Chapter 12

Where Are All the Trans Women in Byzantium?

Roland Betancourt

From the fifth to the ninth century, there are a series of saints' lives composed in the Byzantine Empire (330–1453 CE) that detail the lives of individuals assigned female at birth, who for a variety of reasons chose to live most of their lives as monks, usually presenting as eunuchs. While masculinity was often articulated as a prized virtue for all genders, even going against official decrees and sanctions restricting the dressing of women in male-coded garments, the image of women assigned male at birth is all but absent in Byzantine sources. The question I wish to ask here is not why this is the case but rather where might we find the traces of these lives by shifting our methodological perspectives. My aim here is to focus on methodologies and modes of reading for articulating narratives and identities for women in the Byzantine Empire who had been assigned male at birth.

The answers to this question are difficult to approach, given that women and femininity were almost always seen as the lesser, imperfect sex. To become a woman or to be effeminate offered no social or spiritual gain. Therefore these women emerge only in slanderous texts and invective, more so as the imaginings of critics rather than a contouring of a specific identity. Caroline Walker Bynum understands narratives of men assigned female at birth and female masculinity as a "practical device" for these figures to avoid persecution, escape their families, and take on social roles limited to men

alone. Given that they "could have gained nothing socially by it except opprobrium," as Bynum says, the archive has preserved less the lives of women assigned male at birth, whose meager accounts are short and nameless, wrapped only in accusations of immorality and depravity.[1] Bynum's views capture the prejudices of the archive as much as that of its historians, yet this perspective is by no means unique but pervasive throughout all the existing Byzantine secondary literature on the matter and related studies.[2] As Jack Halberstam critically cautioned, "female masculinity" has often been associated with "a 'natural' desire for the greater freedoms and mobility enjoyed by boys," except of course when that masculinity exceeds its bounds and challenges male identity itself.[3] This chapter aims at filling the absence of women assigned male at birth, precisely by paying attention to the sensibilities of Byzantine sources and their open and fluid handling of gender variance.[4] Here my aim is to understand the various glimmers and discussions of women who had been assigned male at birth as medieval antecedents to modern trans lives. Articulating these medieval women as trans allows us to better understand how Greek writers understood, construed, and imagined gender.

An important methodological challenge in the study and excavation of trans lives in the medieval world is that many of these stories have their origins in the Byzantine Empire.[5] While some of these narratives gained popularity in the Western medieval world in later centuries through translations, these are sources written in Greek that would have been inaccessible to the Latin-speaking West. Scholars of the Western Middle Ages have approached these issues with distinctly Western sensibilities that have a faulty understanding of Byzantine ideas about gender and sexuality. More importantly, scholars have failed to acknowledge that the corpus of ancient Greek literature on which so much discussion of premodern and early modern gender and sexuality hinges was actively preserved, commentated on, and studied in the Byzantine Empire, largely in Constantinople. This is not to say that no text of Plato, for example, was accessible in the West in translation during the Middle Ages, but rather that the corpus of classical learning preserved in its Greek original exists for us because of Byzantine learning and philosophy. Therefore these works are as much a product of antiquity as they are of the Byzantine Empire, as Byzantine scholars chose what to preserve and excerpted and compiled sources into the modern tomes we know them as today.

In this chapter I have collected a series of disparate sources across late antiquity and the medieval period, recognizing that these temporal divisions

for the Byzantine Empire are deeply misleading. These selected texts describe figures assigned male at birth, yet who are said to be feminine in various capacities and whose gender identity is imputed differently across the different sources. I am approaching these various texts with distinctly Byzantine sensibilities, reading them with an attention to how Byzantium understood gender and sexuality, as well as to how these texts were transmitted and understood within Byzantine contexts. But reading through Byzantine eyes serves as a radical shift from Western scholars, including Michel Foucault.[6] Foucault, for example, read Greek texts (both ancient and late antique) on gender and sexuality as a product of the atemporal "Greeks" rather than grasping the deep and fundamental impact that the Byzantine Empire had on what we today consider Greek philosophy and literature, which was actively preserved in an empire that never referred to itself as "Byzantine" or "Byzantium" but always as "Roman" (Rōmaioi).[7]

Moving through late antique theater's impact on Constantinopolitan life, the invectives of early church writers, and the work of late antique historical chronicles, the texts in this chapter establish the foundation for how the Middle Byzantine period (843–1204 CE) understood aspects of gender and sexuality, particularly as they pertain to anxieties about effeminacy and women who were assigned male at birth. The figures discussed throughout these examples demand a revaluation of what trans identities could have looked like in late antiquity and the Byzantine Empire. My goal here is to consider an ethical proposition: if we accept that transgender persons are not a modern phenomenon but have existed in the shadows throughout history, then we must work to understand how the appearance of these figures (when presented through invective and insult) indexed the oppressed presence of medieval people who did not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, even if their self-identification was not imagined in the same manner as it is today.

My goal is to articulate the deeply queer existence of trans women, whose identities have been all but purged from the historical record through screeds of invective. As historians, we are left to excavate these fragments from the archives, even those weakly glimmering possibilities of trans women. In the absence of clearly contoured terms in medieval sources, I use the term "trans" to refer to these figures with the goal of demonstrating a history for them and a model of "best practices" for giving representation to figures whose lives have been denied. One key commitment, however, is to resist medicalizing gender or seeing trans lives only in the representation of outward presentations of gender.[8] This chapter struggles with the absences of

the archive and the potent act of grasping at lives erased and denied. "To read without a trace," as Anjali Arondekar calls it, is a way of embracing the absences of the archive, the seductions of retrieval, and the recuperative hermeneutics of accessing minoritized lives and historiographies.[9]

Much historical work in trans studies has struggled with the tension between linearity and absence, both in the archive and in how we tell our stories. In particular, I am drawn to the work of Jack Halberstam and C. Riley Snorton for their ability to balance the realities of historical subjects by seizing the complexities of our own modern experience of gender.[10] But I am more struck by the imperatives of my fellow medievalist Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski, who has been able to perceive the nuance of historical context by emplacing it within the ethical demands of our teaching and scholarship, which always requires code-switching between modern and premodern language lest we forsake the past and the present at once.[11] The ethical imperative in this chapter is to "read without a trace" in order to pry these fragments from the hands of their abusers and restore to them the dignity of a compelling historical narrative, stitched together from fragments, contradictions, and tracelessness.[12]

The Byzantine Theater and Satire

In the late antique Byzantine world, the theater is a key site for the manifestation of bodies that unsettle gender identity, particularly associated with attacks on femininity and effeminacy. One of the more controversial aspects of pantomime performances was precisely the matter of female roles played by male performers who, as Ruth Webb has argued, readily changed between roles and genders without a costume change or other narrative cues, but simply by altering their gestures, gait, and posture.[13] In an epigram preserved in the *Latin Anthology*, compiled in early sixth-century Carthage, we have a vivid depiction of such performances:

> Declining his masculine breast with a feminine inflection [mascula femineo declinans pectora flexu] and moulding his pliant torso to suit either sex, the dancer enters the stage and greets the people, promising that words will come forth from his expert hands. For when the sweet chorus pours forth its delightful song, what the singer declaims, the dancer himself confirms with his movements. He fights, he plays, he loves, he revels, he turns round, he stands still, he illuminates the truth, and imbues everything with grace. He has as many tongues as limbs, so wonderful is the art by which he can make his joints speak although his mouth is silent.[14]

Reminiscent of performances in the theaters of Constantinople in the same period, such performers drew the ire of imperial and church authorities while often being associated with sex work and other illicit sexual acts (*porneia*).[15] These attacks on performers disproportionately targeted women's sexual lives, but male performers were also included within these accusations of sex work and sexual promiscuity. In the latter cases, however, these attacks were primarily structured around the imputation of effeminacy and the desire to become a woman.[16]

In a text attributed to John Chrysostom (340/50–407 CE), the author writes that these dancers lamented the gender they were assigned at birth by their parents: "But the feminine dancers are broken men, who imitate these things against nature, grieving that they had not been born women from their parents [lypoumenos hoti mē gynē para tōn goneōn etechthē], and been assigned that desired transformation of nature."[17] This is an important text to consider, given that John Chrysostom is a central figure in Eastern Christianity, being an important Church Father, who is credited with providing the church with its key liturgical rite and whose homilies were repeatedly used in the rites of the church. The manuscript tradition's attribution of this text to John Chrysostom carried immense weight, even if modern scholars have come to question its authorship by the Church Father.

Similar suggestions are made in Amphilochius of Iconium's fourth-century iambs to Seleucus, where he describes that the twisting and turning of limbs betray the glory of male gender and destroy nature as these figures neither are male nor fully become female.[18] As Amphilochius explicitly states, they do not simply play the character but desire to become women, and that which they "so wrongly desire is not natural" (au kakōs thelousin, ouk eisin physei). The repeated notion across such texts is that if men perform as women, then they also wish to be women as well.[19] This fear and paranoia about these dancers' being both "effeminate men and masculine women" (andres gynaiki kai gynaikes andrasin), as Amphilochius puts it, are echoed in sources that address anxieties around non-normative gender expression and presentation. These concerns focused specifically around practices of dress and grooming, matters that were also codified across the Councils of Gangra and Trullo in the fourth and seventh centuries, respectively, as well as in the Theodosian Code from the mid-fifth century.[20] These restrictions generally followed the prohibition in Deuteronomy 22:5 that states that "a woman must not wear men's clothing, nor should a man dress up in women's clothing," both being an offense to God.

Since antiquity, the dress and grooming of so-called "effeminate men" is also simultaneously inscribed in sexual practices and promiscuity, primarily

around same-gender desires.[21] In one epigram by the mid-first-century Roman poet Martial, we are graphically presented with a contemplation upon a man who practices feminine habits of depilation: "You pluck your chest and your shins and your arms, and your shaven cock is ringed with short hairs. This, Labienus, you do for your mistress' sake, as everybody knows. For whose sake, Labienus, do you depilate your arse?"[22] As this bawdy poem suggests, it would not be unexpected that a man might shave his chest, arms, legs, and pubic hair for his female lover, "as everybody knows." Yet the question is left open as to what is the extent of this alleged feminization if it applies as well to other sexual practices beyond those with his mistress. The conceit is that if the shaven pubic area welcomes a female partner, the shaven rear welcomes a male partner. Confronting male grooming practices that were seen as somehow feminine, such as coiffing, hair dyeing, or the shaving of body hair, ancient and late antique authors manifest an inherent transphobia, seemingly asking when do these "feminine" practices make men into women, where "womanhood" is understood both as an outward expression of one's gender and as implicating a man as being the receptive partner in anal sex.[23]

Also writing in the first century, the Roman satirist Juvenal confronted this problem by suggesting that men seeking a promotion in the army, for example, should endeavor to leave their hair uncombed and make sure to have untrimmed armpit and nose hair so as to emphasize their virility, manliness, and hardness.[24] Juvenal jokingly proposes the performance of an exuberant caricature of masculinity. The implication of his suggestion is not simply that a feminine man would be unsuitable for the job; this statement also contains a social critique of the fact that affectations of masculinity through a hirsute, unkempt, and rough appearance could be used to one's social advantage. Elsewhere, Juvenal reflects, "Shaggy limbs and stiff bristles all over your arms promise a spirit that's fierce, but your arsehole is smooth when the laughing doctor lances your swollen 'figs.'"[25] Here the bravado of hyper-masculine performance is foiled by the doctor who laughs while lancing hemorrhoids from the man's shaven ass, given that anal hemorrhoids were seen as a consequence of anal sex. In the instances recounted by Martial and Juvenal, we observe the enforcement of a normative masculinity that is also deeply preoccupied with a figure assigned male at birth who is allegedly concealing their femininity. At times, this femininity is understood as indicating a sexual desire to be the passive partner in same-gender relations. Repeatedly, however, this conclusion results from the observation of grooming and other bodily practices associated with women at the time.

The Early Church and Transmisogyny

By the late second century, the early Christian philosopher Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 CE) would grapple with the question of femininity more broadly in his chapter on the "beautification of men" (kallōpizomenous tōn andrōn) in *The Instructor*, in which he condemns same-gender sexual desire in the service of the development of the rest of his treatise.[26] Clement describes at some length the contours of late antique Alexandria and the preponderance of "effeminate men," along with expressing in passing how to even begin to read these men who "become women" (gynaikizontai) by being "inclined toward softness" (malthakōteron). He concludes that they must be "adulterers and androgynous men" (moichous te kai androgynous).[27] He carefully details the garments and adornments they wear; the various methods they use and the street shops they frequent for depilation, hair dyeing, and coiffing; and the gestures, behaviors, movements, and habits of these "womanish creatures," while simultaneously offering sordid speculations about their sexual proclivities.[28] For Clement, this phenomenon is rooted in the "disease" of "luxury," whereby men "become effeminate, cutting their hair in an ungentlemanly and meretricious way, cloth[ing themselves] in fine and transparent garments, chewing mastic, smelling of perfume." Likewise, Clement takes aim at hair dyeing for several reasons, primarily because the bleaching and yellowing of hair was associated with women but is here offered as evidence that these are "androgynous men with a pernicious lifestyle" (androgynōn exōlōn epitēdeumata).[29]

Hair removal, however, appears to be a particular preoccupation for Clement. He begins at first by describing the various shops in town where one can go to get shaven, plucked, or waxed: the equivalent of modern waxing is "the violent tuggings of pitch-plasters." In an almost comical acrobatics of invective, he even takes issue with the process of waxing itself, condemning "the act of bending back and bending down, the violence done to nature's modesty by stepping out and bending backwards in shameful positions." What is worse is that this waxing occurs while these men are exposed to the gaze of all in these waxing shops in the middle of town, and thus "he who in the light of day denies his manhood, will prove himself manifestly a woman by night."[30] He connects the shamelessness of being publicly waxed to sexual passivity, evidenced by the need to be bent over in all sorts of positions.

This connection between hairless smoothness and sexual passivity is echoed in Clement's discussion of women who do sex work and those "boys, taught to deny their sex," who thus "act the part of women." This

is understood in terms of both sexual passivity and gender performance, as he then goes on to say that these days, "men play the part of women, and women that of men, contrary to nature."[31] The misogynistic fear of men "playing" the role of women is common to early church writings. For example, in the late fourth century, John Chrysostom attacks the femininity of men who "receive women at the door, strutting as if they had been transformed into eunuchs," and also those who comport themselves with a lack of self-restraint or perform womanly tasks.[32] For Chrysostom, for a man to behave as a woman in one's actions was akin to being castrated as a eunuch. These ideas, however, reveal the tenuous manner in which gender identity was handled. Rather than understanding gender as a byproduct of a medicalized notion of sex, these comments hint at the anxieties that gender may in fact not adhere to that assigned at birth.

Furthermore, Clement of Alexandria struggles with the way these figures practice other forms of bodily adornment and garb, such as the wearing of jewelry and fine garments that are socially and legally reserved for women: "For although not allowed to wear gold, yet out of effeminate desire they enwreath their lashes and fringes with leaves of gold" or dangle gold and pearls from their ankles and necks.[33] Here we understand that the use of feminine adornments by men, while prohibited by legal decrees, was nevertheless being done quite openly. Clement ascribes this contrary-to-law practice as emerging from an inner "effeminate desire" (thēlydriōdē epithymian),[34] positing an internalized feminine identity for these men that is not exclusively associated with same-gender desire. As he goes on to say, they deny the characteristics of their sex and also spend time in women's apartments, becoming chimerical "amphibious beasts."[35] For Clement, this goes against nature, because at Creation God extracted all "smoothness and softness" from Adam when he created Eve, who was formed as his receptive partner, while Adam "remained a man, and shows himself man."[36]

While Clement might seek to connect effeminacy to same-gender desire as a trope of such earlier invective, it would seem that he is anxious about the enmeshed relationship between gender expression and sexuality. In a fanciful leap of invective, Clement tries to summarize such sexual depravity by speaking of men who engage in any form of "luxury" and father many children without their knowledge. Such men, he argues, seek out female sex workers and boys for sex, copulating unknowingly with their own progeny: these men "have intercourse with a son that has debauched himself, and daughters that are sex workers."[37] These comments clarify that for Clement of Alexandria, male "luxury" is not simply associated with men who seek out male partners but is nevertheless understood as a negative quality associated

with women and femininity.[38] This is expressed earlier, when Clement grapples with the ambiguity of these effeminate men's sexuality, observing that "the embellishment of depilation . . . if it is to attract men, is the act of a womanly person, but if to attract women, is the act of an adulterer," going back to the suggestions he had made initially in *The Instructor* about how to read feminine men as either effeminates or adulterers.[39] Thus, while same-gender desire or sexual passivity, more broadly, might be lazily ascribed to femininity, Clement repeatedly seems to concede that this gender expression is not directly tied to sexual desire but amounts to its own category.[40] The importance of stressing this is that it attempts to make a distinction between homophobic rhetoric and transphobic rhetoric. While Clement resorts to the former, his true preoccupation is the latter.

In one instance, reflecting on men who comb, pluck, smooth, and arrange their hair, "in truth, unless you saw them naked, you would suppose them to be women."[41] While this may simply be a rhetorical exaggeration, we could also begin to read Clement as outlining a cultural understanding of a certain class of individuals that we might think of as a historical relative of something like trans identity. As he summarizes near the end of his tirade, struggling with terms to describe some of these men: "Rather we ought not to call them men [ouk andras], but lispers [batalous] and effeminates [gynnidas], whose voices are broken, and whose clothes are womanish both in feel and dye. And such creatures are manifestly shown to be what they are from their external appearance, their clothes, shoes, form, walk, cut of their hair, look."[42] While the terms *batalous* and *gynnidas* should certainly be understood as gesturing to sexualized passivity, here they are being deployed as constructions meant to articulate a different gender category, explicitly stating that these are "not men" (ouk andras) because, as he goes on to say, following Ecclesiastes 19:29–30, men should be identifiable from their dress, gait, affect, and character. Hence the implication is that these lispers and effeminates are not men but another gender altogether. This does not, however, apply wholesale to all the various figures and practices he has described throughout. Note in particular that elsewhere he does not draw attention to "broken voices" (phōnai tethrymmenai), which suggests a gender expression beyond mere grooming practices, like hair shaving, waxing, or dyeing, or the wearing of jewelry and other bodily adornments. Here we get the explicit sense not only that these figures have taken up an effeminate behavior through their "clothes, shoes, form, walk, cut of their hair, look" but also, specifically, that their dresses are those of women in "feel and dye," and that even the quality of their voices has been modified. These litanies of gender-crossed terms, like Amphilochius's "effeminate men and

masculine women," are common throughout Byzantine texts, both in late antiquity and in the later Middle Ages. This struggle with language precisely demonstrates writers attempting to articulate and give voice to a reality they cannot quite name.

While there is a distracting conflation of many identities and the ways they intersect, Clement's text ultimately does offer a glimpse into what late antique authors imagined as a transgender identity. In Clement's text, we are left to understand that within a wide spectrum of practices deployed by late antique Alexandrian "effeminate men," there is a nod toward a complex spectrum of gender identities. We see here the fragments of a negatively defined identity projected onto trans women in late antiquity, shaped unwittingly and haphazardly by Clement of Alexandria's invective. Previous scholarship has all but ignored these claims, mining these texts for histories of sexuality, normative gender roles, and their ancillary prohibitions, but not as a way to see the imprints of trans women and gender-nonconforming figures. Clement's text nevertheless stages the specific challenge of naming people who, while assigned male at birth, seem to live out their lives with a female gender presentation. For Clement, this is vividly manifested by the passing comment that only their genitalia could allow them to be identified as "male," an emphasis on the genitals that echoes transphobic rhetoric to this day.[43]

Thus, to perceive any hint of transgender women's experience in the late antique and Byzantine world, we must read simultaneously along and against the grain of the archive's transmisogyny. Transmisogyny distinguishes itself from a generalized transphobic anxiety in these texts in the fact that it is trans women and trans femininity, broadly and variably conceived, that is singled out as the medium for the transphobic invective.[44] It is a disproportionate attack that singles out the figure of the trans woman as the subject of ridicule, attack, and insult based on the underlying delusion that men are better than women. It is this form of transmisogyny that we see most prominently across late antique and medieval Greek sources, effectively erasing and denying the lives of trans women and "effeminate men," except when represented as negative rhetorical figures.

Dio Cassius's Elagabalus

At the end of antiquity, we are provided with one of the most extensive narratives of a single figure who not only identified as female but also actively sought out gender-affirming surgery. This striking evidence is found in the figure of the Roman emperor Elagabalus (203–222 CE).[45] In the *Roman History*,

Elagabalus's contemporary Dio Cassius attacks the ruler's life and deeds by stressing Elagabalus's identification as a woman.[46] Dio Cassius recounts horrific and barbaric ritual sacrifices and magic associated with Elagabalus's name and offers graphic details pertaining to the ruler's various marriages and lascivious sexual conquests.[47] But of key importance here is the manner in which Elagabalus is depicted as a trans woman, that is to say, as a person who had been assigned male at birth but identified herself as female. Dio Cassius recounts precisely how Elagabalus presented her gender identity. Dio Cassius claims that Elagabalus "would go to the taverns by night, wearing a wig, and there ply the trade of a female huckster."[48] Repeatedly Elagabalus is said to behave in the manner resembling that of female sex workers, standing naked in the doorway of the palace while in a "soft and melting voice"[49] soliciting all who went by. Furthermore, Dio Cassius argues that Elagabalus took on a lover she referred to as "husband" and wished to make a co-emperor. For herself Elagabalus chose the titles of "wife, mistress, and queen." Only when she tried someone in the court of law did Elagabalus have "more or less the appearance of a man, but everywhere else he showed his affectation in his actions and in the quality of his voice." Elagabalus would shave her own face and pluck her hairs out "so as to look more like a woman," and she worked wool, wore a hairnet, and painted her eyeslids.[50]

In the figure of Elagabalus, one is confronted with an image of a ruler rooted in the tropes of classical and late antique invective, using femininity as a slanderous tactic. Yet, simultaneously, there is a careful depiction of this figure's gender expression and her quite self-conscious identification as a woman. Dio Cassius's depiction, however, often evokes Elagabalus's femininity through accusations of sexual depravity to shame the person's gender. Nevertheless, through these litanies of so-called depravities we are also offered fragments of historical evidence of a woman who had been assigned male at birth. Uniquely, the narrative states that she not only dressed in women's clothing and followed women's grooming practices but also sought gender-affirming surgical procedures, to which I now turn.

Throughout the later Byzantine sources, there is a claim that Elagabalus sought to undergo gender-affirming surgical procedures. While this is at times attributed to Dio Cassius, it is only attested across Byzantine writers.[51] In a passing yet telling comment, the twelfth-century historian John Zonaras writes that Elagabalus "carried his lewdness to such a point that he asked the physicians to contrive a woman's vagina in his body by means of an incision, promising them large sums for doing so." A similar request is found in George Kedrenos's twelfth-century *Synopsis of History*. There, Elagabalus, "according to Dio, besought his physician to employ his skill to make

him bisexual [diphuē] by means of an anterior incision."[52] This detail, whose attribution to Dio Cassius by Kedrenos is plausible, captured the imagination of several other Byzantine writers. This passage is cited verbatim by both the mid-tenth-century Symeon Logothete (also referred to as Leo Grammatikos) and the twelfth-century Michael Glykas in their respective historical chronicles.[53]

Elagabalus's request stresses the desire of this figure (real or rhetorical) to undergo gender-affirming surgery in the late antique world. This point is emphasized by Dio Cassius, who leaves little uncertainty about Elagabalus's motivation. When noting that she also circumcised herself in order to lead her cult, he writes that Elagabalus "had planned, indeed, to cut off his genitals altogether, but that desire was prompted solely by his effeminacy."[54] That these details about Elagabalus's gender and desire for gender affirming surgery are often the only aspects provided about her reign in several Byzantine chronicles is immensely poignant.

Perhaps even more striking is that the late-thirteenth-century Theodore Skoutariotes presented a wholly positive image of Elagabalus, writing that she was "righteous, sharp in war, gentle, thoughtful, servicing all, and loved by all," suggesting an erroneous understanding of Elagabalus or a purposeful revision of the narrative, with the detail of her gentleness or softness (ēpios) being the only remnant of the stereotypical charges of effeminacy lodged against the trans Elagabalus.[55] His work may be partially indebted to Herodian's *History of the Empire*, which featured a more neutral approach to Elagabalus's reign while nevertheless noting Elagabalus's dressing and adornment habits.[56] Herodian's text was also known to Byzantine writers and is attested in Photius's *Bibliotheca*.[57]

The salacious details about Elgabalus's sexuality and gender identity were by no means limited to Dio Cassius's work. Similar claims are found in the works of both contemporaneous and later writers, whose dependence on Dio's *Roman History* cannot be readily assumed. For example, Philostratus of Athens tells us in the *Lives of the Sophists* that the Roman Sophist Claudius Aelianus (a contemporary of Elagabalus) composed and delivered an indignant attack against Elagabalus called the "Indictment against the Little Woman" (katēgoria tou Gynnidos).[58] Several decades later, the fourth-century anonymous author of the *Epitome de Caesaribus* wrote that Elagabalus "turned himself into a woman" (in se convertens muliebri) and also asked to be called by a female name.[59] The attack by Aelianus referring to Elagabalus as a "little woman" speaks tellingly to a widespread understanding that the ruler was a woman, beyond Dio's specific account. And while Aelianus's text was long believed to be wholly lost, Steven Smith has provocatively and convincingly

suggested that fragments have in fact come down to us, preserved in the tenth-century Byzantine lexicon *The Souda*, providing further evidence that it was well known and popular in the Byzantine world.[60]

Byzantine Eunuchs and Femininity

A critical aspect in this conversation focused on Byzantium is the important role that eunuchs played in the empire, which was markedly different from the negative stereotypes that eunuchs carried in antiquity. Kathryn Ringrose has helpfully made the point that eunuchs functioned in Byzantium as a "third gender," appearing in the writings of figures like Cyril of Alexandria and Basil of Caesarea as "an accursed gender [genos] . . . neither feminine nor masculine."[61] Shaun Tougher has added to this conversation by rightly stressing that eunuchs could be considered masculine or feminine depending on the context, particularly in later centuries, when a more favorable approach to eunuchs in Byzantium replaced older cultural attitudes.[62] Byzantine authors understood castration as feminizing the body and in a sense transforming men into women. In more popular writings, this was understood potently in terms of the psychology, behavior, and appearance of eunuchs. Their character was feminine, that is, defined by their inability to control their passions, desires, and appetites. Ringrose has surveyed the manner in which eunuchs were described: accused of indulging in sexual excess, smelling of musk, weaving webs and trying to ensnare others, having soft white flesh and high shrill voices, being unable to control their emotions.[63] The eunuch served as a telling exemplar of the malleability of the body's sexes since the removal of the genitals alone, according to Aristotle, "results in such a great alteration of their old semblance, and in close approximation to the appearance of the female."[64]

Certainly it is possible that persons assigned male at birth chose to live their lives as (or become) eunuchs with a feminine gender presentation. Particularly in late antiquity, self-castration for religious purposes is evidenced in the story of Origen.[65] The topic even came up at the Council of Nicaea in 325, which in its first canon bars the person who "in sound health has castrated himself" from entering or serving in the clergy, even though those castrated for medical reasons, by barbarians, by their masters, or those who "should otherwise be found worthy" can be admitted.[66] This attack on self-castration may have been aimed at deterring any extreme ascetic drives to attempt to cut off sexual desire, but it also might have been contoured by pejorative views of the eunuch's femininity in body and character in the late antique period.

Beyond their feminine and androgynous appearance, the notion that eunuchs could operate socially as women appears in the story of the life of Matrona of Perge. At one point in the story, while she is living as the eunuch Babylas in the male monastery of Bassianos in Constantinople, she is nearly misgendered by a fellow monk while they are both gardening when he asks, "How is it, brother, that the lobes of both your ears are pierced?" After chastising the monk for not minding his own business, Babylas replies, "The woman to whom I formerly belonged was lovingly disposed toward me, maintaining me with all generosity and luxury, and she shrank not from putting gold about my ears, so that many of those who saw me said that I was a girl."[67] Here the narrative offers us an interesting example whereby a eunuch, by virtue of their garments and fine jewelry, was understood as a woman according to late antique and Byzantine associations between luxury and femininity, as we have seen earlier in Clement of Alexandria. Certainly this fits the established image of eunuchs in Constantinople, many of whom worked for the imperial court and thus would have dressed in the most exquisite finery. The fact that some eunuchs after castration could be referred to as women has precedent in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

In the *Lives of the Caesars*, Suetonius tells us that one of Nero's many depraved crimes included the fact that he "castrated the boy Sporus and actually tried to make a woman of him; and he married him with all the usual ceremonies . . . and treated him as his wife."[68] This suggests that castration could in some way be consciously understood as a surgical procedure for affirming a female identity, though there is no evidence in this case to suggest that it operated as a gender-affirming procedure for the figure being castrated. In the late Roman and Byzantine sphere, the roles that eunuchs filled were often akin to those played by women, and they had particularly privileged access to women's spaces.[69] Thus, it is likewise possible that some masters might even have had a say in the gender presentation of their eunuchs. Hence, Babylas's imaginary owner may not only have kept them in the finest clothing from Constantinople but also pierced both their ears in the style of women so as to alter their perceived gender.

As a made-up story within a saint's life, this detail must be taken lightly, yet a telling narrative from the Western medieval world sheds light on the notion that Constantinopolitan eunuchs could have served likewise as a space to maneuver for women assigned male at birth. In the *History of the Franks*, Gregory of Tours recounts the story of a eunuch who lived much of their life as a woman. As the story goes, during a revolt at a convent, various accusations are lodged against its abbess, one being that "she had a man in the monastery who wore woman's clothes and was treated as a woman although

he had been very clearly shown to be a man." The figure then takes the stand, wearing the woman's clothes they were accustomed to wearing, and explains that they were "impotent" and thus took on these clothes but did not know the abbess and lived far from the convent. The accuser, frustrated with her inability to properly incriminate the abbess, states that she "makes men eunuchs" and has them live with her "as if she were an empress," drawing an allusion to stereotypes of the Byzantine capital. In the end, a doctor comes forward and reveals that he was the one who castrated the youth. As a young boy, the eunuch had suffered from a disease of the groin, and thus the doctor performed the castration procedure "in the way I had once seen physicians do in Constantinople," restoring the child's health.[70] The story is laden with the traces of Constantinople, from the comparison to the imperial presence of eunuchs associated with the empress to the fact that the physician learned the operation in the Byzantine capital, reinforcing the associations between this gender-variant figure and the Eastern empire.

In Gregory of Tours, we have an instance of a person assigned male at birth, who is castrated for medical reasons, and then chooses to live their life as a woman. The story of this figure is exceptional, appearing without challenge or judgment, given that the eunuch's revelation serves to vindicate a falsely accused religious figure. But the quality of the invective wrongly cast against the abbess demonstrates the challenge in discovering other, similar instances. As one scholar puts it, "The implication remains . . . that the only reason a man might don female garb and live in a convent was to gain sexual satisfaction from the nuns."[71] This prejudice alerts us that in order to seek out further traces of trans women in the Byzantine sphere, we require a closer scrutiny of invective against sexual depravity, seeking not simply attacks on effeminacy and same-gender desire but, more importantly, instances where figures assigned male at birth might be described as masquerading or disguising themselves as women for the sake of sexual gain. While such stories might themselves be transphobic inventions, they may well point to the presence of erased trans figures, misrepresented as sex-crazed men.

Michael Psellus and Nonbinary Gender Identity

In a culture where dressing as a woman is prohibited to individuals assigned male at birth, it is also necessary to grasp that to be and live as a gender-nonconforming individual would not always coincide with the outward manifestation of one's gender through clothing and grooming. In other words, to seek out the erased lives of both trans men and women, it is also possible to excavate these subjectivities through other practices, such as those

of self-identification. For this, we can consider the gender identity of the imperial court philosopher Michael Psellus (ca. 1018–1081 CE), who in their letters repeatedly referred to themself as being feminine. In one instance Psellus writes that while they have a masculine disposition toward learning, "with regard to nature I am feminine [thēlys]," given that they are "softened [malthakizomai] with respect to natural emotions." Or, elsewhere, "my soul is indeed simply feminine [thēlys] and easily moved toward compassion."[72] While this form of feminine identification has precedent in the writings of Synesius of Cyrene, in his careful study of Psellus's gender identification, Stratis Papaioannou notes that "what is virtually unprecedented" is that Psellus "does not simply express his emotions. Nor, as it were, does he merely confess the excessively emotional sides of his personality. Rather, he identifies female affects with his unique 'nature' and 'ethos,' and these become a 'fundamental feature of the author's persona.'" Papaioannou refers to this as Psellus's "rhetorical transvestism," yet I believe this should be pushed further to recognize that what we perceive in Psellus offers the foundations of a marginalized transgender identity in Byzantium.[73]

Michael's surname Psellus does not seem to have been given to them as a patronymic, as it refers to one who lisps (*psellos*). They repeatedly not only identify as having a feminine soul or nature but also recount the ways in which they do not adhere to the masculine gender identity that they are expected to express as an imperial philosopher. Psellus states in another letter regarding their emotional states and interests that they have always been feminine, writing, "Now if this pertains to a feminine [thēleia] soul, I do not really know; at all events, my character [ēthos] has been stamped in this way all along," comparing their nature to a bit of soft, malleable wax.[74] Almost defiantly, Psellus refuses to be limited to the stereotypes of their assigned gender, saying that they will "chat with friends in a jolly spirit" and "nor will I despise the women's chamber to indulge in that quarter a bit." Thus Psellus concludes with a poetic reflection on their gender identity, comparing it to the strings of an instrument, possibly playing with notions of masculinity and femininity through the notion of low- and high-pitched voices: "I am not like the strings that are either only high-pitched or in harmony, but contain every melody, now more bright and sweet-sounding, now taut and noble."[75]

What we find in Psellus's writings about themself is a poetic reflection on gender fluidity in the Byzantine world. This highly learned figure reflects upon the sociocultural constitutions of their profession and assigned sex, which conflicts with their own self-identification as female in matters of emotion, affect, and social behavior. Psellus pushes the boundaries of what

it means to perceive a transgender subjectivity in the Byzantine world, demanding that we look both at the externalization of one's gender expression through dress, grooming, and affects, and likewise at how authors perceived themselves according to the rubrics of what it meant to be male and female in the late-antique and medieval world.

Across Byzantine sources and their late antique precedents, we find a surprising distinction between gender and sexuality with a whole spectrum of gender variance. Even before Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, there has been a misconception that the premodern world primarily articulated gender and sexuality as one and the same. This matter becomes all the more critical in the case of trans women and "male effeminacy," given that so much of Western rhetoric has resorted to transmisogyny to call out same-gender desire among figures assigned male at birth. While this was certainly the case in Clement of Alexandria's *The Instructor*, it was also possible to observe deeper anxieties that beyond sexuality there was an underlying "desire" among the persons described to "become women." This concern is seen centrally in Dio Cassius and Byzantine historians' fascination with the accounts of Elagabalus's gender, which, while deploying sexualized stereotypes of femininity and same-gender desire, repeatedly assert her gender identity as existing beyond sexuality alone. The nonbinary and gender-variant identification of eunuchs in the Middle Byzantine period affirms a more fluid understanding of gender over the centuries, which grappled with the malleability of the body, psychology, and social roles through the wealth of classical philosophy and medicine available to Constantinopolitan writers. This culminates in the self-identification of Michael Psellus as nonbinary, stressing how their gender identity does not adhere to cultural stereotypes and expectations but rather exists between the various categories in a harmonious unity.

While I have selected here only a very limited number of texts focused specifically on figures who identified as female or more feminine than their assigned gender, the same nuanced approach to gender variance (and attendant anxieties among critics) is extensive throughout the Middle Byzantine period. What this chapter uniquely offers is a directive to consider Byzantine authors according to the rich wealth of knowledge that the learning of the period offered, on their own terms and distinct from the models that have been created for the Western Middle Ages and early modern period. All of the lives and persons cited across this chapter are lost to us, as we confront the limits of the archive. More importantly, in attempting to liberate these lives from erasure, we are forced to re-perform and recount the violence

of humiliation, misgendering, and slander that was deployed against trans women in the premodern world. As Saidiya Hartman has asked, "How does one recuperate the lives entangled with and impossible to differentiate from the terrible utterances that condemned them to death"?[76] The romanticized retrieval of such lives requires us to display the litanies of slut-shaming, misgendering, and incorrect pronouns. "The dream is to liberate them from the obscene descriptions that first introduced them to us," but as Hartman eventually goes on to say, it simply "replicates the very order of violence that it writes against by placing yet another demand upon the girl, requiring that her life be made useful or instructive." Hartman contemplates failure and restraint while at the same time having poignantly indulged in the methods she resists. Ultimately she resolves that we must seek not to absolve but to "bear what cannot be borne."[77]

In asking here, Where are all the trans women in Byzantium? I am not answering this question with a list of names nor with an answer about their locations. Instead, I am often forced to read the vitriol of male authors who have chosen to deride an imagined group—imagined because they are rhetorical tropes and argumentative foils. Unlike the records of the forgotten dead, these stories have been deemed by historians and theologians alike to bear no import on reality, that they speak no truth to a life but rather to mere inventions of the mind in the abstract. What to Hartman is the all too easy confrontation with the crimes of slavery—"It is too easy to hate a man like Thistlewood"—is a meager reckoning that Byzantine studies has not had,[78] not simply because of the erasure of trans women, but because of the fundamental refusal to consider how these transmisogynistic texts might have referred to a host of gender-variant subjects. Rather than horrors in the archive, they are simply Christian invective no different from other litanies of heresies or moralizations.

In writing this chapter, I want us to collectively confront this horror as such. Not to recuperate lost lives, restored and healed by an archive, but to simply take the attacks on those lives seriously for what they are. In this necessary process, this first step, we can simultaneously keep our eyes on the horizon to read the archive obliquely, to note the patterns and repetitions that accrue over the centuries. They suggest to us that beyond rhetorical tropes and the delusional inventions of an idiosyncratic mind, these texts are the flotsam of trans women's lives, the violences they faced and the freedoms they might have carved out for themselves in the meantime. Too often, in my reading, I have found that the wreckages of these lives are not hidden or obscure but are all around us, fragments that have continued to be left

behind, denied as valid, and remained unseen. A future Byzantine trans studies must begin with a history of transphobia and transmisogyny, in order to chart out the lives those attacks reveal, and teach us new ways to creatively and fluidly seek out those lives beyond texts of shame and hate.

Notes

1. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 291.

2. See Stephen J. Davis, "Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10.1 (2002): 1–36; Evelyne Patlagean, "L'histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l'évolution de la sainteté féminine a Byzance," *Studi Medievali*, ser. 3, 17 (1976): 597–623; John Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif," *Viator* 5 (1974): 1–32; Kari Vogt, "'The Woman Monk': A Theme in Byzantine Hagiography," in *Greece and Gender*, ed. Brit Berggreen and Nanno Marinatos (Bergen: Norwegian Institute at Athens, 1995), 141–48; Crystal Lynn Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers to Reveal a Holy Womanhood: The Female Transvestite Monks of Late Antique Eastern Christianity* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); Valerie R. Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland, 1996); Stavroula Constantinou, "Holy Actors and Actresses: Fools and Cross-Dressers as the Protagonists of Saints' *Lives*," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis, vol. 2 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 343–62; Vern L. Bullough, "Transvestites in the Middle Ages," *American Journal of Sociology* 79.6 (1974): 1381–94; cf. Vern L. Bullough, "Transvestism in the Middle Ages," in *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1982), 43–54.

3. Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 6.

4. For an extensive study and further bibliography, see Roland Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

5. As David Valentine has carefully elucidated in his ethnography on the category of "transgender" as this term came into widespread use by social actors and activists during the early 1990s, many individuals who participated in the transgender community did not always identify as transgender. The label served a key role in structuring a collective community encompassing a range of gender-variant lives and practices, even though at times not all members would have claimed it for themselves. This tension between self-identification and identification by others is critical, for—as Valentine notes—it draws attention to how the politics of identification are shaped through relations of social power. See David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), esp. 1–28. In citing "best practices" for the case of representation, I also respect the power that media groups focused on representation have in promoting ever-changing guidelines for better representing modern gender-variant

communities. See "GLAAD Media Reference Guide—Transgender," www.glaad.org/reference/transgender.

6. While Foucault's *History of Sexuality* merits citing for its contribution to a long-standing discourse, viewing the premodern Greek-speaking world as a historian of the Byzantine Empire, I find it difficult to work with Foucault's generalizing observations on "the Greeks" and "Christianity." Foucault's focus on confession in Christianity (in volumes 1 and 4) has little to no function in the Eastern church. And his use of ancient Greek texts on pederasty to explore the ethics of same-gender relationality amidst other sexual relations denies the heritage and complexity of this tradition in the Greek-speaking medieval world that preserved and transmitted the texts he relies on. Authors like Kadji Amin have also rightly criticized the "attachment genealogies" of contemporary queer theory with pederastic theorizations by authors like Foucault and Genet. This Western-centric view of history, which places the Greeks and Christianity as opposed, leaves us with an impossible translation onto Byzantium, when so much of the subject formation that Foucault relies upon is oriented around "a confessing animal" and the impact of shift that occurred exclusively in Western Christianity. As the Greek Christian Empire, which also was a continuation imperially of the Roman Empire, Byzantium is a synthesis that merits a new consideration, not only because it produced or preserved the key sources Foucault relies on, but also because the cultural sensibilities of the two social and religious spheres were so markedly different. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, 3 vols. (New York: Vintage Books, 1988–1990), quotation at 1:59. See also Michel Foucault, *Les aveux de la chair* (Paris: Gallimard, 2018); and Kadji Amin, *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Pederasty, and Queer History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

7. On the identity of the "Byzantine" Empire, see Anthony Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

8. On the medicalization of gender, see Dean Spade, "Resisting Medicine, Re/modeling Gender," *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law and Justice* 18.1 (2013): 15–37.

9. Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 1–25, quotation at 4.

10. See Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*; C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

11. See Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski et al., "Trans*historicities: A Roundtable Discussion," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5.4 (2018): 658–85, esp. 678–80.

12. Scholars have long struggled with the tension of using modern terms to understand past subjectivities and the complicity of sustaining the erasure of marginalized subjects in the past. See Mary Weismantel, "Towards a Transgender Archaeology: A Queer Rampage through Prehistory," in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, ed. Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), 319–34.

13. Ruth Webb, *Demons and Dancers: Performance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), esp. 77–79. See also Regine May, "The Metamorphosis of Pantomime: Apuleius' *Judgment of Paris* (*Met*. 10:30–34)," in *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, ed. Edith Hall and Rosie Wyles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 338–62.

14. *Latin Anthology*, 100, ed. and trans. Edith Hall and Rosie Wyles with Jonathan Powell, in "Appendix: Selected Source Texts," in Hall and Wyles, *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, 378–419, quotation at 402–3.

15. For a survey of the association between sex work and performance, see Webb, *Demons and Dancers*, 49–53, 152. See also Ismene Lada-Richards, *Silent Eloquence: Lucian and Pantomime Dancing* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), esp. 56–78. These stereotypes, for example, are amply deployed in Procopius's late sixth-century *Secret History* to attack the empress Theodora as having been a mime and sex worker. See Procopius, *The Secret History* esp. 9.2–10, in *The Secret History with Related Texts*, trans. Anthony Kaldellis (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010), 40–41. See also John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 68, ed. Jacques-Paul Minge, *Patrologia cursus completes. Series Graeca* (Paris: Migne, 1857–1866), PG 58:644.

16. See I. Lada-Richards, "'A Worthless Feminine Thing'? Lucian and the 'Optic Intoxication' of Pantomime Dancing," *Helios* 30 (2003): 21–75.

17. Pseudo-John Chrysostom, *De paenitentia*, ed. PG 59:670.

18. Amphilochius of Iconium, *Iambi ad Seleucum* 90–99, in *Amphilochii Iconiensis iambi ad Seleucum*, ed. E. Oberg, Patristische Texte und Studien 9 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969), 29–40. This echoes the language used by Basil of Caesarea to describe the ambiguous and fluid gender identity of eunuchs. See Basil of Caesarea, *Letters* 115, in *Letters*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Roy J. Deferrari, Loeb Classical Library 215 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 230–31. Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Homilies* 19, ed. PG 77:1109B.

19. These charges are reiterated by Procopius of Gaza in the early fifth century in his panegyric for the emperor Anastasius I, praising the emperor's decision to exile dancers. See Procopius of Gaza, *Panegyricus in Anastasium imperatorem* 16, in *Procopio di Gaza: Panegirico per l'imperatore Anastasio*, ed. G. Matino (Naples: Accademia Pontaniana, 2005), 41–57.

20. See *Council in Trullo* 62, in *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, ed. and trans. George Nedungatt and Michael Featherstone (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1995), 143; *Council of Gangra* 13 and 17, trans. Henry Percival, "The Council of Gangra," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1900), 89–101, esp. 97 and 99; *Theodosian Code* 16.2.27, in *The Theodosian Code*, trans. Clyde Pharr (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), 445.

21. Intimately associated with these discussions of male dancers' effeminacy is the worry that these male performers also wished to become more like women by serving as receptive sexual partners in same-gender relations, popularized in part by the second-century Aelius Aristides and responses to his text. See Aelius Aristides, as preserved in Libanius, *Orationes* 64.38–40, in *Libanii opera*, vol. 4, ed. R. Foerster (Leipzig: Teubner, 1908).

22. Martial, *Epigrams* 2.62, in *Epigrams*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb Classical Library 94 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 168–69. See Margaret E. Molloy, *Libanius and the Dancers* (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1996).

23. See Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), esp. 137–76.

24. Juvenal, *Satires* 14.194–95, in *Juvenal*, ed. and trans. Susanna Morton Braund, Loeb Classical Library 91 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 472–73.

25. Juvenal, *Satires* 2.11–12, in Braund, *Juvenal*, 148–49.

26. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 3.3, trans. A. Cleveland Coxe, "The Instructor," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmanns, 1956), 207–98, esp. 275–77; *Le pédagogue*, vol. 3, ed. Claude Mondésert, Chantal Matray, and Henri-Irénée Marrou, Sources Chrétiennes 158 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970), 38–59.

27. Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 3.3, modified trans. Coxe, "Instructor," 275; *Le pédagogue*, 38.

28. Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 3.3, trans. Coxe, "Instructor," 275.

29. Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 3.3, modified trans. Coxe, "Instructor," 275; *Le pédagogue*, 40.

30. Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor*, 3.3, trans. Coxe, "Instructor," 275.

31. Ibid.

32. John Chrysostom, *Instruction and Refutation Directed against Those Men Cohabiting with Virgins* 10, in *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations*, trans. Elizabeth A. Clark (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1979), 194. See Aideen Hartney, "Manly Women and Womanly Men: The *Subintroductae* and John Chrysostom," in *Desire and Denial in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 1999), 41–48.

33. Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 3.3, trans. Coxe, "Instructor," 275.

34. Ibid.; *Le pédagogue*, 42.

35. Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 3.3, trans. Coxe, "Instructor," 275.

36. Ibid., 276.

37. Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 3.3, modified trans. Coxe, "Instructor," 276.

38. In attempting to find a place for male-to-female "cross-dressers" in late antiquity, Maria Doerfler has connected the tirades against effeminate men in the period to those against foreigners, pagans, and luxury. See Maria E. Doerfler, "Coming Apart at the Seams: Cross-Dressing, Masculinity, and the Social Body in Late Antiquity," in *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*, ed. Kristi Upson-Saia, Carly Daniel-Hughes, and Alicia J. Batten (London: Routledge, 2014), 37–51.

39. Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 3.3, modified trans. Coxe, "Instructor," 276.

40. Robert Mills, in his study of the wide-ranging category of "sodomy" in the Western medieval world, has made the powerful suggestion that the notion of "transgender" is a better fit for the wide spectrum of queer subjectivities in the premodern world, since ancient and medieval authors often attack same-gender desire not as such but as a sign of a person's betraying their gender identity. See Robert Mills, *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), esp. 81–132.

41. Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 3.3, trans. Coxe, "Instructor," 275.

42. Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 3.3, modified trans. Coxe, "Instructor," 277; *Le pédagogue*, 54.

43. Clement struggles with how precisely to characterize and categorize these bodies he identifies as men who do not simply, or at least not always, fit into the normative cultural prohibitions against same-gender desire or passivity. The active effeminates are adulterers, and the passive effeminates are "womanly" (thēlydriou).

The latter term at times implies a concurrent same-gender desire but is not necessarily limited to it. Eventually Clement realizes that the association between same-gender, passive desire and effeminacy is inadequate to describe his contemporary circumstances. See *Le pédagogue*, 46.

44. Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007), esp. 14–16.

45. On Elagabalus, see Martijn Icks, *The Crimes of Elagabalus: The Life and Legacy of Rome's Decadent Boy Emperor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), esp. 92–122; Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado, *The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or Fiction?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

46. On trans lives in Roman antiquity, see Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, trans. Cormac Ó Culleanáin, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); G. Francis, "On a Romano-British Castration Clamp Used in the Rites of Cybele," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 1 (1926): 95–110; Shelley Halles, "Looking for Eunuchs: The Galli and Attis in Roman Art," in *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. Shaun Tougher (London: Gerald Duckworth, 2002), 87–102; Cheryl Morgan, "Trans Lives in Rome," in *Introduction to Transgender Studies*, ed. Ardel Haefele-Thomas (New York: Harrington Press, 2019), 370–80; and Amy Richlin, "Not Before Homosexuality: The Materiality of the Cinaedus and the Roman Law against Love between Men," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3.4 (1993): 523–73.

47. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 80.11–17, in *Roman History*, vol. 9, ed. and trans. Earnest Cary and Herbert B. Foster, Loeb Classical Library 177 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 460–71.

48. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 80.13, in Cary and Foster, *Roman History*, 462–63.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., 464–65.

51. See Fergus Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), esp. 1–4, 168–70, 195–203. See also Christopher Mallan, "The Style, Method, and Programme of Xiphilinus' *Epitome* of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 53 (2013): 610–44; Thomas M. Banchich and Eugene N. Lane, *The* History *of Zonaras: From Alexander Severus to the Death of Theodosius the Great* (London: Routledge, 2009), esp. 73–75; Iordanis Grigoriadis, *Linguistic and Literary Studies in the* Epitome Historion *of John Zonaras* (Thessaloniki: Byzantine Research Center, 1998). John Xiphilinus's epitome, commissioned at the behest of Emperor Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078), specifically covered the chapters dealing with Elagabalus's reign and is preserved in a critical exemplar on Mount Athos. The Xiphilinus text is of particular importance because it attests to the enduring importance and popularity of Dio Cassius's work for Byzantine understandings of late antique Roman history. See B. C. Barmann, "The Mount Athos Epitome of Cassius Dio's Roman History," *Phoenix* 25.1 (1971): 58–67.

52. See Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 80.16, in Cary and Foster, *Roman History*, 470–71.

53. See Michael Glykas, *Chronicle* 453.6–8, in *Michaelis Glycae annals*, ed. I. Bekker, Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae (Bonn: Weber, 1836), 453; Symeon Logothete [Leo Grammatikos], *Chronicle* 74:8–10, in *Leonis Grammatici chronographia*, ed. I. Bekker, Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae (Bonn: Weber, 1842), 74.

54. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 80.9, in Cary and Foster, *Roman History*, 456–57.

55. See Theodore Skoutariotes, *Chronicle* 2.40, in *Theodori Scutariotae chronica*, ed. R. Tocci, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, Series Berolinensis 46 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

56. See also Herodian, *History of the Empire* 5, in *History of the Empire*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. C. R. Whittaker, Loeb Classical Library 455 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 2–75.

57. Photius, *Bibliotheca* 99, in *The Library of Photius*, vol. 1, trans. J. H. Freese (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 191–93.

58. Philostratus of Athens, *Lives of the Sophists* 625, in *Lives of the Sophists*, ed. and trans. Wilmer C. Wright, Loeb Classical Library 134 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 304–5.

59. *Epitome de Caesaribus* 23.3, in *Sextii Aurelii Victoris Liber de Caesaribus*, ed. F. Pichlmayr (Leipzig: Teubner, 1911), 157.

60. The relevant text concerns a certain Syrian mime. Evidence of a connection to Aelianus's attack on Elagabalus includes references to Elagabalus's Syrian origins, the fragment's derisive comments on the courtesan's wantonness and femininity, and the *Souda*'s attribution of these quotes to Aelianus himself. See Steven D. Smith, *Man and Animal in Severan Rome: The Literary Imagination of Claudius Aelianus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), esp. 274–79.

61. Kathryn M. Ringrose, "Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium," in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. G. Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 85–109 and 507–18. See Basil of Caesarea, *Letters* 115, in *Letters*, 2:230–31.

62. Shaun Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society* (London: Routledge, 2008), 109–11.

63. Kathryn Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), esp. 35–37.

64. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 766a25, in *Generation of Animals*, ed. and trans. A. L. Peck, Loeb Classical Library 366 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 390–91.

65. Tougher, *Eunuch*, 68–82.

66. *Council of Nicaea* 1, trans. Henry R. Percival, "The First Ecumenical Council," in Schaff and Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., 14:1–57, quotation at 8.

67. *Life of Matrona of Perge*, 5, trans. Featherstone and Mango, "Life of St. Matrona of Perge," *Byzantine Saints' Lives in Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), 23–24.

68. Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars* 6.28, in *Suetonius*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 38 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 127–28.

69. See Tougher, *Eunuch*, 34–35; Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 67–86.

70. Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* 10.15, in *History of the Franks*, trans. Ernest Brehaut (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), 238–39.

71. Bullough, "Transvestism in the Middle Ages," 46.

72. Michael Psellus, *Letters* S 180, in *Michael Psellos*, ed. and trans. Stratis Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 207–8.

73. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, 215 and 231.

74. Michael Psellus, *Letters* S 57, in Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, 196–98.

75. Ibid., 196–99.

76. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26.12–2 (June 2008): 1–14, quotation at 3.

77. Ibid., 6 and 14.

78. Ibid., 6.