



Charles XII of Sweden: Versus Peter the Great of Russia

Michael Hone

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Charles was King at age 15 after losing the mother he adored and the father he worshipped. Totally fearless and determined, like Frederick the Great he won battles while immensely outnumbered, like the Great Alexander he was often foolhardy, and like Peter, Tsar at age 10, his curiosity was put to the glory of his realm. A bullet stopped him in midflight, an Icarus brought to earth by the Sun he wished to emulate. Charles' life was defined by his wars against Peter the Great, as was Russia's struggle against Sweden, the landmass that barred the tsars from a Baltic port for centuries. Peter was omnisexual, leaving the rule of his empire in the hands of his lover Menshikov, who was literally picked up off the streets of Moscow by Peter's favorite, Lefort. Charles was without doubt homosexual, a sexuality, in his case, impossible to pin down. The subject of homosexuality was largely avoided by ancient historians--with the notable exception of Plutarch--and is shunned by modern historians to such a degree that one wonders to what extent they're homophobic. Sex is the essential motor of life, as we know from Freud, and Nietzsche himself wrote that "a man's sexuality reaches up to the very summit of his spirit." Alexander the Great said "Sex and sleep alone make me conscious that I am mortal." The homosexuality of many of the great men who lived during the times covered by this book will be fully revealed, even though, concerning Peter, we have but one (perhaps flawed) eyewitness testimony and several assertions, while concerning Charles we have the existence of two boys of immense and intimate importance, Arvid Horn and Frederick of Holstein-Gottorp. Sexual felicity takes place in private, and unless someone leaves his autobiography (as did Cellini) or diaries (Maynard Keynes and Roger Casement), or is revealed by historians like Burchard and memoirists like Saint-Simon, we have little of a concrete nature to go on. This fully-illustrated book is not exhaustive, in the sense that I will not go into every battle, every town seized and every treaty signed, but let this be clear: there is no event of importance, no anecdote of interest, which is not within these pages.

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