

life and death of Nero's favorite **Petronius**, the probable author of the *Satyricon* which, even preserved as it is in a fragmentary form, still affords a panorama of the sexual life of first-century Rome. Thus while Tacitus does not describe the homosexuality of that period in as much detail as do **Suetonius** and **Martial**, his work is a valuable supplement to other contemporary portrayals of Roman eroticism.

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### TALMUD

A collection of 67 treatises, the Talmud interprets and elaborates the commandments of the Torah and the narratives of the **Old Testament**; the legal portion is known as *halakhah*, the folklore is called *agadah*. There are two redactions of the Talmud, the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. Both have as their core the Mishnah, the decisions of the sages of the preceding three centuries that was edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince in 193. Written in late Hebrew, it served as the basis for subsequent teaching and interpretation that lasted from the first half of the third century to the year 499. These secondary deliberations, not in the Mishnah and assembled in the Gemara, were mainly conducted in Aramaic, the spoken language of the Jews of Palestine and Babylonia (each with its own dialect). The final process of redaction probably began before the end of the fifth century and lasted into the seventh. The *editio princeps* of the Babylonian Talmud is that of Venice: Daniel Bomberg, 1520–23, the numbering of whose folios is the basis for later citation; the standard modern edition is that of Vilnius: Romm, 1922, with the classic commentary in Rabbinic Hebrew of Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes (1040–1105) and numerous minor glosses.

The largest part of the material relative to homosexuality in the Talmud is in the treatise Sanhedrin, which deals with the capital crimes adjudicated by the Beth Din, the high court of the Jewish religious community. In Sanhedrin 53a it is stated that death by stoning is the penalty for two groups of offenses, the first of which constitute violations of the *patria potestas*—the authority of the head of the patriarchal extended family—the second the propagation or practice of idolatry or magic:

incest with mother	blasphemy
father's sexual intercourse with daughter in law	idolatry
intercourse with another male or with a beast	giving one's seed to Molech
cursing one's father or mother	necromancy or divination
adultery with a betrothed maiden	incitement to idolatry
a wayward and rebellious son	sorcery

In Sanhedrin 54a–55a the Gemara elaborates this prescription as follows: In Leviticus 20:13 "if a man also lie with mankind" means "a man" not a minor, "mankind" both adult and minor; "their blood shall be upon them" is by analogy with Leviticus 20:27 (the penalty for one who "hath a familiar spirit" or "is a wizard" is interpreted to ordain death by stoning). Leviticus 18:22 is taken to apply to the active partner, Deuteronomy 23:18 to the passive, proving that the *kadesh* mentioned in the latter verse was the sacred prostitute who served the male worshipper in the Ishtar–Tammuz cult; but Rabbi Akiba derived both prohibitions from the former by reading the consonantal text as both *tishkabh*, "thou shalt lie" and *tishshakebh*, "thou shalt be lain with." Legal responsibility commenced at the age of nine years and a day, which was also the lower limit for the emancipation of the child from the *patria potestas* in sexual matters in later Islamic law.

In Niddah 13b, the tractate that deals with menstrual impurity in women, there is the curious statement that "those who play with children delay the coming of the Messiah." While the assertion is not interpreted solely to refer to pederasty, the underlying notion is that the Messiah will not come until all the unborn souls contained in Guph (literally "body") have been disposed of. This is the probable source of the thirteenth-century Christian accretion to the account of the Nativity which maintained that because of the "crime against nature" the Son of Man repeatedly postponed his incarnation, and even thought of abandoning the project altogether.

Sanhedrin 70a interprets the passage in Genesis 9:22 "And Ham . . . saw the nakedness of his father" as meaning that Ham sodomized Noah, while the alternative explanation is that he castrated him. The allusion is to the legal language of Leviticus 18:7 "The nakedness of thy father . . . thou shalt not uncover," which prohibited homosexual incest with the male parent, an indirect proof that the generalized taboo of Leviticus 18:22 is a later insertion into the Holiness Code.

On the subject of Sodom, Sanhedrin 109a-b relates that the "men of Sodom were wicked and sinners" (Genesis 13:23), "wicked" meaning "with their bodies" and "sinners" with their money, hence both depraved and uncharitable. In their prosperity the Sodomites resolved to abrogate the laws which protected the stranger and the traveler, and further inverted the principles of justice so that if someone wounded his neighbor he was ordered to pay the fee for bleeding; if someone crossed the river by ferry he had to pay four *zuzim*, if on foot he had to pay eight. A particular tale of their inhospitality concerned a maiden who gave a poor man some bread hidden in a pitcher. When the Sodomites discovered this, they smeared her body with honey and exposed her on the city wall so that the bees would come and devour her.

The decisions and pronouncements of the sages were later codified, first by Musa ibn Maimun (Maimonides) in the thirteenth century in the *Mishneh Torah*, then by Joseph Karo in the sixteenth in the *Shulhan Arukh*. The latter remains the fundamental code of morality and religious observance for the Orthodox Jew to the present day, and authorizes the fierce opposition of some Orthodox groups in large American cities to the enactment of gay rights legislation. On this issue they can form alliances with conservative Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants, even though they refuse, unlike the Conservative and Reform wings of Judaism, to join the contemporary ecumenical dialogue on public policy and social justice with the Christian denominations.

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## TASTE

Traditionally one of the five senses, taste is used in an extended sense to denote critical judgment, discernment, or appreciation. In this broader sense it has played a major role in the history of aesthetics. In addition, sociologists hold that taste preferences characterize specific social groups or classes.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a reign of "good taste." While most agreed that this taste was formed through experience and cultivation, it proved difficult to determine what its actual defining characteristics were. For some, good taste was unitary and identifiable with classic norms, including such qualities as balance, restraint, and ideal beauty; for others, there were several tastes, each valid in its own sphere. In the latter approach, one might acquire a taste