

## Homosexuality in Antiquity

### *Ancient Egypt*

I have not lain with men. (The Negative Confession from the Egyptian Book of the Dead, found in the Papyrus of Ani, Internet Ancient History Sourcebook, Fordham University)

### *Ancient Mesopotamia*

If a man has intercourse with his brother-in-arms, they shall turn him into a eunuch. (Middle Assyrian Law, Internet Ancient History Sourcebook, Fordham University)

### *Judaism*

You shall not lie with a man as one lies with a woman, it is an abomination. (Leviticus 18:22, Stone Edition, Jewish Bible)

A man who lies with a man as one lies with a woman, they have both done an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon themselves. (Leviticus 20:13, Stone Edition, Jewish Bible)

### *Ancient Greece*

...in most of the Greek cities the laws do not oppose men's desire for boys. (Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, as translated in *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, edited by Thomas K. Hubbard, University of California Press, 2003, page 68.)

...And many men, overall, prefer love with boys to love with females. In the very cities of Greece that have the best laws by comparison with others, this is the mode of behavior that is fashionable. (Athenaeus, *The Sophists at Dinner*, as translated in *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, page 76.)

Personally, I neither criticize legitimate desire, nor do I allege that boys of outstanding beauty have prostituted themselves; nor do I deny that I myself have felt desire and still do. And I do not deny that the rivalries and fights which the thing provokes have befallen me... According to my definition, desire for those who are noble and decent is characteristic of the generous and discerning spirit, but debauchery based on hiring someone for money I consider characteristic of a wanton and uncultivated man. And to be loved without corruption I count as noble, while to have been induced by money to prostitute oneself is shameful. (Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*, as translated in *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, page 148.)

I can see nothing better in life for a young boy, as soon as he is old enough, than finding a good lover, nor for a lover than finding a boyfriend. Love, more than anything (more than family, or position, or wealth), implants in men the thing which must be their guide if they are to live a good life. And what is that? It is a horror of what is degrading, and a

passionate desire for what is good. These qualities are essential if a state or an individual is to accomplish anything great or good. Imagine a man in love being found out doing something humiliating, or letting someone else do something degrading to him, because he was too cowardly to stop it. It would embarrass him more to be found out by the boy he loved than by his father or his friends, or anyone. And you can see just the same thing happening with the boy. He is more worried about being caught behaving badly by his admirers than by anyone else. So if there were some way of arranging that a state, or an army, could be made up entirely of pairs of lovers, it is impossible to imagine a finer population. They would avoid all dishonor, and compete with one another for glory: in battle, this kind of army, though small, fighting side by side could conquer virtually the whole world. After all, a lover would sooner be seen by anyone deserting his post or throwing away his weapons, rather than by his boyfriend. He would normally choose to die many times over instead. And as for abandoning the boy, or not trying to save him if he is in danger—no one is such a coward as not to be inspired with courage by Eros [love], making him the equal of the naturally brave man. Homer says, and rightly, that god breathes fire into some of his heroes. And it is just this quality, whose origin is to be found within himself, that Eros imparts to lovers. (Plato, *Symposium*, as translated in *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, pages 181-182.)

Now you are fair, Diodorus, and ripe for lovers. Yet even if you marry, we will not abandon you. (Strato of Sardis, *The Boyish Muse*, as translated in *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, page 300.)

#### *Ancient Rome*

Or is it because it was not unseemly or shameful for the [Roman] men of old to love male slaves who were in their season of youthful beauty, as the comedies show even today, but they emphatically kept away from free boys, and free boys bore this sign [an amulet called the “bulla”] so men would not be uncertain if they encountered boys naked [in a public bath—where male cruising often occurred]? (Plutarch, *Roman Questions*, as translated in *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, page 315.)

If you're a boy, and the gods make you a pimp's slave and also make you ugly, you have a really, really hard time of it. I know that from my own experience, for that's the kind of slavery I've got here. I've got all sorts of troubles on all sides, big ones and small ones. And I can't find myself a lover anywhere, somebody to love me, so I could be cared for even a little bit. Today's the pimp's birthday. He's threatened us all, from the biggest to the smallest: he says anybody who doesn't send him a gift today is gonna be tortured and crucified tomorrow. So I've got no idea what to do. I can't do *that* thing, like those slaves do, who can. But unless I send the pimp a gift today, I'll have to drink fuller's juice tomorrow [a fuller was a dry cleaner, and fuller's juice was urine, which was used as a solvent]. Oh dear, I'm really still too small for *that* thing. But gosh, I'm so afraid of him now, if anybody gives me something to make my hand heavier, though they say that *thing* makes you groan a lot when it happens, I think I'll be able to bite down hard and bear it somehow. (Plautus, *Pseudolus*, as translated in *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, pages 316-317.)

...at that time in Rome...the inclinations of most men were disgraceful. Some of them had given themselves over to their boyfriends among the young men, others to prostitutes, and many to music and parties, and all the extravagance that comes with them. For they had quickly become swept up in Greek licentiousness for such things in the war with Perseus [the last Macedonian king of Greece, defeated by Rome in 168 B.C.E.]. So great a fever had infected the young men over these kinds of things that many would pay a talent for a beautiful male slave and many would pay three hundred drachmas for a jar of Pontic smoked fish. Outraged at this, M. Cato [an advocate of traditional Roman morality] once said in an address to the people that he could see the Republic collapsing when he saw good-looking boys selling for more than fields, jars of smoked fish for more than ox-drivers. (Polybius, *The Histories*, as translated in *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, page 319.)

Why, like a foolish woman, do you torture yourself about slave-boy rivals, whose love is both brief and transitory? I will prove to you how the boys do more for you than for their master: They see to it that you are the only woman for your husband... Let boys use their own part, you use yours. (Martial, *Epigrams*, as translated in *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, page 427.)

### *Christianity*

...God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. (Romans 1:26-27, New American Standard, Christian Bible)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, New American Standard, Christian Bible)