

trials for attempted blackmail as for sodomy committed or attempted. Blackmail was the form of extortion practiced by the criminal or semi-criminal classes at the expense of the individual with means and social position who was nevertheless in the grip of forbidden sexual desires. When a blackmailer was convicted, the penalty was usually the same—pillory, fine, and imprisonment amounting to ten months in jail—as for attempted sodomy.

The subculture of the molly houses tried to protect itself from discovery and from betrayal by its own members. The worst foe of all was a vindictive participant in the molly houses' activity, or an individual who had kept records and documents which later fell into the hands of the authorities, indirectly revealing the whole clandestine network of sexual interaction.

For the ordinary Englishman with no powerful protectors, access to the shielded environment of the molly house was the sole way of making homosexual contacts with ease. The absence of a highly organized police force and of a vice squad with regular infiltrators and paid informers actually gave such houses more security than comparable establishments in the first half of the twentieth century enjoyed. It was religious fanaticism in the form of societies "for the protection of morals" that persecuted the subculture from above, while the criminal underworld preyed on it from below—a situation that remained into the twentieth century until the campaign to enlighten the public on the nature of homosexuality and reform the the archaic criminal laws made possible a new social environment for the homosexual community.

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MONASTICISM

Originating in late antique Egypt, the monastic movement had as its goal to achieve an ideal of Christian life in community with others or in contemplative solitude. Monastic asceticism required the rejection of worldly existence with its cares and temptations. The institution, one of the formative elements of medieval society, transformed the ancient world. The asceticism it demanded stands at the opposite pole from what most modern (and classical) thinkers would deem a healthy attitude toward sex, diet, sleep, sanitation, and mental balance.

Institutional History. St. Anthony of Egypt (died 356), a son of Coptic peasants, came to be regarded as the father of the monks, though he was not the founder of monasticism. The Egyptian anchorite movement began, perhaps under the influence of Buddhism, just before the end of the persecutions, about 300. The *Life of Anthony* by Athanasius of Alexandria (circa 357) emphasizes Anthony's orthodoxy, the gospel sources of his renunciation of the world, his fight against the demons, and his austere way of life. Later depictions often stressed the sexual aspect of the temptations to which Anthony was subjected. Anthony found a number of imitators who lived in solitude, separated by greater or lesser distances, but coming to him at intervals for counsel; eventually he agreed to see them every Sunday.

Farther to the south, a younger contemporary of Anthony's, Pachomius, who had become a monk about 313, began organizing cenobitic communities. He founded monasteries that were divided into houses where men lived in common, performed remunerative labor, and practiced self-imposed poverty joined with organized prayer. A novelty in the ancient world, monastic communities were rigidly homosocial, consisting of members of only one gender but, needless to say, genital sexuality was proscribed. Monasticism began in the eastern provinces of the empire and was strongly colored by the ascetic

trends found in that part of the world. It included not just members of religious communities, but also hermits who preferred to wander far from civilization, in wild and desert places, choosing a primitive and eccentric mode of life. Systematic practice of deprivation of food and sleep produced a hypnotic effect designed to obviate direct need for sexual release, in part by stimulating a kind of ecstasy that was its surrogate.

Monasticism reached the West through the exile of Athanasius to the Italian peninsula, while John Cassian from Egypt set up houses near Marseilles. There it characteristically penetrated the clergy in the service of the local church. From the end of the fourth-century monasticism based on communal life spread in the West, and the Oriental monastic texts were early translated into Latin by Jerome, Rufinus, Evagrius, and others. The Latin genius multiplied and codified the Oriental rules, until St. Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480–ca. 543) synthesized them, mainly shortening the *Rule of the Master*. The monks had their own culture, independent of the world of classical antiquity and strongly permeated with the ideal of asceticism, new forms of worship such as the recitation of the Psalter, and a cultivation of the inner life.

Western monasticism was at first not organized into an order, nor did it have a common rule. Oriental, Celtic (most of these usually hermits, not cloistered), and Benedictine elements were combined to form various rules, but in the course of the seventh century these rules incorporated ever larger parts of the Rule of St. Columban and St. Benedict. It was the latter that spread and finally became obligatory for all monks and nuns under Carolingian authority. Missionaries when abroad, at home the good monks labored in the school and scriptorium, composing and copying theological, hagiographical, and historical works, and managing the lands of the abbey. They also copied (and sometimes composed) secular Latin and Greek texts, in-

cluding some sexually explicit ones. Bad monks, some even under lay abbots, enjoyed the good life and observed the Rule, though also transgressing it.

Following the foundation of the Abbey of Cluny in 910, Western monasticism entered a new phase. The monastic institutions of that congregation, which came to have hundreds of daughter houses, were centralized in a single order. Monks were no longer primarily missionaries and teachers, manual labor was curtailed or rather shifted to serfs, and the Divine Office was made longer and more solemn. Many great churchmen of the tenth to twelfth centuries such as the fanatical enemy of Judaism St. Bernard were monks. As bishops and popes others led the struggle of the church for freedom from secular authority and like Hildebrand, Pope Gregory VII, for political domination in Christendom. Until the rise of the cathedral schools in the mid-twelfth century (followed by the universities), the monks enjoyed a near monopoly on intellectual life.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries monasticism lost much of its initial fervor and sincerity. The abbeys had become immersed in secular affairs, some had become resorts for members of the nobility, and others restricted their membership so that the professed monks could enjoy a larger income. The Friars, who at first begged for their living—Dominican, Franciscan, and Augustinian—wandered among the people and gained much of the prestige formerly enjoyed by monks. The Hundred Years War and the Black Death intruded on the self-isolated existence of the monasteries, while the office of abbot and other monastic dignities were treated as benefices and commitment to personal poverty all but vanished.

Erotic Aspects. As communities composed of members of but one sex, the monasteries were a Christian innovation—and one that could hardly have been free of homosexual desire. St. Basil (ca. 330–ca. 379) had to warn against the dangers which a handsome monk in the pride of his youth

could pose to those in his entourage, yet in so doing he indirectly admitted the homoerotic character of the attraction which the novice inspired. As early as the reign of Charlemagne (died 814), accusations of sodomy among the monks begin to appear in documents, and not without evidence. The immediate forerunner of the Rule of St. Benedict provided that all monks were to sleep in the same room, with the abbot's bed in the center. Benedict refined this principle by decreeing that a light had to be kept burning in the dormitory all night, the monks had to sleep clothed, and the young men were to mingle with the older ones, not being allowed to sleep side by side (chapter 22). This precaution had its precedents in the Eastern Church, where the purpose was explicitly to forestall homosexual relations. The St. Gall plan of an ideal monastery (ca. 820) clearly shows these preoccupations about sleeping arrangements. All this, naturally, was in the context of an institution whose members had taken a vow of celibacy.

The tradition of friendship that had survived from antiquity gave the homoerotic feelings of the literarily gifted monks an outlet in the form of passionate verses addressed to a "friend" or "brother." These outpourings belong to a specific legacy of erotic attachment between males with a wealth of strands and nuances both pagan/secular and biblical/religious. The guilt that was later to envelop such intense feelings had not yet ensconced itself in the Christian mind.

It is not easy for the modern reader to penetrate the mind of the author of texts written in a dead, even if still cultivated tongue, where so much is cast in the form of clichés and commonplaces. St. Anselm (1033–1109), the prior of Bec and later archbishop of Canterbury, who advised mitigating punishments, especially against sodomitical clerks, and St. Aelred of Rievaulx (ca. 1109–1166), the abbot of a Cistercian monastery and adviser of Henry II of England, whom some suspect of

homosexuality, gave Christian friendship a quality that united human and spiritual love and rendered it an avenue to divine love. A great intellect may have been capable of the self-discipline that denied such feelings any physical expression, but lesser souls probably were not. A German manuscript of the twelfth or thirteenth century contains two eloquent Latin poems of nuns who were lovers. Not surprisingly many of the penalties for homosexual misconduct in the early penitentials applied specifically to monks and novices, not to the laity. The thin line between pure emotion and sensuality could be crossed imperceptibly and—from the standpoint of Christian morality—fatally.

The question legitimately arises as to what extent the monastic life attracted individuals whom the modern world would label homosexual. The Russian Vasiliĭ Vasil'evich **Roza**nov (1856–1919), in *Liudi lunnogo sveta* (Moonlight Men), claimed that the monastic orders were an ideal refuge for such individuals from the cares and obligations—more often the latter, in an age of arranged marriages—of heterosexual life: an instance of the psychological "I cannot" masquerading as the moral "I will not!" The outward celibacy of the monks and nuns was a cover for homoerotic involvements shielded from the arm of the secular power—which was to take an interest in the matter only much later—by the high walls of the abbey. Roza nov likened monasticism to a hard crystal indissoluble within Christian civilization, the embodiment of the Christian ideal of life—rejecting this world, and preparing the soul for its transition to the next. Some medieval writers compared monasteries to prisons, and they are the prototype of the "total institution" in Western society. It would be of no small interest to compare the sexual mores of the inmates of such institutions—boardingschools, reform schools, prisons, military units—in different settings. For women the nunnery meant an

escape from the world of male domination and the drudgery imposed upon the wife and mother in an ever-growing household.

Aftermath. By the early sixteenth century the great days of the monasteries were long over. Protestant reformers and monarchs greedy to confiscate their wealth, found them easy targets for their charges of idleness, self-indulgence, and vice—fornication, masturbation, and sodomy. For the most part abbeys and nunneries survived only in Catholic and Orthodox countries, where they eventually came under attack by secularists and in not a few instances saw their property sequestered by the state power. The link between religious mysticism and sexual ecstasy was inadvertently brought out in the vivid imagery of the Spanish mystics St. John of the Cross (1542–1591) and St. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582). In an unusual, sensational case (1619–23), the lesbian sister Benedetta Carlini of Pescia, near Florence, created a complex visionary world of magic in which she enveloped her lovers. *La Religieuse*, a posthumously published novel by Denis Diderot (1713–1784), portrays graphically, even melodramatically, the distress of a nun at the hands of a lesbian prioress. After the end of the Old Regime this work was followed by a large class of exposé literature, perpetuated by the anti-clerical movement at the close of the nineteenth century, and designed to flay the Catholic church as a redoubt of the vicious and depraved and to undermine its self-proclaimed sanctity.

At the present time it is hard to know (and harder even to appraise the situation in historical epochs) what proportion of Catholic and Orthodox members of religious orders are homosexual and, of these, how many are practicing. Probably both figures are much higher than the ecclesiastical authorities would care to admit. As in former times, abbots seek to inhibit the formation of erotically charged pair-bonds by separating "particular friends." But declining vocations and applications of religious for return to lay

status make such interventions seem counterproductive: if monasteries are to survive as an institution a less harsh regime may be required. In 1985 considerable stir was caused by the publication of *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking the Silence* (edited by Rosemary Curb and Nancy Manahan), which contains autobiographical accounts by some fifty women.

Though it has its obvious sociological aspect (the magnetism of a homosexual environment), the question of gay and lesbian religious is part of a broader interface between homoeroticism and religious feeling that extends from the shamanism of the paleo-Arctic cultures to the occult underground of today. Albeit explored by such pioneers as Rozanov and Edward Carpenter, it is yet to be fully recognized or understood by researchers into the phenomena of religion.

See also Christianity; Clergy, Gay; Medieval Latin Poetry; Middle Ages; Patristic Writers.

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MONTAIGNE, MICHEL EYQUEM DE (1533–1592)

French courtier, essayist, and thinker. In 1571, during the French religious wars, he retired from the *Parlement* of Bordeaux and, after inheriting his father's estate, lived in seclusion at his chateau. Here, isolated in a tower to avoid visitors, he wrote his *Essais*, published in 1580. After a stint as mayor of Bordeaux he again returned in 1588. Inspired by the Latin classics and by Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of Famous Greeks and Romans*, he skeptically considered the careers and beliefs of the prominent figures of his own time. His *Essais* influenced both French and English literature, being considered models of