

12. Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, vol. 1, (New York: Penguin, 1966), p. 62.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 67–68.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Pillar Edict VII, trans. in Vincent A. Smith, *Ashoka, the Buddhist Emperor of India*, 3rd ed., rev. and enl. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920). Quoted in William H. McNeill and Jean W. Sedlar, *Classical India*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 111.
17. Thapar, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
18. Quoted in Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 90.



Love and Sex

Passion and Conquest in Greece, Rome, and India

PEOPLE WHO HAVE REACHED ADULTHOOD in America since World War II have a problem that would have been an undreamed luxury for the mass of people throughout most of human history. Only some small ruling classes in past history have been able to afford such a problem. The problem is difficult to define. In general, it is that love, sex, and marriage have become problematic for us. A simple way of putting it is that we do not have to get married. The increasing divorce rate is just a symptom of the much greater freedom we have to choose love, sex, or marriage. It is a "problem" of vastly expanded experience, consciousness, and ability to choose. The problem is that since we can enjoy sex without love, and either or both without marriage, we have to figure out what we want. Perhaps no problem is more difficult than self-understanding and self-realization.

Most ordinary people in traditional society never had to ask themselves if they wanted to get married. There were some respectable, especially religious, alternatives, but aside from these, people simply married because they were expected to. People in traditional society had a lot more opportunity for sexual satisfaction outside of marriage than we usually think, but such activities were rarely translated

to feelings of love, and even more rarely threatened the basic social institution marriage. Marriages were arranged by parents and normally were permanent cause they formed the only social cement (for those without status and money) at protected people from periodic disaster. Marriage was simply too important to be left to individual feelings.

Modern governments, middle-class mobility, the money economy, and the dependent nuclear family have all created a contraceptive technology and a ease ethic that make marriage an entirely different arrangement. Instead of a union between families, it has become a possible life-style to choose for love, sex, children, friendship, or whatever else one desires. We have made it one of many options because we have had the option to do so. We have the luxury to experiment, but that inevitably leads us to ask ourselves what we want.

We will examine some of the first societies in which people in fairly large numbers began to have these experiences and ask these questions. These elite members of a leisure class developed much of the self-conscious understanding of sex and love that both burdens us and frees us today. When we think of sex and love, we use ideas and feelings that they developed and passed on.

GREEK LOVES

The ancient Greeks spoke of love as if they had invented the word. Actually, they invented two words for love: *eros*, meaning physical or sexual love, and *agape*, meaning spiritual love. They also spoke of *philia* when they meant affection or friendship. They spoke of love often, symbolized it as the heart pierced by Cupid's arrow, diagnosed it as a newly discovered disease, and talked endlessly about its meaning and effects.

It is interesting that in so much of their talk about love, they rarely mentioned marriage. The purpose of marriage had much more to do with housekeeping and insurance against old age. The Athenian aristocrat, soldier, and statesman Xenophon put it this way:

Did you ever stop to consider, dear wife, what led me to choose you, and your parents to intrust you to me? It was surely not because either of us would have any trouble in finding another consort. No! it was with deliberate intent, I for myself, and your parents for you, to discover the best partners of house and children we could find. . . . If at some future time God grants us children, we will take counsel together how best to bring them up, for that, too, will be a common interest, and a common blessing if happily they live to fight our battles and we find in them hereafter support and succor for ourselves.¹

For the Greeks married life was not expected to yield either *eros* or *agape*. In this respect Greece was no different from other societies. One Greek summed up the

situation this way: "Mistresses we keep for pleasure, concubines for daily attendance upon our persons, and wives to bear us legitimate children and be our housekeepers."²

Greek men entered marriage out of a sense of duty rather than of love. They felt a duty to their ancestors, the city, and their religion to have children. And if they were to lead lives in the city, they needed someone to take care of the children and the household. Wives served this function amply. But a wife was hardly a person to spend time with. Women were not educated, and their lives were occupied with dull trivia.

Marriage was so unpopular that the government of Athens, the leading Greek city, considered making bachelorhood illegal in order to ensure sufficient population growth. Such a law was almost passed as early as the sixth century B.C. During the golden age of Athens (the fifth century B.C.) a law was passed that allowed only married men to become generals or orators (our equivalent of lawyers). So Athenian men learned to carry out duty to the state, but rarely pretended that marriage was anything but such a necessity. The Greek poet Palladas must have expressed the feelings of many when he wrote:

*Marriage brings a man only two happy days:
The day he takes his bride to bed, and the day he lays
her in her grave.³*

It would be interesting to know if Greek wives wasted any love on their husbands. Since they were not taught to write, we can only guess. Oppressed people sometimes have a peculiar capacity to love their masters, or at least accept their authority as beneficial. But there is some evidence that Greek wives were not always taken in. The great Greek dramatist Sophocles in his play *Antigone* has the heroine, Antigone, who buries her brother in defiance of her uncle's order, say that a brother is irreplaceable while a husband is not. It seems, furthermore, that many Greek wives remained much closer to their own families than they were to their husbands. The Greek historian Herodotus approvingly tells a story of a Persian woman who, when given the choice by a conqueror of saving the life of one person, chose her brother rather than her husband.

Whom did the Greeks love, then, if not their husbands and wives? The women that Greek men loved were prostitutes. Prostitution was widely developed, if not invented, in almost all of the first patriarchal cities. The city fathers considered it a noble solution to the problem of providing men with seductive and interesting women while ensuring that their own wives (and thus their own family lines) would remain pure. In short, they created a society of two types of women: the sexless wives and virginal daughters of the men of substance, and the women (drawn mostly from the lower class) who were trained to satisfy men's pleasures.



One of the Greek auletrides plays the double flute as the men drink and spill wine from bowls like this one. (Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge)

GREEK PROSTITUTION: LOVE, DEATH, AND SOCIAL DISEASE

Greek prostitution actually became quite specialized by the golden age of the fifth century B.C. There were three types of prostitutes. The common prostitutes, called *pornae*, lived in brothels marked by a large phallus on the door. They were uneducated and cheap, and they served to siphon off the sexual energy of lower-class men. Above the *pornae* in prestige were the *auletrides*, who were trained as entertainers. They were usually hired out by their teachers (who usually owned them as slaves) to play the flute, dance, and amuse men at private dinners and to spend the night with some of the guests. Both of these groups, resembling the streetwalkers and call girls of other patriarchal societies, were frowned on by men of wealth or refinement. These men recognized the necessity of such women in maintaining social order, and they might use them themselves, but they did not "love" them even when they enjoyed their company.

The love poems of the poets and the love interests of successful citizens were usually confined to the third type of prostitute—the *hetaerae*. When the word was first used in the sixth century B.C. it meant only an intimate female friend. By the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. it meant high-class courtesans. As the only well-

educated and interesting women of Greece, and as women of good families who were often citizens, they ranked higher in social esteem than wives or virgins. They were trained to be not only sexually alluring but also intellectually stimulating. The *hetaerae* lived independently in their own homes, chose as few or as many lovers as they wanted, and frequently became quite prosperous and influential.

One of these courtesans, Aspasia, was probably the most influential woman of the fifth century B.C. She is said to have trained the philosopher Socrates in the skills of speaking and argument, and even to have written speeches for the greatest Athenian statesman, Pericles, who was one of her oratory students. Aspasia captivated Athenian men with her physical charms as well as her wit and sophistication. After Pericles divorced his wife he took Aspasia to his home as his exclusive mistress.

The settled, almost marital, love of Pericles and Aspasia was the exception, however. Most Greek men were interested in the excitement and bittersweet anguish of love rather than its domestication in married life. No less serious and philosophical a man than Socrates expressed this desire in his reported advice to Diotima, a courtesan renowned for her exquisite beauty:

You will charm them best if you never surrender except when they are sharp-set. You have noticed that the daintiest fare, if served before a man wants it, is apt to seem insipid, while, if he is already sated, it even produces a feeling of nausea. Create a hunger before you bring on your banquet. . . . Seem not to wish to yield. Fly from them—and fly again, until they feel the keen pang of hunger. That is your moment. The gift is the same as when the man did not want it: but wondrous different now its value.⁴

Hetaerae were not desired for sex alone. If that were the case they would not have existed. They charged a minimum of 100 drachmas (the equivalent in our economy of hundreds of dollars) for the evening, while the average *porna* charged the equivalent of a couple of dollars. And if they were desired only for their intelligence, they would have been replaced by much cheaper teachers, or free male companionship. They were successful because they offered a tempting combination of both. A cynic might say that the courtesan offered sex without guilt. Certainly these Greeks felt the sex was less vulgar when it was so tastefully introduced. But the Greeks did not feel guilty about sexual drives in the way Christians later did. It would be more accurate to say that the *hetaerae* were sought and loved because they were complex, full-bodied human beings with whom a man could become lost in conversation, as well as in love.

In a society that had no hang-ups about sex, all women could have acquired these attributes, all could have been trained intellectually and sexually, and practiced their skills in or out of marriage. But in patriarchal society, where men felt forced to de-emphasize the sexuality of some of the women (their wives), and then in compensation to exaggerate the sexual appeal of other women (the courtesans), their relationships with these "ideal" women must have always been full of tension,



"You will charm them best if you never surrender except when they are sharp-set." One of the hetaerae and one of the sharp set. (Hirmer Fotoarchiv)

ambiguity, and frustration. They were interested in conversation, but talk was always a prelude. *Hetaerae* seemed to be genuinely interested in their lovers as people, but they were studiously trained to be so, and it was all for a fee. They were some of the most interesting people in Greece, but they were women—people men had consigned to inferior status. They represented what every man wanted in a companion, but the last thing in the world that he wanted from his wife.

The contradictions in this patriarchal view of women were so great that a man could not simply "love." He could feel *eros* or *agape*, rarely both. And even when he idealized his sexual passion for a courtesan and imagined her to be a noble companion, he was haunted by his unwillingness to allow the women of his own family to become so desirable.

It is no wonder then that the Greeks sensed that their deepest love, their love of these courtesans, yielded as much pain as delight, as much sickness as intoxication, and as much torment as joy. That is the way they wanted it—or rather the love that they idealized and craved could thrive only on the social illness that they created. The courtesans, all Greeks knew as well as Socrates, must tempt and frustrate in order to satisfy. Love in patriarchal society could not be love alone. In the words of the great poet Sophocles,

*Love is not love alone,
But in her name lie many names concealed;
For she is Death, imperishable Force,
Desire unmixed, wild Frenzy, Lamentation.*⁵

Love involved death because the ideal love of the courtesan, carried to its logical conclusion, allowed to all men and women, meant the death of the Greek patriarchal system. The poet probably did not see things that way. He was thinking of the tragically conflicting emotions of the lover. But these were tragic for Greek men precisely because the social ideals of women and love were so contradictory. The more they attempted to enforce the chastity of their wives and daughters, the more they desexualized them; the more they split the female population in two, the more they compartmentalized their own emotions. The breathless love of the courtesan that the Greeks created was possible only as long as all women were not courtesans. If all women were as exciting and intriguing as the courtesans, there would be no need or possibility of courtesan love. That was something the Greeks would not even consider.

GREEK HOMOSEXUALITY: IDEALS AND EDUCATION

Greek men always felt that there was something imperfect in loving women. The more highly they thought of love, the more foolish it seemed to waste the emotion on their inferiors. It was only natural, then, that the Greeks would develop

homosexual love as an even nobler ideal than the love of the courtesan. Since, as all Greeks agreed, men were the most nearly perfect creatures, they were also the most worthy of love. But the most appealing of all, in fact the ideal love, was the love of a mature man for a youth. Some said that it could last until the boy's beard was full; others said that boys could be appealing until their late twenties.

Few Greeks were unaffected by the sight of a beautiful boy. When one entered the room, heads would turn, conversation would stop, grown men would blush or look foolish. Some men thought that it was improper to have sexual relationships with these youths, but few were untouched by their beauty. Socrates was one of these. According to his student Plato, Socrates always felt a "flame" when he looked at a handsome young man. One, Alcibiades, even tried to seduce the philosopher, but Socrates repressed his desire and treated the youth as a son. Plato (at least in his early life when he was influenced by Socrates) thought that love of a boy was useful in leading men to see the higher, ideal kinds of love—love of the ideas of beauty, virtue, and knowledge. And later Aristotle developed a philosophy of ethics that disapproved of sexual relations with young men, but insisted nevertheless that "love and friendship are found most and in their best form between men."

The avowed homosexuality of Greek philosophers and educators would shock modern educators. Far from being considered a vice or a detriment, love of the pupil was considered a necessary element of the teaching process. When Socrates went looking for students, he said he was "hunting down good-looking young fellows" because he regarded education as "a spiritual bringing to birth of beauty."

Pointing out that all Greek philosophers defined homosexuality in terms of education, H. I. Marrou writes in his *A History of Education in Antiquity*:

For the Greeks, education—*paideia*—meant, essentially, a profound and intimate relationship, a personal union between a young man and an elder who was at once his model, his guide and his initiator—a relationship on to which the fire of passion threw warm and turbid reflections.

Public opinion—and, in Sparta, the law—held the lover morally responsible for the development of his beloved. Pederasty was considered the most beautiful, the perfect, form of education. Throughout Greek history the relationship between master and pupil was to remain that between a lover and his beloved: education remained in principle not so much a form of teaching, an instruction in techniques, as an expenditure of loving effort by an elder concerned to promote the growth of a younger man who was burning with the desire to respond to this love and show himself worthy of it.⁶

Greek homosexuality may have originated, as Marrou suggests, in the military as part of the recruitment of the young, the training in physical combat, and the "comradeship of warriors." (Plato has Phaedo say in the *Symposium*: "A handful



The Greek gentleman reaches beyond the arrow of love and death to grasp the virility of beardless youth. (Hirmer Fotoarchiv)

of lovers and loved ones, fighting shoulder to shoulder, could rout a whole army.") It flourished in the gymnasiums, where youths exercised and competed in the nude. Despite official disapproval, it became an elaborate preoccupation of the educated, prosperous, and aristocratic men by the fifth century B.C. Although by no means universal, even among the well-to-do, the culture of homosexuality created rituals of flirtation and seduction that later became the repertoire of heterosexual romance as well.

GREEK ROMANCE: THE DELICIOUS DISEASE

Romance is a leisure activity. If the Greek leisure class was the first to afford the cultivation of jealousy and love because of the exclusion of women, foreigners, and

slaves from its ideals, their rituals have since been opened to all. Lovers, for instance, would swear their faithfulness, allow themselves to be tested by doing foolish errands or dangerous acts. They would write long letters or poems to their beloveds, serenade them, sleep all night at their doorsteps, become speechless in their presence, or bore their friends with an endless catalog of their lovers' virtues. Almost everything that was later integrated into the romance of boy and girl was perfected in the Greek love of man and boy.

These signs of love—blushing, stammering, silly behavior—seemed so new to the Greeks that one of them, Sappho, made a long list, which was useful to physicians for hundreds of years. The Greek historian Plutarch tells the story of a young man who fell in love with his father's young wife. The doctor was called in but was as mystified as everyone else by the young man's behavior. Then the doctor noticed that every time the boy's stepmother appeared, the youth would display all of the symptoms of "love sickness" that Sappho had listed: flushed face, faltering voice, faintness, irregular violent heartbeats, darting eyes, and sweaty skin. With the aid of Sappho's list the doctor was able to diagnose the illness as the youth's love sickness for his father's new wife.

Plutarch's story is interesting because it shows how unknown the symptoms of this new "disease" must have been. Plutarch's story is instructive in another way. He goes on to tell us that when the boy's father learned of the illness he graciously gave his young wife to his son in marriage. The symptoms, we are told, vanished, but with the pain gone, the joy and ecstasy of love also evaporated. Evidently the romance that the boy found in his father's wife had a lot to do with the impossibility of ever consummating his desire. The Greeks developed romance out of very unlikely material. The love of a courtesan, or member of the same sex, or "mother figure" was not the type of love that was likely ever to become permanent. It fed on the obstacles that it created, and thrived on the social instability that it caused.

We should say one other thing about Sappho's contribution to "medical history." Sappho was a woman. Since she happened to live on the Greek island of Lesbos, and since she was sexually attracted to other women, her life is the source of our word "lesbians" today. Her study of love's symptoms, which taught the Greeks so much about the new "delicious malady," was drawn to a great extent from her own experience. And her experience was rich. She was married to a man, raised a daughter, and ran one of the few schools for girls. She fell in love with one after another of her pupils. The poems that she wrote to these girls were considered to be among the finest in Greek. Though some of her art is lost in translation, we can get some sense of her passion:

Zeus, the ruler of the Greek gods, abducts Ganymede, the most beautiful boy in the world. Zeus pleased himself with males and females, human and divine, often outwitting the plots of his wife Hera, the goddess of marriage. (Hirmer Fotoarchiv)



For should I but see thee a little moment,
 Straight is my voice hushed;
 Yea, my tongue is broken, and through and through me
 'Neath the flesh, impalpable fire runs tingling;
 Nothing see mine eyes, and a voice of roaring
 Waves in my ear sounds;
 Sweat runs down in rivers, a tremor seizes
 All my limbs, and paler than grass in autumn,
 Caught by pains of menacing death, I falter,
 Lost in the love-trance.⁷

If the Greeks did not invent sex or friendship, they invented romantic love with all of its bittersweet moods that we know today. But the idea of passionate, romantic love that they gave us came out of relationships that were at best temporary and full of difficulty. They burned with a passion that would have been impossible in marriage, and a few Greeks seemed to care. They spoke of love as a sickness, but the "cure" was rarely as satisfying as the disease.

Romantic love hardly reached epidemic proportions in ancient Greece. Actually, it was felt deeply by only a minority of sensitive souls. Many Greeks, particularly among the upper class of citizens, had homosexual and heterosexual experiences that they might have called love. Many were infatuated with or affected by courtesans and young men, but few could afford to throw all of their time and energy into the wreckless passion that consumed Sappho and some of the poets.

The pursuit of love on such a grand romantic scale began to develop in Greece among an educated, sensitive leisure class. A system of slave labor gave a few people the opportunity to cultivate "the finer things." Since women were degraded, this new sensitivity was directed toward the rare female who magnified the magic that was denied to others and toward other men—the most worthy objects of love. The women who were not trained to excite men probably knew very little of love. A few, like Sappho, turned the tables on their masters and found deep relationships or casual sex with other women.

THE ROMAN CONTRIBUTION: LOVE AS SEX

When Roman legions marched from nowhere to take over the faded Greek cities that Alexander the Great had united briefly, they paid the Greeks the highest compliment possible—they stole their art and imitated their culture.

Returning Roman legions (like American GI's returning from France after World War II) had found sex, and they approved. Within decades after the Roman conquest of the Mediterranean empire in the second century B.C., courtesans had become popular in Rome. Even young boys were bought and sold (sometimes for the price of a nice farm), and the Romans were acclaiming the joys of "Greek

love," by which they seem to have meant pederasty. The problem with the Romans was that they (like the Americans) fell in love with sex rather than love. They were not really interested in sex mixed with philosophy, and so the courtesans were never as popular or satisfying as cheaper prostitutes. Nor were the Romans interested in charming, handsome young boys for their wit and intelligence. They preferred to seduce them and leave it at that.

Romans looked to Greece in the same way that some Americans have looked to Europe. They recognized the high achievements of Greek culture, but tried to buy it or reproduce it without ever fully understanding it. Some of the better minds would write poetry or plays in the style of the Greeks or spout Greek phrases to impress other Romans with their sophistication. But when most Romans heard about Greek culture, they missed the elaborate, intricate rituals of love, and found the open attitude toward sex that lay beneath these ritualistic restraints.

When Rome consisted of just the city and some other parts of Italy, the people were repressed, or "moral," as many Americans of the 1940s and 1950s were. Marriages were valued, not for love certainly, but for the honor that children gave to the family and the prosperity that a virtuous, hardworking wife gave to the husband. But the Rome that had conquered an empire was as different from the early Rome as the American world power was different from the new republic.

FASHIONABLE ROMANS: OVID'S ART OF WAR

For the "liberated" upper-class Romans who ruled the empire, love meant sex. The fashionable society poet during the reign of the emperor Augustus (the heir and successor of Julius Caesar) was Ovid, whose popular book *The Art of Love* was simply a manual for seduction. Ovid's art had nothing to do with the Greek romantic sickness. He cautioned his readers to pretend to be incapacitated in order to manipulate the feelings of the women they desired. The tone of his advice sounds more like *Popular Mechanics* than *Modern Romance*.⁸

Also, the theater's curve is a very good place for your hunting,
 More opportunity here, maybe, than anywhere else.
 Here you may find one to love, or possibly only have fun with,
 Someone to take for a night, someone to have and to hold.
 (i, 89-92)

Try to find something in common, to open the conversation;
 Don't care too much what you say, just so that everyone hears. . . .
 Often it happens that dust may fall on the blouse of the lady.
 If such dust should fall, carefully brush it away.
 Even if there's no dust, brush off whatever there isn't.
 (i, 142-143, 149-152)

*See that you promise: what harm can there be in promising freely?
There's not a man in the world who can't be rich in that coin.*
(i, 443-444)

*Also, make it your aim to get her husband to like you;
If you can make him your friend, he will be useful, you'll find.*
(i, 581-582)

*Getting really drunk is bad, but pretending to do so
Does no harm at all, might in fact, be a gain.
Make your cunning tongue stumble and stutter a little,
So, if you go too far, people will say, "Oh, he's drunk."*
(i, 596-599)

*After the party breaks up, draw close to her in the confusion,
Let your foot touch hers, finger the sleeve of her dress.
Now is the time for talk! Don't be an oaf of a farmer.*
(i, 603-605)

Play the role of the lover, give the impression of heartache.
(i, 609)

*Flattery works on the mind as the waves on the bank of a river:
Praise her face and her hair; praise her fingers and toes.*
(i, 617-618)

*Gods are convenient to have, so let us concede their existence. . . .
What you are eager to be, tell her, is Only a friend.
I have seen this work, on the most unwilling of women—
Only a friend, who was found more than proficient in bed!*
(i, 637, 721-723)

Lying, cheating, pretending are all part of the game for Ovid. The important thing is to win. Women, any women, are the object. And nothing short of sexual conquest is acceptable to the "artist" in love. Even a little muscle is fair in love, as in war.

*Once you have taken a kiss, the other things surely will follow,
Or, if they don't, you should lose all you have taken before.
How far away is a kiss from the right true end, the completion?
Failure the rest of the way proves you are clumsy, not shy.
Force is all right to apply, and women like you to use it;
What they enjoy they pretend they were unwilling to give.
One who is overcome, and, suddenly, forcefully taken,
Welcomes the wanton assault, takes it as proof of her charm.*
(i, 669-676)

There are times, however, when Ovid sounds like a highly civilized modern marriage counselor. Not out of sympathy for a woman's needs, but because a happy

conquest is more likely to continue to make herself available, Ovid also urges a touch of tenderness.

*Take my word for it, love is never a thing to be hurried,
Coax it along, go slow, tease it with proper delay.
When you have found the place where a woman loves to be fondled,
Let no feeling of shame keep your caresses away.
Then you will see in her eyes a tremulous brightness, a glitter,
Like a flash of the sun when the water is clear.
She will complain, but not mean it, murmuring words of endearment,
Sigh in the sweetest way, utter appropriate cries.
Neither go too fast, nor let her get there before you;
Pleasure is best when both come at one time to the goal.*
(ii, 717-727)

Ovid's ideal of love as mere sexual gratification was probably pretty typical of the Roman ruling class during the days of the empire. It was necessarily promiscuous. Since love was the animal passion aroused in the loins, it had nothing to do with the character or background or intelligence of the beloved. Ovid, for instance, advised his readers to imitate the person desired: the lover, like the politician, should be all things to all women. Be what they want or what they are, he instructs.

*Use a thousand means, since there are thousands of ends.
Earth brings forth varying yield: one soil is good for the olive,
One for the vine, and a third richly productive in corn. . . .
If you seem coarse to a prude, or learned to some little lowbrow,
She will be filled with distrust, made to feel cheap in your eyes.*
(i, 757-759, 767-768)

Ovid is hardly interested in weighing the comparative merits of the vulgar and the prudish or the intelligent and the lowbrow. "All the stars in the sky, are less than the girls Rome can offer." The rich and poor, mistress and servant, married and unmarried, young and old, coy and aggressive, all are fish for the net. Ovid would probably have nothing but contempt for the romantic Greek ideal of love for "that special someone" with the "special something."

Like any artist, Ovid probably reflected the ideas of the upper class as much as he taught them. Some of the upstanding citizens objected to his frankness, and eventually the poet was banished by the emperor Augustus—but only after Ovid became too friendly with the emperor's granddaughter, who was beginning to follow her mother's example of taking on every man in Rome.

Adultery seemed to be the favorite indoor sport of the fashionable set. Love had nothing to do with one's own wife, but everyone else's wife was fair and exciting game. The "smart" women played the game just as eagerly as the men. It was risky in a society without motels or cars, but the risks often made it more delicious.

OLD-FASHIONED ROMANS: PLINY LOVES CALPURNIA?

Of course, there were those who, like Augustus, found this whole "new morality" obscene and corrupt. Some voices from the past spoke of a very different kind of love, which they actually found in their relationships with their wives. One of these old-fashioned Romans, Pliny the Younger (A.D. 62–113), an author and diplomat, looked back at the sexual revolution from the perspective of the second century (when Caesar, and Augustus, and Nero were long dead), and wrote a glowing tribute to the loving marriages of imperial Rome. Pliny was convinced that there were many lovers, even in the most licentious days of the empire, who were married to each other. But almost all of Pliny's examples of loving wives were chosen because they killed themselves when their husbands died or were about to die. The emotion that Pliny called love was blind devotion and dependence.

Pliny tips his hand when he talks of his own marriage to Calpurnia, a young girl. He said that he loved her; indeed, he continually swore that he couldn't be away from her. But his letters to friends show that he barely knew the girl, and that her feeling toward him was more like that of disciple to teacher, or servant to master, than lover to lover. In a letter to his aunt he wrote:

Her mind is keen and her tastes simple. She loves me, which proves her chastity. Besides, she likes literature, to which she was led by her affection for me. She keeps my books, reads them, and even learns passages from them off by heart. She is painfully anxious when I am to conduct a case, and delighted when I have completed it. She appoints people to tell her what applause and shouts I have received, and what the verdict was. If I am reading my work in public she sits near by, behind a curtain, and drinks in the praise of my audience with expectant ears. She also sings my verses, and even sets them to music, taught not by a musician but by love, the best master.⁹

What Pliny seemed to love most in Calpurnia, according to Jérôme Carcopino in *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, "was her admiration for his writings." And while he missed her admiration while he was away, he was consoled by the chance to "polish the phrases" of his letters to her.

Even when the couple were living under the same roof they were not together. They had, as we should say, their separate rooms. Even amid the peace of his Tuscan villa, Pliny's chief delight was in a solitude favourable to his meditations, and it was his secretary, not his wife, whom he was wont to summon to his bedside at dawn. His conjugal affection was for him a matter of good taste and *savoir vivre*, and we cannot avoid the conviction that, taken all around, it was gravely lacking in warmth and intimacy.¹⁰

On the other hand, if Roman divorce statistics are any indication, some Roman husbands and wives must have loved each other as equals. One Roman critic of



In Rome, as in Greece, love was a leisure-class activity. One needed the afternoon free and servants to set the scene and bring on the wine. (EPA; Kunsthistorisches Museum)

the high divorce rate claims that men and women were continually getting divorced to be remarried, and getting married to be divorced. Though this is an exaggeration, we know that many of the men and women in the upper class took four and five spouses, one after the other. This means two things: they frequently fell out of love with their spouses, but they also frequently married their new lovers. Again one is led to suspect that the adulterous affairs cooled off when they became legalized.

A CHRISTIAN DILEMMA

We have seen the development of two very different ideas of love in the West: the romantic love of the Greeks and the explicitly sexual love of the Romans. Neither of these ideas of love was associated with marriage. The roots of marriage were in social necessity—the needs of the community and the patriarchal family. When the word “love” became fashionable in Roman society, some people like Pliny attempted to read it into marriage. No doubt other Romans attempted to add love to their marriages or began new marriages based on love. But these were short-lived attempts for the most part, and the most passionate affairs usually lay outside the bonds of matrimony.

The Christians attempted to infuse marriage with love. But their idea of love was not Roman sexuality, not even Greek *eros*. It was the Greek ideal of *agape*, spiritual love. The Christian marriage was to be modeled on the highest type of spiritual love—the love of God. Christian love was to be romantic love, more idealized than the Greeks had ever imagined. Going way beyond the Greek tendency to romanticize the charm of a physical lover, the Christians followed Plato in the belief that all physical love was but an imperfect reflection of the ideal love. The ideal love that the Christians knew was the love for Christ. It was that love that was substituted for Plato's ideal—love of the good, of virtue, of truth, and of knowledge. All Christian love was to absorb as completely as possible the love of Christ. The effect that this belief had on Western sexuality was enormous. Imagine, for instance, what it means to love one's spouse in the same way that one loves God.

Christian love was not practiced by all, of course. No ideal ever is. But Christianity radically changed the Greek idea of love and almost abolished the Roman version. The Roman idea of love as sex revived (at least by the eighteenth century) as the influence of Christianity declined. It is perhaps one of the dominant ideas of love in today's *Playboy* culture. But the romantic idea of love is also very much with us today, sometimes in its original Greek form, but more often in the form that Christianity has made of it during the last two thousand years. Let's examine, then, what Christianity did to the romantic ideal of love that was just beginning to emerge in ancient Greece.

Educated Christians who lived in the Roman Empire were familiar with both

the writings of the Greeks and the Jewish Bible, which they called the “Old Testament.” From the Old Testament they inherited an un-Roman distaste for adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, and fornication. But the Jews expressed a lusty enthusiasm for sex in marriage. They felt a responsibility to their God as his chosen people to multiply, but the duty was also evidently quite pleasurable. Read the “Song of Solomon” in the Old Testament, for instance.

The attitudes of Jesus toward sex, love, and marriage are not too clear. His closest followers were twelve men, but he seems, according to some accounts, to have taken a personal interest in Mary Magdalene, a reformed prostitute. He seems to have thought highly of marriage and opposed divorce, but according to Matthew he also spoke approvingly of those “which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.”

For most Romans, though, Jesus was a minor Jewish troublemaker in a remote corner of the empire until Paul opened the new religion to non-Jews and helped organize groups of these “Christians” throughout the empire. One of the most striking things about these communities of Christians was their obsession with sex as the source of evil. Paul went so far as to develop a whole philosophy based on the implication in the Old Testament that Eve's sin was sexual seduction and that her sin had been the cause of all human suffering ever since causing everyone to be born with this “original sin,” and requiring that God purify his people by sacrificing his own son.

THE IDEAL OF CHASTITY

We can understand why some of the poorer people in Rome might have taken to the new religion. It offered the meek, humble, and dispossessed eternal salvation from exploitation, sickness, and daily misery. A loving God (even one that urged sexual abstinence) must have been very appealing to people who led loveless lives, especially women who were brutalized in the only intimate relationships they knew.

But Christianity appealed to members of all classes in ancient Rome. One of the early church historians tells us of a wealthy young Egyptian, Ammon, born into a wealthy family that employed servants, who frequented Roman theaters and games, and enjoyed fine foods and stimulating women; but Ammon decided to become a Christian. Pressured into getting married, Ammon shocked his young bride on their wedding night by reading from Paul:

It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. . . . I would that all men were [chaste] even as I myself. . . . I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.¹¹

Ammon spoke to his young wife about the spiritual exuberation he felt by keeping his body "pure" of sexual contact, and argued that virginity brought people closer to God. Ammon's bride (probably as afraid of sex as he) pledged that she too would become a Christian and they would live together as brother and sister.

After a while the couple felt they might better serve God if they moved from the sinful city of Alexandria with all its worldly distractions, and they moved into a hut in the desert. There they ate only bread and water, often fasting for two or three days at a time. But even on such a diet they still felt an occasional prompting of the flesh, and so they moved apart to live in two separate huts. Temptation, however, did not even disappear with his wife. Ammon vowed never to remove his own clothing because "it becomes not a monk to see even his own person exposed." Once, in fact, Ammon wanted to cross a river but would have gotten his clothes so wet that he would have had to remove them. So Ammon explained his dilemma to God, who, according to the historian, immediately dispatched an angel to lift Ammon across the river dry and pure.¹²

The writings of the early Christians are full of such stories of continent marriages and ascetic behavior that other Romans must have considered bizarre. Another wealthy young man (Injuriosus in the fifth century) and his Christian wife slept in the same bed but refrained from any sexual contact. According to the story, their spiritual love was rewarded after their deaths when their two tombs miraculously came together. Tourists even today are shown the burial place of "The Two Lovers."¹³

Most of these stories were based on some event that actually happened, even if they were made more fantastic in the telling. They were self-fulfilling fantasies. They became models of proper Christian behavior. Even when a Christian could not escape from the pleadings of the body (and many certainly could not), he or she would feel guilty. Others no doubt who heard of the innumerable virgins who gave their lives rather than be forced to have sexual intercourse, or of the monks who burned their fingers or castrated themselves in order to free their minds of sex, must have tried to do the same.

LOVE AND SEX IN INDIA

If Christianity rejected sexuality and took the Greek idealization of love to its spiritual extreme, other cultures developed romance along with sex. Indian culture was one of these.

Sexuality had been an important element of Indian religion at least since the Aryan invasion around 1500 B.C. Early fertility worship centered on the large phallic stones (*lingā*) and the bowl-shaped female *yoni*, sometimes represented by lotus leaves, still seen in Indian worship today.

The intense concern for fertility in the religion of the Vedas is shocking to one brought up in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Compare, for instance, this creation story from the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad* with the Hebrew account:



A painting commemorating the death of a Syrian Christian shows some of the ascetic practices of Christian monks in the desert, where Christian monasticism originated. One monk, Saint Simeon Stylites of Syria, was said to have lived on top of a column for over thirty years. Some lived as hermits in caves. Other joined together in monasteries. All seem to have avoided women and struggled against the temptations of the flesh. (Musei Vaticani)

Prajapati (the Lord of Creation) thought to himself: "Let me provide a firm foundation." So he created woman. When he had created her, he honored her below. Therefore one should honor women below. He stretched out for himself that stone which projects [the *lingā*]. With that he impregnated her. Her lap is a sacrificial altar; her hairs, the sacrificial grass; her skin, the soma-press. The two lips of the *yonī* are the fire in the middle. Verily, indeed, as great as is the world of the person who performs the *Vajapeya* sacrifice [the drink of strength], just as great is the world of him who practices sexual intercourse knowing this. He takes the good deeds of women to himself. But he who practices sexual intercourse without knowing this—women take his good deeds for themselves.¹⁴

The Judeo-Christian Bible tended to focus on what should *not* be done, and sex was high on the list. Conversely, the emphasis in India was on attaining the goals of life, and sex was one of the four. The goals of life were *dharma* (duty, righteousness, proper behavior), *artha* (wealth, power, material well-being), *kama* (love, sex, fertility), and *moksha* (final release). The first three lead to the fourth. The path to *moksha* was usually begun with *dharma*, but there were some texts that held *kama* the more important, including this from the greatest of Indian epics, the *Mahabharata*:

One without Kama never wishes for Artha. One without Kama never wishes for Dharma. One who is destitute of Kama can never feel and wish. For this reason, Kama is the foremost of the three. . . . As nectar is extracted from flowers, so is Kama to be extracted from these two. Kama is the parent of Dharma and Artha. Kama is the soul of these two.¹⁵

THE KAMA SUTRA

The classic Indian discussion of *kama* is contained in the *Kama Sutra* by Vatsyayana. It was written between the first and fourth centuries A.D. for an Indian upper class, probably in one of the monarchical courts, just before or during the Gupta period.

Vatsyayana's "*kama* manual" presupposes an urban world where kings have harems, wealthy men have a number of wives, and many men frequent courtesans. He addresses the courtesans as well as the men, advising courtesans on how to wheedle extra money from a client, live like a wife, or get rid of a lover. Vatsyayana has counted everything. There are sixty-four arts that a woman should study, four kinds of love, but also four kinds of kissing, embracing, biting, and so forth. There are twenty-four types of men who generally have success with women, but forty-one kinds of women who are "easily gained over." There are eight kinds of go-betweens, or female messengers, and twenty-eight ways to leave a lover.

Much of this carefully cataloged advice could hardly have been news two thousand years ago. Among the twenty-eight ways to get rid of a lover, for

instance, are the following: pretend to be sleepy; go out visiting; misconstrue his words; laugh without any joke; and glance at his attendants. Much more is painfully obvious: "When a courtesan is not sure how much a man will give her or spend on her, this is called a doubt about wealth."

There is much to remind us of Ovid's manipulation (unfortunately without his wit) in the *Kama Sutra*.

When a man is endeavoring to seduce one woman, he should not attempt to seduce any other at the same time. But after he has succeeded with the first, and enjoyed her for a considerable time, he can keep her affections by giving her presents that she likes, and then commence making up to another woman.¹⁶

It would be a mistake, however, to see the *Kama Sutra* as merely a guide to sexual seduction. While there is considerable attention to the mechanics of sex, there is also a cultivation of romance. It is as if Vatsyayana, for all his seriousness of purpose and dull cataloging mentality, wants to teach young men gentility, charm, and romance. In a chapter on courtship, he suggests to the young man interested in winning a young woman that he entertain her with music, bring her to moonlit fairs and festivals, and give her bouquets of flowers. In another chapter on sending a go-between (or messenger) to the girl's parents, he says that the go-between should declare that the aspiring young man is going mad, and dying from his love.

Romance is hardly the central message of the *Kama Sutra*, but its presence in such an unpoetic work suggests that love was being taught in the courts of Indian society along with sex. Indeed, we do not have to look far for love stories in classical India. One of the great poetic works of Gupta culture was a love story taken from a subplot in the *Mahabharata*, the story of Shakuntala.

KALIDASA'S SHAKUNTALA

Kalidasa was the great poet and dramatist of Gupta India. *Shakuntala* is his best-known play. It is a richly romantic drama that centers on the love of King Dushyanta and the poor hermit-maid Shakuntala. The idea comes from a description of a meeting of the king and maid in the *Mahabharata*, that collection of legend and history that many Indians, then as now, heard over and over again. Kalidasa took a story about a contemptible king who seduced a maid and then abandoned her, and turned it into a romance. Kalidasa's play is full of the florid imagery and emotional confusions of romance. When he first sees her:

*She seems a flower whose fragrance none has tasted,
A gem uncut by workman's tool,
A branch no desecrating hands have wasted,
Fresh honey, beautifully cool.*¹⁷

First he is distressed that he cannot marry a woman of such low caste. Then he convinces himself that she must actually be of a similar caste to his or he would not feel so strongly toward her. They marry, but they must part temporarily. Before they reunite a curse is put on Shakuntala: King Dushyanta won't recognize her when they meet again, unless Shakuntala can produce the ring he gave her. This is fulfilled when she finally arrives at the palace with their child, but without the king's ring. The king does not remember her, and tells her to return to her real husband. Brokenhearted, she leaves. Then later the ring is found, the curse is lifted, the king remembers his love, and they live happily ever after.

INDIAN LOVE AND MARRIAGE

"Love marriage," like that of Kalidasa's King Dushyanta and Shakuntala, was not unknown in India, despite the fact that most marriages were (and still are) arranged by parents. *Gandhara* (love marriage) was one of eight recognized types of Hindu marriage: *brahma*, the giving of a daughter by her father to the groom he has chosen; *prajapatya*, the giving away of a bride by her guardian; *daiva*, the giving of a girl to a priest; *arsha*, the giving away of a daughter after the father has received a cow and a bull from the groom; *gandhara*, love marriage; *asura*, the purchase of a girl from her father; *rakshasa*, marriage by capture; and *paisacha*, the drugging and rape of a bride.¹⁸

That love marriage existed is perhaps less striking than its relative unimportance in a classification system that includes various forms of conquest and sale. While the plays of Kalidasa suggest what one observer calls "the romanticization of sex in the classical age,"¹⁹ the Indian ideal remained the devoted wife. The model wife in Indian literature was Sita, not Shakuntala. Sita was the wife of Rama in the great epic *The Ramayana*, who remains faithful to her husband throughout her long captivity in the palace of the evil Ravana. When Rama, with the aid of many monkeys, rescues Sita, he is unable to accept her as his wife until she throws herself on the funeral pyre and the fire God Agni attests to her innocence by not touching her.

FOR FURTHER READING

Morton Hunt's entertaining, anecdotal *The Natural History of Love* is an engaging introduction to the subject. Other popular general histories are Reay Tannahill's *Sex in History* and Amaury de Riencourt's *Sex and Power in History*.

For specific studies of the Greco-Roman classical world, the most useful introductions are Sarah B. Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* and Eva Cantarella's *Pandora's Daughters*. A valuable collection of short primary sources can be found in *Women's Life in Greece and Rome*, edited by Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant.

There are a number of interesting studies of sexuality in classical Athens and Greece. One

is *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* by Eva Keuls. Another is K. J. Dover's *Greek Homosexuality*. Robert Flaceliere's *Love in Ancient Greece* is fascinating. W. K. Lacey's *The Family in Classical Greece* is an absorbing, relevant study. For a more general treatment of Greek social life, Emile Mireaux's *Daily Life in the Time of Homer* is superb for the archaic period, and Robert Flaceliere's *Daily Life in Greece at the Time of Pericles* is an excellent introduction to the classical period. For an intriguing interpretation of the sexuality of a Greek myth, see Erich Neumann's *Amor and Psyche*. A relevant approach to sexuality in Greece and Rome that is especially valuable on Greek homosexuality and education is H. I. Marrou's *A History of Education in Antiquity*.

There are also good studies of Roman sexuality and social life. J. P. V. D. Balsdon's *Roman Woman* is an interesting historical treatment. Otto Kiefer's *Sexual Life in Ancient Rome* is almost as readable as it was fifty years ago. E. P. Corbett's *The Roman Law of Marriage* is a solid study of legal change and complexities. There is a brilliant essay called "The Silent Women of Rome" (among others) in M. I. Finley's *Aspects of Antiquity*. Love, marriage, and sexuality are also discussed in broader interpretations of Roman social life. Jérôme Carcopino's *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* and Frederik Poulsen's *Glimpses of Roman Culture* are especially valuable.

This is one topic that can be most usefully and entertainingly approached through the rich literature of the period. The Greeks and Romans wrote frequently and vividly of love, sex, and marriage. One can approach Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (many editions) from this perspective (as does Mireaux, above). Hesiod's *Works and Days* is also full of information about archaic social life. Plato's dialogues are treasures of sexual and social attitudes for the classical period, especially the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Phaedo*. Xenophon's *Symposium* and *Oeconomicus* (*Economics*) are also rich in detail. The plays of Aristophanes (something of an antihomosexual) are hilarious dramatizations of homosexual and heterosexual relationships, among other themes. All are available as *The Complete Plays of Aristophanes*, including his *Thesmophoriazusae* (or "Women Celebrating the Thesmophoria") and *Ecclesiazusae* (or "Women in Parliament"). But if you read only one, make it Douglass Parker's modernized translation of *Lysistrata*, about an imagined women's sex strike for peace. Other classical writings on love and sex include Plutarch's *Amatorius*, *Erotikos*, and *Conjugal Precepts*, Lucian's *Erotes*, and, of course, Ovid's *Art of Love*. The last is published with Ovid's *The Loves, the Art of Beauty*, and *The Remedies for Love* in an excellent translation by Rolfe Humphries called *Ovid, The Art of Love*. Humphries also has a good translation of *The Satires of Juvenal*, and there is also a good translation by Smith Palmer Bovie of *Satires and Epistles of Horace*, both of which are more general Roman works. Finally, Robert Graves's translation of *The Golden Ass of Apuleius* is a joyous classic.

An excellent introduction to the issue of religion and sexuality is *Sex in the World's Religions* by Geoffrey Parrinder. Marina Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* is a thorough study, mostly of later Christian ideas, as is John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. As always, the *Bible* is an excellent source: the letters of Paul and the Book of Acts are particularly valuable for the attitudes of the early Christian church.

Among the sources of classical Indian ideas, there are numerous editions of the *Kama Sutra*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Ramayana*. R. K. Narayan's short version and William Buck's longer version of the last are both excellent. There are also translations of Kalidasa's plays, including *Shakuntala*.

NOTES

1. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, in *Readings in Ancient History*, trans. H. G. Dakyns (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1912), p. 266.
2. Attributed to Demosthenes, "Against Neaera." This and much of the other material in this section is drawn from Morton Hunt, *The Natural History of Love* (New York: Knopf, 1967).
3. Quoted in Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
4. Xenophone, *Memorabilia*, III: xi, quoted in Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
5. Sophocles, Fragment 678, quoted in Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
6. H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 57.
7. Sappho, "Ode to Atthis," quoted in Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
8. This and the following selections are taken from Ovid, *The Art of Love*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957).
9. Pliny, *Letters*, iv: 19, quoted in Otto Kiefer, *Sexual Life in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1934), and excerpted in Michael Cherniavsky and Arthur J. Slavin, *Social Textures of Western Civilization: The Lower Depths* (Waltham, Mass.: Xerox, 1972), p. 162.
10. Jérôme Carcopino, quoted in *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, ed. Henry T. Rowell, trans. E. O. Lorimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 89.
11. 1 Cor. 7: 1-9.
12. The story of Ammon is told by Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* iv: 23; this version is adapted from Morton Hunt, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-95.
13. Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
14. *Kama Sutra*, I, 4:14, quoted in John W. Spellman's introduction to *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana* (New York: Dutton, 1962), p. 16.
15. Quoted in Spellman, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
16. *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*, trans. Sir Richard F. Burton (New York: Dutton, 1962), p. 182.
17. *Shakuntala and Other Writings by Kalidasa*, trans. Arthur W. Ryder (London: J. M. Dent & Sons; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1912). Quoted in William H. McNeill and Jean W. Sedlar, eds., *Classical India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 77.
18. A. S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1956), pp. 35-49. Cited in F. Roy Willis, *World Civilizations* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1982), p. 251.
19. Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 117.

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