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Depictions of Male-Male Sexual Activities in Ancient Greece As Expressed Through Visual Imagery: Aspects of Roles

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DEPICTIONS OF MALE-MALE SEXUAL ACTIVITIES IN ANCIENT GREECE AS
EXPRESSED THROUGH VISUAL IMAGERY: ASPECTS OF ROLES

A Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

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The Greek Classical period (ca. 400-600 BCE) yields various types of evidence concerning male-male sex. These include figural depictions and literary references with some of the later addressing rules of civilized behavior. This study will explore the existing material with an attempt to find the extent to which the visual imagery reflects the social rules as described in the surviving literary texts.

Male-male relationships were often between a youth and an elder with each role demanding specific behavior: The youth was not to make advances; neither speaking seductively nor entreating the elder.¹ Nor was he to succumb too quickly to the elder's advances.² It was the elder who was to seduce the youth and not give up too easily despite the youth's reluctance to give in. The conundrum brought about by these rules is that it creates a perpetual chase, and power struggle. This chase is a popular motif in the pottery and sculpture. These pieces will serve as the primary sources for this study.

In both same-sex and opposite-sex pairings, the male, whether old or young is usually the aggressor. There are various visual formulae used for all of the relationships including ones with: courting gifts, gestures of interest, and sexual activities.

Two Greek gods personify all aspects of love. Aphrodite and Eros share control of that powerful force; yet they have specializations which distinguish their separate roles.³ Aphrodite with Hermes parented Hermaphroditos (a name which is now used as "Hermaphrodite" to describe a being of ambiguous sex), and with Dionysus bore Priapus, the god of male sexuality and fertility ("priapism" is now used to describe the condition of a male with a perpetually erect penis, because Priapus is eternally erect himself.)⁴

According to some modern scholars, Aphrodite holds the key to feminine love, or what might be identified as the sweeter, lighter side of love. For example, Dover concludes that in Hellenistic literature, Aphrodite presides over female affairs as Eros “himself holds the reins of male desire.”⁵ He goes on to describe Aphrodite as the force which attracts men to women and youths,⁶ and that through her, the *eromenos* (male youth) gets his beauty.⁷

Sappho wrote to Aphrodite in one of her poems, “please don’t hurt me, don’t overcome my spirit, goddess, with longing.”⁸ For Sappho and many other Greeks, love through Aphrodite was not gentle as it was not necessarily given to both parties. Though having love was a joy when it was reciprocated, when it was not, it was torture. According to Sappho’s writings, Aphrodite serves as an agent to satisfy the love-sick by way of longing for someone specific.⁹ She was credited as an agent of change anytime a love connection was found or sparked.

According to one modern scholar, Reay Tannahill, Aphrodite, was the “goddess of sexual intercourse,” and her son, Eros, “was god of the emotional state of ‘love.’”¹⁰ Interestingly, the word “*eros*” is the noun for “sexual desire,” as well as Eros being the personification of desire, and sometimes the messenger of Aphrodite. (Forms of “Eros” are found in modern English as: “Erotic” and “Eroticism.”) Asklepiades wrote that “male eros” was stronger than that of females. On the other hand, Sappho says of Artemis, the eternal virgin and goddess of the hunt, “Eros never approaches her,” perhaps suggesting that the absence of Eros made virginity easier for her to maintain. Herself frustrated by love, Sappho called Eros a “sweet, bitter, impossible creature.”¹¹ Her feelings of love sickness or unrequited love were so strong that she described them in terms of illness. It

would seem that the only thing to cure Sappho's condition would be that through her expression of love she would receive reciprocation from her beloved.

A sculpture from Delos depicts Aphrodite and Eros with Pan, the Greek god of shepherds and flocks, springtime, and fertility (Fig. 2). Aphrodite is a beautiful, young woman; Eros is a small, winged figure, hovering by her left shoulder and Pan is half-goat and half-human, standing by her calf and gazing up at her. His face combines goat and human attributes and his physical characteristics relate him to satyrs and other quasi-human creatures.

Pan, satyrs, and other semi-human/semi-animal creatures seem driven by the forces of lust as coming from Eros and Aphrodite and these include the springtime and fertility themes. Unlike the Greeks who when portrayed represent civilized behavior, these semi-human/semi-animal creatures are unfettered by civilized behavior and therefore can be depicted as enjoying unbridled primal lust. Satyrs have a human upper body often with long beard, thick eyebrows, and thinning hair gathered at the back of their heads, and the lower body of an animal, including a tail. In Figure 3, a central squatting satyr is framed by two standing ones. The satyr on our left holds a *kantharos* in his extended hands. The satyr on our right pours liquid from an *oinochoe*, into another *kantharos* which the squatting satyr balances on the tip of his erect penis. Whether this depiction is meant to be serious or playful, one can only admire the central satyr's skill. In another vessel, many satyrs are involved in various sexual acts such as fellatio and anal penetration (Fig. 4). While copulation is obviously a part of Greek life, it seems that rules of civilized behavior restrict the visual representations of it, because there are so

few examples of it between Greeks and so many between semi-human/semi-animal creatures.

The ancient Greeks felt that there were many types of love as witnessed in Plato's *Symposium* in which the speakers praising love are puzzled by which type of love to describe.¹² Aristophanes' interest in love had him speak of the soulmate, which, according to him, had its origin in a world filled with double-humans. These once back-to-back double-males, double-females, and female-male pairings (called "androgynous") all had twice the number of appendages and organs, which were all part of a sphere-like body.¹³ This race of soulmates seemed to represent a threat to the Gods, so much so that Zeus felt he had to cut them in half in order to decrease their power. When they were split Apollo fashioned their new bodies for them as the now half mates were "throwing their arms about one another, entwining in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one."¹⁴ As Aristophanes says, "So ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man," suggesting the constant search for a suitable mate.¹⁵ Plato recognizes that there are natural forces that draw people together and he makes distinctions between different sexual preferences. Clearly the notion of sexual preference was recognized by the culture. Plato has Aristophanes' making a distinction between the love of youths and the love of males but does not make it clear. Plato himself only describes the male-male relationships and that the now half of what once was a "double male" would grow up with an embedded yearning for male youths.

Though the story of the soulmate offers an explanation for the quest of finding the proper partner, it does not explain the nature of what they would do having found one

another. Aristophanes proposes that if Hephaestus came to these lovers and demanded, ““What do you people want of one another?” They would be unable to explain.”¹⁶

Furthermore, if he came to the lovers to join them, they would whole-heartedly agree to be rejoined as they once were, “There is not a man of them who when he heard the proposal would deny or would not acknowledge that this meeting and melting into one another, this becoming one instead of two, was the very expression of his ancient need.”¹⁷

Is this union part of the complexity of love?

Aristophanes’ descriptions of males seeking males and females seeking females do not agree with the visual depictions. While courtship is depicted between males (old and young) and female, and older men and younger men, we rarely if ever see depictions of courtship or sex between an older man and an older woman, and two older men. Interestingly, the tactics of courtship are similar in all circumstances.

Plato believed “that if our loves were perfectly accomplished, and each one returning to his primeval nature had his original true love, then our race would be happy” and he felt this was true for all men and women everywhere.¹⁸

Plato connects love and wisdom: he states, “Love is also a philosopher or lover of wisdom.”¹⁹ To many writers it seems that the system of pederasty (defined as the love for prepubescent boys) was created to honor wisdom.²⁰ Plato continues, “For they love not boys, but intelligent beings whose reason is beginning to be developed, much about the time at which their beards begin to grow.”²¹ In Athens and many other Greek cities, it was illegal to copulate with a youth under the age of puberty.²² Certainly, not all pederastic relationships were exclusively educational; however, it was the mentoring process which fostered relationships between men and youths. Not all relationships were

sexual; in fact, the Spartan lawgiver, Lycurgus claimed that all same-sex relationships were to be chaste. However, the Spartans were sometimes called “Laconians” and to “laconize” was to copulate anally.²³ Then, just as now, rules were made and subsequently broken.

The mentoring process mentioned above is an important male-male relationship in the Greek world with an elder, the *erastes*, sharing his knowledge with a youth, the *eromenos*, in order to enable him to grow into a responsible citizen.²⁴ For the Greek world, democracy only functions when citizens are informed and knowledgeable of the world around them. In this sense, pederasty worked in a system of improving the state of government and life in Greece. Traditionally, this *erastes-eromenos* relationship began after the boy’s schooling when a man, usually in his thirties, would take, according to Socrates, the responsibility for, “the cultivation of moral perfection in the beloved.”²⁵

Aristotle once said that same-sex relationships were promoted to keep the population in check. He said this was true of Crete, where young men and women were traditionally kept apart.²⁶ The *erastes-eromenos* relationship was enjoyed primarily by the aristocracy, including the numerous Greek political leaders who were also known to have had same-sex relationships at some point in their lives: Solon, Peisistratus, Hippias, Hipparchus, Themistocles, Aristides, Critias.²⁷ Many scholars, such as Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, Sappho, Alcaeus, and Ibycus, spoke and wrote about same-sex love.²⁸ More than fifty relationships between male youths and deities are described in Greek mythology.²⁹ Some of the gods are: Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo, Dionysus, Hermes, and Pan. One of Zeus’ relationships was with Ganymede, a beautiful Trojan prince and is often depicted courting or abducting this young love. Their same-sex relationship seems to

have been mirrored by mortals including Herakles who was said to have copulated with his nephew Iolaus, and “sweet Hylas, he of the curling locks.”³⁰

Though the term “pederasty” has negative connotations, in ancient Greece it was a respected situation and the youths were lawfully and socially protected. For example, the law of Berea protected youths from the “unworthy” and “infamous” men and “school masters,” though it is unclear whether the roles of “school master” and *erastes* are one and the same.³¹ If we want to see this type of relationship in terms of love, we can turn to Plato who writes “Now love ought to be for the advantage of both parties and for the injury of neither.”³² The *erastes* was thought to be not only a mentor, but also a protector of his youth and responsible for the youth actions. There were codes of conduct for the *eromenos* and in one case an *erastes* was reprimanded because his *eromenos* “cried out in pain in battle.”³³ Youths were not to take the first helpings of delicacies at meals, giggle, or cross their legs. Also, a youth should not speak seductively to his *erastes*, nor should he proposition an elder.³⁴

As described above, the rules of etiquette create dilemmas for courtship. Youths were revered for their beauty and youth, and were usually treated with care and delicacy. Were they to act delicately in return? Plato once wrote against any kind of immediacy in courtship, “A hasty attachment is held to be dishonorable, because time is the true test of this as of most other things.”³⁵ Plato also wrote that the attraction to a man for his money is “not honorable,” because following wealth instead of virtue is unwise.³⁶

In the Greek world, there is the inseparability of mind and body (and by extension beauty). In such a system, the *erastes* could mold this youth into a proper citizen while enjoying the fruits of love. Modern scholar Reay Tannahill continues, “To the Greeks,

however, these two aspects of beauty were integrally related. One could not exist without the other and, conversely, the existence of one implied the existence of the other. The handsome body had to contain a fine-drawn soul.”³⁷

Depictions of males and females on Greek pottery are often rather similar. Only when breasts, genitalia, or facial hair are indicated is the gender clear. On an Attic red-figure vase (Fig. 5) all figures are represented nearly the same. In the center, a youth in a flowing garment with an ivy wreath on his short cropped hair is depicted grabbing the central female figure with his forearm in front of her body. Because the figures are clothed and not bearded, their identities are revealed only through a slight variation in action and dress. The youth is grabbing the woman and his garment reveals the part of his arm, just below the shoulder (unlike the other figures where the upper arm is covered).

In Figure 6, a reclining man titillates a young woman who by way of body build but for lack of male genitalia could as well be a male youth. The man is bearded (indicating maturity), and reclines on a couch, supporting himself on his left arm. Such a couch would be common for a symposium. The man reaches out with his right hand to touch the breast of the young girl. She extends her arms outward while looking down at the man’s hand. A scene like this would not be uncommon, especially at a symposium, in which such a woman would be a part of the entertainment as a *hetaera* (prostitute).

To have a relationship with a beautiful youth was important (as a mark of status) for a person of high class and great wealth. The process of courtship through which the youth was won was a game of wooing depicted visually via gifts and gestures. It was also a process in which the elder would chase both literally and figuratively a youth of his

liking. These chases could indicate the possibilities of a power struggle. The youth is being propositioned; while the elder must wait for the response. Plato wrote in *Lysis*, “Will you tell me by what words or actions I may become endeared to my love?”³⁸ Truly, in courtship, the *erastes* is the lover and the *eromenos* is the loved. One had to proposition his love in a most tasteful way. Though there may be no absolute definition of “honorable,” Plato warns in the *Symposium*, “There is dishonor in yielding to the evil, or in an evil manner; but there is honor in yielding to the good, or in an honorable manner.” He continues, defining evil as, “the vulgar lover who loves the body rather than the soul.”³⁹ Being involved in any type of evil would be dishonorable; however, the social rules and the visual depictions may depart here. Plato is one voice from the period, but to speak of the love of “the soul” over that of “the body” seems to be somewhat contrary to the visual narrative because only the physical attraction can be fully represented. Regardless of how one would define “evil” in courtship or not, Plato recognizes that there are proper and improper ways to engage with another. Also, it is the choice of the youth to follow or reject as they see fit. Understandably, the tactics to entice youths are also used on females as seen in the following examples.

Figure 7 depicts a youth courting with an entreating pose an even younger boy. Here, the youth, older than the boy, is the dominant agent in the courtship. The relationship between youth and boy is just another variation of the same-sex. On the vessel, the youth is hunched over with his knees bent, arms hanging down and his thumbs outstretched (perhaps a then readable sign?). This composition puts them eye-to-eye and suggests the humility of the youth in courtship. The youth seems to be imploring the boy

to engage with him. The boy nearly completely covered in garments strongly contrasts to the nude youth. Perhaps the youth's nudity is meant to entice the boy?

In another depiction, two nude men in this same hunched position are courting the woman between them (Fig. 8): in this arrangement they are all at the same eye level. Both men are depicted with beards, the sign of maturity. The man on the right has both arms hanging down, which is similar to the previous depiction, but the man on the left has his left arm on or behind the shoulder of the woman. The female is clothed, emphasizing the nudity of the males.

These two depictions also explore the vulnerability of the courtiers. Though it would seem that the older males would have the power, they are depicted as hunched over, nude, and nearly pleading. They are offering themselves and are vulnerable to rejection. The dominant male is now, in a sense, passive. He must do all that he can to achieve his goal of being with his beloved. At this point in the courtship, the youth does not have to make any efforts or give any gifts. Simply, it is the effortless beauty and attraction of the youth which compels the elder to chase him.

The elder's vulnerability can also be seen in the depiction of Zeus giving Ganymede a cockerel as a courting gift (Fig. 9). Zeus, bearded and wearing a bun, holds a staff in his left hand and extends his empty right hand, possibly having just given Ganymede the cockerel. The young Ganymede, hair pulled back in a bun, looks back at Zeus as he flees. Zeus is at the mercy of the youth as Ganymede could run away with the gift never to see or thank his courtier again.

In another courting gift scene, a bearded, clothed man holding in his left hand a staff gives a cut of meat to the nude youth holding a hoop that faces him (Fig. 10). They

are both holding the courting gift in their outstretched right hands. The youth's nudity may be explained by his athletic activity as evidenced by the hoop in his left hand.⁴⁰ Again, a youth is in a powerful position to receive a gift and run away, but at this image's moment, the plans of this particular youth are ambiguous.

The hoop-game seems to be a popular Greek pastime as it is also depicted on an Attic red-figure bell-krater by the Berlin Painter (Fig. 11). Here, the young, beautiful, nude Trojan prince, Ganymede, holds a hoop in one hand while holding the courting-gift cockerel in the other. Ganymede moves to our right while looking back at the hoop in his right hand. Zeus depicted on the other side, also moves to our right continuous with the movement on the other side. The clothed, bearded Zeus is holding a staff in his left hand while his right hand is outstretched and empty, suggesting two things: the gift was already given and that he would like to grab the youth. It is in the all-powerful Zeus' frustration which we find the irony of Ganymede's control. The two figures seem to be in a perpetual chase around the vessel itself.

In another depiction, Zeus is again giving a cockerel to Ganymede, but the frame and the composition negates a chase (Fig. 12). Ganymede is in the forefront, his knees are bent with his legs in stride. His right arm is extended and being held by Zeus while the beautiful courting-gift cockerel sits on his left arm. Ganymede looks behind him, where Zeus is in stride. Zeus' left leg is extended out, behind Ganymede and his right leg is bent below his body. Zeus' right arm holds Ganymede's arm extended, while the left side of his body is lost behind Ganymede's figure. Zeus' focus seems to be the lower portion of the beautiful Trojan prince's body. They are both nude though they carry garments on their arms. Zeus seems to be more empowered than in the previous

depictions. Not only is he nude, but he is depicted as muscular and athletic as he moves around Ganymede. There seems to be a trade-off between the courting gift and the visual delights of a youthful body or, possibly, as Zeus distracts Ganymede with the cockerel, he is able to look closely at Ganymede's youthful body.

The "up and down" gesture, as described by Dover, is common in courtship scenes between men and youths and even occurs in scenes involving men and women. This gesture describes a man touching the prospective lover on the cheek or chin with one hand while simultaneously touching the genitals with the other. The propositioning male lowers himself so that he is at the same eye level. Both are usually depicted nude.

In an Attic black-figure cup from around 520 BCE, the bearded man is depicted in the "up and down" gesture with a garlanded youth (Fig. 13). The man's knees are bent placing him nearly at eye-level with his prospective lover. The standing youth leans back with his hand on hips. The pose could be seen as both an offering and refusal on the youth's part.

In another depiction of the "up and down" gesture from the sixth century on Attic black figure vessel (Fig. 14), the youth shields his genitals with his one hand and blocks the elder's reach with his other. This couple is flanked by two nude figures who are shown in motion, perhaps a dance or some kind of athletic activity. This depiction is important in that it shows a youth rejecting an elder's advances. It is possible that the youth simply was not interested in the man; however, it is also possible that this is a part of the wooing game. As previously stated, it would have been unacceptable for the youth to accept with immediacy and aggression. Possibly, if the youth rejected the advances,

the potential lover could approach him again, at a later time when the youth might accept them.

It may not have been proper for a youth to accept advances of many men at once or in the presence of multiple men. In another depiction of the “up and down” gesture (Fig. 15), there is a youth being propositioned by a man touching his genitals and face. There are seven other men gathered around, one of which touches his buttocks. The youth holds the forearm of the man who reaches toward his genitals (either stopping or pulling him). The two dogs probably indicating courting gifts from more than one suitor. As all the men look at the youth, it may be that he is particularly beautiful.

As previously mentioned, the image of a youth courting a woman using the “up and down” gesture again puts females and youths in the same category (Fig. 16). Though the pursuer is a youth, he is dominant because he is courting a female (nearly always depicted as passive). In this case, the youth, as the aggressor, touches the face and genitalia of a woman. She holds both of his arms as they reach for her.. She could be restricting his reach and rejecting him because she is genuinely uninterested or because she would like to maintain virtue. On the other hand, perhaps she is pulling him closer. As females and youths were in the same class, they had a code of conduct when dealing with their more aggressive suitors.

Figure 17 depicts an example of the “up and down” in a public place. Gymnasia were common places for men to court youths. As athletic activity was done in the nude, one could see a beautiful youth’s flexed muscles and agile reflexes from afar. After the strenuous activity, the athletes would bath at the gymnasia, again, displaying themselves in the nude. Aristophanes once jokingly said of this seductive situation, “Well, this is a

fine state of affairs, you damned desperado! You meet my son just as he comes out of the gymnasium, all fresh from the bath, and you don't kiss him, you don't say a word to him, you don't hug him, you don't feel his balls! And yet you're supposed to be a friend of ours!"⁴¹ As Aristophanes points out, youths straight from the bath may have been quite irresistible and were certainly vulnerable to advances.

On this Attic black-figure vessel, men flank the courting couple. One must look closely below the neck of the vessel to see yet another pair of male figures flanked by two men. However, this couple is not involved in the delicate dance of courtship, they are wrestling. Their legs are spread as they struggle to throw the other off balance. The flanking figures seem to be holding garments, as clothing is usually depicted as if it had been rolled up with the remaining slack faced out and draped down. The wrestling scene depicted on this vase is similar to that of another Attic black-figure vase from the same time (Fig. 18).

However vulnerable, youths were protected by law in the gymnasia with certain people excluded from those premises. These include: "slaves, freed slaves, unfit people, male prostitutes, commercial activity-doers, drunkards and lunatics," who possibly because of their low status, unattractiveness, and/or poor judgment threatened youths.⁴² Protecting the youths from these elements also protected the system of pederasty by ensuring that youths had the best mentors/companions possible.⁴³ Kenneth Dover writes of the gymnasium, "it was a social headquarters for men who are able to afford times of leisure."⁴⁴ On occasion, as described by Strato, the wrestling instructors' would even try to enjoy their time spent in the gymnasia.

Once a wrestling-master, taking advantage of the occasion, when he was giving a lesson to a smooth boy, forced him to kneel down, and set about

working on his middle, stroking the berries with one hand. But by chance the master of the house came, wanting the boy. The teacher threw [the boy] quickly on his back, getting astride of him and grasping him by the throat. But the master of the house, who was not unversed in wrestling, said to him, Stop, you are smuggling the boy.⁴⁵

By Strato's account, it would seem that wrestling instructors were to preserve the system of pederasty as well. However, as seen in many visual depictions, any worthy man touching an unknown, beautiful youth was not an uncommon occurrence. Gymnasia, or, more specifically, *palaestrai*, were great places to attract youths, as described in Plato's *Symposium*, "I challenged [a youth] to the *palaestra*; and he wrestled and closed with me several times alone; I fancied that I might succeed in this way. Not a bit; there was no use in that."⁴⁶ Again, youths still have the choice of whether or not to accept the advances of elders.

Youths were able to reject their lovers, as reflected in the poems of Theognis who writes such lines as "I mounted the high walls but did not sack the city" and "A lion trusting in its strength, I seized in my claws a fawn from under a hind, but did not drink its blood."⁴⁷ The sexual innuendos and slang were not limited to poetic language. For instance, the mentioning of the roles of horse and charioteer often alluded to the roles in same-sex copulation.⁴⁸ "Barley" was common, humorous slang for a penis and "rotten cable" for an aged penis.⁴⁹ Though one may think of slang as a modern phenomenon, in actuality, the ancient Greeks were just as candid as we believe ourselves to be.

Just as there was slang, the dramatic situations created by love and lust were as common as they are today.⁵⁰ There was bitterness between lovers and arguments over the "possession of a sexual object."⁵¹ There were even deadly rejections, as youths had assassinated public figures such as Archelaus of Macedonia, Alexander of Phelae, Periander of Ambracia, and Hipparchus of Athens.⁵² It was not unheard of for the youths

to reject an *erastes*, least of all, fight back. Athenian law was on the youths' side as it fined those who attempted to attain same-sex relationships through violence and force.⁵³

In Crete, abduction was said to be the mode of obtaining a lover.⁵⁴ The man hoping to abduct the youth would have to tell the youth's friends of his intentions a few days beforehand. It was the task of the friends to decide if the match was equal, or for the benefit of the youth. If the man was deemed "unworthy," the friends would prevent the boy from leaving. The friends would act as the jury for the relationship and protect the system of pederasty.

The most famous abduction in the ancient Greek culture is that involving Zeus and Ganymede. Though Zeus and Ganymede are shown in other depictions as being involved in the sweet game of courtship, a terracotta sculpture from 470 BC (Fig. 19) shows another version of the story. Since Zeus was a god living high on Mt. Olympus and Ganymede was a Trojan prince living on earth, a long earth-bound courtship was not the most convenient thing for the all-powerful god. Abduction would have been quick and some-what easy, at least for Zeus. In the Roman tradition, Jupiter had turned himself into an eagle to swoop down to earth to retrieve the beautiful Trojan prince. In that version, there was no courting, no cockerels, no chasing. But then, no one knows exactly what happens before Zeus carries Ganymede away.

When courtship works and abduction is unnecessary, the visual representations of reciprocated interests of the youth become important. Sometimes, physical contact between males and youths were also delicate displays of affection rather than just courtship or sexual intimacy. A depiction of a clothed man and youth engaged in a kiss displays the care they have for each other (Fig. 20). The clothed pair stands facing each

other as the man lowers his head as if to make concentrated eye-contact with the youth. The bearded man rests his right arm on the youth's shoulder as his hand surrounds the top of the youth's head. The youth mirrors him and reaches his right arm up to place his hand on the top of the man's head. Another, similar depiction of an embracing pair is that of a youth and a boy (Fig. 21). The youth is taller than the boy? and lowers his head in order to gaze into the boy's eyes. The boy returns his gaze and is wrapped up in the arms of his partner. The youth's left arm is around the shoulders and neck of the boy as his right arm touches the boy's face. The two are wrapped up in each other, both figuratively and literally. These two depictions of care could represent a long lasting relationship. It is clear that the connection between the couples is not exclusively lustful or sexual, rather a softer intimacy, evidenced through the focus on each other's eyes and face, as well as the hands being on the face, or, at least above the waist. If paint could "caress," these couples would be caressing. Certainly, as this is only a single moment in time, this could be the commencement of a lustful situation.

Another illustration of accepted advances, on a sixth century Attic black-figure vessel features a playful mood among a Dionysian vineyard of grapes (Fig. 22). On one side, a bearded man makes eye contact with a youth while touching the youth's genitals with his right hand and the youth's shoulder with his left. The youth looks up to the man's eyes and touches the man's face. The two of them are almost gesturing in an "up and down" fashion. On the reverse side, the man is making the same gestures (the fragment of the vessel is missing where his head would have been). The youth reaches around the man's neck with his arms as he lifts his legs off the ground. The youth appears overjoyed as he jumps in acceptance of his lover. As a fragment is missing, we

do not know how the elder's reaction was rendered. However, it must be within the decorum of a youth to jump for joy into the arms of his lover if it is so publicly displayed for all to see.

This youth's exuberant reciprocation of interest contrasts to the depictions of youths' rejections as previously seen. Some depictions present the moment before the youth is able to react one way or the other: of those displaying reaction, there are more depictions of rejections than acceptances when it comes to the gestures of courtship.

There are, of course, depictions of courting victories by both parties, however, the methods of courting or achieving them are not completely revealed. A depiction of a crouching man with a responsive youth (Fig. 23) shows that the man may have possibly touched the youth's genitals in order to get a response; however, the youth is carrying what seems to be a fishing net, which might have been a courting gift. The youth is standing in between the man's bent legs as the man touches the youth's genitals. The youth is noticeably willing, as he places his hand on the man's head. It is revealed to the viewer, as the man places his hand on his hip to hold back his garment; the man is also noticeably aroused as his penis is erect.

The man's crouching position seen in Fig. 23 is common with depictions of intercrural or interfemoral copulation.⁵⁵ This type of sexual pleasure is achieved when the man's penis is moving between the thighs of a youth (or sometimes, a woman).⁵⁶ Intercrural copulation allowed men to pleasure themselves with their youth without having to invade the youth's body. Two Attic black-figure amphorae from the sixth century B.C. (Figs. 24, 25) depict two nude intercrurally copulating males flanked by two nude males in motion. In both, the elder male is hunched over with his knees bent and

arms around the waist of the youth. The youth is standing upright with his legs together and his arms around the elder. Another depiction features men courting youths while one pair intercrurally copulates (Fig. 26). The surrounding men hold celebratory garlands as well as courting gifts such as a cockerel and stag.⁵⁷ In figure 27, a man and youth copulate intercrurally among male and female pairs. The pair is shown to the far left, depicted in black. The two male intercrurally copulating figures are depicted in consistently similar positions which indicate that there was a standard way of visually representing such an act.

The intercrural method was used in the older-younger male relationship, whereas anal copulation was most commonly depicted with males from the same age group, male-female pairs or satyrs.⁵⁸ Two white ground depictions from around 530 – 430 B.C. show the moment of preparation for anal copulation. One depicts two nude youths with crowning headdresses (Fig. 28). One youth with his penis erect is seated in a chair while the other places his left foot on the chair to hoist himself on top of the seated youth. They stare into each other's eyes as they prepare to engage with each other. The other depiction features a youth and woman in an identical situation (Fig. 29). The nude, erect youth is seated with his arms to his side and his eyes connecting eyes with the proximal female. She has her arms on his shoulders and her right foot on the chair, preparing to copulate.

In a most revealing look into the sexual practices of ancient Greeks, Zeus and Ganymede are also engaged in anal copulation (Fig. 30). Zeus stands behind Ganymede with his right hand on the shoulder of the youth and the other holding Ganymede's arm behind his back. Ganymede has his weight on his right leg which is bent underneath him

on a platform. His other leg is wrapped around one of Zeus' right leg. In Ganymede's right hand, close to his mouth, is an *olisbos*, or artificial penis.

Olisboi were commonly used by females, both alone and in same-sex relationships.⁵⁹ The occurrence of such *olisbos* ownership is evidenced in an amphora in which a woman is depicted with a basket full of *olisboi* (Fig. 31). The female seems to be climbing into the basket, as her left foot is behind the plane of the basket and her right hand is stabilizes the container. The *olisbos* in her hand looks similar to the *olisbos* Ganymede holds in Fig. 30: however, the woman's *olisbos* seems to have twisting lines down the shaft. There is an *olisbos* in the basket identical to the one in the woman's hand with the same line formation.

After courtship, there were relationships which were committed and long-lasting. Socrates' relationship with the young Alcibiades was a relationship not unlike that of the modern world. When walking into a dinner party, Alcibiades noticed that Socrates was lounging on a couch with the host. The young Alcibiades exclaimed, "Oh yes! You would move heaven and earth to sit next to the best looking person in the room!"⁶⁰ An annoyed Socrates replied to his host, "My love for the fellow is always landing me in trouble. Ever since I fell for him, I have not been allowed even to glance at a good-looking boy, far less talk to one. He gets jealous straight away... I'm afraid that one of these days he'll go for me in earnest."⁶¹ Whether Socrates felt threatened by Alcibiades because of his aggression is unclear, however, he is fully aware of Alcibiades sensitivity. This may indicate that once courtship is over that roles shift and *eromenos* have more room to be aggressive and outgoing in this manner.

Another long-lasting relationship described many times in literary and figural works is that between the warriors Achilles and Patroclus. The literary references may not have had the intention of suggesting anything other than an asexual *erastes* and *eromenos* relationship. When readers are first introduced to Achilles and Patroclus in Homer's *Iliad*: Book IX, the two are alone in a tent with Achilles singing and playing the lyre. When unexpected visitors arrived, Achilles "sprang from his seat"⁶² and asked Patroclus to retrieve beds, water, and anything the visitors might need. They are only calling each other "comrade."⁶³ In Book XVI, Achilles lets Patroclus borrow his armor and it is revealed that Patroclus is "the finest spearman" and is often referred to as "noble knight."⁶⁴ Patroclus continues to successfully wipe out his opponents, until the end of Book XVI when he is killed by Hector. In the beginning of Book XVIII, Achilles finds out about this terrible incident and feels a "dark cloud of grief" hovering over him. He asks Thetis how his own life can have worth after the death of "he whom I valued more than all others, and loved as dearly as my own life?"⁶⁵ After Thetis tells Achilles that he will die avenging the death of Patroclus by attacking Hector, he replies, "I would die here and now, in that I could not save my comrade."⁶⁶

There is nothing in Homer's text which would exclusively suggest a sexual or romantic relationship of any kind. However, Plato writes in the *Symposium* that Achilles and Patroclus were lovers in the "full physical sense."⁶⁷ Examining the evidence in the *Iliad*, there is no doubt that Achilles cared deeply for Patroclus. He even said that he had hoped to "win the honor of conquering Troy" with his comrade.⁶⁸ The conclusion that Achilles and Patroclus were lovers to the extent that Plato describes is debatable.

It was not unheard of for comrades to be lovers, in fact, there was an entire militia made up of 150 pairs of lovers.⁶⁹ The Sacred Battalion of Thebes was destroyed after 33 years by Philip and Alexander of Macedon at the battle of Chaeronea.⁷⁰ Plato advocated the idea of lovers side by side in battle: “Who would desert his beloved or fail him in the hour of danger?”⁷¹ He even wrote of an entire city both governed and composed of lovers: “they would be the very best governors of their own city, abstaining from all dishonor, and emulating one another in honor.”⁷² Modern scholar, Bruce S. Thornton, writes about “situational homosexuality,” however, for Achilles and Patroclus this would not be the case. In Book XI, both Achilles and Patroclus secluded themselves on opposite sides of the same tent with “lovely Diomedes” and “fair Iphigenia,” respectively.⁷³ Certainly, the warriors could have enjoyed themselves with these women in addition to each other, however, in their case, situational homosexuality was unlikely.

Thornton also wrote that “the friendship between Achilles and Patroclus, central to the Iliad, does not appear as pederastic until Pindar’s Tenth Olympian in the early fifth century B.C.”⁷⁴ Plato also conceded that the two were lovers, which may have propelled this idea into popular thought.

Interestingly, the *erastes* and *eromenos* roles are unclear for the pair. As a note in the Symposium states: “The notion that [Patroclus] was the beloved one is a foolish error into which Aeschylus has fallen, for Achilles was surely the fairer of the two, fairer also than all the other heroes; and he was much younger, as Homer informs us, and he had no beard.”⁷⁵ Plato is right in assigning the dashing good looks to Achilles, as Homer calls him “comely.”⁷⁶ This ambiguity of roles in Homer’s texts could be an attempt to portray the pair as peers and comrades equal in their differences. However, Homer was a

member of the Ionian culture, which had not set the same systematic roles as were created later.⁷⁷ In age, Patroclus is both bearded and physically older. Achilles is mentioned as handsome and physically younger. However, in action and behavior, Achilles gave orders, his armor, and eventually, fatally avenged Patroclus' death. This is all illustrated in a kylix cup painted by the Sosias Painter depicting Achilles binding the wounds of Patroclus (Fig. 32). Achilles is shown nearly kneeling in his helmet and under-armor as he focuses on Patroclus' left arm. Bearded Patroclus is sitting on a cushion, legs wide, as he extends his arm for binding. He wears a skullcap, which is the padding between the head and the helmet, as he looks away from his wound. It is Achilles who seems to be in control, as he is armored and kneeling, attending to his comrade Patroclus.

If it were true that Achilles was Patroclus' *eromenos*, let alone his lover, it is possible that their relationship had changed enough that Achilles would be taking care of Patroclus. How well-versed and educated the youth, is the test of the *erastes*' abilities as a teacher. Even early on in a relationship, there is an exchange of talents. In a depiction of a banqueting scene, a nude *eromenos* plays an *aulos* for his *erastes* (Fig. 33). The elder is reclining on a couch, with one hand behind his head and the other holding a kylix, probably filled with wine. The youth stands nude at the foot of the couch, holding and playing an *aulos* for the man's entertainment. In instances like this, the roles seem reversed as the youth must present his gifts and talents to the *erastes*. One may consider this a trade-off from courtship, where the elder had to entice the youth. Though this boy looks far from maturity, there is a give and take to their relationship.

One depiction of a standing youth and a vomiting man (Fig. 34) depicts the care a youth may have for his elder, especially as the youth nears maturity. The nude youth

stands over the elder and places his hands upon his head. The elder's staff leans idly against the frame, and what may possibly be his clothes are draped over the youth's shoulder. The nude and bearded elder is sitting with his head down as he vomits between his legs and onto the ground. Though the two men may be just friends, if one were to look at them in terms of the *erastes-eromenos* relationship one might find that the comforting gestures of the youth indicate an understanding and a nurturing which may be the traditional nature of an *erastes*. A depiction like this creates the notion that the relationship of an *erastes* and *eromenos* may come full circle.

Though some *eromenoi* may grow to be *erastae*, there are some who remain lovers to their elders. Plato once wrote in *Phaedrus*: "But, perhaps, you will say that you ought not to give to the most importunate, but to those who are best able to reward you; ... nor to those who, when their passion is over, will pick a quarrel with you, but rather to those who, when the bloom of youth is over, will show their virtue."⁷⁸ Just as Plato urged men to look past beauty and seek virtue in their youths, he is still suggesting the virtuous path. In fact, Plato once literarily represented Pausanias, an *erastes* in a more than 18-year-long relationship with Agathon. Modern writer Kenneth Dover writes of this relationship that one could "[treat] the endurance itself as a justification of the original homosexual relationship."⁷⁹ For those who do not focus on the soul over the physical nature of love, like Atalante, marriage was shunned.⁸⁰ Atalante once yielded: "Beauty will not last long."⁸¹

Usually, it was between the ages of 15 and 25 years old that a young man might transition into the more dominant role of the *erastes*.⁸² However, as previously stated, it

was the youth's choice to either stay in their *eromenos-erastes* relationship. For some of the once-*eromenoi*, marriage to a female was the next step.⁸³

Of course, in marriage, the male would still be dominant. The once-youth would certainly know how to court a female because of his past as the object of desire. Though the dominant male would be the pursuer, he would have to stay humble as to do all that he could to achieve the love of his beloved. He might have to give a courting gift or hunch his back and plead. His love would be too powerful to ignore and too urgent to wait. Eros and Aphrodite would have entranced him into a world of lusty dreams and lovely delights.

His object of desire will run or stay: although, flight may not indicate disinterest, but the beginnings of a long courtship dance. The beloved could accept, reject, or prolong misery and tease his/her lover. The social rules give the youths a degree of power in their ability to accept or reject the advances of the elders.

The visual depictions from ancient Greece reveal different methods of courting, each with a dominant and passive agent. During courtship, the elder male is at the mercy of the youth. Once the relationship begins, the elder takes the lead, with the youth then learning the ways of the world, and ultimately taking care of the elder. At that point, the younger takes on the dominant role. The cycle of pederasty is one in which wisdom and love is in a continuum. On the vessels and in the sculptures, the figures of youths and elders are in a perpetual chase with one another and on some vessels, they are frozen in time, as if Hephaestus had joined them together after all.

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- ¹ Kenneth J. Dover. *Greek Homosexuality*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978, 85.
- ² Benjamin Jowett. , trans. *On Homosexuality: Plato's Lysis, Phaedrus, and Symposium*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books: 184a
- ³ The ancient Greeks set the stage for heartache and passion, in which two gods would inspire desire and sometimes pain. Aphrodite and *Eros* were in complete control. But as hearts burn with passion, social rules and expectations could complicate one's love life. Male sexuality was important to the Greeks, as evidenced by the phallic monuments at Delos (Fig. 1).
- ⁴ The term "Aphrodisia" was a festival in Athens in honor of Aphrodite, as well as the term for food or drug which arouses sexual desire. Kenneth Dover adds that "Aphrodisia" also refers to copulation. Dover, op. cit., 63.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Jim Powell. trans. *Sappho: A Garland: The Poems and Fragments of Sappho*. New York: Harper Collins, 3.
- ⁹ Sappho spoke for Aphrodite: "What I now most wanted to happen in my raving heart: 'Whom this time should I persuade to lead you back again to her love?'" Ibid., 3.
- ¹⁰ Tannahill, Reay. *Sex in History*. New York: Stein and Day, Scarborough House, 84.
- ¹¹ "limb-loosener" and "weaver of tales" Powell, op. cit., 20, 22.
- ¹² "If there were only one Love, then what you said would be well enough; but since there are more Loves than one,—should have begun by determining which of them was to be the theme of our praises." Jowett, op. cit., 180c
- ¹³ Ibid., 189d -191b.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 189d -191b.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 191c.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 192 d.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 192 d.
- ¹⁸ "Wherefore let us exhort all men to piety, that we may avoid evil, and obtain the good, of which Love is to us the lord and minister; and let no one oppose him—he is the enemy of the gods who opposes him." Ibid., 193a-c.
- ¹⁹ "For wisdom is a most beautiful thing, and love is of the beautiful; and therefore love is also a philosopher or lover of wisdom, and being a love of wisdom is in a mean between the wise and the ignorant." Ibid., 204 b.
- ²⁰ The term "pederasty" is comprised of "ped-" meaning "youth" and "-erasty" coming from "*eros*" meaning "erotic love."
- ²¹ Ibid., 181 d.
- ²² Tannahill, op. cit., 86.
- ²³ Dover, op. cit., 63.
- ²⁴ In Sparta, the mentor was called *eispnelos* (inspirer) and the youth was called *aite*s (hearer.) Crompton, Louis. *Homosexuality & Civilization*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003, 7.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 2.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Interestingly, their relationship becomes the basis for naming the planet Jupiter (the Roman counterpart for Zeus) and its moon, Ganymede. Tannahill, op. cit., 85.
- ³¹ Eva Cantarella. *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*. New Haven: Yale University Press Publication, 2002, 28.
- ³² Jowett, op. cit., 50.
- ³³ Crompton, op. cit., 7-8.
- ³⁴ Dover, op. cit., 85.

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- ³⁵ Jowett, op. cit., 184a
- ³⁶ “For he who is gracious to his lover under the impression that he is rich, and is disappointed of his gains because he turns out to be poor, is disgraced all the same: for he has done his best to show that he would give himself up to any one’s ‘uses base’ for the sake of money; but this is not honorable. Ibid., 185 a.
- ³⁷ Tannahill, op. cit., 85.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 19.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 183d
- ⁴⁰ Nudity is, of course, required in athletic activity, from the gymnasium to the Olympics.
- ⁴¹ Tannahill, op. cit., 85.
- ⁴² Cantarella, op. cit., 28.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 34.
- ⁴⁴ Dover, op. cit., 54.
- ⁴⁵ Cantarella, op. cit., 33.
- ⁴⁶ Jowett, op. cit., 217c, p.151.
- ⁴⁷ Dover, op. cit., 58.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 59.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 57.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 58.
- ⁵² Tannahill, op. cit., 90.
- ⁵³ Cantarella, op. cit., 35.
- ⁵⁴ Crompton, op. cit., 7.
- ⁵⁵ Tannahill, op. cit., 89.
- ⁵⁶ Dover, op. cit., 98.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 99.
- ⁵⁹ Tannahill, op. cit., 99.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 87.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 87.
- ⁶² Samuel Butler. trans. *The Iliad of Homer; and The Odyssey* Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952, Book XI
- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., Book XVI
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., Book XVII
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Crompton, 4.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 6.
- ⁶⁹ Tannahill, op. cit., 91.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Jowett, op. cit., 179a
- ⁷² Ibid., 178e
- ⁷³ Butler, op. cit., Book XI.
- ⁷⁴ Robert Rouselle. “Defining Ancient Greek Sexuality.” *Digital Archive of Psychohistory* 26.4 (1999).
- ⁷⁵ Jowett, op. cit., 179e
- ⁷⁶ Butler, op. cit., Book XI
- ⁷⁷ Crompton, op. cit., 5.
- ⁷⁸ Jowett, op. cit., 50.
- ⁷⁹ Dover, op. cit., 84.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., 58.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² Cantarella, op. cit., 32.
- ⁸³ Ibid., 90.

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Fig. 1 Phallic Monuments on Delos Island



Fig. 2 Sculpture of Aphrodite, Eros, and Pan



Fig. 3 A Satyr Balancing a Kantharos on his Penis



Fig. 4 Satyrs enjoy fellation and anal copulation



Fig. 5. *A Youth among Women*



Fig. 6. *A man titillates a woman*



Fig. 7. *A Youth Entreating a Boy*



Fig. 8. *Two Men Entreating a Woman*



Fig. 9. Zeus and Ganymede with Cockerel



Fig. 10. Man Gives Cut of Meat to Youth



Fig. 11. Berlin Painter, *Ganymede and Zeus*



Fig. 12. *Zeus and Ganymede*



Fig. 13. "Up-and-down" Gesture



Fig. 14. A man who courts a youth, who shields his own genitals with his hand.



Fig. 15. Up and Down with Many Males



Fig. 16. A Youth Courts a Woman.



Fig. 17. *A Man Courts A Youth (In Gymnasium)*



Fig. 18. *Wrestlers*



Fig. 19. *Zeus and Ganymede*



Fig. 20. *The Kiss*

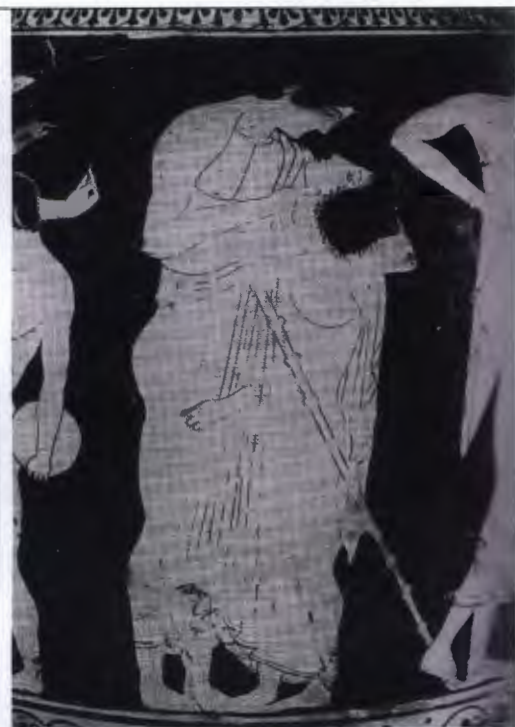


Fig. 21. *A Youth Embraces a Responsive Boy*



Fig. 22. *A man courts a boy, and a boy responds affectionately to a man's courtship*



Fig. 23. *A Man and a Responsive Boy*



Fig. 24. *A man and a youth copulate intercrurally*

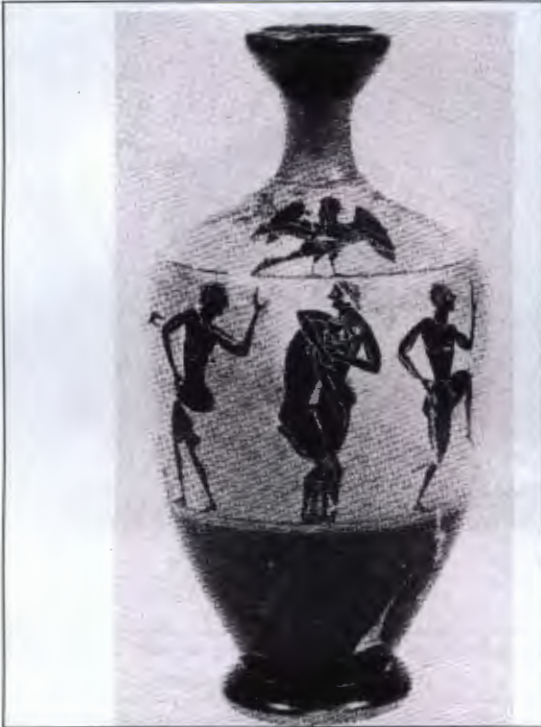


Fig. 25. A man and a youth copulate intercrurally.



Fig. 26. Men court youths, and one pair copulates intercrurally.



Fig. 27. The pair on the left is a man and a youth (painted black), copulating intercrurally



Fig. 28. A boy prepares to squat on of another for anal copulation.



Fig. 29. A woman prepares to squat on the lap of a youth for copulation



Fig. 30. Zeus and Ganymede



Fig. 31 A woman with a basket full of phalloi.



Fig. 32. Achilles binding the wounds of Patroclus.



Fig. 33. Man reclining on a bench and youth playing the aulos.



Fig. 34. A standing youth with a seated man (vomiting)