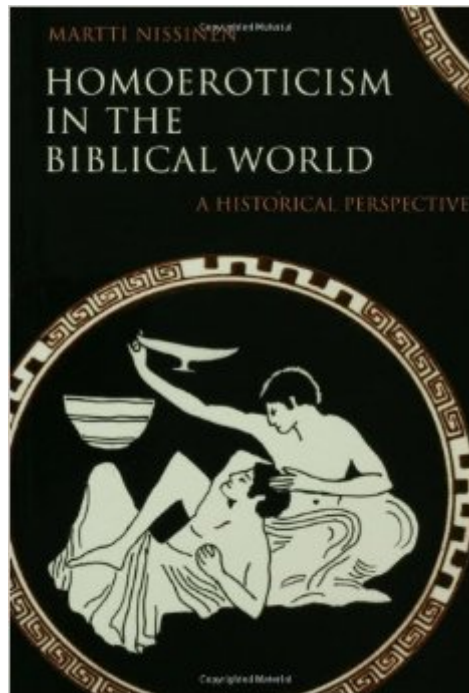


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Homoeroticism In The Biblical World: A Historical Perspective



Synopsis

Nissinen's award-winning book surveys attitudes in the ancient world toward homoeroticism, that is, erotic same-sex relations. Focusing on the Bible and its cultural environment-Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, Israel-Nissinen concisely and readably introduces the relevant sources and their historical contexts in a readable way. Homoeroticism is examined as a part of gender identity, i.e., the interplay of sexual orientation, gender identification, gender roles, and sexual practice. In the patriarchal cultures of the biblical world, Nissinen shows, homoerotic practices were regarded as a role construction between the active and passive partners rather than as expressions of an orientation moderns call "homosexuality." Nissinen shows how this applies to the limited acceptance of homoerotic relationships in Greek and Roman culture, as well as to Israel's and the early church's condemnation of any same-sex erotic activity. For readers interested in the ancient world or contemporary debates, Nissinen's fascinating study shows why the ancient texts - both biblical and nonbiblical - are not appropriate for use as sources of direct analogy or argument in today's discussion.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Martti Nissinen wrote this book with a desire to address issues of homoeroticism for the modern Lutheran Church in Finland. He uses the term "homoeroticism" advisedly, since "homosexuality" is a word only about 150 years old; one of the great strengths of his book is Nissinen's awareness of historical context and his desire to avoid anachronism. Nissinen addresses the crisis in the Finnish Lutheran church in the Introduction, as well as issues of terminology (homoeroticism,

homosexuality, and homosociability) and gender and sexual practice. Chapters 2-6 survey homoerotic elements in texts (and sometimes images) from Mesopotamia, the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, Classical Antiquity, early rabbinic Judaism, and the New Testament. Always his concern is to foreground issues of cultural and temporal location. He shows that for the "plain reading" of such texts to take place, a lot must be known about the text's cultural context and the common usage of words. (His discussion of a word often rendered by the totally anachronistic "homosexuality" in most Greek lexica is particularly enlightening.) The last chapter, entitled "Homoeroticism in the Biblical World and Homosexuality Today" offers a new way to try to interpret the Bible, especially when asking what relevance it has for those of us dealing with contemporary issues such as sexuality. As a faithful churchman, Nissinen does not want to "throw out the Bible," but as a modern person, he does point out that most church exegesis is deeply flawed when there is no "sufficient correlation between the topics discussed today and the ancient sources." (123) The point: sexuality as a concept does not exist in any of the ancient literature.

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