

# (Some Aspects of) Sexuality in Ancient Athens



# Some Mid-Term Information

- I will publish full instructions today, but for now:
- Material from Weeks 1-5.
  - Review Weeks 1-5 “Greek Terms” (and instructions therein) in Google Docs document on CCLE.
  - Review images in slides that are *also* in book.
  - Be sure to have read primary source readings (i.e., readings for section).
- Bring two blue books to this classroom at normal class hour, Friday Nov. 5.
- There are no make-up exams.
- If you think you have Covid-19, I need a note from a physician, nurse, or the Ashe Center, etc. testifying to symptoms and, if possible, the results of a Covid-19 test.

# *ERŌS* (or *EROS*)

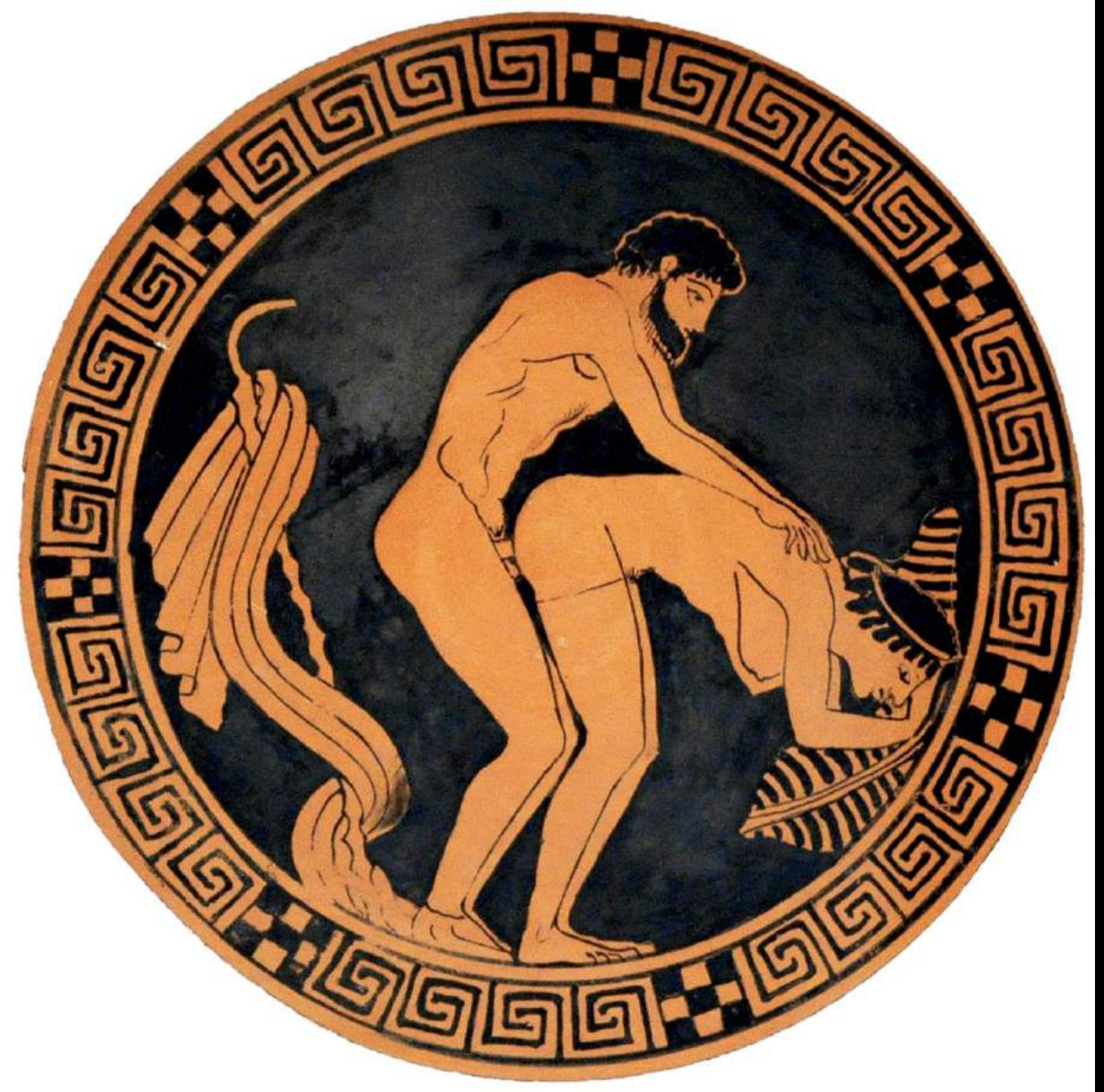
From Proto-Indo-European root:

*erə* - = “to separate, to adjoin”

- probably *erasthai*, “to love, (to be separated?)” > erotic
- probably *eris*, “strife, discord”

# Asymmetry of Power

*Emphasis on actions and behaviors, rather than on identities*





# Pederasty

“love of young boys”

- *Attempt to avoid judgment*
- *Rather to inquire into its function in ancient Greek society*



# A recognized Greek practice

“The Persians adopt more foreign customs than anyone else ... They learn and then practice the habit of all kinds of diverting comforts (*eupatheias*) from various parts of the world, including the practice of having sex (*misgontai*, “to mix with”) with boys, which they learned from the Greeks.” (Herodotus 1.135, trans. Waterfield, adapted)



# Zeus and Ganymede

Ganymede “was the loveliest born of the race of mortals, and therefore the gods caught him away to themselves, to be Zeus' wine-pourer, for the sake of his beauty, so he might be among the immortals.”  
Homer, *Iliad* 20.233-5

Ganymede → *catamite* (“a boy kept for homosexual practices”)





# Male-Male Sexual Experience in Athens

*erastês* – the older male; “the lover” (active partner)

*eromenos* – younger male, with upper age limit 17-22 (?); “the beloved” (passive partner)





# Why the pederastic relationship?

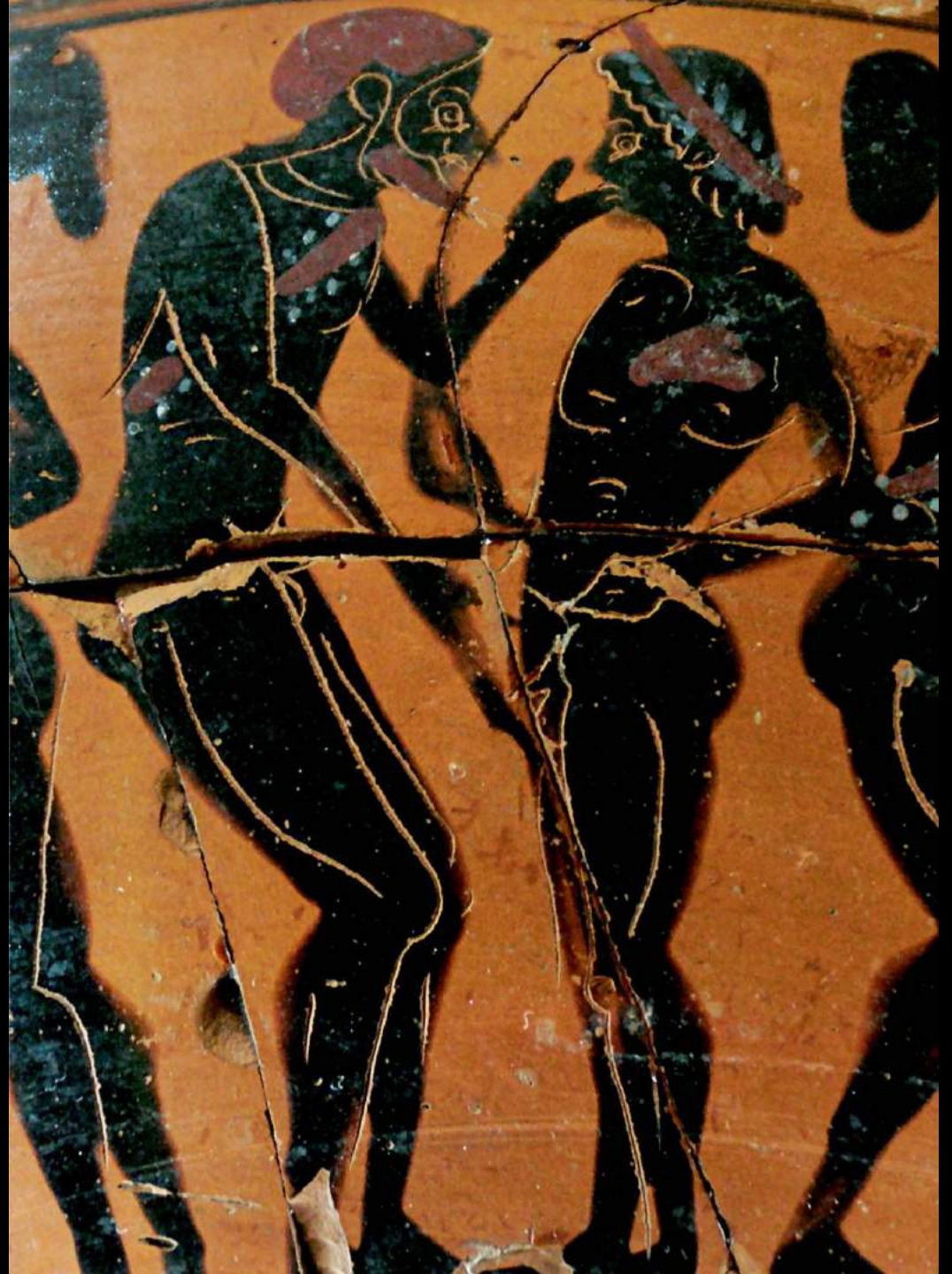
- Brothers in arms?
  - Example of Theban Sacred Band (4<sup>th</sup> century BCE)
  - Achilles and Patroclus [?: see Plato *Symposium* 179e-180b, Aeschines, *Against Timarchus* 133, 141-50];
  - Harmodius and Aristogeiton
- Supplement to marital sex?
- Idea of tutoring/sponsoring → the *erastês* leading the *eromenos* into society?
  - Problem of “elite” evidence



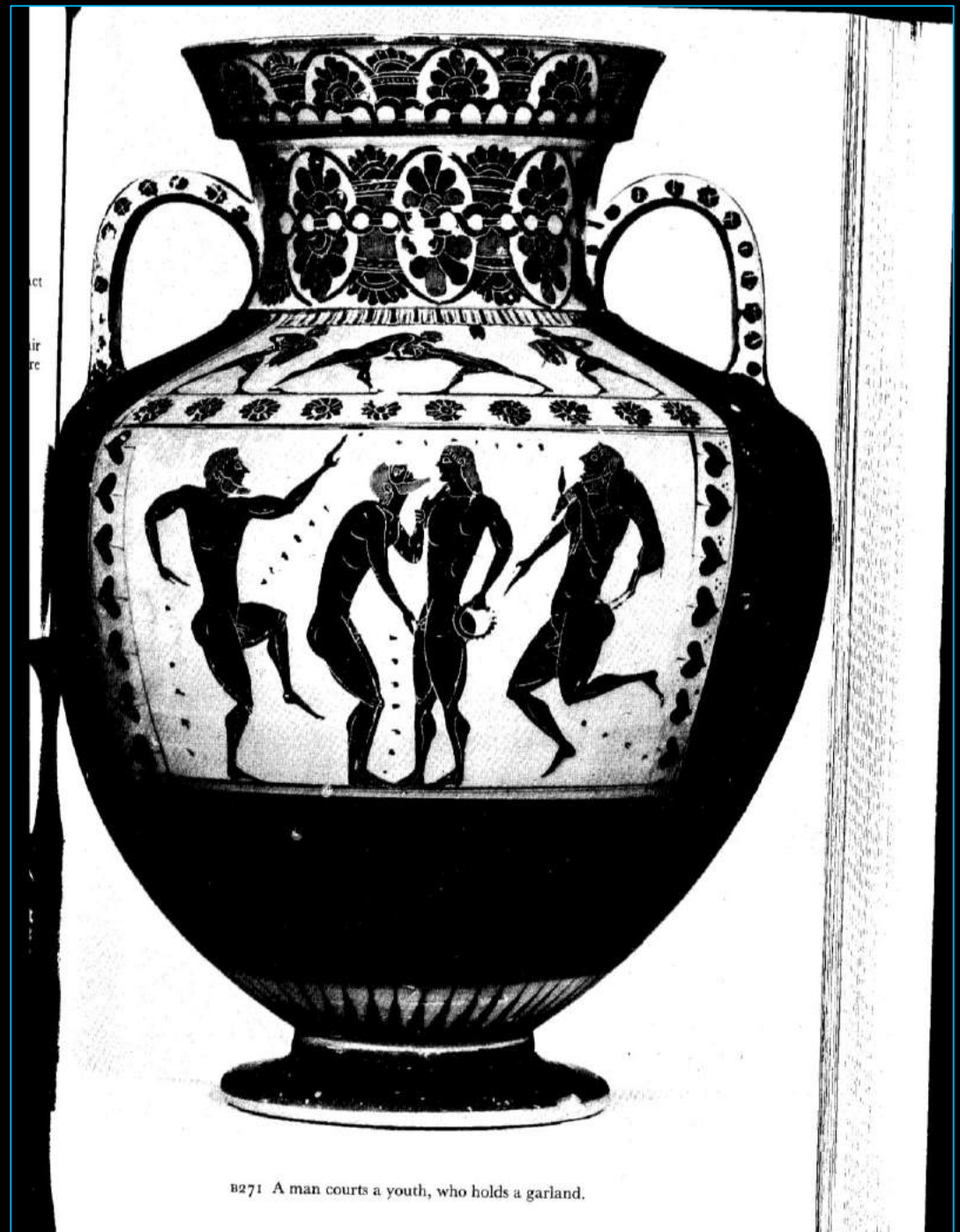
# Asymmetry of Pleasure?

Socrates in Xenophon's  
*Symposium*:

“A youth [the *eromenos*]  
does not share in the  
pleasure of the intercourse  
as a woman does, but looks  
on, sober, at another in  
love's intoxication.” (8.21)







8271 A man courts a youth, who holds a garland.





# Theognis (6<sup>th</sup> C BCE)

“It’s beautiful for you to give in to me,  
And since I desire you, no disgrace for  
me  
To beg. I pray you, by your knees and  
hands  
Honor me, handsome boy, do what I  
ask;  
For some day you will face another boy  
And want the violet-crowned  
Aphrodite’s gift;  
May you receive the same response I’ve  
had!”  
(ll. 1329-34, tr. Wender, adapted)



# Anacreon of Teos (6<sup>th</sup> C BCE)

1] fragment 359 (trans. Miller)

For Cleobulus I long,  
On Cleobulus I dote  
At Cleobulus I gaze.

2] fragment 360 (trans. Miller)

Boy whose glance is girlish,  
I pursue you, but you pay no heed,  
not knowing that you hold my soul's  
reins in your hand.



# The anachronism of term “homosexuality”

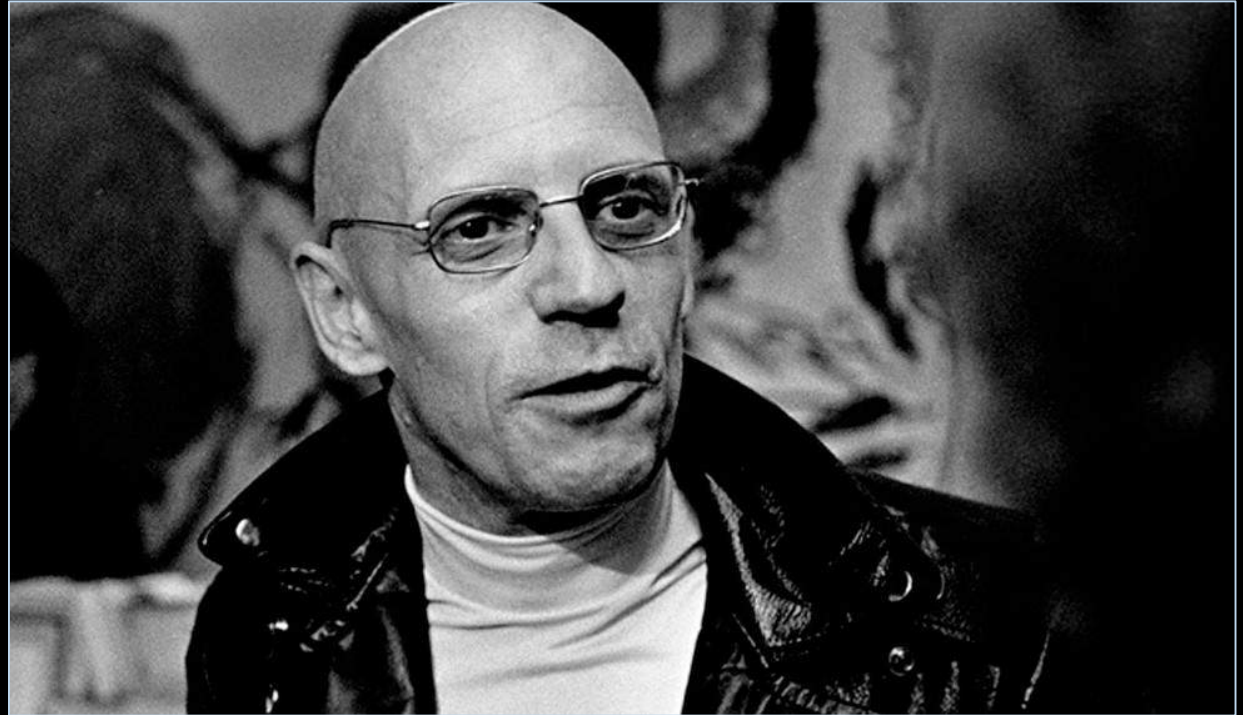
- Charles Gilbert Chaddock — 1892 “homo-sexuality,” rendering of a German term
- Homosexuality presupposes “sexuality” (p. 24): a “specifically sexual dimension to the human personality, a characterological seat within the individual of sexual acts, desires, and pleasures — a determinate source from which all sexual expression proceeds” - David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (1990), p. 26

## Halperin, *One Hundred Years* (continued)

“Instead of attempting to trace the history of ‘homosexuality’ as if it were a *thing*, therefore, we might more profitably analyze how the significance of same-sex sexual contacts have been variously constructed over time by members of human living-groups” (p. 29).

# Three Major Scholars of Ancient Sexuality

- Michel Foucault →
- (Sir) Kenneth Dover
- David Halperin





# Foucault, *History of Sexuality* (3 volumes)

“For every male citizen, at an early stage of their lives, the possibility existed of inhabiting a passive role with respect to a potential *erastēs* ... The day would come when he would have to be a man, to exercise powers and responsibilities, so that obviously he could then no longer be an object of pleasure — but then, to what extent could he *have been* such an object?” (Foucault, vol. 2, pp. 220-21).

# *Kalos* and *Kinaidos*

- To be a desirable *eromenos* was to be *kalos* (“beautiful,” “noble”)
- But to be a grown adult and in a sexual relationship with another grown adult was not viewed well  
→ *kinaidos* (lewd fellow)
- Court-case called *Against Timarchus*

What was hard for Athenians to accept — and this is the feeling that Aeschines tries to play upon in the speech against Timarchus — **was not that they might be governed by someone who loved boys, or who as a youth was loved by a man; but that they might come under the authority of a leader who once identified with the role of pleasure object for others**” (Foucault, vol. 2, p. 219).

# Foucault (and Dover's) Answer: *POWER*

## [1] Power over others:

There is a “difficulty caused in this society that accepted sexual relations between men by the juxtaposition of an ethos of male superiority and a conception of all sexual intercourse in terms of the schema of penetration and male domination” (Foucault, vol. 2, p. 220).

## Foucault on Power, continued ...

“In short, to delight in and be a subject of pleasure with a boy did not cause a problem for the Greeks; **but to be an object of pleasure and to acknowledge oneself as such constituted a major difficulty** for the boy” (Foucault, vol 2, p. 221).



# Regimen of Self-Control (*sôphrosynê*)

## [2] Power over oneself:

The vicious man was “incapable of mastering his own passions and was therefore always prone to abuse his power and to do violence (*hubrizein*) to his subjects ... Opposite [him], there was the positive image of the leader who was **capable of exercising strict control over himself in the authority he exercised over others**. His self-rule moderated his rule over others” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, p. 81).

# Platonic Love?











2.26



2.27





# Hetairae and Pornae



