

RAW MATERIAL

STUDIES IN BIBLICAL SEXUALITY

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APPENDIX 3

Ἀρσεν in the *Sentences* of PsPhokylides

Pages 175-176

2nd Revised Ed. 2010

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The Sentences is an ancient collection of wisdom sayings written by a Jewish author and pseudonymously attributed to the Greek philosopher Phokylides. In his magisterial commentary on *The Sentences*, line 214, Van der Horst translates without comment the term ἄρσεν (*arsen*), which is not age-specific, as “man,” which is age-specific. He does likewise with his translation of this line in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (v. 2; pg. 581), again without footnote or other explanation. Because Van der Horst’s commentary on *The Sentences* is influential in the study of this work, and because his translation in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* is widely consulted, a short note on his translation of the word seems in order.

The subject of line 214 is pederasty, and the line advises the reader to guard an attractive boy while he is young, “for many lust for erotic intercourse with a male (ἄρσεν).” Though Van der Horst comments that these lines, “exhorts parents to protect their children from the immoral cravings of other people” (1978, pg 251), he translates line 214 as if it is the attractive boy who has the immoral cravings for an ἄρσεν. A more coherent reading, which is more consistent with Van der Horst’s comments, should have the attractive boy as the ἄρσεν in line 214 who incites the lust of the pederast.

Because ἄρσεν (or ἄρρεν) is a term which is not age-specific, it is often used in Jewish polemics against pederasty. Sometimes it is contrasted with the ἀνήρ or ἀνδρὸς (adult male), which is specific to the pederast (e.g. Philo, *Vita C.* 59). However, usually ἄρσεν is used to identify both males in the pederastic relationship (e.g. *Sib. Oracles* 3.185; c.f. Rom 1:27; Athenagoras, *Embassy* 34.2-3). When Van der Horst translates lines 191-192, he carefully differentiates between ἄρσενες and ἀνδρῶν, translating the first as “male” and the second as “man.” The term ἄρσεν in line 214 of PseudoPhokylides should be translated to specify the boy from the previous line, or at least it should be left ambiguous in translation, as in line 191, and that ambiguity noted in the commentary.

In short, line 214 of *The Sentences* of PseudoPhokylides should read, “for many [men] lust for erotic intercourse with a boy [such as is described in line 213].”

There is another problem with Van der Horst’s translation of line 191. In this translation

a close relationship with Romans 1:27 seems implied, a relationship which is not to be found in the Greek text. The Greek for line 191 reads αρσενες ευναι (*arsenes eunai*), “sex among males,” which Van der Horst renders, “intercourse of male with male.” Romans 1:27 has αρσενες εν αρσεσιν (*arsenes en arsesin*), “males with males,” a phrase distinct in the Greek, but wrongly implied in Van der Horst’s line 191.

In general, in Classical literature, Greek and Latin, when the topic is sex between adult men and adolescent males, it is important to pay attention to, and correctly represent in translation, a distinction between “male” (αρσεν / *masculus*) and “man” / “adult male” (ανηρ / *vir*). It is important to notice when the term is age-specific, and when it is age-neutral.