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TURKEY

The history of same-sex love is almost coterminous with the Turkish state. At the Seljuk court of Konya there flourished the great Sufi poet Jelal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273), whose life was decisively marked by his passion for the youth Shams al-Din of Tabriz. Not himself ethnic Turkish, Rumi prepared a path for many other figures who were. **Sufism**, which continues to flourish in Turkey, incorporates a tradition of the beautiful youth or Beloved as the channel of Divine Love. The cultivated school of *divan* poetry, which includes such masters as Kadi Burhanettin (1344–1398), Şeyhi (d. ca. 1430), Nedim (1681–1730), and Şeyh Galib (1757–1799), stems from this source, though sometimes inflecting it in secular directions.

Quite early in Turkish history, its rulers discovered the pleasures of sensual boy-love, and Bayezid I (1360–1403) sent his soldiers to comb the conquered areas to find the most delightful boys for his harem. His example caused the practice of taking boys for sexual purposes to spread in the army, among government officials, and through the nobility. During their wars of conquest the Turkish sovereigns did not fail to renew their supply of slaves—especially beautiful, highly desired European youths. This levy as much as anything else contributed to European hatred of the Turks.

Mehmed II, who captured Constantinople in 1453 and made it the capital of the Ottoman Empire, is described as a notorious boy-lover. To rouse his troops to assault the city he painted a glowing picture of the booty that awaited them—especially the gentle, beautiful, aristocratic boys, enough for all. The historical accounts of the fall of the city abound in tales of **rape** and atrocity, as the Greek nobles

were murdered and their children enslaved, with the 200 most handsome going to the Sultan's harem. At the battle of Mohacs in 1526, the Turkish victory caused the entire Balkan Peninsula to fall under Ottoman rule. The Croatian Bartolomej Durdevic has left an eloquent description of the boys enslaved after such conquests and sold as **catamites** or male prostitutes.

The boys chosen for the service of the ruler ranged in age from 8 to 16; they received a geisha-like training to make them both entertainers and skilled bed partners. When the Turkish Empire ceased to expand, the Sultan imposed an infamous "child tax." Every four years the Sultan's agents would visit each village in European Turkey to select the most handsome boys between 7 and 9 for the army corps, the palace pages' school, and the labor corps. European boys were typically not castrated, but feminized in training, manners, and costume "to serve the lusts of lecherous masters." Much has been written on boy-love in the court of Ali Pasha, the Turkish governor of Ioannina in Greece, whose agents roamed the dominion in search of beautiful children, even killing parents who refused their sons to the governor. Ali and his son are said to have engaged in sadomasochistic practices reminiscent of the writings of the Marquis de Sade, both torturing the boys and presenting them with gifts.

Even after Mehmed IV (1641–1691) abolished the "child tribute," the supply of boys was maintained by an active slave traffic into the Turkish Empire. In the 1850s Circassian slave dealers supplied large numbers of children—often sold into slavery by their own parents. Again in 1894, large numbers of the handsomest Armenian boys were taken for sexual purposes. Perhaps no city has ever been so famous for its boy **brothels** as Istanbul, where boys of various nationalities were once available as freely as girls. The anonymous English poem *Don Leon* falsely attributed to Byron (1836) tells of "seeking a brothel where . . . The black-eyed boy his

trade unblushing plies." To the extent that this tradition survives in modern Turkey, the brothels have preserved the arts cultivated to their peak in the Sultans' harems.

Yet even with their excesses—which were in fact exaggerated by hostile European commentators propagating the stereotype of the "cruel and lustful Turk"—the Ottomans were also capable of man-boy love, and European boys were all the more desirable because of their capacity for affection and erotic response which the more familiar Near Eastern boys were thought to lack. The boy used for sexual purposes could graduate from his master's bed to become the manager of an estate, the steward of a household, even a general, court official or governor if his protector were powerful enough. Since the homoerotic side of Turkish life was omnipresent and inevitable, those who could take advantage of the opportunity thrived and climbed the social ladder.

Modern Turkey has actually suffered from Europeanization in that the Christian attitudes became part of the political mentality of the Republic, with the familiar practice of raiding gay bars, arresting the patrons, and subjecting them to humiliation and even torture. Yet despite this, the Istanbul of today is thought to have nearly half a million homosexuals, who concentrate in the Beyoğlu (Pera) district, especially the Cihangir quarter. A majority must still conceal their homosexuality from their families and colleagues at work. Arslan Yüzgün's study of 223 homosexual men in Istanbul showed that 56.1 percent are both active and passive, 30.9 percent are passive only and 13 percent are active only. On the whole they are more educated than the average of the Turkish population. However, the traditional stigmatization of the passive as opposed to the active homosexual lingers. The active homosexual is esteemed and can even boast of his ways, the passive homosexual is despised and persecuted by the police even in the absence of laws against his behavior.

The Western gay rights movement has finally reached Turkey, and in April 1987 the terror tactics employed by the police in Istanbul sparked a resistance movement in which eighteen homosexuals sued the police as a group for the first time, submitted a petition to the Attorney General, and later staged a hunger strike in Taksim Square. Thus another segment of the international gay community has achieved the stage of political consciousness that enables it to organize and fight for its human rights.

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TWILIGHT MEN

In Kenilworth Bruce's 1933 novel, *Goldie*, the hero joins a prototypical (and fictional) gay rights organization, The Twilight League. This reflects the title of André Tellier's popular homosexual novel, *Twilight Men* (1931). It is doubtful whether the term enjoyed much real currency, but images of shadows and of darkness were common in the fiction of the period—and, given the obligatory tragic ending, all too appropriate.

In the nineteenth century the adjective "crepuscular" enjoyed some vogue to designate a declining civilization, because of the allegory of civilization following a quasi-solar course of ascent, zenith, afternoon fullness, and then descent into twilight; hence crepuscular trenches with *fin-de-siècle* and *decadent*. Richard Wagner's 1874 opera, *Die Got-*