

*Harold*. Because of the intense homophobia of English society these poems were ostensibly addressed to a woman, as the name "Thyrza" and Byron's use of feminine pronouns implied.

During his first journey to Greece (1809–11) Byron was involved in several liaisons with Greek boys. One of them, Nicolò Giraud, he made his heir when he returned to England. Details of these affairs appear in letters to his friend John Cam Hobhouse, sometimes in a Latin code. Rumors about Byron's homosexual adventures, circulated in London by Byron's ex-mistress Lady Caroline Lamb after Byron's wife left him, were a principal reason for Byron's being forced to go into exile; publicity about his love affair with his half-sister, Augusta Leigh, compounded the scandal. We know nothing more of the homosexual side of Byron's life until his final return to Greece. There he fell in love with the fifteen-year-old Loukas Chalandritsanos, a young soldier in the Greece resistance movement, whose family he had befriended. Byron's last three poems, "On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year," "Last Words on Greece," and "Love and Death," poignantly describe his love for Loukas, which was not reciprocated.

Byron died at Missolonghi attempting to provide financial and military aid for the Greeks while under the spell of this "maddening fascination," as he called it.

Byron's bisexuality remained a secret from the general public until 1935, when Peter Quennel broached the subject in *Byron: The Years of Fame*. A surreptitiously published erotic poem, *Don Leon*, purporting to be Byron's lost autobiography, probably written in 1833, had set forth many of the facts about Byron's homosexuality but was dismissed as an unwarranted libel. An edition appeared in 1866 but it remained unknown to all but a few specialists. When the Fortune Press reprinted it in 1934, the publication was confiscated by the British police.

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## BYZANTINE EMPIRE

Like China and Egypt this Greek Empire was known for its stability and conservatism. Held together by fidelity to Orthodox Christianity and Roman law, the Byzantine Empire evolved over eleven centuries. This development falls into three distinct formations: 330–711, 711–1071, 1071–1453, each about half the size of the previous. Beginning in 641 the empire lost Asian and African provinces to Islam; in 1071 half of Anatolia fell to the Turks. Byzantium defended Europe from invaders in spite of bitter religious squabbles involving monks and heretics.

*Basic Features.* The beginning of the Byzantine empire, also known as the Eastern or East Roman Empire, is usually placed at A.D. 330, when Constantine the Great founded his new capital, Constantinople, on the ancient site of Byzantium (now Istanbul). From the first the new city was Christian, but many of its institutions, including the Senate and the law code, continued the traditions of ancient Rome. Latin was the official language until the reign of Justinian, but Greek was from the start the language of commerce and intellectual life. The imperial administration, which never wavered in its policy of antihomosexual repression, managed largely to drive same-sex love underground. Yet some of the dearth of current knowledge of Byzantine homosexuality is probably owing simply to inadequate attention by modern scholars.

Byzantine monks and scholars did copy and transmit many ancient Greek pederastic texts, including the twelfth book

of the Greek Anthology. Although lexicographers and antiquarians recorded rare ancient terms for homosexual acts, and some original heterosexual erotica are also known from the empire, homosexual erotica of this kind have not yet come to light. From the time of Constantine nude figures disappeared from art, and nothing is heard of *gymnasia* after 380. The pre-Justinian period was nonetheless one of some ambiguity: those who overthrew him alleged that Constans, Constantine's son, was an exclusive homosexual who surrounded himself with barbarian soldiers selected more for looks than for military ability.

The Cappadocian Fathers, Sts. Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzen, and most of all John Chrysostom, harshly condemned homosexuality. Uninfluenced by Latin Christianity, they set the tone for the official attitudes of the Orthodox church.

The Byzantine terms for male homosexuality are *paiderastia*, *arrhenomixia* ("mingling with males"), and *arrhenokoitia* ("intercourse with males"). The general designation for sexual immorality in Byzantine law codes is *aselgeia* ("lasciviousness"). *Malakia*, which had meant "effeminacy" in Classical Greek, came to mean "masturbation," so that in the Byzantine cultural sphere the translation of I Corinthians 6:9 reads "masturbators . . . shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Homosexual behavior is also styled the "sin of the Sodomite" (e.g., Macarius the Great, *Patrologia Graeca*, 34:2243).

*Justinian.* The reign of Justinian (527-565) constitutes what is sometimes termed the First Golden Age of Byzantium. Justinian's military campaigns succeeded in recovering Italy and other areas of the empire that had been lost to the barbarians in the preceding century, and he adorned the cities of the empire with splendid buildings, above all the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. He also reorganized Roman law in the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, the ultimate basis of the civil law tradition that today dominates legal

systems in a large part of the globe.

Even before assuming full power in 527, Justinian seems to have been implicated in an anti-homosexual trial of 521. The chronicler John Malalas describes the trial of two bishops, Isaiah of Rhodes and Alexander of Diospolis in Thrace; the former was exiled after being subjected to cruel tortures, the latter castrated and publicly dragged in an ignominious procession.

Not surprisingly, the *Corpus* retains the antihomosexual laws promulgated by his predecessors in 342 and 390. Justinian shrewdly perceived, however, that just as in the case of divorce, the hated practices could not be extirpated by a stroke of the pen. Initiating a more tenacious and extended series of steps, he issued two new antihomosexual laws in 538-39 and 559, which reiterated the death penalty already prescribed by the Theodosian Code 9.7.3. In the first of the novellae (no. 77) he ascribed homosexual lust to diabolical incitement and claimed that "because of such crimes there are famines, earthquakes, and pestilences," inferring that homosexual behavior endangered the very physical basis of the empire. Enough of the seismological literature of antiquity had survived into his reign to make such reasoning clearly a superstitious regression, a point conveniently ignored by Christian apologists who would have Justinian act only out of "sincere concern for the general welfare." The second (no. 141) was the first law ever to refer explicitly to Sodom, where the land supposedly still burned with inextinguishable fire. Seeming to combine magnanimousness with severity, Justinian appealed to such sinners to confess themselves humbly and penitently to the Patriarch of Constantinople, consigning them to the avenging flames if they did not repent. In fact Justinian and his consort Theodora conducted a kind of witch hunt among homosexuals of the city, several of whom were publicly disgraced, whether penitent or not. The rulers used the imputation of homosexuality

to persecute those "against whom no other crimes could be imputed," (Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*) or whose fortunes offered a tempting adjunct to the imperial treasury (Procopius, *Secret History*, 11:34–36).

*Later Byzantine Times.* Needless to say, these measures, though reaffirmed in later codes such as the *Basilica*, did not stop same-sex activity. A number of emperors themselves are believed to have been homosexual. Successful in military campaigns against the Arabs, Slavs, and Bulgars, the iconoclast Constantine V (r. 741–775) sought to limit the power of the monasteries. Theophanes the Confessor lists the "impious lust for males" among his crimes. A particularly tragic case, the alcoholic Michael III (r. 842–867), fell in love with a macho soldier-courtier, Basil the Macedonian, whom he made coruler in 866. Basil promptly murdered his patron, and founded the Macedonian dynasty. Also thought to be homosexual were Basil II (r. 976–1025), a great campaigner against the Bulgarians, Constantine VIII (joint ruler with his brother 976–1025, sole r. 1025–1028), and the Empress Zoe's husband Constantine IX (r. 1042–1055). Eunuchs played a major role at the imperial courts, reaching their zenith under the Macedonian dynasty (867–1057).

Accusations of homosexual vice became a standard device of Byzantine polemics. After the ninth century such charges become rarer probably after the consolidation of Christian family values and emerging masculine ideals. In the field of law the *Basilica* do not repeat the old regulations but only something of secondary importance from the Pandects, a change that might be significant in view of the foregoing circumstance. In the last centuries of the Eastern Empire, however, complaints about homosexuality again surface (e.g., in the Patriarch Athanasius I and Joseph Bryennius). The vice flourished in both male and female monasteries (*typicon* of Prodromos tou Phoberou, 80.31–82.1); the *typica* denied access to

the monasteries to beardless youths and eunuchs in an effort to shield monks from temptation.

*The Later Byzantine Empire.* Beginning in 1071 the Comneni created a new state. After the Byzantines expelled the Latins, who ruled the Eastern empire from the time of the Fourth Crusade (which captured Byzantium in 1203–04) until their expulsion in 1261, the Palaeologi restored a decentralized state ruled by "feudal" magnates on the Western model with the commerce dominated by the Italian maritime republics. Cities shrank, Turks from the East and Bulgars, Serbs, and Franks in the Balkans encroached and barbarized the provinces, and culture declined so precipitously that by the time the capital fell in 1453 the dwindling elite had less knowledge of Plato and Homer than did the Renaissance Italian humanists, who had mastered as well the *Corpus Juris Civilis* and the Orthodox fathers.

An eleventh-century text offers evidence for homosexual clergy in the Orthodox church. The *Penitential* of pseudo-John IV the Faster instructed the confessor to inquire about the sin of *arrhenokoitia*, which in this text means "anal intercourse" in general. Ecclesiastical law punished the "sin of the Sodomite" with two or three years of *epitimion*, while civil law (the *Eclogues*) established decapitation by the sword as the penalty.

In the Orthodox church priests, the "white clergy," could marry, but not monks or bishops, the "black clergy." Still a staple of reading, the texts of the Cappadocian Fathers, whose admonitions to those who could not resist sex to marry young probably lowered the age of marriage, denounced homosexuality as the most heinous of sins, but nothing could prevent its spread in the monasteries. At the most famous monastic establishments, those on Mount Athos, from which even female animals were banished, homosexuality must have flourished from early times; certainly it became notorious there in later centuries.

In 1453 Byzantium fell at last to the Ottoman Turks, and Mehmed the Conqueror immediately sent his agents to requisition the most beautiful boys of the Christian aristocracy for his harem. Mehmed tried to rape the fourteen-year-old son of the noble Lucas Notaras; father and son both perished for their resistance. Likewise the sons of the historian George Phrantzes were killed for refusing to yield to the Sultan's lusts.

These episodes suggest a cultural contrast that was probably less acute in practice, for interface with Islamic homosexuality must have begun centuries earlier. Officially, the greater vigilance of the Byzantine authorities against "the vice" would have served to distinguish them from their adversaries; in practice, there

was undoubtedly a good deal of borrowing from Islamic pederastic customs. This cultural interaction awaits further study.

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