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»... and Moreover, He Was a Sodomite«. Homosexual Behaviour of Medieval Rulers between Political Defamation, Discourse of Sodomy and Modern Psychological Interpretation

Klaus van Eickels

Abstract

Accusing men in power of norm-transgressive sexual behaviour has been a widespread strategy of political defamation since Antiquity. The specific nature of such reproaches, however, depends on cultural norms, which are subject to historical change. When investigating same-sex desire and homosexual behaviour in specific contexts of the past (e.g. medieval or early modern royal courts), historians should be aware of the fundamental difference between the pre-modern discourse of sodomy, and the conceptual framework of modern psychology that structures the perception of sexual behaviour and erotic desire today. The example of rulers ranging from Frederick II to Richard the Lionheart, as well as astonishing statements by Hugh of St-Victor on same-sex partnerships, show the fundamental shift in the perception of affective male bonding and homosexual acts which took place in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries.

Was Emperor Frederick II a sodomite? In his account of the war between the Ibelins against the Lombards in Cyprus that began after the crusade of Emperor Frederick II in 1228/29, Phillip of Novara (1200–1270) describes Frederick II as a ruler who started out as a good king in his youth, but turned bad after his imperial coronation. Fighting against the Church, he raised lowly men to high positions, and protected evildoers. He was unfaithful, keeping neither promise nor oath, and tortured clerics and laymen, old and young, men and women without mercy.

»Because of his wantonness, he transgressed the boundaries of good nature so much that he surpassed Nero in wantonness; without number he perpetrated acts of adultery and fornication, and moreover, he was a sodomite.«

Au fait de luxure, il trespassa la bonne nature, si que en luxure il surmonta Noiron; sans nombre fist d'avoltires et de fornications, et avec ce eistoit sodomites.¹

Nicolaus of Calvi (d. 1273), the chaplain of pope Innocent IV (1243–1254), refers to the sexual wantonness of Frederick II at the end of a long list of evil deeds against the Church, in order to explain his horrible sufferings on his deathbed. According to his *Vita Innocentii IV*, the emperor, who was excommunicated and deposed, deservedly died the »very bad death« of a sinner, suffering from severe diarrhea, tearing himself apart from within, wailing and gnashing his teeth:

»And since he was not contented with women of tender age and girls, as a criminal he suffered from a disgraceful vice that is heinous to think, more heinous to speak about and most heinous to exercise. As if he were a citizen of Sodom, he openly preached this sin and did not even hide it.«

Et non contentus iuvenulis mulieribus et puellis, tanquam scelestus infami vitio laborabat: quod quidem turpe est cogitare, turpius dicere, turpissimum exercere. Nam ipsum peccatum quasi Sodoma aperte praedicabat nec penitus occultabat.²

The Polish dominican Abraham Bzowski (1567–1637), in his continuation of the church history of Cesare Baronio for the years 1198 to 1572 commissioned by pope Paul V, includes the following characterization of Emperor Frederick II when describing the cruel wars in Northern Italy that occurred after the pope had deposed the emperor at the Council of Lyon:

»(1248). In this year Frederick continued the siege of Parma [...]. In the meantime he committed many atrocities. He took captives from various regions, had them maimed and butchered, and with big catapults he flung them half dead into the city. Even in front of female modesty he did not moderate himself, whenever poor women who secretly went to the fields fell into the hands of the Saracens and

¹ Phillip of Novara, »Etoire de la guerre qui fu entre l'empereor Frederic et Johan d'Ibelin«, in: *Les Gestes des Chiprois. Recueil de chroniques françaises écrites en orient aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles (Philippe de Navarre et Gérard de Monréal)*, ed. by Gaston Rayaud, Geneva 1887, § 102, p. 29; for a less literal translation cf. La Monte, John, *The wars of Frederick II against the Ibelins in Syria and Cyprus*, New York 1936, p. 190 (appendix 2).

² Nicolaus of Calvi, »Vita Innocentii IV«, *Archivio della Società Romana di storia patria* 21 (1898), pp. 76–120, cap. 29 (*de morte pessima Frederici*), pp. 102 sq. The emperor's death is described in vivid colours and qualified as a divine punishment for his vile life: »*Qui in Apulia castro Florentini laborans gravibus disenteriis, frendens dentibus, spumans et se discerpens ac rugiens immensis clamoribus, excommunicatus et depositus miserabiliter expiravit, ut sic merito attestaretur sue vite nequissime mors hec tam acerrima et crudelis: mors enim peccatorum pessima et finis eorum interitus terminatur*«; cf. Eickels, Klaus van/Brüsch, Tania, *Kaiser Friedrich II. Leben und Persönlichkeit in Quellen des Mittelalters*, Düsseldorf 2000, pp. 425–431.

Frederick. Even with unmentionable lust he defiled himself. In gardens and vineyards he spent his time with flogs of sweet girls and grown catamites (*in hortis et vinetis inter pellacarum et exoletorum greges versabatur*), delighting in regular and perverse lust (*postera et praepostera lascivia se oblectans*), after having heated himself up with enough wine or not having cooled down from the slaughterhouse (*postquam satis vel a vino incaluisset vel a laniena nondum refriguisset*).³

The representation of same-sex desire that leads to homosexual acts in these texts can be understood only if we take into account the fundamental differences between the premodern discourse of sodomy and the modern psychological interpretation of homosexuality.⁴

The medieval (and early modern) definition of sodomy focussed on homosexual acts as defined in the Old Testament (Lev. 18:22): »You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination«. The premodern discourse of sodomy therefore differs fundamentally from the nowadays self-evident pattern of the perception of »homosexuality« that evolved in the late 19th century as one of the key concepts of modern psychology, but became a dominant pattern of perception in Western culture only in the first half of the 20th century. Present-day common expressions

3 Abraham Bzowski [= Bzovius], *Annales Ecclesiastici*, vol. 13, Cologne 1616, year 1246, § 7, col. 527.

4 I have discussed many of the questions and sources addressed in this article in several publications which give further examples and references: Eickels, Klaus van, »Tender Comrades. Gesten männlicher Freundschaft und die Sprache der Liebe im Mittelalter«, *Invertito* 6 (2004) (*Kontakte – Freundschaften – Partnerschaften*), pp. 9–48; idem, »Kuß und Kinngriff, Umarmung und verschränkte Hände. Zeichen personaler Bindung und ihre Funktion in der symbolischen Kommunikation des Mittelalters«, in: Jürgen Martschukat/Steffen Patzold (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft und »performative turn«. Ritual, Inszenierung und Performanz vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit*, Cologne 2003 (Norm und Struktur, vol. 19), pp. 133–159; idem, *Vom inszenierten Konsens zum systematisierten Konflikt. Die englisch-französischen Beziehungen und ihre Wahrnehmung an der Wende vom Hoch- zum Spätmittelalter*, Stuttgart 2002 (Mittelalter-Forschungen, vol. 10), pp. 19–29 and 333–393; idem, »Homagium« and »amicitia«. Rituals of peace and their significance in the Anglo-French negotiations of the twelfth century«, *Francia* 24 (1997), pp. 133–140; cf. also idem, »Richard Löwenherz und Eduard II. von England als gay heroes of the past«, in: Andrea Schindler (ed.), *Alte Helden, neue Zeiten*, Würzburg 2016 (Rezeptionskulturen in Literatur- und Mediengeschichte, vol. 7), pp. 159–186; idem, »Der Bruder als Freund und Gefährte. Fraternalitas als Konzept personaler Bindung im Mittelalter«, in: Karl-Heinz Spieß (ed.), *Die Familie in der Gesellschaft des Mittelalters*, Ostfildern 2009 (Vorträge und Forschungen, vol. 71), pp. 195–222; idem, »Freundschaft im (spät)mittelalterlichen Europa: Traditionen, Befunde und Perspektiven«, in: Klaus Oschema (ed.), *Freundschaft oder »amitié«? Ein politisch-soziales Konzept der Vormoderne im zwischensprachlichen Vergleich (15.–17. Jahrhundert)*, Berlin 2007 (Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung. Beihefte, vol. 40), pp. 23–34.

such as »sexual preference«, »sexual object choice« and »sexual orientation« do not focus on acts that are to be avoided, but on desire that is perceived as a strong and potentially hazardous instinct, even if not acted out physically.

From the 12th and 13th centuries onwards, scholastic theologians applied a gradual logic to their understanding of illicit sexual acts, which differs fundamentally from the binary logic underlying the »homo-hetero divide« of modern academic and popular psychology in which »bisexuality« only occupies a marginal place, so that men have to define their sexual identity mainly as »gay« or »straight«. The medieval theological discourse, however, focussed almost entirely on avoiding sin, i.e. on avoiding illicit acts and thoughts.

The penitentials of the early Middle Ages perceived all sex outside marriage as fornication, and even within marriage numerous restrictions applied that reduced the non-sinful opportunities for satisfying sexual desire to the strict minimum, necessary either to ensure procreation or to avoid fornication, when the partner was overcome by otherwise uncontrollable lust.

Scholastic theologians in their quest for systematic clarity finally established a logic of gradual hierarchisation of inordinate sexual behaviour. Among the wide range of sexual acts that were perceived as inherently sinful, some were singled out as »counternatural« (and therefore particularly severe) insofar as they went against the nature of the sexual act as a means of procreation. According to St. Augustine, pleasure had not originally been associated with the sexual act. It was only after the fall from grace that God imposed sexual lust upon man as a punishment for his disobedience, thus adding the avoidance of fornication as secondary purpose to the marital act without, however, changing its nature as defined by its original purpose of procreation. Unlike modern psychology, which discusses the sexual instinct in terms of desire and pleasure, medieval perception of man's sexual nature remained focussed on acts and procreation.

Although many of the medical details of procreation were still unknown, it was obvious that siring a child could only occur if the male sperm was deposited in the receptacle designed by nature for this purpose. Using the wrong orifice or place for the emission of semen therefore qualified a sexual act as being »against nature«. As more explicit biblical instances were lacking, sexual »acts against nature« were readily identified as the sin of the inhabitants of Sodom fiercely punished by God who destroyed

their city by sulphur and fire, although the Old Testament account does not tell us precisely the kind of sin which the inhabitants of Sodom had committed.⁵

The clearest condemnation of homosexual acts in the bible can be found in the Old Testament code of holiness (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13).⁶ Consequently, the interdiction »to lie down with a male (*cum masculo*, i.e. man or boy) as one does with a woman«⁷ served as the main biblical point of reference for understanding homosexual acts in medieval theology. »Complete« or »perfect« sodomy was defined as penetration of a man by another man, whereas other forms of sexual acts that implied emitting semen in the wrong place (anal penetration of a woman, interfemoral intercourse with man or woman, mutual or solitary masturbation) qualified as »incomplete« or »imperfect« sodomy.⁸ Sexual object choice was an important, but by no

5 The fact that the inhabitants of Sodom threatened God's envoys to Lot with rape was a flagrant breach of the law of hospitality and an act of outrageous violence rather than a sexual act showing a specific preference for homosexual; Nissinen, Martti, *Homoeroticism in the biblical world. A historical perspective*, Minneapolis 1998, pp. 45–49; cf. also (pp. 49–52) his comments on the much less known story of Gibeah (Judges 19:22), which is told in very similar words, but never associated with homosexual behaviour.

6 St Paul's catalogues of vices that Christians should avoid (1 Cor. 6:9–11; 1 Tim. 1:8–20) use the rare compound noun »males who sleep with males« (Gr.: *arsenokoitai*; Lat.: *masculorum concubitores*), which is probably a technical term from Jewish Greek that refers to the perpetrators of the abomination mentioned in Lev. 18:22; De Young James B, The source and New Testament meaning of *arsenokoitai*, with implications for Christian ethics and ministry, *The Master's Seminary Journal* 3 (1992), pp. 191–215, <https://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj3h.pdf>. Rom. 1, pp. 26–27 translates the message of Lev. 18:22 into the language of Greek natural philosophy, by distinguishing natural from unnatural sexual acts and consequently extends it to sexual acts between women.

7 Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, pp. 37–44. Lying down with a boy would have been the more common practice of both among the neighbours of Israel. Whether a general interdiction of homosexual behaviour is directed primarily against homosexual abuse of minors or against homosexual relationships between adults depends on the cultural context. In classical Antiquity, readers of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 would most probably have thought that the verse was directed against the common practise of pederasty in Greek cities, where age-differentiated models of homosexual relationships prevailed. A similar focus on adult men penetrating boys and adolescents surfaces in the criminal records of Florence in the 15th century; Roche, Michael, *Forbidden Friendships. Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*, Oxford/New York 1996 (Studies in the History of Sexuality).

8 As to masturbation cf. Eickels, Klaus van, »Unerlaubter Handgebrauch. Masturbation und ihr Platz in der Wahrnehmung des sexuellen Verhaltens im Mittelalter«, in: Robert Jütte/Romedio Schmitz-Esser (ed.), *Handgebrauch. Geschichten von der Hand aus dem Mittel-*

means the essential part of the definition of sodomy. In fact, sodomy could easily encompass all kinds of sexual acts, homosexual and heterosexual alike, that aimed exclusively at gaining pleasure, because their very nature excluded procreation.⁹

Since any sexual gratification outside marriage and even all sexual acts within marriage that focussed on pleasure rather than on procreation, or avoiding one's spouse's fornication, were qualified as inherently sinful, sexual desire was perceived as a temptation from without that had to be resisted. St. Augustine taught that Adam and Eve in paradise could use their organs of procreation voluntarily like an arm or a leg. Man had been created in the image of God and the God of the Christians (in contrast to the pagan gods) had no sexual desire. It therefore seemed obvious to St. Augustine and medieval theologians that sexual lust was not a part of human nature as intended by the creator (which, by the way, explained why God had to give an explicit commandment »to be fruitful and multiply«).¹⁰

From this perspective, resisting sexual lust and living an ascetic, chaste life meant overcoming one's animalistic desires and therefore brought man nearer to his original nature, which was meant to be governed by reason (and not by the instincts that mankind shares with animals) at all times. In sharp contrast to this ascetic point of view, modern psychology valued the sexual instinct as the most important driving force of human nature from the late 19th century onwards. Brute sexual desire, of course, needed sublimation, which is the basis of many cultural achievements; blunt sexual repression, however, would no longer appear as a short cut to perfecting

alter und der Frühen Neuzeit, Paderborn 2019, pp. 253–284; Laqueur, Thomas, *Solitary sex. A Cultural History of Masturbation*, New York 2003.

⁹ Jordan, Mark D., *The invention of sodomy in Christian theology*, Chicago 1997 (The Chicago series on sexuality, history, and society); the semantic openness of the term sodomy is particularly stressed by Petrus Damiani, *Liber Gomorrhianus*, in: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Briefe der deutschen Kaiserzeit* 4.1, p. 320: »We do not read that those inhabitants of Sodom only sinned in the backside of others, but we rather have to assume, that as a consequence of the attack of unrestrained lust they operated different kinds of turpitude on themselves and on others« (*Neque enim legitur, quod illi Sodomorum incole solummodo in aliena posteriora sint lapsi, sed potius credendum est, quod iuxta effrenatae libidinis impetum diversis modis turpitudinem sunt in se vel in alios operati*).

¹⁰ Steinberg, Leo, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 2nd ed., Chicago 1996, pp. 318–321. Only the second edition of this seminal work should be used, since it contains long appendices that answer to the controversy that arose when the first edition appeared in 1983; Walker Bynum, Caroline, »The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages. A Reply to Leo Steinberg«, *Renaissance Quarterly* 39 (1986), pp. 399–439.

human nature but as a major reason for deforming personality and a main cause of psychological disorders.

In his *History of Sexuality*, first published in 1976, the French philosopher Michel Foucault consequently described the fundamental change in the perception and categorisation of homosexual acts and same-sex desire that took place in the late 19th century in his now famous words: »The sodomite had been a temporary aberration («a relapsed [sinner]«); the homosexual was now a species« (*Le sodomite était un relaps, l'homosexuel est maintenant une espèce*).¹¹ His impulse gave birth to the essentialist/social constructivist controversy of the 1980s and 1990s that revolved around the question whether the distinction between a »heterosexual« majority and a »homosexual« minority should be considered an anthropological constant or rather a social construct that is specific to Western culture from the end of the 19th century onwards.¹² As Eve Sedgwick pointed out in her *Epistemology of the Closet*, in most cultures a universalising and a minoritising conceptualisation of same-sex desire coexist. The universalising view stresses that homosexual desire can happen to anybody (e.g. by seduction or diabolic temptation), whereas the minoritising view maintains that only certain individuals are truly born homosexual and that only those born with this trait share an interest in it.¹³

When the ideal of marriage out of love superseded the previous ideal of the socially and economically functional married couple in the 19th century, the social institution of marriage became emotionally loaded in way unknown before. The ensuing psychological problems of men and women

11 Foucault, Michel, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 1: *La volonté de savoir*, Paris 1976, p. 208; Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley, New York 1980, p. 157; cf. Halperin, David M., »Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities, and the History of Sexuality«, *Representations* 63 (1998), pp. 93–120, here pp. 95sq. Michel Foucault argued that the increasingly repressive attitude of Western societies towards sexual behaviour in general and non-normative sexual behaviour in particular gave rise to an intense discourse on sexual desire. The quest for the »truth about sex« encouraged legal and medical professionals to explore the »aberrations, perversions, exceptional oddities, pathological abatements, and morbid aggravations« (p. 53). As the »singular sexualities«, which they proposed as scientifically proven truth, became patterns of »sexual identity«, odd sexual desire and behaviour were no longer perceived as a mere eccentricity, but as a »sexual orientation« that defines the person (and thereby also restrains his or her liberty of expression and feeling). While many cultures have what we might call »erotic art«, Western culture developed a specific »science of sex« (p. 57).

12 Abelove, Henry/Aina Barale, Michèle/Halperin, David M., *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, New York 1993.

13 Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve, *Epistemology of the Closet*, Berkeley 1990.

who for one reason or the other (including sexual orientation) were unable to live up to the new ideal contributed considerably to the rise of modern psychology.¹⁴ The resulting discovery of the homo-hetero divide (or rather its invention, as social constructivists would put it) can be described as a paradigm shift from a universalising conceptualisation of homosexual desire as sin and temptation towards a clearly minoritising view focussing on innate sexual orientation. The importance of this turning point cannot be overestimated, although the idea of individuals who were exclusively homosexual already existed before, since the older universalising view had already allowed for the existence of inveterate sodomites who become completely addicted to their bad habits. In the same way the old idea that homosexual desire can be an acquired habit rather than innate, was maintained for a long time, especially in the concept of a possible »seduction of minors to homosexuality« induced by positive representations of same-sex desire.

From the 1990s onwards, it can be considered established consensus in Queer Studies, Gender Studies as well as Cultural Studies in general that looking for »gays« or »homosexuals« in non-Western cultures or earlier eras of European history would be nonsensical unless they had comparable categories of their own.¹⁵ Yet, these disciplines soon reached a level of theoretical abstraction that left perplexed those historians who were and are interested in how sexual acts and sexual desire were perceived in the past and how the underlying patterns of perception changed over time.

The terms »homosexual« or »gay« have therefore not disappeared from medieval or early modern history. Biographers or specialists of political history who introduce the actors of the networks of power which they describe, often speculate about the sexual orientation of their protagonists without even being aware of the fact that the distinction between »homosexuality« or »heterosexuality« might not be an anthropological constant. Others admit to »homosexuality« being a social construct of the late 19th century, but do not take into account the consequences that this insight should have on their analysis. In fact, looking at same-sex desire from a social constructivist point of view only means that we cannot expect the word »homosexual« to appear in medieval or early modern sources. It

14 Krafft-Ebing, Richard von, *Psychopathia sexualis mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der conträren Sexualempfindung. Eine klinisch-forensische Studie*, Stuttgart 1886.

15 Halperin, David M., »How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality«, in: *Gay Lesbian Quarterly. A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6 (2000), pp. 87–123.

rather implies that medieval and early modern writers had no point of reference that allowed them to describe or allude to the sexual orientation of a person. They had their own categories to denounce illicit sexual behaviour or the violation of gender norms or socio-political role models, which have to be analysed in their own right, but cannot be translated easily along the lines of modern terms as »homosexuality«, »heterosexuality« or »heteronormativity«.

Throughout the Middle Ages, sexual acts between men, especially anal penetration, were conceived of as one of the four »sins crying out to heaven« (homicide/fratricide; sodomy; oppressing foreigners, widows and orphans; depriving workers of their just wage) and therefore calling for a punishment of utmost severity and consequence.¹⁶ Communities condoning those sins were warned that such lack of will to prosecute would bring God's vengeance over them in the form of a collective punishment, and not only punishment of the individual perpetrator as in the case of other sins.

The penitentials of the early Middle Ages, despite not being consistent in the hierarchy of sexual sins, had generally imposed particularly long periods of penance and fasting for same-sex fornication of mature males (i.e. with emission of semen).¹⁷ When the Roman legal tradition from late Antiquity was rediscovered in the 12th century, the punishment of burning convicted sodomites at the stake became the norm, although it was rarely enforced.¹⁸ The sexual act as such mostly was difficult to prove, since it

16 Gen. 18:20–21: »And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; / I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.« As to the other sins that call for collective divine punishment of those communities that neglect their prosecution cf. Gen. 4:10, Ex. 22:21–23, and Deut. 24:14–15.

17 Payer, Pierre J., *Sex and the Penitentials. The development of a sexual code 550–1150*, Toronto 1984; Brundage, James A., *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, Chicago 1987.

18 Eickels, Klaus van, »Die Konstruktion des Anderen. (Homo)sexuelles Verhalten als Element des Sarazenenbildes zur Zeit der Kreuzzüge und die Beschlüsse des Konzils von Nablus 1120«, in: Lev Mordechai Thoma/Sven Limbeck (eds.), »Die sünde, der sich der teuvel schamet in der belle«. *Homosexualität in der Kultur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, Ostfildern 2009, pp. 43–68; as to the persecution for homosexual acts in the later Middle Ages cf. Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*; Ruggiero, Guido, *The Boundaries of Eros. Sex, Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice*, New York 1985 (Studies in the History of Sexuality); Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller (ed.), *Sodom und Gomorra. Zur Alltagswirklichkeit und Verfolgung Homosexueller im Mittelalter*, 2nd ed., Hamburg 2000; Boone, Marc, »State Power and Illicit Sexuality. The Persecution of Sodomy in Late Medieval Bruges«, *Journal of Medieval History* 22 (1996), pp. 135–153.

usually took place in private, and accusations were relatively rare because false accusation was considered a punishable offense and the accuser who could not prove his accusation had to face the same punishment as the penalty provided for the alleged crime.

Although the number of sodomites burned at the stake remained relatively low in late medieval societies, the willingness of ecclesiastical as well as secular authorities to ostentatiously prove to God their determination to punish sodomites with utmost severity sufficed to render invisible homosexual behaviour as a social practice. In very much the same way, most theologians considered it an »unmentionable vice«, following the teaching of St. Paul, who (with reference to fornication in general, not homosexual acts in particular) had declared it a shame to even speak about the »unfruitful works of darkness« done in secret.¹⁹

Homosexual behaviour being rendered invisible, unmentionable and therefore unthinkable in respectable public interactions between men resulted in a great liberty of expressing male love and friendship in the public sphere.²⁰ This »freedom of comradeship«, as William T. Stead, one of the leading English publicists at the time, called it in a letter to Edward Carpenter in 1901, remained the norm up to the end of the 19th century.²¹ Yet, it became increasingly restricted and finally unimaginable in Western culture, as the modern psychological perception of sexual desire as an instinct from within and not a temptation from without established itself as self-

19 Eph. 5:3–12: »But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ... And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.«

20 Consequently, the export of Western sexual identities in the era of globalisation has had precisely the opposite effect in many non-Western societies over the last decades; cf. Altman, Dennis, *Global Sex*, Chicago 2001, p. 92: »Speaking openly of homosexuality and transvestism, which is often the consequence of Western influence, can unsettle what is accepted but not acknowledged. Indeed there is some evidence in a number of societies that those who proclaim themselves »gay« or »lesbian«, that is, seek a public identity based on their sexuality, encounter a hostility which may not have been previously apparent.«

21 Foldy, Michael S., *The Trials of Oscar Wilde. Deviance, Morality, and Late-Victorian Society*, New Haven 1997, p. 131; cf. Deitcher, David/Abrams, Harry N., *Dear Friends: American photographs of men together, 1840–1918*, New York 2001, p. 110; Weeks, Jeffrey, *Coming Out. Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, London 1977, p. 26.

evident popular knowledge in the two ground-breaking sexual revolutions of the 20th century. Intimate friendships between males became suspicious already during the years before and after World War I, when the concept of »homosexuality« became known to the general public and a gay subculture emerged in the big cities of the Western world.²² The sexual liberation of the 1960s and 1970s brought about an until then unknown freedom of expressing and living sexual desire, but the exigencies of forming egalitarian couples further reduced the opportunities for Western boys and men to cultivate deep friendships.²³

In fact, gestures of physical intimacy between men are most common in cultures that foster homophobia and machismo. This is not as astonishing or contradictory as it might seem. Soccer players in Europe as well as rugby players in the US can physically express their unity as a team by embracing and even mounting each other in moments of joy precisely because homosexuality is still a taboo in the world of team sports, so that no misunderstanding is possible.²⁴ For the same reason, traditionally brought up Arab or Turkish men with a strictly heteronormative world view are far more likely to touch each other in public or entertain close

22 The spread of »homosexuality« as a generally accepted concept during the Eulenburg Scandal in Germany had immediate repercussions upon the German Youth movement; Geuter, Ulfried, *Homosexualität in der deutschen Jugendbewegung. Jungenfreundschaft und Sexualität im Diskurs von Jugendbewegung, Psychoanalyse und Jugendpsychologie am Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main 1994 (Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, vol. 1113). In the United States older patterns of perception and behaviour prevailed until World War II: Bérubé, Allan, *Coming out under Fire. The history of gay men and women in World War II*, New York 1990; Chauncey, George, »Christian brotherhood or sexual perversion? Homosexual identities and the construction of sexual boundaries in the World War I era«, *Journal of Social History* 19 (1985), S. 189–211 (reprint in: Martin B. Duberman/Martha Vicinus/George Chauncey [eds.], *Hidden from History. Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, New York 1989); Murphy, Lawrence R., *Perverts by Official Order. The campaign against homosexuals by the United States Navy*, New York 1988. As to the emergence of a gay subculture in Berlin and major cities of the Western world before and after World War I cf. Tamagne, Florence, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe. Berlin, London, Paris 1919–1939*, New York 2006 (French edition: Paris 2000); Beachy, Robert, *Gay Berlin. Birthplace of a modern identity*, New York 2014; Chauncey, George, *Gay New York. Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940*, New York 1994.

23 Miller, Stuart, *Men and friendship*, Boston 1983.

24 Paul, Josefina, »Can Gays Kick a Ball? On homophobia in soccer«, in: Michael Groneberg/Christian Funke (eds.), *Combatting Homophobia: Experiences and Analyses Pertinent to Education*, Berlin 2011, pp. 125–136; Muir, Kenneth B./Seitz, Trina, »Machismo, Misogyny, and Homophobia in a Male Athletic Subculture: a participant-observation study of deviant rituals in collegiate rugby«, *Deviant Behavior* 25 (2004), pp. 303–327.

»special friendships« among each other than progressive liberal intellectuals from Western countries.²⁵ It is therefore not astonishing that American Mormons, completely unsuspecting of condoning homosexual acts in any way, accepted and even fostered intimate same-sex friendships, before all kinds of male-male intimacy became suspicious in McCarthy era in the 1950s, which eventually led them to focus exclusively on family values.²⁶

Situated on the margins of Western culture, the Soviet Union resisted the reconceptualization of male-male desire and intimacy even longer. Soviet propaganda unabashedly used the image of two men kissing as a symbol of fraternity and solidarity. When the Red Army occupied the eastern part of Poland according to the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939, Soviet authorities published a poster that showed a Soviet soldier kissing a Belarusian peasant on the mouth. It was meant to reassure the population that the soldiers of the Red Army had come as friends and liberators.²⁷ In 1968, the poster, which had been designed by the famous Soviet artist Viktor Koretsky, was even reproduced on a stamp celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Soviet armed forces.²⁸

25 Tertilt, Hermann, *Turkish Power Boys. Ethnographie einer Jugendbande*, Frankfurt am Main 1996 (Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch, vol. 2501), pp. 171–216.

26 Quinn, Michael D., *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example*, Urbana 1996.

27 https://arthive.com/artists/22279~Victor_Borisovich_Koretsky/works/539718~Unsere_Armee_ist_eine_Armee_der_Befreiung_der_werkttigen_I_Stalin. The explicative text »Our army is the army of liberation of workers. / J. Stalin« is the Belarussian version of a quotation from his address »Distinctive Features of the Red Army. Speech Delivered at a Plenum of the Moscow Soviet Held in Honour of the Tenth Anniversary of the Red Army (February 25, 1928)«, URL: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/02/25.htm>: »All armies that have ever existed under capitalism, no matter what their composition, have been armies for the furtherance of the power of capital. ... In contrast to such armies, our Red Army is distinguished by the fact that it is an instrument for the furtherance of the power of the workers and peasants, an instrument for the furtherance of the dictatorship of the proletariat, an instrument for the liberation of the workers and peasants from the yoke of the landlords and capitalists. Our army is an army of liberation of the working people (Наша армия есть армия освобождения трудящихся)«

28 [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Soviet_Union_1968_CPA_3609_stamp_\(%27Red_Army_as_Liberator%27_Poster_\(Victor_Koretsky,_1939\)_and_Tanks_in_Western_Ukraine\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Soviet_Union_1968_CPA_3609_stamp_(%27Red_Army_as_Liberator%27_Poster_(Victor_Koretsky,_1939)_and_Tanks_in_Western_Ukraine).jpg); cf. also the photo of a used specimen at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vintageprintabledotcom/4967209648>.



Figure 1: Soviet propaganda poster celebrating the occupation of eastern Polish territories at the beginning of World War II as liberation of the Belarusian population (Victor Koretsky 1939); Figure 2: Soviet stamp celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Soviet armed forces 1968

Sources: <https://shostkamuseum.com.ua/en/muzej/pochatok-drugoyi-svitovoyi-vijni-bojovi-diyi-na-shostkinshhini/1939-1941-vijna-na-porozi>; https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ea/The_Soviet_Union_1968_CPA_3609_stamp_%28%27Red_Army_as_Liberator%27_Poster_%28Victor_Koretsky%2C_1939%29_and_Tanks_in_Western_Ukraine%29.jpg

Everywhere in the communist world, the traditional Russian kiss of fraternity became the socialist kiss of brotherhood. As late as 1990, Honecker kissing Brezhnev seemed awkward from a German and Western European perspective only. The photo of their meeting in Berlin in 1979 became famous by the graffiti painting of the Russian artist Dimitri Vrublel »My God, help me to survive this deadly love« in 1990 (repainted by the artist in 2009). Germans and Western visitors of the Eastside Gallery in Berlin read the message of the painting as an ironic allusion to homoeroticism and as political satire unmasking the unequal balance of power in the ideology of »German-Soviet friendship«. The artist himself, however, later claimed that he had chosen the title referring to »deadly love« because he was tormented

by the inability to make a choice between the two women with whom he was in love at the time.²⁹



Figure 3: Painting Honecker kissing Brezhnev, East Side Gallery, Berlin, 1991

Source: Own Photograph

Up to the 19th century, the valorisation of male bonding and the condemnation of homosexual acts were not perceived as contradictory. Their peaceful coexistence in most societies but our own is difficult to understand nowadays. Yet, it is not as surprising as it might seem, as can be

²⁹ Becker, Dirk, »East Side Gallery. Kuss der Geschichte«, *Der Tagesspiegel*, June 16, 2009, URL: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/east-side-gallery-kuss-der-geschichte/1537212.html>: »Back in June 1990, when he painted Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker on the wall, he felt as if he himself had been pressed between the lips of these »disgusting old men,« says Vrubel. But the painting, which has been read as a political symbol for two decades, had originally emerged from a very personal conflict. »Even if it features two men kissing, it shows my then difficult relationship with women.« With two women, as Vrubel specifies. He couldn't choose between them. That almost tore him apart« (»Damals, im Juni 1990, als er Leonid Breschnew und Erich Honecker auf die Mauer malte, habe er sich gefühlt, als wäre er selbst zwischen die Lippen dieser »widerlichen alten Männer« gepresst, sagt Vrubel. Doch das Gemälde, das seit zwei Jahrzehnten als politisches Sinnbild gelesen wird, sei ursprünglich aus einem ganz persönlichen Konflikt entstanden. »Auch wenn sich da zwei Männer küssen, zeigt es mein damals schwieriges Verhältnis zu den Frauen.« Und zwar zu zwei Frauen, wie Vrubel präzisiert. Für keine konnte er sich entscheiden. Das habe ihn fast aufgerieben«).

shown by looking at the way we think and talk about consuming alcoholic beverages today. The discourse of drug addiction remains largely unrelated to the habit of social drinking, which is *not only tolerated but in fact expected* at many occasions so that drinking too much and not drinking at all appear equally norm-transgressive. In fact, the acceptability of drinking alcohol is not so much a question of quantity, but a question of attitude. Appreciating a good glass of wine is a highly respectable pastime, whereas drinking alcohol for its intoxicating effect is considered a severe problem that quickly leads to social exclusion. It would therefore be quite possible to close an academic conference on the dangers of alcohol abuse with a wine reception, without any of the participants perceiving such behaviour as contradictory. In the same vein, medieval men could have close emotional bonds with other men, embrace them, kiss them and even share a bed, without even coming close to the suspicion of illicit sexual acts or desire.

Throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, male bonding and mateship (homosociality), affectionate friendships between men (homoaffectivity) and even applying the discourse of love and corresponding gestures of physical intimacy to male-male relationships (homoeroticism) were perceived and valued as the indispensable social fabric of any functional and cohesive society, while scorn was heaped on those who committed homosexual acts. The discourse on male love and friendship remained entirely unrelated to the discourse of sodomitical sin and vice. It seemed self-evident that every warrior hero needed his companion and that a king needed not only the loyalty but the love of his subjects in order to rule and maintain the peace effectively. In the *Chanson de Roland* the heathen king Marsilias promises to embrace Christianity and become a faithful follower of Charlemagne, »his man by love and fealty« (*ses hom par amur et par feid*).³⁰ Unswerving love of friends could even be construed as a paragon of sainthood as in the legend of Amicus and Amelius, who were buried in differ-

³⁰ *The Song of Roland*. Oxford text and English translation, edited by Gerard J. Brault, Philadelphia 1978 (Bodleian Library Oxford, MS Digby 24, f. 2r/2v), vv. 85sq.; *Si recevrai la crestiène lei, / serai ses hom par amur et par feid*; cf. Ailes, Marianne J., »The Medieval Male Couple and the Language of Homosociality«, in: Dawn Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, London 1999, pp. 214–237; Cotton, William T., »Par amur et par feid. Keeping faith and the varieties of feudalism in La Chanson de Roland«, in: Liam O. Pardon/Cindy L. Vitto (eds.), *The Rusted Hauberk. Feudal ideals of order and their decline*, Gainsville 1994, pp. 163–199.

ent churches after their death, but miraculously brought together in one grave so that they be reunited in death as they had been in life.³¹

The resulting intensity of words and gestures expressing male love and friendship in medieval courtly culture was first analysed by Stephen Jaeger in his study *Ennobling Love* in 1999. Historians and literary scholars working on same-sex bonding and desire in the courtly society owe a lot to his work. Yet, his explanation of the phenomenon is erroneous, because it does not take into account the results of the debate on essentialism and social constructivism in queer studies:

»Non-libidinous love was an exalting and ennobling mode of feeling, a private privilege of the select few [...], a badge of aristocratic refinement [...]. Male friendship, courtly love and gallantry all operate on the border of the illicit [...]. What made all these modes of behavior sublime was precisely that the illicit was near at hand, but either shunned or ignored.«³²

In fact, love and friendship were by no means restricted to the nobility, but equally acceptable between members of the lower strata of society. Writing in the late 12th century, Richard of Devizes reports a ritual murder legend in which the victim is a young craftsman who is mourned for by his companion in vivid words of affection when he has not returned to the bed, which they usually shared, for several days.³³ Male love and friendship were not a privilege of the nobility, but a respectable social practice at all levels of society.

Expressing male love and friendship in words and gestures was an important element of the code of peace-making and conflict resolution that

31 Oetjens, Lena, *Amicus und Amelius im europäischen Mittelalter. Erzählen von Freundschaft im Kontext der Roland-Tradition. Texte und Untersuchungen*, Wiesbaden 2016 (Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, vol. 145); Winst, Silke, *Amicus und Amelius. Kriegerfreundschaft und Gewalt in mittelalterlicher Erzähltradition*, Berlin 2009 (Quellen und Forschungen zur Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte, vol. 57); van Eickels, *Vom inszenierten Konsens*, pp. 377sq.; cf. Krappe, A. H., »The Legend of Amicus and Amelius«, *The Modern Language Review* 18 (1923), pp. 152–161.

32 Jaeger, C. Stephen, »Mark and Tristan. The Love of Medieval Kings and their Courts«, in: Winder McConnell (ed.), *In hohem prasec. A Festschrift in Honor of Ernst S. Dick Presented on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday, April 7, 1989*, Göttingen 1989 (Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, vol. 480), p. 183–197, here p. 192–193; cf. Jaeger, C. Stephen, *Ennobling Love. In Search of a Lost Sensibility*, Philadelphia 1999; Jaeger, C. Stephen, »L'amour des rois. Structure sociale d'une forme de sensibilité aristocratique«, *Annales ESC* 46 (1991), pp. 547–571.

33 Ricardus Divisiensis, *Chronicon des rebus gestis Ricardi Primi*, ed. by John T. Appleby (Medieval texts), pp. 64 and 67–69; cf. van Eickels, *Vom inszenierten Konsens*, p. 346.

counterbalanced the competitive code of constantly defending one's honour and rank, which fostered conflict escalation between the King and his followers as well as among the aristocracy. While the discourse of fidelity expressed the recognition of existing hierarchical bonds, male love and friendship created and defined a safe social space where a lord and his followers as well as noblemen of different or equal rank could interact in an open and relaxed way without being constantly on their guard and ready to defend their honour and their claimed rank.

In June 1187 Richard the Lionheart, aged 29 and heir to the English throne, met his father's major rival, the French king Phillip II, aged 21, in Paris. Roger of Howden, a contemporary chronicler known for always focussing on politically relevant details only, describes Richard's long visit in highly affectionate terms:

»Richard, duke of Aquitaine, son of the king of England, remained with Phillip, the king of France, who so honored him for a long time that they ate every day at the same table, and from the same dish, and at night their beds did not separate them. And the king of France loved him as his own soul; and they loved each other so much that the King of England (= Henry II) was very much astonished at the passionate love between them and marvelled at it.«

*Ricardus dux Aquitaniae, filius regis Angliae, moram fecit cum Philippo rege Franciae, quem ipse in tantum honoravit per longum tempus quod singulis diebus in una mensa ad unum catinum manducabant, et in noctibus non separabat eos lectus. Et dilexit eum rex Franciae quasi animam suam; et in tantum se mutuo dilegebant, quod propter vehementem dilectionem quae inter illos erat, dominus rex Angliae nimio stupore arreptus admirabatur quid hoc esset.*³⁴

In 1980, John Boswell argued in *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* that the church had originally adopted a tolerant attitude towards »gay people« before shifting to a strict condemnation of homosexuality from the 13th century onwards. For Boswell, the case of Richard and Philipp seemed to be clear: »In the twelfth century the [...] future king of England could fall head over heels in love with another monarch without losing support from either the people or the Church.«³⁵ He should have been warned, however, by the wording of the text as well as its political context. The introductory phrase stresses that Richard was honoured by the privile-

34 Rogerus de Hoveden, *Gesta Henrici Secundi*, ed. by William Stubbs (Rerum britannicarum medii ævi scriptores, 49), vol. 2, p. 7; cf. Rogerus de Hoveden, *Chronica*, ed. by William Stubbs (Rerum britannicarum medii ævi scriptores, 51), vol. 2, p. 318.

35 Boswell, John, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality. Gay people in Western Europe from the beginning of the Christian Era to the fourteenth century*, Chicago 1980, p. 298.

ge to eat and sleep at the king's side. The events immediately before and after Richard's visit to Paris do not leave room for suspecting romantic feelings between Richard and Philip either. Before accompanying Phillip to his capital, Richard had to ask Phillip for peace under humiliating conditions on behalf of his father. When learning about Richard's prolonged presence at the French king's court, Henry's reaction is therefore not moral outrage, but preparing a new army against the French king.

In fact, two men sharing a bed was so common a habit in everyday life, and so self-explaining an element of ritual peacemaking, that a considerable number of instances can be found in historiography from the early to later Middle Ages and beyond. Evidence could have been overwhelming, had the recording of this and other gestures of male-male intimacy not been limited to those exceptional cases when a scandalous breach of the fidelity so solemnly pledged ensued.³⁶

At the centre of the story told by Roger of Howden, the words »the King of France loved him as his own soul« allude to the biblical friendship between Saul's son Jonathan and David. The Old Testament narrative, better known to medieval than to present-day readers, is a story of strong male bonding between two young men who are ready to fulfil God's will in a hostile environment. God has chosen David to succeed Saul instead of Jonathan. In recognizing David as the future king and helping him against his own father, Jonathan goes against his own interest as heir apparent to the crown and against the obligations of filial piety, but he knows that he is doing right because the will of God is supreme.

The whole narrative is cast in emotionally loaded language that lets it appear as a true love story. In Sam. 18:1 Jonathan and David become one soul as spouses become one flesh in marriage:

»The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.«

Anima Ionathan conligata est animae David et dilexit eum Ionathan quasi animam suam.

After Saul's and Jonathan's death, David sings a song of mourning for his »brother Jonathan«, who had been to him »lovely surpassing the love of women« (2 Sam. 1:26): »I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing

³⁶ van Eickels, *Vom inszenierten Konsens*, pp. 368–393; van Eickels, *Tender Comrades*, pp. 33–38.

the love of women.« Or translated more literally from the Vulgate, which was the medieval standard text:

»I am mourning for you, my brother Jonathan, all too handsome and lovely beyond the love of women.«

Doleo super te, frater mi Ionathan, decore nimis et amabilis super amorem mulierum.

The original Hebrew text as well as the Greek translation of the Septuaginta, which was produced by Greek-speaking Jews for a Jewish audience, obviously did not see anything inappropriate in the close relationship of love that united the two exemplary young Jewish men. A Jewish audience would take it for granted that the protagonists of the narrative would respect the code of holiness as expressed in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, unless the narrative explicitly hints at its violation. The Latin Vulgate, however, was meant to be read in the context of a predominantly pagan culture of late Antiquity in which »lying down with a male as one does with a woman« was common practice³⁷. It therefore added a clarifying verse that explained the nature of the bond of love that existed between Jonathan and David as chaste: »as a mother loves her only son I have loved you« (*sicut mater unicum amat filium, ita te diligebam*).

All along the narrative, Jonathan plays the active part. In the Old Testament account, Jonathan's affective bonds are always construed as love towards David. David never appears as the one who loves, and those who love him in fact love God through David, the ruler chosen by God.³⁸ By putting Richard in the position of David, Roger of Howden, who had greeted Richard's rule as a new dawn, underlines his own future king's superiority to his own overlord, the young king of France. In fact, Roger of Howden tells us a story of treason and fealty clad in the language of male love and friendship.

Gestures of physical intimacy between men had an established place in medieval art. When mentioning the peace between Henry III of England and the future Louis VIII of France (Treaty of Lambeth, 11th September 1217), Matthew Paris shows the two king's embracing and kissing in a marginal drawing, just in order to draw the reader's attention to the event.³⁹

37 Williams, Craig A., *Roman Homosexuality*, 2nd ed., Oxford/New York 2010 (first published 1999).

38 Römer Thomas/Bonjour, Loyse, *L'homosexualité dans le Proche-Orient ancien et la Bible* (Essais bibliques 37), 2nd ed., Geneva 2016, p. 78.

39 Matthew Paris (ca. 1200–1259), *Chronica maiora*, The Parker Library, Corpus Christi College Cambridge, MS 16, f. 52v.

In a similar vein, a 13th-century illuminated manuscript of the *Life of Edward the Confessor* shows Edmund Ironside and Canute of Denmark fighting for the lordship of England⁴⁰ and finally making peace after the Battle of Assandun (October 18th, 1016). The image of the two kings in full armor kissing and embracing is put in the central position between the fighting scene on the left and the treacherous murder of Edward Ironside on right, which shows that peace was concluded in due form, only to be broken shortly afterwards. The intimate scene in the middle is explained by the words »The soul of Canute was glued to the soul of Edmund from this time onwards and they became very close friends« (*conglutinata anima Cnutonis cum anima Aedmundi ex hoc tempore et facti sunt amicissimi*).



Figure 4: Matthew Paris (ca. 1200–1259), *Chronica maiora*

Source: The Parker Library, Corpus Christi College Cambridge, MS 16, f. 52v Peace between Henry III of England and the future Louis VIII of France Treaty of Lambeth (September 11th, 1217)

Medieval representations of the Last Supper clearly show the »disciple whom Jesus loved« lying at his chest, even though this forced the beloved disciple into a quite unnatural posture, since Jesus and his disciples were

⁴⁰ *Life of Edward the Confessor* (13th c.), Cambridge University Library MS. Ee.3.59, f. 5r.

represented sitting not lying at table as it would have been the norm in Antiquity (John 13,23):

»At the chest of Jesus lay the disciple whom Jesus loved.«

Erat ergo recumbens unus ex discipulis eius in sinu Iesu, quem diligebat Iesus.

A 12th-century manuscript of Anselm's of Canterbury *Meditationes et Orationes* even shows the Evangelist John leaving his bride in order to lay down his head into Jesus' lap who caresses him lovingly, accompanied by the text:



Figure 5: *Life of Edward the Confessor* (13th c.), »conglutinata anima Cnutonis cum anima Aedmundi ex hoc tempore et facti sunt amicissimi«, Edmund Ironside and Canute of Denmark fight for the lordship of England Battle of Assandum (October 18th, 1016)

Source: Cambridge University Library MS. Ee.3.59, f. 5r

»You have followed the Messiah in order to become worthy to drink the sacred liquids flowing from his chest.«

Messiam secutus, / ut eius pectoris / sacra meruisses / fluentia potare.

Since Jesus was »equal to us in everything but sin«, this scene from the Acts of John could be safely represented without fear of homosexual or otherwise inappropriate innuendo.⁴¹

41 Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), *Meditationes et Orationes*, Stiftsbibliothek Admont (Steiermark), MS latt. 289, f. 56r (ca. 1160, provenance: nunnery of Traunkirchen); cf.

When Hugh of St Victor, the leading theologian of early scholasticism, discussed the nature of marriage in his treatise on the virginity of Mary around 1140, he claimed that the marriage of Mary shows that marriage can be contracted validly without consenting to carnal intercourse, since otherwise the virginity of Mary would have depended not on her own virtue but on the chastity of Joseph. He then tries to prove his conclusion by submitting it to the test of a *reductio ad absurdum*. Would the option to



Figure 6: Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), *Meditationes et Orationes: Messiam secutus, / ut eius pectoris / sacra meruisses / fluentia potare*

Source: Stiftsbibliothek Admont (Steiermark, Austria), MS lat. 289, f. 56r (ca. 1160) (provenance: nunnery of Traunkirchen)

conclude marriage without consenting to carnal intercourse not automatically permit same-sex marriage? Obviously, for Hugh of St Victor love

Lalleman, Pieter J., *The Acts of John: A Two-stage Initiation Into Johannine Gnosticism*, Leuven 1998, pp. 15sq.; Carlidge, D. R., »Evangelist leaves wife, clings to Christ: An illustration in the Admond ›Anselm‹ and its relevance to the Acta Ioannis«, in: Society of Biblical Literature (ed.), *Annual Meeting Seminar Papers*, Atlanta 1994, pp. 376–389.

between two men or two women is perfectly laudable, as long as illicit sexual acts remain excluded:

»If marriage is nothing but an association in which two human beings give each other to one another totally, pleading to preserve and maintain without reserve the indissoluble unity and fidelity of their association, excluding, however, by mutual consent carnal commerce, why then should it not be possible to celebrate a most rightful and holy marriage and to conclude an inseparable bond of laudable love between members of the same sex? What should hinder a man from associating himself to another man or a woman from associating herself to another woman by such an agreement of mutual love?«

*Si, inquiunt, aliud non est conjugium, nisi talis societas, in qua excepto quoque carnis commercio ex pari consensu, uterque semetipsum debet alteri debito conservandi et non negandi se ad eam, quae in communi est societate, inseparabilem unionem ac fidem: cur etiam in eodem sexu coniugium rectissime ac sanctissime celebrari non possit et individua societas laudabili charitate sanciri? Quid enim impedit ut vir virum, et femina feminam tali sibi pactionis foedere et societatis amore non astringat?*⁴²

In fact, his final argument that restricts the name of marriage to male-female couples totally abstains from denigrating same-sex love and attraction. It rather focusses on the sacramental quality of marriage that must be a bond of love between naturally unequal partners, because it represents the love between God and man, which is an unequal relationship.

The language of love and gestures of physical intimacy between men were fully available and constituted an important part of the political discourse on social cohesiveness in the warrior society of the early Middle Ages, and especially in the chivalrous code of conduct of the 12th and 13th centuries that arose from it. When Henry II of England and Louis VII of France made peace in 1177, the final treaty is called »friendship and final concord« (*amicitia et finalis concordia*) by Roger of Howden.⁴³ Gervase of Canterbury, however, indiscriminately applying the full range of Latin words for »love« to the event, described the same treaty as a »pawn of love« (*pignus amoris*):

42 Hugo de Sancto Victore, »De virginitate beatae Mariae«, *Migne PL* 176, Sp. 857–876, here Sp. 873D; new edition: *L'œuvre de Hugues de Saint-Victor* 2, ed. by Patrice Sicard/Bernadete Jollès (Sous la règle de Saint Augustin, vol. 7), pp. 244–251; cf.: Reynolds, Philip Lyndon, *How Marriage Became One of the Sacraments. The sacramental theology of marriage from its medieval origins to the Council of Trent*, Cambridge 2016, pp. 384–386; van Eickels, »Kuß und Kinngriff«, pp. 133–159.

43 Rogerus de Hoveden, *Chronica*, p. 143.

»Since the aforementioned kings had often burst out in mutual hatred, and had often re-established concord, yet without being confirmed by a tie of love, they came together in a decision of mutual love, and finally set up the following document as a pawn of their love.«

*Sed quoniam praedicti reges saepe ad invicem fuerant irati, saepe concordati, sed nullo caritatis vinculo confirmati, in unam convenerunt dilectionis sententiam, tandem que scriptum subscriptum quasi pignus amoris concuderunt.*⁴⁴

It is therefore not useful to distinguish between love and friendship in medieval texts. Even the fine lines of distinction between sexual and non-sexual, individual and collective forms of love in classical Latin collapsed in medieval usage. The only difference that distinguished friendship (*amicitia*) from love (*amor, dilectio, caritas*) was the obvious fact that love can be unilateral whereas friendship is always reciprocal.

As we have seen, the distinction between »homosexuality« and »heterosexuality« was invented in the late 19th century only. If this were not enough to discourage us from applying the category »homosexuality« to medieval sources, the polemic use of the reproach of sodomy and the apparent lack of terminological precision when it comes to distinguishing between relationships based on sexual attraction and homosocial bonds of friendship, should warn us not to speculate about the »sexual orientation« of medieval rulers. If we resist this temptation, adopting a social constructivist view on human sexuality can help us to understand the importance of ties of love and friendship between men as a social fabric in pre-modern Europe.

⁴⁴ Gervasius Cantaburiensis, *Chronica maior*, ed. by William Stubbs (RS 73.1), p. 271.