

on avoiding being labeled themselves than in exploring differences and commonalities of social processes.

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Stephen O. Murray

SOCRATES (469-399 B.C.)

Athenian philosopher. The son of a well-to-do sculptor or stonemason, he was later reduced to poverty. Late in life he married Xantippe, who became proverbial in subsequent ages for her bad temper and shrewishness, though the stories about her may have been exaggerated. In early life he was interested in the scientific philosophy of his time and is said to have associated with Archelaus the physicist, but in the period best known to posterity he had abandoned these interests and was concerned solely with the right conduct of life, a quest which he conducted by the so-called "Socratic" method of cross-examin-

ing the individuals whom he encountered. While serving in the army he gained a great reputation for bravery, and as one of the presidents of the Athenian Assembly at the trial of the generals after the battle of Arginusae, he courageously refused to put an illegal motion to the vote despite the fury of the multitude. In 399 he was brought to trial before a popular jury on the charge of introducing strange gods and of "corrupting the youth." There has been considerable dispute over the precise meaning of the indictment, but the first part seems not to have been serious, while the second amounted to a charge that he had a "subversive" influence on the minds of the young, which was based on his known friendship with some of those who had been most prominent in their attacks on democracy in Athens. He made no attempt to placate the jury and was found guilty and sentenced to die by drinking a cup of hemlock. Though his friends could have enabled him to escape, he acquiesced to the sentence.

Socrates left no writings of his own: knowledge of his life and work comes from Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle. He probably never formulated a precise philosophy. His legacy to his disciples and to later generations consisted in the method by which he analyzed and criticized the fundamental assumptions of existing systems. He probably rejected the conventional Greek religious beliefs of his time, yet professed or created no heterodox religious doctrines. From time to time he had paranormal experiences, signs, or warnings which he interpreted as guideposts to his own conduct.

His sexual life, apart from the unhappy marriage, reflected the Greek custom of *paidērasteia* to the fullest. He was both the teacher of the young men who frequented his circle and the lover of at least some of them. As a boy of seventeen he had been the favorite of Archelaus, because he was in the bloom of youthful sensuality, which later gave place to serious intellectual concerns. As an adult he

loved good and noble boys with a passion that he asked only to be requited, but he was never given to a coarse and purely sensual **pederasty**; if the beauty of the young **Alcibiades** made an intense and lasting impression on him, he never forgot his duty as a teacher to guide his youthful pupils toward perfection. He was capable of self-willed abstinence and held this power up to others as an ideal; to have sought to impose it on all others was foreign to the Greek mentality. As a **bisexual** Hellene Socrates was always responsive to the beauty of the male adolescent and craved the companionship of young men; as a philosopher he practiced and taught the virtues of moderation and self-control. He endures as one of the outstanding examples in antiquity of a teacher for whom eros was an inspiration and a guide.

Because Socrates is a major figure in Western tradition, his sexual nature posed a continual problem. From **Ficino** to **Johann Matthias Gesner** (1691–1761) scholars sought to address the question discreetly. The **Marquis de Sade** was bolder, using *socratiser* as a verb meaning “to sodomize.” Even today, however, many classicists choose to evade the problem.

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Warren Johansson

SODOM AND GOMORRAH

These legendary cities have been traditionally located in the vicinity of the Dead Sea, where they constituted two members of a pentapolis, the Cities of the Plain. According to the Old Testament account in Genesis 14, 18, and 19, God overthrew four of the five cities in a rain of brimstone and fire. The names of Sodom

and Gomorrah, especially the former, have become proverbial. Echoes of the episode recur in the Bible and in the Koran, as well as in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic exegetical and homiletic writings. From the first city, Jewish Hellenistic Greek formed the derivative *sodomitēs*, from which medieval Latin obtained the noun of agent *sodomita*; as a result the connection with male homosexuality is for many axiomatic. However the matter is more complex.

A number of main constituents of the Sodom legend emerge from the central passages and fragmentary allusions in the **Old Testament** and the **intertestamental literature**, together with the midrashic writings of later centuries:

(1) the geographical legend that sought to explain the peculiarly barren terrain around the shores of the Dead Sea. The ancient world's rudimentary science of geology correctly related this barrenness to the circumstance that the water level of the Dead Sea had in prehistoric times been far higher; the sinking of the water level had exposed the previously inundated, now strikingly arid and sterile region to the gaze of the traveler.

(2) the theme of sterility by which the ancient mind sought to explain the origins of this condition; to the Bedouin living east and south of the Dead Sea it suggested the etiological inference that at one time the area surrounding this salinized body of water had been a fruitful garden belt. Yet the inhabitants of the cities of the plain had even in the midst of their abundance and prosperity denied hospitality to the poverty-stricken and the wayfarer, while the luxury in which they wallowed led them inevitably into effeminacy and vice (the parallel in the Hellenistic world was the city of Sybaris, whose proverbial self-indulgence gave the English language the word *sybaritic*). For this reason they were punished by the destruction of their cities and the conversion of the whole area into a lifeless desert.

(3) a Bedouin folk tale on the perils of city life, of which Lot is the hero who