

Chapter 2

Early Modern Galleys as Spaces of Vigilance: Livorno and Civitavecchia from the 16th to the 18th Century

1 Vigilance aboard galleys: punishing, controlling, and correcting deviance

While doctors were a marginal group aboard the galleys, at least in numerical terms—typically numbering one or two per galley serving a crew of around 300 men—their function was undeniably essential: they were not only responsible for providing health care but also for exerting control over the crew's bodies and behavior. Their duties extended beyond the crew's welfare for the practical purpose of ensuring successful navigation; they also played a key role for maintaining order and punishing criminal behavior, such as fighting or sodomy.

In this context, the Battle of Lepanto can be seen as marking a turning point for Italian galleys and military forces more broadly. The intensity of the battles prompted a series of reforms in crew management and discipline for the armies fighting the Turks in the Cyprus War (1570–1573). At the same time, the Battle of Lepanto made the authorities aware of the shockingly poor levels of medical care aboard sea-faring vessels. This realization created a sense of urgency for better sanitary conditions, creating an ideal environment for developing innovative hygienic and medical organizational measures. Thus, medicine's dual role—treating illness and controlling the body—became an essential tool for successful navigation and combat.

This chapter will focus on the galley as a space of vigilance, examining the pervasive and systematic oversight exercised over galley slaves and convicts in the Tuscan galleys of Livorno and the Papal galleys of Civitavecchia, from the 16th to the 18th century. In these fleets, convicts and slaves made up more than half of the galley crews.¹

Sources testify to the overriding concern of those officials managing the *galeotti*, as they were often aware that they were dealing with morally ambiguous figures. Most galley sentences were given to repeat offenders, considered incorri-

¹ Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, pp. 345f, 391. In 1570, forced oarsmen made up 53% of the crew of the Tuscan galleys; the situation later changing to a fleet primarily consisting of slaves. In the Papal State, forced rowers made up 79.8% of the crew.

gible; there was a constant suspicion that convicts would continue their criminal behavior aboard. Enslaved rowers were similarly viewed as immoral due to their heretical, blasphemous beliefs, particularly the Muslim faith. As a result, a series of rules and instructions were established to maintain constant surveillance over forced rowers who, as written in the *incipit* of various manuscript orders for the galleys issued in the late 16th century, were “morally inclined to licentious living, or accustomed to live badly.”²

Crew members, including the *galeotti* [galley rowers], were tasked with ensuring that the entire crew behaved in the most appropriate manner, not only from a technical perspective, to guarantee successful seafaring, but also, and more importantly, from a moral and behavioral standpoint. Sending convicts to serve on the penal ships was not merely a means of providing free labor for the shipping industry, but was also a way to punish them and, in a sense, “re-educate” them in the name of Christian doctrine and military discipline by forcing them to row. As for the slaves, military discipline took on the character of true religious instruction, with the hope of converting them and preventing them from influencing the convicts to renounce Christianity and embrace Muslim. The ultimate goal was to cultivate a crew of obedient and disciplined rowers, with the twofold objective of ensuring successful navigation and avoiding divine wrath—two aims regarded as inseparably linked. Once the practice of deploying slaves and convicts to complete galley crews was officially established, galley service evolved into a fully-fledged penal and servile system in which the correction and re-education of rowers took center stage. It seems fair to say, then, that aboard early modern galleys, punishment, subordination, and military discipline were interwoven facets of the same phenomenon.

For this reason, there was constant and meticulous monitoring of the convicts’ and slaves’ behavior aboard. To make this system of control fully effective, it had to rely on an efficient denunciation apparatus and, even more crucially, on a system of mutual surveillance. These multiple control strategies clearly illustrate the ambivalence surrounding vigilance, which could disrupt any sense of equilibrium. For example, in certain cases, to facilitate effective “horizontal control,” some rowers were assigned specific tasks that required them to monitor their fellow inmates. This approach, in turn, “verticalized” relationships that were otherwise horizontal—between two individuals of equal status and, theoretically, equal standing and duties. In particular, oarsmen were tasked with keeping a watchful eye not only on their galley-bench mates, but also on those rowers in front of and

2 ASF, MP, 2131, dossier 6, *Ordini da osservarsi nelle Galere del Ser.mo Gran Duca di Toscana*, cc. n.n.: “i quali sono moralmente inclinati ò dalla Licentia, o dall’habito confermati à mal vivere.”

behind them. For instance, in the regulations governing the detection and punishment of blasphemous offenders aboard the Papal galleys, officers were instructed to question rowers from neighboring benches to identify those committing blasphemy.³ Similarly, convicts and slaves were encouraged to monitor from “below” whether their officers were behaving properly and, if not, to report instances of abuse or harassment. It is noteworthy that the most common punishment for officers who failed to carry out their duties was being sent to the galley themselves, thus becoming convicts and joining that very social category they had once been tasked to supervise. Additionally, a form of vigilance could be observed among the officer class—both toward their colleagues and themselves. The galley thus became a space in which everyone was to become subject to strict behavioral codes and under permanent scrutiny from other crew members. Obviously, it was no easy feat to keep an eye on 300 men all at once, even in such a confined space as the galley, typically only 40 meters long, five meters wide, and less than two meters high.⁴ This may explain why a whole series of strategies were devised to ensure that each crew member effectively remained the object of observation by others within the confined space they shared.

The deep concern for what might be termed the “moral correction” of rowers was actually part of a broader stratagem to ensure military discipline—a responsibility entrusted to religious orders, particularly from the latter half of the 16th century. The need for disciplined and God-fearing soldiers in conflicts against heretics rendered an extensive catechization program of military forces imperative.⁵ The ideal of the Christian soldier [*miles christianus*] could only be realized through a rigorous system of controlling soldiers in both land and sea forces. Furthermore, the need for diligent and virtuous conduct aboard the galleys was reinforced by the hope of achieving victory through divine intervention.⁶ In the fleets, the deployment of convicts and slaves to man the crews necessitated tighter control over behaviors deemed criminal, immoral, or deviant. The demand for the

3 AAV, Misc. Arm. IV/V, b.54, f. 105: “Che non sia persona alcuna di qualsivoglia stato, ordine e condizione, che ardisci bestemmiare il Santissimo Nome di Dio, Gloriosissima Vergine Maria, e de’ Santi, sotto pena della Galera per cinque anni, & essendo Forzato in vita, di cento bastonate, e della morte ad arbitrio, & acciò un sì grave, e pernicioso delitto più facilmente si scopra, ordiniamo, e comandiamo ad ognuno delle trè Bancate, cioè à quella, dove sarà stata detta la bestemmia, à quella di sopra, & à quella di sotto di rivelare subito il Delinquente all’Ufficiale della Galera.”

4 Aymard, *Chiourmes et galères*, p. 73.

5 On this topic see Lavenia, *Dio in uniforme*.

6 Filioli Uranio, *I cappellani delle galere*, p. 219f.

unwavering and rigid observance of military discipline thus justified the implementation of an extensive program aimed at disciplining and re-educating the forced rowers in the name of Christian morality, enforced through strict surveillance and regulation of their conduct. The ultimate goal was to impose an efficient, rigid military discipline on board.⁷

Even from the perspective of moral correction, the Battle of Lepanto is often regarded as a turning point, heralding the beginning of a stable and substantial presence of chaplains aboard galleys, whose religious zeal was deemed pivotal in igniting the crusading spirit in soldiers and thus, in winning battles.⁸ As early as 1570, Pope Pius V had planned to have 27 Capuchin Friars embark aboard the vessels to provide pastoral care for sick soldiers, and in 1571, 29 of them did embark; with the papal brief *Cum dilectus filius*, issued in March of the same year, they were granted full faculties to celebrate the sacraments aboard.⁹ The captain of the Papal fleet, Pantero Pantera, devoted several pages of his treatise *L'Armata Navale* (1614) to detailing the crucial role played by chaplains, whose main task was to persuade sinning rowers not to succumb to temptation, thereby averting God's wrath.¹⁰ Despite this initial presence of the Capuchins, the spiritual care of the galleys after the Battle of Lepanto was entrusted to secular priests, as well as to the Dominicans. It was not until 15 May 1684 that the Capuchins were officially designated as responsible for the pastoral care of the galley crews, as well as that of the galley hospitals.¹¹

The need to enforce strict moral and behavioral discipline aboard arguably aligns seamlessly with the broader stratagem of “disciplining” and “confessionalization” that characterized the Italian states following the Council of Trent (1545–1563).¹² Within the more confined spaces of the galley, we can observe an attempt to put into practice the ideals upon which the foundation of the Christian *societas perfecta* was to be built. Evidence of the imposition of the Counter-Reformation framework can be found even aboard the penal ships, in a system aimed at trans-

7 This reflection has been primarily inspired by the positions formulated in Civale, *Guerrieri di Cristo*; Lavenia, *Dio in uniforme*; Filioli Uranio, *I cappellani delle galere*.

8 Filioli Uranio, *I cappellani delle galere*, pp. 225–227.

9 Criscuolo, *I Cappuccini*, p. 121. The presence of the Capuchins aboard the papal galleys was later confirmed by Innocent IX in 1684 as we read in De Polis, *Storie di galee e soldati*, p. 13.

10 Pantera, *L'armata Navale*, p. 116.

11 Angioini, Leone, *La Guerra di Morea*, in De Polis, *Storie di galee e soldati*, p. 19.

12 However controversial the terms “disciplining” and “confessionalization” may be, they are effective for analyzing the specific phenomena of Counter-Reformation Catholicism, as attested by the works of Paolo Prodi. Therefore, as much as I reserve the right to use them, I am aware that it is always necessary to do so wisely and carefully.

forming soldiers and *galeotti* into members of the ideal Catholic army.¹³ Hence, the significant presence of Capuchins, and subsequently Jesuits, aboard Italian galleys. Their responsibilities included overseeing living conditions, providing spiritual care to the crew, managing field hospitals, and tending to the sick.¹⁴ The various control strategies employed against the early modern *galeotti* reflect broader power strategies that defined the Italian states during the Counter-Reformation. In this context, the galleys could be defined as a kind of “Other Indies” [*Otras Indias*]: barbaric, uncivilized, and superstitious spaces requiring the religious orders to undertake a mission of evangelization and an initiation into the values of Christian morality. The Capuchins, and later the Jesuits, assumed responsibility for this evangelical mission.¹⁵ The Council of Trent marked a decisive turning point, ushering in an unprecedented phase in the concept of “mission,” one imbued with an increasingly functional significance for a project to thoroughly educate and discipline the populace. The expression *Indias de por acá* [the Indies over here] thus served to legitimize efforts to spiritually conquer Europe, employing strategies not so dissimilar to those implemented in the New World.¹⁶ Aboard the galleys, we can therefore find the presence of missionaries in the true sense of the term—religious brethren specialized in conversion and evangelistic activities “among the infidels or natives of those distant regions where Christianity had never been preached or where all reference to the primitive preaching had now been definitively lost.”¹⁷ After all, the *galeotti* were nothing more than enslaved, condemned rowers, and therefore were seen as blasphemous, criminal, and immoral people. Thus, missions conducted within galley life were configured as missions *ad intra*,¹⁸ akin to those missions conducted across continental

¹³ Filioli Uranio, *I cappellani delle galere*, p. 229.

¹⁴ Here, too, the Church's involvement in care for the body is still profoundly strong. For the long-standing tradition of hospital care by the Capuchin Fathers, see De Castelsangiovanni, *L'assistenza ospedaliera*.

¹⁵ See Prosperi, *Tribunali*, pp. 551–559; *La vocazione*; Broggio, *Evangelizzare il Mondo*; Pavone, *I gesuiti*. As will be shown, the Jesuits organized a mission aboard the papal galleys in the first half of the 18th century. See Ginzburg, *Folklore*; Faralli, *Le missioni*, pp. 97–116; Prosperi, “*Otras Indias*,” pp. 205–234; *Missionari*.

¹⁶ Broggio, *Evangelizzare il mondo*, p. 17; Camaioni, *Pulpiti*, p. VII. On the idea of slave conversion projects in the Mediterranean as an evangelizing mission, see also Lavenia, *Schiavi*.

¹⁷ Cantù, preface to Broggio, *Evangelizzare il Mondo*, p. 13.

¹⁸ Whereas the *missiones ad extra* were directed toward the so-called savages of the New World, the *missiones ad intra* took place within the “Indies of over here”—remote and quasi-dechristianized territories within Europe, whose inhabitants were often likened to the indigenous peoples of the Americas due to their perceived ignorance of Catholic doctrine.

Europe. This same inward-facing evangelical impulse extended to rural communities as well:

[W]here heresy or the sad condition of peasant life in rural settings, degraded by ignorance and poverty, had introduced a dangerous departure from doctrinal orthodoxy, from righteous sacramental practice, from Christian morality, and from the customs and traditions rooted in the tradition of the faith.¹⁹

This hypothesis is supported by archival sources, and particularly the reports and instructions compiled by the Jesuits—who took over the management of the convict fleet from the Capuchins at the end of the 18th century—concerning the religious missions conducted aboard the galleys of Civitavecchia, typically held before Easter Week. The explicit purpose of these missions was to provide religious instruction to the rowers, hear their confessions, and comfort the sick in the hospital.²⁰ These missions typically lasted about a week, with the days structured around prayer and catechism. In addition to preaching aboard the ships, the missionaries visited the port hospital and organized long processions in which the inhabitants of Civitavecchia took an active part, thus imbuing the activities with both solemnity and public significance. These missions, with the core objective of educating the rowers in Christian values and persuading them to abandon sin and crime, were deemed a genuine success whenever they culminated in the conversion of slaves who—to be enslaved—had to be either heretics or Muslims. A notable example was the 1716 mission, which resulted in the conversion of one Zwinglian and three Lutherans to Catholicism.²¹ Particularly significant was the mission of 9 November 1783, organized at the behest of Cardinal Marcantonio Colonna. Over the course of 22 days, the ten religious chosen for the task were re-

19 Francesca Cantù, preface to Broggio, *Evangelizzare il Mondo*, p. 13. The idea that the spaces inhabited by slaves were “Other Indies” has been by now officially accepted by historiography. See, for example, the studies by Colombo and Sanseverino. However, Italian historiography has not considered convicts in these kinds of analysis.

20 See ARSI, Rom.138, *Breve relazione delle missioni fatte in Civitavecchia il 1716 per ordine di nostro signor papa clemente XI. Missione alle galere pontificie*, ff. 61–63, 65–73; Rom. 132.I, *Breve relatione della Missione fatta alle Galere Pontificie in Civitavecchia da quattro padri della compagnia di Gesù l'anno 1649*, f. 248f; Fondo gesuitico, manoscritti, 10, *Breve istruttione Per quelli che vanno Alla Missione delle Galere*; Instit. 50, *Breve informat. O istruttione per quei, che vanno a Civitavecchia alle Galere*, ff. 157–168. It is important to point out that the Capuchins also carried out processions with the crews of the galleys, which can be considered as real missions, and which usually ended with some conversions and baptisms. Unfortunately, there is less evidence of this, but some useful information can be found in Angioni, Leone, *La Guerra di Morea*, pp. 21–27.

21 ARSI, Rom.138, *Breve relazione delle missioni fatte in Civitavecchia il 1716 per ordine di nostro signor papa clemente XI. Missione alle galere pontificie*, ff. 61–63.

sponsible for communicating with, providing religious instruction to, and hearing the confessions of a total of 3,000 rowers. Sources particularly highlight Father Bartholomew of St. John's zeal; not only did he die from a malignant fever and pneumonia upon completing the mission,²² but he was also credited with numerous conversions, including those of seven "Turkish" slaves.²³

It is noteworthy that the conversion of slaves was a point of contention between the religious and naval authorities. The latter were opposed to converting slaves, as it would necessarily entail an—albeit slight—improvement in their conditions of captivity, without fundamentally altering their status as slaves.²⁴ Such conversions could potentially lower the likelihood of their ransom, and, consequently, the associated economic gain. Conversely, for the chaplains, the conversion of heretical slaves was considered one of the primary objectives of their mission aboard the convict ships.

Although there were fewer chaplains on galley vessels of the Tuscan fleet, they were significantly more numerous in the *Bagno de' forzati*, or *Bagno degli schiavi*—the prison compound in which forced rowers were confined when not sailing. The fleet was under the authority of the Order of Saint Stephen, which had been founded specifically to attack the commercial and military interests of the Berbers and the Ottoman Empire by means of corsair raids.²⁵ While sources from Livorno mention fewer missions than those from Civitavecchia,²⁶ the life of the *galeotti* in the *Bagno* can be viewed as a genuine religious mission, carried out daily after the Capuchins were placed in charge in 1677. Their first superior, Father Ginepro (born Cristofano Cestoni, 1630–1709), a missionary who had previously worked in the outlying rural areas of Bologna, was appointed "chief missionary of the *Bagno* and galleys of Livorno."²⁷ Evangelical preaching—a hallmark of the Capuchin Order since its earliest directives—was characterized by a pronounced theatrical rhetoric intended to instill fear and enforce moral discipline among the faithful.²⁸ The Capuchins' arrival at the *Bagno* was marked by a strik-

22 During the mission, the missionaries shared the same living conditions as the rowers, in extremely poor hygienic conditions, at the mercy of the elements.

23 Vitalini Sacconi, *Civitavecchia*, pp. 200–202.

24 Benedetti, *Servi introvabili*, p. 63. Differences in treatment were minimal, consisting mainly in receiving some extra food and clothing. For Livorno, see Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 353.

25 For a somewhat dated but accurate history of the birth of the Tuscan navy and the Order of St. Stephen see Guarnieri, *I cavalieri di Santo Stegano*; for a more recent volume see Angiolini, *L'Ordine di Santo Stefano*.

26 The only references I have found to a mission established for galley crews refer to the mission of January 1694, and are contained in ASF, MP, 2102, cc.n.n.

27 Cavallo, Ginepro da Barga, p. 32.

28 Camaioni, *Pulpiti*, pp. XII–XIII.

ing procession in which the friars walked barefoot, wearing a crown of thorns on their heads, a hempen rope around their waists, and a crucifix around their necks, chanting the psalm *Miserere mei, Deus*.²⁹ A vivid spectacle of repentance and penance, this procession was intended to ignite a sense of Christian zeal among the *Bagno*'s inhabitants. The time spent in the *Bagno* became marked by prayers and religious services designed to instruct as many *galeotti* as possible in Christian doctrine, with the goal of guiding Christian convicts back to the righteous path and converting the slaves.³⁰

Thus, galleys were depicted as isolated, self-contained universes in which crew members were, in theory, separated from the rest of society.³¹ Peter Burke has noted how the maritime world represented a distinct subculture, separate from the popular culture of early modern European societies. Endowed with their own set of beliefs, practices, and language, seafarers were often viewed with suspicion by the general population, frequently likened to other itinerant social categories such as vagrants, and were thus completely marginalized.³² I propose examining the *galeotti* through the lens of the "foreigner"—an individual relegated to the margins of society due to their professional, economic, religious, or social status.³³ The galley crew, therefore, may be regarded as the very embodiment of deviance, confined to a restricted space that, in many respects, was detached from the structures of official social life. Not only did *galeotti* share a culture exclusive to the maritime world, but they were also aboard the galleys as convicts—criminals—or as slaves of another faith, most likely Muslim. With the practice of assigning convicts and slaves to crew duties, the sailors' subculture was further enriched with new layers. The sources thus depict the galleys as a true microcosm of violence and illegality—albeit one governed by its own specific rules and codes of conduct.³⁴

This project's aim to control the *galeotti*'s morals and conduct—though it is important to note it was intended for the entire crew—was not limited to the salvation of their souls and did not envisage their social reintegration. The primary objective was to make the crew reliable, disciplined, and God-fearing individuals, for navigational and military purposes. Doctors also played a key role in this

29 Bernardi, *Relazione*, p. 26

30 On the element of spectacle during religious missions, see Alfieri, *Forme memoria*, pp. 344–346.

31 We will see how galley rowers continued to maintain close links with the rest of society and how many outsiders, sometimes even women, could come aboard the vessels.

32 Burke, *Cultura popolare*, pp. 44–49.

33 Cerutti, *Étrangers*, pp. 21–24; Pomara Saverino, *Rifugiati*, pp. 19–21.

34 Santus, "Il turco," p. 48.

broadest effort to detect—and thus punish—any deviation in conduct on board. Medical vigilance was seen as complementary to the task of disciplining the crew. Indeed, it is notable how care and control of the body were seen as inextricably linked to, and conducive to, salvation of the soul. Medicine's attempt at secularization was still in its nascent phase.³⁵ Doctors were not only tasked with making sure that the sick confessed their sins and received the last rites on their deathbeds, but also with using their expertise to ensure that the patients they treated and examined showed no signs of engaging in activities deemed illicit. What was implemented aboard early modern galleys could be described as an attempt "to conquer the soul through a cure extended to the body."³⁶ Preventing illicit behavior served not only a militaristic function but also a more specific religious one, aimed both at ensuring the rowers' spiritual salvation and averting the risk of incurring divine punishment. As is often the case, however, the hoped-for outcome diverged from reality, and the imposition of strict discipline and control frequently led the *galeotti* to devise innovative responses in their bid to maintain even the smallest margin of freedom.

2 Early modern galleys and rowers from the 16th to the 18th century

In the early modern Mediterranean, the galley was the quintessential seafaring vessel for maritime warfare. Known since the Roman Empire, its enduring success can be attributed to three key factors: simplicity of construction, low cost, and, above all, its adaptability to the Mediterranean's unique topographical and meteorological conditions. As Lo Basso explains, the persistence of galleys in the Mediterranean should not be seen as a sign of technological backwardness, but rather as an adaptation to the region's geographical and climatic features.³⁷ The Mediterranean is characterized by a dense geography of narrow passages, islands, inlets, and similar obstacles, making rowing the most effective way to maneuver through such confined spaces without risking damage to the vessel. In addition, the region's weather patterns, alternate between strong winds and calm. In periods of calm, sailboats struggle to navigate, sometimes for days at a time. In this context, rowing provided a highly practical solution to this problem.³⁸

³⁵ On the strict relationship between medicine and religion, see Donato, Berlivet, Cabibbo, Michetti, Nicoud (études réunies par), *Médecine et religion*.

³⁶ Lavenia, *Dio in uniforme*, p. 139.

³⁷ Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 11.

³⁸ Ibid.

The decision to deploy forced rowers to man galley crews appears to have been primarily driven by technical and military considerations. Between 1530 and 1540, there was a shift from the *alla sensile* rowing system known in Italian as *galloccia* or *scaloccio*. The *alla sensile* system required each oarsman to maneuver his own oar, with typically three rowers per bench—though there could be as many as five. A typical galley using the *sensile* system would generally have between 150 and 164 rowers. In contrast, rowing *a scaloccio* involved the use of a large single oar operated by multiple oarsmen seated on the same bench, usually three in a typical galley, and between five and seven in larger ones.³⁹ The number of oarsmen required increased considerably from 192–265 to around 350 oarsmen aboard the Tuscan galleys, arranged in 51 benches: 26 on the starboard side and 25 on the port side. According to Lo Basso's calculations, this change in rowing technique increased the number of rowers aboard each galley by between 16% and 43%. This new navigational system—which required more men but did not demand specialized skills—thus became both the precondition and the inevitable consequence of the use of convicted and enslaved rowers to fill the crews. *Scalocio* rowing enabled the rapid manning of the galleys by mixing experienced and inexperienced rowers, thus eliminating the need for the latter to undergo long training periods, as had previously been the case.⁴⁰ This innovative rowing system thus allowed convicts and slaves to be deployed in the galley crews, circumventing the increasingly difficult task of recruiting oarsmen from among freemen. Given that rowing was an exhausting, poorly paid, and socially degrading job, only those in desperate circumstances were likely to accept it.⁴¹

Early modern galley crews consisted of three types of *galeotti*: free rowers, convicts, and slaves. Together, they constituted the generic mass of *huomini da remo* [oarsmen]. Free rowers were known in the Pontine navies as *buonavoglia* [men of good will], and were often considered a marginal and suspect category—on par with convicts and slaves—despite, or perhaps because of, their willingness to serve in the galleys. As many scholars have argued, the challenge of recruiting crews was closely linked to pauperism. The economic crises of the 14th century, the “price revolution” of the 16th century, and, more broadly, the collapse of the medieval feudal economy and the resulting transformation of traditional rural society were among the key causes of the widespread proletarianization of the rural population.⁴²

39 Candiani, *Dalla galea*, pp. 192, 279. There were about 23–25 benches in the regular galleys and about 27–28 benches in the larger ones.

40 Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, pp. 13–20.

41 Angiolini, *La pena della galera*, p. 85.

42 Geremek, *Poverty*, pp. 76–109.

Lacking the resources to secure a basic existence—let alone a stable livelihood—the rural poor migrated to the cities in search of work, or at the very least some form of relief. The dramatic increase in the number of impoverished individuals, combined with demographic shifts and greater mobility, posed a serious challenge to cities, which were still closely tied to the traditional corporate economy and struggled to respond adequately to such an influx. From the 1520s onward, urban poverty and—even more so, vagrancy—became a mass phenomenon reaching unprecedented levels and compelling society to view it as a genuine threat to the prevailing public order.⁴³ This amorphous and haphazard mass of impoverished individuals was to become—especially in the maritime cities—a valuable resource for naval recruiters. By offering substantial enlistment bonuses, or recruiting indebted men through gambling, it became possible to draw large numbers of oarsmen from the ranks of the city's destitute. As Bronisław Geremek wrote: “In times when the harshest misery reigns [...] it is not difficult to enlist volunteer *galeotti*. It is enough to choose among the city's wretched, deprived of every means of subsistence and any possibility of work. [...] It is evident that when many unemployed are eager to find work, their needs are modest and the wages low.”⁴⁴

Alberto Guglielmotti, in his pivotal 19th-century treatise on the papal navy, also described the *buonavoglia* as robust, healthy young men “obliged by necessity, or debt, or gambling, or any other—even honest—reason, such as helping their parents, or providing a dowry for a sister; in short, anyone who needed money at that time.” He particularly highlighted the widespread prevalence of gambling during this period and how easy it was to find individuals in debt and unable to repay what they owed.⁴⁵

The practice of filling crews with the most destitute and desperate people in society—those willing to sell their freedom—was already noted by Pantera Pantera in his naval treatise.⁴⁶ There, the captain describes the *buonavoglia* pri-

⁴³ Geremek, *Inutiles au monde*, pp. 144–147.

⁴⁴ Geremek, *Il pauperismo*, pp. 695–696. “Nei periodi in cui regna la miseria più nera [...] non è difficile arruolare galeotti volontari, basta scegliere tra i miserabili della città, privi di ogni mezzo di sussistenza e di ogni possibilità di lavoro. [...] è evidente che quando i disoccupati desiderosi di trovar lavoro sono molti, le loro esigenze sono modeste e i salari bassi.”

⁴⁵ Guglielmotti, *La Guerra dei Pirati, Volume Primo*, pp. 298–304: “Un giovane robusto e sano, stretto dal bisogno, o dai debiti, o dal giuoco, o da qualunque (anche onesta) ragione, pognamo di soccorrere i genitori o di dotare una sorella; in somma chiunque voleva denaro per quei tempi, purché fosse robusto e giovane.”

⁴⁶ Pantera, *L'armata Navale*, p. 136: “impresa molto difficile persuadere gl'huomini liberi à maneggiare un remo, & porsi alla servitù d'una catena, & alle battiture, & à gl'innnumerabili incomodi della galea, i quali se la necessità, ò la sciocchezza di molti vagabondi, & per altro

marily as either convicts who had completed their penal sentences but were still in debt to the state and were required to row until the debt was repaid, or vagabonds who had sold their freedom to survive and had agreed to serve onboard. Despite their circumstances, *buonavoglia* were always highly valued in galley life and considered essential to its effective operation. In particular, they were often sent ashore when needed, for example, to collect provisions or ammunition. Ex-convicts were given special consideration, especially those who had served long sentences, as this allowed them time to train and develop into skilled rowers. This led to a tendency to find any means possible to retain them aboard once their sentences had elapsed.

The *buonavoglia*'s marginal social character is also emphasized by Capuchin Father Filippo Bernardi of Florence who, in his account of the Capuchin management of Livorno's *Bagno de' forzati*, describes the galley crews as divided into "Turks" [*turchi*, i.e., Muslim slaves], convicts [*forzati*], and lastly *buonavoglia*, for whom contempt is both explicit and patently deliberate. Noted for their trademark mustaches and beards,⁴⁷ the *buonavoglia* were known as such because they "for the sake of a few coins voluntarily subject themselves to such a laborious and disreputable, standard of living." They were considered worse than brutes, for not even beasts, though irrational, would have sold their freedom, "more valuable than any rich treasure," for a few coins.⁴⁸

Being sent to the galleys was one of the primary forms of punishment and repression in pre-modern Europe. According to Franco Angiolini, the earliest evidence of convicts and slaves as rowers on galleys dates back to the late 14th and early 15th centuries. In 1331–1332, we find sailors who, after being imprisoned for owing money to Venetian shipowners under a law of 1329, were placed on galleys without pay to settle their debts. Similarly, over the course of the 15th century, the Aragonese Crown resorted, when necessary, to convicts known as *reos galeotes* to fully man the crews. These were men convicted of minor crimes who, as an alternative to capital punishment, served as rowers for a set period of time. Although there were numerous antecedents, these remained sporadic

mancipij vilissimi, & abietissimi de i vitij, non gli conducesse à termini di vender se medesimi, si può credere che non si troverebbe mai huomo alcuno, che spontaneamente volesse sottomettersi ad una vita così infelice, & piena di tanti miserabili & horribili incidenti."

47 Ibid., p. 131f. On the contrary, convicts and slaves had to shave their faces completely.

48 Bernardi, *Relazione*, p. 13f: "[...] ed I terzi pùr Cristiani, sono le buona Voglie, così detti, perchè volontariamente per interesse di pochi soldi si soggettano ad un tenor di vita così laboriosa, ed infame. Mostransi costoro d'essere di peggior condizione de' Brutti, i quali benché irrazionali, fuggono nulladiméno il soggettarsi; e l'huomo, tralasciando i migliori discorsi dell'intelletto, per prezzo di pochi denari vénde la propria libertà più stimabile di qualunque ricco tesoro."

measures. The first instance of the massive and regular use of convicts on board galleys appears to date to 1443. In that year, the French shipowner Jacques Cœur obtained permission from the King of France to use convicts to arm his galleys—despite opposition from the Parisian courts and the Church. Later, in 1490, Charles VIII (1438–1498) issued an edict obliging royal judges to send to the galleys all those sentenced to death or other corporal punishment, as well as those deemed “unfit for social life.” In this way, many individuals convicted of crimes—especially vagrants, Romani, and others considered “unsocial”—were removed from society and sent to the galleys.⁴⁹

Italian navies soon followed the French example. In Genoa, the presence of *galiotti per forza* is recorded as early as 1473. The presence of men chained to oars is also mentioned in the account of a shipwreck near Oneglia in 1492.⁵⁰ Given the shortage of Muslim slaves to man the penal fleet of the Papal States in 1502, shipowners turned to using nearly all of Rome’s prisoners, as well as a large number of vagrants begging in the city streets.⁵¹ In his treatise on the Papal Navy, Guglielmotti explicitly mentions “a very ancient usage” of sentencing criminals to row. According to him, it was customary for those sentenced to serve for a year at the oars in place of execution. This arrangement was thought to benefit all parties involved: those condemned would believe that they had succeeded in extracting one more year of life from the authorities, while society would, at the same time, be compensated for any damages caused by their crimes.⁵² However, these were also episodic measures, and it was not until the latter half of the 16th century that galley punishment was officially codified in Italian legislation.⁵³ Initially, galley service targeted those individuals who would otherwise have faced corporal punishment. The first to be condemned were those whose conduct was considered deviant in multiple respects, rendering them candidates for exclusion from society.

Over time, a galley sentence assumed an increasingly exemplary function, designed to deter the population at large from committing similar offenses through

49 Angiolini, *La pena della galera*, p. 79f.

50 Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 232.

51 Guglielmotti, *La Guerra dei Pirati, Volume Primo*, p. 21.

52 Ibid., p. 116f: “L’uso antichissimo del condannare I malfattori alla pena del remo viene espresso nel capitolo decimottavo, con una giunta straordinaria. Si tratta di mettere a remigare per un anno anche i condannati a morte; ai quali senza ingiuria pensavano di poter concedere un anno di vita, perché alla società oltraggiata dai loro misfatti venisse compenso con qualche servizio di pubblica utilità.”

53 The Papal State was an exception, given that galley punishment was formally introduced in the first half of the 16th century.

the threat of forced labor and deprivation of liberty. For this reason—alongside the practical need to find rowers—the range of crimes punishable by such service expanded during the 16th and 17th centuries.⁵⁴ In the aforementioned naval treatise by Pantera, convicted *galeotti* are described as rowers sentenced by the courts to serve aboard for a limited period—or even for life. He argued that the use of convicted criminals was the ideal solution to the problem posed by the difficulty of persuading free men to row, to “submit to the bondage of chains,” and, more generally, “to the torture and misery of life on the galleys.”

He contended that it was praiseworthy for criminal judges to commute not only corporal punishment, but also fines, turning them into galley sentences of reasonable duration, proportionate to the crime committed. In this sense, those sentenced to death would serve in the galleys for life. Similarly, all vagrants found begging in the city streets were dispatched to the galleys and put to public use.⁵⁵ As a distinguishing mark, they were required to shave off both their hair and beards and to wear a red beret. A convict’s most obvious sign of servitude, however, was the iron clasped to his leg, used to chain him to the oar bench, ensuring he could not escape.⁵⁶ Although the tasks, way of life, and conditions of forced *galeotti* were largely consistent across the Mediterranean, the main point of divergence lay in the length of their sentences. For example, in the Papal States, a life sentence in the galleys was considered acceptable and widely practiced. In contrast, in the Serenissima, an edict of the *Maggior Consiglio*, proclaimed on 15 January 1588, stipulated that the sentence could only range between a minimum of eighteen months and a maximum of twelve years: a life sentence was not permitted. The rationale behind this decision rested on the belief that the lack of hope of future freedom would lead the *galeotti* to despair, thereby reducing their efficiency.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, convicts were still required to repay the Republic all the expenses they incurred during their years of service, thus accumulating a debt that was unlikely ever to be repaid. As a result, they ended up serving onboard until the end of their days.⁵⁸

54 Angiolini, La pena della galera; Filioli Uranio, *La squadra navale Pontificia*.

55 Pantera, *L’Armata Navale*, p. 137f.

56 Ibid., pp. 130–132. “Gli sforzati son quelli, che da i tribunali della giustitia sono stati condannati per i loro delitti à vogar in galea à tempo limitato, ò à vita, & non si lasciano uscir mai di galea, ne di catena per qualsivoglia occasione, fin che non hanno finito il tempo della loro condannagione [...] Sono distinti da gl’altri con questo segno, che portano il capo, et la barba tutta rasa.”

57 Lo Basso, *Condannati alla galera*, p. 123.

58 Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 141f. On indebtedness as a strategy used by masters to keep servants and laborers in their service even after the end of their contracts, see Campbell/Stanziani, *Debt and Slavery*; Stanziani, *Lavoro coatto*.

The last category of rowers consisted of enslaved individuals, most of whom were Muslims, and were generically referred to as slaves, or “Turks.”⁵⁹ These individuals were primarily prisoners of war, captured mainly during naval battles. In theory, they were to be freed and repatriated at the end of the wars—either after a ransom had been paid or in exchange for a Christian prisoner. In reality, however, efforts were made to keep them on the galleys for as long as possible, often without ever releasing them. The term “slave” was widely used in the Ponentine navy. In Venice, however, slaves were referred to only as “Turks,” in order to emphasize their status as prisoners of war rather than as slaves—likely with the aim of maintaining a less antagonistic relationship with the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁰ In the Papal Navy, in contrast, the term “Turks” referred to a category of slaves which also included “Moors” and “Blacks.” As Pantera wrote:

Slaves are those Turks who are captured or purchased, and they fall into three categories: Moors, Turks, and Blacks. The Moors are the best, and among them, the most excellent are those taken aboard galleys, brigantines, galiots, or other corsair vessels, for having become accustomed to hardships and toil of the sea and of rowing, they are better than the others and are perfect oarsmen. But by nature, they are so proud, brutal, treacherous, and seditious that their behavior must be closely monitored, as they have, on occasion, gone so far as to kill their masters. The Turks are not as good, nor as suited for rowing and hard labor as the Moors, yet they are far gentler and more docile. The Blacks are the worst of all, and most of them die purely from melancholy. They can be distinguished from the others by the tuft of hair they wear on the crown of their heads, being otherwise completely shaven. They receive the same food and clothing as the convicts.⁶¹

59 See Di Nepi, *Confini salvezza*, p. 163; Ricci, *I turchi*, p. 66.

60 Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 29.

61 Pantera, *L'armata Navale*, p. 131: “Gli schiavi sono quei Turchi, che si pigliano, ò s comprano, & sono di tre sorti, cioè Mori, Turchi, & Negri. I Mori sono i migliori, et tra loro ottimi quelli che si pigliano sopra le fuste, ò sopra i brigantini, ò galeotte, ò galee, ò sopra altri vascelli da corso, i quali per haver fatto l'habito ne i patimenti, et nelle fatiche del mare, et del remo, sono migliori de gl'altri, et sono perfetti vogatori: ma sono per natura talmente superbi, bestiali, traditori & seditiosi, che bisogna osservare bene i loro andamenti, che alcune volte si è condotta fino ad ammazzare i patroni. I Turchi non sono buoni, ne atti al remo, ne alle fatiche, come i Mori, ma sono ben più mansueti, & più docili [...] I Negri sono peggiori di tutti, et muoiono la maggior parte di pura malinconia [...] si conoscono da gl'altri per la ciocca di capelli che portano nella sommità della testa, essendo nel resto tutti rasi. Hanno il vitto, & il vestito come gli sforzati.” It is noteworthy that Bartolomeo Crescentio, writing about fifteen years before Pantera, describes slaves in a similar fashion, but does not speak of “blacks”; instead he refers to *morlacchi*. This likely refers to the Morlachs, a rural Christian population from the Balkans, subjected to the Ottoman Empire and enslaved and sold prior to sub-Saharan Africans. Indeed, it should not be forgotten that medieval slavery primarily involved populations of the Balkan and the Black Sea regions, see Barker, *Most Precious Merchandise*; Schiel, *Slaves' Religious Choice*, pp. 23–45. Crescentio, *Nautica mediterranea*, p. 95: “Schiavi parte sono Mori, parte Turchi, parte Morlacchi. I Turchi, & i Mori

The distinction between these three categories of enslaved rowers remains somewhat unclear, with differentiation likely based on skin color and geographic origin. The term “Turks” was often used interchangeably with “Muslims,” though in this context it might also refer to North African men. It seems reasonable to conclude that the term “Blacks” described slaves from sub-Saharan Africa, bought by slave traders from Spain, Genoa, and Portugal, and later northern Europe.⁶² More uncertain, however, is the meaning of the term “Moors.” In later sources, “Moors” and “Blacks” are frequently used interchangeably. It’s possible that the primary distinction between these two categories of enslaved individuals was the darker skin color of the latter, while “Moors” likely referred to those of Maghrebi origin.⁶³ Adherence to the Muslim faith—or any other religion differing from Catholicism—was a defining characteristic of Mediterranean slavery. It was, in fact, a prerequisite for becoming a slave, given that the practice of Mediterranean *captivitas* originated in the Papal edict *Romanus pontifex* of 8 January 1454, by which Pope Nicholas V (r. 1447–1455) granted the King of Portugal the power to enslave “Saracens, pagans, infidels and enemies of Christ.”⁶⁴ Enslaved individuals were dressed like convicts and subjected to similar tasks. They differed from the *forzati* primarily in their original faith and in the distinctive knot of hair arranged atop their heads, though they were otherwise completely shaven.⁶⁵ Interestingly, convicts were often referred to as “slaves for punishment” [*servi/schiavi di pena*].⁶⁶ The galley sentence—despite some notable differences—aligns with the category of servitude by punishment, as theorized in Roman law.⁶⁷ As the *Scrivano Generale* [Chief Scribe] of the Tuscan galleys wrote in 1699: “it scarcely matters whether one says Slave or forced rower, as even the forced rowers are said to be a slave of punishment for the time they are onboard.”⁶⁸

pigliati su le loro Fuste sono migliori, che quei che in terra se pigliano. Morlacchi la maggior parte muoiono di melanconia & ostinatione.” See also ASF, MP, 2077.

62 Hershenzon, *The Captive Sea*, p. 19.

63 On the problem on distinguishing between Moors [*mori*] and Blacks [*negri*] in the Italian context, see Boccadamo, “*Mori Negri*”; De Lucia, *History of a Black Saint*.

64 Benedetti, *Servi introvabili*, p. 54.

65 On the visual signs of identification of Muslim slaves in the early modern Mediterranean, and in particular on the topknot as the key sign of identification of Muslims, see Martin, Weiss, *The Sun King at Sea*.

66 *Servi* and *schiavi* are used in the sources as synonyms and used interchangeably.

67 Fiume, *Schiavitù Mediterranee*, p. 17.

68 ASF, MP, 2108, cc. n.n.: “poco per altro importando, che si dica Schiavo, ò forzato, mentre anche il forzato si dice schiavo della pena, per quel tempo che deve servire alle Galere.” See Chizzolini, *Navigating Ambiguities*.

On early modern Italian galleys, the status of “slave” hardly differed from that of “convict.” In either case, rowers had their liberty curtailed—either permanently or temporarily. They were subject to similar duties, meals, and accommodations, and even their clothing differed only in the smallest details. Above all, both categories of rowers were considered deviant and marginal on account of their behavior, their religion, and, to some extent, their personal inclinations. Belonging to a different geographical or religious context only served to amplify their already marginal status, simply by virtue of being forced aboard such vessels.

3 Juridical discourse on the galley sentence

Although there are precedents in antiquity, galley punishment represented a novel development in the practice and theory of early modern European criminal jurisprudence. Recognizing this punishment’s innovative nature, some 16th- and 17th-century jurists sought to develop an increasingly complex and articulated corpus of law that would position galley punishment within the broader spectrum of crimes and their respective punishments. To fully legitimize this new form of punishment, it had to be integrated into the legal cultural heritage of the time, as well as into the existing legal-historical categories.⁶⁹

As Franco Angiolini noted, the first jurist to attempt to establish a historical and doctrinal antecedent for galley punishment was Tiberius Deciani (1509–1582), who argued that the Athenians had employed this practice. Despite Deciani’s influential status, later scholars did not widely accept this hypothesis. The criminal judge Giulio Claro (1525–1575), while acknowledging its novelty, likened service aboard the galley to forced labor, specifically the *damnatio ad metallum* in Roman law. In fact, Claro proposed that galley service be categorized among capital punishments involving the loss of liberty and citizenship [*civitas*], thereby reinforcing its character as a form of penal servitude. For this reason, the galley sentence was ranked in severity immediately below capital punishment and above penalties that only involved the loss of civic status. While Claro’s thesis—linking the punishment to *damnatio ad metallum*—gained widespread acceptance, many jurists argued that it more closely resembled punishments such as deportation, banishment, and forced labor, collectively associated with *in insulam deportatio* in Roman Law. Doctrinally, galley punishment was thus equated with both the second degree [*damnatio ad metallum*] and third degree [*in insulam de-*

⁶⁹ Angiolini, La pena della galera, p. 87.

portatio] of capital punishment. Though formally less severe than death—and thus more compatible with Christian teachings—it remained a harsh penalty, intended both to punish the condemned and serve as a deterrent.⁷⁰ According to Marcantonio Savelli, a judge of the Florentine *Rota Criminale*, galley sentencing was the civil counterpart of canonical excommunication. Both were considered substitutes for the now-obsolete *interdictio ignis & aquae*—a Roman legal sanction that stripped offenders of their citizenship and, by extension, their civic rights, rendering them unworthy of membership in the Roman community.⁷¹

As the jurist Luigi Cremani (1748–1838) observed in the late 18th century, no doctrinal framework for galley punishment was ever developed.⁷² It had largely escaped jurisprudential reflection, which accounts for its multifaceted character: at once a form of confinement, a means of public labor, and an arbitrary punishment [*custodia loco depositi, opus publicum, and poena extraordinaria*].⁷³ The notable exceptions are two legal treatises, both shaped by the Venetian context and thus specific to it: Lorenzo Priori's *Prattica criminale* (1663), and Antonio Barbaro's *Prattica Criminale* (1739). According to Priori, a galley sentence was viewed as a corporal and arbitrary punishment, imposed solely at the judge's discretion.⁷⁴ A century later, Barbaro categorized punishments into corporal and non-corporal, with the former further divided into capital and non-capital forms. As noted, Priori had already classified the galley as a form of corporal punishment, but Barbaro refined this classification, placing the galley sentence in both categories on the basis of its duration. Capital punishments included death, banishment, perpetual ignominy, life imprisonment and ten years' service in the galley. Conversely, non-capital punishments encompassed amputation, whipping, temporary banishment, as well as perpetual ignominy, imprisonment, and a galley sentence of fewer than ten years.⁷⁵ Despite the lack of sustained, in-depth theoretical reflection, galley punishment would ultimately become an integral part of criminal legislation across European jurisdictions. As Franco Angiolini suggested, it may have been precisely this very absence of theoretical underpinnings that enabled the galley to thrive as an effective and flexible instrument of repression—

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 88–91.

⁷¹ Savelli, *Prattica*, p. 167.

⁷² Angiolini, *La pena della galera*, p. 91.

⁷³ Alessi, *Pene e remieri*, p. 250.

⁷⁴ Priori, *Prattica criminale*, p. 123. "Ordinary," on the other hand, referred to the punishment established by laws or statutes.

⁷⁵ Barbaro, *Prattica criminale*, capo XXXVI—*Delle pene*, cited in Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 141.

one fundamentally rooted in the deprivation of liberty. It thus emerged as a key institution for both punishing and correcting criminals.⁷⁶

As much as the specificity of galley punishment lay in its provision of forced labor—especially through the grueling labor of rowing—it is essential not to overlook the central role played by the curtailment of liberty. The need to maintain a high degree of discipline onboard—vital to effective navigation—formed the basis for a correctional program and, in a sense, a process of re-education for convicts grounded in the denial of their freedom. Stripping individuals of their liberty enabled the exercise of total control over them. In galley life, this control was directed at the profound transformation of behaviors and tendencies deemed deviant and criminal, with the aim of turning convicts into disciplined individuals. Contemporary sources—both implicitly and explicitly—consistently emphasize this objective of correction. From the late 16th century onward, galley punishment came to be seen as one of the best tools to manage social deviance. It served to eliminate the perceived threats posed by individuals deemed harmful to the social order by removing them from society and attempting to reform them—albeit without any provision for their eventual reintegration into society. Suffice it to say that the earliest galley condemnations in early modern Italy were specifically directed at social categories deemed disruptive to moral and civic norms. In Tuscany, for example, the galley penalty was first applied in 1542 to blasphemers and sodomites, while in Venice, it was first used in 1545 against vagabonds and Romani people.⁷⁷

One could argue that the galley sentence was thus conceived as complementary to—and, in some ways, continuous with—imprisonment. In many cities, the earliest galley sentences were applied as commutations for death penalties or prison terms. Conversely, incarceration was often offered as an alternative to the galley if a medical examination at the time of sentencing deemed the condemned unfit to row. The most-well documented case is undoubtedly that of Venice, where a fixed conversion scale was established to determine the equivalent prison term: eighteen months at sea corresponded to three years in prison, three years in the galley to five years in prison, and so on.

The stark disparity between the duration of galley service and imprisonment underscores the perceived inherent difference between these two institutions. The galley was widely regarded as a harsher punishment—almost akin to the death penalty—due to the inhumane conditions and the grueling labor. Yet, I would argue that the fact that these two punishments were often treated as interchange-

⁷⁶ Angiolini, *La pena della galera*, p. 91.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 79–82.

able suggests a fundamental structural similarity. When the galley was docked, convicts were confined to specially designed holding facilities intended primarily to prevent escapes. The most notable of these—complementary to the galley both in nature and function—was the *Bagno de' forzati* in Livorno.⁷⁸

Ultimately, life as a convict aboard the galley scarcely differed from that of a convict on land, with the main distinction being the emphasis of forced labor for public works at sea. The 1542 proclamation that introduced the first appearance of the galley sentence in Tuscan legislation, explicitly stated that the punishment could entail confinement either aboard a galley or in Florence's Stinche prison.⁷⁹ By the 19th century, prisons had already formally adopted forced labor for inmates, mirroring the fate of those confined to the galleys. A prime example is the Stinche prison itself, which, under Austrian rule, was converted into a penal colony where inmates sentenced to public works were held. Like their counterparts at sea, these prisoners were easily identifiable by their red caps and the chains around their feet—clear symbols of their convict status.⁸⁰

Against this hypothesis, many scholars have argued that, prior to the Enlightenment, imprisonment—or more precisely the legal deprivation of liberty—was viewed primarily as a custodial measure rather than a punitive one. This interpretation largely draws upon legal sources of the time, particularly the jurist Ulpianus (170–228), who asserted that “prison is meant to guard, not to punish.”⁸¹ However, recent research has challenged this view, showing that local prisons during the Middle Ages, far from being restricted to canon law,⁸² sometimes served punitive and even socially rehabilitative functions—albeit with a fully developed objective of reintegrating convicts into society.⁸³ In light of these new perspectives, I argue that the galleys and the institutions associated with them—such as the *Bagno* in Livorno—were deliberately designed to enforce discipline. These institutions

78 See Frattarelli Fischer, *Il bagno delle galere*; Santus, “*Il turco*.”

79 Cantini, *Legislazione toscana*, p. 212.

80 ASF, Gabinetto, 111, dossier 2, cc.n.n. Regarding the continuities and discontinuities between galley sentence, prison, *ergastolo*, and forced labor, please refer to the Ph.D. project by Andrea Giuliani, *Punishing the Convicts of Serious Crime: the Evolution of the Italian Ergastolo between Forced Labor and Detention 1769–1890*, defended in 2024 (Università di Roma Tor Vergata), which aims to analyze the process through which *ergastolo* was established as a penal institution based on forced labor, in order to understand the trajectories through which penal practices have evolved, in Italy and elsewhere, since the age of reform.

81 Geltner, *La prigionie medievale*, (translation) p. 83: “carcere ad custodiendum, non ad puniendum.”

82 On this topic see particularly Paglia, *La Pietà dei carcerati*; Mibillion, *Riflessioni sulle prigionie*; Benedetti, *Dalla galera all'ergastolo*, p. 18 f.

83 In this sense, the study by Geltner, *La prigionie medievale* has been absolutely inspiring.

aimed not only to reform convicts but also to exert a broader societal influence through the constant threat of the deprivation of liberty.

Throughout the early modern period, imprisonment increasingly became a punishment for specific social groups: the nobility, the clergy, as well as women and children. This shift is evident in the use of imprisonment as an alternative to the galley sentence on account of the convict's elevated status. This appears to contradict the views of jurists who upheld the idea that galley punishment, in theory, should be indiscriminate—that even nobles and clergy could be subjected to such a fate. Yet, as is often the case, theory diverged from practice. When members of the nobility or the clergy were incarcerated, steps were typically taken to prevent them from mingling with lower-class criminals. This disparity is particularly evident in the Papal States, notably following the establishment of the Corneto “Ergastolo”—a facility specifically designed to house members of the clergy sentenced to galley service.⁸⁴ With the notable exception of the nobility and the clergy, the rest of the male population remained effectively subject to galley punishment.

In Rome, the death penalty and galley sentences for minors were often commuted to terms of confinement in Saint Michael's penitentiary, founded in 1693 by Pope Innocent XII. Notably, in this case, imprisonment was not regarded as an alternative to the galleys but rather as its precursor. Once the condemned youths were of age, they were taken to Civitavecchia and assigned as rowers on the Papal galleys. This practice supports the view that prison was often treated as little more than a holding space prior to the execution of a sentence.⁸⁵ My intention is not to refute this widely accepted interpretation, but to suggest that it represents only one of the many functions that imprisonment could fulfill. In this case, once again, we see that imprisonment functioned in a complementary relationship with galley service. Importantly, detention at St Michael's was also explicitly aimed at re-education and frequently responded to parents' requests to confine particularly unruly or disobedient children.⁸⁶

In conclusion, both galleys and prisons constituted forms of punishment rooted in confinement and the deprivation of liberty. It is telling that the petitions of the *galeotti* sought not only release from rowing service but also, and perhaps more significantly, the restoration of their freedom and their rights as citizens. Even before the Enlightenment's penal reforms, the notion of freedom as a primary

⁸⁴ On this topic, see in particular Benedetti, *Dalla galera all'ergastolo*, pp. 15–69.

⁸⁵ Baldassarri, *Bande giovanili*, p. 28f. On the history of the institute, see Lucrezio Monticelli, S. Michele a Ripa, pp. 397–420; Coccoli, *La Casa di correzione*.

⁸⁶ Baldassarri, *Bande giovanili*, p. 31.

human prerogative—and thus a supreme value—was already deeply embedded in early modern thought, both in preventive and repressive contexts. As noted earlier, Father Filippo Bernardi's disdain for the *buonavoglia* stemmed precisely from the fact that they—by consenting to be recruited in exchange for paltry pay—had sold what he saw as a human being's most precious attribute: freedom.⁸⁷

That the early modern penal treaties make little or no mention of the deprivation of liberty should not lead us to conclude that discussing its rehabilitative or moral dimension is anachronistic. On the contrary, this silence highlights the frequent disjunction between juridical theory and penal practice.

3.1 “There is nothing so dear in this world to man as freedom”

Nearly every scholar is now familiar with Cesare Beccaria's stance in his treatise *Dei delitti e delle pene* (1764) against capital punishment and torture, which he deemed inhumane practices—contrary to Christian values—and utterly useless from a practical standpoint. Beccaria's criticism was directed primarily at the death penalty, which, rather than deterring crime, often provoked, indignation and contempt for the executioner. Initially, this cruel spectacle of justice had the merit of attracting curious onlookers and imparting a lesson to the public. However, prolonged exposure to such a spectacle inevitably led the audience to empathize more with the condemned, fostering pity for the criminal. A criminal justice system that relied on excessive severity and bloodshed could not maintain control over the populace: over time, the population became desensitized to violent, rendering punishment less effective as a deterrent. As an alternative, Beccaria proposes life imprisonment as the most severe—and the most effective—penalty a State could impose. His work was widely read throughout Europe, and became a symbol of Enlightenment intellectual renewal. It also played a pivotal role in shaping the “prison revolution” of the 19th century during which incarceration was thoroughly reimagined not only as a punitive tool for but also as a rehabilitative measure for social integration.⁸⁸

However, as has been demonstrated over the past two decades, referring to a “19th-century revolution” is misleading.⁸⁹ Confinement and deprivation of liberty had already been used as punitive and rehabilitative measures since the Middle

⁸⁷ Bernardi, *Relazione*, p. 13f.

⁸⁸ Ironically, the first printed version of Beccaria's work appeared in Livorno in 1764, in the building that once housed the *Bagno de' Forzati*, which was then converted into a printing press.

⁸⁹ Lucrezio Monticelli, *Prigioni e rappresentazioni*, p. 2f.

Ages. Early medieval Christianity introduced a “medicinal” conception of punishment—aimed primarily at correcting the offender and rectifying their offenses through imprisonment.⁹⁰ Canon law, from the 4th to the 13th centuries, provided for solitary confinement in monasteries as a form of penance. This practice evolved into a broader system of monastic isolation for religious offenders. Solitary confinement thus took on a dual purpose: as a temporal punishment which involved depriving the religious of their liberty and as a spiritual punishment aimed at re-educating the prisoner.⁹¹

In civil law, while contemporary jurists did not formally legitimize punitive imprisonment, such practices are widely documented in medieval statutes and judicial records.⁹² Guy Geltner’s thesis is noteworthy: he argues that the use of prison as a primary punishment represents a shift from “deportation”—understood as isolation from the rest of society—to “containment” of offenders. The purpose of incarceration was not to eradicate social deviance but rather to contain and monitor it, maintaining a visible reminder of the consequences of criminal behavior. Furthermore, as early as the mid-16th century, a specifically correctional strategy for imprisonment—distinct from mere detention and punishment, began to emerge.⁹³ Throughout the early modern period, the concepts of “correction” and “deprivation of liberty” were not seen as oppositional but were closely linked. As several historians of penal and penitentiary regimes have argued, the Judicial Enlightenment—of which Beccaria is the most prominent exponent—contributed to a decisive shift in penal thinking, culminating in the emergence of an unprecedented “prison discourse.” This period marked the creation of a new approach to punishment shaped by a renewed interest in the penal question and public debate. While the penal system itself was by no means an exclusive creation of the Enlightenment, its real innovation lay in its systematic use of such punishment as a tool for both punishment and reform—and in making it a central topic in public discourse.⁹⁴

A similar reasoning can be applied to galley punishment, which, at its core, was rooted in the same principles as imprisonment: deprivation of liberty in service of public labor. In this context, I will focus on the previously cited report by Father Filippo of Florence concerning the Capuchins’ work at the *Bagno* in Livorno. In the introduction to his account, Father Filippo reflects on the prince’s need to have recourse to a strict and unyielding justice—punishing the guilty

⁹⁰ Benedetti, Dell’Ergastolo, p. 10.

⁹¹ Paglia, *La pietà*, pp. 7–11.

⁹² Geltner, *La prigionie medievale*, pp. 84–86.

⁹³ Coccoli, *La Casa di correzione*, p. 12.

⁹⁴ Lucrezio Monticelli, *Prigioni e rappresentazioni*, p. 2.

while rewarding the virtuous. The prince's mercy, he argues, must be balanced by the "terror of punishments." Criminal justice must not only penalize wrongdoers but also set an example for the broader population—discouraging them from committing crimes and encouraging them to become better citizens. The idea of strict and inflexible justice is underscored by the proverbial expression: "one is punished, a hundred are warned."⁹⁵ Particularly fitting is Father Filippo's image of the gardener, who must uproot weeds so that healthy plants may flourish.

Without going so far as to theorize the futility of the death penalty, Father Filippo acknowledges that corporal punishment often proved excessively severe and ineffective for certain crimes. Since antiquity, he reminds us, galley service has served as a substitute for corporal punishment, with the added advantage of being more effective: like death, it entailed the loss of honor and freedom. This deprivation of liberty, then, represented the gravest punishment—second only to the death penalty—as it amounted to a form of social death. As Father Filippo suggests, this innate love of liberty is not unique to humankind; even animals, though lacking reason, have often demonstrated a preference for death over bondage.⁹⁶

It is possible to argue that the widespread use of galley punishment—driven in part by the need for rowers—demonstrates how confinement functioned as a form of penal discipline. Yet, galley service went beyond mere confinement: it entailed strenuous physical labor. From the 15th century onward, the use of forced labor as a corrective measure became increasingly common, supported by the belief that physical work could transform the idle individual—"curing" him, so to speak—and re-educating him in the core values of society.⁹⁷ As Bronisław Gereemek has argued, by the 15th and 16th centuries, a genuine work ethic had emerged: manual labor was not just idealized as virtuous but treated as an obligation for the lower classes, and a tool for moral correction and social rehabilitation. The aim was to prepare the poor for society once they had been "cured" of laziness and criminality.⁹⁸ In this context, galley service was considered particularly well-suited for vagrants, whose idleness and perceived "uselessness" made them prime candidates for reformation.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Bernardi, *Relazione*, p. 11: "Suol dirsi fin per Proverbio, Che uno se ne castiga, e cento se n'ammonisce."

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–13: "Non ha l'huomo cosa più cara al mondo della libertà; anzi gli animali stessi, che pur non conoscendo le loro prerogative, incontrano più tosto la morte che cadere in servitù."

⁹⁷ This was to become the norm from the mid-16th century, thanks in particular to the English example of the Bridewell House of Correction, founded by Henry VI in 1552.

⁹⁸ Gereemek, *Inutiles au monde*, p. 60.

⁹⁹ Viaro, *La pena della galera*, p. 400f.

The ruling classes, both on mainland Europe and in England, recognized the galley's preventive and rehabilitative nature. Admiral Sir William Monson (1569–1643), praised the “terror of galleys” in his posthumous work *Naval Tracts*. He contended that not only were they the best deterrent to crime and the most efficient instrument with which to control and discipline, but they had also “saved so much blood that is unfortunately shed by the execution of thieves and criminals.”¹⁰⁰ Notable examples that illustrate the corrective and disciplinary function of deprivation of liberty linked to coerced labor include the Bridewell House of Correction, founded in London in 1555, and the Amsterdam *Rasphuis* established in 1596, both of which served as models for the Parisian *Hôpital Général* in the following century.¹⁰¹ The link between imprisonment and imposed labor is also evident in Tuscany after the abolition of galley labor in 1750 when convicts still serving their sentences were transferred to fortresses, where they continued to perform their sentences.¹⁰²

The significance attributed to the curtailment of liberty aligns with the theories of the social contract, such as those outlined by John Locke in the *Second Treatise on Government* (1689). Thus, for example, an edict published in 1784 on the management of the papal galleys—focused on the large number of forced rowers attempting to escape—explicitly stated that freedom was a natural human right. This right, however, could be legitimately revoked from any individual whose actions violated and threatened public order. Furthermore, the edict further emphasized that individuals had, in effect, renounced their natural right to freedom once they decided to form a society. As a result, attempting to escape the galley was not only a rejection of the punishment legally imposed but also a breach of the social contract.¹⁰³

In the same vein, while the concept of the deprivation of liberty as a punitive and re-educational tool was already present in early modern Italy, it is important to stress that re-education aboard the galleys was primarily focused on ensuring successful seafaring and military performance. Although in theory, convicts were expected to return to normal life once they completed their sentences, many ended their days in the galleys or remained excluded from society, labelled as

100 Cited in Angiolini, *La pena della galera*, p. 84.

101 Alessi, *Il processo penale*, pp. 141–143.

102 Angiolini, *La pena della galera*, p. 110.

103 ASR, Camerale III—Comuni, Civitavecchia, b. 846, f. n.n.: “Conciosiachè si oppongono a sì fatto titolo le primordiali convenzioni del contratto sociale, su cui poggia ogni civile società, e per cui il contravventore della legge legittimamente condannato, e caduto nella Forza del Principe suddito diviene, e Servo della pena avendo rinunciato alli diritti della naturale libertà per li vantaggi della vita sociale.”

“disgraced” individuals. The absence of reintegration efforts is particularly evident in the *Proclamation on the Government of the Papal Galleys*, issued on 19 December 1705. Article 70 of this document explicitly forbade any freed rower from entering Civitavecchia, arguing that their presence posed a threat to public order and tranquility.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, fully restoring these individuals to society was virtually impossible, as the very notion of reintegration presupposed the existence of structured resettlement policies which simply did not exist at the time. Nevertheless, this absence did not diminish the significance of depriving individuals of their liberty as a corrective tool in the penal practices of the early modern period.

4 Cultural discourse concerning the galleys

Galley life was widely perceived as a miserable existence. In popular imagination, *galeotti* were often depicted as wretched individuals, condemned to row in chains under inhumane and exhausting conditions. Contemporary sources, particularly the institutional reports, confirm the harsh reality of daily life for these convicts and slaves, with a high degree of violence and exploitation. These documents reveal a pressing need to maintain order on board, not only among the rowers as well as the officials, who were frequently accused of brutalizing and harassing the crew. Beyond this extreme violence, additional hardships included rough seas, diseases, and the perils of naval battles.¹⁰⁵ The sea’s unpredictability was a constant cause for fear and anxiety. Impossible to control or predict, bad weather could strike suddenly, often catching crews off guard. Even Saint Paul, as noted by Pantera, in his First Letter to Titus, emphasized the necessity for mariners to keep themselves in God’s good grace because of the danger of being at sea, constantly in a state “between life and death.”¹⁰⁶ A prime example of this peril is the

104 AAV, Misc. Arm. IV/V, b. 54, f. 106: “70. Considerando quanto sia pernicioso alla pubblica, e privata quiete la dimora in Civita Vecchia di quelli forzati, che dopo aver terminato il tempo della condanna sono stati sciolti dal Remo, volendo perciò opportunatamente provvedere d’ordine espresso della Santità sua ordiniamo, e comandiamo à qualunque Forzato, che posto in libertà debba subito sfrattare da Civitavecchia, e suo Territorio, sotto pena della galera per cinque anni da incorrersi irremissibilmente in caso di contraventione, considerate però le circostanze, e qualità delle persone, e cause di essersi ivi trattenuto.”

105 AAV, Fondo Pio, b.112, *Discorso in materia della salute di qual si voglia armata di mare e di terra*, f.333: “tre potentissimi nemici sono che ognuno di loro è bastante a ruinare una armata, per fare potente che ella sia il primo de quali è il turbato mare quando à fortuna, il secondo è l’infermità quando regnano, et il terzo è il nemico col quale si guerreggia.”

106 Pantera, *L’armata Navale*, p. 101.

storm that struck the Marseilles coast between 19 and 22 April 1569, resulting in the loss of five of the ten Florentine galleys anchored there.¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, the cramped conditions and long periods at sea often led to extremely poor hygienic conditions. Diseases were common, stemming both from poor sanitation and the practical impossibility of effectively separating the healthy from the sick, thus promoting contagion and the spread of epidemics. The situation worsened during times of war. During the Battle of Lepanto, for example, the sick rowers were made to lie directly on the deck, leaving them exposed to being trampled by the rest of the crew.¹⁰⁸ Finally, it should not be overlooked that the galleys were primarily military vessels, equipped to engage in naval warfare.

4.1 An infernal place: depiction of life onboard the galleys

The reconstruction of galley life—or at least its depiction—is also possible through the study of non-institutional sources. While rare, there are cultural sources such as memoirs and poems written in the first person by rowers themselves, evoking daily life within the galleys: a miserable, painful, and even infernal existence. Unquestionably, the most widely known of these is the autobiography by the Frenchman Jean Marteilhe, who was condemned to the galleys in the 18th century on account of his Protestant beliefs. The picture he paints is one of a painful existence, comparable to hell itself.¹⁰⁹ Although less well-known, there are also comparable accounts from Italy. The earliest dates back to 1577: an autobiographical manuscript report by Aurelio Scetti, addressed to Francesco I de' Medici. Scetti was a Florentine musician who, in 1565, was sentenced to life at the oar for the murder of his wife. His manuscript recounts the successful voyages of the Tuscan fleet during those years of his forced service. The author, through this narrative, explicitly sets out to incite pity and win the favor of the Grand Duke in hopes of securing his release.

Apart from Scetti's fascinating details of his personal trajectory, what is particularly interesting is how he describes his condition aboard the galleys. Life there is portrayed as desperate and painful, yet not without purpose. In line with his intention of pleasing the political authorities, his suffering as a galley rower becomes the starting point for the author's account of an experience of

¹⁰⁷ Monga (translated and edited by), *Aurelio Scetti*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁸ AAV, Misc. Arm. II, b.110, f. 386.

¹⁰⁹ Marteilhe, *Mémoires d'un galérien*.

growth, spiritual renewal, and catharsis. Just as the galley's misery had brought the narrator back to the spiritual light by freeing him from the darkness of his sins, Scetti hoped to be saved and reintegrated into the light—into society. To this end, he adopts the use of the third person, transforming an autobiographical narrative into a more universal exemplary tale of purification and conversion.¹¹⁰

A century later, in 1654, another convict aboard Lieutenant Lomellino's papal vessel described his galley-bound journey to the Levant—likely with the same intent of seeking grace and redemption in exchange for his suffering, thus also testifying to the effectiveness of life at the oar. While the author remains anonymous, the use of imagery and the Christian lexicon of mission and salvation prominently feature alongside descriptions of seafaring and battles against the Turks. It is reasonable to assume that this text was also written with the purpose of demonstrating to the authorities the writer's military and religious zeal, in the hope that it might help him in his quest for freedom. Indeed, the text appears to have been composed with the intent of being read, if not published, as evidenced by the author's direct appeal to the "benevolent readers."¹¹¹ To my knowledge, there has been no study or critical edition of this manuscript memoir.

Reflections on the harshness and misery of forced service in the galleys—often likened to death—can be found in a variety of literary works, occasionally in the most unexpected places, such as in literary collections primarily intended for entertainment. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are two rhymed poems preserved in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. The first, published in the 19th century under the title *Sforzadi alle galere* [Forced Convicts in the Galleys], is actually part of a larger composition on the Mediterranean arsenals by a Venetian named Battista Baldigara, who likely penned the work around 1562, during the early stages of galley punishment. Even at that time, galley service was considered the worst possible torture—some even argued that death would be a preferable alternative. The oarsman's life is depicted as sheer hell on earth, both because of the harshness of the conditions in which he had to live and his deprivation of freedom. He was reduced to an animalistic state, yoked to an oar and deprived of all agency—chained to his bench ever at the mercy of his masters' blows. The poem is made even more pitiful by the use of the first-person singular. Unfortunately, we have no biographical information about the author, though it seems safe to assume that his portrayal was more a product of poetic license than a genuine account from a former convict at the oar.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Monga, *Aurelio Scetti*, pp. 1–9.

¹¹¹ BCR, 34D11, *Scritture diverse e notizie appartenenti alle galere pontificie*, p. 262, ff. 167–251.

¹¹² BAV, Stamp.Cappon.V681(int.3), Baldigara, *Ragionamento di maraviglie*.

The second rhymed poem is the anonymous *Vita miserabile che fanno li poveri forzati delle galere in ottava rima. Ad esempio delli sfrenati giovani* [The Miserable Life of the Poor Convicts of the Galleys in Ottava Rima. As an Example for the Unrestrained Youth]. The poem's stated purpose—"that every unbridled youth may escape so much pain"¹¹³—was to highlight the harshness of the convict's life at the oar, aiming to warn society, and young people in particular, against committing crimes that could result in galley service. The poem is structured as a discourse addressed directly to an ideal reader.

Once again, galley life is depicted as a space of utter degradation,¹¹⁴ where physical torment and moral despair converge, mortal sin reigns supreme and social distinctions are obliterated in the face of justice.¹¹⁵ What makes this poem especially intriguing is that the author clearly knew the realities of everyday life in the galleys. He describes the clothing, the food—and in what quantities—the daily tasks, as well as the navigational difficulties they had to confront. Typically, the oarsmen were not sailors and were unaccustomed to life at sea. Their pleas were ignored and they were assigned the most grueling tasks—ones for which they were entirely unprepared and often lacked the necessary stamina.

Strict discipline was enforced, with officials even resorting to cutting off the noses and ears of thieves.¹¹⁶ Though not explicitly stated, we can infer that the author had been a convict—not only on account of the granular detail, but also because of the use of the first-person plural, especially when describing the excitement and desperation that gripped the crew as they set sail—emotions so intense that they made the rowers appear “frenzied.”¹¹⁷

If this were indeed the case, the text would have served an overriding didactic purpose—intended to convey repentance. Like Scetti's manuscript, it was likely written to win the favor of the political authorities by demonstrating that the author had learned his lesson and repented. Furthermore, it seems likely that the text was part of a broader political agenda to make citizens truly aware of what galley service entailed, using exemplary and brutal punishments as a deterrent. It is probable that the text was later edited and published, indirectly indicating how first-hand accounts of galley life had become integral to early modern popular culture, forming literary motifs. Indeed, the mutual references in these

113 BAV, Stamp.Cappon.V.681(int.16bis), s.n., *Vita miserabile*: “Acciò ogni sfrenato giovinetto, Possa fuggir da lui tanto dolore.”

114 Ibid., p. 78: “Se ritrova un’inferno in questo mondo, che un altro inferno non se può trovare, salvo che quello che giù nel profondo, Donde fa capo il peccator mortale.”

115 Ibid., p. 78 r–v.

116 Ibid., p. 79r–v. On the practice of *denasatio* see Groebner, *Defaced*, pp. 68–86.

117 Ibid., p. 78r.

texts confirm the persistence of cultural patterns of representation. This hypothesis is supported by comparing the texts preserved in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana with a Spanish anonymous poetic composition in stanzas of eight lines written in the early 17th century and published by Benedetto Croce under the title *La vita infernale delle galere* [The Infernal Life of the Galleys].¹¹⁸

Suffering became even harsher when life at the oar was experienced in captivity. It is noteworthy, for instance, that as early as the 15th century, Teseo Pini's *Speculum Cerretanorum* (1484–1486)—a work focused on depicting various categories of false beggars—highlighted the deep compassion evoked by the conditions endured by galley slaves. Among the many categories described in his work is that of the *accattosi*—beggars who feigned enslavement aboard Turkish galleys, claiming to have escaped and returned home, or who asserted that they had relatives captured by the Turks and sought alms to secure their release. Once again, Pini's description of daily life at the oar is vivid and detailed, underscoring the widespread awareness of how such a miserable fate could potentially strike anyone:

They begin to cry out, “*Allah, Allah, Allah, heber, elhemdu, lillahi, la illah, illelhac,*” and other words in such a strange tongue, while displaying long chains and irons, claiming to have been bound and to have escaped from the galleys. They seek to convince the common people that they endured severe beatings daily at the hands of the Turks, enemies of the Christian faith, showing certain marks on their flesh that they have skillfully fabricated. [...] They claim to have subsisted on dry bread, black biscuits as dark as the earth, and to have drunk water infested with vermin.¹¹⁹

As for captivity in the Italian context, we can consult the memoirs of William Davies—an English Protestant captured by the Tuscans in 1598 while sailing in the Aegean Sea as a ship's doctor on an English vessel carrying Turkish goods, and thus exchanged for an Ottoman ship and eventually sent to the galleys. His memoirs, published in London in 1614, recount nearly nine years of captivity—three years in the shipyards of Livorno, and later as a galley surgeon for almost six years, sailing as far as the Amazon in search of the mythical Eldorado.¹²⁰ He

¹¹⁸ Croce, *La vita infernale delle galere*, pp. 83–92.

¹¹⁹ Camporesi, *Lo “Speculum cerretanorum,”* p. 115: “Cominiano a gridare ‘Allah, Allah, Allah, heber, elhemdu, lillahi, la illah, illelhac’, et altre parole con sì strana lingua, e mostrare lunghe catene e ferri con cui dicono essere stati legati e dalla galera fuggiti, danno ad intendere al volgo d’aver ricevuta ogni dì grandissima quantità di bastonate da’ Turchi, inimici della fede di Cristo, mostrando certi segni che artificiosamente hanno fatto nelle carni. [...] Dicono d’aver mangiato pane secco, biscotto nero come la terra e aver bevuto acqua verminosa.”

¹²⁰ Davies, *Captivité of William Davies*, pp. 13f.

likened his time at sea—marked by physical and mental suffering—to hell on earth. “The misery of the galleys is beyond all judgment or imagination, no one would think that such torture or torment exists in the world, only those who suffer it.”¹²¹ Chained to their benches, the oarsmen were constantly exposed to the elements and to the violence of the officers day and night. During battles, they were compelled to endure gunfire by holding a cork in their mouths to stifle their screams of pain.

In this regard, a remark by the Tuscan commander Giovanni Paolo del Monte is noteworthy. In his report of the voyage to Negroponte in 1623, he recounts the battle with two Turkish galleys: “Where they fought for two hours, the sound of artillery and musketry was an incredible horror to our ears, the moans of the wounded aroused great pity, the darkness of the night increased their misery.”¹²² The suffering, the violence, and the hardships of the sea voyages were so unbearable that many slaves attempted suicide or plotted to murder their officers. Few followed through, however, for fear of the severe punishment that failure would bring.¹²³ Furthermore, as Prosperi noted, the horrors of Tuscan captivity are exacerbated by the fact that Davies—a Protestant surgeon—viewed Italians as a superstitious and idolatrous people, of a deceitful nature, and devoted to murder and lust—comparable, in his eyes, to the savages of the Amazon.¹²⁴

5 Galleys and vigilance practices in early modern Tuscany: the case of Livorno

Throughout history, the Tuscan port of Livorno has come to symbolize the already high level of mobility and interconnectedness that marked early modern Europe. The image of Livorno as an open and cosmopolitan port has, over time, become something of a myth.¹²⁵ As one of the central hubs of the early modern Mediterranean economy, Livorno quickly acquired the status of a “free port.” With the

121 Partner, *Corsari e crociati*, p. 105f.

122 The report is conserved in BAV, Stamp.Ferr.IV.8532 (int.4), *Fedel relazione mandata dall'Il-lustrissimo Signor Balio di Cremona C. Bernardo Vecchietti generale delle Galere della Sacra Religione Gerosolimitana Del viaggio, e presa delle tre Galeotte, Fuste, e vascelli d'Infedeli. Fatta dalle medesime Galere in Levante*, in Roma, appresso Ludovico Grignani, 1641: “ove si combattè per due ore con horrendi urli, al suon d'Artigliarie, e moschetti faceva nelle nostre orecchie un terrore incredibile, li lamenti delli feriti eccitavano compassione grande, il buio della notte ne accresceva l'affanno.”

123 Davies, *Captivitie of William Davies*, p. 20.

124 Prosperi, *Presentazione*, in Davies, *Captivitie of William Davies*, p. 11f.

125 See Prosperi, *Livorno 1606–1806*; Santus, “Il turco”; Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*.

promulgation of the *Livornine Laws* (1591–1593), the Grand Dukes of Tuscany committed themselves to welcoming all people of non-Catholic faith—“merchants of any nation, Levantines, Ponentines, Spaniards, Portuguese, Greeks, Germans and Italians, Hebrews, Turks, Moors, Armenians, Persians and others”¹²⁶—treating them with justice and protecting them from religious intolerance.¹²⁷ The city thus became home to a notably large Jewish,¹²⁸ Protestant, and Muslim presence—the latter found in the port both as merchants and, above all, as slaves captured and employed as rowers in the galleys.

In the early 17th century, Livorno also became a fortified settlement, a center for military raids against the infidels carried out by the Knights of St. Stephen. Cesare Santus’ book *Il “turco” a Livorno* (2019) successfully highlights the city’s paradoxical character—at once a fortress of Christianity and a free port. While the “Turk” continued to be an object of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination, the opportunities for encounters and cultural exchanges between Muslim slaves and Catholic citizens formed an integral part of everyday life in the city, illustrating that their integration into Tuscan society was indeed possible.¹²⁹

The *Bagno de’ Forzati* was a privileged site for such exchanges. In theory, its purpose was to isolate the galley slaves and convicts from society during periods when the vessels were not at sea. However, interaction with society was a daily occurrence, and slaves, in particular, enjoyed considerable freedom of movement—in fact, some were permitted to run shops and taverns in the city harbor. Livorno presents a compelling case for examining surveillance practices directed at the *galeotti*, precisely because of this relationship with the slaves and convicts, as well as the presence of the *Bagno de’ forzati*—a facility that, by its very nature and function, complemented the galley system. It thus represents an ideal context in which to explore the liminal status of *galeotti*, set apart from society and yet constantly in contact with it.

126 The text is quoted in Frattarelli Fischer, *La Livornina*, pp. 44–49: “mercanti di qualsivoglia nazione, Levantini, Ponentini, Spagnoli, Portoghesi, Greci, Todeschi et Italiani, Hebrei, Turchi, Mori, Armeni, Persiani et altri.” On the Livornine laws see Felici, *La Livornina*.

127 Ibid. However, the supposedly cosmopolitan and tolerant character of Livorno has been debated in recent years. As Frattarelli Fischer and Villani highlighted in “*People of Every Mixture*,” religious co-existence seems more appropriate than tolerance to describe the situation.

128 See Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*.

129 Santus, “*Il turco*,” p. 10f.

5.1 The rise of Livorno and the birth of the Medici fleet

Throughout the 17th century, Livorno emerged as the Grand Duchy of Tuscany's most important commercial and military port. This rise, however, stemmed from a strategic initiative launched a century earlier by Cosimo I (r. 1537–1569). Before this, Livorno had been little more than a fortified village of five hundred inhabitants—a garrison supporting the now-silted port of Pisa. After its brief occupation by Genoa (1406–1421) the site was sold to Doge Tommaso di Campofregoso for the enormous sum of 100,000 florins. Despite the swampy terrain, the House of Medici soon recognized its strategic and economic potential, and set about revitalizing and improving the city. Construction work began under Cosimo the Elder (r. 1434–1464), but it was only under Cosimo I that a comprehensive Medici project for Livorno took shape—driven in part by the need to compensate for the loss of access to the Pisan Gulf. In an effort to boost the local population, the Medici began granting economic incentives and legal immunity to those who relocated to the territories of Pisa and Livorno, beginning in the 1540s. This initiative formed a central part of their strategy to transform Livorno into a key hub for Mediterranean trade.¹³⁰

After a brief interlude in the 15th century, Cosimo I, recognizing the strategic importance of galleys in the Mediterranean's geopolitical landscape, decided to rearm the fleet. On 13 April 1547, the first galley of the Medici fleet docked at the Pisa arsenal. Initially, the Medici relied on the Ligurian navy for their technical and organizational skills. The Tuscan galleys were built by Genoese shipwrights until the end of the century, and their crews were composed almost entirely of Ligurian officers and oarsmen. The fleet's initially non-Tuscan character was further emphasized by the fact that Cosimo I, in order to equip the galleys, resorted to the *appalto*—also known as *assento* or *asiento* on the Italian peninsula—a system of private management whereby, by signing a contract, one party undertook to manage, arm, and finance the galleys, although the vessels themselves remained the property of the Grand Duchy.¹³¹

During its early years, the Tuscan navy, still composed of three-banked galleys—known as triremes—rowing *alla sensile*, followed a recruitment model that relied heavily on a majority of forced rowers, given that corsair activity remained relatively low. In 1555, the five galleys of the Tuscan fleet had a total crew of 768 oarsmen, of whom 535 were convicts and 234 were slaves. The first Tuscan

¹³⁰ Santus, “*Il turco*,” p. 16f. On the history of the rise of the port of Livorno, see Frattarelli Fischer/Papi, *Studi di storia*; Vaccari, *Il porto*, pp. 302–323.

¹³¹ Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 337f.

prisoners were condemned to the galleys in October 1547, while many more came from the territories of the Papal States. A law issued on 8 July 1542 ensured that blasphemers and sodomites were punished by being sent to the galleys.¹³²

Throughout the early modern period, blasphemy and sodomy were harshly condemned both legally, as crimes, and morally, as sins. Both were viewed as acts against God, and as such, needed to be punished to prevent divine retribution from being unleashed on the Grand Duchy's cities.¹³³ However, galley service was primarily reserved for repeat offenders and was typically not imposed for a first offense.¹³⁴ Repeat blasphemers were sentenced to two years at the oar, while recidivist "active" sodomites faced life sentences.¹³⁵ The sources make no mention of Tuscan convicts before 1547.¹³⁶ In 1547, galley service was extended to Romani people and vagrants, and gradually came to cover a broader range of serious offenses.¹³⁷ The most commonly punished crime was theft (20%), while it is interesting to note that acts of sodomy and vagrancy were relatively rare (1.1% and 0.6%, respectively).¹³⁸ The expansion of galley sentences was further facilitated by lowering the age of majority in criminal cases; it was reduced from 25 to 18, following a law passed in 1561.¹³⁹ Furthermore, many of those sentenced were tried by the Inquisition or came from the territories of the Papal States, although these were predominantly vagrants.¹⁴⁰

While crews aboard the Medici fleet later came to be largely composed of slaves, galley service continued to play a major role in Tuscan legislation. Over time, it was applied to an ever-widening range of offenses, and remained in force until 6 February 1750, following the final disarmament of the fleet's last two galleys in 1748. The law that abolished galley service also outlined the penalties that would replace it. A life sentence at the oar was replaced by branding the offender on both shoulders, public flogging, and perpetual exile. And yet, those

132 *Legislazione toscana*, vol. I, pp. 210–221, *Bando sopra la Bestemmia e la Sodomia del dì 8 Luglio 1542 ab incarnazione*.

133 *Ibid.*, p. 210: "che li vitii al tutto si spenghino, quelli massime che sogliono provocare a ire el sommo & onnipotente Dio: & conoscendo che la bestemmia è peccato che più offende sua Maiestà che li altri, dal quale procedono nel mondo turbolentie, & inopinati flagelli"; p. 211: "nefando vitio della Sodomia [...] Et volendo al tutto estinguerlo per la grande offese che se ne fa al sommo, & onnipotente Iddio, & al dishonore che ne resulta nell'universale."

134 *Ibid.*, p. 211f.

135 Grassi, *Sodoma*, p. 16.

136 Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, table p. 341.

137 Angiolini, *La pena della galera*, p. 95.

138 Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 341.

139 Angiolini, *La pena della galera*, p. 99.

140 ASF, MP, 2099, c. 21r, 19 giugno 1680.

originally condemned to the galleys for a limited term had their sentences commuted to an equal duration of public service, with the remaining time to be served in prison.¹⁴¹

In 1558, the Medici government, unable to conclude a new and profitable *asiento* treaty, decided to create an order of knights to manage their fleet. Negotiations began in 1560, and the agreement was signed by Pope Pius IV (r. 1559–1565) on 1 October 1561. The Pope approved the statutes at the end of January 1562, and on 15 March in Pisa, Cosimo I was officially proclaimed Grand Master of the Order of Santo Stefano.¹⁴² Created with the aim of targeting the commercial and military interests of the Berbers and Turks, the Order quickly began to finance itself through piracy. By capturing prisoners of war and enslaving them, corsair activities also provided a solution to the persistent and enormously difficult problem of finding enough manpower to enlist.¹⁴³ In 1570, slaves made up 23.4% of the rowers and convicts accounted for 53%. By 1680, however, only the *Capitana* galley had a crew composed of 56% slaves and 30.8% convicts.¹⁴⁴ According to Franco Angiolini, up until the first half of the 17th century, the Tuscan fleet was a major player in Mediterranean corsairing: between 1563 and 1693, some 16,000 slaves were captured by the Medici galleys.¹⁴⁵ In 1601, Turkish slaves accounted for about 20% of Livorno's population, a figure that dropped to 8% by the early 1640s, steadily declining as conflicts with the Muslim world diminished, along with piracy.¹⁴⁶

5.2 *Bagno de' Forzati*

The *Bagno de' Forzati* in Livorno was constructed between 1598 and 1604 by order of Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici; its design was based on the model of the *Bagni*¹⁴⁷ of Constantinople and Algiers. While no similar facility is documented in other continental Catholic ports, the concept of a *Bagno degli schiavi* was typical in large Mediterranean ports and was advocated by Giorgio Vasari in his treatise

¹⁴¹ Angiolini, *La pena della galera*, p. 95.

¹⁴² Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 342f.

¹⁴³ Frattarelli Fischer, *Il bagno*, p. 69.

¹⁴⁴ Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 345 f.

¹⁴⁵ Angiolini, *Il Granducato di Toscana*, pp. 39–61; *Slaves and Slavery*, pp. 67–82.

¹⁴⁶ Santus, *“Il turco,”* p. 42.

¹⁴⁷ Probably, the English term that corresponds most closely to the original meaning is “penal colony.”

on the ideal city of 1596. Vasari offered an erudite justification for such a facility—one that did not exist elsewhere in Christendom outside of Malta.¹⁴⁸

The *Bagno de' Forzati* functioned primarily as a prison compound where *galeotti* were confined at night and during periods when they were port-bound. Between 1598 and 1604 alone, roughly 3,000 forced rowers were imprisoned there.¹⁴⁹ Both the nature and function of this prison were complementary to those of the galley. As Father Filippo noted, it was constructed with the dual purpose of improving sanitary conditions for convicts—who would otherwise be “cramped like dogs in the galleys day and night”—and ensuring that they could not escape at night.¹⁵⁰

The entire compound covered an area of 6,000 square meters and consisted of two main buildings: the *Bagno* itself and the *Biscotteria*. The *Bagno* was a trapezoidal quadrangle built around a central courtyard, which housed a freshwater well and a cistern for washing clothes. On the ground floor of each side were dormitories for the crew of each of the four galleys. At the rear of these dormitories—except for St. Anthony’s dormitory—was a mosque where Muslim slaves could gather. A Catholic chapel was located within St. Anthony’s dormitory.

Above the dormitories were quarters for those officers in charge of the *Bagno*: the scribes, the captain, and also the doctors and apothecaries. The *Biscotteria*, in contrast, was the factory where the food for the convicts—a type of hardtack called *biscotto*—was produced by milling wheat stored in underground pits. In addition to food for the crew, white bread and other refined products were manufactured there and sold to the inhabitants of Livorno.¹⁵¹ Eventually, Livorno’s *Bagno* closed on 13 February 1750, following the peace treaties concluded with the Ottoman Empire and the Berbers. The slaves were freed, while the convicts were branded and put to forced labor in the city’s *Fortezza Nuova* and the Pisan Arsenal.¹⁵²

148 Frattarelli Fischer, *Il bagno*, p. 79.

149 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

150 Bernardi, *Relazione*, pp. 13–15: “che que’ poverelli stessero tutto l’anno di giorno, e di notte abbrancati come cani, e ristretti dentro una Galera [...] a fine dunque d’accomodare la ciurma delle Galere, e [perché] non potessero di notte tempo tentar la fuga, come facilmente può avvenire stando in Galera, [si decise] la costruzione d’una gran fabrica isolata per ogni parte e circondata da alte muraglie a guisa di fortezza.”

151 Santus, “*Il turco*,” pp. 35–39.

152 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

5.3 Life aboard a Tuscan galley: Control over convicts and slaves

We can reconstruct, to a certain extent, daily life aboard Tuscan galleys from the available sources, primarily letters, reports, travel diaries, and instructions written by and addressed to the galley officers. Most of these sources are housed in Florence's State Archives—in the *Mediceo del Principato* fond—under the heading “Livorno.” While numerous, these sources provide only a partial picture of reality, with few first-person accounts from the *galeotti*, so the records primarily reflect the perspectives of those in charge of managing the convicts. Due to the variety of documents in this archive, scholars such as Luca Lo Basso, Lucia Frattarelli Fischer, and Cesare Santus have partially analyzed this collection to study the construction techniques, navigation, and organization of the vessels and Livorno's *Bagno de' Forzati*.

The governors' overriding concern was that the naval crew and officers should behave appropriately. Strict discipline was enforced, guaranteeing that each individual could perform his duties and fulfill the position entrusted to him. The guidelines for operating the galleys during navigation emphasized that disorder on board should be strictly avoided: no fighting, gambling, blackmail, swearing, or any other misconduct, and above all, no escapes.¹⁵³ This focus on preventing fraud or violence equally applied to the officer class. Numerous orders were issued requiring them to treat the crews well, as they were considered the galleys' driving force and primary source of manpower. In particular, soldiers were explicitly ordered—under threat of being condemned to the galley themselves—not to beat convicts and captives without just cause.¹⁵⁴

Among the many forms of mistreatment convicts endured, extortion was likely the most widespread. Numerous *galeotti*, in exchange for a fee, were able to secure their release and depart with relative ease.¹⁵⁵ As Santus observed, similar “mechanisms of oppression and corruption typical of prison institutions and the servile condition” were prevalent within the galleys and at the *Bagno*.¹⁵⁶ Recognizing the gravity of the issue, ten of the thirty articles in *Costitutioni, et ordinationi dell'offitio del Capitano del Bagno di Livorno* specifically addressed the prohibition of exploitation and corruption.¹⁵⁷

153 ASF, MP, 2131, dossier 3, cc.n.n.

154 Ibid.

155 BCR, Ms, 34D18, *Memorie e scritture diverse appartenenti alle galere Pontificie e condannati nelle medesime Principalmente in tempo del tesorerato di mons. Lorenzo Corsini poi cardinale, e papa col nome di Clemente XII*, f. 35.

156 Santus, “*Il turco*,” p.119.

157 ASF, MP, 2132, dossier 7, cc.n.n.

In those cases examined by Santus, the most common motive for illegally extorting money from inmates was the desire for their release from chains, enabling them to leave the *Bagno* at their own discretion. Even more scandalous, however, were the demands for money from convicts and slaves who wished to engage in sexual relations with younger inmates.¹⁵⁸ In an effort to prevent disorder, a deeply paternalistic system of control emerged—one that balanced punishment, discipline, and the welfare of the crew. To ensure its effectiveness, a stringent system of vigilance was put in place to monitor the rowers, alongside the enforcement of a harsh justice, intended to make sure that “for fear of punishment, they would restrain themselves from committing any harm.”¹⁵⁹ Mutual surveillance and denunciation of wrongdoings—with severe and exemplary penalties for those who violated them—formed the twin pillars of the disciplinary framework governing rowers aboard Tuscan galleys.

Given that the various regulations concerning the control of convicts aboard Tuscan galleys largely repeat one another over the years, my observations will focus primarily on the manuscript volume contained in fascicle 2131 of the aforementioned fonds *Mediceo del Principato*, titled *Ordini da osservarsi nelle Galere del Ser.mo G. Duca di Toscana* (c. 1626). The issuing of these directives stemmed from the desire to prevent rowers and officers from behaving licentiously.

Aboard the vessels, the *galeotti* were under the authority of the *aguzzino* [overseer], whose primary responsibility was to supervise them. He was often assisted by a *mozzo* [deckhand], typically selected from among the slaves and convicts. To maintain order and discipline aboard, the authorities sought to discourage crew members from committing crimes. To this end, they aimed to establish a permanent system of mutual control and denunciation, and to introduce an extremely harsh regime of corporal punishment. For example, mariners or soldiers who dared to blaspheme were punished with a minimum of two months and a maximum of one year at the oars, while convicts and slaves faced flogging and, in cases of recidivism, tongue-piercing. No exceptions were allowed: punishment had to be rigidly enforced. To identify both offenders and their crimes, all crew members were instructed to report any offenses they witnessed. Rowers chained to the benches were tasked with watching over their fellow oarsmen, as well as those seated on the benches directly in front, behind, and beside them. Any violation of this directive resulted in two months' imprisonment. It is noteworthy

158 Santus, “*Il turco*,” p.130.

159 ASF, MP, 2131, dossier 3, *Ordini da osservarsi nelle Galere del Ser.mo Gran Duca di Toscana*, c.n.n.: “nell’avvenire per timor delle pene s’habbino a ritenere di far male, e in questo modo provvedere alla sicurezza de buoni e reprimere l’insolenza de cattivi.”

that, while blasphemy and sodomy were among the earliest crimes in Tuscany to be punished by time in the galleys, sodomy receives little or no mention in the directives that have been analyzed. Conversely, recommendations against blasphemy were consistently present.¹⁶⁰

Furthermore, it was strictly forbidden to provoke conflicts—whether verbal or physical. Fights in particular were strongly discouraged, and if they erupted aboard, both the galley captain and the admiral had to be notified. To prevent rowers from escaping, continuous shifts of watchmen were required both during the day and at night. The sailors on watch were forbidden to allow any unauthorized person to board or leave the vessel, and anyone who disobeyed orders or, even worse, was negligent, such as falling asleep during their watch, faced punishment—including loss of pay and other corporal penalties such as a galley sentence.

In a similar vein, regular patrols aboard were scheduled to ensure that no convict had gone missing. Officers were instructed to report any absence due to illness, death, or escape.¹⁶¹ To ensure greater horizontal control, spies—known as *trombi* or *buonomini*—were recruited from among the forced rowers, with the specific task of communicating to the captain everything that transpired amongst the crew.¹⁶² What was being implemented was a decentralized system of information focused on the actions and behavior of rowers, grounded in a system of horizontal and vertical denunciation.

Any rower who saw, heard, or knew of a fellow convict who had violated any orders was compelled to notify his superiors; failure to do so would result in punishment akin to that meted out to other offenders. On the vertical level, this system was based on the information gathered by figures such as the *aguzzini*, as well as by soldiers, officials, doctors, or surgeons—all of whom were tasked with communicating any relevant information to the captain. This obligation to report, together with the active participation of all crew members, was fully recognized as essential to establishing an effective system of control.

When not at sea, slaves and convicts were confined to the *Bagno*, though they were not required to remain locked up at all times; in fact, they enjoyed numerous opportunities to go outside. This was especially true for slaves, who, being unchained, could partake in daytime economic activities such as running taverns and workshops in the dockyard. Convicts, however, were primarily used for forced labor, especially in the city's arsenal.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 353.

This arrangement underscores the transitional nature of the *Bagno* and its inhabitants, as well as their physical and figurative isolation from society, even as they continued to maintain close relations with it. At the end of each working day, however, everyone had to return to sleep in the compound, where the gates were locked and monitored by the warden—the *Custode del Bagno*.¹⁶³

Although originally conceived as a male-only setting, women were often forced to stay there as well. These women were slaves—captured or bought on behalf of the Grand Duke—who were temporarily housed in a wing of the *Bagno* while awaiting sale to private individuals. Ideally, the women were to be kept apart from the men. However, at least on two occasions—likely due to space constraints—women and men were locked in together, leading to sexual promiscuity and violent assaults on the enslaved women.¹⁶⁴

As Lucia Frattarelli Fischer noted, the administration of the *Bagno*, like that of the galleys, was rooted in militaristic discipline and the systematic use of institutionalized violence and corporal punishment.¹⁶⁵ According to the *Bagno*'s rules, guards were responsible for maintaining law and order, following directives from the *aguzzini*, higher officials, and the *Bagno*'s captain. The *Bagno*, as outlined in these instructions, was to operate as a fortress, with its guards expected to be exceptionally vigilant, for, in this case, the enemy was within. The prisoners were considered the worst of the worst and were constantly seeking to escape.¹⁶⁶

Despite strict supervision and corporal punishment, disorder and violence were rampant. An examination of the edicts governing daily life within the institution reveals that stolen and smuggled goods such as opium, salt, and tobacco circulated freely within the compound.¹⁶⁷ The crimes committed there were similar

¹⁶³ Bernardi, *Relazione*, p. 16.

¹⁶⁴ Salvadorini, *Traffici e schiavi*; Herzig, *Slavery and Sexual Violence*; Cultural Commemoration; Chizzolini, *Enslavement*.

¹⁶⁵ Frattarelli Fischer, *Il bagno*, p. 82.

¹⁶⁶ ASF, MP, 2132, dossier 7, *Costituzione, et ordinazione dell'Offitio del Capitano del Bagno*, cc.n.n.: "L'offitio del Capitano del Bagno è di grandissima importanza, poiche alla diligenza e fede sua, viene commesso notabilissimo numero d'infedeli, et anco cristiani mal fattori, ritenuti in servitù, della quale procurano sempre con ogni industria di liberarsi, e perche il Bagno, è simile a una fortezza, dove si ritiene la sudetta Gente destinata al servizio pubblico, e delle Galere, il Capitano di questo luogo può aguagliarsi più presto a castellano di fortezza che a custode di carcere, poiche questo tiene li rei in custodia a fine solamente che i colpevoli possano punirsi, e gl'innocenti liberarsi, e quelli che già giudicati cristiani ò infedeli Schiavi tutti applicati all'uso delle Galere [...]e dev'essere ancora più vigilante e diligente, visto che il castellano per guardarsi dai nemici di fuori si avvale di soldati e gente d'honore, e giurata, et il capitano del Bagno vi tiene dentro l'inimici infedeli, e mal fattori, con pochi, e deboli strumenti di chiavi, e catene."

¹⁶⁷ Frattarelli Fischer, *Il bagno*, p. 83.

to those aboard the galleys: violence, gambling, blasphemy, and so forth. Murders and brawls between slaves and convicts were frequent, especially those triggered by excessive drinking. Wine was included in the *galeotti's* rations, and even the “Turks,” forbidden by their religion from drinking, partook.¹⁶⁸

In April 1651, the slave Solfara di Moratto from Scio, without provocation, brutally stabbed the slave Mostafà di Arsano di Cecimeche twice while the latter was shaving another convict, leaving him critically wounded. When asked for a motive, Solfara simply answered: “Wine.” The perpetrator was punished severely at the commissary’s discretion.¹⁶⁹ In another incident, in 1692, a drunken slave in the Turkish dormitory stabbed a comrade in the kidneys after being told to stop drinking. As the wound was not life-threatening, the punishment was limited to a hundred lashes and a foot ring, for there was no greater humiliation for a slave than being unable to leave the *Bagno*.¹⁷⁰ Tension within the institution was so intense that violence often erupted for the most trivial of reasons, such as saying a single word too many. Reports indicate that sodomy was common within the *Bagno* due to the pervasive promiscuity and the relative freedom among the prisoners.

In addition to behavioral control, there was the pressing need for strict spiritual oversight, as the rowers were depicted as highly immoral and blasphemous individuals. Religious guidance was particularly urgent because of the large number of Muslim slaves within the *Bagno*, as the authorities feared that they might influence—or rather, “infect”—Christian convicts with Islamic heresy. The stereotype of the diabolic and infidel “Turk,” devoted to lust and black magic, was widespread.

Consequently, Muslim slaves had to be rigidly controlled and, when necessary, punished. To judge moral and religious offenses, the Pisan Inquisition’s tribunal was established circa 1560, remaining in place until its abolition by a *motu proprio* initiated by Grand Duke Peter Leopold on 5 July 1782. The Pisan Sant’Uffizio was based in the Convent of St. Francis and presided over by judges of the Order of the Friars Minor. During the 1620s, a General Vicariate was created with extensive powers and autonomy, and was located in a chapel within the *Bagno*.¹⁷¹ The effort to enforce Christian moral teachings reached a critical turning point with the arrival of the Capuchins, led by Father Ginepro of Barga, on

¹⁶⁸ Santus, “*Il turco*,” p. 123.

¹⁶⁹ ASF, MP, 2132, part II, dossier 8, *Liburniensis Iurisdictionis*, n. 14, *sommario* 6.

¹⁷⁰ ASF, MP, 2102, c.n.n.

¹⁷¹ Santus, “*Il turco*,” pp. 55. On the origin of the Roman Inquisition, see Prodi, *storia giustizia*, pp. 92–97.

1 December 1677. Their core objective was to “induce those wretched people to live as good Christians and in fear of God.”¹⁷² The Capuchins’ approach in the *Bagno* combined popular evangelization and missionary activity.¹⁷³

5.4 *Vigilanti di Maria*

The need for greater and more consistent control of the *galeotti*—to regulate their conduct in the *Bagno*—led the Capuchins to create, on 8 December 1678, a special corps of convicts dedicated to denouncing their fellow inmates, known as the *vigilanti di Maria* [Vigilantes of Mary]. Comprising only four prisoners, they were described as being “among the most God-fearing,” who, under the leadership of a Chief Vigilante, were entrusted with monitoring their comrades day and night. Their duty was to report any illicit actions, speech, or even thoughts they became aware of, ensuring that those who committed criminal or immoral acts were duly punished.

The *vigilanti* were specifically tasked with preventing “nefarious sins” such as blasphemy, lechery, sodomy, and heresy.¹⁷⁴ In serious cases, they had to notify the Vicar of the Inquisition, who would then initiate a trial. Minor blasphemies were punished with the pillory, while sodomy was penalized with shackles and the cane. They were also held responsible for the infirmary in the *Bagno* compound, ensuring that sick rowers were treated with compassion and were carefully guarded at night to prevent escape.¹⁷⁵ This vigilance corps extended its duties to the galleys during the sailing season, with each vessel equipped with four vigilantes responsible for reporting any “dangerous” behavior or language they were aware of. The *vigilanti* themselves, however, were not beyond scrutiny. They were subject to strict monitoring by a guardian and a governor from one of the four companies of clerics operating in the compound, who ensured their diligence and moral conduct.

172 Bernardi, *Relazione*, p. 32: “ridurre quella misera gente a vivere da buoni Cristiani e col timore di Dio.”

173 See also Santus, “*Il turco*,” pp. 57.

174 Bernardi, *Relazione*, p. 33: “Hebbe il buon P(ad)re notizia, che tra quella Ciurmaglia del Bagno vi si commettevano molti peccati nefandi, per ovviare a’ quali prese spedito con consenso di S.A.R. di costituire quattro Forzati per Bagno, de’ più timorati di Dio, e più esemplari, et accorti, i quali giorno, e notte invigilassero.”

175 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

In a report by Father Philip, the *vigilanti* are described as trustworthy, faithful, and sincere. Yet given that they were condemned criminals, it is reasonable to question how much these commendatory terms reflected reality, or to what extent they served propaganda purposes? Father Philip's account concludes with a celebration of the Capuchins' religious zeal, extolling their dedication to both the physical and spiritual well-being of the inmates. According to his report, they were so effective that "it almost no longer looked like a prison—a receptacle for infamous and dangerous people—but a Cloister of modest and devout Religious, both in their speech and in their deeds."¹⁷⁶ Here, the report's idealistic and eulogistic tones become apparent, particularly when set against the countless cases of violence that continued to surface in the archives, even after the Capuchins' arrival.

5.5 Punishing crimes in a liminal context: a clash of jurisdictions

The image of Livorno that emerges from the archival sources—particularly from the criminal records—depicts a typical early modern seaport: a hub not only for merchants but also a haven for soldiers, galley slaves, convicts, and prostitutes, where crime was commonplace. One of the primary causes of unrest on Livorno's streets was the copious quantities of wine consumed in the port's numerous taverns,¹⁷⁷ and violent conflict among galley rowers was, therefore, not confined to the galleys or the *Bagno*—it frequently spilled into the city streets.

Convicts and slaves had numerous opportunities to venture out and actively participate in Livorno's daily life. Though integrated into society, the *galeotti* remained a marginalized group, and this ambiguous status often led to jurisdictional conflicts between the overlapping authorities charged with managing them. Formally, the *galeotti*, as public slaves, were under the authority of the Grand Duke's navy officers. When not at sea, they were placed under the control of the *Auditore delle Galere* and, while in the *Bagno*, under the authority of the *Capitano del Bagno*. However, the existence of an autonomous authority independent from that of the city's governor was resented by the *Capitano del Bagno*, as Livorno's governors frequently claimed the right to judge and prosecute those *galeotti* who committed crimes on urban soil.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 113 f: "che quasi non più rassembra un Bagno di Galeotti, che vale a diré un Ridotto di gente infame, e per lo più facinorosa; ma ben sì un Claustro di modesti, e divoti Religiosi, tanto nel parlare, che nell'operare."

¹⁷⁷ Santus, "*Il turco*," pp. 120–122

To clarify roles and avoid ongoing confusion between the civil and military authorities, Cosimo II issued a decree on 3 July 1609, specifying that the galleys' commissioner had full authority over crimes committed aboard the vessels and within the *Bagno*, while the governor would preside over crimes committed in Livorno itself. Even so, the governor's jurisdiction was limited: in cases of minor infractions—those not involving death or mutilation—the parties involved could resort to an out-of-court settlement. Only if that process failed did it become necessary to appeal to the governor.¹⁷⁸

The 1609 Edict did not completely resolve the issue, and even in 1613,¹⁷⁹ and again in 1635, Ferdinand II issued a *motu proprio* reaffirming the limitations to be placed upon the governor's authority. Even in those cases falling within his jurisdiction, he still had to operate in conjunction with the *Auditore delle galere*.¹⁸⁰ Despite the Grand Dukes' interventions, the matter was never definitively resolved, and the two authorities continued to clash even into the 18th century. A case from 1731 illustrated the enduring conflict. A storehouse slave was fatally wounded and was arrested by Spanish soldiers, who detained him in their guardhouse. Whereupon the *Bagno*'s officers requested the slave's return so he could be punished as an example for the entire crew. The Spaniards, however, refused. Instead, they handed him over to the Governor who imprisoned him and prepared him for trial. The galley authorities then appealed to the Grand Duke, arguing that, because the incident only involved slaves and no citizens, it should not fall under the Governor's authority. Most importantly, the authorities wanted to avoid the publicity associated with the governor's trials, expressing a desire to punish the misdeeds of slaves and convicts, whatever their nature, "without publicity and solemnity," away from the indiscreet eyes of the population.¹⁸¹

To complicate matters, there was a third authority to which galley rowers were subject: the ecclesiastical. The Catholic Church maintained a presence within the *Bagno*, with the Vicar of Livorno reporting to the Inquisition of Pisa. Since Cosimo I's reign, relations between secular and ecclesiastical authorities had been fraught. Despite an apparent rapprochement between the two, the Tuscan Church sought to maintain a degree of autonomy from the Papal Curia by creating an ecclesiastical structure aligned with the Medici. Bishops were officially appointed by the Pope but chosen from a shortlist of three candidates submitted by the dukes, who thereby had the opportunity to present individuals more closely

178 Ibid.

179 ASF, MP, 2130, cc.n.n.

180 Santus, "*Il turco*," pp. 120–122.

181 ASF, MP, 2116, cc.n.n.: "risolto senza solennità."

aligned with their interests and thus secure valuable allies.¹⁸² Nonetheless, ecclesiastical courts consistently sought to preserve their authority, and it was not uncommon for them to interfere in the affairs of both the Governor and the *Auditore delle Galere*. Because jurisdictional boundaries among civil, military, and ecclesiastical authorities were never clearly defined, criminal punishment in Livorno remained a liminal, contested practice.¹⁸³

6 The Papal States and the galleys of Civitavecchia

From the late 15th century onward, after a series of alarming events such as the Ottoman conquest of Otranto in 1480, the Papal States found themselves in conflict with the Ottomans and the Berbers, and increasingly felt the need to arm a small squadron of galleys to defend their coastline. One of the first measures taken was the promulgation of a decree in 1486 by Pope Innocent VIII (r. 1484–1492) to arm a galley to defend the merchant navy against pirate raids in the Tyrrhenian Sea.¹⁸⁴ The threat of corsair aggression, along with the possibility of organizing a crusade against the Ottomans—who by then had advanced into the Balkans—led the Pope in 1492 to order the arming of six more galleys in Civitavecchia, which soon became the Papal States' leading military port.¹⁸⁵ This laid the foundation for what would later be called the “permanent squadron.”

Once the fleet was established, the usual problems associated with recruiting crews arose. To make up for the small number of volunteers, the papal crews were mostly composed of forced oarsmen. The stated aim of defending Christianity against the threat of the “infidel Turks,” as well as the high percentage of convicts aboard, led to the decision to provide each galley with chaplains responsible for caring for the sick, enforcing discipline, and ensuring the crew's religious education.¹⁸⁶ Thus, the Papal galleys became the setting in which, for obvious reasons, the program of moral reform and behavioral discipline for the rowers—aligned with Catholic doctrine—was most clearly enacted. The *galeotti* were placed directly under the authority of the Roman Church, and, in particular, under the spiritual authority of the Cardinal Vicar,¹⁸⁷ who entrusted them to the daily pastoral care of

¹⁸² Cavarzere, *Cosimo I*, p. 82.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 52–55. See Chizzolini, *Navigating Ambiguities*.

¹⁸⁴ Filioli Uranio, *La squadra navale*, p. 44.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48f.

¹⁸⁶ Guglielmotti, *La Squadra Permanente*, p. 23.

¹⁸⁷ On the jurisdiction of the Court of the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, see Bonacchi, *Il governo delle anime*; Rocciolo, *Della giurisdittione del Vicario*; *Il tribunale del cardinal Vicario*, pp. 175–184.

the Capuchins. Aboard the galleys, the temporal and spiritual dimensions were perfectly aligned. Care and control of the soul, and care and control of the body, were two sides of the same coin. This was perfectly in keeping with the profound importance—both real and symbolic—attached in early modern Rome to the concrete realization of earthly discipline and justice. Given the dual nature of papal authority, earthly justice in the Papal State became an anticipation of divine justice; and disciplining the body was both a consequence of, and a prerequisite for, disciplining the soul.¹⁸⁸

6.1 The port of Civitavecchia and the *squadra permanente*

Civitavecchia was the leading port of Papal States, not only commercially but also politically and militarily, serving as the training ground for the Papal Militia.¹⁸⁹ Known in ancient times as *Centum Cellae*, Civitavecchia has been a prominent town since Etruscan times due to its strategic location.¹⁹⁰ During the mid-15th century, it was enlarged and given new defenses by Popes Callistus III (r. 1455–1458), Pius II (r. 1458–1464), and Paul II (r. 1461–1471). After the discovery of alum shale in the Tolfa Mountains in 1462, the papacy began systematically modernizing the port and making it more accessible. Between 1508 and 1513, during the pontificate of Julius II (r. 1503–1513), the architect Donato Bramante was commissioned to work on the fortress and the harbor. While all the popes were committed to improving the port's facilities, it was Pope Clement VII (r. 1523–1534) who initiated a systematic program of improvements, describing the port as the “portal to the Papal States.”¹⁹¹

In 1621, to ensure Civitavecchia's further development and future prosperity through trade, Pope Urban VIII granted the city “free port” status. This stipulated that no ships or goods landing in the port could be subject to customs duties or *gabelle* [taxes], and that all merchants could store their goods in warehouses without having to pay any additional charges, except for a minimal payment to the *custodi dei magazzini* [warehouse keepers]. Moreover, no one would be prosecuted

188 Prodi, *Storia giustizia*, pp. 62–64. On the dual nature—temporal and spiritual—of the Papal monarchy, see also Prodi, *Il sovrano pontefice*.

189 Calisse, *Civitavecchia*, p. 235.

190 Moroni, *Dizionario*, Vol. 13, p. 298f.

191 Filioli Uranio, *La squadra navale*, pp. 126–128.

for debts incurred or sentences received outside the territories of the Papal States.¹⁹²

As early as the 16th century, the popes adopted the *assento* system to maintain the small squadron of galleys defending the Roman coastline. The first contract, signed in September 1511, did not specify whether the vessels were state-owned or captain-owned. Regardless, the Apostolic Chamber granted the captain the right to levy a 2% tax on all goods passing through Roman ports and seaboard, in exchange for the obligation to patrol and defend the coast against piracy.¹⁹³

The foundation of what would later be known as the *marina pontificia* [Papal navy] dates back to the pontificate of Pope Sixtus V (1585–1590). The Battle of Lepanto revealed the need for Christendom to rely on a permanent and sufficiently large fleet, with an adequate bureaucratic and fiscal apparatus. On 22 January 1587, the Pope issued a decree establishing a congregation tasked with creating and maintaining a permanent fleet. Having ensured the “defense of public tranquility on land,” it was now time to guarantee “common security at sea” against the threat of piracy.¹⁹⁴ This was commemorated on a medal minted in 1588 to honor Pope Sixtus V’s zeal for arming the navy, with the inscription: “*Sicurezza per terra e per mare* [Security on land and sea].”¹⁹⁵

Thus, ten galleys were armed, and the pope introduced the “galley tax” that same year, distributed across the provinces and capitals.¹⁹⁶ From 1606 to 1644, the Papal navy came under the direct control of the *Reverenda Camera Apostolica* [the Apostolic Chamber], with the management of the fleet entrusted to private individuals via a system of contracts. However, this management system was short-lived, and by 1670, the pontiffs resumed delegating galley operations.¹⁹⁷ For the Pope, the establishment of a squadron of galleys had twofold significance: on one hand, to defend the temporal territories against external aggression; on the other, to control the seas, the primary vector for trade.¹⁹⁸ Although the fiscal management of the galleys evolved over time, the moral and military oversight of the

192 AAV, Misc. Arm. IV/V, b.54, f. 32: *Privilegii, & Essentioni concesse à quelli che condurranno mercantile nel porto di Civita Vecchia*.

193 Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 383f.

194 Guglielmotti, *La squadra permanente*, p. 22: “e restituita oramai dentro terra la pubblica tranquillità, sì che ciascuno senza tema può riposare all’ombra del frascato nel suo campo, fa mestieri adesso provvedere alla sicurezza comune dalla parte del mare, perché le nostre riviere superiori ed inferiori, per quanto è possibile, sieno garantite dalla prepotenza dei pirati e ladroni.”

195 Ibid., p. 38.

196 Filioli Uranio, *La squadra navale*, p. 94.

197 Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 388f.

198 Ibid., p. 95.

rowers was strictly regulated from the outset, ensuring that “the conduct of the Roman fleet might be praised everywhere.”¹⁹⁹

6.2 Condemned to the Papal galleys

The legal provision for a galley sentence in the Papal States was established relatively early compared with other Italian states. Though not yet systematic, references to the use of convicts to man the galleys can be found as early as February 1502. In the absence of Muslim slaves, Cesare Borgia (r. 1475–1507), the famous *condottiero* and son of Pope Alexander VI (r. 1492–1503), ordered that every prisoner in Rome be conscripted as a rower. Additionally, he decreed that the large number of vagrants arrested for begging in the city streets should also be made to serve.²⁰⁰

Throughout the early modern age, the galley sentence became one of the primary punishments for vagrants, who were often regarded as a serious social “plague” to be eradicated.²⁰¹ The official provision for using convicts to man the crews of the Papal galleys dates back to 1511. In the edict issued by the Captain of the Galleys, published that same year, the various courts of the Papal States were explicitly instructed to commute the death penalty to a sentence requiring the condemned to man the oars for at least one year.²⁰² Over time, the galley sentence evolved into a formal punishment, a sentence that could be imposed for a limited period, or even for life—as evidenced by the *Libro dei condannati* [Convicts’ Book], in which galley captains were required to record each convict’s full name, along with the duration and reason for their sentence.²⁰³

Thus, from 1523 onward, the forced *galeotti* became the primary component of the crews in the Papal galleys. In 1655, for example, out of 1,512 rowers, 79.8% were convicts, while 12.6% were slaves, and 7.6% were volunteer rowers. Similarly, in 1726, convicts made up 70.8% of the crew, slaves 24.5%, and the *buonavoglia*, only 4.7%.²⁰⁴

199 Guglielmotti, *La squadra permanente*, p. 23: “in ogni luogo tutti abbiano a lodarsi del congegno della squadra romana.”

200 Guglielmotti, *La guerra dei pirati*, Vol. I, p. 21.

201 On the medical metaphor of social deviance as a plague to be eradicated, see Pastore, *Le regole dei corpi*, pp. 19–21.

202 Guglielmotti, *La guerra dei pirati*. Vol. I, pp. 96–109.

203 *Ibid.*, p. 256.

204 Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo*, p. 391. As we read in BCR, Ms, 34B13, *Raccolta di notizie e scritture diverse sopra le galere pontificie, armamento di vascelli, fatto dal papa Alessandro VII per soccorso*

The convicts had been sent from all the courts in the Papal States. Accompanied by magistrates, they were brought to the collection point set up in Civita Castellana and, after no more than three days, continued their journey to Rome to await their final sentence. From there, they were sent to Civitavecchia.²⁰⁵ The transfer to Civitavecchia took place during daylight hours, through the streets and alleys of the city, providing an exemplary demonstration of justice to the rest of the population. Often, however, the effect was counterproductive: frequent attacks by the populace aimed to free the condemned, with whom they sympathized.

By the late 18th century, it was decided to abandon this public spectacle for greater security, and the condemned were instead brought to Civitavecchia at night.²⁰⁶ Following the establishment of the *Carceri Nuove* in 1656, criminals sentenced in Rome were temporarily locked up in one of the prison's cells, specifically called the *Galeotta*, while awaiting transfer.²⁰⁷

6.3 Life aboard the Papal galleys

From the fleet's earliest years, sources attest to the extreme disorder and lack of discipline aboard the galleys. Desertions were frequent, as were violent quarrels that often led to bloody confrontations. As in Tuscany, much of the violence on the Papal galleys was attributed to excessive drinking.²⁰⁸ Despite the strict control to which they were supposed to be subject, sources indicate that rowers experienced an unusual degree of freedom. Apparently, the ship's guards were easily corrupted, and often, for a fee, convicts were free to leave the ship at any time, and even to sleep with whomever they pleased—a liberty that frequently gave rise to sinful acts. Convicts and slaves often spent their days gambling by playing cards or dice games. Gambling was considered an abominable practice that not only disrupted order aboard but also acted as a precursor to unrest, as rowers, caught up in the heat of the games, were prone to lose all self-control, both in words (blasphemy)

di veneziani contro il turco, fortezza e porto di Civitavecchia, Istruzione del provveditore delle galere, f. 942, in 1656 on the five Papal galleys the total number of convicts was 1063, slaves was 153, and *buonavoglia* was 113.

²⁰⁵ Benedetti, *Tribunali e giustizia*, p. 508.

²⁰⁶ Fosi, *La giustizia del papa*, p. 156f.

²⁰⁷ Calzolari/Di Sivo/Grantaliano, *Giustizia e criminalità*, p. 31f.

²⁰⁸ Calisse, *Civitavecchia*, p. 327.

and deeds (brawls). Fighting—whether armed or unarmed—was strictly forbidden and punished severely.²⁰⁹

Indiscipline was not confined to rowers alone; officers were also often accused of taking advantage of the oarsmen's misery, extorting money from them, as well as beating and humiliating them without just cause. Consequently, the Superintendent of the Galleys was tasked with not only making sure that the galleys were well-maintained and adequately supplied, but also with making sure the galley officers exercised their duties honestly and diligently. As one directive emphasized:

It is essential that the Superintendent, with prudence, vigilance, and diligence, continually oversee and provide for whatever is necessary or may arise from the various and ongoing contingencies that might occur at any moment, and he must always remain vigilant [...] to ensure the galleys are kept in good order and fully supplied.²¹⁰

The guards, and in particular the *aguzzini*, became a significant source of concern. Given their direct responsibility for the custody of the rowers, they were expected to be vigilant day and night to ensure that those in their charge lacked nothing and, above all, that they behaved properly and did not attempt to escape. They were cautioned, however, not to abuse the power entrusted in them, and only to use force when absolutely necessary.²¹¹ Even Guglielmotti, in his treatise, notes how it was often necessary for higher authorities to intervene to address officers' abuses, frequently in response to denunciations and petitions from the crew themselves.²¹²

The General of the Galleys of Civitavecchia, in his annual orders and regulations, explicitly warned galley masters, captains, and officers of every rank not to extort money from the *galeotti* with promises of a reduction in punishment or in exchange for more favorable treatment. Similarly, galley officials were strictly forbidden to accept any offers from rowers, as this was considered bribery, punishable by dismissal from service, and could subject them to an arbitrary amount of

²⁰⁹ AAV, Misc. Arm. IV/V, b. 54, f. 85.

²¹⁰ BCR, Ms, 34B13, *Raccolta di notizie e scritture diverse sopra le galere pontificie, armamento di vascelli, fatto dal papa Alessandro VII per soccorso di veneziani contro il turco, fortezza e porto di Civitavecchia, Istruzione del provveditore delle galere*, ff. 1–56 (11 giugno 1652): “Però è necessario che esso provveditore con la prudenza, vigilanza e diligenza supplischi invigilando continuamente quello bisogna e può occorrere per gli diversi e continui accidenti che ogni momento possono nascere e deve anco tenere sempre avvisato [...] che siano sempre le galere bene in ordine e provviste quanto è necessario.”

²¹¹ ASF, MP, 2131, dossier 6: *Ordini da osservarsi nelle Galere del sermo G. duca di Toscana*.

²¹² Guglielmotti, *La squadra permanente*, p. 48.

corporal punishment—including sentencing them to the galley itself for ten years. Furthermore, the prohibition of improper behavior such as blasphemy, gambling, fighting, and so forth extended to all crew members. Ironically, but not surprisingly, the primary form of punishment was a sentence to the galleys.²¹³

Among the Papal galley officers' methods of harassment, we find mention of the practice of forcing galley oarsmen to undress and pose—probably for a price—as freaks for the amusement of visitors, mostly women. Unfortunately, the sources do not specify the nature or status of these women.²¹⁴ In an attempt to remedy this desperate situation, numerous decrees were issued to ensure stricter discipline aboard, both from a moral and behavioral standpoint—two aspects which, though conceptually distinct, were inextricably intertwined. In fact, as we read in the preface to the annual proclamations on the management of the Papal galleys: “Good governance of the pontifical galleys require an exact and punctual observance of both the Christian religion and good morals, as well as of the discipline and duties proper to each one.”²¹⁵

To achieve this goal, it was necessary to discipline the crew and punish any transgressions with maximum severity and exemplary force. The orders issued aboard the Papal galleys differed little from those on the Tuscan galleys. Here, too, the captains had to ensure that disturbances such as theft, escape, fights, gambling, or sodomy did not erupt. Likewise, the guards were required to be upright and refrain from extorting any money from the convicts in exchange for favors. The mechanisms used to enforce discipline were similar: the creation of an efficient apparatus of vertical and horizontal control and denunciation, and the threat of financial or corporal punishment to discourage crime.

For example, if an officer—whether a captain, a *comito*, or an *aguzzino*—failed to notify the Governor of Civitavecchia of a brawl or a riot, he could, at

213 AAV, Misc. Arm. IV/V, b.54, ff. 85–87.

214 BCR, Ms, 34D18, *Memorie e scritture diverse appartenenti alle galere Pontificie e condannati nelle medesime Principalmente in tempo del tesorerato di mons. Lorenzo Corsini poi cardinale, e papa col nome di Clemente XII*, f. 35f: “Quando si conducono donne o signore a vedere le galere fanno spogliar nudi li forzati e gli fanno far diversi giochi, ò come dicono essi li buffoni, e burattini per dare spasso alle signore.”

215 In the AAV, all the texts of the proclamations published at the beginning of each new governor's mandate for the period 1668–1715 are preserved in Misc. Arm. IV/V, b. 54, ff. 85–123. The incipit of these edicts is always the same and, in case, changes only in minor details: “Il buon governo e cura delle Galere pontificie richiede più esatta, e speciale osservanza così della religione Christiana, e buoni costumi, come anche dell'obbedienza al servitio, e fattioni, alle quali ciascuno sarà eletto, e destinato, onde con la piena & assoluta autorità del nostro offitio, e per ordin espresso havutone à bocca della Santità di nostro Signore papa Clemente Nono ordiniamo, e commandiamo sotto le infrascritte pene.”

the governor's discretion, be fined 50 *scudi* and sentenced to five years in the galleys. A similar punishment was imposed on galley surgeons and their assistants who, having treated prisoners with wounds, infirmities, or mutilations clearly caused by fighting, failed to report them.²¹⁶ In cases of bribery and extortion committed by officers, the penalty—beyond dismissal from duty—was a ten-year sentence to man the oars. To ensure compliance with this prohibition, governors often encouraged convicts to denounce offenders, in return for which they were promised impunity, mercy, or a financial reward if they came forward voluntarily.²¹⁷

In response to the increasing number of escapes, time-limited sentences for those caught were doubled, while life-sentenced slaves or rowers faced the death penalty.²¹⁸ The fear of escape and of convicts gaining freedom unlawfully became a near-obsession. Ultimately, this led, in 1770, to the formation of a new corps of guardians, tasked with monitoring the crew both in port and at sea, day and night.²¹⁹

Despite the numerous and meticulous regulations, order and discipline aboard the galleys were apparently lacking, as can be inferred from the series of proclamations issued by the Commissioner of Galleys between 1668 and 1715. The earliest of these was published on 22 February 1668, contained 68 articles;

216 Ibid.: “8. 8. Li Comiti, Sottocomiti, Agozzini & altri rispettivamente debano, succedendo alcun delitto ò scandalo, denunciarlo alla nostra Corte subito sotto pena di scudi 50. E di anni cinque di galera, & altro ad arbitrio &c nelle quali pene incorreranno li Barbieri delle Galere, loro Barbierotti & altri che cureranno feriti, stroppiati, e altri offesi non li denunciando nel modo sudetto.”

217 Ibid.: “17. E perché si è trovato che alcuno benché ne Offitiale, ne Minsitro è sì temerario, che per estorcere denari, promesse, & obblighi, ò altre cose à forzati, & altri di Galera promette farli ottenere gratie, libertà, ò in tutto, ò in parte, ò altri alleggerimenti di pena, ò pure officij, ò cariche col fingere, e dare intendere haver emzzi, & amicizie atte à tali impetrations; Si proibisce à qualsisia di qualunque stato il dare, promettere, e far'obblighi per le sudette cause sotto pene corporali gravi ad arbitrio nsotro, e quanto à quelli che faranno, è procureranno tali estorsioni la pena sarà della Galera per anni 10 & altre à nostro arbitrio, e per venire à più precisa cognitione di simili delitti si promette l'impunità perdono, e premio à quelli che spontaneamente riveleranno, e denuntieranno li Contraventori del presente Capitolo per il quale sarà la prova privilegiata con ammettersi ancora quelli che dalle leggi comuni fussero à ciò stimati inhabili.”

218 Ibid.: “25. E per ovviare coll'accrescimento delle pene alle fughe dei forzati, à altri, si notifiche che se alcun forzato fuggirà dalla Galera, ò altri luoghi dove stasse, ò fosse mandato per ordine de Commananti incorrerà ipso facto nella pena della riduplicazione del tempo per il quale fusse stato condannato per altro, e della vita se sarà per altro forzato in perpetuo, ò schiavo benché fusse ripreso per strada, ò altrove nell'atto, & attentato, ò procuramento di fuga benché non perfetta.”

219 ASR, Serie Bandi, b. 100, 1770, I semester, f. V.

the final one on 8 August 1715, included 77 articles. Over time, not only were new regulations added, but several existing articles were supplemented with more precise provisions and harsher penalties—particularly in response to the apparent rise in escape attempts. One notable example is the edict of 15 January 1709 issued by the Navy Commissioner General Carlo de Marini, specifically to address the rampant issues of sodomy and blasphemy, which had reportedly plagued galley crews since the Battle of Lepanto.²²⁰ Whereas the 1668 proclamation imposed life at the oars for blasphemers—or one hundred lashes for those serving life²²¹—the 1709 edict introduced a more extensive system of denunciation and surveillance. This included the threat of flogging for uncooperative rowers and demotion for negligent officers.²²² The escalating volume of regulations and the severity of the associated punishments not only reflected heightened vigilance over disruptive behavior, but also betrayed the authorities' inability to enforce discipline. The frequent re-issuance of regulations aimed at curbing specific practices and offenses serves as indirect evidence of their persistence.

6.4 Spiritual care

In addition to military discipline, there was an urgent need to enforce spiritual discipline aboard the galleys, whose objective was to “serve God through the proper administration of the sacraments, and to reform morals whenever necessary.”²²³ It was essential not only to ensure that the crew attended confession and received the sacraments, but also to re-educate the *galeotti* in the principles of morality and the Christian faith.

Catechesis began with the chaplain's obligation to celebrate Mass and have the convicts recite prayers according to a fixed schedule.²²⁴ Galley time was thus structured around a rhythm of liturgical time: even before navigation or military training, spiritual exercises shaped the daily routine. Mass signaled the start of each day, while reciting the Hail Mary signified its conclusion. Saturdays were reserved for reciting the litanies. Pastoral care, however, also legitimized tighter control over the crew—evident in the introduction of special registers for Confes-

²²⁰ AAV, Misc. Arm., II, b. 110, ff. 394–396.

²²¹ AAV, Misc. Arm. IV/V, b. 54, f. 85.

²²² *Ibid.*, f. 105.

²²³ ASVR, Atti della segreteria, b.74, *Giurisdizione dell'e.mo vicario sopra le galere pontificie ed, in Civitavecchia, sopra l'ospedale di S. Barbara e su di alcune chiese (1722–1773)*, f. 49.

²²⁴ AAV, Misc. Arm. IV/V, b. 54, f. 85.

sions and Communion from the pontificate of Alexander VII onward.²²⁵ This was hardly a novel development, but rather the maritime extension of long-established practices in daily life throughout society at large. Following the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), parish priests were required to maintain lists of the names of those who had fulfilled their annual obligation to confess—a prerequisite for Easter Communion. From the late thirteenth century onward, the use of *schedulae confessionis* [confession slips] became widespread. These personal documents confirmed whether an individual had attended confession and was eligible for communion. Over time, the Church's drive to monitor the faithful extended to recording excommunications, baptisms (especially after the Council of Trent), marriages, and funerals, following the adoption of the Roman ritual in 1614. The *status animarum*—parish style registrars listing baptized individuals—also existed aboard the galleys.²²⁶ The meticulous recording of convicts' participation in the sacraments became a key tool in reinforcing moral discipline.

The vigilance exercised by the religious aboard went well beyond spiritual matters. In the aftermath of the Battle of Lepanto, their responsibilities broadened to include the monitoring of criminal or immoral behavior. Chaplains were not only expected to denounce the faintest suspicion of unethical and heretical conduct, but also to serve as models of rectitude. According to the instructions issued to chaplains during the Cyprus War, they were tasked with teaching Christian doctrine to the crew—referred to as a form of spiritual medicine, and regarded as the only true remedy capable of reforming and converting souls.²²⁷

This drive to convert galley crews became increasingly evident during the 18th century when the Jesuits—who replaced the Capuchins as spiritual directors of the crews—embarked upon serious missionary activities on Civitavecchia's galleys. These religious missions were organized down to every last detail, from the Jesuits' arrival in the city—they were supposed to be four in number—to their departure. Efforts were made to align these missions with Easter, ensuring that the two ecclesiastical commandments—annual Confession and Communion at Easter—could be fulfilled simultaneously. The overriding concern was to

225 Ibid., f. 106; ASVR, Atti della segreteria, b. 74, *Giurisdizione dell'e.mo vicario sopra le galere pontificie ed, in Civitavecchia, sopra l'ospedale di S. Barbara e su di alcune chiese (1722–1773)*, ff. 273–278.

226 Groebner, *Identità*, p. 67f.

227 AAV, Misc. Arm. II., b. 110, ff. 370–373, *Istruzioni del molto Ill.re Sig. D. Marniese à gli Preti, frati, e persone religiose che anderanno nell'armata del ser.mo S.V. Don Gio. D'Austria et principalm.te agli Preti [...] delle Galere*. As Michele Camaioni has aptly observed in *Pulpiti*, p. XIII: the expression “to convert souls” denoted not only the conversion of non-Christians to Christianity, but also the transition from one Christian confession to another.

have convicts repent for their sins. To achieve this, they needed to be convinced of the gravity of their crimes through preaching about the shamefulness of sin, purgatory and its punishments, and by insisting that God patiently await the repentant sinner. Yet, should the sinner fail to repent, God would punish him more severely on the Day of Judgment. For this reason, severe penances were not to be imposed—no matter how much they were deserved. Meekness was seen as the best means to guide the sinner to mend their ways; the process had to appear voluntary, not imposed from outside.²²⁸ The entire population of Civitavecchia participated in the celebration of Masses, processions, and sacraments, engaging actively with the significance of the events—especially during the 1716 mission which culminated in the conversion of four Protestants.²²⁹

6.5 Control of the body, control of the soul: the *Governatore di Civitavecchia* and the *Vicario di Roma*

As in Livorno, the ambiguous legal status of the *galeotti* in Civitavecchia often led to misunderstandings—if not outright conflict—among the legal authorities. The situation was further complicated by the dual nature of oversight exercised aboard the galleys. Chaplains, for example, frequently intervened in matters beyond pastoral care and exercised authority similar to that of captains, which only exacerbated tensions.

The temporal governance of Civitavecchia was entrusted to the Governor, who himself was subordinate to the Governor of Rome.²³⁰ Under the pontificate of Innocent XII, it was decided that the Governor would be assisted by a prelate from the curia, holding the rank of protonotary, who was to be appointed in accordance with the instructions of the pope.²³¹ In theory, the Governor's authority extended to almost all legal matters. In practice, however, exceptions were frequent. Certain groups—most notably the clergy—remained subject to other tribunals, such as that of the diocesan bishop residing in Viterbo. The *galeotti* were formally under the authority of the Governor of Civitavecchia. Initially, however, galley crews were overseen by a separate official—the *Auditore delle Galere*. To resolve the numerous disputes arising from this overlap of authorities, the of-

228 ARSI, Fondo gesuitico, manoscritti, n.10, *Breve istruzione Per quelli che vanno Alla Missione delle Galere*.

229 ARSI, Rom. 138. ff. 61–63, *Breve relazione delle missioni fatte in Civitavecchia il 1716 per ordine di nostro signor papa clemente XI. Missione alle galere pontificie*.

230 On the Governor of Rome see Fosi, *La giustizia*, pp. 21–23.

231 Calisse, *Civitavecchia*, p. 445.

fice of *Auditore* was abolished in the early 17th century, and responsibility for convicts was transferred to the Governor of Civitavecchia, who then also assumed the title of “General of the Papal Galleys.”²³²

Conversely, spiritual oversight of the *galeotti* fell under the ecclesiastical authority of the Roman Curia.²³³ In Civitavecchia, which was part of the diocese of Viterbo, the Vicar of Rome exercised authority over the galleys whenever they were docked in port—and even at sea, so long as they were within a hundred miles of Civitavecchia. His authority also extended to the Ospedale di Santa Barbara in Civitavecchia, which was designated for the care of convicts and slaves. Elsewhere in the city, galley rowers and personnel fell under the ecclesiastical authority of the Bishop of Viterbo.²³⁴ Both the Vicar and the Bishop were responsible for approving and licensing confessors to serve aboard the vessels, and ensuring that chaplains properly fulfilled their duties, especially in administering the sacraments.²³⁵

²³² Ibid., pp. 451–452.

²³³ See Rocciolo, *Della giurisdittione del Vicario*, pp. 35–71.

²³⁴ ASVR, Raccolta di notizie di vario genere sui Diritti, giurisdizione e prerogative del vicariato di Roma, 1650–1740, tomo 55, ff. 678–679.

²³⁵ ASVR, Atti della segreteria, b. 74, *Giurisdittione dell'e.mo vicario sopra le galere pontificie ed, in Civitavecchia, sopra l'ospedale di S. Barbara e su di alcune chiese (1722–1773)*. At the opening of the tome there is a *Breve relazione di quel ch'è seguito nell'esercizio della giurisdizione spirituale dell'E.mo Vicario di Roma sopra le galere pontificie, l'Ospedale di S. Barbara ed alcune Chiese di Civita Vecchia* which has been transcribed in Rocciolo, *Della giurisdittione del Vicario*, pp. 350–352.