ANCIENT HOMOPHOBIA:
PREJUDICES AGAINST HOMOSEXUALITY IN CLASSICAL ATHENS¹.

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Abstract

The following paper discusses the problem of the alleged prejudices of the Athenian masses against homosexuality in the second half of the fifth century BC. It has been suggested that the unsympathetic perception of pederasty might have been as a result of the generally unfriendly attitudes of the so-called common people towards behaviours associated with the social elite. In what follows, I argue that there is no reason to think that homosexual desires and behaviours were limited to the upper classes; prejudices against homosexuality can hardly be taken, therefore, as a result of populist sentiments. Moreover, it seems that few or no phenomena recorded in our sources relevant to classical Athens can really be associated with homophobia as such.

Keywords: Homosexuality; Pederasty; Greece; Aristophanes; Class struggle; Democracy

At the beginning of my PhD studies, as a bearded young man of post-ephebic age, while hitch-hiking in Sicily I experienced what is called by classical scholars, “homoerotic courtship”.² The erastes happened to be a corpulent peasant, who spoke Italian with a strong Sicilian accent and drove a rusty Fiat littered with various tools, vegetable boxes and a basket

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