IN AN ANALYSIS THAT PROMISES TO BE CONTROVERSIAL, 
Man to Man: Desire, Homosociality, and Authority in Late-Roman Manhood surveys the presence of same-sex desire 
between men in the later Roman empire. Most accounts of 
recent years have either noted that sexual desire between 
men was forbidden or they have ignored it. This book argues 
that desire between men was known and that it was a way 
to express friendship, patronage, solidarity, and other impor-
tant relationships among elite males in late antiquity. The 
evocation of this desire and its possible attendant corporeal 
satisfactions made it a compelling metaphor for friendship. 
A man’s grandeur could also be portrayed metaphorically as 
sexual attractiveness, and the substantial status differences 
often seen in late antiquity could be ameliorated by a superior 
using amatory language to address an inferior.

At the same time, however, there was a marked ambiva-
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lence about same-sex desire and sexual behavior between 
men, and indeed same-sex sexual behavior was criminalized 
as it had never been before. While rejection and condemna-
tion may seem to indicate a decisive distancing between au-
thority and this desire and behavior, authority gained power 
from maintaining a relation to them. Demonstrating knowl-
edge of the actual mechanics of sex between men suggested 
to a witness that there was nothing unknown to the authority 
making the demonstration: authority that knew of scandal-
ous masculine sexual pleasure could project its power pretty 
much anywhere.

This startling dissonance between positive uses of same-
sex desire between men and its criminalization in one and the 
same moment—a dissonance which recent discussions have 
been unable to address—requires further investigation, and 
this book supplies it.

“Masterson has written something bold and provocative. 
Something important is being said, and a debate needs to take 
place about this mode of reading and these questions. Even those 
who want to disagree with it will be forced to think hard about 
their own positions.”

Erik Gunderson, professor of Classics, University of Toronto

“MARK MASTERS
is senior lecturer of Classics at Victoria University of 
Wellington, New Zealand.

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