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An Atypical Affair? Alexander the Great, Hephaistion Amyntoros and the Nature of Their Relationship

(Johnne Reames-Zimmerman, Pennsylvania State University)

Most recent Alexander historians—especially those writing after Stonewall—assume that the friendship of Alexander the Great and Hephaistion Amyntoros was 'not purely platonic.' Despite this, the names of Alexander and Hephaistion rarely find their way into modern lists of ancient lovers, nor are they much mentioned in studies of Greek homoeroticism—perhaps because they fail to fit the model first detailed by K.J. Dover in 1978. This dichotomy is a curiosity of recent specialization in classics. Alexander historians assume the affair while historians of Greek sexuality ignore it. In any case, the matter of Alexander and Hephaistion has not really been addressed in light of the last fifteen years of scholarship on Greek homoeroticism. Certainly, the answer cannot be assumed. For one thing, the two men were coevals; that by itself would disqualify them according to commonly agreed-upon criteria. So perhaps it is time to bring these two threads of scholarship together.

In the past fifteen years since the advent of Dover's *Greek Homosexuality* and the first volume of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, there has been a veritable explosion of studies concerned with Greek and Roman homoerotic behavior. Where once the interested scholar was faced by a dearth of secondary sources and even deliberate concealment of primary sources, one now has an embarrassment of riches.

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1 This paper was presented at the December 1999 annual meeting of the APA. I would like to thank Gene Borza, Beth Carney, and Paul Harvey for their input at different times during the paper's genesis.


5 I have chosen to use the term 'homoerotic behavior' rather than 'homosexual'—so Dover 1989: 1; or 'gay', so Boswell 1980: 41-8. I do not think 'homosexual' can be comfortably employed. 'Homoerotic' seems preferable as it escapes the anachronistic categories of homo- and heterosexual, much less 'gay', as well as the emotionally loaded term 'pedophilia', by focusing on activity rather than on a personality trait. Ogden's (1996) persistent use of 'homosexual', despite acknowledgment of Halperin's questions about the term (108,
As a result, certain sociological models for ancient Greek homoeroticism have come to be, more or less, agreed upon by scholars of antiquity. They center on the pederastic bond of elder lover and younger beloved (erastes-eromenos). A constellation of restrictions additionally defined these, which rendered the relationships publicly acceptable.

What has not been much considered yet are the exceptions. Partially this owes to the need to have a model before one can begin examining anomalies to it. And partially it owes to the nature of the evidence itself, which makes the recognition of exceptions difficult. We cannot see into the bedroom. We know only what the ancients tell us about themselves—and they may not tell us honestly. This is all the more true since it is exceptions we seek and these, because they are exceptions, tend to be concealed: 'closeted.' In the words of Peter Brown, 'it is both our privilege and our accursed lot to work the flinty soil of a long-extinct and deeply reticent world.'

Certainly, in order to determine exceptions in the absence of direct admission, we would need a good deal of circumstantial evidence, which we have for few figures in antiquity. But the relationship of Alexander and Hephaistion is one of those that we can plumb for just such details.

**Defining the Model**

We should begin our inquiry by defining what I shall here refer to as the ‘Dover Model’, as its original elucidation owes largely to the frank and painstaking analysis of Sir Kenneth Dover. Stated briefly, it involves an older erastes with a younger eromenos who was typically below the age of twenty or, at least, beardless yet.

and n.12) is problematic. He never provides an explanation. Perhaps because he himself questions the dominant model of pederasty, he rejects their terminology, or perhaps he assumes that their resistance to the term ‘homosexual’ is directly related to the popular pederastic model (his comments on page 111 might suggest as much). Yet neither reason recognizes the real difficulty with the term, which has to do with matters of self-ascription. Our modern psychology-based categories which see sexual orientation as a fixed aspect of personality do not match the ancient activity-oriented categories, though these were perhaps no less profound (contra Foucault). I am not certain Ogden has really given the matter much thought and this leads him into problems, as we shall see, in his discussion of Alexander's 'homosexuality' (122). See Halperin 1989.

6 Boswell 1980: 17-21, describes the scholarly gymnastics designed to conceal what was once deemed unsuitable material: Greek being translated into Latin, and Latin into Italian. And I myself have had conversations with E. N. Borza about a time when students of ancient history had incentive to master their Latin in order to translate the 'dirty' sections of Catullus, Martial, and Suetonius.

7 For disagreement with these models, see Boswell 1980: 17-36, and Mohr 1992: 231-42. Mohr delivers an acid critique of David Halperin's constructionist theories, while Thorp 1992: 64-5 brings up more reasoned—and more reasonable—objections.


9 Cantarella 1992 has some discussion of exceptions.


12 The question of 'beardlessness' is problematic, a point not much addressed. Dover 1989: 85-6 states
The erastes could be a youth pursuing a boy, a young man in his twenties pursuing a youth, or even an older, married man who still had an occasional affair—though a geron who habitually chased boys was frowned upon. In any case, some difference in age and social status was critical. Usually, difference in social status was a direct result of age difference: that is, a full citizen with a pre-ephebe. But it could be a full-citizen or even a citizen’s son with a male slave of any age. Equality was not a feature of these relationships. This does not preclude genuine affection. Expectations of equality were not a part of any sexual exchange.

Nevertheless, certain features of pursuit and consummation were designed to preserve the citizen boy’s dignity. For one thing, he had the right to say no. If he said yes, there were grades of submission: anal intercourse was something else entirely from intercrural copulation—though the act described may have been influenced by the medium that it was described on. Intercrural copulation, popular on pottery, is rarely referred to in literature.

The erastes was pursuer, and also the one who experienced desire (eros); the eromenos might entertain philia for his erastes but not eros. Nor was he supposed to enjoy the sexual encounter. His submission stemmed from a mixture of respect and pity. One is reminded of Victorian brides who were advised to grit their teeth and think of England. With some dry humor, Dover 1989: 96 observes:

The penis of the erastes is sometimes erect even before any bodily contact is established, but that of the eromenos remains flaccid even in circumstances to which one would expect the penis of any healthy adolescent to respond willy-nilly.

As the fondling of a boy’s penis by his erastes was part of courting foreplay, it is difficult to imagine that some boys did not react, since the sexual response is at least partially involuntary. Nevertheless, the predominance of flaccid penises depicted on pottery certainly suggests a gulf between their expectations and ours. It is difficult for us to

that the growth of a beard terminated a relationship. Yet there is evidence of ‘boys’ (paides) over eighteen still being referred to as eromenoi (Meleag. 117), an age by which they had surely begun to show facial hair. Yet some men are well into their twenties before they are able to grow a full beard, so just what is meant by ‘beardless’ is not clear. Lucian (43.6) would seem to indicate that any facial hair made a boy too old: ‘....was just getting his beard...coincided with the passing of his beauty.’ But this does not explain the older eromenoi.

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For particular elucidation of the need for this difference, see Cohen 1991 and Golden 1984. But Dover 1989: 90ff., does mention the existence of vases depicting boys of the same age-group engaged in homoerotic activity: ‘Homosexual anal copulation, by contrast with the intercrural mode, is portrayed by painters only when it involves people of the same age group.’ Yet this point is not much enlarged upon, by Dover or others. Ogden (1996) also points out this lack of consideration of non-pederastic models.

Aristophanes refers almost exclusively to anal intercourse. Cartledge 1981: 33 n.36, remarks that the intercrural version does not appear to have been practised much in Sparta. He then spends some pages considering whether the greater acceptability of anal copulation might be related to a semi-magical belief (whether recognized or not) that taking in the semen of the senior partner would infuse masculine virtue into the boy (23-7). Ogden 1996: 144-7, also considers this angle with his discussion of ‘blowing in.’

For discussion of ante-eros on the part of the eromenos, see Halperin 1986: esp. 70ff. Note, however, that Halperin specifies the unusualness of this term.

Dover 1989 has a number of illustrative plates of vase painting depictions.
evaluate whether this non-aroused state in boys was an ideal rarely attained in reality—or if, in fact, our biases are speaking.

While there is literary evidence that anal intercourse was engaged in regularly by same-sex pairs,\(^{17}\) most visual evidence, as indicated, describes the intercrural mode. This may be part of the overall attempt to protect a boy’s self-respect, even while he functions as the ‘penetrated’ partner. It is the erastes who bends at the knee and lowers his gaze, and there are no visual examples of intercrural copulation while a couple reclines though literary evidence would suggest reclining was not uncommon (Pl. Symp. 219). A boy was not to seek out the attentions of his erastes, to ‘play the procurer with his eyes’ (Arist. Cl. 979-80) and he might even be expected to put up token resistance. But in some visual evidence, the eromenos responds with evident affection, or even enthusiastically.\(^{18}\)

Finally, the roles of the erastes and eromenos were not interchangeable. A youth might be eromenos to an older man, and erastes to a boy, but he was never eromenos and erastes to the same person. His role in any given relationship was static: penetrator or the penetrated.\(^{19}\) Partners did not exchange places as the mood struck. And certainly, the older partner was never to take the subordinate position of being penetrated. There were derogatory terms for such men: katapugos or euryproktos, etc.\(^{20}\) Of course, it should be noted that the existence of special terms points to the fact there were men who took this subordinate rôle whether or not socially approved. One does not invent a term (or several terms) for what does not exist.

Which brings us to the question of exceptions. That they existed is evident and not in contention. Certainly the ‘faggot’\(^{21}\) was a stock character in Aristophanic comedy, along with the persistent stereotype of effeminate male. What is less evident is whether every exception to the erastes-eromenos model was considered a deviation, or is our model too heavily colored by Athenian perspectives? As Dover himself points out, by far the majority of our evidence is Athenian.\(^{22}\) Ogden (1996) in particular questions the pederastic model, especially in military contexts. Homoerotic behavior in other poleis took other forms.

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\(^{17}\) Dover 1989: 99ff. for citations.

\(^{18}\) Dover 1989: R520 [Oxford 1967:304] and R186a [Berlin 2279]; and for an enthusiastic response, a plate found in the Getty, reproduced as the frontispiece for Halperin 1990. Yet it is clear from the erastes’ expression on the Getty plate that the boy’s response was a surprise. The picture is humorous precisely for its inversion of expectations.

\(^{19}\) See Halperin 1989, 1990. Halperin et al. 1990. I have avoided here the common—and imprecise—terms ‘active’ and ‘passive.’ Ogden 1996: 110 notes that the pederastic model assume too rigid a division between these categories, pointing out that no one can know what went on in private with the implication that age-peer pairs may have enjoyed more flexibility in rôles. Perhaps, I am unsure sufficient evidence exists to know, and what evidence we do have suggests otherwise. I agree that the pederastic model is too categorically rigid—as I argue throughout this chapter—but Ogden’s alternative stems from an assimilation of ancient to modern behavior with which I am also fundamentally uncomfortable.


\(^{21}\) I use this term with some hesitation, but find ‘pathic’ even less appropriate. ‘Faggot’ conveys the social imprecation of katapugos while ‘pathic’ has overtones of psychological diagnosis.

\(^{22}\) Dover 1989: 1-17 discusses the problems involved in the evaluation of the evidence.
In Athens, the setting for most homoerotic courting seems to have been the gymnasium (Pl. Laws 1.63b). In Sparta, it was the army training grounds. This distinction is important as it indicates different expectations and different views about the role of homoerotic attachments. As Cartledge (1981: 17-36) elucidates, such attachments were part of the Spartan agoge. An erastes chose his eromenos based on military and athletic prowess, not on beauty or birth (as at Athens). Certainly, the two are not mutually exclusive, but it is a difference of emphasis. Since it seems that a lover could be punished for any weakness on the part of his beloved (Plut. Lyk. 17-18), it would be important for him to choose a brave and physically tough boy, rather than a merely attractive one. Nevertheless, we still see pairs made up of one senior and one junior partner. The terms used, however, differ. The erastes was eisphelos (inspirer) and the eromenos was aitas (hearer). Desire is downplayed in favor of education but that did not, it seems, indicate a more platonic nature to Spartan pederasty.

The pairing of eisphelos and aitas in Sparta did not end with the growth of a boy's beard. Plutarch (Lyk. 25.1) mentions that unmarried warriors under the age of thirty did not go to market, but rather their lovers (or their kinsmen) went for them—yet these are full-grown Spartans. It is unclear whether sexual activity still continued between them, but the use of the terms should be noted. It could be a reflection of a lasting attachment reminiscent of the Theban Sacred Band.

This 'Sacred Band'—Thebes' crack hoplite unit—gives a dramatic example of homoerotic loyalty. The entire justification for the Band's existence and arrangement (150 pairs of pledged lovers fighting side-by-side) is that a man would fight more valiantly for the one he loved than even for his own kinsmen (Pl. Symp. 178e-179a, Plut. Pelop. 18). In the Moralia (618d and 761), we learn that not only did the pairs fight beside one another, but the erastes was also responsible for training his eromenos as well as supplying the young man with his armor.

The gymnasium as part of this should not be dismissed, as the Band was known for including wrestling as a part of their training (just as the Spartans were known for emphasizing dance). In fact, the beginnings of the Band may have been among those young men whom Gorgidas and Epaminondas met in the gymnasium. Further, the 254 skeletons recovered from under the Lion of Chaironeia and reputed to be the remains of the Sacred Band (annihilated by the cavalry charge of Alexander in 338 BCE), were buried along with a variety of small personal items—including strigils (DeVoto 1992: 18). Such a uniform pattern of burial may reflect the Band's association with the gymnasium.

The oath of the Band is one of its more elusive features. Plutarch reports a comment by Aristotle that still in his own time there was a custom for lovers to exchange vows at Iolaos' heroön beside the gymnasium outside the Protaiades gates; Iolaos was, of course, one of Herakles' eromenoi (Plut. Pelop. 18-19). Plutarch's wording suggests the custom predated the Band, may even have been a regular feature of Theban homoerotic affairs. There is simply no way to know. But it does seem that Thebes had a formalization of the erastes-eromenos relationship. One would like to know what they pledged. Some promise of loyalty was evidently a part of it. There does not seem to have been the same

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23 See Plato Laws 836a-c; also Cicero de rep. 4.4. Modern discussion: Ogden 1996: 117-19, 139-47.
24 See also DeVoto 1992 and Hanson 1989: 124-5.
movement in and out of affairs as at Athens. This would make sense. A phalanx depended on the cohesion of its line that was a matter of regular training. An army unit could not afford a constant flux of eromenoi (or erastai) in and out of pairs. It also seems that they remained paired long after the eromenos had left puberty behind. DeVoto (1992: 7) argues, 'the sexual phase of the relation normally ended with the eromenos' first beard', but this seems more a compliance with the Dover Model than anything based on evidence; Ogden (1996: 111-15) convincingly argues the opposite. It seems, rather, that Boeotia (and Elis) had a reputation for liberality on the matter of homoerotic expression (Pl. Symp. 182ab; Xen. Symp. 8.32-33). We must be careful not to assume something simply because it fits our preconceived ideas, especially when that model owes so much to Athenian evidence.

**Macedonian Homoeroticism**

Thus we begin to see how homoerotic partnerships outside of Athens centered as much in the army as in the gymnasion. In Macedonia, they centered almost exclusively in a court and/or military setting. We are probably safer using a Theban or Spartan model than an Athenian one. A scandalized Theopompus (FGrH 115 F225) reports that Macedonians not only engaged in homoerotic affairs, but took a passive role even after their beards were grown—a telling remark, and perhaps not pure slander. One is reminded of Spartan aitai and the members of the Band.

One of the earliest records of homoerotic liaisons in Macedonian society relates to the death of Archelaos who was killed by a former eromenos in a hunting 'accident' (Diod. 14.37.6, Arist. Pol. 1311b.11). The precise nature of and motivations behind Archelaos' death are debated. What is significant for our purposes is the reference to not just one, but two affairs on the part of the king (Arist. Pol. 1311b.12).

Apparently, one of the boys was old enough to be married since, according to Aristotle, his motivation for killing the king was Archelaos' refusal to give him a daughter in marriage as promised. The Macedonian age of marriage among the upper classes seems to have been lower than in the rest of Greece. Philip married his first wife while in his early twenties and Alexander was urged to marry before leaving Macedonia when he was also in his early twenties. Thus, it is not unreasonable to suppose the elder boy, Krateras, was over twenty, if under thirty: a notable point, in light of the Dover model. The passage implies that the other eromenos involved, Hellanokrates, was younger. It is unclear whether Archelaos was having both affairs simultaneously or consecutively. What Aristotle does say is that Krateras had resented the liaison because it had been forced upon him. (One supposes it would not do to refuse the king.) At least the affair with Hellanokrates seems to have been current. His participation in the plot stemmed from

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25 Hammond 1990: 263, argues that Krateras was a Page. Our ancient sources, however, are in conflict as to when the institution came into being.

26 For a thorough discussion, see Carney 1983: 262-3.

27 Named either Krateras, Krateuas, or Krataios.

28 Ellis 1976: 45-6, for comments on Philip's early marriages and their motivations. On Parmenion and Antipatros advising Alexander to marry, and a shrewd observation as to why he did not, see Green 1991: 152-3; also Baynham 1998.
his belief that Archelaos had used him for sex in order to insult him. Apparently, Archelaos had refused to help restore his land to him, after promising to do so for the sake of eros.

In both cases, however, the erastes (Archelaos) is both the elder and the social superior. Usually age alone would guarantee this, but not in the case of a prince—as with the Thessalian Hellanokrates. Who but a king could possibly be his social superior? For an apposite example, consider Lysander's affair with Agesilaos, although at the time that began, Agesilaos was not expected to inherit the throne (Plut. Ages. 2.1). Nonetheless, the problem of a prince's status should be remembered with reference to Alexander and Hephaestion.

Philip of Macedon was infamous even in antiquity for his amours with both sexes, and it was a common joke that he took a new wife after each new war.29 Reputedly, he also had affairs with boys ranging from Olympias' own brother to Pausanias, who would prove to be his death.30 But again, as with Archelaos, Philip is clearly the age superior as well as the social superior in each case.31 It is not until the reign of Alexander that we find a record of homoerotic attachments which do not involve the king, and may thus tell us more about their social function within general Macedonian society.

Let us begin with the first conspiracy against Alexander, conceived of by Dimnos32 and reported in the most detail by Curtius.33 One conspirator grew alarmed and revealed the plan to his eromenos, who in turn told his brother, who went immediately to Philotas and later to Ptolemy when Philotas did nothing about it. Although Dimnos' grievance is never stated outright, unlike the conspiracies against Archelaos and Philip, the sources do not suggest that it stemmed from a specifically sexual insult. Nevertheless the two lovers are central to all versions of the tale and they meet the usual criteria for erastes and eromenos: one elder, one younger.

Another tale in which male lovers figure prominently is the Page's conspiracy;34 there are several pairs of lovers in fact, but we are concerned only with the principals: Hermolaos and Sostratos. This time we do know the ostensible reason behind the conspiracy: Hermolaos believed that Alexander had acted in a high-handed fashion towards him.35 Carney (1983) discusses some particularly intriguing aspects of the plot.36

29 On Macedonian polygamy, see Greenwalt 1989.
30 Diodorus 16.93-94 and 17.2.1. Much has been written regarding Philip's murder and its motivations, but see Carney 1983 for what I consider the best supposition. For the report about Philip and Alexander of Epeiros, Justin (8.6.5) is not entirely to be trusted, but in light of the affair between Archelaos and Hellanokrates reported by Aristotle, we must not reject it out of hand.
31 According to a late attestation in the Suda s.v. Kápoço, while a hostage in Thebes, Philip may have been the eromenos of Pammenes. Griffith discusses the possibility in Hammond and Griffith 1979: 204-5. If this was the case, Philip would have been only the younger brother of the king, but still a prince.
32 Called Limnos by Plutarch and Dymnus (Dymnos) by Curtius.
33 The fullest account of the Philotas Conspiracy, for which Dimnos' plot is the precursor, is found in Curtius, beginning 6.7.1 and running through the end of that book. But see also Diodorus 17.79-80 and Plutarch 48-9. Arrian skims it in 3.26.1-27.3 with no specific mention of Dimnos at all.
34 Curtius 8.6.7-8.8.23, Arrian 4.13-14, and in passing, Plut. Alex. 55. For a full discussion, see Carney 1983 and 1981.
35 For the accusation of hubris, see Ogden 1996: n.124. Apparently while out hunting, Hermolaos leaped in front of Alexander to spear the king's boar, whether from excitement or a desire to protect Alexander or...
but for our purposes it is enough to note the high profile occupied by homoerotic affairs. They seem to be a regular feature of Macedonian life, at least among the upper classes. Equally notable is the fact that nearly all of these affairs involve a Page as at least one member, if not both.37

The Pages' corps was a kind of officers' training-school, and the members seem to have been between the ages of 14 and 18.38 After 'graduating', the boys left the corps to be placed in regular army units. But it is within the exclusive and agonistic atmosphere of this corps—reminiscent of upper-class boarding schools—that boys away from home would have formed attachments to one another and to the young men who trained them,39 and it is likely within this setting that Hephaistion first met Alexander. Curtius (8.6.2) stresses the menial nature of their tasks,40 and their punishment for disobedience could be—maybe often was—severe, in order to foster endurance (Val. Max 3.3). Within this atmosphere designed to teach them to obey orders, they no doubt turned to one another to vent frustration and humiliation at what must have seemed unfair treatment at times—as Hermolaos turned to Sostratos when Alexander had him flogged.41

We must pause to consider an interesting gloss in the story of Hermolaos. Arrian tells us that Sostratos Amyntou was: 'a boy of the same age and his erastes' (4.13.3).42 In light of our Dover Model, this is a remarkable statement. Sostratos is called the erastes but we are also clearly told the boys were the same age. 'Heliodoten' is not strengthened by an adjective: e.g., the 'exact' same age. It can mean the same stage of life, generally. Perhaps Sostratos was a year or two older than Hermolaos. Nevertheless, they were regarded as coevals.

This passage is critical when considering the relationship of Alexander and Hephaistion. It calls into question—at least for Macedonia—certain aspects of the Dover Model. In the case of Hermolaos and Sostratos, we are presented with two boys for
whom the terms are applied but without the accompanying age difference. Yet this affair apparently coexisted right alongside those that did fit a pederastic model. Was it atypical? Apparently not. Neither Arrian nor Curtius indicate that it was regarded as remarkable or that either boy earned reproach for it. In fact, Curtius gives Hermolaos a wonderful rhetorical set-piece and evidently modeled his version of the story on the legend of Harmodios and Aristogeiton—hardly an appropriate model if Hermolaos was thought effeminate or their love-affair considered shameful.

**Alexander and Hephaistion**

Having thus reviewed both Greek and Macedonian models, we may turn to the relationship of Alexander and Hephaistion specifically. In modern studies, Alexander has both been portrayed as a homosexual and defended from such allegations. One side accepts a reputed disinterest in women, while the other tries to deny it. Neither gives proper recognition to Alexander's circumstances or to ancient social realities. He had three wives and (perhaps) two mistresses: there is some suggestion that he had other occasional assignations as well. A liking for women need not be false for an equal liking for men to be true. As typical of his era and culture, Alexander seems to have comfortably pursued either sex.

43 Curtius 8.7.1-15. It is highly unlikely that this speech bears much resemblance to what Hermolaos actually said at his trial—if he said anything.

44 Hermolaos would be the offending party since he, though the same age as his partner, was taking a penetrated role and assimilating himself to the part of a woman. Yet he is in no way depicted as effeminate. Curtius gives him, not Sostratos, the pluck to speak out at their trial. In fact, he seems a model eromenos: brave, tough, and passionately protective of his dignity. It is nearly an Athenian cliché, which should probably make us suspicious. No doubt the real boy was less ideal.

45 See note 2 above for a comprehensive list of who accepted his affair with Hephaistion, and who did not. Among those who have made arguments for his homosexuality are Africa 1982: 410-14, with a misplaced attempt both to psychoanalyze and to postulate an oedipal complex, and O'Brien 1992: 56-9, who suggests homosexuality inversely by calling him a 'reluctant heterosexual.' Ogden says 1996: 122, 'Alexander's homosexual preference was famous in antiquity,' then goes on to list the ancient evidence in favor of Alexander's interest in men while ignoring the ancient evidence that indicates his interest in women. Ogden also accepts Hephaistion as lover without question though, as we shall see, the evidence is far from conclusive. The most famous attempt to deny Alexander's 'homosexuality' was made, of course, by Tarn 1948: II.316-26; his permutations of the evidence are extraordinary. See E. Badian's equally famous response 1958.

46 For one thing, Alexander was on an extended campaign that kept him constantly on the move. For another, in antiquity, relationships between men and women—particularly within the upper classes—were radically different from those of today. And the familial structure of a polygamous royal court would have been different yet again from that of a private family in the Greek south. That Alexander's primary affective relationship might have been with another man is not only unsurprising, but perhaps predictable.

47 Wives: Roxane (Arr. 4.19ff.), Stateira and Parysatis (Arr. 7.4.4; Curt. 10.3.12). Mistresses: Barsine (Plut. Alex. 21.7), and perhaps Pankaste/Kampaspe (Plin. NH 35.86; Ael. VH 7.34). Plutarch (Alex. 47.4) calls the marriage to Roxane both a love affair and fortunate for his plans. That he did not marry Stateira directly after the Battle of Issos can be easily explained by his military situation, and that he did not marry before he left Macedonia perhaps owed to a pragmatic rationale (see Green 1991: 152-3). But the assumption that his first heterosexual encounter was with Barsine reflects Plutarch's morals (Alex. 21), not Macedonian ones. We may presume, I think, that he lost his virginity some time before the age of 22, the infamous story of Kallixena aside (Athen. 454-5). In fact, Pankaste was probably his first mistress, not Barsine. Despite the late nature of the sources referring to her, the main reason for doubting her existence seems to be Plutarch's
In regard to Hephaestion in particular, our three Greek biographers (Arrian, Diodorus and Plutarch) never call him erastes or eromenos in their histories—only philos (or malista timomenos). Alexander himself uses philalexandros. Curtius and Justin use only amicus, never amans. Boswell argues (1980: 46-7) that amicus is employed interchangeably with amans and may carry homoerotic overtones. But as with the Greek philos, there is no need to assume it. Arrian does, however, use the term eromenos to refer to Hephaestion once in his Discourses (2.12.17-18): '...as Alexander ordered the temples of Asklepios to be burned when his eromenos died.' We know Hephaestion is meant (Arr.7.14.5). Arrian says (1.2-3) that he wrote down, word for word, what Epiktetos taught and so the choice of eromenos may rest with Epiktetos, not Arrian, but since we have Arrian writing, his wording is worth noting. There is also a late reference in Aelian (21.5) that he called Persian women 'a torment to the eyes'—hardly the remark of a man indifferent to female beauty, even if Plutarch goes on to add that his 'self-mastery' was such that he did not act on his inclinations. Perhaps he did not; he did say that sex and sleep reminded him he was mortal (Plut. Alex. 22.3). We must take into consideration, however, Plutarch’s own agendas in writing his biography—as well as the Greek bias evident throughout chapters 21-22. Probably more indicative of Alexander's attitude is an anecdote preserved (interestingly enough) by Plutarch (21.5) that he called Persian women 'a torment to the eyes'—hardly the remark of a man indifferent to female beauty, even if Plutarch goes on to add that his ‘self-mastery’ was such that he did not act on his inclinations. Perhaps he did not; he did say that sex and sleep reminded him he was mortal (Plut. Alex. 22.3). 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in Diogenes’ *Epistles* (24) to Alexander being ruled by Hephaistion’s thighs. Recalling homoerotic iconography, this is almost certainly a reference to Hephaistion as Alexander’s *eromenos*. Use of the term *eromenos* in these passages is suggestive, but hardly conclusive. After all, we are still faced with the age problem.

Curtius (3.12.15) says, ‘and though [Hephaistion] was coeval with the king in age, he was rather larger in physique.’52 The Latin *aetas* used here is very similar in meaning with the Greek *helikia* (Arr. 4.13.3). Given the example of Hermolaos and Sostratos then, such an affair is not impossible. Yet as just indicated, at no point in our five biographers is an affair between them ever made explicit with the terms *erastes, eromenos* or *amans*, while Arrian does specifically call Sostratos Hermolaos’ *erastes*. Thus, all Arrian 4.13.3 can prove is that sharing the same *aetas*, or *helikia*, does not automatically rule out the possibility of an affair between Alexander and Hephaistion—as a strict interpretation of the Dover Model might insist.

If an affair did exist between them, since Epiktetos and Aelian both name Hephaistion as *eromenos* to the king, we might conclude he was slightly younger.53 But as indicated above (note 51), as with Achilles, that choice of term has more to do with Alexander’s royal status than his age, since Patroklos in the same passage was also called *eromenos*, though he was certainly Achilles’ senior. In fact, Hephaistion—like Patroklos—may have been the elder. The most probable circumstance for their meeting suggests it.

Curtius’ phrase *pariter eductus* (3.12.15), taken together with evidence from Diogenes Laertius (5.27) allows us to assume that the prince and Hephaistion had met at least by the time of their sojourn at Mieza. We know that Aristotle arrived in Macedonia in 343 BCE to tutor the prince when Alexander was twelve or thirteen (Plut. *Alex.* 7.1 ff.); a group of boys went with them, probably selected from the Pages. As stated above, boys generally entered the Pages at about fourteen. If Alexander were thirteen at the time, that would have made Hephaistion his senior by at least a year. A year or two one way or the other is more significant in youth than as adults.

What other clues might suggest that their *philia* included an erotic side? Curtius makes a curious comparison between Hephaistion and a certain Euxenippus:

[Euxenippus] was still very young and beloved (or dear to) the king because he was in the blossom of youth. But though he was Hephaistion’s equal in physical beauty, he was not his match in charm, since his was not virile.54

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Patroklos, by Alexander’s time, a large segment of the population assumed an erotic side to that friendship. This erotic side did not preclude Achilles’ (or Patroklos’) heterosexual pursuits, pace Barrett 1981, who fundamentally misunderstands Greek homoeroticism.

52...*et sicut aetate par erat regi, ita corporis habitu praestabat.*

53 Remembering that neither *aetas* or *helikia* means the exact same age, but merely *syntrophoi*. Ogden suggests that Justin’s use (12.12.11) of *pueritia*—‘boyish’ charms—may imply that Hephaistion was younger 1996 n. 138, but it seems to be more descriptive of his looks or self-presentation than his age.

54...*adhuc admodum iuvenem, aetatis flore conciliatum sibi, qui cum specie corporis aequaret Hephaestionem, ei lepore haud sane virili par non erat* (7.9.19). The name of the youth is uncertain: Euxenippos or Exkipinos.
Conciliatum need not mean beloved, but it can and given the rest of the passage, I believe this to be the implication. Euxenippos was a pretty boy who had caught Alexander's eye; the courting cliché *kalos Euxenippos* echoes faintly behind Curtius' words. As he was still very much a youth, he was likely a Page and it all sounds rather like a classic affair of the Dover Model: a young man under thirty paying court to a beautiful youth, if one a little effeminate. This makes the parallel with Hephaestion suggestive. The king's current boy is set beside his old *eromenos* (or *erastes*) and comes off the worse for the comparison.

And finally there is the famous account of Alexander's visit to Sisygambis the morning after the Battle of Issos. Arrian has doubts about its authenticity but we should mention it for the sake of completeness since it does bear on our question. Reputedly, Alexander went to visit Dareios' women after the battle in order to assure them that they would be well treated. He took Hephaestion with him. The queen-mother mistakenly bowed to Hephaestion because—to use Curtius' words—he was *ita corporis habitu praestabat*: more impressive-looking. Flustered upon realizing her mistake, she began to re-prostrate herself before Alexander. He forestalls her with the gracious words, 'Never mind mother; you were not far wrong. He, too, is Alexander.' Perhaps the king was punning on his name that meant 'a protector of men.' If the passage is literary fiction, this is highly probable. But if the encounter did happen, the joke would be lost on a woman who did not understand Greek; one wonders, too, if he thought so quickly on his feet. It is difficult what, or how much, to make of it.

It is the deep grief that Alexander showed upon Hephaestion's death that leads most modern Alexander historians to consider their friendship more than platonic. Its extreme nature was remarked upon, or censured, in antiquity as well as modern times. As I have argued elsewhere, his grief was *not* as extreme or unusual as popularly believed when understood in the right context, but it is sufficient here to note that Arrian called it 'no small calamity' for Alexander, and thought the king would rather have died first.

We must remember the two of them had been friends at least nineteen years, if we accept Mieza as a terminus ante quem for their meeting. During much of this, they would have lived in close quarters on campaign and no doubt seen one another daily when not away on independent missions. Nineteen years is longer than many modern marriages. In terms of affectional attachment, Hephaestion—not any of Alexander's three wives—was the king's life partner. Whatever the truth of any sexual involvement, their

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55 Arrian 2.12.6-8; Curt. 3.12.15-26; Diod. 17.37.5, 114.2; v. also the *Suda* s.v. *Hephaistion*.
56 So the *Suda* s.v. *Hephaistion*.
57 So Arrian complains about the problem of assessing the truth behind various testimonies due to hostility or disapproval for Alexander and Hephaestion biasing them (7.14.2f.). And Lucian, in a typical stoic passage from his *Dialogues of the Dead* (397), has Philip reproach Alexander for his inordinate love (*huperagapdon*) for Hephaestion.
emotional attachment has never been seriously questioned. No doubt as teenagers, both had learned from Aristotle some version of what he would later write in his *Nicomachean Ethics*—that perfect love was the highest friendship (1156b), and that friendship was a state of being, not a feeling (1157b). Moreover, Aristotle speaks of the friend as the 'second self' (1170b) and indicates that there is only one special friend (1171a).

Thus, given the evidence for same-age homoerotic affairs in Macedonia and the weight of circumstantial testimony—even if it violates Dover's model—I do think it quite possible that Alexander and Hephaistion were physically intimate at some point. I do not necessarily think, however, that they were still physically intimate in their latter years, though they may have been. Mostly, I don't think it greatly significant to the affection they held for one another.

While they may indeed have been lovers, I think it reductive to characterize their relationship solely in this way. Nussbaum (1986: 354) contrasts Greek philia with modern concepts of friendship and says that philia 'includes the very strongest affective relationships that human beings form... English 'love' seems more appropriately wide-ranging.' Greek philia could include a sexual component but extended far beyond that. Similarly, and though speaking of Achilles and Patroklos, Van Nortwick (1995: 17-18) offers an observation it would do us well to keep in mind:

We need to be careful not to misunderstand this intimacy.... Friendship in general is a difficult relationship to fix, seen in our modern cultures as existing on the boundaries of other bonds, familial or sexual, which provide the categories through which friendship itself is defined. The poems we will read here offer another model for friendship, one accommodating a greater degree of intimacy than is often accorded to nonsexual friendship these days. The first and second selves are intimate because they compose, together, a single entity...—at this level of intensity, sexual love is sometimes inadequate as a model because it may not be intimate enough. [Italics mine]

59 The ancient evidence is unequivocal. There are several anecdotes expressing Alexander's affection for Hephaistion, from sending him a delicacy of small fish as a special gift (Plut. Alex. 28.3 and Athen. 250) to marrying him to the sister of Alexander's own wife so their children would be cousins (Arr. 7.5). Diodorus (17.114.3) reports a letter from Hephaistion to Olympias in which he reputedly said, '...you know Alexander means more to us than anyone.' The letter is quite probably spurious, but I find no reason in the sources to doubt the affection it mimes. The one point on which all the ancient evidence agrees: Hephaistion was loyal to a fault.

60 Shay 1994: 40 says, 'Modern American English makes soldiers' love for special comrades into a problem, because the word love evokes sexual and romantic associations. But friendship seems too bland for the passion of care that arises between soldiers in combat.'

61 Contrary to Kostan 1997: 108, who says, 'Modern critics have intuited an erotic motive that is absent in the sources and effectively excluded by the label philos.' To state that philos excludes erotic attachment is too strong, though I do believe that Kostan is correct to note that friendship alone would be a strong enough tie. Erotic attachment, if there was one, would have been incidental, but we need not set up an either-or opposition.
Van Nortwick's observation is a shrewd one. Our model of friendship is not consonant with theirs. Within these ancient societies where homoerotic desire was freely, sometimes emphatically, expressed, intense friendship might well develop a sexual expression even while that expression was not the focus of the friendship, or even thought of as particularly characteristic of it. The ancient Greeks, perhaps because their societies were so highly militarized...simply assumed the centrality of *philia* (Shay 1994: 41). It would be inappropriate to refer to the friend as lover (except in very specific circumstances), as such would fall far short of encompassing the whole relationship. Alexander's choice of 'philalexandros' for Hephaistion said more about the nature of his affection than calling him merely *erastes* or *eromenos*.

**Conclusion**

Was the relationship of Alexander and Hephaistion an atypical affair? I do not believe that it was. We have shown that Macedonian society allowed same-age partnerships and seems to have accepted them without comment. Among the Pages, it was not only possible, but perhaps even to be expected that young men would form friendships with one another that included a sexual aspect, but was not limited to it.62

What, then, might we gather from this detailed look at one example? Simply that models—even good ones based on careful analysis of the evidence—can put blinders on subsequent scholarship if we are not careful. Without the cognitive dissonance created by the sheer bulk of circumstantial testimony in the case of Alexander and Hephaistion, it would be easy to overlook a relationship like theirs. Even with the circumstantial evidence, we still cannot be at all certain they were lovers. Because such relationships are not atypical for their societies, sly insinuations—such as those made about Agathon the Tragician63—are absent.

It does cause one to wonder how many other such relationships may have existed between less famous *philoi*. While the Dover Model describes the most common—and least ambiguous—form for homoerotic expression in ancient Greece, it was not the only one. There were other options, particularly in military contexts. In short, a confusion of terms may make it difficult for us to pinpoint other such typical 'atypical' affairs, and we should take this into account when employing our models. All such models are to some degree artificial constructs; we should expect them, then, to be ultimately inadequate.

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62 Again, returning to the evidence found on pottery, it may be that such attachments were no more remarkable in Athenian life but have been overlooked due to the predominance of pederastic models. Ogden argues that they were indeed present (1996: 125-35).

63 He appears as an almost stereotypical drag-queen in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*. Even while allowing for the usual comic exaggeration, it would not have been funny without some truth behind it. Compare Aristophanes' Agathon with Curtius' contrast of Euxenippos and Hephaistion mentioned above.
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