

**PEDERASTY AND PEDAGOGY IN ARCHAIC
GREECE BY WILLIAM ARMSTRONG
PERCY III**

*Pederasty and Pedagogy
in Archaic Greece*



William Armstrong Percy III



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Combining impeccable scholarship with accessible, straightforward prose, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece* argues that institutionalized pederasty began after 650 B.C., far later than previous authors have thought, and was initiated as a means of stemming overpopulation in the upper class. William Armstrong Percy III maintains that Cretan sages established a system under which a young warrior in his early twenties took a teenager of his own aristocratic background as a beloved until the age of thirty, when service to the state required the older partner to marry. The practice spread with significant variants to other Greek-speaking areas. In some places it emphasized development of the athletic, warrior individual, while in others both intellectual and civic achievement were its goals. In Athens it became a vehicle of cultural transmission, so that the best of each older cohort selected, loved, and trained the best of the younger. Pederasty was from the beginning both physical and emotional, the highest and most intense type of male bonding. These pederastic bonds, Percy believes, were responsible for the rise of Hellas and the "Greek miracle": in two centuries the population of Attica, a mere 45,000 adult males in six generations, produced an astounding number of great men who laid the enduring foundations of Western thought and civilization.

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One of best on male love in Ancient Greece.

By A Customer

In the course of a few centuries the foundations of Western civilization were laid in Ancient Greece. Philosophy, democracy, architecture, sculpture, science, literature. Male love was very much a part of Greek culture -- and William Percy boldly argues that pedagogical eros, the relationship between adolescent youths and their older mentors, helped to create and sustain the "Greek miracle". This is a very thorough and scholarly book. It fully belongs in the company of the other great works on the topic: John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883); Hans Licht (pseud. of Paul Brandt), *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece* (English edition 1932); and K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (1978).

33 of 36 people found the following review helpful.

A very readable and provoking book.

By Richard Harrold

I am by no means a Greek historian or scholar, but I find this book to be exceptionally well documented, and even in those areas where the author admits the hard evidence is scant, he carefully lays out his hypothesis to

support his conclusions. The book provides a fascinating insight into how previous historians downplayed or ignored the evidence of wide-spread pederasty and male-male relations during the Archaic period, particularly when references to the phenomenon were quite clear in Aristotle's and Socrates' works. The author also clearly differentiates "pederasty" (sex between postpubescent youth and adult males) from "pedophilia" (sex between prepubescent boys and adult males), noting the evidence showing that pedophilia was not a condoned behavior in Archaic Greece. This work is an excellent place to begin for anyone who wishes to trace how previous civilizations not only tolerated, but in some instances even encouraged, male-male relationships until the purveyors of the Judeo-Christian model vigorously proselytized their beliefs and shunned the behavior out of the mainstream. Whether a reader believes homosexuality is a moral aberration is irrelevant. If the reader can cast aside his or her preconceptions, this becomes a truly fascinating work.

22 of 24 people found the following review helpful.

Scholarship without prejudice

By Emile Lucien

As the late Irish writer, scholar and philosopher, Iris Murdoch, observed, early Greek history 'is a game with very few pieces, where the skill of the player lies in complicating the rules'. It is the nature of this 'game' which underlies William Armstrong Percy's detailed examination of the origin and spread of pederasty in ancient Greece. Sparse and fragmentary evidence together with the consequent difficulties of interpretation pose particular problems for the objective historian: speculative play is inevitable, and to some extent, the juggling of sources as a means of furthering the author's historical predilections.

It is nonetheless an impressive study in which the technicalities do not obscure - for the less informed reader - the enjoyment of a closely argued and richly diversified discussion. Percy's espousal of the theory of a seventh century Cretan origin of institutionalized pederasty subsequently spread by the Spartans to Greece, is persuasive rather than compelling. As is clearly acknowledged in the Introduction, the Archaic period provides virtually no evidence: reliance is placed on later writers such as Plutarch, Lucian and Athenaeus. Historical texts survive in many versions about which scholars disagree more often than not: 'almost every detail of early Greek history, especially of Greek sexuality is open to doubt and indeed is hotly debated'. Repeated references to Aristotle's observation about the curbing of overpopulation by encouraging male sexual relations does little to advance the argument.

Percy is an enthusiast for his subject, though in no sense an apologist. The book is outstanding by virtue - as the author points out - of the paucity of works which treat fairly and without distaste of the topic of Greek pederasty, a term which he defines unequivocally from the outset as a love-bond (whether spiritual or sexual) between men and adolescent boys. The Greeks, it seems, showed little sexual interest in adult males, and indeed 'would be quick to condemn our prevalent androphilia as extremely distasteful and even reprehensible in that it serves no pedagogical purpose'.

This then is the crucial element in Percy's thesis: the link between pederastic custom and the rise of Hellas and the 'Greek Miracle', in spite of the acknowledged absence of surviving documents giving more precise testimony to that link. At the outset, he stresses that 'the Greeks we most admire almost always practised pederasty, at least before marriage.' The list is impressive, embracing poets, statesmen and philosophers. The Epilogue which looks forward to the 'Golden Age of Greek love' seeks to underline the argument that the intimate bonding of youths and older males transcended mere eroticism, quoting the Platonic dialogues, Aristotle and others who debated the spiritual versus the physical aspects of the 'erastes' and 'eromenos' relationship. In the wide, though detailed overview offered by this book, the argument is palpable.

The place of women in Greek society is perhaps understandably neglected in this study, except to argue a causal link between 'seclusion of women' and the proliferation of male love. The description of Spartan marriage customs and the attempt by Sparta 'to correlate marriage patterns and birthrates with population pressures' introduces a wider perspective, as does the reference to the 'love poetry' of Alcman and his 'sensual glorification of beautiful Spartan girls'. To the Greek mind, pederastic desire and heterosexual love were clearly not incompatible, on which point the author chooses to reserve comment. A brief reference to

Sappho's poetry as 'a clear parallel in the world of females to cardinal features of Greek pederastic practice' has the odour of a starkly irrelevant concession to contemporary sexual politics. Similarly, the chapter entitled 'Situational Homosexuality and Demography' in its descriptions of 'womenless colonists', comradeship on voyages, and the 'parastates' (battle companion) smacks of modern sexology in its attempt to establish 'elements in the background to institutionalized pederasty'. Nevertheless, the case for the 'uniqueness' of Greek pederasty is well made.

The author intends the book for a wide audience and not just specialists or homosexual sympathizers in the hope 'that a true understanding of Greek institutionalized pederasty will at long last permit the educated world to confront the accomplishments of that practice honestly, without embarrassment or outrage'.

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