

# STONEHENGE TO STONEWALL

Or Gay History In A Nutshell

BY CHARLIE EMOND

After spending the last couple of columns traipsing across the burning sands of Israel, it is time for a break at the oasis! (Besides, I have to set the scene for the arrival of Jesus Christ.) Here, then, is a culture in which we all might like to have lived. Pitch your tent, cool your feet and enjoy!

## Everybody's doing it!

In ancient Greece, as in other early cultures, homosexuality was an unremarkable and common aspect of life. The idea of separating people into gay and straight camps would have confused the hell out of your average Greek.

The same goes for above-average Greeks. To Plato, same-sex love was the only real and lasting love, vital to democracy itself. Homer presented the example of Achilles and Patroclus, admired through the ages as the best example of true love. Xenophon spoke for them all when he said that homosexuality is just a part of human nature. Philostratus complained that one boy who had rejected him was "opposing the commands of nature."

Use of the term "boy" and implications of pederasty often come up when studying the Greeks. It is important to note

that, as in all of antiquity, there were laws against sex with a minor child or any use of force. However, they tended to take puberty as a natural sign of sexual maturity, and were therefore comfortable with consensual sexual activity at an earlier age than we are today.

The most common Greek same-sex relationships were between an older mentor and a younger man. Marriage was a legal business undertaken later in life mainly to settle problems surrounding inheritance. (To quote one Roman to his wife on their wedding day, "My sex life is none of your business!")

## Nobody here but us chicken farmers...

The golden age of Greece is filled with famous pairs of male lovers; I could insert a long list here, but you'd miss the rest of the story. Hercules is said to have had 14 himself, but he was the son of a Greek god — what do you expect? His world of brave warriors was very much a world of same-sex relationships; we'll take a closer look at it next time.

There was even a version of the Advocate classifieds. Greek pottery contained many depictions of older men offering cock-

erels — chickens — to younger men to gain favor. (Yes, the Greeks made the same link between "cockere!" and "cock" you're making right now!) Conservative historians claim that the man is a farmer selling chickens. But countless jars are painted with these images; others show feminine-looking boys in frilly frocks or two men "wrestling." Some of these pots are definitely X-rated!

Just as with the classifieds, these drawings reflect society's idea of male beauty. In looking at them, you will immediately notice that they considered small, delicate genitals beautiful and larger genitals ugly. (K.J. Dover's Greek Homosexuality devotes 10 pages to explaining this cultural quirk!)

## Meanwhile, back in the kitchen

Women were free to relate to each other in any way that caught their fancy. Unmarried women had only to worry about getting pregnant and ruining chances at a good husband. The only man a married woman could legally have sex with was her husband, although he was free to roam. We can conclude from this setup that women probably did a lot of "relating" to each

other. Plutarch reports that in Sparta, love between women was common "and even the most respectable women become infatuated with girls."

This was also the time of Sappho, one of the world's greatest love poets, who lived on the island of Lesbos. My Western Civilization text identifies her as bisexual because she was married (therefore she can't be lesbian, right?). However, the fact remains that her timeless poetry is addressed to other women.

## The eagle has landed!

Greek legend has it that Zeus, king of the gods, was lazing around Mount Olympus one day when he spied a gorgeous young Trojan shepherd named Ganymede tending sheep on a hillside. Zeus changed himself into an eagle and, like Superman, swooped down and carried the boy off to Olympus for sex. (This story was popular during the Renaissance. More than 200 paintings and drawings survive, plus plays and stories. You know where their minds were!)

Zeus had his fling and decided to keep the lad around as a sort of houseboy. This caused family problems, since he had to fire Hebe, who had the job before

Ganymede. Hebe was the daughter of the queen of the gods; you can bet it was icy around that dinner table!

When Ganymede died (he was mortal, after all), he was turned into the constellation Aquarius. This provides a connection worth pondering. The 1968 musical Hair contained that prophetic song about the "dawning of the Age of Aquarius." This song became a hit in 1969, the year the Stonewall riots touched off the gay liberation movement. The Greeks gave us democracy; why not a little mystical shove toward our own version of their Golden Age?

**For further reading:** If you want to read the story of Ganymede for yourself, dip into Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 10:55-61 or Virgil's *Aeneid* 5:250-257. For further insight into Greek thought, read Plato's *Symposium*. For a detailed commentary on Greek homosexuality, KJ Dover's *Greek Homosexuality* is a classic. He includes pages and pages of excellent photos. ▼

Charlie Emond teaches in Springfield. He has a bachelor's degree from Queens College and master's degrees from both Dartmouth and Keene State.

He teaches college history courses including a course he developed: *Hidden History: Homosexuality in Western Civilization*.

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