

A close-up photograph of a marble sculpture of a woman's face, looking downwards. The sculpture is highly detailed, showing the texture of the marble and the curls of her hair. The lighting is soft, highlighting the contours of her face.

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HISTORY**

Greek and Roman Sexualities

A SOURCEBOOK

Jennifer Larson

Greek and Roman Sexualities: A Sourcebook

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A Sourcebook

JENNIFER LARSON

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For Christina A. Clark

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Using This Book 19

1 Sexuality and the Gods 23

- 1.1 Homer *Iliad* 14.159–86, 214–21, 312–51. 27
- 1.2 Hesiod *Theogony* 886–929. 28
- 1.3 Homer *Odyssey* 5.118–29. 30
- 1.4 Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* 4–20. 31
- 1.5 Aeschylus *Danaids* TrGF 3 Fr. 44.1–7. 32
- 1.6 Aristophanes *Acharnians* 259–78. 33
- 1.7 Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 387–98. 33
- 1.8 Aristotle *The Constitution of Athens* 3.5. 33
- 1.9 Theocritus *Idylls* 15.65–149. 33
- 1.10 Catullus *Songs* 63.1–26. 36
- 1.11 Livy *History of Rome* 39.8.3–39.13.14. 37
- 1.12 Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 4.2–3. 41
- 1.13 Ovid *Fasti* 4.224–44. 41
- 1.14 *Priapea* 10–17, 25–31, 67–70. 42
- 1.15 Pausanias *Description of Greece* 7.17.9–12. 43
- 1.16 Clement of Alexandria *Exhortation to the Greeks* 2.17–18, 29–30. 44
- 1.17 Augustine *City of God* 6.9. 45
- 1.18 Scholiast on Lucian *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 2.1, 7.4 (Rabe). 47

2 Deities of Desire: Their Nature and Effects 49

- 2.1 Homer *Iliad* 3.380–420. 52
- 2.2 Hesiod *Theogony* 114–22, 173–206. 53
- 2.3 Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* 45–246. 54
- 2.4 Sappho Frs. 31, 47, 130 Lobel-Page. 59
- 2.5 Anacreon *PMG* 413. 60
- 2.6 Ibycus *PMG* 286. 60
- 2.7 Empedocles Fr. 17.15–29 Diels-Kranz. 61

- 2.8 Euripides *Hippolytus* 170–222, 525–64. 61
- 2.9 Aristophanes *Birds* 673–702. 63
- 2.10 Plato *Symposium* 180c–181c, 189c–193d. 64
- 2.11 Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1370b. 68
- 2.12 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1167a 3–8. 68
- 2.13 Asclepiades *Greek Anthology* 5.210, 5.189, 12.105. 69
- 2.14 Posidippus *Greek Anthology* 5.211. 69
- 2.15 Apollonius of Rhodes *Argonautica* 3.275–98. 70
- 2.16 Lucretius *On the Nature of Things* 1–43. 70
- 2.17 Vergil *Georgics* 3.242–263. 71
- 2.18 Vergil *Aeneid* 4.296–330 72
- 2.19 Propertius *Elegies* 1.1. 73
- 2.20 Ovid *Amores* 1.5. 74
- 2.21 Sulpicia [Tib.] 3.18. 75
- 2.22 Pausanias *Description of Greece* 1.27.1–4. 75
- 2.23 Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 5.22–3. 76

3 Anxiety, Suspicion and Blame 79

- 3.1 Hesiod *Theogony* 565–612. 82
- 3.2 Hesiod *Works and Days* 53–105. 83
- 3.3 Homer *Odyssey* 10.326–47. 85
- 3.4 Euripides *Hippolytus* 616–68. 85
- 3.5 Aristophanes *Women at the Thesmophoria* 466–519. 87
- 3.6 Euripides *Bacchae* 215–262, 314–27. 88
- 3.7 Antiphon *Against the Stepmother for Poisoning* 1.14–20. 90
- 3.8 Demosthenes *Against Androtion* 22.30–32. 91
- 3.9 Aeschines *Against Timarchus* 1.21. 92
- 3.10 Ritual law from Methymna IG XII, 2.499 (= LSCG 127). 92
- 3.11 *To Herennius on Rhetoric* 4.16.23. 92
- 3.12 Cicero *For Caelius* 13.30–16.36. 93
- 3.13 Catullus *Songs* 57. 95
- 3.14 Cicero *Philippics* 2.44–5. 96
- 3.15 Livy *History of Rome* 34.4.1–20, 34.6.16. 96
- 3.16 Seneca the Elder *Controversiae* 1 Pref. 8–9. 99
- 3.17 Martial *Epigrams* 5.61. 99
- 3.18 Juvenal *Satires* 2.82–116, 6.268–341. 100
- 3.19 Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* 6.12. 102
- 3.20 Curse tablet. *Suppl. Mag.* 1.38. 103
- 3.21 Tertullian *On the Apparel of Women* 1.1.1–3, 2.2.4–6. 103

4 Pederasty and Male Homoerotic Relations 107

- 4.1 Graffiti from Thera. *IG XII* 3.536, 537, 540, 542, 543, 550. 110
- 4.2 Theognis *Elegies* 1259–70. 111
- 4.3 Anacreon *PMG* 360, 407. 111
- 4.4 Aristophanes *Clouds* 957–1029. 112
- 4.5 Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War* 6.54.1–4, 6.56.1–57.4. 114
- 4.6 Plato *Symposium* 181c–184c. 115
- 4.7 Plato *Phaedrus* 255a–256d. 118
- 4.8 Xenophon *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 2.12–14. 119
- 4.9 Xenophon *Symposium* 8.16–22. 120
- 4.10 Plato *Laws* 636b–d. 121
- 4.11 Ephorus of Cyme *FrGrHist* 70 F 149. 121
- 4.12 Plautus *Casina* 449–70. 123
- 4.13 Vergil *Eclogues* 2.1–27. 124
- 4.14 Cicero *On the Republic* 4.3–4. 125
- 4.15 Petronius *Satyrica* 85–7. 125
- 4.16 Martial *Epigrams* 11.43. 127
- 4.17 Plutarch *Life of Solon* 1.2–3. 127
- 4.18 Plutarch *Life of Pelopidas* 18. 128
- 4.19 Statius *Silvae* 2.6.35–58. 129
- 4.20 Suetonius *The Twelve Caesars* 1.49 (Caesar); 7.22 (Galba). 129
- 4.21 Aelian *Various History* 3.10. 130
- 4.22 Augustine *Confessions* 3.8. 131

5 Female Homosocial and Homoerotic Relations 133

- 5.1 Alcman *PMG* Fr. 1.36–101, Fr. 3.61–85. 136
- 5.2 Sappho Fr. 1, 16 Lobel-Page. 139
- 5.3 Anacreon *PMG* 358. 141
- 5.4 Nossis *Greek Anthology* 5.170, 6.275, 9.604. 141
- 5.5 Herodas *Mimes* 6. 141
- 5.6 Asclepiades *Greek Anthology* 5.207. 145
- 5.7 Ovid *Metamorphoses* 9.702–97. 145
- 5.8 Seneca the Elder *Controversiae* 1.2.23. 148
- 5.9 Phaedrus *Fables* 4.16. 148
- 5.10 Paul *Letter to the Romans* 1.22–32. 149
- 5.11 Martial *Epigrams* 1.90, 7.67. 149
- 5.12 Plutarch *Life of Lycurgus* 18.4. 150
- 5.13 Artemidorus of Daldis *Interpretation of Dreams* 1.80. 150
- 5.14 Magical papyrus with binding spell. *PGM* 32. 151

- 5.15 Tatian *Address to the Greeks* 33. 151
- 5.16 Lucian *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 5. 152
- 5.17 Tertullian *On the Pallium* 4.9. 153
- 5.18 Tertullian *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 16.6. 154

6 Philosophical and Medical Models of the Body and Sexuality 157

- 6.1 Hesiod *Works and Days* 582–8. 160
- 6.2 Hippocrates *On Generation* 1.1–3, 4 Joly. 160
- 6.3 Hippocrates *On Diseases of Virgins* 8.468 Littré. 161
- 6.4 Plato *Timaeus* 91b–d. 162
- 6.5 Plato *Laws* 838a–841a. 162
- 6.6 Aristotle *Generation of Animals* 727b–728a (selections), 737a. 167
- 6.7 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1118a 8–9. 168
- 6.8 Epicurus *Sententiae Vaticanae* 51 Muehll. 169
- 6.9 Lucretius *On the Nature of Things* 4.1037–1208. 169
- 6.10 Philo of Alexandria *The Special Laws* 1.1–2. 173
- 6.11 Musonius Rufus 12 (*Concerning Sexual Pleasures*). 175
- 6.12 Dio Chrysostom *Orations* 36.55–6. 176
- 6.13 Soranus *Gynecology* 1.8 (33), 1.10 (37). 176
- 6.14 Galen *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* 14.2, 14.6 (selections), 15.3. 178
- 6.15 Galen *On Semen* 1.16 (selections). 179
- 6.16 Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 6.2.46, 72; 7.1.129–31; 10.1.118. 180
- 6.17 Origen *Against Celsus* 4.48. 181

7 Virginity, Chastity, and Modesty 183

- 7.1 Homer *Odyssey* 6.251–88. 186
- 7.2 Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* 1–44. 187
- 7.3 Herodotus *Histories* 1.8–12. 188
- 7.4 Euripides *Hippolytus* 73–87. 189
- 7.5 Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.2.1–2. 190
- 7.6 Theopompus of Chios *FGrHist* 115 F 204. 190
- 7.7 Ritual law from Cyrene. *LSCG Supp.* 115.A11–15, B 1–23. 191
- 7.8 Catullus *Songs* 61.46–118. 192
- 7.9 Cornelius Nepos *Lives of Eminent Commanders* Preface 1–8. 194
- 7.10 Propertius *Elegies* 2.33a. 194
- 7.11 Seneca the Elder *Controversiae* 4 Preface 10. 195
- 7.12 Valerius Maximus *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 6.1.1–4. 195

- 7.13 Plutarch *Life of Numa* 9.5–10.7. 196
- 7.14 Soranus *Gynecology* 1.7 (30–32). 198
- 7.15 *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 7–12. 200
- 7.16 Heliodorus *Aethiopica* 5.4.4–5, 10.7.6–10.9.4. 201
- 7.17 Ammianus Marcellinus *History* 25.4.2–3. 202

8 Marital Sexuality 205

- 8.1 Homer *Odyssey* 6.175–85. 208
- 8.2 Homer *Odyssey* 23.164–232. 209
- 8.3 Sophocles *Antigone* 806–16, 890–925. 211
- 8.4 Euripides *Medea* 214–66. 212
- 8.5 Euripides *Suppliants* 990–1030. 213
- 8.6 Euripides *Helen* 625–59. 215
- 8.7 Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 99–166. 216
- 8.8 Isaeus 10.18–20. 219
- 8.9 Xenophon *Symposium* 9.1–7. 220
- 8.10 Xenophon *Economics* 10.2–13. 221
- 8.11 Pseudo-Demosthenes *Against Neaera* 59.122. 222
- 8.12 Roman gravestone. *CIL* I² 1221. 222
- 8.13 Musonius Rufus 13a (*On the Goal of Marriage*). 223
- 8.14 Paul *First Letter to the Corinthians* 7.1–9. 223
- 8.15 Plutarch *Advice on Marriage* 16–18 (= *Moralia* 140b–146a). 224
- 8.16 Plutarch *Life of Lycurgus* 15.3–9. 224
- 8.17 Plutarch *Life of Solon* 20.2–3. 226
- 8.18 Plutarch *Life of Cato the Younger* 25.2–5. 226
- 8.19 Plutarch *Dialogue on Love* 749d–750a, 750b–e, 751b–52a. 227
- 8.20 Flavius Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.7.2–6 (selections). 230
- 8.21 Pliny the Younger *Letters* 7.5. 232
- 8.22 Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* 1.6.1–6. 233

9 Transgression and Deviance 235

- 9.1 Homer *Iliad* 3.38–75. 239
- 9.2 Homer *Odyssey* 8.266–370. 240
- 9.3 Archilochus Fr. 196a West Vol. 1. 242
- 9.4 Herodotus *Histories* 5.92G.1–4. 244
- 9.5 Euripides *Cretans TrGF* 5.1, F 472e lines 4–52. 244
- 9.6 Sophocles *Oedipus the King* 1205–21. 246
- 9.7 Euripides *Bacchae* 912–62. 246
- 9.8 Lysias *On the Murder of Eratosthenes* 1.30–33. 249

- 9.9 Aeschines *Against Timarchus* 1.14–16. 249
- 9.10 *Leviticus* 18 (Septuagint). 250
- 9.11 Catullus *Songs* 89–91. 251
- 9.12 Livy *History of Rome* 1.9, 1.58. 252
- 9.13 Ovid *The Art of Love* 1.659–78. 255
- 9.14 Petronius *Satyrica* 16–26. 255
- 9.15 Suetonius *The Twelve Caesars* 6.28–9 (Nero). 260
- 9.16 Artemidorus of Daldis *Interpretation of Dreams* 1.79. 261
- 9.17 Pausanias *Description of Greece* 4.16.9–10. 261
- 9.18 Julius Paulus Prudentissimus *Opinions* 2.26.1–17. 262

10 Prostitutes and Courtesans 265

- 10.1 Pindar Fr. 122 Snell-Maehler. 268
- 10.2 Herodotus *Histories* 1.199.1–5. 269
- 10.3 Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.11.1–15. 270
- 10.4 Pseudo-Demosthenes *Against Neaera* 59.17–25. 273
- 10.5 Philemon *The Brothers* PCG 7, Fr. 3. 274
- 10.6 Plato (?) *Greek Anthology* 6.1. 275
- 10.7 Antipater of Sidon *Greek Anthology* 7.218. 275
- 10.8 Horace *Satires* 1.2.82–105. 275
- 10.9 Horace *Odes* 1.25. 276
- 10.10 Strabo *Geography* 8.6.20. 277
- 10.11 Seneca the Elder *Controversiae* 1.2.5–7. 277
- 10.12 Valerius Maximus *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 2.10.8. 278
- 10.13 Graffiti from Pompeii. *CIL* 4.2175, 2192–3, 2248, 2259, 3999, 8949. 279
- 10.14 Plutarch *Life of Pericles* 24.1–7. 279
- 10.15 Martial *Epigrams* 1.34. 280
- 10.16 Juvenal *Satires* 6.115–32. 281
- 10.17 Dio Chrysostom *Orations* 7.133–9. 281
- 10.18 Tacitus *Annals* 2.85. 283
- 10.19 Lucian *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 3. 283
- 10.20 Justin Martyr *Apology* 1.27.1–5. 285
- 10.21 Athenaeus *The Philosophers at Dinner* 13.590d–91d. 285

Notes 288

Bibliography 302

Index of Sources 312

Index 316

Introduction

In this volume, readers will find a broad variety of texts illustrating attitudes toward sexuality and gender in the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome. Some of the selections are familiar to any student of Classics, while others will be new to most readers. Chronologically, they stretch from the eighth century BCE, when the Homeric epics were composed, through the fifth century CE, when the Christian father Augustine reflected on the sexual mores of paganism in a Mediterranean world that was rapidly turning toward Christianity. Poets, historians, scholars, philosophers, lawgivers, physicians, sorcerers, and inscribers of graffiti are represented. That these voices are almost exclusively male is something all readers should keep in mind when using this book. Unlike the written culture of our modern world, ancient writings were typically products of a male perspective on life, and for the most part, the authors of the texts that follow were men of education and privilege. Therefore, as varied as the texts here appear to be, for the most part they represent the thought of a relatively small (though influential) slice of society.

How much of a difference does this make? It depends on our concept of history. If we approach history as a narrative of outstanding cultural achievements, great thinkers, and pivotal events, then what has been preserved to the modern day is a trove of valuable information (with the caveat that what ends up being recognised as 'great' has been decided in part by this same small group of people). If, on the other hand, we wish to learn more about the everyday experiences of ordinary people, or even influential and famous people who happened to be female, the sources available to us can be misleading. We are forced to examine them more carefully and critically, in the hope of uncovering precious insights into all that has been lost. I hope that this book will be helpful to readers pursuing both these types of history.

In the United States, most of us live in a defiantly monolingual culture, and it is easy to forget that a translation is just that – not the original text, but a creative and scholarly product that seeks to accurately convey the thought and aesthetic of the original. Because I have chosen and translated all the texts in this book myself, the process of translation and its implications for the experience of students have been uppermost in my mind throughout its preparation. Sourcebooks are typically compiled by licensing selections from existing works by a number of translators. Where the translations

are all relatively recent (which is not always the case), this method works reasonably well, because the editor is able to draw upon the specialised expertise of translators working in various fields. However, even under ideal conditions, this approach has drawbacks, because every translator is faced with a myriad of choices when approaching a text. Should poetic originals be rendered as verse in English? Should the final product reflect stylistic features of the original even at the expense of readability in English? Do hints of the original syntax and sentence structure, and the literal translation of idioms help the reader grasp the 'otherness' of the culture under study, or do they amount to clumsy 'translationese'? To what degree should cultural references unfamiliar to the reader be clarified in the translated text itself, and when should they be relegated to notes? In texts dealing with sexuality, how should colloquial, explicit, and obscene terms be rendered in English? These are just a few of the choices facing each translator, and each translator inevitably makes different choices based on personal preference and the perceived needs of the audience for the translation. These varied choices can result in compilations that are wildly inconsistent in the vocabulary used for key terms, as well as accessibility to general readers, and the aesthetics of the final product.

Only in the twenty-first century has Translation Studies been fully established as a distinct discipline, and the complexities involved in the translation of Classical texts are receiving increased scholarly attention.¹ Critical attention has long been lavished on major new translations, particularly of epic poetry, and this has revealed a chasm between literary critics, who evaluate translations primarily as creative works using aesthetic criteria, and scholars, who tend to come down on the side of 'fidelity' to the content and even the syntax of the original text. Classicists often favour Richmond Lattimore's translation of the *Iliad*, for example, because it takes a 'line by line' approach and adheres very closely to the content of the original. Critics, on the other hand, have enthusiastically welcomed the Homeric translations of Robert Fagles, who exercises greater metrical freedom and jettisons stylistic features of the original, including the repetitions characteristic of poetry derived from an oral tradition. Because the goals of this book are primarily pedagogical, my general strategy is closer to that of Lattimore than Fagles. I adopt a 'sense for sense' approach, and a line of poetry in this book, more often than not, closely approximates the content in the original line. I avoid bold creative liberties and the use of anachronistic modern equivalents. On the other hand, there is sometimes a surprisingly inverse relationship between so-called 'fidelity' to the wording or stylistic features of an original, and the degree to which a translation achieves 'equivalence' to the source text. For example, in Lattimore's *Iliad*, the six-beat English line represents the six-footed Greek hexameter, but feels heavy and slow in comparison to the original. While the

translation of classical texts is a scholarly process, the aesthetic choices are as essential to the final product as the philological ones.

Crucial to the translator are the intended audience for and purpose of a given work. For example, translation of Greek comedy for presentation on the stage leads to a product quite different from a translation for study purposes, where it is possible to provide explanatory notes on the text. I have translated the texts in this sourcebook for people engaged in serious formal or informal study of the ancient world. Because a student's knowledge of ancient genres and literary styles is blurred when poetry is presented as prose, I offer verse translations where appropriate. It seems important to me, for example, that students experience the work of the philosophers Empedocles and Lucretius as poetry. While I make no attempt to reproduce the metrical systems of the originals, I use a variety of rhythms, line-lengths, and other techniques in order to convey differences in genre. In place of the dactylic hexameter in epic selections, for example, I use a five-beat English line; elegiacs are represented by the alternation of five- and four-beat lines. In order to help acquaint students with the cultures in question, I avoid anachronistic 'equivalents', even in comic texts where the jokes may not translate well. Endnotes explain unfamiliar names and features of the text when the translation alone is not sufficient. Throughout, I have attempted to make the texts as accessible and readable as possible without sacrificing essential features of the originals.

One of the more dismaying discoveries I made while consulting existing translations of the texts in this volume was the frequency with which sexual terms and ideas are elided or translated with euphemisms in English. Students often rely on translations freely available via the internet for reasons of cost and convenience, but because of copyright issues, these are likely to be older versions and to reflect the prudish sensibilities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In some cases, sections that contain sexual content are simply omitted from these translations. For coursework on ancient concepts of gender and sexuality, students need access to unexpurgated translations that accurately convey whether the diction in the original is vulgar, clinical, or euphemistic. It is essential that translators make no attempt to conceal the role of pederasty and other homosexual behaviours in ancient cultures (for example, the assumption in many of Plato's texts that *erōs* is operating between two males). Finally, the translator must accurately convey ancient cultural attitudes (for example, concerning rape or sexual relations with slaves) that are offensive to modern ethical standards.

Throughout this book, I have aimed at consistency in the use of key terminology, without falling into rigid one-for-one correspondences that could damage the integrity of the individual translations. A few observations about the vocabulary of the texts in this book, and how I have translated key terms, are in order.

Love, Desire and Affection

The Greeks distinguished between *erōs*, which they personified as a god, and *philia*. *Erōs* (or *eros* with a short o, depending on the dialect) is the feeling we describe as ‘falling in love’, the restless and passionate desire to draw near to and to touch another person. We can feel *erōs* for someone we hardly know. To the Greek way of thinking, a person we find physically beautiful inspires *erōs* in us, yet this emotion has a dark side; the effect of *erōs* is ‘limb-loosening’ and often destructive. In this book, I most often use ‘love’, ‘to love’, and ‘fall in love’ to translate *erōs*, the verb *eramai* and related words. When Zeus suddenly feels a strong desire for his wife Hera, he exclaims:

For never has such *love* [*eros*] for goddess or woman
Mastered my heart so overwhelmingly...(1.1; Homer *Iliad* 14.315–16)

Philia and its relatives in Greek have a much broader application, encompassing both non-sexual and sexual forms of love. *Philia* is friendship, but also tender concern and the emotion one feels for family members. We would be unlikely to feel *philia* for someone we hardly know. *Erōs* tends to be focused on the needs of the person who feels it, and is not completely incompatible with hate, whereas *philia* involves a feeling of goodwill and affection for its object. In order to convey a distinction between these two concepts in my translations, I render *philia* and its relatives by terms such as ‘care’, ‘affection’, or ‘friendship’, except in cases where it is clearly non-sexual: a king may feel a ‘love of music’ and a woman may mourn her ‘loved ones’. Thus two women discussing their friendship say:

‘See, *you don’t care for me* [*ou phileis me*] or you would not hide such things.’
‘*I care for you* [*philō men se*] as much as I do any other woman.’ (5.16; Lucian *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 5.1)

In relationships that involve sexual attraction, of course, it is often the case that both *erōs* and *philia* are present, and one may speak of the *philia* that the partners feel. In a performance by two actors portraying a loving encounter between Dionysus and his bride Ariadne as they prepare for bed, the verb *philein* is emphasised:

For they heard Dionysus asking her *if she loved him* [*ei philei auton*], and she vowed that she did, in such a way that not only Dionysus, but all those present would have sworn that this boy and girl truly *cared for* [*phileisthai*] one another. (8.9; Xenophon *Symposium* 9.6)

In poetry, moreover, and particularly in Homeric texts, the related term *philotēs* often refers to sexual love. In the *Iliad*, Hera protests at Zeus' desire to have sex out in the open:

If you want to *make love* [*eunēthēnai en philotēti*] right now on Ida's peak
Where everything is visible to anyone... (1.1; Homer *Iliad* 14.331–2)

The verb *kataphilein* means 'to kiss', an act that is associated with loving affection as much as (or even more than) erotic love. Thus Plutarch notes that the Athenian statesman Pericles felt both desire and affection for Aspasia:

They say that *he kissed her* [*kataphilein*] every day as he left for the city centre,
and he greeted her the same way when he returned home. (10.14; Plutarch
Pericles 24.6)

The terms *pothos* and *himeros* are often used, especially in poetry, for the feelings that accompany *erōs*. I usually translate *pothos* as 'yearning' and *himeros* as 'longing', although both can also be rendered 'desire', depending on the context. The word I most often translate as 'desire' is *epithumia*, which is used to refer to physical desires and lustfulness. It is the term used when the speaker is thinking of desire in a neutral way, as physicians do, or as something to be avoided, as philosophers often do:

Yet surely no one considers men inferior to women, or less able to *school their own desires* [*epithumias paidagōgein*]... (6.11; Musonius Rufus 12 *Concerning Sexual Pleasures*)

When criminal or deviant lust is at issue, Greek texts may use *pathos*, 'passion', or the word *hubris*, which emphasises failure to restrain the baser urges toward violence and sex. In Latin texts, *cupīdo* is a close counterpart to *epithumia*, and I generally translate it as 'desire'. The word *libīdo* ('lust'), meanwhile, has a still more negative connotation:

For people *blinded by desire* [*cupidine caecī*] often do thus...(6.9; Lucretius *On the Nature of Things* 4.1154)

At this terrifying prospect, his *savage lust* [*trux libīdo*] prevailed as if by force over her resolute chastity. (9.12; Livy *History of Rome* 1.58)

The Latin noun *amor* and the verb *amāre* are used analogously to English 'love', encompassing sexual love, family feeling, and friendly affection. Like Greek *philia*, *amor* can refer to a sexual attachment and loving devotion at the

same time, as in Livy's story of a prostitute who risked her life for her the young man she loved:

For she *loved and sought him out* [*amātus adpetītusque erat*] of her own accord, and since his own relatives were very stingy, the prostitute generously supported him. (1.11; Livy *History of Rome* 39.9.6)

Yet as a sexually charged emotion *amor*, like Greek *erōs*, was viewed in a more negative light in Roman culture than 'love' is in ours, and often refers to sexual passion in the absence of caring or even goodwill. Livy sees no contradiction in describing as *amor* the emotion felt by the rapist Sextus Tarquinius:

Burning with passion [*amōre ardens*], he waited until everyone seemed to be asleep and it was safe to move about. (9.12; Livy *History of Rome* 1.58.2)

The ambivalence with which the ancients viewed *amor* and *erōs*, and their conviction that it often led to disastrous and fatal outcomes, is a key difference between their culture and ours.

Sexual Relations and Partners

Greek texts exhibit a broad variety of terms for sexual relations, but the most common are *sunousia* 'being together', *homilia* 'intercourse', and *mixis* or *summixis* 'mingling, mingling together'. These nouns and their related verbs may be used in poetry as well as philosophical or medical writings:

Some people suppose that it is a good thing for the female to continue in a state of virginity as long as there is not yet *an urge for intercourse* [*hormēn pros tēn mixin*]. (6.13; Soranus *Gynecology* 1.8 [33])

Circumlocutions involving the words for 'bed' (*eunē*, *lechos*) are common, especially in poetic texts. In the *Bacchae*, Pentheus expresses his suspicion that the women of his family are engaging in illicit sex:

And they slink off here and there in secret,
To *serve the beds* [*eunais hupēretein*] of men. (3.6; Euripides *Bacchae* 222–3)

A more prosaic verb is *plēsiazēin*, which literally means 'draw near to' and is similar in tone to our phrase 'have relations with' where the context is understood to be sexual. In Latin we find *coitus* 'sexual intercourse' and

concubitus 'lying together' used as positive or neutral terms for sexual relations, while *stuprum* is used instead if the act is perceived negatively:

And the Spartans themselves, while they grant every freedom in the love of youths except *actual fornication* [*stuprum*]... (4.14; Cicero *On the Republic* 4.4)

In both Greek and Latin, the goddesses of love give their names to parts of speech denoting sexual intercourse; in these cases the emphasis is on the pleasurable aspects of sex. Therefore I typically translate *ta aphrodisia* (literally 'the things of Aphrodite') as 'sexual pleasures' and the verb *aphrodisiazēin* as 'to enjoy sex' or the like. In Latin too, particularly in poetic texts, the name of Venus herself is used by metonymy for sexual love:

Near tears, she asks 'Where will it end for me,
Gripped by a strange new love [*novae... Veneris*], unknown to any?' (5.7; Ovid *Metamorphoses* 9.726–8)

Modern scholarship on ancient sexualities has shown that for the ancients, the gender of a sexual partner was less important than the roles played by the respective partners in the sexual act. The 'active' role of the penetrator was assigned to the masculine, dominant, and powerful partner, while the supposedly 'passive' role of one who is penetrated belonged to the weaker, submissive, and/or feminine partner. When sexual relations are described, the cognate verbs *paschein* in Greek and *patī* in Latin often refer to the role of the 'passive' partner. For example, the Julian law says that any male who willingly 'submits' (*patitur*) is guilty of criminal behaviour (9.18; Julius Paulus, *Opinions*, 2.26.13), while Lucian's prostitutes gossip about women who 'won't do it' (*ouk ethelousas auto paschein*) with men (5.16; Lucian *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 5.2). The historian Theopompus uses this terminology when he expresses shock at Etruscan men's sexual habits:

The Etruscans feel no shame if they are seen having sex in the open, and they do not even feel ashamed *to be the passive partner* [*paschontas*], for this too is the custom in their country. (7.6; Theopompus of Chios *FGrHist* 115 F 204)

In more vulgar and colloquial contexts, the verbs *binein* in Greek and *futuere* in Latin are very close to English 'fuck' and are so translated in this book. The active and passive roles are reflected in the grammatical voice chosen for the verb. Thus in Martial's advice to the woman he calls Lesbia, he refers to the fact that she is penetrated by her partner, and the words have the same insulting tone as in English:

Don't get caught, but do get fucked [*futuī*]. (10.15; Martial *Epigrams* 1.34.10)

Another Greek term that can be used to refer to the different roles of partners in sex is the verb *charizesthai*, which has the basic meaning of 'grant a favour for' or 'gratify'. Xenophon's character Ischomachus uses this verb to indicate his own dominant status in relation to his wife and female slaves:

And whenever her looks are compared with those of a female servant, she will be cleaner and better dressed, and altogether more stimulating, especially since she is *willing to gratify me* [*hekousan charizesthai*], whereas a female servant is compelled to do so. (8.10; Xenophon *Economics* 10.12)

Just as sex acts were assumed to require an active and a passive participant, the partners in a love affair could themselves be assigned active and passive labels. I use the English noun 'lover' to translate Greek *erastēs*. Conventionally, the *erastēs*, an older male partner in a pederastic relationship (or the male partner in a heterosexual relationship) actively pursued the satisfaction of his desire, while the 'beloved', *erōmenos* (or if female, *erōmenē*) was perceived as a relatively passive object of desire. Another word used to denote the beloved (typically in the case of younger males) was *paidika*, which I translate 'boyfriend', 'darling', or 'favourite'. Thus in his speech on pederasty in the *Symposium*, Pausanias says:

For example, if a man in pursuit of someone's money, or political office, or any other type of power were to behave the way *lovers* [*erastai*] do with their *boyfriends* [*paidika*], begging and pleading in a needy fashion... (4.6; Plato *Symposium* 183a)

There was debate in antiquity over what the beloved felt, or ought to feel, toward the lover. According to pederastic ideals, the beloved felt affection rather than desire. Thus differing emotions are ascribed to the lovers Harmodius and Aristogiton:

The tyrants here certainly learned this by experience, for the love [*erōs*] of Aristogiton and the affection [*philia*] of Harmodius were strong enough to destroy their power. (4.6; Plato *Symposium* 182c)

When the love object is female, a different vocabulary seems to apply. In Greek, a female lover (as opposed to a spouse or prostitute) was often called a *pallakē* or *pallakis*. I translate 'mistress' when the context makes clear that the woman with this title is a slave or a person of low status, and 'concubine' when the context indicates that she cohabits with her partner as a spouse

would, but has a status lower than that of a wife. The Latin equivalents, *paelex* and *concupīnus/a*, are used to denote dependent male or female sex partners who have relatively low status. Suetonius uses the latter term to refer to a sexual partner of the emperor Galba, a freed slave:

Icelus, *one of his old lovers* [*e veteribus concubīnis*], brought him news in Spain of Nero's death. (4.20; Suetonius *The Twelve Caesars* 7.22.1)

Sexual Virtues and Vices

In Classical antiquity, at least insofar as it is conveyed to us through the written sources, the most admired virtue when it came to sexual behaviour was not abstinence, but self-control and moderation. Particularly for men who were free citizens and possessed economic and political privileges, the ability to control one's bodily urges and to enjoy physical pleasures in moderation demonstrated one's worthiness to exercise power. In Greek thought *enkrateia* ('self-control') was highly prized. In his praise of archaic Spartan marriage customs that required spouses to meet clandestinely, Plutarch approvingly observes:

Not only were such meetings good practice in *self-control* [*enkrateias*] and *moderation* [*sōphrosynēs*], they also brought together the spouses in sexual union when their bodies were ready for procreation. (8.16; Plutarch *Lycurgus* 15.5)

The opposite of *enkrateia* is *akrateia*, which literally means 'lack of control'. This vice encompasses overindulgence and self-indulgence. The related term *akolasia* refers to a lack of discipline or restraint that may be either internal or external. I translate the adjective *akolastos* variously as 'undisciplined', 'unbridled', and 'unrestrained':

...the tactile pleasure of *the undisciplined person* [*akolastoi*] has to do not with the whole body, but with certain parts. (6.7; Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1118a 9)

The virtue of moderation is not as highly valued in modern times as it was in antiquity, and the English word does not fully convey the prestige attached to Greek *sōphrosynē*. In Latin, the equivalent virtue is *temperantia* and the vice *intemperantia*. While *sōphrosynē* and related parts of speech have to do with moderation in every aspect of life, they are often used specifically in

reference to sexual behaviour, and in such cases I translate them as 'chastity', 'chaste', etc. When the misogynist character Hippolytus complains about women's lack of moderation, he is thinking of sexual transgressions:

Either *let them be taught chastity* [*sōphronein didaxatō*],
Or let me trample them down forever. (3.4; Euripides *Hippolytus* 667–8)

This type of chastity did not mean total abstinence from sex, but the restriction of sexual activity to the appropriate amount and type for the individual concerned. Thus, for a virgin daughter chastity meant no sex, for a wife it meant sex only with her husband, and for a husband it meant sex in moderation, and only with partners sanctioned by society. The Latin noun *castitas* and adjective *castus* (which give us our words 'chastity' and 'chaste') refer to this same virtue and are often found in poetry as synonyms of Latin *pudicitia*, which I also translate as 'chastity'. The virtue of *pudicitia* had a special prestige in Roman culture, similar to that of *sōphrosynē* in Greek, and the Romans personified *Pudicitia* as a goddess. *Pudicitia* was desirable for both men and women and the possession of this virtue meant that a person had self-control. The Elder Seneca deplored the apparent lack of *pudicitia* as a manly virtue in the youth of his day:

They are born spineless weaklings, and remain like that for life, assaulting the *chastity* [*pudicitiae*] of others, and careless of their own. (3.16; Seneca *Controversiae* 1 Pref. 9)

As this passage from Seneca suggests, *pudicitia* could be forcibly taken from a man and especially from a woman. Livy reports that after Lucretia's rape,

When her husband asked whether all was well with her, she replied, 'Not at all. For how can a woman be well when *she has lost her chastity* [*āmissā pudicitia*]?' (9.12; Livy *History of Rome* 1.58.7)

Thus *pudicitia* was not only a virtue, but also a physical state subject to violation and irretrievable loss.

Modesty, Shame, and Disgrace

In antiquity, the concepts of modesty and shame were often invoked in texts touching on sexuality. The Latin noun *pudor* and verb *pudēre* share the

same root as *pudicitia* and refer to the sense of modesty, shame, or respect that causes people to make the 'right', socially approved choice in a given situation. Thus Ovid's self-consciously naughty manual of seduction ridicules men who hesitate to force themselves on their dates:

Such a short path from kisses to your heart's desire –
Blunders, *not scruples* [*nōn pudor*], hold you back! (9.13; Ovid *The Art of Love* 1.671–2)

Latin *verēcundia* is similar to *pudor*, with stronger connotations of shyness and physical modesty. Augustine uses both terms when he professes that strenuous effort is required to convey the shameful facts about pagan religion without offending his readers:

Let human *modesty* [*verēcundiae*] be spared; let the tale of lustful flesh and blood go forward in a way that preserves *respect* [*pudōris*]. (1.17; Augustine *City of God* 6.9)

In Greek, the person who possesses a sense of modesty or shame has *aidōs* or *aischunē*. *Aidōs* is often personified as a virtue. In a Euripidean tragedy, the title character sings a song of praise to the virgin goddess Artemis, personifying *aidōs* as a keeper of an inviolate garden:

The spring bee roams this untouched meadow
And *Reverence* [*Aidōs*] tends the plants with river dew (7.4; Euripides *Hippolytus* 77–8)

Things about which one ought to feel shame or modesty, on the other hand, are *aischra* or *aidoia*. The phrase *ta aidoia* is often used euphemistically to refer to the genitals. In medical writings, it is used as a neutral word for the genitals without connotations of shame:

As to the outgrowths of skin at the ends of *the genitals* [*ta aidoia*] of both sexes, in women they are present for the sake of ornament... (6.14; Galen *On the Usefulness of Parts of the Body* 15.3)

Greek generally uses words formed from one of these roots to describe sexual acts considered shameful or disgraceful. For example, Herodotus disapprovingly refers to the alleged practice of sacred prostitution in Babylonia:

This is the most shameful [*aischistos*] of the Babylonian customs...(10.2; Herodotus *Histories* 1.99.1)

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