Lesbianism in Islam and Christianity

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Overview

- Project medium: argumentative essay
- Thesis: By virtue of patriarchal ignorance of women if nothing else, was female homosexuality accepted in the early days of the traditions?
- Contrast attitudes towards male vs. female homosexuality
- Similar analysis possible in other traditions, but I focus on Islam and Christianity

Islam

Story of Lot

Background

Lot hosts God's angels, mob insists they be allowed to "know" them, God destroys city

Traditional interpretation

Some authorities "read into the scriptural text the conclusion that Lot was sent...to forbid anal sex between men."

Hospitality and power dynamics

The true focuses of God's wrath

No mention of women

Lot story discusses anal sex between men, not sex acts between women

Omission = acceptance?

No discussion of lesbianism suggests an approval not afforded to men

¹ Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, Homosexuality in Islam: Critica, Reflection on Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Muslims, (Oxford: OneWorld Press, 2010), 50.

"The immorality"

- Need 4 eyewitnesses to confirm: same as to confirm zina
 - Hence why some think it refers to female homosexuality
 - Punishment is not the same though
- Grammatical structures of verse debunk that idea: hunna and "your women" suggest group of 3 or more women
 - O What kind of intercourse is that?
- Surrounding verses are about financial honesty and fraud
 - Lesbianism would be a discontinuity
- Male jurists "often suppress issues of economic injustice and social justice in favor of more narrowly defining ethics in terms of sexual morality."²

Legal Frameworks

Marriage

- sex only acceptable within marriage → no such thing as a legal same-sex marriage in Islam → no forum for licit homosexual sex acts
- Lesbian relationships acceptable in and of themselves, but cannot be legitimated through marriage
 - It's not the connection between the partners, it's the inability to marry

Sex

- "Many legal effects of sex depend on penetration by a penis."³
- Sex between women not considered actual sex-could bypass need for marriage

³ Kecia Ali, Sexual Ethics in Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence (n.p.: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 80.

Christianity

Counterargument: Romans 1:26-27

"Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another."

- "In the same way": men and women are having the same kind of "unnatural intercourse"
- Categorizes male and female homosexuality together: Paul doesn't separate them
- Not a place where lesbianism is "accidentally" accepted

⁷ Romans 1:26-27 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁸ Bernadette J. Brooten, "The Bible and Love Between Women," *Open Hands* Volume, 15:3 (Winter 2000): 15.

Ruth and Naomi

Devotion

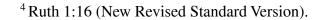
"Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God."⁴

David and Jonathan

Not a place where lesbianism is condoned but male homosexuality is not

Exalted lesbian love

Not condemned but rather celebrated with their own book in the Bible



Leviticus 18:22

- Most oft-cited clobber passage, yet is only about men: "do not lie with a man as with a woman"
- "Biblical and Jewish law regard this 'lying' as requiring penetration by a penis"⁵: lesbian sex does not qualify as sex
- Lesbianism doubly affirmed by Leviticus 18:22:
 - Once under traditional anti-homosexuality interpretation (even if only by oversight)
 - Once through reinterpretation/queer hermeneutics
- Lesbianism not a violation of biblical law until 12th century ⁶

⁵ Jay Michaelson, God Vs. Gay?: The Religious Case for Equality, (n.p.: Beacon Press, 2012), 61.

⁶ Michaelson, God Vs. Gay?, 60.

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Questions?