

Between Piety and Sin: Zaragoza's Confraternity of San Roque, Syphilis, and Sodomy*

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Destape. With this word Spaniards refer to the sudden explosion of liberal attitudes towards sexuality in the 1980s after the death of Franco and the advent of democracy. After years of state-imposed censure and control of public displays of sexuality, the genie was out of the box and Spain witnessed a sudden liberalization of sexual mores. From risqué sexual depictions in film to open prostitution in the streets, from women's increasing assertion of sexuality to a thriving gay community, from sex-change clinics to wild orgies in the Ibiza nights; Spaniards swiftly transformed their society into an internationally perceived haven of hedonism. And yet, religiosity—that quality traditionally associated with the Spanish nation, if perhaps negatively exaggerated—still thrives. The road to Santiago abounds with pilgrims even today. Popular participation during Holy Week—even if we cynically overlook Seville as a tourist caricature—remains enthusiastic and extensive. An internet search on the words “confraternidad” and “hermandad” reveals reams of websites dedicated to local confraternities throughout the country. On any given Sunday, as witnessed by yours truly, one can observe families and senior citizens filing out of mass into a local square, and in an unperturbed fashion walking by various young couples engaging in amorous behaviour so explicit as to be shocking to a North American public.

When assessing this phenomenon, the ever observant Spaniards will refer to the existence of “two Spains”—a pious and a liberal one. Others will remind us of the decades of Francoist repression that stifled sexual mores. Yet, to a historian, the sudden and easy irruption of sexual behaviour into a society still largely shaped by religious undertones suggests other long-term factors as possible contributors to this seeming paradox. After all, an assessment of early modern Spanish society yields similar results. The success of the Counter Reformation, the popular support for the inquisitorial control of heresy, and the strength of popular religious devotion have all

* The research for this article has been made possible by a doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and a research grant from the Program for Cultural Cooperation between Spain and the United States.

1 For an excellent analysis of the local impact of Counter Reformation measures see Nalle, *God in La Mancha*. William Monter, among others, has extensively documented the cooperation of the local populace in inquisitorial programs in his *Frontiers of Heresy*. Those interested in the development and strength of Spanish popular religiosity may turn to Christian, Jr., *Local Religion*. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory* has provided an outstanding analysis of baroque spirituality from a novel point of view. For the ever expanding scholarship on the role of confraternities in local Spanish life see Flynn, *Sacred Charity*, and Mantecón Movellán, *Contrarreforma y religiosidad popular*.

been analysed by scholars.¹ Likewise, a mere glimpse into Spanish sexual mores during this period reveals a wealth of openly public sexual practices that, in purely religious terms, would have been classified as extremely sinful. From the large number of illegitimate children to the widespread existence of extra-marital arrangements, from popular sexual literature to the often very public nature of homosexual relationships; early modern Spaniards could not but witness, and often participate in, what their preachers defined as sinful sexual behaviour.² Rather than concentrate on what may be an unrealistically rigid contrast between permissive and religious attitudes, I propose to assess this phenomenon—this easy coexistence between sexuality and religiosity—as a multi-causal process embedded in the complex structure of early modern religiosity. An analysis of the confraternity of San Roque in Zaragoza in early modern Spain reveals the desire for the moral reformation of the sinful, the influence of popular conceptions of sexuality, and the need for the visibility of sin to validate a religious self-identity as three variables that contributed to the coexistence of piety and sin in its daily working atmosphere.

The confraternity of San Roque was founded sometime in the late sixteenth century to bring together the assistants, surgeons, male nurses, and nurse-practitioners who worked in Zaragoza's largest and most important hospital, the Hospital Real y General de Nuestra Señora de Gracia.³ The hospital fell under royal jurisdiction and patronage and, as such, the crown appointed its lay and religious governors. A

2 Poska, "Getting Out of Marriage" shows how local religious culture in Ourense tolerated extra-marital sexuality despite strong ecclesiastical admonishments. For the often slippery slope between legitimate and sinful sexual practices see the seminal collection of essays by Redondo, ed., *Amours légitimes*. In terms of sexual literature, see, for example, the humorous and wildly explicit anonymous satire known as the *Carajicomedia*, literally the "Comedy of the Cock," published in 1519 as part of the *Cancionero de obras de burlas provocantes a la risa* (an excellent modern edition of the poem can be found in *Cancionero*, ed. Carlos Varo). The tale of a former playboy, Don Fajardo, whose massive appendage and amorous abilities had been celebrated throughout the realm, and his quest to regain his past virility includes a variety of encounters with prostitutes whose names possibly referred to Queen Isabel. This sexual poem must have been well known, for later authors referred to its characters without fear of misunderstanding. Thus, a member of Philip II's court published a poem in the *Cancionero General de Amberes* (1557) where he refers to various prostitutes from the *Carajicomedia* such as La Varga, La Leona, La Guerra, La Mendez, and La Correa. See Domínguez, ed., *Cancionero*, 29. An excellent example of a publicly known homosexual relationship is that of the Master of Montesa, tried for sodomy in 1575, and his companion, Martín de Castro. Witnesses testified that the Master kept Martín in luxury as payment for his sexual services. Martín himself bragged to inquisitors that he would "ride" only rich men and that in the Master's house he enjoyed great power and received many gifts (Archivo Histórico Nacional [hereafter AHN], Inquisición, libro 936, 87r–100r). In a less publicized yet equally telling instance, a Valencian market guard who was engaging in sexual intercourse with an adolescent unabashedly introduced the young man to his neighbours, saying that the boy served him like a woman whenever he wished in exchange for some money (AHN, Inquisición, libro 941, 365r–371v).

3 Fernández Doctor, *Hospital*, 113.

charitable lay association, the confraternity participated heavily in the daily provision of medical assistance, even if it was not involved in hospital management and supervision. The confraternity's purpose, its *raison d'être*, made assistance to the sick in the hospital its sole duty. The name of San Roque itself was no arbitrary coincidence, but rather reflected a long-standing tradition of confraternities specifically created to conduct charitable work on behalf of the sick. As Maureen Flynn has pointed out, numerous confraternities developed to participate in health care activities acquired San Roque as their patron saint, given his fame as protector of the sick.⁴

Although the religious duty of charity placed San Roque within the traditional understanding of confraternities as voluntary providers of health care, some organizational factors reveal somewhat anomalous peculiarities. While the assistants, probably the largest group in the confraternity, received no salary whatsoever from hospital administrators, nurses, nurse-practitioners, and surgeons were paid for their services. The surgeons, given their expertise, received a compensation commensurate with their importance within the hospital's structure. Both nurses and nurse-practitioners, however, had to make do with mere nominal wages, symbolic tokens that forced them to take their trade into private homes in their spare time to supplement their meagre income.⁵ Nonetheless, these small anomalies that deviate from a view of confraternities as strictly and wholly voluntary do not detract from the charitable basis of this institution. After all, only the surgeons, probably the highest-ranking yet smallest group within the confraternity, could be truly considered as remunerated hospital staff.

The involvement of the confraternity of San Roque with the hospital it served did not represent an ancillary endeavour, an easily dismissed and replaceable aid. Rather, the services its brothers provided embodied an essential and indispensable factor in the hospital's ability to function. According to the hospital's constitution of 1655, the surgeon on duty would examine and assess the status of any patients upon their arrival, thereafter diverting them to the appropriate wing. Once settled, the head nurse would give them a bed and take their clothes to the wash. The nurse-practitioners, for their part, would diligently ensure that all patients had an appropriate bed-pan, and would look after their disposal. As part of their daily duties, they would assist the doctors and surgeons during their daily rounds, noting and supervising the administration of medications.⁶

During meals, the assistants, nurses, and nurse-practitioners would bring the bread and wine from the kitchen to the patients, while the head nurse would oversee their proper distribution. After supper, only a nurse on duty would remain in each wing, in case patients required any assistance. Nurses would also take care of the bodies of the deceased. Assistants provided a variety of daily services as ordered by their superiors, from making beds, washing clothes, grooming patients, bringing

4 Flynn, "Baroque Piety."

5 Fernández Doctor, *Hospital*, 109, 118.

6 *Ordinaciones*, 65–9. In Biblioteca Nacional (Madrid) [hereafter BN], 2-50622.

medications from the dispensary, and closing the windows at night, to feeding patients, cleaning syringes, warming the water for bleedings, and sweeping the floors. Their duties were indispensable to the hospital's proper function.⁷

To carry out such crucial work, the confraternity required a large number of members that, in essence, constituted the heart of the hospital. In 1729, for instance, just the nurse-practitioners, nurses, and assistants numbered forty eight among the hospital's staff.⁸ Perhaps only the female servants and caretakers of the women's wings, and the members of the clergy associated with the hospital for the undertaking of religious duties, even approached the numerical preponderance of San Roque's members within the hospital. Because of their several duties and large numbers, the brothers constituted a strong presence in the daily life of the hospital. They represented a mass of men who not only fuelled the sometimes cumbersome machine that such a large hospital had become, but also appeared at every turn and corner of its structure.

Lest this description of daily chores and medical services as an outline of the hospital's functionality detract from the religious nature of these endeavours, the devotional and charitable nature underlining the hospital and its staff should be stressed. Both the members of San Roque and the others who participated in the hospital's mission did so, theoretically, as a service to Christ himself, an aspect underlined in the constitutions. The reception and treatment of the sick did not constitute a mere mechanical chore, but comprised a work of "so much merit and Christian charity."⁹ The religious tone of the hospital as a duty to God did not only exist in the abstract but permeated the fabric of its daily and routine activities. Religiosity formed part of its very architecture and formation as a medical institution. For instance, before a nurse took a newly admitted patient to his or her respective ward, the hospital vicar would offer this individual the opportunity to confess and receive the Holy Sacrament. Those who did not wish to do so were taken to their beds, above which a wooden cross was placed, as a reminder that they had not partaken the Sacraments. The vicar and ministers would thereafter continuously exhort these patients to confession and communion. Aside from normal masses, special ones would be celebrated in each ward during feast days. Moreover, every night, clergymen would visit the wards, reciting the Act of Contrition, and "exhorting patients to say it with the highest possible fervour, immediately after sprinkling holy water on the patients' beds."¹⁰ A constant religious rhythm imbued the structure of

7 Fernández Doctor, *Hospital*, 115–6.

8 *Ibid.*, 116–7.

9 "Por ser la causa principal de averse fundado este santo Hospital el recibir en el, curar, y servir a los pobres enfermos, y por ser obra de tanto mérito, y de caridad Christiana ..."
Ordinaciones, 64.

10 "Todas las noches, después de aver cenado los enfermos, irán los Clérigos por las Quadras, uno en cada una, diciendo el Acto de Contrición en voz alta, e intelligible, exortando a los enfermos a que lo hagan con el mayor fervor que pudieren, y luego inmediatamente echarán agua bendita por las camas de los enfermos, dexándolos reposar con quietud."

the hospital, its patients, and staff with an underlying and omnipresent tone of devotion and spirituality.

Beside this institutionalized atmosphere of religious dedication and charity that defined both the hospital and the confraternity of San Roque, however, a steady and inevitable reminder of sexual sin seeped into the daily activities of confraternity members. Alongside the many ailments to which it devoted its attention, the hospital also treated large numbers of patients with syphilis. Because of the connection between sexuality and venereal disease, syphilitics were extraordinary patients who, through the pustulent and ulcerous marks on their bodies, served as living evidence of God's punishment for unbridled lust and sexual sinfulness.

Commentators throughout Spain and Europe had invariably expressed the connection between sexual sin and syphilis from the first time they noticed it. According to contemporary accounts, the first cases of the disease most widely known as *morbus gallicus* or *mal francese* occurred after the lengthy siege of Naples by the invading army of King Charles VII of France. Whether through sexual intercourse with Neapolitan prostitutes or the equally sinful consumption of the flesh of their enemies, theologians, doctors, and chroniclers agreed that the soldiers contracted the pox. Then, upon their return to their homes, they proceeded to disseminate it to the larger European population. Faced with a terrifying new disease, scholars and pious men speculated about its varied causes, but most agreed on God's punishment for sins and the unbridled sexual lust of the time as two of the main factors fuelling this pestilence.¹¹ In a treatise written as early as 1497, the Spanish doctor Francisco López de Villalobos speculated that, "Some have said that this pestilence stems from the lust in which today people sin, and it shows as an appropriate and very just sentence, for such the sin, such the punishment. And the body part that sins is the one that is punished for it."¹² By the eighteenth century Spanish preachers and educators resolutely warned young men about sinful sexual activity that could result in such a painful and debilitating disease.¹³ Associated with sexual intercourse, most patients with syphilis, except those deemed innocent like children and faithful married

Ordinaciones, 72.

- 11 For the early assessments of syphilis' causes and the connection to sexual misbehavior see Fabricius, *Syphilis in Shakespeare's England*, 9–20; Allen, *The Wages of Sin*, 45–9. Arrizabalaga, Henderson, and French, *The Great Pox*, 34–7 show that the sexual explanation for the emergence of syphilis constituted but one of disparate perceived causes at the time.
- 12 "Algunos dixeron la tal pestilencia/ venir por luxuria en que oy peca la gente/ y muéstrase propia y muy justa sentencia/ qual es el pecado tal la penitencia/ la parte pecante es la parte paciente..." López de Villalobos, *Sumario de la medicina*, stanza 373, p.155.
- 13 See for instance Arbiol, *Estragos de la luxuria*, 102 where he describes the dangers associated with the sin of lust in the following terms, "Los peligros fatales, que suelen exponerse los jóvenes, y mozos con su luxuria desenfrenada, son bien notorios; ojalá, no lo fuesen tanto. El uno, que se estropea con los pestíferos accidentes, y humores Gallicos, que recoge." BN, 3–57777.

women, carried the visible stigma of their licentious corruption on their skin and thus served as a daily reminder of sexual sin.

This new venereal disease spread rapidly among Europe's population, and Spain was no exception. As early as 1500 the Catholic Monarchs converted the Hospital of Santiago in the capital of Toledo to specifically treat and cure syphilis.¹⁴ Large numbers of patients from the city proper and surrounding villages sought help there to relieve their suffering. Although few records have survived, between 1654 and 1656 inclusive this hospital admitted an average of 331 patients every year.¹⁵ Likewise, in the hospital Real y General de Zaragoza, where our confraternity exercised its charitable works, the treatment of syphilis seems to have comprised an important part of its activity. For instance, hospital administrators destined two whole wards for men and women, the *Quadras de Bubas*, to the treatment of syphilis. Given the exorbitant cost of the medicines utilized in the care of this disease, the hospital was forced to interrupt regular admissions to these wards during the eighteenth century, although those patients already admitted for other ailments who exhibited symptoms still received due care.¹⁶ Moreover, the members of the confraternity, as the largest group of staff that attended to the medical functions of the hospital, must have certainly engaged in daily contact with syphilitic patients. Not only did the confraternity surgeons treat these unfortunates—because of the skin lesions, syphilis was considered part of the surgical aspect of medicine—but other members, like the assistants, were theoretically supposed to help administer medicines and wash all patients, as stipulated above.

To explore the coexistence of an institutionalized religious and pious mandate on the part of the confraternity of San Roque, and the daily reminders of sinful sexual activity expressed in the body of the patients they served, represents a worthwhile endeavour. North of the Pyrenees, many charitable institutions and devout men of learning sought to dissociate themselves from the treatment of the obviously wicked who had brought upon themselves such terrible afflictions. Hospitals in Geneva, Aberdeen, and Paris, including the famous Hôtel Dieu, did not accept syphilis patients, the latter expelling those who had seeped through the administrative cracks in 1496 and, again, in 1508.¹⁷ Many French cities actually took the drastic step of expelling all persons suffering from this disease from their municipal territory.¹⁸ The situation in England might have been somewhat more favourable. London's St. Bartholomew Hospital at least housed syphilis patients in locks, or outhouses, during the sixteenth century, although their exorbitant costs meant that only two of these remained in operation by 1621.¹⁹ However, London's first centre for the exclusive treatment of syphilis, the Lock Hospital, was not established until 1746.²⁰ The unease

14 Zamorano Rodríguez, *San Juan Bautista*, 78–9.

15 Archivo de la Diputación Provincial de Toledo, Libro 55.

16 Fernández Doctor, *Hospital*, 220–1.

17 Allen, *The Wages of Sin*, 42.

18 Quézel, *History of Syphilis*, 24–5.

19 Fabricius, *Syphilis in Shakespeare's England*, 71–2.

in treating these patients during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries stemmed from the moral and religious tones that influenced medical discourse. Thus, doctors such as William Bullein, perhaps the most renowned physician of the Elizabethan court, advocated providing remedies only for the blameless. Practitioners would be standing in God's way if they cured a disease that stemmed from wickedness.²¹ These adverse reactions, rooted in a religious morality that strictly separated the innocent from the culpable carriers of disease through sexual sin, attests to the possible differentiation between religiosity and sexual activity that denoted their antithetical roots.

Yet the situation in Spain and in Zaragoza in particular, where the confraternity of San Roque directed its charitable religious impulses towards the service of treating such sinful creatures, reflects an altogether different understanding of the connection between religiosity and sin. The seeming paradox that resulted in the refusal of treatment for syphilitic patients in some areas of Northern Europe was partly resolved through a connection between religious charity and moral reform. This model found its most ready expression in the Italian peninsula, where a host of lay confraternities designated as Companies of Divine Love emerged in various cities with the mandate of setting up hospitals for incurable diseases. Among others, large numbers of syphilis patients received treatment in these institutions. By the era of the Counter Reformation, ideals of charity and the moral reform of patients were inextricably linked in the functioning of these hospitals. For instance, in Rome, the local Company of Divine Love ran the Hospital of San Giacomo, and counted on the full support of the papacy and the Jesuit order. Although admitting patients with syphilis, the hospital's mandate also entailed the reformation of their sinful morals and behaviour, and the control of such undesirables by keeping them off the streets.²² The intricate connection between religiosity, moral reform and social control as expressed in San Giacomo has been observed throughout Catholic Europe and particularly in both Spain and Italy.²³

20 Merians, ed., *The Secret Malady*, 4.

21 Allen, *The Wages of Sin*, 49.

22 Arrizabalga, Henderson, and French, *The Great Pox*, 176. See also chapter 7 in the same work for a discussion of the Companies of Divine Love in other Italian cities.

23 During the Counter Reformation, Italian confraternities seem to have been especially dedicated to ideals of social control. See for example, Lazar, "The First Jesuit Confraternities." Of course, attempts to regulate morals were not new to the Post-Tridentine era. For instance, Eisenbichler, "Italian Youth Confraternities," discusses the connection between youth confraternities and the moral formation of adolescents in fifteenth-century Florence. Moreover, the tangled and often ineffective process of social control should not be ignored. See, for instance, Black, *Italian Confraternities*, 8. The process of Catholic Reform and the social control of minorities has attracted great attention in Spain as well, especially after the publication of Perry and Cruz, eds., *Culture and Control*. Scholars have often noted that confraternities placed great emphasis on the reformation of the poor they served. See, for instance, Callahan, "Corporate Charity in Spain," or the case of Zamora's Confraternity of Nuestra Señora de la Anunciación in Flynn, *Sacred Charity*, 61–2.

Under this model of charity and reform, the activities of the confraternity of San Roque and their daily connection to the sexual sin of the wicked within a religious and pious mandate emerge as a reasonable resolution to the conundrum. Religiosity and evidence of sexual sin could coexist because of the impetus to reform the morality of sinners. Indeed, the brothers of San Roque confirmed this model when, in 1667, they treated a patient with syphilis named Bernardo Martínez. Bernardo was a young student in Zaragoza's Vicente Ferrer College. When, upon admittance, the surgeon examined him, he asked Bernardo if he had caught the disease from women. The young man promptly responded in the negative. The next day, presumably after having given the matter much thought, he actually confessed to the surgeon that he had engaged in passive anal intercourse on numerous occasions with Juan Curán, a French kitchen aid who worked in Vicente Ferrer College. Eventually, Bernardo willingly approached the local inquisitors to accuse Juan Curán of sodomy and hopefully receive leniency for his own sin. Although the sources do not specify it, it is highly likely that the surgeon and perhaps other staff in the hospital convinced Bernardo of the error in his sexual behaviour for, when originally questioned, he had not assessed it as a particularly grave occurrence. Rather, he had explained that intercourse "happened many times playing."²⁴ Whereas the youngster considered this behaviour a mere sexual game, the surgeon, obviously a pious member of the confraternity, must have shown him the serious sin behind sodomy and thus reformed his errant ways.

This episode confirms the analysis of the coexistence of piety and sin as part of a program of moral reform to which charitable lay institutions subscribed. Yet, this explanation for the phenomenon, as useful as it is, addresses only part of the causal variables. Such an analysis based purely on religiosity and duty as the main motivational factors in behaviour can apply only to those confraternity members who piously followed their religious mandate. In essence, this explanation remains only partial because it mostly reflects an idealized view of the confraternity based on its religious foundations. Unlike the aforesaid surgeon who dutifully attempted to reform the sinful ways of a sexualised youngster, not all members of the confraternity might have been so steadfast in their religious and charitable duties. Moreover, although popular religiosity constituted an essential factor in the life of a confraternity, other social, kinship, and political variables could induce people to join such a lay group. Much could be argued about the voluntary nature of a confraternity as evidence of the religiosity underlining the motivations of its members. Yet, such a view may dangerously rest on modern assumptions about religiosity. At a time when Western society approaches a largely secular structure, the deeply religious seem a minority, anomalies of piety lived through voluntary association to various religious organizations. In the early modern world, however, the exact meaning of the voluntary nature of a confraternity membership remains unclear, especially in areas like Spain where these brotherhoods were so ubiquitous and constituted so much of the process of

24 AHN, Inquisición, libro 998, 77v–81r.

social organization in local society. This assessment does not question the importance of religion to early modern peoples. Rather it suggests that religious participation on such an institutionalized and large popular scale may have owed much to a variety of other factors. The expectation placed on individuals to participate, given the ubiquitous presence of confraternities and their influence far beyond their religious duties, suggests a more complex—and less direct—correlation between participation and religious conviction than that which we may associate with modern religious communities.

While most members of San Roque may have acted on principles of charitable religiosity, their religious convictions exhibited a degree of malleability. Indeed, a variety of social factors could influence their application. Thus, when we examine the question of syphilis more closely, certain aspects anomalous to the idealized charitable mandate expressed by their duties could, at times, exert weight. For instance, although the confraternity's assistants were supposed to care for all patients in the hospital, it seems that the task of washing and applying ointments to syphilis patients fell to the hospital's mentally ill patients who performed a variety of menial duties.²⁵ Perhaps even more surprisingly, during an inspection of the hospital, one of the administrators complained about the assistants and nurses because, as they received no stipend for their work, they allegedly took house calls for medical aid, and in the process acquired many vices, including the affliction of syphilis.²⁶

Whether spurious or not, these allegations stress the fact that the men and youngsters belonging to the confraternity of San Roque did not undertake their religious commitments inside a bubble. Just as the large hospital where they worked constituted a microcosm of society at large, replete with piety and sin, so did their organization exist within systems of social and sexual behaviour that permeated daily life. We need look no further for confirmation of the irruption of popular assessments of sexuality into the working atmosphere of the hospital of Santa Gracia than the instances of sodomy that occurred within its walls. Although we have already seen that a hospital surgeon piously took it upon himself to reform a young man who had committed sodomy and thus acquired syphilis, hospital authorities and confraternity members seem to have largely ignored other instances where people engaged in the nefarious sin. For example, in 1687, the parents of two mental patients housed in the hospital accused another mental patient, Simón Serrano, to the Inquisition for having sodomized their sons. According to one of the youngsters, Simón had taken him into a room and had tried to sodomize him but, because of the resistance he offered and the screams he proffered, Simón left him unharmed. An unnamed witness also testified that he had seen Simón with another teenager, “glued to him from behind.” Furthermore, Simón himself confessed to having committed sodomy with a variety of patients, including an adolescent whom he sodomized in the hospital's kitchen.²⁷

25 Fernández Doctor, *Hospital*, 207.

26 *Ibid.*, 118.

27 AHN, Inquisición, libro 989, 245r.

That this behaviour would have gone unnoticed, given its sometimes public nature and its repeated occurrence, seems highly unlikely. Yet, it took two parents, moved to protect their sons from sexual interference, to bring the matter to light.

Only after repeated instances of sodomitical sin and parental pressure would hospital authorities dare bring the question to the authorities. In 1763, the father of a boy who served in the hospital's sacristy approached Blas Benito Martínez, the hospital's vicar, and complained that Miguel Lázaro, the bell-ringer of the institution, had been engaging in indecent acts with his teenage son. The vicar urged the concerned parent to keep silent about the matter, promising a swift reprimand of the culprit. Miguel, an orphan who had lived his entire life in the hospital, seemed largely unperturbed and even confronted the father of the boy during a mass at the hospital's church. According to Miguel, the father should have approached him directly, rather than the authorities, especially since "he did these things playing ... and he had confessed many times but the confessor would give him a minor penitence." Miguel assessed his behaviour as sexual play, something he undertook with various boys serving in the hospital. To him, this sexual behaviour "meant nothing. Although he knew it was a sin, it did not belong to the tribunal's jurisdiction."²⁸ Again, the openness of this sexual act (Miguel would even have the boys masturbate him while he rang the bells) and the reluctance of the hospital's vicar to undertake action suggest a certain complicity, an awareness of sexual behaviour within the hospital that was dismissed as a regrettable but all-too-common aspect of daily life.

Although no members of the confraternity ever graced the tribunal's records with tales of sexual misbehaviour, the possibility remains that some of them might have been involved in such actions. In 1602, a man accused a French cook named Andrés Botella of inducing him to commit sodomy. Invariably the passive partner in intercourse, Andrés had told the man that "in the Hospital of Santa Gracia, where he had worked, there were good studs," thus attempting to convince the man with this tale expressing the common nature of the act. After all, everyone was doing it.²⁹ That Andrés had found the hospital of Santa Gracia such a pleasurable and constant source of satisfaction for his sexual appetites evinces the constant possibility of sexual sin that permeated the routine of the hospital's working atmosphere. It would be frankly surprising if members of the confraternity were unaware, or even uninvolved, in this sexual undercurrent that seemed so removed from the institutionalized deployment of piety inherent to their mandate.

The existence of three documented cases of homosexual sodomy within the hospital of Santa Gracia, given the relative long-term inactivity of the inquisition regarding this matter,³⁰ suggests the myriad instances of sexual misbehaviour that were left unrecorded. Male homoeroticism in early modern Aragon was a wide-

28 AHN, Inquisición, legajo 3732, número 405.

29 AHN, Inquisición, libro 990, 97r–97v.

30 Between 1581 and 1691 the Inquisition tried sixty three sodomy cases involving males in the city of Zaragoza, that is one case for almost every two years, a rate hardly worthy of being considered an overbearing and virulent repression.

spread occurrence, a possibility all males knew existed and that seemed a normal outlet for sexual behaviour so long as it occurred within a gendered system of sexuality that assigned masculinity to the penetrator in the sexual act. When trying to convince a young man to have sexual intercourse with him, as befitted a long-standing pattern of age-dissonance in sexual roles, Joan Valderrama expressed that “to enjoy oneself with other men was what men did.”³¹ In a similar vein, a Bernardite monk uttered in 1586 that “it was impossible for any man to refrain from having sex with either women or men.”³² As long as men enjoyed sexuality as dominators and penetrators, gender did not particularly matter. Thus, male friends in a Valencian village within the district of Denia would jokingly tease their friend Jusepe Busot for being the town “puto” or fag, allowing them and others to sodomize him.³³ That they effectively enjoyed his services did not constitute a blight on their masculinity because they participated as penetrators.³⁴

Whether any members of the confraternity throughout its long history were involved in sodomitical sin remains irrelevant. The aspect to note remains their ability to undertake their religious and charitable duties within a working atmosphere filled with undertones of sexual sin. Just like their daily encounter with evidence of lust in the bodies of the syphilitic patients housed in the hospital, the sexual misbehaviour that could not but occur in such a large microcosm of society could not have gone unnoticed. The reaction of confraternity members to the existence of sexual sinfulness in their midst and their ability to conciliate their religious duties with such evidence must be explained through a variety of interlinking factors. As we have seen, the imperative to reform sexual mores could act as a powerful incentive for the acceptance of the so-deemed “guilty” within the hospital's walls. On the other hand, an undercurrent of popular notions that, in the least, somewhat tolerated the deployment of sexual sin within certain established bounds of masculine sexuality could also allow confraternity members to reconcile religious duty with the existence of sexual sin.

A third factor that may be taken into account when assessing this easy coexistence between religiosity and sin in the working atmosphere of a charitable

31 AHN, Inquisición, libro 730, 95r.

32 AHN, Inquisición, libro 936, 460r.

33 AHN, Inquisición, libro 940, 296r.

34 An important literary example of this sexual culture of penetrative masculinity can be found in the above mentioned poem *Carajicomedia*. One of the stanzas relates the story of a virile farmer who overcame an *incubus* in the shape of a young man by sodomizing him. Indeed, although the incubus somewhat unluckily tripped and fell on Satilario's erect penis, the farmer's response exemplified the association between sexual activity and manliness. Thus, Satilario, “le apretó y tuvo firme, llamando a bozes sus perros. Lo qual viendo el Diablo y mirando su desastrado caso, y sintiendo venir los perros ladrando, comenzó a dar grandes voces, diciendo: ‘Satilario, suelta’. El qual, teniéndole rezio con feroz boz respondía: ‘Nunca, si el carajo no quiebra.’ Y assi le tuvo hasta le remojár; y entonces le soltó, y ya llegavan los perros cerca quando el diablo culi roto comenzó de fuyr, y los perros tras el, hasta le encerrar en el infierno, adonde el triste se esta remendando el culo hasta oy.” *Carajicomedia*, copla XXVIII, in *Cancionero*, ed. Varo, 166–7.

institution like the Confraternity of San Roque remains the ability of such markers of wickedness to reinforce the group identity of those who scoff at such behaviour. Unlike later conceptualisations of the self, early modern Europeans conceived identity as metaphysically constituted within a natural social order. To belong to a certain group of people signified a specific social positioning in relation to others.³⁵ As members of an organization dedicated to Christian ideals through good works, the brothers of San Roque occupied a certain position within local social structures that ideally and publicly reinforced their standing. Yet to realize and continuously construct this favourable identity within community standards necessitated a visible daily reminder of those sinners it identified itself against. The sexual sin that permeated the ambiance of the Hospital of Santa Gracia could act as an inverted reflection of the virtues exercised by the confraternity members. Wickedness, lust, and perfidy highlighted and glorified, through a garish contrast, charity, brotherly love, and piety. As Stephen Greenblatt so aptly discusses when referring to Faustus, “the blasphemy pays homage to the power it insults.”³⁶ The same can be said of the evidence of lust and sin that surrounded the members of San Roque. The visibility of sexual transgression not only reinforced the virtues of the confraternity as a group but also legitimized the moral and religious definitions of sexual sin that constituted an antithetical pole to these virtues. The normative conceptualisations of sin and virtue that shaped the institutional structure of a confraternity like San Roque necessitated the constant irruption of sin, its continuous resurfacing, as a palpable factor essential to the construction of these very norms.

Again, the concept of the fashioning of a group religious identity through a contrast with sin cannot be seen as the sole explicator of the complex process of coexistence between piety and sexual sin in the Confraternity of San Roque. Both the growing impulse to reform the morals of the poor and the influence of popular notions of masculine sexuality also serve as variables that shaped the daily encounter between religiosity and lust in the Hospital of Santa Gracia. The daily drama of the shuffling feet of the brothers who brought food to their patients, the care they provided for countless pestilent bodies, the agony of mercury treatments etched in the faces of the sufferers of venereal disease, and the sexual escapades within a structure dedicated to Christ, constitute a snapshot from one small corner of Spanish confraternal life. This picture, however, provides a useful gateway to the intricate interaction between piety and sin so crucial to our understanding of the social processes that have shaped Spanish society.

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35 For a lucid discussion of early modern identities see Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 280.

36 Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 209.

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