

Empire he traveled to Rome in the winter of 218/19. Here he reigned in a style of luxury and effeminacy unprecedented even in the history of Rome. He sent out agents to comb the city for particularly well-hung partners for his couch, whom he made his advisers and ministers. His life was an endless search for pleasure of every kind, and he had his body depilated so that he could arouse the lusts of the greatest number. His extant portraits on coins suggest a sensual, even African type evolving through late adolescence. The refinements which he innovated in the spheres of culinary pleasure and of sumptuous interior decoration and household furnishing are mentioned by the historians of his reign as having survived him and found emulators among the Roman aristocracy of later times. For what Veblen called "conspicuous consumption" he set a standard probably unequaled until the Islamic middle ages.

His sexual personality cannot be reduced to a mere formula of passive-effeminate homosexuality, although this aspect of his erotic pleasure-seeking is the one stressed by his ancient biographers. He loved the role of Venus at the theatre and the passive role in his encounters with other men, yet he was married several times and even violated a Vestal virgin, but remained childless. This facet of his sexual life has enabled the more dishonest classical historians to write of him as if he were just another heterosexual ruler, when in fact he seems to have desired an operation that would gratify his fantasy not of changing into a member of the opposite sex (transsexual in the modern sense) but of becoming truly androgynous—having the functioning genital organs of both. As high priest of the Syrian deity Elagabal he sought to elevate the cult of the latter to the sole religion of the Empire, yet he did not persecute the Christians. Family intrigues ultimately cost him the favor of the soldiers who murdered him and his mother on March 11, 222. Unique as he was in the history of eroticism and of

luxury, he has inspired writers from the third-century biographer Aelius Lampridius in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* through the later treatments of Jean Lombard, Louis Couperus, and Stefan George to Antonin Artaud and Alberto Arbasino.

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HELLENISM

This trend in Western civilization is part of a larger preoccupation with idealizing a privileged era of the past as a source of cultural norms for the present. Sometimes this idealization engenders utopian longings. In this case classical antiquity, or a portion of it, occupies the place of honor as model and guide. Examples of prescriptive precedents from ancient Greece include the three orders in architecture (Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian), Platonism in philosophy, and Homer as a pattern for epic poetry.

Permutations of the Hellenic Image. Although Christianity retained selected elements of Greek culture and philosophy, it tended to treat the whole phenomenon as part of the discarded pagan model of human development. Clearly unsalvageable, the institution of pederasty figured as one of the most reprehensible survivals of the Hellenic heritage. This rejection persisted for a thousand years after the adoption of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman empire in the fourth century of our era. Hellenism as a norm reemerged during the Italian Renaissance; although this word is modern, it captures the central notion of rebirth of classical ideals and standards of beauty. The Renaissance also saw the first tentative beginnings of an apologetic literature for homosexual behavior. The Florentine thinker Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), who contributed to this apologetic endeavor,

was interested not only in Greece but equally in Egyptian (or what he believed to be Egyptian) thought: the Hermetic corpus. Other humanists were more attracted to ancient Rome than to Greece.

A more exclusive focus on Greece began to emerge in the course of the eighteenth century, reflecting the consolidation of a Europocentric mentality that had become contemptuous of the cultures of other continents which colonialism was engaged in subduing. In 1752 the Göttingen scholar Johann Matthias Gesner (1691–1761) gave a lecture in which he cautiously explored the evidence for Socrates' homosexuality. The text, *Socrates Sanctus Paederasta*, was only published eight years after the author's death and not in Germany but in Utrecht in Holland with its much greater freedom of the press. In 1759 Johann Georg Hamann, the precursor of the Counter-Enlightenment, issued his *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*, emphasizing the sensual element in true friendship between males. Toward the end of the century franker discussions were offered in the Netherlands by Frans Hemsterhuis and Cornelis de Pauw.

A new purified Hellenism triumphed in the artistic movement known as neo-classicism. The homosexual archeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), for example, rejected Egypt as a source of ideal beauty, saying that short, stocky people with snub noses could never inspire great figural art. Although he was not able to visit Greece in person, knowing it only from art and literature, he insisted that only the physical type of that country could serve as a paradigm. Winckelmann had a major influence not only over the rise of neo-classical painting and sculpture, with their emphasis on the male nude, but also over the trend toward "aesthetic paganism" in German literature. Greek ideals, though sometimes anachronistically conflated with Roman ones, played a major role in both the American and French Revolutions.

In the nineteenth century, cultural Hellenism found particular favor with English homosexuals, such as Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds. This ethos of aestheticism was grounded in part in the all-male public schools that combined the officially approved reading of Greek texts with a clandestine, but pervasive subculture of homosexuality. Matthew Arnold, though not himself homosexual, had posited a fundamental contrast between the stern morality of Hebraism and the more permissive and beauty-loving Hellenism. Toward the end of the century a group of minor pederastic poets appeared in England (sometimes termed the Calamites), who went back to the Greek Anthology for much of their inspiration.

In Switzerland Heinrich Hoessli, who published the first major modern work on homosexuality (1836–38), took much of his material from ancient Greece, as did his successor Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. In his *Birth of Tragedy* (1872), the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche effected a major correction of the conventional wisdom about the Greeks. He showed that the ideal of "nothing in excess," of rule by reason and good sense, was but one aspect of the Greek ethos, which he termed the Apollonian side. Its complement was the Dionysian element, which was emotional, intuitive, and irrational. Beginning with the Göttingen professor Karl Otfried Müller (1797–1840), German philologists strove to distinguish separate strands of pederasty, as those of Sparta, Thebes, and Athens. The contemporary French scholar Bernard Sergent has sought to relate Greek homosexual traditions to a putative Indo-European pederasty. Although their findings have remained controversial in detail, the labors of these writers have served to show that Hellenic pederasty was not monolithic.

The great modern Greek poet Constantine Cavafy chose as his two central themes Greek history, though more

the Hellenistic period than the Golden Age, and his own homosexual experiences in *Alexandria*, a city whose very existence attested to the expansive capacity of Hellenism. In the early twentieth century André Gide could still appeal (in *Corydon*, 1924) to Greek pederasty as his model, saying that it was hypocritical to honor the Greeks for their philosophy and art, while ignoring or condemning a central feature of their civilization. This approach lingered in J. Z. Eglinton's *Greek Love* (New York, 1964).

The fame of an ancient Greek poet, **Sappho** of Lesbos, assured that she was synonymous with female same-sex love: sapphism. Later that honor was transferred to the island on which she lived. In the twentieth century such writers as H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Natalie Barney made a cult of ancient Greece, striving to recapture qualities of purity and concision that they found in surviving texts. Significantly, Barney was known as "the Amazon," after that legendary women's tribe.

Outlook. The same-sex component of Greek culture has been subject to various procedures of censorship and emendation. Until recently, more popular treatments of "the Greek miracle" simply omitted any discussion of the prevalence of homosexuality. Some mentioned it only to chide the Greeks for their tragic flaw. In recent decades some homophile scholars have seen the Greeks in their own image—one of adult-adult love or **androphilia**—and neglected to acknowledge that the normative form of Greek same-sex love was pederastic, the love of a male adult for an adolescent youth. In keeping with the male-centered character of Greek society as whole, there was no generally accredited lesbian counterpart of the pederastic institution.

Today's rapid pace of social and technological change has dimmed the appeal of the Greek model. Feminists and others have flayed Hellenic civilization as sexist and elitist. More broadly, the contemporary mainstream, discounting the

idea of inspiration from the past, has become present-minded and future oriented. In gay studies, the **social construction** trend has branded investigation of eras before the nineteenth century irrelevant, claiming that "homosexuality" is a recent innovation. Even disregarding this prohibition—as scholars should—more careful study of ancient Greece suggests that it was not as **sex positive** as earlier idealized views had claimed. Sexual freedom was hedged with formidable taboos of class and gender.

Acknowledging these restrictions and qualifications, there is no doubt that continued scrutiny of the well documented sexual behavior of the ancient Greeks can provide insights for the understanding of such distant societies as **Japan** and **Melanesia**. Ancient Greece was the focus of the last works of the influential French social philosopher **Michel Foucault**. Using both time-honored and distinctively modern techniques of investigation, other scholars are at work in a new effort to wring the full meaning from the extensive body of Greek texts on human sexuality. In the present context the enduring significance of ancient Hellas is that its civilization cherished an attitude toward the pederastic form of male homosexuality standing in diametric opposition to that of the **Judaeo-Christian** tradition. This chapter of the collective memory of mankind encapsulates a behavioral norm which institutionalized Christianity and other opponents could reject but never wholly suppress.

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