

17. Unpardonable Vice and Unspeakable Sin Homosexuality in the Christian West

Although sexual relations between males (and sometimes females) in most societies has been at worst, tolerated and at best, elevated to a societal ideal, in a small minority of societies it has been condemned and severely punished. Nowhere has this intolerance been more in evidence than in the regions which



have been heir to the so-called “Abrahamic” religions, viz. Judaism, Christianity and Islam. And, to make matters worse — especially for us because this is the basis for our own Western culture — it has been in Europe, particularly in the last millennium, that what some scientists call “homophobia” has been most intense. “Homophobia”¹ is a term coined in 1969² by the prominent American researcher and writer on

Men Kissing
by Bartolomeo Cesi (1556–1629)

matters homosexual, George Weinberg but it really came into general use when, in 1973 the American Psychiatric Association dropped “homosexuality” from its official list of diagnoses which in turn prompted research into reasons why some people feel a strong — even violent — aversion to homosexuals and homosexual behaviour.

As a label in scientific use, however, “homophobia” has several limitations, the most important of which is the fact that few “homophobes” demonstrate what is usually defined as phobic behaviour, viz: an unreasonable and uncontrollable fear. It is better, in the opinion of many, either to refer to “sexual prejudice” or to describe in more concrete terms what actual behaviour, symptoms etc the “homophobic” person is showing. Nonetheless, the word has gone into the language meaning an “aversion to gay or homosexual people or their lifestyle or culture”³. Despite its limitations, however, in social history, “homophobia”

¹ See: *Homophobia, Heterosexism, and Sexual Prejudice* at http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/prej_defn.html

² The first major discussion of the term was in Weinberg’s 1972 book, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*

³ American Heritage Dictionary, 1992 edition.

is a useful shorthand term for very extreme aversion, the kind which launches wide-scale persecutions and horrendous punishments.⁴

The origins of homophobia in Europe

The Ancient Hebrews, from whose histories and traditions the Old Testament was derived, were always surrounded by enemies ready and eager to take over their lands and sell them into slavery so it is understandable that they resented any procreative act which did not result in more sons who would grow up and defend them. Hence, for example, Onan has suffered a bad press down the centuries for doing what he probably thought was right in a tight corner. Semen was believed so sacred, so powerful, that a man had to undergo purification if any touched him or his clothes, and probably to avoid this, he was supposed therefore not even to touch his penis when peeing.... Which surely must have made things difficult in a high wind....

As in the *Holy Qu'an*, one of the main sources of anti-homosexual teaching lies in the story of Lot (*Lut* in Arabic) and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Although there is now a considerable body of scholarship which indicates that the “sin of Sodom” was not sodomy but that of “inhospitality”, the story of what happened in those benighted cities was enough to strike fear into the hearts of our ancestors. This was a fear that if anyone in their community had homosexual sex, this would so anger God that He would send a terrible punishment visited not only upon the culprits but upon the whole community. In the centuries following the introduction of Bubonic Plague to Europe, perhaps the “punishment” the people feared most would have been the Black Death, the actual cause of which they did not understand?

Another authority usually quoted as showing God’s condemnation of homosexuality is to be found in Leviticus 18:22 which states (New English Bible) “*You shall not lie with a man as with a woman: that is an abomination*” And Leviticus 20:13 which says: “*If a man has intercourse with a man, as with a woman, they both commit an abomination: they shall be put to death; their blood shall be on their own heads.*” These are part of what is known as “The Holiness Code” and appear to date from the time of the Hebrew’s slavery, from the 7th to 5th Centuries BC and were aimed at minimizing any foreign influence upon their own cultural purity.⁵ Just as The Prophet fought to remove idolatry

⁴ As one example (but one which we won’t have time to elaborate) see: “The Persecutions of Sodomites in Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam: Changing Perceptions of Sodomy”, by Drs Theo van der Meer, in *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*,

Gerard, k. and Hekma, G., (Eds)., Harrington Park Press, 1988,p263-307

⁵ “*You shall not do as they do in Egypt where you once dwelt, not shall you do as they do in the land of Canaan to which I am bringing you; you shall not conform to their institutions. You must keep my laws and conform to my instructions without fail. I am the Lord thy God.*” NEB, Leviticus 18:1-2.

from the newly-founded Islam, so too the Hebrews were concerned about the impact of other gods and religious practices upon their own community. One of the institutions of the Canaanites they particularly disliked was the temples where men and boys, surrounded by phallic shaped pillars, offered themselves as sacred prostitutes — *kadesh* — with whom, it was believed, intercourse ritually enhanced individual fertility and tribal power⁶.

There are a few, rather cryptic verses in the New Testament: for example, Matthew 5:21-22 in the King James Version includes an obscure word “*Raca*”, which some scholars tentatively equate with the Greek “*malakos*” (soft or effeminate, or the Hebrew *rakh*, also meaning “soft”, which is the modern word for “gay” in Israel). Some understand these verses to mean that Jesus considered that to accuse another man of homosexuality was a serious crime but to commit sodomy was an impious act deserving of Hellfire.

To some, Matthew seemed to suggest an “out clause” when he said⁷: “*For there are some eunuchs who are born so from their mother's womb, and some eunuchs who are eunuchized by men, and some eunuchs who eunuchize themselves for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens..*” While the last two were clear in their meaning, pointing to men who were castrated by others or, for religious reasons, by themselves (Origen, for example, castrated himself, by tying cords tightly around his testicles until they died and dropped off, much as rams are castrated by the “elastrator” method), the meaning of “born eunuchs” was less clear but many suggest they would have been in today’s terms, “exclusive homosexuals” who were impotent with women. This, some argued, meant that they did not sin when expressing their innate sexuality. Such ambiguity, at least in Spain, was eventually solved by the Visigoths when they came to power by decreeing in 650 AD that any man found having sex with another man would be castrated.

Strangely, one of the most influential weapons put into the hands of the early Christian Fathers in their holy war against Pagan beliefs and especially against homosexuality was given them by Plato when he suggested homosexuality was “against nature” and praised the chastity of the birds and beasts. Although scholars such as Boswell⁸ argue that Plato’s term “*phusis*” was ambiguous and might have meant simply that such intercourse was not procreative, the early Christians adopted it in the sense of “unnatural” and their descendants have used it down the centuries and still use it even today.

⁶ The judge Samuel might have been a *kadesh* in younger days.

⁷ Matthew 19:12. See also: Faris Malik’s thesis on this topic at <http://www.well.com/user/aquarius/section4.htm>

⁸ Boswell, J.: *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, 1980, 13-14 n. 22.

Perhaps the most influential of all the early Christian writers, however, was St Paul:⁹

His concern for the holiness — and reputation — of the founding Christian churches led him to concentrate in particular on the sexual practices of early Christian communities, many of which took Christ's commandment to love one another quite literally.

Paul seems to have been particularly troubled by the number of men in the early Christian communities who engaged passively in homosexual acts. The "abusers of themselves with mankind" (1 Cor. 6:9-10; see also 1 Tim. 1:9-10), as Paul termed them, leave "the natural use of the woman" to "burn in lust one toward another."

But, Paul assures his followers, they have been given up by God to "uncleanness," "vile affections," and "a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:26-27) and are to be excluded from the Christian community.

Western intolerance of homosexuality and the Church's persecution of it was carried forward on the great tide of aestheticism which flooded the early Christian church. The so-called "Patrist" writers, the "Fathers of the Church", fulminated against all forms of homosexuality but especially pederasty. Indeed, they fulminated against all forms of pleasure, sexual or otherwise and many set about making life as uncomfortable for themselves and others as they could. For a time — until St Augustine, who had been married and had loved a young man in his time, gainsaid the idea — it was proclaimed by many that only virgins could enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Chastity became a man's most prized possession, beyond the price of rubies and more valuable, so it seemed, than his own genitals.

The Church's war against homosexuality was also fuelled by the threat of many cults and "heresies" which flourished at the time, including Gnosticism and Manichaeism which not only interpreted God and Jesus in different ways but also permitted homosexual relations. And, although schools of philosophy rather than religions, both Neoplatonism and Stoicism added substance to the fight.

An interesting, albeit fire-and-brimstone homophobic web site called "*What the saints say about the sin of homosexuality*"¹⁰, sets out quotes from several of the Church Fathers¹¹:

⁹ Prof. Raymond-Jean Frontain writing at <http://www.glbtc.com/literature/bible.html>

¹⁰ Virgin Mary's End-Time Prophecies, at <http://www.tldm.org/news7/homosexualitySaints.htm>

¹¹ This is an edited selection. See the site for the complete text, including references.

Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo: “Sins against nature, therefore, like the sin of Sodom, are abominable and deserve punishment whenever and wherever they are committed.” (St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book III, chap. 8)

Saint John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople: “All passions are dishonorable, for the soul is even more prejudiced and degraded by sin than is the body by disease; but the worst of all passions is lust between men.....There is nothing, absolutely nothing more mad or damaging than this perversity.” (St. John Chrysostom, *In Epistulam ad Romanos IV*)

Saint Gregory the Great: “It was, therefore, just that the sodomites, burning with perverse desires that originated from the foul odor of flesh, should perish at the same time by fire and” (St. Gregory the Great, *Commento morale a Giobbe*, XIV, 23, vol. II, p. 371)

Saint Thomas Aquinas, writing about sins against nature, explains: “However, they are called passions of ignominy because they are not worthy of being named, according to that passage in Ephesians (5:12): ‘For the things that are done by them in secret, it is a shame even to speak of.....’” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistulas Sancti Pauli Ad Romanum I*, 26, pp. 27f)

By far the worst, however, is Saint Peter Damian who goes on and on for page after page in the most terrible purple prose.... This is just a taste:

Saint Peter Damian:¹² “This vice strives to destroy the walls of one’s heavenly motherland and rebuild those of devastated Sodom. Indeed, it violates temperance, kills purity, stifles chastity and annihilates virginity ... with the sword of a most infamous union. It infects, stains and pollutes everything.....” (*Liber Gomorrhianus*, in PL 145, col. 159-178).

Of course the Christian case against Paganism was vastly strengthened when in 313 the Emperor Constantine converted to the new religion and made it the official religion of the Empire in 325 AD. However, it was not until May 14, 390 AD, that the Emperor Theodosius¹³ decreed the first anti-homosexual law in the West when he posted his decree — perhaps significantly — in the Hall of Minerva, then a popular gathering place for actors, writers and other artists.

¹² The “What the Saints say....” site says “St Peter Damien’s “Liber Gomorrhianus” [Book of Gomorrha], addressed to Pope Leo IX in the year 1051, is considered the principal work against homosexuality.

¹³ He also ordered the destruction of any remaining books after the great Library at Alexandria burnt down in 391 AD, and in 393, he banned the thousand-year-old Olympic Games.

Later, in 533 AD Justinian, also intent on rooting out all vestiges of Paganism in the Empire, revised the *Lex Julia*, which originally only punished adulterers with death, by adding “those who dare to commit acts of vile lust with [other] men”¹⁴

In the late 4th Century, a collection of ecclesiastical law called *The Constitution of the Apostles* appeared which, although comprised of mostly earlier materials, rather surprisingly published a revised version of the 6th Commandment: it read thus¹⁵ —

"Do not commit adultery: for you divide one flesh into two: For . . . husband and wife are one by nature, concord, union, affection, life, and habit, and separated only by sex and number. Do not abuse boys: for this vice is against nature and had its beginning in Sodom, a city consumed by fire sent down from Heaven. Let such a man be cursed and the whole people say: So be it, so be it (Deut. 27:15)."

In this latter-day version of the Mosaic commandment, a new word was used: *paidophthoros* (*paidophthoria*) which is a compound of the Greek *pais* (boy) and *phthora* (abuse, corruption). The word was coined, according to Professor Rice, by Hellenized Jews but it was adopted by Christians in about the 2nd Century AD. He goes on to claim:

To be sure, pagan moralists and legalists had strong views of their own about honor and shame, consent and coercion, and they had words like *hubris* and *stuprum*, each capable of registering a wide range of disapproval, with which to reprobate sexual behaviors they considered abusive: for example, any effort to coerce or buy a freeborn boy, the seduction of boys too young to be legitimate players on the sexual scene, or the failure of an adult lover to protect with tact the masculinity of his adolescent boyfriend.

The innovation of the early fathers of the church was to make the crucial move of labeling pederasty itself an abuse. So Greek Christians learned to say "boy-abuse" (*paidophthoria*) instead of "boy-love" (*paiderastia*) and "abuser of boys" (*paidophthoros*) instead of "lover of boys" (*paederastés*, *paidophilos*).

Such terms — unnatural, contrary to or Sin against Nature, abuse, self-abuse, child abuse (when referring to post-pubertal males), depravity, abominable crime, unspeakable vice, and a host more — have followed homosexuals down

¹⁴ Quoted in Fone, B. op cit, p.115.

¹⁵ Quoted by Eugene Rice, Shepherd Professor of History Emeritus at Columbia University at the site: http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/patristic_writers.html

the centuries like avenging Furies and howling Banshees ever since. Even so, one suspects that ordinary men just kept on doing what they had always done and had sex with each other when the opportunity and the desire presented themselves. Much of this caterwauling by powerful men within the Church was not heard outside in the fields and in the towns except when, on odd occasions, something went wrong and a homosexual liaison was brought to the notice of the authorities or, most horribly of all, official persecutions were launched, as they were episodically, in the attempt to eradicate heresies and Pagan cults. First, the authorities set about wiping out the Arians, then the Manicheans, and later in the Middle Ages, the Jews, the Cathari mystics and Waldenses, and later still, the Hussites, Lutherans, Calvinists, other Protestants and Rosicrucians, while not forgetting the witch hunts which, among others, were directed towards practitioners of remnants of the “Old Religion”, the indigenous European practices and beliefs.

Although most of the earlier persecutions of “heretics” were rather small-scale and localized, the intolerance of religious views other than those in strict accordance with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church reached its most systematic and terrifying under the so-called “Inquisitions”.

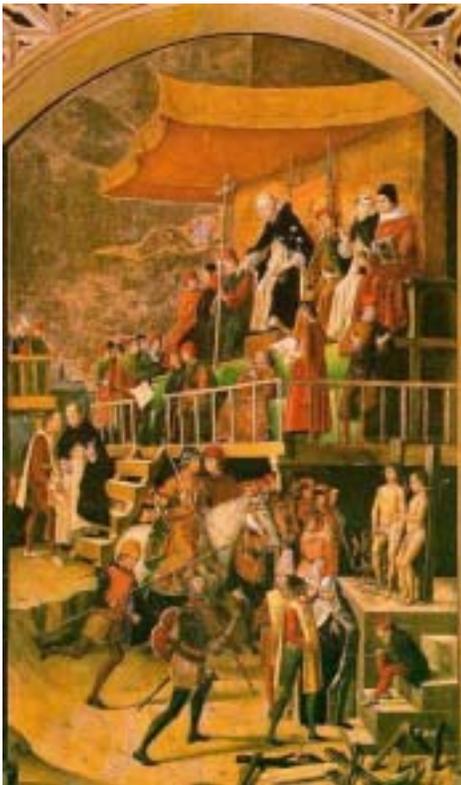
The Age of Inquisitions

Usually we say simply “the Inquisition” by which we mean the Spanish Inquisition, but in fact there were four Inquisitions, of which the Spanish was the second to be established and the longest-running, ending only in 1834. The first Inquisition was the Medieval or “Episcopal” (established in 1184); followed by the Spanish (1478); the Portuguese (1536); and lastly, the Roman (1542). To some degree, the various inquisitions were not entirely independent of each other, some overlapping of resources and functions happening from time to time. Despite their different locations and intentions, the Inquisitions followed a set pattern:

Initially a tribunal would open at a location and an edict of grace would be published calling upon those who are conscious of heresy to confess; after a period of grace, the tribunal officers could make accusations. Those accused of heresy were sentenced at an auto-da-fe, Act of Faith. Clergyman would sit at the proceedings and would deliver the punishments. Punishments included confinement to dungeons, physical abuse and torture. Those who reconciled with the church were still punished and many had their property confiscated, as well as were banished from public life. Those who never confessed were burned at the stake without strangulation; those who did confess were strangled

first. During the 16th and 17th centuries, attendance at auto da-fe' reached as high as the attendance at bullfights.¹⁶

The Medieval or “Episcopal” Inquisition was established in 1184 by a papal bull called *Ad abolendam* and was set up to deal with the growing Catharist heresy in the south of France. This Inquisition was not very effective and so another, called the “Papal Inquisition” was established in the 1230s. This was staffed mostly by Dominican clergy who had been trained specifically for the job of hunting down heretics. Punishment for those found guilty of heresy was to be burnt at the stake but, as was to be the custom thereafter (from at least the 1220s), the sentence was always carried out by the civil authorities.



Pedro Berruguete: St. Dominic presides over an auto da fe, 1475

The Spanish Inquisition was founded in 1478 by Their Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella, to find out and destroy, if not a heresy, then a suspected apostasy. Jews had been forced either to convert to Christianity or leave the country. Many of these “Conversos” were suspected of continuing in their Jewish faith while maintaining outwardly Christian appearances. Ferdinand and Isabella petitioned the Pope for permission to start an Inquisition and in 1483 Tomas de Torquemada was appointed inquisitor-general assisted by two Dominican monks, Miguel de Morillo and Juan de San Martin. Finally, in 1492, the year Columbus “discovered” America and the last Moors

were defeated at Granada, the Jews were expelled from Spain. During the three and a half centuries the Spanish Inquisition operated, it is estimated that 31,912 “heretics” were burned at the stake, 17,659 were burned in effigy (the accused had fled before they could be arrested) while 291,450 made reconciliations with the Church authorities.

When the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, more than 150,000 fled to Portugal which traditionally had been more tolerant than Spain. At the time, D. João II allowed them to enter, at a price, because he wanted to benefit from their wealth and skills. João II died in 1494 and was succeeded by D. Manuel I who initially took a more lenient view of the Jewish community. However, his

¹⁶ See <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/History/Inquisition.html>

marriage to Princess Isabel of Spain in 1496 forced him to expel the Jews within the year. In 1536, during the reign of D. João III, Pope Leo X established the Inquisition in Portugal and tribunals were set up in Lisboa, Évora and Coimbra. In Portugal, the Inquisition was under the authority of the King who appointed the Grand Inquisitor, always from within the Royal Family. As it happened, the first Grand Inquisitor was Cardinal Henry who himself later became king and was responsible, on his death, for the passing of the Portuguese crown to Spain for 80 years.

As in Spain, the Portuguese Inquisition was responsible for rooting out Conversos, but it also took on responsibility for book censorship, as well as prosecuting witchcraft, divination, bigamy and of course, sodomy which, over the centuries, had become so closely associated in Christian minds with heresy that often the same word was used interchangeably for both. For example, in Old French, *herite* means both heretic and sodomite while we get our word “bugger” and “buggery” and the Italians, “*buggerone*” from the French word, *bougre* for “a Bulgarian” because they believed the Bulgars were responsible for importing the Catharist heresy into France. All in all, by the time of its abolition in 1821, approximately 40,000 cases had been tried in Portugal, although only 1800 were actually burned.

Love Letters from the Sacristan of Silves



In the archives of the Portuguese Inquisition, the Arquivo da Torre do Tombo, in Lisbon are five love letters written by one man to another in Lent, 1664. These are among the oldest homosexual love letters in the whole of Western civilization¹⁷. Sadly, they came to be in these archives because their author had been denounced as a sodomite.

A traditional Portuguese guitarra

They were written by a man who was the sacristan in the Cathedral of Silves, a small mining town in the south of Portugal, in the region known then as now as Algarve. The

¹⁷ This section is based on the article, Mott, L and Assungdo, A.: “Love's Labors Lost: Five Letters from a Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Sodomite” in Gerard, K. and Hekma, G.: (Eds): *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, Harrington Park Press, New York and London, The Haworth Press, Inc., 1989 Pp.91-101. Higgs (see later) gives slightly different statistics. The authors say there are the oldest homosexual love letters in Europe except for the *Epistolae* of Alcuin, but the letters of James I of England to George Villiers, Duke of Buckham, are older.

sacristan was Francisco Correa Netto and the man to whom he wrote his letters was Manuel Viegas, a professional musician who both played and made guitars (Spanish guitars, *viola*, not the traditional Portuguese *guitarra*) for a living.



Modern Silves (the Sé or cathedral is much altered since Netto's day)

On 29 March, 1664, Viegas passed his lover's letters to the Vicar of Silves, Manuel Luis Coelho who in turn sent them to the Inquisition in Évora, with a covering letter, denouncing his sacristan, Correa Netto for sodomy. In this official letter to the Commissioner of the Inquisition in Évora, Vicar Coelho said that "*We have long had a clandestine sodomite in this city who by God's will is now discovered.*"

Generally speaking, the Portuguese Inquisition dealt fairly compassionately with cases known as *nefandum peccatum*. Of the 4,419 names of persons listed alphabetically in the *Repetitios do Nefando* (the Catalogues of Sodomites) who had been denounced or who had confessed to having committed this crime between the years 1587 and 1794, only 408 (10%) appear to have been put on trial and of these, about 30 (0.7% of the total denounced or 6% of those actually accused) were ever executed. The Inquisition was most concerned with backsliding Conversos and heretics, who made up about 80% of cases brought

before the Tribunals, most of the rest being suspected witches or cases of bigamy.¹⁸

At the time these letters were written, Portugal appears to have been fairly tolerant of homosexuality: the king, D. Affonso VI (1656-1683), was himself well-known to be homosexual. Also well-known was the *danca dos fanchonos* held in Rossio, the ancient common and still the civic heart of the city of Lisbon, where boys dressed as women and danced the night away. Nearby, pretty much next door to the Palace of the Inquisition, effeminate homosexuals, *fanchonos*, met for sex in a famous rooming house. And, as popular then as *fado* is today, was a kind of lyric poetry set to music known as *cancioneiro medieval*, among which were the famous *Cancoes de Amigo* (“Songs for a friend”) in which sodomy is mentioned several times as a positive, natural thing to do.

Even so, to write so openly about his love for the guitarist and to admit in letters what they had done together, was a dangerous thing to do and speaks of the passion, desperation and ultimately anger the sacristan must have experienced. Note in these letters that the expression *Your Grace (Vossa Merce)* was a common expression used among equals, even lovers in 17th Century Portugal. It has all but disappeared now from common usage.



Rossio, lithograph 1849 commemorating the completion of the *Calçada*.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p.100

Letter Number One

Senhor Manoel Viegas:

If men sleep with me, it is not to find a pussy. They place the cock between my legs, and there they have their way. I do not achieve it. If Your Grace (Vossa Merce) would wish the same, dispose of me, I am at your service, to whom I swear unto death, to offer what is needed, and the losses are mine.

Francisco Correa Netto

Personally, I suspect that the authors of the article in which these letters were first published, Luiz Mott and Aroldo Assungdo, both of the University of Bahia, in Brazil, might have some difficulty with English because there are a few strange renditions....¹⁹

Commentary

- The Canon Law definition of the capital offence of *sodimia completa* required evidence of penetration and emission, so by limiting their activities to intercourse “between the legs” (*entre as pernas*), that is, “*frottage*” or, in Portuguese, *coxeta* many homosexuals hoped to avoid punishment by the Inquisition. Both masturbation (*punheta*) and *coxeta* were deemed mere “sins of pleasure”.
- Correa's remark that "I do not achieve it" is a strange translation of the original, “*Eu, nao me vem nada*”: “*vem*” is 1st person singular of the verb “*vir*”, to come: this verb is commonly used in modern Portuguese meaning “to ejaculate”. If you discount the double negative (used in Portuguese for emphasis) with a little elegant variation to achieve the same effect, the phrase can be translated into modern English most accurately as “*Personally, I don't come at all*”, where “come” is often spelled “cum” nowadays to make it clear it means “ejaculate”. Judging by the authors' comments, this practice of foregoing ejaculation and even of concealing their genitals entirely by the passive partner was not uncommon and probably was intended to avoid reminding the active partner that it was another man with whom he was taking his pleasure.
- The Vicar of Silves in his accompanying letter to the Inquisition added: "This letter was written in front of the most holy Sacrament" which was probably another attempt to indict Correa for sacrilege in addition to sodomy and possibly Judaism. There seems no doubt that Correa was generally despised by his

¹⁹ Mott, L and Assungdo, A: Op. cit. All quoted translations are from this work.

superior, the Vicar, who also might have been a relative of Viagas' fiancée of whom we learn later in the correspondence. Correa apparently had wished to become a priest earlier in his career but had been blocked, partly because the Vicar, Manoel Coelho, considered him to be one-quarter Converso or "New Christian".

If there was ever any doubt that Correa was an effeminate man, a "fanchono", the modern-day "bicha", it is surely dispelled in the second letter he wrote to the guitar-maker, even though, as true-love, it is all down-hill from here:

Letter Number Two

Tender gift to me and longing of my senses, the tranquillity of my thoughts about you is the proof of how much I desire and love you!

Now I shall not have peace nor hope of having you, because I see that not even with the best argument will my pledge serve you, heart wounded to death, heart never to be released from my affection for you.

My love and bounty: my feelings cannot rest an hour, either by day or night, without bringing to mind your companionship and your sweet words that are continually reflected in my memory.

Mirror of my sight and joy, if I have any right to you, bring peace to my heart and confirm the news I received this evening, that you were betrothed to a niece of Francisco Luiz last Monday. I would have said that by Easter you would be betrothed to me. You implied that often, and you gave your word on it. But do as you please: in spite of this I shall not stop doing what I can to be at your service. And remembering your arms and the kiss you gave me, that is what torments me most! And you know this subject well, in that heart of your loins, it was that which desired me, with its craving to fly up. There was no Lent for that heart in your loins, when I touched it with my fingers, and instantly it sprang up! And you, so evil, who did not want to do what comes so naturally!

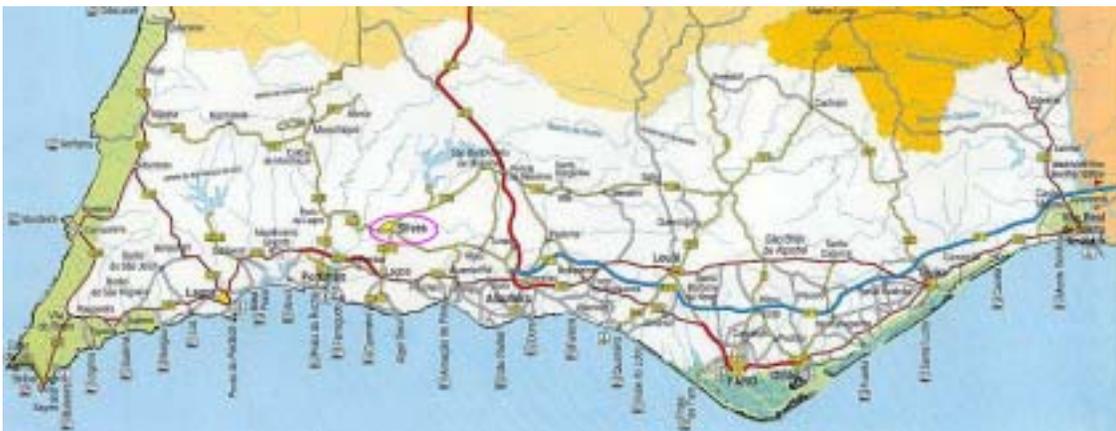
Goodbye, my darling, my happiness, my true love!

My idea is that, even though you may be married, you do not have to break your promise to be the betrothed of your devoted Francisquinha. It seems to me you told Manoel da Costa that if I complied with your whims, even then you would not come to me, because you do not care, and it was all sham.

Here is paper to answer: Now you have no excuse not to write for lack of paper.²⁰

Commentary

- Clearly, when they met, Manoel Viegas the guitar-maker had not “gone all the way” and done *coxeta* with Netto, but even so, his embraces and sweet words had stolen the Sacristan’s heart.
- Again, the translation of the expression *coracao da barguilha*, (literally “heart trouser fly”) is a bit strange — what Netto meant would be better rendered in English as “trouser snake”. Netto means that even though it was Lent, Viegas’ trouser snake was always ready to rise to the occasion....
- When he refers to himself as "*Francisquinha*", Netto was using the affectionate feminine diminutive form of his given name “Francisco”. The use of an affectionate diminutive form — eg, Francisquinho — would not have been unusual between intimate friends. The use of the female diminutive however, was not uncommon among *fanchonos* at the time.
- Clearly, Correa Netto was upset by receiving the news that Viegas intended to marry and he probably is beginning to suspect that the guitar maker is exploiting his good will. However, he gives the impression he would be prepared to share his lover. Here, he is identifying with the resignation by women in Algame who traditionally had to share their husbands because, in earlier times, the Moors when they occupied the region, practised polygamy.
- Again, in his covering letter, Vicar Coelho added his own comment: "Observe the fatuity of this whore of a sodomite (*puto do somitigo*). Ha! How pious he seems!"



Southern Portugal — Algame — showing Silves

²⁰ Op. cit p. p. 95

In **Letter 3**, Francisco Correa Netto seems clearly very wounded even though he tries to buy his lover's affection by giving him and his fiancée expensive gifts and commissioning him to make him a guitar (*viola*, not *guiterra*). He also asks Viegas to destroy his letters. Of course, Viegas did not do as he asked but instead passed them over to the Vica. Netto kept his word and destroyed whatever Viegas had written to him.

In **Letter #4**, Netto writes of his humiliation, jealousy and anger. Gone are the flowery terms of endearment; instead he expresses his hurt that Viegas is giving his gifts to his fiancée and apparently telling her all about the man who is pursuing him. In her turn, Maria Nunes is doing her best to humiliate him and make him jealous.....

False Traitor!

False deluded love: with what words can I express this sentiment? After Your Grace (Vossa Merce) left, news came to me that Your Grace intended to possess Maria Nunes..... she said that Your Grace gave her some [of the biscuits he had given Viegas], and she said there were none so perfect. So it seems that Your Grace has a great love for her, because she says that you come from your lovers, bringing her their gifts..... she goes around telling everyone that she saw what you gave me on my finger..... and I had to excuse this by saying that I had purchased the ring from Your Grace.....

Letter Number Five

False and Flatterer:

If I could mock, scoffing at someone in love! But in the end, quem mais ama menos merece. For me there were only tears, tears caused by you and by so many skirts. Now she has what I desired. So often I have sent you word not to pay attention to me, but why do you dine with your women friends rather than with me, and then why do you send me notes that are lies? Those women were jealous of me because I wore someone else's ring. They said that I should return it to its owner. And here it is. I don't want anything of yours in my possession. Do the same with what you have of mine, and that will give me much pleasure. Do not ever speak to me or look at me again. I return the ring to encourage the hilarity of your lady friends.

Because we are trained to see effeminate men such as Francisco Correa Netto as “funny” and even “ridiculous”, we tend to read his letters with some embarrassment and perhaps even to sympathise with the guitar maker, Manual Viagas, rather than allow ourselves to feel properly sorry for this man whose emotions have been trammelled and whose person has been used, and worse still, whose “boss” will actually denounce him to the Inquisition.

One of the more stylish of American gay writers, John Preston²¹, once said that effeminate homosexuals are the strongest men in the world. He said they gain their strength because they have nowhere to hide: they cannot pass for “straight”, they wear their sexuality for everyone to see and they have to learn to live with the consequences. So too it must have been for Francisco Correa Netto: hopefully, though wounded by his experience with the guitar maker, he recovered and lived to love another day.

And indeed, he did live: despite the Vicar’s best attempts at denunciation, hoping the Inquisition would get rid of his unwanted and embarrassing sacristan, and even though the mayor and another priest were prepared to swear that Correa Netto was an infamous sodomite, the Inquisition took no further notice. To qualify as a denunciation, the “abominable sin” of sodomy required two witnesses to both penetration and ejaculation, and on two separate occasions. If nothing else, the Inquisition was meticulous in following its own rules.



Although no description has yet been found of the execution of a sodomite in Portugal (and so it is not known if they had the option of being strangled as others did after confessing their “heresy”), just what Correa Netto escaped was

²¹ in “Fanny: the Queen of Provincetown”.

described by a British resident of Portugal on 15th January 1707 after he had witnessed the Auto da Fé on 12 September, 1706. After one man was reprieved, four people were burnt, two after being strangled first and the other two, burnt alive. Those burnt alive were a woman (Maria Pinheira) and a man (Heytor Diaz da Paz), both convicted as “Judaisers”. The Englishman²² wrote:

The execution was very cruel. The woman was alive in the flames half an hour, and the man above an hour. The present king [João V, 1706-50] and his brothers were seated at a window so near, as to be addressed to a considerable time, in very moving terms, by the man as he was burning. But though the favour he begged was only for a few more faggots, yet he was not able to obtain it. Those which are burnt alive here, are seated on a bench twelve feet high, fastened to a pole, and above six feet higher than the faggots. The wind being a little fresh, the man's hinder parts were perfectly wasted; and as he turned himself, his ribs opened before he left speaking, the fire being recruited as it wasted to keep him just in the same degree of heat. But all his entreaties could not procure him a larger allowance of wood to shorten his misery and despatch him.

²² Later the Bishop of Rochester, then minister to the English factory Wilcox. The description is quoted by Higgs, D: “Lisbon”, in Higgs, D. (Ed). *Queer Sites – gay urban histories since 1600*, Routledge 1999, pp. 122-123