

eleven years old. Powerful residues of this infatuation accompanied him on his grand tour of the European continent (1780–82), and they were transmuted into the manuscript of his Gothic novel *Vathek*, which was published in French only in 1787. On his return to England he resumed seeing Courtenay, and the simmeringscandal was only partly effaced by his marriage in 1783. Beckford judged it advisable to spend a number of years in exile abroad, in Portugal, Spain, and Paris, where he witnessed the French Revolution.

After his return to England he commenced construction, in 1796, of a remarkable architectural folly, his Gothic revival country seat of Fonthill Abbey, which he embellished with frescoes, stained glass and objets d'art. Financial reverses forced him to sell Fonthill in 1821, which was fortunate as it fell into ruin shortly thereafter. Beckford lived the rest of his life in Bath and London, taking a lively interest in homosexual gossip. Having survived several scandals and the repressive atmosphere of the era of the Napoleonic wars, his homosexual interests were prudently reduced to those of an epistolary voyeur. Despite his irregular life and his dilettantism, Beckford made contributions in two areas. His novel *Vathek*, with its exotic oriental setting and androgynous characters, formed part of the pre-Romantic literary movement. Fonthill Abbey, though only a portion of it survives, was one of the first major secular constructions of the Gothic Revival trend in British architecture.

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BELGIUM

The kingdom of Belgium, though a relatively small country, enjoys a pivotal geographical position in Europe. The lands that are now Belgium, together with northern Italy, saw the emergence of European urban society at the end of the Middle

Ages. As yet insufficiently explored, the history of homosexuality in Belgium promises to offer important insights. In our present state of knowledge, however, the beginnings are melancholy, since the first execution for sodomy documented anywhere in Europe took place in Ghent in 1292.

Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries show a considerable increase of prosecutions of the criminal act of *vuyte faicten* (buggery). In 1373, Willem Case and Jan van Aersdone were executed in Antwerp. In Mechelen, one person was burned at the stake, and in 1391 the same city witnessed a mass trial of seventeen people, among them two women. Yet only one confessed and was executed. In Ypres, the death penalty was imposed on two men in 1375. Twenty-two executions were recorded in Antwerp, Brussels, and Louvain during the fifteenth century.

The occurrence of these trials, though only a few led to executions in medieval Flanders, raises the question of whether there is a link between urbanization and the regulation of sexuality from above, especially since homosexual behavior continued to go largely unnoticed between farmers and male servants in the countryside. In the view of Geert Debeuckelaere, the cities witnessed more homosexual acts because of the anonymity of the urban environment. Yet medieval cities were relatively small and anonymity could only be assured from the eighteenth century onward, when urbanization had increased. Probably—but more research remains to be done and generalization is very risky—the persecution of sodomy was also inspired by a general policy of social control, launched by the small urban economic and political elite, and thus a forerunner of the “civilizing process” in modern Europe.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the persecution of sodomy was intertwined with a radical and intolerant campaign of Protestants against Catholics

and, more precisely, their religious orders. In Ghent, the Church hierarchy yielded to a new political Committee of Eighteen, which favored Protestantism. After the execution of some Franciscan friars in Bruges in 1578, eight Franciscans and six Augustinians were burned at the stake in Ghent. But only a few trials occurred after 1579, when the Low Countries, until then part of the Spanish Empire, were divided into the largely Calvinist Northern Provinces, now the Netherlands, and the almost exclusively Catholic Southern Provinces, now Belgium. In 1601 a Jesuit was burned in Antwerp; in 1618 two women were tried for sodomy in Bruges; in 1654 the sculptor Jérôme Duquesnoy was strangled and burned at the stake after having seduced two boys aged 8 and 11; finally, in 1688, two men who had "raped" a 17-year-old boy fled the country before the actual trial could take place.

In 1713 the Southern Provinces became part of the Austrian Empire. In 1781, the Antwerp trial of Jan Stockaert, who admitted having had sex with more than a hundred boys, indicates that an important change was taking place. Contrary to practice in the previous centuries, the authorities were very careful in judging the nature of the crime and even more in determining the appropriate punishment. The court of Antwerp did not sentence Stockaert to death, but asked the Secret Council in Brussels for advice. As a result the court decided to execute Stockaert secretly within the prison walls. In the future, similar cases were to be punished by banishment or, sometimes, by execution in prison—punishment enough even without the theatrical show of public burning. This veil of secrecy contrasts with the mass sodomy trials occurring at about the same time in Holland, but it is hard to explain why. Perhaps the Church did not want to be compromised by witnesses saying that Stockaert also had sex with clergymen, but it is more probable that repression through the spread of fear and guilt was considered a better

strategy against the gradually growing gay subcultures in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, and Liège.

Legalization. In 1795 the French invaded and introduced the *Code Pénal* of 1791 on Belgian territory: sexual activity between people of the same sex was no longer a crime as long as it was pursued among adults and in private. The temporary reunion of the Northern and Southern Provinces in the United Kingdom of Holland from 1815 until Belgium became independent in 1830 did not bring about any change.

The control and regulation of sexuality was gradually shifted to a medical model of homosexuality and confined to personal communication within the walls of the physician's office. Still, Belgian experts assumed different positions during the International Conference on Criminal Anthropology in Brussels in 1892. Léon de Rode distinguished congenital and acquired *inversion*, but the Catholic Lefebvre warned against the "corrupting" activities of pederasts and advocated punishment. A preliminary survey reveals that prison sentences remained very common until the early twentieth century, but an enlightened elite did not share Lefebvre's plea for police repression. The trial in 1900, for example, against Georges Eekhoud's gay novel *Escal-Vigor* (1899), provoked by a conservative, was considered a ridiculous matter and the author was acquitted.

Gay Activism. In the absence of systematic research, it is impossible even to sketch the evolution between 1900 and the emergence of a gay liberation movement in the late 1960s in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, and Louvain. In 1968, the *Gesprekken Ontmoetingscentra* (G.O.C.) were established after the model of the Dutch C.O.C. Meanwhile, gay student groups were organized at universities. In 1975 the *Federatie Werkgroepen Homofilie* (FWH) was to coordinate gay activism and started publishing *Infoma*, later the *Homokrant*. But soon more radical groups were founded, such as the *Rooie Vlinder* (Red Butterfly;

leftist) and the Roze Aktie Front, while gay subculture organized itself, setting up gay periodicals (*De Janet van Antwerpen*, *Zonder Pardon*, *Link*, *Antenne Rose-Info*, *Tels Quels*, *Anderzijds*), radio programs, film festivals, and other gay-defined activities, alongside the commercial circuit of gay bars, discos, coffeeshops, and restaurants.

A success of gay activism in Belgium was the repeal in 1986 of the article 372bis of the penal code, which had been introduced in 1965 stipulating eighteen instead of sixteen as the age of consent for homosexual contact.

The relative decline of gay activism in the 1980s showed its vulnerability in an age of health crisis and rising moral judgment. Yet, an AIDS-prevention campaign sponsored by the Department of Health warned against the scapegoating of homosexuals and actually discussed the campaign with FWH and the Roze Dinsdag Beweging, a recent gay activist group. Also, the acquittal of Professor Michel Vincineau, the owner of two gay bathhouses who was prosecuted for "organizing male prostitution," reveals a fairly enlightened public opinion toward the gay community.

Pedophile organization is rather limited; an Antwerp workshop on pedophilia is still active, but a police crusade was launched in February 1987 against CRIES, the Centre de Recherche et d'Information sur l'Enfance et la Sexualité in Brussels.

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BELOVED DISCIPLE

This mysterious figure of the New Testament, sometimes identified with

John the Evangelist, has attracted the attention of some homosexuals as an "affectional ancestor." According to Christian tradition, the Apostle John is the author of the Fourth Gospel, the Book of Revelation (also known as the Apocalypse of St. John), and three of the Catholic Epistles. All these ascriptions have been questioned by modern Biblical criticism, and the consensus is that this group of writings, so different from one another, cannot be by one author. It is traditional to identify as John the unnamed disciple "whom Jesus loved" and who reclined on his bosom at the Last Supper (John 13:23). Again this identification has been denied by some modern scholars.

Depictions of the college of the Apostles in medieval art generally distinguish John as a youthful beardless man, in contrast to his older bearded associates. A special theme of late medieval German sculpture is the Christ-John pair, in which these two figures are excerpted from the Last Supper context with John, identified as the Beloved Disciple, asleep with his head in Christ's lap. These sculptural groups belong to a broad category of devotional imagery, intended for meditation; the groups are probably not homoerotic in any primary sense. It has been shown, however, that they generated a group of mystical texts in which John is spoken of as enjoying the milk of the Lord. This motif may relate to the imagery of Christ as mother.

However this may be, explicit mentions of a physical erotic relationship between the two New Testament figures appear in our documents only in the sixteenth century. According to the playwright Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), as reported by the informer Richard Baines, "St. John the Evangelist was bedfellow to Christ and leaned always in his bosom, that he used him as the sinners of Sodoma." This blasphemous assertion has a precedent in the confession of a libertine of Venice who was tried about 1550 for believing, among other heresies, that St.