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Queer Identity in the Ancient World: Transgender, Intersex, and Nonbinary Bodies in Ancient Greece, Etruria, and Rome

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Abstract

In art and literature throughout the ancient Mediterranean, there are references to queer minorities whose gender identities did not adhere to the polarizing gender roles commonly found in Greek and Roman culture. Ancient Greece and Rome both acknowledged the existence of transgender and intersex identities, and attempted to explain these identities with a mix of medical interest and moral repulsion. Intersex imagery was particularly popular in mythological stories and scenes, and nonbinary bodies seem to have been of particular interest to the Etruscans. Until the gay liberation movement of the 1970s, scholarship examining these ancient queer minorities has dismissed them as sexual deviants, agreeing with the condemnation of such groups by ancient authors. Some scholars in the field of queer studies have attempted to re-examine these groups within more positive homosexual contexts. However, these attempts have been largely cisnormative in approach, and overlook the possibility that these ancient groups constituted gender identities outside of the male-female gender binary. This paper seeks to examine literary and artistic examples from ancient Greece, Etruria, and Rome through the modern framework of queer studies, and argue that the individuals represented in them are representative of transgender, intersex, and nonbinary identities. It will furthermore suggest new ways to consider how alternative gender identities were constructed in antiquity.

1. Introduction

The subject of queer identity in the ancient world is a relatively young field of study compared to other aspects of life in antiquity. Only since the middle of the twentieth century has gender identity in general been given serious academic thought, and the concept of transgender identity is even more modern. Merry Wiesner-Hanks states in her book *Gender in History* that the academic discipline of gay and lesbian studies has only existed since the 1970s, and the more encompassing discipline of queer theory, since the 1990s.[1] Though the academic inquiry of queer identity has only come into existence recently, queer minorities themselves are certainly nothing new. Ancient authors recorded the existence of queer minorities in ancient Greece and Italy, and attempted to reconcile their understanding of such minorities with what they understood about the nature of sex and gender. Queer minorities in these cultures challenged notions of identity not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of culture, religion, sex, and gender. This led both to condemnation by the upper echelons of the societies in which they lived, as well as a popular fascination with these groups of people who, by all definitions of the word, seemed then and now to be quite queer.

Gilbert Herdt explains the dismissal of queer identities in his book, *Third Sex, Third Gender*, saying "for centuries the existence of people who did not fit the sex/gender categories male and female have been known but typically dismissed from reports of certain non-Western societies, while in the Western European tradition they have been marginalized, stigmatized and persecuted...these anomalous persons have remained overlooked by anthropologists and historians."[2] It is impossible to reconstruct ancient lives in the Mediterranean without analyzing the marginalized groups among them. Likewise, it is difficult to achieve a clear understanding of gender roles and constructs without examining those minorities who did not fit into the typical gender roles of their culture. The examination of such

minorities, and how other Greeks and Italians perceived, reacted to, and depicted them in art and literature, all contribute to a better understanding of not just the queer minorities in question, but of ancient Greek and Italian cultures as a whole.

Gender constructs are not universal across all cultures and time periods. With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge the differences between how ancient cultures viewed alternative gender identities and how such identities are constructed in modern times. John J. Winkler observes, for example, that the ancient Greeks did not have a word for biological sex, and asserts that this is because they were more concerned with gender as a performance than they were with any notion that gender identity and biological sex were inherently linked.[3] "Homosexuality is a notion that dates from the nineteenth century, and thus...it is a recent category," said Michel Foucault in *The Gay Science.*[4] In a 1982 interview, Foucault stated that homosexuality is not a concept that remains constant throughout history, but is a sort of "cultural phenomenon" which is observed to be unique compared to the general populace.[5] Merry Wiesner-Hanks, in her book *Gender in History*, agrees that terms such as "sex," "sexual," and "gender" in relation to queer identities did not exist in ancient Greek or Latin, so the evidence of queer identity in antiquity comes through analyzing the intersectionality of gender and sexuality.[6] Foucault's main focus is on Greco-Roman ideas of homosexuality, but the ideas he presented are a good starting point for the examination of transgender identity as well.

Although the term "transgender" is a modern construct, the ancient Greeks and Romans were aware of the idea that a person of one sex could somehow transform themselves into another sex. Authors such as Aristotle, Galen, Lucien, Martial, Cassius Dio, and Ovid analyzed this idea, attempted early scientific explanations of the phenomenon, and in other places mocked or condemned it. Examples of transgender phenomena appear in Greek, Roman, and Etruscan mythology. Though they may not have had the same terms or concepts of transgender identity as in modern times, it is possible to look back on the concepts they did have and view them through a queer lens. To analyze an era when hormone replacement therapy and sex reassignment surgeries did not exist, it is acceptable to look at examples of cross-dressing and gender nonconformity as potential examples of transgender expression. As Wiesner-Hanks says, "using modern categories to explore the past is not an unacceptable practice as long as we use them carefully, because investigations of the past are always informed by present understandings and concerns."[7]

2. The Greeks

The most apparent examples of queer identity in ancient Greek art and literature appear in religion and mythology. The divine entity called Hermaphroditos, offspring of Hermes and Aphrodite, constitutes a large portion of the artistic depictions of intersex people. Aileen Ajootian, in her dissertation N*atus Diformis: Hermaphrodites in Greek and Roman Art*, states that "frontal representations of Hermaphroditos standing, raising its long skirt to expose the often erect phallus beneath, constitute the largest, and earliest, group of images, some of which have been found in securely dated contexts...images of this type date from the late fourth century B.C. to at least until late in the third century A.C."[8] (fig. 1) Ajootian links the significance of Hermaphroditos to several creation myths present in ancient Greece that feature dual-sexed entities at their core. She describes these myths and the idea that intersexuality was linked to creation and fertility as "generally pervasive" in ancient Greece, and she states that the iconography of Hermaphroditos is the "concrete, visual form" of these philosophical ideas.[9] Other popular themes of intersexuality show intersex nymphs with ever-hypersexual satyrs, often in the midst of a struggle against the satyrs' amorous advances (fig. 2).[10] Similarly, there are images of Hermaphroditos or other intersex individuals struggling against the god Pan.[11]

Leslie Feinberg touches on the importance of intersexuality and transgender expression in Greek myth in her book *Transgender Warriors*. She suggests that although cults which involved transgender elements appealed to the working class in ancient Greece, they were a threatening force to the elite men of its patriarchal society. "Whatever homage trans expression still enjoyed was a holdover from the communal past. It was hard for the Greek patriarchs to diminish the honor that transgender and intersexuality still held among the laboring class," she writes.[12] Feinberg lists as instances of transgender expression the mythological characters of Achilles, Heracles, Dionysus, Athena, Theseus, Kaineus, and the Amazons.[13] Of these, she asserts that Kaineus, the Amazons, and Dionysus particularly threatened Greek patriarchs as assaults on typical constructions of masculinity. Feinberg considers the Amazons in particular to be an example of "transgendered resistance," citing Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*: "Above the Nasamones, and the Machlytæ, who border upon them, are found, as we learn from Calliphanes, the nation of the Androgyni, a people who unite the two sexes in the same individual, and alternately perform the functions of each. Aristotle also states, that their right breast is that of a male, the left that of a female."[14] The double-edged axe that the Amazons used in battle, Feinberg argues, is closely associated with intersexuality because it is always held by transgendered or intersex

individuals, such as the Amazons, Heracles and Omphale while they crossdressed, and Zeus Labrandeus, "a beardless deity...the upper body bearing four rows of breasts."[15]

Feinberg does not further analyze the crossdressing instances of Heracles and the other heroes, but other scholars have done so, and have postulated that these themes pertain to Greek ideas of gender as polarized forces that relate to and can amplify a person's strength or weakness. Eve D'Ambra in her essay *The Calculus of Venus* states that in both Greek and Roman physiognomics, "male and female stand at opposite ends of a gender spectrum spanning an infinite number of gradations, from hirsute virility to effeminacy, from the inverted femininity of the virago to that of the wily seducer of men."[16] Natalie Kampen, writing in her essay *Omphale and the Instability of Gender,* suggests that the motif of Omphale and Heracles crossdressing in each others' clothes (fig. 3) could be meant to evoke images of Dionysian crossdressing rites.[17] She specifically cites this myth as an example of what she calls "the importance of gender destabilization," noting that Heracles in his crossdressing depictions in art (fig. 4) is shown in the same pose as the hermaphrodite with Pan.[18]

These examples of transvestism and intersexuality in Greek art and myth show a certain philosophical fascination with the concept of gender as fluid and mutable. The myth of Tiresias is an obvious example of sex transformation in Greek literature, but there was a prevalent idea of gender as distinct from sex. As Kathryn Ringrose discusses in her essay *Living in the Shadows,* the ancient Greeks conceived of sex-and-gender as being partly biological and partially performative, and a person could move up or down a sort of "gender ladder" with masculinity representing perfection and femininity representing the bottom of the hierarchy.[19] For example, Ringrose states that castrated males "were more manly than women or young male children, but they could not reach the status of sexually mature men and thus could never attain the culturally defined attributes of full masculinity."[20] She refers to Galen and Aristotle's treatments of eunuchs as examples of how the Greeks viewed the connection between the corporeal and incorporeal aspects of gender. Aristotle's view, as put forth in his *On The Generation of Animals,* is that there are two sexes, but he states several times that they are able to transition one between the other through mutilation. He mentions that "the female is, as it were, a mutilated male,"[21] as if they had the potential to become men but failed to achieve it. In describing eunuchs, he states that they "depart so much from their original appearance and approximate closely to the female form" due to their mutilation,[22] and also that "eunuchs do not become bald, because they change into the female condition...this mutilation is a change from the male to the female condition."[23] Galen agrees with Aristotle, but also puts forth the idea that neutered animals belong to a third sex category separate from both male and female; Ringrose notes that Galen does not extend this theory to humans, but it is important that the concept of three genders, itself, exists.[24]

On Regimen, a work attributed to Hippocrates, contains a section that also considers a biological component to intersexuality. In it, the author suggests that all humans contain both male and female seeds, and that the physical and "soul" components of a child's sex depends on, first, which seeds each parent produces, and second, which parent "gains mastery" over the developing fetus.[25] For example, a masculine male is produced through both parents producing a male seed and the father gaining mastery; a less manly, but still masculine man comes from the father producing a male seed and the mother producing a female seed, but the father still gaining mastery; and the effeminate male are born from the father producing a female seed and the mother producing a male seed, with the father gaining mastery.[26] The author suggests that the vice-versa is true of female-sexed offspring as well. In other words, though there are two sexes, there are six possible genders, three for each sex. The theory put forth in this text does not fully resemble the modern concept of transgender identity, but there is still an awareness that sex and gender are not identical, and that gender is not binary.

Outside of mythology and philosophical interest, there does not seem to have been much acceptance in ancient Greece for those who did not conform to the typical gender roles. In *Thesmophoria Women,* a comedy written by Aristophanes, the real-life playwright Agathon appears as an effeminate crossdresser who becomes the target of endless vulgar jokes from the character of Euripides' In-Law. Though in the play Agathon defends his crossdressing as a means by which he can better write about women, the concept of changing appearance to change one's gender mentality is clearly present. Euripides says to Agathon that he is perfectly suited to infiltrate the women's meeting, "because anyone would think you were a woman…"[27] and says also, "I'm bearded and white-haired, whereas you're fresh-faced, fair-complexioned, clean-shaven, you've a woman's voice, soft cheeks, attractive looks…"[28] before being interrupted by Agathon. Euripides specifically mentions that Agathon always possesses a razor to shave both his face and his nethers, implying that his feminine appearance may not just be an act, but a part of his every-day identity. Likewise, his possession of a large variety of feminine accessories, including a mantle, a breastband, a saffron gown, feminine shoes, and a headpiece which Agathon himself says he wears at night, indicates that his crossdressing is very much a habit rather than an occasional act. Though Agathon's effeminacy is clearly exaggerated to be a source of humor in this play, it is clear that the phenomenon of crossdressing was known to the general audience, and, further, it may have reflected a fictionalized interpretation of transgender identity in that era.

Agathon would appear again in Plato's *Symposium*, in which he gives a speech on the nature of Love. In his speech, he personifies Love as male and masculine, but describes it with terms that are more associated with femininity: "delicate," "soft," "gentle," "supple," "graceful," and so on.[29] Nevertheless, he also describes Love specifically as *masculinely* brave, saying, "as for manly bravery, not even Ares can stand up to Love! For Ares has no hold on Love, but Love does on Ares...because Love has power over the bravest of the others, he is the bravest of them all."[30] He reconciles Love having both masculine and feminine attributes by explaining that Love is a god of moderation, because Love has power over pleasures and passions, and cannot be ruled by them.[31] The gendered language with which Agathon describes Love is similar to the way that the Roman poet Catullus will describe the gender-altered figure of Attis, which will be discussed below. The Greek word μᾰλᾰκός, related to Latin *mollis*, is frequently used to describe Love in this speech, even though this word carries negative connotations of effeminacy and weakness, as it does in Latin. Given that Agathon himself apparently had a reputation of gender deviance, as evidenced by his representation in Aristophanes' play, it is intriguing that he would take the time to discuss the nature of Love with such gendered language. It is especially intriguing that he would ascribe both masculine and feminine qualities to Love considering that his speech immediately follows Aristophanes', in which Aristophanes describes the origin of male and female as having once been one intersex being.[32]

Aristophanes explains that in the beginning of creation, "there were three kinds of human beings...not two as there are now, male and female. In addition to these, there was a third, a combination of these two; its name survives, though the kind itself has vanished. At that time, you see, the word "androgynous" really meant something: a form made up of male and female elements, though now there's nothing but the word, and that's used as an insult."[33] These humans, along with the male and female ones, had two heads, eight limbs, and in general twice as many body parts as normal humans; fearing their strength, the god Zeus split humans in half to form the four-limbed, one-headed creatures they now are. Their desire to reunite, Aristophanes argues, is expressed through love, in which homosexual males and females seek each others' company as well as heterosexual pairs. Towards the end of the speech, Aristophanes says, "Don't think I'm pointing this at Pausanias and Agathon. Probably, they both do belong to the group that are entirely masculine in nature,"[34] referencing both Agathon and Pausanias' effeminacy. Though the sort of intersex creature that Aristophanes describes belongs purely to the realm of mythology, it nevertheless shows that intersexuality held a prominent place in philosophical discourse. His line that *androgyny*, or intersexuality, was considered an insult at that time, underlines the controversial nature of gender deviancy in Greek society. This shows that even if intersexuality was important as a philosophical concept to the Greeks, it nevertheless was not fully accepted outside of the realm of the hypothetical.

The ancient Greeks, therefore, certainly possessed an awareness of the gender concepts upon which transgender identities are built. There was a medical and philosophical interest in transgender and intersex bodies, as well as a religious interest in them. Transgender characters appear in myth and in profane literature, as do intersex characters. These myths, texts, images, and philosophies not only would be familiar to Greek audiences, but also to the Romans. The visibility of these queer minorities in Greek culture would provide fertile grounds for discussion of queer minorities in Italian cultures, and it is in Italian art and literature that some of the most vivid depictions of transgender identity can be seen in the ancient Mediterranean.

3. The Etruscans

The Etruscans had very different conceptions of gender in their culture than those of the Greeks or the Romans. Though there are no written texts from the Etruscans that survive, except for texts that pertain to their religion[35], there is evidence in their surviving art and sculpture that the Etruscans conceived of several more gender identities than just male and female. In addition to the typical cisgendered male and female bodies, Bridget Sandhoff describes at least six different kinds of nonbinary gender depicted in Etruscan bronze art: "(1) ambiguous body shapes (no overt signs of sex except for the genitals); (2) athletic or muscular females; (3) hyper-masculine females; (4) effeminate males; (5) borderline males (those who appear typically male apart from some type of feminine attribute, such as small breasts or effeminate hairstyle); and (6) total androgyny."[36] Sandhoff observes that these types of androgynous depictions occur frequently on Praenestine *cistae*, which are bronze toiletry boxes believed to have been primarily used by women, based on depictions of *cistae* in Etruscan art, and in their common presence in female burials.[37] According to Sandhoff, the *cistae* most often show borderline males and athletic females (fig. 5).[38]

Sandhoff offers several explanations for the significance of these figures. The first interpretation offered is that the figures held apotropaic power, because "hermaphroditic characters in the ancient Mediterranean...primarily functioned as protective figures."[39] She also cites Larissa Bonfante's concept of apotropaic nudity, and suggests that the exposure

to these androgynous bodies protected the Etruscan woman's own body against physical dangers such as childbirth and infertility.[40] One question worth considering regarding this interpretation is why the Etruscans would have preferred androgynous figures for promoting female fecundity, rather than overtly intersex figures such as Hermaphroditus, Eros, and Priapus, whom Sandhoff mentions in the same section. There are examples of androgynous figures, hermaphroditic figures, and figures with clearly exaggerated or emphasized genitalia in the Etruscan art record, such as in *kyathoi* and other ritual and decorative vessels found throughout Etruria.[41] It would seem like these figures would have served better as apotropaic devices and fertility symbols than nonbinary figures with *de-emphasized* genitals, but gendered iconography in Etruscan art did not necessarily carry the same cultural nuances as in Greek or Roman culture. Sandhoff states, "Although these handles are not as conspicuous as [Hermaphroditus, Eros, and Priapus], it does not seem illogical to assume that these cista handles possess similar capabilities."[42] The unusual gender of these figures, combined with their nudity, may have offered apotropaic qualities without the need for exaggerated genitals.

Sandhoff's second interpretation is that the figures are a symbol of transition and liminality, suggesting their importance has to do with a woman's transition from girl to woman through marriage, from wife to mother through childbirth, and possibly as part of the transition through life into death via the *cistae'*s inclusion among grave goods. The possibility of liminal or transitory symbolism has also been suggested for other ambiguously-gendered or ultra-gendered figures, such as in a vase from Vetulonia (fig. 6) that Annette Rathje discusses: "her gesture of mourning fits with the end of the liminal phase; that is, the transition from biological and cultural death to the entering into the other world, and [Filippe Delpino] suggests that emphasizing sexuality could be an invitation to a ritual in this connection."[43]

A precedent of androgynous or intersex figures with associations of liminality exists in Greek and Roman art as well. To support this interpretation, Sandhoff looks to the mythological story of Atalanta and Peleus, in which Atalanta, a masculine and athletic woman, "oscillates between the realms of male and female and occupies the muddled area in between...Atalanta resides in a liminal state, a disruptive third sex or gender. She does not neatly fall into either polarized category and thus possesses an ambiguous gender."[44] Sandhoff also examines Greek coming-of-age rituals that involved cross-dressing and acting as the opposite gender.[45] This interpretation takes notice of the athleticism depicted in the *cistae*'s figures and notes that the "transitory nudity" may have served a relevant purpose for the woman using the *cista*, given that its purpose was to hold toiletries and beautifying tools.[46]

It is also possible that the nonbinary figures on the *cistae* are a form of representation to nonbinary or transgender groups, which may have seemed somehow exotic or unique to the Etruscans as they did in Greek and Roman culture. For example, Sandhoff's third interpretation of these *cistae* relates to the fact that athletic female figures were popular decorations on mirrors and as votive objects in Laconia, possibly inspired by the athletic lifestyles of Spartan women. Sandhoff suggests that this influenced the bronze-workers who made the Praenestine *cistae*.[47] In this sense, it would be aesthetically pleasing to place a complementary effeminate male counterpart to the athletic females in decoration, perhaps for symmetry and contrast. The interpretation of athletic, masculine females like Atalanta as third gender or nonbinary would similarly apply to the effeminate males depicted on these *cistae*. Together, the athletic women and effeminate men display two different ways in which gender liminality could manifest. The concepts of gender duality and gender liminality are also seen in the Etruscan pantheon, and as such appear to have been pervasive concepts in Etruscan culture.

The Etruscans depicted their deities and spirits with a wider variety of gender expressions than the Greeks and Romans did for their pantheons. A few notable examples are works of art depicting the figures known as Lasa, as well as deities such as Thalna and Turan, and Terasias, the Etruscan version of Tiresias. There is at least one example of a *cista* which displays a pair of Etruscan religious entities called Lasa (fig. 7), which look like winged humans, and are as androgynous in appearance as the male-female pair of athletes on other *cistae*. Of the Lasa, Nancy de Grummond writes, "There has been endless discussion about the nature of Lasa, whether the name is generic, and means something like "nymph," or whether it refers to one particular deity who demonstrates great variation in appearance and is active in a number of different contexts."[48] She also writes that Lasa are present "in scenes of love and prophecy" and that they can be male or female, nude or clothed, winged or not winged.[49]

In regards to the Lasa depicted on the *cista*, there is the possibility that the two nonbinary-gendered figures are not two individual Lasa, but two different gender expressions of the same Lasa. The Etruscan religion is full of examples of deities that had multiple expressions of gender. Nancy de Grummond summarizes, "Some divinities changed sex. Thalna, Alpan, Leinth, Lasa, Evan, Achvizr, all of whose names are quite unknown in Greek myth, are sometimes represented as male and sometimes as female. Even Greek gods could change sex in Etruria: Artumes is represented at least twice as male."[50] One interpretation is that the Etruscans may simply not have assigned genders to their deities at all. Nancy de Grummond writes that "Before representation of anthropomorphic forms began in Etruria, the gods were probably conceived of as vague essences."[51] Regarding Thalna, she suggests "...the artists and most likely their

patrons as well did not have a strong sense of the physical appearance of the god. We are reminded that the Romans would pray to a deity *si deo si deae* ("whether a god or goddess") without stipulating the gender."[52]

It is difficult to extrapolate without literary references why an artist would choose to depict Artumes (Artemis) as male rather than female, as the Greeks did, but Annette Rathje writes a curious suggestion: "What matters is nakedness, as nakedness is somewhat magic. Divine sex and gender are ambiguous in Etruria. Many gods can be represented as women as well as men, and the gods and goddesses switch between the spheres of heaven, earth and the underworld."[53] Going back to Sandhoff's earlier interpretation that nudity was a sort of magic in itself, it may be that a person's genitals or other sex markers such as breasts each held certain symbolism or cultural significance separate from their gendered significance. For example, the Greek character Tiresias changes gender multiple times in myth, but is only ever depicted in Greek art as male. The Etruscan *Terasias*, however, is depicted as female in at least one example, a bronze mirror (fig. 8). Erika Simon writes of this, "whereas the Homeric Teiresias is an old man, Terasias has a young, female face: he was in a part of his life as a woman. As far as we know, the old tradition of the double gender of the great Theban prophet was nowhere represented in Greek visual art. The artist of this Vulci mirror has dared to show it."[54] If the Etruscans associated gender presentation or physical genitals with metaphysical properties, such as magic or ritual, then there may be some symbolic or magical significance to why the mirror specifically depicts Terasias as female. This may be a more helpful explanation than the idea that Etruscans were simply not familiar with, or did not agree upon, the gender or sex of their deities.

One prominent example of the variation in gender expression in Etruscan art is a bronze mirror showing the myth of the Judgement of Paris (fig. 9). In Greek depictions of this myth, the goddesses Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite are always female-bodied; however, in this example, each of the goddesses possess different gender expressions, and Elcsntre also appears effeminate, possibly even a borderline male according to Sandhoff's list. Uni (Hera) appears to be the most feminine of the three goddesses, with Menrva (Athena) appearing more masculine, and Turan (Aphrodite) having both male and female genitals, appearing intersex.

One possibility is that, as a deity of sex, Turan's phallus may simply be symbolic of her associated fecundity. Von Stackelberg writes, "Both Etruscan and Roman religious traditions appear to have conceptualized the fertile divinities of the earth as gender-labile, moving between male and female before either settling on a final, female identity."[55] Of this mirror in particular she writes, "the hermaphrodite Turan on the Judgment mirror, while unusual on stylistic grounds, is consistent with concepts of divinity and desire that took on both male and female embodiments...other instances of masculinized Venus indicate that from at least the late fifth to first centuries B.C. the personification of fructifying desire could be—and was—visualized as dual-gendered."[56] However, it may not be a far reach to suggest that Turan here represents a transgender woman or feminine intersex person, completing a sort of feminine gender spectrum along with the other figures: Elcsntre representing an effeminate man, Uni representing a feminine woman, Menrva representing a masculine woman, and Turan representing a transgender woman or intersex figure. Such a gender spectrum may correspond with the gender theories proposed by the Hippocratic school as discussed above.

4. The Romans

Like the Greeks, the Romans also had many depictions of intersex individuals, particularly in domestic settings (fig. 10). An analysis of intersex images in Roman domestic settings by Katharine von Stackelberg has led to her suggestion that these images represent domestic and marital harmony through the union of two sexes in one body.[57] In particular, these figures were often displayed in gardens, linking the intersex body with ideas of fertility as well, particularly since Venus, the mother of Hermaphroditus, was a goddess of gardens.[58] But while transgendered behavior in ritual contexts was acceptable to the Greeks, acceptance of the cults that practiced it varied in Rome. To many Roman authors and politicians, transgender and intersex identity was meant to be symbolic and mythical; once these identities began to show in Roman society, they perceived it as unnatural and even threatening.

Feinberg, who considers Dionysus to be an intersex god who was "doubly powerful" due to his dual genders, asserts that legislation to ban activities related to his cult are evidence of transphobia in ancient Rome.[59] She refers to Dionysus as a "transgendered, cross-dressing god--a hybridization of the old beliefs and the new," and notes that his followers also crossdressed in their rites.[60] Feinberg argues that aristocratic men saw anything that was not masculine as a threat to their power, including femininity, intersexuality, crossdressing, and any sort of transgender behavior. The idea that one could change their gender also implied they could change their class; the idea of a woman being able to change into a man is similar in notion to a slave being able to change into a patrician, Feinberg argues.[61] As a result, the Senate attempted to control these threats to the patricians' masculinity by such acts as banning the *bacchanalia* in 186 B.C.E., although this was met by heavy backlash.[62]

Another cult that sanctioned transgendered behavior was the cult of Cybele, whose priesthood was comprised of eunuchs who had self-castrated (fig. 11). Jacob Latham writes that the men of Cybele's cult, called *galli* (fig. 12), were not considered men at all, and criticism of their transgendered behavior helped to define Roman masculinity.[63] Ovid criticizes them in his *Ars Amatoria*: "Don't delight in curling your hair with tongs, don't smooth your legs with sharp pumice stone. Leave that to those who celebrate Cybele the Mother, howling wildly in the Phrygian manner."[64] Catullus' Poem 63 describes Attis post-castration as "neither man nor woman," and has Attis speak the following lines: "I am a woman, hear my voice and look at me who once walked bravely, hero of games, a boy who stood," and "witness me, a girl, a slave of Cybele, dressed like a girlish follower of Bacchus, half my soul destroyed."[65] Catullus refers to Attis with feminine pronouns after the castration, and in the poem, Attis also uses feminine pronouns for himself at that point. Other feminine descriptors apply to Attis' entire body. Craig Williams, in his book *Roman Homosexuality,* writes, "Of course, everything about Attis is now soft and womanish, as he holds the *tympanum* in his "snowy" hands and strikes it with his "delicate" fingers. Castration is an extreme instance of a conceptual all-or-nothing tendency that pervades Roman texts: softening a male constitutes a direct infringement upon his masculine identity."[66] This treatment of Cybele's eunuchs in literature reflects how the Romans thought of eunuchs, as men who had transformed themselves into women (fig. 13). Such a transformation of physical sex has now moved outside of the realm of the supernatural and into the realm of the possible.

This theme of castration as a means of physically transforming one's entire sex continued outside of fictional literature. Cassius Dio gives an account of the emperor Elagabalus (fig. 14) that effectively portrays him as a transgender woman. Elagabalus, Dio says, appeared often in women's clothing, groomed himself to look more like a woman, and presented himself as a bride to his lover, Hierocles. Elagabalus asked to be addressed as *κυρία* ("lady") rather than *κύριον* ("lord")[67], and offered great reward to any physician who could surgically give him a vagina. And while Dio attributes Elagabalus' circumcision to the cult of Elagabal, he also says that Elagabalus "had planned, indeed, to cut off his genitals altogether, but that desire was prompted solely by his effeminacy."[68] The desire to be addressed as a woman and specifically to desire a change in sex is a clear sign of transgender expression; whether these accusations of Elagabalus are true, or if they are intended to be scandalous slander against his character, is irrelevant. The fact is that the idea of the transgender individual existed in the mind of the author by this time, and was treated quite differently in Roman culture than in Greek.

Two of the gender constructs in ancient Rome comparable to transgender identity were the *cinaedus* and the *tribades*, the surviving accounts of which are almost wholly negative. As described in the text attributed to Hippocrates, *cinaedi* were ultra-effeminate men, and *tribades* ultra-masculine women, who acted behaviorally and sexually in the ways of the "opposite" sex.[69] Just as Roman men used the *galli* as a way of measuring their own masculinity, they also compared themselves to the *cinaedi* for the same reasons, reassuring themselves of their masculinity by condemning the effeminacy of these not-quite-men. Williams observes that there is a modern discussion of what *cinaedus* actually meant. Some scholars argue that it merely referred to an effeminate man who preferred to be the passive partner in same-sex relations, and who was perceived to have a voracious sexual appetite. Others argue that it constituted another gender identity entirely. After an analysis of both arguments, Williams states, "I am suggesting that the Roman *cinaedus* was in fact a category of person who was considered "socially deviant," but that his social identity was crucially different from that of the "homosexual," since his desire for persons of his own sex was not a defining or even problematic feature of his makeup as a deviant...the deviance of the *cinaedus* is ultimately a matter of gender identity rather than sexual identity."[70] It would in fact be inaccurate to consider *cinaedi* and *tribades* as merely homosexual, because they are both described as having relations with men as well as women.[71] Williams also suggests that terms of "gender-liminal," "gender-transgressive," and "transgenderal" might apply to the *cinaedi.*[72]

Williams refers to a story by Phaedrus that explains the origin of *cinaedi* and *tribades* to show that in ancient Roman literature, there is a certain conflation between transgressive same-sex behavior and transgender identity.[73] He states that the story, in which *cinaedi* and *tribades* are created due to Prometheus getting drunk and mistakenly giving male genitalia to women and vice versa, shows that these transgenderal people "are problematic not because they are men who seek sexual contact with other men and women who seek sexual contact with other women, but because they are people whose desires fail to align themselves with a set of fundamental rules: the male is to penetrate, the female to be penetrated."[74] Female same-sex activity seemed to be especially difficult for some Romans to understand because of this concept that sex required both an active and a passive partner. As a result, women who acted masculine in behavior and personality were perceived to have masculinized bodies as well.

The *tribas* is described as a "phallically endowed" woman who actively, physically penetrated their partners, both male and female.[75] Several of Martial's epigrams attest to this perception, such as 1.90, in which he writes of Bassa, a woman who uses her exceedingly large clitoris as a penis, and 7.67, in which he refers to Philaenis as taking the active sexual role with both girls and boys.[76] J.P. Sullivan comments on these epigrams, "rich, imperious and threatening women, common as they are in the obscene epigrams, are overshadowed by the dramatic depiction of the

phallic woman, the figure that occurs so prominently in the Roman novelists (Quartilla, Circe, Palaestra, Fotis) and satirists. This is the woman who destroys a man's ego and sexual potency, who desires to subjugate and control the male by aggressive and, if necessary, vicious and castrating behavior."[77] In Lucian's *Dialogues of Courtesans* there is the story of Megilla/Megillus, whose description in the story fits the definition of a transgender man. Eva Cantarella writes that Megilla "was not a man in the physical sense of the word...she did not have *to andreion* ('the men's thing'). She had no need of this male 'thing': she had her own way, much more pleasant, of playing the husband."[78] Referring to himself as Megillus, this transgender man is described as having a close-shaven head, and possessing a very masculine body. Megillus says to Laeana, "have you ever seen such a good-looking young fellow?" and, when Laeana does not follow the hint, "don't make a woman out of me."[79] When asked if he was intersex, or if he had supernaturally been transformed from one sex to the other like Tiresias, Megillus says "I was born a woman like the rest of you, but I have the mind and desires and everything else of a man."[80] More than any other, this story represents a very clear concept of what is in modern times considered transgender identity. Likewise, it is clear that these identities challenged the cisgender authors who wrote about them on their understanding of sex and gender relations.

5. Conclusions

There is more to the depiction of transgendered, intersex, and nonbinary bodies in ancient Mediterranean art than simple aesthetics. Some of the reasons that these bodies were depicted in art range from potentially apotropaic qualities to ritual or symbolic importance. Some of the reasons that these bodies were despised is due to a perception that they transgressed the order of nature, or that they threatened patriarchal society by weakening the social strength of masculinity. More research is necessary to draw solid conclusions about transgender and intersex lives within these ancient societies, but, more importantly, it is necessary for these bodies to be recognized as transgender and intersex in future scholarship. The recognition of these queer minorities is not only important for a better understanding of ancient cultures, but also for today's queer minorities, who can to look to the ancient past and see in it a reflection of themselves.

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7. Illustrations

Figure 1: Hermaphroditus statue from Paros, 20 B.C.E - 40 AD. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Permitted for noncommercial educational and scholarly uses permitted under the Artstor Digital Library Terms, located at www.artstor.org. http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/hermaphrodite-150262

Figure 2: Satyr & Hermaphroditus. Marble Roman copy from a Hellenistic original of the 2nd century AD. Public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Satyr_Hermaphrodit.jpg

Figure 3: Mosaic depicting Heracles (left) and Omphale (right) dressed in each other's clothes. 3rd century A.D. National Archaeological Museum of Spain, Madrid. Photograph by Carole Raddato. Permitted to be used with credit to photographer.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hercules_and_Omphale,_central_panel_of_the_Mosaic_with_the_Labors_of_Hercules,_3rd_century_AD,_found_in_Ll%C3%ADria_(Valencia),_National_Archaeological_Museum_of_Spain,_Madrid_(15457429395).jpg

Figure 4: Omphale and Heracles wearing each other's clothes. Copy of 1st century A.D. Roman statue. Museo Archeologico di Napoli, inv. 6406. http://www.vroma.org/images/raia_images/index10.html (item #2 on page)

figure 2: Cast bronze cista handle of a male/female pair, fourth century B.C., probably Praeneste. Rome, Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia, inv. no. 24825. Photo: author.

Figure 5: Borderline male and athletic female on bronze *cista.* Sandhoff, page 75. Print

Fig. 2 Impasto oinochoe fragment from Sovana. Courtesy Enrico Pelelgrino.

Figure 6: Intersex figurine. Rathje, page 109.
https://www.academia.edu/3232195/the_ambiguous_sex_or_embodied_divinity_a_note_on_an_unusual_vessel_in_the_Ny_Carlsberg_Glyptotek

figure 6: Cast bronze cista handle of winged male/female couple, fourth century B.C., Praeneste. Rome, Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia, inv. no. 13135. Photo: author.

Figure 7: Male and female Lasa pair. Sandhoff, page 80. Print

IV.9. Mirror with Uthuze, Turmś Aitaś and Hinthial Terasiaś. Fourth century BCE. Vatican Museums. (After ES, 2.240.)

Figure 8: Bronze mirror depicting Terasias as female. de Grummond, page 198. Print

Figure 9: Bronze relief mirror depicting the Judgment of Paris, ca. 300 B.C.E. Paris, Petit Palais, Musées des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris. De Grummond, page 93. Print

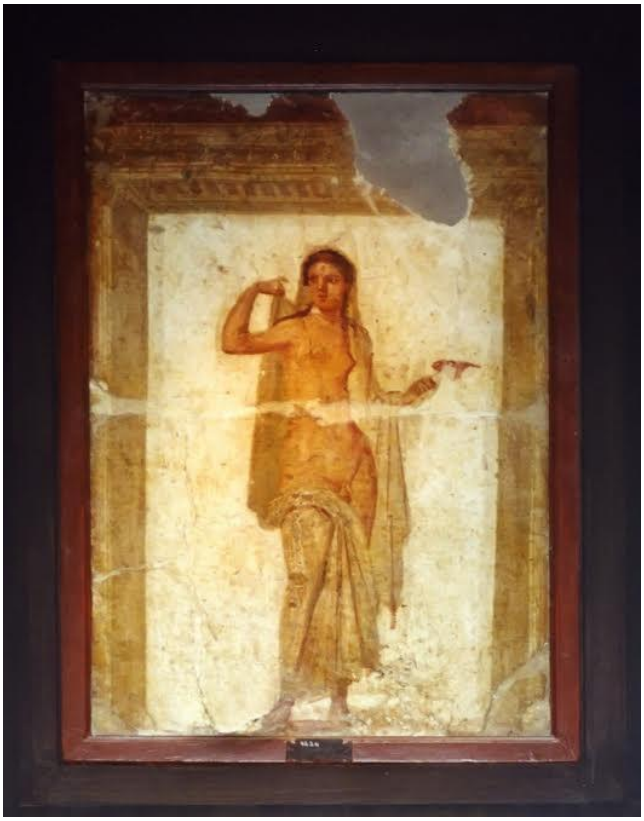

Figure 10: Fresco of Hermaphroditus from a house in Herculaneum, 1-50 C.E. National Archaeological Museum, Naples.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ermafrodito,_affresco_Romano_di_Ercolano_(1%E2%80%9350_d.C.,_Museo_Archeologico_Nazionale_di_Napoli)_-_01.jpg

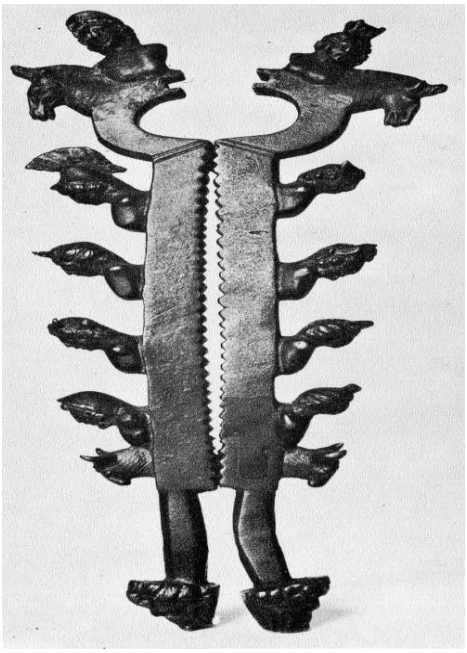

Figure 11: Bronze clamp used for castration, decorated with busts of Cybele and Attis. Found in London. Public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cult_of_Cybele_castration_clamp.JPG

Figure 12: Illustration of a statue of an *archigallus*, or head gallus priest. From *L'Antique Expliquée et Représentée en Figures: Tome Premier: Les Dieux des Grecs et des Romains* by Bernard de Montfaucon. Public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Montfaucon,_Bernard_de._L%E2%80%99Antiquite_Expliqu%C3%A9e_et_Repr%C3%A9sent%C3%A9e_en_Figures_-_Archigalle_(1719).jpg

Figure 13: Funerary relief of an *archigallus* originally found in Lavinium, near Rome. 2nd century C.E. Capitoline Museums, Rome. Public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Relief_of_Archigallus.jpg

Figure 14: Bust of Elagabalus. Capitoline Museums, Rome. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elagabalo_(203_o_204-222_d.C)_-_Musei_capitolini_-_Foto_Giovanni_Dall%27Orto_-_15-08-2000.jpg

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