

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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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 **intertextual 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

must be rescued again and again by the intervention of others. In Genesis 14:12 Lot is taken captive when Sodom is conquered by the four kings who have allied themselves against the Cities of the Plain; Abraham saves him by military intervention in the manner of a tribal sheikh with his retinue of 318 warriors. In 19:4-9 the Sodomites threaten Lot's guests with gang rape, but are miraculously blinded and repelled, and in 19:13, 15 the angelic visitors warn Lot of the imminent destruction of the city so that he and his family can leave just in time to escape the rain of brimstone and fire. This underlying motif explains why Lot later "feared to dwell in Zoar" (19:30), even though God has spared the place as a reward for his model hospitality toward the two visitors. Over the centuries Sodom and Gomorrah, along with the Babylon of the Book of Revelation, came to symbolize the corruption and depravity of the big city as contrasted with the virtue and innocence of the countryside, a notion cherished by those who idealized rural life and is still present, though fading in twentieth-century America.

(4) the occurrence in the region east and south of the Dead Sea of volcanic activity that persisted throughout antiquity and subsided only after the thirteenth century. These volcanic eruptions, which have left traces still to be seen at the present day, inspired the "rain of brimstone and fire" (burning sulfur) of Genesis 19:24, which supplemented the notion that the four cities had been "overthrown" (destroyed by an earthquake) that figures in Genesis 19:25.

(5) the presence in the geographical vicinity of the tribe of Benjamin, which belonged to the pre-Israelite population of Canaan and had for centuries lived by marauding and plundering at the expense of its more civilized neighbors. The culmination of this brigandage in the period of the judges was the outrage at Gibeah recorded in Judges 19, with its explicit motifs of sexual aggression and gang rape.

(6) the currency in antiquity of world destruction legends, in which the earth is annihilated either by water (*kataklysmos*) or by fire (*ekpyrosis*). The story of Noah and the deluge is the rendering of the first in the book of Genesis, while the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a localization of the second, in which the catastrophe is limited to four cities in the vicinity of the Dead Sea (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim) even though the epilogue involving Lot and his daughters clearly derives from a universal conflagration myth.

(7) world destruction legends that actualize elements of fantasy wish-fulfillment. If the human race were annihilated with the exception of a single family, the earth could be repopled only by means of sexual unions ordinarily condemned as incestuous. The handful of virtuous human beings preserved from the catastrophe by the gods are the chosen seed of a new mankind.

(8) world destruction fantasies associated in modern clinical experience with the early stages of schizophrenia. These fantasies reveal a key component of the Sodomy delusion: the subject cherishes the belief that particular actions would expose the world to this awful fate, and that only by refraining from them is he virtuously warding off the catastrophe. Astrological literature supplied the ancients with an entire list of calamities that betokened divine wrath, as in Luke 21:11, all of which were later ascribed to retribution for "sodomy." Fear of homosexual aggression plays a role in these paranoid fantasies, of the sort analyzed by Freud in the classic Schreber case.

The Sodom legend and its gradual expansion into the delusional form that obsesses the Christian mind were therefore overdetermined; the conscious and unconscious associations of the component themes blended to form the later complex of Christian beliefs that may be designated the "sodomy delusion." Its priority in the Old Testament sequence

notwithstanding, the more prosaic story in Judges 19 served as the model for the mythical narrative in Genesis 19, where Lot's angelic visitors are miraculously saved from homosexual assault. The whole account, reinforced by the enduring geographical features of the Dead Sea region (the supposed "statue of Lot's wife"), underlay the theological dogma that the destruction of the Cities of the Plain had been divine retribution for the homosexual depravity of the former inhabitants. And so the "sin of Sodom" became synonymous with homosexual activity and then with "unnatural vice"—a Hellenic, not a Judaic concept—in general, and the scriptural fate of the cities and prophecies of future doom made their barren site linger as an eternal warning to any people that tolerated such depravity in its midst.

The notion of *sodomy* is an innovation of Latin Christianity toward the end of the twelfth century; it is not found in Jewish or **Byzantine** writings. Legal usage in various countries has given the word broader or narrower definitions, particularly in regard to the character of the actions that "constitute the offense." In the late **Middle Ages** the tendency of the allegorizing mind to parallelism led to the notion that Gomorrah, the twin city of Sodom, had been a hotbed of lesbianism, even though there was nothing in either Testament that would suggest such a construction. The hold of the legend on the mind of Christian Europe has been such that even in the twentieth century literary works have been composed on the subject, and the less sophisticated part of the population still believes that the destruction of Sodom exemplified the wrath of God that is revealed from heaven (Romans 1:18) against those who practice homosexuality.

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SODOMA (GIOVANNI ANTONIO BAZZI, CALLED "IL SODOMA"; 1477–1549)

Italian painter. Born at Vercelli, Sodoma studied under a minor Lombard artist (Martino Spanzotti) in Milan, where he sustained a more crucial influence—that of the innovative work of **Leonardo da Vinci**. Between 1505 and 1508 he executed a series of frescoes in the Benedictine monastery of Monte Oliveto near Siena. He then became Siena's leading artist. He was also summoned to Rome, where he painted part of a ceiling in the Vatican's Stanza della Segnatura, as well as some handsome frescoes in the Villa Farnesina. Today his works are less appreciated than those of his Sienese rival, Domenico Beccafumi.

Despite some nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars who have sought to deny it, his nickname is deserved. According to his biographer Giorgio Vasari, Sodoma loved unchaste entertainments and merrymaking; he surrounded himself with an entourage of boys and beardless youths. Cherishing them greatly, "he acquired the name of Sodoma, which he did not take with annoyance or disdain, but rather gloried in it, making jingles and verses on the subject, which he pleasantly sang to the accompaniment of the lute." Once, while in Florence, his horse won a race, and on being asked what name should be proclaimed, he insisted "Sodoma, Sodoma!" This effrontery earned him a session of fagbashing by the mob. He was moreover an eccentric, keeping a menagerie of animals so that "his house resembled Noah's Ark" (Vasari). In his early years at Siena he did marry, siring a daughter, but his wife left him in disgust after a year. In a tax return of 1531 Sodoma facetiously claimed to have three mistresses and thirty grown children—an assertion that is no more indicative of basic heterosexuality than was Walt Whitman's comparable declaration three and a half centuries later.