



R E W R I T I N G   A N T I Q U I T Y

# SEX IN ANTIQUITY

EXPLORING GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

EDITED BY MARK MASTERSON, NANCY SORKIN RABINOWITZ AND JAMES ROBSON

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## SEX IN ANTIQUITY

Looking at sex and sexuality from a variety of historical, sociological and theoretical perspectives, represented in a variety of media, *Sex in Antiquity* represents a vibrant picture of the discipline of ancient gender and sexuality studies, showcasing the work of leading international scholars as well as that of emerging talents and new voices.

Sexuality and gender in the ancient world is an area of research that has grown quickly with often sudden shifts in focus and theoretical standpoints. This volume contextualizes these shifts while putting in place new ideas and avenues of exploration that further develop this lively field or set of disciplines. This broad study also includes studies of gender and sexuality in the Ancient Near East which provide not only rich consideration of those areas but also a comparative perspective not often found in such collections. *Sex in Antiquity* is a major contribution to the field of ancient gender and sexuality studies.

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# SEX IN ANTIQUITY

Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the  
Ancient World

*Edited by Mark Masterson, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and  
James Robson*

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This book is dedicated:

To T. R. Heartt

To Ella and Sophie Gold, granddaughters extraordinaires

To Owain Thomas, cariad and ffrind mawr

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABV</i>	Beazley, J. (1956) <i>Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters</i> . Oxford: Clarendon
Adam.	Adamantius, <i>Physiognomonica</i>
<i>ADB</i>	<i>Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie</i>
<i>Add<sup>2</sup></i>	Carpenter, T. (1989) <i>Beazley Addenda</i> , 2nd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press
<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i>
<i>Anon.</i>	Anonymous, <i>De Physiognomonica Liber</i>
<i>Lat.</i>	
AO	Assurbanipal texts, British Museum
APA	American Philological Association
<i>ARV<sup>2</sup></i>	Beazley, J. (1963) <i>Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters</i> , 2nd edn. Oxford: Clarendon
b-f	black-figure
<i>CAT</i>	Dietrich, M., Loretz, O. and Sanmartín, J. (eds) (1995) <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places</i> , 2nd edn. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag
<i>CGL</i>	<i>Corpus Grammaticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>Coll.</i>	<i>Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio</i>
<i>CTh.</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i>
DAI	Deutsches Archäologisches Institut
ETCSL	Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature
<i>FGrH</i>	<i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> , ed. F. Jacoby (Berlin)
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
<i>ILAlg</i>	<i>Inscriptions latines d'Algérie</i>
<i>in de An.</i>	<i>In de Anima</i>
Jul.	Emperor Julian
<i>KBO</i>	<i>Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi</i> . Leipzig & Berlin: Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft.
<i>KUB</i>	<i>Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi</i> , Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatische Abteilung. Berlin: Akademie Verlag
Lampe	Lampe, G. (ed.) (1961) <i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i>

<i>LSJ</i>	Liddell, H., Scott, R. and Jones, H. (eds) (1968) <i>Greek–English Lexicon</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press
<i>LSO</i>	<i>Lateres Signati Ostienses</i> , Appendix
MT	Masoretic Text [the text of the Hebrew Bible]
<i>Myst.</i>	Iamblichus, <i>De Mysteriis</i>
NEB	New English Bible
<i>NRSV</i>	<i>New Revised Standard Version</i> [of the Bible]
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>OLD</i>	Glare, P.G.W. (ed.) (2012) <i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> , 2nd edn, 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press
<i>P.</i> <i>Chester Beatty</i>	<i>Chester Beatty Papyrus</i>
<i>P.</i> <i>Elephantine</i>	<i>Elephantine Papyri</i> , ed. O. Rubensohn, <i>Aegyptische Urkunden aus dem Königlichen Museum zu Berlin: Griechische Urkunden</i> . Berlin: Sonderheft, 1907
<i>P. Giss.</i>	<i>Griechische Papyri im Museum des oberhessischen Geschichtsvereins zu Giessen</i> , Band 1 Hefte 1–3, ed. O. Eger, E. Kornemann, P.M. Meyer. Leipzig, 1910–12
<i>P. Oxy.</i>	Grenfell, P., Hunt, A. S. <i>et al.</i> (eds) (1898–) <i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> , London: Egypt Exploration Fund
<i>P. Ram.</i>	<i>Papyrus Ramesseum</i>
<i>Para</i>	Beazley, J. (1971) <i>Paralipomena</i> . Oxford: Clarendon
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
<i>PPF</i>	<i>Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas</i>
<i>RE</i>	Pauly, A., Walz, C. and Teuffel, W. S. (eds) (1894–1978) <i>Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> . Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler
r-f	red-figure
RIB	<i>Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i>
RIH	Ras Ibn-Hani
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
<i>RSV</i>	<i>Revised Standard Version</i> [of the Bible]
<i>Suppl. Ital.</i>	<i>Corporis Inscriptionum Latinarum Supplementa Italica</i>
<i>TLG</i>	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</i>
<i>TLL</i>	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i>
<i>Victric.</i>	Victricius, <i>De Laude Sanctorum</i>
<i>VP</i>	Iamblichus, <i>De Vita Pythagorica</i>
WA	Western Asiatic Antiquities, British Museum

The names of Greek and Latin authors and works are generally abbreviated according to the conventions used in reference works such as *LSJ* and *OLD*. Where authors have departed from this practice, the abbreviations used are self-explanatory.

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# INTRODUCTION

*Mark Masterson, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and James Robson, with assistance from  
Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones*

When we were asked by Routledge to edit a volume on gender and sexuality, we knew that we wanted a set of new and forward-looking essays, not a summation of where we had been. We wanted to present what people were currently working on. Throughout the editing process, however, we struggled about what to call it – “Sex in Antiquity” was our attempt at a catchy title, but what should the subtitle be? We were concerned for a while that the eventual choice, “gender and sexuality in the ancient world,” might lead to a redundancy between the two halves – before and after the colon. Antiquity and the ancient world might seem to be synonyms, even though they are not really identical: one refers to time and the other designates a space as well. In a similar fashion, sex is not the same as gender and sexuality but is refined and expanded on in those terms. Looked at in this way, the subtitle explains and complicates the word sex. The apparent redundancy is even less significant because each term – sex, gender, sexuality – might be said to contain multitudes; they are not only internally complex but lie in complex relationships with one another, and are sometimes even in conflict with one another. The essays in this collection take gender and sexuality, in all the richness that these terms possess, as their starting point; thus the book is about sex, as refracted through these lenses.

The terms themselves are difficult to define because they are ideologically laden, historically fluid, and, of course, dependent on the English language for their articulation here. Indeed it is a lively question as to how well the words sex, gender, and sexuality apply to antiquity. Clearly we, as editors of this volume, believe that it is worthwhile to look at the ancient world through these modern terms. Thus, we agree with those who would say it is not an anachronistic effort. In a recent book on gender, Lin Foxhall goes so far as to assert that the ancients were what we would call essentialist (2013: 3–4). Moreover, as Brooke Holmes points out in *Gender: Antiquity and Its Legacy*, not only did the ancient Greeks and Romans have ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality, but those ideas have had an impact on the ways in which we moderns conceptualize them (Holmes 2012: 6–11).

We must nonetheless be aware of changing meanings. Consider, for example, understandings of “sex” in recent decades. Sex is a complicated term, in English at least, because it is something an individual might “be” or “have” or “do.” In Foucauldian terms it is both an identity and an act.

Traditionally, sex has been taken to be physical. In the introduction to the important volume *Before Sexuality*, the editors (Halperin *et al.* 1990) state that “sex lies outside history,” that it refers to the “erogenous capacities and genital functions of the human body” (3).<sup>1</sup> In antiquity and until comparatively recently, gender seemed to flow seamlessly from the binary of biological sex, with two sexes leading to two genders.

The “being” of sex referred to above has been typically limited to male and female, but the expansion of contemporary studies of the body (e.g. Laqueur 1990; Bordo 1993; Grosz 1999) emphasizes that that binary opposition is an oversimplification.<sup>2</sup> Recent developments around transgendered and transsexual individuals increasingly question the idea that there are only two sexes. In any case, although bodies and pleasures may not change that much, their enactment and reactions to them do shift in different historical periods and in different places. In short, what counts as sex (and how it counts) varies over time.

Theories of gender have tended to emphasize first the constructedness of gender, as opposed to the seemingly essential physiology of the body, pointing out that the dichotomy of gender is not intrinsic but is imposed on the body. It has further been pointed out that the dichotomy of sexed bodies is itself an imposition owing to binary thinking, which is in a mutually reinforcing relationship with gender (Wohl 2014).<sup>3</sup> The idea (in the quotation above, p. 1, from *Before Sexuality*) that the body is a residue inside and outside of history has been implicitly challenged by, for instance, Judith Butler’s work, which argues that there is no secure anchor point for gender in the body (*Gender Trouble* [1990], *Bodies that Matter* [1993]). But Butler’s move has hardly settled matters. There is still extensive debate, with some arguing against the extreme constructivist position.

Sexuality is a slippery term that obviously has a close relation to sex. It might be used to speak of the sex one has, or to refer to an individual’s sexual object choice. In the wake of Michel Foucault’s influential *The History of Sexuality* (1978, 1985, 1986) the word has been more cautiously deployed and now is taken most often to signify the set of discourses and practices that are in effect around sexual behavior (with a suite of identity effects, if persons in the modern West are meant). Foucault was crucial in making sexuality an object of study with a history (more about Foucault below, pp. 3–4). From that point on, there has been much work done emphasizing the delineation of sexuality as an area of inquiry. Influential in this regard were the works of Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, both of whom, as founding figures of queer theory, were building on and reacting to the work of Foucault, French feminists (such as Luce Irigaray), and Gayle Rubin, among others.

How does this volume fit into this terrain of “sex,” “gender,” and “sexuality,” a terrain in which there is much that is not settled and lively debate is the rule? To answer this question, we will address historical moments, geographical locations, and disciplinary contexts.

First of all, the historical moments. We are talking about the ancient periods in (here come geography) the Near East, Greece, and Rome. This portion of the introduction will for the most part focus on Greece and Rome, with a later section on the Ancient Near East (ANE). There are further details about the specific ancient locations in time and space in the table of contents and in the summary of the book that follows this part of the introduction. But we are also using the theoretical framework provided primarily by post-World War II Euro-American scholarship, so that is a second relevant time frame as well.

The bulk of modern and postmodern work on sex, gender, and sexuality must be put in the context of the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, in particular the women’s and gay liberation movements. Like Africana Studies, for instance, these academic disciplines were spawned by student pressure for a more inclusive curriculum. The Australasian, British, French, and North American settings of our authors differ from one another in their histories but are still interconnected, and all were affected by this activism in the academy.



As a sign of the interrelationships in the academic community, it is striking that one of the earliest figures cited in the American scene was a French woman. Simone de Beauvoir made the initial rupture between sex and gender, saying “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (1953: 267). This phrase initiated a long period (in which we still are) of parsing those distinctions and others that follow from this first de-coupling. De Beauvoir’s underlying point was that womanliness is not a biological condition but rather something imposed on the female child. She continues: “It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which we have described as feminine. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an *Other*” (de Beauvoir 1953: 267).

Studying women was at first almost synonymous with studying gender, and vice versa. But gradually there came to be a concentrated emphasis on gender itself as a category of analysis. Rubin was one of the early voices theorizing the relationship between biological sex and gender with her influential essay “The traffic in women: Notes on the ‘political economy’ of sex.” In that essay, she first of all pointed out that there *is* a sex/gender system constructing what is posited as an inert fact of human existence by, for instance, Claude Lévi-Strauss in his description of the exchange of women in kinship systems. She further defined the sex/gender system as the set of practices whereby “biological sexuality is transformed into products of human activity” (Rubin 1975: 159).

We might make the following list of distinctions based to some extent on de Beauvoir’s formulation and Rubin’s posited sex/gender system: biological sex, that with which one is born, the gender (man/woman) into which one is socialized with more or less pain and effort, and the traits associated with that gender (cultural masculinity and femininity). Overlaid on that set of binaries was taken, by the dominant culture, to be that of sexual orientation (when it was discussed at all) based on the sex (or is it the gender?) of the desired person. In the regime of heteronormativity, that meant a desire for the “opposite sex.” All of this has been disrupted and problematized in the years following. For instance, is there one object of desire? Why does the object have to have one sex or gender?

Within the immediately relevant setting of Classics in the United States we could conveniently center on three moments: 1978–84, marked by two volumes from *Arethusa* on women in antiquity (1978 and 1984); 1990–93, when several volumes on gender and sexuality appeared;<sup>5</sup> and the present moment, which does not have such a clear stamp – but is marked by a certain retrospective quality. It might best be regarded as the moment of the survey or companion, which, if so, is a moment we are querying with as the focus of this volume on new work. To be clear, however, these are not stages (or waves) with clear beginnings and endings; rather they need to be understood as interwoven with one another.

What we are calling the first moment (1978–84) was part of a general feminist body of work in the humanities and social sciences, for the most part focusing on women in antiquity as a field. This work involved recovering historical women and engaging in feminist critique of male authors; that is, reading the literary material differently and for difference. The Women’s Classical Caucus of the APhA was founded in 1972 and has since then offered panels at the annual meetings of the association. There have been a number of important publications showing the continuing interest in the topic of women in antiquity, such as *Images of Women in Antiquity* (1983); *Women in Ancient Societies* (1994); and *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments* (1995). The wider project, of giving voice and reading differently, also led to feminist classicists becoming to some extent “resisting readers,” in the words of Judith Fetterley (1978).

In Classics, the practice of looking for women in history and texts gradually changed into a concern with the organization of gendered relations in society, perhaps because of an early influence of structuralism on Classics. Froma Zeitlin is a good example; her early essay on Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* published in the *Arethusa* volume (1978) undertook to analyze the misogyny of the myth (Zeitlin 1978); she was also one of the first to look for the feminine, as opposed to actual females. Writing

1996, in the introduction to a collection of her essays from the previous decades, she counseled

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prob[ing] the cognitive, symbolic, and psychological functions of the feminine in a highly coded system of androcentric authority, a system whose own quest for universal categories and success in making culture pass for nature has left its imprint on us even today.

(Zeitlin 1996: 1)

Zeitlin and others recognized the importance of “the category of gender and the dynamics of its manifold and varying uses as an integral structuring element of Greek literature and, more generally, of the social imagination” (Zeitlin 1996: 1). A fear that is often expressed, however, is that we might find ourselves forgetting women when attention turns to gender. It is worthwhile keeping both in place as we move forward.

Rubin was also in the vanguard of what might be taken to be the divergence, if not the outright war between gender studies and sexuality studies, the next stage in this trajectory we are sketching in her work. Ten years after her first groundbreaking essay, Rubin suggested that gender might not actually be the best hermeneutic tool for the discussion of sexuality. In “Thinking Sex” from 1984, she called for radical politics of sexuality, and she explicitly separated the methodology for studying sexuality from that useful for gender studies, countering in this move, to some extent, her earlier essay.

One could say that the force of these questions and similar ones burst into Classics to form the second moment, a moment in which sexuality increasingly came to the fore, joining gender and sex as topics of discourse and providing further complications. In the study of sexuality in antiquity, an important or even dominant voice has been that of Michel Foucault. The scholarship we have associated above with the second moment was responsive to these trends and scholarship and indeed helped to shape them (for example Foucault knew and learned from Jack Winkler and Kenneth Dover, and David Halperin’s work has proven to be influential within and outside of Classics). The groundbreaking collection from 1990, *Before Sexuality*, has already been mentioned (p. 1). It, and both other works from around the same time and subsequent scholarship, foregrounded sexuality in a way that had not been done before.<sup>6</sup> Corollary to the appearance of the Women’s Classical Caucus in 1977 and responsive to the increased interest in sexuality in Classics, the Lesbian and Gay Classical Caucus (now called the Lambda Classical Caucus) was founded in 1989 with an expressed interest in politically and intellectually supporting lesbian, gay, and now, queer classicists and their allies. The caucus has sponsored a panel at the APA annual meeting every year since then. Also at around this time, the study of ancient masculinity and men, as men, emerged and continued throughout the 1990s and into the next century.<sup>7</sup>

There has been vigorous debate accompanying this elaboration of Classics into considerations of gender and sexuality. While we agree with Foucault that sexuality is usefully regarded as having a history and as being responsive to its discursive situation, his influence on the shape of many research agendas in Classics has produced contention. The masculinist emphasis that underlies the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality* was problematic from the start and has only come to seem more so. The contours of these volumes seemed to justify the fear that women would be forgotten when attention turned to gender and sexuality: all subjectivities but that of the elite free man were erased from consideration,<sup>8</sup> and, making the erasure more profound, this man was even disembedded from his place in his world, specifically the *oikos/domus* and *polis/respublica*, and made into the solipsistic competitor with his urges and desires. Indeed, it is possible that the masculinist tendencies of work on sexuality that has come out since the very late 1980s stem from Foucault’s influence.

Accompanying the debate about the influence of Foucault has also been considerable discussion about how to understand sexuality *itself* in antiquity, indeed if we can even use this term. Foucault’s insight that there is a “history of sexuality” to be written was generally accepted and sexuality studi-



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