

Love (and Marriage) between Women

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IT USED TO BE THOUGHT that love between women in Greco-Roman antiquity, though no doubt as common as at most other periods of human history, was a subject the surviving male writers of the times either did not notice or could not bring themselves to mention. But an important book by Bernadette Brooten has revealed that there is more evidence than most of us had supposed. Almost all of it hostile, to be sure, but evidence nonetheless. There can be no question that she has expanded the frontiers of the subject, and that female homoeroticism is at last a viable area for research.¹

But not content with bringing her subject into the mainstream of modern scholarly study, Brooten went further and claimed that some women sought the public recognition of marriage for their relationships. Notoriously, John Boswell made the same claim about gay men in Roman and mediaeval times in his *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-modern Europe* (1994). I have no intention of reopening that debate here, but it has to be said that his ancient evidence was particularly thin.² At one point Brooten remarks casually that "Iamblichus was one of several second-century authors to write about marriage between women" (51). In fact her case rests essentially on four Greek texts: Lucian, Clement of

¹Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago 1996); see the reviews by Corey Brennan, *BMCRCR* 8 (1997) 506–515; Elizabeth Castelli, *The Women's Review of Books* 14.6 (1997) 15–16.

²See now the complementary articles of Elizabeth Brown, Brent Shaw, and Claudia Rapp in *Traditio* 52 (1997).

Alexandria, the romance-writer Iamblichus, and the mathematician and astrologer Ptolemy.

Every one is far more problematic than Brooten allows. The two that seem most explicit are Lucian and Clement of Alexandria. Of the Clement passage Brooten writes: "For years I believed that Clement's reference to marriage between women was metaphorical, but I now take Clement seriously as a historical source for woman-woman marriage" (332), mainly (of course) on the basis of the other texts. But the principal objection to pressing both the Clement and Lucian passages as Brooten does is not so much the possibility that *γαμεῖν* is being used metaphorically, but whether it implies "marriage" at all.

The first section will consider Clement and Lucian; the second some Byzantine scholia on Clement and Lucian; and the third two further passages that seem to refer to marriage between women, together with some remarks about love in the Greek novels.

I

It is obvious from the fact that the man *γαμεῖ τινα* in the active and the woman *γαμεῖται τινί* in the passive that in the active the verb represents the male role in marriage.³ It is not therefore surprising that as early as Homer *γαμεῖν* is occasionally found of "mere sexual intercourse" (LSJ *s.v.* I.2), a usage that became widespread and eventually dominant by the Roman period. The Byzantine Lexicon of E. A. Sophocles defines it as "a euphemism for *βινέω*, *futuo*," and in 1955 Phaidon Koukoulès cited *γαμεῖν* first in a list of "words the Byzantines avoided."⁴ The third example on his list is this very passage of

³Cf. John H. Oakley and Rebecca H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* (Madison 1993) 9.

⁴τὰ οὐ φωνητὰ τῶν Βυζαντινῶν, in his *Βυζαντινῶν Βίος καὶ πολιτισμὸς VI* (Athens 1955) 535. See too the passages quoted by L. Robert, *RevPhil* 41 (1967) 77–81, and (briefly) G. P. Shipp, *Modern Greek Evidence for the Ancient Greek Vocabulary* (Sydney 1979) 187–188, who also cites the frequentative *γαμητιάω* = *βινητιάω* in *Vita W* of Aesop §103 (B. E. Perry, *Aesopica* I [Ur-

Clement. The Patristic Lexicon of G. W. H. Lampe (1961) has a long entry for γάμος, both human and divine, but cites only one text under the verb γαμέω, an eloquent silence.

Sophocles and Koukoulès may have gone too far in reading the indelicate Byzantine and modern connotations into the age of Lucian and Clement. Both were still able to use the word of marriage proper.⁵ But beyond question both also use it freely as a euphemism for sexual intercourse. No real current English equivalent occurs to me: “mate” and “couple” can bear both meanings and have the right euphemistic tone, but are no longer idiomatic in either sense. As in most such cases of words with a range of meanings, the context normally offers enough pointers to leave no room for doubt.

The two clearest examples from the turn of the first and second centuries come in the Neronian epigrammatist Rufinus and the pseudo-Lucianic *Lucius or the Ass*. Here is the last couplet of *Anth.Pal.* 5.94 by Rufinus:⁶

Εὐδαίμων ὁ βλέπων σε, τρισόλβιος ὅστις ἀκούει,
ἡμίθεος δ' ὁ φιλῶν, ἀθάνατος δ' ὁ γαμῶν.

“Happy is the man who looks upon you, thrice-blessed the man who listens to you, half-divine the man who kisses you, and immortal the man who”—what? The culminating stage in this ascending scale of intimacies has to be “something less permanent than marriage.”⁷ In the pseudo-Lucianic *Lucius* (32), a boy who was the temporary owner of Lucius while in the form of an ass falsely accuses him of forever chasing after women.

bana 1952] 100). Some Latin words for marriage are occasionally used in this sense, notably *nubo* of males penetrated by other males: H. D. Jocelyn, *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 3 (1981) 277–278; J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore 1982) 159–161. But nothing equivalent to Greek γαμῶ.

⁵So almost all examples in Clement except those discussed below (see Stählin's index verborum pp.302–303); Luc. *Tox.* 35, *Dial.meretr.* 4.1, 7.2 and 4.

⁶For Rufinus's date, Cameron, *CQ* N.S. 32 (1982) 162–173; L. Robert, *CRAI* 1982, 50–63.

⁷For the Planudean bowdlerization συνών for the γαμῶν of the *Palatinus*, Robert (*supra* n.4) 78–79; quotation from Cameron (*supra* n.6) 163.

On one occasion (he claims) Lucius “knocked a woman down on the road and tried to ‘mate’ with her” (τὴν δὲ γυναῖκα ἐς τὴν ὁδὸν ἀνατρέψας γαμεῖν ἐβούλετο). In this case, as if the context did not make the meaning plain enough, we have a contemporary interpretation. The surviving *Lucius* is an abridgment of a lost Greek original of which Apuleius’s *Golden Ass* is part adaptation and part translation. It is instructive to compare Apuleius’s version of this phrase (7.21): “he laid her down on the dirty ground and was making as if to mount her right there in front of everybody” (*humo sordida prostratam mulierem ibidem incoram omnium gestiebat inscendere*). Hardly less explicit is a passage of Clement that appears first on Koukoulès’ list: ἐσθίων, πίνων καὶ γαμῶν (*Strom.* 8.12.78). Marriage is no doubt one of life’s great pleasures, but few marry as often as they enjoy a fine dinner or a night at the pub. It is food, wine, and *sex* that are the classic constituents of the good life.⁸ From the pen of the pious Clement, γαμῶν is a *euphemism* for the expected βινῶν or ἀφροδισιάζων.

Then there is *Protr.* 2.32.4, an attack on the sexual morals of Aphrodite: “having been put to shame by Ares, Aphrodite chased after Cinyras, mated with Anchises, waylaid Phaethon, and loved Adonis” (ἐπ’ Ἄρει κατησχυμμένη μετῆλθεν ἐπὶ Κινύραν καὶ Ἀγχίσην ἔγημεν καὶ Φαέθοντα ἐλόχα καὶ ἦρα Ἀδωνίδος). Aphrodite’s relationship with Anchises was no more long-lived or respectable than any of the others. It is purely for the sake of literary variation that he uses four different verbs: ἔγημεν means exactly the same here as ἦρα, clearly implying a sexual relationship outside marriage. Lastly, *Protr.* 4.54.6: the Athenians were preparing a ritual marriage between Demetrius and Athena, and Demetrius dishonoured the goddess, τὸ ἄγαλμα γῆμαι μὴ δυνάμενος.⁹ No one knows

⁸For a representative selection, illustrating this very passage of Clement, Robert (*supra* n.4) 80. Add (*e.g.*) Longus 4.11.2, ἐσθίειν . . . καὶ πίνειν . . . καὶ λαγνέειν.

⁹Probably as part of the honours offered Demetrius in 304 B.C.: C. Habicht, *Gottmenschentum und griechische Städte*² (Munich 1970) 49.

how a ritual marriage between a man and a goddess was conducted, though it is likely that the goddess was represented during the ceremony by her statue. But it was the absent goddess rather than the present statue that the man married. The “dishonour” Demetrius did the goddess must have consisted of taking the implied relationship with her statue literally.¹⁰ he evidently said he could not go to bed with a statue.¹¹

With these passages in mind, we may finally turn to *Paedagogus* 3.21.3. Clement is describing how sensuality has turned everything upside down: “men suffer womanly things, and women play the male role, getting married and marrying women contrary to nature” (γυναικες ἀνδρίζονται, παρὰ φύσιν γαμοῦσαι γυναικας).¹² If his point had been that these women lived in permanent unions, why repeat the verb in both passive and active? His point must be rather that some women play the husband and some the wife in these unions. This is undoubtedly the way Mondésert and Matray took the passage in their *Sources Chrétienne*s edition: “les femmes agissent comme des hommes, lorsqu’elles se laissent posséder de façon contraire à la nature ou qu’elles s’unissent à des femmes.” Intriguingly enough, it is another passage of Lucian that provides the best parallel here. In *True History* 1.22 the traveller describes a society he encountered on the Moon that consisted entirely of males. The very word “woman” was unknown to them, and men even gave

¹⁰In Greek literature, wanting to sleep with or marry a goddess was a proverbially hybriatic act: Cameron, *Callimachus and his Critics* (Princeton 1995) 15; Matthew Dickie, *Papers of the Leeds International Latin Seminar* 9 (1996) 333. This real-life occasion may have inspired the theme of the presumptuous man who wanted to marry Athena in Rhianus fr.1 Powell, though there is also a similar story about Cotys of Thrace (Cameron *l.c.*).

¹¹In Achilles Tatius 5.22, sleeping with an unresponsive man is compared to being in love with a statue.

¹²The manuscripts offer the nominative γυναικες a second time at the end of the sentence, a reading kept by Stählin in all three of his editions and quoted by Brooten (322 n.76). But the repetition adds nothing to either sense or rhetoric, and C. Mondésert, C. Matray, and H.-I. Marrou rightly print A. Plassart’s γυναικας (*Clément d’Alexandrie: Le Pédagogue* III [Paris 1970] 50 n.1).

birth: “up to the age of twenty-five each is married and thereafter marries” (μέχρι μὲν οὖν πέντε καὶ εἴκοσι ἐτῶν γαμεῖται ἕκαστος, ἀπὸ δὲ τούτων γαμεῖ αὐτός), or in A. M. Harmon’s neat Loeb translation, “up to the age of twenty-five each is a wife, and thereafter a husband.” The emphasis clearly falls on sexual roles rather than the permanence or public nature of the unions.

Now for the second of Brooten’s passages, *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 5.3. Lucian is describing how two rich women, Megilla and Demonassa, hire the flute-girl Leaena to play at a party they are planning. Afterwards they try to persuade her to go to bed with them. First they kiss her and squeeze her breasts, then Megilla takes off her wig, revealing a close-cropped hairstyle like an athlete. The simple-minded Leaena is still bewildered, and Megilla becomes more aggressive: “Don’t treat me like a woman (καταθήλυγε); my name is Megillos.” She then appears to say: “I have been married to Demonassa here for ever so long, and she is my wife” (γεγάμηκα πρόπαλαι ταύτην τὴν Δημόνασσαν, καὶ ἔστιν ἡ ἐμὴ γυνή). Boswell went even further than Brooten here, regretting that Megilla had neglected to provide “clues about any legal or ceremonial aspects of the relationship” (82).

But this sentence cannot be understood out of its context. Indeed in order to get the full sense of γεγάμηκα, it is essential to follow the exchange between Leaena and Megilla right through to the end of the dialogue. Megilla does not love Leaena, who is no more than a prostitute hired for the evening. She just wants to get her in bed. She has failed so far because Leaena is unworldly enough not to understand what is being asked of her. There would be no point in introducing the idea of marriage at this stage of the negotiations. If Leaena cannot grasp the idea of sex between women, she is only going to be further confused by talk of marriage between women. It may well be that we are meant to think of Megilla and Demonassa as devoted lovers who have been living together for years—though

given their desire for a threesome with Leana, evidently not in an exclusive, monogamous relationship. But if Megilla is to stand any chance of getting through to Leana, it is not the permanence of her relationship with Demonassa that needs to be spelled out, but its sexual nature. So she points to Demonassa with the words γεγάμηκα πρόπαλαι ταύτην τὴν Δημόνασσαν. The point of the active γεγάμηκα is to indicate that she has been playing the male role in bed with Demonassa.

Following this hint and taking the remark about Megillos literally, but still completely missing the point, Leana then asks whether Megilla is really a man “just as they say Achilles once hid among the girls.” “Do you have a man’s thing (τὸ ἀνδρεῖον ἐκεῖνο) and ‘do’ Demonassa like a man?” (ποιεῖς τὴν Δημόνασσαν ἄπερ οἱ ἄνδρες).¹³ ποιεῖς here is clearly (like *facio* occasionally in Latin)¹⁴ a euphemism for sexual intercourse. That is to say, Megilla’s γεγάμηκα prompts Leana to ask whether she has a penis rather than for details of the “legal or ceremonial aspects” of her relationship with Demonassa.

Not exactly, replies Megilla. Poor Leana despairingly tries two further possibilities. Perhaps Megilla is a hermaphrodite? or maybe she has had a sex change? Wasn’t there that soothsayer from Thebes called Tiresias? As she admits to the friend she is telling the story to, “I still had no idea what was going on” (ἔτι γὰρ ἠγνόουν . . . τὸ πρῶγμα). It is not till Megilla finally announces (5.4) that she “has something instead of a man’s thing” (ἔχω γάρ τι ἀντὶ τοῦ ἀνδρείου)¹⁵ that Leana “fondled her like a man” (ὡσπερ ἄνδρα περιελάμβανον) and “she did me (ἐποίη) and kissed me and panted away and seemed to have a great time.” Robert has shown that περιλαμβάνειν

¹³The euphemisms in Macleod’s Loeb translation fail to bring out the purely sexual focus of Leana’s response.

¹⁴TLL VI.1 (1912) 121.40–52; Adams (*supra* n.4) 204. But I have not found other examples of either ποιέω or *facio* governing a direct accusative in this sense, but it is hard to doubt that both verbs were so used (as indeed “do” is in modern English).

¹⁵Presumably a dildo: Brooten 153.

frequently bears erotic connotations.¹⁶ “Embrace” and “hug” are too neutral; better “fondle” or “cuddle,” intimate and suggestive without being explicit. But the key element in Lucian’s phrase is ὡσερ ἄνδρα: “I fondled her *as if she were a man.*” At long last Leaena has understood what she is supposed to do.

From start to finish Megilla has been trying to persuade Leaena to go to bed with her and Leaena has been trying to understand why. In a cruder version of the faux naïveté of Daphnis and Chloe in Longus’s novel, Leaena simply cannot grasp either the point or the mechanics of sex between women. Mention of marriage would have hindered rather than helped in the laborious story of her enlightenment.

II

Now for the Byzantine scholia; by scholia I simply mean comments jotted in the margin of texts of Clement and Lucian by a Byzantine reader. A note against Clement’s reference to women “playing the male role” (ἀνδρίζονται) offers the following gloss: “he means the disgusting tribades, whom they also call hetairistriaï and Lesbians” (τὰς μιὰρὰς τριβάδας λέγει, ἅς καὶ ἑταιριστρίας καὶ Λεσβίας καλοῦσιν).¹⁷ ἑταιρίστρια is the word Plato uses in his *Symposium* (191E) for women who love women. This note has acquired unexpected notoriety since Alberto Cassio claimed it as the earliest known example of the

¹⁶L. Robert, *Hellenica* XIII (1965) 184–189.

¹⁷Brooten 337. μιὰρὰς does not here bear the meaning polluted or defiled “in a ritual sense,” as Brooten suggests (337 n.140). It is one of the Byzantine reader’s standard terms of disapproval for items of a sexual nature, appearing constantly in the margins of Arethas and other scholars of the age—notably the editor of the *Palatine Anthology* (C. Preisendanz, *Codex Palatinus et Codex Parisinus phototypice editi* I [Leiden 1911] lxxvii; my *Greek Anthology* [Oxford 1993] 113). In addition, as L. G. Westerink pointed out (“Marginalia by Arethas in Moscow Greek MS 231,” *Byzantion* 42 [1972] 201–202), it was a way for owners of dangerous books to protect themselves from the suspicion of reading them for pleasure. Books were rare and expensive, and so frequently borrowed. Arethas’s marginalia were much admired and extensively copied, even in his lifetime.

word Lesbian used in its modern sense.¹⁸ But according to Brooten, it also “demonstrates the existence of a cultural category of homoerotic women (and not just of individual homoerotic acts)”; and it does this (she suggests) by linking the words *τριβάδες*, *ἑταιρίστριαι*, and *Λέσβιαι* to Clement’s *ἀνδρίζονται*. This is an attractive argument. Yet how far did the scholiast know what he was talking about? Does he reflect genuine ancient usage, if only of the Roman period? In a nutshell, what was his source?

Despite making so much of his equation of these terms, Brooten nonetheless refers to the scholiast dismissively as “scribe” and “commentator” (337, 5 n.9). It is surprising that she does not make more of the fact that we know who he was and when and where he wrote: Arethas of Patras, well known to Byzantinists and palaeographers. By a happy chance, a number of books from his personal library have survived, copied specially for him and annotated in his own hand.¹⁹ Arethas was bishop of Caesarea from 902 to at least 932, and he wrote the note in question in a text of Clement (*Par.gr.* 451) copied for him by a scribe called Baanes in 913/4 (at a cost of twenty gold *solidi* for the scribe plus six more for the parchment).

Elsewhere Brooten cites another Byzantine scholion, this time on the word *ἑταιρίστρια* in an earlier passage of Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Courtesans*: “the same ones they call tribades” (*τὰς αὐτὰς καὶ τριβάδας φασίν*).²⁰ She also cites yet another scholion which notes, against a reference to the celebrated female pornographer Philainis in the pseudo-Lucianic *Erotes* 28, that an Athenian called Philocrates “held her up to public

¹⁸“Post-classical Λέσβιαι,” *CQ* n.s. 33 (1983) 296–297; accepted by Brooten 5.

¹⁹For a list of his books, P. Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin* (Paris 1971) 205–241.

²⁰*Dial.meretr.* 5.2; H. Rabe, *Scholia in Lucianum* (Leipzig 1906) 277; Brooten 5.

shame" (ἐξεπόμπευσεν)²¹ as a ἑταιρίστρια and τριβάς.²² Here she accepts the standard view that the Philocrates mentioned in this passage was a comic poet, implying a date no later than the beginning of the third century B.C.

Brooten cites these three scholia separately. Reasonably enough, it might seem. Why should marginal jottings in different manuscripts of different writers be linked in any way? Yet they are linked and should be studied as a group. For by a remarkable coincidence all three were written by the same man, Arethas. His Lucian scholia are partly preserved in *Harl.* 5694, copied by the same scribe Baanes and annotated in Arethas's own hand, and partly in three later apographs.²³ The *Harleianus* is usually dated a little earlier than the Clement manuscript.

Arethas's scholia are opinionated and often polemical, but for the most part they contribute little that is new or important,²⁴ and these three are no exception. Not one of them preserves any genuine ancient lore. Not even the third, for all that it cites what looks like an otherwise unattested fragment of Attic comedy: "he means the Philaenis that Philocrates the Athenian held up to ridicule as a Lesbian and tribad" (τάυτην τὴν Φιλαινίδα φησίν, ἣν Φιλοκράτης ὁ Ἀθηναῖος ἐξεπόμπευσεν ὡς ἑταιρίστριαν καὶ τριβάδα). There are two problems here: there was no Attic comic poet called Philocrates, and no other source associates Philainis with tribadism. Such as it is, her fame derives entirely from a sex-manual (of which we now have a fragment on papyrus).²⁵ Nothing in the dozen or so surviving

²¹ For this meaning (not attested in LSJ) see Lampe, *Patristic Lexicon s.v.* 3.

²² Rabe 205; Brooten 55 n.119.

²³ For the manuscripts, Rabe iii–iv; Lemerle (*supra* n.19) 229.

²⁴ N. G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (London 1983) 120–135.

²⁵ *P.Oxy.* XXXIX (1972) 2891, with K. Tsantsanoglou, "The Memoirs of a Lady from Samos," *ZPE* 12 (1973) 183–195. This is one of the rare occasions where Brooten fails to cite the latest scholarship, having missed both the papyrus and the work it inspired: D. W. T. Vessey, "Philaenis," *RBPhil* 54 (1976) 78–83; Holt N. Parker, "Love's Body Anatomized: The Ancient Erotic Handbooks and the Rhetoric of Sexuality," in Amy Richlin, ed., *Pornography*

references suggests that it dealt with anything but heterosexual love—not surprisingly, since even contemporaries suspected that it was written by a man.²⁶ It is generally assumed that the mistaken name derives from a confusion with the Athenian Polycrates supposed to have been the true author of the book.²⁷ But that does not explain the implication that Poly-/Philocrates wrote comedies and Philainis loved women.

The source of all Arethas's confusions is to be found in an epigram by the third-century B.C. poet Aeschrion of Samos that defends Philainis and denounces Polycrates.²⁸ Arethas quotes a number of epigrams in his various scholia, and there can be no doubt that he found them in the influential Anthology of classical epigrams compiled *ca* 900 by the Byzantine schoolmaster Constantine Bighead (Cephalas). In some cases he even repeats corruptions known to have stood in Cephalas's text.²⁹ In the surviving *Palatine Anthology* we have a careful copy of Cephalas made within half a century (*ca* 950) and actually corrected against Cephalas's autograph.³⁰ In *Anth.Pal.* the Aeschrion

and Representation in Greece and Rome (Oxford 1992) 94, with a list of texts referring to Philainis (108), missing only the lemma to *Anth.Pal.* 7.345 cited below.

²⁶ Brooten (46 n.82) infers from pseudo-Lucian *Erotes* 28 that her book "exemplified] love between women," as does Vessey (*supra* n.25) 80–81. But if the passage is examined in context, it proves the exact reverse. In a debate about the respective merits of love with women and boys, the speaker defending the former position argues that if we are going to allow pederasty, why not love between women: "let tribadic licentiousness ... parade itself, and let our women's chambers emulate Philainis, disgracing themselves with androgynous amours" (Macleod's translation, adapted by Brooten 54). As even Boswell recognized, this is represented as "preposterous and unheard of" (82 n.149). The implication is surely that it would be absurd for women to make love with a copy of Philainis on the night-table. According to Vessey, Aeschrion's claim that she was οὐκ ἐς ἄνδρας μάχλος implies that "her lust was directed ἐς γυναικάς." This seems perverse.

²⁷ A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, *The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams II* (Cambridge 1965) 5; Tsantsanoglou (*supra* n.25) 194. Perhaps but not necessarily the well-known fourth-century sophist of that name.

²⁸ *Anth.Pal.* 7.345, with Gow/Page II 3–5 and Vessey (*supra* n.25) 78–79.

²⁹ See Cameron (*supra* n.17) 282–292.

³⁰ On the scholion that refers to Cephalas's autograph, Cameron (*supra* n.17) 111.

epigram is equipped with the following explanatory lemma: “on Philainis ... who depicted in tabular form the various types of female intercourse, for which she was made fun of by the clever fellows in Athens” (εἰς Φιλαινίδα . . . τὴν γράψασαν ἐν πίνακι τὰς γυναικειᾶς μίξεις ἐκείνας, δι’ ἃς καὶ κωμωδεῖται παρὰ τῶν ἐν Ἀθήναις σοφῶν). Many of Cephalas’s lemmata are simply inferences from the poems, but some undoubtedly preserve authentic information.³¹ One detail here that cannot have been inferred from the text of Aeschrion’s poem is ἐν πίνακι, suggesting that Philainis’s book was illustrated, as a passage of Clement also implies.³² As for the rest, whether he just misread the epigram or recalled some other source of information, Cephalas states that Philainis wrote about female intercourse (γυναικειᾶς μίξεις) and was abused or satirized (κωμωδεῖται) in Athens. There is nothing in Arethas’s scholion that could not have come from Aeschrion’s poem equipped with this lemma in Cephalas’s Anthology, and since we know that Arethas regularly consulted Cephalas, we do not need to look any further.

So no Attic comedy, and no genuine ancient quotation about Philainis at all. When Arethas came across her name in his Lucian he just recalled from his copy of Cephalas something about love between women and public abuse in Athens, and paraphrased it in words of his own.³³ This is probably the earliest of Arethas’s three notes. Then when he came across ἐταιρίστρια in the *Dialogues of the Courtesans* he simply repeated one of the glosses from his own earlier scholion: τριβάδας. And when he came to the “mannish” women in Clement, the first words that came to his pen were naturally, once again, ἐταιρίστριαι and τριβάδες. They were just words he knew from lexicæ. For example, according to the Atticist lexicon of Moiris,

³¹ For Cephalas and his lemmata, see Cameron (*supra* n.17) *passim*.

³² Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 53 P.; Vessey (*supra* n.25) 83.

³³ We have already seen (*supra* n.21) that ἐξεπόμευσεν is pure Byzantine Greek.

ἑταιρίστρια was Attic for Koine τριβάδες.³⁴ In Timaeus's modest lexicon to Plato, ἑταιρίστρια is simply glossed αἰ καλούμεναι τριβάδες.

As for his Λέσβιαι, while he might have had some independent source, it is more likely that he *inferred* it from *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 5.2, which he had read a year or so earlier:³⁵ "they say there are women like that in Lesbos, with faces like men, and unwilling to consort with men, but only with women, as though they themselves were men." If so, then in all probability Arethas was not using the word in its modern sense after all. He was simply taking at face value Lucian's claim that there were lots of tribads on Lesbos.³⁶

It does not look as if there is any authentic information about homoerotic women of the Greco-Roman period in any of these notes of Arethas.³⁷ Their main interest is the light they cast on the bishop's own preoccupation with same-sex love between women.

III

That leaves a passage each in Ptolemy's astrological handbook *Tetrabiblos* and Photius's précis of Iamblichus's *Babyloniaka*. According to Brooten's paraphrase of Ptolemy,

³⁴P.196.24 Bekker: ἑταιρίστριαι Ἀττικοί, τριβάδες Ἑλληνες.

³⁵The Clement manuscript is generally believed to be a year or so later than the Lucian manuscript: Lemerle (*supra* n.19) 229.

³⁶The Lucian passage proves that the women of Lesbos enjoyed a reputation for same-sex inclination by the Roman period, but that is not quite the same as using the word Lesbian to mean that.

³⁷Brooten (42) cites one other "ancient commentator," on an epigram by Asclepiades (ca 270 B.C.) about two women lovers (*Anth.Pal.* 5.207). According to this scholiast the poet "attacks them as tribads" (ὡς τριβάδας διαβάλλει). Here again the commentator (Schol. B in the edition of H. Stadtmueller, I [1894] xi) can be identified, and this time he is not "ancient" by any stretch of the imagination. These scholia were written by the Cretan humanist Marcus Musurus ca 1506 (J. Hutton, *The Greek Anthology in Italy to the Year 1800* [Ithaca 1935] 155–158). Brooten's attempt to connect the fact that these women are described as Samian with Philainis of Samos is misguided. More relevant is the fact that Asclepiades came from Samos. On the interpretation of the poem see Cameron (*supra* n.10) 512–513.

“women born under a particular constellation have sexual relations with other women, with whom they play a male sexual role, and whom they call their ‘lawful wives.’”³⁸ What Ptolemy actually said is “sometimes they refer to the women with whom they are on such terms *as though* they were actually their legal wives” (ἐνίοτε καὶ νομίμας ὡσπερ γυναικάς τὰς διατιθεμένας ἀναδεικνύειν). That ὡσπερ makes all the difference. If these relationships could be *compared* to marriages, they were obviously not marriages.

That leaves only Iamblichus. Interpretation of this passage is especially delicate, in that we do not even have Iamblichus’s own words, but a Byzantine paraphrase. According to one section,³⁹ the Egyptian princess Berenice had a passionate love affair with another woman called Mesopotamia. A few sections later⁴⁰ the eunuch Zobaras falls in love with Mesopotamia and takes her to Egypt, where Berenice, now queen of Egypt, marries her—at any rate on Brooten’s translation. But here too interpretation turns on a question of Greek usage. According to Photius’s paraphrase, what Iamblichus wrote was γάμους Μεσοποταμίας ἢ Βερενίκη ποιεῖται. In Classical Greek, the middle γάμους ποιεῖσθαι means “get married,” while the active γάμους ποιεῖν means “hold a wedding feast,” that is to say for someone else.⁴¹ On the face of it, Iamblichus might indeed appear to be saying that Berenice got married to Mesopotamia. Yet in Classical Greek γάμους ποιεῖσθαι is used absolutely, and it would be odd to use the genitive (γάμους Μεσοποταμίας) of the person one was marrying. Elsewhere we normally find the genitive with the formula γάμους ποιεῖν, celebrate someone else’s wedding. So Herodas (7.85–86): “on the twentieth of Taureon

³⁸ *Tetrab.* 3.14 (pp.368–370 in F. E. Robbins’s Loeb); Brooten 332.

³⁹ §17 (Photius p.77a20 Bekker), translated by G. N. Sandy in B. P. Reardon, ed., *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Berkeley 1989) 791; and Susan A. Stephens and John J. Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels: The Fragments* (Princeton 1995) 196.

⁴⁰ §20 (77b36 Bekker = II 46.35 Henry).

⁴¹ Walter Headlam, *Herodas* (Cambridge 1922) 356 (on 7.86).

Hecate is celebrating her daughter Artakene's wedding" (τῆ γὰρ εἰκοστῇ τοῦ Ταυρεῶνος ἢ 'κατῆ γάμον ποιεῖ | τῆς Ἀρτακηνηῆς); and Xenophon of Ephesus (2.7): "Apsyrtus celebrated his daughter's wedding" (ὁ Ἀψυρτος ἐποίει τῆς θυγατρὸς τοῦς γάμους).

Iamblichus seems to be conflating two different formulas: γάμους ποιεῖσθαι (get married) and γάμους (τῆς δεῖνος) ποιεῖν (celebrate someone else's marriage). He would not be the first post-classical writer to blur the distinction.⁴² Headlam cites a clear example from the Alexander-historian Chares of Mytilene: Homartes, king of a people called the Marathi beyond the Tanais, gathered together all his friends and kinsmen and ἐποιεῖτο (middle) τοῦς γάμους.⁴³ Since it is obvious from the context that this is the wedding of the king's daughter, there can be no doubt which sense Chares intended. With Iamblichus things are not so simple. Without either his original words or any pointers the missing context would have supplied, there is no way of being sure which sense he intended.

Boswell was the first to suggest what he tendentiously described as the "only possible translation" for what he admitted to be "the odd Greek expression."⁴⁴ R. Henry's "Bérénice fait célébrer le mariage de Mesopotamia" in the Budé Photius⁴⁵ he dismissed on the somewhat disingenuous grounds that "Berenice is the only person in the story (other than her servant) erotically interested in Mesopotamia." This "servant" (his own characterization) whom he tucks away in a parenthesis is the eunuch Zobaras, who has just rescued Mesopotamia from

⁴² Always assuming that the phrase is Iamblichus's rather than Photius's paraphrase.

⁴³ Athen. 13.575c = *FGrHist* 125 F 5. For his simple style and unclassical vocabulary, L. Pearson, *The Lost Histories of Alexander the Great* (London 1960) 52.

⁴⁴ *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago 1980) 84 n.114.

⁴⁵ So too Sandy (*supra* n.39) 792: "Berenice has Mesopotamia's marriage performed"; and Stephens/Winkler (*supra* n.39) 198: "Berenice celebrates Mesopotamia's marriage."

certain death and whose passionate love for her was reported in the previous sentence. The *Suda*-entry for Iamblichus records only two details from his novel: the love of Rhodanes and Sinonis (the hero and heroine)—and “Zobaras the eunuch, the lover of the beautiful Mesopotamia.” Given the fantastic nature of Iamblichus’s plot and the uncertainty about his Greek, it would be idle to claim certainty.⁴⁶ But Zobaras must surely be counted at least as serious a candidate for Mesopotamia’s hand as Berenice. Iamblichus’s purpose may have been to exploit the dramatic irony of Berenice hosting the wedding of a woman she loved herself—irony that would be only heightened if the groom were a eunuch. A eunuch taking a wife comes first in the list of horrors that drove Juvenal to write satire.⁴⁷

Without the support of Lucian, Clement, and Ptolemy, an ambiguous passage in the most extravagant known ancient work of fiction⁴⁸ can hardly bear the full weight of Brooten’s marriage hypothesis. Better just to drop what is after all an anachronistic notion at best. We have only to reflect on the characteristic features of marriage in Greco-Roman society to appreciate how little they suit a union between two women. Among the elite at least, marriages were normally arranged by parents, with contracts between groom and bride’s father, and heavy emphasis on the production of legitimate children.

It has indeed been observed that we find a rather different

⁴⁶Brooten (51) tucks away in a footnote the names of those (everyone before and most after Boswell) who have opted for Zobaras. To the best of my knowledge, no one has previously raised the question of Iamblichus’s Greek.

⁴⁷*cum tener uxorem ducat spado*, Juv. 1.22, perhaps inspired by a real case, since (as Courtney, *Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* [London 1980], points out in his note, citing *Dig.* 23.3.39.1) it was possible for a eunuch to marry, as long as his condition was congenital rather than the result of castration.

⁴⁸Photius’s collection includes summaries of 386 different books (W. T. Treadgold, *The Nature of the Bibliotheca of Photius* [Washington 1980] 5), and while no one has ever cast doubt on his basic honesty (his accuracy is another matter), Iamblichus’s novel is the one case, as Stephens and Winkler remark, where we might be tempted to wonder whether “the patriarch was capable of pulling our leg” (*supra* n.39: 179).

situation in the Greek novels: a couple of the same age (young) and status (high) who marry after falling desperately in love with each other. Some have been tempted to infer that such "symmetrical" relationships reflect a real-life change in marriage practice in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, according to David Konstan an "eclipse of the *polis*" that supposedly "facilitated the collapse of distinctions between masculine and feminine amatory roles."⁴⁹ But not only is there no evidence outside the novels for any such change; even inside them the lovers themselves do little or nothing to advance their own marriages. In every one of the extant novels it is taken for granted that parents alone have the power to decide who their children marry.⁵⁰ In both Chariton and Xenophon the parents of the young lovers are initially opposed and eventually forced to consent, but by public opinion and an oracle respectively, not by anything their children do or say. Longus provides a particularly detailed example of negotiations between Chloe's father Dryas and her various suitors (3.25–32, 4.7). Dryas is much influenced by Daphnis's discovery of the 3,000 drachmas left behind by the Methymnaeans and his suspicion that Daphnis, like Chloe, is a foundling of noble birth. In Heliodorus, where Charicleia's real parents do not learn of her existence till the very end of the book, it is assumed that her successive guardians have the right to give her in marriage (4.7, 5.19, 10.37). Even in the case of the ill-starred Charite and Tlepolemus in *The Golden Ass*, Apuleius goes out of his way to emphasize that mutual love blossomed between a couple already long since betrothed "by a written contract with the consent of our parents" (4.26, cf. 8.2).

The reciprocated love of hero and heroine is essentially a

⁴⁹ *Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres* (Princeton 1994) 230.

⁵⁰ As emphasized by Konstan himself (*supra* n.49: 30–31, 73–74); for many useful references, Brigitte Egger, "Women and Marriage in the Greek Novels," in James Tatum, ed., *The Search for the Ancient Novel* (Baltimore 1994) 260–280.

plot-device to motivate the loyalty that will enable them to survive all the trials that keep them apart till the final chapter. To infer a general change of attitude is to ignore the clear indications to the contrary in the novels themselves. With the sole exception of the hero and heroine, love in the novels is otherwise almost invariably extra-marital.⁵¹ It is therefore unlikely on these grounds alone that the love of minor characters like Berenice and Mesopotamia would lead to marriage, whatever their gender. The truth is that not even the novels contradict the truism that passionate love (ἔρως) was not generally thought of as a necessary or even desirable basis for marriage in the ancient world.⁵²

Not the least interesting character in the novels from the point of view of same-sex relations is the bandit Hippothous in Xenophon of Ephesus, lover of two handsome young men and unsuccessful suitor of the hero Habrocomes. When recounting the sad story of his first love, he remarks, in a clear allusion to the familiar pattern of older *erastes* and younger *eromenos*, that since he and his lover had been much the same age, no one suspected the nature of their relationship (3.2). In his days as a bandit he twice captured Anthia, the heroine of the tale, and instead of immediately falling in love with her like everyone else, he tried to kill her each time, first by using her as a target for javelins, the second time by throwing her in a trench with ravenous dogs. Admittedly he does briefly fall for her on their third meeting, and when down on his luck at one point he had the good fortune to marry a rich old lady who promptly died. But it seems clear that we are meant to see Hippothous as a man with what we would now call a primarily homosexual orientation.⁵³ At the end of the novel, he settles in Ephesus with his friends Habrocomes and Anthia, at last reunited in marital

⁵¹Two exceptions (both strange stories) are Aegialeus and Thelxinoe in Xen. Eph. 5.1 and Callisthenes and Calligone in Achilles Tatius 8.17.

⁵²Konstan (*supra* n.49) 57 and *passim*.

⁵³Longus describes the parasite Gnathon as φύσει παιδεραστής (4.11.2).

bliss. Now rich and respectable himself, did he marry his latest boyfriend? No. He *adopted* him (5.15).

Adoption was the only realistic strategy open to a man who wanted to secure the protection of the law and inheritance rights for a male lover.⁵⁴ Unfortunately it was not a strategy open to women, since in Roman law the purpose of adoption was to bring someone under one's *patria potestas*, which only males could possess.⁵⁵ As for marriage, in the late as in the early empire, for the Roman upper classes it was in effect "a transfer of women between two existing families" rather than the creation of a new one.⁵⁶ Given the several alternative forms of respectable cohabitation available in the Roman world,⁵⁷ it is hard to see why female lovers would even think of such a model. It is a late-twentieth-century ideal of marriage that modern gay couples have in mind when they seek public recognition of their relationships: a pair of lovers taking mutual vows of love and fidelity.⁵⁸ But this is not what ancient marriages were about.

The passage of Iamblichus is striking enough on the traditional reading: a passionate affair between two women prominently featured in an ancient work of fiction.⁵⁹ And the most significant thing about the passage of Ptolemy is surely the distinction he draws between the two categories of women who love women: those who keep their relationships secret and

⁵⁴So Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions* 74 and 97–98.

⁵⁵See briefly the entry *adoptio* in Adolf Berger, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law* (Philadelphia 1953) 350.

⁵⁶Brent Shaw, "The Family in Late Antiquity: the Experience of Augustine," *P&P* 115 (1987) 33; Judith Evans Grubbs, *Law and Family in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 1995) ch. 4.

⁵⁷Briefly discussed by Brooten 333–336, without seeing that they tell as much against as for her position.

⁵⁸Not to mention a variety of concomitant financial benefits.

⁵⁹Even if characterized as ἐκθέσμων ἐρώτων (Phot. 77a21–22), "unlawful" for Sandy (*supra* n.39) 791, "unnatural" for Stephens and Winkler (*supra* n.39) 196. Possibly an editorial characterization by Photius rather than original Iamblichus.

hidden away (λάθρα καὶ οὐκ ἀναφανδόν), and those who proclaim them openly, sometimes going so far as to refer to their partners “*as if* their lawful wives.” Whatever we think of his astrological explanation, there can be little doubt that female couples who openly lived together were a not uncommon feature of the observant Ptolemy’s everyday world—one of the many phenomena that (in the eyes of an astrologer) required an appropriate explanation. So sharply drawn a distinction between in- and out-of-the-closet gay couples seems to me a more positive gain than the dubious hypothesis of gay marriages.

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