

RAW MATERIAL

Studies in Biblical Sexuality

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APPENDIX 2

Hyenas and Hares

A Bit of Clement of Alexandria's *Pedagogue*

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Hyenas and Hares

A Bit of Clement of Alexandria's *Pedagogue*

This appendix is a small introduction to the ways in which writers of the Greco-Roman period wrote about sexuality, human and animal. The text is the portion of *Paedagogue* by Clement of Alexandria mentioned in the chapters on Patristics.

In the two chapters on Patristics we studied the agricultural metaphor which may be found in Clement's *Pedagogue*. The metaphor compares human semen/seed with a farmer's seed. The metaphor argues that good and rational farmers only spread seed where they expect it to grow. So also semen should be sowed only where the man desires and expects that seed to produce a successful pregnancy.

Clement ties the agricultural metaphor to an allegorical interpretation of the laws of Moses, the ban on eating certain animals, namely the hare and the hyena (Paed 2.84.4). Clement writes as if he is quoting Scripture, citing a text from the laws of Moses, "Do not eat the hare or the hyena." But the quote must be from a digest of Jewish law, for this quote appears nowhere in the Bible, in either Hebrew or Septuagint texts. For Clement the hyena and hare are rejected because of their sexual practices, practices which he wishes to condemn and forbid among faithful Christians.

Clement explains that the hare gets a new anus (φάσι την ἀφοδευσιν, *phasi ten aphodeusin*) each year. Apparently there is a story here which Clement does not spell out. What does this annual anus have to do with sexuality? So Clement concludes that the divine rejection of the hare means humans should reject pederasty (παιδεραστία, *paiderastia*). The reader is left to draw the connection between the (heterosexual) hare and the pederast.

Next Clement explains at length the problem of the hyena, and why it is rejected by God for its sexuality. Clement explains that the hyena changes gender annually, male to female and back again. But Clement does not actually believe that. Rather he argues (following Aristotle) that the male and female hyenas are difficult to distinguish, even by other hyenas, which explains how human observers have often confused the genders of the hyena. He states that the female seems to be male, and the male has a false vagina in which he can receive another male. To this false vagina he ascribes the hyena's empty lust. As a result the hyena produces only rare

pregnancies, often wasting its seed on fellow males.

In a logical leap Clement uses the hyena as a representative of all quadrupeds (τετραποδων) and forbids any such rear-entry copulation among humans, whether between males or male with female. Clement ignores that in most species the male successfully penetrates the female vagina through rear-entry intercourse. At this point he quotes Romans 1:26-27 and explains that even the most lascivious animals (e.g. the hyena) do not use the anus for their lust, but rather the male hyenas have a special accommodation. After railing against sex between males, fruitless sowing, rear intercourse, futile androgynous intercourse and semen producers receiving semen, he wraps up the hyena with a quote from Jeremiah.

Clement now takes up the hare in detail (2.88.1-2). Aside from being mounted from behind Clement has the following against the hare. He claims they copulate frequently and indiscriminately, lacking moderation and monogamy. For some reason he does not return to the issue of the hare's annual new anus. One might suspect that Clement connected rear intercourse in hares with the annual new anus, but he is not explicit. Clement's treatment of both hare and hyena is inconsistent, confusing and somewhat diffuse. Some background may shed light on Clement's argument.

Our earliest texts on these animals comes from Aristotle, though he was commenting on yet earlier texts. In *Generation of Animals* 3.6.3 (757a) and *Animal History* 32 (579b) he describes the rumor that hyenas alternate gender between male and female. He denies the truth of this claim, pointing out that female hyenas are physically similar to males, confusing unwary observers.

In *Animal History* 33 the topic following hyenas is hares. For some reason Aristotle specifies that hares copulate from the rear. It is not clear why this is important in the hares, for sheep, goats and cattle likewise copulate from behind, as do most mammals — donkeys, mice and dogs alike. Aristotle does not mention anything about the hare's anus, but makes a point of the hare's ability to mate and bear young all year round, and that a female is ready for further insemination immediately upon giving birth. Clearly Clement, or Clement's source, is dependant on Aristotle for his treatment of these two animals.

In particular the hyena's sexual ambiguity received special attention in Aesop fables (Perry #242 & 243; Temple # 340 & 341). Aelian 1.25 and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.400 also accept as fact the switch in genders which Aristotle sought to refute. The *Epistle of Barnabas*

10.6-8 speaks of both the hyena and hare as well as the weasel as warnings against certain sexual activities. *Barnabas* also quotes the non-scriptural texts we have seen in Clement, and similar phrasings may be found between the two texts. Clement's passage clearly is derived from *Barnabas* or from the source for *Barnabas*. The weasel was reputed to conceive orally, and thus its unclean status warns the believer against oral sex. The text attacks both male and female humans who receive semen orally, even though the weasel presumably is heterosexual. The hyena, which alternates gender, is used as a warning against becoming an adulterer or seducer (μοιχος, φθορευς, *moichos, phthoreus*) — a *heterosexual* adulterer or seducer. The hare is a warning against becoming a boy seducer (παιδοφθορος, *paidophthoros*), for the hare grows a new anus each year.

Again, there is confusion here. The reader might conclude the confusion is deliberate in *Barnabas* and Clement. A “boy seducer” would be expected to invade the boy's anus with no effect on his own. Why, then, compare him with the hare, who's chief attribute is the annual new anus? Why use the androgynous bisexual hyena to describe heterosexual excesses? In *Barnabas* as in Clement the reader feels a need to rework these passages, putting things in order. The hyena should be connected with androgyny, bisexuality and pederasty, and the hare with heterosexual anal intercourse.

Perhaps the key in Clement is the term *homoios* (ὁμοίως, likewise) which stands between verses 26 and 27 of Romans 1, a text quoted by Clement. Something is being described as similar between the sexual practices of the women in verse 26 and the pederasts of verse 27. For Clement that similarity refers to one particular sexual practice, anal penetration, practiced heterosexually by the women of verse 26 and the pederasts of verse 27. So, to emphasize this similarity as well as preserve source material from *Barnabas* Clement cross-links his examples, linking the heterosexual couplings of the hare with pederasts and the male homosexual couplings of the hyena with sexually incontinent heterosexual couples. For they are all one to Clement, hare and hyena, females and males of Romans 1. All sow semen in infertile fields, taking the “necessary” out of the necessary evil which is our human sexuality.

Clement and *Barnabas* derive a sexual moral from the cases of the hare and the hyena. But human sexual practices were not always the moral of the story when the sexuality of these animals was discussed. These animals took an interesting turn in later moralist literature, where the sexual impropriety represented non-sexual moral failings. For instance, in the *Physiologus*

the weasel (35) and hyena (38) are described for oral copulation and alternating gender, with their uncleanness emphasized much as in *Barnabas*. However, the morals derived from these animals are quite different. The weasel represents those who receive spiritual food in church, but the word of God does not stay in them. The hyena represents those who have masculine courage in the assembly but turn into women on the field of battle — “for he is not man or woman, neither faithful or unfaithful.” Ovid used the weasel in a similar manner, as representing the mouth which speaks lies (*Metamorphoses* 321-323; c.f. Plutarch, *Isis & Osiris* 74 / 381a), and in Aesop one of the hyena tales yielded a moral about one magistrate succeeding another in office.

The moral of the story is, Clement, Barnabas and Aesop can make for some fascinating reading.