

BETWEEN GYNEPHILIA AND PEDERASTY:  
EROTIC DILEMMAS AND SEXUAL PREFERENCES  
IN THE *GREEK ANTHOLOGY*

Athenaeus 13.604f (*TrGF* vol. 4, T N 75, p. 62):

Ἥλιος ἦν, οὐ παῖς, Εὐριπίδῃ, ὃς με χλαιίνων  
γυμνὸν ἐποίησεν· σοὶ δὲ φιλοῦνθ' ἑτέραν  
Βορρᾶς ὠμίλησε. σὺ δ' οὐ σοφός, ὃς τὸν Ἔρωτα  
ἀλλοτρίαν σπειρῶν λωποδύτην ἀπάγεις.

Helios it was, and not a boy, Euripides, who by his heat  
stripped me of my cape; but with you, when you were embrac-  
ing another man's wife, Boreas consorted. So you are not so  
clever, because when sowing in another's field, you bring Eros  
into court for thieving<sup>1</sup>.

According to the information conveyed by Athenaeus this is the witty epigram Sophocles composed addressing Euripides when he received mockery by the latter<sup>2</sup>. It is said that Sophocles was a victim of gossip because of the following incident: «Sophocles lured a handsome boy outside the city wall to consort with him. Now the boy spread his own cloak on the grass, while they wrapped themselves in Sophocles' cape. When the meeting was over the boy seized Sophocles' cape and made off with it, leaving behind for Sophocles his boyish cloak. Naturally the incident was much talked of; when Euripides learned of the occurrence he jeered, saying that he himself had once consorted with this boy without paying any bonus, whereas Sophocles had been treated with contempt for his licentiousness»<sup>3</sup>. In his epigram Sophocles refers to the Aesopian fable about the sun and the north wind and hints at Euripides's adultery. As far as we know, Sophocles and Euripides had sexual

1. Trans. by Ch. Burton Gulick.

2. Theodor Bergk, *Poetae Lyrici Graeci*, vol. II, B.G. Teubner, Lipsiae 1882, p. 244;  
Ernest Diehl, *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca*, vol. I, B.G. Teubner, Lipsiae 1949, p. 79.

3. Athenaeus 13.604d-e (trans. by Ch. Burton Gulick).

relations with both women and boys. Nevertheless, it is said that Sophocles was fond of boys and Euripides fond of women (φιλομειραξ δὲ ἦν ὁ Σοφοκλῆς, ὡς Εὐριπίδης φιλογύνης)<sup>4</sup>.

By studying the ancient sources, we understand very well that the sexuality of Greek men at least from the sixth century onward appears double-faced. Homosexual desire for a boy was regarded as natural. According to Michel Foucault «the Greeks did not see love for one's own sex and love for the other sex as opposites, as two exclusive choices, two radically different types of behavior»<sup>5</sup>. With the lively words of Kenneth Dover: «An Athenian who said, "I am in love" would not have taken it amiss if asked "With a boy or a woman?"»<sup>6</sup>.

*Palatine Anthology* could be regarded as a poetic encyclopedia of Greek social and private life in long duration from the 6th century BC to the late antiquity and beyond – in particular during the Hellenistic and Imperial Age, the flourishing era of the Greek epigram. If the poetic voice of all the epigrammatists of the *Greek Anthology* could be condensed into the voice of one speaker, Terence's famous line *Homo sum: humani nihil a me alienum puto* would be absolutely representative<sup>7</sup>.

The topic of love (and sex) –*human, all too human*, indeed– is one of the most central themes in the *Greek Anthology*. Two whole books are devoted to it: the fifth book to heterosexual love and the twelfth one to pederasty. My purpose in this paper is to explore the comparisons, dilemmas, and preferences on the sex of the desired object in epigrams of the *Greek Anthology*.

To begin with I would like to dedicate a few words about the literary background. Plato's erotic dialogues, *Phaedrus* and especially *Symposium*, sparked off the creation of a Greek tradition in the popular philosophical literature on *eros*. Xenophon also gave us a *Symposium* and the Peripatetic philosopher Clearchus of Soli, a disciple of Aristotle's School, nevertheless favorable to Plato<sup>8</sup>, wrote a work under the title *Erotika*, on which we learn from Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*<sup>9</sup>. Later, from the Imperial Age, we have two treatises on love in the form of debate (*Agones*

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4. Athenaeus 13.603e; cf. Idem 13.557e.

5. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, II. *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. R. Hurley, Vintage, New York 1985, p. 187.

6. Kenneth Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the time of Plato and Aristotle*, Blackwell, Oxford 1974, p. 213 with a lot of evidence. For a comprehensive consideration see James Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek Love: A Radical Reappraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient Greece*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 2007.

7. *Heauton Timorumenos* 77.

8. Among his works is mentioned an eulogy to Plato (Πλάτωνος ἐγκώμιον).

9. 13.564a; 589d; 597a; 605d.

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logon): *Amatorius* by Plutarch and *Amores* by pseudo-Lucian. They both focus on the issue which *eros* is preferable for a male: women or boys? The first shows his preference for heterosexual love and for marriage, while the latter tends to prefer pederasty. The famous dialogue at the end of the second book of the novel *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius is in the same context. Plotinus finally under the shadow of Plato devotes a chapter of the third *Ennead* to *eros*<sup>10</sup>.

From an examination in the two erotic books of the *Greek Anthology* it can be concluded that most epigrams with originality on our topic come from the Late Hellenistic and early Imperial Period.

I shall begin with an epigram of Meleager of Gadara<sup>11</sup>.

AP 12.86 (= Meleager 18 G-P)

Ἄ Κύπρις θήλεια γυναικομανῆ φλόγα βάλλει,  
ἄρσενά δ' αὐτὸς Ἔρωσ ἕμερον ἀνιοχεῖ.  
ποῖ ῥέψω; ποτὶ παῖδ' ἢ ματέρα; φαμί δὲ καὐτάν  
Κύπριν ἐρεῖν, «νικᾷ τὸ θρασὺ παιδάριον».

The Cyprian, being female, throws flames of woman madness.

Eros is the charioteer of desire for males.

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10. The strand of philosophical tradition on *eros* in the Greek writing starting from Plato reaches up to the last century. The gifted philosopher and poet Demetrios Capetanakis (1912-1944) published in 1936 his essay *Liebe und Zeit (Eros and Time)*. It had been submitted as a doctoral dissertation to the University of Heidelberg supervised by Karl Jaspers. Capetanakis discusses some major issues on *eros* such as the eternity or ephemerality of desire and the male or female love, starting with Platonic *Symposium* and drawing on the work of authors with a particularly intense and idiosyncratic eroticism: Shakespeare, La Rochefoucauld, Winckelmann, Marcel Proust, Stefan George. In his essay Capetanakis, swaying between the abyss of loneliness and the fever of desire, experienced the anguish of that one, who goes through the first rung of the ladder of the erotic attraction, namely through the inspiration for the “absolutely individual” – for the “one body” according to Plato (*Symp.* 210a: ἐνὸς αὐτὸν σώματος ἐρᾶν). See also the Greek version of his essay: Demetrios Capetanakis, «Ἔρωσ καὶ Χρόνος», in *Μυθολογία τοῦ Ὁραίου*, D. Harvey House Publishing, Athens 1988, pp. 73-148.

11. Epigrams of the *Greek Anthology* are cited according to the editions of A.S.F. Gow and D.L. Page (*The Greek Anthology. Hellenistic Epigrams*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1965 and *The Greek Anthology. The Garland of Philipp and some Contemporary Epigrams*, C.U.P., Cambridge 1968), if included therein; otherwise according to Hermann Beckby's edition of the *Anthologia Graeca* (Ernst Heimeran, München <sup>2</sup>1965-68). Especially: in Strato's epigrams I follow Lucia Floridi's edition (*Stratone de Sardi. Epigrammi*, Edizioni dell' Orso, Alessandria 2007); Rufinus is cited according to Regina Höschele's book (*Verrückt nach Frauen: Der Epigrammatiker Rufin*, G. Narr, Tübingen 2006).

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On which side should I come down? The son or the mother? I think even the Cyprian will say, «The bold brat wins»<sup>12</sup>.

Meleager is one of the major erotic epigrammatists (along with Asclepiades and Posidippus) of the *Garland* he himself had composed<sup>13</sup>. In the whole corpus of his epigrams a dual sexual desire emerges. He has written great verses to praise the beauty of his mistresses Heliodora and Zenophila<sup>14</sup>; but he also accepts the immersive charm of the eyes of his lover Myiscus<sup>15</sup>. In this epigram the dilemma for female or male love is personified (or deified) between Aphrodite and her son Eros<sup>16</sup>. The preference for male love is stated rather mildly. On the same topic but with a much more strongly-worded expression of the superiority of the homosexual desire is the epigram *AP* 12.17; it is included anonymously in Meleager's *Garland*<sup>17</sup>:

Οὐ μοι θῆλυς ἔρωσ ἐγκάρδιος, ἀλλά με πυρσοὶ  
ἄρσενες ἀσβέστω θῆκαν ὑπ' ἀνθρακιῆ.  
πλειότερον τόδε θάλπος· ὅσον δυνατώτερος ἄρσην  
θηλυτέρης, τόσσον χῶ πάθος δέξύτερος.

The love of women touches not my heart, but male brands  
have heaped unquenchable coals of fire on me.

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12. Trans. by K. J. Gutzwiller.

13. A very serious attempt to reconstruct both sections, heterosexual and homosexual, of Meleager's epigrams in his *Garland*, has been made by Kathryn J. Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands. Hellenistic Epigrams in Context*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1998, pp. 276-301; Eadem, «The Paradox of Amatory Epigram», in Peter Bing – Jon Steffen Bruss (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Hellenistic Epigram*, Brill, Leiden/Boston 2007, pp. 313-332: 326-332. Cf. Daniel H. Garrison *Mild Frenzy: A Reading of the Hellenistic Love Epigram*, Steiner, Wiesbaden 1978, pp. 71-93.

14. See the sequences 24, 41-56 and 30-40 G-P; cf. Regina Höschele, «Meleager and Heliodora: A Love Story in Bits and Pieces?», in Ingela Nilsson (ed.), *Plotting with Eros: Essays on the Poetics of Love and the Erotics of Reading*, Museum Tusulanum Press, Copenhagen 2009, pp. 99-134.

15. *AP* 12.101, 106, 110, 154, 159. On amatory cycles in Meleager, see Maria Ypsilanti, «Literary Loves as Cycles: From Meleager to Ovid», *L'Antiquité Classique* 74 (2005), pp. 83-110.

16. In the epigram *AP* 5.65 the dilemma is personified between Ganymedes and Leda.

17. According to Gow-Page: Asclepiades 37. In the manuscript of the *Palatine Anthology* it appears as ἄδηλον, while according to the (unreliable) *Appendix Barberino-Vaticana* is Ἀσκληπιάδου ἢ Ποσειδίππου. It is ascribed by Gow-Page to Asclepiades and by Sternbach to Posidippus. See Ioannes S. Nastos, *Ασκληπιάδου του Σαμίου Επιγράμματα*, Heraklion 2006, pp. 292-295; cf. Sonya Lida Tarán, «Εἰσὶ τρίχες: An Erotic Motif in the Greek Anthology», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 105 (1985), pp. 90-107: 101 n. 81; Kathryn J. Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands. Hellenistic Epigrams in Context* op.cit., p. 122 n. 21.

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Greater is this heat; by as much as a man is stronger  
than a woman, by so much is this desire sharper<sup>18</sup>.

The argument that love for boys is preferable because of the greater power of the male appears already in Pausanias' speech in the Platonic *Symposium* (181c): ὄθεν δὴ ἐπὶ τὸ ἄρρεν τρέπονται οἱ ἐκ τούτου τοῦ ἔρωτος ἔπιπνοι, τὸ φύσει ἐρρωμενέστερον καὶ νοῦν μᾶλλον ἔχον ἀγαπῶντες<sup>19</sup>.

We return to Meleager; however, now a lover of women!

AP 12.41 (= Meleager 94 G-P)

Οὐκέτι μοι Θήρων γράφεται καλός, οὐδ' ὁ πυραυγῆς  
πρὶν ποτε, νῦν δ' ἦδη δαλὸς Ἀπολλόδοτος.  
στέργω θῆλυν ἔρωτα· δασυτρώγων δὲ πίεσιμα  
λασταύρων μελέτω ποιμέσιν αἰγοβάταις.

I do not count Thero fair any longer, nor Apollodotus,  
once gleaming like fire, but now already burnt-out torch.  
I care for the love of women. Let it be for goat-mounting herds  
to press in their arms hairy minions<sup>20</sup>.

The two boys are now too old, their beauty has gone away, and the hairs in the anus grew. As Sonya L. Tarán has pointed out in her relevant article, Meleager's innovation here is «that he does not prefer heterosexual to homosexual love *per se* but because his *eromenos* has become hairy»<sup>21</sup>.

The motif of first hair-growth as a sign of the boy's transition to young manhood is old and very strong in the Greek epigram (not only in the subgenre of the amatory ones)<sup>22</sup>. Meleager is the first to use the *eromenos*' hairs as a cause of disgust for the *erastes*<sup>23</sup>. This motif is indicative of how differently the epigrammatic poetry of the late Hellenistic period uses the topic of pederasty in comparison to the ideal-

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18. Trans. by W. R. Paton.

19. Cf. Socrates' opinion in Xenophon's *Symposium* 2.9: ἡ γυναικεία φύσις οὐδὲν χείρων τῆς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς οὔσα τυγχάνει, γνώμης δὲ καὶ ἰσχύος δεῖται.

20. Trans. by W. R. Paton.

21. Sonya Lida Tarán, *op.cit.*, p. 101.

22. For the motif of *mors immatura* in the sepulchral epigrams what is marriage for girls is the first hair growth for boys; see Ewald Griessmair, *Das Motiv der mors immatura in den griechischen metrischen Grabinschriften*, («Commentationes Aenipontanae» 17), Universitätsverlag Wagner, Innsbruck 1966, 60-62.

23. Cf. the use of the hairs motif in the late epigrammatist Eratosthenes Scholasticus, AP 5.277.

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zation of the time and the work of Plato<sup>24</sup>. In the *Symposium*, Pausanias expresses the conventional aristocratic ideology of boy-love making the well known distinction between Common Aphrodite (Πάνδημος) and Heavenly Aphrodite (Οὐρανία). The Eros of the Heavenly Goddess refers only to youths but at the right age, namely when they start developing intelligence. The appearance of hair-growth is the sign for that<sup>25</sup>. For Meleager this point works completely opposite and shifts from the cheeks to the anus.

Poet's speaker also has another reason to reject the boys and prefer his beloved woman.

AP 5.208 (= Meleager 9 G-P)

Οὐ μοι παιδομανῆς κραδία· τί δὲ τερπνόν, Ἔρωτες,  
ἀνδροβατεῖν εἰ μὴ δούς τι λαβεῖν ἐθέλοι;  
ἅ χεῖρ γὰρ τὰν χεῖρα· καλὰ με μένει παράκοιτις.  
ἔρροι πᾶς ἄρσῃ ἀρσενικαῖς λαβίσιν<sup>26</sup>.

My heart is not boy-mad. What pleasure, Eroses,  
in mounting a male, if the giver doesn't want to receive?  
One hand should wash the other. A lovely woman awaits me in bed.  
To hell with male lovers and male embraces<sup>27</sup>.

According to the conclusion of Kathryn J. Gutzwiller this epigram along with the previous one would stand at the end of the heterosexual sequence of Meleager's amatory epigrams<sup>28</sup>. The epigram does not name any individual love object. It is a variation of the same theme with a general comparison of male and female love expressing a preference to women. The point is the lack of mutuality in the intercourse with males. A boy only receives but does not give pleasure! As Socrates says in Xenophon's *Symposium* (8.22): οὐδὲ γὰρ ὁ παῖς τῷ ἀνδρὶ ὥσπερ γυνὴ κοινωνεῖ τῶν ἐν τοῖς ἀφροδισίοις εὐφροσυνῶν, ἀλλὰ νήφων μεθύοντα ὑπὸ τῆς ἀφροδίτης θεᾶται.

24. Cf. Strato, AP 12.229; Sonya Lida Tarán, *op.cit.*, pp. 101-102.

25. Plato, *Symposium* 181d: καὶ τις ἂν γνοίη καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ παιδεραστία τοὺς εἰλικρινῶς ὑπὸ τούτου τοῦ ἔρωτος ὠρμημένους· οὐ γὰρ ἐρώσει παίδων, ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴν ἤδη ἄρχωνται νοῦν ἴσχειν, τοῦτο δὲ πλησιάζει τῷ γενειάσκειν.

26. The text of the second distich is corrupted, but it makes sense. Gow-Page put the four last words of the hexameter and the first one of the pentameter between *crucis*; see their Commentary, *The Greek Anthology, Hellenistic Epigrams*, vol. II, *op.cit.*, p. 613. I follow in this case Gutzwiller's text, *Poetic Garlands op.cit.*, p. 297.

27. Trans. by K. J. Gutzwiller

28. Kathryn J. Gutzwiller, *op.cit.*, pp. 297-298.

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ἐξ ὧν οὐδὲν θαυμαστὸν εἶ καὶ τὸ ὑπερορᾶν ἐγγίγνεται αὐτῷ τοῦ ἐραστοῦ<sup>29</sup>. Marcus Argentarius, an epigrammatist of *Garland of Philip*, who is identified with the Roman orator of the age of Augustus, expresses his preference for female love, but showing understanding for homosexual lovers. He suggests a remedy to them!

AP 5.116 (= Marcus Argentarius 10 G-P)

Θῆλυς ἔρωσ κάλλιστος ἐνὶ θνητοῖσι τέτυκται  
ὄσσοις ἐς φιλίην σεμνὸς ἔνεστι νόος.  
εἰ δὲ καὶ ἀρσενικὸν στέργεις πόθον, οἶδα διδάξαι  
φάρμακον, ᾧ παύσεις τὴν δυσέρωτα νόσον·  
στρέψας Μηνοφίλαν εὐίσχιον ἐν φρεσὶν ἔλπου  
αὐτὸν ἔχειν κόλποις ἄρσενα Μηνόφιλον.

Woman's love is best for mortals,  
all who have a serious mind for loving.  
If you cherish desire for males too, I can teach you  
a remedy to stop that sick-love malady:  
turn Menophila's fine hips about, and in your mind imagine  
that you have nothing but a male Menophilus in your embrace<sup>30</sup>.

Argentarius probably gets the idea from Dioscorides (AP 5.54), who advises a husband of a pregnant woman to avoid her inflated belly turning her in a prone position. So he could enjoy sex with her like with a boy<sup>31</sup>! Athenaeus (13.602d-e) transmits the information that this sexual practice was usual for the virgin maidens of Sparta before their marriage<sup>32</sup>:

παρὰ δὲ Σπαρτιάταις, ὡς Ἄγων φησὶν ὁ Ἀκαδημαϊκός, πρὸ τῶν γάμων ταῖς παρθένους ὡς παιδικαῖς νόμος ἐστὶν ὁμιλεῖν.

Most of the rest of the relevant epigrams belong to both Rufinus and Strato of Sardis, two amatory epigrammatists whom we have some good reasons to correlate in any case, since there are many intertextual relations between their poems. Recent scholarship advocates the dating of both in

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29. See Marilyn B. Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*, Blackwell, Oxford 2014, pp. 18-19.

30. Trans. by Gow – Page

31. Cf. Martial 11.43.

32. Cf. Herodotus 1.61.1-2.

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the first century AD with Rufinus preceding Strato<sup>33</sup>. Both are known to Martial. Still, the epigrams of both poets are erotic and demonstrate a clear sexual orientation: Rufinus favors love for women, while Strato is best known for his pederastic epigrams.

Firstly, a poem by Rufinus.

AP 5.19 (6 Page = 6 Höschele)

Οὐκέτι παιδομανῆς ὡς πρὶν ποτε, νῦν δὲ καλοῦμαι  
θηλυμανῆς, καὶ νῦν δίσκος ἐμοὶ κρόταλον,  
ἀντὶ δέ μοι παίδων ἀδόλου χροὸς ἤρесе γύφου  
χρώματα καὶ φύκους ἄνθος ἐπεισόδιον.  
βοσκήσει δελφῖνας ὁ δενδροκόμης Ἐρύμανθος  
καὶ πολλὸν πόντου κῦμα θοᾶς ἐλάφους.

I am not said to rave about boys as before, but now they say  
I am mad about women, and my quoit has become a rattle.  
Instead of the unadulterated complexion of boys  
I am now fond of powder and rouge and colours that are laid on.  
Dolphins shall feed in the forests of Erymanthus,  
and fleet deer in grey sea<sup>34</sup>.

The epigram opens with a clear statement about changing the poet's preference: while previously seeking boys, he is now mad for women. The justification of this shift is set out in the second couplet, which is the central point of the poem. The speaker is now fascinated by the powder and cosmetics on the girls' cheeks – not by the pure boys' complexion. The double *adynaton* trope<sup>35</sup> of the third distich closing the epigram demonstrates that this choice runs counter to the established view. The epigram seems to express a minority position and to engage in dialogue with other poets, mainly Strato.

AP 12.7, 1-4 (= Strato 7 Floridi)

Σφιγκτῆρ οὐκ ἔστιν παρὰ παρθένω οὐδὲ φίλημα  
ἀπλοῦν, οὐ φυσικὴ χρωτὸς ἔυπνοίη.

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33. Regina Höschele, *Verrückt nach Frauen: Der Epigrammatiker Rufin*, op.cit., pp. 49-50; Lucia Floridi, op.cit., pp. 1-6; cf. Alan Cameron, «Strato and Rufinus», *The Classical Quarterly* 32/1 (1982), pp. 162-173; Idem, *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993, pp. 65-69.

34. Trans. by W. R. Paton.

35. On this see Regina Höschele, *Verrückt nach Frauen: Der Epigrammatiker Rufin*, op.cit., pp. 97-99.



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οὐ λόγος ἡδὺς ἐκεῖνος ὁ πορνικὸς, οὐδ' ἀκέραιον  
βλέμμα, διδασκομένη δ' ἔστι κακιοτέρα [...]

There is no sphincter in a maiden, nor a straightforward kiss,  
nor a natural fragrance to the skin,  
nor that sweet erotic talk or limpid glance,  
and when she's being taught, she's worse<sup>36</sup> [...]

The firm argument is that boy's beauty is natural, while that of woman is artificial. And further: the kisses and the whole behavior of the boys in love are characterized by simplicity and guilelessness; women are supposed to be sly. Following the same pattern is the next epigram of Strato:

AP 12.192 (= 33 Floridi)

Οὐ τέρπουσι κόμαι με περισσότεροί τε κίκιννοι,  
τέχνης, οὐ φύσεως ἔργα διδασκόμενοι·  
ἀλλὰ παλαιστρίτου παιδὸς ῥύπος ὁ φαφαρίτης,  
καὶ χροίη μελέων σαρκὶ λιπαινομένη.  
ἡδὺς ἀκαλλώπιστος ἐμὸς πόθος· ἡ δὲ γοῆτις  
μορφῇ θηλυτέρης ἔργον ἔχει Παφίης.

I am not charmed by long hair and needless ringlets  
taught in the school of art, not of nature,  
but by the dusty grime of a boy fresh from the play-ground  
and colour given to the limbs by the gloss of oil.  
My love is sweet when unadorned, but a fraudulent  
beauty has in it the work of female Cypris<sup>37</sup>.

The speaker is not attracted by a woman's sophisticated beauty; he is praising instead the naturalness of the boyish body. The opposing dipole "gymnastics vs cosmetics" is already set by Plato in *Gorgias* (465b). In the epigram an echo could be possibly traced from the doctrine of the Stoics for «living in accordance with nature» (ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν)<sup>38</sup>.

Palaestra is the fixed place where the youth's body is revealed and

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36. Trans. by L. Watson.

37. Trans. by W. R. Paton.

38. Cf. Andreas Knecht, *Gregor von Nazianz: Gegen die Putzsucht der Frauen*, Winter, Heidelberg 1972, pp. 43-46; Lucia Floridi, *op.cit.*, pp. 218 f.

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carries oil and dust from the play-ground. These views coincide with the arguments of Protogenes in Plutarch's *Amatotius*. Protogenes came to Athens from Tarsus searching for handsome boys, and in this Plutarchean dialogue he emerges as a warm advocator of pederasty and a professed enemy of marriage<sup>39</sup>:

750f: Εἰ δ' οὖν καὶ τοῦτο τὸ πάθος δεῖ καλεῖν Ἔρωτα, θῆλον καὶ νόθον [...] συντελοῦντα τὴν γυναικωνίτιν.

751a: οὕτως εἷς Ἔρωσ [ὁ] γνήσιος ὁ παιδικός ἐστιν, οὐ «πόθω στίλβων», ὡς ἔφη τὸν παρθένιον Ἀνακρέων, οὐδὲ «μύρων ἀνάπλεως καὶ γεγανωμένος», ἀλλὰ λιτὸν αὐτὸν ὄψει καὶ ἄθροπτον ἐν σχολαῖς φιλοσόφοις ἢ που περὶ γυμνάσια καὶ παλαιστρας [...]

Similar –more or less– arguments are used in Achilles Tatius' novel by Menelaus in the discussion with Clitophon about female and male love (2.38.2-3). In this case the sense of smell is added to the repeated motif of palaestra: the sweat of the boys smells better than women's fragrances!

γυναικὶ μὲν γὰρ πάντα ἐπίπλαστα, καὶ τὰ ῥήματα καὶ τὰ σχήματα· κἄν εἶναι δόξη καλή, τῶν ἀλειμμάτων ἢ πολυπράγμων μηχανῆ. καὶ ἔστιν αὐτῆς τὸ κάλλος ἢ μύρων, ἢ τριχῶν βαφῆς, ἢ καὶ φαρμάκων· ἂν δὲ τῶν πολλῶν τούτων γυμνώσης δόλων, ἔοικε κολοῖφ γεγυμνωμένῳ τῶν τοῦ μύθου πετρῶν. τὸ δὲ κάλλος τὸ παιδικὸν οὐκ ἀρδεύεται μύρων ὄσφραις οὐδὲ δολεραῖς καὶ ἄλλοτριαῖς ὀσμαῖς, πάσης δὲ γυναικῶν μυραλοιφίας ἡδίων ὄδωδεν ὁ τῶν παίδων ἰδρώς<sup>40</sup>.

The erotic epigrammatists of the *Greek Anthology* who praise the female beauty, –for instance Philodemus and Rufinus– highlight the well known erogenous zones on a woman's body: legs, thighs, buttocks, pudenda, breasts<sup>41</sup>. On the contrary Strato finds nothing appealing about the female body. In the last couplet of the epigram we saw above the narrator stays unexcited about any part of the female body.

AP 12.7, 5-6 (= Strato 7 Floridi)

φυχροῦνται δ' ὀπιθεν πᾶσαι [sc. αἱ παρθένοι]· τὸ δὲ μεῖζον ἐκεῖνο,  
οὐκ ἔστιν, ποῦ θῆς τὴν χέρα πλαζομένην.

39. On the artificial beauty of women Theomnestos also argues in [Lucian], *Amores* 38-41.

40. Cf. Xenophon, *Symposium* 2.3-4.

41. See Philodemus AP 5.132; Rufinus AP 5.35, 36, 48, 60, 94.

*Between gynephilia and pederasty*

And they [sc. the maidens] are all cold behind. And a greater problem still is that there's no place to put your wandering hand<sup>42</sup>.

What is the most attractive spot on the male body that could be superior to anything female? Strato's position is clear:

AP 12.207 (= 48 Floridi)

Ἐχθὲς λουόμενος Διοκλῆς ἀνενήνοχε σαύραν  
ἐκ τῆς ἐμβάσεως τὴν Ἀναδυομένην.  
ταύτην εἴ τις ἔδειξεν Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τότε ἐν Ἰδῆι,  
τὰς τρεῖς ἂν ταύτης προκατέκρινε θεάς.

Yesterday Diocles in the bath brought up a lizard  
from the tub, "Aphrodite rising from the waves".  
If someone had shown it to Paris then in Ida,  
he would have preferred it to the three goddesses<sup>43</sup>.

The metaphorical significance of lizard (σαύρα) as the erect penis of a boy is supported by one more of Strato's epigrams dedicated to the different phases of the shape of a youth's penis depending on the intensity of the erection (AP 12.3.5)<sup>44</sup>: τὴν δ' ἤδη πρὸς χεῖρα σαλευομένην λέγε σαύραν<sup>45</sup>.

Finally, Strato has in his arsenal another strong argument – the most «philosophical» one!

AP 12.245 (87 Floridi)

Πᾶν ἄλογον ζῶον βινεῖ μόνον· οἱ λογικοὶ δὲ  
τῶν ἄλλων ζώων τοῦτ' ἔχομεν τὸ πλεόν  
πυγίξειν εὐρόντες. ὅσοι δὲ γυναιξὶ κρατοῦνται,  
τῶν ἀλόγων ζώων οὐδὲν ἔχουσι πλεόν.

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42. Trans. by L. Watson.

43. Trans. by W. R. Paton.

44. See Lucia Floridi, *op.cit.*, pp. 123-129; Evina Sistakou, «Mock epic in the Greek Anthology», in B. Acosta-Hughes – C. Cusset – Y. Durbec – D. Pralon (eds.), *Homère revisité. Parodie et humour dans les réécritures homériques*. Actes du colloque international, Aix-en-Provence 30-31 Octobre 2008, Institut des Sciences et Techniques de l'Antiquité, Besançon 2011, pp. 193-210: 199-200. See also Strato AP 12.242: Πρώην τὴν σαύραν ὁδοδόακτυλον, Ἄλκιμ', ἔδειξας/ νῦν αὐτὴν ἤδη καὶ ὁδοόπηχυν ἔχεις.

45. See also Strato AP 11.21; 12.242. Cf. Jeffrey Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1991, p. 127.

## Επιστημονική Επετηροίς

Every unreasoning animal just screws; but we have reason  
and excel the other animals in this:  
we have discovered buggery. All who are ruled by women  
have no more going for them than the unreasoning beasts<sup>46</sup>.

The speaker brings in equivalence the dipole of heterosexual and homosexual intercourse with that of unreasoning animals and rational human beings. The poet contrasts human logic with the animal instinct for procreation<sup>47</sup>. So Strato's epigram reproduces the widespread idea during the imperial era that male animals do not copulate with males<sup>48</sup>; this is said to be an exclusive privilege of reasoning man<sup>49</sup>. The most representative development of this view lies in pseudo-Lucian's *Amores* (36). There, Theomnestus, a lover of boys, refutes Charicles' argument that male animals following nature do not have a homosexual desire:

τί δὴ παράδοξον εἰ ζῶα τῆς φύσεως κατάκριτα μηδὲν ὧν λογισμοὶ παρέχονται παρὰ τῆς προνοίας λαβεῖν ἠτύχηγκότα προσαφῆρηται μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ τὰς ἄρρενας ἐπιθυμίας; οὐκ ἐρῶσι λέοντες, οὐδὲ γὰρ φιλοσοφοῦσιν· οὐκ ἐρῶσιν ἄρκτοι, τὸ γὰρ ἐκ φιλίας καλὸν οὐκ ἴσασιν. ἀνθρώποις δ' ἡ μετ' ἐπιστήμης φρόνησις ἐκ τοῦ πολλάκις πειρᾶσαι τὸ κάλλιστον ἐλομένη βεβαιωτάτους ἐρώτων ἐνόμισεν τοὺς ἄρρενας<sup>50</sup>.

The epigrams we have seen above are characterized by sensuality, personal tone, outspokenness, individuality expressed by a sophisticated language. These poems either portray personal experience or are merely a poetic fiction, they converse with the Greek philosophical and poetic tradition. They come from a period in which *polis* has completely lost the political function of the classical period, and before Christianity is established and enforces its own morality. Most of them declare a preference for boys over women. I think this is psychologically interpretable. The one who wants to praise sex with a woman is much less likely to compare it to sex with a boy. The reverse is most likely!

The motif of the comparison between male and female sex comes back in the sixth century. It occurs in three epigrams of Agathias and

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46. Trans. by S. Goldhill.

47. Cf. Lucia Floridi, *op.cit.*, pp. 375-376.

48. Cf. *AP* 10.68.

49. See Simon Goldhill, *Foucault's Virginity. Ancient Erotic Fiction and the History of Sexuality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995, pp. 46-66.

50. Cf. [Lucian], *Amores* 22 where Charicles' position is cited.

## *Between gynephilia and pederasty*

Eratosthenes Scholasticus<sup>51</sup>. In these epigrams written during the period of Justinian's Christian fanaticism and the strict anti-homosexual law<sup>52</sup>, the preference is always for the female love.

Many centuries later, in the modern times, Arthur Rimbaud writes in his prose poem *A Season in Hell* (1873): *Il dit: «Je n'aime pas les femmes: l'amour est à réinventer, on le sait.»* These are the words of the *Infernal Spouse*, that is poet's own mask, in the part of the poem under the title *Delirium I*, an allegory for Rimbaud's relation with Verlaine. Starting from this verse Marilyn Yalom dedicates a chapter of her book *How the French Invented Love* (New York 2012) to the same-sex erotic ethos and legal troubles of Rimbaud, Verlaine, Oscar Wilde, and André Gide. Before Judeo-Christian ethics shapes the sexuality of the Western world and makes homosexuality a taboo, the literature of Greek-Roman antiquity felt completely free to represent the flexible sexuality of this era.

### ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

*Φιλομείραξ ή φιλογύνης;*

*Ερωτικά διλήμματα και σεξουαλικές προτιμήσεις  
στα επιγράμματα της Παλατινής Ανθολογίας*

Το παρόν άρθρο διερευνά την ιδιότυπη –για τη χριστιανική Δύση– «διπλή» σεξουαλικότητα των αρχαίων Ελλήνων στην επιγραμματική ποίηση με έμφαση στην ύστερη ελληνιστική και αυτοκρατορική περίοδο. Οι περί τον έρωτα πλατωνικοί διάλογοι, ο *Φαίδρος* και κυρίως το *Συμπόσιον*, αποτέλεσαν την αρχή μιας μακράς παράδοσης ερωτικής λογοτεχνίας στην οποία ένα σημαντικό ρόλο παίζει η σύγκριση ανάμεσα στον έρωτα για γυναίκες και στον έρωτα για αγόρια (inter alia Πλουτάρχου, *Έρωτικός*, ψευδο-Λουκιανού, *Έρωτες*, Αχιλλέα Τάτιου, *Λευκίππη και Κλειτοφών* 2.35-38). Το θέμα της σύγκρισης και του διλήμματος μεταξύ του ετεροφυλόφιλου και του παιδικού έρωτα εξετάζεται στα επιγράμματα του 5ου και του 12ου βιβλίου της *Παλατινής Ανθολογίας*. Τα

51. Agathias AP 5.278 and 10.68; Eratosthenes AP 5.277.

52. See *Novellae* 77 and 141 (*Edictum ad Constantinopolitanos de luxuriantibus contra naturam*); Procopius, *Historia Arcana* 11.34-36. Cf. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1980, pp. 171-174; Luigi Santiroco, «Cum vir nubit in feminam», *Rivista di Diritto Romano* 9 (2009), pp. 1-17; 14-17; Vassilios P. Vertoudakis, *Αριστάνετος, Έρωτικά έπιστολάι*, Gutenberg, Athens 2018, pp. 54-60.

## Επιστημονική Επετηρίς

περισσότερα ανήκουν σε τρεις κατ' εξοχήν ερωτικούς επιγραμματικούς, τον Μελέαγρο, τον Ρουφίνο και τον Στράτωνα, τα ποιητικά υποκείμενα των οποίων εμφανίζουν διαφορετικό σεξουαλικό προσανατολισμό. Αναλύονται διεξοδικά τα επιχειρήματα της μιας και της άλλης πλευράς. Τα περισσότερα επιγράμματα εκφράζουν προτίμηση υπέρ της παιδεραστίας έναντι του έρωτα προς γυναίκες. Προέρχονται από μία περίοδο στην οποία η πόλις έχει απολέσει παντελώς τη λειτουργία της κλασικής εποχής, και προτού ο χριστιανισμός εγκαθιδρυθεί και επιβάλει τα δικά του κανονιστικά πρότυπα ηθικής. Απεναντίας, όταν το μοτίβο επιστρέφει κατά τον 6ο αιώνα η προτίμηση αντιστρέφεται. Τα επιγράμματα του Αγαθία και του Ερατοσθένη του Σχολαστικού στην ιουστινιάνεια περίοδο –μιαν εποχή επικράτησης ενός ακραιφνούς χριστιανισμού και σκληρής ποινικής μεταχείρισης της ομοφυλοφιλίας– δηλώνουν πάντοτε την προτίμησή τους για τον ετεροφυλόφιλο έρωτα.

### ABSTRACT

This paper is exploring the peculiar –for the Christian West– “double-faced” sexuality of the ancient Greeks in epigrammatic poetry with emphasis on the Late Hellenistic and Imperial period. Platonic dialogues on *eros*, *Phaedrus* and especially *Symposium*, sparked off the creation of a long tradition of erotic literature in which the comparison between love for women and love for boys plays an important role (*inter alia* Plutarch’s *Amatorius*, ps.-Lucian’s *Amores*, Achilles Tatius’ *Leucippe and Clitophon* 2.35-38). The topic of the comparison and dilemma between heterosexual sex and *paidikos eros* is examined in the epigrams of the 5th and 12th books of the *Palatine Anthology*. Most of them belong to three erotic epigrammatists *par excellence*, Meleager, Rufinus and Strato, whose poetic speakers have a differentiated sexual orientation. The arguments of both sides are analyzed in detail. Most of these epigrams declare a preference for boys over women. They come from a period in which *polis* has completely lost the political function of the classical period, and before Christianity is established and enforces its own morality. However, when the motif returns in the 6th century, the preference is reversed. The epigrams of Agathias and Eratosthenes Scholasticus, written during the period of Justinian’s Christian fanaticism and the strict anti-homosexual law, advocate always female love.