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We look forward to hearing from you, our readers and members, for comments, ideas and articles for future issues.

We encourage advertising and correspondence between readers regarding their philatelic interests.

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## Greek Homosexuality On Stamps, Part 1: Mythology

By Brian F. Lanter

To the Greeks, homosexual activity among their gods and heroes was not only not extraordinary, it was business (or pleasure) as usual. Greek myths were more often explanatory than exemplary, so the fact of divine homosexual activity does not necessarily imply moral sanction, but the sheer quantity of mythological homosexuality may help convey how normal homosexual behavior was in Greek society. The mythological images which abound on stamps often carry homosexual connotations and, not coincidentally, often illustrate the ancient Greeks' enthusiasm for the human body. In fact, Greek religion was shaped and altered largely through the visual and literary images of artists and poets, and had no official compendium of divine behavior nor central authority to propagate myth. The specificity of the Greek gods' homosexual behavior changed over the centuries, presumably to suit changing tastes, until the ascendent Christians finally outlawed pantheism and homosexuality. As numerous stamps reflect, Christianity never overcame the powerful appeal of Greek paganism, of which homosexuality is an integral part.



Gr 398



Cyp 290



Gr C27



Fr C20

The most important institutional acknowledgement of male homosexual desire, cited countless times in classical literature, was Zeus (Greece 398), chief among the gods, carrying off mortal Ganymede (Cyprus 290, Greece C27). The operative Greek verb can mean carry off, ravish away, snatch up or sieze and overpower. Homer, who mentions the incident, does not confirm or reject homosexual motives of his characters, but later writers clarified Zeus's homosexual desire. The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite (later than Homer) says, "cunning Zeus ravished away golden Ganymede on account of his beauty" (fn 1), in context with the explicitly sexual abduction of Tithonos by Eos. Sophokles's *Kolchians* contains a line about Ganymede's "thighs setting Zeus's sovereign power secretly aflame" (fn 2).

Zeus, in the shape of an eagle, according to one tradition (but also often portrayed in his human guise), took Ganymede to Olympos where he replaced the goddess Hebe as cupbearer. The constellation Aquarius, the water-bearer (e.g. San Marino 726), apparently represented Ganymede to the Greeks, and so the Eagle seems to fly above Aquarius (fn 3). France C20 shows Zeus as an eagle carrying Hebe. But Hebe, the daughter of Zeus and Hera, was certainly not abducted and I can find no reference to Zeus carrying her. Perhaps a postal administrator or stamp designer thought a design showing Zeus and Ganymede would be too bold.



Tun 193



Gr 793



Alg 407

Pindar's rewrite of a myth about Pelops is a good example of how comfortable Greek poets felt to attribute homosexual desire to their gods. Poseidon (Tunisia 193), autonomous sea-ruling, earth-shaking brother of Zeus, carries off Pelops in Olympian Ode I:

Then the god of the bright trident (Greece 793), his heart conquered by longing, siezed you and carried you away in his golden chariot (Algeria 407) to the highest home of far-honored Zeus, where next afterwards Ganymede came for the same service to Zeus (fn 4).



Alg 245



Gr C62



Gr 185



Mon 212

Another divine love story can be pieced together on stamps. Both Apollo (Algeria 245), god of light, music and healing, and Zephyros (Greece C62), the west wind, loved the beautiful youth Hyakinthos. Zephyros was jealous of Apollo and when the god was throwing the discus (Greece 185), Zephyros blew it into Hyakinthos, killing him (Monaco 212). Apollo caused a flower to spring from the youth's blood. Some say the flower was dyed with blood, but the wild progenitor of our modern hyacinth (e.g. Hungary B230) is light blue. Others say the flower was marked with Apollo's cry of woe, AIAI (fn 5), and may have been our Turk's cap lily (Albania 1280) (fn 6).



Alb 1280



F Mor CB25



Gr 797



Sp 1946



Apollo also loved the youth Kyparissos, whom the god turned into a cypress tree (French Morocco CB25), the Greek symbol of mourning, because of the youth's inconsolable grief over killing a favorite stag. Classical writers credited Apollo with at least 25 homosexual affairs (fn 7), including Zakynthos (Greece 797), eponym of the island, and Orpheus (Spain 1946) (fn 8). The maenads who tore Orpheus apart may have been angry over his introduction of homosexual love to Thrace (fn 9).



Aus 667



It 534



Gr 858



Dom 242



DDR 1094

Hermes (Austria 667), messenger and shepherd, god of travellers, gaming, thieves, etc., was a model of young manhood, whose statue often appeared in training schools with those of Apollo and Herakles. Lucian (Pseudo-Lucian), in his Charidemus, lists Hermes along with Zeus, Poseidon and Apollo as susceptible to male beauty, falling victim to Kadmos, founder of Thebes (fn 10). Hermes may have helped Perseus (Italy 534) out of love for the hero (fn 11). Dionysos (Greece 858), god of wine and the theater, loved Ampelos, who died accidentally and was changed into the vine from which the god made wine (fn 12). Dionysos also shared Aphrodite's passion for Adonis (Dominica 242) (fn 13), from whose blood sprang the anemone (DDR 1094).



Cyp 291



NZ B30



Gr 743



Gr 658



Gr 627

Aphrodite (Cyprus 291), goddess of love, apparently did not love any women in myth, but her inspiration was not limited to heterosexual love. Pelops, later wanting Poseidon's help, reminds the god of the "dear gifts of Aphrodite" (fn 14). In Sappho's

Hymn to Aphrodite, the poetess invoked the aid of Aphrodite, her ally, to help her win yet another woman. Aphrodite is equally the goddess of gay male sex while Eros (New Zealand B30) is the personification of the desire which moves men to fall in love with each other (fn 15). The major earth goddess, Demeter (Greece 743), may have shown a homosexual response as part of the Eleusinian mystery story: Baubo (a woman or minor goddess) tries to console Demeter, who is searching for her daughter Persephone, and succeeds in making Demeter smile by displaying her vulva (fn 16).



Gr 940



Gr 806



Cyp recent



Gr 624



Gr 1198

Lesser divinities and mythic figures found on stamps had their homosexual loves, too, such as these from a list compiled by an early Christian father, Pseudo-Clement of Rome (fn 17): Asklepios (Greece 658) loved Hippolytos, Pan (Greece 627) loved Daphnis and Hephaistos (Greece 940) loved Peleus (Greece 806). Pseudo-Clement's incomplete list names 36 homosexual loves of 8 gods and heroes. According to the poet Ibykos, Talos (e.g. Crete 69) loved Rhadamanthys the Just (fn 18). Talos, also called Perdix (partridge), was saved when his uncle Daidalos threw him off the Acropolis by being turned into a partridge (e.g. Greece 994). The historian Zenis or Zeneus of Chios said that Minos (e.g. Crete 70) loved Theseus (Cyprus, recent issue) (fn 19), who loved Pirithoos (fn 20). Narkissos (Greece 624), who eventually pined away for his own reflection, which entails a homosexual response, and became a flower (e.g. Hungary B231), loved Aminios (fn 21). Agamemnon (Greece 1198), the high king of Mykenai, loved Argyinnos (fn 22).



Mon CB11



Gr 977



Gr 660



S Mar 856

Between homosexual affairs the gods were, to be sure, fornicating freely. Their offspring often became heroes and, taking after their fathers, had their own homosexual affairs. The popular model of strength and sensual pleasure (fn 23) was Herakles (Monaco CB11), the extramarital son of Zeus and Alkmene (Zeus's wife, incidentally, was his sister), who did almost everything, including a transvestite period. Herakles is attributed with at least 17 homosexual affairs (fn 24). Theokritos tells of one in Idyll XIII:

But also Amphitryon's brazen-hearted son  
[Amphitryon being mortal husband of Alkmene],  
who abode the fierce lion (e.g. Romania 1911),  
loved a boy, the lovely Hylas, the  
curly-haired. . . (fn 20).

Hylas was Herakles's companion on the voyage of the Argonauts, during which the boy was lost, to Herakles's sense-robbing grief. Later Herakles loved Iolaos, his charioteer or arms-bearer. Theban lovers took their love as a symbol, as Plutarch reports:

It is said that Iolaos, who was beloved of  
Herakles, shared his labors and fought beside  
him. And Aristotle says that down to his time  
the mutual vows of lovers and beloved were  
performed at the tomb of Iolaos (fn 26).

Diotimos of Adramyttium, in his Struggles of Herakles, has Herakles undertake his labors because King Eurystheus (Greece 977) is his favorite (fn 27).

The most famous love of a semi-divine hero was that of Achilles, great-grandson of Zeus, son of Peleus and the nymph Thetis, for Patroklos. Homer celebrates their love in the Iliad without saying whether it was sexual, but he certainly portrays it as intimate and intense (Greece 660). Later poets again made their relationship explicitly sexual. In Aischylos's lost play Myrmidons, Achilles reproaches the dead Patroklos, saying:

The unsullied awe of the thighs you did not  
reverence, O most ungrateful for those frequent  
kisses (fn 28).

Sophokles wrote a Lovers of Achilles which takes place during his youth on Pelion, and a play in which Achilles, instead of ambushing Priam's son Troilos (San Marino 856), loves him but kills him accidentally (fn 29). Like Herakles, Achilles played a transvestite role for a time.



Gr 561



Gr 1209

The Bronze age stories of Herakles, Achilleus, Theseus, etc., probably mixed history into mythology. These heroes and their lovers, and the beautiful youths beloved of the gods, may have been based on real people. Written history does not stop the process of myth-making: Alexander the Great was widely deified and generated many legends. He is often portrayed with ram's horns (Greece 561), symbolic of his divinity through Zeus-Ammon, his reputed divine father. Alexander's lover, Hephaestion, became a divine hero (fr 30), though perhaps because of the intervention of Christianity in the myth process, it is mainly through written history that we know of the homosexual loves of Alexander.

Myths about homosexual loves and lovers, which many stamps recall, are both an exploration of the human psyche and a pathway into our past. As the characters in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings realize, they are living in the web of a story that does not stop, as perhaps Alexander and Hephaestion thought when they sacrificed together at the tomb of Achilleus and Patroklos, and Alexander put the Iliad in the tomb (Greece 1209). The best surviving history of the divine Alexander was written by a Greek friend of the divine Hadrian, who deified his beloved Antinoos. But that is getting ahead of the story--there is plenty of Greek history and culture concerning homosexuality to be illustrated on stamps.

FOOTNOTES

Stamp references are to the Scott catalogue. I have cited primary sources for myths when they were available to me for checking, otherwise I have given the secondary source of a reference. The best secondary sources are Beyer (in Latin), Dover and Licht, all cited below. Translations are mine, from the Loeb Classical Library text, using Loeb's numbering systems.

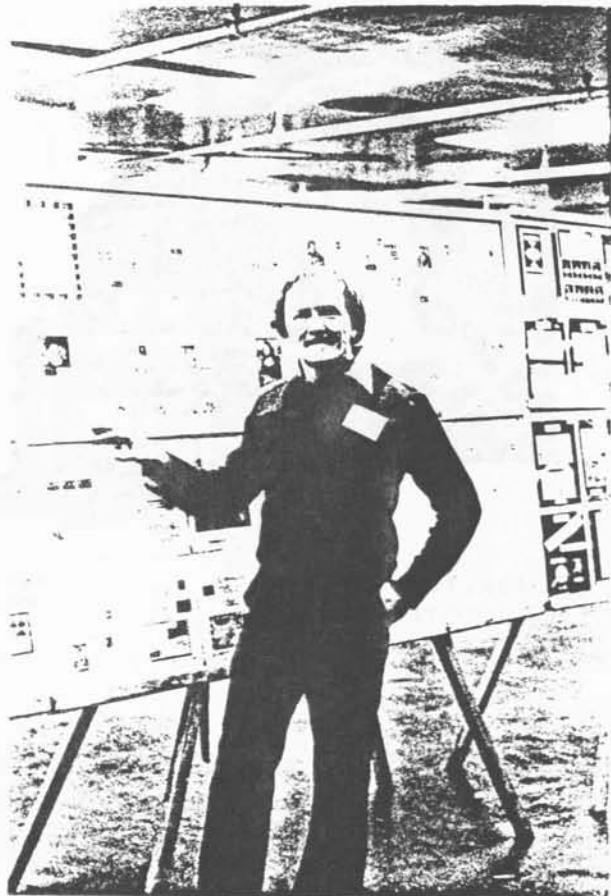
1. Homeric Hymn V--to Aphrodite, 202-203.
2. Athenaios, Deipnosophistai XIII, 602e.
3. Hyginos, Poeticus Astronomicus II.16 and II.29.
4. Pindar, Olympian Odes I, 40-45.
5. Ovid, Metamorphoses X, 215.
6. Beales, Katherine, Flower Lore and Legend, NY, Holt, 1917. The story of Apollo and Hyakinthos appears in Ovid, Apollodoros, Pausanios and many other sources.
7. Beyer, Rudolf, Fabulae Graecae Quatenus Quave Aetate Puerorum Amore Commutatae Sint, Leipzig doctoral dissertation, Thuringen, Thomas & Hubert, 1910, pp. 25-41; Licht, Hans (pseudonym of Paul Brandt), Sexual Life in Ancient Greece, tr. J.H. Freese, London, Rutledge & Kegan Paul, 1956, p. 193.
8. Beyer, p. 6; Licht p. 493.
9. Ovid, Metamorphoses X, 83-85; Hyginos, Poet. Astron. II.7.
10. Lucian (Pseudo-Lucian), Charidemos, 9.
11. Licht, p. 493; Tripp, Edward, Crowell's Handbook of Classical Mythology, NY, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970, p. 435; Beyer p. 6.
12. Nonnos, Dionysiaca IX-X.
13. Athenaios, Deipnosophistai X, 456b, citing Plato's Adonis; Plutarch, Symposiakon (Quaestionum Convivialum--Table Talk) IV-5, 671B-C, citing Phanokles.
14. Pindar, Olym. Odes I, 75.
15. Dover, Kenneth J., Greek Homosexuality, Harvard, 1978, p. 63.
16. Clement of Alexandria, Exhortation to the Greeks, II, 18, quoting the Orphic poem; Monaghan, Patricia, The Book of Goddesses and Heroines, NY, Dutton, 1981, pp. 42-43.
17. Beyer, p. 6; Licht, p. 493; citing Clemens Romanus, Pseudo-, Homiliae V, 15.
18. Athenaios, Deipnosophistai XIII, 603d.
19. Id., 601f.
20. Bion, Idyll VIII.
21. Conon, Mythographer, Narrationes 24, cited in Beyer, p. 70.
22. Athenaios, Deipnosophistai XIII, 603d.
23. Licht, p. 10.
24. Beyer, pp. 9-24.
25. Theokritos, Idyll XIII, 5-7.
26. Plutarch, Lives, Pelopidas, 18.4.
27. Athenaios, Deip. XIII, 603d.
28. Id., 602e.
29. Licht, p. 137.
30. Renault, Mary, The Nature of Alexander, NY, Pantheon, 1975, p. 226, citing Arrian.

I would like to correspond with any other collectors interested in this topic, about the subjects and sources and about compiling a master list of illustrative stamps. My address is 1204 Columbia Dr., NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106.



Since becoming involved in the local ATA and Fine Arts club, which meets jointly at the Collectors' Club in New York City, I've discovered that there is more to topical collecting than I had originally imagined. The novice usually starts out by collecting stamps which meet the minimum requirements of one's topic. But if the individual doesn't attempt to join a local topical stamp group or to read the appropriate material on topical collecting, the collection will go no further. Naturally satisfaction will still be obtained from the hobby, but it will remain stagnant. That in fact happened to my collection of Gay and Lesbian History on Stamps. I had plenty of stamps, mint singles of most everything in the checklist, but no awareness of the many other philatelic items that were needed to insure a more well-rounded collection. A variety of philatelic material is essential; one assumes in effect the role of a detective, tracking down postal stationery, post marks, etc. pertaining to the relevant subject matter.

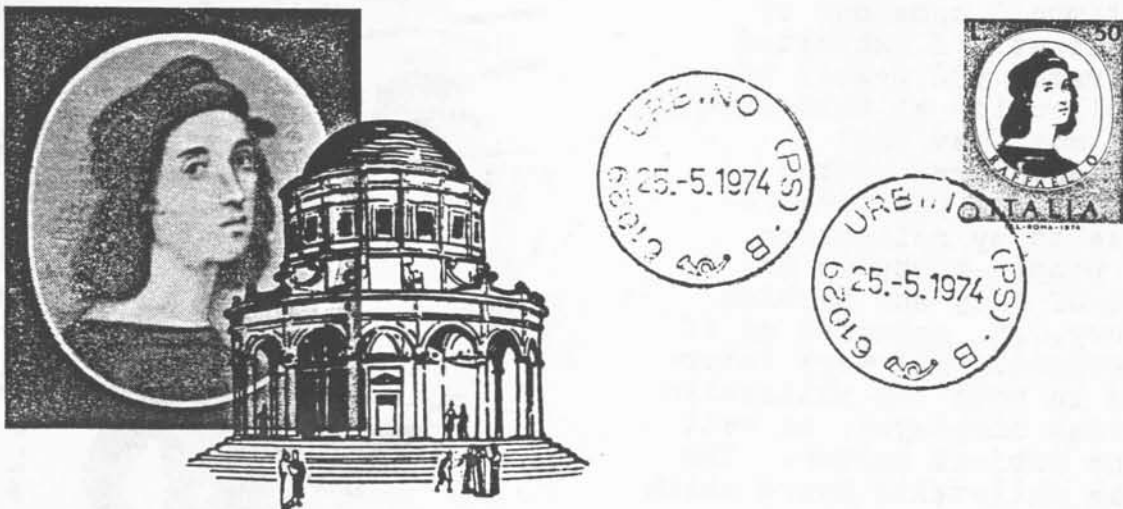
INTERPEX '83, held at the New York Coliseum, March 10-13, is one of the world's greatest philatelic extravaganzas. It was at this show that "Alternate Life-Styles of Famous People (A representative Collection of Gay and Lesbian History on Stamps)" came out of the closet. I exhibited two frames (32 pages) of my collection at this show, and I must say that I was overwhelmed by the interest and positive response to my collection. Most people stopping in front of "Gay and Lesbian History..." appeared as if transfixed. All were interested in both the philatelic material displayed, as well as the subject matter. The bronze philatelic award which the collection received was flattering to me, but also pointed the way for future areas of improvement.



note: I sincerely appreciated the many cards, kind messages, and flowers which I received during my recent hospital stay. The diagnosis was cancer, the operation successful, and the prognosis optimistic.

Our sincere thanks go to Ken Morris and Ron Bilby, until recently our neighbors here in Montclair, who spent countless hours photocopying the quarterly Journal, and then in conjunction with us, many an evening collating, typing labels, stapling, etc. Well, they've moved to a "sunnier clime", and all of us here in Montclair miss them dearly. The very best of everything to you, Ron and Ken, in your new home!

*Lain O'Neil*



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The year 1983 is the 500th. anniversary of the birth of Raphael. Many countries are planning to issue stamps in his honor.

The above cover may be purchased from Giorgio Migliavacca, Box 250, 27100 Pavia, Italy.