NAZISM
The ideology and practice of National Socialism, which under the leadership of Adolf Hitler ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945, united several virulent strands of hostility to homosexuality. Inheriting the repressive attitudes of the nineteenth-century sexual purity movements, Nazi ideologues reacted also to the licence they perceived as eroding the social fabric of Germany under the Weimar Republic (1918–33). Popular sentiment among the Nazis favored a strong polarization of male and female roles, which the perception of homosexuals as “the third sex” contradicted. Equating population growth with power, the Nazis also pursued a vigorous pronatalist policy. Their attitude toward male homosexual behavior, regarded as a threat to the survival of the German people, was unequivocably negative. Heinrich Himmler, the Nazi leader most concerned with the question, advocated drowning homosexuals in bogs as a return to the tribal custom of the ancient Germans recorded by Tacitus.

It is a historical paradox that the presence of a few known homosexuals in the ranks of the early Nazi Party, notably Ernst Röhm, the head of the paramilitary Brownshirts (SA), gave unscrupulous opponents and propagandists of the left the leverage required for the superficial plausibility of their myth of the “fascist perversion”—a supposed affinity between sexual deviation and Nazism. In fact, Röhm and his associates were liquidated on Hitler’s orders in the Night of the Long Knives, June 30, 1934.

The jurists of the Third Reich reinforced the existing antihomosexual clause of the Reich Penal Code by adding a new section [175a], but at the same time inserted an article in the Code of Criminal Procedure [154b] that allowed the public prosecutor to take no action in a case in which the offender had been the object of blackmail—thus acknowledging the validity of Magnus Hirschfeld’s claim that the existing law encouraged the extortion of homosexuals. The prohibition was not extended to lesbians, so that female homosexuality remained legal.

When detected, male homosexuals were arrested and consigned to the concentration camps, where they were placed in the lowest category of prisoners. In the camps homosexual inmates were required to wear the pink triangle as an identifying mark; subsequently, this emblem was adopted as a positive symbol by the gay liberation movements of the 1970s. Estimates of the number of pink triangle men killed vary from 10,000 to 250,000; probably the true number will never be known. Sadly, homosexual victims of the Nazis were the only such group denied monetary compensation from the West German government after World War II because of their continuing illegal status. Even today commemorations of the Holocaust often fail to mention them. A bizarre footnote is the appearance of two tiny groups of “gay Nazis” in California in the mid 1970s; this episode is a reflection, probably of ephemeral significance, of the lingering myth of the “fascist perversion.”


Wayne R. Dynes

NEOPATONISM
A revival and recasting of Platonism—mingling with it Pythagorean, Aristotelian, Stoic, and mystic ideas—Neoplatonism supplanted Stoicism as the dominant philosophy of the classical world from the mid-third century to the closing
of the pagan schools at Athens and elsewhere by Justinian in 529. Philosophers from Antiochus (d. ca. 68 B.C.) to Plotinus (205–269/70), who opposed all sex, including homosexuality of every type, evolved this new synthesis. In Rome when he was forty, Plotinus founded a circle of leading politicians and scholars, including his most important disciple, Porphyry (232/3-ca. 305), who arranged for the publication of Plotinus’ Enneads almost on the eve of the official recognition of Christianity in 313.

In the fourth century, from its chief centers in Syria and then Pergamon, its star proponent being Iamblichus, Neoplatonism became the creed of the pagan antagonists of Christianity, which had been made the state religion by Theodosius ca. 390.

Neoplatonism even influenced Christianity through St. Gregory of Nyssa and other theologians of the Byzantine Empire, and through St. Augustine. Neoplatonism survived at Athens and Alexandria into the sixth century. It appeared in the writings of the pseudo-Areopagite (about 500) and John Scotus Eriugena in the ninth century, as well as in the work of the middle Byzantine polymath Michael Psellus. One of the principal features of Neoplatonism was its spectrum of gradations between “the One” and “matter”: the world-mind, the world-soul, and nature—each stage being characterized by diminishing unity. Mystical as well as rational, Neoplatonism encouraged Christian belief in intermediate powers such as angels and demons. One of Porphyry’s works in five books, Against the Christians, of which fragments survive, though the source was condemned to the flames by the Christians in 448, used historical criticism to prove the lateness of composition of the Book of Daniel, as elsewhere he proved the “Book of Zoroaster” a forgery. His work on logic became the standard Byzantine text and his critique of Homer a philological landmark.

Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), the Florentine philosopher and humanist who was also homophile, was the chief exponent of Renaissance Neoplatonism. Exposed to Greek thought by the arrival in Italy of learned Byzantines fleeing Constantinople after its fall to the Turks in 1453, the young Ficino discovered Plato and his later followers, learning Greek in order to study the original texts. (Plato had been known in medieval Europe only through often faulty Latin versions, some of them secondary translations from the Arabic.) An eclectic, Ficino sought to reconcile Platonism and Neoplatonism with Christianity, using another body of Greek texts, the Hermetic Corpus compiled in late antiquity.

Of special significance is his resurrection of the Platonic ideal of love, as it is known from the Phaedrus and the Symposium. In the sixteenth century Ficino’s version was repackaged in countless treatises on love, becoming the prototype of a new concept of “courtly love” that was very different from the medieval variety. Ficino advocated a profound but highly spiritual love between two men, ideally united by their common quest for knowledge. This love is caused, following Plato’s conception, by the vision of beauty conveyed by the soul of the other individual—a beauty that reflects the celestial perfection of God. Through the physical beauty of a young man—women were in Ficino’s view unsuitable as catalysts of this sublimity—the conscience of the enlightened man ascends to the Beauty which is the archetypal Idea (in Plato’s sense) on which the beauty that he responds to depends—to God himself. With Cosimo and Lorenzo de’ Medici’s patronage, he founded—in imitation of Plato’s Academy in Athens—the Platonic Academy in Florence, which was to be a major center of Italian Renaissance thought.

In the course of the sixteenth century those who followed Ficino became increasingly uncomfortable with the homoerotic aspects of his philosophy of love. Deploying an intellectual sleight of hand, they heterosexualized the ideal—so that today “Platonic love” usually means...
the love of man and woman that includes no physical expression.

William A. Percy

NERO (37–68)

Roman emperor. Exiled as a result of the disfavor of the Emperor Caligula, the boy Nero and his ambitious mother Agrippina were rehabilitated and allowed to return to Rome after the emperor's death in 41. Several years later Agrippina married the emperor Claudius and, on his demise in 54, was able to secure the throne for her son. Guided by the philosopher Seneca, the empire then entered an auspicious period of sound government. Growing bored of the tedium of rule, however, Nero became addicted to luxury and to his artistic pursuits—he imagined himself a distinguished poet and performer. He constructed for himself a great palace known as the Domus Transitoria. This proved insufficient, and Nero apparently ordered a large part of Rome set on fire in 64, to serve as a site for the construction of his Golden House. As foreign relations became more difficult, his connections with the Senate soured, and the plots against him required increasingly repressive measures. A revolt by the army and Senate caused him to commit suicide, uttering the words, "What an artist is perish ing in me." His death ended the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

Nero's appetite for luxury and self-indulgence emerged in his sexual escapades. After enjoying sexual relations with his mother (or so Suetonius claims) he grew tired of her when she disapproved of his liaisons with the freedwoman Acte and the glamorous sophisticate Sabina Poppaea. He then devised a special collapsing boat on which he sent her with great ceremony for a short cruise. But Agrippina escaped and swam to shore, where she was dispatched. Nero had a youth, Sporus, whom he castrated and treated as his wife. Sporus was escorted through the streets, receiving the homage due an empress. Reversing roles, Nero made his husky freedman Doryphorus marry him (though dispensing with the castration).

Nero's many misdeeds have earned him an infamy outstanding even for the profligate age in which he lived. Recent historians, however, have sought to redress the balance. His early years were marked by a serious effort at governmental reform. Unlike his cruelty, his sexual irregularities no longer seem monstrous. And Nero presided over what has been called the Roman architectural revolution, the beginning of the great phase that made the empire's accomplishments in this field unsurpassed. The image perpetuated by Henryk Sienkiewicz' novel Quo Vadis (1896) and by Hollywood films is not confirmed by sober historical analysis.


Warren Johansson

NETHERLANDS, THE
(HOLLAND)

A European kingdom of fifteen million Dutch-speaking inhabitants, the Netherlands has in recent times acquired a reputation as the most tolerant country in the industrialized Western world on the subject of homosexuality.

History. The (northern) Netherlands emerged as a national entity (the Republic of the United Provinces) during the Eighty Years War (1568–1648), a revolt against the Spanish Habsburg empire, which separated them from the southern Netherlands (Belgium). A great commercial and maritime power, until 1795 they were a loose federation of seven virtually independent provinces. The House of Orange, by no means a monarchy, held only limited rights. Until 1748 the princes of Orange, the so-called stadholders (vice-