

Instructions for Virtual Queer Ancestry Ritual

Queer People of Intolerant Cultures:

In your breakout room, make sure to introduce yourselves.

Your group represents all queer humans living in homophobic cultures, from the dawn of humanity, up to about the 1850s.

Some societies in the past upheld formal prohibitions against some or all forms of queerness. These typically became enshrined in religious myths, laws, and stories. To varying degrees, societies adhering to the three major monotheistic religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) fall into this category, based on teachings in the Book of Sodom.

Take a few minutes for each person to read through one of the informational posters below. Take turns paraphrasing, in a minute, what you have read to the others.

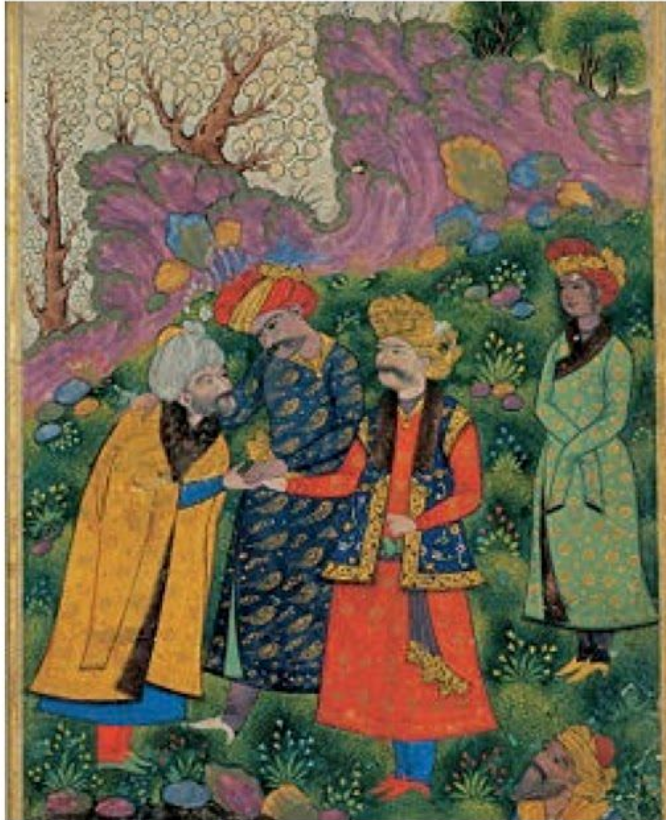
When finished, each person can share for 1 or 2 minutes:

- How would my life be different if I lived in a much more homophobic culture?

Imagine that you could go in the past and be some of these people. What would you wish to say to your present self? The present generation of queers? Next, imagine that you could invoke the queer people that live in cultures that are more tolerant. What might you want to say to them? You may wish to write down some of the phrases that feel the most potent to you.

Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni

The Islamic ruler of the Ghazni empire, Sultan Mahmud (971-1030) fell in love with his slave, Malik Ayaz.



Mahmud and Ayaz

The Sultan is to the right, shaking the hand of the sheikh, with Ayaz standing behind him in the background. The figure between the two is Shah Abbas I who reigned about 600 years later.

Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran

The boundaries of the Islamic faith burst in the decades after Muhammad's death. Islam finally reached the Indian subcontinent in the 8th century. Sultan Mahmud was the ruler of the Ghazni Empire in present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan. Along with their faith, the Islamic rulers brought their customs, and as a result, gay love figured in the lives of some of the most prominent of the Islamic rulers of India.

The love between Sultan Mahmud and his slave Malik Ayaz was such that it became an Islamic legend. Poets praising the power of love looked to Sultan Mahmud as a prime example of the man who, because of the power of his love, became "a slave to his slave." Malik Ayaz became the embodiment of the ideal beloved, and a model for purity in Sufi literature.

An anecdote about Sultan Mahmud was included by the great Persian poet Sa'di in his collection of verses, *Bustan*: "Some one found fault with the king of Ghazani, saying, 'Ayaz, his favourite slave, possesses no beauty. It is strange that a nightingale should love a rose that has neither colour nor perfume.' This was told to Mahmud, who said, 'My love, O sir, is for virtue, not for form or stature.'"

Islam, in ancient times, had a much more lenient attitudes towards queerness. The Prophet Mohammed said: "There is in Paradise a market wherein there will be no buying or selling, but will consist of men and women. When a man desires a beauty, he will have intercourse with them."

Joan of Arc

“For nothing in the world will I swear not to put on a man’s dress.”



Joan of Arc saw her transgender identity as rooted in divinity, as the following quote by the judges from the court proceedings of her interrogation reveal: “You have said that, by God’s command, you have continually worn man’s dress... with nothing left that could show you to be a woman; although you have been frequently admonished to leave it off, which you have refused to do so, saying that you would rather die than leave it off, save by God’s command. And you said further that if you were still so dressed and with the king, it would be one of the greatest blessings for the kingdom of France; and you have said that not for anything would you take an oath not to wear this dress or carry arms; and concerning all these matters you have said that you did well, and obediently to God’s command.”

Joan of Arc was born in France in 1412, a country gripped by the Hundred Years War. French peasants suffered plunder and violence at the hands of the marauding English occupation armies. At just 17 years old, dressed in men’s clothing, Joan of Arc approached Prince Charles, heir to the French throne, to declare her goal: to lead an army of peasants to drive out the English. Prince Charles placed her at the head of a ten-thousand-strong peasant army. She proved herself to be a military genius and defeated the English at Orleans in 1429.

Unfortunately, with her success, the newly crowned King Charles could not ignore her unique gender expression. She was caught by the English, sold back to the French, and put in jail. At the same time, peasants worshipped her as a saint and deity, and her cross-dressing was central to that reverence. Cross-dressing had long been seen as a sign of divinity in pagan and peasant cultures. Nevertheless, the Inquisition sentenced her to death for her male dress, saying “time and again you have relapsed, as a dog that returns to its vomit...” Joan of Arc suffered the excruciating pain of being burned alive rather than renounce her identity.



Source: Leslie Feinberg. *Transgender Warriors*.

Utrecht Sodomy Trials

A major purge in 1730 put up to 300 men on trial.



Representation of the Netherlands destroyed by water and fire, while allegories of Truth and Virtue uncover a group of sodomites. On top, Justice looks at it from above, as does a figure holding a flaming sword and a scroll that reads "men, leaving the natural use of the woman" (Romans 1:27). The conveyed meaning is that Dutch sodomites will incur Gods wrath, who, as a consequence, will destroy the Netherlands.

As of 1730, several disasters had hit the country of Holland: the flooding of Stavoren in 1657 and the collapse of the Utrecht Dom Church's nave in 1674 were ascribed to divine wrath. These circumstances had readied the minds of the Dutch for moral panics, and the queer male population became their scapegoat.

The ruins of the Dom Church's nave had for years been a meeting place for gay men when in April 1730, the city authorities started an investigation. A number of men were arrested and interrogated. Their confessions indicated the presence of networks and meeting places of homosexuals elsewhere in the Republic. A nationwide wave of prosecutions ensued; several men in high positions were suspected, but fled before they could be arrested. In Utrecht, some forty men were tried, of whom 18 were convicted and strangled. Death by strangling was the most common punishment for gay acts, but other punishments during the 1730–31 purge included hanging and drowning in a barrel of water. The convicts' remains were either burnt, cast into the sea or buried under the gallows.

The Knighthood

Were the knights really competing for the hand of the fair maid?



The longstanding supposition, found in scholarly writings and popular culture alike, that the knights of the Middle Ages were exemplars of Christian moral ideals and paragons of heterosexual manliness is another of the old myths surrounding sex that we in the modern West have inherited. Commentators from the period present quite a different picture of the knighthood. "Like from the flames of Sodom!" wrote Vitalus, a conservative clergyman. Others spoke of the "depraved habits of the knighthoods," and most chroniclers of the times took homosexuality among the knighthood as a given.

George Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 1979

Nineteenth century writings propagated the fictional image of the knight as a chivalrous ladies' man, imagining that the castles were filled with eligible young ladies for whom the young knights would become enraptured. That literature was written at a time when chivalry, in its pure form, no longer existed, and when strenuous efforts were being made throughout society to suppress the open homosexuality that was widespread until the mid-13th century.

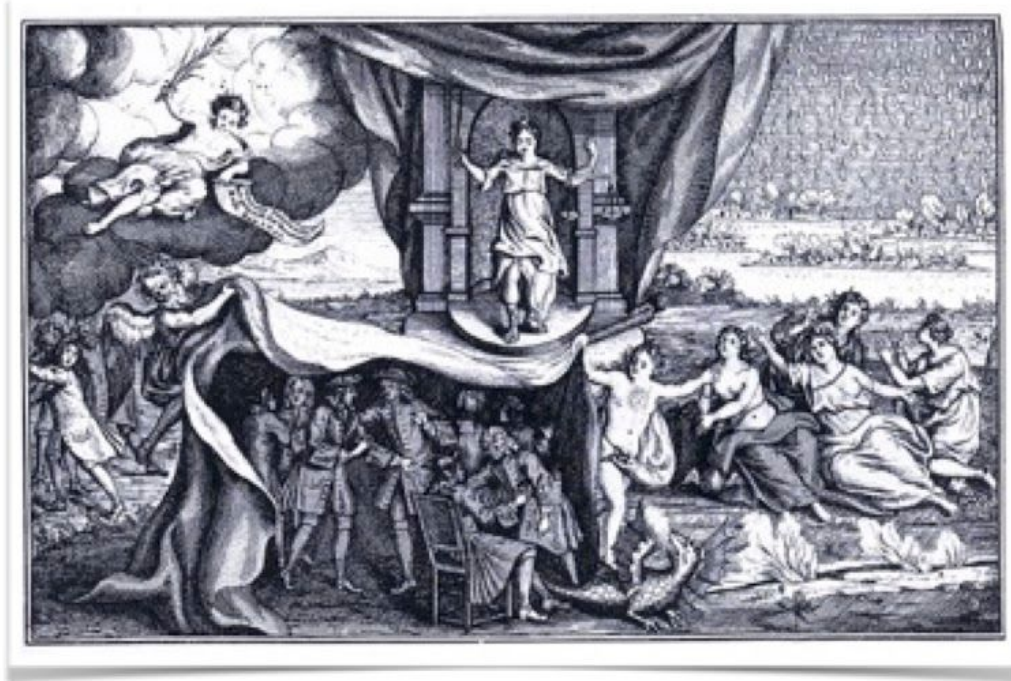
In fact, newly dubbed knights immediately formed companies, often several young men, to chase pleasure, adventure and profit. The men became inseparable companions, who "loved each other like brothers," and who would remain together their whole lives, unless one of them went as far as marriage and fatherhood. "Morals were far from strict" among these youthful gangs. In tournaments, the knights were given an opportunity to demonstrate valour and skill before spectators, usually assumed to include many women. However, the descriptions of the numerous tournaments from the time only mention women in two such events. The historian Duby writes, "This is a masculine world, and in it only males count."



Source: James Neill. *The Origins and Role of Same-Sex Relations in Human Society*

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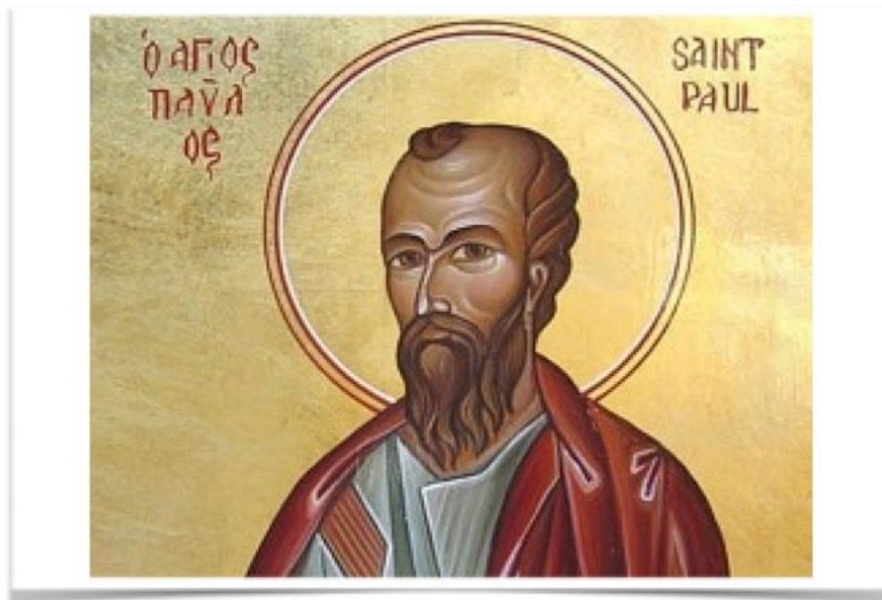
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Saint Paul

Jesus remained silent about same-sex love. Christian homophobia began with Saint Paul.

In his writings, Paul, one of the disciples of Jesus, displayed the self-loathing and torment of a man in conflict with his desires, regarding sexual urges as “a thorn in the flesh.” As a Pharisee, Paul would have been expected to get married, but he never married, which was unusual for a Jew in that period. Throughout his life,



“The Law...is spiritual, but I am unspiritual. I have been sold as a slave to sin. I cannot understand my own behaviour... I find that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my *members* another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my *members*.. Wretched man that I am!”

Paul, Romans 7:15-25

Paul seemed incapable of relating to women in general, except to derogate them. His later life was marked by a series of close friendships with younger men. Scholar Bishop Spong concludes: “The war that went on between what he desired with his mind and what he desired with his body, his drivenness to a legalistic religion of control, his fear when that system was threatened, his attitude towards woman, his refusal to see marriage as an outlet for his passion - nothing else accounts for this data as well as the possibility that Paul was a gay male.” In Saint Paul we see the classic archetype of the neurotic, self-hating homophobe, obsessed with his own wicked nature and with repugnance for other people exhibiting the same nature.

Source: James Neill. *The Origins and Role of Same-Sex Relations in Human Society*

Ruth and Naomi

A story of lesbian love in the Ancient Israelites.

Naomi, a Hebrew woman, was married to a man and had two wedded sons. Some time later, her husband and sons died, leaving the three women alone. Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to go



Sexual relations between women are not prohibited in Hebrew scripture, as later occurred with men. While a sexual relationship between Ruth and Naomi cannot be proven from what is said in the scripture, such a relationship could certainly have been possible under those circumstances in that period. Indeed, lesbianism in the harems of the ancient Near East and India were well known.

back to live with their families. One daughter-in-law left, but the other, Ruth, “clung to her” and refused to leave the older woman, making a solemn vow never to desert Naomi as long as she lived. Her passionate statement to Naomi has been described as one of the most eloquent pledges of love that has ever been made:

*“Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee;
For whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge.*

Thy people shall be my people, and they God my God;

Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.

The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.”

Source: James Neill. *The Origins and Role of Same-Sex Relations in Human Society*