

turies, revealed brilliant colors, but was attacked by some critics as having damaged it in other respects.

The artist then turned to the Medici tombs in Florence, which were commissioned by the new pope, Leo X. After the expulsion of the Medici from the city in 1529, Michelangelo defected to the republicans, but was forgiven and reinstated by that powerful family not long thereafter. In 1534 he returned to Rome. In the thirty years that remained to him he painted the *Last Judgment* on the wall of the Sistine Chapel and the frescoes of the Capella Paolina. He also addressed himself to architecture, and to several unfinished sculptures.

When Michelangelo was a boy, his father had opposed his choice of profession as being fit only for a laborer. Long before the artist died, however, he was regularly hailed as *Il Divino*, an almost blasphemous title for a unique artist who exemplified the idea that the supreme genius surpasses the ordinary rules to which other artists are subject.

For fifty years Michelangelo enjoyed undisputed sway as an artist. Yet his psych sexual identity was much less secure. Throughout his life Michelangelo experienced a powerful emotive and erotic attraction to men, particularly those in their late teens and early twenties. The presence of apprentices in his studio, who were undoubtedly among the models for such sensual male nudes as the Slaves for the Julius tomb and the *ignudi* of the Sistine ceiling, exposed him to constant temptation. At least one case is recorded where a former apprentice attempted to blackmail the artist by threatening to tell tales, while in another instance the father of a potential apprentice offered the boy's services in bed. (Michelangelo indignantly refused.)

In 1532 the artist met a young Roman nobleman, Tommaso de' Cavalieri, to whom he was to be devoted for the rest of his life. To Cavalieri he sent drawings, including the famous one of an eagle

(evidently himself) carrying a beautiful *Ganymede* (Cavalieri) aloft. Poems and letters also avow his passion. However, beginning in his late fifties, this love, being directed to a person whose standing placed him far above the working-class youths to whom he was accustomed, assumed a sublimated character.

Michelangelo's poems contain many fascinating hints of his self-understanding. Yet his language is difficult and his handling of philosophical ideas unsure. Revealingly, in 1623 the artist's grandnephew and editor, Michelangelo the Younger, bowdlerized them, changing many male pronouns to female ones. This act (since remedied in modern editions) shows that contemporaries were embarrassed by his love objects.

While Michelangelo's enemies (including the spiteful Aretino) gossiped, his friends insisted on his chaste purity. As yet we have no actual proof of genital contacts with young men. However, what evidence there is suggests that they were not lacking—though probably sparse—in his earlier years, ceasing later. Michelangelo was born into an era in which the relatively easy-going attitudes toward artists' sexual peccadillos that prevailed in the early and middle decades of the fifteenth century had yielded to more disapproving ones, a development that climaxed in the bigoted prudery of the incipient Counterreformation of the middle decades of the sixteenth century. Michelangelo witnessed such contemporaries as Leonardo da Vinci, Sandro Botticelli, and Benvenuto Cellini disgraced by charges of sodomy. Evidently, he was able to convince himself, and many others as well, that his "spiritual" love of beautiful young men had nothing in common with base acts of buggery.

In an as-told-to life penned by his epigone Ascanio Condivi, Michelangelo seems to have intended to attribute his attraction to men to the stars. Referring to the fact that he was born under the joint influence of Mercury and Venus, he surely

knew that the ancient astrological tradition stemming from Ptolemy held that this conjunction caused men to be attracted more to boys than women. Thus the tendency was not the product of a whim, but was foreordained by cosmic forces. However this may be, because of his fame and the changing temper of the times in which he lived, Michelangelo experienced unique pressures on his sexual self-understanding. These pressures are linked to—though they cannot explain—the special intensity of his art, the *terribilità* for which he is renowned.

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MIDDLE AGES

The Middle Ages constitute the major phase of European history that stands between classical antiquity (Greece and Rome), on the one hand, and the Renaissance, on the other. The beginning of the Renaissance can be placed with relative precision in fifteenth-century Italy, whence the new outlook spread in the following century to the rest of Europe. The other boundary, the end of classical antiquity, cannot be pinpointed, as the change was a gradual process beginning in the third century of our era and not completed until the fifth or even later. Moreover, to understand the formation of the Middle Ages it is necessary to look back even earlier: to the origins of Christianity. Inspired by the teachings of Jesus Christ, the church did not achieve firm institutions until the latter half of the second century. At this time one can confirm the separation from Judaism, the consolidation of the canon of writings known as the New Testament, the crystalization of a system of governance based on bishops as presiding officers, and a growing roster of martyrs created by

official persecution—in attacks which were to have the ultimate effect of strengthening rather than smothering the church.

The Patristic Period and the Official Recognition of Christianity. From this time onwards comes a large body of exegetical tracts and theological disquisitions known as the Patristic writings. Taken as a whole, these texts tend to confirm the ascetic morality of the New Testament. In those rare instances where they depart from rigorism, as in relaxation of the ban on visual images, there was extensive and heated controversy, with both sides strenuously maintaining their positions. In the case of sex between males, no such debate occurred, a silence signifying that the matter needed no discussion, for the negative judgment of homosexuality enshrined in the Levitical prohibitions was incorporated in the constitution of the primitive church and reinforced by New Testament passages condemning sexual activity between males in particular and all forms of sexual depravity and impurity in general. Occasionally, the Fathers do attack the corrupt morals of pagan pederasty, warning their own flock not to yield to temptation.

The transition from the toleration and indifference which the pagan ancient Mediterranean world had shown toward homosexuality to the implacable intolerance and social ostracism of the later Middle Ages could not have been effected overnight. Apologists for Christian rigorism would like to begin *in medias res*, claiming that "the Church taught, and people universally believed" that homosexual behavior was a crime against nature for which an act of divine wrath had destroyed Sodom and the neighboring cities. But this Jewish legend embellished with Hellenic moralizing was only gradually inculcated into the mass mind, particularly in countries outside the classical world and ignorant of Palestine and its geographical myths.

Constantine the Great's Edict of Milan (313) transformed Christianity from