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on

Sexual Revolution 600 B.C. - 400 A.D.

The Origins of Institutionalized Pederasty in Greece

So often blamed for the fall of the Roman Empire, homosexuals or rather bisexuals actually founded it: Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Nero -- all the Julio-Claudian Roman emperors loved boys, except for the idiot Claudius. And later, as the empire teetered under the stresses of political and natural disasters, mystical religions, and barbarians at the gates, homosexuals like Hadrian fought, in Professor Percy's words, "brilliant rear-guard actions" to save the Roman Empire.

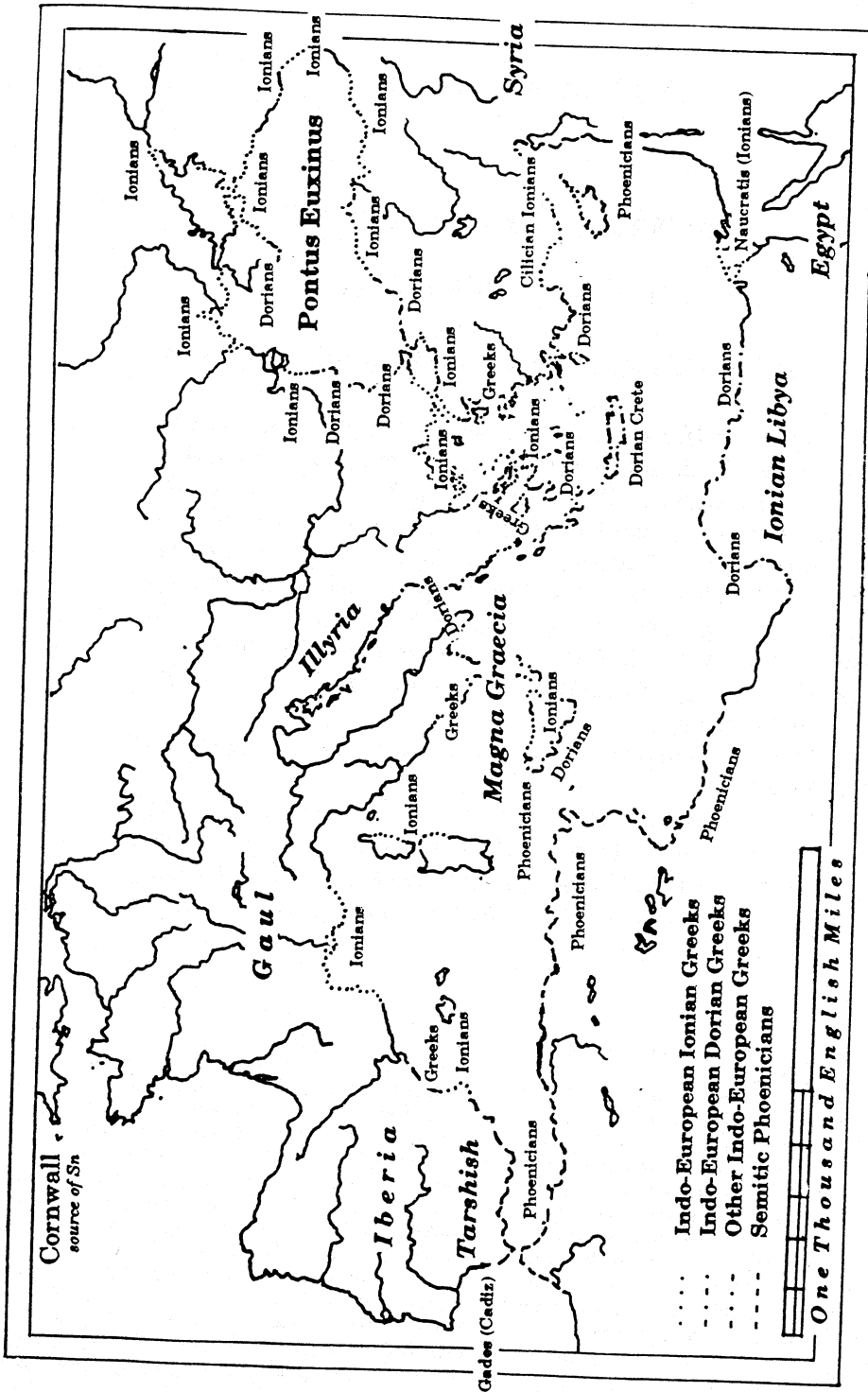
Greek culture was even more dependent on pederasty.

Here, in a grand panorama of classical gay history, Professor Percy delineates not merely the rôle played by institutionalized pederasty in the Roman Empire, but its birth in Greece -- yea, its conception in Crete . . .

In the Aegean crisis of overpopulation during the mid-seventh century B.C., Cretan sages evolved a system of interlocking institutions centered on delayed marriage and pedagogical pederasty to hold down the birthrate of 'knights' (about 1% or 2% of the total population) so that their heirs would not overly subdivide their estates, while improving the military training of their sons. Each young mounted warrior ritually kidnapped an aristocratic boy of 12 to love and train. Thereafter the beloved was dubbed "the renowned one" to distinguish him from a boy not yet chosen who was called an "obscure one".

This phenomenon (*institutionalized pederasty*) can now be placed in time and space.

Cretan knights first institutionalized pederasty, that is, they ordained a set of recognized legal and social norms governing the relationship between the erastes (a 20-year-old lover) and eromenos (his teenaged beloved) and its concomitants: *seclusion of women, nudity of males in gymnasia, 'herds' (agelai) of boys living in gangs in the wild, postponement of marriage of males until 30, and men's messes held in 'men's houses' (andreia)*. The Cretan founders of this system intended to control population in their narrow valleys which had become overcrowded in the preceding century and a half because of a seven-fold increase in population. The situational pederasty, androphilia, voluntary infanticide, and



widespread but not mandatory postponement of marriage that existed earlier had not sufficed to prevent the breakup among numerous sons of estates into parcels too small to maintain the aristocratic if austere lifestyle that necessarily included expensive mounts.

Although *at least a dozen* ancient authorities imply a Cretan origin of these institutions, no modern scholars have heretofore accepted this explanation for the phenomenon. They assume instead that the numerous pederastic episodes in the Greek myths were mostly older than 600 B.C., perhaps even prehistoric. This assumption confused them all about the place and date of origin of "Greek love". In fact, beginning about 600 B.C., mythographers, some (like the famous poet Pindar) by their own admission, inserted pederastic episodes into old fables or added entirely new pederastic stories about immortals and heroes.

It is not to be assumed, as some have, that the Greeks were ever unfamiliar with pederasty or with any other forms of homosexuality, but, before Cretan sages (or 'musicians', as the Greeks termed all those who served the muses) institutionalized pederasty during the late 7th century B.C., it was occasional and incidental. Such practices have, of course, occurred among *all* peoples and even among all mammals that have been carefully observed, but the the Greeks may already have been especially familiar with them from situations that had arisen during their past which had encouraged homosexual emotions and practices between males. During the Dark Age [1200 B.C.- 800 B.C.], nomads who had left their womenfolk behind while conquering the peninsula and offshore islands including Crete may well have raped indigenous boys. It is unreasonable to assume that knights and squires, sailors and 'merchant marines', and other all-male groups who, during those centuries and the ones that followed, did not cohabit with females when guarding dangerous outposts or sailing across or founding colonies along the whole length of the Mediterranean. In fact they often came into contact with peoples openly practicing forms of homosexuality such as the Scythians of Russia, the Celts of Gaul, or the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians.

Following the Cretan initiative, other Greeks institutionalized pederasty. Within a generation Spartans had adapted the hoplite system for heavy infantry made up of substantial landowners (who constituted at least 10% of the population). During or just after the great crisis caused by the revolt of the their serfs in the Second Messenian War (635-615 B.C.), Spartans imitated these Cretan institutions designed for

cavalry but adapted them to a wider segment of the population able to afford the expensive heavy armor (still expensive but cheaper than war horses) and weaponry of the new-style elite infantryman. The *phalanx* evolved about the middle of the 7th century in which each man's shield protected the exposed right of the man on his right (the huge 'porpax shield'). This military reformation which displaced the even more costly knights on the mainland required more coordination and male bonding than heroic cavalry charges had.

Spartans who could endure the severe and arduous training (*agoge*) and then became tested, proven, and thus solid citizens were called 'Equals'. Spartan custom, *written laws* being forbidden, had the *force* of law, made a pederastic relationship *obligatory* for upper-class males. A 20-22-year-old 'inspirer' took a 12-year-old 'hearer' to love and train until the 'inspirer' obligatorily married at 30 a girl of 18; the 'hearer', in turn, became an 'inspirer'.

While debate rages as to specifically what kind of sex lovers had with each other, the universality of the obligation in the Spartan hegemony is not questioned. One theory, based in part on graffiti bragging 'I buggered So-and-so', holds that, like Melanesians of today, the inspirer 'inseminated' the hearer in the anus with his sperm, thus transmitting his valor and his strength through the sperm. A second explanation, supported by erotic vase paintings showing such positions, holds that the elder only put his penis between his partner's thighs and that sexual intercourse was only intercrural, and then only after lengthy courtships, and that boys were not penetrated. Yet a third theory, expressed as early as the 4th century B.C., alleged that no sex, beyond carresses and kisses, took place between lovers and beloveds and that their "Platonic" relationship was akin to that between father and son or brother and brother. I believe that, while all three types occurred all across Hellas, they were nonetheless influenced by individual taste and local custom, anal intercourse predominating.

The concatenated institutions, which included *athletic nudity*, *seclusion of women*, *common messes for warriors*, and *segregation of teen-aged boys in herds*, bred countless athletic champions and warriors at Sparta. Though as boys they had been the passive partner of an active young warrior in a pederastic relationship, these heroes were hardly the worse off for their experience as objects of sexual lust. Both Cretan and Spartan institutions seemed so primitive and ritualistic, like those found among pre-literate tribes over much of the world, that many scholars

have assumed that they dated back to the prehistory of the Dorian tribe - one of the many subcategories of Hellenes. More recently some professors have even suggested that the phenomenon stemmed from "ritualized pederasty" practiced amongst *all* Indo-Europeans in their original homeland of the 3rd millennium B.C. Claims for a pan-Indo-European ritualized pederasty are unsubstantiable! They ignore the clear and inarguable record in the ancient Greek sources of this extraordinary sexual revolution at risk to their academic reputations!

Sparta had become a conservative, xenophobic, intolerant, belligerent power: its culture austere, its powers of innovation limited by too much discipline. Luxuries were excised from its culture, all but iron bars were banned as monetary exchange, permission to travel was very difficult to obtain. The chief elected authorities had to be at least 60 years old or over! The city-state was operated as and much resembled an army base. Yet, because of the prestige that the sober, unimaginative, stolid Spartans gained through victories in battles and games, all other advanced *poleis* ('city-states') of the Greek-speaking world adapted Spartan institutions, some of them also going directly to Crete for inspiration.

Much engaged in trade, having contact with so many foreigners, the Ionians, those Greeks who had settled the western coast of Asia Minor from the tenth century B.C. onwards, altered Spartan institutions to fit their own tastes and needs. They complemented rather than displaced the rigorous physical and arduous character training of Cretans and Spartans with often beguiling intellectual instruction. Commerce required sophistication and knowledge not just brute strength and unflinching loyalty. Reducing Spartan rigidity, they adapted pederastic pedagogy to intellectual pursuits (*paideia*) in *symposia* (literally 'drinking party', one held after dinner) modeled on the Spartan *syssitia* or all-male mess. Thus each upper-class boy had a devoted tutor for intellectual as well as physical and moral training, whom he loved. This unprecedented pederastic pedagogy on such a wide scale among literate peoples caused an intellectual breakthrough that has perhaps never been equalled before or after.

While obligatory, long-term, and perhaps exclusive in Crete and in Sparta, in Ionia, where tyrants vied with oligarchs for control, the pederastic relationship was voluntary, often brief, and even promiscuous. Ionian colonists in Sicily and Magna Graecia (southern Italy) were often more ostentatious and prone to luxury than even the Ionians of the homeland. As their intellectual

interests broadened, Ionian physicists and poets, and their colonists in Sicily and southern Italy (reinforced by poets and philosophers from their mother cities after the invasion of Ionia itself by Persians in 546 B.C.) shifted the training more to the mind than to the body, to refined symposia from crude gymnasia, to which ideas even began to permeate. Socrates loved to regale the boys in gyms' 'undressing rooms' as the Greeks called it. Ebullient and insouciant, mercantile Ionians preceded Athenians in stressing intellectual development of their boys at the expense of physical and moral education.

Developing the arts and sciences as no other people had before, Greeks *created* Western civilization by coupling pederasty with pedagogy. Just after 600 B.C., Solon, who imported pederasty along with nude exercises and the seclusion of women to Athens from Sparta and Crete, greatly expanded the suffrage and partially democratized Athens' constitution. Of course, women, slaves, and resident aliens, who made up the greater part of the population, were always excluded from the vote but he did give it to all adult male citizens. Only the rich, however, qualified at first to hold office. Continuing to democratize their institutions, Athenians became the first literate people to develop democracy, where, within a few generations, any citizen, protected through popular courts, could hold office, for which they were eventually selected by lot. Some other Greek states followed suit after they too had adopted gymnasia, symposia, and the institutionalized pederasty that came with them. (No state let women vote before the 19th century, so we should not condemn the Greeks particularly on that score; they may have treated women better than any other ancient society did.)

Although we cannot prove a causal connection, democracy followed shortly after the institutionalization of pederasty in a number of Greek cities. Many if not most Greek theorists hailed pederastic couples as founders, restorers, or protectors of liberty (such as the heroic pederastic Athenian tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton). They even associated pederasty with *eunomia* ('good government'). As a 2nd-century A.D. *litterator* pointed out: "For they [Greek scholars] maintain that this practice is zealously pursued in those cities throughout Hellas which, as compared with others, are ruled by good laws." [Atheneus, XIII, 601c.] Mythographers, religious writers had by then justified the new way of life by ascribing pederasty to their heroes and gods. Even Zeus came to have his Ganymede.

Commercial success and immigration, especially of Ionians fleeing the Persians, made

Athens the school of Hellas, the intellectual center of Greece. Athens became the greatest Hellenic metropolis in 480 B.C. by defeating the Persians at Salamis. By then, almost every upper-class Greek boy outside Sparta and Crete (both of which strictly limited intellectual instruction) had a devoted tutor, whom he in turn loved, to inspire him mentally as well as morally. As the great Victorian student of Greek pederasty, John Addington Symonds, declared:

What the Greeks called pederastia, or boy-love, was a phenomenon of one of the most brilliant periods of human culture, in one of the most highly organized and nobly active nations. It is the feature by which Greek social life is most sharply distinguished from that of any other people approaching the Hellenes in moral or mental distinction.

As the "school of Hellas", Athens saw the culmination of Greek culture during the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. As Symonds said:

pederastia at Athens was closely associated with liberty, manly sports, severe studies, enthusiasm, self-sacrifice, self-control, and deeds of daring, by those who cared for such things.

Pederasty, however, had its critics. Before the end of the 6th century B.C., Greek tyrants from time to time closed gymnasia out of fear; and the Persians, after they had seized Ionia, began to criticize, suppress, and perhaps to outlaw pederasty in the Greek *poleis* that they held. Claiming that man was the measure of all things and that they could make the better seem worse, 5th-century B.C. sophists, whether refugees from such persecutors merely drawn to Athens by its wealth and freedom, its gymnasia and symposia, its devotion to and subsidizing of culture, undermined the commitment to character training and morality that stern, patriotic, pederastic masters had demanded. To restore civic order and personal morality, Socrates and Plato counterattacked, insisting on absolutes, defending love between males but demanding limitation if not, as some argue, renunciation of physical contact between *erastoi* and *eromenoi*. No admirer of democracy, even the stern Plato declared that what differentiated Greek from barbarian was *nude gymnastics, pederasty, and philosophy*.

After Philip II of Macedon and his son Alexander III, the Great, extinguished Greek liberties in the mid-4th century B.C. and created

standing armies of mercenaries, their upper-class subjects, no longer citizens of independent *poleis*, did not need political or military skills so much as before. The *poleis* did retain local autonomy and citizen levies fought alongside or revolted against mercenary armies for almost two centuries, but a new culture - Hellenistic, blending oriental with pure Greek (Hellenic) culture - emerged, emphasizing individuality more than collective citizenship. Cosmopolitan philosophers henceforth spoke of 'natural law', 'world citizenship', divine reason, and universal providence more than of the *polis*. They imagined a single law for the *oecumene* to which all men belong, of which they are all fellow-citizens.

The boy was to be trained for membership in the *oecumene* rather than in the *polis*: for universal brotherhood or individual escape into philosophy rather than heroic loyalty in the *phalanx* and the civic assembly. Thus pederasty lost some of its original social and educational *raison d'être*. The *oecumene* blended Greek with Near Eastern elements in a synthesis. With the homeland no longer burdened by overpopulation because of casualties to war or plague and immigration to Asia, some physicians and philosophers criticized not only excesses but occasionally nonprocreative sex itself -- *though none before the Christians recommended outright chastity*. Yet many others and most Hellenistic poets continued to extol pederastic love. Inhabitants of the new cities that Alexander the Great and his successors founded in Asia and Africa and even of those old *poleis* of the homeland, Greeks of all classes began to enjoy eunuchs and effeminates, often cross-dressers, with perfume and powdered cheeks of the Oriental kind in addition to, or instead of, athletic *eromenoi* of the Hellenic sort. Boy prostitutes may have become more numerous than before and some men may have turned to their own slave boys.

Annexation by Rome did not substantially alter the pederasty practiced in Greek-speaking areas. There were in many respects fewer differences for Greeks between the later Hellenistic period and the Early Empire (the Principate, 30 B.C. - 180 A.D.) than there were between the flourishing, expensive, innovative early Hellenistic (which so resembled the 4th-century -- the late classical) and the late Hellenistic. This is true of pederasty: the first Greeks of the Hellenistic period who settled in Asia and Africa continued to act like Greeks. They set up gymnasia, symposia, and theatres wherever they settled. Beginning, however, with Antiochus IV [175-163 B.C.] and Ptolemy VIII [170-116 B.C.], their monarchs came more to

resemble Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, their merchants more the anti-hero of Petronius's *Satyricon* Trimalchio than a proper Greek merchant such as Cephalus. In exotic Alexandria and Antioch, many lost sense of proportion, of measure, and of good taste and came to resemble barbarians rather than the classical ideal. Orgies or one-night stands replaced mannered courtships, eunuchs *eromenoi*, tyrants heroes. But some correct young men and boys everywhere did continue decorous relationships. Intellectuals and artists as well as strong as emperors like Augustus, Hadrian, Septimus Severus, and Julian the Apostate fought brilliant rear-guard actions against further intellectual, spiritual, and cultural decline.

If the *Pax Romana* restored order and prosperity to the Greek provinces, it could not restore the honor and pride that had been lost with liberty. Orations no longer rang with freedom, philosophy with praise of liberty, art and poetry with such great originality. Preservation and imitation characterized Greek culture under Roman domination. The growth of population and prosperity, which did not extend to every region, failed to reinvigorate the culture or to re-inspire boy-love, which thus lost the capacity to provide itself with heroic citizens. But the old institutions continued, though less inspired, until the disasters of the 3rd century A.D. -- plagues, famines, and wars -- destroyed the classical synthesis. There were never again enough people or money.

The collapse of the system in the 3rd century A.D., which weakened upper-class pederastic institutions, led to the triumph of Christianity in the 4th century A.D. The new despotic Christian Empire decreed death for sodomites in 342 A.D., effectively suppressing the remnants of the millennium-old pederastic system. The Christians in fact also destroyed the classical synthesis that had endured for a millennium. They organized a new *oecumene*, radically different both socially and sexually. The Christian takeover of the still far-flung Roman Empire in 312 A.D. began the greatest change of sexuality and many other subdivisions of history since the sages had institutionalized pederasty as the basis for classical civilization and its concomitants one thousand years earlier. The main change the Christians brought was in sexuality. The Germans who eliminated the last Western emperor in the 5th century A.D. did not, perhaps, make as decisive a change as the Christians had, and, in the East, which survived the German onslaught, the reign of Justinian (527-565 A.D.) marked a greater watershed than the deposition by Germans of the last Roman Emperor

of the West, Romulus Augustulus, had in 476 A.D.

The *coup de grâce* for the noble institution of pederasty came with the Justinian Code which said that God would punish a society that tolerated Sodomites with earthquakes, famines, and pestilences.

Professor Percy, PhD (Princeton), is co-author of *Age of Recovery: Europe During the 15th Century* (Cornell U., 1972); Associate Co-Editor of the *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, Garland Publications, 1990; Chair, Committee for Lesbian and Gay History, American Historical Association (1989-); author of numerous articles in medieval taxation, Greek pederasty, gays in the Holocaust, and introductory college texts. His forthcoming book is *The Origins and Spread of Greek Pederasty* is the first in a series of three projected works on Greek and Roman sexuality. He presently teaches at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.
