

The Sin of Sodomy in Late Antiquity

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WHY DID GOD DESTROY THE cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone? Since the High Middle Ages, there has been a clear and popular answer to that question: for the sin of male-male sexual congress. As a number of groundbreaking studies have demonstrated, however, the homosexual reading of the sin of Sodom was an addition of later commentators to the biblical narrative.¹ The book of Genesis itself does not imply same-sex relations. In early Christian writings, too, the emphasis was not upon the sexual deviance of the Sodomites but upon their pride or their violation of guest rights.² The reading of the Sodom narrative as a punishment for homosexual sin only began to develop in later centuries—this would culminate in the invention of a new word, “sodomy,” to refer to homosexual sin.³

Many scholars identify the writings of Augustine, the celebrated bishop of Hippo, as a particular turning point in the evolution of the image of Sodom’s sin. In book 16 of *De ciuitate Dei* (*The City of God*), composed in 420 CE, Augustine states that the reason God punished the citizens of Sodom was because of their sin, identified as “illicit sexual intercourse with men” (*stupra in masculos*).⁴ Historians have seen this statement as the first attempt in Latin Christian literature to explicitly link the sin of Sodom with homosexual sin.⁵ J. A. Loader believes that Augustine’s depiction set the

¹ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); J. A. Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities: Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament, Early Jewish and Early Christian Traditions* (Kampen: Kok, 1990); Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Michael Carden, *Sodomy: A History of a Christian Biblical Myth* (London: Equinox, 2004); Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides, “Luxuria and Homosexuality in Suetonius, Augustine, and Aquinas,” *Mediaeval Journal* 5, no. 2 (2015): 1–32.

² Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

³ Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*.

⁴ Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* 16.30, ed. Bernard Dombart and Alphons Kalb, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (hereafter CCSL) 48 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), 535.

⁵ Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 34–35; and Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 136.

tone for future discourse: "From this time on neither the social awareness of the Old Testament Sodom traditions nor that of the Jewish reception of these traditions is to be found in the centre of the Sodom and Gomorrah theme. A new motif has come to the fore, where it has stayed ever since—'sodomy.'"⁶ From where did Augustine draw this image of Sodom? Loader surmises that he might have been influenced by knowledge of Jewish Talmudic tradition, but this does not seem the most likely explanation. More recently, Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides has argued that Augustine's take on the sin of Sodom was influenced by Stoic philosophy, but while this does account for Augustine's general outlook on sexual deviance, particularly homosexuality, it does not explain why he came to associate the Sodom narrative with homosexual sin.⁷

In fact, Augustine's comment in *De ciuitate Dei* is not the first to equate the sin of Sodom with male-male sex. This article will draw attention to two earlier texts that associate Sodom with homosexual sin: the *Tractatus* (*Tractates*) of Gaudentius of Brescia and the *Historiarum adversum paganos libri septem* (*Seven Books of History against the Pagans*) of Orosius. I will demonstrate that these texts make a crucial connection between the Sodom narrative and Saint Paul's comments about male-male sex in the Epistle to the Romans (Romans 1:27)—a connection that is sustained first by Augustine and later by the author of the Latin *Visio sancti Pauli* (*Vision of Saint Paul*). This fifth-century convention of linking Romans 1:27 with Sodom is, I argue, the catalyst for later traditions in which the sin of Sodom is presented as specifically homosexual in nature.

SEXUAL EXCESS IN CLASSICAL THOUGHT

Greek and Roman sexual morals were deeply influenced by ideas about nature and natural behaviors. The just person attempted to live according to "natural law." The height of immorality, according to many ancient schools of thought, was to put things to a use for which nature provided no precedent: such activities were framed as being against or in excess of nature (*phusis/natura*).⁸ Those influenced by Stoicism—the Greek philosophical movement that enjoyed widespread influence in the Roman world during the first few centuries CE—were particularly keen on this point,⁹ but the idea had traction in wider circles as well. Excessive decadence (*luxuria*) in

⁶ Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 136.

⁷ Anagnostou-Laoutides, "Luxuria and Homosexuality."

⁸ Catharine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993), 87–89, 137–38, 144–49, 155, 195–96.

⁹ Malcolm Schofield, "Stoic Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 239–46; and T. H. Irwin, "Stoic Naturalism and Its Critics," in the same volume, 345–64.

all its forms was decried by Roman moralists.¹⁰ As the first-century philosopher Seneca put it, “At first *luxuria* began to covet what was, according to nature, superfluous, later what was in opposition to nature, and then she made the mind the servant of the body and ordered it to be a slave to pleasure.”¹¹ Seneca spoke of the *luxuria* of those who insist on eating only freshly killed mullet or of men who wear women’s clothing.¹² Pliny the Elder denigrated as *luxuria* a whole series of things that he saw as going beyond nature: from mining and the use of poisons to perfume and iced drinks.¹³ Sexual immorality was part of this picture; Stoic philosophers saw practices such as same-sex intercourse and adultery as going against nature—only sex for the purpose of procreation was permissible.¹⁴ The writings of the second-century Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus exemplify this type of reasoning. Rufus notes that those who live luxuriously tend toward sexual excess: they wish for many partners and sex with both women and men. He condemns both adultery and sexual relations between men as being “against nature.”¹⁵

Sexual excess was also closely associated with a *topos* from Greco-Roman historiographical and anthropological writings: the idea of moral corruption through abundance.¹⁶ Once a polity or group became too successful and wealthy, *luxuria* and excess would grow, and immoral behavior was sure to follow. Though the specifics of this process varied, the basic assumption that abundance and wealth led to *luxuria* and moral degradation had an enduring fixity. This cluster of ideas about sexual morals and natural law was transmitted more or less intact to the Christian thinkers of late antiquity. The sexual ethics of fourth- and fifth-century Christian thinkers like Augustine and Ambrose, bishop of Milan, were colored by Stoic

¹⁰ On *luxuria* see Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Edwards, *Politics of Immorality*, 173–206; and Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 29–44.

¹¹ “Primo supervacua coepit concupiscere, inde contraria, novissime animum corpori addixit et illius deservire libidini iussit” (Seneca, *Ep.* 90.19, ed. Otto Hense, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1938], 388; translation adapted from Edwards, *Politics of Immorality*, 196).

¹² Seneca, *Quaestiones* 3.18, ed. Harry M. Hine, *L. Annaei Senecae Naturalium Quaestionum Libros VIII* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1996), 132–33; Seneca, *Ep.* 122.7–8, ed. Hense, 597.

¹³ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “Pliny the Elder and Man’s Unnatural History,” *Greece & Rome* 37, no. 1 (April 1990): 80–96.

¹⁴ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 21; John T. Noonan, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2012), 46–48, 75.

¹⁵ Musonius Rufus, *Fragment* 12, ed. in Cora E. Lutz, “Musonius Rufus, the Roman Socrates,” *Yale Classical Studies* 10 (1947): 3–147, 85–89.

¹⁶ See my forthcoming article in the *Journal of Early Christian Studies*.

philosophy.¹⁷ Perhaps more importantly, foundational Christian texts such as the letters of Paul reveal a language of morality that reflects Greek and Roman ideas about natural law.¹⁸ The *topos* of corrupting abundance also survived into the Christian period. Its application to a Christian moral universe is demonstrated by an aphorism of the fourth-century theologian Lactantius: “From prosperity [comes] *luxuria*, from *luxuria* all other vices assuredly spring forth, likewise impiety towards God.”¹⁹ And, as was the case for classical moralists, there was a close connection between *luxuria* and *libido* (inordinate desire, wantonness).²⁰ Ambrose would assert that “*luxuria* . . . is the mother of *libido*” (*luxuria* . . . mater libidinis est).²¹

We must note here that later centuries would see a narrowing of associations of the term *luxuria*. It would come to be identified specifically with sexual lust or sodomy—witness the meaning of derivate words in many modern Latinate languages.²² By the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas could offer a definition of the vice of *luxuria* as excess in “venereal pleasures” (*voluptates venereae*), although he notes that it can also refer to other nonsexual excesses such as drinking too much wine.²³ In late antiquity, however, the term still carried a wider range of connotations. When Augustine, for instance, spoke about *luxuria*, he meant it in the traditional sense—excess, going against nature, a love of “corporeal pleasures” (*corporeae uoluptates*).²⁴ This concept contained within itself the implica-

¹⁷ Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1990); and Anagnostou-Laoutides, “Luxuria and Homosexuality.”

¹⁸ Bernadette J. Brooken, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 267–302; David E. Fredrickson, “Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24–27: Paul and the Philosophic Critique of Eros,” in *Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 197–222.

¹⁹ The original Latin reads: “ex rerum prosperitate luxuria, ex luxuria uero ut uitia omnia sic inpietas aduersus deum nascitur” (Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 2.1, ed. Samuel Brandt, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* [hereafter CSEL] 19 [Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1890], 97).

²⁰ Timo Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 15–58.

²¹ Ambrose, *Epistulae extra collectionem* 14.26, ed. M. Zelzer, CSEL 82.3 (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1982), 249.

²² On the later history of *luxuria* as one of the capital sins, see Claire Catalini, “*Luxuria* and Its Branches,” in *Sex, Love and Marriage in Medieval Literature and Reality*, ed. Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok (Greifswald: Reineke-Verlag, 1996), 13–20; Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*; and Glenn W. Olsen, *Of Sodomites, Effeminate, Hermaphrodites, and Androgynes: Sodomy in the Age of Peter Damian* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2011), 329–86. *Luxure* (French), *lussuria* (Italian), *luxúria* (Portuguese), and *lujuria* (Spanish) all translate as “lust.”

²³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 153.1–154.12, Blackfriars ed., 2.2ae:188–248. See Mark D. Jordan’s analysis of this passage in “Homosexuality, *Luxuria*, and Textual Abuse,” in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 24–39, at 25.

²⁴ Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* 12.8, ed. Dombart and Kalb, 523.

tion of sexual immorality, but this was only one part of its overall system of associations.

By the same token, we must also note that the term “homosexual” has no direct analogue in this period. Romans did not see “people with exclusively homosexual preferences as a distinct social group.”²⁵ Similarly, sex between two men was not seen as immoral, *per se*; rather, allowing oneself to be penetrated was viewed as playing the female role and was castigated.²⁶ We can illustrate this with reference to an edict of the emperor Theodosius, issued in 390, which decried those “whose disgraceful sensuality led them to use the male body in a female manner so to damn it to the passive role of the other sex.”²⁷ Historians have sometimes spoken of this law as a straightforward example of the persecution of homosexuals.²⁸ It was not, however, aimed at all men who engaged in sex with men but only at those who allowed themselves to play the “feminine” role. As we shall see, the changing understanding of sexuality and sexual morals would be reflected in the language of the law.

THE SIN OF SODOM AS SEXUAL EXCESS

The book of Genesis, the first book of both the Hebrew Tanakh and the Christian Old Testament, relates the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18–19). The narrative begins with God telling Abraham that God is going to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because “their sin has become exceedingly grievous” (18:20).²⁹ Abraham convinces God to spare the city if ten righteous people are found to live there (18:32). God then sends two angels into Sodom (19:1). They are met there by Lot, Abraham’s nephew, who welcomes them into his home (19:1–3), but the people of Sodom proceed to surround Lot’s house and to demand that he send the

²⁵ Edwards, *Politics of Immorality*, 66. On this subject, see also Paul Veyne, “La famille et l’amour sous le Haut-Empire romain,” *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 33, no. 1 (1978): 35–63; Paul Veyne, “Homosexuality in Ancient Rome,” in *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, ed. Philippe Ariès and André Béjin (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 26–35, 27–28; Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4–8.

²⁶ There has been much scholarship on this issue. On some of the nuances and problems of our understanding of Roman homosexual practice, see Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*; Amy Richlin, “Not before Homosexuality: The Materiality of the *Cinaedus* and the Roman Law against Love between Men,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 4 (1993): 523–73; and Deborah Kamen and Sarah Levin-Richardson, “Revisiting Roman Sexuality: Agency and the Conceptualization of Penetrated Males,” in *Sex in Antiquity: Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World*, ed. Mark Masterson, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, and James Robson (New York: Routledge, 2015), 449–60.

²⁷ *Collatio Legum Mosaicorum et Romanorum* 5.2, ed. R. M. Frakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 170; trans. Frakes, *Collatio*, 213.

²⁸ See, for instance, Brown, *Body and Society*, 383.

²⁹ Biblical translations are based on the Douay-Rheims 1899 American edition (amended for clarity).

angels out to them “so that we may know them” (19:5). Lot offers his daughters in an attempt to appease the crowd, but they refuse; they are then struck blind by the angels (19:6–11). The angels then warn Lot to flee the city, as it is to be destroyed (19:12–15). Lot and his family flee, after which God “rained brimstone and fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah from the Lord out of heaven. And he destroyed these cities, and all the country about, all the inhabitants of the cities, and all things that spring from the earth” (19:24–25). Lot and his daughters escape unharmed, but Lot’s wife, despite the angels’ warning, looks back to the city and is transformed into a pillar of salt (19:26). When Abraham looks toward the land of Sodom and Gomorrah from his home place, he sees “the ashes rise up from the earth, like smoke from a furnace” (19:28).

In the first few centuries CE, one particularly prominent strand of biblical interpretation associated the Sodomites with excess and *luxuria*. The first to interpret the Sodom narrative in this way was Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenized Jewish writer of the first century CE. Philo’s interpretation of the Sodom narrative was shaped in a number of important respects by assumptions derived from Greco-Roman thought. Philo was particularly influenced by Stoic ideas; for him, natural law was a kind of unacquired, intuitive antecedent of the written law of Moses.³⁰ The idea that wealth and abundance led inevitably to moral corruption was, as noted above, ubiquitous in Greco-Roman literature. When Philo came to recount the Sodom narrative in his *De Abrahamo*, he projected these ideas onto the biblical text. Indeed, the Sodom narrative lent itself in particular to this kind of reading, since the area around Sodom had been depicted as exhibiting great natural fertility since the Old Testament. In Genesis 13:10, for instance, the land around Sodom is compared to “the paradise of the Lord”. A more explicit connection is made in Ezekiel 16:49, in which “fullness of bread” is listed among the sins of Sodom. According to this biblical tradition, however, the sin of Sodom was not caused by its fecundity, which served only as an ironic contrast to its later desolation. Philo, on the other hand, believed that the moral degradation of the Sodomites was a direct result of the fecundity of the land around the city—that they were corrupted by its luxuriousness.³¹ He even backs up his case by quoting two lines from the poet Menander (fourth century BCE) that are typical of the Greek attitude toward luxury: “The chief beginning of evils, as one has aptly said, is goods in excess.”³² Philo is the first commentator that I am aware of to link the Greco-Roman theme of corruption by *luxuria* with the biblical narrative of sin and divine punishment.

³⁰ Richard A. Horsley, “The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero,” *Harvard Theological Review* 71, no. 1–2 (1978): 35–59.

³¹ Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 88.

³² The original reads: “μεγίστη δ’ ἀρχὴ κακῶν” ὡς εἶπέ τις οὐκ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ “τὰ λίαν ἀγαθὰ” (Philo, *De Abrahamo* 26, ed. and trans. F. H. Colson, Loeb Classical Library 289 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935], 70–71).

Stoic ideas about natural law permeate Philo's depiction of the immorality of the Sodomites. He explains that the Sodomites fell into worse and worse depravity: "Incapable of bearing such satiety, plunging like cattle, they threw off from their necks the law of nature and applied themselves to deep drinking of strong liquor and dainty feeding and forbidden forms of intercourse."³³ Consistent with the Greco-Roman distrust of *luxuria*, he includes among the excesses of the Sodomites male-male sexual acts. Sexual excess—adultery, bestiality, incest, and same-sex love—was part of a category of behaviors that went against, or contradicted, the laws of nature. Once the connection was made between the Sodom narrative and corrupting *luxuria*, sexual immorality was immediately implied; it took very little, then, to assume that the sin of the Sodomites involved same-sex intercourse, and this is exactly how Philo proceeds. Men having sex with men is particularly shocking for Philo, as a man playing the submissive sexual function of the woman goes against the Platonic understanding of natural roles and leads to the man becoming feminized. Philo, then, is the first to link Sodom with same-sex acts in this way, and he has been seen as "the inventor of the homophobic reading of Genesis 19."³⁴ However, it is important to note that while he gives particular attention to homosexual behavior, it is still only part of Philo's depiction of Sodomitic *luxuria* and immorality. He also lists overindulgence in alcohol and the eating of decadent types of food, as well as other types of sexual immorality.

In only one book of the Bible do we find Sodom being deployed as an image of sexual sin, and it is one of the last. The example comes in the Epistle of Jude, a text of the late first century CE that draws heavily on extrabiblical Jewish material. The reference to Sodom comes as part of a list of examples of God's wrath: "Sodom and Gomorrah, and the neighbouring cities, in like manner, having given themselves to fornication, and going after other flesh, were made an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire" (Jude 1:7). This follows similar lines to Philo, associating the Sodomites with general sexual immorality but not specifically with same-sex acts. In the original Greek, it is clear that the sexual immorality of which the Sodomites are accused is the desiring of "strange flesh" (i.e., of sexual congress with the angels in Genesis 19:4–11).³⁵ In the Latin-speaking sphere, doubts about its authenticity (coupled with an unclear translation) made the Epistle of Jude an unpopular text for early Christian writers seeking scriptural attestation of the Sodomitic sin.

In early Christian writings in Greek, the idea that Sodom represented corruption through abundance and the proliferation of decadent behaviors—

³³ The original reads: "ὡν ἀδυνατούντες φέρειν τὸν κόρον ὥστε τὰ θρέμματα σκιρτῶντες ἀπαυχενίζουσι τὸν τῆς φύσεως νόμον, ἀκρατὸν πολὺν καὶ ὀφθαλμίας καὶ ὀχλείας ἐκθέσμονας μεταδιῶ κοντέες" (Philo, *De Abrahamo* 26, ed. and trans. Colson, 70–71).

³⁴ Carden, *Sodomy*, 61.

³⁵ J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 258; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco: Word Books, 1996), 54.

what I shall call the Philonic interpretation—was extremely influential. Sexual transgression appears prominently in descriptions of the Sodomites' sinfulness, but it is still only one among many misdemeanors representative of decadence and excess. Clement of Alexandria, who drew heavily on Philo's writings, including his *De Abrahamo*, describes the Sodomites as a people driven to immorality, fornication, and lust.³⁶ In the fourth century, John Chrysostom interpreted the sin of Sodom along similar lines.³⁷ Recently, Michael Carden has identified the writings of Chrysostom as the first to attach a "homophobic reading" to the Sodom narrative.³⁸ In truth, however, Chrysostom's interpretation follows the same lines of interpretation as Philo and Clement: he certainly emphasizes sexual sin, but no more so than his predecessors, and he nowhere explicitly references male-male sexual relations in particular. Other sexual misdemeanors were sometimes associated with the Sodomites. The fourth-century Syrian text the *Constitutiones apostolorum* (*Apostolic Constitutions*) accused the Sodomites of *paidophthoreō*, best translated as "seduction/corruption of children."³⁹ The mistranslation of this word as corruption of boys specifically has led some to argue that the *Constitutiones* represent the first Christian reference to the sin of Sodom as primarily homosexual sin.⁴⁰ However, according to John W. Martens's recent analysis, the term "does not denote any particular sexual practice, let alone one focused on male homosexual behaviour."⁴¹ In any case, it does not seem to have fed into the tradition in the Latin West that linked Sodom with homosexual sin.⁴²

The image of Sodom developed along similar lines in the Latin West. The writings of Ambrose of Milan provide an apt example. In the works

³⁶ Anniewies van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the Stromateis: An Early Christian Reshaping of a Jewish Model* (Leiden: Brill, 1988); David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 132–56; Clement, *Paedagogus* 3.8.44, ed. M. Marcovich, *Clementis Alexandrini Paedagogus* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 174.

³⁷ Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesim* 42, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca* 54 (Paris: Migne, 1865), 385–95.

³⁸ Carden, *Sodomy*, 141–45.

³⁹ *Constitutiones Apostolorum* 7.2.10, ed. M. Metzger, *Sources Chrétiennes* 336 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1987), 30. On this term and its meaning, see Cornelia B. Horn and John W. Martens, "Let the Little Children Come to Me": *Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2009), 226–30; and John W. Martens, "Do Not Sexually Abuse Children?: The Language of Early Christian Sexual Ethics," in *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. Cornelia B. Horn and Robert R. Phenix (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 227–54.

⁴⁰ Mistranslations in, for instance, Franz Xaver Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones apostolorum* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoeningh, 1905), 391; Philip Schaff, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885), 262. For a discussion of the idea that this represents the first Christian reference to the sin of Sodom as homosexual activity, see, for example, Carden, *Sodomy*, 125; Boswell, *Christianity*, 104n47; and David F. Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of ἀρσενοκοῖται (1 Cor. 6: 9, 1 Tim. 1: 10)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38, no. 2 (June 1984): 125–53.

⁴¹ Martens, "Do Not Sexually Abuse Children," 235.

⁴² Boswell, *Christianity*, 104n47.

of Ambrose, we see how the image of Sodom presented in Philo and the Epistle of Jude has been accommodated to a Christian moral universe. Ambrose saw Sodom as an example and symbol of excess in worldly pleasures.⁴³ In *De fuga saeculi* (On flight from the world) he urged withdrawal from the trappings of the present corporeal world (*saeculum*). Lot's flight from Sodom provides an apt metaphor—the city stands as a symbol of the temptations of cups and drinking vessels, women and fools.⁴⁴ Ambrose expresses similar sentiments in one of his letters, where the idea of “turning back” to Sodom (as Lot's wife had done: Genesis 19:26) serves as a symbol of turning (in one's life) to *luxuria* and *impuritas*.⁴⁵ He deploys Sodom in the same way in his *De Abraham* (On Abraham), which drew heavily on Philo's *De Abrahamo*. “Sodom,” he tells us in that work, “is *luxuria* and wantonness [*lasciuitia*].”⁴⁶ One other aspect of Ambrose's interpretation of Sodom is worth noting. As we have seen, the book of Genesis relates how Lot was visited in Sodom by two angels. The men of Sodom then surrounded Lot's house and demanded that he send out the guests: “Where are the men that came in to you at night? Bring them out here that we may know them” (Genesis 19:5). In later years, the idea that the Sodomites wished to rape Lot's guests served to lend support to the idea that the sin of Sodom was homosexual in nature. In fact, there is no inherent link between the Sodomites' desire to “know” the angels and the sin for which Sodom is destroyed. God, after all, had already decided to destroy Sodom by the time the angels visited Lot. Ambrose clearly understands that the Sodomites wish to rape the angels in Genesis 19:4–8, yet he never makes a connection between this episode and the sin for which Sodom was destroyed. Instead, according to Ambrose, the specific misdeed for which the Sodomites were punished is violation of guests' rights, a long-established and popular interpretation of the Genesis narrative.⁴⁷

CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDINGS OF HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

The Sodom narrative of Genesis may not have originally contained any mention of it, but male-male sex was certainly proscribed elsewhere in the Bible. Leviticus 18:22 declares: “Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with

⁴³ Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 34.

⁴⁴ Ambrose, *De fuga saeculi* 9.56, ed. C. Schenkl, CSEL 32.2 (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1897), 206.

⁴⁵ Ambrose, *Epistulae* 11.21, ed. Otto Faller, CSEL 82.2 (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1982), 90.

⁴⁶ “Sodoma . . . luxuria atque lasciuitia est” (Ambrose, *De Abraham* 1.3.14, ed. C. Schenkl, CSEL 32.1 [Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1897], 512).

⁴⁷ Ambrose, *Hexameron* 5.16, ed. C. Schenkl, CSEL 32.1 (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1897), 181. The idea that the destruction of Sodom was a punishment for inhospitality was very common (discussed in Boswell, *Christianity*; Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities*; Carden, *Sodomy*).

womankind, because it is an abomination.” Leviticus 20:13 spells out a similar code of conduct: “If any one lie with a man as with a woman, both have committed an abomination, let them be put to death: their blood be upon them.” In the New Testament, Paul’s Epistle to the Romans was a central text in the history of Christian views of same-sex relations. As part of his broader depiction of depravity among the Gentiles, Paul notes in Romans 1:26–27:

διὰ τοῦτο παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς πάθη ἀτιμίας: αἱ τε γὰρ θήλειαι αὐτῶν μετέλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν, ὁμοίως τε καὶ οἱ ἄρσενες ἀφέντες τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἄρσενες ἐν ἄρσεσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι καὶ τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν ἣν ἔδει τῆς πλάνης αὐτῶν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀπολαμβάνοντες.

propterea tradidit illos Deus in passiones ignominiae nam feminae eorum inmutaverunt naturalem usum in eum usum qui est contra naturam; similiter autem et masculi relicto naturali usu feminae exarserunt in desideriis suis in invicem masculi in masculos turpitudinem operantes et mercedem quam oportuit erroris sui in semet ipsis recipientes.⁴⁸

For this cause God delivered them up to shameful affections. For their women have changed the natural use into that use which is against nature. And, in like manner, the men also, leaving the natural use of the women, have burned in their lusts one toward another, men with men practicing obscenity, and receiving in themselves the recompense which was due to their error.

The biblical and nonbiblical traditions that lie behind Paul’s language in this extract have been the subject of extensive analysis.⁴⁹ The emphasis on nature does not come from Old Testament traditions; rather, it is derived from Greek tradition, particularly Stoicism, and it had already been applied to Hebrew scripture in the writings of Philo and Josephus. As Richard

⁴⁸ I include here the Vulgate Latin translation of the original Greek. Two of our sources (Gaudentius’s *Tractatus* and the *Visio sancti Pauli*) share a variant Latin translation in which the verb *operare* is replaced with *exercere*; the reading is also attested in Pelagius, *Expositiones XIII epistolarum Pauli*, ed. Alexander Souter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922–31), 16; and Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei* 7.17.76, ed. Georges LaGarrigue, Sources Chrétiennes 220 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1975), 484. Unfortunately, given that later copyists had a frustrating habit of emending scriptural quotations to the “correct” form, this can tell us little about the textual transmission of our tradition.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Brooten, *Love between Women*, 267–302; Fredrickson, “Natural and Unnatural Use”; Roy Bowen Ward, “Why Unnatural? The Tradition behind Romans 1:26–27,” *Harvard Theological Review* 90, no. 3 (July 1997): 263–84; Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979); and Richard B. Hays, “Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 184–215, 192–94.

Hays puts it, "The categorization of homosexual practices as *para physin* [against nature] was a commonplace feature of polemical attacks against such behavior, particularly in the world of Hellenistic Judaism."⁵⁰ Romans 1:27 and the Hellenized version of the Sodom narrative promulgated by Philo were, therefore, close thematic cousins. It would not have taken much to push an educated reader to make a connection between the two.

During the formative centuries of church doctrine, Stoic definitions of "natural" and "unnatural" sexual behavior continued to permeate Christian discourse on the subject of male-male sex.⁵¹ The majority of early commentators on Romans understood Paul's statements about nature in the context of the *lex naturalis*—the law of nature.⁵² The earliest extant Latin commentary on Romans—that of Ambrosiaster, a pseudonymous Christian cleric writing in Rome in the early 380s—provides a particularly vivid insight into the way such ideas had permeated fourth-century views of homosexual sex.⁵³ Ambrosiaster reshaped Stoic tradition, placing the idea of *lex naturalis* within a Christian context and providing two further kinds of laws (the written Mosaic law and the new dispensation of the Christian scripture) in a kind of hierarchy of revelation. He goes into some detail about the reasons *why* certain sexual practices are against natural law: they use parts of the body that were not meant to be used in this way. Ambrosiaster's preoccupation with such matters seems to have been based on the popularity of same-sex sexual practices in contemporary Rome. "Even today," he tells us, scandalized, "one may come upon such women."⁵⁴ The patristic view of unnatural sex is perhaps best summarized by Augustine in his discussion of Romans 1:26. Augustine argues that any part of the body that is not made for procreation should not be used for sexual gratification. Sex with a prostitute, while immoral, is at least according to nature. Same-sex acts, though, are worse than forms of "natural" fornication as

⁵⁰ Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," 194.

⁵¹ See R. W. Carlyle and A. J. Carlyle, *A History of Mediaeval Political Theory in the West*, 4 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), 1:102–10; and Michael Bertram Crowe, *The Changing Profile of the Natural Law* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 52–71.

⁵² It was understood in this manner by, for instance, Rufinus, *In Epistulam Pauli ad Romanos explanationum libri* 3.4, ed. C. P. Hammond Bammel, *Der Römerbrieftext des Rufin und seine Origenes-Übersetzung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1985), 232; Tertullian, *De corona* 6, ed. Emil Kroymann, CCL 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 1046; Pelagius, *Expositiones XIII epistolarum Pauli* 1.27, ed. Souter, 16; Brooten, *Love between Women*, 267–68n1.

⁵³ On Ambrosiaster, see Sophie Lunn-Rockliffe, *Ambrosiaster's Political Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); David G. Hunter, "2008 NAPS Presidential Address: The Significance of Ambrosiaster," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 1–26; and Theodore de Bruyn, "Ambrosiaster's Interpretations of Romans 1:26–27," *Vigiliae Christianae* 65, no. 5 (2011): 463–83.

⁵⁴ Ambrosiaster, *In epistulam ad Romanos* 1.27, ed. H. J. Vogels, CSEL 81.1 (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1966), 51; trans. de Bruyn, "Ambrosiaster's Interpretations," 482: "hodieque tales mulieres reperiantur."

they violate both the law of nature and the law of God.⁵⁵ The same concepts lay behind Ambrose's discussion of the Sodomites' attempted rape of the angels; according to him, the rape of Lot's daughters would have been better than the rape of males, as the latter goes against nature, while the former is at least natural.⁵⁶

Here I must sound a note of caution. While all of these writers clearly frown on same-sex acts, they have no conception of "homosexual" as a distinct category of person and therefore no need or desire to single out *homosexuals* for castigation.⁵⁷ Indeed, in many of our sources, it is implied that the same people who are engaged in homosexual sex are also those engaged in incest and adultery or indulging in other immoderate behaviors. As a number of scholars have noted, Philo depicts the Sodomites' sexual intercourse with men as an extension of their lust for other forms of unnatural sex.⁵⁸ Paul's attitude in his Epistle to the Romans is similar: he is not singling out homosexual relations so much as using them as an example of the sinfulness of the Gentiles. Like Philo, he is chastising a society that is so far gone in corruption that men sleep with men. We can see similar patterns in the way that patristic thinkers use references to Romans 1:27 in their writings. Jerome, for instance, in his commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, describes the sinfulness of the Gentiles in colorful language: they immerse themselves in filth (*coenum*) and the abyss (*vorago*); they have surrendered to immodesty and *luxuria*; their appetites are never satisfied; perhaps, says Jerome, they even "ascend to things greater than the permitted union of a man with a woman, men with men practicing obscenity."⁵⁹ Male-male sex thus functions as a kind of *symptom* of corruption and excess, an expected consequence of depravity that does not warrant any separate discussion in and of itself. I will return to this point in my analysis below.

THE SIN OF SODOM AND ROMANS 1:27: GAUDENTIUS OF BRESCIA

Let us turn now to the first text to make an explicit link between the sin of Sodom and Romans 1:27. This is a sermon of Gaudentius, bishop of Brescia in northern Italy in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Northern Italy at this time was home to a network of active and literate

⁵⁵ Augustine, *De nuptiis* 2.20, ed. Charles F. Urban and Joseph Zycha, CSEL 42 (Vienna: Holder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1902), 289.

⁵⁶ Ambrose, *De Abraham* 1.6, ed. Schenkl, 537.

⁵⁷ Edwards, *Politics of Immorality*, 66; Veyne, "La famille et l'amour"; Veyne, "Homosexuality in Ancient Rome," 27–28; Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 4–8.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Ward, "Why Unnatural?," 270; and Furnish, *Moral Teaching of Paul*, 65.

⁵⁹ The original Latin reads: "ultra concessam uiri ad feminam coniunctionem, ad maiora conscendunt, masculi in masculos turpitudinem operantes" (Jerome, *Ad Ephesios* 2, Patrologia Latina 26 [Paris: Migne, 1845], 536).

bishops whose most celebrated example is Ambrose of Milan.⁶⁰ Gaudentius is a rather shadowy figure. He became bishop (at the direction of Ambrose) at some point between 387 and 397, and we know from the evidence of one of his sermons that he remained in office for at least fourteen years. In 406 he was sent as a legate to Constantinople. He then disappears from the historical record. At some point during these years, he published official versions of twenty-one of his sermons at the behest of one of his parishioners who was too ill to attend in person. Like Ambrose, Gaudentius was not a cleric before becoming bishop and was likely therefore possessed of a private classical education; he knew Greek, as well as Hebrew. He was also very familiar with Stoic doctrine on natural law, as is clear from his discussion of the same in his tenth tractate.⁶¹ Like his contemporary Ambrosiaster, Gaudentius argues that there are three kinds of law: the *lex naturalis*, the *lex mandati*, and the *lex litterae*. The law of nature is defined by Gaudentius as “that by which the Gentiles, not having the law of the letter, naturally do those things which are of the law.”⁶²

In that same tractate, Gaudentius, in passing, makes a clear connection between the sin of Sodom and Romans 1:27. He does this in the context of a longer list of biblical examples of God’s power and wrath. In summary style, he mentions events such as the Flood, the plagues of Egypt, and the parting of the Red Sea. As part of this sequence the destruction of Sodom is described as follows: “He rained down sulphur and fire on the four cities of Sodom, where men with men practiced obscenity, so that the burning fire destroyed those who, assaulting the law of nature, burned with illicit ardor.”⁶³ This passage is the result of a convergence of a number of different traditions. The idea that male-male sexual relations are a violation of the *ius naturae* is, no doubt, inspired by Paul’s similar comments in Romans, but it is also directly in keeping with Stoic tradition. That the Sodomites stood as a particularly apt example of such a violation, however, is a distinctly Philonic concept.

How did this reading of the Sodom narrative come to be repeated by Gaudentius? There are a number of possible routes of transmission. Late fourth-century Italy appears to have seen a sudden vogue for the writings of Philo—before this point there is no evidence for knowledge of Philo in the

⁶⁰ On Gaudentius and his world, see Carlo Truzzi, *Zeno, Gaudenzio e Cromazio: Testi e contenuti della predicazione cristiana per le chiese di Verona, Brescia e Aquileia (360–410 ca.)* (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1985).

⁶¹ Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, 126–28.

⁶² The original Latin reads: “illa, qua gentes legem litterae non habentes naturaliter ea, quae legis sunt, faciunt” (Gaudentius, *Tractatus* 10, ed. Ambrose Glück, CSEL 68 [Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1936], 98; trans. Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, 127).

⁶³ “Ipse super quattuor urbes Sodomorum, ubi masculi in masculos turpitudines exercebant, sulfur et ignem de caelo contra morem pluvit, ut, quos ardor illicitus ad expugnandum ius naturae succenderat, igneus imber exstingueret” (Gaudentius, *Tractatus* 10, ed. Glück, 93).

Latin West. The earliest Latin translations of Philo date from this period in Italy.⁶⁴ Ambrose was certainly very familiar with the writings of Philo, and he made extensive use of them.⁶⁵ Given Gaudentius's knowledge of Greek and his close association with Ambrose, there is a strong possibility that he was familiar with Philo's writings. Indeed, Philo's discussion of natural law in *De Abrahamo* could easily have inspired Gaudentius's treatment of the same in his tenth tractate. Perhaps tellingly, Gaudentius and Ambrose both share a particular interpretation of the word *pascha* derived from Philo.⁶⁶ There are also other possible means by which Gaudentius would have become familiar with the Philonic interpretation of the Sodom narrative: he was a close personal acquaintance of John Chrysostom, who, as we have noted above, was an interpreter of the Sodom narrative along the sexual lines established by Philo.⁶⁷

Wherever he came across the idea that the sin of Sodom represented sexual crimes contrary to the law of nature, Gaudentius was the first to link this idea with Romans 1:27. Connecting the two must have seemed a self-evident step, in many respects. The path had been cleared by centuries of Jewish and Christian commentary (not least the writings of Gaudentius's friends Ambrose and Chrysostom). Gaudentius would have been primed to understand the sin of Sodom in terms of excess and *luxuria*—and sexual transgressions were part and parcel of this *topos*. Romans 1:27, meanwhile, provided very clear scriptural approbation of this kind of sexual transgression against nature. Gaudentius's *Tractatus* 10 is a sermon on natural law and morality, and in it very brief mention is made of some scriptural examples (the Fall, the plagues of Egypt) that serve to demonstrate the power of God. The Sodom narrative is thus reduced to one short summarizing sentence. In attempting to encapsulate the Philonic reading of Sodom in one line of a sermon, Gaudentius might easily have been reminded of Paul's edict against homosexual relations in Romans. As noted, Paul and Philo share much of the same language, derived from Stoic terminology, and the homosexual aspect of Philo's narrative may have seemed particularly pertinent in late fifth-century northern Italy, if the testimony of Ambrosiaster is to be believed.

⁶⁴ Françoise Petit, *L'ancienne version latine des Questions sur la Genèse de Philon d'Alexandrie*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Akademie, 1973).

⁶⁵ Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 292–95; David T. Runia, "Philo and the Early Christian Fathers," in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam Kamesar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 223–24, 229.

⁶⁶ Thomas J. Talley, "History and Eschatology in the Primitive Pascha," in *Between Memory and Hope: Readings on the Liturgical Year*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 108.

⁶⁷ Chrysostom, *Epistulae* 184, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca* 52 (Paris: Migne, 1862), 715–16.

THE SIN OF SODOM AND ROMANS 1:27: OROSIUS

Over a decade after Gaudentius, Orosius composed his influential *Historiae adversum paganos*. Written at the instigation of Augustine, Orosius's text is a world history intended to argue against the idea that the fortunes of Rome had declined as a result of Christianity's rise. Orosius begins his history with the events of the Old Testament, though always with an eye toward the contemporary situation.⁶⁸ The destruction of Sodom stands as a particularly potent warning for contemporary Romans about the dangers of awakening God's wrath through immorality. Orosius's version of the Sodom narrative ties together the Philonic narrative of corrupting *luxuria* with Paul's image of sexual corruption. The land around Sodom and Gomorrah, Orosius tells us, was extremely fertile and rich, which led to moral degradation:

Huic uniuersae regioni, bonis male utenti, abundantia rerum causa malorum fuit. Ex abundantia enim luxuria, ex luxuria foedae libidines adoleuere, adeo ut "masculi in masculos operantes turpitudinem" ne consideratis quidem locis condicionibus aetatibus que prouerent.

This abundance of things was the cause of evil for this entire region, which put these goods to bad use. For from abundance came *luxuria*, and from *luxuria* came foul lusts, "men with men practicing obscenity" without even giving thought to place, rank, or age.⁶⁹

From where did Orosius derive this reading? He may have known Gaudentius's work, perhaps through Gaudentius's correspondent Jerome, whom Orosius would have met in Palestine.⁷⁰ Alternatively, Orosius may have simply made the same connections between the Philonic tradition and Paul's epistle that Gaudentius had, for much the same reason.

Though Orosius's connection of Sodom with homosexual relations has been noted,⁷¹ his work has not been accorded its deserved importance in helping to fasten this image of Sodom. Orosius's work has, in general, been overshadowed by that of his mentor Augustine, and scholars have perhaps assumed that Orosius's comments about the sin of Sodom simply reflect Augustine's ideas. As we shall see, however, Augustine did not link Sodom

⁶⁸ For a recent overview, see Peter Van Nuffelen, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁶⁹ Orosius, *Historiae* 1.5.6–8, ed. M.-P. Arnaud-Lindet, *Orose: Histoires contre les païens*, 3 vols. (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1990–91), 1:46; translation adapted from A. T. Fear, *Orosius: Seven Books of History against the Pagans* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 52–53.

⁷⁰ Jerome also dedicated a work to Gaudentius: Paul Meyvaert, "Excerpts from an Unknown Treatise of Jerome to Gaudentius of Brescia," *Revue Bénédictine* 96, no. 3/4 (1986): 203–18, 209–10.

⁷¹ Carden, *Sodomy*, 125.

with male-male sexual relations until *after* Orosius had composed his work.⁷² The *Historiae* were extremely popular and influential in the early Middle Ages.⁷³ Orosius's depiction of the Sodom narrative became the definitive version, and it was his words rather than the words of scripture that were reproduced in the early medieval histories of Bede and Frechulf.⁷⁴ His decision to interpret the story in this way significantly strengthened the association of Sodom with homosexual acts.

THE SIN OF SODOM AND ROMANS 1:27: AUGUSTINE

In his early writings, Augustine's depiction of Sodom is not focused on homosexual sin. In his *Confessio*, for instance, Augustine sees the sin of Sodom as lying in "shameful acts against nature" (*flagitia contra naturam*).⁷⁵ The exact crime remains unmentioned; Mark Jordan is correct to point out that despite its later interpretations, this passage does not suggest homosexual sin.⁷⁶ As we have seen, the writings of Philo, Chrysostom, and Ambrose provided plenty of scope for crimes "against nature" performed by the Sodomites. In later writings, however, Augustine begins to depict the sin of Sodom in a more particular way. References to Romans 1:27, meanwhile, occur frequently in Augustine's writings throughout his life, although these references are sometimes obscured by the fact that he is wont to play around with the wording; he will sometimes, for instance, speak of "men with men, practicing [moral] deformity" (*masculi in masculos deformitatem operantes*), a phrasing that appears to be unique to him.⁷⁷ He links the sin of Sodom specifically with Romans 1:27 in three separate texts, all composed in the third decade of the fifth century: *Contra mendacium* (*Against Lying*, 420), book 16 of *De ciuitate Dei* (420), and *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* (*Unfinished Work against Julian*, 428–30).

The impetus for this change of approach can be traced to Augustine's early writing against his most trenchant Pelagian opponent, Julian of Eclanum.⁷⁸ The clash between Augustine and Julian was, among other things,

⁷² The *Historiae* were completed before the death of Gothic king Vallia in 418.

⁷³ Matthew Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 54–80.

⁷⁴ Bede, *In Genesis* 1, ed. Charles W. Jones, CCSL 118A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1967), 179; Frechulf, *Historiarum libri XII* 1.2.4, ed. Michael Allen, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis 169A (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 97.

⁷⁵ Augustine, *Confessio* 3.8, ed. James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions, A Text and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 29.

⁷⁶ Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 34.

⁷⁷ Augustine, *Contra Iulianum*, Patrologia Latina 44 (Paris: Migne, 1865), 789; Augustine, *De natura et gratia* 22.24, ed. Charles F. Urbani and Joseph Zycha, CSEL 60 (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1913), 250.

⁷⁸ For details of the clash between Augustine and Julian, see Dorothea Weber, "Some Literary Aspects of the Debate between Julian of Eclanum and Augustine," in *Studia Patristica Vol. XLIII: Papers Presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2003*, ed. F. Young, M. Edwards, and P. Parvis (Leuven: Peeters, 2006),

a clash between attitudes to sexuality. Augustine foregrounded sexual lust in Christian theology: it was a consequence of the Fall and an evil in and of itself. Julian argued against what he saw as Augustine's overly ascetic viewpoint. For Julian, the sexual drive could be managed by the will and was not an evil in itself as long as it was used for procreation—a view that was much more in keeping with Roman cultural tradition and, indeed, with pre-Augustinian Christian thought.⁷⁹ His views were highly objectionable to Augustine, who held that the “evil of lust” (*malum libidinis*), a phrase that Augustine uses again and again, was independent of the good use that marriage and procreation put it to. In one particular section of his *Ad Turbantium* (*To Turbantius*, written ca. 419), Julian brings in some scriptural references to argue his point. He quotes Romans 1:27 and notes that Paul speaks of men leaving the “natural use” of women in order to engage in sex with men; this shows, according to Julian, that sex with women is both natural and even commendable. He then brings in the narrative of Sodom, misquoting Ezekiel 16:49 to the effect that Sodom was destroyed for “fullness of bread and abundance of wine” (*saturitas panum et abundantia uini*). If one wishes to blame the Sodomites' corruption on the “vigor of their members” (*membra uigor*), he argues, one must also blame bread and wine, since they were also responsible for this corruption.⁸⁰ In other words, according to Julian's reading, the sin of Sodom is general excess rather than specifically sexual excess, and Augustine's obsession with the sexual aspect of Christian ethics leads him to go beyond what is written in scripture. In his reply, Augustine does not pay much attention at all to Julian's point about the real sin of Sodom, simply noting that bread and wine are not to be reprehended because some men are luxurious. However, from this point forward, Augustine begins to adopt the shorthand of talking about the sin of Sodom with reference to Romans 1:27. This idea was already abroad in the late antique world, but Augustine seems to have made a particular point of pushing this association. In yoking the sin of Sodom to Paul's edict against “unnatural” behaviors, he may have been making a statement against the teachings of Julian. Where Julian had sought to emphasize the point that the sin of Sodom was not just rooted in sexual excess, Augustine wished to push a different reading of the narrative, one that emphasized concupiscence as the reason for Sodom's punishment.

In *Contra mendacium*, composed in 420, Augustine discusses the Sodomites' desire for Lot's angelic visitors. He refers to Sodom as a place where “men with men inflamed with wicked lusts” (*masculi in masculos nefanda libidine accensi*) could not even find the door to the house where

289–302; and Peter Brown, “Sexuality and Society in the Fifth Century A.D.: Augustine and Julian of Eclanum,” in *Tria Corda: Scritti in onore di Arnaldo Momigliano*, ed. Emilio Gabba (Como: New Press, 1983).

⁷⁹ Brown, “Sexuality and Society.”

⁸⁰ Augustine, *De nuptiis* 2.19.34, ed. Urba and Zycha, 288.

the angels were residing.⁸¹ Though the wording in this quotation is not as clear as that of Gaudentius and Orosius, this is certainly a reference to Romans 1:27; “masculi in masculos” is a phrase not found outside of this context across Latin literature. Its use by Augustine in *Contra mendacium* is an important moment, as it represents the first time that the image from Romans 1:27 is combined with the idea that the men of Sodom wished to rape the angels.

In book 16 of *De ciuitate Dei*, composed in the same year, Augustine deploys similar imagery in a passing reference to Sodom. According to this book, Sodom is a place “where illicit intercourse with men thrived to an enormous extent” (ubi stupra in masculos in tantam consuetudinem conualuerant).⁸² This quotation has been much discussed in studies of Christian views of homosexuality. It has not before now been noted that Augustine is referencing Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. Again, while Augustine’s wording here differs from that of Paul, given the clear citations of Romans in Augustine’s other works, it is apparent that we should think of it as a rough paraphrase of Paul’s words.

The final reference is found in Augustine’s *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum*, which he was working on at his death in 430. This work was aimed once again at the teachings of Julian of Eclanum, and the question of Sodom’s sin comes up again. Julian had argued against the Augustinian concept of original sin because it was not mentioned in scripture. Augustine is dismissive of this argument. Does Julian also think that Sodom was therefore not destroyed, he wonders, because scripture does not mention their “crimes and parricidal sacrifices” (maleficia et parricidalia sacrificia) or that “they practiced obscenity, men with men” (masculi in masculos turpitudinem operabantur)?⁸³ By these last years of Augustine’s life, Sodom had become indelibly associated in his mind with the crimes described by Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. Note, however, that he still sees homosexual sin as a corollary of general excess—it can be used in conjunction with accusations of general crimes and “parricidal sacrifices.”

THE SIN OF SODOM AND ROMANS 1:27: THE *VISIO SANCTI PAULI*

Finally, we turn to the last of our texts: the *Visio sancti Pauli*. This apocryphal and extremely popular work enjoyed a long and complex history: it began life as a Greek work of the late fourth or early fifth century (its original form is no longer extant); this Greek text was then translated into Latin at

⁸¹ Augustine, *Contra mendacium* 17.34, ed. Joseph Zycha, CSEL 41 (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1900), 517.

⁸² Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* 16.30, ed. Dombart and Kalb, 535.

⁸³ Augustine, *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* 4.128, ed. M. Zelzer, CSEL 85.2 (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 2004), 152.

some point in the late fifth or early sixth century.⁸⁴ It is this Latin version of the *Visio* that concerns us here. It purports to depict a vision of hell experienced by Saint Paul, the author of the Epistle to the Romans. During this vision, Paul is shown the various groups of sinners in hell and the ways in which they are being punished. The punishments depicted are extremely specific, and a number are for sexual sins. For instance, Paul witnesses one group of men and women who are being punished for adultery—they are hanging by their eyebrows and hair over fire.⁸⁵ One group of sinners (both men and women) are in a pit of pitch and brimstone and are being carried along a river of fire. When Paul asks who they are he is told that they are those who committed “the impiety of Sodom and Gomorrah, men with men” (*impietas Sodome et Gomorre, masculi in masculos*).⁸⁶ In one variant of the text, there is a longer explanation of this impiety that integrates more of the language of Romans 1:27: the impiety involved “men with men practicing obscenity” (*masculi in masculos turpitudinem exercentes*).⁸⁷

One might question whether a similar statement was present in the early fifth-century Greek text from which the Latin translation sprung or whether this is an interpolation of the translator. This is impossible to answer definitively, as the original Greek text has been lost. However, we might note that this reference to Sodom is not present in the Greek epitomes of the *Visio* (also probably fifth century in date).⁸⁸ Neither is it found in the later medieval Latin translation, which appears to have been translated from the Greek independent of the first Latin translation, nor in the Coptic or Syriac versions, which are thought to be otherwise very close to the Greek original.⁸⁹ Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, puzzled by the absence of this sin from the Coptic version, has suggested that this punishment was purposefully

⁸⁴ On the dating of the text, see Theodore Silverstein, “The Date of the ‘Apocalypse of Paul,’” *Mediaeval Studies* 24 (1962): 335–48; Theodore Silverstein and Anthony Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions* (Geneva: Patrick Cramer, 1997), 12; Pierluigi Piovanelli, “Les origines de l’Apocalypse de Paul reconsidérées,” *Apocrypha* 4 (1993): 25–64; and Jan N. Bremmer, “Christian Hell: From the Apocalypse of Peter to the Apocalypse of Paul,” *Numen* 56, no. 2/3 (2009): 298–325, 305–7. The translation to be discussed here is L¹, the earliest and most popular Latin translation, which is reproduced in Silverstein and Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul*, 65–167.

⁸⁵ *Visio sancti Pauli* 39, ed. Silverstein and Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul*, 146–47.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 148–49.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁸⁸ The Greek epitomes are edited in Constantin von Tischendorf, *Apocalypses apocryphae Mosis, Esdrae, Pauli, Johannis, item Mariae Dormitio* (Leipzig: H. Mendelssohn, 1866), 34–69; Bertrand Bouvier and François Buvon, “Prière et Apocalypse de Paul: Un fragment grec inédit conservé au Sinäi; introduction, texte, traduction et notes,” *Apocrypha* 15 (2004): 9–30.

⁸⁹ This second translation, L², is reproduced in Silverstein and Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul*, 169–207. The Coptic and Syriac versions are edited in (respectively) E. A. Wallis Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London: British Museum, 1915); G. Ricciotti, “Apocalypsis Pauli syriace,” *Orientalia* 2 (1933): 1–25, 120–49.

omitted by the compiler of the Coptic text for reasons of censorship.⁹⁰ I would like to suggest instead that it is an addition of the Latin translator and was not present in the original Greek text from which the Coptic, Syriac, and later Latin translations and the Greek epitomes were derived. Jan Bremmer has already noted that the enumeration of sins and punishments in the Latin *Visio sancti Pauli* “shows signs of reworking by an author without great literary skills.”⁹¹ That the reference to Sodomites represents a rather ill-thought-out addition to the original is suggested by the fact that those being punished for crimes of “men with men” are described a few lines previously as a group consisting of both “men and women” (*uiros ac mulieres*)!⁹² I believe we can be relatively safe, then, in seeing this reference to Sodom as an interpolation of the late fifth-century Latin translator.

The suggested date of composition of the Greek original—in the late fourth or early fifth century—would place it before the publication of Orosius’s *Historiae* and before the writings of Augustine had popularized the idea that Sodom was to be associated with Romans 1:27. The Latin translation, on the other hand, written in the late fifth century or slightly later, would have doubtless been influenced by the writings of the bishop of Hippo, whose writings and teachings were widely disseminated throughout the Latin-speaking countries of the Mediterranean even before his death in 430.⁹³ Both Anthony Hilhorst and Jan Bremmer have noted that the *Visio sancti Pauli* betrays signs of having been composed in a monastic milieu.⁹⁴ This would make the author’s concern with “impietas Sodome et Gomorre,” therefore, and his framing of it in strictly homosexual terms unsurprising.⁹⁵ This monastic influence is evident in the earlier Greek text as well. However, only the Latin translator had access to the Augustinian image of Sodom as a place to be associated with Romans 1:27 and its depiction of “men with men, practicing obscenity.” The *Visio sancti Pauli* enjoyed a singular popularity during the Middle Ages, particularly in monastic circles, and it inspired a genre of vision literature—texts that purported to report on voyages to the afterlife—that thrived until the time of Dante.⁹⁶ No doubt its success helped strengthen the idea that the sin of Sodom was the same as that decried by Paul in Romans.

⁹⁰ Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, “The Coptic Apocalypse of Paul in MS OR 7023,” in *The Visio Pauli and the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and István Czachesz (Leuven, 2007), 158–97, 168.

⁹¹ Bremmer, “Christian Hell,” 309.

⁹² *Visio sancti Pauli* 39, ed. Silverstein and Hilhorst, 148–49.

⁹³ David Lambert, “Patterns of Augustine’s Reception, 430–c.700,” in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. Karla Pollmann, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1:15–23.

⁹⁴ Anthony Hilhorst, “The Apocalypse of Paul: Previous History and Afterlife,” in Bremmer and Czachesz, *The Visio Pauli*, 18–19; Bremmer, “Christian Hell,” 306–7.

⁹⁵ Bremmer, “Christian Hell,” 311.

⁹⁶ See Hilhorst, “Previous History and Afterlife,” 19–20nn44–45.

THE INVENTION OF "SODOMY"

To summarize, in a number of texts from the late fourth and fifth centuries we see a sudden trend toward the identification of the sin of Sodom with the sin proscribed by Paul in Romans 1:27. What can we say of the origin of this trend? It is possible that it owes its origin to a source that is no longer extant: the lost commentary on Romans written by Marius Victorinus, for instance, or an unknown early Latin translation of Philo. The earliest surviving text to make the link that we know of, however, is Gaudentius's *Tractatus*. Given the cultural climate in which Gaudentius wrote, it does not seem at all improbable that the link was an innovation of the bishop of Brescia. Orosius then either followed Gaudentius or came to the same conclusion independently; from there this interpretation of the sin of Sodom influenced Augustine and the Latin translator of the *Visio sancti Pauli*.

Why did this idea take hold? The path had already been laid out in many ways: Sodom was already associated with lust and sexual excess, as we have seen in the writings of Philo, Clement, Chrysostom, and Ambrose. Once the Sodom narrative became associated with *luxuria* and excess in worldly pleasures, sexual deviance would become part of the clutch of associations that an educated reader might make. Meanwhile, the image of male-male sexual intercourse as a violation of nature was established in a Christian context by Paul. Almost all early Christian discussion of the law of nature was centered on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and Paul's depiction of "unnatural" acts in that text would become the definitive image of breaking natural law in Christian discourse.⁹⁷ For late antique Christian writers, influenced both by Paul and by Stoic ideas, the image of "men with men practicing obscenity" was a potent metonym for excessive and decadent behaviors.

It would therefore be a misreading to claim that Gaudentius, Orosius, and Augustine were saying that sexual intercourse with men was the only association to be made with the sinfulness of the Sodomites. The examples of Philo and Paul show how male-male sex was not generally seen as a vice in particular need of admonishment so much as a symptom of wider debauchery and sexual excess. That this is also the case for these early Christian writers is suggested by the context of their own writings. Augustine, in particular, clearly sees Sodom as an image of worldly excess in general and not just *stupra in masculos*. Orosius, in his *Historiae*, explicitly connected Sodom with Rome (the sack of Rome in 410 was a similar punishment from God), but he was not seeking to imply that the Romans were deserving of punishment for male-male sex so much as for their paganism and other sins.⁹⁸ In his depiction of the corrupt emperor Nero, we see how Orosius viewed sexual intercourse with men as but one symptom of a more general

⁹⁷ See n. 48.

⁹⁸ Orosius, *Historiae* 7.39.18, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, 3:117.

kind of moral depravity.⁹⁹ In linking the sin of Sodom with Romans 1:27, therefore, these writers were not seeking to formulate a radical new reading of the Sodom narrative but were providing a kind of shorthand for the excesses of the Sodomites that had already been well established.

We can best demonstrate that this is the case by examining the works of those writers who followed shortly after. In the fifth-century epic poem *De Sodoma* (*On Sodom*), for instance, there is no mention of a sexual element to Sodom's sin; instead, the general excessive luxury of the Sodomites is chastised.¹⁰⁰ The writings of Gregory the Great depict Sodom being punished for "crimes of the flesh" (*scelera carnis*) and illicit sexual desire, but he does not specifically home in on male-male intercourse.¹⁰¹ Despite his familiarity with Augustine and Orosius, Gregory still understands the crime of Sodom to be general sexual excess, not specifically homosexual sin. In the sixth century, the British moralist Gildas would adapt the reading of history found in Orosius and apply it to British history. At one point in his *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* (*On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain*), the Britons experience a bountiful period of prosperity and inevitably succumb to *luxuria*. Gildas, like Orosius, deploys a reference to a Pauline epistle to illustrate the depths of the Britons' depravity.¹⁰² Rather than quote from Romans 1:27, however, Gildas invokes a different biblical verse, 1 Corinthians 5:1, which decries a very specific form of adultery: "It is absolutely heard, that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as the like is not among the heathens; that one should have his father's wife." It is clear from context that Gildas meant to paint the Britons as indulging in general sexual excess, not just the very specific crime of sex with their fathers' wives. The reference to 1 Corinthians 5:1 here functions synecdochically, as a symbol of excess and moral degradation. Elsewhere in that work, Gildas deploys the image of Sodom as a generalized symbol of depravity and worldly excess. It has not yet become a symbol of homosexual acts, though it has certainly come to strongly imply sexual excess.

The *Visio sancti Pauli* is different from the other texts. In the *Visio*'s precise and detailed breakdown of different kinds of crimes and their punishments, the specific link between Sodom and "men with men practicing obscenity" begins to harden. Where Gaudentius, Orosius, and Augustine,

⁹⁹ Orosius, *Historiae* 7.7, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, 3:32–35. See also J. Roger Dunkle, "The Rhetorical Tyrant in Roman Historiography: Sallust, Livy and Tacitus," *Classical World* 65, no. 1 (September 1971): 12–20; and Tamsyn Barton, "The *inventio* of Nero: Suetonius," in *Reflections of Nero: Culture, History and Representation*, ed. Jas Elsner and Jamie Masters (London: Duckworth, 1994), 48–63.

¹⁰⁰ *De Sodoma* 42–50, ed. Luca Morisi, *Versus de Sodoma: introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento* (Bologna: Pàtron Editore, 1993), 48–50.

¹⁰¹ Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob* 14.19, ed. Mark Adriaen, CCSL 143A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971), 711.

¹⁰² *De excidio Britanniae* 21.2, ed. Michael Winterbottom, *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 1978), 96.

in my reading, were not necessarily speaking of homosexual acts as the only crime committed by the Sodomites, the Latin redactor of the *Visio sancti Pauli* articulates a fixed cosmic order of sin and consequent punishment in which the impiety of Sodom and Gomorrah is to be associated very specifically with the sin depicted in Romans 1:27. The *Visio* thus cements male-male sex as *the* sin of the Sodomites rather than *a* sin. As the product of a monastic environment, this change in the text is perhaps unsurprising; it represents changed priorities in a world very different from the classically tinged intellectual environment in which Gaudentius, Orosius, and Augustine developed their thinking.

We can even point to an example, from soon after the *Visio*, of how the Sodom-Romans paradigm had begun to influence the sexual mores of the world beyond the monastery. The emperor Justinian (527–65), in a series of laws issued over the course of his reign, legislated against men who slept with men.¹⁰³ He did so in language that should by now be familiar. One body of Justinianic laws, the *Institutae Iustiniani*, mentions the very Augustinian category of “those who dare to exercise their abominable lust with men” (eos qui cum masculis infandam libidinem exercere audent).¹⁰⁴ More importantly, another collection of laws, the *Novellae Constitutiones*, speaks of “men with men, practicing obscenity” (ἄρσενες ἐν ἄρσεσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι; mares cum maribus turpitudinem perpetrantes).¹⁰⁵ It explicitly declares that it was this behavior that brought about the ruin of Sodom.¹⁰⁶ It is the first example of a text not written by a churchman that links Sodom with Romans 1:27. We can profitably compare these laws with Theodosius’s edict of 390, described previously. Justinian, unlike his predecessor, is no longer concerned with older Roman ideas about effeminization and sexual roles. His laws instead articulate a different moral framework: God will punish those who, like the Sodomites, engage in sex with other men. Both participants are now implicated, not just the passive or the penetrated.¹⁰⁷ In Byzantium, Justinian’s law codes would remain in effect for centuries. In the Latin West, they were less influential (particularly the *Novellae*), but they stand as a good example of how the language used

¹⁰³ For discussions of this issue, see Boswell, *Christianity*, 171–72; and Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 142–49.

¹⁰⁴ Institutae 4.14.4, ed. Theodor Mommsen and Paul Krüger, *Corpus iuris civilis* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1872), 1:55.

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Smith notes that this “is a virtual quotation of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans” (“Agathias and Paul the Silentiary: Erotic Epigram and the Sublimation of Same-Sex Desire in the Age of Justinian,” in Masterson, Rabinowitz, and Robson, *Sex in Antiquity*, 501). This *Novella* was written originally in Greek; the Greek text hews close to Romans 1:27, but the Latin translator does not appear to have understood the reference being made and so wanders further from the language of scripture.

¹⁰⁶ *Novellae* 141, ed. Theodor Mommsen and Paul Krüger, *Corpus iuris civilis* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), 3:704.

¹⁰⁷ Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 142–43.

to talk about sexual misdemeanors could change under the influence of works of biblical interpretation.

Even after this, however, there was no blanket change in the way the sin of Sodom was read. In the early Middle Ages, it continued to be understood in a variety of ways.¹⁰⁸ While texts like medieval penitentials (written in monastic contexts) probably had male-male anal intercourse in mind when they mentioned the crime of Sodom, the term retained a broader meaning. For Hincmar of Reims in the ninth century, *sodomia* meant any kind of sex *contra naturam* that wasted semen.¹⁰⁹ The *Visio Wettini* (*Vision of Wetti*) by the ninth-century abbot Heito is often discussed in relation to its depiction of the “crime of Sodom” (*scelus sodomiticum*) and is clearly influenced by the *Visio sancti Pauli* in this regard.¹¹⁰ Yet Heito uses the term *scelus sodomiticum* as a catch-all for any kind of lustful act outside of procreative sex with one’s wife.¹¹¹ This multiplicity of meaning held true through the Renaissance and even into the nineteenth century.¹¹²

This evolution of interpretations of the sin of Sodom followed the overall evolution of the term *luxuria*, which, as we have seen, came to refer more and more to specifically sexual excess but kept its original meaning of general excess well into the early modern period. We should be wary, therefore, of depicting any one text as a paradigm-shifting game-changer that immediately redefined the associations surrounding the imagery of Sodom. Yet it is clear that the primary connotations of the Sodom narrative, as well as the boundaries of possible interpretations, did change over time. The sin of Sodom meant something very different in the world of ninth-century monasticism, for instance, from what it meant in the fifth century, and although Heito’s definition of *scelus sodomiticum* was broad, his concern with same-sex relations in a monastic context shines through.¹¹³ Two centuries after Heito, the Italian monk and theologian Peter Damian would be very specific about the kinds of activity he had in mind when speaking of the “Sodomitic vice”: masturbation, mutual masturbation,

¹⁰⁸ On the later history of “sodomy,” see Olsen, *Of Sodomites*, 13–46; Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*; and R. Mills, *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁹ Hincmar, *De Divortio Lotharii Regis et Theutbergae Reginae* 4.1.12, ed. Letha Böhringer, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Concilia* 4.1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1992), 181.

¹¹⁰ Richard Kay, “Charlemagne in Hell,” in *Law as Profession and Practice in Medieval Europe: Essays in Honor of James A. Brundage*, ed. Kenneth Pennington and Melodie Harris Eichbauer (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 293–326; Albrecht Diem, “Teaching Sodomy in a Carolingian Monastery: A Study of Walahfrid Strabo’s and Heito’s *Visio Wettini*,” *German History* 34, no. 3 (September 2016): 385–401.

¹¹¹ Heito, *Visio Wettini* 19, ed. Ernst Dümmler, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae* 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1884), 272.

¹¹² Olsen, *Of Sodomites*, 13–15.

¹¹³ Diem, “Teaching Sodomy.”

interfemoral intercourse, and anal intercourse.¹¹⁴ Though he was doubtless aware of the multiplicity of meaning attached to the sin of Sodom in traditional Christian literature, Damian—driven by the circumstances of his own day and particularly the kinds of sexual sins that he identified in the contemporary church—spoke of “sodomia” as male-male sexual activity almost exclusively.¹¹⁵

To conclude, let me briefly recap the steps that brought about this very particular reading of the narrative of Sodom. In the first century CE, Philo grafted the Sodom narrative to Greco-Roman ideas about corrupting *luxuria*; the sexual excess of the Sodomites then became a popular theme among those who came after him. Centuries later, Gaudentius, Orosius, and Augustine would popularize an association between Sodomitic sin and Paul’s depiction of homosexual acts in his Epistle to the Romans. Then the Latin redactor of the *Visio sancti Pauli* would make the same connection, but in a new context that implied a direct parallel between the sin of Sodom and the sin of Romans 1:27. Although it took a long time, this particular reading would become popular in the monastic world in which the *Visio sancti Pauli* circulated. Once this reading had become established, Gaudentius, Orosius, and Augustine could be read retrospectively as endorsing this same interpretation. By a series of small steps over centuries, Sodom would become indelibly associated with “sodomy.”

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¹¹⁴ Conrad Leyser, “Cities of the Plain: The Rhetoric of Sodomy in Peter Damian’s Book of Gomorrah,” *Romanic Review* 86, no. 2 (March 1995): 193.

¹¹⁵ For discussion of Peter Damian and his importance in the history of the concept of sodomy, see Leyser, “Cities of the Plain”; Michael D. Barbezat, “Bodies of Spirit and Bodies of Flesh: The Significance of the Sexual Practices Attributed to Heretics from the Eleventh to the Fourteenth Century,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 25, no. 3 (September 2016): 398–402; Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 45–66.