
The claim for this collection of ancient Greek and Latin texts is that they ‘bring together, in as complete a form as is possible in a single affordable volume, the literary and documentary evidence concerning same-gender eroticism in ancient Greece and Rome, as well as a limited, but representative, sample of artistic evidence’ (xv). The usefulness of this collection lies in the contribution it can make to the understanding of ancient same sex relationships and practices at a time when the topic of homosexuality has some prominence and finds quite a wide acceptance in many modern societies. There is often an assumption that homosexuality was widely accepted in the ancient world and that therefore there should be a corresponding modern acceptance. What this collection shows is that ancient views were far from uniform and that attitudes to homosexuals were often sharply polarised.

This book will have wide appeal to all who are concerned about the question of the morality of same sex relationships. It has been deliberately structured to meet the needs of those who have little or no familiarity with ancient texts. Each text or group of texts quoted has a brief introductory note of explanation which outlines the context and elucidates technical points. Footnotes are provided which clarify references to ancient customs in a way that is succinct and helpful. The book is very user-friendly and will appeal to the classicist and non-classicist alike. The few Greek words referred to are transliterated and their meaning explained. The translations used are all listed at the front of the book. The scope of the book excludes ‘selections that were clearly written under Christian influence, since early Christian expressions on this subject merit an anthology of their own’.

There are twenty pages of general introduction which discuss the way in which the selections will illuminate the significant questions surrounding homosexuality. Hubbard recognises that ‘homosexuality’ is not an ancient designation; in fact it is a late nineteenth-century coinage.
However it is a convenient term which we now understand to cover ‘a plethora of practices and sub-cultures’ (1). The word is used in the book to likewise cover the wide variety of ancient manifestations of homoeroticism, while acknowledging that it is not entirely satisfactory. Another question which is constantly raised is whether sexual orientation is genetic or whether it is a social construct; i.e. whether homosexuality is ‘curable’ or not. The selections reveal very clearly that the ancients were as uncertain about this as we are—essentialist and social constructionist views are expressed in different contexts. Interestingly, the earliest text quoted is from the lyric poet Archilochus in the early seventh century BC who expresses the essentialist view; he speaks of men having different ‘natures’ and therefore different sexual preferences.

The selections show the wide variety of sexual activities associated with same sex relationships. Pederasty was common among the aristocracy, and while widespread in the early period it was often frowned on as corrupting and damaging to youth; the aged lover is also often a pathetic figure. An interesting comment is that the depiction in art of intercultural penetration shows the older man as considerably larger and as having to take up a very uncomfortable position in relation to his younger beloved. Not that age difference was always a factor: there are examples of homosexual relations between those of similar age, old and young, male and female. Lesbianism gets less prominence in the selections and they show that it was almost always regarded as unacceptable and even disgusting.

Moral judgements about same sex relations varied. There was a view among the lower classes that this was an aristocratic phenomenon and judgements were often politically motivated. Self control was a positive virtue current in philosophical circles—so Socrates was moved by the beautiful youth Charmides, but managed to recommend a cure for his headache without touching him. Appreciation of beauty was acceptable, but, as in the case of Xenophon’s Agesilas, self restraint needed to accompany admiration. So too Socrates’ reputation is defended by both Plato and Xenophon even though ‘corruption of youth’ was one of the accusations for which he was condemned to death.
Roman literature is generally more negative about homosexual practices and realises that the Roman audience was less sympathetic on the whole; this is particularly so for Roman attitudes to lesbianism. In Rome same sex relations were activities one indulged in with slaves not free men.

Hubbard makes the point that many scholars have assumed that the culture of homosexuality in the ancient world was more or less a constant. The selections show that this was not the case. There were swings in attitudes and there were periods when homosexuality was more acceptable than at others. He points out that the last fifty years have seen a significant increase in recognition of homosexuality in the modern world; such peaks and troughs were part of the ancient world too. For instance, at Athens the growth of democracy and the gradual decline of the power of the aristocracy had an effect on attitudes and practices in relation to homosexuality. But where did it all start? This is an interesting question. Perhaps on Crete. Thera also provides early graffiti and it is suggested that homosexuality was seen as a solution for overcrowding—a sort of contraceptive.

There are ten chapters in all. Each chapter has a short and informative introduction to the period covered and the overall picture that will emerge from the passages quoted is delineated. Enough information is given to make the passages easily understood by non specialists. The introductory section in each chapter is followed by bibliographical notes guiding the reader to further information which is briefly explained. Chapters one to six cover the Greek sources, chapters seven to ten the Roman.

Chapter one deals with ancient Greek lyric. The quotes are fragmentary. Sappho is prominent. Attitudes to love between same sex lovers are sympathetic and the context aristocratic. Chapter two is entitled Greek Historical Texts. These include ‘historiography, biography, anecdotes, political theory and inscriptions.’ Care is needed in interpreting these texts because many of them refer to events which took place centuries earlier, and others are rhetorical. The story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton is referred to in the Introduction and quoted here as an example of how Thucydides and Aristotle both
‘demythologise’ the story and show that the relationship and the ensuing actions had very little significance in the overthrow of the Peisistratid tyranny. Xenophon’s attitudes are shown to be generally hostile to homosexual practices and the chapter ends with an interesting mid second century BC inscription from Beroea in Macedonia which forbids young men from approaching boys in the gymnasium or chatting with them.

Greek comedy is the subject of chapter three. Comedy is a helpful source because it is so explicit and reflects prevailing attitudes. Aristophanes is not sympathetic on the whole. *Frogs* 52-70 is quoted as providing a ‘hierarchy’ of sexual practices, with the heterosexual desire for a woman placed first, followed by a boy, then a man and finally a corpse. Hubbard distinguishes the varying emphases of Old, Middle and New Comedy.

Greek oratory is next in chapter four. The forensic speeches play to the common attitudes of the Athenian juries and their prejudices. A most dangerous accusation was that of having been a male prostitute in earlier years. Homosexuality is generally a negative in this genre. Fellatio is regarded as especially undesirable. Greek Philosophy is covered in chapter five. The interest of the wealthy young pupils in the nature of love in all its manifestations is prominent. Plato’s *Symposium* is set over against that of Xenophon, and there is a long passage from the Laws in which homoeroticism is condemned as contrary to nature. There is also a passage attributed to Hippocrates on genetic determination and the mechanics of the various secretions which determine orientation at conception. However the passage also allows the possibility of social conditioning. The Greek part of the book concludes with a consideration of what Hellenistic poetry has to say about the matter. The sources are much more varied because the Hellenistic world draws so many different peoples within the orbit of Greek culture, but now Alexandria rather than Athens is the influential centre. The texts seem to give equal significance to heterosexual and homosexual relations.
Roman literature begins with republican Rome in chapter seven. Roman interest in pederasty may derive from Etruscan interest: Etruscans were consumers of Athenian vases with homoerotic themes. In Rome the violation of citizen boys was totally unacceptable, and same sex relationships are principally something that takes place between a master and his slave. Such relationships could lead to manumission for the slave. Plautus provides the earliest evidence, and there are lengthy quotes from the poems of Catullus. Chapter eight brings the reader to Augustan Rome and the golden period of Latin literature. It was a period of stability and literary creativity. The passive role in sexual encounters was regarded as a sign of weakness and something of which an enemy might be accused. There is a greater emphasis on heterosexual love at this period. Chapter nine is about early imperial Rome. Moral and cultural decline is a theme in this period arising from the excesses of Tiberius and Nero, described by Suetonius who is quoted here at length. Views were also polarised by the open homosexuality of the likes of Hadrian on the one hand and the conservative views of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius on the other. Graffiti from Pompeii provide evidence of the views of ordinary people at this time and reveal that sexual practices of all sorts and orientations were prevalent. Seneca the Elder and Martial reveal an abhorrence for lesbianism. The Phaedrus myth is quoted as another attempt to explain why homoeroticism exists. There is a long quote also from Petronius.

The final chapter, Later Greco-Roman Antiquity, gathers together pagan texts of the second, third and early fourth centuries. This is the period of the Second Sophistic and a return to the earlier Greek philosophical ideals. The growing importance of women led to the idea that pederasty reflected a hatred of women. There is also a growing emphasis on lesbianism. There are further theories about orientation and the prevailing view is that it is fixed and incurable.

This is a valuable book in the present climate of debate about modern homosexuality, civil unions and same sex marriage. The arguments do not change much and the issues of orientation have not been much illuminated by modern medicine. Opinions are as polarised now as they were in ancient times. The collection suggests that nothing
much has changed. Tolerance is required and clarification of the issues is valuable.

It is to be hoped that before too long a similar volume will appear covering the Christian texts. This might help to inform modern Christian debate about the morality of same sex relationships and help work through the deep polarisation that exists within and between Christian communities in regard to the moral issues involved.

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