

## PEDERASTY IN ANCIENT GREECE

**Branka Ljiljak**

Juridicum, Universitat Wien, Austria, e-mail: djosa56@hotmail.com

**Summary:** *Homosexuality is not a phenomenon of the new era, nor it is a “fad”, it dates back to the beginning of humankind. The socio-political environment, socio-economic moments, cultural development, military campaigns, the position of woman during a particular period in history, were fertile soil for the creation of an acceptable model of behavior in a society. The intended objective of this paper is to analyze pederasty from legal-historical and legal-anthropological aspects. However, in order for any judgment to be made about this unusual phenomenon, which includes custom and law, its essence, history and evolution and causes must be taken into account. Methodologically, by analyzing historical facts, the paper is trying to present opinions in favor and against the acceptance of homosexual behavior as ethical in the global sense.*

**Keywords:** *morals, Ancient Greece, homosexual, society*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The question is whether homosexuality is natural or unnatural, healthy or morbid, legitimate or illegitimate, pleasing to God or blasphemous, moral or immoral. Any act may be attractive or repulsive to me or any other individual, but the fact of the matter is that any act may induce good or bad consequences. The socio-political environment, socio-economic moments, cultural development, military campaigns, the position of woman in a particular period of history, were fertile soil for the creation of an acceptable model of behavior in a society.

### 2. CLAN SOCIETY

In clan societies homosexual acts were practiced in three basic forms[1]: intergenerational - within the initiation rituals; trans-sexual –through a phenomenon called berdache[2] and egalitarian – as a form of friendship of men. In most of those cultures homosexual behavior and the very act of practicing sex with the same sex of an individual had never been the basis for assigning an individual his or her social identity. The homosexual act has been interpreted and classified in line with its other aspects relevant for the internal norms of a society. Social opinions of sexual acts haven't been formed based on a sexual orientation or the gender of participants, but based on the roles those participants would assume, for instance, whether they had been active or passive. An active role was associated with manhood and a passive one with womanhood or lack of manhood.

### 3. HOMOSEXUALITY IN ANCIENT PERIOD

In ancient times same sex love, love between men was quite popular and was not rare for the Assyrians, Jews or in slave societies like the Egyptian. Namely, homosexual relations and even marriages, in addition to incest-based marriages, were frequent in Egypt. Homosexuality was not just the privilege of the elite but the slaves looked at it with much pride.

### 4. ANCIENT GREECE

In Ancient Greece from the Archaic Period, same sex relations existed mostly in the form of the pederasty relationship (paiderasteia) [3] between an adult free man – the lover (erast, erastai, eispnelas- „the one who inspires“) and a favorite, an adolescent (eromenos, eronomoi- „the loved one“). Martha Nussbaum explains that an erastis not “a filthy old man”,[4] because the difference in age between an erast and his eromenos often was not large. An eromenos may also become erast once he turns 18. Historians have different explanations for this which vary from the opinion that pederasty had evolved as a form of birth control method to the opinion that this had been an initiation ritual. A free love affair with younger girls was unusual in Greece (!), however, love affairs with efebos, young boys, was an everyday occurrence. Although the Ancient Greeks were excellent warriors, philosophers, artists, unbelievable politicians, their attitude towards sexuality/homosexuality was for the most part different, and for many today, unacceptable, deviant and immoral. They didn't differentiate between a homosexual and heterosexual.[5] An adult free citizen could often, in addition to his young lover, have a woman lover (pallake), use the services of prostitutes (hetairai) or enjoy the love of house slaves; or be a good husband and a father. People were not classified as “straight”, “gay” or “bi” either. Historians had many debates about whether such love is sublime or sodomic, whether it is the source of anxiousness or a reason to celebrate. Even the Greeks themselves sometimes wholeheartedly approved it and sometimes sharply criticized it. Over time, numerous solutions were proposed to address these apparently contradicting opinions. By taking into account the era when pederasty flourished in Greece, Mayer thinks that pederasty relations were a rather extreme form of bushido, comrades-in-arms behavior such as the one of Achilles and Patroclus mentioned in Homer's Iliad, rather than behavior of lovers in the modern sense of the word, or any other sense but of relationship of extremely good friends. The Greeks were the first to institutionalize pederasty, to admire it and ascribe divinity to it.[7] As a norm of primarily aristocratic conduct, of educational character, pederasty had become a key element of the Ancient Greek culture from Homer onward. Homosexuality in Ancient Greece hadn't just been usual, but it was recommendable, and even obligatory. The education of the ruling class was based on pederasty, which was required from all citizens, and therefore it represented a kind of social norm. Pederasty relationships were used for the introduction into the world of adults and the creation of responsibility. To that end adult men were expected to educate and train young boys. It is interesting that a boy of 12 or 17 years of age could not be taught about combat and morals by his father, uncle or cousin but it had to be his “suitor” who would teach him responsibility, philosophy, war techniques, only through the enchanted world of pederasty. Their relationship is partly based on mutual love and sexual passion and partly on political interest. Also, pederasty had been an integral part of military training and organization. Military training is inseparable from other aspects of education because Greeks were in constant warfare.

Pederasty had been impossible to separate from sports in Greece. Gymnasiums (γυμνάσιον – *gymnos* means naked), were the main places where young boys and men got together and places where men taught their young favorites the skills of war, sports and philosophy. There, far away from the eyes of the public, they could enjoy friendship, observe the naked bodies of young boys and feed their lust. Men and boys practiced naked in gymnasiums and women were prohibited. The oginisin his second book quotes the verse: “Happy is the lover who exercises and then goes home to sleep all day long with a handsome boy”. [8]

In Greece, it was usual for a man to be attracted by the beauty of boys, even more than by the beauty of women. The women’s social position considerably influenced the popularization of pederasty. Women were degraded in an intellectual and physical sense, they didn’t take part in feasts and they were excluded from the public life. They considered that a woman ought to be a mother, a good wife, an oracle and a prostitute (hetairai), but not a warrior, politician, athlete, philosopher, poet, or mathematician; she didn’t have the right to vote or to discharge public office. There was no place for a woman in the public life, she was kept in the house, and therefore the Greek literature, except for the satire, has no mention of her.

The Spartans believed that the love of an older man, a successful aristocrat, towards a young boy was a basis for creation of free citizens and democracy. The only way for an eronomoi, a middle class boy, to enter the circle of a higher class was to become the lover of an older and powerful mentor. It would often happen that lovers would bring their favorites to their houses and take care of their education and costs of living. The state benefited from those relationships, claimed ancient writers. Such friendships were binding in the sense that when the young boy would commit a crime his lover would be the one punished. Parents gladly gave their children – underage boys (12-17 years of age), to the custody of Erastais, in exchange for material gain. [9] For their “friendship” young boys would get cattle, expensive clothes, weapons, they were flattered to be full members of a circle of friends. They had a comfortable life style, the career of a warrior, a respectful citizen and philosopher. Only those young boys who surrendered their bodies and soul to the love of men, could later on become statesmen, points out Aristophanes. [10] By the 5th century, a large number of Athenians, whether coming from the ranks of aristocrats or free citizens, experienced the charms of pederasty.

Same sex love, among men in Ancient times expanded to all countries of East Mediterranean. However, physiologically and psychologically it remained a puzzle why it was so widespread in Greece out of all places. Besides youth, the rigid Greek criteria of beauty were also an ideal. Nothing points to the fact that Greeks were of different body constitution than other nations. The explanation should be sought in sociological factors, in a specific ideal of beauty. The ancient ideal of a man’s beauty (the closest to the appearance of an adolescent) was represented in: wide shoulders, a developed torso, muscles, a distinctively narrow waist, plump buttocks, large thighs, medium height, a straight nose, a nicely shaped lower lip, a round chin, large eyes, thick hair, and small genitals (men with large penises were compared to monkeys, [11] while on the other hand, it was more acceptable that a man with a passive role had smaller genitals compared to an active one). In Ancient Sparta there was an annual celebration (a festival or a dance) organized with the aim of glorifying youth and beauty – *gimnopedia* [12], during which naked young boys displayed their athletic and martial skills through their dances. This custom was introduced in 668 BC simultaneously with the custom for naked athletes to apply oil to their bodies in order to draw attention to their beauty. [13] The festival was organized in the summer time and

was dedicated to Apollo (and /or, according to Plutarch, to Athens). The military style of dances celebrated military successes and gave support to military campaigns in Spartan society. Today, this festival could be freely called an "Ancient Greek Pride Parade".

## 5. CONCLUSION

Both history of law and history in general record that social constructs such as - homosexuality, pedophilia, prostitution, 'Gay Pride' and the promotion of equality of rights of homosexuals and heterosexuals are neither new, nor 'products' of 20-21-th century; on the contrary, their roots date back to the distant history of civilization. Pederasty occupies an important place in the history of law, as an institute that used to shape social reality through norms of behavior in communities of ancient Greece; further, it was reflected in other areas of creativity of ancient times - in literature, poetry, painting, sculpture. In Serbia, the word 'pederasty' is used in a pejorative sense.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- [1] David F.Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988: 25-88), *Homosexual Relations in Kinship-Structured Societies, Egalitarian* 1988:73)
- [2] Roscoe, Will. *The Zuni Man-Woman* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press 1991:2,28,146)
- [3] Oxford Dictionaries, at: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/pederasty?searchDictCode=all>
- [4] Martha Nussbaum, *Platonic Love and Colorado Law: The Relevance of Ancient Greek Norms to Modern Sexual Controversies, Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 309
- [5] Itsaso Guerrero (Posted on 11 December, 2013), *Homosexuality back to the Ancient Greeks*, downloaded: 07.02.2015., at: <https://timetunnels.wordpress.com/2013/12/11/homosexuality-back-to-the-ancient-greeks/>
- [6] James Davidson, "Mad about the boy", downloaded: 10.10.2007, at: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/nov/10/history.society>
- [7] „Lovers' Legends“ downloaded 18.01.2014 at: <http://www.sexarchive.info/BIB/LLGGM/LLGGM.html>
- [8] Gordon L. Fain, *Ancient Greek Epigrams: Major Poets in Verse Translation*, University of California Press, 2010, p.17
- [9] Morus, Lewinsohn Richard, „Eine Weltgeschichte der Sexualität“, Rowohlt Verlag, Hamburg 1956, pp.63-65
- [10] Plato, „Symposium about love“ XVI, Dereta 2003
- [11] Hein van Dolen, *Greek homosexuality*, downloaded: 07.02.2014., at: <http://www.livius.org/ho-hz/homosexuality/homosexuality.html>
- [12] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, downloaded 07.02.2014 at: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gymnopaedia>.
- [13] „Gimnopediā“, downloaded: 10.02.2014., at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gymnopaedia> David F.Greenberg, *Homosexual Relations in Kinship-Structured Societies, Egalitarian* 1988, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press