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Traduction Anne Stevens

Dans Clio. Women, Gender, History 2015/2 No 42 , pages 25 à 52
Éditions Belin

ISSN 1252-7017
ISBN 9782701194325
DOI 10.4000/clio.12731
Date de mise en ligne : 21/10/2016

The age of love: gender and erotic reciprocity in archaic Greece

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Any reference today to "age and sexuality in Antiquity" almost automatically invokes thoughts of "Greek pederasty", a practice that was recognized and accepted at certain points in history. However, caution is necessary before taking anything for granted and making unwarranted assumptions: questioning the age of the partners in a sexual relationship does not, in relation to Antiquity, pose the same issues or problems as in present-day Western societies. It would be anachronistic to look for the relationships between age and sexuality that can be observed today in societies which are nowadays regarded as existing "before sexuality"[1]

The question of age was not, of course, absent from the customs and norms of ancient societies, and there is a good deal of work pointing out the specific characteristics of the groups which researchers sometimes call "age cohorts".[2] The latter combined considerations of gender, status and geographical and cultural

* The authors wish to thank Claude Calame, Camillo Neri and Violaine Sebillotte Cuchet for their suggestions, and for their personal and academic support

1 On this approach to societies in Antiquity, see, in particular, the work with this title edited by Halperin, Winkler & Zeitlin (1990), as well as Halperin 1990 and Winkler 1990. These expand the hypothesis developed by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* on the fundamental difference in structures (*dispositif* or "apparatus") between ancient societies and present-day Western societies which have inherited a *scientia sexualis*. For an overview of recent work on questions of gender and sexuality in Ancient Greece, see Boehringer 2012, Hubbard (ed.) 2014a, and Blondel & Ormand (eds) 2015.

2 See Jeanmaire 1939, Brelich 1969 and Calame 1977. For an epistemological analysis of the usage of these analytical categories, see Calame 2003.

distinctions (in Greece, for example, customs clearly varied between one city and another).[3] The interest which we, as twenty-first-century Western researchers, take in the relationship between age and sexuality originates in current preoccupations and is conceived in modern terms. It is this concept which we need to tease out, so as to take into account the vast differences which separate us from the erotic regime of these ancient societies.

This article will first attempt to define the terms of this enquiry and then to give an overview of the findings of recent work on Antiquity concerned with issues of age and sexuality, which have often been interpreted in terms of symmetrical or asymmetrical relationships. Finally, this point will be expanded by an analysis based on a study of Greek poetry from the archaic period,[4] which should enable us to deconstruct any preconceived idea that homoerotic relationships between women would have been more egalitarian than homosexual relationships between men, and to take a fresh look at the question of erotic reciprocity.

Societies "before sexuality"

Many researchers, mostly following Michel Foucault's work, have shown that in Antiquity people did not consider themselves to be defined by such a thing as "sexuality", and the sex of the person desired was not a criterion used to define and categorize a desiring subject. It was never thought that individuals, whether men or women, whatever their status (citizen, resident alien, foreigner, or slave), their origin or their social background, could be grouped under a single heading on the sole basis that they were attracted to persons of the opposite sex, or on the criterion of their attraction to persons of the same sex. A study of the documents clearly shows that the

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3 For a discussion on the way which the nineteenth- and twentieth-century studies of age cohorts have intersected with issues of sexuality and homosexuality, in particular in the case of the Dorian populations, see Boehringer 2014.

4 This section of this article will focus particularly on non-epic Greek poetry of the archaic period (seventh to sixth century BCE). Unless otherwise specified, the centuries mentioned in this article are all BCE.

primary distinction perceived in Antiquity was not between the sexes, but between those who were free and those who were not, those who could dispose of their own bodies and those whose bodies belonged to a master – that is, the slave population, a high proportion of the overall population.[5] In general, when the Greeks said *ándres* or *gynaîkes,* they were referring only to the citizen population, or at the outside to free people (citizens, freedmen and freedwomen, resident aliens and foreigners). For this reason, these terms do not signify what the words "men" and "women" do today.

Moreover, given that no repression singled out individuals attracted to those of the same sex as themselves, there were no groups of people whose common experience might form the basis of a specific subculture. The studies by Michel Foucault and, a few years later, by David Halperin, of the discourse which developed a comparison between love of boys and love of women (in *The Greek Anthology*, and in Lucian, Plutarch and Achilles Tatius)[6] have shown that the rhetorical and occasional contrasts which it drew not only excluded women's perspectives and the possibility of relationships between adult men (which none of these authors took into account) but primarily described matters of taste which did not engage one's entire life, still less one's psychological identity. Add to this the fact that relationships between women are never included amongst the possible comparisons,[7] and the conclusion is simple. Not only did identities as "men" or "women" not exist independently of social status (because the prime distinguishing characteristic was such status, ruling out any consciousness of a "feminine condition"[8]) but equally neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality, as such, existed in

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5 On the huge question of the slave population in Ancient Greece, see amongst others the extensive work of Finley and that of Garlan 1982. On the importance of slaves in the area of "sexual services", see the recent study by Cohen E. 2014.

6 For a study of erotic comparison from the point of view of the Greek citizen, see Foucault 1984: 243-261 and Halperin 1992.

7 For a study of erotic comparison including the question of women, see Boehringer 2007b.

8 This is not to say that a "history of women" would be pointless, but simply to emphasise that "women" do not constitute a homogenous social category from an emic point of view.

the Ancient World. In Ancient Greece, the desirability of a body is not determined by its sex.[9] However, in these matters of taste (though not identity), age can arise explicitly as a factor.

Greek marriage: entirely asymmetric

Solon, the sixth century Athenian poet and law-maker, provides some indications of how the Greeks perceived the ages of the life of a free man.[10] Despite an arbitrary subdivision of the human lifespan into seven year periods, it is possible to identify five key points: childhood, when the *paîs* has not reached puberty; adolescence, which is essentially ephemeral, since the "flower" of the skin changes and the cheeks become covered by hair;[11] young adulthood, when the twenty-one year old becomes a *néos* and is no longer a *népios*,[12] being at the height of his strength and powers; maturity, when a man (*anér*) is fully developed, so that he marries at around age thirty, and has acquired prudence; and finally old age, when people have lost their strength but reached the height of wisdom.[13]

These subdivisions do not apply to women.[14] For women, there are childhood; maidenhood (*parthenía*) which lasts for more or less

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9 On the erotic nature of the body in Ancient Greece, see the recent study by Stansbury-O'Donnell 2014, which also offers a synthesis of the historiography of this question.

10 The poems of Sappho and Alcaeus are quoted from Voigt's edition [= V., 1971], and those of Alcman from Davies's edition [= D., 1991]. Mimnermus and Theognis are cited from West's second edition [=W.², 1989-1992] and Anacreon from Page's edition [= P., 1962].

11 The flower, *ánthos*, has an erotic significance, see below.

12 In the *Odyssey* II, 312-315, Telemachus asserts to the suitors the fact that he is no longer a *népios*. Since we know that Odysseus was fighting for ten years and his return lasted a further ten years, and given that Telemachus was a small child when his father went away to war (see Eustathius, *Commentary on the Odyssey*, 1956, 20 ff.) we can conclude that he was about twenty years old.

13 Solon, fr. 27 [W.²]: childhood (lines 1 ff.); adolescence (lines 3-6); young adulthood (lines 7 ff.); maturity (lines 9-14); old age (lines 15- 18).

14 See for example, *Scholies* at line 356 of the *Alexandra* of Lycophron. See also Calame 1996: 130-145.

four years[15] and is characterized by the erotic desire which the girl can arouse;[16] the state – in principle very short-lived – of being a young wife (*nýmphē*) who has not yet given birth; that of being an adult woman (*gynḗ*) who has become a mother; and old age, when a woman has lost the capacity to have a child.[17] In general, and in spite of variation at different periods and in different places, this asymmetry between the age cohorts of men and women is evident at the age of marriage.[18] Men marry at around 30 years old,[19] while women are given in marriage at about eighteen. Thus men were young adults (*néoi*) for some ten years while women were young wives (*nýmphai*) generally for only a year.

The differences in life history between free men and free women are immediately apparent from these subdivisions. Thus a future wife is "given in marriage" by her father or guardian, and sometimes betrothed very early, even before the marriage ceremony (*gámos*) has taken place. There was no legal minimum age, always and everywhere applied, but documents do allow us to indicate tendencies and customs.[20] In the eighth century BCE, Hesiod mentions the age of about eighteen.[21] The Gortyn Code, from fifth-century Crete, fixes the age at twelve at the earliest.[22] In the fourth century, Aristotle

15 Cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 695-705.

16 Cf. for example, Pindar, *Pythian*, 3, 8-23 and Sappho, fr. 112 [V].

17 In Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*, lines 641-645, the women of the chorus seem to allude to certain age cohorts: *arrephoroi*, *aletrides*, she-bears and *canephoroi*. However, the religious functions the terms refer to did not involve all Athenian women, which may suggest that they have no direct link to age cohorts (cf. Caciagli 2011: 308 ff.). On the philological problems surrounding these lines and their interpretation, see Perusino 2002.

18 On marriage in Ancient Greece see, in particular the studies by Leduc 1991, Oakley & Sinos 1994 and Glazebrook & Olson 2014.

19 Cf. Hesiod *Works and Days*, line 696.

20 In Ancient Greece, a person's age is calculated by the current year, and not by the number of years which have passed. For example the fourteenth year means the year after the thirteenth birthday (that is, an age of between thirteen and fourteen).

21 Hesiod *Works and Days*, lines 695-705. The poet advises that a girl should be given in marriage four years after her first period (which occurs at around age thirteen to fourteen). On this point cf. Brulé 1987: 361 ff.

22 Gortyn Code, *Inscriptiones Creticae*, IV, 72, col. XII, line 18.

speaks of 14 as the lowest age at which in Athens, an *epíkleros* can be married.[23] Finally, girls could be married before the onset of menstruation.[24] The usual age-gap was from ten to fifteen years, but girls could have very much older husbands. Whatever the historical period or the region, customs and habits resulted in an asymmetry of age in the marital relationships of free individuals.

A question thus arises. Did this asymmetry in age at marriage mean that married men must have had inclinations towards paedophilia? It is obvious how anachronistic this question is. Nevertheless, its equivalent for sexual relationships between men has often been raised, which proves that views of the past are always influenced by the moral codes of today.

Youth and consent in erotic relationships

In French law today, the age of consent is 15 years, and sex by minors is either forbidden (between persons over 15 and those under 15), or regulated (for those between 15 and 18).[25] By implication, the law favours relationships between people of the same age. In Ancient Greece on the other hand, an age difference was a factor which made a relationship between lovers commendable and worthy of respect. Such a relationship could be announced publicly, for example at banquets, and sometimes legally recognized by the city.[26] Over and over again, myths retell stories of love and erotic abductions between a powerful god and a young (male) mortal.[27] In a similar inversion, sexual relationships between a minor and a "person in authority",

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23 An *epíkleros* was a girl who, on the death of her father, was the only descendant. She would be married very early to a close relative so that the estate, the *klêros,* remained in the family. Cf. Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution* 56, 7 and also Xenophon, *The Economist*, 7, 5.

24 Cf. Brulé 1987: 366.

25 See articles 227-25 and 222-27 of the French *Criminal Code.*

26 On particular forms of homoeroticism and the contexts in which they were acceptable see, amongst others, Dover 1978, Halperin 1990, Lear 2014.

27 See, for example, Pindar, *Olympian Ode* 1, which recalls the abduction of the young Pelops by the god Poseidon. For a study of the myths said to concern male homosexuality, see Sergent 1984.

which in France today is prohibited by criminal law, was, in Greece by contrast, generally portrayed as rendering the relationship more ethical. Within the context of aristocratic banquets in the archaic period, the difference in age might be celebrated,[28] and it is also an aspect emphasized by Plato in his dialogues; "pederasty" is "good" when it leads towards philosophy.[29]

In contrast to what some commentators have proposed in their search for explanations of these exotic practices,[30] the dimension of a pedagogical relationship based on an asymmetry of authority was not essential to erotic relationships between adults and young men. There is substantial documentary evidence for erotic attraction to the bodies of youths, which although lacking any justification on the grounds of intellectual or ethical impulses, was neither legally prohibited nor subject to moral condemnation[31].

The age of a young man did not make him a prohibited sexual partner on grounds of vulnerability; on the contrary, his youth rendered him a preferable partner. In Crete, as reported, according to Strabo, by fourth-century BCE historian Ephorus,[32] once a child (*ho paîs*), abducted by his lover (*ho erastés*) with the approval of all, returns to the city, he receives praise and presents and reports that he has not suffered physical violence (*bía*). The erotic relationship has indeed taken place with his consent, and with the agreement of the whole community. Both iconographic images and erotic poems portray boys

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28 Cf. below.

29 See Brisson 2006, Renaut 2016 and forthcoming.

30 For a theoretically-based overview of the temptations of the search for causality, see the comments of David Halperin on the work of Harald Patzer. "For by purifying paederasty of sexual desire and interpreting it not as expression of personal preference but rather as a form of social ritual (thus relegating it to the category of activities set apart from normal daily life and only performed under specially sanctioned circumstances), Patzer in effect maintains heterosexuality as the ordinary locus of eroticism – even for the Greeks, despite their various sexual peculiarities – and thereby preserves it as the privileged and normative mode of human sexuality". Halperin 1990: 63.

31 See for example the documents collected by Dover 1978 or the images commented upon by Lear in Cantarella and Lear 2008, in which there is nothing to suggest any need for an intellectual or "initiatory" exchange.

32 Strabo, *Geography*, X, 4, 21, which quotes Ephorus (*FgrHist*, 70, F 149).

who (provisionally or definitively) refuse the advances of their seducer.[33] It was allowable for a *paîs* to consent to a relationship, and the lover did not thereby become a rapist or a pervert riddled with unmentionable desires. The relationship was all the more acceptable, moreover, if the lover took part in the education of the young man, and if he was from a noble family, with a good reputation. For example, in Xenophon's *Symposium*, the rich Kallias, in love with the young Autolycus, invites his beloved and the boy's father to the dinner party organized in his house in Piraeus,[34] and both willingly accept. This is very distant from our contemporary structures for keeping a close watch over the sexuality of minors.

Eros: an impulse, not a component of identity

In the ancient world, to be struck by *érōs* meant being propelled by an ungovernable impulse, being invaded by an external force.[35] The terms *erastés* or *erôn* (the present active participle) are sometimes used for the person struck by *eros*: the equivalent as a feminine noun is very rare.[36] The person who is the cause of this amorous impulse is described by the words *erómenos/eroménē*. None of these words, however, indicate an identity. They are derived from the root word *erân,* forming, in the former case, a noun for an active subject, and, in the latter case, a passive verbal noun (the form is *-menos*). However, given the meaning of the verb *erân* (to be struck by *érōs*) and its construction taking a genitive (and not a direct object),[37] this grammatical passive should not be seen as carrying a passive connotation based on a distribution of sexual roles, in the sense of dominant/dominated or even

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33 See also the games and the attitudes in the courtship scenes depicted in the iconography (Lear *in* Lear and Cantarella 2008: 38-62).

34 Xenophon, *Symposium*, I, 2-4.

35 On *eros* and its effects, see Calame 1996.

36 There are examples of the usage of a participle (not a verbal noun) of the verb *erân* in the feminine form, as well as the use, in comedies, of the term *andrerástria*. The word *gynaikerástria* occurs in a papyrus from the end of the second/beginning of the third century CE, as a description of Sappho (P. Oxy. 1800, fr. 1). This point would merit an extended discussion which is not appropriate here.

37 See Apollonius Dyscolus, *Syntax,* III, 172.

penetrating/penetrated.[38] The two terms simply indicate two lovers, in an asymmetrical and contextualized way.

The vocabulary used in the context of amorous relationships between men contrasts with present-day terminology such as homo/heterosexuality or pederasty, in that its morphology does not indicate the object of love. The term *paidophileîn* or its derivatives appears three times in sympotic poetry (poems sung at banquets)[39] but without indicating any category of individuals. Equally, the terms *paiderastía*, *paiderasteîn* and *paiderastés* are seldom used in the period between the eighth and second centuries BCE. Almost all the occurrences of these words date from the Roman period, in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, of the authors who wrote in Greek under the Roman Empire (Lucian, Plutarch, Athenaeus), and in technical writings (on magic, astrology and medicine). Out of the dozen occurrences in classical Greek, seven come from Plato (six of them in the *Symposium*),[40] and one from Xenophon (to describe a soldier from Olynthos who fights better if surrounded by beautiful young men),[41] while the other, single, occurrences are rare: one hapax (that is, a word which only appears once in the whole corpus) in the work of the orator

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38 According to Dover, the active suffix indicates "active" erotic practice, interpreted in terms of phallic penetration and this act embodies a hierarchical relationship (legal or symbolic). This interpretation is said to be confirmed by the conventions of iconographic representation, which avoid the "humiliation" of the young man by anal penetration and prefer a representation of erotic relationships as intercrural penetration. Dover's analyses played a large role in leading Michel Foucault to develop an interpretation of erotic relationships in terms of isomorphism or heteromorphism. He analysed the Greek "boy problem" as the sexual domination of a free young person. The interpretation of erotic relationships through a model of active/passive, penetrating/penetrated, and dominant/dominated (or indeed masculine/feminine or effeminate) was also developed by David Halperin and John Winkler at the end of the 1980s. For them, the criterion of age was fundamental. Nowadays, many researchers seek to nuance these interpretations, whilst still retaining the basic theoretical foundation of this approach, i.e. that society did not recognize our current structures of sexual identity. For a synthesis of the numerous discussions on this subject see Ormand 2014.

39 Theognis, lines 1345 and 1358 [W.²]; Solon, fr. 25 [W.²].

40 Plato, *Symposium*, 181c, 184c, 192b (three times), 211b; *Phaedrus*, 211b.

41 Xenophon, *Anabasis*, VII, 4. 7-11.

Isaeus (the verb *katapaiderasteîn)*;[42] one insult in a play by Aristophanes (appearing only once, on an equal footing with "womaniser"!)[43] and in a few fragments, mostly from comedies (in the title of works whose text is lost, or in a solitary line).[44]

In addition, the repeated use by Plato of the word *paiderastía* (in comparison with the dearth of occurrences in the overall corpus of that period) can be explained by that philosopher's wish to prove that a certain type of love allowed for the pursuit of philosophy.[45] However, although it might be thought that this text sanctions pederasty both as a custom and as a noun, the relationship between the young and handsome Alcibiades and Socrates, who refuses his advances, challenges traditional assumptions.[46]

In the archaic and classical period, what we call "Greek pederasty" did not constitute a particular sexual category separate from other erotic desires. Sappho, like Alcaeus or the *Theognidea,* speaks of *érōs*. Xenophon, when he discusses the educational value attached to the love of boys in Sparta at the time of the legislator Lycurgus, simply uses the tern *erastés.*[47] Likewise, in the works of Aristotle, as we have seen, and in very many contexts where erotic relationships are mentioned,[48] the lovers, struck by *érōs*, are *erôntes* and not *paiderôntes*, even if they love boys. Therefore, even if practices which *we* define as pederastic frequently appear in the documentation available to us, we

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42 Isaeus, *On the Estate of Aristarchus*, 25, 2: by deduction from the context the verb seems to mean the ruination of one's *oîkos* through expenditure on frequenting *paîdes*.

43 Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, line 265.

44 Antiphanes, *Paiderastés*, fr. 179 [K.-A.]; Diphilus, *Paiderastaí*, fr. 57 [K.-A.]; and Eubulus, fr. 130 [K.-A.].

45 Luc Brisson concludes that "the coherence of the Symposium is constituted by the rules surrounding an Eros which becomes the type of seduction which takes the form of education, sexual in the case of *paiderastía*, dialogical in the case of *philosophía*", Brisson 2016.

46 On Plato, and on the speech of Pausanias in the *Symposium* in particular, see the illuminating study by Renaut (2016).

47 Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians,* 212-13.

48 See the numerous texts mentioning erotic relationships in collections and anthologies: Hubbard 2003 and Boehringer & Tin 2010.

have to recognize that Greeks did not "self-identify" as pederasts in the way we can say today that someone "self-identifies as lesbian".[49] People engaged in such relationships occupied roles and functions in particular contexts, but they did not think of themselves as having a specific identity (as *erastes* or *eromenos*), nor did they wish to construct a specific culture, whether marginal or mainstream. In classical and archaic Greece, no-one affirmed their identity as a lover of the young, either as a matter of pride or of shame.[50]

Erotic relationships of this type clearly provided matter for intense reflection and a rich seam of poetic and artistic creativity in Greek society, but it was not a case of specific or separate artistic production. Vases described as "pederastic" were to be found in contexts where female flute players could excite the senses of the same banquet guests,[51] or where various types of couples (men and women, men together, satyrs together or with maenads) were depicted on the cups that were passed around. All contributed to the glamour of the occasion. For the periods with which we are concerned, the category "pederastic" is an anachronism, constructed by scholars influenced by the "moral discourse" of later Greek authors and trapped in the classifications introduced by a *scientia sexualis*.

Lovers and beloved: erotic asymmetry in archaic poetry

Given that there is no clear category which can be called "pederastic", and no identity tied to an (anachronistic) "sexual orientation", the most useful way of interpreting erotic relationships within non-epic Greek poetry from the archaic period is in terms of asymmetry.

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49 [Translator's note: the French reads "se dire lesbienne".] *Se dire lesbienne* alludes to the title of a recent study *Se dire lesbienne* (Payot, 2010) by Natacha Chetcuti, in which the importance of self-affirmation in these terms illustrates the strength of sexuality in forming identity today. Moreover in Greece the verb *lesbiázein* referred to sexual practices with men, including fellatio. On the complicated link between Sappho, Lesbos and female homosexuality in ancient history, see Boehringer 2007a: 61-66 and 211-214 and Gilhully 2015.

50 If shame was involved, it was as a consequence of excess or expense, not because of perceived psychological anomaly or deviance.

51 See the work of Cantarella & Lear 2008 and an update in Lear 2014.

Indeed, practices were in reality much more varied than certain modern classifications would suggest.

First, however, some formal precision is required. Archaic poetry is radically different from modern poetry. Because it was oral and the poet had direct contact with the audience, it can be regarded as pragmatic poetry, in the sense that it had a direct link with reality, at least with reality at the time of the first performance. Even though they were not simply a *reflection* of reality, poems from the archaic period can be seen as an important, indeed fundamental, source of information on the social customs of the period.[52] The context for these poems was generally aristocratic banquets,[53] events which were ideologically central to archaic and classical Greece. These were the occasions where men discussed, among other matters, political and social questions. These occasions were also, as we shall see, key moments in the education of young aristocrats.

In Greek poetry, a difference in age is typical as much for the relationships of men with other men as for those with free women. The young bride and the beloved are more or less the same age, and the husband of the one and the lover of the other are older than their partner. This asymmetry has consequences in two key areas of Greek society; first, in aristocratic banquets, where adolescents from noble families were getting an education, as they listened to the adults' discussions and saw their gestures, thereby acquiring the habits of their social class; second, in the marriage ceremony, the *gámos* where the free young woman became an adult woman and aroused legitimate and acknowledged desire. There were certainly exceptions to this norm. There might be no asymmetry of age in a given marriage,[54] or symmetry in an all-male relationship.[55] Archaic Greek poetry, however,

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52 Cf. Gentili 2006 [1984]: 15-47; Rösler 1984; Calame 1998 and 2005: 30 ff.; Caciagli 2011: 11-19.

53 Cf. Rösler 1980: 26-41 and Vetta 1983: XIII ff. On Greek banquets, cf. Murray (ed.) 1990 and Schmitt-Pantel 1992.

54 Penelope's suitors were young men (cf. *Odyssey,* XVI, 245 ff., XXII, 30, XIV, 131), though she must have been at least forty, since she had a son aged twenty.

55 On symmetrical *érōs* between men see Hubbard 2003: 5 and 2014b: 128-130. The examples which he gives to back up his argument are still conjectures. Apart from Theognis, lines 1362 ff. [W.²] (see the comment above) the other extracts

as far as we can discover from the sources, does not speak of these exceptions. That does not, of course, mean that these types of relationships did not exist in archaic Greece, merely that they were of no social interest to the participants in aristocratic banquets. The only relevant example which can be cited is lines 1062 ff. of the *Theognidea*[56] "In youth a man may sleep all night with one of his age (*homêlix*) and satisfy his amorous desires."[57] This passage is, nevertheless, problematic. In particular, the Greek word *homêlix* can signify either a man or a woman. Since the circumstances in which this verse was first performed are unknown, it is indeed the case that *homêlix* might refer to a liaison between two men of the same age. But it could equally well refer to a woman, without this necessarily implying an egalitarian relationship. It could refer to a liaison with a courtesan of the same age. Moreover *homêlix* could simply mean that the partners were both young. 'Of his [own] age' needs to be understood in a wider sense.[58]

Youth, above all, is the ideal time for *érōs*, as the poet Mimnermus emphasizes in these lines: "Reciprocated relationships (*philótēs*),[59] honey-sweet gifts, bed... are the desired flowers of youth (*hébē*), for men (*andrásin*) and for women (*gynaixín*)."[60] There is a parallel passage in the *Theognidea*. There, the poet invokes Cypris, asking her to free him from the cares of love and give him wisdom, linking this to the

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Hubbard cites are Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, 10, 57-60 (Hippocles is admired without being desired); Theognis, lines 1319-1322 [W.²] (the statuses of *paîs* and *néos* are different, see above); Plato, *Phaedrus* 240c (pleasure between young people of the same age is not necessarily sexual). Vases are difficult to interpret because they were not necessarily realistic (see Lear 2014: 107).

56 The corpus of the *Theognidea* is a sort of anthology of elegies from several authors, mostly from the archaic period. This corpus has come down to us under Theognis's name because of the seal with his name mentioned in lines 22 ff. (cf. West 1974: 40-46; Vetta 1980: XI-XXVII; Colesanti 2011: 1-33). However, this seal only relates to the elegy at lines 14-25, or at most to one section of the corpus.

57 Theognis, lines 1062-1063 [W.²].

58 Cf. Van Groningen 1966: 394.

59 *Philótēs* is often translated as "love" or "friendship"; essentially it means a pact which implies reciprocity between the contracting parties (cf. Benveniste 1969: I, 335-353).

60 Mimnermus, fr. 1, 3-5 [W.²]

end of youth (*hébē*).[61] It is thus apparent that youth is the age which is susceptible to *érōs*. The lover is a young adult (*néos*).[62] Where does this leave the asymmetry that is generally considered to be obligatory for homoerotic relationships between an adolescent and an adult man?

In the verses of the *Theognidea*, the beloved and the lover are often celebrated and portrayed as having fixed and unequal roles. The beloved is often depicted as not being dominated by Aphrodite's actions, even though he possesses her gifts. In lines 1299-1304, the beloved is accused of fleeing from the lover, who has to follow him.[63] To persuade the *paîs* to stop, he is reminded that the gifts of Cypris do not last; the flower (*ánthos*) of adolescence wilts rapidly[64] and the *paîs* should think about the time when he too will suffer the torment and agonies that Aphrodite-Cypris decrees.

In this context, the arrival of a beard signals the end of the possibility of being a beloved:[65] in line 1327 and the following, the poet of the *Theognidea* insists that he will praise the *paîs* for as long as his cheek is smooth. The absence of a beard is a feature which causes the *paîs* and the *parthénos,* the two objects of desire for *néoi*, to resemble each other. In lines 1238-1294 of the *Theognidea*, for example, the *paîs* who runs away from the lover is compared to the mythical figure of Atalanta, a *parthénos* of marriageable age who flees her suitors.[66] Equally, Anacreon, a poet of the sixth century BCE, mostly active in Samos and Athens, says that the boy he loves has the gaze of a girl.[67] In sexual affairs, it thus seems that the absence of hairs, and, in particular, of a beard, removes any distinction between the young girl and the young boy.

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61 Theognis, lines 1323-1326 [W.²].

62 Cf. above. According to Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 17, 1, in Sparta lovers were respectable *néoi*. On the problematic connection between the idea of archaic Sparta and the reality in the time of the Roman Empire, see Kennell 1995: 83 ff. 87-07, 143-148.

63 Cf. below, Sappho, fr. 1, 21 [V.].

64 Cf. Theognis, lines 1323-1326 [W.²].

65 Cf. above, Solon, fr. 27 [W.²].

66 On these verses, and for a gender-based analysis, see, among others, Boehringer & Chabod forthcoming.

67 Cf. Anacreon, fr. 360 [P.] (below).

The fact that the possibility of being a beloved is fleeting is linked to the role this plays in a beloved's relationship with his older lover. If the lover is overpowered by the desire which the *paîs* arouses,[68] and demands *cháris* (in the sense of a favour, in a relationship of mutual exchange) then the *paîs* should be the donor.[69] Lines 1263-1266 sketch out clearly the reciprocity of the pederastic relationship: in spite of its asymmetry, *cháris* requires that the *paîs* makes a response in return for the benefits received. These benefits include the presents which lovers give to their beloved, but also the good advice which the young adult gives to the adolescent, hence the educational value of this sexual relationship. However, sympotic poetry often sings about how the *paîs* does not respond to the demands of the lover.

> Young boy (*paîs*) with the look of a maiden (*parthénos*)
> I seek you, but you don't hear me,
> Not knowing you hold
> the reins
> of my soul.[70]

Several elements of sexual asymmetry are clearly evident here: the lover, overpowered by loving desire, seeks the beloved who does not respond to his requests. Equally the passage could be understood as referring to a desirable delay: the *paîs* should not give in to *érōs* straight away, even if erotic reciprocity is the eventual goal of the relationship between lover and beloved. Lines 1319-1322 of the *Theognidea*, which raise the question of "persuasion" of the beloved, offer another insight into the roles of lover and beloved:

> Young boy (*paîs*), since the goddess Cypris has granted you this charming favour (*cháris*),
> And all the young men think of nothing but your beauty (*eîdos*) lend an ear to my words,
> and, granting me this favour (*cháris*), let them penetrate your heart.
> You know that loving desire (*érōs*) is a heavy burden for a man (*anér*) to bear.[71]

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68 Cf. Theognis, lines 1235-1238, 1344, 1350, 1388 ff. [W.²].

69 Cf. Theognis, lines 1329 ff. [W.²].

70 Anacreon fr. 360 [P.].

71 Theognis, lines 1319-1322 [W.²] based on Carrière, modified.

Here there is a clear distinction between the *paîs* and the *néoi*, to whom the boy is an object of concern. What is important about these lines is, first, the fact that the boy is depicted as an almost inert element. His beauty which arouses desire affects the lovers through their gaze (the word *eîdos* "looks" is linked to the verb *eideîn* = to see). Second, it is clear that the *néoi* are overcome by desire and it is they who appear as the active elements of the scene. They are attempting to persuade the beloved to establish a relationship of *philótēs* (reciprocity is implied by the word *cháris* in line 1321). In this poem, the portrayal of the *paîs* is almost identical to that of the young wife in an epithalamium by Sappho, fragment 112. Both, thanks to Aphrodite, are marked out by their beauty and the desire they arouse in those who see them. The audience is of a similar kind in both cases: for the *paîs*, they are *néoi*, and for the young wife, it is someone who is about to lose the status of *néos*, a young man of an age to marry.[72]

In this erotic context, the question of persuasion is crucial. In lines 1235-1238 of the *Theognidea*, the poet seeks to convince the *paîs* that he is not compelled to do what he does not wish. Asymmetry, thus, does not mean the *paîs* remains inactive, subject to the desires of the lover. Not only does the *paîs* have to be persuaded to grant his *cháris*, but he may indeed have his own "appetites".

> Young boy (*paîs*), like a horse after eating your fill of barleycorns,
> you have come back under my roof,
> Longing for your good rider, the lovely meadow,
> the cool spring water and the shady grove.[73]

Evidently erotic asymmetry does not imply that the *paîs* is an inactive element. If he is generally portrayed as the one who arouses desire, runs away, and only grants his *cháris*, whereas the lover has to pursue him, overcome by *érōs*, and compelled to ask for reciprocation, equally the beloved may also be susceptible to the charm of the one who loves him, and, as in traditional erotic imagery, be like a horse seeking both its rider and the pastures which the rider can offer.[74]

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72 Cf. above, Solon, fr. 27 [W.²].

73 Theognis, lines 1249-1252 [W.²].

74 Cf. Alcman, fr. 1, 47 ff. [D.]; Sappho, fr. 2, 9 [V.] and additionally, Neri 2011: 264.

What, therefore, was the social status of the *paîs* at an aristocratic banquet? It is worth noting that adolescents remained seated on chairs, or occasionally waited on the adults as cupbearers. This is significant, because guests normally lay on couches during the meal.[75] The *Theognidea* provides important evidence on this point. At lines 27-38, which are very informative about the education of aristocrats in the archaic period, the poet advises the *paîs* to make a habit of visiting the *agathoí*, the nobility, since he will be able to learn good things from people who are good. The poet urges the adolescent to eat and drink with noble and good men, and, above all, to sit with them (lines 33 ff. *metà toîsin hízẹ*).[76] If, as seems probable, the banquet with couches had already been introduced into Greece at the time of the *Theognidea,* the fact that a *paîs* would remain seated may denote the difference in social status between adults and adolescents.

The framework suggested here for men's experience of *érōs* involves on the one hand desire for *parthénoi* and on the other hand, for *paîdes*. Both are undoubtedly asymmetrical relationships. Nevertheless, within these relationships, the element of persuasion is fundamental. Archilochus, a seventh-century poet from Paros, tells in one poem[77] of the seduction of a *parthénos* who is the daughter of his old enemy Lycambes and sister to his former fiancée Neobule. The speaker's intention is to persuade the *parthénos*: he mentions her mother favourably, and, to show how he respects her, he explains that his goal is not the divine thing (line 10 *theîon chrêma*, that is, full sexual intercourse),[78] since the other pleasures young men (line 9 *néoisin andrásin*) enjoy will suffice for him. He invites the girl to be persuaded to fulfil what he is asking her for (line 19). It is clear that here the *parthénos* is portrayed as herself having her own desires. A similar situation appears in a poem by Sappho,[79] where the speaker admits to

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75 Cf. Bremmer 1990: 139 ff. and Caciagli 2011: 93 and 168 ff. On the use of couches at banquets, cf. Dentzer 1982.

76 Cf. also Alcaeus, fr. 75, 7 ff. [V.].

77 Archilochus, fr. 196a [W.²].

78 Cf. Degani 1977: 20-23; Degani 2005 [1977]: 13.

79 Cf. Sappho, fr. 102 [V.].

her mother that she can no longer weave at her loom, because she is overcome by her feelings of desire for a *paîs*.[80]

Feminine symmetry?

Was *érōs* between women different from that between men? There are considerable risks of over-interpretation of the evidence, because of the longstanding anachronistic, longstanding assumptions regarding female homoerotocism... One typical example of these anachronistic approaches is that female *érōs* is alleged to be symmetrical, in contrast to the asymmetry of male *érōs*. Some interpretations argue that, outside the inevitable domination typical of patriarchal societies, Greek women experienced erotic relationships in which there was complete reciprocity and genuine affection.[81]

This approach is too rigid, and it is only necessary to look at a few documents to disprove it. Alcman, the Spartan poet from the seventh century BCE, composed, among other works, poems intended to be sung by choruses of girls. They sang of their admiration and erotic attraction towards several female personages. This erotic attraction, which appears in two contexts, is expressed in situations which are the exact inverse of what occurs in the erotic poems said to be pederastic. In fragment 1,[82] the poetic voice is in turn a *parthénos*, and then the members of the chorus (line 68 and line 99)[83]. The choragus, Hagesichora, is portrayed as being at a higher level, especially with regard to her beauty and her singing ability.[84] Nothing is said about her age, but her function means she could be the oldest of the chorus members.[85] The praises of her beauty may suggest that the chorus

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80 Although the word *paîs* can be used for girls and boys, these lines seem to stem from a nuptial context, so it can be assumed that the *paîs* is masculine.

81 Cf. Pippin Burnett 1983: 226; Cantarella 1991 [1988]: 129 ff.; cf. Dover 1978: 174-183.

82 For an overall interpretation of Alcman's fr.1 [D.], cf. Caciagli 2009.

83 The ancient commentaries on Alcman's fr.1 [D.] indicate that the chorus members are *parthénoi*.

84 Cf. lines 45-59 and lines 90-101.

85 Cf. Calame 1977: II, 98-104.

experiences *érōs* for her, but if that is the case it is the higher ranking person who is desired by her inferiors.[86]

In Alcman's fragment 3, the situation is similar. The speaker, who is certainly young, is inferior in status to Astymeloisa, for she speaks of herself as a supplicant (line 81); Astymeloisa, on the other hand, "is the object of the people's solicitude" (line 74 *mélēma dámōi*).[87] She is delicate (line 68), is compared to a bud (line 68) and possesses *cháris* (line 71). What is interesting, however, is that Astymeloisa, desired by the "I" who speaks, does not respond to her.[88] As in fragment 1, the one with the higher status is portrayed as the object of the desire of her inferiors. This problematic situation is perhaps the consequence of the fact that men were members of the audience for these two poems. In men's eyes, girls are always the objects of desire. The point of view of the speakers of the poems thus in fact expresses that of the audience as well.

The case of Sappho's poems is different, however, since some of them presuppose an entirely female audience.[89] Fragments 22 and 96 can only be understood if there is an asymmetry in the *érōs*. In these, Sappho is not a participant in the erotic relationship but simply observes the connection between two women. Here it is important to use the term "women", because the idea that Sappho's "friends" (*phílai*) were all young girls may reflect contemporary prejudices or over-interpretation. In fragment 94, for example, Sappho's interlocutor is often said by commentators to be a *parthénos* who is leaving Sappho to be married, but there is nothing in the text to support this supposition. In any case, Fragment 1 (in which the poet addresses Aphrodite) depicts an erotic situation and a language similar to that found in the male homoerotic relationships about which the poets of the archaic period sang. In Sappho's poem, in fact, the person who loves is overcome by desire (line 3 ff.) and the person who is loved does not respond to the feelings she arouses (line 18). *Eros* is a trap, a *dólos* (line 2) and the lack of

86 Lines 70-76 could suggest symmetrical *érōs* between girls, if those mentioned are assumed to be chorus members. However, this need not necessarily be assumed.

87 Cf. above, Theognis, line 1320 [W.²].

88 Cf. below, Anacreon, fr. 360 [P.]

89 Cf. Aloni 1997: IX ff.

reciprocation is an injustice, an *adikía.*[90] Persuasion is a necessary element (line 15), and, finally, erotic relationships imply flight and pursuit, with an exchange of gifts (lines 21-22).

> Indeed, if she runs away, soon she'll be chasing;
> if she does not accept gifts, yet she will give them;
> if she loves not, soon she'll love,
> even against her will.

This verse seems unspecific, since the verbs in lines 21 and 23 have no direct object. Aphrodite, who is speaking, gives assurances that the beloved girl[91] will not only stop running away, and will accept the gifts she is offered, but will actually pursue, and proffer gifts in her turn. Two possibilities exist: either this passage is saying that the beloved will one day find herself in the same position as the person who is in love,[92] so what is foretold here is a sort of revenge for the lover,[93] or on the other hand the goddess is promising that in the future there will be complete reciprocity between the person who is in love and the person who is the object of this *philótēs*.[94] The first option, however, seems improbable, because it is not consistent with the request that Sappho makes to Aphrodite: she asks her to accomplish "what her heart desires should be accomplished" (lines 26 ff.),[95] that is, that her beloved be willing to enter into a relationship of *philótēs* with her.[96]

The interpretation which suggests that there is complete reciprocity does not, however, imply that there is symmetry. *Philótēs* is a form of relationship which often involves asymmetrical reciprocity. Given that a *paîs*, whether male or female, may not only receive gifts from the lover but also grant *cháris*, and equally that a *paîs* may seek out and desire the lover,[97] it may be useful to compare erotic *philótēs*

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90 Cf. Theognis, line 1282 ff. [W.²].

91 For the gender of the beloved, see the feminine participle *ethéloisa* (willing) in line 22.

92 Cf. Theognis, lines 1329-1334 [W.²].

93 Cf. Giacomelli 1980.

94 Cf. Dover 1978: 177.

95 Sappho, fr. 1, lines 26 ff. [V.].

96 Cf. Sappho, fr. 1, lines 18-20 [V.].

97 Cf. Theognis, lines 1249-1252.

and relations of companionship, *hetaireía*. *Hetaireía* is in fact simply a variant of the *philótēs* relationship.[98] Yet one relationship regarded as a paradigm of warrior companionship, that between Achilles and Patroclus, demonstrates that reciprocity between the partners was not based on equality of age or of social status. Patroclus, who is Achilles' servant[99] and is even frightened of him,[100] is older than him,[101] but not as strong. Nevertheless, despite his higher rank, Achilles abandons his sulking to avenge the death of Patroclus, the companion who expressed the wish to be buried in the same tomb as his *phílos hetaîros*.[102]

The texts which provide evidence for sexuality in antiquity are very often analysed by scholars of the classical and archaic period through the lens of notions of symmetry and asymmetry in erotic relationships. However, this analysis is often hampered by anachronistic projections of understandings of sexual identity. What the texts reveal is that in ancient Greece, *érōs* apparently establishes an asymmetric relationship, whatever the gender of the participants. Desire results in a chase, a flight, rejection, and expectation. The verses of the poets of the archaic period, whether female (Sappho) or male (Alcman, the *Theognidea,* Anacreon) often overturn the dominance in the relationship. Reciprocity is what *érōs* aspires to, and, in this configuration, asymmetry and reciprocity are compatible.

It can therefore be said that certain interpretations have often painted an overly static picture of the reality of the practices of *érōs* and of sexuality in archaic Greece. These practices were much more varied and complex than are modern concepts about the social relationships of sex, or than any notion of equivalence between "sexual penetration" and "social hierarchy". Notions of symmetry or asymmetry, of equality or domination tell us less about the Greeks than about the scholars who study them. To the question "what is at

98 Cf. Caciagli 2011: 56 ff.
99 Cf. *Iliad*, XVIIII, 151 ff.
100 Cf. *Iliad*, XI, 649-654.
101 Cf. *Iliad*, XI, 786-789.
102 Cf. *Iliad*, XXIII, 77-83.

stake in *érōs"*, a Greek man (or woman) of the archaic period would probably have quite simply replied "reciprocity (*philótēs*)".

Translated by Anne STEVENS

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