

The Convivial Background of Romans 1:26–27*

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The *convivium* served as Rome’s “after-dark entertainment,”¹ of which idolatry and feasting led to a steady march toward inebriation and wild promiscuity.² Temples provided dining facilities for both sacrificial meals and private parties, which were almost always connected with a sacrifice to the gods.³ Consequently at the *convivia*, hymns would be sung, cups lifted up, prayers spoken forth, and libations poured out in celebration and worship of the deities considered to be present at the table.⁴ In addition to their religious ambiance, the atmospheres of the banquets were sexually charged making it unsurprising that many of them allegedly ended in licentiousness.⁵ Consequently, the prurient nature of the dinners became a stock feature in Greco-Roman literature and art.⁶ Satirists lampooned unbridled feasters and moral philosophers chastised the partygoers’ escapades.

Scholars have discussed the convivial background of Pauline passages such as Gal 2:11–14 and Romans 14–15. Of these works, Dennis Smith’s monograph represents the most recent and extensive treatment. From his research, Smith infers that not only are issues at the table prominent in the major churches of Paul, but also that “the ideology of the banquet as found in the culture formed the backdrop for the development of the issues and Paul’s resulting theological, liturgical, and ethical responses.”⁷ Similarly, Bruce Winter has shown how these banquets and their after-parties serve as the *Sitz im Leben* for a number of passages in 1 Corinthians as a handful of the believers

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exercised what they considered their inalienable rights to recline, dine, and fornicate with prostitutes in a pagan temple.⁸

Likewise, this article seeks to examine the wide-spread expressions of disgust and reports of the sexual exploits said to occur at the *convivia* in order to suggest that these actions associated with these banquets provide one plausible background for Rom 1:26–27. Although Paul does not mention a dinner until later in his letter, I will attempt to show with respect to Romans 1 that many of the most flagrant images the first century person could use to illustrate the height of human depravity are the unrestrained hetero-, homo-, and bi-sexual activities as well as the pederastic abuses associated with the *convivia*. To achieve this, I will first present a summary of the practices affiliated with these dinner parties and then discuss Rom 1:26–27 in view of that literature. Finally, I will conclude with the possible ramifications for interpreting the passage.

Before moving on, however, a few qualifications need to be noted. First, I do *not* intend to argue that the homoerotic deeds associated with the banquets stand as the only possible feature in the background of Rom 1:26–27. Rather, in light of the evidence, I suggest that it could be one facet of the backdrop—either implied by Paul or assumed by his audience.⁹ Second, as I seek to illustrate practices associated with the banquets, I will not attempt to establish the degree of polemical exaggeration in the references taken from biographies or of the ribald imagination in those gathered from poems and works of fiction.¹⁰ As Jennifer Wright Knust has argued: while these reported escapades could have actually occurred, they should more likely be understood in the ancient context of “sexualized slander.”¹¹ It will suffice to show that these are common notions related to the dinners whether real or imagined. Finally, when I use value-laden words such as “perverse,” “appalling,” “unnatural,” and “deviant,” they are meant to reflect the attitudes of the Jewish and Greco-Roman authors and *not* a personal polemic.

Sexual Conduct Surrounding Greco-Roman Dinner Parties

In his diatribe, Philo complains that banquets are prevalent everywhere and quips that the frenzied guests act as if they drink *not* wine but a witch’s potion (*Contempl.* 6.48–54). In turn the partygoers’ much feasting leads to much sex, and the unnatural indulgence among them stimulates the stings of lust within them (*Contempl.* 5.40–8.64). Consequently, Philo concludes that their wanton desires precipitate

adultery, pederasty, and even bestiality (*Opif.* 158; *Abr.* 135; *Spec.* 3.43).¹² Similarly, Plutarch argues that intemperance in eating the lawless meals conceives shameful caresses, effeminate titillations, and inordinate sexual acts (*De esu* 2.997b).¹³ According to Plutarch, just as overeating goes beyond the necessary ends of nature, insatiable women go astray in seeking pleasure so that they explore the full gamut of profligacy until it ends in unspeakable practices (*De esu* 2.997b).

Likewise, Seneca refers to convivial conduct to illustrate how in the Empire everything goes and nothing is base (*Ep.* 95.33).¹⁴ As with Philo and Plutarch, Seneca discusses the degrading sex acts that ensue after the banquets (*Ep.* 95.21).¹⁵ According to the Stoic, at the *convivia*, women invented “the most impossible varieties of unchastity”¹⁶ with the result that, though they were born to be penetrated by men,¹⁷ they began to penetrate men—(likely referring to the female use of an artificial penis).¹⁸

Prostitutes and courtesans were often the chief players portrayed in sordid convivial conduct.¹⁹ For instance, at one banquet, Theodora is said to have had intercourse with over thirty men.²⁰ At another, she opened three doors to three lovers simultaneously: only to complain that nature did not give her body more entryways (Procopius, *Secret History* 9.15–20). Elsewhere, a companion named Leaena tells how a rich Corinthian woman took her and another lady from a dinner to engage in an eye-opening *ménage à trois* (Lucian, *Dial. meretr.* 5.2). Sex-hungry wives, referred to as frisky women and marriage wreckers,²¹ also prowled around the *convivia*.²² For instance, Valerius Maximus bewails a banquet where Mucia and Fulvia—wives of Pompey and Anthony—offered their bodies as sex toys to indulge the guests’ drunken lust (Val. Max. 9.1.8). Horace likewise speaks of a lustful woman who sought junior adulterers whom she could service at her husband’s dinners as soon as the lamps were dimmed (Horace, *Carm.* 3.6.25–28).²³

At these parties, men generally turned a blind eye to their wives’ sexual indiscretions, as many of them were involved in their own sullied behavior.²⁴ For example, after Habinnas had intercourse with Trimalchio’s wife on the sofa in front of his own wife and Trimalchio, Trimalchio merely responds by ordering another course to eat before he himself engages in pederasty (Petronius, *Satyricon*, 67–73). Similarly, Seneca expresses revulsion at the practice of parading troops of unlucky young boys and male prostitutes before debased dinner guests (*Ep.* 95.24)²⁵ and disgust at the shameful molestations a slave must endure after the dinner: being expected to receive it like a

boy at the party but in the bedroom to penetrate his master like a man (*Ep.* 47.7).²⁶ It was not just sodomy of *slave boys*, however.²⁷ Roman *adulescentulus* were also objects of these grown men's desires. As soon as the young Romans assumed the *toga virilis* (around the age of 15), they too were liable to be pursued by invitations to *convivia* from men with homoerotic intentions.²⁸ Consequently, Dio Cassius observes that young men way past their prime could be seen reclining with older male lovers as well (62.6.4).²⁹

In contrast to the humiliation most boys experienced in pederastic relationships,³⁰ some Roman men derived pleasure from—in the words of Plutarch—having been mounted and ridden like cattle (*Amat.* 751E).³¹ There were those, for example, like Lucienus who not only spent his youth at dinner parties being penetrated, but also as an adult allowed himself still to be pounded (Virgil, *Catal.* 13–14).³² Philo complains the practice had become so rampant that even the men who were mounted began to grandstand their actions (*Spec.* 3.37). Along these lines, Petronius—a regular at Nero's banquets—tells the tale of a man (a *cinaedus*), who at one dinner party forced two young freedmen to take turns penetrating him while others looked on and laughed at how hard he rode them (Petronius, *Satyr.* 23–24).³³ Similarly, Hostius Quadra bragged about being penetrated by a male and by a female at the same time (Seneca, *Nat.* 1.16.7).³⁴

Some of these men also assumed the passive role for the sake of political maneuvering.³⁵ For instance, Alcibiades took it upon himself to learn from licentious women how to be skillful in his sexual receptivity at banquets in order to please potential supporters (Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 12.525B).³⁶ In addition to the literature detailing such conduct, ancient Greek art portrays images of gay group sex—such as one depiction of three young men involved in trilateral position and one with five young men penetrating each other in a cluster.³⁷

Whereas most of the examples of the lechery associated with ancient dinner parties come from the social elite, Catullus 13 provides a case from the other side. In the poem, Catullus is so impoverished that he invites his friend Fabullus to his party but beseeches Fabullus to bring the food and the wine as well as his own woman to share. In return, Catullus promises to offer his own irresistible lover, Lesbia, for dessert: an after dinner foursome.³⁸ Nonetheless, the dissipation among the poor-man's dinner parties and the typical Roman banquets may have been tame compared to the liaisons said to occur at Caesar's palace. For example, it was reported that Augustus once led the wife of a Roman ex-consul from the dining room into his bedroom right before

her husband's eyes (Suetonius, *Aug.* 69).³⁹ Likewise, Suetonius claimed Gaius used dinner parties to rape the wives of his guests and then to return to the table to score their performance (Suetonius, *Cal.* 36). Further, it is said that at one *convivium* Gaius took each one of his own sisters in turn below him while his wife reclined above (Suetonius, *Cal.* 24).⁴⁰ Rather than being displeased with these outrageous proceedings, Dio Cassius reports the multitude actually rejoiced in the licentiousness (59.10).⁴¹

Such activities caused Quintilian to complain that every dinner is filled with conduct of which men should blush even to speak (*Inst.* 1.2.6–8). Moral philosophers threatened “split loins, angry gods, and neglected dependents” as the party favors for such prurient and homoerotic convivial behavior.⁴² For example, Philo claims that as a result of their actions these men rightly contracted the “disease of effemination”—the defilement of body and soul to the point that not a single masculine ember continued to smolder (*Spec.* 3.37). In his invective, when he cannot bear imagining the homoerotic acts anymore, Seneca interjects: “may the gods and goddesses damn them” (*Ep.* 95.21).⁴³

Some followers of Christ also attended Roman *convivia*: a practice that vexed writers of the New Testament. For instance, Paul considers the Corinthian believers' participation in banquets as putting them dangerously close to Israel's idolatry and promiscuity before the Golden Calf (1 Cor 10:7). The apostle warns of God's judgment to these believers who sat at the table of demons and partook of devilish cups (1 Cor 10:21).⁴⁴ Although written later than Romans, Jude and 2 Peter give evidence that even some church leaders turned *agape* meals into pagan feasts full of lustful desires, adulterous eyes, and incessant sin (Jude 12; 2 Pet 2:13–14).⁴⁵

Having now summarized the widespread association of sexual perversion associated with Roman dinners, the next section will survey Rom 1:26–27 in light of this background in order to suggest the conceivability of situating Paul's discussion about unnatural sexual conduct within the context of the well-documented lechery surrounding the *convivia*.

Sexual Conduct in Romans 1:26–27

The larger background of Rom 1:18–32 is the common Jewish notion regarding how idol worship leads to moral depravity. Paul draws from this as he proclaims that divine wrath is revealed from heaven

against reprobates who refused to honor God despite the divine attributes on display from creation.⁴⁶ The apostle writes that instead of glorifying God these fools exchanged his incorruptible glory for corrupt idols.⁴⁷

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles (Rom 1:18–23; NRSV).

According to Paul, because the men worshiped false gods, God handed them over to their sinful desires and shameful passions so that they began to disgrace their bodies among themselves.⁴⁸

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions (Rom 1:24–26a; NRSV).

To illustrate what happens when men abandon the divine design and “exchange”⁴⁹ the truth of God for a lie, Paul refers to deviant sexual activity among women.⁵⁰

Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural (Rom 1:26b; NRSV).

In his denouncement here, Paul is consistent with almost all of the ancient sources condemning sexual love between women.⁵¹ Nonetheless, since he is more interested in establishing the inversion of the natural sex roles, Paul does not provide much detail regarding the behavior or even give a concrete hint at the circumstances where these actions take place.⁵² In comparison with the convivial references to females mentioned above—such as Theodora having intercourse with dozens of men, Leaena having three-way sex with two other ladies, Mucia and Fulvia offering themselves as play things, and women using artificial penises—Paul merely writes that females forsook the natural act. That is to say, the women abandoned what Paul considered God’s design for women. Although the apostle does not say exactly what he considers to be natural for a woman, he likely means something along the lines of Seneca’s insistence that females were created to be penetrated by men (*Ep.* 95.21).⁵³ Similar to Seneca, Paul laments that the women exchanged this natural act for what he considers *παρὰ φύσιν* (*para physin*): against and beyond nature.⁵⁴

Next, having condemned these women,⁵⁵ Paul proceeds to discuss in v. 27 how the males “likewise”⁵⁶ became inflamed for one another.

And in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error (Rom 1:27; NRSV).

As with the sexual acts of the women in v. 26, the apostle also resists specifying here what particular form of male homoerotic behavior he has in view.⁵⁷ In comparison to the references mentioned above of sex slaves, of males involved in group sex, and of men who sought to be mounted by other men and women (e.g., Lucienus, Alcibiades, Hostius Quadra), Paul merely writes that “males with males” committed indecent acts.⁵⁸

As with other moral philosophers, however, the apostle considers the perpetrators as having received their just deserts. According to Paul, the people received the due penalty for their shameful acts.⁵⁹ In contrast to the punishment of homoerotic activity with medical maladies, sore loins, and effemination-sickness, Paul’s reference probably relates to the homoerotic deeds themselves as “*die*

*adäquate Vergeltung.*⁶⁰ That is to say, for the apostle, sin itself is an appropriate punishment for sin.⁶¹

*Ramifications for interpreting Rom 1:26–27
in light of a convivial background*

As mentioned above, I would like to suggest the homoerotic deeds associated with the *convivia* and the popular diatribes against them—*while by no means the only conceivable feature in the background*—is indeed a plausible one for Rom 1:26–27. The idolatry and homoerotic activities reported to occur at dinner parties make it very likely that some believers would have connected the references so sparse of details in Romans with the explicit particulars of the convivial events so prevalent in Rome. That is to say, in light of the unrestrained, omniseual debaucheries allegedly taking place at the banquets all around them, Paul’s audience would have plausibly related his references to illicit sexual behavior to this more precise cultural situation that was familiar to them—whether it be from gross exaggerations or simple gossip that leaked into the streets from the houses of the elite or that appeared in the literature surrounding them. Although what most of Paul’s audience knew of these affairs was likely generated by rumor mills,⁶² the believers who served in Caesar’s household (see Rom 16:10–11) may have been forced to experience such events firsthand.⁶³

Of course, due to the ambiguity of Rom 1:26–27, one cannot make a definite case that Paul had in mind particular activities from a specific social context—convivial or otherwise. Nevertheless, in light of Corinth’s infamous no-holds-barred sexual reputation, Paul is probably aware of the stigma of the dinner parties surrounding him as he pens Romans from that city. Further, as noted above, this would not be the first time convivial conduct stood in the background of one of Paul’s letter—not to mention his discussion of dinners at the end of this one (i.e., Romans 14–15).⁶⁴

In addition to suggesting that the misconduct of the banquets could serve as one possible reference in the background of Rom 1:26–27, this reading would also serve as another example of Timothy Brookins’s and Jennifer Wright Knust’s conclusions regarding how Paul intentionally draws upon associations familiar to his audience. It also reinforces James Dunn’s and Ben Witherington’s argument that Paul may have constructed Romans 1:18–32 in a way that critiqued society by drawing upon the popular philosophy of his day to reinforce

his own convictions.⁶⁵ Based on the frequent rebukes of convivial sins, then, it is also plausible that Paul borrowed from the common invectives used to condemn the unspeakable acts of men and women affiliated with the revelry of Roman banquets.

If notions of the *convivium* also stand behind Rom 1:26, Paul's castigation of the unnatural behavior of women would follow along the lines of carnal activities associated with the dinner parties. This would include women taking part in all sorts of warped behavior—be it heteroerotic, homoerotic, autoerotic, or various combinations of the above.⁶⁶ So also, the sexual misconduct affiliated with these banquets gives one reason to consider Paul's references to "males with males" as invoking portrayals of group sex depicted in Greco-Roman literature and art, as well as deeds such as men's convivial habits of molesting slave boys and abusing male prostitutes.⁶⁷ This does not rule out Paul's general rejection of other sexual behavior forbidden by the Jewish Law and by moral philosophers: such as a male engaging in cunnilingus, a female performing fellatio, a couple having sex during menstruation, or any form of homoerotic intercourse.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, the orgy-like background of Roman banquets would lend more weight to an excessive lust interpretation of these verses.⁶⁹

In conclusion, I have shown from the above survey that many of the most egregious instances the first century mind could conjure up to illustrate how far humans had collapsed into sin are the inordinate hetero-, homo-, and bi-sexual activities as well as the pederastic abuse of slaves associated with the debauchery at the *convivia*.⁷⁰ Even though the point of reference of Rom 1:26–27 cannot be restricted to the degrading deeds affiliated with dinner parties (especially since Paul waits until later in the letter to mention dining), it is plausible that the convivial conduct condemned by moral philosophers would have at least occurred in the minds of Paul's readers in Rome when considering examples of rhetorical attacks on flagrant homoerotic acts. While one should avoid deductions from the invective of Rom 1:26–27 that are too detailed, the attempt to locate the passage closer to its specific milieu also helps prevent one from overgeneralizing the reproach and, as Peter Stuhlmacher warns, "gives for us today a reason *not* to repeat Paul's statements without reflection!"⁷¹ The survey above should remind those seeking to apply Rom 1:26–27 to any current debate that the passage is directed to a culture riddled with aggressive free-for-all parties involving multiple consensual partners, manipulated lovers, professional courtesans, exploited prostitutes, and abused children. Therefore, the social context surrounding Rom 1:26–27 especially

coheres with modern incidents related to private sex clubs, pedophilia, child pornography, prison rape, prostitution and human trafficking.

Endnotes

¹ Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did* 2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 314 n. 42. Most of the references are of the upper-class, see Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, trans. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 73. Nevertheless, ancient artwork reveals sexual acts from the non-elite as well, see John R. Clarke, *Looking at Lovemaking: Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art 100 BC – AD 250* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1–3.

² Alan Booth, “The Age for Reclining and Its Attendant Perils” in *Dining in a Classical Context*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 105; and Gene L. Green, *Jude & 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 280. For more on the convivial practices, see Florence Dupont, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, trans. Christopher Woodall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 269; Katherine M.D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11–102; Bruce Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 22. Cf. *comissationes* and κῶμος (*kōmos*) in Nicholas R. Fisher, “Roman Associations, Dinner Parties, and Clubs” in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome*, vol. 2, ed. Michael Grant and Rachel Kitzinger (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1988), 1199–1219; and Joseph R. Dodson, “Locked-Out Lovers: *Wisdom of Solomon* 1.16 in Light of the *Paraclausithyron* Motif,” *JSP* 17 (2007): 21–35.

³ Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 67–85.

⁴ As the dinner progressed, the participants would greet each refilled cup of wine with a doxology, “To the good god” or “To god the savior.” See Smith, *Symposium*, 24–31. In fact, the invitation to a *convivium* could even be written as coming from a certain deity. See Moyer V. Hubbard, *Christianity in the Greco-Roman World: A*

Narrative Introduction (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 126–27.

⁵ Fisher, “Roman Associations,” 1208. Even the party games they played were rewarded with sexual favors. See Smith, *Symposium*, 34.

⁶ The *convivium* did not always carry the connotation of debauch, however. It could be used in an idealized sense (e.g., Cicero, *Sen* 13.45–14.46). See Smith, *Symposium*, 38.

⁷ Smith, *Symposium*, 216.

⁸ Bruce Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 85. See also Smith, *Symposium*, 173–217.

⁹ The prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20, for instance, stand in the background as well as other denouncements of homosexuality in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition. See E.P. Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle’s Life, Letters, and Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 349–63. Scholars also generally agree on the influence of *Wisdom* 13–15. See Joseph R. Dodson, *The ‘Powers’ of Personification: Rhetorical Purpose in the Book of Wisdom and the Letter to the Romans*, BZNW 161 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 5–13. Jewett argues that the practice of slave masters having sex with their slaves is part of the background. See Robert Jewett, *Romans, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 180–181. Dunn sees echoes of Adam’s fall in the pericope; see James D.G. Dunn, *Romans*, 2 vols., WBC 38 (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 1:74. Barclay suggests echoes of the idolatry of Israel. See John M.G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 463. Elliott argues that it is the sexual exploits of these Caesars to which Paul alludes in Romans 1. See Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 78–80.

¹⁰ That the invectives against the debaucheries associated with these dinners reflect real events and not simply rhetorical flourish, see Anthony Corbeill, “Dining Deviants in Roman Political Invective” in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner; (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 99–101.

¹¹ Knust, *Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2006), 3.

¹² See J. Edward Ellis, “Philo’s View of Homosexuality,” *PRSt* 30 (2003): 313–23; and Sanders, *Paul*, 355–63.

¹³ See Plato, *Leg.* 636A–D, where he discusses homoerotic activity in the context of common meals and the gymnasium.

¹⁴ Cf., Seneca, *Nat.* 7.31.1.

¹⁵ Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 45. Emphasis mine. See also Judith P. Hallett, “Female Homoeroticism and the Denial of Roman Reality in Latin Literature,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 3.1 (1989): 179–97, here at 185. For more on Seneca’s notion of humankind’s subversion of nature, see Maria Bellincioni, *Lettere a Lucilio* (vol. 15; Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1979), 255–56. For more on Seneca’s view on lust, see J. Edward Ellis, *Paul and Ancient Views of Sexual Desire*, LNTS 354 (London: Continuum, 2007), 115–22. Cf. Dale B. Martin, “Paul Without Passion” in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (New York: Routledge, 1997), 138–46.

¹⁶ *Seneca: Epistles*, trans. Richard M. Gummere et al. 10 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917–2004), 6:71.

¹⁷ Holt N. Parker, “The Teratogenic Grid” in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 50. See also Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 31.

¹⁸ ὀλιβός (*olisbos*), *penis coriaceus*. See Lucian, *Am.* 28 and Martial, *Epigrams* 7.67. Cf., Seneca the Elder, *Cont.* 1.2.23; Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.300–315; Herodas, *Mimes* 6.18–100; Aristophanes, *Lys.* 110. See Joseph R. Dodson, “The Fall of Men and the Lust of Women in Seneca’s *Epistle* 95 and Paul’s Letter to the Romans” *NovT* 59.4 (2017) 1–12; Giuseppe Scarpato, “Il fico e le sue foglie nella tradizione classica e Cristiana” in *Studi Linguistici in Onore Di Vittore Pisani*, 2 vols. (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1969), 2:886 n. 22; Marilyn B. Skinner, “Quod Multo Fit Aliter in Graecia” in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 5–6; Diana Swancutt, “Sexy Stoics and the Rereading of Romans 1:18–2:16” in *A Feminist Companion to Paul*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (London: Continuum, 2004), 55–56; idem, “The Disease of Effemination: The Charge of Effeminacy and the Verdict of God (Romans 1:18–2:16)” in *New Testament Masculinities*, SBLSemS 45; ed. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 187; Hans Licht, *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece* (London: The Abbey Library, 1932), 113, 314–19; and Bellincioni, *Lettere a Lucilio*, 257. See also Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, “Excavating Women’s Homoeroticism in Ancient Greece” in *Among Women*, ed. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Lisa Auanger (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 106–66; Ray Laurence, *Romans Passions* (London:

Continuum, 2009), 77; Clarke, *Lovemaking*, 3, 144–240; and Mark D. Smith, “Ancient Bisexuality and the Interpretation of Romans 1:26–27,” *JAAR* 64.2 (1996): 223–56. In addition to dildos and strap-ons, a woman could be said to penetrate others with an overly large clitoris; see Brooten, *Love*, 6, 50.

¹⁹ See Fisher, “Associations,” 1208; Matthew B. Roller, *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 99; Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 88; Sharon L. James, “A Courtesan’s Choreography: Female Liberty and Male Anxiety at the Roman Dinner Party” in *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 224–51; and K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 20–21.

²⁰ See also Melitta, whose sexual exploits at banquets earned her the nickname “Freak,” Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 13.579–580.

²¹ Val. Max. 2.1.5.

²² See Cicero’s denigration of Clodia in *Cael.* 30–39.

²³ See also Pliny, *Nat.* 14.28.140–41; and Petronius, *Satyr.* 24.

²⁴ See also Winter, *Roman Wives*, 28, 153.

²⁵ Cf. Philo, *Contempl.* 5.52 and Plato, *Leg.* 836C–E. On the different categories for these young boys and male prostitutes, see Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul: Selected Issues*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 60; and Bellincioni, *Lettere a Lucilio*, 260–61.

²⁶ I.e., *in cubiculo vir, in convivio puer.*

²⁷ On pederasty, see Smith, “Bisexuality,” 223–56; Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 29–65; Herman C. Waetjen, “Same-Sex Sexual Relations in Antiquity and Sexuality and Sexual Identity in Contemporary American Society” in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 103–16; and Licht, *Sexual Life*, 436–47.

²⁸ Booth, “Reclining,” 113.

²⁹ See Rabun Taylor, “Two Pathic Subcultures in Ancient Rome,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7 (1997): 319–71; and Smith, “Bisexuality,” 228–31. Cf. Alcibiades’ attempt to seduce Socrates at his dinner party (Plato, *Symp.* 217–219).

³⁰ See Scroggs, *Homosexuality*, 37–38.

³¹ On the *pathicus*, see Parker, “The Teratogenic Grid,” 57; Amy Richlin, “Not Before Homosexuality,” *Journal of the History of*

Sexuality 3.4 (1993): 523-73; and Taylor, "Two Pathic Subcultures," 319-71.

³² In *Appendix Vergiliana*.

³³ On the term *cinaedus* and its range of meaning, see Swancutt, "Effemination," 193-234. See also Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 35; and Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 53.

³⁴ Cf. Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 36.

³⁵ Scroggs, *Homosexuality*, 33-42; 130-39.

³⁶ See Booth, "Reclining," 116.

³⁷ See Dover, *Homosexuality*, R243 and R223.

³⁸ This poem is considered a mock dinner invitation. See Robert J. Littman, "The Unguent of Venus: Catullus 13," *Latomus* 36.1 (1977): 123-128.

³⁹ Cf. Augustus' daughter, Julia in Suetonius, *Aug.* 65.

⁴⁰ Cf. Dio Cassius, *Roman Histories*, 26-28.

⁴¹ Cf. Elliott, *Arrogance*, 78-80. Elliott argues that it is the exploits of these Caesars to which Paul alludes in Romans 1. See also James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 59-60; and Richlin, "Not Before Homosexuality," 523-73.

⁴² Taylor, "Two Pathic Subcultures," 330.

⁴³ My translation. On Seneca's imprecations, see Bellincioni, *Lettere a Lucilio*, 256.

⁴⁴ Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 86-94; 301.

⁴⁵ The writers, of course, considered these leaders spurious. See Green, *Jude & 2 Peter*, 94-95; 280-81. See also Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 119-35.

⁴⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 39. A number of scholars consider Paul to be especially drawing from *Wisdom* 13-14. For a recent discussion of this pattern in *Wisdom*, Joseph R. Dodson, "Death and Idols in The Book of Wisdom," *JJS* 67 (Spring 2016), 36-45.

⁴⁷ Paul will state that three times God handed the idolaters over and then illustrate the immoral results. Each time the apostle refers to the offending idolatry with increasing brevity and the sinful results with expanding examples. See Leander E. Keck, *Romans*, ACNT (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 65.

⁴⁸ Barrett, *Romans*, 38.

⁴⁹ On μετέλλαξαν (*metēllaخان*), see Richard B. Hays “Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1986): 184–215.

⁵⁰ Jewett, *Romans*, 173.

⁵¹ See Brooten, *Love*, 31–186.

⁵² Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 111; Swancutt, “Effemination,” 184. It may be Paul has discomfort with discussing female homoeroticism which keeps him from spelling it out, or that the answer is obvious to him, or that he desires to stress instead the aberrant acts of men in the next verse. See Brooten, *Love*, 240; C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC; vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 125; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 92; and Dunn, *Romans*, 64.

⁵³ He perhaps even means penetration in a way that could lead to conception. See Sanders, *Paul*, 343. On τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν (*tēn physikēn chrēsīn*), see David Fredrickson, “Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24–27: Paul and the Philosophical Critique of Eros,” in *Homosexuality, Science, and the ‘Plain Sense’ of Scripture*, ed. David Balch (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 197–222; Brooten, *Love*, 244–45; Robert A.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 387–92; and Klaus Wengst, “Paulus und die Homosexualität: Überlegungen zu Röm 1:26f,” *ZEE* 31 (1987): 72–81.

⁵⁴ Παρὰ φύσιν (*Para physin*) was a prevalent phrase among the Roman Stoics and the most common stereotype used by Greco-Roman writers rejecting homoerotic activities. See Jewett, *Romans*, 175; and Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 59–62. For more on the definition of παρὰ φύσιν (*para physin*), see Cranfield, *Romans*, 125; Dale B. Martin, “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18–32,” *BibInt* 3 (1995): 332–55; Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 369–78, 389–95; Hays, “Relations Natural and Unnatural,” 192–99; Keck, *Romans*, 68–69; Brooten, *Love*, 251–52; Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 52–62; and Preston Sprinkle, “Paul and Homosexual Behavior: A Critical Evaluation of the Excessive-Lust Interpretation of Romans 1:26–27,” *BBR* 25.4 (2015): 519–39.

⁵⁵ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 40. See Brooten, *Love*, 31–186.

⁵⁶ See Jamie A. Banister, “ὁμοίως [*homoiōs*] and the Use of Parallelism in Romans 1:26–27,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 569–90.

⁵⁷ Keck, *Romans*, 71. Cf. 2 Enoch 10:4–5.

⁵⁸ See August Tholuck, *Kommentar zum Briefe Pauli an die Römer* (Halle: Neue Ausarbeitung, 1842), 99.

⁵⁹ For Paul, there is a connection between men turning from the creator to worship creation and their turning from their attraction of females to that of other males, see Simon J. Gathercole, “Sin in God’s Economy: Agencies in Romans 1 and 7” in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, ed. John M.G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 158–72.

⁶⁰ As Ernst Käsemann puts it: “Sittliche Perversion ist nicht der Grund, sondern die Auswirkung des Gotteszorn.” See Ernst Käsemann, *An Die Römer*, HZNT (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 1974), 43. See also E. Klostermann, “Die adäquate Vergeltung in Röm 1, 22–31,” *ZNW* 32 (1933): 1–6; and Robert Jewett, “The Social Context and Implications of Homoerotic References in Romans 1:24–27” in *Homosexuality, Science, and the ‘Plain Sense’ of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 213. Cf. Keck, *Romans*, 70; Cranfield, *Romans*, 126–27; and Brooten, *Love*, 258. Moo suggests that Paul may have eternal punishment in mind, see Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 116.

⁶¹ Morris, *Romans*, 92; and Brooten, *Love*, 239. See also Gathercole, “Sin in God’s Economy,” 166–72.

⁶² See Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 1–163.

⁶³ Cf. Scroggs, *Homosexuality*, 1, 43, 122.

⁶⁴ Smith, *Symposium*, 202–217; Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 85.

⁶⁵ Timothy A. Brookins, *Corinthian Wisdom, Stoic Philosophy, and the Ancient Economy*, SNTSMS 159 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 228; Jennifer Wright Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 17; Dunn, *Romans*, 74; and Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 69–70. See also Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 72.

⁶⁶ As to whether the reference in Rom 1:26 should be restricted to lesbian intercourse, see Banister, “ὁμοίως [*homoiōs*],” 569–90; James E. Miller, “The Practices of Romans 1:26: Homosexual or Heterosexual,” *NovT* 37 (1995): 1–11; Brooten, *Love*, 264–66; and Sprinkle, “Paul and Homosexual Behavior,” 519–39. Cf. Bernadette J. Brooten, “Patristic Interpretations of Romans 1:26,” *StPatr* 16 (1985): 287–91.

⁶⁷ See Jewett, 'Social Context', 238; Cranfield, *Romans*, 127; Keck, *Romans*, 70; and Wengst, "die Homosexualität," 72-81. Cf. Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 347-50 and Dunn, *Romans*, 65.

⁶⁸ See Martin, "Heterosexism," 335-48; William R. Schoedel, "Same-Sex Eros: Paul and the Greco-Roman Tradition" in *Homosexuality, Science, and the 'Plain Sense' of Scripture*, ed. David Balch (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 43-72; Dunn, *Romans* 65-66; Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 254-69; Brooten, *Love*, 247-52; and Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 206-207. See also Sanders, *Paul*, 354.

⁶⁹ Cf. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980); Fredrickson, "Natural and Unnatural Use," 197-222; Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 52-82; and Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*. For a critique of this view, see Sprinkle, "Paul and Homosexual Behavior," 519-39; and idem., "Romans 1 and Homosexuality: A critical review of James Brownson's *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*," *BBR* 24 (2014): 515-28.

⁷⁰ Compare Jewett, "Social Context," 230; and Martin, "Heterosexism," 340-42.

⁷¹ Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 37. See also Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2006), 37-50; Boswell, *Christianity*, 1-39; Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 78-82; Hays, "Relations and Unnatural," 200; Elliott, *Arrogance*, 78; Keck, *Romans*, 65, 69; Swancutt, "Effemination," 169-173; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 111; Brooten, *Love*, 244; Arland J. Hultgren, "Being Faithful to the Scriptures: Romans 1:26-27 as a Case in Point," *WW* 14.3 (1994): 315-25; and Wengst, "die Homosexualität," 72-81.