

HOMOSEXUALITY CHALLENGING THE STIGMA

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Chapter 7

Homosexuality and Moral Values in Historical Perspective: The Case of Malta in a European Context

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Abstract

Homosexual activity was one of the many strands that composed the fabric of male experience, one that not only grew out of established social bonds and patterns of collective life but it even contributed in creative ways to fashioning and reinforcing them. However it was only in the last few decades that historians have begun to study homosexuality. In past cultures the term was normally associated with sex between males which was not only a common and integral feature of daily life but it also formed part of a universe of experience and values that differed substantially from our own. Past cultures did not clearly separate persons into the categories of 'homosexuals' and 'heterosexuals'. The terms 'sodomy' and 'sodomite' were standard in the juridical and religious language of Malta, as in the rest of pre-modern Europe, for conveying same-sex relations. The terms might however seem to work as substitutes to each other, for in some contexts they appear to have much the same meanings. Sexual interactions were usually structured by age where the passive partner in same-sex sodomy was usually relatively young.

Introduction

Historians and men of letters have long been familiar with the prominence ascribed to 'sodomy' in past times and few have doubted that homosexual activity was relatively common. Until quite recently, however, the general prejudice against homosexuality, combined with an old ideological tendency to downplay its role in past societies, effectively inhibited its study.

Professional historians have, until recently, avoided acknowledging the topic altogether, or at best touched on it superficially, frequently with embarrassed apologies if not open disdain. Such attitudes and rhetorical tactics helped to perpetuate the stigmatisation of homosexuality as an object of historical inquiry and to ensure that it remained firmly consigned, despite the wealth of contrary evidence, to the margins of representations of history and culture.

In the last couple of decades, these barriers have to a large extent been broken down, as the visibility and acceptance of homosexuality have grown substantially and as social historians, particularly those studying the late Medieval and early modern periods have devoted attention to new topics. The list is endless but it includes subjects such as ritual, social networks, violence, criminality, prostitution, and gender, as well as to the history of the family and of subordinate groups such as women, children, and the labouring classes. Since then, a number of specific works have appeared on the subject of sodomy – above all, its practice. Two geographical and historical areas which have been studied in depth are the leading Italian Renaissance republics of Venice and, more recently, Florence. Both these cities mounted unprecedented efforts to police this 'vice', particularly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and both uncovered thriving undergrounds of homosexual activity. Only further research will show whether other cities or regions, in Italy and elsewhere, shared Venetian and Florentine preoccupations or developed similar sexual cultures.

The Cultural Context of Sexual Behaviour in Pre-modern Europe

One must point out that although sex between males was a common and integral feature of daily life in Christian Europe, it formed part of a universe of experience and values that differed substantially from our own. In the first place, the culture of late medieval and early modern times was not one in which men were clearly separated into the categories of 'homosexuals' and 'heterosexuals'. In our own culture, it has become common to imagine sexuality largely in terms of a polar opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Most people are thought to fall more or less neatly into either one category or the other, but even the alternative 'bisexuality' derives its sense from its hybrid position somewhere between these two extremes. Moreover, the notion that a person's homosexuality or heterosexuality profoundly defines one's personality and identity is nowadays taken practically for granted, and these categories are accepted with little questioning as part of some timeless and natural order. Yet much research carried out by anthropologists, historians, and social theorists over the past few decades has shown, to the contrary, that such a way of construing erotic experience and sentiment is a very recent development, and one that is closely tied to the evolution of the contemporary Western world. Other cultures and people in other historical periods have conceived and organized sexuality in quite different ways.

Thus, for example, among the ancient Spartans the warrior ethic not only permitted but encouraged temporary homosexual relations between soldiers and boys. Such relations were not seen as effeminate either by the men or their society but in precisely the opposite terms, as masculine and as conducive to warrior resolve. One must point out though that the Spartan soldier was always in the active role in the sex act. The soldier's lover, or partner, was always a youth of inferior status who acted

out the passive 'feminine' role. The catamite, or male lover, in the ancient world, was usually a youthful slave who was sodomised by an adult in a superior status.

In effect in the classical world sexual inversion was not universally linked to a lack of masculinity, nor was pederasty always a sign of effeminacy. Greek and Roman texts are full of homosexuality in action, and 'lovers of boys were just as numerous as lovers of women' in classical antiquity. These Greeks and Roman homosexuals did not necessarily give up their claim to masculinity. So long as this homosexuality conformed to current images of the 'male' (active) role in sex play, it was entirely compatible with, in fact, supportive of, a fully masculine image in the society at large. Indeed, the Spartans, like other Greeks of the time, thought that such men made better soldiers because they had their lovers with them on the battlefield to prevent them from becoming lonely and depressed.²

The Romans likewise believed that 'to be active was to be male, whatever the sex of the compliant partner'. Plutarch in his *Dialogues on Love*, remarks, 'Those who enjoy playing the passive role we treat as the lowest of the low, and we have not the slightest degree of respect or affection for them'.¹

Past Conceptualisations of Different Sexual Behaviour

People of the Middle Ages and the early modern period lacked the words to convey the precise equivalents of the current 'homosexuality' as a distinct category of erotic experience or 'homosexual' as a person or a sexual identity. These words were coined in the late nineteenth century, and only filtered slowly and unevenly into popular use. This ideology was also found in Malta. In 1845, for example, Vincenzo Emanuelli, an eighteen year-old youth from Floriana, was accused of having abused two young boys, aged ten and twelve.³ The terms 'sodomy' and

'sodomite', were standard in the juridical and religious language of pre-modern Europe for conveying same-sex relations, the terms might however seem to work as substitutes to each other, for in some contexts they appear to have much the same meanings.

As these words were employed outside the subtle field of moral theology, however, 'sodomy' was not strictly synonymous with 'homosexuality', nor was 'sodomite' the equivalent of the noun 'homosexual'. The tidy scholastic categories of 'unnatural' practices collapsed in secular legal and judicial contexts, and apparently in popular concepts as well. When governments came to persecute sodomy, with growing intensity from the thirteenth century on, both 'homosexual' and certain 'heterosexual' acts fell distinctly into this category of sexual crime. Presumably these formulations included sexual relations between women, but in all cases the context strongly suggests that they referred instead to erotic acts deemed 'contrary to nature' either between males or between males and females. The case of 31 year-old Anna Zammit from Zebbug is perhaps one of the few Maltese case-studies in which a woman is reported to have had bisexual relations with a man and a woman. On 8 June 1702 Anna declared that she had a lascivious relationship with the 29 year-old Don Bartholomeo Bonnici and his sister the tertiary nun Rosaria. She declared that apart from caressing, masturbating and touching her sexual parts with those of Don Bartholomeo, Anna had weekly touching and kissing sessions with suor Rosaria. The two siblings apparently complied because Anna - who had a fame of sainthood among the villagers of Zebbug - told them that such behaviour would free them from lust.³ Suor Rosaria claimed that she had such great faith in Anna's sanctity that at first she did not consider it to be a 'sin' although she confessed the matter to her confessor.⁴ Touching was thought to be the only form of sex possible between women and when lay people occasionally

denounced such acts the courts pursued it as sodomy. In other words, it was certain sexual acts alone that denoted sodomy, not the gender of the persons who practised them. Correspondingly, a sodomite was not, strictly speaking, a person who engaged in sex with members of his (or her) own biological gender, the sodomite, that is, was not a homosexual, but a person who committed the various acts defined as sodomy. In an Inquisition tribunal case of 1597 the Flemish painter Joanne Gallo was not allowed to sleep with his young wife by his mother-in-law, Catherina Bevarda, since he allegedly wanted to sodomise her daughter.⁵

Nonetheless generally speaking, when people used the words 'sodomy' or 'sodomite' in a generic way they probably had sexual relations between males in mind, since these were by far the most common and conspicuous, and aroused the greatest public concern.

From the thirteenth century on, most theologians, following the work of Thomas Aquinas, defined sodomy as comprehending all sexual acts between persons of the same sex, whether male with male or female with female. On the basis of the gender of the sexual partners, therefore, some religious authorities differentiated sodomy from the other carnal vices 'against nature', which included intercourse with animals, masturbation, and non-reproductive coitus between the opposite sexes.⁶ In Malta one comes across the latter kinds of sexual behaviour but one hardly ever meets with cases of bestiality. Between 1771-1798 Anthony Camenzuli only came across one case of bestiality.⁷ It could be that bestiality cases took place more frequently in the outlying villages where the peasants were in daily contact with their animals. In such circumstances similar culprits must have felt safe enough to practice whatever 'illegal' practice that pleased them because they lived far from the prying eyes of official church and Inquisition officers.

If sexual regulation in the institutions of marriage and holy orders, and the challenge of heresies, played a role in the formulation of the religious definitions of acceptable and unacceptable sexual behaviour, the enforcement of gender roles was also a significant factor in this process. The insistence that men should be masculine and that women should be feminine cannot explain some of the emerging prohibitions, such as the censure of male masturbation in Christian moral theology: there is no sign that masturbation was regarded as effeminate behaviour in the late Middle Ages, as it sometimes has been in later times. However, descriptions of homosexual acts, between women and between men, were commonly put in terms of role reversals, bearing the implication that there is something inherently feminine about taking what was construed as a passive role in intercourse and something inherently masculine about taking the active role.

Many arguments against acts of sodomy apply equally to men and women. They were put forward particularly because sodomy involved pleasure without procreation and it was thought to be unnatural. Some late medieval commentators on Scripture and Roman law made sure to condemn sexual acts between women, sometimes with and sometimes without good textual authority. Repeated transgression could become a capital crime for both women and men, but fewer women were executed than men. Whatever parity existed on the basis of the dominant rationales for condemning comparable acts was moderated to women's advantage by the lesser dignity of the female and the passive and secondary roles attributed to her in sex and reproduction. Nicholas Davidson asserts that

In all parts of Italy, legislation against sodomy and homosexuality was unrelenting. In Florence, for example, the penalty for sodomy before the Black Death (1347-1348) had been castration; in 1365, this was increased to death

for the active partner. In Padua, from 1329, anal intercourse of men or women was to be punished by burning; in Lucca, by the early fifteenth century, the law specified the same penalty for both active and passive male partners over the age of eighteen. Similar ruling applied in Modena, in Trieste (for active partners), and in most other cities. In Ferrara the guilty (including women) were to be hanged before they were burnt, and in Venice decapitation preceded burning from the mid fifteenth century. The prevalence of Protestantism in the Italian-speaking Valtelline made no difference to the local statutes in the sixteenth century, which also required death by fire for sodomy of both men and women.⁸

In spite of the impetus to control female sexuality in the interests of the family in particular and society in general (interests expressed in medieval views on sterility and abstinence, for example), the passive sexual and reproductive roles attributed to women and the lesser value placed upon the feminine are likely to have led to a relative lack of concern about women betraying their gender roles within the domain of sexual relations. But women making love to women were sometimes seen as behaving 'like men' and were prosecuted by lay authorities in the late Middle Ages. Such cases, which surface only toward the end of the period, reflect the expanding role of secular government in the regulation of morals and social life and represent gender enforcement. Thus for example, the 24 year-old Anna Vassallo of Balzan, who engaged in lesbian sex with three older spinsters, namely Catarina 'tâ Navarina' from Valletta; Vittoria daughter of Giuseppe 'tâ Misbalna' of Balzan; and the late Maria 'tâ itruscia', put her mind at rest when she was told that 'such dishonest touches were not sinful...' Anna thus continued to practice her sexual activities without any malice or scruples.⁹

Nonetheless some cities made clear distinctions between different types of culprit: passive partners, the young and first offenders were generally treated more leniently. We learn that boys involved in sodomy were hardly ever executed.¹⁰ In various ways then, society recognised the age of eighteen as a watershed in young males' lives. Boys' abandonment of the passive role around this age, whether they continued to engage in sodomy as the dominant partner or not, marked like a symbolic and sometimes experiential rite of passage their entry into the sexual world of adult males.

Nonetheless William Lithgow, a Scottish traveller to Malta in 1616, wrote that

The fift day of my staying here, I saw a Spanish Souldier and a Maltezen boy burnt in ashes, for the publick profession of Sodomy, and long or night, there were above a hundred Bardassoes, whoorish boyes that fled away to Sicilie in a Galleyot, for feare of fire but never one Burgeon stirred, being few or none there free of it.¹¹

Lithgow's comment seems to suggest that the Maltese authorities were seriously preoccupied with the spreading practice of sodomy at the time. One cannot exclude that the judges were ready to condemn to death anyone singled out for practising the abominable crime (*vizio nefando*) once the victim was accused. As Michel Foucault puts it

Ever since the Middle Ages slowly and painfully built up the great procedure of investigation, to judge was to establish the truth of crime, it was to determine its author and to apply a punishment.¹²

One of those condemned for sodomy was the neophyte Jew Luis de Mendoza Gonzales. He was sentenced to death in 1611 even though he vehemently refused to confess and continued to claim his innocence under torture and during his later

depositions. Luis de Mendoza Gonzales was a 36 year-old freed Jewish slave hailing from Jerusalem who served at the house of Signor Don Pietro Gonzales in Valletta. In his deposition of 26 May 1611 Mendoza said that he had been christened a year before but had recently been accused of sodomy and condemned to death by the Grand Master's law courts (*Magna Curia Castellania*) even though he never admitted the crime. When the chaplain of the Order of St John Fra Baldassaro Cagliares (later appointed Bishop of Malta (1615-1633)), together with some Capuchin friars, went to console him and induced him to pray with them in the prison's chapel, he refused the last rites. In desperation Mendoza tore his clothes and declared that he wanted to die a Jew because he had been unjustly convicted on the false evidence of Jews. The reason he gave for wanting to die a Jew is that under Jewish law the evidence of two witnesses of the same law (in his case the witnesses had to be real Christians) was required to convict him.¹³

Members of monastic congregations appear to have been particularly prone to accusations of sodomy. This may perhaps have been the result of the problem of emotional and sexual frustration caused by strict enforcement of the rule of celibacy that friars, in particular, had to face: a condition which may have induced several friars to practice homosexuality. Two Franciscan Minors residing at the Valletta friary - Fra Battista Agliarda,¹⁴ and Fra Geronimo from Catania,¹⁵ had been accused of sodomy to the Inquisitor and Apostolic Visitor Mgr Pietro Dusina in 1574. The accusation of these two friars however appears to have been based on a cursory comment and suggests that it was not taken further. However, in a sodomy case dated 1603, a proper investigation was carried out after a denunciation made by Salvator Lombardo of Valletta. Lombardo reported a sodomy attempt on his 17-year-old companion Giovanne Battista de Aurisi. Lombardo explained how he had gone to Mdina, accompanied by Aurisi, to visit his sister - a nun at the

monasterio de' vergini. Since it was already late Lombardo decided to seek overnight lodging at the Augustinian priory which is not far from the main gates of Mdina. Lombardo and the lad were given a bed to share while the prior and a foreign friar shared a nearby bed. At some point the foreign friar moved out of his bed and went to lie beside Aurisi whom he tried to sodomise.¹⁶ The trial must be seen in the view of a general rejection of homosexuality in early modern society and the teachings of the Church which condemned it. In fact medieval canonists associated homosexual behaviour with heresy meaning that sodomy came to be considered as a most serious sexual offence.¹⁷ Consequently after the drastic decline of population caused by the Black Death of 1347-1348, sodomy came to be regarded as a serious threat to the survival of society itself and new laws, that laid down new gruesome punishments, were implemented.¹⁸

People had no way to distinguish verbally, between a man who engaged in sex with males from one who committed precisely the same acts with women, whether occasionally or even exclusively. Generally speaking, both were simply called sodomites. As in classical times sodomy between males normally assumed a hierarchical form that would now be called 'pederasty'. Homosexual relations, that is, were usually characterised by a disparity in the age of the two partners and by a correspondingly rigid adherence to culturally prescribed roles in sexual intercourse. Men over the age of eighteen took the so-called active role with a passive teenage adolescent. Fra Vincenzo Carnisi, Prior of the Augustinian friars had the habit of sodomising the novices at the Rabat friary.¹⁹ Relations in which roles were exchanged or reversed were rare and occurred almost solely between adolescents, while sex between mature men was, with very few exceptions, unknown. Uldrich Galea Medati came across one such case in the mid-19th century where a fifteen year-old Valletta youth, Giorgio Biancardi, sodomised

a 24 year-old Scottish soldier, Robert Reid. It appears however that Reid was drunk when Biancardi sodomised him.²⁰ These patterns therefore situate homosexual behaviour within an age-graded model that had ancient roots throughout the Mediterranean world and continued to prevail in Europe until at least the eighteenth century when new forms and conceptions of homosexuality first began to appear. This explains why violations of the expected norms evoked the indignant or harsh reactions of both the law courts and the community.

What was an aberration for males was, of course, the passive sexual role. However as this was normally restricted to the phase of physical and social immaturity, it marked only a temporary detour for a boy's progress towards manhood. Perhaps the best ethnographic study on the theme has been carried out on Renaissance Florence. In Florence, virtually all adolescent passives whose same-sex activity is documented converted with success to a solely dominant role with teenage boys. This helps explain why passive minors usually received much lighter penalties than their companions. At times they were not given any punishment whatsoever, no matter how promiscuous they were. If the penalties were levied, they often involved corporal punishments of the sort usually applied to women.²¹ This state of affairs also accounts for the paramount significance attributed to the transition to sexual adulthood, with its expectations of adherence to virile conventions. For boys up to the age of eighteen or twenty the passive role was considered more or less consonant with their status, but afterward most men carefully avoided the shame of being penetrated 'like a woman'. It was a crucial experiential and symbolic passage, and both community and state anxiously patrolled the border between passive and active, boyhood and maturity, feminine and masculine. With a combination of embarrassment and derision, informers castigated the rare youth or older man who still 'let themselves be sodomised',

emphasising their dishonour and disgrace. The authorities often reinforced these concerns about proper masculine roles by punishing over-aged passives with exemplary penalties of public floggings, exorbitant fines or exile. So powerful was the aversion to older men's sexual receptivity, that when an elderly man allowed himself to be sodomised they refrained from executing him and commuted his sentence, upon payment of a huge fine, to life imprisonment hidden away in a prison ward for the insane.

The exemplary punishments imposed on adult men for taking the 'unmanly' sexual role emphasise that individual erotic behaviour and collective gender norms and identity formed a part of a seamless whole. Informers in criminal proceedings expressed concern that the passivity of older men, a disgrace to themselves, would also implicate and malign the honour – that is, the virility – of the entire male population.

At this point one needs to stress that accounts of same-sex sexual behaviour in various cultures are fragmentary at best, and generally fail to answer the questions on intra-cultural diversity, individual meaning, the individual, and what the relationship is between what people do and what they say. The 'native views' about gender crossing and homosexuality recorded by historians, travellers, and in literature similarly tend to mistake elite prescriptions and rationalisations for descriptions of usual behaviour. Official accounts, especially for outsiders, may have little to do with statistical behavioural regularities, let alone with showing the range of intra-cultural variation or the range of roles that individuals play in a society. What the locals think that the alien 'analysts' want to hear, and what the natives think the alien observer approves of (based in part on what the locals know about the observer's culture), shape even unofficial accounts and explanations. Often little or no space was left to describe the reprehensible conduct itself or exploring what the conduct means to those involved in it.

Ranked among the most nefarious of carnal acts in both Church doctrine and legal rhetoric, sodomy – mainly but not only sex between males – was one of the most frequently prosecuted and heavily penalised ‘crime’ during the Middle Ages through the early modern period and up to the early 20th century. Same-sex relations corresponded to a hierarchical pattern, very ancient in Mediterranean cultures and long-lasting throughout Europe, in which adult males took the so-called active, usually anally insertive role with ‘passive’ teenage boys or adolescents to the age of about eighteen or twenty. Reciprocal or age-reversed relations were rare, and limited to adolescence, while it was rarer still for mature males to have sex together. Indeed, the assumption of the receptive sexual role by adult men constituted a widely respected taboo.²²

In contrast, accusers virtually never represented the ‘active’ partner in feminine terms, calling him at most a ‘sodomite’ or ‘bugger’. Neither term bore overt gendered connotations other than indicating the dominant role in sex. Indeed, while passive partners were hardly ever described with these terms, both were regularly used to indicate men who sodomised women.²³ Late medieval and early modern Europeans evidently found it difficult to conceive of same-sex relations – whether between males or females – outside the traditional gender dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles.²⁴

These representations suggest that the sodomite, though castigated as a criminal and a sinner, was perceived as conforming to the behaviours and values defined in culture as masculine. As long as he observed proper conventions, a man’s sexual relations with boys did not compromise his status as a ‘normal’ and virile male. Indeed, the act of dominating another male, even if a boy, might well have reinforced it. Since sodomising someone did not constitute deviation from ‘manly’ norms, and the ‘womanly’ role was in effect limited to very young males, this permitted all mature men to engage in same-

sex activity – as very many did – without endangering their masculine identity or being relegated to a distinctive category of deviants. Theology, canon law, and medieval mores operated on the double standard that more readily allowed men than women to indulge in sinful fornication. In order to avoid the worse evil of having all girls subject to illicit fornication, religious and lay authorities realised that they had to tolerate the lesser evil of prostitution and so deter the rape of respectable women or other ignominies such as male sodomy.²⁵

The boundaries established by religion, and marital status were restrained by an even more fundamental opposition, that between 'natural' and 'unnatural'. Sodomy in all its forms – homosexual, bestial, heterosexual anal – was first defined as a 'crime against nature' in about 1250, and viewed by some authorities as heresy and a violation of God's commandments. This belief continued to be upheld, and its prohibitions appear to have been strengthened in the period following the Council of Trent (1543-1564). In 16th century Italy the Jesuits encouraged young men to join the newly organised juvenile confraternities where they were provided religious and secular education, organised entertainments such as ball games, and dramatic productions. These confraternities may have been designed to protect youths from sodomitic attacks by their elders, or restrain their own inclination.²⁶ In Malta the Jesuits organized five different confraternities: 'the Conception' meant for members of the Order of St John, 'the Assumption' meant for artisans and clerks, 'the Annunciation' was for scholars, 'the Conception' was for the students of the Jesuit College, the fifth congregation, known as 'the Assumption' was based in Vittoriosa. Confraternities had a kind of exclusiveness, which was based on moral criteria.²⁷ We know that the clerk Cesare Passalacqua, accused of witchcraft practices in Malta in 1617, was a member of 'the Assumption'.²⁸ The confraternities' statutes unsurprisingly banned heretics, usurers, adulterers, sodomites and the like.

Sexual interactions structured by age – and pederasty in particular – seem to have been the predominant form of homosexual relations in other southern European settings, and probably in northern Europe as well, though this point is often underrated.²⁹ Most scholars who have worked on judiciary records agree that the passive partner in same-sex sodomy was usually relatively young. The judiciary evidence on the prevalence of relations between adult men and boys also corresponds closely to literary representations of the period. Virtually all of the contemporary novellas on homoerotic themes, from Bocaccio on, feature the love of mature youths or men for adolescents or young boys. A hierarchy of age and sexual role was thus one of the fundamental traits of the social organisation of homosexual sodomy in most of Europe. Sodomy was a crime against nature in which by the eighteenth century accomplices were also given very harsh sentences. The adolescent Gio Batta Calamatta was arrested together with a slave employed at the Foundry of the Order, whilst they were in the tavern of Antonio Sammut, nicknamed *il-Bar*.³⁰ Calamatta was condemned to perpetual exile in France,³¹ while the slave was given a life sentence on the galleys. Antonio Sammut was treated as an accomplice but managed to escape and sought asylum in a church. He was later caught at St Venera³² and was condemned to perpetual exile.³³

This distinction, with its corresponding and perhaps decisive difference in physical maturity and strength, played a key role in shaping both the expression and the perception of homosexual desire and behaviour in this society. It should be noted, however, that a substantial age gap and an erotic focus on adolescents were not peculiar to same-sex relations, nor did they necessarily or merely imply a desire to dominate; rather, these features were basic to this society's social structure and mentality, for men usually also married women, who were on average, their junior.

Conclusion

Homosexual activity was one of the many strands that composed the fabric of male experience, one that not only grew out of established social bonds and patterns of collective life but it even contributed in creative ways to fashioning and reinforcing them. The oppositions of age and role inherent in sodomy, as it was lived and conceived, not only helped delineate the contours of successive biological and social stages in males' lives, from adolescence to youth and adulthood, but also played a significant part in fashioning gender identity, as people commonly construed the active-passive sexual roles in terms of such value-laden dichotomies as masculinity and femininity, dominance and submission, honour and shame. The 'active' role substantially conformed to the behaviours and ideals that were defined as virile, and consequently a man's sexual relations with a boy, when enacted within these conventions, did not call into question his status as a 'normal' and masculine male. To take the 'passive' role in sex with a male, however, was deemed 'feminine' and dishonourable, but since this role was in effect limited to the biological period of adolescence it was only a temporary wayward turn on a boy's path to full-fledged manhood. The restriction of the 'womanly' role to adolescents actually permitted all mature males to engage in sex with boys without jeopardising their 'manly' gender identity. Same-sex relations thus formed part of the life experience of men and were deeply integrated into that cluster of social structures, gender values, and forms of aggregation that together helped constitute male culture. Indeed the control of homosexual behaviour as well as the ethos of same-sex relations themselves was part and parcel of the tensions that animated the social, cultural, and political set-up of most pre-modern societies.

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