

IS "SYMPOSIUM" A DEFENCE FOR HOMOSEXUALITY?

In ancient Greece there was an institution named "boy-love" or doric love¹. This term signified the love of a matured, middle-aged man for a youth, a teen-ager. Perhaps this love was of a kind of temporary sexual relation (the man being the lover and the boy or youth being the beloved one), but the aim of this love was pedagogical: the man should teach to his beloved teenager all he know about life and the world, "the one (=the lover) able to contribute something for education and wisdom in general, the other (=the beloved) desiring to get this for education and wisdom in general" (Plato, *Symposium*, in W.H.D. Rouses' transl., *Symp. henceforth*, p. 81) 184 de in the OCT edition by J. Burnet).

The "doric love" was a temporary state, because the beloved stopped having sexual relation² with the lover, when he (= the boy) reached maturity, and the two men, the "lover" and "the beloved" often became steady friends all their life long. This "doric love" was not a way of life, but a way of education. Neither the "lover" nor the "beloved" went on having sexual relation; neither the first nor the other one become homosexual all their life long.

As I said, there was a difference between "doric love" and "homosexuality". There are some puritanical philologues who even doubted whether "doric love" meant "full sexual relation for pedagogical purposes"; and they suggested that the word in Athens, at least, meant "friendship for pedagogical purposes". Of course there were "homosexuals" of any kind in Athens (see e.g. the irony —*εἰρωνεία*— against them in Aristophanes' comedies, and Aristophanes' speech in the *Symp.*, pp. 85 ff 189 c ff).

The "doric love" appeared more frequently in military groups and militaristic societies, as were the doric Sparta and the boeotian Thebes; in Thebes there was an infantry company, called "Sacred Company", which consisted of "couples" of soldiers. (Even now homosexuality is more often to be met in groups where there live only men). Pausanias in his speech (*Symp.*, p. 79) says that this custom of "doric love" was not equally accepted all over the Greek city-state world (182 ab.).

There are six speeches in the "Symposium" concerning with Love. Phaedros, speaking as a "common man in the street", presented the benefits that Love gives to its worshippers; "Love has most power to provide virtue and happiness for mankind" (*Symp.*, p. 78 180b). Eryximachos looked at the Love as if it were a cosmological element (*Symp.*, p. 82-185 c ff). Aristophanes in his seemingly comic myth emphasizes the need of any human being to be "brought (i.e. by Love) home to his own. (*Symp.*, p. 89-193d). Agathon, the beloved of Pausanias, spoke about Love, as if it were a handsome youth; he is a poet, and that is why he created a poetical figure of Love (*Symp.*, p. 93-197 c ff); therefore the rôle of Love is one of special importance, as far as fine arts are concerned (*Symp.*, p. 92 196d-7b c). Only Pausanias (*Symp.*, p. 78 ff 181 c-e) emphasized the importance "doric-love" takes for the education from that point of view, and gave a praise of the Heavenly Aphrodite. Diotima (=Socrates) will afterwards develop this thesis (cf. Diotima's words: "he tries to educate", *Symp.*, p. 104-209 c).

As far as we are concerned with Plato's ideas of "doric love", my opinion is that it is Diotima (=Socrates) who was the spokeswoman of his ideas. Alcibiades' narrat-

ion completed actually what "Diotima" had expressed in a theoretical way. I believe that neither Socrates nor Plato defended homosexuality, not even sexual relation in "doric love". Here are my arguments:

Diotima, after exposing the myth of Love (Symp., pp. 98-99, 203 b-e), started speaking about the aim of that pedagogical love, and said what it is: it is "wisdom", beauty, perfection and blessing (Symp., p. 99-203 e-4b). Thus the lover longs for immortal essences, and the Forms are immortal. She said also. (Symp., pp. 100, 102 204e-5a, 207a) that "Love is all the desire for good things and for happiness", "Love is for immortality also"). According to Diotima, any kind of love is "a love for immortality", but one considers love in the way he is able to do it. These are human beings "pregnant in body" and others "pregnant in soul" (Symp., p. 103-209a), and these last ones long for "wisdom and virtue", "temperance and justice" (Symp., ib).

Then Diotima exposed the "grades" through which the lover should pass, so as to reach Beauty itself, the Idea of Beauty. The lover will pass from the beautiful bodies to the beautiful things and thoughts, and so he will draw the beloved to know this beauty in things and souls and bodies. Until they both "behold a beauty marvellous in its nature, the very Beauty" (Symp., p. 105-210d), thus approaching the last grade. But I think better to give here the whole passage (Symp., pp. 105-106 211c ff), where Diotima summed up her teaching:

"Beginning from these beautiful things, to mount for that beauty's sake ever upwards, as by a flight of steps, from one to two, and from two to all beautiful bodies, and from beautiful bodies to beautiful pursuits and practices, and from practices to beautiful learnings, so that from learnings he may come at last to that perfect learning which is the learning solely of that beauty itself, and may know at last that which is the perfection of beauty". "There is life worth living for man", added Diotima. Who has seen Beauty itself with his mind (because "mind alone can see it"), who has known Beauty itself "unmixed, not adulterated with human *flesh* and *colors* and much other *mortal rubbish*", he alone becomes happy; he is "the friend of God and immortal-if any man ever is" (Symp., p. 106. 212a).

I don't think that Diotima's speech could be thought of a defense for homosexuality, not even that she defended sexual relation between "lover" and "beloved" as was the case with the institution of "doric love". The best argument in favor of my view is the narration that follows Diotima's speech. Alcibiades, the most renowned among the "beloved" by the "lover" Socrates, gave the answer to the question put.

He narrated the whole story about his friendship with Socrates. The most significant passage of his speech was where he tried to have a sexual intercourse with Socrates (Symp., p. 113. 219 b-d). "I threw my own mantle over the man (=Socrates) and crept in under this man's threadbare cloak... and threw my arms round this man... and there I lay the whole night! ... This man was so much above me and so despised me and laughed at my bloom, and insulted me in the point where I did think I was something... that I swear by the gods... when I got up I had no more slept with Socrates than if I had been with a father or elder brother". Also in Symp., p. 115: "he (=Socrates) has done the same to Charmides and Euthydemus and many others, whom he has tricked as a lover and made them treat him as beloved instead". (222 ab).

There is a term: "platonic love", which means: "a love between a man and a woman similar to a deep friendship, without sexual relation at all" (Cf. how in Webster's International Dictionary "Platonic love" is defined)³. It's a love of that kind, a love of minds, that was defended by Plato (and Socrates) in the "Symposium".

NOTES

1. «παιδικά» Plat. Symp. 184d, cf. Symp. 182 ab.
2. If there was any sexual relation. Cf. Georges Karayannis, *L' amour pédagogique dans la Grèce antique*. Paris 1976, Pp. 1-2.
3. "Platonic love. a. Love, according to Plato, conceived as an urge to union with the beautiful, ascending from passion for the individual to ecstasy in contemplation of the universal idea. b. Originally among late Renaissance writers, a spiritual comradeship or love, in which there is no element of sexual desire, esp. between persons of opposite sex".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In this article I only used the platonic text of the Symposium (OCT, ed. by J. Burnet (OCT) and the English translation by W.H.D. Rouse: *Great Dialogues of Plato*, New York, ed. Penguin, ²1984. I fully accept G. St. Karayannis' distinction among homosexuality, pederasty and pedagogical love (cf. n. 3 supra):

"L' homosexualité est la relation érotique, charnelle entre deux personnes du même sexe sans distinction d'âges. La pédérastie est la liaison, charnelle ou non, entre un homme, adulte et un jeune garçon. L'amour pédagogique est l'aspect de la pédérastie qui se caractérise par le but final, à savoir un but (pédagogique) visé par cette relation entre l'adulte et le garçon et, avant tout, la sincérité des sentiments" (pp. 1-2).

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΙΣ

Εἰς τὸ σύντομον τοῦτο ἄρθρον, στηριζόμενος ἀποκλειστικῶς εἰς τὸ κείμενον τοῦ πλατωνικοῦ «Συμποσίου», καὶ δὴ εἰς τὸν "λόγον τῆς Διοτίμας" καὶ τὴν διήγησιν τοῦ Ἀλκιβιάδου, ὑποστηρίζω ὅτι ὁ λεγόμενος "πλατωνικὸς ἔρωσ", ὅπως ἐκφράζεται εἰς τὸ ἔργον τοῦτο διὰ στόματος Διοτίμας, οὐδὲν τὸ σαρκικὸν ἔχει καὶ δὲν ἀποτελεῖ μορφήν ὁμοφυλοφιλίας ἢ σαρκικῆς παιδευραστίας. Ἡ δὲ διήγησις τοῦ Ἀλκιβιάδου ἐπιβεβαίωσι τοῦτο.