

school days. In 1930–33 Isherwood lived in Berlin, where he gathered the material for some of his most effective writing. After Hitler's rise to power, he moved from country to country in an effort to stay together with his young German lover Heinz. He described this period with considerable frankness in his later memoir *Christopher and His Kind* (1976). During this period he worked with Auden (who had emerged as a major poet) on three plays, and they traveled to China together in 1938. Isherwood then settled in Southern California where in 1953 he took another young lover, Don Bachardy, who remained with him until Isherwood's death. Bachardy acquired some renown as an artist, creating many portraits of the writer and his friends.

Isherwood first found his footing as a writer in the material written in the 1930s and later collected in *The Berlin Stories* (1954). In these sketches of expatriation and sexual eccentricity, of poverty and political turmoil, he introduced the naturalistic method he called "I am a camera." Through several stage and screen metamorphoses this material came to play an important part in the post-War fascination with Weimar decadence.

Homosexuality, which was only one of several themes in his earlier novels, became increasingly prominent with the passage of time. *The World in the Evening* (1954), though later dismissed by the author as unsuccessful, contains what may be the first satisfactory explanation of camp. *A Single Man* (1964) is the portrait of a lonely, but not despairing Los Angeles gay man, while *Down There on a Visit* (1966) offers a portrait of Danny Fouts, said to be the most expensive hustler in the world. In Southern California Isherwood became interested in mysticism under the influence of a fellow expatriate, Gerald Heard, who later emerged as something of a philosopher of the homophile movement. For several years the novelist was a devoted disciple of Swami Prabhavananda, a Vedantist who had settled in Hollywood

(see *My Guru and Myself*, 1980). Isherwood was also active in the homophile rights organization, ONE.

Isherwood's writing has a spare elegance, but he declined to participate in the avant-garde experiments of his time. In all likelihood, his works will continue to be read for their candid picture of the life trajectory of a gay man in a time that saw enormous social and sexual changes.

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## ISLAM

A major world religion, Islam stems from the preaching of the Prophet Muhammad in Arabia in the seventh century. It is based on the principle that the believer (or *muslim*) surrenders (Arabic: *islam*) to the will of the one and only God (Allah). God's will is expressed in Islamic law, consisting of a system of duties which every Muslim has to submit to by virtue of his belief. Islamic law, also known as the *Shari'ah* (path), forms a comprehensive code of behavior, a divinely ordained path of conduct that guides the Muslim in the practical expression of his religious conviction toward the goal of divine favor in paradise. Law is based on the *Koran*, the word of God as revealed to his Prophet, on the *Hadith*, which is a collection of the words and deeds attributed to the Prophet which are used as precedents, and on the interpretations of the Islamic jurists (*Ulama*).

*Basic Features.* A central theme is Islamic law and its theoretical attitude toward male homosexual behavior, and how this attitude relates to the way Muslims generally deal with such behavior in practice. It is difficult to speak of Islamic law in general, however, because of the differences of opinion among various Islamic law schools and sects (such as the

Shi'a), while the same can be said of Islamic attitude in practice, as it varies in specific historical periods and regions. Even with a focus on material from the contemporary Middle East, an emphasis adopted in this article, general conclusions must be tentative

Islam considers sexuality an absolutely normal and natural urge of every human being. Symbolic of this positive attitude is the important place sex is accorded in paradise, which will be the fulfillment of the spiritual and bodily self. Islamic representations of paradise depict a height of delights, with, among other things, girls whose virginity is continually renewed, immortal boys as beautiful as hidden pearls, perpetual erections and infinite orgasms. On earth, however, because of human imperfection, sex has a problematic side, which makes regulation necessary. Unregulated sex threatens the social order and leads to anarchy and chaos, and therefore has to be restricted to marriage. Marriage is a social obligation, and forms the basis of orderly society, giving expression to the divine harmony consisting of the complementarity of men and women. An essential and sacred part of marriage, sex is considered to be a tribute to divine will, an acknowledgement of God's kindness and generosity, and a foretaste of the joys of paradise, which will sometimes lead to a renewal of his creation. Social order and the God-given harmony of life are threatened by the suppression of sexuality in celibacy and by sexual acts outside of marriage, heterosexual as well as homosexual. Celibacy is regarded as boring and unnatural, and rejected because it would inevitably lead to sinful feelings and to a knocking on forbidden doors. Sexual activity outside of marriage, adultery, is sharply condemned by Islamic law as a crime against humanity, which opens the door to many other shameful acts, and affects the reputation and property of the family, thereby disrupting the social fabric.

Homosexual behavior (*liwat*), i.e., sexual acts between members of the same sex, is considered to be adultery, being sex with an illicit partner. A person who performs such actions (*luti*) is regarded as extraordinarily corrupt, because he challenges the harmony of the sexes and topsyturvy God's creation: "Cursed are the men who behave effeminately, and cursed are the women who behave in a masculine way." Homosexual behavior is actually considered a revolt against God which violates the order of the world, and would be a source of evil and anarchy. The only remedy against such unnatural and sinful feelings is to fight and suppress them: "He who falls in love, conceals his passion, is chaste and patiently abstains, is forgiven by God and received into Paradise." Those who stubbornly persist in their behavior, however, await severe punishments, at least theoretically.

*The Koran and the Hadith.* In the Koran, homosexual behavior is explicitly condemned: "And as for the two of you who are guilty thereof, punish them both. If they repent and mend their ways, let them be. God is forgiving and merciful." (4:16). Homosexual behavior is further mentioned in the parable of the apostle Lot, which is repeatedly told in the Koran, and relates of the corrupted and evil-minded people of Lot's village, who transgressed consciously against the bounds of God. The behavior of these unbelievers was considered evil in general, their avarice led to inhospitality and robbery, which in turn led to the humiliation of strangers by mistreatment and rape. It was their homosexual behavior, however, which was seen as symptomatic of their attitudes, because it was regarded as "an abomination such as none in all the world has ever committed before." Obstinate refusing to accept God's message brought by Lot, the villagers were punished by God raining upon them "stones of heated clay" which killed them all and left their village ruined as a sign of the power of God for all to see. "The doings of the people of Lot" even became

proverbial, alluding specifically to homosexual behavior, while the Arabic words for homosexual behavior and for a person who performs such actions both derive from Lot's name.

In the Hadith, homosexual behavior is condemned harshly: "Whenever a male mounts another male, the throne of God trembles"; the angels look on in loathing and say: "Lord, why do you not command the earth to punish them and the heaven to rain stones on them?" God replies: "I am forbearing; nothing will escape me." Beside dreadful torments and humiliations in the world to come, homosexual behavior had to be punished on earth: "If you see two people who act like the people of Lot, then kill the active and the passive."

*Legal Sanctions.* The punishment which the Islamic jurists generally prescribe for adultery, and therefore also for homosexual behavior, is stoning to death for married people, and one hundred lashes for unmarried people. Persons who are married are punished more harshly because their behavior had severe consequences in regard to property and reputation, and would disrupt the family and the institution of marriage, both so important for the social order. The extravagant punishments which are prescribed are meant to have a deterring effect, and for that reason punishments are even carried out publicly.

Discouragement and repentance are considered more important than punishment, therefore the following conditions have to be met before condemnation is possible: Four adult muslims of the male sex, of unblemished integrity of character, have to swear that they have been eye-witnesses to the carnal act itself. Less than four witnesses will lead to a punishment of the witnesses themselves, while the false accuser will receive eighty lashes, because of slander. Perpetrators can only be condemned when adult, muslim, sane, and acting out of free will. A confession is sufficient for condemnation, if four times

repeated. Before it is accepted, however, the judge has to point out to the accused the consequences of his confession, and the fact that repentance before the giving of testimony will be punished less harshly.

The fulfillment of all these conditions seems almost out of the question, leading to the conclusion that in practice it is only in very exceptional circumstances that persons are convicted and punished for adultery, and thus for homosexual behavior.

*Theory and Practice.* Theoretically homosexual behavior is sharply condemned by Islam, but in practice it is at present, and has been in the past, for the most part tolerantly treated and frequently occurring in countries where Islam predominates. The established societal norms and morals of Islam are accepted as unchangeable and respected by the majority of muslims, which does not imply however that they will or can conform to them in practice. Human beings are considered by Islam as imperfect, and are expected to make mistakes and consequently to sin. God is understanding of man's weaknesses, and when a person is sincere in his shame and shows repentance of his sinful behavior, he will be mercifully forgiven by God. In practice it is only public transgression of Islamic morals that is condemned, and therefore Islamic law stresses the role of eye-witnesses to an offence. The police are not allowed to go in search of possible sinners, who can only be caught red-handed, and not behind the "veil of decency" of their closed doors. In a way, concealment is advised, because to disclose a dreadful sin would be a sin in itself.

But it is not only condemnation by the law which can be avoided by secrecy, the same can be said of shame, a concept which plays an important part in the social role pattern of Islamic countries. Shame is engendered by what an individual thinks that others might think of him, and arises when public behavior is not according to the prescribed role, and therefore improper and disgraceful, bringing

obloquy on the individual and tarnishing the reputation and standing of his family.

This emphasis on externals in Islamic law as well as in the social concept of shame, with its connivance in theoretically forbidden and shameful behavior, could be deemed hypocritical. But such a judgment would be beside the point, missing the essence of the entire matter, which is that in principle the validity of Islamic morals and of the social role pattern is confirmed by not openly resisting it, and it is just that which maintains the system as it is.

Kicking at the boundaries of permissibility by telling obscene and shocking anecdotes, sometimes expressed in literature but mostly in the conversation and speech of the people, has always been popular, but as long as it did not give rise to publicly unlawful behavior or to open resistance to morality, it posed no serious problem for the social order.

The generally tolerant attitude toward homosexual behavior in practice can partly be explained by the fact that it will usually take place discreetly. Moreover it does not have serious personal consequences such as, for example, heterosexual adultery would have. There is no question of abuse of possession (which a wife is of her husband) or of loss of honor and face of husband and family, while there fortunately exists no danger of pregnancy, with all its consequences.

Practical tolerance therefore is the rule with respect to discreet homosexual behavior, but what about homosexuality?

Islamic law in theory only condemns homosexual acts and does not express itself on the subject of homosexuality. This is not in the least surprising, however, if we bear in mind that homosexuality is a western concept, crystallizing in the nineteenth century and stemming from the notion that sexual behavior is characteristic of someone's personality and identity, and therefore influences his behavior in general, leading to a certain lifestyle. Such a concept is essentially

foreign to countries where Islam predominates, because there (sexual) behavior is not so much determined by personal preferences or someone's personality, as by a person's role and the circumstances in which he finds himself. Generally speaking, a person behaves in a particular situation as much as possible according to the social role pattern that prescribes whether a certain kind of behavior in that situation is proper or not. He conforms to this, because otherwise he would bring shame on himself and his family, and lose face and honor. For that reason it is, for example, not particularly important if a sexual act is homo- or heterosexual, but rather which role is performed (active, as is proper for a man, or passive, like a woman), and if the act has social consequences or not. Therefore concepts like homo- and heterosexuality make no sense in cultures like these. Such contemporary western principles as "I am a homosexual, and thus I do not marry" are laughed at, because a person has to comply with his role, and therefore is expected to marry and beget children. As long as he maintains his role in public, his private preferences and idiosyncracies are nobody's business but his own, that is if he is discrete about them, and harms no one.

*The Repression in Iran.* What, then, of the executions of homosexuals in Iran between 1979 and 1984? The problem here is a confusion of terms, because the "homosexuality" meant in Iran is far different from the western concept of it. In Iran "homosexuality" has become a negative label, as it has in other Islamic countries, but fortunately with less extreme consequences. The label "homosexuality" refers to behavior which clashes with the God-given order of society and with the social role pattern; it is behavior which violates public decency, and is moreover seen as a typical example of western decadence. "Homosexuality" refers specifically to passive homosexual behavior, which is considered particularly objectionable, because it turns God's creation topsyturvy,

and threatens the God-given harmony between men and women, which is reflected in the social role pattern. A man who plays the active, penetrator role in a homosexual act, behaves like a man, and is therefore not considered "homosexual." Passive homosexual behavior, however, implies being penetrated like a woman, and is considered to be extremely scandalous and humiliating for a man, because it is feminine behavior. Deviant behavior like this was in olden times viewed as abnormal and unnatural, and sometimes even characterized as an illness, because it was incomprehensible that a man could voluntarily choose to be dishonored and debased in the role of a woman. More common is the belief that sexual behavior that deviates from the norm causes illness, a notion soon to be confirmed by the appearance of AIDS.

Another myth that influences the negative labeling of "homosexuality" is that of the foreignness of sexually deviant behavior. In past centuries the Arabs ascribed homosexual behavior to Persian influence, and nowadays it is mostly regarded as originating from the West—a rather paradoxical viewpoint, because it used to be the other way around. Western society is viewed as shameless and depraved, permissiveness making license public and ultimately leading to social chaos. "Homosexuality" epitomizes this western decadence, this "unbridled riot of wantonness."

Finally, "homosexuality" also refers to the public transgression of morals, the conscious refusal to hide behind the veil of secrecy, and thus openly challenging established norms and values. As in the story of Lot, it is today "homosexuality" that has become symptomatic of evil behavior in general. "Homosexuality" would inevitably lead to chaos and decay, and therefore "homosexuals" are considered as antisocial, and as a threat to social order. Ayatollah Khomeini (who died in 1989) alluded to this idea, asserting that "homosexuals" had to be exterminated

because they were parasites and corruptors of the nation by spreading the "stain of wickedness." "Homosexuality" not only is seen as evil in itself, but provides a convenient label for stigmatizing bad people in general. This broad-gauge definition underpinned what happened in Iran, where "homosexuality" was often deployed as a generic label to be applied at will to persons adjudged criminals, whether rightly or wrongly. It did not matter much what they did, it was enough to know that they were antisocial and therefore evil. In this way, for example, political opponents could be eliminated without any legal justification. In times of crisis especially, when the need for security is strong, public morals tend to become more severe, and deviant behavior that was once ignored is repressed. Moreover, in a period of political, economic, and social instability, internal chaos will often be blamed on outsiders and foreigners.

But what occurred in Iran is certainly not typical of the attitude toward homosexual behavior in the whole spectrum of Islamic countries. Even in Iran it may be regarded as exceptional. The executions of "homosexuals" took place in an atmosphere of revolutionary turbulence, with strong reactionary and antiwestern accents that led to excesses and an overall atmosphere of terror. Yet the foundation of such extremes is probably present in all Islamic countries, and stems from a negative attitude toward passive homosexual behavior, coupled with a rejection of western morality and condemnation of public indecency. Therefore "homosexuality" is rejected. In practice homosexual behavior is usually treated tolerantly as long as it is discrete and harms no one. This tolerance was well characterized by the words of an unknown Arab poet: "As the boy looked at it, my thing moved, and he whispered: 'It is splendid! Do let me try its love making.' I answered 'Such an act is reprehended, in fact many people call it unlawful.' He said: 'Oh them; oh them! With me all things are lawful.' And I was too polite to disobey."

*Lesbianism.* Of female same-sex behavior (*musahaqa*) almost nothing is known. Islamic law considers it sex outside of marriage and therefore as adultery, with all the consequences already described. Yet because no penetration takes place, punishment is theoretically limited to one hundred lashes. In practice lesbian behavior is regarded as relatively unimportant, because it usually takes place discreetly.

See also *Abu Nuwas; Africa, North; Mujun; Rumi; Sa'di; Sufism; Turkey.*

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## ITALY

Apart from classical antiquity, there are two eras in which Italy has a salient interest for the study of homosexual behavior. The first stretches from approximately 1250 to 1650 (the *Renaissance*, broadly interpreted); the second from World War II to the present.

Italy has a particular attraction for the historian because of its vast archives of material from the premodern period—archives which have not yet been much tapped. For the curious layperson, present-day Italy offers a lively homosexual subculture which sprang up after World War II, accelerating notably after the birth of the country's gay movement in 1971.

*The Classical Heritage.* Contrary to what has often been stated, there was no

direct continuity on Italian soil between the homosexuality of Greco-Roman stamp and that which arose after the barbarian invasions. "Greek love" in Italy is in fact a later invention of northern European travelers of the nineteenth century, invented to lend dignity to the type of sex that they came to the country to enjoy.

In reality, at the time of the fall of the Roman empire there were recurrent foreign invasions. Over the centuries Italian soil was occupied by the most disparate peoples—Goths, Langobards (Lombards) and other Germanic tribes, Byzantines, Slavs, Arabs and Berbers, Normans, and Albanians. In addition it would be a mistake to discount the profound effects of the implantation of Christianity. All these factors could not help but disturb the characteristic features of the Greco-Roman world.

To cite an example of how complex the amalgam produced by the introduction of the customs of foreign peoples, one need only recall that the laws of the Lombards, a Germanic people, displaced Roman law in vast regions of Italy down to the thirteenth century. In fact the last remnants of Lombard law, confined to a few districts of southern Italy, disappeared only with the Napoleonic regime at the start of the nineteenth century. (See *Law, Germanic.*)

The Latin heritage was significant in the history of Italy (and not solely in that country) as an ideal image of a golden age which must be recaptured through a "revival." In the Middle Ages this aim took concrete form in the institution known as the Holy Roman Empire, and it was to have later avatars.

This theme is found in jurisprudence, having come about through the rediscovery and renewed study of Roman law (as concretized in the *Corpus Juris Civilis* of Justinian) conducted by the great Bolognese jurists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This rediscovery is responsible for the West's adoption of the penalty of burning at the stake for sodo-