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# Enslavement, Religion, and Cultural Commemoration in Livorno

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**Abstract:** This essay critically reexamines the career of Bernardetto Buonromei (d. c. 1616), a physician who is celebrated today as one of Livorno's founding fathers. It argues that Buonromei's expertise as a medical practitioner was instrumental for turning the Tuscan port city of Livorno into a major stronghold of the early modern Mediterranean slave trade. Buonromei's fame in the early seventeenth century, it proposes, reflected the high esteem with which the Medici Grand Dukes held his contribution to the Tuscan state's involvement in religiously justified slaving. The essay analyzes documentary evidence regarding Buonromei's exceptionally cruel treatment of enslaved Jews and Muslims who were placed under his care while he was serving as the physician in charge of Livorno's slave prison. It demonstrates that Cosimo II continued to back Buonromei despite repeated complaints about the physician's excessively ruthless conduct. The final part of the essay delineates the varied manifestations of Buonromei's cultural commemoration from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century. The continuous textual, artistic, and performative celebrations of Buonromei's accomplishments, it concludes, complements the erasure of the suffering he had inflicted on enslaved non-Catholics in Livorno.

**Keywords:** enslavement; Livorno; Grand Duchy of Tuscany; ethnoreligious groups; interethnic relations; commemoration; Mediterranean slave trade; violence; rape

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## 1. Introduction

The bustling port city of Livorno was early modern Italy's leading slaving center (Greene 2010, pp. 80–87; Santus 2019, pp. 28–52). Even today, the city's most popular monument known as *I Quattro Mori* (*The Four Moors*) alerts visitors to the prominent role that it played in the Mediterranean slave trade (Figure 1). Completed by Pietro Tacca in 1626, the monument shows Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici (r. 1587–1609) subjugating four chained enslaved men of African and Asian origins (Polese 1999; Brook 2008, 2012; Mandalis 2009; Brege 2021, p. 225).

Slave-hunting corsairing became a major instrument in the military and political conflict between Muslim and Christian powers after the 1571 Battle of Lepanto (Angiolini 1997; Bono 1999; Di Nepi 2022). The sculptural group of *I Quattro Mori* was originally intended as a symbol of Livorno's prominent position in this religiously justified slaving (Frattarelli Fischer 2001; Rosen 2015; Ostrow 2015; Sicca 2022, pp. 49–53). In recent years, however, it became a symbol of Italian racism (Helmstutler Di Dio 2020). Hence, when anti-racist activists organized a demonstration in Livorno in June 2020, in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, they decided to hold it in the area around this famous sculptural group. The demonstration kindled a public debate about *I Quattro Mori* and its unapologetic celebration of the trade in human beings. Whereas some protesters called for the dismantling of Tacca's masterpiece, their opponents voiced concern about the statue's safety, arguing that "The Four Moors" represent the "Barbarian pirates", who engaged in sacking the Italian coastline and taking Christian captives before being captured themselves.[1] Such claims attest to the enduring association of human bondage in early modern Livorno with the enslavement of Muslim men.



**Figure 1.** Pietro Tacca, *I Quattro Mori* (1621–1626). Livorno, Piazza Micheli. Photo by author.

Like other monuments featuring enslaved individuals in Mediterranean Europe, that of *I Quattro Mori* was meant to broadcast the humiliating military defeat of religious enemies by Catholic powers. Sculptures of this kind presented the fearsome masculine bodies of enslaved non-Christian men and usually did not portray enslaved women (Matar 2021, pp. 229–51; Caffiero 2022, pp. 75–84).[2] The enslavement of females, who had been captured by Tuscan forces and brought to Livorno, was depicted only in a handful of seventeenth-century drawings and paintings (Massing 2012, pp. 87–88; Santus 2019, p. 113; Poole-Jones 2020, pp. 170, 177; Sicca 2022, pp. 56–57, 69). These visual sources, like the more extensive documentary evidence pertaining to enslaved women in early modern Livorno, still remain largely unexplored (Herzig 2022).

Several studies have noted the widespread presence of girls and women from North and West Africa who toiled as household slaves in the abodes of affluent Livornese families (Salvadorini 1978, pp. 225–31; Toaff 1985, p. 87; Galasso 2002, pp. 141–44; Trivellato 2009, p. 307 n. 95; Nadalo 2011, p. 291; Calafat and Santus 2011, pp. 489–90; Santus 2019, p. 41; Calafat 2019, p. 177). We also know that hundreds of women were lodged in Livorno's Bagno (slave prison) as state-owned slaves until they were ransomed or sold to private owners. Many of these enslaved females were Muslims from the Maghreb, but some of them were *moriscas* (Spanish-born baptized women of Muslim origins), non-Catholic Christians from the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Europe, and Jews (Frattarelli Fischer 2000; Pomara Saverino 2017, pp. 100–4, 284–88).

In the summer of 1610, a group of Jews from the northern Moroccan city of Tétouan were captured by Tuscan forces and brought to Livorno. The enslaved female Jews were assigned to the men's quarters at the Bagno, where they were raped by a multitude of enslaved Muslim men and Catholic forced laborers (Herzig 2022). The brutal interethnic rape was orchestrated by Dr. Bernardetto Buonromei (also spelled Borromei, d. c. 1617), the Bagno's officially appointed physician (*medico fiscale*) (Toaff 1990, p. 269).

The leaders of Livorno's prosperous Jewish community, known as the Jewish nation (*nazione ebrea*), protested Buonromei's abuse of their enslaved female coreligionists. Their extant supplications to Grand Duke Cosimo II de' Medici (r. 1609–1621) detailed the horrific consequences of the atrocity. In particular, they described that one of the enslaved women "lost her mind" as a result of the rape and attempted to throw her children from the window.[3] One of her daughters was gravely wounded and required medical care. The

mother herself had to be removed to the Bagno's hospital, where her hands and feet were tied up to prevent her from killing herself or her other child (Toaff 1986, pp. 44, 51–52).

Cosimo II ordered an investigation of the case. Once he became aware of this investigation, Buonromei justified his maltreatment of the enslaved Jews as part of a business strategy, which was meant to ensure the future payment of exorbitant ransom fees from Livorno's affluent Jewish community. The Grand Duke, who accepted his claims, turned down the plea to punish Buonromei and left him in the position of the Bagno's *medico fiscale* (Herzig 2022).

Recent historiography has pointed to the pivotal role that physicians such as Buonromei played in the development of the early modern slave trade. Important studies have shown that European slaving practices relied on medical practitioners for treating enslaved individuals on board vessels that forcibly transported them across the Atlantic. Physicians also filled varied bureaucratic functions in the process of inspecting enslaved persons in order to determine their commodified value. Medical encounters were thus a prerequisite for the construction of the slave trade (Murphy 2021).

Work on Atlantic slaving has revealed that medicine posited a major means for enacting the violence of enslavement (Fett 2002; Hartman 2008) and especially for the exploitation of enslaved women's sexuality and reproductive capacities (Axelsen 1985; Morgan 2004; Wailoo 2018; Vernon 2019). Buonromei, as the physician in charge of Livorno's slave prison, similarly subjected the female Jews from Tétouan to horrendous sexual abuse as part of his attempts to increase the gains elicited from slaving. Moreover, like the medical practitioners who were involved in state administration in the Americas and were thus implicated in creating the archives of Atlantic slavery (Stoler 2002), Buonromei was a state functionary of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, who was thus engaged in forming the archives of Mediterranean slavery.

In an earlier study, I have analyzed the letters that Buonromei wrote in the aftermath of the atrocious group raping. Charting the rhetorical tactics that he employed for silencing the enslaved Jewish women, I have suggested that he ultimately succeeded in obliterating the memory of their suffering (Herzig 2022). In the present essay, I examine Buonromei's career. I argue that his skills as a medical practitioner were instrumental for turning Livorno into a major stronghold of the Mediterranean slave trade, and that the Medici Grand Dukes held his contribution to the slaving business in high esteem. Hence, Buonromei's reputation continued to grow despite the protests of Livorno's Jewish community and later complaints about his excessive cruelty toward enslaved non-Catholics in Livorno. The final part of the essay delineates the varied cultural commemorations of Buonromei from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century. Buonromei's continuous commemoration, it proposes, complements the erasure of the torments he had inflicted on enslaved Jews and Muslims in Livorno.

## 2. A Physician in the Service of the Tuscan Slave Trade

The date of Buonromei's birth is not known, but in the early 1570s, he was already involved in the activities of the Florentine Academy (Buonromei 1572; Salvini 1718, p. 212; Acciarino 2019, p. 13) which flourished under the auspices of Cosimo I de' Medici (r. 1537–1574) (Di Filippo Bareggi 1973, pp. 527–74). By 1575, Buonromei had completed his university studies and began his employment as a physician on the Tuscan slave galleys. In this capacity, he provided medical treatment for illness and injury in key stages in the process of enslavement, including encounter, confrontation, transport, and disembarkation (Ciano 1976; Newson and Minchin 2007). Buonromei was evidently successful in this position, because in 1585 he obtained the much-coveted appointment as physician of the commune of Livorno (Sainati 1906; Guarnieri 1970, p. 77; Floridi 1991, p. 68, n. 34). Furthermore, in 1604, Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici selected Buonromei as one of the four citizens charged with appointing the various office holders who would carry out all municipal functions in Livorno (Castignoli 2006, pp. 14–18; Calafat 2018, pp. 748–49).

In 1606, Buonromei dedicated an altar to the Virgin Mary and commissioned a tomb for himself in Livorno's cathedral (Sainati 1906, p. 31). The epigraph that he ordered for his tomb stated: "During the reign of Francesco and Ferdinano, the Grand Dukes of Tuscany, Bernardetto Borromei, having dedicated his zealous work as a physician to the people of Livorno for thirty years, honored by the favor of the princes and by a generous stipend, due to his religious sentiments dedicates the adjacent altar to the Blessed Virgin Mary Assumed in Heaven, and while he is still alive has built a tomb for himself in which he would rest after his death".[4]

Shortly before commissioning this altar, Buonromei was honored by Ferdinando de' Medici, who appointed him as the highest municipal official in Livorno, by conferring the insignia of *gonfaloniere* (standard-bearer) on him. In the ceremony that marked Livorno's elevation to the status of a city in March 1606, Grand Duke Ferdinando gifted Buonromei an enslaved Muslim man as a token of his appreciation of the Livornese commune (Tesi 1867, vol. 2, pp. 556–57; Wiquel 1976–1985, p. 86). The choice of this particular gift attests to the significance that the Medici regime ascribed to Livorno's importance as a center of slaving, while also paying homage to Buonromei's contribution to the lucrative trade in humans.

After the end of his term of office as *gonfaloniere*, in October 1606 (Castignoli 2006, p. 18), Buonromei assumed the role of the slave prison's *medico fiscale*. In addition to inspecting all the enslaved persons who were brought to the Bagno, he provided medical care for foreign slave traders and brokers who came to Livorno to purchase or redeem enslaved individuals. Thus, in September 1610, Buonromei treated Muhammad Ibn Faraj who was known in Tuscany as Mometto di Feracchi (Santus 2013, pp. 767–68; Pomara Saverino 2017, pp. 257–59). The Muslim broker arrived in Livorno to negotiate ransom deals for more than ninety enslaved Muslim women and children who had been captured during the 1607 conquest of Bona (Annaba). In a letter that he sent the Grand Duke's privy secretary on 12 September 1610, Ibn Faraj praised Buonromei for having cured him from a life-threatening illness.[5]

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Cosimo II—Ferdinando de' Medici's son—continued to favor Buonromei, notwithstanding the Jewish community's request to take punitive measures against the physician. Moreover, an inscription placed under Buonromei's bust portrait in Livorno's cathedral affirms that Cosimo II ordered its erection in 1610 (Piombanti 1903, p. 169). This statement has led scholars to surmise that Buonromei was already dead by that year (Vivoli 1844, vol. 3, pp. 508–11; Sainati 1906, p. 31; Wiquel 1976–1985, p. 86; Paliaga 2007, pp. 32–33). Recently discovered documents, however, indicate that the Grand Duke sponsored the sculpture and the inscription while the physician was still very much alive and continued to work as the slave prison's *medico fiscale*, a role that he filled until 31 May 1616.[6]

Throughout the last six years of his well-documented career, Buonromei was regularly in contact with Cosimo II. On 15 October 1610, he addressed a letter to the Grand Duke, complaining that "because of this business of slaves" he made himself hated "by all the Christian and Jewish merchants, and by the slaves themselves".[7] Unlike other commodities that were traded in Livorno, the prices of enslaved persons were not determined by market forces but were decided by the state (Tazzara 2020, p. 201, n. 18), and the man who set the commodified value of all enslaved individuals was the Bagno's *medico fiscale*. According to Buonromei, Jewish and Christian merchants who wished to ransom or purchase state-owned slaves resented him for the high sums he requested for this human merchandise, while the enslaved persons themselves detested him for the brutal methods he employed in the course of determining their commodified value. Buonromei affirmed that his harsh treatment of human chattel at the Bagno had proven effective for eliciting high payments in the past, referring specifically to the ransom fees obtained for one enslaved Muslim woman and several enslaved Muslim men. The physician admitted that some of the individuals enslaved in Livorno's prison died as a result of the long periods required for amassing the large sums that he had requested for their release. This, he asserted, was an occasional and

unintended outcome of his desire to serve the Medici Grand Duke loyally, by ensuring that he would receive the highest ransom price possible for state-owned slaves.[8]

Disapproval of Buonromei's questionable methods persisted in the following years. In a letter of 9 May 1611, the physician remarked that his insistence on high ransom payments "does not conform to the state of mind of those who propose to His Most Serene Highness that . . . some of them [the enslaved persons] die and that I have obtained their elevated ransom prices by force". This, Buonromei concluded, was because his adversaries "are jealous, and almost as if they seek to have the Most Serene Highness abhor the many tens of thousands of ducats that He has gained by my slave ransoming deals".[9]

Buonromei's critics were ultimately unsuccessful; not only did the Grand Duke never discharge the abusive physician, but he also paid for the stonework in Buonromei's chapel at the cathedral, which was completed by March 1613.[10] Moreover, in 1614, Cosimo commissioned a detailed report about conditions in the Tuscan slave galleys from Buonromei (Minutelli 1899, p. 3). The Grand Duke also employed the physician for treating his own ailments, notably during one of the Medici court's seasonal visits to Livorno, in March 1616 (Tozzetti 1780, vol. 3, p. 34; Guarnieri 1970, p. 77).[11]

Throughout these years, Buonromei retained his position at the slave prison. In May 1616, Paolo Rucellai (1568–1626), the recently appointed official in charge of the Tuscan galleys (Rosen 2015, p. 55, n. 99; Ostrow 2015, p. 159), sent a complaint about the physician's mistreatment of the individuals enslaved by Tuscan forces. According to Rucellai, Buonromei's eagerness to receive inflated ransom fees resulted in lengthy periods of incarceration at the Bagno, leading to the "countless deaths" of those for whom high payments could never be obtained. He also criticized Buonromei's method of having the enslaved persons tied to a pillar and beaten up as a way of forcing them to reveal information about their financial resources, family networks, and patrons who could pay for their ransom. Such brutal methods of treating state-owned slaves, Rucellai observed, were unbecoming of a "great prince" such as the Grand Duke of Tuscany.[12] When Cosimo II asked Buonromei to allow Rucellai to be present during the examination of newly arrived slaves, the elderly physician asked to be dismissed from his role as the Bagno's *medico fiscale* and retire to Pisa, where his medical services were still much in demand.[13]

Having indeed relocated to Pisa, Buonromei nonetheless remained involved in the slaving business. In September 1617, he was asked to write a report about Bechir of Aleppo, a sixty-two-year old Muslim man. Bechir was enslaved by Tuscan forces together with his son, Muhammad, back in 1608, and Buonromei was the one who determined their original ransom price. Muhammad died under slavery four years later. Bechir, who was blind in his right eye and could therefore not row in the galleys, was sent to work in the Medicean arsenal in Pisa until his relatives back home could come up with the sum requested for his redemption.

At some point, the French became interested in paying for Bechir's liberation, so that he could be exchanged with a Frenchman who was enslaved in Istanbul. On 29 September 1617, Buonromei was asked to explain why he had set Bechir's ransom price so high, but just a few days later the elderly man became terminally ill.[14] Buonromei was entrusted with treating him in Pisa, but to no avail; the physician's last known missive, of 19 October 1617, reported Bechir's death.[15] The enslaved man from Aleppo, who had been forced to perform harsh physical labor for nine years because of Buonromei's insistence on his exorbitant ransom price, was the last victim of the physician's ruthless greed. Bechir's demise added one more death to the "countless" other deaths of enslaved individuals, for which Rucellai held Buonromei responsible. The physician himself must have passed away not long afterward.

## 3. The Cultural Politics of Commemoration

Buonromei's involvement in turning Livorno into a thriving center of slaving was not only the main reason for the favors he received from the Medici Grand Dukes, but also the

source of the fortune that he accumulated.[16] This wealth, in turn, enabled him to invest in the artistic patronage of the cathedral, Livorno's liturgical and devotional center. The works that Buonromei commissioned reinforced the triumphal message of his sepulchral epigraph: they stressed his boundless dedication to the people of Livorno and his faithful service to the House of Medici, but disregarded his involvement in enslaving pursuits.

The female Jewish victims of the serial raping, which Buonromei concocted in 1610, disappeared from the historical record just a few weeks after the assault (Herzig 2022), while the enslaved Muslims whose "countless deaths" were attributed to the physician were forgotten shortly after their demise. The callous slaver's name, on the other hand, was never forgotten. Indeed, his fame continued to grow posthumously. For more than four centuries, Buonromei's magnificent chapel and his impressive bust portrait have continued to remind viewers of the leading role he had played during the heroic years of Livorno's establishment as a flourishing mercantile hub.

Local interest in Buonromei peaked after 1720, when Cosimo III de' Medici (r. 1670–1723) enabled Livorno's leading citizens to apply for noble status. Any Livornese citizen appointed to the office of *gonfaloniere*, as well as those whose ancestors had served as standard-bearers, could now apply for patents of nobility. After the extinction of the House of Medici, in 1737, Grand Duke Francesco Stefano of Lorraine (r. 1737–1765) allowed the descendants of men who had filled the office of standard-bearer since Livorno's declaration as a city—beginning with Bernardetto Buonromei—to backdate their families' noble status to 1606 (Wiquel 1976–1985, p. 404; Tazzara 2017, p. 157).

Unlike other towns that were incorporated into the Tuscan state in the early modern era, Livorno lacked both an illustrious past as an independent medieval city-state and an old landed aristocracy (Trivellato 2009, p. 86; Bregoli 2014, p. 44). As the eighteenth century progressed, the desire to establish the supposedly noble ancestry of eminent Livornese citizens increased, and so did the significance accorded to the 1606 ceremony, in which Buonromei received the standard-bearer's insignia from Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici. This enhanced concern with pedigree helped turn the physician into a heroic figure. Thus, we read in a local chronicle, published in 1745, that Livorno

> was ennobled with having a notable class, selected from among the most illustrious and qualified families, whose honored head has the title of Gonfaloniere, the first of whom was Bernardetto Borromei, a nobleman, native of San Miniato, whence he was brought there [to Livorno] by Grand Duke Francesco I to practice medicine, of which he was a celebrated and renowned professor, and he put his excellent work in it at the service of the aforementioned city for a period of thirty years. This personality [was] of such distinguished traits and noble qualities, as can be certified by an authentic declaration inscribed on his sepulchral inscription, affixed to his rich and magnificent tomb, above which his bust is placed, all of which is elegantly made of the finest marbles of different colors, as can be presently seen... from this inscription emerges how worthy he was of the city of Livorno, how generously he enjoyed the grace of the Most Serene Grand Dukes Francesco I and Ferdinando I, and how committed he was to the works of Christian piety, with the largest pious donation... Hence for such exalted and rare virtues of his, he deserved... to be Livorno's first Gonfaloniere.[17]

This account and those subsequently penned by Livornese writers, such as the Augustinian theologian Agostino Santelli (fl. 1749) and jurist Antonio Michon (d. after 1810), never mentioned Buonromei's vigorous participation in the slave trade. Echoing the encomium in Buonromei's chapel at the cathedral, they portrayed him as an erudite and skilled physician of patrician background, who arrived in Livorno at the behest of Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici (r. 1574–1587) and became a pillar of the newly founded city (Vivoli 1844, vol. 3, pp. 508–10). This image of Buonromei also featured in artistic representations. These included a large-scale fresco (later destroyed by French forces, in 1799) that the Livornese artist Francesco Maria Terreni (1739–1811) painted in the city hall in the late eighteenth century. Depicting the ceremony of Livorno's elevation to the status

of a city, the fresco focused on Ferdinando de' Medici's conferring of the standard-bearer's insignia on Buonromei. An oil painting, which is similarly attributed to Terreni, presented a smaller version of this scene and was destined for display in the office of Livorno's mayor (Minutelli 1899, p. 3; Sainati 1906, p. 28; Wiquel 1976–1985, pp. 86, 580).

By the time Giuseppe Vivoli (1779–1853) set out to write his four-volume history of Livorno, which was published in 1843–1846, he could draw on a vast array of textual and visual sources that extolled Buonromei. Citing earlier writers, Vivoli dedicated five pages to a panegyric of the physician (Vivoli 1844, vol. 3, pp. 231–32, 508–10). He praised Buonromei as a man "gifted with distinguished talents", who "had a magnificent mausoleum, equipped with his bust, placed in the cathedral by order of Grand Duke Cosimo II".[18]

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the continued local fascination with Buonromei's figure led to the search for documentary evidence pertaining to the physician's career, some of which recorded his involvement in enslaving activities (Tesi 1867, vol. 2, pp. 556–57; Minutelli 1899, p. 3). This, however, did not detract from the admiration toward him in Livorno. Hence, when in 1906 another physician, Dr. Lorenzo Sainati, noted Buonromei's work on the slave galleys, this did not diminish the pride that he claimed to have felt upon learning that Livorno's first *gonfaloniere* had been a medical practitioner (Sainati 1906, pp. 28–30).

In 1911, the city of Livorno decided to name a street in honor of Dr. Bernardetto Buonromei (Figure 2). In the Fascist era, the Italian Minister of Public Works commissioned a bas-relief, featuring Buonromei in the ceremony marking the declaration of Livorno's new status as a city, for the exterior of the Palazzo del Governo—a municipal building constructed on the site of the demolished slave prison. The new edifice was decorated with a series of panels, executed by sculptor Tommaso Peccini (1910–1986), which presented key scenes from Livorno's civic history. Completed in 1943, these bas-reliefs were damaged during World War II, but in 1954, regional authorities undertook their restoration (Wiquel 1976–1985, pp. 86, 425–26). The restored panel that celebrates Buonromei continues to decorate the centrally located Palazzo del Governo today (Figure 3).




**Figure 2.** Corner of the street named in honor of Bernardetto Borromei (Buonromei) in Livorno. Photo by author.

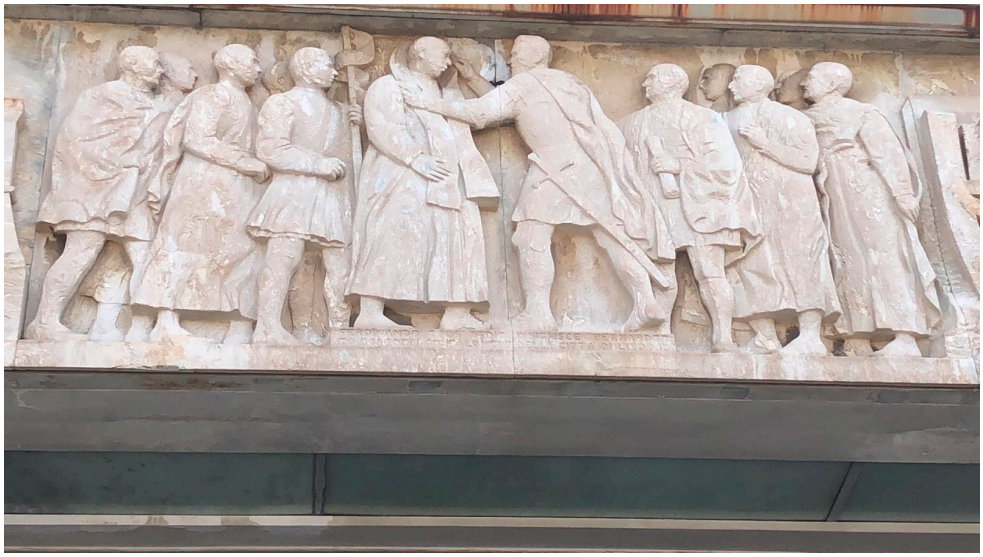

**Figure 3.** Tommaso Peccini, *Bernardetto Buonromei receiving the insignia of gonfaloniere from Ferdinando I de' Medici* (1943; restored, 1954). Façade of the Palazzo del Governo, Livorno. Photo by author.

Like the Palazzo del Governo, Livorno's cathedral was heavily bombed during World War II, and was almost completely destroyed in May 1944 (Ciorli 2007, pp. 139–48). Buonromei's sepulchral monument, which suffered some damage, was later restored as part of the cathedral's overall reconstruction (Bruni 2007, p. 62; Paliaga 2007, p. 32). A new inscription attesting to the restoration, which the city of Livorno undertook in 1974, was affixed to the earlier inscription affirming Cosimo II's order to erect Buonromei's statue. Giovanni Wiquel's *Dizionario di persone e cose livornesi* (*Dictionary of Livornese Persons and Things*), which was completed in 1985, included an entry on Buonromei that commended the decision to have his chapel and statue "laudably restored". Wiquel praised "the good Buonromei" as "a gifted physician, loved by the people of Livorno and by the prince".[19]

Yet, around 1985, one Livornese-born scholar began to challenge this positive image of Buonromei. The scholar in question was Dr. Renzo Toaff (1913–1997), a Jewish surgeon who grew up in Tuscany but was forced to flee Fascist Italy following the promulgation of the Racial Laws in 1938 (Tedeschi 2015, p. 10). After a successful medical career in Israel, Toaff devoted the last twenty years of his life to researching the history of Livorno's Jewish community in Livornese archives.[20] In his study of the Jewish community's fund for ransoming captives (Toaff 1986), Toaff was the first to note the "acts of antisemitic barbarism performed upon a group of young Jewish slave women from Tétouan by the doctor Bernardetto Borromei, Livorno's *gonfaloniere togato* and the Bagno's physician".[21] Citing Toaff's works, other studies subsequently mentioned in passing the "harassment of female Jewish slaves at the Bagno" (Nadalo 2011, p. 300; see also Galasso 2002, pp. 144–45; Rozen 2016, p. 57). In an article on the Bagno of Livorno, local historian Lucia Frattarelli Fischer also reiterated Toaff's identification of Buonromei as the man responsible for the abuse of enslaved female Jews in 1610 (Frattarelli Fischer 2000, p. 87).

Neither Toaff's authoritative studies nor Frattarelli Fischer's influential essay took the shine off Buonromei's acclaim. The renowned physician continues to be portrayed as one of Livorno's heroic founders in studies of Livornese history (Castignoli 2006), including a major edited volume on the history of the cathedral, which was published in 2007 (Bruni 2007, pp. 61–68; Lazzarini 2007, pp. 121–25; Ciorli 2007, pp. 139–48). Echoing Buonromei's commemorative epigraph, this book designates him as a "noteworthy figure and a patron of the Duomo . . . the city's first *gonfaloniere togato* elected by Ferdinando, the person in charge of the Confraternity of the Misericordia and who worked as a physician in Livorno for more than thirty years".[22]

## 4. Conclusions

Buonromei's memory continues to be positively associated with the formative phase of Livorno's past to this very day, not only in the scholarly literature, but also in the popular imagination. In addition to the street named in his honor, the restored portrait at the cathedral, and the reinstated bas-relief adorning the city hall, Buonromei's figure also stars in the historical processions that commemorate Livorno's declaration as a city in 1606. The public reenactments of the ceremony, featuring an impersonation of Buonromei as the city's first *gonfaloniere*, are performed every year, on March 19th.[23] In September 2021, visitors to Livorno and local residents were also offered the opportunity to spend an evening with an actor impersonating Buonromei, and hear all about the history of one of Livorno's founding fathers.[24] All, that is, except for the notorious methods that Buonromei used to employ, which included serial raping and led to "countless deaths" of enslaved persons at the Bagno.

While the enslaving activities in which Buonromei was involved were justified as a key aspect of the religious and military conflict between Christian and Muslim powers, his abusive methods were evidently also directed at Jews, and were self-admittedly driven by economic motivations. His victims included enslaved females and males who died or were gravely injured, and enslaved women who were repeatedly raped—all as a result of Buonromei's ceaseless efforts to extort exorbitant sums for their ransom. From the seventeenth century onward, the textual, artistic, and performative commemorations of Livorno's early history have exalted the figure of Buonromei, while conveniently ignoring his notoriety for cruelty toward Livorno's disenfranchised population. In this manner, they have effectively contributed to obliterating the suffering of enslaved Muslims and Jews in this Tuscan city.

The uncovering of documentary evidence, which attests to Buonromei's systematic maltreatment of enslaved persons—which even other state officials, such as Paolo Rucellai, decried as excessive—now calls for a reconsideration of the physician's cultural commemorations. In light of the ongoing debates on celebrating the cultural, scientific, and philanthropic achievements of rapacious slavers (Wailoo 2018; Farrer 2020), it is time to shift public initiatives from the celebration of the slave prison's merciless physician to remembering his victims. This begins by acknowledging the physical and emotional torments that Buonromei inflicted upon enslaved non-Catholics who were captured in the Mediterranean and were forcibly transported to Livorno in the early seventeenth century.

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## Notes

1 "Domani manifestazione Black Lives Matter ai Mori di Livorno, si teme per il capolavoro: Sarà il caso di proteggerlo?" *Finestre sull'Arte: Rivista online d'arte antica e contemporanea*, 12 June 2020 (https://www.finestresullarte.info/attualita/manifestazione-ai-quattro-mori-di-livorno-si-teme-per-il-capolavoro accessed 26 February 2023): "pirati barbareschi (persecutori e saccheggiatori, nella realtà della storia, delle coste italiche nonché spina nel fianco per i commerci), rappresentati da quattro Mori in catene". See also "C'è il rischio che i rivoltosi 'antirazzisti' distruggano un monumento del Seicento, a Livorno", *TicinoLive: Quotidiano della Svizzera italiana*, 13 June 2020. (http://www.ticinolive.ch/2020/06/13/ce-il-rischio-che-i-rivoltosi-antirazzisti-distruggano-un-monumento-del-seicento-a-livorno/, accessed 26 February 2023).

2 A notable exception is the *Fontana dei Mori*, a monument executed by Sergio Venturi and Pompeo Castiglia in Marino (Lazio) in 1632–1642, which was inspired by Tacca's group sculpture but included two female figures (Ostrow 2015, pp. 168–69; Matar 2021, pp. 235–41).

3 Archivio di Stato di Livorno, Governatore e Auditore, filza 2602, vol. 1, fol. 418$^{r}$: "è uscita di senno e vinta dalla disperazione ha gettato una figliuola per la finestra la quale è in pericolo di vita et una creatura che si trova al petto voleva fare il simile, se non che fu impedita".

4 "Fran. et Ferd. MM Etruriae DD Bernardettus Borromeus. Medicus/Liburnensi Pop ann XXX opera fideli praestita. Principum gratia/stipendiisque amploribus auctus piae rel. ergo proxum sacellum B. Vir./Mariae Coelos ascen dicat. Tumulum vero ut in morte quiescat S.V.P. Anno a red.or MDCV" (reproduced in Paliaga 2007, p. 35, n. 64). Buonromei's investment in lavish artistic patronage and in the attempts to immortalize his earthly achievements may be interpreted as a manifestation of his pursuit of cultural legitimacy, which was common among Italian physicians in this era (see Ross 2016).

5 Muhammad Ibn Faraj's letter to Lorenzo Usimbardi of 12 September 1610, Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASF), Mediceo del Principato (hereafter MP), no. 1305, c. 30.

6 Bernardetto Buonromei's letter to Grand Duke Cosimo II de' Medici of 31 May 1616 (ASF, MP, no. 2144, c. 204$^{r}$).

7 Bernardetto Buonromei's letter to Cosimo II of 15 October 1610 (ASF, MP, no. 5999, unfoliated): "per questo negotio di schiavi mi feci odioso quanti ministri siano de V.A.S tutti i mercanti christiani, et ebrei, et gli schiavi istessi". On the enmity of other state officials toward Buonromei, to which he alludes in this letter, see n. 9 below.

8 Ibid.

9 Bernardetto Buonromei's letter to Lorenzo Usimbardi of 9 May 1611 (ASF, MP, no. 1308, unfoliated): "Io conosco non havere parlato conforme all'humore di chi propone a S.A.S che gli schiavi . . . sene muiono, e che da me siano stati tagliati per forza in grosse somme di danari. Come che essi habbino invidia, et quasi che procaccino, che l'Al.S aborisca le molte decine di migliara di ducati fatti mettere a contrato da me per ricatti di schiavi". Buonromei identified one of his chief rivals as Bernardo Uguccioni, the head of Livorno's customs bureau, in his letters to Lorenzo Usimbardi and Cosimo II of 18 September 1610 (ASF, MP, no. 1305, fols. 10–12).

10 As noted in Bernardetto Buonromei's request, approved by Vinta Belisario on 16 March 1613 (ASF, Soprassindaci, no. 42, fasc. 29).

11 First noted in Cesare Tinghi's manuscript diary of significant events at the Medici court, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Gino Capponi 261, vol. 2, fol. 31.

12 Paolo Rucellai's letter to Cosimo II of 30 May 1616 (ASF, MP, no. 2144, c. 203$^{r}$): "ancora ce ne sono le memorie nel Bagno che mai se ne caverà un soldo oltre alli infiniti morti per non poter pagare il taglio . . . se V.A. non comanda in contrario non voglio che il Dottor Bernardetto faccia cosa alcuna con questi schiavi senza la mia presenza, mediante che si vede tener lo stile medesimo che tenne l'altra volta che dalli schiavi vecchi tagliati sono avertiti questi nuovi del modo che fa tenuto con loro di metterli fino alla colonna e batterli per tagliarli per forza . . . perché invecchiando o trapassando il tempo in questo Bagno, si muoiano e deteriorano la loro faculta a loro paesi, oltre che a Principe grande come è V.A.S. non mi pare che convenga il voler tagliare per forza li suoi schiavi".

13 Bernardetto Buonromei's letter to Cosimo II of 31 May 1616 (ASF, MP, no. 2144, c. 204$^{r}$).

14 The French attempts to secure the liberation of Bechir, the son of Hassan from Aleppo and Buonromei's earlier inspection of the enslaved Muslim man, for determining his ransom price, are documented in ASF, MP, no. 1829, cc. 381$^{r}$–384$^{r}$.

15 Bernardetto Buonromei's report of 19 October 1617 (ibid., c. 386$^{r}$).

16 His rivals emphasized his acquisition of wealth in the course of working as the Bagno's *medico fiscale*, as noted in Bernardetto Buonromei's letter to Cosimo II of 15 October 1610 (ASF, MP, no. 5999, unfoliated).

17 "[Livorno] fù nobilitato con essersi in esso prescelto dalle più qualificate, ed illustri Famiglie un primo Ordine, il di cui Capo insignito è del titolo di Gonfaloniere, il primo de' quali fù Bernardetto Borromei Nobile nativo di Samminiato, d'onde dal Gran Duca Francesco I fù fatto passare ad esercitarvi la Medicina, in cui era celebre, e rinomato Professore, e di cui alla detta Città prestò l'eccellente sua opera per lo spazio di anni trenta. Personaggio codesto di tante eminenti prerogative, e nobili qualità, che con un autentico attestato per tali si riscontrano nell'Inscrizione sulla di Lui Lapida Sepolcrale incisa, apposta al magnifico, e ricco suo Deposito, sopra del quale è la dilui statua in busto, il tutto a finissimi marmi di vari colori elegantemente travagliato, come presentemente si vede... dalla quale Iscrizione appare quanto della Città di Livorno benemerito ei fosse, quanto della grazia de' Serenissimi Granduchi Francesco I, e Ferdinando I largamente godesse, e quanto delle opere di Cristiana pietà con amplissima pia elargizione si facesse un impegno... Onde per tante eccelse, e rare sue virtù... meritò di essere il primo Gonfaloniere di Livorno" (Oberhausen 1745, pp. 66–67).

18 "Dotato inoltre di distinti talenti . . . essendogli stato posto in Duomo un magnifico Mausoleo insieme col suo Busto per ordine del Granduca Cosimo II" (Vivoli 1844, vol. 3, pp. 231, 509).

19 "Medico valente, amato dai Livornesi e dal Principe... il buon Borromei... vuole il sepolcro in Duomo...; nel 1974, l'intero sepolcreto fu lodevolmente riparato a cura della Civica Amministrazione" (Wiquel 1976–1985, p. 86).

20 Toaff's biography is outlined in an obituary published in a Tuscan daily: "A Tel Aviv la scomparsa di Renzo Toaff, un grande scienziato che amava Livorno", *Il Tirreno*, 27 December 1997. See also the author entry in https://data.bnf.fr/fr/12747054/renzo_toaff/ (accessed 26 February 2023).

21 "Atti di barbarie antisemita compiuti su un gruppo di giovani schiave ebree di Tetuan dal dottor Bernardetto Borromei, gonfaloniere togato di Livorno e medico del Bagno" (Toaff 1986, p. 44, 1990, p. 269).

[22] "L'ultimo personaggio di spicco e mecenate del Duomo livornese fu Bernardetto Borromei, primo gonfaloniere togato della città eletto da Ferdinando, preposto della Compagnia della Misericordia e che svolse la professione di medico a Livorno per più di trent'anni" (Paliaga 2007, p. 31).

[23] "Si rievoca l'elevazione di Livorno al rango di città", *La Nazione. Livorno*, 17 March 2017, published online: https://www.lanazione.it/livorno/cosa%20fare/si-rievoca-l-elevazione-di-livorno-al-rango-di-citt%C3%A0-1.2972295 (accessed 26 February 2023).

[24] https://www.livornosera.it/eventi-livorno/la-storia-di-bernadetto-borromei-gonfaloniere-di-livorno-allex-cinema-aurora/ (accessed 26 February 2023).

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