



Islanders seek to reclaim term 'Lesbian'

Court has been asked to draw line between Lesbos natives and gay women

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ATHENS, Greece - A Greek court has been asked to draw the line between the natives of the Aegean Sea island of Lesbos and the world's gay women.

Three islanders from Lesbos — home of the ancient poet Sappho, who praised love between women — have taken a gay rights group to court for using the word lesbian in its name.

One of the plaintiffs said Wednesday that the name of the association, Homosexual and Lesbian Community of Greece, "insults the identity" of the people of Lesbos, who are also known as Lesbians.

"My sister can't say she is a Lesbian," said Dimitris Lambrou. "Our geographical designation has been usurped by certain ladies who have no connection whatsoever with Lesbos," he said.

The three plaintiffs are seeking to have the group barred from using "lesbian" in its name and filed a lawsuit on April 10. The other two plaintiffs are women.

Also called Mytilene, after its capital, Lesbos is famed as the birthplace of Sappho. The island is a favored holiday destination for gay women, particularly the lyric poet's reputed home town of Eressos.

"This is not an aggressive act against gay women," Lambrou said. "Let them visit Lesbos and get married and whatever they like. We just want (the group) to remove the word lesbian from their title."

He said the plaintiffs targeted the group because it is the only officially registered gay group in Greece to use the word lesbian in its name. The case will be heard in an Athens court on June 10.

'Lesbians for thousands of years'

Sappho lived from the late 7th to the early 6th century B.C. and is considered one of the greatest poets of antiquity. Many of her poems, written in the first person and intended to be accompanied by music, contain passionate references to love for other women.

Lambrou said the word lesbian has only been linked with gay women in the past few decades. "But we have been Lesbians for thousands of years," said Lambrou, who publishes a small magazine on ancient Greek religion and technology that frequently criticizes the Christian Church.

Very little is known of Sappho's life. According to some ancient accounts, she was an aristocrat who married a rich merchant and had a daughter with him. One tradition says that she killed herself by jumping off a cliff over an unhappy love affair.

Lambrou says Sappho was not gay. "But even if we assume she was, how can 250,000 people of Lesbian descent — including women — be considered homosexual?"

The Homosexual and Lesbian Community of Greece could not be reached for comment.

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