Scholars researching homosexuality in the Middle Ages have devoted far less attention to its existence in the Carolingian period rather than in later centuries for at least two reasons: the practice does not emerge as a significant theological issue until the middle of the eleventh century, and it is not treated as a civil crime until after then, when it began to be prosecuted only sporadically and inconsistently. A third reason has proved perhaps more atmospheric in nature, namely a tendency to accept without further analysis the position advocated by John Boswell who, as an important element of the “Boswell thesis,” argues that homosexuality, although criminalized in the early sixth century by Justinian, was not a matter of much concern in the early Church, and that it remained in this condition throughout the early Middle Ages. Boswell maintains that homosexuality did not initially qualify as a more grievous sexual sin than others (given the repressive nature of the Church’s attitude toward human sexuality in general) as it was the Late medieval Church that rejected and demonized it. Boswell’s larger historical argument is that pagan society and the early Christian community accepted, or at least tolerated, homosexuality without exceptional interest until fundamentalist elements in the medieval Church eventually united to condemn it.

Regardless of the extent to which same-sex relationships were tolerated in the Carolingian era, which we will define here as spanning 751 C.E. to 987 C.E., it is quite clear from even a casual review of the sources that homosexual desire and behavior were very much present and visible.
throughout the entire period. Both aspects are mentioned in an astonishing variety of contemporary texts that either express same-sex desire or else urge its repression, which provides ample evidence to conclude that Carolingian monks and clerics—and in the tenth century, nuns as well—were, to say the very least, quite knowledgeable. Our purpose in this paper is to locate the most significant references to homosexuality in texts that were created and preserved in Carolingian monastic institutions, to review the kinds of texts in which such references are found, and to attempt a brief response to the minimization of any negative evaluation as put forward by John Boswell. Since modern historiography has yet to provide a detailed account of same-sex relations in the ninth and tenth centuries, this paper will locate and identify a number of texts where such a project might be sourced.

Our survey begins not only chronologically, but also at the top of the social order with a capitularium issued by Charlemagne in 802. The Emperor, attempting to enforce sexual morality among the clergy, warns that:

\[\ldots\ a\ most\ pernicious\ rumor\ has\ come\ to\ our\ ears\ that\ many\ in\ the\ monasteries\ have\ already\ been\ detected\ in\ fornication\ and\ in\ abomination\ and\ uncleanness.\ \text{It}\ especially\ saddens\ and\ disturbs\ us\ that\ it\ can\ be\ said,\ without\ a\ great\ mistake,\ that\ some\ of\ the\ monks\ are\ understood\ to\ be\ sodomites,\ so\ that\ whereas\ the\ greatest\ hope\ of\ salvation\ to\ all\ Christians\ is\ believed\ to\ arise\ from\ the\ life\ and\ chastity\ of\ the\ monks,\ damage\ has\ been\ incurred\ instead\ \ldots\ \text{Certainly,\ if\ any\ such\ report\ shall\ have\ come\ to\ our\ ears\ in\ the\ future,\ we\ shall\ inflict\ such\ a\ penalty,\ not\ only\ on\ the\ guilty\ but\ also\ on\ those\ who\ have\ consented\ to\ such\ deeds,\ that\ no\ Christian\ who\ shall\ have\ heard\ of\ it\ will\ ever\ dare\ in\ the\ future\ to\ perpetrate\ such\ acts.}\]

For the purposes of this paper, we assume an essentialist position, recognizing that homosexuals have existed as a minority in all societies at all times, although not necessarily as a recognized, visible, or self-aware community within a particular society. Since the term "sodomy" meant many different things throughout history, we use instead the term homosexuality, signifying either same-sex relations or same-sex desire. Except in the penitential literature discussed below, we have not found any reference to female homosexuality in this period.

With the exception of one imperial capitulary, all references to our subject emanate from monastic institutions. This limitation is not to accede to any notion of a "monastic vice," but affirms instead that the monasteries were the foundation of Carolingian literacy.

In an earlier capitulary of 789, Charlemagne had endorsed the sanctions authorized at the Council of Ancyra and admonished bishops and priests to apply them to "those who sin against nature or with men." But the 802 capitulary is completely different in nature: the Emperor wrote that he had received reports that there was fornication occurring in the monasteries, and that something bad would happen if it did not stop. A word to the wise seems to have been sufficient, as there are no records of further utterances from him or his successors on the subject and no civil statutes were enacted until well after the final departure of the Frankish kings.

The only other agencies attempting to proscribe same-sex activity during the Carolingian era were Church councils and synods held at various places throughout the realm. These councils issued ordinances that with time became the basis for canon law and several of these decrees expressed disapproval of homosexuality without precisely defining it or meting out any punishments. Thus in 813, the Council of Châlons attacked penitential books, which had been in widespread employment throughout Europe since the sixth century, for failing to cite scriptural and patristic authority for their pronouncements, as well as for their perceived leniency especially in matters of homosexuality. The Council thus decreed, unsuccessfully, that collections of penances to be assigned by priestly confessors for committed sins called penitentials were to be eliminated. In 829, Bishop Wala, a leading churchman of the Frankish kingdom, convened the Council of Paris. Canon 34 of this Council explicitly argued for a death penalty for sodomites, based on the by then customary interpretations of Leviticus 20:13 and Romans 1:32. More significantly—since we have no record that the Council's decree was ever enforced by anyone—the Canon departed from a script that had originated with Justinian by making homosexual intercourse responsible not only for the usual variety of natural disasters such as floods, fires, and earthquakes, but also for a lack of success in warfare. This innovative wrinkle in the scapegoating of gay people may have been induced by a

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6 Held in 314 in Ankara, the Council of Ancyra did not mention same-sex behavior explicitly, but Latin translators later tacked it onto the canon about bestiality. Cf. Louis Crompton, Homosexuality and civilization (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 154.
9 For a full discussion of Canon 34 see Louis Crompton, Homosexuality and Civilization (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 157-158.
contemporary fear of invasion by the ‘Saracens,’ Bulgarian hordes, and the pagan Vikings and Danes in apprehension of which Louis the Pious had ordered public prayers and fasting in 827.10

The other arena of ecclesiastical interest pertaining to sexual non-conformity is located in the penitentials (collections of penances to be assigned by priestly confessors for committed sins). They were first developed by Celtic monks in Ireland in the sixth century and were widely employed across Europe for 400 years, but because they lacked uniformity and remained non-canonical due to their multiple authorship, they came under attack by the Frankish councils mentioned earlier. However, their practical utility to priests who required personal handbooks of reference for confessions delayed their immediate rejection. Since there was no single official version, many were fragmentary and frequently incorporated penances from differing earlier sources, but then invented some new ones as well. The register of sinful acts also varied. To regard these books as a moral index of the early Middle Ages might be overstated, but nonetheless they do provide insight into the kind of offenses that required correction by the Church, and how seriously these might be evaluated when measured by the severity of the penances. For example, there is explicit mention of lesbianism in several penitentials, beginning with the early Anglo-Saxon Codex Theodosianus or Theodosian Code (438) and continuing on through the ninth century with Rabanus Maurus Magnentius (d. 856) and Hincmar of Reims (d. 882).11 Given the paucity of information about female homosexuality in this period, the fact that it is mentioned in the penitentials gives a reliable indication that the practice was well-known at least to the priesthood (at least in theory, since of course there is no record at all of how many women might have actually confessed to it).

A more contentious approach to the penitential texts has resulted from assessing the importance of different offenses by comparing the degree of the penalties imposed. This tendency has been nowhere more pronounced than in the on-going debate about the “Boswell thesis.” Reviewing various penances specified in the eighth-century penitential of Pope Gregory III (d. 741), Boswell notes that lesbian practitioners were given 160 days of penance, whereas their male counterparts received a whole year—all of which recedes into insignificance compared with the priest who had sinfully hunted and received three years of penance.12

10 Crompton, Homosexuality, 158.
11 “If a woman commits fornication with a woman, she shall do penance for three years.” In Payer, Pierre J., Sex and the Penitentials. The Development of a Sexual Code 550-1150 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 43.
12 Boswell, Christianity, 180.

EX POST FACTO
Boswell cites this as evidence of the relative indifference accorded to homosexuality in the early Middle Ages—some penitentials do not mention gay practices at all, for example—but other critics have reviewed the consistent seriousness with which homosexuality is treated from decade to decade, and also the increasing amount of attention devoted to it, and have therefore come to opposing conclusions. It is nonetheless clear that the practice remains a hot item in the penitential literature: Pierre J. Payer has compiled a list of thirty texts that contain canons which censure male homosexuality and fourteen that reference female relations. The various kinds of sexual behaviors involved, the age groups of those concerned, and the range of persons addressed (meaning their clerical status) were meticulously identified in several of the texts, and most male homosexual relations carried a penance of ten to fifteen years.

Given that the penitential books originated outside the Frankish kingdoms and found employment almost everywhere in Europe, it seems relevant to ask if the Carolingians were able to inject anything original into the genre, besides forbidding the books altogether at the Councils of Paris and Châlons. In fact the prohibitions seem to have had the reverse effect, since several leading Carolingian clerics lost no time in filling the gap. Four notable examples of Carolingian penitentials are: the Poenitentiale Romanum of ca. 830 by Halitgar, Bishop of Cambrai, France; the Paenitentiale ad Otgarium Moguntinensem (813) and Paenitentiale ad Heribaldum (853) by Hrabanus Maurus; and Libri duo de synodalibus causis et disciplinis ecclesiasticis of Regino of Plüm, ca. 906. None of these writers added anything novel to the atonements recommended for gay people in penitentials; they preferred instead to elaborate upon such cogent issues as whether the calves born of cows that had been abused sexually by humans might be eaten or not. Halitgar’s single canon on

Allen Frantzen, after an exhaustive comparative review of the Anglo-Saxon inventory, states unequivocally that intolerance of same-sex acts “is steadily manifest in English and Continental evidence throughout the early medieval period.” Frantzen, Allen J. Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 2000), 129.

Payer, Penitentials, 136-138.

Payer, Penitentials, 136.

Hincmar, Archbishop of Reims 845-882, ought by rights to be included in this list, since he wrote extensively about several sins addressed in the penitentials. He did not himself write a penitential, but scholars like to cite his opinions, for example concerning the employment of dildos by lesbians, in Edith Benkov, “The Erased Lesbian: Sodomy and the Legal Tradition in Medieval Europe,” in Sautman, Francesca Canadé and Pamela Sheingorn, eds., Same sex love and desire among women in the Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 104-105.

Payer, Penitentials, 69-70.
homosexuality, by way of contrast, is succinct and to the point: "If anyone commits fornication as [did] the Sodomites, he shall do penance for ten years, three of these on bread and water."8 Perhaps the repertory of offenses engaged in by the "Sodomites," both oral and anal in nature, had by this time become sufficiently articulated as to require no further analysis by these diligent Carolingian moralists.9

It is well-known that child oblation was the chief source of recruitment for new monks in the larger monasteries in the Carolingian era—especially at Fulda, Reichenau and St. Gall—which meant simply that parents could surrender their sons at a young age to be educated as professional monks. This was to be understood as an act of religious devotion, and the principle itself is included in the Rule of St. Benedict, along with a religious ceremony to be performed when the child is received at the altar.20 In manuscripts containing monastic rules and prohibitions, there existed numerous mandates according to which the monks and boys are to be kept separate, in addition to schedules for the daily activities of the boys, their recommended diets, recreational activities, etc. (In the penitentials, there are also listed offenses involving relations with children (called minimi, or pueri), with special punishments reserved for clerics, perhaps enforcing the rules as about separating the monks and boys.).21

The monastic schools for oblates were called external schools, and for a period they also boarded children from the local nobility, not given as oblates, but to be educated with them. The "Plan of St. Gall" (Codex Sangallensis 1092) dating from between 819 and 826 gives a very clear idea of how the boys' school was carefully sequestered not only from the world beyond the monastery walls, but also from the day-to-day sphere of monastic activities (see Appendix One / 1, 2, 3). The plan shows twelve privies for use by the boys' dormitory space to accommodate perhaps twenty, and one single doorway entering into the school building, where entrants could perhaps be carefully screened as they passed through.22

The building itself was located a good distance from the areas where

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9 For a list of all the proscribed homosexual behaviors, and the age and status of the persons performing them, see Payer, Penitentials, 135-136.
21 Boswell, John. The Kindness of Strangers. The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 250-251. There are also of course regulations which are meant to prevent intimate contact among monks, such as dormitory rules that require a light to be kept burning all night, etc.
22 Boswell, Christianity, 250, n. 70.
adult monks resided or were likely to be active. The plan shows how carefully the arrangements for the housing of the children had been crafted by monastery administrators and how unlikely it would have been that any opportunity for privacy might arise.23

Turning from the universally negative pronouncements and commentaries about homosexuality expressed by Carolingian churchmen, we will examine other forms of literature in the period, some of which offer quite a contrastive perspective. One literary work which accepts and reinforces the negative attitude of the Church is Roswitha von Gandersheim’s narrative account of the life of Saint Pelagius of Cordoba. As Abbess (959-1001) of a Damenstift at Gandersheim Abbey in Germany, a privately-founded nunnery whose main purpose was to house unmarried daughters of the nobility, Roswitha is known to us as the author of numerous plays in the form of dialogues which were evidently acted out or at least recited by the nuns. Roswitha also composed in the 950s or 960s a book which she entitled Book of Legends, a hagiographical collection of the stories of eight saints dedicated to the abbess Gerberga and composed in Latin hexameters. Among them is the Passio Sancti Pelagii, derived, as she says, from an eyewitness report of Saint Pelagius of Cordoba’s martyrdom in 926, an event occurring within Roswitha’s own lifetime. The saint is portrayed as incorporating the unlikely combination of a beautiful boy and a pious Christian. After resisting the sexual advances of Caliph Abd-ar-Rahman, who also demands that the boy convert to Islam, Pelagius punches his seducer in the face and is subsequently tortured and killed, then quickly elevated to sainthood.

What is quite remarkable about the martyrdom story is her characterization of the young Christian from Galicia, Spain as an ephebos, the pagan archetype of a beautiful young boy targeted by older men. Because we have no information about similar activities among the Franks and because her secluded nunnery would hardly seem a hotbed of such adventures, it seems likely that Roswitha educated herself from reading ancient myths and stories about Apollo and Hyacinth, Jupiter and Ganymede, or from various other classical sources. Her description of Pelagius’ beauty is devoid of all restraint and suggests instead that he was drop-dead gorgeous:

Now as he was placed in the midst of courtiers.

He surpassed them all beauty in beauty of countenance.  
They were all amazed as at him they gazed  
Admiring now his face, now his sweet speech.  
The king, too, felt delight at the youth's lovely sight  
And enflamed with love for the royal offspring's beauty,  
He ordered a squire that the object of his desire,  
Pelagius, be placed on the throne with him.²⁴

Roswitha seems quite transported in her portrayal of the “sweet neck,” “lovely lips,” and “lovely face” of the “handsome youth” before her wrath falls upon the wicked caliph, who is not only “savage,” but also “stained with pederasty.”²⁵ It has been argued that Roswitha is more concerned with the illegitimacy of a carnal union between a Christian and a Muslim than with the Caliph’s gay proclivities.²⁶ However, by associating homosexuality with villains, Roswitha created a construct that served medieval European Christians well as a useful instrument in the demonizing of Muslims, whom they often pictured as aggressive homosexuals.²⁷

Another area of Carolingian literary production that takes a far less antagonistic view to the expression of same-sex desire are the surviving “poems of friendship” written by contemporary clerics to one another. Here we find no professional castigations targeting a sinful species of lovemaking, but rather a constant outpouring of warm feelings from one monastic or cleric to another. The erotic imagery in some of the poems strongly suggest a distant romance is in progress, or else is being urgently solicited, whereas others articulate desire in a much subtler fashion. Thus Walafrid Strabo, Abbot of the German monastery at Reichenau (838-849) writes to a cleric friend named Liutger:

Care venis subito, subito quoque, care recedis:  
Audio, non video, vido tamen intus et intus  
amplector fugientem et, corpore non pietate.

My dear, you come suddenly, and even so suddenly, my dear one, you withdraw.  
I hear but don’t see, but I do see inwardly, and I embrace you  
Inwardly as you flee from me physically, but not from our loyalty to each other.

²⁴ Hroswitha of Gandersheim.  
Hrotsvit of Gandersheim.  
A Florilegium of her Works.  
Katharina M. Wilson, transl. (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1998), 35

²⁵ Ibid., 34.

²⁶ Boswell, Christianity, 199.

²⁷ On the other hand, “some Muslim sources . . . criticize the Christian clergy for their particular addiction to the practice.” Boswell, Christianity, 198.

EX POST FACTO
The lines are inspired no doubt by a friend's departure, but could also refer to withdrawal after penetration. Lines from other poems by Walafrid addressed to Liutger seem full of restless yearning: *Non requiesco, nisi videro te citius* ("I cannot rest unless I see you again soon"), which seems to be a common malaise, and in another poem to a distant friend Walafrid writes—one supposes late at night under moonlight:

\[
\textit{qualiter ex luna splendescat lampade pura} \\
\textit{et splendore suo caros amplectitur uno} \\
\textit{corporis divisi, sed mentis amore ligatos.}^{25}
\]

how the moon shines like a clear torch, embracing in splendor the ones it loves, separated in body, but mentally bound by love.

Of course it is in the nature of love letters that they are written under conditions of separation and Notker Balbulus (ca. 840-912), a monk of St. Gall better known to us for his biography of Charlemagne, after scolding his friend Salamo for running off to visit a nun, complains that someone else now possesses his affections and threatens to subject him to a bondage session:

\[
\textit{Ni remeare velis, non obstat ripa furentis} \\
\textit{Rheni vel Potami litus acerba fremens} \\
\textit{Non Hilerae fremitus revocat neque saltus inhorrens:} \\
\textit{persequar et temet fune ligabo, fugax} \ldots \\
\textit{Te sequor et lacrimis strata rigabo tua.}^{29}
\]

If you don't return willingly, neither the banks of the furious Rhine or the wild shores of Potamus\(^{30}\) will stop me, neither will the roaring of the Iller\(^{31}\) or its steep waterfall prevent me, as you fly away, from hunting you down and tying you up with ropes . . . I shall follow you and wet your bed with my tears.

Unrequited love however does not appear to be an option for Salamo (ca. 860-920), an Abbot of St. Gall who prefers boys (*pueri*) and who has apparently accommodated himself to the circumstance that they will grow older no matter what happens—but not without some groaning on

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\(^{30}\) Possibly the Bodensee is meant, or some part of it. Potamus means river in Greek.

\(^{31}\) A river that runs to the Danube from neighboring Austria. These rivers functioned in early times like freeways around Europe.
his part: *Ut cerva rugio, cum fugit hinnulus* ("I bellow like a doe when her fawn runs off"). Of the Carolingian poets we have encountered here, Salamo is the first to unambiguously call a spade a spade:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Propagatur quae latebat discincta luxuria;} \\
\text{molles sibi subiugavit Venus sodomestica;} \\
\text{pro absu catamitae mulier fit vacua.}\end{align*}
\]

Formerly hidden, open lechery is now thriving. Sodomytic Venus has subjugated effeminacy, leaving women empty because of the Catamite’s abuse.

This may indeed be the very first in a long series of medieval complaints about the expanding popularity of homosexuality, decorously observed here in Latin end-rhymes, but given Salamo’s reputation as a practitioner and the passions he describes in several of his poems, it is very hard to think that he was seriously upset by the prospect.

It is also hard to tell from Salamo’s observation whether gay sex was actually more prevalent than the astonishing quantity of gay love poetry it seems to have inspired, but in either case a lifetime achievement award must go to Alcuin of York (ca. 735-804), a towering figure of Carolingian literacy who, thanks to Charlemagne’s support, was able to get many of his numerous pupils placed in positions of clerical leadership. In a poem to a former student named Arno, Alcuin writes fervently:

\[
\begin{align*}
Pectus amor nostrum penetravit flamma \\
atque calore novo semper inardet amor, \\
Nec mare, nec tellus, montes nec silva vel alpes huic obstare queunt aut inhibre viam, \\
quo minus, alme puer, semper tua viscera lingat, \\
vel lacrimis lavet petus, amate, tuum.\end{align*}
\]

Love’s flame has penetrated my breast, and love burns again and again with renewed warmth. Neither sea, nor land, nor mountains, forests or alps can hinder or block my path, dear father, Far less can they prevent me from licking your body with my tongue, or bathing your breast with my tears.

\[\text{34 Stehling, Male Love, 23.}\]
\[\text{33 Stehling, Male Love, 22.}\]
\[\text{34 For a generous sampling of them, and for other poems addressed to Salamo, see}\]
\[\text{Stehling, Male Love, 21-23.}\]
\[\text{35 Stehling, Male Love, 14.}\]
Alcuin also even seems to have idealized this form of affection between members of the clerical elite as relationships that were or would be sanctioned by Christ. In an epitaph poem composed for Arno and Paulinus of Aquileia, Italy, who may have been buried together, Alcuin writes of “two dear friends whom Christ’s love had joined together.” In Alcuin’s letters to his friends, some of whom received names like Alexis, Corydon, and Daphnis, taken from the overtly gay shepherds in Vergil’s Eclogues. One letter to Bishop Arno of Salzburg, possibly the same friend addressed to Arno in the poem quoted above, says:

I think of your love and friendship with such sweet memories, reverend bishop, that I long for that lovely time when I may be able to clutch the neck of your sweetness with the fingers of my desires. Alas, if it only were granted to me . . . to be transported to you, how would I sink into your embraces . . . how would I cover, with tightly pressed lips, not only your eyes, ears, and mouth but also your every finger and your toes, not once but many a time.

It is quite tempting to think of Alcuin ardently nibbling on the toes of the Bishop of Salzburg, but of course it is far more difficult to assess the underlying realities behind this effusion of homoerotic poetry written by Carolingian clerics. One real deficit is that there exists nothing at all to compare it with, since we find no similar written records of romantic love between men and women during this period. The fact that successive church councils in the ninth and tenth centuries issued repeated mandates against priests having children, mistresses and wives, shows that enforcing celibacy amongst the priesthood must have been quite a problem for the church establishment. But the sequestered life of monastics, involving an enforced life-style lacking any contact with women, would have hardly permitted similar transgressions, and if we remember that many monks were oblati and also that the chief scholars and abbots in the monasteries were constantly networking with one another throughout their working lives, it is certainly no surprise that same-sex desire was expressed to such an amazing extent in their writing.

It is easy for us to misread the cultural significance of these poems, since the border between warmth of feeling and overt eroticism may be drawn more clearly, or at least differently, for us today. Nonetheless, taken together, the texts must also be viewed as potentially representing.

37 In Boswell, Christianity, 190.
sexual involvements, and at the least they certainly express same-sex desire. The homoerotic imagery in any case is pervasive and constant, and it carries beyond the Carolingian era. Thus Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1070-1130), a German theologian of a later era, expresses a profound relationship to God in sexual imagery quite worthy of the Carolingian friendship poems:

I was not satisfied until I touched him [God] with my hands, embraced him, and kissed him . . . I held him, embraced him, kissed him for a long time. I sensed how reluctantly he accepted these caresses—then he opened his lips so that I might kiss him all the more deeply.\(^{38}\)

Quite astonishingly, there even exist visual representations of homosexuality in the early medieval period, disguised to be sure behind the device of personified allegorical figures. Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (b. 348) was celebrated as the first poet of Christianity. In fact, his works were copied frequently and proved quite popular throughout the Middle Ages. His major work is called *Psychomachia*, or “Soul War.” Written ca. 400, it describes a series of confrontations between allegorical representations of Christian virtues and vices, including Faith, Chastity, Wrath, Lust, Honesty, Purity, Deceit, Reason, Avarice, and so forth. Rosamond McKitterick writes that *Psychomachia* “appears constantly in the library catalogues and book-lists of the Carolingian period” and the original text is notable historically as the first poem in which the only characters to appear are personifications of ideas or concepts.\(^{39}\) They are always female, since the Latin words for abstract ideas are grammatically feminine. The personified virtues and vices are engaged in personal combat and Scriptural references abound to justify the inevitable victory of the designated virtues.

It became popular to illustrate these individual battles in early medieval manuscripts and at least two that were done in Carolingian scriptoria depict the fight that took place between *Pudicitia* (Chastity) and *Libido Sodomita*, (literally “Sodomite love”). In one drawing done at Reichenau around 900 (see Appendix Two), Sodomite Love lies vanquished at the feet of Chastity, whom she has attacked with three torches—meant to symbolize the fire which consumed Sodom and Gomorrah, or also perhaps the flames of lust. Chastity bends over her, dressed in military Roman garb worn over a tunic with a feather in her


A second drawing from St. Gall dating from the following century shows three combat scenes in comic strip fashion depicting the same confrontation (Appendix Three). Deftly parrying a torch thrust with her shield, Chastity is about to let go with a stone the size of a brick. Next we see Sodomite Love leaning against a tree stabbed through with a sword and bleeding profusely, while Chastity, her hand upraised, delivers a lengthy speech of admonition. Then Chastity washes off her sword in a stream before taking it to a church, where, as the poem states, it is to be placed on the altar and purified.

What concerns us here is the fact that in the Carolingian period, the term “Sodomite Love” had come to signify homosexuality, which however was not what Prudentius had in mind, writing in the early fifth century. For Prudentius, these words simply meant sexual licentiousness, or lust that was sufficiently over-the-top as to incur divine wrath. This might have included same-sex behavior, but was not limited to it. Yet the meaning of the adjective sodomita had shifted by 825, when Walafrid Strabo, about eighteen years of age, wrote a long narrative poem in Latin hexameters at the behest of his teachers called Visio Wettini. It relates a dream-vision experienced by a Reichenau monk named Wetti, the director of the monastery school and a teacher of Walafrid, a few days before his death. A guardian angel comes to escort the dying monk to heaven, but not before giving him a brief tour en route of hell and

But perhaps the tunic is there only to show that the warrior is a female. Chastity's right arm appears to be bent backward, prompting one to think she may have been skilled in some variety of the Asian martial arts, but in fact it is supposed to indicate that she has struck Sodomite Love with a rock, as described in the text, having fended off the torch attack with her shield.


According to another scholar, "There is little reason to think that Prudentius wishes to elevate Sodomy (the monastic vice) [!] to a major vice." Smith, Macklin. Prudentius' Psychomachia: A Reexamination. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 185n. On the other hand, Prudentius was not cognizant of the possibilities involved. In another text called Hamartigenia, "The Origin of Sin," he observes that "One sees strong men, no longer young, turn effeminate in their self-refinement... they are ashamed to be men." Prudentius Clemens, Aurelius. Psychomachia. Translated by H.J. Thomason. Loeb Classical Library, Volume One. Cambridge, Harvard University Press: 1949), 225. Prudentius here assumes a commonly encountered late-Roman, pre-Christian position toward molles, or "effeminate men," namely that through their effeminacy they have betrayed their own gender. A Sodomite, on the other hand, could have been anybody.
purgatory," where practitioners of Sodomite love reside, having succumbed to the "mother of vices:"

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Nulla tamen tanto peccata furore creator} \\
&\text{Vindicat offensus, quam quae contraria constant} \\
&\text{Naturae, quod quisque nefas vitae laboret.} \\
&\text{Ne subeat mater scelerum Sodomita libido} \\
&\text{Et templum domini mutetur in horrida nigri} \\
&\text{Serpentis delubra, quibus se degere gaudet.}\end{align*}
\]

There are no sins which the creator punishes with such anger as when he is offended by this sin against nature, a vice which everyone must avoid—lest Sodomite love, the mother of vices, infiltrate the temple of the Lord and transform it into a horrible den of black serpents, where they would very happily reside.

Walafrid employs the term "Sodomite love" as does Prudentius, but he describes it as a sin against nature, \textit{qua contrairementa naturae}. Therefore it is clear that by this time the term signifies \textit{sodomia}, the official designation that will replace it in the eleventh century when it becomes a matter of vigorous theological debate requiring papal adjudication, initiated by Peter Damian.\textsuperscript{44} We may conclude therefore that the allegorical images in the \textit{Psychomachia} manuscripts of \textit{libido Sodomita}, the mother of all vices, would have been readily understood in Walafrid's times as signifying homosexuality.

\textsuperscript{42} The work is of interest to scholars trying to trace the derivation and history of the notion of purgatory, which did not concern the early Church. One might see \textit{Visio Wettini} as an early version of Dante's poems.

\textsuperscript{43} Heito, and Walahfrid Strabo. \textit{Visio Wettini}. Edited by Hermann Knittel. (Heidelberg: Mattes, 2004), 104.

\textsuperscript{44} A medieval invention, the concept of "sodomy" has a long and complicated career and is infamously difficult to define. Jordan says he has found no mention of the word \textit{sodomia} before the eleventh century, when Peter Damian's \textit{Book of Gomorrah} established it as the object of an institutionalized homophobic discourse lasting for centuries afterwards (cf. Footnote \textsuperscript{1} above). But it is clear from the lines of Walafrid above that the adjective form "Sodomite" was commonly used to refer to homosexuality two centuries before then, since collaterally it acquires the epithet "against Nature." In Late Antiquity, the destruction of Sodom was not associated with homosexuality until it appeared in the law codes of Emperor Justinian (528 and 542) and more influentially in the writings of St. Augustine. The original story of the destruction of the Sodomites found in Leviticus of course makes no such association, their sins apparently being no more salacious in nature than arrogance mixed with ingratitude.

\textbf{EX POST FACTO}
Conclusions

As we have seen, same-sex sexuality is located throughout almost the entire range of Carolingian literacy—in imperial capitularies; decrees issued by Frankish Church councils; the penitential books used by priests; monastic rules meant to enforce the separation from child oblates and adult monks, (and an architectural plan from St. Gall suggesting how that might be arranged physically); the narrative text by Roswitha of Gandersheim relating the history of St. Pelagius of Cordoba; the “friendship” poems and letters written by several leading monks and clerics; and the Prudentius manuscript drawings which show “Sodomite love” locked in mortal combat with Chastity. Because homosexuality cuts across almost the total spectrum of Carolingian textual records, it is obvious that the issue was not only well-known to writers and scholars of the day, but also that its problematic nature was equally manifest, since many clerics were forced to deny in public what many were engaging in privately. Clearly a two-tiered level of morality in public and private deportment was well-underway in the Carolingian period, evidenced for example by the conflicting attitudes expressed in Walafrid’s Visio Wettini compared with his intimate poems to his friends.

But does this mean, as Boswell suggests:

Correspondence between the relatively mild attitude of Carolingian theologians toward homosexuality and the notable restraint of legal enactments—indeed the virtual absence of civil statutes regarding it—argues very strongly that the Christian hierarchy in the seventh through the tenth centuries considered homosexual behavior no more (and probably less) reprehensible than comparable heterosexual behavior (i.e., extramarital)?

Perhaps, yet the Christian agenda was set for the condemnation of homosexuality in the Codex Iustitianus by at least the end of the late fifth century and in principle the Church has never varied in its moral disapproval, even to this day. Compared with the later Middle Ages, the Carolingians may not have actively prosecuted gay people, far less have subjected them to such horrors as the public executions which awaited in the thirteenth century, but the official condemnation was certainly always present and well-advertised, as we have shown here in Charlemagne’s capitulary, in the penitentials and in Roswitha’s Pelagius narrative. The absence of any objective debate about the matter and the

45 Boswell, Christianity, 179.
absence of any criminal enforcement could as easily be attributed to a lack of effective governmental administration, or to the existence of a judicial system sophisticated enough to dispense justice to the population at large.

It is certainly also true that the Church in the early Middle Ages had far more pressing matters to attend to—it was a time when pagans were still being converted, when new bishoprics were being established in the newly conquered territories and when church leaders had their hands more than full enough trying to develop literacy and to enforce at least a semblance of celibacy among the priesthood. What is most significant about the treatment of homosexuals in Carolingian times rests rather in the fact that because the heat was still off, same-sex love was expressed openly and passionately in the many letters and poems written by contemporary monks and churchmen, who in their time functioned also as the appointed guardians of culture and literacy. It is an activity which came to a rapid end after 1050 when the moral atmosphere turned severely repressive.

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