

Queer space in seventeenth-century Lisbon: centres and peripheries

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The capital of the Portuguese maritime world empire in the seventeenth century was Lisbon, located on the eastern coastline of the Iberian peninsula. The city was the major focus of assembling fleets to set off for Brazil and the Indies, the seat of the monarchy and royal government and also the heart of the Portuguese inquisitions. The Lisbon Inquisition listed in the Edict of the Faith the "abominable sin" sodomy as an offence which should if known be denounced to it. Book V, title XIII, of the legal code, the Ordenações Filipinas pointed to sodomy and bestiality as crimes, and even added masturbation (molicies) as a grave offence which could be punished with sentence to the galleys. The consequence of that system of jurisprudence was the records of the Inquisition which have survived into the twenty-first century and which are preserved in the National Archives of Portugal in Lisbon. These are denunciations, many of which were not followed up, preliminary enquiries to see if arrest was justified, and then the full trials. Sodomy was only one of various offences denounced to the early-modern Inquisition, particularly that of apostasy to Judaism of individuals who had Jewish antecedents.

The Portuguese records comprise a remarkable source for the history of homosexual behaviours between men. These are overwhelming about male same sex encounters: there is no trial of a woman accused of participating in sodomy. The historian of Queer Space thus has written evidence of sexual activities between males long before the emergence of a modern Portuguese gay and lesbian movement in the years following the restoration of democracy in 1974.

The historian trying to recapture elements of the sexual geography of early-modern Lisbon must be conscious of the limitations as well as the strengths of the Inquisition sources. They were not organized with spatial considerations in mind but in establishing sexual practices. The reader of the privately published book by Asdrubal d'Aguiar in the 1930s was told that homosexuals in Lisbon of that time were to be encountered:

on Liberty Avenue, marquês de Pombal place, D. Pedro IV place, the Terreiro do Paço, Chiado, S. Pedro d'Alcantara and the Sodre Quay (p.22)

The gay tourist of the twenty-first century might consult the printed map of Lisbon or the internet websites with one district

highlighted, the Bairro Alto, and list of establishments available in the gay bookshop and bars.

However in the seventeenth-century such guide documents did not exist. There were locations that reappeared in the records: thus a Madeiran priest who lived on rua de Pão met in 1611 a previous sexual partner at the Palace Square where he was accompanied by a sixteen year old boy who was offered for sodomy in exchange for dinner for all three. (National Archives of Portugal Lisbon Inquisition document, henceforth IL2303) In general terms the area by the Tagus riverside and the royal palace, including the Ribeira where various ship building craftsmen operated, was a loitering area and cruising ground. Manuel Teixeira described "how he the confessant was to be found on the Palace Square in a house near the stile with Luis d'Almeida who is more than forty five years old, with a big body, who was married twice and lives near the tile yard at St. Vincent Without / se achou ele confitente nesta cidade no Terreiro do Paço em umas casas que estão sobre os Couceiras com Luis d'Almeida de Brito que será de mais de quarenta e cinco anos de idade, grande de corpo, que casou duas vezes, e vive no telheiro [tile covered shed] de São Vicente de Fora..." and went on to describe acts of sodomy in which he was receptive to the older nobleman. (IL10328) Two men "being alone and with the friendship and easyness which they had because of having both comitted the sin of masturbation agreed to comit also that of sodomy, and being already at the start of night when the stairway was dark / e estando sós pela amizade e facilidade que já de antes tinham de haverem cometidos ambos o pecado de molicies ad invicem se vieram a concordar em virem a cometer também o de sodomia, e sendo já a boca da noite em que a escada estava escura" and Domingos sodomized him. (IL945)

There was no concept of a homosexual identity but knowledge of sexual practices. Sodomy was said to be a result of temptation by the devil (called the demon). The sexological vocabulary appeared in the documents often with a distinction between effeminate men (fanchonos) and sodomites, e.g.: "he was lodged in the house of the said Simão Gomes because they had an illicit friendship according to what was said because the same Simão Gomes is a procurer of youths although not known whether for sodomy or for fanchono things, and being both of them with their britches down / se agazalhava em casa do dito Simão Gomes por terem ambos ilícita amizade segundo se dizia

porque o dito Simao Gomes é alcoveteiro de moços nao sabe se para sodomia se para fanchonices, e estando ambos eles com as calças descidas..." (IL6554) A priest in his early 30s was denouncing in September 1643 a soldier he sodomized in the house and bed of an old priest where they all got very drunk on wine and when the old priest awoke and asked what were they doing and he told him masturbation (molicias): he added he sodomized Jacome on three other occasions, and Jacome did him once with ejaculation (semente), and he said that he had given Jacome some stockings and money on several occasions. The soldier was arrested in December. He confessed to the sexual encounter with the priest and also with another man on several occasions, and after an interval of a year the man having by then married penetrated him in his shop. (IL 5103) In 1682 a twenty-one year old confessed to sex with various priests from the Belém monastery where he was housed including father António de Campos 6 or 7 times he masturbated and talked of French kissing "tongue in mouth/lingua na boca"). Various depositions made it plain that this young man was having sex in the cells of individual monks. (IL6118)

The individual either came to the Inquisition to give a voluntary confession or was investigated because he had appeared in the testimony of another. The accused was not told by the Inquisitors who had denounced him or of what. He did not have access to the previous witnesses who were called. Once he had understood the charge and started to confess he would try to escape punishment. In the phallo-centric Mediterranean sexual system obloquy was strongest against the receptive partner in sodomy who accepted an intra-anal orgasm with seminal discharge. There is a great stress in the trials on whether seed had been ejaculated inside or outside of the "rear vase."

Much testimony was denial of receptivity: the other partner had withdrawn, or while in a sexual encounter it was inter-femoral frottage, or mutual masturbation. The Inquisitors made great fuss about active or passive in the sentences. Sunday 17 September 1662 on the Terreiro do Paço numbers five and six in the list of those "processed to hear their sentences in the public Act of Faith/que sairam a ouvir suas sentenças no Auto publico da Fé" were a 26 year old Moor by birth, baptised, native of the city of Morocco (meaning Ceuta presumably) and a resident of Lisbon who was convicted, had confessed and was the sodomizer and was whipped and sentenced to five years in the galleys. The next on the list was a 22 year old Joao Rodrigues, a mulatto slave, bachelor born in Benavente and a resident of Lisbon, convicted, confessed and receptive in sodomy who was also punished with a whipping and six years in the galleys. (ANTT Book 435 Conselho Geral, fol. 103 r/v)

One can raise the question of the contemporaneity of historical investigation, or the way in which current susceptibilities affect understanding of the past. The inquisition records show the strong emphasis on the age stepped relationships with disadvantaged youths among those sodomized. The documents can be examined in order to define a list of genital practices, or of a sociology of those involved, or of psychological considerations about the sincerity of regrets, or of locations for interactions. It is the latter which concerns us in this paper. These are the cruising grounds of the early modern city on one hand, and on the other places where gay sex could take place. This could be a moving point like a coach like the witness who recalled a second encounter with a nobleman in the Asias street at night with the curtains drawn the said dom Alvaro committed again

the same sin "with him the confessant again this time receptive /sendo ele confitente também desta vez paciente..."IL806. We should be aware of the limitations on privacy in the early-modern city. The houses of priests were those where women would not be expected at night. The most elaborate description of a queer household was that contained in the trial of Santos de Almeida. There are references to his sex life in a trial of 1630 and a second trial in 1644 thus stretch from c. 1624 to the 1640s: he has enough money to have a house on the calçada de São Crispim near the Colegio of the Irish fathers - approximately where the present Escadinhas are - and to get boys there, particularly in the 13 to 20 age range, including runaways like Manuel Gomes of 1640. He was chaplain of the royal chapel of Santa Barbara which was further up the hill in the Castelo of São Jorge.¹ He figured in other trials from the 1640s as fellating adolescents. (IL8183), IL6587.

In his house on rua da Crasta in São Nicolau parish a priest sodomized a teenaged shoemaker having masturbated with him for years before that. (IL 4418) On the other hand in inns it was considered usual for two men to share bedding. There were also the opportunities in the city provided by poor street lighting. There was no centre for queer space in the sense of a designated place or district although the royal palace and its environs teemed with pages, servants, guards, attendants, and those who loitered. A nineteen year old met a priest in the garden of São Domingos and went from there to a house for sexual activity for which the priest paid him two reales. IL8232 Peripheries were spaces like fields beyond the city where couplings could take place.

The punishment in Lisbon of those found guilty of sodomy was in some cases very public. Verdicts could range from the extreme of the death penalty to being whipped through the streets, sentenced to exile and the confiscation of property. In the case of an execution the prisoner was given over to the secular authorities and the corpse was burnt. The executions could perhaps involve burning alive as was certainly the fate of some people accused of apostasy from Christianity to Judaism. More commonly those guilty of sodomy were exiled to Brazil or to Spain, or sentenced to serve in the galleys. It has been shown that the Lisbon auto-da-fé like that in other Catholic cities, did not have an immutable fixed ceremonial but it was altered to heighten the theatricality of the procession.² The Estaus Palace of the Inquisition dominated the principal square of the lower city. The adjacent church of Dominic was used to celebrate rites in connection with reading out the sentences of those found guilty and wearing the painted vestments with the insignia of their offences. On the square by the river side stands were erected for spectators to hear sermons and watch punishments. There was also the suspense of calling upon the condemned to recant and repent.

The centre of early-modern Lisbon was thus a site of memories of punishment for those men and youth who fell foul of the Inquisition for homosexuality. Streets and river-side cruising grounds also recalled public ceremonies of shaming and degradation. It was the very area mentioned in an edict of 1642 as being the repair of many vagrant youths to be found near the riverside, the slaughter house and the palace square.³ These were not only involved in petty crime but were also eligible as hustlers.

CONCLUSION

The Inquisition documentation about sodomy shows a shared knowledge of a sexual geography of the city among military personnel, hustler adolescents and errand boys, pages and others. This might include some latrines like those at the cathedral. The walls of the castle and the market area near the royal palace were obvious cruising zones. In the early-modern city privacy for sexual activities was rare, and hence the mention in the Inquisition byelaws of the offence of providing lodgings for this. The housing of priests like that of St. Nicholas parish less than ten minutes walk from the Inquisition palace provided both a window from which the cleric called out to young men and the bedroom in which he sodomized them. Social disapproval made unthinkable egalitarian domesticity in seventeenth-century Lisbon.

See considerations in David Higgs (ed.) *Queer sites: gay urban histories since 1600* (1999), and also Stephen Whittle (ed.) *The margins of the city: gay men's urban lives*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1994, HQ76/.M234/1994.

¹ This chapel had initially at the time of Afonso Henrique been called Sao Miguel and then “mais tarde, deram-lhe a invocacao de Santa Barbara. Ja como tal era conhecida em 1707, quando se publicava o Sanctuario marianno, que a descreve”. Julio de Castilho, *Lisboa antiga: bairros orientais* ... Lisboa, 1936, 2a ed. vol. iv, 39.

² Francisco Bethencourt, *História das Inquisições: Portugal, Espanha e Italia*, Lisbon, Círculo de Leitores, 1994, 195-258.

³ Bill M. Donovan, “Crime and Punishment, Old Lisbon” *Portuguese Studies Review* vol. 5, no. 2, Fall-Winter 1996-97, 62 & note 40.