

EUNUCHS AND SEX:
BEYOND SEXUAL DICHOTOMY IN THE ROMAN WORLD

A Dissertation
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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MAY 2014

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EUNUCHS AND SEX:
BEYOND SEXUAL DICHOTOMY IN THE ROMAN WORLD

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To my parents, for all their support, and never asking “A Classics degree? What on earth are you going to do with that?”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Doctor Ray Marks for his guidance throughout the entire process of writing this dissertation from beginning to end, for his encouragement, valuable criticism, and for making the sometimes seemingly opaque and mysterious university procedures clearer. In addition, I would like to thank the other members of my committee: Doctor Dan Hooley, Doctor Mary Jo Neitz, Doctor Dennis Trout, and Doctor Barbara Wallach for their comments and suggestions, making this final revision better than it otherwise would have been.

I also would like to acknowledge my proof reader, science consultant, and father, biologist Doctor Peter Rowlands. Also Doctor Nancy Wonders, who pointed me to critical books on feminist research and gender studies very early on, when this dissertation was just a glimmer in my eye, and Doctor Marilyn Skinner who advised the MA thesis from which many ideas in this dissertation germinated. I would also like to thank Doctor Shaun Tougher for encouraging me to pursue my newly burgeoning interest in eunuchs during a brief meeting (but for me very memorable) when I was only a recent BA graduate. And last but not least, Doctor Cynthia Kosso for inspiring me to pursue studies in classics in the first place.

This dissertation would be all the poorer without their assistance and support. All remaining errors and flaws are my own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
The Social Construction of Biological Sex	3
Survey of Scholarship on Eunuchs in Antiquity.....	8
Across Space and Time	19
Summary.....	20
Chapter Two: Biological Sex in Greece and Rome	22
Sex As Metamorphosis: From Aristotle to Twentieth Century Embryology.....	26
Biological Sex in the Roman Empire	35
Biological Sex and Society.....	41
Summary.....	48
Chapter Three: Prepubescent Castration	50
An Overview of Castration (The How, When, and Why of Castration and the Eunuch Slave Trade).....	52
The Sex and Gender of Eunuch Slaves.....	59
Eunuchs Compared to Desirable Boys	62
Eunuchs Compared to Women.....	65
Eunuchs as a Category of Their Own	68
Eunuchs and the Preternatural.....	74
Can a Eunuch Also Be a Man?.....	78
Summary.....	84

Chapter Four: Self Castration and <i>Cinaedi</i>	85
A Brief History of the Cult of the Great Mother	87
The Initiates of the Great Mother: Who were castrated and how?	90
Sex and Bodies of Self-castrated Eunuch Initiates.....	94
<i>Galli</i> and <i>Cinaedi</i> : the bodies of gender deviants	99
Roman Attitudes towards Eunuchs of the Great Mother.....	104
Summary.....	112
Chapter Five: Eunuch Eroticism	115
Eunuch Slaves and Freedmen	116
Eunuchs Initiates.....	126
Analysis of Martial epigram 9.2	130
Summary.....	135
Chapter Six: Conclusion	137
Works Cited.....	141
VITA.....	148

Chapter One: Introduction

Alfred Kinsey wrote in his seminal study of human sexuality that, “It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects.”¹ Through empirical research, Kinsey proved that the cultural construction of the dichotomous categories of heterosexual and homosexual do not accurately reflect the range of actual human desire. In short, he brought attention to the discrepancy between sexual behavior and the societal interpretation and categorization of sexual behavior, a categorization so thoroughly imbedded in the social consciousness that it had previously been thought to be natural rather than cultural.

Academics in a wide variety of disciplines generally accept this basic premise as it applies to human sexuality. Classicist David Halperin, for example, uses the phrase “the dark days before the Kinsey Reports” to describe a gynecological text published in 1943, marking Kinsey’s work as a pivotal moment in the study of sex and sexuality, as if the world of sexuality research can be divided into BK (before Kinsey) and AK (after Kinsey).² There is some quibbling about the exact nature of the continuum of sexuality, how many different axes ought be included and of what kind,³ but the question of whether or not human sexual orientation comes in two and only two discreet categories—heterosexual and homosexual—is considered settled with Kinsey and his concept of a

¹ Alfred Kinsey, et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1948), 639.

² David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 142.

³ For example, Dr. Fritz Klein’s orientation grid, as laid out in his book *The Bisexual Option* (Philadelphia: Haworth Press, 1978).

continuum on the winning side. The phrase “Kinsey scale” is even fairly well known outside academia and has filtered into the wider cultural consciousness.

In the 1980s, this social constructionist view of sexuality gained further academic support across disciplines with Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*. Where Kinsey took a scientific, empirical approach, Foucault came at the problem from the direction of poststructuralist philosophy and history. Although Foucault’s work on sexuality received some criticism, particularly for the near-invisibility of women in his volumes,⁴ his principle that sexuality is culturally constructed and historically situated, as evidenced by the presentation of sexuality in historical sources, has remained the dominant framework in classical scholarship on ancient sexuality.

Kinsey’s premise that the living world in **each and every one of its aspects** is a continuum has gained only a little traction when it comes to the matter of interpreting bodies themselves, however, and not just what bodies do with other bodies. Both academics and laypersons still, for the most part, hold to a dichotomous system of biological sex. There are males and there are females. Discrete categories, the very sort of thing that Kinsey states nature rarely deals with.

Therefore, this dissertation is an exploration of the categories of biological sex in the Roman world. If the discrete categories are a social artifact imposed upon nature’s variety, then different societies ought to show evidence of different ways of defining and understanding the categories. Thus, this work hinges on the premise that the definition of sex in the Roman world is not the same as it is in our time, and therefore is a topic worthy of study, even though at first glance concepts such as “male” and “female” seem obvious and universal. This is not, of course, to say that the Romans had no concept of male or

⁴ See Amy Richlin, “Zeus and Metis: Foucault, Feminism, and Classics,” *Helios* 18 (1991): 160-180.

female, but that the physical criteria for categorization, and even the number of possible categories themselves, are different from our own. A person we would place confidently in the category “man,” or “male,” does not necessarily have a place in the Roman category of *vir*.

Eunuchs, with their altered genitals, demonstrate well the flexible and impermanent quality of masculinity and maleness in the Roman mind. Therefore, in my dissertation, I pay particular attention the representation of eunuchs in the Roman world, especially the ways in which authors and artists interpret their bodies and ascribe sex and gender to them. In addition, I will touch upon other ambiguously bodied and ambiguously gendered persons, particularly the concept of the *cinaedus*.

The Social Construction of Biological Sex

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the words gender and sex have been used interchangeably since the late 14th century.⁵ The concept, if not the technical vocabulary, of distinguishing gender from sex appears at least as early as 1949 in Simone de Beauvoir’s famous statement that “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.”⁶ From de Beauvoir, second

⁵ "gender, n." OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com> (accessed October 06, 2011).

⁶ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Bantam, 1961 reprint), 249. Whereas second wave feminists use her words to create a separation of sex and gender, one biological, one cultural, third wave feminists interpret this same quote to say that sex, too, is constructed. The quote continues, “In so far as he exists in and for himself, the child would hardly be able to think of himself as sexually differentiated. ...The dramas of birth and of weaning unfold after the same fashion for nurslings of both sexes; these have the same interest and the same pleasures; sucking is at first the source of their most agreeable sensations; then they go through an anal phase in which they get their greatest satisfactions from the excretory

wave feminists developed the separation of gender and sex. The modern terminology separating sex as biological and gender as social is associated particularly with Ann Oakley's 1972 book *Sex, Gender, and Society*, wherein she states, "Sex differences may be 'natural', but gender differences have their source in culture."⁷ The distinction between sex and gender shows up even earlier, in A. Comfort's *Sex in Society*. "The gender role learned by the age of two years is for most individuals almost irreversible, even if it runs counter to the physical sex of the subject."⁸

The initial blurring of terms reflects a social belief that, as Freud states, "anatomy is destiny"⁹ where the body determines behavior and social roles, so a clear distinction between sex and gender wasn't necessary. Sex and gender were both deemed equally natural and inescapable expressions of human difference. Second wave feminism, however, was invested in challenging and breaking apart the assumption that one's sex determined one's life, and so gender acquired the specialized meaning of the phenomena that arises from the cultural interpretation of natural, biological sex. Third wave feminism, however, is slowly collapsing the terms again, with some theorists arguing that *both* sex and gender are culturally constructed.

Although more recent theorists argue that there is no meaningful difference between sex and gender, for the purposes of this dissertation it is useful to make a distinction between the social construction that is believed to be biological (sex) and the

functions, which they have in common. Their genital development is analogous; they explore their bodies with the same curiosity and the same indifference; from clitoris and penis they derive the same vague pleasure." In other words, children are assigned a sex by society even while they are physiologically barely different, thus showing the strongly cultural aspect of the categories.

⁷ Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender, and Society*, (London: Temple Smith, 1972).

⁸ A. Comfort, *Sex in Society*, (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1963), 42.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex* (1924) in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. 19, translated by James Strachey, 173-182, (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 178.

social construction that is generally accepted to be social (gender), as my project is based on specifically challenging the former. When I refer to sex, then, I am referring to the set of physical, bodied characteristics that a society considers meaningful and relevant to creating sex categories, and to those categories themselves.

West and Zimmerman contributed two major ideas to the scholarly discussion of sex and gender in their 1987 article “Doing Gender.” The first idea is that gender is not static or a social marker that once determined is more or less fixed. Rather, gender is ongoing. It is constantly acted and reenacted by each individual as a social requirement. In their own words, “...gender [is] a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment. We contend that the ‘doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production.”¹⁰

West and Zimmerman also created a new terminology to recognize a distinction between biological sex of the body itself and biological sex as perceived and categorized by people within a social context. The latter concept they called *sex category*. They state that “[s]ex is a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying personas as females or males....Placement in a *sex category* is achieved through application of the sex criteria, but in everyday life, categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one’s membership in one or the other category. In this sense, one’s sex category presumes one’s sex and stands as proxy for it in many situations, but sex and sex category can vary independently.”¹¹ In short, since the biological markers that are typically assumed to be the most irrefutable determiners of sex, namely chromosome type

¹⁰ Candice West and Don H. Zimmerman “Doing Gender,” *Gender and Society* 1 (1987): 126.

¹¹ West and Zimmerman (1987), 127.

and genitalia, are unknown in most social situations, sex is also unknown. Sex category—in essence the display of visible, socially determined markers of sex—indicates sex in everyday interactions without *being* sex. In their schema, sex is biology, sex category is identifying markers to indicate a particular biology, and gender is the sum of socially determined activities performed by each individual.

Biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling takes this one step further and argues that even the biological reality of human sex is not as simple as a male and female dichotomy. In her book, *Sexing the Body*, she argues that “labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision.”¹² Although our categories of sex are based on biological criteria, biology is interpreted through a social lens. “We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decisions, but only our beliefs about gender—not science—can define our sex. Furthermore, our beliefs about gender affect what kinds of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place.”¹³ In addition, she points out that biology itself is not static. “...[O]rganisms, human and otherwise—are active processes, moving targets, from fertilization until death.”¹⁴ The body reacts and changes according to the circumstances in which it finds itself. The brain in particular is extraordinarily plastic. Thus, the very act of interpreting the body and creating social categories can affect human biology in subtle ways.

A decade prior, historian Thomas Laqueur postulated that until the seventeenth century, a one-sex system reigned, where the proper human body was male, and the female body—rather than being construed as the opposite sex—was a distorted version of

¹² Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: gender politics and the construction of sexuality*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 10.

¹³ Fausto-Sterling (2000), 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 235.

the same sex. He writes, “[i]nstead of being divided by their reproductive anatomies, the sexes are linked by a common one. Women, in other words, are inverted, and hence less perfect, men. They have exactly the same organs but in exactly the wrong places.”¹⁵

Biological theories of the perfect male body and the imperfect female body thus served as metaphors for the then more important categories of gender and social position. “To be a man or a woman was to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to *be* organically one or the other of two incommensurable sexes. Sex before the seventeenth century, in other words, was still a sociological and not an ontological category.”¹⁶

Also in 1990, Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble*, which has become the most influential philosophical feminist work on the social construction of sex. Butler argued that sex, like gender, is a culturally and socially constructed phenomenon. She writes, “if the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.”¹⁷ The apparent naturalness of sex is created through and exists in the form of repeated actions, what Butler calls performativity. Sex is not what one is but the accretion of what one does. Through the culturally required repeated actions, a social reality of sex comes into being. “Collectively considered, the repeated practice of naming sexual difference has created the appearance of natural division. The “naming” of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, an institutionalized performative that both

¹⁵ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1990), 26.

¹⁶ Laqueur (1990), 8.

¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (1990, repr. New York: Routledge, 2008), 9-10.

creates and legislates social reality by requiring the discursive/perceptual construction of bodies in accord with principles of sexual difference”¹⁸

The English translation of Michel Foucault’s of *The History of Sexuality*, which explored the social construction of sexuality, was published only one year before West and Zimmerman’s article “Doing Gender,” and four years before Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*. Nevertheless, while constructionism quickly became a hot topic of debate among classicists who studied gender and sexuality, the constructionist nature of sex itself remains largely unexplored. The field of classics has produced a great deal of scholarship on the social production of gender, but very little has been said on the social production of sex. As Fausto-Sterling states, however, the separations between physical actions versus biological form, between the cultural traditions surrounding gendered behavior versus the cultural traditions surrounding how bodies are interpreted, are not so clear cut. For a person, being born a human male or a human female is not a biological given; the definition of the categories that constitute sex, in regards to human bodies, is mediated by culture.¹⁹

Survey of Scholarship on Eunuchs in Antiquity

While eunuchs have recently become a growing topic of research, the current scholarship focuses primarily on eunuchs’ political or religious roles, and there is no

¹⁸ Butler (2008), 157.

¹⁹ I specify *human* male and *human bodies* here because there are scientific definitions of “male” and “female” that are not so culturally weighted. To say that a gamete, whether of a plant or a dog or a human, is male or female has a specific technical definition describing the form and function of the gamete. To expand that term to encompass the whole of a human body, however, is fraught with problems, specifically the wide variety of physical criteria used to designate a person as “male” or “female” and the inconsistencies that can arise between those criteria within one body. I will discuss this in detail in chapter two.

study that deals thoroughly and at length with the social construction of the sex of eunuchs in the ancient world. The paucity of studies on eunuchs, and, more broadly, on the cultural construction of sex in general, shows that there is a scholarly gap to be filled. My intent is to produce a work of scholarship that addresses these issues: the interpretation of sexed bodies in the Roman world, in particular those bodies, which to a modern eye appear at first ambiguous or difficult to categorize; the representation of eunuchs—both those who choose castration and those who do not; and finally to do so in a way that is sensitive to the language and implications of modern questions of sex, gender and society.

Although these people from classical antiquity are not direct analogues to modern transgender or intersexed people, any discourse about them can cast ripples across the modern struggle transgender and intersexed people face. For this reason, the language used to discuss issues of ambiguous genitals, castration, and gender transgressions must be chosen with care. Too many studies reiterate the language of madness, mutilation, self-violence, and monstrosity when discussing gender transgression that is rooted in or enacted on the body. In a modern climate where intersexed infants are surgically altered and arbitrarily assigned a gender without regard to their own wishes, where they fight against being called “it,” where transgender people are still officially classified as mentally ill in the newly published DSM V²⁰ and sexual reassignment surgery is called

²⁰ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-V*. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Gender Dysphoria, Transvestic Disorder. Although the DSM-V makes some improvements over the DSM-IV, including changing the name of transgenderism from Gender Identity Disorder to Gender Dysphoria and moving it out of the chapter on sexual dysfunctions, it still defines transgenderism as a mental illness, gender variance is still pathologized. Although the DSM-V does not itself endorse reparative therapy, the presence of the diagnosis could implicate transgenderism as something to be cured. Worse is the Transvestic Disorder (formerly Transvestic Fetishism) which, in the new DSM, strongly associates transvestism and transgenderism with

mutilation by its detractors, such language in academic discourse is fraught with unpleasant implications for modern issues.

The history of early modern scholarship of eunuchs is rife with the perpetuation of the negative stereotypes of eunuchs found in the ancient sources based on perceptions of gender. As Shaun Tougher notes, “the treatment of eunuchs by modern historians can be marked by distaste and hostility.”²¹ Some early twentieth century scholars touched upon topics related to eunuchs, such as the practice of castration or Byzantine political offices filled by eunuchs, often even while avoiding discussing eunuchs as human beings with both a physical and a social self.

For example, Peter Browe’s *Zur Geschichte der Entmannung*, discusses the history of castration, how and why it was performed, from antiquity to the early modern era, across Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. The overview is broad, but because of it, often superficial, and focuses on the process and morbidity of castration rather than the persons castrated.²² Bertha Eckstein-Diener’s 1938 book, *Emperors, Angels, and Eunuchs*, gives ten pages of the three hundred and seventy page book to a cursory discussion of eunuchs in their role as imperial servants. (The title seems more a reflection of contemporary imaginings of the Byzantine Empire as an Oriental land of mystery than a reflection of the content of the book.) Although she notes the connection

the added diagnosis of *autogynephilia* (ie- being “sexually aroused by thoughts or images of self as female”), which pathologizes and sexualizes non-heterosexual MTFs. Gender dysphoria is presented as an extension of transvestism. “Some cases of transvestic disorder progress to gender dysphoria. The males in these cases, who may be indistinguishable from other with transvestic disorder in adolescence or early childhood, gradually develop desires to remain in the female role for longer periods and to feminize their anatomy.” (Especially disquieting is that the diagnosis is located in the same chapter as such illegal activities as exhibitionism, frotteurism, and pedophilia.)

²¹ Shaun Tougher. *Eunuchs in Byzantine History and Society*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 14.

²² Peter Browe, *Zur Geschichte der Entmannung: eine religions- und rechtsgeschichtliche Studie*, (Breslau: Müller & Seiffert, 1936).

between the imagery of angels and of eunuchs in the imperial court, she shows a marked bias against eunuchs, going so far as to hypothesize that the historical eunuchs who achieved great deeds were not real eunuchs at all, with no evidence to support this argument beyond a perceived unlikelihood of eunuchs being capable of great deeds.²³

James Dunlap's 1924 study was more about the role of the office of the Grand Chamberlain than the eunuchs that held it, but as the office was later reserved for only eunuchs his study did advance some understanding of the social presence of eunuchs in the political life of the late Roman and Byzantine Empires. His study, however, is laced with Orientalism and describes eunuch chamberlains as an unfavorable practice of eastern origin and associated with decadence.²⁴ Similarly, Rodolphe Guiland's 1943 article, "Les eunuques dans l'empire byzantine: étude de titulaire et de prosopographie byzantines," addresses the official political roles eunuchs played in the Byzantine empire, their titles and their duties, but says little about the social perceptions of these eunuchs. Guiland conceives of his study as part of the history of Byzantine administration not the history of eunuchs, and like most of these early scholars he treats the eunuchs themselves with considerable negative bias.²⁵ Humana's book, *The Keeper of the Bed: The Story of*

²³ Bertha Eckstein-Diener, *Emperors, Angels, and Eunuchs: the thousand years of the Byzantine empire*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1938), 71. "When we contemplate the marvelous doings of Byzantine eunuchs, in every field of activity, we are driven to ask ourselves whether these men really were eunuchs in the proper sense of the term, and may not rather have been subjected to something like the modern Steinach operation—a vaso-ligature which, since the patient has not been completely emasculated by the removal of the testicles, energises him while depriving him of the capacity of reproduction." The Steinach operation is a half-vasectomy. The implication Diner puts forth is that although these men may have had some genital operation, testicles are absolutely essential to greatness and their greatness alone is to be taken as proof of the presence of testicles.

²⁴ J. E. Dunlap, "The office of the grand chamberlain in the later Roman and Byzantine empires" in Arthur E. R. Boak and James E. Dunlap, *Two Studies in Later Roman and Byzantine Administration*, 161-324. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), 165.

²⁵ Rodolphe Guiland, "Les eunuques dans l'empire byzantine: étude de titulaire et de prosopographie byzantines," *REB* 1 (1943): 197-238.

the Eunuch, published in 1973, acknowledges the negative bias against eunuchs in much of the previous scholarship, but the book is unfortunately little more than a collection of stories about eunuchs in various times and eras and not an analytical survey. It does little to advance any depth of understanding of eunuchs in the ancient world.²⁶

Keith Hopkins' study on court eunuchs set a new, higher bar. As Tougher notes dryly, it "had the virtue of taking the subject seriously."²⁷ In a book chapter in *Conquerors and Slaves*, he develops a theory to explain the power of court eunuchs, hypothesizing that their socially disenfranchised state made them safe figures for the emperor to invest with power, as a eunuch could never hope to usurp the emperor's place himself.²⁸

Although articles and books on the topic of eunuchs have become somewhat more common in recent years, and more critical of ancient stereotypes, studies of eunuchs are still surprisingly thin on the ground considering their frequent presence in classical literature as slaves, lovers, philosophers, religious devotees, palace administrators, and even military leaders.²⁹ Of those few modern scholarly works on eunuchs, most briefly address the sex and gender of eunuchs, but only briefly.

In the last twenty years, only six books have been published that focus extensively on eunuchs of the ancient Mediterranean as a topic of study in their own right, rather than as a minor side note of cult activity or political forces. Of those, four focus on late

²⁶ Charles Humana, *The Keeper of the Bed: the story of the eunuch*, (London: Arlington Books, 1973).

²⁷ Tougher (2008), 18.

²⁸ Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

²⁹ The Egyptian eunuch Ganymedes led his armies against Julius Caesar in 47 BCE. Eutropius, as Roman consul, beat back the Huns in 398 CE.

antiquity and the Byzantine Empire³⁰ and one is devoted to the study of the cult of Cybele, therefore only discussing eunuch initiates and primarily in their religious context.³¹ Only one book, a collection of articles edited by Shaun Tougher, is broad in both chronological and conceptual scope.³²

Although the cult of Cybele has been a topic of study for scholars for a long time, Lynn Roller's work, *In Search of God the Mother* (1999), was the first book that expressly attempted to counteract the negative bias that infiltrates prior scholarship towards eunuch devotees of the goddess. Her book describes the worship of Cybele, focusing in particular on the Phrygian origins of the cult and the apparent dramatic shift in form as it progressed west to Greece and Rome. In particular, she challenges the assumption that the wild, orgiastic, "eastern" elements for which the cult is famous—cymbals, drums, and, of course, castration in a wild ritual—originated in Phrygia. In her prolegomenon, she criticizes the bias and disgust that has characterized the study of the cult of Cybele. Quoting Versnel (1990): "The male attendant of the Great Goddess and his repulsive myth and ritual were obviously kept at bay [in Greece]."³³ A few paragraphs later she herself states that "[i]t is a sad commentary on Modern Classical scholarship that myths of rape and incest, the myths of violence to women that populate the Greek and Roman landscape so abundantly, are considered a natural part of the Greek

³⁰ Jacqueline Long, *Claudian's In Eutropian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Matthew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Kathryn Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and Shaun Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

³¹ Lynn Roller, *In Search of God the Mother* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

³² Shaun Tougher, ed., *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London: Classical Press of Wales and Duckworth, 2002).

³³ Roller (1999), 21.

and Roman experience, while a myth of castration, of violence to men, must be explained away as a foreign import, the mark of an inferior Oriental people.”³⁴

She devotes chapter eight to the myth of Attis and its use by scholars, both ancient and modern, to explain the more unusual features of the cult. She notes that the self-castration of Attis and his worship as a divinity alongside Cybele does not appear to be present in the original Phrygian version of the cult. Roller asserts that some of the Phrygian priests may have been eunuchs as a way of “publically declaring [the priest’s] fidelity to the goddess and his determination to maintain the vows of chastity necessary for total commitment to her cult.”³⁵ This aspect of the Phrygian priesthood was then imported into the Greek and then Roman myth and transformed into an act of madness, not chaste devotion. This new version of the myth then in turn affected the cult practice as it was carried out in Greece and Rome.

Roller briefly addresses the topic of the perceived sex and gender of the *galli*³⁶ in an earlier article, “The Ideology of a Eunuch Priest.” Her conclusion is that the *galli* were seen as “neither male nor female.”³⁷ It is my hope to expand upon that and explore what the *galli* are, if not either male or female, and what those sex categories mean to the Romans.

³⁴ Roller (1999), 22.

³⁵ Ibid. 253.

³⁶ *Gallus* is the term used to describe an effeminate religious follower of the goddess Cybele. They are generally castrated in imitation of Attis, Cybele’s eunuch consort. Scholarly debate continues on whether all *galli* are castrated and to what degree—testicles only or testicles and penis. I shall discuss *galli* further in Chapter Four.

³⁷ Lynn Roller, “The Ideology of a Eunuch Priest” *Gender & History* 9 (1997): 543.

Craig Williams's book, *Roman Homosexuality*, focuses on the figure of the *cinaedus*³⁸ and not eunuchs per se, but he does present a brief comparison between the portrayal of *cinaedi* and the portrayal of *galli*. This passage hints at the construction of the sex and gender of the *galli*. Namely, that the strong association of *galli* with *cinaedi* and vice versa implies that *galli* and *cinaedi* were viewed as possessing similar physical habits and bodies. A *gallus* is simply an extreme version of a *cinaedus*. Thus, a *gallus* was possibly categorized as the same or similar sex as a *cinaedus*.³⁹ In contrast, eunuchs who were castrated involuntarily as children are never compared to *cinaedi* in the extant literature, implying that prepubescently castrated eunuchs were some different category entirely, unlike either *cinaedi* or *galli*. Roman authors did not interpret the bodies of eunuch devotees to the goddess Cybele the same way they interpreted the bodies of prepubescently castrated eunuch slaves.

Jacqueline Long's commentary on *In Eutropium*, subtitled "How, When, and Why to Slander a Eunuch" is an excellent catalogue of the negative stereotypes of eunuchs who were castrated as slaves. In her fourth chapter, titled "How to Slander a Eunuch," she discusses the motifs of femininity, accusations of corruption and incompetence, and insults related to his servile origins that are all used in the invective against the eunuch Eutropius.

In 1999, Shaun Tougher arranged a conference in Cardiff, "Neither Woman nor Man?: Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond." From this conference emerged a collection of articles under the title *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond*. The purpose of the conference

³⁸ *Cinaedus* was formerly understood to mean "passive homosexual." Craig Williams convincingly argues that *cinaedus* more accurately refers to an effeminate man, a man who deviates from Roman gender norms of masculinity. This gender deviancy may include taking the passive role in homoerotic sex, but also includes conducting affairs with married women and general sexual insatiety and lack of self-control.

³⁹ I expand this idea further in Chapter Four.

and subsequent book, as stated in the introduction, was to “bring together scholars who were researching eunuchs in differing times and cultures, as well as from differing points of view and with differing approaches.”⁴⁰ The conference was conceptualized as a reaction against scholarly isolation across disciplines and conceived as an effort to bring together the different viewpoints and methodologies at work in eunuch scholarship to promote further research on this uncommon topic.

Within this collection, three articles approach the topic of Roman eunuchs, each from a different perspective. Shelley Hales’ article “Looking for eunuchs: the *galli* and Attis in Roman art” examines representations of eunuchs associated with the cult of Cybele.⁴¹ She notes the often feminine costume covering the bodies of the represented *galli*, leaving their castration non-apparent, if indeed all *galli* were castrated, which is still an open question. Artists usually depict Attis, too, as clothed, and when his body is exposed, it is usually a depiction of his body as it was before his self-castration. The statue of Attis at the sanctuary of Cybele at Ostia, which shows an exposed and castrated body, reveals “a smooth pubis, its female characteristics complemented by the curves of the torso. A second Attis from the same sanctuary clearly depicts the hermaphroditic nature of the god, bereft of male genitalia.”⁴² She concludes that the images create an ambiguity between male and female, Roman and foreign, castrated and not. Walter Stevenson’s contribution to the book discusses the role of eunuchs in the development of early Christianity and Christian asceticism,⁴³ and Shaun Tougher’s article “In or Out?”

⁴⁰ Tougher (2002), vii.

⁴¹ Shelly Hales, “Looking for eunuchs: the *galli* and Attis in Roman art,” In *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. by Shaun Tougher (London: Classical Press of Wales and Duckworth, 2002), 87-102.

⁴² Hales (2002), 97.

⁴³ Walter Stevenson, “Eunuchs and Early Christianity,” In *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. by Shaun Tougher (London: Classical Press of Wales and Duckworth, 2002), 123-142.

Origins of Court Eunuchs” explores the secular side of eunuchs during roughly the same era of late antiquity, calling to question the view that court eunuchs were predominately ethnic outsiders.⁴⁴

The Perfect Servant by Kathryn Ringrose is the first book to explore at length the gender identity of court eunuchs and how it directly ties to their political function. She devotes a chapter to Byzantine medical writings and the physicality of eunuchs, noting that “Byzantine society assumed that traits that we consider learned behavioral attributes were inherent in the *physical* being of the individual”⁴⁵ and therefore perceptions of the body were integral to perceptions of character, habits, and, of course, gender roles. She concludes the chapter emphasizing the ambiguous physiology of eunuchs and offers many examples from the literature.

Ringrose concludes that eunuchs constituted a third sex, defined by the traits that make them “perfect servants.” She brings forth evidence for positive depictions of eunuchs, primarily as figures of chastity or as beings who resemble angels in their sexlessness and their role as intermediary between the Emperor and the court just as angels are intermediaries between God and mortals. Her study, however, is limited to the seventh through eleventh century. Thus, like Matthew Kuefler’s book, *The Manly Eunuch* (2001), which discusses eunuchs as a representation of the virtue of masculine chastity vis a vis monks and Christian asceticism, it explores a specifically Christian view of eunuchs, eunuchs living and working at a time when concepts of the body, sexuality, and gender were increasingly filtered through a Christian lens.

⁴⁴ Shaun Tougher, “In or Out? Origins of Court Eunuchs,” In *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. by Shaun Tougher (London: Classical Press of Wales and Duckworth, 2002), 143-160.

⁴⁵ Ringrose (2003), 51.

Shaun Tougher's book, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society*, questions Ringrose's assertion that eunuchs constituted a third gender. Although he does not deny the idea that Byzantine court eunuchs may have sometimes been perceived as a third gender, he notes that a variety of gender identities for eunuchs may have co-existed and that the gender of eunuchs may have been different in different social roles—particularly the court eunuchs as compared to the clergy. He states that depending on the views of the author, eunuchs might be portrayed as masculine, feminine or a third gender. He does not, however, pursue this further. His discussion of the sex and gender of eunuchs is small, only touched on briefly in one chapter. He observes that Classical and Byzantine scholarship shows a general “unwillingness to engage with the subject [of eunuchs].”⁴⁶ Tougher frames his book as part of a quest to begin to fill this silence, particularly regarding scholarship on eunuchs of the Byzantine Empire

Despite the recent small surge in studies on eunuchs in antiquity, there are no books that treat the sex and gender of pre-Byzantine Roman eunuchs at great length. The subject is touched upon in the studies of Byzantine eunuchs and of the eunuch devotees of Cybele, but only briefly, and no book addresses *both* eunuch slaves and the *galli* together. Furthermore, the discussions of castration—particularly the castration of the eunuch devotees—are sometimes still inadvertently peppered with problematic language. For example, Lynn Roller's statement that voluntary self-castration is “violence towards men”⁴⁷ is troubling in light of the experiences of male-to-female transsexuals and the current controversy over the inclusion of Gender Dysphoria among the lists of mental

⁴⁶ Tougher (2008), 16.

⁴⁷ Roller (1999), 22.

illness in the newest edition of the DSM, the diagnostic standard for mental health professionals.

Across Space and Time

The broad nature of this topic requires that I not limit myself to Latin sources alone. The intellectual history of discourse on the body begins with the Greeks who greatly influenced Roman thought. Separating out a vision of the body that is uniquely Italic would be impossible. What I mean, then, by “the Roman world” is the Mediterranean and Europe under Roman rule, which facilitated this blending of ideas from different regions. To deal with this geographical breadth, I will look for consistent patterns in the intellectual tradition, whether the source is Latin or Greek.

Some Greek authors, such as Aristotle, represent a one-way influence of Greek thinking upon later Roman intellectuals. Other authors, such the Greek author Lucian, present a two-way influence, where although he is writing in Greek, Greek culture has had centuries of influence upon Rome and Rome in turn has influenced Greek culture. Even more convoluted are authors such as Claudian or Ammianus Marcellinus, writing in Latin, but native Greek speakers hailing from the Eastern part of the Empire. As the culture of the Rome is more than Italy, and more than just the western empire, I am including sources written in Greek when appropriate, while remaining on guard for possible points of deviation regarding the views of eunuchs in the east versus the west.

In addition to examining Greek texts as part of the Roman intellectual tradition and part of the blending of cultures that the empire facilitated, I also draw on Roman sources across a wide breadth of time, from Terence in the second century BCE to Claudian and Ammianus Marcellinus in the late fourth and early fifth century CE. My

justification for using sources that span nearly seven centuries is that attitudes regarding the construction of sex are extremely conservative. The sources show a persistent unity of thought over many centuries.

Summary

In my next chapter I shall discuss the biological criteria that produce the social concept of sex, examining Greek and Latin medical texts and the work of biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling. I shall present the evidence for sex as a socially determined category and explore the classical criteria and categories of sex and how they differ from modern ideas. Whereas in modern thinking biological sex is inherent and immutable at birth, the classical view is one of transformation, with maleness being a state achieved through puberty and subject to interruption or failure to complete the metamorphosis.

In my third chapter I shall examine one such example of the sex transformation interrupted: slave eunuchs castrated before puberty. The chapter begins with an overview of practice of castration in the ancient Mediterranean and from there leads into a discussion of the sex and gender of slave eunuchs in Roman sources. Their bodies, considered unnatural and altered from nature's path, are more closely associated with the bodies of children or women than of men, and their sex is likewise considered unmale.

The fourth chapter will address self-castration and the eunuch initiates of the Great Goddess. Castrated after puberty, these eunuchs achieve a male bodily state and then reject it. They are presented as similar to *cinaedi*, who are likewise men whose bodily integrity—the status of maleness—has been altered from the perceived perfect male ideal.

Chapter five will explore eunuchs as erotic figures in Roman texts, feeling sexual desire and the focus of the sexual desire of others. It concludes with an interpretation of Martial's epigram 9.2.

Chapter Two: Biological Sex in Greece and Rome

In *Sexing the Body*, biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling relates the experience of Olympic athlete, Maria Patiño, who was banned from competing in the woman's hurdle race in 1988 because although she "looked like a woman, had a woman's strength, and never had reason to suspect that she wasn't a woman... examinations revealed that Patiño's cells sported a Y chromosome, and that her labia hid testes within."⁴⁸ This revelation revoked her social status as a female and prevented her from participating in the Olympics. This incident serves as an illustration of the insufficiencies of the modern dichotomous categories of sex.

At its most basic, the biological definition of "male" is the organism or part of an organism that produces the smaller, generally mobile gamete. "Female" is the organism or part of an organism that produces the larger, generally immobile gamete. In practice, as far as human categories are concerned, the criteria become much more complicated: an indeterminate combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, external morphological sex, internal morphological sex, and phenotype, which may or may not all correlate nicely to assign a person to one clear category. With respect to a specific individual, such as Patiño, some criteria might designate her as female (her hormones, her phenotype) while others designate her as male (her chromosomes, her hidden testes), and still others are ambiguous (her inability to reproduce as either a male or a female). Which criteria are given greater weight varies depending on the observer. As Fausto-Sterling writes, physicians, for example, "focus primarily on reproductive abilities (in the case of a potential girl) or penis size (in the case of a potential boy). If a child is born with two X

⁴⁸ Fausto-Sterling (2000), 1.

chromosomes, oviducts, ovaries, and a uterus on the inside, but a penis and scrotum on the outside, for instance, is the child a boy or a girl? Most doctors declare the child a girl, despite the penis, because of her potential to give birth, and intervene using surgery and hormones to carry out the decision.”⁴⁹ The Olympic committee overseeing Patiño’s qualifications to compete in the woman’s hurdle race gave preference to a chromosome test. In our day to day interactions, we form conclusions about other people’s sex based largely on a perception of external phenotype and a host of social cues that mark gender.⁵⁰

Thus, what theorist Walter Benn Michaels says about race (“What is race if you get to belong to one without looking like you do, without feeling like you do, and without even knowing that you do?”⁵¹) applies equally to sex. Just as it is difficult to argue that an essentialist idea of race exists, if one can go one’s entire life as a member of a certain race without being aware of it, so too an essentialist idea of sex as a foundation of identity is unsupportable. Because of the confusion of what exactly the criteria for determining sex are, the numerous ways these many criteria can fail to line up and create a unified picture of sex, and the fact that many of the criteria are internal and therefore invisible to casual observation, it is difficult to know one’s sex with total empirical certainty. Even less do we truly know the sex of anyone else we encounter in our daily lives. We assume we know the sex of those we interact with, when in fact of all the

⁴⁹ Fausto-Sterling (2000), 5.

⁵⁰ West and Zimmerman (1987).

⁵¹ Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble With Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 23. This comment is in reference to his account of Susie Guillory Phipps, a fair-skinned and fair-haired forty-three year old woman who’d always assumed she was white until, in 1977, she acquired a copy of her birth certificate and discovered much to her surprise that the Bureau of Vital Records deemed her “colored” on account of her heritage.

possible criteria we use to categorize sex, the ones we use for our supposed knowledge are the most unstable and unreliable—apparent phenotype and gender social cues.

The dichotomy that we generally call “sex” does not reflect a natural truth about human bodies. Differences in bodies exist, but the categories by which bodies are labeled are artificial in nature, and the criteria too numerous and potentially conflicting to accurately create a dichotomous system. Distinctions between small, mobile gametes and larger, immobile gametes are useful for describing the biological process of reproduction, but less useful for creating rigid categories burdened with widespread social and physiological implications. Not only can no one determine what, exactly, the criteria for determining sex *are*, when it comes to human biology—all too often, the various elements that constitute sex do not properly line up to constitute an individual as wholly male or wholly female—but also within these assorted criteria, variations between individuals and variations even within one individual’s lifetime render many of these criteria an insecure seat on which to place a supposedly basic and unchangeable identity. As Michael Lavin states in his article in *The Journal of Medical Ethics*, “The biologically oriented may believe it best to dispense with an organism’s having a Sex. Instead, one might distinguish an organism’s sex at different levels, noting, such levels as chromosomal sex, hormonal sex, gonadal sex, gender sex, and social sex, and so, on this view, there is no Sex of an organism.”⁵²

Ancient medical authors and scientists, lacking the ability to observe chromosomes, hormones, or gametes, found other criteria to create and interpret their categories. Faced with the same biological reality of the human form, they came to different conclusions. This change is not simply a matter of scientific and technological

⁵² Michael Lavin, “Mutilation, Deception, and Sex Changes,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* (1987) 13: 89.

advancement revealing a truth about sex that was previously unknown. As Thomas Laqueur points out “... ‘oppositions and contrasts’ between the female and the male, if one wished to construe them as such, have been clear since the beginning of time: the one gives birth and the other does not. Set against such momentous truths, the discovery that the ovarian artery is not, as Galen would have it, the female version of the vas deferens is of relatively minor significance. The same can be said about the ‘discoveries’ of more recent research on the biochemical, neurological, or other natural determinants or insignia of sexual difference.”⁵³

Sex in the Roman Empire was not conceived as a difference between two dichotomously opposed and immutable categories set at birth. Sex was not inherent but instead was the result of a process of transformation or a failure to transform. Maleness had to be achieved and once achieved had to be maintained. Those who had not achieved, failed to achieve, or failed to maintain their maleness have bodies that are interpreted to fall into a variety of categories including women, boys, eunuchs, and possibly *cinaedi* and other men who are deemed excessively effeminate. These categories, rooted in interpretations of bodies, gonads, and reproductive capabilities, constitute different sexes.

Any discussion of Roman concepts of the body must begin with the Greeks and the intellectual tradition the Romans inherited from Greek philosophers and physicians. Although views differ slightly from author to author, some conceptual consistencies appear. In particular, authors show sex as mutable, as something that is acquired through a process of change (or failure to change) rather than something that a person simply *is*. For these writers, a boy is not born male; he’s born with the potential to become male.

⁵³ Laqueur (1990), 9.

Sex As Metamorphosis: From Aristotle to Twentieth Century Embryology

Aristotle's influence on western intellectual tradition is profound. Horowitz writes in her article, "Aristotle and Women," that Aristotle's description of women's bodies is the source for "many of the standard Western arguments for the inferiority of womankind and for the political subordination of women to men in home and in society."⁵⁴

Whereas Aristotle did attempt to use empiricism to explain the natural world, sometimes (particularly when writing about human beings) his descriptions of biology become less reflective of biological reality and more reflective of and supporting social "truths." Biology has on occasion been put to similar use all the way to modern times. Cultural bias can unconsciously skew the interpretation of empirical observations of even conscientious scientists.⁵⁵ All scientists, all scholars, must in the end filter their observations through their body, the life they live in that body, and the society in which they interact with other bodies. As Donna Haraway states, "[the] view of infinite vision [that is, of disembodied objectivity] is an illusion, a god trick."⁵⁶ To say that Aristotle was biased is not to say that he was not a good empiricist, but that he was human.

⁵⁴ Maryanne Horowitz "Aristotle and Woman" *Journal of the History of Biology* 9 (1976):183.

⁵⁵ While conscientious scientists would naturally attempt to avoid conscious bias, as Stewart Richards points out "many kinds of science can be practised only by virtue of financial support provided by governments or industrial companies with goals which are frequently unclear, and almost always directed by political or economic interests" (Stewart Richards, *Philosophy and Sociology of Science* (New York: Schocken Books: 1984), 148). In addition, every researcher has a host of unconscious cultural biases lurking in his or her mind. Although methods of scientific progress eventually push out theories that are created through biased thinking skewing the interpretation of empirical data, the history of science has been darkened more than once by ideology twisting the production of scientific knowledge (for example, the eugenics movement of the early 20th century).

⁵⁶ Donna Haraway "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988), 582.

Although at first glance Aristotle might appear to reaffirm dichotomous categories of sex, with male and female qualities in opposition, a detailed look at his writings present a view of biological sex that is markedly different from our own. He empirically observed the same bodily phenomena as modern doctors and scientists do, and yet came to different conclusions about the nature and proper categorization of body types according to sex and the relevant criteria for this categorization.

“Among all except a few blooded animals, they are either male or female, **when completely formed.**” (emphasis mine)

ἐν μὲν τοῖς ἐνάιμοις ἔξω ὀλίγων ἅπασι τὸ μὲν ἄρρεν
τὸ δὲ θῆλυ τελειωθὲν ἔστι.⁵⁷

Aristotle’s qualification *τελειωθὲν* leads naturally to the question: what are they when they are not completely formed? The female body itself is presented as deformed, but Aristotle states that the female body is such a common deformity that it must be considered complete even in its deformed incompleteness. Their natural state is to be unfinished.⁵⁸ But there are also other ways that individuals can be sexually incomplete or deformed based on the criteria for sex that Aristotle provides.

What criteria then does Aristotle put forth to determine sex? In other words, what characteristics must the “completely formed” animal have before it can be labeled male or female? He quite explicitly states that sex is not an essence of an animal as a whole. It requires particular narrow physical criteria to be met.

“...it is not male or female in respect to all of itself, but only in respect of a certain ability and a certain part...”

⁵⁷Arist. *Gen. an.* 715a.

⁵⁸Ibid. 775a.

...οὐ κατὰ πᾶν γε αὐτὸ θῆλυ καὶ ἄρρεν ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ
κατὰ τινὰ δύναμιν καὶ κατὰ τι μόνιον...⁵⁹

In short, animals—including humans—are not male or female. Their *parts* are male or female and the presence or absence of these parts influences the shape and quality of the individual as a whole. Therefore, a change in just the pertinent part of the body changes the entire sex of the individual. If the vital part that determines sex is absent or altered, the body is altered accordingly. Sex is mutable, not a static state of being. As Aristotle states more explicitly in book 4:

“When one critical part changes, the whole composite of the animal differs very much in appearance. This can be seen in eunuchs; they are thoroughly changed from their original form with their one part being maimed such and they are left with the appearance almost of a female.”

ἑνὸς δὲ μορίου ἐπικαίρου μεταβάλλοντος ὅλη ἡ
σύστασις τοῦ ζώου πολὺ τῷ εἶδει διαφέρει. ὅραν δ'
ἔξεστιν ἐπὶ τῶν εὐνούχων, οἱ ἑνὸς μορίου πηρωθέντος
τοσοῦτον ἐξαλλάττουσι τῆς ἀρχαίας μορφῆς καὶ
μικρὸν ἐλλείπουσι τοῦ θήλεος τὴν ἰδέαν.⁶⁰

The other factor in determining sex in Aristotle’s writing is the presence or absence of sperm. Males are those who produce sperm; non-males (of various sorts, including females) are those who do not. Aristotle may not be able to measure the size of the gamete to qualify “male” versus “female” as modern biologists can, but the gamete still forms the basis of his criteria for sex categorization. The vital part that determines sex—the part that must be completely formed to render a person male—is therefore

⁵⁹ Arist. *Gen. an.* 716a.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 766a.

specifically the part involved in the creation of sperm. The proper function of the vital part is essential, not merely the presence of it.

“For the male is that which is able to concoct, to condense, and to discharge, sperm”

Τὸ μὲν γὰρ δυνάμενον πέττειν καὶ συνιστάναι τε καὶ ἐκκρίνειν σπέρμα... ἄρρεν.⁶¹

Therefore, children—even boy children—and eunuchs do not wholly fulfill Aristotle’s criteria for maleness. Boy children fail to meet the criteria for maleness through their unfinished genitals and dearth of sperm. Eunuchs fail through their altered genitals and consequent lack of sperm. And so it is unsurprising that Aristotle groups boys and women (and implicitly eunuchs and perhaps other infertile adult men) together as examples of similar non-sperm-producing bodies.

“A boy actually resembles the form of a woman, and a woman is just as an infertile male; for the female is defined through a certain inability, for them, it is not possible for the female to concoct sperm from nourishment...”

Ἐοικε δὲ καὶ τὴν μορφήν γυναικὶ πάϊς, καὶ ἔστιν ἡ γυνὴ ὡςπερ ἄρρεν ἄγονον· ἀδυναμία γάρ τινι τὸ θῆλυ ἔστι, τῷ μὴ δύνασθαι πέττειν ἐκ τῆς τροφῆς σπέρμα...⁶²

In *Historia Animalia*, Aristotle clarifies when the transformation from boy to man happens and what the process looks like, how adult males become thoroughly differentiated from adult females.

⁶¹ Arist. *Gen. an.* 765b.

⁶² *Ibid.* 728a.

“The difference of males compared to females, and the difference in their parts, was stated earlier.⁶³ The male first begins to produce sperm, for the most part, on the completion of twice seven years. At the same time the growth of the hair from puberty begins...At about this same time, the voice begins to change...and there is a swelling up of breasts and genitalia, not only in size but also in form.”

ἡ μὲν διαφορὰ τοῦ ἄρρενος πρὸς τὸ θῆλυ καὶ τὰ μόρια πρότερον εἴρηται, φέρειν δὲ σπέρμα πρῶτον ἄρχεται τὸ ἄρρεν ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ ἐν τοῖς ἔτεσι τοῖς δῖς ἑπτὰ τετελεσμένοις· ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἡ τρίχωσις τῆς ἥβης ἄρχεται...περὶ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν χρόνον τοῦτον ἢ τε φωνὴ μεταβάλλειν ἄρχεται... καὶ μαστῶν ἔπαρσις γίνεται καὶ αἰδοίων οὐ μεγέθει μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ εἶδει.⁶⁴

Girls, too, experience a transformation at this time, albeit a lesser one.

“Around the same time in the females also there is a swelling of the breasts, and the thing called menses begins to flow...and the voice changes for girls also around this time to a deeper pitch. For while on the whole a woman is higher voiced than a man, young women are higher voiced than older women, just as boys are higher voiced than men; but the voice of girl children is higher than boy children...”

Περὶ τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ χρόνον καὶ τοῖς θήλεσιν ἢ τ' ἔπαρσις γίνεται τῶν μαστῶν καὶ τὰ καταμήνια καλούμενα καταρρήγνυται...καὶ ἡ φωνὴ δὲ καὶ ταῖς παισὶ μεταβάλλει περὶ τὸν χρόνον τοῦτον ἐπὶ τὸ βαρύτερον. ὅλως μὲν γὰρ γυνὴ ἀνδρὸς ὄξυφωνόταρπον, αἱ δὲ νέαι τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, ὥσπερ καὶ οἱ παῖδες τῶν ἀνδρῶν· ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὄξυτέρα ἢ φωνὴ τῶν θηλειῶν παίδων ἢ τῶν ἀρρένων...⁶⁵

⁶³ The footnote in the Loeb edition edited by Balme refers the reader to a brief summary of the different genitalia in *Hist. an.* 1.493a. But this statement also calls to mind Aristotle's emphasis in *Gen. an.* on the production of sperm as the prime criteria of maleness, especially since the very next line details when that production begins.

⁶⁴ *Arist. Hist. an.*, 581a.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 581b.

The emphasis of girl children's voice deepening and boy children's breast development underscores a parallel development from unfinished children to more finished adults. Although Aristotle doesn't posit boy children and girl children as identical sexes, they have similar bodies that undergo similar transformations. In girl children, however, the change of voice is not as extreme, and changes in genitalia are wholly overlooked. In contrast, boys are described as undergoing the same changes (including breast development),⁶⁶ some of those changes more extreme, such as the greater deepening of the voice, and also additional changes that girl children are not described as experiencing, namely, genital change. Aristotle describes the unfinished girl children as experiencing only a smaller, partial transformation in contrast to the unfinished boy children who transform more thoroughly to become adult males. A female is defined by her weak and incomplete metamorphosis at puberty. A male is defined as having a full transformation.

Maleness is therefore something that a boy child must grow into. A boy is a male *in potentia*, but has not yet reached that physical state. It is not inherent to birth and the transformative process from unfinished, woman-like boy-child to a perfected male can be interrupted by castration or natural deficiency. To put a reverse spin on Simone de Beauvoir's oft quoted line: one is not born a man, one becomes one. Or to put it another

⁶⁶ This concept of the transformation of the unfinished boy into the perfect male form might explain Aristotle's statement about boy's breasts developing, a statement which might strike a modern reader as odd as it is a rather minor element of most boys' puberty. But the schema of unfinished children transforming into finished males and less finished females requires that the boy children transform more thoroughly than girl children. Thus, the most visibly notable change during female puberty, breast development, is given to boy children as well and listed as a basic part of male puberty.

way, maleness is construed as an achievement, and those who fail to achieve it are condemned to a second-class status as women or eunuchs or failed men.⁶⁷

As recently as the 1970s, the language of sex differentiation reflected this concept of maleness as a struggle against a female default that happens when transformation fails. Female is represented by a bodily absence and male by bodily presence. As Anne Fausto-Sterling points out, “until recently, the idea that females ‘just happen’ has been a staple of even the most sophisticated scientific thought.”⁶⁸ French embryologist Alfred Jost began experiments on male and female embryonic development in the 1940s and continued to publish results through the middle and late twentieth century. He discovered that female reproductive duct systems could develop in XY animals if they weren’t inhibited by testicular secretion. Although this was an empirically sound insight into male development, Jost neglected to pursue research in the biological actions of female development. In his first paper he notes that the presence of ovaries plays a role in development and that their absence alters female development, yet this finding is de-emphasized. Jost writes, “Becoming a male is a prolonged, uneasy, and risky adventure; it is a kind of struggle against inherent trends towards femaleness.”⁶⁹ Femaleness is thus rhetorically rendered as the result of biological passivity in contrast to the “risky adventure” of becoming male, despite Jost’s own findings to the contrary, that female development, like male development, *can* be interrupted and altered and doesn’t just happen whenever male development does not.

⁶⁷ Including so-called “born eunuchs” such as Favorinus and other individuals who were not castrated but nevertheless experience puberty in a way similar to eunuchs.

⁶⁸ Fausto-Sterling (2005), 203.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Fausto-Sterling (2005), 204.

As Fausto-Sterling says, “If female development was a state of nature, only male development required explanation, and the phrase ‘sexual differentiation’ really meant ‘male differentiation.’”⁷⁰ Just as Aristotle defines maleness as successful transformation, and femaleness as lack of transformation, so too does Jost. The biology of sex is conceived and presented in a way that reflects social expectations of male activity and female passivity.

More difficult to interpret are the sex categories of men as described by Aristotle who produce sperm but in limited quantities or without procreative ability, specifically, old men, sterile men, and effeminate men.

“There are mannish-looking women and womanly men, the former do not produce menstrual blood and the latter produce thin and cold semen.”

Γίνονται γὰρ γυναῖκές τε ἀρρενωποὶ καὶ ἄνδρες
θηλυκοὶ, καὶ ταῖς μὲν οὐ φίνεται τὰ καταμήνια, τοῖς
δὲ τὸ σπέρμα λεπτὸν καὶ ψυχρόν.⁷¹

This statement appears to indicate a spectrum of sex, where some male bodies are more male than others and some female bodies are less female, until they begin to meet in the middle in androgyny. The presence of sperm may be Aristotle’s prime criteria for determining sex, but the quality of the sperm matters as well for a man to be a true male and not one of the ἄνδρες θηλυκοί (girly men). Some males are more male than others. Similarly, between the partial transformation of females and the full transformation of proper males, there are men who are presented as more fully developed than females, but

⁷⁰ Fausto-Sterling (2005), 202-203.

⁷¹ Arist. *Gen. an.* 747a.

have some physical deformity that prevents them from being entirely properly male. As presented in pseudo-Aristotle *Problemata*:

“For those in whom the passages [to carry semen to the testicles and privates] are not in accordance with nature, but either because those leading to the testicles are blind, such as occurs with eunuchs and in eunuch-like persons, or for some other reason, such moisture flows into the buttocks; for indeed the moisture passes by it. ...those effeminate by nature are thus put together in such a way that there is little or no secretion in the place where there is natural secretion for others, but rather only in this place [the buttocks]. This is the reason that such persons are put together contrary to nature: for although they are men, they are disposed in such a way that they must be maimed in this place. And the maiming makes either complete corruption or a distortion. The former is impossible, for the person would become a woman. So it must be distortion and a disposition to get excited somewhere other than the genitals. Therefore they are also unsatisfied, like women... Those who have semen going to the buttocks desire to be passive, and those who have semen in both places [genitals and buttocks] desire to be both active and passive in sexual intercourse... In some cases this sexual passivity arises out of habit.”

οἷς δὴ οἱ πόροι μὴ κατὰ φύσιν ἔχουσιν, ἀλλ' ἢ διὰ τὸ ἐπιτυφλωθῆναι τοὺς εἰς τὸ αἰδοῖον, οἷον συμβαίνει τοῖς εὐνούχοις καὶ εὐνουχίαις, ἢ καὶ ἄλλως, εἰς τὴν ἔδραν συρρεῖ ἢ τοιαύτη ἰκμάς· καὶ γὰρ διεξέρχεται ταύτη...οἱ δὲ φύσει θηλυδρίαὶ οὕτω συνεστᾶσιν ὥστ' ἐκεῖ μὲν μὴ ἐκκρίνεται ἢ ὀλίγην, οὐπὲρ τοῖς ἔχουσιν κατὰ φύσιν ἐκκρίνεται, εἰς δὲ τὸν τόπον τοῦτον. αἴτιον δέ, ὅτι παρὰ φύσιν συνεστᾶσιν· ἄρσενες γὰρ ὄντες οὕτω διάκεινται ὥστε ἀνάγκη τὸν τόπον τοῦτον πεπηρῶσθαι αὐτῶν. πῆρωσις δὲ ἢ μὲν ὅλως ποιεῖ φθόρον, ἢ δὲ διαστροφὴν. ἐκείνη μὲν οὖν οὐκ ἔστιν· γυνὴ γὰρ ἂν ἐγένετο. ἀνάγκη ἄρα παρεστράφθαι καὶ ἄλλοθί που ὁρμᾶν τῆς γονικῆς ἐκκρίσεως. διὸ καὶ ἀπληστοί, ὥσπερ αἱ γυναῖκες...καὶ ὅσοις μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν ἔδραν, οὗτοι πάσχειν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν, ὅσοις δ' ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρα, οὗτοι καὶ δρᾶν καὶ πάσχειν... ἐνίοις δὲ γίνεται καὶ ἐξ ἔθους τὸ πάθος τοῦτο.⁷²

⁷² Arist. [Pr.] 4.26.

Eunuchs and sterile (eunuch-like) men are grouped into one similar category, a category that exists in the middle of a continuum between female and male. This category of passive, effeminate males is a partial deformation of the male body where females are a complete deformation. The anonymous author goes on to say that habit or actions can play a role as well. What a man does sexually can alter what he is. Actions can cause a “distortion” in his body and a loss of male status.

Biological Sex in the Roman Empire

After Aristotle, Galen was the single most influential author concerning matters medical and physiological.⁷³ Although Galen was a native Greek speaker, born in the eastern half of the Roman Empire in Pergamum around 129 CE, he lived and wrote in the city of Rome, with Emperor Marcus Aurelius himself as his patron. In his person he demonstrates the interconnectedness of Greek and Italic intellectualism within the Roman Empire.

Thomas Laqueur demonstrates in his book, *Making Sex*, that the Galenic literature presents male and female bodies as variations of the same body. In Galen’s writing there is one sex, which presents itself in two basic forms.

“Think first, please, of the man’s [external genitalia] turned in and extending inward between the rectum and the bladder. If this should happen, the scrotum would necessarily take the place of the uterus with the testes lying

⁷³ As P. N. Singer puts it in his introduction to *Galen: Selected Works*, “Galen’s immense influence on later generations can hardly be denied; with the exception of Aristotle, and the possible exception of Plato, there can be no more historically influential ancient author in matters scientific. ...[F]or more than a millennium and a half the effects of this thought can be traced, at a variety of levels from philosophically sophisticated to semi-literate, from Byzantium to the Greek-speaking east, from the Arab work to southern and then northern Europe on the one hand, and to India on the other.” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), vii.

outside, next to it on either side. Think too, please, of...the uterus turned outward and projecting. Would not the testes [overies] then necessarily be inside it? Would it not contain them like a scrotum? Would not the neck [the cervix and vagina], hitherto concealed inside the perineum but now pendant, be made into the male member? You could not find a single male part left over that had not simply changed its position.”⁷⁴

In short, Galen conceptualizes females as inside out males. The bodies of one sex are not in opposition to the other but simply rearranged. The structure of the human body is essentially male, with females possessing all the same parts but in a different location.

“Now just as humankind is the most perfect of all animals, so within humankind the man is more perfect than the woman, and the reason for his perfection is his excess of heat, for heat is Nature’s primary instrument. Hence in those animals that have less of it, her workmanship is necessarily more imperfect, and so it is no wonder that the female is less perfect than the male by as much as she is colder than he.”⁷⁵

Thus, the element that determines physical difference is the heat of the body. Heat renders a body perfect (male) and lack of heat leads to an imperfected (female) body. Female and male are not conceptualized as “opposite” sexes, as they often are called in modern times, but as variations of the same sex, with the variations depended upon a temperature continuum of hot to cold. Galen, unlike Aristotle, even states that females create sperm, although not in as purified a form.

⁷⁴ Gal. *UP*. 14.2.297, trans. by Margaret Tallmudge May (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968). No Greek edition was available.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 14.2.299.

“...the female must have smaller, less perfect testes, and the semen generated in them must be scantier, colder, and wetter...”⁷⁶

Where Aristotle stated that the ability to produce sperm was the physical criterion that defines a male, Galen erases that distinction. The male seed and the female seed are, like the rest of their bodies, close variations of one another. Galen defines sperm in *On the Natural Faculties*. In it he states:

“And what is the sperm? It is clearly the active first principle of the animal, for the material first principle is the menstrual blood.”

Τί δ' ἦν τὸ σπερμα; ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ ζώου δηλονότι ἡ δραστική· ἡ γὰρ ὑλικὴ τὸ καταμήνιον ἐστίν.⁷⁷

Although there is an apparent duality of oppositions—male/sperm/active versus female/menstrual blood/passive—because females possess sperm as well, an active element, it is less a matter of oppositions and more a matter of degree. Like Aristotle, Galen’s construction of sex is one of gradations of body type ranging from more heat to less heat, more active to less active, rather than a dichotomy of rigid opposites. And like Aristotle, Galen demonstrates this spectrum in his description of eunuchs who, like females, are cooler and moister than males. Their bodies are not conceived as being male bodies. They are more similar to the imperfect bodies of females and children.

...excessive stretching harms children less than adults, because of the moisture and softness of their bodies...we should take [this remark] also as applying to eunuchs and

⁷⁶ Gal. *UP* 14.2.301.

⁷⁷ Gal. *Nat. Fac.*, 2.3.85.

women and others who, through nature or habit, are moist of body and soft-fleshed.⁷⁸

Women, like eunuchs, are even called “mutilated” in Galen’s writings.⁷⁹ Both women and eunuchs are types of incomplete males who, because of their perceived mutilation, do not have the potential that boy children do to grow to completion.

So Laqueur’s one-sex system can be further divided into subcategories beyond just men and women as imperfect men. There are perfect (male) bodies and a wide variety of imperfect bodies, each of which are imperfect in slightly different ways. These imperfect bodies include children’s bodies, female bodies, and eunuch bodies. Children are imperfect because they are still developing. Females are imperfect because their lack of heat stunts their development. Eunuchs are imperfect because of human interference with their development, leaving them in a perpetually unfinished, child-like state.⁸⁰

Jonathan Walter’s article “Invading the Roman Body” argues that the Roman ideal of masculinity “defined men as impenetrable penetrators.”⁸¹ The masculine gender is closely tied to the body and perceived bodily states—penetrated or unpenetrated. Walters goes on to say that when a man is penetrated the act is described as *muliebria pati* “having a woman’s experience.” Being penetrated is associated with the female sex, being unpenetrated with the male.

⁷⁸ Gal. *Hipp. Off. Med.*, 868. This text is unfortunately preserved only in Arabic, so I rely on M.C. Lyon’s translation.

⁷⁹ Gal. *UP* 14.2.299.

⁸⁰ Galen does not specify explicitly whether he is referring to eunuchs castrated before puberty or after. His description, however, implies that he has pre-puberty castration in mind. Eunuchs castrated as adults, such as the *galli* of Cybele, have a markedly different and less childlike appearance, retaining post-puberty elements such as facial hair and male-pattern baldness.

⁸¹ Jonathon Walters “Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought” in *Roman Sexualities*, ed by Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 30.

This is not simply a factor of sexual activity. In Galen's scheme of the body as quoted earlier, women's genitals are conceived as being like a reverse penis. In other words a woman is perpetually penetrating herself. This conceptually renders her body inherently non-integral and susceptible to and even requiring further penetration. And for a man to be sexually penetrated is to (temporarily, at least) give him a female-like body.

Roman medical author Caelius Aurelianus describes pathics as men suffering from a mental condition, yet he ultimately ties preferences for sexual activity to the condition of the body engaging in the activity.

“...nevertheless the affliction being discussed, which produces pathic or effeminate men, is the only one that burns the body stronger as age increases and greatly moves the body with an unspeakable lust, and indeed this is not without explanation. For in other years, when the body is still strong and performs the natural duties of sexual intercourse, sexual desire is divided by excess into two aspects, with the soul of those younger men sometimes excited by being active and sometimes by being acted upon. But among those who are lacking their virile powers of sexual intercourse, lost because of old age, all their sexual desire of their soul is led to a contrary longing, and therefore more strongly demands a feminine role in sexual intercourse. In fact, many infer that this is the reason why boys are also frequently driven by this passion. For, like old men, they are lacking virile powers, because the virility that has deserted those who are old is not yet in those who are young.”

Sola tamen supradicta quae subactos seu molles efficit viros senescenti corpora gravius incalescit, et infanda magis libidine movet, non quidem sine ratione. In aliis enim aetatibus, adhuc valido corpora et naturalia veneris officia celebrante, gemina luxuriate libido dividitur, animo eorum nunc faciendo nunc patiando iactato. In his vero qui senectute defecti virili veneris officio caruerint, omnis animi libido in contrariam ducitur appetentiam, et propterea femineam validius venerem poscit. Hinc denique coniciunt plurimi etiam pueros hac passione iactari. Similiter enim

senibus virili indigent officio, quod in ipsis nondum et illos deseruit.⁸²

Boys, in other words, are not yet men, and therefore are especially prone to be drawn to “having a woman’s experience” as Jonathon Walters calls it. Old men similarly have bodies whose manliness is reduced by their age. In Caelius’ account of sex the transformations or shifts of the body do not end with the transition of ambiguously sexed child into a male adult, but comes around full circle back to an ambiguously sexed elder. The maleness of a man varies over the course of his life. As a boy, he is like a woman, an incompleting sex. As an adult, he achieves the sex category of male. And as an old man, his body breaks down to resemble the unfinished state he had as a child. Fausto-Sterling says, when discussing the changes in human sexual anatomy over an individual’s lifetime, “We take for granted that the bodies of a new-born, a twenty-year-old, and an eighty-year old differ. Yet we persist in a static vision of anatomical sex.”⁸³ Ancient medical writers, in contrast, incorporate the changes of the body in their schema of biological sex.

What Walters argues concerning the inviolate body of Roman males echoes a passage in the previously mentioned pseudo-Aristotle text *Problemata*, and what the author describes are the causes and physical effects of men engaging in passive sex. In this scheme, women are the ultimate “destroyed” or failed male form. Eunuchs and effeminate men are somewhere in between, adults who are not as incomplete as females, but not as perfected as true males.

⁸²Cael. Aur. *Acut. pass.* 4.137.

⁸³ Fausto-Sterling (2005), 242.

Walters notes that “not all males are accorded that designation [of being called *viri*].”⁸⁴ He argues that *viri* is a term denoting “gender-as-social-status”⁸⁵ and not sex. *Viri* are those who are sexually impenetrable and penetrate others. In other words, they are adult, freeborn Roman citizens who properly fulfill their gender role. The very action of receiving penetration, however, is seen as changing a person’s body and subtly changing their sex. Gender performance and sex are intertwined. The one influences and alters the other. *Viri* therefore is not merely a term denoting gender, because gender is not merely gender. Gender (and gendered behavior, particularly sexual behavior) is also sex.

Biological Sex and Society

Although the medical writers acknowledge a broad variety of sex categories, that does not necessarily carry over into widespread social constructions. For a modern example, most educated individuals will, if asked, acknowledge the existence of intersex conditions. In day-to-day social activity, however, everything from bathrooms to drivers’ licenses to medical forms offer only two categories. Sex categories that are an invisible minority easily vanish from cultural consciousness. But some of the categories expressed by the ancient medical authors were either common enough or captured the imagination enough to become prevalent, visible types that are frequently acknowledged outside of medical treatises. These categories include children, hermaphrodites, eunuchs, and effeminate men.

⁸⁴ Walters (1997), 31.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 32.

Furthermore, the idea of metamorphosis is deep in classical thought, including the idea of sexual metamorphosis. As Luc Brisson writes, “the idea of transformation, or metamorphosis, can be traced a long way back in Greek literature. Already present in the *Iliad* (see *Metamorphoses* II 309-319, the *Odyssey* (see *Metamorphoses* X 237-281) and Hesiod (*Theogony* 183-206, 280-281), it persists in both the poetry and the figurative art of the fifth and fourth centuries.”⁸⁶ The theme is overtly picked up by Roman authors such as Ovid and Apuleius. Stories of not just metamorphosis in general but sex change in particular abound in myth. Ovid alone mentions six in the *Metamorphoses*: from Tiresias, Sithon, Hermaphroditus, Mestra, Iphis, and Cainis.⁸⁷

In Diodorus’ account of Herais, social transformation is emphasized. While his narrative reveals Herais’/Diophantus’ male genitalia, the female pronoun is still used to describe her/him. And at the end of the story, Diodorus describes Diophantus as “a woman [who] took on a man’s courage and renown”⁸⁸ as if the social aspects of courage and renown were more important than the physical aspects. The right genitalia gave Diophantus the opportunity to become a man, but it did not automatically make him a man, just as a boy child has the opportunity to become a man, but the opportunity can be lost through castration or effeminacy of character.

In his account of Callon, it is a transformation of genitals that appears to change Callo into Callon. Callo, the married woman, became Callon the man. Callon is treated as if he were *always* a man, however, even while his testicles were hidden and he appeared female and believed himself to be female. Like the Olympic athlete Maria

⁸⁶ Luc Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence: Androgyny and Hermaphroditism in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, trans. By Janet Lloyd, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 43-4.

⁸⁷ List from Brisson (2002), 44. Ovid *Meta.* 3.316-38, 4.279-80, 4.285-88, 8.843-78, 9.666-797, 12.169-209.

⁸⁸ Diod. Sic. 32.10.2.

Patiño, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Callon's ignorance did not excuse him from social punishment for transgressing sex boundaries and he was brought to trial for impiety.⁸⁹ He, like Diophrantus, had the potential for manhood, even while he was unaware of it. According to Diodorus then, sex can not only be transformed. It can be hidden. Superficial observation does not necessarily reveal a person's true sex or sexed nature.⁹⁰

Diodorus undermines the dominance of the genitals for determining sex as he continues to write, stating that it is "not that the male and female natures have been united to form a truly bisexual type, for that is impossible, but that Nature, to mankind's consternation and mystification, has through the bodily parts given this impression."⁹¹ The two natures, male and female, are not determined by body. These natures, which correspond to the modern concept of gender, are described as fluid but cannot coexist equally in one person. Individuals such as Herais and Callo can transform from a feminine to a masculine nature but they cannot be equally feminine and masculine at the same time. One gender must predominate. The body, however, can have both male parts and female parts. And the sex of a person's body does not always correspond to his or her nature, as seen in the quote by Ennius as related by Cicero:

"For you, young men, show a womanish soul, you, maiden,
a soul of a man."

Vos enim, iuvenes, animum geritis muliebrem,
illa virgo viri⁹²

⁸⁹ Diod. Sic. 32.11.

⁹⁰ As Juvenal bemoans in *Satire 2*, which I shall discuss in the next chapter.

⁹¹ Diod. Sic., 32.12.1.

⁹² Cic. *Off.*, 1.61.

This is particularly true when it comes to men who may possess male parts but a feminine nature. Conceptualized as an achieved state, maleness and masculinity are difficult to maintain. In the ancient literature it is far easier for a man to “deteriorate” into femininity than it is for a woman to rise to manly virtue. Some women may be imagined to become masculinized, but in a manner that is generally conceived as foreign, mythical, unreal, or all of the above, and Roman authors describe masculinity of these women as almost wholly negative.⁹³ They are often presented as a parody, acting out an over the top performance of manliness with none of the Roman masculine virtues, and not truly manly at all.⁹⁴ Roman women could only be imagined to possess a manly spirit in a positive sense in that they could be a reflection of the positive characteristics of their male relatives.⁹⁵ In general, Roman authors present a properly manly nature as something that takes effort, something which all women and those men who are not sufficiently self-disciplined cannot reach and retain. Being a man in Roman terms was not merely a matter of possessing a penis and testicles.

A person’s nature, however, is presented as leaving a mark upon one’s physical form as well. In that way, personal nature (or gendered activity) can become sex as a person’s behavior and character is writ upon their body. What pseudo-Aristotle’s *Problemata* states about sexual habits changing the body, the Roman authors imagined as true for other habits as well. For example, overly-luxurious living was associated with *mollitia*, “softness,” of both behavior and body.

⁹³ Judith Hallett, “Female Homoeroticism and the Denial of Roman Reality in Latin Literature,” in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. by Judith Hallett and Marilyn Skinner, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 255-273.

⁹⁴ The clearest example is Martial’s epigram 7.67, where he describes the tribad Philaenis as refusing to fellate men on the grounds that such an action is unmanly, but performs cunnilingus on women, which, by Roman standards of masculinity, is equally unmanly and objectionable.

⁹⁵ Judith Hallett, “Women as ‘Same’ and ‘Other’ in the Classical Roman Elite” *Helios* 16 (1989).

This creates anxiety about the uncertainty of sex. If sex can shift and change just as gender can, simply by alterations in behavior and activity, then maleness itself can be lost. And a man who appears properly male upon superficial observation might in fact be masquerading, hiding an unmale nature. Physiognomists in the empire described associations between the most minute of physical characteristics and hidden effeminacy or other unacceptable traits. Physiognomy rests on the assumption—Aristotelian in its origins—that the nature and the body change in tandem.

It seems to me that the soul and the body are in sympathy with each other. When the condition of the soul is altered it will likewise alter the shape of the body, and again when the shape of the body is altered, the condition of the soul will alter with it.

Δοκεῖ δέ μοι ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα συμπαθεῖν ἀλλήλοις· καὶ ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς ἕξις ἀλλοιούμενη συναλλοιοῖ τὴν τοῦ σώματος μορφήν, πάλιν τε ἡ τοῦ σώματος μορφή ἀλλοιούμενη συναλλοιοῖ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἕξιν.⁹⁶

The physiognomy paradigm places the physicality of masculinity and femininity along a spectrum. The natural shapes of the body and body parts can vary in regards the perceived manliness of their configuration. Rather than a dichotomy, individuals are assumed to have both male and female physical elements, with an assignment of one sex over the other determined by which elements predominate. In the second century CE, the sophist Polemon, an ethnic Greek but associate of Emperor Hadrian and born of a family of Roman Consular rank, writes:

You should learn this from the gaze, the movement, and the voice, and then measure up one part with the other until you come to know where resides precedence (of one over

⁹⁶ Arist. [Phgn.], 808b.

the other). For in masculinity is femininity, and in femininity there is masculinity, and the name (of male of female) falls to whichever has precedence.⁹⁷

The genre of oratory, too, reveals concerns about possible slippage and transformation of sex. Quintilian's advice for orators reveals the same Aristotelian thinking regarding the close relationship between body and soul that forms the foundation for the physiognomists. Quintilian's concerns with the body, gestures, and voice necessary for a good orator conflate the body and actions of a proper Roman male with the soul of a good Roman orator. A man is produced both by what he is and what he does. Nature gives him the potential but actions are essential to realize and maintain masculinity and maleness itself, as the actions performed produce not just the character of the orator, but his embodied self as well. As Gunderson states in *Staging Masculinity*, "With his arguments on labor, Quintilian points towards [Judith] Butler's theses on the body. Butler has insisted on a performativity that acts as a process that is necessarily enacted over time. And the performative subject is an accretion formed via these iterations. Furthermore, the possibility and consequences of performative failure are the same for both Butler and Quintilian: the subject's very being is at stake. Quintilian, though, sets himself up as a guardian against the queerness that Butler is glad to see ever waiting in the wings."⁹⁸

Where modern scholars such as Butler and Fausto-Sterling see the flexibility of the body as a method for breaking down gender roles, the ancient authors viewed it as

⁹⁷ (PA 25^a) Polemon's original Greek *Physiognomy* has been lost so I have used Robert Hoyland's translation of the Arabic Leiden manuscript (PA) in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul*, ed. Simon Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 329-464.

⁹⁸ Erik Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 86.

intensifying the importance of gender roles. With the body so plastic and potentially ambiguous, proper gender presentation becomes all the more crucial. If maleness is something that is neither secure nor permanent, then the production of masculinity becomes the bulwark to maintain it. The threat of the “hidden *cinaedi*” as expressed in Juvenal *Satire 2* is that those bristling-bearded, manly *cinaedi* destabilize that bulwark. If one cannot be inherently male, and if public performance of masculinity cannot make and keep one male, then questions could be raised about any Roman man’s maleness. Hence comes the physiognomists’ obsession with the subtle physical marks by which one can tell who is masculine (and therefore also fully male) and who is not.

Transformative or transitional sex can also be seen in sculpture in the many depictions of Attis and the priests of Cybele. The cult statue of Attis at the Sanctuary of Cybele in Ostia reveals a sexually ambiguous form. Attis reclines with groin exposed like a reverse Hermaphroditus. Instead of the feminine breasts and masculine phallus of Hermaphroditus statues, Attis displays the soft but masculine torso of a young man contrasted by a feminine genital mound unmarked by a phallus and testicles or the scars of castration. Hales describes it: “Far from depicting the mere castration, the artist has removed any sight of male genitals. In their place he has substituted a smooth pubis, its female characteristics complemented by the curves of the torso.”⁹⁹ As Hales points out, however, such sculptures of Attis are rare and appear only to occur within sanctuaries, visible only to initiates. Most sculptures of Attis show the young man before his castration, his defining moment of bodily change yet to occur.

Statues of *galli* do not display their bare bodies as the Attis sanctuary statue does. They do, however, display the trapping of femininity. The emasculation of their bodies is

⁹⁹ Hales (2002), 97.

represented through the woman's dress and jewelry they wear. Rather than adopting a visual construction of identity that would render them either thoroughly foreign and alien or assimilate them into a more traditional, manly picture of priesthood, the devotees of Cybele claim a very Roman but very feminine image for themselves.

Summary

From a biological standpoint, the sexual dimorphism of humans, compared to other mammals, is slight. Gender exists to socially create differences through action that do not firmly exist biologically.¹⁰⁰ Most of what we as a society think of as sex characteristics are not as rigidly broken down into two discrete categories as our culture would have us believe. Sex at its most basic biological definition—female is the large, immobile gamete in reproduction and male is the small, mobile gamete—is socially invisible. Furthermore it leaves anyone who, by nature or by surgery, does not produce gametes, completely outside the system of sexual categorization. The conventional definitions of sex, involving a mish-mash of chromosomes, genitalia, internal morphology, external morphology, phenotype, and hormones contain so many criteria (that do not necessarily correlate) that sex becomes incomprehensible.

In addition to the transformations the body goes through as it passes through different ages of life, the body's actions also affect sex. A person who possesses a body that modern medical categories would label male would not necessarily be a male by Roman standards. The ancient literature shows male bodies perceived as being made womanly through feminine action or feminine demeanor. Action and character are not

¹⁰⁰ Ray L. Birdwhistell, "Masculinity and Femininity as Display," in *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 39-46.

just displays of gender. They change the body itself. In this Roman conception of sex, bodies are not static and sex is not innate and unchanging.

Chapter Three: Prepubescent Castration

Eunuchs in the Roman Empire provide an excellent example of the differences between the modern and ancient categories of phenotypic sex, showing how different interpretations can arise from observing the same sorts of bodies. In the modern western world, castrated men may be gendered as masculine, feminine, or as a third gender,¹⁰¹ but their sex is still conceived as male. Their chromosomes are XY and a randomly chosen modern medical doctor, upon examining the person and noting a lack of vagina, ovaries, or uterus, would almost certainly declare the individual a male from a medical perspective. In contrast, authors in the Roman world see eunuchs as physically distinct from males in such a way and to such an extent that they are no longer part of the male sex category. Castration before puberty results in markedly different physical effects than castration after puberty, but in most circumstances Roman authors consider neither class of eunuchs as properly male. Each of the two classes of eunuch, however, receives distinct representations of their bodies, behavior, and place in society. In this chapter, I shall exclusively discuss eunuchs castrated before puberty. In particular, I shall explore how the ancient authors compare the bodies of these eunuchs with the bodies of women and children; their phenotype is thought to resemble those bodies more than the body of an adult man.

¹⁰¹ The forum at “The Eunuch Archive” at www.eunuch.org includes many castrated men who still consider themselves masculine. The hijra of India, however, take on a predominantly feminine gender role. “They wear women’s dress, hairstyles and accessories; they imitate women’s walk, gestures, voice, facial expressions and language; they prefer male sexual partners and experience being sexual objects of men’s desires; and many identify themselves as women. Hijras take feminine names when they join the community and use feminine kinship terms for each other such as ‘sister,’ ‘auntie,’ and ‘grandmother.’ In public transport or accommodations, they request ‘ladies only’ seating and they periodically demand to be counted as women in the census.” (Serena Nanda, “Hijras: An Alternative Sex and Gender Role In India” in *Third Sex, Third Gender* ed. by Gilbert Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 382.)

Eunuchs represent multiple intersections of the Other, their identities creating an opposition to the dominant identity of the Roman aristocratic male. If the proper Roman man is masculine, sexually impenetrable, and born of a good Roman family, then eunuchs represent the opposite of a proper Roman man in every possible way. Roman literature presents eunuch slaves as effeminate, sexually penetrable, servile, and foreign.

The rise of Christianity alters the criteria of proper Roman masculinity. The virtue of chastity becomes more prominent and conflicting views of eunuchs begin to appear. A vision of eunuchs as monkish or angelic figures of perfect Christian chastity arises, inspired by the biblical verse Matthew 19:12, and subsequently clashes with the concurrent and persisting classical tradition of eunuchs as uneasily ambiguous in body and often associated with moral turpitude.¹⁰² For this dissertation I am limiting my study to pagan sources. Because of extensive cultural cross pollination, it is impossible to tell where pagan thought ends and Christian thought begins during the late empire. Nevertheless, many of the late pagan representations of eunuchs are consistent with earlier representations, so I shall include them here as examples of part of the same pattern that stretches out over centuries. I am also focusing my study on sex and gender in particular, although issues of race and class are also intrinsically tied up with issues of gender and sex within eunuch bodies.

¹⁰² See Ringrose (2004), Tougher (2008), and especially Kuefler (2001) for discussions on Christian representations of eunuchs.

An Overview of Castration (The How, When, and Why of Castration and the Eunuch Slave Trade)

Gary Taylor's timeline on the first page of *Castration: An Abbreviated History of Western Manhood* gives 4000 BCE as the approximate era when the practice of human castration begins. He includes copious question marks ("First castrated humans? Uruk?")¹⁰³ and the true origin of human castration as a common cultural practice is no more than a guess. Scholars generally presume that it arose out of the agricultural practice of castrating farm animals as part of animal domestication, although some hypothesize that it originates from the use of castration as punishment.¹⁰⁴ The earliest historical records for the existence of human castration date from around the second millennium BCE both in Mesopotamia and ancient China. Deller assigns a date of somewhere around the 13th century BCE for the first attested eunuchs in Assyria, and hypothesizes that the Assyrians may have adopted the practice from the neighboring Hittites.¹⁰⁵ Middle Assyrian law dictates castration as the punishment for adultery and some sexual crimes, but eunuchs were most commonly associated not with sexual criminality but with palace administrators. The royal corps of eunuchs was an honorable organization and a common way for younger sons to achieve high ranks, much like in the later Byzantine Empire.¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile in China, the earliest recorded reference to palace eunuchs is in the eighth century BCE during the Chou Dynasty (1122-250 BCE). The Chou Dynasty, however, deliberately maintained continuity of customs and institutions

¹⁰³ Taylor (2000).

¹⁰⁴ Vern L. Bullough "Eunuchs in history and society" in *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* ed. Shaun Tougher (Swansea: University of Wales Press, 2002), 1, 5.

¹⁰⁵ Karlheinz Deller, "The Assyrian Eunuchs and their Predecessors," *In Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East*, ed. by Kazuko Watanabe, (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1999), 309.

¹⁰⁶ Deller (1999), 304 and 306.

from the previous Shang Dynasty (1766-1122 BCE), including, presumably, the institution of palace eunuchs.¹⁰⁷

In the Roman Empire, authors associated eunuchs and castration with the East. According to legend, the practice of castration was invented by the semi-mythical Assyrian queen, Semiramis. As Ammianus writes:

When seeing the line of mutilated human beings, one would curse the memory of Samiramis, queen of that ancient time, who, first before all others, castrated young males, as if hurling violence at Nature, twisting her away from her intended course.

...cernens mutilorum hominum agmina, detestetur
memoriam Samiramidis reginae illius veteris, quae teneros
mares castravit omnium prima, velut vim iniectans naturae,
eandemque ab instituto cursu retorquens...¹⁰⁸

Diodorus Siculus relates two separate accounts of Semiramis' rise to power. In one account, which comes from Ctesias of Cnidus, she enslaved her husband, causing him to become so enamored with her that he obeyed her every whim and committed suicide when the king took her away to be his own wife.¹⁰⁹ In the second account, which Diodorus attributes to Athenaeus, Semiramis persuaded her husband, the king, to give his royal power to her for five days. On the second day, she ordered her husband to be seized and imprisoned, thus obtaining absolute power.¹¹⁰ In both accounts, Semiramis snatches power from her husband and leads him to destruction. Furthermore, she is said to order the destruction of the lovers she takes as well, after she has received her pleasure

¹⁰⁷ Mary M. Anderson, *Hidden Power: The Palace Eunuchs of Imperial China*, (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1990), 21.

¹⁰⁸ Amm. Marc. 14.6.17 Also Claud. *In. Eutr.* 1.339-42 relates the legend of Semiramis inventing castration so she could better disguise her sex, and Ov. *Met.* 4.108.

¹⁰⁹ Diod. Sic. 2.5.2 and 2.6.10.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 2.20.4.

from them.¹¹¹

Semiramis herself displays elements of gender transgression. She is foresighted and bold; she is skilled in her martial endeavors and is eager for great exploits and honor; and she desires to test her valor in war like a man.¹¹² She not only shows masculine characteristics but also, earlier in her career, assumed a manner of dress “on account of which it was impossible to distinguish whether the wearer of it was a man or a woman.”

(δι ‘ ἧς οὐκ ἦν διαγνώσκειν τὸν περιβεβλημένον πότερον ἀνὴρ ἔστιν ἢ γυνή.)¹¹³

According to the ancient historians, her son Ninyas lived a life of luxury and idleness, quite unlike his mother, and subsequent kings followed this example. Where Semiramis took on masculine or androgynous clothing and manners, Diodorus depicts her male descendants as living a life of feminine decadence and luxury. In his words, King Sardanapallus, her last royal descendant, “lived the life of a woman”

(Βίον ἔζησε γυναικίως).¹¹⁴ He secluded himself in the palace, wore women’s clothing (complete reversal of Semiramis’ masculinizing androgynous garb) and cosmetics, and engaged in a task associated with women’s labor—spinning wool.

Thus, Semiramis left a legacy of broken masculinity behind her. Dead kings, destroyed lovers, and effeminate male offspring. With this literary tradition surrounding her, it is no wonder that Semiramis, who causes effeminacy in the men around her, should be accused of inventing castration. Semiramis inverts the natural order. She is a manly woman who makes men womanly.

This concept of the powerful Eastern woman who emasculates men appears in

¹¹¹ Diod. Sic. 2.13.4.

¹¹² Ibid. 2.6.5; 2.7.2; 2.18.2.

¹¹³ Ibid. 2.6.6.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 2.23.1.

other contexts as well. The East is the un-Roman place where gender order is inverted. Some depictions of Cleopatra follow a similar pattern as Semiramis. She, too, is an eastern queen whose court becomes associated with eunuchs and who is accused of feminizing the men who become her consorts. Horace's Epode 9 vividly describes the disgrace Cleopatra was said to bring upon Roman men.

Alas, a Roman man—posterity, you will deny it—
after having been handed over to a woman
holds the barricade and bears arms and
is willing to be governed by wrinkled eunuchs...

Romanus eheu—posteri negabitis—
emancipatus feminae
fert vallum et arma miles et spadonibus
servire rugosis potest...¹¹⁵

Emperor Domitian outlawed castration within the Roman Empire during his reign, further solidifying the idea of eunuchs as part of a foreign (primarily eastern) order. Such legislation against the creation and selling of Roman eunuchs was later repeated by Leo I and Justinian. Eunuchs could still be imported and sold throughout the empire, but the medical operation to make them eunuchs had to be carried out beyond the empire's borders. (It is difficult, however, to imagine that there was not a black market trade in eunuch slaves illegally castrated within the empire. As Tougher writes, "...the case of Leo I legislating against the selling of Roman eunuchs within the empire reveals that such trade was going on rather than that the emperor [Domitian] had managed to stamp it out."¹¹⁶)

Eunuch slaves were a popular luxury item and status symbol. Long associated

¹¹⁵ Hor. *Epod.* 9.11-14.

¹¹⁶ Shaun Tougher, "Byzantine eunuchs: an overview, with special reference to their creation and origin," in *Women, Men, and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* ed. by L. James (New York: Routledge, 1997), 178.

with the wealthy royal courts in Persia and Egypt, eunuch slaves were as much a sign of opulence as gold jewelry and purple dye. Terence's play, *The Eunuch*, shows clearly the status of eunuch slaves as luxury goods. The girl Phaedria asks for an Ethiopian maid and a eunuch as special presents, because "queens alone use these."¹¹⁷ Pliny the Elder mentions a particularly expensive eunuch slave who cost fifty million sesterces, although this was probably a higher than average price.¹¹⁸ Piotr Scholz states that an average slave laborer in Rome in the 2nd century BCE cost five hundred denari, while a eunuch cost two thousand denari.¹¹⁹ The medical risks of castration make eunuch slaves a rarer and therefore more expensive commodity than unaltered slaves. In economic terms, they are a value-added processed product, with the raw material being the human body itself.¹²⁰

Justinian's legislation states that out of ninety people who were castrated, only three survived.¹²¹ Yet the physician Soranus describes it as a not dangerous operation.¹²² Both have reason to present a biased picture, Justinian because he gives his statistics on the riskiness of the operation in the context of justifying his legislation against castration in the empire. Whereas Soranus, naturally, would not want to imply that he kills his castration patients in vast numbers.

In modern scholarship, Scholz, discussing black eunuchs that Coptic monasteries provided to the Turks, states that "according to figures collected in the region at that time, only every fourth person forced to undergo castration survived the brutal procedure."¹²³

¹¹⁷ Ter. *Eun.* 169 "Quia solae utuntur his reginae."

¹¹⁸ Plin. *HN.* 7.128.

¹¹⁹ Scholtz (2001), 113.

¹²⁰ Claudian notes the increase in the value of a slave that castration brings in *In Eutr.* 1.48-9.

¹²¹ Justinianus Imperator, *Novellae* 142, R. Schoell and W. Kroll, eds, *Corpus Iuris Civilis vol. 3* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1912).

¹²² Sor. *Gyn.* 2.40.

¹²³ Scholz (2001), 16.

Scholz gives no specific citation for the sources used to calculate this number, however. Gary Taylor's *Castration: An Abbreviated History of Western Manhood*, in contrast, states that castration of the testicles alone¹²⁴ "is as simple, and safe, for humans as for other animals," whereas castration of the penis is an operation which "for most of human history few people survived."¹²⁵

The most common methods used for castration were crushing or cutting. Paul of Aegina, writing in the seventh century, describes the two methods of castration in his time, which were simple procedures also likely used in earlier centuries as well.

There are two [methods of castration], one is by compression, the other by cutting. Castration by compression is done thus: Children, while still infants, are placed in a pot of hot water, then when the body parts are relaxed and drooping, the testicles are crushed with the fingers in that very pot, until they disappear, and, being broken up, can no longer be found by touch. The method by cutting is such: the person to be made a eunuch must be placed upon a bench on his back, and the scrotum with the testicles grasped by the fingers of the left hand, and stretched; two straight incisions then must be made with a scalpel, one for each testicle; and when the testicles draw up they must be incised and cut through, leaving only the most thin bond of connection between the natural state of the testicular vessels. This method is preferred to that by compression; for those who have been castrated by compression sometimes have venereal diseases, a certain part of the testicles, so it seems, having escaped the compression.

διπλὸς δὲ ἔστιν οὗτος, ὁ μὲν κατὰ θλάσιν, ὁ δὲ κατ' ἐκτομήν. ὁ μὲν κατὰ θλάσιν οὕτως ἐπιτελεῖται· ἐπι νήπια ὄντα τὰ παιδία ἐπικαθίζεταί εἰς λεκάνην θερμοῦ ὕδατος· ἔπειτα, ὅταν χαλασθῇ τὰ σώματα, ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ λεκάνῃ τοῖς δακτύλοις θλάσ τὰ διδύμια, ἕως οὗ

¹²⁴ This is the only type of slave castration attested to in classical sources. If full castration of both testicles and penis occurred, it must have been rare enough to not receive comment in descriptions of castration procedure.

¹²⁵ Taylor (2000), 55-56.

ἀφανισθῆ καὶ διαλυθέντα μηκέτι τῆ ἀφῆ συνεστῶτα
ὑποπέση. ὁ δὲ κατ' ἐκτομὴν τρόπος τοιοῦτὸς ἐστίν·
ὑπτίος ἐσχηματίσθω ἐπὶ βάθρου ὁ εὐνουχιζόμενος,
καὶ τοῖς δακτύλοις τῆς ἀριστερᾶ χειρὸς πιεζέσθω ὁ
ὄσχεος σὺν τοῖς διδύμοις καὶ δισταθεὶς ἐπ' ὀρθὸν
τεμνέσθω σμίλη δύο τομαῖς μιᾶ καθ' ἑκάτερον δίδυμον·
ἐκπηδήσαντες δὲ οἱ δίδυμοι ἐκτεμνέσθωσαν
διαδερόμενοι λεπτοτάτης μόνον συνεχείας τῆ κατὰ
τὴν πρόσφυσιν τῶν ἀγγείων καταλιμπανομένης.
οὗτος ὁ τρόπος τοῦ κατὰ θλάσιν προκέκριται· οἱ γὰρ
τεθλασμένοι ποτὲ καὶ συνουσία ὀρέγονται μέρους
τινός, ὡς ἔοικε, τῶν διδύμων ἐν τῆ θλάσει
διαλανθάνοντος.¹²⁶

The crushing method requires the procedure to be done at a very young age.

Juvenal, however, describes a eunuch who, though beardless, was clearly castrated late in adolescence, and he expects his readers to consider this a familiar enough practice to be believable.¹²⁷ Juvenal compares this older castrate, a privately owned slave whose castration was arranged by the mistress who owns him, with the more typical slave-dealers' eunuchs who were castrated when they were very young.¹²⁸ The implication is that the operation was most commonly done in very young childhood or infancy, but could be, and sometimes was, performed later in adolescence.

Whatever the mortality rate and the age, pre-pubescent castration of slaves would dramatically alter the life and body of the individual who unwillingly underwent the operation.

¹²⁶ Paul of Aegina 6.68. The bleeding from the cutting procedure would be minimal. Infection would be a somewhat higher risk, although as pathologist Guido Majno observes in a close reading of Cornelius Celsus, Romans were aware of and used antiseptic solutions to treat wounds. (Guido Majno, *The Healing Hand: Man and Wound in the Ancient World*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 369.) Whether such care would be used on slaves being castrated for sale as luxury goods, however, is anyone's guess.

¹²⁷ Juv. 6.366-377.

¹²⁸ Claudian's *In Eutropium* also indicates that castration of slaves was commonly done in infancy. *In Eutr.* 1.44-53.

The Sex and Gender of Eunuch Slaves

The physical nature of eunuchs makes them a good focus of study for exploring how ideas of the sexed body within the Roman Empire were unlike our own. Eunuch bodies are complicated; defining their sex is equally complicated. Their bodies illuminate the problems with the modern criteria for defining sex, and show how a dichotomous paradigm of sex is not as simple and natural as it may at first appear. Roman authors present eunuchs castrated before puberty quite differently from those castrated after puberty (such as the eunuch devotees of Cybele). The bodies of young eunuch slaves and freedmen are presented as similar to adolescent youths, as if they were boys whose pubertal transformation were forcibly halted. As they age, and their youthful features wrinkle and fade, they are often compared to old women.

Aristotle gives a fairly accurate description of the physical effects of pre-puberty castration.

Some animals change their form and their character not only according to their ages and the seasons but also through castration...this change is also present for people; for if anything should be maimed while a child, the late-coming hair does not come to exist, nor does the voice change, but it continues to be shrill; and if they are maimed while young men, then the late-coming hair leaves except that on the groin (and this lessens, but remains), and the hair from birth does not leave; for no eunuchs are bald.

μεταβάλλει δὲ τὰ ζῶα οὐ μόνον τὰς μορφὰς ἕνια καὶ τὸ ἦθος κατὰ τὰς ἡλικίας καὶ τὰς ὥρας ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκτεμνόμενα...τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον καὶ ἐπὶ ἀνθρώπων· ἂν μὲν γὰρ παῖδας ὄντας πηρώσει τις, οὔτε αἱ ὑστερογενεῖς ἐπιγίνονται τρίχες οὔτε ἡ φωνὴ μεταβάλλει ἀλλ' ὀξεῖα διατελεῖ· ἂν δ' ἤδη ἡβῶντας,

αἱ μὲν ὑστερογενεῖς τρίζες ἀπολείπουσι πλὴν τῶν ἐπὶ
τῆς ἥβης· αὐταὶ δ' ἐλάττους μὲν, μέντουσι δέ, αἱ δ'
ἐκ γενετῆς τρίχες οὐκ ἀπολείπουσιν· οὐδεὶς γὰρ
γίνεται εὐνουχος φαλακρός.¹²⁹

And:

All things, when castrated, change into the feminine, and as their sinewy strength is unstrung in its origin [i.e. the testicles] they emit a voice similar to the female.

Ἐκτεμνόμενα δὲ πάντα εἰς τὸ θῆλυ μεταβάλλει, καὶ διὰ τὸ ἀνίσθαι τὴν ἰσχὺν τὴν νευρώδη ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ ὁμοίαν ἀφίησι φωνὴν τοῖς θήλεσιν.¹³⁰

Jean D. Wilson and Claus Roehrborn, writing in the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, state that Aristotle understood the physiological effects of castration “with remarkable exactitude.”¹³¹ In addition to the features observed by Aristotle—high pitched voiced and lack of beard and body hair—other easily observable physical differences in eunuchs castrated pre-puberty include a high incidence of gynecomastia, or female-like breast development, and unusually long limbs and extremities from the ends of the long bones failing to cap at puberty. Osteoporosis is common in older eunuchs, often severe osteoporosis, as bone mineral density steadily and gradually decreases after castration.¹³²

The lack of testicles causes bodily differences between females and eunuchs on

¹²⁹ Arist. *Hist. an.* 632a.

¹³⁰ Arist. *Gen. an.* 787b.

¹³¹ Jean D. Wilson and Claus Roehrborn, “Long-Term Consequences of Castration in Men: Lessons from the Skoptzy and the Eunuchs of the Chinese and Ottoman Courts,” *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* 84 (1999), 4324.

¹³² *Ibid.* 4330-31.

the one hand, and testicled males on the other. But the lack of testicles alone does not create the sex categories of not-men. In the ancient world, males are not simply defined as persons with testicles. Boy children, too, are lumped in the same category as females and eunuchs. It is not the testicles themselves that make a man, but the action of testicles upon the body during puberty. In ancient medical texts, they act as a trigger mechanism for metamorphosis, functioning as a weight upon the sinews, which effects the change that creates a male body from one that was previously not fully formed as male.¹³³

Aristotle states that animals are male and female in their faculty and function, namely, that males have the power to generate and females are that which forms the generated offspring. This definition leaves eunuchs in a bind, however, as they are obviously capable of neither. It is in this context that Aristotle says that “although animals are called male and female with respect to the whole of the animal, they are not male or female in respect of the whole of itself, but only in respect of a certain faculty and a certain part” (εἰ γὰρ καὶ καθ’ ὅλου λέγεται τοῦ ζώου τοῦ μὲν τὸ θῆλυ τοῦ δὲ τὸ ἄρρεν, ἀλλ’ οὐ κατὰ πᾶν γε τὸ αὐτὸ θῆλυ καὶ ἄρρεν ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τινα δύναμιν καὶ κατὰ τι μέρος...)¹³⁴ Eunuchs, then, having had the male part removed and thus lacking the male faculty as Aristotle defines it, are left between sexes. The whole of itself is more in nature and form like a female than a male, and yet missing the parts to serve in the female function as well. Thus, under this paradigm, eunuchs most closely resemble children, who are also left ambiguously sexed by Aristotle’s definitions of male and female, able neither to generate nor form offspring. Indeed, Aristotle

¹³³ Arist. Gen an. 787b.

¹³⁴ Arist. Gen an. 716a.

categorizes children, eunuchs, and women as having similar bodies.¹³⁵ All three possess bodies that, for different reasons, have not transformed into a male body.

Literary authors, too, not just medical and scientific authors, associate eunuch bodies more with women than with men. Authors frequently compare eunuchs to women, particularly when the eunuch is elderly. A young eunuch might still be thought as being not very different from a youthful boy who has yet to show the effects of puberty. But an old eunuch, by failing to transform into a man via the process of puberty, receives a more unflattering comparison.

Eunuchs Compared to Desirable Boys

When slave eunuchs are young, Roman authors present them as being much like any other favored slave boy. Their only physical distinction (aside from the obvious lack of testicles) is that their castration allows them to keep their youthful, adolescent appearance for a much greater length of time. The feminine softness and hairlessness that is desirable in youths is not taken away by puberty. This artificial extension of their youth and beauty is the source of their value.¹³⁶ As Ringrose states, “[c]astration offered an opportunity to restructure a prepubescent boy into an individual whose physical and psychological properties were perceived to be distinct from those of a mature man and to preserve elements of prepubescence that were valued by society.”¹³⁷ Claudian

¹³⁵ “Women do not go bald for their nature is similar to that of children: both do not produce seminal secretion. Eunuchs also do not become bald, because of their change into the female.”

(καὶ αἱ γυνκαῖκες οὐ φαλακροῦνται· παραπλησίᾳ γὰρ ἡ φύσις τῆ τῶν παιδίων· ἄγωνα γὰρ σπερματικῆς ἐκκρίσεως ἀμφότερα. καὶ εὐνοῦχος οὐ γίνεται φαλακρὸς διὰ τὸ εἰς τὸ θῆλυ μεταβάλλειν.) Arist. Gen. an. 784a.

¹³⁶ Whereas once a eunuch becomes too old to maintain a pretense of youthful desirability, authors’ descriptions become much more hostile, as the next section will relate.

¹³⁷ Ringrose (2003), 59-60.

specifically cites the extension of boyish adolescence as a reason for castration when he presents various legendary accounts of the origin of the practice.

...the Parthians prevented, by use of the knife, the shadow of downy hair from growing and compelled the age of adulthood to be delayed, with the flower of boyhood preserved for a long time through artifice, to serve their sexual desires.

...Parthica ferro
luxuries vetuit nasci lanuginis umbram
servatoque diu puerili flore coegit
arte retardatam Veneri servire iuventam.¹³⁸

For a desired boy to be soft and effeminate is no bad thing, unlike for a man. But a boy who is not castrated is expected to grow out of youthful softness, and is considered to have failed as a man if he does not. As Craig Williams writes, “While the effeminacy of *cinaedi* was a serious failing, we will see that beautiful boys might be charmingly butch or delightfully soft and girlish. In other words, boys could get away with things that *cinaedi* could not. Indeed, one might say that the image of the *cinaedus* served as a reminder of what could happen if the normative transition from passive, penetrated *puer* to active, penetrating *vir*, did not take place as expected.”¹³⁹ Eunuchs, however, are failed men by design. They are not supposed to grow out of boyish softness, and by their extended boyishness, remain objects of sexual desire.¹⁴⁰

Beautiful young eunuch attendants were common amongst the imperial retinue. Tiberius’s son, Iulius Caesar Drusus, possessed a favored eunuch amongst his slaves. This eunuch, Lygdus, was “dear to his master on account of his youth and beauty and was

¹³⁸ Claud. *In Eutr.* 1.342-45.

¹³⁹ Williams (1999) 183. For the desirability of effeminate boys see Tibull. 1.4.9-14, Hor. *Epod.* 11.23-4, and Mart. 12.75.

¹⁴⁰ I shall further discuss the perceived sexual desirability of youthful eunuchs in Chapter Five.

among his principal attendants,” (*aetate atque forma carus domino interque primores ministros erat*)¹⁴¹ Nero had Sporus, an attractive eunuch youth he claimed as his wife.¹⁴² Suetonius states that Titus’ fondness for eunuchs was so great that Domitian’s motive for outlawing castration was simply vindictiveness against his brother, despite Domitian himself having a eunuch lover.¹⁴³ That lover, the eunuch Earinus, is the most notable eunuch *puer delicatus*, about whom both Statius and Martial wrote extensively.

In the fourth poem in book three of the *Silvae*, Statius writes of Earinus’ dedication of a few locks of his hair to the temple of Asclepius at Pergamum. He compares Earinus to Ganymede the (not castrated) beloved youth of Zeus, and declares him lovelier than Endymion, Attis, Narcissus and Hylas.¹⁴⁴ The inclusion of Attis in the list is particularly notable. Although Attis was not castrated when he first became Cybele’s beloved, his castration is his most distinguishing feature. Statius carefully slips a eunuch within his list of other mythological youths known for their beauty. He even states outright that if Earinus had been born after Domitian’s edict against castration and had not been made a eunuch, he would be a man now rather than a youth.

And you, now a young man, if you had been born later and
had darkened cheeks and stronger full-grown limbs, you,
joyful, would have sent not just one offering to the Phoeban
shore.

Tu quoque nunc iuvenis, genitus si tardius esses,
umbratusque genas et adultos fortior artus,
non unum gaudens Phoebea ad limina munus
misisses...¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Tac. *Ann.* 4.10.

¹⁴² Suet. *Ner.* 28. and Cass. Dio 62.13.

¹⁴³ Suet. *Dom.* 7.

¹⁴⁴ Stat. *Silv.* 3.4.12-19 and 4.39-45.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 3.4.78-81. The second offering referred to here, which Earinus would have given had he not been castrated, is presumably the first clipping of the beard, as described in Suet. *Ner.* 12.

Martial also compares Earinus to Ganymede, Zeus' cupbearer and lover, in epigram 9.36. As Domitian and Earinus are on Earth, so Zeus and Ganymede are in heaven. Ganymede's genitally intact state does not impede Martial from drawing a direct parallel. Although Ganymede is not castrated, Zeus' favor gives him an extended youth. Ganymede, like Earinus, will never be a man. Although the comparison to Ganymede might serve to downplay Earinus' castration, it may also subtly point out that Earinus, like Ganymede, will never be permitted to grow into manhood on account of the desires of a powerful ruler.¹⁴⁶

Castration interrupts the transformation into a man, but as age creeps up, a eunuch cannot remain a soft and unmanly boy forever. They skip over the period of virile adulthood and physically go from adolescent youths to unmanned elders. As Claudian writes, they are "in the midst of boyhood and old age and nothing in between" (*inter puerumque senemque / nil medium*).¹⁴⁷

Eunuchs Compared to Women

Philostratus relates an exchange between Timocrates and Polemon, concerning Favorinus, the sophist who was called a born eunuch.

When Timocrates the philosopher said to him that Favorinus had become a big chatterbox, Polemo said most wittily: "Like every old woman," joking about him being like a eunuch.

¹⁴⁶ Mart. 9.36.

¹⁴⁷ Claud. *In. Eutr.* 1.470.

Τιμοκράτους δὲ τοῦ φιλοσόφου πρὸς αὐτὸν εἰπόντος,
ὡς λάλον χρῆμα ὁ Φαβωρίνος γένοιτο, ἀστειότατα ὁ
Πολέμων “καὶ πᾶσα” ἔφη “γραῦς” τὸ εὐνουχῶδες
αὐτοῦ διασκώπτων.¹⁴⁸

Claudian’s depiction of the eunuch consul Eutropius frequently makes use of similes comparing Eutropius to a woman. Each stage of Eutropius’ life is rendered in female terms. First, as a young slave, Eutropius is portrayed by Claudian as a soft and effeminate sexual object for men. When abandoned by the man who owns him, Eutropius cries out in mourning at the loss in a parody of the abandoned heroines of myth.¹⁴⁹ Claudian has Eutropius frame the relationship in terms of a marriage, and Eutropius himself as a scorned wife.

Alas, was this your faith, Prolomaeus? Was this my reward
for a youth used up in your arms, and for the conjugal bed,
and so many nights spent in the inn? Must the liberty
promised to me be lost? Do you leave Eutropius a widow,
cruel man, and does forgetfulness suppress the memories of
such wonderful nights?

“haec erat, heu, Ptolomaeae, fides? Hoc profuit aetas
in gremio consumpta tuo lectusque iugalis
et ducti totiens inter praesaepia somni?
libertas promissa perit? Viduumne relinquis
Eutropium tantasque premunt oblivia noctes,
crudelis?”¹⁵⁰

Once he has grown too old to continue in the sex business, as either an object of penetration or a facilitator of adulterous affairs, he becomes a lady’s maid. Like a middle-aged servant woman he bathes and brushes the hair of the woman of the

¹⁴⁸ Philostr. *VS* 541.

¹⁴⁹ Long (1996), 123-5.

¹⁵⁰ Claud. *In Eutr.* 1.66-71.

household.¹⁵¹ And at last, in his old age, Eutropius is compared to an elderly woman. Claudian describes Eutropius as such multiple times,¹⁵² but the most cutting comes during Claudian's account of Eutropius' successful battle campaign against the Huns. Eutropius, as consul of Rome at the time Claudian composed his poem, defended the empire's borders from foreign attack, but Claudian degrades the victory by describing the victorious return of Eutropius being akin to an old woman arriving for a family visit.

Like a dried up old woman about to see her daughter-in-law, having travelled far—tired, scarcely seated and already asks for wine.

Qualis venit arida socrus
longinquam visura nurum; vix lassa resedit
et iam vinam petit.¹⁵³

Even a task as traditionally masculine as the waging of war is twisted into a feminine metaphor. Eutropius' attempts at masculine activities are laughable because he is a eunuch. Even when Eutropius is engaging in battle against the enemies of Rome, Claudian argues that Eutropius' actions are not manly simply by virtue of having been done by a person such as Eutropius—a castrate. Instead, Claudian offers, Eutropius should devote himself to women's tasks, such as weaving.¹⁵⁴ That Eutropius was, in fact, very successful in battle is irrelevant (and would undermine Claudian's invective). Rather than warfare bringing masculine honor to Eutropius, Eutropius brings feminine shame to war.

And yet eunuchs are not old women or children. Despite the comparisons, they

¹⁵¹ Claud. *In Eutr.* 1.103-109.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* 1.10; 1.145; 1.240.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 1.269-71.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 1.272-276.

are a separate category of not-men all their own.

Eunuchs as a Category of Their Own

Pliny's *Natural History* states that eunuchs are one of three types of *semivir* (half-man). The *semivir* forms a kind of third sex, which is then subdivided into three subtypes—eunuchs, hermaphrodites, and men with injured testicles.

Only in humankind are the genitalia damaged by injury or by chance; those form a third kind of half men, in addition to hermaphrodites and eunuchs.

homini tantum iniuria aut sponte naturae franguntur, idque tertium ab hermaphroditis et spadonibus semiviri genus habent¹⁵⁵

Similarly, in Lucian's satire *The Eunuch*, one of his characters tells of an Aristotelian philosopher who states that “a eunuch was neither man nor woman...” (οὔτε ἄνδρα οὔτε γυναῖκα εἶναι τὸν εὐνούχον).¹⁵⁶ Philostratus describes a declamation in which the sophist Antiochus took part, wherein the topic under debate is whether a eunuch, castrated by a tyrant, has the right to murder said tyrant despite his abdication on the condition of immunity. Antiochus' argument, which Philostratus admires as quite smart, is as follows.

“For with whom,” he said, “did he make this agreement? With children, women, youths, old men, and men. But my label is not in the treaty.”

“τίσι γὰρ” ἔφη “ταῦτα ὡμολόγησε; παισὶ γυναῖοις μεираκίοις πρεσβύταις ἀνδράσιν· ἐγὼ δὲ ὄνομα ἐν

¹⁵⁵ Plin. *HN* 11.110.

¹⁵⁶ Lucian *Eu.* 6.

ταῖς συνθήκαις οὐκ ἔχω.”¹⁵⁷

The unmale bodies of eunuchs created a perception that the many of the masculine gender roles associated with male bodies were inappropriate for eunuchs. The respectable gender roles for women, too, were beyond a eunuch’s reach as they could not fill the role of wife or mother. Therefore, they filled a unique niche, taking on a gender that was neither entirely masculine nor feminine, as befitted the perception of their bodies as neither male nor female.

Thus Ovid bemoans the gender of the eunuch Bagoas, who guards his mistress’ bedchamber, believing that since Bagoas is neither a man nor a woman, he will not sympathize with Ovid’s plight.

Poor me, because you, neither a man nor woman, defend
the mistress...

“Ei mihi quod dominam nec vir nec femina servas...”¹⁵⁸

Bagoas’ lack of manliness in particular is further emphasized a few lines later. His body is not fit for male pursuits. His feminine physique renders masculine gender roles unsuitable in Ovid’s mind.

You are not meant for a horse, not meant for the use of
strong weapons;
A warlike spear does not fit in your hand.

Those certain things should be left to men. Put aside your
manly hopes.

“Non tu natus equo, non fortibus utilis armis;
bellica non dextrae convenit hasta tuae.

¹⁵⁷ Philostr. *VS* 569.

¹⁵⁸ Ov. *Am.* 2.3.1.

Ista mares tractent, tu spes deponere viriles.”¹⁵⁹

While Claudian occasionally calls Eutropius a woman, he also frequently asserts that eunuchs are even more of an un-man than a woman is. As Jacqueline Long notes, Claudian “explicitly ranks Eutropius below women.”¹⁶⁰ In particular, his inability to take on women’s gender roles—those of wife and mother—on account of his infertility and inability to start a family, render him inferior to women.¹⁶¹ Claudian further disparages Eutropius, and eunuchs in general, as inferior even to women in a statement that recalls Aristotle’s views of women’s bodies as a natural deformity. Women are at least a natural kind of un-man, but a eunuch is created by human hands and therefore more suspect.

Moreover, the natural order created those females, human hands made these [eunuchs].

Illas praeterea rerum natura creavit,
Hos fecere manus.¹⁶²

Claudian states that even a woman consul would be preferable to a eunuch. There are queens of foreign lands and goddesses, and therefore some precedent for female power, but a eunuch in power is beyond the pale. He emphasizes the artificial creation of eunuchs as slaves compared to the natural development of women. His objection to a eunuch in a position of authority is not just a matter of sex, but of class also. Claudian points out that women can be priestesses, queens, goddesses, and hold positions of high social rank, whereas eunuchs, even those who rise to power, are indelibly associated with

¹⁵⁹ Ov. Am. 2.3.7-9.

¹⁶⁰ Long (1996), 126.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 126 and 129.

¹⁶² Claud. *In Eutr.* 1.338-9.

servitude and slavery. Unlike an intact freedman, who might pass down money and power to freeborn sons and distance his family from servile origins and become an honored progenitor of a wealthy dynasty, a eunuch is always only a slave or former slave.

If a woman assumed the fasces, even though illegal, it would be less foul. This sex bears rule among the Medes and swift Sabaeans; a great portion of barbarian lands are under the martial power of queens. No race is known who bears a eunuch's rule. Minerva, Diana, Terra, Ceres, Cybele, Juno, and Latona are worshipped: what temples are there for a eunuch god; what altars have we seen? From women there are priestesses; Phoebus enters into their hearts; from them the Delphian oracles sing; the Vestal Virgins alone approach Trojan Minerva and tend her flames: these [eunuchs] have earned no priestly fillets and are always unholy. A woman is born to produce children and future offspring; this tribe [of eunuchs] was invented to be slaves.

sumeret inlicitos etenim si femina fasces,
esset turpe minus. Medis levibusque Sabaeis
imperat hic sexus, reginarumque sub armis
barbariae pars magna iacet: gens nulla probatur,
eunuchi quae sceptrum ferat. Tritonia, Phoebe,
Terra, Ceres, Cybele, Iuno, Latona coluntur:
eunuchi quae templa dei, quas vidimus aras?
inde sacerdotes; haec intrat pectora Phoebus;
inde canunt Delphi; Troianam sola Minervam
virginitas Vestalis adit flammasque tuetur:
hi nullas meriti vitas semperque profani.
nascitur ad fructum mulier prolemque futuram:
hoc genus inventum est ut serviat.¹⁶³

He calls Eutropius a *semivir*—a common term for a eunuch and itself revealing of cultural perceptions of a eunuch as a partial or deformed man—and emphasizes his difference from either men or women. He bemoans Eutropius' rise to consul and implores to Fortuna to let anyone else become consul so long as he is a real man rather

¹⁶³ Claud. *In Eutr.* 1.320-330.

than the eunuch Eutropius. He writes, “Give us at least some sort of man.” (*Da saltem quemcumque virum*).¹⁶⁴ From his phrasing, he suggests that a freedman, a beggar, a lowly farmhand, *anyone* would be better than Eutropius so long as he were male.

In describing Eutropius’ castration, Claudian states that it would have been preferable for Eutropius to have remained a man (*profuerat mansisse virum*).¹⁶⁵ A consul who is a former slave is bad enough; one who is a former *eunuch* slave is worse. Castration rendered Eutropius something other than a *vir* and therefore doubly inappropriate for the rank of consul in Claudian’s mind. Furthermore, Claudian asserts that not only is Eutropius not a man, but manly occupations are wholly off limits for him. He states that, “[w]hatever is right for men is a crime for a eunuch” (*quodcumque virorum / est decus, eunuchi scelus est*).¹⁶⁶ Like Ovid’s accusations towards Bagoas in the *Amores*, Claudian declares that castration removes not just the testicles but also a person’s fitness for filling masculine gender roles. A eunuch ought not behave as a man behaves.

In book two, where he briefly describes Eutropius’ rise to power, Claudian laments that the previous consul, Rufinus, was replaced by someone equally odious. He explicitly states that Eutropius, as a eunuch, is not male, and that the only meaningful difference between these two unbearable consuls is their sex. Rufinus is a man and Eutropius is not.

Fortune brought back the same miseries again, but that the
sex of my master appeared to have changed.

Et similes iterum luctus Fortuna reduxit,

¹⁶⁴ Claud. *In Eutr.* 1.29.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 1.56.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 1.297-8.

Ut solum domini sexum mutasse viderer.¹⁶⁷

Claudian brings up the issue of Eutropius' lack of fertility not only in reference to his inferiority even to women, but also uses it as evidence for Eutropius (and by implication other eunuchs also) for being morally bankrupt. Since eunuchs are unable to bear or sire children, they are unable to form families and are cut off from participating in this most fundamental Roman social unit.

You can place a bridal veil on your head or be led down the aisle, but you will never be a mother nor a father: the latter the knife denies you, the former nature denies you.

nubas ducasve licebit:
numquam mater eris, numquam pater; hoc tibi ferrum,
hoc natura negat.¹⁶⁸

And:

This as well, that a eunuch is moved by no familial duty,
nor has concern for parents or children.

adde, quod eunuchus nulla pietate movetur
nec generi natisve cavet.¹⁶⁹

Claudian calls eunuchs those of an “ambiguous sex” (*ambigui...mares*)¹⁷⁰ and states outright that they are neither men nor women. They are similar to boys who have not achieved manhood or to the frail elderly who have lost it, but the cessation of metamorphosis from child to man, through the act of castration, keeps eunuchs in a state of limbo. They are people who are not and never were men, are also not women, and

¹⁶⁷ Claud. *In Eutr.* 2.551-2.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 1.222-4.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 1.187-8.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 1.462.

lack the transformative potential of children. Women and children constitute a category of natural un-men: children, whose bodies have yet to experience transformation into men; and women, because of their bodies' natural state, never will transform. Eunuchs form yet another type. They are those for whom the bodily potential of transformation was taken away. They are, in Claudian's words, "[t]hose whom the one sex pushed away and the other did not take up..." (*alter quos pepulit sexus nec suscipit alter...*).¹⁷¹

Eunuch slaves as a category are thus the purest antithesis of the Roman male elite. They are associated with foreign, eastern courts, especially so after Domitian's edict against castration within the bounds of the Roman Empire. They are un-male, usually made so through means perceived as unnatural. And they have no biological family. As foreign slaves imported to Rome they have no parents to whom they might give devotion, and as eunuchs they can have no children. This places them almost outside the society of humankind itself and denies to them the core Roman virtue of familial devotion (*pietas*). Their ambiguous and incomplete state places eunuchs in an uncertain category: a bit like women, a bit like adolescent boys, and yet not quite like either.

Eunuchs and the Preternatural

Amy Richlin states that Pliny and other authors "view the female human body as raw material for medicines," and believe that "the female body itself is intrinsically powerful."¹⁷² This applies equally to the bodies of eunuchs as well. Like women, eunuchs' bodies—ambiguous and forever caught in the liminal state of puberty's

¹⁷¹ Claud. *In Eutr.* 1.467-70.

¹⁷² Amy Richlin, "Pliny's Brassiere" in *Roman Sexualities* ed. by Judith Hallett and Marilyn Skinner, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 201.

transformation—are strange and foreign to the predominantly male authors. It is therefore not surprising that certain magical traits are ascribed to eunuchs, just as such traits are ascribed to women. As anthropologist Mary Douglas states, “Danger lies in transitional states, simply because the transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable.”¹⁷³ And “[w]here the social system requires people to hold dangerously ambiguous roles, these persons are credited with uncontrolled, unconscious, dangerous, disapproved powers—such as witchcraft and evil eye.”¹⁷⁴ For example, Pliny the Elder mentions a peculiar quality attributed to the urine of eunuchs, describing it as an almost magical substance.

Of even urine there have been found among authors not only many theories, but also superstitions, collected according to type; indeed the urine of eunuchs is used to achieve fecundity.

magna et urinae non ratio solum, sed etiam religio apud auctores invenitur digestae in genera, spadonum quoque ad fecunditatis veneficia.¹⁷⁵

This homeopathic treatment derives from the idea that a substance of a certain quality will draw out similar substances that negatively affect the body. Thus, the urine of the eunuch, an infertile being, might magically draw out the substance that is causing infertility. Most preternatural associations, however, are more sinister. Eunuchs, like women, are associated with poison. Suetonius’ account of Emperor Claudius’ death asserts that a woman and a eunuch worked together (the Empress Agrippina and the

¹⁷³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*, (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 119.

¹⁷⁴ Douglas (2002), 124.

¹⁷⁵ Plin. *HN*. 28.18.

official taster, a eunuch named Halotus) to poison the emperor.¹⁷⁶ Tiberius' son Drusus was poisoned by the eunuch Lygdus on Sejanus' urging.¹⁷⁷ Polemon states that the eunuch philosopher, Favorinus, collected poisons.¹⁷⁸ And Ammianus Marcellinus relates a story that eunuchs are mysteriously immune to the deadly fumes at Hierapolis.

A poisonous breath rising forth from this place destroyed with its persistent stench anyone who had come near, except eunuchs alone. Why this happens should be given to naturalists for theories.

Unde emergens itidem noxius spiritus, perseveranti odore quidquid prope venerat corrumpebat, absque spadonibus solis, quod qua causa eveniat, rationibus physicis permittatur.¹⁷⁹

Ammianus does not attempt to explain the reason for this strange phenomenon, but accepts that some peculiarity of a eunuch's being, something physically different from normal humans, was responsible for this immunity.

A character in Lucian's *Eunuch* calls eunuchs "ill-omened". He claims that it is bad luck to see a eunuch first upon leaving the house, and that eunuchs should be banned from temples and places of public assembly, as if the very presence of eunuchs causes contamination.¹⁸⁰ Claudian's invective also casts the eunuch consul Eutropius as ill-omened. The very beginning of the work lists the existence of a eunuch as consul among a number of monstrosities. As a eunuch, Eutropius pollutes the office of consul. But he

¹⁷⁶ Suet. *Claud.* 28.

¹⁷⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 4.10.

¹⁷⁸ PA 18^b trans. by Robert Hoyland in Swain (2007).

¹⁷⁹ Amm. Marc. 23.6.18.

¹⁸⁰ Lucian *Eu.* 6. The idea of eunuchs as ill-omened and religiously polluted also occurs in Hebrew law. "He whose testicles are crushed or whose male member is cut off shall not enter the assembly of the Lord." (Deut 23:1 Revised Standard Version).

describes Eutropius himself, not just Eutropius as consul, as an unlucky sight, a *procedentibus omen*, a bad omen to those who meet him.¹⁸¹

This uncanny liminality made eunuchs not only a source of potential danger, but also useful. Keith Hopkins' chapter "The political power of eunuchs" in *Conquerors and Slaves* posits that the rise of eunuchs to high political power in the late Roman Empire was not in spite of their status as outsiders, but *because* of it.¹⁸² He states, "any exercise of power by non-aristocrats limited the power of aristocrats. Indeed, the authority exercised by eunuchs not only by-passed the aristocracy but also served to supervise them. The search for executives of lowly or foreign origin free from aristocratic ties and dependent upon royal favour has been common to many kings..." Eunuchs are a particularly safe class of outsider in which to invest power because by their very nature they cannot ever hope to start a dynasty or, through wealth and power gathered through successive generations, assimilate their family into the aristocracy. Furthermore, they served as convenient scapegoats to soak up criticism that might otherwise fall upon the emperor. As Hopkins notes, "Anything strange or wrong was attributed to the court eunuchs: above all, anything unpopular."¹⁸³

Kathryn Ringrose also argues that the ambiguity of eunuchs could lead them into positions of great political power, particularly in the later Roman Empire and Byzantine Empire. She, however, writes that the explanation of eunuch servants being desirable because of their lack of dynastic concerns is "too simple and reductionist for the Byzantine context."¹⁸⁴ Instead, she argues that the rise of imperial power and the

¹⁸¹ Claud. In *Eutr.* 1.123.

¹⁸² Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 188-9.

¹⁸³ Hopkins (1978), 174.

¹⁸⁴ Ringrose (2003) 194.

concurrent rising need for a class of people to serve as mediators between the emperor and the aristocracy created a space for eunuchs as a “perfect servant.” Eunuchs were people who transcended boundaries, whether it was the boundaries of sex and gender, or the boundary between the divine emperor and the world.¹⁸⁵

Prepubescently castrated eunuchs can be summed up as having useful bodies, but threatening minds. Eunuchs’ unfinished bodies make them safe to attend to women, safe to invest with power, safe to cross over boundaries, while contradictorily their perceived character (greedy, lacking loyalty, ambitious, malicious, cowardly) make them a potential source of trouble. Like women they are simultaneously desirable to have, but also a source of suspicion.

Can a Eunuch Also Be a Man?

Favorinus: aristocrat, orator, philosopher...and also a so-called born eunuch.¹⁸⁶ His body and identity was the site of contest.¹⁸⁷ To be a proper philosopher, a proper Roman aristocrat, he had to be a man, and yet his voice and physical form was that of a eunuch. To prove his *bona fides* as an aristocratic Roman philosopher, Favorinus had to

¹⁸⁵ Ringrose (2003), 202-9.

¹⁸⁶ Simon Swain posits, following in the footsteps of other scholars, that Favorinus had either cryptorchidism or Reifenstein’s Syndrome, now more commonly known as androgen insensitivity syndrome. (Simon Swain, “Favorinus and Hadrian” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 79 (1989), 154.) Cryptorchidism alone would not produce the feminizing elements described in his voice and appearance, as the hormone-producing capacity would remain functional. Partial androgen insensitivity syndrome is the most likely condition to produce the effect described. The condition is also often comorbid with cryptorchidism. The combination would result in hidden testicles, prompting comparisons with eunuchs for the apparent lack of testicles, and the hormone insensitivity would cause a similar sort of physical effect as castration. (Angeliki Galani, Sophia Kitsiou-Tzeli, et. al. “Androgen insensitivity syndrome: clinical features and molecular defects,” *Hormones* 7 (2008), 217-229.)

¹⁸⁷ See Gleason (1995) pp. 131-58 for further discussion on the construction of Favorinus’ identity from the perspective of masculine performance in philosophy and oratory in the Second Sophistic.

establish himself as male. For his detractors, his lack of manhood was an easy target in attempts to tear him down.

According to Polemon, Favorinus' rival, castration thoroughly changes a person's body and (as the tenets of physiognomy decree) character. But the worst character of all is that of a born eunuch such as Favorinus.

You have learnt that eunuchs are an evil people, and in them is greed and an assembly of various (evil) qualities. Know also that eunuchs whom people castrate have an inner capture, colour, and body that change from their condition before castration. As for those born without testicles, other things apply to them different from those who are castrated. No one is more perfect in evil than those who are born without testicles.¹⁸⁸

Polemon makes it quite clear in the passages leading up to this condemnation that the evil character he decries, and the body that reveals it, is associated with unmanliness.

I do not know if I have seen any of this description [a man who was born without testicles] except for one man....His neck was similar to the neck of a woman, and likewise all the rest of his limbs...He had a voice resembling the voice of women and slim lips.¹⁸⁹

Lucian appears to support Polemon's assessments that a eunuch, even an aristocratic philosopher such as Favorinus, cannot be a man. In his satirical account of two Peripatetics competing for the Emperor's patronage for a philosophy chair at Athens, one of the fictional competitors, a eunuch named Bagoas, is at least partly inspired by

¹⁸⁸ PA 19^a.

¹⁸⁹ PA 18^a and 18^b.

Favorinus.¹⁹⁰ One of the interlocutors in his satire relates that the eunuch's competitor, Diocles, asserted that eunuchs should be barred from competing.

And there was a great speech about this, stating that a eunuch was neither a man nor a woman, but something composite, and mixed, and monstrous, outside human nature.

καὶ πολὺς ἦν ὁ περὶ τούτου λόγος, οὔτε ἄνδρα οὔτε
γυναῖκα εἶναι τὸν εὐνούχον λέγοντος, ἀλλὰ τι
σύνθετον καὶ μικτὸν καὶ τερατώδες ἔξω τῆς
ἀνθρωπείας φύσεως.¹⁹¹

The interlocutor does little to contradict Diocles' pronouncement that a eunuch is unmanly and not fit for philosophy. He only reaffirms negative stereotypes of the perceived "natural" eunuch character.

At first, with shame and cowardice—for that sort of thing is befitting to those sorts—he was silent a long time, and blushed and was sweating visibly, but finally he argued in a thin and womanly voice that Diocles was being unjust, barring a eunuch from philosophy, which even women engaged in.

Τὰ μὲν πρῶτα ὑπ' αἰδοῦς καὶ δειλίας--οἰκῆιον γὰρ
αὐτοῖς τὸ τοιοῦτον--ἐπὶ πολὺ ἐσιώπα καὶ ἠρυθρία καὶ
ἰδίω φανερός ἦν, τέλος δὲ λεπτόν τι καὶ γυναικῆιον
ἐμφθεγξάμενος οὐ δίκαια ποιεῖν ἔφη τὸν Διοκλέα
φιλοσοφίας ἀποκλείοντα εὐνούχον ὄντα, ἧς καὶ
γυναίξι μετεῖναι.¹⁹²

Lucian also writes about two interactions between Favorinus and the Cynic

¹⁹⁰ Aside from the fact that the eunuch in question is a eunuch Peripatetic (of which there were surely not many), an additional detail linking Lucian's eunuch and Favorinus is that the fictitious eunuch is also revealed to have been accused of adultery, a peculiar paradox that Favorinus shared, as related in Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists*. (VS 489).

¹⁹¹ Lucian. *Eu.* 6.

¹⁹² Lucian. *Eu.* 7.

philosopher Demonax, wherein Demonax cuts down Favorinus' claims to manhood and along with it his suitability to practice philosophy. In one encounter, after Demonax has criticized Favorinus' speech for being too womanly, Favorinus asks, "What qualifications do you hold, Demonax, you who drop out of school and into philosophy?"

(τίνα δὲ καὶ εφόδια ἔχων, ὦ Δημῶναξ, ἐκ παιδείας εἰς φιλοσοφίαν ἤκεις;)

Demonax's succinct reply: "Balls" (ὄρχεις).¹⁹³

In the second encounter between the two philosophers, Favorinus asks to which sect Demonax belongs. Demonax replies, laughing, that "It seemed risible to me, if you should think yourself fit to judge philosophers by their beards when you yourself do not have a beard." (Γελοῖόν μοι εἶναι ἔδοξεν, εἰ σὺ ἀπὸ τοῦ πῶγωνος ἀξιῶς κρίνεσθαι τοὺς φιλοσοφούντας αὐτὸς πῶγωνα οὐκ ἔχων.)¹⁹⁴ The dig at Favorinus' unphilosopher-like physicality is blatantly gendered. The issue is not truly that he does not have a beard, but that he is not manly enough to be a legitimate philosopher.

Favorinus had his supporters, however. Aulus Gellius, the author of *Attic Nights*, was a friend and great admirer of Favorinus. And unlike most eunuchs, Favorinus also had an authoritative voice of his own to put to work carving out his own identity. As Gleason states, "[l]iterary knowledge was a form of symbolic capital to be displayed,"¹⁹⁵ and the few remaining sources on Favorinus' life suggest that he displayed his extensive knowledge with vigor, reaffirming his social status. While Gellius' *Attic Nights* depicts many of Rome's intellectual elite, including such notables as Marcus Fronto and Herodes

¹⁹³ Lucian. *Demon*. 12.

¹⁹⁴ Lucian. *Demon*. 13. Lucian brings up the notion of philosophers requiring beards (a physical code for "proper manliness") in *The Eunuch* as well, where Bagoas' rival claims that a proper philosopher ought to have a full, manly beard. (Luc. *Eun.* 9) See Gleason (1995) p. 137 for discussion of Demonax and the relationship between physicality and philosophy and oratory.

¹⁹⁵ Gleason (1995), 140.

Atticus,¹⁹⁶ Favorinus holds a special place of privilege in the text. Stephen Beall calls Favorinus the star of Gellius’ writings, with twenty-seven anecdotes about Favorinus’ intellectual prowess.¹⁹⁷ Gellius never calls into question Favorinus’ masculinity and his worthiness to be included in the social circles of other aristocratic and intellectually elite men. Cassius Dio preserves a favorable opinion of Favorinus’ abilities as a philosopher for posterity as well. Writing after Favorinus’ death, from the viewpoint of a historian rather than a friend, Cassius Dio reports that Favorinus earned the ire of the Emperor Hadrian on account of being a better orator than the emperor. He states that Hadrian’s jealousy drove him to try to sabotage some of the renowned intellectuals of his day.

“Because of this [jealousy] he contrived to destroy the sophists Favorinus the Gaul and Dionysius the Milesian by various means, and especially by raising up their rivals, even though some of them were worth nothing, and others worth very little.”

κάκ τούτου καὶ τὸν Φαουωρίνον τὸν Γαλάτην τὸν τε
 Διονύσιον τὸν Μιλήσιον τοὺς σοφιστὰς καταλύειν
 ἐπεχείρει τοῖς τε ἄλλοις καὶ μάλιστα τῶ τοὺς
 ἀνταγωνιστὰς σφῶν ἐξάγειν, τοὺς μὲν μηδενὸς τοὺς
 δὲ βραχυτάτου τινὸς ἀξίους ὄντας.¹⁹⁸

Since Polemon was among those to whom Hadrian showed favor, appointing him to deliver the dedication speech of the Olympieion in Athens, it is clear that Cassius Dio, at least, sided with Favorinus, and perceived him as a true philosopher and intellectual (and implicitly as a proper man).

In his own writings, Favorinus persistently defines his identity as a man and

¹⁹⁶ Marcus Fronto and Herodes Atticus were tutors for young Marcus Aurelius, who later became emperor.

¹⁹⁷ Stephen M. Beall “Homo Fandi Dulcissimus: The Role Of Favorinus in the Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius” *American Journal of Philology* 122.1 (2001), 87.

¹⁹⁸ Cass. Dio 69.3.4.

dismisses any social significance of his physical condition. In both his *Corinthian Oration* and *On Exile* he states that he is a paradigm, an example of philosophical (and therefore manly) virtue for other men to emulate.¹⁹⁹ Favorinus gives primacy to his social attributes of philosophical education and sophistic eloquence and subtly asserts that these are of greater importance than his physical condition.

Sociologists Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna separate out the idea of biological genitals from cultural genitals, and further postulate that it is the cultural genitals—that is, the genitals that are *assumed* to be present (because of a person’s dress, behavior, and comportment)—that are critical to the assignment of sex and gender in social interactions, more so than whatever biological genitals a person possesses.²⁰⁰ They state that, “[e]ven if the genital is not present in a physical sense, it exists in a cultural sense if the person feels entitled to it and/or is assumed to have it.”²⁰¹ In their study on sex attribution, they found that cultural genitals, and more specifically, the presence or absence of male cultural genitals, was the predominate factor for the social determination of sex/gender. Moreover, the cultural genitals may not correspond to physical genitals. “If the physical genital is not present when it is expected (or vice versa), the original gender attribution is not necessarily altered.”²⁰²

Favorinus uses his cultural genitals, acquired through his skill at the manly occupation of philosophy, to attempt to make his lack of physical testicles (and lack of philosopher’s beard) irrelevant. Whether he was successful or not is mixed. Polemon certainly did not seem to think so, but others appeared to accept Favorinus as a proper

¹⁹⁹ *Corinthian Oration* 37.27; *On Exile* col 1.42-44.

²⁰⁰ Drawing on Harold Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology and his theory of cultural genitals. (1967).

²⁰¹ Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna, “Toward a Theory of Gender,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 173.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

philosopher and man. The only way the attempt was even possible, though, was by virtue of Favorinus having the advantages of being born of an aristocratic family and given an education that allowed him to compete on the intellectual field of manhood.

Summary

The practice of the castration of slaves had long been associated with opulence and Eastern courts before eunuchs became widespread in Roman aristocratic circles. Slaves who were castrated were a luxury item, desired as catamites owing to the artificial extension of a beardless, youthful appearance that results from castration, and often valued as attendants.

Despite their material value, they were a source of anxiety as well, on account of their status as outsiders, their associations with foreign kingdoms and their ambiguous sex. Whereas a young eunuch might be described in much the same terms as any beautiful youth, Roman texts often present older eunuchs as ugly, morally corrupt, ill-omened and preternatural.

The sex and gender of eunuchs castrated before puberty, as presented in Roman literature, varies. They might be conceptualized as bodily similar to boys, to women, or a category of their own. A eunuch such as Favorinus, who possesses copious cultural capital and the (metaphorical and social) balls to claim masculinity, might establish an identity as a man, although not without detractors. For the most part, eunuchs castrated before puberty are conceptualized in Roman texts as biologically un-male, despite possessing the criteria that, by modern sex categories, would define them as male.

Chapter Four: Self Castration and *Cinaedi*

The eunuch initiates of the goddess Cybele, self-castrated as adults, comprise a very different sort of eunuch than the slaves unwillingly castrated at a young age. The status and social roles of the two groups of eunuchs are different, as are the physical effects of their respective castrations. Therefore, it is not surprising that Roman literature treats the bodies and biological sex of eunuch initiates in a different way from those of slave eunuchs castrated before puberty. In this chapter, I will explore how Roman literature presents the eunuch initiates of Cybele (also known as the Great Mother or *Magna Mater*) and how they fit into the Roman scheme of sex and gender.

To refer to these eunuchs as “priests” is the scholarly convention; however, such terminology somewhat misrepresents their role in the worship of Cybele.²⁰³ In the cult’s original Anatolian setting, there were indeed official eunuch priests, associated with the ruling class and possessing hierarchical authority.²⁰⁴ But in Rome, although the *galli* did serve as mediators between the mortal realm and the Great Mother, for the most part they did not carry out the official ritual activity associated with the state cult of Cybele. In the Republican era, a Phrygian priest and priestess carried out the sacrifices during the Megalesian festival to Cybele, and the curule aediles—elected Roman officials—

²⁰³ Lancellotti also questions the use of the word priests to refer to *galli*. She writes in a footnote “the term ‘priests’—which I use here only in its general meaning of ‘ritual agents’—is unsuitable for the Galli: it would perhaps be more exact to use the expression ‘cultic appointees.’” (*Attis, Between Myth and History: King, Priest, and God*, (Boston: Brill, 2002), n. 91.) She continues to use the words priest and priesthood in her book, but places the terms in quotations to indicate their dubious appropriateness. Hugh Bowden also makes a distinction between the state priests and the travelling bands of eunuch worshippers. (*Mystery Cults in the Ancient World*, (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2010), 101).

²⁰⁴ In pre-Hellenized Anatolia, the Phrygian king himself appeared to serve as high priest. Roller (1999), 111-12. By the 3rd century B.C.E. (and possibly as early as the 7th century, when Phrygia lost its independent monarchy) the Phrygian city of Pessinous was the site of a temple to Cybele and a theocracy of eunuch priests. Lancellotti (2002), 47-9.

organized the ritual games. *Galli* participated in the procession of the cult statue of the Great Mother, but their role appears to be largely informal and unofficial.²⁰⁵ They participate in the procession, banging drums and rattling castanets, but with no specifically prescribed ceremonial role.

During the Principate, Emperor Claudius reformed the ritual organization and created the office of the *archigallus* to carry out the state sacrifices to Cybele.²⁰⁶ The *archigallus* was a Roman citizen of high rank who held the position for life but may not have been self-castrated,²⁰⁷ although the iconography of the *archigalli* includes much of the same gender-bending that the *galli* show, such as large jewelry and imagery that clearly harkens back to the eunuch-god Attis.²⁰⁸ The bands of *galli*, in contrast, did not receive authority from any hierarchy or have an official standing as the word “priest” implies. Instead, they were rather more like shamans, or the initiates of a mystery cult,

²⁰⁵ Dion. of Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.19.3-5; Lucr. 2.610-28; Ov. *Fast.* 4.179-372.

²⁰⁶ Vermaseren (1977), 96-9. Lambrechts (1969) argues that the office of the *archigallus* was instituted by Antoninus Pius. Momigliano (1932), in contrast, posits that the position of *archigallus* existed *before* Claudius, but that Claudius made the *archigallus* the overseer of the temples to Cybele. Juvenal references an individual in his Second Satire whom a fourth century scholiast identifies as an *archigallus*. (E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal*, (London: the Athlone Press, 1980), 56 and 125.) If the scholiast is correct, it would imply that the position of *archigallus* existed in Rome in some form or another before Antoninus Pius’ reforms of the cult.

²⁰⁷ I am loath to make a blanket assumption that a Roman could never be a eunuch for no other reason than because he is a Roman. That said, for a high ranking Roman man to castrate himself would certainly be very unusual, although hypothetically possible. But if Domitian’s edict against castration within the bounds of the empire applied equally to self-castration as well as forced castration of slaves, it would have made such an action not only unusual but illegal. It is unclear whether his edict had such a broad scope. Certainly there were still numerous *galli* wandering throughout the Roman Empire after the edict. Shelley Hales entertains the possibility that some of the *archigalli* depicted in statues may have been castrated, and notes that, castrated or not, they are “apparently deliberately alienating themselves from the Roman norm.” (Hales (2002), 94). Another hypothetical possibility is that the rank of *archigallus* sometimes may have been held by Roman men whose genitals had been damaged in war or mishap, Fate having made them most suitable for the role, from a Roman perspective.

²⁰⁸ Hales (2002), 93-95.

with the higher levels of initiation involving the act of self-castration.²⁰⁹ Therefore, I shall refer to them as “initiates,” “devotees,” or “followers of Cybele” instead of the more common (but misleading) phrase “priests,” unless the individual in question is described in the sources specifically as a priest or is an *archigallus* and therefore part of the state cult.

A Brief History of the Cult of the Great Mother

Lynn Roller’s 1999 book *In Search of God the Mother* is the most recent extensive treatment of the origins and development of the cult of Cybele in the Mediterranean, and Maria Grazia Lancellotti’s *Attis, Between Myth and History: King, Priest, and God* the most recent extensive work on the history of the role of Attis in the cult. Therefore, my abbreviated history takes much of its information from these two books, with some few additional sources.

The worship of Cybele (or the mother goddess from which she originated) is sometimes traced back as early as the Neolithic period in Central Anatolia, although the physical evidence is unclear. There are a number of female images, but none that can be unambiguously identified as a mother goddess from which Cybele might have developed. The oldest secure evidence for the Phrygian mother goddess is the early first millennium

²⁰⁹ Lancellotti states, “the sacrifice of the Galli could be conceived as a ‘mystery’ ritual.” (2002, 114). As the question of state ritual activity versus private has little to do with the sex and gender of the *galli*, I am saying no more on the matter of terminology here, but would like to pursue it further in the future. What is clear, however, is that the *galli* in the Roman Empire lacked any kind of hierarchy or organizational structure, and are typically described as having a wandering mendicant lifestyle.

BCE although her iconography and ritual may have been influenced by earlier Hittite goddesses and religious activity.²¹⁰

Attis, later the famous (and perhaps infamous) consort of Cybele, does not appear as a deity in the Phrygian tradition. Rather, Attis was merely the Phrygian title for a priest to the Great Mother.²¹¹ Lancellotti notes that Attis is a common name in Phrygian inscriptions, often in a royal and religious context. The proper name “Attis” occurs both as a person giving a dedication, and receiving a dedication, leading Lancellotti to postulate that the concept of Attis as a divine consort of Cybele may have originated from the deification of the priest-king.²¹² In time, Attis (and its variations, Ates and Atys) may have become a title for high priestly office.²¹³

The castration of Attis in myth may have come about partially from conflation of Attis with the castrated deity Agdistis who was the hermaphroditic child of Cybele (or in some variations, an incarnation of Cybele herself) and parent of Attis. Lancellotti also proposes the hypothesis that the myth of Attis’ castration might have come about when the monarchy in Phrygia collapsed. As Lancellotti states, “As soon as the Phrygian monarchy no longer existed, [the theocratic rulers of Pessinous] wished to found a new ‘dynastic’ model in the sacred city of Pessinous by means of this myth, a priestly model based on sterility and the non-hereditary transfer of office, while retaining the royal funerary cult: Attis is the priest in Pessinous, but he is also an ‘anti-king.’”²¹⁴

Furthermore, a Phrygian statuette of an unbearded priest implies that the Phrygian priests of Cybele may have been eunuchs, as adult men in ancient Phrygia were

²¹⁰ Roller (1999), 42-4.

²¹¹ Ibid. 114.

²¹² Lancellotti (2002), 36.

²¹³ Ibid. 37.

²¹⁴ Ibid. 51.

typically represented as bearded. Roller notes that the Phrygian cult had “several cult regulations requiring a high degree of morally uplifting behavior from those who worshipped the goddess. This extended to sexual fidelity, since fornication and adultery were expressly forbidden. In this context, it may be that the goddess’s principal devotees, namely, her priests, were expected to make a permanent commitment to sexual chastity through castration.”²¹⁵

Archaeological and epigraphical evidence indicates that the cult of the Phrygian Mother Goddess first appeared in the Greek cities on the western coast of Anatolia in the early sixth century BCE. She was sometimes conflated with older Greek mother goddesses, such as Rhea and Demeter, but simultaneously retained her foreign character. As the cult gradually made its way westward, Cybele is both Hellenized and further barbarized. Her cult picks up stereotypical eastern elements that were not actually part of the original Phrygian cult practice. As Roller states, in Classical Greece Cybele “came to represent, not the religion and culture of Phrygia, but the Greek concept of an Oriental barbarian deity.”²¹⁶

In the earliest Greek version of the cult, there is no trace of Attis and the eunuch devotees associated with the later myths of Attis’ self-castration. Greek ritual practice added Attis to the worship of Cybele as consort of the goddess and a cult figure in his own right sometime in the mid fourth century BCE. On the Greek mainland, although there is some archeological evidence for the worship of Cybele in Piraeus, and the

²¹⁵ Roller (1999), 253.

²¹⁶ Ibid. 144.

Athenians built a temple to her in the agora,²¹⁷ Lancellotti asserts that “there is no evidence at all of a ‘Greek’ cult of Attis in the pre-Roman period.”²¹⁸

The Romans formally brought the cult of Cybele into Rome in 204 BCE during the Second Punic War. The cult was undoubtedly known in Italy before then but enjoyed no particular prominence. The Roman adoption of Cybele in such a manner creates a dual nature in the character of the religious worship of the goddess in the Roman world. Cybele is part of the state religion, with formal sacrifices and games carried out for her on the Palatine hill in traditional Roman manner. And yet the cult of Cybele also has aspects of an eastern mystery religion with orgiastic rites of rather un-Roman character. Archaeological evidence from the temple of Cybele on the Palatine suggest that the Romans adopted Cybele’s eunuch consort, Attis, concurrently with Cybele herself.²¹⁹

For this chapter, I will refer to both the *galli* of the Phrygian Cybele and the eunuch followers of the Syrian goddess Atargatis as eunuch initiates or eunuch devotees and treat them as one category under the general umbrella of religious eunuchs. The two Near Eastern goddesses (and their eunuch attendants) are often conflated in the ancient sources, and are represented by the same literary tropes.²²⁰

The Initiates of the Great Mother: Who were castrated and how?

One question that scholars dispute is whether all devotees of the Great Mother were castrated. As Hales states, “The debate concerning the physical condition of the

²¹⁷ Roller (1999), 119.

²¹⁸ Lancellotti (2002), 74.

²¹⁹ Mary Beard “The Roman and the foreign: the cult of the ‘Great Mother’ in imperial Rome” in *Shamanism, History and the State* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 168.

²²⁰ In *De Dea Syria* Lucian even calls the eunuch attendants of the Syrian goddess *galli*, although the term is usually reserved for the devotees of Cybele.

priests is ongoing and, ultimately, insoluble. However, it does seem increasingly likely that the ranks of *galli* and *archigalli* featured both castrated and whole men.”²²¹ Mary Beard also notes that it is “far from certain that all of [the *galli*], literally, as was regularly claimed, castrated themselves with a stone or broken pot on entry into their priesthood.”²²² She adds that there might have been some lesser form of scarification that could substitute for castration for the purposes of initiation. But even if not all initiates of Cybele or the Syrian goddess were self-castrated eunuchs, the association between the rites of the Great Goddess and castration was so strong that any author who referred to a follower of the Great Mother would surely expect his readership to immediately think “eunuch.”

Another thorny question is who in the Roman Empire could become an initiate of the Great Mother. If all initiates had to undergo castration, it would imply that initiation was not common for Roman citizens, or (obviously) women of any rank. And yet some *galli* have Roman names and statues of *galli* convey that at least some of them possessed wealth and social standing, enough to commission a sculptor and to want to proudly display their religious affiliations. Indeed, the *archigallus*, who was the titular leader of the *galli*, in Lancelotti’s words, “is Roman, has a wife, sacrifices for the emperor (pro-state, pro-cosmos, pro-procreation) and belongs fully within Roman society.”²²³ If, as Lancelotti suggests, the ritual of bull-bleeding could function as a substitute for self-castration,²²⁴ it would allow Roman citizens to be initiated into the cult of Cybele without compromising their manhood physically, although the effeminate garb and

²²¹ Hales (2002), 88.

²²² Beard (1996), 173-4.

²²³ Lancelotti (2002), 105.

²²⁴ Ibid. 114.

appearance of the *galli* might make such a man's masculinity suspect, even if he were not physically castrated. And yet the state cult was an official fixture in Rome, and the goddess Cybele had a temple on the Palatine. Even the emperor participated in the official state rites to Cybele.

There is surely a distinction, however, between temporary and sporadic participation in the rites of Cybele—participation in the state celebrations or a simple initiation into the mystery cult—and becoming a permanent devotee and full time attendant to the goddess. Initiation in many mystery cults involves a degree of *ecstasis*, a momentary frenzy and disorientation during the course of initiation, but afterwards the ritual madness is put aside and initiates return to their normal lives.²²⁵ Varro's description of an encounter with the *galli* might be read as such. The narrator is initially drawn to the *galli*, almost hypnotized and drawn into an altered mental state. He temporarily joins their ranks by donning the feminine garb of a *gallus*, then after a while casts the vestments aside and returns to his previous self and vehemently rejects the notion of joining their number permanently.²²⁶ For a *gallus*, however, participation in the ritual does not end. The feminine clothes are never cast away.²²⁷

Also under discussion is what form of castration took place for those who were castrated, whether they removed just the testicles or both the testicles and penis. Those ancient sources that describe the ritual of self-castration unanimously suggest that only

²²⁵ Hugh Bowden, *Mystery Cults in the Ancient World*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 15-21.

²²⁶ Varro *Sat. Men.* 132-42. I use Wiseman's (1985) adaptation of Cébe's (1977) arrangement of the fragments.

²²⁷ Compare to the mysteries of Dionysus, as Plato writes in *Phaedo*. "As they say concerning the initiations, 'Many are the thyrsus-bearers, but few are Bacchants.'" (ὡς φασιν οἱ περὶ τὰς τελετάς, νερθηκοφόροι μὲν πολλοί, βάρχοι δέ τε παῦροι. 69c-d).

the testicles were removed.²²⁸ But some ambiguity persists. In Martial's epigram 9.2, he implies that it is the *mentula* (penis) that is removed, although given the poetic and comedic nature of the source, some degree of metonymy and artistic license may be at work.²²⁹ Artistic representations of Attis present a smooth and wholly genital-free groin area, which could also lead credence to the possibility that, in imitation of Attis, the eunuch initiates also left no genitalia intact in the wake of their self-castration.

One possibility is that both were options. A variety of levels of initiation and ritual devotion might have existed simultaneously. On one end of the scale, initiates who preferred minimal bodily alteration may have merely participated in rituals such as the rites of bull-bleeding and perhaps scarification as proposed by Mary Beard. On the other end of the scale, those wishing to carry out the highest levels of initiation may have castrated not just testicles but penis as well. Thus, castration of only the testicles may have been the most common form of castration and therefore most remarked upon in the texts describing the ritual, but some particularly devoted initiates might have undergone a more thorough castration. Similar examples of ritual castration that follow such a pattern include the Russian Skoptsy and the hijra of India. Among the Skoptsy, there are those who are celibate without castration; castration of testicles alone, called the "lesser seal" and castration of testicles and penis, called the "greater seal."²³⁰ The hijra of India, although commonly perceived as eunuchs, can be either uncastrated (but are ideally celibate) or fully castrated (testicles and penis removed).²³¹ This practice of multiple

²²⁸ Lucian *Syr. D.* 51; Plin. *HN* 35.165; Juv. 6.514; Catull. 63.

²²⁹ Mart. 9.2.14.

²³⁰ Laura Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 13.

²³¹ Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 57.

modes of genital alteration in groups that practice self-castration is common enough in other instances of religiously motivated castration to be worth considering a possibility.

Sex and Bodies of Self-castrated Eunuch Initiates

Roman sources indicate confusion about the bodies and sex of eunuchs who were self-castrated after puberty. Valerius Maximus tells of a eunuch slave who was an initiate of Cybele whose master bequeathed an inheritance to him but was denied the inheritance by the court on the grounds that he was not properly a man or a woman and therefore not eligible to receive an inheritance.²³² The confusion on the sex of the eunuch led to the proclamation that he was no sex at all. Most sources, however, grapple with the question without coming to such a resolution.²³³

The physical effects of castration after puberty are markedly different from castration before puberty. In most respects, eunuchs castrated after puberty retain the same external bodily characteristics as before castration. The voice remains deep and growth of body and facial hair remains much the same as before castration. Male-pattern baldness (if the individual is genetically predisposed to it) ceases progressing and some hair regrowth may occur, but there is not complete reversal. If only the testicles are removed then erections are still possible for some eunuchs but take longer to achieve.

²³² Val. Max. 7.7.6.

²³³ The story Valerius relates is from early in Rome's history compared to the other sources, which may explain the differences in the treatment of the eunuch. Furthermore, although Valerius himself shows aversion to the idea of a eunuch inheriting, and praises the consul's ruling, it is notable that the praetor who first assessed the will affirmed that the inheritance should go to the *gallus*. It is only upon appeal that the inheritance is denied. Hostility to the *galli* or belief in their lack of sex was not so widespread as to be uncontested. The citizen who made the will and the praetor both saw no issue to a castrated *gallus* inheriting.

Body fat may settle more on the hips and breasts in pattern more associated with female fat distribution.²³⁴

Lynn Roller states, “The eunuch [initiate of the cult of Cybele] is quite clearly conceptualized as male, as the Greek masculine pronoun and adjectives describing him make clear.”²³⁵ Grammatical gender, however, does not necessarily correlate to perceptions of physical sex. (There is clearly little that is conceptually female about a *mentula* (penis) despite the grammatical feminine gender.) The grammatical gender of persons may not function quite the same as the grammatical gender of objects, but a perfect correlation of feminine/female and masculine/male is no sure thing. Some texts show linguistic battles over whether feminine or masculine grammatical endings are proper when referring to eunuchs.²³⁶ Ultimately, grammatical masculine endings prevail in most circumstances. This does not, however, mean that eunuchs were perceived as socially masculine or as particularly male, merely that, given only two viable grammatical options with which to refer to people, the grammatical masculine is chosen as the closer frame of reference from which to conceptualize eunuchs. The same preference for conceptualizing eunuchs in comparison to a masculine and not feminine starting point is seen in the word *semivir* for eunuchs. They are pointedly not truly men (*viri*), but they are still defined in reference to maleness.

Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna state that “In the social construction of

²³⁴Johan Bremer, *Asexualization: A follow-up study of 244 cases*, (Oslo: Oslo University Press, 1958); also Tauber (1940).

²³⁵ Roller (1997), 547.

²³⁶ I have found no instances of eunuchs being grammatically constructed as neuter. Eunuch initiates are not sexless. They exist within the continuum of sex, not outside it as something wholly separate, and so there is no reason for Roman authors to use the grammatical neuter to refer to eunuchs.

gender ‘male’ is the primary construction.”²³⁷ They theorize social primacy of masculinity in a patriarchal culture leads to a preference for masculine as the default. That is, to be defined as definitively female requires an absence of *any male characteristics whatsoever*.

Cognitively, given two poles—male and female—observers choose female only if no male characteristics are present. Otherwise, observers choose male, or male-ish, or ambiguously male. The presence of a penis in particular (or assumed presence of a penis in the case of clothed individuals) made a male identification almost inevitable, even if female characteristics were also present. The absence of a penis, however, did not necessarily lead to a female identification unless no other male characteristics were present.

Although Kessler and McKenna’s study dealt with modern perceptions, a similar view appears in Aristotle’s writing, wherein he defines female as the most deformed variant of male. Given not a dichotomy but a spectrum, female is the state at the furthest end of the spectrum from male. Male is still the default by which other types of bodies are cognitively (and for Aristotle, physically) compared. As females are such a common deformation, they are considered a “natural” deformation and so constitute their own category, but one that is derived from the male category.²³⁸ They are not the opposite sex but the incomplete sex, the unfinished form of the male body.

As both the most “deformed” variant and the most common, females alone among all peoples on the spectrum of sex receive a different grammatical marker. In Aristotle,

²³⁷ Kessler and McKenna, (2006), 176. In the article, Kessler and McKenna use gender as synonymous with sex, and in the context of this quote are referring specifically to gender as assigned by biological “sex” markers.

²³⁸ Arist. *Gen. An.* 775a.

as in Kessler and McKenna's study, the male body is the body in comparison to which other bodies are conceptually constructed. Eunuchs possess some male characteristics and therefore are not generally rendered grammatically feminine. Masculine pronouns are used not to imply that eunuchs receive full maleness, but merely because masculine is the default when the body in question is not fully deformed as female and some male characteristics are present. In short, the use of predominantly masculine pronouns and adjectives to describe eunuchs does not prove that they were conceptualized as male, only that they were not conceptualized as female.²³⁹

In Catullus' poem 63, Attis is rendered grammatically feminine in his maddened state and masculine in his sane state. It is not the castration that gives him in turn both feminine and masculine pronouns, but rather his state of mind. When Attis accepted his subservience to Cybele during the middle section of the poem and then once again at the very end, he is given feminine pronouns. Between his initial frenzy and his return to Cybele, he experiences remorse for his act of self-castration, during which moment the narrator gives him masculine pronouns. The poet's use of feminine pronouns emphasizes Attis' post-castration effeminacy but it does not make Attis identify himself as a female, as he states in his monologue. He is, rather, a *notha mulier*, a "counterfeit woman."²⁴⁰ Likewise, the temporary use of masculine pronouns in Attis' moment of regret does not make him temporarily a man.

²³⁹ Similarly, English shows a linguistic preference for masculine pronouns in circumstances where the sex of the person in question may or may not be male, as seen in the long use of masculine pronouns as the grammatical gender-neutral pronouns.

²⁴⁰ Catull. 63.27 *Notha* also means "mixed" in the grammatical sense, such as words of mixed declensions. There may be implication not that his femininity is false or deceptive, but that he possesses a combination of female and male traits, a mixed bag of sex and gender markers, and therefore, under the principle of described above of female being defined by an absence of male traits, not a woman at all despite the occasional use of feminine pronouns. The feminine pronouns do not make him a female in Roman eyes any more than masculine pronouns make him fully male. After his castration he exists in between.

In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the eunuch priests refer to themselves as both grammatically feminine and socially female. The chief of the band refers to the other eunuchs as "girls" (*puellae*) and they in turn call themselves "little doves" (*palumbulis*).²⁴¹ Feminine grammatical constructions are used throughout when the eunuchs are referring to themselves. The narrator, however, disagrees and states that the girls are actually a band of cinaedi.

But those girls were a chorus of cinaedi, who were immediately crying out in joy, and rousing a resounding shout with a broken, raucous and effeminate voice.

Sed illae puellae chorus erat cinaedorum, quae statim exultantes in gaudium, fracta et rauca et effeminata voce clamores absonos intollunt...²⁴²

The narrator does not call them *puellae* (as the eunuchs call themselves) or *viri*, but *cinaedi*, placing the eunuchs in a separate category of persons who, through their effeminate habits, have rejected the masculinity to which their bodies once entitled them. And yet he also uses the feminine relative pronoun *quae* to refer to them, immediately after stating that they were *not* girls, choosing *puellae* as the antecedent rather than the masculine word *chorus*. Throughout the whole account, the narrator makes frequent mention of their womanliness while simultaneously denying that they are female. Although he rejects the initiates' self-identification as women, he does not view them as men either, despite the masculine grammatical constructions he later uses to refer to them. Their voices, their clothes, even their very blood is described as woman-like.²⁴³

²⁴¹ Ap. *Meta.* 8.26.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ The priests dress in saffron and white, the colors also associated with brides and Vestal Virgins.

The episode of Lucius' adventures with the eunuch initiates of the Syrian goddess is framed with deception and disappointment of expectations. The first is when Lucius discovers that the "girls" are *cinaedi*. And then at the end, the villagers discover the eunuchs in a sexually compromising position with a young man. The villagers mock the eunuchs' supposed pure chastity (*purissimam...castimoniam*) and the eunuchs flee.²⁴⁴ The eunuchs are doubly linked to deception. First the word *puellae* temporarily hides their bodily nature from the narrator and then religious expectations temporarily hide their sexual nature from the villagers, who had been tricked into giving up alms before they had made this discovery.

Although Apuleius' eunuchs are not girls, they are not men either. Lucius calls them *cinaedi*, a comment upon their effeminacy and their sexual desires, but he never calls them men.

Galli and Cinaedi: the bodies of gender deviants

In *Roman Homosexuality*, Craig Williams notes the close conceptual connection between eunuch priests and *cinaedi*. "I would suggest that the image of an effeminate eastern dancer lurked behind every description of a man as a *cinaedus* in a transferred sense, and that behind the Eastern dancer in turn lurked the image of the *gallus*."²⁴⁵ Roman literature represents *cinaedi* and *galli* as part of the same gender spectrum, as if a *gallus* were the most extreme version of a *cinaedus*.

Both are described as soft, effeminate, sexually promiscuous with both men and women, and lacking in self-control, particularly sexual self-control. The lack of control

²⁴⁴ Ap. *Meta.* 8.29.

²⁴⁵ Williams (1999), 177.

of self and over others is the most important defining aspect of *cinaedi* and eunuch initiates. Both groups are notable for their service to others, sexually and otherwise. For *cinaedi*, all other characteristics derive from and are symptoms of this characteristic. They are womanly (with all the characteristics associated with that—soft, effeminate) by virtue of this lack of control or failure to take control. As Craig Williams writes, “a real man is in control of his own desires, fears, and passions, and he exercises dominion over others and their bodies. An effeminate man cedes control and is dominated, whether by his own desires and fears or by others’ bodies.”²⁴⁶

Similarly, the literary image of the *galli* is of people who are servile in more ways than just sexually, although they are sometimes depicted as sexually servile, as well. Catullus’ Attis refers to himself as a handmaiden of Cybele, a servant or slave to the goddess.²⁴⁷ In addition to the metaphors of *galli* as servants, they are also associated with begging, a profession perceived to be servile and passive in nature. Bands of *galli*, known as *metragyrtes*, travelled and begged for alms.²⁴⁸ Servility forms as intrinsic a part of the *galli* image as their castration, and the Romans perceived both servility and castration as markers of effeminacy.

Craig Williams posits that the defining trait of *cinaedi* is that they are, in his term, gender deviants.²⁴⁹ But the *cinaedi*’s actions do not affect just their gender, but also physicality. What one *does* effects what one *is*. Gendered actions are done by the body and to the body. By engaging in “gender deviancy,” *cinaedi* are also changing what their bodies represent. Judith Butler argues that sex and gender are indistinguishable.

²⁴⁶ Williams (1999), 153.

²⁴⁷ Catull. 63.68 “Now must I become a handmaiden of the gods, a servant girl of Cybele?” (*ego nunc deum ministra et Cybeles famula ferar?*).

²⁴⁸ Roller (1999), 165.

²⁴⁹ Williams (1999).

“...perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.”²⁵⁰ The creation of gender also creates the categories of sex. Butler further states that “gender is always a doing.”²⁵¹ The enacting of gender creates gender (which is also sex), while rendering the production invisible and naturalized.

The pseudo-science of physiognomy, popular in the Roman world, inscribes gender upon the body, rendering gender and sex identical. A *cinaedus*’ effeminacy is thus believed to have physical implications. And so Polemon’s description of how to spot an effeminate man includes physical traits such as moist eyes and a narrow forehead, Adamantius suggests that soft and fleshy feet, knock knees, and collar bones that are spaced too far apart are signs of effeminate men.²⁵² One anonymous Latin physiognomist writes that *cinaedi* have joined collar bones, mostly joined together feet, and separated eyebrows.²⁵³ Many of these characteristics, smaller head, soft and fleshy body parts, were, not coincidentally, also associated with women. *Cinaedi* were imagined (however erroneously) to possess different physical bodies than manly men, physical differences that were socially relevant and tied to their unmasculine gender. They were, in effect, imagined to have a unique sex.

Pseudo-Aristotle, too, shows this perceived link between gendered activity and bodily status. The anonymous Aristotelian author writes (emphasis mine):

²⁵⁰ Butler (1990), 10.

²⁵¹ Ibid. 34.

²⁵² Polemon *Physiognomy* B52 Arabic trans. of the Leiden Polemon by Hoyland; Adamantius the Sophist *Physiognomy* B6, B9, B17, Ian Repath’s edition. Both in Swain (2007).

²⁵³ anon. Lat. *Physiognomy* 115. Ian Repath’s edition in Swain (2007).

For those whom [the semen goes] to the backside, they desire to be sexually passive, and for those whom it goes to both places, they desire to be both sexually active and passive; in whichever of the two places is full, they desire more of such. In some men this sexual passivity comes about from habit. For what things they do happen to please them and they ejaculate semen in this way. So they desire to do those things by which this may happen and habit becomes as nature. ...many times **habit brings it about just as if they were born with it.**

καὶ ὅσοις μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν ἕδραν, οὗτοι πάσχειν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν, ὅσοις δ' ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρα, οὗτοι καὶ δρᾶν καὶ πάσχειν· ἐφ' ὅποτερα δὲ πλείον, τούτου μᾶλλον ἐπιθυμοῦσιν. ἐνίοις δὲ γίνεται καὶ ἐξ ἔθους τὸ πάθος τοῦτο. ὅσα γὰρ ἂν ποιῶσιν συμβαίνει αὐτοῖς χαίρειν καὶ προΐεσθαι τὴν γονὴν οὕτως. ἐπιθυμοῦσιν οὖν ποιεῖν οἷς ἂν ταῦτα γίνηται, καὶ μᾶλλον τὸ ἔθος ὥσπερ φύσις γίνεται. ...τὰ μέντοι πολλὰ καὶ τὸ ἔθος ὥσπερ πεφυκόσι γίνεται.²⁵⁴

As Jonathon Walters states, true Roman men are conceptualized as physically inviolate.²⁵⁵ *Cinaedi* break this requirement; they fail to meet this criterion by which a Roman man is truly a man, by allowing themselves to be sexually penetrated. The *cinaedus* and the *gallus* then are both men who have achieved adult male status through the transformative process of puberty, but then choose to reject that status.²⁵⁶ As men, they have the power and agency (somewhat paradoxically) to reject their masculinity and become men no longer. If *cinaedi* are defined by actions deviant to the actions of proper Roman males, those actions create not only a gender for *cinaedi*, but a sex as well. Their bodies, like those of the *galli*, are something other than properly male in the Roman eye.

²⁵⁴ Arist. [*Pr.*] 4.26.

²⁵⁵ Walters (1997), 41.

²⁵⁶ As Lucian's unnamed philosopher says in *The Eunuch*, "the being of this eunuch is worse than of those initiates of Cybele, for the latter at least had experience with maleness once, but the former had been chopped from the very beginning..." (τὸ δὲ τοῦ εὐνούχου καὶ τῶν βακίλων χεῖρον εἶναι· τοὺς μὲν γὰρ κἂν πεπειρᾶσθαι ποτε ἀνδρείας, τοῦτον δὲ ἐξ ἀρχῆς εὐθύς ἀποκεκόφθαι...) *Eu.* 7.

In place of the modern presumption of sex creating gender, in the ancient paradigm gender (and gendered sexual activity) created biological sex.

Both *cinaedi* and *galli* choose to slip down the sex spectrum as they make their bodies more “imperfect,” more like female bodies. As Roller describes it, a *gallus* is “an individual who had deliberately forgone the rights and privileges associated with the possession of a male body.”²⁵⁷ This is in stark contrast to slave eunuchs castrated involuntarily before puberty, who never achieve male status and thus never possess the agency to reject it. The self-castrated eunuch devotees are the ultimate extension of the gender deviancy and physical alteration of the *cinaedi*. Where the *cinaedi* are made physically more feminine as mere side effects of their actions, self-castrated eunuchs take matters into their own hands (so to speak) and choose a more drastically feminine body.

Yet for all that *galli* are, in a sense, the ultimate expression of *cinaedi*, the sources show more hostility to non-castrated *cinaedi* than to the eunuch initiates. This is in part because the *galli*'s clothing and behavior are often expressed in the context of traditional cultic actions, and in part because the *galli*'s visibility and obvious effeminacy renders them paradoxically less threatening to gender norms and therefore more culturally acceptable. *Cinaedi* are more threatening than eunuch initiates, and the so-called “hidden *cinaedi*,” who appear to be wholly masculine to all but the most perceptive observer, are the most threatening of all to the sex-gender social system.

When sex is not clearly written on the body, it brings to light how the categories of sex are not just mutable but totally ephemeral and arbitrary. In a culture such as ancient Rome (or, indeed, our own) destabilizing sex produces anxiety. Social roles are influenced by gender, which is in turn produced from sex, therefore when sex is unstable

²⁵⁷ Roller (1997), 555.

the whole system of gender and gender roles also becomes unstable. The panic over the “hidden *cinaedi*” in this way resembles the modern day “trans panic.”²⁵⁸ The “hidden *cinaedi*” in Juvenal are socially threatening, then, in much the same way that a male-to-female who passes as a female-assigned-at-birth is socially threatening. The threat is in the realization that one cannot actually know the sex of those with whom one interacts. A person who appears to have a body that can be easily categorized may, in fact, possess a much less cut-and-dry physiology. Indeed, the ancient physiognomists attempt to mitigate the threat by describing subtle signs by which one could recognize whether a person was a true man or a secret *cinaedus*. As manly as a *cinaedus* might first appear, the physiognomists argued that their bodies were altered in such a way that a true expert could always tell the difference. No amount of masculine behavior could cover those distinctions.

Roman Attitudes towards Eunuchs of the Great Mother

While much is made of the dislike or contempt the Romans had for the *galli*, the ancient sources present a more nuanced relationship, and certainly less unrelentingly pejorative than the treatment of *cinaedi* in Roman texts. Lynn Roller describes the cult of the Great Mother as being “held at arm’s length, largely because of general disgust at the

²⁵⁸ I compare it to trans panic and not homophobia, because homophobia is itself rooted in the social aversion to gender noncompliance. The phobia is not about the sexual actions themselves, but that such actions are gender transgressions. As Monique Wittig writes, “The refusal to become (or remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not.” (“One is Not Born a Woman” in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) 13.) A “real” man or “real” woman is defined by society as heterosexual. Therefore, homophobia is essentially a variation of trans panic which is applied to persons who do not identify as transgendered but are perceived by a repressive society as gender transgressors because of their sexual behavior. Furthermore, as Craig Williams convincingly argues in *Roman Homosexuality* (1999), the *cinaedi* were not defined by their sexual actions so much as by their gender deviancy, of which sexual behavior was only a part.

eunuch priests who attended her.”²⁵⁹ Scholz asserts that “the city fathers tried, though without success, to banish and suppress the oriental cult of Attis that was inextricably linked to Cybele.”²⁶⁰ But this view is incomplete.

In the early days of the cult Attis only appears in the context of private rites rather than the public rites of Cybele but Lancellotti notes that these private rites took place “in the civic temple, on the Palatine Hill, that is in the very ‘heart’ of Rome.”²⁶¹

Consequently, there is little merit to the theory that there were any deliberate efforts to suppress Attis’ role in the cult. Lancellotti argues that Attis’ absence in the historical accounts describing the adoption of Cybele into the Roman pantheon is instead because “the transfer of the Great Mother to Rome automatically implied the ‘adoption’ of Attis, but in a subordinate role, without the sources in question considering it necessary to mention him.”²⁶² She further states that the rite of the *taurobolium*, which included the ritual castration and blood-letting of a bull, which was introduced to the cult in the mid-second century CE, allowed Roman citizens and even women to participate in the cult with a ritual substitution of the castration of the bull for self castration.²⁶³

Thus, the cult must have had some degree of social acceptance, perhaps even respectability. The treatment the Romans gave to cults they truly thought disruptive—such as Christianity—is well documented, whereas there is no evidence of any sort of sustained clash between the state and the *galli*. On a more private social level, a fragment of a Greek novel depicts a man hoping to gain entrance to the house of the lady of his desire by posing as a *gallus*. He therefore arranges to learn the mysteries of Cybele from

²⁵⁹ Roller (1999), 4.

²⁶⁰ Scholz (2001), 96.

²⁶¹ Lancellotti (2002), 80.

²⁶² Ibid. 80.

²⁶³ Ibid. 83, 112-115.

a friend who is about to be initiated. The incipient initiation into the cult (and possible self-castration) appears to put no strain on this friendship and receives no censure.²⁶⁴

The opinions of these ancient authors are more nuanced than simply dislike or disgust. While it is certainly the case that not all accounts of eunuch devotees are respectful, those sources most blatantly hostile to eunuch initiates are humorists and satirists, such as Apuleius, Juvenal, and Martial, for whom a great many types of people are the subject of mockery and derision. Eunuchs, like women, receive a fair amount of literary abuse, but, like women, this does not mean that all eunuch initiates were virulently despised all the time. Roman aristocratic masculinity was indisputably the most privileged social position, but that does not mean that there was no place at all for any social respect for other groups.

The writings of Varro and Catullus which describe encounters with Cybele and her eunuchs show religious awe and fear rather than contempt. Wiseman argues that, based on form and meter, Catullus' poem 63 should be understood as a hymn to Cybele.²⁶⁵ The narrator's prayer at the conclusion of the poem is similar to poetic invocations begging for Venus to be merciful, or fearing the destructive power of Cupid.²⁶⁶ Desire is often framed as illness or madness. Cybele's power, embodied in the

²⁶⁴ *Ox. Pap.* XLII 3010; T. P. Wiseman, *Catullus and his World: A Reappraisal*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 203. The papyrus itself dates from the 2nd century CE. The author and year of composition are unknown, but presumably date from no earlier than the 1st century, when the genre of the novel flourished and therefore was written within the context of the Roman Empire. "Oxyrhynchus Online" <http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/> for the date of the papyrus.

²⁶⁵ Wiseman (1985) 200-6. Although Wiseman believes that Catullus' poem balances reverence for Cybele with abhorrence for Attis and his castration, I argue that the narrator's fear of Cybele's power over Attis does not need to be read as abhorrence for the eunuch or his actions, just as the poetic narrators who confess to being in the grips of the madness of Venus may hope to elicit a sympathetic sense of pity, fear, even thrill of the forbidden, but not abhorrence.

²⁶⁶ For a Greek example, Thgn. 1231-4, 1323-6. And in Catull. 76 the narrator describes his love as a disease and begs the gods to remove it from him.

devotion of her eunuchs, is to be respected and feared, much like Venus' power.

Goddess, great goddess, Cybebe, mistress goddess
of Dindymus

May all your insanity be far away from my house,
Lady:

Drive others wild, drive others mad.

dea, magna dea, Cebebe, dea domina Dindymi,
procul a mea tuos sit furor omnis, era, domo:
alios age incitatos, alios age rabidos.²⁶⁷

Varro's description is initially laced with awe before the narrator departs in unnerved fright.²⁶⁸ The narrator is temporarily seduced by the appearance of the eunuch priests and their exotic costume. They are dressed in *stolae*, like women. The narrator perceives them as beautiful water nymphs, remarks on their delicate beauty and briefly succumbs to temptation to join them. Attiring himself in a *stola* and woman's slippers, he goes so far as to participate in the cross-dressing of the *galli*. But like Catullus' narrator in poem 63, Varro's narrator concludes the episode fearing the power of Cybele's madness and the fearsome appeal (however temporary) of divesting himself of his masculinity.

Go on, away with that insanity from my house!

Apage in directum a domo nostra istam insanitatem.²⁶⁹

The invocation is only necessary because the *galli* hold some appeal. The narrator *wants* to put on women's clothes. The *galli* are frightening in that there is a

²⁶⁷ Catull. 63.91-93.

²⁶⁸ Varro Sat. *Men.* 132-143.

²⁶⁹ Varro Sat. *Men.* 142.

strong temptation to join them, although in the end he determines that the cost would be far too great. This depiction is similar to attitudes to the power of Venus or Bacchus. Propertius makes the comparison explicit in 2.22a where he imagines an associate asking him why he is so susceptible to desire. He replies:

What you're asking, "why?" is something no love has.
Why does anyone lacerate his arms with sacred blades,
and wound himself to the mad meters of a Phrygian flute?

quod quaeris, 'quare' non habet ullus amor.
cur aliquis sacris laniat sua bracchia cultris
et Phrygis insanos caeditur ad numeros?²⁷⁰

For Propertius, the power of Venus to turn his head is identical to the power of Cybele to turn the heads of her followers. For all that Catullus writes that Attis castrated himself "out of too much hatred for Venus" (*Veneris nimio odio*),²⁷¹ the goddess whose follower he becomes bears more than a passing resemblance to her. Both are goddesses of birth, fertility, growth, and both possess strong ties to the Roman state, Venus as the mother of Aeneas, and Cybele as Rome's savior against the Carthaginians.²⁷²

These deities can force a dangerous loss of control, and the temptation to give in is high. Temporarily giving in to Venus or Bacchus is acceptable, within the proper, safe, boundaries, with a cautious respect for the gods' power to drive mortals mad. When the madness leads to a violation of social codes, such as Venus' passion driving a person to adultery, or the frenzy of Bacchus leading to chaos, the state steps in to restore social

²⁷⁰ Prop. 2.22a.14-16.

²⁷¹ Catull. 63.17.

²⁷² Robert McKay Wilhelm, "Cybele: The Great Mother of Augustan Order," Vergilius 34, (1988), 86.

order.²⁷³ Cybele, however, represents the Roman social order as much as she represents the wilderness and madness. Her followers do not threaten the social order, rather, they reaffirm it.

Vergil's *Aeneid* presents a striking example of the place of Cybele and her initiates in the Roman social order. Vergil places a *gallus*, Chloereus, among the Trojan warriors. He depicts his form as exotic, yet glorious all the same. The splendor of Chloereus is attractive and inspires awe and envy. Although West argues that "Vergil goes out of his way to emphasize Chloereus' effeminacy," and references his explicit status as a priest of Cybele and golden armor as evidence,²⁷⁴ in fact, the *lack* of feminine descriptors, compared to descriptions of eunuchs in other texts, is notable. Vergil describes Chloereus as foreign, using adjectives such as *peregrina* (exotic) and *barbara* (barbarian) in reference to Chloereus' garb.²⁷⁵ All adjectives denoting femininity, however, are reserved for the female warrior, Camilla, who pursues him.

But although Chloereus is strange in appearance by Italian standards, by locating a *gallus* with Aeneas' exiled Trojans, Virgil places the cult of Cybele and Attis firmly in the Roman tradition. The good Roman pedigree of Cybele and her eunuch cult can be without doubt if, like Aeneas' *lares* and *penates*, she was there in some form at the very beginning, a part of Rome's distant mythological origins. Cybele and her worship prevail throughout the *Aeneid*.²⁷⁶ Although Jupiter promises Juno that the Trojans will set aside

²⁷³ Livy 39.14-19. The Roman senate ordered the destruction of shrines to Bacchus, outlaws the Bacchanalia in Rome and Italy, and executed those who had participated in some of the more wild rites during a massive Bacchanalia which took place in 186 BCE.

²⁷⁴ Grace Starry West "Chloereus and Camilla," *Vergilius* 31 (1985), 22.

²⁷⁵ Verg. *Aen.* 11.772 and 11.777.

²⁷⁶ As Robert Wilhelm states, "Aeneas is intimately connected with Cybele, who plays a crucial and determinative role in the life of her great grandson. At critical moments in Aeneas' life, Cybele is present and involved in the action..." (Wilhelm (1988), 78).

their customs and modes of worship once they join with the Italians, Cybele becomes a self-evident exception: for she is worshipped in Rome as part of the state religion. In book six, Vergil even compares Cybele and Rome in an extended simile.²⁷⁷ Wilhelm notes that “[i]n this simile Vergil has inextricably linked the life and fortunes of Cybele and Rome by a comparison that focuses on their qualities as creators and rulers.”²⁷⁸ Cybele is not presented as a goddess to be discarded as too foreign for Rome; she and Rome’s fate are joined. Chloereus, likewise, although startling in appearance, is a figure of brilliance and a reminder of Cybele’s beneficial presence among Aeneas’ forces, not a figure of horror or scorn.

Historical evidence for Roman treatment of *galli* shows mixed views, but predominately positive. Although Obsequens states that in 101 BCE, a slave castrated himself in honor of Cybele and was exiled, and Valerius Maximus writes that another slave was denied his inheritance in his deceased master’s will on account of being a *gallus*, in most accounts, the *galli* fare much better.

Polybius and Livy both tell of a certain Roman consul who served in office in 189 BCE. The consul, in hearing prophecies of a Roman victory from a pair of Phrygian *galli*, received the priests graciously.²⁷⁹ Diodorus offers a story from Rome’s past (102 BCE) of a Phrygian priest of Cybele coming to Rome and demanding purification of the Palatine temple. He was at first greeted warmly with accommodations and gifts, until one tribune roundly insulted and abused him. Shortly after, the tribune was struck with fever and died. The Romans believed that his death was the result of his having offended the goddess through her priest and gave the Phrygian priest great honors before his

²⁷⁷ Verg. *Aen.* 6.781-7.

²⁷⁸ Wilhelm (1988), 92-3.

²⁷⁹ Polyb. 21.37.4-7; Livy 38.18.9-10.

departure.²⁸⁰ In 76 BCE Marcus Volteius issued a coin with Cybele in her chariot, with Attis depicted on the obverse.²⁸¹ In effect, he placed a eunuch of Cybele on a Roman coin, an expression of respect.

Although the positive examples above relate to mythic eunuchs or visiting foreign priests, the same general pattern holds true for the *galli* in Rome as well. Cicero mentions a special legal privilege for *galli* within the bounds of the Roman Empire. Begging was forbidden by Roman law, except for initiates of Cybele on their festival days.²⁸² Elsewhere, Cicero calls the Megalensia festival to Cybele, which included extensive participation of *galli*, “the most pure, solemn, and pious, by custom and institution.” (*more institutisque maxime casti sollemes, religiosi*).²⁸³

Why, then, did the *galli* receive at least some degree of toleration while *cinaedi* were roundly reviled? I propose two possibilities, which may have worked in tandem. The first is that religious context matters. Breaking gender roles for traditional, religious reasons—in service of the supernatural or incited by the supernatural—often allows exceptions in gender presentation in societies that may otherwise police gender fiercely.²⁸⁴ Just as the gender roles for women as wife and mother could find exception

²⁸⁰ Diod. Sic. 36.13.

²⁸¹ Wilhem (1988), 84.

²⁸² Cic. *Leg.* 2.18.21.

²⁸³ Cic. *Har. Resp.* 12.24.

²⁸⁴ For example: the North American “berdache” who, as Callender and Kochems write, usually “required supernatural validation, usually in the form of a vision and generally occurring at adolescence or later, resulting in a public transformation of gender status.” (Charles Callender and Lee M. Kochems, “The North American Berdache,” *Current Anthropology* 24 (1983), 451); the hijra of India are usually devotees to Shiva or the mother goddess, Bahuchara Mata (Serena Nanda, *Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India*, (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 1990); the *mugawe* of the Meru tribe in Kenya, a male cross-dresser who serves as a religious leader (Rodney Needham, *Right and left. Essays on dual symbolic classification*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973) cited in David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 60); among the Bantu of Angola, many of the diviners and augurs also are men who take on women’s clothes and social roles (Carlos Estermann, *The*

in the Vestal Virgins, so too perhaps the social acceptability of men breaking masculine gender roles and presentation could be stretched when the man was moved by religious devotion to a state-approved cult. Indeed, individuals who cross gender boundaries may be considered particularly suited for religious roles. As Mary Douglas writes, “[categorical] formlessness is also credited with powers, some dangerous, some good. ... To have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power.”²⁸⁵

My second proposition is that the *galli* were cognitively “safe” gender deviants because they were less ambiguous than *cinaedi*. By their very visible outlandishness and obvious un-Roman and un-male presentation, they were no threat to social categories of standard Roman masculinity. A *cinaedus*, who may be Roman, aristocratic, and look like a proper Roman man in public while acting effeminate in private, could make proper masculinity that much harder to define. One could look masculine and be mistaken as masculine, without truly being so. *Galli*, unlike *cinaedi*, do not try to pass as “real” men and therefore do not challenge masculine primacy.

Summary

Scholarship on the initiates of Cybele is full of disputes on whether all *galli* were castrated, whether the *archigallus* was castrated and when the office was created. Most scholars now agree that the rank and file *galli* most likely included both castrated and

ethnography of southwestern Angola, (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1976) cited in Greenberg (1988) 61); a late 18th century Jesuit missionary, Thomas Falkner, recorded that male shamans in Argentina were required to adopt women’s clothing (Greenberg (1988) 56); the shamans of Korea, called *mudang*, are often females but sometimes include males who take up women’s clothing (John A. Grim, “‘Chaesu Kut’: A Korean Shamanistic Performance,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 43 (1984) 235-59).

²⁸⁵ Douglas (2002), 118-20.

non-castrated men, possibly with scarification or the rite of the *taurobolium* substituting for castration. I posit further that different degrees of castration, from no castration at all to complete castration of penis and testicles, may have all been present within the cult as variations of forms of initiation. The *archigallus*, too, might have been castrated or not, and I assert that dismissing the possibility of castrated *archigalli* purely on the basis of their Roman status might be too hasty as the *archigalli*—despite being Roman citizen—take on, and flaunt, an effeminate appearance just like any other *galli*. With that sort of unmanly gendered presentation, any physical alteration would be of secondary social significance.

Unlike slaves who were castrated before puberty, the *galli* go through the process of puberty and allow their bodies to metamorphose into the bodies of adult men. Through castration, however, they reject those male bodies. Similarly, the bodies of *cinaedi* are superficially male, but the literature presents their bodies as altered. The *galli*'s castration is the furthest expression of physical alteration, but even without castration, Roman authors conceive of *cinaedi* bodies as different from those of proper males. The *cinaedi* and the *galli*, having grown to male adulthood, have the agency to reject their maleness.

The *galli* were ambiguously sexed, effeminate in gender, and yet, as the statues indicate, could hold some degree of social power. Castration in devotion to Cybele was, perhaps, a safe and somewhat culturally acceptable outlet for gender transgression for individuals, culturally acceptable because it (somewhat paradoxically) reinforced socially standard gender norms. Because of this social integration, they allowed a space for

gender transgression that, unlike the *cinaedi*, was culturally permissible, even something to boast about in statuary and inscriptions.

Chapter Five: Eunuch Eroticism

To the modern ear the phrase “eunuch eroticism” or “eunuch sexuality” seems like an oxymoron.²⁸⁶ Roman literature, however, frequently portrays eunuchs as both objects of sexual desire and as individuals sexually desiring others. Eunuchs who were castrated before puberty and after puberty alike are imagined in erotic contexts.

Although the texts conceptualize and present the sexuality of eunuchs as different from that of intact men, castration does not eliminate desire or sexual activity.

Medical information on the reality of the sexual functioning of castrated men (particularly those castrated before puberty) is difficult to find in the modern era where hormone replacement therapy can offset many of the effects of medically necessary castration or forms of congenital testicular malformation such as cryptorchidism.

Tauber’s 1940 meta-analysis, however, gives a survey of early twentieth-century medical studies on various groups of castrated men. In the studies described, the effect castration had on libido and sexual functioning varied widely from individual to individual. Tauber concludes that overall, “the clinical evidence strongly points to the fact that a large number of persons manage their sexual adjustment relatively satisfactorily without their testes.”²⁸⁷ The studies in Tauber’s meta-analysis included a Russian Skoptsy castrated at the age of ten, who, at age twenty was reported to still be able to achieve an erection, and soldiers castrated through wounding in the First World War, many of whom were able to

²⁸⁶ Some modern representations depict eunuchs as erotic, such as Anne Rice’s book *Cry to Heaven*, or the 1994 film *Farinelli* directed by Gérard Corbiau, but Captain Jack Sparrow’s opinion is the sort more commonly expressed in popular media. With his quote, “You’re not a eunuch, are you?” (*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, 2003) eunuchism is presented as a possible explanation for why a man might be incapable of or undesirous of pursuing a woman.

²⁸⁷ Tauber (1940) “Effects of castration upon the sexuality of the adult male: a review of relevant literature” *Psychosomatic Medicine* 2, 85-6.

resume sexual relations with their wives after some period of adjustment. Although none were castrated as young as the slave infants reported in the ancient sources, the studies indicate that many eunuchs (although certainly not all), both those castrated before puberty and after, retained at least some libido and sexual function. The Roman descriptions of eunuchs as sexual are not simply fantasies or absurd jokes, but likely had some basis in reality.

In this chapter I shall first discuss eunuch slaves and freedmen as both objects of desire in Roman literature and as persons who feel sexual desire. Then I will turn to eunuch initiates self-castrated after puberty as both desired and desiring others. The third section will present an analysis, which uses information on eunuchs and castration as presented in this and previous chapters, for understanding the meaning of Martial's epigram 9.2.

Eunuch Slaves and Freedmen

Despite, or rather *because* of their castrated state, Romans viewed eunuch slaves as appropriate objects of sexual desire for adult Roman men. The castration of boys at a young age serves to prolong the appearance of youthful desirability. They never acquire the beard or hairy physique of an adult man and instead retain the hairlessness that is the most remarked upon feature of sexual desirability.²⁸⁸ The arrestment of their transformation into men through castration makes them physically akin to youths long

²⁸⁸ Williams (1999) 19. Craig Williams remarks upon the tendency of Roman authors to comment upon the hairlessness and youth of objects of sexual desire. "When the sources conceive of the kind of male partner who will normally arouse men's desires, they regularly picture a smooth youth."

past adolescence, up until a point where old age wrinkles their face.²⁸⁹ Like other slave youths they are subject to the erotic desires of their owners and eunuch slaves are particularly expensive and desirable concubines. In an epigram praising Domitian's edict against castration within the bounds of the Roman Empire, Martial notes the prevalence of eunuchs castrated in infancy being used as prostitutes.

As though it were a small injury to our sex to prostitute males to be defiled by the people, then the pimps had even the cradles, so that a boy snatched from the breast begged for dirty coins: immature bodies were subjected to unspeakable punishments. The Ausonian father did not tolerate such monstrosities, that one who recently helped tender youths, so that cruel lust would not make males sterile. Previously, boys, youths, and old men appreciated you, and now infants love you too, Caesar.²⁹⁰

Tamquam parva foret sexus iniuria nostri
foedandos populo prostituisse mares,
iam cunae lenonis erant, ut ab ubere raptus
sordida vagitu posceret aera puer:
inmatura dabant infandas corpora poenas.
Non tulit Ausonius talia monstra pater,
idem qui teneris nuper succurrit ephebis,
ne faceret steriles saeva libido viros.
Dilexere prius pueri iuvenesque senesque,
at nunc infantes te quoque, Caesar, amant.

²⁸⁹ At that point the eunuch slaves might be compared to an old woman, and like old women they are seen to have passed the age of desirability. For example, Claudian's *In Eutropium* 1.10 and 1.269-71. Other references to the general hideousness of elderly eunuch slaves include Terrance's *Eunuchus* (especially lines 684-8 where the titular eunuch is described as foul, wrinkled, old, and feeble) for an old example of the trope of the ugly aged eunuch; and Ammianus Marcellinus 14.6.17 (...[P]ostremo multitudo spadonum a senibus in pueros desinens, obluridi distortaque lineamentorum compage deformes... "Last of all, a multitude of eunuchs, ranging downwards from old men to boys, sallow and deformed by the distorted joints of their features..."). Claudian gives a particularly vivid extended description of Eutropius' withered and ugly appearance in lines 1.110-131. Where a Roman man or matron might be dignified in old age as a leader of a household, elderly eunuch slaves or freedmen cannot have families and are therefore denied that avenue of respectability.

²⁹⁰ Mart. 9.7 (9.8).

Many influential Roman men, emperors notably among them, favored eunuchs for their beauty. Among Emperor Claudius's freedmen, who influenced the emperor and received honors from him, was a eunuch, Posides.²⁹¹ Emperor Nero wed a eunuch boy, dressed him in empress's garments and treated him as a wife.²⁹² Tiberius's son, Iulius Caesar Drusus, was poisoned by a eunuch on Sejanus's prompting. This eunuch, Lygdus, was "dear to his master on account of his youth and beauty and was among his principal attendants," *aetate atque forma carus domino interque primores ministros erat.*²⁹³ Drusus' excessive fondness for Lygdus and weakness for his boyish good looks led him to his death.

In his treatise on slaves and slavery, Seneca lists protracted, artificial youth and effeminacy among the indignities that slaves are forced to endure.²⁹⁴ He reminds his Roman readers that the difference between a slave and a master is only a matter of fate, and as such masters should be kind to their slaves, for they may themselves be slaves some day and endure a similar fate. This awareness of a common humanity renders the artificial extension of youth through castration problematic. As Peter Brown states, "the physical appearance and the reputed character of eunuchs acted as constant reminders that the male body was a fearsomely plastic thing."²⁹⁵ Eunuchs were walking, talking, (and sexing) evidence that maleness could be easily stripped away. The sexual desirability of eunuchs combined with their artificially forced effeminacy creates a tension. The very thing that makes the eunuchs desirable is also a reminder,

²⁹¹ Suet. Cl. 28.

²⁹² Suet. Nero 28; Cass. Dio 62.28.2-3.

²⁹³ Tac. Ann. 4.10.

²⁹⁴ Sen. Ep. 42.7.

²⁹⁵ Peter Brown, *Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 10.

uncomfortable for a Roman aristocratic male, of what frail categories maleness and masculinity are. Thus, for a Roman man their presence is both desired and distressing.

This is evident in the reports of Nero's marriage to the eunuch Sporus, which is heartily criticized by Roman historians and biographers.²⁹⁶ Through castration and then marriage, Nero forces effeminacy on Sporus and parades him around in woman's clothing. As Craig Williams states, "this public flaunting of Sporos' demasculinization may well have been perceived as a significant threat to masculine privilege..."²⁹⁷

Though Sporus is one obvious example, every eunuch boy must carry with him the intimations of the frailty of masculinity and the result of the failure of a boy to transform into a man.

Aside from the anxieties about literal emasculation that the very public marriage of Nero to Sporus might have provoked, the marriage also serves as a performance of a political metaphor of a powerful (and unpopular) emperor constraining and "emasculating" the men of the Roman aristocracy. In an interpretation of the castration of Attis in Catullus 63, Skinner writes that "the monstrous inversion of gender relations contained in the asymmetrical partnership of *minax Cybele*, 'threatening Cybele,' and her emasculate consort Attis reflects elite alarm over perceived restrictions on personal autonomy and diminished capacity for meaningful public action during the agonized death throes of the Roman Republic."²⁹⁸ Just as the Attis of Catullus may have represented a loss of power in the minds of Roman aristocrats during the unstable period of transition of power away from the Senate and to individual military generals during the

²⁹⁶ Cass. Dio 62.28.2-3, 63.13.1-3.; Suet. *Nero* 28; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 5; Plut. *Galb.* 9; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 21.4.

²⁹⁷ Williams (1999) 252.

²⁹⁸ Marilyn Skinner, "Ego Mulier" in *Roman Sexualities*, edd. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner, 129-150, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 142.

end of the Republic, so too Nero's parading of Sporus as his effeminate and subservient wife may have tapped into existing fears of subordination to the emperor in the early days of the Roman Empire. As Skinner states, "[a]ncient sexual ideology favors the conversion of discourses nominally concerned with erotic behavior, actual or fantasized, into a matrix for addressing larger power issues."²⁹⁹ Nero's desire for a pretty young eunuch was not itself problematic, but as a displayed metaphor for the power relations between Nero and other Roman men it becomes a source of disquiet.

The representation of Flavius Earinus, Domitian's *puer delicatus*, whom both Statius and Martial praise for his youthful beauty, also shows this tension between a young eunuch's desirability versus the forced effeminacy and the disquiet it provokes as a threat to Roman masculinity. Earinus, as an imperial favorite, was the subject of much flattering poetry by Statius and Martial, but since Domitian had outlawed castration within the Roman Empire, both poets were cautious in referring to Earinus's own castration.

Statius wrote *Silvae* 3.4 for the dedication of Earinus's tresses to Asclepius at Pergamum. He opens his poem by addressing the locks of hair, bidding them speed to their intended goal, and compares them to the tresses of Dionysus himself, thus praising Earinus's appearance and linking him to a handsome and effeminate youth of mythology.³⁰⁰ Statius cautiously notes that Earinus would be a young man (*iuvenis*) if he had been born after Domitian's edict.³⁰¹ As a eunuch, however, Earinus will never develop into a *iuvenis* or a *vir*. The castration (not mentioned directly) caused Earinus to retain his boyish beauty. To reconcile this paradox—the beauty Domitian admired

²⁹⁹ Skinner (1997), 140.

³⁰⁰ Stat. *Silv.* 3.4.8-11.

³⁰¹ Stat. *Silv.* 3.4.78-81.

flourishing as a result of a practice he outlawed—Stattius makes the responsibility for the act divine rather than human:

To no one was the authority given to soften the boy [through castration], but Phoebus's son with quiet skill gently ordered his body, struck by no wound at all, to separate from his sex.

haud ulli puerum mollire potestas
credita, sed tacita iuvenis Phoebus arte
leniter haud ullo concussus vulnere corpus
de sexu transire iubet.³⁰²

To the Roman audience, castration, sexual penetration, and any violation of the body were markers of effeminacy, whereas the body of a proper Roman citizen was hard, impenetrable and not to be violated.³⁰³ Earinus's inviolate body is not subject to abuse by any mortal, and the castration occurred without so much as cutting his skin. Thus, Stattius makes Earinus's body inviolable and whole, even though castrated. He is thus made akin to freeborn Roman youths, who were, as Jonathan Walters states, "naturally desirable, but not to be penetrated."³⁰⁴ In his poem, Stattius elevates Earinus from his standing as a castrated eunuch slave and gives him the bodily integrity of a non-castrated young man, even though he was undoubtedly the recipient of Domitian's sexual desires. The shame of both castration, and by extension penetration, is smoothed over, as if the castration and penetration never happened. And so the hypocrisy of Domitian outlawing castration within the bounds of the Roman Empire, while keeping a favored eunuch himself, is resolved.

³⁰² Stat. *Silv.* 3.4.68-71.

³⁰³ Jonathan Walters, "Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought," in *Roman Sexualities*, edd. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner, 29-46. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) .

³⁰⁴ Walters (1997), 34.

Martial wrote two epigrams on the theme of the dedication of Earinus' locks of hair (9.16-17), three about Earinus's name (9.11-13), and one comparing Domitian and Earinus to their heavenly counterparts, Jupiter and Ganymede (9.36). Martial never refers to Earinus's castration explicitly, but he does compare Earinus to Attis, the handsome and young divine consort of Cybele—a clever comparison, as it hints to Earinus' castration by comparing him the famously castrated Attis, and simultaneously plays with Attis's associations with springtime and Earinus's own name, derived from the Greek, ἔαρινός, "of the spring."³⁰⁵ Martial also compares Earinus in his role as cup-bearer of Domitian to the beautiful Ganymede who was the cup-bearer and lover of Zeus, thus hinting at the erotic attachment between emperor and servant. Both Statius and Martial praise the emperor's favorite and idealize him through flattering mythological comparisons to other beautiful, desirable boys. By raising Earinus out of the mortal realm and into the realm of myth, they both avoid the troubling associations of castration and the forced emasculation of males. And by claiming divine associations for Earinus, they quietly permit his castration to fall beyond the scope of Domitian's law.

Most representations of slave or freedmen eunuchs as objects of desire involve adult men as a lover for a eunuch youth, but some texts from the later years of the Roman Empire indicate that women may have also favored eunuch slaves.³⁰⁶ Martial's epigram 6.39 tells of the affairs the matron of the house has had with the male staff of the household, begetting many children from them, and adds that she would have had more illegitimate children if two of the persons involved in these affairs weren't eunuchs.

Representations of eunuch slaves and freedmen desired by women are uncommon,

³⁰⁵ C. Henriksen, "Earinus: An Imperial Eunuch in the Light of the Poems of Martial and Statius," *Mnemosyne* 50 (1997): 284.

³⁰⁶ Hopkins (1978) 194; Cyril of Alexandria, *hom. div.*, 19 (PG 77.1108-9); Jer. *Adv. Iovinian* 1.47.

however, and usually appear in the context of a woman whose sexuality is out of control and who desires every partner imaginable, including inappropriate ones. Eunuch slaves are presented as the extreme example of inappropriate desires, as women's sexuality was supposed to be limited to the conjugal bed, and eunuch slaves were unmarriageable on many levels, worse even than engaging in sex with an intact slave, which was itself considered a tremendous social shame.³⁰⁷

Roman literature shows skepticism that a eunuch slave castrated before puberty would be capable of initiating an affair with a woman. The latter assumption is illustrated in Terence's *Eunuchus*: when the news comes that the eunuch has raped a maiden, the characters react with disbelief. One character expresses the conviction that such eunuchs may desire women, but lack the ability to act on any desire.³⁰⁸ In *Amores* 2.3.1 Ovid explicitly states that his mistress's eunuch attendant cannot behave as a lover or understand a lover's plight. Claudian mentions that the one virtue eunuchs possess is that they guard the chastity of the marriage chamber.³⁰⁹ This general assumption is supported further by Lucian's dialogue *Eunouchos*, in which a eunuch is accused of being an intact man, but had claimed to be a eunuch to escape a charge of adultery.³¹⁰ The charge is a clear allusion to the orator and philosopher Favorinus, who counts among the paradoxes of his life that he was a eunuch who was accused of adultery.³¹¹

While texts vary on whether a eunuch slave is capable or desirous of conducting an affair with a woman, there is more consistent evidence for authors imagining eunuch

³⁰⁷ For example, the myth of the rape of Lucretia, where Tarquinius Sextus threatened to not only murder Lucretia but to shame her by placing a murdered slave in her bed.

³⁰⁸ *Eu.* 656-66.

³⁰⁹ *Eutr.* 1.98-9.

³¹⁰ *Eun.* 10.

³¹¹ Philostr. *VS* 489.

slaves explicitly wanting sexual relationships with men. The Roman obsession with sexual penetration meant that eunuchs castrated well before puberty, unlikely to penetrate a woman with a phallus, were therefore often perceived as unable and therefore uninterested in having sex with a woman at all. But these eunuchs were capable of being the receiving partner, of playing the woman's role, so to speak, and therefore were easily conceptualized of desiring penetration just as a woman might. Authors represent these eunuchs' sexuality as they represent women's, that is, predominately male-focused in desire and wanting to please a man by offering themselves for penetration.³¹² Furthermore, the male authors have cause to want to imagine eunuch slaves as receptive to the men who desire them, but not as rivals for women's affections.

Except in the case of Favorinus (who is an anomaly as he was not castrated, but was what the Romans called "a born eunuch"), the voices of these eunuchs are unheard and the desire they might feel or not feel is given relatively little attention in the texts. The eye of the man desiring a lovely eunuch youth is the usual focus and the possible thoughts or feelings of the eunuch slave are mostly ignored. There are some sources, however, that present a eunuch slave or freedman as having lusts and passions, but the sources are always filtered through the imagination of a male author.

Claudian scathingly describes Eutropius, eunuch consul of Rome, as not only a former slave catamite but an undesirable one. Instead, in a bitter reversal, it is Eutropius who desires these sexual unions and is repeatedly cast aside by his owners. Claudian

³¹² Holt Parker describes the paradigm of Roman sexual desires in his article "The Teratogenic Grid." He notes that, for the Romans, "the one normative action is the penetration of a bodily orifice by a penis" (48). He further states that "the passive victim is rewritten as active: one who actively desires to be hurt, humiliated, fucked and fucked over" (54). Although he is referring there to the Roman portrayal of women and *cinaedi* it also applies to the portrayal of the sexuality of eunuch slaves. (Holt Parker, "The Teratogenic Grid" in *Roman Sexualities*, edd. Judith Hallett and Marilyn Skinner, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

gives Eutropius dialogue that is closely reminiscent of literary depictions of scorned or abandoned women.³¹³ Eutropius desires the continuation of the sexual relationship where his former partner does not.

Was this, this, faith, Ptolemaeus? Was this my reward for my youth used
up in your arms and the marriage bed and for how many nights spent in
hotels? Has my promised liberty perished? Will you leave Eutropius a
widow, and does forgetfulness bury such nights, cruel man?

Haec erat, haec, Ptolemaee, fides? Hoc profuit aetas
in gremio consumpta tuo lectusque iugalis
et ducti totiens inter praesepia somni?
Libertas promissa perit? Viduumne relinquis
Eutropium tantasque premunt oblivia noctes,
crudelis?³¹⁴

Claudian also mentions Eutropius' wife, but in contrast to the lurid list of male owners and lovers, his wife receives no sexual reference at all. Instead Eutropius' misdeeds involve the gender transgression of letting her make decisions regarding matters of state.³¹⁵ Since Claudian's invective aims to depict Eutropius as effeminate, he is the wife sexually with his male lovers and remains the wife socially with his female spouse.

³¹³ Jacqueline Long, *In Eutropium: How, When, and Why to Slander a Eunuch*. pp. 123-7. Long notes that Eutropius' words are similar to Catullus' Ariadne in poem 64 and Ovid's Ariadne and Briseis in *Heroides* 10 and 3 respectively.

³¹⁴ Claud. *In Eutr.* 1.66-71.

³¹⁵ Claud. *In Eutr.* 2.84-94. As Jacqueline Long states, this woman whom Claudian sometimes describes as Eutropius' wife and sometimes his sister may have been a *subintroducta*, that is, a woman brought into the household in a chaste role somewhat analogous to an adopted sister. Although the relationship between a man and his *subintroducta* was supposedly a sexless one, the practice was often assumed to hide scandal. This would explain why Claudian calls her both sister and wife to Eutropius, who, as a eunuch and former slave, likely had neither in a strict legal sense. (Long (1996) 133-4).

Eunuchs Initiates

Self-castrated eunuch initiates of the Mother Goddess are also depicted as objects of sexual desire, but more so for women than for men. As Martial pithily puts it:

You ask, Pannychus, why your Gellia has eunuchs so much? Gellia wants to be fucked, not give birth.

cur tantum eunuchos habeat tua Gellia quaeris,
Pannyche? volt futui Gellia nec parere.³¹⁶

Juvenal's Satire Six also describes eunuch initiates as being very popular with women. They are risk-free sexual partners, who can engage in penetrative sex with a woman without ever leaving inconvenient evidence in the form of pregnancy. *Galli* are depicted as engaging in licentious behavior with both men and women, but women were considered to be, as Lynn Roller states, "especially susceptible to the charms of the *Galli*, whose sterility may have made them a favored choice among women for extramarital relationships."

There are unmanly eunuchs who delight those women with always soft and beardless kisses and there is no problem with abortions. Nevertheless this is the highest pleasure, one whom the hot and mature groin of a young man was cut away by the doctors, now he has a dark quill. Therefore Heliodorus cuts away testicles which were awaited and permitted to grow first, after they become two-pound weights, to the loss of the barber only. A true and miserable debilitation vexes the boys of the slave-dealers; the little bag they have shames them and the chickpea left behind. But a eunuch made so by his mistress is conspicuous from afar and obvious to all when he enters the bath, nor is there doubt that he challenges Priapus, the

³¹⁶ Mart. 6.67 The use of the verb *futui* implies a eunuch initiate castrated after puberty rather than a eunuch slave, because the former is more likely to be physically capable of carrying out sexual penetration.

guardian of vines and the garden. He may sleep with his mistress, but you, Postumus, do not trust Bromius, once he is hard and hairy, to that eunuch.

sunt quas eunuchi inbelles ac mollia semper
oscula delectent et desperatio barbae
et quod abortiuo non est opus. illa uoluptas
summa tamen, quom iam calida matura iuuenta
inguina traduntur medicis, iam pectine nigro.
ergo expectatos ac iussos crescere primum
testiculos, postquam coeperunt esse bilibres,
tonsoris tantum damno rapit Heliodorus.
mangonum pueros uera ac miserabilis urit
debilitas, follisque pudet cicerisque relictis.
conspicuis longe cunctisque notabilis intrat
balnea nec dubie custodem uitis et horti
prouocat a domina factus spado. dormiat ille
cum domina, sed tu iam durum, Postume, iamque
tondendum eunuchis Bromium committere noli.³¹⁷

There were likely men as well who desired and engaged in sex with eunuch initiates. But the texts render those men invisible for whom *cinaedi* and eunuch initiates were objects of desire. Clearly these eunuchs were perceived as engaging in homoerotic acts with *someone*, since sexual submissiveness to another including desire for sexual penetration was part of the literary stereotype of *cinaedi* and *galli* alike, as I will show in the following section. But the desires of male active parties in these sexual engagements are scarcely mentioned. The emphasis is fully on the perceived sexual deviance of the submissive partner, and the active participant who enables the deviance, while he himself keeps to proper Roman sexual roles, receives little comment and no censure. As Craig Williams states, “[i]n their public posturing at least, those Romans who prided

³¹⁷ Juv. 6.366-78.

themselves on being real men showed themselves capable of quietly suppressing the fact that it takes two to tango, or even of imagining that it did not really take two at all.”³¹⁸

Where the sexuality of eunuch slaves is presented as similar to that of a woman or youth—an appropriate object of attraction for adult men and imagined to desire such relations in turn—the sexuality of eunuch initiates of the Great Mother is more akin to that of a *cinaedus*. They are represented as desiring both men and women, are attractive to a certain type of lascivious woman in turn, but the men who desire sexual relations with these eunuchs and carry out the penetrating role are largely invisible.

Martial’s description of a eunuch of Cybele performing cunnilingus for a woman shows the same sort of Roman sexual misdeeds that are the hallmark of *cinaedi*. In this case, oral sex on a woman.

What is a female slit to you, Baeticus Gallus? This tongue ought to lick male crotches. Why was your dick cut off with a Samian shard, if the cunt was so satisfying to you, Baeticus? Your head should be castrated: for though you are admitted because you are a *gallus* in the groin, nonetheless you betray the rites of Cybele: in the mouth you are a man.

Quid cum femineo tibi, Baetice galle, barathro?
Haec debet medios lambere lingua uiros.
Abscisa est quare Samia tibi mentula testa,
si tibi tam gratus, Baetice, cunnus erat?
Castrandum caput est: nam sis licet inguine gallus,
sacra tamen Cybeles decipis: ore uir es.³¹⁹

Apuleius emphasizes again and again the lustiness of the eunuch followers of the Syrian goddess in book eight of his *Metamorphoses*. When the leader of their troop first brings home the narrator Lucius, trapped in the form of an ass, the rest of the company

³¹⁸ Williams (1999), 182.

³¹⁹ Mart. 3.81.

expresses disappointment that the “servant” their leader had promised them was not a man to service their desires. Lucius is immediately thereafter taken to where another slave of the eunuch initiates is kept. He intimates that he, too, is used for the sexual satisfaction of the eunuchs and jokes that Lucius the ass can help him.³²⁰

After an interval wherein Lucius describes the eunuchs’ devotion to the Syrian goddess and their daily routine, they bring in a man from a nearby village to dine and have sex with them. There’s no implication that the man is a slave, or that he is an unwilling participant. Lucius is disgusted by the sight, but all the disgust is reserved for the eunuchs. The stud they brought in, who is also a participant in events, is scarcely mentioned in Lucius’ censure.³²¹

In Petronius’ *Satyricon* a *cinaedus* dances in during Quintilla’s party of debauchery and sings a call to arms to his fellow *cinaedi* and *galli* before aggressively rubbing his backside against the narrator’s crotch.

Here! Here! Swiftly! Gather ‘round now, wanton *cinaedi*,
extend your foot, quicken the pace, fly together with foot
and smooth leg, nimble in ass and insolent in hand
you softies, geezers, Delians cut by hand.

huc huc cito convenite nunc, spatolocinaedi,
pede tendite, cursum addite, convolate planta
femoreque facili, clune agili et manu procaces,
molles, veteres, Deliaci manu recisi.³²²

This *cinaedus* calls his fellows “*Deliaci manu recisi*,” an allusion to castration.³²³

Whether or not the dancer himself is a eunuch or merely a *cinaedus* with eunuch

³²⁰ Ap. *Meta.* 8.26.

³²¹ Ap *Meta.* 8.29. Williams (1999), 182 also notes the young village man’s apparent lack of complaint at the state of affairs. Such is the double standard where a man who is penetrated is thought to be abhorrent, but the man who penetrates him is unremarkable and simply carrying out appropriate male sexual activity.

³²² Petr. 23.

associates is unclear, but in this passage *cinaedus* and *gallus* are assimilated in such a way that it doesn't matter which he is. Being one is very much like being the other. As Williams states, "the image of an effeminate Eastern dancer lurked behind every description of a man as a *cinaedus* in the transferred sense, and...behind the Eastern dancer in turn lurked the image of the *gallus*."³²⁴

Eunuch initiates are not just presented as erotic, they are presented as almost hypersexual. Just as *cinaedi* are defined by their uncontrolled and equal opportunity sexual appetites, so too are eunuch initiates. The literary trope of the lusty eunuch, which seems incomprehensible to modern eyes, stems from the deep mental association between self-castrated eunuchs and *cinaedi*. If a eunuch initiate is the ultimate form of the effeminate man that the *cinaedi* represents, then eunuch initiates must also carry with them the same hypersexual stereotype of *cinaedi*.

Analysis of Martial epigram 9.2

You're like a pauper with friendship, Lupus, but not with your girlfriend, and only your dick alone has no complaint about you. That adulteress grows sleek on cunt-shaped wheat loaves, but black flour feeds your dinner guests. Warm Setina wine dissolves the snows for your mistress, but we drink the black poison of a Corsican jar; you buy not a whole night with her with the entirety of your paternal estate, but your abandoned comrade plows fields that are not his own; your shining mistress gleams with Erythraean jewels, but your client, having been sentenced as a debtor, is lead away to prison while you are fucking; a litter held aloft by eight Syrian slaves is given to your girl, but your friend will be carried naked on a cheap coffin. Go now and cut those wretched *cinaedi*, Cybele: This, this was the dick that was worthy of your knife.

³²³ Delos was known for its capons. "I galli e i capponi di Delo erano famosi." Carlo Pellegrino, *Satyricon* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1975), 242.

³²⁴ Williams (1999), 177.

Pauper amicitiae cum sis, Lupe, non es amicae
et queritur de te mentula sola nihil.
illa siligineis pinguescit adultera cunnis,
convivam pascit nigra farina tuum.
incensura nives dominae Setina liquantur,
nos bibimus Corsi pulla venena cadi;
empta tibi nox est fundis non tota paternis,
non sua desertus rura sodalis arat;
splendet Erythraeis perlucida moecha lapillis,
ducitur addictus, te futuente, cliens;
octo Syris suffulta datur lectica puellae,
nudum sandapilae pondus amicus erit.
I nunc et miseros, Cybele, praecide cinaedos:
haec erat, haec cultris mentula digna tuis.

Martial composed many epigrams that address the topic of eunuch sexuality, representing eunuchs both as objects of sexual attraction (particularly to woman) and as persons who experience sexual attraction and enjoy engaging in sexual activities. In this context, epigram 9.2 is a puzzle. In light of the sexualization of eunuchs in Roman literature in general, and in other epigrams of Martial specifically, the seemingly obvious interpretation of the end of this poem—that Lupus should be castrated so he will devote less attention to his mistress—makes little sense.

Instead, I propose that Martial is subtly depicting Lupus as a *cinaedus*. The punch line of the epigram is that the reference to castration, and to *cinaedi* in particular, makes the subtle clues evident. Likewise, the call for castration is not to render Lupus uninterested in his mistress, but to make evident his status as a *cinaedus*. With the lines on castration, the poet wishes to inscribe Lupus' body with a clearly visible mark of a *cinaedus* where before his *cinaedi*-like behavior was overlooked. So, too, he marks the poem itself as having been about a *cinaedus* all along.

As Craig Williams argues throughout his book *Roman Homosexuality*, a *cinaedus* is not defined solely by homoerotic activity. Rather, the stereotype of a *cinaedus* is marked by sexual promiscuousness and perceived sexual deviance of all sorts, including not only taking the passive role in sex with other males, but also conducting affairs with married women and taking a subservient, effeminate role in sexual relations with women. A man who is too eager to sexually please a woman might be deemed a *cinaedus*. As Maud Gleason writes, “A man who aims to please—any one, male or female—in his erotic encounters is ipso facto effeminate.”³²⁵

Although Lupus’s sexual activities with his mistress are not detailed in the poem, he is presented as submissive to her and concerned with her pleasure, offering her only the best while his male acquaintances are denied. Whatever his sexual activities, by placing himself so completely at his mistress’ whims, Lupus renders himself effeminate in the eyes of a Roman reader.³²⁶

Lupus is thus a hidden *cinaedus*, of the sort so reviled by Juvenal in Satire 2. His effeminacy is not in his appearance but only in his actions towards his mistress. The castration that Martial proposes, then, is a way of marking that subservience on his body. It makes the hidden visible, and Lupus’ effeminate nature—seen only in his actions—blatantly physical and tangible.

Juvenal writes:

Thus more true and
frank is Peribomius; I think that he is a product of fate, who
confesses his sickness by his face and his walk. The
wretched candor of those sorts, their very madness should

³²⁵ Gleason (1995), 65.

³²⁶ In Catullus 16, the narrator fights against just such an accusation because of his own similar enthrallment with and subservience to Lesbia.

be pitied; but worse are those who attack such things with Herculean words, and, although discoursing about virtue, shake their ass.

... verius ergo
et magis ingenue Peribomius;³²⁷ hunc ego fatis
inputo, qui vultu morbum incessuque fatetur.
horum simplicitas miserabilis, his furor ipse
dat veniam; sed peiores, qui talia verbis
Herculis invadunt et de virtute locuti
clunem agitant.³²⁸

The castration is not to make him lose interest in his mistress, it is to show the world what sort of man (i.e., not a real man at all) he really is and to carve it upon his flesh. Juvenal states the same idea albeit more bluntly, when he says that all *cinaedi* should make themselves *galli*.

And so what are they waiting for? It has long been time for them to rip away their useless flesh with a knife in the Phrygian style.

Quid tamen expectant, Phrygio quos tempus erat iam
more supervacua cultris abrumperere carnem?³²⁹

Walters writes that “a respectable, freeborn Roman citizen was...marked, at least in theory, on the corporeal level by bodily inviolability.”³³⁰ *Cinaedi* lose bodily inviolability subtly, so much so that Silver Age Roman literature shows a preoccupation with the concept of “hidden *cinaedi*” (*cinaedi latentes*), men who appear properly

³²⁷ A scholiast identifies Peribomius as a historic *archigallus* of the time. Edward Courtney ((1980), 125) suggests that it is unlikely that Juvenal is referring to a historic individual. His name, however, implies some sort of cultic reference, which further implies that Peribomius is indeed supposed to represent an effeminate initiate of Cybele, if not a specific individual.

³²⁸ Juv. 2.15-21.

³²⁹ Juv. 2.115-16.

³³⁰ Walters (1997), 34.

masculine in public but enjoy penetration or other effeminate sexual activities in private.³³¹ So originates a desire that a more thorough marking occur to separate out the proper Roman men from the pretenders, whether that marker be small physiological “tells” divulged by the physiognomists, or the curled hair and feminine clothes that is part of the stereotypical image of *cinaedi*, or castration for a very extreme and permanent mark.

Gregory Herek writes in his article, "Beyond 'Homophobia'" that “recent research in social cognition has revealed the importance of stereotypes as cognitive categories for imposing order and predictability on the world. Some people feel the need for categorization so strongly that they increase their liking for a person simply because she or he labels another as homosexual. Homosexual persons who violate stereotypical expectations (e.g., masculine gay men and feminine lesbians) may actually be disliked.”³³² The effeminate *cinaedi* (like in modern times, the stereotype of effeminate gay men) serve to keep gender categories clear. A vast gulf between “proper” masculinity and gender deviancy reinforces the boundaries and supports the social superiority of the former by giving a vivid object example of what it is not. In literature or other media, gender deviants presented for the purpose to be mocked, derided, or otherwise made laughable reinforce what is socially acceptable gender behavior. In contrast the “hidden *cinaedus*,” who looks, talks, and acts in public like a real man, calls into question what being a real man really means if someone who is not one can be easily mistaken for one.

³³¹ See Juv. 2; Mart. 1.24, 1.96, 7.58, 7.62, 9.27, 9.47, 11.88; *Mathesis* 7.25.7-23, and 8.29.7. Discussed in Gleason (1995), 67 and Williams (1999), 188-9.

³³² Gregory M. Herek "Beyond 'Homophobia': A Social Psychological Perspective on Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men," *The Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 10, (1984), 9.

Summary

The literary evidence shows that authors in the Roman Empire considered eunuchs to be sexual individuals. Young eunuchs are conceptually assimilated with young boys and as such are presented as a fitting object of desire in a pederastic relationship. Indeed, part of the rationale for the castration of slaves was to artificially extend the length of time their appearance would retain the adolescent look that was considered particularly sexually attractive. The sources often present these eunuchs as willing partners. If a writer depicts a eunuch slave as resentful, it is towards the slave-seller who castrated him rather than the master who owns him.³³³ (Although some slaves may have liked their masters, for the most part it is probably a fantasy on the part of male, slave-owning authors.)

Self-castrated eunuchs were imagined to be highly desirable sexual partners for lascivious women, their sterility a highly attractive quality to a lady who wants to have sex without risking pregnancy. In sexual matters, Roman authors present self-castrated eunuchs as an extreme form of *cinaedus*. Their effeminacy, in addition to their sterility, made them desirable to women, the same way *cinaedi* were imagined to be, and like *cinaedi*, self-castrated eunuchs are frequently presented in Roman literature as enjoying passive anal intercourse. The men who enjoy buggering them, however, are hardly mentioned, in contrast to the open desirability of young eunuch slaves.

³³³ A very old example appears in Herodotus 8.106, where the eunuch Hermotimus, a slave or former slave and a loyal servant of the Persian emperor Xerxes, seeks out the man who castrated and sold him as a boy and forces the slaver to castrate his sons and his sons to castrate him in turn. Rather less gory and more subtle is the poem Statius wrote on at the request of Domitian's eunuch favorite, Earinus. The practice of castration and the slavers who carry it out are vilified while the owner of the eunuch slave is exonerated. (Stat. *Silv.* 3.4.74-6).

Understanding the sex and sexuality of eunuchs in the Roman Empire is relevant to interpreting texts in which eunuchs or castration is mentioned, as demonstrated in Martial's satire 9.2. Castration is the punchline, but understanding the joke requires understanding what adult castration meant to a Roman audience. Castration did not usually imply a lack of sexuality, but rather a certain type of sexuality that aligned with the perceived unmasculine gender of eunuchs.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the categories of biological sex in Roman culture. Two distinct groups of eunuchs—those castrated before puberty and those self-castrated after puberty—were examined in order to shed some small light on Roman conceptualizations of sex and gender and the relations between the two. I argue that categories of biological sex are mediated by cultural perceptions of the body. Knowing what the Roman categories were and how they were formed is crucial to understanding and interpreting references to sex and gender and the day to day social interactions that are mediated by them.

Although studies on the social construction of sexuality are common in the field of Classics, studies on the social construction of sex are not. Eunuchs in the Roman world serve as an unintended cultural “experiment” that enables us to answer questions about how categories of sex difference may vary across cultures and eras. Most studies on eunuchs in the ancient world, however, focus on either their religious role or their political role, with their sex and gender touched upon only as a side issue. Furthermore, scholarship on eunuchs has divided itself into studies on the *galli* and religion on the one hand, and studies on eunuch slaves and freedmen in politics on the other, with few, if any scholarly works undertaking a comprehensive, synoptic approach. Moreover, scholarship on eunuch slaves and freedmen has hitherto been focused on the Byzantine era, with Roman eunuchs touched upon to give historical context but not a focus of study in their own right. The works of scholars who specialize in eunuchs in the ancient Mediterranean, namely Kathryn Ringrose, Lynn Roller, and Shaun Tougher, though invaluable in the course of researching this dissertation, revealed a relative paucity of

scholarship on eunuch slaves in the pre-Byzantine Roman world, and a lack of a comparative study that addressed both the self-castrated *galli* and forcibly castrated eunuch slaves.

Therefore, this dissertation addresses questions and topics that have either not been explored at all, or unsatisfactorily. Of particular interest is the continuity of thinking from Aristotle to 20th century embryologists that maleness is a transformation and an achievement, and failure to transform defines the (biologically underachieving) female. Whether this persistence of thought, even across radically different ideas of where, when and how the transformation itself takes place, is a matter of Aristotle's vast influence over Western thinking or a side-effect of male domination and bias in the production of knowledge in the Western world is an open question. Tracing this idea across the centuries would be a fascinating project in its own right.

Knowing that Romans defined "maleness" as a transformation occurring at puberty, raises questions about the presentation in Roman texts of eunuch slaves castrated before puberty. Eunuch slaves are part of a class of not-men which also includes women and children. These three groups—eunuch slaves, women, and children—are physically defined by their lack of transformation into males, children because they have not yet reached the age of transformation, women because they, by nature, do not transform, and eunuch slaves because they, by artifice, are prevented from transforming. The *galli*, who castrate themselves after puberty, then form a different sex category of their own. They pass through the metamorphosis of puberty but then reject their male body and identity. *Cinaedi* and *galli* are often conceptually linked in literature, with *galli* presented as almost an extreme form of *cinaedi*. *Cinaedi* and *galli* then form yet another class of not-

men: those who become male but reject it, either through the blatant physical alteration of self-castration, or through more subtle physical changes brought on by habit and behavior. And yet despite *galli* rejecting manhood, some Roman authors grant them a degree of respectability. Like women, they may be mocked in comedy and satire, but are presented as reputable and filling a valued social role in other sources. While I briefly posited two possibilities for this—that they were greater tolerated than *cinaedi* either because the mantle of religion gave them validity or because the very obviousness of their gender transgression made them less threatening to the social construction of gender and sex—a more extensive study of passages that present *galli* in a favorable light might illuminate this issue further.

Over the course of writing this dissertation, I have keenly felt the absence of major topics that deserve inquiry. Most notably is the absence of women and how the sex (and gender) of women might also come in more than one form. *Tribades*, foreign queens, women gladiators, and women philosophers all engage in “manly” pursuits, and some, like the *tribades*, are explicitly described as physically different from other women as well. Also missing is a discussion of images of hermaphrodites, which was a form enormously popular in art. Last, although this dissertation touches upon sexuality as well as sex, I would like to see how the categories and determinants of sex as presented in this study might reflect Roman concepts of sexuality. The modern Western paradigm of sexuality, where sexual options are essentially heterosexual or homosexual, requires as a supporting structure a concept of sex that allows two and only two sexes, one to be “same” and one to be “opposite.” Thus, I would like to explore whether or not the

categories of biological sex in the Roman world as presented in this dissertation similarly served as a supporting structure for the Roman system of sexuality.

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