

A FREETHINKER'S PRIMER OF MALE LOVE. John Lauritsen.  
*Provincetown: Pagan Press, 1998. 96 pp.*

Concise, elegant, learned, and readable, this work constitutes an impressive introduction to gay history and theory whose usefulness is enhanced by an extensive eight-page bibliography. Furthermore, it corrects the errors or shortcomings of a number of well-known best sellers on gay subjects.

For example, under the subheading "Male love in the ancient world," Lauritsen underscores the connection that existed in Greece between male bonding and military prowess. In this he completes Kenneth Dover's famous *Greek Homosexuality*. Dover limited himself to a few early sources, ignoring the later Greek and Roman writings that glorify pederastic heroes and thinkers. Similarly, Lauritsen's recognition of the moral and ethical goals of Greek pederasty confounds the work of David Halperin, who, in the vein of Foucault, sees such coupling as sadistic efforts to achieve sexual domination.

More directly, Lauritsen challenges many of the claims made by John Boswell. With Wayne Dynes and Warren Johansson, Lauritsen published the first serious critique of *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*. Their analysis was largely ignored in the face of the enthusiasm of gay Christians for Boswell's casuistry. Only after Boswell published his book on gay marriages did his reputation collapse as scholars revealed to what extent Boswell had distorted and misrepresented the evidence presented in both of his volumes.

In its support for the research of Giovanni Dall'Orto and Louis Crompton, among others, Lauritsen's discussion may also be considered a reaffirmation of the views of gay historians from Burkhardt and Symonds through Licht, Hirschfeld, and other members of the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement. Since the mid-twentieth century *Altertumswissenschaft* has been in decline within the universities. Lauritsen's presentation represents a healthy and long-overdue return to the facts of history. It does not bow to post-modernism, feminism, or any form of marxism or freudianism. For this aspect alone it deserves to be recommended.

A few misprints appear, but they are not of consequence. Occasionally the brevity of the discussion requires omission of pertinent material. Lauritsen recognizes the roles of Philo Judaeus and St. Paul in modern fear of "'defilement' from sodomitical acts" (p. 28) but

passes over the equally negative views of those acts by pagan Roman authors. No matter. This writer understands our history, including the historical and anthropological fact that in Greece, Rome, and most European societies before the eighteenth century the majority of males who lay with other males practiced what we today call pederasty. Still, he refuses to take sides in the debate over this activity. Rather, Lauritsen argues in the chapter "Paradigms for Gay Liberation," that we must cease to be "mired down in identity politics, masochistically committed to the cult of victimhood, and futilely striving for a simulacrum of respectability" (p. 69). Citing Benedict Friedlaender, he posits two paths out of the mire: "Abolish all laws that deny the right of males to love each other," "Restore Male Love to a place of honor in society" (p. 69).

The rhetoric is moving, but might there not be an argument to make for ensuring the protection of the very young? It may not be easy to fix the age at which a young person can be considered legally to give his consent; nevertheless, the reasons to try are powerful ones.

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