

## BOOK REVIEW

*Ancient Sex: New Essays*. Edited by RUBY BLONDELL and KIRK ORMAND. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2015. Pp. xii + 343. Hardcover, \$97.95. ISBN 978-0-8142-1283-7.

In their recent volume, *Ancient Sex: New Essays*, Ruby Blondell and Kirk Ormand seek to build upon the work of the forty years since Foucault and to point to new directions of scholarship on ancient sexualities. The volume's principal premise is that scholarship on the topic has entered a new post-Foucauldian state in which the overall theoretical framework laid out by Foucault is "incontrovertible" (13) and has now reached mainstream status in Classics. Blondell and Ormand define this framework as (1) the decoupling of sexual desire from psychological makeup and (2) the insistence on reading a given culture's sexual discourse on its own terms. As such, Blondell and Ormand see their collection as building out from this framework inasmuch as it explores the ways in which Greek and Roman discourses about sex functioned not within our modern constructions of sexuality, but within each respective culture (14).

Holt Parker begins the volume with his chapter entitled "Vaseworld: Depiction and Description of Sex at Athens." Parker's chapter—though lengthy (119 pages)—provides an invaluable introduction to the various manners in which visual representations of sexuality were presented in Athens, examining nearly every known pot depicting homoerotic activity in the corpus and arguing that these representations do not provide realistic illustrations of sexual *mores* as much they reflect a particular set of generic and stylistic conventions.

In Chapter Two, "Lesbians are not from Lesbos," Kate Gilhuly explores how the island of Lesbos got its association with female same-sex desire and alternative female sexuality, generally. Beginning with the earliest sources connecting Lesbos with sexuality, Gilhuly argues for a nonlinear evolution of associations connecting conceptions about the culture of Lesbos, Athenian comic practice, the representation of the courtesan, and the representation of Sappho (145).

Chapter Three, "Pederasty and the Popular Audience," continues the emphasis on representations of sex, as Julia Shapiro tackles the traditional theory that in Classical Athens pederasty was confined to elites, and that forensic oratory

and comedy illustrate a popular contempt for the practice among non-elites. Shapiro problematizes this black-and-white definition and shows that the depiction of pederasty in oratory and comedy is not aimed at demeaning the elite practice, but is instead interested in poking fun at pederasty performed incorrectly, a move that shows not popular contempt of but aspiration towards pederasty.

In Chapter Four, “What is Greek Sex for?” Nancy Worman also examines the use of sex in Athenian social discourse and—like Parker above—argues that such representations should be read metaphorically instead of as representative of Athenian social practices. In particular, she shows that literary depictions of Greek sexual practices are largely metaphors aiming at the regulation of citizen behaviors.

The volume turns to Rome in Chapter Five, “Lusty Ladies in the Roman Imaginary,” as Deborah Kamen and Sarah Levin-Richardson sharpen the traditional axis of activity/passivity promulgated by Dover and Foucault. In particular, they revise this conceptual map (1) by using the more precise terms “penetrating” and “penetrated” and (2) by reclaiming a cognitive space for female sexual agency. In so doing, they include normative females, who are penetrated and passive, but also account for non-normative females who are active, whether they penetrate (e.g. *tribades*) or are penetrated (e.g. *fututrices*).

In Chapter Six, “The Illusion of Sexual Identity in Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 5,” Sandra Boehringer moves beyond older discussions of the dialogue that seek to apply either Classical Athenian or modern Western discursive practices onto the characterization of the Lucian’s characters. In place of these discursive misapplications, Boehringer shows that Lucian is not offering an alternative sexuality as much as creating “a pastiche of ancient clichés about women, sex, and gender” (19).

In Chapter Seven, “Sculpting Antinous: Creations of the Ideal Companion,” Bryan Burns explores the manners in which the historical figure of Antinous has been reinterpreted and reinvented in a variety of discourses from antiquity to modernity. In each case, Antinous was read through a particular discursive lens, a process that has led to his privileged position as an icon of male beauty and a touchstone of gay identities in modernity.

To close out the collection, David Halperin provides an Epilogue in which he reflects on the development of the field of ancient sexualities from Foucault to modern times, reminding us that studies of ancient sexualities are always in some way concerned with our own discursive assumptions. He leaves us, therefore,

with the hope that this field will continue not only to illuminate the practices of the past, but also to negotiate the *mores* of the present.

As a whole, this volume achieves the objectives it set out for itself: to build upon the Foucauldian theoretical foundations and to lead the field into new, post-Foucauldian era. Therefore, this volume will be of great value to individuals—both professional and non-professional—with interest in Classics, Sociology, or Anthropology. The only weakness of the volume is that it focuses too heavily on Greece with little attention paid to Rome (six chapters to one). That said, each essay has an important part to play in the collection and points out valuable methodologies for analyzing ancient sexual discourses. Moreover, Chapters Two and Five should be required reading for any serious students of ancient sexualities. For these reasons alone, Blondell and Ormand have created a truly remarkable volume that will undoubtedly add to the already lively discourse on ancient sexualities.

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