Galvano servant of Signor Enrico Cimicelli and with Lazzaro the Jew in the house of the said Signor Enrico in the room of the servants. These acts dirtied my backside, the first one slept there for a long time, the second around a month and Lazzaro the Jew, for around three weeks, and he always made me dirty behind...<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps because some time had passed since these events, Giovanni's report suggested that he found the memory distasteful, rather than traumatizing.<sup>28</sup> It was not the forceful or violent penetration of the sexual act that had stuck in his

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Francesco di Rossi, Gioseffe had left his son strict instructions about where he was to sleep in the Cimicelli household and: "When the wife of the coachman came to Modena, the coachman began to sleep in his house with her, and Giovanni, his son, slept in the house of Signor Cimicelli in the bed where his father had slept before, in the room of servants. But when the coachman was outside the city, the boy was ordered by his father to go and sleep with his mother. I know this because I heard the father order his son to do this, but whether he obeyed his father I don't know."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 251r-252v.

<sup>26</sup> Lazzaro continually testified that he had never slept with Giovanni in the servants' quarters.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 13r. Giovanni was three years under the age of legal responsibility and unable to take an oath. Ibid 80-81r.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 60r. See also David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 310.



mind, but how the men’s ejaculation and fluid semen had made him feel “dirty.” He could give no indication of being treated differently by the Jew and tried instead to include him in a general accusation. These testimonies contradicted other witnesses’ accounts, particularly those of Lazarro, himself and Gioseffo, who completely denied the accusations.<sup>29</sup>

In his testimony before Cimicelli’s defense lawyer on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1670, Giovanni again downplayed Lazarro’s role in the sexual attack. Here he confirmed that it was the Christian men who had raped and then sodomized him before he was penetrated by Lazarro:

When my mother noticed that I had been harmed in my backside, and she saw blood on my bed – it must have been three or four months ago, since I had a wounded backside... I had not said anything, before this, because I was afraid that I would get a beating. And it is true that although the Jew was the last to do this to me – to penetrate me from behind – in every way, however, harm had also been done to me by Gioseffo and Galvano.<sup>30</sup>

Giovanni also mentioned here his fear of being reprimanded. Was he referring to a beating by his parents, angry that he had been powerless to defend himself, or more likely a threat to harm him made by Galvano and/or Gioseffo if he revealed what they had done to him?

Gioseppe knew that he had been remiss in not ensuring the surveillance and protection of his son at night in the servants’ quarter.<sup>31</sup> The 11-year-old boy had been left vulnerable to the sexual advances of his older bed partners.<sup>32</sup> Both Galvano and Gioseffo had subjugated Giovanni not only to the initial rape but to subsequent sodomy as he tried to sleep in the bed he was forced to share. These

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<sup>29</sup> Don Giosaffat, the Cimicelli household’s priest and caretaker, testified that Giovanni never slept in the house when the *padroni* were in the villa, which contradicted the testimony of Giovanni, Lucia, and Lodovica. See ASMō. FI CH 250 f. 33, 24r.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 80r.

<sup>31</sup> It is questionable whether we should trust Gioseffo’s testimony that occasionally when the family was in the villa, Gioseppe used to travel back to the palazzo and sleep at home. *Ibid.*, 84r. This was his reasoning as to why the Jew could sleep with the boy in the Cimicelli household at this time.

<sup>32</sup> If Gioseppe had not seen his son’s bloodied bedsheets, the case would have escaped suspicion and remained unreported. Giovanni had no intention of telling his father.

testimonies provide a picture of a young unsupervised boy becoming a victim of lawless sexual violence in the male servants' quarters of an early modern household.

Just before Giosepe had turned to the Inquisition in May 1670, he had reported to Cesare Cimicelli that his son had been raped and sodomized. Cesare had immediately fired Galvano, and Galvano had probably fled Modena to avoid investigation.<sup>33</sup> It is unclear whether Cesare had also punished Gioseffo. Gioseffo Romagnolo was called to give testimony in the inquisitorial court on two occasions. Because the Inquisition did not have jurisdiction over Christians accused of committing acts of sodomy with other Christians, it could only interrogate Gioseffo as a witness to Lazarro's alleged offence. When Gioseffo was summoned by the court on 4<sup>th</sup> June and by the defense on 8<sup>th</sup> July, he was not even asked if he had sodomized the boy himself.

Whereas Giosepe and his son were only allowed to sleep in the servants' quarter, Lazarro testified that he hardly ever slept in these quarters and never shared a bed with Giovanni.<sup>34</sup> In fact, the Cimicellis had turned a blind eye to ducal rules that specified that the Jew had to sleep in the ghetto on what is now Piazza Mazzini, the residential enclosure of the Jews established in Modena in 1638. At night all Jews had to return to this area and only Jewish physicians were allowed to emerge from it in order to attend to Christian patients. In fact, Lazarro was allowed to sleep in any part of the *palazzo* when the *padroni* were away and was chosen by Cesare Cimicelli, Enrico's oldest son, to share a bed with him in his personal apartment at the top of the house.<sup>35</sup> This arrangement clearly bothered Giosepe. In his delation, Giosepe describes Lazarro not as sleeping occasionally in the Cimicelli household, but as actually "living" there:

Father, I have to say this to you that around a month ago, my wife called Lucia, on the occasion of making the bed of my son Giovanni who is 11 years old, saw that the sheets were bloodied (*insanguinati*), and suspected

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<sup>33</sup> See *Ibid.*, 72r. Galvano did not appear as a witness in the *processo*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 35r and 23r, Lazarro told the Inquisitor "at times I slept below with a servant called Francesco di Rossi."

<sup>35</sup> ASMō. FI CH 250 f. 33, 191r, 328r. In contrast, Cesare reported that "he [Giovanni] was not allowed to sleep in another place".

that the boy had been harmed. When she asked him what had happened and what the blood signified, he [Giovanni] said that Lazarro the Jew, who *lives and often came to sleep in the house* [my italics] of Signore Enrico Cimicelli, because he serves in the house, as well as Galvano, the groom of the said Signore Enrico, had sodomized him...<sup>36</sup>

There was some correlation between sleeping chambers, social status, and who slept where, and the coachman may have felt cheated since he was one of the most prominent servants of the household. The *padroni* apartments were situated far from the main entrance and provided some privacy and protection from intrusion.<sup>37</sup> The apartment probably had four rooms—an antechamber; a room with a bed with feather mattress, feather pillows, woolen blankets, quilt and sheets; a lavatory and a linen room.<sup>38</sup> A luxurious bed—particularly the four poster beds or canopy beds—provided a different sleeping experience from the woolen mattresses in the servants’ quarter.<sup>39</sup> Servants wandered around everywhere, even in the inner parts of the building, and it was well known and a topic of conversation in the household that Lazarro and Cesare slept together. Francesco di Rossi, a Christian servant in the household until 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1669, when he had become a footman to Duke Alfonso IV d’Este of Modena, reported that he saw the Jew leaving Cesare’s apartment in the morning after he had slept there.<sup>40</sup> Gioseppe may have felt jealous or, possibly, disgusted. Additionally, Cesare’s detailed testimony that the household’s sleeping arrangements allowed temporary bedsharing suggests some kind of intricate code regarding its civility and sociability. When all the family were in the *palazzo*, each had their allocated places for sleeping. Cesare sharing a bed with Lazarro was done not out of necessity but as a deliberate decision that offered Lazarro and Cesare

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 32r.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Jütte, *The Strait Gate: Thresholds and Power in Western History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 53.

<sup>38</sup> Sarti, *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture*, 120.

<sup>39</sup> Galandra Cooper and Mary Laven “The Material Culture of Piety in the Italian Renaissance,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Catherine Richardson, Tara Hamling and David Gaimster (London: Routledge, 2017), 338.

<sup>40</sup> ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 191r.

protection, space, time, and privacy.<sup>41</sup> Cesare testified that Lazarro slept in their household at night during his busiest periods, when styling garments for *carnevale* or Christmas. Cesare also hinted at some antagonism from the servants towards Lazarro and explained that he wished to protect the Jew from their animosity. Whether he was referring specifically to Gioseppe is not clear. Cesare testified to the Inquisitor that he had not allowed Lazarro to sleep in the servants' room when he was in the *palazzo* "because of the danger that the Jew would be attacked in some way."<sup>42</sup> He continued:

In the winter, that is those nights that I said around Christmas, and Carnival he slept with me in the same<sup>43</sup> bed, since all the servants were in the house. I did not want him to go down below in case the servants would do something insolent against him.<sup>44</sup>

When Cesare was asked by Septo where the Jew slept when he was not there, he indicated that Lazarro had his full permission to sleep where he wanted and therefore it made sense for the Jew to stay away from the servants' quarter: "I don't know if the Jew ever slept in the room of servants. He would have been a big fool if he had. Why would he want to go to a bad room when he could go to a good one?"<sup>45</sup>

Cesare confirmed that it was Lazarro whom he naturally favored and protected thereby justifying his bedsharing in this way. Not only does Cesare hint at the potential danger that the Jew would have faced had he slept in the servants' quarter when he was not there because of the antagonism of the other servants, but his statement also indicates a firm and deep attachment to Lazarro. This needs to be further assessed.

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<sup>41</sup> On bedsharing see Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 151-158 and A. Robert Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co), 280-284.

<sup>42</sup> ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 334r.

<sup>43</sup> This is the notary's own underlining in the text.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 66r.

### Enmity, Friendship and Homo-sociality among Jews and Christians

The official Catholic position on relations between Jewish and Christian men was that they might be business acquaintances but not affectionate friends or intimates. Shylock's aspirations to friendship with Antonio ('I would be friends with you and have your love') are surely a mockery.<sup>46</sup> When Gioseppe's wife, Lucia, was interrogated on the 1<sup>st</sup> July, she was asked why Lazarro had stayed in the Cimicellis' house. Lucia expressed her dislike of the Jew, calling him the *padroni's* "friend" (*amico*), and emphasizing the favoritism the Cimicellis showed their Jewish tailor.<sup>47</sup> "A friend" in early modern society did not necessarily mean someone for whom one felt affection, a sincere social relationship or reciprocity, but essentially someone one could trust or rely on, either generally or for a particular purpose.<sup>48</sup> Christians might argue before the Inquisition—as they did on occasion—that they had become "friends" with Jews in order to redeem their souls, and that it made sense to be a friend for that purpose.<sup>49</sup>

Did Lazarro's friendship with the Cimicellis have anything to do with his flirtations with Christianity? Lazarro was already known to the Inquisition before Gioseppe accused him of sodomy in April 1670. A month earlier, on the 24<sup>th</sup> March, Lazarro had approached the Holy Office requesting baptism.<sup>50</sup> When the Inquisitor inquired who had encouraged him, Lazarro did not in fact mention the

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<sup>46</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, edited by E.C. Pettet (London: Blackie, 1969), Act One Scene Three [14].

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 131r.

<sup>48</sup> On friendships in the early modern period See Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno and Cross-cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 181-183. See the recent pertinent edited volume on Jews and friendship, Lawrence Fine, ed., *Friendship in Jewish History, Religion and Culture* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), 204. See in particular the article which discusses friendships between Jews and Christians in the early modern period by Daniel Jütte, "Interfaith Encounters Between Jews and Christians in the Early Modern Period and Beyond: Toward a Framework," 185-211.

<sup>49</sup> See my discussion of the Christian witnesses in Viviano Sanguinetti's case in Katherine Aron-Beller, *Jews on Trial: The Inquisition in Modena 1598-1638* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 175ff.

<sup>50</sup> ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 96r-97v.

Cimicellis as being this type of Christian friend.<sup>51</sup> He failed to provide the names of any Christians who had influenced him.

Like many potential converts, at some stage Lazarro hesitated and stalled.<sup>52</sup> There was no *casa dei catecumeni* (an institution for the instruction of Jewish or Islamic converts) in Modena until the *Pia Casa* was erected in the duchy's capital in 1700.<sup>53</sup> Instead, in late March, Lazarro had been sent to the home of a recent convert from Judaism to Christianity, Anna Maria da Moisi, for his catechetical instruction.<sup>54</sup> A week later, on 31<sup>st</sup> March, Lazarro seems to have changed his mind and, afraid that he would get into trouble—or so he told the Inquisitor—he had fled to Reggio Emilia with the help of some Christians who had been waiting outside the house in the middle of the night to help him escape.<sup>55</sup> Lazarro refused to give the names of the Christians who had aided him. He had continued his journey to deliver a letter for a “friend” and to have some *spasso* (leisure/fun)—a clear

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 112r-113v.

<sup>52</sup> ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 123r. A similar case is reported in the inquisitorial archives in 1601. ASMo FI CH244 f5. Here Israele Sacerdote, the 15-year-old the son of Davide Sacerdote, had approached Stephano de Malvertio in his tailor workshop in Vignola to tell him that he wanted to become a Christian. Stephano had taken the boy to the Archpriest in the Cathedral, who suggested the boy go immediately to the bishop. According to the testimony of de Malvertio, Bishop Gaspare Silingardi did not have a place to keep the boy during the day and requested that de Malvertio take him home. During this interval in de Malvertio's home, the delator reported that Israele had taken flight and gone back to his father's house. When Israele was interrogated, he told the Inquisitor that he had only wanted to convert for a brief moment, as some sort of angry rebellion against his father. Also in 1609 Emmanuel de Corrigio, a teenager, had come to Modena from Carpi and toyed with the idea of conversion after coming to the big city. He soon changed his mind, although his father Leone was indicted and imprisoned by the Holy Office. The trial was dropped due to lack of evidence. See ASMo FI CH244 f11.

<sup>53</sup> On the Modenese and Reggio *Casa dei Catecumeni*, see Matteo Al Kalak and Ilaria Pavan, *Un'altra fede. Le case dei catecumeni nei territori estensi (1583-1938)* (Florence: Olschki, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> It was unusual for a Jewish man to be placed in the home of a female convert, but all conversations between them would no doubt be held in the presence of her Christian husband. See Archivio Storico Diocesano di Modena-Nonantola, Archivio della Curia, *Opera Pia dei Catecumeni*, Registri, 15, «Catalogo delli neofiti battezzati in Modena» which lists two women with this name. The first is Anna Maria Emanuela who converted in 1635 and the second is Anna Maria da Vignola who was baptized on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1657, in the church of San Vincenzo by the Bishop of Modena, Ettore Molza. Anna Maria di Moisi was probably one of these women. I thank Matteo Al Kalak for discussing this with me.

<sup>55</sup> This is according to the testimony of Anna's (unnamed) neighbor. See ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 102r-104r, 108r.

indication that he felt comfortable in a Christian environment.<sup>56</sup> He had removed his Jewish badge and, pretending to be Christian, had gambled with two Christian soldiers in Barbaro Mosca's tavern.<sup>57</sup>

Soon afterwards, he denounced himself to the Inquisition. Spontaneous confession of an offence would usually help the guilty party to escape severe punishment. On the 16<sup>th</sup> April, he returned to the Holy Office and admitted to having sex with two Christian women in another inn, the Montone tavern in Modena. He apologized for his behavior without mentioning his short-lived interest in conversion and suffered nothing worse than house arrest. On 17<sup>th</sup> May, while he was under house arrest, the accusation of sodomy was brought against him by Giosepe.<sup>58</sup>

It is hard not to see Lazarro as an experimenter, determined to test the perimeters of Christian friendships—trying anything from entering a Christian household and flirting with Christianity to forbidden sexual practices with Christian women. As a Jewish tailor, he did not serve in the Cimicelli household as a servant, but as a Jewish artisan called whenever he was needed and sometimes working full days in the *palazzo*. He seemed to navigate the Christian world with careful calculation. He managed to acquire Christian acquaintances, bedfellows, and supporters who were willing to put themselves at risk to help him. The Cimicellis had clearly allowed Lazarro to stay in the *palazzo* when he was tired at the end of a long day dealing with their alterations. He was provided with sheets for his bed, or so he said. On other nights, it seems, he would return to the ghetto accompanied by a Christian servant or alone, with a torch to illuminate his way through Modena's dark streets.<sup>59</sup>

How unusual was Lazarro's position? Examples of similar privileges for and experiences of Jews are difficult to uncover. Christians were certainly known to enter Jewish homes as servants rather than friends, and sometimes stay the night,

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<sup>56</sup> ASMo. FI CH250 f.33, 109r-111v.

<sup>57</sup> On the yellow or blue letter badges that Jews had to wear in Modena see Federica Francesconi, *Invisible Enlighteners: The Jewish Merchants of Modena, from the Renaissance to the Emancipation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 39.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 34r.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 66r.

but any evidence of Jews entering Christian homes is more difficult to find.<sup>60</sup> There is little evidence of Jews entering Christian households to attend Christian banquets, or to play backgammon, nor of Jewish men or women being hired as domestic servants. I have uncovered only one other case of a Jew entering a Christian household regularly. This case also resulted in an accusation of illicit sexual activity, but investigations revealed instead another friendship between a Jew and a Christian. In 1628, 15-year-old Leone Usilio was accused of having sexual relations with Margherita Bescheni, a Christian prostitute in Carpi. Christian neighbors had seen the teenager enter the home which she shared with her mother, Julia. Curious witnesses had assumed that the boy had entered the home for sex.<sup>61</sup> At the time of the investigation, Leone had escaped from Modena to avoid prosecution, but it became clear through numerous interrogations of neighboring Christians that most of those who had seen him held petty grievances against the Christian women and wanted to cause them trouble.<sup>62</sup> Eventually the Inquisition uncovered the real reason for the young Jew entering the Christians' home. Leone had gone, not to have sex with Margherita, but to read the two illiterate women letters that he had delivered from Giovanni Battista Masatori, the husband of one of Julia's daughters, who had been banished.<sup>63</sup> When Giovanni Battista was eventually brought before the Inquisition on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1628, he openly described Leone as his "friend" (*amico*), whom he particularly trusted to deliver his letters.<sup>64</sup> The investigation confirms a form of friendship between the two, providing Giovanni Battista with someone he could rely on for a particular purpose: enabling the family to keep in touch.

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<sup>60</sup> See Aron-Beller, *Jews on Trial*, 87-124 and Aron-Beller, "Christians in Jewish Houses: The Testimony of the Inquisition in the Duchy of Modena in the Seventeenth Century," *Religions* 14 (2023): 614-628. Also ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 35r.

<sup>61</sup> ASMo. FI. Causae Hebreorum busta 245 f 44.

<sup>62</sup> One, Hippolita Cavana, reported that Julia had even threatened to kill her, when she had discovered that Hippolita had denounced her to the Inquisition *Ibid.* 6r and 13r. Margherita testified: "I know this Jew Leone very well because he has come at times to my house to carry letters to my mother and I have only seen him two times... This Leone was never in my house when I was alone but he always came when my mother was present."

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* Both women are unable to sign their names at the end of the record of their interrogations - a clear sign of their illiteracy.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 46r.



It would seem that Lazarro had established a real friendship with the Cimicellis which included protection, patronage and privilege. In the Cimicellis' household he, his brother, and his father before him had already experienced this loyalty. Lazarro would go to the Cimicellis whenever called, and one can imagine him becoming an indispensable member of this elite family.<sup>65</sup> He was a skilled workman whose superior abilities might have been preferred to those of Christian tailors belonging to the guild in Modena.<sup>66</sup> He probably used both new fabrics and rich textiles, including cotton, to dress the wealthy and prominent patrician families for the main Christian festivals each year.<sup>67</sup> Lazarro told the Inquisitor with some pride about his position as tailor to the Cimicellis and spoke openly as to where he slept:<sup>68</sup>

At times in the rooms of the apartment of the *Padroni*, and at times above in the dressing room [*camerino*] with his son who is called Signor Cesare and at times with one called Don Giosaffat Battochi, I believe, and at times below with a servant called Francesco di Rossi [adding of his own accord] and when I slept in the same room with those I mentioned, not only did I sleep in the same room, but also in the same bed where they slept.<sup>69</sup>

He had experienced the whole range of chambers in the household, not only the sparse servants' quarters but also the most comfortable sleeping facilities. Lazarro knew the *palazzo* well and even had complete freedom to come and stay in the *palazzo* when everyone was away. Moving in and around the household, he would have also been exposed to Christian traditions, devotional practices, and the Cimicellis' leisure time activities.

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<sup>65</sup> ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 35r.

<sup>66</sup> In other cities like Turin and Venice, the Christian tailors' guilds objected strongly to Jews making new clothes. There is no suggestion that the tailors' guild in Modena had such strong views. See Francesconi, *Invisible Enlighteners*, 4, 45, 129-130. On these guilds, see Richard Mackenney, *Tradesmen and Traders: The World of the Guilds in Venice and Europe c.1250-c.1650* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble Books, 1987), 12, 107.

<sup>67</sup> ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 178r. The Cimicellis' 33-year-old housekeeper, Isabella de Stocali, reported how the Jew frequently appeared with a young boy who carried the fabrics for him.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 35r.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, and a second copy on 230r.

Signs of friendship, protective concern, and efforts to ensure that Lazarro would be found innocent were exhibited by other members of the Cimicelli household. The footman, Francesco di Rossi and the 29-year-old Christian priest/chaplain and caretaker of the house, Don Giosaffat Bottocchio, defended Lazarro's character and actions, claiming that he had not sodomized Giovanni and that he was a well-liked, valuable, and reliable figure. Another Christian witness, Francisco Barberi, a 30-year-old confectioner and owner of the pastry shop where young Giovanni had also been employed (but not a member of the household) also refused to support Lazarro's indictment. He denied that he had seen the Jew with Giovanni at the pastry shop or that Lazarro had ever waited for Giovanni outside. Barberi had sacked the boy, and implied that he could not be trusted.<sup>70</sup>

Would these Christians have chosen to endorse Lazarro out of friendship or were they pushed to support his case by the Cimicellis? It is difficult to know but there is a suggestion of some sort of kinship being established—a solidarity, a pattern of giving and receiving favors—that demanded that the Jewish tailor be protected. Francesco di Rossi testified that the Jew was “well-liked by Christians in Modena”: “The Jew is held as a good person. I am able to swear that I have never heard disconcerting words from his mouth.”<sup>71</sup>

Lazarro's contact with the Jesuit priest of the household, Don Giosaffat Bottocchio, is even more intriguing. Don Giosaffat had been named by Gioseppe as a witness for the prosecution, but when he was interrogated, he did not support Gioseppe's testimony against Lazarro.<sup>72</sup> He taught at the Jesuit college in Modena and was in charge of the education of the young Cimicellis. Accorded the same dignity as other chief servants, he was also in charge of the religious life of the household, responsible for the vessels of worship and daily communion.<sup>73</sup> When Don Giosaffat and Lazarro were sleeping in the *palazzo* on their own (when the *padroni* were in the villa), the two of them enjoyed a choice of rooms but sometimes, when the house was busy, they too shared a bed.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 46r and the second copy 269ff. His only interrogation was on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1670.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 23r.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 11r and 25r. Don Giosaffat testified that Giovanni never slept in the house when the *padroni* were in the villa, which contradicted the testimony of Giovanni, Lucia and Lodovica.

<sup>73</sup> See also ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 24r. Here Don Giosaffat testified that Lazarro had shared a bed with Cesare.

<sup>74</sup> See Ibid., 64r.

The one Christian who was critical of Lazarro (besides the delators) was his fellow accused, Gioseffo di Romagnolo. Gioseffo criticized the Jew, perhaps in the hope of avoiding blame himself. He testified that he had seen Lazarro and Giovanni sleeping in the same bed.<sup>75</sup> He told the Inquisitor that he himself had slept across from Lazarro and Giovanni in the servants' quarter, and that the two had slept together on at least six or seven nights.<sup>76</sup> He falsely testified to Lazarro's abusive control of Giovanni as well as intimacy between them. No other witnesses mentioned this:

One evening, they were fooling around together... the Jew gave him two or three spanks, making fun of him, saying to him that he had to go to bed. Also Francesco, that evening when they were making a noise – the Jew and the boy – he found them and said that they should go to bed, I know this because I was present, and I heard them.<sup>77</sup>

Francesco did not testify that he had seen or shouted at Lazarro and Giovanni in the servants' quarter. Also, according to Gioseffo, between Easter 1669 and May 1670, Lazarro often followed Giovanni around late at night, loitering around the pastry shop where he worked and buying him *aqua vita*.<sup>78</sup> Gioseffo called Lazarro a “whoremonger and a spendthrift or wastrel (*sellaquatore*) who went with women of bad conduct that stand outside the Porta di Bologna, and he even asked me if I had a bedroom so that he could take a woman there.”<sup>79</sup>

Gioseffo's testimony about Lazarro and Giovanni did not tally with any other Christian's and therefore could not be taken as proof by the Inquisition.

The hardest relationship to penetrate remains that of Lazarro and Cesare. When Cesare was interrogated on 1<sup>st</sup> July, he showed concern and support for the Jew.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 56r and 298r. Lazarro denied these charges.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 255r-256v.

<sup>77</sup> This was in his second interrogation, this time by the defense procurator on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1670. Ibid., 83r, 258r-260v, and copy on 433r ff.

<sup>78</sup> On *aqua vitae* see Sarti, *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture*, 184. “Water of life” was a generic name for all spirits. Gioseffo is the only Christian witness who gives the impression that the Jew was waiting around for Giovanni late at night.

<sup>79</sup> ASMō. FI CH 250 f. 33, 83r. I thank Brian Pullan for discussing the term “sellaquatore” with me.

Calling Lazzaro his *creatura*—his protégé, or favorite—he reported that the de Norsas had a tradition of household service to the Cimicellis and was unable to remember when Lazzaro’s father had first been employed as their tailor.<sup>80</sup> It is certainly possible that Cesare’s patronage of and relationship with Lazzaro was more than just as a male friend. Cesare showed a detailed knowledge of Lazzaro’s movements, including his reasons for travelling to Reggio Emilia. This strong sense of loyalty and affection is particularly demonstrated in Cesare’s readiness to aid his friend’s case and work with the defense procurator, Dr. Domino Benedetto Septo.

Had their bed been a crucial place to foster their sociability? Did Cesare’s protective concern, loyalty, and friendship indicate homosexual intimacy? Bedsharing and pillow talk must have strengthened their personal affections. Here, perhaps, familiarity and trust grew between them, and they shared secrets and intimate and private thoughts relating to their inner lives.<sup>81</sup> Within the closed doors of the apartment in the Cimicelli household, homoerotic feelings between these young, energetic males might well have been expressed without interference from hostile servants, church, or society.<sup>82</sup>

The enmity exhibited by Gioseppe may have been inspired by this favoritism. But it remains unclear whether his antagonism was motivated by his own experiences or broader anti-Jewish prejudices. He confirmed that two incidents had estranged him from the Jew. First, he described an occasion when he was in the ducal court with Lazzaro, and the Jew’s actions had offended him<sup>83</sup>:

In the court of Prince Cesare there was a Jew named Rosso who makes buttons. Since I was often there together with Signor Enrico, who is the servant of Prince Cesare, he [Enrico] was also a regular visitor of the court.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 59r.

<sup>81</sup> As Handley points out in “Sociable Sleeping in Early Modern England,” 102, Samuel Pepys ranked his bedfellows in terms of preferences by the quality of their conversations and behavior in bed.

<sup>82</sup> Sarti, *Europe at Home*, 76.

<sup>83</sup> ASM<sup>o</sup> FI Processi busta 161 folio 9, 5r. The notes of Septo, the procurator, confirm that he saw this as evidence against Gioseppe. He notes that Lazzaro had had no idea that he was going to be accused of sodomy. If Gioseppe had asked him for the money to pay for the barber surgeon’s treatment of Giovanni, “he would have known about the crime.” So, Septo deduced, Gioseppe was not being honest.

Lazarro came to see the Jew Rosso. One day Lazarro got into an argument with a servant of Signor Giuseppe Cassola (who was also in the court of Cesare) because Lazarro, wanting to make himself at home there, took some food from the table of the servants. The servant of Giuseppe Cassola told Lazarro that he was impertinent and other similar things. Lazarro also replied other words of discord, that I do not remember well. On that occasion, I told the servant that he should let him go, that Lazarro was impertinent and that he still owed me money that I had lent to him. I do not remember if he asked me the reason why I had given him money, but I know he did not say anything else to the Jew.<sup>84</sup>

According to Gioseppe, Cassola's servant had clearly had some kind of altercation with Lazarro. Gioseppe was arguing that it was highly improper for Lazarro, as a Jew, to attempt to share food with Christian servants, or take food from their table, something that they, not he, had earned with their work. The Jew was intruding on their company, thereby assuming equality with the Christians. It seems that, in Gioseppe's mind, Jews ought at all times to be manifestly inferior to Christians, to eat separately and at a different table from the Christians in the household, a view which most clerics would have shared and transmitted to their flocks.<sup>85</sup> The servants' homosociality had its own rituals and customs that played a role in shaping the social identity of those involved in them. Gioseppe seemed to imply that Lazarro was so impertinent that there was no point in reprimanding him. His resentment towards the Jew is clear.

When interrogated on 1<sup>st</sup> July, Gioseppe testified to a second altercation, when Lazarro had broken the brakes on Signora Cimicelli's carriage, which he had borrowed.<sup>86</sup> The repairs had cost Gioseppe 70 or 80 *bolognini* and he was still

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<sup>84</sup> ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 69r. I thank Martina Mampieri for her assistance with this particular text.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 38 and copied on Ibid., 239. See also 240r-241v. In his testimony, Lazarro confirmed that he had always sat at a different table from the Christian servants, and ate separately when he visited the Cimicelli *palazzo*: "I did not eat with him [Giovanni]. I ate always before the servants ate, and I always ate alone, at times in the room and at times in the kitchen. The boy ate with his father, and another servant."

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 368r. The Inquisitor records in his notes a slightly different reason for Gioseppe's grievances. Gioseppe had taken Lazarro in Signor Enrico's coach, and the Jew had not tipped him (*di buona mano*).

waiting for the Jew to pay him back.<sup>87</sup> Gioseppe admitted that he had threatened to harm Lazarro:

One day I told him that I wanted him to give me satisfaction, and that if he had not been in the master's house, I would have made some trouble for him, and he replied to me that he would give it [the money] to me when he had it, or he would make me some article of clothing.<sup>88</sup>

It sounds like a very non-specific threat, but hints that Gioseppe was limited in how much harm he could inflict on Lazarro because of Lazarro's favored status in the household.<sup>89</sup> Gioseppe knew he had to control his anger and not attack the Jew if he wanted to keep his position. It seems probable that Gioseppe had therefore decided to blame Lazarro for the rape and injury of his son.<sup>90</sup>

Perhaps Gioseppe's approach to the Inquisition was a final move to strike at the Jew and also, indirectly, at his master. Gioseppe had tried several ways to make his allegation against Lazarro both effective and financially beneficial for himself. In his testimony, he admitted that when he had discovered the rape of his son, he approached Cesare Cimicelli to demand justice and recompense for the injury (as noted above).<sup>91</sup> Gioseppe had not been able to speak to Enrico directly about it and had been told to speak to his son Cesare. Cesare advised him that he should leave the situation to his father, who would make those held responsible by Giovanni pay for the expenses of the barber surgeon who had treated him. Enrico clearly wanted to prevent Gioseppe's grievances being aired in court. A delation of sodomy would discredit the household's reputation and standing, and reflect

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<sup>87</sup> Gioseppe had even been in touch with Lazarro's brother who said he would pay the money for Lazarro. *Ibid.*, 379r.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 69r.

<sup>89</sup> In this trial, these statements provided the defense with a motive for Gioseppe denouncing Lazarro.

<sup>90</sup> Gioseppe failed to produce fellow servants in the household who would support his denunciation. The one witness he provided, Don Giosaffat, did not corroborate his testimony: *ibid.*, 131r.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 108r: "After this... he [Cesare] said to me that he had spoken to his Signor father, and that it was not good that I complain, and that they would give me something for the expense and for the barber-surgeon and not only from the brother of the Jew... but also from Gioseffo the Locksmith and he would send Galvano out of the house."

badly on the master of the household. Very likely, many sexual assaults were never reported to public authorities for this reason.

Unfortunately, what Giuseppe thought of Enrico is irretrievably lost to us, but Giuseppe was unhappy with the Cimicellis' response, and this might explain why he had turned to the Inquisition. He decided to defy the Cimicellis' desire to treat the situation in-house, and to denounce the Jew, besmirching his master's honor and disturbing the peace of the household at the same time.<sup>92</sup> He clearly hoped to do more damage to both Lazzaro and the Cimicellis this way. By making Lazzaro the sodomizer, he hoped to attack the Jew and expose his privileged position in the household. Ultimately, Giuseppe's disobedience and his failure to provide loyal service and protect the name of the Cimicelli household cost him his position. Enrico's exercise of authority meant that Giuseppe and Giovanni were fired.

Despite his victimization, no Christian witness could say a good word about Giovanni. Francesco di Rossi argued that Giovanni was an unpleasant child: "You cannot find a more insolent boy than him."<sup>93</sup> Gioseffo Romagnolo da Cesana also had bad words to add, although, since he was a suspect himself, they should be read cautiously:

I heard many times the boy speaking dishonestly...and also at times when his father ordered him to give the horses something to eat, he blasphemed on the blood of God, because he did not want to obey his father, and he also did dishonest things with the other boys, and all of this information can be got from his master [at the pastry shop].<sup>94</sup>

With such negative character references, both father and son were regarded suspiciously by the Inquisition.

The Inquisitor General's notes of 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> July registered the court's increasing doubts as to whether to continue with the investigation, since the Christian denouncers had proved to be "criminals and therefore their testimony could not

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<sup>92</sup> On household integrity, see Juttë, *The Strait Gate*, 64.

<sup>93</sup> ASMō. FI CH 250 f. 33, 22r, 46r and 189r,

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 44r and 263r-4v. Giovanni's disobedience is hinted at here and this might explain his carelessness in not reporting the denunciation exactly as his father told him.

be trusted.”<sup>95</sup> Septo’s interrogations of Giuseppe had forced him to admit that he himself had been in trouble with the law on previous occasions. Giuseppe had been incarcerated in Forlì for having, for some reason, thrown stones at boys with intent to injure them, and twice imprisoned for disturbing the peace in the middle of the night. It seems that, while the Inquisitor General was still deliberating, the bishop of Modena, Ettore Molza, who had heard about the case, gathered a group of eleven inquisitorial and episcopal consultants in his palace. Perhaps he was claiming some jurisdiction over the case, or perhaps the Inquisitor had asked for his opinion.<sup>96</sup> The consultants proffered differing opinions, mostly against the Jew, some demanding that Lazarro be tortured to find out the truth and others that he be punished with imprisonment and whipping, or even passed to the secular or ecclesiastical court for sentencing. Yet after this consultation, nothing was done and it was merely noted by Inquisitor General Giovanni Tommaso Visconti who served in Modena between 1664 and 1673, that “we in this case, principally, agree that there has been sexual intercourse between a Jew and Christian [women],<sup>97</sup> but not the crime of sodomy as such,”<sup>98</sup> a clear suggestion that the Jew was to be exonerated of the crime of sodomy.

## Conclusion

The inquisitorial trial records against Lazarro de Norsa serve to shed light on male sociability in a Christian household in early modern Italy. They have shown how men had a primary role within the domestic space, how relationships between male servants could be made and unmade, and how beds could be spaces of Jewish-Christian encounter, homosociality as well as sodomy.

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<sup>95</sup> ASMo. FI CH 250 f. 33, 2r-7v. Here is inserted a letter from an Inquisitor discussing the case. He notes too that “confessions serve more the defense of Norsa.”

<sup>96</sup> This is in a separate folio. “Processo contro Lazarro Norsa d. Barboino, ebreo,” in ASMo. FI., P 161 no. 9, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1670. On the Inquisition’s relationship with the bishop see Aron-Beller, *Jews on Trial*, 30-31. Although Inquisitors became the predominant judicial figure in the church hierarchy in the peninsula, this did not stop bishops from wanting to maintain some role in Inquisitorial proceedings. In 1635, Pope Urban VIII (1623-44) ordered Inquisitors to transfer to the palace of the bishop any interrogations in which the bishop wanted to be personally involved.

<sup>97</sup> This referred to Lazarro’s previous offense for which he was given house arrest in March 1670.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.



It remains uncertain whether Gioseppe was instinctively hostile to Jews in general or was revenging himself on Lazarro in particular, moved by jealousy and petty grievances, with the intention of destroying Lazarro's reputation. Gioseppe might have had over-optimistic ideas of what the case could have achieved and hoped that blaming Lazarro would ensure his punishment. Sodomy was an accusation of shameful misconduct, but it was difficult to prove. Ideally, to prove his case, Gioseppe needed two reliable eyewitnesses to the Jew's crime, and he was far from finding them. His lies and those of his wife, neighbor, Gioseffo, and Giovanni served only to create confusion.

Whatever Gioseppe's motives, the collaboration of most of the members of the Cimicelli household to support the Jew, as well as the sophisticated investigation of Septo, are revealing. Lazarro's frequent presence in the Christian household enabled him to be identified as part of that household. He had successfully exploited and taken advantage of the patronage and protection of a prominent family of Modena. Even without Septo's intervention, it seems clear that Lazarro would have been released without punishment, although the process would have taken far longer.

This article has revealed how far friendships could develop between men of different faiths and social standing in seventeenth-century Italy. Lazarro's own activities and practices confirm the lengths he could go to in the Christian world, without being forced to convert. The emotional ties, bonding, and friendship demonstrated are revealing. The Cimicelli household was an important structure for helping Lazarro conceive, comprehend, and execute a rather different existence as a Jew in early modern Italy. He had removed his Jewish badge, lived temporarily with a Christian family, and had even shared a bed with Christians, in particular Cesare, with whom he appeared to have cultivated an intimate and perhaps homosexual relationship. The transcript therefore shows two very different types of male sociality under the roof of an early modern household. On the one hand, an aggressive act of sexual violence between Christian men and a pre-adolescent boy, and on the other a relationship of intimacy and friendship between two young men, a Jew and a Christian. As far as we know, Lazarro remained a Jew, conscious after 1670 that the grievances of a Christian male servant could cause him to be blamed for a serious crime he had not committed.

**Katherine Aron-Beller** is lecturer of Jewish History at the Rothberg International School of the Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University. Her areas of expertise are the early modern Inquisition, Jewish-Christian relations and antisemitism. At present she is a Visiting Scholar of the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism. She is the author of *Jews on Trial: The Papal Inquisition in Modena 1598-1638* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), the co-editor of *The Roman Inquisition: Centre versus Peripheries* (Leiden: Brill, 2018) and a forthcoming book *Christian Images and their Jewish Desecrators: The History of an Allegation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024).

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