

# STONEHENGE TO STONEWALL

## Or Gay History In A Nutshell

### What's in a Name?

BY CHARLIE EMOND

Was Alexander the Great gay?

He lived in a warrior culture that believed same-sex relationships to be more appropriate for soldiers. He had male lovers and he also had many wives. However, he seems to have truly loved only men. He was so infatuated with a certain Hephaestion, that upon the guy's death from a fever when they returned from India, he refused food and drink for three days, cut his hair and that of all his horses, ordered mourning throughout the empire, and had the doctors hanged. This was not just some trick he picked up at a bar on the Ganges! Alexander was seriously in love. But was he "homosexual?"

One of our most brilliant historians, John Boswell, has addressed this issue: "Any person in the past whose erotic and romantic interest was predominately directed toward members of his/her own gender regardless of how conscious they were of this as a distinguishing characterological feature can legitimately be called gay." That's our Boswell all right!

### Everybody into Bed!

Throughout most of western history, same-sex activity didn't have a special name. People of the same sex slept together all the time and had sex whenever the opportunity presented itself — which, by all accounts, was often. The norm was to pile as many people into one bed as it would hold! Even the idea of having your own room in a hotel is very new to humankind. Up until this century, you would share your bed at an inn with strangers, often several of them. Check out the beginning of Moby Dick!

Some terms that were used in earlier times include "sodomite," "Uranian," "urning," "invert," "Ganymede," "mollie," and, of course, the usual inventive turns of phrase that indicated a person with a different slant on the sexual thing. As a community, we are currently trying out the word "queer" — but don't get me started on that!

The recipients of most of the naming attention were effeminate men, because they loved to dress up and flock together for tea. They were very conspicuous to the folks around them! It was flamboyance that got them attention, not the activity which went on in so many beds at night.

### Gay or Homosexual?

The term "gay" has a long — if somewhat sordid and shaky — histo-

ry. It can be traced back to the middle ages, but there is no proof that it was ever used in the modern way. "Homosexual" continues to be the more generally used term even with its clinical overtones, but that seems to be changing.

The happily married straight men haunting our rest areas and the women in our prisons may engage in same-sex activity, but they tend to resist any attempt to call them "gay," "lesbian," or even "bisexual." They are actually a connection to our past, a time when you didn't name it, you just did it!

Boswell argues that we have come to prefer the term "gay" because we have chosen it our for ourselves, rather than "homosexual," which was coined by psychiatrists who probably charged us by the hour while they were at it. (This comes from the folks who brought you electroshock therapy!)

The term "lesbian" has a rich history at least in its origin, because it goes back to the island where the great poet Sappho lived in the golden age of Greece. We will meet her and her girlfriends at a later time, but the term has a lovely provenance.

Kinsey proposed a scale of one to six, from completely heterosexual to completely homosexual. (I myself am a seven or quite possibly an eight on this scale!) But think about it. Would all of the men and women you know fit neatly into one of six

categories? What about straight men who crossdress? What about transsexuals? What about Marv Albert? Pee Wee Herman? Anne Heche? Eddie Murphy & Divine Brown? That's about 20 different categories right there!

other men and women with other women. We need to understand that it has always been so. And we need to accept the fact that those of us who do need all the help we can get from those of us who did!

Way to go Alexander!

*Up until this century, you would share your bed at an inn with strangers, often several of them. Check out the beginning of Moby Dick!*

### These Are Our People After All

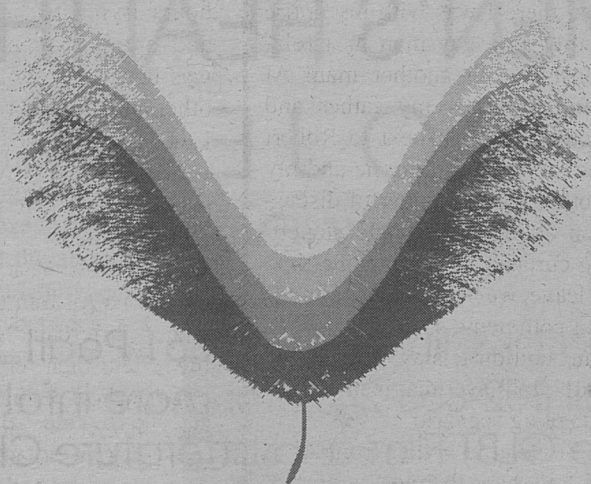
I tend to come down on the side of most people who look at the sweep of history and see all this homosexual activity going on and call it natural. The naming doesn't matter as much as the connection. We need that connection to those in history who fell in love with or willingly had sex with someone of the same sex. These are our brothers and sisters...whether they knew it or not.

It doesn't matter that Sappho didn't carry a rainbow flag down Church Street singing "We Shall Overcome," and it doesn't matter that Herman Melville never put a pink triangle sticker on his horse. After all, men will fall in love with

### Next time: Sex in a Cave!

For more information I would suggest *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* by John Boswell, University of Chicago Press, 1980. This is a brilliant book, even if one must choose between reading the text and reading the equally informative footnotes. It is the foundation stone of a gay library and often quoted by history textbook writers. ▼

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