

Alexander and Bagoas

Zanghellini, Aleardo *The Sexual Constitution of Political Authority: The 'Trials' of Same-Sex Desire* (2015, Routledge) “if the idea of a physical relationship between Alexander and Hephaistion did not bear mentioning lest Plutarch’s morally nuanced discussion were held hostage to the moral abhorrence inevitably attending an implication of either the king’s or his companion’s sexual passivity, a reference to the physical nature of Alexander’s relationship with Bagoas held no such danger. Bagoas was, after all, a eunuch, which made him less than male to begin with. It went without saying, then, that in any relationship with Bagoas, Alexander would be assumed to be the insertive partner.

Zanghellini on Bagoas



Furthermore, Bagoas was a foreigner and a social inferior. All the moral complexities that were involved in a citizen sexually submitting to a social equal were simply not pertinent in this case. Plutarch could then safely report that Alexander had desired Bagoas.

There are other instances in which Plutarch mentions same-sex desire and Alexander's susceptibility to it. But they are cases where, again, nothing untoward emerges from the point of view of the conventional valuation of same-sex relationships typical of ancient Greek sexual morality. For all these cases involve [p34] not adult men, but boys - a natural object of desire for grown-up males, quite regardless of Plutarch's view about the deficiencies of same-sex love compared to heterosexual unions.



Zanghellini on Bagoas

Furthermore, in all cases, Alexander's conduct is exemplary in two ways. First, he shows loathing of relationships that are mercenary in their nature and too distant from the pederastic paradigm. Secondly, he shows much capacity for self-restraint when presented with opportunities for sexual intimacy with these boys (Plutarch, 1919: 285-287; 1936: 419). Again, bearing in mind that Plutarch maintained that a good ruler must first be able to successfully govern himself, these reports of Alexander's capacity for self-restraint in his private affairs make a clear statement about his civil and military leadership qualities" (33f)

Baynham, Elizabeth. *Alexander the Great* 1998



“Curtius touches on Alexander’s sexual peccadillos just before the second digression. The sexual practices of rulers had long been a favorite motif with Hellenistic historians; yet Curtius’ exploitation of Alexander’s habits is notably low-key, at least at this point. Among the gifts that Nabarzanes brings Alexander is Bagoas, “a eunuch of remarkable beauty” who had already been the concubine of Darius and was soon to be Alexander’s (6.5.23). The historian does not comment on this episode beyond stating that it was mainly through the eunuch’s entreaties that Alexander pardoned Nabarzanes; he thus lays the foundations of Bagoas’ baleful influence.”
(171)



Baynham, Elizabeth. *Alexander the Great* 1998



“Likewise, the visit of the Amazonian queen Thalestris (6.5.24-32), a story that was widely distributed in the Alexander sources,[9] passes without authorial censure. The version that appears in Curtius and the vulgate is not corroborated by Arrian; instead, he relates a *logos* (7.13.2-6), which he claims to be of dubious historicity. In 324 BC Atropates, the satrap of the large and powerful province of Media, presented Alexander with a troupe of one hundred women, whom he declared were Amazons, armed with little axes and light bucklers, and with the right breast bared...”

“However, Thalestris, like Bagoas, is a barbarian to Curtius; hence an account of Alexander’s sexual activities with unusual foreign queens and Persian catamites, although sparingly treated by Curtius, nevertheless provides an appropriate background for the elaboration on Alexander’s adoption of Persian customs and its effect on his followers.”



Agenda of sources



“Yet she was not intended as a warning to Alexander about the dangers of unity with orientals, nor as a sign of his moral degeneration. .. she became an early romantic expression of an aspiration, namely reconciliation between the conquerors and barbarians..” (Baynham 2001: 126)

Curtius’ story of Bagoas: “has little to tell us of the actual sexuality of Alexander the Great” (Ogden 2011 p. 184).

