

Introduction: sexual culture? France? Renaissance?

The first premise of this book is that the French Renaissance understood sex and sexuality in ways that look strange to us. Neither a matter of identity nor restricted to individual acts, sexual expression occupied, saturated, and helped organize modes of thinking to which we, for the most part, have little access. Sex as it was understood in the French Renaissance was less a matter of modern origins and more a synecdoche that allowed for elasticity around the deployment of sexuality. This is not to argue that Renaissance sexuality was somehow more free than modern formulations of it. Rather, I contend that sexual knowledge and understanding organized and was utilized in ways that reflected Renaissance rather than modern sensibilities. Love, procreation, marriage, intimacy, friendship – all had sexual dimensions, the changing contours of which reveal much about sexuality and Renaissance society as it was, and is, constructed.

It seems that some questions ought to be immediately obvious. What were those sensibilities? How were they different from Medieval ones before or modern ones after? How might I offer to explain why the Renaissance mattered? Why France? Why sex? Let me begin with the nature of the thing by way of a rather dense little ditty. Pierre de Ronsard wrote a sonnet that ended:

Le Roi ne m'aime point pour estre trop barbu:	The king does not love me for being too much with beard
Il aime à semancer le champ qui n'est herbu,	He likes to seed the field which is not grassy
Et comme le castor chevaucher le derriere:	And like the beaver, rides the behind When he fucks the assholes that are tight cunts
Lors qu'il foute les culs qui sont cons estrecis	He takes after the nature of the Medici And in taking the lead he imitates his father. ¹
Il tient du naturel de ceux de Medicis, Et prennent le devant il imite son pere.	

¹ Pierre de Ronsard, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Paul Laumonier, Isidore Silver, and René Lebègue, 20 vols. (Paris: Marcel Didier, 1914–1967), vol. XVIII, 417. The editors reject the claims of earlier editors and accept this and other sonnets as part of Ronsard's oeuvre. Laumonier, Silver, and Lebègue point out that the piece appears in multiple contemporary manuscripts and is noted by the journalist Pierre de L'Estoile as by Ronsard. See Ronsard, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. XVIII,

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I expect this is not the Ronsard most people know. The court poet who challenged French writers to purify and exalt French language as exemplary of the heights of human achievement is using sexual slander to denigrate the king, Henri III. The simple back-story is that Ronsard was slipping out of favor. Younger poets such as Philippe Desportes were receiving more of the king's largesse. The standard supplement to that very pragmatic set of issues is that Ronsard disapproved of Henri III's management of the kingdom – Ronsard and seemingly almost everyone else. At this point, the Wars of Religion had left the country in tatters. The monarchy was in debt to the tune of 100 million livres by 1576 and enormously dependent on Italian financial expertise and banking resources.² The intersections with sex are not always as obvious, but it is impossible not to notice how it saturates Ronsard's poem. The reference to Henri's alleged preference for his young male favorites, or *mignons*, is immediately sexualized around the assumption that gender hierarchy within same-sex male relationships featured an older (bearded) man and his younger, not-yet-bearded, lover.³ The poem attacks Henri for enjoying such a relationship, but Ronsard puts the king, as the sexual initiator, in the dominant role. Sort of. Henri is also effeminized because he desires men. By invoking Henri's Italian mother, Catherine de' Medici, Ronsard tapped into the xenophobia directed at Italians, and merged it with the widespread assumption that Italians were sexually corrupt. Henri was emasculated and corrupt by association. Henri's sexual traits are cast as "genetic," to use a deliberate anachronism, in that his gender and sexual miscues were inherited from his mother and father. More obliquely, Catherine was infamous for her devotion to astrology, and invoking her was to suggest that Henri was star-crossed progeny in the sense that generation – the Renaissance term for procreation – was marked by the configurations of the heavens. Henri's failure to generate reflected the will of the heavens and cast doubt on him as the representative of the fertile realm of France. Oblique too, but in a cumulative sense, was the critique of Henri as a failed ideal, too bound by earthly concerns and desires to achieve either the status of a Platonic philosopher-king or the transcendence of a Neoplatonic lover. The sensibilities in this brief example are expansive, diffuse, and allusive. Rather than defining the sexual as a thing with specificity, Ronsard comes at it from odd angles and includes topical cultural referents to pack his poem with multiple levels of scandal and critique that ultimately imply Henri is not entirely fit to be king.

415, n. 1. This poem is discussed in Guy Poirier, *L'Homosexualité dans l'imaginaire de la Renaissance* (Paris: Champion, 1996), 139, relative to the controversies around Henri III.

² Martin Wolfe, *The Fiscal System of Renaissance France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 159; Henry Heller, *Anti-Italianism in Sixteenth-Century France* (University of Toronto Press, 2003), 164–70.

³ There is no analysis for France, but for England, see Will Fisher, "The Renaissance Beard: Masculinity in Early Modern England," *RQ* 54 (2001): 155–87. The cultural origin of this sexual combination in the west is the Greek *erastoi*.

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All of the domains that figure in the essay that follows are represented in Ronsard's lines. He includes the notion of the Renaissance, astrology, Neoplatonism, poetry, and politics as influences on sexuality. Through consideration of these categories, I will address the questions that opened this introduction. But first, my use of several terms requires some explanation. "Heterosexual," "homosexual," their other familiar forms ("heterosexuality" and "homosexuality"), and the less common "heteronormative" are anachronisms, but for these purposes, they abbreviate cumbersome, longer locutions that reflect much deeper historical patterns in French thought. In defense of their appearance in what follows, first, I use them always with an awareness of the anachronism. Second, I do not use the terms to refer to modern notions of foundational sexual identity. "Homosexual" refers to sex acts (actual or imagined) between persons of the same biological sex; "heterosexual" between persons of different biological sex. "Homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" are used when assumptions about persons and behaviors are attached to sexual expression without presuming that the person about whom the assumption is made felt any generalized identificatory attachment. "Heteronormative" reflects the tendency to assume value judgments that construct limited heterosexual behaviors as the norm and everything else (including a number of sexual practices involving men and women) as deviant.

I use these terms in order to move past them. Invoked most often to describe modern identity categories, their origins and configurations have been debated. Historians and theorists have spent much energy analyzing Michel Foucault's famous intervention: "As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life".⁴ In Foucault's wake, historians became absorbed in whether acts might accumulate to a functional, if unstable, notion of identity. Accordingly, some scholars maintain that early modern sodomy points toward nascent notions of homosexual orientation that began to coalesce in urban contexts in association with group or subculture behavior.⁵ More broadly, Foucault's description

⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1976), 43.

⁵ The classic account here is Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982). On homosexual subculture in Renaissance France, see Maurice Lever, *Les Bûchers de Sodome* (Paris: Fayard, 1985), 67. See also Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (Oxford University Press, 1996) and Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex, Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (Oxford University Press, 1985) for early modern Italian examples. On emergent subcultures in eighteenth-century Europe, see Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, vol. I, *Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (University of Chicago Press, 1998); Theo van der Meer, "Sodom's Seed in the Netherlands: The Emergence of Homosexuality

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of sodomy as an “utterly confused category” prompted investigation into the meanings attached to sex in the past. On the one hand, historians confirmed sodomy’s capaciousness: it meant masturbation, several forms of same-sex sexual behavior, bestiality, non-procreative sex (oral or anal most commonly) between a man and a woman, or any form of sex in which conception was impossible.⁶

On the other hand, the more historians filled in the missing pieces about sexual practices in the past, the more intractable the question of identity came to seem. When John Boswell argued that same-sex relationships between men, which he termed “gay,” existed under relatively benign conditions until the late Middle Ages, he posited that innate behavior created identity.⁷ Less radically, some historians, such as Joan Cadden and Joseph Cady for the Middle Ages and early modern France respectively, reconstructed contexts in which specific versions of sexual identity emerged long before the nineteenth century.⁸ In whatever form, the underlying question has been about the relationship of sodomy to modern homosexuality. Trying to defuse tensions over Foucault’s contention that there was no “homosexual” identity before the nineteenth century, David Halperin argued that the identity question was more strategic than most accounts would allow, seeing Foucault’s intentions in describing the emergence

in the Early Modern Period,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 24 (1997): 1–16. Trumbach’s insistence on men distinguishing themselves by heterosexual coitus is problematic, but his research on the context of identity formation is highly suggestive.

⁶ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 101. For the early modern meanings of sodomy, see Cynthia B. Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 30–4 and Jeffrey Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan, Jr., eds., *Homosexuality in Early Modern France: A Documentary Collection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). See also William Naphy, *Sex Crimes from Renaissance to Enlightenment* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002) for the changing sexual climate.

⁷ This is often shorthand for “essentialism,” and the principle texts are John Boswell, *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) and “Revolutions, Universals and Sexual Categories,” in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (New York: NAL Books, 1989), 17–36. For a summary of the essentialism/construction debate, see Robert A. Nye, ed., *Sexuality* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 4–10. See also Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality*, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) and Rictor Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (London: Cassell, 1997), esp. 11–33, 98–9, 132–5 for rupture and continuity models respectively.

⁸ Joan Cadden, “Sciences/Silences: The Natures and Languages of ‘Sodomy’ in Peter of Albano’s *Problemata* Commentary,” in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 40–57; Joseph Cady, “The ‘Masculine Love’ of the ‘Princes of Sodom’ ‘Practicing the Art of Ganymede’ at Henri III’s Court: The Homosexuality of Henri III and His Mignons in Pierre de L’Estoile’s *Mémoires-Journaux*,” in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (University of Toronto Press, 1996), 123–54. See also discussions of later contexts, especially Jeffrey Merrick, “Commissioner Foucault, Inspector Noël, and the ‘Pederasts’ of Paris, 1780–3,” *Journal of Social History* 32 (1998): 287–307 and Michael Rey, “Parisian Homosexuals Create a Lifestyle, 1700–1750: The Police Archives,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 9 (1985): 179–91.

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of sexual identity as a product of discourse and a political strategy to challenge hegemonic narratives of sexuality.⁹ But Halperin has also been taken to task for his tendency to consider antiquity alongside modernity while regarding all that lies between as unhelpful with respect to defining sexual identity.¹⁰

One aim here is to revisit the chronological span Halperin avoids in order to move beyond the debates over sexual acts vs. identities and essentialism vs. social construction that resulted from engagement with Foucault's assertions. I am guided in part by seemingly contradictory understandings of sexuality in early modernity. Jonathan Goldberg argues that sodomy was always a matter of "relational structures." Homoerotics within and across texts can be traced, analyzed, and deconstructed, but the "sodomite" was never a stable identity category. In that sodomy meant so many things depending on time and place, this was – and to a degree still is – utterly true.¹¹ Meanwhile, some historians have argued that early modern people used "sodomy" and "sodomite" quite specifically. They knew it when they saw it.¹² Both amorphous relationality and specificity of particular cases routinely operate at once. While we often know very little about how people generalized their behavior, we do know that they thought about sex in various domains, and that the persistence of old ideas was difficult to maintain when new ones clamored onto the scene. That I assert this to be the case would seem to indicate that I am not much of an essentialist, in that rupture is evidently much at work in moments of change. At the same time, continuities in sexual practice (there are only so many possibilities with respect to "doing it," although perhaps infinite variations on them) are undeniable and often reassuring to those who engage in them. Seeing this dual operation being formulated and deployed, I maintain, gets us closer to understanding the lineaments of sexual culture.¹³

By analyzing a specific place and time, what people made of sex when their cultural assumptions were under question or even threatened can become evident. Specificity helps to reveal sexuality as a fundamental ideological formation. As a social system, sexuality partakes of the general quality of ideology:

⁹ David M. Halperin, "Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities, and the History of Sexuality," *Representations* 63 (1998): 93–120.

¹⁰ Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 31–50.

¹¹ Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford University Press, 1992), 20.

¹² See for instance Helmut Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400–1600* (University of Chicago Press, 2003); Maria R. Boes, "On Trial for Sodomy in Early Modern Germany," in *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Tom Betteridge (Manchester University Press, 2002), 27–45.

¹³ "Culture" can have many meanings. I am using it as an analytical term aimed at understanding the significations that French society deployed. My presumption is that the system of signifying meaning indicates what members of that society think about themselves and locates that culture relative to others outside it.

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it is hard to see. For Louis Althusser, ideology is disguised by its own seeming inevitability:

It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes (without appearing to do so, since these are “obviousnesses”) obviousnesses as obviousnesses, which we cannot *fail to recognize* and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (aloud or in the “still, small voice of conscience”): “That’s obvious! That’s right! That’s true!”¹⁴

Recognizing the “obvious,” however, blocks theoretical development. Recognition is taken as enough. Althusser imagines that scientific discourse could possibly obviate or circumvent ideological subjection, but he concedes that attempts to generate historical distance in order to recognize ideological formations are not entirely successful. Indeed, one of the foremost modern “ideological state apparatuses,” to use his term, is education. In modern society, the school/family has replaced the church/family as a primary locus of ideology.¹⁵ I am not going to refute Althusser in that I do not dispute the intractable omnipresence of ideology, but I do think, following Slavoj Žižek, that Althusserian ideology rests on a presumption of ignorance: “[I]deological’ is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence – that is, the social effectivity, the very reproduction of which implies that the individuals ‘do not know what they are doing.’”¹⁶ This suggests that denaturalizing ideological formations might reveal them, at least in part.

The Renaissance created conditions of denaturalized knowledge – by provoking change, this period laid bare some of the ideological support for the “obvious” state of things. For that reason, I am drawn to problems of continuity and discontinuity and to questions of sexuality which help illuminate them. My project is not a queer reading of the French Renaissance, but I do draw on queer theory. Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon have argued for the notion of “homohistory.”¹⁷ This is not a history of homosexuality, but a willing suspension of the certainty of heterosexual norms in historical contexts. The idea is to refuse, consciously, acceptance of the simple equation of sexual difference and chronological change. Ancient sodomy in, say, classical Athens is not the same as Renaissance sodomy in Florence, which is not the same as sodomy in twenty-first-century Dallas, Texas. But the similarities in what people did and thought about it are at least as important as the changes.

¹⁴ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 121–73; see esp. p. 161.

¹⁵ Louis Althusser, “A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre,” in *Lenin and Philosophy*, 203–8; see esp. pp. 206–7; Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” 136–7, 127.

¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 21. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁷ Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon, “Queering History,” *PMLA* (2005): 1608–17.

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Conscious evocations or rejections of the past seem improbable to me, but the Texas queer might inadvertently or unknowingly recall the Athenian citizen or the Florentine merchant when he does his sexual business.

Of course the reality is that we all do live in our own times as heirs to historical moments past. Because the Renaissance was an especially revealing collision of cultural imperatives, it is an especially ripe area to explore what people thought about sex. Ironically, the idea of homohistory encourages seeing the range of languages of love, desire, sodomy, lust, inadequacy, and procreation, to name just a few of the recurrent issues that exercised French Renaissance writers and readers. Awareness of the persistence of sameness increases awareness of possibilities and borrowings. At the same time, the self-conscious reflections on the past by Renaissance humanists, poets, and artists help to highlight infusions of new or renewed sexual thinking. My aim is to underscore both the consistency of disruption as ancient myth encounters Renaissance problems and the differences in the qualities of those disruptions around French cultural priorities.

By looking at a place (France) in a specific time (the Renaissance), this essay aims to understand how sexualized categories took shape as they did. How might time and place matter for better understanding sexuality? Historians are still trained in chronological divisions we more or less accept as having meaning: antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, modernity, and so on, with an extensive and growing list of subdivisions and specificities. We also recognize that, in lived experience, such periodizations were rarely evident to those who lived in them, and that the differences between, say, late antiquity and the early Middle Ages are not always clear. Yet, I want to hold out for the Renaissance as having distinct characteristics in matters of sex and sexuality, particularly compared to the periods before it.¹⁸ This essay assumes that the European Middle Ages, with its constant references to the Catholic Church as the central maker of sexual meaning, had its own distinct responses to problems of sexuality and desire. The lineaments of these responses are explored in works as diverse as Pierre J. Payer's studies of confessional literature, James A. Brundage's work on canon law, and various explorations of female sexuality relative to Catholicism, all of which display the influence of the Catholic Church on sexual norms.¹⁹ We know that marriage was a matter of doctrine drawn from

¹⁸ For a refusal of the idea of periodizing sex, see Merry E. Wiesner, "Disembodied Theory? Discourses of Sex in Early Modern Germany," in *Gender in Early Modern German History*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 152–77.

¹⁹ Pierre J. Payer, "Confession and the Study of Sex in the Middle Ages," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland, 1996), 3–31; *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code 550–1150* (University of Toronto Press, 1984); *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (University of Toronto Press, 1993); James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society* (University of

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St. Paul and St. Augustine, neither of whom regarded sex in a positive light, and that the value of sexual desire was highly disputed through much of the Middle Ages.²⁰ We have to some extent inherited the great oxymoron that chastity and virginity are sexual virtues. Whatever one makes of John Boswell's claims for "gay" Christians in the early Middle Ages, his work makes clear that clerics routinely considered matters of sexual normativity. Mark D. Jordan has demonstrated how Catholic thought on sodomy was shaped by such Church luminaries as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, and more polemically, by Peter Damian.²¹ The definition of sexual misdeeds of heretics (with the Church defining the contours of heresy) and the fusion of doctrinal and sexual deviance were largely the work of clerics.²²

The Church did not cease to matter in the Renaissance, and Christianity remained a force in shaping understandings and discipline around sex, but

Chicago, 1987); "Sex and Canon Law," in Bullough and Brundage, eds., *Handbook*, 33–50. On women, see for instance Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality and the Catholic Church*, trans. Peter Heinegg (New York: Doubleday, 1990); Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (University of Chicago Press, 1996); Joyce E. Salisbury, ed., *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland, 1991); and Joseph H. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1986). More generally, see Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); the essays in Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, eds., *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1982); Charles Trinkaus and Heiko Oberman, eds., *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion. Papers from the University of Michigan Conference* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); and the special issue of *JHS*, ed. William N. Bonds and Barbara Loomis (2001), 10:3/4.

²⁰ See for instance Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) and *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 2nd edn. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); John O'Meara, "St. Augustine's Attitude to Love," *Arethusa* 2 (1969): 46–60; James A. Brundage, *Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1993); Anne Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy* (New York and Toronto: Mellen, 1982); Charles A. Frazee, "The Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church," *Church History* 41 (1972): 149–67; Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton University Press, 1993), and for a different view, see Margaret McGlynn and Richard J. Moll, "Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages: 'It Were to Hire a Greet Merite,'" in Bullough and Brundage, eds., *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, 103–22.

²¹ Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (University of Chicago Press, 1997). For context, see Walter Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991); and Allen J. Frantzen, "Between the Lines: Queer Theory, the History of Homosexuality, and Anglo-Saxon Penitentials," *JMEMS* 26 (1996): 245–96.

²² For various perspectives, see Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger, eds., *Queering the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Karma Lochrie, ed., *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*; Phyllis A. Bird, "'Male and Female He Created Them': Gen. 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," *Harvard Theological Review* 74:2 (1981): 129–59; Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

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gradually, the dominance of the Church diminished. Municipalities displaced the Church courts in Italy and later, in Germany.²³ The infusion of humanism and the study of ancient texts offered philosophical and moral paradigms besides Christianity that held great appeal for some.²⁴ All of this meant that Christianity's centrality as a way of organizing thought about sex waned. (Catholic) Christianity, however multi-vocal it could be, had a unity of purpose in defining sex in terms of sin. Secular and humanist interests offered instead contending loci of understanding and power around sex. The construction of normative sexuality in the Renaissance included adaptations of "new" (that is, old or long-discredited and then revived) texts, discoveries of new bodies (of land and peoples), and the pressure of competition for cultural priority between nations, institutions, and individuals.

The last on that list brings us especially to France, where the Renaissance was repeatedly marked by claims for French linguistic superiority and for France as the heir to the ancients through the mechanism of *translatio studii et imperii*. While always a part of the wider European Renaissance, French efforts to distinguish French culture were especially self-conscious and salient. Whether one argues – as Pierre Jodogne has done – that the French Renaissance began with the transfer of the papacy to Avignon²⁵ or one follows the more conventional claim that late fifteenth-century cultural communication, including the Italian Wars beginning in 1494, was the crucial contact between the French and the "Italians," French humanists developed an insistent nationalism as part of their

²³ Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, eds., *History from Crime*, trans. Corrada Biazzo Curry, Margaret A. Gallucci, and Mary M. Gallucci (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); H. Schilling, "History of Crime or History of Sin? Some Reflections on the Social History of Early Modern Church Discipline," in *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe*, ed. E. I. Kouri and Tom Scott (London: St. Martin's, 1987); Nicolas Davidson, "Theology, Nature and the Law: Sexual Sin and Sexual Crime in Italy from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century," in *Crime, Society and the Law in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Trevor Dean and K. J. P. Lowe (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 74–98; Thomas V. Cohen and Elizabeth S. Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome: Trials before the Papal Magistrates* (University of Toronto Press, 1993); Richard von Dülmen, *Theatre of Horror: Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Germany*, trans. Elisabeth Neu (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1990); Patricia H. Labalme, "Sodomy and Venetian Justice in the Renaissance," *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* 52 (1984): 217–54; Richard J. Evans, *Rituals of Retribution: Capital Punishment in Germany, 1600–1987* (Oxford University Press, 1996); John Theibault, *German Villages in Crisis: Rural Life in Hesse-Kassel and the Thirty Years' War, 1580–1720* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995).

²⁴ For the European context, see James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1990) and Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino* (Florence: Sansoni, 1953). Other disruptions of Christian hegemony came from Catullus. See Julia Haig Gaisser, *Catullus and His Renaissance Readers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993). The phenomenon of "civic humanism" contributed as well. The discussions are extensive; see James Hankins, ed., *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) for a range of positions.

²⁵ Pierre Jodogne, *Jean Lemaire de Belges, écrivain franco-bourguignon* (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1972), 51–67.

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understanding of Renaissance values. Despite the novelty of much associated with humanistic study, French engagement with Renaissance humanism has been located in terms of its continuities with the past over time and by place.²⁶ Franco Simone's analysis of the absorption of Petrarch in France was crucial for understanding the dynamics of such cultural exchange in nationally specific terms.²⁷ Simone emphasized the cultural interplay between the Italians and the French and argued that the notion of the French taking over the Renaissance was overblown. But the question of specificity, as we shall see, was elaborated by French writers and artists, developed in the sixteenth century, and routinely cast in terms of the "new" learning.

In making a case for the Renaissance (singular) in Europe, the debates over large-scale cultural shifts have collectively suggested that France was an acute locus for self-conscious engagement with precepts emanating from Italy and antiquity. Many have documented the extensive anti-Italian rhetoric in France.²⁸ The political dimensions of anti-Italianism are several, but two beg special notice. First, the French monarchy relied on and then rejected Italian financial supports and the inclusion of Italians in royal patronage networks. Recently, Nicolas Le Roux and Xavier Le Person have demonstrated the complex workings of political change in terms of Italian connections and political patronage.²⁹ Second, historians and art historians have demonstrated that the artistic patronage of the monarchy drew heavily on Italian expertise.³⁰ The

²⁶ See for instance the essays in A. H. T. Levi, ed., *Humanism in France at the end of the Middle Ages and in the Early Renaissance* (Manchester University Press, 1970).

²⁷ See especially Franco Simone, *Il Rinascimento francese: studi e ricerche* (Turin: Società editrice internazionale, 1961). For the continuing influence of Simone, see Pierre Blanc, ed., *Dynamique d'une expansion culturelle: Pétrarque en Europe, XIV^e–XX^e siècle: actes du XXVI^e congrès international du CEFI, Turin et Chambéry, 11–15 décembre 1995: à la mémoire de Franco Simone* (Paris: Champion, 2001). In addition to Simone, see Alberto Tenenti, *Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento: (Francia e Italia)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989), which traces a different node of cultural contact.

²⁸ See discussions in Heller, *Anti-Italianism in Sixteenth-Century France*; Jean-François Dubost, *La France italienne: XVI^e–XVII^e siècle*, preface Daniel Roche (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1997).

²⁹ Nicolas Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi: mignons et courtisans au temps des derniers Valois* (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 2001); Xavier Le Person, "Pratiques" et "Practiqueurs": *la vie politique à la fin du règne de Henri III, 1584–1589*, preface Denis Crouzet (Geneva: Droz, 2002). For institutional shifts in the monarchy, see J. Russell Major, *From Renaissance Monarchy to Absolute Monarchy: French Kings, Nobles, & Estates* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). The question of the character of the French government is central to historical inquiry about the seventeenth century. For the center of the storm about "absolute monarchy," see William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³⁰ See for instance R. J. Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior and Patron: The Reign of Francis I* (Cambridge University Press, 1994) and *The French Renaissance Court* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008); Anne-Marie Lecoq, *François I^{er} imaginaire: symbolique et politique à l'aube de la Renaissance française* (Cahors: Tardy Quercy, 1987); Sylvie Béguin, *L'École de Fontainebleau: le maniérisme à la cour de France* (Paris: Gonthier-Seghers, 1960); Eugene Carroll, "Rosso in France," and Sydney Freedberg, "Rosso's Style in France and