

The first stage in my research process began fall quarter 2017, in a history class I was taking on the Ottoman Empire. We were assigned a reading on sexuality, after which I was very intrigued by how different it seemed to the way we perceive sexuality in the modern world, so I decided that I wanted to do more research on the topic. The first step I took was to go talk to my professor in office hours. We first talked about the scope of the field which allowed me to narrow my interest down into the single topic of homoeroticism in the context of a one sex system in the early Ottoman Empire. We decided to begin with five secondary sources to give a general depth of field on the topic. The first book I read was *The Age of Beloveds* by Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpakli. I selected this one because a three-page excerpt from it had been the original reading that piqued my interest in the topic, and after discussing it with my professor we agreed that it was a good general resource and that it represented a lot of the modern trends in how scholarship was addressing the topic. This book also turned out to be especially helpful, because one of the biggest barriers to researching this topic is that most of the primary sources are not translated into English yet and this book contained translations of poems, court cases and literature.

The other four books we agreed on for secondary sources were intended to give a range of different approaches to the topic. *Producing Desire* by Dror Ze'evi represented an overview of the medical analysis of sexuality, some legal dialogue, and European and Ottoman travel accounts. *Islamicate Sexualities* by Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi represented a broader approach to the topic, and focused on case studies from the Spain, France, Venice, the Ottoman Empire, Iran, etc, from approximately 1400 up until the 1950s. *Before Homosexuality in the Arabic-Islamic World* by Khaled El-Rouayheb was another overall discussion of the topic, and provided an overarching discussion, that covered many of the same topics as *The Age of Beloveds* but from a different perspective. The last

book was *Homosexuality in Islam* by Scott Kugle, which offered a historical and modern religious perspective.

I read those books over the first 5 weeks of winter quarter and discussed them with my professor. All five of them had been published after 2000 by scholars who are well known in the field of Middle Eastern and Ottoman history, except for *Islamicate Sexualities* which is an edited volume on the topic and instead offered a picture from many different locations such as Spain, France, Egypt, Venice, the Ottoman Empire, modern Iraq which gave a good footing to understand a variety of perspectives from a large period of time.

*Producing Desire*, *The Age of Beloveds*, and *Before Homosexuality* served as one of the most substantial platform of my research. From the broader perspective of having discussed the topic with my professor and having read several different perspectives in *Islamicate Sexualities* it seemed like these three works were attempts at reexamining evidence that had in the past been left unread, disregarded as “corrupt” or “pornographic” or mistranslated which had caused homoerotic trends in the Ottoman Empire to be overlooked by scholarship, or ignored because of an aversion to the topic. They also offered a lot of material that had been translated from Turkish which served as the bulk of my primary source material. They were, for the most part, in agreement and offered arguments that were complementary to each other. The place that they diverged was over the topic of the origins of homoerotic behavior. El- Rouayheb argued against the accessibility hypothesis which the other two works had mentioned. Ze’evi, and Andrews and Kalpakli presented several possible origins, including the accessibility hypothesis which El-Rouayheb refuted. For the most part these three works dealt with the issue carefully, and with a consciousness of the modern social, political and historical dialogue on the topic.

*Homosexuality in Islam* was the outlier to the group, it used history as an approach to make a modern-day argument for the acceptability of homosexuality in Islam. The way it

categorized the past and interpreted some of the evidence showed a bias for certain modern thought that got superimposed on sexuality, for instance he argued that we should understand homoerotic trends from the perspective of looking at how other cultures view what we now know to be a binary system, rather than attempting to assume a historical perspective like other authors such as Kalpakli and Andrews had. Even though I didn't end up using his work in my essay, the way he presented liberation theology and attempted to "liberate" the Qur'an helped me to better understand how this topic pertains to the modern world and the religious dialogue on the topic, which in the past was part of the reason why many works were left untranslated, or were branded as pornographic or unrepresentative of Ottoman culture. He also did a good job of compiling old legal rulings, hadith, and other religious documents. He also meticulously evaluated historical author's biases, and did a great deal of work placing them into the historical context of their own time.

After becoming comfortable with these five sources as the foundation for my understanding of scholarship on homoeroticism in the Ottoman Empire, I felt comfortable expanding out into a wider variety of resources. The next set of readings were various articles from the authors whose books I had just read and articles that my professor recommended. Through my professor, I was also able to contact some of the authors whose articles I had read and ask them for more material that they thought was relevant for the topic. This how I found the articles by Selim Kuru, Algar Hamid and Atcil Adburrahman. These were from academic journals and focused on analyzing one piece of literature, which they also translated into English, which provided me with both primary resources, and current academic thinking on the topic.

After this round of research, I decided that I wanted change directions a bit and make my new focus a cross cultural comparison and see what trends would be revealed. In *Islamicate Sexualities* there had been a reference to how some of these trends were present in

Spain, and was suggestive that they were happening among the clergy. To find resources on this topic I tried various key word searches on a few historical databases like Worldcat and Jstor, I checked the footnotes from *Islamic Sexualities* and contacted a professor of Spanish history who I was taking a class with. I was not able to find any substantial resources from the databases, the footnotes from the book led to a short essay on literary analysis of Don Quixote but nothing further, and my professor said she was not aware of any sources on the topic, so I decided to try and search in a different region.

Next, my professor suggested that I look into homoeroticism in China so we repeated the same process. Sources for this topic were a lot easier to find, Jstor and Worldcat came up with several results just from searching “homoeroticism” and his colleague gave some recommended articles and books which were all relevant to the topic. I started reading the material but it seemed to be too much of a stretch to connect the two trends aside from trying to make an argument about more universalized trends which I wasn’t comfortable doing.

Because of Kugel’s religious take on the topic, I thought religion might be a good area to look into, so I contacted one of my professors in the religious studies department, and she recommended a book on the development of *Western Sexualities*. This book had a reference to the growing of the moustache in Roman culture being symbolic of the end of the time where it was permissible to have homoerotic relationships, which reminded me of a similar trend I had learned about in the Ottoman Empire. This connection was also one that had not been suggested by any of the sources I had read, so I decided that was where I wanted to take my argument next. In order to make this connection, I needed more primary sources on Ottoman literature, and sources on the Greco-Roman world. I contacted the subject librarian for Classics and Middle Eastern studies, and with the help of my professor contacted one of his colleagues in the classics department. From them I got several book recommendations, and after discussing them, settled on *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*, by Marilyn B.

Skinner. I selected this one because it seemed to be the most comprehensive overview, it was a fairly recent publication, and the professor from the classics department had recommended it as one of the best works on Greco-Roman sexuality available. Her work also provided a lot of stories and literature translated into English which I was able to use as a point of comparison with the Ottoman sources.